

GAZA CONFLICT ON PUBLIC PERSPECTIVES

(Konflik Gaza pada Perspektif Awam)

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ABSTRACT

This research addresses “The Gaza Conflict on Public Perspectives” to investigate the extent of public awareness and knowledge regarding the conflict. Employing a qualitative study, in which, a questionnaire was adopted from the Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD) study, the study aims to gather 385 public opinions of Subang Jaya residents to explore attitudes, perspectives and impacts that shape the broader public understanding of the Gaza conflict. The findings analysed through descriptive analysis show that Gaza conflict has a profound and multifaceted impact on public perceptions and behaviors, emphasizing the importance of understanding demographic nuances and adopting nuanced approaches to address the conflict’s root causes and promote peace and stability in the region. This analysis endeavors to offer comprehensive, community-specific insights into the ways the Gaza conflict shapes perceptions within the Subang Jaya community. The research findings are expected to shed light on existing gaps in public knowledge and awareness concerning the Gaza conflict, thereby informing policymakers, educators, and the broader community.

Keywords: Gaza; conflict; perspectives; awareness; knowledge

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ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini membincangkan “Konflik Gaza pada Perspektif Awam” untuk menyiasat sejauh mana kesedaran dan pengetahuan orang ramai mengenai konflik tersebut. Menggunakan kajian kualitatif, yang mana, soal selidik telah diadaptasi daripada kajian Dunia Arab untuk Penyelidikan dan Pembangunan (AWRAD), kajian itu bertujuan untuk mengumpulkan 385 pendapat umum penduduk Subang Jaya untuk meneroka sikap, perspektif dan impak yang membentuk pemahaman awam yang lebih luas tentang konflik Gaza. Dapatan yang dianalisis melalui analisis deskriptif menunjukkan bahawa konflik Gaza mempunyai kesan yang mendalam dan pelbagai aspek terhadap persepsi dan tingkah laku orang ramai, menekankan kepada kepentingan memahami nuansa demografi dan menggunakan pendekatan bernuansa untuk menangani punca konflik dan menggalakkan keamanan dan kestabilan di rantau ini. Penemuan penyelidikan dijangka memberi penerangan tentang jurang yang sedia ada dalam pengetahuan dan kesedaran awam mengenai konflik Gaza, dengan itu menyediakan maklumat kepada penggubal dasar, pendidik dan komuniti yang lebih luas.

Kata kunci: *Gaza; konflik; perspektif; kesedaran; pengetahuan*

INTRODUCTION

The Gaza conflict has been a longstanding and deeply entrenched issue in international politics, evoking strong emotions and polarizing opinions across the globe. The conflict between Israel and Hamas, which governs Gaza, has led to multiple escalations of violence, each leaving a profound impact on regional stability and global perceptions. The assassination of Ismail Haniyeh, a prominent leader of Hamas, would likely exacerbate tensions, leading to significant and far-reaching consequences (Ali 2024). Such an event would not only influence the immediate geopolitical landscape but also deeply affect public perceptions, international relations, and the broader discourse on the Gaza conflict and peacebuilding efforts.

Public perceptions are shaped by a variety of factors, including media portrayals, political rhetoric and grassroots activism (Rye 2024). The media plays a pivotal role in framing the conflict, often influencing public opinion through the lens of coverage that can range from sympathetic to critical, depending on the source (Milićević & Drndarević 2023). Political rhetoric, particularly from world leaders and influential figures, can further polarize or unite public sentiment, affecting how the conflict is perceived globally (David 2021). Additionally, grassroots activism, both within the region and internationally, reflects and amplifies these perceptions, often driving the discourse on conflict resolution and peacebuilding.

