

## **Framing and Sourcing the 2019 Lebanese Protests on Local Television**

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This content analysis examined how local television framed and sourced the 2019 Lebanese protests. Conflict and responsibility frames dominated the coverage in all media, with anti-protest TV more likely to highlight conflict, attribute responsibility to the protestors, and emphasize the negative economic consequences of the protests. Regarding sources, state actors were more likely to be used in anti-protest media, whereas protestor sources were more prevalent in pro-protest media and in stories about responsibility. As for regular citizens, they appeared significantly more in stories about conflict. Findings indicate that the media rely on the public and not always officials to relay their message if media owners support the protests. The contribution of this study lies in uncovering new patterns in media sourcing and framing during protests, which allows the discipline to better predict when and how frames and sources intersect beyond the West.

*Keywords: framing, sourcing, protests, partisan media, Lebanon*

As the year 2019 edged closer to its end, Lebanon became one of many countries rocked by protests that aimed at achieving a myriad of political and economic objectives. As significant social movements, protests capture the interest of the media whose coverage is generally favorable to the protests when they support political and economic elites (Luther & Miller, 2005) and critical of the protests when they challenge existing structures of power relations in society, which include political and economic systems (Smith, McCarthy, McPhail, & Augustyn, 2001). The media have traditionally played a crucial role in affecting the form, nature, and development of protests, as well as their ability to succeed (Supadhiloke, 2015). It is, thus, natural for media coverage of social movements to incorporate frames that are formed by packaging experiences and events to provide a discrete point of view (Ciurel, 2018). Often ignored in framing studies is the role sources play in the news. As sources exercise a substantial power in framing journalistic content (Carpenter, 2007), often through the framing judgments that journalists make (Andsager, 2000), the relationship between framing and sourcing is an area that requires in-depth analysis (Kozman, 2017).

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This study examines media framing in the context of the Lebanese protests that started on October 17, 2019, with the primary goal of government resignation and political reform. Expectedly, the local media covered the same events at the same time but from different perspectives. Any casual observer of the television coverage of the unfolding events on the ground could see the stark differences in media accounts of the protests, most of which were casually attributed to the political economy. Although the impact of media ownership on media content has been established throughout history in various parts of the world, the Lebanese situation presents a unique case that blends political affiliation with sectarianism, reflecting the power non-state political and religious elites exert on various social institutions, including the media (El-Richani, 2016). This reality is protected by the power-sharing confessional system that has, for decades, cemented the supremacy of sectarian patrons in the country, creating a structure of patronage and clientelism (El-Richani, 2016; Geha, 2019). It follows that the sectarian affiliations of the media outlets, coupled with media plurality, would play a role in how journalists covered the 2019 popular uprising. The Lebanese protests, thus, offer a significant opportunity to understand how the media cover protests in a non-Western context characterized by a unique media landscape that combines sectarian affiliations, media diversity, and media-political parallelism. Understanding the framing process during protests is especially important as social movements differ from other controversial political issues (Park, 2003).

In line with calls for de-Westernizing communication studies (Waisbord & Mellado, 2014), this research aims at expanding framing research by testing its robustness in explaining media coverage of protests beyond normative media systems. To achieve this goal, we tested generic and issue-specific frames and analyzed their relationship with sourcing in television coverage of protests in a country plagued by political strife, class inequality, and economic instability (Geha, 2019), factors that are shared across the Global South and could thus provide valuable insight into other similar processes in the region.

## **Literature Review**

### ***Framing Theory***

For the past five decades, communication researchers have used framing as a theoretical framework to analyze how the media package issues, how the audience applies its own schema to understand media content, and how the two are connected. The broadness of framing has also been blamed for the theory's conceptual vagueness, leading scholars to criticize it for its lack of clear definitions and standardized operationalizations (Scheufele, 1999). One of the most successful attempts at remedying what ails framing came from Entman (1993), who provided a definition that has become a standard in the field. Using Entman's (1993) often-cited definition, scholars have concluded that frames create content, provide definitions, diagnose causal relationships, provide moral judgments, and prescribe solutions.

### ***Framing Types***

Within the traditions of empirical research, scholars have mostly relied on two ways to examine frames deductively: Generic and issue specific. Whereas generic frames provide an organized area for

comparing topics, frames, and problems, issue-specific frames are confined to the issue under study (De Vreese, Peter, & Semetko, 2001).

Extant literature has found five generic frames to be prevalent in media content: Conflict, responsibility, economic consequences, human interest, and morality frames (Neuman, Just, & Crigler, 1992; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Conflict is a crucial part of politics since it forms the basis of democracy by paving the way for disputes among different political ideas in a variety of issues and geographic regions (Hertog & McLeod, 2001). Examples include the "Occupy Wall Street" protests in the United States (Gottlieb, 2015), protests in Hong Kong (Veneti, Karadimitriou, & Poulakidakos, 2016), the Syrian war (Cozma & Kozman, 2015, 2018), the 2011 Egyptian revolution (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012), and anti-war demonstrations in the U.S., British, and Chinese media (Peng, 2008).

