

Article

A Qualitative Study of the Experiences of Palestinian Journalists in the United States During the Ongoing Gaza Genocide

Yasmeen Abed 

Krieger School of Arts and Sciences, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD 21218, USA;
yasmeenresearch@protonmail.com

Abstract

This exploratory project uses muted group theory and qualitative methods to examine the personal and professional experiences of Palestinian journalists in the United States during the ongoing genocide in Gaza. The survey responses and interviews uncovered changes to Palestinians' professional relationships, the impact of the current political climate in the U.S. on newsrooms, and how these factors have affected reporting experiences. The findings underscore the dangers of attacks on Palestinian voices in journalism and media, and the heightened importance of amplifying Palestinian stories and sources in media coverage.

Keywords: journalism; Palestine; Gaza; media bias; Israel-Palestine; mental health; censorship

1. Introduction

International journalists have been barred from entering the Gaza Strip to independently report the war and unfolding genocide since October 2023, placing the responsibility for coverage on Gazan journalists ([United Nations, 2024](#)). In tandem, Gazan journalists are experiencing the deadliest conflict for journalists ever reported by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ) ([Committee to Protect Journalists, 2025a](#)). As of April 2025, 175 journalists have been killed in Gaza and 35 imprisoned by Israel ([Committee to Protect Journalists, 2025b](#)).

American attitudes in the U.S. towards Israel, Palestine, and the U.S.'s involvement have significantly shifted since October 2023 ([Jones, 2024](#); [Brenan, 2025](#)). Within newsrooms, journalists have criticized coverage of Israel's war on Gaza and targeting of Palestinian reporters. A letter signed by more than 750 journalists across news agencies expressed frustration in media coverage of the conflict, indicating a disconnect between reporters and news leadership ([Wagner & Sommer, 2023](#)).

While American attitudes evolved, the U.S. presidential administrations have not significantly changed foreign policy decisions related to Israel-Palestine ([Khoury, 2025](#)).

Under the Biden administration, the U.S. delivered at least \$17.9 billion in military aid to Israel between October 2023 and September 2024 and welcomed Israel's former minister of defense, Yoav Gallant, to the White House despite his arrest warrant by the International Criminal Court for "crimes against humanity and war crimes" committed in Gaza ([Bilmes et al., 2024](#); [ICC, 2024](#), para. 5; [Gallant, 2024](#)).

Under the Trump administration, the White House announced plans to annex the Gaza Strip and displace Palestinians to build "the Riviera of the Middle East," criminalized criticism of Israel by expanding the definition of anti-semitism, and signed an executive order directing federal resources "to combat the explosion of anti-Semitism on



Academic Editors: Chelsea Reynolds
and Jesús Ayala Rico

Received: 11 December 2025

Revised: 30 January 2026

Accepted: 3 February 2026

Published: 12 February 2026

Copyright: © 2026 by the author.

Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland.

This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons Attribution \(CC BY\) license](#).

our campuses and in our streets since 7 October 2023” (Stokols, 2025; Mayer-Rich, 2025; The White House, 2025).

Palestine Legal reported a 55% increase in requests for legal support between 2023 and 2024, following a campaign by the Trump administration targeting pro-Palestinian students through deportations, federal investigations, and defunding universities (Palestine Legal, 2025).

This qualitatively oriented exploratory project investigates the experiences of Palestinian journalists in the U.S. to understand connections and reactions to the ongoing genocide in Gaza, changes to their professional relationships, and personal attitudes under the current political climate. The researcher uses the word genocide to describe the experiences of Palestinians in Gaza beginning in October 2023, in accordance with United Nations report findings (Human Rights Council, 2024). This term was also used by participants, reflecting their lived experiences and framing.

Research Questions

RQ1: How are Palestinian journalists living in the United States directly or indirectly impacted by the media coverage of conflicts in the Palestinian territories? What factors impact their personal, professional and social lives?

“Palestinian territories” are defined as the geographic territories of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem (United Nations, n.d.). Responses are also welcomed from Palestinians whose ancestral background is tied to regions within Israel’s territory in 2025.

RQ2: How have Palestinian journalists living in the diaspora coped with the experiences and emotions witnessing media coverage of episodes of violence beginning in October 2023?

This research project offers communication and media leaders insight into the role of the media in shaping the lived experiences of Palestinian journalists, and how journalists cope with episodes of violence related to their ancestral background.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Muted Group Theory

This study uses muted group theory (MGT) as a lens to understand how Palestinian journalists, an underrepresented population in the U.S. and the journalism industry, negotiate with social dynamics and hierarchies when expressing or constraining their viewpoints amid the ongoing genocide in Gaza beginning in 2023 (Orbe, 1998; Gottfried et al., 2022).

Existing academic literature examines how muted, or traditionally marginalized, groups express counter-narratives within society that challenge hegemony. Among the twelve communication strategies identified in Orbe’s (1996) investigation, participants of this study described instances of avoidance, self-censorship, increased visibility, confrontational tactics, and utilization of liaisons to cope with negative interactions with dominant counterparts. These communication strategies suggest tactical examples of non-dominant groups navigating climates of opposing or offensive narratives.

Considering the pivotal role of journalists and the media in reporting on conflicts around the world, existing findings underscore the significance of understanding factors influencing reporters and audiences specifically related to conflicts in Israel and Palestine.

In the context of the 2021 Israel-Palestine conflict, Bhowmik and Fisher (2023) investigated coverage from CNN, which showed an emphasis on insight from U.S. and Israeli officials, disproportionate bias towards Israel, “absence of historical context when discussing the cause of the conflict,” rhetoric reinforcing destruction and violence using imagery, and emphasis “on one side ‘winning’” (p. 1026). Notably, researchers found three stories among thirteen “considered human rights issues and loss of life in Palestine”,

suggesting an overall lack of inclusion within media coverage (Bhowmik & Fisher, 2023, p. 1026). This reveals a pattern in framing ongoing conflicts to reflect U.S. “foreign policy and political interests” (Bhowmik & Fisher, 2023, p. 1032).

