

Overview

- This study examines how the American public applies the term *genocide* to Israel's military campaign in Gaza and to a range of historical and contemporary armed conflicts involving civilian deaths.
- Respondents were not provided with a definition of genocide, allowing the study to measure how the term is understood and applied in contemporary public discourse rather than according to its legal definition.
- While Germany's actions against the Jews of Europe in WWII remained the clearest and most widely recognized example of genocide, many respondents also applied the term to military campaigns that have generally not been classified as genocide under international law.
- A majority of respondents agreed that Israel is committing genocide in Gaza, but they also applied the label to numerous other military conflicts, including several involving the United States.
- The findings suggest that many Americans associate genocide primarily with large-scale civilian deaths rather than with the legally required intent to destroy an ethnic group.
- Women, younger respondents, and Democrats were significantly more likely than men, older respondents, and Republicans to characterize both Israel's actions and other military conflicts as genocide.
- The findings are consistent with a process of conceptual expansion and dilution that broadens the public meaning of genocide beyond its accepted legal definition, effectively downgrading the term's historical and legal distinctiveness.
- Public diplomacy that relies exclusively on legal arguments may have limited effectiveness if many audiences understand genocide differently from its legal definition.

Study Summary

1. Purpose of the Study

- To examine how Americans understand and apply the term *genocide* in relation to Israel's war in Gaza.
- To determine whether the public applies the term consistently across other historical and contemporary conflicts involving large-scale civilian deaths.

2. Research Question

- Is the accusation of genocide against Israel unique, or does it reflect a broader change or misunderstanding in how the American public understands the concept of genocide?

3. Methodology

- Survey participants first evaluated whether Israel is committing genocide in Gaza.
- Participants then evaluated several other historical and contemporary conflicts using the same standard.

4. Findings

- A majority of participants overall viewed Israel's actions in Gaza as "genocide."
- However, the same sample we studied also viewed **all the other** examples presented as genocide as well (to varying degrees).

5. Results

Demographic & Political Variations

- **Gender:** Women characterize conflicts as genocide more than men
- **Age:** Adults under age 45 apply the label more frequently
- **Politics:** Democrats show the highest rates of labeling actions as "genocide"
- **Consistency:** Demographic trends remain uniform across all evaluated conflicts

Practical Implications

- **Term Downgrading:** The term "genocide" loses factual, historical and legal distinctiveness. It has undergone what we call "conceptual dilution," where the expansion of the term's meaning alters not only the vocabulary of public discourse but also the framework through which the public interprets reality.
- **Moral Language:** Functions primarily as an expression of moral condemnation

Detailed Factual Data & Conflict Breakdown

The study quantified public agreement on whether the term "genocide" applies to eight specific military campaigns involving extensive civilian deaths:

Evaluated Conflict	Responsible Actor(s)	Agreement Rate (%)	Key Contextual Nuance
The Holocaust	Nazi Germany	78.13%	Overwhelmingly recognized as the historical and legal benchmark.
Treatment of Native Americans	United States	63.82%	Highest agreement rate for a domestic/historical conflict.
Invasion of Ukraine	Russia	63.02%	Broad agreement regarding a contemporary state-on-state war.
Military Campaign in Gaza	Israel	54.63%	Supported by a majority, though fiercely polarized by demographic subsets.
Violence Against Black Christians	Islamists in Africa	52.28%	Labeled genocide by a majority, despite involving a non-state actor.
Atomic Bombing of Hiroshima/Nagasaki	United States	44.53%	Plurality agreement for a decisive WWII strategic action.
The Vietnam War	United States	40.95%	Substantial public inclusion despite a lack of international legal consensus.
Allied Bombing of Germany	Allied Forces (WWII)	31.21%	The lowest agreement rate, yet still embraced by nearly a third of respondents.

Specific Survey Questions & Methodology

The study evaluated a nationally representative sample of **505 American adults** using a strategic question framework. To capture organic public understanding, **no legal definition of genocide was provided** to the respondents.

Baseline Conflict Question

The core questionnaire structure prompted respondents with the following model across all eight conflicts:

- *“To what degree do you agree that [Actor] is guilty of conducting a ‘genocide’ against [Target Population] during [Conflict/Timeframe]?”*
 - **Answer Choices:** Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree, Strongly disagree.
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Targeted Demographic & Political Discrepancies

The semantic expansion of "genocide" is heavily concentrated within specific societal segments rather than occurring uniformly.

- **Gender Disparity:** Women (58.75%) hold a perceptibly higher baseline tracking rate than men (50.83%). This variance persists across all conflicts, highlighting a distinct focus on humanitarian outcomes.
 - **Generational Divide:** Respondents under 45 (64.13%) are vastly more likely to apply the term than those 45 and older (46.56%). This points to a potential long-term generational shift in vocabulary.
 - **Partisan Polarities:** Political affiliation represents the sharpest cleavage in the data. Democrats track at 75.49%, outstripping Independents (47.77%) and **doubling** Republicans (36.71%).
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Public Diplomacy Implications

We conclude that traditional messaging strategies are structurally obsolete because the public and legal entities operate on completely different conceptual planes, with the public having “diluted” and downgraded the term “genocide.” We can outline several core suggestions for state actors, legal institutions, and public information officers:

- **Modify Purely Legalistic Defenses:** Public diplomacy strategies that rely exclusively on reciting international treaties or demanding technical "proof of intent" will consistently fail to persuade majorities who view the term through a purely (possibly socially determined) moral lens.
- **Modify the Conflict Narrative:** Accusations should not be treated as unique byproducts of localized biases (such as anti-Israel sentiment). Communication strategies should recognize that this vocabulary shift stems from a broader, structural inflation (and conflation) of political language.

- **Segment Communications by Audience:** Information campaigns cannot assume a uniform public. Outreach should be heavily tailored; younger cohorts, women, and left-leaning groups require frameworks that actively address humanitarian outcomes and scale of suffering rather than strictly clinical legal codes.
- **Invest in Longitudinal Education:** Because brief, single-exposure counter-messages failed to alter perspectives, state and academic institutions should pivot toward sustained, long-term educational efforts to successfully preserve the distinctiveness of humanitarian law.