

## Scrolling Past Suffering: Ethnocentric Media, Distrust, and Humanitarian Responsibility

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This study investigates the extent to which Israeli Jews' exposure to Israeli news coverage through social media platforms and their distrust of Palestinians predict their sense of humanitarian responsibility toward Palestinians, within the context of the 2023–2025 Israel-Hamas war. Our analysis is based on a representative sample of Israeli Jews ( $N = 903$ ) obtained through public opinion polling. In line with our expectation, exposure to Israeli news coverage and distrust of Palestinians each made a significant contribution to explaining a Jewish-Israeli (decreased) sense of humanitarian responsibility toward Palestinians ( $R^2 = .30$ ). Distrust also partially mediated the association between news exposure and humanitarian responsibility. In addition, hawkishness and level of religiosity significantly contributed to the overall explanatory power of the model ( $R^2 = .43$ ). Higher levels of all predictor variables were associated with a decreased sense of humanitarian responsibility toward Palestinians. The implications of our findings for understanding the role of media coverage in shaping humanitarian responsibility toward the opponent in asymmetric conflict are discussed.

*Keywords: ethnocentric media, distrust, media coverage in conflict, humanitarian responsibility, protracted conflict, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, public opinion*

The role of media in conflict and war has been a central focus in communication research, with studies examining how traditional news outlets can influence public perception and potentially escalate tensions. Research has shown that media, particularly in conflict zones, often prioritizes sensationalism and drama over nuanced analysis, hindering efforts toward reconciliation (Sheafer & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2010; Wolfsfeld, 2004, 2009). Furthermore, media sometimes adopts ethnocentric perspectives that emphasize narratives resonating with the ingroup's identity and values, further entrenching divisions and

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impeding conflict resolution (Baden & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2018; Doufesh & Briel, 2021). The ongoing shift of news consumption to digital and social media platforms may bolster ethnocentric perspectives due to the echo chamber dynamics inherent in these environments, where users are often primarily exposed to information that aligns with their preexisting beliefs and values (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Friedman & Neubauer-Shani, 2022).

The present study aims to empirically investigate the relationship between exposure to in-group news coverage during wartime and ethnocentric attitudes among Israeli Jews. Specifically, we examine the extent to which such exposure through social media platforms is associated with a specific and crucial form of ethnocentrism: a decreased sense of humanitarian responsibility toward Palestinians in the context of the 2023–2025 Israel-Hamas war. Furthermore, we explore the role of intergroup distrust, another crucial factor in conflicts, as a potential mediating factor in this relationship. The study assesses the extent to which Israeli Jews' distrust of Palestinians independently predicts their humanitarian responsibility toward Palestinians and the extent to which such distrust mediates the association between news exposure and humanitarian responsibility. This multifaceted approach allows for a nuanced understanding of the interplay among media exposure, intergroup attitudes, and conflict dynamics in protracted asymmetrical conflicts.

### **Media and Ethnocentrism in Conflict**

The role of media in violent conflicts and wars has been a central focus of communication research. A rich research tradition focuses on the ways in which media coverage can shape public perceptions, influence political decisions, and affect the course of conflicts. Previous studies have discussed the potential of news coverage to escalate tensions by prioritizing sensationalism over nuanced analysis and by highlighting violence rather than peace and reconciliation initiatives, thus creating a cycle where public discourse perpetuates violence. This emphasis on immediacy and drama is frequently at odds with the slow, complex processes required for peace (Sheafer & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2010; Wolfsfeld, 2004, 2009). The framing decisions made by media outlets, which emphasize negative aspects of conflicts, have been shown to have a more substantial adverse effect on public expectations of peace compared with the positive effects of supportive reporting. This suggests the media's framing choices can significantly influence the trajectory of processes aimed at conflict resolution and peace (Sheafer & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2010).

A significant body of research has also highlighted the prevalence of ethnocentric perspectives in media reporting, particularly in conflict zones. Media ethnocentrism manifests as a tendency to prioritize narratives that align with the ingroup's identity and values. Analyses of news coverage during conflicts consistently reveal ethnocentric framing in both textual and visual representations. These biases predominantly favor narratives that resonate with the media outlet's own cultural or national group (Baden & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2018; Wolfsfeld, 2004, 2009; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). Ethnocentric media coverage is particularly pronounced during periods of conflict escalation. Consequently, media coverage during conflicts typically reflects and reinforces dominant in-group agendas, often at the expense of balanced reporting, while marginalizing other perspectives and narratives (Wolfsfeld, 2009). Indeed, several studies (Katz & Benziman, 2024; Panievsky, 2024; Somfalvi et al., 2024) conducted in Israel during the 2023–2025 Israel-Hamas war found a significant increase in ethnocentrism and bias in Israeli

news media coverage of the war, as well as underrepresentation of the pain, suffering, and losses of Palestinians in Gaza.

Ethnocentric media coverage in conflict can entrench existing divisions and impede efforts aimed at reaching conflict resolution and peace (Ginosar & Cohen, 2017; Sheaffer & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2010; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). Moreover, ethnocentrism in media coverage can further exacerbate conflicts and foster an environment where concessions and agreements between the sides are viewed as betrayals rather than steps toward resolution (Baden & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2018; Wolfsfeld, 2004, 2009).

