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## FOCUSING PUBLIC DELIBERATION: EDITORIAL FRAMING OF PAKISTAN DEMOCRATIC MOVEMENT

<b>Author 1:</b>	<b>RUQIA SHAHID</b> , Department of Media and Communication, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: <a href="mailto:biya3148@gmail.com">biya3148@gmail.com</a>
<b>Corresponding &amp; Author 2:</b>	<b>MUZAMMIL SAEED</b> , Department of Media and Communication, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: <a href="mailto:muzammil.saeed@umt.edu.pk">muzammil.saeed@umt.edu.pk</a>
<b>Author 3:</b>	<b>MUAZAM ALI KHAN</b> , Department of Media and Communication, University of Management and Technology, Lahore, Pakistan. Email: <a href="mailto:muazam.khan@umt.edu.pk">muazam.khan@umt.edu.pk</a>

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### Abstract

The role of newspaper editorials is awe-inspiring in the field of journalism making public opinion. Editorials following organizational policy and maintaining accuracy and impartiality build a narrative about political positioning. This study was conducted to bring forth the editorial framing of Pakistani elite newspapers about the Pakistan Democratic Movement. The movement was initiated by a coalition of 13 opposition parties to oust the government of then-prime minister Imran Khan, accusing the poor performance of his regime in economic and strategic sectors. The study examined how prominent English and Urdu dailies have outlined the struggle of the opposition alliance. For this purpose, qualitative content analysis was used as a methodological tool to analyze editorials of the four selected newspapers, 'Dawn and The News' and 'Jang and Express' from 20 September 2020 to 28 February 2021. The study's results showed that newspaper editorials have criticized the opposition and government for their anti-democratic behavior, attributing a burden of responsibility on one side, either towards the government or the opposition alliance. A clear difference of opinion was found between English and Urdu newspapers emphasizing government and opposition roles. English newspapers have stressed opposition alliance to focus on solving the issues in parliament while Urdu newspapers have forced the government to apply democratic values with full spirit to overcome the turmoil. In a nutshell, they stressed on both sides, government, and opposition, to practice democratic norms and good governance for the public good and national interest.

**Keywords:** Democratic, Opposition, Newspapers, Turmoil, Politics.

## Introduction

The political history of Pakistan underwent many struggles of political opposition against the political government. It has been observed that "Pakistan's path to democracy has encountered several notable challenges. The opposition often stages demonstrations not to support and strengthen the democratic system but to undermine the current government. Furthermore, they seek help from the military establishment and damage the democratic evolution that the nation has experienced since its independence. In response to these developments, mainstream news media, including TV channels and newspapers, extensively cover these political events due to their significant implications. They disseminate news and views according to their expertise and exposure; however, their attitude, incompetency, and political affiliations frame the story accordingly. In the field of journalism, newspaper editorials are considered the most critical and analytical part due to the objectivity in writing. Newspaper editorials' opinions on several critical issues including social, economic, political, and legal are intended to persuade readers toward viewpoints (Ani & Anyandike, 2013). These arguments or comments support particular policies, and ideas to be conveyed or latent (Duyile, 2005). Primarily, it presents stands of newspapers on current political, social, and economic issues to enlighten readers on how they could think on such issues as they are written to persuade. Topics of editorials do not develop from the sky (Ate, 2006), they are based on current issues reported or being discussed in media. Hence, such issues entice the attention of the public towards such debates. Similarly, editorials provide detailed discussions and enlightened

judgments to readers (Ekeanyanwu & Jokodola, 2009). In addition, editorials condemn social, political, economic, and moral problems of society. Editorials at times perform the functions of raising alarms on brazen abuses, human rights, and protection of norms and sufficient social order in society. Moreover, policies of governance under ruling government policies can be criticized by editorials. Democracy and media are interconnected, and media serves as a bridge between the audience and politicians while disseminating information. However, its role always remains under investigation by scholars to identify the constructive and destructive character of the medium. The purpose of this study is to examine how leading Urdu and English newspapers frame editorials related to democracy, with a specific focus on the recent political movement, the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM).

