

Constructing Jerusalem in English-Language News Media

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The asymmetric nature of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict has several manifestations, including the inability of the resources and infrastructures of the 2 parties to equally communicate, network, and influence prevailing political discourse and the global media coverage of the conflict. The framing of news on political conflict is usually contested, as political actors use the power at their disposal to control interpretations and instrumentalize a carefully crafted discourse featuring specific linguistic choices. This quantitative study looks at the linguistic identification and labeling of the city of Jerusalem in English-language news media using word frequency and concordance. This assessment is conducted using the Google News search engine (GNSE) with an open timeframe ending in September 2022. The study finds that the city is more frequently presented in English-language news media as a Jewish city and that the Palestinian, Arab, Muslim, and Christian populations—as well as their claims and rights to the city—are marginalized, obscuring the multifaceted identity of the city and hindering the global public understanding of its reality, legal status, and conflict.

Keywords: Jerusalem, reporting conflict, Google News search engine (GNSE), Palestinian-Israeli conflict, framing

Jerusalem is at the center of the conflict between the Palestinians and the Israelis. Jerusalem—both East and West—is claimed by Israel as its united capital, while East Jerusalem alone is claimed as the capital of the Palestinian state. The city is designated as a *corpus separatum* (Latin: “separate entity”; Britannica, 2023) by United Nations Resolution 181, which called for the division of Mandatory Palestine into a Jewish state and an Arab Palestinian state. Jerusalem is a contested city; the boundaries and demographics of which are constantly in flux under the Israeli occupation (Harker, Shebeith, & Sayyad, 2014). This city is where the “three world religions meet, share and compete over their access to holy sites and their interpretation of the divine” (Dumper, 2002, p. 1). Since Israel occupied East Jerusalem in 1967, the city of Jerusalem has become “sharply divided and highly segregated,” and violence has become routine (Weiss, Tsur, Miodownik, Lupu, & Finkel, 2024, p. 2).

The conflict over the city between Israel and the Palestinians is evident in the two nations’ political discourse and their attempts to impact the news media coverage of the conflict. Gadi Wolfsfeld (1997) maintains that news is a “central arena for political conflict” and that “competition” over representation in

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news is increasingly a major feature of modern conflict (pp. 3–5). The “perceived power” of actors in a conflict impacts the domination of certain frames underlying political discourse and news media (Vladisavljević, 2015, p. 28). The news constitutes an important factor in shaping prevailing debates and public opinions about conflicts as well as an important archival source that influences how students, scholars, and historians study both historical events and current phenomena.

The ample literature on the reporting of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is largely episodal, short-term in focus; thus, most of it rarely offers an understanding of the overall outcome of long-term trends in reporting. This study examines the dominant frames of the city by investigating news texts. It focuses on word frequencies and concordances as indicators of dominant framing across all English-language news sources on the freely available Google News search engine (GNSE). These sources include newspapers, broadcasters, and news outlets from around the world in the United States and Europe as well as Africa, Asia, and the Arab world. The theoretical framework of framing builds on Fowler’s (1991) understanding of news “content” not as “facts about the world” but as “ideas” (p. 1) that generate certain selective interpretations (framings) of events. Framing is a “form of social action” (Chiang & Wu, 2015, p. 257), and language is one of its main instruments. Frame analyses of conflict “have been especially useful in the study of intractable conflicts” (Agne, 2007, p. 552). Scholars maintain that language selection in news media and political discourse should be examined as an articulation of power domination or the “abuse of power”; the question is, “who can ‘control’ news ‘discourse’” (Van Dijk, 2017, p. VIII) and the political and social meanings generated by it? As Conboy (2013) contends, the social and political ramifications are what matter in the study of news texts.

Although numerous studies have examined news reporting on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (e.g., Bourdon, 2012; Ghareeb, 1983; Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Noakes & Wilkins, 2002; Philo & Berry, 2011; Philo et al., 2003; Ross, 2001, 2003; Siddiqui & Zaheer, 2018; Terry & Mendenhall, 1974; Viser, 2003; Wolfsfeld, 1997, 2001; Yarchi, 2014), most have focused on the reporting of violence (e.g., Falah, 2023; Jackson, 2023; Liebes & First, 2004) or on political contestations and news bias. Despite the centrality of Jerusalem in political discourse and media coverage, there is a dearth of scholarly work on how news has covered the city (e.g., Hannerz, 1998; Klatzker, 1994) or contributed to the construction of the city’s identity.

This study focuses on identifying long-term patterns of linguistic choices in reporting on Jerusalem and the conflict over it. It employs concordance analysis to analyze patterns of religious, nationalist, and cultural identifications and labels in English-language news media sources’ reports on Jerusalem. Importantly, this study recognizes the editorial elements behind language selection and the structure of news texts; still, it aims to shed light on language selection and frequencies as indicators of the dominance of certain framing aspects in these news texts. Word choices activate certain interpretations of events and identifications of actors and places. Thus, this study answers the following research questions:

- RQ1: How is news about Jerusalem framed in global English-language news media through linguistic choices? Is there an overall balance in competing frames about the city in the news available through GNSE?*
- RQ2: What names and labels are more frequently assigned to Jerusalem and its holy places in the news available through GNSE? What do these naming and language choices mean for the overall portrayal of the city?*

This study considers English-language news sources available through the freely available GNSE, which includes content from mainstream “digital born” news organizations (Nicholls, Shbbir, & Nielsen, 2016) as well as legacy broadcasters, newspapers, online news sites, newswires, and their archives (Vague & Iselid, 2010) from around the world. For frame analysis, it uses a quantitative content analysis design focused on the editorial linguistic choices of news texts as indicators of news framing.