2.2. Journalists, Conflicts and Coping

Understanding how journalists cope with internal and external factors within their personal and professional lives is necessary when faced with a turbulent social and political environment. Smith et al. (2017) find increased risks of trauma exposure to journalists due to being exposed to stressful events. Factors contributing to increased stress include editorial processes, shifting newsrooms, and “conflicts with supervisors” (Smith et al., 2017, p. 224). Settling internal newsroom changes and editorial processes were named as remedies to mitigate the emotional burden of reporting traumatic events (Smith et al., 2017). These findings reiterate the significant toll of internal newsroom dynamics, including leadership styles and hierarchies, in shaping journalists’ experiences covering traumatic events.

Buchanan (2011) investigates the impact of witnessing traumatic events amongst journalists, finding risks to their physical, emotional, and psychological health. Respondents share coping mechanisms including avoidance, emotional regulation, and personal detachment from professional work.

2.3. Reporting on and Within Palestine and Israel

Examining historical conflicts in Israel and Palestine, Attar and King (2023) analyze Western English-language media coverage to understand the ideological framing of the Intifada of Knives and how Palestinians were represented in news versus Israelis. Findings indicate a lack of Palestinian viewpoint representation, defense of the Israeli viewpoint, and justification for the brutality against Palestinians (Attar & King, 2023). Researchers cite quotes from American politicians underscoring Israel’s right to defense and labeling Palestinians as violent. Attar and King (2023) find Western news coverage “sustains a colonial approach” by “favoring Israeli voices and censoring Palestinian voices” (p. 575).

This study explores how media coverage of conflicts in Palestine impacts the attitudes and professional lives of Palestinian journalists in the diaspora, specifically in the U.S. The findings aim to fill existing gaps by collecting the testimonies from Palestinian journalists separated geographically from their homeland.

3. Materials and Methods

This research employed a mixed-methods approach using a qualitative research survey and interviews. The triangulation of surveys with interviews prompted deeper discussion of participants’ experiences, while the survey provided faster, more accessible data collection. Given the sensitivity of topics discussed and limited access to target participants, virtual interviews allowed for richer discussion of personal and sensitive topics (Howlett, 2021).

The researcher employed the constant comparative method by continuously evolving the survey and interview recruitment processes, conducting comparisons in between and following each interview to maximize the results from each conversation (Boeije, 2002).

This study recruited Palestinian journalists based in the U.S. working for national, international, and trade publications with various coverage focuses. Their identities were kept confidential throughout data collection and referenced with alphanumeric codes here. Survey respondents are identified by number, while interview respondents were identified by letter.

3.1. Survey

The 20-question online survey posed closed- and open-ended questions to uncover respondents' professional backgrounds, personal ties and reflections, and interactions on the ongoing genocide against Palestinians. The survey did not collect identifiable information to protect respondents' identities and encourage honest participation. (See survey questions in Appendix A).

The study began with outreach to professional journalism networks. One journalism association shared the call for recruitment with their membership but asked not to be identified due to security concerns. This outreach elicited access to one gatekeeper who expressed interest in the study. The researcher sought to encourage Palestinian journalists to participate in the survey using the "snowball effect"; however, the response rate was initially very slow (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018).

Recruitment remained challenging throughout nearly four months of data collection, requiring the researcher to build rapport with willing participants (Liamputtong, 2007; Joseph et al., 2021). The sensitivity of the topic likely contributed to the limited response, leading the researcher to use convenience and purposive sampling (Westland et al., 2024).

Following the initial wave of survey responses, the researcher observed a drop in participation in questions regarding journalists' professional interactions, which was interpreted as hesitation to potentially share identifiable information or criticize employers during a socially and politically charged time. To remedy this, the researcher rearranged questions to begin with personal reflection questions. The reluctance to answer certain questions about their experiences limits the study's ability to draw firm conclusions about the implications for journalists' reporting but may itself indicate hesitation to share editorial constraints or professional interactions.

The online survey generated ten valid responses with various completeness levels. Nearly all respondents confirmed their roles as journalists and/or media workers, with years of reporting experience ranging between five and seven years, and identified themselves as Palestinians with familial ties to Gaza, Jerusalem, Nablus, Ramallah, Haifa, Akka, and Yaffa. This represents diversity in perspectives and experiences of displacement, occupation, and/or violence toward themselves or their families.

Results showed that responses dropped off after the question, "Have you been or are you currently involved in covering the news of the events in the Palestinian territories since October 2023?" Nine out of ten respondents answered "Yes" to this question but did not respond to the question about how the genocide in Gaza affected their reporting ability.

Survey and interview responses were coded for patterns in participants' relationship and connection to the events in Palestine, professional environments, methods of coping, and reflections on the future of their industry. The researcher used Simultaneous coding to combine both Process Code, which described the actions respondents took in their professional and personal lives, and to acknowledge respondents' managing behavior of these experiences (Saldana, 2009). Simultaneous coding allowed the researcher to identify similarities across participants and prompt new questions for discussion with other participants in the interviews.

3.2. Interviews

The survey method was triangulated with interviews to allow participants to share more open-ended, in-depth reflections and testimonials of their experiences in newsrooms and beyond (McCracken, 1988). (See question guide in Appendix B).

Given the sensitivities regarding the research topic, this study implemented recommended practices, including appropriate self-disclosure, sensitive questioning, and thoughtful timing (Elmir et al., 2011; Silverio et al., 2022). The timing of interview re-

cruitment overlapped with the U.S. government's crackdown on noncitizen students and academics for their pro-Palestinian speech and opinions (Mayer-Rich, 2025; Fadel et al., 2025). In response, the researcher reinforced the anonymity of the research opportunity and emphasized the rights of participants to confidentiality to minimize apprehension towards participation.