## Research Questions

1. How do the newspapers' editorials frame the Pakistan democratic movement?
2. Do the newspapers' editorials support democratic values?

## Objectives

1. To investigate the editorials' frames and stance of leading newspapers about PDM.
2. To analyze the media framing of newspapers' editorials against PDM.

## Literature Review

Media has a predominant role in presenting political issues and building audience perception towards them. They provide information on certain ideas and help in constructing reality (Dwivedi & Pandey, 2013; Oluwakemi & Bricksens, 2016). However, we can find the influence of several factors like journalists' opinions, the ideology of media owners, and pressure groups that frame the content. Media

frames intend to understand the issues more properly. There are two main components of a message comprising real content and framing. It provides a connection between actual and perceived reality (Janssen, & LeBlanc, 2010). These media frames help to understand critical issues, and these frames produce powerful forces both at an individual and societal level.

### **Media Framing**

Framing is a representative framework that links reality to a clear proposal. It is about understanding protocol to make a certain event more comprehensible (Goffman, 1974). Framing involves deliberating topics that have imperative inferences for political process and communication to draw attention towards certain facets that are concealed. It ultimately leads to the audience having numerous actions and states of mind (Entman 1993). It is used as a framework to investigate tendencies regarding transformations in negative framing and political instructions in any material and somehow to connect the ideological and political stances of the newspapers to the discourses of identity and value they use to build their texts (Le, 2010). Media framing has become a widely used technique in the process of information dissemination by the media persons to construct a particular picture or meaning of the issues in the minds of the audience. Media content is shaped in planned contextualization through effective methods and media persons follow illustrative techniques to classify the excessive knowledge and effectively utilize them to achieve the goals behind the message (Arowolo, 2017; Goffman, 1974). They make the issue pertinent, prominent, and considerable for the readers and audience using selection, interpretation, and way of discussion (Tankard, 1991). Further,

we can see that the usage of words and sentences demonstrates the ideological partisanship and partiality of the media (Van Dijk, 1995). Even, it is also visible in editorial writings which are considered the official opinion of a newspaper. Editorials are significant when we analyze the political role of news media (Henry & Tator, 2002). Editorial writers framed the occasions, subjects, and personalities in the way that correspondents and editors make it; rather they should be focused on the objectivity of journalism (Ryan, 2001). They provide an appraisal of the whole situation particularly the one in action and actors. Editorials developed practical conclusions in the form of stances, giving recommendations and instructing along with warnings (Van Dijk, 1992). Media frames are significant in two ways firstly they are the reflection of large public discourse and secondly, they have a great influence on public opinion. These frames define the actual problem, categorize the root causes, convey moral judgments, and offer concluding remarks with suggestions. The final approach is left to the audience, allowing them to fill any remaining gaps or choose to overlook them (Entman, 2004). Frames make features of certain issues more important (Nelson et al.1997; Nelson & Oxley, 1999) and conversely prime the addressee and have steady access to certain observations to shape the comprehension of a particular issue (Iyengar, 1990; Kahnemann & Tversky, 1984). However, in selecting certain features of an issue it is important to know what to include or accentuate, which aspects need to be ignored and modulated, and an assembly of illustrations can be displayed. *“Far from being stable, the social world is, therefore, a chameleon, or to suggest a better metaphor, a kaleidoscope of potential realities, any of which can be readily evoked by altering how*

