Coverage of Populism Related Content in Pakistani Media: An Analysis of the Coverage of *Dawn and The News*

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Contents:

Abstract: *Populists are dominating the world's political situation. The election campaign of Donald Trump in the United States, the emergence of right-wing populist parties in Eastern Europe, and the popularity of Narendra Modi of India prove that we live in a populist world. Populism has also returned to Pakistan as cricketer-turning politician Imran Khan's popularity was attributed to a massive publicity campaign. This article aims to evaluate the populist coverage of Pakistan's political parties in media. This research study aims to answer the question of which political party shares more populist views, in what form they share it, and who the targets of these populist views are. The researcher has utilized the "Quantitative Content Analysis" as a research method to answer the outstanding research questions. The news coverage of the two leading English-language newspapers of Pakistan, namely Dawn and The News International, has been studied. A total of 278 news stories were examined during the month of the 2018 elections. The findings support that Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaf was the most populist party and the Sharif family/PMLN was the prime target of anti-elitist views shared by PTI. Findings also support that The News International gave more coverage to populist narratives than Dawn.*

Key Words: Populism, Media Politics, Political Parties, Elections

Introduction

In political science, populism is a phenomenon in which emerging politicians project the views of ordinary peoples and condemn those that regulate the regime. The Populist leaders point out shortcomings in the democratic systems and hold the elites accountable for poor people's agonies passing through them. They communicate regularly with ordinary people and send certain messages to the group that appeals to them (Doi et al., 2014; Walgrave, 2018).

In July 2018, Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaf (PTI) won elections, and Imran Khan became Prime Minister of Pakistan. Many scholars called it the return of populism in Pakistan. Albertazzi &

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Mcdonnell (2008) believe that PTI's success resulted from a widespread media campaign. Some scholars have identified populism as a detriment to democracy as authoritarian politicians do not allow dissent and support exclusionism when entering the power arena. Lippmann (1922) claims that populist leaders become autocratic when they succeed. He also argues that the ideals of western democracy and freedom of expression will be undermined when the autocratic model is implemented. Populist politicians are driving the world into a situation where anti-government policies become a misdemeanour, and the ethnic minorities feel vulnerable (Semetko, 2003).

It has been observed that when populist politicians enter the corridor of influence, then the actual problems of society are superficially overlooked or addressed. Rhetoric replaces facts, dissent is seen as a crime, and the constructive debate culture diminishes. Media plays a bridge between politicians and people; therefore, this idiosyncrasy paves the way for promoting undemocratic values in society, e.g., exclusionism, personalization, censorship, etc. In other words, instead of working to strengthen the country's political system and promote democratic values, the media promote undemocratic values in society.

There are two general approaches to studying the media's role in populism. One approach focuses on the media's role in providing favourable potential avenues for populist actors to communicate to their electorates, also known as populism for or through the media (e.g., Bos and Brants 2014). Populist actors and ideas receive disproportionate media attention because of their focus on negativity, conflict, dramatization, and common sense, which fits the current media logic well. The second interpretation of the populism-media relationship gives the media a more active role, with the media potentially disseminating populist viewpoints themselves, referred to as media populism (e.g., Krämer 2014; Mazzoleni 2008).

However, as per the author's literature review, little empirical research has been conducted to explore the second interpretation of the media's role in communicating populist ideas (Wettstein et al., 2018; Hameleers et al., 2017). The lack of empirical evidence for the populism-media relationship may be elucidated while considering that populism across the media is distributed in a more fragmented way (Engesser et al. 2017); this corresponds to populism's "thinness" and incompleteness as a complete ideology (Taggart 2000). Moreover, most empirical studies on the media's dissemination of populist ideas have been conducted in Western countries (Manucci and Weber 2017; Rooduijn 2014), making it worth studying populism-related content in Asian countries, particularly Pakistan. Therefore, by adding to existing literature, this content analysis examines the evidence of populist ideas in two English newspapers in Pakistan.

Based on the analysis of one-month coverage of *Dawn* and *The News International*, this research article aims to answer the following research questions.

1. What is the nature of populist content published in Daily *Dawn* and *The News*?
2. How much political content published in Pakistani English newspapers carries populism?
3. How do Pakistani newspapers treat political content on their pages?
4. Which political party gets more coverage of their populist views?
5. Which party shares the most anti-elitist views?
6. Which party shares the most people-centric views?
7. Which party in Pakistan shares exclusionist views?
8. Which political party/group is the prime target of populist views?