The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict in Global News Media

The centrality of media and public opinion in conflicts is hardly disputable in the modern media-saturated world. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict has persisted for nearly a century. Although it enjoys considerable global media attention (Ghareeb, 1983; Philo et al., 2003; Ross, 2003), studies show that this attention is largely distorted, misrepresented, stereotyped, and manipulated. Researchers have exposed a long-term systematic bias against the Palestinians, particularly in the globally prestigious English-language news media (Jackson, 2023; Philo & Berry, 2011; Philo et al., 2003; Siddiqui & Zaheer, 2018). Although this bias may be attributed to various political, economic, cultural, and journalistic factors, the public relations apparatus of Israel—a versatile (Freeman, 2012), pervasive, and state-subsidized system—should not be ignored as a potential explanatory factor.

Several studies have focused on the international coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (e.g., Bourdon, 2012; Ghareeb, 1983; Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Noakes & Wilkins, 2002; Philo et al., 2003; Ross, 2001; Terry & Mendenhall, 1974; Viser, 2003; Wolfsfeld, 2001; Yarchi, 2014), and most of them have confirmed the imbalance in the overall portrayals of both sides—the contrasting framing and interpretations of their actions, victims, and political claims (e.g., Bourdon, 2012; Ghareeb, 1983; Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Noakes & Wilkins, 2002; Philo et al., 2003; Ross, 2001; Terry & Mendenhall, 1974; Viser, 2003). Israel widely enjoys more favorable, humanizing, and legitimizing treatment in the news media despite the rising diversity of news and information sources.

Although the Oslo Accords provided the Palestinians with some level of recognition in news media, the systematic bias in favor of Israel remained in place (Deprez & Raeymaeckers, 2010; Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Noakes & Wilkins, 2002; Zaharna, 1995). Zaharna (1995) noted how the image of the Palestinians has changed from that of an “invisible” people in 1948 to one of “voiceless refugees” in 1967 (pp. 38–39). Noakes and Wilkins (2002) found that the First Intifada in 1987 and the Oslo Accords in 1993 shifted portrayals of Palestinians, introducing some degree of journalistic fairness. Notably, this same trend was observed in Israeli media (Noakes & Wilkins, 2002).

American media has been shown to be biased against the Palestinians. Viser (2003) found that, although both *The New York Times* and *Haaretz* are biased in favor of Israel, the former—a newspaper of record with an “iconic status in U.S. journalism and politics”—ironically exhibited more bias than the Israeli publication *Haaretz* (Brittain, 2003, para. 5; Viser, 2003). Guttenplan (2002) argued that the American press is reluctant to report events related to the Israeli harassment of Palestinians that both the British and Israeli press cover. Even when American media outlets have occasionally reported on Israeli aggression and violence against civilians—such as in the invasion of Lebanon in 1982—pro-Zionist media commentators and scholars have always been present to defend Israel, accusing critics of Israel of bias and anti-Semitism

(Said, 1984). This practice continues to be observable in the current reporting of many news outlets (Jackson, 2023; Philo & Berry, 2011; Philo et al., 2003; Siddiqui & Zaheer, 2018).

Competing for Jerusalem

Israel uses various strategies to strengthen its ties to Jerusalem in the global mainstream news media and, in turn, in international public opinion. Israeli communication strategies pertaining to the city can be traced back to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948. In December 1949, Israel moved most of its state institutions to West Jerusalem (Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion on Moving the Capital of Israel to Jerusalem, n.d.). In doing so, every event and official statement reported by the global news media entrenched its connection to West Jerusalem—often simply referred to as just Jerusalem. These factors have contributed to the long-term connection between Israel and the city of Jerusalem in the global media. This link was inevitable, as West Jerusalem began to appear in all news reports from Israel as their location, just below the byline identifying the journalists responsible for the story. To further manipulate foreign media coverage and assert the state's claim to the supposedly unified city, Israel placed foreign correspondents in West Jerusalem. Important cultural and educational institutions were in the city, arguably, to maximize the volume of the association. Historically, alongside Cairo and Beirut, Jerusalem has been one of the centers through which the Middle East is reported. The city "has one of the highest densities of foreign correspondents in the world" (Hannerz, 1998, p. 549); all those in the city to cover the workings of the Israeli government are subjected to an implicit endorsement of Israel's dominion over the city.

A few decades later, the Palestinians attempted to bolster their connection to East Jerusalem through the naming and labeling of major events. Since 2000, many of the major events in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict have been labeled by the Palestinians in reference to Jerusalem or one of its holy sites. The Second Palestinian Intifada was termed "the Al-Aqsa Intifada" in response to the provocative visit by Ariel Sharon—the Israeli opposition leader at the time—to Al-Aqsa Mosque (Ackerman, 2001). In 2015, the Palestinians called their uprising the Al-Quds Intifada—Al-Quds being the Arabic name for Jerusalem. In 2021, the wave of attacks by Hamas, the Palestinian militant group, on Israel over the latter's forced evictions of Palestinian residents from their homes in the Shaikh Jarrah neighborhood of occupied East Jerusalem was also referred to as "Saif Al-Quds" in Arabic: the Sword of Jerusalem. Additionally, "Al-Aqsa Flood" is the label that Hamas gave its October 2023 attack on Israel. Al-Aqsa, the mosque cited in these names, is the third holiest site in Islam, located in the Al-Haram Al-Sharif area of occupied East Jerusalem. Within the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound lies the Dome of the Rock, an Islamic place of worship with a golden dome that is frequently displayed as a background image in news reports on Jerusalem. This site is where Prophet Mohammad is believed by Muslims to have ascended to heaven. The same area, Al-Haram Al-Sharif, is believed by Israelis to be the site of the Temple Mount, the holiest religious shrine for Jews (Reiter, Eordegian, & Khalaf, 2000).