*observations are framed and categorized*" (Edelman 1993, p.232). Research scholars introduced several frames to evaluate the framing of editorial interference; Nationalistic frame, responsibility frame, human interest frame, morality frame, peace frame, and clash frame were commonly used to comprehend certain social and political content categories (Iyengar 1994; Vreese et al., 2001). It was observed that editorials as compared to news sections have a significant role in identifying core frames (Rivera, 2018). Newspapers' editorials have astounding contributions to the opinion world but they are found largely influenced by the social, cultural, and political concerns confined to local areas where such media has been operated. It is imperative to note at this point the manifestation between editorial and framing never fails to play a central role in providing a guide to the coverage of information on a particular subject (Fonseca, 2005). Studies have also contributed to international editorial framing and documented how news media framed international news. It indicated that gatekeepers in leading newspapers fail to come up with the potential to provide some degree of discussion about the underdeveloped world (Wu, 1998). In the contemporary era, media framing theory has been commonly applied to news reports including editorials (Le, 2010), and the new world of communication is still unveiling the new aspects and realities through the application of this theory. There were several studies conducted, employing framing theory to understand the intermediating realities about the societal world and to examine how the media and journalists build these social real factors in the media talks to make them prominent, featuring and making light of, including and

excluding occasions by utilizing numerous media frames (Entman, 1989; Graber, 1988; Goffman, 1974; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989; Pan & Kosicki, 1993; Tuchman, 1978). The framing process assists journalists in conceptualizing the issues that affect understanding public issues. Iyengar (1987) elucidated that frames are commonly drawn from which are the reflection of cultural narratives and stereotypes in resonance with the larger socio-cultural context and media organizations functions within it. Gitlin (1980) states "*Frames are largely unspoken and unacknowledged; organize the world both for the journalists who report it and, in some important degree, for us who rely on their reports*" (p.7). Frames narrate the content of media in social and moral contexts. Expression of frames in media discussions is possibly the selection of words, and arguments, namely, slogans, paradigms, visual images, and descriptions (Gamson & Lasch, 1983). Similarly, other scholars Lewis and Reese (2009) have conferred that frames are used by communal actors as a tool to construct reality and "*often embedded in and resonate with the normal culture, and so are considered usual and natural, their impact is by stealth*" (p.3).

### **Editorial Journalism**

Editorials are unidentified official texts (Hallock, 2007; Shabir et al. 2014) categorized by position-taking, unbiased, and consistency with time (Firmstone 2008; Izadi & Saghaye-Biria, 2007). "*Editorial is predominantly defined as to inform and lead public opinion. It interprets news to the readers by pointing its significance*" (Bond, 1955, p. 194) whose prime responsibility is to maintain a level of accuracy, impartiality, and responsibility in giving coverage of certain events. Editorial information is not only based on professional codes but also

represents the organization's vision (Kelling & Thomas, 2018; Mont'Alverne et al., 2018). Editorials are fundamentally subjective, but this is also innate to note that editorials reflect the policy of newspapers which must produce content according to organization strategies. It can be supported by the literature as some structural and organizational pressures give rise to media towards news frames which ultimately affect editorials. Editorials express the fundamental models and editors' attitudes. They focus on journalistic ideologies and norms that guide the editorial progression of news media rather than the main objective to problematize the editorial treatment of certain stories and subjects (Gitlin, 1980; Ghanem, 1996; Hofstetter, 1976; Liebes, 2000; Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; Van Dijk, 1991). Editorials have a significant role as they present and deliver not only the newspaper's viewpoint but also reveal their ideological and political values. The analysis of newspapers is not only based on assessing the political positioning of a specific media organization but rather it represents the dynamics of an issue and its agenda. Editorials build narratives about political events by employing reasoning and argumentative language which makes it "the most noble section of a newspaper" (Gradim, 2000, p.81). These writings are not only information sources for political actors or policymakers, but they are also the source of opinion-making for opinion leaders and social activists. Newspapers' editorials have a crucial part in attempting to evaluate diverse viewpoints and develop their stance. Editorials in newspapers are generally anticipated as a form of political interference due to their critical opinion and acute observation; it is the expression of political opinion generated as the "voice of the reader" or as the "calm, authoritative

voice of the editor" targeted at legislators (McNair, 2011, p. 12).

