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# Framing the Israel-Palestine conflict: a comparative analysis of Svenska Dagbladet and Dagens Nyheter

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## Abstract

The Israel-Palestine conflict, infamous for its complexity, recently escalated with the devastating October 7th Hamas attack on Israel. Simultaneously, the role of media, both historical and contemporary, has become ever more crucial in highlighting the ongoing atrocities of the conflict. Through a comparative small-N case study, we seek to answer the question: how does the Swedish media frame the Israel-Palestine conflict? We conducted a quantitative content analysis on 60 articles from DN and SvD, using generic framing. The analysis aimed to reveal how Swedish media framed two significant events of the conflict, in turn capturing a potential connection between foreign policy, ideological bias and media framing. Our findings reveal that the attribution of responsibility frame, while prominent, evolved from portraying Israel as the principal aggressor in 2014 to a more balanced attribution by 2023. This shift reflects the diverging Swedish foreign policy stance and fragmented consensus among the coalition government today. Additionally, the human interest frame increased by 2023, highlighting individual stories and indicating a trend toward sensationalism. Differences between DN and SvD also emerged, with DN increasingly focusing on humanizing the narrative, while SvD continuously emphasizes conflict and accountability.

**Keywords:** *media framing, foreign policy, Israel-Palestine conflict, editorial bias, Swedish media, generic frames.*

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# 1. Introduction

The Israel-Palestine conflict stands as an enduring testament to the complexities and challenges inherent in international relations. Since its inception in 1948, the Israel-Palestine conflict has been characterized by deep-seated historical grievances, territorial disputes, and competing national aspirations, with the conflict being globally recognized as one of the most protracted and complex conflicts to date (Dowty, 2008). Most recently, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of October 2023, the conflict took a new turn when Hamas launched a large-scale attack on Israel, killing over 1200 civilians and abducting hundreds more (Byman et al., 2023).

One protruding contentious issue of the conflict is the diverse international stances on the recognition of Palestine. To date, while 139 out of 193 UN member states formally recognize Palestine as a state (Roth, 2023), Western states make up the majority of the 54 UN member states that have yet to recognize Palestine. Subsequently, out of 27 EU member states, only nine states recognize Palestine. Further, ‘almost all of the EU member states that recognize Palestinian statehood were once members of the Soviet-aligned Eastern bloc, and all recognized its statehood before joining the European Union’ (Roth, 2023).

Sweden comes forth as an outlier in this respect. In 2014, under a coalition government consisting of the Social Democratic Party and the Green Party, Sweden became the first EU member to formally recognize the State of Palestine, and to date ‘[...] is the only country to have done so as a member of the bloc [EU]’ (Roth, 2023).

The minister for foreign affairs at the time, Margot Wallström, commented on the matter by stating that the Swedish government considers all criteria of international law for recognition of the State of Palestine met, with ‘[...] a territory, albeit one with undefined boundaries.

There is also a population. And there is a government with the ability to demonstrate internal and external control' (Wallström, 2014).

Changes in Sweden's government have altered this stance. Since 2022, Sweden is led by a centre-to-right coalition government, consisting of the Moderate Party, the Liberal Party and the Christian Democrats, with parliamentary support from the Sweden Democrats. The current prime minister Ulf Kristersson has recently characterized the 2014 decision as incorrect and 'pure symbolic politics', even though he also stated that Sweden has no plans on formally pulling back its recognition of Palestine, despite calls from the other coalition parties to do so (Andersson, 2023). Evidently, while formally Sweden's foreign policy position on the issue of Israel-Palestine remains the same, the stance is now more ambiguous.

We know from existing research that media outlets, serving as primary sources of information for both the public and policymakers, wield considerable power in shaping foreign policy priorities and public opinion (Elmasry et al., 2013; Noakes & Wilkins, 2002). Scholars have emphasized the pivotal role of media in shaping societal narratives, particularly in the post-Cold War era (Evans, 2010). Scholars have also highlighted the intricate relationship between media reporting and a country's foreign policy stance, noting that media interpretations of international events can vary greatly based on political affiliations and national interests (Karniel et al., 2017; Cavari et al., 2017). Further, scholars have shown that consensus has a large impact on the media framing of the conflict. Thus, in times of elite non-consensus it is expected that the media will also show divergence in its framing of the conflict (Bhowmik, 2023; Vladislavljević, 2015).



Consequently, the literature review conducted within this thesis identifies a gap in the existing scholarship. While extensive research exists on media portrayals of the Israel-Palestine conflict, there remains a notable absence of current studies that specifically investigate how this conflict is framed within the Swedish media context. Given Sweden's shift from a social democratic government with a unique stance on Palestine in 2014, to a conservative block that today sees the recognition of Palestine in 2014 as a mistake, there could be usefulness in exploring how this evolving political landscape is reflected in media portrayal. This shift in stance emphasizes the significance of this study in filling a void within political studies. Hence, this thesis aims to examine the framing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Swedish media. We are curious to know how two significant events of the conflict are reflected in Swedish media framing, and whether Swedish media have changed their framing over time, potentially reflecting Swedish political currents. Therefore, this thesis does not aim to look at the causal relationship between media and foreign policy, but rather we aim to look at the media framing of foreign policy stances in times of elite non-consensus.

In line with the social constructivist perspective, we assume that reality is socially constructed through media portrayals. Framing theory provides us with a lens through which to analyse the construction of narratives within media discourse, shedding light on the underlying power dynamics and potential biases. More specifically, we apply Semetko & Valkenburg's (2000) analytical framework, which offers a structured approach to examining media framing, guiding the empirical analysis undertaken in this study.

To uncover disparities in media framing, this study employs a comparative cross sectional approach structured across two key events and two prominent Swedish newspapers—one conservative (SvD) and one liberal (DN). By comparing media representations surrounding

two events—the Israeli led invasion of Gaza in 2014 and the Hamas led attack on Israel in 2023—we seek to capture potential variations in framing of Sweden's foreign policy in times of elite non-consensus. Furthermore, through a comparison of two ideologically differing newspapers, we aim to capture potential disparities in how the conflict is portrayed, potentially reflecting the distinct editorial perspectives and ideological leanings of each publication.

The remaining parts of the thesis are structured as follows: After this introductory section, the subsequent chapter provides a comprehensive review of existing literature, highlighting the important role of media, especially in times of conflict. We then end the chapter by presenting the gap which we aim to fill. The third chapter looks at theoretical concepts such as social constructivism, framing theory and generic framing, before finally presenting our analytical framework which we will employ to analyse the data. In the fourth chapter we state our research questions and specify the aim of our thesis. Chapter five, the methodology section, presents the research design, data collection and data analysis methods employed, as well as a discussion about reliability, validity, generalizability and ethical considerations. We then move on to the analysis section in chapter six, where we present our finding. Lastly, we end with a conclusion in chapter seven, discussing implications of our findings and avenues for future research.

## **2. Literature Review**

This chapter will look at the existing literature regarding the complex interplay between media framing and conflict. The chapter begins with a broad overview of media portrayal of conflicts, where we explore how various outlets impact narratives and affect public opinion. We will then narrow down our focus to look at studies of how international media has framed the Israel-Palestine conflict previously, examining the diverse perspectives and agendas at play. Lastly, we will present the scientific gap which we aim to fill.

### **2.1 The media and conflict reporting**

The topic of media and conflict has garnered significant attention among scholars, particularly in the fields of political science and media studies, among others. Numerous studies within this realm have focused on examining the dynamics between media representations and various forms of conflict, ranging from international disputes to domestic political tensions. In particular, scholars have delved into the role of media in shaping public perceptions, influencing policy responses, and even exacerbating or mitigating conflicts.

In liberal democracies, it is argued media portrayal of conflict often serves as a mirror to the power dynamics at play within the political elite, presenting competing frames during institutional conflicts while echoing official perspectives during periods of elite consensus (Vladisavljević, 2015). Vladisavljević (2015: 10) also argues that the media framing of situations of unrest, such as protests and international conflicts, has a large role in shaping public perception, insofar as '[...] wars have more recently been framed by the media in even more simplistic and 'sanitized' terms than usual, ignoring a great loss of life and extensive material damage'. Apart from this general trend, the geographical proximity of the conflict plays a large role in the narrative portrayed in the media, as war is represented 'from the

perspective of its [media's] country of origin. The media and the general public tend to adopt a patriotic/nationalist stance, supporting the country's armed forces and their operations and reducing space for legitimate criticism of the official policy' (Vladislavljević, 2015: 10).

Evans (2010) suggests that media framing of international conflicts profoundly influences public opinion and foreign policy decisions. Media reports influence policymakers both indirectly, by shaping public opinion, and directly, by framing their perception of reality (Evans, 2010). Information from elite publications or international news reports are often the public and policymakers' primary reference to events abroad, and as such the media's framing of foreign events holds significant sway. Evans (2010) also observes that media reporting is far from neutral – with certain conflicts receiving disproportionate attention, and diverting attention from others, ultimately leading to inconsistent foreign policy priorities.

Another strand of research on media and conflict highlights the shift in the way which we receive our news. Thussu & Freedman (2003) state that the advent of 24/7 news coverage has further complicated the media landscape, with privatized satellite networks often sensationalizing and oversimplifying complex stories. This 'infotainment' approach, blending information and entertainment to attract audiences, is particularly evident in war reporting, which, the authors claim (Thussu & Freedman (2003), can desensitize viewers and distort public opinion. The authors also argue that live reporting compromise news quality, fostering speculation and sensationalism as a result, and that despite efforts to diversify, Western conglomerates still dominate the narrative, shaping foreign policy perceptions.

A recent publication by Springer, et al (2022) zooms in on how journalistic practices in conflict zones undergo changes on several fronts, with a potential shift in perspectives during

times of unified societal opposition to a common enemy (Springer, et al., 2022). In doing so they reveal contrasting approaches, with Ukrainian journalists predominantly employing desk journalism and as such tending to avoid opinionated pieces, while Swedish counterparts more frequently published opinionated and authoritative articles, favouring the Ukrainian side of the conflict and blurring the lines between interpretation and reporting. Thus, Ukrainian journalists, often operating amidst political pressures, demonstrate a higher commitment to objectivity despite challenges from media owners and political interests (Springer, et al., 2022). This piece highlights the correlation between geographical proximity to the conflict, media autonomy, and adherence to objectivity norms.

In analysing the media reporting on conflicts, scholars uncover a complex interplay between political dynamics, geographical proximity and media logic. It becomes evident that media reporting on conflicts is far from a straightforward process; rather, it is deeply entangled with political interests, power struggles, and the pursuit of sensational narratives. Through their coverage, media outlets often reflect the perspectives of political elites, amplifying certain narratives while downplaying others, which in turn not only shapes public opinion but also influences policy responses. Furthermore, the evolving landscape of journalistic practices introduces another layer of complexity to the media-conflict nexus. Factors such as geographical proximity to conflict zones and the degree of media autonomy also play important roles in shaping how conflicts are portrayed in the media. In turn, journalistic decisions, including story selection, framing, and sourcing, are inevitably influenced by these factors and as a result, the narratives that emerge surrounding conflicts are not solely determined by the events themselves.

