

**JOURNALISM, POLITICS AND SOCIETY**

e-ISSN: 3005-527X , p-ISSN: 3005-5261

Volume 02, Issue 01, March 2024, Pages 69-86

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.63067/0fj42m94>Journal Homepage: <https://jpolas.com>

---

**Analyzing the Portrayal of Political Leadership in Leading Pakistani News Channels: A Critical Analysis****Rana Babar Sohail<sup>1</sup>**<sup>1</sup>Doctoral Fellow, College of Journalism and Communication, University of Florida, USAEmail: [sohail.rana@ufl.edu](mailto:sohail.rana@ufl.edu)

---

**Abstract**

*This study focuses on the framing theory as a lens to analyze the coverage and frames of political parties by two prominent news channels, Dunya News and Geo News. A comprehensive content analysis spanning over three months was conducted to assess the frequency, story types, frames, and tone of news coverage related to political leaders from 1<sup>st</sup> Sep 2023 to 20<sup>th</sup> Dec 2023 through purposive sampling. For this purpose, five themes, party manifesto, and plans, leader's character, past performance of the party, voting worth, bias, and victimization were designed to explore the study's objectives. The findings indicate a notable disparity in the salience given to political parties, with both news channels showing a higher emphasis on PMLN compared to PTI and PPP. Furthermore, the results reveal that Nawaz Sharif, received more favorable coverage from both news channels, followed by Imran Khan. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari receives comparable coverage to Imran Khan on Dunya News but notably less on Geo News. Additionally, the majority of the stance from these news channels leans in favor of PMLN leader Nawaz Sharif, while PTI leader Imran Khan tends to receive a more negative stance across both channels. A frames-wise analysis uncovers that Dunya News provides a more diverse range of perspectives when portraying political leaders, encompassing frames such as party manifesto, party previous performance, and voting worth, in contrast to Geo News, which maintains a more consistent distribution of emphasis across different frames. Findings also revealed that Nawaz Sharif's frames prominently centered on the manifesto category. On the other hand, Imran Khan received coverage under the attributes of leaders' character while party performance was a common attribute covered related to politicians.*

**Keywords:** Framing political leaders, geo news, dunya news, Imran khan, Nawaz Sharif, Bilawal Bhutto, Pakistan.

---

© 2024 The Authors. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License

---

**1. Introduction**

Television has changed how we cover news and events, making it more powerful than traditional media like newspapers. The magic of TV lies in its ability to show things visually, which can be more impactful than using a lot of words. According to McLuhan (1994), TV has a special power that greatly affects other media. Television has the power to make viewers feel like they are right there at an event. It can show the important parts of a story, helping people understand why it matters. The visual and sound effects on Television make the news more exciting and draw people in. The news can answer people's questions and keep them interested by showing videos and describing things with sound. According to Barkin (2016), television news possesses considerable political influence and serves as a potent tool, frequently aligning with the agendas of influential individuals in society. This means that TV news doesn't just give information; it can also shape how people see politics and power.

In our modern world, most people rely on TV to know what's happening around them, especially when it comes to politics. The press, TV, and social media also have this amazing power to tell us what's

important and what we should care about in politics and our country. The public's impression of what matters in politics and for the country can be shaped by the agendas, opinions, and stories that the electronic media leaves on the collective consciousness of the populace. As a result, the media is essential for communicating politics to the general public (Coleman & Banning, 2006). News Media now plays a crucial role in considering political perspectives and advocating narratives. Its function in constructing, reinforcing, and projecting democratic norms and values is vital, fostering awareness among the general public about various political viewpoints (Khan, 2005). Every well-established democracy in the globe, besides its political parties, makes use of voter discussions and interactions, with the media acting as a central organ with two main functions: to inform and to propagate. Political communication thus includes both spoken and visual components taken from conventions, party gatherings, and discussions (McNair, 2012). Political parties and leaders frequently utilize television as a powerful tool to communicate their messages to party members, voters, and fellow leaders regarding various social issues and political matters. This strategic use of mass media gives them the potential to significantly influence and shape public opinion, essentially guiding people's thoughts by emphasizing their agendas (Mushtaq & Mushtaq, 2018).

In the current landscape, Television has become a means for gaining exposure, capturing attention, and molding public perceptions (Ahmed & Hussain, 2016). Within the realm of televised politics, there is a discernible shift towards prioritizing style over substance, personality over issues, and emotion over information. This evolving trend underscores the growing significance of visual and emotional elements in shaping political discourse (Graber & Dunaway, 2017). The public's reliance on media intensifies both before and during polling. Before elections, people turn to the media for information about political candidates, while during polling, the media updates the masses on security conditions, polling booth situations, tabulation processes, and voter trends. It is quite a common phenomenon under discussion in today's digitized and sophisticated technological world to understand man and machines and its outcomes-good or worse. It is quite right to say that no area of human's life left untouched by information and technology (Shehzad et al., 2019). The continuous flow of information is a vital ingredient that makes democracy feasible. Scholars have consistently highlighted the strong connection between democracies and political parties (Mushtaq et al., 2018). Media significantly contributes to providing a platform for diverse political discourses, connecting hope, positive visions, peace, prosperity, and equality to the success of democratic transitions. The democratic system relies on the active participation of political parties (Akhtar, 2011). However, in Pakistani society, political groups often contend with influence from other powerful segments like the military, bureaucracy, and judiciary (Hussain & Kokab, 2013). Media perform different functions in society. Which are following

### **Media Functioning as a Watchdog**

Media plays a pivotal role in politics, often referred to as the "fourth estate" or "fourth power." Scholars assert that media serves as a platform where politics is portrayed, acting as a watchdog for society. Voltmer (2006) emphasizes its control function, safeguarding the rights of citizens by monitoring government and political elite activities, exposing injustices, and identifying abuses of power. This watchdog role is deemed crucial as it holds the three estates—executive, legislative, and judicial—accountable to the public. According to Obiora and Chukwuma (2017), underscores the constitutional emphasis on government accountability, portraying the press as a key player in this function. Media is expected to uncover instances of corruption and malfeasance within the three estates, thereby ensuring transparency and accountability. However, external pressures, as noted by Nai (2019), can impede the watchdog role. Social and political structures, as well as government regulations, may influence media content, hindering its critical stance. Additionally, recent trends in political news coverage, characterized by increased negativity and personalization, raise questions about the efficacy of the watchdog role (Lengauer et al., 2012; Nai, 2019).

### **Media is an Information Source**

Media is a vital information source for citizens, offering insights into news and current affairs.

Acting as a public sphere, media serves as a communication channel for the public to convey messages to policymakers through various programs like talk shows and news. In the contemporary media landscape, citizens can express their views via letters, emails, and social media platforms, making media an influential channel for public discourse (McNair, 2012). Even, citizens benefit from the media's provision of information on diverse political topics, enhancing awareness of national and international political events (Shehata & Strömbäck, 2014). Media, often referred to as the "day-to-day parliament of the people" facilitates public debates on politics and government policies, acting as an opposition force (Strömbäck & Van Aelst, 2013).

