

Al Jazeera's Media Framing of the Humanitarian Crisis in Rafah 2024

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Abstract

Framing is a method used by the media to present ideas or perspectives on an issue in a way that can influence how people think. Using Robert Entman's framing theory, this study analyzes how Al Jazeera framed its news coverage of the violence in Rafah in 2024, which led to a humanitarian crisis. This study employs qualitative content analysis as its research method and adopts Entman's framing model, which comprises four analytical elements: defined problems, diagnosed causes, moral judgment, and treatment/recommendation. The findings reveal that the main issues highlighted were the humanitarian situation in Rafah and Israel's planned ground invasion. The causes of these problems were identified as Israeli military attacks, access restrictions imposed by Israel, and stalled ceasefire negotiations. In the moral judgment aspect, Al Jazeera emphasized support for Palestine and a negative judgment on Israel. Furthermore, in the treatment/recommendation dimension, Al Jazeera urged the international community to continue warning Israel against attacking Rafah and to pursue ceasefire negotiations. Lastly, the UN Security Council's emergency

meeting was also featured by Al Jazeera as a key recommendation in its reporting.

Keywords: Framing, Al Jazeera, Palestine, Israel, Rafah

INTRODUCTION

On October 7, 2023, Hamas, an armed group from Palestine, launched an attack on Israel by firing around 5,000 rockets. In this assault, Hamas carried out attacks by land, sea, and air (Al Jazeera, 2023a). The offensive by Hamas naturally provoked Israel, which retaliated against Hamas with counterattacks through bombings in Palestinian territory (Al Jazeera, 2023b). What began as Israeli strikes focused only on Gaza later expanded into Rafah, which was initially referred to as a “safe zone” for Palestinians, but in reality, Israel continued bombing within the supposed safe zone. In February 2024, Israel planned to expand its ground offensive into Rafah, which began on February 7, 2024, resulting in many deaths and injuries (Al Jazeera, 2024a). After the February assault, the Israeli military again launched an attack on May 6, 2024. The offensive targeted relentless bombings of Palestinian residential areas; even as most residents fled to save themselves, Israel only intensified its attacks (Motamedi & Siddiqui, 2024).

In the Israel-Palestine conflict, Al Jazeera has been one of the media outlets reporting on the events. Al Jazeera is a mass media organization established in Doha, Qatar. Considered a media network with pro-Arab

leanings, Al Jazeera has taken a hostile stance toward the Israeli occupation. Thus, the focus of Al Jazeera's coverage tends to emphasize the suffering of Palestinians and Israel's continuous violence in its attacks. The reporting delivered by Al Jazeera on conditions in Rafah is expected to attract public attention to the crimes endured by Palestinians. Moreover, the extensive coverage by Al Jazeera plays a role in creating pressure on international actors and political stakeholders to urgently seek solutions to the problems in Rafah (Amaireh, 2023). Based on this, this study seeks to analyze Al Jazeera's framing of the humanitarian crisis in Rafah in 2024 using Robert Entman's framing theory.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Media framing is a theory that explains how the media define problems and can act as an agent that changes the way people view ongoing issues or conflicts. The media itself usually focuses on news and matters that can attract public attention. In some cases, the media may even become involved in the decision-making processes of certain parties regarding an issue. Framing is also regarded as a way to illustrate the communicative power of texts. Entman states that framing analysis requires the selection of the most salient textual elements. This selection is made in order to make the framing of the news clearer. According to Entman, media framing consists of four components: defined problems, diagnosed causes, moral judgment, and treatment/recommendation (Entman, 1993).

Table 1: Robert M. Entman's Framing Analysis Model

Defined Problems	An aspect that explains how an event is considered a problem and described clearly and specifically.
Diagnosed Causes	An aspect that identifies the factors triggering the emergence of problems in a conflict and explains the causes of their appearance.
Moral Judgement	An aspect that re-evaluates the events in order to provide values related to their moral dimension. This aspect aims to provide a moral evaluation.
Treatment/Recommendation	An aspect that functions to provide recommendations or solutions that certain parties or actors should take in dealing with the events, such as how to resolve the issues.

Source: Robert M. Entman (1993)

RESEARCH METHOD

In this study, the researcher used a data collection method through Qualitative Content Analysis, which is the process of collecting information that explains the characteristics of the content of a message conveyed by the media. The content analysis to be conducted aimed to describe the characteristics of the content of messages presented by Al Jazeera. In this study, the researcher collected data through articles published by Al Jazeera, particularly those related to important events that occurred during the Israel-Palestine conflict, especially at the time when the humanitarian crisis began to unfold in Rafah in 2024.