Closely related to conflict are responsibility frames, which present issues and assign the responsibility of causes and solutions to certain individuals or groups (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). In U.S. television, news programs frequently frame issues in terms of responsibility (Iyengar, 1987). Similarly in Europe, Dutch television journalists were most likely to use responsibility frames than other frames in serious news shows (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Responsibility frames are additionally found in news coverage of conflicts, such as the Syrian civil war in U.S. and Lebanese newspapers (Cozma & Kozman, 2015, 2018) and during the Chevron protests in the United States (Coman & Cmeciu, 2014).

The economic consequences frame is used in reporting the economic impacts of an issue on individuals, groups, or countries (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). Although it is one of the most dominant frames (Neuman et al., 1992), it is considered more complex and demanding than other frames because of the specific technical terms it employs (Valenzuela, Pina, & Ramirez, 2017). Evidence from the Arab region has shown it to be present during political unrest, such as Egypt's protests (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012), but was largely absent from the media coverage of the Syrian war even though the losses of the war were huge in terms of human casualties and property damage (Cozma & Kozman, 2018).

The human-interest frame presents an issue or event through an emotional angle or a human face (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). By doing so, it helps explain a broad and general issue by emphasizing the human element, which can highly affect the public's attitudes toward political issues (Boukes, Bomgaarden, Moorman, & de Vreese, 2015). In the context of political turmoil, research has found two opposing patterns. While the human-interest frame was rare in traditional media's coverage of the Syrian war (Cozma & Kozman, 2018), it was prevalent on social media and in independent newspapers during the 2011 Egyptian revolution (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012). In the coverage of the Chevron protests, as well, the human-interest frame was used to personalize and emotionalize the issue (Coman & Cmeciu, 2014).

Lastly, the morality frame presents issues or events from a moral or religious perspective (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000) but is rare in the news since journalists find it tends to clash with their idea of objectivity (Valenzuela et al., 2017). Thus, journalists present moral judgments in inferences or quotations using someone else's question and not their own (Valenzuela et al., 2017).

Whereas generic frames are broad, issue-specific frames are frames that relate to a particular issue. Framing research on the coverage of protests in various parts of the world has observed the presence of chaos, public disapproval, violence, democracy, and motivational frames (Hestres, 2018; Park, 2003; Supadhiloke, 2015). Chaos frames use negative characteristics, such as corrupt, bad, unorganized, and crippling to the society's order, in their description of protest movements, as was the case in South Korea (Park, 2003) and Thailand (Supadhiloke, 2015). Public disapproval frames show how public opinion opposed the protests, underrepresented them, and disagreed with their acts, whereas violence frames appear in photos of clashes in protests and the dramatization of violent actions and injuries reported (Supadhiloke, 2015). In some cases, newspapers can frame the issue as one of violence according to the political affiliations and interests of the countries, either presenting protestors as aggressive and violent (Veneti et al., 2016) or as democratic and defenders of justice (Park, 2003; Supadhiloke, 2015). Lastly, motivational frames aim to mobilize supporters by giving them a reason to take action (Hestres, 2018). Accordingly, the media can widely diffuse protests by inviting supporters through the use of motivational frames in their coverage of ongoing protests (Ciurel, 2018).

#### *Framing in a Partisan Media Environment*

Previous research has suggested that people see the world through the lens of partisan minds, especially when the issues are not very important to them (Wagner & Gruszczynski, 2016). Although research on framing and partisanship during conflict is rare, most studies point to the significant role partisanship and political ideologies play in media frames. Examples come from various parts of the world, such as the framing of economy and crisis news stories in South Korea and Japan (Park, 2003), the Bahrain protests, during which frames in the media's YouTube channels were mainly supportive of the protesters (Al Rawi, 2015), the United States, where the *New York Times* framed the Arab Spring as young individuals' protests aiming for political change, whereas the *Washington Post* framed it as a conflict between protesters and authoritarian systems (Chung & Cho, 2013), the Syrian war, during which Lebanese media's frames were related to their political affiliations (Cozma & Kozman, 2018), and the 2006 Lebanese-Israeli war, during which media outlets framed the war according to their political interests (Melki, 2014).

