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Israel in Crisis Coverage of Israel's Palestinian Problem

How have our media covered Israel during the current wave of Palestinian unrest? We analyzed 375 stories on the ABC, CBS, and NBC evening news and 242 articles in the *New York Times* from the onset of protest last December 9 through April 4.

The results:

- ***Bad News for Israel** - Israel was the target of twice as much negative "spin" (judgmental reporting) as the protesters. (p. 4) Nine out of ten sources criticized Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. (p. 3)
- ***Balancing Blame** - Blame for the unrest was divided about evenly between Israel and the Palestinians. Israel's use of force was justified almost as often as it was criticized. (p. 2)
- ***Video Violence** - Over 1100 scenes of violence appeared on TV news in five months. Palestinian protesters were shown committing more acts of violence than Israeli soldiers. But the Israelis committed 61% of the one-sided violence. (p. 5)
- ***Media Ban Backfired** - The week after the army restricted press access, TV news more than doubled its coverage of Israeli violence. (p. 6)

ELECTION UPDATE - JACKSON COMES DOWN TO EARTH (p. 5)

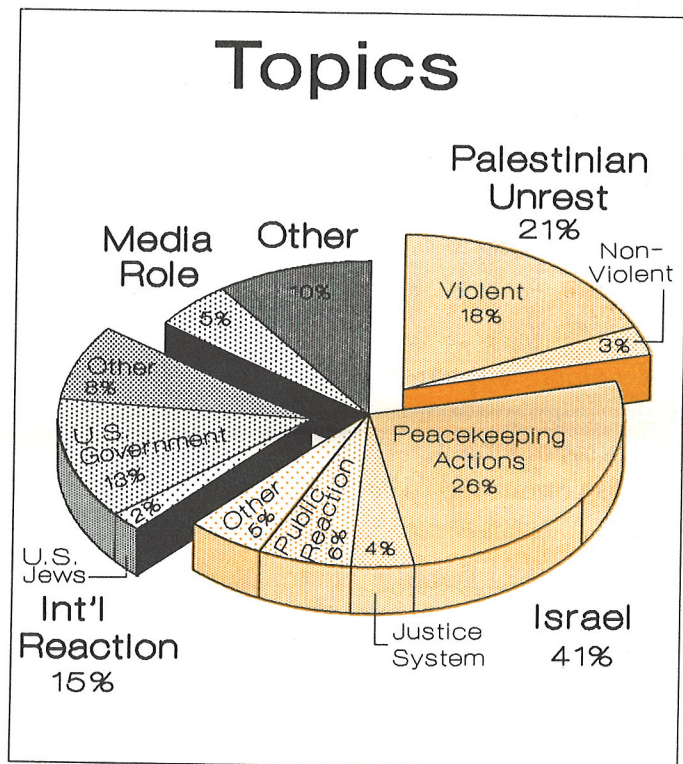
In the Spotlight

We monitored network evening news and *New York Times* coverage of Israel from the outbreak of protest on December 9 through April 4, on the eve of Secretary of State Shultz's visit. During this period TV news ran 375 stories, averaging over three a day. ABC aired 136 stories, followed by NBC with 126 and CBS with 112. The total airtime was 10 hours 41 minutes. The *New York Times* printed 242 stories, an average of two a day. The 4276 column inches of text would fill 35 pages in the *Times* with no headlines, ads, or pictures.

Focus on Israel

The newspeg was Palestinian unrest, but the main story was Israel itself. About one fifth of the coverage focused on the protests. Israel's response and other aspects of Israeli society and politics generated twice as much coverage as the protests themselves.

The media became part of the story, as 65 stories addressed questions of press access and media responsibility. The remaining coverage centered mainly on international reaction. One-sixth of the U.S. coverage concerned the reactions and opinions of American Jews toward events in the Middle East.



