FRAMING WAR

UTS Centre for Media Transition

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We thank the researchers Alana Su-Navratil, Gary Dickson and Tamara Markus who contributed to the preliminary research on this project. We also thank CMT Co–Director Professor Derek Wilding, Research Fellow Dr Michael Davis and Associate Professor Sacha Molitorisz for their advice.

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Suggested citation: Attard, M., Radina, A. 2026. *Framing War.* Centre for Media Transition, University of Technology Sydney, Australia, cmt.uts.edu.au. DOI: doi.org/10.71741/4pyxmbnjaq.34741722

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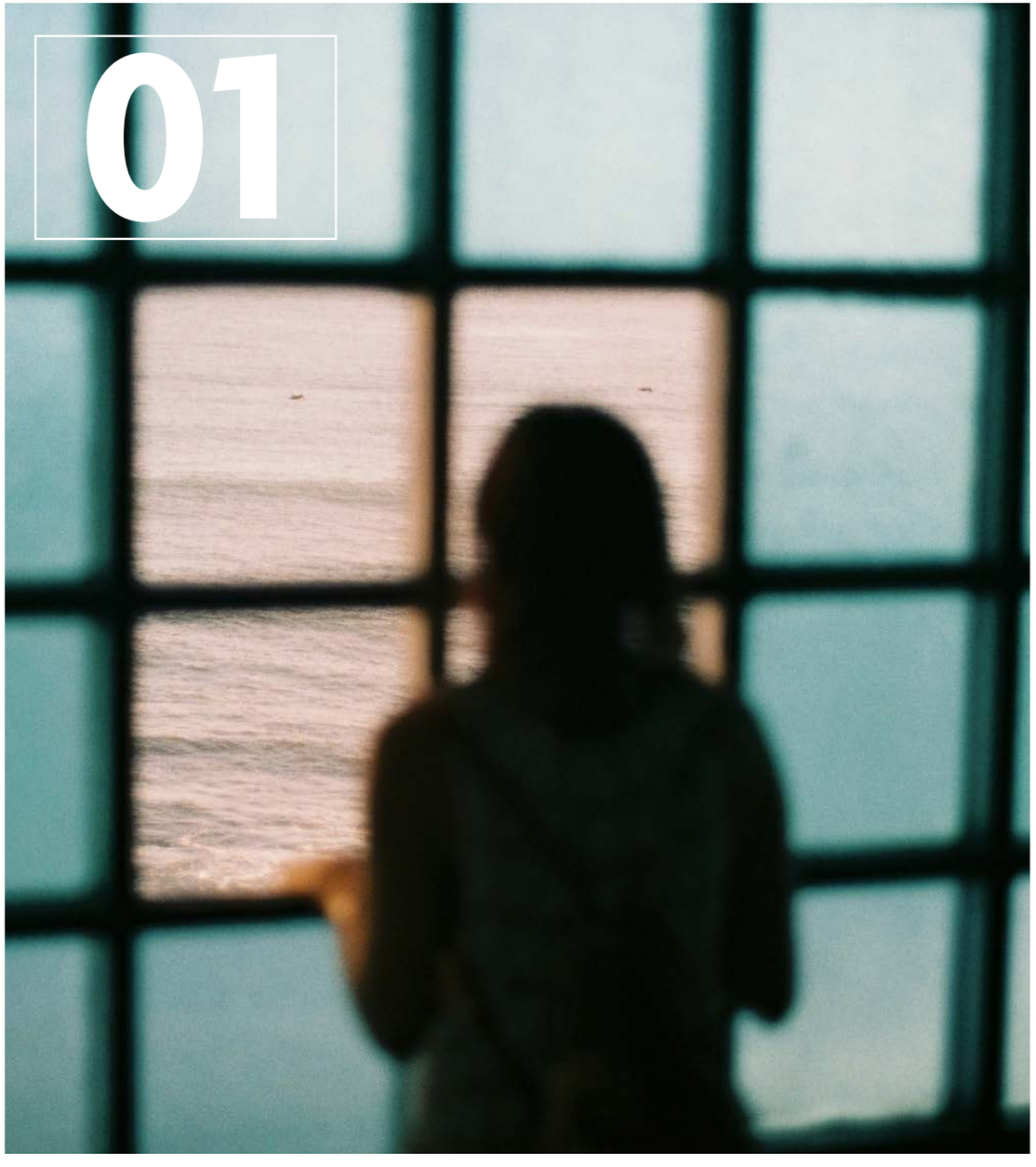


01

TWO CONFLICTS AND JOURNALISM

This study emerges from the media coverage of two wars — Israel–Gaza and Russia–Ukraine — both of which have generated considerable public and academic scrutiny. The research focused on limited coverage of four Australian media organisations across selected events that attracted heightened media attention reporting. Using framing analysis, the study explored the rhetorical devices used by the surveyed outlets which promoted particular interpretations of events.

This study does not claim that bias or advocacy exists in the reporting of either conflict. To make such a claim, the issue of intent would need to be explored in interviews with the journalists and editors responsible for the coverage. Using content analysis of published stories, the researchers can address only the balance or imbalance in the use and treatment of the frames through which the conflict was presented, as well as how sources were used and how unfolding events on the ground were contextualised.

In this chapter, we give background for both the Israel–Gaza and Russia–Ukraine conflicts that we have made as fact-based as possible, including by drawing on a series of academic sources.

Israel–Gaza war

The Israeli–Palestinian conflict has endured for decades, since the 1948 Nakba which displaced an estimated 750,000 Palestinians during the creation of the state of Israel. Its most recent and ongoing iteration began on 7 October 2023, when the ruling militant group in Gaza, Iranian-backed Hamas, aided by Palestinian Islamic Jihad combatants, launched a surprise attack on Israeli communities and military positions near the Gaza Strip. The attack involved firing a barrage of rockets across southern Israel and the breaching of Israeli land security barriers separating Israel and Gaza by approximately 1,000 Hamas fighters (United Nations, 2024). The attack, including the assault on the Supernova festival held in the desert of southern Israel to coincide with the Jewish festival of Sukkot, saw Hamas-led militants infiltrate 22 Israeli towns and army bases and led to the first battles between Israeli and Arab forces on Israeli soil in decades. According to Israeli sources cited by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry, more than 1,200 people were killed, of whom at least 809 were civilians and the remaining, Israeli military personnel. At least 252 people were kidnapped (some have been released, some were killed when kidnapped, and others were killed during Israel's strikes on Gaza (United Nations, 2024)). The killings constituted the deadliest attack on Jewish civilians since the Holocaust. Dubbed 'Al-Aqsa Flood' by Hamas, the objectives were stated as avenging the Israeli desecration of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in Jerusalem in April 2023, in which 50 Palestinians were injured and 400 were arrested, and in retaliation for Israel's occupation of the West Bank and blockade of Gaza (Sen, 2023).

The next day, October 8, 2023, the Israeli Government declared war for the first time since the Yom Kippur war of 1973 when Israel was surprised by a multi-fronted attack and sustained heavy losses (Kingsley & Kershner, 2023). Israel retaliated against Hamas with massive firepower.

Within weeks, the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) had killed tens of thousands of Palestinians in Gaza, in a show of force triggering a humanitarian crisis. According to the Gaza Ministry of Health, as of September 2026, 73,658 Palestinians had been killed, 174,622 had been injured (SANA, 2026), more than 10 percent of Gaza's total pre-war population of 2.1 million (Crawford, 2025). Approximately 100,000 had exited the territory, and 90 percent of the Gaza population had been forced to move at least once to escape bombardment. Despite having disputed these figures, Israel now accepts that the death toll compiled by the Gaza Health Ministry is "broadly correct" (Graham-Harrison, 2026). The destruction of hospitals and food points has contributed to what the United Nations Human Rights Council has called a humanitarian crisis (Human Rights Council, 2025a).

In January 2024, South Africa accused Israel of genocide in Gaza in the International Court of Justice (ICJ), the United Nations' top court based in the Hague in the Netherlands and established after World War II to settle disputes between states. South Africa argued that Israel's retaliation against Hamas was genocidal in character because the acts "are intended to bring about the destruction of a substantial part of the Palestinian national, racial and ethnical group" (International Court of Justice, 2023). Israel responded it was Hamas itself which had genocidal intentions, rejecting the claim it was carrying out a genocide, and claimed to be acting in self-defence.

The ICJ did not determine that there was a plausible case for genocide, but rather that the Palestinians in Gaza had plausible rights to be protected from genocide under the Genocide Convention, requiring Israel to take steps to prevent a risk of genocidal acts and enable humanitarian aid (International Court of Justice, 2024). In September 2025, the United Nations Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and Israel released a report concluding that Israel had committed genocide against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip (Human Rights Council, 2025b), and the June 2026 report detailed instances of alleged crimes against Palestinian children since the start of the Gaza war in October 2023 through to March 2026 (United Nations, 2026). The inquiry noted that Israeli security forces had deliberately carried out "acts inflicting death and severe bodily and mental harm on hundreds of thousands of Palestinian children, irreparably destroying the sanctity of childhood, including family ties, identity, innocence, safety and future" (United Nations, 2026).

Under sustained and overwhelming bombardment by the IDF, little remains of Gaza City in 2026. It has been described by a BBC journalist as a "monochrome landscape of rubble stretching flat and still for 180 degrees, from Beit Hanoun on one side to Gaza City on the other" (Williamson, 2025). Israel still has not permitted international news organisations to report freely from within Gaza, offering tightly controlled, military-escorted visits. These embedded visits do not offer access to Palestinians, while information gathered is scrutinised by the IDF. In any event, relatively few embedded visits into Gaza have occurred.

Within these restricted reporting conditions, competing narratives have emerged. The Hamas administration has claimed an alarmingly high death toll, the use of starvation as a tool of war, and the deliberate targeting of civilians and journalists. In contrast, Israel at first disputed Hamas's death toll claims, and continues to deny using starvation as a tool of war, retorting that it only attacks areas where Hamas fighters are known to be hiding. Israel has also repeatedly denied targeting journalists despite estimates by the International Federation of Journalists that 240 Palestinian reporters have been killed (International Federation of Journalists, 2026).

Russia–Ukraine war

More than a year before the Israel–Gaza conflict re-opened, the simmering Russia–Ukraine conflict entered a new intensified phase when, on 24 February 2022, about 140,000 Russian troops stationed on the near 2,000-kilometre border between the two independent nations began moving into Ukraine, marking the start of the biggest conflict in Europe since World War II (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022). Russia called it a "special military operation." Ukraine and much of the global community called it an "invasion." This conflict too has long antecedents. In 2013, after sustained Russian pressure on Ukraine not to sign a trade agreement with the European Union, an uprising against Russian influence in Ukraine, known as the Revolution of Dignity, led to violence, and Ukraine's then pro-Moscow president was ousted from office (Ukrainian Research Institute, 2024). In 2014, armed Russian personnel, bearing no insignia, appeared across Crimea, blockading Ukrainian military bases, while a referendum held by Russia showed support for the territory's incorporation into Russia (BBC, 2014). The United Nations General Assembly passed a resolution affirming Ukrainian sovereignty and territorial integrity, rejecting the validity of the referendum. In the years preceding the major escalation of the conflict in 2022, Russian-backed militants had seized towns and cities in Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, declaring the Donetsk People's Republic (DPR) and the Luhansk People's Republic (LPR). With Russia supporting the DPR and LPR, Ukraine was unable to retake the territories.

Throughout the winter of 2021–2022, as Russia's build-up of military troops along the Ukrainian border increased concerns about possible large-scale military action against Ukraine, the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, insisted there was no such intention. Instead, Russia argued that its military manoeuvrings were defensive, framing the NATO military alliance as an existential threat to Russia. Russian officials claimed that NATO intended to place US missile defence shields in Ukraine and, since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, had been increasing its presence in the former USSR, which Russia considered its traditional sphere of influence, and across Eastern Europe (Putin, 2022). Russia also claimed Ukraine had violated or failed to meet the protocols of the Minsk I and II agreements, mediated by France and Germany to de-escalate or end the Donbas conflict between Russian separatists backed by Moscow and Ukrainian military forces. Both Russia and Ukraine had claimed violations of the agreements, which called, among other measures, for an immediate ceasefire monitored by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), local elections in parts of Donetsk and Luhansk under Ukrainian law, and provisions for self-governance in those areas. In December 2021, Russia sent an ultimatum to NATO, demanding the alliance end all activity in its Eastern European member states and ban Ukraine or any former Soviet republic from ever joining NATO (Tétrault-Farber & Balmforth, 2021). No country bordering Russia had joined NATO since 2004. NATO General Secretary Jens Stoltenberg asserted that "Russia has no veto" on Ukraine's relations with the alliance and further that "Russia has no right to establish a sphere of influence to attempt the control of its neighbours' actions and intentions" (Basu, 2021). Despite NATO offering greater transparency in its dealings with Ukraine in return for Russia pulling back its troop build-up along the border, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy appeared equivocal on the question of NATO membership, stating only that he did not "anticipate" his country would join the alliance in the near future (Carey et al., 2022).

Russia reiterated its earlier vow to "eliminate unacceptable threats" to its security (Roth, 2022a) and argued that Ukrainian membership of NATO would directly threaten Russia because the alliance would use Ukraine to launch a surprise attack (Reuters, 2022).

When Russia launched its "special military operation" in February 2022 (banning and penalising the use of the word 'war' to describe the military action), it said the move was necessary to demilitarise and de-Nazify Ukraine. President Putin argued that Ukraine was "an inalienable part of our own history, culture and spiritual space" and that a neo-Nazi puppet regime under Volodymyr Zelenskyy was now ruling it (Putin, 2022). Ukraine maintained Russia's motivation was imperialist rather than defensive. Competing narratives emerged, each side labelling the other's propaganda. The Russia–Ukraine human toll is contested.

Since 24 February 2022, the UN Human Rights Monitoring Mission has reported at least 16,874 civilians killed and 51,273 injured in Ukraine (United Nations Ukraine, 2026). In addition, the Centre for Strategies and International Studies (CSIS, 2026) has placed the Ukrainian military casualties as between 525,000 and 625,000 and estimated fatalities between 125,000 and 150,000. There are no official, publicly available statistics on Russian military casualties and deaths, though the CSIS (2026) has estimated there are approximately 1.4 million Russian military casualties of which an estimated 400,000 to 450,000 have been killed, to June 2026. The Russian Foreign Ministry (2026) cites that approximately 8,500 Russian civilians have been killed and 22,500 injured as a result of Ukrainian military attacks, to June 2026.

In this conflict too, a degree of narrative fracturing can be observed, particularly on social media (Mir et al., 2023; Utulu, 2024). In this case, it has focused on whether Russia's claims of a security threat posed by the possibility of Ukraine joining NATO was a credible motivation for their invasion; whether Russia's actions in Ukraine reflected broader imperial ambitions and centred on a full-scale takeover of the former Soviet republic; and further, whether US and NATO support of Ukraine indicated it was a proxy war between the two former Cold War enemies, thus preventing speedy resolution (Ibrahim et al., 2025). Unlike the war between Hamas and Israel,

the Russia–Ukraine conflict did not generate the same volume of sustained debate as to whether news media coverage favoured one side over the other. Nevertheless, academic research has found that western media largely reproduced their respective state narratives relying on political elites (Roman et al., 2017) while giving limited space to competing interpretations (Bergman & Hearns-Branaman, 2024), morally evaluating Russia's actions in Ukraine (Parmelee et al., 2024), and negatively portraying Putin, primarily relying on historical motives to reassert Russian influence (Franch et al, 2025).

Both wars were brought into focus in 2026 when Israel and the United States launched renewed joint air strikes against their long-term enemy Iran, targeting military and leadership assets. In this second phase of the war against Iran, the country's supreme leader, the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed. In retaliation, Lebanon-based, Iran-backed Hezbollah initiated drone strikes against northern Israel. In response, Israel renewed its military campaign against southern Lebanon, leaving more than one million people displaced and causing thousands of casualties (Reuters,2026). Iran has launched retaliatory military action against Israel and US military assets in the Gulf States. The vital Strait of Hormuz has been closed since the conflict escalated. As a result of the impact on oil markets globally, the United States temporarily lifted oil sanctions against Russia, causing consternation and protest from Ukraine's European allies, which claimed the action had strengthened Russia's ability to continue its war against its neighbour.

The backlash

The Israel–Gaza conflict has engendered a high degree of social fracturing in Australia and elsewhere and given rise to marked increases in both antisemitism (Nathan, 2025) and Islamophobia (Carland et al., 2025). Most notably, an antisemitic terror incident at Bondi Beach in NSW on 14 December 2025 (Ting et al., 2026), which resulted in the deaths of 15 people, has intensified a deep schism in Australian society. The attack on a group of Jews celebrating Hanukkah at the iconic Sydney beach is currently the subject of a Royal Commission into Antisemitism (Bell, 2026), with the final report to be handed down in December 2026. The attack occurred amid a series of antisemitic incidents since the 7 October attack, including the doxxing of Jewish creatives and academics communicating on WhatsApp (Lowrey, 2024), the intimidation of Jewish students and staff at the University of Sydney (Hare, 2025), and a string of firebombings, arson, and graffiti, some of which were later found to be linked to organised crime and others to Iran, that prompted the Director General of ASIO to declare antisemitism incidents had become the agencies number one priority in terms of threat to life (Chatterjee, 2025).

Until mid-2026, there were almost weekly pro-Palestinian marches attracting large crowds of people in various Australian cities, and since 7 October 2023, numerous incidents of professional employees punished for the expression of sympathy with the Palestinian cause have been reported. Amongst these were Antoinette Lattouf, removed from a five-day presenting stint on ABC Local Radio following orchestrated pro-Israel lobbying (Federal Court of Australia, 2025), and Dr Randa Abdel Fattah, whose removal from the slate of writers scheduled to appear at the renowned Adelaide Writers Week in 2026 triggered the collapse of the festival and resignation of its artistic director, Louise Adler (Story, 2026). Pianist Jayson Gillham lost an unlawful discrimination case against the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra over the cancellation of his contract after he accused Israel of targeting journalists in its war on Gaza, without first clearing the statement with the orchestra's management (Robin, 2026).

There has been torrid social media debate in Australia too, a significant amount of which centred on whether Australian news coverage has been balanced. Commentators have accused mainstream media organisations of pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian bias. Mainstream media has been accused of being influenced by a so-called Israeli lobby or otherwise favouring Israel in ways consistent with Australia's broader geopolitical leanings, including its consideration of Israel as an ally and the Australian government's expressed commitment to maintaining relations with Israel's primary partner in its war on Hamas (and its 2025 war on Iran and Lebanon), the United States. On the other hand, there has also been significant and loud criticism that news media reporting has been notably sympathetic to the Palestinian cause; commentator Chris Kenny claimed that ABC news coverage of the war was so "jaundiced and deceptive that it was contributing to a climate that has seen the incitement of hatred against Jewish Australians" (Kenny, 2026). On social media sites such as X (or Twitter as it was known in 2022-2023), reporters have been accused of bias and media outlets labelled propaganda outfits.

The backlash against media coverage in Australia began early in the Israel–Gaza conflict, when in 2023 some 270 media workers, backed by the journalist's union, the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, signed a petition calling for "ethical reporting on the war on Gaza" (Open Letter, Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, 2023). The petition called for news outlets in Australia to adhere to truth over what it called "bothsidesism" in the reporting of the conflict, and for the most stringent journalistic principles to be applied in coverage. As noted by Denis Muller (2024), bothsidesism is a term used to describe the journalistic practice of presenting both sides of an issue to seemingly create balance, without regard to the relative merit of arguments for which evidence can be provided. Opponents of this rhetorical practice argue that it falsely equates competing viewpoints, presenting equal validity to both, and that it can be used to give wrongdoers a platform (Muller, 2024). The term is also often used to diminish the value of impartiality in journalism practice.

The petition signed by Australian media workers implied that Australian media coverage of the Israel–Gaza war had, in the two months since the Hamas attack, been pro-Israel. It called for the application of "as much professional scepticism when prioritising or relying on uncorroborated Israeli government and military sources to shape coverage as is applied to Hamas [...] The Israeli government's version of events should never be reported verbatim without context or factchecking" (Open Letter, 2023). Further, it called for "adequate coverage be given to credible allegations against Israel of war crimes, genocide, ethnic cleansing and apartheid" (Open Letter, 2023). The ABC responded that it would report the use of terms such as "genocide" and "war crimes" by sources but would not assert them as fact itself, adding that the public broadcaster would not pick sides (Muller, 2023). Noting the difficulties of producing objective journalism, then ABC Managing Director David Anderson said, "It is possible for the ABC to accurately describe the shocking attacks in Israel while also providing coverage of the shocking conditions being experienced by civilians in Gaza, as well as appropriate historical context. More broadly, without the careful interrogations provided by the ABC, the partisan bubbles on either side would float free, intact, and undisturbed" (ABC, 2023h). Nine Media banned reporters who had signed the petition from reporting on the conflict claiming those who signed the petition had put the impartiality of the signees into doubt. The Guardian strongly advised its reporters not to imperil their personal impartiality and that of the publication by signing public petitions. The petition served as a lightning rod for persistent accusations that Australian mainstream news coverage of the Israel–Gaza war was biased towards Israel, in part because of a refusal to use terms such as "genocide" and "war crimes" to describe the intent and effect of the Israeli military bombardment of Gaza. However, the debate also focused attention on how legacy media framed the conflict and in particular which narratives were privileged and whether these framing choices indicated that the objectivity claimed by media outlets in their reportage of the conflict was compromising truth-telling.

Objectivity vs advocacy

Whilst both objective journalism and advocacy journalism share the same aim of providing information from which audiences can make sound decisions, they differ markedly in process, result, and audience perception. Whilst there are many definitions of objective journalism, most agree that it is journalism which pursues the aim of creating a safe, healthy, and fully functioning society by giving people the reliable, researched, and verified information gathered impartially, needed to take part in the democratic process (Maras, 2013; Raeijmaekers & Maeseele, 2017). Its central operational elements are critical to its aim: an obligation to the truth (executed through practices associated with fairness and balance), independence from those it covers (evidenced by unequivocal impartiality), the verification of information (a set of practices which produce factual accuracy), and integrity and transparency (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014).

Objective journalism practice is more or less settled. It begins with an event or issue which is subjected to balanced research via fairly conducted interviews with those holding various viewpoints or knowledge, and impartial information collation overseen by a set of ethical guidelines. The journalist uses a process of reasoned elimination to discard untruths (Sunderland, 2019) in order to seek out the closest approximation of the truth or "positive epistemic valence" (Rauch, 2021, p. 121). The remaining information is then subjected to a process of verification which generally takes the form of factchecking, to assist in eliminating error. The

result can be imperfect. Without claiming absolute certainty, it provides a functional approximation of truth through a 'journalism of verification' (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014). Or as Sunderland notes, "It listens to all views, works as hard as it can to identify and eliminate any prejudices or assumptions of its own. It then reports those facts, providing the context required to understand what is being reported. It understands the difference between facts (which are true and verifiable) and opinions, which are the many and varied views about those facts" (Sunderland, 2019). This examination of multiple positions allows the journalist to arrive at a practical truth.

Objectivity is not the core guiding principle of advocacy journalism, even though its practitioners also claim their aim is to create a safe, healthy, and fully functioning society. Whilst it follows a similar journalistic process, beginning with an event or issue, it deviates from objective journalism in that its starting point is a single hypothesis. It adopts a position that "It's not good enough for journalism just to fling everything on the wall and see what sticks" (Jericho, 2019), particularly in a context of proliferating information disorder and viewpoint extremism. Fairness and balance matter only when there is merit, as determined by the journalist, on both or multiple sides. As Jericho (2019) argues, "Sometimes the better part of the journalist's job is not to report, not to interview, not to hold to account." The difference between objective and advocacy journalism lies in part in the intent of the journalists in their treatment of competing viewpoints. Perspectives considered to be without merit can be ignored or de-privileged regardless of the fact they may be honestly held.

Advocacy journalism can be viewed as a subjective methodology in which journalists may engage in a form of "strategic silence" by choosing not to cover certain topics in order to reduce harm and/or prevent manipulation (Donovan & Boyd, 2021). Public benefit can attach to strategic silence. One example is the refusal of journalists to name the perpetrator of the 2019 Christchurch massacre. The rationale was that the attacker of Islam worshippers intended his written manifesto of hatred to be amplified by news media; naming him would make access to the material easier for the general population and inflict moral harm on the victims' families.

To help journalists discern when there is benefit to strategic silence, Jericho (2019) cites the American communications scholar, Whitney Phillips, who suggests that editorial staff should ask a series of questions before reporting a claim:

> *"If I don't report this will the story go away? If yes, then why are you reporting it? Would our knowledge be improved by debunking the lies being spouted? Is there a political or social-action point that would help people recognise manipulation campaigns? Finally, is the risk of entrenching/rewarding the falsehood in some stories worth dislodging the falsehood in others? These questions take us away from the standard 'we need to hold people to account' position and move us closer to 'does this person deserve being held to account, or will my doing so merely assist their cause?' If your model of journalism sees you unconcerned whether interviewing an extremist will lead to those views being more widely spread, because you feel it is more important they be seen to be 'held to account', then fine"* (Jericho, 2019).

This approach gives the journalist agency as a player, discarding the much-debated contention that journalists have a capacity to leave their prejudices at the door and accepting that those prejudices are in fact an important act of journalism.

However, the intentional pushing of ideas or voices, or advocacy of viewpoints is amongst the major factors cited by Australian audiences as contributing to distrust in news media (Flew et al., 2020). At the same time, research of American audiences shows trust is predicated on several factors (Barthel & Mitchell, 2017), including the sources cited within the story (51 percent), the news organisation that published the story (48 percent), their gut instinct (30 percent), and the person who shared the story (26 percent) (McKewon, 2018).

Framing–where objectivity hits a roadblock

Objectivity that demands facts without personal bias can be undermined by the subjective processes involved in news selection and framing, acknowledging the reality that journalists choose which stories to cover, who they speak to, which facts are surfaced, and how they are presented (Entman, 1993).

Framing theory examines the rhetorical devices that are used by journalists to promote particular interpretations of events. Whilst there is no single, agreed definition of framing (Cacciatore et al., 2016), there is common acceptance that a frame is a "central organising idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1994, p. 376). The frames select, emphasise, and present (Lakoff, 2014) particular aspects of a perceived reality to amplify, shape, or simplify a message (Klein & Amis, 2021), thereby promoting a particular problem, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993, p. 52). While often presented as neutral or unintentional, framing devices unavoidably introduce bias, since choices of which frame to deploy and under what circumstances are made by individual reporters or editors in interactive processes with their audience. Framing choices can be influenced by professional priorities, journalistic routines, personal experiences, and interpretations of events (Boudana, 2016). Interpretations of a narrative can be changed through omittance, inclusion, emphasis, ordering, and contextualisation of facts as well as language and sources used. These framing devices can lead to significant differences in how audiences think about controversial issues (Lecheler & De Vreese, 2018).

This was observed by Price et al. (1997) across two experiments, in which four news frames were used. They concluded that "by activating some ideas, feelings and values rather than others, then, the news can encourage particular trains of thought about political phenomena and lead audience members to arrive at more or less predictable conclusions" (Price et al., 1997, p. 501).

The effects of news framing, like the definition of framing itself, is a contested area (Lecheler & De Vreese, 2018). However, its function is less contested: to create a paradigm through which a consumer can interpret events. The frames can be identified by the presence or absence of certain keywords, phrases, images, and sources of information, all of which serve to cluster information around a central idea (Entman, 1993). Together, these define how consumers come to think about and interpret events.

In the coverage of war, public discourse can be driven by competing and strongly held geopolitical viewpoints, and when accompanied by a high degree of propaganda, excluding the viewpoint of one side over another via framing choices can lead to the propagation of one narrative over the other which is unlikely to serve the cause of truth. Framing devices can better or worsen this, to bring public understanding closer or further away from a fuller picture of reality, depending on which perspectives are challenged or supported, excluded or amplified. The advancement of particular frames, voices, and contexts, particularly in times of conflict, may leave the way open for ideology or propaganda to take hold or it may widen the availability of information and interpretations of events. When certain moral and ideological perspectives take precedence over historical context, rigorous verification, and the weighing of competing viewpoints and narratives, the advancement of particular frames over others risks presenting only the most morally compelling arguments. Whether this reflects truth or even the closest approximation to truth becomes questionable because the most appealing narratives, including those that gain approval from political actors, are surfaced and privileged without the testing and verification offered by more traditional methodologies of journalism.

Our study examines the framing devices used in the coverage of the Israel–Gaza and Russia–Ukraine conflicts, by four media outlets across specified events. The findings indicate that in relation to both conflicts, the framing devices used achieved different results and likely created the capacity to influence readers in particular direction, which in some instances narrowed available viewpoints and in others widened them. The question of whether these patterns reflect the intent of journalists and editors and constitute advocacy, rather than the appearance of advocacy, is a question for future determination. Finally, the frames chosen for this study's analytical framework do not reflect the researchers' personal viewpoints, and the researchers make no claim as to the veracity of the frame content and assertions. Rather, the frames are summaries of competing narratives advanced by nations involved in the conflicts. The frames used appear on pages 20–23 of this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Across four events in the Russia–Ukraine war and five in the Israel–Gaza war, this study examined the use of frames emerging from all sides and the sources used in the selected event-based reportage to understand which positions were privileged in journalistic coverage.

1 In the Israel–Gaza war coverage, in all but one media outlet, reporting frequently scrutinised Israeli frames while amplifying the humanitarian consequences and Palestinian perspectives that historically received less coverage in western media, contributing to broader audience understanding of the conflict. In the Russia–Ukraine coverage, Western frames were dominant, privileging narratives supported by Western governments with limited space provided to Russian perspectives and historical complexities, narrowing the range of viewpoints available for interpretation of the war.

2 Two percent of our sample across both the Israel–Gaza and Russia–Ukraine coverage provided space to competing Israeli/Palestinian or Western/Russian frames and avoided overt evaluative language. Asymmetries in contextualisation and sourcing were observed.

Israel–Gaza:

3 The Australian was the sole surveyed outlet which privileged Israeli frames (71 percent) and marginalised Palestinian perspectives across sampled articles, amplifying Israeli victimhood from the Hamas attack in October 2023 to the conflict's regional escalation in 2026. It was the only outlet to embed pro-Palestinian advocacy into narratives of antisemitism and social division. Palestinian-aligned frames comprised 3 percent of the paper's coverage across five sampled events, and 2 percent of its overall sample used competing frames simultaneously.

4 The ABC demonstrated more balanced use of frames (42 percent of Israeli frames vs 38 percent Palestinian) across sampled articles; coverage of the Hamas attack included narratives of Israeli victimhood and self-defence, alongside the earliest coverage of Palestinian suffering. As the conflict unfolded, Israeli frames were no longer dominant, while focus turned to the disproportionality of Israeli military action in Gaza. Competing frames were used simultaneously in 2 percent of sampled ABC coverage:

5 Across The Guardian's sample, Israeli frames comprised 33 percent, while Palestinian frames accounted for 54 percent. The outlet demonstrated the most pronounced framing shift from Israeli victimhood and self-defence to Palestinian suffering and scrutiny of the proportionality of Israeli military action. Israeli frames did not appear as dominant from January 2024 through to the 2026 regional escalation. Competing frames were used simultaneously in 2 percent of The Guardian's overall sample.

6 9News.com.au's dominant framing changed as the conflict unfolded, although Israeli-aligned frames remained prevalent, comprising 55 percent of the overall sample. Palestinian frames accounted for 27 percent of the overall sample, outweighing Israeli perspectives during the lower-volume sampled events, and entirely disappeared when the conflict escalated. 3 percent of 9News.com.au's overall sample showed the simultaneous use of competing frames.

Russia–Ukraine:

7 The Australian's sampled coverage of the Russia–Ukraine war was characterised by a democracy–autocracy dichotomy, localised to Indo-Pacific security threats. Russia was portrayed through the voices of Western politicians, defence officials, and security and business analysts as creating a blueprint for China in Taiwan and the South China Sea. Western frames accounted for 57 percent while 0 percent of Russian frames were incorporated as dominant. The simultaneous appearance of competing frames was not identified in any sampled articles.

8 The sampled ABC coverage combined Ukrainian testimony with Western and Ukrainian diplomatic, governmental, and expert voices, at times reinforced by evaluative journalistic narration. Russian voices were limited to Kremlin officials and Russian opposition figures and framed in narratives of authoritarian control, military weakness, and Russia's imminent demise. Western frames accounted for 58 percent while Russian frames accounted for 0 percent. The simultaneous appearance of competing frames was identified in 6 percent of sampled articles.

9 The Guardian's sampled coverage also deployed a democracy–autocracy dichotomy, frequently relying on evaluative journalistic narration and drawing on the highest proportion of Western-aligned sources. Primarily European and Ukrainian politicians, and the Russian opposition amplified a legal and moral framework for the war, delegitimised the Kremlin's war rationale, and reinforced NATO's defensive identity, alongside personal accounts of Ukrainian civilians. Western frames accounted for 74 percent and Russian frames for 0 percent. The simultaneous appearance of competing frames was observed in 1 percent of sampled articles.

10 9News.com.au sampled coverage was characterised by personality-centred and overtly evaluative reporting, with heavy reliance on American, European, and Ukrainian political sources and civilian voices. 9News.com.au gave more space to Russian sources in coverage of one event to infer Russian political fragmentation, and presented competing political and expert perspectives on Washington's temporary sanctions relief for Russia. Western frames accounted for 78 percent of sampled articles while 0 percent of Russian frames emerged as dominant. The simultaneous appearance of competing frames was observed in 0 percent of articles.

02

METHODOLOGY

Using a mixed qualitative–quantitative framing analysis (D'Angelo, 2018; Entman, 1993), the Centre for Media Transition sought to understand which frames and framing devices were used by select Australian news outlets across particular events in their coverage of the Israel–Gaza and Russia–Ukraine conflicts to guide audience interpretation.

Research Questions

RQ1. Which frames were dominant in the Australian media coverage of the Israel–Gaza war during 2023–2026 and the Russia–Ukraine war between 2022–2026?

RQ2: How did the framing choices privilege competing interpretations?

Sampling and data collection

Four news outlets were selected representing differing editorial dispositions and a mix of commercially and publicly funded media organisations:

- The Guardian Australia, acknowledging that the sampled reportage, although published in Australia, emanates from the publication's UK and Middle East-based correspondents;
- 9News.com.au, acknowledging that the site published a significant number of reports on both conflicts from the Associated Press agency and CNN, alongside reporting by Nine Media journalists;
- The ABC online, which published articles produced by its foreign correspondents and Australia-based reporters; and
- The Australian, which similarly published articles produced by its foreign correspondents and Australia-based reporters.

The study used event-based purposive sampling, where information-rich periods of intensified media attention associated with major turning points in the conflicts were intentionally selected (Patton, 2013). Those events generated concentrated media attention around military, humanitarian, geopolitical, and legal debates. The Israel–Gaza conflict was analysed across five events between 2023–2026 (Table 1).

The Russia–Ukraine conflict demonstrated extremely high levels of coverage during the 2022 military offensive, but fewer comparable clusters of media attention during the subsequent years, which is why four events were selected (Table 2).

For the Israel–Gaza conflict, events 1–4 were sampled across two-week periods, capturing the initial spike of attention and the longer tail over the subsequent fortnight. However, event 5, following the US–Israeli attacks on Iran in February–March 2026, demonstrated an exceptionally large volume of coverage and was therefore narrowed to one week to preserve the feasibility of detailed qualitative framing analysis while capturing dominant discursive narratives.

Table 1. Israel–Gaza war sampled events

Events		No. of Articles
1	The Hamas attack on southern Israel (7–21 October 2023)	140
2	The suspension of funding to the United Nations Relief and Work Agency (UNRWA) (26 January–9 February 2024)	30
3	The Israeli invasion of the city of Rafah (7–21 May 2024)	37
4	The imposition of Western sanctions on Israeli ministers in the Netanyahu government (1–14 June 2025)	50
5	The second Iran war (28 February–6 March 2026)	160

Table 2. Russia–Ukraine war sampled events

Events		No. of Articles
1	The initial phase (24 February–10 March 2022)	158
2	The uprising led by Yevgeny Prigozhin's Wagner Group (23 June 2023–7 July 2023)	53
3	The White House meeting between US President Donald Trump, Vice President J.D Vance, and Secretary of State, Marco Rubio with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (28 February–14 March 2025)	90
4	The temporary lifting of sanctions on Russian oil following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz during the second US–Iran conflict (9–23 March 2026)	38

For Israel–Gaza, the corpus was assembled using the Factiva database for The Australian and 9News.com.au. Meanwhile, articles from the ABC News and The Guardian Australia were collected through Google Advance keyword search to minimise the risk of omitting relevant materials. Article availability on Factiva differed across outlets and sampling periods, with some articles available on the outlets' websites but not retrievable through Factiva searches. Once identified via Google Advance keyword search, articles were collected through relevant news outlets' websites. The following keywords were used: "Hamas attack" OR "October 7" (event 1); "UNRWA AND Gaza" OR "Gaza AND Aid" OR "Gaza AND Pause" (event 2); "Rafah" OR "Rafah invasion" (event 3); "Gaza" OR "Gaza AND ceasefire" (event 4); "Iran" (event 5).

For Russia–Ukraine, Factiva was used for the ABC, The Australian, and The Guardian, while a Google Advance search was performed for 9News.com.au. The search terms were: "Ukraine" AND "Russia" (event 1); "Prigozhin" OR "Wagner Group" (event 2); "Trump" AND ("Zelenskyy" OR "Zelensky") AND "White House" (event 3); "Russia* AND oil AND sanctions" (event 4).

The study was limited to straight news articles only. Opinion, analysis, commentary, letters, live blogs, aggregation (such as a "morning briefing" of the day's headlines with a paragraph summarising the key points) pieces, and anything with fewer than 100 words were excluded from the final corpus. A target corpus of approximately 40 articles per outlet, per event was set to maintain comparability across the sample. Where the collected corpus substantially exceeded this number, a systematic sampling approach was taken, whereby every nth article was selected for coding to achieve a manageable sample size. A random starting point between 1 and n was assigned depending on the size of the collected corpus to reduce potential bias caused by periodicity.

Following the exclusion of non-straight-news materials and the application of systematic sampling where necessary, the final sample comprised 417 articles covering Israel–Gaza and 339 articles covering Russia–Ukraine.

The codebook: Frames and sources

The codebook included three identifying codes – date of publication, headline, outlet – and four variables examining framing devices that formed a pattern across the sample – article structure (the sequencing of facts), sources (quoted voices), quotations, and language (treatment and interpretation of events by the journalist). These variables allowed determination of the salience of the frames within an article and an assessment of which functioned as dominant interpretations. As multiple frames can occur within an article, the researchers distinguished between a frame presence and its relative dominance, recognising the methodological difficulties of manual coding within an article of overarching frames (Matthes and Kohring, 2008). Drawing on applications of framing analysis that assess frame prominence through focal points within an article (Tankard et al., 2001; Ugwu & Akase, 2025), such as frame positioning in headlines and lead paragraphs, its recurrence throughout the text, sourcing and quoting patterns, contextualisation, and where present, evaluative journalistic narration (Lecheler & De Vreese, 2018), frame dominance was determined through its salience and sustained development as the main interpretation.

The research used a hybrid deductive–inductive approach to identify and analyse dominant frames and was responsive to emergent discursive patterns. The selected frames were derived from the dominant narratives advanced by major parties involved in the conflicts. The Israel–Gaza frames reflected the recurring narratives which emerged from the government of Benjamin Netanyahu, Palestinian representatives, and the Hamas administration in Gaza. These narratives were extracted from public statements and were translated into an initial set of competing frames (See Table 3 for some examples of such statements). During the coding process, the frame categories and associated sub-themes were inductively refined by the research team through close reading of the sample and examination of how the initial frames were reproduced and modified in media coverage to adequately capture journalistic interpretation as the conflict developed. The fifth Israeli frame, for example, was introduced at the final stage of the research process to reflect the role Israel played with the US in extending the conflict to Iran as a key backer of Hamas. However, as the extension of the conflict to Iran and the broader Middle East did not focus on Gaza or the West Bank, a specific corresponding Palestinian frame was not detected. Instead, the P3 frame, which was originally named as "Palestine is experiencing an unjustified humanitarian crisis" was reworded into "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" to cover the humanitarian toll on Palestinian, Iranian, and Lebanese civilians.

Similarly, the Russia–Ukraine frames reflected competing Russian and Ukrainian/Western geopolitical narratives within political and media discourse, with the former emerging from the Kremlin and the latter from the US-led Western alliance and Ukraine (which is why they were cumulatively labelled as "Western frames") (Table 4). The W4 frame's theme of sanction flexibility was added at the final stages of the research to reflect the temporary lifting of sanctions on Russian oil in response to the closure of the Strait of Hormuz during the war between the US, Israel, and Iran that began on 28 February 2026.

We also included a "no frame"category to avoid "pressing an article into an already existing frame" (Matthes and Kohring, 2008, p. 261). This was applied in various situations: to capture the emergence of new frames outside the codebook; to denote simultaneous or dual frame use of competing frames from our codebook; or to categorise content where an alternative frame was dominant and a predetermined frame appeared as secondary.

As well as dominant frames, the study examined sourcing patterns, including the number and type of quoted sources. Rather than grouping sources by nationality alone, the coding of sources examined the side or perspective they reflected:

- **Pro-Israeli sources** referred to voices supporting Israeli perspectives, irrespective of whether the source itself was Israeli;
- **Pro-Palestinian sources** voiced Palestinian perspectives irrespective of nationality;
- **Pro-Western/Ukrainian** sources supported Ukrainian perspectives irrespective of nationality;
- **Pro-Russian sources** advanced Russian perspectives irrespective of nationality; and
- **Non-aligned sources** offered mixed Israeli and Palestinian, Western/Ukrainian and Russian perspectives, as well as perspectives that were neither and unrelated to the conflicts.

For Event 5, Iranian sources expressing anti-Israeli positions were coded within the pro-Palestinian alignment category for consistency with the study's framework of sources' political alignment, including the comments concerned with the regional escalation of the conflict rather than Gaza specifically.

While every quoted source was counted in every sampled article and categorised according to the perspective it advanced, one overarching source category was further determined per article, depending on which category was given the most authority to drive the narrative, with consideration given to its prominence within the article and the extent of its development and contextualisation (Table 5).

Frame and sourcing frequencies were quantified across the sample, while the ways the outlets framed the conflicts were examined qualitatively, with the help of:

- Sequencing (hierarchy and prominence of facts and competing perspectives) (Zelizer et al., 2002),
- Emotionalisation (the use of graphic descriptions, affective or evaluative vocabulary) (Elmasry, 2024; Kim & Grabe, 2024),
- Contextualisation (selective choice/absence and differences in the explanatory depth of relevant historical, political, social, and diplomatic information through which events and competing interpretations are presented) (Cherkaoui, 2024; Deprez & Raeymaeckers, 2010; Kang & Yang, 2025; Centre for Media Monitoring, 2025), and
- (De)personalisation (reliance on statistics or presentation of parties as identifiable individuals, with a space afforded to personal testimony and lived experience) (Elmasry, 2024; Wolfsfeld et al., 2008).

To ensure reliability and validity, this research followed inductive category development steps (Mayring, 2000): formulation of research questions and coding units; revision of categories after completing the coding of ten percent of the material as a reliability check and discussion of proposed revisions to the codebook and refinements of coding decisions; the analysis of different portions of the sampled articles performed by three coders; and final review and coding of the entire sample by one researcher to ensure cross-sample consistency.

This study does not aim to analyse the entire continuum of coverage of either conflict. Indeed, in this study the scope was very specific. We selected only news articles in four Australian media outlets, excluding published commentary, and analysed quoted sources by type and the perspectives they represented, rather than by national origin alone. It focused on dominant frames across a limited number of key escalation periods that attracted heightened media attention; the week-long or fortnight sampled coverage volume varied across events and outlets. Future researchers could analyse the total coverage across each conflict, expand the corpus size, compare international media outlets, incorporate other media formats, examine the presence of multiple frames occurring within an article rather than focusing on overarching frames, and interview media professionals to gather production-side evidence on editorial practices and decision-making in order to determine intentionality of framing choices and questions of bias, implicit or otherwise. This study also acknowledges the limitations imposed on journalistic coverage by the unequal access to Palestinian voices due to the Israeli government ban on international media entering Gaza and similarly limitations on access to Russian voices due to the Russian government's banning, blocking, and criminalisation of international media since March 2022.

