

# A Comparative Media Analysis of the ICJ Gaza Verdict

## Source Location and Narrative Framing Across Regional News Ecosystems

This case study showcases the **media intelligence capabilities of Event Registry**, with a focus on:

- **Source filtering** to distinguish how narratives vary by region
- **Concept-level analysis** using tag clouds and thematic mapping
- **Framing and sentiment comparison** across languages and editorial ecosystems

It offers practical value to:



### Communications professionals and brand strategists

tracking reputational risk in politically sensitive environments



### Policy advisors and humanitarian organizations

monitoring global reactions to judicial or diplomatic decisions



### Media analysts and platform users

aiming to understand how location, tone, and terminology shape narrative landscapes



### Researchers and students

studying framing theory, regional bias, and information ecosystems

By examining coverage of the **ICJ ruling on Israel's actions in Gaza**, this study illustrates how **the same event** can be framed as **a legal dispute, a moral victory, or a diplomatic challenge**, depending on the **source location, editorial stance, and concept emphasis**.

## Introduction

In January 2024, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) issued provisional measures in response to South Africa's accusation that Israel was committing acts of genocide in Gaza. The ruling did not determine whether genocide was occurring, but it called on Israel to prevent such acts and to allow humanitarian aid to reach civilians. While legally cautious, the court's decision reverberated far beyond the courtroom — triggering a wave of global media coverage, each outlet interpreting the ruling through its own cultural, political, and editorial lens.

This case study examines how that same legal event — the ICJ Gaza ruling — was **framed differently across regions**, from Israel and Palestine to South Africa, Arabic-speaking countries, and Western nations. Using Event Registry's capabilities in **source filtering, concept tracking, and sentiment analysis**, we compare narratives across five distinct media ecosystems

Our findings reveal not just variations in tone or vocabulary, but **entirely different conceptual realities**. The same court order is reported as an unjust political attack, a long-awaited moral reckoning, a symbolic gesture, or a diplomatic turning point — depending on who is telling the story, and to whom

By unpacking these narrative contrasts, this study offers a real-world demonstration of how **source selection** fundamentally shapes media analysis. It also highlights why understanding these divergences is essential for communicators, analysts, and anyone working at the intersection of public opinion and international affairs.

## How Source Location Shapes Narrative — Israel, Palestine, and South Africa

This search was designed to investigate how **media narratives shift based on geographic origin**, even when reporting on the same international legal ruling. Using the Event Registry platform, we filtered English-language news sources from three countries: **Israel, Palestine, and South Africa** — each directly involved or named in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) case on Gaza. The search covered articles from **January 26 to 31, 2024**, immediately after the ICJ delivered its **provisional measures ruling**.

By holding the query constant — focused on **ICJ + Israel** — and only changing the **source location**, we observed how the **same event** was **interpreted, emphasized, and framed differently** across three media ecosystems.



ISRAELI MEDIA

- **Tone:** Defensive and dismissive
- **Top Sources:** The Jerusalem Post, Ynetnews, Israel Hayom, Times of Israel

NARRATIVE CHARACTERISTICS

- Coverage was dominated by government statements and legal rebuttals.
- Articles framed the ICJ ruling as politically motivated and legally unfounded.
- The narrative emphasized Israel's right to self-defense and procedural flaws in the case.

EXAMPLE ARTICLE TITLES

- “Netanyahu: ICJ decision is outrageous, we will continue to defend ourselves”
- “Israeli officials slam ICJ: political, antisemitic, and disconnected from reality”
- “Israel responds to genocide charge: Hamas responsible for Gaza suffering”

Conceptual Focus  
(based on tag cloud and concept scores):



Israeli media coverage presents a complex mix of historical, legal, political, and security-related framing around the ICJ ruling. The top 50 terms reveal the dominant themes:

Legal and Institutional Framing:

Frequent terms like "ruling", "ICJ", "measures", "case", "order", "law", "Hague", and "convention" indicate a structured, judicial perspective. Coverage is heavily focused on the court’s decision, the legal process, and interpretations of international law.

Political Figures and Governance:

Names and roles such as "Netanyahu", "minister", "cassif", "president", and "knesset" suggest an emphasis on government reaction and political discourse. The presence of "decision", "state", and "government" supports this institutional narrative.

National Identity and Historical Framing:

The prominence of "holocaust", "Jewish", "Jews", and "Israeli" reflects an emotionally charged backdrop rooted in national memory and identity. These terms may have been invoked to contextualize the ICJ ruling within Israel's historical experience and perceived legitimacy.