It was important to this study to disclose the researcher's heritage to participants, construct interview questions using sensitive language, and consider the timing of interviews in relation to the ongoing incursions in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem (Westland et al., 2024). However, the social and political environment and global suppression of Palestinian speech may have contributed to delayed and sometimes no response.

Early interviews showed promise, so the researcher pivoted toward prioritizing interview participation and made new calls for interviews online and through email outreach. Following each interview, the primary researcher asked for referrals to prospective respondents, to which participants shared their recommendations and offered to share the research flyer with their network. Eventually, there were ten total survey responses and four interviews conducted.

The process of conducting interviews virtually with four respondents led to richer insights and an opportunity to hear from Palestinian journalists with diverse personal and professional backgrounds. Participants' backgrounds varied, including differences in coverage focuses and publication type. Interviews uncovered a range of experiences with the ongoing genocide in Gaza, involvement in covering the news, and methods of coping with the emotional, physical and professional toll of witnessing an unfolding genocide in real-time.

4. Results

4.1. Inside the Newsroom

Covering news stories about the Palestinian territories since 2023 took a toll on participants that required occupational balance and emotional regulation. Respondents 2, 3, and 4 were all involved in covering the news of Palestine professionally. Respondent 2 reported that the impact of witnessing the ongoing Gaza genocide required emotional regulation to maintain their ability to report the news in Palestine. *"First: Traumatic, Second: I had to pretend that I had no emotions in order to keep a balanced point of view and keep my job,"* they said.

By regulating their emotions and choosing to self-censor by being selective of which disagreements were worth voicing, Respondent 2 grew their role and impact by later hosting discussions with Palestinian and Lebanese speakers to introduce diverse voices to newsrooms (Orbe, 1996).

When asked about their career journey, Participant D described their preference to gravitate towards progressive news outlets over mainstream U.S. news outlets that are less sympathetic to Palestinians, saying, "they don't see me as a human being." This response shows the effects of the dehumanization and exclusion of Palestinian voices in mainstream U.S. media, ultimately contributing to an unbalanced reporting environment and limiting the fairness in coverage of issues related to Palestine and Palestinians.

Participants offered varied experiences in their relationships with their employers at the time of data collection. While Respondents 2 and 3 reported a change in the relationship with their employer, their responses varied from favorable to neither unfavorable nor favorable, meaning their relationships did not necessarily sour, but they dipped to more neutral. While Respondent 1 reported a more neutral relationship at the start, this respondent was also unsure if the relationship had changed since October 2023. Respondent 2 stated, "At first it was difficult to get a Palestinian viewpoint in, but as the situation in Gaza became more catastrophic, the more we could bring in more balance."

Among those willing to discuss this topic, respondents did not report any directly hostile interactions from colleagues since October 2023. Respondents 1 and 4 shared that they might or might not have experienced these types of interactions while Respondent 2 definitely did not.

Participant C said that in their experience, the genocide has led colleagues to investigate broader issues tied to Israel-Palestine, leading to increased awareness of the Nakba, Israel's control over the borders and electricity in Gaza, and Palestinians' restriction from returning to their ancestral homes. This participant shared, "You notice everybody's learning so much over the last year and a half, and they're all waking up to it. In the newsroom, there were some people that you could tell just can't deny it."

4.2. Inside the Newsroom: Under Attack

Participants A, C and D all identified the involvement of the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis (CAMERA) in leading systematic attacks on coverage that is deemed too sympathetic to Palestinians. CAMERA is a global non-profit, pro-Israel organization focused on media monitoring and research related to Israel and the Middle East ([Committee for accuracy in Middle East reporting and analysis, n.d.](#)). Its oversight of Palestinian journalists is done by continuously and closely scrutinizing mainstream media and targeting individual journalists reporting on Middle Eastern affairs by reporting directly to senior leadership and donors, according to Participant A.

In addition to coping with the emotional toll of covering the genocide and navigating their emotions to present a balanced point of view in reporting, Respondent 2 called out the added stress of undergoing "systematic attacks" on the Palestinian narrative.

They said there was an added responsibility on all those covering issues related to Palestine to navigate the systematic attacks on the integrity of their reporting and answering issues raised directly to senior leadership.

Participant A described incidents in which Palestinian and Lebanese sources' credibility was attacked using loose and false claims by CAMERA. Due to the organized and systematic nature of the attacks, access to senior leaders and donors, and loose definitions of "anti-Semitism," CAMERA succeeded in swaying editorial decisions and coverage in their favor.

Participant C also described being targeted by CAMERA for their news reporting. Participant D further reinforced the systematic power of pro-Israel organizations that target Palestinian and MENA journalists in an effort to silence their coverage, saying, "It's just that there is no support that exists for journalists in this field covering Palestine. Just look at how we have CAMERA and Honest Reporting."

Security concerns were a consistent theme across survey responses and interviews, with participants underscoring the importance of maintaining a lowkey profile and identity. Nearly all respondents reiterated their requests to remain anonymous in the interview transcripts and the resulting study. The researcher assured participants of their rights to confidentiality and anonymized identifiable information.

4.3. Inside the Newsroom: (Not) Expressing Disagreement or Dissent

The interviews also explored internal news production experiences among participants. One question asked whether participants felt comfortable speaking out in their newsrooms if they disagreed with coverage. Generally, Participant A and Participant C discussed feeling hesitant to speak vocally in newsrooms about their Palestinian identity and/or emotions due to worry about being taken off their assignments involved in covering Palestine-related news stories. Their credibility is treated as more fragile than other journalists'.

Most Palestinian journalists end up in positions where they don't have that power, where they don't have that opportunity, where they and their jobs are under constant threat. Just for being Palestinian, they are deemed unfit to cover the subject, and to have an objective point of view. (Participant A)

However, given their involvement in covering Palestine, Participant C answered the question regarding hesitation to pitch stories to editors, saying, "I take it upon myself to put myself in situations that make me nervous. I need to show you who I am in my work."