### **Media is a Voice of the People**

Ismaeli (2015) contends that while media traditionally conveys political viewpoints to the public, it also bears the responsibility of articulating public messages to enhance the effectiveness of democracy. Acting as a mediator between citizens and those in power, media, in democratic systems, must amplify the voices of marginalized societal groups. McNair (2011) underscores the role of media in supervising the government by providing citizens access to public spheres for debates, consensus-building, and effective communication with government elites.

### **Pakistani Perspective of Media**

Media in Pakistan has evolved from being a mouthpiece of the government to a more mature form. However, it has never been entirely free due to historical government censorship (Jamali & Mahesar, 2021). In his study Waqas and Khattak (2017) quotes journalist Aasma Sherazi, stating that "free media emerges out of democracy, but here, in Pakistan, democracy is emerging out of free media." However, the media's role has evolved from maintaining the status quo to becoming a dynamic force in shaping public opinion. The protests in 2014 saw extensive media coverage, with Abbas & Sheikh (2022) noting the media's tendencies to simplify, polarize, personalize, intensify, concretize, and accentuate political crises. Qadeer, Shehzad, and Chishti (2017) argue that the media often personalizes political coverage, potentially distorting public perception. Siraj and Hussain (2017) critique the autonomy of journalists, indicating that editorial decisions are influenced by political, social, and economic factors. Islam (2016) claims that viewers are more interested in and attentive to TV news from the standpoints of immediacy, timeliness, and credibility. But, there's a catch – it can't go into all the nitty-gritty details because it has a time limit.

#### **1.1 Statement of the problem**

Political news typically revolves around information concerning political figures, and their party affiliations, and Voltmer (2010) contends that the media often presents superficial information to the public about politics, lacking in-depth discussions. The argument posits that politics is personalized, with media giving more attention to political personalities than to issues and events. Dissatisfaction with political figures results in reduced citizen engagement in the political process. Ishaq (2020) highlights that negative media coverage not only impacts the credibility of politicians but also influences the credibility of the news itself. This study investigates Pakistani news channels' leanings towards political parties before elections, exploring whether media information conveys affective attributes or portrays negative framing about political leadership. Either media focuses on the political party's work or attributes only their personality as a leadership style.

#### **1.2 Research significance**

The electronic media provides a pivotal link between political leaders and the general populace, possessing the transformative power to shape perspectives for both leaders and the public (Vreese & Hopmann, 2016). Serving as a platform, the media grants political candidates and groups the opportunity to shape public opinion, with both politicians and media personnel playing instrumental roles in the news-making process (Hussain & Kokab, 2013). This research endeavours to address a significant gap in current literature, delving into the intricate relationship between media and the portrayal of political leadership in Pakistan. This underscores the pivotal role of media in shaping political landscapes and public perceptions,

emphasizing the need for an autonomous and impactful media environment. The study aims to unravel how media frames shape public perception of politics, exploring the frames chosen by media channels for political leaders and the extent to which they contribute to the leaders' popularity.

### 1.3 Objective of the study

1. To find out the nature and extent of coverage of political leaders in selected news channels.
2. To find out what type of frames are used in selected media for political leaders in Pakistan.

### 1.4 Research Questions

RQ1. How do different Pakistani mainstream news media outlets frame top political leaders in terms of stance?

RQ2. What are the predominant frames used to depict political leaders in these cable TV channels?

## 2. Literature Review

A study was conducted to scrutinize the reporting trends of the Pakistani media throughout the 2018 general elections, under the frameworks of agenda setting and framing theory. The primary attention of the study was directed toward the portrayal of political parties in Pakistan by two prominent cable channels Geo News and *Dunya News*. The study underscored the imbalances in media coverage. Media overemphasis on PMLN and the marginalization of other political parties. This discrepancy in coverage was further emphasized by the apparent lack of equality in the representation of different political parties. Additionally, the results highlighted a notable underrepresentation of other political entities such as MMA, BNP, ANP, and BAP in the coverage (Bari & Soomro, 2021).

After conducting a content analysis on three private TV networks in Pakistan, Haider (2007) found that political news was given the most prominence. He also demonstrated how the reporting was biased in favor of the networks' political ideologies. One of the noteworthy things about the TV news coverage was how they gave attention to specific ministers and members of parliament, thereby prioritizing protocol values over journalistic values. Rahman & Alam (2013, p. 202), who documented in a study that the practice of using television channels as a tool for ideological persuasion by the ruling class is the reason behind the mushroom expansion of television channels, can be used to support these conclusions. Another research related to politicians on TV news was conducted. Distinct strategies were observed in the Netherlands and Germany concerning the frequency of politician mentions or appearances in the news during national election campaigns. Analysis of content from the 1990s indicates that Dutch political and media traditions foster a more even distribution of attention among various political positions. In contrast, German TV news predominantly concentrates on the incumbent candidate for the national government and his challengers. This divergence may be attributed not only to the political system and circumstances of the 1990s but also to shifts in how German journalists perceive their role (Schoenbach & Lauf 2001).

Jamali and Mahesar's (2021) research provides a perspective on the democratic role played by Pakistani media. By adopting criteria from existing scholarship on democratic role performance, the researchers systematically analyzed news stories related to the General Elections 2018 in Dawn, Jang, and Express News channels. The results indicate that the Pakistani media often presents events in a sensationalistic manner, sacrificing qualitative debates on democracy for drama, superficiality, and subjectivity. The researchers advocate for a more diverse and robust media approach to democratic practices to foster a more informed citizenry in Pakistan. A study was conducted to check the bias in TV channel coverage by analyzing the content of 130 selectively chosen reports from three TV channels, including both state-run and private-owned ones. The findings indicate that 39% of the reports, totaling 51, focused on power, politics, and elites—emerging as the predominant thematic coverage across the selected channels. The ruling party received the most extensive coverage, highlighting the Prime Minister, Ministers, Members of Parliament, and senior political leaders. Consequently, the television channels

portrayed the powerful and influential classes, sidelining the common people who represent a majority in the socio-economic landscape of Bangladesh (Islam, 2007).

Hanan and Saleem (2014) offer a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative examination of The News and Dawn's coverage concerning appropriate portrayal versus sensationalism about the way Pakistani leadership handled domestic and foreign policy matters between 2008 and 2011. The editing text was examined using the content analysis methodology. According to this study, The News and the Dawn both covered "Foreign Policy Issues" sensationally. The press presented a highly sensationalized picture of Pakistan when discussing "Issues related to Good Governance." According to this study, The News and the Dawn presented Asif Ali Zardari's presidency sensationally while remaining impartial when covering Yousaf Raza Gillani.

Wang (2012) compared the elements of news sensationalism, news rivalry, and professionalism practices in 14 nations through a study on cross-national TV news. When compared to other broadcasting systems, the commercial TV material was more dramatic. Another major factor contributing to news sensationalism was the competition among TV channels for breaking news. Instead of letting officials or reliable sources validate the tales, celebrities and regular individuals more often than not pretended to be news actors to personalize and dramatize the news.

