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Pakistan's General Elections of 2018: Representation of Economic Issues and Orientation of Political News Coverage in The Elite Newspapers of Pakistan

Abstract *In a democratic society, mass media and political system have a strong bond with each other. Big media powerhouses attempt to develop linkages with political parties for economic benefits. These parties' linkages with media houses may have affected news items' representation of issues from both positive and negative reporting angles. An eminent scholar of agenda-setting through McCombs et al. (1997), pointed out that media has great power to set the agenda of public and political parties also actively engages the media houses to advance their elections. This study attempts to learn the news representation of issues during the General Elections (GE) of 2018 in Pakistan. This present study employed a content analysis method to investigate news issues coverage and representation in 10 mainstream newspapers based on readership size. The findings suggest that news items representation of issues among newspapers are highly polarized on the basis of sympathize towards their favourite political parties.*

Introduction

The political system of a country is closely intertwined with its mass media system (McCombs et al., 1997). Newspaper being part of mass media structure plays a very important role in determining the political values and norms in any country. These norms may range from freedom of expression to political justice, law, or election values. Newspaper can be an integral aspect of the maintenance of the status quo in the country and will work to create harmony and social integration in the country. The newspaper provides a significant platform for political elites to dispense or furthering their political election campaigns or agenda to the masses. Moreover, a newspaper may offer as one of the public's participation platform in the political system (Sualman et al., 2017). Defining news framing, Reese (2001) stressed that a frame is a form of symbolic representation of expressed words or pictures to create trends or to make visuals in the perception of its receiver/audience. The development of a frame is known as macro constructs (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996), involving how a frame is drawn up. The concept of frame is known to consist of very wide constructs (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996) and is subjected to how it is drawn. The frame refers to elements that could have a substantial impact on the quality of news framing, which is linked within or outside the factors of the news organization. The determination of frame is considered as micro construct focusing on the media audience and its influence on them. However, a frame's discernment is in nature measured as a micro construct that can measure media usage and media effects on audience/readers. In the current research, the focus is given on news framing manufactured to influence the public on general

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elections of 2018, Pakistan. Thus, framing gives the opportunity to learn the role of media in shaping the news.

The news framing is a complex process of decision making which entails about its significance, besides news story may be observed by editors and reporters on the know criteria based on space, nature of news or various conditions (Blood & Holland, 2004). Thus, the political issue framing lens during elections was known to have an impact on public opinion formation with regards to contemporary issues (Sualman et al., 2017). Newspaper delivers extensive coverage on election news. Therefore, several queries were raised from Pakistan's General Elections of 2018 reporting as to what sort of communication message from the newspaper can determine the impact on voters' behaviours/voting decisions during general elections? Whether issues raised in news media are 'natural occurrence' or media selected agenda? What is the goal for the representation of specific issues in newspapers during general elections? What is the nature of news orientation?

However, the present investigation seeks to examine how newspapers presented the issues related to the government (then Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz-PML -N) and opposition (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, PTI). The present research is built on the ground that there is nexus between issues and newspaper outlets ownership during elections and the news orientation. Therefore, the objectives of the present research are:

1) To seek the occurrence of issues representation with general elections, 2018 in elite newspapers of Pakistan.
2) To reveal chief issues presented during general election campaigns of 2018, Pakistan
3) To identify the orientation of news issues, whether it is positive or negative in nature, fair or objective, constructed on newspapers' ownership.

Literature Review

Ishaq (2020) discovered a few main issues that have a great influence on the result of General Elections in Pakistan. In the 2018 general elections, both government and opposition parties (i.e., PML-N, PTI and PPP) sympathizer news media outlets provided coverage on development, corruption, economy and personal attacks like calling either agent of India or Jews (Zionist agent). Even though Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) and Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) has a wide range of code of conduct for political parties and news media coverage during election season. In addition to news media outlets used by political elites in Pakistan to advance election campaigns, Pakistani politicians used social media to advance election campaigns for the younger or tech-savvy urban population for forming favourable opinion about them (Ida, Saud & Mashud, 2020). However, a vast number of political leaders still use traditional media as issues of access to the internet, internet literacy and issue of illiteracy keeping the population away from social media usage, particularly the older section of the population (Ida, Saud & Mashud, 2020). So in this given condition, traditional mass media are very important players to political elites, so they have a strong connection with many news media outlets garner favourable opinions towards their election campaigns (Cheema, 2011; Jabbar, 2011). On the one side, the diehard voters either supported their own politicians or, if angry with a party, may oppose the former party bitterly. On the other side, certain elements were perceived with the intention of ruining politicians' image without examining the reality of that particular accusation. Nevertheless, the personal attacks continued, and resultantly, the political environment was below the belt attached after the general elections of 2018.