Despite feeling nervous at times to be vocal about their Palestinian identity, Participant C described their willingness to increase their visibility on stories related to Palestine due to their credibility on the topic, years of experience, and connection to their coverage beat (Orbe, 1996). Arguments with editors to voice their passion for a story topic or disagreement with editorial decisions demonstrate Participant C's confrontation of leadership and its processes.

Participant C said they were initially hesitant to participate in the interview due to concerns about their identity being outed and the potential to be barred from writing stories.

[Newsrooms] usually want people with personal experience to be writing about stuff. For example, you would want people who understand Ukraine or people who are from Ukraine to write about Ukraine-Russia. For Black Lives Matter, you'd want people that are Black who understand and that live through things to write. But when it comes to us, we just get kicked out essentially so there's always been that sort of hesitation. (Participant C)

Palestinian journalists are held to unique standards by Western newsrooms and foreign-interest groups, which creates a higher risk for reporters who are more vocal in newsrooms. As a result, these scrutinized groups must navigate and comply with existing social dynamics to make gradual change in the coverage of Palestine.

Based on the experiences of their peers, Participant B shared that Middle Eastern journalists need to understand the levels of power and structure to indirectly make change. They explained:

What you have to do is you have to be able to slip in, try to get things in when no one is looking. Do the best you can and maybe you can turn the knob a little bit in another direction just for a time to kind of give some people who are more critically-minded readers or viewers a different perspective, which might lead them on a path to something else. (Participant B)

In political coverage of Israel-Palestine, Participant C said there is inherently more access to Israeli officials due to existing institutions and organizations in the U.S. This advantage is attributed to Israeli sources being Western-educated and English-speaking, while geographically accessible to major U.S. cities. In addition to access, Participant C's experiences expand upon the understanding of U.S. media coverage focusing on ideological conflicts between the U.S. and foreign parties (Labbe & Park, 2024). This demonstrates the bias for sources aligned with American culture, language, and institutions, which shape news coverage.

Additionally, Participant C's response builds upon the findings of Bhowmik and Fisher (2023) by explaining newsrooms' favor for and access to insights from U.S. and Israeli officials for reporting.

They also described that in their experience, many reporters and editors will often speak to Israelis without the opportunity to speak to Palestinians. This insight shows the significance of access and explains the phenomena Attar and King (2023) describe, where Western news coverage of Israel-Palestine inherently favors "Israeli voices." Participant C shared:

You get to meet a lot of Israelis and they pretty much start becoming your sources. If you're not careful, it becomes a biased source where they're kind of maybe leaking information to you that they want to be leaked or something. Or when they give you a quote, it's clearly a discriminatory quote, but the Palestinians don't really have an infrastructure that's like that that could counter it."

4.4. *Inside the Newsrooms: Witnessing Change*

All participants agreed to some level that there was a shift occurring in public opinion, and sometimes media coverage was more sympathetic to Palestinians since October 2023. Participant A, who works at a news organization with a national reach, witnessed a change catalyzed by younger journalists' responses to coverage of Palestinians post-October 2023. Participant B connected their reflections on the media landscape to a broader shift in American public opinion over recent years.

While small changes have occurred over time, Participant B said that in response, universities and newsrooms have "amped up Pro-Israel narratives" to counter growing sympathy for the Palestinian struggle. Participant B connected this experience to the U.S. political landscape, with the government's involvement in providing aid and manufacturing weaponry for Israel.

The shift toward more representation and sympathy for the Palestinian perspective was attributed to increased access to news and events through social media. Participant C explained this phenomenon, saying, "You can't avoid the news. You can't avoid what's happening. I think because we live in such a state of being able to see what people in Gaza are posting, you can't say that they're lying."

Participants indicate change has occurred, sparked by younger and newer journalists. However, Participant B observed that despite pushback in reporting misrepresenting the Palestinian narrative, "top editors fall in line," and the overall theme remains focused on reinforcing the "barbarity of Palestinians." Participant B reinforces the dangers and notes that the mainstream U.S. media carries complicity in the genocide.

4.5. *Personal Toll: Reactions to the Death Toll of Palestinian Journalists*

Three out of four survey respondents reported the death toll of journalists in and from Palestine specifically affecting their attitudes towards their profession. (Respondent 3 did not address this question). All respondents explained that they felt like their life as a Palestinian journalist is cheap, that protecting Palestinian journalists at this critical time was important to them, and that they felt a responsibility to speak out against the targeting of journalists.

Respondent 4 reflected, "If journalists are not protected in Palestine, they're not protected anywhere. It's more critical to report and provide access to info to the masses now more than ever."

Further, Respondent C described this experience within newsrooms, saying, "You sit through these news meetings, and you realize that everybody you know kind of just thinks that Palestinians are like fodder."

These responses show the impact of the significant death toll of Palestinian journalists and media workers, specifically in Gaza, as a targeted group during the genocide. The implications of these results for Palestinian journalists in the U.S. feeling their security and value is undermined, given the lack of accountability for Israel's killing of Palestinian journalists in Gaza. This fear also translates into today's political environment and the current attack on pro-Palestinian speech in the U.S.

Moreover, with their role of publishing stories from Palestinians in Gaza, Participant D described their routine of constantly needing to check in with friends and colleagues in

Gaza to make sure they were still alive. Since October 2023, this participant said they have had friends and colleagues killed, which had a significant effect on their levels of anxiety and stress.

4.6. Personal Toll: Effects of Witnessing Genocide on News Consumption

Describing themselves as someone who regularly follows traditional U.S. and international media, including French and Arabic press, Participant B noted a shift to personally consuming more social media news via Instagram and X.

The beginning of the genocide in 2023 marked the moment in time when journalists' media consumption habits shifted, as Participant C described:

I've always been interested in Palestine news just because it's just so near and dear to me. But now, since October 7th, I've exclusively been watching, reading, listening to news about Gaza, about the West Bank, about Israel. Most of all my free time is just spent listening to Palestine.