This research addresses how the mass media establish connections between issues and political parties in their news coverage, a crucial aspect for parties seeking to assert or sustain their ownership of political matters. The study examines hypotheses proposing that journalists utilize parties' emphasis on issues and their positions on those issues as a heuristic to determine which party to feature in discussions on specific matters. Utilizing datasets derived from electoral programs and election news coverage spanning national elections in Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the UK from 1991 to 2007, the research reveals that journalists tend to link issues with parties that have previously emphasized these issues or increased their emphasis in the current election. Surprisingly, the positioning of issues does not significantly impact the connections between parties and issues (Merz, 2017).

The question of whether media coverage of political parties results from their success or, on the other hand, whether media reports drive their success is one that Dewenter and Thomas (2019) look into how media coverage affects people's short- and long-term political preferences, particularly party affiliation and voting intention, to answer this question. According to the results, media coverage significantly and favorably affects people's intentions to vote for a political party shortly. A more positive portrayal in the media correlates with a higher likelihood of the electorate voting for that party. However, this effect does not extend to long-term party affiliation, aligning with economic theory. Long-term preferences are considered stable, and as such, contemporary events like media coverage have minimal impact on these presumed enduring preferences. Nevertheless, over the long term, party affiliation may still be subject to influence.

Ishaq, (2020) focuses on the relationship between Pakistani political parties and print media in their present study. Using both qualitative and quantitative content analysis methodologies, the researcher has discussed this complex relationship by examining how mainstream political parties (PML-N, PPP, and PTI) are covered in Pakistan's top dailies (*Jang*, *Nawa-e-Waqt*, *Dawn*, and *The News*). In the context of agenda-setting and framing theories, it looks at editorial trends and policies. The study's findings clarify that *The Nation*, a daily, was given greater space than *The News* and *Dawn*. While *Dawn* is viewed as an ideology daily in Pakistan, *The Nation*, and *The News* are considered political organs in the nation's politics.

Politicians with more political experience, according to Vos (2014), have more authority and frequently open the gates to the media. Politicians who are deemed physically appealing are also thought to possess other desirable traits in society. Because of this, the endearing traits may help political figures

get media attention. Tsfaty et al. (2010) discovered that politicians' physical appearance has a significant impact on how the media covers them. Media coverage of political figures is most closely linked to their political status (Arnold, 2004). Political actors' prominence is positively and significantly impacted by their role as party leaders.

## 2.1 Theoretical Framework

### Framing Theory

Kheirabadi and Aghagolzadeh (2012) identified media as a powerful "image former" tool. As a result, the mass media plays a crucial role in shaping people's perceptions of their country and leaders. According to Kellner (1995), media frame events in the framework of ideology, politics, and culture to foster a representational picture in the minds of the public. Cohen (1963) provides an example of how the majority of us receive our impressions of foreign nations and communities from the media. The frames that serve as the basis for the media images may have neutral, positive, or negative tones. As per Sparks (2010), the formation of a nation's image is a multifaceted historical process that encompasses various elements like the political and socioeconomic conditions of a country, diplomatic relations, and shifts in global political and economic spheres. "Pictures in our heads" is how Lippmann described media images (Lippmann 1922). The frames from which the media images are derived may have neutral, positive, or negative tones. According to Saleem (2007), "frames make messages memorable and understandable". Media frames as "largely unspoken and unacknowledged, organize the world both for journalists reporting it and, to some extent, for us to rely on their reports". Neuman et al. (1992) defined frames as 'conceptual tools' used to express, understand, and evaluate information (p. 60). As per Valkenburg and Semetko (1999), news frames act as mental frameworks, allowing journalists to simplify, prioritize, and structure the storytelling of events.

Akhavan-Majid and Ramaprasad (2000) argue that framing is an inherent part of creating news stories, offering journalists a platform to identify flaws, assess reasoning, and form moral judgments. When framing an issue or event, the media employs either sensational or responsible frames, depending on the organization's policy regarding the subject at hand. These frames incorporate engaging language, metaphors, phrases, adjectives, and value-laden sentences, shaping the communication style of the media.

Under the framing perspective, this study analyzed how *Dunya News* and *Geo News* frame Pakistani political parties' leadership from mainstream parties like PLMN, PPP & PTI, in their prime-time news headlines while handling domestic and foreign policy issues. Further study investigates the impact of "attribute" salience, which refers to the qualities and tone that characterize politicians in the news. At this point, what matters is how the media describes something rather than what they highlight. Framing research has shown that characteristics of topics and candidates that are highlighted in news reports also become characteristics that voters stress.

## 3. Research Methodology

The study conducted a quantitative investigation through "content analyses of the selected TV news channels. Content analysis is an academic approach to evaluating communication content in media studies, particularly to understand the nature of the coverage farming According to communication specialists, the approach is frequently utilized by the media because it is an effective method of looking into media content.

"Content analysis" by Walizer and Wienir, (1978) was described as "any systematic procedure devised to examine the content of recorded information". Krippendorf (2004) defined it, as a research technique for creating meaningful and replicable references from data in their context. According to Kerlinger (2000), content analysis is a methodical and objective technique for quantitatively examining communication to measure various variables. Therefore, drawing on these principles, we will analyse the quantitative aspects of the chosen TV news.

## Population

### *Channels*

The research aims to comprehend the coverage provided by TV news channels in the country by selecting a representative sample from the existing channels. Out of 15 news channels, registered channels, two leading news channels namely *Dunya News* and *Geo News*, will be included in the analysis. The objective is to investigate how these chosen channels influenced the public and political perception of leaders in the minds of voters before the election. The study also aims to assess the extent of coverage given to political parties in Pakistan. These TV channels were selected after assuming that they presented diverse content about political parties. A total of 228 news headlines (reports) have been analyzed from the 09:00 pm broadcast of news on the channels starting from 01.09.2023 to 20.12.2023 purposively.

### *Political Parties*

The attributes of three main political parties i.e. Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PLMN, Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) were analyzed. The following leaders who are party heads are chosen:

From PLMN (Nawaz Sharif),

From PTI (Imran Khan),

From PPP (Bilawal Bhutto),

### **Unit of analysis**

The "Headlines" from two selected channels i.e., *Dunya News* & *Geo News* were considered as a unit of analysis. This study focused on the prime-time news of these selected channels.

### **Period of study**

The period of the study was approximately about three months due to resource limitation which was starting from 1<sup>st</sup> Sep 2023 to 20<sup>th</sup> Dec 2023 through purposive sampling.

### **Selected Variables**

This study analyzed the coverage of selected leaders by mainstream three political parties. The tone of the news will be measured as pro, anti, or neutral towards the political party and its leaders. Six themes were built to check the Framing contents such as Political ideology, News about the portrayal of political leaders' character, whether they faced bias or victimization in news, news about the worth of voting, news reports on the party manifesto, and previous performance. These analyses were made based on contextual units. The study also explores the visual information.

