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The Role of Media in Pakistan's Political Landscape: A Critical Analysis

Abstract

This article looks at media's role in the political landscape of Pakistan, and how it has shaped political narratives and governed. It examines the contribution of the media to the strengthening of democracy, with a focus on the electoral processes as well as public accountability, and, equally, the role of the media under martial law regimes where freedom of expression was severely curtailed. The study uses a qualitative and descriptive methodology that reflects historic and current contexts and considers the media as a watchdog, as well as a means to politically manipulate. The focus of this analysis includes both the changing status of the media in Pakistan's multi-faceted political landscape and the impact of democratic development.

Keywords: Media, Politics, Democracy, Governance, Political Awareness, Martial Law Regimes

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This article looks at media's role in the political landscape of Pakistan, and how it has shaped political narratives and governed. It examines the contribution of the media to the strengthening of democracy, with a focus on the electoral processes as well as public accountability, and, equally, the role of the media under martial law regimes where freedom of expression was severely curtailed. The study uses a qualitative and descriptive methodology that reflects historic and current contexts and considers the media as a watchdog, as well as a means to politically manipulate. The focus of this analysis includes both the changing status of the media in Pakistan's multi-faceted political landscape and the impact of democratic development.

Contents:

Introduction

In Pakistan, the media is becoming more and more popular. In terms of political communication and information provision, it is currently fulfilling its function. With so many talk shows and political debates constantly on television, the role of the media in Pakistan is becoming increasingly careless, and occasionally it appears like they are going too far. As a cornerstone of any democratic society, the media has a great impact on the way political land-scapes are shaped and how governance takes shape. In Pakistan where although it is a country of political turbulence, authoritarian period, and growing democratic consciousness, the media has been becoming a powerful force and part of the politics. Media is a watchdog in democratic settings to promote transparency and accountability and to build an informed citizenry. In Pakistan, it has helped to bring corruption into the spotlight, formulating

public opinion in the run-up to elections or amplifying the voices of marginalized communities. But there has been plenty wrong along the media's journey, with censorship, political manipulation, and biased accusations topping the list. During martial law regimes, the media have faced special constraints often under strict censorship and state control. Pakistani media should address the issues with a constructive outlook in addition to disseminating hyperbole. But Pakistani media is skewed. Due to its disruption of the social and political fabric of Pakistani society, the news channel's position is extremely dubious (Bibi & Yousaf, 2020).

This article explores three key aspects of the media's role in Pakistan: its impact on the political landscape, its service to democratic institutions, and its work during martial law regimes.

Role of Media in the Politics of Pakistan

The media is now recognized globally as one of the four pillars of the state, along with the parliament, judiciary, and executive. The media in Pakistan has developed into a major pillar of the state. A society's traits and the policies of the government are mostly reflected in the media. The way the media portrays the policies of the ruling parties has up to now been controlled and forced by the government. Because of this, the media relied on the government, especially during the administration of President Zia-ul-Haq. But Musharaf deserves the credit for establishing media freedom. These days, a number of TV networks offer news and entertainment to their viewers. There are currently over 100 TV channels in Pakistan. In addition to English, these stations offer native languages such as Pashtu, Hindku, and Urdu. As a result, it also helps to promote other languages and cultures within the community (Mubasharah, Siyal & Larik, 2024).

Importance of Media in Politics

The media is crucial and has a significant role in Pakistani politics. Most individuals watch political television shows and take part in public discussions about them during their free time. People's decisions about global politics and societal issues are influenced by talk programs worldwide. This keeps us informed about the most recent

events and the changing political climate in the country. Despite Pakistan's low literacy rate, people may nevertheless read the news to learn about political decisions. They use their leisure time to watch television or other media to keep up with the political situation in the country. The media is crucial and has a significant role in Pakistani politics. For all kinds of individuals, it is the main source of news and information. It is also a vital channel of contact with links to political leaders and prospective voters, especially during election seasons. The public has historically relied on the media as a reliable source of information. The development of political institutions, the transformation of the political scene, and public education on a range of political issues are all greatly aided by television in particular. Pakistan enjoys the maximum level of freedom possible despite being able to endure political pressures and direct bans on its periodicals from different governments due to its powerful media environment (Bibi & Yousaf, 2020).