Reporting on Jerusalem

Jerusalem has often garnered international media attention because of staged events, violence, or official political statements. News values that have long guided the practices of foreign journalists and editors continue to center on conflict and violence (Ross, 2003). The city is rarely reported on beyond the context of conflict or the staged meet and greet events of the Israeli government, notwithstanding the spiritual weight of

the city for the world's three monotheistic religions, its economic and political centrality to the Arab-Israeli conflict at large, and the grave conditions imposed on its Palestinian population by Israel's occupation and discriminatory long-term policies (Amnesty, 2022; Human Rights Watch, 2021). International news media is event driven (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001), lending itself to actors with more resources at their disposal to manipulate reporting.

An analysis of 30 years of reporting on Jerusalem in the British press—*The Times*, *The Guardian*, and *The Daily Telegraph*—reveals a few trends in the coverage of the city. First, it is focused almost entirely on “dramatic events”; even less intense events are frequently dramatized to fit the frames of terrorism or religious war (Najjar, 2009). This dramatic focus and portrayal can also be found in American news coverage. Over the years, especially after 9/11, the prestigious American press has connected “terror” to the Palestinians three times more frequently than it has to the Israeli occupation (Siddiqui & Zaheer, 2018). Elmasry (2009) found that both *The New York Times* and *The Chicago Tribune* framed the violence perpetrated by Israel during the Second Palestinian Intifada in a way that subtly legitimized it, presenting the news from a predominantly Israeli perspective. Meanwhile, they delegitimized Palestinian violence during the same period. In Ross's (2003) analysis of 13 months of editorials in *The New York Times* on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict following 9/11, he found that,

New York Times editorials were likely to depersonalize Palestinians and frame them as aggressors rather than victims. Commentary on Israeli acts of violence, in contrast, often favored law and order frames, and the personal suffering of Israeli victims frequently provided the context for discussion of regional violence. (p. 1)

Second, coverage of the conflict over Jerusalem is largely driven by Israel's actions and statements (Elmasry, 2009). Third, several key shifts occurred in the portrayals of Palestinians in Jerusalem between 1967 and 2000: the share of news stories mentioning the Palestinians increased over time, and they were portrayed as “terrorists” with little context or alternative framings. Similar trends appeared in the Flemish press (Deprez & Raeymaeckers, 2010).

At least two interpretations/narratives competed in the reporting on events associated with Jerusalem—and the Israeli narrative won out in most prominent newspapers. An excellent illustration of the dominance of Israel's frames and interpretations is evident in how prominent newspapers reported on the failure of the two rounds of Camp David talks in 1980 and 2000. During their coverage of the Camp David II negotiations between then Prime Minister Ehud Barak, late Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, and then President of the United States Bill Clinton, the newspapers followed the Israeli narrative that the peace talks failed because of disagreements over Jerusalem and Arafat's reluctance to abide by the Israeli “compromise” over the city. Notably, the first round of talks in 1980 failed when Israel unilaterally annexed East Jerusalem, yet Israel was not identified as the point of failure in the peace talks. When it came to Camp David II, however, Arafat was labeled as “an obstacle to peace” (Baumgarten, 2004, p. 31). In both cases, the provided interpretations were aligned with Israel's official interpretations of the events (Najjar, 2009).

The “context” of the occupation was almost entirely absent from U.S. media coverage of the Al-Aqsa Intifada and most BBC reporting on it (Ackerman, 2001; Philo et al., 2003). Recently, Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP), a U.S.-based NGO, has criticized *The New York Times's* coverage of the 2015 confrontations in Jerusalem. JVP noted that the newspaper often dehumanizes the Palestinians, linking them to violence far more frequently

than the Israelis. In a letter to *The New York Times's* public editor at the time, Margaret Sullivan, JVP called for the paper's coverage to be reevaluated in a way that guarantees fair and unbiased reporting as well as the provision of critical context (JVP, 2015). News about Jerusalem is important, as it can influence public opinion around the world and mobilize large segments of the public. In 2016, a special issue of the *Journal of Palestine Studies* devoted to the city of Jerusalem, according to Rashid Khalidi (2016), brought to light the

reality [of Palestinians in Jerusalem] far from the false picture projected by Israel that is generally reproduced by most of the U.S. mainstream media in a mendacious rendering of the situation luridly highlighting the occasional outbursts of Palestinian violence against Israelis. (p. 6)

Israel's narrative—and, in turn, that of the U.S. media—not only associates Palestinians with violent "terrorism" but also ignores the systematic violence and human rights violations committed against them by Israeli institutions and armed settlers. Media attention is only paid to the city when violence reaches West Jerusalem and only if an Israeli is hurt (Khalidi, 2016), continuing the long-standing tradition of valuing Israeli life over Palestinian life. An argument that was made by Jewish philosopher Judith Butler (2004) in response to her own question—"Who counts as a human?" (ch. 2, p. 2)—thus deserves to be mourned. This difference in the valuation of life is evident in political discourse and in mainstream English-language news media. Israel represents "a machine for the conversion of grief into power"; "Palestinian death is, famously, publicly worthless and undeserving of commemoration" (Winant, 2023). Indeed, "the dehumanization of the Palestinians in their native land is deeply rooted in the ideology and vision of the founders of the Jewish state" (Abdelrazek, 2021, p. 158).

