



Coverage of Pakistan General Election 2008 in Leading Pakistan English Newspapers: Exploring Agenda Setting

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Abstract

The paper identifies the patterns of 2008 general elections coverage in three leading English dailies The News, Dawn and The Nation. It examines the editorial policies and trends in the light of agenda setting and framing theories. The editorial pages of daily Dawn, The News and The Nation were selected to examine variables frequency, placement, slant and framing. The researchers conducted content analysis of editorial pages for two months of these newspapers from 01-01-2008 to 28-02-2008. The paper explores how print media gave significance to general elections 2008. It further explores the media watchdog role played by press through editorials. The study unpacks the structure used in editorials to sketch image of general elections.

The research can be classified as exploratory. The aim of the research was to discover the treatment and nature provided by the English leading newspapers of the country to the big and crucial event of general elections 2008. Altogether, 409 editorials were read and the researchers found 98 editorials relevant to the topic. Result of the study elaborates that daily The Nation allocated more space than daily The News and Dawn. Daily The Nation and The News are being regarded as a political organ in the country politics while Dawn is treated as an ideological daily in Pakistan.

Keywords: Elections 2008, Agenda Setting, Framing, Print Media, Democracy

Introduction

Media is playing an important role for the establishment and strengthening of democracy in many parts of the world. In the time of globalization, media has the ability to carry out a positive role in democracy. Every international institution and state guarantees the fundamental rights of individual through freedom of speech and expression and access to information. These principles are enshrined by the respective constitutions and ensured by the state organs.

Media and politics have a strong connection in the contemporary political environment. The earlier role of Media, as a source of information/communication between people and state, and between states, has been transformed and widened. Now the political actors work in the environment shaped by the Media. Media shapes the perceptions of leaders and people. And on the basis of these perceptions the political actors formulate the policies especially during the situations of crises or political changes i.e. elections. Media can never be independent; either it works under the government pressure imposed through laws or under the influence of financier; as it has become a money-making industry. The role of Media is predominantly determined by its relationships with the state. (Sohail, 2008).

In developing countries press role becomes more significant due to weak democratic system. For the effectiveness of this role, reporters should file stories in a non-partisan way.



Media is like a bridge between politicians and people. Media is a debate forum which provides opportunities to candidates and political parties to highlight their manifesto and shape public opinions. Political expert Mushtaq Gaadi states “without press freedom, a smooth transition to democracy will remain merely a pipe dream. However, without democracy, the existence of a free media is inconceivable” (Huma, 2013). On the day of election, media groups televised and published complete coverage of results and polling process. Print media provided opportunity to parties and candidates to present their manifestos to public. Press widely published activities regarding election administration.

This research is designed to study and evaluate the role of mass media in strengthening democracy in a country like Pakistan, which has undergone tremendous hardships to keep the flag of democracy floating. After lawyers’ movement in 2007, mass media emerged in Pakistan as a fourth pillar of state. It is vibrant, powerful and has the ability to divert and change the opinions of masses. The Media impact on both the rural and urban areas in Pakistan is outstanding. The role of mass media, its responsibility, weakness of media itself and external and internal challenges are evaluated in this study.

The proliferation of mass media in Pakistan in 2002 and the unprecedented role it played in creating social, economic and political awareness in the masses. The media’s role it played during the 2008 elections is important milestones. The vibrant role of media played in the evolving democratic culture in Pakistan. Therefore, this research attempts to analyze the role of media specially the print media in the development of political culture in Pakistan.

General Elections 2008

In a democratic society, elections are generally seen as a vital mean for transporting changes in any country. February 2008 general election was distinctive practice in the history of Pakistan. Elections were held in a conflict situation after the assassination of Pakistan People Party (PPP) Chairperson Benazir Bhutto on 27th December 2007. The polls were postponed till 18th February 2008. However, polls were held in a peaceful manner. Media and civil society activists closely monitored the whole process of election. Political experts express widely apprehension about the postponement of elections and rigging plans. Independent monitors of the voting process voiced anxiety regarding the fairness of the elections with the kind of props have already been put in place. Fears were predicted after Bhutto assassination that “it is equally striking that while the decision to postpone elections raises a serious legal and constitutional issue” (The News, 2008). It is also stated that her assassination will play great role and Pakistan People Party will get a vote of sympathy.

Pakistan’s 9th general elections were held on 18th February 2008 for National and Provincial Assemblies. Major political parties PPPP, PML-(N), ANP, MQM, PML-(Q) and other participated in the elections. However, Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf, Jamat-i-Islami and many other parties abstained from elections. Forty four point six percent (44.6 %) turnout was recorded with 2.7 % increase than previous elections. In 2002 general elections voter’s turnout was 41.9 percent. For National Assembly total registered voters were 80,910,318. Male voters were 45,306,540 and female were 35,603,778” (Noor ul-Haq, 2008).