In this research, the researcher used 20% of the 100 news reports that were posted on Al Jazeera's website related to the humanitarian crisis in Rafah. The researcher focused on text analysis of the news displayed on Al Jazeera's website to obtain the data needed for the study. The analysis began with understanding the framing aspects emphasized in each article. The authors then interpreted these aspects and conducted coding by grouping related phrases into relevant themes. Subsequently, the identified themes were categorized and analyzed based on the four dimensions of Entman's framing theory.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

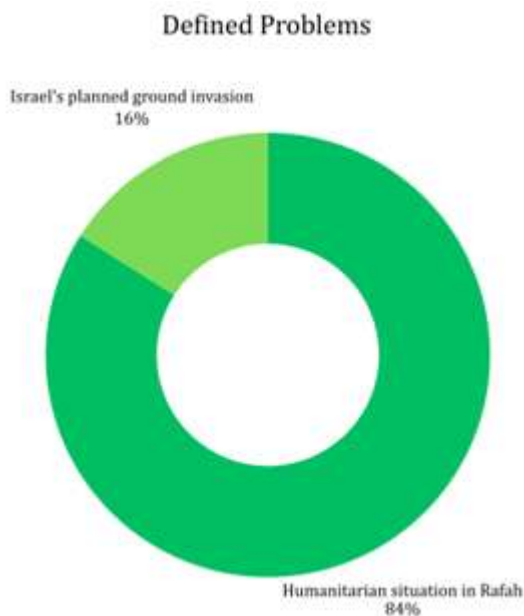
Israeli attacks that were initially concentrated in Gaza later expanded to Rafah, an area that had previously been described as a “safe zone” for Palestinian civilians. Although Israel had instructed Gaza residents to evacuate to the southern region, bombardments continued even as the evacuation process was underway. In February 2024, conditions in Rafah became increasingly overcrowded due to the surge of displaced people, while Israel also planned to extend its ground offensive into the area. Airstrikes that began on 7 February 2024 resulted in numerous deaths and injuries.

Al Jazeera emerged as an influential global media outlet in shaping the framing of these events. In Robert Entman's framing theory, framing is understood as the process by which media select and emphasize certain aspects of reality to define problems, identify causes, make moral judgments, and propose solutions or recommendations. Thus, the media function not only as conveyors of information but also as actors that actively shape how the public understands an issue. This study analyzes four main aspects of framing; *defined problems*, *diagnosed causes*, *moral judgment*, and *treatment/recommendation* reflected in written news articles accessible through the Al Jazeera website.

1. Defined Problems

Entman defines “defined problems” as a fundamental aspect used to determine whether an event is perceived as a problem, which is then described clearly and specifically (Entman, 1993). Based on an analysis of several news reports broadcast by Al Jazeera, what is considered a “problem” for Al Jazeera refers to the situation in Rafah and Israel’s planned ground invasion. Among the reports analyzed, 84% are related to the crisis in Rafah, while 16% concern Israel’s ground invasion plan.

Figure 1. Defined Problems Diagram in Al Jazeera’s News Coverage



In reporting on the situation in Rafah, Al Jazeera focuses on the problems faced by refugees in the area. For example, in the news report published on April 11, 2024, titled “What’s happening in Gaza’s Rafah as Israel threatens to attack?”, Al Jazeera described how Palestinian refugees who survived Israeli attacks live in dire conditions, staying in tents that flood whenever it rains. Refugees in Rafah live in overcrowded shelters, causing diseases to spread rapidly. Medical workers in Rafah reported that an outbreak of hepatitis A has been spreading quickly through close contact. However, there is little hope of containing the outbreak, as isolating patients is nearly impossible. Another factor contributing to the spread of disease is the lack of hygienic toilets and sanitation facilities (Staff, 2024).

