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DATA REPORT AUGUST 7, 2026

Why Does US Media Undercount the Gaza Death Toll? What the Published Counts Actually Measure

US coverage carries one direct-death registry. Named bodies challenge it in both directions: 41% underreporting in The Lancet, and a 41,000 civilian ceiling.

Gaza Death Toll

Casualty Counting

Media Measurement

Contested Statistics

Source Provenance



The number US coverage carries is the Gaza Ministry of Health's direct-death tally, and the sharpest published claim that it falls short puts the shortfall at about **41%**: researchers at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, writing in *The Lancet* in 2025, estimated 64,260 traumatic-injury deaths in the Gaza Strip through June 30, 2024, against the 37,877 the ministry had reported for the same period. The same registry is challenged in the opposite direction by the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs, which in 2025 subtracted estimated natural deaths and Israel's count of fighters killed from the ministry total to derive a ceiling of at most 41,000 civilian war-related deaths. Both challenges point at one registry, and the Jerusalem Center's own page states that neither the ministry's total nor Israel's fighter estimate has been independently confirmed.

Key Findings

- The Gaza Ministry of Health reported **67,075 killed and 169,430 injured**, the figure Brown University's Costs of War project cited in 2025.
- Researchers at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, in *The Lancet* (2025), estimated **64,260 traumatic-injury deaths** through June 30, 2024, against 37,877 reported by the ministry for that window, an implied underreporting of about 41%.
- The Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs (2025) derived a ceiling of **at most 41,000** civilian war-related deaths, its own arithmetic on inputs supplied by parties to the conflict, and states on the same page that neither input has been independently confirmed.
- The Israel Defense Forces, in a February 29, 2024 briefing, reported **over 13,000** people it describes as terrorists killed in Gaza, its own count and its own classification.
- The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics put Gaza at about **2.13 million** at the end of 2025 against roughly 2.2 million on October 6, 2023, a decline it attributes to deaths, missing persons and roughly 100,000 departures, and describes expressly as a population estimate rather than a casualty count.

What death toll does US coverage actually carry?

67,075 killed and 169,430 injured is the figure reported by the Gaza Ministry of Health and cited by Brown University's Costs of War project in 2025. It is a direct-death registry, published by a ministry in Hamas-run Gaza, and it is one of at least four figures in circulation, each counting a different population over a different window.

The Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs, in a 2025 essay, sets out three of the four alongside one another: the ministry's total of about 67,000, Israel's estimate of 21,000 Hamas fighters killed, and the center's own derived ceiling of at most 41,000 civilian war-related deaths, reached by subtracting estimated natural deaths and the fighter estimate from the ministry total. The center's page states plainly that neither the ministry claim nor the Israeli estimate has been independently confirmed.

The fourth is Israel's own operational count. At a briefing on February 29, 2024, the Israel Defense Forces Spokesperson reported over 13,000 people the IDF describes as terrorists killed in Gaza since the start of the war. That is the IDF's count and the IDF's classification, published by a party to the events, and its window closes more than a year before the ministry total above. The full decomposition of these overlapping records sits in the Institute's report on [civilian harm in Gaza](#).

Four figures in circulation, each counting something different

GAZA STRIP, WINDOWS DIFFER BY FIGURE



Source: Gaza Ministry of Health total as cited by Brown University's Costs of War project, 2025; ceiling and fighter estimate as reported by the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs, 2025; early-war count from the IDF Spokesperson briefing, February 29, 2024.

Who says the tally undercounts, and on what argument?

It is often said that US media undercounts the Gaza death toll. The quantified version of that claim comes from researchers at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, whose 2025 study in *The Lancet* estimated **64,260 traumatic-injury deaths** through June 30, 2024, against 37,877 reported by the Palestinian Ministry of Health for the same window, an implied underreporting of roughly 41%.