**Frequency:** Headlines frequency about political parties' leaders.

**Story Type:** Story was divided into two categories Hard news and featured news. Hard News is defined the news as breaking news and deadline-oriented stories. While feature news is used when news doesn't deal with the breaking news. It has some background in it or can say follow-up issues.

**Slants:** The analysis focused on determining the slant of headlines related to issues concerning political leaders, categorizing them as positive, negative, or neutral. Each headline was treated as a coding unit for content analysis, and the counted units were then indexed based on their neutrality, positivity, or negativity. Negativity in news is defined as news overloaded with politicians' misconduct, political failures, allegations, etc. Negativity in news will be analyzed by the overall tone and language used in news stories. On the other hand, positivity in news is when politicians' positive points are highlighted in news like news related to development, etc.

**Frames:** This means how headlines were attributed to a particular leader. The framers of headlines were analyzed in terms of five thematic frames. These analyses were made based on contextual units.

**Thematic Frames:** The headlines were analyzed by putting them in different themes.

- i. Party Manifesto and Plans:** The stories were contextualized under this theme if it were talk about part plans, party preferences, and party manifestos by political leaders.
- ii. Leader's Character:** A story about a leader's character is a person who is positive or negative, Honest or Dishonest, etc. Patriot or Traitor, good decision maker or Boorish, Honorable or Corrupt, etc.
- iii. Past Performances of Party:** The stories were contextualized under this theme if it was talking about party's previous performance, previous achievements, and faults.
- iv. Voting Worth:** A story about voters' behaviors about party or leadership was considered in part of this frame.
- v. Party-Faced Biased or Victimization in News Stories:** If a news channel shows favoritism towards a particular party and highlights any small issue as a big one known as bias. News story shows leaders as a victim poorly handled by other parties and sources.

### Format for Data Gathering

To extract information from the news items that were analyzed, a format for collecting data was created. Information was gathered based on the news slot, date, and TV channel. For that purpose, a coding sheet was built in which all data was entered date-wise. The variables were coded from 0 to 6 range. Which indicates the complete presence of the variable in the news story.

## 4. Data Analysis

Table\_1

### 4.1 Distribution of Frequencies

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Variables</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>1: News Channels</i>	Dunya News	107	49%
	Geo News	111	51%
<i>2: Party Leaders</i>	Nawaz Sharif	127	58.3%
	Imran Khan	50	22.9%
	Bilawal Bhutto	41	18.8%
<i>3: Story Type</i>	Lead Story	68	31.2%
	Featured Story	150	68.8%
<i>4: Leaders Attributes</i>	Party Manifesto	44	20.2%
	Leaders Character	32	14.7%
	Previous Performance	51	23.4%
	Voting Worth	47	21.6%
	Biased or Victimization	20	9.2%
	Other Domestic Issues	24	11.0%
<i>5: Slants</i>	Favorable	74	33.9%
	Unfavorable	48	22.0%
	Neutral	96	44.0%
<i>Total</i>		218	100.0



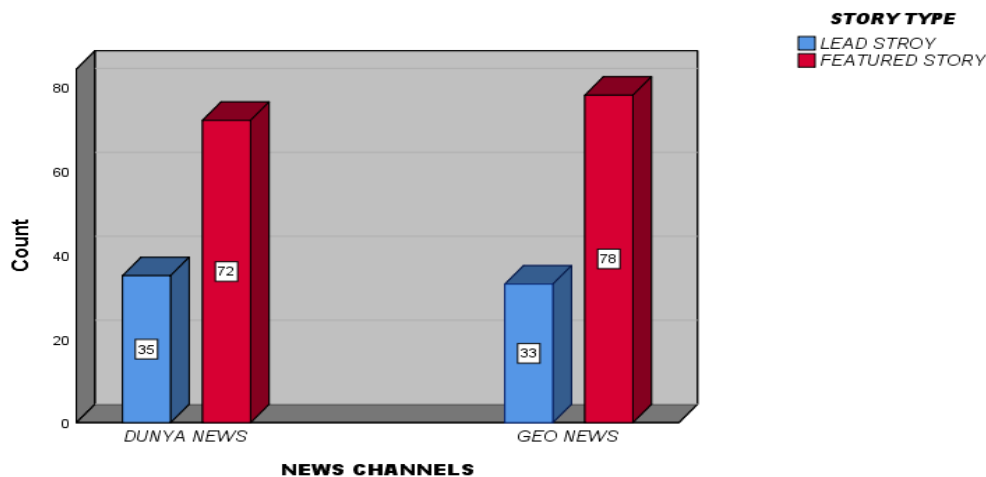
The research encompasses data from a span of 110 days, incorporating content from two major Pakistani news channels: *Dunya News* (49%) and *Geo News* (51%). The results show an almost equal distribution of coverage between these channels when it comes to political leadership, indicating alignment with both channels' editorial approaches. Among the three main political party leaders, Nawaz Sharif gets the most coverage (58.3%), followed by Imran Khan (22.9%) and Bilawal Bhutto (18.8%). This difference in coverage highlights variations in the perceived importance of these political figures. In a story type category most of the content falls under the "featured story" category (68.8%), followed by "lead story" (31.2%). This suggests that news coverage tends to cover follow up of issues which is particularly relevant to election-related activities or domestic political issues, like judicial references against PLMN for corruption charges from their previous government and PTI leader facing cases like Tosha Khana, Unethical Nikah, Faizabad Dharna, among others from their governance period. Looking at leader attributes, the analysis reveals that news stories often touch on the Party Manifesto (20.2%), followed by Party Previous Performance (23.4%), and Voting Worth (21.6%). This emphasizes a significant focus on political aspects, policies, and performance. Analysing the data on slants shows a relatively balanced distribution, with (33.9%) of stories being favorable, (22.0%) unfavorable, and (44.0%) neutral. Overall, the findings present a diverse view of news content from both *Dunya News* and *Geo News*. The high coverage of Nawaz Sharif suggests a potential focus on his political activities or significance in the media.

Table\_2

4.2 Distribution of Story Types Across TV News Channels

Story Type	Dunya News		Geo News		Total
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	
Lead Story	35	51.5%	33	48.0%	68
Featured Story	72	48.5%	78	52.0%	150
Total	107	49	111	51	218

Figure\_4.1



The study's results reveal that "Lead Story" content is distributed almost equally between *Dunya News* and *Geo News*, with only a slight variation in percentages. In terms of "Featured Story," *Geo News* holds a slightly higher percentage (52.0%) compared to *Dunya News* (48.5%). Overall, the total number of stories is fairly balanced between the two channels, with *Geo News* having a slightly greater representation.