It is worth noting that a total of 278 news reports have been analyzed. It included 163 stories from *The News International* and 115 stories from *Dawn*. The time period chosen for this analysis is the 2018 General Elections.

Literature Review

Scholars have contradictory perceptions regarding the concept of populism. Some delineate it as a peculiar form of political communication that demonstrates affinity to people, taking an anti-

establishment stance (Walgrave, 2018). He explains populism as a political idea; it refers to the term used by anti-establishment forces in the political arena to denounce elites and the status quo. Art (2006) described populism practitioners as "populists,". He states that their (populists) emotions are often "angry," and their voters are "frustrated" (Art, 2016).

Mudde (2016) & Rovira Kaltwasser (2012) provides some plausible approaches and populist description. The book, when referencing populism, states that populism is, first and foremost, a political tactic used by a specific type of leader who aims to rule based on direct and unmediated support from his supporters. Populism implies the emergence of a strong and charismatic figure who concentrates power and maintains a direct connection with the masses.

Rovira Kaltwasser (2012) consider populism predominantly a folkloric style of politics, which leaders and parties employ to mobilize the masses. They state that this approach is particularly popular within (political) communication studies and the media. In this understanding, populism alludes to amateurish and unprofessional political behaviour that aims to maximize media attention and popular support. By disrespecting the dress code and language manners, populist actors can present themselves as different and novel and as courageous leaders who stand with "the people" in opposition to "the elite."

Any politician needs to appeal to electors all through the election process. Populists tell a very straightforward tale as they interact with the general population. Semetko (2003) believes that populists create an impression of commoners. They talk on the ground like ordinary folks do. Populists perceive themselves as immaculate politicians who can run the job without plundering taxpayer money. Like people on the field, they portray themselves and exhibit a charming presence (Tartar, 2017).

The populist leaders are anti-elitist and anti-pluralist. They always claim that they are the people's only voice. They portray their political rivals as immoral, corrupt, and not recognizing any legitimacy of the opposition (Zaslove, 2014). Populists invite conflicts by encouraging polarization and treating opponents as enemies of the people and want to exclude them altogether.

Populist leaders use media as a platform for reaching out to the public. Some media channels also endorse these populist leaders; therefore, media channels mould these popular statements in a way that creates public perception (Jaffrelot & Therwath, 2007). In brief, public perception is utilized for populist leaders' electoral advantage (Blackman, 2001). Albertazzi & Mcdonnell (2008) claim that populist persuasion is a tactic to seize leverage, and populist politicians turn this technique on and off when they need public support or wish to suppress political opponents in a country's democratic structure.

Some researchers believe that the appeal of populism is rooted in the perception of deprivation (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012). Both the government and the affluent elites are accused of the plight of the poor people and what they are suffering (Vreese, 2015).

The media has a strong affiliation with populism. The theoretical assumptions of media are based on right-wing populism. De Vreese (2015) proposed three types of media populism. These include the centrality of people, anti-elites, and populism in the mono-cultural media. Reporting on these ground-based media messages and promoting populist views on the sender side and appealing to the public on the recipient side (Boomgaarden, 2015). Interpreting facts from an anti-establishment angle, people perceive the democratic leaders as fraudulent and those who misled the people (Gide, 1898).

Journalists centre their reports on objectivity. They concentrate more on the specialist origin and less on the viewpoint of ordinary citizens than on the tabloid media (Buckingham, 2001). Some media outlets have more inclination toward populist leaders. It works as a bridge between populist leaders and their voters. The media disseminate populist ideas to the audience. Both citizens and journalists can interpret societal issues in populist ways. The audience prefers media content that interprets societal issues (de Vreese, 2014).

Walgrave (2018) believes that populist parties' readers have a specific media diet. Besides reading daily newspapers, they ingest more entertainment and social news material than most people (Kruikemeier, 2014). Based on this claim Mazzoleni (2011) assumes that people who prefer entertainment are more likely to hold the strongest populist attitudes than those who do not prefer such content. Moorman (2015) also endorses the point. Both agree that those with more exposure to entertainment-based news are more likely to adopt populist opinions, and those with less exposure to it are more likely to endorse elites.