Participant D further expands on how their media consumption habits have changed in the frequency of news consumption and mediums followed, describing:

It's almost like you can't look away like you have to be aware of everything, especially in the field of journalism because you want to be as accurate as possible. The frequency of consumption has increased in terms of channels. I never used to follow TV, but now I do.

Participant C also said they began consuming more international news in response to the U.S.' bias towards Israel. This participant shared, "I find that American media feels compromised when it comes to covering Israel and Palestine."

This reflection builds upon the findings of [Sun and Cheung \(2022\)](#), where European media outlets tend to practice more impartiality in comparison to U.S. media.

4.7. Method of Coping: Bearing Responsibilities

In terms of methods of coping at work, Participant A and Participant C expressed the same sentiment of choosing one's battles in the newsroom as it relates to coverage and Palestine.

I'm really proud of what I achieved. And I think it's about how to play that game, how to make these changes in a kind of subtle way. It's not an easy game, and not many people are able to do it. Emotions have to be really controlled, and you have to choose your battles wisely and what to fight for and what to not fight for. (Participant A)

With access through speaking Arabic or past journalistic experience, Participant A and Participant D expressed their sense of responsibility to cover the news in Palestine and to give a platform to sources in Gaza.

I think this work right now, with the genocide ongoing, is more important than ever. We're at a point where we can't come back from this. It's just so important to be able to document what is happening accurately and give voice to people whose voices would otherwise be sanitized or edited a certain way or censored or not even given because they just don't speak English. (Participant D)

While involved in covering Palestine in their day-to-day work, Participant C responded, "Yes, yes, a lot. I wish I could be doing more. Sometimes it doesn't feel like enough" in response to their role in covering the Palestinian narrative. This feeling of responsibility was shared across respondents as Participant D explained, "The Palestinian

issue is a global human rights issue. There are so many parallels all over the place. So, I've always tried to incorporate that in my reporting."

5. Discussion

The purpose of this project was to understand how Palestinian journalists in the U.S. are directly or indirectly impacted by the ongoing genocide in Gaza, how the current media landscape and coverage affect this experience, and the coping mechanisms employed while witnessing the genocide since October 2023.

The findings, based on the sample of ten survey responses and four interviews, expand upon existing literature studying the MGT phenomenon, specifically related to Palestinians within the media industry, conflict journalism for underrepresented communities, and the mental health toll of journalists witnessing tragedies related to their own groups.

5.1. Muted Group Theory and Communication Tactics

While experiences varied across participants based on their unique backgrounds and professional roles, their communication tactics showed consistency with those described by Orbe (1996) to navigate U.S. newsrooms since October 2023. In the context of this study, these include:

Self-censorship: One respondent's experience mirrored Orbe's (1996) description of "self-censoring" by suppressing their personal emotions and disagreement to maintain their position in the newsroom and to enact other forms of meaningful change for fairer coverage of the Palestinian perspective.

Utilization of Liaisons: As part of this response, this participant relied on younger, more vocal colleagues to challenge biased editorial decisions, recounting arguments and interactions during editorial meetings expressing frustration with unfair coverage. This allowed Participant A to feel heard but also apprehensive regarding the risks to their colleagues professionally.

Avoidance: One participant did not feel comfortable openly telling colleagues that they are Palestinian, due to the potential efforts to undermine their credibility in the newsroom. Another participant expressed disinterest in working for mainstream news publications less sympathetic to the Palestinian struggle.

Increased visibility: Participant C felt comfortable pitching stories related to Palestine given the relevance to their coverage beat. Furthermore, Participant A used their position to host discussions with Palestinian and Lebanese guest speakers and negotiated with editorial standards to offer balanced perspectives of Palestinians.

Confrontational tactics: When Participant C was told to remove Amnesty International as a source within their reporting due to the perceived harshness of the word "apartheid," this journalist tried to push back given the weakness in the editor's rationale. Participant C recounted "verbal arguments" over these types of interactions, showcasing their willingness to disagree with leadership when positioned to do so.

Future research can explore how organizational and political communication frameworks complement MGT in examining these dynamics.

5.2. Personal and Professional Impacts on Journalist Attitudes and Behaviors

Survey and interview results indicate the impact of the alarming death toll of the Palestinians in Gaza on the global Palestinian community. All survey respondents reported that the targeting of Palestinian journalists and media workers in Gaza negatively affected how their lives are perceived as Palestinians globally. Participants also reinforced the importance of protecting journalists and media workers providing access to direct accounts of Israel's actions in the genocide.

Palestinian journalists shared their personal and professional journeys navigating the politicization of their Palestinian identity. This manifests through hesitation to openly share their ethnic background with colleagues, wanting to protect their own security, avoiding “blackballing,” and feeling like they need to supplement their Palestinian identity with something “more palpable” to American audiences.

5.3. Coping Mechanisms at Work and at Home

There is no one-size-fits-all solution in how Palestinian journalists have coped with the ongoing genocide. However, a recurring theme amongst participants appeared of feeling responsible to document the genocide and amplify the stories of Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, Jerusalem and Israeli territories. Palestinian journalists in this study see themselves in a unique position to uncover sources and stories traditionally overlooked in media coverage in the United States.

For participants involved in covering Palestine, the always-on news cycle and direct access to Palestinians in Gaza undergoing the genocide have led to increased levels of stress and anxiety. In response, respondents feel a sense of duty to cover what is happening and amplify the Palestinian narrative to correct existing biases in newsroom coverage.

Respondents cited other forms of coping in their personal lives, including: spending time with community, attending therapy, spiritual or religious grounding, and by connecting the current horrors in Palestine to similar struggles against Western imperialism.

As part of this investigation into how Palestinian journalists are impacted by news coverage and their preferred channels for consuming news, findings show an increased use of social media, looking to alternative international publications for less bias, and using a more critical lens while consuming traditional forms of American media.