The networks featured stories on the riots half again as often as the *New York Times*. One TV story in five focused on violent protest, compared to one in eight newspaper articles. TV's coverage of the media's role

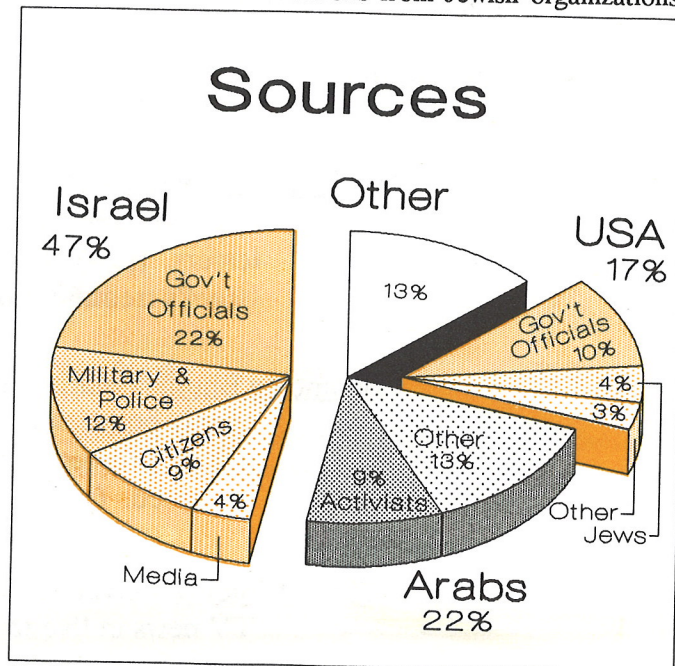
2/Media Monitor

focused on problems of access, while the *Times* devoted more coverage to media responsibility. TV carried almost three times as many media access stories as print (35 to 13), while the *Times* carried over twice as many pieces as the networks (12 to 5) on the media's role in the crisis and the quality of information conveyed.

Middle East Voices

Nearly half the 2836 sources cited (47%) were Israeli. The largest number were government officials, led by Prime Minister Shamir with 120 citations. But the military and police were also cited over 300 times. Journalists and other private citizens were also well represented.

Palestinian and other Arab sources were cited about half as often as Israelis. Among them were 180 citations from Palestinian activists and demonstrators, including 64 from PLO representatives. The American response was most often presented by government sources but also included 107 citations from Jewish organizations.

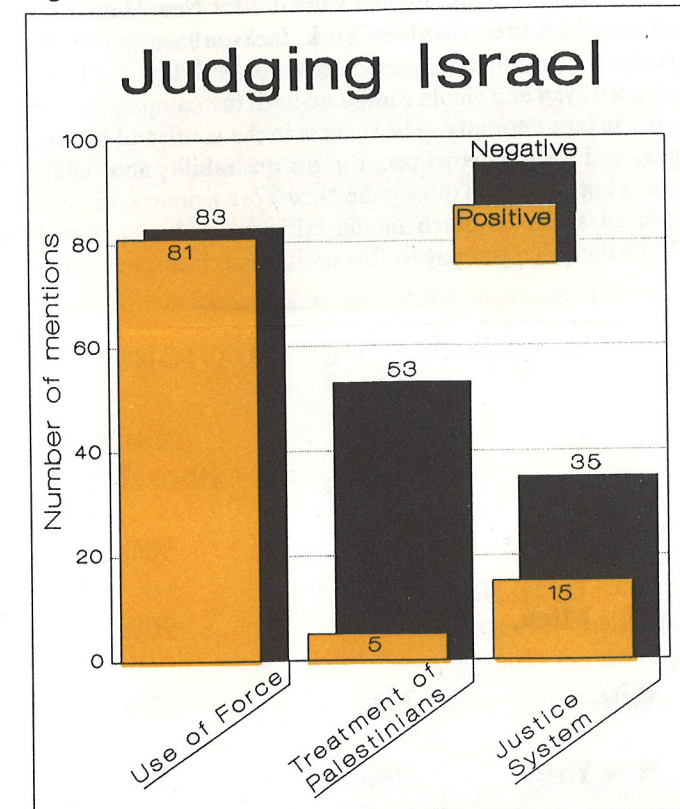


Judging Israel

The major points of contention in the news concerned Israel's use of force, its justice system, and its treatment of the Palestinians. Israel's use of force against the protesters was by far the most heavily debated issue. The 164 statements coded were almost perfectly balanced, with 49% justifying Israeli force and 51% criticizing it.