National Assembly contested seats were 268. Total strength was 342 including 60 seats reserved for women and 10 for Minorities. For NA overall 7335 candidates took part in the elections. Election Commission allotted symbols to Forty Six political parties” (Noor ul-Haq, 2008). Polls result was surprising and no single party could get simple majority in the parliament. The ruling party for the first time conceded its defeats. Pakistan Muslim League accepted polls results. According to official result Pakistan People Party Parliamentarian won 88 seats and emerged single largest party. Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) got 66



seats while Pakistan Muslim League secured 35 seats. Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) gained 19, Awami National Party (ANP) 10, Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) retained five, Pakistan Muslim League Functional (PML-F) got four seats and independent candidates along with minor parties won 38 seats in the general elections” (Noor ul-Haq, 2008). PPPP along with the support of coalition partners formed government in the center. However, later PML (N) parted ways from the coalition government over differences of Supreme Court Judges restoration deposed by General (Retired) Pervez Musharraf.

Similarly, in the provincial assemblies, PPPP got majority with 77 seats in Sindh, PML (N) emerged as single largest party in Punjab, PML (Q) managed to form government in Baluchistan and ANP with coalition parties established government in NWFP (Now Khyber Pakhtunkhwa)” (Noor ul-Haq, 2008).

The result proved that mostly pro-democracy and moderate political parties are deep rooted in democratic system as compared to religious parties which have no grip over voters in the country. Polls reflected people’s will for support of democracy as they nominated their candidates for the parliament. Political professionals say that “the relatively successful elections are an indication that Pakistan is shifting away from its traditional feudal-patronage political system” (CRS, 2008).

Role of Media in 2008 Elections

At the time of 2008 general elections a vigorous private mass media was ready to cover all events related to the polls. A new history was being made for the first time in Pakistan. Electronic media was going to cover elections in 2008. Earlier, only private print media experienced polls coverage along with state-owned PTV and Radio Pakistan. There was tense and charged political situation. Any misadventure in analysis or in publishing of news could have fatal consequences.

In 2008, ten television channels covered the whole elections process. They competed with each other in the dissemination of news about election and voting coverage. Political parties and contesting candidates enjoyed the modern communication means. Websites, text messages, facebook, blogs and email were widely used during elections procedure by politicians. Widespread publicity was there in streets and roads through billboards, handbills and posters (PILDAT, 2013)

Print media played a responsible and matured role and no unfortunate incident was reported during voting process. Ruling and opposition parties used negative attitude to influence media in their favour. They discouraged impartial and free reporting of press. Journalists across the country received threats. In rural areas some powerful candidates stopped coverage of their activities as they were trying to rig polls. In some places reporters were harassed.

Political parties widely used print media during elections. Advertisements were published in dailies, weeklies, magazines and in other publications to mobilize public in their favour for getting votes. Stories were narrated in press regarding past achievements, promises for future and of opponent’s failure. Parties published vast advertisement with voting appeal on front and back pages of newspapers. Contesting candidates approached people through media to inform them about their agenda containing future promises.

In developing countries press role becomes more significant due to weak democratic system. For the effectiveness of this role, reporters should file stories in a non-partisan way. Media is like a bridge between politicians and people. Media is a debate forum which provides opportunities to candidates and political parties to highlight their manifesto and shape public opinions. Political expert Mushtaq Gaadi states “without press freedom, a



smooth transition to democracy will remain merely a pipe dream. However, without democracy, the existence of a free media is inconceivable” (Huma, 2013). On the day of election, media groups televised and published complete coverage of results and polling process. Print media provided opportunity to parties and candidates to present their manifestos to public. Press widely published activities regarding election administration.

Television Channels aired several programmes on elections. Channels devoted largest airtime to Pakistan People Party (PPP). AAJ TV provided 29 percent while GEO and ARY devoted 26 percent coverage to PPP. Pakistan Muslim League (PML-N) received only 8 percent attention as compared to PPP and PML-Q received 18 percent in election campaign (EU Report, 2008). In the print media PPP received main focus during campaign. Daily *Jang* allotted 29 percent, *Nawa-i-Waqt* devoted 24 percent while *Dawn* provided 40 percent and *The News* allocated 38 percent space in publishing news to PPP (Ibid). Other political parties including ANP, JUI (F) and MQM received less attention from press.

Literature Review

“Strangling Liberty, Media in Distress in Pakistan” (2013) by Riaz Ahmed Shaikh describes the history of media during the last sixty-six years in Pakistan. The press during the British Raj and the new journey of media after 1947 has been highlighted. It is stated, that despite tremendous pressure from different political forces media gained outstanding importance and growth in the society. Government often forced media to follow their agenda. The press in Pakistan is now vibrant, powerful and to some extent is liberal. The author explained that Pakistan remained unsafe for the journalists. At least 118 media persons were killed in the recent past. The dream of Jinnah regarding freedom of speech and expression is on the verge of terrorism. Presently Pakistan is facing multiple challenges since the beginning of war on terror in 2011. Media and democracy have seen many ups and downs on the hand of dictators. The book narrates the new trend of media and its further influence in the humanity. The democratic government in 2010 provided more power to the press through 18th Constitutional Amendments. The amendment further strengthened media’s rights to the freedom of expression. The emerging threat to media in Pakistan is also underlined in the book.