With Palestinians in Gaza using Instagram, X, and TikTok to document their experiences throughout the genocide, Palestinian journalists are part of the audience seeking unfiltered accounts of their community. Participants described an addictive relationship to social media and the continuous stream of news and information.

Beyond personally managing their emotional, mental and physical toll of witnessing the unfolding genocide in Palestine and, for some, reporting the news, journalists expressed the need for employers and the media industry more broadly to humanize the Palestinian community.

6. Applications

6.1. Dangers of Attacks on Pro-Palestinian Perspectives

Having undergone strategic attacks at unprecedented levels since October 2023 by groups such as CAMERA, the work of Palestinian journalists must be increasingly safeguarded in the unfolding political landscape. These attacks result in imbalanced reporting, which often negates the entire perspective of Palestinians, despite being subjects of stories. These attacks pose dangers to the integrity of publications and editorial processes, showing editors’ willingness to appease external groups over staff. Under the Trump administration’s crackdown on pro-Palestinian speech, inflamed claims by CAMERA pose significant threats to the safety of Palestinian and MENA journalists, sources, and organizations.

6.2. Heightened Importance of Amplifying Palestinian Stories

Palestinian journalists possess a critical role with access to important sources and share narratives traditionally underrepresented in coverage of their own communities in mainstream media. Through connecting Palestinian and Lebanese sources with mainstream American media, Participant A increased representation of the Palestinian and Lebanese perspectives in reporting. Beyond the newsroom, one participant underscored the impor-

tance of external campaigns, such as letter-writing groups, in showing support for fair and balanced reporting to counter efforts to suppress the Palestinian viewpoint.

6.3. Influence of U.S. Foreign Policy in Newsrooms

The experiences documented within this study showcase the role of U.S. foreign policy in influencing newsroom decisions and processes. One participant described that Israel's lobbying power, influence in the technology industry, and ties to academic institutions within the U.S. create an unfair advantage in gaining access to reporters and being chosen as sources for news stories. This experience suggests the growing role of government, academic, and private-sector influence on representation of certain viewpoints within media.

7. Limitations

The smaller sample size of participants—ten survey responses and four interviews—limits the generalizability of this project's findings. While this study is limited in transferability due to the small number of participants, the sensitive nature of the content and its applications are important to document and spotlight at a critical time for Palestinian journalists.

The timing of this study likely impacted participant recruitment and hesitation to potentially openly criticize the government or employers. The researcher created the study proposal under the Biden administration, which shaped the beginning of the genocide through foreign and domestic policies. Data collection for this study took place under the Trump administration, from January 2025 through April 2025. The researcher initiated interviews in March, with two interviews taking place right before the March 8 arrest of Mahmoud Khalil by ICE agents (Florido, 2025). The final two interviews took place after a series of kidnappings as part of the Trump administration's criminalization of pro-Palestinian political speech (Florido, 2025), which participants directly cited as elements contributing to fear and hesitation to be publicly vocal around the Palestinian struggle.

Security was also a big concern of participants, which likely impacted recruitment levels, making participation by respondents in itself an accomplishment under the social and political climate. In response to limited responses, the researcher asked interview participants about any hesitation to participate in this study during the interviews. One respondent reported that so long as their identity remained anonymous, they felt comfortable participating. However, two other respondents expressed hesitation by noting they do not typically engage with research projects and shared prior experience of being targeted on social media.

8. Conclusions

The increased politicization of the Palestinian identity in the U.S. underscores the importance of investigating the experiences of this group in various environments. Given the role of American media in influencing public opinion around the genocide, understanding the experience of Palestinians from within the newsroom is critical (Hawari, 2024). Additionally, the staggering death toll of Palestinian journalists in Gaza raises alarm regarding tactics used to suppress voicing the Palestinian narrative.

The findings of this exploratory study underscore the importance of documenting the experiences of Palestinians within the U.S. as the Trump administration continues its campaign against pro-Palestinian speech. This study further suggests that Palestinians are impacted by the staggering death toll in Gaza, with effects seen in media consumption habits, heightened senses of responsibility to report on the genocide, and politicization of the Palestinian identity. Notably, Palestinian journalists in this study have called upon

the media industry to “end its complicity in the genocide” and to make stronger efforts to humanize Palestinians in news stories through fair, balanced coverage.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: The study was conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki, and approved by the Institutional Review Board of Johns Hopkins University Homewood Institutional Review Board in January 2025 (Protocol Number: HIRB00020422).

Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The original contributions presented in this study are included in the article. Further inquiries can be directed to the corresponding author.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Appendix A

Table A1. Survey Questions.

Question	Response Options
Biographical	
Are you a journalist or media worker working in the United States?	Yes/No
How long have you been in the media profession?	0–1 years/2–4 years/ 5–7 years/7+ years
Do you identify with being of Palestinian heritage?	Yes/No
Where is your family from in Palestine?	[Open response]
Have you been or are you currently involved in covering the news of the events in the Palestinian territories since October 2023?	Yes/No
Professional	
How would you describe your relationship with your employer?	Unfavorable/Neither unfavorable nor favorable/Favorable
Has this relationship changed since October 2023?	Yes/No/Unsure
If yes, what has changed?	[Open response]
If yes, what factors do you attribute to this change?	[Open response]
Have you experienced any hostile interactions related to your profession since October 2023?	Definitely not/Probably not/Might or might not/Probably yes/Definitely yes
If yes, please share your experiences, if comfortable	[Open response]
Has the death toll specifically amongst media workers and journalists in and from Palestine affected your attitudes towards your profession?	Yes/No/Unsure
If yes, please elaborate on your experience.	[Open response]