Framing

Framing involves various journalistic decisions about the selection, arrangement, and prioritization of different aspects of an event. The details selected support a specific interpretation of an event or dynamic. Thus, framing is "the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue" (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 104). Frames define problems, identify causes, determine the consequences of actions, attribute blame, and suggest remedies (Entman, 2004). They are "socially shared and persistent over time [and] work symbolically to meaningfully structure the social world" (Reese, 2001, p. 11). The frequent use of certain terms and labels in news coverage activates certain frames while dissuading others. If Al-Aqsa Mosque or Al-Haram Al-Sharif are labeled as Temple Mount, the frame suggests that Palestinians—labeled largely as Muslims—have no right to go or pray there. On the other hand, if the current names—Al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, or Al-Haram Al-Sharif—are used in the story, headline, or picture captions, then the Israeli police presence in the mosque looks illegitimate and probably provocative. Hence, "the alternative phrasings of the same basic issue significantly alter its meaning" (Chong & Druckman, 2007, p. 104). This aligns well with the conceptualization of framing as "a communicative and deliberate strategic tool" (Gal, Collins-Kreiner, & Shmueli, 2015, p. 589).

Framing Jerusalem and the conflict over it significantly impact issues of political power, human rights, and legitimacy: "Differences in framing also influence [the] evolution of conflict" (Gal et al., 2015, p. 588). News frames are both the outcome of previous understandings of similar events and the result of current attempts to provide interpretations of the reported event. Simply labeling the city, its

neighborhoods, and its holy sites bestows legitimacy on certain political and religious behaviors of citizens, residents, and security apparatuses while depriving others of their legitimacy: "By selecting which [. . .] frames to feature, and speakers to recognize, contributors to the political communication space are exercising discursive power" (Jungherr, Posegga, & An, 2019, p. 409). The frequencies of terms and concordances in service of certain interpretations and framings constitute indicators of discursive power, or "the ability of contributors to political communication spaces to introduce, amplify, and maintain topics, frames, and speakers that come to dominate political discourse" (Jungherr et al., 2019, p. 409).

Methods and Materials

The words and phrases used in news media to refer to the city of Jerusalem alongside its increasingly complex reality and competing claims are worth examining. The choices behind these words and phrases stem from editorial decisions and are meaningful in their influence on the public perception of the city and of who has the right to reside in it, work in it, govern it, and claim it as their own.

This study uses the freely available GNSE as the source of its text corpus. It analyzes language selection in English-language news reports related to events in the city of Jerusalem. Its quantitative research design is a content analysis of news texts on the city of Jerusalem and the conflict over it. Statistical data on word frequency and concordances were gathered using term searches in September 2022. Unfortunately, there is no available method that avoids algorithmic bias. This bias is clear in news ranking rather than in quantitative news search results (Nechushtai & Lewis, 2019). The literature highlights "the traditional retrieval problem of producing a ranked result set for a given user query" (Beitzel, Jensen, Chowdhury, Grossman, & Frieder, 2004, p. 494). To minimize it, the researcher tasked two assistants, in addition to herself, with searching for the same terms and concordances during the same week. Then, the numbers were calculated from the three sets of data to generate the results presented in this study. The search was open in timeframe (endpoint in September 2022), meaning that no dates were established as the definitive beginning or the end of the search. For the search, each word and phrase were placed in quotation marks.

The researcher identified key search terms used to nationally identify the city of Jerusalem (i.e., Palestine, Palestinian/s, Israel, Israeli/s). Religious framing was also considered, so search terms pertaining to holy places in the city were also employed (i.e., Temple Mount, Al-Haram Al-Sharif, Al-Aqsa Mosque, Church of the Holy Sepulcher, Jews, Jewish, Islam, Muslim/s, Christian/s).

Word Frequency and Concordances

The concordances (multiword expressions) are investigated to determine which national, cultural, and religious affiliations and legitimacies have been created for East Jerusalem in the news corpus available. For instance, the phrases "East Jerusalem" and "West Jerusalem" represent the identities of these two sides of the city, with frequency constituting an indication of their relative significance. The concordances of "Israel and Jerusalem, Jerusalem and Israel, Jerusalem and Israeli/s," and "Israeli/s and Jerusalem" indicate a national identification of the city as Israeli, whereas a Palestinian identification of the city can be gleaned through those of "Palestine and Jerusalem" and "Palestinian/s and Jerusalem." If the word "occupied" precedes "East Jerusalem" (in line with the status of East Jerusalem under international law since 1967),

the actions of the occupiers—the Israeli government, military, and police may be deemed questionable or illegitimate. Such a term also highlights the presence of people under a military occupation—the Palestinians—as well as their rights to live, reside, build, assemble, and all other rights associated with international law for those under military occupation.

Jerusalem is a culturally and religiously hybrid city. It is a holy city for Jews, Christians, and Muslims around the world. The frequency of the words (names and labels) of its holy sites and what they are referred to impacts the city's overall constructed religious identity. The concordances of "Jerusalem and Jew/s, Jerusalem and Jewish," and so on emphasize the religious ties between Jews and the city of Jerusalem. Likewise, the concordances of "Islam and Jerusalem, Muslim/s and Jerusalem, Christian/s and Jerusalem," and "Christianity and Jerusalem" point to either a single Christian or Muslim religious identity of the city or a multifaceted religious identity.

This search was conducted manually by three researchers, with each being assigned all considered key words, phrases, and word/phrase combinations (concordances). The tabulated results were compared independently for each term, phrase, and concordance, and the results for each search entry were added and divided by three (the number of researchers who conducted the search). A new table was generated from the results and is used as the main document for the findings of this study.

Data Analysis

Content analysis is conducted using the frequencies of words and concordances with the aim of investigating media strategies as they pertain to the identity of the city of Jerusalem and its holy sites. As one of the "basic tools" in corpus linguistics, frequency "is used to illuminate interesting findings and provide users with a greater understanding of the use of a given word in certain contexts" (Stubbs, 2004, p. 67). "Although many corpus studies discard individual words as units of meaning, and instead investigate them as a part of phrasal units, words are still a good starting point" (Baker, 2010, p. 69), especially when we realize that "the more frequent a word is, the more important it is to investigate" (Stubbs, 2004, pp. 115–116). Notably, concordance analysis, as a corpus linguistic method, includes both quantitative and qualitative processes, enabling researchers to search for and identify "patterns" of linguistic choices (Baker, 2010, p. 93) that express forms of ideological and/or political domination.