Security and Conflict Context:

Concepts such as "Hamas", "terrorists", "hostages", "prevent", "military", "war", "IDF", and "security" indicate that the ruling was viewed through the lens of national defense and the ongoing conflict. "Ceasefire" also appears in this cluster, suggesting discussion around military restraint or its absence.

Geopolitical and Regional Context:

Mentions of "Africa", "South", "Palestinians", "Gaza", and "Palestinian" show the regional dimensions of the narrative. "World", "support", and "aid" imply some coverage of the international response and humanitarian dynamics.

Civilian and Humanitarian Themes:

While secondary, terms like "civilians", "people", "humanitarian", and "aid" also appear. These likely reflect concern for civilian impacts but are less dominant than legal and security frames.

Language of Genocide:

Words such as "genocide", "genocidal", and "acts" are present but not among the top 10. Their presence suggests that Israeli media did engage with the core accusations, possibly to refute or legally contextualize them.

The Israeli media narrative, based on concept-level analysis, prioritizes defensive legal framing, political leadership, and security concerns. National identity and historical trauma also play a significant role, particularly through terms tied to Jewish history and the Holocaust. While humanitarian concepts are present, they are overshadowed by political and legal discourse.



## PALESTINIAN MEDIA

- **Tone:** Vindicated but frustrated
- **Top Sources:** Wafa News Agency, Alquds News, Palestinian Chronicle, PNN

## NARRATIVE CHARACTERISTICS

- Coverage framed the ruling as a symbolic step toward justice but stressed the lack of enforcement.
- The language highlighted civilian suffering, historical injustice, and global accountability.

### EXAMPLE ARTICLE TITLES

- “Genocide continues despite ICJ ruling”
- “Ink on paper: Palestinians fear ruling will not stop Israel”
- “Palestine hails historic ICJ decision against Israeli crimes”

Conceptual Focus  
(based on tag cloud and concept scores):



Palestinian media coverage of the ICJ ruling emphasizes legal framing, humanitarian consequences, and the broader geopolitical and regional context. Top-ranking concepts include:

Legal and Institutional: "ICJ," "ruling," "provisional," "measures," "order," "case," "law," "convention," "lawsuit"

These terms show that the legal process and decisions by the International Court of Justice were central to Palestinian coverage. The ruling is not just a symbolic gesture but a pivotal legal moment that affirms a path of international justice.

Humanitarian Crisis: "civilians," "humanitarian," "people," "committing," "crimes," "crime," "prevent," "ceasefire," "ensure"

The focus is strongly on the suffering of civilians in Gaza. These terms reflect the moral and practical urgency expressed in Palestinian media, where international law is seen as a mechanism to stop ongoing human suffering.

**National Identity and Collective Experience: "Palestine," "Palestinians," "Palestinian," "strip," "occupation," "occupying"**

These terms ground the story in the collective Palestinian experience, emphasizing identity, place, and the long-standing context of occupation.

Geopolitical Actors and Solidarity: "South," "Africa," "foreign," "united," "council," "countries," "meeting," "statement"

The prominent mentions of South Africa and other international players signal global solidarity and support, while references to entities like the "United Nations" and "council" suggest expectations for follow-up from international institutions.

Security and Conflict References: "Hamas," "security," "minister," "ministry," "state"

These appear less prominently and are not the main narrative drivers. The presence of "Hamas" indicates recognition of their role in the situation, but without the framing typical of adversarial or security-dominant discourse.

**Process and Urgency:** "decision," "called," "ordered," "added," "friday," "january"

These terms indicate timing, statements, and ongoing developments, reinforcing the active, evolving nature of the legal-political process.

Overall, Palestinian media frames the ICJ ruling as a moment of international validation, focusing on humanitarian protection, accountability under international law, and the shared suffering of the Palestinian people. The narrative balances legal gravitas with emotional resonance, using global legal mechanisms as both shields and tools for justice.