Role of Media in Struggle for Independence

The press played a crucial role in the subcontinent's struggle for independence, and millions of young people joined it. Newspapers helped spread the word about the need for independence from the British. The Muslim press began with the publication of "Urdu Akbar" in 1836 and continued with articles in the Journal of Scientific Society and Urdu "TehzibulAklaq" in 1866 and 1870. "Comrade," "Hamdard," "Urdu-i-Moalla," "Al-Hilal," "Al Balagh," and "Zamindar," among other Muslim periodicals, articulated the worries of Muslims. The struggle for independence was intellectually led by thousands of newspapers. Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the man who founded Pakistan, was a strong advocate for press freedom. He helped establish the "Dawn English Newspaper" in 1941. Dawn was the official name of the Muslim League. In colonial India, the three main print media currents were Anglo-Indian, nationalist, and Muslim. Support for Hinduism by the British government was condemned by Muslim media. The struggle for freedom relied heavily on newspapers. Only a few major Muslim newspapers, such as Pakistan Times, Dawn, Zamindar, Nawa-i-Waqt, and the Civil and Military Gazette, were published in Lahore during

the time of independence. Dawn was founded by Quaid-i-Azam and began publication as a daily in Karachi in 1947 (Mubasharah, Siyal & Larik, 2024).

Media as a Source of Political Awareness in Student

Students' political consciousness is greatly increased by the media. Mass communication techniques have evolved throughout time. The media greatly influences our beliefs, and these viewpoints affect our society. One of the hallmarks of the mass media industries is the dissemination of ideas and information to the general public. The mainstream media provides a means of communication for the entire public. The number of people who watch, listen, or read media channels can have an impact on the general populace. Media outlets are important providers of political information, according to several studies. Voters rely on the political assessments provided by the media to inform their choices. Depending on the type of media and the outcome, media impacts might vary, but they are usually substantial. Furthermore, the public's perception of political issues is greatly influenced by the media, as seen during an election campaign. These days, the media are essential to politics since political issues can be communicated quickly and instantly. However, the preferences of the general public have an impact on media consumption patterns (Khan, 2009). The average American spends 8.5 hours a day in front of a screen of some kind, including a computer, television, mobile phone, etc., according to a recent poll on media consumption in the country. It is a considerable amount of time. Involving today's youth in tomorrow's democracy is necessary for the advancement of youth in politics. Citizens' political engagement is regarded as a requirement for a functioning democratic society. As engaged citizens, children must thus embrace their obligations. The purpose of the survey is to find out how frequently students use print, electronic, and electronic media about political issues. These days, the use of different media and political issues are controversial topics. Young people are the cornerstone of any society (Khan et al., 2023).

Media Role in Policy Formulation

Numerous social and economic factors affect the

political process of formulating policies, and the media greatly affects the social context in which policies are developed. The public and the government are informed on the impact of policies and programs through the media. The media act as an intermediary between those attempting to regulate the dissemination of information and those seeking to impact policy discussions. In an orderly fashion, issues are identified, solutions are created, policies are selected, implemented, and then evaluated. In actuality, policymaking is a more fluid process that incorporates the divergent philosophies of many lobbying organizations. The primary policy issues may—and often do—be greatly influenced by the policies that are the focus of the media. The topic or policy issue that the media chooses to cover and how they present it determines their ability to either support change or maintain the status quo. The policy-making process involves active participation from the media. While active (investigative) reporting aims to impact policy results, this does not necessarily mean that it is the most successful means to affect policy (Khan, 2009).

Media Selection of Legitimate Policy Actors

The media serves as a powerful political actor with connections to the status quo and other corporate policy actors, rather than speaking for the interests of the general public. In order to align reporting with their prevailing news values, journalists and editors deliberately choose which topics to cover and which sources to employ. This tends to keep policy discussions strictly within the parameters of the conventional wisdom that has been established by the main political parties or institutional policymakers. The conservative nature of the perception screens is being reinforced by the media's need for concision, which is particularly evident on television with its penchant for sound-bite politics (Khan et al., 2023).

Policy Formulation Become Transparent Due to Media.

