

North American Media Coverage Analysis of Benjamin Netanyahu

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Project Code: <https://github.com/rafxrs/comp370-project>

Abstract

We analyze how North American news media portray Benjamin Netanyahu by examining a dataset of 500 manually coded articles collected from major outlets. Using a custom typology developed through open coding, we categorize coverage into seven themes: U.S.-Israel diplomatic relations, domestic political standing, Gaza war strategy, international legal and diplomatic pressure, hostage and cease-fire negotiations, regional escalation involving Iran and Hezbollah, and personal image. We supplement this topic analysis with sentiment annotations based on structured guidelines distinguishing positive, negative, and neutral framing. Our results show that Netanyahu is depicted predominantly as a leader focused on geopolitics, international diplomacy and conflict management, with less focus on domestic politics and personal image. The sentiment patterns reflect the political biases at play in the media, modulating how the coverage portrays Netanyahu.

Introduction

News coverage plays a critical role in shaping public understanding of political leaders, particularly during periods of heightened geopolitical conflict. Our team was tasked by a media company with assessing how Benjamin Netanyahu is portrayed across North American news outlets. Specifically, the company sought to understand (1) whether coverage tends to be positive, negative, or neutral, and (2) what dominant topics characterize media discussion of Netanyahu. Because media narratives often shift in response to military escalation, diplomatic pressure, and public controversy, analyzing how Netanyahu is framed during this period provides insight into broader patterns of political communication.

To address this task, we collected and analyzed 500 news articles published across 2024 and 2025 – a period in which the ongoing Gaza war profoundly shaped international discourse and, consequently, media attention toward Netanyahu. The conflict significantly influenced both the volume and nature of reporting, with frontline developments, hostage negotiations, and global criticism appearing frequently in coverage. Using open coding on an initial subset of articles, we developed a typology of seven themes:

U.S.-Israel diplomatic relations, Netanyahu’s domestic political standing, Gaza war military operations, international legal and diplomatic pressure, hostage and cease-fire negotiations, Iran and Hezbollah-related regional escalation, and Netanyahu’s personal image and public perception. We then applied this typology to the full dataset and evaluated sentiment using structured guidelines distinguishing negative, neutral, and positive framing.

Our findings show that the war context heavily shaped the media landscape, resulting in coverage dominated by conflict-related narratives, diplomatic strain, and legal scrutiny. Positive portrayals were more uncommon compared to neutral or negative framing. By combining manual annotation with topic characterization and sentiment analysis, this study provides a comprehensive and systematic view of how North American media depict Netanyahu during one of the most consequential geopolitical periods in recent years.

Data

For this project, we drew just over 500 articles from various North American news outlets. In order to have a wider range of representation, we selected both American and Canadian outlets. In total, twelve news organizations were chosen for data collection; The New York Times, The Washington Post, CNN, Fox News, NBC News, ABC News, CBS News, Global News, The Globe, National Post, and Toronto Star. We targeted the major news outlets in both countries, as their high visibility and large respective audience would have the most influence on the political landscape. It was also important to include organizations leaning on both sides of the political spectrum, as a main focus of the project is exploring the presence of bias in media coverage.

Following bias classifications at AllSides.com and Ad Fontes Media, both Fox News and National Post are generally right-leaning news outlets, while the rest are generally left-leaning outlets. This profile guided our data collection process, as we wanted to ensure political bias was balanced among the outlets.

To draw the data, we used TheNewsAPI, filtering articles published from 2024 to present, with the keyword “Netanyahu” included in the article title and/or article opening. This bounded the representation of articles according to their respective source. While collecting our data from the initial

twelve outlets, we used sampling in order to create a balanced dataset: if our dataset started containing 60% of left- or right-leaning articles at any point in the collection process, we temporarily prevent more from being pulled and prioritized the other to keep a rough 50-50 balance. This led us to narrow down to the six news sources shown in Figure 1. As we sampled, more emphasis was added to Fox News articles and National Post articles, as four of the six outlets were left-leaning. Therefore, the coverage of Netanyahu through the media we are analyzing will extend to both sides of the political spectrum. This design aspect of the data collection process enabled an even distribution of political bias along the final dataset.