## **2.2 The framing of the Israel/Palestine conflict in media**

The longevity of the Israel/Palestine conflict has made it a widely covered topic in research, including research on media framing of the conflict. As a result of this there have been many studies that have examined the news media's coverage of the conflict in different countries. In line with the broader literature on media and conflict discussed above, several scholars argue that there is a direct correlation between a country's foreign policy and said country's media reporting (Karniel, et al., 2017; Evans, 2010, Cavari, et al., 2017). For instance, comparing the narratives presented by different news outlets in regard to a 2014 Israel-Hamas prisoner deal, Karniel, et al. (2017) highlight the differing media interpretations shaped by political affiliations and national interests. As they write in their paper, 'thus US coverage of the Gilad Shalit deal is less professional and balanced than the BBC, reflecting the US government's extensive involvement in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict' (Karniel, et al, 2017: 119). Neureiter (2017: 78) concurs that 'variation in media bias between countries appears to be a function of public opinion, demographics, and interstate relations'.

As several scholars have argued (Dorman and Farhang, 1987; Galtung, 2003; Bhowmik, 2023), the prioritization of influential figures, particularly government officials, significantly influences how conflicts are reported, often leading to coverage that mirrors U.S. policy objectives and adopts a war journalism perspective. However, there are deviations from this assumption, with instances where U.S. Congress members made dissenting statements that directly opposed the U.S. foreign policy regarding Israel-Palestine. Bhowmik (2023: 1032) writes that the statements often, '[...] led to consideration, albeit brief, of humanitarian issues and the suffering of Palestinian civilians within news stories'. Thus, this underscores the significance of consensus in shaping media framing.

Friedman (2020) looks at blaming frames, but instead highlights a correlation between cultural proximity and statement bias. Comparing Israeli and Palestinian media, Friedman (2020) argues that Israeli media showed a higher capacity to attribute blame broadly, whereas the Palestinian side predominantly pointed blame at Israel. In asymmetric conflict, he maintains, this suggests self-doubt in the stronger party and confidence in the weaker party. What is more, tabloids extensively blamed the adversary, further reinforcing polarizing perspectives. The author concludes that when a third-party mediator enters the conflict, ‘the mediator’s media was found to adopt blame frames from the side with which it shares cultural proximity’ (Friedman, 2020: 1888). These studies show that national interests and political affiliations to some extent shape media reporting, leading to biases and frame divergence between different countries’ media outlets.

Other scholars highlight a different form of bias in media reporting of the Israel-Palestine conflict (Noakes & Wilkins, 2002; Elmasry, et al., 2013). Elmasry, et al. (2013) examine the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, highlighting differences in resources, journalistic standards, and framing between the two media sources. The authors suggest that the funding of a media source affects how a subject is portrayed, whether consciously or not. To illustrate this, the authors bring up Al-Jazeera, contending that it offers more comprehensive and detailed coverage compared to its counterpart. This disparity, the authors suggest, could be attributed to the financial support Al-Jazeera receives from the Qatari government. This is again reflected in their portrayal of the two sides of the conflict, with Al-Jazeera being ‘[...] positive toward Hamas and critical of Egypt, the USA and the United Nations’ (Elmasry, et al., 2013: 764). The authors conclude that this comes as no surprise, as Al-Jazeera has a long track record of being sympathetic toward Hamas. The

same can also be said for the Qatari government, which has long been seen as Hamas' biggest financial backer (Karnitschnig, 2024).

Further, it has been claimed that the ideological leanings of media outlets can influence their framing. Here, Noakes & Wilkins (2002; 666) in a paper on the portrayal of Palestinians in the US media, state that '[...] the sponsorship of external parties can influence media coverage and framing'. An example of such a phenomena was the U.S and Israeli recognition of Yasser Arafat's right to negotiate for the Palestinian side, which in turn '[...] raised the legitimacy of the PLO and granted Arafat the status of political leader' (Noakes & Wilkins, 2002: 666).

As seen in the above section, there are various perspectives on media coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict, with scholars having examined how national interests, political affiliations, and ideological biases shape media reporting, thereby further highlighting the complexity of the issue. Moreover, in times of no elite consensus we might expect to see disparities in the media framing of the conflict. Finally, it is noteworthy that throughout the literature review we have seen different floating notions that follow along a similar line of argument, but carry distinct connotations, thus, moving forward, we will adopt the term 'media framing'.<sup>1</sup>

### **2.3 What's missing from existing literature**

Exploring the intricate connection between media and conflict is a popular topic in academic research, yet the research is inconclusive when it comes to the possible factors behind the role of media in impacting perceptions and narratives during times of conflict. It is also clear that

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that the term 'media framing' will be used throughout. However, at times, the term 'media portrayals' will also be used synonymously to increase the variation in the text.



there has been a lot of research about media reporting of the Israel-Palestine conflict in international media. However, very little research has been conducted regarding the framing of the conflict in Swedish media, and especially so with a comparative focus. Therefore, this thesis investigates how the Swedish media has framed the Israel-Palestine conflict over time and how the framing differs between different news outlets. In this way, we expect to capture changes that might have occurred in terms of framing of the Israel-Palestine conflict in relation to times of elite non-consensus, as well as with respect to different ideological leaning of media outlets.

### **3. Theoretical Approach**

In this section we will outline the theories and concepts that are utilized in this descriptive study, which takes on a deductive approach. As Halperin & Heath (2020: 34) aptly write, ‘[...] deduction starts with a theory that has already been confirmed, or with a logical argument, and then draws out the meaning or implications it has for explaining some particular case or phenomena’. To begin with, we will give a short description of social constructivism. We will then move on to framing theory, a cornerstone in media studies, which offers insights into the strategies and mechanisms through which media portrayals are constructed and disseminated. Building upon framing theory, we then introduce the concept of generic framing, which further helps us to understand how media frames are structured and utilized within specific contexts. Lastly, we will end the chapter by presenting the analytical framework that will guide our forthcoming analysis section.

#### **3.1 Social Constructivism**

This thesis adopts a social constructivist perspective, which views reality as socially and actively constructed rather than existing independently of individuals. Thus, according to this perspective, knowledge, norms, values, and other assumptions are developed through social interactions (Halperin & Heath, 2020). As this theoretical approach underscores the significance of social interaction and context in shaping perceptions of events, it can be particularly useful in understanding the framing used in Swedish media to frame the Israel-Palestine conflict.

As many scholars have observed, the media has an important role in constructing reality, particularly in times of conflict and crisis communication (Evans, 2010; Thussu & Freedman, 2003). However, during times of conflict, the ‘[...] media—in terms of providing people with

information about the world in which they live and, thus, shaping their perceptions of the others with whom they share this world—contribute to creating the key drivers of the escalation spiral: anxiety, agitation, alienation, and accusation in a mirror’ (Hamelink, 2010: 55). Therefore, the media can be seen as a mirror, reflecting and amplifying negative emotions back to the audience, potentially intensifying tensions and exacerbating the conflict dynamics. This again underscores the influential power of media in shaping public attitudes and behaviours, particularly in conflict situations where emotions are heightened, and perceptions are crucial in determining outcomes.

By employing a social constructivist lens, we can analyse how the narrative surrounding the conflict is portrayed in the Swedish media. Further, this approach can help to provide insights into how social dynamics and contextual factors help to influence the portrayal of the conflict in Swedish media, and subsequently shape public understanding of the conflict at large. This understanding sets the stage for a deeper exploration of framing theory, which elucidates the specific strategies and mechanisms through which media narratives are constructed and disseminated.

### **3.2 Framing Theory**

Framing theory has emerged as a crucial social constructivist perspective on media. The theory aids in dissecting media content and further exploring the relationship between media and public opinion (De Vreese, 2005). Thus, framing theory is presented as a significant paradigm not only for scrutinizing media content but also for moulding public perceptions and opinions by emphasizing specific facets of information to render them more prominent (Entman, 1993). Already Goffman (1974) underscored this by stating that an individual's perspective on a subject can be influenced by how a writer presents it.

Entman (1993) delves into the concept of framing, arguing that it showcases the power of communicative text and that by studying frames, one gains insight into how information is framed within communicative text. He argues that media frames can consciously impact individuals. For instance, frames selectively emphasize certain aspects of communicated information, thereby heightening their salience. Within communicative text, Entman (1993) claims that frames can serve four functions and be situated in four locations. These functions include problem definition, causal analysis, evaluation through moral judgments, and policy recommendations, while the locations comprise the communicator, the text itself, the receiver, and the culture. However, according to Entman (1993), not all frames necessarily encompass all four functions.

In his influential conceptualization, Goffman (1974) describes the communicative process in terms of primary frameworks or interpretative schemata. Entman (1993) goes on to elaborate on these schemata, referring to them as frames that guide communicators in making framing judgments, either consciously or unconsciously, in their communication of text. De Vrees (2005) contributes by exploring frame building and frame-setting in media, identifying several factors that influence framing in news: its structural qualities, the interplay between media frames, the audience's prior knowledge of perceived reality, and their inclination towards the reported news. Thus, De Vrees' conceptualization suggests that depending on the selected aspect of perceived reality and frame building, individuals are likely to be influenced by communicative text.

Transitioning from the broader discussions of framing theory and its relevance, Nord and Von Krogh's (2021) examination of the Swedish media landscape delves into the specific

implications of the ongoing transformation in media dynamics. The authors highlight the implications of this transformation on the framing of various topics, noting that different media outlets may present the same subject in multiple ways. They suggest that this fragmentation could lead to increased bias, potentially shaping both public opinion and policy responses.

Terkildsen and Schnell (1997) reiterate the significant power of media frames in directing citizens' beliefs and information cues, in part because '[...] for most issues the vast majority of citizens are without a strong personal stake or a cognitive ballast' (Terkildsen & Schnell, 1997: 894), in turn influencing public opinion orchestration, either by the media outlet themselves, or by external parties. The authors conclude that media's true power '[...] lies in telling the public what issues to think about, as well as how to think about those issues' (Terkildsen & Schnell, 1997: 894).

Therefore, the media can be seen as taking on multiple roles, as observed by Happer and Philo (2013). One such role is of 'facilitating', i.e. by utilizing repetition and reinforcement to aid in the 'easing through of policy action'; 'legitimizing', i.e., shaping behaviour among readers, in part by the ability to either legitimize certain actions, or to invoke feelings of mistrust and doubt in other actions. Thus, 'the media are in essence a contested space in which the most powerful groups can establish the dominance of specific messages' (Happer & Philo, 2013: 333). Subsequently, the idea that the media is a contested space where powerful groups vie for dominance in shaping messages further emphasizes the potential for bias and manipulation in media representations of conflicts.

### **3.3 Generic and Issue-Specific Framing**

Framing theory distinguishes between generic and issue-specific framing. Generic framing can offer the versatility to analyse diverse fields of research and subjects, facilitating cross-cultural research and assessments (De Vrees, 2002: 59). Thus, generic framing can be seen as relying on a conceptual or methodological foundation that is both precise and flexible, allowing for adaptability when needed to align closely with the desired objectives. De Vrees defines generic frames as being able to ‘transcend thematic limitations and can be identified in relation to different topics, some even over time and in different cultural contexts’ (De Vreese, 2002: 28). This is in contrast to issue-specific frames, which allow for a deep level of specificity and detail about a chosen event but are ‘relevant only to specific topics or events’ (De Vreese, 2002: 28). Thus, the high specificity of issue-specific frames can be a disadvantage in the sense that the results are difficult, if not impossible, to generalize, compare and use as empirical evidence for theory building (De Vreese 2005: 55). Consequently, the choice between generic and issue-specific framing affects the external validity of the study.

