Routledge Research in Communication Studies

Populist Political Communication in Europe
Edited by Toril Aalberg, Frank Esser, Carsten Reinemann, Jesper Strömbäck, and Claes H. de Vreese

Setting Agendas in Cultural Markets
Organizations, Creators, Experiences
Philemon Bantimaroudis

Communication, Advocacy, and Work/Family Balance
Jenny Dixon

Integrative Framing Analysis
Framing Health through Words and Visuals
Viorela Dan

The Discourse of Special Populations
Critical Intercultural Communication Pedagogy and Practice
Edited by Ahmet Atay and Diana Trebing

Interrogating the Communicative Power of Whiteness
Edited by Dawn Marie D. McIntosh, Dreama G. Moon, and Thomas K. Nakayama

Media in War and Armed Conflict
The Dynamics of Conflict News Production and Dissemination
Edited by Romy Fröhlich

For more information about this series, please visit: https://www.routledge.com

Media in War and Armed Conflict

The Dynamics of Conflict News Production and Dissemination

Edited by
Romy Fröhlich

2018

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
NEW YORK AND LONDON

agenda driving the perception of the data and find the data works for you

8 Political Leaders, Media and Violent Conflict in the Digital Age

Gadi Wolfsfeld and Linor Tsifroni

This chapter is devoted to the topic of how political leaders mired in violent conflict deal with the media in the modern age of communication.[1] It is clear to even the most casual of observers that the dawn of the 'digital age' has led to major changes in the role the media play in such conflicts. The newer media provide political leaders, both in and out of power, with powerful new tools for waging war over national and international public opinion. A number of previous studies have dealt with the role of the newer media in the politics. This is one of the first, however, to look at the ways in which the new technology has provided both opportunities and threats for political leaders involved in conflict. It is also one of the only studies to look at the issue from a cross-cultural perspective.

This study is based on in-depth interviews conducted with government officials and members of the opposition from four entities involved in conflict: Israel, Palestine, Kosovo and Macedonia. The goal was to better understand how these leaders have adapted to the new realities brought about by the introduction of so many new forms of communication. It should be considered an exploratory study in that we intend to provide an initial list of the most important changes that emerged from these interviews.

Our argument is structured as follows. First, we will present some of the previous scientific literature on the topic, and then present some of the major theoretical arguments, followed by a brief description of the methodology employed for collecting the evidence and brief overviews of the conflicts that studied. Next, we will briefly summarize each of the conflicts. This is followed by the findings and discussion section, in which we use selected quotes from various interviewed leaders to demonstrate what we have learned. In the conclusion, we will summarize our findings and suggest future avenues for research.

Scientific Background

The role of the traditional media in conflict has received considerable attention in the scientific literature. A partial list of topics includes the

role of the media in uprisings and revolutions (Aday et al., 2010; Cohen & Wolfsfeld, 1994; Popkin, 2015; Wolfsfeld, 1997; Wolfsfeld, Frosh, & Awabdy, 2008;), terrorism (Hess & Kalb, 2003; Liebes & Kampf, 2009; Norris, Kern, & Just, 2003; Yarchi, Wolfsfeld, Sheafer, & Shenhav, 2013) and wars (Aday, Livingston, & Herbert, 2005; Baum & Groeling, 2010; Bennett, Lawrence, & Livingston, 2007; Hoskins & O'Loughlin, 2010; Wolfsfeld 1997, 2004).[2] Other studies have investigated the role of the media in conflict resolution, especially the role of the media in peace processes (Hackett, 2006; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005; Saleem & Hanan, 2014; Sheafer & Dvir-Gvirsman, 2010; Spencer, 2005; Wolfsfeld, 2004; Wolfsfeld, Alimi, & Kailani, 2007).

Although research on the role of the newer media and conflict is in its early stages, it is clear that interest in the field is growing.[3] Perhaps unsurprisingly, much of this research deals with how the new communication environment provides important opportunities to weaker challengers to mobilize supporters (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Bimber, 2014; Cable, 2017; Gohdes, 2015; Morozov, 2011; Youmans & York, 2012) and get their messages out to a variety of publics. There is also quite a bit of scholarly interest in the ways that terrorist organizations use the Internet and social media, both for recruitment and for sharing information (Klausen, 2015; Weimann 2015; Yarchi et al., 2013).

There has been less work put into adopting the perspective of political leaders, especially those who are in power or more established members of the opposition who are trying to replace them. According to Zeitzoff (2017), over 75% of world leaders have active Facebook and Twitter accounts. The newer media have become essential tools for leaders to communicate with both their own people and the world. This is especially true for those involved in violent conflicts, where the ability to mobilize local and international support can have a major impact on their levels of success (Wolfsfeld, 1997). As with any change in the communication environment, the advent of the digital age has brought both opportunities and threats to these leaders.

Given the goals of this chapter essay, we will focus specifically on the literature regarding leaders' use of the newer media in violent conflicts. It is noteworthy that the role of the newer media in one of the conflicts we studied *has* received a certain amount of scholarly attention. The use of the newer media in the Israel–Palestine conflict became especially salient during the last two wars in Gaza (Kwon, Oh, Agrawal, & Rao, 2012; Rapaport, 2010; Ward, 2009; Zeitzoff, 2011, 2017). In addition, some studies have looked more at the 'image war' as Israelis and Palestinians compete as each promotes their cause both locally and to the international community (Wolfsfeld, 2018; Yarchi, et al., 2013).

In the present study, we intend to expand the literature in three major ways. The first is to examine this issue specifically from the perspective of political leaders involved in violent conflict. As noted, this is an

important and somewhat neglected perspective because so much of the literature on the newer media has dealt with either social movements or election campaigns. Secondly, we shall propose a more detailed list of the advantages and disadvantages for these leaders that can be linked to the modern media ecosystem. This should make a theoretical contribution to the literature in the field. Finally, we will deal with two new conflict areas that have been mostly ignored: Macedonia and Kosovo. The more conflicts that are studied, the more likely we will be in a position to understand cross-cultural commonalities and differences with regard to this issue. In this particular essay, the emphasis will be what these different leaders have in common. This will provide an opening for generalizing more than in previous studies, which have often focused on one country or conflict.

Theoretical Claims

It is important to begin this discussion by making two preliminary points. First, despite our focus on the newer media, the underlying assumption is that one cannot make a clear distinction between the various types of media that now exist. Chadwick (2013) describes these changes as a "hybrid media system". Chadwick's major point is that it is critical to see the new communication environment as one in which older and newer media not only feed off and influence each other, but also have an ongoing impact on the overall flow of information among citizens. As Chadwick notes: "Internet-driven norms of networking, flexibility, spontaneity, and ad-hoc organizing have started to diffuse into our politics and media, and these norms are generating new expectations about what counts as effective and worthwhile political action" (p. 210). Van Dijck and Poell (2013) make a similar point by noting: "Social media logic is increasingly becoming entangled with mass media logic" (p. 3). Modern political leaders have little choice but to adapt to this new hybrid media environment.