Table 5. Source types

Source type	Examples
Political elites	Zelenskyy, Putin, Netanyahu, Trump, Starmer, Macron, Merz, von der Leyen, Albanese, ministers, diplomats, Gaza Health Ministry
Military and security actors	Israeli Defence Forces, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, Hamas, Ukrainian military, Pentagon, Russian Ministry of Defence, UK Defence Secretary, generals, intelligence officials, police
International, intergovernmental, and legal institutions	UN, United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, United Nations Children's Fund, International Criminal Court, International Court of Justice, European Commission, United Nations Relief Works Agency
Humanitarian organisations, civil society groups, human rights organisations, NGOs	World Vision, Amnesty, Human Rights Watch, Red Cross, NGOs, advocacy groups, charities, Médecins Sans Frontières, Committee to Protect Journalists
Civilians, witnesses	Israelis, Palestinians, Ukrainians, Russians, diaspora voices
Experts, analysts	Think tanks, academics, economists, energy analysts
Business, industry	Energy companies, shipping firms
Journalistic voice	Journalists, media outlets

Table 3. Dominant frames and underlying sub-themes in Israel–Gaza conflict

Israeli frames

Isr1 Israel is the victim and has a right to defend itself

- Israel is innocent and has a right to respond militarily
- Israel is a victim and its attackers are hostile
- International governments accept Israel's right to defend itself

Benjamin Netanyahu: *"We will take mighty vengeance for this black day. All the places where Hamas hides, operates from — we will turn them into cities of ruins"* (Gavin & von der Burchard, 2023).

Isr2 Opposing Israel is antisemitic

- Criticism of Israeli actions is antisemitic
- Opposing Israel is rooted in a broader historical and ongoing persecution of Jewish people

Benjamin Netanyahu: *"These false accusations [that Israel's war is causing starvation in Gaza or that the war is genocidal] are not levelled against us because of the things we do, but because of the simple fact that we exist"* (Goldenberg, 2024).

Palestinian frames

P1 October 7 was justified resistance against Israeli occupation

- Drawing on the history of Palestinian dispossession and suffering, Hamas's attack was an act of acceptable and necessary defence against Israeli occupation

Hamas's report "Our Narrative": *7 October attack was "a necessary step and a normal response to confront all Israeli conspiracies against the Palestinian people"* (Al Jazeera, 2024).

P2 Israeli attacks are disproportionate

- Israel's military actions defy international law and moral principles and qualify as a 'war crime' and/or genocide

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly: *"It is the crime of a full-scale war of genocide that Israel is perpetrating"* (Abbas, 2024).

Israeli frames

Isr3 Israeli victimhood and moral priority

- Violent against Israelis underscores the psychological and physical toll of the Holocaust

Benjamin Netanyahu: *"Saturday, October 7, will forever be remembered as a cursed and dark day for us, and for us it is the most terrifying day for the Jewish people since the Holocaust, first and foremost because of the horrors, which are reminiscent of those horrors, and also because of the pain that is felt by the entire public"* (Netanyahu, 2023a).

Isr4 Hamas must be eliminated

- Hamas is a listed terrorist organisation that threatens Israel's existence and destabilises the region and the world
- The global community believes in coordinated international action to remove Hamas for peace, stability, and democracy

Benjamin Netanyahu: *"Our goal is a decisive victory over Hamas, the toppling of its rule and the removal of its threat on Israel, once and for all"* (Netanyahu, 2023b).

Isr5 The conflict extends beyond Gaza and requires broader regional actions

- Israeli and allied actions are necessary to prevent Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons or expanding its nuclear capacity
- Israel's actions are framed as defensive in relation to Hamas, and the wider regional threat

Benjamin Netanyahu: *"Israel is fighting not only its war, but a war for all of humanity–the war of humanity against barbarism. Our allies in the West and our partners in the Arab world, understand today that if Israel does not win, they will be next in line in the axis of evil's campaign of conquest and murder"* (Netanyahu, 2023c).

Palestinian frames

P3 Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering

- Israel is inflicting collective punishment on civilian populations and causing unjustified large-scale humanitarian devastation and displacement
- Israel's bombing and suspension/disruption of humanitarian aid is unjustified

Hamas's statement: *"[Israel] is depriving innocent civilians of basic necessities of life, including food, medicine, water and fuel, for the seventh consecutive week. We renew our calls for the international community to take action to stop the starvation and blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip"* (Al Jazeera, 2025).

P4 Palestinian views deserve greater recognition and support

- Palestinians have a right to their voice and self-determination
- Hamas is a separate entity to Palestinians

Dr. Riad Malki, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates of the State of Palestine: *"For over a century, the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to self-determination has been denied and violated"* (Malki, 2024).

Table 4. Dominant frames and underlying sub-themes in Russia–Ukraine conflict

Western frames

W1 Russia wishes to restore the USSR and revive its imperial greatness by crushing a democratic state

- The invasion is part of a broader attempt to revive Russian dominance over former Soviet republics
- The invasion is a Russian rejection of democracy and echoes Cold War narratives
- Reports of mass atrocities, targeting of journalists and opposition figures reinforce the portrayal of Russia as a brutal force

Volodymyr Zelenskyy: *"Putin will remain in the Kremlin until his death, and he has one goal — the restoration of the Soviet Union"* (The New Voice of Ukraine, 2026).

W2 NATO's presence within Russia's perceived sphere of influence is not a cause for insecurity and invasion

- NATO is a defensive alliance, not an aggressor
- Russia's portrayal of NATO as a security threat is a pretext for expansionism, military aggression, and consolidation of Putin's domestic support
- Sovereign nations have a right to choose their geopolitical alliances

UK Defence Secretary in the House of Commons: *"No one is trying to "rule" the Russian nation. Only 1/16th of Russia shares a border with a NATO Ally. And NATO is–and always has been–a defensive alliance"* (Wallace, 2022).

NATO Heads of State and Government: *"In light of Russia's actions, we will draw all the necessary consequences for NATO's deterrence and defence posture"* (NATO, 2022).

Russian frames

R1 Russia's 'special military operation' is not an expression of wider imperial ambitions

- The 'special military operation' is necessary and just for Russia to stand up to Western global dominance and end post-Cold-War unipolarity
- Ukraine is an illegitimate Western-controlled state, incapable of functioning without Western support

Vladimir Putin: *"The purpose of this operation is to protect people who, for eight years now, have been facing humiliation and genocide perpetrated by the Kiev regime... To this end, we will seek to demilitarise and denazify Ukraine"* (Putin, 2022b).

R2 NATO undermines Russian sovereignty and causes geo-political insecurity

- NATO's expansion is a direct threat to Russia, and Western security guarantees are empty and untrustworthy
- The West is using NATO to fight a proxy war against Russia
- NATO interferes in Russia's legitimate sphere of influence

Vladimir Putin: *"I am referring to the eastward expansion of NATO, which is moving its military infrastructure ever closer to the Russian border... This is how it was in the 1990s and the early 2000s, when the so-called collective West was actively supporting separatism and gangs of mercenaries in southern Russia..."* (Putin, 2022b).

Western frames

W3 The Russian President is an authoritarian adversary and an irrational actor

- Putin's decision to invade Ukraine was self-destructive and suggestive of the president's psychological instability and personal ambition
- Putin sees liberal democratic order as a threat to his rule
- Russia promotes anti-Western alliances, strengthening ties with China, Iran, North Korea, Syria, and other authoritarian states

A member of the European parliament: *"... this man is losing his sense of reality, to say it politely"* (Borger & Chrisafis, 2022).

European diplomat: *"All our Russia-watchers... think that he's descending even more into a despotic mindset"* (Borger & Chrisafis, 2022).

W4 Economic pressure and sanctions on Russia

- Sanctions are an instrument of punishing and isolating Russia
- Temporary and limited sanction flexibility can be justified to prevent wider disruption to global energy markets, without abandoning broader pressure on Russia
- Russia and Iran are sources of global economic disruption

The G7 statement: *"We will continue and elevate our campaign against the financial elites and family members, who support President Putin in his war effort and squander the resources of the Russian people"* (Deutsche Welle, 2022).

US Treasury: *"The temporary increase in oil prices is a short-term and temporary disruption that will result in a massive benefit to our nation and economy in the long-term"* (Jie, 2026).

Russian frames

R3 The Russian President is a rational protector

- The President is the defender of Russian sovereignty and national interest against western hypocrisy and double standards, hostile media coverage, western sanctions, and military support for Ukraine
- Putin is the guardian of traditional Russian values

Vladimir Putin: *"It is not only a very real threat to our interests but to the very existence of our state and to its sovereignty... one can say with good reason and confidence that the whole so-called Western bloc formed by the United States in its own image and likeness is, in its entirety, the very same "empire of lies"* (Putin, 2022b).

R4 Economic resilience: Russia can withstand sanctions

- Russia can withstand economic crises and sanctions and remain a necessary actor in global energy markets
- Russia is self-sufficient and has established new trade partnerships
- Western economies are struggling from the unintended consequences of sanctions against Russia

Vladimir Putin: *"We are witnessing an artificial disruption of the energy system, driven by the aggressive and assertive actions of certain Western elites... The repercussions of these actions are evident within the European Union... The EU's gambit has only accelerated the shift of our supply direction towards more promising and reliable buyers–states that respect their interests and act rationally based on their national interests"* (Putin, 2025).

03

FRAMING THE ISRAEL–GAZA CONFLICT

The events examined in this chapter begin on 7 October 2023 and end on 6 March 2026.

EVENT 1

On 7 October 2023, Hamas, the militant group which has administrative and political control of Gaza, and Palestinian Islamic Jihad combatants launched an attack on southern Israel, coinciding with the Jewish festival of Sukkot. An estimated 1,000 fighters breached the land security barriers separating Israel and Gaza, killing 1,200 people and taking another 252 people hostages. It was the deadliest attack on Jewish civilians since the Holocaust. In response, the Israeli President Benjamin Netanyahu declared war on Hamas, retaliating within days with massive firepower that has left Gaza in ruins over more than three years of attacks. The Palestinian death toll stands at approximately 73,000, with more than 170,000 injured; at least 90 percent of Gaza's population has been forced to move at least once to escape Israeli firepower. Within this event, 140 articles are examined, between 7 and 21 October 2023.

EVENT 2

In late January 2024, multiple countries suspended funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees following Israeli allegations that 12 of its 30,000 employees had taken part in the Hamas attack. The suspension of funding posed a serious threat to UNRWA's work and the humanitarian efforts to assist civilian Palestinians which followed Israel's retaliation against Hamas. The United States led the pause in funding, followed by other nations including Australia on 27 January 2024. Most countries that suspended funding, including Australia, have now resumed their financial contributions after an independent review found, while systems could be improved, UNRWA had extensive tools in place to ensure neutrality (United Nations Palestine, 2024). Within this event, we have examined 30 articles between 26 January and 9 February 2024.

EVENT 3

On 7 May 2024, Israel mounted an offensive on Rafah, a city on the Egypt–Gaza border. Palestinians in the Gaza Strip had sought shelter in Rafah as other parts of the strip were depopulated under Israeli bombardment. Israel's February 2024 announcement that it intended to invade Rafah was met with international condemnation and was included in South Africa's pleadings to the International Court of Justice during which it accused Israel of conducting genocide in Gaza. On 6 May 2024, Israel struck Rafah at least 50 times, and battles between Hamas and Israel continued for weeks. We have examined 37 articles covering this event between 7 and 21 May 2024.

EVENT 4

As Israel's bombardment of Gaza continued and the humanitarian crisis worsened, in coordination with Canada, New Zealand, Norway, and the UK, Australia imposed human rights sanctions on two Israeli Cabinet members – National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich. The Magnitsky style sanctions were imposed on 10 June 2025, for repeatedly inciting extremist violence and supporting unlawful and violent expansions in the West Bank. The sanctions bar the ministers from entering Australia and freeze any financial assets they may hold in Australia. The sanctions generated considerable political debate, with the Australian opposition questioning whether they were imposed for objectionable comments rather than actions. Within this event, we have examined 50 articles between 1 and 14 June 2025.

EVENT 5

Israel's war on Gaza transformed into a regional conflict on 28 February 2026, when Israel and the United States bombed Hamas's chief financial backer, Iran. Iran responded by bombing US base sites across Qatar, Bahrain, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. Iran has also closed the vital shipping corridor, the Strait of Hormuz through which oil cargo is routinely transported. The latter action caused the United States to temporarily lift sanctions on the transportation and sale of Russian oil. In April 2026, Israel extended its war against Hamas to Lebanon, targeting the Iran-backed Hezbollah militia, where the death toll has since surpassed 3,000 (Granville, 2026). Within this event, 160 articles are examined, between 28 February and 6 March 2026.

Event 1: Hamas attack and initial Israeli retaliation (October 2023)

Event one comprises two weeks (7 October–21 October 2023) of coverage (N=140) from The Australian, 9News.com.au, The Guardian, and the ABC. The Isr3 "Israeli victimhood and moral priority" frame (41 percent) was the most frequently used, followed by P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" (14 percent) and the Isr1 "Israel is the victim and has a right to defend itself" frame (13 percent) (Figure 1). During the first week of event one, Israeli suffering appeared as nationally and internationally significant through emotional storytelling, references to the Holocaust and 9/11, and profiling of victims on the Israeli side. During the second week, Palestinian casualties emerged primarily through institutional voices, statistics, and occasional vignettes of personal experience and historical context, albeit often as collective and contested, particularly following the al-Ahli Arab Hospital blast on 17 October 2023 where Israeli officials disputed responsibility. Below, we analyse the dominant frames that appeared across event one.

Israeli victimhood and moral priority (Israeli frame 3)

During the first week following the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023, the Isr3 "Israeli victimhood and moral priority" frame dominated.

Pro-Israeli sources – survivors, relatives, soldiers, diaspora members, and Western officials – dominated, and humanised Israeli suffering (Figure 2). Israeli victims were described in detail – names, faces, occupations, family connections, domestic routines, and hobbies. In contrast, Palestinians appeared in statistical references to civilian casualties or Hamas's hostile statements and videos. At this point in time, the Gaza Strip remained highly securitised and partially closed to Western reporters. As a result, foreign correspondents were either unable to enter the region or found it sufficiently dangerous to not attempt entry, limiting first-hand reportage of Palestinian victims of Israel's offensive. Coverage therefore relied on NGOs and official statements, with occasional IDF embedment (CNN, The Times of Israel, ABC Australia).

Across the four outlets, sensory realism and personalisation became the main framing devices. Using the Isr3 frame, The Guardian (N=17) described the initial Hamas attack as an "unimaginable tragedy" (Davies, 2023a) and a "senseless act of violence" (The Guardian, 2023b), while the ABC (N=9) characterised it as a "mass atrocity" (Evans, 2023a), 9News.com.au (N=10) as a "desert horror" (9News.com.au, 2023f), and The Australian (N=21) as "sickening barbarity" (Magnay, 2023e).

Across the outlets, the scenes of "young partygoers enjoying the sunrise" (McKernan, 2023) at the Supernova festival "of unity and love… in a place stunning for its beauty" (Sherwood, 2023), were juxtaposed with the sudden horror of the Hamas attack through the details of abandoned bottles, "scattered piles of clothes and makeup," cars pierced by bullet holes, and burned tents (Graham-Harrison & Kierszenbaum, 2023). Sensory language reinforced chaos: "screams fill the air" (McKernan, 2023); "the beat of the music became confused with gunfire as Palestinian militants stormed the festival" (Sherwood, 2023). Chronological first-person testimony visualised fear and survival: "They were going tree by tree and shooting. I saw people dying all around" (Saunokonoko, 2023); "[they] took cover under the scaffolding, where they had a view of the bloodbath below" (Joyner & Halpern, 2023).

Israeli casualties were occasionally reported as statistics highlighting the human stakes (Rice, 2023): "At least 260 bodies were discovered at the site of the all-night festival" (McKernan, 2023); however, most articles constructed Israeli experiences through detailed human stories. The ABC relied on biographical notes, providing a full portrait of Adi Maizel, aged 21, who "vanished" at the Supernova festival: her occupation ("operated a nail salon from her family's home in the settlement of Karnei Shomron"), education ("completed training at a local college to become an instructor in the beauty industry"), and personal quirks ("had a penchant of bringing home animals") (Joyner & Halpern, 2023).

9News.com.au centred on civilian innocence, dedicating standalone articles to the festivalgoer Karin Journo ("My daughter didn't go to war. She just went to dance" (9News.com.au, 2023s)); or the mother and daughter barricading with a Dyson vacuum and a rolling pin to survive Hamas's 12-hour siege of their kibbutz (9News.com.au, 2023q); or the jewellery designer Moran Yanai, a "peace-seeking loving artist" who had been invited to set up a retail stand at the Supernova festival (Balzer, 2023).

The Guardian reported the Israeli human rights worker Yotam Kipnis, whose 10 relatives were missing: "They heard shouting down the phone. I haven't been able to contact my parents since then… our lives on the kibbutzim are 95 percent heaven and 5 percent hell" (Jones, 2023a).

The Australian demonstrated the highest degree of emotional amplification through intensified vocabulary of trauma ("unleash hell" (Magnay, 2023c), "brutally murdered" (Magnay, 2023d), "state of numb shock" (Rice, 2023)) and graphic depictions of babies used as "human shield[s]" (Magnay, 2023c), found "among the blood-soaked sheets… with their bodies in their cots and their severed heads placed separately on the floor" (Magnay, 2023e). The vignettes of civilian hero stories reinforced Israeli endurance: "Itay and Hadar… hid their 10-month-old twin children in the shelter while terrorists infiltrated their home" (Magnay, 2023d). Compared to The Guardian and the ABC, which portrayed the Israeli Defence Force as narrators of Hamas's atrocities ("It's not a war, it's not a battlefield. It's a massacre" (Graham-Harrison, 2023b)), The Australian amplified Israeli military emotions: "Hardened soldiers broke down and cried at barbaric massacre of harmless babies" (Magnay, 2023e). The ABC reinforced a shared Australian–Israeli sense of belonging: "Australia is a beautiful country… but this is home"; "Even if I left, my head and my heart would still be here" (Stuart, 2023c). The Guardian mobilised a Latin American connection ("Glazer was from South Brazil but moved to Israel where he served in the IDF and dreamed of becoming a DJ" (Phillips, 2023)). Within the same reports in The

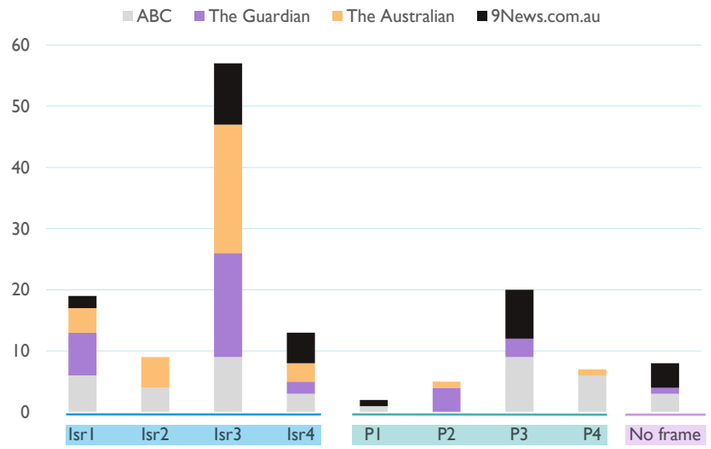


Figure 1 | Event 1: Distribution of dominant frames by media outlet following the 7 October Hamas attack. Bars represent the number of sampled articles with the dominant frame.

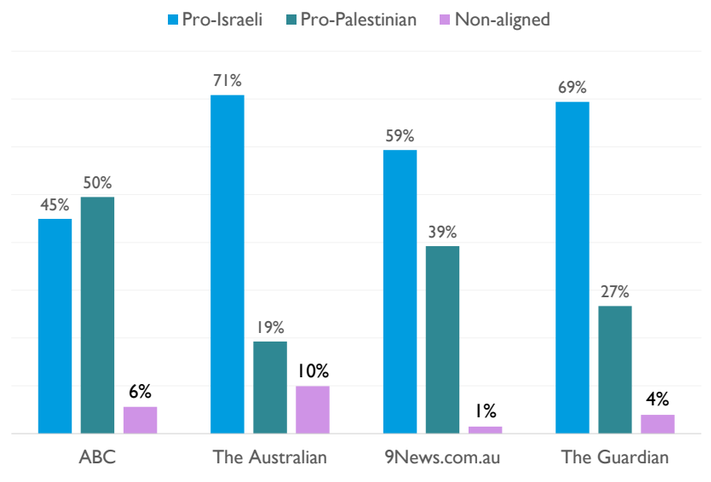


Figure 2 | Event 1: Distribution of quoted sources voicing pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, or non-aligned perspectives by media outlet. Percentages represent the political alignment category as a proportion of all quoted sources within each outlet's event one sample.

Guardian, non-Western victims were represented collectively: "Seventeen Thai workers at the kibbutz had been killed by Hamas" (Dumas & Davies, 2023). Political leaders consolidated the moral framing (Phillips, 2023); Joe Biden was quoted empathising with families "going through agony not knowing the status of their sons, daughters, husbands, wives, children" (Helmore, 2023). The Australian (2023) extended solidarity framing by amplifying celebrity voices (such as Gal Gadot, Gigi Hadid, Natalie Portman, Madonna, and U2, saying "The world cannot sit on the fence," "innocent lives," "barbaric acts," "heartbreaking, unjustifiable tragedy") and corporate statements (Atlassian, Telstra, Microsoft) condemning "the brutal, horrific and unthinkable acts of [Hamas's] terror" (Lynch, 2023).

Repeated analogies to the Holocaust, 9/11, and Pearl Harbour in The Australian, The Guardian, and 9News.com.au reinforced the narrative of existential Jewish victimhood. The Australian used the word "pogrom" (Magnay, 2023e), referring to the organised massacre of Jewish people in Eastern Europe in the late 19th-early 20th centuries. The Guardian and the ABC referenced the 1948 war of independence, the Entebbe raid, and the release of Gilad Shalit in return for 1,027 Palestinian prisoners in 2011 to emphasise Israel's resilience and moral commitment: "no one is left behind" (Graham-Harrison, 2023c). The asymmetry between the Israeli and Palestinian historical experiences functioned as defensive contextualisation (Wolfsfeld et al., 2008), with Israeli retaliation positioned as morally inevitable.

Israel is the victim and has a right to defend itself (Israeli frame 1); Hamas must be eliminated (Israeli frame 4); Opposing Israel is antisemitic (Israeli frame 2)

Over 10 days following the initial Hamas attack, the narrative of Israeli retaliation as morally and strategically inevitable (the Isr1 "Israel is the victim and has a right to defend itself" frame) surfaced in the Guardian (N=7) and the ABC (N=5), followed by the Australian (N=4) and 9News.com.au (N=2) as the second most referenced frame.

While The Guardian and the ABC tended to situate Israel's right to retaliate within broader humanitarian issues and the historical context of the conflict, The Australian and 9News.com.au presented the defensive frame in a less contested manner. Their coverage foregrounded Israeli military retaliation as a legitimate response to terrorism, reinforced by the Isr4 "Hamas must be eliminated" frame that portrayed Hamas as an existential threat and the Isr2 "Opposing Israel is antisemitic" frame that linked pro-Palestinian mobilisation with antisemitism.

Across outlets, Hamas was compared with ISIS and described through criminalising labels: "terrorists" (Joyner & Halpern, 2023), "the Gaza-based militant group" (9News.com.au, 2023q), "evil people" (Magnay, 2023b), "very aggressive, like animals" (Graham-Harrison, 2023b). They were portrayed as faceless aggressors, infiltrating homes, murdering, laughing, hiding underground, and dispersing hostages: "men cheering [and] shouting 'Allahu Akbar'"; "one gunman, carrying a rocket propelled grenade, has his leg draped over her waist; the other holds a clump of her dreadlocks," "one man spits on Louk's head as the car drives off" (9News.com.au, 2023f). Hamas's statements threatening hostage executions were quoted verbatim as proof of barbarity: "We declare that any targeting of our people in their homes without prior warning will be regrettably faced with the execution of one of the hostages we are holding" (Magnay, 2023d). Anonymous social media uploads filmed and distributed by Hamas were described as a "devastating effort, magnifying their savagery for maximum pychological impact" (9News.com.au, 2023h; Magnay, 2023d, 2023e; Yerushalmy, 2023). The depictions reinforced the necessity of Israeli self-defence (the Isr1 "Israel is the victim and has a right to defend itself" frame), albeit articulated differently across outlets.

The coverage from 9News.com.au amplified the Israeli self-defence rationale. The use of phrases – such as "surprise land, sea and air attack from Gaza," "the deadliest day in decades for Israel" (9News.com.au, 2023j) – naturalised Israel's retaliation. Reports citing Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's words that Israel was "fighting for our home and for our existence" (9News.com.au, 2023m) reinforced the retaliatory Isr4 "Hamas must be eliminated" frame (N=5). Within this narrative, the war aims were presented as the destruction of Hamas with force "like never before" and the imposition of a "complete siege" on the Gaza Strip (9News.com.au, 2023l). While the Palestinian death toll was mentioned briefly ("at least 313 Palestinians have died and nearly 1,990 wounded in the past 24 hours" (9News.com.au, 2023j)), the Israeli hostage threat sharpened the perception of Hamas as a ruthless actor (9News.com.au, 2023h).

The sampled Australian coverage simultaneously legitimised Israeli military retaliation (Isr1 "Israel is the victim and has a right to defend itself" (N=4)) and delegitimised domestic opposition to Israel by emphasising Israeli victimhood and moral asymmetry between Hamas and Israel. Anthony Albanese was quoted stating that "Israel has a right to defend itself" (Amiet,2023). Describing the conflict as an "existential threat" to Israel, The Australian asserted that Israel had to "take very, very fierce action to re-establish its security" (Amiet, 2023).

Alongside this victim–defence narrative, The Australian also linked pro-Palestinian demonstrations in Sydney to antisemitism and vulnerability of Jewish Australians (Isr2 "Opposing Israel is antisemitic" (N=5)). Atrocity-invoking headlines ("babies were beheaded by Hamas") were juxtaposed with ACT Chief Minister Andrew Barr's call to "not take sides in the conflict" and a NSW Greens endorsement of pro-Palestinian rallies (Demetriadi & Malcolm, 2023). The articles contrasted scenes of aggressive Sydney protest behaviour, when demonstrators threw flares, chanted slogans such as "f..k Israel," "f..k the Jews" (Green & Zemek, 2023), and "from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" (Ellis, 2023a), with "peaceful observance and support" of Israel in Paris, Berlin, and New York (Demetriadi & Dowling, 2023). The antisemitism narrative was given a human face through the experience of a Ukrainian-Jewish man who was spat on at the Opera House rally (Ellis, 2023a). Celebratory rhetoric about Hamas ("An 'elated and smiling' sheikh [Ibrahim Dadoun, an imam at the United Muslims of Australia] who called Hamas' attacks a 'day of pride'" (Demetriadi, 2023)) was condemned by political and community leaders as "shameful" and antisemitic (Ellis, 2023b). NSW Premier Chris Minns noted "there was nothing to celebrate in the killing of innocents," while the Australia/Israel & Jewish Affairs Council described the throwing of flares and chanting of abuse as "deeply disgusting" (Demetriadi, 2023), and the Australian Jewish Association and the NSW Jewish Board of Deputies "slammed" the NSW Greens for "backing terror" (Demetriadi & Dowling, 2023).

The ABC also reported antisemitic rhetoric at pro-Palestinian rallies; antisemitic slogans were strongly condemned by Australian politicians (ABC, 2023f; Stonehouse & Parkes-Hupton, 2023) and Jewish community leaders, who emphasised Israel's right and obligation "to defend herself and her citizens" (Stonehouse & Parkes-Hupton, 2023).

While the ABC portrayed Hamas as the primary source of violence and the central target of Israel's military response, thus using the Isr4 "Hamas must be eliminated" frame (N=3) (Burgess, 2023), it balanced Israel's calls to "decapitate" Hamas with cautionary expert commentary that killing individual leaders would not end the conflict (Stein & Sweeney, 2023a).

The ABC embedded the narratives of Israeli self-defence and Hamas elimination within a broader multicultural and humanitarian discourse. Australia was framed as a "multicultural community" that should support both Israelis and Palestinians "going through a terrible time" (Timms, 2023). Calls for intercommunity solidarity were incorporated (Ferguson, 2023), with the Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria stating that both Jewish and Palestinian Australians deserved support because "they bare no responsibility for the actions of foreign governments or extremist groups" (Yu & Brown, 2023). The ABC also gave voice to rally organisers and attendees who distanced themselves from antisemitic chants, describing them as the actions of a "tiny fringe" (ABC, 2023a; Stonehouse & Parkes-Hupton, 2023).

Similar to the ABC, The Guardian introduced the nuance of political complexity without displacing Israeli centrality. The Guardian's recurring invocation of "code red," the warning used by Israelis for incoming rocket attacks from Gaza (Sherwood, 2023), and "the hi-tech Israeli defences" situated the attack within Israel's ongoing security discourse (McKernan, 2023; Michaelson & Doherty, 2023). Political statements further positioned Israel as a victim with the right to retaliate. Australian politicians, including Foreign Affairs Minister Penny Wong, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, and then leader of the Opposition Peter Dutton, confirmed "Australia's support for Israel's right to defend itself" (Hurst & Karp, 2023).

Simultaneously, The Guardian embedded this defensive logic within a more balanced narrative of a humanitarian cost that acknowledged Palestinian casualties and displacement ("more than 1,100 Palestinian deaths and over 260,000 displaced people" (Sabbagh, 2023), "home to 2.3 million trapped civilians" (McKernan & Kierszenbaum, 2023)) and the broader context of Israel–Gaza conflicts ("there have now been five wars and several smaller escalations between Israel and Gaza's fighting factions" (McKernan & Kierszenbaum, 2023)). The outlet featured Scotland's first minister Humza Yousaf describing relatives trapped in Gaza and emphasising that "most Gazans" had "nothing to do with Hamas" (Davies, 2023a).

Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering (Palestinian frame 3); Palestinian views deserve greater recognition and support (Palestinian frame 4); Israeli attacks are disproportionate (Palestinian frame 2)

While Israeli and pro-Israeli Western voices were personalised and emotionally amplified, the humanitarian crisis affecting Palestinians was primarily represented through institutional humanitarian warnings, casualty figures, and collective depictions of shortages, displacement, and infrastructure destruction.

Across outlets, Palestinians frequently appeared as brief statistical references attributed to the Gaza Health Ministry: "More than 400 Palestinians have reportedly died" (9News.com.au, 2023i); "Retaliatory Israeli airstrikes on the besieged Palestinian territory have killed at least 370 people" (McKernan, 2023); "Israeli airstrikes have pounded Gaza in intensive waves every four hours... at least 770 Palestinians had died and 4,000 were wounded" (Carroll, 2023).

The ABC was the only outlet to publish articles with the P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" (N=9) and P4 "Palestinian views deserve greater recognition and support" (N=6) frames from 10 October 2023, three days after the Hamas attack, and use a diversity of voices from civilians to humanitarian officials, politicians, and journalists to situate the crisis within broader historical, legal, and political debates.

Several sampled ABC articles cited the humanitarian consequences of Israel's "complete siege" following the Hamas attack, warning that blocking the entry of "all food, fuel, and other supplies" would turn Gaza into an "open prison" (Flemming, 2023) and lead to an "unprecedented human catastrophe" (Saarinen, 2023).

Drawing on the assessments from international humanitarian organisations as well as the Palestinian Health Ministry and Egypt, the ABC described Gaza as facing "collective punishment in violation of international law" (Flemming, 2023) and potentially "a second Palestinian ethnic cleansing" (Stein & Sweeney, 2023b). The humanitarian crisis was frequently situated within a broader historical context. In one sampled ABC report, NSW parliamentarians acknowledged the loss of Palestinian and Israeli lives "over the course of the many years of conflict" (Houlbrook-Walk, 2023). Coverage also referenced longer-term patterns of violence, reporting that the Palestinian Ministry of Health had recorded the highest number of Palestinians killed in the West Bank in a single week since 2017, following 7 october (Joyner, 2023). Personalised civilian narratives of fear and vulnerability also situated the conflict within longer historical grievances: "I'm too afraid to go outside... Our people have literally been living in a cage, besieged like animals for over 17 years" (Silva, 2023). One article on a displaced Gaza family of 25 described how air strikes forced residents to flee their homes on foot, with a 47-year-old grandmother Hana' Mahmoud Nayem recounting how "planes were above us with the bombs falling wherever... It was a horror, of course" (Stuart, 2023a).

Scenes of children unable to sleep during bombardments increased the moral salience of the humanitarian crisis: "Stunned children sit quietly, arms around each other" (Stuart, 2023a); "Children should be able to live a normal life. But here in Palestine, they have known nothing but war their whole life" (Silva, 2023).

Civilians reinforced the idea that they were not combatants but victims of circumstances beyond their control, trapped between Hamas and Israel. "What did I do wrong?" wondered a Gazan labourer Shanali. "As a Palestinian, how did I end up caught between Hamas and Israel? We want to live peacefully" (Joyner, 2023). Further separation between Hamas and ordinary Palestinians was drawn by the Cabinet minister Ed Husic: "There has got to be a more strategic and precise way to hold Hamas to account but not affect innocent Palestinian families. I feel very strongly that Palestinians are being collectively punished here for Hamas' barbarism" (Evans, 2023b).

Similar to the proximity strategy used in the reports with the Isr3 "Israeli victimhood and moral priority" frame, Western connections of Palestinians brought distant suffering closer to home (Donnellan et al., 2023; Joyner, 2023). Testimony from a Sydney mother-of-two Sara El-Masry, whose family was urged to go to the Rafah crossing, described "the situation just from leaving our house to the border [as] really scary" (Stein & Sweeney, 2023b).

The ABC coverage incorporated domestic political debate. Peter Dutton argued that there was "deep division" within Labor and "a lot of anti-Israel sentiment in the Labor caucus" (Evans, 2023b). Simultaneously, another article highlighted an open letter signed by a group of NSW parliamentarians expressing solidarity with Palestinians and the Palestinian-Australian community "facing a catastrophic crisis" (Houlbrook-Walk, 2023). The coverage also pointed out the marginalisation of Palestinian suffering. Husic noted that while the 7 October attacks had been compared to Israel's 9/11, the number of Palestinians killed reached a similar scale, yet "we don't see any public landmarks in Australia being lit up in red, black, white and green," reflecting perceptions that "Palestinian lives are considered lesser" and marking the emergence of the P4 frame (Evans, 2023b).

From 10 October, ABC coverage included other articles with the P4 "Palestinian views deserve greater recognition and support" frame (N=6) that focused more explicitly on the marginalisation of Palestinian suffering and perspectives within political and media discourses. Protesters across Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Perth, and Adelaide described feeling "pain, anger, outrage, betrayed [as] blood spilled in Gaza was considered less than" (ABC, 2023g). They questioned government's "scare tactics" against protestors (ABC, 2023g), "the silence of the world" (Lewis et al., 2023), and "media attention diverted from the suffering of people in Gaza" (Taouk, 2023), while the conflict "has been ongoing for 75-plus years" (Lewis et al., 2023).

The P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame in The Guardian (N=3) appeared a week later than in ABC coverage, on 17 October and focused on the emergency of a large-scale Palestinian catastrophe expressed through critical institutional voices and statistics.

Humanitarian warnings from then US president Joe Biden, amongst other Western and regional political leaders, aid organisations, and UN officials, emphasised that Gaza was "trapped under bombardment," that civilians were "running out of the basics for sustaining life," and that the events could "become one of the biggest humanitarian crises in recent history" (Borger, 2023a).

Framing humanitarian suffering through numbers, the emergencies director of the World Health Organization and the UN Secretary-General further reinforced the inadequacy of the "pitiful" Rafah aid convoy relative to a 2.3 million population need, amid "more than 3,000 people killed" and "more than 12,000 wounded" (Borger, 2023b). Local journalists' testimony emphasised shelter conditions: "The UN compound... is overcrowded and dirty; there are too few bathrooms and too many people to accommodate" (Glinski, 2023).

Western and regional political voices similarly surfaced in The Guardian's articles with the P2 frame "Israeli attacks are disproportionate" (N=4) and questioned the legality and morality of Israel's response in Gaza (Jones, 2023b). While Israel's right to respond in self-defence was acknowledged, reports on the airstrike on the al-Ahli Arab Hospital in Gaza quoted Anthony Albanese condemning "any indiscriminate attacks" on civilians and "calling for international law to always be upheld"; and Greens senator Mehreen Faruqi denouncing the "silence as innocent civilians are being killed" (Hurst & Basford Canales, 2023).

From 13 October, 9News.com.au (N=7) also started amplifying the civilian consequences of the Israeli bombardment and blockade of Gaza with the P3 "Israeli military actions cause humanitarian suffering" frame, but civilian suffering was layered onto an Israeli security narrative. Quantification and primarily institutional voices constructed the crisis across Gaza as a collective and systemic collapse, often situated within the historical context of earlier Israel–Gaza wars: "2329 Palestinians have been killed since the fighting erupted, making this the deadliest of the five Gaza wars for Palestinians" (9News.com.au, 2023k).

Personalisation of suffering remained selective and primarily tied to Western citizenship possibly resulting from limted access. One article briefly introduced a "family of five Palestinian Americans" stranded at Rafah (9News.com.au, 2023m), while another emphasised the connections of a stranded family and directly quoted Shurouq Alkhazendar, a Palestinian woman whose two children held US citizenship, as she urged the US to protect its citizens first, "not leave them suffering and being humiliated in front of the crossing" (9News.com.au, 2023l).

The World Health Organization shared concerns about "disease outbreaks due to mass displacement and poor water and sanitation" (9News.com.au, 2023u). The Palestinian Ministry of Health and Foreign Ministry framed the al-Ahli Arab Hospital incident as a "cold-blooded massacre" (9News.com.au, 2023v) and "pleaded with gas stations to give whatever fuel they had left to hospitals" (9News.com.au, 2023w). "Overwhelmed" Palestinian medical professionals warned that entire hospital facilities "would be shut down and many [patients] would die" (9News.com.au, 2023t).

Simultaneously, Israeli officials were prominently quoted contesting Palestinian narratives and reinforcing the Israeli security framing (9News.com.au, 2023q). The IDF stated they were "not aware of any strikes" and attributed the al-Ahli Arab Hospital blast to a "failed rocket launch" by the Palestinian Islamic Jihad group, while the Israeli government insisted that the "IDF does not target hospitals" (9News.com.au, 2023v). Israeli politicians further hardened the rhetoric (9News.com.au, 2023l). National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir stated that the only things that should be entering Gaza are "hundreds of tons of explosives… not an ounce of humanitarian aid" until Hamas released the hostages (9News.com.au, 2023m) and that "it might take a week, a month, two months until we destroy them [Hamas]" (9News.com.au, 2023n).

In The Australian newspaper, Palestinian-aligned frames rarely appeared (N=2); the conflict was constructed through political debate rather than direct civilian testimony. For example, a 19 October article, with a P2 "Israeli attacks are disproportionate" frame, followed a claim-counter-claim structure; when Labor ministers Ed Husic and Anne Aly, alongside trade unions drew comparisons between Palestinian deaths and 9/11 criticising Israel's actions as collective punishment and describing Hamas's terrorist attack as a "direct result" of Israel's "illegal occupation of Palestinian land" and policies of "apartheid and ethnic cleansing" (Packham & Ison, 2023), it was contested by Jewish community representatives who warned that Husic and Aly had "wrongly implied a moral equivalence" between the actions of Hamas and Israel (Packham & Ison, 2023).

Summary

Israeli lives were constructed as individually worthy of grieving through emotional storytelling, graphic depictions of suffering, detailed victim stories, and international civic, political, and cultural solidarity. Comparatively, Palestinian casualties appeared as anonymous statistics possibly due to lack of access and the significant numerical difference in victims. The Australian and 9News.com.au advanced the victim–perpetrator dichotomy more than the ABC and The Guardian, which placed Israeli emotional and personalised storytelling against the backdrop of the deteriorating Gazan humanitarian crisis. Selective historical contextualisation further justified Israeli retaliation, juxtaposing self-defence with unprovoked aggression, thus portraying Israel as a victim with the right to defend itself (Isr1 frame) and Israeli lives as more important (Isr3 frame).

Across the four outlets, the ABC presented the widest spectrum of frames during event one, portraying Israel as a victim, emphasising its right to defend itself (Isr1), foregrounding institutional and civic responses to antisemitism (Isr2), and expert commentary on the logic of eliminating Hamas (Isr4). At the same time, the ABC introduced the earliest coverage of Palestinian perspectives and humanitarian concerns, combining institutional warnings with first-person testimony, family stories, domestic Australian political debate, and references to the longer history of Israel–Gaza conflicts.

Although later, and less historically layered and personal, The Guardian also developed a humanitarian lens and provided substantial space for Palestinian suffering and criticism of Israeli actions, but it relied primarily on elite and institutional voices – diplomats, humanitarian organisations, lawyers, advocacy groups, and politicians – rather than on detailed civilian narratives. 9News.com.au acknowledged Palestinian deprivation and briefly humanised Palestinians through foreign-citizenship links but subordinated this coverage to the Israeli security discourse, reporting on Israeli military aims, evacuation orders, hostage politics, and official denials of attacks on civilian sites. The Australian provided the least space in sampled articles to the Palestinian cause and mainly focused on Australian domestic ideological debate, quoting political and diaspora voices.

Event 2: UNRWA funding suspension and humanitarian accountability debates (January–February 2024)

The volume of media coverage in the surveyed outlets during event two (26 January–9 February 2024) declined, compared to event one. Only 30 articles were collected across four news outlets, centred on the decision by the US, UK, and other Western nations, including Australia, to freeze funding for the UN's agency for Palestinian refugees, as 12 members of staff allegedly took part in the 7 October Hamas attack. Five days were recorded without any coverage dedicated to the conflict.

Within this reduced volume, Palestinian frames became more prominent than in event one, comprising 43 percent of the sample, while Israeli frames fell to 7 percent, and 50 percent of articles were coded as "no frame." The P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame emerged as dominant overall (37 percent). Most "no frame" articles focused on a legal accountability narrative and the controversy surrounding UNRWA funding suspensions, while the P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame appeared as secondary.

At the media outlet level (Figure 3), The Guardian relied most heavily on the P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame, followed by 9News.com.au, which also drew extensively on pro-Palestinian sources (Figure 4). Still, while The Guardian gave slightly greater prominence to institutional voices supporting the Palestinian side, it maintained the most balanced distribution of pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian sources across the sample.

The Australian was the only outlet to use the Isr2 "Opposing Israel is antisemitic" frame during event two, despite citing pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian sources in near-equal proportions. This relative balance of voices happened due to the coverage dedicated to legal accountability debates, with some articles invoking Israeli security concerns and allegations against Hamas (Isr4 frame appearing as secondary) or Palestinian humanitarian perspectives highlighting the consequences of funding suspension (P3 frame as secondary).

The simultaneous use of competing frames was rare. Only one ABC article combined Israeli and Palestinian perspectives, pairing the Isr1 "Israel is

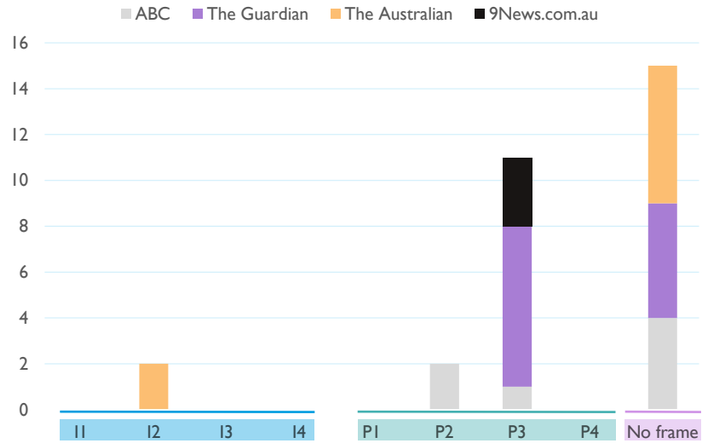


Figure 3 | Event 2: Distribution of dominant frames by media outlet between 26 January and 9 February 2024. Bars represent the number of sampled articles with the dominant frame.

