



## THE COVERAGE OF KASHMIR AND YEMEN CONFLICTS IN THE CONTEXT OF POLICY CERTAINTY AND PREVAILING POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT: CONTENT ANALYSIS OF *NAWA-I-WAQT* AND *EXPRESS*

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### Abstract

*This article examines the relationship between Urdu press and policy issues in Pakistan, where, apart from vibrant electronic media, the press has a lot of importance in shaping public opinions about foreign policy related issues. Analyzing the diversified approaches of press towards [foreign] policy issues, this study is theoretically conducted in the context of elites' debate over policy issues as thoroughly explained in literature on Indexing theory (Bennett, 1990). Coupled with the cover assumptions of Pier Robinson's Policy-media interaction model (2000), the study evaluates the nature of reporting of the two violent issues including Kashmir conflict (2016), after killing of digitally connected freedom fighter-Burhan Wani, and the Yemen conflict (2015) in selected newspapers i.e. Nawa-i-Waqt and Express. The findings, mainly, suggest that oppositional or critical coverage was triggered at the time when government was lacking a clear policy line or it [government] failed to dominate the policy debate over an issue as in the case of Yemen conflict. Hence, reporting this issue, the selected newspapers criticized Pakistan's uncertain policy line, mainly in the context of government's delayed decision to join coalition, which was formed to fight with terrorism, and it*



*[the military coalition] was leading by Saudi Arabia. Unlike the Yemen conflict, the findings that were in line with the core assumptions of Robinson's model suggest that Pakistani media was tended more towards supportive coverage in case of politically controlled policy issue of Kashmir, which was highly framed in line with government's guidelines, and decisions.*

**Key Words:** Kashmir conflict, Burhan Wani, freedom struggle, Yemen conflict, neutrality.

## **Introduction**

Evaluating the media- government interaction in policy perspective, many researchers including Bennett, 1990; Bennett & Lawrence, 1995; Entman, 1991; Hallin, 1989; Robinson, 2000; 2017 and Wolfsfeld, 1997 have studied the relationship between media and government [ an area of political communication] in different perspectives. For instance, Bennet (1990) is talking about the elites' consensus, and argued that media will follow the elites' perspectives/ guidelines [on policy issue], especially when there exists 'consensus' in the circle of [political/ governing] elites. Furthering the scholarship on the state of relationship between media and government, the political contest model (Wolfsfeld, 1997) explains the impact of politically controlled environment over media-government relationship, whereas it would be, more, obvious that the pro-government storyline will dominate the media debate. However, the policy-media interaction model (Robinson, 2000), which is the outcome of scholarly work of Hallin (1986) and Bennett (1990), gauges the relationship between media and policy issues/ government on the basis of 'policy certainty'. For instance, when there is a certain and well-articulated policy line of government on any policy issue, it [government] would be privileged of supportive media coverage.

This paper examines the relationship between Pakistani media and government on the basis of politically controlled issue- Kashmir conflict, and the issue that triggered political opposition/resistance in political circle of Pakistan i.e. the Yemen conflict. The researchers, further, evaluate the relationship between the two-player i.e. government and media in the context of policy certainty (Robinson, 2000) as in the case of Kashmir issue, and policy uncertainty (Robinson, 2017) as in the case of Yemen conflict. Before entering into further theoretical discussion, a brief is given on Urdu press and selected issues in the following paragraphs;

## **Brief History of Urdu Press**

Apart from the English press, the Urdu press in Pakistan has also been playing its vital role in, almost, all fields of life, especially in the field of politics and policy issues since the independence of Pakistan in 1947. Even, before the partition of sub-continent, the Urdu press vibrantly voiced for the freedom of Muslim. The history, in this regard, shows that "Jam-e-Jahan Numa", which was a weekly newspaper that started its publication in 1922, is considered a pioneer Urdu language newspaper. However, its contents were published both in Urdu and Persian languages. Noticeably, the first ever full-pledged Urdu language newspaper was "Urdu



Akhbar”, which started its publication from Dehli in 1836, and its owner was Maulvi Muhammad Baqar (Buglio, 1988).

After partition, Pakistan got four major newspapers including “*Pakistan Times, Zamindar, Nawa-i-Waqt, and Civil and Military Gazette*”, which were based in Lahore, while some other major newspapers of the time such as English dailies *Dawn* and *Morning News*, and Urdu language newspapers- *Jang* and *Anjam* moved to Karachi (Ponkey, 2013).

Currently, there are more than 400 newspapers/ member publications of All Pakistan Newspaper Society (APNS), whereas majority of daily newspapers are publishing in Urdu (APNS, n.d.). These newspapers cover numerous issues ranging from social to political, sports and crimes related issues. Out of the vibrant Urdu press, two newspapers i.e. *Nawa-i-Waqt*, which is publishing from four cities including Lahore, Multan, Islamabad and Karachi, and daily *Express*, which is publishing from ten different cities across Pakistan (APNS, n.d.), have been selected by researchers. This selection is made on ground that *Nawa-i-Waqt* keeps a clear policy stance over the issue of Kashmir, supporting more vibrantly the freedom struggle of Kashmiri while *Express*, as compare to *Nawa-i-Waqt*, has a moderate stance on the issue of Kashmir. For instance, the policy of *Nawa-i-Waqt* reflects in one of the reports on August 01, 2016 of its English language newspaper i.e. *The Nation*, which termed the killing of Burhan Wani as brutality;

*“More than twenty days have passed since Burhan Wani was killed in what India terms as an ‘operation’ against terrorist elements, but what was actually the brutal murder of a 21-year-old”.*

*The Express Tribune*, which is the flagship publication of the *Daily Express* media group, described the situation in Indian held Kashmir in following words; was “Urdu Akhbar” published in 1836 by the Maulvi Muhammad Baqar from Dehli.

