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Keywords: Media Framing, Media Bias, Political Representation, Dawn, Jang, Pakistan General Elections 2024, Framing Theory, Political Communication

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Framing Techniques, Media Bias, and Its Effects on Political Representation: A Comparative Study of Dawn and Jang's Coverage of the 2024 Pakistan General Elections



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Abstract

The present article discusses the effect of media framing and bias on political representation in the 2024 General Elections of Pakistan. It is a comparative analysis on two of the popular newspapers Dawn, an English & Jang, an Urdu Newspaper. The study applies Entman's Framing Theory and Political Discourse Analysis to examine front-page election coverage in January–February 2024. Findings show Dawn framed elections through accountability, transparency, and legitimacy, while Jang emphasised participation, leadership, and stability. These contrasting ideological and linguistic frames conveyed distinct political messages, with Dawn targeting elites and Jang appealing to a broader Urdu readership. This means that both newspapers made their respective contribution towards the construction of public awareness of the elections. Media framing is important not only as a style to report news but also as a crucial aspect of democracy, legitimacy and ethics of the media in the hybrid political set-up of Pakistan.

Keywords: *Media Framing, Media Bias, Political Representation, Dawn, Jang, Pakistan General Elections 2024, Framing Theory, Political Communication*

Introduction

There is a strong link between media and democracy. A democratic society requires an involved citizenry focused on political activity; and the media needs freedom and independence to do their job effectively. This relationship becomes especially important during elections, when political competition increases and citizens depend heavily on newspapers, television, and digital platforms for information about parties, candidates, institutions, and the electoral process.

The media not only report issues, but also influence them during election campaigns. They inform on issues they choose, amplify voices that they choose and frame the politics in certain ways. In this way by and by media plays a role in determining people's understanding about political reality. According to the agenda setting theory of McCombs and Shaw, the media do not necessarily determine an individual's attitude, but rather what he or she thinks about. Framing theory further this concept by revealing how the media can be instrumental in the interpretation of political issues, events and actors.



As per the views of Anchorage Pakistan, General Elections 2024 were held amidst a highly charged political climate in Pakistan. The nation had been experiencing political polarization, institutional pressures, legal issues, limitations on political campaigning and general concerns about the fairness of the election. Political actors were not equally provided access to mainstream media, some political leaders were disqualified and there were limitations imposed on some campaigns. Meanwhile, public debate also had a high concentration of issues surrounding electoral veracity, democratic legitimacy, and institutional neutrality.

The newspapers as an institution had a crucial role in influencing people's views of elections. While the digital and social media are gaining significance the print media have their significance in Pakistan. As far as political opinion of various segments in the society is concerned, major newspapers like Dawn and Jang have been affecting. As an English language newspaper Dawn's readership primarily consists of elite, policy-oriented, educated and urban readers. Jang being a widely circulated Urdu-language newspaper, has a much larger public readership. Due to these readerships both newspapers can depict the same political happenings in different ways and provide different perceptions of political reality.

This study aims to shed light on the coverage of General Elections in Pakistan by the Dawn and Jang by scrutinizing the issues of media framing, media bias, and political representation. The study provides an analysis of the English language newspaper coverage and Urdu language newspaper coverage to understand how language, ideological stance, readership and placement of the newspaper within the institutional context contribute to shaping political narratives. In terms of media and communication studies, this research demonstrates how same electoral event is framed by newspapers to produce potentially contradictory versions of it. It also provides a broader commentary on these frames and the implications thereof for democratic participation, public trust and political legitimacy in Pakistan.

Problem Statement

Media framing is instrumental in the formation of political discourse, as it affects the way the population perceives things and the way they vote, especially at the time of elections. The issues of media bias, state interference, and unfair political representation were brought to the fore in the highly polarized political situation in Pakistan in the 2024 General Elections. It is important to note that both articles in the category of election coverage, i.e., *Dawn* and *Jang*, took a different approach in their coverage, which showed divergent accounts of political events, electoral legitimacy and democratic processes. This brings about the necessity to critically analyze the way these two newspapers packaged the major issues surrounding the elections. Thus, this research compares the framing of the news item on the topic of the current state of political parties, electoral transparency, and democratic principles in January and February 2024 in the articles by *Dawn* and *Jang* to determine the tendencies of bias, agenda-setting, and possible effects on the opinion of the population.

