

Framing Palestinians' displacement in Gaza after October 7: A multi- layered quantitative content analysis of Swiss media

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Abstract

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by Amal Mekki

On October 13, 2023, the Israeli army ordered the mass evacuation of Palestinians living in the north of Gaza. Over the next two years, about 90% of the Strip's population would be displaced. This transformed civilian movements in Gaza into a central object of interpretation. Whether the Gazans' movement was described as an evacuation, displacement, forced displacement, or a measure of humanitarian protection was not merely a semantic issue. Given that the media shape understanding of current events, this analysis examines how displacement in Gaza was framed across 6 Swiss media outlets, how that framing varied between October 7, 2023, and October 10, 2025, and between French- and German-language outlets. It does so by identifying both measurable framing patterns across the Swiss corpus and more contextual uses of legal references, historical anchoring, and displacement-related labels via a multi-layered quantitative content analysis of framing displacement. The findings reveal that the Swiss media rarely framed the displacement of Palestinians in Gaza as a legally structured process of forced displacement or as part of a longer trajectory of dispossession. Instead, displacement was mainly framed as a humanitarian and coercive condition of wartime. Furthermore, while variation over time existed, they were thematic rather than legal. Moreover, differences between the Swiss French- and German-language media outlets in their framing of Palestinians' displacement in Gaza were identified, but they were uneven, thus not amounting to a simple *Röstigraben*. In sum, the results suggest that the Swiss media framing of displacement in Gaza was more diagnostic than prescriptive. In other words, it was more humanitarian-driven than about treating it as a situation requiring legal and political remedies.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

On October 13, 2023, the Israeli army (also known as the Israel Defense Forces, IDF) ordered the mass evacuation of 1.1 million Palestinians living in the north of Gaza (IDF, 2023). Over the course of two years, Israel would repeatedly order the Strip's population, amounting to 2.3 million at the beginning of the war (United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia [ESCWA], 2023), to move, which resulted in about 90% of them being displaced at least once (World Bank, European Union, & United Nations, 2026). This transformed civilian movements in Gaza into a central object of interpretation at the political, legal, and media levels; whether Gazans' movement was described as an evacuation, displacement, forced displacement, or a measure of humanitarian protection was not merely a semantic issue. On the one hand, Israel presented its repeated evacuation orders in the Strip as measures of civilian protection and casualty minimization (IDF, Ibid). On the other hand, the resulting civilian movements occurred under coercive conditions of bombardment, siege, and uncertainty of return (Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, 2026).

This thesis examines how the Swiss media reported on this displacement: the central question is therefore not whether they covered Palestinian displacement, but how they did so. For instance, which terms were used to describe civilian movements, which causes were emphasized, which legal and historical contexts were included or omitted, and which interpretations of civilian movements were made visible more than others. Consequently, this study does not seek to provide a comprehensive legal or military assessment of the war in Gaza, nor to determine the intent behind the Israeli evacuation orders. Rather, it examines the way in which Palestinian displacement in Gaza was represented and interpreted in the Swiss media discourse.

Media discourse as a system of meaning construction (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989) is central to this study. Not only does news coverage report displacement as an event, but it also helps organize the terms by which the public understands it. At the same time, this public understanding is not only about meaning-making; it is also a matter of journalism's democratic responsibility. For instance, in media theory, journalism is *ideally* understood as a *Fourth Estate*, that is, an independent "watchdog over government" (Bulla, 2022) and powerful institutions. Because these constructed meanings are produced across repeated choices of

language, emphasis, and omission, they require a systematic analysis rather than isolated textual examples. Therefore, this study uses a structured mixed-method media analysis to examine the Swiss media representations of Palestinians' displacement in Gaza after October 7; a large collection of articles is treated as measurable data to generate content-driven and representative insights. The analysis also adopts the theoretical lens of media framing, an approach grounded in the understanding that the way the media present information directly influences how audiences interpret and respond to the issues under debate. More specifically, media framing is defined in this analysis as the process of selecting specific aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicative text, thereby promoting a particular interpretation and evaluation of that reality (Entman, 1993). Beyond this general definition, the analysis draws precisely on Entman's four framing functions: Problem Definition, Causal Attribution, Moral Evaluation, and Treatment Recommendations.

The aim of this thesis is therefore to examine how the Swiss media framed Palestinians' displacement in Gaza after October 7 and how this framing varied over time (from October 7, 2023, to October 10, 2025) and between French- and German- language outlets. To address the overarching research problem, the present analysis is further guided by two sub-questions: the first focuses on the legal framing of displacement, in particular references to International Law (IL) and International Humanitarian Law (IHL), while the second addresses the historical anchoring of displacement. The sub-questions are as follows:

- 1.) To what extent did Swiss media frame displacement with reference to International Law (IL) and International Humanitarian Law (IHL)?
- 2.) To what extent did Swiss media contextualize Gaza's displacement historically?

Based on these research questions, the present study formulates six hypotheses. They are derived from the study's theoretical framework on media framing and previous research on legal and historical contextualization of displacement within the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They also stem from established differences between the Swiss language-region media markets. The hypotheses read as follows:

H1a: Swiss French-language media include more IL/IHL general legal references in their coverage of Palestinians' displacement in Gaza after October 7 than German-language media.

H1b: Swiss French-language media include more engagement with IL/IHL evacuation lawfulness conditions in their coverage of Palestinians' displacement in Gaza after October 7 than German-language media.

H2: Swiss French-language media include more historical context in their coverage of Palestinians' displacement in Gaza after October 7 than German-language media.

H3a: Swiss media coverage of Palestinians' displacement in Gaza is less likely to include IL/IHL general references in Phase 1 than in subsequent phases.

H3b: Swiss media coverage of Palestinians' displacement in Gaza is less likely to include IL/IHL evacuation lawfulness conditions in Phase 1 than in subsequent phases.

H4: Swiss French-language media are more likely to include moral evaluation in their coverage of Palestinians' displacement in Gaza after October 7 than German-language media.

To answer the above-mentioned questions, this thesis combines quantitative content analysis, manual coding, descriptive statistics, hypothesis testing, LDA topic modeling, and corpus-assisted framing analysis (CAPA). Using such a mixed design allows the identification of both measurable framing patterns across the Swiss corpus and more contextual uses of key terms, namely legal references, historical anchoring, and displacement-related labels. The study's coding strategy operationalizes Entman's (1993) four framing functions. It therefore examines how Palestinians' displacement in Gaza after October 7 was defined as a problem, how causality or responsibility was attributed, whether moral evaluation was present, and whether legal, political, or humanitarian solutions were suggested. In doing so, this analysis does not treat media framing as a simple description of events, but rather as part of a process in which the news coverage selects, organizes, and gives a public meaning to Palestinian displacement in the Strip.

This study contributes to the still limited research on Swiss media coverage of displacement in Gaza. It pays particular attention to legal references, historical contextualization, displacement labels, differences between Swiss French- and German-language regions, and Entman's (1993) four framing functions. Framing theory assumes that media frames can shape how the audience understands a given topic by acting as a cognitive lens. This thesis, however, does not empirically measure such an effect; it focuses instead on the media texts themselves. In doing so, this study examines how the selected Swiss outlets made Palestinian displacement visible, legible, and interpretable during the period under study.

The subsequent chapters of this thesis proceed as follows. Chapter 2, Background, provides the legal and historical setting needed to understand the framing of Palestinian displacement in Gaza after October 7. Chapter 3 establishes the theoretical framework surrounding framing theory and maps the extant literature on the Western media framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in general and of displacement within it specifically, thereby

informing the development of the hypotheses that guide the empirical analysis. Chapter 4 outlines the empirical approach used to address the previously mentioned research questions. Lastly, Chapter 5 presents and interprets the findings from the analysis and answers the research's guiding questions.

Chapter 2

Background

The main aim of this chapter is to provide the background necessary to understand the framing of the displacement of Palestinians in Gaza. It is first contextualized within International Law (IL) and International Humanitarian Law (IHL), and then within the broader settler-colonial paradigm. It subsequently traces key phases of displacement in the Strip after October 7, 2023, and concludes by explaining the choice of Swiss media as a case study.

Analytical orientation

This chapter contextualizes displacement in Gaza through a dual framework that combines International Law (IL) and International Humanitarian Law (IHL) on the one hand, and settler colonialism on the other. There are three primary reasons for this choice. In the first place, there is a structural contradiction between what IL- and particularly IHL- *presuppose*, and what settler-colonialism is *defined by* (Milner & Kedar, 2023). As we will see in detail in sections 2.1.2- 2.1.4., while under IL/IHL occupation is temporary, *spatially conservationist*, and reversible, settler colonialism is defined by its permanence, territorial transformation, demographic replacement (of the indigenous), and an *intention to stay* (of the settlers) (Milner & Kedar, Ibid, Wolfe, 2006, Veracini, 2013). In this understanding, International Humanitarian Law (IHL) is a legal and normative framework that regulates belligerent occupation, whereas settler colonialism is a political framework that seeks to explain structures of domination and the elimination of the indigenous. The legal ontology of occupation thus contradicts the political ontology of settler colonialism. In the second place, although IL and IHL do not *fully* explain the large-scale internal displacement of Palestinians in Gaza (or in Palestine altogether), it remains the language through which States justify their actions (e.g. 'evacuation' or 'voluntary migration' or 'transfer' versus 'forced displacement'), humanitarian actors operate, national and international courts reason, and eventually, the language through which displacement may be framed in the media. Finally, settler colonialism provides an analytical framework through which displacement can be interpreted as structural rather than episodic, and as part of a long-term spatial project. Within this framework, practices such as 'evacuations' or 'transfers' can be interpreted as techniques of territorial reconfiguration. While other frameworks could be mobilized to understand displacement in Gaza, this study focuses on two dominant logics:

international law (IL/IHL) and settler colonialism. In this sense, Gaza's displacement is legally narrated through IL/IHL, but also interpreted through a settler colonial framework.

2.1. Displacement in Gaza under IL/IHL

2.1.1. Definition of forced displacement and key distinctions

While the term “displacement” fundamentally implies involuntariness, there is no one straightforward definition of forced displacement under International Humanitarian Law. However, there are a “variety of terms which can collectively be referred to as acts of 'forced displacement'” (International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC], 2019, April, p. 25). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2010, p. 164), forced displacement describes situations in which individuals or groups flee or are forcibly removed, evicted, or relocated by State or non-State actors to locations not of their choosing. The defining criteria, in all cases, is the *lack of will or consent* (Ibid). As a result of forced displacement, two distinct groups of people can be distinguished. Those who cross an international border become refugees, and those who remain within their country's borders are known as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). This is essentially relevant to the case of Gaza, where 70 per cent of the whole population is registered as Palestine refugees¹ (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA], 2023), and 90 per cent of the population was internally displaced² by 2024 (OCHA, 2025, September 10).

Displacement and armed conflict are *indisputably* correlated (Jacques, 2012, p. 1). The displacement of people can be a mere consequence of the conflict or a result of “excesses committed against the civilian population or military strategies” targeting civilians (UNHCR, 1992, para. 19). Gillard (2005, p. 37) also stresses that in recent conflicts, civilian displacement

¹ Albanese and Takkenberg (2020) distinguish between *Palestine refugees* and *Palestinian refugees*. In this distinction, Palestine refugees refer specifically to those displaced from British Mandate Palestine between 1947–1949 and their descendants who fall under UNRWA's mandate as defined by the relevant UN General Assembly resolutions. By contrast, “Palestinian refugees” is a broader term that includes all refugees of Palestinian (Arab) origin displaced since 1947 from any part of historic Palestine (including those displaced in 1967), in line with UNHCR's interpretation of Article 1D of the 1951 Refugee Convention. Palestinian refugees have a distinct normative and institutional regime devised for them compared to all other refugees, a situation Mason (2020) describes as ‘*liminality*’. Akram (2002) provides three reasons for this special regime: First, while Palestinians met the requirements of Article 1 of the Refugee Convention definition, as being persecuted and lacking national protection, they required distinct protection based on the right to return and not the global norm of third-country resettlement. Second, the United Nations itself directly contributed to the political process that created the Palestinian refugee crisis, making it unlike any previous situation. Third, because their rights –especially the right to return– could not be safeguarded within the ordinary refugee system.

² In the case of the Gaza Strip, the notion of “internal” displacement is used in line with UN terminology. However, the legal interpretation of the “internal” aspect of Palestinian displacement in Gaza is complex due to the absence of Palestinian sovereignty and clearly defined borders, and to the unique status of the Strip itself.

has increasingly been used as a method of warfare. This distinction matters for interpreting ‘evacuation’ claims within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Gaza, as the framing of displacement depends on whether it is presented as a deliberate strategy, a security measure, or an unintended consequence of hostilities.

Forced displacement does not occur merely by the use of physical force. Coercive environments also create the conditions for forced displacement. For instance, sieges function as a mechanism of forced displacement, as they systematically deprive the civilian population of the means of survival (see e.g. Independent International Commission on the Syrian Arab Republic, 2018). The flight in this case is coercive, even though it requires no formal expulsion orders. A pertinent example of this is the 2007 siege/blockade of Gaza, which has evolved into a total blockade following the October 7, 2023, events (Procter, 2024; Elkahlout, 2025).

International Law can be defined as “the body of rules and principles of action which are binding upon civilized states in their relations with one another” (Brierly, 1928, as cited in Clapham, 2021, p. 29). Under International Law, forced displacement is broadly prohibited, with limited exceptions. This aspect will be dealt with in more detail in the next section.

2.1.2. Prohibition and regulation in IL and IHL

The prohibition of forced displacement has evolved significantly through the centuries, moving from implicit protections to explicit norms. As early as 1863, the Lieber Code prohibited the *carrying off* of civilians to distant parts (United States War Department, 1863, Art. 23). A few decades later, the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 were adopted. While neither Convention explicitly prohibits deportation or forcible transfer of civilians, the prohibition was a ‘self-understood rule’ at the time (Schwarzenberger, 1989, p. 228, as cited in Jacques, 2012, p. 23). Taken together, the Hague Regulations establish the first comprehensive codification of the laws of war (International Peace Conference, 1907). Following World War II, the adoption of the Four Geneva Conventions in 1949, and later their Additional Protocols of 1977 and 2005, formed the cornerstone of International Humanitarian Law (IHL). In the case of an occupation, the Fourth Geneva Convention (GC IV) is of the most relevance, as it was the first to explicitly and comprehensively codify the prohibition of forced displacement. In its first paragraph, Article 49 of the GC IV stipulates that,

[i]ndividual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power or to that of any other country, occupied or not, are prohibited, regardless of their motive.

This general prohibition is, however, subject to exceptions set by the same Article. In fact, an Occupying Power may conduct a total or partial evacuation if “the security of the population or imperative military reasons so demand” (GC IV, Art. 49, para. 2). Still, strict conditions must be met for evacuations to be lawful (Ibid., para. 2-4). This includes proper accommodation, dignity, and family unity. Most importantly, evacuations should not “involve the displacement of protected persons outside the bounds of the occupied territory,” (Ibid., para. 2), and the evacuees “shall be transferred back to their homes as soon as hostilities in the area in question have ceased” (Ibid.). In other words, evacuation is not prohibited *per se* under IHL. An evacuation becomes unlawful when it is not strictly required by civilian security or imperative military necessity, when it fails to meet the protective conditions set by Article 49, or when it is not followed by the evacuees’ return once hostilities in the area have ceased. If these conditions are not respected, an evacuation may amount to arbitrary or unlawful displacement.

In 1998, the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (also known as the ICC Statute) consolidated three pathways for the criminalization of forced displacement (International Criminal Court [ICC], 2021). According to the treaty, forced displacement is recognized as (1) an act constituting genocide when used as a means of a group destruction (Article 6(e)), (2) a crime against humanity when committed “as part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population” (Article 7(1)(d)), and (3) a war crime in both international and non-international armed conflicts, including situations of occupation (ICC, Ibid, Article 8(2)(a)(vii); Article 8(2)(b)(viii); Article 8(2)(e)(viii)).

This prohibition and its exceptions apply only where the legal regime is triggered. The law of belligerent occupation, primarily the Hague Regulations and the Fourth Geneva Convention, governs the conduct of an occupying power vis-à-vis the civilian population. Therefore, it is necessary to establish Gaza’s legal status under international law, which we will undertake in the next section.

2.1.3. Forced displacement in Occupied Gaza under International Law

Occupation is a type of international armed conflict (Ferraro, 2012, p. 134; Cuyckens, 2016, p. 276-277) and is, as a result, regulated by the laws of war, primarily the 1907 Hague Regulations and the 1949 Fourth Geneva Convention, supplemented in certain aspects by the 1977 Additional Protocol I (Cuyckens, Ibid.) Establishing whether Gaza remains occupied or not after the 2005 Israeli ‘disengagement’ is instrumental in determining the applicable regime in

the Strip (Darcy & Reynolds, 2010, p. 214). If Gaza is still occupied, the law of belligerent occupation as seen in the previous section applies, including the specific prohibitions on population forcible transfer. The Israeli occupation of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip was *instituted* in 1967 (Ibid, p. 211), following the Six-Day War (5-10 June 1967). Since then, the United Nations and other international legal and humanitarian bodies have collectively referred to these territories as the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), to which the law of belligerent occupation applies. For instance, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) stressed in its 2004 Advisory Opinion that both International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL) apply to the OPT.

However, following Israel's unilateral 'disengagement' from Gaza, including the withdrawal of its military units and evacuation of the settlements, Gaza's status as occupied territory became "disputed ...amongst parties to the conflict and other relevant actors" (Darcy & Reynolds, 2010., p. 212), including legal scholars (see e.g. Shany, 2005; Cuyckens, 2016; and Scobbie, 2012, as cited in Darcy & Reynolds, 2010.). However, several United Nations bodies, such as the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza conflict (2009, para. 276), have since concluded that Gaza "remains occupied by Israel". For instance, the ICJ's 2024 Advisory Opinion found that Israel "remained capable of exercising, and continued to exercise", certain key aspects of authority over the Strip. These include "control of the land, sea and air borders, restrictions on movement of people and goods, collection of import and export taxes, and military control over the buffer zone" (ICJ, 2024, July 19, para. 93). The Court therefore concluded that Israel's withdrawal from Gaza did not *entirely* release it from its obligations as an Occupying Power (Ibid, para. 94).

In 1951, Israel ratified the Fourth Geneva Convention (ICRC, n.d.-a), which, under Article 2 of the Geneva Convention IV, extends its reach to the OPT, including Gaza (ICRC, n.d.-b). Amara et al. (2025) add that, although Israel is not a party to the Hague Regulations of 1907, they still apply to it. That is because several of these provisions have long become part of customary international law (ICJ, 2004, July 9, para. 78 and 89). Based on these provisions, the forcible transfer of civilians from Gaza, an occupied territory, is prohibited except when required for the security of the civilians concerned or for imperative military reasons.

To better distinguish between lawful evacuation and forced displacement, our next section will define 'evacuations' and outline their regulations under IL and IHL.

2.1.4. Evacuation vs. forcible transfer

Evacuation is recognized as a form of displacement (McAdam, 2025, p. 205). Internal (humanitarian) evacuations are defined as “the large-scale relocation of civilian population within a conflict zone” who are under significant threat “to safer locations where they can be more effectively protected” (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2025, September 19). The Norwegian Refugee Council (2016, p. 6) explains that “depending on the context”, evacuations may be called “relocations, transfers, or facilitated onward movement”. The term “evacuation”, however, can be used as a disguise for unlawful transfer or deportation. As McAdam (2025, p. 213) explains, “despite the dominance of the rescue paradigm, there are examples of evacuations being used as a guise for (unlawful) forced transfers, motivated by State interests rather than the protection of the population”. In the context of an armed conflict, evacuations are strictly regulated under International Humanitarian Law as an exception to the prohibition on the forcible transfer or deportation of civilians.

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) and International Human Rights Law (IHRL) impose strict conditions on the lawfulness of evacuations. They must be necessary, proportionate, and temporary (see, e.g., United Nations Commission on Human Rights, 1998, Principle 6(2)(b); Kälin, 2008, as cited in McAdam, 2025, p. 218; McDermott & Gibbons, 2017, as cited in McAdam, *Ibid*). “If any of these requirements is violated”, Kälin (2023, as cited in McAdam, 2025, p. 219) notes, “evacuations amount to arbitrary displacement, even if they were initially lawful”.

2.2. Displacement in Gaza within the settler colonial project

2.2.1. Displacement as a recurrent mechanism

Competing claims to historical and political legitimacy shape media narratives regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which, according to Kelman (1999, p. 588), is a struggle between “two national movements claiming the same land”. These claims are structured, on the Israeli side, around security and self-determination, and, on the Palestinian side, around dispossession and self-determination. Iqbal and Farukh (2025) further demonstrate that contemporary media metaphors reinforce these divergent ideological positions; They either legitimize Palestinian resistance as a matter of justice or Israeli actions as matters of security and historical legitimacy. This section builds on these debates by situating the displacement in Gaza within the scholarship that interprets Zionism and the formation of the Israeli state through the lens of settler-colonialism.