Dr. Shahzad Ali and Dr. Muhammad Khalid in “Press, Pressmen and the Governments in Pakistan: Mishandling of Powers & Position” (2012) explain that free media is mandatory for the health of democracy. Media has the ability to make accountable the most influential political elites in Pakistan. They highlighted press freedom during dictatorial and democratic regimes since independence. The authors explored the control level and nature of different governments to keep the press silent over exposing corruption cases against them. They also put in plain words the scandals of journalists by getting benefits from the government in different regimes. How the media persons were awarded with cash and plots by democratic rulers for the promotion of their own political ideology. It is stated that every ruler expressed solid determination for liberal and free media but nothing has been done for the freedom of press in Pakistan. It is an established fact that freedom of media has been curtailed by democratic governments. Despite this media witnessed mushroom growth in the country particularly from 2002. Journalists offered a lot of sacrifices for this freedom.

Zamir Niazi in “The Press in Chains” (2010) describes the history of rulers regarding control over the press from time to time in Pakistan. The author highlighted the history of press in South Asia. The core theme of the author is the maltreatment and severe actions were taken against dissenting media men. He also explained the press’ important role in the society. Jinnah played a significant role for the promotion of press for the cause of Muslims in sub-continent. He termed that liberal press is necessary for the promotion of democracy. He



said that press is acting as mirror of people in democratic society. The imposition of black laws by different rulers to suppress the press has been underlined. The censorship policies of rulers against media has also been highlighted in the book.

Muhammad Anwar and Mirza Jan in “Role of Media in Political Socialization: The case study of Pakistan” (2011) narrate a structure of political socialization in Pakistan. It is said that the media is life-line of political socialization. Political communication interacts between media and political systems at local, national and international level. The authors describe that public make its opinion in democracy through voting and by participating in the elections of the country. Media has a key role in shaping political awareness among the general masses and guarantees their contribution in any democratic process of a country. Media is one of the key mediator that mainly socialize general masses which affects every day behavior of human life but also offer information regarding other similar developments taking place at national and international level. The writers also discuss the style of media political campaign to create awareness in the general people especially during the election time. The key stakeholders particularly politicians and parties in the political process play important role in democracy through keeping links with media among people and those having the politics of power.

“Media and Democracy: Are Western Concepts of Press Freedom Applicable in New Democracies?” (2000) by Michael Kunczik explains media as a key source of information about politics. The print and electronic media have the capacity to place the agenda to describe what is significant in politics of any country. Quoting Kepplinger (1983) the author said that access to the general public is only possible through mass media particularly for government and parliaments. The significance of the internet has also been highlighted that it offers new opening for direct democracy. If a government wants to act justly and in accordance with the constitutional principles then it will be necessary for it to hear all voices and all opinions. But this is possible only if one grants freedom of press

“Political Communication and Democratic Process in Pakistan” (2006) by Muhammad Rashid Khan analyzes that media is projecting democratic values and norms in the society for generating awareness among the general public. The study found that the media served as a channel for the advocacy of political viewpoint. It was found that media always enhance freedom of expression to facilitate the public to take part in democratic process and in policy and decision making, and educate the public through access to information. The watchdog role of Media is so important in checking non-democratic action taken by the elected representative of the government, while opinions in the national press affected government policy and press enjoyed a high degree of freedom during this period.

“New Media VS Old Politics: The Internet, Social Media and Democratization in Pakistan” (2011) by Marcus Michelson highlights the role of media, specially the significance of internet for the process of political change and democratization. The twitter and face book (in the Arab spring 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt) are plying important role to shape future political expectations and decisions. In Egypt protesters used social media particularly Facebook as a tool to organize their vast presence in Cairo’s central Tahrir Square for the regime change in the country. Giving deferent examples, the article also highlights the political changes in Latin America and Europe in the 1980s and 1990s as well as the hasty development of communication technologies during the last decades that created mounting interest in mass media. The year 2007 witnessed the emerging role of mass media during emergency and lawyer’s movement. The media emerged during this time with new power and potential gained as a strong pillar of state in the country. The study further underlines that media play an essential role in the process of democratic consolidation. Media



facilitates the circulation of information and opinions so that an informed citizenry can articulate its demand and influence the political decision making process. The challenges facing by journalists specially security threat to them has been described in detail.

“Role of Media in Democracy: Does Globalization affect media’s role in the context of Bangladesh” (2009) by Pradip Kumar Panday analyzes the effect of globalization in determining the role of media in a democracy. The article points six symbols of an ideal role of media in democracy. First watchdog role of the media, in such role media can facilitate to reduce corruption and can strengthen democracy. Second media can create public sphere which serves as a channel between governors and the governed and as a ground for public dispute that leads to more good policy and decision making. Third Media can act as a fourth state, a co-equal branch of government that provides the check and balance without which government cannot be effective. Fourth media can act as a mirror of society, ensures availability of information on what is going on in the country as well as in each parts of the world. For example the meeting of G-8 groups is covered by most of the media and the protest against these meeting is also covered by the same media in the same way. Fifth media can act smoothly in the age of information super highway. The rapid growth of information technology such as internet has opened up countless new channels for media. The mobile phones help people to contact other people of different places immediately through SMS. Sixth Media can create a market of ideas. Media always make people familiar with different ideas. People have diverse programs of different countries