Concordance analysis is used in this study to identify patterns of political, religious, national, and cultural identifications, associations, and labels activated by the patterns detected in global English-language news reports on East Jerusalem. In his work on the academic manipulation of the names used to portray Jerusalem, British linguist Yasir Suleiman (2004) argued that names are used to construct certain identities and establish legitimacies:

The Multiplicity of terminologies [in the article] is no doubt intended to satisfy different political and ideological imperatives, but it ultimately has the effect of making the Israeli occupation of the Occupied Territories almost invisible. As a matter of fact, quantitatively—in terms of frequency—the "names/labels" in the article promote a view of the legality of occupation over its indisputable illegality. (p. 166)

Google News

This study uses GNSE as its main source of data. The parent company of GNSE, Alphabet, is the owner of the globally dominant Google search engine (91.86%), which is one of the most influential Internet browsers. Notably, Google “isn’t just an index to help sort through the endless libraries of online information—it’s a reference guide for the physical world too, having mapped most corners of the Earth and cataloged its contents. It is part encyclopedia” (Warzel, 2023, para. 1). In 2022, Google had 1 billion users and handled over 40,000 search attempts every second. Statista estimated its number of daily searches as about 4.5 billion (2023).

GNSE “is a computer-generated news service that aggregates headlines from over 50,000 news sources globally” (PPCexpo, n.d., para. 3). The scope of available English-language news from around the world is based on principles of “transparency” and trustworthiness (Understanding the Sources Behind Google News, 2021, n.d.). The relative ranking of news sites is based on factors relevant to news items, including frequency of publishing and the “freshness, location, relevance, and diversity” of “news content” (PPCexpo, n.d., para. 2). Beyond the United States and Europe, GNSE has certain limitations about the availability of news content (Vage & Iselid, 2010). This allows for the assumption that much of the available content comes from the United States and Western Europe, though there is also a significant amount of English-language content from elsewhere, including the Middle East. According to Google, indicators like byline clarity and the availability of information on a news source determine whether it is included in GNSE results.

Findings

The divided city of Jerusalem often appears as a unified city in the news media, referred to as such—just “Jerusalem”—11.3 million times in the frequency search. In comparison, there were only a total of 3.4 million instances of either “West Jerusalem” or “East Jerusalem” being used (see Table 1), collectively representing 29.9% of the total mentions of the city. This overall dynamic gives the impression that Jerusalem is a unified city, as the term “Jerusalem” accounts for 70% of references to the city, as shown in Figure 1. A unified city is the narrative that Israel promotes about its capital city, which includes occupied East Jerusalem.

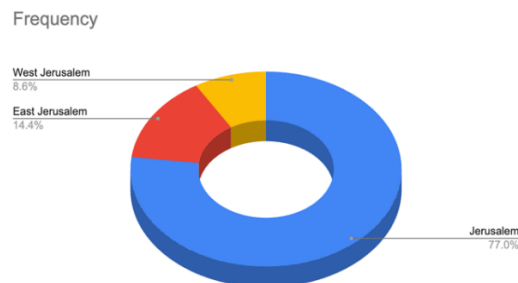


Figure 1. Word and phrase frequency of “Jerusalem,” “East Jerusalem,” and “West Jerusalem.”

The Status of East Jerusalem Under International Law

As for the labeling of "East Jerusalem," the term "Arab" is added to just 14% of the mentions of "East Jerusalem." The term "Arab" is often used in political discourse to differentiate between Palestinian areas under the Israeli occupation and Israeli (Jewish) areas and neighborhoods. The term "occupied" is used less frequently in reference to the status of East Jerusalem. Among the more than 2 million mentions of East Jerusalem, the term "occupied" precedes it less than 9% of the time, as shown in Figure 2. This means that 90% of the considered news reports do not make their readers aware of the military occupation, the status of the city, or the lack of international legitimacy held by the Israeli military and police on the eastern side of Jerusalem. "Occupied" is a key word in the context of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; it is necessary to adequately understand and contextualize the events that occur in East Jerusalem and to achieve an accurate and balanced framing of reported events.

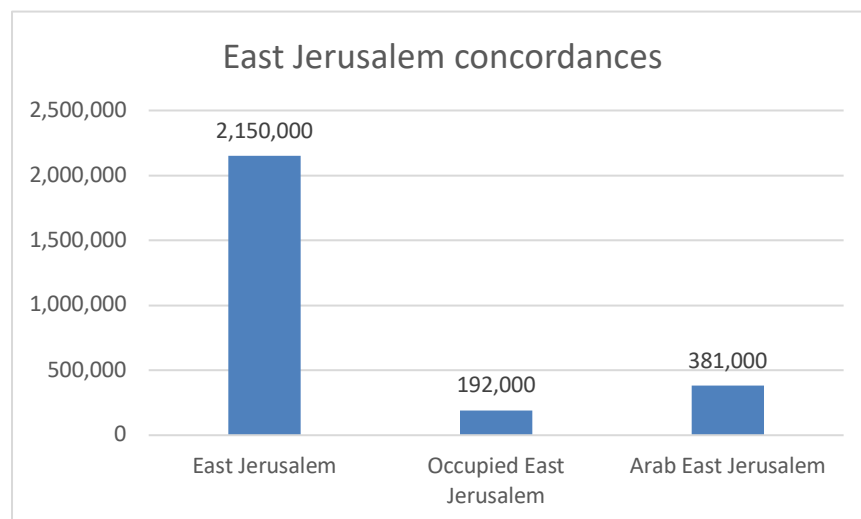


Figure 2. Concordances of "East Jerusalem, Occupied East Jerusalem," and "Arab East Jerusalem."

