

Framing Pro-Palestine Protests: A Comparative Analysis of News Coverage by The Guardian and USA Today

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Abstract

This study examines the framing strategies employed by The Guardian and USA Today in their coverage of the pro-Palestine protests in American universities during April and May 2024. Accordingly, the corpus comprises 213 news texts, with The Guardian contributing 106 articles and USA Today contributing 107 articles from April 17 to May 17, 2024. The research identifies and contrasts the dominant frames used by these two newspapers by conducting a framing content analysis on the selected news articles. The Guardian frequently utilizes conflict and adversarial frames, emphasizing university-wide ideological and political struggles. Conversely, USA Today focuses on broader political confrontations and administrative accountability, often highlighting institutional responses and governance issues. The analysis process is guided by framing theory to reveal how news representations influence public perception and interpretation and media agenda-setting theory to explore how media news coverage prioritizes specific issues within the same event. The findings underscore the decisive role of media framing in shaping public opinion and priorities, particularly in the context of global and political issues.

Keywords: agenda-setting theory, media framing, pro-Palestine protests, the Guardian, USA Today

1. Introduction

Historically, there have been instances of pro-Palestine protests on university and college campuses across the United States, particularly during times of heightened tensions in the Israel-Palestine conflict. These protests often focus on issues such as Palestinian human rights and the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Recently, universities across the United States have witnessed widespread protests supporting Palestine and demanding an end to Israel's ongoing war on Gaza. As of September 2024, Israeli troops killed more than 41,455 Palestinians, including more than 16,500 children, over 10,000 missing, and 95,878 injured in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank since October 7, 2023, according to the Palestinian Ministry of Health and the Palestine Red Crescent.

Following these events, protests erupted on April 18 in American universities such as Columbia University, the University of New York, North Carolina, Charlotte, and Michigan. Responding to these demonstrations, university administrations summoned law enforcement to suppress the unrest, leading to confrontations with students. For instance, students at Columbia University initiated a sit-in protest on campus, declaring their intent to persist until Israel ceases its ongoing war on Gaza, thus pushing the university into the spotlight. Alongside the protests, presidents of renowned American universities like Harvard, Pennsylvania, MIT, Yale, New York, and Columbia appeared before Congress to address their handling of pro-Palestine demonstrations on campus. Eventually, facing increasing pressure, several resigned (Gambino, 2023; Saul & Hartocollis, 2023). In addition, students and faculty members, guilty only of peacefully protesting against Israel's ongoing war on Gaza, were handcuffed behind their backs, arrested, and forcibly taken to the police station, with some being dragged on the ground in the process. According to the latest tally by The Associated Press, over 2,000 people have been arrested nationwide as of May 3, 2024.

Global media outlets have covered the U.S. university's protests daily, yet media representations and framing of this significant event have shaped and reshaped the public's view of pro-Palestine protests. Some Western media have framed pro-Palestine protests and protesters as violent, racist, and antisemitic. Specifically, U.S. mainstream media coverage demonizes pro-Palestine encampments on campuses (Khouri, 2024). In this sense, many U.S. reporters, commentators, and hosts use the same verbal frames and labels that U.S. President Joe Biden and U.S. and Israeli officials have used to smear pro-Palestine protests. For example, U.S. mainstream media used Biden's words "hate speech and hate symbols" to condemn students who participated in the protests (Khouri, 2024).

Additionally, leaked memos to the New York Times journalists from the paper's management dictate guidelines on how to characterize the war on Gaza. These memos instruct journalists to significantly limit the usage of terms like "genocide," "ethnic cleansing," and "occupied territory." Instead of highlighting the grievances of protesters, such as concerns over Palestinian casualties, injuries, and the imminent famine, U.S. media coverage of the campus encampments has focused more on the clashes between protesters and police forces (Brown, 2024).

Examining framing in media coverage, particularly around contentious social and political events, is essential for understanding the media's role in shaping public perception and discourse. Grounded in established theories, such as framing and agenda-setting, this study provides valuable insights into how news representations impact societal views on sensitive issues, including university-based pro-Palestine protests. By focusing on two major news outlets – *The Guardian* and *USA Today* – this study highlights the nuanced framing techniques that distinguish each publication's portrayal of these events. Each section in the following study offers a detailed breakdown of framing strategies and their implications, aimed at providing scholars, media professionals, and activists with actionable insights into the relationship between media narratives and public opinion. This approach illuminates the distinct framing employed by different media and provides a foundation for future studies in media influence and public perception, particularly in contentious or polarized sociopolitical contexts.