“Media in Pakistan: Between radicalization and democratization in an unrolling conflict” (2009) is a research report by the International Media Support. The report analyzes that after nine years of military rule, Pakistan today finds itself in the second year (2009) of a challenging transition to democracy and this transition is characterized by the existence of a newly liberalized mass media. The report also states that media in Pakistan is vibrant but this is difficult task because the media is faced with a number of challenges. By highlighting these challenges the report focuses on how the Pakistani media is affected by, and function under, the conflict currently unfolding in the country

Naveed Iqbal Chaudhry and Amna Ashraf in their research “Agenda setting and Framing during Musharraf Period in Pakistani Print Media 1999-008” (2012) describe that responsible and liberal press is ever demanded in Pakistan. It promotes democratic culture and norms in the society. Free media always raises political consciousness among the general public. The mass media puts checks on political leaders by exposing their corruption scams. They state that election is the back bone of democracy. Large numbers of people involve in the election process for choosing their rulers. Media in this regard connects people with election commission about the matters of electoral process in a country. Political parties use media platform for spreading their ideology among the people. The media act as watchdog during voting process. The boom of media in Pakistan is flourishing with the passage of time.

Dr. Zafar Iqbal in “Pakistan’s Press and Politics in the first decade 1947-58: An Analysis in Structural-functionalist perspective” analyze the government and press relations after independence in 1947. The press faced toughest kind of time in the sub-continent before the partition and afterward. However, dramatic change occurred in the relations of government with the press. The father of the nation allowed the press to play its due role in the process of nation building. Unfortunately, this role of press could not continue for long time after the sudden death of Jinnah. The politicians and bureaucracy played havoc with the newly born press in Pakistan. All black laws were imposed against press which earlier rejected by M. Ali Jinnah. Regressive steps were taken to curb the freedom of press. The



press also faced economic ban by the hand of rulers. Government took no efforts to make the press professionally sound. After independence, several newspapers fought their survival war separately, which revealed the press as segmented units and not as organization. The press was badly reined by the governments. The other important segment was the lack of people support to press. The people were uneducated. As a result, no support had been witnessed from the people for the press survival.

Research Question

How and to what extent English Newspapers of Pakistan gave salience to general elections 2008 in the light of agenda setting theory?

Theoretical Frame Work

Agenda Setting

The theory of agenda setting is fundamentally a theory of resilient mass media influence which states that with the passage of time the agenda of media converts to the agenda of people. The term 'agenda-setting' created by McCombs and Shaw (1972) defines a phenomenon that had been examined and studied in the framework of the election campaigns. It describes;

"Considerable evidence has accumulated that the editor and broadcasters play an important part in shaping our social reality as they go about their day to day task of choosing and display news. This impact of mass media– the ability to affect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking – has been labeled the agenda setting function of mass communication. Here may lay the most important effect of mass communication, its ability to mentally order and organize our world for us. In short, the mass media may not be successful in telling us what to think, but they are stunningly successful in telling us what to think about."

(Cited in Littlejohn, 2002: 319)

Agenda setting is the conceivable ways that the mass media can have an effect on the masses. It is idea through which news media by displaying of news, come to determine the problems of masses, talks about and thinks about. Since early 1970 the hypothesis of the agenda setting is considering one of the major concepts in communication theory. The agenda setting recommends a way that the media can have influence on the society that is substitute to attitude change.

Theory of Framing

The theory of Framing explains that how media focuses on events and then to put the subject within a field of sense. It states how something to be portrayed to listeners/audience (called "the frame"). The theory manipulates the opinions of masses by shaping regarding how to process that information. Frames are ideas that enact how to structure or organize message meaning. Theory of Framing is very attached to Agenda Setting and both are focusing on how media depict the masses' eye to a significant subject. Through this way the media set the agenda.

Methodology

Analysis of News Papers *The News*, *Dawn* and *The Nation*

This study identifies coverage prototype of general elections 2008 in the light of agenda setting in three elite English newspapers; *Daily The News*, *Daily Dawn* and *Daily The Nation*. The editorial pages of these dailies from 01-01-2008 to 18-02-2008 were selected to



measure three variables placement, slant, framing and frequency. These dailies are being considered prominent icon of English press. They have vast credibility and circulation. Have huge readers and play significant role in disseminating information following their own editorial policies. Editorials enjoy central place in the papers and attract comparatively serious readers. Editorials differentiate one newspaper from the others by originally presenting the viewpoint of editor or owner (Naveed 2012). Editorials are being called the voice of newspaper.

The rationale behind choosing these dailies are that all the three newspapers are popular and largely being read in the society. Setting of time frame is due to the peak movement of elections campaign and rallies of several political parties to examine the result to what extent coverage was given to polls. Print media have the ability to change the opinion of public. These newspapers belong to different group of publications. These media groups have multi-dimensional approach for their outlets on key national and international issues.