The media channels also become rivals of the populist frame, and they engage in a populist style of communication themselves (Tartar, 2017). These outlets also frame the issues as populist leaders do. Journalists describe crooked elites vertically and delinquent societal out-groups horizontally (Anderson, 1998). Critical coverage of political figures reinforces pessimistic perceptions in the media and optimistic expectations for populist parties (Kusters, 2018).

Research Framework

The researchers selected the two highest circulated English-language newspapers of Pakistan, *Dawn* and *The News. Dawn* is Pakistan's leading and historical newspaper, published by the country's founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah. Critics claim that *Dawn* represents the best of Pakistani Journalism. It is also highly regarded for its objective approach in its reporting. *The News International* is the highest circulated English-language daily in Pakistan. It is owned by the biggest media network – Jang Group of Pakistan.

To get a better outcome and to provide a reasonable opinion on the content of the analysis, it is necessary to choose the timespan that is the representative sample of the research (Berelson, 1952). The objective of this research study was to recognize populism in the messages of political leaders. The electioneering month of the 2018 General Elections (from 01 July 2018 to 25 July 2018) was preferred as the timeline for this research study. Political parties' heads were announcing

party manifestos for the coming five years. They told the voters that they would give them what they wanted. News conferences, party meetings, and political gatherings (Jalsas) become an hourly routine during this period. This time period was, therefore, most appropriate for this research study.

The empirical research unit was all political news published by *Dawn* and *The News International* on its front and back pages. Therefore, newspapers are often full of political material; only the front and back pages of both newspapers were chosen for this analysis to examine a specific number of articles. For this analysis, the front pages are chosen regardless of the justification for bearing the most important news items, being lively, and illustrating the newspaper's policy and agenda.

Many of those articles occurred in the selected time period and were chosen to provide facts about politics, politicians, political parties, or political events. To avoid biases and particular inclinations and agendas, even those stories were selected as content for this study that contained personal information about a political personality. For instance, reports stated about Nawaz Sharif's poor health status, this was a health story, but also it included facts about a political leader then it was included in the newspaper.

Research Methodology

This research study deals with micro-level news content, and 'Content Analysis' is the best method to quantify words in a text. Charles (1922) believes that the 'Content Analysis' approach is the most effective when explicit hypotheses or research queries are raised. Holsti (1969) calls it a technique for a very accurate and structured analysis of defined characteristics of messages.

Though the 'Content Analysis' method has the restraint of not looking into the message's veiled meaning, Aarts & Semetko (2003) believe that it is the best methodology to address the qualitative questions effectively by identifying the specified and then analyzing relationships between these dimensions. He expounded on the process by saying: "content analysis first splits the text into the constituent part, which can be counted; it

reassembles these constituent parts at the analysis and interpretation stage to examine which one co-occurs in which sense, with what reason and with what consequences" (Anderson, 1998). He strongly agrees that, in contrast to many other interpretive and qualitative approaches, content analysis is more open to scrutiny (ibid, 1998).

In the case of this study, this perception stands true as the data (news stories) of *Daily Dawn* and *The News International* were codded in different ways to place a broader opinion on the comparative coverage. The study of content analysis persuaded the researcher to opt for this method. As Berelson (1952) termed this method the best technique for measuring many words, this researcher also examines a month-long data of two leading newspapers of Pakistan. This method will assist in measuring words and converting them into fewer content categories. Besides, Holsti (1969) termed it the best method for interpreting specified attributes of messages. This method will help to categorize the news stories into different coding groups.

Many researchers deem that the content analysis method deals with factual data rather than looking into its clandestine message (Buckingham, 2001; Holsti, 1969). Research questions in this analysis not only pursue latent knowledge but also aim to know the face value of the available data, which is why this approach would be the most effective technique for responding to these questions.

Doi et al. (2014) studied the diffusion of populism in Western European Media's public debates and used the content analysis method for their study. He labelled it the most accurate approach for acquiring a wider view from small-coded messages. We also believe that the Content Analysis method is the most suitable method for examining the populism-related content in the Pakistani press.

Table 1. Strength of News Stories

Name of Newspaper	Number of Political Stories Published
The News International	163 (58.6%)
Dawn	115 (41.3%)
TOTAL	278 (100%)

This researcher relied on a coding sheet to collect the data. The coding sheet is an imperative aspect of labelling and grouping data analysis in a manner that defines various themes and the associations between them. The coding sheet is a method in which the gathered data is assigned separate numbers and symbols and organizes these separate numbers and symbols in a manner that offers a broader perspective (Jaffrelot & Therwath, 2007). A fellow M.Phil. researcher was asked to collect the data from randomly selected news stories to ensure intercoder reliability. The coding sheet was approved after it showed 90 per cent similarity in collected data. Once the data was collected, it was put into the SPSS, and different relevant tables were generated to discuss the findings.