That estimate concerns violent deaths alone. The broader version of the undercount argument is held by Brown University's Costs of War project, whose 2025 paper on the human toll of the Gaza war reports the ministry's 67,075 killed and 169,430 injured and separates direct from indirect deaths: people who die of untreated injury, of starvation, of disease, and of the collapse of medical care. A registry built on bodies that reach health facilities does not enter those deaths, and Costs of War states that public-health analysis indicates the ministry tally may be a significant undercount of violent deaths.

The mechanism is also described by relayers of the figure themselves. The BBC's explainer on how the dead are counted in Gaza notes that the ministry's figures do not distinguish military from civilian deaths and may be an undercount because they exclude bodies that have not been recovered.

Reported deaths and an estimated total for the same period

GAZA STRIP, OCTOBER 7, 2023 TO JUNE 30, 2024



Source: Researchers at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, The Lancet, 2025.

The two arguments are not the same claim. One is a modelled estimate of violent deaths for a closed window; the other is a statement about a category of death the registry was never built

to record. They support the same direction and rest on different evidence, and a report that carries the direction should say which of the two it is carrying.

Who says the same tally overcounts?

At most 41,000 is the ceiling the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs published in 2025 for civilians in Gaza who died of war-related causes, derived by subtracting estimated natural deaths and Israel's count of 21,000 Hamas fighters killed from the ministry's total. The center presents it as a ceiling reached by its own arithmetic on inputs supplied by parties to the conflict, and states on the same page that neither input has been independently confirmed.

The second line of challenge is about relaying rather than arithmetic. HonestReporting, a media-monitoring organisation with an advocacy mission, published a report in 2024 arguing that mainstream outlets carried Hamas-provided casualty figures without sufficient distinction of their source and rarely set Israeli figures beside them. That is an advocacy organisation's characterisation of editorial practice, not a measured share of coverage, and it is presented here as the position it is.

What both directions have in common is the object they aim at. The undercount argument holds that the registry misses categories of death; the overcount argument holds that the registry's composition is unknown, because it publishes no combatant-civilian split and its inputs are not externally auditable. Neither argument disputes that the registry is the only continuously published enumeration of the dead. Each proposes a correction to it, and each correction is computed from figures published by a party to the events or by a body monitoring them.

The gap between the two positions is wide in a specific, checkable way. The Lancet estimate is 64,260 traumatic-injury deaths through mid-2024; the Jerusalem Center's ceiling is 41,000 civilian war-related deaths through October 2025, over a period more than a year longer. They are not the same category, they do not cover the same window, and they cannot be subtracted from one another.

What does the ministry's registry measure?

169,430 injured is the second half of the pair the Costs of War project cited in 2025, and it marks the registry for what it is: a health-system record of direct casualties, compiled by a ministry in Hamas-run Gaza, published without a combatant-civilian split and relayed by outlets with that provenance attached. It counts deaths that reach the system. It does not model the deaths that do not.

A second measurement exists for the same territory and answers a different question. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reported that Gaza stood at about **2.13 million** at the end of 2025 against a pre-war baseline of roughly 2.2 million on October 6, 2023, a decline of about 10.6% relative to pre-war estimates, with roughly 100,000 people having left the Strip. The bureau describes this expressly as an estimate of population change, incorporating deaths, missing persons and out-migration together, and it cannot be converted into a casualty figure. The wider series behind that baseline, and the reasons Palestinian population totals are disputed, are set out in the Institute's report on [Israeli and Palestinian population growth](#).

The distinction matters because the three published quantities answer three questions. The ministry's number is how many deaths the health system recorded. The Lancet estimate is how many traumatic-injury deaths a statistical model implies for a defined window. The bureau's number is how many fewer people are present. A sentence that moves between them without naming which is which has changed the subject inside itself.

Has US coverage itself been measured?