**SOUTH AFRICAN MEDIA**

- **Tone:** Proud, moral, and legally assertive
- **Top Sources:** News24, Daily Maverick, SABC News, IOL

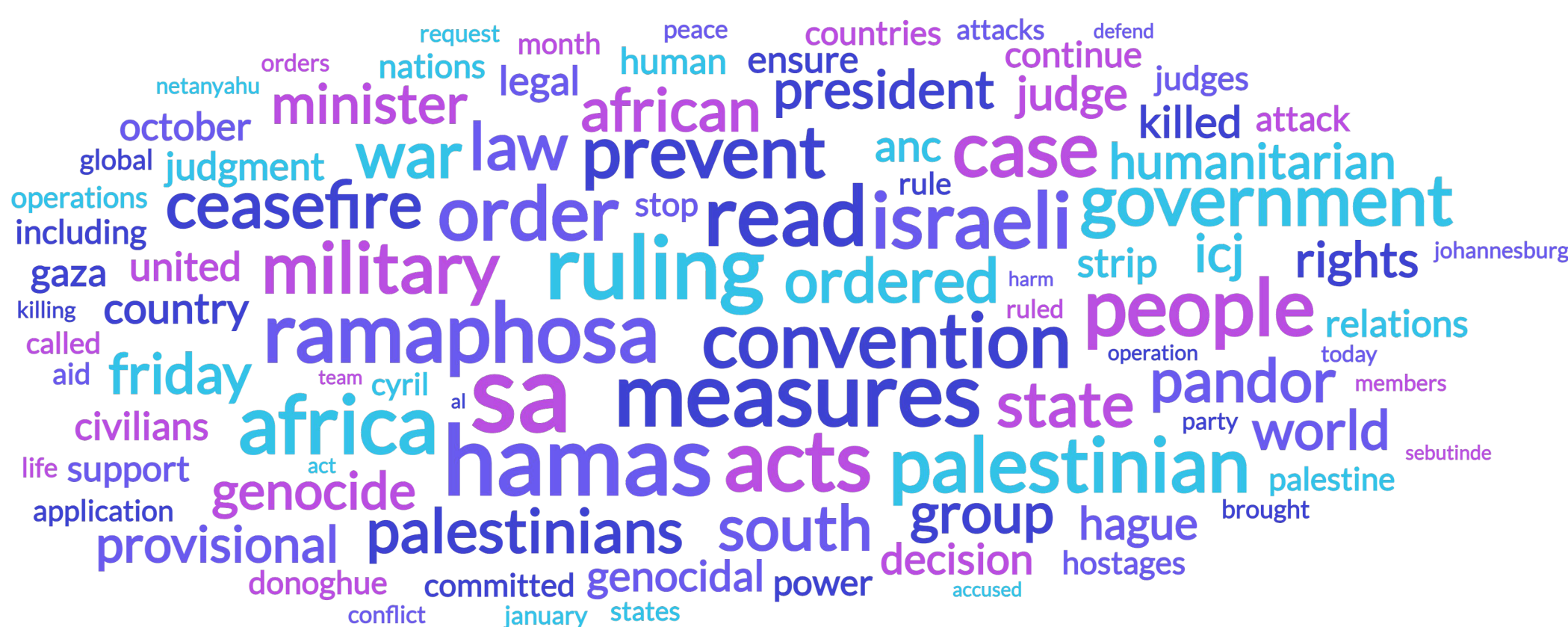
## NARRATIVE CHARACTERISTICS

- Articles emphasized South Africa's leadership in filing the ICJ case, invoking Mandela's legacy and international solidarity.
- The ICJ process was framed as a moral responsibility and global legal milestone.

### EXAMPLE ARTICLE TITLES

- “South Africa takes historic stand at the ICJ”
- “Ramaphosa says South Africa acted on moral duty in Gaza genocide case”
- “SA confronts genocide at The Hague – a bold legal step”

Conceptual Focus  
(based on tag cloud and concept scores):



South African media coverage of the ICJ ruling blends legal framing, national identity, and political activism. Top-ranking concepts include:

**Legal and Procedural Terms:** "measures," "ruling," "acts," "convention," "case," "order," "prevent," "law," "ceasefire," "ordered," "icj," "genocide," "provisional," "rights," "humanitarian," "judge," "decision," "genocidal," "legal," "judgment"

These frequent legal references show a strong focus on the judicial dimension of the ICJ case, the responsibility to prevent genocide, and procedural outcomes like provisional measures. The term "ceasefire" suggests legal expectations tied to real-world military activity.

**Political and National Identity:** "ramaphosa," "pandor," "minister," "president," "government," "state," "anc," "country," "south," "africa," "african"

South African leadership plays a prominent role in coverage. Cyril Ramaphosa, the President of South Africa, and Naledi Pandor, the Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, are frequently mentioned as key figures driving the country's legal action at the ICJ. Their visibility reflects a strong sense of national pride and political ownership of the case. The inclusion of "ANC" (African National Congress), South Africa's ruling party, reinforces the framing of the ICJ case as aligned with the country's historical identity rooted in justice, anti-apartheid struggle, and international solidarity.