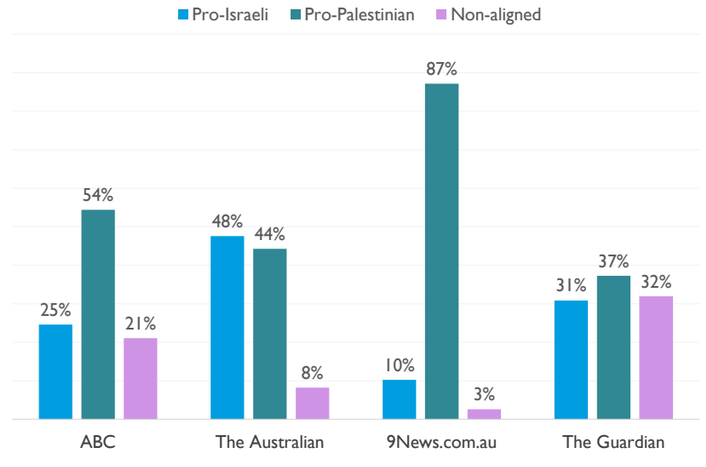


Figure 4 | Event 2: Distribution of quoted sources voicing pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, or non-aligned perspectives by media outlet. Percentages represent the political alignment category as a proportion of all quoted sources within each outlet's event two sample.

the victim and has a right to defend itself" frame with the P2 "Israeli attacks are disproportionate" frame, while situating the conflict within a broader geopolitical and humanitarian context.

Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering (Palestinian frame 3); Israeli attacks are disproportionate (Palestinian frame 2); Israel is the victim and has a right to defend itself (Israeli frame 1)

The prominence of the P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame in event two introduced a different mode of framing. Unlike the highly emotionalised and individualised narratives of Israeli victimhood in event one, the coverage of Palestinian suffering in event two relied more on collective deprivation, structural vulnerability, and practical consequences, narrated by institutional voices. This may reflect the lack of firsthand reporting due to the Israeli government's refusal to allow reporters into Gaza.

Among the four outlets, The Guardian used the P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame most extensively (N=7), foregrounding the consequences of the funding suspension and the deepening crisis faced by Palestinians: "starvation, looming famine and an outbreak of disease under Israel's continued indiscriminate bombardment and deliberate deprivation of aid" (Livingstone, 2024). The scale of the "dire" situation was amplified by official statistics from the local health ministry and aid agencies (McKernan, 2024), noting that "2 million civilians, over half of them children, rely on UNRWA aid in Gaza" (Livingstone, 2024), that UNRWA-run schools "would close, leaving an estimated 500,000 children without education" (Michaelson, 2024), and that suspension "collectively punishes over 2.2 million Palestinians" (Michaelson & McKernan, 2024). Political acknowledgement was also used, with former New Zealand prime minister Helen Clark describing the funding suspension as a "very, very harsh, collective punishment of the Gaza people" and underscoring disproportionality of the allegations related to 12 people "out of a UNRWA workforce of 13,000" (Hurst, 2024a). Penny Wong cited UN reports that "400,000 Palestinians in Gaza are actually starving and a million are at risk of starvation" (Hurst, 2024b). In this way, humanitarian framing was embedded within legal discourse and emerging claims of international law violations in response to South Africa's case against Israel under the Genocide Convention.

The UN, UNRWA, and Palestinian aid and liberation organisations pleaded for continuity of aid and expressed "deep concern and outrage" to the "reckless" decision to cut funding (Livingstone, 2024). The UN secretary general António Guterres acknowledged that he was "horrified" by the accusations of UNRWA staff but urged donor states to "guarantee the continuity" of aid operations (McKernan, 2024). Referring to the ruling from the UN's top court that Israel must prevent acts of genocide in Gaza, Hamas officials were quoted condemning the suspension decision while Palestinians in the Gaza Strip were "facing mass extermination" (McKernan, 2024). UNRWA further challenged the timing and intent of Israel's accusations that its staff were involved in the Hamas attack, describing it as Israel's "news management" (Livingstone, 2024). A subtle layer of historical contextualisation within sampled coverage in The Guardian further strengthened the P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame and positioned UNRWA as indispensable but contested. Israeli authorities were presented as having "long called" for the "obsolete" agency to be dismantled (Michaelson, 2024). In contrast, a EuroMed Human Rights representative sheltering in Rafah described the organisation as a "constant reminder of how Palestinians were displaced during the creation of Israel in 1948" (Michaelson, 2024).

One exception to The Guardian's predominantly institutional use of P3 was the inclusion of a single personalised Palestinian story of Muthanna al-Najjar, a journalist who was present during the Hamas attack and "implor[ed] the gunmen not to hurt" Israeli captives: "Even though I handled the situation humanely, preventing harm to the settlers [Israelis] during my work, Israel destroyed my house with a missile" (Michaelson & McKernan, 2024). Although this vignette was included at the very end of the article, Palestinian suffering was framed as morally unjustified.

9News.com.au articles (N=3) also foregrounded the suspension of UNRWA funding through institutional voices and statistics as a threat to an already catastrophic situation in Gaza. UN officials, the World Health Organization, and World Food Programme warned that "the clock is indeed ticking" (9News.com.au, 2024d), as "more than one million people have crammed into Rafah and the surrounding areas" (9News.com.au, 2024c) and "about a quarter of the population now faces starvation" (9News.com.au, 2024b). Gaza's Health Ministry reported that Israel's offensive had killed "more than 26,000 Palestinians, most women and children, and wounded more than 64,400 others," while "more than 1.7 million of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been driven from their homes by the war–with hundreds of thousands of them crowded into schools and other shelters run by UNRWA" (9News.com.au, 2024b).

One sampled article on 9News.com.au shifted towards highly emotional and personal narratives, with a strong focus on children's suffering, emphasising malnutrition, dehydration, and diarrhea; a mother of seven, El Jamara, described her children as "weak… dying out of hunger and thirst," while another woman, Gihan El Baz, said her children and grandchildren "wake each day screaming for food" (9News.com.au, 2024d). Another article also gave Palestinian civilians direct voice, with Bilal al-Siksik saying the UN court ruling meant little because "America with all its greatness and strength can do nothing," and Bassam Bolbol saying: "We have nothing and we left [our homes] with nothing" (9News.com.au, 2024c). This humanitarian framing was briefly woven into the legal narrative of UNRWA accountability and emerging genocide-related scrutiny of Israel's military conduct. Although UNRWA's centrality to civilian survival was acknowledged (9News.com.au, 2024b), this was counterbalanced with the US State Department's statement that it was "extremely troubled" by the allegations against its staff (9News.com.au, 2024c). The sampled articles also noted the UN's "increasing scrutiny" (9News.com.au, 2024c) and top court order for Israel "to do all it could to prevent death, destruction and any acts of genocide in Gaza" (9News.com.au, 2024b).

Humanitarian framing was also filtered through Israeli military claims; Netanyahu vowing "to press on until complete victory," and describing Israeli operations as "targeted raids on terror targets," while attributing civilian casualties to Hamas that "embedd[ed] themselves in the local population" (9News.com.au, 2024c).

The ABC (N=1) presented the P3 "Israeli military actions cause humanitarian suffering" frame in a more restrained form, avoiding the emotional intensity seen in some 9News.com.au reporting. On the one hand, a broader political debate around the funding suspension was reported, with references to an Israeli dossier provided to the UN which contained "no evidence" to back up the claims against UNRWA staff, alongside Senator Penny Wong's calls for investigations and accountability, as "the recent allegations… are grave" (Bovill,2024). On the other hand, UNRWA was described as "a critical source of support… provid[ing] education, health and aid services" (Bovill, 2024). Institutional voices reinforced humanitarian urgency, particularly the UN secretary general's plea to "guarantee the continuity of UNRWA's operations [as] the dire needs of the desperate populations they serve must be met" (Bovill, 2024). The article also incorporated claims by Greens deputy leader Mehreen Faruqi of "four months of Israel's genocide, with more than 27,000 Palestinians killed, including over 11,000 children" (Bovill, 2024). During event two, the use of the term 'genocide' was most consistently articulated by the Greens, while major party Australian political actors did not use it.

The ABC – the only media outlet during event two that used the P2 "Israeli attacks are disproportionate" frame (N=2) – further positioned the conflict within a framework of legal scrutiny via references to international law (ABC, 2024a), following the top UN court ruling that South Africa's accusation of Israel committing genocide against the Palestinian people was "plausible" (Al-Khouri, 2024). Advocacy voices, such as the Australian Centre for International Justice and Amnesty International extended responsibility beyond Israel to Australia and called for "a comprehensive arms embargo" and sanctions on Netanyahu and his Cabinet members, stressing that the ruling "triggered obligations on all high contracting parties to the Genocide Convention to act on their duties to prevent genocide" (Al-Khouri, 2024). A brief historical reference to Israel's occupation of the West Bank of the Jordan River since the 1967 Middle East war and the disputed legality of settlements situated present-day violence within a longer trajectory of legal ambiguity, while Israel's counterclaims based on "historical and biblical ties to the land" were also acknowledged (ABC, 2024a). The "catastrophic" humanitarian situation was depicted through statistics, with the Gaza Health Ministry reporting a death toll of over 27,000 and over 66,000 wounded, while pro-Israeli voices were positioned in response to the dominant legal narrative (Al-Khouri, 2024). The Executive Council of Australian Jewry asserted that the International Court of Justice ruling did not impede Israel's efforts to "rescue hostages and destroy Hamas" (Al-Khori,2024). Netanyahu described the allegations of genocide as "outrageous": "No-one will stop us — not The Hague, not the Axis of Evil, no one" (Al-Khouri, 2024).

Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich rejected the settler violence campaign as "an antisemitic lie that enemies of Israel disseminate with the goal of smearing the pioneering settlers and settlement enterprise" (ABC, 2024a).

This legal framing was extended in another ABC article that combined the Isr1 "Israel is a victim and has a right to defend itself" frame with the P2 "Israeli attacks are disproportionate" frame – a single instance of the simultaneous use of competing frames within the sampled event two coverage. The article juxtaposed Israel's justification of its actions with South Africa's legal argument. The ICJ's notes on the "catastrophic" humanitarian situation in Gaza and calls for Israel to "take all measures" to prevent acts within the scope of the Genocide Convention were reported alongside Netanyahu's reference to Amalek, a biblical tale of destruction, defending Israel's actions as "not an incitement to genocide of Palestinians, but a description of the utterly evil actions perpetrated by the genocidal terrorists of Hamas" (Marin & West, 2024). This was countered by a Notre Dame University Professor in the US who placed Netanyahu's statement within a "whole spectrum" of assertions, such as "there are no innocent people in Gaza" (Marin & West, 2024).

No frame; Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering (Palestinian frame 3); Hamas must be eliminated (Israeli frame 4)

While the ABC foregrounded legal accountability of Israeli conduct, the articles coded as "no frame" shifted the focus towards UNRWA accountability, with the P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame remaining secondary.

In sampled ABC articles (N=2), the humanitarian crisis mainly appeared as the consequence of a funding and accountability dispute. UNICEF and Penny Wong questioned whether donors "feel comfortable" and stressed the need for an "immediate" and "fast investigation," to ensure those responsible are "held to account" (Ferguson, 2024). The closing section of the sampled articles explicitly introduced the P3 framing, combining statistics – "More than 1.4 million Palestinians are sheltering within UNRWA facilities " – with statements describing "unconscionable bombardment and suffering of the people of Gaza" (Manfield, 2024).

The Guardian (N=4) reported Australia's pause on funding and the procedural conditions for restoring it. Amid allegations that 12 UNRWA staff were involved in the 7 October attacks, Penny Wong stressed the need to consult with international partners and protect UNRWA's "neutrality" (Hurst & Karp, 2024). UNRWA urged for a distinction between "12 very bad apples among 13,000 staff" in Gaza (Sherwood, 2024), while the Israeli ambassador to Australia Amir Maimon stated that Australia "seemed to have forgotten Hamas' culpability" when it announced the potential to restart funding (Hurst, 2024c). A secondary P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame was present but unevenly distributed across institutional and political voices through references to "collective punishment" of "women, children, the wounded, the sick, the dying" (Sherwood, 2024) and mass displacement of "1.7 million people in Gaza" (Hurst & Karp, 2024), shifting the focus briefly towards the human cost of the accountability debate.

The Australian (N=3) framed the UNRWA controversy through the lens of internal reform, shifting attention away from humanitarian urgency. The Rozana International health organisation – which "had tried to partner with [UNRWA] before 7 October but had been denied permission by Hamas" – characterised the agency's "unsustainable delivery model [that] needs to be rethought" (Trinca, 2024). Retrospective allegations constructed a narrative of recurring failure, including claims that the head of UNRWA's union "had been elected to the political leadership of Hamas" in 2017 or that weapons stockpiles were found in UNRWA schools in 2014. Israeli voices further reinforced this framing; Defence Minister Yoav Gallant described "terrorism under the guise of humanitarian work [as] a disgrace to the UN and the principles it claims to represent" (Salama & Luhnow, 2024). While a "dire humanitarian situation" (Trinca, 2024), with "570,000 Gazans classified as having food insecurity" was acknowledged (Salama & Luhnow, 2024), humanitarian need was mainly used to support arguments about aid delivery reconstruction.

Across these articles, humanitarian suffering was acknowledged but subordinated to support funding debates, in which aid becomes conditional on UNRWA accountability, donor confidence, and internal reform.

Another subset of The Australian coverage (N=3) shifted discourse around legal scrutiny of UNRWA towards a narrative of Hamas eradication, voiced by senior Israeli government officials, including Netanyahu, who cast the agency as "irrevocably radicalised" (Luhnow & Keller-Lynn, 2024), and a "haven for Hamas' radical ideology" (Keller-Lynn & Luhnow, 2024). These claims were amplified by US Secretary of State Antony Blinken who described the allegations as "highly, highly credible" (Luhnow & Keller-Lynn, 2024), and by Australian opposition spokesperson James Paterson, who argued the Albanese government "had been reckless to ignore [earlier] warnings" (Stewart, 2024a). The sampled articles suggested that "the clues were there all along" and invoked earlier controversies including "weapons caches" in schools, "textbooks promoting the hatred of Jews and Israel," and a sinking parking lot "likely from a Hamas tunnel dug beneath" (Luhnow & Keller-Lynn, 2024). Legal accountability was further quantified, expanding individual misconduct to institutional design: "23 percent of UNRWA's male employees had ties to Hamas," while "49 percent had close relatives who also had official ties to the militant groups" (Keller-Lynn & Luhnow, 2024).

Opposing Israel is antisemitic (Israeli frame 2)

The Australian was the only outlet in event two to employ the Isr2 "Opposing Israel is antisemitic" frame (N=2), bringing international conflict into Australian domestic discourse of "social disharmony" and linking support for Israel to solidarity with Australia's Jewish community (Brown, 2024). The articles spotlighted Prime Minister Albanese's condemnation of NSW Greens MP Jenny Leong's use of the term "tentacles," noting its historical association with Nazi-era antisemitic slurs to "convey conspiracy [that] Jews were taking over the world" (Brown, 2024). Israeli ambassador to Australia Amir Maimon further amplified the frame by urging Greens politicians, accused of putting "genocidal antisemitic ideology into action," to watch "raw footage" of Hamas's 7 October attack (Brown, 2024). Then Opposition leader Peter Dutton extended the frame, pointing out a broader pattern and stating that the Greens had displayed "antisemitic conduct at a state level and here in the federal parliament on a daily basis" (Ison & Brown, 2024).

Summary

Shifting away from emotional and personalised reporting on Israeli victimhood during event one, the event two coverage focused on legal scrutiny of UNRWA's links to Hamas and Israeli military conduct in Gaza. Palestinian humanitarian suffering was acknowledged, primarily by The Guardian and 9News.com.au, but frequently appeared as a secondary layer – collective, depersonalised, and mediated as statistics or contextual background to the discussions of UNRWA donor confidence. Palestinian civilians appeared as the objects of discourse, while politicians, diplomats, and aid officials occupied the positions of authoritative narrators of the crisis (Foucault, 1980).

The Guardian relied the most on the P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame, emphasising the humanitarian-legal discourse – the scale of displacement and starvation – through institutional voices, humanitarian officials, and one personalised Palestinian story. Present suffering was occasionally inserted into historical narratives, underpinning the role of UNRWA as a symbol of unresolved Palestinian displacement.

Compared with The Guardian, 9News.com.au's humanitarian coverage was less historically contextualised. While 9News.com.au gave prominence to the P3 frame of unjustified Palestinian suffering, its coverage oscillated between Israeli security concerns and the scale of the crisis in Gaza expressed through statistics, institutional warnings about famine and displacement, and highly emotional and personal depictions of civilian suffering, especially of children. At the same time, some 9News.com.au articles filtered Palestinian suffering through Israeli military logic and a narrative of security necessity.

The ABC – the only outlet in event two to use the P2 "Israeli attacks are disproportionate" frame – foregrounded a broader legal discourse, embedding limited discussion of Palestinian humanitarian concerns, largely through casualty figures and displacement statistics, within a political debate driven by South Africa, Australia, and the US about proportionality and the legitimacy of Israel's conduct, with potential violations of international law. At the same time, space was given to Israeli defensive rebuttals.

The Australian prioritised elite political discourse and shifted the focus from Israeli conduct to UNRWA's legal accountability. While the dominant focus was on allegations against UNRWA, a secondary Isr4 "Hamas must be eliminated" frame emerged, reinforced by statistical and political claims that the agency had been compromised by Hamas. The Australian was also the only outlet to use the Isr2 "Opposing Israel is antisemitic" frame, embedding the international conflict within Australian political discourse and outlining the boundaries of legitimate critique of Israel.

Event 3: Rafah offensive and Palestinian statehood debates (May 2024)

Event three coverage (N=37) from 7 May to 21 May 2024 focused on the Israeli invasion of Rafah, in the southern Gaza Strip and was dominated even more strongly by Palestinian frames, compared to event two (Figure 5). Palestinian frames comprised 68 percent of the sample. The P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame appeared dominant (41 percent), followed by the P2 "Israeli attacks are disproportionate" frame (19 percent). "No frame" articles accounted for 30 percent of the sample, while Israeli frames plummeted to only 3 percent.

The ABC and 9News.com.au primarily relied on the P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame, whereas The Guardian mostly used P2, focusing on the discussion of humanitarian deprivation and disproportionality of attacks from a legal-moral point of view. Articles coded as "no frame" were mainly organised around diplomatic controversy, including souring US–Israel relations over the use of heavy weapons in densely populated areas and Israel's planned offensive in Rafah (in 9News.com.au), as well as criticism of the Australian government's position on the conflict (ABC), and Palestinian status at the United Nations (The Australian). Within these articles, the P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering", P4 "Palestinian voices deserve greater recognition and support," and P1 "7 October was justified resistance against Israeli occupation" frames appeared as secondary and contested.

Similar to event two, The Australian was the only outlet using Israeli frames. The Australian's quoted sources were mixed, with a relatively equal distribution of pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, and non-aligned voices, although Palestinian advocacy was portrayed as dangerous, problematic, and illegitimate (Figure 6). In contrast, the ABC, 9News.com.au, and The Guardian used almost twice as many pro-Palestinian sources as pro-Israeli.

The Australian stood out for its reported debates around Palestinian United Nations membership and recognition of Palestine as a state, while the Rafah offensive often appeared as a backdrop for these discussions. The Australian also used the P1 "7 October was justified resistance against Israeli occupation" frame in the coverage of protester celebrations of the Hamas attack, with the sampled article portraying them as crossing the line into radicalism and hate speech, distant from legitimate advocacy for greater recognition of Palestinian views. Additionally, The Australian was the only outlet presenting Israeli and Palestinian perspectives back-to-back in two sampled articles, especially the Isr4 "Hamas must be eliminated" with either P4 "Palestinian views deserve greater recognition and support" or P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frames. This dual framing presented the tension between Israel's security concerns, the international community's support for Palestinian statehood and rights, and the humanitarian toll of the Rafah offensive, although Israeli military logic appeared more actively elaborated.

Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering (Palestinian frame 3)

Across the ABC coverage of Israel's seizure of the Palestinian side of the Rafah crossing, the P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame dominated (N=6). Institutional and personal testimony supported the narrative, while Israeli political and military logic was acknowledged but presented as secondary.

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) warned that the disruption of a "crucial pipeline" of humanitarian aid was "catastrophic" and would leave people in the entire strip "choked off," creating a "very-very acute... life-threatening situation" (Horn & Halpern, 2024). The World Food Programme confirmed "full-blown famine" (ABC, 2024b; Chamas, 2024). Gaza's health authority warned that "the wounded and sick suffer a slow death because there is no treatment and supplies and they cannot travel" (ABC, 2024c).

Statistics emphasised the scale and urgency of crisis: "about 300,000 Gazans have moved towards Al-Mawasi"; "Saturday's order affects at least a further 40,000 people" (ABC, 2024b); "Palestinian death toll in the war has now surpassed 35,000, with 57 killed in the past 24 hours"; bringing "the total death toll of UN personnel to about 190" (ABC, 2024c). Personal testimony from a father of six Bilal Ahmad Hussein who fled to Rafah exemplified everyday survival: "I only have 10 green beans and peas cans left. The aid is essential as I don't have money to buy food and water" (Horn & Halpern, 2024). Emphasis on children further intensified civilian vulnerability: "Look at these children. What has he done wrong? What has he got to do with October 7?" (Horn & Halpern, 2024). Sensory details visualised displacement: "the loud sounds of bombing and missiles [that] fill the air and do not stop for a moment" (Chamas, 2024), with descriptions of "rubble-strewn streets" and "makeshift tent camps" (ABC, 2024c). The inclusion of historical context was limited, with northern Gaza's Jabalia described as "a sprawling refugee camp built for displaced Palestinians 75 years ago" (ABC, 2024c). An Australian volunteer doctor's testimony both personalised and legitimised the crisis:

> *"We're exhausted. We've been working for 19, 20 days non-stop... In intensive care, you're talking one nurse to 12 patients... We brought about 240 bags full of supplies when we came in... Now we're almost running out of all those supplies, so within the coming maybe 48 hours we'll be useless here"* (Horn, 2024).

While disproportionate impact on civilians appeared as primary, Israeli denials of blocking aid and targeting civilians were included, alongside strategic justifications of the "limited" and "specific" operation (Horn & Halpern, 2024). Netanyahu stressed the importance of "damaging" and "wiping out" Hamas capabilities for Israel's "existence, liberty, security and prosperity" (ABC, 2024c), and Israel's defence minister Yoav Gallant indicated that the Rafah operation could be "deepened" to the entire Gaza Strip for the return of hostages (Horn & Halpern, 2024), "whether they are alive or dead" (ABC, 2024d).

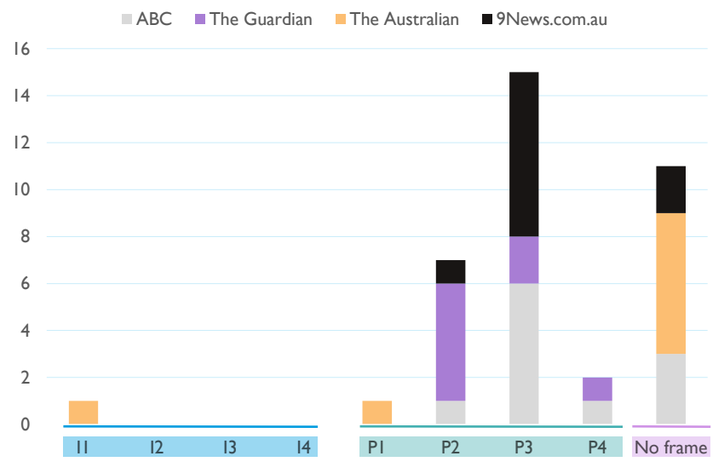


Figure 5 | Event 3: Distribution of dominant frames by media outlet following the Rafah offensive on 7 May 2024. Bars represent the number of sampled articles with the dominant frame.

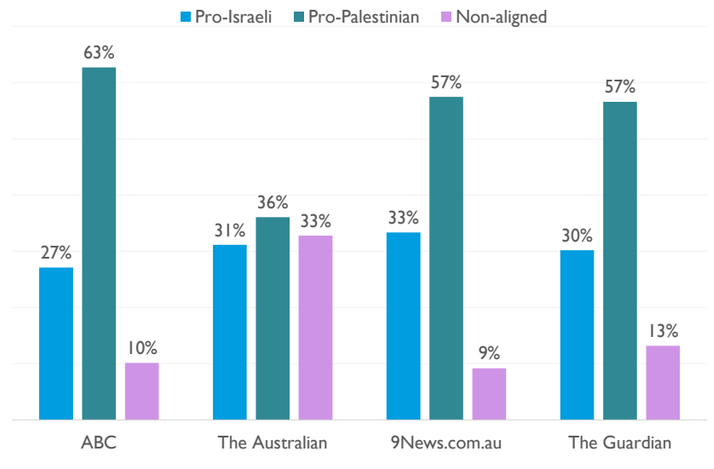


Figure 6 | Event 3: Distribution of quoted sources voicing pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, or non-aligned perspectives by media outlet. Percentages represent the political alignment category as a proportion of all quoted sources within each outlet's event three sample.

The response of the Group of Seven governments and Australia was reported including a joint letter insisting that Israel "must fully comply with international law, including international humanitarian law" and take "specific, concrete and measurable steps to significantly boost the flow of aid" (ABC, 2024d). American responses were constructed as a progression from diplomatic caution to moral condemnation; the White House was initially quoted as watching developments "with concern," hesitant over weapons shipments (ABC, 2024b), before the State Department condemned Israeli protest group attacks on aid convoys as "completely and utterly unacceptable behaviour" (ABC, 2024c).

The ABC coverage was also built around a dominant "controversy" frame (N=3), with domestic political conflict in focus and Palestinian perspectives appearing as secondary. The ABC allowed competing claims to appear in a relatively full and symmetrical form; the storming of the Victoria Labor conference by pro-Palestinian protestors accusing Labor of "aiding and abetting the genocide" and Senator Fatima Payman's calls for Australia to "stand for what is right" introduced elements of P4 framing (ABC, 2024e) but counterbalanced with government criticism describing the protesters' rhetoric as "not appropriate" and inconsistent with a two-state solution (ABC, 2024e).

9News.com.au deployed the P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame in its coverage (N=7) to present the scale of unfolding events through quantification of civilian impact with rare inclusions of personalised Palestinian experience. Israeli military logic was juxtaposed with Hamas's demands for a complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and Western government and aid agency alarm over the fate of Palestinians sheltering in Rafah (9News.com.au, 2024e). The G7 countries and Australia shared "grave" concerns about the "potential for harm to more than a million Palestinian civilians" (9News.com.au, 2024e, 2024j). Quantification played a central role in establishing scale, with repeated references to "1.4 million Palestinians–more than half of Gaza's population" sheltering in Rafah (9News.com.au, 2024f), "more than 34,800 Palestinians" killed, and "80 percent of Gaza's population... driven from their homes" (9News.com.au, 2024g). The UNRWA and the OCHA warned of a "full-blown famine" (9News.com.au, 2024g) and "devastating consequences" of Israel's military campaign (9News.com.au, 2024e). Rare civilian voices personalised the humanitarian crisis. "So many people here are displaced and now they have to move again," said a father of five Nidal Alzaanin. Sahar Abu Nahel, displaced to Rafah with 20 of her family members, her husband held by Israel, and son-in-law missing, expressed despair: "Where am I going to go? ... Maybe it's more honourable for us to die. We are being humiliated" (9News.com.au, 2024e).

US–Israel diplomatic controversy over weapons and military restraint was discussed, with the humanitarian crisis appearing as a secondary layer. 9News.com.au's coverage (N=2) was structured around a dominant "controversy" frame, with the P3 humanitarian suffering frame as secondary. While Biden reaffirmed that US support for Israel remained "ironclad, even when we disagree," he pointed to "significant civilian casualties" in Gaza linked to US-supplied heavy bombs and signalled a plan to halt further military assistance (9News.com.au, 2024h). These claims were immediately juxtaposed with sharp backlash from Israeli and Republican figures (9News.com.au, 2024a), with Israel's ambassador to the UN describing Biden's decision as "disappointing" and "frustrating," Netanyahu stating that Israel would "stand alone" and press ahead, and the Republicans supporting Israel's decision to go into Rafah "to root out the Hamas threat" (9News.com.au, 2024h).

The Guardian framed the Rafah offensive not only as a humanitarian emergency but as a case of potentially unlawful use of force through the P2 "Israeli attacks are disproportionate" frame (N=5) and escalating international criticism (Hurst, 2024d; Wintour, 2024). Israel's aim to "destroy the last stronghold of Hamas" and its position as facing "an existential and multi-front threat" were acknowledged but subordinated to critical international responses, such as "the US, EU, UK and other countries pursu[ing] an escalating sanctions campaign against extremist Israeli settlers and far-right organisations," reinforcing a narrative in which military objectives were weighed against legal accountability and civilian harm (Borger & Beaumont, 2024).

Particular attention was given to a "simmering US-Israel rift" and Israel's divergence from Pentagon rules on the use of large aerial weapons in heavily populated urban settings (Borger & Beaumont, 2024). However, later articles noted that "despite American concerns," a US report found Israel had offered "credible assurances that it was not violating US or international law" (Luscombe & Helmore, 2024). This was contrasted with UN and humanitarian organisation assessments documenting the toll of 34,844 casualties.

Israel is the victim and has a right to defend itself (Israeli frame 1); Hamas must be eliminated (Israeli frame 4); 7 October was justified resistance against Israeli occupation (Palestinian frame 1); Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering (Palestinian frame 3); Palestinian views deserve greater recognition and support (Palestinian frame 4)

While 9News.com.au and The Guardian mainly framed US–Israel tensions as a dispute over civilian harm and weapons use, The Australian (N=1) presented Israel as facing an existential threat, yet under pressure from an ally through the Isr1 "Israel is the victim and has a right to defend itself" frame – the only Israeli frame identified in the event three sample. Although the article acknowledged US warnings ("Civilians have been killed in Gaza as a consequence of those bombs" (Creighton & Barrowclough, 2024)), most space was given to Netanyahu, determined to continue the war despite growing international pressure.

Two of The Australian's sampled articles simultaneously used Israeli and Palestinian frames, although Israeli military logic appeared more actively elaborated through emotional and more frequent direct quotes, while Palestinian suffering mainly appeared depersonalised, with no or limited direct civilian testimony.

One article juxtaposed Israel's "just cause [of] defeat[ing] genocidal enemies" (Stewart, 2024b) (Isr4 "Hamas must be eliminated" frame) with warnings about catastrophic civilian consequences (P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering"). Rafah was framed as central to Israel's aim of "wiping out the terrorist group," while Netanyahu warned that without an attack on Rafah, Hamas would "regroup and regenerate over time" (Stewart, 2024b). On the other hand, the article emphasised that Rafah was sheltering "an estimated 1.4 million displaced Palestinians," while the G7 countries called on Israel "to change course," warning of "massive civilian casualties," and describing a ground offensive as "unjustifiable" (Stewart, 2024b).

Another article in The Australian juxtaposed Israeli security concerns (Isr4 "Hamas must be eliminated" frame) with the impending UN vote on Palestinian statehood (P4 "Palestinian views deserve greater recognition and support" frame). Hamas was described as the governing "terrorist" authority in Gaza "still holding 130 hostages," while political actors framed the UN vote on Palestinian statehood as dangerous; Australian politicians and the Israeli ambassador to the UN warned that recognition would "send the wrong message to Hamas, who are committed to the destruction of Israel" (Baldwin & Creighton, 2024). The article incorporated Palestinian perspectives through short yet direct civilian testimony. Displaced Nuseirat refugee camp resident Malek al-Zaza reported that they had "no food" and "no water" (Baldwin & Creighton, 2024). However, the juxtaposition of frames was complicated by an emphasis on the domestic social-cohesion narrative, amplified through the emotional language of Anti-Defamation Commission chair Dvir Abramovich and Labor MP Josh Burns describing the UN vote as contributing to internal division, warning it would likely "embolden home-grown anti-Israel radicals" and leave Jewish Australians "stabbed in the heart" amid "a national crisis of skyrocketing antisemitism," in which "Jews are facing a hurricane of vicious hate" (Baldwin & Creighton, 2024).

The Australian's sampled coverage turned to domestic political tensions around the contested legitimacy of pro-Palestinian advocacy, Palestinian statehood, and its UN membership casting this rhetoric as socially divisive and potentially illegitimate. The sampled articles (N=4) adopted a "controversy" frame as dominant and the P4 "Palestinian views deserve greater recognition and support" or P1 "7 October was justified resistance against Israeli occupation" frames as secondary.

While references to the humanitarian situation in Rafah were included, they functioned as contextual. Albanese was concerned about where Palestinians would go, "given the destruction that's occurred to housing in other parts of Gaza," while Adam Bandt urged Australia to send "a clear message that the killing must stop" (Lewis, 2024).

Statements from the Australian Muslim Advocacy Network, the Islamic Council of Victoria, and Senator Fatima Payman emphasised Palestinian perspectives, including references to a "right to resist," the framing of Gaza as a site of "occupation," and the defence of the slogan "from the river to the sea" as a "call for freedom" (Down & Kelly, 2024). These claims were immediately contested by Opposition figures warning that such rhetoric could constitute racial vilification and criticising

organisations for "refus[ing] to condemn Hamas for October 7" (Down & Kelly, 2024).

Support for Palestinian recognition (Packham & Kelly, 2024) was further counterbalanced by strong criticism from the Executive Council of Australian Jewry that framed pro-Palestinian political actors, particularly the Greens, as having "no interest in peace and constructive steps towards a two-state solution [but rather] in their anti-imperialist, anti-Western fantasies… caus[ing] more harm, more division, incit[ing] more hatred and frequently split[ting] into open racism, references to Jewish tentacles and all" (Lewis, 2024). Limited historical context was invoked, with reference to Labor's internal fracturing during the 2012 UN vote on Palestinian observer status, where the Gillard government ultimately shifted from opposition to abstention.

Additionally, The Australian used the P1 frame "7 October was justified resistance against Israeli occupation" in a strongly critical manner. "A controversial Muslim commentator" Sami Hamdi was reported as urging the University of Sydney's pro-Palestine encampment to "celebrate the victory" of the 7 October attack, asking, while "wiping away tears": "How many of you felt the euphoria? Allahu Akbar!" (Yim & Bita, 2024). Hamdi was associated with other "controversial" figures including "anti-Israel Macquarie University academic" Dr Randa Abdel-Fattah (Yim & Bita, 2024).

Summary

Across event three, The Guardian focused on a legal-moral critique of Israeli conduct, 9News.com.au on geopolitical uncertainty, The Australian on domestic social division, and the ABC on humanitarian consequences.

With the P2 frame "Israeli attacks are disproportionate," The Guardian placed the Rafah offensive within the discourse of legal and moral evaluation, reinforced by growing international criticism, and references to death tolls and emotional commentary, although Palestinian civilian voices were absent. Israeli justifications were acknowledged but weighed against their humanitarian implications, with Western political voices framing Israeli actions as potentially inconsistent with international law.

9News.com.au presented the humanitarian crisis as a rapidly evolving emergency through numbers and institutional sources. Warnings from UN agencies and Western government spokespeople that aid operations could collapse were juxtaposed with Israeli rebuttals, alongside limited personalisation of Palestinians.

Using the P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame, the ABC focused on the catastrophic conditions of famine, displacement, and collapsing infrastructure in Gaza, narrated by UN humanitarian agencies, Western governments, and emotional family and medical testimony. Quantification reinforced the scale of the crisis, while a single historical reference to a sprawling refugee camp built for displaced Palestinians 75 years ago linked present-day displacement to the longer history of Palestinian struggle.

The ABC, 9News.com.au, and The Australian used, albeit differently, controversy as the dominant frame, focusing on two contested questions: diplomatic debates around Palestinian recognition and the US–Israeli tensions over the planned Rafah offensive. Within these broader controversies, the P3 "Israeli actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering," P4 "Palestinian views deserve greater recognition and support," and P1 "7 October was justified resistance against Israeli occupation" frames appeared as secondary. Unlike The Australian, which presented Palestinian recognition and advocacy as risky and socially divisive, the ABC cited pro-Palestinian perspectives alongside government-aligned two-state solution and opposition responses. In contrast, 9News.com.au focused on US–Israel tensions over a full offensive in Rafah using heavy weapons in densely populated areas, with humanitarian concerns articulated through official warnings; but these did not drive the narrative.

Across event three, rather than focusing on the Rafah offensive, The Australian focused more consistently than any other outlet on the diplomatic debate around the possible recognition of a Palestinian state by the UN and the legitimacy of pro-Palestinian advocacy. Sampled articles strongly criticised the most extreme articulations of the pro-Palestinian movement, discrediting a broader pro-Palestinian stance while simultaneously focusing on the Israeli self-defence frame and narratives of existential threat. Israeli military logic appeared more developed, and Palestinian suffering depersonalised. Even articles which simultaneously presented competing perspectives pulled the conflict back into a discourse of domestic social division and antisemitism.

Event 4: Gaza humanitarian collapse and diplomatic sanctions (June 2025)

Continuing the pattern observed in events two and three, Palestinian frames again outweighed Israeli frames across the event four sample (N=50). Between 1–14 June 2025, three major developments were captured: intensified Israeli military activity in central and southern Gaza; renewed settlement expansion announced by Israeli Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich in the last days of May; and the joint diplomatic response from Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and Norway imposing sanctions on Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir on 10 June for inciting violence against Palestinians in the West Bank.

Palestinian perspectives appeared in 68 percent of the sampled articles, led by P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" (42 percent) and P2 "Israeli attacks are disproportionate" (24 percent). The articles coded as "no frame," organised around alternative dominant narratives, comprised 26 percent, while Israeli frames accounted for 6 percent (Figure 7).

Pro-Palestinian sources outweighed pro-Israeli ones (56 percent vs 36 percent), with The Guardian, the ABC, and 9News.com.au relying on around 1.5 times as many pro-Palestinian as pro-Israeli voices, while The Australian demonstrated an opposite tendency (Figure 8).

At outlet level, The Guardian and 9News.com.au most consistently emphasised the humanitarian crisis (P3) frame. The Guardian was also the only outlet to publish an article juxtaposing the recovery of two Israeli American hostage bodies (Isr3) with the broader humanitarian toll of Israel's war in Gaza (P3). The ABC had a nearly equal number of articles with both the humanitarian question (P3) and the disproportionality of Israeli attacks (P2) frames and was also the only outlet in event four to use Israeli frames of self-defence (Isr1) and hostage victimhood (Isr3) as dominant framings. In contrast, The Australian covered sanction politics, and domestic ideological and media credibility debates.

Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering (Palestinian frame 3)

The Guardian strongly used the P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame (N=11) that portrayed Gaza as a place surviving under sustained conditions of hunger, displacement, and potentially "deliberate" Israeli military bombardment (Davies, 2025).

Coverage strongly personalised bereaved families, identifying members by name, age, and profession, most notably the story of 40-year-old Hamdi al-Najjar who died after losing "nine of his 10 children" in an Israeli airstrike: "He had just returned home after accompanying his wife Alaa, a pediatrician at the Nasser medical complex, to work when the building was struck" (Tondo & Tantesh, 2025a).

A set of articles focused on "brutally repetitive attacks on desperate crowds" trying to access food handouts at the Israeli-backed Gaza Humanitarian Foundation (GHF) hubs inside Israeli military zones (Graham-Harrison, 2025). Israeli and GHF explanations were included but consistently placed in tension with humanitarian evidence (Davies, 2025; Tondo, 2025a).

Casualty figures underscored the scale of suffering (Davies & Abraham, 2025). According to the Red Cross and local health officials, Israeli fire had "kill[ed] at least three people and injur[ed] dozens" on one day (Davies, 2025) and left "184 people wounded, 19 of whom were declared dead on arrival" the next (Tondo & Tantesh, 2025b). Long-term societal destruction was also included: "400 schools classified as having suffered a direct hit" (Davies, 2025), "90 percent of school and university buildings" damaged (Graham-Harrison, 2025), while a UN commission of inquiry concluded there were signs of a campaign to "obliterate Palestinian life in Gaza" (Graham-Harrison, 2025).

Witness testimony of medical staff and named survivors deepened the emotional humanitarian frame (Tondo & Tantesh, 2025b). The head of nursing at Nasser hospital reported patients with gunshot wounds and shrapnel "all over the bodies," indicating "they were targeted with tanks or artillery munitions" (Davies, 2025). After a tank fired in their direction, 30-year-old Adham Dahman described food distribution centres as a "trap for us, not aid" and questioned why troops opened fire in what had been declared "a safe area from 6am until 6pm" (Tondo, 2025e). International organisations reinforced the moral and legal dimensions of the frame (Borger, 2025). While the IDF justified the "military necessity" of strikes targeting Hamas militants "in strict accordance with international law" (Davies, 2025), the

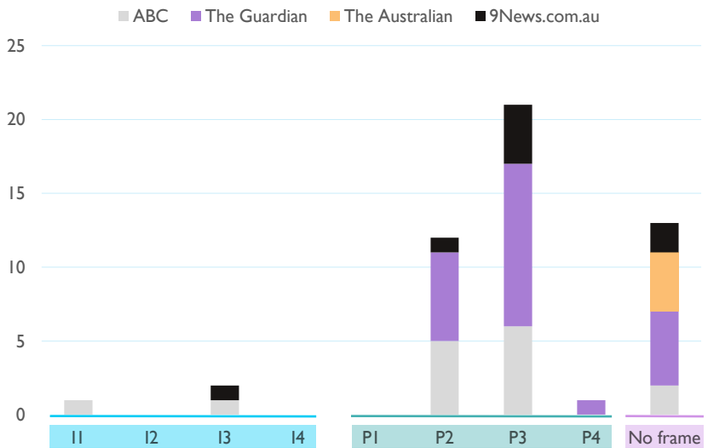


Figure 7 | Event 4: Distribution of dominant frame adoption by media outlet between 1–14 June 2025. Bars represent the number of sampled articles with the dominant frame.

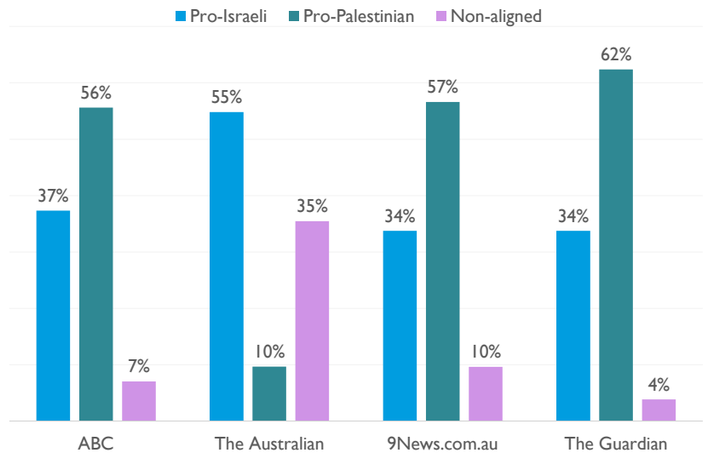


Figure 8 | Event 4: Distribution of quoted sources voicing pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, or non-aligned perspectives by media outlet. Percentages represent the political alignment category as a proportion of all quoted sources within each outlet's event four sample.

UN human rights chief described the "deadly attacks" on civilians around food distribution sites as an "unconscionable… war crime" (Tondo & Tantesh, 2025b). The humanitarian critique was also intensified through Israeli dissent, particularly in one sampled article in which Israeli military intelligence officers were quoted as refusing to serve in an "unnecessary, eternal" war, condemning the "killing of innocent people," with one officer framing the scale of violence as ethically intolerable and concluding: "If there is a goal, it's to try to get rid of Gaza's population by any means" (Davies & Abraham, 2025).