Although twelve outlets were chosen in the initial data collection process, substantial results were only found in six. As seen in Figure 1, the articles collected belonged mostly to Fox News and NBC News, with less coverage from the other four outlets. Our final dataset shows a political bias distribution of 44.6% of articles from right-leaning sources and 55.4% from left-leaning sources. This profile of our data is important to note, as it can reflect the biases we interpret further on in the project.

To organize the data, we included the article id number, the news source, the date of publication, the article title and its opening. The opening line of each article was maintained in the dataset to provide further context for the annotation process. In order to design the data for this process, it was important to filter out any duplicate articles. We qualified a duplicate article as one with the same title and the same source, an identical opening being negligible. Many the articles drawn from the API contained duplicate openings, descriptive of the news outlet instead of the article content. This was ignored, as we focused the annotation process on the article titles, using the openings as additional content. If any two articles shared a title, but differed in news outlet, both articles were kept. As we are focusing on the media representation of Netanyahu, we are evaluating the coverage across numerous outlets. Therefore, the same title of an article can be an indicator of convergence between two given sources, so both are maintained in the collection. These adjustments allowed us to create a neat and concise dataset, ready for the annotation phase.

Methods

Our methodological approach focused on structuring the coding, topic development, and sentiment annotation processes in ways that would reduce subjectivity as much as possible and ensure consistent results.

Open Coding and Typology Construction

Although the assignment required open coding on 200 articles, we deliberately structured the process to avoid early-topic anchoring and inconsistent interpretations. Instead of coding the subset in a single pass, we divided it into batches of 35 articles. Since each team member open-coded on roughly 70 articles, this means we used a two-step approach. After the first batch, we paused to examine whether the emerging categories were overly broad, overlapping, or

Source	article_count	percentage
foxnews.com	126	24.95
nbcnews.com	108	21.39
nationalpost.com	98	19.41
globalnews.ca	70	13.86
abcnews.go.com	59	11.68
washingtonpost.com	41	8.12
nytimes.com	2	0.4
cnn.com	1	0.2

Figure 1: Distribution of Data According to News Outlet

missing recurring narrative patterns, and whether our data was consistent. This iterative approach allowed us to get a good glimpse of -what kind of articles we have in our dataset. We were able to adjust definitions gradually, ensuring that later coding was not constrained by premature or unstable topic boundaries formed early in the process.

To maintain mutual exclusivity, we adopted two refinement rules that guided how categories evolved. First, if a provisional category contained multiple distinguishable sub-narratives, we split it into separate topics. Second, if we repeatedly found uncertainty between two topics even after clarifying definitions, we merged them. These rules were central to identifying distinctions such as the separation between U.S.–Israel diplomatic coverage and broader international legal scrutiny, which initially appeared intertwined during early coding rounds, e.g. "diplomatic pressure".

Full-Set Annotation Protocol

For annotating the full dataset, we implemented procedures to reduce drift over time and improve consistency despite using single annotation. Before coding all articles, the annotator completed a calibration step by re-coding 50 items from the original open-coding subset using the finalized topic definitions. This served as a test of whether the definitions were operationalized clearly enough to reproduce earlier decisions.

Before full annotation, we went through the dataset as a group and outlined a "borderline case log" documenting how ambiguous articles were resolved in our annotation process. These articles were then used as important edge case examples in our typology document. This was particularly important for articles referencing multiple contexts (e.g., diplomacy intertwined with battlefield updates). Logging the rationale ensured that once a classification principle was applied to one ambiguous case, the same principle would be applied systematically across the remaining dataset.

Text Preprocessing and TF-IDF Design Choices

For topic characterization, we computed TF-IDF scores using a unigram representation of the article titles and open-

ings. We selected unigrams rather than multi-word n-grams to maintain interpretability and avoid sparsity issues inherent to short texts. Our preprocessing pipeline consisted of lowercasing, punctuation normalization, and stopword removal. In addition to standard English stopwords, we created a domain-specific stopword list to prevent extremely frequent but non-informative political terms from dominating the TF-IDF output. These included “netanyahu,” “benjamin,” “israel,” “israeli,” “prime,” “minister,” “says,” and “said.” We deliberately chose not to use stemming or lemmatization, as reducing words to morphological roots made the resulting vocabulary less interpretable during topic analysis. This light, domain-aware preprocessing allowed TF-IDF to surface distinctive and meaningful terms that aligned closely with our manually defined topics.

