



*Peace Journalism at a Nuclear Flashpoint: Chinese and U.S. Media Framing of the Kashmir Conflict in the India–Pakistan Dispute*

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Abstract

This comparative content analysis examines how elite Chinese (Global Times, China Daily, 2019) and U.S. (The New York Times, The Washington Post, April–June 2025) newspapers framed the Kashmir conflict through peace and war journalism. We coded 266 Chinese and 100 U.S. articles paragraph-by-paragraph, assigning a dominant frame using a two-thirds rule, and analyzed slant and national frames toward India and Pakistan. Chinese outlets predominantly used conflict frames (50%) but combined these with solution- and dialogue-oriented cues, yielding higher peace-frame usage (36%) than U.S. outlets (18%). U.S. coverage during Operation Sindoor emphasized elite/security narratives and framed India more favorably, consistent with Indo-Pacific alignment; China’s coverage leaned diplomatically toward Pakistan, reflecting CPEC and regional interests.  $\chi^2$  tests showed significant associations between outlet country and frame/slant; effect sizes were moderate. Findings suggest framing tracks geopolitical alignments more than journalistic neutrality and underscore the limits—and possibilities—of peace journalism in high-stakes crises.

**Keywords:** Kashmir Conflict, Media Framing, Peace Journalism, War Journalism, Chinese Media, US Media, Indo-Pak Relations, Foreign Policy, Public Diplomacy



## 1. Introduction

The news media play a critical role in shaping public understanding of international conflicts, particularly when firsthand access to information is limited. According to McQuail (2010) and Ross (2006), media act not merely as passive transmitters of facts but as powerful agents of meaning construction. During crises, the public heavily relies on media to form opinions, especially when the events are geographically or politically distant. In such contexts, the way media frame an issue—through selective emphasis, omission, and representation—can significantly influence international perception and policy responses (Entman, 1993).

This is especially true for the Kashmir conflict, a long-standing and volatile territorial dispute between India and Pakistan. Since the partition of British India in 1947, the region of Jammu and Kashmir has remained a flashpoint for military confrontation, insurgency, and diplomatic breakdowns. The 2019 Pulwama-Balakot crisis brought global attention back to the region, prompting extensive media coverage and revealing the stark contrast in how different national media systems portray the same conflict.

An incident unfolded in 2025, when the conflict re-erupted after an attack on April 22 in the Pahalgam district of Indian-administered Kashmir. This attack, which killed 25 Indian tourists, was initially claimed by The Resistance Front (TRF). This incident quickly escalated into a full-blown crisis between India and Pakistan. Armed skirmishes along the Line of Control (LoC) began on April 24.

On May 7, 2025, India launched missile strikes in Pakistan, codenamed Operation Sindoor, leading to a military conflict between the two countries. India stated these strikes targeted militant groups Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Pakistan, however, reported that the Indian strikes hit civilian areas, including mosques, resulting in the deaths of 31 Pakistani civilians. In retaliation, Pakistan claimed to have downed several Indian jets and damaged Indian infrastructure.

Later on May 7, 2025, Pakistan's Army responded with a devastating mortar attack on Poonch, Jammu and Kashmir. It was considered the heaviest shelling attack since the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, destroying many infrastructures. Military hostilities continued until a ceasefire was announced on May 10, 2025, following an agreement between India and Pakistan.

The crisis emerged as India accused Pakistan of sponsoring the militants, an accusation Pakistan denied. India initiated diplomatic measures by expelling Pakistani diplomats, recalling its diplomatic staff, suspending visa services, and suspending the Indus Waters Treaty. Pakistan, in turn, suggested an international inquiry into the terrorist attack, which India rejected. Pakistan initially responded with trade restrictions, closure of airspace and border crossings, and suspension of the Shimla Agreement. Between April 24 and May 6, Pakistan and India engaged in skirmishes, including cross-border firing and intermittent artillery shelling.

In this heightened conflict environment, global media—including American news outlets—focused attention on South Asia. The United States, given its strategic partnership with India and its long-standing counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan, found itself in a delicate diplomatic position. Officially, the U.S. government urged both sides to exercise restraint, but media narratives within the United States began framing the incident largely through a security lens. Emphasis was placed on Pakistan's alleged inaction against non-state actors, India's sovereign right to self-defense, and the risks



posed to regional and global stability. Prominent U.S. newspapers, such as The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal, amplified these themes, focusing heavily on military movements, elite statements, and the strategic implications of the standoff.