Research Objectives

The following are the objectives that will guide this study:

1. The use of framing techniques used to cover the 2024 general elections in Pakistan by *Dawn* and *Jang*.
2. To examine the influence of media bias in opinion formation regarding representation of political parties and candidates.

Research Questions

The research will attempt to answer the following questions:

1. How did the 2024 general elections in *Dawn* and *Jang* treat the elections?
2. How do the media bias assess in terms of covering political parties and candidates?

Theoretical Framework:

Framing and Media Bias

Framing theory offers a potent analytical framework to examine the ways in which media texts construct audience perceptions of political events. Building on Goffman's (1974) seminal work and operationalised by Entman (1993), framing is the salience and prominence of aspects of reality in a communicative text. Framing, according to Entman (1993), involves four functions: problem definition, causal attribution, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendations. Such functions are especially evident in election media coverage, which involves judgements of political actors, institutions, and processes. Framing is also closely associated with media bias, as frames can reflect ideological, institutional, and audience biases. In hybrid or polarised democracies like Pakistan, media organisations often voluntarily or by force align with the established power or alternative narratives. Research suggests that in Pakistan, English language newspapers tend to have a critical, watchdog role, whereas Urdu language newspapers put greater emphasis on populist, nationalist, or legitimating frames (Ahmed & Skoric, 2020).

Political Discourse Analysis

In addition to the Framing Theory this research will incorporate Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) which is one of the subfields of Critical Discourse Analysis, as it argued by the academics such as van Dijk (1997) and Fairclough (1995). PDA discusses how the use of language can reinforce or contest power dynamics in terms of word choice, syntax, metaphors and narratives. As far as elections are concerned, PDA creates the chance to reveal taken for granted assumptions, ideological underpinnings and inclusion and exclusion strategies of media reporting. Framing theory and PDA can be used together to analyse both of the overall and specific linguistic aspects of news story.

Media and Political Context of Pakistan's 2024 Elections

The political system in Pakistan has been interrupted by the involvement of democracy, weak institutions and military rule. Although civilian governments have alternated since 2008, doubts persist regarding the important issues of election integrity and supremacy of civilian rule. But the 2024 General Elections took place in a very contentious situation, marked by the arrest and disqualification of main political leaders, claims of pre-poll rigging, and security threats, among others, and media censorship. The media in Pakistan was reported to be subject to censorship, intimidation and cybercensorship during this period, by international observers. Sometimes in this world, Dawn and Jang had significant, different functions. The country's oldest English newspaper, Dawn has a liberal and critical tone and mainly addresses to educated and elite class of urban population. As Pakistani's largest Urdu newspaper Jang has a popular readership and is apt to represent mainstream or popular opinion. It was through these differences in structure and target audience that they represented elections, political leaders and the democratic processes.

Literature Review

Media Framing, Elections and Political Representation

Research on media framing has traditionally focused on the capacity of the media to construct political meanings, especially during elections. Drawing on agenda-setting (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), research on media frames shows how media not only set the agenda but also frame political events with a set of interpretive structures through which news becomes meaningful (Entman, 1993). During elections, frames shape perceptions of candidate legitimacy, institutional legitimacy, and procedural legitimacy (de Vreese, 2005). Semetko and Valkenburg's (2000) generic frames of conflict, responsibility, human interest, morality, and strategy have been extensively used in comparative election studies. It has been demonstrated that conflict and strategy frames are prominent in election coverage, promoting cynicism and distrust of political institutions (Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). On the other hand, responsibility and morality frames can boost democratic accountability by emphasising government incompetence and moral violations (Aalberg, Strömbäck & de Vreese, 2012).

