What Shapes the Frame? The Role of Country, Topic, and Actor in the Framing of U.S. and China's International Reports in Malaysian Press

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Abstract

This study explores how international news coverage frames United States and China in Malaysian newspapers, focusing on five dominant news frames: conflict, cooperation, economic impact, human interest, and morality. Drawing on a content analysis of 330 news articles from diverse global outlets, the study employs both descriptive statistics and binary logistic regression to identify patterns and predictors of frame usage. The results reveal that framing varies significantly by country, topic, and actor presence rather than by media outlet affiliation. China is predominantly framed through economic impact, reflecting its image as an emerging economic power, whereas the U.S. is more frequently associated with conflict and human interest narratives, aligning with perceptions of its global political and military dominance. Cooperation and morality frames, however, are more evenly distributed across both nations. Binary logistic regression identifies news topic and actor presence as the strongest predictors of frame usage: political topics trigger conflict and morality frames, economic topics predict economic framing, and citizen-centered stories evoke human interest and cooperation frames. Media outlet affiliation shows minimal influence, suggesting professional convergence in international journalism. These findings highlight the content-specific and actor-sensitive nature of framing, underscoring the importance of contextual factors in cross-national media analysis.

Keywords: News Framing, International Report, China, United States

Introduction

In today's multipolar world, international news coverage plays a crucial role in shaping public understanding of global affairs, particularly in countries navigating relationships with major powers. Malaysia, situated strategically in Southeast Asia, is a compelling case for examining how international media frames are constructed—especially with regard to global giants like the United States and China. As both states vie for influence in the region, how they are

portrayed in third-party media such as Malaysia's becomes a significant site for analyzing geopolitical discourse and public perception.

Framing, as conceptualized by Entman (1993), involves selecting certain aspects of a perceived reality and making them more salient in a communicative context to promote a particular interpretation. Generic news frames such as conflict, cooperation, economic consequences, human interest, and morality help structure these narratives, influencing audience interpretation across cultural and political contexts (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). These frames are not arbitrarily chosen; they are often shaped by multiple interacting factors, including the geopolitical identity of the focus country, the topical content of the story, the dominant actor represented, and the media outlet's institutional norms (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Golan & Wanta, 2003).

While there is a growing body of literature examining how China and the U.S. are represented in global media, much of it remains focused on Western outlets or bilateral comparisons. Relatively few studies have explored how non-Western, third-party countries frame these global powers, and even fewer have assessed how multiple variables interact to shape these narratives. Malaysia presents a compelling site for this inquiry for several reasons. First, as a multi-ethnic democracy with a relatively free press operating within a hybrid media system, Malaysia provides a nuanced vantage point from which to examine competing narratives about global powers. Second, Malaysian English-language newspapers often serve elite and policymaking audiences, amplifying the political relevance of international framing patterns. Finally, Malaysian media operate in a space that is neither entirely Western nor fully aligned with China, offering a distinctive lens through which third-party perspectives on global power rivalries can be assessed.

This study seeks to bridge these gaps by examining how international news stories about the U.S. and China are framed in Malaysian newspapers. Specifically, it investigates two central research questions: (1) How do news frames differ in the portrayal of the U.S. and China in Malaysian press? (2) To what extent do variables such as focus country, topic, news actor, and media outlet predict the use of specific frames? By addressing these questions, this research not only deepens our understanding of international framing practices in Southeast Asia but also contributes to broader theoretical discussions on media, power, and representation in global contexts.

Literature Review
Framing theory, most notably articulated by Entman (1993), asserts that media frames function by selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of reality while omitting or downplaying others, thereby shaping how audiences interpret events and actors. Frames not only define problems and diagnose causes but also make moral judgments and suggest remedies. Building on this foundational concept, Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) proposed five widely cited generic frames—conflict, economic consequences, human interest, morality, and responsibility—which have been extensively applied in both domestic and international news contexts. These frames provide a systematic way to analyze journalistic choices and the underlying ideologies or assumptions they may reflect.