2. Theoretical Foundation

This study scrutinizes *The Guardian* and *USA Today*'s news coverage of pro-Palestine protests in American universities to gain insights into how these Anglo-American newspapers prioritize and emphasize specific aspects of the event. To do so, the analysis process identifies the prominent frames embedded in the selected news texts.

2.1 Framing Theory

Framing theory, introduced by Goffman (1967, 1981, 1986), explores how framing events and activities influences communication and behavior. Goffman distinguished between natural frameworks, which develop independently of social agents, and social frameworks, shaped by the motives and actions of individuals. Building upon this, Gitlin (1980) applied framing theory to the study of protest movements, establishing it as a critical approach to analyzing media coverage of social movements. According to Gitlin, frames are "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion," that guide the way verbal and visual discourse is organized (1980, p. 7).

The work of Entman (1991, 1993, 2004, 2007, 2010) further advanced the understanding of framing in media and news discourse. Entman defined framing as selecting certain aspects of reality and making them more salient to promote a specific interpretation or response. Entman (1993) identified four critical functions of news frames. First, it identifies the main issue and assigns responsibility to specific actors. Second, it offers explanations for why an issue exists. Third, it applies moral judgments to the actors or issues. Finally, it proposes solutions or actions to steer audiences toward specific responses. These functions highlight how framing influences public perception by shaping how issues are understood and acted upon.

Entman (2004) also noted that frames can be found in four locations within the communication process: the communicator, the text, the receiver, and the culture. Communicators consciously or unconsciously select frames based on their belief systems, which are then embedded in the text through specific keywords, stereotypes, images, and sources. Receivers may interpret these frames differently, influenced by their cognitive frameworks, while culture provides a broader context that influences both the creation and reception of frames. In addition, Entman emphasized that news frames often evoke emotional responses through their use of "cultural resonance and magnitude." Frames incorporating culturally resonant terms—noticeable, understandable, and emotionally charged—impact audiences more. The repetition of certain words, phrases, and images further reinforces the prominence of these frames. Entman argued that what is omitted from a frame can be as important as what is included, as exclusions can significantly shape audience interpretation.

Entman's work also explored the relationship between framing and media bias. He identified three types of bias: 1) distortion bias, which involves inaccurate or misleading reporting; 2) content bias, where one side of a political conflict is favored; and 3) decision-making bias, driven by journalists or media decision-makers belief systems. Entman (2010) argued that a news slant occurs when one side's preferred frame is emphasized, influencing how audiences perceive political conflicts. Slanted framing often results from interactions between real-world events, cultural norms, journalistic practices, and efforts by political elites to shape the news.

Iyengar (1990, 1996) also contributed significantly to framing theory, particularly about public opinion. He distinguished between episodic frames, which focus on specific events or individuals, and thematic frames, which place issues within a broader societal context. Iyengar found that episodic frames often lead viewers to attribute responsibility

to individuals, while thematic frames encourage audiences to consider more prominent systemic factors. Researchers analyzing media coverage of protest movements have identified recurring patterns, collectively known as the "protest paradigm" (McLeod, 2007). This term describes a framework that guides journalists in reporting on protests. Studies on the protest paradigm have revealed that the media often employs negative frames to depict protest movements, focusing on spectacle, violence, and conflict. This approach and a preference for official sources and other delegitimizing techniques have led to the side-lining of protesters' demands and issues.

Framing theory has been valuable in analyzing how media portray protests, shaping public perception and discourse. The study by Gitlin (1980) examined the media coverage of the 1960s student movement in the United States. It revealed how the media used frames to emphasize certain aspects of the protests while marginalizing others. Gitlin found that the media often highlighted violence and disruption, overshadowing the protesters' messages and demands. This pioneering work laid the foundation for understanding how framing can influence public opinion about social movements.

Subsequent studies have expanded on Gitlin's findings. For instance, McLeod and Hertog (1992) analyzed media coverage of Central American solidarity protests in the 1980s, revealing that the media frequently used frames delegitimizing protesters by focusing on conflict and disruption. Similarly, Brasted (2010) found that coverage of anti-globalization protests emphasized violence and chaos, obscuring critiques of global economic policies.