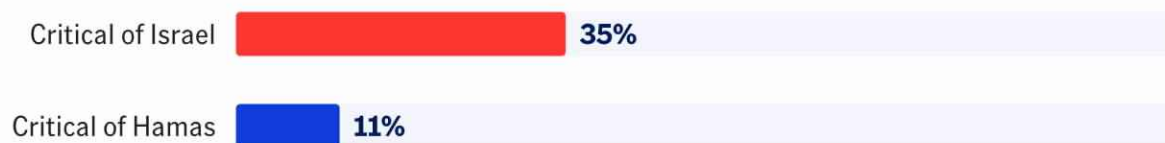
Coded measurement of US outlets is thin. CAMERA, a media-monitoring organisation with an advocacy mission, counted the 99 new articles in CNN's Middle East section from July to September 2023 and divided the region's combined population by that count, reporting **324,316** Israelis and Palestinians per article. The article count and the calculation are CAMERA's own, and the window closes before the war began.

The same organisation's larger exercise measured a British outlet. CAMERA coded the headlines of over 2,500 BBC News articles published from October 7, 2023 to October 7, 2025

and reported that 35% were critical of Israel against 11% critical of Hamas, with 45 headlines featuring claims of genocide, famine or starvation in Gaza and 21 uses of the words starving or starvation. The coding rests on CAMERA's own judgment of what counts as critical, not on an independently replicated method.

Share of headlines coded as critical of each party

OVER 2,500 BBC NEWS HEADLINES, OCTOBER 2023 TO OCTOBER 2025



Source: CAMERA, 2025; coding performed by CAMERA.

Academic measurement of the same terrain is early. A 2025 preprint, *Media Coverage of War Victims: Journalistic Biases in Reporting* (arXiv:2510.06453), examines how outlets report war victims; as a preprint it has not completed peer review. The Institute's own published study of [how Gaza-war headlines name the agent of violence](#) measures a narrower and more tractable property: whether a headline names who caused a death or leaves the sentence agentless. None of these measures how many deaths a given outlet printed, which is the quantity the undercount claim is about.

What would settle the count, and does it exist?

1,899,291 is the number of Gaza residents counted in the last full enumeration of the territory, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics census of 2017, and every Gaza total published since, in the UN and World Bank series alike, is a projection off that base rather than a count. No independent body has enumerated Gaza's war dead.

What exists instead is a set of records of known and stated provenance: a direct-death registry published by a ministry in Hamas-run Gaza; Israel's own estimates of fighters killed, published by a party to the conflict; a ceiling derived by a research institute from those two

inputs; a peer-reviewed statistical estimate for a closed nine-month window; and a demographic estimate of population change from the Palestinian statistical authority. Each is checkable as what its publisher says it is, and none is an audit of another.

That is the condition both challenge directions share. The claim that the printed figure is too low and the claim that it is too high are each computed against a base that has not been independently verified, and the Jerusalem Center's own page says so of the two inputs it used. A reader can verify who published each figure, when, over what window, and of what category of death. A reader cannot, from any currently published source, verify the total.

Methodology

This report measures the published record on the Gaza death toll and on the coverage that carries it. No count of deaths appears here from any source as an established total; every figure carries its publisher and its type.

Sources are drawn in the Institute's priority order and labelled by type. Official and party records: the Israel Defense Forces Spokesperson's briefing of February 29, 2024, a self-reported count using the IDF's own classification of those counted; the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics 2017 census and its end-2025 population brief, both official statistical products. Peer-reviewed research: the 2025 study in *The Lancet* by researchers at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, cited for its estimate of 64,260 traumatic-injury deaths and the 37,877 ministry figure it compared against.

Research and monitoring organisations: Brown University's Costs of War project, cited for the Gaza Ministry of Health totals it relays and for its direct-versus-indirect framing; the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs, a research institute, whose 41,000 ceiling is its own arithmetic on party-supplied inputs and is reported as such; CAMERA and HonestReporting, both media-monitoring organisations with advocacy missions, whose coding and characterisations are their own. The BBC explainer on how the dead are counted in Gaza is cited for the caveats it states, not for a figure. The arXiv item on journalistic biases in reporting war victims is a preprint and is labelled as one.