### **Theoretical Framework**

There has been various research by scholars who argued that the opinions of the journalist are enduring and would be able to form more ethical rules and good political judgments; however, media coverage of events must be culturally consistent and must emphasize the commonly held cultural values and representations. In this specific situation, scholars have stated that media conceptualize the social accord, and predominant philosophy plays a significant part in characterizing the media landscape for the political world (Lee & Yang, 1996). As per Tuchman (1978), news is a window that limits our impression of reality by concealing different parts of the story. He likewise characterized the frame as the belief system of an association that coordinates its activities in a specific setting. The conceptions of Tuchman have defined framing theory as media selecting a problem by giving importance to certain parts of reality to characterize an issue and to propose its answer. Framing states the method by which media and its gatekeepers manage the content to be presented. The researcher has established a theoretical framework to strengthen research based on framing theory. The objective of this study is to examine the editorial framing of the Pakistan Democratic Movement in English and Urdu newspapers. Framing theory suggests the construction of categories and frames which is particularly relevant in the scope of this work. It intends to investigate how editorials have framed this movement under certain categories.

### **Research Methodology**

The study employed qualitative content analysis to investigate the role of four leading daily newspapers regarding the



framing of editorials about the Pakistan Democratic Movement. We classified newspapers in English and Urdu, the national language; two from each, '*Dawn* and *The News*' and '*Jang* and *Express*' respectively. The selection of these newspapers was based on their higher circulation and wide readership from common citizens to the elite. Further, the period from September 2020 to February 2021 was considered and the reason behind this selection was to analyze the role of press particularly editorial framing during the emergence and beginning of this political movement. It is a census study meaning that all 185 editorials extracted from selected newspapers about the Pakistan Democratic Movement were analyzed. The unit of analysis in this research was a sentence. The focus of this investigation was to know the editorial stance about government and opposition alliance against democratic values.

### Results and Discussion

This study aimed to analyze the editorial coverage of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) by elite English and Urdu newspapers in Pakistan. The prime objective of this alliance is to run a movement so that the current government can be ousted. The purpose of this study was to examine newspaper coverage of the PDM, issue framing, and editorial policies involving PDM issues with the government, government issues with the opposition alliance, and editorial perception of the movement. The results presented above show differences against several categories in this regard. The newspapers selected for this study were *Dawn*, *The News*, *Daily Jang*, and *Express*. These newspapers have high circulation in Pakistan. The selected English press published 97 editorials discussing the framing of the opposition alliance, PDM,

while the Urdu press covered 88 editorials about PDM. The study includes categories organized around the frames of government stance on PDM, opposition stance on government performance, and editorial stances on government and opposition. In this connection, the authors witnessed that the media helps to construct realities and often shows biased stances for readers, but considering newspapers, they interpret facts in their own way (Gill et al., 2012). In its editorial, the newspaper *Dawn* has been supporting democratic values by elucidating the causes that should be adopted to avoid a political crisis in the country. They have been directing that "instead of preaching to the choir, both sides should start a healthy political 'fight' that draws the line at accusing each other of being unpatriotic or working against Pakistan". On the other hand, the newspaper has openly stated that both the government and the opposition are meant to serve the people and protect public interests. The opposition, according to the newspaper, is exercising its democratic right to protest. However, it also acknowledges that the devastating impact of the coronavirus outbreak cannot be ignored. Similarly, all newspapers have been emphasizing the need to maintain democratic values for political stability in the country. As far as editorials of *The News* stress that "battles between the opposition and the leadership should ideally be fought within the Parliament". Perhaps time will allow across the aisle for some kind of dialogue that would be in the best interest of the country. Editorials have also framed PDM while supporting them in their continuous struggle for a one-point agenda to oust the government, while Urdu dailies have more support in this regard. Though in terms of supporting the government, the frequency of Urdu dailies was more

significant to maintain strength against opposition protests. The editorial policy of the press was found to be “neutral” in terms of favoring and criticizing the policies and performances of both the government and the opposition. There were differences in the results, but all newspapers have framed this movement under common categories. The most common editorials about PDM published were about criticism of ruling state governance, which has failed to fix chaos, and their reactions to PDM protests. Editorials, particularly of *Jang* newspaper, have stressed the importance of sustaining democratic values to save the country and democracy. Editorials of Urdu dailies were found to be more supportive of government and opposition.