There is previous research looking at issue-specific framing in regard to the Israel-Palestine conflict. For instance, Gamson (1992) identifies five prominent frames utilized by American media throughout the conflict. The first, ‘strategic interest,’ portrays the conflict within a global chess game, emphasizing the region's geopolitical significance rather than the conflict itself. The second frame, ‘feuding neighbours’ frames the conflict as a destructive cycle of attack and retaliation, with innocent bystanders as the true victims. The third frame, ‘Arab intransigence’ depicts Israeli victimization. Conversely, the fourth frame, ‘Israeli expansionism’ portrays Arab victimization, labelling Israel as a Western-backed colonial power oppressing indigenous people. Lastly, ‘dual liberation’ emphasizes compromise as the

just solution due to both sides having historical claims and rights to the land. Gamson's findings reveal that the conflict-oriented frame of 'feuding neighbours' and the U.S.-centred 'strategic interest' frame were most prevalent in media coverage, while both the injustice- and justice frames were less prevalent and more often tended to exclude each other. While it would be possible to apply this framework to Swedish media, in order to see whether the same types and patterns of frames are present in this context, we have opted for a generic framing approach because of the advantages of such an approach as stated above.

Hence, for our study of Swedish media framing of the Israel-Palestine conflict, we will instead utilize Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) analytical framework as presented in their work titled 'Framing European Politics: A Content Analysis of Press and Television News'. Despite their focus on European politics in general, the framework has been tried and tested over several fields by various scholars (e.g., Guenduez et al., 2016; Han et al., 2017; Muhamad & Yang, 2017). Guenduez et al. (2016) looked at how Swiss media outlets framed the highly polarized 'clean money' policy; Han et al. (2017) analysed how Chinese newspapers framed climate change in the years 2005 to 2015; and Muhamad & Yang (2017) traced how U.S. newspapers framed child autism-related news stories. This illustrates the high versatility of generic frame analysis. We motivate our choice of this framework for the analysis of the Swedish media portrayals of the Israel-Palestine conflict based on its simplicity and high generalizability, but also because the framework provides a detailed and systematic approach to analysing data.

The framework is composed of five elements: 1. the conflict framework highlights conflicts between individuals, groups or institutions to capture public interest; 2. the human interest framework, which brings a human face or emotional angle to the presentation of an event,

issue or problem; 3. the economic consequences framework, which reports an event, issue or problem in terms of its economic consequences for an individual, group, institution, region or country; 4. the moral framework, which places the event, problem or issue in the context of religious principles or moral prescriptions; 5. the responsibility framework, which presents an issue or problem in such a way as to attribute responsibility for its cause or solution either to the government or to an individual or group (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000: 95-96).

### 3.4 Analytical Framework

Our analytical framework is borrowed from Semetko & Valkenburg (2000) and consists of five framing categories and a total of 20 framing items. These framing items are in essence 20 instances of yes (1) or no (0) questions posed to the data. These questions are subsequently answered binarily, with Semetko & Valkenburg (2000: 99) stating that: ‘an advantage of such a binary coding strategy is that intercoder reliabilities are relatively high’. Thus, with this detailed but relatively simple coding we can easier control the level of agreement among coders (i.e., the two authors) when categorizing framing items, thereby heightening the validity and rigor of our analytical process. Such coding also allows for a quantitative assessment of divergence and change in framing.

Table 1. Generic media framing of the Palestine-Israel conflict

<b>Framing category</b>	<b>Framing items</b>	<b>Yes (1)</b>	<b>No (0)</b>
<b>Attribution of responsibility</b>	Does the story suggest that some level of gov’t has the		



	ability to alleviate the problem?		
	Does the story suggest that some level of the government is responsible for the issue/problem?		
	Does the story suggest solution(s) to the problem/issue?		
	Does the story suggest that an ind. (or group of people in society) is resp. for the issue-problem?		
	Does the story suggest the problem requires urgent action?		
<b>Human interest frame</b>	Does the story provide a human example or “human face” on the issue?		

	<p>Does the story employ adjectives or personal vignettes that generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion?</p>		
	<p>Does the story emphasize how individuals and groups are affected by the issue/problem?</p>		
	<p>Does the story go into the private or personal lives of the actors?</p>		
	<p>Does the story contain visual information that might generate feelings of outrage, empathy-caring, sympathy, or compassion?</p>		

<b>Conflict frame</b>	Does the story reflect disagreement between parties- individuals-groups- countries?		
	Does one party- individual-group- country reproach another?		
	Does the story refer to two sides or to more than two sides of the problem or issue?		
	Does the story refer to winners and losers?		
<b>Morality frame</b>	Does the story contain any moral message?		
	Does the story make reference to morality, God, and		

	other religious tenets?		
	Does the story offer specific social prescriptions about how to behave?		
<b>Economic frame</b>	Is there a mention of financial losses or gains now or in the future?		
	Is there a mention of the costs/degree of expense involved?		
	Is there a reference to economic consequences of pursuing or not pursuing a course of action?		

Source: Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000

## 4. Specified Aim & Research Questions

The scholarly focus on the relations between politics, particularly foreign policy, and media framing (Cavari, 2017; Evans, 2010; Karniel, et al., 2017) sparked our interest in how the Swedish media frames the Israel-Palestine conflict, in part because of Sweden's unique position as the first EU member state to formally recognize the state of Palestine (Persson, 2015). To keep our analysis focused, and to be able to capture a potential connection between media framing and foreign policy in times of elite non-consensus, we have chosen two distinct events – one attack led by Israel and the other by Hamas – to comprehensively examine how Swedish media portrays these events. This in turn resulted in sub-question 1 (Q1). Furthermore, as we identified in the literature review, scholars have highlighted the presence of ideological biases in media outlets, prompting us to pose our second sub-question (Q2) aimed at capturing these potential biases. Thus, our theory and analytical framework help us to formulate specific questions that will guide our analysis.

Main Research Question:

How does the Swedish media frame the Israel-Palestine conflict?

Sub-questions:

1. Are there any differences in framing of two events: the Israeli invasion of Gaza in 2014 and Hamas attack on Israel in 2023?

1a) Which generic frames were most frequent in Swedish media reporting of the 2014 Israeli invasion of Gaza?

1b) Which generic frames were most frequent in Swedish media reporting of the 2023 Hamas attack on Israel?

2. Are there any differences in framing of these two events between the conservative (SvD) and the liberal (DN) newspapers?

2a) Which generic frames were most frequent in SvD's reporting about the 2014 and 2023 events?

2b) Which generic frames were most frequent in DN's reporting about the 2014 and 2023 events?

Hence, our research questions are inherently comparative in nature – question one focuses on comparison between framing of the two events thus capturing potential shifts in framing over time with the Swedish changed foreign policy stance towards Palestine, and question two focuses on comparison between the differently ideologically positioned newspapers, capturing potential ideological bias.

Informed by the previous literature, the diverging stances on the conflict between the social democratic government in 2014 and the conservative government in 2023, along with the lack of elite consensus among the coalition government today, it is hypothesized that we will see a shift toward non-unison framing of the conflict. Thus, in 2014, when the government clearly sided with the Palestinian cause, media coverage may have leaned towards framing the conflict from a Palestinian perspective. Conversely, in 2023 the position is more fragmented with the government's stance on the conflict being unclear, and thus media coverage may shift from a Palestinian perspective towards a more scattered perspective. Further, it is hypothesized that we will see disparities in the framing between SvD and DN based on their distinct ideological leaning. Thus, we expect that the liberal DN, following basic tenets of liberalism, will focus on the individual perspective. Stewart & Morris (2021: 2) state that '[...] it has been said that liberals tend to use Individualizing moral foundations that are

concerned with the rights of individual'. On the other hand, SvD is expected to follow the basic tenets of conservatism, thus focusing on the collective and traditions. Conservatism puts a strong emphasis on societal structure, best described as an '[...] ideology of caution in departing from the historical roots of a society, or changing its inherited traditions and institutions' (Blackburn, 2016: 101).

## **5. Research Design and Methodological Approach**

In this chapter, we will discuss and explain our choice of conducting a small-N case study utilizing quantitative content analysis to answer our research questions. The first section elaborates on the chosen research design and the rationale behind our case selection. The second section focuses on the data collection, before we move on to data analysis in the third section. In the fourth section we will discuss reliability, validity and generalizability. Finally, we delve into ethical considerations.

### **5.1 Small-N Case Design**

For this study, we have utilized a small-N case study in answering our question of how the Swedish media portrays the Israel-Palestine conflict. This is based on the idea that a quantitative analysis focusing solely on one case, although being able to explore the topic in detail, lacks generalizability to other contexts (Halperin & Heath, 2020). Therefore, to address our research questions, and informed by existing literature, we construct our study in two distinct ways. First, we delve into two specific events within the Israel-Palestine conflict, chosen to capture potential disparities in framing related to Sweden's foreign policy stance, with this approach being warranted by the differing aggressors in 2014 and 2023. Hence, for research question (RQ1), these two events constitute two cases. Second, we identify two prominent Swedish newspapers, DN and SvD, to explore potential variations in framing linked to the ideological positioning of said media outlets. By selecting these newspapers as two cases for research question (RQ2), we aim to capture potential differences in how the Israel-Palestine conflict is portrayed, reflecting the distinct editorial perspectives and ideological leanings of each publication.



This type of design has many advantages, allowing us to go into an in-depth analysis but also to get a greater scope to contextualization (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 238). However, small-N case design is not without its challenges, with the biggest challenge being to avoid selection bias. Given the limited number of cases studied in this type of design, it is crucial to think carefully about the strategies used to select our cases. A haphazard and/or ill-considered selection could lead to biased results which would affect the validity of our results. Similarly, an oriented selection of cases to “match” our research question could lead to misleading results (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 238).

A different approach to conducting this research could have involved employing a large-N design instead, which in turn could circumvent the inherent selection bias present in small-N studies. However, we argue that opting for a large-N approach would potentially sacrifice the depth of insight offered by utilizing a smaller subset of cases with less comparative elements (Peters, 2013).

## **5.2 Case Selection**

This is a study of Swedish media framing of the Israel-Palestine conflict. The choice to focus on *Swedish* media is motivated by Sweden being renowned for its commitment to human rights, international law, and peace-building endeavours, which offers a unique lens through which to study media dynamics in the context of global affairs. The decision to centre our thesis on the examination of the Swedish *media* stems from the previously reviewed literature and its recognition of the media as taking on a role as a mirror of societal values, a shaper of public discourse, and an influencer of policy agendas. The *Israel-Palestine conflict's* global significance, characterized by its longstanding complexity and profound humanitarian implications, make it an apt subject for this analysis. Through studying Swedish media

portrayal, we aim to gain insights into how this conflict is debated within a specific cultural and geopolitical context. Moreover, Sweden's unique stance on the conflict, including support for a two-state solution, criticism of Israeli policies, and early recognition of Palestine, is another motivation for our empirical focus. Thus, analysing how Swedish media articulate and/or reinforce these positions within the national media discourse provides valuable insights into media's attempts to impact public perceptions and policy discussions, including potential bias.

We compare differences in media portrayals between two major Swedish newspapers: Svenska Dagbladet (SvD) and Dagens Nyheter (DN). Our decision to use these two newspapers is based on their net reach per day, with DN seen as Sweden's most read paper with 483 000 readers per day, and SvD coming in fourth place with 286 000 daily readers (Ocast, 2023). Further, to limit down the risk of sensationalism, we disregarded the second and third places (Aftonbladet; Expressen), as they were made up of tabloids. Nordström (2002: 57) highlights the problematic approach that Aftonbladet and Expressen have in the Swedish media landscape, writing that 'it is no coincidence that these newspapers have come to be called "sensational press" and "drama factories"'. Hence, we focus our study on the two most read quality media outlets in Sweden.