Findings and Discussion

The findings of this research article are apportioned into eight different sections.

Strength of News Coverage in *Dawn* and *The News International*

This section previews political stories published in *Dawn* and *The News International* during the selected time of the 2018 General Elections. It also includes stories that are not populist. It also stresses the number of articles on the front and back of the chosen newspaper. The information is provided below in table 1.

There were 278 stories in Dawn and The News International that contained political content. The

News International gave more coverage to political stories than Dawn. There was a total of 163 stories related to politics/politicians. The tally of such stories in Dawn stood at 115.

It is observed that *The News International* accommodated more political stories on its front and back pages than *Dawn*. While on the other hand, *Dawn* also accommodated some sports and other non-political stories on its front and back pages. Besides, both newspapers' page make-up also made a difference as *The News*

International accommodated more stories than *Dawn* on its colourful pages.

Treatment of Political Content in Pakistani English Language Newspapers

This researcher has endeavoured to evaluate the Representation and style pursued by Pakistani media in this section, which covers political content. With the help of the table, the results are clarified. The findings can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Treatment of Political Content in Pakistani Media

Name of Newspaper	Coverage on Front Page	Coverage on Back Page	Total
The News International	108 (66.2%)	55 (33.7 %)	163 (100%)
Dawn	87 (75.6%)	28 (24.3%)	115 (100%)

70% of these stories appeared on the front pages of both newspapers. *Dawn* has given more coverage to political content on its front page than The News International. If we look into the political content comprehensively, 75% of political stories in Daily *Dawn* were published on the front pages only a quarter were on the back page. Similarly, the tally in The News International was 66%.

During the research, it was observed that the back page of Dawn newspapers featured more foreign content. The News International accommodated the national/political content on both pages; therefore, there is a big discrepancy in the treatment.

Going utterly through the content of both the newspapers, the researcher observed that *The News International* gave more space to political content

than *Dawn*. The disparity between both pages' layout and style also played a role. *Dawn's* layout accommodated more stories as compared to *The News.*

Besides, *Dawn* often covered the statements of politicians in a comparative style. For instance, *The News International* on the front and back pages accommodated Imran Khan, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Shahbaz Sharief, and Molana Fazal Rehman's statements separately, but *Dawn* cumulatively covered all these utterances in a single story.

Populist Narrative in Pakistani Press

In selected newspapers, all political articles are analyzed. This segment offers a bird' eye view of stories with and without populism. The results are set out in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Populist Narrative in Pakistani Press

Name of Newspaper	Number of Stories contain Populism		Total
	Yes	No	
The News International	63 (38.6%)	100 (61.3%)	163 (100%)
Dawn	29 (25.21%)	86 (74.78%)	115 (100%)

The News International has offered more populist content on its front and back pages than Dawn. Out of The News International's 163 stories, 38.65 per cent featured populism. The populist content ratio is 4:6. In Dawn, on the other hand, the ratio was very poor. For 115 stories, 25.2 % are enclosed with material related to populism.

The News International was ahead of Dawn in boosting the populist narrative in its stories. According to this researcher's findings, the style of reporting was the explanation behind it. The News International gave most of its political stories in utterance style. For example, the statements of political leaders were given in quotation style. While the Dawn followed the occurrence (descriptive) style in which readers were told of what occurred.

Nature of Populist Content published in Pakistani English-Language Press

This section addresses this research study's key query about the nature of populist material published in Pakistani English-language newspapers. This section discusses the essence of populist material in Pakistani media. This chapter provides a snapshot of populism and its manifestations and the statistics found while comparatively analyzing the content of Dawn and The News International. The nature of populism is identified with the help of its feature, namely anti-elitism, people-centric, and exclusionism.

These features are expounded as follows.

Anti-Elitism is the symbol of populism in which leaders typically attack elites. Elites are the ones who have been in government. Holding each other liable for the miseries people suffer. Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) persisted in power before the 2018 General Elections; Pakistan Tahreek-e-

Insaf (PTI) was ruling in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), while Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) was in power in Sindh. The researchers pulled together all those anti-elitism reports in which politicians addressed publicly and blamed each other for people's concerns. For example, PTI leader Imran Khan said that Sharif and Zardari's family had plundered the country for three decades.