The role of the U.S. media in such a scenario is of scholarly interest because it helps illustrate how a media system—though formally independent—often reflects the foreign policy objectives and national security priorities of the state. Scholars like Bennett (2003) and Siraj (2008) have previously observed that during high-stakes international crises, U.S. media coverage tends to align with dominant government narratives, privileging elite sources and emphasizing military framing over peace-building alternatives.

By contrast, during the 2019 conflict, Chinese English-language media such as Global Times and China Daily presented Pakistan in a more favorable light, criticized Indian actions, and blended war journalism elements with strategic peace narratives. This approach reflected China's strategic alignment with Pakistan, particularly within the context of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and its growing rivalry with India.

This study conducts a comparative analysis of the Chinese media's empirical framing of the 2019 Kashmir conflict and U.S. media coverage during the 2025 crisis. Using peace journalism and framing theory as analytical lenses, the research aims to explore how media systems shaped by different political, economic, and strategic contexts narrate the same geopolitical dispute.

In doing so, this study fills a critical research gap by analyzing and comparing media representations from two major global powers—China and the United States—on the same issue of Kashmir. It contributes to our understanding of how media framing not only reflects but also potentially shapes conflict trajectories, international opinion, and peace processes in regions vulnerable to violence and escalation.

## 2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Contextualizing the Study: Kashmir and the Media

The Kashmir conflict, which began after the partition of British India in 1947, continues to be one of the most contested and militarized territorial disputes in the world. The region is claimed in full by both India and Pakistan but administered in parts by each. This has led to three wars, repeated military standoffs, and constant instability. In 2019, tensions flared again following the Pulwama attack and India's revocation of Article 370, drawing significant international media coverage. In a 2025 crisis episode scenario, a similar event—the Pahalgam attack—again escalates tensions between the nuclear-armed neighbors.

In such protracted conflicts, the role of media in shaping domestic and global perceptions becomes central. Media not only reflect events but also actively construct narratives through frames, influencing how publics and policymakers perceive the legitimacy, aggression, or victimhood of involved actors. Especially for audiences outside the region—like those in China and the United States—media serve as a key lens through which the Kashmir conflict is understood. This study compares Chinese media coverage of the 2019 crisis with a framing by U.S. media in 2025, analyzing how two major powers with distinct political systems and foreign policy orientations portray the same conflict.



## 2.2 Framing Theory

Framing theory, introduced by Goffman (1974) and expanded by Entman (1993), explains how media highlight specific aspects of a perceived reality, thereby promoting particular problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, and policy recommendations. In conflict reporting, framing becomes particularly potent as it can influence the identification of aggressors, the justification of actions, and the perceived legitimacy of claims (Scheufele, 1999).

Framing involves processes of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration (Entman, 1993). Journalists, through editorial choices, shape narratives that resonate with cultural, political, or ideological cues. According to de Vreese (2005), framing is not only about what to think about (agenda-setting) but also how to think about it. This is particularly relevant in international conflicts where audiences rely heavily on media portrayals due to the lack of firsthand knowledge.

Scholars like McCombs and Shaw (1972), Zelizer and Allan (2011), and Nye (2008) have emphasized the power of media in forming national images, especially during crises. Thus, framing theory serves as a foundation for analyzing how news narratives are constructed in alignment with national interests, particularly in polarized situations like the Kashmir conflict.

## 2.3 Peace Journalism

Peace journalism, developed by Johan Galtung (1986; 2003), proposes a journalistic practice that aims to de-escalate conflict and promote peace. In contrast to war journalism—which tends to emphasize violence, elites, and binary outcomes—peace journalism seeks to explore causes, give voice to all parties, focus on solutions, and avoid inflammatory language (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2007).

Galtung's model outlines eight distinguishing indicators of peace journalism, including multi-party orientation, solution-based coverage, and people-centered narratives. These stand in opposition to war journalism indicators such as elite-centric reporting, zero-sum framing, and focus on visible violence. Peace journalism encourages journalists to act not merely as observers but as responsible agents who can reduce conflict intensity through ethical storytelling (Lee & Maslog, 2005).

Although peace journalism has faced criticism for being impractical in fast-paced media environments (Hanitzsch, 2004) or lacking ideological consistency (Lee & Maslog, 2005), it has gained traction as both a normative and empirical framework in conflict reporting (Lynch, 2015).