Variables of the Editorials Analysis

The variables frequency, slant, placement, and frame were measured to bring out the result in the light of agenda setting theory in these three newspapers.

Frequency: Editorials published about general elections 2008 of the study on the editorial pages of the three newspapers were counted.

Slant: The slant of editorials published regarding issues was measured in terms of unfavorable, favorable and neutral to government. The whole editorials were treated as coding units of content analysis and the counted units were indexed in terms of neutral, favorable and unfavorable.

Placement: Placement is being considered very significant factor in agenda setting. It means where the editorial or news story was placed in newspapers. In this research, placement was divided into two categories. These are upper half and lower half of editorials pages.

Frame: Means how editorial was framed. The framers of editorials were analyzed in term of anti-government, pro-government and neutral. These analyses were made on the bases of contextual unit.

The print media gave tremendous coverage to 2008 general elections held in Pakistan. Some dailies provided huge space while many others gave low or moderate coverage to the whole process of elections. The researcher thoroughly read the editorials of The News, Dawn and The Nation from 01-01-2008 to 18-02-2008 on elections.

Data Analysis and Discussion

There was great disparity in the pattern of coverage and agenda setting of these three English leading dailies. Analysis is being presented on separate basis of these three newspapers due to their different agenda setting ways. Eventually, this inequality remains in the people agenda setting. The result of the finding is explained in the following lines.

Frequency of the Editorials published regarding general elections

The study elaborates that during the study time of 49 days from 01-01-2008 to 18-02-2008 the daily *The News* published 32 editorials about the general elections 2008. In the month January 2008 daily *The News* published 18 editorials while in the month of February from 01-02-2008 to 18-02-2008 the daily donated 14 editorials on elections.

The study shows that daily *Dawn* gave less coverage to the general elections and donated 21 editorials during the 49 days period of peak time of candidate's campaign. In the month of January 2008 the daily published only 10 stories on the editorials pages. In the

month of February from 01-02-2008 to 18-02-2008 the *Daily Dawn* provided a space to 11 editorials.

On the other hand *Daily The Nation* provided huge space to editorials regarding the general elections 2008. Altogether the daily published 45 editorials about polling process in the country. In the month of January 2008 *daily The Nation* published 26 editorials and provided space to 19 editorials from 01-02-2008 to 18-02-2008. It shows that the paper gave tremendous coverage to elections related information. The disparity in the agenda-setting of media can be judged in the above facts. These three newspapers show different coverage approach towards 2008 general elections.

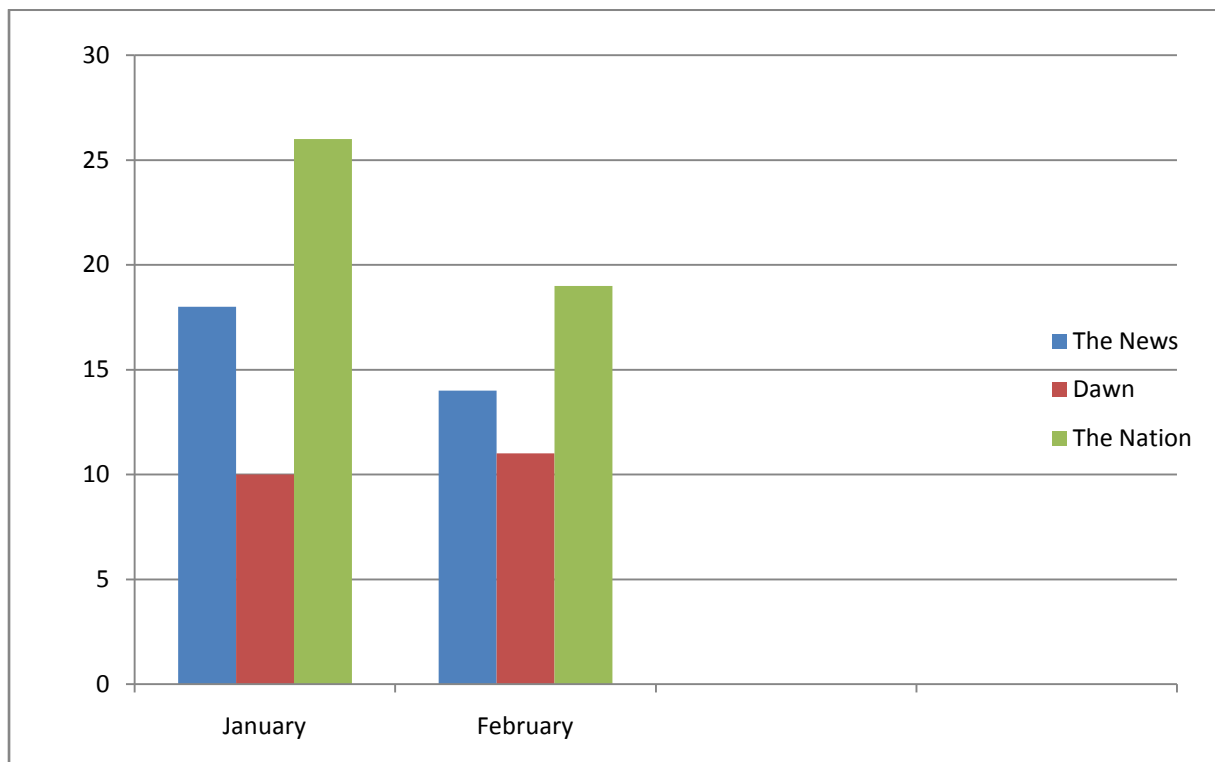


Figure 1 Comparison of Frequency of the Editorials published in daily the News, Dawn, and the Nation

