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Media construction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: The case of the German press and the German public¹

Abstract: Based on the assumption that acceptance and effects of media frames depend on the audience's *a priori* understanding of the respective issue, the present paper combines findings of the Anti-Semitism and the Criticism of Israel (ASCI) survey with a series of content-analytical and experimental studies on the media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the German press. The results of the studies indicate that the short time effects of media peace frames must not be overestimated. In the long run, however, peace journalism will strengthen the peace forces within society, and reduce the share of hard-liners on both sides.

1. Introduction

The escalation dynamics of conflicts are decisively influenced by whether a conflict is interpreted as a competitive or as a cooperative process. Competitive conflicts have a tendency to expand and escalate and go together with typical misperceptions (Deutsch, 1973, 2000) that become motors of conflict escalation and – in the long-run (Kempf, 2003) – solidify into societal beliefs (Bar-Tal, 1998) that constitute a *war frame* that interprets literally every interaction with the opponent as another episode in the struggle between good and evil.

According to Bar-Tal, these beliefs include, among others, beliefs about the justness of one's cause, one's victim role, the delegitimizing of the enemy and the defence of personal and national security through a policy of strength. In order to give peace a chance, it is necessary to overcome these beliefs and replace them with a different interpretative frame – I call it a *peace frame* – that acknowledges the justification (of at least some) of the interests of the other side, recognizes mutual victim roles, ends the delegitimizing of the opponent and strives to achieve personal and national security through a peaceful conflict resolution.

	Pro-Israel	Neutral	Pro-Palestine
War Frame	Accentuation of the vital needs of the Israeli society, affirmation of the Israeli policy and justification of Israeli use of force while delegitimizing the Palestinians, condemning their use of violence and criticizing their policy.		Accentuation of the vital needs of the Palestinian society, affirmation of the Palestinian policy, and justification of Palestinian use of force while delegitimizing the Israelis, condemning their use of violence and criticizing their policy.
Peace Frame	Accentuation of the vital needs of the Israeli society without delegitimizing the Palestinians	Refraining from the delegitimation of any party and accentuating the vital needs of both societies,	Accentuation of the vital needs of the Palestinian society without delegitimizing the Israelis.
	Criticism of both sides' policy, and rejection of both sides' use of force and violence.		

Table 1, War frames vs. peace frames.

Such beliefs (cf. Table 1) are found on all sides of a conflict, and the members of a society directly affected by a conflict are not the only ones who develop such beliefs. Outsiders trying to make sense of a conflict in which they are not themselves engaged will also interpret it either in the sense of a peace frame or of a war frame. How a person positions himself toward a conflict – which side he takes, e.g., in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – thus depends essentially on the mental model he forms of the conflict.

Particularly in Germany, the way people position themselves toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is quite ambivalent, however. The World War II lesson of “never again fascism, never again war” implies a tendency to adopt the Peace Frame (never again war). But, it is ambivalent with regard to human rights. “Never again fascism” can be interpreted in two ways:

1. It can be interpreted as support for the *direct victims of the Nazis*, which implies a tendency toward unconditional solidarity with Israeli policy and a weakening of the peace frame; or

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2. It can be interpreted as support for the *universality of human rights*, which implies rejecting at least some aspects of Israeli policy and includes at least a certain degree of empathy with the Palestinian side. Although this tends to strengthen the peace frame, it also poses the danger of adopting the war frame and siding with the Palestinians.

In the concrete case the situation is, however, more complicated: Israel has not only been in a continuous state of war for several decades, but rather – despite all setbacks – over the past twenty years it has on and off again participated in a peace process. This has led to a weakening of the above-named societal beliefs in Israel. From the writing of critical Israeli intellectuals, discussions with my Israeli friends – and also from discussions with German-Jewish friends – I have the impression that both frames co-exist today among both Israelis and Jews abroad, sometimes even within a single person vacillating back and forth between a war frame and a peace frame.

Here it seems important to me that both frames do not only represent cognitive interpretative patterns. They also involve emotional ties, and they do so in a quite ambivalent manner, since both frames promise security and simultaneously they create insecurity.

- The War Frame offers security, because tried-and-true action patterns can be continued, but it also creates insecurity, because it poses the threat of continued violence.
- The Peace Frame offers security, because it promises an end to violence, but at the same time it creates insecurity, because new behavioral patterns must be tried whose effectiveness is still uncertain.

If we want to understand the construction of the Israeli conflict in Germany and the interaction between German media and their audience, we must, therefore, not only take the cognitive patterns into account, according to which they interpret the conflict but also their sensitivity for the ambivalence of war and peace in the Middle East.

2. The ASCI survey

In order to measure participants' sensitivity for this ambivalence, Anti-Semitism and the Criticism of Israel (ASCI) survey (Kempf, 2013) included a set of 8 items (cf. Table 2) to which participants reacted on a five-point Likert-scale.

		For Israelis	For Palestinians
War frame	Offers security	<i>ambi01i</i> : With firm resolve and military strength, Israel's existence can be secured in the long term	<i>ambi01p</i> : Through persistent armed resistance a Palestinian state can be brought about by force
	Creates threat	<i>ambi02i</i> : As long as Israel tries to control the conflict by military means (alone), its population will be exposed to the constant threat of Palestinian violence	<i>ambi02p</i> : If the Palestinian leadership does not prevent the use of force, the Palestinians will not be allowed to found their own state
Peace frame	Offers security	<i>ambi03i</i> : The complete return of the occupied territories would make it possible for Israel to have an enduring peace with the Palestinians	<i>ambi03p</i> : A little more flexibility would make it possible for the Palestinians to have a lasting peace with Israel
	Creates threat	<i>ambi04i</i> : Returning to the borders of 1967 would represent a great security risk for Israel	<i>ambi04p</i> : A compromise with Israel would mean selling out Palestinian interests

Table 2, The items of the ambivalence scale.

Applying Latent-Class-Analysis in order to identify the typical patterns to which the item-responses combine identified 7 ambivalence patterns (cf. Appendix 1) whose distribution indicates that:

- 33% of the Germans are naïve pacifists for whom war is threatening, and peace offers security;
- 28% are sceptical pacifists who are uncertain whether peace could offer Israel security and/or whether a Palestinian state couldn't be brought about by force;
- 18% are sensible for the ambivalence of peace for both sides, though uncertain whether the status quo can offer Israel security; and
- 21% are sensible for Israel's security dilemma and/or assume that the status quo is the lesser evil for Israel.

This pacifist attitude of the German's is also visible in the way how they make sense of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and how they position themselves to it. Applying Latent-Class-Analysis to the items in Table 3 identified a number of typical positioning patterns that are displayed in Figure 1 and indicate that.

- 45% of the Germans interpret the Israeli-Palestinian conflict according to a peace frame.

- 10% are pro-Israeli hard-liners who interpret it according to a pro-Israeli war frame.
- 9% are pro-Palestinian hard-liners who interpret it according to a pro-Palestinian war frame, and
- 21% take a more moderate position in favor of the Palestinians.²

	Pro-Israeli	Pro-Palestinian
Solution by negotiation	<i>npeace01</i> : A solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be found through negotiation.	
Violence deepens gap	<i>npeace02</i> : The continued violence of the Israelis and Palestinians deepens the gulf between the two societies and leads to radicalization on both sides.	
Accentuation of both sides' needs	<i>npeace03</i> : A solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must take account of the necessities of life of both populations.	
Accentuation of own sides' needs	<i>ipeace01</i> : All the participants should work for the Israelis to be able to look forward to a peaceful future free of fear.	<i>ppeace01</i> : All the participants should work for the Palestinians to be able to lead a peaceful, self-determined life.
Need to force the opponent	<i>iwor01a</i> : The Palestinian leadership should be forced to recognize Israel.	<i>pwar01a</i> : The Israeli government should be forced to recognize the rights of the Palestinians.
Criticism of opponent's policy	<i>iwor02</i> : The Palestinian leadership is not ready to make compromises and tries to impose its maximum aims without regard to losses.	<i>pwar02</i> : Israel is intransigent and tries to maintain existing conditions by the use of force.
Delegitimation of the opponent	<i>iwor03</i> : The goal of the Palestinian leadership is the destruction of Israel.	<i>pwar03</i> : The aim of Israeli policy is the continued oppression and disenfranchisement of the Palestinians.
Legitimation of own side's warfare	<i>iwor04</i> : The Israelis are conducting a legitimate defensive war against Palestinian terrorism.	<i>pwar04</i> : The Palestinians are conducting a legitimate war of liberation against the Israeli occupation.
Condemnation of opponent's violence	<i>iwor05</i> : Nothing can justify the Palestinian terror attacks against the Israeli population.	<i>pwar05</i> : Israel's military operations against the Palestinians are excessive and unjustified.

