

## Reporting Pak-Afghan Relations: A Comparative Analysis of Pakistani and Afghan Media

### Abstract

This research paper investigates the role of media towards foreign policy issues between Pakistan and Afghanistan. For this purpose, it examines the type of coverage Pak-Afghan relations get in Pakistani newspapers *Dawn* and *The News International*, Afghan newspaper *Afghanistan Times* and Afghan news website *Kabul Press*. Content analysis of news reports from years 2013 and 2014 is done in order to know the framing of Pak-Afghan relations. Results reveal that Pakistani newspapers give more favorable and positive coverage than Afghan news media which tends to be more critical of Pakistan. Thus it is evident that media of both countries seems to be aligned with the foreign policy of their governments.

**Keywords:** Pak-Afghan Relationship, Foreign Policy, Media Coverage.

### Introduction

Pakistan and Afghanistan are neighboring countries having bilateral relations. There have always been great ups and downs in their relations since the inception of Pakistan (Siddiqi, 2008; Sial, 2011; International Crisis Group, 2014). Both countries are member of SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Corporation) along with other eight countries. Both of the countries have strategic relations with USA as major non-NATO allies (Hamilton, 2014).

Afghanistan is declared the third most dangerous country for investment in the world, while Pakistan is on ninth number (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2015). This indicates very well that both countries share not only the border with each other but also the circumstances. Other than terrorism many other issues are faced by both of them, particularly issues of Afghan Refugees. Afghan refugees have been living in Pakistan since Soviet Union forces announced the war on Afghanistan. When U.S announced a war in Afghanistan then again a great number of refugees entered Pakistan and settled in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, total number of Afghan refugees is almost 1.5 million and Pakistan is on top of the list for hosting the largest number of refugees (UNHCR, 2015).

Despite having these similarities, Pak-Afghan relations had passed through thick and thin. Many conflicted issues have made their relations a bumpy ride. 2250 km long unsettled Durand Line between two countries, allegations of extremists' infiltration and cross border terrorism from both sides, aspiration of Pakistan for strategic depth and desire of Afghanistan for combining the Pashtun

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areas of both countries to form Pashtunistan are among such conflicts (Qaseem, 2008; Gul, 2012; International Crisis Group, 2014).

Many studies have been done on the Pak-Afghan relations and its historical background but media's role is touched by very few. Media has become an important and dominating tool to manipulate the public opinion. It may also provide connection between public and government officials or politicians. So this article attempts to examine the role of media of both countries in fostering the diplomatic relations. It also investigates the type of coverage Pak-Afghan relations get in the news media of both countries.

The Afghan and Pakistani media was not well established in early days. The rapid and impressive growth by the media of both countries particularly of Pakistan in last decade set precedent for other countries. At the end of 2012, almost 80 terrestrial TV stations, around 175 FM radio stations and hundreds of print media publications were operating in Afghanistan. On the other hand, Print media of Pakistan was already established even before partition as during British rule many newspapers were working successfully (PIPS, 2013). Electronic media both TV and radio have got boost in the last decade when General Pervez Musharraf was ruling the country. After he opened the air waves many private TV channels both news and entertainment sprung up in great number.

Media becomes a reflection of foreign policy and source of awareness for high rank officials. In both the cases, strategic importance of media is undeniable. This impact of media on the foreign policy of any country is dubbed as CNN effect. According to this theory of CNN effect, media can be an *accelerant* to policy decision-making, an *impediment* to the achievement of policy goals and most importantly a *policy agenda-setting agent* (Livingstone, 1997). Media as agenda setting agent becomes a manipulating force. National interests and foreign policy matters are decided according to the content of media. Thus foreign policy of the government becomes a mere reflection of its media content. On the other hand it is also debated that rather than giving its agenda, media actually follows the directives given by government. While covering the foreign policy issues, government's view point and policies are more prominent than any other point of view (Bennett, 1991; Bennett, Lawrence & Livingstone, 2006).

Whether media follows government policy or influences foreign policy, it surely does set the agenda, only the goals of this agenda setting may be different. People are informed about realities of the world through media without even experiencing them first hand thus generating the public opinion (Lippman, 1922). In a study Cohen (1963) explained the relations of press and foreign policy while saying that media "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (p. 13).