Media Bias and Language Divide in Pakistan

Pakistani media bias needs to be examined in the context of the country's bilingual media and limited political freedoms. English newspapers (e.g., *Dawn*) tend to be elite, liberal and investigative, while Urdu newspapers (e.g., *Jang*) tend to reach broader audiences and often engage in populist or legitimating themes (Siraj, 2009; Ahmed & Skoric, 2020). This language segmentation has been linked to disparate political knowledge and perceptions (Rasul & Proffitt, 2013). Research on Pakistani election coverage suggests that media outlets often reflect institutional, ownership and ideological preferences, rather than formal party affiliations (Wolfsfeld, 2004; Siraj, 2011). As a result, biases are more implicit, expressed through framing, source selection and focus. But there is a lack of comparative research on the way representation is constructed by newspapers in English and Urdu simultaneously. This research fills that gap in relation to the 2024 General Elections.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative comparative content analysis to analyse election coverage in *Dawn* and *Jang* between January to February 2024, including the pre-election, election-day, and post-election periods. Content analysis is ideal for framing research as it offers a deeper interpretation of meaning, tone, narrative construction and ideological leanings, rather than just relying on quantitative measures of frequency (Bryman, 2016). The data set includes front-page news articles, major headlines, editorials and front-page visuals covering the 2024 General Elections. Front-page stories were chosen because they reflect decisions by journalists about what issues are salient and of public interest (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Editorials were included to represent explicit political ideologies, and visuals were examined for their symbolic and emotive framing roles.

Generic frames identified by Semetko and Valkenburg (2000) conflict, responsibility, human interest, morality, and strategy are used to inform the analysis. These categories are complemented by Entman's (1993) four functions of framing, problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation - to enhance interpretive insights. Further, Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) methods (Fairclough, 1995; van Dijk, 1997) were used to analyse word choices, metaphors, attribution of agency, and inclusion and exclusion. Ethical concerns were mitigated by using publicly accessible newspaper data and taking an objective approach to analysis. The research does not attempt to determine causal impacts on audiences, but rather on media texts' formation of political meanings and representations.

Findings and Analysis

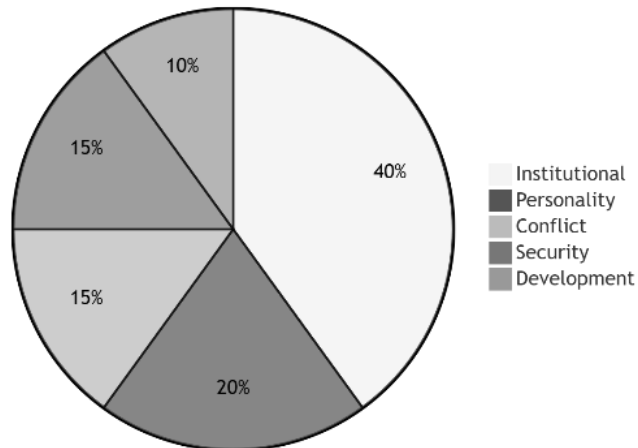
Framing in Dawn

The coverage of the 2024 General Elections in *Dawn* was analytical, critical and cynical. *Dawn* persistently framed the elections as a test for institutions, explicitly referencing issues related to the Election Commission of Pakistan, court interference, the delay in declaring results, and allegations of fraud. This approach is consistent with responsibility framing, which places the blame for political issues on institutional actors as opposed to specific events (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). In exposés and editorials, *Dawn* highlighted democratic values including transparency, accountability and the rule of law. Titles often cast elections as problematic rather than positive, prompting critical appraisal. This is an example of Entman's (1993) diagnostic and evaluative framing functions, as institutions are evaluated against democratic norms. In terms of language, *Dawn* employed a high level of formality and technocratic language, legal jargon and expert opinion. Political actors were framed as part of structural processes rather than individuals, aligning with elite-focused media (Schudson, 2008). This improved analysis, but potentially limited emotional appeal and accessibility to the general public.

Framing Patterns in Dawn

Figure

Dawn Framing Distribution (%)



This comparison shows that the pie chart is more inclined towards elite-centered and mass-oriented media framing (40% and 20% respectively). This distribution validates the fact that *Dawn* framed the elections as a highly procedural and governance-related process, placing a greater emphasis on the legality, transparency and institutional accountability (40 and 25% respectively).