Table 3, The items of the positioning scale.

Peace oriented participants have an equally strong focus on the vital needs of both societies, they criticize the intransigence of both sides' leadership, they question the justness of both sides' warfare, and condemn both sides' violence.

The pro-Israeli hard-liners have a stronger focus on the vital needs of the Israeli society, they see a need to force the Palestinian leadership, and criticize its intransigence. They believe that the destruction of Israel is the goal of the Palestinian leadership, they legitimize the Israeli warfare as a defense against Palestinian terrorism, and condemn the Palestinian attacks.

The pro-Palestinian hard-liners are quite the opposite: They have a stronger focus on the vital needs of the Palestinian society, they see a need to force the Israeli leadership, and criticize the Israeli intransigence. They believe in the continued oppression of the Palestinians as the goal of the Israeli leadership, they legitimize the Palestinian warfare as a war of liberation, and condemn the Israeli military operations.

As well those who take a more moderate pro-Palestinian position, have a relatively stronger focus on the vital needs of the Palestinian society and criticize the intransigence of the Israeli leadership. They also tend to believe in the continued oppression of the Palestinians as the goal of the Israeli leadership, and doubt that the destruction of Israel is the goal of the Palestinian leadership.

They do not take a radically pro-Palestinian position, however, but see some need to force *both sides'* leadership, they question the justness of *both sides'* warfare, and condemn *both sides'* violence.

Most striking about these results is the (nearly) throughout ambivalence between opposing the supposed goals of the Israeli policy on the one hand and condemning Palestinian attacks on the other.

- *Pro-Israeli hard-liners* are the only ones who *do not* believe that the Israeli policy aims at the continued oppression of the Palestinians,
- and *pro-Palestinian hard-liners* are the only ones who *do not* condemn Palestinian attacks more harshly than the Israeli military operations

Both of these groups are a minority within the German society, however.

² Another 15% of the participants were not sufficiently familiar with the conflict and didn't take a position at all.

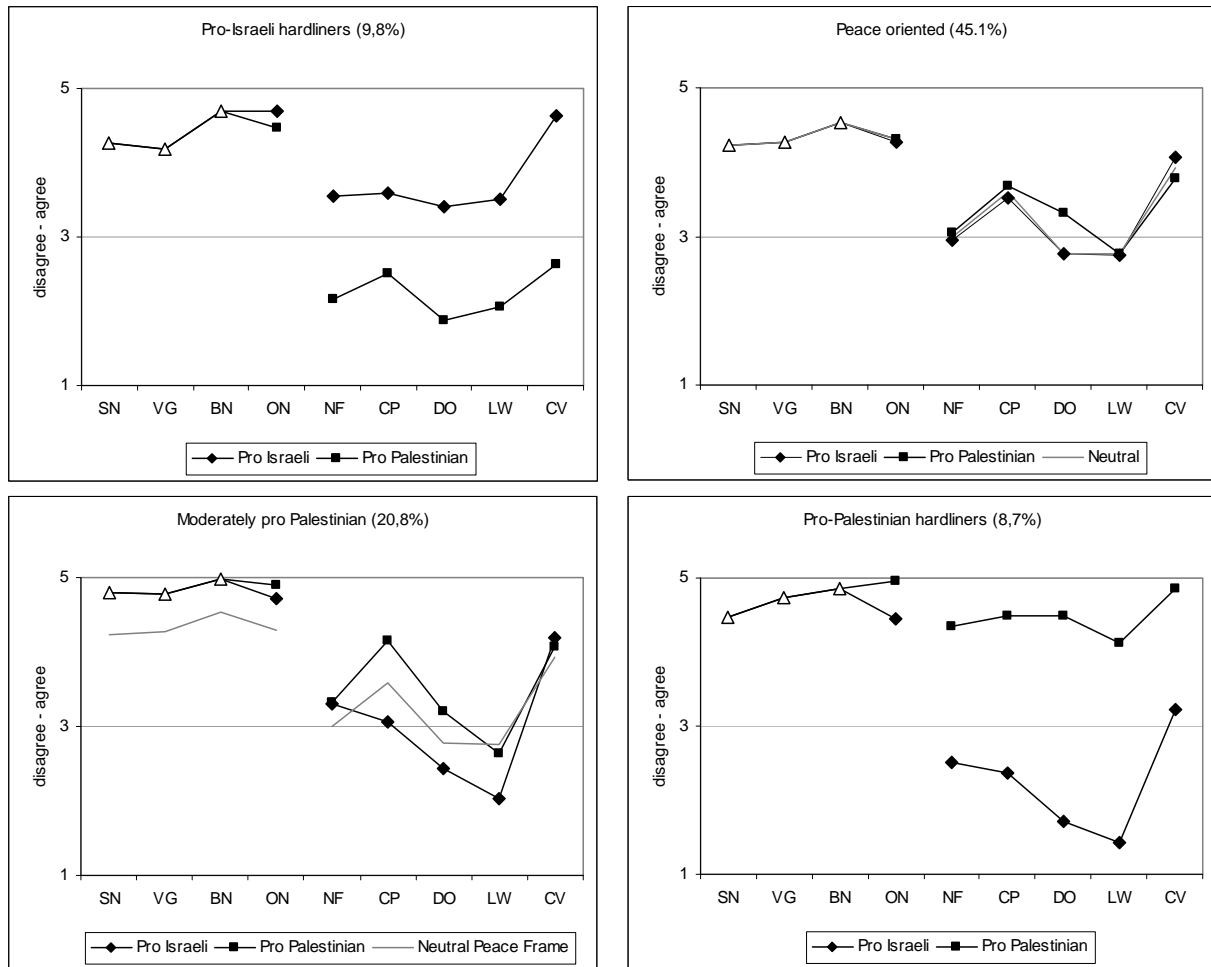


Figure 1, Positioning patterns. SN = Solution by negotiation; VG = Violence deepens gap; BN = Account of both sides' needs; ON = Accentuation of own sides' needs; NF = Need to force the opponent; CP = Criticism of opponents' policy; DO = Delegitimation of the opponent; LW = Legitimation of own sides' warfare; CV = Condemnation of opponents' violence.

3. Peace journalism

Also journalists and the media do not just report facts but they give it a meaning which interprets conflict either in an escalation-prone war frame that sides with one of the parties or in a de-escalation oriented peace frame which aims to give peace a chance.

In doing their job, most journalists try to do their best to produce quality journalism. Since they share the same beliefs as the rest of society, however, in an antagonistic situation they often end up with one-sided coverage that does not live up to these norms. The only way out of this dilemma is to learn to accept facts before they are interpreted.

- Accordingly, the first rule for journalists who aim to facilitate such a process of social learning is to mistrust the plausible, and
- the second rule is, to ask the right questions.

A peace or reconciliation discourse is *not* a discourse *about* peace or reconciliation, and especially not a discourse that harmonizes contradictions or suppresses conflicts. It is a matter of *how* to deal with conflict. Correspondingly, the best way to characterize the various discourse forms in which journalists may engage is in terms of the questions they focus on.

- In *war discourse*, it is a matter of "Who is guilty?" and "How can they be stopped?"
- *Peace discourse* asks, "What is the problem?" and "How can it be solved?"
- And when a *reconciliation discourse* is appropriate, the focus is on questions such as "Who is the other?" and "How can we meet each other with mutual respect?"