The second major point is that although this specific study focused on leaders involved in violent conflicts, there is every reason to believe that many of the principles discussed here can be applied more generally. While there are no doubt cross-cultural variations, Western leaders running for election or simply attempting to compete for political influence face similar opportunities and threats. While some of the points we make are more narrowly focused, researchers should attempt to think about which parts of the discussion could be applied to related areas of research.

The major theoretical claims we intend to make will only be *listed* in this section. The underlying rationale and empirical evidence in support of these claims will be presented in the findings section. The underlying question refers to the ways in which the ability of political leaders to achieve their communication goals has become easier and/or more difficult in the digital age.

As noted, this should be considered an exploratory study. The purpose is to create an initial list of changes that have taken place during the digital era. The underlying assumption is that other studies and scholars will add their own additions to this list and will contribute to our level of cumulative knowledge on the topic. In addition, as we begin to examine this issue in an increasing number of cultural settings, countries and circumstances, we will gain a better understanding of how the role of the newer media varies. To put it differently, the opportunities and threats detailed below should become the *dependent* variables in future studies. We will discuss four opportunities and two threats.

The four opportunities are: (1) an increase in leaders' ability to bypass the traditional media and communicate directly with various publics; (2) the ability to use the newer media to generate news stories in the traditional media; (3) an increased ability to mobilize supporters for their cause and (4) an enhanced ability to send messages to the international community.

The two major threats to modern political leaders are: (1) the difficulties they face taking control over the flow of information about the conflicts; and (2) the pressures leaders face to react much more quickly than in the past to events as they erupt on the national and international agenda.

Methodology

The data here is based on one specific dimension of the larger research project focused on the ongoing interactions between political leaders and the media. In this chapter, we will report on the results of interviews carried out in Israel (15), Palestine (15), Macedonia (10) and Kosovo (15). In addition to those interviewees who were elected to their positions, some were officials involved in diplomacy, while others were leaders of political organizations. The major criteria for selection were that interviewees must be somehow involved in promoting a particular political agenda concerning the conflict and had to have ongoing contact with the media concerning this issue. All interviewees were promised anonymity, so only a general description of their role and status is noted when they are quoted below. The one-hour interviews were conducted in person in 2015, in the local language. They were recorded, transcribed and then translated into English.

As is usually the case with research employing in-depth interviews, the overall approach was mostly inductive rather than an attempt at hypothesis testing. We did have a number of theoretical expectations that were based on previous research and our own observations of current events. Nevertheless, the overall methodological plan was to listen and learn

and, based on these conversations, say something meaningful about political leaders and the new media.

Although the interviews covered a large number of topics, the core questions that are the most relevant to this chapter are presented below (some of the answers reported in the findings section were based on follow-up questions that varied among interviewees).

how you construct the interviews

1. Can you tell me something about the amount of efforts and resources that you invest in attempting to communicate using the Internet in general and more specifically the social media?
2. Has this changed much in recent years?
3. Would you say you mostly use social media to communicate with various publics or more to attempt to interest journalists?
4. Do you sometimes exploit social media for sending messages to international audiences, including foreign leaders?
5. Can you please tell me something about the differences you find in using social media compared to traditional media?
6. Some leaders have argued that, in the last few years, the amount of time they have to react to events has become much shorter. Do you agree with this? If so, do you think it is a problem?
7. Many people have talked about the fact that people walking around with camera phones has changed the nature of the news, meaning much more stories start from the field. Do you think this new development has affected the news and the conflict itself?

The Conflicts: A Very Brief Summary

Israel–Palestine Conflict

While we assume that most readers know quite a bit about this conflict. Nevertheless, a short summary is in order.[4] The conflict, which started as a political and nationalist conflict over competing territorial ambitions, has shifted over the years from the large-scale regional Arab–Israeli conflict to the more specific Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Although there have been a number of clashes, a turning point was the 'Six-Day War' of 1967, which resulted in Israel taking over all of Jerusalem and capturing Gaza and the West Bank. The territories captured in 1967 (whose border is known today as the 'Green Line') remain one of the most contentious issues in the conflict.

The First Intifada (uprisings) began in December 1987. In 1993, when the violence declined, Israel and Palestinian officials signed a Declaration of Principles (the Oslo Accords) guiding the interim period of Palestinian self-rule. It was assumed that these accords would set the stage for a comprehensive peace agreement, but all subsequent attempts have ended in failure.

The Second Intifada broke out in September 2000. In contrast to the relatively low level of Palestinian violence of the First Intifada, the second uprising included guerilla warfare and a large number of terrorist attacks. Israel also used a considerable amount of force to put down the uprising, including targeted attacks on terrorist leaders.

In early 2006, the Islamic Resistance Movement, Hamas, won the Palestinian Legislative Council election and took control of the Palestinian Authority (PA) government. Attempts to form a unified government failed.[5] The status quo remains, with Hamas in control of the Gaza Strip and the PA governing the West Bank.

In 2008, in response to the ongoing rocket fire from the Gaza Strip to Israel, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert decided to conduct a military operation (known as the 'Gaza War'), which included airstrikes, naval operations and a ground invasion. The goal was to damage the Hamas infrastructure and to reduce the level of rocket fire aimed at Israel. Two other recent military operations in the Gaza Strip against Hamas were (to use the Israeli terms) Operation Pillar of Defense (2012) and Protective Edge (2014).

In 2016, the Freedom House (2016b) lowered the grade given to Israel from "Free" to "Partly Free", based on the following rationale: "Israel declined from Free to Partly Free due to the growing impact of *Israel Hayom*, whose owner-subsidized business model endangered the stability of other media outlets, and the unchecked expansion of paid content – some of it government funded – whose nature was not clearly identified to the public." As in other Western countries, there are often controversies in Israel regarding if and how social media should be regulated. However, for the most part, this form of communication remains open and free.

When it comes to the PA, the Freedom House makes a distinction between the West Bank, which is governed by *Fatach* and the Gaza Strip, which is ruled by Hamas. Nevertheless, both entities are considered "Not Free". Here is the explanation for that designation for the West Bank: The media are not free in the West Bank. Under a 1995 PA press law, journalists may be fined and jailed, and newspapers closed, for publishing 'secret information' on PA security forces or news that might harm national unity or incite violence. Media outlets are routinely pressured to provide favourable coverage of the PA and Fatah. Journalists who criticize the PA or Fatah face arbitrary arrests, threats and physical abuse. Reporters are also subject to administrative detention by Israeli forces (Freedom House, 2016a).

