

## Editorial coverage of leading political parties for General elections 2018. JRSP, Vol 57, Issue 1, 2020)

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### Print Media and Pakistani politics: Editorial coverage of leading political parties for General elections 2018.

#### Abstract

*Media have become a key element during the electoral process as it frames the image of political parties in a way that influence public opinion accordingly. This research aims at analyzing the editorial coverage of leading Pakistani political parties PML (N)<sup>1</sup>, PTI<sup>2</sup> and PPP<sup>3</sup> in four mainstream newspapers during the general elections of 2018. For this study, National newspapers-two each of English (Dawn and The News) and Urdu language (Jang and Nawaiwaqt) were selected and their content was analyzed. Furthermore, it identifies the pattern of editorial coverage (positive, negative, neutral) given to the political parties of selected newspapers from 25 May 2018 to 25 July 2018. For this purpose, quantitative and qualitative content analysis was conducted under the theoretical framework of agenda setting. Finding of the study revealed that PML (N) was given the maximum coverage as compared to other political parties. However, all the newspapers had similar framing pattern towards PML (N) during the general elections of 2018.*

**Key words:** Print media, editorial coverage, general election 2018, agenda setting

#### Introduction:

Mass media is considered to have a significant potential to influence public opinion as it has widened the mindset of the society by presenting various perspectives and angles to a particular issue. Its function is to provide information as well as helps in constructing and shaping the reality (Dwivedi & Pandey, 2013; Oluwakemi & Brickens, 2016). With the evolving technology, media has become far more interactive as compare to traditional media. It is a powerful tool of communication used to influence public behavior and societal change (Abroms & Maibach, 2008; Happer & Philo, 2013; Sormanen & Dutton, 2015).

Media organizations and media people determines the news items as well as the scale of priority given to certain issues. The media also tell us which issues are the prime ones among plenty of ongoing issues. Due to limited resources, people are dependent on mass media to acquire desired information, from which they make their own sense of issues. Media frames information in a way to influence public's belief and attitudes (Berinsky & Kinder, 2006). Various forms of media including print media present the views of the outside world that helps us in forming and reshaping our opinion towards a certain issue. Considering this notion, media have power to influence the public opinion by setting the agenda and prioritizing the news items.

Media is the fourth pillar of democracy; it plays a vital role in functioning of the state effectively by educating the public and keep them updated with the ongoing political scenario in a country (Mir, 2019). Media and politics have a defined relationship of symbiosis in which both benefits each other (Enli, 2017). Politicians need media coverage

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to promote their political campaigns, as it is the only way to win public's trust. On the other hand, media need political parties to keep their citizens well informed and updated regarding their political activities. They both are dependent on each other. However, media is famous for its watchdog role to government policies as well as making the politicians accountable to the public (Simon Targema, 2017).

Similarly, media in Pakistan is contributing its role in strengthening the democracy, forming public opinions and in setting the agendas to certain issues (Hanan et al., 2016). It is found that media supported the leading political party PML (N) during general elections in 2013 (Toor & Saleem, 2020). Hence, media framing helped PML (N) in winning the general election 2013.

The purpose of this research is to analyze the outcome of media agenda setting in general election 2018 and, to find out that does media agenda changed voter's mindset. Meaning to vote for the party is that media is inclined towards that particular political party. To achieve this objective, this study revealed the content from newspapers two of each Urdu and English dailies. Editorials from selected newspapers are analyzed during the general elections 2018 under the theoretical framework of agenda setting.

### **Literature review:**

Various studies have been conducted on a similar subject. Davis (2005) explained the amount of media coverage given to some South African political parties during the elections 2004. He emphasized that well-resourced parties get significant media coverage as they spend great amount of money in various forms of media to influence the maximum voters. Whereas, some of the political parties get press coverage because of media's tendency to generate the news from updated information.

Abbott (2011) examined the electoral authoritarianism and print media in Malaysia. Researcher selected six leading newspapers (two Malay-language, two English language and two Tamil language) and analyzed content for two periods including pre-election biased campaigns started from 2006 until the general election 2008. Besides the fact that majority of Malaysian media is private it was identified that print media is overtly supporting the government in pre-election campaigns though, news coverage during the election showed description with little context, analysis and critique. Similarly, Sani (2014) conducted a study on political partisanship in the mainstream print media during the 13th general election in Malaysia. Content analysis of news items, editorials, opinion columns, election advertisements from selected newspapers unveils that almost all the leading print media had a tilt towards ruling party. However, few of Chinese newspapers provided a slight balanced portrayal of political parties.