People-Centric is the other feature of populism, in which politicians speak on behalf of common folks and call themselves the only genuine representative of the people. The researcher added that all those claims and assertions whose accomplishment seemed impossible were used as a political stunt. For example, Imran Khan claimed he would wipe out corruption from the country in three months or bulldoze Governor, CM, PM, and President's Residences.

Exclusionism is the phenomenon of depriving certain communities or persons of the privilege of certain rights. All the statements meant for deprivation of someone from the enjoyment of their right are positioned in this category. For example, Zardari and Sharif have no right to rule the people; their place is in jail.

There was also a disparity in the portrayal of the populist content of both newspapers concerning their nature. Moving into its conclusions, this researcher would like to clarify the discrepancy between the gross number of populism stories in terms of their nature. For example, in table 3, there are 92 stories with populism, while in table 4, this number reaches 132. A single-story contains populist content numerous times with distinct features. For example, a single story had anti-elitist content. Similarly, it had people-centric and exclusionism elements of populism as well, so these were counted separately; hence the total of tables 3 and 4 has a difference.

Table 4. Nature of Populist Content in Pakistan Press

Name of Newspaper	Nature of Populist Content			Grant Total
	Anti-Elitism	People Centric	Exclusionism	
The News International	52	37	5	94
	55.5%	39.5%	5%	100%

	23	14	1	38
Dawn	60.5%	37%	2.5%	100%
	75	51	6	132
Total	57%	38.5%	4.5%	100%

The results are set out in Table 4 and discussed momentarily in the subsequent section.

Almost all the political parties relied on populism, but when we discuss the use of populism in terms of its characteristics, most of the material was anti–elitist and far less of an exclusionist type. In both publications, 57% of the data contained anti–elitist content, while people-centric data was just 38%, and the percentage of exclusionist content was just 4.5%. If we calculate the proportion on a stand-alone basis, 55.5% of the data in *The News International* and 60.5% in *Dawn* is anti–elitist. The proportion of people-centric content was 39.5% in *The News* and 37% in *Dawn.*

Targeting opponents is the main theme of populism; therefore, the number of anti-elitist content was so elevated. The researchers used unprovable claims as a yardstick for measurement; therefore, the content with people-centric nature was less than ant-elitism. The News International's policy was to accommodate more political stories on its front and back pages; consequently, the number of populism-related stories was higher in *The News*

International as compared to that of *Dawn. Dawn* newspaper also gave space to non-political stories on its colourful pages. That is why the number of populism-related stories was less than *The News International.* It was observed that the colourful pages of both newspapers were generally devoted to mainstream political stories. Most of the stories, particularly in *The News International* and generally in *Dawn*, were centred on statements of politicians. Both newspapers adopted the quotation style while encompassing these stories. The stories about developments were not given space on the front pages. Besides, the regional and non-political stories were given more space.

Political Parties of Pakistan having more Populist views

This section addresses the crucial question of this research study, which deals with the awareness of the political parties that hold the most populist opinions. This section provides a wider view of these groups in table 5 below.

Table 5. Political Parties sharing more Populist Views

Name of Newspaper	Parties Share Anti–Elitist Content						Grand Total
	PMLN	PPP	PTI	ANP	MQM	Other	
The News International	13	7	21	0	0	11	52
Dawn	4	4	11	0	0	4	23
Total	17 (22.6%)	11 (14.6%)	32 (42.6%)	0 (00.0%)	0 (00.0%)	15 (20.0%)	75 (100%)

Almost all parties somehow shared populist views, but Pakistan Tahreek-e-Insaf was ahead of all others in this respect. We will first discuss the anti-elitist nature of the content.

Out of all anti-elitist content, 42% was shared only by PTI. Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PMLN) stood second, which shared 22.6% of anti-

elitist content. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) share was 14.6 %.

The data shows that PTI Leader Imran Khan was using anti-Elitism as a tool to persuade his supporters. Almost all his tweets and messages were anti-elitist in which he criticized his rival, including former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and former President Asif Ali Zardari personally. Often this was

a rough attitude. For example, Imran Khan called all PMLN workers 'donkeys' who had gathered to welcome Nawaz Sharif back to Pakistan when he returned from the United Kingdom.