#### **Sources in the News**

Sources play a crucial role in both the news selection and production phases (O'Neill & O'Connor, 2008). This is particularly true since having a voice in the news represents the power to interpret situations (Mathisen, 2023). Journalists and sources are tightly connected in that sources in a story reflect media organizations' preference to privilege powerful individuals (Berkowitz, 2009). The tendency to use some sources more than others in journalism comes as a result of the routines in news (Hickerson, Moy, & Dunsmore, 2011). Journalists tend to use official sources (Mathisen, 2023) because they perceive authoritative sources as credible (Manning, 2001) as opposed to quoting unofficial interest groups, toward which journalists might be accused of being biased (Hickerson et al., 2011). Besides official sources, journalists use unofficial sources during crises to represent an issue more closely, generally by using citizens who witnessed the event (Matthews, 2010) or by relying on experts who are considered legitimate and can provide interesting and unique stories with depth and breadth (Allgaier, 2011). The diversity of sources in

the news is crucial as research has shown that people who are exposed to news containing a variety of sources perceive it as more credible and interesting (Cozma, 2006).

Analyzing the coverage of anti-war movements in three different countries, Peng (2008) found that media outlets that gave more space in their coverage for protest-related news stories used nongovernment and protest sources, whereas those that gave less coverage for protests relied more on government sources. In non-Western instances, as well, newspapers that presented the anti-Mubarak opposition in Egypt in a positive light used protesters as their primary source (Fitzgerald, 2017).

### ***Frame-Source Relationship in a Partisan Media Environment***

In their daily news-gathering routines, journalists often depend on sources to interpret issues, and therefore, tend to frame the news using sources (Kim & Weaver, 2003). When journalists choose their sources, they inadvertently pave the way for these sources to impose their agendas on the news story (Berbers et al., 2015; Kozman, 2017), lending the latter a significant role in the framing process (Carpenter, 2007). Studies that have examined this relationship in the context of wars found a clear pattern in the use of political sources in stories that highlighted conflict and responsibility (e.g., Carpenter, 2007; Cozma & Kozman, 2015).

### ***Lebanese Media During the 2019 Protests***

The Lebanese protests started on October 17, 2019, as a response to the government's announcement of tax measures on WhatsApp ("Lebanon: WhatsApp Tax," 2019). Although the direct cause for the protests was the WhatsApp tax, the uprising was the result of the long-standing corrupt sectarian political system that used the country's resources for decades without providing the public with the most basic services, such as electricity, water, and garbage disposal (Melki & Kozman, 2021). Lebanon's widespread social and political crises are attributed to the country's "consociational democracy," which blends "a neoliberal economic system" with "sectarian clientelism and political patronage" (Majed, 2023, p. 76). Since the end of the Lebanese civil war in 1990, the sectarian environment in the country has been reflected in the political parallelism of the media, where political groups are represented either through direct ownership or indirect affiliations with the media (El-Richani, 2016).

In the coverage of the 2019 Lebanese protests, local TV stations were divided between pro-protest and anti-protest (Melki & Kozman, 2021). Since the main aim of the protests was to achieve the resignation of the government, which at that time constituted political parties, outlets that were directly affiliated, funded, or owned by political parties became anti-protest. These included Al Manar, which is owned by and supportive of Hezbollah since it started operations in 1991, and OTV, which is owned by a public trading company affiliated with the Free Patriotic Movement and supportive of the president (El-Richani, 2016). As for pro-protest channels, they included Al Jadeed, which is owned by Qatar-allied Tahsin Al Khayat and publicly announced its support of the protests, LBCI, which is privately owned by Pierre El Daher and considered to be the least biased channel (Bou Hamad & Yehya, 2020), and MTV (Murr TV), which is privately owned by the Al-Murr family and perceived as supportive of the March 14 Alliance.

Extant literature on Lebanese media points to a possible connection between outlet affiliation and news content. However, limited knowledge of how the media would frame the protests and how sources relate to frames paved the way for the following research questions:

*RQ1: Is there a difference between the types of generic frames used by pro- and anti-protest TV channels?*

*RQ2: Is there a difference between the types of issue-specific frames used by pro- and anti-protest TV channels?*

*RQ3: Is there a difference between the types of sources used by pro- and anti-protest TV channels?*

*RQ4: Is there a relationship between the frames and sources used by channels covering protests?*

### **Method**

This study analyzed the content of evening newscasts of five prominent Lebanese TV channels—anti-protest Al Manar and OTV and pro-protest Al Jadeed, LBCI, and MTV—during the 2019 Lebanese protests. Television is considered the most penetrating media source in the country (Aoun & Monin, 2017) and has been shown to be the most used and trusted media platform for protest news in Lebanon (Melki & Kozman, 2021).