A growing strand of research has moved beyond identifying frames to investigating the factors that influence their selection. Golan and Wanta (2003), for example, found that the nature of the news topic strongly correlates with frame type—economic news stories are more likely to be framed through economic consequences, whereas social and cultural issues tend to invite human interest or morality frames. Similarly, Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern (2007) demonstrated that the identity of the dominant actor in a news story significantly impacts framing. Stories featuring government officials or political elites are more likely to employ institutional frames such as conflict or responsibility, while those focused on citizens are more prone to adopt human-centered frames such as human interest. These findings align with broader media sociology debates on personalization versus institutionalization in political reporting (Reese, 2001; Shoemaker & Reese, 2013).

Despite these insights, cross-national research on framing remains underdeveloped. Most studies are confined to single-country contexts or focus narrowly on bilateral media portrayals (e.g., U.S.–China, U.S.–Russia). Jebril et al. (2013) conducted one of the few comparative studies in Europe, showing that media framing significantly affects public knowledge and attitudes, yet few studies have systematically tested the predictors of frame use across diverse media environments. Tang et al. (2023) argue that national ideology, media ownership structures, and geopolitical orientation all shape frame selection, though these effects are often mediated by other variables such as actor identity and topic salience.

While earlier studies have explored media framing of international actors in Malaysia (Nain, 2002), few have tested the combined effects of focus country, news topic, actor identity, and outlet affiliation across multiple generic frames. Most research has examined each predictor in isolation or applied only one or two frames. Therefore, this study fills a critical gap by adopting a multivariate approach to investigate how these variables interact to shape the portrayal of the U.S. and China in Malaysian press coverage. By analyzing five major news frames within a single dataset, this research not only extends framing theory but also contributes to a more integrated understanding of international media narratives in the Global South.

Methodology
This study adopts a deductive and issue-focused methodology to analyze how media frames are applied in news coverage of international engagement involving the United States and China. The content analysis sample included news stories from two English-language newspapers, *the Star* and *New Strait Times*, published in 2000. The search terms "U.S." and "China", were used in the official websites of the two English newspapers to collect relevant articles, which generated about 1,570 stories. For framing analysis, only articles exclusively focused on China or the U.S. in international contexts were selected. A random sampling method was applied through the platform of Divorminor. The final sample comprised 330 news articles, including 149 US-related stories and 138 China-related stories.

Before conducting the content analysis, coders were required to thoroughly review all coding components to ensure consistency and accuracy in categorization. A detailed codebook was provided to guide the process, containing clear instructions and illustrative examples of typical media expressions.

The codebook outlined definitions and examples for key independent variables, including the focus country (U.S. or China), news topics (political, economic, social, and cultural), news actors (government and political officials, professionals and experts, civil society organizations, and citizens), and news outlet affiliations categorized by country (Chinese, U.S., Malaysian, Western, and other Asian media). The coding of news frames was drawn on frameworks established by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) and Supadhiloke (2012), five generic frames are analyzed: economic consequences, human interest, morality, conflict, and cooperation. The original "responsibility" frame from Semetko and Valkenburg was excluded, while a "cooperation" frame was incorporated in the present study. This adjustment is supported by recent studies that highlight the relevance of cooperation in framing international news, particularly in the context of public diplomacy and bilateral relations (Gong & Guo, 2022; Supadhiloke, 2012; Yi, Liu, & Yang, 2024).

This framework consists of five dominant news frames to explain the international relationship of US and China with other countries: Economic Impact Frame focuses on the financial or economic outcomes of an event or issue, including its effects on trade, employment, investment, or national economic performance. Human Interest Frame seeks to humanize news content by highlighting individual experiences, personal struggles, or emotional dimensions, often aiming to elicit empathy from the audience. Morality Frame presents issues through a lens of ethics, religion, or cultural values, emphasizing judgments about what is morally right or wrong. Conflict Frame highlights disagreement, confrontation, or competition between individuals, groups, or nations, often portraying the issue as a struggle or clash. Cooperation Frame offers a contrasting perspective to the conflict frame by emphasizing harmony, mutual understanding, and collaborative efforts between actors or countries.