In the past, the elites had control over the policies when there were no ways for information to be sent. These ruling elites controlled all information sources, either directly or indirectly. The public now has easy access to information thanks to the

proliferation of print and electronic media. Established interests are finding it harder and harder to hide the truth. As a result, there is more transparency in how policies are developed (Ghaznavi, Waheed & Amin, 2024).

Political Transformation

Political activities essentially evolve into political transformation. Political change in geography and time is brought about by political action. Electronic media is regarded as a political force behind this kind of social change since it keeps up with the most recent political events. There is ample room for the change of electronic media in Pakistan due to problems including corruption, bad political leadership, a weak political system, poor governance, and a lack of accountability and transparency (Hussain, 2012).

Media in Martial Law Regime, in Pakistan

Whether through legal or covert means—whatever works best for the ruling class—censoring, restricting, and controlling the media has always been a goal of every government and dictatorship. The media landscape has remained constant throughout history, with periodic attempts to silence journalists by tactics such as murder, slander, trolling, and threats of rape and murder. In Pakistan, where a harsh new "media martial law" is set to take effect as the result of a protracted attempt to suppress the free press, the situation is far worse. The dictator's first action after imposing martial law in Pakistan was to take over the media. The media in Pakistan was not significantly impacted by the military dictatorships and repressive regimes that forced them to operate under rigorous laws and regulations designed to "control" the media. However, the laws are harmful to the reform of democracy and pose a risk to Pakistan's democracy and future (Ghaznavi, Waheed & Amin, 2024).

Media in General Ayub Khan's Regime

The Press and Publication Ordinance (PPO), enacted in 1962 by the nation's then-military president Ayub Khan, was the first step toward enacting media laws. The law allowed the government to imprison journalists, close news outlets, and seize newspapers. Using these regulations, Ayub Khan took control of one of the two largest news companies and nationalized large parts of the press. Since the other agencies were in a dire situation, the government was forced to give them financial support. Pakistani radio and television, which were established in 1964, were also subject to strict government oversight (Shah, Riaz & Mukhtar,2019).

Media in General Zia-ul-Haq's Regime

When Zia-ul-Haq was in charge, there was an open hostility between the government and the news media. The press often witnessed pre-censorship and warnings. If you ignored warnings, you ran the prospect of jail time or possibly having your publication shut down. The most harmful effect was the self-censorship that many gifted journalists consequently adopted. In the 1990s, while civilian administration was in place, there was a small vacancy. Nevertheless, the government tried to buy or sway journalists to write positively. Since working journalists could not be bought, management was the focus of tactics like government advertising reductions and newsprint quotas. The General Zia-ul-Haq dictatorship has been significant in the study of press-government relations because of political difficulties that affected Pakistan's economy and press operations (Hassan, 2018).

Media in General Parvez Musharaf's Regime

In the midst of the country's continuous political unrest, President Musharraf has persuaded the UAE media to shut down GEO and ARY, two satellite news networks with Pakistani roots. They were both coming from the famous media quarter of Dubai. To save money, one of them had moved to Dubai from London. It is ironic that the ruler of Pakistan made this extraterritorial power exhibition at the same time that US Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte landed in Pakistan. According to reports, Condoleezza Rice's second-in-command was dispatched to chastise the "indispensable ally" and persuade him to cancel the emergency and relax media restrictions. By consistently advocating for press freedom, Musharraf had amassed substantial political support both within and outside of his own country prior to the most recent crackdown. Nonetheless,

two events were significant to both his supporters and critics. First, Musharraf created a media regulator with acting police officers who could threaten to shut down cable networks, thereby putting an end to the earlier sense of freedom connected to the satellite revolution. Additionally, Musharraf developed the practice of regularly updating "codes of conduct" for the media, which his regulator would subsequently enforce. Thus, comfortable with these modern instruments of control, he presented Pakistan as a fictional world of media independence (Khan & Aziz, 2023).

Liberalization of Media

Pakistan's electronic media have been under government control since 1950. The government monopolized radio and television broadcasts, controlling the information flow and serving as a gatekeeper. However, media independence was reinstated in 2002 during General Pervez Musharraf's dictatorial government. His liberalization of the media astonished a lot of people. Liberalization of the broadcasting sector would benefit Musharraf. Following the bad press, this contradicted the widely held belief that tyrants seek to keep strict control over the media, while democratic administrations liberalize it (Hussain, 2020).