By examining these various dimensions of public response, from media portrayal to political rhetoric to grassroots activism, this study aims to provide valuable insights into the complex dynamics at play. It seeks to offer a nuanced understanding of the enduring ramifications of the Gaza conflict on global consciousness, contributing to the broader discourse on conflict resolution and peacebuilding. The study will draw on a range of sources to analyze these impacts, including media reports, political speeches and social media commentary, providing a comprehensive overview of how the Gaza conflict shapes and is shaped by public perceptions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Gaza conflict, characterized by recurrent cycles of violence, military operations and humanitarian crises, stems from territorial disputes, historical grievances and competing national aspirations. Ongoing tensions between Israel and Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, have resulted in periodic clashes and a profound humanitarian crisis affecting the civilian population (Atanasiu 2021). The origin of the Gaza conflict can be traced back to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 and the subsequent Arab-Israeli wars, which led to the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, including those in Gaza. Israel's occupation of Gaza following the 1967 Six-Day War and the subsequent blockade have further fueled tensions and violence in the region (Masudi 2023). This conflict is rooted in a complex web of historical, political and socio-economic factors, including competing national narratives, territorial disputes and the failure to achieve a comprehensive peace agreement. The unresolved issues of Palestinian statehood, Israeli settlements and the status of Jerusalem continue to perpetuate the conflict, exacerbating grievances and deepening mistrust between the parties (Masudi 2023).

The media's portrayal of the Gaza conflict plays a significant role in shaping public attitudes and opinions (Amer 2022). Analysis of media coverage often reveals biases and narratives that reflect the perspectives of the parties involved. While some media outlets may emphasize Israeli security concerns and the threat posed by Hamas rockets, others may focus on Palestinian suffering and the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, contributing to divergent public perceptions of the conflict (Cook 2018). Studies examining media coverage of the Gaza conflict have identified various forms of bias, including framing effects, selective reporting and the prioritization of certain narratives over others. Biases in media coverage can influence public perceptions, reinforce stereotypes and contribute to polarization, hindering efforts to achieve a nuanced understanding of the conflict (Amer 2022). The media's portrayal of the Gaza conflict can shape public attitudes and opinions, influencing support for or opposition to the policies of the parties involved. Biased or sensationalized media coverage may fuel misinformation, stoke public outrage, and perpetuate stereotypes, making it challenging to foster constructive dialogue and empathy across conflicting narratives.

The Gaza conflict has profound psychological effects on civilians, including trauma, anxiety and depression. Studies have documented high rates of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and other mental health disorders among residents of Gaza, particularly children and adolescents exposed to violence and displacement (Giacaman et al. 2018). The protracted nature of the Gaza conflict and the recurrent cycles of violence have contributed to widespread trauma and psychological distress among civilians. Living under conditions of siege and insecurity, Gazans experience heightened levels of stress, fear and helplessness, exacerbating existing mental health vulnerabilities and straining coping mechanisms (Masudi 2023).

INTERNATIONAL LAW

Law is a product of social processes that determine society's common interest and organize the making and application of the law. The international legal system integrates all subordinate legal systems and regulates the international public realm and the interaction of the subordinate public realm (Allott 1999). On 7 October 2023, Hamas initiated a large-scale attack on Israel, launching thousands of missiles. Israel responded by unleashing an attack of unprecedented proportions, amounting to 18,000 tonnes of bombs in Gaza. The actions of both states in the ongoing conflict are subject to regulation under international law, which mandates adherence to fundamental principles focusing on humanity, the distinction between civilians and combatants, civilian objects and military objects, proportionality, precaution, and military necessity. According to Lynk (2023), three main branches of international law apply to Israel and Palestine respecting conflict and occupation namely (1) International Humanitarian Law, Geneva Conventions of 1949, (2) International Human Rights law, 1948 and (3) International Criminal Law 1998 Rome Statute.