Sentiment Classification Framework

The sentiment annotation required distinguishing positive, negative, and neutral coverage, but we formalized a rule set to constrain interpretation and ensure alignment with the project’s conceptual goal: assessing sentiment *toward Netanyahu himself*. To avoid inflating negativity simply because the Gaza war is an intrinsically negative context, we treated descriptions of military operations, humanitarian crises, or geopolitical tension as neutral unless the article explicitly attributed criticism or praise to Netanyahu. Positive sentiment similarly required explicit framing of Netanyahu as effective, successful, or responsible for a favorable outcome, rather than merely reporting events he participated in. These rules ensured that sentiment scores reflected personal framing rather than background situational negativity or positivity. Similarly to the annotation process, we built a precise typology document for sentiment annotation that includes included, excluded and edge cases for all types of annotations.

Overall, the methodological decisions described above – iterative topic refinement, calibration before annotation, explicit handling of ambiguous cases, selective preprocessing for TF-IDF, and rule-based sentiment criteria – were central to producing consistent and interpretable results that reflect genuine patterns in media coverage rather than coder subjectivity or preprocessing artifacts.

Results

Our analysis produced seven distinct thematic categories capturing the range of North American media coverage of Benjamin Netanyahu across 2024-2025. These categories emerged from an open-coding process and were refined into a final typology. Below, we summarize each topic and present its definition, frequency in the dataset, and key linguistic features identified through TF-IDF analysis. Table 1 lists the top 10 tf-idf terms for each category. Figure 2 shows the distribution of topics across all 500 articles.

Topic Selection

Through an iterative open-coding process applied to an initial subset of 200 articles, we developed a typology capturing the major themes present in North American media

coverage of Benjamin Netanyahu during 2024-2025. The final typology consists of seven mutually exclusive categories, each representing a distinct narrative frame reflected in the dataset:

- **U.S.–Israel Diplomatic Relations:** Articles focused on Netanyahu’s interactions with U.S. officials, policy disagreements with the Biden administration, bilateral negotiations, and strategic coordination between the two governments.
- **International Legal & Diplomatic Pressure:** Coverage involving responses from the international community, including statements from foreign governments, UN resolutions, ICC arrest warrants, sanctions discussions, and broader global scrutiny.
- **Hostage Crisis & Cease-fire Negotiations:** Articles centered on mediation efforts, hostage-release talks, humanitarian pauses, pressure from families of hostages, and cease-fire proposals involving actors such as the U.S., Qatar, and Egypt.
- **Gaza War Military Operations & Strategy:** Reporting on Israeli military actions in Gaza, strategy debates, battlefield updates, regional security discussions, and statements regarding ongoing or planned operations.
- **Netanyahu’s Political Standing & Israeli Domestic Politics:** Articles addressing internal Israeli politics, including coalition stability, calls for resignation, public protests, cabinet tensions, and shifts in Netanyahu’s approval or legitimacy.
- **Iran, Hezbollah, & Regional Escalation:** Coverage extending beyond Gaza to regional conflict dynamics, particularly threats or attacks involving Hezbollah in Lebanon, Iranian strategic involvement, and cross-border escalation.
- **Personal Image & Public Perception:** Articles focusing on Netanyahu as an individual – his speeches, symbolic actions, public appearances, reputation, and portrayals of his leadership persona.

These definitions served as the foundation for coding the full dataset and enabled consistent classification across annotators. The typology captures both conflict-driven and political narratives, reflecting the heightened prominence of the Gaza war in shaping media discourse during the past two years.

Topic Characterization

To better understand how each topic differs in content, we examined the language patterns within each category using TF-IDF to identify the terms most characteristic of each theme. Within each category, the top 10 terms are ordered from highest to lowest score.

