

Morality Framing in Cross-border Political Issues between Indian and Pakistani Print Media

Abstract: *Media framing has a significant role in demonstrating a certain perspective and eventually determining the context and intention of the news creator. While this research focused on the trends in framing news on cross-border political issues in Times of India and The Hindu from India and Dawn and The Nation from Pakistan from June 1st, 2014, to May 31st, 2018. The news coverage of political issues pertaining to morality; exploitation of religious, moral, and ethical sentiments across the board, were studied to examine the political agenda-setting by the selected dailies. The data of 7236 were collected on census bases from the selected dailies and analyzed with respect to three main indicators of morality framing: religion, ethics, and moral values. The research concludes that both India and Pakistani media use the moral aspect of religion and ethics in framing political issues to set certain political agendas and deteriorated bilateral political efforts.*

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Key Words: Framing, Politics, India, Pakistan

Introduction

The understanding of a country's political situation helps in determining its national and international image perception worldwide. As media influences the public opinion and the image of a country, the study focuses on political issues of India and Pakistan as represented in their media. The coverage of these issues helps in determining the relationship between the two countries that are politically adhering to their legacies.

The framing of news affects how the Pakistani and Indian publics and governments perceive mutual relations, conflicts and responsibilities, how the public complies with the policies of their governments, and how the two governments win the public sentiment and support on the specific issues.

This study is significant in terms of considering a time frame of right-wing and conservative political parties in India and Pakistan which, in their antagonistic approach towards each other, have been relying on media

* Assistant Professor, School of Creative Arts, The University of Lahore, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

Email: a.hassanqureshi@umt.edu.pk (*Corresponding Author*).

† Lecturer, School of Media and Communication Studies, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

‡ Lecturer, School of Media and Communication Studies, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

to restructure their internal and external policies ([Kazmi, & Kumar, 2011](#)) and controlling political propagandas ([Chattarji, 2009](#)) to steer public moods in the national direction against rival neighbors. Moreover, these two political parties from each side have been trying to keep their conservative ideologies alive ([Brasted, & Khan, 2002](#); Tariq, 2014) through their pro-religious, nationalists, and social conservatism. This research studies the importance of denoting the news stories in specific frames as Indo-Pak media propagate hostility against each other ([Jabbar, 1994](#)). Media from the both opposing nations have been subjective by ardently overwhelming the public with religious enthusiasm and political instabilities since the time of separation ([Lall, 2008](#)).

As India and Pakistan are fighting media wars besides the real or proxy wars since 1947, their media represent cross border news on political diplomacy, social variance, and economic issues in their newspapers using particular frames. However, the media of both the countries surrendered their typical stances and acquired positive stances towards each other ([Kadiwal, and Jain, 2020](#)) when their political commands shifted from the left-wing liberal parties to the right-wing conservative parties of Nawaz and Modi in 2014. A few bilateral conflicts opened new dimensions of news reporting for both sides; the arrest of the Indian agent Kulbhushan Sudhir Jadhav by the Pakistan army in March 2016, the assassination of the Kashmiri freedom fighter Burhan Wani by the Indian army in Jammu in July 2016, the Uri attacks and the alleged two-sided surgical strikes on the Line of Control in September 2016, and border clashes and turbulence in Kashmir from 2016 to 2018.

During the Nawaz-Modi regimes from 2015- to 2018, the selected newspaper gave certain coverage to each other's political issues, such as Nawaz attending Modi's oath-taking ceremony in Delhi (2014), Modi's surprise visit to Pakistan to attend a Nawaz family wedding at Sharif City (2015), and their secret or open meetings during the SAARC Conference at Katmandu (2015), Ufa Summit, Russia (2015), and Paris Climate Summit (2016).

[Gadgil Guha \(2013\)](#) states that the challenging political situations pose a real threat

to India becoming the world's most powerful economy. Where the leftist extremism disrupts the process of moderate political decision-making by the government, religious fundamentalism restrains it from taking any broad political steps ([Bauman, 2016](#)).

The BJP has deep-rooted affiliations with Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS), which is recognized as the extremist faction of the Hindu religious right-wing groups that is believed to popularize or indoctrinate orthodox religiosity among the Indians under the concept of Hindutva. Prime Minister Modi has deep affiliations with RSS and its agenda of dominating the population's faith by any means ([Chousalkar, 2019](#)).