Saeed, Bilal & Raza (2020) conducted a content analysis among mainstream and selected newspapers on political allegations during the general elections of 2013. The study presented issues of national importance and particularly political fraud in elections. In another study, Ishaq (2020) pointed out that Urdu language newspapers were more political bias during elections as compared to other major English newspapers. While the types of news presented were largely texts rather than news with photos.

Personality and sensitive religious issues or character assassination of political opponents were at the peak as English daily, *The Nation* (considered pro PML-N news outlets) wrote, "Without the shred of evidence, that the PMLN government to please western power had deliberately weakened the pledge on the finality of prophethood in exchange of hiding his corruption" (as cited in Ishaq, 2020). As the news outlet further stated that Imran Khan, the (present Prime Minister of Pakistan) PTI actively fanning the flames (as cited in Ishaq, 2020). The objective of this news reporting/opinion writing was an attempt to counter-attack Imran Khan of PTI as PTI's three main election campaign allegations against the PMLN government were 'puppet of western government', 'sensitive issues related with religion and 'corruption' dismissed it without evidence. LittleJohn and Foss (2008) explained that the pioneer scholar of agenda-setting Shah, McCom, the theory presented in their own words; "The ability to affect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking—has been labelled the Agenda-setting function of mass communication. Briefly, the mass media are not successful in telling us what to think about; they are sunning successful in telling what to think about (293).

Wogu (2008) narrated about the community fellows that "audience not only learn about public issues through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the mass media place upon it" (139). The current empirical investigation was embarked on three major premises: 1) news media is vital for the development of the public agenda 2) media is important but is inadequate in setting the public agenda 3) media is neither vital nor sufficient when setting the public agenda. The research found that in the process of agenda-setting, there are several vital factors that impact an election campaign. Amongst the factors were heightened voters' interests in the election, contenders' public images and polices, media law and future empirical on how media developed public agenda during the election campaign (McCombs et al. 1981).

McCombs (2005) stated that agenda-setting and public agenda are interrelated to each other during the election. The study also indicated that issues and news orientation have a positive correlation between them. As the most common tendency in privately-owned newspapers to present news that would be served the 'personal interest' of their owners. It is evident that during elections, news media outlets have their own vested personal agenda to form positive opinions for their favourite political leaders to gain voters' desired views for that agenda. Both media and political parties do it by exploiting strategic media campaigns that will recommend the particular political contenders standing for elections to their readers.

Method

The most relevant method for the present study was content analysis. Hence this method was selected for this present research. The qualitative analysis approach was exercised, focusing on sentence analysis, interviews, notes, transcripts and related documents analyses. The content analysis deals with an opportunity for researchers for observing a set of items such as news types in the newspapers and communication of elements that represents the sample of the current investigation. Thus, data collected are quantitative as well as qualitative in nature. Neuendorf & Kumar (2015) stated that content analysis is a useful technique employed to study communication message in a very objective and systematic quantitative manner.

According to Neuendorf & Kumar (2015), content analysis understands the meaning of a message which can be scrutinized by the native speaker. The three conditions are a prerequisite in the exercise of content analysis 1) objective, this requisite requires documentation of relevant prudent categories, which can be verified by other researchers through employing similar measurements and will arrive at a similar conclusion 2) under this systematic criterion or any research method must be an organized method of data collection and 3) the last quantitative method suggests to the usage of numbers to the corresponding items which in turn help the coding process. The major goal of content analysis is to determine the accurate meaning of the message.