In the digital age, new media technologies have further complicated the media's role in conflicts and introduced new dynamics to ethnocentric tendencies (Chadwick, 2017). Social media have amplified conflict reporting, often driven by ethnocentric bias. Ethnocentric narratives are further emphasized on social media platforms by creating echo chambers where users are primarily exposed to information that aligns with their preexisting beliefs (Sunstein, 1999). These platforms rapidly disseminate information that reinforces existing prejudices, further complicating peace efforts (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Wolfsfeld, 2018). Digital ethnocentrism reinforces biases and polarizes public opinion, making it challenging for diverse perspectives to gain traction (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017; Friedman & Neubauer-Shani, 2022).

A substantial body of research has demonstrated the tendency of media content, framing, discourse, and visual imagery to propagate an ethnocentric approach to conflict, particularly during periods of escalation (Baden & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2018; Doufesh & Briel, 2021; Wolfsfeld, 2004, 2009; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). However, there has been limited empirical investigation into the relationship between the degree of exposure to such media and attitudes toward opponents in conflict situations. Our study aims to address this gap by empirically examining the association between Israeli Jews' exposure to their own side's news coverage and their ethnocentric attitudes in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Specifically, we focus on how such exposure relates to a specific and crucial form of ethnocentrism: a decreased sense of humanitarian responsibility toward Palestinians in the context of the extreme violence that escalated during the 2023–2025 Israel-Hamas war.

### **Moral Concern and Humanitarian Responsibility in Ethnopolitical Conflict**

In ethnopolitical conflicts, especially asymmetric ones, moral responsibility for maintaining (or not violating) the human rights of the opponents is a major issue that can be complicated by increased mutual animosity, threat, and violence in times of escalation and war. In the specific context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the pivotal work of Herb Kelman (1987) emphasized the need for each side to recognize the legitimate and basic rights of the other side. Recognizing and taking moral responsibility for the pain and suffering of the other side in a conflict is a vital factor in determining readiness for conflict resolution (Nagar & Maoz, 2017a, 2017b; Nagar & Shamir, 2013).

Kampf (2012) identified three aspects or acts of moral recognition. The most basic act of moral recognition—which constitutes an important precondition for moral responsibility—is humanizing the other, namely, acknowledging the human existence of the other. The second aspect of moral recognition is acknowledging the pain and suffering of the other. The third aspect is acknowledging one's own responsibility

for the suffering of the other. Within these three important acts of moral recognition, our study focuses on the third aspect, which we define here as humanitarian responsibility: taking responsibility for preserving the humanity and the human rights of the opponent in conflict.

Metz (1972, 1980) argues that there are memories of human suffering that interrupt taken-for-granted and fixed historical narratives. "Dangerous memories" are new and subversive narratives about the past (Ostovich, 2005). Such memories question static and tribal group identities that rest on a distinction between the "good us" and "bad them" (Hill, 2000). These "dangerous memories" contribute to the formation of an alternative consciousness that shows compassion for others and their suffering, as well as moral concern and humanitarian responsibility (Bar-On, 2008; Bar-On & Kassem, 2004; Bekerman & Zembylas, 2011).

Acknowledging the opponent's pain and suffering and maintaining a sense of humanitarian responsibility toward preserving the opponent's basic human rights can extend the realm of moral response to include moments of ethical concern for the opponent in conflict (Ron & Maoz, 2013). Such acknowledgment and sense of moral responsibility play a crucial role in the prospects for reconciliation in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Kampf, 2012; Kelman, 1992; Nagar & Shamir, 2013; Rouhana, 2004). In times of escalation of extreme violence, the sense of humanitarian responsibility of each side toward the people of the other side becomes even more urgent and is crucial in preventing catastrophic deterioration to further manifestations of inhumanity (Maoz & McCauley, 2008) as have already been witnessed in the 2023–2025 Israel-Hamas war.

However, a sense of moral responsibility toward the opponent requires a certain amount of readiness and willingness from the public involved (Bar-Tal & Bennink, 2004; Kampf, 2009). Acts that acknowledge the humanity of the opponent are often discouraged and deterred by collective perceptions of threat and distrust as well as derogative images and dehumanization (Bar-Tal, 2001; Kelman, 1987) that are even more prominently disseminated through media and social media platforms in times of escalation of the extreme violence between the sides. Therefore, it is important to systematically examine the factors encouraging or discouraging moral concern and humanitarian responsibility toward the opponent in conflict.

Based on the literature reviewed above, including the review of theorizing and findings on ethnocentric media in conflict (Wolfsfeld, 2004, 2009), we expect that Israeli Jews' higher exposure to Israeli news media during the 2023–2025 Israel-Hamas war will predict a decreased Jewish-Israeli sense of humanitarian responsibility toward the situation of Palestinians in Gaza.

### **Trust and Distrust in Conflict**

Trust and distrust are pivotal factors in conflict dynamics and resolution, influencing both the progression and potential resolution of conflicts. Trust has been identified as key in resolving protracted social conflicts, as it enables the development of spaces necessary to establish a viable peace process (Brahimi & Ahmed, 2008). Previous work on conflict situations has highlighted the importance of trust (Bar-Tal et al., 2016; Booth & Wheeler, 2007; Cox, 2008; Pillar, 1983). At its core, trust is the belief that another party will follow through on an expectation. It is the confidence in, and willingness one has to act on and

accept, the words and actions of another. Trust is crucial for conflict resolution and successful decision making, built by consistently and reliably maintaining commitments over time.

Trust is probably the most important affective tie that emerges from intergroup contact (Hewstone, 2003). It results from forming closer ties and the resulting decrease in prejudice and anxiety about the other group. Increased trust in out-group aspirations and in the positive or nonharmful intentions the out-group has toward one's own group is, in turn, associated with higher readiness for conflict resolution through compromise and identity widening (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). In ethnopolitical conflict, trust is an important "bottom-up" strategy for building understanding and acceptance of the other's needs and interests (Maoz & McCauley, 2008).