Further, both SvD and DN are easily accessible in both print and online versions, ensuring that they reach a diverse demographic of readers. Moreover, selection of these two newspapers as cases for our research question 2 allows us to compare how ideological leanings can affect the portrayal of the same set of events. As Dagens Nyheter (2008) themselves state, they position themselves as independent liberal, whilst SvD (2003) positions

themselves as independent moderate. Hence our selection covers the liberal-conservative ideological spectrum<sup>2</sup>.

The choice of our specific events within the Israel-Palestine conflict was based on the amount of article ‘spikes’ seen over time on Retriever (See appendix figure 1. Retriever article frequencies 2012-2024). In reviewing ‘spikes’ of articles published by DN and SvD we identified that there was a significant increase of articles in 2014 (n=637) and again in 2023 (n=899), considerably higher than any other year when looking at the years 2012-2024. Looking closer at the year 2014, we identified another spike in the month of July (n=196), which coincides with the start of the Israeli invasion of Gaza (See appendix figure 2. Retriever article frequencies 2014). Worth noting is another spike in October of 2014 (n=77), which is presumed to be tied to Sweden’s formal recognition of Palestine. Based on this data we construct the Israeli invasion of Gaza, beginning on the 8th of July, and ending one month later when a peace treaty was signed on the 26th of August 2014, as our first case. Looking closer at the year 2023, we identified a large spike in October (n=313), comparing to the approximate 30 articles seen over previous months (See appendix figure 3. Retriever article frequencies 2023). This large increase is presumed to be tied to the October 7th Hamas attack on Israel, and Israel’s subsequent invasion of Gaza. Hence, this event became our second case for research question 1.

While the consequences of the October 7<sup>th</sup>, 2023, events are still taking place today, we have decided to use the same timeframe when looking at both conflicts, to make comparisons

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<sup>2</sup> We are aware that our selection mainly covers the middle to right-wing political spectrum, and thus does not cover the social democratic spectrum. In regard to the social democratic spectrum Aftonbladet could have been a valid option when looking at readership numbers as determined by Ocast (2023), however, there are issues with the quality of their reporting as shown by Nordström (2002). Subsequently, there is a lack of good candidates on the left spectrum when taking into account both readership numbers and quality.

easier. Thus, as the 2014 conflict lasted for 48 days, we have subsequently looked at the first 48 days of the 2023 event, ending our search on the 28<sup>th</sup> of November 2023. Further, we argue that a symmetrical design in our case selection is necessary as to not tilt any results. These two cases are also interesting in the sense that the 2014 events can be viewed as an Israel led attack, while the 2023 events can be viewed instead as a Palestine led attack. In doing so, we believe that analysing two periods with a relatively similar context, but with differing aggressors, will enable us to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how the narrative surrounding the conflict has evolved over time within Swedish media.

It should be clarified that in this thesis, we view Hamas as representing Palestine in the conflict. Formally, Palestine is politically represented by Palestinian Authority (PA), however, in practice, Hamas performs many governance functions. Subsequently, Hamas is widely recognized as one of the key political and military entities representing the Palestinian people, particularly in the area surrounding the Gaza Strip. Thus, while its designation as a terrorist organization by several western countries complicates its status, Hamas can be seen as playing a significant role in Palestinian politics and resistance against Israeli occupation. While scholars note Hamas's complicated legitimacy in Gaza, for instance, when it comes to humanitarian assistance, which a majority of Gaza residents are dependent upon, 'some of this is provided by the United Nations, but much comes from Hamas' (Andrew, 2023). Moreover, Hamas has made 'attempts to change the structure of the informal judicial system by creating a parallel one, thus diminishing the role of the PA-affiliated system' (Abdalahdi, 2021: 18). Thus, despite the contested nature of its legitimacy, Hamas performs vital governance functions in Gaza, and the 2023 attacks led by Hamas can be seen as a Palestinian attack on Israel.

### 5.3 Data Collection

Having previously decided on two periods and two news sources as discussed in the previous case selection (5.2), we then utilized Retriever Mediearkivet to help us gather data, which we were able to access through the University West library database list. To find data within Mediearkivet we used the search term ‘Israel\* AND Palestin\*’, with the ‘AND’ meaning that only articles mentioning both search words were shown. Further, the asterisk (\*) indicates truncation, so that for example the search term ‘Palestin\*’ includes results such as ‘Palestinier’<sup>3</sup>, ‘Palestina’, and so forth. We then limited down the timeframe to reflect the two time periods, namely 8th of July – 26th of August 2014 for the first period, and October 7th, 2023 – 24th November 2023 for the second period. Lastly, we narrowed the search to only show articles published by SvD and DN. This resulted in 246 hits (SvD n=108; DN n= 138) for the first period and 503 hits (SvD n=218; DN n=285) for the second period. Employing identical search terms across both time periods ensures a neutral approach to locating data, making our retrieval of data systematic.

Given the large number of articles in the total sample of our cases, and to make data analysis manageable, we opted to select a smaller number of articles for analysis. For this second-tier selection, we utilized simple random sampling (SRS), which offers several notable advantages. Firstly, it ensures every element in the population under study has an equal chance of being selected, thus minimizing selection bias. This method also simplifies the process of selecting samples, making it transparent and replicable (Toshkov, 2018). As Toshkov (2018: 232) concludes, ‘random selection of the cases to observe is still crucial for the validity of the inferences to a broader population of interest’. Therefore, we argue that

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<sup>3</sup> Translates to ‘Palestinians’ in English.

SRS promotes rigor, fairness, and reliability in the collection of data, enhancing internal validity of our study.

Concretely, we randomly chose 15 articles per paper and period by utilizing SRS, which involves assigning a distinct number to each located article, before feeding the numbers through Google's random number generator. From the pool of randomized articles, we then removed any op-eds. The choice to remove op-eds from the sample is based on op-eds being a very particular type of article where individual opinions are reflected rather than objective reporting. As Sommer & Maycroft (2008: 588) write, 'unlike articles in the news section, op-eds are openly subjective and highly opinionated, taking strong stands on issues of interest to the newspaper's editorial board'. We replaced these removed articles with new randomly selected articles from the total sample, with two op-eds removed in total across all 60 articles (See section 8.2 for full list of articles). The equal number of articles per source and period were chosen to make sure that samples on all ends (across newspapers and events) are balanced, thus certifying that the results are not tilted by a more numerous ends of the sample.

#### **5.4 Quantitative Data Analysis**

In our thesis, we have employed a quantitative content analysis to analyse our data. A content analysis is an 'analysis of the content of a text in order to uncover its meanings and intentions' (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 386). While content analysis can be both qualitative and quantitative, we have opted for the latter, in part since it allows for efficient statistical analysis of larger amounts of information across cases (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 6). Quantitative content analysis 'entails the collection of numerical data' (Bryman, 2012: 75). Thus, 'the aim of quantitative content analysis is to draw inferences about the meaning and intention of a text through an analysis of the usage and frequency of words, sentences, and images, and the

patterns they form within a text' (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 365). However, there are some arguments voiced against the use of quantitative content analysis, with some scholars arguing that the meaning of the text or the elements sought are not visible through a simple quantification of keywords or any other elements but rather through the general meaning, of a sentence, a paragraph or an entire text (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 376). Bryman (2012: 300) additionally states that 'problems of interpretation are especially likely to arise when the aim is to identify latent meanings (as opposed to the more readily apparent manifest meanings) [...]'. To avoid such problems, we follow our analytical framework, which guides our quantitative data analysis. Instead of counting words or phrases, we have searched for occurrence of specific generic frames in the analysed media texts, guided by detailed yes/no questions in our framework posed to the entire article.

Further, we have conducted this research deductively, meaning that we start from the theory to then guide us forward to an observation (Bryman 2012: 35). Once the data had been collected, the coding proceeded as follows: applying our analytical framework from section 3.4, which entails 20 questions/framing items relating to the five framing categories that we wish to analyse, to the 60 randomly selected articles. Each question in our analytical framework was then answered binarily by Yes (1) or No (0), with the total number of points collected in a frame divided by the total number of articles. This in turn gave us a number between 0 and 1 for each generic frame. The closer this score is to 1, the more present the frame was in said article. We have then aggregated these scores to answer our research questions, first by adding scores for all articles in the sample for our two cases of 2014 and 2023 events respectively (RQ1), then by adding scores for all articles in the sample for our two cases of DN and SvD respectively (RQ2). This allowed us to uncover differences

between the generic framing used across the cases and also to uncover possible bias in regard to the selected media outlets.

## **5.5 Reliability, Validity & Generalizability**

Reliability is described by Halperin & Heath (2020: 163) as ‘the extent to which a measurement produces the same results on repeated trials’. In regard to this thesis, we argue that we have made several purposeful steps to ensure a higher degree of reliability. First, we clearly outline our data selection, coding and analysis processes to ensure transparency, which ensures a high reliability. Second, the use of quantitative content analysis and especially binary coding in combination with a particularly clear coding scheme borrowed from Semetko & Valkenburg (2000), ensures a high level of reliability. This can be compared to a qualitative research method, where achieving a high level of reliability can be inherently difficult (Yardley, 2000). Further, additional steps are taken to ensure reliability with two researchers interpreting the data – all of the news items will be coded by both of us, and we will control intercoder reliability. Halperin & Heath (2020: 490) describe intercoder reliability as ‘the degree of coding consistency between two or more coders’.

Another important aspect is that of internal validity, which hinges on the meticulous recording and ongoing verification of coding to mitigate the risk of errors and secure accuracy of analysis (McDermott, 2011). In this way, internal validity further strengthens reliability of findings. Thus, adhering to systematic approaches in data collection and analysis ensures that the potential for bias can be minimized, while at the same time enhancing the trustworthiness of results (Halperin & Heath, 2020). This emphasis on careful recording and continual verification serves as a cornerstone in maintaining internal validity, safeguarding against sloppiness and methodological flaws that could compromise the validity of the findings. As



De Vaus, (2001: 28 as cited by Halperin & Heath, 2020: 162) writes ‘the more the structure of a study eliminates alternative interpretations, the better we are able to draw unambiguous conclusions from our results, and “the stronger the internal validity of the study”’. Therefore, by adhering to systematic approaches in data collection and analysis, this can subsequently enhance the trustworthiness of results.

Concerning external validity, which refers to ‘the extent to which results from a study can be generalized beyond the particular study’ (Halperin & Heath, 2020: 163), we acknowledge limits to generalizability with respect to our small-N case study. Given the complexities of the Israel-Palestine conflict and its unique contextual factors, such as the influence of superpowers, religions, and ethnicities, generalizing findings to other conflicts proves highly problematic. While our conclusions may extend to other events within the Israel-Palestine conflict, the transferability of results to other conflicts is constrained by the distinct nature of each conflict. Our study hopefully showcases the usefulness of the chosen analytical framework for analysing media framing of conflict, and by deliberately selecting generic rather than issue-specific frames in our analytical framework, we open up for the possibility of future comparative studies analysing media framing of other conflicts.

## **5.6 Ethical Considerations**

Halperin & Heath (2020: 175) state that ‘there are certain behaviours in research—such as causing harm to individuals, breaching confidentiality, using information improperly, and introducing bias—that are considered unethical’. Thus, given that the majority of ethical considerations revolve around the treatment of research participants, we argue that we instead need to address the ethical concerns in relation to us as researchers.