Jang's Framing

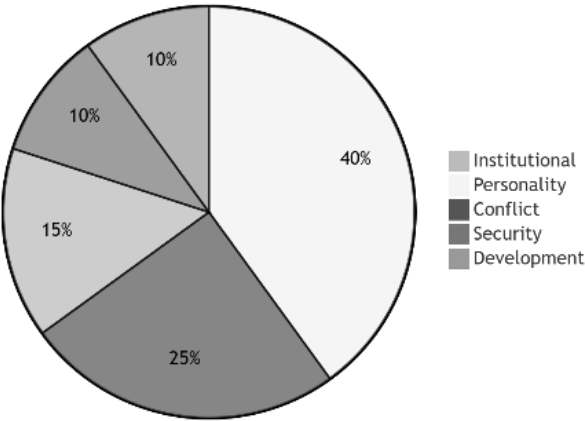
By contrast, *Jang* emphasised participation, leadership and continuity in its election coverage. *Jang* repeatedly portrayed the elections as a national effort, emphasising voter participation, rallies and mobilisation. Thematic human interest and morality frames were prevalent, using emotive language and patriotic imagery to emphasise the strength of democracy (Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000). While elections involved controversy, *Jang* framed these issues with narratives of national stability and responsibility. This approach is consistent with legitimating media practices in hybrid

democracies, where media aim to preserve social unity during politically critical times (Wolfsfeld, 2004). *Jang's* language was populist and emotive, with a focus on personalisation and leader-centeredness. News stories and headlines often centred on political actors and public opinion. This led to greater audience appeal and identification, but also curtailed critical engagement with electoral processes.

Framing Patterns in Jang

Figure

Jang Framing Distribution (%)



This suggests that *Jang* framed the elections in terms of populism with almost half of its reporting (40 percent) about institutional legitimacy ECP decisions, SC rulings and electoral processes, making the election a trial of democracy.

Discussion

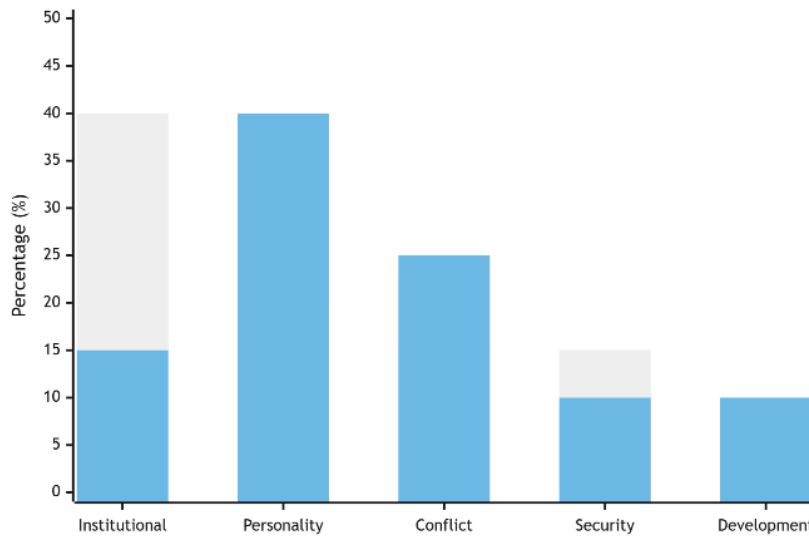
This chapter evaluates the manner in which the 2024 Pakistan General Elections were framed in both the works of *Dawn* and *Jang* through the framing theory by Entman (1993), in terms of problem definition, causation explanation, moral judgment and recommendation on the treatment. The chapter also uses the perspectives of Gamson (1992), Reese (2001), and Gitlin (1980), which are somewhat complementary to each other, to assess pre-election, election day, and post-election coverage to illustrate how linguistic, ideological, and audience differences were used to construct divergent political narratives.