The country's senior administrator, General Pervez Musharraf, imposed martial law in October 1999. The Musharraf administration was heavily influenced by the media. In the Iftikhar Chodhary case, he banned the media even though he had previously granted them freedom. That evening, November 3, 2007, General Pervez Musharraf declared a state of emergency throughout the whole country of Pakistan. An 88-day campaign against the latest "emergency plus" media restriction in Pakistan's alarming 63-year history began on that day (Khan & Aziz, 2023).

The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulation Authority (PEMRA) has been given the authority by President General Pervez Musharraf to stop broadcasting, shut down offices, confiscate equipment, revoke licenses, and double fine infractions. The government already has strict rules governing live broadcasts. The strain on Pakistan's media has increased since Musharraf's arbitrary dismissal of Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry as

chief judge of the Supreme Court on March 9 sparked a legal and political crisis. Media coverage of anti-government demonstrations and the nonviolent movement to reinstate the chief justice has been severely curtailed by the administration through physical assaults, coercion, and extreme pressure. Members of the Mutahedda Qaumi Movement (MQM), a crucial coalition partner in the Musharraf administration, attempted to prevent Chaudhry from flying to Karachi to address the Sindh High Court prohibit Association by inciting rioting on May 12 that resulted in 42 fatalities. The private television network Aaj TV showed live footage of armed MQM activists fleeing its premises as part of its coverage of the day's events. MQM supporters were incensed at the show, and they opened fire on more than a dozen cars in the station's parking area in addition to shooting at the Aaj TV building. Musharraf has frequently attacked the media for their "sensationalism" in reporting the political issue, even as he supports the MQM's strategies (Qadeer, Shehzad & Chishti, 2017).

Media and the Down Fall of Musharraf Power

In 2007, the media saw the first widespread, well-supported protest movement in decades. When then-dictator President General Pervez Musharraf dismissed Supreme Court Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry in violation of the Constitution, Pakistani lawyers organized the protest that became known as the lawyer movement. In addition to examining the second-level attribute agenda-setting effects of Pakistani news media, this dissertation also examines the public's perception of General Pervez Musharraf and the sense of cognitive liberation—the belief that the mind can affect society—among Pakistanis that ultimately contributed to Musharraf's political downfall. Pakistanis' belief that they might band together to successfully oppose Musharraf's government was greatly aided by the movement's news media coverage (Hussain, 2020).

Media's Role in Strengthening Democracy in Pakistan

The media should be a platform for citizens to freely express their views in a democracy. The

democratic government also leads to media democracy. According to popular belief, democracy is a form of government in which the people themselves make decisions. The fundamental tenet of the definition is that democratic institutions ought to prioritize popular opinion, and it is imperative that the broader public hears these viewpoints. In order for the state government to remain responsive to the people, public opinion should be acknowledged and encouraged in a democratic environment. In a democracy, the media should serve as a forum for individuals to freely express their opinions and have their say. Democracy is a widely accepted political concept in the modern world. Democracy necessitates free and fair elections, and a true democracy must include the supremacy of the constitution, the defense of human rights, and the freedom to exercise those rights. Pakistan has a long history of democracy, yet due to the interests of its numerous communities, the nation has also seen both brief democracies and protracted military dictatorships. But during the last 10 years, Pakistan's media has expanded and matured into a powerful and important tool in the fight against sociopolitical challenges. In democracies, the audience is impacted directly or indirectly by media personnel, content, and regulations; their significance and influence are undeniable (Fatima et al., 2024). In Pakistan nowadays, the media is playing a political role. Several governments in Pakistan have placed restrictions on the media. Despite the fact that practically every state in the modern world allows freedom of expression, several restrictions and laws still exist. However, the media has played a vital role in promoting Pakistan's democracy over the past ten years. Following Pakistan's media liberalization, democracy was best strengthened. The media and democracy are intertwined. Countries with strong democracies always have free and strong media (Qadeer, Shehzad & Chishti, 2017).