Freedom House (2017) describes the lack of press freedom in Gaza as follows: "The media are not free in Gaza. Following the 2007 schism, Hamas security forces closed down pro-Fatah media outlets and began exerting pressure on media critics, including through the

use of arbitrary arrest, detention, beatings, and other tactics of intimidation (...). In 2012, Hamas's media office banned Palestinian journalists from giving interviews to or working with Israeli media. In 2016, foreign journalists reported various arbitrarily enforced restrictions on their work, including detentions and interrogations, excessive registration fees for vehicles, and unreasonable conditions attached to permits."

It is worth noting that when comparing the three antagonists involved in this conflict, with regard to the social media, Israelis have the most freedom, with the West Bank second, while in Gaza publishing oppositional material on the Internet can be considered a crime.

The Conflict in Macedonia

Macedonia is a country of about two million citizens and was the only entity to secede non-violently from Yugoslavia in 1991.[6] While relations between the Macedonian majority and the Albanian minority were historically peaceful, there were a number of events that led to tension and bloodshed. Significant violence broke out in 2001, including a number of violent events between local insurgents and the Macedonian government. One of the more important was the 'Aracinovo Crisis': On June 12, 2001, members of the Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA) took control of the ethnically mixed village of Aracinovo.[7] After attempts at negotiation and international intervention failed, the Macedonian government launched an attack on the NLA forces on June 21. Eventually, the insurgent forces were allowed to evacuate their positions. A ceasefire was declared on July 5. Nevertheless, there were a number of battles and other acts of violence in the months ahead.

In January of 2002, the two sides settled the Ohrid Agreement, in which, among other things, the Macedonian government agreed to improve the rights of the Albanian minority. The Albanian side gave up any demands for independence and agreed to recognize all Macedonian institutions. Even after the agreement, however, there were acts of violence. In October of 2014, NLA insurgents fired rocket-propelled grenades at a Skopje government facility and further violent confrontations occurred in April and May of 2015.[8]

When it comes to freedom of the press, Freedom House (2016c) gives Macedonia low grades. In fact, in 2016 the country moved from "Partly Free" to "Not Free", "due to revelations indicating large-scale and illegal government wiretapping of journalists, corrupt ties between officials and media owners, and an increase in threats and attacks on media workers". As discussed below, this lack of press freedom has significant ramifications for the use of social media by those in the

opposition. The expression of oppositional views in the social media in Macedonia is relatively free, especially when compared to the traditional news media.

The Conflict in Kosovo

The conflict in Kosovo can be traced back to an historical dispute with roots in both Albanian and Serbian ethnic-nationalisms, each claiming rights to the area.[9] The Kosovo War took place from February of 1998 to June of 1999 between the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (which, at the time, included the Republics of Montenegro and Serbia) and the Kosovo Liberation Army. It was also the first time NATO went to war, by providing air support for the Kosovo forces. The bombings continued until an agreement was reached, which led to the withdrawal of Yugoslavian troops from Kosovo and the establishment of the United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK). In June 1999, the outline of a new Kosovo peace deal was announced and direct talks between Serbian and Kosovo Albanian leaders began in 2003. In 2004, following some years of tense peace, the worst clashes since 1999 between Serbs and ethnic Albanians erupted.

Direct talks between ethnic Serbia and Kosovo leaders on the future status of Kosovo started in 2006 and, at the end of that year, voters in a referendum in Serbia approved a new constitution declaring that Kosovo is an integral part of that country. Kosovo's Albanian majority boycotted that ballot (the Albanians are the largest ethnic group in Kosovo).

Kosovo authorities declared independence on February 17, 2008, and 110 UN members recognized Kosovo's independence. Traditional allies of Serbia, including Russia, China and Greece, refused to recognize the new state. Serbia protested the decision, issued a warrant for the arrest of Kosovo leaders for high treason and adopted an "action plan" that involved withdrawing its ambassadors from countries that recognized Kosovo.

Serbia and Kosovo began direct talks to try to end their dispute in March of 2011. The talks are referred to as the "Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue" (based on the names of the two capital cities) and were facilitated by the United Nations. These were the first talks between the two countries since Kosovo broke away from Serbia. The two sides made some progress, including an agreement to regulate border crossings between the two entities.

With regard to press freedom, Freedom House (2016c) gives Kosovo a grade of "Partly Free", with the following explanation: "Laws protecting press freedom are mostly in line with European Union (EU) standards, but their enforcement is inconsistent. While the media environment is diverse, many private outlets struggle financially, particularly those serving Kosovo's ethnic Serb population. The public broadcaster, *Radio*

Television of Kosovo (RTK), is funded through the state budget, leaving it vulnerable to politicization. Journalists continue to experience death threats and occasional physical attacks in connection with their work." As with Macedonia, the expression of dissident views in the social media in Kosovo is mostly free.

Political Leaders and the Newer Media: Findings and Discussion

As discussed, the findings are based on what we learned from the interviews conducted with the four sets of leaders from the three conflicts. In this relatively early stage in the research, we focused on those opportunities and threats that were mentioned by many different leaders. While we will also allude to a few interesting differences, this will not be the major concern here. We start by discussing the ways in which the new technologies provided new opportunities to political leaders that were unavailable in the past.

Opportunities

As noted, the digital age provides a number of important opportunities for modern leaders that were previously unavailable. We focus on four major ways in which the newer media can serve the political leaders from both the government and the opposition. First, while political leaders are often frustrated by the coverage they receive in the traditional media (Street, 2012; Wolfsfeld, 2001, 2004; Wolfsfeld & Sheafer, 2006), they find the unfiltered nature of the new media to be a major advantage. President Trump's almost obsessive use of Twitter is the best-known example of this phenomenon (Barbaro, 2015; Ott, 2017), but the basic strategy is one that we found in all four of the conflict areas we studied.

As might be expected, oppositional leaders who found the mainstream media difficult to access were the most enthusiastic about the opportunities provided by the newer media. Oppositional leaders in Macedonia, for example, talked about their extensive use of the social media and argued that it was essential because all of the traditional outlets were owned by (what they called) government "cronies". A senior member of one of the oppositional parties echoed the sentiments of many of the interviewees about the newer media:

> *This is one powerful tool and we as a political party [...] are active in order to spread our ideas, because it is the cheapest way to convey certain positions to the public. And since we do not have access to the mainstream media, the social networks are very important.*
>
> (M6, 12/6/2015)[10]

The case of the Palestinian leaders is similar, but somewhat more complex. Unsurprisingly, they have no faith in the Hebrew press in Israel to convey their messages and many also feel the international media is against them.[11] Nevertheless, many leaders claimed that they also use the social media to bypass the mainstream media in Arabic because they are frustrated about how they are covered. As with many of the people we spoke to, Palestinian leaders emphasized the advantages of reaching various publics through an unfiltered medium. The comments by one of the Palestinian leaders were typical:

> *There are clear differences between messages that are published through social networks and messages put out via traditional media outlets. Social media publishes the messages fast and in a vital way that stays very close to the average citizen while using simple language and terminology.*
>
> (P4, 1/12/2015)

It is important to emphasize that those in power also find the social media an extremely useful tool for bypassing the mainstream media. President Trump is not the only powerful leader to feel the press is against him. The ability to talk *directly* to large audiences represents an extremely positive development for those both in and out of power.