A substantial body of scholarship³ has interpreted Zionism and the creation of Israel through the lens of settler-colonialism. For instance, Wolfe describes Zionism as an *intensification* of settler colonialism (Salamanca et al., 2012, p.6). Veracini (2006) argues that the current situation in Israel/Palestine is *determined* by a settler colonial system. Robinson (2013, as cited in Robson, 2018, p. 145) posits that the “project of statehood in Israel/ (...) was from its inception fundamentally imbued with the language, tactics, and structures of a highly racialized settler colonialism”. The use of settler colonialism as an *interpretive paradigm* (Busbridge, 2018, p. 92) therefore provides “powerful conceptual and pedagogical implications for reframing understandings” of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This paradigm helps understand the current displacement as a recurrent mechanism rather than an episodic movement.

³ A vast body of scholarship across disciplines consider Zionism, as an ideological movement, and the State of Israel a colonial project (e.g. Rodinson, 1967, 1973, as cited in Strawson, 2019; Shafir, 1989, as cited in Tuma, 1990; Kimmerling, 2001, as cited in Abu-Rabī, 2002; Robinson, 2013, as cited in Robson, 2018; Shalhoub-Kevorkian & Ihmoud, 2014; Santos & Nasser, 2024; Nijim, 2025; Wolfe, 2006; Veracini, 2006, 2019; Lloyd, 2012; Said, 1979; Stefanini, 2024; Masalha, 1992, 2002; Munem, 2023; Pappé, 2008, 2012, 2020; Sanbar, 2001; Rashed, Short & Docker, 2014). Said (1979, p.23) further notes that “Zionism never spoke of itself unambiguously as a Jewish liberation movement, but rather as a Jewish movement for colonial settlement in the Orient”. In the words of the Founder of Zionism, Theodore Herzl, when establishing a Jewish State in Palestine, the Jewish people would “form a portion of the rampart of Europe against Asia, an outpost of civilization against barbarism” (Herzl, 1896/2008, p. 96). In this context, Khalidi (2020, p. 10) draws a parallel between Herzl's language and “the language used in the conquest of the North American frontier, which ended in the nineteenth century with the eradication or subjugation of the continent's entire native population”.

Displacement is central within settler colonialism, whose objective is land and sovereignty over it via removal and replacement; an objective that is sustained by claims to historical and political entitlement. Against this backdrop, control over the land is presented as legitimate, while the presence of the colonized is constructed as an obstacle to be managed, displaced, or erased. Wolfe (2006, p. 388) defines settler colonialism as a *structure* rather than an *event*. Within this structure, the *logic of elimination* is continuous instead of being tied to a single historical moment. In this sense, scholars differentiate between two forms of colonialism: classical colonialism and settler colonialism. That is because "colonisers and settler colonisers want essentially different things" (Veracini, 2011, p. 1). Under this classification, classical colonialism is marked by "the subjection of peoples to alien subjugation, domination and exploitation" (United Nations General Assembly, 1960, December 14). In contrast, the settler colonial project, as Veracini (2013, p. 33) argues, "is obsessed with demographic concerns". Hence, the settler colonialism's logic of elimination leads to the replacement and erasure of the colonised (Busbridge, 2018). It is within this logic of elimination that the displacement of Palestinians has consistently constituted a fundamental pillar of the Zionist settler colonial project before and after the creation of Israel.

2.2.2. 'Transfer' as euphemism for forced displacement

The expulsion of Palestinians from historic Palestine is deeply rooted in Zionism, which has euphemistically referred to it as *transfer* (see e.g. Shahak, 1989; Masalha, 1988; Rubin, 2019). Masalha (1992, p. 7) defines transfer as "a euphemism denoting the organized removal of the indigenous population of Palestine to neighboring countries". He further explains that this idea is "as old as the early Zionist colonies" in historic Palestine and "the rise of political Zionism" (Ibid). For instance, back in 1895, Theodor Herzl "already predicted" the necessity to expel the Palestinians in order for Zionism to establish its "dream of a Jewish homeland" (Pappé, 2005, xi). It was not until the Zurich Zionist congress in 1937, though, that "'transfer' became policy, planned and supported by most of the highest-ranking leaders and opposed on moral grounds by none" (Shahak, 1989, p. 23). Rubin (2019, p. 495) adds that

shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War, Vladimir Jabotinsky [Zionist leader, co-founder of the Jewish Legion in the British Army during World War I, Jewish Virtual Library, n.d.] (...) had begun to advocate for the transfer of the Arab population from Palestine.

By the end of World War II, Khalidi (1988, p. 11) argues that the 'transfer' of the Palestinians was once again recommended "on two notable occasions", by British and

American politicians and officials, with the recommendations being either *Zionist-inspired* or *blessed by the Zionists*. For instance, in 1944, the British Labor Party Executive suggested that "the Arabs be encouraged to move out as the Jews move in". One year later, the former American President Herbert Hoover endorsed the transfer of the Arabs of Palestine to Iraq (Khalidi, Ibid.). Almost one century later, Pappé (Ibid., xv) writes,

'population transfer' is now the official, moral option recommended by one of Israel's most prestigious academic centres, the Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies in Herzliya, which advises the government.

In the Gaza Strip, and even before October 7, the confinement (see section 2.2.4.) pushes Palestinians toward coerced migration, and yet, the Israeli political and media discourse rebrands it as 'voluntary migration' (Elkahlout, 2025). Since October 7, 2023, reports have documented Israeli discussions with third States about proposals for the removal of Palestinians from Gaza as a population, not temporary evacuations. Other terms, more morally sanitized, were of use: 'relocation', 'resettlement', and 'voluntary migration' (see e.g., Berman & Staff, 2025, September 12; Kraus, 2025, August 16; McKernan, 2024, January 29). Analytically, however, such terminology does not, by itself, determine whether a movement is voluntary or forced. Under the ICC Elements of Crimes, the foundational text used to interpret the Rome Statute, deportation or forcible transfer involves the movement of one or more persons "by expulsion or other coercive acts" (ICC, 2013, art. 7(1)(d), element 1). The same text specifies that the term "forcibly" (in forcibly transferred) is not limited to direct physical force but may also include

threat of force or coercion, such as that caused by fear of violence, duress, detention, psychological oppression or abuse of power against such person (...), or by taking advantage of a coercive environment" (Ibid, n.12, p. 4).

This distinction depends less on the descriptive label used and more on whether the persons concerned retained a meaningful possibility of remaining, living in safety, or returning. An investigation by the Israeli leading news website Haaretz found that hundreds of Palestinians left the Strip with the aid of an Israeli-Estonian-led *shadowy* firm, and that "Israel's Voluntary Emigration Bureau in the Defense Ministry referred the firm to the IDF to help coordinate the departures" (Scharf & Rozovski, 2025, November 16). The Voluntary Emigration Bureau was established in March 2025 by the Israeli Security Cabinet with the aim

of facilitating the relocation of Gaza residents to third countries (Lis & Kubovich, 2025, March 23).

2.2.3. Gaza, a product of settler colonialism

During the First World War, the United Kingdom occupied historical Palestine and was granted a Mandate over it a few years later, with the "understanding that the Balfour Declaration⁴ would be put into effect" (United Nations Special Committee on Palestine, 1947, para. 68). In 1947, the United Nations General Assembly adopted its Partition Plan (also known as Resolution 181), which allocated 54 per cent of historical Palestine to the future Jewish State (United Nations Department of Public Information, 1983; See Appendix A). However, the Jews constituted only 33 per cent of the population of Palestine up until 1948 (International Court of Justice, 2023). As a result of the Partition Plan, hostilities started between Palestinians and different armed Zionist militias, resulting in the displacement of 250,000 Palestinians by May 14th, 1948. On that day, both the United Kingdom mandate ended, and the Zionist movement announced the creation of the State of Israel. Following that announcement, the First Israeli-Arab War started, and would end one year later, with Israel establishing itself on 78 per cent of the territory of historical Palestine. Under the British Mandate, approximately two million people were living in Palestine (Bachi, 1977, as cited in DellaPergola, 2003, p.10). By March 1949, over half of Palestine's Arab population was displaced; UN reports estimated a range of 711,000 to 774,000 displaced (Albanese & Takkenberg, 2020, p.35). During the 1947-1949 hostilities, between 400 and 531 Palestinian villages and towns were forcibly depopulated, with most being systematically destroyed to "assure that the refugees would have nowhere, and nothing, to return to" (Morris, 2004, p. 341). Using a broader definition that goes beyond UNRWA registration (See previous distinction between Palestine refugees and Palestinian refugees in footnote 1, p. 5), Albanese and Takkenberg (2020) estimate that around 7.5 million Palestinians are refugees, dispersed across the Arab region and beyond, and the majority of whom remain stateless⁵.

⁴ A letter sent on 2 November 1917 by the then British Foreign Minister, A.J. Balfour, to Lord Rothschild, leader of the Jewish community. It was a single-paragraph letter that expressed support for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people" (Page, 2016, p. 4).

⁵ Following the creation of the State of Israel, most Palestinians became stateless in addition to becoming refugees, as the Israeli nationality law excluded the Palestinians who had been displaced outside of the territory controlled by Israel by 1949 and whom it also prevented from returning (Albanese & Takkenberg, 2020, p.76)

Under Mandate Palestine, the Gaza District was much larger than today's Gaza Strip. It comprised the Gaza and Beersheba sub-districts (Government of Palestine, 1945; Ben-David & Kressel, 1996), with the latter alone covering approximately 12,577 km² (12,577,000 dunams in the original source), that is almost half the area of Mandatory Palestine (Kark & Frantzman, 2012, p. 53 -54). With the Gaza sub-district covering 1,113 km² (Government of Palestine, 1946, p. 104), the whole Gaza District was around 38 times the size of today's Strip. In the course of the First Israeli-Arab war, approximately 250,000 expelled Palestinians (from the areas allocated to the Jewish State or occupied by Jewish) fled to Gaza, joining the local population of some 80,000 (Finkelstein, 2018, p. 3; Irfan, 2025, p.5).

In settler-colonial scholarship, the 1948 war is not treated as a mere interstate war but rather as a moment of territorial reconfiguration through depopulation, village destruction, and the prevention of Palestinian return (Wolfe, 2006; Pappé, 2006; Morris, 2004). The refugees who entered Gaza came largely from the Palestinian towns and villages that were depopulated or came under Israeli control during the war (see Albanese and Takkenberg's (2020) definition of Palestine refugees in footnote 1, p. 5). Today, those expellees and their descendants make up 70 per cent of Gaza's inhabitants (Finkelstein, 2018, p.3), rendering Gaza a concentrated space of refugees/displaced people. Until the 2023-2025 hostilities, there were eight refugee camps in Gaza (Santos & Nasser, 2024, p. 258). Refuge is thus the *norm*, not the *exception*, in the Strip (Tayeh, 2022, as cited in Santos & Nasser, Ibid.). This forced displacement that led to the Gaza Strip of today occurred during the *Nakba* (catastrophe in Arabic, نكبة). This refers to the events during which "hundreds of thousands of indigenous Palestinian (were) killed or forced into exile" (Shalhoub-Kevorkian & Ihmoud, 2014, p. 396) and "a country and its people disappeared from both maps and dictionaries" (Sanbar, 2001, p.87). Moreover, Salamanca et al. (2012, p.2) argue that the Nakba persists today with the "continuing subjection of Palestinians by Israelis". Understanding Nakba is therefore crucial to understanding the situation in Gaza. The years 1947-1949 marked the emergence of the world's most enduring group of refugees (Albanese & Takkenberg, 2020; Paz & Kook, 2021; Robson, 2020; Mason, 2020; Akram, 2002), making Palestine an emblematic case of *protracted* displacement (Jacques, 2012; Albanese & Takkenberg, 2020).

2.2.4. Gaza as 'containment', fragmentation, siege, and 'open-air prison'

Gaza's displacement is an example of the logic of elimination even in the absence of settlers. Joudah (2020) postulates that even following the 2005 'disengagement', Gaza remains a

“settler-colonial city”. The elimination persists in this understanding through *containment* or *confinement* (Elkahlout, 2025; Joudah, 2020; Pace & Yacobi, 2021). In this context, Elkahlout (2025, p. 4) interprets the 2007 siege/blockade as a “tool of elimination through confinement”, that is, by “systematically eroding Palestinian economic, social and political systems”. Pace and Yacobi (2021) also argue that Israeli “strategies of incarceration, exploitation and elimination of the existing population” in Gaza turn the people’s lives into *non-life*. Similarly, Elkahlout (2025) and Procter (2024) argue that Israel maintains Gaza as a non-viable space.

Palestinian dispossession did not end with the 1948 war. Scholars have situated Gaza’s containment within a longer demographic and territorial logic of dispossession (Masalha 1992, 2002; Segev, 2007; Forman & Kedar, 2004). Aiming to have maximum land with a minimum number of Arabs (Palestinians), the Israeli ‘transfer’ policy persisted (Masalha, 1997, as cited in Kyle, 1998). In the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War, and the occupation by Israel of the remaining 22 per cent of Mandatory Palestine, quarter a million to 450,000 Palestinians were displaced from the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (see e.g. United Nations Secretary-General, 1967, October 2, para. 159; UNRWA, 1967, para. 1; BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights, 2012, xxiii), both within and beyond the borders (United Nations Secretary-General, Ibid, para. 40). That came to be known as the *Naksa* (setback in Arabic, (نكسة)), which is distinct from the Nakba of 1948. Following the war, Israel consolidated a system of legal, political, and military control that combined elements of occupation, apartheid, and settler colonialism to enforce forced displacement. A core feature of this system is the fragmentation of the Occupied Palestinian Territory into isolated, non-contiguous enclaves, closely resembling the Bantustan model of apartheid South Africa (Elkahlout, 2025, p. 9). The system was largely inspired by the Allon Plan, which proposed the ‘transfer’ of Palestinians from Gaza (Central Intelligence Agency, 1969, February 25). In the plan, Gaza was thus conceptualised as a containment space for displaced Palestinians, with refugee ‘transfer’ (rather than return) framed as a primary “solution” to the refugee problem. In the aftermath of the military occupation, the Israeli ‘transfer’ policy took yet other forms, namely through legal regimes, such as denial of citizenship and revocation of residency to coerce Palestinians into displacement, be it within its sovereign territory or within the Occupied Palestinian Territory (Nuseibah, 2013, p. 16). This policy would persist even with the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 (Ibid.). Already prior to 2023, the Gaza Strip was known as an “open-air prison” (Human Rights Watch, 2022, June 14) or a “prison camp” (as former British Prime Minister David Cameron put it, in Watt & Sherwood, 2010, July 27). In the years 2008-

2022, the Strip was the field of numerous destructive Israeli military operations. Israel has officially framed its recurrent military operations in Gaza as acts of self-defense or as retaliatory responses to different Palestinian armed groups in the Strip, particularly rocket fire (see, for e.g., Security Council Report, 2009). Critical scholarship, however, has described these recurring incursions through the metaphor of “mowing the lawn/grass”. According to Inbar and Shamir (2014, p. 67-68), mowing the grass is

a new term in Israel’s strategic parlance that reflects the assumption that Israel finds itself in protracted intractable conflict with extremely hostile non-state entities, which is qualitatively different from an inter-state conflict(...) the use of force is therefore not intended to attain impossible political goals, but rather to debilitate the capabilities of the enemy to harm Israel.

Over 100,000 Palestinians were internally displaced as a result of these wars collectively (Milton-Edwards, 2024, as cited in Elkahlout, 2025, p. 11).

As demonstrated in this section, Gaza, prior to October 2023, was already a *produced* space of displacement, uniquely vulnerable to mass, repeated, coerced movement. Following this, the next section will examine the Gazans' displacement during the October 7 war.

2. 3. Forced displacement in Gaza during the October 7 war

Displacement in Gaza, since the beginning of hostilities on October 7, 2023, has been marked by mass, repeated movements and produced through recurring evacuation orders to unsafe destinations. Just in 2024, more than 3.2 million displacements were reported in the Strip, a number that the Global Report on Internal Displacement [GRID] considers a “*significant underestimate*” (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre & Norwegian Refugee Council, 2025). Between October 8, 2023, and August 31, 2024, at least 184 evacuation orders were posted by the Israeli army (Human Rights Watch, 2024, November 14). Civilians across the Strip had to flee and seek shelter repeatedly. By October 2024, more than 90 per cent of Gaza’s population were estimated to have been displaced “for an average of six times, and some up to an alarming 19 times” (OCHA, 2025, September 10). Furthermore, the areas to which they were fleeing were attacked, resulting in “further displacement” and “increasing death toll” (Internal Displacement Monitoring Center & Norwegian Refugee Council, Ibid.) The United Nations and other international humanitarian agencies have consistently repeated that “there is no safe

place in Gaza” (see, e.g., OCHA, 2024). By around mid-July 2025, 88 per cent of the Strip was either within Israeli-militarized zones or had been placed under displacement orders, according to OCHA (2025, July 23).

Our analysis will focus on three analytically relevant periods, which correspond to our dataset sampling windows. Period one runs from October 7 to 12, 2023, and marks the immediate displacement of the Gazans before mass orders were issued. Period two starts on October 13, 2023, the day the Israeli army ordered the entire population of northern Gaza to move south, and ends on January 27, 2025, when hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians walked back to northern Gaza. On September 9, 2025, Israel issued an evacuation order covering the entirety of Gaza City. Almost one month later, on October 10, 2025, a new ceasefire came into effect. These two dates delineate Period three.

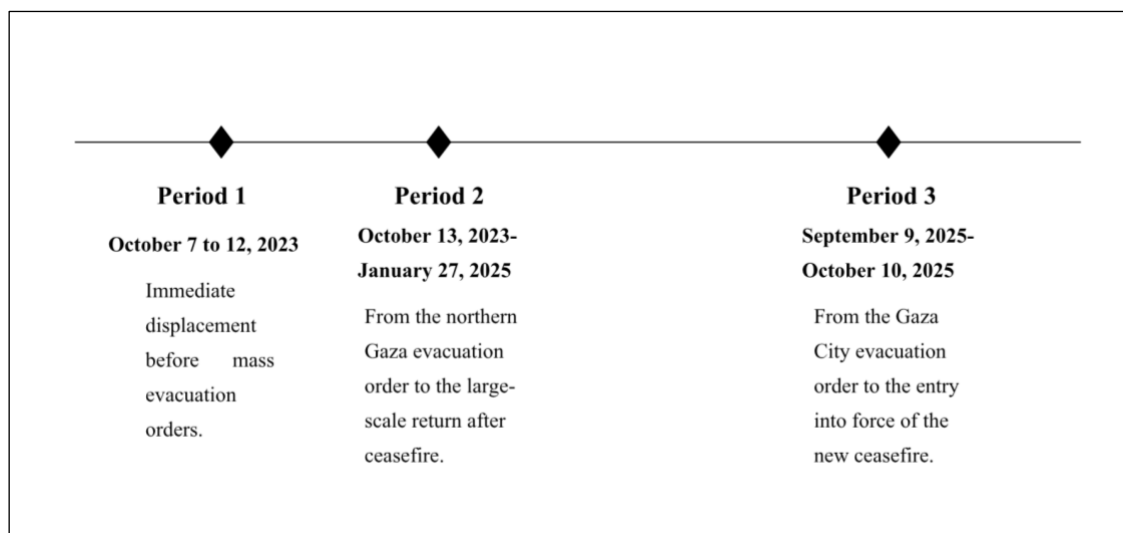


Figure 2.3. Analytical time periods of the study.

With the beginning of hostilities, 423,378 Palestinians were displaced between October 7 and October 12, 2023. Among them, 64 per cent were hosted in UNRWA shelters, and an estimated 26,984 Internally Displaced Persons were taking refuge in public schools (OCHA, 2023, October 12). Over 153,004 IDPs were estimated to be staying with relatives and neighbors, as well as in other public facilities (Ibid). By 12 October, 752 residential and non-residential buildings, comprising 2,835 housing units, had been destroyed, according to the Gaza Ministry of Public Works, which confirmed that another 1,791 housing units had been damaged beyond repair and rendered uninhabitable (Ibid). After this flight under attack, displacement would come to be via formalized orders.

In Period Two, displacement in Gaza started to be shaped by a formal ‘evacuation order’-architecture. On the night of 12-13 October 2023, shortly before midnight, the Israeli military issued an evacuation order requiring approximately 1.1 million Palestinians residing north of Wadi Gaza to relocate to Southern Gaza within 24 hours. The order read as follows,

[t]he IDF calls for the evacuation of all civilians of Gaza City from their homes southwards for their own safety and protection and move to the area south of the Wadi Gaza, as shown on the map⁶.

The original map referenced in the IDF announcement could not be retrieved from their webpage, nor their official X account. Instead, Figure 2.3.1 depicts the areas affected by the abovementioned evacuation order, as documented by OCHA.