Table 1: Top 10 TF-IDF Terms for Each Topic Category (Ranked Highest to Lowest)

Topic	Top TF-IDF Terms
Gaza War Military Operations & Strategy	gaza, hamas, rafah, military, offensive, strikes, killed, ahead, end, war
Hostage Crisis & Cease-fire Negotiations	hostage, ceasefire, deal, hamas, gaza, hostages, cease, trump, president, biden
International Legal & Diplomatic Pressure	arrest, icc, international, canada, court, warrants, warrant, criminal, palestinian, leaders
Iran, Hezbollah, & Regional Escalation	iran, hezbollah, lebanon, missile, middle, attack, east, strike, new, iranian
Netanyahu's Political Standing & Israeli Domestic Politics	war, cabinet, government, corruption, announced, benny, gantz, coalition, state, schumer
Personal Image & Public Perception	delegates, united, report, police, drone, nations, schumer, reporting, house, protests
U.S.-Israel Diplomatic Relations	trump, biden, president, donald, congress, meet, house, white, washington, news

Topic Engagement

Next, we examine the distribution of articles across the seven topics to understand how frequently each category appeared in the data set.

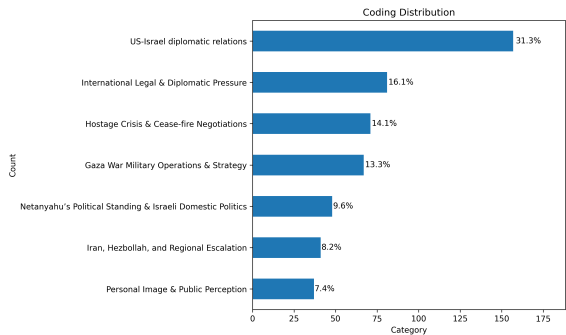


Figure 2: Distribution of Coding Categories Across the Collected News Articles.

Discussion

The distribution of topics in our dataset reveals several broader patterns in how North American media covered Benjamin Netanyahu throughout 2024-2025. An important finding was the dominance of two categories: *U.S.-Israel Diplomatic Relations* (30.88%) and *International Legal & Diplomatic Pressure* (16.14%). This ordering aligns well with both the structure of our dataset and the geopolitical conditions of the period. Because our sample draws exclusively from U.S. and Canadian outlets, it is expected that their reporting consistently foregrounds American foreign policy, bilateral coordination, and tensions between the Biden administration and the Netanyahu government. Diplomatic engagement was an ongoing and relatively stable nar-

rative from January 2024 to late 2025, in contrast to categories that fluctuated with discrete events. This helps explain why topics such as *Gaza War Military Operations*, *Regional Escalation*, and *Netanyahu's Domestic Politics* appear less frequently: these themes spike during specific crises but do not sustain the same baseline presence as U.S.-Israel diplomacy or international institutional responses.

A similar logic applies to the second-most common category. International legal scrutiny – including ICC announcements, UN debates, and condemnations by foreign governments – persisted throughout the entire time range of our dataset. Compared to event-driven topics (e.g., hostage negotiations or military operations), international legal commentary constitutes a continuous backdrop to Netanyahu-focused reporting. The temporal stability of these narratives likely contributed to their high frequency across outlets, independent of short-term developments.

Sentiment analysis provides a complementary perspective on how Netanyahu is portrayed. As expected given our strict coding guidelines, the majority of articles were labeled neutral (65.54%) as shown in Figure 3, reflecting the prevalence of descriptive, event-focused reporting rather than explicit evaluative framing. Negative sentiment accounted for 26.10% of the dataset, while positive sentiment was relatively rare at 8.37%. Although the overall rates are unsurprising, the variation across outlets is revealing. Positive sentiment was overwhelmingly concentrated in *Fox News*, which accounted for 73.8% of all positive articles despite representing roughly one-quarter of the dataset. The concentration becomes even more striking when considering that Fox News and the National Post together represent approximately 86% of all positive sentiment, even though right-leaning outlets constitute only about 45% of the dataset. This disproportionate share suggests that favorable framing of Netanyahu is not simply distributed according to outlet frequency, but is instead heavily driven by ideologically aligned sources. As shown in Figure 4, positive sentiment is highly uneven across outlets.

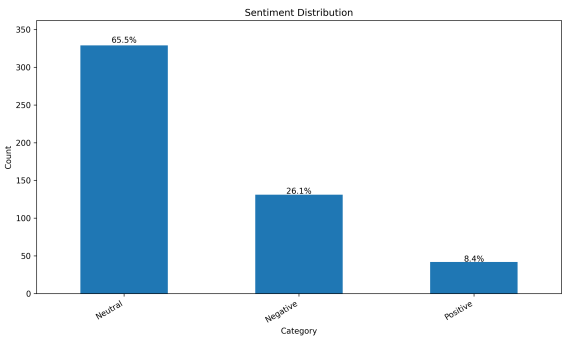


Figure 3: Distribution of Sentiments Across the Collected News Articles.