Generating News Stories for the Traditional Media

The second opportunity for modern political leaders is the ability to use the newer media as a convenient tool for attracting interest from the traditional media. It may appear somewhat contradictory that modern political leaders want to both bypass the traditional media and exploit them. Thinking strategically however, it makes perfect sense.

All of the leaders we spoke to from the four entities were cognizant of the continuing importance of the traditional media for reaching a variety of audiences. It is no secret that many journalists invest time following leaders' social media tweets and Facebook posts to see if there is anything sufficiently interesting that they can turn into a news story. In some ways, this practice can be seen as the digital version of the traditional press conference or press release. Here is a typical comment about this from a political leader in Kosovo:

> *When I joined politics, Tim Juda, a journalist, recommended to me to start using Twitter on a daily basis. He is a friend of mine and he says that if a modern politician doesn't have a Twitter account, they don't have access to the world journalists' network as well. Nowadays, Facebook is not as helpful as Twitter is as a primary source of information for journalists in the world. Thus, I've been using it for*

five years now, and I can say that I consider myself as a source of information in the Balkans, for international journalists on Twitter, from Macedonia to Greece, and I am followed, perhaps, by thousands of journalists on my information network. I consider it an essential tool.

(K9, 22/12/2015)

This practice has other similarities to the traditional press release or conference. The most important is that, given the vast number of leaders in each of these conflict zones who use these tools, only a few can expect to have their stories turned into news. The rules of competition regarding whose tweets and posts are picked up by the news media remain the same as in the pre-digital era. The more powerful leaders are inherently more newsworthy and the weaker ones can only hope to gain access if their messages are especially provocative.

It is important to re-emphasize that it is not an 'either-or' type of situation for political leaders. The modern politician may use somewhat different strategies for sending messages through the traditional and newer media, but the ultimate goal is to exploit as many different communication channels as possible. As is the case more generally in public relations, there is a certain skill set that leaders and their staff need to develop in order to be successful in these efforts. One Israeli leader provided some useful insights about his strategy for exploiting the various forms of media:

Today in Israel, Twitter is better than other social media tools because there is an inner circle of journalists there. The distinction is different – we use social media when we want to stimulate interest among all journalists at once. Actually, we have two ways to access the media: I can penetrate a central media outlet, contact Amit Segal [an Israeli political journalist] and tell him: 'Amit I have a story just for you,' and then we both have a definite interest in the growth of the story because for him it's an exclusive, and for me because I want it to be a big story. The second way is to flood a post on Facebook and I know everyone will take it, but with less interest. It is a kind of negotiation that we do on a daily basis.

(I4, 27/5/2017)

Mobilizing Support for the Cause

If there is one indisputable advantage to using social media that has been discussed in previous research, it is the ability to mobilize supporters for one's cause (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013; Cable, 2017; Katz-Kimchi & Manosevitch, 2015; McCurdy, 2012; Youmans & York, 2012). It is unsurprising that much of this research focuses on social movements

and other extra-parliamentary organizations. Here too, the weaker the political actor, the more difficult they find it to gain access to the traditional media (Wolfsfeld 1997, 2011).

Some leaders are popular enough on social media that they can reach audiences that are as large as, or even larger than, those they can contact via the 'mass' media. The following comments by a Kosovo political leader were representative of this understanding:

According to the British Council's survey that I just read today, this means that now we have a Kosovan population of over 70 percent using the Internet, either daily or few times a week. So, if you are not present on social networks, then you have a much narrower channel of information to the citizens.

(K12, 22/12/2015)

As discussed in the previous literature cited above, the social media also provides other extremely important advantages when communicating with supporters or potential supporters. Major advantages include being able to frame messages with no editorial filter, the ability to distribute multimedia types of content, quickly mobilizing supporters for public events, the ability to direct audiences to other supportive content and fundraising. Perhaps the most important advantage of all for political leaders is that the social media provide an ongoing *dialogue* with audiences that often leads to a greater level of engagement.

This is one reason why the newer media have become especially important in election campaigns (Gurevitch, Coleman, & Blumler, 2009; Trippi, 2013; Zurn, 2017). These newer media allow campaigners to turn their supporters into *activists* who can then mobilize others to the cause. While there has been less research on political leaders' ability to exploit the new media between elections, it is clear that the same principles apply. One Israeli political leader talked about his own extremely positive experience in building his political party by relying heavily on the social media:

When I founded the party, we had no money and no operations, so I did most through Facebook and that was how we gathered the people. The great ability of social media, as opposed to a newspaper or radio or television, is that they are bi-directional. In other words, they allow you to gather people around an idea. In the past, you had to be engaged intensively in doing segmentation and you had to go around the world looking for people interested in your idea. Today, you just launch it and it comes back to you with a pretty good segmentation of people who agree with you. Therefore, my initial effort was made through Facebook.

(I4 27/5/2015)

None of this enthusiasm for the newer media is meant to suggest that they are some form of magical wand that can bring success to all those who wave it. Every political leader has access to these tools. Their level of success in exploiting them is not just a matter of digital knowledge and experience; it rests on a more fundamental question about leaders' inherent popularity among various publics. As is the case with all forms of media, political success leads to success in the media (Wolfsfeld, 2011). This can be seen as a good example of the Politics–Media–Politics principle (Wolfsfeld, 2011, Wolfsfeld, Segev, & Sheafer, 2013). Here, variations in the political environment (the relative popularity of leaders and their messages) lead to variations in media performance (more people liking and sharing the leaders' political content), which can then lead to further variations in the political environment (higher levels of political support).

Sending Messages to the International Community

All the digital opportunities that have been discussed thus far are easily applied to political leaders of almost all Western democracies. The next point, however, can be linked more specifically to leaders involved in violent conflicts. While many political leaders often find themselves in need of international support, this need is especially strong for those involved in violent conflicts.

In an asymmetrical conflict, the weaker side is especially desperate for the rest of the world to intervene. Those who are able to enlist third parties onto their side have a better chance of surviving than those who find themselves isolated from the world (Wolfsfeld, 1997). This has always been the case with the traditional media and the social media now provides new opportunities to gain access to a global audience.