Criticism for improvement is the essence of a democratic society, but as politicians tend to critique for criticism, the discussion gets even uglier. The use of slur language and personal assaults on each other by Pakistani leaders has risen over the last few years. The government and representatives of the opposition barely agree on a single issue. This fact has threatened the country's survival and the social and cultural ideals of society. Newspapers provide room for the political opinions of different parties that encourage this blame game politics.

Smaller political parties, regional politics, and the actual problems of society are still neglected.

Party sharing People-Centric Views

Among the major features of populism was people-centric. Only those stories covered in this segment possessed unrealistic or huge claims based on the above people-centred concept. For example, PTI's leader, Imran Khan, claimed that 10 million jobs would be created, and 5 million houses would be constructed if elected to General Elections. Besides all those messages, a political party or individual considers itself the only and true representative. This segment briefly tells us about the political parties that hold much of the people-Centric views. The findings can be seen below in Table 6.

Table 6. Party sharing People-Centric Views

Name of Newspaper	Parties Share People-Centric Content						Grand Total
	PMLN	PPP	PTI	ANP	MQM	Other	
The News International	7	7	17	0	0	6	37
Dawn	4	2	7	0	0	2	15
Total	11 (21.1%)	9 (17.3%)	24 (46.1%)	0 (00.0%)	0 (00.0%)	8 (15.3%)	52 (100%)

If we look into the party's position based on its people-centric views, PTI is at the forefront of all other political parties in this regard. Just PTI shared 46% of overall articles featuring people-centred perspectives. The PML-N share is 21.15%, and the PPP share is 17%. In this respect, PTI was ahead of all the other political parties.

Almost all politicians talk on behalf of the people, and they term themselves as the only representative of the common people. All of them symbolize themselves as the saviour of the nation. That is the truth of every community, but it is not justified that governments have already made

commitments to the voting population that they realize will never be met. The leaders must take a rational attitude to the polls. Otherwise, the image of these politicians in the coming elections will be severely affected.

Party sharing Exclusionists Content

As far as the concept of the exclusionist content of populism is concerned, all those remarks intended to deprive a group, or a person of their right are exclusionary material. This section briefly describes the parties that hold this kind of populist vision. The findings can be seen below in Table 7.

Table 7. Parties Sharing Exclusionist Views

Name of Newspaper	Parties Share Exclusionists Content						Grand Total
	PMLN	PPP	PTI	ANP	MQM	OTHER	
The News International	0	0	5	0	0	0	5
Dawn	0	0	1	0	0	0	1

Total	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	6 (100%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	6 (100%)

If we look into statistics, Exclusionist views were least used by political parties. A total of 6 stories possessed exclusionist content, five were published in *The News International,* and one was published in Daily *Dawn.* PTI shared all these stories. We can declare that PTI shared 100% of exclusionist content.

Populism is the essence of a democratic society. Every person, group, or party possess analogous democratic right. And depriving someone of their democratic rights will lead the society to instability and chaos.

Political Parties Targeted with Populist Narratives

As per the definition of populism, populist views are used by new politicians, and they target senior politicians/political groups. This characteristic of populism is called anti-elitism. To explain anti-elitism briefly, I will share some specimens of news stories that contained anti-elitism.

- *"Sharif, Zardari has conjured up a 'charter of corruption'", Imran tells a rally in Sukkur (The News International, Published July 11, 2018). "Sharif, Zardari destroyed Pak in last 10 years": Imran Khan (The News International, Published July 20, 2018)*
- *Imran gets bitter at PML-N workers welcoming sharifs*

Lahore/Narowal

Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) Chairman Imran Khan putting aside all the political correctness and norms on Thursday questioned as to why the people would go to <u>welcome the thieves (the Sharifs)</u> of the country. (Daily Dawn published July 13, 2018)

- *"Those greeting Nawaz are donkeys": Imran*

Islamabad

Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan said on Thursday that he would not let former prime minister Nawaz Sharif become a hero, as he was being arrested on corruption charges, according to Geo News report. The PTI chief was addressing a gathering in Narowal, where he said no PML-N worker with a clear conscience would go to the airport to receive him. "And whoever will go to receive him will be a donkey (fool)." (The News International published July 13, 2018)

PMLN and PPP in reaction also used slur language for PTI Leader Imran Khan. For example, Shahbaz Sharif, President of PML-N while talking about the PTI Leader said "his (Imran Khan), upper chamber" is empty.