So actually media does prioritize the issue for its audience and readers which is actually agenda setting (McComb & Shaw, 1972). Media does so by gathering and presenting the news with a specific treatment thus giving the news desired meanings (Entman, 2005). Framing is a step ahead of agenda setting theory. At agenda setting phase audiences are told "what to think about" while in second phase framing tells people how to think about (McCombs, Shaw &

Weaver, 1997). Through using certain frames, desired attitude change is brought in people (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). Selection of these frames depends on the type of issue as media coverage varies for every foreign policy issue depending on the involvement of government. According to Schulz (2013) this involvement may be categorized as direct involvement, indirect involvement, and no involvement.

In case of Pak-Afghan relations, both countries are directly involved with each other and their interests are deeply intertwined. Therefore, this study examines the type of coverage Pak-Afghan relations get in Pakistani newspapers *Dawn* and *The News International*, Afghan newspaper *Afghanistan Times* and Afghan news website *Kabul Press*. Following research questions are addressed in this study.

**RQ1:** How Pakistani newspapers *Dawn* and *The News International*, Afghan newspaper *Afghanistan Times* and Afghan news website *Kabul Press* are framing the relations of both countries?

**RQ2:** Is there any difference in the coverage of Pak-Afghan relations in Pakistani and Afghan news media with reference to their frames and prominence?

### **Methodology**

For this study, content analysis of the news items published from January 2013 to December 2104 in the newspapers *Dawn* and *The News International* of Pakistan, *Afghanistan Times* and news website *Kabul Press* of Afghanistan is done. Only those news items were selected which were related to Pak-Afghan relations. Content analysis is used for “defining, measuring, and analyzing both the substance and meaning of texts or messages or documents” (Beck & Manuel, 2008, p. 35). For the selected newspapers, data is collected from the online versions.

In case of Afghan newspaper *Afghanistan Times* and website *Kabul Press* not many relevant news are found so without application of any sampling technique, almost all the news items fulfilling the purpose of the study have been selected.

Systematic random sampling technique is applied to select the news items from both Pakistani newspapers. One news item was selected after each fifteen days from January 2013 to December 2104. Thus total 100 news items are analyzed for both Pakistani newspapers.

In order to explore the framing of Pak-Afghan relations in the newspapers of both countries, news items are coded as favorable, unfavorable and neutral. Length of every news item is checked to know further that how much prominence is given to different types of news. According to the emergent criteria among the selected news items, we have set the standard for length of news items which are coded according to the total number of words. News reports of 100 to 250 words as short, 251 to 500 words as medium and news items having more than 500 words are considered long news.

## Results and Discussion

### Pakistani Newspapers

Data is collected from Pakistani newspapers *Dawn* and *The News International* to examine the coverage of Pak-Afghan relations.

**Dawn:** Total 50 news items of *Dawn* were selected, 25 from the year 2013 and 25 from 2014.

Table 1  
*Length and Framing of News Items in Dawn (2013-2014)*

News Items	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Total
Short	14	8	5	27
Medium	11	5	4	20
Long	1	0	2	3
Total	26	13	11	50

Table 1 shows that out of 27 short news reports, 14 are favorable, 8 unfavorable and 5 neutral. In medium length news reports, 11 are favorable, 5 unfavorable and 4 neutral. 1 long news report is favorable to Pak-Afghan relationship and 2 are neutral. Hence, *Dawn* newspaper seems to be in favor of Pak-Afghan relations as the favorable news reports are more in numbers.

**The News International:** 50 news reports are selected as a sample from *The News International* in which 25 news reports are from year 2013 and 25 from 2014. Table 2 shows lengthwise data divided into categories of favorable, unfavorable and neutral. In both years 24 news reports are in favor of Pak-Afghan relations. According to ratio of news reports, *The News International* is in favor of Pak-Afghan relations as favorable news reports are dominating the unfavorable and neutral.