This point was made very forcibly by almost all of the Palestinian leaders who were interviewed. One argued that while the Israelis were in a better position to exploit the traditional media, Palestinians depended more on the social media to get their message out. Here is how one of the Palestinian leaders put it:

> *With regard to sending out Palestinian and Israeli messages to European leaders, I say the Israelis use their media outlets as the main channel of sending their messages to European leaders whereby Palestinians rely more on Twitter, which has become the best tool for them to send out their messages.*
>
> (P1, 30/10/2015)

The Israelis have also invested a great deal of resources into harnessing the power of the social media in the battle over world opinion.

One of the more interesting comments on this issue came from a senior official in the Foreign Ministry, who talked about using social media to reach Arab audiences:

> *As soon as we talk about digital media, you have more tools to measure, and have more ability to keep track of things with hashtags, some kind of search or another. What we see at the micro-level is that we reach people. We see who is following us because these studies have showed that we are doing not bad. It's not just Israelis, and it is not only non-Israelis. We can see and identify information that goes away and really comes to other media outlets. Important examples come from those who are not considered pro-Israel. We see that the Arabic page, in terms of 'likes', is our most popular, with 320,000 likes.*
>
> (I11, 16/9/2015)

The problems facing political leaders in Macedonia and Kosovo are somewhat different. While the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is almost constantly on the international news agenda, leaders from these conflict areas are mostly ignored unless violence breaks out. Some of the leaders we spoke to in those countries talked about exploiting the new media to raise awareness about their problems.[12] One of the Kosovo leaders brought up an interesting example where Facebook became especially significant:

> *One concrete example was when Facebook recognized Kosovo as a region in the list of states, whose citizens are allowed to register. We also published a new item on social networks that Facebook recognizes Kosovo, given that the wording was unusual because it is the United Nations recognizing states and not social networks. But, on the other hand, it showed a new field of digital diplomacy. Then this news got the momentum, and at the end it reached the front page of the New York Times newspaper, Facebook recognizes Kosovo, on Washington Post, on BBC trending news, being one of the most clicked news of the day, on The Atlantic magazine, Slate magazine, and it was selected as one of 10 leading news of diplomacy for 2013.*
>
> (K4, 17/12/2015)

In order to summarize this section, it is perhaps best to think about the newer media as an additional communication tool that political leaders use in order to compete, both domestically and internationally. This list of functions is certainly not exhaustive, but it does provide some helpful insights about how the communication environment has

changed in recent years. However, it is important to bear in mind that previous developments in communication have also led to significant changes in how political leaders operate. The invention of the telegraph, radio and television are three important examples. Whether the most recent changes represent a more revolutionary development remains an open question.

Threats

As is always the case, changes in communication technology represent a double-sided sword. They present both opportunities and threats for political leaders. The notion of threats refers to those aspects of the new communication environment that create difficulties and dangers for modern political leaders that their predecessors were less likely to face. While a number of threats emerged from the interviews, we will focus on two that are especially relevant to leaders involved in violent conflicts: (1) The difficulties they face taking control over the flow of information about the conflicts; and (2) the pressures leaders face to react much quicker than in the past to events as they erupt on the national and international agenda.

Lack of Control Over the Flow of Information

The most important negative change for political leaders involved in violent conflict, especially for those in power, is the difficulties they face in their attempts to take control of the flow of information. Here, the flow of information refers to everything that is "known" and seen concerning a particular conflict. We have put "known" in quotation marks because one of the problems with the digital age is that journalists and citizens find it increasingly difficult to make a clear distinction between facts, rumours, fake videos and outright lies. While traditional journalism was far from perfect, there was, at least among the most reputable news organs, a sense of professional responsibility for verifying the stories they produced.

At first glance, the very notion of 'taking control over information' may seem like an undemocratic approach to this issue. It certainly runs against the value of governmental transparency. For many, the difficulties modern leaders face in controlling the flow of information in the digital age should be seen as a blessing rather than a curse. Scholars studying this topic must bear this perspective in mind when thinking about this question.

However, our approach is somewhat different. We are quite consciously looking at the issue from the perspective of those who have the responsibility for governing. When these leaders are involved in violent conflicts, their ability to take control over the flow of information is

likely to have an impact on their ability to succeed. The analysis intentionally leaves out questions concerning the best possible outcome for a given conflict. For those who are uncomfortable with this approach, it is worth remembering that there *are* circumstances, such as the war against terrorism, when the international community is relatively united in support of those attempting to defeat these enemies.

Two major aspects of this change are especially notable. The first is the widespread use of camera phones, which enable observers to instantly record, upload and disseminate conflict events as they take place. The second is the fact that governments find it extremely difficult to keep secrets. While there have always been leaks that embarrassed, endangered or reduced the legitimacy of those in power, the ability of individuals to gain access to classified information has grown enormously in recent years.

The ways in which the spread of camera phones has put political and military leaders on the defensive is apparent in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Many Palestinian and human rights activists have learned to use their phones to record any abuses by the Israeli security forces. This is good news for the Palestinians and bad news for the Israeli authorities. The comments by one Palestinian leader were typical of this phenomenon:

> *The people's media, so I call it, has a major influence on news and on the conflict itself through publishing live coverage from the site of events. This is more crucial in cases where journalists are not present while ordinary people with their smartphones are there to capture the scenes. People now use their smartphones and publish images almost instantly, causing a major echo and impact to what they do. This in itself is positive.*
>
> (P6, 11/1/2015)

The Israeli leaders who were interviewed considered their inability to take control over the flow of information to be a serious problem. Revealingly, some of the more serious problems in this area had to do with problems associated with their own troops going into battle with cell phones. This became especially apparent during the Second Lebanese War in 2006. The continual flow of bad news from the front coming from the troops themselves led to a significant change in policies when the Gaza War broke out in 2008. Among other things, the policies prohibited soldiers from taking their cell phones into battle and strictly controlling officers being allowed to give interviews to the press without prior authorization (Rappaport, 2010; Wolfsfeld, 2018).