The table below offers descriptions of the political parties and groups that have been subjects of populist views.

Table 8. Victims of Populist Narrative

Name of Newspaper	Anti-Elitist Content Published about whom?									Grand Total
	Sharif Family	Bhutto/Zardari	JUIF	PMLN	PPP	PTI	ANP	MQM	Other	
The News International	25	14	4	23	12	17	0	1	8	104
Dawn	12	6	0	11	8	7	0	1	0	45
Total	37 (24.8%)	20 (13.4%)	4 (2.6%)	34 (22.8)	20 (13.4)	24 (16.1%)	0 (00.0%)	2 (1.3%)	8 (5.3%)	149 (100%)

When we determine which political group or family has been the target of populist propaganda, statistics tell us that the Sharif family and PML–N have experienced the most in this respect.24.8 % of the overall anti-elitist content was against the Sharif family alone. If we incorporate the Sharif family and PML–N as a single group, this percentage will exceed 47%.

The second favourite focus of the anti-elitist campaign was the Bhutto / Zardari family. 13.4% of the overall content was against Asif Ali Zardari. Likewise, if we jointly calculate the anti-elitist narrative about the Zardari / Bhutto family and PPP, this figure reaches 26.8%. PTI itself was a victim of it, and 16% of content was shared against it. Other parties such as JUI-F, MQM, PML-Q, the Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), and others were also vulnerable to it, but their proportion was comparatively low compared to conventional political parties such as PML-N, PPP, and PTI.

It seems that PTI Leader Imran Khan had set a strategy of accusing Nawaz Sharif and Zardari's image, and through it, he persuaded his voters to make him reach to power corridor.

Instead of giving his program for the government, almost all of Imran Khan's statements/interviews had a reference to Sharifs and Zardari. Almost all of Imran Khan's statements/interviews had a reference to Sharifs and Zardari instead of giving his program to the government. Such statements/interviews were prevalent and very negative.

Maligning each other in public forums and using slur language has severely affected our social norms. Such nasty debates have compelled the parents to make their children away from it. The politicians must deliberate and find a way to stop this attitude as it does not benefit either side. The media can play a vital role in covering only the real issues of society instead of giving space to the politicians' statements, which are full of personal attacks.

Conclusion

From Europe to America and Africa to Asia, populism captures the political scenario of the future world; the same is the case with Pakistan. Some researchers believe that populism poses a serious threat to liberal democracy, and it is creating problems for democratic values. Therefore, this article investigated the moth coverage of two English-language newspapers in Pakistan, namely *Dawn* and *The News International*. Particularly, we looked at whether these media outlets are giving populism space in their coverage or not? The electioneering month of the 2018 General Elections (from 01 July 2018 to 25 July 2018) was preferred as the timeline for this research study. This time span is particularly significant since both political parties and newspapers have concentrated on the election process. The content analysis results revealed that *The News International* and *Dawn* have each provided space on their main pages. It has been noticed that *The News International* has given more room to populism-related material than *Dawn*. It also clarified how political parties used populism as a weapon to reach out to voters and the essence of populist material. Leaders have mostly used the anti-elitism aspect of populism in their speeches, followed by people-centred and exclusionist, respectively. It was observed that the Sharif family and PMLN was the prime target of anti-elitist content shared by other political parties. The Bhutto/Zardari family followed it.

The findings of the study are consistent with the existing body of knowledge. For example, Kusters (2018) believed that PTI's success resulted from a widespread media campaign. The outcomes of this study proved that PTI got more coverage of its populist views than other political parties of Pakistan in *Dawn* and *The News International*. Further, Doi et al. (2014) studied the diffusion of populism in public debates in Western European Media. He claims that opinion articles in the UK, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands ' media have become more populist.

Beattie. J., & Bloom (2016) believed that populist leaders portray their political rivals as immoral and corrupt and do not recognise any legitimacy of the opposition. The findings of this study show that PMLN, the Sharif family, PPP, and the Bhutto family were portrayed as immoral,

corrupt, and looters by PTI. Over the years, public debates in Pakistan have become nastier as personal and unethical assaults by politicians on each other increased. The findings of this study have shown that the media in Pakistan have also become more populist. Thus, such media coverage poses serious challenges to the democracy of Pakistan, where people have already suffered a lot due to the longtime rule of the establishment of Pakistan. There is a need that Pakistani politicians and media should reset their objectives and try to inform the people in the most realistic possible ways.

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