Table\_3

## 4.3 Distribution of Political Leaders Across News Channel

Party leaders	Dunya News		Geo News		Total	
	F	%	F	%	F	P
Nawaz Sharif	55	51.4	72	64.9	127	58.3
Imran Khan	26	24.3	24	21.6	50	22.9
Bilawal Bhutto	26	24.3	15	13.5	41	18.8
Total	107	49	111	51	218	100

$\chi^2$ : 5.235, P=.023

The results illustrate how coverage is distributed among the three main Political leaders in *Dunya News* and *Geo News*. Notably difference was found in the coverage of Nawaz Sharif with (51.4%) on *Dunya News* and (64.9%) on *Geo News*. Imran Khan receives (24.3%) coverage on *Dunya News* and (21.6%) on *Geo News*. Similarly, Bilawal Bhutto also shows differences in coverage between the two channels, with (24.3%) on *Dunya News* and (13.5%) on *Geo News*. The Chi-Square test confirms that these observed differences are statistically significant. The Chi-Square statistic is 5.235 with a p-value of .023, indicating a statistically significant difference between "Party Leaders" and "News Channel" for the given data.

Table\_4

## 4.4 Distribution of Framing of Political Leaders Across News Channels

Leaders Attributes	Dunya News		Geo News		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
A	23	21.5%	21	18.9%	44	20.2%
B	10	9.3%	22	19.8%	32	14.7%
C	25	23.4%	26	23.4%	51	23.4%
D	24	22.4%	23	20.7%	47	21.6%
E	10	9.3%	10	9.0%	20	9.2%
F	15	14.0%	09	8.1%	24	11.0%
Total	107	100	11	100	218	100

$\chi^2$ : 6.060, P=.236

**A= Party Manifesto, B= Leaders's Character, C= Previous Performance, D= Voting Worth, E= Biased or Victimization, F= Leader faced other issues**

The findings indicate that *Dunya News* offers a more diverse range of perspectives when portraying political leaders, covering various frames like Party Manifesto, Party Previous Performance, and Voting Worth. Additionally, frames such as Leader's Character, Biased or Victimization, and Leaders facing other domestic court issues are also covered, albeit to a lesser extent. In contrast, *Geo News* maintains a more consistent distribution of emphasis across different frames. Frames related to the party's previous performance and voting worth receive similar attention compared to *Dunya News*. However, there are some differences in other frames like the Leader's Character and other domestic issues when compared to *Dunya News*. The findings show that in comparison to *Dunya News* (21.5%), *Geo News* (18.9%) places slightly less emphasis on covering the manifesto category while framing news stories. When it comes to framing related to the political leader's character, *Geo News* (19.8%) shows a higher emphasis on the same aspects, potentially presenting a different narrative compared to *Dunya News* (9.3%).

Table\_5

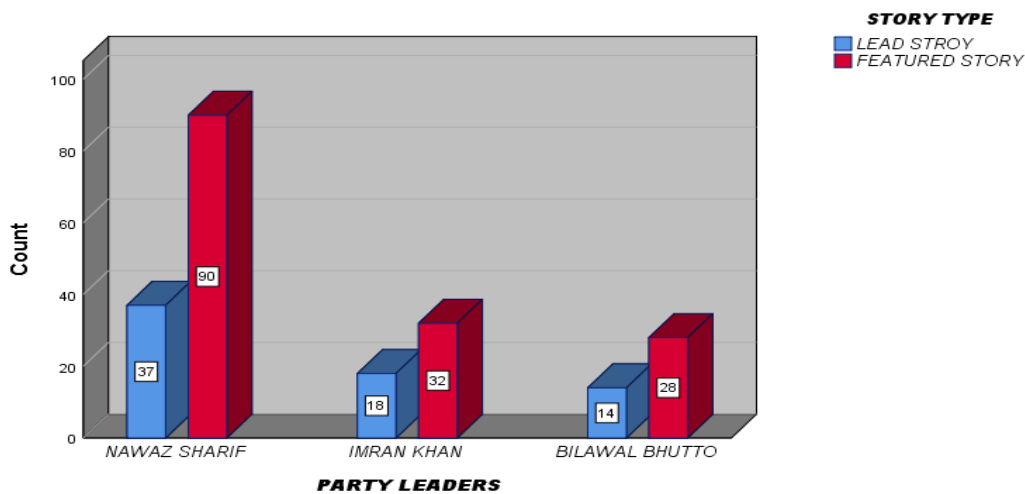
## 4.5 Distribution of Story Type with Party Leader

Story Type	Nawaz Sharif		Imran Khan		Bilawal Bhutto	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage

<i>Lead Story</i>	37	53.6%	18	26.1%	14	20.3%
<i>Featured Story</i>	90	60.0%	32	21.3%	28	18.7%
<i>Total</i>	127	58.3	50	22.9	41	18.8
$\chi^2: 794, P=.599$						

The analysis indicates that Nawaz Sharif is the most prominent figure, particularly in the "Featured Story" (60.0%). This shows that Nawaz Sharif had a significant presence in Pakistan during the study period, engaging with other political parties, making election plans, and addressing the public with new promises. Imran Khan follows with (21.3%) of coverage, and Bilawal Bhutto with (18.7%) in the "Featured Story".

4.2 Figure\_2



In the "Lead Story", there is a noticeable dominance of Nawaz Sharif (54%), suggesting a consistent emphasis on him across different story types. This could be reflective of the political landscape and events during the specified period. The provided narrative emphasizes that Nawaz Sharif's extensive coverage may be attributed to his return to Pakistan, engagement with political parties, election planning, promises to the public, and a focus on previous performance and victimization. The study concludes that Nawaz Sharif's extensive coverage signifies the popularity of the PLMN during the specified period.