### **Sample**

The time frame for the study was between October 18, 2019, the day following the start of the protests (October 17 was excluded because the protests started after the evening newscasts), and December 19, 2019, the day Hassan Diab was assigned as the new prime minister. Following his assignment, negotiations for forming a new government began, rapidly decreasing the number of people in the streets and subsequent media coverage by anti-protest outlets. Although many protestors rejected the appointment of Diab, December 19 marked a significant break that fulfilled one of the demands of the protests: The formation of a new government of nonpartisan members (Assi, 2021). As such, the first two months of the protests were considered the heart of the uprising, a period that witnessed the public's most concentrated efforts at effecting change. Notable instances were protestors enforcing a countrywide strike through road blockages, deliberating legal issues in public squares overseen by nongovernmental legal and human rights organizations, and forcing the postponement of the parliamentary session by preventing lawmakers from reaching the parliament (for the timeline, see Al Sharq Strategic Research, 2020; Karamé, 2023).

The initial sample included all six viable outlets of the eight television stations in the country, excluding the nearly defunct state broadcaster Télé Liban and the Catholic channel Télé *Lumière*. However, one of the anti-protest channels NBN was dropped because it lost its archived material in 2019 due to a conflict between political parties, resulting in unequal samples. Further skewing the sample toward pro-protest channels was the limited amount of protest coverage on anti-protest channels as the

latter dramatically dropped their coverage after December 19. To account for these issues, a disproportionate stratified systematic sampling method was used to analyze the evening newscasts during specific important dates of the protests (Appendix A). This sampling technique, which relies on unequal numbers from each stratum (Daniel, 2012), was deemed appropriate for the current study to avoid the data being heavily tilted toward pro-protest outlets. Since some anti-protest channels did not have a newscast on some sampling days, we added more days to obtain an equal sample size. Considering some anti-protest channels rarely went beyond a couple of stories per newscast, we selected only the first two stories with at least one reference to the protests or protestors, the role of protests, or achievements/consequences of protests. The total sample was 224 news stories divided equally between pro- and anti-protest channels over 46 days.

### **Measurements**

The unit of analysis was the news story in a newscast. Two graduate students coded each news story for the following: Media outlet (Al Manar, OTV, Al Jadeed, LBCI, and MTV), media affiliation (pro- or anti-protest), date of story, sources, and generic and issue-specific frames.

#### *Frames*

The study coded the five generic frames identified by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000)—responsibility, human interest, conflict, morality, and economic consequences— and five issue-specific frames: Violence, public disapproval, motivational, chaos, and democracy (Ciurel, 2018; Park, 2003; Supadhiloke, 2015). Following the recommendation of Matthes and Kohring (2008) to measure frames through framing elements, for each frame, three questions were asked with answer options yes or no to measure the presence of the frame, per Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) study (see Appendix B in Supplemental Files<sup>1</sup>). The generic frames were conceptualized according to the following operational definitions (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000): Morality (moral messages and judgments); human interest (a human or emotional angle, human losses or injuries and sufferings); responsibility (attributing responsibility and diagnosing causes of issues); economic consequences (financial losses, gains, and consequences); and conflict (disagreements between protestors and another group). To measure the internal reliability of the three variables for each generic frame, Cronbach's alphas were used. Although the variables of the generic frames were adopted from Semetko and Valkenburg (2000), most of the variables of the generic frames did not achieve scale reliability. As such, two of the three questions were dropped, leaving each frame to be presented by only one question that was the most general one referring to the issue as a whole and not to a specific aspect of it.

Issue-specific frames were adopted from previous research (Ciurel, 2018; Park, 2003; Supadhiloke, 2015) as follows: Democracy (freedom of speech and freedom of opinion); violence (injuries, deaths, and physical clashes between protestors and another group, verbal violence practiced by the protestors); public disapproval (citizen or journalists' opinions regarding the public's

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1 Supplemental Files can be accessed here:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/3xfbs74v9jfu8cz/MS%20ID%2321049-Supplemental%20Files.pdf?dl=0>

dissatisfaction with the ongoing protests); chaos (unorganized protests and damage to public and private property); and motivational (motivational messages and calls for action for the audience to join protests). For consistency purposes, each frame was operationalized using three questions to create a composite frame, similar to the generic frames (Appendix B in Supplemental Files). The composite measures of the issue-specific frames resulted in the following Cronbach's alpha values: 0.646 (violence), 0.795 (democracy), 0.523 (chaos), 0.527 (public disapproval), and 0.407 (motivational). To improve the reliability of the motivational frame, the Call for Action variable was dropped, resulting in an alpha value of 0.523.