While The Guardian emphasised more forensic and graphic detail of casualty scenes and linked humanitarian suffering directly to legal and moral scrutiny, including allegations of genocide, the ABC focused on witnessed suffering and the collapse of social systems pinpointed by doctors, aid organisers, academics, and tent-school students. Israeli rejections of the genocide allegations, the release of unverified IDF drone footage (Doran & Yazbek, 2025a), references to 1,200 Israelis killed in the October 2023 Hamas attack, and justification for the bombardment of the al-Ahli Arab Hospital and the Islamic University of Gaza over alleged links with Hamas provided contextual balance; these claims were directly challenged by Palestinian voices.

Palestinian academics from Cambridge University and Gaza University described Gaza as having already lost "a generation of students and academics" (Michie & Benton, 2025). Juxtaposition of the "once buzzing" Islamic University of Gaza with now "ruined classrooms" housing displaced families who burn books for kindling reinforced the narrative of societal collapse (Michie & Benton, 2025).

Gazans were further personalised through named witnesses and their frontline graphic recollections, especially children. Ahmad Awad, 13, said his school had been destroyed, and that he had to study in a tent while living "as a refugee" with "no food, no flour, nothing" (Tlozek & Yazbek, 2025). Another 13-year-old Mohammad Iyad Sabbah could not understand "why I should not be learning despite the war" (Tlozek & Yazbek, 2025). A 37-year-old displaced Palestinian mother Ikram Nasser, after surviving the gunfire incident at the Gaza Humanitarian Foundation aid site, said:

> *"I will never ever go to these distributions again. I'd rather starve to death. I have no flour, no sugar, I have no food, nothing, no formula for my son — yet I will not go anymore"* (Doran & Yazbek, 2025b).

Australian doctors shared accounts of "apocalyptic" scenes in Gaza, "starving children with horrific injuries," "dogs eating people in the streets," and hospitals lacking food, anesthesia, and sanitation (Chamas, 2025). A Wollongong pharmacist Yossra Aboulfadl said many medical professionals were "heartbroken and traumatised… watching and witnessing this genocide for over a year and a half," while a staffer with Médecins Sans Frontières in Gaza shared memories of seeing "babies burned and children mutilated" (Al-Nashar, 2025).

Quantification signalled broad professional consensus, with more than 1,000 Israeli academics condemning the "complete elimination of the educational system" in Gaza (Michie & Benton, 2025) and 900 Australian doctors pushing for "targeted sanctions on Israel" (Al-Nashar, 2025). The World Food Programme, World Health Organization, and UNICEF reported that "at least 94 percent of hospitals [were] damaged or destroyed" (Al-Nashar, 2025), with "70 percent of school buildings directly hit" (Tlozek & Yazbek, 2025), "55,104 Palestinians killed and 127,394 injured," "[the] entire 2.1 million population of Gaza facing prolonged food shortages, with nearly half a million people in a catastrophic situation of hunger, acute malnutrition, starvation, illness and death" (Chamas, 2025).

Using the P3 frame, 9News.com.au (N=4) also relied on witness testimony, hospital officials, UN criticism, and quantification to depict dangerous aid access. However, the reporting provided space to Israeli hostage grief and military denials, creating a contested but still humanitarian-centred coverage.

In a 2 June article, the Israeli army stated that it was "currently unaware of injuries caused by [Israeli] fire within the humanitarian aid distribution site," and the GHF complained about "false reporting about deaths, mass injuries and chaos," while a health ministry official and doctor at Nasser Hospital reported seeing people shot "in the upper part of their bodies, including the head, neck and chest" and later receiving "150 wounded people… along with 28 bodies" (9News.com.au, 2025m).

A 3 June article presented competing claims from Palestinian health officials and witnesses accusing Israeli forces of firing on civilians as they headed towards an aid distribution site, with the Israeli military specifying it fired "near a few individual suspects" who left the designated route and ignored warning shots (9News.com.au, 2025n). While Palestinian civilians described scenes of hunger and trauma ("There was no aid there. There was gunfire from all directions."), the Israeli military reported the death of three soldiers in the Jabalya area, "in what appeared to be the deadliest attack on Israel's forces since it ended a ceasefire with Hamas in March" (9News.com.au, 2025n).

An 8 June article also incorporated both sides, combining hostage recovery with reporting of aid-site shootings, the mass displacement of Palestinians, and famine warnings. On the Israeli side, the bodies of a Thai national and two Israeli-American hostages abducted from Kibbutz Nir Oz were retrieved, while 55 hostages remained in Gaza, with "more than half dead" (9News.com.au, 2025o). Palestinian suffering was personalised through the scenes of bereavement and scarcity: a man carried "the body of a small boy," and another woman described waiting in the heat for food for hours after running out of lentils while feeding six people (9News.com.au, 2025o).

Israeli victimhood and moral priority (Israeli frame 3); Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering (Palestinian frame 3)

The ABC (N=2) and The Guardian (N=1) were the only outlets during event four to use Israeli frames. While The Guardian balanced the Isr3 "Israeli victimhood and moral priority" and P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frames, the ABC primarily focused

on Israeli victimhood through hostage recovery narratives, while incorporating the Palestinian humanitarian context as a secondary layer.

Presenting Israel's continuing "special military operation" as a response to Hamas's "barbaric attacks" and an effort to "dismantle the terror group's capabilities," a sampled ABC article on 7 June (Thorpe, 2025a) used the Isr1 "Israel is the victim and has a right to defend itself" frame and centred on the Thai hostage retrieval. An article on 5 June foregrounded the Isr3 "Israeli victimhood and moral priority" frame, focusing on the recovery of two Israeli hostages, with Netanyahu stating that "our hearts ache over this unbearable loss," and Israel's UN ambassador rejecting calls for an unconditional or permanent ceasefire (Doran, 2025d). Both reports repeatedly referenced those still captive ("55 hostages are still being held in Gaza" (Thorpe, 2025a) with "around a third... alive" (Doran, 2025d). At the same time, each article acknowledged that Israeli strikes had killed "more than 54,000 Palestinians... about 80 percent civilians" (Thorpe, 2025a), and that a "humanitarian crisis grips the enclave of more than 2 million people" (Doran, 2025d).

A similar balancing pattern appeared in an article on 6 June in The Guardian on the recovery of two Israeli hostages' bodies, but with stronger emphasis on juxtaposing Israeli grief with Gaza's devastation. Hostage families insisted the state "must do everything necessary to reach an agreement that will return all 56 remaining hostages" (Tondo, 2025b), whilst substantial Palestinian context was provided citing the closure of food distribution points after "the killings by Israeli troops of dozens of civilians waiting for food" (Tondo, 2025b).

Israeli attacks are disproportionate (Palestinian frame 2)

The P2 "Israeli attacks are disproportionate" frame appeared in The Guardian (N=6), the ABC (N=5), and 9News.com.au (N=1), although articulated differently across outlets. The Guardian amplified moral condemnation of potentially unlawful methods of Israeli warfare voiced by domestic Israeli actors and its close democratic allies and humanitarian organisations abroad. In contrast, the ABC allowed casualty statistics, UN legal warnings, and competing claims to imply disproportionality, while giving constrained space to Israeli rebuttals. 9News.com.au framed disproportionality through the diplomatic controversy surrounding sanctions against Israeli ministers Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, balancing criticism of Israeli conduct with official Israeli rebuttals.

Both The Guardian and the ABC reported Netanyahu's admission that Israel had armed anti-Hamas clans in Gaza, despite allegations that "members of these criminal gangs looted humanitarian aid and have ties to jihadist groups" (Tondo, 2025d). Israeli justifications were present in both outlets; Netanyahu and Israeli security officials described the operation as "planned and managed" (Tondo, 2025c), with the goal to "save lives of Israeli soldiers" (ABC, 2025f), while the Popular Forces group insisted they sought to "protect the Palestinians from Hamas terror" (Thorpe, 2025b). These claims were juxtaposed with criticism from Israeli political figures (ABC, 2025f; Tondo, 2025d).

The Guardian, the ABC, and 9News.com.au all legitimised coordinated sanctions against Israeli ministers Ben-Gvir and Smotrich for inciting "extremist violence" (Doran & Crowley, 2025) and "serious abuses of Palestinian human rights" (Wintour, 2025) by reproducing Smotrich's own remarks, that "Gaza [would] be entirely destroyed" (Doran & Crowley, 2025), that "not even a grain of wheat" should enter Gaza, and that the death of two million Palestinians from hunger was "justified and moral until [Israeli] hostages returned" (Wintour, 2025).

9News.com.au particularly highlighted the delayed nature of the sanctions. The UK Foreign Secretary David Lammy noted that Ben-Gvir and Smotrich had been inciting extremist rhetoric "for months and months and months" (9News.com.au, 2025p).

The Guardian focused more closely on the British response: Foreign Office minister Hamish Falconer warned that unless Israel ceased its renewed offensive in Rafah, the UK would take "further concrete actions," including arms export restrictions and sanctions on Israeli government members (Stacey & Butler, 2025).

In turn, the ABC framed the issue more diplomatically. Penny Wong emphasised "a strong friendship with the people of Israel," but described the creation of new Israeli settlements, the forced displacement of Palestinians, and denial of essential aid as "appalling and dangerous," undermining "Israel's own security and standing in the world" (Doran & Crowley, 2025).

Simultaneously, all three outlets included moderating counter-voices. The Guardian noted that the US Secretary of State Marco Rubio opposed the sanctions and pledged to stand "shoulder to shoulder" with its ally, while former Israeli defence minister Benny Gantz, although "vehemently disagree[ing]" with Ben-Gvir and Smotrich, argued that sanctions were a "profound moral mistake [that would] send a dangerous message to terrorists" (Wintour, 2025). Consistent with the tendency of 9News.com.au toward back-to-back competing claims, Israeli reaction was prominently included: Israel's Foreign Minister Gideon Saar called the sanctions "outrageous," and Smotrich and Ben-Gvir mocked the measures: "We overcame Pharoah [sic], we'll overcome Starmer's Wall" (9News.com.au, 2025p).

Both the ABC and The Guardian also linked disproportionality to repeated shootings near aid distribution sites and broader humanitarian deprivation. In The Guardian, humanitarian, legal, and political voices reinforced the moral framing, with then UK prime minister Sir Keir Starmer describing Israel's killings of civilians at food points as "appalling, counterproductive and intolerable," and Oxfam UK and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) saying conditions in Gaza surpassed "any acceptable legal, moral and humane standard" (Stacey & Butler, 2025). In contrast, the ABC included familiar pro-Israeli counterclaims, such as that troops fired "warning shots" (Thorpe, 2025b) and that the Israeli military was "doing everything in its power" to facilitate aid (Doran, 2025c). However, casualty figures and institutional criticism reinforced the disproportionality of Israeli conduct; Gaza's health ministry, doctors, and the ICRC reported that Israeli gunfire and air strikes killed "a total of 163 people" and wounded "more than 1,000" (Thorpe, 2025b). Overall, the three outlets framed Israeli actions as disproportionate, but 9News.com.au presented competing claims back-to-back, The Guardian relied on more overtly condemnatory rhetoric built around allied pressure and moral criticism, whereas the ABC prioritised casualty statistics, verification reporting, and competing elite voices.

No frame

The Australian did not directly engage with the Israeli or Palestinian frames. Instead, its event four coverage (N=4) was organised around two issues, both concerning alignment with the US. One sampled article framed Hamas rather than Israel as responsible for aid-site violence. Another focused on the diplomatic fallout of Australia's sanctions on two Israeli ministers and what the move meant for Labor's internal agenda and relations with the US.

A 5 June article centred on the White House "attack" on the BBC after it published claims about Israeli forces shooting Palestinians near aid sites. Trump's press secretary Karoline Leavitt accused reporters of taking "Hamas's word as total truth" and urged media who "actually care about truth" to reduce "misinformation" (Barrowclough, 2025).

Articles on 11 and 12 June framed the sanctions as a catalyst to the growing US–Australia "divide" (Ison, 2025b) and "a dramatic escalation in the government's criticism of Israel" (Chambers, 2025). On the one hand, Albanese stressed balance ("We support Israel's right to live and to exist in secure borders. But we also support the legitimate aspirations of Palestinians" (Chambers, 2025)), and Penny Wong defended the measures by calling Ben-Gvir and Smotrich "the most extreme proponents of the unlawful and violent settlement enterprise" in the West Bank and Gaza (Ison, 2025b). However, criticism of Labor's stance dominated the coverage. US Secretary of State Marco Rubio insisted the measures did "not advance US-led efforts to achieve a ceasefire, bring all hostages home, and end the war" (Ison, 2025a). Likewise, former Labor minister Mike Kelly warned the move risked being seen by Hamas as a "reward," and Israel's ambassador to Australia Amir Maimon labelled the decision "deeply concerning and entirely unacceptable" (Ison, 2025a).

Summary

The event four coverage focused on Gaza's humanitarian collapse, sanctions, and legal scrutiny of Israeli conduct and aid governance.

The Guardian reinforced the humanitarian consequences of war and growing international scrutiny over allegations of genocide through quantification of casualties and destruction, personalisation of victims, and dense sourcing from legal organisations, hospitals, UN agencies, and at times dissenting Israeli military voices.

The ABC's coverage was also human-centred. Gaza was primarily depicted as a place of social collapse through the voices of doctors, teachers, parents, aid workers, and children. Foreign leaders' competing claims, ranging from support to condemnation of Israeli conduct, and UN agencies' quantification of damaged hospitals, ruined schools, hunger, and civilian deaths reinforced the P3 and P2 frames.

9News.com.au primarily structured its reporting through back-to-back competing Israeli and Palestinian perspectives, presenting witness and health ministry accounts of civilian harm alongside Israeli political and military rebuttals. Coordinated sanctions against far-right Israeli ministers were similarly placed against Israeli counterclaims. Nevertheless, more space was given to Gaza's humanitarian crisis through repeated casualty figures and hunger warnings.

The Australian, in contrast, prioritised the discussion of the US–Australia tensions, Labor's sanctions fallout, and media credibility disputes.

Event 5: Regional escalation and the US–Israeli strikes on Iran (February–March 2026)

The event five coverage (N=160) between 28 February and 6 March 2026 demonstrated the transformation of the Israel–Gaza war into a broader regional conflict, involving the US, Israel, Iran, Lebanon, and the Gulf states. The Isr5 "The conflict extends beyond Gaza and requires broader regional actions" frame dominated (60 percent), spotlighting Iran's nuclear threat and the regime's destabilisation narratives, international debates around the legality of the US–Israeli attacks, and regional security consequences (Figure 9). The articles coded as "no frame" comprised 20 percent of the overall sample and mainly focused on the broader economic consequences of the conflict, including oil market and aviation disruption, and the Iranian women's football team arriving in Australia for the Women's Asian Cup, with narratives of Iranian repression and censorship.

The Palestinian humanitarian (P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering") and legality scrutiny frames (P2 "Israeli attacks are disproportionate") declined sharply in this event, comprising only 11 percent and 7 percent of the sample, respectively. However, both frames remained prominent in The Guardian which organised 40 percent of its coverage around the P3 frame and 17.5 percent around the P2 frame and relatively balanced pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian voices (Figure 10). As outlined in the methodology, the latter category included Iranian officials expressing anti-Israeli positions in relation to the regional escalation of the conflict rather than Gaza specifically, alongside civilians narrating the unfolding humanitarian crisis. The ABC gave less space to Iranian civilian voices but weighed the US–Israeli security rationales against the voices of Iranian officials, European leaders, legal experts, and the Iranian–Australian diaspora, spotlighting the questions of legality, humanitarian consequences, and mixed feelings on the death of the Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. In contrast, 9News.com.au and The Australian reduced Iranian casualties to brief official statistics, while Iranian perspectives were limited to anti-Western threat or anti-regime rhetoric supportive of the US–Israeli attacks. 9News.com.au mainly favoured American political voices, while The Australian gave prominence to Israeli civilians who narrated everyday resilience.

The conflict extends beyond Gaza and requires broader regional actions (Israeli frame 5)

Through the Isr5 "The conflict extends beyond Gaza and requires broader regional actions" frame, the ABC (N=24) examined the US–Israeli preventative-war justification of strikes as part of a "renewed military confrontation" in the Middle East, "dim[ming] hopes for a diplomatic solution to Tehran's long-running nuclear dispute with the West" and involving the Iranian regime's regional destabilisation, including missile attacks across the Gulf. Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz was quoted announcing that his nation had conducted a "pre-emptive strike… to remove threats" to Israel (Hindeleh & Yussuf, 2026), backed by US President Donald Trump, who wanted Iran to hold "no nuclear weapons" and dubbed the joint US–Israeli attack "Epic Fury" (Wearmouth, 2026a).

On the other hand, the ABC also asked, "why did this [attack] happen now?", noting the shift in US–Israeli rhetoric from nuclear prevention to regime change (Hindeleh & Yussuf, 2026), with Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu justifying US–Israeli joint actions as creating "the conditions for the courageous Iranian people to take their destiny into their own hands" (Doran et al., 2026) and "remove the yoke of tyranny" (Wearmouth, 2026b). Trump's rhetoric also changed from the earlier justification of nuclear threat prevention towards the removal of "the world's number one state sponsor of terror" (Doran et al., 2026), led by "one of the most evil people in history" Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, assassinated during the opening strikes on Tehran (Hindeleh & Yussuf, 2026).

While American perspectives appeared more prominent, with Trump as the primary voice across the sampled ABC articles, warning against Iranian retaliation (Dingwall, 2026b), Iranian claims first surfaced as deterrence rhetoric, with Tehran warning neighboring countries hosting US troops that it would "retaliate against American bases if Washington struck Iran" (Doran et al., 2026). Iranian perspectives were briefly included through military and political figures noting that Iran would launch its "most intense offensive operation" ever (Dingwall, 2026b), and accusing the US–Israeli attacks had caused mounting casualties of innocent civilians. A strike on a girls' school in the Iranian southern city of Minab was reported to have killed "more than 160 people" (Cooper, 2026a) and wounded "at least 45" (Doran et al., 2026). Iran's death toll was stated to have "reached 787," and Tehran described as a "ghost town," with civilians hiding in basements pleading, "World, do you see? They are killing us. Hear our voice" (Ryan, 2026c).

At the same time, deaths in Israel, Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, the UAE, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Azerbaijan were recorded; Lebanese officials reported that the death toll "reached 50, with 355 wounded," including "at least seven" children (Ryan, 2026c) while the Kuwait Health Ministry confirmed "one death and 32 injuries" and the UAE, three deaths. Israeli authorities were quoted reporting that "11 people had been killed, more than 100 hurt by Iran's retaliatory strikes… in the central town of Beit Shemesh" (Ryan, 2026a). However, narratives foregrounding disproportionality and the mounting

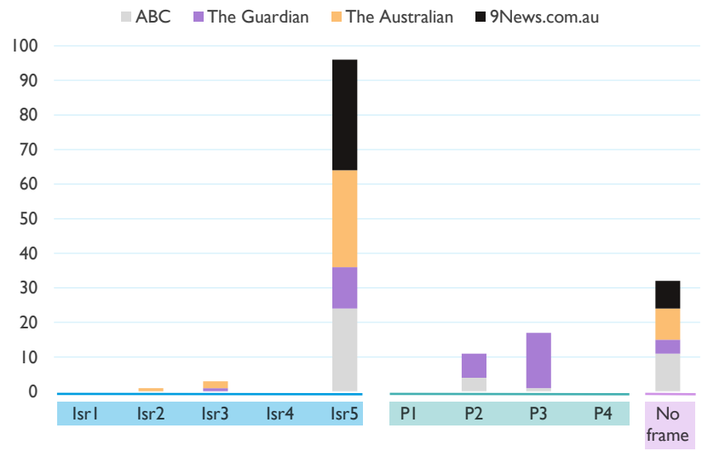


Figure 9 | Event 5: Distribution of dominant frame adoption by media outlet between 28 February and 6 March 2026. Bars represent the number of sampled articles with the dominant frame.

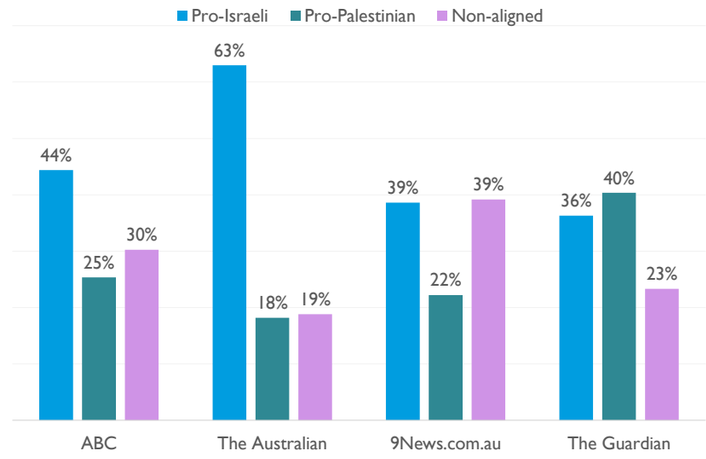


Figure 10 | Event 5: Distribution of quoted sources voicing pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, or non-aligned perspectives by media outlet. Percentages represent the political alignment category as a proportion of all quoted sources within each outlet's event five sample.

regional death toll remained secondary to broader security rhetoric (Dingwall, 2026b).

Notably, the ABC articles described US–Israeli strikes as "massive and ongoing" but more strategic (Burgess, 2026), "advancing decisively" (Hosier, 2026), as "swift, precise, overwhelming," "calculated," and "coordinated space and cyber operations" (Stein, 2026), while Iranian retaliation was portrayed as "fierce" and technologically sophisticated (Burgess, 2026). The "lethality and precision" of Iranian missiles and drones were heavily reported, described as able to "wreak havoc," "breaching air defences," "unleashing large numbers of drones across the Arab Gulf," "slamming into buildings and causing damage to luxury hotels and international airports," "deadlier and harder to intercept," and "overwhelming [US and Israeli] defence systems" through "relentless, deadly barrages" (Burgess, 2026).

The ABC weighed global warnings against and in support of the US and Israeli "military operation" in Iran and, as a secondary layer, questioned the legality of preventative strikes (Ryan, 2026a). While regime change and previous calls for Iran's citizens to overthrow the government were not repeated by Trump as the war progressed, Trump's renewed goals were listed – destroying Iran's ballistic missile capacity, "annihilating" Iran's navy, preventing Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, and stopping Iran from arming proxy groups. The expansion into "a new front" – Lebanon, "one of Tehran's principal allies in the Middle East" – further strengthened the Isr5 frame, with Israel declaring Hezbollah's leader a "target for elimination" and launching a ground invasion (Ryan, 2026b). Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, Foreign Minister Penny Wong, and Defence Minister Richard Marles supported US actions to stop Iran acquiring nuclear weapons, linking Iran to threats to "international peace and security," while Opposition Leader Angus Taylor described Iran's regime as "authoritarian, antisemitic and abhorrent," seeking "the destruction of Israel," supporting terrorism through its proxies Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis, and supplying weapons to Russia "to support Putin's invasion of Ukraine" (Dingwall, 2026a). In contrast, the UK government announced it was not involved in "the US and Israeli strikes on Iran," with then British Prime Minister Sir Keir Starmer noting, "We all remember the mistakes of Iraq, and we have learned the lesson" (Ryan, 2026a). Reactions from other global leaders largely repeated similar concerns over escalation and legality. As news reports emerged that Iran's supreme leader Khamenei had been killed in air strikes by the US and Israel, the Isr5 frame presented his assassination as a turning point, "potentially mark[ing] a monumental shift in the power dynamics of the Middle East," legitimising the strategic significance of the "audacious gamble" of the US and Israel (Thorpe, 2026). Biographical profiles portrayed him as a "brutal dictator," with an "iron grip on power within his own country," ordering "brutal crackdowns" on protesters, and a long-term adversary having "proved a thorn in the side of both the United States and Israel" (Thorpe, 2026).

Iranians across the country were reported "rejoicing, cheering from rooftops, blowing whistles and letting out ululations" (Dingwall, 2026b), celebrating "what they hope might be the near end of a brutal regime" (Khadem, 2026a). Iranian-Australians expressed solidarity with victims of the Iranian regime, celebrating the "end of Khamenei, end of sugar daddy to Hezbollah and Hamas and Houthis" (ABC, 2026a). While some described Khamenei's death as "our Berlin Wall moment," others were reported as saying, "it wasn't easy for me to accept it or cheer for it. It was very difficult to see your country being bombed," and "war wouldn't change the situation, wouldn't bring anybody democracy… it just leads to fragmentation and chaos" (Khadem,2026a). Celebratory rhetoric was juxtaposed with voice notes of Iranians (sent during intermittent internet connections via Starlink, as on 8 January, Iran cut phone and internet services as nationwide protests intensified) that expressed "mixed feelings on the situation… both pleased that 47 years of brutality under the Islamic Republic could come to an end, but fearful of a prolonged war and the possibility of civilian casualties" (Khadem, 2026a). Thus, the ABC treated this regime change narrative ambivalently.

Australian memorials held to mourn Khamenei's death were described by Prime Minister Albanese as "inappropriate" (Johnson, 2026) and condemned by NSW Premier Chris Minns ("We can call the mourning of this tyrant atrocious and that's what I'm going to do" (Gerathy, 2026)).

Similar to the ABC's more ambivalent and scrutinised use of the Isr5 frame, 9News.com.au (N=32) also presented a wide spectrum of international responses to the US–Israeli attacks, but Iran was still portrayed as a repressive regime and a nuclear and regional-security threat. Prime Minister Albanese and Opposition leader Angus Taylor described Iran as a threat to "international peace and stability" that "seek[s] the destruction of Israel" and "encourage[s] terrorism through its proxies," including the "brutal acts of violence and intimidation" on Jewish synagogues in Australia in 2024 (Brischetto, 2026b). The US combat operation was described by the Albanian, Ukrainian, British, German, and French leaders as necessary for nuclear prevention, broader regional security, and support of the "brave people of Iran in their struggle against oppression" (Sarkari et al., 2026). While Iran was not given a direct voice other than stating that "it does not seek nuclear weapons," 9News.com.au repeatedly returned to Trump's rationale: Iran "cannot have nuclear weapons" (Vidler, 2026). Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu echoed that goal and called for "the brave Iranian people to take their fate into their own hands" (Brischetto et al., 2026). The Israeli Operation against the "overly cautious supreme leader" was also narrated by Israeli air force pilots who reinforced US–Israeli technological and intelligence superiority (9News.com.au, 2026a; Brischetto et al., 2026).

Two articles from 3 March and 5 March focused on American anti-war backlash, with news influencers Tucker Carlson, Alex Jones, Matt Walsh, Benny Johnson, and Andrew Tate condemning the strikes as "absolutely disgusting and evil," a "gigantic problem," and incompatible with "America First" principles (9News.com.au, 2026e; Pearson, 2026a). Nevertheless, considerable space in 9News.com.au's coverage was given to the US's pro-war rationale; an article published on 2 March portrayed Trump and Netanyahu as "two men on the wisdom of trying to negotiate with Iran to avoid conflict" withTrump intent on "exhausting any diplomatic window that would avoid starting a new war," juxtaposed with an "unmoving" Iran engaging in "games, tricks, [and] stall tactics" that "hardened" Trump's view of military action as "necessary" (9News.com.au, 2026a). A 28 February article reproduced Trump's speech in full, allowing the US' security narrative to dominate without counterargument, with Iran framed as a "wicked, radical dictatorship," linked to Hamas, Hezbollah, Yemen, Syria, and Iraq, who "directly endanger" the US and its allies (Brischetto, 2026a).

When Iranian officials' voices were quoted, emotionally charged, violent revenge rhetoric prevailed, while extended political or strategic explanations were absent. Although Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi initially framed the sinking of the Iranian frigate by the US Navy as "an atrocity at sea," the sampled article quickly shifted to threats that the US would

"bitterly regret the precedent it has set" and calls for the shedding of Israeli and "Trump's blood" (9News.com.au, 2026f).

Iranian casualties were briefly acknowledged at the end of articles, with references to the Iranian Red Crescent and the state news agency IRNA's statistics – "201 people" killed, "among those 85 people" at a girls' school, and "another 747 injured across 24 provinces" (Brischetto et al., 2026), "killed at least 555 people" (9News.com.au, 2026b), "killed at least 787 people" (9News.com.au, 2026c). Abbas Araghchi was briefly quoted, "These are graves being dug for more than 160 innocent young girls who were killed in the US–Israeli bombing of a primary school" (9News.com.au, 2026d), with immediate rebuttals from Marco Rubio included: "[The US] would not deliberately target a school" (9News.com.au, 2026d).

The coverage in general quickly pivoted to Iran's "unprecedented" retaliatory attacks, disrupting air travel and oil shipments through the Strait of Hormuz, Israel's military statements that Iran had fired "dozens" of missiles at it "even after sundown," and Iran's military strategy, saying "it's ready for a long war... until the aggressor is punished," and rejection of negotiations with the US (Brischetto et al., 2026). First-person testimony of Dubai-based Australians narrated Iran's "unprecedented wave of strikes" across the Middle East: "You could actually hear the missiles coming through" (Glover & Branco, 2026).

Unlike the ABC's more ambivalent coverage of public reactions in Australia and Iran to the death of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, 9News.com.au instead reported on an Iranian state media presenter breaking down in tears as he read the news.

Compared to 9News.com.au, The Australian (N=28) devoted less space to detailed explanations of the US–Israeli military rationale and to international criticism. The coverage strongly amplified American and Israeli perspectives through frequent quotations of Trump, Rubio, Hegseth, Netanyahu, Albanese, Coalition figures, and other supportive political and military voices who framed the conflict as necessary against a dangerous Islamist regime.

While nuclear prevention, missile site destruction, proxy degradation, and navy annihilation were briefly mentioned, Trump's "push for regime change" was the main focus and described as a "sweeping and ambitious objective... emboldened by his record of past success" (Kelly, 2026a). The Australian framed the US–Israeli strikes on Iran as "historic" (Kelly, 2026b) and a high-stakes strategic operation against an "almost impossible target," enabled by the CIA and Israeli intelligence, "highly sophisticated tracking systems," and "heavy and pinpoint bombing" (Hodge, 2026a). Alex Ryvchin, co-chief executive officer of the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, expressed gratitude to Trump for "joining with Israel to take decisive action against the Iranian regime" that would result in a "curtailment in antisemitic activity" across the globe, including Australia (Kelly, 2026c). Albanese was reported to have "swiftly come out in support" of the US (Kelly, 2026b), framing Iran as "brutal" and "oppressive," and responsible for antisemitic attacks in Australia, which was echoed by Angus Taylor who praised the "decisiveness and moral fortitude" of the US and Israel (Brown & Yim, 2026). A full article was dedicated to the perspective of Israel's new ambassador to Australia Hillel Newman who was quoted thanking the Albanese government for its support of the Israel–US operation, vowing to keep fighting "for as long as is necessary" to remove "existential threats," and calling "Australian antisemites... totally immoral" and "bent on hatred," not wanting "to hear the truth [that] there was no genocide, no intentional starvation [in Gaza]" (Packham, 2026).

Although The Australian mainly focused on the supportive rhetoric around the regime's "precision decapitation," the risks of regional instability and the potential transformation of the Islamic Republic into "IRGCistan," a military-controlled state with a new symbolic supreme leader, were also mentioned (Hodge, 2026).

Greens leader Larissa Waters called the strikes "illegal, abhorrent and unilateral," adding "we cannot bomb our way to peace," while Doug Cameron, a former union official and senator criticised Albanese for his "sycophantic capitulation to militarism" and Australia for being "completely devoid of acting independently from Trump and Netanyahu" (Brown & Yim, 2026).

Another preselected Greens candidate Omar Sakr, a Lebanese-Turkish Muslim activist and a "long-time critic of Israel," was also reported calling Australia a "slave" to the US and Israel in his Instagram post ("F..k this murderous fascist empire forever. F..k the inevitably stupid and servile s..t our government will say to not piss off the genocidal US that is run by a pedophile rapist. F..k the whole rotten status quo."), before being countered by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry, who said the comments were "abusive" and representative of the Greens who were "known for their political extremism" (Plesser, 2026). As in earlier coverage of pro-Palestinian rhetoric, the selection of extreme language allowed anti-war and anti-Israel positions to appear hostile and irrational.

While the Iranian death toll appeared only in brief statistical references ("Iranian authorities claim more than 200 people have died on their territory from Israeli and US strikes" (Bashan, 2026a)), Israelis were strongly humanised through names, family roles, biographical details, and emotions, indicating the Isr3 "Israeli victimhood and moral priority" frame (N=2). When an Iranian ballistic missile "slammed" the Beit Shemesh shelter, nine Israelis were killed, marking "Israel's deadliest day since the war with Iran erupted" (Bashan, 2026a).

One article richly personalised Israeli daily life under Iranian threat and described Israeli families baking to create a sense of "home-sweet-home" during missile attacks, stockpiling snacks, and transforming bomb shelters into rave and wedding venues (Bashan, 2026b).

Unlike the ABC, which reported on emotional ambivalence after the announcement of Khamenei's death, The Australian mainly used voices that supported the assassination. Khamenei's death was described as a moment of hope and liberation the Iranian people "had waited decades" for (Azar, 2026a). Iranians were reported "dancing on criminal Khamenei's corpse" and pulling down the Islamic regime's flags (Azar, 2026a). Unlike the whole set of the sampled articles from The Australian, one gave substantial voice to ordinary Iranians and portrayed Iran as collapsing under public anger. Citizens were described as "so angry" they could "no longer feel fear," while others described the Revolutionary Guards turning schools and universities into "human shields, a cynical move similar to those used by Hamas in Gaza" (Azar, 2026b). Iranian-Australians were quoted calling Khamenei a "monster," feeling "born again," and "carrying no grief for a man who deceived and brutalised his people" (Dowling et al., 2026). While Academic Kylie Moore-Gilbert, who spent years imprisoned in Iran on espionage charges, questioned "the lack of clarity around Trump's [war] objectives," the Australian-Iranian Community Alliance feared for civilian deaths but blamed Iran for casualties: "If even one Iranian gets killed by an American, the regime in Iran is responsible, not America" (Dowling et al.,

2026). Australian public mourning ceremonies among Shi'ite Muslim communities were mainly criticised by the Executive Council of Australian Jewry and NSW Premier Chris Minns, who called the mourning events "atrocious" (Packham et al., 2026).

The Guardian's initial event five coverage centred on Prime Minister Albanese's support for the US–Israeli strikes and European efforts to contain escalation. However, unlike The Australian, the articles balanced the security narrative of the Isr5 frame (N=12) with statements about legal accountability and civilian risk. Although only marginally, Iranian officials were given space to share their strategic reasoning, without militaristic threat and emotionally charged vows of revenge.

Albanese described Iran as a "regime that relies on the repression and murder of its own people to retain power without legitimacy" (The Guardian, 2026). Opposition leader Angus Taylor denounced the "theocratic Iranian regime" which he described as "authoritarian, antisemitic and abhorrent," while the department of foreign affairs warned of potential "reprisal attacks and further escalation" across the Middle East (The Guardian, 2026).

Broad Israeli civilian support for the strikes was reported ("what we started needs to be finished") as well as frustration and fear ("I just want it to be over") (Graham-Harrison et al., 2026). Israeli opposition leaders, centre-left Democrats, right-wing representatives, and former defence minister Yoav Gallant expressed "full backing [in] removing Iranian threat," dismissing Iran's retaliation as "weak" (Graham-Harrison et al., 2026).

Unlike the predominantly one-directional threat framing visible in 9News.com.au and The Australian, The Guardian incorporated Iran's deterrence logic, allowing Iran to appear as a political actor rather than an extremist state. Iran's foreign minister Abbas Araghchi described the attacks as a "breach of the UN charter," highlighted that the strikes occurred "in the middle of sensitive negotiations over [Iran's] program [when] peace was within reach," and called for Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and Iraq to "try to stop" the US from using their bases (Wintour, 2026a). "We do not intend to attack you [the Gulf states]," stated Ali Larijani, the head of Tehran's supreme national security council, "But when the bases of your country are used against us and the United States operates in the region with its own forces, we target them" (Wintour, 2026b). However, later this justification "lost traction," as hotels, apartment blocks, and oil refineries came under attack. On the fifth day of the rapidly escalating war, Tehran threatened the "complete destruction of the region's military and economic infrastructure" (Christou, 2026c).

Israeli attacks are disproportionate (Palestinian frame 2); Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering (Palestinian frame 3)

The ABC (N=4) and The Guardian (N=7) were the only outlets to use the P2 "Israeli attacks are disproportionate" frame, questioning whether the US–Israeli strikes constituted unlawful rather than legitimate self-defence. In these articles, the Isr5 frame with a rationale of nuclear threat prevention and regime change appeared as secondary. While the ABC embedded the Isr1 "Israel is the victim and has a right to defend itself" narrative in the background logic of regional security, The Guardian was the only outlet to extensively foreground the P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame as a dominant narrative.

The Albanese government's avoidance of questions about the legality of the joint US–Israeli attacks on Iran was discussed by the ABC; Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Defence Minister Richard Marles noted, "The legality is a matter for both United States and Israel to go through, but we support the United States in preventing Iran acquiring this capability [nuclear weapons program]" (Dick & Tomevska, 2026). Thus, Isr5 frame elements started appearing. Albanese expressed hope for Iranians to be able to "determine their own destiny" after Khamenei's passing adding that he would "not be mourned," as he was "responsible for orchestrating attacks on Australian soil" (Evans, 2026).

The sampled ABC articles also included the US–Israeli rationale for the strikes as "pre-emptive" (Dick & Tomevska, 2026), elaborating the Isr1 self-defence frame; the Israeli ambassador to Australia Hillel Newman noted a "tremendous justification" of the attacks," arguing there was an "imminent threat" from nuclear and ballistic weapons (Johnson, 2026). On the other hand, Greens senator David Shoebridge was quoted by the ABC as saying the US–Israeli attack was not consistent with international law: "There's a reason the foreign minister has refused to discuss ... whether or not this war is illegal" (Dick & Tomevska, 2026). United Nations Special Rapporteur on Counter Terrorism and Human Rights Ben Saul challenged the US–Israeli operation as "naked aggression," saying it was "widely condemned" by international lawyers as "unlawful," and urged "middle powers like Australia, and Canada, and the United Kingdom to stand up for international law" (Dick & Tomevska, 2026).

Civilian harm was reported through statistics (killing of "more than 100 children" and "63 others injured from the strike") (Ho, 2026). Iranian accusations of the "deliberate" targeting of civilian infrastructure by the US and Israel were also included (Ho, 2026). Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said "dozens of innocent children have been murdered... in broad daylight" (Ho, 2026). UNESCO described the killing of pupils in a place dedicated to learning as "a grave violation of the protection afforded to schools under international humanitarian law" (Cooper, 2026a). Notably, the ABC displayed asymmetry in the treatment of battlefield claims. Iranian claims were presented as uncertain; "The exact origin of the strike [on a girls' school] remains unclear" (Cooper, 2026a); "The figures from Iranian authorities have not been independently verified by the ABC" (Ho, 2026). However, US and Israeli clarifications or rebuttals were often used: Israeli military spokesman Lieutenant Colonel Nadav Shoshani reported he was "unaware of an Israeli or an American strike [on the school]... we're operating in an extremely accurate manner" (Cooper, 2026a). Notably, US claims that "more than 1,000 targets were struck in the first 24 hours of the attack on Iran," attributed to the Department of Defence, were not subjected to equivalent qualification (Ryan, 2026a).

The Guardian directly scrutinised the US' "casus belli" for an attack on Iran (Roth, 2026), "fraught with contradictions" (Christou, 2026a). Unlike other outlets, The Guardian did not reduce Iranian voices to either pro- or anti-war, but emphasised Iranian and Lebanese civilian risk, making the P3 "Israeli military actions cause unjustified humanitarian suffering" frame dominant (N=16), and extended its humanitarian framing to Israeli civilians, with the Isr3 "Israeli victimhood and moral priority" (N=1).

Contradictory US rhetoric was routinely pointed out. Trump alleged that Iran was developing "missiles that [would] soon reach" the US, despite US defence intelligence expecting Iran to develop militarily viable intercontinental ballistic missiles only by 2035, "should Tehran pursue the capability" (Roth, 2026). White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt was simultaneously "boasting" that the US "obliterated" Iran's nuclear facilities while "making the case for war" (Roth, 2026).

The sampled articles also repeatedly invoked comparisons with the Iraq war and highlighted the absence of clear evidence for "why the need to act against a regime that had been a strategic foe for decades had suddenly become so urgent" (Tait, 2026). The anti-war sentiment of Democratic senators, anti-war Republicans, and prominent MAGA-aligned commentators such as Tucker Carlson were reported extensively (Tait, 2026). Anti-war narratives also surfaced in the coverage of US protests, where left-wing civil liberties groups acknowledged that Iran was repressive and that Israel "has a right to defend itself," but cast Trump as an "impatient child" that turned the US into a "fascist state" (Helmore, 2026).

Unlike the ABC, where Iranian missiles were mainly portrayed as a fierce and technologically sophisticated threat, The Guardian quoted a senior fellow for the Defense and Security Department at the Center for Strategic and International Studies who described them as "essential for deterrence" (Roth, 2026).

Unlike The Australian, which cast anti-war voices as marginal and extremist, The Guardian gave space to the Greens and Labor Against War, which highlighted Australian complicity and "sycophantic capitulation to militarism" (McIlroy, 2026). These voices were balanced with qualified supportive comment from the Prime Minister, the opposition frontbencher Andrew Hastie, and the foreign minister (McIlroy, 2026).

While The Australian foregrounded the US–Israeli attacks as a precise military success, The Guardian juxtaposed Netanyahu's call to "remove the existential threat" and Trump's appeals to Iranians to "take over" their government with humanitarian consequences of the regime-change ambitions (Borger, 2026). The full daylight timing of the attacks across the country was emphasised (Parent & McClure, 2026), as it "rais[ed] the chances of killing children arriving at school and other civilians being crowded together" (Borger, 2026). A spokesperson for Iran's health ministry described the bombing as "the most bitter news" of the conflict so far: "God knows how many more children's bodies they will pull from under the rubble" (Parent & McClure, 2026). Civilian casualties appeared prominently and early in the articles or in stand-alone articles with the dominant P3 frame.

Iranian civilian voices, all named, expressed "a mixture of terror and hope": relief that the "long-expected" strikes had arrived, fear of seeing the "body bags on the streets due to US and Israeli strikes" (Parent & McClure, 2026) and more "chaos and bloodshed" similar to Iraq (Parent, 2026). In response to Khamenei's death, some were reported as gathering to mourn and chanted "death to America" and "death to Israel," while others joined the "jubilation" and celebrated "vengeance" (Parent, 2026). On the third day when Lebanon was attacked by Israel, civilian harm in Beirut was also covered ("At least 31 people were killed [and] 149 injured" in Israeli strikes; "the area almost entirely deserted by the time of a strike at around noon"; "burnt out husks of cars"; "crumpled buildings" (Christou, 2026a). Unlike The Australian, which mainly mobilised Israeli suffering as the justification for military escalation, The Guardian framed it as part of the broader tragedy. In the bomb shelter of Beit Shemesh, a "sleepy hillside town" about half an hour from Jerusalem, "two [were reported] dead, one injured," and seven were killed outside. The final line of the article explicitly linked the cost of Israeli lives to "the new war launched" by Netanyahu (Graham-Harrison & kierszenbaum, 2026).