"East Jerusalem" appeared 2.15 million times in the frequency search, whereas "Arab" was only added to it—forming "Arab East Jerusalem"—380,000 times (less than 18%). Considering that GNSE includes many news outlets from the Middle East, much of the references to occupation come from regional news sources like Al Jazeera English, Al Arabiya, *Jordan Times* in Jordan, and *Daily Star* in Lebanon, among others. Hence, the percentage of texts that use the term "occupation" could decrease upon excluding regional news sources.

Is East Jerusalem a Palestinian City or an Israeli City?

In terms of nationalist and political portrayals, the search of the news corpus revealed a huge frequency gap. The number of times that "Jerusalem and Palestine" are mentioned together is one-twelfth of the number of times that "Jerusalem and Israel" are mentioned together. Additionally, the frequency of the concordance of "Palestinians and Jerusalem" is one-fourth of that of "Israelis and Jerusalem." This distinction is visualized below

in Figure 3. "Jerusalem and Palestine" is mentioned in only 3.4% of the gathered GNSE results, whereas "Jerusalem and Israel" appears in 43% of them. Together, "Jerusalem and Israel" and "Jerusalem and Israeli/s" are used alongside more than 85% of the instances in which Jerusalem is mentioned; the same figure for "Jerusalem and Palestine" and "Jerusalem and Palestinian/s" is below 14%.

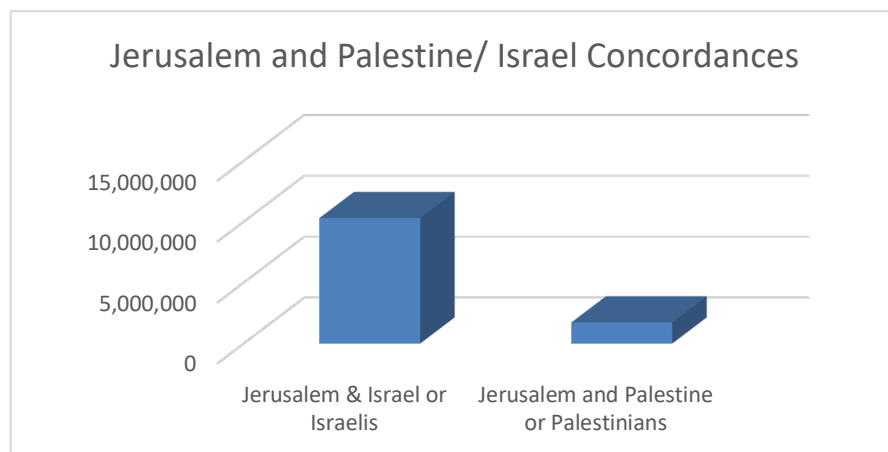


Figure 3. Concordances of "Jerusalem and Palestine, Jerusalem and Israel, Jerusalem and Palestinians," and "Jerusalem and Israelis."

The Religious Labeling of East Jerusalem

Statistically, Jerusalem is largely presented as a Jewish city in English-language news texts. Remarkably, the concordances of "Jerusalem and Jew/s" and "Jerusalem and Jewish" are 10 times more frequent than those of "Jerusalem and Muslim/s" and four times more frequent than those of "Jerusalem and Christian/s," as shown in Figure 4. These terms were examined to investigate the labels associated with the city and the identity created for it and for its holy places, where many of the reported events and confrontations take place.

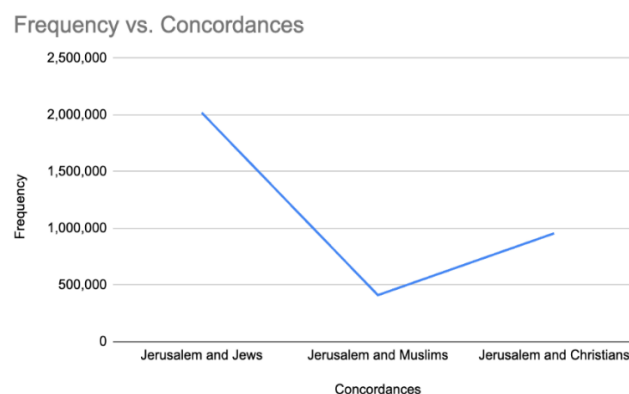


Figure 4. Concordances of "Jerusalem and Muslims, Jerusalem and Christians," and "Jerusalem and Jews."

Based on the associations created by these concordances, the city appears as a predominantly Jewish city rather than a multireligious city with several current and historical Muslim, Christian, and Jewish holy sites. These concordances are more consequential when considering the reporting on violence near or inside the holy places and in combination with the results displayed in Figure 4, which visualizes the silencing of the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem.

As for the associations created through name concordances between the city on the one hand and Jewish, Christian, and Muslim holy places on the other, these terms are central to the recognition of the city's residents as well as their claims; it is fundamentally necessary for any meaningful understanding of the conflict over the city.

The most salient result of this GNSE search is the discovery of the systematic use of the name of the historic Jewish shrine Temple Mount when referring to Al-Haram Al-Sharif, Al-Aqsa Mosque, or the Dome of the Rock. Temple Mount is a shrine that no longer physically exists, yet the term is frequently used by news media; whereas references to the two Muslim shrines at which Palestinian Muslims have prayed daily for the past 14 centuries and which are revered by 2.2 billion Muslims around the world as of 2023 (as projected by the Population Reference Bureau) are less frequent, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequencies and Concordances.