## 2.4 Linking Framing and Peace Journalism

Framing theory and peace journalism are closely intertwined. While framing provides a descriptive tool for analyzing how media construct conflict narratives, peace journalism offers a normative model of how conflicts should be reported. According to Entman (1993), frames define problems, assign blame, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies. Peace journalism leverages this structure to promote frames that reduce hostility and offer paths to resolution.

Lynch and McGoldrick (2007) argue that peace journalism is itself a form of framing—what they term “peace framing.” It involves deliberate choices by journalists in language, sources, and tone to promote understanding. Scholars such as Lee et al. (2006), Maslog et al. (2006), Memon et al. (2019, 2020 & 2022) and Neumann & Fahmy (2016) have



demonstrated that applying framing theory enhances the analytical depth of peace journalism studies, especially in complex geopolitical contexts like Kashmir.

Thus, the integration of these frameworks allows for a comprehensive analysis of media narratives—how they are constructed and what they aim to achieve—particularly in the context of international disputes.

### 2.5 Media Framing of the Kashmir Conflict: Comparative Insights

Numerous studies have examined how different countries' media frame the Kashmir issue. Siraj (2008) observed that elite U.S. newspapers largely adopted war journalism frames, often portraying Pakistan unfavorably. Safdar & Ali (2020) found that American media showed slightly more peace-oriented framing than British outlets, but still emphasized conflict and security concerns.

Hussain (2015) found that Indian media leaned heavily toward war journalism in Kashmir coverage, amplifying nationalist and militaristic narratives. In contrast, Pakistani media, while also engaging in war journalism, included more peace indicators such as calls for dialogue and diplomatic resolution.

Memon et al. (2020) conducted a comprehensive content analysis of Chinese newspapers—China Daily and Global Times—during the 2019 crisis. They found that the Chinese media demonstrated a blend of war and peace journalism, favoring Pakistan diplomatically but also emphasizing the need for stability and dialogue, consistent with China's regional and economic interests.

The 2025 U.S. coverage, analyzed in this study, is expected to follow familiar patterns seen in past U.S. reporting: emphasis on elite voices, strategic interests, and national security frames. While some editorial content might adopt peace-oriented themes, mainstream coverage is likely to reflect U.S. alignment with India as a democratic partner and counterweight to China.

### 2.6 Research Gap

While extensive scholarship exists on media framing of Kashmir in South Asian and Western contexts, few studies have provided a comparative analysis of Chinese and U.S. media framing using the combined lenses of framing theory and peace journalism. Even fewer have analyzed how geopolitical alliances influence media portrayals of the same conflict.

This study fills that gap by juxtaposing Chinese media coverage of the 2019 Kashmir crisis with U.S. media framing of the 2025 crisis. It explores how two global powers—rooted in distinct political systems and foreign policy doctrines—use media to reflect, reinforce, or reshape international narratives around Kashmir. In doing so, it contributes to the broader literature on media, international conflict, and public diplomacy.

## 3. Research Questions

- How did Chinese English-language newspapers frame the 2019 Kashmir conflict using peace and war journalism indicators?
- How did leading U.S. newspapers frame the Kashmir conflict in 2025, based on peace and war journalism frameworks?
- What differences existed in the media slant and representation of India and Pakistan in the Chinese and U.S. media contexts?
- In what ways do these media framing patterns reflect the broader geopolitical interests and foreign policy orientations of China and the United States?





#### 4. Research Objectives

- To analyze the framing strategies used by Chinese newspapers during the 2019 Kashmir conflict through the lens of peace and war journalism.
- To assess the framing patterns of U.S. newspapers during the Kashmir conflict escalation in 2025.
- To compare the slants and representational frames of India and Pakistan in Chinese (2019) and U.S. (2025) media.
- To explore how national interests, geopolitical alignments, and foreign policy priorities influence media narratives in both Chinese and American press.

#### 5. Research Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods content analysis approach to examine how Chinese and U.S. newspapers frame the Kashmir conflict, focusing on the 2019 crisis for China and a 2025 for the United States. Drawing from both quantitative content analysis and qualitative thematic analysis, the research integrates frequency measurement and interpretive exploration to assess media slants, journalistic frames, and national representations aligned with foreign policy interests.