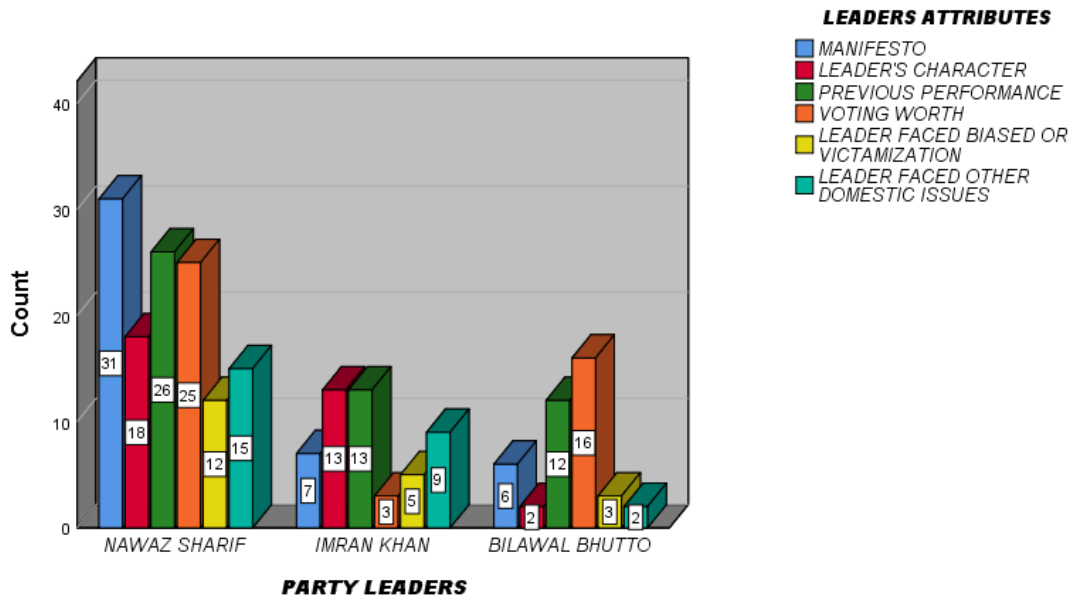
Table\_6

4.6 Distribution of Attributes/Frames across Party Leaders

<i>Leaders Attributes</i>	<i>Nawaz Sharif</i>		<i>Imran Khan</i>		<i>Bilawal Bhutto</i>		<i>Total</i>	
	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>A</i>	31	24.4	07	14.0	06	14.6	44	20.2
<i>B</i>	18	14.2	13	26.0	02	04.9	33	15.1
<i>C</i>	26	20.5	13	26.0	12	29.3	51	23.4
<i>D</i>	25	19.7	03	06.0	16	39.0	44	20.2
<i>E</i>	12	9.4	05	10.0	03	7.3	20	9.2
<i>F</i>	15	11.8	09	18.0	02	4.9	26	11.9
<i>Total</i>	127	100	50	100	41	100	218	100
$\chi^2: 6.060, P=.236$								

A= Party Manifesto, B= Leaders's Character, C= Previous Performance, D= Voting Worth, E= Biased

or Victimization, F= Leader faced other issues  
 4.3 Figure\_3



The study's findings illuminate distinct patterns in the media coverage of political leaders, specifically Nawaz Sharif, Imran Khan, and Bilawal Bhutto. The analysis revealed that Nawaz Sharif's coverage prominently centered around the framing of his manifesto (24.4%), the party's previous performance (20.5%), and voting worth (19.7%). On the other hand, Imran Khan received coverage predominantly under the attributes of leaders' character and previous performance (26.0% each). Bilawal Bhutto's coverage, meanwhile, focused on his previous performance (23.4%), followed by the party manifesto and voting worth (20.2%). In conclusion, the study suggests that the framing of political leaders in the media is not uniform and varies based on individual attributes and performance indicators. The identification of common frames, such as the emphasis on the party's previous performance, underscores the significance of certain themes in shaping public perception. The chi-square analysis indicates that the observed distribution across attributes/frames is not statistically significant ( $\chi^2:6.060, P=.236$ )

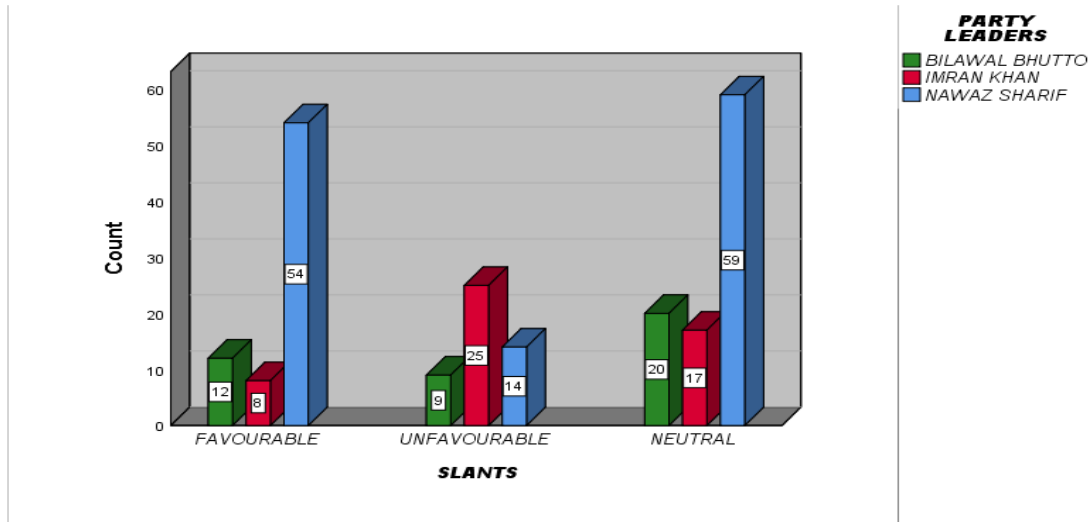
Table\_7

4.7 Distribution of Slants across Party Leaders

Party leaders	Favorable		Unfavorable		Neutral	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Nawaz Sharif	54	73.0%	14	29.2%	59	61.5%
Imran Khan	08	10.8%	25	52.1%	17	17.7%
Bilawal Bhutto	12	16.2%	09	18.8%	20	20.8%
Total	74	100	48	100	96	100

$\chi^2:34.033, P=.251$

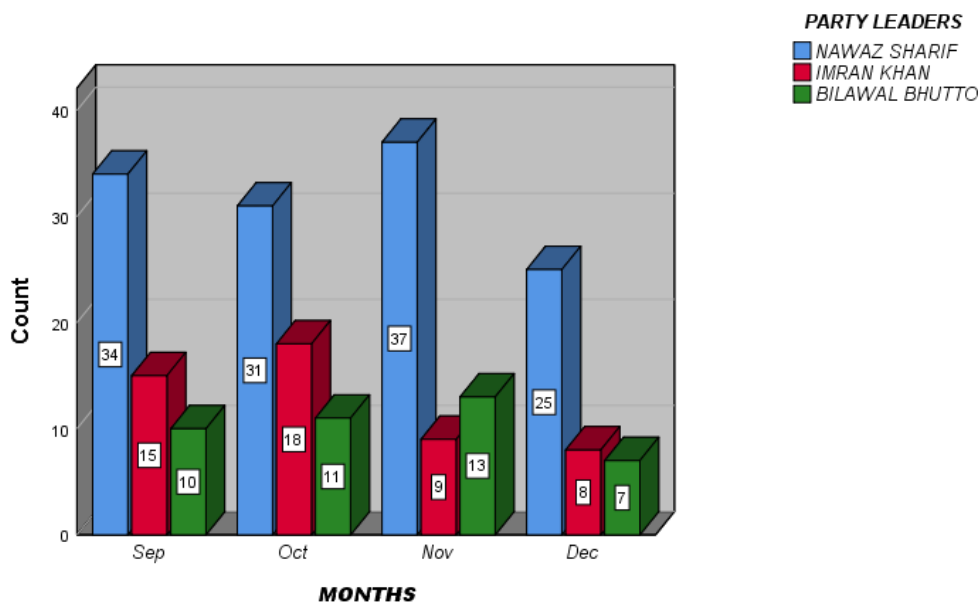
4.4 Figure\_4



The findings of the study reveal that Nawaz Sharif receives more coverage in both channels (73%) compared to other political leaders, as indicated by the favorable slants. This could suggest a positive representation or bias in the media coverage of Nawaz Sharif. It is noteworthy that despite facing corruption charges and being removed from the prime minister's seat in 2018, Nawaz Sharif received favorable opinions upon his return, indicating a shift in media perception. While Bilawal Bhutto faces more neutral and unfavorable coverage in a relevant manner (18 and 21%). Imran Khan, on the other hand, faces more negative coverage and unfavorable slants (52%), especially related to his character. This suggests that media coverage of Imran Khan may be more critical or scrutinizing, possibly due to factors such as media perception, political stance, or public opinion. The Chi-Square statistic is 794 with a p-value of .599. This suggests that there is no statistically significant association between "Slants" and "Party Leader" for the given data.