Gilardi et al., (2017) explored gender gap in media coverage during election campaigns. They focused on print and online news items covering the 2015 Swiss national election and explored the election coverage as gender stereotyped. In addition, Heldman et al., (2005) observed the print media coverage of female presidential candidate for US election in 1999. They analyzed the two data sets for content analysis; two of each include the article section from US major newspapers. Findings revealed the gender differences in number of ways including appearance, personality and power. Whereas, it is suggested that press coverage is decidedly gender bias that is likely hindered her candidacy.

Cushion et al., (2018) examined the importance of intermedia agenda setting influence of national newspapers during the 2015 electoral cycle. They studied the relationship between newspaper agenda setting and television news. The results revealed that news related party policies, motives and agendas published in newspapers is visible in television.

Hopmann et al., (2010) conducted a research on effects of election news coverage on voter choice of political parties. By analyzing the content, they found that the more positive coverage toward a given party is, the more voters are inclined to vote for that political party. Another study being conducted by Hopmann et al., (2012) during the general elections campaign in 2007 indicate that political parties have significant influence on which news media cover during the election. Based on content analysis of political news stories and published press releases, it is noted that political parties get short-term news coverage based on their published press releases during election campaigns.

As the technology gets advanced, political parties started using social media for their promotion as Williams and Gulati (2013) reviewed the usage of Facebook during 2006 election in United States of America. They report that all the candidates of political parties used Facebook for their promotion that include their personal and official information.

Similarly, a study confirms that the effective usage of social media including Facebook and Twitter helps the politicians to maintain a good relationship with their voters (Hellweg, 2011). Moreover, a study has dealt with the activity of local and regional politicians during the election period. It presents a contrasting view of mentioned developments as many of politicians prefer traditional media (Larsson & Skogerbø, 2018).

### **Research Questions**

**RQ1:** Which political party received maximum coverage in the editorial section of the print media during the General Election 2018, Pakistan?

**RQ2:** Does the pattern of coverage effected the results of General Election 2018?

### **Agenda Setting Theory as theoretical framework:**

Agenda setting is one of the core functions of mass media that tell audiences what to think and worry about (Nizam, 2019). Considering the literature review, researchers found it most appropriate for current study. An American writer, Walter Lippmann presented the main concept of this theory in 1920s when he expressed his concern on potential role of mass media by influencing people's behavior over certain issues (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2007). He explained the media's role by bridging the gap between the world outside and the images in people's mind. Mass media have power to shape the public opinion, as editorial section of a newspaper is considered a backbone of a newspaper and number of studies shows that traditional media frequently set agenda that helps people in making their minds accordingly. Agenda setting theory highlights the relationship between the importance that mass media give to an issue and public reaction to such issues. The significant contribution later added to this theory in 1970s when McComb and shaw explored the ability of media to influence voter's opinion during US presidential election campaign in Chapel Hill (Nizam, 2019). Their research identified the media tendency to affect its audiences in various manners. For instance, media had less percentage on people who used media only to acquire information related to elections. It was increased for that segment of the public who actively followed up news particularly for presidential election in 1968 (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Later on, researchers established a relationship between media agenda and public agenda and concluded that mass media play an important role in creating or filtering the reality. Meanwhile agenda's second level was also identified which decided the importance of certain parts of the issues during presidential elections (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2007). Since then, it has been widely applied to study mass media impacts in changing political behavior during election campaigns. Hence, this study aims to understand the pattern of traditional media agenda setting in General election 2018. In addition, researchers are interested in finding out if the media agenda affected the results of general election 2018 in Pakistan.