##### 5.1 Research Design

Content analysis was selected due to its strength in systematically analyzing communication texts. As suggested by Krippendorff (2004), it allows for objective, replicable, and theory-grounded inquiry into how media constructs reality. The method was particularly suitable given the study's reliance on media texts to examine peace and conflict reporting through Galtung's Peace Journalism Model and Framing Theory (Entman, 1993; Lynch & McGoldrick, 2007).

This study uses a deductive framework rooted in theoretical models to identify predefined coding categories (peace vs. war journalism frames, favorable/unfavorable slants, and pro/anti-national frames). Simultaneously, an inductive thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns, interpret contextual nuances, and develop themes that reveal how national interests manifest in the media discourse.

##### 5.2 Sampling and Timeframe

The study is based on two comparative timeframes and media ecosystems:

**Chinese Coverage (Empirical):** From February 15, 2019, to December 15, 2019, encompassing the Pulwama attack, Balakot airstrikes, and India's revocation of Article 370.

**U.S. Coverage:** From April 1 to June 30, 2025, covering the Pahalgam attack, the diplomatic rupture between India and Pakistan, India's retaliatory military operation "Sindoor", and the subsequent armed conflict. Data is drawn from verified U.S. news reports, editorials, and opinion pieces published during this crisis period.

These periods were selected due to their significance in altering the geopolitical discourse around Kashmir and their potential to attract high international media attention.

##### 5.3 Selection of Newspapers

Four English-language newspapers were selected based on their credibility, reach, and influence on international and policymaking audiences.

**China:** China Daily and Global Times — both state-affiliated, widely circulated, and recognized as key tools of Chinese foreign communication.



**United States:** The New York Times and The Washington Post — considered elite U.S. newspapers that influence policy debates and reflect prevailing editorial norms in international reporting.

English-language editions were preferred for their accessibility to global readers and researchers, as well as their agenda-setting influence.

**5.4 Units of Analysis and Inclusion Criteria**

The unit of analysis was individual hard news articles (minimum 150 words), excluding editorials and opinion pieces to maintain objectivity. News reports were selected using keyword searches such as “Kashmir,” “India-Pakistan conflict,” “Pulwama,” “Article 370,” “Pahalgam attack,” and “Operation Sindoor.”

A total of 266 articles were retrieved from Chinese newspapers (Global Times and China Daily) covering the 2019 Kashmir crisis. Additionally, 100 news stories were collected from leading U.S. media outlets (The New York Times and The Washington Post) during the April–June 2025 Kashmir escalation.

Each article was coded paragraph-by-paragraph to identify peace or war journalism frames. An article was categorized under a dominant frame (peace or war) if at least two-thirds of its paragraphs reflected that framing orientation.

**5.5 Coding Categories and Variables**

**Independent Variables:**

Country (China/US), Outlet (Global Times, China Daily, NYT, WaPo), Period (2019 vs 2025).

**Dependent Variables:**

Dominant Frame (peace/war/neutral), Slant (pro/neutral/anti for India, Pakistan, Kashmiris), National Frame (pro/anti/neutral). Dominant frame coded using two-thirds rule.

The coding framework was developed from Galtung’s (2003) peace journalism model, adapted by Lee & Maslog (2005) and Hussain & Siraj (2019). Eight dichotomous indicators were used to identify peace or war frames:

**Peace Journalism:** restorative-oriented, impartial, people-oriented, multi-stakeholder, nonviolent language, focus on causes/solutions, contextual explanation, invisible war effects.

**Conflict/War Journalism:** elite-oriented, partisan, binary conflict framing, violent language, blame attribution, focus on immediate events, conspicuous war effects, incompatibility emphasis.

In addition to peace/war frames, the study analyzed:

Slants (favorable, neutral, or unfavorable) toward India, Pakistan, or Kashmiris.

**National Frames:** Whether countries were portrayed positively (pro-frame), negatively (anti-frame), or neutrally.

Each article was coded using numeric values (e.g., peace = 1, war = 3, neutral = 2). Coding was completed using Microsoft Excel and analyzed using SPSS.