Content Analysis is a suitable method for mass media researchers as it offers to investigate phenomena in a prudent way of studying media content. The content analysis is also a very effective method to research the opinions, attitudes, behaviours and social values. The content analysis gives leverage to the scholars in order to compare or contrast communication messages of multiple media as in this present research. The current investigation also aims to enquire at the differences in news representation in multiple newspapers and the several illustrations approved by newspapers in reporting of election issues.

Content Analysis is employed to unearth the motives of journalists in the message, identification of the message effect and examine the audience behaviour (Neuendorf & Kumar, 2015). Content analysis is the best-known method in measuring and revealing the audience or readers' behaviours by discerning the messages and interpreting the meanings (Benoit, 2011). A descriptive analysis was employed in the present research to identify the objectivity of the message representation and news orientation of the sampled newspapers. The descriptive analysis inspects multiple facets of the message elements, chiefly its meanings and other persuading communications influence at work, for example, propaganda, trends and social change (Benoit, 2011).

Ten major Pakistani newspapers in English, Urdu and regional Sindhi languages were taken as sample for this study; Dawn (English), Express Tribune (English), The News International (English), The nation (English), Daily Jang (Urdu), Roznama Dunya (Urdu), Nawaiwaqt (Urdu), Daily Express (Urdu), Daily Kawish (Sindhi) and Sindh Express (Sindhi). Content analysis is aimed at types of news during general election campaigns of Pakistan, 2018. In the present research investigation, the contents of the newspaper were observed as a source of news in the traditional media. The agenda in the new or alternative media and mainstream media were compared and contrasted for the coverage of the general elections, 2018. All sampled newspapers selected representation related issues to the elections were summarily coded for the duration of June 1st – August 20th 2018. This sampled period is between the inception of the caretaker government and the inauguration of Prime Minister Imran Khan Government on 18th August 2018. Data Collected were run through the SPSS program and were analyzed using descriptive statistics to observe the frequency of the categories for news representation. The qualitative analysis generated with codes and themes. Following categories were identified; frequency of election news reporting, main news category, news agency, source of news, news origin and news size whereas news representation was studied interpretatively. The interpretative analysis was employed to scrutinize news representation, which was either inspected as positive, neutral and negative. The selection of alternative or anti-establishment newspapers (consider opposition sympathizer, i.e., now PMLN) as Dawn and Daily Jang was used to discover the representation of news by the opposition party. The components studied are as follows:

News Types

Any type of news, election-related press conferences, election interviews, political rallies, features in relationship with elections, editorial features on elections, pictures related with elections, commentaries, letter to the editors related during elections, profile and caricature depicted in the newspapers about elections.

News objectives

Inform, educate, persuade, explain, refute, blame and counter-attack.

News Source/Personality in News/Issues

A statement made by a party, government sources, opposition or independent including government or opposition political leaders, scholars, cultural/ political analysts, religious personalities and others.

Election Issues

All related news, features and pictures focus was on key news issues.

News Representation

Positive, neutral and negative. Many newspapers work as political mouthpieces of political parties.

Positive News

Reporting on supposed Pro-establishment parties (PTI/ pro established)

Negative News

Reporting on the weakness of PMLN, PPP & other anti-establishment parties.

Balance News

Supposed Pro and Anti-establishment parties are reported in the news without bias and news that does not include any political inclinations.

Findings

Table 1 provides 10 newspapers having 3106 news items that were examined for this research. From these 10 newspapers, the largest news item 12.07% came from Dawn, 11.75% from Jang, 11.04 % drawn from Express Tribune, 10.53% from Roznama Dunya and 10.11 from Daily Express. Moreover, other newspaper having 9.98%, 9.21, 8.53% and 7.73%, namely Daily Kawish, Nawai-Waqt, Sindh Express, The Nation and The News International, respectively.

Table 1. Frequency of Election News Reporting

S. No	Name of Newspaper	Frequency	Percentage
1	Dawn	375	12.07
2	Daily Jang	365	11.75
3	Express Tribune	343	11.04
4	Roznama Dunya	327	10.53
5	Daily Express	314	10.11
6	Daily Kawish	310	9.98
7	Nawai-waqt	286	9.21
8	Sindh Express	281	9.05
9	The Nation	265	8.53
10	The News International	240	7.73
	Total	3106	100

Main Issues Reported in the Newspapers

The main issues shown in Table 2, corruption news was highest 12.56, followed by infrastructure development, 11.27%, the use of word 'Naya Pakistan' and 'Vote ko Izzat dou or Ladlay' was 10.46 and 9.98% respectively. While at the bottom, women, minority, and sports issues received the least share of 2.73%, 1.93% and 1.77%, respectively.