In order to contribute to the transformation of war discourses, journalists need to refrain from the media's focus on negative news, and they need to avoid over-simplification.

Prior studies on audience reactions to a so-defined *peace journalism* indicates that journalists who do so will find an audience that appreciates their coverage as less biased than conventional war reporting. If news recipients already side with one party or the other, however, it may happen that they reject peace journalism as biased in favour of the opposing party.

This poses a number of questions that we tried to investigate in a series of empirical studies:

1. How do the German media cover the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
2. How does the German public deal with this sort of coverage?

4. Media Frames of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

In the light of increasing sympathy for the Palestinian cause in the German public, it is not surprising that German media are often accused of providing one-sided reportage on the Middle East conflict and displaying narrow partisanship for the Palestinian position (Krämer, 2010).

Criticism like this should not be taken lightly. In order to find out whether there is a growing pro-Palestinian bias in the German media, we compared the coverage of the second Intifada and the Gaza War in the big five German national quality papers which cover the entire political spectrum and are generally regarded as representative for the German media landscape (cf. Wilke, 1999).

The results of our study (cf. Maurer & Kempf, 2014) demonstrated that media coverage of both conflicts was much more complex and differentiated than assumed by critics, and during the Gaza War the German quality press likewise did its best to avoid taking the Palestinian side.

The press tried hard to satisfy the quality norms of journalism and to report in an objective and detached manner. In many regards, it maintained a uniform distance from both conflict parties, it was quite critical of both sides' policies, and it tried to make clear the pluralism of both societies by reporting criticism of their policy not only from outside but also from within their own society.

However, the results of our study also demonstrated the negative impact of the news selection mechanisms that produce an escalation-prone bias of conventional war journalism (cf. Figure 2):

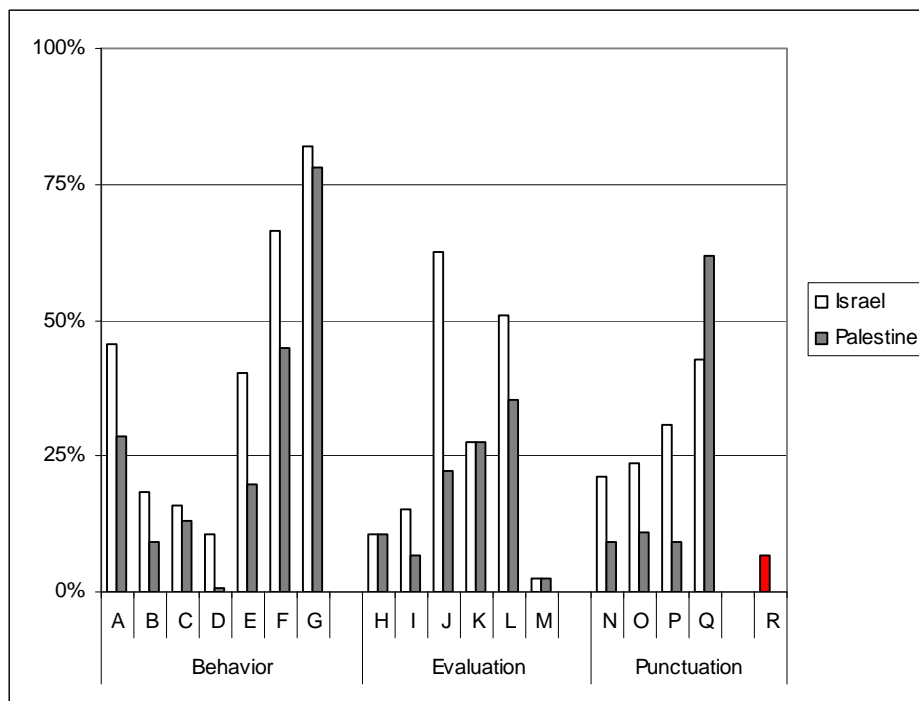


Figure 2. Coverage of the Second Intifada and the Gaza War. A = Cooperative behaviour; B = Offers of cooperation; C = Political demands; D = Competitive logic; E = Threatening behaviour; F = Confrontational behaviour; G = Employment of force; H = Support by third parties; I = Legitimation of intentions; J = Justification of behaviour; K = Self-critique from own ranks; L = Critique of behaviour; M = Delegitimation of intentions; N = Defensive position; O = Strength and confidence of victory; P = Threat to and mistrust; Q = Victims; R = Calculation and comparison of victim statistics.

1. Due to the news factor "social, cultural, historical proximity," more was reported on the Israelis than on the Palestinians. Only with regard to victims (and due to the actual number of victims) did the German papers report less about Israel than about the Palestinians.
2. Due to the news factor "negativism," German coverage was dominated by negative news. It focused on the employment of force, the victims of violence, as well as on the conflict parties' confrontational and threatening behaviour and thus put not only the Palestinians, but also Israel in a bad light.
3. In this context, Israeli actions were more often criticized than those of the Palestinians. Israel's strength and confidence of victory, competitive logic, its confrontational behaviour and threats to it were more often reported than on the Palestinian side. This makes Israel appear extremely powerful and uncompromising and could possibly favour a "David versus Goliath" image that encourages solidarity with the Palestinians.
4. Trying to provide balanced reportage, however, the German media neutralized this negative effect by displaying a measure of understanding for Israeli policies, so that on balance Israel came off looking better than the Palestinians.
 - Israel was more frequently portrayed in a defensive position than were the Palestinians, and the threat to Israel was more often addressed.
 - Israeli actions were more often justified, Israel's rights were more often acknowledged, and not only Israel's cooperative behaviour, but also its readiness for cooperation were addressed more often.

Due to the different nature of the two wars, during the Gaza War the reportage situation tended to shift in favour of the Palestinians, however.

1. There were more frequent reports on threats to the Palestinians than during the second Intifada, and the calculation and comparison of victim statistics was more frequent.
2. Cooperative behaviour, offers of cooperation and (merely) threatening behaviour were less often addressed for both sides, and the focus of the reportage shifted to Israeli use of force, on the one side, and confrontational Palestinian (political) measures, on the other.

How dramatic this change was, becomes evident if we do not look at the various text characteristics themselves but at the patterns into which they combine (cf. Table 4).

	Israel	Palestinians
Poorly contextualized focus on violence	33.7%	49.6%
Competitive logic and confrontational behavior	20.0%	35.0%
Dialectic of confrontation and cooperation	41.8%	15.4%
Focus on cooperative behavior	4.4%	missing

Table 4, Patterns of coverage.

Over all, 33.7% of the depictions of Israeli behaviour had a poorly contextualized focus on Israeli violence; 20% focused on competitive logic and confrontational behaviour; 41.8% depicted a mixture of confrontation and cooperation, and 4.4% focused on cooperative behaviour of the Israeli side.

On the Palestinian side, a focus on cooperative behaviour was not found at all, a mixture of cooperative and confrontational behaviour was characteristic for only 15.4% of the articles, 35% of the articles focused on competitive logic and confrontational behaviour of the Palestinians, and 49,6% had a poorly contextualized focus on Palestinian violence.

Comparing the coverage of the second Intifada with the Gaza war (cf. Figure 3), showed that the focus on Palestinian violence declined during the Gaza War in favour of a competitive logic and confrontational behaviour, while Israeli violence, was focused on about twice as often as during the second Intifada.

Thereby an impression was given of an increasing asymmetry between Israel's (excessive) use of violence and the Palestinian's (mere) political confrontation. Thus, the media image of Israeli actions during the Gaza War was more negative than during the second Intifada, and that of Palestinian actions, in contrast, not quite as negative as previously.

This partial levelling of the differences between the representations of the two parties' actions was, however, probably due more to the facts and the specific characteristics of the two wars than to bias in favour of the Palestinians. Quite to the contrary, differences in German reportage on the two wars indicate a clear tendency to tone down a reporting situation unfavourable to Israel (cf. Figure 4).