**Figure\_5**

**4.5 Distribution of Date Wise Stories Across Party Leaders**



The findings reveal a consistent pattern in media coverage, with Nawaz Sharif consistently receiving the highest number of appearances across all months. Following closely are Imran Khan and Bilawal Bhutto in terms of frequency. Notably, in the month of November, there is a deviation from the usual trend, as Imran Khan experiences a decrease in coverage compared to Bilawal Bhutto. This deviation suggests a shift in media attention or priorities during that specific period.

## 5. Discussion

In the realm of political communication, media acts as a key informant, shape public understanding of political events and the overall state of the country. The influence of press and electronic media in disseminating information, setting agendas, and shaping narratives is undeniable. This research aims to explore the role of media, particularly two news channels of Pakistan i.e., *Dunya News* and *Geo News*. By employing the framing theory, we seek to shed light on how three mainstream political parties (PLMN, PTI, PPP) are portrayed in the news coverage of two selected channels As *Dawn* very truly quoted, “PMLN, PPP, PTI are the largest parties (Ishaq, 2020). For that purpose, a comprehensive content analysis spanning over three months (110 days) was conducted to examine the reporting patterns of these news channels. The analysis focused on the frequency of news, story types, frames, and the tone of the news coverage related to political leaders. According to Tresch (2009), media visibility means how often someone shows up in the media. To measure this, scholars use different methods. Tresch says it's about counting how many times a political figure appears in the news. Andrews and Caren (2010) simplify it further, stating that it's just about getting coverage or not. Another way to look at it is by checking how much attention, in terms of paragraphs, a political figure receives on average.

In this study frequency distribution analysis revealed that both *Dunya News* and *Geo News* exhibited nearly equal coverage of political leadership, which shows an alignment with the editorial policies of both channels. Findings reveal that among the three main political party leaders, Nawaz Sharif gets the most coverage, followed by Imran Khan and Bilawal Bhutto. This difference in coverage highlights variations in the perceived importance of these political parties. In a story-type category, most of the content falls under the Featured Story followed by the Lead Story. This suggests that news coverage tends to cover follow-up of issues which is particularly relevant to election-related activities or domestic political issues,

like judicial references against PLMN for corruption charges from their previous government and PTI leader facing cases like Tosha Khana, Unethical Nikah, Faizabad Dharna, among others from their governance period.

**In response to the RQ1: How do different Pakistani mainstream news media outlets frame top political leaders in terms of stance?**

In terms of coverage by selected news channels, the results illustrate that among the three main Political leaders, notable difference were found. Nawaz Sharif gets more coverage on *Geo News* (65%) as compared to *Dunya News* (52%). Imran Khan receives (24%) coverage on *Dunya News* and (22%) on *Geo News*. Similarly, Bilawal Bhutto also shows differences in coverage between the two channels, with (24%) on *Dunya News* and (14%) on *Geo News*. The Chi-Square statistic is 5.235 with a p-value of .023, indicating a statistically significant difference between "Party Leaders" and "News Channel" for the given data. These findings are in line with the findings of Bari and Soomro, (2021) who underscored the imbalances in media coverage Also, media overemphasis on PMLN and the marginalization of other political parties. Also, relatable to the findings of Haider (2007) where he found that political news getting the highest priority in TV news channels. Islam (2007) states that the ruling party received the most coverage, with the prime minister, ministers, members of parliament, and other political figures portrayed.

In terms of slants findings of the study reveal that Nawaz Sharif receives more favorable coverage in both news channels (73%) compared to other political leaders. This could suggest a positive representation or bias in the media coverage of Nawaz Sharif. It is noteworthy that despite facing corruption charges and being removed from the prime minister's seat in 2018, Nawaz Sharif received favorable opinions upon his return, indicating a shift in media perception. At the same time, Bilawal Bhutto faces more neutral and unfavorable coverage in a relevant manner (18 and 21%) with little difference. Imran Khan, on the other hand, faces more negative coverage and unfavorable slants (52%), especially related to his Character, i.e., corruption cases, unethical Nikah with Bushra Manika, etc. This suggests that media coverage of Imran Khan may be more critical or scrutinizing, possibly due to factors such as media perception, political stance, or public opinion. Also, these findings are different from the findings of (Ishaq, 2020) researcher has discoursed this multi-faced rapport by analyzing the treatment of mainstream political parties (PML-N, PPP, and PTI) in Pakistani leading dailies (*Jang, Nawa-i-Waqt, Dawn and The News*). The Chi-Square value of .599 suggests that there is no statistically significant association between "Slants" and "Party Leaders" for the given data.

**In response to the RQ2. What are the predominant frames used to depict political leaders in Pakistani media, and how do these frames vary across different channels?**

The results of the study suggest that *Dunya News* shows a more diverse range of perspectives when depicting political leaders, encompassing various frames such as Party Manifesto (22%), Party Previous Performance (24%), and Voting Worth (22%). In contrast, *Geo News* maintains a more uniform distribution of emphasis across different frames. Frames associated with the party's previous performance (24%) and voting worth (21%) receive equal attention to *Dunya News* except for Leader's Character (20%). The findings indicate that, in comparison to both news channels, *Geo News* places slightly less emphasis on covering the manifesto category when framing news stories. Concerning the framing of political leaders' character, *Geo News* exhibits a higher emphasis on these aspects. These results align with Tresch's (2009) findings, suggesting that media organizations are not passive entities; rather, their news decisions reflect the organization's internal workings, preferences, and interests, reflecting media logic and media market theories. In an analysis of media frames concerning political leaders, the findings reveal distinct frames used in the coverage of news. Notably, Nawaz Sharif's coverage predominantly emphasizes the framing of his manifesto (25%), the party's prior performance (21%), and voting worth (20%). In contrast, Imran Khan garners attention mainly for attributes related to his character and previous performance (26% each), while Bilawal Bhutto's coverage centers on his past performance (23%), with additional emphasis on the party manifesto and voting worth (20%). Overall, the study underscores the diverse nature of media framing for political leaders, which varies based on individual attributes and

performance indicators. The chi-square analysis indicates that the observed distribution across attributes/frames lacks statistical significance ( $\chi^2:6.060$ ,  $P=.236$ ). These findings align with Vos's (2014) study, suggesting that politicians with more experience tend to have greater authority and, consequently, attract more media coverage. Additionally, Vos (2014) notes that perceived physical attractiveness, political standing are linked to other socially desirable qualities, influencing media coverage favorably. The aforementioned conclusions lead to the conclusion that Pakistani television networks support political influence and power. The media's credibility is called into doubt and they are unable to fulfill their proper function in society as a result of "coverage bias."