#### ***Editorial stance about government and opposition***

The editorials supported democratic values by recommending that the government and opposition must engage in a national dialogue. The editorial has been criticizing the opposition and government for all the actions against democratic norms and values editorial on one side supported the peaceful right of protest and speech for the opposition, on the other hand, criticized the opposition for making unethical demands.

#### ***Support democratic values.***

The editorial focuses on the fact that all political parties need to make decisions under democratic values. The parties are supposed to serve the people’s interests and protect their rights. The government and the opposition need to work together on productive solutions. The editorial is constantly emphasizing that this attitude of constant confrontation must change because it is critical to improving people's lives rather than continuing to be confrontational. The editorial has further

indicated that both sides need to agree on a healthy debate instead of accusing each other of being unpatriotic. The opposition and the government must start the dialogue on national issues inside the parliament rather than on the roads. Refusal of talk from both sides is heating the political temperature, and some sort of midway point needs to be reached immediately. The government must end its posturing and focus on dialogue with the opposition, which would be a wiser step. Political stability is needed at this time of the pandemic. The Constitution gives every person the right to communicate with freedom of speech. So, the government needs to stop dissuading them from protesting. Further, the editorial argues that this open blame game will not be beneficial for longer terms and that seditious rhetoric will only give rise to polarization in the country, which will ultimately weaken the foundations of democracy. To limit the political discourse in the country, every perspective needs to be respected and a path of dialogue must be open between the opposition and the government.

#### ***Criticized the performance of the government.***

The editorials criticized the government for its performance and reaction, particularly the blame game against the opposition. The editorial pointed out PM should stop criticizing the opposition as the opposition is serving the interests of the enemies of Pakistan. The editorials stressed that calling any politician a traitor will damage the system’s credibility and end any chances of healthy dialogue and relationship within and outside parliament; Instead of mocking the opposition, the government needs to improve its governance.

*“There is no doubt that allegations of financial mismanagement at the hands of*

*public officerholders must be investigated according to the tenets of the law, Mr. Khan's relentless and dogged obsession with the opposition's alleged theft is perhaps distracting him from the greater task at hand, which is to serve the people of this country and uphold their constitutional rights. By fixating on the accountability drive and constantly threatening to jail his political opponents, it appears Mr. Khan is missing the forest for the trees; accountability, after all, is just one crucial aspect of governance. The prime minister would be well-advised to focus on the larger issues of bringing relief to citizens crushed by economic hardship"* (Editorial Board, 2020). Furthermore, they wrote that the use of national accountability and state institutions against the members of opposition parties will not only damage the institution but will also make these institutes controversial. Editorials expressed that currently all responsibility is on the government to take the lead and it's time to sort out differences with the opposition, which they have hardly attempted.

#### **Criticized opposition.**

The editorial criticizes the opposition for coming up with unrealistic demands on the agenda list. The editorial pointed out major flaws and shifts in the opposition's stance. The conflicting agendas of these parties have hindered the process of solving problems in parliament. The situation sometimes fluctuates so much that opposition parties fail to agree on the same goal, and they have failed to build a narrative against the government. The opposition alliance has been showing irresponsibility during their public gatherings at this time of the pandemic. *"The actions of the political leaders who lead these parties are supremely irresponsible and betray a careless approach to a virus that has destroyed lives and livelihoods all over the world. Even more*