Using Semetko & Valkenburg's (2000) approach, every news story is coded 1 for each detected frame and 0 when it is absent. Three trained coders conducted the content analysis using the Divorminor platform. To assess coding consistency, intercoder reliability was calculated by double-coding 10% of the sample. Using Holsti's Coefficient, reliability scores were as follows: cooperation (0.89), conflict (0.89), economic impact (0.98), human interest (0.82), and morality (0.89), indicating a high level of agreement across variables

Result and Discussion
General pattern of international news in Malaysia
Table 1 provides an overview of the sample of 330 international news articles, including 149 US-related articles and 181 China-related articles. Malaysian media outlets dominated the sample (56.7%), followed by Western media (23%) and Chinese outlets (10.9%), while U.S. and other Asian sources were minimally represented.

The majority of articles were published by Malaysian-based outlets (56.7%), followed by those affiliated with Western countries (23%). Coverage from Chinese (10.9%), Asian (6.1%), and U.S. media (3.3%) was more limited, indicating a predominantly local framing of international stories. This aligns with Nain's (2002) argument that Malaysian media largely maintain domestically driven narratives, even when covering international topics.

Regarding dominant news actors, government and political figures overwhelmingly led the coverage (58.5%), while civil society organizations (19.7%), experts (11.8%), and citizens (8.8%) appeared far less frequently. This mirrors existing literature suggesting elite-centric coverage in international reporting, especially in Southeast Asia, where media often defer to state authority (Shoemaker & Reese, 2013).

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics of Sample (N = 330)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent (%)
The focus Country	U.S.	149	45.2
	China	181	54.8
News Sources' Country Affiliation	China	36	10.9
	Malaysia	187	56.7
	U.S.	11	3.3
	Western Countries	76	23
	Other Asian Countries	20	6.1
Dominant News Actor	Government & Political Actors	193	58.5
	Professionals & Experts	39	11.8
	Civil Society Organizations	65	19.7
	Citizens	29	8.8
	Mixed	4	1.2
News Topic	Political	129	39.1
	Economic	110	33.3
	Social	63	19.1
	Cultural	28	8.5
News Frame	Conflict	122	37
	Cooperation	167	50.6
	Economic Impact	201	60.9
	Human Interest	177	53.6
	Value Frame	94	28.5

In terms of news topics, political (39.1%) and economic issues (33.3%) were most prevalent, together comprising over 70% of all stories. Social (19.1%) and cultural themes (8.5%) were less common, reinforcing the perception that international news is often anchored in formal diplomatic or economic relations (Golan & Wanta, 2003).

Among the five identified frames, the economic impact frame (60.9%) appeared most frequently, followed by human interest (53.6%), cooperation (50.6%), conflict (37%), and morality/value (28.5%). These patterns indicate that Malaysian coverage tends to foreground material and human dimensions of international relations. The prominence of the economic frame reflects Malaysia's positioning as a trade-oriented state with significant economic engagement with both China and the U.S. (Supadhiloke, 2012). The high usage of the human interest frame suggests an effort to localize or personalize global events, consistent with framing strategies noted in other Asian media (Lyu et al., 2021).

Comparative Study of News Frames of US and China in International News
Table 2 presents the distribution of five news frames across reports focusing on the United States (n = 149) and China (n = 181). Chi-square tests were conducted to assess whether the differences in frame usage between US- and China-focused news reports were statistically significant.