**Conflict and Contextual Actors: "hamas," "israeli," "palestinian," "palestinians," "military," "war," "gaza," "civilians," "killed," "strip"**

These terms position the ICJ case within the broader Gaza conflict and humanitarian impact. While " Hamas" and "Israeli" are mentioned, the focus appears more on outcomes for "Palestinians" and the suffering of "civilians."

## International and Institutional Presence: "united," "hague," "group," "world"

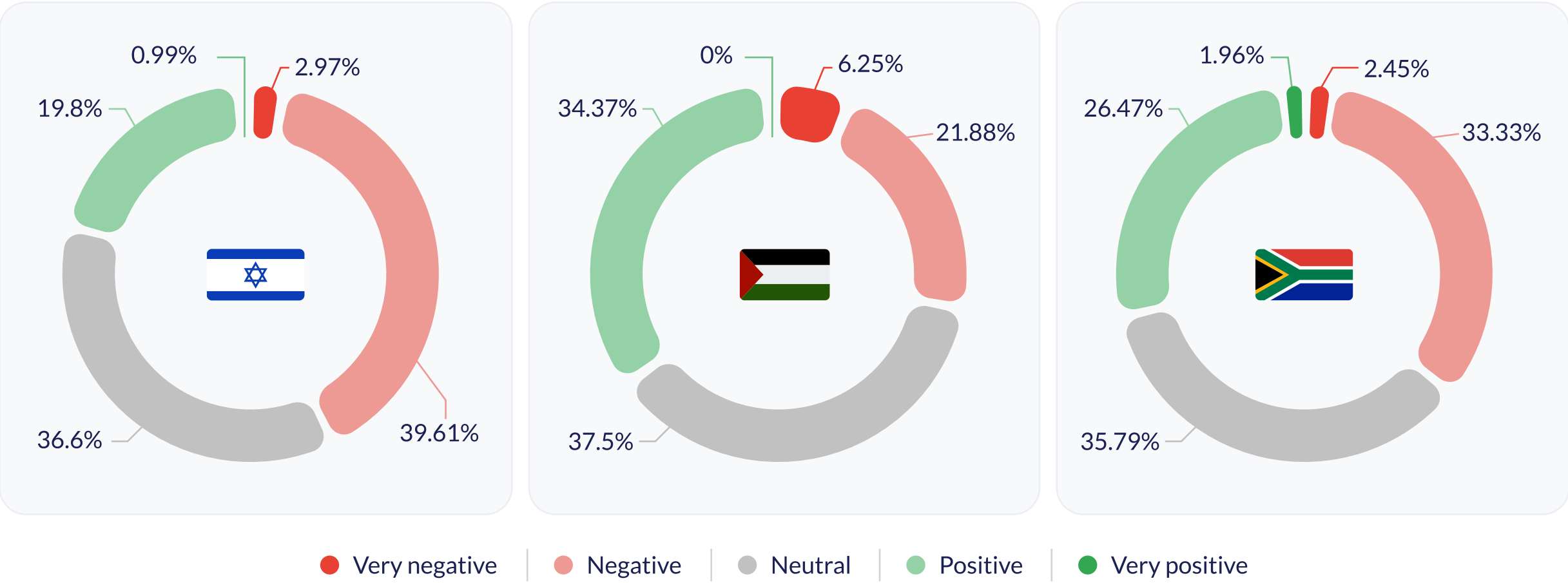
Global institutions are referenced, indicating that the ruling is portrayed as part of a larger international justice movement. The "Hague" functions as a symbolic legal center.

South African media frames the ICJ ruling through a legal and moral leadership lens, emphasizing its own role as a global advocate against genocide. The focus blends legal accountability, national pride, and solidarity with Palestinians, while maintaining strong references to judicial norms and international law.



# Sentiment Distribution by Source Region

To complement the narrative framing, we conducted a sentiment analysis on 200 articles per region, using Event Registry’s automated classification. This revealed measurable tonal differences in how the ICJ ruling was covered.