Media organizations, under the dominance of big businesses and political collaborations ([Mohan, 2009](#)), design content that keep them run well and get popularity in public at the same time. Thus, it is not only the pressure of the government that they have to endure but also the public demand, which is immensely large and diversified. Media, at times, proves to be the main motivator of foreign policy-making by depicting a popular idea and demonstrating it is a vital need or move to be taken by the government ([Joshi, 2015](#)).

Due to interconnectivity with the foreign policies of different governments, Indian media has always been critical of Pakistan, reflecting that India has never had good terms with Pakistan since 1947. It always described Pakistan as a hostile enemy and a troublemaking country ([Joseph, 2006](#)). Indian public sentiment also kept aligned with the sensation of bad news coming from the neighboring country, Pakistan. India particularly promoted the anti-Pakistan ideology during the war times, during the late 1990s Kargil war. Yet, Indian media claims to be neutral and free from any pressure. [Robotka \(2019\)](#) describes its freedom as an untrue myth. He stated that Indian media has liabilities towards a large and diversified population, governmental pressures, huge businesses, religious influences, nationalistic inclinations, and global imaging.

Indian media describes Pakistan's participation in Afghanistan (war) as unlawful, terrorism based, and troublemaking, in the eyes of not just Indians but also Afghans and the

international community ([Ahmed & Bhatnagar, 2007](#)). For this reason, many Indians and Afghans have started to believe Pakistan is the conspirator and cause of many problems occurring in Afghanistan ([Kaura, 2017](#)). The Indian media brought issues like the Bombay attacks, Uri attacks, Pathankot attacks, and Taj Mahal Hotel attacks to a confrontation line and increased the hostility towards Pakistan through the printed words ([Dwivedi, 2008](#)). It intervened to halt the peace talks and steps taken to end the enmity between the two countries. India vividly blames terrorism on Pakistan using its media (Shabbir et al., 2014). It directly and indirectly involves Pakistan and Muslims in all news on terror attacks in India. The hatred about Pakistan and Islam dominates all media reports from India and India frames Pakistan and Islam as the felons behind all evil news ([Narayana et al., 2011](#)). Most of the Indian English dailies use services of international news agencies, and they keep the prime focus on showcasing their country's security, national imaging, religious entity building, harsh news framing against Islamic states like Pakistan, Afghanistan, Yemen, and Egypt, and give very less coverage to trade and population issues ([Gupta, 2012](#)). India's foreign policy on the indigenous freedom struggle of Kashmiris is illustrated through aggressive news coverage against J&K Muslim residents and Pakistan for its support for Kashmiris ([Nazakat, 2012](#)). Pakistan's relationship with China is covered as the biggest threat in English newspapers of India ([Akbar & Adnan, 2018](#)), and China Pakistan Economic Corridor, particularly is considered as a reason of the upcoming rift between the two countries. Indian media projects the CPEC as a strategic blow to their national integrity in South Asia and has tried to showcase it internationally as a violation of Indian sovereignty ([Akbar, & Adnan, 2018](#)). Indian media popularized the Mumbai terror attacks so much that Daya Kishan Thussu (2009) stated that it was like watching a soap opera of the terror attacks that intended to grab international sympathies for India and to direct them against Pakistan's alleged involvement in the attacks. While Indian media mainly portrays the policies and directives of their government and uses the RSS and religion as the umbrella against Pakistan, it constantly lynches Muslims on

matters of cow slaughtering punishment ([Tajammul-ul-Islam, 2019](#)). The study however focuses on cross border news reporting in the *Times of India* and *The Hindu* believing the specific English dailies of India may be neutral as opposed to those newspapers printed in national and regional languages, as the former target the elite or educated classes and international community and the latter target the local masses.

[James Painter and Teresa Ashe \(2012\)](#) state that *The Hindu* has a left-leaning political tendency while *the Times of India* is more centrist or right-leaning newspaper. *The Hindu* has vivid policies about its leftist ideologies and the fact that it is owned by a Kasturi family results in its sympathetic ties with the communist party in India. Comparatively, *the Times of India* presents a nationalist view in its reporting and selecting news. It favours the ruling government and tends to frame the news in coherence with the government's policies. It openly supports the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), which is evidence of its support for the centre-rightist stance ([Raj, 2021](#)).