The coverage was more negative toward Israel's system of justice (including both the civil legal system and military courts). Seventy percent of the 50 statements coded on this issue criticized its fairness, treatment of protesters, etc.

The most negative coverage was directed toward Israel's treatment of the Palestinians, aside from its behavior toward protesters and detainees. Among 58 statements addressing the broader social, political, or economic context of Israeli-Palestinian relations, over nine out of ten (91%) criticized Israel. And this did not include statements that addressed the Palestinians' plight without linking it to Israeli treatment.



Research shows that non-partisan sources are more influential in changing opinion than are self-interested sources. Most of the pro-Israeli viewpoints on these three issues came from Israeli sources, while the anti-Israeli viewpoints came from a wide range of sources. Among the 101 positive assessments of Israeli behavior, 94% came from Israeli sources, 4% from American Jews, and 2% from the U.S. government. Of the 168 negative assessments, 36% came from Arab sources, 15% from American Jews, 11% from other U.S. sources, and 24% from other international sources. Overall 80% of the views expressed by American Jews were critical of Israel, mostly about its use of force.

Coverage of Israel in the American press is likely to be more factual and carefully worded than coverage from any foreign country.

--Jim Hoagland, *Washington Post*, 3/19

So far, TV news has not distinguished itself on (this) story.

--Tom Shales, *Washington Post*, 4/25

Casting Stones

Despite heavy criticism of some Israeli actions, blame for the unrest was divided about equally between Israel and the Palestinians. Of 148 expressions of blame, 33% accused Israel, while 31% accused the Palestinian side (including 10% that specified the PLO). Another 17%

Blame the Media?

Yes--

We know the presence of the press incites and instigates the violence.

--Israeli Defense Force spokesman

The insurrection must be quelled immediately, and the first stop is to throw out television, a la South Africa.

--Henry Kissinger

A lot of reporters who come in here for a few weeks...don't realize that Gaza isn't Berkeley in the 1960's.

--B'nai B'rith spokesman

I'm not for freedom of the press. I'm for the freedom of Israel.

--Knesset member

No--

Uprising by the Palestinians is Not a Made-for-TV Movie

--New York Times headline

Hiding the public's business by banning TV is the stuff of tyrannies, not democracies.

--Richard Clurman

I think we should wrestle with the real problem and not the media.

--Israeli General Zeev Livneh

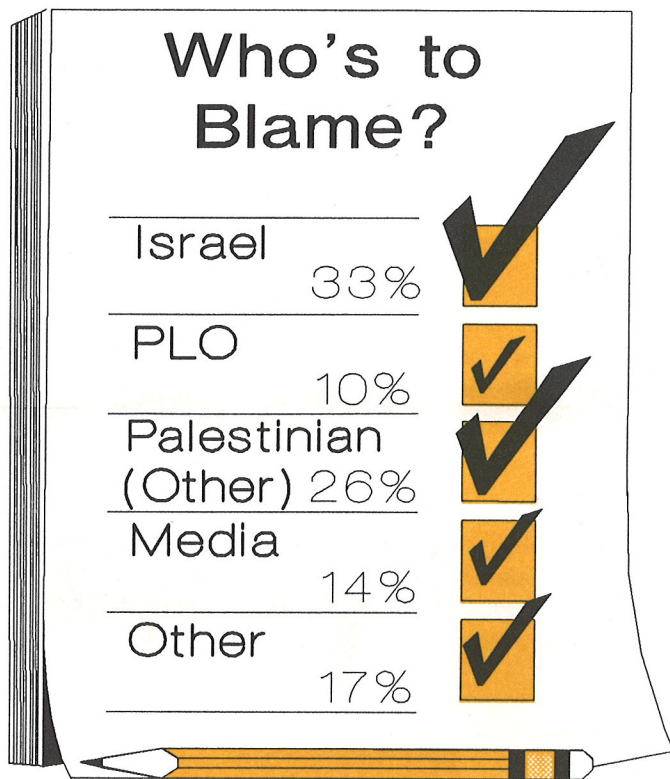
There is no evidence to suggest that the...rioting...is influenced by the presence or absence of TV cameras.