Table 2  
*Length and Framing of News Items in The News International (2013-2014)*

News Items	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Total
Short	15	4	10	29
Medium	8	2	6	16
Long	1	2	2	5
Total	24	8	18	50

Both Pakistani newspapers are giving more favorable and positive coverage and thus promoting the Pak-Afghan relation.

### Afghan Newspapers

Afghan newspaper *Afghanistan Times* and news website *Kabul Press* are selected for this study as both are in English language and available online.

**Kabul Press:** In *Kabul Press*, total 30 relevant news reports are found in both the years. Table 3 shows the cross tabulation of both length and frame type of news reports in *Kabul Press*. 5 news reports are found favorable, 17 unfavorable and 8 neutral. Though, number of long news reports is more than medium and short news reports but most of the long news fall under the category of

unfavorable. It indicates that *Kabul Press* give prominence to Pak-Afghan relations but does not report it positively.

Table 3  
*Length and Framing of News Items in Kabul Press (2013-2014)*

News Items	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Total
Short	1	1	1	3
Medium	1	6	4	11
Long	3	10	3	16
Total	5	17	8	30

**Afghanistan Times:** From *Afghanistan Times*, 30 news reports are collected for both years. Table 4 indicates that *Afghanistan Times* is not supporting Pak-Afghan relations as the number of unfavorable is more as compared to the number of favorable news.

Table 4  
*Length and Framing of News Items in Afghanistan Times (2013-2014)*

News Items	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	Total
Short	1	3	1	5
Medium	2	8	6	16
Long	1	4	4	9
Total	4	15	11	30

Only 4 favorable, 15 unfavorable and 11 neutral news reports are found. The ratio of short news report is less than medium and long news reports. This again is the same pattern we have witnessed in *Kabul Press*. Afghan news media is not promoting the positive stuff regarding Pak-Afghan relations. Already many flaws are present in the policies of both countries. Instead of promoting the positivity, they are promoting the unfavorable news.

**Comparison between Pakistani and Afghan News Media**

For this study, total 100 news items from Pakistani newspapers and 60 from Afghan newspaper and news website are selected.

Table 5  
*Comparison of Types of Frames in Pakistani and Afghan News Media*

News Media	Types of Frames			Total
	Favorable	Unfavorable	Neutral	
Dawn	26	13	11	50
The News International	24	8	18	50
Kabul Press	5	17	8	30
Afghanistan Times	4	15	11	30

While comparing the newspapers of both media as shown in Table 5, Pakistani newspapers *Dawn* and *The News International* seem to be almost on the same page. They are giving coverage which is in favor of Pak-Afghan relations. Out of 100 news reports, 50% are in favor, 21% are not in favor and 29% are neutral.

On the other hand, Afghan newspaper *Afghanistan Times* and news website *Kabul Press* are giving parallel results. Out of 60 news reports only 15% news items are in favor though their long news reports are more in number than a Pakistani newspaper which shows that Afghan media also give prominence to the issues related to Pakistan but does not cover them favorably.

Pakistani media seems to build positive ties. Percentage of unfavorable news reports is also present but it is lesser than percentage of news reports in favor of Pak-Afghan relations. Pakistani media does not retaliate against the policies of Afghan media. It is stepping forward to make close relationship.

**Statistical Analysis**

Though simple count has already cleared the picture but in order to know the statistically valid answer to research questions, chi-square test is applied between the length and types of frames of news reports.

Table 6  
*Cross Tabulation between Length and Types of Frames of News Items*

Length of News Items	Types of Frames			Total
	Unfavorable	Neutral	Favorable	
Short	16	17	31	64
	32.7%	32.7%	52.5%	40.0%
Medium	17	24	22	63
	34.7%	46.2%	37.3%	39.4%
Long	16	11	6	33
	32.7%	21.2%	10.2%	20.6%
Total	49	52	59	160
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 6.1  
*Chi-Square Test*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	11.192 <sup>a</sup>	4	0.024
Likelihood Ratio	11.256	4	0.024
N of Valid Cases	160		

- a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 10.11.

Results in Table 6.1 do not reveal any statistically significant relationship between both variables (chi-square value = 11.192, df = 2,  $p > .001$ ). In Table 6, percentages in cross tabulation also reflect that there is not much difference between the lengths of news with reference to different types of frames.