Except for the first two frames, all composite measures showed low internal reliability, indicating the items used were not the best statistical measure for the construct. However, considering the three abovementioned studies did not use this strategy to measure frames, but instead, relied on one all-encompassing question, we accepted the frames as a good conceptual—but not statistical—measure of the corresponding construct for descriptive purposes only while acknowledging their limitation in providing a true scale that measures latent constructs. Our composite measures also fall in the middle of Streiner's (2003) conceptualizations of a scale and an index, where a scale measures a latent construct that cannot be observed directly, such as intelligence, and an index measures a hypothetical construct that consists of a list of various factors that may not be necessarily correlated. In the case of the latter, using Cronbach's alpha whose assumption is the homogeneity of items is deemed inappropriate (Streiner, 2003). Further evidence comes from psychology where scholars have argued that low values of alpha do not always mean the scale is unreliable as the coefficient is dependent on the number of items and what the scale is testing (see Field, 2013). Taking together the above limitations, we accept the issue-specific frames with face validity and interpret the results with extreme caution.

### *Sources*

Sources are any person or document that is quoted or paraphrased and identified by attributional phrases or verbs, such as "stated," "said," "reported," and "according to." The frequency of each type of source in the news story was recorded, according to the following types: Official state or political party (including government employees, representatives, executives, and members of political associations); business (representatives of specific businesses, private and public companies, and commercial organizations); official police and security (those responsible for enforcing the law and securing the homeland); official legal/court (judiciary personnel, such as judges, public legal officials, lawyers, and court-related officials); civil society (nongovernmental organizations, unions, and other social organizations); religion (representatives of religious institutions, such as churches and mosques); protesters (people participating in the protests who are not labeled as political or identified as affiliated with a specific political party); citizens (non-protesting citizens, or protesting citizens identified to be affiliated to a political party); media (journalists, members of media organizations, and representatives of media channels and blogs); anonymous (sources having a veiled name and position); and other (any source that did not fall under the above categories).



### ***Intercoder Reliability***

The coding was conducted by two graduate students who were native speakers of the Arabic language. Both coders had extensive knowledge and familiarity with protest-related framing research, having worked with faculty on similar studies. Therefore, they trained each other on the material with the supervision of two faculty advisors. After conducting the pilot coding on news stories outside the sample, they were deemed ready by the faculty to code the intercoder reliability sample. For the intercoder reliability tests, each coder independently coded 46 (20%) news stories from the study's sample, which were randomly chosen from the first month of the protests. The reliability coefficients using Krippendorff's alpha ranged between 0.78 and 1, with an average of 0.92 for 30 variables. The remaining variables did not show any variance. After achieving reliability, the coders proceeded to code the entire sample, which was split equally between them.

### **Results**

Descriptive statistics found that the attribution of responsibility frame was the most prominent generic frame in both anti- and pro-protest channels (Table 1). RQ1, which asked whether there was a difference between the generic frames used by the TV channels, showed significant differences in the responsibility, economic consequences, and conflict frames. Anti-protest channels were more likely to employ responsibility frames than pro-protest channels [ $\chi^2(1, N = 224) = 6.960, p < .01$ ], more conflict frames [ $\chi^2(1, N = 224) = 4.073, p < .05$ ], and more economic consequences frames [ $\chi^2(1, N = 224) = 4.876, p < .05$ ]. The differences in the use of morality and human interest frames were not significant.

**Table 1. Differences in Generic Frames Between Pro-Protest and Anti-Protest TV.**

<b>Frames</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Presence</b>	<b>All Stories</b>	<b><math>\chi^2</math></b>	<b>df</b>	<b>p</b>
Conflict	Pro-protest	36.4%	14.3%	4.073	1	.044
	Anti-protest	63.6%	25%			
Responsibility	Pro-protest	36.4%	21.4%	6.960	1	.008
	Anti-protest	63.6%	37.5%			
Human-interest	Pro-protest	60%	5.4%	.419	1	.518
	Anti-protest	40%	3.6%			
Morality	Pro-protest	55.6%	4.5%	.116	1	.734
	Anti-protest	44.4%	3.6%			
Econ. consequences	Pro-protest	21.4%	2.7%	4.876	1	.027
	Anti-protest	78.6%	9.8%			

Regarding issue-specific frames, descriptive statistics revealed the violence frame to be the most prevalent issue-specific frame in all outlets (Table 2). The results of RQ2, which assessed the presence of issue-specific frames between the two types of media, showed anti-protest channels included more chaos frames [ $t(222) = -3.182, p < .002$ ] and more public disapproval frames [ $t(222) = -3.425, p < .001$ ] than pro-protest news channels. On the other hand, pro-protest channels used democracy frames [ $t(222) = 6.294, p < .001$ ] and motivational frames [ $t(222) = 6.609, p < .001$ ] significantly more than anti-protest channels. There was no significant difference in the use of violence frames between pro- and anti-protest media.