According to Halperin & Heath (2020: 180), ‘areas of ethical concern with regard to the researcher include introducing bias; inaccurate reporting; and the inappropriate use of information’. As stated above, we argue that the careful construction and delimitation of our cases, the automated selection of articles through Retriever, as well as the SRS strategy for selecting the sample of articles for the analysis, all ensure that our data gathering is systematic. What is more, our data analysis is quantitative, adheres to a rigidly structured theoretical framework, whose systematic application, with two coders, ensures accuracy in our results. Additionally, we argue that the responsible use of information is heightened through a transparent methodology and results section.

## 6. Analysis

Reflecting on the swath of articles reviewed from both time periods and sources, one can begin to identify the focus and shifts in narrative strategies within the Swedish media. At first, one gets the impression of a deep-rooted willingness to attribute responsibility, where the media time and time again pinpoints specific actors or states as being responsible for the conflict. What comes as a surprise is not the intensity of this attribution throughout time but rather how the narrative scope has broadened by 2023 to include more humanizing elements, intertwining personal stories with broader geopolitical stakes.

This section commences by presenting the results derived from our analysis of generic frames present across the two cases, one case in 2014 and the other case in 2023, thus answering our sub-question Q1: Are there any differences in framing of the two events: the Israeli invasion of Gaza in 2014 and Hamas attack on Israel in 2023? Our analysis of the 2014 case reveals a frequent usage of the attribution of responsibility frame. Further, the second most prevalent frame during this time period was the conflict frame. Similarly, in 2023, the most frequently used frame was attribution of responsibility. However, for this time period, the second most frequently used frame shifted toward the human interest frame.

Following along from the previous sub-question, we delve into the analysis of generic framing present across the two media sources, namely DN and SvD, and thus answering sub-question Q2: Are there any differences in framing of these two events between the conservative (SvD) and the liberal (DN) newspapers? Here both newspapers show a high score in regard to the attribution of responsibility. However, when it comes to the human interest frame, we can see that DN puts a greater emphasis on humanizing the conflict. In contrast to this, we can see that SvD instead scores higher in regard to the conflict frame.

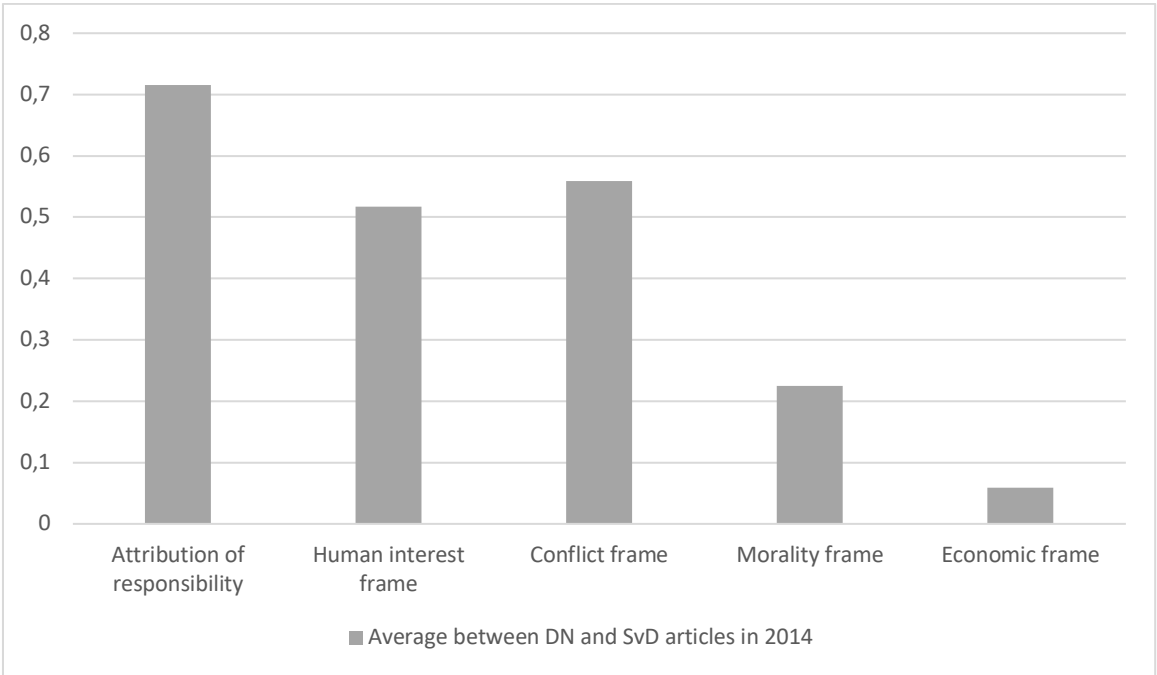
Concluding this segment is a discussion of the results, wherein we tackle our overall research question: How does the Swedish media frame the Israel-Palestine conflict?

## 6.1 A comparative analysis of generic frame occurrences in 2014 vs. 2023

### 6.1.1 2014

Having looked at and subsequently coded a total of 30 articles for the 2014 case (15 from DN & 15 from SvD) using our analytical framework we uncovered 249 instances of frames being utilized. The data, illustrated in Figure 4, indicates that attribution of responsibility was the most prevalent, scoring 0.716. Following closely was the conflict frame at 0.559, trailed by the human interest frame at 0.517. In fourth place we find the morality frame at 0.225. Lastly, the economic frame registered at 0.059.

Figure 4. Frame occurrences 2014



Note: The numbers (0-1) were calculated by taking the total number of points collected in a frame and dividing this by the total number of articles. This in turn gave us a number between 0 and 1 for each generic frame. As we had two sets of articles in our sample, we calculated an average for the two. The closer the resulting score is to 1, the more prevalent the frame is.

The high number in regard to the attribution of responsibility frame shows an editorial focus within Swedish media that actively emphasized who they believed was responsible for the conflict as such or some particular event within this conflict. This in turn implies a strategic usage of narrative to shape perceptions of accountability, potentially influencing public opinion and policy discussions. The conflict frame is the second most prevalent frame, pointing to a disagreement with the handling of the situation by other actors. When considering both frames, it implies that the media is portraying disagreement among parties while simultaneously placing blame on a specific actor. The juxtaposition of these two frames indicates a media landscape that is both confrontational and blame-oriented, favouring narratives that analyse and occasionally contest the behaviour of key actors.

Ranking third in prevalence is the human interest frame, thus suggesting that while individuals' stories may be covered, or otherwise seen as supplementary, they are not the primary focus or seen as central to the conflict's narrative. In fourth place we find the moral frame, thus indicating that ethical dimensions may not be as prominently highlighted or emphasized compared to other frames, suggesting a more pragmatic than ethical focus in the news coverage. Lastly, the economic frame scored the lowest at 0.059, indicating that economic factors were not prominently emphasized in the media's portrayal of the conflict.

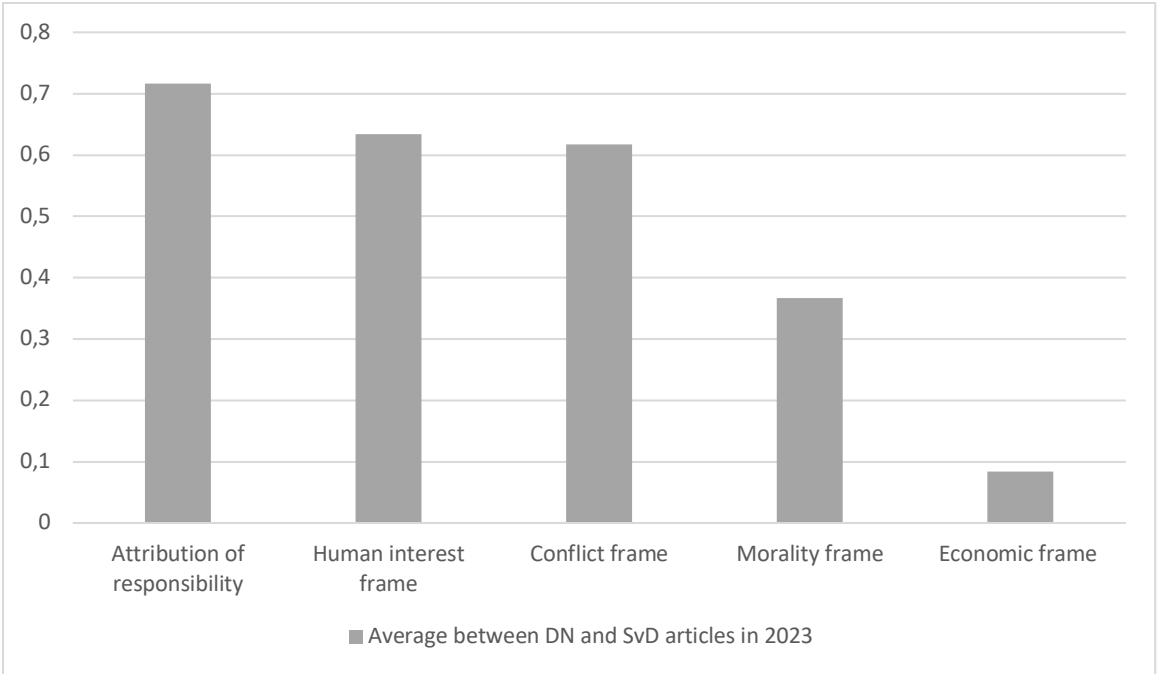
Overall, the conclusion can be drawn that during 2014 the media's portrayal suggests a focus on assigning responsibility and critiquing actions, with less emphasis on moral or economic considerations. This approach suggests a media strategy aimed at engaging audiences through

narratives of accountability and contention, potentially at the expense of a more rounded discussion of moral or economic implications of the Palestine-Israel conflict.

6.1.2 2023

We now shift our focus to the 2023 case. This again entailed analysing another set of 30 articles (15 from DN & 15 from SvD) to which we then applied our analytical framework, which in turn uncovered 290 instances of frames being utilized within the articles. The data, visualized in Figure 5, indicates that attribution of responsibility is the most frequently used frame, scoring 0.716. In second place is the human interest frame (0.634), followed closely by the conflict frame in third (0.617). In fourth place is the morality frame at 0.367. Lastly, the economic frame registering at 0.084.

Figure 5. Frame occurrences 2023



Interestingly, the attribution of responsibility frame showed the same score as in 2014, thus suggesting that the Swedish media at an unchanged frequency actively emphasized and

pinpointed who they believed was responsible for the conflict. However, the increased scores in the four other frames from 2023 signal a nuanced shift in the narrative approach.

The rise in the human interest frame score, now second, indicates a slight increase in the coverage of personal stories. This suggests a shift in narrative towards humanizing the conflict, providing a deeper, more personal connection to the issues at hand. When looking at the attribution of responsibility and the human interest frame together, this signals that the media not only identifies accountability but also emphasizes the human impact of the conflict, potentially signalling an exploration of the moral dimensions underlying the actions and consequences depicted.

The conflict frame is the third most prevalent frame, now also closer in score to the human interest frame, indicating that, in 2023, the media to a higher degree compared to in 2014 highlighted disagreements, tensions, or confrontations between different parties involved in the conflict. Again, when connecting the conflict frame together with the human interest frame it suggests a juxtaposition of the broader geopolitical tensions and individual human stories, possibly indicating an attempt to provide a holistic understanding of the conflict that incorporates both its systemic causes and effects, and its personal, human costs.

In fourth place, and despite an increase in its score, the morality frame remains less dominant than others, though its higher presence compared to 2014 suggests a growing consideration of ethical dimensions within the media's narrative. This in turn could be a result of a broader societal or editorial shift towards engaging with the moral complexities of the conflict, albeit still not at the forefront of coverage. Lastly, the economic frame, while slightly higher at

0.084, indicating that economic factors were mentioned in 2023 than in 2014 but were not as prominent in the media's coverage of the 2023 case compared to other frames.