No frame

"No frame" articles coded under the alternative "geopolitical-economic consequences" narrative comprised 31 percent of the overall sample and framed the conflict through its disruptive impact on energy markets and aviation. Coverage described the US–Israeli strikes as having "throw[n] international flights into chaos," after Iran, Iraq, Israel, Syria, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates closed their skies (Dingwall, 2026c), stranding "about 115,000 Australians in the Middle East region" (Dick, 2026). Simultaneously, Iran was described as a "threatening military" actor that could "exercise sovereignty… restricting shipping at the narrowest point" of the Strait of Hormuz to destabilise the global energy system (Taylor, 2026). Another subset of articles coded as "no frame" – mainly on the ABC (N=11) – indirectly reinforced the portrayal of the Islamic Republic as authoritarian through the Iranian women's football team, which arrived in Australia for the Women's Asian Cup "under the watchful eye of the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp" (Holmes, 2026). While they "were not allowed to speak publicly about the Iranian regime" (Shalala, 2026), several members at their Gold Coast match were reported not singing the anthem as "an act of resistance" – "They did it with confidence. They were not scared and not stressed" (Khadem, 2026c). Others, supported by the US-based Center for Human Rights in Iran, reported how "gender apartheid in Iran crushes Iranian women's lives": "For the past four decades, Iranian authorities have banned girls and women from sports events in stadiums — arresting, beating, and imprisoning those who defy the ban" (Khadem, 2026c).

Summary

While the ABC provided substantial space to the US–Israeli security rationale for the wars' escalation, it was weighed against legality questions and humanitarian consequences raised by Iranian official voices, European leaders and legal experts, UN humanitarian representatives, Australian diaspora voices, and rare inclusions of Iranian civilian testimony. While many welcomed the death of the Iranian supreme leader the Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, others expressed grief, fear, and doubt as to whether war could bring peace or democracy. Articles coded as "no frame" focused on economic and logistical consequences of war, including disrupted flights and energy market instability, and coverage of Iranian women soccer players demonstrating against Iranian repression and censorship. The latter reinforced the broader Isr5 frame logic.

In sampled 9News.com.au coverage the US–Israeli strikes were legitimised by political and military voices, primarily American, and Iran was portrayed as a threat to world peace, a state sponsor of terror, and an oppressive regime. Compared to the ABC, minimal space was given to legal accountability and humanitarian critiques, with only one article focusing on international responses to the US–Israeli strikes and another highlighting growing anti-war sentiment among Trump's conservative supporters, including concerns about Israeli influence on US decision-making. Israeli military planning was portrayed as highly sophisticated, accurate, and of historic significance. Iranian perspectives rarely appeared and, if included, primarily voiced threatening rhetoric. Iranian civilian casualties were briefly acknowledged, and only a single and brief personal testimony of a Tehran resident appeared, while Iranian retaliation in Dubai and other Gulf states was emotionally narrated by Australian witnesses and tourists.

The Australian gave less space to Trump's full rationale, but still framed event five primarily through the Isr5 frame and privileged American, Israeli, and Australian supportive political voices that presented the US–Israeli strikes as a historic decapitation of Iran's authoritarian regime. Unlike the ABC, The Australian included almost no legal accountability framing and gave minimal space to voices opposing or questioning the war. Dissenting perspectives were often framed as political extremism, similar to how The Australian used extreme pro-Palestinian voices during event three that discredited a broader pro-Palestinian stance. Rare Iranian and Iranian–Australian civil voices were included but mainly supported the anti-regime rhetoric, while Iranian official statements were largely excluded. Iranian casualties were reduced to brief official statistics closer to the end of articles, and discussion of the Minab school bombing was largely omitted, while Israeli civilian experiences were personalised through names, food rituals, and emotional testimony narrating everyday resilience.

The Guardian's event five coverage appeared the most balanced. While the outlet recognised Iran as a serious regional actor, including citing Israeli public support for the strikes, it scrutinised the legality of the US–Israeli war, the contradictions in the US' preventive rhetoric, congressional and international criticism, comparisons with Iraq, and civilian harm in Iran, Lebanon, and, to a lesser extent, Israel. Iranian voices were given more space and appeared not only as threats but as strategic and civilian perspectives, narrating the humanitarian crisis.

04

FRAMING THE RUSSIA–UKRAINE CONFLICT

The events examined in this chapter begin on 24 February 2022 and end on 16 March 2026.

EVENT 1

On 24 February 2022, the Russia–Ukraine conflict entered a new intensified phase. Ukraine marks this date as the beginning of Russia's "full-scale invasion," using Russia's assumption of control over Crimea in 2014 as the official beginning of the war. Russia calls its military action in Ukraine a "special military operation." Within this event, 158 articles are examined, spanning 24 February to 10 March 2022.

EVENT 2

On 23 June 2023, the mercenary Wagner militia, led by Yevgeny Prigozhin fighting in Ukraine alongside Russian Defence troops, moved into Russia's Rostov region, without opposition. At the time, Prigozhin was in open rebellion against the Russian Defence Ministry accusing it of corruption, under-resourcing of the war effort, and the use of falsehoods to launch the war. Prigozhin also claimed the Kremlin had concealed the number of Russian troop deaths in the conflict. After capturing the city of Rostov-on-Don, Prigozhin, heavily backed by Wagner troops, was sighted travelling to Moscow. Several Russian defence planes and helicopters sent to monitor the Wagner Group's progression were shot down. President Vladimir Putin denounced Wagner's actions as treason. The Belarusian president, Alexander Lukashenko mediated, convincing Prigozhin to halt his march to Moscow in return for the dropping of treason charges against him and his troops. We have examined 53 articles covering this event between 23 June and 7 July 2023.

EVENT 3

On 28 February 2025, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with US President Donald Trump and Vice President J.D. Vance in the White House to discuss continued US support for the war. The meeting was televised live and was to conclude with the signing of the Ukraine–US Mineral Resources Agreement as a quid-pro-quo for continued US support. Instead, the meeting devolved into an unprecedented and fiery confrontation in which President Trump accused President Zelenskyy of starting the war and being a dictator (later retracted) and the Vice President accused the Ukrainian leader of forcing young men into conscription, refusing to engage in diplomacy, and showing disrespect by wearing military fatigues to the White House. The Ukrainian leader left the White House empty-handed and humiliated, whilst Russia applauded the tone of the meeting. The Trump administration suspended intelligence and military aid to Ukraine, which was resumed only when Ukraine agreed to an unconditional 30-day ceasefire which was not observed by Russia. Within this event, we have examined 90 articles between 28 February and 14 March 2025.

EVENT 4

In response to Russia's military action in Ukraine, Western nations led by the United States coordinated to impose a series of economic sanctions on Russia, including on the sale of its oil, which was aimed at depriving Russia of vital oil revenue. The sanctions were a tool of economic punishment to deter aggression. In March 2026, in response to Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz, the United States and the United Kingdom announced the temporary lifting of sanctions on Russian oil trade to stabilise global energy markets as an emergency measure without abandoning broader pressure on Russia. The decision allowed temporary access to and purchase of Russian oil and petroleum products by energy-vulnerable nations hit by the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. The lifting of the sanctions, criticised by US Democrats as an "indefensible gift" to the Russian war effort (Lawder, 2026), were justified as economic pragmatism by the White House. Within this event, we have examined 38 articles between 9 and 23 March 2026.

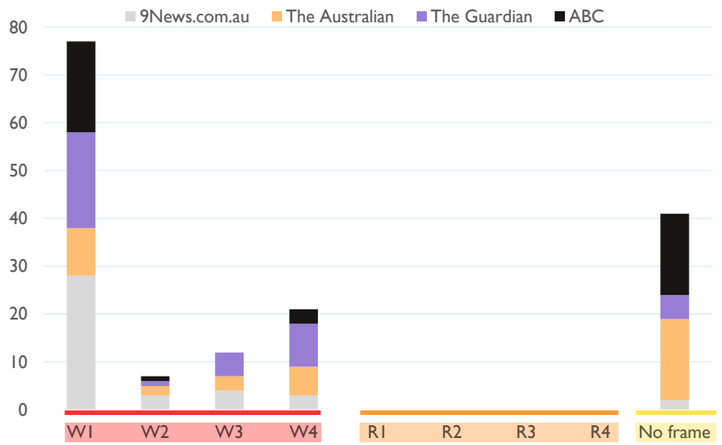


Figure 11 | Event 1: Comparison of dominant frame adoption by media outlet. Bars represent the number of sampled articles with the dominant frame.

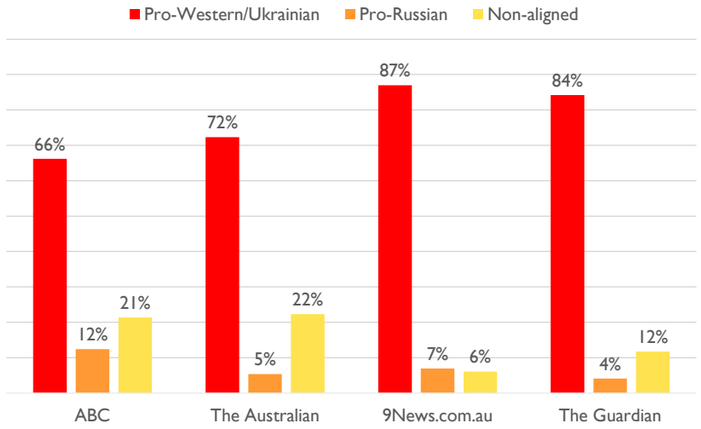


Figure 12 | Event 1: Distribution of quoted sources voicing pro-Western/Ukrainian, pro-Russian, or non-aligned perspectives by media outlet. Percentages represent the political alignment category as a proportion of all quoted sources within each outlet's event one sample.

Event 1: Military escalation (24 February–10 March 2022)

In event one coverage (N=158) from 24 February 2022 to 10 March 2022, Western frames prevailed, comprising 74 percent of the sample. The W1 "Russia wishes to restore the USSR and revive its imperial greatness by crushing a democratic state" frame was the most prominent (49 percent), portraying Russia as the aggressor seeking to undermine Ukrainian sovereignty and the post-Cold War order (Figure 11). The W4 "Economic pressure and sanctions on Russia" frame became the second most used (13 percent), followed by the W3 frame "The Russian President is an authoritarian adversary and an irrational actor" (8 percent) and the W2 frame "NATO's presence within Russia's perceived sphere of influence is not a cause for insecurity and invasion" (4 percent). Articles coded as "no frame" comprised 26 percent of the sample and were mainly concentrated in coverage on the ABC (N=17) and in The Australian (N=17).

Pro-Western voices accounted for 78 percent of all the quoted sources – mainly European, Ukrainian, American, and Australian political actors and analysts, as well as Ukrainian military spokespeople, civilians, and members of the Ukrainian diaspora (Figure 12). Seven percent of quoted voices canvassed pro-Russian perspectives; these were mainly Russian politicians, whose statements were reported in brief, and immediately challenged or contextualised. Russian civilian voices, if quoted, mainly expressed anti-war sentiment. Notably, 15 percent of sources were non-aligned and primarily appeared in articles coded as "no frame" that did not discuss the conflict directly but rather focused on the war's economic ripple effects as well as Australian visa arrangements for Ukrainian refugees and the renewed global interest in joining the fight in Ukraine.

The remaining "no frame" articles reported on the conflict more directly, but without any of the predefined frames emerging as dominant. In the ABC (N=8), The Australian (N=2), and 9News.com.au (N=1), articles adopted a relatively restrained journalistic voice when discussing battlefield developments, often signalling uncertainty. However, quoted voices remained primarily Western, advancing pro-Ukrainian perspectives on the origins, conduct, and consequences of the war possibly due to lack of access.

Several developments – including the killings of civilians in Bucha, the evidence for which would later draw global media attention, started emerging on 1 April 2022 – fell outside the sample period and as a result were not captured in the analysis of event one.

Russia wishes to restore the USSR and revive its imperial greatness by crushing a democratic state (Western frame 1)

This frame appeared most in 9News.com.au (N=28), followed by The Guardian (N=20), the ABC (N=19), and The Australian (N=10). All four outlets emphasised the same moral evaluation of the "brutal," "unprovoked," "violent," and "egregious" invasion (Hurst et al., 2022) of the democratic and sovereign Ukraine by Vladimir Putin's Russia. The ABC and 9News.com.au primarily amplified civilian suffering, resistance, and witness testimony. The Guardian privileged legal and diplomatic voices, portraying Russia as increasingly isolated by a unified West. The Australian placed the conflict within broader opposition and strategic competition between the liberal West – the Quad (the informal strategic partnership between Australia, India, Japan, and the US), NATO, and United Nations diplomacy – and the authoritarian rest, involving Russia and China. Across the outlets, the Ukrainian response was personalised through civilian, political, and military voices.

While the ABC, 9News.com.au, and The Guardian briefly outlined Russian security concerns regarding NATO expansion and the Kremlin's opposition to Ukraine's growing alignment with the West, they were presented as insufficient allegations to justify a "multi-pronged [Russian] attack" against its ex-Soviet neighbour, "threatening to destabilise Europe and draw in the US" and "triggering the greatest security crisis since the Cold War" (9News.com.au, 2022c).

The ABC repeatedly included Russian statements that "Mr Putin said Russia did not intend to occupy Ukraine," "the Russian military operation aims to ensure a 'demilitarisation' of Ukraine," "the responsibility for any resultant bloodshed lies with the Ukrainian regime [and] in response to threats coming from Ukraine," and that Russia–Ukraine "clashes were inevitable and it was just a matter of time" (ABC, 2022a). These were counterbalanced with voices of condemnation from political actors from NATO, the EU, the US, Australia, and Ukraine.

Ukraine's then foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba called on "the world [to] stop Putin" (ABC, 2022a) and "fully isolate Russia, expel ambassadors, oil embargo, ruin its economy" (Dasey, 2022), while Ukraine's UN representative Sergiy Kyslytsya said, "There is no purgatory for war criminals, they go straight to hell" (ABC, 2022a). European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen deemed Putin "responsible for bringing war back to Europe" (ABC, 2022a), then Prime Minister Scott Morrison condemned the "brutal and illegal invasion… breaching international law and the UN charter" (Evans, 2022a), and then US President Joe Biden stressed that "Russia alone is responsible for the death and destruction [in this] premediated war" promising that the US and its allies would "hold Russia accountable" (ABC, 2022a).

On 9News.com.au, Russian "conditions" for ending the "bloody conflict" (9News.com.au, 2022p) – including Ukrainian cessation of military action, abandonment of Ukraine's ambition to join NATO, and recognition of Crimea as Russian territory as well as the separatist republics of Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states – were presented as Russian demands, grievances, "false claims" (9News.com.au, 2022b), and pretexts for imperial expansion. Russian justifications were subordinated to the portrayal of Russia as a revisionist power, "determined to redraw the map of Europe and revive Moscow's Cold War-era influence" (9News.com.au, 2022g), to end the sovereign democratic status of Ukraine. Ukraine was described as a "cornerstone" of the former Soviet Union until it "voted overwhelmingly for independence in a democratic referendum" in 1991, which marked a "death knell for the failing superpower" (9News.com.au, 2022c). The following three-decade journey of Ukraine was framed as a trajectory

to "closer align with Western institutions," particularly the European Union and NATO (9News.com.au, 2022c).

This framing foregrounded Ukraine's democratic separation from the Soviet Union and westward orientation, while giving limited attention to the broader historical context of the joint Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian signing of the Belovezha Accords on 8 December 1991, which resulted in the dissolution of the USSR, followed by the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States (comprised initially of Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus), the complexities of post-Soviet foreign policy, Russia's similar movement towards westward orientation, and Russian geopolitical narratives surrounding NATO which later emerged.

Drawing on US and Ukrainian intelligence officials and using Soviet imagery, 9News.com.au reported that "more than 150,000 Russian troops [had] encircled the country on three sides, like a sickle" (9News.com.au, 2022c), framing Russia as "friendless, apart from a few nations like China and Belarus" (Saunokonoko & Wood, 2022). Like the ABC coverage, this portrayal was reinforced through extensive coverage of "a barrage of international condemnation" (9News.com.au, 2022i), set against support of Ukraine from a broader Western community. 9News.com.au described a "coordinated assault," following Russia's official recognition of the Donetsk, Luhansk, and Donbas regions as the opening step in broader territorial expansion (9News.com.au, 2022c). Then secretary-general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), Jens Stoltenberg, condemned "the Russian attack as a grave breach of international law and a serious threat to Euro-Atlantic security," while Biden vowed to deploy forces to Eastern flank NATO allies (9News.com.au, 2022c). Stressing that the Australian Government would continue to "stand up for what is right when it comes to Ukraine," Morrison announced funding to support non-lethal and lethal aid through NATO partners as well as the fast-tracking of visa applications and approvals for fleeing Ukrainian citizens (Sarkari, 2022b).

The Guardian similarly quoted Putin's argument that "a hostile anti-Russia is being created on our historic lands," accusing the Russian leader of having "fabricated a feeble pretext on which to invade" (Hurst et al., 2022). Framing the invasion as a violation of "one of the core principles of the post-World War II order" and international law, the outlet reinforced coordinated condemnation of Russia, "a pariah nation" (Borger, 2022), discussions over Ukraine's fast-track EU membership, a decision to purchase and deliver weapons to Ukraine "to ensure that Putin does not turn the clocks back," and a ban on the Russian state-backed channels RT and Sputnik that "spread their lies to justify Putin's war and to sow division in our union" (Wintour et al., 2022). (RT was never formally banned in Australia, but SBS suspended RT content in its news bulletins, and Foxtel removed the channel from its streaming services in the days following the Russian invasion, citing concerns of its coverage of the war.) The Western frame that Russia intended to restore imperial greatness was reinforced by Australian politicians, including Peter Dutton:

> *"Putin has a view of erasing history and of conquering those countries around him and bringing back a re-unified USSR. Does it stop at the Ukraine, or does it provide them with a greater foothold in Europe and a launching pad then into another country?"* (Hurst, 2022).

These speculative claims amplifying a broader threat to Europe and the international order were quoted without contextual evidence but were reinforced through historical analogies. The Guardian reported the anxieties of Ukraine's neighbouring European states as well as references to the Soviet Union "attack in 1991, when Lithuania was trying for independence" (Obordo & Bannock, 2022). (Lithuania's declaration of independence from the USSR in March 1990 was followed by a Soviet military crackdown in January 1991 on its communications facilities and an attempted seizure of the parliament.) The Guardian also referenced 2008 when "Russia invaded Georgia" (Obordo & Bannock, 2022), which resulted in Russia declaring two Russian-backed breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states, and Germany's military escalation of Poland in 1939. Comments from young citizens of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, Slovakia, and Romania also framed the invasion as a wider European security crisis: "Is your country going to be the next target?" (Obordo & Bannock, 2022).

The Australian foregrounded Ukraine's plea to NATO countries to intervene and "just bomb them out, shoot them out, do something to stop them before they come and kill more people" (Packham & Magnay, 2022b). The outlet similarly relied on diplomatic and political voices, juxtaposing Putin's branding of the West as an "empire of lies" with unified international condemnation of Russia's "unprovoked" and "unjustified" assault (Packham & Magnay, 2022a). These voices framed the conflict as a "direct challenge to the international rules-based order" (Ison, 2022a). Unlike other outlets, The Australian consistently placed Russia's "brutal invasion" (Packham & Magnay, 2022b) within the context of Australia's own strategic interests, particularly Australia's Indo-Pacific security concerns. The Australian described the Russia–Ukraine war as a "distraction to the benefit of China" and quoted EU MP David Lega describing Ukraine as a "blueprint" for future Chinese military action in Taiwan (Ison, 2022a). Further scrutinising the implications of the "new-found friendship between Xi Jinping and Putin" (Ison, 2022a), The Australian repeatedly highlighted China's unwillingness to condemn Russian actions (Packham & Magnay, 2022a). China's foreign ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying "bristled" when asked if China had a double standard on Russian warfare; and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi recognised "the complex and special historical context of the Ukraine issue and Russia's legitimate security concerns" (Glasgow, 2022). These statements were situated within discussions of hypocrisy and authoritarian alignment. A former East Asia policy adviser at the US State Department said that Beijing would "not be able to avoid the perception that it is enabling Russian policy through silence, complicity, or even active support" and would "pay a cost with the transatlantic West for its lean towards Moscow" (Glasgow, 2022). Scott Morrison was quoted reframing the war into a test of China's commitment to international norms, rather than within the historical context of revised post-Cold War security arrangements in Europe: "China had not closed the gap between where the Western world is on Ukraine and where they are... the silence is concerning and the gap should be closed" (Benson, 2022).

In its treatment of China's reaction, The Guardian explored competing pressures shaping Beijing's position, framing the Ukraine crisis as a challenge to the post-war liberal order, "offer[ing] Beijing the opportunity to express grievances against the US and NATO" and "upend that order" (Ni, 2022). In turn, the ABC emphasised China's role as a potential mediator between Russia and Ukraine, including statements from Scott Morrison ("No country will have a bigger impact on concluding this terrible war in Ukraine than China") (Dziedzic, 2022a).

Both The Guardian and the ABC framed Russian actions as an unlawful act subject to international accountability and Russian asserted justifications as lacking credibility. The

Guardian reported Ukraine's plea to the International Court of Justice demanding Russia's withdrawal, the Russian non-attendance at the proceedings, and the rejection by legal experts of Moscow's claim that Russian-speaking Ukrainians were being subjected to genocide as a "grotesque lie" that had produced "cities under siege, civilians under fire, humanitarian catastrophe and refugees fleeing for their lives" (Wintour, 2022). Similarly, while the ABC examined the legal definition of war crimes and the difficulties of prosecuting state leaders (ABC, 2022n), it cited the claim by Russia's Ambassador to the United Nation that the Russian army did not pose a threat to civilians (ABC, 2022f), and Russian Major General Igor Konashenkov's statement that "the fire is directed only on the objects of the military infrastructure of the Armed Forces of Ukraine" (ABC, 2022f). These statements were rebutted by Ukrainian officials emphasising that Russia was committing a "crime," as artillery fire occurred in daytime, "when people have gone out to the pharmacy, for groceries, or for drinking water" (ABC, 2022f).

The W1 frame "Russia wishes to restore the USSR and revive its imperial greatness by crushing a democratic state," was further advanced, primarily through the lens of Ukrainian and Western sources claiming Russian military power aimed to seize Ukrainian strategic sites and key population centres as well as to "decapitate" and "dismantle" Ukraine's leadership (ABC, 2022b). Across all surveyed outlets, the narrative was dominated by the observation that Ukrainian civilian suffering formed part of Russia's deliberate military strategy, and that Russian forces were an overwhelming military machine: "troops and tanks from three sides unleashing air strikes" (ABC, 2022b) or "pummel[ling] rockets" (9News.com.au, 2022m) across Ukraine, with heavily armed "troops moving," "tanks rolling" (Meacham, 2022b), "deadly rocket strikes" (Packham & Magnay, 2022b), "indiscriminate shelling," and "scorched-earth [and] terror tactics" (Beaumont, 2022).

In 9News.com.au coverage, Russian military action was depicted through advancing troops and bombardment. Shortly after the Antonov Airport capture in Hostomel on the north-western outskirts of Kyiv on 24 February 2022, a "startling vision" of CNN journalist Matthew Chance meeting "face to face" with Russian airborne forces was described (Attanasio, 2022). Despite being "allowed to come in and be with them" while Russian forces secured the perimeter, Russian comments were absent (Attanasio, 2022). Coverage focused on unnamed Ukrainian officials claiming that Russia intended not merely to surround the capital but to replace Ukrainian leadership with a pro-Russian government, while the capture of the Chernobyl Exclusion Zone on the same day was described as "the absolutely senseless attack" by a Ukrainian presidential adviser (Attanasio, 2022) and the White House, which expressed "outrage" at "credible reports from Ukrainian officials" that Chernobyl nuclear facility staff had been taken hostage (9News.com.au, 2022d). While the reports were initially presented through White House endorsement, the article later identified the Facebook post of Alyona Shevtsova (an adviser to the commander of Ukraine's Ground Force) as the source of these claims. Russian statements occasionally appeared in the final paragraphs as military updates; the Russian Defence Ministry confirmed "it ha[d] destroyed 83 Ukrainian military facilities" (9News.com.au, 2022d).

Reflecting the highly limited access of Western reporters to Russian-controlled territory and Russian sources, testimony from the Ukrainian side contributed to a more personalised representation, allowing for the foregrounding of heroic sacrifice, loss, and often unarmed but "stiffer than expected" resistance (9News.com.au, 2022g), and "bravery and courage" (ABC, 2022k). The Australian, for example, described Ukrainian soldiers and civilians erecting makeshift barricades: "We will greet them with Molotov cocktails and bullets to the head. The only flowers they might get from us will be for their grave" (Packham & Magnay, 2022a). The Guardian similarly relied on first-person testimony to construct civilian resilience (Halliday, 2022); it published the diaries of a 43-year-old Kyiv resident whose son, fighting in the war, described the gradual disruption of life – from abandoned 15th wedding anniversary celebrations and nights spent in underground shelters to organising food for neighbours and deciding how to save his parents "out of [Chernihiv's] hell" (Bartholomew, 2022).

The ABC similarly published detailed accounts of Ukrainian civilians, emphasising everyday resilience and leadership; school administrators were described organising a "daring escape out of Russia's clutches" for 329 children (Joyner & Higgins, 2022). Having "become surrogate parents, caterers, cleaners, hoteliers, travel agents, advocates and security guards," they "bundled" the kids into buses after midnight for "secret extraction" from Kyiv and "areas under Russia-backed separatist control in the east to the safety of Lviv" close to the Polish border (Joyner & Higgins, 2022). As "Russian rockets hit the country," the ABC described families and children sheltering in metro stations and Cold War-era bunkers, surrounded by sleeping bags, blankets, crossword puzzles, and dogs, while schools converted basements into gun ranges where students, using a printed picture of Putin as one of the targets, did firearms training to "defend [the] homeland" (ABC, 2022c). The ABC linked the 2022 attack to the broader context of the earlier phase of the Russia–Ukraine conflict in 2014, reporting on families who described their children as "traumatised" by "eight years of conflict" (Vikhrov, 2022).

9News.com.au similarly highlighted the bravery of Ukrainian civilians. "Dramatic footage" from Bakhmach, north-east of Kyiv, of a Ukrainian man attempting to stop a Russian tank likened to the 1989 Tiananmen Square Tank Man image was described as "a symbol of defiance in the face of authoritarianism" (Meacham, 2022b). A newly married couple Yaryna Arieva and Sviatoslav Fursin were described as having abandoned their honeymoon to "kill for their land" and sacrifice for "the freedom of the world" (9News.com.au, 2022l). Another article reported a threatening ultimatum to Ukrainian soldiers in the north-western Black Sea – "This is a Russian military warship. I suggest you lay down your weapons and surrender to avoid bloodshed and needless casualties" – which was met with "Russian warship, go f--- yourself," an act of defiance by 13 Ukrainian defenders who "died heroically but did not give up," according to President Zelenskyy (9News.com.au, 2022e). The killing of six people and wounding of 20 others during the Freedom Square strike in Kharkiv was reported with vivid scenes of pregnant women "pac[ing] the crowded space, accompanied by the cries of dozens of newborns" amid "makeshift electrical sockets and mattresses piled up against the walls" in a bomb shelter which amplified the narratives of fear and insecurity (Saunokonoko & Wood, 2022).

9News.com.au further reinforced the humanitarian suffering through diaspora and political voices. Olga Malchevska, a Ukrainian journalist living in London, expressed shock upon discovering during a live interview on BBC World News that her Kyiv family apartment building had been destroyed: "I just can't link in my head that what I'm seeing is actually somewhere I used to live" (Sarkari, 2022a). Anton Bogdanovych, a Ukrainian living in Australia, told the outlet that his parents in Kyiv woke up to the sounds

of explosions, while Russia was "violently invad[ing] his homeland" (Meacham, 2022a). Political actors also amplified the humanitarian consequences; 9News.com.au's coverage of failed evacuation attempts from Mariupol included a US State department warning that the US had seen "very credible reports of deliberate attacks on civilians [which] would constitute a war crime," while French President Emmanuel Macron criticised the evacuation routes mainly leading towards Russia or Belarus as "hypocrisy," stressing that he did "not know many Ukrainians who [would] want to seek refuge in Russia" (9News.com.au, 2022o). Australian politicians responded to the humanitarian emergency, with then Premier of Victoria Daniel Andrews stressing Australians' "responsibility to do whatever we can to help protect innocent people running from war," and then NSW Premier Dominic Perrottet similarly standing ready to "provide shelter to Ukrainians in need" (Sarkari, 2022b). 9News.com.au contrasted "a huge outpouring of support" and "unconditional welcome" for fleeing Ukrainians, particularly by Poland and Hungary, with the previous reluctance to accept those fleeing conflict in the Middle East and Africa (9News.com.au, 2022h).

The Russian President is an authoritarian adversary and an irrational actor (Western frame 3)

The W3 "The Russian President is an authoritarian adversary and an irrational actor" frame appeared as dominant in The Guardian (N=5) and 9News.com.au (N=4), followed by The Australian (N=3), and occasionally as a secondary frame of analysis across the ABC coverage. Portrayals of the Ukrainian and Russian presidents were presented as a democratic-autocratic binary across the outlets. While Zelenskyy was positioned as a courageous wartime leader defending national sovereignty and democratic values, Putin was depicted as a coercive authoritarian actor threatening Ukraine and the broader international order.

9News.com.au emphasised Zelenskyy's transformation from a TV comedian and actor into a courageous and "defiant wartime leader" who remained in Kyiv, "David to... Putin's Goliath," embodying national resistance, keeping Ukraine's "democratically elected government intact" (9News.com.au, 2022i), and telling the US he "need[ed] ammunition, not a ride" (9News.com.au, 2022i). Substantial space was given to his emotional appeals to ordinary Ukrainians and the European Parliament, defending national sovereignty (9News.com.au, 2022n, 2022o):

> *"Putin... wants to destroy my country, our country, everything we've been building, everything we are living for. Russia cannot stop Ukraine from getting closer with NATO and has no right to have any say in relevant discussions"* (9News.com.au, 2022c).

Drawing on Zelenskyy's video message, the ABC similarly stressed that the Ukrainian president had become Russia's "number one target" (ABC, 2022b). It surmised, "The enemy... want[s] to destroy Ukraine politically by destroying the head of state" (ABC, 2022b).

In contrast, Putin was portrayed as an authoritarian aggressor driven by historical revisionism and rejection of Ukrainian sovereignty, without reference to Russia's narrative that Ukraine had failed to abide by the Minsk I and II accords aimed at resolving conflict in Eastern Ukraine. Ukraine, in turn, accused Russia of failing to comply with the agreements. In sampled articles in The Australian, the evaluative language often came from journalists themselves, painting a "striking contrast" between the two presidents. Putin was described as "seething with hatred," pursuing a "dark imperial fantasy" (The Australian, 2022), with concerns raised about "the mental stability of a dictator with a nuclear war button" (Gottliebsen, 2022), while Zelenskyy was "everything Putin is not": "dignity, strength, and a dash of humour," "young and charismatic," and "embraced by his own people and by the world" (The Australian, 2022). The Australian, echoed by the Guardian, quoted Biden's first State of the Union address in which he presented "Putin's invasion as a battle between democracy and autocracy" (Packham & Creighton, 2022) and promised that "light would win over darkness" (Gabbatt, 2022), as Putin would "never gain the hearts and souls of the Ukrainian people... never extinguish their love of freedom" (Packham & Creighton, 2022). Putin's aim to "take Ukraine off the map of nations" was further placed within broader historical narratives in The Australian, with then UK prime minister Boris Johnson warning that Putin might try to "Grozny-fy" Kyiv (a reference to the Russian military response to Chechnya's move for extended autonomy in 2003), then Ukraine foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba referencing World War II ("Last time our capital experienced anything like this was in 1941 when it was attacked by Nazi Germany"), and Zelenskyy describing a "new iron curtain" between Russia and the rest of the world (Packham & Creighton, 2022). 9News.com.au reported former Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko describing Putin as "simply crazy" and warning that he had "declared a war to the whole world" (9News.com.au, 2022c). Quoting Putin's calls to Ukrainians to "overthrow" Zelenskyy and his "gang of drug addicts and neo-Nazis" (9News.com.au, 2022h), 9News.com.au further stressed that Putin "sees" Ukraine as part of Russia, "culturally, linguistically and politically" (9News.com.au, 2022c). It cited the Russian narrative that Ukraine joining NATO would be a "hostile act" and a "dire threat to Russia," and NATO's expansion as an "existential threat," through the Russian President:

> *"It is you who must give us guarantees, and you must do it immediately, right now. Are we deploying missiles near the US border? No, we are not. It is the United States that has come to our home with its missiles and is already standing at our doorstep"* (9News.com.au, 2022c).

Putin was further portrayed as an unpredictable actor and a threat to post-Cold War global security whose actions extended beyond traditional military weapons and sent "chills down the spines of military analysts" (ABC, 2022g). 9News.com.au stressed that Putin's decision to place Russia's nuclear forces on high alert, send nuclear submarines for drills in the Barents Sea, north of Norway and Russia, and disperse intercontinental ballistic missile launchers in the Irkutsk region in southeast Siberia had "heightened already souring tensions" between Russia and the US, reminiscent of the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis (9News.com.au, 2022j). Similarly in sampled ABC articles, an Obama-era US State Department adviser on Ukraine and Russia stressed that Putin, willing to challenge the nuclear deterrence norms, had crossed a threshold that had held during the Cold War: "The Cold-War messaging from the Soviet Union, from the United States, about nuclear weapons was far more disciplined than what Putin has been doing...[a] blatant threat about using nuclear weapons if the situation doesn't go his way" (ABC, 2022g). Following Russia's claim that Ukraine had tried "to erase evidence of military biological programs" financed by the Pentagon, Russia was situated in the reportage within a "long and well-documented" history of chemical weapons use, citing references to the nerve agent Novichok poisonings of "Putin's political enemies like Alexei Navalny" (ABC, 2022n).

Whilst Ukrainian statements about the war were generally presented as credible, Russian justifications were immediately rebutted, particularly in 9News.com.au and The Australian.

The Australian quoted Zelenskyy describing Putin's claim that civilian objects were not a target as "another lie of theirs" (Packham & Creighton, 2022), while 9News.com.au described Putin's security demands as "non-starters," and his allegations of Ukraine's "genocide" against Russian speakers in the Donbas region and descriptions of the "democratically elected" Ukrainian government as a "fascist" or "Nazi" regime as "unsubstantiated" (9News.com.au, 2022c), rebutted with the fact that Zelenskyy is Jewish and had family members perish in the Holocaust. Putin's calls for the revival of Minsk peace process, negotiated by France and Germany involving direct talks between Ukraine and Russia, were described as rhetoric echoing "a pretext for annexing Crimea" (9News.com.au, 2022c), whilst Zelenskyy's calls for direct talks were quoted as an appeal to end civilian suffering; "Let's sit down at the negotiation table to stop the people's deaths" (9News.com.au, 2022i). President Zelenskyy's statement that he did not like a single point of the Minsk accords was contrasted with Putin's "stark, undiplomatic language," positioning the Russian President as coercive and dismissive of Ukrainian agency: "Like it or don't like it, it's your duty" (9News.com.au, 2022c). Putin was also portrayed as driven by historical grievance. With his July 2021 essay describing Russians and Ukrainians as "one people" and arguing that the West had "corrupted Ukraine and yanked it out of Russia's orbit through a 'forced change of identity'" was contrasted with "several recent polls" that demonstrated "a majority of Ukrainians" favoured Ukraine's membership in NATO (9News.com.au, 2022c) and journalistic comment that Putin's appeals were "unlikely to spur any sort of Ukrainian uprising" (9News.com.au, 2022i).

Additionally, 9News.com.au, The Australian, The Guardian, and the ABC reported Russia policing domestic dissent through descriptions of "mass detentions" of anti-war protests, "partial restrictions" on Facebook and Twitter, and online petitions and open letters of condemnation from Russian medical workers, architects, engineers, journalists, and cultural figures (9News.com.au, 2022f). The Australian, The Guardian, and 9News.com.au quoted primarily Russian anti-war voices. The Australian focused on the Russian diaspora, "dreading" Russian regression "to a life of Soviet-style repression" (Ison, 2022b); Lana Vasilieva, a Canberran who left Russia when she was 22, whose father "was born in Stalin's prison and grandmother sent to a gulag as a political prisoner," feared "the same fate might befall my friends in modern-day Russia" and described the war as the work of "literally one person who made the decision without consulting his own circle, let alone the Russian people" (Ison, 2022b).

The Guardian referred to Putin's "attempts to subjugate a democratic European country" and "brutally shut down political opposition and independent press" (Mason & Elgot, 2022). The Russian-born crossbench peer Evgeny Lebedev was quoted by The Guardian pleading as a British citizen "to save Europe from war" and as a Russian citizen to "prevent any more young Russian soldiers from dying needlessly," while Lubov Chernukhin, a significant Conservative party donor and wife of Putin's former finance minister described Putin's "despotic regime" as similar to "Stalinesque persecution" (Mason & Elgot, 2022). The Guardian quoted Russians fleeing the country: the owner of an advertising services company leaving for Armenia stressed, "There's no future for our children here if Putin stays in power" (Roth, 2022c).

Descriptions by ordinary Russians of Putin as a "bloody monster" and the war as "a tragedy for all of us" reinforced the authoritarian portrayal of Putin (9News.com.au, 2022j). In her Facebook post quoted by 9News.com.au, Tatyana Usmanova, an opposition activist in Moscow, asked Ukrainians for forgiveness and called the war "a disgrace that will be forever with us now." Yekaterina Kuznetsova, a 40-year-old engineer who joined a demonstration in Saint Petersburg, said, "This is the most shameful and terrible day in my life. My country is an aggressor. I hate Putin," while Yelena Kovalskaya, director of a state-funded Moscow theatre announced on Facebook her decision to quit her job: "It's impossible to work for a killer and get paid by him" (9News.com.au, 2022b). Russia's information war was further spotlighted. The ABC highlighted Russia's introduction of legislation to impose prison terms of up to 15 years for "fake" reporting about the military and the blocking of foreign and Russian independent media outlets (ABC, 2022k). 9News.com.au reported that the state communications watchdog Roskomnadzor demanded the removal of stories describing fighting in Ukraine as an "attack," "invasion," or "declaration of war" (9News.com.au, 2022f), and The Guardian described Russian "troll farms" and Russian state media as coordinating "significant misinformation campaigns to destabilize Western countries" (Schreiber, 2022).

Economic pressure and sanctions on Russia (Western frame 4)

The W4 frame became most prominent in The Guardian (N=9) and The Australian (N=6), while the ABC and 9News.com.au had only three articles each with this frame. Sanctions adopted by the US, EU, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and Japan were presented as the primary punitive tool, removing Russia from the SWIFT international banking system, targeting the country's sovereign debt, halting certification of the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline from Russia to Germany, controlling imports to Russia in the strategic defence, energy, and aerospace sectors, extending individual sanctions to Russian elites and their family members, and pausing international projects and acquisitions within Russia.

The Guardian emphasised Western solidarity, quoting Biden, Germany's then foreign minister Annalena Baerbock, and Italy's then Prime Minister Mario Draghi among others ("This is the time to be united" (Bryant, 2022)) to rationalise the importance of sanctions against "Putin's war machine" (Mason et al., 2022). The Guardian positioned sanctions within a moral framework using British political voices including Boris Johnson, then Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer, former prime minister Theresa May, and other Conservative MPs, presenting "ferocious" sanctions as justice against the "pariah state" that had "effectively declared war on the West," and as a "remorseless mission" of Russia's isolation from the global economy "piece by piece, day by day and week by week" (Elgot et al., 2022).

The Australian acknowledged the possibility of "significant damage" to the global economy and emphasised that although there was "a danger that Putin [would] start a war with Europe" (Gottliebsen, 2022), sanctions were tools for defending the liberal international world order. Russia was forecast to face "economic disaster," be "deprived of almost all revenue," its economy "smashed" and "sent into a depression," and its banking system "wrecked" (Gottliebsen, 2022). Quoting Biden, the outlet stated that sanctions would make Russia "a second-rate power" (Packham & Creighton, 2022). In the absence of a military response from NATO, Scott Morrison was quoted by The Australian supporting "complete and comprehensive" sanctions (Benson, 2022) and criticising China for imposing sanctions on Australian barley, while "throw[ing] a lifeline to Russia" by ending restrictions on Russian wheat imports (Benson, 2022). Unlike The Australian, the ABC contrasted Morrison's criticism of China's aid for Russia with China's rebuttal, citing former foreign ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin:

> *"For some time, Australia has been spreading false information to smear and blame China out of the Cold War mentality and zero-sum thinking. The [countries] that will see their reputation stained are those who interfere in others' internal affairs in the name of democracy and human rights, or wage wars around the world"* (Evans, 2022b).

Unlike some of the stronger rhetoric of punishment and strategic confrontation in The Australian, the ABC framed sanctions as part of a comprehensive diplomatic process. Quoting then foreign minister Marise Payne, the outlet positioned sanctions as a response to Putin's attempt to "reverse history and take away the freedom and the democracy that the Ukrainian people chose for themselves," while emphasising the importance of diplomacy (Evans, 2022b). Sanctions were described as "an exceptional step [in] an exceptional situation," with the Russian ambassador allowed to remain in Australia in order to "have a direct line of communication with the Russian government" (Evans, 2022b). Further quoting Payne, the ABC reported that sanctions were also punishing Russian "state propagandists spreading 'pro-Kremlin disinformation'," broadening the scope of sanctions beyond economic measures (Dziedzic, 2022b).

While most coverage across the outlets portrayed sanctions as Western unilateral measures against Russia, the ABC reported the Russian response, which labelled Australia and other sanctioning states as "unfriendly countries," promising retaliatory restrictions including allowing Russian entities to temporarily pay foreign currency debts in roubles (Dziedzic, 2022b). While sanctions against Russian oligarchs with "close ties" to Putin were primarily detailed, the ABC – although briefly and in the final paragraphs of sampled articles – also noted that consequences extended to "ordinary Russians" (ABC, 2022j), forcing them to "queue outside banks for their savings" (ABC, 2022h).

9News.com.au primarily relied on analytical voices (US Treasury Department, JPMorgan Chase, a University of Nottingham professor of politics and international relations, an anti-money-laundering expert, and a fellow at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs) to present sanctions as a

coordinated democratic response. Its reporting detailed how banking restrictions, export controls, asset freezes, and travel bans would "really hurt Russia" and "deter further aggression" (9News.com.au, 2022a). Russia's rejection of sanctions was included, with the deputy head of Russia's Security Council Dmitry Medvedev ominously warning that "economic wars quite often turned into real ones" (9News.com.au, 2022m). 9News.com.au also focused on measures targeting Putin's personal wealth, reporting these would only make "a dent" in his total, unconfirmed fortune but would "undermine his credibility on the world stage" (9News.com.au, 2022k). Putin's official image of "a humble bureaucrat" with "no paper trail for his assets" was questioned through references to alleged "extortion and massive theft from state funds" and placed alongside "despots such as Kim Jong Un, Alexander Lukashenko and Bashar al-Assad" (9News.com.au, 2022k).

NATO's presence within Russia's perceived sphere of influence is not a cause for insecurity and invasion (Western frame 2)

The W2 frame was relatively rare across event one coverage and appeared mostly in 9News.com.au (N=3), followed by The Australian (N=2), the ABC (N=1), and The Guardian (N=1). While no space was dedicated to broader geopolitical discussions of NATO expansion, and Russia's perceived security concerns were only briefly mentioned and immediately rebutted, the coverage primarily focused on a collective democratic response – depicted as morally justified and non-negotiable – to Russia's "act of aggression" (Saunokonoko, 2022).

9News.com.au presented NATO as a legitimate defender of the liberal international order and Ukraine's sovereignty against Russia's "outrageous objectives" (Saunokonoko, 2022) to "topple Ukraine's democratically elected government and upend geopolitics and Europe's post-Cold War security balance" (Wood & Meacham, 2022). While Putin's security argument was reported – "He accused the US and its allies of ignoring Russia's demands to prevent Ukraine from joining NATO and for security guarantees" – it was immediately described by 9News.com.au as a "false claim the US had predicted he would make as a pretext for an invasion" (Wood & Meacham, 2022). Australia's contribution of missiles and weaponry to Ukraine in partnership with NATO was confirmed by Scott Morrison, who said that Australia "'cannot be absent' when it comes to standing up for the principles of liberal democracy in today's world, even if it meant becoming a target" and, justifying greater NATO cooperation, "to impose the most significant costs on Russia that we possibly can" (Saunokonoko, 2022).