Figure 1 elaborates comparison between the coverage of general elections 2008 given by the daily *The News*, *Dawn* and daily *The Nation*. The figure shows that the daily *The Nation* has provided slightly more coverage than daily *The News* and *Dawn*. Secondly daily *The News* published more editorial than the *Dawn*. All three newspapers donated more space and published many editorials in the month of February in comparison to the month of January. However, print media provide more space on the editorial pages to the assassination of Benazir's Bhutto. The incident remained on the top of the agenda of press in Pakistan.

Slant of Editorials

The slant of the editorials published about 2008 general elections was considered in term of favorable, unfavorable and neutral. The whole editorial story was the coding unit of study. The event received tremendous slant against the ruler. It may be the result of judiciary restoration movement or the waves of Benazir Bhutto assassination against the government

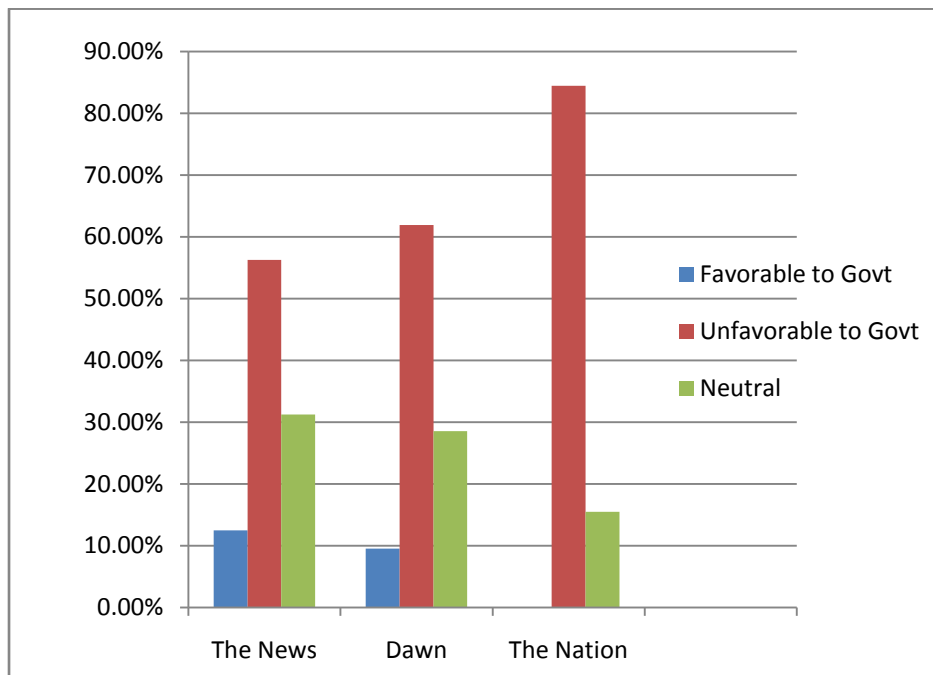


Figure 2 Slant of Editorials published about the event of 2008 elections

Interestingly, the figure 2 shows that the daily *The News* published 12.5 percent editorials in favor of government while 56.25 % coverage was allocated by the daily unfavorable to government on the editorial pages. The paper published 31.25 % neutral editorials regarding elections process.

The daily *Dawn* allotted 9.52 percent editorials in favor of government. The daily donated a space for 61.90 % editorial stories unfavorable to the government while 28.57 neutral stories were published in the same time of study about the voting.

On the other hand, daily *The Nation* did not contribute a single editorial in favor of government. The percentage of the unfavorable editorial stories was 84.44 towards government while the percentage of neutral editorials was only 15.5 of the daily.

The editorials about the general elections that were found in favor of government included Chief of Army Staff Ashfaq Pervez Kayani direction in which he barred all officers to restrain from unauthorized meeting with political leaders. This step was highly lauded by the print media in the editorials. The unfavorable editorials were about the poor performance of caretaker government, Elections Commission and terrible law and order situation in the country. Musharraf policies to get PML (Q) party elected in the elections were widely criticized. The plans of rigging and tactics to delay the elections were also highlighted in the stories.

Placement of the Editorials

Placement of stories on the pages of a newspaper has many times great impact on readers than stories published on the inner pages. The placement of editorial is an important function in media gate-keeping which eventually results in agenda-setting of media.