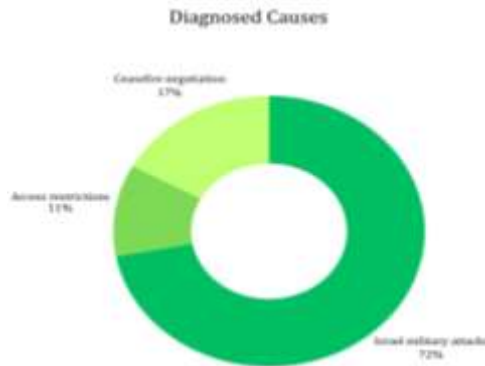
Furthermore, Israel’s planned ground invasion is also presented by Al Jazeera as a defined problem. For instance, in an article titled “Panic in hemmed-in Rafah as Israel PM orders troops to prepare ground entry” published on February 8, 2024, Al Jazeera highlighted the panic caused by the imminent ground invasion planned in Rafah. The outlet quoted United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, who warned that the invasion would “exponentially increase what is already a humanitarian nightmare with untold regional consequences,” emphasizing that if the ground invasion takes place, it would drastically worsen an already catastrophic humanitarian situation (Al Jazeera, 2024d).

In its coverage of the violence in Rafah, the defined problems emphasized by Al Jazeera are the conditions in Rafah and Israel's planned ground invasion. Across the reports analyzed, Al Jazeera underscored how refugees live in overcrowded tents, suffer from shortages of basic necessities, face the rapid spread of disease, and endure hospital closures. In addition, Al Jazeera highlighted that the plan for a ground invasion has caused widespread panic among refugees in Rafah.

2. Diagnosed Causes

In media framing, Entman explains that "diagnosed causes" refer to an aspect that analyzes the factors triggering the emergence of a problem within a conflict and identifies the reasons why the problem occurs (Entman, 1993). In the diagnosed causes category, Al Jazeera's news coverage on Rafah shows that 72% of the reports concern Israeli military attacks, 11% discuss restrictions on access imposed by Israel, and the remaining 17% focus on ceasefire negotiations.

Figure 2. Diagnosed Cause Diagram in Al Jazeera's News Coverage



In reporting on the violence in Rafah in 2024, Al Jazeera identifies Israel's military attacks as the main cause of the crisis, covering assaults that took place from February 2024 and peaked in May 2024. For example, in its article titled "Heinous massacre: Israel's attack on Rafah tent camp widely condemned", published on May 27, 2024, Al Jazeera highlighted that Israel had once again launched airstrikes on refugee tents in Rafah. The Palestinian Presidency accused Israel of deliberately targeting civilians during the attack. Israel's top military prosecutor described the strike as "very grave" and stated that an investigation would be conducted. Furthermore, Al Jazeera reported, citing the Wafa News Agency and the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS), that "the dead included women and children, with many burned alive inside their tents." Through this coverage, Al Jazeera's framing focuses on the

suffering of civilians, especially women and children, caused by Israel's attacks in Rafah (Al Jazeera, 2024b).

In addition, Israel's restriction of access was another issue highlighted by Al Jazeera, particularly its control over the Rafah border crossing and the limitations imposed on the transportation of food, fuel, water, and humanitarian aid. For instance, in an article titled "Israel seizes key Gaza border crossing as it launches assault on Rafah" published on May 7, 2024, Al Jazeera reported that Israeli forces had seized control of the Rafah crossing in Gaza, halting a crucial route for humanitarian assistance. With the closure of key routes and the deployment of tanks in central Rafah, the Israeli military took full operational control of the Gaza side. This act was portrayed as a demonstration of Israel's determination to continue its offensive in Rafah. Such control over the border crossings, according to Al Jazeera, created an extremely dangerous situation for Palestinians, as they were unable to flee to safety. Moreover, the closure of the borders had also stopped the flow of humanitarian aid, further worsening the crisis (Al Jazeera, 2024g).

Another factor that Al Jazeera identified as contributing to the crisis in Rafah was the stalled ceasefire negotiations. The network reported that ongoing negotiations between Hamas and Israel, mediated by several countries, faced setbacks due to fundamental disagreements over the release of hostages and the terms for ending

the war, leading to the continuation of the planned ground invasion. For example, in its article published on May 14, 2024, titled “Gaza ceasefire deadlocked as Israel’s Rafah attacks set talks ‘backward’”, Al Jazeera highlighted that the ceasefire talks had regressed. In the mediation efforts that had been ongoing for months, Qatar, Egypt, and the United States acted as intermediaries. Al Jazeera quoted the Prime Minister of Qatar, who stated that there was no clarity from Israel regarding how to end the war. The ceasefire negotiations had failed because of deep-rooted differences between Israel and Hamas on the release of hostages and the conditions for ending the conflict. The absence of common ground meant that no progress could be achieved, while Israel’s persistent determination to attack Rafah further derailed the ceasefire efforts and made it increasingly difficult to reach an agreement (Al Jazeera, 2024a).