Concern about how the lack of control over information, especially videos, is not limited to the Middle East. One leader from Kosovo talked about how information spread through the newer media, which

is often picked up by the mainstream media, can make a bad situation even worse:

> *I have watched some sequences, and thanks to these video materials provided by some portals, I have been watching some materials of RTS [Radio Television of Serbia], which simply contributed to the spread of dissatisfaction among citizens, in the sense that this is what is really happening, KFOR [NATO] NMIK [United Nations] and EULEX [European] troops are having an impact on the citizens, or they are limiting citizens' freedom, which then affects in massiveness of demonstrators, protesters, which led to the burning of premises at the border points.*
>
> (K7, 21/7/2015)

Concerns about the media's effects on political violence are not new. In Northern Ireland, for example, a number of television stations made a conscious and mutual decision not to send cameras when violent protests would erupt (Wolfsfeld, 2004). In an unusual step, they decided that the presence of cameras could inflame an already volatile situation. One can only wonder whether such policies would be possible today. Given that anyone with a cell phone is in a position to both film and upload video clips of such events, few television stations can afford to ignore them. Even if they did, those who were interested in inflaming the situation could easily distribute the most sensational scenes to a large audience, even without any coverage in the mainstream media. A counter-argument could claim that the presence of large television cameras are more likely to inflame a volatile confrontation than a video clip taken with a cell phone.

A related issue is the difficulty that political and military leaders have in the modern age in keeping secrets. Again, we stress that although having secrets leaked can often bring positive results for a society, it does make it more difficult for modern leaders to govern. This problem arose quite often in the interviews with Israeli leaders, who were especially concerned about leaks concerning military operations. Here are the comments of one fairly senior political leader about this problem:

> *One day I saw during the operation ['Protective Edge'], a presentation the IDF [Israel Defence Forces] presented something in one of the meetings of the Cabinet. Someone leaked. I wanted to perform a polygraph test for everyone, but Netanyahu refused. This was an attempt to influence someone through the media on public opinion, in a certain way on the decision making as well. It teaches us that the walls of the meeting rooms are not sealed.*
>
> (I7, 8/8/2015)

The Instantaneous News Cycle

The other major problem that political leaders face in the digital age is the speed at which information and images spread around the globe. Virtually all of the political leaders we spoke to talked about how difficult it was to deal with the dramatic change in what is conventionally known as the 'news cycle'. In the digital age, political leaders have significantly less time to consider their options and respond. It is almost as if the entire political world has "Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder". Here is how one Kosovo leader responded when asked about whether there had been a change in how quickly leaders were expected to react to breaking news:

> *Certainly yes. There is huge time difference. In the past, if you were able to wait for 24 hours for reaction, for example once the evening news were over, you were able to wait until the next evening news, because those were prime-time massive information news, now you cannot wait like that. Now, even in midnight you can tell your opinion which will be placed early in the morning.*
>
> (K2, 5/5/2015)

The problem is that the pressure to respond too quickly in times of crisis can be dangerous Here, again, it is hard not to think of the many times when President Trump has decided to tweet an ill-considered reaction to something he has heard or seen in the media. Most analysts believe that his aggressive rhetoric concerning North Korea in the summer of 2017 increased the probability of war between those two countries. Modern political leaders no longer have the luxury enjoyed by their predecessors of carefully gathering all of the facts and carefully considering their options before responding. Below is the way an Israeli leader formulated this concern when asked about the pressure to respond quickly:

> *This is true. The pace here is very quick. Once we could convene a meeting of consultants and think of what to say and what not to say and what and what not to initiate. Today the speed is high and need the ability to respond immediately and non-response has a meaning. That is why you see many more young men and women in new media.*
>
> [Interviewer: Do you think this does damage to leaders' decision making process?]
>
> *There is no doubt that when you need to respond quickly, the range of errors may grow. If you have to react to a specific event and a there are only a few hours, it is a problem. When the incident happened in the morning, you have until tonight to fix, to consider,*

delete, and if you have 15 minutes after the event to give a comment on a social network, which is viral and many people see it in seconds and minutes, there is no doubt that the number of mistakes is growing.

(I13, 19/4/2015)

Another leader from Kosovo made a similar point about the instantaneous news cycle:

This has happened gradually, and this process started two or three years ago. You get used to it, and it becomes an ordinary thing in life. So, the media pressure has started imposing on us another way of working, not as in the past. For example, you may be in your car and write your own opinion and post it, being aware that the media will take it immediately.

(P14, 5/5/2015)

The fact that modern leaders have to react quickly does not necessarily mean that they have to change their actions or their policies. The more perceptive and experienced leaders realize that the best course of action is often to respond rhetorically rather than actually changing course. However, when it comes to violent conflicts, ill-considered rhetoric can certainly lead to some very dangerous consequences.[13]

Conclusion

The goal of this essay was to provide some details about the major opportunities and threats faced by modern political leaders involved in violent conflicts as they enter the digital age. As with every new technology, the emergence of the Internet, and especially the social media, has brought good and bad news for these leaders.

Four major changes were seen as good news for these leaders. The first was an increased ability to use the newer media to bypass the traditional media. The second was the ability of leaders to exploit the newer media for generating news stories that the mainstream media would then pick up and provide a much larger audience. Third, the dawn of the digital age has provided political leaders, both those in government and those in opposition, with a dramatically increased ability to mobilize support for their causes. Finally, the change in the media environment has provided leaders with a much more effective means of communicating with the international community. All of these changes are especially important for weaker challengers who are attempting to overcome the inherent disadvantages they have always faced in their attempts to use the more traditional media.

On the other hand, the threats that were discussed were especially likely to create difficulties for those in power. By far the most serious difficulty they face is their inability to maintain control over the flow of information and images concerning the conflict. It is not an exaggeration to suggest that the spread of cell phone cameras and the difficulties that leaders have in keeping secrets can be considered a revolutionary change in the ability of modern leaders to manage conflicts. As discussed, we are fully aware that this change also had positive ramifications because this has become a powerful weapon for those working on behalf of human rights. Nevertheless, not all official actions and plans are inherently evil, and some amount of secrecy is essential for governments to function.

The final threat has to do with the significant shortening of the traditional news cycle. All of the interviewed leaders from the four entities discussed this development and most saw it as a problem. Modern leaders are now expected to react immediately to every major event, and this new reality is unhealthy. As discussed, even when leaders confine themselves to rhetorical responses, such reactions have the potential to further inflame an already dangerous situation.

The way forward is clear. First, we need to expand the list of opportunities and threats that confront leaders in the digital age. As an example, we have not dealt with the fact that the Internet and social media have become much more powerful tools for spreading hate than for reconciliation.[14] However, this should also be considered as a new threat not only for leaders, but also for the entire world.

Second, we need to better understand cross-cultural differences in the use and abuse of the newer media in violent conflicts. As noted, the purpose of this article was to discuss the commonalities that were found by interviewing leaders from the four entities. We need to expand the number of conflicts being studied and to give more thought to those variables that are most likely to lead to variations in the role the newer media play in different conflicts.