In summary, our analysis of the 2023 case, mirroring our findings from 2014, underscores the prevalence of the attribution of responsibility frame in Swedish media coverage. However, notable increases were observed across other frames, particularly in the human interest category, suggesting a deeper exploration of personal narratives within the conflict's context. The concurrent rise in the conflict frame highlights heightened attention to geopolitical tensions alongside individual stories. At the same time, while the moral frame saw increased representation, ethical dimensions remain less emphasized compared to other frames. This in turn suggests a more layered approach to reporting that seeks to engage readers with a blend of accountability, personal impact, and ethical considerations, though economic factors still receive minimal attention. These changes in framing from 2014 compared to 2023 could be indicative of a response to reader interests or to a broader change in the political discourse surrounding the conflict.

## **6.2 A comparative analysis of generic frame occurrences in DN vs. SvD**

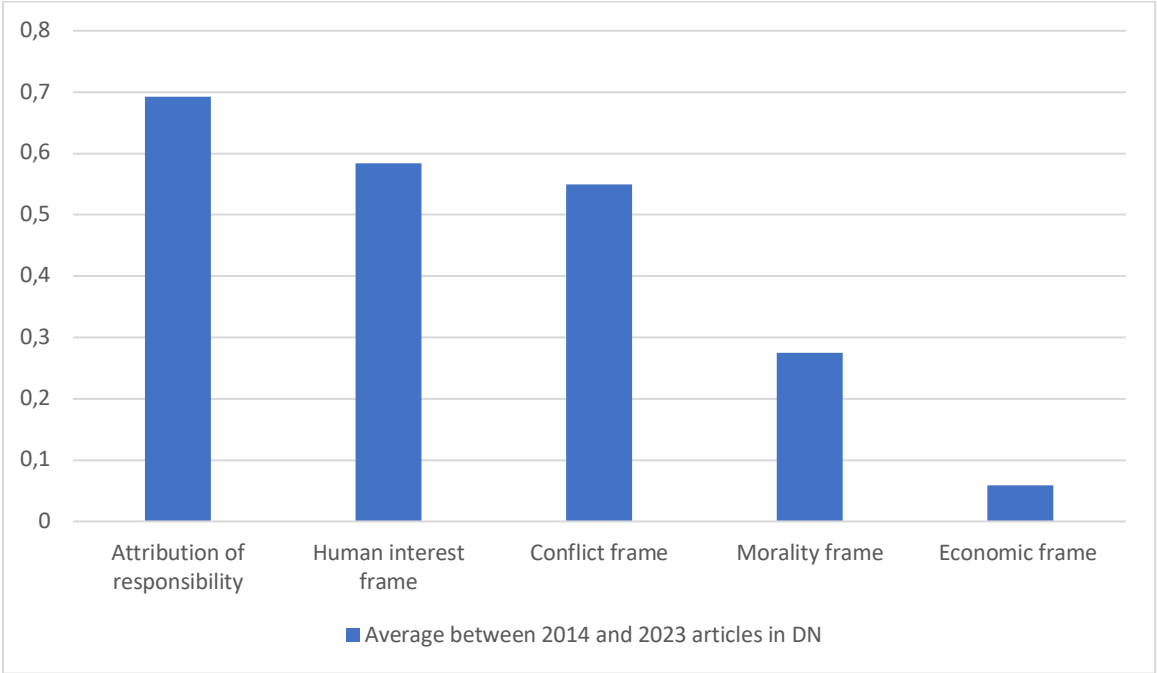
### *6.2.1 DN*

After examining two distinct periods, we now turn our analysis to two media outlets, DN and SvD. This meant that we grouped the articles differently and first analysed the total of 30 articles from DN (15 from 2014 & 15 from 2023). The exercise resulted in 259 instances of frames being utilized across these articles from DN. The data, presented in Figure 6, tells us that attribution of responsibility again is the most prevalent, with a score of 0.692. In second place we find the human interest frame at 0.584. Following closely behind is the conflict



frame at 0.55. The morality frame comes in at fourth place with a score of 0.275, trailed by the economic frame in last place with a score of 0.059.

Figure 6. Frame occurrences DN



The attribution of responsibility frame emerged as the most prevalent, indicating that DN actively emphasized who they perceived as responsible for the conflict. This suggests a consistent focus on assigning blame or accountability throughout their reporting. Ranking second in prevalence is the human interest frame, indicating that DN to a higher degree included individual stories in their reporting, and portrayed them as playing a vital part to the conflict's narrative, thus offering readers a personal connection to the events reported.

The conflict frame ranked third in prevalence, suggesting a disagreement with the handling of the situation by other parties involved in the conflict. Similarly to what we have previously seen, when considering both the attribution of responsibility and conflict frames, it implies that the media portrayed disagreement among parties while simultaneously placing blame on

specific actors, thus further highlighting the complexity and tensions inherent in the conflict's narrative, where the narrative often pivots between conflict and blame.

Interestingly, the moral frame, despite its lower occurrence in fourth place, implies a selective but impactful use of ethical judgment in DN's storytelling, possibly to invoke reader reflection on the moral implications of the events reported. Lastly, the economic frame scored the lowest, indicating that economic factors were only occasionally emphasized in the media's portrayal of the conflict.

To sum up, the most frequent frame observed was attribution of responsibility, suggesting a strong focus on assigning blame or highlighting perceived misconduct. This was closely followed by the human interest frame, telling us that DN to a higher degree included human stories and saw them as central to the conflict. In third place was the conflict frame, indicating disagreement with how other actors were managing the situation, often intertwined with assigning blame. Moreover, moral and economic frames were given relatively less emphasis. Thus, DN's framing strategy, heavily weighted towards attributing responsibility, highlights a consistent editorial focus on accountability and culpability, which is complemented by significant inclusion of human interest stories to provide depth and personal connection

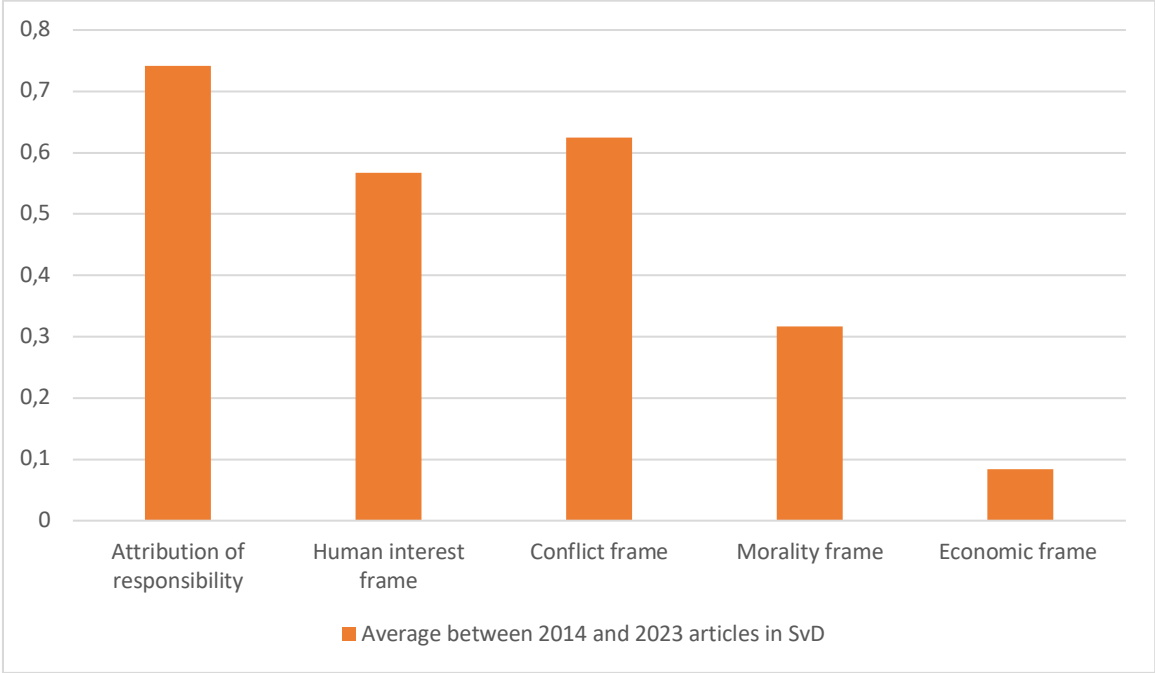
### 6.2.2 *SvD*

Having examined the articles from DN, our next step is to analyse SvD and then compare the two newspapers to uncover potential disparities in how they frame the conflict over time.

Again, this entailed analysis of a total of 30 articles from SvD (15 from 2014 and 15 from 2023), which revealed 280 instances of frames being employed across the articles. The data displayed in Figure 7 shows that the attribution of responsibility frame was the most common,

with a score of 0.742. The conflict frame followed with a score of 0.625, and the human interest frame came in at third place with a score of 0.567. The morality frame can be seen in fourth place, with a score of 0.317, whilst the economic frame was the least prevalent, at 0.084.

Figure 7. Frame occurrences SvD



The high score of the attribution of responsibility frame again indicates that SvD actively emphasized who they perceived as responsibility for the conflict. The conflict frame, ranking second, implies a significant focus on the disagreements and opposing views involved in the conflict, in turn reflecting a narrative rich in tension and dispute. The persistence of this frame could also point to a deliberate shift toward focusing on tension and opposition as a means to engage and maintain audience interest. While the human interest frame came in at third place, its high score indicates that SvD to a higher degree included individual stories in their reporting and portrayed them as playing a vital part to the conflict's narrative.

Further, the relatively low occurrence of the morality frame suggests that while ethical considerations are present in SvD's reporting, they are not as prioritized as other frames. Lastly, we find the economic frame, with its minimal presence indicating a lesser focus on the financial implications of the conflict.

In summary, SvD can be seen as putting significant focus on assigning blame or highlighting perceived misconduct in their reporting, possibly indicating a purposeful attempt to frame the public conversation around blame and responsibility. In second place we find the conflict frame, which in complement to the significant focus on attribution adds to the story's' depth and complexity. The human interest frame, which can be found in third place, shows an inclination toward humanizing the conflict, where individual human stories serve more to enrich than dominate the discourse, providing personal perspectives that support the overarching themes. The moral and economic frames, though less emphasized, still contribute to a comprehensive portrayal of the issues, albeit with a focus that is more on human and social factors than on ethical or economic considerations.

### **6.3 Discussion**

Informed by the previous literature (Karniel, et al., 2017; Evans, 2010, Cavari, et al., 2017), the diverging stances on the conflict between the social democratic government in 2014 and the conservative government in 2023, coupled with the lack of elite consensus among the governing coalition today, we hypothesized that we would see a shift toward more diverse framing of the conflict between 2014 and 2023. We expected that in 2014, with the government clearly siding with the Palestinian cause, media coverage would lean towards portraying the conflict from a Palestinian perspective. In contrast, in 2023, with a fragmented stance where the government's position is less clear, media coverage was expected to move

away from a predominantly Palestinian perspective towards a more scattered narrative.

Additionally, we hypothesized that we would see disparities in framing between the conservative Svenska Dagbladet and the liberal Dagens Nyheter based on their political affiliations (Noakes & Wilkins, 2002).