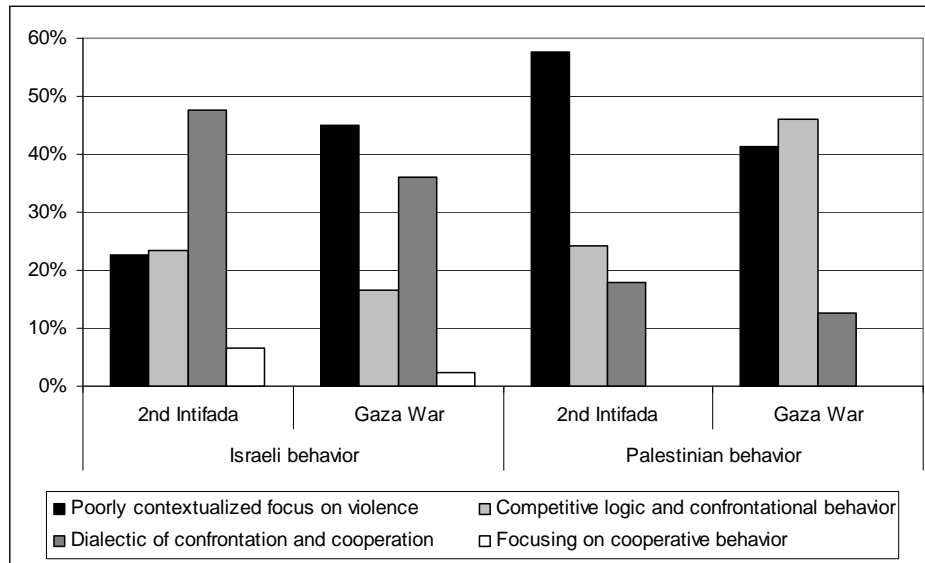


Figure 3, Comparison of the two conflicts: Patterns of coverage.

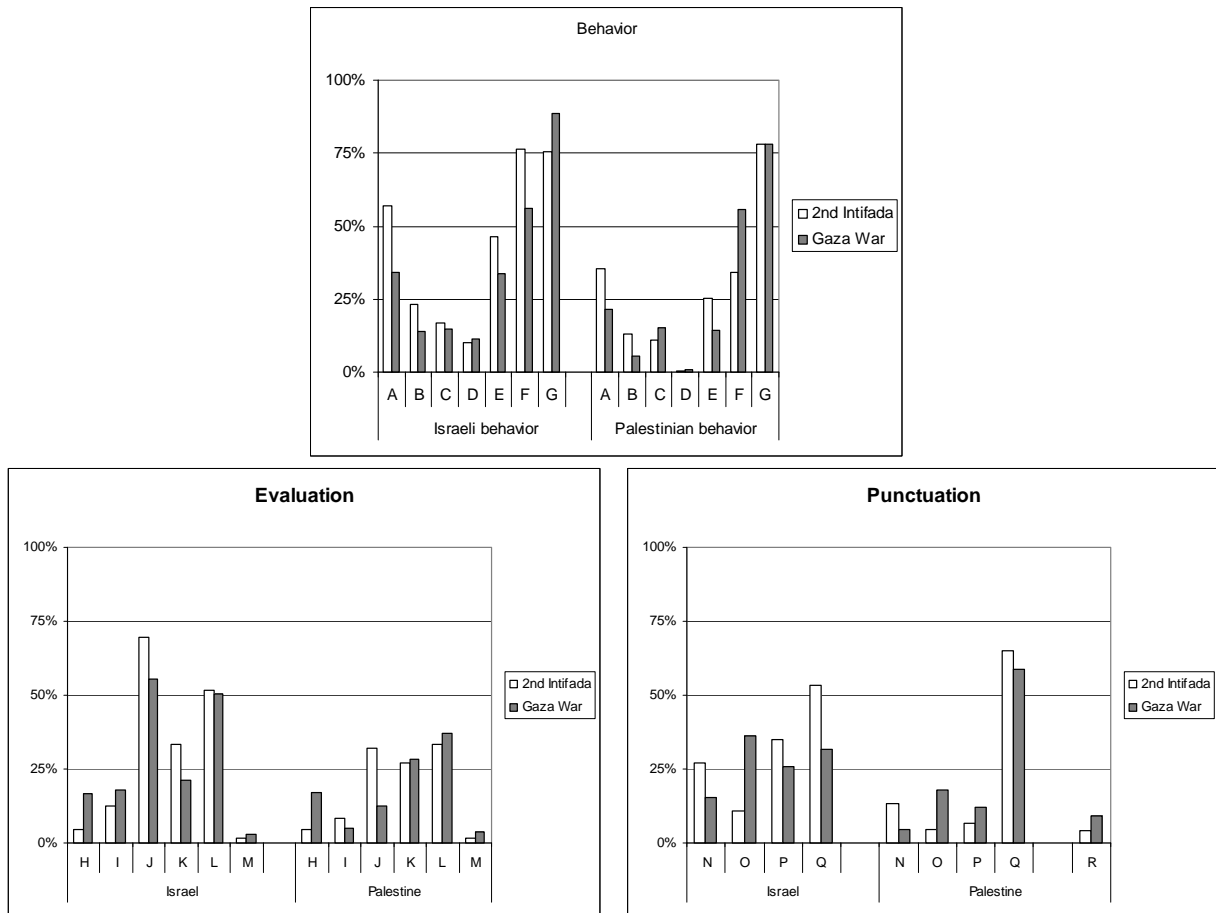


Figure 4, Comparison of the two conflicts: Behavior, evaluation and punctuation. A = Cooperative behaviour; B = Offers of cooperation; C = Political demands; D = Competitive logic; E = Threatening behaviour; F = Confrontational behaviour; G = Employment of force; H = Support by third parties; I = Legitimation of intentions; J = Justification of behaviour; K = Self-critique from own ranks; L = Critique of behaviour; M = Delegitimation of intentions; N = Defensive position; O = Strength and confidence of victory; P = Threat to and mistrust; Q = Victims; R = Calculation and comparison of victim statistics.

1. Also, during the Gaza War, Israel's behaviour was still less negatively represented than that of the Palestinians.
2. Israel's seemingly excessive use of force was balanced with reportage that justified Israeli actions, increasingly represented Israel as taking a defensive position and less often addressed Israel's superior military power.
3. To be sure, the frequency of justifications of *both* conflict parties' actions decreased during the Gaza War, but the judgment of Israeli intentions and actions did not change in comparison with the second Intifada and also remained largely positive during the Gaza War.
4. Instead, reportage on events that could turn readers against Israel was counteracted by a negative shift in the evaluation of Palestinian intentions and actions.
5. Thereby the imbalance between the two parties increased in favour of Israel. Whereas during the second Intifada Israeli behaviour was justified somewhat more than twice as often, during the Gaza War this rose to four-and-a-half times as often.

This asymmetry between increased portrayal of Israeli use of force, on the one side, and increased justification of Israeli actions, on the other, is also mirrored in the punctuation of the conflict and the representation of its victims.

1. Thus, during the Gaza War reportage on victims and numbers of victims admittedly shifted in favour of the Palestinians, but this was counteracted in that Israel (relative to the Palestinians) was increasingly represented in a defensive position, and Israel's superior military force was (relatively) less often addressed.
2. Although the amount of coverage devoted to the two sides was not as dramatically unequal as during the second Intifada, during the Gaza War the threat to Israel was still represented more than twice as frequently as that to the Palestinians.
3. And although both parties were less often represented in a defensive position during the Gaza War, the ratio between the two parties shifted in favour of Israel. While Israel was represented twice as often in a defensive position during the second Intifada, this rose to more than three times as often during the Gaza War.

This counterbalancing of a reporting situation unfavorable for Israel was also found in the study by Gaisbauer (2014), who analyzed the representation of victimization and responsibility during the two conflicts and found a reversal in the victim roles and a convergence in the perpetrator roles from the Second Intifada to the Gaza War which was counterbalanced by an increased focus on Israeli civilian victims, while Palestinian civilian victims received less attention than during the Second Intifada.