One such cross-cultural difference was alluded to earlier. In a country such as Macedonia, where oppositional actors find it so difficult to gain access to the mainstream media, these leaders are much more dependent on the social media. It would also be a good idea to compare those societies where the vast majority of citizens have easy access to the Internet with those where citizens have little or no access. Yet another direction for future research along these lines would compare conflicts that are high on the international news agenda (such as the Israel–Palestinian conflict) with those that are rarely mentioned in international news (such as Macedonia and Kosovo). Clearly, this will have a major impact on the ability of leaders to exploit all forms of media for sending messages to the international community.

Finally, this paper has intentionally avoided thinking about policies that would lead to newer media playing a more constructive role in violent conflicts. This should be the ultimate goal for those who study this issue. Given our assumption about newer technology always being a double-edged sword, researchers and policymakers need to give some serious thought to how the new 'swords' can be used in ways that decrease the likelihood of bloodshed.

Notes

1 This research was conducted as part of INFOCORE, an international collaborative research project funded under the 7th European Framework Program of the European Commission.
2 None of these bibliographic lists is to be considered exhaustive. They are given as examples of some of the more noteworthy research in each of these fields.
3 A useful summary of much of this research can be found in Zeitzoff (2017).
4 Although a huge number of books and articles have been written about this conflict, we mention three of the more recent volumes: Bourke (2013), Bunton (2013), Shavit (2015).
5 At the time of this writing (fall 2017), there is a renewed attempt to form a unity government.
6 Those interested in learning more about the conflict in Macedonia should read Crighton (2003); Engström (2009); MacEvoy (2014); Micevski and Trpevska (2015).
7 See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2001_insurgency_in_the_Republic_of_Macedonia #Ara.C4.8Dinovo_crisis, and www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/balkans/macedonia/macedonia-last-chance-peace
8 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2001_insurgency_in_the_Republic_of_Macedonia #Ara.C4.8Dinovo_crisis. See also: www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32674121. It is worth noting that the NLA eventually became a political party with many of the insurgents becoming politicians who were elected to office.
9 For more about the conflict, refer to Adams (2016), Judah (2002) and Webber (2009).
10 We will use the first letter of the entity to indicate where the interview was conducted (in this case, Macedonia) and the interview number we used when transcribing the interviews. We use the American system of writing the date of the interview (Month/Day/Year).
11 Most Israeli Jews feel that the international media are biased against *them*.
12 It should be remembered that, for some political leaders in these countries, especially those in power, 'no news is good news'. While all leaders have an interest in sending their messages to the global community when necessary, some would prefer to stay off the international news agenda. This is also true for the Israeli government, although given the number of journalists permanently stationed in the country, this is unlikely to happen very often.
13 Again, it is difficult not to think of Trump in this regard. Most analysts believe that his aggressive (and often immediate) rhetoric concerning North Korea in the summer of 2017 increased the probably of war between those two countries.
14 This issue was discussed in a previous article from this research project (Wolfsfeld, 2018).

References

Adams, E. (2016). *History of Kosovo and Conflict*. Seattle, WA: Amazon.

Aday, S., Farrell, H., Lynch, M., Sides, J., Kelly, J., & Zuckerman, E. (2010). *Blogs and bullets: New media in contentious politics*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace.

Aday, S., Livingston, S., & Hebert, M. (2005). Embedding the truth a cross-cultural analysis of objectivity and television coverage of the Iraq War. *The Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics, 10*(1), 3–21.

Barbaro, M. (2015). Pithy, mean and powerful: How Donald Trump mastered Twitter for 2016. *International New York Times* (October 5th). Available online at www.nytimes.com/2015/10/06/us/politics/donald-trump-twitter-use-campaign-2016.html

Baum, M., & Groeling, T. (2010). *War stories*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bennett, W. L., Lawrence, R. G., & Livingston, S. (2007). *When the press fails: Political power and the news media from Iraq to Katrina*. Chicago, IL: University Of Chicago Press.

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2012). The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics. *Information, Communication & Society, 15*, 739–768.

Bennett, W. L., & Segerberg, A. (2013). *The logic of connective action: Digital media and the personalization of contentious politics*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Bimber, B. (2014). What's next? Three challenges for the future of political communication research. In H. G. d. Zuniga Navajas (Ed.), *New technologies and civic engagement: New agendas in communication* (pp. 215–223). New York, NY: Routledge.

Bourke, D. H. (2013). *The Israeli–Palestinian conflict: Tough questions, direct answers (Skeptic's Guide)*. Westmont, IL: IVP Books.

Bunton, M. (2013). *The Palestinian–Israeli conflict: A very short introduction*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Cable, J. (2017). Communication sciences and the study of social movements. In C. Roggeband, & B. Klandermans (Eds.), *Handbook of social movements across disciplines* (pp. 185–201). New York, NY: Springer.

Chadwick, A. (2013). *The hybrid media system: Politics and power*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Cohen, A. A., & Wolfsfeld, G. (1994). *Framing the Intifada: People and media*. New York, NY: Preager.

Crighton, A. (2003) *Macedonia: The conflict and the media*. Skopje, Republic of Macedonia: Macedonian Institute for Media.

Engström, J. (2009). *Democratization and the prevention of violent conflict: Lessons learned from Bulgaria and Macedonia*. Burglington, VT: Ashgate Publishing.

Freedom House. (2016a). *Freedom in the World 2016 — West Bank*. Available online at https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2016/west-bank

Freedom House. (2016b). *Freedom of the Press 2016 — Report on Israel*. Available online at https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/israel

Freedom House. (2016c). *Freedom of the Press 2016 — Report on Kosovo.* Available online at https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/kosovo

Freedom House. (2017). *Freedom in the World 2017 — Gaza Strip.* Available online at www.ecoi.net/local_link/341803/485122_de

Gohdes, A. R. (2015). Pulling the plug network disruptions and violence in civil conflict. *Journal of Peace Research, 52*, 352–367.

Gurevitch, M., Coleman, S., & Blumler, J. G. (2009). Political communication – Old and new media relationships. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, 625*(1), 164–181.

Hackett, R. A. (2006). Is peace journalism possible? Three frameworks for assessing structure and agency in news media. *Conflict & Communication online, 5*, 1–13.

Hess, S., & Kalb, M. L. (2003). *The media and the war on terrorism.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Hoskins, A., & O'Loughlin, B. (2010). *War and media.* Cambridge, UK: Polity.

Judah, T. (2002). *Kosovo: War and revenge.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Katz-Kimchi, M., & Manosevitch, I. (2015). Mobilizing Facebook users against Facebook's energy policy: The case of Greenpeace unfriend coal campaign. *Environmental Communication, 9*, 248–267.

Klausen, J. (2015). Tweeting the Jihad: Social media networks of Western foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 38*, 1–22.