Conversely, distrust can exacerbate conflicts and create significant barriers to peace. Deeply ingrained beliefs, such as those involving perceived threats or moral superiority, can intensify distrust between groups (Eidelson & Eidelson, 2003). Such beliefs often reinforce negative perceptions and amplify conflict, making trust difficult to establish. Moreover, perceptions of threat and distrust contribute to support for aggressive policies (Maoz & Eidelson, 2007).

Beyond its impact on conflict resolution processes, distrust critically shapes humanitarian responsibility in conflict situations. When one group distrusts another, they question the authenticity of the other's suffering and their moral deservingness (Noor et al., 2012). As Kelman (2005) argued, acknowledging the legitimate existence and rights of others requires a minimal level of trust in their basic intentions; without it, recognizing and taking responsibility for the other's suffering becomes psychologically unsustainable.

### **News Media and Distrust in Conflict**

Media coverage plays a significant role in shaping trust and distrust in conflict situations. Selective reporting, which focuses on the suffering of one's own group while vilifying the adversary, can entrench existing prejudices and deepen distrust between conflicting parties.

News coverage by one's own side in a conflict can encourage media narratives that magnify in-group and out-group biases, leading to a more polarized and distrustful environment (Wolfsfeld et al., 2008). Additionally, media coverage that casts efforts aimed at reaching an agreement, conflict resolution, or peace as unattainable can reinforce distrust by framing such initiatives as threats to the ingroup's interests or as insincere efforts by the out-group (Sheafer & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2010; Wolfsfeld, 2009).

Furthermore, news media in conflict can strengthen the relationship between distrust and decreased humanitarian responsibility. Research demonstrates that positive cross-group interactions increase trust while reducing dehumanization toward out-groups (Borinca et al., 2023). Given these findings, ethnocentric media coverage, by limiting exposure to the opponent, can reinforce distrust and significantly impair one's capacity to view the opponent as fully human. Evidence from a study of media representations following terrorist attacks has confirmed that expressions of distrust correlate with dehumanizing discourse, while trust appears alongside humanizing discourse (Haji et al., 2021). When opponents are systematically

distrusted and dehumanized through ethnocentric media framings, the psychological foundation necessary for moral concern and humanitarian responsibility toward them becomes substantially eroded.

Building on this literature, our study investigates the extent to which distrust of opponents predicts a decreased sense of humanitarian responsibility toward them. We examine this relationship in two ways: first, as an independent predictor, and second, as a mediating factor in the relationship between exposure to in-group news coverage and the sense of humanitarian responsibility toward opponents.

By analyzing distrust both as a direct influence and as a mediator, we aim to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how media exposure and intergroup attitudes interact to shape moral concern in conflicts. We expect that Jewish-Israeli distrust of Palestinians will be associated with a decreased Jewish-Israeli sense of humanitarian responsibility toward them. Furthermore, we anticipate that exposure to news coverage by one's own side in conflict will be associated with higher distrust of the opponent.

### **The Current Case Study**

#### ***The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict and the 2023–2025 Israel-Hamas War***

Our study focuses on the Jewish-Israeli society in the context of the 2023–2025 Israel-Hamas war, the most recent escalation in the longstanding Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The origins of this conflict are rooted in the early 20th century and were significantly intensified following the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, an event celebrated by Israelis as independence, but remembered by Palestinians as the Nakba (catastrophe; Ramsbotham, 2022). Over subsequent decades, the conflict has been shaped by wars, two Palestinian uprisings (intifadas), peace negotiations, and ongoing disputes over territory, security, borders, settlements, refugees, and Jerusalem's status (Arieli, 2021). Despite various diplomatic initiatives, the conflict remains unresolved, with both sides maintaining competing historical narratives and territorial claims (Eriksson, 2022).

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is characterized by its protracted nature and cycles of violence that have profoundly impacted civilian populations, contributing to ongoing trauma and grievances (Bar-Tal, 1998). A key feature of this conflict is the significant power asymmetry between Israeli state institutions and the Palestinian Authority, which is evident in aspects such as territorial control, economic resources, and military capacity (Ramsbotham, 2022). This imbalance has influenced the dynamics of confrontations and the framework for potential conflict resolution.

The current escalation began in October 2023, when Hamas launched a large-scale attack on southern Israel, causing widespread casualties and taking hostages to Gaza. In response, Israel initiated a military operation involving air strikes and ground incursions. The conflict has resulted in massive Palestinian casualties and deaths in Gaza, alongside widespread destruction and a devastating humanitarian crisis, characterized by severe food shortages and the collapse of health-care services (Hathaway, 2024; Mahmoud & Abuzerr, 2023).

The data collection period can be characterized as a “war routine” that did not include outstanding events or major escalations. Clearly, however, a war routine is by nature intense and difficult, and it involves attacks and violence of each side toward the other, as well as related injuries, losses, grieving, and a sense of threat.

### ***Jewish-Israeli Public Opinion About the Conflict and Palestinians***

According to previous studies, a significant part of the Jewish-Israeli population perceives Palestinians as holding negative and destructive intentions toward Israeli Jews, with distrust of Palestinians being a major part of this sense of threat (Bar-Tal, 2001; Gordon & Arian, 2001; Maoz & McCauley, 2008). Studies based on Jewish-Israeli polling data found that perceptions of threat/distrust toward Palestinians decrease the willingness to preserve Palestinian basic human rights and increase support for concrete acts that violate these rights (Maoz & Eidelson, 2007; Maoz & McCauley, 2008). Furthermore, unwillingness to recognize Palestinian suffering is often associated with Israeli Jews’ distrust of Palestinians and perceptions of Palestinians as a threat to their security as well as to the existence of Israel (Nagar & Maoz, 2017b).