--Patrick Cockburn,
Carnegie Endowment

This is not a media war but a real war.

--Israeli scholar

blamed the media for perpetuating or escalating the unrest. A majority of the accusations against Israel concerned underlying legal, political and economic inequities rather than the use of force against protesters.



Seeking Solutions

Much of the coverage was occupied with the search for solutions to the Palestinian unrest. The need for a negotiated settlement was mentioned by far the most often, especially after Secretary of State Shultz began his efforts toward this goal.

Israel was called on most frequently to resolve the crisis through military force or by deporting leaders of the Palestinian protests. Proposals for deportation sparked the most controversy. Of those who mentioned this policy, 46% opposed it. On the Palestinian side, the most frequent proposals were for autonomy for the occupied territories or resistance against the Israeli occupation. Fifteen sources called for violent overthrow of the occupation.

Overall the calls for Israeli policies of force or deportation slightly outnumbered (by 66 to 57) the voices seeking Palestinian autonomy and resistance. Solutions that were only rarely mentioned included early elections in Israel and integration of the Palestinians into Israeli society.

Anyone who wants to damage this fortress (Israel) will have his head smashed against the boulders and walls.

--Yitzhak Shamir

It's not human not to shoot them, it's stupid not to shoot them.

--Israeli settler

We can't live here like human beings. We can't express our feelings. No one can hear us. This is our statement.

--Palestinian activist

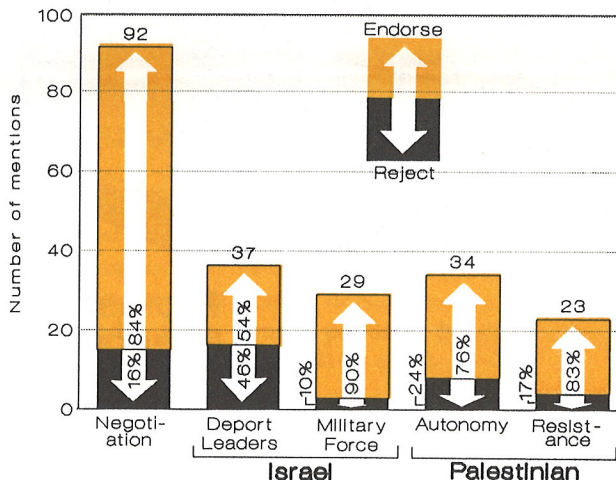
To be in daily touch with your enemy, and to do everything against him, makes a person feel very good.

--Palestinian protester

Spin Patrol

The tone of the news can be influenced by judgmental phrasing or "spin" that introduces or concludes a story. For example: "Palestinian youths went on a rampage in East Jerusalem today..."; "...what Prime Minister Shamir left behind--three months of turmoil that has divided the Israeli people and their leaders". We examined network leads and