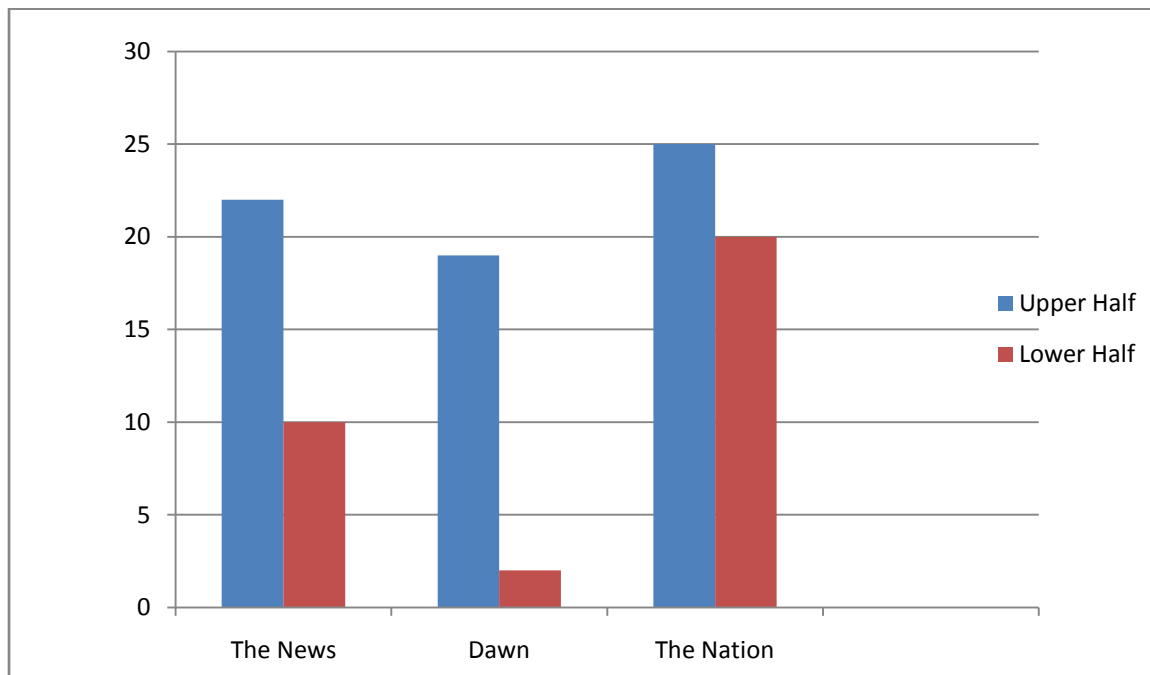


Figure 3 Placement of the editorials published about 2008 elections

The event of the general elections remained at top priority of the leading English newspapers till the holding of polls. All the three dailies of this study provided fabulous coverage to the elections process and disseminated significant information among the general public. These newspapers gave utmost coverage to the event on the upper half of the editorial pages.

Figure 3 explains that daily *The News* published 22 editorials on upper half of the pages while the daily placed 9 stories on the lower half of the pages. The daily *Dawn* provided a space to 19 editorials on upper half of the pages while the same donated space to only 2 stories about elections on the lower half of the pages. The daily *The Nation* published 25 editorials on the upper half of the pages and placed 20 stories bearing elections news on the lower half of the pages.

The ratio between upper half and lower half remained 67.34 percent and 31.63 %. Upper half received 67.34 editorials while the lower half received 31.63 percent on the pages of these newspapers during 49 days study period. It shows that upper half of the editorial pages get more stories rather than lower half about the elections issues.

Slanting of Election issues

Regarding the coverage of general election issues, these dailies provided more space to the stories of anti-government frames. The figure 4 illustrates that daily *The News* published 4 stories giving a pro-government stance. The daily make public 18 editorials against the ruler giving anti-government frame and stance. *Daily Dawn* donated only 2 editorials by giving pro-government frame while it provide a space to 13 editorials against the government and give anti-government frame. The daily *The Nation* did not contribute a single pro-government story on editorial pages during the study period. On the other hand, the daily provided tremendous space to anti-government stories on its editorial pages. It published 38 editorials with an anti- government frame.

The dailies showed their clear policy on the general election issues. They did not support the then president Musharraf and caretaker government steps and policies which were taken for the conduct of free and fair elections in the country. They provide a huge space to the stories by expressing apprehension about the rigging and poor performance and arrangements of the government. The issue of judiciary restoration was also included in the coverage against the government.