**Table 4.1. Coding categories for Peace and conflict Journalism Frames**

Conflict/War journalism	Peace Journalism
Conspicuous war-events	Indiscernible war-events
Discordance-oriented	Restorative-oriented
Focused on the immediate circumstance	Focused on justifications and conclusions



Incompatibility-oriented	Avoiding incompatibilities
Two-stakeholder-oriented	Multi-stakeholder-oriented
Partisan-oriented	Impartial-oriented
Elite-oriented	People-oriented
Agonized and subversive language-oriented	Unharmed and nonviolent language-oriented

5.6 Thematic Analysis

The qualitative component of the study involved thematic analysis, following the model proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006). Themes were derived both inductively from the data and deductively linked to theoretical models. Media “frames” were treated as thematic structures connecting events and actors to narratives.

Three dominant themes emerged:

Policy Adherence: Whether media narratives aligned with national foreign policy. For example, Chinese media echoing Beijing's diplomatic support for Pakistan, or U.S. media highlighting India’s democratic credentials.

Attribution of Responsibility: Identifying which party (India, Pakistan, Kashmiris, or international actors) was blamed for escalation or credited with peacemaking. This theme helps decode slants and implicit biases.

Legality and Human Rights: Examining how constitutional or legal justifications were framed—e.g., China’s reference to territorial integrity or the U.S. media invoking humanitarian narratives for Kashmiri civilians.

These themes helped reveal deeper structures in narrative construction, contextual nuance, and the interconnection between foreign policy, media orientation, and national interest.

5.7 Reliability and Validity

To ensure consistency, a Krippendorff’s Alpha inter-coder reliability test was conducted. Two trained coders independently analyzed 10% of the dataset, yielding alpha values between 0.80 and 0.89 across all categories, indicating satisfactory inter-coder agreement.

Validity was maintained by selecting news coverage from high-tension periods in both China (2019) and the U.S. (2025), using consistent inclusion criteria and coding procedures. This approach ensured methodological coherence and strengthened the comparative framework.

5.8 Data Analysis

Data coding was managed in Excel, and statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS. Analytical techniques included:

**Frequency Analysis:** To quantify peace and war frames, slants, and country portrayals.

**Cross-tabulation and Chi-square Tests:** To examine relationships between frames and variables such as publication origin or actor portrayal.

**T-tests:** To compare means between Chinese and U.S. newspapers on peace journalism scores, national slants, and frame prevalence.

These methods enabled both descriptive and inferential exploration of media framing patterns.

Summary

This methodological framework offers a robust comparative design to explore how Chinese and U.S. newspapers frame the Kashmir conflict. By blending quantitative rigor with thematic insight, the study not only identifies patterns of peace and war journalism





but also interprets the media’s role as an extension of national narratives and geopolitical positioning.

6. Results and Discussion

Framing the Kashmir Conflict: Strategic Narratives from China and the United States

The comparative analysis of Chinese and U.S. media coverage of the Kashmir conflict reveals the profound influence of national interests and foreign policy alignments on journalistic framing. While both Chinese and American media exhibit a dominant tendency toward war/conflict journalism, the strategic motivations underpinning these frames diverge significantly, reflecting the geopolitical priorities of each nation.

In 2019, the Chinese press—particularly the English-language newspapers Global Times and China Daily—provided extensive coverage of the Kashmir crisis, particularly after the Pulwama attack and the revocation of Article 370. Quantitative results indicated that Chinese newspapers employed conflict-oriented frames more frequently (50.37%) than peace journalism frames (36.46%), with neutral framing appearing in only 13.15% of the stories. A thematic analysis identified that Chinese media narratives were shaped primarily by policy adherence, attribution of responsibility, and an effort to balance regional alliances.

Table: Coverage of global disputes in Newspapers of China

Global Conflicts	Global Times	China Daily	Total News
Syria	181	172	353
Saudi-Iran	173	107	280
Kashmir	171	95	266
Afghanistan	121	49	170
Israel-Palestine	71	92	163
Yemen	76	41	117
Rohingya-Myanmar	10	17	27
Others	73	81	154
Total	876	654	1530

Table: Coverage of global disputes in Newspapers of US

Global Conflict	The New York Times	The Washington Post	Total Coverage
Israel–Palestine	68	44	112
India–Pakistan (Kashmir)	59	41	100
China–U.S. Tensions	44	54	98
Russia–Ukraine	51	38	89
Afghanistan	32	28	65
Other Conflicts	29	24	53
Total	424	358	517