Solutions



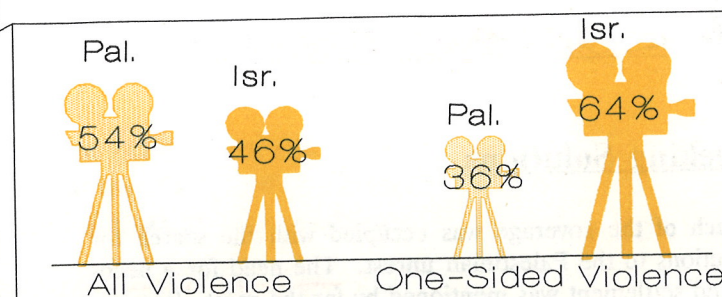
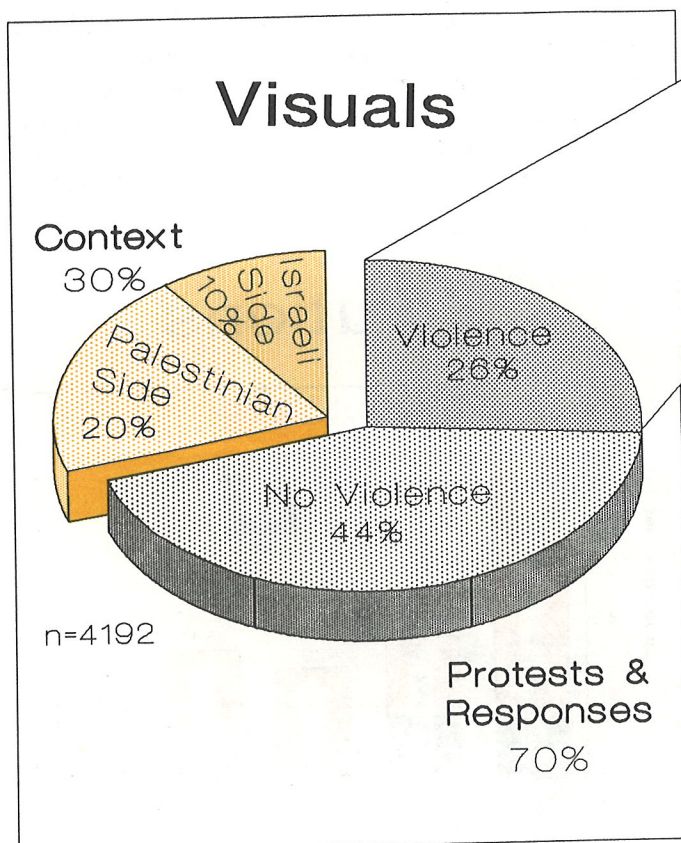
closers for spin, along with opening and closing paragraphs in the *Times*. Spin turned out to be overwhelmingly negative--90% or 114 of 126 instances coded.

Negative spin was directed at Israel twice as often as the Palestinians. It was more prevalent (81 cases) and more anti-Israeli (70% vs. 30%) at the networks, compared to 33 cases that split against Israel by 58% to 42% in the *Times*. Israel did receive the benefit of nine of the twelve positive cases of spin.

Pictures of Protest

TV news is more than the words that are spoken. It is also, and perhaps preeminently, the pictures that appear on screen. To examine the visual impact of the coverage, we coded every camera shot taken on location. We excluded studio reports and indoor interviews. This procedure yielded 4192 "visuals". The three networks did not differ significantly in their selection of visuals.

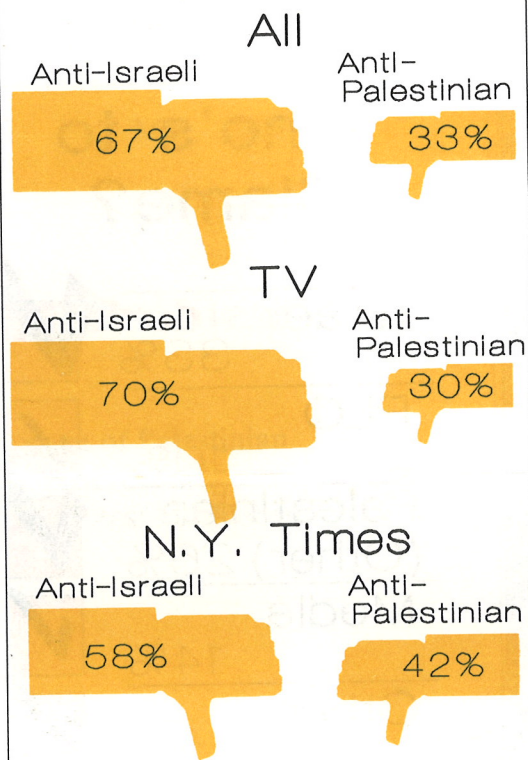
The cameras mainly showed the protests themselves rather than the background context, e.g., refugee camps, victims of terrorism, street scenes, etc. Pictures of protesters, security forces, and detainees outnumbered "contextual" shots by 70 to 30 percent. Of the scenes that depicted the context of the unrest, the Palestinian side was seen about twice as often as the Israeli side.



Just over one on-location visual in four (26%) portrayed an act of violence, ranging from fistfights to gunshots. Of the 1103 scenes involving violence, 600 (54%) showed Palestinian protesters and 503 (46%) showed Israeli security forces. (When both sides behaved violently, we coded the side that was shown initiating the violence.)