### **Methodology**

For this research, Quantitative and Qualitative content analysis method is applied, this method is extensively used in social sciences as well as in political communication studies. (Neuendorf & Kumar, 2016). Usage of content analysis has further extended to political content in news media, advertisements, debates and recently blogs and social media. In this study, we are analyzing four different newspapers. Two newspapers in English language i.e. Dawn and The News and two newspapers in Urdu Language i.e. Jang and Express. The time chosen lies in between May 25, 2018 to July 25, 2018. The data analyzed falls under following categories:

1. Party leaders
2. Political party
3. Party policies (previous, Current, Future)
4. Party candidates and Party workers

For the study, content of 677 editorials were analyzed. Out of which 210 editorials were written on PML (N), PPP and (PTI). Therefore, it is found that 31% of coverage was given to above-mentioned parties in the given time period during the general elections of 2018. Here, the frequency and type of coverage (Positive, Negative and

Neutral) were also studied and the data is measured on three point Likert scale ranging from positive to negative.

### Finding and Interpretation

**Table No. 1: Newspapers editorials and party wise coverage.**

Newspaper		Political parties			Total
		PML (N)	PPPP	PTI	
Dawn	Count	29	13	20	62
	%	46.7%	20.9%	32.2%	29.5%
The News	Count	25	5	11	41
	%	60.9%	12.1%	26.8%	19.5%
Jang	Count	24	11	9	44
	%	54.5%	25%	20.4%	20.9%
Nawaiwaqt	Count	44	10	9	63
	%	69.8%	15.8%	14.2%	30%
Total	Count	122	39	49	210
	%	58%	18.5%	23.5%	

According to the table, total 210 editorials were written on afore mentioned leading political parties that is 31% coverage from the four mainstream newspapers i.e. DAWN, THE NEWS, JANG and NAWAIWAQT from 25 May 2018 to 25 July 2018 in general election 2018. Dawn wrote total 62 editorials on these three parties. Whilst, The News gave 19.5% coverage to these parties (the newspaper wrote 41 editorials). On the other hand, Jang and Nawaiwaqt, the two urdu mainstream newspaper gave 20.9% and 30% coverage to these parties. Both newspapers wrote 44 and 63 editorials on these parties respectively.

It illustrates that PML (N) received the most coverage by all these newspapers. Total 122 editorials were written on PML (N), which resulted in 58% coverage in the 18' general elections in Pakistan. PTI and PPPP preceding PML (N) by 23.5 % and 18.5% respectively. Meanwhile, their editorial count was 49 and 39 respectively.

The table also suggests that PML (N) received most coverage by each newspaper that has been included in the study. Dawn newspaper coverage counts total 46.7% to PML (N). However, PPPP and PTI received 20.9% and 32.2% coverage by the same newspaper in the given time period. The News, on the other hand, gave 60.9% coverage to PML (N), 12.1% to PPPP and 26.8% to PTI. Jang gave 54.5% coverage to PML (N), 25% coverage to PPPP and 20.4% to PTI. PML (N) is leading with the most coverage given by Nawaiwaqt. The newspaper gave 69.8% coverage to PML (N) that makes up 44 editorials written on PML (N). Whereas, on PPPP and PTI the newspaper wrote 15.8% and 14.2% coverage. Hence, it can be deduced that PML (N) received maximum coverage in the general election 2018 and PPPP received minimum coverage and PTI fell at the second place in terms of coverage given by above-mentioned newspapers.

**Table No. 2: Pattern of editorial coverage in Newspapers**

Frequency of Editorial	Political parties			
	PML (N)	PPPP	PTI	Total

Positive Ed	Count	47	8	3	58
	%	38.50%	21%	6.10%	27.60%
Negative Ed	count	54	21	34	109
	%	44.20%	53.80%	69%	51.90%
Neutral Ed	count	21	10	12	43
	%	17.20%	25%	24.40%	20.40%
Total Ed	Count	122	38	49	210

The table no 2 illustrates that PML (N) received most positive coverage with 47 (38.5%) editorials written in favor of the party. The party is given minimum negative coverage as compared to the other parties. Although, the number of editorials written against the party is higher i.e. 54 but the percentage of negative written editorials is lower than PPPP and PTI. On the contrary, PTI was given most negative coverage during the election period. Total 69% coverage was against the party. Even though the count of negatively written editorials is lesser than that of PML (N) but in terms of percentage, maximum negative editorials were written against PTI. PPPP falls in the second place with maximum negative editorials. 53.8% of editorials were written negatively about PPPP. The party received 21% coverage showing positive face of the party. However, PTI received minimum positive coverage with only 6.1% of editorials that are in the favor of the party. Whilst it's opposing parties received far better positive coverage as compared to PTI.