Table 2
News frames in the international reports about US and China

Frame Type	US (n=149)		China (n=181)		X^2	P
	N	%	N	%		
Conflict	73	48.30%	49	27.20%	15.74	0.000
Cooperation	70	46.40%	97	53.90%	1.863	0.172
Economic impact	79	52.30%	122	67.80%	8.229	0.004
Human Interest	108	71.50%	69	38%	36.357	0.000
Morality frame	46	28.40%	48	26.70%	0.582	0.445

The analysis reveals notable differences in how international news reports frame the United States and China. Among the five frames examined, conflict and human interest frames were significantly more common in U.S.-related stories, while the economic impact frame appeared more frequently in reports about China. Specifically, nearly half (48.3%) of the U.S.-related articles employed a conflict frame, compared to just 27.2% of China-related stories, a difference that is statistically significant (χ^2 = 15.74, p < .001). This suggests that media are more likely to present the U.S. within a narrative of confrontation, possibly reflecting its global military and political engagements. In contrast, China was more frequently associated with economic consequences, with 67.8% of Chinese stories using this frame versus 52.3% of U.S. stories (χ^2 = 8.229, p = .004). This finding aligns with China's prominent role in global trade and investment and supports previous literature that links rising powers with economic framing (Golan & Wanta, 2003; Tang et al., 2023).

The human interest frame showed the most pronounced difference. It was applied in 71.5% of stories about the U.S., compared to just 38% of China-related stories (χ^2 = 36.357, p < .001). This may reflect a tendency for media to humanize U.S. stories through personal narratives or emotionally resonant themes, perhaps due to cultural proximity or audience identification with Western perspectives (Jebril et al., 2013). On the other hand, cooperation and morality frames did not differ significantly between the two countries. Although China was slightly more likely to be portrayed through a cooperation frame (53.9% vs. 46.4%), the difference was not statistically meaningful (p = .172). Similarly, morality frames appeared in approximately one-quarter of stories for both countries, indicating a relatively balanced use of value-based narratives.

Factors Predicting News Frames

Table 3

Binary Logistic Regression for Cooperation Frame

Covarient		N	B	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Focus Country	US	149	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)
	China	181	0.239	0.961	0.327	1.27
News Topic	Political Dimension	129	(Ref)	1.919	0.589	(Ref)
	Economic Dimension	110	-0.01	0.001	0.972	0.99
	Social Dimension	63	-0.341	0.996	0.318	0.711
	Cultural Dimension	28	-0.483	0.996	0.318	0.617
News Actor	Government and Political Actors	193	(Ref)	7.889	0.096	(Ref)
	Expert or Celebrity	39	-0.31	0.632	0.427	0.734
	Company or Organization	65	0.018	0.003	0.956	1.018
	Citizen	29	-1.2	6.183	0.013	0.301
	Mixed	4	1.139	0.899	0.343	3.123
News Outlet	Malaysian Media	187	(Ref)	6.217	0.183	(Ref)
	Chinese Media	36	0.766	3.441	0.064	2.152
	US Media	11	-0.824	1.344	0.246	0.438
	Western Media	76	-0.065	0.052	0.82	0.937
	Asian Media	20	-0.373	0.584	0.445	0.689

To examine the factors influencing the use of the cooperation frame in international news coverage of the U.S. and China, a binary logistic regression was conducted. Among the variables tested, the **focus country** did not significantly influence the likelihood of cooperation framing (p = .327). While China-focused articles were slightly more likely to use this frame (Exp(B) = 1.27), the difference was not statistically meaningful, suggesting that both countries are portrayed in similarly cooperative terms across the sample.

Likewise, **news topic** was not a significant predictor. Whether the story emphasized political, economic, social, or cultural issues had no significant bearing on the use of the cooperation frame. This finding challenges previous assumptions that economic or diplomatic topics are more conducive to cooperative narratives and suggests that cooperation framing may cut across various thematic areas.

The most notable finding emerged from the analysis of **news actors.** Articles that featured **citizens as the primary actors** were significantly less likely to use the cooperation frame (p = .013). In fact, when citizens were the focus, the odds of cooperation framing dropped by approximately 70% compared to stories featuring government or political figures. This result highlights the narrative power of institutional actors in shaping diplomatic or collaborative portrayals, consistent with earlier findings that government sources are more likely to be associated with official discourse and international cooperation (Dimitrova & Connolly-Ahern, 2007). In contrast, stories featuring everyday individuals may be more likely to evoke human interest, grievance, or conflict, reducing the emphasis on mutual engagement.