International Humanitarian Law (IHL) can be described as the mother of human rights in conflict situations. This is because IHL is a set of rules that seek, for humanitarian reasons, to limit the effect of armed conflict which is stated in the four Geneva Conventions of 1949 (ICRC 2004). The IHL consists of the concept of *jus in bello* and *jus ad bellum*. *Jus in bello* regulates the conduct of parties engaged in armed conflict. IHL is synonymous with *Jus in bello*; it seeks to minimize suffering in armed conflicts, notably by protecting and assisting all victims of armed conflict to the greatest extent possible (ICRC 2015). According to Jan & Haruna (2015), *Jus ad bellum* means "law to war" or "justice to war", which refers to a set of rules that regulate and initiate the use of armed force. During the surprise attack on Israeli territory, it was said Hamas committed war crimes. As reported by Baldwin (2023), war crimes are serious violations of the laws of war committed by individuals with criminal intent, that is, deliberately or recklessly. War crimes include deliberately attacking civilians, taking hostages, and collective punishment.

According to Scheffer (2023), the attack on Israel's territory violated provisions of the IHL under Common Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions (treatment of civilians and noncombatants), Article 51 of the Conventions Protocol I (protects civilian population and host provisions on war crimes). Meanwhile, Soni (2023) stated that Israel has justified its response as self-defence, which is a right under international law in the Charter of the United Nations. The International Court of Justice has confirmed that for a state to invoke the right to self-defence under international law, the responsive use of force must be proportional and not excessive the need to bring the attack to an end. However, as mentioned by Edwards (2023), the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights stated "the collective punishment by Israel of Palestinian civilians amounts also to a war crime, as does the unlawful forcible evacuation of civilians." Thus, Gaza is also a territory occupied by Israel, so the legitimacy of Israel's defence is in itself questionable.

ROLE AND RESPONSE OF INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION

The United Nations and other organizations have expressed concerns about the situation in Gaza and have long called on Israel to stop its actions. UN experts call on the international community to prevent genocide against the Palestinian people (United Nation 2023). The experts stated "We are deeply disturbed by the failure of governments to heed our call and to achieve an immediate ceasefire. We are also profoundly concerned about the support of certain governments for Israel's strategy of warfare against the besieged population of Gaza, and the failure of the international system to mobilize to prevent genocide". The International Federation of Red Cross (IFRC) has called on all parties for humanitarian access across Gaza and the West Bank, the release of hostages, the protection of civilians, hospitals and humanitarian workers from indiscriminate attack, and compliance with international humanitarian law (IFRC 2023).

UNRWA, known as the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, has been a lifeline for Palestine refugees since it started operation in 1950. Since the announcement by Israel of a "complete siege" Gaza has been facing a humanitarian catastrophe. According to Seita (2023), UNRWA is urgently appealing to all parties to facilitate a humanitarian corridor so they can reach all those in need of support. The people of Gaza are in desperate need of relief and support, and our collective humanity demands swift action to alleviate their suffering. Meanwhile, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) expressed disappointment at the US veto of a resolution for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza. The IRC insists on the necessity of an immediate and sustained ceasefire to protect civilians, ensure access to humanitarian aid and secure the release of hostages (IRC 2024).

Other than that, Aljazeera (2024) reported that Agnas Callamard and Udo Jude Ilo, the head of Amnesty International and the Center for Civilians in Conflict, demand world leaders who will be coming together on Friday for the 2024 Munich Security Conference to protect international humanitarian and international human rights laws which are the best tools for protecting civilians in times of conflict and stop creating exceptions that weaken rights protection and endanger global security and stability. Unfortunately, the world leaders responded unevenly to the countless violations of both international humanitarian and human rights law. In many cases, they also turned a blind eye to the plight of civilians suffering in conflicts.

Continued research on public perspectives of the Gaza conflict remains crucial for several reasons. Understanding public attitudes and opinions is essential for policymakers, scholars and advocacy groups seeking to address the complexities of the conflict and develop effective strategies for peacebuilding and reconciliation (Smith 2018). By analyzing the diverse range of viewpoints held by various segments of society, researchers can identify underlying factors shaping public perceptions, such as historical narratives, political affiliations and media influences. Moreover, studying changes in public opinion over time can provide insights into the impact of events, policies and media coverage on attitudes towards the conflict, facilitating informed decision-making and dialogue (Jones & Patel 2020). Furthermore, research on public perspectives can contribute to fostering empathy and understanding among different communities affected by the conflict, promoting efforts towards reconciliation and conflict resolution (Davies et al. 2019). Overall, continued investigation into public perspectives of the Gaza conflict is essential for advancing knowledge, promoting dialogue and working towards a just and lasting peace in the region. As such, future research endeavours in this area are indispensable for addressing the multifaceted challenges and complexities of the conflict and for fostering a more inclusive and constructive discourse towards resolution.