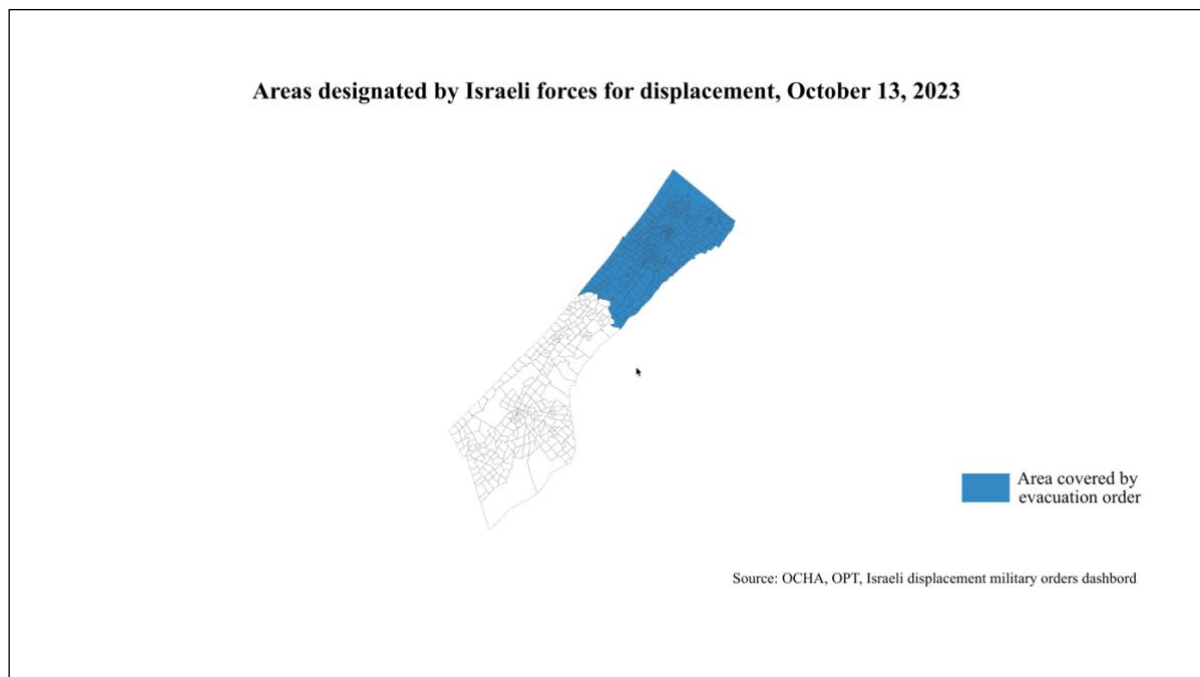


Figure 2.4. Visualization of the areas affected by the Israeli evacuation order in Gaza on 13 October 2023.

Note: Cropped from Gaza Strip - OPT: Israeli military displacement orders [dashboard], by United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, (n.d.).

UN experts and international humanitarian organizations condemned the evacuation order “as a crime against humanity and a blatant violation of international humanitarian law” (see e.g. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2023, October 13), with a UN expert warning that *tripling* the number of displaced Palestinians in Gaza

⁶ Israel Defense Forces, 2023, October 13.

overnight “will decimate and permanently alter the civilian population of Gaza” (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Ibid*). These condemnations connect to the legal distinction discussed in section 2.1.4. between lawful evacuation and forcible displacement. The first Israeli evacuation order was thus framed as a risk of forcible Palestinian population transfer and collective punishment rather than as a merely protective measure. This first “broad and urgent mass evacuation order” (Human Rights Watch, 2024, November 14) would be followed up with many directives and orders throughout the Strip, “forcing hundreds of thousands of people into overcrowded areas and restricting the United Nations’ ability to deliver urgently needed essential supplies” (United Nations, 2025, August 27, para. 26). By the time a ceasefire came into effect on January 19, 2025, some 80 per cent of the Gaza Strip had been placed under “evacuation orders or declared as off-limits” (Gisha- Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, 2025, July 13). On the night of 26-27 January 2025, the Israeli army announced that Gaza residents would be allowed to return to northern Gaza (OCHA, 2025, January 28). The Israeli forces started withdrawing from parts of the Netzarim corridor, thus allowing the return of tens of thousands of displaced Palestinians to northern Gaza (*Ibid*). This was after a ceasefire came into effect on January 19, 2025. By noon on 28 January, more than 376,000 people had moved north, as reported by the Site Management Working Group (Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster, 2025, January 28).

On 9 September 2025, the Israeli military ordered the immediate evacuation of all residents of Gaza City. By that time, famine (IPC Phase 5) had been confirmed “with reasonable evidence” two weeks earlier in the Strip (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification [IPC], 2025, August 22), and the nearly one million Palestinians estimated to be in the City had been “facing daily bombardment and compromised access to means of survival” (OCHA, 2025, September 10). The evacuation order came weeks after Israeli authorities announced on 8 August 2025 preparations for taking control of Gaza City (*Ibid*). The UN and several of its humanitarian partners noted that Israeli authorities issued the evacuation order without taking “effective steps to ensure the safety of those forced to move” (OCHA, *Ibid*). An estimated 400,000 people were displaced from Gaza City between mid-August and the end of September 2025 (United Nations, 2025, September 30). Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, however, remained “trapped under relentless bombardment” in the city, unable to flee. As Amnesty International (2025, October 3) explains, because

they cannot afford transportation costs or because the small area designated by Israel for evacuation is overcrowded and not fit for human habitation. For people with disabilities, older people, and

people who have long exhausted their support networks, there is effectively no choice but to remain where they are.

Israeli Defense Minister, Israel Katz, threatened on October 1, 2025, that those who remain in Gaza City will be regarded as "terrorists and terrorist supporters" (Christou, 2025, October 1), a statement Amnesty International described as "a green light for war crimes, including the targeting of civilians and imposition of collective punishment" (Amnesty International, Ibid). On 10 October 2025, a second ceasefire came into effect, marking two years since the war in Gaza began. Between 10 October and 6 December 2025, nearly 653,532 displacement movements from south to north were recorded (Camp Coordination and Camp Management Cluster, 2025, December 6). Israel presented these recurrent evacuation orders as measures of civilian protection and military necessity. Yet, the legal question remains: whether the two narrow exceptions previously discussed, that is, civilian security and imperative military reasons, were met under the Gaza conditions. UN and human rights reports argue that the total siege, continuous bombardment, threats against those who refused to leave, and uncertainty of return constitute coercive conditions under which displacement can not be depicted as 'by choice'.

2.4. Why Switzerland and why language-region comparison

We chose Switzerland as a case study the country is a site where IL/IHL language is salient, and its multilingual market, especially the French- and German-speaking segments, is worth studying as distinct public spheres.

Described as the *cradle* of International Humanitarian Law, Switzerland has a structurally embedded relationship to IHL that makes IL/IHL references media variables theoretically. In the words of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA, 2024, p. 3), the country has "unique ties" with IHL "thanks to its neutrality (and) its humanitarian tradition". Examples include the fact that the country serves as the Depositary State for the Geneva Conventions (Sandoz et al., 1987; International Committee of the Red Cross, 1960) and 79 international treaties in total (Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, 2023, April 14). This gives Switzerland a special responsibility and legitimacy to promote the implementation of those treaties. Furthermore, the *strengthening* and *promotion* of IHL are declared as Switzerland's "foreign policy priorities" (FDFA, 2024, p. 3; see also FDFA, 2024, January 31). International Humanitarian Law is even integrated into the Swiss military training programs (FDFA, 2024, p. 4). IHL narrative is thus not incidental but institutionalized in Switzerland as

a foreign affairs asset. All this makes IL/IHL references plausible, salient, and analytically meaningful in the Swiss context.

Humanitarian-legal discourse is also dense in Switzerland, due to *International Geneva*. Known as a *humanitarian capital* (Lunshof, 2007), the Swiss city is a global center for humanitarian action. As of 2023, 38 international governmental organizations and 461 non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were hosted in Geneva. Among those bodies, the ICRC, an association governed by Articles 66 ff of the Swiss Civil Code (Haroff-Tavel, 2005, p. 2), is described as a “unique humanitarian protagonist” (Forsythe, 2007) and depicted as having a “humanitarian diplomacy” (Haroff-Tavel, Ibid). Acknowledging its importance and “unique place in global governance”, the Swiss Federal Council allocated CHF 269 million to strengthen International Geneva in 2025 (Swiss Federal Council, 2025, June 20).

At the same time, this humanitarian and legal self-positioning coexists with important diplomatic limits. For instance, despite maintaining relations with the Palestinian Authority and supporting the two-state solution (FDFA, 2026), Switzerland doesn’t recognize Palestine as a state. Yet, this tension further justifies treating IL/IHL references as a theoretically meaningful *frame ingredient* (following Entman’s (1993) understanding of frames as composed of multiple salient elements) to measure in Swiss media discourse.

Switzerland, a small, landlocked country, has a multilingual media system that produces segmented public spheres. In fact, the country’s four official languages make Switzerland “a clear case of an officially multilingual state” that is “segmented along language regions with accordingly segmented media markets” (Tresch 2008, as cited in Vogler & Udris, 2021, p. 1794). Bonfadelli et al. (2021, pp. 381, 386, 382, and 393) provide four main reasons for analyzing Swiss media as addressing distinct publics. First, the distinct linguistic regions reflect distinct “cultural mentalities”. Second, each Swiss language region has its own media ecosystem. Third, there is a legal mandate (for Public media) to address different language communities separately. And fourth, media discourse in Switzerland tends to circulate within, rather than across, linguistic publics. Taken together, these reasons justify a cross-regional comparison of Swiss media.

Among these segmented public spheres, French- and German-speaking are of the utmost importance to our case for objective reasons. In fact, German and French constitute the country’s most spoken languages (62.6 per cent and 23 per cent, respectively). Additionally, the media markets in German- and French-speaking Switzerland are leading the country, with 5.2 million adults in the former and 1.8 million in the latter. (Udris et al., 2020, p. 261). The

“informal Franco-German language boundary” (PORĘBSKI, 2019, p. 173) in Switzerland, widely known as *Röstigraben*, and although not the only *language moat* (Ibid) in the country, is thus worth empirical assessment. We will then be interested to know if the *Röstigraben* influences Swiss media coverage of Gaza’s displacement on both sides of the language border.

Chapter 3

Theoretical framework and state of research

3.1. Framing: Origins and key definitions

In this study, framing is approached primarily through a communication and journalism perspective, while the framing literature encompasses a wide range of definitions, reflecting distinct disciplinary traditions (Cacciatore et al., 2016, p. 8). As D'Angelo and Kuypers (2010, p. 2, as cited in Linström & Marais, 2012, p. 24) explain, framing has been described as a concept, a theory, a class of media effects, a paradigm, and a “multiparadigmatic research programme”, among other things. No fewer than seven definitions of *frame* and *framing* are found in Druckman (2001, pp. 226-227) alone. These include frames being *principles of organization* (Goffman, 1974, as cited in Druckman, Ibid), and “principles of selection, emphasis, and presentation” (Gitlin, 1980, as cited in Druckman, 2001, Ibid), framing referring to “subtle alterations in the statement or presentation of judgment and choice problems” (Iyengar, 1991, as cited in Druckman, Ibid), and more generally, “the way the story is written and produced” (Cappella and Jamieson, 1997, as cited in Druckman, pp. 226-227).

The roots of the concept of framing can be traced back to the early 20th century. Studies of media effects emerged from concern about the impact of World War I propaganda on public opinion. For example, Lippmann's (1922) *Public Opinion* (as cited in Arnold-Forster, 2023, p. 59-60) argued that *pseudo-environments*, that is, the “social-psychological spaces where opinions [are] formed, contested, influenced, evolved,” can be shaped and mediated by propaganda, among other psychological and social factors. By the 1960s, other factors, such as pre-existing opinions and attitudes, started to be taken into consideration. For instance, mass media were found to rarely produce direct attitude change (Klapper, 1960, as cited in Larsen, 1962). It's “most likely effect”, the author argues, is *reinforcement*, not conversion (p. 111). By the early 1960s, scholarship on media effects increasingly focused on salience and attention. For instance, Cohen (1963, as cited in Robinson, 1964) made the seminal observation that the press may not tell people *what to think*, but is highly effective in telling them *what to think about*. His insight was later formalised as agenda-setting theory.

By the 1980s, framing was theorized as a construction of social reality, in which both the media and individuals' “preexisting meaning structures” play a role (Scheufele, 1999, p. 104-105). Concurrently, *framing effects* were empirically demonstrated in psychological

studies (Kahneman and Tversky, 1979, 1981, 1984, as cited in Kahneman & Tversky, 2000, pp. 1-16). The authors posited that when a problem is framed differently, it leads to predictable shifts in preferences. As a case in point, their classic experiment, known as the Asian Disease Problem, found that when a health policy was framed in terms of *lives saved* (gains relative to a reference point), people's preferences were *risk-averse*. However, when the exact problem was framed in terms of *lives lost* (losses), preferences reversed to *risk-seeking* behavior (Ibid, p. 4-5). In simpler terms, participants in the experiment were presented with two programs to deal with a disease expected to kill 600 people: in a positive frame, most chose the sure option (200 lives saved), whereas in a negative frame (400 die), most participants chose the risky option (1/3 no one dies, 2/3 chance all die). Saving 200 lives out of 600 is mathematically equivalent to 400 dying. Yet, the way choices are framed drastically changes decisions. The pioneering experiment was later replicated across different issues, with its results consistently showing that people make decisions based on how options are presented, rather than on the logical value of the outcomes (Cacciatore et al., 2016, p. 10). This presentation-based effect is commonly referred to as *equivalence framing*. It involves manipulating the wording or format of "logically equivalent information" rather than altering its substantive content, which is known as *emphasis framing*. (Ibid, p. 8). The latter, while coined only in later communication scholarship (e.g., Cacciatore et al. 2016), has its roots in Erving Goffman's (1974). Goffman, a sociologist, advanced the idea of frames as interpretive schemes, that is, typically shared structures which individuals use to make sense of everyday situations. From Goffman's analytical perspective, a frame provides a working definition of a situation that participants usually take for granted, such as the shared responses of different individuals to the question "What is it that's going on here?" (1974, p. 8). He writes, "...definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events –at least social ones –" (Ibid, p. 10-11).

This *schemata* of interpretation or primary framework, as Goffman refers to it, "allows its user to locate, perceive, identify, and label" quotidian occurrences (Ibid, p. 21). According to Goffman, meaning is socially constructed and interactional. Framing is not only cognitive but also relational, and meaning emerges through interaction, coordination, and mutual recognition among participants. Most importantly, frames are far from being fixed templates. They are rather continuously negotiated, reinforced, or altered through communicative *keys* (contextual cues) and *keying* (the process of using these keys to make sense of something) (Linström & Marais, 2012, p. 21).

3.1.1. Media frames

Because journalism necessarily involves discretion in choosing which events to cover and which facts to include, news reporting inevitably involves framing. Nelson et al. (1997, as cited in Evans, 2010) describe this process as the way a communicator constructs and defines a social or political topic.

Ever since the publication of his paper *Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm*, Entman's (1993) conceptualization of media framing has been applied by scholars to investigate and explain how the media present information. According to Entman (1993, p. 53), framing is a matter of *selection* and *salience*. In this view, the importance of framing lies not only in what it *includes* but also in what it *omits*. Media frames, Entman (Ibid.) writes, "highlight some bits of information about an item that is the subject of a communication, thereby elevating them in salience". This means raising the noticeability, meaningfulness, and memorability of the information. The salience aspect of framing can be achieved through *placement* or *repetition* of a certain piece of information, or by aligning it with existing cultural schemata. Cohen (1997, as cited in Evans, 2010, p. 210) explains that

[w]hether an item appears on the front page of a newspaper or at the opening of a television news broadcast, is placed in the lead or buried in a later paragraph, reflects the importance which the media attribute to an issue.

This differential framing by placement can also determine how the public will receive the information (Druckman 2001; Nelson & Oxley 1999, as cited in Evans, Ibid). In this regard, a briefly mentioned notion, without illustration, and in an "obscure" part of a text, can still be salient if it aligns well with the reader's existing beliefs and understanding of the world, Entman (1993) elucidates. As for the selection aspect of framing, Entman (Ibid, p. 54) states that "frames select and call attention to particular aspects of the reality described," which means they "simultaneously direct attention away from other aspects."

Media frames are important because the way an issue is presented in the news can shape how audiences understand it (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Edelman (1993, as cited in Entman, 1993) stresses that the power of framing lies in its ability to shape perception by selectively including certain details and excluding others. Together, salience and selection, as conceptualized by Entman (1993), differentiate framing as a media effect from other approaches such as agenda-setting and gatekeeping (Scheufele, 1999). Whereas the latter two approaches studied the selection and salience of the issues themselves, the former "referred to

the selection and salience of particular aspects of an issue rather than to the issue itself” (Scheufele, Ibid, p. 107). Drawing on that, Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) argue that agenda-setting and priming operate primarily through *accessibility effects*. That means making issues more prominent and easier to remember, so people can recall them more easily. Framing, on the other hand, works through *applicability effects*, that is, by making certain interpretive schemas relevant for understanding an issue. Both effects can not be “completely isolated from one another”, note Scheufele and Tewksbury (Ibid, p. 16)

Framing also works at two levels simultaneously (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). First, as a macrolevel concept, or a *macroconstruct*, framing refers to how journalists and other communicators present information “in a way that resonates with existing underlying schemas among their audience” (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, as cited in Scheufele & Tewksbury, Ibid). Within this framework, a frame is a *tool* used to simplify and streamline information (Gans, 1979, as cited in Ibid). Second, framing explains how people use contextual cues and highlighted features to form opinions. This is the *microlevel construct*. In this framework, equivalence versus emphasis framing can clarify the macro-micro distinction: emphasis framing, for example, spans both levels. It is created at the macro level and interpreted at the micro level. Scheufele (1999, pp. 106-107) further specifies what those levels consist of and how they interact. Accordingly, the author adopts Kinder and Sanders’s (1990, p. 74, as cited in Scheufele, Ibid, p. 106) proposal to identify two analytically distinct components of framing: media frames, defined “devices embedded in political discourse,” and individual frames, which they understood as “internal structures of the mind.” In this understanding, framing serves as a *bridge* between discourse and cognition (Friedland and Zhong, 1996, p. 13, as cited in Scheufele, Ibid). This study focuses on framing as a media-level analytical concept, operationalized through Entman’s (1993) four framing functions. Analysis of the individual cognitive level of framing is not addressed.

3.1.2. Framing's key functions

The four functions of media framing are explicitly mentioned in Entman's (1993) often-cited definition. The author explains (p. 52) that framing 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.

The four functions are thus as follows:

Problem definition: At this level, the frames first define the problem. Hence, they decide what the core issue is and why it matters. Herein, Entman defines a problem in terms of what a *causal agent* is doing, which is never neutral but rather defined in relation to *values*.

Causal interpretation: Frames then assign responsibility by deciding who and what *forces* caused the problem.

Moral evaluation: Subsequently, frames evaluate the actors and actions involved, invoking moral standards, judgments, or norms.

Treatment recommendation: Finally, frames propose or imply solutions, responses, or future actions. The recommendations often include predictions about the consequences of taking or not taking certain actions.

These four functions expand on Gamson's (1992) work on interpretive packages and collective action frames. While conducting focus groups to discuss how the US media covers four major issues—affirmative action, troubled industry, nuclear power, and the Arab-Israel conflict—the author demonstrated empirically that media frames provide frames *to think with* rather than *dictating* what to think of an issue (Gamson, 1992, as cited in Katz, 1993, p. 582). Gamson highlighted diagnosis (what's wrong/injustice identified), attribution (who's responsible/*adversary*), and collective action orientation (Ibid). Entman (1993) later systematized this insight into four distinct framing functions, making them useful for content analysis. Applying the four functions to the example of the US media coverage of the Cold War, Entman (1993, p. 52) explains that the Cold War frame defined civil wars as problems originating from communist rebels (the forces causing the problem), characterized these events as *atheistic aggression* (moral evaluation), and advocated for U.S. support for the opposing side as the treatment recommended.

Within this framework, framing is not limited to a single location; it functions across four interconnected points in the communication process (Entman, Ibid). These are: the communicators, the text, the receiver, and the culture. Firstly, framing begins even before the text is written. Guided by existing frames or schemata in their belief systems, journalists and editors—as communicators—make either conscious or unconscious framing judgments. In the Cold War case, for example, US journalists worked within an anti-communist worldview that shaped what was considered newsworthy. Secondly, frames are empirically visible in media content. They appear, as Entman (1993) explains, through “certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences,” which, when taken together, form “thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments” (p. 52). Thirdly, framing effects are rather probabilistic, not deterministic at the receiver’s level; that is, the audience interprets texts using their own frames. Consequently, the receiver’s own frames may or may not align with the communicator’s intention or the frame embedded in the text. Fourthly, frames derive power from cultural resonance. In this understanding, culture is the *stock* of commonly available frames, which are “exhibited in the discourse and thinking of most people in a social grouping” (Ibid, p.53). Across these four locations, framing performs its core functions through selection and salience, thus constructing a problem, a cause, a moral evaluation, and a solution (Figure 3).