Kwon, K. H., Oh, O., Agrawal, M., & Rao, H. R. (2012). Audience gatekeeping in the Twitter service: An investigation of tweets about the 2009 Gaza conflict. *AIS Transactions on Human–Computer Interaction, 4*, 212–229.

Liebes, T., & Kampf, Z. (2009). Performance journalism: The case of media's coverage of war and terror. *The Communication Review, 12*, 239–249.

Lynch, J., & McGoldrick, A. (2005). *Peace journalism.* Stroud, UK: Hawthorn Press Stroud.

MacEvoy, J. (2014). *Power-sharing executives: Governing in Bosnia, Macedonia, and Northern Ireland.* Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

McCurdy, P. (2012). Social movements, protest and mainstream media. *Sociology Compass, 6*, 244–255.

Micevski, I., & Trpevska, S. (2015). What the Macedonian phone-tapping scandal tells us about clientelism in the media. *International Journal of Digital Television, 6*, 319–326.

Morozov, E. (2011). *The net delusion: The dark side of internet freedom.* Jackson, TN: Public Affairs.

Norris, P., Kern, M., & Just, M. R. (2003). *Framing terrorism: The news media, the government, and the public.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Ott, B. L. (2017). The age of Twitter: Donald J. Trump and the politics of debasement. *Critical Studies in Media Communication, 34*, 59–68.

Popkin, J. D. (2015). *Media and revolution.* Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky.

Rapaport, A. 2010. *The IDF and the lessons of the second Lebanon War.* Ramat Gam, Israel: Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies.

Saleem, N., & Hanan, M. A. (2014). Media and conflict resolution: Toward building a relationship model. *Journal of Political Studies, 21*, 179–198.

Shavit, A. (2015). *My promised land: The triumph and tragedy of Israel.* New York, NY: Spiegel & Grau.

Sheafer, T., & Dvir-Gvirsman, S. (2010). The spoiler effect: Framing attitudes and expectations toward peace. *Journal of Peace Research, 47*, 205–215.

Spencer, G. (2005). *The media and peace: From Vietnam to the 'war on terror'.* New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Street, J. (2012). Do celebrity politics and celebrity politicians matter? *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations, 14*, 346–356.

Trippi, J. (2013). How Technology has restored the soul of politics. *MIT Technology Review, 116*, 34–36.

Van Dijck, J., & Poell, T. (2013). Understanding social media logic. *Media and Communication, 1*, 2–14.

Ward, W. (2009). Social Media in the Gaza Conflict. *Arab Media & Society.* Available online at www.arabmediasociety.com/social-media-and-the-gaza-conflict/

Webber, M. (2009). The Kosovo war: A recapitulation. *International Affairs, 85*, 447–459.

Weimann, G. (2015). *Terrorism in cyberspace: The next generation.* New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Wolfsfeld, G. (1997). *Media and political conflict: News from the Middle East.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Wolfsfeld, G. (2001). The news media and the Second Intifada: Some initial lessons. *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics, 6*, 113–111.

Wolfsfeld G. (2004). *Media and the path to peace.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Wolfsfeld, G. (2011). *Making sense of media and politics: Five principles in political communication.* New York, NY: Routledge.

Wolfsfeld, G. (2018). The role of the media in violent conflicts in the digital age: Israeli and Palestinian leaders' perceptions. *Media, War & Conflict, 11*, 107–124.

Wolfsfeld, G., Alimi, E. Y., & Kailani, W. (2007). News media and peace building in asymmetrical conflicts: The flow of news between Jordan and Israel. *Political Studies, 56*, 374–398.

Wolfsfeld, G., Frosh, P., & Awabdy, M. T. (2008). Covering death in conflicts: Coverage of the Second Intifada on Israeli and Palestinian television. *Journal of Peace Research, 45*, 401–417.

Wolfsfeld, G., Segev, E., & Sheafer, T. (2013). Social media and the Arab Spring: Politics comes first. The *International Journal of Press/Politics, 18*, 115–137.

Wolfsfeld, G., & Sheafer, T. (2006). Competing actors and the construction of political news: The contest over waves in Israel. *Political Communication, 23*, 333–354.

Yarchi, M., Wolfsfeld, G., Sheafer, T., & Shenhav, S. R. (2013). Promoting stories about terrorism to the international news media: A study of public diplomacy. *Media, War & Conflict, 6*, 263–278.

Youmans, W. L., & York, J. C. (2012). Social Media and the activist toolkit: User agreements, corporate interests, and the information infrastructure of modern social movements. *Journal of Communication, 62*, 315–329.

Zeitzoff, T. (2011). Using social media to measure conflict dynamics: An application to the 2008–2009 Gaza conflict. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *55*, 938–969.

Zeitzoff, T. (2017). How social media is changing conflict. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *61*, 1970–1991.

Zurn, S. (2017). The digital battle. In D. W. Johnson, & L. M. Brown, (Eds.), *Campaigning for president 2016: Strategy and tactics* (pp129–144). New York, NY: Routledge.

9 A Game of Frames in Conflict Transformation

Mapping the Media-Active Publics' Nexus of Competing Conflict Frames

Igor Micevski and Snezana Trpevska

Introduction

Societies struggling to pledge to a democratic process, in their recovery from a violent conflict, tend to be multidirectionally pulled by competing conceptions about the 'nature' of past antagonism. Different groups tend to believe in different 'truths' about why violence occurred and consequently feel uncertain about whether the achieved peace is just and sustainable. The content, the character and the public current of these conceptions about the conflict, referred to as conflict frames (Baden, 2014; Bartholomé, Lecheler, & De Vreese, 2017; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000)[1], are obviously a critical matter of concern regarding how complex the sociopolitical aspects of future conflict transformation and reconciliation will be[2] (Drake & Donohue, 1996; Galtung, 2000). This is because various types of conflict frames encapsulate certain power relations and as they are constructing frictional collective identities, their public flow may impact potential antagonists' positions in the prospective conflict developments (Wolfsfeld, 2004). By implication, just as they contribute to constructing frictional identities, publicly circulated conflict frames may also be important in constructing residual spaces of solidarity and alliances that cut across hitherto antagonistic lines, opening up spaces for new frictions. A greater understanding of this nexus of fluctuating lines of antagonism and solidarity is especially important for conflict transformation processes in the age of social media, where virtually anyone is able to contribute to the construction and dissemination of conflict frames, adding new qualities into the conflict dynamics.

The aim of this study,[3] therefore, is to identify the repertoires of these competing conflict frames in post-conflict societies and to better understand them by deconstructing each frame's potential to create future frictions, including the potentials to support relapses into violence. We consider comparatively two cases of violent conflicts on the Balkan Peninsula: Macedonia, a moderately violent conflict with ever-present post-conflict tensions; and Kosovo, a somewhat more severe conflict