Limitations. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics brief's absolute-change figure does not reconcile with its own endpoints, so only the endpoints and the 10.6% share are used and no absolute change is derived here. The four casualty figures in the first section cover different windows and different categories and are not summed, subtracted or netted. CAMERA's headline shares rest on CAMERA's own coding criteria, which are not independently replicated. No source located for this report enumerates Gaza's war dead independently of the parties, and that absence is reported rather than filled.

Conclusion

So does US coverage undercount? The direct answer runs in two parts. On the quantity, yes in one measured respect: researchers at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, in *The Lancet* in 2025, put traumatic-injury deaths through June 2024 at 64,260 against 37,877 reported, and Brown University's Costs of War project states that the ministry tally may be a significant undercount of violent deaths and that indirect deaths sit outside it altogether. On the practice, the figure most outlets print is not a lower one; it is the ministry's own 67,075, relayed with its provenance attached.

The same registry carries a challenge in the other direction. The Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs derived a ceiling of at most 41,000 civilian war-related deaths from that total and Israel's 21,000 fighter estimate, and wrote on the same page that neither figure has been independently confirmed. The Israel Defense Forces published its own count of over 13,000 in February 2024, with its own classification of the counted. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics measured a 10.6% population decline that folds deaths, missing persons and roughly 100,000 departures into one estimate it says is not a casualty count. Four bodies, four quantities, one territory, no independent enumeration since the 2017 census of 1,899,291 residents.

A number nobody can audit still moves. It appears in headlines, in arguments about who is responsible, and in the conspiracy claims about Jewish influence over what gets printed that circulate wherever a figure is disputed. The Institute's work is to find the inputs that feed those claims, and this is a live candidate: when the central quantity in a conflict can be corrected upward by one named body and downward by another off the same unverified

base, what does that unresolvable arithmetic supply to the people already convinced the count is being managed for them? The record here says what each figure measures. It does not say what a reader does with a number that no one can check.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do outlets attribute the figure to the Gaza Ministry of Health rather than stating it plainly?

The tally is published by a ministry in Hamas-run Gaza and carries no combatant-civilian split, which is why relayers attach the provenance. The BBC's explainer on how the dead are counted in Gaza sets out that the figures do not distinguish military from civilian deaths and may exclude bodies not recovered.

How much higher than the reported figure do published estimates go?

For the period October 7, 2023 to June 30, 2024, researchers at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine estimated 64,260 traumatic-injury deaths in The Lancet in 2025, against 37,877 reported by the Palestinian Ministry of Health for that window. That estimate covers violent deaths only and closes in mid-2024.

What is an indirect death, and why is it counted separately?

Brown University's Costs of War project uses the term for deaths caused by untreated injury, starvation, disease and the collapse of medical care rather than by blast or gunfire. A registry compiled from bodies reaching health facilities does not record them, so estimates of indirect deaths are modelled separately rather than added to the registry total.

Which figure does Israel publish?

The Israel Defense Forces reported over 13,000 people it describes as terrorists killed in Gaza at its February 29, 2024 briefing, a floor rather than an exact total, and the Jerusalem Center for Security and Foreign Affairs relays an Israeli estimate of 21,000 Hamas fighters killed. Both are counts published by a party to the conflict.

Does the Palestinian population decline tell us the death toll?

No. The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reported Gaza at about 2.13 million at the end of 2025 against roughly 2.2 million on October 6, 2023, and states the change reflects deaths, missing persons and roughly 100,000 departures together. The bureau presents it as a population estimate, not a casualty count.

Which measurements of Gaza coverage actually exist?

Coded measurement is thin and mostly organisational. CAMERA, a monitoring organisation with an advocacy mission, coded over 2,500 BBC News headlines from October 2023 to October 2025 and reported 35% critical of Israel against 11% critical of Hamas, using its own criteria. Comparable coding of US outlets over the war period was not located.

Why can no one simply audit the count?

The last full enumeration of Gaza's population was the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics census of 2017, which counted 1,899,291 residents, and every later total in the UN and World Bank series is a projection off that base. No independent body has enumerated the war dead, so both the undercount and the overcount arguments are computed against an unverified base.

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