Table 2. Main Issues in Newspaper

S. No	Election Issues	Frequency	Percentage
1	Corruption	390	12.56

2	Infrastructure Development	350	11.27
3	The use of the word 'Naya Pakistan.'	325	10.46
4	The use of the word 'Vote ko Izzat dou or Ladlay'	310	9.98
5	CPEC	271	8.73
6	Economy	240	7.73
7	Job Employment	220	7.08
8	Power Crisis	190	6.12
9	The Election Commission	145	4.67
10	Environment	133	4.28
11	The use of the word 'Show-baz.'	121	3.90
12	The use of the word 'Rot Kapra aur Makan'	120	3.86
13	Morality of leaders	91	2.93
14	Women Issues	85	2.74
15	Minority	60	1.93
16	Sports	55	1.77
	Total	3106	100.00

Purpose of Reporting

The chief purpose of news reporting is to inform its readers/audience. The Table 3 data reported that purpose of reporting in the following order as 35.58% to inform, 19.80 to explain or clarify, 17.03% to persuade, 16.13% related to condemn, 6.47% noted to argue purpose, whereas to monitor is 2.58% and others were at 2.41%. Moreover, Table 4 produced a detailed description of each newspaper's reporting.

Table 3. Purpose of Reporting

S. No	Purpose	Frequency	Percentage
1	To inform	1105	35.58
2	To explain/ clarify	615	19.80
3	To persuade	529	17.03
4	To condemn	501	16.13
5	To argue	201	6.47
6	To monitor	80	2.58
7	Others	75	2.41
	Total	3106	100.00

Table 4. Name of Newspaper and Reporting

S. No	Name of Newspaper	Purpose of Reporting						
		Inform	Explain	Persuade	Accuse	Debate and discussion	Monitor	Others
1	Dawn	54.5%	18.1%	12.2%	12.1%	2.3%	0.1%	0.7%
2	Daily Jang	51.1%	22.3%	16.1%	6.8%	2.8%	0.3%	0.6%
3	Express Tribune	48.9%	19.1%	17.9%	8.9%	4.1%	0.8%	0.3%
4	Roznama Dunya	44.4%	18.3%	19.5%	11.2%	4.7%	1.1%	0.8%
5	Daily Express	49.8%	19.7%	13.5%	10.2%	5.5%	1.2%	0.1%
6	Daily Kawish	41.2%	21.2%	12.2%	17.8%	5.8%	0.9%	0.9%

7	Nawai-waqt	39.8%	24.5%	14.2%	16.6%	3.8%	0.7%	0.4%
8	Sindh Express	40.5%	23.3%	16.8%	13.3%	4.8%	0.5%	0.85
9	The Nation	44.4%	22.7%	15.1%	13.1%	4.3%	0.4%	0
10	The News International	43.8%	27.9%	10.2%	14.1%	2.9%	0.9%	0.2%

News and Issues related to the Elections

The good governance news on PTI was positively reported as 26.16%, whereas PMLN & PPP was only 21.52%. The PMLN related CPEC news items were positively reported at 25.95%, while PTI related CPEC news items only managed to receive mere positive reporting at 15.57% only. As obvious that PTI's main slogan of the main election campaign was based on corruption free Pakistan and Pakistani overseas issues, generated huge positive news report of 36.31% & 41.28%. Whereas PMLN and PPP related news items generated more negative news representation on corruption and Pakistani overseas issues, 16.71% and 11.01%, respectively. It is evident that parties related to their main election campaign issues received positive orientation from news reporting, as presented in below table 5.