The table further reveals that all three parties received neutral coverage as well. Most neutral editorials were written on PPPP. The count of neutral written editorial on PPPP is 10, PML (N) 21 and PTI 12 but the percentage suggests that 25% editorials were written neutrally about the PPPP whilst 17.2% and 24.4% editorial were written neutrally on PML (N) and PTI respectively.

### Discussion

The study focuses on the impact of media coverage on the general election 2018 as well as to understand the media agenda setting done during elections. To achieve this purpose content analysis of four mainstream newspapers were conducted. Two of them were English newspapers i.e. Dawn and The News and two were Urdu newspapers i.e. Jang and Nawaiwaqt. The findings suggest that the PML (N) had given the maximum coverage, yet, it had failed to win the elections. Therefore, it is deduced that agenda setting was futile in elections as well as the traditional media had failed to frame the minds of the voters.

In the election 2018, PML (N) received maximum coverage by the editorial section of selected newspapers. While PTI received second most coverage and PPPP fell in the third place. Further, Table No. 1 shows that PML (N) gained more media attention as compared to PPPP and PTI. A study shows that ruling party usually receive more media attention than the rest of the parties in a country. Strömbäck & Kaid (2009) studied the elections coverage in Serbia and concluded that ruling party received more news stories than other parties did. Here, in the General Election 2018 the ruling party, which at that time was PML (N), received more media coverage.

In terms of coverage pattern given to these parties, PTI received most negative coverage and PPPP fell in the second place at the same time PML (N) stands third as shown in Table no 2. On the other hand, PML (N) received most positive coverage, PPPP find itself in the second and PTI in the third place. Here, it is established that PML (N) had not only received maximum coverage by the editorial section of the print media but also was able to secure most positive coverage by the editorial section of print media during election 2018. Although, the results of the election 2018 indicated that the positive coverage given to PML (N) did not help it in winning the elections. On the other hand, PTI was given the most negative coverage but it was able to secure the majority seats in the general elections.

Therefore, this shows that negative media agenda setting against PTI did not affect the voting behavior of public during election. At this point, it is also important to understand the role of social media in election outcome. As it is perceived from 2013 elections in Pakistan, social media played an important role in mobilizing the people. Rao (2020) suggested that social media has changed the concept of political campaigning in election period. He concluded that in 2013 elections, PTI was able to get voters' attention through social media. Majority of social media users were young people due to which in 2013 general election all three parties PML (N), PPP and PTI focused their campaigns primarily on youth (Hussain et al., 2018). PTI published highest number of advertisement but it did not help them to win that election. Similarly, during general election 2018 in Pakistan, almost all political parties tried to reach its audience through social media and the impact is evident from the election result.

Kruikemeier et al., (2018) implied that the social media and traditional media influence each other. Thus, it can be stated that social media affected the agenda setting of traditional media as well as the results of election 2018. Likewise, Aaldering et al., (2017) describes that during election campaign negative leadership images does not affect the intention of the voter although positive leadership image adds to the stronger effect on voter's intention. Therefore, the outcome of elections showed that despite the negative coverage given to PTI, it failed to change the voter's intention against the party. The negative coverage had no effect on PTI voter. Hence, the negative framing of PTI remained fruitless and agenda setting of media yielded no result.

### Conclusion

In this study, it is concluded that PML (N) received maximum amount of coverage by the newspapers but it did not help the party to win the general elections 2018. In addition, the party received highest positive coverage during election period but the outcome of the election was in favor of PTI. Pakistan Tehreek-e Insaf had not only given lesser coverage but had also received negative coverage by the traditional media. At this point, social media factor comes into play. During the elections, social media campaigning helped PTI to connect with its voters. Thus, social media overshadowed the image of PTI created by traditional media as well as it reshaped their voter's opinion. This research opens more questions regarding how social media has changed the traditional forms of election campaigning and the role of social media in contemporary politics. Furthermore, there is a need to understand the changing dynamics in political campaigning and, also to what extent social media is capable to change public attitude towards political leadership in a country.

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