**Table 2. Differences in Issue-Specific Frames Between Pro-Protest and Anti-Protest TV.**

Frames	Affiliation	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p</i>
Chaos	Pro-protest	0.9702	0.12297	-3.182	222	.002
	Anti-protest	0.8958	0.21473			
Public disapproval	Pro-protest	0.9762	0.11594	-3.425	222	.001
	Anti-protest	0.8988	0.20910			
Violence	Pro-protest	0.9792	0.12876	-.721	220.3	.472
	Anti-protest	0.9673	0.11804			
Democracy	Pro-protest	0.4256	0.35854	6.294	222	.001
	Anti-protest	0.7351	0.37738			
Motivational	Pro-protest	0.5938	0.39439	6.609	222	.001
	Anti-protest	0.8750	0.21748			

Note. Considering the presence of a frame was coded as 0 while absence was coded as 1, the closer the values to 0, the more prominent the frame.

RQ3, which measured the use of source types between anti- and pro-protest channels, found significant differences only in the use of state/political and protestor sources (for all tests, see Table C1 in Supplemental Files). Pro-protest channels used protestor sources ( $M = 1.2$ ,  $SD = 2.3$ ) significantly more than anti-protest channels ( $M = 0.52$ ,  $SD = 1.2$ ),  $t(-2.837) = 222$ ,  $p < .02$ , whereas anti-protest channels used state/political sources ( $M = 0.7$ ,  $SD = 0.85$ ) significantly more than pro-protest channels ( $M = 0.27$ ,  $SD = 0.74$ ),  $t(4.044) = 222$ ,  $p < .001$ .

RQ4 examined the relationship between the presence of generic frames and the frequency of sources. To do this, *t*-tests were used where the independent variable was each frame (measured as absence/presence) and the dependent variable was each source type. The only significant results of the 55 tests were in responsibility, conflict, and morality frames with three types of sources (for all tests, see Table C2 in Supplemental Files). In particular, protestor sources were more likely to be present ( $M = 1.38$ ,  $SD = 1.92$ ) when the responsibility frame was used than when it was not ( $M = 0.65$ ,  $SD = 1.77$ ),  $t(113.469) = 2.665$ ,  $p < .01$ . Citizen sources were more likely to be present in stories that employed the conflict frame ( $M = 0.48$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ) than those that did not ( $M = 0.08$ ,  $SD = 0.59$ ),  $t(49.233) = 2.275$ ,  $p < .05$ . As for the morality frame, its presence was associated with the complete absence of anonymous sources, as opposed to their presence in stories that did not include a morality frame ( $M = 0.13$ ,  $SD = 0.41$ ),  $t(214) = -4.515$ ,  $p < .001$ . Anonymous sources were also less prevalent in stories that included responsibility ( $M = 0.05$ ,  $SD = 0.21$ ) and more prevalent when morality was absent ( $M = 0.15$ ,  $SD = 0.45$ ),  $t(219.7) = -2.397$ ,  $p < .05$ .

To test the relationship between issue-specific frames and sources, we used only violence and democracy frames as the others showed low internal reliability and also because the variables did not establish a linear relationship (for all tests, see Table C3 in Supplemental Files). As such, we interpret the results with caution and discuss them as exploratory findings to guide future research. Pearson's *r* revealed a weak negative relationship between state/political sources and democracy frames,  $r = -.183$ ,  $p < .01$ , and a moderate negative relationship between protestor sources and democracy frames,  $r = -.444$ ,  $p < .01$ .

.001. Democracy frames were also negatively associated with citizen sources,  $r = -.214, p < .001$ . Violence frames were not related to any source type.

### Discussion

This study examined local television coverage of the 2019 Lebanese protests through the theoretical frameworks of media framing and sourcing. The analysis found significant differences in how pro- and anti-protest television stations used frames and sources. In general, all television outlets frequently employed the responsibility and conflict frames to show the conflicting ideas of protestors and political parties and to put the blame on the various sides involved. As a news value that is central to journalism, conflict (Neuman et al., 1992; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000), alongside responsibility, naturally dominated journalistic coverage regardless of the media's political affiliations. Conflict is not only a crucial part of politics (Hertog & McLeod, 2001) but also at the heart of protests (Cozma & Kozman, 2015, 2018; Gottlieb, 2015; Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012; Veneti et al., 2016). Although responsibility frames are also expected to appear, as it is common for all sides involved in protests to attribute the cause or the solution to some entity, their heavy usage points to the nature of protests as occurrences that attract more responsibility than conflict. While popular demonstrations entail a group protesting against an issue, it is the consequences of the conflict that seem to be more important than the conflict itself. In our case, outlets affiliated with specific political parties attributed responsibility to other parties in the government, while others attributed responsibility to the government.