Table 5. News Representation and Election Issues

S. No.	Issue	Positive of PTI	Negative PTI	Representation Positive PMLN & PPP	Negative PML & PPP	Neutral	Balanced
1	Good Governance	79 26.16%	40 13.25%	65 21.52%	38 12.58%	45 14.90%	35 11.59%
2	Terrorism	43 17.34%	42 16.94%	46 18.55%	39 15.73%	33 13.31%	45 18.15%
3	Law & Order	110 25.58%	38 8.84%	100 23.26%	65 15.12%	55 12.79%	62 14.42%
4	Religious Issues	74 27.31%	33 12.18%	62 22.88%	28 10.33%	45 16.61%	29 10.70%
5	CPEC	45 15.57%	43 14.88%	75 25.95%	38 13.15%	41 14.19%	47 16.26%
6	Education	120 30.85	42 10.80%	65 16.71%	45 11.57%	62 15.94%	55 14.14%
7	Economy	129 29.32	38 8.64%	110 25%	65 14.77%	51 11.59%	47 10.68%
8	Internal Conflict in PMLN	43 15.30%	21 7.47%	62 22.06%	67 23.84%	46 16.37%	42 14.95%
9	Youth	110 33.23%	40 12.08%	45 13.60%	55 16.62%	39 11.78%	42 12.69%
10	Overseas Pakistani issues	135 41.28%	23 7.03%	51 15.60%	36 11.01%	41 12.54%	41 12.54%
11	Inflation	121 34.77%	31 8.91%	45 12.93%	60 17.24%	44 12.64%	47 13.51%
12	Corruption	126 36.31%	23 6.63%	42 12.10%	58 16.71%	47 13.54%	51 14.70%
13	Infrastructure Development	102 29.82%	33 9.65%	104 30.41%	35 10.23%	32 9.36%	36 10.53%

14	Health	89	31	65	34	51	41
		28.62%	9.97%	20.90%	10.93%	16.40%	13.18%
15	Women issues	51	35	55	35	39	49
		19.32%	13.26%	20.83%	13.26%	14.77%	18.56%
16	Poverty	77	34	68	37	45	36
		25.93%	11.45%	22.90%	12.46%	15.15%	12.12%
17	Benazir income Support Program	43	35	77	33	48	51
		14.98%	12.20%	26.83%	11.50%	16.72%	17.77%
18	International Issues	77	29	65	33	41	46
		26.46%	9.97%	22.34%	11.34%	14.09%	15.81%
19	Panama Case of Nawaz	77	34	26	62	51	43
		26.28%	11.60%	8.87%	21.16%	17.41%	14.68%
20	Lahore Development	46	42	85	23	51	55
		15.23%	13.91%	28.15%	7.62%	16.89%	18.21%
21	Marginalisation of Small Provinces or Section of Population	73	34	67	31	45	40
		25.17%	11.72%	23.10%	10.69%	15.52%	13.79%
22	Provincial Rights	81	42	77	48	38	37
		25.08%	13.00%	23.84%	14.86%	11.76%	11.46%

News Representation of the Newspapers

The news representation of political parties indicates polarisation within elite newspapers based on the sympathies towards their favourite political parties. Hence, findings revealed that the newspaper sympathy towards a political party also severely change the orientation of news reporting on issues of its favourite political parties. For example, daily Jang is known as the anti-PTI, extended majority of positive news reporting of PMLN & PPP at 33.50%, while PTI's positive news is reporting at 22.25%.

However, PTI empathizes newspapers also vastly differ news reporting of opposing parties; for example, Express Tribune & Roznama Dunya positively reported news items at 28.94% and 34.94% whereas PMLN and PPP related news items were positively reported in these dailies at 26.36% and 26.15% respectively. The popular English daily newspaper was reporting news items in favour of PML and PPP at 27.18%, whereas PTI was given optimistic coverage at 24.54%.

The Sindhi daily newspapers called Kawish & Sindh Express positively covered the news with the minor difference between these political parties. For example, Daily Kawish positively reported news items of PTI at 32.08%, whereas PML and PPP at 31.76%. Moreover, other Sindhi newspaper as Sindh Express, covered positive news items of PTI at 28.90% and PML and PPP at 27.98% correspondingly.