METHODOLOGY

The methodology allows for the exploration of nuanced individual experiences and narratives, which is essential for gaining deeper insights into the complexities of public perspectives. By collecting quantitative data, the research methodology facilitates an analysis that can uncover patterns, trends and underlying factors shaping public understanding of the conflict (Ali 2023). This analysis involved summarizing and interpreting the survey data using measures such as frequencies and percentages. By quantitatively summarizing the responses to survey questions, the research can provide an overview of public awareness levels and identify common perceptions and misconceptions surrounding the conflict. To ensure the reliability of the research findings, the internal consistency of the survey items was measured using Cronbach's

Alpha, which yielded a value above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating that the survey instrument is reliable. Furthermore, the survey questionnaire was derived from the public opinion polls conducted by the Arab World for Research and Development (AWRAD) and adapted for the purposes of this study, adding to its validity and reliability.

The target population for this study comprises residents of Subang Jaya, including areas such as SS12-SS19, PJS7, PJS9, PJS11, Bandar Sunway, USJ, Putra Heights, and Batu Tiga. Through random sampling, the study aims to collect 385 public opinions to achieve a confidence level of 95% with a margin of error within $\pm 5\%$ of the measured or surveyed value. Subang Jaya was selected as the study area due to its diverse population and representation of various socioeconomic backgrounds, making it conducive for capturing a range of perspectives on the impact of the Gaza conflict on public attitudes and knowledge.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

TABLE 1 Age group (Disaggregated by region)

Age Group	SS12-SS19	PJS7, PJS9, PJS11	Bandar Sunway	USJ	Putra Heights	Batu Tiga
20-29	15	15	10	8	11	11
30-39	17	18	12	7	15	10
40-49	12	13	11	7	12	14
50-59	20	15	9	5	14	13
60-69	17	10	8	6	9	10
>70	6	0	6	5	3	11

The descriptive data provided offers valuable insights into the distribution of respondents across different age groups and regions within the study area. Among the regions surveyed, SS12-SS19 has the highest number of participants, with 87 individuals contributing to the study. In SS12-SS19, the 50-59 age group dominates, comprising 20 participants, indicating a significant representation of middle-aged individuals in this area. Conversely, in PJS7, PJS9, PJS11, Putra Heights, and Bandar Sunway, the 30-39 age group emerges as the most prominent, with 18, 18, 12, and 12 respondents, respectively, suggesting a concentration of participants in their thirties in these regions. Notably, Batu Tiga stands out as the only region where the 40-49 age group has the highest representation, with 14 respondents. These findings underscore the importance of considering both age and regional demographics when analyzing public perspectives on the Gaza conflict, as they may influence perceptions and attitudes differently across various segments of the population.

TABLE 2 Percentage of participants based on work sector

Work Sector	Percentage
Government	30%
Private	43%
NGOs	7%
Other	20%

The findings from Table 2 show that participants come from various work sectors. A significant portion, 43%, work in the private sector, while 30% work in government. Additionally, 7% are from NGOs and the remaining 20% fall into the “Other” category. This diversity in employment backgrounds enhances the validity and broad applicability of the study’s results.