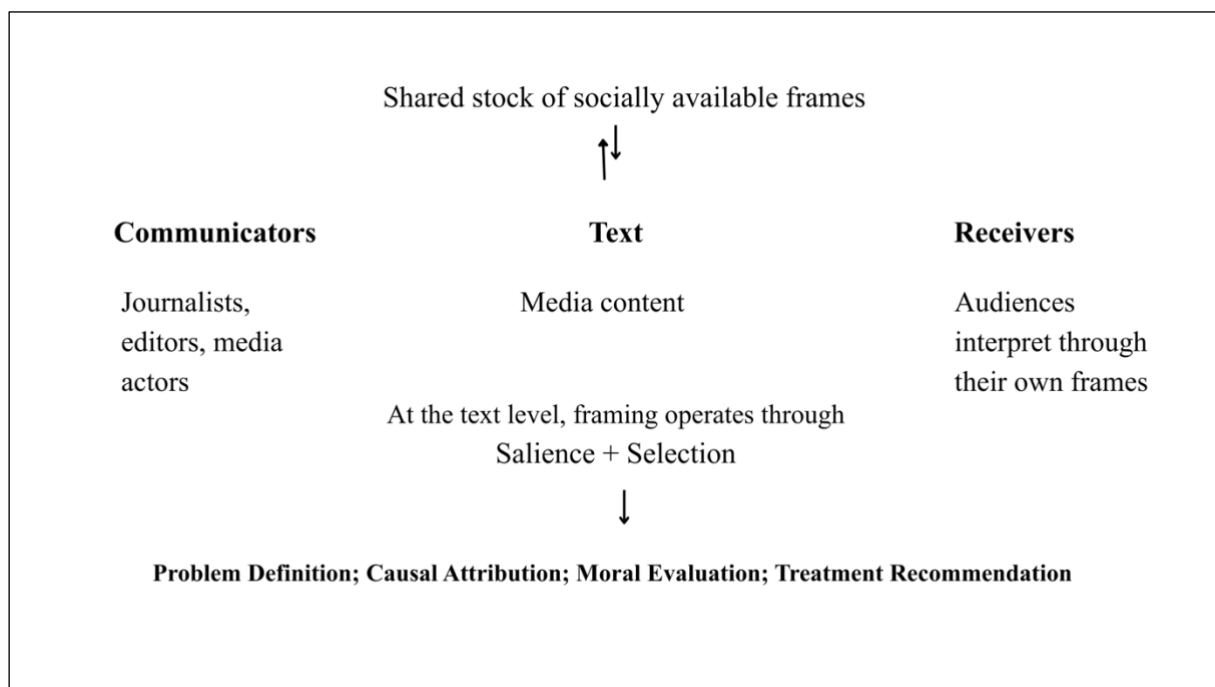


Figure 3.1. Entman’s (1993) framing model and its operationalization in this study.

3.2. Status of research

This literature review examines scholarship on Western media framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, mainly in the U.S., the UK, and other European media outlets. It further narrows to literature addressing the framing of Palestinian displacement within the conflict. It spans over decades of media coverage of the conflict up until the post-October 7 period. The review does not cover Israeli, Palestinian, or Arab media studies on the coverage of the conflict, as it is more interested in how external media actors, situated outside the conflict itself, cover it. The status of research also does not cover migration/refugee literature that is irrelevant to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While there is a substantial body of research on the Western media framing of the conflict, displacement is rarely the main analytical focus. There is limited research on Palestinian displacement before or after October 7 and on media legal framing of it through International Law (IL) and International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Most importantly, there are no systematic quantitative studies that examined Swiss French- and German-language media framing of Palestinian displacement after October 7, 2023.

3.2.1. Media framing of conflicts

The media serves a crucial role in framing political conflicts and their solutions (Robinson, 2011). It thereby shapes public opinion on conflicts, namely the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Wolfsfeld, 2018). However, this influence is not neutral. Multiple studies have shown that in its coverage of conflicts, the media often aligns with the interests of those in power (Şahin & Karayianni, 2020; Hawkins, 2011; Shinar, 2009), its sourcing for international reporting is elite-centered (Hafez, 2007; Van Leuven et al., 2023), and it tends to adopt governmental framing of the conflict (Ginosar & Konovalov, 2015). While this journalistic coverage can be described as patriotic (Ginosar & Konovalov, Ibid), an elite-driven model of wartime coverage (Robinson et al., 2009), other scholars argue it can also be simply taking the side of power (Hawkins, 2011; Şahin and Karayianni, 2020; Shinar, 2009, as cited in Bhowmik & Fisher, 2023, p. 1022).

Equally important, the *indexing* hypothesis posits that the influence of official, powerful sources is pervasive throughout all levels of news production. Developed by Lance Bennett (1990), *indexing* theory means that the range of viewpoints expressed in news coverage aligns with the range of the elite debate in a given context. To elaborate, when political elites (such as the president, high-ranking government officials, and congressional leaders) largely agree on an issue, the media tends to present a narrow, rather unified framework of it. Conversely, when the elite are divided over a given issue, the media's framing broadens to reflect that

disagreement, thus allowing a wider range of perspectives to enter the public discourse. Bennett (1990) builds his hypothesis on a study of the New York Times' four-year coverage of U.S. funding for the Nicaraguan contras, which he found tracked government debate rather than public opinion.

Conflict reporting can take two main orientations: war journalism and peace journalism. The model of peace journalism was first defined by Johan Galtung (1986) as an alternative to war journalism. Explaining Galtung's (1986, 2003) classification, Bhowmik and Ferrucci (2024, p. 283) write,

[t]he war journalism model includes four main types of approaches that are violence-oriented, propaganda-oriented, elite-oriented, and victory-oriented. On the other hand, peace journalism is peace-oriented, truth-oriented, people-oriented, and solution-oriented approach.

Beyond normative orientations, conflict framing may also be distinguished as thematic or episodic. These two concepts of news broadcasts' framing were elaborated in Iyengar's 1991 book, *Is Anyone Responsible? How Television Frames Political Issues*. As Cacciatore et al. (2016, p. 10) explain, thematic framing "involves placing an issue in a general context", whereas episodic framing "treats an issue more singularly and without the context of its thematic-based counterpart". An example of this is the way media frames terrorist attacks, either focusing on isolated cases or events or linking them to "a more general political context" (Ibid., p. 16). Iyengar (1987, as cited in Cacciatore et al., Ibid) found that this framing can affect how responsibility for acts of terrorism is attributed.

Media conflict framing also produces moral hierarchies of suffering and selective empathy. Especially, "in protracted armed conflicts", write Grimm et al. (2025, p. 1), "media framing plays a powerful role in shaping public sentiment". For instance, media coverage determines who to mourn and who not to mourn. In their foundational critique of mainstream media in capitalist democracies, Herman and Chomsky (1988) introduced the concepts of *worthy* and *unworthy* victims. The authors argue, based on a series of case studies, that, in conflict contexts, mainstream media differentiates between victims of violence. This differentiation depends on the political alignment of the perpetrating state. To illustrate, within a *propaganda system*, as Herman and Chomsky coin it, "people abused in enemy states", such as Communist countries, are framed as worthy victims, whereas those abused by the home government or its allied 'client' states will be framed as unworthy (p. 97). Previous studies have also shown that the media present *distant suffering* in uneven or one-sided ways to Western

audiences. In her 2006 *Spectatorship of suffering*, Lilie Chouliaraki argues that the Western viewer is positioned as *safe* and *morally distant*, whereas the sufferer's pain is rendered *spectacular*, *emotive*, and *ahistorical*.

Overall, the mechanisms highlighted in this literature are analytically related to Entman's (1993) four framing functions. To begin with, the practices of elite-centered sourcing and indexing limit the available Problem Definitions. In addition, they explain why specific Causal Interpretations predominate, and why Treatment Recommendations remain within elite bounds. Second, the reporting orientation (war vs. peace journalism) determines how a conflict is morally judged (as a security, humanitarian, religious, or political issue). As a result, it affects whether military or political solutions (Treatment Recommendations) are emphasized. Furthermore, episodic vs. thematic framing influences whether the broader historical context is brought in (into the Problem Definition). In doing so, it likewise shapes Causal Diagnosis (individual vs. structural responsibility). Finally, the distinction between worthy and unworthy victims shapes Moral Evaluation. This is accomplished by determining which suffering is problematized and which is normalized. Such a distinction may also indirectly influence whether structural remedies are discussed.

3.2.2. Western media framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Over its decades-long existence, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been widely mediated. This is because it is deeply embedded in global political-economic structures and meets numerous newsworthiness criteria (Aguilar, 2009, p. 16). Western media, especially in the U.S., have historically dominated global news coverage of the issue (Ozohu-Suleiman, 2014, p. 86). A vast body of literature has been published on how the media in Western nations have reported on the conflict. Newspapers and television reporting constitute the main data for these studies, with a focus on periodic episodes of the conflict (Sahin, 2017). Prior scholarship has shown that Western media privilege the Israeli perspective and prioritize violence over the structural or historical background (e.g., Philo & Berry, 2004, as cited in Brennan, 2006; Friel & Falk, 2007, 2008; Dunskey, 2008, as cited in Rubenberg, 2008; Elmasry, 2009; Amer, 2022; El Damanhoury, 2025). Early studies from the 1960s to the 1980s noted patterns of inaccuracy and favoritism (Kressel, 1987, as cited in Ozohu-Suleiman, Ibid). Later studies found that the media coverage is characterized by an "obsessive interest in threats and violence" (Wolfsfeld et al., 2008, p. 374), thereby leaving the public *mystified* by the conflict (Philo & Berry, 2004, as cited in Brennan, 2006, p. 398).

The identified patterns in framing can be explained by elite sourcing and indexing practices. For example, between 1987 and 2001, the New York Times consistently “used more Israeli sources than Palestinian sources, and the disparity increased over time” (Viser, 2003, p. 117). Through source selection, end-quote placement, and story prominence, the paper was “more favorable toward the Israelis than the Palestinians” (Ibid, p. 114). Similarly, but more recently, the BBC “dedicated most of its quotations to Western voices (40%), mainly Britain” during the early stages of the October 7 war (El Damanhoury et al., 2025, p. 9). Also in the BBC’s coverage of three major events between October 2023 and April 2024, “Israeli security framing is foremost established through headlines and bolded subheadlines” (Miladi & Miladi, 2025, p.11). Although it included a range of Palestinian, Israeli, and international voices, the UK’s national public broadcaster offered Israeli military and Western official sources greater authority and salience (Ibid).

Sourcing asymmetries operate within specific national and institutional contexts. For instance, Neureiter (2017, p. 66) suggests that

a newspaper’s ideological leaning as well as a country’s public opinion, demographic make-up, and relationship with Israel explain the occurrence of... biases rather well, whereas national business interests do not.

At the institutional level, appeals to “due impartiality” can operate as omissions and false balance (Hall, 2024). False balance reference here to the media presentation of opposing positions as equally valid, even when their legal, factual, or evidentiary basis is in fact asymmetrical. For instance, drawing on the ABC Editorial Policy 2023, Hall (Ibid, p. 35) argues that, for example, “merely reporting accusations of war crimes and Israel’s denials gives Israeli claims ‘a respectability or parity with proven facts’, which is not being impartial”. In doing so, the media limit accountability and public understanding.

Framing within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is also a matter of “struggle over narration” (Aloufi et al., 2026, p. 2). Herein, the terminology itself is contested. For instance, Wearing (2021, as cited in Miladi, 2023, p. 16) argues that

the Western media’s continued use of the word ‘conflict’ perpetrates the idea that the occupier and occupied are equals, possessing the same amount of weapons, resources, and international support at their disposal.

Furthermore, numerous studies document the privileging of Israeli narratives in Western media outlets. For example, Viser (2003) examined The New York Times across three periods of analysis: December 1987–December 1988, September 10, 2000–September 10, 2001, and September 11, 2001–December 11, 2001, and found that the media outlet has “grown less and less balanced in its reporting” by favoring the Israeli side of the story (p. 118). Similarly, more recent studies have demonstrated that Western media disproportionately amplifies the Israeli narratives at the expense of Palestinians (Aguiar, 2009; Alkalliny, 2017; Amer, 2022; El Damanhoury et al., 2025). This is also evident in how certain media outlets treated the events of October 7 as a stand-alone rupture in history (El Damanhoury et al., Ibid).

Taken together, these findings and observations suggest a recurrent privileging of Israeli narratives across episodes of the conflict. Nevertheless, framing patterns may be dependent on the event’s specificity. For instance, in his analysis of the 2010 Gaza flotilla raid, Neureiter (2017) finds the opposite tendency. The author examined coverage of the 2010 Gaza flotilla raid in German (*FAZ*, *SZ*, *Die Welt*, and *TAZ*), British (Daily Mail, The Independent, Daily Telegraph, and Daily Mirror), and U.S. (RTD, Washington Post, Washington Times, and NYT) newspapers. He found that

German media coverage (...) exhibits a considerable anti-Israel bias”, and that in relation to “statement bias and coverage bias, German newspapers are slightly more critical of Israel than British outlets and much more critical of it than the American ones (p. 75).

This suggests that framing patterns may vary depending on national media cultures and specific conflict episodes. In summary, narrative framing constructs interpretive hierarchies using selection, salience, lexical choice, and contextual anchoring.

Moral asymmetries in the framing of violence are also identified in the literature. Focusing on the period before and after the September 11th events, Ross (2003, as cited in Elmasry, 2009) conducted a framing analysis of the New York Times editorial coverage of the conflict. The author found a tendency to *depersonalize* Palestinians (p. 5) and frame them as aggressors while framing Israelis as victims. Viser (2003, p. 117-118) found that the NYT’s stories where Palestinians are perpetrators were “more likely to be on the front page” of the NYT, whereas stories where Israelis are perpetrators were more likely to be inside the paper. Elmasry (2009) conducted a large-N content analysis of the NYT and the Chicago Tribune coverage during the first two years of the second *Intifada* (2000-2002). The study found that both newspapers were more likely to frame Israeli killings (of Palestinians) through

legitimation devices, that is, self-defense, war/battle (terminology), explicit rationale, and accident frames. Palestinian killings (of Israelis), however, were more often framed through condemnation framing devices (aggression, criminality, cruelty, humanization). The two media outlets thus didn't merely report violence but rather framed responsibility, legitimacy, and victimhood in an uneven way.

Elmasry (2009) is particularly relevant to the present study because he shows how Entman's (1993) abstract framing functions can be translated into concrete empirical indicators: **Justification:** measures whether violence is framed as self-defense, necessary, or inevitable. It maps onto Causal Interpretation and Moral evaluation.

Condemnation: measures whether violence is labeled as criminal, excessive, immoral, and whether it is associated with blame or illegality. It maps primarily onto Moral evaluation.

Prominence: This measurement tool covers headline vs. body placement, article length, and frequency. It maps directly onto the problem definition through salience.

Overall, this study empirically shows how framing works in practice through selection (which deaths are reported), salience (headline placement and lead paragraphs), moral evaluation (justified vs. criminal violence), and causal interpretation (retaliation vs. unprovoked attack).

Another body of literature focuses on victim representation and *hierarchies of grievability*. Viser (2003) found that across multiple conflict periods (1987 to 2001), Palestinian deaths were less likely to be "identified by name" (p. 117). Over time, Palestinian fatalities become increasingly anonymous, compressed into statistics, and often given "only passing reference" (Viser, 2003, Ibid). Grimm, Könniker, and Salehi (2025) conducted a comparative frame analysis of five major German newspapers (*Bild*, *Welt*, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, and *taz*). The study revealed a "stark contrast between the framing of Israeli and Palestinian deaths in German media" (p. 9). Methodologically, Grimm et al. (2025) operationalized the otherwise abstract concept of grievability developed by Judith Butler (2009). Drawing on an extensive anglophone literature on media coverage of the conflict, the authors (Ibid, p. 8) identified eight central framing devices relevant to the recognition of victims as grievable lives:

- (1) *conflict*, the abstraction and contextualisation of death as part of a reciprocal conflict, often supported by passive voice and indirect mentions of casualties
- (2) *human interest*, the individualisation of death through emphasis of the personal character traits, their social identities, and detailed personalised description of victims
- (3) *responsibility*, the attribution of blame for a death event to a specific actor, including victims

- (4) *victimisation*, the description of casualties as innocent or as passive victims
- (5) *credibility*, the expression of doubt about information on death events and the questioning of its legitimacy, accuracy, or sourcing
- (6) *comparison*, the internal or external juxtaposition of the scale and quality of death
- (7) *justification*, the reasoning of death
- (8) *condemnation*, the thematisation of moral criticism of violence.

On the one hand, the study found that “Palestinian deaths were framed predominantly within a conflict narrative”, thus abstracting individual suffering and marginalizing “violent acts committed against civilians (Ibid, p. 9). On the other hand, it also found that “[c]overage of violence against Israelis predominantly employed a human-interest frame, personalising victims through vivid and emotionalising language” (Ibid). Through the comparison frame, several of the German newspapers examined “reinforced hierarchies of grievability by explicitly denying the comparability of Palestinian and Israeli suffering” (p. 11). These hierarchies illustrate how linguistic and contextual framing conditions which lives are recognized as publicly grievable.

Closely related is research on linguistic constructions of agency. El Damanhoury et al. (2025) studied the headlines from the BBC and Al Jazeera English during the first months of the post-October 7 war. They found that the BBC’s headlines differed qualitatively in how they represented who was included and how. For instance, the BBC hardly presented Palestinians as actors “unless in reference to Hamas” (p. 7). When they did appear as independent actors, it was private individuals checking on family or searching for a loved one. El Damanhoury et al. (2025) also found that the BBC refrained from platforming the words genocide, ethnic cleansing, and war crimes in its headlines, subheaders, lead paragraphs, and quotes, even when such accusations against Israel are voiced by credible actors (p. 11). Others referred to an “^euphemistic, passive ‘conflict’ framing that did not implicate Israel directly” (Miladi & Miladi, 2025, p. 15). The authors note that this framing logic is not uniformly applied. When the victims of violence in Gaza were Westerners, such as the killed World Central Kitchen aid workers, BBC coverage shifted toward explicit responsibility attribution. Only in this case were Israeli responsibility frames made salient (p. 1). These language asymmetries, therefore, reveal that framing is not only a matter of perspective selection. It is also a matter of grammatical construction and responsibility attribution. In Entman’s (1993) terms, choices of naming, omission, passive construction, and verb form shape which actors become salient, how responsibility is causally attributed, and whether violence is morally evaluated as criminal,

accidental, defensive, or merely unfortunate. Agency attribution is, therefore, one textual mechanism through which media framing performs its functions of problem definition, causal interpretation, and moral evaluation.

3.2.3. Framing displacement in the Israeli-Palestinian context

In the Israeli-Palestinian context, displacement is a central historical and political issue, connected to dispossession, refugeehood, and the right of return. Therefore, how media outlets frame displacement matters as it shapes whether the Palestinian movement is understood as temporary evacuation, a humanitarian crisis, forced displacement, or a part of a longer history of expulsion and non-return. Marda Dunskey (2008, as cited in Rubenberg, 2008) studied U.S. media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, analyzing approximately 350 reports and transcripts from nearly 30 American outlets. Covering the period from 2000 to 2004, Dunskey found that the Palestinian refugee question “is rarely reported on in depth or with any historical context in spite of the fact that it lies at the root of the conflict” (Rubenberg, p. 84). Similarly, instruments of international law on refugee issues are *almost never* cited by the studied media.

Decades before Dunskey’s (2008) empirical findings, Edward Said (1979/2024, p. 116) noted that,

For twenty years after Israel appeared, the world knew vaguely and generally of ‘Palestinian refugees,’ or more commonly it heard about Arab refugees’. One of the standard American social science texts on the Middle East produced in the fifties, [...], spoke of the Palestinians in a separate chapter, but there was no indication to the reader that these people existed except as minor irritant to “progress” in the region, or as statistics on the United Nations agenda for refugees in general.

These findings reflect Entman’s (1993) definition of the selection aspect of framing. While media frames *call attention* to periodic violence in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they *direct attention away* from its long-continuing aspects, namely displacement. This may explain the rarity of academic research focused solely on media framing of Palestinian displacement. In this regard, the vast majority of findings in the following body of literature did not come from displacement’s framing scholarship but were embedded in studies on media framing of diverse episodes/aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Legal and humanitarian framing of displacement

In their study of the New York Times coverage of the conflict between 2000 and 2006, during which there was significant Palestinian displacement, Friel and Falk (2007) found a *gap*

between the NYT-reported facts and those documented by human rights organizations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch (HRW), and the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (shortly known as B'Tselem). The inconsistencies, the authors argue, concern how the factual circumstances of the conflict are depicted and how legal responsibility for different practices is attributed. In addition, the paper *failed*, over the six years studied, to contextualize the conflict using international legal instruments. For example, the authors (p. 150; p. 9, consecutively) note that,

[f]rom September 29, 2000, to December 31, 2006, the Times' editorial page never mentioned the [Fourth Geneva] Convention as applied to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

And it

refuses even to acknowledge the relevance of international law unless it reinforces the paper's pro-Israel bias" (...) "This selectivity in the treatment of international law establishes the bias of the Times beyond any reasonable doubt.