The Australian described NATO as aiming to avoid escalation ("The US and NATO members have resisted entering the conflict directly"), reinforced by then NATO secretary Jens Stoltenberg's description of NATO as "a defensive alliance that doesn't seek conflict with Russia" (Youssef et al., 2022). The Australian, echoed by the ABC, focused on ways in which the West could maximise military assistance, reporting Morrison's readiness to work through "our NATO partners" to provide lethal aid to Ukraine, as "the most effective way to do it" (Packham & Mendes, 2022).

The ABC specified that Australia would financially support NATO to bolster weapons shipments and provide cybersecurity assistance. Stoltenberg's voice was used to stress that NATO had taken "tireless efforts to engage in diplomacy" with Russia and would "do all it takes to protect and defend all allies... in line with our defensive planning to protect" (ABC, 2022a).

The Guardian similarly reinforced NATO's defensive identity through the lens of deliberate military restraint. The arming of Ukrainian forces was described as a "moral duty" by Ben Wallace, then UK defence secretary (Mason, 2022) while Russia's security rationale was explicitly dismissed, with Wallace stating that "none of the reasons why he [Putin] would do that stack up," and warning that Putin would "proceed to train his sights on Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as he doesn't believe the Baltic states are countries" (Mason, 2022).

No frame

Most articles across event one coded as "no frame" were found in the ABC (N=17) and The Australian (N=17) and focused primarily on the economic consequences of the war for domestic and global markets (rising fuel and food prices, a new wave of inflation, and disruptions to aviation) and Australia's defence planning and broader security threats in the Indo-Pacific (sending weapons to Taiwan and acquiring nuclear submarines).

In the reportage coded as "no frame" but directly covering Russia–Ukraine conflict developments, the ABC (N=8) demonstrated relatively restrained reporting but with a heavy reliance on Western testimony. Uncertainty was frequently signalled ("Russia and Ukraine gave conflicting casualty figures"; "The numbers given by Moscow and Kyiv could not be independently verified" (ABC, 2022i)). However, an asymmetrical narrative rebutting Russian claims emerged across varying interpretations of military developments, humanitarian consequences, diplomatic intricacies, and legal implications with voice given primarily to Ukrainian politicians, Western governments and experts, and Russian anti-Kremlin voices. Then Ukrainian foreign minister Dmytro Kuleba and Zelenskyy's advisor Mykhailo Podolyak portrayed the Ukrainian president as "not scared of anything," while Russian-proposed "humanitarian corridors" were rejected as "completely immoral" (ABC, 2022m). On the battlefield, Zelenskyy's then military adviser Oleksiy Arestovych reported "cautious optimism about the future prospects of the enemy offensive," while the US Department of Defence and the US think tank Institute for the Study of War noted "creative," "determined," and effective" Ukrainian resistance and "logistical and sustainment" problems as well as "poorly planned and poorly executed" actions on the Russian side (Doman et al., 2022). Western organisations and officials similarly reinforced this interpretation: the UN Security Council US representative condemned Russia's capturing of the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant after heavy fighting as "reckless," warning that "by the grace of God, the world narrowly averted a nuclear catastrophe," while both the International Atomic Energy Agency and the US Pentagon warned of a "potential catastrophe" and the "global alarm" created by Russia's "reckless invasion" (ABC, 2022k). Civilian voices complemented the institutional condemnation; Ukrainian residents were described as "furious but also proud of... the successful defence," declaring that "Russian troops all should go to hell" (ABC, 2022l). Criticism from within Russia was amplified through jailed Kremlin critic Alexei Navalny, who accused Putin of bringing "shame on the Russian national flag and language" (ABC, 2022l).

Russian perspectives occupied limited interpretive space. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov was reported listing Russian "demands" for Ukraine to cease military action, including a change to its constitution to enshrine neutrality and the recognition of Crimea as Russian territory and of two separatist republics Donetsk and Luhansk as independent states (ABC, 2022l). In another article, a Russian perspective appeared near the conclusion, when Russia Today (RT)

deputy-editor-in-chief Anna Belkina was quoted claiming that Western "collective establishment" was "terrified of a mere presence of any outside voice for the fear of losing their historically captive audience" (Glenday, 2022). However, before quoting Belkina, the article established an interpretive frame through both journalistic voice and a supportive western official voice; the reporter stated that "Kremlin-funded state media outlets have promoted propaganda and falsely claimed that invading troops are liberating parts of Ukraine," while then communications minister Paul Fletcher commented on "the lack of genuinely independent Russian media" and the resulting suspension of broadcasts from RT, NTV, and Sputnik media (Glenday, 2022).

Summary

Across event one, the outlets amplified the dichotomy between Russia the aggressor and Ukraine the victim of an unprovoked attack with strong reliance on Western and Ukrainian political, military, and expert voices, while Russian perspectives were limited and immediately rebutted. The ABC at times signalled uncertainty but primarily quoted Western voices. The Guardian amplified humanitarian suffering and legal discourse. 9News.com.au personalised the conflict through civilian stories of resistance. The Australian focused on geopolitical implications. Rather than offering competing frames, articles coded as "no frame" similarly amplified the portrayal of Russia as the aggressor through heavy reliance on Western sources.

Event 2: The uprising led by Yevgeny Prigozhin's Wagner Group (23 June 2023–7 July 2023)

The event two coverage (N=53) focused on the revolt of the Wagner Group. After the Russian defence ministry's alleged strike on a Wagner camp in Russia's southern Rostov region on 23 June 2023, the Russian state-funded private military contractor took control of a key military facility in Rostov-on-Don and started advancing towards Moscow. Wagner's mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin accused the Russian defence ministry of incompetence, withholding supplies to Wagner, and pursuing the war for the elite's interest, thus questioning the Kremlin's stated causes for the conflict. The insurrection was aborted a day later after Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko brokered a settlement with Prigozhin, who agreed to halt his advance towards Moscow and leave for Belarus.

The Western 3 frame "The Russian President is an authoritarian adversary and an irrational actor" was the most prominent (58.5 percent) in sampled coverage of this event, particularly in The Guardian and the ABC, presenting the Wagner insurrection as an indication of internal Russian disunity and a weakening of the Russian president's grip on power (Figure 13). The W1 frame "Russia wishes to restore the USSR and revive its imperial greatness by crushing a democratic state" comprised 17 percent of the sample, mainly advanced by The Guardian and The Australian, presenting the Wagner Group as a tool of Russia's transnational expansionism, and its rebellion as exposing fractures within Russian war efforts in Ukraine. The articles coded as "no frame" similarly represented 17 percent of the sample. While some of these articles covered issues not directly related to the Wagner revolt (e.g. financial market reactions or consular contingency planning), others presented competing political and expert statements on Wagner without advancing the narrative of Putin's vulnerability. The W2 frame "NATO's presence within Russia's perceived sphere of influence is not a cause for insecurity and invasion" made up 7.5 percent of the sample and appeared only in The Guardian, which amplified evidence of Russia's alleged war crimes in Ukraine, Prigozhin's delegitimisation of the Kremlin's justification for the war, and Western political voices rejecting the Russian narrative that NATO posed a threat to Russia or orchestrated the Wagner insurrection.

Pro-Western political, military, and expert voices dominated the coverage (62 percent), followed by pro-Russian sources (23 percent) and non-aligned voices (15 percent) (Figure 14). The Wagner revolt marked a shift in the narrative boundary of sources. In the event one sample, Western-aligned perspectives were voiced by Western and Ukrainian political, civic, and expert representatives as well as the occasional Russian opposition figures, peripheral to official Russian discourse, whilst Russian-aligned perspectives were voiced by Russian state representatives. During event two, Prigozhin – a Russian establishment insider and an influential figure within Russia's military and political structures – himself challenged official Kremlin narratives and amplified Western interpretations of the Russia–Ukraine conflict. Additionally, contrary to its event one coverage, where 9News.com.au gave space only sporadically to pro-Russian voices, in event two it gave equal space to pro-Western and pro-Russian sources, relying heavily on Russian official statements that were designed to reinforce Russian unity, but were used to infer a Western narrative of Russia's elite fragmentation.

Russia wishes to restore the USSR and revive its imperial greatness by crushing a democratic state (Western frame 1)

9News.com.au (N=1), the ABC (N=2), and The Guardian (N=3) portrayed the Wagner Group as a covert transnational instrument of Russian expansionism. Projecting the Kremlin's military, political, and economic influence abroad, Wagner was described as a mercenary organisation with an established "reputation for brutality and ruthlessness" evidenced by allegations of "human rights abuses" and "destabilizing activities" (9News.com.au, 2023a) across its "darkest battles" (Higgins, 2023) in Ukraine, the Central African Republic, Libya, and Syria.

9News.com.au amplified Wagner's brutalist behaviour through journalistic voice and traced Wagner's first appearance in Crimea and Donbas to 2014, highlighting Russia's denial of sending its own weapons and troops "despite ample evidence to the contrary" (9News.com.au, 2023a). The outlet argued that the private contractor's activities allowed Moscow

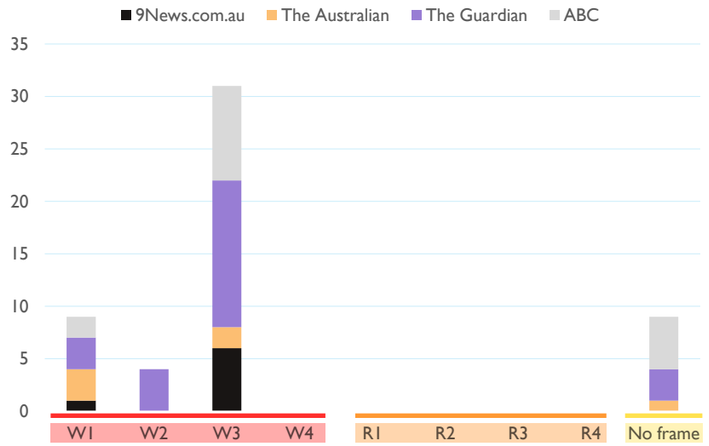


Figure 13 | Event 2: Comparison of dominant frame adoption by media outlet. Bars represent the number of sampled articles with the dominant frame.

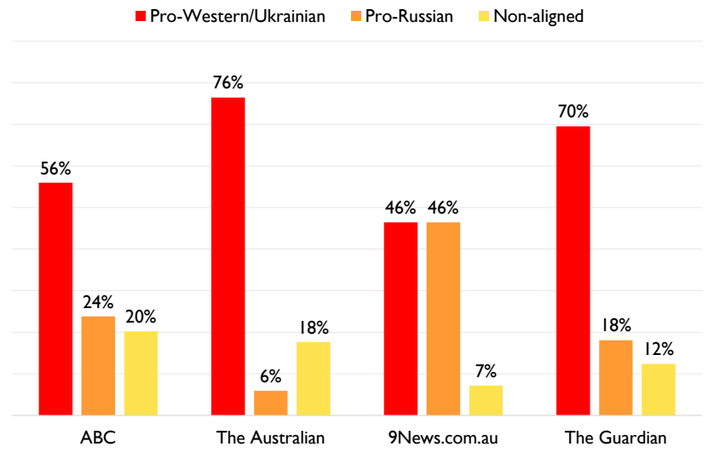


Figure 14 | Distribution of quoted sources voicing pro-Western/Ukrainian, pro-Russian, or non-aligned perspectives by media outlet. Percentages represent the political alignment category as a proportion of all quoted sources within each outlet's event two sample.

"a degree of deniability" (9News.com.au, 2023a) and pointed to a wider ecosystem of Russian covert operations by describing Prigozhin as a figure who had set up the Internet Research Agency, "the Russian troll farm whose mission was to interfere in the US 2016 election" (9News.com.au, 2023b).

The ABC and The Guardian similarly positioned the Wagner Group as the Kremlin's "key fixture" to expand its sphere of influence while minimising the domestic cost of war (Higgins, 2023) with both outlets primarily relying on foreign policy experts. In the sampled ABC coverage, an expert from the US Naval War College argued that Wagner provided the Kremlin with "plausible deniability" to operate across the world while avoiding a broader mobilisation that might "upset" the Russian population, as "dictators still care about ensuring the domestic situation is stable enough for them for their survival" (Higgins, 2023). The Guardian represented Wagner as closely aligned with "Russia's longer-term foreign policy objectives" (Burke, 2023), sustained through "death and destruction," as per statements of the US state department spokesman and treasury's secretary for terrorism and financial intelligence (The Guardian, 2023), and emphasised Wagner's presence in Africa to "strong arm" the US, the UK, and France out of the region by "striking military deals," building relations with existing rulers, and "grooming" future leaders and undercover "agents" (Burke, 2023).

Beyond examining Wagner's background, The Guardian and The Australian (N=3) also framed the revolt as contributing to Ukraine's counteroffensive gaining momentum and undermining Russia's military positions, arguing that in the wake of the Wagner insurrection, Ukrainian units were seeking "to exploit fresh weaknesses in Russia's defensive position" (Harding, 2023). A video by a Ukrainian brigade in the Donetsk region stated that Russian "orcs were running away" (Harding, 2023), and Kyiv and Lviv residents expressed hopes for "the end of Putin's regime" and happiness over an opportunity to turn Moscow's "internal chaos" into an advantage on the battlefield (Tondo, 2023). The Australian framed the Wagner revolt as having "disoriented and further demoralised Russian troops," before "a crumbling husk of a former empire" and "the Putin regime's enfeebled rottenness," all further justification for continued Western support for Ukraine (Baker, 2023).

NATO's presence within Russia's perceived sphere of influence is not a cause for insecurity and invasion (Western frame 2)

The Guardian was the only outlet to use the W2 frame (N=4) in sampled articles during event two coverage, emphasising contradictions in Russia's justification for the war, while presenting NATO as posing no threat to Russia and not being involved in the Wagner insurrection.

The outlet framed "Putin's rationale for the invasion" as internally undermined and evidenced by an insider, Prigozhin accusing Moscow's leadership of "the deepest deception" that Russia had thwarted Kyiv's offensive on the Russian-controlled territories in Eastern Ukraine. Prigozhin claimed that the ministry of defence was "trying to deceive the public and the president and spin the story that... they were going to attack us together with the whole NATO block" (Sauer, 2023a). The outlet foregrounded Prigozhin's interpretation that the war resulted from the choice of Russia's "oligarchic clan [that] needed the war" and avoided negotiations: "When Zelenskiy became president, he was ready for agreements. All that needed to be done was to get off Mount Olympus and negotiate with him" (Sauer, 2023a). One sampled article cited the US ambassador-at-large for Global Criminal Justice which advises the State Department stating, "It is notable he [Prigozhin] said quite openly that this war is based on false pretences and that Ukraine and NATO had no intention of attacking Russia and this is very much a war of Russia's own making" (Wintour, 2023). The sampled Guardian articles cited Western political voices pre-empting Russian claims that the West had orchestrated the Wagner revolt. Joe Biden and Canada's then prime minister Justin Trudeau stressed they "made a pointed effort to stay out of the uprising" (Robins-Early, 2023), echoed by German chancellor Olaf Scholz, who reported that leaders of France, the UK, and Poland had also "quickly agreed to stay very quiet" (Russell, 2023b).

The Russian President is an authoritarian adversary and an irrational actor (Western frame 3)

While the Wagner Group accepted a Kremlin deal and left Russia for Belarus within a day of the insurrection, its actions were represented across the outlets less as a failed rebellion than an indication of growing internal division and Putin's weakening grip on power. The Guardian and the ABC primarily relied on Ukrainian, opposition, and expert voices. 9News.com.au juxtaposed Russian claims of unity with Western claims of internal fracture, while The Australian discussed the possibility of personalised authoritarian systems emerging stronger as a result of failed coups.

The Guardian (N=14) provided space to Ukrainian political and military voices that represented Prigozhin's uprising against "corruption and lies" as the fulfilment of Ukraine's expectation that Russia would eventually destabilise itself internally. Collectively, these sources speculated that the insurrection was evidence of Russia's "flimsy structure held together by inertia on a wing and a prayer" (Tondo, 2023). Zelenskyy's office characterised the mutiny as "the beginning of a civil war" and Putin's "de facto loss of power," while praising Kyiv's counteroffensive efforts that had "finally destabilised the Russian elites... after the defeat in Ukraine" (Sauer & Roth, 2023). Ukraine's military intelligence spokesperson Andriy Yusov argued the insurrection signalled "the collapse of the ruling regime," while Zelenskyy described the insurrection as a result of Russia's "full-scale weakness" (Tondo, 2023), and the Secretary of Ukraine's national security and defence council promised that the war would "end inside Russia" (Tondo & Mazhulin, 2023).

The Guardian reinforced its reportage of the mutiny undermining Putin's grip on power by including Russian and Western political and expert commentary, as well as surveying how British, German, and American newspapers framed the insurrection in which Putin was universally described as "humiliated," his "weakest in decades," and "pushed to [the] brink" (Russell, 2023a). Russian quoted voices highlighted elite anxiety, with an unnamed former Russian defence ministry official describing "real shock and hysteria" in the government (Sauer & Roth, 2023), and a low-level official in Moscow's mayor's office describing the day of the revolt as "a crazy reality show" (Sauer, 2023b). Commentary from the Russia Institute at King's College London highlighted that "previously unimaginable things, like a change of leadership, may become more plausible" (Sauer, 2023b). European leader statements similarly highlighted Putin's instability; EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell described Prigozhin's aborted mutiny as "the monster acting against his creator" and pointed out "fragilities" in the Russian political and military systems. His rhetoric was echoed by German and Swedish foreign ministers who interpreted the mutiny as exposing the vulnerabilities of an authoritarian system, where "everything seems to be very stable until one day, nothing is stable anymore" (O'Carroll, 2022).

Like The Guardian, 9News.com.au (N=6) repeatedly described the rebellion as "the greatest threat to Putin's authority in decades" (9News.com.au, 2023b), "exposing his weakness and eroding the Kremlin's authority" (9News.com.au, 2023e). However, unlike The Guardian, which emphasised Ukrainian and Western commentary about Russia's elite fragmentation, 9News.com.au (N=6) incorporated official Russian statements that portrayed Wagner's actions as a betrayal and projected Russian unity. This sat alongside US government statements that highlighted Russia's growing fractures. Acknowledging Prigozhin's support for the war, 9News.com.au presented the mutiny as a result of a prolonged internal division rather than an isolated event, emphasising Prigozhin's "very public and months-long feud" (9News.com.au, 2023b) with Russia's military leadership over its "failures in the war in Ukraine" (9News.com.au, 2023a).

While Prigozhin himself called the insurrection "a march of justice" (9News.com.au, 2023a), Russian officials repeatedly described it as an act of betrayal and consistently articulated the Kremlin's response that aligned with the R3 frame "The Russian President is a rational protector." However, within the 9News.com.au coverage, such claims indirectly indicated Russia's internal crisis that required declarations of unity, or as 9News.com.au put it, "an aggressive campaign to reassert the authority of the Russian President" (9News.com.au, 2023d). A "sombre looking" Putin was quoted characterising the coup as a "stab in the back of our country and our people" (9News.com.au, 2023b), a view echoed by the National Anti-Terrorism Committee, a part of the Russian Federal Security Services (FSB). Highlighting loyalty to the Russian state, the Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov was reported declaring his readiness to "fulfill any order of Putin" (9News.com.au, 2023b), while Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov rejected suggestions that Wagner's mutiny "jeopardised Putin's grip on power" and stated that Prigozhin's withdrawal demonstrated "the level of unity within society around the president" (9News.com.au, 2023e).

The sampled 9News.com.au coverage, underpinned by Western political, intelligence, and military voices, characterised the revolt as exposing "cracks" in Putin's "role as a leader of the country" (9News.com.au, 2023c). Then US secretary of state Antony Blinken assessed the uprising as "an

added chapter to a very, very bad book that Putin has written for Russia," with a figure "from within directly questioning Putin's authority," supported by former CIA director David Petraeus, who described the government as "shaken" and Putin as "personally shaken" and "more vulnerable than at any time in his two-decade rule" (9News.com.au, 2023c).

A distinctive feature of the ABC's W3 frame "The Russian President is an authoritarian adversary and an irrational actor" (N=9) was its emphasis on the reversal of the established power dynamics between Belarusian president Alexander Lukashenko and his "elder brother" Putin – both described by Atlantic Council's Eurasia Centre as "authoritarian bros" (Armitage, 2023a). Combining journalistic voice and statements from Belarusian opposition figures, the ABC portrayed Lukashenko as "increasingly a puppet of the Kremlin" (Dole & Clark, 2023), "entirely dependent on Putin's support to stay in office" after the 2020 Belarusian protests against the president's rule. However, the Wagner revolt was presented as triggering the reversal of their roles, as Lukashenko "stunned almost everyone" by brokering a deal with Prigozhin to halt the armed march and allow Wagner fighters to escape to Belarus, which ultimately "saved Putin from the brink" (Armitage, 2023a). The Eurasian Democracy Initiative reinforced this interpretation, describing Lukashenko's intermediary role as "an indication of Putin's weakness" and "desperation" (Armitage, 2023a). The ABC concluded that the revolt "up-ended the carefully maintained power structure in Putin's world" and framed it as the latest manifestation of the Russian leader's already undermined position, retrospectively describing Putin's manoeuvre to capture Kyiv as "abject humiliation" (Armitage, 2023a).

Drawing on Western political and expert commentary, the ABC further amplified the narrative of Putin's authority as "compromised, perhaps fatally" (ABC, 2023d) with reportage of the rivalry between Prigozhin and Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu; the ABC deconstructed Putin's strongman image by suggesting that it had been modelled on Shoigu – the "hyper-masculine, outdoorsy leader Putin wanted to be" – and argued that Putin's Kremlin circle grew "smaller and smaller" (Sweeny & Armitage, 2023). This interpretation was amplified by politicians; Anthony Albanese described the aborted revolt as evidence of growing "internal opposition" and a "real shake-up to the internal dynamics of Russia," despite "the control in the media" (Dziedzic, 2023).

Russian opposition voices further expanded the W3 frame within sampled ABC coverage. A former Russian diplomat Boris Bondarev stated that both the insurrection and the war had "significantly damaged Putin's grip on power" and revealed disillusionment with the war among the "majority of people in the Kremlin" as well as the weaknesses of Putin's "dictatorial style of leadership" (Ferguson & Freri, 2023). Similarly, the commander of the Freedom of Russia Legion – the so-called Russian partisans conducting cross-border raids from Ukraine for "liberation from the Putin regime"– highlighted that Russia had once again "embarked on the path of aggression, capture, and destruction" and that "the entire Putin system [was] completely rotten" (Cannane, 2023).

Beyond portraying Putin's vulnerability, The Australian (N=2) also explored whether the mutiny contributed to authoritarian resilience and reinforcement of the autocracy – democracy dichotomy by situating Russia alongside authoritarian regimes "from Belarus to China to Venezuela," and Iran, and grouping Putin with Xi Jinping and Kim Jong Un as leaders of "personalised autocracies" (Luhnow & Forero, 2023). Expert commentary from the Royal United Services Institute and Bath University cautioned that failed coups could strengthen "personalised autocracies" like Russia, supported by extensive "networks of patronage": "After Putin, there will be Putin, it just depends which type of Putin" (Luhnow & Forero, 2023). The Australian framed the Wagner revolt as an indicator of Putin's vulnerability and further reinforced the W3 frame "The Russian President is an authoritarian adversary and an irrational actor" by contrasting Putin's "humiliation" ("Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy mocked him for apparently fleeing Moscow, calling him 'obviously very afraid and probably in hiding') with Zelenskyy's wartime leadership ("stayed in Kyiv to lead his national resistance") (Sheridan, 2023). Putin was described by journalistic voice as a "wounded," "diminished," and "furious dictator who ha[d] quelled previous and less obvious dissent with poison and apparent suicides," had been "stripped bare" of his "strongman and invincible persona" (Magnay, 2023a), "far from conquering Ukraine and re-establishing the Russian empire" (Sheridan, 2023).

No frame

The ABC published several articles (N=5) coded as "no frame" that attributed evaluations of Wagner's revolt to a range of pro-Kremlin, anti-Russian, and relatively neutral political and expert voices. Without reinforcement of the weakness narrative, these materials focused on the rupture of the "mutually beneficial relationship between the two powerful men" (Armitage, 2023a). While the ABC described Wagner's insurrection as "the dramatic turn of events [that] looked like the biggest domestic crisis" (ABC, 2023c), the evaluative claim that Moscow was suffering "full-scale weakness" appeared once and was attributed to Volodymyr Zelenskyy, supported by anti-Kremlin figure Mikhail Khodorkovsky, who stressed the importance of backing "'even the devil' if he decided to take on the Kremlin" (ABC, 2023a). In contrast, Putin denounced Prigozhin's move as "treason" and promised "inevitable punishment," echoed by Colonel General Sergei Surovikin and Lieutenant General Vladimir Alexeyev who described it as "madness" and a "provocation" that "would play into the hands of Russia's enemies 'waiting to see the exacerbation of our domestic political situation'" (ABC, 2023a). Relatively neutral and descriptive voices narrated the Russian government's emergency response to an unprecedented security challenge – citing Russian news agency TASS reporting on the heightened security in Rostov-on-Don and Moscow; the Rostov governor Vasily Golubev and Moscow governor Sergei Sobyanin instructed residents to "stay calm and not to leave home" (ABC, 2023b); and Russia's chief prosecutor justified a criminal investigation (ABC, 2023b). The limitations of available and verifiable information were also signalled: "The situation inside Russia is extremely murky right now. There is almost no independent media in the country, and most of the information we have is coming from either the Kremlin or Prigozhin's frenzied, unverified claims on social media" (Armitage, 2023a).

One sampled article in The Guardian also documented the post-mutiny developments whilst providing significant space to Lukashenko and Putin's statements regarding the Wagner Group's future, along with Western expert commentary on Putin's attempts to "rewrite the narrative of Prigozhin's putsch as one of consolidation and consensus" (Sauer, 2023c).

Summary

Event two portrayed Putin as losing his grip on power. Compared to event one, Russian sources became more prominent but were mainly used to demonstrate internal division and contradictions in the Kremlin's rationale for the war in Ukraine. Relying on expert voices, the ABC treated the mutiny as a turning point. The Guardian was the only outlet to use the W2 frame "NATO's presence within Russia's perceived sphere of influence is not a cause for insecurity and invasion," focusing on Prigozhin's statements that dismantled the Kremlin's official justifications for the war. 9News.com.au mainly relied on political elite voices and framed the insurrection as a sign of a leadership crisis, amplifying the dramatic language of chaos. The Australian mainly quoted military analysts and Western political leaders who framed the insurrection through the strategic implications for Ukraine's battlefield advancements.

Event 3: The White House meeting between US President Donald Trump, Vice President J.D. Vance, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy (28 February–14 March 2025)

From the reportage on the Russia–Ukraine conflict in event one, to disunity of Russian elites in event two, event three coverage (N=90) shifted to the discussion of the Western alliance's fracturing, with the challenge to Ukraine no longer coming solely from Russia's military actions but from the uncertainty surrounding continued US support for Ukraine. The tense Oval Office meeting between the Trump administration and Volodymyr Zelenskyy on 28 February 2025 marked a sharp shift in the US positioning on the war, with Donald Trump delivering an ultimatum to the Ukrainian president to make a peace deal with Russia or risk losing US support.

The W2 frame "NATO's presence within Russia's perceived sphere of influence is not a cause for insecurity and invasion" and W3 frame "The Russian President is an authoritarian adversary and an irrational actor," including frequent rebuttals of Russian claims about NATO expansion and Western provocation, disappeared during event three.

More than half of the dataset (58 percent) no longer framed the conflict within the outlined dominant frames and instead focused on the political implications of the Oval Office

meeting, thus falling under the category of "no frame" (Figure 15). Within that "no frame" category, 46 percent examined fragmentation of the transatlantic alliance. Western political leaders urged continued support of Ukraine and framed the Trump administration's actions as undermining Western cohesion, signalling the need for a potential replacement for declining American support for Ukraine. A further 12 percent of articles coded as "no frame" discussed adjacent political and economic developments not directly related to the Russia–Ukraine conflict, including the British domestic political response and trade tensions surrounding Trump's tariffs on steel and aluminium imports. The remaining 42 percent of the sample continued to use the W1 frame "Russia wishes to restore the USSR and revive its imperial greatness by crushing a democratic state," portraying Russia as an enduring threat for Ukraine and wider Europe.

Quoted sources largely followed geopolitical boundaries in event one – Western-aligned perspectives were primarily voiced by Western and Ukrainian politicians and civilians as well as occasional Russian opposition figures. During event two, conventional source alignments were blurred, with Yevgeny Prigozhin as both a Kremlin insider and the main challenger of official Russian wartime discourse. Event three marked a further complication of the relationship between the national affiliation of sources and their interpretive perspectives, as the fracture within the Western alliance disrupted the previously relatively unified Western framing of the war and increasingly enabled some Western political actors from the Trump administration to voice interpretations of the conflict which aligned more closely with Russian official narratives regarding the responsibility for prolonging the war and the conditions for achieving peace.

While pro-Western political voices continued to dominate the coverage (74 percent), pro-Russian sources comprised 19 percent of all quoted sources (Figure 16). Across events two and three, pro-Russian sources recorded their highest proportion, compared to event one, but their narrative function differed; event two coverage relied on Russian sources to illustrate Russian elite's internal fracture, while the event three sample featured statements from Trump administration officials that echoed Russian official narratives, amplifying transatlantic alliance rupture, and were therefore coded as pro-Russian sources under the study's coding framework.

Non-aligned sources remained limited (7 percent) and primarily consisted of Trump administration officials. As the US–Ukraine ceasefire negotiations in Saudi Arabia approached, US political rhetoric also started shifting from more Russian-aligned (coded as pro-Russian sources) towards presenting the US as a mediator seeking ceasefire negotiations and compromise from the two sides of the conflict (coded as non-aligned sources). For example, Donald Trump noted that "it takes two to tango," while Marco Rubio noted that "both sides need to come to an understanding that there's no military solution to this situation. The Russians can't conquer all of Ukraine, and obviously it'll be very difficult for Ukraine to force the Russians back all the way to where they were in 2014" (The Australian, 2025b).

Russia wishes to restore the USSR and revive its imperial greatness by crushing a democratic state (Western frame 1)

Under the W1 frame, sampled coverage from The Guardian (N=18), The Australian (N=9), 9News.com.au (N=6), and the ABC (N=5) rejected the Trump administration's reframing of the war in Ukraine by heavily relying on European and American political and expert voices as well as Ukrainian political, journalistic, and military voices that reaffirmed the established dichotomy of Russia, the aggressor, versus Ukraine, the victim. Russian-aligned remarks from the Trump administration appeared in The Guardian and 9News.com.au, marking a departure from the traditional Western understanding of the conflict. Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff called Ukraine's ambitions to join NATO "a threat to the Russians," noting that "the war didn't need to happen – it was provoked... not necessarily by the Russians" (Helmore, 2025). The characterisation that "again and again, Trump has sided with Putin" was supported with Trump's own statement that Putin "went through a hell of a lot" with him – referring to the investigation of Russian interference in the 2016 election described by Trump as "a phony witch hunt" (9News.com.au, 2025b). Trump was further quoted declaring himself "in the middle" and not on either side of the conflict, deriding Zelenskyy's desire to "fight, fight, fight" (9News.com.au, 2025c) and "hatred" for Putin as roadblocks to negotiations and peace (9News.com.au, 2025a), and justifying the aid pause as contributing to peace negotiations ("This guy [Zelenskyy] doesn't want there to be peace as long as he has America's backing" (9News.com.au, 2025i)). US administration officials similarly framed Ukraine as the obstacle to peace. Vice President J.D. Vance argued that "the path to peace... is maybe engaging in diplomacy" (9News.com.au, 2025c), and Senator Lindsey Graham noted that Zelenskyy "either needs to resign and send somebody over that we can do business with, or he needs to change" (9News.com.au, 2025b). Trump's "sweet little deal with Putin" was also noted in The Guardian (as described by the Ukrainian journalist and blogger Illia Ponomorenko) as a reference to US diplomats siding with Russia and North Korea against a European-drafted resolution that condemned Russian aggression and supported Ukraine's territorial integrity (Harding, 2025a).

Following the Oval Office meeting, all four outlets immediately rebutted these Russian-aligned claims with statements reaffirming Russia's "illegal" and "unprovoked" invasion (9News.com.au, 2025l), without further reference to Russian justifications for war. The strongest commentary across the outlets came from Australian PM Anthony Albanese who reiterated his support for Ukraine against a nation led by the "murderous" (Packham & Magnay, 2025) and "authoritarian dictator" Putin, who "clearly ha[d] imperialistic designs not just on Ukraine but throughout that region" (Lu, 2025). Across the outlets, Australia's rhetoric was echoed by European and American political figures; German chancellor Friedrich Merz urged audiences to "never confuse aggressor and victim in this terrible war" (Gramenz et al., 2025), and Republican congressman Don Bacon claimed Russia "hates us and our Western values" (Sciberras, 2025a). The Australian drew a parallel between Zelenskyy's refusal to flee Kyiv in 2022 with his refusal to "bow to Trump" in

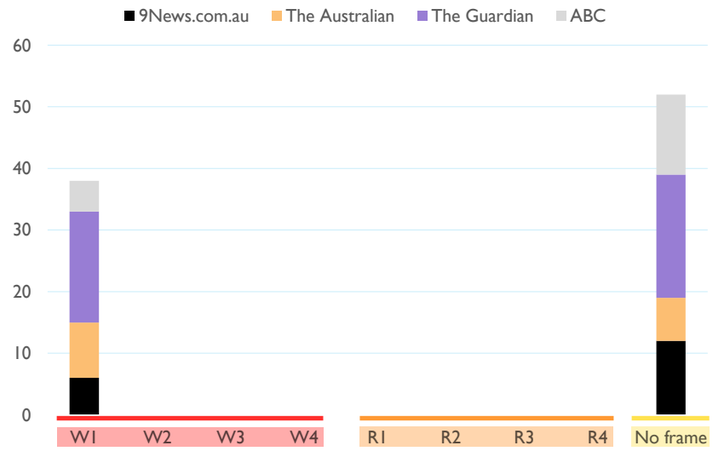


Figure 15 | Event 3: Comparison of dominant frame adoption by media outlet. Bars represent the number of sampled articles with the dominant frame.

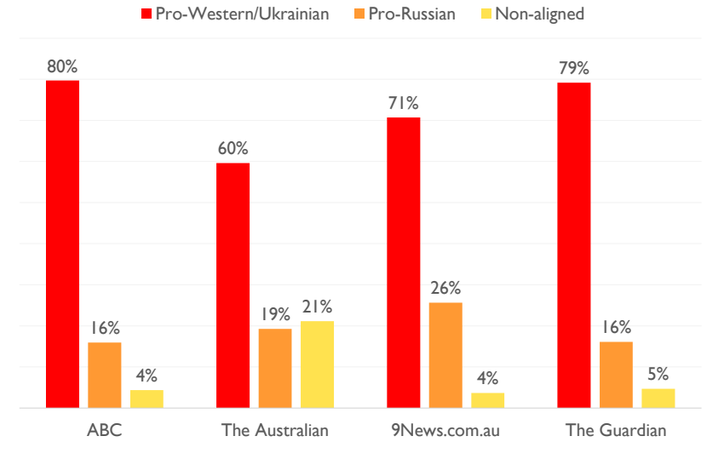


Figure 16 | Event 3: Distribution of quoted sources voicing pro-Western/Ukrainian, pro-Russian, or non-aligned perspectives by media outlet. Percentages represent the political alignment category as a proportion of all quoted sources within each outlet's event three sample.

the Oval Office, quoting a former Polish ambassador to Kyiv: "The two alpha males clashed. Zelenskyy in that respect is similar to Trump–he very much relies on his own instincts, and not on the system, and is not ready to subordinate" (Trofimov & Lytvynenko, 2025).

Consistent with event one and two of the sampled data where references to the Minsk I and II agreements were largely omitted, a brief mention of previous agreements appeared in the event three dataset of 9News.com.au and The Guardian but remained largely decontextualised. Zelenskyy's claim that Putin "had broken 'his own signature' 25 times on ceasefires and other agreements" was left unexplored (Henley et al., 2025), as well as Trump's counterclaim that Putin "had not broken agreements with him" (9News.com.au, 2025a). The narrative of Russia as a persistently unreliable actor was constructed by Zelenskyy, repeatedly quoted as stressing that Ukraine sought "a quick and reliable peace" and that "the war continues solely because of Russia" (ABC, 2025e). Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to the head of Zelenskyy's office concluded that "generations of American politicians come and go, yet Russia's inability to adhere to the rules of civilised international coexistence remains constant" (Henley et al., 2025).

Contextualising why Ukrainian and Western officials rejected the Trump administration's reframing of the war, the outlets portrayed Russia as an enduring threat not only to Ukraine but to broader Europe, supported by political, expert, and military commentary as well as past and present evidence of Russian aggression. The French foreign minister, Jean-Noël Barrot noted, "Never has the risk of a war in Europe, in the EU, been so high … The threat keeps getting closer to us" (Henley et al., 2025). Delaware, California, Maryland, Minnesota, and Illinois Democratic senators thanked Zelenskyy for "standing up to a dictator" (Chao-Fong, 2025). Albanese urged NATO to ensure that "the illegal, immoral actions of Russia… Vladimir Putin and his designs, which are imperialistic, not just on Ukraine but on other countries, are not rewarded or encouraged" (Packham, 2025). Putin was cast by The Guardian's journalistic voice and Zelenskyy as having "no interest in a ceasefire" (Holmes, 2025) and "the only party that wants the war to continue and diplomacy to break down" (Sauer et al., 2025), with defence analysts and military experts from US intelligence services, King's College London, and the Institute for the Study of War repeatedly warning of Putin's "maximalist goal of dominating Ukraine" and ongoing Russian aggression (Sabbagh & Harding, 2025). Absent was reporting on the failed Istanbul peace protocols of March–April 2022, supported by Russia and Ukraine but rejected by the UK. The Guardian also recalled Russian troops "killing, torturing and raping hundreds of civilians" in Bucha in March 2022 (Harding, 2025a), alongside references to earlier atrocities, such as Russia's "devastating attack" on Dobropillia in the eastern Donetsk region in March 2025 (Harding, 2025b). In sampled 9News.com.au articles, against the descriptions of Ukrainian troop withdrawal from Russia's Kursk region and Ukrainian shortages of manpower, weaponry, and ammunition, Russian military developments were narrated by anonymous Ukrainian military voices. One Ukrainian soldier noted Russian air superiority and the physical fitness of North Korean soldiers aiding Russian forces, while a commander argued that Russia was "delaying ceasefire negotiations until they reclaim Kursk," recognising the "political stakes" of the defeat that had "cost Ukraine some of its best units and most precious weapons" and a key "bargaining chip" to recover occupied territories (9News.com.au, 2025l).

Reinforcing the narrative that Russia remained a security threat and that Putin "has proven once and again that he is a hostile neighbour [that] cannot be trusted, only be deterred" (9News.com.au, 2025k), as stated by EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, the outlets repeatedly framed Ukraine's military strength and Western defence aid as prerequisites for a lasting peace. A defence and security think tank Royal United Services Institute described the European deterrence logic to "keep Ukraine in the fight so it can negotiate from a maximum position of strength" (9News.com.au, 2025e). Von der Leyen and Sir Keir Starmer rallied their European counterparts around "continuing–and likely much increased–support for Ukraine" (9News.com.au, 2025e) and the need to turn Ukraine "into a steel porcupine indigestible for potential invaders" and "urgently rearm" the continent (Morris-Grant, 2025; Stacey et al., 2025), referring to Britain's and France's efforts to establish a "coalition of the willing," a multinational force deployment in Ukraine to underpin a ceasefire proposal. The Australian concentrated on the limits of Australia's military involvement. While its journalistic voice warned that a prolonged suspension of military aid could "seriously hamper Ukrainian forces on the battlefield and weaken Zelenskyy's hand in any future peace talks" (Dawber, 2025), Dutton and former foreign minister Alexander Downer were quoted stressing that there was no need for Australia to contribute troops to a proposed European peacekeeping force (Packham, 2025; Packham & Magnay, 2025).

No frame

Following the meeting in the Oval Office between Trump, Rubio, Vance, and Zelenskyy, the outlets centred their coverage on the uncertainty of future Western support for Ukraine and whether Western unity could overcome Trumpian reframing of the war. As these sampled articles across The Guardian (N=14), 9News.com.au (N=12), the ABC (N=11), and The Australian (N=4) scrutinised the transatlantic alliance's cohesion that did not align with any of the dominant frames, they were coded as "no frame." For analytical purposes, this subset of articles is discussed under the descriptive title "Fragmentation of Western support for Ukraine."

Within this subset of articles, the outlets presented "an astonishing Oval Office blowout" (9News.com.au, 2025g) and the Trump–Putin rapprochement as a "crucial moment" for the war in Ukraine (Roth, 2025a), a catalyst for "a deepening transatlantic rift" (9News.com.au, 2025g) between "the once staunch allies" (9News.com.au, 2025g), and a "generational moment" for Europe to assume greater responsibility for its security (Mason & Adu, 2025). Occasional quotes of Russian officials were immediately tempered by statements predominantly coming from European and Ukrainian leaders, and military and civic sources that interpreted Trump's behaviour and American military assistance suspension as weakening Ukraine, strengthening Russia, and reinforcing the Western alliance divergence.

Sparce Russian official statements across the outlets demonstrated a perceived alignment between the Kremlin and Trump's administration and a widening gap between the transatlantic alliance. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov stated, "It doesn't matter what we're expecting, it matters what the United States are expecting," and repeated the White House claim that Ukraine must "demonstrate a desire to make peace" (Doran, 2025a), while Russia's Foreign Ministry welcomed the US suspension of aid as "the best contribution to peace" (9News.com.au, 2025j), noting that "the collective west ha[d] partially begun to lose its collectivity" (Henley et al., 2025), describing Ukraine as a "totalitarian state [that] ruthlessly sends millions of citizens to their deaths" (Morgan, 2025). While Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov insisted there was "no room for compromise" over European peacekeepers because such deployments would be "overtly hostile," viewed by Russia as a NATO presence in Ukraine (The Australian, 2025a), State Duma deputy Mikhail Sheremet noted that Moscow was "interested in settlement but [would] not allow itself to be deceived" (The Australian, 2025b). Supportive voices of Republican senators and a former Hungarian PM appeared briefly in the final sections of sampled articles, thanking Trump and Vance for standing up for America and peace and against Zelenskyy who "ungratefully expects us to bankroll and escalate another forever war" (Badshah, 2025a).

Across the outlets, such statements were immediately rebutted by American Democrats as well as European and Ukrainian political and civic representatives urging the US to stay "on the right side of history and freedom" and seek to preserve Western unity (9News.com.au, 2025g). Democrats repeatedly described Trump's treatment of Zelenskyy as "disheartening" (Badshah, 2025a), while members of the US Senate Armed Services Committee called the Oval Office meeting "a political ambush" doing "great harm to US standing in the world" (9News.com.au, 2025b). The Australian argued that Trump had "essentially embraced Mr Putin's vision of the conflict" (Trofimov & Lytvynenko, 2025) and noted J.D. Vance's dismissal of prospective European peacekeepers as "20,000 troops from some random country that hasn't fought a war in 30 or 40 years" (Magnay, 2025b). The Guardian highlighted that British press were "united in their horror," universally portraying Trump's behaviour as an "ambush" (The Guardian, 2025). Former French prime minister François Bayrou similarly criticised Trump for humiliating the Ukrainian president "with the goal of making Zelenskyy fold through threats" (9News.com.au, 2025c), while Emmanuel Macron blamed Putin for "gambling with World War III" (9News.com.au, 2025g).

Trump's administration was criticised for the transatlantic breakdown across the outlets, with Democratic Senate leader Chuck Schumer saying that Trump and Vance – "ventriloquist dummies for Putin" (Chao-Fong, 2025) – were "doing Putin's dirty work" (9News.com.au, 2025a). German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier stated he could not believe "that we would one day have to protect Ukraine from the USA" (9News.com.au, 2025e). Other European leaders signalled the need for a reorganisation of Western support. While Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni warned that "every division of the West makes us all weaker" (Pearson, 2025), the EU foreign

policy chief Kaja Kallas reinforced the notion that "the free world needs a new leader," stating "it's up to us, Europeans, to take this challenge" (Badshah, 2025a; Sciberras, 2025a). Following an emergency London summit on 1–2 March 2025, the ABC dedicated standalone articles documenting statements from Australian, British, and European leaders, alongside military analysts and academics highlighting a narrative consensus over Europe's need to "do the heavy lifting" to support Ukraine (ABC, 2025a, 2025c, 2025b, 2025d). The ABC also included reactions from ordinary Australians – two rural NSW café owners described the Oval Office meeting as "schoolyard bulling" and expressed their solidarity through the imposition of "tariffs" on American products to raise money for Ukraine (Woodburn & Cole, 2025).