Finally, while **media outlet affiliation** did not show overall significance, one marginal trend was worth noting. News stories from **Chinese media** were more likely to adopt a cooperation

frame compared to those from Malaysian media, with the odds being slightly more than double (Exp(B) = 2.15, *p* = .064). Although this result fell just short of statistical significance, it may reflect editorial tendencies within Chinese media to emphasize diplomatic harmony and soft power narratives in their international reporting. Other media outlets, including those from the U.S., Western countries, and other parts of Asia, did not show significant differences in their use of the cooperation frame.

Taken together, the results suggest that the presence of political or governmental actors plays a more influential role in driving cooperation framing than either the topic of the article or the country being covered. This actor-centered pattern indicates that the construction of international cooperation in the media is shaped less by issue type and more by who is speaking within the story.

Table 4
Binary Logistic Regression for Conflict frame

Covariant		N	B	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Focus Country	US	149	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)
	China	181	-0.864	10.742	0.001	0.421
News Topic	Political Dimension	129	(Ref)	6.347	0.096	(Ref)
	Economic Dimension	110	-0.796	6.128	0.013	0.451
	Social Dimension	63	-0.477	1.75	0.186	0.621
	Cultural Dimension	28	-0.429	0.665	0.415	0.651
News Actor	Government and Political Actors	193	(Ref)	5.303	0.258	(Ref)
	Expert or Celebrity	39	-1.021	4.905	0.027	0.36
	Company or Organization	65	-0.297	0.692	0.406	0.743
	Citizen	29	0.039	0.007	0.932	1.04
	Mixed	4	-20.718	0	0.999	0
News Outlet	Malaysian Media	187	(Ref)	14.582	0.006	(Ref)
	Chinese Media	36	-1.201	4.382	0.036	0.301
	US Media	11	0.193	0.084	0.772	1.213
	Western Media	76	0.788	7.125	0.008	2.199
	Asian Media	20	0.586	1.248	0.264	1.796

The logistic regression analysis reveals several significant predictors for the use of the conflict frame in international news reporting on the U.S. and China. Most notably, articles focused on China were significantly less likely to employ the conflict frame compared to those about the U.S. (Exp(B) = 0.421, p = .001), suggesting a consistent tendency to frame the U.S. in more confrontational terms. This aligns with past research that associates U.S. foreign policy coverage with narratives of dominance and intervention (Golan & Wanta, 2003). Topic-wise, stories with an economic focus were also less likely to use conflict framing compared to political topics (Exp(B) = 0.451, p = .013), indicating that economic issues tend to be framed in terms of cooperation or mutual benefit rather than tension.

In terms of news actors, reports featuring experts or celebrities were significantly less likely to use conflict frames than those featuring political actors (Exp(B) = 0.360, p = .027), perhaps because experts tend to offer neutral or analytical perspectives. Although other actor categories showed no significant effect, the presence of experts appears to moderate confrontational narratives. Finally, media outlet also played a significant role. Articles from

Chinese media were less likely to use conflict framing (Exp(B) = 0.301, p = .036), while those from Western media were significantly more likely to do so (Exp(B) = 2.199, p = .008). This contrast may reflect different editorial orientations, with Chinese outlets promoting diplomatic narratives and Western outlets favoring adversarial frames, particularly in coverage of geopolitical rivals. Overall, these findings highlight how national identity, topic focus, actor presence, and media origin all shape the likelihood of conflict framing in international news.