When we examined one-sided violence, however, the focus shifted to the Israeli side. One-sided violence was coded only when a violent act and non-violent response were both clearly shown. One-sided violence ranged from soldiers beating civilians to protesters throwing rocks at retreating soldiers. There were 280 scenes in which one side acted in a violent manner against a person or group who did not respond in kind. The Israeli defense forces were shown committing 178 acts of one-sided violence (61%), compared to 102 acts (39%) by Palestinian protesters.

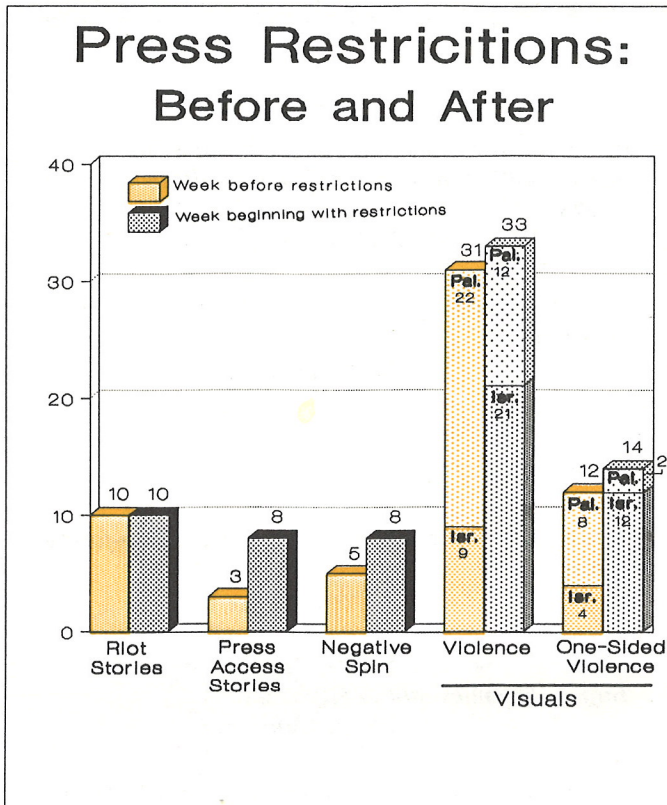
Negative Spin



The Camera Didn't Blink

Angered by pictures of Israeli violence, the army banned all foreign reporters from the occupied territories during Palestinian Land Day protests (March 29-31), except for a small pool of reporters with a military escort. Did this get tough policy change the coverage? To find out, we compared TV coverage of the week that included the ban (March 29-April 4) with coverage of the week preceding the ban (March 22-28).

The result: After the press restrictions, the cameras produced more negative images of Israel than before. The focus of coverage did not shift away from the riots, but expanded to include the issue of press access. Instances of negative spin toward Israel also increased. (There was no negative spin toward the Palestinians during the two-week period.)



Most striking, pictures of violent acts not only increased, they shifted decisively toward the Israeli side. The week before the ban, only 21% of the violent visuals featured the Israeli Defense Forces. The next week 64% focused on Israeli violence. Before the ban, only 33% of the one-sided violence shown was committed by Israelis. Afterward the Israeli share increased to 86%.

Limiting what the press could see did not limit the violence.
--Peter Jennings, ABC, 3/30

ELECTION UPDATE

Jackson's Ups and Downs

Jesse Jackson's media bubble soared after New Hampshire, but came back to earth in New York. Jackson has always gotten good press (positive assessments of his desirability), but he was not portrayed as a viable candidate until the campaign moved south in late February. His success in the south and midwest produced a media bonanza. But his desirability and viability scores both dropped during the New York primary, where he suffered about as much media criticism as his opponents. That's the price you pay for becoming a serious candidate.

JACKSON'S TV EVALUATIONS*

	<u>Good Press</u>	<u>Positive Horse Race</u>
Super Tues.	74%	90%
Ill. - Mich.	100%	90%
Wisc.	71%	83%
New York	60%	52%

*Calculated as a percent of clearly positive and clearly negative judgments in these categories.

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