The researcher decided to study cross border news reporting in *Dawn* and *The Nation* due to *Dawn's* neutrality ([Parveen and Zahoor, 2018](#)) and *The Nation's* aggressive and critical attention to internal issues. Hayat and Wabab found that *The Nation* is "more critical than other newspapers" on the internal peace issues and it relied on deleterious frames for covering hostile deeds of the terrorists because it wanted to keep its image as a radicalized and politically active system of media (2014, p. 1090).

Research Objectives

- To examine the morality framing in cross border news of political issues in Indian and Pakistani English dailies.

Research Questions

- How Indian and Pakistani print media involve morality framing in cross-border news coverage of political issues?

Hypotheses

In accordance with the research objective and research question, this hypotheses was apprehended,

- The selected newspapers of India and Pakistan frame each other's political issues with morality framing to trigger their respective public's religious, ethical and moral sentiments.

Literature Review

The review covers studies on Pakistani journalistic approaches by [Shabbir Hussain, Syed Abdul Siraj and Tariq Mahmood \(2021\)](#), which determine the ability of media in regards to reporting news stories, building nationalistic agenda for peace and war. Gadda (2014) studied war journalism trends by the Indian national media in covering the Kashmir issue and pointed to war trends and promotion of mutual hatred in the Indian and Pakistani media. These trends point to every nation's internal agenda, as it unites its people on the basis of its national ideology through multiple strategies. It uses its media, being one of the pillars of the state and vital for building public opinion of its public through the framing techniques. The media also influences its governments and people in adopting certain approaches towards any idea and its offshoots, which points to the existence of a democratic two way process of information transmission and influence.

[Chattarji \(2009\)](#) denoted towards India and Pakistan's antagonistic approach of presenting each other's intentions in a maligned way through which they could attain their governmental propitiation, pursuance of public's popular beliefs and keeping the element of sensationalism alive. [Hafeez, E. \(2015\)](#) studied the function of media role in shaping the relationship of two rivals and concluded that media has the capacity to mold directions of people's perception and policies of countries but the old enmity is so deep-rooted that sometimes, media persons have to be nationalistic in presenting news. Hafeez further added that media from both sides take care of the public's interest and popular ideology during their discussions and debate in different media programs. Thus, it becomes hard for them to be neutral, even if media practitioner would prefer to do true reporting of the event, he or she has to keep in mind the national interest and media organization's stake.

Many a times, when both sides intend to initiate professional steps to pursue a positive or constructive change in the approach of both the countries towards each other, they have to face multiple challenges. As in the case of 'Aman ki Asha' campaign to normalize the relationships between the two was practiced for a while and had to shut down due to diplomatic confrontations and Line of Control violations, and it ended up blaming and complaining from either side ([Behuria, 2010](#)).

[McKeever \(2013\)](#) explored the role of media in highlighting, reinforcing and realizing the perception of an issue among the audience and stressed on its significance in changing public views, public policy and decision-making regarding any popular idea. [Archetti \(2007\)](#) studied framing of news by the elite press and found three major intentions behind the framing of news, which include communication at the international level, sociological aspects and political perspective. She studied three aspects: the international communication, political communication and sociology of the news media from the USA, France, Italy, and Pakistan. She found that news frames were generated on the bases of policies of the media groups, aptitudes and inclinations of the respective journalists, the state/government interests and the level of importance associated with the news ([Archetti, 2007](#)). She added that no news is interpreted merely from a single angle. It is rather associated with multiple factors.

[Dimitrova et al. \(2005\)](#) studied framing perspectives related to Gulf War II on the websites of various international papers. They pointed out that the domestic websites picked those frames which appealed to the nationality, patriotism and national interest of the audience and military conflicts of their country. On the contrary, international news websites covered war news neutrally and responsibly. They compared news frames from countries favoring or disfavoring war and found that war frames were more prominent in the former group of countries. The review showed the researcher that the Indian and Pakistani academia can inculcate certain national ideologies in their respective masses through various framing strategies and news implementation plans. The two countries

have multifarious implementation plans and start to influence the minds of their citizens through news and textbooks since their childhoods. Marie [Lall \(2008\)](#) identified core aspects of the Indian and Pakistani educational systems in shaping patriotism through their textbooks. She studied the Indian BJP government (1998-2004) and Pakistan's government of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977-1988) and found that the educational systems originated and propagated the point of conflict that persisted over a period of time ([Lall, 2008](#)). She said both the governments were controlling, directing and deteriorating the content of textbooks and using all their political and non-political means to shape their governing policies accordingly ([Lall, 2008](#)). She raised international concerns about the issues as India and Pakistan instilled negativity in their citizens towards each other and assured their media used war journalism strategies.