In the Lebanese context, protests were seen as the tip of the iceberg after decades of corruption and nepotism drained the country's resources, causing one of the world's most severe economic crises since the mid-19th century ("Lebanon Sinking," 2021). Although the economic crash was realized a few months after the protests, the first real signs of the problem started surfacing in the first month of the protests, adding fuel to the fire that prompted protestors to include economic security in their list of demands and vandalize major banks related to the economic crisis. These findings, therefore, reveal that protests are a special case of conflict where the media focus on who is responsible for the cause or the solution, as opposed to merely pitting sides against one another. Of equal importance is the fact that they raise questions about the extent to which Lebanese television exercised social responsibility in reporting the protests. Although this theory has been criticized for its failure to take into account press responsibility around the globe (Barnhurst & Nerone, 2009), it could nevertheless serve as a useful analysis tool, particularly to highlight how the notion of social responsibility itself, which was designed to allow journalists to take proactive decisions in a responsible manner (Ward, 2009), could be framed differently, depending on the goals of the media outlet.

Perhaps less meaningful were the differences in the use of generic frames between anti- and pro-protest stations. Anti-protest media used the conflict and responsibility frames heavily to blame the protestors by emphasizing the consequences of road blockages on the mobility of individuals and on the operations of businesses. The prevalence of responsibility, conflict, and economic consequences frames could therefore be attributed to the pro-governmental, anti-protest media's focus on the negative nature of the protests that caused massive disruptions in daily life. These findings align with previous studies that

revealed anti-protest media use these frames to oppose the protests or disapprove of the protestors and their demands (Peng, 2008) and to highlight their negative effect on the economy (Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012).

Regarding protest-specific frames, the current study found violence to prevail in the media uniformly between the supporters and the opposers, reflecting the media's tendency to present protests as violent acts (Veneti et al., 2016). The absence of differences between the media is likely due to the relatively low occurrence of violence during the protests, which started mainly as peaceful demonstrations but later included some incidents of standoffs and clashes among protestors, the police, and supporters of the government. Regarding differences between the media, pro-protest TV stations relied on democracy and motivational frames, primarily in their coverage of arrests and police violence by describing the protestors as regular people practicing their freedom of speech, more than anti-protest stations, which used more chaos and public disapproval frames. Except for the democracy frame, these results are taken at face value due to the low internal reliability of the frames. Although limited in their predictive power, the results are nevertheless in line with previous literature that showed democracy and motivational frames defend protestors and provide a positive image of protests (Ciurel, 2018; Park, 2003; Supadiloke, 2015) while motivating people to join them (Ciurel, 2018).

These variances are best explained through the lens of partisanship, which is a crucial political identity that affects framing patterns (Wagner & Gruszczynski, 2016). This close-knit relationship between the media and political ideology in our sample falls in line with previous research that highlighted the media's negative coverage of protests when they challenge dominant political and economic systems (Smith et al., 2001), particularly when the media's ideology aligns with that of the government (Shahin, Zheng, Sturm, & Fadnis, 2016). All five outlets in the current study are privately owned and/or financed directly by political parties. As the protests targeted all factions of the political system through the slogan "all-means-all," parties felt threatened, leading them to seek support from their constituents through the media and other means, encouraging the public to oppose the protests ("2019 Lebanese Revolution," 2019). For anti-protest channels, especially, this meant serious efforts at opposing the protests that aimed at bringing down the very parties that funded these stations. Although pro-protest channels as well are privately owned and have political affiliations, their support of the protests was seen as a result of their owners' anti-government ideologies, which opposed the ruling elites at the time.

Beyond framing, source usage in this study not only moved along familiar lines but also revealed new information not previously found. In general, the results corroborate extant research about the dominance of official, especially political, sources in the news (Carpenter, 2007; Cozma & Kozman, 2015) as well as the appearance of unofficial, citizen sources as witness accounts in crises (Matthews, 2010). The distinction between sources in media coverage, where protestors were used by pro-protest TV and state/political sources by anti-protest TV, is also consistent with previous research on sourcing during protests (Fitzgerald, 2017; Peng, 2008). As political actors are perceived to be legitimate sources for the public, their use by anti-protest media serves the objectivity news value for journalists (Hertog & McLeod, 2001).

Perhaps more interesting than the inclusion of typical sources is the exclusion of others, such as experts or civil society sources, which is contrary to previous research (Allgaier, 2011). Business,

legal, alternative media, and civil society sources were major players in online conversations surrounding the protests (Kozman, 2023), but their voices were only apparent in the coverage of specific events, such as shootings, elections of the lawyers' syndicate, and the demonstrations in front of the central bank. As for the public, journalists included protestors in their stories to give them a venue to blame the government and politicians for the deteriorating economic situation. Inversely, citizens were part of stories that showed differences in opinion between non-protesting citizens and protestors who were blamed for disrupting daily life. Regardless of their affiliations, therefore, the media used the public to package the protests either in responsibility or conflict terms, frames that have been traditionally under the control of officials (Carpenter, 2007; Cozma & Kozman, 2015). Beyond the country context, the prevalence of laypersons as sources could be perceived as a rare break in the sourcing patterns journalists have historically employed. The inconsistencies, then, could be ascribed to the intersection of the media's political ideology with the nature of the events they cover. Based on these findings, we contend the media could very well discard officials and replace them with members of the public as sources if the latter's views align with the media's political ideology.