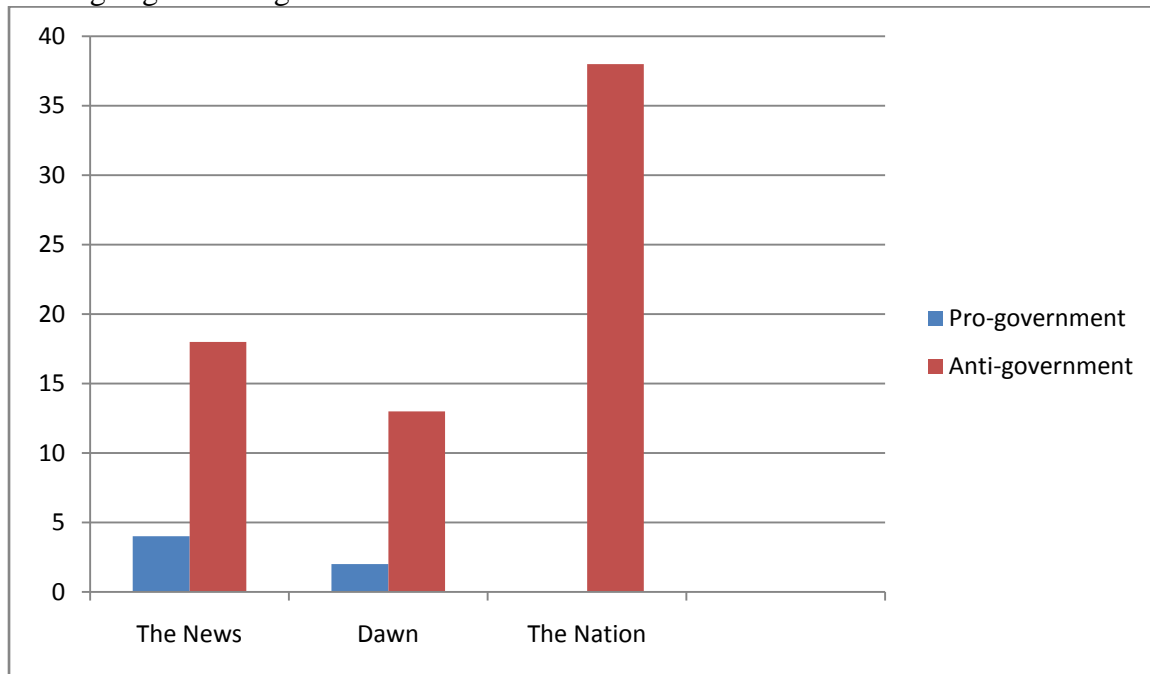


Figure 4 Slanting of Elections issues about pro and anti-government stance

Discussion

The research can be classified as exploratory. The aim of the research was to discover the treatment and nature provided by the English leading newspapers of the country to the big and crucial event of general elections 2008. Altogether, 409 editorials were read and the researcher found 98 editorials relevant to the topic. Daily *The News* published 32, *Dawn* placed 21 and *The Nation* contributed 45 stories about elections during the study period from 01-01-2008 to 18-02-2008. Daily *The News* devoted 16396 words to the event of elections coverage. *Daily Dawn* gave 9931 words to the same event while daily *The Nation* contributed 17310 words toward elections process. *Dawn* is considered as one of the best daily among the elite newspapers in the country. Result of the study elaborates that daily *The Nation* allocated more space than daily *The News* and *Dawn*. Daily *The Nation* and *The News* are being regarded as a political organ in the country politics while *Dawn* is treated as an ideological daily in Pakistan.

In the light of Agenda Setting theory it is significant to say that these three English dailies involved in the politics through different ways. We can see a clear line of agenda of the dailies on the event of elections 2008. It is pertinent to mention that neutral editorials published by these dailies are mainly comprised of the different political parties' statements, their campaign and alliance with the other parties. The coverage style was different in these three newspapers. Newspaper *The Nation* is the third largest English daily in the country published maximum number of editorials regarding elections. Daily *The News* donated less



coverage than *The Nation* to the elections while daily *Dawn* is the largest English daily in Pakistan provided very less space to the elections related editorials.

Dr. Siraj (1997) states under the heading of 'Media Hegemony' that "the assumption of media hegemony is that the ideas of the ruling class become ruling ideas in society" (Sohail, 2008). However, in this research the samples of these three dailies did not support the design of this media hegemony in the society. All the three newspapers published maximum editorials against the government. They openly criticized government policies. It was established that daily *The Nation* was more involved in the 2008 general elections than *The News* and daily *Dawn*.

Democracy in Pakistan is getting power despite countless attacks by dictators since 1947. For the first time in the history, a democratic transaction was witnessed after general elections in 2013. A vibrant media played a key role in this regard. Independent Judiciary and powerful media made it difficult for the military establishment to topple the democratic regime. It is the fantasy of media that it is promoting democratic culture in the country. Media plays outstanding role in disseminating democratic norms among the people.

Many political leaders rendered sacrifices for the promotion of democracy. Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto are the icons of democracy in Pakistan. There are weaknesses in the system but on the other hand democratic culture is being groomed. The 18th amendment is the shining examples of democracy enable the provinces to perform with their own well without central government influence. This amendment provides complete freedom to the provinces and they are enjoying complete provincial autonomy. However, a true democracy is far away from the people, but its roots are knocking every door and every corner of the country. In Pakistan, democracy needs time to resolve the people issues like at par. The media and democracy are now inter-dependable on each other.

In conclusion we can say that the print media can play important role in shaping the minds of the masses and public views. The press has marvelous effect on the policies of government. This is the reason that media is being considered the fourth pillar of state. It is a reality that we consider media as a mean of education, entertainment and information. We can utilize media in better ways in eliminating unwanted practices and customs prevailing in the society. The media has capability to save segments of society and individuals, whenever their privileges are infringed.

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