In addition to omission by selection, the framing of Palestinian displacement is a matter of linguistic choices. AlKhawaldeh and Alserhan (2025) analyzed the coverage of the October 7 war by several Israeli and Western media outlets, including The Guardian (UK), *Le Monde* (France), and CNN (U.S.). Using critical media discourse analysis, the authors examined lexical choices such as "evacuation" and "relocation". They argue that such choices of terms frame Palestinian displacement in Gaza as a humanitarian or precautionary measure. By doing so, the media minimizes coercion and obscures Israel's responsibility. Moreover, in their view, the use of the terms "move" and "leave" implicitly means that the Palestinian displacement is "not enforced by Israel", but is rather a "viable option for civilians to avoid danger" (p. 32). Another study using critical discourse analysis argues that Palestinians are linguistically stripped of their protected status as civilians under IHL. Drawing on the concept of *de-civilianization*, Alhirthani (2025) examines how Palestinian civilian suffering is discursively mediated in the BBC's English and Arabic services. Analyzing a news story about the arrest of a 'group of internally displaced' Palestinians in Gaza, the author found that while Israel was explicitly named as the actor behind the arrest, it was "omitted as the direct doer" in the English version of the same story (p. 10). Alhirthani (Ibid, p. 2) notes that,

[w]hat stands out is the [BBC's] emphasis on Israeli caution and care, no mention is made of UN reports on Israeli actions, in one which [Francesca] Albanese stresses that Israel has intensified the

de-civilianization of Palestinians by manipulating and stretching IHL concepts such as ‘human shields, collateral damage, safe zones, evacuations and medical protection in such a permissive manner to gut these concepts of their normative content [...] eroding the distinction between civilians and combatants’ (2023: 14) [‘Anatomy of a genocide: Report of the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967’, United Nations Human Rights Council, 20 October,] in its war on Gaza.

Correspondingly, recent research argues that displacement in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is a *weaponized* process. Displacement, in this conception, operates both on the ground as a military strategy and in discourse. Shah (2025) draws on Middle Eastern cases, including Gaza, to highlight how terms such as “evacuation” and “safe zones” depoliticize displacement. In this process, language choices and omission of international legal obligations work in tandem.

An empirical study, structured around Entman’s (1993) framing model, concluded that clearly defining the problem and attributing responsibility increases the likelihood of treatment recommendations (policy responses). Evans (2010) conducted an analytical comparative analysis of New York Times coverage of the army sieges of two Palestinian refugee camps: in Jenine, Palestine (by the Israeli army, 2002) and in Nahr al-Bared, Lebanon (by the Lebanese army, 2007). The author found that, across the two events, the NYT applied inconsistent frames to Palestinian displacement. While the two cases shared strong structural similarities, as they both involved regular armies besieging Palestinian refugee camps and resulted in large-scale destruction and civilian displacements (3000 displaced in Jenine’s siege; 31,000 displaced in Nahr al-Bared’s), the two events were framed in significantly different ways.

Problem Definition:

In the case of Jenine’s siege, the problem was framed as a civilian catastrophe and humanitarian devastation. To illustrate this, the NYT’s stories used expressions such as a “landscape of devastation” (p. 224), sensory descriptions such as “‘stench’ of rotting corpses and mattresses being put over children” (p. 224), foregrounding civilian suffering, and framing the Israeli operation as destructive and excessive. In the case of Nahr al-Bared, the damage was described briefly, “buried in the context of the necessity to ‘flush out’ the militants” (p. 224), and the civilian destruction backgrounded. The problem was thus framed as a security threat posed by militants rather than a humanitarian crisis.

Causal Interpretation:

In the case of Jenine, Evans (2010) found that the stories analyzed attributed responsibility to the Israeli army for disproportionate destruction. On the other hand, the militants involved in the violence against the Lebanese army in Nahr al-Bared were depicted as initiators, linked to radical Islam, and responsible for the destruction and subsequent displacement.

Moral evaluation:

In the case of Jenine, Evans (2010) found that the Israeli operation was depicted as “futile” and “counterproductive”, while the Lebanese army operation in Nahr al-Bared was framed as “decisive” and necessary. Likewise, in Jenine, civilian suffering was foregrounded, and the fighters were “romanticized”, while militants in Nahr al-Bared were morally delegitimized.

Treatment Recommendation:

While Evans (2010) does not show explicit policy prescriptions, the framing implies them. For instance, the more in-depth reporting on Jenine’s siege by the NYT sparked international criticism towards Israel, led to the adoption of UN Resolutions (UNSC/1405, UNGA ES-10/10), and to donations made to rebuild Jenine. In the case of Nahr al-Bared, however, Evans (2010) noted that sparse, emotionally distant coverage and the normalization of the destruction as counterterrorism led to minimal international reaction.

To sum it all up, Evans (2010) shows that the scale of displacement does not determine visibility. Framing, specifically at the Problem Definition level, determines the attribution of responsibility and moral judgments, thereby influencing political consequences.

Historical contextualization of displacement

How the media historically frames Palestinian displacement shapes global understanding, political policies, and human rights responses. Previous scholarship, however, shows that the Palestinian movement has been poorly historically contextualized. In *Bad News from Israel* (2004), prime-time British TV news reporting (BBC 1 and ITV 1) between September 2000 and April 2002 was analyzed. Philo & Berry (2004, as cited in Brennan, 2006, p. 398) found that the two media outlets

privilege the ‘bang bang’ of visually eye-catching coverage at the expense of reportage that attempts to situate the conflict within a wider social and historical context; that explanations, when they came, were ‘enigmatic and brief’, tending to leave audiences mystified by the conflict.

These journalistic practices, the authors argue, create confusion while assuming the *status quo*; the confusion was so great that two-thirds of the participants questioned within the study's framework "did not know that it is the Israelis – and not the Palestinians – who are occupying the occupied territories" (Brennan, Ibid). Similar findings had been made in the UK, with the Glasgow University Media Group already finding in 2002 that in a sample of 300 young people, "71% did not know that it was the Israelis who were occupying the territories". Furthermore, "only 9% of people knew that the Israelis were the occupiers, while 11% thought the Palestinians were the occupiers" (Philo, 2002, April 16). As per the Palestinian refugee aspect of the conflict, the same audience sample was "asked where the Palestinian refugees had come from and how they had become refugees. Eighty per cent replied that they did not know" (Philo, Ibid). In this regard, Philo and Berry (2004, as cited in Brennan, 2006) posit that reporting that is "bereft of historical background" does, in fact, "dis-advantage the Palestinian position" (p. 399). Barkho's (2008) critical analysis of the BBC's English- and Arabic-language online stories about the conflict, from 15 March to 31 July 2007, reached similar conclusions. Both services were found to "select patterns that fail to explain the circumstance or context" (p. 291) on the syntactic level. Likewise, Amer (2022) found that "the contexts of Israel's occupation, siege, brutalities and violations, colonization, and ethnic cleansing were largely missing in the reportage [of the BBC and NYT of the May 2021 Gaza war]" (p. 15). The construction of events and actors, the authors show, happens "in patterns of exclusion and inclusion, over-reporting and underreporting" (Amer, Ibid).

The absence of historical background matters even when the reporting itself is neutral. Sanz Sabido (2023, in Miladi, 2023) studied the coverage of the 2021 Gaza war by six Spanish national newspapers. The author found that, in spite of the "*broadly neutral coverage*" and humanitarian-centered reporting, "it remains unclear who is responsible for the conditions that Palestinians are living in and how they ended up in that position" (p. 41). This is especially true of the protracted condition of refugeehood in Gaza, where most of the residents are refugees or descendants of refugees displaced in 1948. While the episodic framing of the conflict, Sanz Sabido argues, is necessary to grasp the immediate development of events, it is insufficient; "Thematic framing is essential to comprehend the broader nature of the conflict" (Ibid, p. 42).

Chapter 4

Data and Methods

Content analysis is a set of research methods designed to draw reliable, valid, and replicable inferences from various forms of communication (Drisko & Maschi, 2016, p. 7). Building on this, a more detailed definition is provided by Neuendorf (2017, p. 32) and reads as follows

a summarizing, quantitative analysis of messages that follows the standards of the scientific method (including attention to objectivity–intersubjectivity, a priori design, reliability, validity, generalizability, replicability, and hypothesis testing based on theory) and is not limited as to the types of variables that may be measured or the context in which the messages are created or presented.

It is nearly impossible to systematically analyze vast amounts of text solely through qualitative methods. While questions of validity and interpretation are relevant to both manual and computational approaches, large datasets introduce additional challenges. These are related to scale, consistency, and the systematic processing of extensive textual material (Grimmer & Stewart, 2013). This challenge is particularly acute in news analysis; online media alone generate vast, multilingual archives for a single topic. Quantitative text analysis thus emerges as a promising approach for deriving comprehensive, evidence-based conclusions from large text collections (corpora).

To illustrate the value of quantitative content analysis in media studies, Van Gorp (2005) conducted a content analysis of asylum framing in the Belgian press. He argues that “sequences of manifest variables” can be used to understand a latent construct of news framing, that is, a “latent message from the journalist” (Van Gorp, 2005, p. 487-488). Complementing this perspective, Neuendorf (2017, p. 13) explains that quantitative content analysis comprises both “human-coded analyses” and “computer-aided text analysis” (CATA).

This study combines manual quantitative content analysis with complementary computational text analysis techniques: Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) topic modeling and corpus-assisted framing analysis. The former is a generative model used to estimate probability distributions over grouped, categorical observations, such as sets of text documents (Blei et al., 2003). The latter builds on corpus-assisted discourse studies (CADS) by combining corpus linguistic techniques with framing analysis. This aims to identify recurring thematic and linguistic patterns across the media corpus (Baker et al, 2008).

4.1. Data

Data collection

This analysis aims to compare the framing of Palestinians' displacement in Gaza after October 7, 2023, in German-speaking versus French-speaking Swiss media. Accordingly, 2381 news articles from six media outlets were collected via Swissdox over three periods spanning from October 7, 2023, to October 10, 2025.

Period	Dates	Rationale
Period 1	October 7-12, 2023	Immediate displacement, prior to mass evacuation orders
Period 2	October 13, 2023- January 27, 2025	Starts with the Israeli army ordering the entire population of north Gaza to move south, and when hundreds of thousands of displaced Palestinians walked back to northern Gaza.
Period 3	September 9, 2025-October 10, 2025	Starts with Israel issuing an evacuation order covering the entirety of Gaza City, and ends with a new ceasefire coming into effect.

Table 4.1. Overview of the three analytical periods.

The outlets were chosen to reflect different media types within the Swiss media system; srf.ch and rts.ch represent the public service media, nzz.ch and letemps.ch represent quality/elite press, whereas popular outlets/tabloids are represented by blick.ch and 20minutes.ch. These three media types correspond to well-established distinctions within the Swiss media market (Bonfadelli et al., 2021). In addition to their distinct types, all chosen media outlets are characterized by prominence and reach within the two studied language regions.

By way of illustration, rts.ch and srf.ch are two out of the four units that make up the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG SSR). The latter holds the “greatest opinion-forming power” in the country (28%, Publicom, 2025). NZZ and Le Temps represent the subscription press, which is characterized by a strong focus on hard news. Both outlets are consistently identified by the Forschungszentrum Öffentlichkeit und Gesellschaft as high-quality media (fög, 2024). Blick and 20 Minutes were included to capture mass-market media logics. As commuter and tabloid outlets, they have a strong orientation towards reach (fög, 2024). Swiss media consumption is strongly structured along linguistic lines (Udris et al., 2020); comparing these outlets with representatives of language regions remains analytically meaningful.

Media type	German-speaking outlet	French-speaking outlet
Public service	srf.ch	rts.ch
Quality/elite press	nzz.ch	letemps.ch
Popular/Tabloid	blick.ch	20minutes.ch

Table 4.2. List of used media outlets by language and media type.

A Boolean search operator was used to retrieve articles. It consisted of two main parts: a geographic anchor (Gaza) and terms related to displacement. To capture these elements, two queries were designed separately in French and German. Such a rule-based selection criterion aligns with content analysis principles that emphasize transparency, consistency, and reproducibility (Krippendorff, 2004). The queries used for French and German, respectively, were:

("Gaza AND (évacua* OR fui* OR déplac* OR expuls*)")*

("Gaza AND (Evakuier* OR flieh* OR Vertreib* OR Zwangsvertreib*)")*

Swissdox, an online media database, allows filtering of the search results through its comprehensive archive. This can be done according to language, outlet, period, author, etc. Hence, all six outlets were searched across three periods of analysis. Whenever an outlet had both a print and an online version (e.g., NZZ), the latter was selected to avoid duplication. There is already evidence that half of the Swiss population gets its information through digital channels (Forschungszentrum Öffentlichkeit und Gesellschaft, n.d.). Furthermore, it was evident that the search would return the highest number of articles for Period 2, spanning more than 15 months, compared with the other two periods studied, which were much shorter. Hence, the search for Period 1 returned 69 articles, Period 3 returned 144, and Period 2 returned 2188.

Data cleaning

All articles were manually retrieved from Swissdox. The full content of each article, that is, the headline, lead, and body text, was transferred into TXT format in TextEdit, a plain text editor. That helped create a standardized, plain-text corpus suitable for systematic quantitative analysis. To ensure further traceability and corpus organization, the source, author, and date of each item were also recorded in the TXT files. An Excel sheet was created to document the detailed screening of the retrieved articles. It contained 11 columns. These were: Date (of

screening), Outlet, Period, Query, Mode (of search in Swissdox, which was “Exact”), Hits (number of articles found), Title, Date (of publication), Identifier (ID), Included (Yes or No), and Reason (for the decision).

A comprehensive manual screening protocol was designed to ensure only relevant articles are included. Articles were thus reviewed manually, case by case, and according to predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The protocol was further refined following an initial pilot query conducted on articles retrieved for Period 1. Substantiveness was the main rule for inclusion; displacement references needed to contribute to the article’s description, explanation, or reporting. Substantive references to displacement included but were not limited to: number of displaced persons and shelters, UNRWA/OCHA displacement reporting, testimonies of Gazans describing their flights or displacement living conditions, calls from Israeli officials or public figures advocating that Gaza’s population needs to leave/flee as long as they are framed as affecting the population movement (order, evacuation, expulsion scenario), border closures affecting flights, and expulsion scenarios (even if framed as just a ‘feared’ scenario). An operational test was conducted manually to examine whether the removal of the displacement-related term would result in changing the article’s core meaning. Whenever it was the case, the article was excluded.

Displacement can be an event, a process, or a condition, as long as it is directly related to Gaza’s war (October 7, 2023-). Many retrieved articles were thus excluded due to keyword noise (e.g., “displacement” referring to sports travel in the French expression “*déplacement de l’équipe*”, or the German verb “*vertreiben*” meaning “to sell something” in the sentence “*Er vertreibt auf Adobe Stock verschiedene seiner Werke.*”). Other articles were also excluded for being about the wrong population and or geography (e.g., evacuations related to Israeli or Lebanese residents in border areas, or referring to foreign nationals' evacuations from Gaza). References to Palestinians’ displacement that were not clearly linked to the period under study led to the exclusion of the concerned articles. For example, timelines (and chronologies) about the 1948 Nakba or the Israeli/Palestinian conflict that didn’t link past displacements to the current one were excluded. Moreover, when references were limited to medical and humanitarian staff and institutional personnel, the articles were excluded because they did not represent population-level displacement.

Certain article formats were excluded by their very nature. These are: live tickers, rolling trackers (e.g., “*Chroniques d’Israël et de Palestine*” on letemps.ch), compilations, photo galleries, continuous galleries, news digests (e.g., “*Les 5 choix de la semaine*” on rts.ch), agency

content (e.g., from AFP, Reuters, dpa, AP, and Keystone-SDA), duplicates (and updated versions), and republications. For media framing analysis, a consistent narrative across individual items is crucial, as is a fixed publication date for cross-period comparison. An item consisting of mere captions, or spanning multiple time periods, is thus not suitable for analysis. An item imported from an international news agency, even if slightly adapted by a member of the editorial team, may not fully reflect a given media's editorial line. After considering all the above factors, 2190 articles were removed. The final clean dataframe consisted of 191 articles (see **Table 4.3** below).

Outlet	Number of items
letemps.ch	78
nzz.ch	55
rts.ch	19
srf.ch	24
blick.ch	18
20minutes.ch	2

Table 4.3. Number of articles per outlet in the final dataframe.

Data formatting

The quantitative analysis was conducted in the statistical programming environment R. Multiple R packages were used to import data, clean it, prepare the corpus, mine text, perform topic modeling, and visualization. The workflow relied in particular on the *quanteda* package for corpus construction and text processing (Benoit et al., 2018). The package *topicmodels* was later used for LDA topic modeling (Grün & Hornik, 2011). The packages *tidytext* (Silge et al., 2016) and *tidyverse* (Wickham et al., 2019) were used for textual analysis and data manipulation, respectively.

After the manual coding, data from all included articles (191 items) were organized into a Microsoft Excel file. Each row represented one coded article, and each column corresponded to a variable from the designed codebook (see Methods). The dataset was then imported into R, and the variable names were standardized and cleaned. At this stage, to verify the structure,

column names, data types, and the overall dataset integrity of the variables, an initial inspection was conducted. These consisted of using the *names()*, *head()*, and *glimpse()* functions from base R (Helmreich, 2016) and *tidyverse*. In addition, to facilitate the quantitative analysis, categorical variables, that is, period, outlet, and language region, were converted into factor variables. Using the *as_date()* function in base R, date variables (DD.MM.YY) were standardized into date format (YY.MM.DD).

Following the quantitative analysis, a computational text analysis was conducted. The raw article texts were imported into R. Given that this programming environment initially read the article as a series of separate lines, the *paste(lines, collapse= "\n")* function was used to merge them into a single continuous text object. Using the function *str_extract()* from the *stringr* package (Wickham, 2010), articles' metadata were extracted (title, date_raw, and source), while the main body text was isolated from the metadata using the *str_remove()* and *str_squish()* functions from the same package. Thereafter, a structured corpus table was created, consisting of one row per article and columns for article_id, date, outlet, title, and text. Article identifiers were generated from file names, and dates were converted into date format. Following this, all individual articles were combined into a single master. To this corpus, period, and language labels were added. At this point, metadata inconsistencies were identified and corrected. For example, missing language labels for some blick.ch articles were corrected, as was the date for one rts.ch article; following this, period labels were recalculated. The cleaned master corpus was saved in both .csv and .rds formats. Since this study is interested in cross-language-region comparison, two language-specific corpora were created, and the resulting French and German corpora were saved separately. Ensuing language-specific pre-processing, a critical stage in Natural Language Processing (NLP), started. During this stage, the textual corpus was normalized in order to create a clean text field for computational analysis. Text normalization included lowercasing, removal of HTML tags, white space normalization, and trimming of extra spaces. After cleaning, the textual dataset was converted into a corpus object. Another *quanteda* function, *tokens()*, was used for tokenization, with punctuation, numbers, symbols, and URLs removed during preprocessing. French and German stopwords lists were first generated, then removed from the tokenized corpus. At this point, a document-feature matrix (DFM) was created using the function *dfm()*. Finally, sparse terms were reduced, and residual metadata artifacts (e.g., "title", "date", "source") were removed.

During the exploratory text analysis, additional residual noise terms were identified and thus eliminated. The updated DFM was trimmed again to retain only terms that appear at least 5 times in the corpus and at least 3 documents, further reducing sparsity. In text analysis, sparsity refers to a high proportion of zero-frequency cells in a document-feature matrix (DFM), arising from terms that rarely occur across documents (quanteda, n.d.). In this context, reducing sparsity helps limit noise and improve the corpus's usability for analysis.

Since LDA topic modeling was used as a secondary exploratory method, specific data formatting steps were undertaken in preparation. Including, for instance, assigning the previously prepared and trimmed DFM to an LDA-specific object, using the code snippet `dfm_lda <- dfm_trimmed`. Additional high-frequency but analytically weak terms were removed after inspecting the top features. Examples include the German “*dass*”, “*laut*”, “*sei*”, “*gibt*”, and the French “*comme*”, “*tout*”, “*d’un*”, “*aussi*”. After a second trimming, the final DFM was converted into a format compatible with the *topicmodels* package. Once the LDA model was run, topic probabilities were transformed into a dataframe, to which the metadata were attached. Topic columns were renamed for an easier-to-read and analyze output. An exported LDA topic-probability table was consequently exported.