## 5.1 Conclusion

The findings suggest that television channels in Pakistan play a significant role in facilitating power and political influence. The prevalence of 'coverage bias' raises concerns about the media's ability to fulfill its societal role, leading to questioning of media credibility. The study concludes that the portrayal of politicians in the media poses a challenge to the democratic fabric of any nation. The rapid shaping of public perception towards political players and institutions, driven by unfavorable media coverage, contributes to diminished citizen engagement in the political process. Negative portrayals of politicians not only impact their credibility but also have repercussions on the overall credibility of news. As a result, the study underscores the influential role media plays in shaping public opinion and its potential consequences for the democratic functioning of a nation.

## References

- Ishaq, N. (2020). Media's Projection Of Democratic Process: A Comparative Analysis Of Three Leading Pakistani Political Parties During Election 2018 In National Dailies. *Journal of Public Value and Administrative Insight*, 3(1), 8-11.
- Islam, S. M. S. (2016). Coverage bias of Bangladesh television media: A portrayal of power and politics. *Jurnal Komunikasi: Malaysian Journal of Communication*, 32(2), 240-258.
- Ismaeli, A. (2015). *The Role of The Media in Developing Democracy In Kurdistan: A study of Rudaw Journalists Perspectives, Notions and Attitudes* (Master's thesis).
- Jamali, Y., Shoukat, G., & Mahesar, R. A. (2021). Comparative Study of Democratic Performance of News Media in Pakistan: Analysis of Framing Theory. *Ilkogretim Online*, 20(5), 6897-6906.
- Kellner, D. (2009). Toward a critical media/cultural studies. *Media/cultural studies: Critical approaches*, 5-24.
- Kheirabadi, R., & Aghagolzadeh, F. (2012). A Discursive Review of Galtung and Ruge's News Factors in Iranian Newspapers. *Theory and practice in language studies*, 2(5), 989.
- Lengauer, G., Esser, F., & Berganza, R. (2012). Negativity in political news: A review of concepts, operationalizations and key findings. *Journalism*, 13(2), 179-202.
- LIPMANN, O. (1922). The school in the service of vocational study. *British Journal of Psychology*, 12(4), 337.
- McLuhan, M. (1994). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. MIT press.
- McNair, B. (2012). *Journalism and democracy: An evaluation of the political public sphere*. Routledge.
- Merz, N. (2017). Gaining voice in the mass media: The effect of parties' strategies on party-issue linkages in election news coverage. *Acta Politica*, 52, 436-460.
- Mushtaq, I., Baig, F., & Mushtaq, S. (2018). The role of political parties in political development of Pakistan. *Pakistan vision*, 19(1), 176-190.
- Nai, A. (2019). Watchdog press. *The International Encyclopedia of Journalism Studies*, 1-6.
- Neuman, W. R., Just, M. R., & Crigler, A. N. (1992). *Common knowledge: News and the construction of political meaning*. University of Chicago Press.
- Qadeer, A., Shehzad, W., & Chishti, M. I. (2017). Print Media Practices in the Representation of Political Discourse in Pakistan. *NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry*, 15(2), 186-XIV.
- Rahman, A., & Alam, K. (2014). State, capital and media in the age of globalization: An inquiry into the



- rapid growth of private TV channels of Bangladesh. *Journal of Social Science Review*, 30(2), 291-306.
- Saleem, N. (2007). US media framing of foreign countries image: An analytical perspective. *Canadian Journal of Media Studies*, 2(1), 130-162.
- Schoenbach, K., De Ridder, J., & Lauf, E. (2001). Politicians on TV news: Getting attention in Dutch and German election campaigns. *European Journal of Political Research*, 39(4), 519-531.
- Shehzad, H., Raza, M. R., & Zahra, S. (2019). Licensed to Learn: A Case of TV and Radio Channels in Pakistani Universities. *International Journal of Distance Education and E-Learning*, 5(1), 57-67.
- Siraj, S. A., & Hussain, S. (2017). Critical analysis of journalistic autonomy in Pakistan. *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*, 11(1), 106.
- Sparks, C. (2010). Coverage of China in the UK national press. *Chinese Journal of Communication*, 3(3), 347-365.
- Strömbäck, J., & Van Aelst, P. (2013). Why political parties adapt to the media: Exploring the fourth dimension of mediatization. *International Communication Gazette*, 75(4), 341-358.
- Tresch, A. (2009). Politicians in the media: Determinants of legislators' presence and prominence in Swiss newspapers. *The International Journal of Press/Politics*, 14(1), 67-90.
- Valkenburg, P. M., Semetko, H. A., & De Vreese, C. H. (1999). The effects of news frames on readers' thoughts and recall. *Communication research*, 26(5), 550-569.
- Voltmer, K., & Schmitt-Beck, R. (2006). New democracies without citizens?. *Mass media and political communication in new democracies*, 42, 199.
- Vos, D. (2014). Which politicians pass the news gates and why? Explaining inconsistencies in research on news coverage of individual politicians. *International journal of communication*., 8, 2438-2461.
- Wang, T. L. (2012). Presentation and impact of market-driven journalism on sensationalism in global TV news. *International Communication Gazette*, 74(8), 711-727.
- Waqas, M., & Khattak, M. (2017). Democracy in Pakistan: Problems and Prospects in Making Informed Choices. *International Journal of Social Sciences and Management*, 4(1), 9-11.

#### Appendix A: Contents Categorization Scheme

	Frames	Categories and Explanation	Codes
1	News Channels	<b>Dunya News:</b> Nine o'clock news headlines from Dunya news about selected political parties will be used for analysis.	1
		<b>Geo News:</b> Nine o'clock news headlines from Geo News about selected political parties will be used for analysis.	2
2	Leaders of Political Parties	<b>Pakistan Muslim League (PLMN):</b> For framing, I will choose Nawaz Sharif from PLMN as a party leader.	1
		<b>Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI):</b> For framing purposes, I will choose Imran Khan as a representative of PTI.	2
		<b>Pakistan People's Party (PPP):</b> I will select Bilawal Bhutto from the headlines as a representative of PPP for framing purposes.	3
4	News Type	<b>Hard News Lead:</b> The opening stance of the news i.e., breaking news, deadline-oriented story.	0
		<b>Feature Lead News:</b> It is used when news doesn't deal with the breaking news. It has some background in it.	1
5	Leadership Attributes	Party manifesto and plans: Stories about party plans and manifesto and commitments	1
		<b>Leader's character:</b> Story about leaders' personal character is person is positive or negative, Honest or Dishonest etc. good decision maker or not etc.	2

		<b>Past performances of party:</b> Story about party previous performance	3
		<b>Voting worth:</b> Story about voters' behaviors about party or leadership	4
		<b>Party faced bias or victimization in news stories:</b> If a news channel shows favoritism towards a particular party and highlights any small issue as a big one known as bias. News story shows leaders as a victim poorly handled by other party and sources	5
6	<b>Slants Towards Party Leader</b>	Favourable or Pro	1
		Unfavourable or Anti	2
		Neutral	3