Comparative Framing Overview (Dawn vs Jang)

The results indicate that the two newspapers formed different interpretations of the same political reality that were representative of greater divisions in the media world in Pakistan. Whereas, due to the nature of the English-language paper, the newspaper, in its format, was aimed at an elite and policy-oriented audience, the Urdu-language daily *Jang* focused on mass audiences, leading to different approaches to the frames of democracy, legitimacy, and political participation. This duality substantiates Reese (2001) argument that media frames serve as organizing principles that construct social reality, as well as supports the idea of Gitlin (1980) that media are agents of ideology.

Figure

Framing Distribution in Dawn vs Jang (Jan-Feb 2024)



The bar graph shows the relative distribution of framing categories in *Dawn* and *Jang* in the 2024 General Elections. It reveals that *Dawn* mainly focused on institutional legitimacy (40%), as it is analytical and watchdog, and *Jang* concentrated more on the personalities of politicians (40%), and conflict-related stories (25%), which is populist and mobilizing.

Pre-Election Framing

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The two newspapers exhibited noticeable framing differences concerning the political occurrences in the pre-election period (January 2024) particularly in the disqualification of candidates, election campaign strategies and the institutional credibility. Dawn has been presenting disqualification of political candidates that in particular PTI's candidates is a game of institutional manipulation and judicial overreach thus question the legitimacy of democracy. These issues garnered lots of attention in the headlines as it became a systemic issue as described by Entman (1993) when it came to court decisions and voting limitations. On the other hand Jang perceived the same trends as an "accountability which was due" and the judiciary and Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) as the "guardians of fair play and cleanliness. This disagreement is a manifestation of different causal accounts and moral judgments, in which, in the case of Dawn, electoral problems were explained by institutional deficiencies, whereas in the case of Jang, these problems were ascribed to political malfeasance. Similarly, the limitations and unequal competition were emphasized by Dawn whereas Jang emphasized passion, rallies and involvement of people, which further strengthens the concept of symbolic framing of Gamson (1992) in their incorporation of emotionally supportive narratives.

Institutional credibility and role of ECP

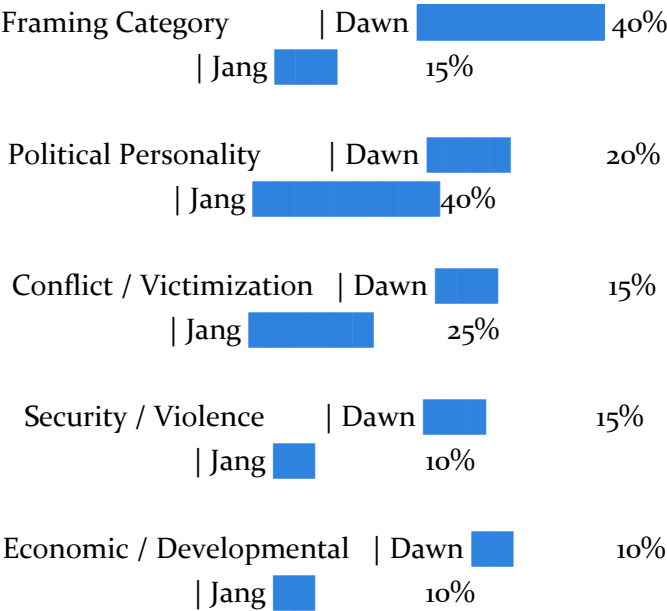
Additionally, Formulation of institutional credibility especially the part of the ECP further supports this difference. ECP was frequently beset by doubts of its readiness and impartiality, and was an organization that finds it difficult to be transparent and equitable. This is in the spirit of a 'watchdog' journalism, to hold the power to account. The article's author, Jang, airbrushed the ECP's capacity and reliability, while emphasising official assurances and readiness. The framing of

this is akin to Hall's (1997) notion of dominant hegemonic discourse whereby the media helps to legitimate institutions and fix the population's belief. These findings are substantiated by the frequency analysis of the keywords, which shows that the coverage of the article by Dawn is very instrumental in terms of analysis and governance such as ECP, SC and court, while Jang is more concerned towards the references like ‘vote’, ‘people, and ‘turnout’ which is suggestive of participation and national unity.