[Shabir et al. \(2014\)](#) studied the Pakistan-India relationship through the framing and presentation of content on Kashmir issues, Mumbai attacks, terrorism and diplomatic negotiations in Pakistan's two English dailies, *The News* and *The Nation* from 2008 to 2010. They found that the two newspapers gave reasonable space to the Indo-Pak news and framed the selected issues according to the policies of Pakistan government. Though a bit neutral, the papers backed the policies of the Pakistani government on the Kashmir issue and the Mumbai attacks. [Shabir et al. \(2014\)](#) noted the print media's inclination towards governmental policies, which indicated that the papers framed news with bias, and they played an insignificant role in diffusing or minimizing misunderstandings and tensions between India and Pakistan.

This research incorporated the framing theory, which not only helps in examining the reality behind the coverage that influences public perceptions and sentiments, but it also determines if news portrayals comply with the policies of the respective governments in framing the specific political issues.

Methodology

Method of analyzing content had an interesting beginning during the World War II for the enemy

propaganda identification analyses. Harold Dwight Lasswell created the method which proved to be a reliable research method for worldwide studies. [Holsti \(1969\)](#) stated it is the technique that reaches a conclusion by identifying the objectives of content and highlights them systematically in order to examine the message. This research uses the quantitative content analysis method to analyze news stories from the front pages, back pages and international pages of two Indian English newspapers: *Times of India* and *The Hindu*, and two Pakistani English newspapers: *Dawn* and *The Nation*.

The deductive approach in data review helped the researcher in selecting a news frame; morality framing ([Holli, Semetko, & Patti, 2000](#)), which is significant in terms of its critical association with other bilateral matters of India and Pakistan, highlighted by.

In morality framing, issues are framed in the context of religious and moral sentiments. Religious indifferences between Hindus and Muslims is a sensitive issue in India and Pakistan. Media has been exploiting this motive as a reason of disagreement between the two countries. Every social issue directly or indirectly is coincided with its religious attribution and framed as a threat which people of both sides take very intensely and furiously.

The sample includes 7236 headlines and lead paragraphs of news stories printed on the front pages, back pages and international pages of the English newspapers: *The Times of India* and *The Hindu* from India and *Dawn* and *The Nation* from Pakistan from June 1st, 2014 to May 31st, 2018. The researcher considered the complete data published during the dates as the sample for this research to minimize the possibility of biasness or error. It further helped in studying sequential background and follow-up news of every relevant story throughout the selected timeframe of the research.

Headlines and lead paragraph pertain to a considerable percentage of news abstracts with the mechanism to draw readers' attention towards a news text ([Papacharissi, 2018](#)). Thus, from a big sample data of 7236 news stories, the headlines and lead paragraphs containing political context, published in selected Indian and

Pakistani English dailies were considered the unit of analysis.

The researcher used Minitab 17 software for data analysis and two-sample proportion tests

and applied the Holsti formula. The tests helped in examining the association and significance of variables and the formula in checking the reliability of the tool.

Table 1. Analysis of overall coverage of political news in selected English dailies of Indo-Pak

News Category	Times of India	The Hindu	Dawn	The Nation	Total
Political	1726 23.86%	1997 27.6%	1687 23.33%	1823 25.2%	7233 100%

Table 1 shows the overall coverage of political news coverage in selected dailies during the selected time period of research. It indicates that

The Hindu from India and *The Nation* from Pakistan gave more coverage to the political issues than other selected dailies.