Studies also indicate that Israeli Jews generally exhibit low levels of empathy toward Palestinians. Previous research has explored factors that affect or explain this decreased Jewish-Israeli empathy and moral concern toward Palestinians (Nagar & Maoz, 2017a; Rosler et al., 2017). Another body of research examines the reluctance of Israeli Jews to acknowledge Palestinian pain and suffering, focusing on mechanisms that underlie these barriers (Halperin & Gross, 2011; Kampf, 2012; Kelman, 1987; Nagar & Maoz, 2017a). Finally, studies have documented significant Jewish-Israeli support for actions that violate the basic human rights of Palestinians, identifying key predictors of such support (David et al., 2016; Maoz & Eidelson, 2007; Maoz & McCauley, 2008).

Research has identified key ideological factors that significantly explain low Jewish-Israeli empathy and moral concern toward Palestinians. The first key factor is hawkish (right-wing) ideology. Generally, hawkish positions tend to be less cooperative and trusting toward conflict resolution. In the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, previous studies have found that stronger Jewish-Israeli hawkishness is associated with more rigid and negative attitudes toward Palestinians and lower willingness to support a compromise solution (Bar-Tal, 2001; Shamir & Shamir, 2000; Shamir & Shikaki, 2002, 2010). Furthermore, hawkishness has been found to be linked with a lower willingness to recognize Palestinian suffering and reduced moral concern toward Palestinians (Nagar & Maoz, 2017b).

A second major factor is the level of religiosity, which has been identified as a strong predictor of Jewish-Israeli attitudes in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Cohen-Zada et al., 2016). Religiosity has been found to be linked to both in-group favoritism and out-group derogation, as well as to in-group biases and prejudices against out-group members. Consequently, religiosity can perpetuate intergroup hostility, thereby complicating efforts toward intergroup harmony and compromise (Shen et al., 2012). In the specific context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, religiosity has consistently emerged as strongly associated with lower support for compromise solutions and more negative attitudes toward Palestinians and preserving Palestinian human rights (Cohen-Zada et al., 2016; Gordon & Arian, 2001; Maoz & Eidelson, 2007).

The literature reviewed above indicates how multiple factors can shape Jewish-Israeli attitudes toward Palestinians during protracted conflict. Media exposure through social media platforms can reinforce ethnocentric narratives, while ideological factors like hawkishness and religiosity may decrease moral concern toward Palestinians and increase intergroup distrust. Understanding how these factors relate to Jewish-Israeli sense of humanitarian responsibility toward Palestinians is particularly crucial in the current study's context of extreme violence and humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Based on this theoretical framework, we propose the following hypotheses.

### **Hypotheses**

- H1: Exposure to Israeli news through social media platforms (news exposure) and distrust of Palestinians will predict Jewish-Israeli sense of humanitarian responsibility toward Palestinians (humanitarian responsibility), with higher exposure to Israeli news through social media platforms and higher levels of distrust of Palestinians predicting a decreased sense of humanitarian responsibility toward Palestinians.*
- H2: Hawkishness and level of religiosity will predict Jewish-Israeli humanitarian responsibility, with a higher level of hawkishness and religiosity predicting a decreased humanitarian responsibility.*
- H3: News exposure and distrust toward Palestinians will significantly predict Jewish-Israeli humanitarian responsibility, even when controlling for the degree of hawkishness and level of religiosity. The direction and significance of these relationships will remain consistent with those observed in hypothesis 1.*
- H4: The association of news exposure and Jewish-Israeli humanitarian responsibility will be mediated by distrust of Palestinians.*

### **Methods**

#### **Participants and Procedure**

Participants completed an online questionnaire administered by an Israeli survey company in exchange for compensation. Data were collected in July 2024, during the Israel-Hamas war that began on October 7, 2023. Participants who failed an attention check were excluded from the survey by the survey company immediately after the attention check. The final representative sample consisted of 903 Israeli Jews ( $M_{\text{age}} = 44.76$ , 51% female). In our sample, 11.4% identified as leftists, 64.4% as rightists, and 24.1% as centrists. This distribution closely mirrors the political affiliation patterns observed in the broader Jewish-Israeli society (Herman et al., 2024).

#### **Measures**

Exposure to Israeli news through social media platforms was based on one item rated on a 6-point scale in which respondents were asked to indicate the frequency of which they are exposed to Israeli news

through social media platforms (How often do you consume Israeli news in Hebrew through one of the following: X [Twitter], Telegram, Instagram, or TikTok accounts?) ranging from (1) never or almost never to (6) several times a day.

Distrust of Palestinians was based on two items rated on a 6-point scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree. Responses were averaged for each respondent to create one scale, where higher scores indicate higher levels of distrust of Palestinians. The two items were "In my opinion, one can trust the Palestinians (reversed)" and "I feel trust toward Palestinians (reversed)" ( $\alpha = .66$ ).

The humanitarian responsibility toward Palestinians scale was based on two items rated on a 6-point scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (6) strongly agree. Responses were averaged for each respondent to create one scale, where higher scores indicate higher levels of humanitarian responsibility toward Palestinians. The two items were "Israel has a responsibility to minimize harm to innocent Palestinians during the war" and "Israel should increase humanitarian assistance to Gaza residents" ( $\alpha = .80$ ).