5. Audience reactions

In order to find out about the way, how the German public deals with this kind of coverage, we made an experiment that confronted the participants in six experimental groups with differently framed reports on either Israeli or Palestinian violence (cf. Table 5): A Palestinian suicide attack in Tel Aviv in April 2006 and an Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip at the end of February and beginning of March 2008 (cf. Kempf & Thiel, 2014; Thiel & Kempf, 2014).

Frame	Partisanship	Scenario	
		Palestinian terror attack / Israeli victims	Israeli military operation / Palestinian victims
War Frame	Pro-Israeli	"Suicide Attack: Terror Shakes Tel Aviv"	"Offensive in Gaza: Israel Cracks Down on Constant Fire by Militant Palestinians"
	Pro-Palestinian	"Suicide Attack in Tel Aviv: Israel Announces Retaliation"	"Gaza: Israel Kills Dozens of Palestinians: Peace Talks Cancelled"
Peace Frame	Neutral	"Suicide Attack Shakes Tel Aviv"	"Gaza Strip: Dozens of Dead and Injured in Battles"

Table 5, The framing experiment: Frames, scenarios and headlines of the articles.

Using original material from the German quality press, each of these scenarios was framed either according to an escalation oriented pro-Israeli war frame which condemns Palestinian violence and/or justifies Israeli actions, or according to an escalation oriented pro-Palestinian war frame which condemns Israeli violence and/or justifies Palestinian actions, or according to a de-escalation oriented peace frame which focuses on the costs of war for both sides.

After reading the articles, participants filled in a text-evaluation questionnaire and wrote an essay on their own view of the events reported in the article. The instructions for participants' essays read as follows:

Now please try to describe the events you have just read about and their background from your own viewpoint. Take into account thereby especially the aspects of this conflict that appear important to you.

The results of the experiment (cf. Figure 5) demonstrated, that media peace frames were generally regarded as less biased and more impartial than media war frames. The only exception are pro-Israeli hard-liners who are somewhat reserved about peace frames and regard pro-Israeli media frames as more impartial.

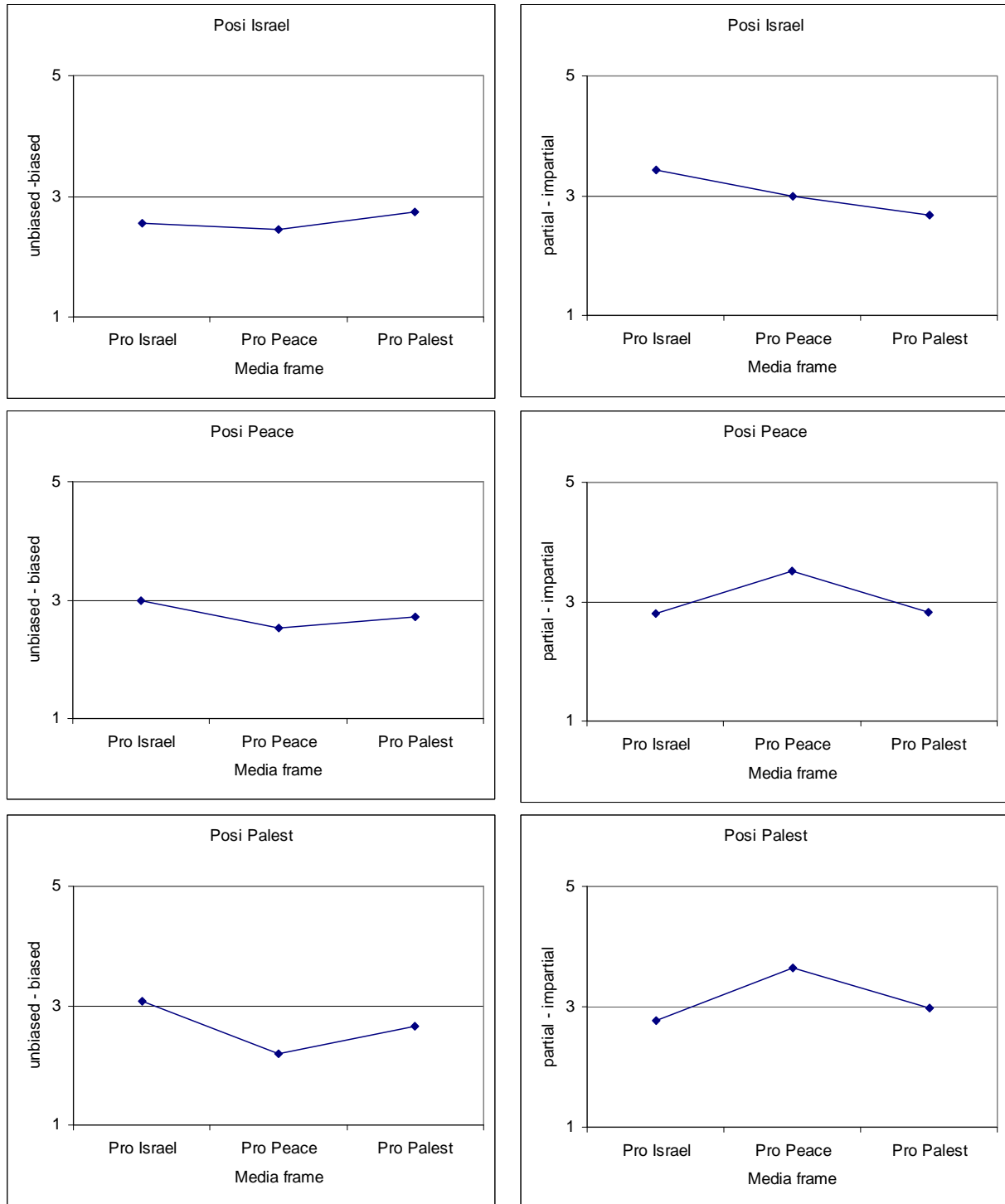


Figure 5, Text evaluation: Bias and partiality.

They regard media peace frames as well as reports about Israeli military operations with Palestinian victims as completely partisan for the Palestinians (cf. Figure 6).