Finally, a Corpus-Assisted Framing Analysis (CAPA) was conducted to explore how the displacement is discursively constructed around key actors (Israel, Hamas), displacement terms (e.g., evacuation, ethnic cleansing), and two other chosen terms, “human shields” and “Nakba”. Again, the French and German corpora were tokenized, and all tokens were converted to lowercase. Using the *phrase()* function, multi-lingual multi-word expressions, such as forced displacement, were identified, predefined, and compounded into single lexical units using the *tokens_compound()* function. This ensured their semantic integrity during corpus analysis. Eventually, the selected corpus output and concordance extractions generated during CAPA were exported into CSV format to facilitate manual inspection and interpretation.

4.2. Methods

This study utilizes a multi-layer method to examine Swiss media framing of the Palestinians' displacement in Gaza after October 7.

First, manual coding was conducted on the 191 included news articles. A major advantage of this method is that it captures implicit meaning and contextual references, which a human coder is assumed to be better equipped to detect (Conway, 2006, as cited in Matthes & Kohring, 2008, p. 262). It also allows a nuanced interpretation of framing. A frame, Van Gorp (2007) posits, is already an "abstract variable that is both hard to identify and hard to code in content analysis" (cited in Matthes & Kohring, *Ibid*). Hence, there is a need for human interpretation. Manual coding, for instance, can be useful for identifying legal and humanitarian framing that automated analysis may miss. Specifically, legal contextualization may be conveyed through paraphrasing rather than mere explicit terminology.

Coding was based on a predefined codebook grounded in the research questions, Entman's framing theory, the IL/IHL displacement framework, and the literature on media framing, conflict, and displacement. To strengthen the validity and reliability of the coding scheme, 20 articles spanning all 6 outlets and 3 study periods were first coded as a pilot test. First, this informed the refinement of variable definitions, category boundaries, and operational coding instructions; second, it helped reduce interpretive ambiguity; and last, it helped limit coder bias before the codebook was finalized. To strengthen content validity, variables were operationalized directly from the study's theoretical framework and research questions. After completion of the initial coding, a test-retest procedure was conducted on a subset of the Swiss corpus to enhance reliability. For instance, a purposive subset of 12 articles was selected across the two language regions, all 6 media outlets, and the three analytical periods. To assess consistency over time, the selected items were then recoded and compared with the original coding decisions. Using R, the first coding-vs.-test-retest comparison was conducted. It demonstrates high coding consistency: 263 of 276 variable comparisons yielded identical coding decisions, with an overall agreement rate of 95.3%. The found discrepancies were mainly related to interpretive framing variables, such as Moral Evaluation and Causal Attribution. Factual and lexical variables, namely IL- and IHL-related variables, however, showed complete agreement. Subsequently, the discrepancies were manually reviewed and harmonized in the finalized dataset.

At the content level, the variables were IL/IHL variables, Historical anchoring of displacement, Entman's four framing functions, Displacement construction variables (also

referred to as “labels”), and Independent variables (Language regions and Time periods). This variable-by-variable coding scheme follows Matthes and Kohring's (2008, p. 263) argument that to “measure a frame in a valid and reliable way”, it is crucial “to identify the single elements of a frame”. The descriptions of the 25 variables are shown in Table 4.3 below.

Variable/Subvariable	Type	Description
VI V2	binary: 0=no; 1=yes	They capture the presence of legal framing. A distinction is made between general references to IL/IHL (V1) and engagement with the lawfulness of evacuations (V2).
V3	ordinal: 0= no references; 1= generic references; 2= specific references	It measures the degree of contextualization of displacement.
V4- V5-V6-V7	binary 0= no; 1= yes	These variables indicate whether an article defines the problem (V4), attributes causality (V5), expresses/documents moral evaluation (V6), and/or proposes treatment recommendations (V7).
V8a-V8b-V8c-V8D-V8e- V8f-V8g-V8h-V8i-V8j-V8k- V8l-V9a-V9b-V9c_V9D	binary: 0= no; 1= yes	These capture how displacement is discursively constructed, including lexical labeling of movement and agency-related features.
IV1	nominal: 1= French speaking media; 2= German speaking media	They consist of language region (IV1) and time periods (IV2).
IV2	categorical: 1= Period 1; 2= Period 2; 3= Period 3	

Table 4.4. Description of the variables and subvariables for quantitative analysis.

While manual coding offers notable benefits, it is not without limitations. First of all, this method is notably time-intensive. Secondly, it carries the risk of researcher subjectivity, especially given the politically and legally sensitive topic of study, and of coding ambiguity in borderline cases. Moreover, manual coding may be influenced by the researcher's contextual knowledge of the topic. This may affect interpretations of meanings that are not explicitly stated in the text. Hence, four additional layers of analysis were employed to address these limitations: descriptive statistics, hypothesis testing, LDA topic modeling, and corpus-assisted

framing analysis. Essentially, the aforementioned computational methods rely on observable textual patterns and co-occurrences within a given corpus, rather than on interpretive human coding.

First, descriptive statistics were used to summarize the dataset's composition by language-region, period, and media outlet. Frequency tables for the main coding variables (such as displacement labels) were then produced, and the key framing variables were compared across French- and German-language media outlets. Using bar charts, the proportional distributions of different variables were also visualized. Exploratory summaries of different variables permitted a better understanding of how displacement, agency, and coercion were linguistically constructed in the Swiss corpus.

Second, the study's six hypotheses were tested. The focus was mainly on the associations between language regions, time periods, and key framing variables. For instance, IL/IHL references, conditions for the lawfulness of evacuation, historical contextualization, and moral evaluation were compared across the two language regions and three analytical periods. This was done using chi-square tests and Fisher's Exact test when expected cell counts were too small.

Furthermore, topic modeling was chosen as a complementary layer of analysis. In it, topics are inferred by the model itself. In this study, the topics were interpreted as potential thematic clusters related to framing patterns. Following language-specific preprocessing, the texts were combined into a document-feature matrix using minimum term and frequency thresholds. An exploratory LDA model was run for $k = 4-8$, with $k = 5$ selected as the main model because its topics clearly separated into interpretable clusters.

Last but not least, a corpus-assisted framing analysis was conducted to examine specific framing expressions/terms in context through concordance analysis. Given that such an approach identifies frames through the presence and contextual use of specific keywords (Touri & Koteyko, 2015), the study focused on the expressions "human shields" and "*Nakba*". The former is directly linked to agency attribution and captures a military/security frame in which civilian harm may be explained by one actor's tactics rather than another's military actions. The latter is linked to the historical anchoring variable. It helps assess whether Swiss media present the Gazans' displacement as a new humanitarian emergency or as part of a longer historical process.

Chapter 5:

Findings and Discussion

This chapter presents the findings from the empirical analysis and offers potential interpretations. It reports the results of the manual coding, hypothesis tests, LDA topic modeling, and CAPA. As previously mentioned, this study investigates how the Swiss media framed Palestinians' displacement in Gaza after October 7 and how this framing varied across time (October 7, 2023- October 10, 2025) and language regions (French and German). It pays particular attention to whether the displacement was framed in terms of International Law and International Humanitarian Law, and whether it was historically contextualized. Firstly, this chapter's findings section presents the descriptive, statistical, topic modeling, and CAPA results of the study. Secondly, the discussion section interprets those findings through Entman's (1993) four framing functions and relates them to the study's theoretical and historical framework.

5.1. Findings

We find that the Swiss media rarely framed the displacement of Palestinians in Gaza as a legally structured process of forced displacement or as part of a longer trajectory of dispossession (Figure 5. 1). This suggests that they mainly framed the civilian movements as a humanitarian and coercive condition of wartime. The overwhelming majority of articles across the corpus did define displacement as a problem, used coercive language to describe the movement itself and the coercive environment in which it occurred, but rarely referred to the legal aspects of the coerced movement or the possible treatment. For instance, there were no explicit references to the Fourth Geneva Convention⁷ across the corpus, even though it is the central legal framework for assessing forced displacement under occupation.

The Swiss media outlets defined the Palestinians movement in Gaza as a danger, flight, humanitarian vulnerability, and survival. The two most frequent displacement terms (also referred to in this analysis as labels) used were “displacement” and “evacuation”. Labels carrying stronger legal implications, such as “forced displacement”, “deportation”, and “ethnic cleansing”, were much less frequent. At the same time, there was no reproduction of the terms “voluntary migration” and “emigration” used by Israeli officials to describe the proposals for the removal of Palestinians from Gaza. Put differently, the Swiss corpus did not frame the

⁷ Additional keyword search.

Gazans' movement as voluntary, nor did it frequently use the strongest legal vocabulary of forced displacement. This, however, should not be read as simply a neutral midpoint between two conflicting narratives.

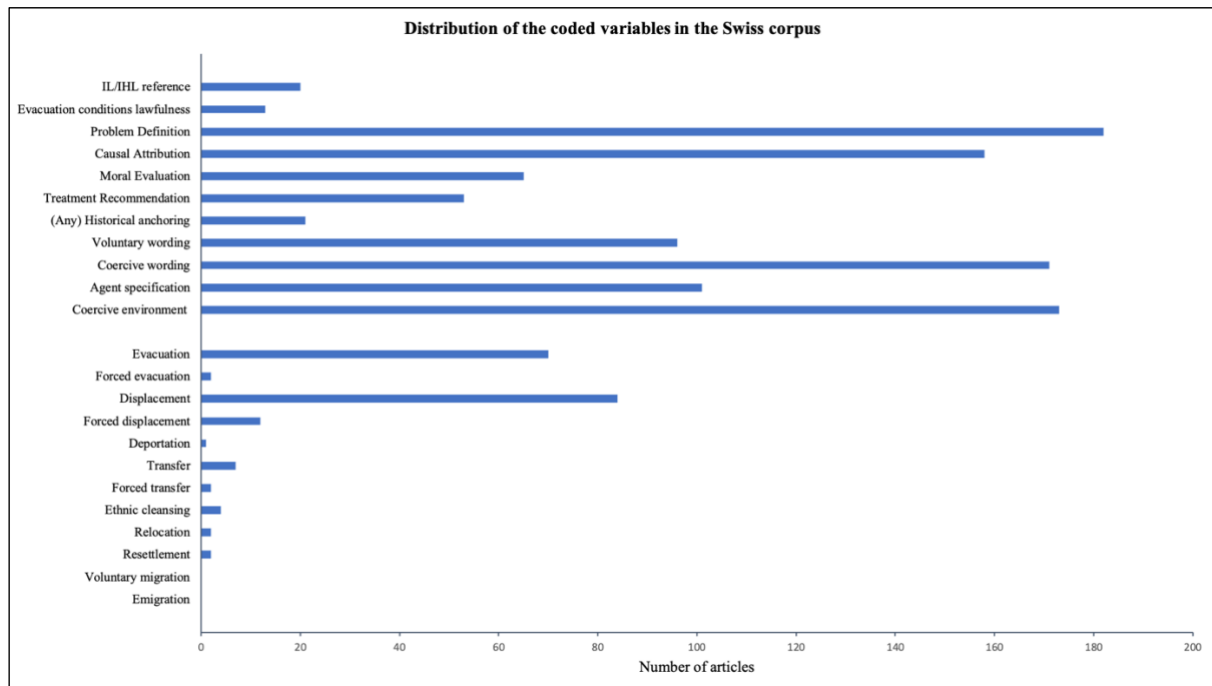


Figure 5.1. Frequency of coded variables in the Swiss corpus.

Note: For the full results, including frequencies and percentages, see Appendix B.

The Swiss corpus often referred to the conditions that had caused the displacement of Palestinians in Gaza, but did not always explicitly attribute it to an agency. The two variables, Causal Attribution and Agent specification, measure different levels: the first indicates that displacement is embedded in an explanatory narrative, while the second means that a concrete agent is grammatically named as responsible for causing or ordering the population movement. The audience is often left to draw connections and assign responsibility based on the provided context, as the Agent specification appears in only half of the corpus.

The Swiss corpus contained moral judgments on the recurrent Palestinian displacement, but these were more often humanitarian than legal and historical. Remedies to displacement are the least present in the corpus. Not only was this framing function absent in 72.3% of the corpus, but the topic modeling also showed no clear remedy-related topics (Table 5.1). This means that the Swiss media coverage of Palestinians' displacement in Gaza stopped at defining the problem, describing the suffering, and sometimes attributing responsibility; remedies, such as legal accountability, protection obligations, compliance with conditions for the lawfulness of

evacuations, or the return of displaced people, were rarely present. Thus, the framing of displacement was more diagnostic than prescriptive.

Topic	Label	Top 15 terms
Topic 1	<i>Israeli military strategy and diplomatic management</i>	gaza, hamas, Israël, israélienne, palestiniens, l'armée, guerre, israéliens, depuis, rafah, bande, civils, israélien, nord, otages
Topic 2	<i>Civilian suffering and humanitarian experience</i>	gaza, depuis, guerre, bande, humanitaire, personnes, situation, enfants, famille, Hamas, Israël, israélienne, palestiniens, nord, bombardements
Topic 3	<i>Rafah, borders, displacement governance, and post-war scenarios</i>	israel, rafah, hamas, gazastreifen, ägypten, palästinenser, grenze, israelische, gaza, gazastreifens, krieg, israels, netanyahu, israelischen, kairo
Topic 4	<i>Israeli attacks, civilian harm, and contested accountability</i>	hamas, israel, israelischen, israelische, armee, gazastreifen, stadt, gaza, menschen, gazastreifens, süden, norden, geiseln, rafah, worden
Topic 5	<i>Palestinian displacement, exile, and everyday survival</i>	gaza, menschen, gazastreifen, familie, krieg, hamas, leben, kinder, israel, rafah, immer, tag, süden, ägypten, palästinenser

Table 5.1. LDA topic modeling results

Note: LDA topic modeling was used in this study as an exploratory method, not as a hypothesis test. The final document-feature matrix used for LDA contained 191 documents and 3,473 terms. A five-topic solution was retained after comparing models with four to eight topics because it produced the most interpretable thematic structure. The topic labels are interpretive and were assigned after examining the highest-ranking terms and the highest-loading documents for each topic.

We also find a variation in the framing of displacement over time. However, this was a thematic rather than a legal variation. References to IL/IHL were most visible in the immediate aftermath of October 7 (Period 1) and disappeared entirely in Period 3. Both the chi-square test, $\chi^2(2) = 2.85$, $p = 0.240$, and Fisher's exact test, $p = 0.237$, indicate that this difference was not statistically significant. References to the lawfulness of evacuation conditions remained rare across all three periods studied. However, they appeared more often in Period 1 (11.1%) than in Periods 2 and 3 (6.5% and 7.7%), respectively. Still, the chi-square, $\chi^2(2) = 0.30$, $p = 0.860$, and Fisher's exact test, $p = 0.456$, found this difference to be statistically non-significant. H3a and H3b were thus not supported. In contrast, the topic modeling showed thematic shifts over the same period (Figure 5.2). The focus in Period 1 was on civilian suffering and humanitarian

experience. Period 3 concentrated more on the topics of Israeli attacks, civilian harm, and contested accountability. During Period 2, the thematic structure became more balanced. This shift, however, did not lead to greater legal contextualization.

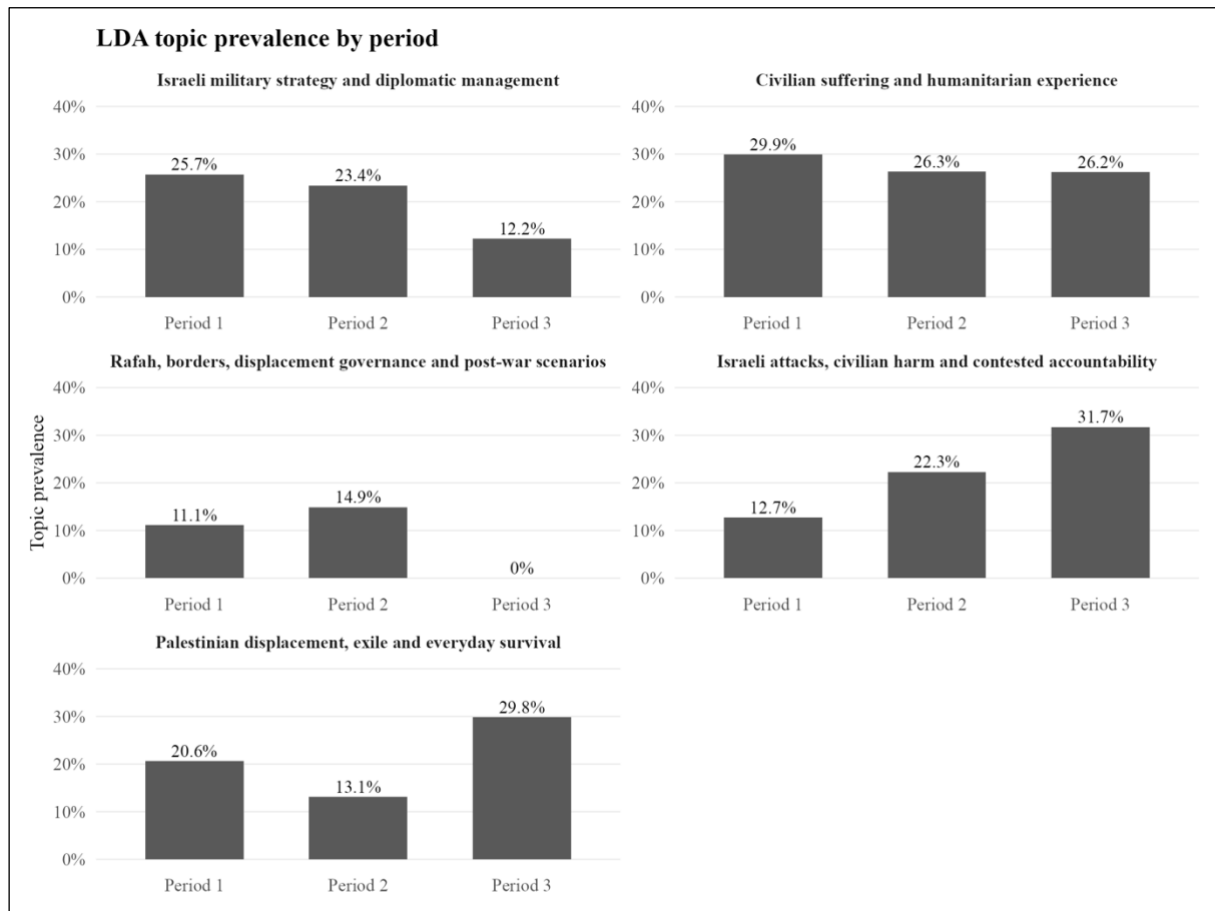


Figure 5.2. LDA topic prevalence by period.

Note: Since Period 3 contains only 13 articles, this trend is to be interpreted cautiously.

There are differences between the Swiss French- and German-speaking media outlets in their framing of Palestinians' displacement in Gaza after October 7. These differences, however, are uneven and do not form a simple *Röstigraben* (Table 4). While displacement was overall marginally framed in legal or humanitarian law terms, French-language outlets were more likely to include general references to IL/IHL than German-language outlets (15.9% of articles in the French-language corpus, compared with 5.2% in the German-language corpus). The chi-square test with Yates' correction for continuity indicated that this difference was statistically significant, $\chi^2(1) = 4.85$, $p = 0.028$, supporting H1a. Yet French-language media outlets did not have an advantage in terms of the lawfulness of evacuation conditions, the historical anchoring of displacement, or Moral Evaluation. Hence, H1b, H2, and H4 were not

supported. This suggests that Swiss French-language media are more legally oriented than German-language media in one aspect of framing displacement, but not in the broader legal, historical, and moral framework more generally.

Hypothesis	Comparison	FR%	DE%	Period 1 %	Period 2 %	Period 3 %	Test result	Supported?
H1a	IL/IHL general reference by language	15.9	5.2	-	-	-	$\chi^2(1) = 4.85$, $p = 0.028$	Yes
H1b	Evacuation lawfulness by language	8.5	5.2	-	-	-	$\chi^2(1) = 0.40$, $p = 0.527$	No
H2	Historical anchoring by language	10.6	11.3	-	-	-	$\chi^2(1) = 0.00$, $p = 1.00$ *	No
H3a	IL/IHL reference by Period	-	-	22.2	10.7	0.0	$\chi^2(2) = 2.85$, $p = 0.240$; Fisher $p = 0.237$	No
H3b	Evacuation lawfulness by Period	-	-	11.1	6.5	7.7	$\chi^2(2) = 0.30$, $p = 0.860$; Fisher $p = 0.456$	No
H4	Moral Evaluation by language	29.8	38.1	-	-	-	$\chi^2(1) = 0.14$, $p = 0.287$	No

Table 5.2. Hypothesis table results for language region and temporal variation

Note: Chi-square result after collapsing the original three-category variable into a binary distinction between presence and absence of historical anchoring.

The differences in French- and German-language media framing of displacement are also linguistic (Figure 5.3). To describe Palestinians' movements in Gaza, French-language outlets used terms coded as "displacement" more often (54.3%), while German-language outlets used, more frequently, terms coded as "evacuation" (58%). The latter can be understood as an administrative or preventive measure; the former leaves more room for coercion. Although more legally charged terms, such as "deportation" and "forced displacement," were rare overall, they appeared either predominantly or exclusively in French-language articles. The statistical significance of the language-region differences in using "evacuation", "displacement" and "forced displacement" was further confirmed by article-level tests ($\chi^2(1)=10.82$, $p=.001$; $\chi^2(1)=19.54$, Fisher: $p<.001$, respectively).