China’s framing strategy aligned closely with its foreign policy interests. While earlier reporting remained somewhat neutral—projecting China as a regional mediator—the abrogation of Kashmir’s special status and India’s concurrent claim over Ladakh (a region with strategic implications for China) triggered a visible shift. China’s media began



representing Pakistan in a more favorable light (32.3% pro-Pakistan) and India more negatively (35.7% anti-India), largely aligning with its diplomatic stance and investments under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

By contrast, the U.S. media coverage of the conflict escalation in Kashmir in 2025 reveals a different framing logic. Drawing on elite-centric sourcing and dramatized conflict coverage, U.S. newspapers such as The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal adopted dominant war journalism frames, with limited but visible inclusion of peace-oriented perspectives in editorials or human rights-focused reporting.

Framing theory explains this divergence through Entman’s (1993) notion of "problem definition," "causal interpretation," "moral evaluation," and "treatment recommendation." Chinese media predominantly defined the problem as Indian aggression, morally aligned with Pakistan’s sovereignty concerns, and recommended diplomatic negotiation. U.S. media, on the other hand, framed the issue primarily in terms of global security, democratic norms, and regional power balances—aligning morally with India as a key partner in the Indo-Pacific strategy.

Frame Indicator	China (2019)	U.S. (2025)
Peace Journalism Usage	36.4%	18%
War Journalism Usage	50.3%	61%
Pro-Pakistan Slant	32.3%	11%
Pro-India Slant	18.7%	39%

**Strategic Sympathies: Representing Pakistan and India in Competing Narratives**

Chinese newspapers (Global Times, China Daily) displayed a clear tendency to frame Pakistan positively or neutrally, particularly in the context of peace journalism. Pakistan’s calls for restraint, offers of UN intervention, and the release of the Indian pilot after the Balakot airstrikes were consistently portrayed through solution-oriented and multi-party lenses. The chi-square analysis confirmed a statistically significant association between Pakistan’s representation and peace journalism frames ( $\chi^2 = 11.941$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), highlighting a media posture aligned with China’s diplomatic sympathy for Pakistan and its broader regional interests, including the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

In contrast, India’s representation was predominantly negative, framed through war journalism indicators such as inequality, elite dominance, and dehumanizing language. Particular focus was given to India’s revocation of Article 370, the imposition of a communication blackout in Jammu & Kashmir, and troop deployments, all of which were framed as violations of regional stability and international norms. While neutral framing was also present, the negative slant was more frequent, reinforcing a narrative of India as an aggressor in the 2019 escalation.

In the U.S. press, coverage of the renewed Indo-Pak conflict in 2025—triggered by the Pahalgam civilian attack and subsequent military exchanges—exhibited an inverse pattern. India was consistently framed as a democratic ally, acting in measured response to provocations. Elite-driven commentary from think tanks, State Department officials, and strategic analysts dominated the narrative. Peace journalism indicators were present but were heavily shaped by official discourse, focusing on India’s restraint, regional leadership, and anti-terrorism posture.

The chi-square test conducted on U.S. coverage confirmed a statistically significant relationship between India’s representation and the use of legitimizing or peace-oriented frames ( $\chi^2 = 9.873$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). In contrast, Pakistan was portrayed through a lens of security



risk and instability. Its actions were often framed within narratives of cross-border militancy or reactive aggression. The prevalence of war journalism frames—such as elite orientation, binary conflict construction, and blame attribution—demonstrated a lack of journalistic neutrality, echoing historical patterns seen in U.S. reporting on conflicts involving strategic adversaries.

Overall, while Chinese media leaned toward Pakistan and emphasized diplomatic de-escalation, U.S. media reflected Washington's Indo-Pacific strategic alignment by framing India in a more favorable light and portraying Pakistan as a source of regional volatility. These findings reinforce the central objectives of this study: to examine how global media systems construct conflicting narratives of the same international dispute, and how those narratives are shaped by national interests, foreign policy alignments, and geopolitical sympathies rather than neutral journalistic routines.

#### **Peace Journalism and Its Limits: Thematic Indicators and Interpretive Challenges**

A thematic analysis of Chinese and U.S. newspaper coverage revealed three recurring themes in the framing of the Kashmir conflict and the portrayal of India and Pakistan: attribution of responsibility, constitutionality and jurisprudence, and fairness and equality. These themes, rooted in peace and conflict journalism frameworks, reflect how media align with national interests in international conflict reporting.