Word/concordance	Number of results	Date
Jerusalem	11,500,000	4/9/2022
Jerusalem and Palestine	410,000	4/9/2022
Jerusalem and Israel	5,170,000	4/9/2022
Jerusalem and Palestinians	1,320,000	4/9/2022
Jerusalem and Israelis	5,120,000	4/9/2022
Jerusalem and Muslims	411,000	4/9/2022
Jerusalem and Jews	2,020,000	4/9/2022
Jerusalem and Christians	965,000	4/9/2022
Temple Mount	623,000	4/9/2022
Church of the Holy Sepulcher	31,300	4/9/2022
Al-Aqsa Mosque	125,000	4/9/2022
East Jerusalem	2,150,000	4/9/2022
Occupied East Jerusalem	192,000	4/9/2022
Arab East Jerusalem	381,000	4/9/2022
West Jerusalem	1,290,000	4/9/2022
Dome of the Rock and Muslims	26,900	4/9/2022
Dome of the Rock and Islam	43,400	4/9/2022
Temple Mount and Israel	113,000	4/9/2022
Al-Aqsa Mosque and Muslims	55,000	4/9/2022
Al-Aqsa Mosque and Islam	37,100	4/9/2022

Temple Mount was also mentioned 90 times as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher—the holiest church in Christianity, where it is believed that Jesus was crucified, buried, and resurrected, as shown in Figure 5.

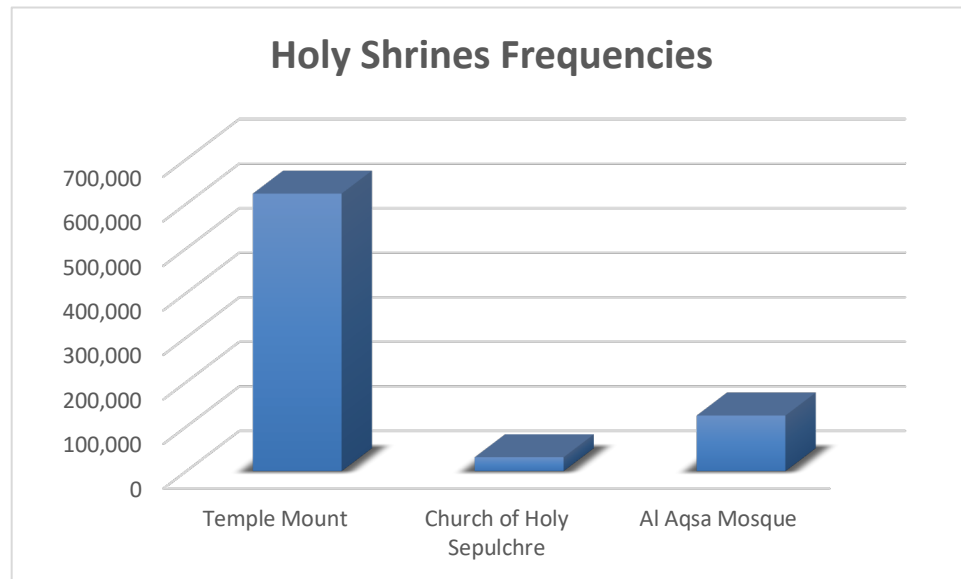


Figure 5. Holy shrine names frequencies.

The search resulted in several times more concordances between terms referring to Jewish holy sites than those referring to Muslim and Christian sites. Of the 779,000 concordances, “Temple Mount” was associated with Jerusalem 623,000 times (nearly 78%). The Christian “Church of Holy Sepulcher” was mentioned only 31,300 times (less than 5%), and the Al-Aqsa Mosque was mentioned 125,000 times (15.6%) alongside mention of the city.

Discussion: Framing East Jerusalem in English-Language News Media

This study uses the quantitative method of content analysis to identify the predominant linguistic choices—active elements in the construction of meaning through interpretations (framings)—in English-language news reports on Jerusalem. Concordance analysis, as a corpus linguistic method, enables researchers to search for and identify “patterns” of linguistic choices (Baker, 2010, p. 93). These patterns can evoke certain interpretations of events and enact dominant frames and identities based on selected labels and associations. In news texts, these choices are based on editorial decisions, newsroom judgments, and official statements. The relationship between states’ officials in political conflict and news media organizations is that of mutual influence (Wolfsfeld, 1997, p. 5). Journalists admit difficulty in reporting on Jerusalem because of the pressure placed on them by political actors. Journalist Ulf Hannerz (1998) asserted that it is challenging to report on the city of Jerusalem, where “history never ends” (p. 548). In 2021, 500 American journalists signed an open letter asking for more ethical reporting on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, asserting that “We [journalists] have failed our audiences with a narrative that obscures the most fundamental aspects of the story: Israel’s military occupation and its system of apartheid” (“An Open Letter

on U.S. Media Coverage of Palestine,” 2021, para. 2). Editorial decisions and journalistic choices can manipulate facts and alter interpretations, resulting in news texts that constitute evidence of bias. Bias in journalism is indicated by the choice of certain terms and names over others or the attribution of credibility to certain actors and sources (Hamborg, Donnay, & Gipp, 2019).

Word choices in news media enact certain framings of events. Evident in the results of this study is the systematic selections of terms and concordances that maintain the predominance of the Israeli narrative and framing as they pertain to the city of Jerusalem, most prominently evident in the Jewish identity of the city: “selective omission, choice of words, and varying credibility ascribed to the primary source, each conveys a radically different impression of what actually happened” (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2006, p. 281). These choices lead to the activation of news frames, the priming of certain aspects of reality, and, in turn, the exclusion of others. News frames construct the audience’s perception of the world and their judgment of actors’ behaviors, as it is “the semantic and narrative elements of media content [. . .] that construct and transmit meanings” (Ross, 2003, p. 1).