Research on student protests has also shed light on the socio-political dimensions of these movements. Ibrahim (2011, 2013) examined the 2010–2011 student protests in the U.K. against tuition fee hikes. It highlighted the protesters' concerns about the commodification of education and neoliberal reforms. This study underscored the collective identity and solidarity among students and their resistance to austerity measures. In the U.S., Rhoads (2016) explored the growing political engagement of college students and linked student activism to broader movements for social justice and equity. His research demonstrated how student protests catalyze institutional reflection and reform, particularly in addressing socioeconomic disparities and promoting inclusive policies. By analyzing news coverage of events, we can uncover how media narratives influence collective understanding and response to critical societal and political events.

2.2 Agenda-Setting Theory

The idea of agenda setting began in the 1920s when Lippmann (1920) argued in his book *Public Opinion* that audiences form feelings about events they do not experience directly through mental images and symbolic pictures created by words and phrases used by journalists and editors. Lippmann suggested that authorities' choices of specific facts, messages, and vocabulary create patterns of stereotypes that align with audience beliefs and interests, eventually shaping public opinion. He noted that news and editorial policies are imposed by the journal's system of stereotypes that can limit and control the public's access to information and facts about events.

In effect, the media no longer tell the public "what to think" but "what to think about" (Cohen, 1963). McCombs and Shaw (1972) tested this idea during the 1968 U.S. presidential campaign. They found a strong correlation between the prominent issues in the news media and the leading public issues. This laid the foundation for the agenda-setting theory, which suggests that news outlets influence public agendas by determining the importance of information and messages. Agenda-setting theory has been effectively utilized to understand how the media influence the perception of student protests. Building on this theory, Boyle et al. (2012) investigated how U.S. and international newspapers covered the 2000 student protests against the World Trade Organization in Seattle. The study found that U.S. and international media tended to emphasize disruptive tactics, violence, or sensational aspects of protests rather than the underlying goals, especially when the tactics were confrontational. However, the news coverage was more nuanced when the protests had clearly defined non-violent goals. This pattern suggests that media portrayal can vary based on the protest's objectives and methods, potentially influencing public perception and support for protest movements.

McCombs and Valenzuela (2007) expanded on this theory, identifying two levels of agenda setting: object salience (the selection of objects transmitted to the public) and attribute salience (the selection of specific attributes of objects). They also examined the theoretical links between agenda-setting and media framing. They observed that both emphasize how particular attributes are highlighted to shape certain aspects of reality, making them stand out in news coverage. Moreover, McCombs and Valenzuela identified three consequences of agenda-setting effects: forming opinions, priming opinions through emphasis on specific issues, and shaping opinions through emphasis on particular attributes. Ghanem (1997) further elaborated on the second level of agenda-setting theory by examining how the media not only influence what issues are important but also how those issues are perceived through specific attributes, thus significantly shaping public opinion and attitudes.

Further extending this approach, Vliegthart and Walgrave (2012) examined the agenda-setting effects of student protests in Belgium. Their research revealed that extensive media coverage of the protests significantly influenced the political agenda, leading to policy discussions and reforms in the education sector. The study highlighted the reciprocal

relationship between media coverage and political action. It demonstrated how student protests can catalyze substantial changes through agenda-setting processes. These studies underscore the critical role of media in shaping public and political agendas regarding student activism, providing valuable insights into the dynamics of media influence on social and political movements.

The theoretical foundation, primarily framing and agenda-setting theories, is a guiding framework for analyzing the media coverage of pro-Palestine protests in American universities. By applying framing theory, this study identifies the patterns used by The Guardian and USA Today to shape narratives around these events. Agenda-setting theory further contextualizes the selection and prioritization of protest-related issues, examining how media outlets emphasize particular aspects to influence public attention and concern. Throughout the analysis, these theories will be integrated into each phase of the research process to allow for a comprehensive understanding of how framing and agenda-setting work together to construct media narratives. This theoretical lens enhances the depth of the study's insights. It allows for a nuanced comparison of the newspapers' framing techniques and agenda-setting strategies, thereby illustrating the broader implications of media influence on public discourse and perception.