Hawkishness was measured by asking respondents to place themselves on a 7-point scale as follows: "Most people use the terms 'right' and 'left' to define their political views. How would you describe your political view according to the following categories: 1—far right, 4—center, 7—far left." We reverse-coded this variable so higher ratings would indicate a higher level of hawkishness.

Level of religiosity was assessed by asking respondents to define themselves in terms of their level of religiosity, with options ranging from secular to ultra-Orthodox.

## Results

### *Descriptive Analysis*

Table 1 presents means and standard deviations for our measures as well as the correlations among them. These data indicate that Israeli Jews reported medium levels of news exposure ( $M = 3.51$ ,  $SD = 2.04$ ), with 41.9% of our respondents indicating high exposure (ratings of 5 or 6 on the 1–6 scale). Distrust of Palestinians was notably high ( $M = 4.34$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ), with 77.6% of respondents indicating strong distrust (ratings of 5 or 6 on the 1–6 scale). In contrast, humanitarian responsibility was relatively low ( $M = 2.85$ ,  $SD = 1.36$ ), with only 8.3% expressing a strong humanitarian responsibility (ratings of 5 or 6 on the 1–6 scale). Hawkishness was prevalent among participants ( $M = 4.95$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ): 64.4% identified as hawks (ratings of 4–7 on the reversed 1–7 scale), while 11.4% considered themselves doves (ratings of 5–7), and 24.1% positioned themselves as centrists (rating of 4). As for the level of religiosity, the sample was diverse: 44.1% of our respondents identified as secular, 29% as traditional, 15.8% as religious, and 11.1% as ultra-Orthodox.

**Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations.**

Variable	<i>M</i>	SD	$\alpha$	1	2	3	4
1. Humanitarian responsibility (2)	2.85	1.36	.80(2)				
2. News exposure (1)	3.51	2.04		-.16**			
3. Distrust of Palestinians (2)	4.34	0.85	.66(2)	-.53**	.07*		
4. Hawkishness (1)	4.95	1.24		-.58**	.11**	.50**	
5. Level of religiosity (1)	2.21	1.43		-.31**	-.16**	.25**	.39**

Notes. *M* and SD are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively.

$\alpha$  represents Cronbach's alpha; number of items appears in parentheses.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .  $N = 903$ .

**Exposure to Israeli News Through Social Media Platforms and Distrust of Palestinians as Predictors of Jewish-Israeli Humanitarian Responsibility Toward Palestinians**

Jewish-Israeli humanitarian responsibility showed a low negative correlation with news exposure ( $r = -0.16$ ,  $p < .01$ ; see Table 1) and a high negative correlation with distrust of Palestinians ( $r = -0.53$ ,  $p < .01$ ; see Table 1). News exposure and distrust of Palestinians showed a low positive correlation ( $r = 0.07$ ,  $p < .05$ ; see Table 1).

To test our hypothesis 1, we conducted a regression analysis predicting Jewish-Israeli humanitarian responsibility from news exposure and distrust of Palestinians (Model 1, Table 2). The model was statistically significant,  $F(2, 900) = 191.23$ ,  $p < .001$ , explaining 29.7% of the variance (adjusted  $R^2 = 0.30$ , rounded). As hypothesized, news exposure significantly predicted a lower humanitarian responsibility ( $\beta = -0.13$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-0.12, -0.05]). In addition, as expected, distrust of Palestinians had a significant negative effect on Jewish-Israeli humanitarian responsibility ( $\beta = -0.52$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-0.93, -0.75]). These results indicate that respondents with higher news exposure and greater distrust of Palestinians showed a decreased humanitarian responsibility.

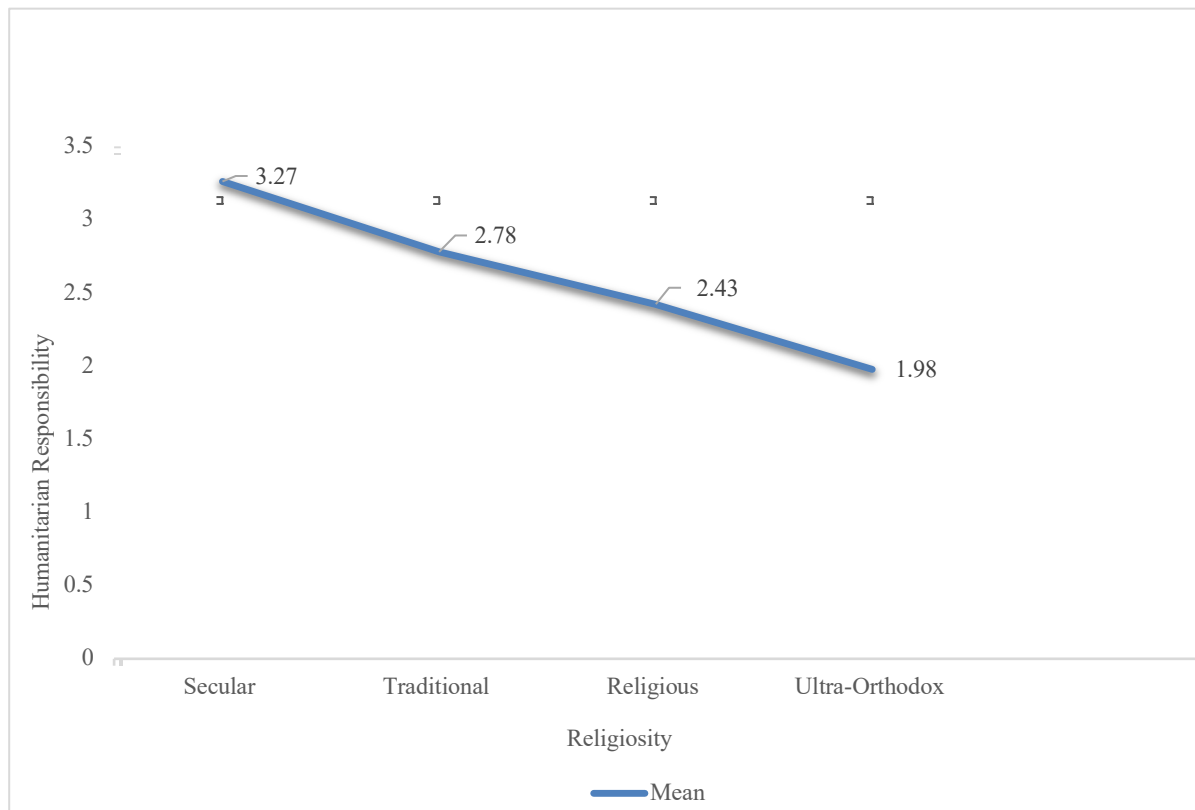
**Table 2. Three Models of Multiple Regression Predicting Humanitarian Responsibility Toward Palestinians: Standardized Coefficient Values.**