Table 2. Coverage of Political issues in all selected dailies

Sub-categories	Issues	Times of India	The Hindu	Dawn	The Nation	Total
Territorial conflicts	Kashmir	348 23.76%	398 27.16%	330 22.53%	389 26.55%	1469 100.00%
	Baluchistan	314 25.45%	368 29.82%	275 22.29%	277 22.45%	1234 100.00%
	Khalistan	208 28.26%	193 26.22%	166 22.55%	169 22.96%	736 100.00%
Diplomatic relationships	Sports diplomacy	128 26.34%	104 21.40%	105 21.60%	149 30.66%	486 100.00%
	Art & culture diplomacy	116 19.86%	164 28.08%	157 26.88%	147 25.17%	584 100.00%
	Peace diplomacy	93 25.91%	72 20.06%	91 25.35%	103 28.69%	359 100.00%
Security	Terrorism	298 25.91%	343 29.83%	242 21.04%	267 23.22%	1150 100.00%
	Internal insurgency	112 23.14%	142 29.34%	127 26.24%	103 21.28%	484 100.00%
	Line of Control	109 14.83%	213 28.98%	194 26.39%	219 29.80%	735 100.00%

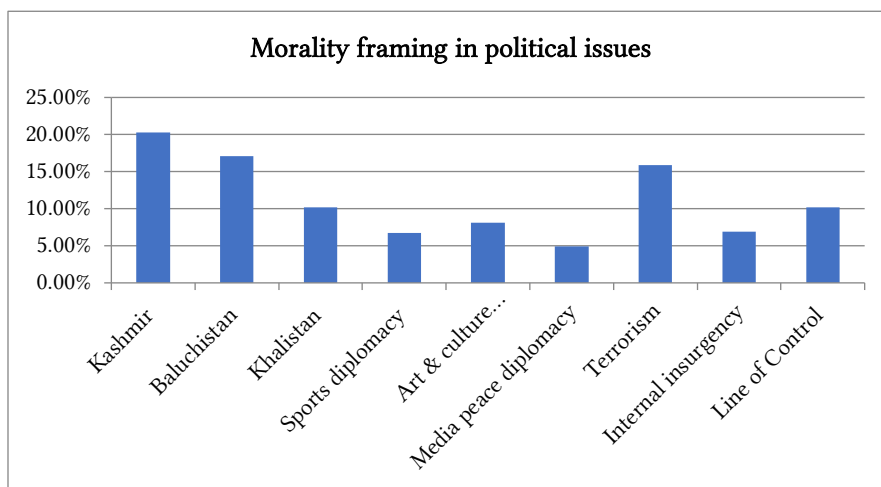
Table 2 shows that the selected newspapers gave more morality framing coverage to “Kashmir” issue in the sub-category of “Territorial Conflicts”. “Art & Cultural diplomacy” in the “Diplomatic Relationships” and news related to “Terrorism” in the sub-category of “Security”. *The Hindu* has given more morality framing coverage to “Kashmir”, “Territorial Conflicts”

and “Terrorism” as compared to other selected newspapers.

H: The selected newspapers of India and Pakistan frame each other’s political issues with morality framing to trigger their respective public’s religious, ethical and moral sentiments.

Table 3.

Category	Sub-Categories	Issues	Times of India	The Hindu	Dawn	The Nation	Total	Total of sub-category
Political	Territorial conflicts	Kashmir	349	399	331	390	1469 (20.30%)	3439
		Baluchistan	314	368	275	277	1234 (17.05%)	
		Khalistan	208	193	166	169	736 (10.17%)	
	Diplomatic relationships	Sports diplomacy	128	104	105	149	486 (6.72%)	1429
		Art & culture diplomacy	116	164	157	147	584 (8.07%)	
		Media peace diplomacy	93	72	91	103	359 (4.96%)	
	Security	Terrorism	298	343	242	267	1150 (15.89%)	2369
		Internal insurgency	112	142	127	103	484 (6.89%)	
		Line of Control	109	213	194	219	735 (10.16%)	



Test and CI for Two Proportions

Variable/Issue	News Coverage	N	Sample P
Kashmir (highest)	1469	7236	0.202985
Media peace diplomacy (lowest)	359	7236	0.049606

Difference = p (1) - p (2)
 Estimate for difference: 0.153378

95% CI for difference: (0.142848, 0.163909)

Test for difference = 0 (vs $\neq 0$): $z = 28.55$ p-Value = 0.000

Fisher's exact test: p-Value = 0.000

The two samples proportion test was applied for checking statistical significance, which indicated that the Kashmir Issue was framed with morality indicators as compared to other issues within the political category of news by the selected newspapers of both Pakistan and India.