## Sentiment Evaluation (% of Articles)

Region	Very Negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very Positive
Israel	2.97%	39.61%	36.63%	19.80%	0.99%
Palestine	6.25%	21.88%	37.50%	34.73%	0.00%
South Africa	2.45%	33.33%	35.79%	26.47%	1.96%

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Israeli coverage clustered around neutral and negative sentiment, reflecting the defensive, legalistic tone seen in headlines and bodies.
- Palestinian articles skewed slightly toward neutral and positive, aligned with narratives of symbolic justice and international recognition — though the overall volume of sentiment polarity was more evenly spread.
- South African sources exhibited the most polarized sentiment distribution, with high representation in both negative and positive categories. This reflects a dynamic media landscape where the ICJ case is seen through contrasting lenses: for some, it represents a historic moral and diplomatic victory that elevates South Africa’s global standing; for others, it raises concerns about potential political consequences or limitations of the court's decision. The polarity likely stems from this split — between viewing the outcome as a symbolic win and questioning its practical impact.

## Key Contrast Summary

Aspect	Israel	Palestine	South Africa
Tone	Defensive, legalistic	Triumphant, skeptical	Proud, moral
Focus	Delegitimizing the case; legal defense	Civilian suffering; justice	Legal leadership; historical continuity
Narrative Anchors	Outrageous,” “unfounded,” “defend”	“Genocide,” “ink on paper,” “justice”	“Moral duty,” “Mandela,” “bold step”
Top Concepts	Netanyahu, ICJ, security, Hamas	Gaza, civilians, law, international court	Mandela, minister, Africa, legal order



This comparative analysis focuses on international media coverage of the ICJ ruling on Israel’s operations in Gaza, using the search query “ICJ + Israel” and filtering for the period January 26–30, 2024 — immediately following the court’s decision. The dataset includes articles across all languages but is geographically narrowed to two regional groups:

- Western countries (USA, UK, Canada, France, Australia, Germany)
- Arabic countries (Egypt, Qatar, UAE, Jordan, Lebanon)

By comparing article content and concept tag clouds from these two regions, the analysis reveals how the same legal event was framed through distinct editorial lenses, shaped by regional context, political priorities, and narrative emphasis.

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Despite regional and editorial differences, both Arabic and Western media consistently focus on the core elements of the ICJ ruling. Terms like “court,” “ICJ,” “ruling,” “genocide,” “order,” and “measures” appear prominently in both concept tag clouds. Additionally, both highlight key actors and institutions, including “Israel,” “Palestine,” “South Africa,” and “UNRWA.” This shared terminology reflects a common factual framing centered on the legal process, geopolitical context, and the key players involved.

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This framing is reinforced by article excerpts that describe the ICJ's actions in formal and diplomatic language. For example, one article refers to the ruling as a "legal victory for South Africa," while another debates its practical impact, using phrases such as "حبر على ورق" ("ink on paper"), indicating skepticism about enforcement.

## Western Media: Institutional Analysis with Humanitarian Nuance



Articles also emphasize political reactions, with frequent mentions of “Netanyahu,” “military,” “government,” “Biden,” “militants,” and “Hamás.” This indicates coverage that extends beyond the courtroom to address geopolitical stakes and leadership responses.

### Table: Summary of Differences

Focus Area	Arabic Media	Western Media
Legal Language	Dominant: “genocide,” “application,” “collective”	Strong, though balanced with other frames
Institutional Framing	Prominent: “foreign affairs,” “commission,” “justice”	Political and legal mix: “government,” “Biden,” “military”
Humanitarian Terms	Limited: “humanitarian,” “occupation” present but not central	Present: “hostages,” “civilians,” “aid,” “bread”
Actor Focus	Emphasis on institutions and processes	Broader: includes political figures and alliances
Tone	Formal, procedural, legally grounded	Mixed: procedural, political, and humanitarian



## Conclusion: Why Source Matters

This case study illustrates a fundamental truth in media intelligence: the story is shaped not just by the facts, but by who tells it. The same ICJ ruling — a single, legal decision — generated divergent narratives across regional ecosystems. From legal rebuttals in Israeli media to symbolic justice in Palestinian coverage, from South Africa’s moral positioning to Arabic formality and Western humanitarian nuance, each region emphasized different actors, motives, and consequences.

What emerges is not a single global narrative, but a multi-layered landscape of perception — shaped by language, geography, political context, and editorial stance. This is why source filtering is not just a technical feature — it is an editorial decision with profound implications.

For organizations operating in sensitive geopolitical spaces, understanding these divergent frames is essential — whether for shaping communication strategies, managing reputational risk, or informing policy responses.

With Event Registry, users can dissect global narratives at the level of concepts, sources, tone, and region — transforming unstructured media coverage into structured, actionable insight.