Another chi-square test was done between the news media and types of frames they use for Pak-Afghan relations.

Table 7  
Cross Tabulation between News Media and Types of Frames

News Media	Types of Frames			Total
	Unfavorable	Neutral	Favorable	
Dawn	9	15	26	50
	18.4%	28.8%	44.1%	31.2%
The News International	8	18	24	50
	16.3%	34.6%	40.7%	31.2%
Kabul Press	17	8	5	30
	34.7%	15.4%	8.5%	18.8%
Afghanistan Times	15	11	4	30
	30.6%	21.2%	6.8%	18.8%
Total	49	52	59	160
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Table 7.1  
Chi-Square Test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	29.785 <sup>a</sup>	6	.000
Likelihood Ratio	30.894	6	.000
N of Valid Cases	160		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 9.19.

Table 7.1 shows statistically significant relationship between two (chi-square = 29.785, df = 6 and  $p < .001$ ) is shown. According to Table 7 significantly reasonable amount of favorable news items were found both in *Dawn* (44.1%) and *The News International* (40.7%) as compared to the *Kabul Press* (8.5%) and *Afghanistan Times* (6.8%).

In order to further validate the above results, another chi-square test was applied on the variable of news media with the categories of Pakistani and Afghan media and types of frames they use.

Table 8  
*Cross Tabulation of Types of Frames in Pak-Afghan Media*

News Media	Types of Frames			Total
	Unfavorable	Neutral	Favorable	
Pakistani News Media	17 34.7%	33 63.5%	50 84.7%	100 62.5%
Afghan News Media	32 65.3%	19 36.5%	9 15.3%	60 37.5%
Total	49 100.0%	52 100.0%	59 100.0%	160 100.0%

Table 8.1  
*Chi-Square Test*

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	28.643 <sup>a</sup>	2	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	29.770	2	0.000
N of Valid Cases	160		

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 18.38.

Results demonstrated statistically significant relationship between these two variables (chi-square = 28.643, df = 2,  $p < .001$ ) which is clear from Table 8.1. While cross tabulation in Table 8 reveal that Pakistani media reported Pak-Afghan relation largely in favorable way (84.7%) as compared to favorable frames of Afghan media (15.3%). In the same way Afghan media used mostly unfavorable frames (65.3%) for Pak-Afghan relations as compared to Pakistani newspapers (34.7%).

### Conclusion

Results indicate that Pakistani media has given positive coverage to Pak-Afghan relations in the year 2013 and 2014 while Afghan media is more critical towards the issue. Thus it is evident that media of both countries seem to be aligned with the foreign policy of their governments.

As earlier we have discussed that Pak-Afghan relationships has always been bumpy. Results of the study also show this pattern of coverage in the years 2013 and 2014 which were the years of elections in both Pakistan and Afghanistan. Main focus of the study was to see the attitude of the newspapers of both countries and examine that whether they are promoting the positive news or not. Pakistani media is found to give more positive and favorable coverage to Pak-Afghan relations. Pakistani government desires to have good diplomatic relations with Afghanistan, probably this is the reason that Pakistani media has also realized this dire need regarding the foreign policy of country and given positive coverage. On the other hand Afghan government seems apprehensive of the role of Pakistan

in their internal conditions. Therefore their media also does not treat Pakistan as an ally and they have been more critical towards the issues.

Media can surely play positive role in connecting with neighboring countries. In order to resolve conflicted issues with mutual understanding, media of both countries may launch projects like 'Aman ki Asha' which is a mutual project launched by the Indian and Pakistani media groups in order to promote good relations between Pakistan and India. Media must arrange its content in order to promote peace. On different forums media can arrange events to aware the public about the significance of good relations with neighboring countries.

Pak-China economic corridor is strategically important not only for Pakistan but for Afghanistan also. This project will be significant for the economic progress of both countries. It can only be accomplished if terrorism is diminished. Media can be helpful in this regard as well by running awareness raising and promotional campaigns. Such kind of steps by media can build a good image of both countries in-front of their public and such image will lead towards building a solid opinion resulting in good relationship both at public and government level (Sial, 2011).

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