Table 5
Binary Logistic Regression for Economic Impact Frame

Covariant		N	B	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Focus Country	US	149	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)
	China	181	0.789	8.886	0.003	2.202
News Topic	Political Dimension	129	(Ref)	29.716	0	(Ref)
	Economic Dimension	110	1.672	22.323	0	5.321
	Social Dimension	63	-0.079	0.053	0.817	0.924
	Cultural Dimension	28	-0.302	0.394	0.53	0.739
News Actor	Government and Political Actors	193	(Ref)	2.792	0.593	(Ref)
	Expert or Celebrity	39	-0.025	0.004	0.953	0.975
	Company or Organization	65	-0.299	0.655	0.418	0.741
	Citizen	29	-0.685	2.337	0.126	0.504
	Mixed	4	-0.362	0.109	0.742	0.696
News Outlet	Malaysian Media	187	(Ref)	2.023	0.732	(Ref)
	Chinese Media	36	0.103	0.055	0.814	1.108
	US Media	11	0.995	1.804	0.179	2.704
	Western Media	76	-0.03	0.01	0.921	0.971
	Asian Media	20	-0.141	0.069	0.792	0.868

The logistic regression analysis identified several key predictors for the use of the **economic impact frame** in international news coverage of the U.S. and China. Notably, articles focusing on **China** were significantly more likely to adopt this frame than those about the U.S. (*p* = .003). The odds of economic framing were more than twice as high in China-related stories (Exp(B) = 2.202), suggesting that China is consistently portrayed in terms of trade, investment, and market influence. This aligns with China's image as a global economic actor and reflects media attention to its role in regional and international financial dynamics.

Among all variables, **news topic** was the strongest predictor. Compared to politically themed stories, articles with an **economic focus** were over five times more likely to use the economic impact frame (*p* < .001). This clear result confirms that topic selection directly shapes framing, consistent with existing framing theory (Entman, 1993). Stories categorized as social or cultural were not significantly associated with economic framing, underscoring the topical specificity of this frame.

In contrast, **news actors** did not significantly influence the use of the economic frame. Whether the story featured government officials, experts, organizations, or citizens had no meaningful effect, indicating that economic framing is less about who is involved and more

about what is being reported. Similarly, **news outlet affiliation** had no significant impact. While U.S. media showed a slight tendency toward economic framing (Exp(B) = 2.704), the difference was not statistically significant. Other outlets—including Chinese and Western media—exhibited framing patterns similar to those of Malaysian media.

Taken together, these results suggest that **economic framing is primarily driven by the article's topic and focus country**, rather than by the media source or dominant news actor. This consistency across media outlets may reflect a shared global understanding of China's economic relevance and the natural linkage between economic content and economic framing.

Table 1
Binary Logistic Regression for Human Interest Frame

Covarient		N	B	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Focus Country	US	149	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)
	China	181	-1.43	28.677	0.000	0.239
News Topic	Political Dimension	129	(Ref)	13.362	0.004	(Ref)
	Economic Dimension	110	-0.417	1.774	0.183	0.659
	Social Dimension	63	0.11	0.091	0.763	1.116
	Cultural Dimension	28	2.533	8.906	0.003	12.587
News Actor	Government and Political Actors	193	(Ref)	10.325	0.035	(Ref)
	Expert or Celebrity	39	-0.042	0.009	0.924	0.959
	Company or Organization	65	0.315	0.805	0.37	1.37
	Citizen	29	1.644	8.611	0.003	5.175
	Mixed	4	-1.212	0.838	0.36	0.298
News Outlet	Malaysian Media	187	(Ref)	3.647	0.456	(Ref)
	Chinese Media	36	-0.378	0.761	0.383	0.685
	US Media	11	-0.6	0.736	0.391	0.549
	Western Media	76	0.248	0.637	0.425	1.282
	Asian Media	20	-0.549	0.971	0.324	0.578

The logistic regression results indicate that the use of the human interest frame is significantly shaped by the focus country, topic, and news actor. Articles about China were far less likely to adopt this frame compared to those about the U.S. (Exp(B) = 0.239, p < .001), suggesting that U.S. coverage tends to feature more emotionally resonant, personalized storytelling. This aligns with previous findings that Western media often emphasize individual experiences and affective narratives (Dimitrova & Connolly-Ahern, 2007), while reporting on China tends to be more institutional or abstract. Additionally, cultural stories were much more likely to be framed with human interest than political topics (Exp(B) = 12.587, p = .003), which is consistent with the nature of cultural content that often highlights personal stories, identity, and emotion (Entman, 1993). The presence of citizens as main news actors also strongly predicted human interest framing (Exp(B) = 5.175, p = .003), further supporting the idea that this frame thrives when individual human voices are central to the narrative. In contrast, news outlet had no significant influence, suggesting that the tendency to use human interest framing is not specific to national media traditions but is more closely linked to story content and perspective. These findings reinforce prior research showing that both actor identity and narrative domain are critical in shaping how emotionally engaging frames are constructed across international media (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000).