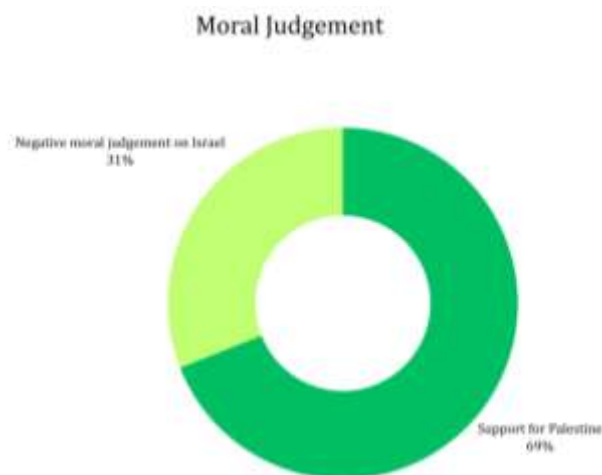
From the explanation above, it can be seen that three main causes of the Rafah crisis are highlighted in Al Jazeera’s reporting: Israel’s military attacks, Israel’s restrictions on access, and the stalled ceasefire negotiations. Al Jazeera’s coverage of Israel’s military actions emphasizes the devastation and civilian suffering resulting from the attacks, which left many homeless and without safe refuge. In reporting on access restrictions, Al Jazeera highlights the severe hardship faced by refugees in obtaining daily necessities. Finally, Al Jazeera’s framing of the failed ceasefire negotiations underscores how the absence of an agreement forced refugees to

endure continuous attacks and the looming threat of a ground invasion.

3. Moral Judgement

According to Entman, “moral judgment” is an aspect that reevaluates an event in order to provide an assessment related to moral considerations (Entman, 1993). In this category, Al Jazeera’s coverage focuses on expressing support for Palestine (31%) and conveying negative moral evaluations toward Israel (69%).

Figure 3. Moral Judgement Diagram in Al Jazeera’s News Coverage



In reporting on the violence in Rafah in 2024, the moral judgment emphasized by Al Jazeera centers on support for Palestine, highlighting responses and expressions of solidarity from

the United Nations, other countries, and international actors regarding Israel's attacks on Rafah. For example, in the article published on February 12, 2024, titled "The aftermath of Israeli strikes on Rafah," Al Jazeera reported on the alarming humanitarian situation in Rafah caused by Israel's assaults, which prompted aid organizations and foreign governments, including the United States, to express concern for Palestinians. They warned that if Israel continued its expanded operations, it could lead to an even greater humanitarian catastrophe (Al Jazeera, 2024e).

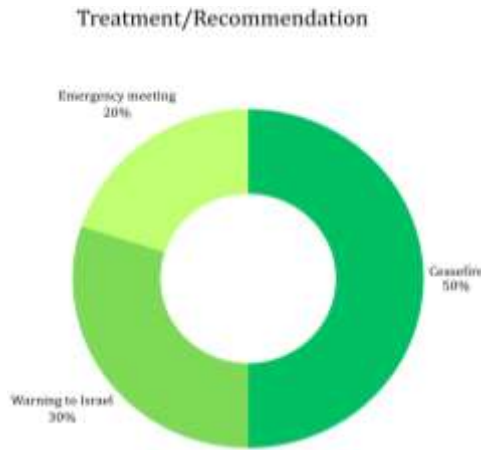
In addition to coverage showing support for Palestine, Al Jazeera also highlighted negative moral evaluations toward Israel, focusing on the numerous warnings issued by international actors and other countries urging Israel to halt its attacks on Rafah due to the rising number of civilian casualties. For instance, in an article titled "At least 21 killed in Israeli attack on tent camp near Gaza's Rafah," published on May 28, 2024, Al Jazeera reported on the situation following yet another Israeli strike on Rafah. The spokesperson for the Palestinian presidency, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, described the attack as a "massacre" and called for the implementation of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruling ordering Israel to stop its offensive in Rafah. Despite the UN's highest court having issued this order, Israel continued its attacks (Al Jazeera, 2024f).

It can thus be observed that the moral values reflected in Al Jazeera's framing highlight widespread international and state-level support for Palestine, conveyed through warnings and pressure directed at Israel. These actors view Israel's actions in Rafah as condemnable, expressing fear that continued attacks and the planned ground invasion would result in even greater civilian suffering.