TABLE 3 Participants’ attitude towards Gaza conflict

PERSPECTIVES	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The Gaza conflict impacts global perceptions of peace and conflict resolution	44.4%	24.2%	17.4%	8.8%	5.2%
The Gaza conflict has not changed my perspective on the rights and struggles of Palestinians.	3.4%	10.6%	18.2%	46.0%	21.8%
The Gaza conflict has affected my opinion on the effectiveness of international diplomacy in resolving conflicts.	51.7%	23.9%	17.9%	4.2%	2.3%
The Gaza conflict has not impacted my belief in the possibility of a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.	12.7%	22.3%	31.2%	19.5%	14.3%
The Gaza conflict has strengthened my belief in the importance of diplomatic efforts to prevent and resolve conflicts.	42.1%	27.8%	15.2%	11.4%	3.6%

As shown in Table 3, the findings from the survey indicate a significant impact of the Gaza conflict on the perceptions and behaviours of respondents. A majority, comprising 38.25% who strongly agree and 22.25% who agree, believe that the Gaza conflict has influenced their perception of the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict, highlighting the substantial influence of regional conflicts on global perspectives. Similarly, a majority, consisting of 43.4% who strongly agree and 26.2% who agree, feel that the Gaza conflict has shaped their attitudes towards the role of international organizations in conflict resolution, underscoring the far-reaching implications of regional conflicts on global governance mechanisms. Moreover, a notable proportion, with 38.2% strongly agreeing and 29.3% agreeing, acknowledges the influence of the Gaza conflict on their participation in activism or advocacy related to Middle Eastern conflicts, emphasizing the interconnectedness of regional conflicts and individual engagement in social and political activism. Overall, the findings suggest a prevailing recognition among participants of the significant impact of the Gaza conflict on shaping perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours towards broader global issues, highlighting the complex interplay between regional conflicts and individual perspectives and actions.

TABLE 4 The impacts of Gaza conflict

IMPACT	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The Gaza Conflict has not prompted me to seek out more information about the historical and political context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.	4.2%	8.8%	21.6%	25.7%	39.7%
The Gaza conflict has influenced my participation in activism or advocacy related to conflicts in the Middle East.	38.2%	29.4%	19.2%	8.6%	4.7%
Media coverage does not accurately portrays the complexities of the Gaza conflict.	20.3%	14.0%	26.2%	17.9%	21.6%
The Gaza conflict receives adequate international attention.	17.4%	17.7%	31.9%	22.9%	10.1%
The Gaza conflict has influenced my sympathy towards the people affected by the conflict.	56.4%	28.8%	11.7%	1.8%	1.3%

The findings underscore the significant impact of the Gaza conflict across various aspects, reflecting its profound influence on individuals' perceptions and actions. A majority of respondents, 65.4%, feel prompted to seek more information about the historical and political context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, indicating a heightened awareness of its complexities. Moreover, 67.6% acknowledge the conflict's influence on their participation in activism or advocacy related to Middle Eastern conflicts, showcasing a strong inclination towards addressing regional issues. However, the mixed perception regarding media coverage (41.9%) and divergent opinions on international attention (35.1%) highlight the complexity of interpreting the conflict's portrayal and global response. Despite differing perspectives, the overwhelming sympathy expressed by 85.2% towards those affected and the strong belief in humanitarian aid (78.1%) underscores the human impact of the conflict. Additionally, while some respondents (43.5%) acknowledge heightened awareness of children's psychological trauma, others express varying levels of determination in advocating for policies protecting civilians (45.7%). Overall, the findings illustrate the multifaceted nature of individuals' responses to the Gaza conflict, emphasizing its far-reaching implications on perceptions, actions and awareness.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research has delved into the intricate web of public perspectives surrounding the Gaza conflict, examining its multifaceted impact on the attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of Subang Jaya residents. Through a comprehensive quantitative methodology, the study has uncovered significant insights into the enduring ramifications of the conflict on global consciousness. The implications of this research extend beyond Subang Jaya, offering broader insights into how regional conflicts resonate on a global scale, shaping public attitudes and actions. As individuals grapple with the complexities of the Gaza conflict, there is a heightened sense of awareness, prompting a significant portion of respondents to seek more information and actively engage in advocacy.

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