Table 7

Binary Logistic Regression for Morality Frame

Covariant		N	B	Wald	Sig.	Exp(B)
Focus Country	US	149	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)	(Ref)
	China	181	-0.281	1.088	0.297	0.755
News Topic	Political Dimension	129	(Ref)	10.02	0.018	(Ref)
	Economic Dimension	110	-0.615	3.807	0.051	0.541
	Social Dimension	63	-0.846	4.72	0.03	0.429
	Cultural Dimension	28	-1.71	6.382	0.012	0.181
News Actor	Government and Political Actors	193	(Ref)	0.358	0.986	(Ref)
	Expert or Celebrity	39	-0.001	0	0.999	0.999
	Company or Organization	65	-0.126	0.116	0.733	0.881
	Citizen	29	-0.236	0.207	0.649	0.79
	Mixed	4	0.247	0.04	0.842	1.28
News Outlet	Malaysian Media	187	(Ref)	5.846	0.211	(Ref)
	Chinese Media	36	0.699	2.913	0.088	2.011
	US Media	11	-1.415	1.714	0.19	0.243
	Western Media	76	0.112	0.132	0.717	1.119
	Asian Media	20	-0.439	0.532	0.466	0.644

The logistic regression analysis shows that the **morality frame** in international news reporting is primarily influenced by **news topic,** rather than by the focus country, news actor, or media outlet. While China-focused stories were slightly less likely to use the morality frame than U.S.-focused ones, the difference was not statistically significant ($p = .297$). In contrast, **topic type was a strong predictor:** compared to political stories, articles on **cultural** ($p = .012$), **social** ($p = .030$), and to a lesser extent **economic** topics ($p = .051$) were significantly less likely to adopt moral framing. This supports earlier studies suggesting that moral frames are more commonly activated in political discourse, where normative judgments and ideological values are more salient (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Entman, 1993). Neither the identity of the **main news actor** nor the **origin of the media outlet** significantly affected the use of this frame, suggesting that morality framing is largely topic-driven and less shaped by national or institutional context.

Binary logistic regression results reveal that the **focus country** significantly affects certain frames—particularly **conflict, economic impact**, and **human interest.** This finding aligns with prior research emphasizing the influence of a country's global status (e.g., core vs. periphery) on media representation (Chang, 1998; Wu, 2000). However, this influence is not uniform across all frames; for instance, the **cooperation** and **morality** frames appear less sensitive to whether the news focuses on the U.S. or China.

Another consistent and robust predictor is the **news topic**. Echoing Golan and Wanta (2003), the present study finds that topic type strongly shapes framing patterns. **Economic stories** are closely associated with **economic impact frames**, while **social** and **cultural topics** are more likely to elicit **human interest** or **morality framing.** This confirms that the subject matter of a story plays a central role in frame selection.

News actors also significantly shape certain frames, particularly **cooperation** and **human interest.** Articles highlighting **citizens** are more likely to adopt these frames, whereas those featuring **government or political actors** are less likely to do so. This supports Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern's (2007) argument that the individuals featured in news stories influence narrative style, with citizen-centered stories tending toward more emotionally engaging framing. However, the influence of actors is less evident in the **morality** and **economic impact** frames.

In contrast, the role of **media outlet affiliation** is relatively limited. Although some marginal effects exist, outlets themselves do not significantly determine framing patterns. This suggests that framing is more strongly shaped by the **content and actors** within a story than by the platform through which it is delivered. A likely explanation is the widespread adoption of similar journalistic norms and routines across global media, which results in convergent framing practices.