Predictors	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
News exposure	-.13		-.12
Distrust of Palestinians	-.52		-.31
Hawkishness		-.54	-.36
Religiosity		-.10	-.11
Adjusted $R^2$	.30	.34	.43

Note. Coefficients in bold are  $p < .001$ .

To test our hypothesis 2, we conducted a regression analysis predicting Jewish-Israeli humanitarian responsibility from hawkishness and level of religiosity (Model 2, Table 2). The model was statistically significant,  $F(2, 900) = 233.36$ ,  $p < .001$ , explaining 34% of the variance (adjusted  $R^2 = 0.34$ ). As hypothesized, a high level of hawkishness ( $\beta = -0.54$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [-0.66, -0.53]) and a high level

of religiosity ( $\beta = -0.10, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.15, -0.04]$ ) predicted a lower humanitarian responsibility. To further explore this relationship, we compared mean humanitarian responsibility scores across different categories of religiosity (secular, traditional, religious, and ultra-Orthodox). This analysis revealed a consistent decrease in humanitarian responsibility as religiosity increased, with statistically significant differences between adjacent categories (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1. Humanitarian responsibility by religiosity: means.**

Note. All differences between means were found as significant,  $p < .005$ .

### **Predicting Beyond Hawkishness and Level of Religiosity**

To test hypothesis 3, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis, adding hawkishness and level of religiosity to the predictors from Model 1 at stage 2 of the regression (see Model 3, Table 2). This model significantly improved prediction,  $\Delta R^2 = 0.13.$ ,  $F(2, 898) = 103.55, p < .001$ . The full model was statistically significant,  $F(4, 898) = 169.18, p < .001$ , explaining 42.7% of the variance (adjusted  $R^2 = 0.43$ , rounded).

As hypothesized, news exposure ( $\beta = -0.12, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.11, -0.04]$ ) and distrust of Palestinians ( $\beta = -0.31, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.60, -0.41]$ ) remained significant predictors of humanitarian

responsibility, even when controlling for hawkishness ( $\beta = -0.36, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.47, -0.33]$ ) and level of religiosity ( $\beta = -0.11, p < .001, 95\% \text{ CI } [-0.16, -0.05]$ ). These results support hypothesis 3, demonstrating that news exposure and distrust of Palestinians contribute uniquely to predicting humanitarian responsibility beyond the effects of hawkishness and level of religiosity.

### **Mediation Analysis**

Hypothesis 4 predicted that Jewish-Israeli distrust of Palestinians would mediate the association between news exposure and decreased humanitarian responsibility. Using Hayes' (2012) PROCESS macro (Model 4), we tested this with news exposure as the independent variable (X), distrust of Palestinians as the mediator (M), and humanitarian responsibility as the dependent variable (Y).

The total effect of news exposure on humanitarian responsibility was significant ( $B = -0.11, SE = 0.02, t [901] = -4.93, p < .001$ ). The direct effect, after accounting for distrust, was also significant ( $B = -0.08, SE = 0.02, t [901] = -4.49, p < .001$ ). The indirect effect through distrust was significant ( $B = -0.02, SE = 0.01$ ), with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval of  $[-0.05, -0.00]$ , based on 5,000 bootstrap samples, indicating partial mediation. This indirect effect accounted for 22.48% of the total effect.

These results suggest that the association between news exposure and decreased humanitarian responsibility is partially mediated by increased distrust of Palestinians. This indirect pathway accounts for approximately 22.48% of the total effect.

### **Discussion**

The analysis of polling data from a representative sample of Israeli Jews supported our hypotheses about the factors influencing Jewish-Israeli sense of humanitarian responsibility toward Palestinians. Exposure to Israeli news through social media platforms and distrust of Palestinians each significantly contributed to explaining decreased humanitarian responsibility. Additionally, hawkishness and level of religiosity further enhanced the model's explanatory power. Higher levels of all these factors predicted a decreased sense of humanitarian responsibility among Israeli Jews. Our study also revealed that the association between news exposure and Jewish-Israeli humanitarian responsibility is partially mediated by increased distrust of Palestinians.

The robustness of our findings is underscored by the fact that news exposure and distrust of Palestinians remained significant predictors even when we applied a more extensive model that accounted for respondents' level of religiosity and support for hawkish or dovish positions in conflict. Taken together, these findings demonstrate an ethnocentric media effect in which Jewish-Israeli exposure to Israeli news coverage through social media platforms is associated with decreased humanitarian responsibility toward and decreased trust of Palestinians. Given this significant role of ethnocentric news media coverage, we expect the patterns identified in our study will remain unchanged as long as Israeli news coverage of the conflict and of Palestinian losses remains monolithic and biased.