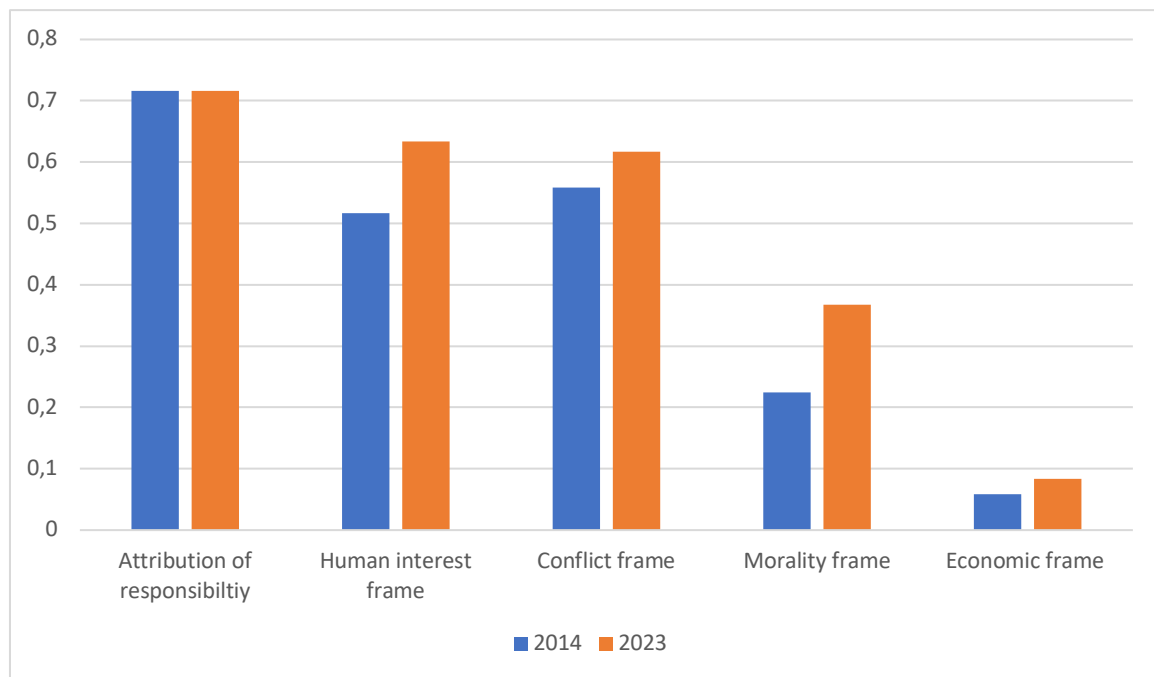
### 6.3.1 *“Are there any differences in framing of two events: the Israeli invasion of Gaza in 2014 and Hamas attack on Israel in 2023?”*

Having conducted the analysis of the sample articles we argue that, although admittedly not big, having gone through the articles systematically one can begin to see a shift in the framing of the Israel-Palestine conflict by Swedish media from a predominantly attribution focused approach in 2014, toward a more scattered perspective in 2023, as can be seen in Figure 8 below. While the most prominently figuring frame was the attribution of responsibility frame, which persisted at the same level in 2014 and in 2023, we observed changes in the frequency of the human interest frame in 2023. It is also noteworthy that there has been a slight increase in the morality frame from 2014 to 2023.

First, we note that while the attribution of responsibility frame scored the same in the two analysed periods, a quick qualitative look at the content of these frames reveals some interesting disparities. In 2014 the articles were more inclined to portray Israel as the perpetrator, responsible for the Israel-Palestine conflict, and did not as frequently associate Hamas with charged words such as ‘terrorists’, portraying them instead as legitimate parts of the conflict. In contrast, in 2023, the portrayal shifted slightly toward more frequently associating Hamas with loaded words such as ‘terrorists’, more often portraying Hamas’ actions as illegitimate. This entails that while attribution of responsibility still was the most

popular way of narrating the conflict, the party responsible for the conflict was found elsewhere.

Figure 8. Comparison of frame occurrences 2014 vs. 2023

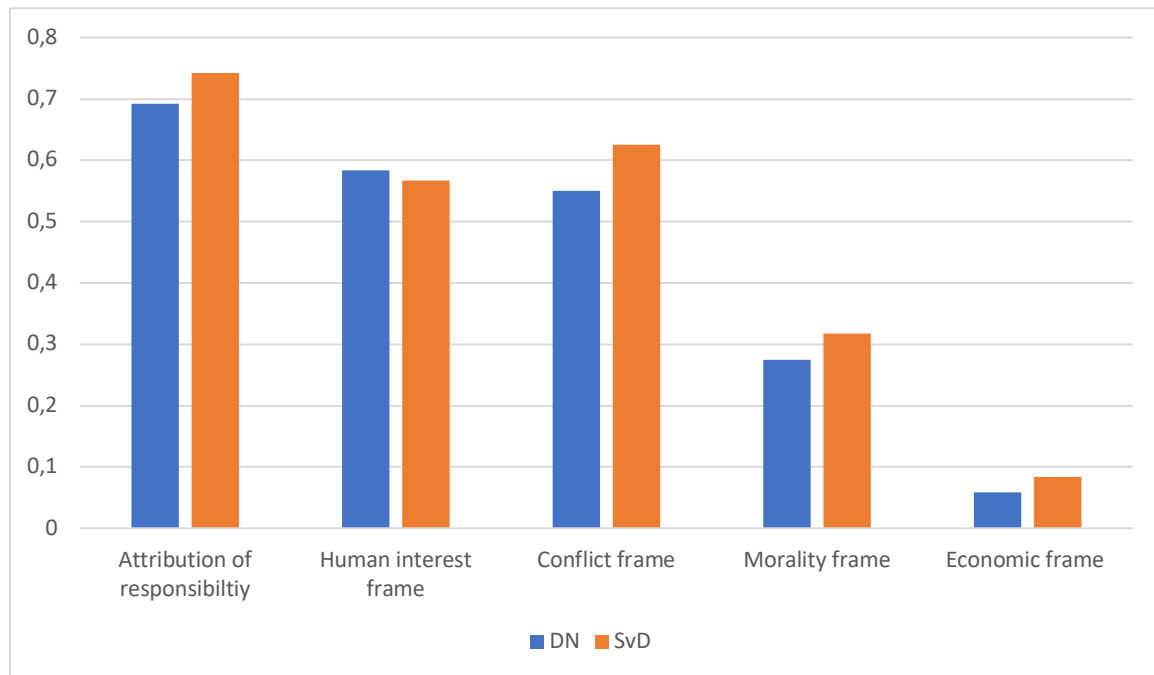


Second, we interpret the shift from a narrow focus on accountability toward a more scattered one, including both attribution of responsibility but also a more human-centred narrative where the perpetrator is not as well defined, as aligning somewhat with the hypothesized response to the less clear-cut foreign policy stances of the Swedish government. This, in turn, confirms that there is some correlation between a country's foreign policy and said country's media reporting as discussed by prior research (Karniel, et al. 2017; Evans, 2010; Cavari, et al. 2017). The increased focus on individual stories and personal impacts of the conflict can also be seen as part of a broader medial trend towards sensationalism, where personalizing news coverage helps to dramatize and oversimplify complex stories, thus potentially desensitizing viewers and distorting public opinion (Thussu & Freedman, 2003).

6.3.2 *“Are there any differences in framing of these two events between the conservative (SvD) and the liberal (DN) newspapers?”*

When it comes to the comparison of SvD and DN we argue that our analysis only partially confirms the hypothesis we posed regarding ideological bias. When it comes to the attribution of responsibility frame, we can see a consistent utilization of the frame across both newspapers, thus making it the most prevalent frame for both cases, as visualized in Figure 9 below. However, the attribution of responsibility frame still varied slightly between the two outlets. SvD’s coverage tended to emphasize the conflict aspects and delineated clear lines of accountability, where they also to a higher degree highlighted aggressive actions in their reporting and spoke about wider structural changes. DN on the other hand, while also scoring high regarding responsibility, presented a more individualistic view in their reporting, and to a higher degree incorporated discussions that included the repercussions of actions on individual parties involved. This shift can be seen as an editorial strategy aimed at fostering empathy and a deeper understanding of the conflict’s human loss.

Figure 9. Comparison of frame occurrences DN vs. SvD



Where one can see slight differences between the two outlets is regarding the human interest and conflict frames. DN on the one hand significantly increased its use of the human interest frame by 2023, further highlighting a shift towards emphasizing individual stories and the human impact of the conflict. SvD on the other hand maintained a strong emphasis on the conflict frame, indicative of a priority toward the portrayal of tensions and divisions among actors of the conflict, which prompts the readers to engage with the geopolitical stakes and dynamics of the conflict.

In regard to the framing disparities shown between SvD and DN, they are somewhat telling of their respective ideological leanings. When it comes to DN, we can see that they put a greater emphasis on humanizing the conflict, suggesting a liberal approach toward prioritizing individual stories, particularly in 2023, thus potentially aiming to shape public opinion



towards empathy and support for humanitarian aspects engaging readers with the personal dimensions of the conflict. However, when we look at SvD, the ideological influences are not as clear. The analysis shows that SvD leans toward a consistent focus on highlighting the ongoing disagreements and tensions of the conflict, but this does not necessarily align with a conservative editorial stance. As such, the result from our analysis only partially confirms our hypothesis regarding ideological bias and only partially aligns with the work by Noakes and Wilkins (2002) who state that ideological leanings can influence a media outlets' framing of a conflict.

It is worth noting that the framing over time and between outlets is surprisingly stable. We have not been able to identify drastic changes or differences in the framing frequency, however, the method and framework has allowed us to capture even the smallest and more subtle shifts.

### *6.3.3 Methodological reflection on generic framing*

In this section we bring in a meta reflection about the method and analytical framework applied in this thesis. When it came to conducting the analysis, the adoption of generic framing as a methodological approach showed both strengths and weaknesses in studying the framing of the Israel-Palestine conflict in Swedish media. On the one hand, the structured, systematic nature of our analytical framework provided a reliable foundation for coding and analysing the relatively large volume of articles. It also allowed for the objective quantification of media frames, which in turn allowed us to conduct a robust comparative analysis across time periods (2014 & 2023) and outlets (DN & SvD). Further, by applying the same set of criteria across all 60 articles, it allowed us to track shifts in framing and in turn link these changes to broader political, editorial and societal trends. This approach also aided

us in identify high-frequency frames such as the attribution of responsibility frame and the rise in the human interest frame, thus showing the evolving nature of media narratives in response to external factors.

However, the rigor of our framework also introduced certain limitations. The process, although meticulous, sometimes became mechanical, in turn distancing the analysis from the human reality of the conflict. In choosing to focus on the quantitative aspect of the conflict, we inherently introduced a risk of overlooking the qualitative aspects that convey deeper meanings and implications. This resulted in an ever rising human death toll and tragic implications on real human lives being turned in to merely another data point made up of a binary yes (1) or no (0).

On a more technical note, we also identified a possible risk in the uneven distribution of questions per frame in the analysis, with certain frame categories having only three questions each, while other frame categories had four or five questions each. This in turn could entail skewed results if the distribution of questions is uneven, while also having the possibility of affecting any conclusions drawn from the study, potentially leading to flawed or biased interpretations. This could be mitigated by conducting an exercise where each frame is weighted differently based on the number of questions it encompasses. Such an exercise would make sure that frames with fewer questions do not disproportionately influence the overall results, and thus maintaining a balanced representation. However, we chose to not conduct such an exercise as the original framework could be designed in a way that each question varies in its scope and impact, intentionally reflecting the differing significance and reach of each frame within the broader context of the analysis of the articles.