Freedom of Speech and Media

Article 19 of the Pakistani Constitution states that every citizen has the right to freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and freedom of the press, subject to any reasonable restrictions imposed by the law in the interest of the integrity, security, or defense of Pakistan or any part of it, the glory of Islam, friendly relations with other states, public order, humanity, or ethical behavior, or in relation to court disrespect, the commission of an act of terrorism, or incitement to one. The freedom of speech and expression is thus expressly and practically guaranteed by the nation's legal foundations. Even yet, Pakistani media outlets have a degree of autonomy in comparison to their neighbors. Nevertheless, Pakistani media outlets are very independent when compared to their neighbors. Freedom of expression and the ability of the media to represent public opinion are important components of the country's democracy (Fayaz, 2024).

Role of Media during Election Season in Pakistan

It is impossible to overstate the importance of the media in a democracy, especially when elections are taking place. During the Musharraf administration, the freedom to report the truth was granted to the broad media. Governments tightly regulated the media prior to that. Because of this, the media in Pakistan has grown in significance, especially since 2000. The 2008 general election was also excellently covered by the media, which was largely liberal. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) was the first Democratic Party to hold office for five years. During the 2013 general elections, the media was advanced enough to highlight political campaigns and provide details on political parties. Social media is an essential part of 2013's media landscape, along with print and electronic media. The PTI, PPP, and PML (N) are now Pakistan's three main political parties. These parties used print, electronic, and social media to promote their agenda, posters, manifesto, etc. Listening to the political debates between different politicians on talk shows might help people choose which party, agenda, and manifesto to support. The public is also encouraged to think about the value and importance of their vote by press freedom. The media, especially social media, has played a significant role in PTI's ascent to prominence as one of Pakistan's main political parties. The choice of political party or candidate also depends on the journalists and media outlets. The media, particularly print and electronic media, decide what to cover and what to omit during elections (Salahuddin, 2020).

Media as a Watchdog

Journalists use their cameras to be impartial. Journalists and reporters are everywhere in the media, sorting through material. Four out of the five experts said the media ensured a free and fair election. The cameras made it impossible to pack voting boxes the old-fashioned way. Keep an eye on the administration's social and political initiatives. The cameras of the media can now see everything (Fayaz, 2024).

Media as a Source of Information

The media's role as a source of information in increasing citizens' awareness of their rights is highly praised by the media professionals surveyed. People were not only made aware of their rights by the media but also of the reasons behind and strategies used to violate them. In order to obtain justice, it is quite important. Human rights abuses could be reported in real-time thanks to electronic media. The media has helped people become more conscious of their rights, but authorities also need to be aware of these rights. Democracy in Pakistan is also strengthened and promoted by the media, which highlights the significance of the public and its views on politics. Democracy is the governance of the people (Salahuddin, 2020).

Promoting Good Governances

The government's acts, whether or not the public is involved, are referred to as governances. In Pakistan, the media and political leaders are urged to advocate for sound governance. The media disseminates information to the general population. The public and the government exchange information through the media. It communicates choices, policies, and messages to the public and provides the government with information about public opinion. The liberalized media may serve as a testament to the nation's efficient government (Hussain, 2022).

Conclusion

Pakistan's shifting political landscape has affected the role of Pakistan's media in politics in multi multi-dimensional way. The media has become an important actor of the political framework of the nation from its ability to shape political narratives, to impacting governance and public opinion. The media has played a crucial role in exposing corruption, preserving transparency, and making voters aware of what really happens, thereby promoting accountability and public participation in the democratic processes. However, the media's Road has also had its moments. At times charges of bias, sensationalism, and political manipulation have eroded its credibility in a politically polarized environment. However, these problems do not eliminate the importance of the media in democratic consolidation, particularly, in periods of political instability. The media had to traverse through eye-watering censorship and state control during martial law regimes, but similarly restrained authoritarian narratives. It helped its subtle dissent and underground journalism to restore democracy and the reestablishment of civilian rule. And yet this analysis makes clear that Pakistan's media has not always been a paragon of institutional virtue but, indeed, has earned a distinguished place in the shaping of the country's political contours. The way forward will require promoting responsible journalism, defending press freedom, and ensuring that the media are excluded from political and corporate influence and can continue projecting a positive impact. A vital force for Pakistan's democratic growth and political stability has been a strong, credible, and livable media that is free.

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