3. Method

The current study employs framing content analysis to examine the selected news articles. The rationale for this research design stems from the need to analyze a corpus of articles published in two Anglo-American newspapers within a specific timeframe. The corpus was compiled from the online archives of The Guardian (a British media outlet) and USA Today (an American media outlet). Accordingly, the corpus comprises 213 news texts, with The Guardian contributing 106 articles and USA Today contributing 107 articles from April 17 to May 17, 2024. The selection of these news texts was based on keywords that explicitly refer to pro-Palestine protests in each news text's headline. The selection of the two Anglo-American media outlets is based on the following three criteria:

1. Their commitment to international news coverage daily, particularly the coverage of pro-Palestine protests in American universities that began on April 18, 2024.
2. Their high daily circulation.
3. Their extensive reach to a broad global audience.

After data collection, a content analysis was conducted on the selected news texts. This analysis is guided by framing theory and agenda-setting theory, which highlight how certain attributes dominate or frame particular aspects of reality and make them prominent in news coverage.

The current study addresses the following research questions and sub-questions:

RQ1: How do The Guardian and USA Today prioritize news coverage of pro-Palestine protests in American universities?

RQ2: What are the dominant frames in the selected news texts?

RQ2a: How does The Guardian frame pro-Palestine protests?

RQ2b: In what ways does USA Today frame pro-Palestine protests?

4. Results

This study scrutinizes The Guardian and USA Today's news coverage of pro-Palestine protests in American universities. It aims to gain insights into how these newspapers prioritize and emphasize specific aspects of the event. Additionally, the analysis identifies prominent frames embedded in the selected news texts. This framing content study follows a systematic analysis guided by framing and agenda-setting theories. The first half of the analysis examines first-level agenda setting, exploring the key issues that are identified and highlighted as necessary by the two newspapers. The second half focuses on second-level agenda setting, which looks at how the newspapers frame those issues in specific ways.

4.1 *The Guardian's News Coverage and Framing of Pro-Palestine Protests*

The Guardian's news articles on pro-Palestine protests can be scrutinized through various framing strategies, each contributing to shaping the narrative of the event and influencing public perception. By exploring these frames in greater detail, we can better understand how media coverage impacts the discourse on these issues. The following are the prominent frames:

4.1.1 Conflict and Adversarial Frame

This frame details the congressional hearing on antisemitism at some American universities, such as Columbia University, and it is dominated by an adversarial tone that portrays a scene of intense conflict. Members of Congress are

depicted as aggressively questioning university presidents and officials, creating a narrative of confrontation. This frame also emphasizes the contentious nature of the debate and the pressure exerted on American universities, positioning them as a battleground for ideological and political struggles. For example, the headline “Columbia president assailed at highly charged antisemitism Congress hearing” (The Guardian on April 17a, 2024) reflects this adversarial framing that presents American universities as under siege from powerful external forces. In the same vein, the cancellation of Asna Tabassum's speech at USC, attributed to safety concerns, is framed as a conflict between the university's administration and advocates of free speech. This frame underscores a more profound ideological struggle, where institutional policies clash with free expression and student activism principles. For example, the article "Backlash as USC cancels valedictorian's speech over support for Palestine" (The Guardian on April 17 b, 2024) highlights the confrontation between administrative decisions and student rights, framing the situation as a contentious issue of academic freedom.

4.1.2 Antisemitism and Double Standards Frame

The framing around antisemitism at American universities scrutinizes the institutions' handling of these accusations. This frame suggests a perceived inconsistency in addressing antisemitism and raises critical questions about universities' integrity and commitment to creating a safe and inclusive environment. For example, the article “Columbia campus protests: what is happening with the standoffs?” (The Guardian on April 30a, 2024) frames the university's response as inadequate and potentially biased. The Guardian's news articles also highlight double standards by contrasting the silencing of pro-Palestinian voices with the tolerance for extreme rhetoric against Palestinians. This frame brings to light the inconsistencies in universities' application of free speech principles and questions the fairness of its policies.

4.1.3 Leadership and Accountability Frame

Many of The Guardian's news articles portrayed Columbia University's president, Minouche Shafik, as uncertain and under significant pressure from external forces. This frame suggests a crisis in leadership and accountability and reflects challenges in managing institutional responsibilities and responding effectively to the accusations of antisemitism. For example, the article “Anti-woke Republicans attacked Columbia University. It capitulated” (The Guardian on April 18, 2024) focuses on Shafik's decision-making and the pressures she faces from different pressure groups. Moreover, USC's response to the cancellation of the valedictorian speech raises questions about academic leadership and accountability. This frame scrutinizes the administration's commitment to upholding free speech and maintaining a fair academic environment amidst political pressures. For example, the article “USC cancels Jon M Chu keynote speech in wake of valedictorian controversy” (The Guardian on April 20a, 2024) highlights concerns about the university's governance and decision-making process.