*disappointing is that the opposition is likely to skip a critical meeting of the Parliamentary Committee on Coronavirus Disease this week as part of their decision to spurn the National Assembly speaker whom they accuse of biased conduct"* (The Editorial Board, 2020). The editorial criticizes the fact that PDM has not been able to pull the crowd to the streets and the government is in a comfortable position inside the parliament as well. The overall findings revealed that newspaper editorials were quite inclusive and straightforward in criticizing government and opposition. It is imperative to note that editorials covered issues of governance as well as the conflicting agendas of the opposition, which they failed to solve in parliament. In framing the events, editors in newspaper organizations decide which are significant for audiences and what issues matter most to them. Since then, it has been observed that editorials emphasize the fact that political parties need to strive hard to practice democratic values and maintain political stability. The selection of words used was influential as editorial reports on issues of current government performance and political instability in the country, which were not the actual focus of the study. In addition, editorial writers were found opposing some derogatory remarks about government performance (standing on somewhat shaky ground, given its poor performance over the last two and a half years), which has indicated that newspapers are condemning their acts of governing. In the case of the Pakistan Democratic Movement, editorials mostly followed organizational ideologies and proposed viewpoints of editorial writers. It can be drawn that the framing of the democratic movement was controlled. Apart from criticizing government performances and



opposition acts, it was the deep analysis of print media to navigate judgments in a more directed way. They have been directing the government and opposition to agree on a national dialogue to strengthen political discourse in the country, despite all the criticism. Hence, it has been advocated that the frames applied in this study are issue-specific (Iyengar, 1991; Vreese et al., 2001), which are extracted from facts stated in editorials. The results of the study show that the editorials made an astounding contribution as they mentioned the authorities responsible for the political crisis and the ongoing democratic movement. Analysis of leading newspapers, *Daily Jang* and *Express*, illustrated more criticism of the performance of a government that has disrupted public concerns. Similarly, *Dawn* and *The News* framed the opposition more critically for their anti-government protests, which have raised the political temperature. On the contrary, it has been observed that the opposition was framed through positive evaluation opinions, even having a single-point agenda to oust the government. The findings show that social, cultural, and political concerns have had a large influence on editorials and news media (Onyebadi, 2016). Editorial writing is less constrained by traditional trends of objective journalism, and freedom of expression allows newspapers to reveal explanatory frameworks within social and political events as interpreted by the audience (Ha, 2017). Under the umbrella of framing theory, studies have been conducted as frames narrate the content of media in social and moral contexts. The expression of frames in media discussions is possibly the selection of words, arguments, and descriptions (Gamson & Lasch, 1983).

## Conclusion

Journalism in the history of Pakistan has experienced some challenges regarding freedom of expression however recently this profession has been enjoying more liberty and journalists have more freedom to express their views overtly. The corpus of our study which was based on an analysis of Urdu and English newspapers to investigate editorial framing has identified diverse opinions between selected newspapers. No doubt, the focus of all selected newspapers was the projection and strengthening of democratic values but there is a clear difference of blame emphasizing government and opposition role now. English newspapers, *Dawn* and *The News*, have mostly criticized the opposition alliance for their focus on streets instead of solving issues in parliament while leading national language newspapers, *Jang* and *Express* have focused more on the implementation of democratic values by the government than the opposition. It can be inferred from findings that editorials while framing the Pakistan Democratic Movement play a predominant role in giving suggestions for opposition and government to end political disputes. It is necessary for the opposition and government to be on the same page for serving public interests and parties need to practice democratic values. The newspapers discussed national dialogue as a major solution in parliament to end political discourse in the country.

## Recommendations

- A quantitative approach may be used by following the personality media framing technique to analyze the portrayal of the leaders of both sides.
- Researchers can investigate the effects of these editorials on readers to understand the power of media.

- Further research could be conducted to investigate the results of this movement as it has succeeded.

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