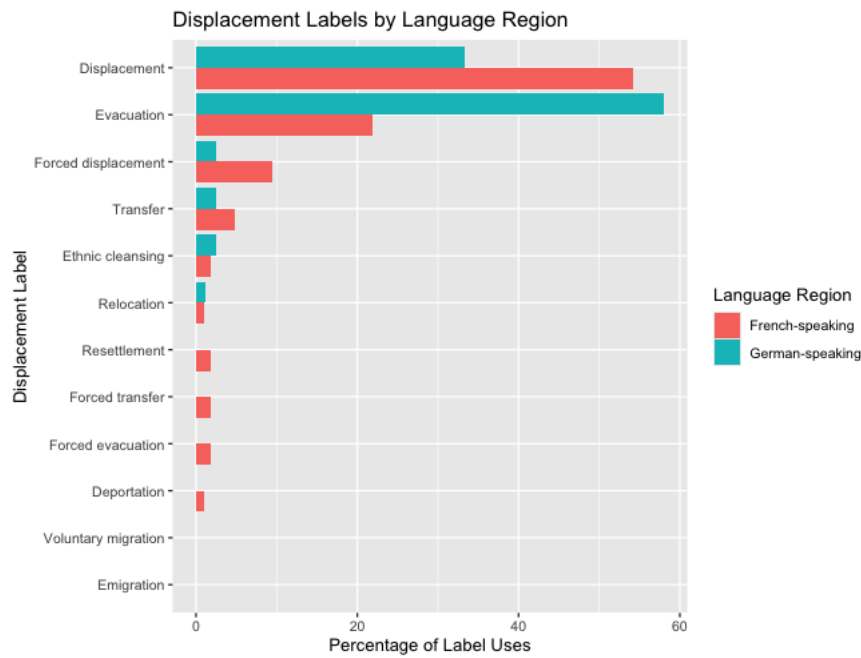


Figure 5.3. Displacement labels by language regions.

Apart from individual words, we find a language-region variation at the thematic level (Figure 5.4). The topic model revealed that the French articles were entirely related to either “Civil suffering and humanitarian experience” (Topic 2) or “Israeli military strategy and diplomatic management” (Topic 1). All three remaining topics were associated with German-language articles: Topic 3 (“Rafah, borders, displacement governance, and post-war scenarios”), Topic 4 (“Israeli attacks, civilian harm, and contested accountability”), and Topic 5 (“Palestinian displacement, exile, and everyday survival”). This pattern was further confirmed when examining the topic distribution at the outlet level (Figure 5.5). The LDA, however, was estimated on a bilingual corpus using an unsupervised model. Hence, these distinctions should rather be interpreted as an exploratory lexical-thematic pattern shaped by language-specific vocabulary, not as direct evidence of substantive editorial differences.

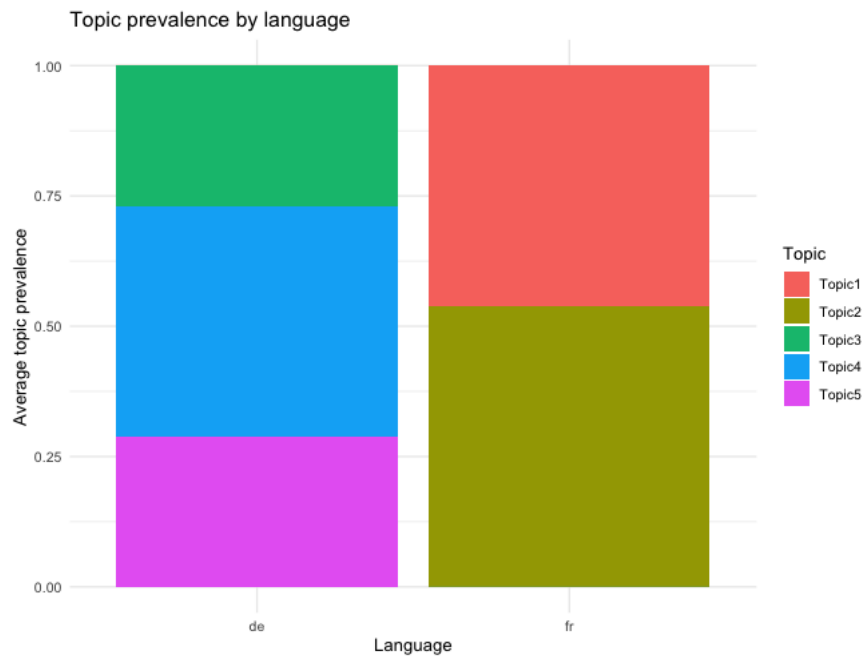


Figure 5.4. Topic prevalence by language.

Note: Topic 1: Israeli military strategy and diplomatic management; Topic 2: Civilian suffering and humanitarian experience; Topic 3: Rafah, borders, displacement governance, and post-war scenarios; Topic 4: Israeli attacks, civilian harm, and contested accountability; Topic 5: Palestinian displacement, exile, and everyday survival.

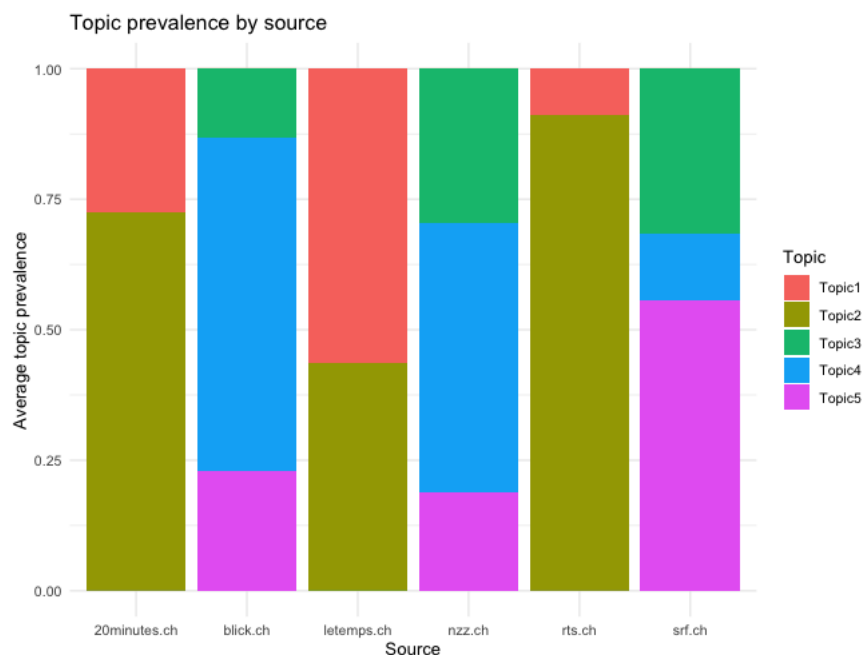


Figure 5.5. Topic prevalence by source.

Using Corpus-Assisted Framing Analysis (CAPA), we can better understand the framing differences between Swiss media at the language-region level. In Table 5.3, two contested frames, “human shields” (Matar, 2025) and “*Nakba*” (Cherkaoui, 2025), are used

differently in context. The use of “human shields” in media can shift the interpretation of civilian harm. When it is attributed to Hamas, “human shields” presents civilian casualties as, at least, partly resulting from the militant group’s use of civilians or civilian structures. When challenged or contextualized, this term becomes a contested justification for Israeli military action. The importance of the “Nakba” frame lies in the fact that it gives displacement in Gaza a much stronger historical and political meaning than neutral references to evacuation. The analysis found that German-language outlets mostly reported the Israeli accusation that Hamas used Palestinian civilians as human shields in an attributed form. In this category, the media outlets provided limited to no counter-framing, legal contextualization, or explicit contestation of the accusation. The French-language outlets, however, most frequently contextualized or contested the term “human shields” used by Israeli officials. One example is in Blick’s October 13, 2023, article, titled “*Gazastreifen: Israel ruft 1,1 Millionen Palästinenser zur Evakuierung auf*” and reads as follows,

[i]t is up to the Palestinian leadership itself to prevent a humanitarian catastrophe, says Shalicar. “We issued the call to evacuate the north so that there would be as few civilian casualties as possible. If Hamas does not allow its own people to leave and uses them as human shields, that is their business.” He emphasizes that the Israeli army is responsible only for the Israeli population and the hostages [translation assisted by DeepL].

In the NZZ’s article “*Israel bereitet sich wohl auf Bodenoffensive im Süden des Gazastreifens vor*”, dated November 11, 2023, the journalist not only presented the use of human shields as an Israeli accusation against a Palestinian militant group, but rather as an “undisputed” fact:

It is undisputed that Hamas abuses the civilian population in hospitals as human shields. Weapons caches and abandoned Hamas command posts have also been discovered in several schools in Gaza [translation assisted by DeepL].

Le Temps, in its article titled “*Les Gazaouis sont aussi victimes du Hamas: «Les combattants viennent exprès dans des zones humanitaires »*”, dated September 23, 2024, provides, on the other hand, a legal and historical background to the term and the accusation of “human shields”. Two scholars specialized in political science and international law explain that the use of Palestinians as human shields is “an argument that Israel has long used to dehumanize Palestinians and render them invisible” and that

[i]t began during the 1982 Lebanon War. At the time, Ariel Sharon wrote in the New York Times that the Palestine Liberation Organization was using the civilian population in Lebanon as human shields. Then, during every war in Gaza—in 2008–2009, 2012, 2014, and 2021—Israel has repeated this accusation against Hamas to justify the enormous civilian casualties⁸.

In reference to the “Nakba,” French-speaking media focused on political warnings, e.g., in Abdel Fattah al-Sissi, the Egyptian president, “raising the specter of a second Nakba” (letemps.ch, February 14, 2024), direct analogy, such as a Palestinian woman aged 83 saying “we’re moving from one Nakba to another Nakba,” (rts.ch, October 27, 2023) and fear of repetition in the subtitle “Craintes d’une «deuxième Nakba»” (letemps.ch, November 2, 2023). The German-speaking media used a wider range of references, including political endorsement, such as in “this [Palestinian] fear [of being driven out into Egypt’s Sinai Peninsula] is fueled by statements from Israeli politicians and commentators who are calling for or threatening a new Nakba” (nzz.ch, November 15, 2023), and memory politics/silencing, in, for example, the NZZ’s guest Op-Ed, dated January 5, 2024, that reads,

[t]his culture of selective memory—the central focus on remembering the Shoah and the forgetting of the Nakba (which continues to this day)—has serious consequences for Palestinians in Germany and Switzerland. By treating Palestinians’ experiences of violence as taboo, the violence of their systematic expulsion is repeated [translation assisted by DeepL].

The analogy between the “Nakba” and the exodus of Arab Jews from their native Middle Eastern and North African countries appeared exclusively in German articles. The remaining categories for both frames were much less frequent. “Human shields” also appeared as a reported allegation, a legal/humanitarian critique, and a political/diplomatic statement. The remaining “Nakba” references were historical memory and background explanation.

⁸ Author’s translation, assisted by DeepL.

CAPA frame	KWIC filtering/ coding base	Valid coded cases	Main categories overall	Main language-region pattern
<i>Human shields</i>	KWIC search produced 8 FR and 46 DE raw matches. After removing duplicates and irrelevant matches, 21 relevant cases remained. Two German cases were uncoded because their surrounding context could not be recovered.	19	Israeli claim: 7/ 36.8%; Journalistic explanation: 5/ 26.3%; Critical contestation: 3/ 15.8%	German-language cases mostly reproduced the frame as an Israeli claim: 7/ 63.6%; French-language cases more often contested or contextualized it: Critical contestation: 3/37.5%; Journalistic explanation: 2/ 25.0%
<i>Nakba</i>	KWIC search produced 26 raw matches. Duplicates were removed.	24	Direct analogy: 6/ 25.0%; Fear of repetition: 5/ 20.8%; Political warning: 4/ 16.7%	French-language cases concentrated on Political warning: 4/ 33.3%; Direct analogy: 3/ 25.0%, and Fear of repetition: 3/ 25.0%. German-language cases were more dispersed, including: Direct analogy: 3/25.0%; Memory politics/silencing: 2/ 16.7%, and Political endorsement: 2/ 16.7%

Table 5.3. Manual CAPA results for “human shields” and “Nakba” references.

Note: The CAPA results were interpreted qualitatively because the number of coded occurrences is small.

5.2. Discussion

Using a multi-layered quantitative framing analysis, this study found that the Swiss media framed Palestinians' displacement in Gaza as a humanitarian condition that is driven by wartime coercion. The six studied outlets rarely framed the population movement through the lens of International Law and International Humanitarian Law, as part of a long trajectory of dispossession, or as a situation that requires legal and political remedies.

On the one hand, not only were IL/IHL references and conditions of lawfulness of evacuation scarce across the Swiss corpus, but the most relevant legal framework on forced displacement in an occupied territory, that is, the law of belligerent occupation, was also completely absent. As previously mentioned in the Background chapter, displacement in Gaza, an occupied territory, is regulated by a specific legal regime: the 1907 Hague Regulations, the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, and, in certain respects, the 1977 Additional Protocol I (Cuyckens, 2016). Herein, a consequence of the Swiss framing is that Palestinians' displacement in Gaza appears as a humanitarian and military issue, rather than as a phenomenon governed by the legal obligations of the occupying power, Israel. For instance, when reporting on evacuation orders without citing International Humanitarian Law, namely Articles 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the law of occupation, Swiss media omit a central legal framework. The absentee here is not "law" in general. It is rather a specific legal grammar of occupation, protected persons, and the restricted exceptions under which evacuations may be lawful. This finding corroborates previous findings on the marginality of the legal framework in Western media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more generally (Dunsky, 2008, as cited in Rubenberg, 2008; Fiel & Falk, 2007). It does not follow that every article across the Swiss corpus should have adopted a legal conclusion on (forced) displacement. Rather, the results demonstrate that the coverage in its entirety rarely equipped readers with the legal framework that is necessary to understand why displacement in and from Gaza is not simply a humanitarian or a military issue.

On the other hand, the studied Swiss media highlighted the current displacement rather than its historical roots. Its settler-colonial aspect was also completely absent. This matters because Gaza is not just a territory where displacement is currently occurring, but an area that, in itself, was historically produced by displacement (Finkelstein, 2018; Irfan, 2025). Such an absence of historical contextualization frames the current Palestinian displacement in the Strip as an isolated event. Failing to situate the Gazan coerced movement after October 7 within the longer history of Palestinian dispossession obscures the longer structural process behind it. On

the contrary, using settler-colonialism as an *interpretive paradigm* (Busbridge, 2018), Wolfe (2006) situates Palestinians' displacement in Gaza within a *logic of elimination* rather than an episodic event. The Swiss media described the Palestinians' displacement, but they rarely provided historical contextualization of the Palestinian dispossession. Since this study understands media framing as a matter of salience and selection, following Entman's (1993) theory, the Swiss corpus emphasized the current humanitarian suffering of the displaced, but the history behind it was largely left out. As a consequence, Palestinians' displacement in Gaza after October 7 appears more like a recurrent wartime event or condition than part of a longer structural process. From this perspective, scholars argue that the current displacement in Gaza can be better understood when connected to the broader mechanisms of settler-colonial projects. These include, but are not limited to, the removal of population under the euphemism of 'transfer' (Shahak, 1989; Masalha, 1988; Rubin, 2019), confinement and containment (Elkahlout, 2025; Joudah, 2020; Pace & Yacobi, 2021), and the prevention of return (Albanese & Takkenberg, 2020). The studied Swiss media failed to make such connections. In this context, one historical frame that connects Gaza's current displacement to the earlier Palestinian dispossession is "Nakba". When these references appeared in the Swiss corpus, they served as interpretive frames for displacement, connecting the current to earlier dispossession, collective memory, and non-return, rather than merely as neutral historical background. However, the Nakba references remained isolated signals and did not fit into a broader historical framework. While this may reflect a broader feature of event-centered news reporting versus analytical or in-depth reporting, previous scholarship on Western coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict shows that this tendency has particular consequences in this context. The focus on the immediate "bang bang" (Philo & Berry, 2004, as cited in Brennan, 2006), the omission of historical context (e.g., Dunskey, 2008, as cited in Rubenberg, 2008), and even neutral or humanitarian coverage can leave unclear how Palestinians came to be displaced in the first place (Sanz Sabido, 2013, in Miladi, 2023).

The absence of both a legal and a historical framework for Palestinians' displacement in Gaza helps clarify the dominant frame this study identified in the Swiss corpus. It is not that displacement was invisible, but rather that it was made visible through some framing functions more than others. So, how can we understand this imbalance through Entman's (1993) four framing functions: Problem Definition, Causal Attribution, Moral Evaluation, and Treatment Recommendation?

Overall, the analysis showed that the Swiss media framing of Palestinians' displacement in Gaza was stronger in Problem Definition and Causal Attribution than in (legal and historical) Moral Evaluation and Treatment Recommendation. Problem Definition was the strongest function present in the Swiss corpus: the media outlets extensively defined displacement as danger, flight, humanitarian vulnerability, evacuation, survival, and coerced movement. They did not frame the movement as "voluntary", yet they rarely used the strongest legal and political vocabulary to describe it. However, as mentioned in section 5.1, this should not be read simply as a neutral midpoint between two conflicting narratives about displacement. From a media-critical perspective, objectivity is not merely a guarantee of truth. For instance, Tuchman (1972) describes the practice of "strategic ritual", that is, a professional routine by which journalists manage accusations of bias, thereby maintaining an appearance of balance. In this understanding, the Swiss media's choice of words to report displacement may, *prima facie*, reflect professional conventions of objectivity. Yet such objectivity becomes analytically significant when the necessary context for reporting on a "problem" is absent. Journalism's democratic and watchdog role (Deuze, 2005) requires contextualization and scrutiny of power (Norris, 2014). Nevertheless, our analysis revealed a significant difference in the lexical construction of Problem Definition. That is to say, French-language outlets (letemps.ch; rts.ch; 20minutes.ch) used "displacement" more frequently; German-language media (nzz.ch; srf.ch; blick.ch) favored "evacuation." Herein, the media's lexical choices are not without impact. The term "evacuation" can frame Palestinians' displacement as a humanitarian and precautionary measure, thus minimizing its coercive nature and obscuring the Israeli responsibility (AlKhawaldeh & Alserhan, 2025; Shah, 2025; Alhirthani, 2025).

This brings us to Entman's second framing function. Although Causal Attribution for Palestinians' displacement was also frequent in the Swiss corpus, responsibility was not always explicitly named. In other terms, the Swiss coverage often explains Palestinians' movements in the Strip through war conditions, bombardments, insecurity, evacuation dynamics, and overall humanitarian collapse. What was rare in the Swiss corpus, though, was the grammatical identification of the actor responsible for causing or ordering these movements, leading us to assume that responsibility can be grammatically diluted even when causality is present. Our finding aligns with previous literature on the linguistic construction of agency. Miladi and Miladi (2025) showed that, on the one hand, major Western media outlets, such as the BBC, used passive language and euphemisms in their coverage of the Gaza war to avoid directly

implicating Israel. On the other hand, the same outlet rarely portrayed Palestinians as independent actors (El Damanhoury et al., 2025).

In this context, our CAPA analysis of the use of the frame “human shields” shows that, in addition to grammatical agent specification, Causal Attribution functions through contested discursive frames. “Human shields” or “human shielding” refers to an illegal tactic under International Humanitarian Law that uses civilians to protect a military target from attack or to otherwise support or obstruct military operations (Gordon & Perugini, 2021, November 18). International law does not, however, accept the *blanket claim* that an entire civilian population constitutes human shields; belligerents must verify the shielding status of civilians on a strictly case-by-case basis (Albanese, 2024, para. 61). In German-language articles, “human shields” appeared mainly as an Israeli accusation attributed to Israeli sources and reported without contestation or contextualization, whereas in the French-language articles, it was more often contested and/or contextualized. The significance of this finding lies in the fact that when reproduced as an Israeli claim, the “human shields” strips Palestinians of their agency and shifts responsibility for their harm from the Israeli army/government towards Hamas (or other militant groups). By contrast, when this frame is contested or explained (legally and/or historically), it becomes itself an object of critique and no longer functions in the same way. Nesiah(2016, p. 323) further argues that while the language of “human shields” is presented as protecting civilians, it also often turns “*colonized or precarious bodies into ‘legitimate’ targets*”. In her report to the United Nations Human Rights Council, Albanese (2024, paras. 59-60) emphasizes that

Israel has accused Palestinian armed groups of deliberately using civilians as human shields in previous aggressions on Gaza (including in 2008-09, 2012, 2014, 2021, and 2022). It also used it to justify high civilian casualties and attacks against paramedics, journalists and others during the 2018–2019 ‘Great March of Return’.¹⁹⁷ UN independent fact-finding missions and reputable human rights organizations have consistently challenged these allegations, sometimes concluding that evidence of human shields had been fabricated. Nevertheless, Israel has used these accusations – sometimes then retracted—to justify widespread and systematic killing of Palestinian civilians in its ongoing assault. (...) After 7 October, this macro-characterization of Gaza’s civilians as a population of human shields has reached unprecedented levels, with Israel’s top-ranking political and military leaders consistently framing civilians as either Hamas operatives, “accomplices”, or human shields among whom Hamas is “embedded”. (...) Two rhetorical elements of this key legal policy document indicate the intention to transform the entire Gaza population and its infrastructures of life into a ‘legitimate’ targetable shield: the use of the all-encompassing *the* combined with the quotation marks to qualify civilians and civilian objects. Israel has thus sought to camouflage genocidal intent with humanitarian law jargon.