4.1.4 Freedom of Speech and Censorship Frame

The tension between condemning antisemitism and protecting free speech at American universities during the protests was a significant focus of The Guardian's news articles. This frame highlights the complexities involved in balancing protecting against hate speech with preserving academic freedom and freedom of speech on campus. It also reflects broader societal debates on the limits of free expression. For example, the article "Columbia begins suspending pro-Palestine protesters after ultimatum ignored" (The Guardian on April 30 b, 2024) encapsulates this framing, presenting the issue as a delicate balancing act. In addition, canceling the valedictorian speech in many American universities is framed as censorship driven by political pressure. It suggests a compromise of academic freedom and freedom of expression.

4.1.5 Protest and Activism Frame

The emphasis on ongoing protests and student activism portrays university campuses in turmoil. This frame highlights the active engagement and dissent of the student body. For example, the article “USC cancels main commencement ceremony amid Gaza protests” (The Guardian on April 26, 2024) focuses on the scale and intensity of student activism. It depicts a highly mobilized and vocal community. Also, the suppression of pro-Palestinian voices in many American universities is a central theme that emphasizes the broader struggle of students to speak out on controversial issues. This frame also presents the challenges activists face and the implications for free speech on campus.

4.1.6 Political Influence Frame

The suggestion that political forces are driving the narrative against pro-Palestine protests frames the scrutiny as politically motivated. This frame focuses on the influence of external political agendas on institutional actions, policies, and public perceptions. For example, the article “Anti-Defamation League ramps up lobbying to promote controversial definition of antisemitism” (The Guardian on May 16, 2024) emphasizes the external political pressures shaping the university's narrative. Additionally, The Guardian's articles emphasize external political pressures from pro-Israel groups influencing the university's decisions and suggest a compromised autonomy of academic institutions. This frame also raises concerns about how external interests and agendas shape policies and actions in American universities.

4.1.7 Support and Solidarity Frame

The inclusion of voices that support American universities' presidents frames the universities as having significant internal and external backing despite the controversy. This frame presents a narrative of solidarity and support amidst criticism. For example, the article "Professors condemn Columbia crackdown on pro-Palestine students" (The Guardian on May 20, 2024) represents the supportive responses and counters the narrative of complete institutional failure. Furthermore, public and community reactions to the speech cancellation, including widespread outrage and support for the valedictorian, are underlined in many news articles. This frame also presents the event as a rallying point for free speech advocates and illustrates the broader community's support and solidarity with the affected students.

4.2 USA Today's News Coverage and Framing of Pro-Palestine Protests

USA Today's news coverage of pro-Palestine protests in American universities is analyzed through the following prominent frames:

4.2.1 Conflict Frame

Framing news around conflicts, such as confrontations between political figures and activists, draws public attention to controversy and dramatic exchanges. In this sense, this frame emphasizes winners and losers, making it compelling for readers but potentially oversimplifying complex issues. For example, the article "Tom Cotton, Kari Lake show how much Trump, Republicans have normalized violent rhetoric" (USA Today on April 19, 2024) sheds light on the provocative remarks by Sen. Tom Cotton, framing it as a broader political conflict between activists and political figures. It also emphasizes the drama and controversy surrounding political confrontations and responses. By focusing on Cotton's inflammatory comments, USA Today stresses political strife and positions it as a central issue. This draws attention and influences public perception of Cotton and the protests. The repeated emphasis on such conflicts elevates their importance in public discourse.

4.2.2 Violence Frame

This frame includes the dangerous consequences of political rhetoric and actions and underlines physical violence in American universities during pro-Palestine protests. It appeals to public concern for safety and justice and creates a sense of urgency and moral clarity. Many news articles include responses from public figures condemning Cotton's remarks as incitement to violence. By presenting these responses, USA Today underscores the perceived threat of vigilantism and positions it as a critical issue for public consideration. Given the fact that this frame focuses on violence, it can provoke strong emotional reactions that compel audiences to take a stand on the issue. For example, the article "GOP Sen. Cotton criticized for comments on dealing with Gaza protesters disrupting traffic" (USA Today on April 17, 2024) underscores the dangerous consequences of political rhetoric by featuring responses from public figures who condemn Cotton's remarks as incitement to violence.