Table A1. *Cont.*

Question	Response Options
Social	
Has the ongoing Gaza Genocide affected your ability to report on news related to the events in Palestine or other news stories?	Yes/No/Unsure
If yes, please elaborate on your experience.	[Open response]
How would you describe the impact of the conflict to your mental health or well-being overall?	Not impacted/Slightly impacted/Very impacted
Closing	
Is there anything else you would like to share that hasn't been included thus far?	[Open response]
Would you be interested in participating in a follow-up interview to discuss your experiences in more detail?	Yes, I would be interested./No, I would not be interested.
Please provide your email address below to be contacted by researchers to schedule an interview:	[Open response]
Your input is invaluable in helping uncover the experiences of Palestinian journalists based in the United States. We welcome you to share this research opportunity within your professional network to Palestinian journalists for the opportunity to share their experiences and ensure we are reaching the right audiences. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and experiences. Your input is invaluable in helping uncover the experiences of Palestinian journalists based in the United States. We welcome you to share this survey link within your professional network to Palestinian journalists for the opportunity to share their experiences and ensure we are reaching the right audiences. We understand the topics of this survey/interview can be heavy and emotionally challenging. If you experience any distress or discomfort at any time during the course of participating in this research, please consider the following resources for support: American Psychology Association Crisis Text Line Text HOME to 741-741 American Arab, Middle Eastern, and North African Psychological Association A Mental Health Guidebook for Those Concerned About Palestine	

Appendix B

Table A2. Interview Guide.

Question
Biographical
Where are you/is your family from in Palestine?
How would you describe your connections to the Gaza Strip, West Bank, Jerusalem or other territories before and after October 2023?
Is your family affected by the current genocide in Gaza? If so, how?
Since October 2023, have your media consumption habits changed? If so, how?
Can you describe your routine of consuming news, including your preferred channels?
As a journalist, what stands out to you in the media coverage of the current situation for Palestinians?

Table A2. Cont.

Question
Professional
Can you please tell me a little bit more about yourself and how you found your way to your current role?
How would you describe the importance of the work you do?
How have the experiences you have had since October 2023 influenced your professional life? As a journalist, how have you coped with the role of the media in covering and consuming the news of the ongoing war?
What specific methods of coping have you found supported you, and what methods have weighed you down?
Looking ahead, what do you hope to change or maintain in your professional career as it relates to violence impacting Palestinian communities?
Closing
Did you experience any hesitation to participate in this study upon review of the topics/questions?
Did you have a preference for participating in the survey or interview due to security concerns?
Are there any final thoughts that you would like to share before we come to a close?
Is there anyone you recommend I speak to?
Thank you for your time and sharing your personal experiences.

References

- Attar, D., & King, G. (2023). Media framing of the Intifada of the Knives. *Media, War & Conflict*, 16(4), 563–581. Available online: <https://doi-org.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/10.1177/17506352221149554>. [CrossRef]
- Bhowmik, S., & Fisher, J. (2023). Framing the Israel-Palestine conflict 2021: Investigation of CNN's coverage from a peace journalism perspective. *Media, Culture & Society*, 45(5), 1019–1035.
- Bilmes, L. J., Hartung, W. D., & Semler, S. (2024). *United States spending on Israel's military operations and related U.S. operations in the region, October 7, 2023–September 30, 2024*. Watson Institute for International & Public Affairs. Available online: https://costsofwar.watson.brown.edu/sites/default/files/papers/Costs-of-War_US-Support-Since-Oct7-FINALv2.pdf (accessed on 16 April 2025).
- Boeije, H. (2002). A purposeful approach to the constant comparative method in the analysis of qualitative interviews. *Quality & Quantity*, 36(4), 391–409. [CrossRef]
- Brenan, M. (2025). *Less than half in U.S. now sympathetic toward Israelis*. Gallup. Available online: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/657404/less-half-sympathetic-toward-israelis.aspx> (accessed on 16 April 2025).
- Buchanan, M. (2011). Coping with traumatic stress in journalism: A critical ethnographic study. *International Journal of Psychology*, 46(2), 127–135. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Committee for accuracy in Middle East reporting and analysis (CAMERA). (n.d.). Home [LinkedIn page]. Available online: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/camera/about/> (accessed on 16 April 2025).
- Committee to Protect Journalists. (2025a). *2024 is deadliest year for journalists in CPJ history; almost 70% killed by Israel*. Available online: <https://cpj.org/special-reports/2024-is-deadliest-year-for-journalists-in-cpj-history-almost-70-percent-killed-by-israel/> (accessed on 16 April 2025).
- Committee to Protect Journalists. (2025b). *Israel-Gaza war*. Available online: <https://cpj.org/full-coverage-israel-gaza-war/> (accessed on 2 February 2026).
- Elmir, R., Schmied, V., Jackson, D., & Wilkes, L. (2011). Interviewing people about potentially sensitive topics. *Nurse Researcher*, 19(1), 12–16. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Fadel, L., Haney, T., Rezvani, A., & Gallego-Mackie, K. (2025). *'Citizenship won't save you': Free speech advocates say student arrests should worry all*. NPR. Available online: <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/08/nx-s1-5349472/students-protest-trump-free-speech-arrests-deportation-gaza> (accessed on 16 April 2025).