Having recognized these limitations early on, we argue that further qualitative elements of framing analysis would be useful. As a complement to this framework, we also included a small qualitative element in our analysis when examining how specific actors were portrayed and also the language used to describe them, thus going beyond the rigid framework we set out to follow. This approach in turn allowed us to see the shift in how Hamas was labelled during different time periods, thus provided insights into the ideological and political undercurrents influencing the media narratives.

Based on both the positives and the negatives as brought up previously, we argue that while generic framing allowed us to through a structured and replicable way gain valuable insights into the framing of the Israel-Palestine conflict, it also calls for a qualitative aspect as a complement to be able to capture the full spectrum of shifts in media framing of the conflict. Therefore, future research could benefit from a mixed-methods approach, combining the rigor of quantitative analysis with the depth of a qualitative approach. Such an approach would not only enhance our understanding of the mechanics of framing but also the content's impact on public empathy, sentiment, and ultimately policy.

## 7. Conclusions

The central focus of this thesis was to examine how the Swedish media frames the Israel-Palestine conflict. In doing so we have looked at how these frames have evolved over time, particularly during two key events: the Israeli invasion of Gaza in 2014 and the Hamas attack on Israel in 2023, and across two media outlets: DN and SvD. This analysis has subsequently illuminated disparities in the media framing of the conflict, to some extent reflecting broader political shifts in Sweden.

In sum, our findings show that while the attribution of responsibility frame remains consistently prominent, its usage has evolved. In 2014, this frame was predominantly used to portray Israel as the principal aggressor, with less emphasis put on Hamas' role in the conflict. By 2023, however, there was a slight shift towards a more balanced attribution, where we saw an increased labelling of Hamas as 'terrorists' and to a higher degree a depiction of their actions as illegitimate. This shift suggests a change in media portrayal toward non-unison framing that in turn aligns with a diverging Swedish foreign policy stance and lack of elite consensus among the coalition today. Moreover, by 2023, one could see an identifiable increase in the human interest frame, which pushed individual stories and personal impacts to the forefront, giving them a central role to the narrative of the conflict. This increase not only highlights a strategic shift towards humanizing the conflict, but it also reflects a broader medial trend towards personalization and sensationalism.

There are also slight differences between how DN and SvD frame the conflict, possibly highlighting how ideological affiliations can influence media framing. We can on the one hand see that the liberal outlet (DN), has increasingly focused on humanizing the narrative, which could potentially be to foster a more empathetic understanding of the conflict. This can

be seen as DN aligning itself with basic tenets of liberalism. On the other hand, the conservative outlet (SvD), while having maintained a strong emphasis on the conflict and accountability aspects, reflecting a preference for portraying stark divisions and the dynamics of confrontation, has not as clearly aligned itself with a conservative ideological stance.

The small differences between how DN and SvD frame the conflict can also be interpreted as disproving the alarming tone in the previous literature regarding ideological bias in the press and the risk of polarization. It is however worth noting that this might also be because the liberal and conservative parties in Sweden are not that far apart ideologically, with the parties representing these ideological positions sitting in the same coalition government today. Therefore, if we would have diverged from the methodological decision to go for only quality press, and instead included a left-leaning tabloid such as Aftonbladet or Expressen, the bias might have potentially been easier to observe.

In regard to this thesis, we believe the degree of reliability to be high, bolstered by purposeful steps such as detailed transparency in the data selection, coding, and analysis processes. The usage of binary coding in combination with a rigid analytical framework also enhances the replicability of our findings, supported by a high degree of intercoder reliability to minimize subjectivity. Further, by adhering to systematic approaches when it comes to our data collection and analysis, we argue that this enhances the trustworthiness of results, thus ensuring a high internal validity. However, the external validity of our findings poses certain limitations. While our conclusions may be applicable to other events within the Israel-Palestine conflict, the transferability of results to other conflicts is constrained by the distinct nature of each conflict.

We argue that our thesis enriches the existing literature on media framing, especially so in a Swedish context regarding how political contexts and ideological leanings can influence media portrayal of international conflicts such as the Israel-Palestine conflict. Our thesis has also shown that future research would benefit from using a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods to fully capture the depth and complexities of media framing within a conflict such as the Israel-Palestine conflict. This approach would not only deepen understanding but also highlights areas for future investigation. Further, as the conflict is still ongoing today, there is the possibility that the Israel-Palestine conflict has evolved in 2024. This could entail that the media framing and the attribution of responsibility might shift. By looking at 2024, future research could therefore explore how narratives and public opinions have evolved over time. We also took strategic decisions not to include tabloids because of problematic approaches with their reporting (Nordström, 2002). The choice to remove tabloids resulted in major news outlets from the social-democratic spectrum being removed, such as Aftonbladet and Expressen. Therefore, this presents an opportunity for future research to look at not only how Swedish tabloids frame the Israel-Palestine conflict but also how the broader political spectrum frames the conflict.

Through our analysis of how Swedish media, and more specifically DN and SvD, frames the Israel-Palestine conflict we have shown that the framing of the conflict is surprisingly similar, with small shifts being identified. On the one hand, DN more closely aligns with basic tenets of liberalism, which supports our hypothesis regarding ideological bias. Conversely, DN demonstrates a much lower degree of alignment with basic tenets of conservatism in their reporting, thereby distancing themselves from our hypothesis on ideological bias. As seen with DN however, by aligning their reporting with liberal ideologies and portraying subtle underlying biases, they not only reflect but also have the possibility to influence public

opinion. Subsequently, as we have seen in the literature review, policymakers rely heavily on public opinion and media narratives to inform their decision-making. Thus, underlying bias within the media can, in turn, sway policymaking. Further, we have been able to identify a possible trend towards humanized reporting, particularly by DN, which not only promotes empathy and a deeper understanding of complex conflicts, but also raises the risk of sensationalism, potentially distorting public perceptions of events. Thus, we believe our findings emphasise the importance of developing critical media literacy to allow for informed news consumption and stresses the need for legislators to critically engage with media influences. Subsequently, we believe that our findings shine light on the role that media has in constructing social realities, thus further highlighting the need for an informed approach toward media consumption in today's democratic society.

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## 9. Appendix

Figure 1. Retriever article frequencies 2012-2024

TIDSPERIOD

2012-01-01 - 2024-02-28

Sökning: israel\* AND palestin\*

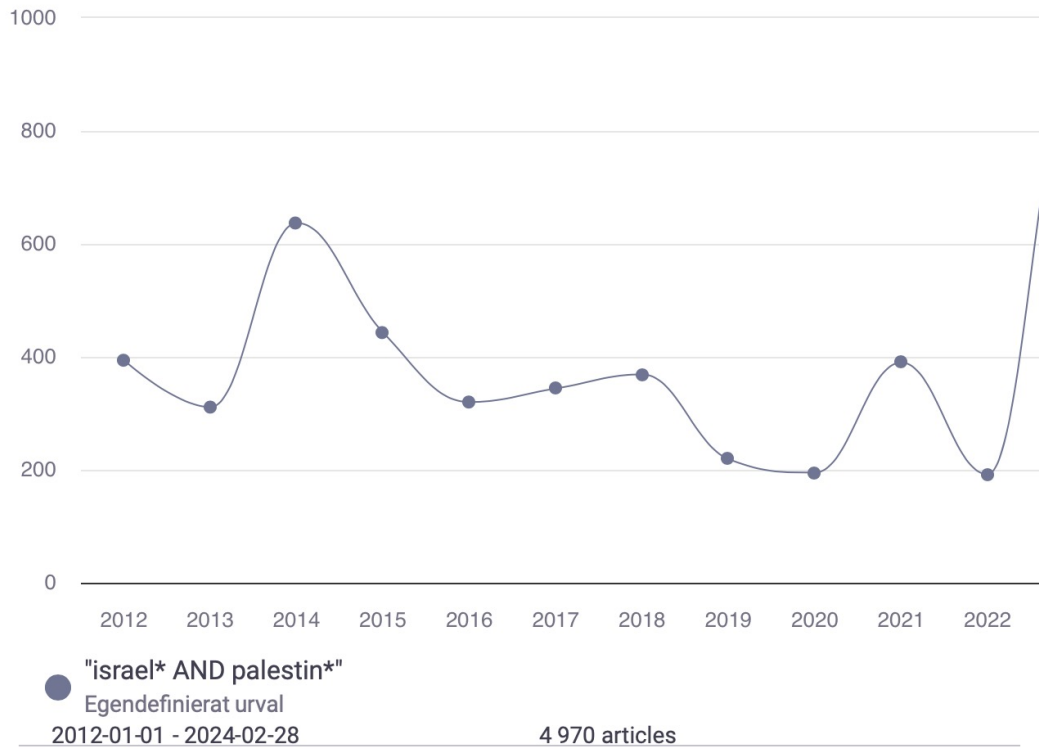


Figure 2. Retriever article frequencies 2014

TIDSPERIOD

2014-01-01 - 2014-12-31

Sökning: israel\* AND palestin\*

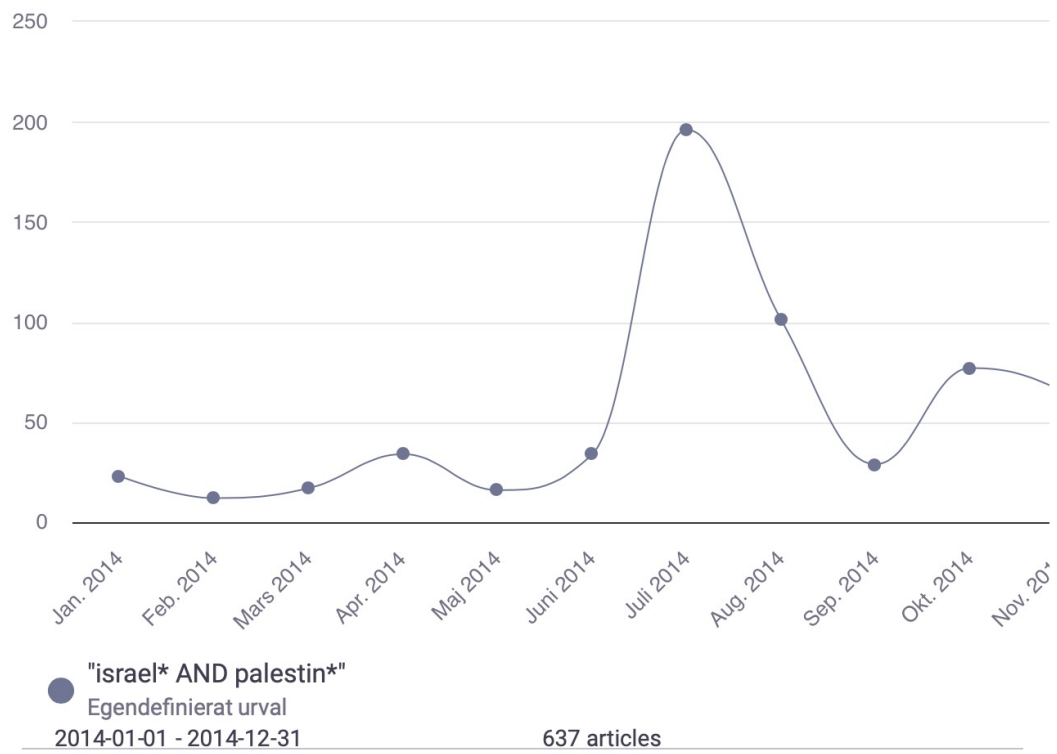




Figure 3. Retriever article frequencies 2023

TIDSPERIOD

2023-01-01 - 2023-12-31

Sökning: israel\* AND palestin\*