***Ethnocentric Media and Moral Responsibility in Conflict: An Integrated Framework***

Our findings demonstrate a complex relationship between media exposure and moral response during conflict, extending previous research on ethnocentric media and on media and moral response. This study provides an integrated framework that bridges research on media, conflict, and crisis.

Ethnocentric media has been studied both generally and in the specific context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Previous studies mainly focus on analyzing media content and interviewing journalists who produce such coverage, thus demonstrating the phenomenon at the level of media output and the underlying journalistic dynamics (Wolfsfeld, 2009, 2018; Wolfsfeld et al., 2022). These studies have shown how media often frames conflicts from the perspective of their own national or ethnic group, potentially reinforcing in-group biases. Our study complements and extends this important previous theorizing and research by empirically demonstrating the extent to which exposure to news coverage from one's own side in a conflict is associated with a specific and crucial form of ethnocentrism—a decreased sense of humanitarian responsibility toward the opponent in an asymmetrical, protracted conflict.

Specifically, our findings reveal how the intersection of ethnocentric media coverage and moral response mechanisms creates a compound effect: Not only does media exposure reinforce in-group biases, but it also simultaneously reduces moral concern for out-group suffering. Our findings thus contribute conceptually and empirically to a broader understanding of the implications of ethnocentric media by directly and empirically demonstrating the association of exposure to one's own side's news coverage during the war and decreased moral responsibility toward the opponent.

The role of media coverage in conflict has also been elaborated in several lines of scholarly work focusing on mediating moral response to conflict, crisis, and the suffering of others (Boltanski, 1999; Chouliaraki, 2013, 2015a, 2015b; Höijer, 2004; Silverstone, 2007). Media coverage can shape public perceptions of others' suffering through framing and representation, promoting responses that range from empathy to moral disengagement (Silverstone, 2007; Sontag, 2003) and apathy (Höijer, 2004).

Particularly in situations of conflict and crisis, compassion and moral response are often mediated through media, potentially affecting how audiences engage with humanitarian issues. Chouliaraki (2013) explores the notion of "post-humanitarianism," where media portrayals of suffering are increasingly detached and ironic, reflecting a shift in how empathy is conveyed and received. Such detachment can lead to a form of "moral numbing," where repeated exposure to suffering reduces emotional impact and moral concern (Slovic, 2007).

Waisbord (2011, 2018) and others (Robinson, 2015; Scott et al., 2022) emphasize the importance of studying humanitarian communication in the broader context of contemporary media environments and further understanding the role of news coverage and framing in encouraging or discouraging humanitarian response. The present study contributes to these important lines of scholarly work by empirically demonstrating the role that exposure to one's own side's news coverage can have in discouraging ethical responsibility toward the other during protracted conflict and war.

Moreover, previous research has demonstrated decreased empathy and moral concern of Israeli Jews toward Palestinians (Nagar & Maoz, 2017a; Rosler et al., 2017), as well as low willingness to recognize Palestinian pain and suffering (Bar-Tal et al., 2014; Halperin & Gross, 2011; Kelman, 1987; Nagar & Maoz, 2017a) and marked support for actions that violate Palestinians' human rights (David et al., 2016; Maoz & Eidelson, 2007; Maoz & McCauley, 2008). Our findings suggest contemporary media consumption patterns may amplify these existing tendencies. Indeed, our results show that this pattern of "uncaring"—low empathy, low moral concern, and decreased willingness to recognize Palestinian suffering—continues to characterize Jewish-Israeli attitudes.

This pattern can be at least partly explained by two mechanisms identified in previous studies as underlying low Jewish-Israeli moral response toward Palestinians: first, high perception of threat and distrust toward Palestinians (Bar-Tal et al., 2014; Halperin & Gross, 2011; Maoz & Eidelson, 2007; Maoz & McCauley, 2008); and second, exposure to monolithic and ethnocentric narratives, coverage, and accounts of the conflict that are biased toward one's own side and fail to sufficiently represent the agendas, needs, and suffering of Palestinians (Bar-On, 2008; Bar-Tal et al., 2014; Kelman, 1987, 1992). Indeed, recent studies of the conflict show more pronounced ethnocentric tendencies in media coverage (Katz & Benziman, 2024; Panievsky, 2024).

Our findings thus have particular implications for understanding the role of contemporary media consumption patterns, such as social media echo chambers, in shaping moral responses to conflict. The tendency to primarily consume news sources that align with existing views may exacerbate the ethnocentric media effect we observed. Moreover, in conflict situations, media consumption patterns may contribute to the erosion of empathy and moral concern for out-group members, potentially complicating efforts toward conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Future research might explore interventions that could mitigate these effects, such as promoting exposure to diverse news sources or developing media literacy programs focused on recognizing and counteracting ethnocentric biases in news coverage.

### ***The Role of Distrust: Mediating Media Exposure and Humanitarian Responsibility***

Our findings demonstrate that media exposure to monolithic, ethnocentric accounts of the war has dramatic implications for intergroup attitudes. When media coverage does not present opponents in a complex way—including both positive and negative aspects—and does not acknowledge their suffering, it affects both trust and moral response. As indicated in previous research (Bar-On, 2008; Bar-Tal et al., 2014), enforcing the monolithic narrative of "we are good, moral (and right) and they are bad, immoral (and wrong)" increases distrust of opponents while fostering dehumanization (Bar-On, 2008; Halperin & Gross, 2011; Maoz & Eidelson, 2007).