- Florida, A. (2025). *Judge rules Mahmoud Khalil can be deported*. NPR. Available online: <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/11/nx-s1-5361208/mahmoud-khalil-deported-judge-rubio-antisemitism-immigration-court> (accessed on 16 April 2025).
- Gallant, Y. (2024). [@yoavgallant] I just finished an important meeting at the White House with Brett McGurk, the US President's envoy to the Middle East. [Post]. X. Available online: <https://x.com/yoavgallant/status/1866519293493453263> (accessed on 16 April 2025).
- Gottfried, J., Mitchell, A., Jurkowitz, M., & Liedke, J. (2022). *Journalists give industry mixed reviews on newsroom diversity, lowest marks in racial and ethnic diversity*. Pew Research Center. Available online: <https://www.pewresearch.org/journalism/2022/06/14/journalists-give-industry-mixed-reviews-on-newsroom-diversity-lowest-marks-in-racial-and-ethnic-diversity/> (accessed on 16 April 2025).
- Hawari, Y. (2024). *The Gaza genocide in western media: Culprits of complicity*. Al-Shabaka. Available online: <https://al-shabaka.org/commentaries/the-gaza-genocide-in-western-media-culprits-of-complicity/> (accessed on 16 April 2025).
- Howlett, M. (2021). Looking at the 'field' through a Zoom lens; Methodological reflections on conducting online research during a global pandemic. *Qualitative Research*, 22(3), 1–16. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Human Rights Council. (2024). *Anatomy of a genocide*. Available online: <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session55/advance-versions/a-hrc-55-73-auv.pdf> (accessed on 16 April 2025).
- ICC. (2024). *Situation in the State of Palestine: ICC pre-trial chamber I rejects the state of Israel's challenges to jurisdiction and issues warrants of arrest for Benjamin Netanyahu and Yoav Gallant*. International Criminal Court. Available online: <https://www.icc-cpi.int/news/situation-state-palestine-icc-pre-trial-chamber-i-rejects-state-israels-challenges> (accessed on 16 April 2025).
- Jones, J. M. (2024). *Majority in U.S. now disapprove of Israeli action in Gaza*. Gallup. Available online: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/642695/majority-disapprove-israeli-action-gaza.aspx> (accessed on 16 April 2025).
- Joseph, F. I., Earland, J., & Ahmed, M. A. (2021). Experience of conducting sensitive qualitative research as a cultural outsider: Formulation of a guide for reflexivity. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 20(1), 1–20. [CrossRef]
- Khouri, R. G. (2025). *The United States is a frontline in the Palestine vs. Israel conflict*. Arab Center Washington DC. Available online: <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-united-states-is-a-frontline-in-the-palestine-vs-israel-conflict/> (accessed on 2 February 2026).
- Kirchherr, J., & Charles, K. (2018). Enhancing the sample diversity of snowball samples: Recommendations from a research project on anti-dam movements in Southeast Asia. *PLoS ONE*, 13(8), e0201710. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Labbe, B., & Park, S. (2024). US news media's framing of the 'North Korean crisis' under the Trump administration: The new ideological foreign affairs paradigm. *Media, War & Conflict*, 17(1), 62–80. [CrossRef]
- Liamputtong, P. (2007). *Researching the vulnerable pratee Liamputtong*. Sage Publications Ltd.
- Mayer-Rich, E. (2025). *The crackdown on pro-Palestine activism intensifies in the United States*. Arab Center Washington DC. Available online: <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-crackdown-on-pro-palestine-activism-intensifies-in-the-united-states/> (accessed on 16 April 2025).
- McCracken, G. (1988). *The long interview* (pp. 12–29). Sage Publications.
- Orbe, M. P. (1996). Laying the foundation for co-cultural communication theory: An inductive approach to studying "non-dominant" communication strategies and the factors that influence them. *Communication Studies*, 47(3), 157–176. [CrossRef]
- Orbe, M. P. (1998). From the standpoint(s) of traditionally muted groups: Explicating a co-cultural communication theoretical model. *Communication Theory*, 8(1), 1–26. [CrossRef]
- Palestine Legal. (2025). *Trump's supercharged attacks on student activism for Palestine follows 50% increase in suppression last year*. Available online: <https://palestinelegal.org/news/2025/4/15/trumps-supercharged-attacks-on-student-activism-for-palestine-follows-50-increase-in-suppression-last-year> (accessed on 16 April 2025).
- Saldana, J. (2009). An introduction to codes and coding. In *Coding manual for qualitative researchers* (pp. 13–40). Sage.
- Silverio, S. A., Sheen, K. S., Bramante, A., Knighting, K., Koops, T. U., Montgomery, E., November, L., Soulsby, L. K., Stevenson, J. H., Watkins, M., Easter, A., & Sandall, J. (2022). Sensitive, challenging, and difficult topics: Experiences and practical considerations for qualitative researchers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21(1), 1–16. [CrossRef]
- Smith, R. J., Drevo, S., & Newman, E. (2017). Covering traumatic news stories: Factors associated with post-traumatic stress disorder among journalists. *Stress and Health*, 34(2), 218–226. [CrossRef] [PubMed]
- Stokols, E. (2025). *Trump says US will 'take over the Gaza Strip'*. POLITICO. Available online: <https://www.politico.com/news/2025/02/04/trump-says-us-will-take-over-the-gaza-strip-00202508> (accessed on 16 April 2025).
- Sun, X., & Cheung, Y. L. (2022). Portrayal of China in online news headlines: A framing and syntactic analysis. *Journalism Studies*, 23(16), 2015–2037. [CrossRef]
- The White House. (2025). *Additional measures to combat anti-Semitism*. Available online: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/additional-measures-to-combat-anti-semitism/> (accessed on 2 February 2026).
- United Nations. (n.d.). *Background: The question of Palestine*. Available online: <https://unctad.org/topic/palestinian-people/The-question-of-Palestine> (accessed on 16 April 2025).

- United Nations. (2024). *With so many stories remaining untold, ban of international journalists from Gaza suffocates truth, secretary-general tells media seminar on peace in Middle East*. Available online: <https://press.un.org/en/2024/sgsm22436.doc.htm> (accessed on 16 April 2025).
- Wagner, L., & Sommer, W. (2023). *Hundreds of journalists sign letter protesting coverage of Israel*. The Washington Post. Available online: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/style/media/2023/11/09/open-letter-journalists-israel-gaza/> (accessed on 16 April 2025).
- Westland, H., Vervoot, S., Kars, M., & Jaarsma, T. (2024). Interviewing people on sensitive topics: Challenges and strategies. *European Journal of Cardiovascular Nursing*, 24(3), 488–493. [CrossRef] [PubMed]

Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.