In summary, this study reinforces existing literature that identifies **geopolitical context, news topic,** and **actor presence** as key influences on international news framing. However, the effects of these factors are **frame-specific,** and their influence can be moderated—or even overridden—by other contextual variables, highlighting the complexity of framing dynamics in cross-national reporting.

Conclusion

This study investigated the involvement of five dominant frames (conflict, cooperation, economic impact, human interest, and morality) in international news coverage about the United States and China in Malaysian press, and examined the factors that predict frame selection. The findings reveal that framing is not uniformly applied across countries, topics, or media systems; rather, it is shaped by a complex interplay of content characteristics and actor presence.

Descriptive and comparative analyses show that China is more frequently framed through economic impact, while the United States is more often associated with conflict and human interest narratives. These distinctions reflect broader geopolitical perceptions, with China portrayed as an emerging economic power and the U.S. as a dominant political and military actor. However, frames such as cooperation and morality are more evenly distributed between the two nations, suggesting areas where media framing is less polarized.

Binary logistic regression results further highlight that news topic and actor presence are the most consistent predictors of frame usage. Political content tends to activate conflict and morality frames, while economic stories predict economic impact framing. Meanwhile, citizen-centered stories are more likely to invoke human interest and cooperation frames, supporting existing literature on the role of actor identity in shaping narrative tone. Surprisingly, media outlet affiliation had minimal predictive power, indicating a degree of professional convergence across international journalism that transcends national boundaries.

Focus country was a strong predictor for the conflict, economic, and human interest frames, but not for morality or cooperation. China-related stories were more likely to receive

economic framing, while U.S. stories were more humanized and conflict-laden. These findings reflect the influence of global power dynamics on media representation (Chang, 1998; Wu, 2000). News topic emerged as the most consistent predictor. Economic topics strongly predicted the economic frame, while cultural stories were associated with human interest and moral frames. This aligns with framing theory, which posits that content features shape interpretive schemas (Entman, 1993). News actor also influenced framing. Stories featuring citizens were more likely to use human interest and cooperation frames but less likely to use conflict frames. This supports the claim by Dimitrova and Connolly-Ahern (2007) that actor identity influences narrative tone. Governmental presence correlated with institutional and conflictual framing. Interestingly, media outlet affiliation had minimal influence. This suggests a convergence of professional norms across global journalism, where framing is more contingent on content and actor than on institutional origin (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996).

This study makes three key contributions, beginning with a theoretical refinement of how frames are determined. Rather than relying on the single-factor explanations that have long dominated framing research (e.g., Chang, 1998; Wu, 2000), we tested three variables in a multivariate design. What emerged is clear: news topic and the actors involved matter more than an outlet's national origin when it comes to predicting which frames get chosen.

Additionally, the study offers a fresh contextual perspective by centering a non-Western viewpoint on great-power rivalry. Most comparative framing work focuses on U.S. or European media, but here we look at Malaysian English-language newspapers, a hybrid system that doesn't fully align with either China or the West. The result reveals that Malaysian outlets mostly frame China through an economic lens and the U.S. through conflict and human-interest angles . This imbalance shows how smaller states adapt great-power narratives to fit their own development goals and cultural ties, adding real-world depth to theories about how media flows operate within the global system. Practically speaking, the findings also hold lessons for diplomatic and public diplomacy efforts. The practical implications of the findings highlight that media outlet nationality has minimal influence on framing, whereas citizen actors significantly shape human-interest and cooperation frames—suggesting grassroots voices could mitigate elite-driven conflict narratives. For policymakers, viable strategies to shift public perception in the Global South might include reframing topics (e.g., from political-security to socio-cultural themes) and elevating non-state actors (such as civil society, experts, and ordinary citizens). Taken together, this work pushes framing theory forward by clarifying when and why content and actors matter more than where a media outlet is from. It also provides a systematic look at how Malaysia navigates the ongoing discursive tug-of-war between the U.S. and China, offering new insights into how these dynamics play out beyond Western borders.

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