Conversely, negative sentiment was more commonly found in outlets classified as lean-left (55%) than in lean-right outlets (45%). Interestingly, this distribution mirrors the proportion of left-leaning to right-leaning articles in the

dataset overall (approximately 55/45). This parallel suggests that the imbalance in negative sentiment does not necessarily imply stronger negativity within left-leaning coverage; instead, it reflects their greater representation in the sample combined with a generally critical stance toward Netanyahu among mainstream outlets.

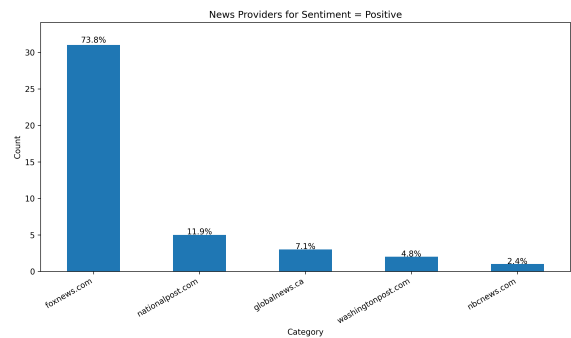


Figure 4: Distribution of Positive Sentiment Across News Outlets.

Taken together, these findings paint a coherent picture of Netanyahu’s media portrayal in North America. Topic prevalence indicates that coverage centers less on Netanyahu as an individual political actor and more on the broader geopolitical systems in which he operates – U.S. foreign policy, international law, and multilateral diplomacy. Sentiment patterns further contextualize this narrative: positive portrayals are limited and heavily concentrated in right-leaning outlets, while most coverage remains neutral or informational. This reflects the fact that much of the reporting during this period focused on high-stakes diplomatic developments and military decision-making rather than personal evaluations of Netanyahu’s leadership.

Overall, our results suggest that North American media portray Netanyahu primarily as a strategic and geopolitical figure rather than a domestically evaluated political leader. The integration of topic modeling, sentiment analysis, and outlet-level comparisons supports a broader conclusion: media framing of Netanyahu is shaped simultaneously by the structural priorities of North American journalism and by ideological divides that influence the tone of coverage. Together, these trends highlight the importance of considering both content and media-source composition when interpreting political narratives in contemporary news ecosystems.

Conclusion

This study examined how North American news media portrayed Benjamin Netanyahu across 2024-2025, a period defined by the Gaza war and heightened geopolitical tension. By combining systematic topic annotation, TF-IDF characterization, and structured sentiment coding, we identified clear patterns in the narratives that guided coverage. The most prevalent themes centered on U.S.-Israel relations and international legal and diplomatic pressure, reflecting the strong global dimension of reporting during this period.

Event-driven topics such as military operations, hostage negotiations, and regional escalation appeared less frequently but remained integral to shaping how Netanyahu’s leadership was contextualized in the media.

Sentiment analysis further illustrated how outlet ideology modulates Netanyahu’s portrayal. While most coverage was neutral, positive framing was heavily concentrated in right-leaning outlets, whereas negative sentiment aligned more closely with the proportional representation of left-leaning sources in the dataset. These patterns suggest that media portrayals of Netanyahu during this time were influenced not only by unfolding geopolitical events but also by the political positioning of the news organizations themselves.

Overall, our findings indicate that North American media primarily depict Netanyahu through a geopolitical and diplomatic lens rather than focusing on personal or purely domestic narratives. This highlights the extent to which international conflict shapes political communication and underscores the importance of considering both topic distribution and outlet composition when interpreting how political figures are represented in the news.

Group Member Contributions

All three group members contributed equally to every stage of the project. The work was intentionally structured so that data collection, open coding, topic development, full-dataset annotation, TF-IDF characterization, sentiment labeling, analysis, writing, and figure creation were shared evenly across the team. Each member independently completed one-third of the articles for both topic annotation and sentiment coding, and all definitions, methodological decisions, and revisions were developed collaboratively through joint discussion. The writing of the report was similarly divided, with each member responsible for drafting and editing an equal share of the final sections. As a result, the project reflects a fully collective effort in which all components were produced through balanced and equitable participation.

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