Dehumanizing opponents and presenting them as untrustworthy can, in turn, diminish moral concern toward them. Enforcing distrust of opponents can also be associated with justifying the violation of their basic human rights (Bar-On, 2008). Our findings empirically validate the theoretical expectation about trust as a psychological prerequisite for maintaining humanitarian responsibility while highlighting the destructive power of distrust in conflict. The data demonstrate the dangerous association among

monolithic accounts of the conflict, distrust of the opponents, and diminished moral responsibility toward them.

Our findings align with previous research that has identified distrust as an important factor linked to unreadiness for reconciliation (Nadler & Liviatan, 2006). Trust, as a social bond, increases security and confidence in the attitudes and intentions of others. Conversely, as Nadler and Liviatan (2006) and Stephan and Stephan (2000) explain, distrust is closely related to a perceived threat, making it impossible to fully trust another party that is perceived as posing a threat. This dynamic is particularly relevant in the context of humanitarian responsibility, as distrust may lead individuals to question the motives or worthiness of providing aid to the other side.

In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, distrust has deep roots in its history of power and status asymmetries between the groups. Their experiences and mutual attitudes have been marked by prejudice, discrimination, and distrust (Maoz & McCauley, 2008). For example, Israeli Jews might distrust Palestinian intentions about peace agreements, while Palestinians might distrust Israeli commitments to territorial compromises. Our findings suggest that media exposure may play a role in reinforcing or exacerbating these existing patterns of distrust.

The mediating role of distrust revealed in our study offers a novel perspective on the mechanisms through which media exposure influences humanitarian attitudes during conflict. By demonstrating that increased media exposure leads to higher levels of distrust, which in turn reduces humanitarian responsibility, our findings suggest a more complex pathway of influence than direct media effects alone. This highlights the need for a more nuanced understanding of how media consumption interacts with psychological factors like trust in shaping conflict attitudes. Furthermore, it suggests that efforts to promote humanitarian responsibility in conflict zones may need to address not only media content and exposure but also the underlying dynamics of intergroup trust.

### ***Implications for Peace Education and for Encouraging Moral Response***

Our findings have important implications for peace education and efforts to increase moral response in conflicts, specifically of Israeli Jews toward the situation of Palestinians in Gaza, the harsh conditions they live in, and the pain and suffering involved.

Our findings reveal that exposure to ethnocentric Israeli news media increases Jewish-Israeli distrust of Palestinians as well as decreases Jewish-Israeli sense of humanitarian responsibility toward the situation of Palestinians in Gaza. Our study thus points to the importance of further emphasizing in peace education efforts the crucial role of humanitarian responsibility toward the other side in the conflict. This is particularly urgent in the current context of extreme violence and humanitarian crisis.

The potentially significant impact of exposure to ethnocentric news coverage in conflict, as well as mechanisms that can counteract this effect or inoculate against it, should receive a stronger emphasis in peace education initiatives. This includes teaching critical viewing of media contents and media framing in conflict as well as encouraging a curated, mindful, and diversified consumption of news coverage on conflict

and war (Bar-On, 2008; Bar-Tal et al., 2014; Ron & Maoz, 2013) and further exposing participants to mediated and nonmediated Palestinian accounts of pain, suffering, and losses in the conflict to increase empathy, trust, and moral response.

Beyond educational efforts, our findings suggest implications for media organizations and journalists covering the current conflict. The strong relationship between news exposure and decreased humanitarian responsibility points to the need for more balanced coverage that acknowledges the suffering and legitimate concerns of all parties involved. While this goes against the prevailing ethnocentric tendency in conflict coverage, balanced reporting is essential for undermining the status quo of decreased humanitarian responsibility and enabling the transition from conflict to resolution. Crucially, more balanced coverage that demonstrates higher resistance to ethnocentric media narratives can create space for moral self-reflection in which the participation (and responsibility) of the self for the suffering of the other is also contemplated and critically debated.

### **Conclusion**

While our study provides valuable insights into the relationship among media exposure, distrust, and humanitarian responsibility in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, it is important to acknowledge its limitations and consider avenues for future research.

Our correlational data cannot definitively establish cause-and-effect relationships. Although our regression implies a causal interpretation by identifying Jewish-Israeli humanitarian responsibility as the dependent variable and news exposure and distrust of Palestinians as predictors, these results are consistent with, but do not prove, a causal model. Future studies employing experimental paradigms could further validate and refine the predictive models identified in our research.

Furthermore, our study focuses on the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To obtain a broader and more comprehensive understanding of how media exposure shapes humanitarian responsibility in conflict situations, future research should examine this relationship in diverse contexts to enable a more generalizable understanding of the media's role in eliciting distrust and shaping moral responsibility.

Different social media platforms can elicit varied civic and political responses due to their specific affordances (Kligler-Vilenchik, 2021; Pfetsch et al., 2021). Future studies should examine the effects of exposure to one's own side's news media while considering specific media platforms or adopting a comparative perspective. This approach would provide a more nuanced understanding of how different media environments might influence humanitarian attitudes.

Finally, our study provides a snapshot of attitudes during a specific period. Longitudinal studies could offer insights into how media exposure and humanitarian responsibility evolve, especially through different phases of conflict escalation and de-escalation.

Future studies can build on our findings to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay among media exposure, intergroup attitudes, and humanitarian responsibility during

conflict. This knowledge could inform strategies for promoting more balanced media coverage and fostering greater humanitarian concern in protracted conflicts.

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