#### **Attribution of Responsibility**

Chinese media predominantly attributed the 2019 escalation in Kashmir to Indian actions, including the revocation of Article 370, the communication lockdown, and arrests in Jammu and Kashmir. India was framed as the destabilizing actor, while Pakistan appeared as a diplomatic advocate calling for UN involvement. Chinese reports often cited government and international voices to support this framing, reflecting both peace journalism cues and national policy alignment.

Conversely, U.S. media coverage of the 2025 Kashmir conflict emphasized Pakistan's alleged role in cross-border militancy following the Pahalgam attack. While framed through elite commentary and strategic analysis, the narrative leaned toward portraying India as a stable democratic power responding to provocation, with minimal critique of its military actions.

#### **Constitutionality and Jurisprudence**

Chinese newspapers gave significant attention to the legal implications of India's revocation of Kashmir's autonomy, framing it as a violation of international agreements and norms. These reports questioned India's legitimacy while portraying China as a neutral yet concerned regional stakeholder.

U.S. coverage, however, largely downplayed constitutional critiques. India's internal legal decisions were framed as sovereign matters, while Pakistan's judicial actions—such as militant crackdowns—were often scrutinized for due process. This framing emphasized governance capacity over legal equity.

#### **Fairness and Equality**

Chinese media highlighted disparities faced by Kashmiri Muslims—especially in terms of religious freedom, healthcare, and education—casting India in a negative light. These stories supported peace journalism values but also advanced China's broader geopolitical stance.



In contrast, U.S. media rarely foregrounded fairness narratives. Coverage focused primarily on regional security and counterterrorism, portraying Indian force as defensive and Pakistan's actions as destabilizing. The unequal treatment of both states reflected a strategic media bias rooted in broader foreign policy alignments.

#### **Interplay Between Media Systems, Policy, and Journalism Ethics**

The findings of this study confirm that media coverage of the Kashmir conflict is deeply intertwined with national policy objectives and the structural nature of each media system. Rather than acting as neutral observers, both Chinese and U.S. media institutions mirrored the geopolitical alignments and strategic interests of their respective states.

In the case of China, the state-aligned media followed a narrative that subtly blended peace journalism elements—such as calls for dialogue and multilateralism—with nationalistic framing. While promoting Pakistan as a cooperative actor advocating diplomatic resolution, Chinese newspapers also framed India as an aggressor, particularly in the wake of the 2019 revocation of Article 370. These representations aligned with China's longstanding alliance with Pakistan and its own territorial interests in Ladakh, illustrating how journalism ethics and peace narratives were subordinated to foreign policy imperatives.

Conversely, U.S. media coverage of the 2025 India-Pakistan conflict largely reinforced existing strategic paradigms. Despite operating within a liberal and ostensibly independent media environment, U.S. news framing echoed elite policy discourse, casting India as a responsible democratic ally and Pakistan as a security threat. This pattern reflects what scholars like Bennett (2003) and Entman (2004) have termed the “indexing” of news to official policy. Coverage emphasized India's military restraint and democratic values, while framing Pakistan's actions in the context of militancy and instability, thus reproducing long-standing narratives from prior U.S. engagements in the region.

Together, these cases illustrate how journalism ethics—especially the principles of fairness, neutrality, and conflict-sensitive reporting—are shaped and often constrained by broader political and ideological forces. Peace journalism, while normatively desirable, is not immune to selective application, particularly when national interests are at stake. In both China and the U.S., the media served not only as a platform for information, but also as a tool of soft power and strategic communication.

#### **Conclusion**

This study set out to investigate how the media systems of two global powers—China and the United States—construct competing narratives of the Kashmir conflict, particularly during periods of heightened Indo-Pakistani hostility. Drawing on peace journalism and framing theory, this comparative analysis incorporated empirical data from Chinese media coverage during the 2019 Kashmir crisis and U.S. media reporting during the Indo-Pak escalation of April–June 2025. Through quantitative content analysis and thematic exploration, the study provides a nuanced understanding of how strategic interests, political ideologies, and media structures interact to shape international conflict narratives.

The results reveal that both Chinese and U.S. media predominantly employed conflict-oriented framing, though with distinct motivations. Chinese newspapers—Global Times and China Daily—maintained an ostensibly neutral tone toward India and Pakistan, but in practice reflected Beijing's geopolitical sympathies by presenting Pakistan more favorably. The framing emphasized India's revocation of Article 370, the associated





curfews and communication blackouts, and the constitutional and human rights implications of these moves. These narratives aligned with China's territorial interests in Ladakh and its diplomatic alliance with Pakistan, suggesting that peace journalism was selectively practiced in ways that served broader national policy goals.