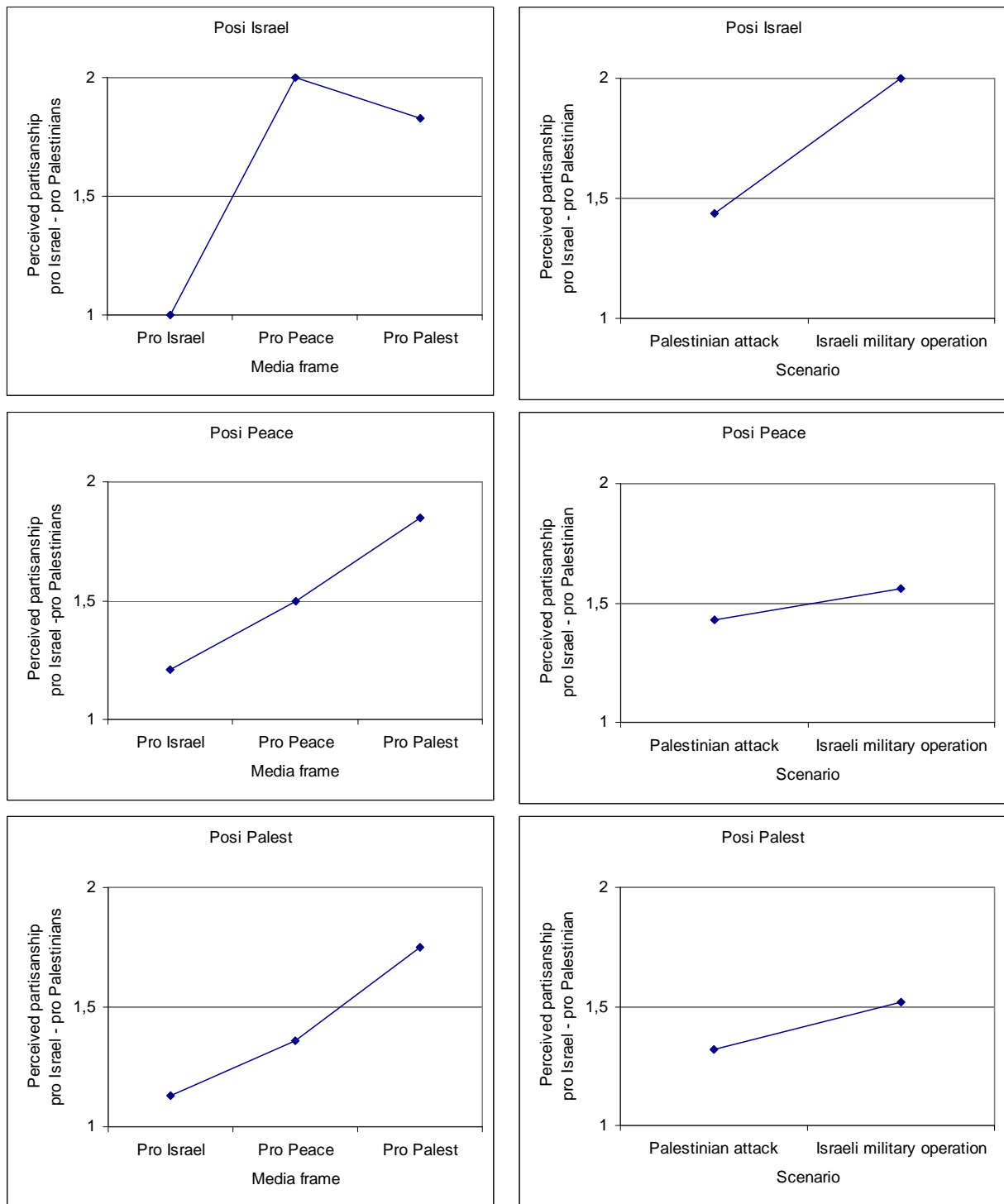


Figure 6, Text evaluation: Perceived partisanship.

Among participants in the pro-Palestinian group, such an effect was not found. This does not mean that pro-Israeli hard-liners are more bull-headed than pro-Palestinian ones, however, but is simply due to the fact, that the majority of the members of pro-Palestinian group took a more moderate stance: only 24% of them were hard-liners who positioned themselves according to a pro-Palestinian war frame.

In order to find out how the participants make sense of the articles they had read we made a content analysis of the essays that identified 5 groups of participants:

- 31% of the participants avoided to deal with the text,
- 20% avoided to frame their essays,
- 27% framed their essays in a de-escalation oriented manner,
- 17% framed them in a pro-Palestinian/anti-Israeli way, and
- 5% in a pro-Israeli/anti-Palestinian way

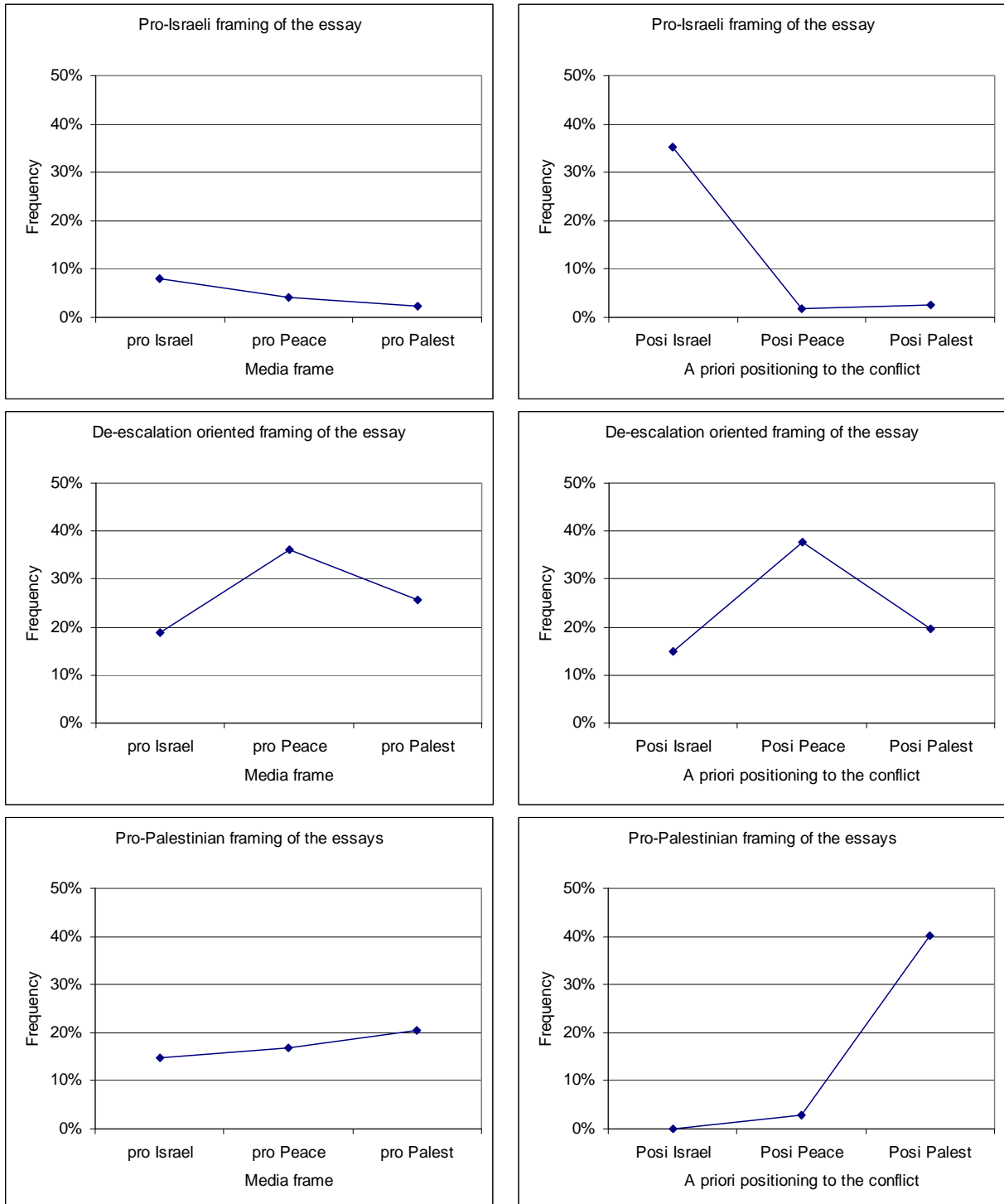


Figure 7, The effect of media frames and participants' a priori positioning on their text understanding.

Relating the framing of the essays to participants' *a priori* positioning to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and to the media frame of the article they had read shows that both factors have a clear influence on the way how participants understand the articles they read (cf. Figure 7). Thereby participants' *a priori* understanding of the conflict has a stronger effect than the media frames.