PTI is very popular in terms of positive news reporting in the Urdu language Daily Express and Nawai-Waqt. As Daily Express positively reported news items of PTI and PMNL & PPP at 31.60% and 26.69%, respectively. Nawai-Waqt also produced similarly positive news reporting items of PTI at 34.23%, and PMLN received 28.86% only.

Furthermore, English daily, The Nation was more positive towards PMLN & PPP and reported news items at 26.54%, whereas PTI received only 23.46%. The last 10th newspapers, The Nation International, noted the minor difference in reporting positive news items of PTI and PMLN at 24.24% and 25.45%, respectively.

Table 6. Newspapers and News Representation

S. No	Newspaper	News Representation						Total
		Positive of PTI	Negative PTI	Positive PMLN & PPP	Negative PML & PPP	Neutral	Balanced	
1	Dawn	121 24.54%	75 15.21%	134 27.18%	34 6.90%	65 13.18%	64 12.98%	493 100%
2	Daily Jang	87 22.25%	61 15.60%	131 33.50%	38 9.72%	32 8.18%	42 10.74%	391 100%
3	Express Tribune	112 28.94%	35 9.04%	102 26.36%	51 13.18%	43 11.11%	44 11.37%	387 100%
4	Roznama Dunya	120 34.48%	22 6.32%	91 26.15%	51 14.66%	33 9.48%	31 8.91%	348 100%
5	Daily Express	103 31.60%	32 9.82%	87 26.69%	43 13.19%	31 9.51%	30 9.20%	326 100%
6	Daily Kawish	102 32.08%	33 10.38%	101 31.76%	36 11.32%	22 6.92%	24 7.55%	318 100%
7	Nawaiwaqt	102 34.23%	34 11.41%	86 28.86%	29 9.73%	25 8.39%	22 7.38%	298 100%
8	Sindh Express	63 28.90%	25 11.47%	61 27.98%	22 10.09%	24 11.01%	23 10.55%	218 100%
9	The Nation	38 23.46%	23 14.20%	43 26.54%	19 11.73%	20 12.35%	19 11.73%	162 100%
10	The News International	40 24.24%	18 10.91%	42 25.45%	18 10.91%	24 14.55%	23 13.94&	165 100%

Discussion and Conclusion

This can be said that elite newspapers have fulfilled their roles as the medium of obtaining election information related to issues that are the focus of reporting. Based on the above-developed news categories in this research, it is indicated that news related to the elections also become a significant agenda for all the major newspapers in Pakistan. Thus, this can easily deduce that two-thirds of news (politics and election) coverage has been given by these newspapers. Regarding news position, national news items have been given priority by major national and local newspapers. Moreover, newspaper editorials are the voice of newspapers; these editorials are naturally inclined to report issues of the elections. Subsequently, it is obvious that the whole process (the election and related issue) has been politicized. The newspaper also followed political campaigns and discussed campaigns' main issues through opinion selection and also reported with their own loyalties or orientation towards respective political parties. Thus, newspapers focused on 'corruption', 'Vote ko Izzat do' and 'overseas Pakistan issues' related news items as these items were heavily advanced by major political parties in the election campaign rallies. Every newspaper has its own approach and localized style to present the news to its readers.

The main issue of the 2018 general elections revolved around the question pertaining to the nation's political environment, particularly those that became the public agenda as reported by the newspaper such as 'Naya Pakistan', corruption, 'Vote Ko Izzat Do', development, CPEC and terrorism. However, women, minority, sports and environment issues were not given much priority in the newspapers investigated. Issues such as deforestation are not given preference even though they were highlighted by Imran Khan of PTI. It seems that the purpose of reporting news was mainly to attack and humiliate each other's opponent. This seems to adhere to the notion that during the election season, newspapers serve as the medium to introduce and advance their favourite political parties besides condemning and criticizing the opposition political parties.

Limitations of the Study

The current research was limited to content analysis, as it was conducted after the completion of general elections. Hence, the result was only based on the content of the newspaper, but not public opinion. Due to paucity of time, only selected newspapers were taken; more newspapers could not be selected for this study.

Future Study

The future study should conduct a quantitative method based on voters' opinions about participating with political parties before, during and after elections. Besides, the longitudinal study can greatly enhance the understating exposure of media coverage of elections to voters' behaviours.

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