4.2.3 Historical Comparison Frame

Comparisons to past protests and similar events contextualize current analysis within a broader historical narrative of political persecution and academic freedom. This frame situates the current event within a legacy of ideological conflicts. For example, the article "U.S. has long history of college protests: Here's what happened in the past" (USA Today on May 15, 2024) draws parallels to historical events and provides a deeper context for understanding current challenges. Furthermore, many news articles highlight historical patterns of discrimination, framing current events within the long-standing Israel-Palestine conflict and the struggle for Palestinian rights. This frame connects contemporary actions to a broader historical narrative and emphasizes the ongoing nature of these struggles.

4.2.4 Administrative Inaction Frame

Criticizing university administrations for failing to address demands against antisemitism frames the issue as a matter of institutional responsibility and accountability. This frame draws attention to perceived inadequacies in academic leadership and governance. USA Today's news articles discuss university administrators' failures to respond effectively to antisemitism actions on campuses and position it as a critical issue that requires immediate attention and action. The frame also indicates that administrative inaction can increase scrutiny of institutional policies and leadership. For example, the article "Harvard, Stanford, and MIT get an 'F' from ADL on antisemitism report card" (USA Today on April 18, 2024) criticizes universities' administrations for not adequately responding to demands against antisemitism actions.

4.2.5 Antisemitism Frame

This frame underscores the widespread fear and vulnerability felt by Jews in the U.S. and American universities as a result of the surge in antisemitism, especially on college campuses, where they have been targeted, threatened, and frightened. By highlighting these sentiments, the frame emphasizes the prevalence and seriousness of antisemitism in

American society. For example, the article “Antisemitism is rampant. Campus protests aren't helping things” (USA Today on April 28, 2024). The article's discussion of campus protests and their role in exacerbating antisemitism further solidifies the antisemitism frame. The frame also serves to underline the alarming rise in hostility towards Jews.

4.2.6 Safety and Security Concerns Frame

Focusing on safety and security concerns frames the current event as one of immediate personal and communal risk, compelling urgent action and intervention, and appeals to basic human needs for safety and protection. Many news articles discuss Jewish and Muslim students feeling unsafe on campuses and highlight the urgent need for universities to address safety concerns. This frame posits that safety and security concerns can provoke strong emotional responses and drive public demand for protective measures. For example, the article “Demonstrators breach barriers, clash at UCLA as campus protests multiply: Updates” (USA Today on April 29, 2024) reflects on this frame that shows how Jewish and Muslim students feel unsafe on campuses due to the tensions.

4.2.7 Institutional Reactions Frame

This frame emphasizes the role of institutional actors in addressing pro-Palestine protests. Many news articles describe institutional reactions to campus protests, including criticism and calls for increased safety measures. This frame also suggests that highlighting institutional reactions can shape public understanding of accountability and responsibility. For example, the article "Columbia says encampments will scale down; scores of protesters arrested at USC: Updates" (USA Today on April 25, 2024) covers the various institutional reactions to campus protests and includes calls for increased safety measures.

5. Discussion

The Guardian's diverse frames shape public understanding of pro-Palestine protests in American universities. By using conflict and adversarial frame. In this sense, The Guardian emphasizes institutional struggles and external pressures that create a narrative of urgency and crisis. The antisemitism and double standards frame draws attention to perceived inconsistencies and biases and prompts readers to question the fairness and integrity of the institutions involved. The focus on antisemitism, institutional accountability, and free speech suppression directs public attention to these critical issues, shapes public discourse, and encourages readers to prioritize these topics in their discussions and understanding of university policies and broader societal debates. Conversely, USA Today's news coverage accentuates administrative inaction, framing the issue as one of institutional responsibility and accountability. By criticizing university leadership, USA Today highlights the need for better governance and responsiveness to severe allegations.

USA Today also utilizes a conflict frame but with a different focus. For instance, its coverage of GOP Sen. Tom Cotton's remarks on direct action against protesters underlines the broader political confrontation between activists and political figures. By highlighting provocative statements and responses, USA Today accentuates the drama and controversy of political clashes and potentially simplifies complex issues into binary conflicts. This approach contrasts with The Guardian's more detailed exploration of institutional dynamics and specific conflicts within American universities.