4. Treatment/Recommendation

In this aspect, Entman explains in his theory that "treatment/recommendation" refers to the element that provides suggestions or solutions proposed by certain parties or actors in addressing the events that occur (Entman, 1993). In this category, Al Jazeera's coverage focuses on warnings directed at Israel (30%), calls for a ceasefire (50%), and reports on emergency meetings (20%).

Figure 4. Treatment/Recommendation in Al Jazeera's News Coverage



Al Jazeera highlights reports containing recommendations related to international pressure on Israel regarding its attacks and planned ground invasion of Rafah, warning that continued aggression could lead to a major catastrophe and mass killings in Gaza. For example, in the article titled “What’s happening in Gaza’s Rafah as Israel threatens to attack?” published on February 11, 2024, Al Jazeera reported that the United Kingdom and the United States had exerted pressure on Israel, but the Israeli Prime Minister insisted that the operation was intended to dismantle Hamas. The United States criticized Israel, stating that it must “put civilians first and foremost,” yet did not threaten to reduce its aid or political support for Israel (Staff, 2024).

Furthermore, ceasefire negotiations between Hamas and Israel, mediated by Qatar, Egypt, and the United States, were also a prominent topic in Al Jazeera's coverage. These talks emerged as a response to Israel's continuous attacks on Rafah. For instance, in an article titled "We're waiting to be martyred: Palestinians await Israeli attack on Rafah" published on February 8, 2024, Al Jazeera reported that Qatar, Egypt, and the United States had offered themselves as mediators in the ceasefire talks, aiming to broker an agreement involving the exchange of hostages between Israel and Palestine and increased humanitarian aid to besieged areas in Gaza. However, although discussions were ongoing, no immediate agreement appeared likely (Nashed & Humaid, 2024).

In addition to coverage of ceasefire negotiations, Al Jazeera also reported on emergency meetings convened by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in response to Israel's ongoing assaults on Rafah. For example, in the article published on May 29, 2024, titled "Israel shrugs off UNSC bid to 'stop the killing' to continue Rafah assault," Al Jazeera reported that Israel ignored a draft UN resolution calling for an end to the killings in Rafah and continued its offensive. The emergency meeting was held in response to Israel's relentless attacks, which sparked global outrage and prompted Algeria, a Council member for the 2024–2025 term, to call for the session. The purpose of the meeting was to present a

draft resolution urging Israel to end its assaults on Rafah and to establish an immediate ceasefire (Al Jazeera, 2024c).

From Al Jazeera's coverage, it can be seen that the framing within the Treatment/Recommendation aspect emphasizes international and state-level appeals for Israel to cease its attacks on Rafah, alongside efforts to advance ceasefire negotiations between Israel and Hamas toward an agreement that would not harm either party. However, the talks have failed to reach an outcome due to fundamental disagreements over how the war should end and the issue of hostage exchanges. In addition, the UN Security Council's emergency meeting, held in response to Israel's ongoing offensive, was also portrayed by Al Jazeera as a key recommendation or solution proposed by the international community.

CONCLUSION

This study aims not only to provide an overview of Al Jazeera's coverage of the crisis in Rafah, but also to contribute to broader discussions on the role of the media in international relations. To achieve this, it draws on Robert Entman's media framing theory, which explains how the media shape news by highlighting certain aspects of an event, thereby influencing how audiences perceive, interpret, and evaluate an issue or conflict. Guided by this framework, the study examines Al Jazeera's reporting on the violence in Rafah in 2024 through four key aspects: defined problems, diagnosed causes, moral judgment, and treatment/recommendation.

In the defined problems aspect, Al Jazeera concentrated its reporting on the conditions of the humanitarian crisis in Rafah and Israel's planned ground invasion. Al Jazeera identified three primary causes of the humanitarian crisis in Rafah in 2024: Israeli military attacks, access restrictions imposed by Israel, and ceasefire negotiations. Furthermore, Al Jazeera also offered moral evaluation, referred to as moral judgment, by emphasizing the responses of many countries and international actors who supported Palestine by issuing warnings and exerting pressure on Israel. In the final aspect, treatment/recommendation, Al Jazeera highlighted the calls made by international actors and states urging Israel to stop its assaults on Rafah and to continue the ongoing ceasefire negotiations between Israel and Hamas. In addition, Al Jazeera also drew attention to the emergency session held by the United Nations Security Council as a response to Israel's continuous attacks on Rafah

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