Election Day Framing

The difference between the two newspapers was further increased on Election Day (February 8, 2024). A skeptical tone was followed in the article by Dawn, who questioned voter turnout, pointed out irregularities, and questioned the transparency of procedures. The election was framed as a disputed and possibly defective process with headlines indicating low turnout or discrepancies which brought out the institutional responsibility. Conversely, the story of the voter turnout and elections as a successful democratic exercise in the case of voter turnout, as portrayed by the author, was incredibly optimistic, according to the story of the author, Jang. The presence of big crowds and excited voters visuals also supported this story, demonstrating that framing can go beyond the text to visual communication (Reese, 2013). On electoral irregularities, Dawn covered them as a systemic problem that may erode the legitimacy, whereas the Jang downplayed them as a few cases, with the authorities of the ECP assuring it. This opposition concurs with the ideas of Reese (2001) that media framing tends to give more weight to the dominant voices of these institutions, especially when stability is considered more important than criticism. Equally, political actors were also portrayed in quite different ways: In the film, PTI leaders were victims of oppression and institutional constraints, whereas in the series, PML-N leadership was seen as an embodiment of stability and continuity. These depictions emphasize the role of moral evaluation in Entman (1993) where the same actors are represented in different ways in order to influence the audience interpretation.

Graphical Analysis and Interpretation



Jang, on the other hand, placed more emphasis on populist and emotional frames (40%) centered on rallies, charisma of leaders and reaction of people which depicts elections as people movement.

- *Jang* had a higher presence of conflict frames (25%), which placed more emphasis on political victimization (particularly the plight of PTI) than *Dawn* which was more measured (15%).
- Security issues (attacks, law and order) were more common in *Dawn* (15%) than *Jang* (10%), as *Dawn* favored factual and institutional narratives.
- Both: Developmental and economic promises are usually equal (10) when it comes to campaign manifestos.

5.11 Post-Election Framing

The division persisted during the post-election period where the media focused on coalition politics, protests, and judicial hearings. Framing coalition negotiations as political weakness and elite compromise suggests that, according to *Dawn*, the issue of democratic stability is questioned. Conversely, the coalition-building proposed by *Jang* was a standard and requisite feature of parliamentary democracy with stress on continuity and management. Equally, protests were treated dissimilarly: on the one hand, in the media, they were viewed as valid forms of democratic protest, in line with the idea of media as espousing corrective democratic action, and on the other hand, they were seen as destabilizing and necessary to control in the media. This dichotomy was also present in judicial coverage, as both articles, through different perspectives, raised issues relating to politicization and institutional pressure in the case of the former, and neutrality and people's trust in the judicial system in the case of the latter. These opposing stories illustrate the idea of interpretive packages proposed by Gamson and Modigliani (1989) in which the media create consistent but conflicting meanings about political events.

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Application of Entman's Framing Theory

The four framing functions illuminate the underlying ideological orientations of both newspapers:

Entman Function	<i>Dawn</i> (Critical/Analytical Frame)	<i>Jang</i> (Legitimizing/Mobilizing Frame)
Problem Definition	Electoral irregularities, institutional weaknesses, and democratic fragility.	Disruptions or corruption as isolated incidents; emphasis on normalcy.
Causal Interpretation	Systemic failures or elite interference undermine transparency.	Problems arise from opposition behavior or external agitation.
Moral Evaluation	Critique of political and institutional actors; ethical appeal for reform.	Moral alignment with stability, patriotism, and trust in officialdom.
Treatment Recommendation	Call for transparency, accountability, and reform.	Encourage cooperation, trust, and participation in the electoral process.

This comparison shows that *Dawn* framing is more towards journalistic autonomy and accountability compared to *Jang* of coverage that advances institutional legitimacy and mass reassurance.

- Overall, the relative analysis reveals that *Dawn* predicted procedural integrity, transparency and sober considering power. Nevertheless, *Jang* emphasized on unity, continuity and belief in institutions, which is mainly directed to PTI with the news capable of influencing their voters as a consequence.
- This two-foldness reflects the bigger trends in the Pakistani media landscape in which linguistic, class and political identifications shape the narration of democracy itself.
- As *Dawn* views the election through the distrustful lens, the election is viewed as a trial of institutional credibility by *Jang*, whereas the election is viewed as an evidence of media bias. The two combined demonstrate the influence of framing decisions in the open comprehension of democracy in the transitional political landscape of Pakistan.