Discussion

Covering the news related to terrorism, both countries directly or indirectly blamed the other country responsible. Posing each other as terrorist by responsibility frame while covering relevant news. Examples from *Times of India*; "Pakistan a 'terrorist state', 'Ivy League of terrorism', war criminal: India's brutal takedown at United Nations" (22nd September 2016), "Pakistan greatest threat to world peace: India tells UN" (12th October 2016), "Pakistan-backed terrorists to continue attacks inside India: US" (13th February 2018), "Pakistan poses three times more terror risk than Syria" (27th October 2018), "It is time to give a befitting reply to Pakistan, terrorists: Army Chief" (22nd September 2018). Examples from *The Hindu*; "Uri attack: India provides evidence of involvement of Pakistan-based terrorists" (21st September 2016), "Pakistan terror charge outrageous: India" (30th September 2018), "Pakistan textbooks glorifying war: UNESCO" (6th December 2017). Examples from *Dawn*; "RAW involved in terrorist activities across Pakistan: foreign secretary" (14th May 2015), "Indian, Afghan agencies supporting terror in Pakistan: IB chief" (18th October 2016), "RAW, NDS" patronizing "terror groups in Afghanistan, national security adviser tells US envoy" (26 October 2016) "India mother of terrorism in South Asia, Maleeha Lodhi tells UN" (24th September 2017), "Indian govt. biggest obstacle in Mumbai attacks trial" (13th May 2018). These news reporting denote that media from both sides try to portray a scary picture of the other country. India claims any terror attack happening in India if it initiated from Pakistan and by Pakistani people. Whereas, Pakistani newspapers try to blame Indian involvement to spread unrest in Pakistan.

"Kashmir" issue got more coverage and different terrorist attacks, Burhan Wani killing and protests were given coverage with moral sensationalism and by blaming it on the other side. "Baluchistan" issue made more coverage as the arrest of Kulbhushan Sudhir Yadhav sparked a rift from both sides, India's coverage of Baluchistan separatist movement and Pakistan's counter coverage blaming Indian involvement to ignite separation of Pakistan's largest province got morality framing. "Terrorism" news were framed with religion and sensationalism by relating it with public's religious and fundamental affiliations with nationalism.

News examples pertaining 'Morality Frame'

Times of India: "Indo-Pak tensions escalate as terrorists behead soldier" (23rd November 2016).

Times of India: "Pak beheadings, a brutal history, continuing story" (24th November 2016).

The Hindu: "In Pakistan, anyone and everyone can be a target" (15th May 2015).

"Pakistan is a country of ghosts. They are everywhere, the victims and the perpetrators" (15th May 2015).

The Hindu: "Rabwah, a sanctuary for Pakistan's persecuted Ahmadis" (16th April 2018).

Dawn: "Where's the beef? Not at Burger King's new India restaurant" (10th November 2014).

Dawn: "Go back to Pakistan if you can't live without beef: BJP Minister" (10th November 2014).

The Nation: "Dalit family lives in fear after boy touches non-Dalit's plate" (9th October 2015).

The Nation: "Low-caste pregnant woman attacked by mob in India over dead cow" (26th September 2016).

Conclusion

The initial year in the selected time period reveals a progressive relationship between the two countries but a series of events pushed the media

to report incidents which were dominantly motivated by their different ideologies and element of animosity for more than seven decades. Nawaz-Modi meetings followed by Pathankot attack, projection was neutral and somewhat positive but turned around as soon terrorist attacks happened on both sides. Media, on the other hand, tend to project political issues in a way that triggers multiple sentiments of Indian and Pakistani publics. Religion, ethics, values, morality and all those sensational indicators were observed during the data review, which directly or indirectly aggravate a hostile agenda by the both sides. *The morality frame* was used in projecting political issues of border conflicts, terrorist events, Kashmir, Baluchistan, and diplomatic relationships. It further reveals that the news stories contain aggressive language, blame game, threatening statements of politicians and biased reviews with partial facts and contexts.

Studies indicate that media framing does not just create public perception about certain national and international issues but it further highlights states' policies. When it comes to framing of issues, both the Indian and Pakistani media use certain types of morality frame to exhibit political affairs in a certain manner. Furthermore, even after more than seven decades of enmity, media from both rival neighbors still use stereotypical approaches to frame each other's political issues which hinder the peace process in-between. This study contributes in terms of theoretical understandings of media framing trends during right-wing and conservative political parties' reigns. Furthermore, this study will help to explore how the conservative governments are still putting their ideologies ahead of social and economic development to sustain their election campaigns and governance priorities.

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