While all four outlets reported on the "fractious and tense" Trump–Zelenskyy breakdown in the Oval Office (Badshah, 2025b), The Guardian quickly shifted its attention to Britain's "intense diplomacy" efforts to repair Zelenskyy's dignity and protect the transatlantic alliance's post-2022 consensus on Ukraine from Trump's unpredictability and increased alignment with Russia. Sir Keir Starmer was cast as the key "Trump whisperer" (Roth, 2025a), "scrambling to mitigate the fallout," coordinate European leaders, and change US position on Ukraine (Abdul, 2025): "I roll up my sleeves, pick up the phone, talk to President Trump, talk to President Zelenskyy… pick up the phone to President Macron and President Trump afterwards, because we have to bridge this" (Stacey & Walker, 2025). Trump was portrayed by The Guardian as a "notoriously mercurial" and "capricious King" (Roth, 2025a), while Putin was described as a beneficiary of the Western alliance fracture ("Putin, no doubt watching from afar, must have been licking his lips" (Smith, 2025)).

Across the outlets, Ukrainian political, military, and civic sources attested to Ukraine as a willing peace partner. In 9News.com.au reportage, Zelenskyy insisted that "nobody wants peace more than the Ukrainians" and pledged to "work under President Trump's strong leadership to get a peace that lasts," confirming Ukraine's willingness to sign the proposed minerals deal with the US (9News.com.au, 2025b), under which future revenues from natural resource extraction in Ukraine would offset US financial and military support.

The Australian portrayed European leaders confronting the possible end of "80 years of locked-in military support" from the US (Magnay, 2025a) and questioned whether Europe had "the firepower and the political will" to replace Washington (Norman & Lovett, 2025). In 9News.com.au, this framing was further personalised through the voices of a Ukrainian soldier fighting in Russia's Kursk region who felt "betrayed" by Trump – "If we have weapons… great. If not, then we're done" – and a 46-year-old Odesa resident Olena Fedorova who expressed hope that Trump's decision would be temporary as "we really need help" (9News.com.au, 2025j).

The Guardian similarly personalised pro-Ukrainian voices, with the organiser of rallying Sydneysiders, Anton Bogdanovych appealing to Australians "for help and support" (Lu, 2025). The Guardian emphasised Europe's need to "navigate the crumbling certainties of the post-second-world-war order," with an adviser to Ukraine's defence minister adding, it was "Putin's plan to destroy the unity of the Euro-Atlantic coalition" (Abdul, 2025). The ABC quoted Ukrainian Ambassador to Australia Vasyl Myroshnychenko framing continued American support as essential for Ukraine's survival ("We cannot survive without an American commitment" (Speers, 2025)). The ABC and The Australian also focused on Australia's domestic security and interpreted the Western alliance rupture as stretching beyond Europe to the Indo-Pacific. In ABC reportage, shadow Home Affairs Minister James Paterson warned that the US–Europe tensions could "not just embolden Putin" but be "misinterpreted" by China: "It would be a mistake for China to believe the United States views the Indo Pacific theatre in the same way it views the European theatre. There is no retreat for America from the Pacific" (Speers, 2025). The Australian similarly presented "America's chaotic politics" as a strategic opportunity for Beijing, while highlighting Chinese media's portrayal of the transatlantic alliance rupture as evidence of "the superiority of the Chinese political system" and the inevitability of a multipolar world (Glasgow, 2025).

Summary

Event three coverage focused on the transatlantic alliance's cohesion after Trump's rapprochement with Moscow and reframing of the war in Ukraine. While 9News.com.au focused on the Oval Office meeting and reported on Western political reaction, the ABC gave space to European analysts who focused on the consequences for NATO, Europe, and international order. The Guardian became the strongest critic of the rapprochement and focused on the UK's role as a mediator between the US, Ukraine, and Europe. The Australian localised the debate and amplified Australian political consensus over military support for Ukraine. Articles coded as "no frame" similarly focused on fractures within the Western alliance following the Oval Office confrontation and foregrounded the importance of continued support for Ukraine.

Event 4: The temporary lifting of sanctions on Russian oil following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz during the second US–Iran conflict (9–23 March 2026)

Event four coverage (N=38) examined the temporary easing of sanctions on Russian oil after the closure of the Strait of Hormuz during the second US–Iran conflict, exposing a Western dilemma over the continued political and economic isolation of Russia pit against the pragmatic need to stabilise global energy supplies.

Western frame 4 "Economic pressure and sanctions on Russia" dominated the coverage (58 percent) (Figure 17). Unlike event one where the W4 frame legitimised sanctions as an instrument of punishing and isolating Russia, event four reframed sanctions through the lens of the US–Iran war; US geopolitical pragmatism and willingness to temporarily ease sanctions on Russian oil were juxtaposed against Europe's moral certainty that Russia should face continued economic pressure, to undermine its capacity to continue the war against Ukraine.

The W1 frame "Russia wishes to restore the USSR and revive its imperial greatness by crushing a democratic state" comprised 16 percent of the sample, while the W3 frame "The Russian President is an authoritarian adversary and an irrational actor" appeared only once, in The Guardian (2 percent).

Unlike event three where articles coded as "no frame" predominantly centred on Western fracturing over the Russia–Ukraine war and thus were included in the analysis, the "no frame" category in this event focused on Australia's inflation amid the Iran war oil crisis, China's foreign policy positioning during the US–Iran war, oligarch Roman Abramovich's frozen assets, and the Hungary–Ukraine dispute over a money-laundering investigation involving Ukraine's state-owned Oschadbank, alongside the election campaign of former Prime Minister Viktor Orbán, planned Russian participation in the Venice Biennale, and Russia's gradual return to global sport.

Pro-Western sources comprised 50 percent of all quoted voices (Figure 18). Primarily European and Ukrainian politicians and experts criticised the temporary relaxation of sanctions on Russian oil and portrayed Russia as the key beneficiary of the Strait of Hormuz closure.

Pro-Russian sources accounted for 10 percent. While Russian citizens shared experiences of Russia's military mobilisation, Russian politicians were predominantly quoted, highlighting the narrative of Kremlin opportunism amid the US–Iran war. Statements from Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán were coded as aligning with Russian perspectives due to his opposition to a European €90bn loan to Ukraine.

Non-aligned sources made an unusually high proportion (40 percent) of the quoted sources, due largely to the coverage focusing on the US–Iran conflict, where European, American, and energy-sector representatives commented on oil markets, and the broader geopolitical fallout, rather than on issues related to Russia–Ukraine.

Russia wishes to restore the USSR and revive its imperial greatness by crushing a democratic state (Western frame 1)

Like in earlier events, The Guardian (N=2) and the ABC (N=4) cast Russia as the cause of Ukrainian suffering and a security threat extending beyond Ukraine, closely intertwined with Iran.

The Guardian quoted Zelenskyy during his address to the British Parliament in which he criticised Putin as "a wealthy madman" and further described Moscow and Tehran as "evil," "brothers in hatred," and "brothers in weapons," urging European nations to prepare for "attacks [on civilian infrastructure] by non-state actors including criminal networks, terror groups and lone attackers," as drone technology advanced (Crerar, 2026). In journalistic narration, 9News.com.au similarly portrayed Iran as one of Russia's

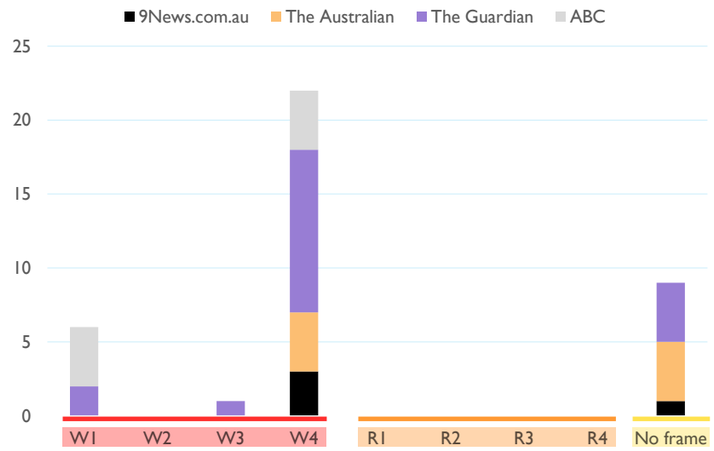


Figure 17 | Event 4: Comparison of dominant frame adoption by media outlet. Bars represent the number of sampled articles with the dominant frame.

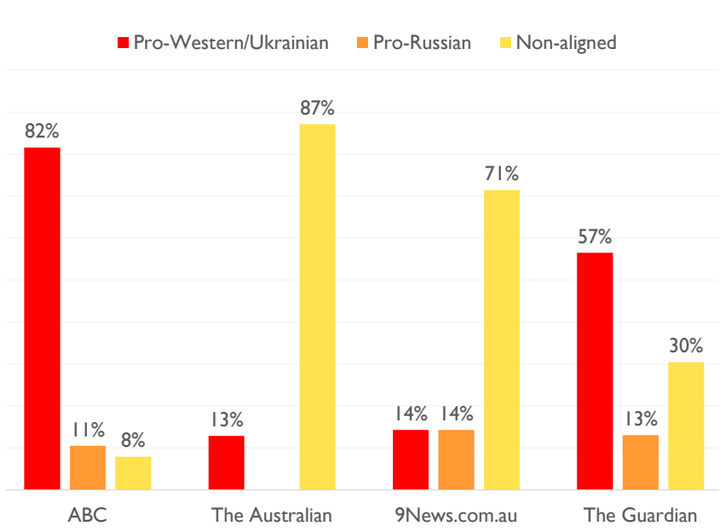


Figure 18 | Event 4: Distribution of quoted sources voicing pro-Western/Ukrainian, pro-Russian, or non-aligned perspectives by media outlet. Percentages represent the political alignment category as a proportion of all quoted sources within each outlet's event four sample.

"closest allies," while describing Putin as "enjoying the spoils" of the US–Israel war (Jeffrey, 2026).

Although event four mainly focused on the discussion of sanctions and energy security, the outlets continued to amplify the humanitarian costs of the war, frequently framed as part of Russia's ambition to restore its former Soviet glory, through personalised accounts of suffering on both the Russian and Ukrainian sides. Contrasting the "relatively undisturbed life in major urban cities," including "insulated" Moscow and Saint Petersburg, The Guardian demonstrated the human cost in a remote settlement in Russia's north-western Komi Republic, a zone described by the independent outlet Mediazona (blocked in Russia) as belonging to the "poor regions with a high number of volunteers" (Sauer, 2026b). While some residents repeated official Kremlin narratives of "defending Russia from "neo-Nazis" and the West," the journalistic voice explicitly described these as "false" (Sauer, 2026b). This was followed by accounts of other rural residents describing their village becoming "deserted," as men were "all fighting in Ukraine"; mothers "cling[ed] to the hope" their sons would return; some had to "bury [their] own children" (Sauer, 2026b). The article further highlighted Russia's losses with the voice of an anonymous Kremlin insider who argued that "Russia [was] no longer able to call up quickly enough to replace those dying on the battlefield in Ukraine" (Sauer, 2026b).

The ABC amplified Ukraine's humanitarian consequences through historical contextualisation, personal accounts, and legal testimony, situating the cost of war within a longer timeframe, tracing the conflict to the 2014 ousting of Ukraine's pro-Russian president and the subsequent dispute over Crimea, while Russian perspectives for the events surrounding Crimea were absent (Cooper, 2026b). The ABC foregrounded narratives of Ukrainian children's lives being destroyed, describing them as "displaced, orphaned and killed in Russian President Vladimir Putin's war" (Cooper, 2026b). Testimony of Ukrainian children, trauma specialists from World Vision Ukraine, and humanitarian organisations reinforced the long-term "psychological torment" of the war (Cooper, 2026b). Gloria, 12, from the town of Boyarka near Kyiv, described her country as "crying these four years"; Maksym, 13, from the southern city of Oleshky, said he "learned pretty early what fear and not knowing what tomorrow will bring feels like"; and Alona Sirant, a mother from Kyiv who relocated her family to Australia concluded that Russia had "not just invaded a country; it has robbed an entire generation of their right to be kids" (Cooper, 2026b). Personalised commentary was further reinforced by institutional evidence from UNICEF and the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, which framed Russia's conduct as a violation of international law and documented "almost 1.8 million Ukrainian children forced to seek refuge abroad," "more than 15,000 civilians dead," "41,000 injured," and "more than 791,000 still living in Ukraine" (Cooper, 2026b). While the Russian perspective was briefly mentioned ("Moscow denies it is taking children against their will, saying it has been evacuating people voluntarily to remove them from a war zone"), the UN Commission and Independent International Commission of Inquiry concluded that Russia's deportation of "close to 20,000 children" to Russia and Belarus, who were "sometimes subject to military training and forced to fight" against Ukraine, constituted "crimes against humanity," and the International Court of Justice issued arrest warrants for Putin (ABC, 2026b).

The Russian President is an authoritarian adversary and an irrational actor (Western frame 3)

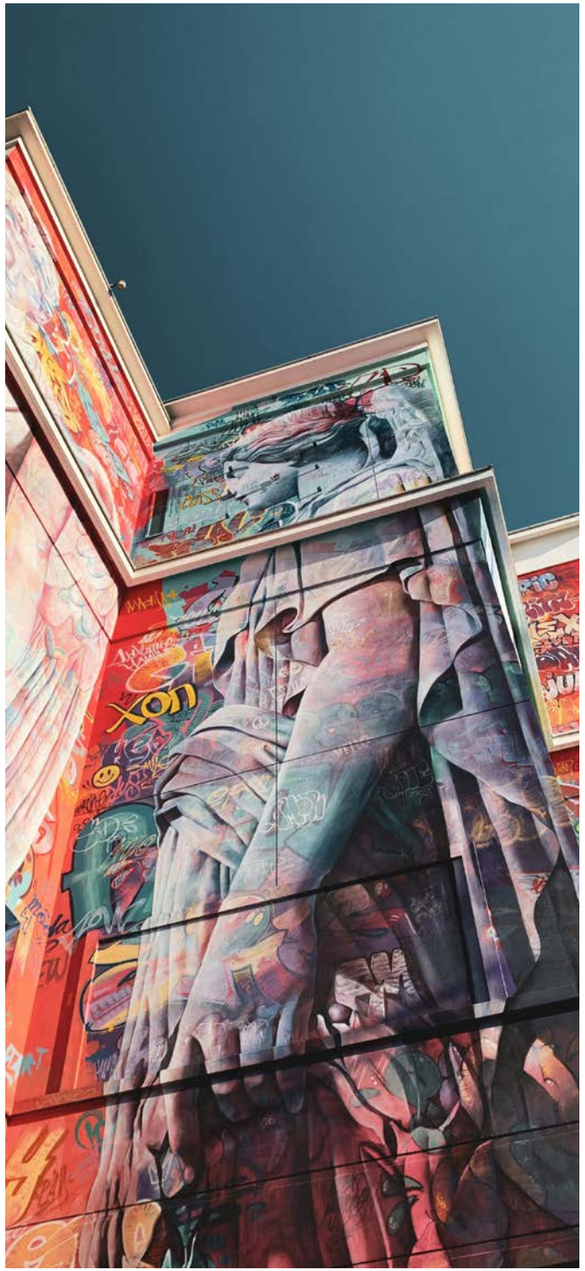
The Guardian was the only outlet to use the W3 frame (N=1), portraying Russian internet restrictions as evidence of authoritarian power consolidation and expanding censorship under Putin, describing the Kremlin's "renewed crackdown" on online spaces, blocking VPNs, WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, and YouTube as part of broader state surveillance. Moscow internet blackouts were presented as the Kremlin "ramp[ing] up control over online activity" and promoting a state-backed "super app" Max, "widely believed to be controlled by Russia's security services" (Sauer, 2026c). While Russian officials justified the disruptions as necessary to thwart Ukrainian drone attacks, the article mainly relied on the voices of human rights activists who linked the shutdown to Moscow testing a new "whitelist" system, under which only a limited number of government-approved websites would remain accessible, thereby "dramatically censor[ing] Russians' access to the wider web" (Sauer, 2026c).

Economic pressure and sanctions on Russia (Western frame 4)

Across The Guardian (N=11), the ABC (N=4), The Australian (N=4), and 9News.com.au (N=3), the W4 frame predominantly justified economic sanctions as essential for constraining Russia's capacity to continue the war against Ukraine.

Amid disrupted oil and gas supplies, Russia was repeatedly described as the main unintended beneficiary and "a big winner" of the Middle East war (Wiseman, 2026), with the closure of the Strait of Hormuz framed as boosting Moscow's capability to finance the war. Reporting on the Trump administration's "narrowly tailored, short-term authorisation" of Russian oil purchasing to lower petrol prices (Pearson, 2026b), 9News.com.au described Russia's surging gas and oil revenues as "sustain[ing] its war chest for its assault on Ukraine" (Jeffrey, 2026). Drawing on economic data from the International Energy Agency and the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air, The Guardian calculated Russia's fossil fuels revenues in the fortnight since the start of the US–Israel war with Iran, concluding that these earnings were "ultimately feed[ing] the Kremlin's war machine" (Goodley, 2026).

Russia and Iran were also portrayed as politically and militarily interconnected. Alongside casting Russia as the "hidden hand" behind Iran's military methods and drone tactics (Sabbagh & Borger, 2026), The Guardian simultaneously framed Europe's response to the US–Israel campaign against Iran as a strategic mishap advancing Russia. Former EU officials and analysts at the European Council on Foreign Relations described Europe's failure to criticise the US–Israeli strikes on Iran as "at best, a fiasco–and at worst, strategic lunacy" (Rankin, 2026a). Echoed by the European Council President who explicitly argued that Russia stood as the "only one winner," The Guardian stressed that Russia gained from higher energy prices, diversion of



military sources to the Middle East, and "reduced attention to the war it launched on its neighbour" (Rankin, 2026a). Similarly, a former Ukrainian defence minister Oleksii Reznikov argued that "when DC started this war, Putin smiled in the Kremlin," reinforcing the Kremlin's "doctrine that 'might is right'" (Walker, 2026). Iranian-designed Shahed drones supplied to Russia were described as "machines of death," and journalistic voice highlighted Kyiv's hopes that the Iran–Russia alliance "might finally push the Trump administration towards viewing Moscow as a clear-cut adversary" (Walker, 2026).

As a result, the continuation of sanctions was presented as economically and strategically necessary. The ABC, The Guardian, and 9News.com.au emphasised a collective European pushback against the Trump administration's temporary easing of sanctions on Russian oil, arguing that Europe's economic and energy dependence on Russian energy should become a thing of the past.

9News.com.au presented competing political and expert perspectives on Washington's temporary sanctions relief. While Zelenskyy warned that lifting sanctions would "only help Russia" and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz argued that it was "not the right signal to send," US Trade Secretary Scott Bessent, former Russian Central Bank official Sergei Aleksashenko, and an energy expert at the Bruegel think tank insisted that the temporary relief would "not be a very significant boost" to the Russian budget (Jeffrey, 2026).

By contrast, the ABC, The Australian, and The Guardian predominantly emphasised European, Australian, and Ukrainian criticism of the sanction relief, framing it as inconsistent with Western efforts to constrain Russia's war effort. Discussing Australia's dilemma of importing petrol and diesel made from Russian oil, The Australian quoted Ukraine's ambassador to Australia, Vasyl Myroshnychenko, who warned the US lifting of sanctions was "aiding Putin's war effort and prolonging the conflict," while Climate Change and Energy Minister Chris Bowen stressed that Australia did "not want to see Russia benefit from the conflict in the Middle East to fund its unjustified war against Ukraine" (Brown & Packham, 2026). In the Guardian reportage, German Chancellor Friedrich Merz, French President Emmanuel Macron, and the UK's then foreign secretary Yvette Cooper decried Russia and Iran's attempt to "hijack the global economy," stressing that pressure "must" be increased, as "Russia continues to show no willingness to negotiate" (Beaumont et al., 2026). The ABC similarly quoted European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen urging democracies to "rearm, decarbonise," while authoritarian "adversaries adapt to cooperate together" (ABC, 2026e).

Russian official responses in sampled Guardian and ABC articles predominantly reinforced the sanctions frame. While Putin described rising oil prices as resulting from the "aggression against Iran" and Western restrictions on Russian oil (Wiseman, 2026), and Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov stressed that the US–Iran war was "not our war... We must secure benefits for ourselves where this is possible" (Walker, 2026), their quotes were mainly used by the ABC and The Guardian to illustrate Russia's opportunism during the Middle East crisis. Stressing that Russia had "always been a reliable supplier," Putin questioned whether it would be "more beneficial for us to stop supplying [the] European market," as "what is happening today on the European markets is... the result of the mistaken policies of European governments in the energy sphere" (Wiseman, 2026). Journalistic voice on the ABC described these statements as a "threat" to Europe, and increasing oil revenues as "flow[ing] into the coffers of Moscow's war machine" (Wiseman, 2026).

Unlike other outlets that mainly amplified moral positioning, The Australian framed the lifting of sanctions through the pragmatic lens of regional energy vulnerability and Russia as an increasingly important supplier within energy markets. Reporting on Australia's cancellations and diversions of refined oil shipments, the outlet focused on the Asian reconfiguration of energy supply chains, noting that countries were "lining up to secure alternative crude oil from Russia," including Vietnam, Thailand, the Philippines and Indonesia (Hodge, 2026b).

The consequences of the sanctions were also explored by the ABC and The Guardian through regional disputes, positioning Hungary as an exception to European unity. A Hungarian money-laundering investigation ignited a major diplomatic row after anti-terrorism and tax authorities staged an armed raid against two armoured vehicles belonging to Ukraine's state-owned bank Oschadbank and detained seven Ukrainians who were transporting cash and gold to Ukraine. The ABC contextualised these developments within Hungary's "close ties with Russia" (ABC, 2026c), alongside Hungary's subsequent refusal to support a €90 billion EU loan package for Ukraine.

While Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha described Hungary's seizure of money as "theft" and an "unprecedented act of state banditism and racketeering," the ABC framed the dispute as evidence of Hungary diverging from the Western consensus, "pledging to prevent Ukraine's entry into the EU" and "pressuring" Kyiv to restart suspended oil shipments from Russia (ABC, 2026c). The Guardian quoted "infuriated" European leaders who characterised Hungary as a "Kremlin-friendly government" and Orbán's u-turn on the loan as "a gross act of disloyalty," "betrayal," and "blackmail," insisting that Europe would "deliver [the loan for Ukraine and the EU's 20th package of sanctions against Russia] one way or the other" (Rankin, 2026b).

Finally, sanctions were legitimised through reportage of tougher action against Russia's "sanction-evading shadow fleet" (Walker & Quinn, 2026). While The Guardian briefly mentioned former FSB director Nikolai Patrushev's reaction to Western efforts to board and inspect sanctioned Russian oil tankers in the Baltic Sea as "piracy," journalistic voice argued this was an effort to "hamper Russia's economy and thus its war efforts in Ukraine," similarly characterised by Starmer as a way to "starve Putin's war machine of the dirty profits that fund his barbaric campaign in Ukraine" (Walker & Quinn, 2026).

Summary

Event four positioned the Russia–Ukraine war within a broader geopolitical context and focused on energy security following the US–Iran conflict, in which Russia was portrayed as the main beneficiary of the energy crisis. The focus of the W4 frame shifted from the discussion of sanctions as a punitive instrument to the discussion of strategic pragmatism over moral consistency. While the aggressor–victim narrative stayed intact across the outlets, the ABC primarily focused on the humanitarian consequences of the war on both the Ukrainian and Russian sides, highlighting voices of refugees, aid agencies, and international organisations. The Australian focused less on humanitarian narratives and instead concentrated on Australia's military strategy and energy security. The Guardian drew parallels between authoritarian regimes and the "war machines" of both Iran and Russia and mainly focused on the consequences of the Iran conflict for Europe and the necessity of pressing sanctions on Russia. 9News.com.au similarly framed Russia as an opportunistic beneficiary but also incorporated competing assessments of the temporary easing of the sanctions.

05

ANALYSIS

In this chapter, we summarise our analysis of the surveyed coverage of the Israel–Gaza conflict between 2023 and 2026 and the Russia–Ukraine conflict between 2022 and 2026 in which we examined the use of the dominant frames, source hierarchy, and contextualisation advanced by four Australian media outlets (ABC, The Guardian, 9News.com.au, and The Australian) across specific time points. By isolating the dominant narratives of each of the four sides at the centre of the two global conflicts, we could identify the narratives favoured for acceptance or challenge.

ISRAEL–GAZA

Narrative Framing

In the Israel–Gaza war coverage, Israeli frames accounted for nearly half (49 percent) of the overall sample across surveyed media outlets followed by Palestinian frames (32 percent) and articles containing none of the dominant narratives (19 percent). Despite a shift away from the Israeli victimhood frame that was dominant immediately after 7 October Hamas attack, the volume of frames amplifying Palestinian-aligned perspectives was significantly smaller (Figure 19). Two percent of the total sample simultaneously used competing frames.

The Australian

The Australian newspaper was the sole surveyed outlet which privileged Israeli frames (71 percent across the total sample) and downplayed Palestinian perspectives (Figure 20). Palestinian-aligned frames comprised only 3 percent of The Australian's overall sample across the five sampled events, and simultaneous use of competing frames occurred in 2 percent of the sample.

The Australian was the only outlet to explicitly link pro-Palestinian activism to the rise in antisemitism, to place Palestinian recognition at the UN as socially divisive, and to report sanctions against Israeli cabinet members as damaging to Australia's relationship with the US. The reporting directed attention away from the humanitarian issues in Gaza, and later in Iran and Lebanon with the regional escalation of the crisis. The emphasis on Israeli frames and the downplaying

of Palestinian frames was notable when compared to the treatment of the same frames by other outlets.

Directing the narrative away from Palestinian suffering onto the broader domestic political, societal, and economic consequences of the conflict, 26 percent of The Australian's overall sample stepped outside the predetermined dominant frame categories, the highest proportion of all outlets.

The analysis indicates a strong preference for Israeli narratives through the use of frames advanced by Israel and its supporters.

ABC

The ABC demonstrated a more even distribution of frames from both sides than The Australian across five sampled events (42 percent of Israeli frames against 38 percent of Palestinian frames) as events unfolded (Figure 21). Articles coded as having no predefined dominant frames made up 20 percent of the ABC's overall sample, within which articles using both Israeli and Palestinian frames accounted for 2 percent.

Israeli frames were dominant in the public broadcaster's coverage of the Hamas attack, but the ABC was the first to shift focus towards the impact of the Israeli military offensive and the loss of Palestinian lives. Israeli frames lost their dominance as the humanitarian crisis in Gaza became more apparent but later returned to prominence, even though Palestinian frames, including claims about the disproportionality of Israeli and later US–Israeli military action, were visible.

The sampled ABC coverage was notable for its relatively equal treatment of Israeli and Palestinian frames. It focused on the historical complexities of the conflict in which both sides had endured violence and significant security concerns. ABC coverage was also notable for its contextualisation of the history of Iranian–Israeli hostilities, although Iran's right to self-defence and reportage of its civilian casualties received less coverage, compared to Palestinian or Israeli casualties in the earlier phase of the conflict.

The analysis of the sampled events indicated reporting of competing perspectives as the conflict unfolded and changes in who was treated as victim and aggressor.

The Guardian

Across The Guardian's sample, originating largely from its UK masthead, Israeli frames comprised 33 percent, while Palestinian frames accounted for 54 percent (Figure 22). Articles coded as containing no predefined dominant frames accounted for 13 percent of the overall sample, within which 2 percent used competing Israeli and Palestinian frames.

The Guardian's sampled coverage was notable for the most pronounced shift in focus to the impact of the Israeli military offensive in Gaza soon after the Hamas attack, questioning its proportionality, its sustained focus on Palestinian suffering during the Israeli offensive on Gaza, and the reportage of the history of conflict between Israel and the Palestinians while presenting both sides as experiencing violence. It also contextualised the regional role played by Iran, questioning the legality of US–Israeli military action against it. Whilst other outlets resurfaced Israeli frames of victimhood when the conflict escalated to Iran, The Guardian maintained focus on Iranian and Lebanese humanitarian suffering, which outweighed the narrative of Iran as a regional security threat.

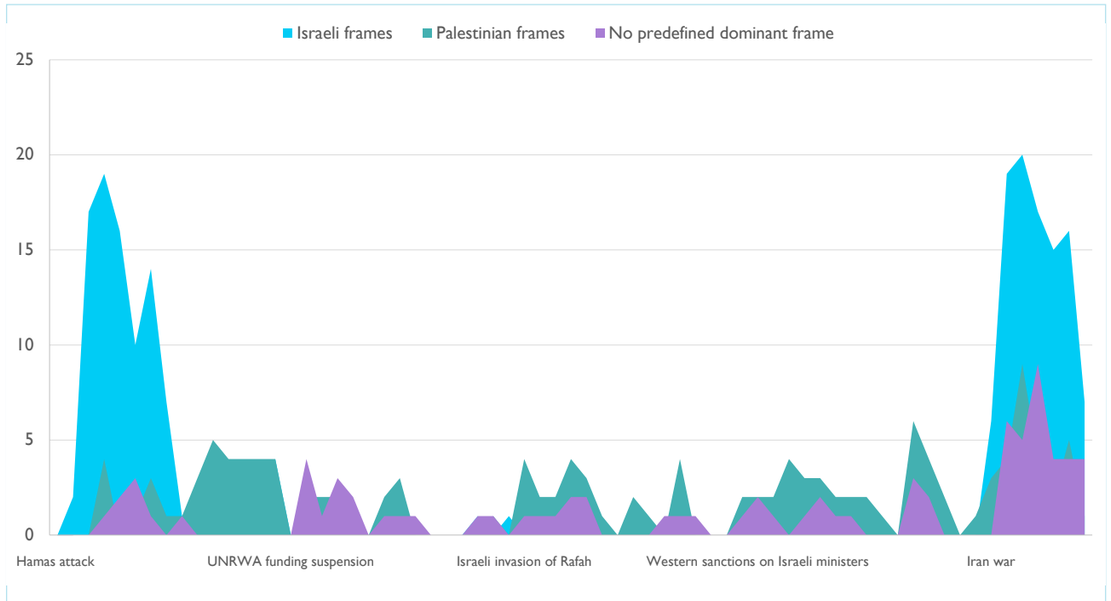


Figure 19 | Published articles across dominant Israeli and Palestinian frames across five sampled events.

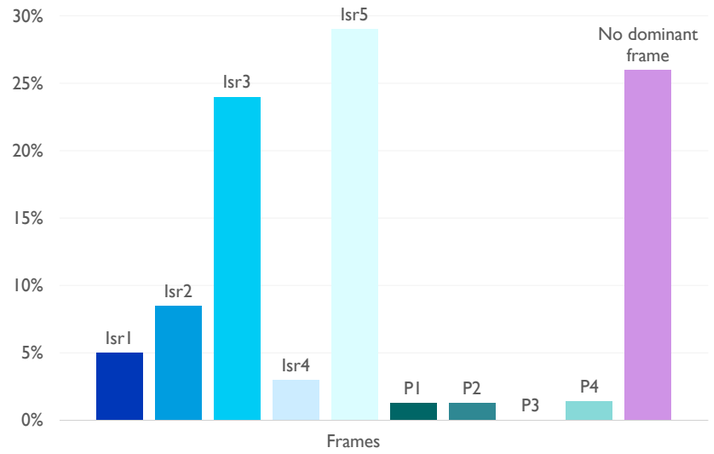


Figure 20 | Distribution of dominant frames across The Australian's Israel–Gaza sample of five events (x-axis: frames; y-axis: percentage of sampled articles). Israeli and Palestinian frame abbreviations used in this figure are defined in Table 3 of Chapter 2 on pp. 20–21.

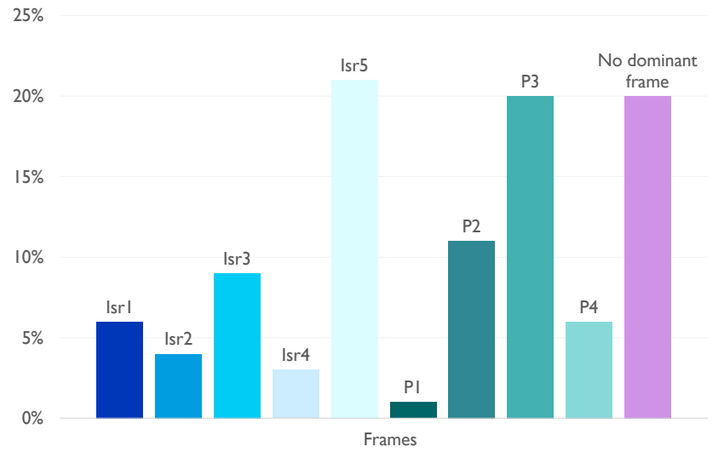


Figure 21 | Distribution of dominant frames across the ABC's Israel–Gaza sample of five events (x-axis: frames; y-axis: percentage of sampled articles).

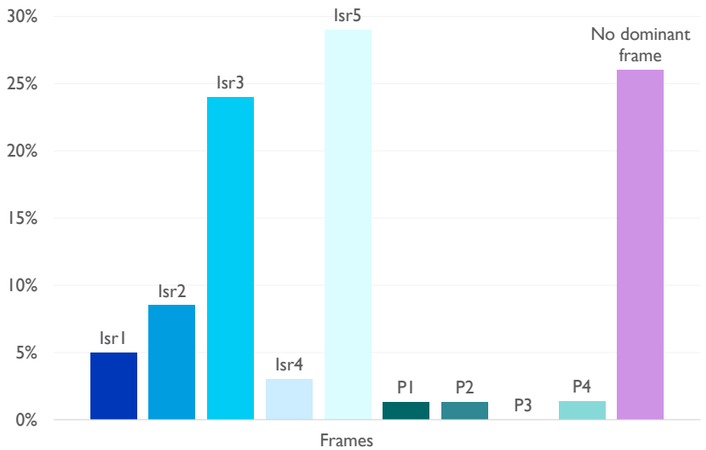


Figure 22 | Distribution of dominant frames across The Guardian's Israel–Gaza sample of five events.

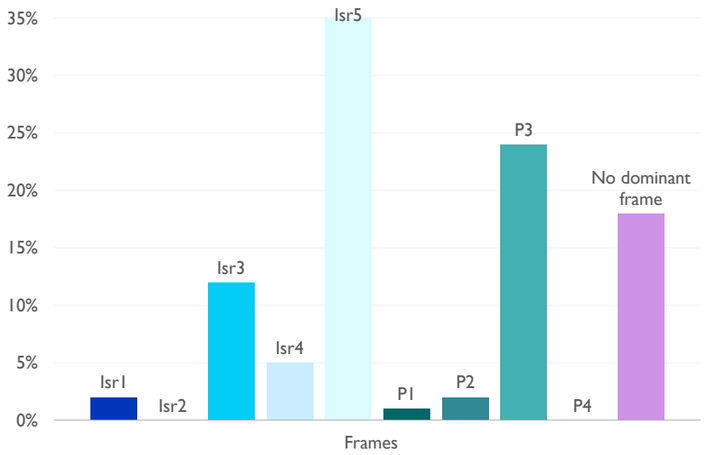


Figure 23 | Distribution of dominant frames across 9News.com.au's Israel–Gaza sample of five events.

9News.com.au

9News.com.au's dominant framing of the conflict shifted as events unfolded, but Israeli-aligned frames remained more prevalent, comprising 55 percent of the overall sample, while Palestinian frames accounted for 27 percent (Figure 23). Articles coded as containing no dominant frame comprised 18 percent of the total sample, within which 3 percent of articles simultaneously used competing frames.

9News.com.au amplified Israeli frames, including its victimhood and security narratives in the immediate aftermath of the Hamas attack, but Israeli frames lost their dominance as the conflict progressed, although the volume of coverage was significantly lower than at the outset of the war and later, when the conflict escalated regionally. While Palestinian humanitarian suffering came into sharp focus as the conflict progressed, it was to a lesser extent compared to the ABC or The Guardian; the outlet produced only a small number of articles when this occurred, and broader issues concerning Palestinian recognition were not covered. Nor were Palestinian-focused narratives evident during the escalation of the conflict to Iran, when 9News.com.au coverage recorded the strongest Israeli frame concentration across all outlets. The outlet positioned Iran as a regional threat and continued to prioritise narratives of Israel's need to defend itself, while downplaying accusations that Israel's response to the security threats it faced were disproportionate.

Sourcing and Contextualisation

Beyond the selection of dominant frames, the outlets differed in terms of both the types of sources granted authority to interpret events and their political alignment, which in turn led to the preferencing of different contexts. The quoted sources across the sampled events, across all outlets were 46 percent pro-Israeli, 40 percent pro-Palestinian, with 14 percent non-aligned, and their distribution largely followed shifts in dominant framing across the five sampled events.

Israeli-aligned sources dominated immediately after the Hamas attack (60 percent) against 35 percent Palestinian-aligned sources, and during the regional expansion of the conflict (44 percent Israeli vs 28 percent Palestinian) (Figure 24). The pattern reversed during events two, three, and through to four when Palestinian-aligned sources comprised 51 percent, 53 percent, and 56 percent, respectively. Non-aligned sources made up a smaller and more varied proportion across the sampled events; they advanced neither position and were least prevalent during more polarised events, including the initial Hamas attack (5 percent) and as Israeli cabinet members were sanctioned (8 percent) when the coverage primarily focused on the issues of Israeli victimhood, retaliation, security, and later on contested questions of Israeli conduct.

Source selection based on political alignment was the most pronounced in The Australian across all five events (60 percent amplifying Israeli-aligned

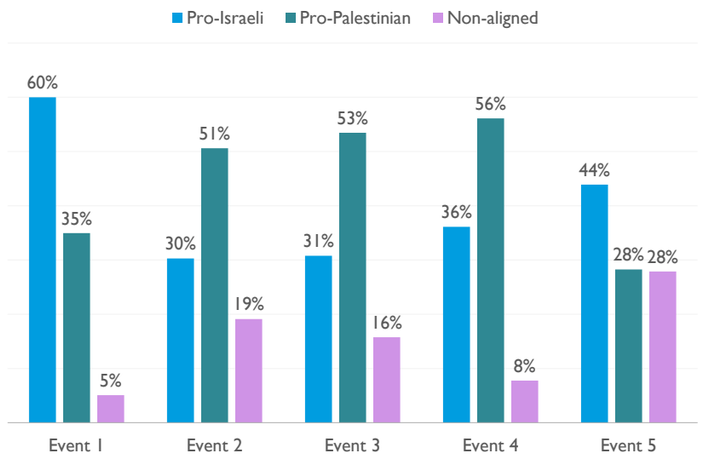


Figure 24 | Distribution of quoted sources voicing pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, or non-aligned perspectives across the sampled five events.

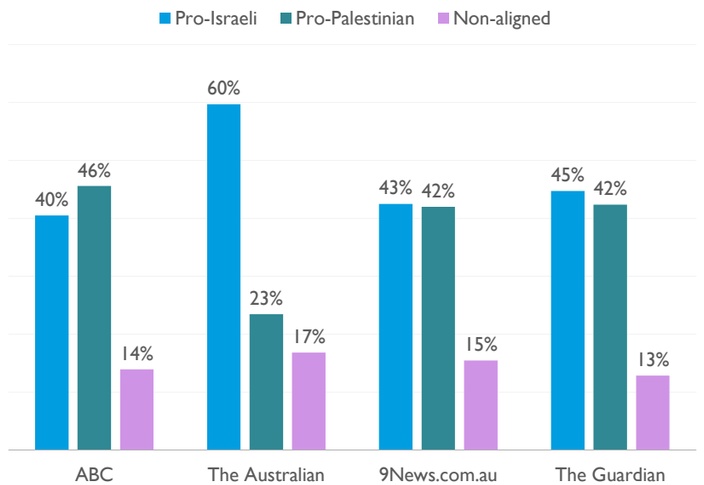


Figure 25 | Distribution of quoted sources voicing pro-Israeli, pro-Palestinian, or non-aligned perspectives by media outlet across the sampled five events.

positions compared with 23 percent of Palestinian-aligned sources) (Figure 25). In contrast, the other three outlets demonstrated near-equal distribution of sources, although this fluctuated across the sampled events following shifts in the dominant framing between Israeli victimhood and security concerns and Palestinian humanitarian and accountability concerns.

The Australian

The Australian relied on political (39 percent) and civilian (22 percent) sources, civil society organisations (15 percent, including Australian Jewish community and advocacy groups), and IDF military officials (11 percent) (Figure 26). This mix of sources appeared to personalise Israeli victimhood and redirect attention away from questioning the legal accountability of Israeli military action and towards the domestic political and societal consequences of the conflict in Australia.

The sampled coverage was notable for the extremely low use of international organisations and legal institutions, including when the conflict escalated to Iran (1 percent, the lowest among the surveyed outlets). When Palestinian-aligned perspectives started appearing, they were immediately challenged with opposing claims by local Jewish community representatives and opposition politicians. Pro-Palestinian sources could reasonably be described as extreme were selectively used to highlight home-grown antisemitism. While named Palestinian victims occasionally appeared, the scale of Palestinian and later Iranian casualties mostly appeared via statistics. Iranian and Iranian-Australian diaspora voices critical of the regime were often used.

The analysis indicates sources were used to reinforce the Israeli narrative of existential threat which shifted from Hamas to Iran. Historical contextualisation appeared via frequent references to the Holocaust, situating the Hamas attack within a longer history of Jewish persecution. References to Israel's previous hostage crises emphasised the country's resilience and commitment to the release of those taken by Hamas in 2023.

The ABC

Like the Australian, the ABC relied on political (40 percent) and civilian voices (24 percent) across the overall sample, but the political alignment of these voices was distributed almost equally (46 percent Palestinian-aligned against 40 percent Israeli-aligned).

Political voices included Australian government and opposition voices; international political actors supporting and opposing Israeli and later US–Israeli military conduct; and Israeli, Palestinian, and Iranian officials, although Iranian claims were presented as untrustworthy and often immediately followed by US and Israeli official clarifications or rebuttals.

The ABC coverage demonstrated a more sustained focus on civilian sources than other outlets (24 percent across the overall sample), which were dominant not only in the immediate aftermath of the Hamas's attack (34 percent) and the regional escalation of the conflict (23 percent), but also during phases of the conflict where global alarm at Palestinian suffering was heightened (Figure 27).

Sourcing in the sampled ABC coverage was notable for the use of named Israeli and Palestinian civilians to describe trauma, fear, and bereavement. Ordinary Palestinians were distinguished from Hamas militants early in the outlet's sampled coverage via diaspora Palestinian and expert voices. Iranian casualties mainly appeared as statistics with occasional inclusions of Iranian-Australian diaspora voices that expressed mixed reactions to the US–Israeli military action.

The analysis indicates significant reliance on aid organisations, experts, civilians, and medical personnel resulting in an amplification of humanitarian and legal concerns. Broader historical contextualisation was evident in journalistic voice and expert commentary during the early stages of the conflict and its regional expansion, situating the present-day violence within a longer trajectory of Israel–Gaza and Israel–Iran conflicts.

The Guardian

The Guardian resembled the ABC in its distribution of source types (Figure 28), relying mostly on political actors (42 percent across the total sample), followed by civilians (22 percent) and civil society groups (13 percent). It amplified commentary from international organisations and legal institutions the most across the sampled outlets (10 percent), which highlighted Gaza's aid crisis and accusations of Israel's alleged war crimes.