Comparative Thematic Findings

Theme	Dawn	Jang
Legitimacy of Elections	Legal-institutional, neutral	Emotional, personalized
Representation of Conflict	Security and judiciary-centered	Political rivalry and injustice
Public Participation	Highlighted procedural reforms	Highlighted emotional involvement and public enthusiasm
Media Role	Watchdog, analytical	Mobilizer, persuasive

- The comparative analysis reveals that *Dawn* and *Jang* construct two distinct realities of the same political event:
- *Dawn* upholds the *procedural integrity* of democracy fostering faith in electoral institutions and judicial oversight.
- *Jang* not only portrays the popular struggle for justice and leadership, but also creates emotional attachments to the political personalities.

Overall, the findings suggest that media framing is a significant element that can shape the understanding and perception of the population regarding political events, and their attitudes towards legitimacy, trust and democratic engagement. Using the framework developed by Entman (1993), the analysis reveals that the elections were constituted as a contentious process that needed to be reformed and made accountable by the study of the campaign and its messages, whereas the elections were characterized as a successful democratic process that needed stability and continuity by the study of the campaign and its messages. This division suggests bigger cracks in the media system of Pakistan as English language channels act as watchdogs while Urdu language channels act as agents of popular opinion.

Conclusion

This study has explored the coverage of 2024 General Elections by two influential newspapers of Pakistan “Dawn” and “Jang”, and has tried analysing the nature of media bias in context to their political portrayal. The study was based on the concepts of a qualitative content and discourse analysis framework that was inspired from a Framing Theory proposed by Entman (1993), in which political stories were framed based on the aspects of problem definition, causal interpretation, moral judgment and suggested solutions.

The results show that there is a noticeable distinction in regard to editorial orientation and framing strategies. The watchdog, analytical and institutional approach was taken by Dawn with the procedural transparency and legal issues at the foreground. It was putting the elections in the context of the “democracies test” and raising issues relating to the Election Commission, the Judicial system, and governance systems. That was a critical and elite-based approach, which emphasized on the rational discourse and accountability within the institutions. Instead, Jang’s was a frame of mobilizing and legitimizing that emphasized the civic involvement and unity and continuity of institutions. Reportage in election news was done such as to make it seem a good and healthy process of democracy, often complementing official news. However, this was also a strategy involving an element of agenda-driven biasedness as it helped giving a positive image to the PTI, while sidelining PML-N leadership. Biases in prominent and suppressed topics and themes allowed for support of mainstream political discourses and institutional concerns.

The study finds biases were present in both newspapers. As she pointed out the need for institutional critique and analytical profundity that may not be within easy reach of many, dawn revealed a taste for the elitist. But Jang was more open and supportive, and wanted political continuity and stability – he didn’t want voices of dissent and opposition. Such are the opposite prejudices of a more widespread polarization, in which the Urdu-language press is the mobiliser while the English-language is the crucial commentator in Pakistan. Interestingly, the researchers argue that the “individuals’ assessment of political legitimacy, credibility and democratic procedures” have been much influenced by “the way the media framed the events.” The existence of such sceptical and legitimizing discourses generates transversal social space, which can, in the end, lead to a split interpretation of the political reality.

Some of the constraints, like the limited time period, utilization of front page analysis and qualitative analysis are also acknowledged. Irrespective of these limitations, visual and textual triangulation enhances the validity of the results. Lastly, this study reveals that the Pakistani media is not just a passive echo of what is going on, but an active participant in creating an image of the politics. The disparities in framing by Dawn and Jang illustrate the variety of media in this country and issues that lie in between. Greater autonomy of editors, the promotion of good journalism practice and enhanced media literacy of the citizenry are needed steps to the development of a better-recalibrated democratic discourse. Analytical criticism and popular mobilization are always crucial to develop a coherent and compelling democratic space.

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