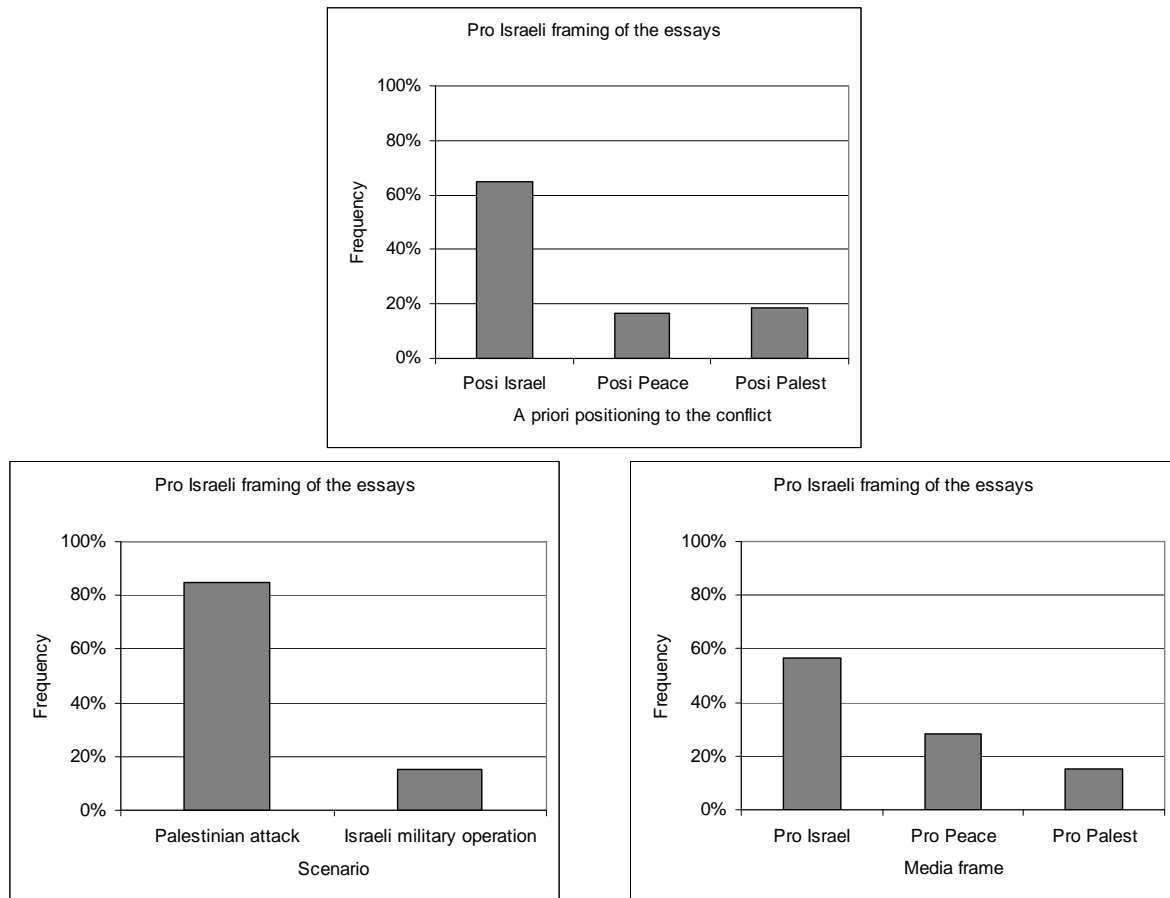


Figure 8, Pro-Israeli framing of the essays.

Moreover, the results indicate that reports about violence further a text understanding in favour of the victim side, if the participants had already positioned themselves *a priori* in their favour and the media frame had the same bias.

Such a propaganda effect was particularly found for reports about Palestinian violence: The majority of participants who framed their essays in a pro-Israeli way (cf. Figure 8) had already *a priori* positioned themselves in favour of the Israeli policy, and had read an article about a Palestinian attack, that was framed in a pro-Israeli way.

The propaganda effect of reports about violence can be neutralized through a media peace frame, if participants had already *a priori* positioned themselves in the same way.

Such a neutralizing effect was particularly found for reports about Israeli violence: The majority of participants who framed their essays in a de-escalation oriented way (cf. Figure 9) had already *a priori* positioned themselves in a peace frame, and had read an article about an Israeli military operation, that was framed according to a peace frame.

If participants *a priori* positioning in favour of the perpetrator side is reinforced by a media frame which has the same bias, reports about victims remain not only ineffective but rather provoke an interpretation in favour of the perpetrator side.

Such an effect was particularly found among participants who framed their essays according to a text-related pro-Palestinian frame (cf. Figure 10): The majority of participants who framed their essays according to a text-related pro-Palestinian frame had already *a priori* positioned themselves in favour of the Palestinians, and had read an article about a Palestinian attack, that was framed according to a pro-Palestinian media frame.

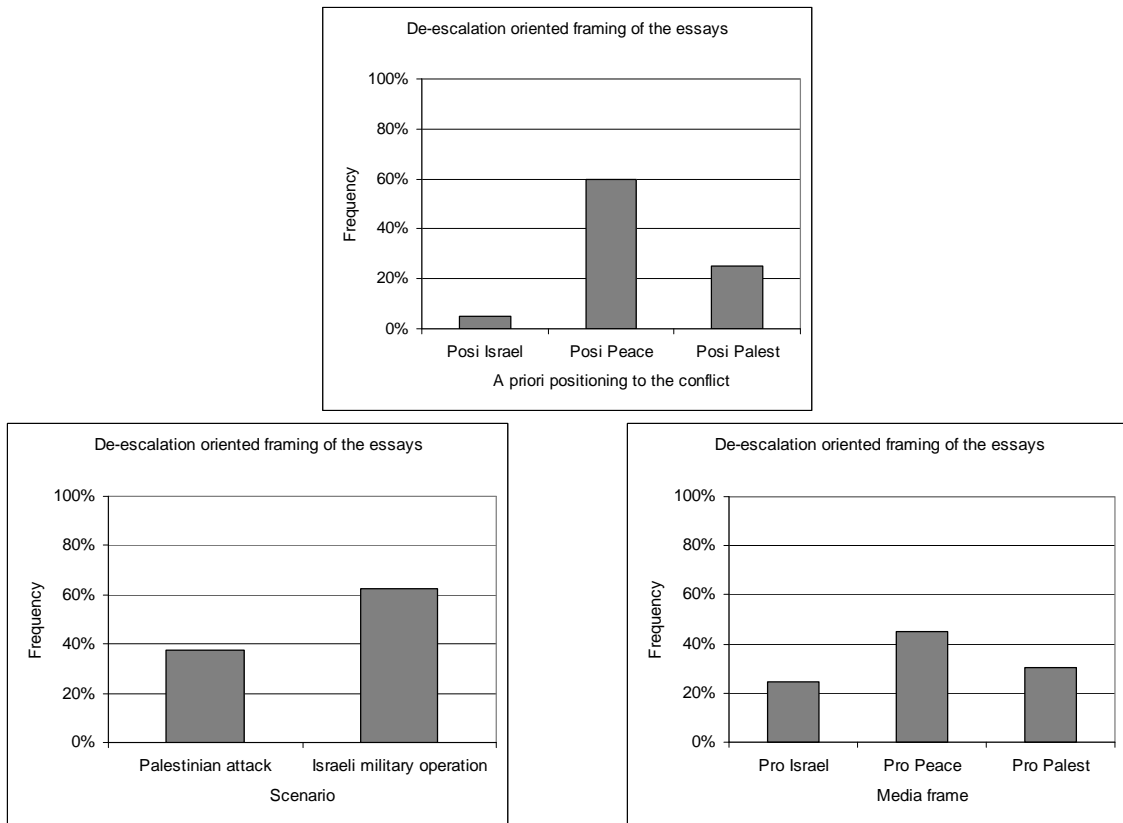


Figure 9, De-escalation oriented framing of the essays.