By contrast, U.S. media coverage during the 2025 Kashmir escalation—triggered by the Pahalgam attack and subsequent cross-border strikes—exhibited a framing bias that favored India's strategic posture. American news outlets portrayed India as a responsible democratic actor responding to provocation, while Pakistan was framed predominantly through a lens of security threats and historical complicity in cross-border militancy. The peace journalism framework was largely absent from U.S. reporting, replaced instead by elite commentary, military analyses, and geopolitical assessments aligned with the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy. Though the United States did play a quiet diplomatic role in de-escalating the conflict in May 2025, its media coverage prioritized narratives of deterrence and regional power balance over peace building or contextual empathy.

This research contributes empirically and theoretically to the evolving literature on international media systems, public diplomacy, and conflict reporting. By bridging Eastern state-aligned and Western liberal media paradigms through a common theoretical lens, the study demonstrates how news framing is never ideologically neutral; it is a product of state relationships, media ownership models, and strategic alignments. Importantly, it reaffirms that media are not mere transmitters of events but actors in the geopolitical arena, capable of legitimizing or contesting particular state narratives.

The significance of this research lies in its original cross-national, cross-systemic comparison of Kashmir-related media discourse. Previous studies have typically treated peace journalism within national or Western-centric contexts; this study expands its application to the Chinese authoritarian and U.S. liberal media ecosystems, offering a broader and more realistic test of the theory's global adaptability. The integration of thematic and quantitative analysis enhanced the study's methodological robustness and allowed for a more layered understanding of the media's framing dynamics.

Theoretically, the research affirms the continued relevance of Galtung's peace journalism framework in assessing the normative role of journalism in international conflict. It also supports Bennett's indexing theory by demonstrating how both authoritarian and democratic media systems tend to align with elite policy positions during crises. The combination of these theories, along with a public diplomacy lens, allows for a holistic analysis of how states communicate power and identity through media representation.

From a practical perspective, the study offers insights for journalists, media educators, and policymakers. For media professionals, the findings highlight the ethical importance of conflict-sensitive reporting, especially in nuclear-armed regions like South Asia. For educators, this research provides a model case for integrating peace journalism principles into journalism curricula, particularly in politically sensitive or divided societies. For policymakers, understanding the interplay between media narratives and diplomatic posture can inform more effective public diplomacy strategies and crisis communication plans.

Nevertheless, the study acknowledges certain limitations. It was restricted to English-language print media, excluding vernacular press, television, and digital platforms that also shape public perception. While this helped ensure comparability, it may have





limited the scope of cultural and demographic diversity in audience reception. Furthermore, although the U.S. coverage was based on real reporting and think tank analyses, the period selected represents a specific conflict episode and may not reflect broader media trends. Regime type was not explicitly examined, though it implicitly influenced findings. These constraints offer opportunities for future researchers to expand the dataset across media formats, languages, and political systems.

Future research should consider triangulating news content with audience perception studies to assess how framed narratives influence public opinion in India, Pakistan, China, and the United States. It may also be fruitful to compare coverage with that of additional global actors—such as the UK, Gulf states, or EU media—to map the full spectrum of international narrative competition over Kashmir. Incorporating longitudinal analysis could further reveal whether framing patterns evolve over time with shifting diplomatic dynamics. Finally, qualitative interviews with journalists and editors would enrich our understanding of the institutional constraints and editorial choices that shape conflict reporting.

In summary, this study confirms that media coverage of the Kashmir issue is shaped not only by journalistic norms but by national interests, institutional ideologies, and global power alignments. Chinese media used peace journalism selectively to project diplomatic neutrality and reinforce regional alliances. U.S. media, while formally independent, reflected policy-driven narratives favoring India as a strategic partner. In both contexts, the pursuit of peace journalism was constrained by realpolitik. Yet, the potential remains: if media professionals embrace their role as agents of peace rather than instruments of power, they can help transform international reporting into a catalyst for understanding and reconciliation. This research affirms that media framing is not just about storytelling—it is about statecraft, ethics, and the power to shape the future of global conflict.

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