Using a systematic quantitative analysis, Johnson (2026) recently demonstrated that U.S. major online and print media outlets (e.g., NYT, Axios, and Politico) disproportionately

referred to Palestinians as “human shields”. Conducting a further analysis of TV news outlets, CNN and MSNBC, the author found a complete absence of reference to the Israeli military's use of “human shields”, a practice well documented by human rights groups (e.g., B’Tselem, n.d.) and the media (Mednick & Magdy, 2025). This is where Causal Attribution overlaps with Entman’s third function. Moral Evaluation was, in fact, present in the Swiss corpus, but was articulated mostly in terms of humanitarian suffering rather than legal responsibility or historical accountability. In other terms, the Palestinians’ suffering in Gaza due to repeated displacement and catastrophic conditions in the refugee camps was visible, but it was not consistently connected to legal and historic responsibility. That is, questions of occupation, dispossession, refugeehood, and non-return were absent in the media reports. This matters because in the absence of such well-established frames, discursive frames like “human shields” can more easily shift the responsibility for civilian harm. The French-language cases in the Swiss corpora, though, show that this frame can also be contested, contextualized, and made the subject of inquiry, making a shift in responsibility more difficult. Taken together, these findings suggest that a journalist’s responsibility is not merely to report the “human shields” frame as an Israeli-attributed claim. Since an uncritical reproduction can help shift causal responsibility for civilian harm from the attacker to the attacked, it is the journalist’s responsibility to scrutinize the political and legal functions of such a frame. To put it in Heurtaux’s (2025, p. 95) words, “‘human shields’ are not legal shields”.

When the “Nakba” references appeared in the analyzed Swiss articles, they created a strong historical and moral frame. These were rare and exceptional amidst the scarcity of references to Gaza’s status as the “world’s largest refugee camp”, the 1967 occupation, the 2007 siege, prior ICJ and other international legal decisions, and the previous recurring Israeli operations in the Strip, to name a few. By framing Palestinians’ displacement mainly through a humanitarian lens, the studied Swiss media mirrored other Western media outlets, which simultaneously make suffering visible, all while obscuring political responsibility (Chouliaraki, 2006). From this perspective, humanitarian framing can narrow the range of possible remedies for displacement. On the one hand, it makes emergency responses, such as aid delivery, evacuation, and temporary protection, more visible. On the other hand, it omits structural solutions such as legal accountability, the right to return, and reparations.

We now turn to Entman’s (1993) fourth and last framing function: Treatment Recommendation. Overall, this function was the least developed across the Swiss corpus. Both French- and German-language media outlets described the displaced Palestinians’ suffering in

Gaza and sometimes provided the causes for their suffering, but they rarely moved toward remedies. That said, this does not mean that the media should prescribe solutions to the issues they cover. Rather, within their informational and watchdog role (Bulla, 2022; Skovsgaard, 2024), the media can make visible the remedies already existing in the public debate. They can also scrutinize whether the responsible actors are implementing those solutions. Under International Humanitarian Law (IHL), the evacuation of populations in conflict zones is significantly regulated to prevent unlawful displacement; it is lawful only when necessary to protect civilians or when required by imperative military necessity. Hence, evacuation cannot be a pretext for demographic manipulation (ICRC, 2025). However, the very scarce references to the lawfulness of evacuation conditions across the Swiss corpus meant that any related legal remedies, such as protection obligations, the right of return, and accountability, were also absent. This led to a rather diagnostic than prescriptive framing. We can find in media practices of elite-sourcing (Hafez, 2007) and the indexing theory (Bennett, 1990) a partial explanation for these results. In this understanding, the media tend to rely on official sources and reflect the range of elite debate. In the Swiss corpus, the legal conditions of evacuations in Gaza were rarely discussed, which may suggest that media coverage remained within a dominant elite debate in which the immediate humanitarian and military dimensions were more visible than other structural solutions. As a result, the treatment-recommendation media framing remained weak.

Our finding, however, complicates Evans' (2010) finding that a media framing in which Problem Definition and Causal Attribution are clearly defined increases the likelihood of a Treatment Recommendation. In the Swiss case, both Problem Definition and Causal Attribution are relatively strong, while Treatment Recommendation remains weak. Thus, overall, this study shows that, as Entman (1993) theorized, framing operates through salience and selection. The importance of Swiss framing of Palestinians' displacement in Gaza lies not only in what it includes, a clear definition of displacement as a problem, but also in what it omits. In Entman's (1993, p. 54) terms, by selecting and calling attention to the described humanitarian reality of Palestinians' current displacement, the media "simultaneously direct attention away from other aspects", namely the legal framework structuring displacement in the occupied Strip.

Having established that the dominant media frame of Palestinians' displacement in Gaza was strongly humanitarian-coercive but weakly legal and remedial, the remaining question is whether this frame was stable over time and between language regions. The findings show that this general frame persisted. However, its thematic, lexical, and discursive forms varied over

time and between French- and German-language outlets. Regarding the temporal variation, the Swiss corpus shifted throughout the study period from immediate humanitarian crisis to contested accountability, civilian harm, and everyday survival, without yielding stronger IL/IHL contextualization.

These results lend support to the distinction between episodic and thematic conflict coverage (Iyengar, 1991; Cacciatore et al., 2016): while the former treats an issue as singular and isolated, the latter situates it within a broader context. Furthermore, previous research indicates that Western coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict prioritizes violence over the structural and historical background (Philo & Berry, 2004, as cited in Brennan, 2006; Friel & Falk, 2007; Dunsky, 2008, as cited in Rubenberg, 2008). The Swiss case shows that even when coverage persists over time, it does not necessarily lead to deeper contextualization. Regarding language-region variation, the analysis showed real differences, but in an uneven way that does not amount to a simple *Röstigraben*. Yet, this finding challenges the notion of a homogeneous Western media pattern in framing Palestinians' displacement in Gaza, and more broadly, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Moreover, following Neureiter's (2017) argument that media bias is shaped by the outlet's ideology, the country's public opinion, and the demographic composition, the Swiss case suggests that intra-national factors may also explain the uneven language-region differences in covering Gazans' displacement.

A number of limitations need to be noted regarding the present study. First, the analyzed corpus is limited to a selected number of Swiss French- and German-language media outlets. Therefore, the results do not necessarily speak for all Swiss media. Second, short periods, especially Period 3, limit the number of news articles and with that the stability of temporal comparisons, thus requiring careful interpretation of non-significant results. Third, because frames are "interpretive schemes" (Goffman, 1974), operationalizing Entman's four functions as binary variables necessarily reduces the range of possible nuances. As Krippendorff (2004) notes, content analysis depends on recording and coding instructions that impose a structure on the studied texts. Such a structure enables systematic analysis while also constraining interpretation. Fourth, the exploratory LDA topic modeling used within the framework of this study was conducted on a bilingual corpus, which creates lexical-language effects and cannot be treated as evidence of editorial differences. In this context, Mimno et al. (2009) argue that standard topic modeling may need to be adapted to discover aligned topics across languages. A seeded LDA could have reduced this limitation by helping align semantically similar topics across the French and German subcorpora. Since such an approach was beyond the scope of

this study, the LDA results are interpreted alongside the manual coding and CAPA results. Finally, although the CAPA analysis of the two contested frames “human shields” and “Nakba” combines quantitative corpus tools with qualitative interpretation, in line with corpus-assisted discourse analysis (Baker, 2006), the number of manually coded occurrences for both frames was small. They should, therefore, be interpreted as exploratory, not as representative patterns across the entire corpus. Despite these limitations, the present study fills an empirical gap by examining how Swiss French- and German-language media framed Palestinians’ displacement in Gaza after October 7. It also underlies a central gap within the coverage itself, that is, the contrast between the salient visibility of the Palestinians’ suffering and the limited legal, historical, and remedial framing of the displacement that produced it.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine how the Swiss media framed Palestinians' displacement in Gaza after October 7. It focused on how Gazans' displacement was covered in six selected French- and German-language outlets (letemps.ch, rts.ch, 20minutes.ch, nzz.ch, srf.ch, and blick.ch) during the period ranging from the beginning of the last escalation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (October 7, 2023) to the date of the official cessation of hostilities (October 10, 2025). During the two-year war, civilian movements in the Gaza Strip became a focal legal, political, and humanitarian topic, which necessitated a systematic examination of the way the media framed these movements. More precisely, it was important to study how the media contextualized Gaza's displacement within the framework of International Law and International Humanitarian Law and the historical trajectory of Palestinian dispossession. Against this backdrop, Swiss media were chosen as a case study because both IL and IHL occupy a salient place in the country's diplomatic and humanitarian self-understanding: not least because Switzerland is the Depositary State of the Geneva Conventions and the host state of International Geneva. At the same time, the country's multilingual media system makes it both possible and relevant to compare language-region outlets as distinct yet nationally embedded public spheres.

Extensive research has shown that Western media often framed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through bias and decontextualization (e.g., Philo & Berry, 2004, as cited in Brennan, 2006; Friel & Falk, 2007; Dunskey, 2008, as cited in Rubenberg, 2008; Elmasry, 2009; Amer, 2022; El Damanhoury, 2025), yet there is very limited research on the Swiss media coverage of the conflict, and more specifically on Palestinians' displacement in Gaza after October 7. The present study thus fills this gap by examining how Swiss media framed the displacement in Gaza and comparing framing across language-region outlets. To achieve this, framing displacement was examined through Entman's (1993) four functions, IL and IHL references (in general and in relation to the lawfulness of evacuation orders), historical contextualization, such as the 1948 expulsion, the 2007- present-day siege, and previous wars, and displacement labels.

The thesis was grounded in Entman's (1993) framing theory; its four framing functions- Problem Definition, Causal Attribution, Moral Evaluation, and Treatment Recommendations- were operationalized as measurable variables. References to IL/IHL and the lawfulness

conditions for evacuations, historical anchoring, displacement labels, and variables related to agency and coercion were also added. This aimed to capture how Palestinian displacement in Gaza was made visible, legible, and interpretable in Swiss French- and German-language discourse. Consequently, framing patterns across time and language regions were compared by analyzing the manually coded data using descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing. Lastly, to further identify potential broader themes and examine the contextual uses of contested frames (human shields and *Nakba*), additional exploratory LDA topic modeling and corpus-assisted framing analysis (CAPA) were used.

Overall, the study found that the Swiss media mainly framed Palestinians' displacement in Gaza as a humanitarian and coercive wartime condition, and rarely as a structured process of forced displacement or as part of a longer trajectory of Palestinian dispossession. While displacement was described in coercive terms, its legal and historical aspects were scarce in the Swiss corpus, as were potential remedies. Significant but uneven differences were found between the French- and German-language regional outlets' framing of displacement, without forming a simple *Röstigraben*. In regard to Entman's (1993) four functions, the analysis found that the selected Swiss media clearly defined displacement as a problem and attributed causality, yet failed to consistently recommend treatments. In other words, Palestinians' displacement in Gaza was salient in Swiss media coverage, yet its legal, historical and remedial aspects were largely omitted. The selected Swiss media prioritized a humanitarian framing of displacement in alignment with broader Western media practices in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Therefore, borrowing Katsiginis's (2025, p. 21) term of "decontextualized and apolitical empathy," it is safe to suggest that the Swiss media favored "philanthropy over systemic changes".

These findings should, however, be interpreted within the methodological boundaries already discussed in Chapter 5. Yet, rather than limiting the value of this study, these boundaries help clarify the scope of its claims. For instance, the present thesis does not speak for all Swiss media, nor does it treat exploratory corpus results as representative evidence; it does, nonetheless, identify meaningful patterns within the selected corpus. Further work is required to establish whether the identified patterns are specific to the six selected outlets or are more widespread in Swiss media discourse. This would mean analyzing more Swiss media outlets, including Italian-language outlets. Such an analysis would not only allow the comparison of Swiss media framing of displacement in Gaza after October 7 at the intra-national level but would also permit a better understanding of three media markets that are "partially influenced

by a large neighbouring country (Germany, France, and Italy)” (Udris et al., 2020, p. 258). Given the selection of major public-service, elite, and tabloid/popular outlets for this analysis, one might expect, for example, that the broad patterns identified here would also be visible in other Swiss mainstream media. It is also plausible that different patterns may emerge in independent and alternative media outlets. Another potentially fruitful avenue for future research is to examine whether the Swiss media framing of displacement in Gaza remains episodic or becomes thematic over time. A qualitative longitudinal study would allow a better understanding of how connecting events to their broader context affects the way responsibility is attributed, in the terms of Iyengar (1987/1991). A further study with a greater focus on settler-colonial framing approaches to displacement in Gaza and Palestine more broadly is also suggested. The aim is not only to add another theoretical lens, but rather to help identify which frames enter Swiss media discourse and which remain marginal. Within this context, Gaza/Palestine could be studied not only as a conflict case, but also as a settler-colonial and decolonial case. This would allow comparison of the Swiss media framing with the frames used by the various actors involved in the conflict, such as States, armies, militant groups, diplomats, humanitarians, human rights actors, and civil society. In doing so, not only is it examined whether Swiss media discourse includes or marginalizes frames such as settler colonialism, *Nakba*, dispossession, containment, non-return, and epistemic violence/silencing (Muhareb et al., 2022), but also whose use of these frames is made salient or omitted by Swiss media. That is to say, moving beyond humanitarian suffering as a dominant frame in the study of the *Palestine Question* to ask how the media makes colonial structures visible or invisible.

As this thesis demonstrated, the media framing of displacement in Gaza is temporally situated: it takes shape before October 7, after October 7, and beyond. For instance, framing decides what is defined as a problem, who (or what) is seen as responsible, and whether (legal and moral) treatments are suggested. In this study, the selected Swiss media strongly diagnosed displacement as a humanitarian and wartime coercive problem, but weakly connected it to the International Law and International Humanitarian Law frameworks and to their historical trajectories. If, as Rittel and Webber (1973) argue, “the choice of explanation determines the nature of the problem’s resolution,” then the scarce legal and historical explanation of displacement in the Strip and Palestine more generally also narrows the range of possible solutions. This directly affects and challenges the media's role as the Fourth Estate since the danger of an overwhelmingly humanitarian framing is not simply in rendering Palestinian suffering invisible. It rather lies in the suffering being visible while obscuring the structures

that produced it and the obligations that should follow from it. To move beyond mere documentation, “prior history must also be included in history-in-the-making reporting” (Jarvis, 2024, as cited in Geracoulis, 2025, p. 6). In this understanding, framing Palestinians’ displacement in Gaza is not only about describing the suffering of the displaced; It is also about making history, law, responsibility, and possible remedies to displacement visible.

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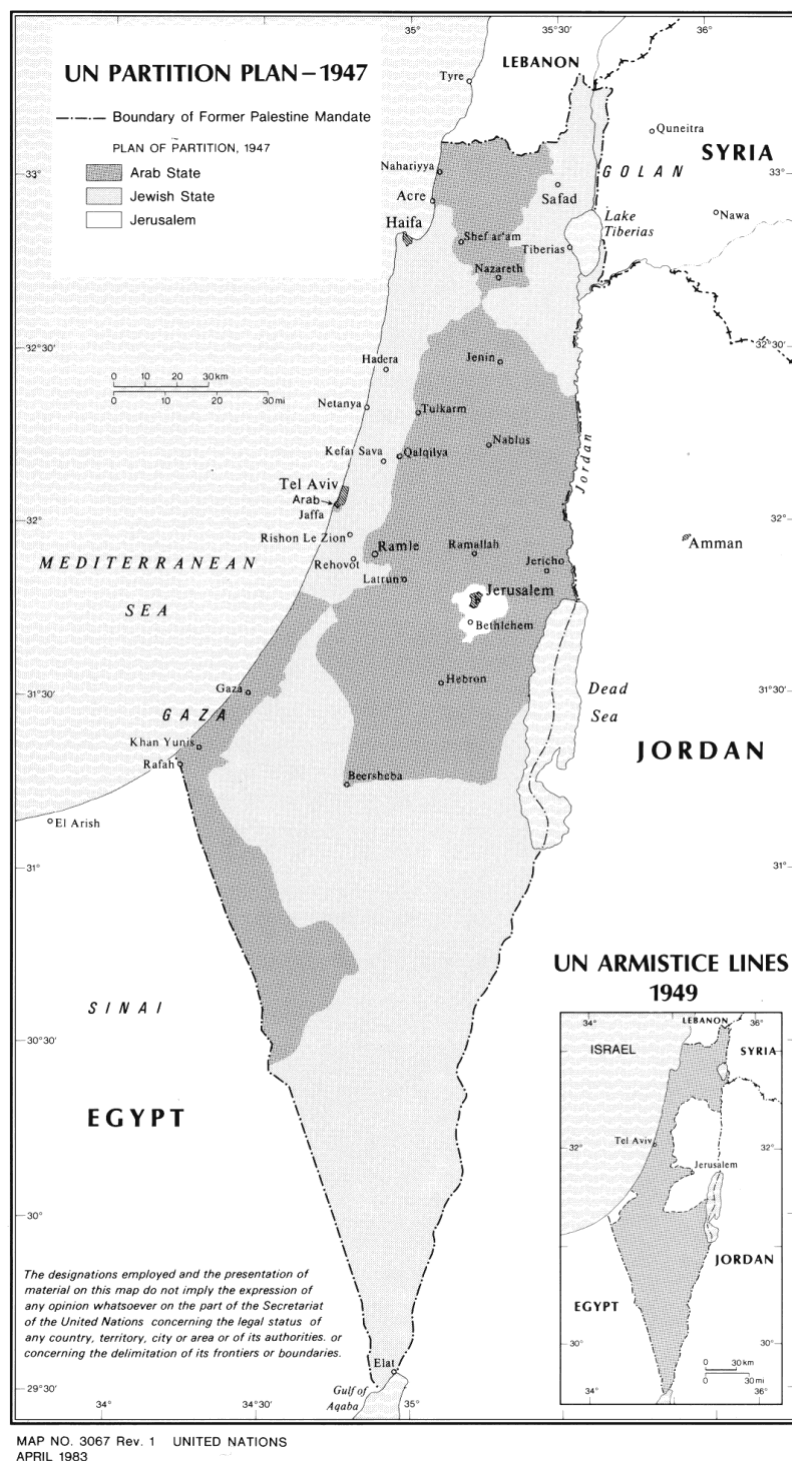
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Appendix A

UN 1947 Partition Plan



From UN partition plan- 1947 (Map No. 3067 Rev.1). United Nations Department of Public Information, 1983, United Nations.

Appendix B

Full distribution of coded variables by frequency and percentage.

Category	Variable	Number	Percentage
Main coding variables	IL/IHL reference	20	10.5%
	Evacuation conditions lawfulness	13	6.8%
	Problem Definition	182	95.3%
	Causal Attribution	158	82.7%
	Moral Evaluation	65	34.0%
	Treatment Recommendation	53	27.7%
	(Any) Historical anchoring	21	11.0%
	Voluntary wording	96	50.3%
	Coercive wording	171	89.5%
	Agent specification	101	52.9%
	Coercive environment	173	90.6%
Displacement labels	Evacuation	70	36.6%
	Forced evacuation	2	1.1%
	Displacement	84	44.0%
	Forced displacement	12	6.3%
	Deportation	1	0.5%
	Transfer	7	3.7%
	Forced transfer	2	1.0%
	Ethnic cleansing	4	2.1%

Relocation	2	1.0%
Resettlement	2	1.0%
Voluntary migration	0	0.0%
Emigration	0	0.0%

Note: The percentage of forced evacuation is based on 190 valid cases, not 191.

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* The text of this form has largely been inspired by the Rector's office's directive 0.3 bis *Directive de la direction 0.3 bis, entitled Formulaire Code de déontologie en matière d'emprunts, de citations et d'exploitation de sources diverses*, of the University of Lausanne, April 23rd 2007, and adapted for the requirements of the University of Neuchâtel.

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AI use declaration

In preparing this study, I used the AI-powered writing assistant Grammarly for grammar and style checks and proofreading. I also used DeepL to assist with translations, especially from German to English, as well as from French and Arabic to English. Furthermore, I used ChatGPT to debug code and troubleshoot errors in R. All substantive analysis, arguments, and critical engagement with sources are my own.