The results show how the word frequencies and concordances construct an image for the city—including both occupied East Jerusalem and West Jerusalem—as one unified city. It does not appear in the media to be “deeply divided and highly segregated,” as Weiss, Tsur, Miodownik, Lupu, and Finkel (2024) argue (p. 2). Jerusalem is a place that is sacred for the followers of the three major monotheistic religions around the world. It is “a centre of meanings, feelings, and experiences” (Gal et al., 2015, p. 590), yet the city is reduced in news reports to the mere political capital of Israel. The naming of and assignment of attributes and labels to places determine their identities and contextualize how groups feel about and experience them.

Additionally, the term “Palestinian” is rarely mentioned alongside East Jerusalem. That East Jerusalem is generally deprived of the context of the occupation and is predominantly referenced as an Israeli city through concordances shows that English-language newsrooms and journalists align with the Israeli narrative on the city and systematically mute its Palestinian identity and inhabitants—as well as those inhabitants’ human rights. This depiction makes the consumers of English-language news view the presence and claims of the Palestinian people as incomprehensible and, to some extent, illegitimate. This dynamic raises serious concerns over the alignment of newsrooms’ policies and journalists, as even reports that discuss the city’s division into east and west rarely reference the city’s Arab/Palestinian residents or identity.

The religious characterizations of the city’s holy sites in the news are of central significance, as they frame the city as either a multiethnic city housing Christian, Muslim, and Jewish people alike or as a predominantly Jewish city. This framing affects people’s interpretations of reported events, as frames “filter people’s perceptions and define their fields of vision” and “influence [people’s] behaviour or elicit desired reactions” (Gal et al., 2015, pp. 588–590).

The data in this study reveal a largely exclusive religious framing that ascribes a Jewish character to the city of Jerusalem, validating the historical and religious claims of the Jewish people at the expense of those of others. Notably, on April 2, 2016, the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) called a vote on the official name of the holy site in East Jerusalem and issued a subsequent

resolution approved by most of its members, according to which the "Arabic terminology of Al-Aqsa Mosque/Haram al-Sharif is the official one to be used" (Kuttab, 2016, para. 3). Still, however, "Temple Mount" is more dominant in English-language news media. Even when one searches for "Al-Haram Al-Sharif" on Google, the search engine turns up results on "Temple Mount" alongside images of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. These choices contribute to the framing of the holy sites in Jerusalem as largely Jewish, influencing the meanings delivered to news consumers about events surrounding Muslim and, to a lesser degree, Christian shrines and holy places. This contributes to the exercise of "discursive power," as Jungherr, Posegga, and An (2019) postulate.

The findings of this study demonstrate that English-language news media exhibits a dominant framing skewed toward the Israeli and Jewish identifications of the city of Jerusalem. The city—divided since 1948—is largely presented as a single, unified city. As a result, the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem is downplayed, and the Arab, Muslim, and Christian identities of the city and its holy sites are significantly diminished relative to the Israeli and Jewish identities. Although both the Israelis and the Palestinians attempt to connect the city to themselves through discursive strategies, the Israeli narrative has become predominant in English-language news media. This finding that English-language news texts align with the Israeli narrative and go against the Palestinian narrative aligns with prevailing scholarly work on the conflict (e.g., Jackson, 2023; Philo & Berry, 2011; Philo et al., 2003; Siddiqui & Zaheer, 2018).

It is important to recognize how the occupation of East Jerusalem was concealed, as identified by Ackerman (2001) and Philo and colleagues (2003). The unified presentation of Jerusalem and the predominantly Jewish naming of its holy sites leave no space for understanding the national, political, legal, or religious foundations of any Palestinian presence or action in the city. The dominance of an actor in language and framing is generally considered to constitute an expression of power in any conflict. In political conflict, the "competition for dominant frames" and "interpretations" is the norm. "The introduction, amplification, and maintenance of frames is another expression of discursive power" (Jungherr et al., 2019, p. 411).

Conclusion

News about Jerusalem and the Palestinians is politically constructed and reflects the discursive power that Israel holds over English-language—largely Western—news media sources. As Manroff (1986) delineated, "No story is the inevitable product of the event it reports; no event dictates its own narrative form. News occurs at the conjunction of events and texts, and while events create the story, the story also creates the event" (p. 228). These sources have shaped events in Jerusalem and the world's view of parties involved in this conflict for decades.

This study revealed that long-term trends in global news media have delegitimized the Palestinians; obscured their story (Attar & King, 2023); decontextualized their struggles from their national, religious, or legal circumstances; and covered up the Israeli occupation and its violations of Palestinians' human rights. These findings pave the way for more careful consideration of news reporting on Jerusalem and the conflict over the city and, more generally, further the scholarly examination of the power of language in frame construction in political conflict. However, the findings of this study are limited to a onetime assessment of word selection and concordances, meaning that they fall short of incorporating time-sensitive or event-based editorial choices and fail to show how media in non-English-speaking regions around the world would

contribute to this body of knowledge. It is important to investigate the regional role of the Middle East in maintaining the dominant Israeli narrative on Jerusalem by diversifying the coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the city of Jerusalem in particular, especially given the rise of powerful English-language news media sources from the region.

Longitudinal data collection and analyses would expand our knowledge on how the increase in news sources—including regional and alternative media sources as well as citizen activists—is impacting the overall portrayal of Jerusalem. Future research on news reporting on the city should consider other news-specific search engines aside from the dominant GNSE. It would also be beneficial to examine how these long-term discrepancies in the presentation of Palestinians and Israelis in relation to the city and its constructed identity may contribute to the overall role of news media in delegitimizing the Palestinians, obscuring and decontextualizing their story, and covering up for the Israeli occupation and its violations of Palestinians' rights. Notably, more than 52% of Internet content, as of February 2024, is written in the English language (Statista, 2024), meaning that reporting in this language has a disproportionate degree of influence relative to that in other languages. Additionally, the most dominant of these English-language news sources are based in the West, which provide Euro and North American centric worldviews in service of the most powerful nations.

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