In the initial phase of the conflict, The Guardian's sampled coverage was notable for its use of civilian sources, which amplified Israeli suffering and its defensive logic but also introduced Palestinian diaspora voices documenting the humanitarian cost. Historical contextuallisation included references to the 1948 Nakba and Palestinian displacement, as well as the four wars between Hamas and Israel since 2007. The Guardian also showed the greatest use of civilian voices when the analysis indicates The Guardian used sources to support its questioning of the proportionality and accountability issues associated with Israel's military action in Gaza and later, in Iran. The extensive use of both Israeli and Palestinian civilian voices, variously emphasised at different points in the ongoing conflict, although to a lesser extent than in the ABC, indicate an attempt to characterise the violence through human consequences experienced on both sides.

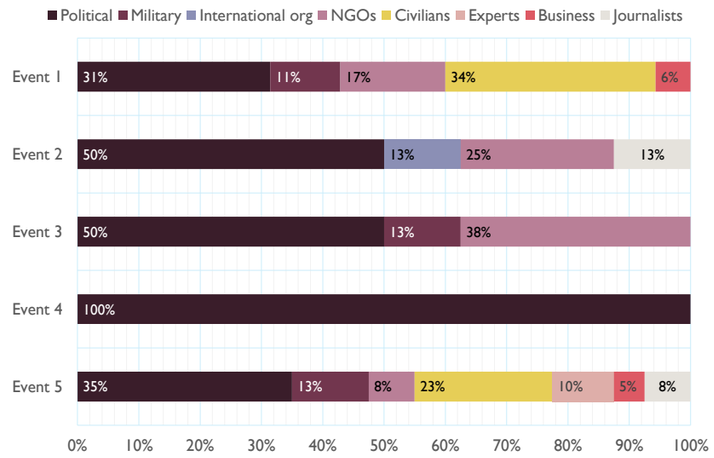


Figure 26 | Distribution of source types across The Australian's Israel–Gaza sample of five events.

9News.com.au

The sampled reportage from 9News.com.au showed the highest reliance on political sources of all outlets (52 percent across the outlet's total sample), while international organisations (5 percent), civil society groups, military voices, or experts (each comprising 7 percent) accounted for a far smaller proportion. Civilian voices made up 16 percent, the lowest across the sampled outlets.

The analysis shows that 9News.com.au relied significantly on Israeli political actors (37 percent) and Israeli civilian accounts of suffering (27 percent) in coverage of the Hamas attack

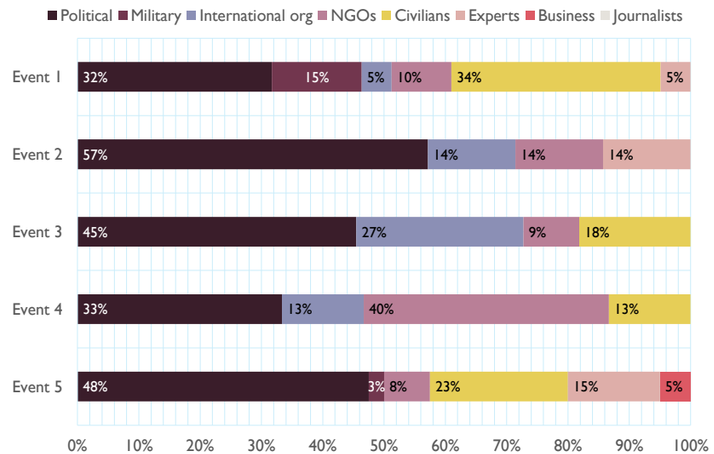


Figure 27 | Distribution of source types across the ABC's Israel–Gaza sample of five events.

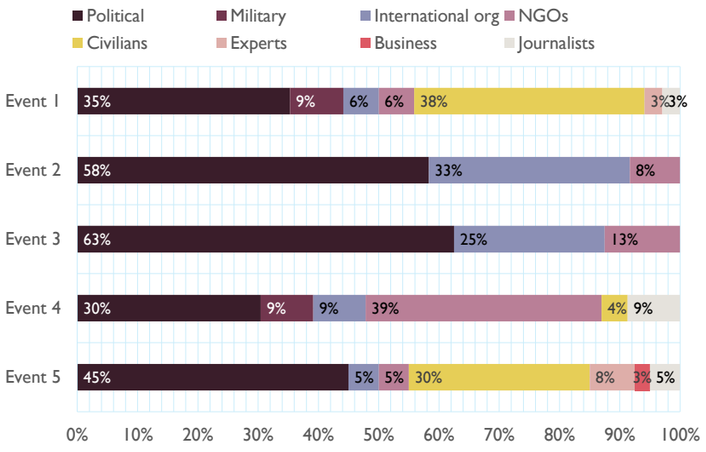


Figure 28 | Distribution of source types across The Guardian's Israel–Gaza sample of five events.

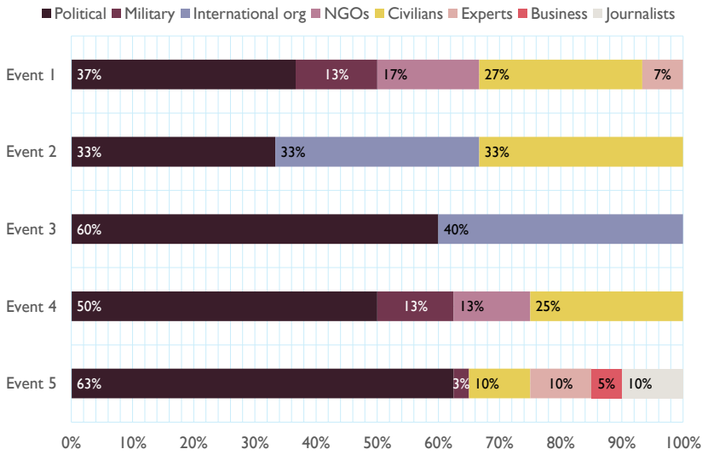


Figure 29 | Distribution of source types across the 9News.com.au's Israel–Gaza sample of five events.

(Figure 29). It started reporting the Palestinian humanitarian consequences in later event coverage, but Palestinian narratives were often contested by Israeli political and military voices. The humanitarian consequences of the Israeli military offensive were largely sourced to institutions, with significant use of statistics rather than civilian voices, and often reported in the context of the broader history of the Israel–Palestinian conflict. Palestinian personalisation was selective, relying on sources with Western citizenship, possibly the result of limited access to the region.

Sourcing during the regional escalation to Iran was notable for its use of political sources (63 percent), the highest across all outlets, and the highest use of journalist voices that amplified the threat narrative to the UAE and Israel, mitigating criticism of the escalation by right-wing media voices in the US.

The analysis indicates a high reliance on political sourcing, which could reflect the access difficulties in Gaza and the availability of Western and Israeli political actors to frame the narrative. The high reliance on institutional sourcing and civilians with Western citizenship to characterise the Palestinian humanitarian consequences could similarly reflect the challenges of access.

RUSSIA–UKRAINE

Narrative Framing

Unlike in the Israel–Gaza coverage in which there was significant framing variation across the sampled outlets, there was a framing convergence observed in the Russia–Ukraine coverage (Figure 30).

The sampled articles in the reportage of the Russia–Ukraine conflict were marked by heavy reliance in sourcing and narrative framing on Western/Ukrainian paradigms across all sampled outlets and events. None of the identified Russian frames were dominant across the sample (Figure 31). Western/Ukrainian frames comprised 67 percent. 33 percent of the sampled articles coded as not containing predefined dominant frames covered economic consequences, Australian domestic implications, and fragmentation of Western support for Ukraine, while Western/Ukrainian narratives remained visible.

Across the overall sample, the framing of Russia as an aggressor with imperial ambitions crushing a democratic state was the most prominent (W1, 38 percent of the overall sample), followed by the portrayal of Vladimir Putin as an authoritarian and irrational adversary (W3, 13 percent) and the necessity of sanctions against Russia (W4, 13 percent). The latter frame shifted between the legitimisation of sanctions as an instrument of punishing and isolating Russia at the beginning of the conflict to the representation of sanctions as a test of Western unity against Trump's perceived openness to Russia during the US–Israeli strikes on Iran, when oil sanctions were temporarily lifted to protect Western markets; the necessity of continued support for Ukraine was amplified, alongside the portrayals of Russia and Iran as connected and dangerous adversaries.

The statements of Russian officials were infrequently incorporated and, when included, were almost always rebutted, dismissed as false, or cited

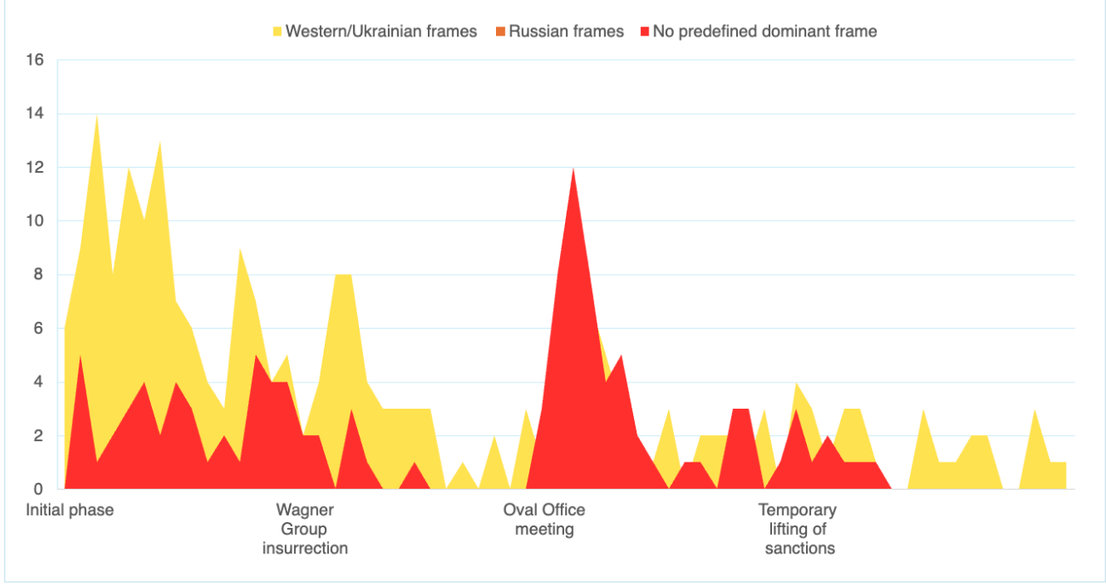


Figure 30 | Daily distribution of dominant Western/Ukrainian, Russian, and no dominant frames across four sampled events (x-axis: sampled events; y-axis: number of sampled articles).

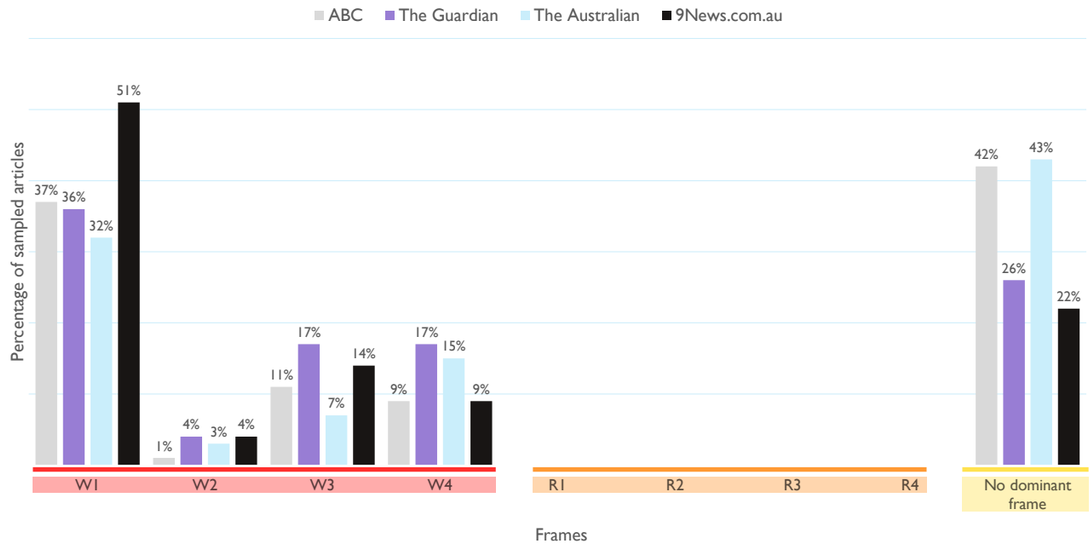


Figure 31 | Distribution of dominant frames across the Russia–Ukraine sample of four events of the ABC, The Guardian, The Australian, and 9News.com.au. Western/Ukrainian and Russian frame abbreviations used in this section are defined in Table 4 of Chapter 2 on pp. 22–23.

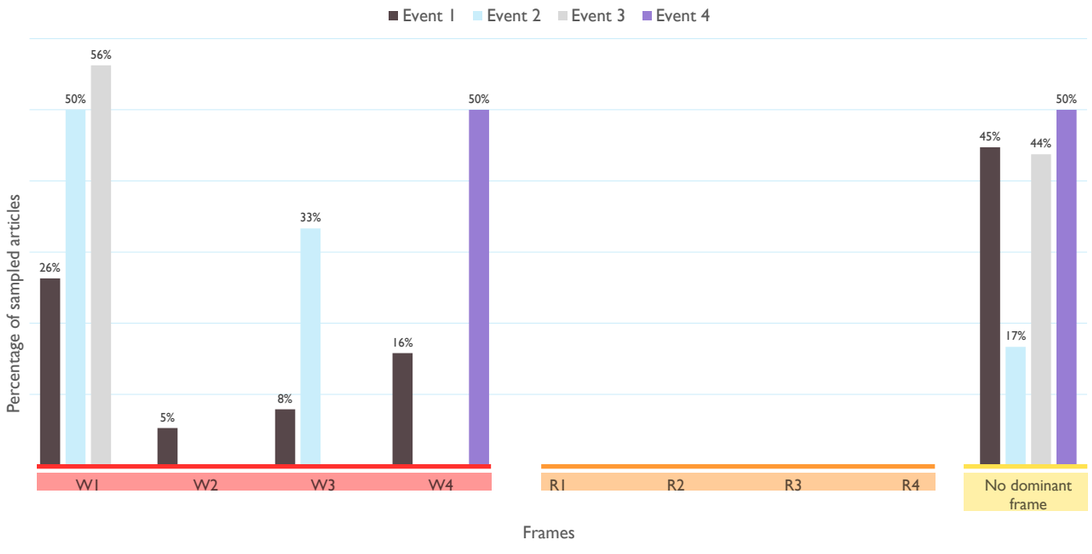


Figure 32 | Distribution of dominant frames across The Australian's sample of Russia–Ukraine four events.

as evidence of Russia's imperial ambitions by both quoted sources and journalists. Articles coded as containing no dominant frames (33 percent of the overall sample) mostly appeared following the tense Oval Office meeting between the Trump administration and Volodymyr Zelenskyy on 28 February 2025 (Figure 30), which was portrayed as a dramatic shift in the US position towards Russia, leaving Ukraine's European allies seeking to preserve Western unity. Articles with simultaneous use of competing frames accounted for 2 percent of the overall sample; the ABC (6 percent of the outlet's total sample) and The Guardian (1 percent of the outlet's total sample) provided space to competing pro-Kremlin and anti-Russian viewpoints in the aftermath of the Wagner insurrection.

The Australian

The Australian often presented the Russia–Ukraine conflict as a case study for security planning in the Indo-Pacific and focused on the economic consequences of the war. Overall, Western/Ukrainian frames were used in 57 percent of sampled articles and Russian frames in 0 percent.

Simultaneous use of competing frames was not identified. The focus on the economic consequences of the conflict, particularly in 2022 and then in 2026, when Russian oil sanctions were temporarily lifted, led to the highest number of articles coded as having no dominant frame (Figure 32).

At the outset of the 2022 military action, The Australian made less use than other outlets of the Western/Ukrainian frame that Russia was pursuing its imperialist ambition (W1, 26 percent). It supported international condemnation and characterised the escalation as a global problem. The most significant rhetorical device used in 2022 and in the aftermath of the Oval Office confrontation to reinforce the frame of Russia as an imperialist and authoritarian aggressor was the juxtaposition of a charismatic and popular Ukrainian President and the Russian President, portrayed as driven by hatred and historical revisionism, his sanity questioned, and his claims dismissed as lies.

The sampled coverage was notable for its framing of the conflict as having significant regional impact for Australia. The war was predominantly described as a distraction benefitting China, which was criticised for its unwillingness to

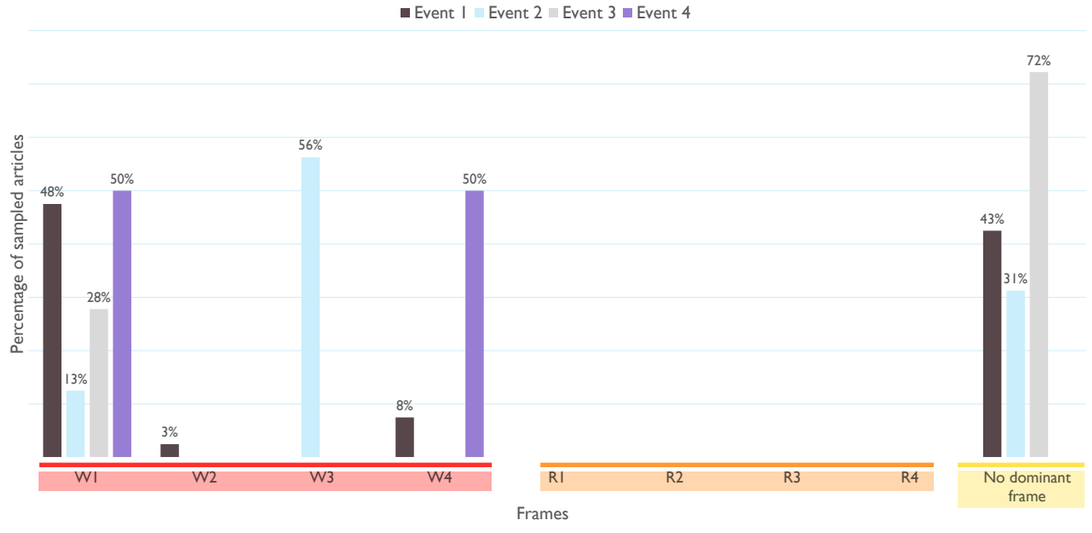


Figure 33. Distribution of dominant frames across the ABC's sample of Russia–Ukraine four events.

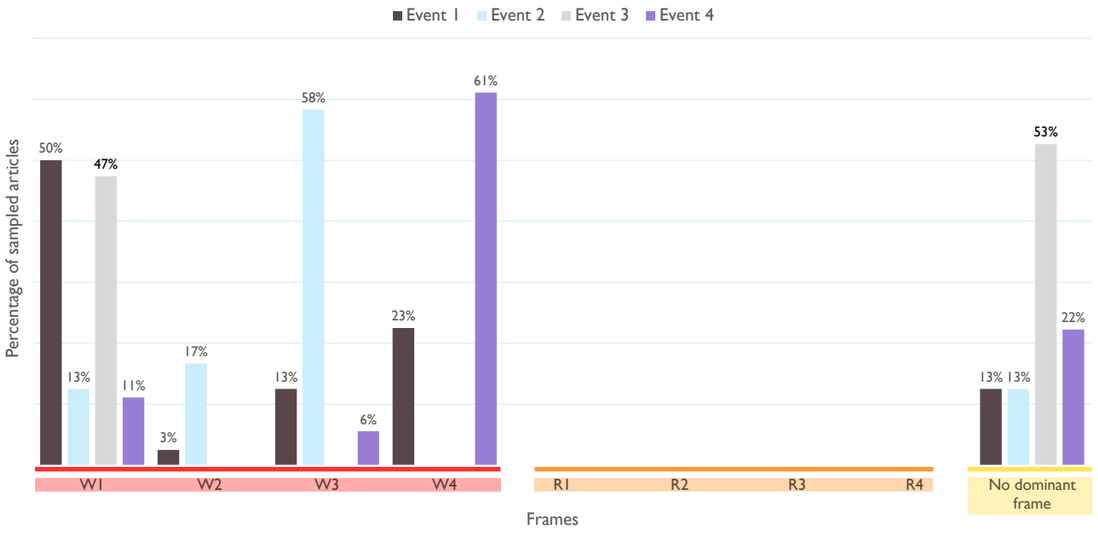


Figure 34. Distribution of dominant frames across The Guardian's sample of Russia–Ukraine four events.

condemn and sanction Russia. During the regional escalation of the Middle East conflict, Russian aggression became less prominent as the coverage shifted to the domestic economic fallout from which Russia would benefit to fund its war.

The analysis indicates that The Australian, while morally outraged by the Russian military conduct, tended to domesticate the conflict by focusing on the regional example it created for China. It advanced Western/Ukrainian characterisations of the conflict and rejected Russian justifications, reflecting broad Western geopolitical viewpoints and sympathy for Ukraine as the victim of Russian aggression.

ABC

The use of Western/Ukrainian frames in the overall sampled coverage by the ABC comprised 58 percent, and Russian frames 0 percent (Figure 33). It used competing frames simultaneously in 6 percent of sampled articles.

The Western/Ukrainian narrative of Russia's imperial ambitions featured prominently, while Russian frames, including those related to security concerns regarding NATO enlargement and its call for the 'demilitarisation' of Ukraine, were rebutted with accompanying condemnation and calls for Russia's isolation. Journalistic narration reinforced the Western/Ukrainian interpretation of Putin's authoritarian rule as fragile and Russia as promoting propaganda. During the US–Iran conflict, the ABC's coverage was evenly split between the portrayal of Russia as an opportunistic beneficiary of eased oil sanctions and discussion of the humanitarian consequences of the war in Ukraine.

The sampled ABC coverage was notable for its evaluative journalistic reporting of Russia's motivations and the political instability and weakness of the Russian President as well as a lack of engagement with Russian framing and explicit rejection of Russian justifications. The analysis indicates conformity with Western geopolitical framing of the conflict and the expressed sympathy for Ukraine in line with broad global attitudes towards victims of foreign state aggression.

The Guardian

Across the sampled reporting from The Guardian, engagement with Western/Ukrainian frames comprised 74 percent and with Russian frames 0 percent. The simultaneous appearance of competing frames was observed in 1 percent of sampled articles.

Frames were distributed between the illegitimacy of Russia's rationale, Putin's authoritarian rule, and the necessity of punitive sanctions (Figure 34), the last two of which comprised 17 percent of The Guardian's overall sample, the highest proportion across all outlets.

The Guardian predominantly used Western/Ukrainian frames to portray Russia as a pariah state, which stood uniformly condemned and isolated by the international community in its mission to reconstitute its former empire. The outlet also advanced the narrative that Russia was a decaying nation, on the verge of collapse, with a weakened military that increased the likelihood of Ukrainian victory. The Guardian was the only outlet in the sampled coverage of the Wagner insurrection to advance the narrative that Russian fear of NATO expansion was insufficient justification. The rapprochement between the US and Russia after the Oval Office ambush of the Ukrainian president was reported as a test of support for Ukraine, while journalistic voice positioned Putin as the main hurdle to peace, highlighting the Western/Ukrainian frame of his imperialist ambitions. Western/Ukrainian frames were again invoked when the Middle East conflict escalated to Iran, with Russia portrayed as an aggressor strongly linked to the Islamic state and an opportunistic recipient of the US president's unpredictability, to be constrained by sanctions.

The Guardian's coverage was notable for the highest use of Western/Ukrainian frames, its acerbic treatment of Russian justifications for the invasion, and negligible engagement with Russian security narratives. When visible, these were disparaged.

The analysis indicates the outlet followed Western geopolitical formulations of the conflict, with strong emphasis on Ukrainian suffering. The sampled coverage reflected broad global consensus on the illegality of what Russia calls a 'special military operation' and expressed sympathy with Ukrainians as victims of foreign state aggression.

9News.com.au

Across the outlet's sample, Western/Ukrainian frames comprised 78 percent, Russian frames 0 percent, and articles falling outside the predetermined dominant frames 22 percent (Figure 35).

At the outset of the conflict, the outlet prominently used the Western/Ukrainian frame of Russia as an imperialist aggressor and showed the highest concentration of the Western/Ukrainian frame that NATO was a defender of the international order and Ukrainian sovereignty. Historical contextualisation was largely absent, save brief references to Ukraine's exit from the former USSR in 1991, framed as a unilateral decision. Its reportage of the rupture of the US–Ukraine relationship after the Oval Office ambush revolved around the European narrative that Russia was a security threat and hostile neighbour. When the US–Israeli–Iran war began, 9News.com.au stressed the legitimacy of economic pressure on Russia and that Russia was an opportunistic winner from the temporary easing of oil sanctions.

Notably, 9News.com.au demonstrated the highest concentration of the four outlets of the Western/Ukrainian frame portraying Russia as seeking to restore the USSR. Its sampled coverage demonstrated robust disengagement with Russian frames. Its sampled reporting reflected broad Western geopolitical framing of the conflict and expressed sympathy for Ukraine as the victim of foreign state aggression.

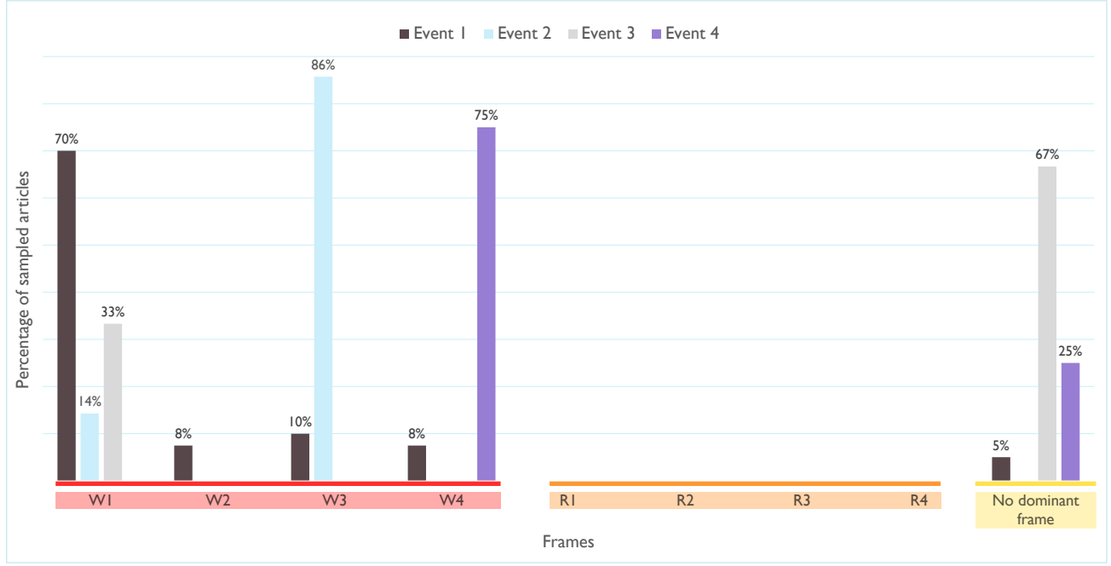


Figure 35. Distribution of dominant frames across the 9News.com.au's sample of Russia–Ukraine four events.

Sourcing and contextualisation

Due to similarities in sources used across the outlets, the contextualisation offered, and the near exclusion of Russian-aligned sources, we have combined the analysis of sourcing and contextualisation across all outlets.

Sources by political alignment and type

The Russia–Ukraine conflict was predominantly interpreted by Western-aligned/Ukrainian voices (71 percent) which led to a convergence of interpretations across all outlets establishing Russian responsibility, assessment of Putin's psychological stability, and Russia's viability as a state. It also led to unanimous rejection of Russia's justifications as fabricated and feeble. Russia-aligned sources accounted for 13 percent and non-aligned for 16 percent across all outlets.

The Guardian showed the highest number of quoted Western-aligned sources (76 percent), followed by the 9News.com.au (72 percent), the ABC (68 percent), and The Australian (61 percent) (Figure 36). The lowest proportion of Russian-aligned voices was observed in The Australian (8 percent), compared to 12 percent in The Guardian, 16 percent in the ABC, and 18 percent in 9News.com.au.

Unlike other outlets, The Australian relied the most on non-aligned sources (31 percent) across all of its sampled coverage. The use of non-aligned sources in the other outlets was lower: 9 percent in 9News.com.au, 12 percent in The Guardian, and 16 percent in the ABC. As Figure 37 demonstrates, the reliance on non-aligned sources was highest in coverage of the temporary suspension of Russian oil sanctions (event 4, 40 percent).

In contrast, the highest proportion of Russia-aligned sources occurred in the coverage of the Wagner insurrection (event 2, 23 percent), where Russian official voices were mostly used to highlight the narrative of Russia's internal chaos and Putin attempting to reassert authority.

The second highest proportion of pro-Russian sources appeared in reportage after the Oval Office ambush, when Trump administration statements echoed Russian narratives around the conditions for peace, and were coded as pro-Russian (event 3, 19 percent).

As outlined in Chapter 2 on the methodology used in this study, a distinction is made between political alignment of quoted sources (the side they reflect) and the type of sources identified through their role in political, institutional, and civic society organisations (Table 5).

Primarily European, American, Australian, and Ukrainian political

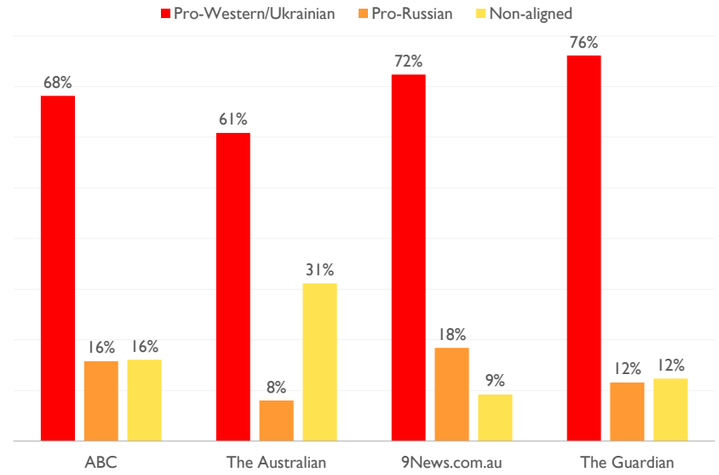


Figure 36 | Distribution of quoted sources voicing pro-Western/Ukrainian, pro-Russian, or non-aligned perspectives by media outlet across the sampled four events.

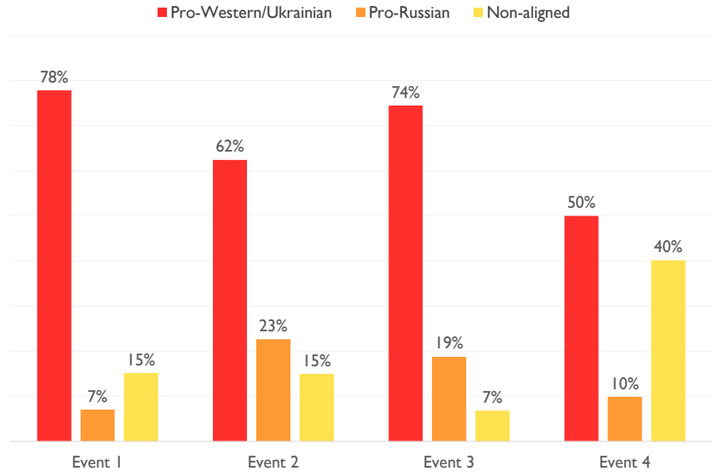


Figure 37 | Distribution of quoted sources voicing pro-Western/Ukrainian, pro-Russian, or non-aligned perspectives across the sampled four events.

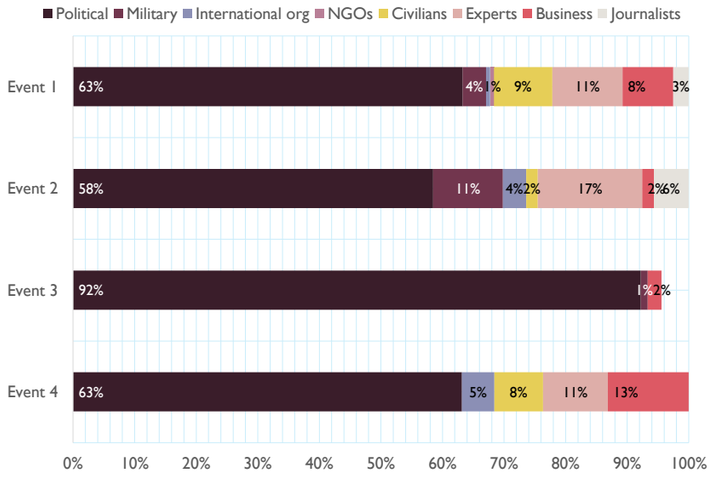


Figure 38 | Distribution of source types across the total Russia–Ukraine sample of four events of The Australian, the ABC, The Guardian, and 9News.com.au.

voices (70 percent) interpreted the conflict, with institutional voices, such as humanitarian organisations and civil society groups, accounting for only 0.5 percent (Figure 38). These voices described the disruption to Ukrainian life, the displacement and deaths resulting from the conflict, and global condemnation. International voices, such as the International Criminal Court and the EU Commission, accounted for 1 percent.

Russian political voices were infrequently used and, when present, frequently rebutted or disparaged in the sampled articles. There were rare examples of the inclusion of Russian political voices, including statements from the Russian president that military action was a response to threats from Ukraine, and accusations that the US and its allies had ignored Russia's security concerns over NATO enlargement. However, all surveyed outlets relied heavily on speeches and social media posts by the Ukrainian president. Overall, while the disruption caused by Russia's military action was primarily interpreted at the start of the 2022 phase of the war by political actors (63 percent), Ukrainian civilians constituted 9 percent of quoted sources (Figure 38) and were most pronounced in 9News.com.au (15 percent), followed by the ABC (10 percent), The Guardian (8 percent), and The Australian (5 percent).

The distribution of source types shifted during the Wagner insurrection. Political voices dropped to their lowest – 58 percent across the total sample – while expert (17 percent) and military voices (11 percent) increased to their highest levels, with the latter reliant on statements from the Wagner Group leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, delegitimising the Kremlin's narrative and asserting instability within Russia. The ABC showed the highest proportion of expert commentary in sampled coverage of the Wagner insurrection (31 percent), to amplify speculation that Putin would fall from power. The ABC's reliance on expert commentary was generally the highest across the outlets (16 percent), compared to The Australian (10 percent), 9News.com.au (7 percent), and The Guardian (6 percent).

Following the Oval Office ambush of the Ukrainian president and the subsequent rupture in the Western alliance's consensus on Ukraine, political voices rose to 92 percent, with the EU criticising the Trump administration's reframing of the war and pledging sustained aid for Ukraine. Political actors became particularly prominent across The Guardian's coverage (95 percent), shifting attention from the Trump–Zelenskyy relationship breakdown to Britain's efforts to protect the transatlantic alliance's consensus. Across all outlets and sampled events, The Guardian amplified political voices the most (75 percent), compared to the other three, where political voices ranged from 65 percent to 70 percent.

As the coverage broadened to economic and energy security issues when the Strait of Hormuz closed, business voices reached 13 percent across all outlets and, notably, 38 percent in The Australian. The Australian relied on business sources the most across all sampled events (18 percent), compared to the ABC (2 percent), The Guardian (4 percent), and 9News.com.au (3 percent), highlighting its tendency to domesticate the conflict and translate it into Australian economic consequence.

Contextualisation

The dominance of Ukrainian and Western-aligned voices contributed to the convergence of contextualisation trends observed across the sampled outlets. Discussion of Russian geopolitical narratives, including the controversial Minsk Agreements under which Ukraine and Russia were to enter ceasefire deals to end the conflict in the Donbas region, was absent across all but one outlet. When briefly mentioned in a sampled 9News.com.au article, the Minsk process remained decontextualised and portrayed as a Russian pretext to justify its aggression and was immediately rebutted. The narrative of Russia as an enduring threat and an unreliable actor was reinforced through Western and Ukrainian political sources presenting Ukraine as committed to achieving a quick and reliable peace, which was left unexplored, as detailed in Chapter 4.

Russian actions were predominantly contextualised within Cold War and Soviet historical narratives through Western and Ukrainian voices, and journalistic narration highlighting the paradox of Russia as a power threatening Western security and international order yet diminished as a failing and internally fragile successor of the Soviet Union. Historical contextualisation was limited to reference to Ukraine's 1991 separation from the USSR under the Belovezha Accords signed on 8 December 1991. The Accords were signed by Ukraine, Russia, and Belarus resulting in the dissolution of the USSR and establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States of which the three countries were founding members. The complexities of the Accords, post-Soviet foreign policy, Russia's own initial westward orientation and its reasons for retreat from this orientation, received no coverage in the sampled articles, while Russian geopolitical narratives surrounding NATO were presented as Russian demands without contextualisation. Russia's military action in Ukraine was presented through the historical lens of Soviet and Russian expansionism, alongside references to nuclear threats and a history of chemical weapons use.

06

CONCLUSION

This study finds that across the two conflicts, through journalistic choices of dominant frames, quoted sources, context, and language, the ABC, The Guardian, The Australian, and 9News.com.au tended to privilege one interpretation over another, to varying extents.

Our study finds distinct asymmetry in the frames used in both conflicts. This asymmetry had the capacity to create sympathies for one side over another and advance political narratives associated with that side. Research shows that when the frames used resonate with people's existing values, they can be less obvious and more acceptable (Schemer et al., 2012), encouraging certain ways of thinking (Price et al., 1997). This is particularly relevant in both the case of the Russia–Ukraine conflict, where a broad Western consensus exists in support of Ukrainian sovereignty and in opposition to Russian military action, and Israel–Gaza, where both documented violations of international humanitarian and human rights law against Palestinians and during the Hamas attack in October 2023 have generated polarised responses, as referenced in Chapter 1.

Recent research into the framing used by the New York Times in its coverage of the Israel–Gaza conflict has also shown that the dominance of frames from one side over another can "plausibly influence the opinions of a reader in a direction that is at odds with reality" (Pinker, 2026, p. 7). Whilst Pinker found the New York Times' framing of this conflict led to a diminution of Hamas's responsibility, another study of The New York Times and Washington Post coverage has found hegemonic beliefs, editorial positioning, and political pressure might have positioned both to adopt and defend Israeli narratives (El Masry, 2026). El Masry concludes that "news outlets can construct meaning not only through what they say but also through what they omit. The consistent downplaying of Palestinian victimization amounts to a structural pattern of erasure" (El Masry, 2026, p. 16).

Our study found the Israel–Gaza coverage demonstrated more framing plurality than the Russia–Ukraine coverage. However, in all but one outlet – The Australian – Israeli narratives and Palestinian narratives appeared prominent at different times and were treated differently. Across surveyed coverage in 9News.com.au, The Guardian, and the ABC, the dominant frames shifted between Israeli and Palestinian over the events to paint a complicated picture. When Palestinian frames were privileged, Israeli frames appeared as counterclaims and were presented as less credible, which served to reinforce the evidence of Palestinian suffering.

When Israeli frames were privileged, Palestinian narratives were sidelined, with the representation of deaths as statistics and selective historical contextualisation resulting in the reinforcement of frames emphasising Israeli victimhood over Palestinian victimhood. The Australian was the outlier, maintaining a strong focus on Israeli narratives of victimhood and security challenges throughout the sampled events, including when Palestinian humanitarian narratives were drawing heightened global attention.

By contrast, in the sampled coverage of Russia–Ukraine, there was strong, stable framing echoing Western geopolitical interpretations of the unfolding conflict. The dominance of Western/Ukrainian-aligned frames, the limited presence of Russian counter-frames, the reliance on Western political sourcing, selective historical contextualisation, and occasional explicitly evaluative journalistic narration contributed to this phenomenon. Indeed, both quoted sources and journalistic narration often embraced contradictory views reinforcing the frames used across events – Russia as militarily weak yet strong enough to be a global menace, politically fragile yet resilient, on the verge of economic collapse yet impervious to the impact of sanctions. While the use of these paradoxes could be the result of lack of information in a wartime environment, and minimal access to Russian citizens, military and government figures, it is notable that they were used across outlets to support the assertion that the Russian president would fall from power as early as 2023. Changes in framing and sourcing over the examined periods were not significant; for example, more Russian sources were used in coverage of the Wagner insurrection, but they reinforced Western/Ukrainian political interpretations of a failing Russian state. When engagement with Russian frames was evident, they were evaluated as lies, propaganda, and political revisionism, and counterbalanced with Western/Ukrainian perspectives which were treated as more authoritative and closer to the truth. This indicates that when clear moral certitude about the actions of one side or another in times of war was established by events, criticisms from the side viewed as the victim at that time were privileged.

This study does not claim to show that the framing devices used by the surveyed media outlets indicate bias. Nor does our study claim to show that the privileging observed indicates that journalists used the methodology of advocacy journalism, even though the source privileging and narrowed contextualisation observed in surveyed articles across the outlets and in both conflicts are the hallmark of advocacy journalism. While arguably it is likely that all journalism "falls along a continuum of advocacy" (Fisher, 2016, p. 723), the asymmetry in the use of frames could be due as much to the development of events on the ground and professional routines, as to editorial orientation of the media outlet, intentional manipulation of narratives, and the wider ideological climate. Indeed, further research is needed, including interviews with journalists and editors, to probe the link between our findings and advocacy.

Further, just as asymmetry in the use of frames does not necessarily indicate advocacy journalism, nor does symmetrical use of frames from competing sides necessarily indicates objective journalism; giving equal exposure, in an act of bothsidesism, to narratives which are irrelevant, produce harm, or are posited without evidence is not objective journalism. However, in the coverage of conflict, particularly in the digital era which accommodates a complex, fast, and powerful infowar ecosystem, passing on frames originating with powerful actors without analysis and evaluation is as damaging as failing to acknowledge and critically engage competing frames fairly and accurately. Both approaches can fuel mistrust of journalism in an age when political actors, good and bad, can and often do bypass news media and engage with audiences directly.

If arriving at the closest approximation to the truth is the aim of journalism, then the fair use of sources and accurate contextualisation of frames advanced by the stakeholders in conflict would bring audiences closer to a set of facts that can be agreed on. As Professor David Greenberg of Rutgers University asserts, arriving at such a set of agreed facts requires a process of talking to a mix of sources "so as not to fall captive to one person's perspective," and in the reporting stage, an "antiseptic tone" which involves "no ideology, snark, self-righteousness, anger, euphoria, invective or exaggeration" and "the inclusion of multiple, competing explanations about complex or controversial issues" (Henley, 2026).

Research suggests that audiences consistently value news that incorporates a range of views and perspectives (Henke et al., 2020; Zerback & Schneiders, 2024). An information ecosystem in which narratives are intentionally or unintentionally shaped with framing decisions, and determining whose suffering is personalised, which sources are heard or silenced, which context is amplified, downplayed, or disparaged, and whether journalistic evaluative language is required, leaves a body of information more open to mistrust and accusations of an intent to advocate for one side or another.

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ABOUT THE CENTRE FOR MEDIA TRANSITION

The Centre for Media Transition (CMT) is an applied research unit based at the University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

Launched in 2017, the CMT is an interdisciplinary initiative of the Faculty of Design and Society and the Faculty of Law. It sits at the intersection of media, journalism, technology, ethics, regulation and business. Working with industry, academia, government and others, the CMT aims to:

- Understand media transition and digital disruption, with a view to recommending legal reform and other measures that promote the public interest;
- Assist news media to adapt for a digital environment, including by identifying potentially sustainable business models;
- Develop suitable ethical and regulatory frameworks for a fast-changing digital ecosystem;
- Foster quality journalism, thereby enhancing democracy in Australia and the region;
- Develop a diverse media environment that embraces local/regional, international and transnational issues and debate;
- Combat misinformation and protect digital privacy; and
- Articulate contemporary formulations of the public interest informed by established and enduring principles such as accountability and the public's right to know.

The CMT's published works include reports on digital defamation, trust in news media, the state of regional news and news media innovation. Current projects include work on industry self-regulation, privacy, news verification, foreign reporting and press freedom.

The Centre regularly hosts public events, conferences and forums. You can sign up to our regular newsletter at **go.uts.edu.au/CMT-eNews-Signup**. Details of events and the CMT's work can be found on our website at **cmt.uts.edu.au**