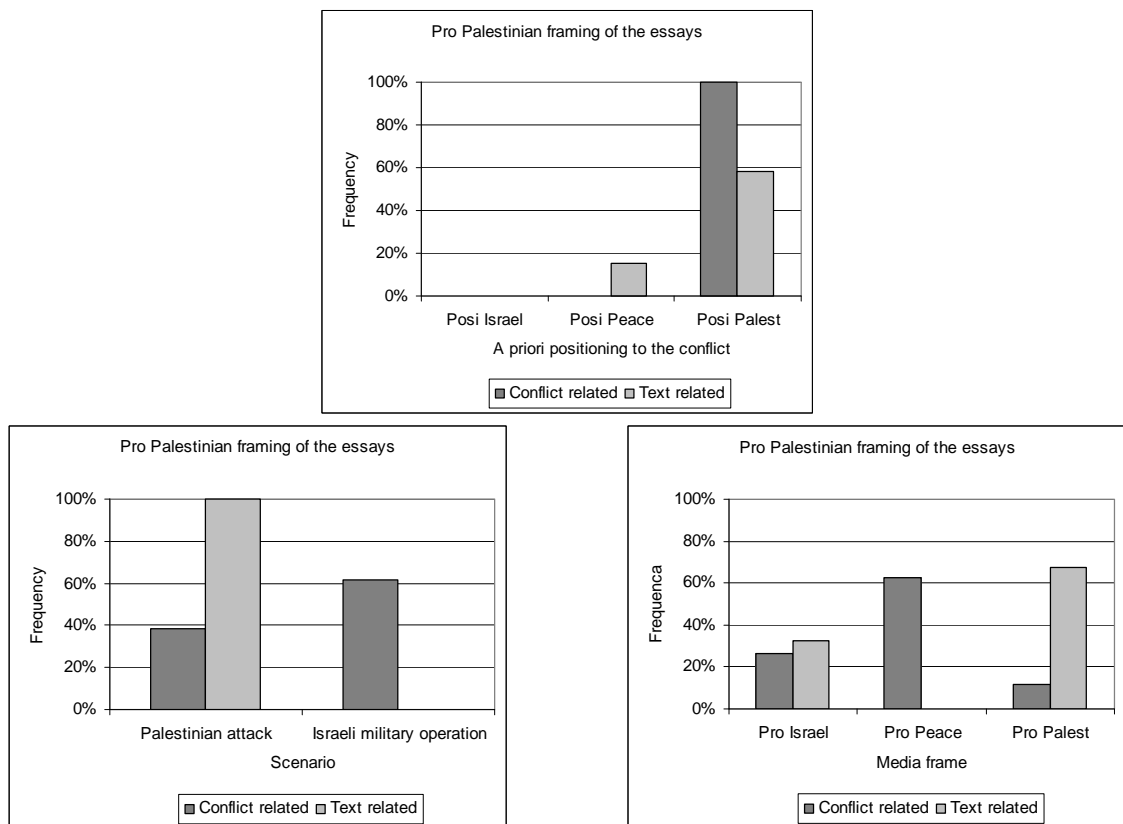


Figure 10, Pro-Palestinian framing of the essays.

If participants *a priori* positioning in favour of one side is reinforced by reports about this sides' victims, peace frames remain ineffective and the participants interpret the articles more than ever in the sense of their *a priori* positioning.

This reactance was particularly found among participants who framed their essays according to a conflict-related pro-Palestinian frame (cf. Figure 10): The majority of participants who framed their essays according to a conflict-related pro-Palestinian frame had already *a priori* positioned themselves in favour of the Palestinians, and had read an article about an Israeli military operation, that was framed according to a media peace frame.

That this reactance is displayed particularly as a response to media peace frames is an unexpected result that highlights the barriers that peace journalism needs to surmount if conflicts are highly escalated and the polarization of the conflict parties has hardened.

6. Conclusions

Summarizing these results, I'll try to answer three questions:

1. Does peace journalism have a chance to contribute to the transformation of war discourses into peace discourses?
2. Is there a danger that de-escalation oriented coverage might incite public opinion against one of the parties?
3. Can the German press be made responsible for the pro-Palestinian bias in how the majority of the Germans understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?

The answer to the first question is yes: Peace journalism does have a chance to contribute to the transformation of war discourses into peace discourses: Media peace frames are appreciated as unbiased and impartial, they have a clear impact on participants' text understanding, and they have the potential to neutralize the propaganda effect of reports about violence and victims. In contrast to media war frames, they avoid to incite the conflict in favour of one or the other party.

However, there are some limitations: Participants *a priori* positioning has a more decisive influence, than the media frames. Hard-liners who unconditionally side with one side's policy are more reserved about peace frames, they may regard them as partisan for the opponent and they may interpret the reported events more than ever in the sense of their *a priori* beliefs.

Altogether this leads to the conclusion that the short time effects of media peace frames must not be overestimated. In the long run, however, peace journalism will strengthen the peace forces within society, and reduce the share of hard-liners on both sides.

This long-term effect can be expected in the German case, at least, where both sides' hard-liners are just minorities. Whether it will also hold in a society where the peace forces are in a minority position and/or how strong this minority needs to be in order to allow for such an effect, is still an open question.

The answer to the second question is partly yes and partly no: There is a danger that de-escalation oriented coverage might incite public opinion against one of the parties, but only among hard-liners who already made up their mind who is good and who is evil. If these hard-liners are startled by the empathy for the opponent's suffering, they may reject the coverage as partisan for the opponent, and if they focus on the empathy for the own sides' burdens, the coverage may reinforce their hard-line.

The peace forces within society will not be incited against any of the parties, however, but will be reinforced in their distancing from both sides' war mongers, and become more resistant against their propaganda.

The answer to the third question is partly yes and partly no as well: The German press *can* be made responsible for the pro-Palestinian bias in how the majority of Germans understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, insofar as the coverage makes Israel appear extremely powerful and uncompromising. This was not only found in the verbal reportage but also in the photographs that illustrated the articles (cf. Hagemann, 2011).

On the other hand, however, the German press coverage does *not* provide one-sided reportage on the conflict and/or display a narrow partisanship for the Palestinians. Quite to the contrary, the German press has a clear tendency to tone down reporting situations that are unfavourable to Israel.

Whether this strategy is an effective means against the increasing sympathy for the Palestinian cause in the German public must be questioned however. Given a situation where the pro-Israeli hard-liners are the only minority group who does *not* believe that the Israeli policy aims at a continued suppression and disenfranchisement of the Palestinians, the justification of Israeli policy, a focus on the threat to Israel, the portrayal of Israel in a defensive position and the justification of Israeli military operations, does not really coincide with the beliefs of the majority of Germans.

On the background of German-Jewish history and precaution against the rise of a “new” Israel-based anti-Semitism, the “balancing” of reportage situations unfavourable to Israel by a coverage that supports the Israeli policy is quite understandable. Given the discrepancy between this kind of coverage and the dominant beliefs in the German society, it may provoke a backlash, however, and even make anti-Semitic prejudices salient: Prejudices from the repertoire of *latent* anti-Semitism – e.g., “One [i.e., the German press] is not allowed to say what one really thinks about the Jews.” or insinuations from the repertoire of *manifest* anti-Semitism – e.g., “International Jewry has a firm grip on the German press and dictates how it has to report.”

Whether such a backlash actually happens, is an open question. In our experiment we didn't collect the data that would be needed to answer it. Fact is, however, that the belief in a Jewish world conspiracy is the most widespread anti-Semitic resentment in Germany: only 38% of the Germans reject the assumption of a Jewish network that has a decisive influence on political and economic processes in the world as prejudice, 21% regard it as a defensible opinion, and another 32% think that it is partly both: prejudice and a defensible opinion.

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Appendix 1: The ambivalence patterns

Class		Frame	For Israelis		For Palestinians	
No.	Description		Security	Threat	Security	Threat
4	Naive pacifists: "War is threatening, peace offers security" (32.9%)	War	no	yes	no	yes
		Peace	yes	no	yes	no
1		War	no	yes	no	yes
		Peace	yes	no	yes	no
2	Sceptical pacifists who are uncertain whether peace could offer Israel security (2: 23.6%) and/or do not regard the status quo as threatening for the Palestinians and are uncertain whether a Palestinian state could'nt be brought about by force (5: 4.2%)	War	no	yes	no	yes
		Peace	yes	???	yes	no
5		War	no	yes	no	no
		Peace	yes	no	yes	???
3	Sensible for the ambivalence of peace for both sides, though uncertain whether the status quo can offer Israel security (18.0%)	War	???	yes	no	yes
		Peace	yes	yes	yes	yes
7	Sensible for Israel's security dilemma (7: 11.6%) and/or assuming that the status quo is the lesser evil for Israel (6: 9.5%)	War	???	yes	no	yes
		Peace	yes	yes	yes	no
6		War	yes	yes	no	yes
		Peace	no	yes	???	no

yes = $M > 3$; no = $M < 3$; ??? = n.s.; $p = 0,05$