When addressing freedom of speech and censorship, The Guardian frames the cancellation of speeches as censorship driven by political pressure and external forces, which eventually compromise academic freedom and freedom of speech. This frame underlines the impact of external political interests on university policies and the suppression of dissenting voices. However, USA Today focuses on broader institutional reactions to campus protests that stress governance and policy responses. This frame also underscores the role of public policy and institutional actions in addressing freedom of expression and censorship.

Moreover, USA Today situates contemporary issues within broader historical narratives, drawing parallels between current events and historical political persecution. This approach provides a deeper context for understanding current challenges and emphasizes the nature of ongoing ideological conflicts. Additionally, USA Today highlights historical patterns within the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, connecting present-day actions to a continuum of advocacy and discrimination and situating these struggles within a larger historical framework.

The two Anglo-American newspapers also use protest and activism frames differently. On the one hand, The Guardian emphasizes ongoing protests and student activism, which portray campuses in turmoil. This frame highlights the active engagement and dissent of the student body, reflecting broader social and political movements advocating for change. On the other hand, USA Today frames pro-Palestine protests as forms of civil disobedience, legitimizing activist actions by situating them within a tradition of peaceful protest aimed at achieving social and political changes.

The findings from the data analysis align closely with established concepts in framing and agenda-setting literature, highlighting the media's role in shaping public understanding of contentious issues. Through the identification of conflict, accountability, and ideological frames in coverage from The Guardian and USA Today, the study echoes

Gitlin's (1980) observations on media framing of protest movements, wherein the media selectively emphasize specific themes – such as institutional criticism or political conflict – that resonate with broader societal values. Similarly, the agenda-setting impact observed aligns with McCombs and Shaw's (1972) theory, as both news outlets selectively highlighted issues that drive public discourse. The Guardian's framing of the protests as ideological battlegrounds, compared to USA Today's focus on institutional accountability, further exemplifies Entman's (1993) notion that frame selection can significantly affect public interpretation. These connections reinforce the theoretical underpinnings of the study, demonstrating that framing and agenda-setting theories provide valuable insights into how media narratives are constructed and how these constructions shape societal perspectives on complex sociopolitical topics.

6. Concluding Remarks

The analysis of The Guardian and USA Today news coverage reveals distinct framing strategies that significantly form the public understanding of pro-Palestine protests in American universities. The Guardian tends to adopt frames that portray American universities as battlegrounds for ideological struggles and emphasize the controversial nature of these debates and issues. This approach draws attention to institutional biases and inconsistencies and prompts readers to question the integrity and fairness of university policies. While USA Today adopted frames that mainly focus on broader political confrontations and administrative accountability, framing the event as matters of institutional responsibility and governance. By highlighting institutional responses and public policy implications, USA Today encourages a focus on the need for better governance and responsiveness to severe allegations.

These differing frames illustrate the interplay between framing theory and agenda-setting theory during media news coverage of events. The media inform the public and play a crucial role in shaping public discourse and priorities. By selecting and emphasizing certain frames, media outlets guide societal conversations and influence public perceptions of important social and political issues and events. This study underscores the importance of understanding media framing strategies to comprehend better how news coverage impacts public opinion and the broader public agenda.

This study provides a foundation for future research by offering a structured approach to analyzing media framing and agenda-setting in the coverage of controversial social issues. By comparing the framing techniques of The Guardian and USA Today, this study demonstrates how varying frames can shape public opinion. This insight can be extended to other media contexts and issues. Future studies can expand on this work by exploring framing in a broader range of media outlets, including digital and social media platforms, where framing dynamics may differ due to the interactive nature of audience engagement. Additionally, further research can scrutinize the effects of these framing and agenda-setting practices on public perception and policy-making, particularly in an increasingly polarized media environment. By adopting and adapting the methodological and theoretical frameworks used in this study, future research can continue to uncover how media shapes public discourse, contributing valuable insights to media studies, communication, and political science fields.

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Dr. Fadi Jaber was responsible for study design and revising. Dr. Jaber was also responsible for data collection, proofreading, and reformatting the manuscript as per submission guidelines. Dr. Jaber read and approved the final manuscript.

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