Lastly, the negative relationship between democracy frames and protestor, politician, and citizen sources is somehow puzzling. While the absence of politicians and citizens is expected, based on the two groups being used to oppose the protests, the low number of protestor sources is counterintuitive. The reason, then, could be the legal aspects of democracy frames, which highlight rights and policies and fall under the domain of legal experts more than protestors. The prevalence of protestors on pro-protest stations but not in relation to democracy frames could be best explained by these outlets' continuous live coverage of the situation on the ground, which translated into the need to fill airtime. Often, this coverage took the form of makeshift studios in the streets, which made use of the demonstrators' occupancy of public spaces. To sum up, when and where sources appear provides evidence of the complex nature of protests that differ based on their aims, lending support to our conclusion that protests present a distinct setting that blends various political and social concerns different from other conflict situations.

### **Conclusion and Limitations**

By finding variances in the use of generic and issue-specific frames between media supporting the protests and those opposing them, the study contributes to framing theory at many levels. Contrary to extant framing literature—most of which has been conducted in the West—this study of one Arab country revealed the dominance of responsibility frames and their close relationship with protestors as main advocates. Unlike decades-worth of journalism research that has demonstrated the supremacy of officials as sources in news on a variety of topics, our study found some importance was afforded to the public as sources of information, either as protestors in pro-protest outlets or as non-protesting citizens in anti-protest media. Analyzing the framing-sourcing patterns in a highly partisan and sectarian environment like Lebanon is timely given the small body of literature that has examined this relationship in critical times, reinforcing the crucial role political allegiances play in the media. Equally important is the fact that including political instability and media partisanship as potentially impactful factors allows our study to pave the way for reconceptualizing the frame-source relationship when examining media coverage of political upheavals.

Similar to any research, this study has some limitations. The composite scales did not achieve the desired statistical reliability measures; therefore, they should be further explored in other contexts. The generalizability of the current study might also be limited by its focus on one specific country whose political makeup is unique to its circumstances. Considering that various factors intersect to shape the media landscape in Lebanon, the country context could be a hindrance to our understanding of media coverage of protests. This unique nature, however, might in fact prove useful in expanding research on this topic. Applying the study's framework to other contexts would allow us to evaluate the robustness of the theory or vice versa. Beyond the above recommendations, we encourage future research to explore frames inductively to better reflect the unique Lebanese context.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the present study revealed significant findings that could help shape future research looking to expand journalism studies beyond the West. For what concerns framing and sourcing, the focus of the media on responsibility frames could mean that the type of topics in protest research plays a role in determining which frames are expected to dominate. Similarly for violence and democracy frames, which we now recognize as major protest-specific frames on which the media lean while covering social movements. Central to this conversation is the connection between sources and frames, which has provided a new perspective on how these essential journalistic components interact during social turmoil. Instead of the go-to players in politics, the media could rely on laypersons to relay their message if their owners support the protests. In conclusion, this study recommends theorizing media coverage of protests differently, by focusing on the intersection of three central factors: The nature of protests and whether they aim at changing systems or have a single concern; the larger country media system, which reflects the political and social environment; and the strategic ways in which the media rely on specific sources during protests to convey their viewpoints. The implications of this study on communication theory, thus, foreground the importance of considering the type of protests in relation to the media's political affiliations in any given context.

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## Appendix A

### Sampling Dates

- October 18–October 26—first 10 days of the protests (October 17 was excluded because the protests started after the evening newscasts)
- October 27—Protestors from different Lebanese regions form a human chain
- October 29—Resignation of Prime Minister Saad Al Hariri
- October 31—The first speech of President Michel Aoun
- November 1—The banks in Lebanon reopen after a long period of closure
- November 2—Massive protests demanding the formation of a new government
- November 3—The Free Patriotic Movement organizes protests in support of President Michel Aoun
- November 5—Formation of protests near state institutions
- November 7—Students from different Lebanese universities join the protests in large numbers
- November 12—The second death case was announced during protests
- November 13—Protests start near the presidential palace and President Aoun's second speech
- November 17—The one-month anniversary of the Lebanese protests
- November 19—Protestors pressuring the government to postpone the parliament session
- November 22—Independence Day in Lebanon
- November 26—Demonstrations at Lebanon's central bank for a whole day
- December 14 and 15—Human Rights Watch announce that, in these two days, security forces in Lebanon used force and weapons against protestors
- December 19—Hassan Diab assigned new prime minister

The following additional dates were sampled: October 28 and 30; November 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 18, 20, 21, and 23; and December 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9.