*“Kashmir is groaning with the pain and the silence of a graveyard which symbolises the region today. The pro-freedom leadership led by Syed Ali Geelani, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq and Yasin Malik remains jailed. Despite that, they have been directing protests asking people to agitate and counter the curfew with shut downs. If it is curfew on one side, it will be a shut down or a protest on the other side”.* (Bukhari, S.,2016).

### **Kashmir Conflict (2016)**

Kashmir conflict is one of the major objectives of Pakistan’s foreign policy, which insists of [the] “safeguarding national security and geo-strategic interests, including Kashmir” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d.). The issue of Kashmir gets more attention both of the policy makers and Pakistani media when the routine affairs regarding maltreatment of human rights (Abid & Ashfaq, 2016), turned into violence then the government, especially the media come



forward to report the violation of human rights, effectively, while giving a platform to public for expressing their sentiments. (Gadda, 2014).

For instance, Kashmir conflict entered into violent phase after the Indian forces killed a young Kashmiri freedom fighter Burhan Wani on July 08, 2016. Unlike other freedom fighters, who prefer to keep their identity hidden, in Indian occupied Kashmir, Wani was known for his social media identity, and he joined the militant group at the age of 15. The killing of this digitally connected militant commander pushed the valley into a series of protests, forcing the Indian government to suspend the coverage of social media (*Dawn* July 21, 2016), and imposed curfew in the Kashmir valley that lifted after 51 consecutive days on August 29, 2016 (*Hindustan Times*, 2016).

The killing of Burhan Wani, a Hizbul Mujahideen commander, not only intensified the hostilities between Pakistan and India, but it also gave birth to a new dimension as many of young Kashmiri, inspired from Wani, are preferring to display their involvement in fight against Indian aggression (Nabeel et al., 2016). This phase of the Kashmir conflict triggered the worst type of insurgency in Indian held Kashmir since 2010, negatively affected the Pak-Indian policy in the region. The international media also characterized the situation after the killing of Burhan Wani as more violent in its nature. (*The New York Times*, 2016).

### **Yemen Conflict (2015)**

The hot discussion on the issue, in political circle of Pakistan, to join the Islamic countries military alliance, which was formed in the context of Yemen conflict, caused policy uncertainty in policy circle of Pakistan. Even after the formal request of Saudi Arabia for military support against the Houthi militants-rebels in Yemen (*The Guardian*, 2015), the policy uncertainty dominated the political scenario in Pakistan. The reason of [policy] uncertainty was Tehran's position in the conflict that pushed Pakistan into difficult situation, generating a state of uncertainty about the issue of joining the Saudi Arabia led coalition- the country, which is not only economic and strategic partner of Pakistan, but it [Saudi Arabia] also gets militarily help from Pakistan (Afzal, 2019). To take opposition parties onboard, and defuse the internal political pressure the government summoned a "joint session" of Parliament in April, 2015, where it was decided;

*"the government to stay out of the conflict in Yemen where the Saudi-led coalition is bombing Houthi rebels. A unanimous resolution backed the government's commitment to protect Saudi Arabia's territory, which has so far not been threatened by the conflict. But it [resolution] said Pakistan should play a mediating role". (The Express Tribune, 2015).*

However, at later stage, Pakistan became part of the Saudi Arabia led counter terrorism coalition on December 17, 2015, and the then army chief Pakistan, "General (retired) Raheel Sharif was made the chief of 39-nation Islamic military coalition" (*Dawn*, 2017).



## Literature Review: Theoretical Discussion on Media-government Interactions

The elite-driven approach, mainly, dominates the theoretical scholarship on media–government relations, whereas theorists including Daniel Hallin, 1989; Herman and Noam Chomsky, 1988; Lance Bennett, 1990 and Pier Robinson, 2000 described the nature of relationship between media and government in light of different theoretical perspectives. For instance, the indexing theory (Bennett, 1990) explains the government- media relationship on the basis of elites' debate over policy issue, arguing that the existence of elites' consensus will shape supportive media coverage, and the media will do independent reporting in the absence of elites' consensus. Similarly, policy-media interaction model (Robinson, 2000) presents two different conditions that will determine the nature of media coverage i.e. policy certainty and uncertainty. The policy certainty, as in the case of Kashmir conflict, will shape more supportive coverage in media, however the condition i.e. policy uncertainty, as in the case of Yemen conflict, makes media free from the control of government/ political elites, and it [media] perform a more independent role (Robinson, 2017).

Taking into consideration the above brief discussion on media and government relationship, this paper attempts, theoretically, to examine that how the government and media relationship effects the media coverage in Pakistan. Whereas, the researchers have selected the issue of Kashmir [ which is a politically controlled issue] and Yemen conflict, which caused policy uncertainty to evaluate the media approach towards these diversified natures of issues. The study is conducted, mainly, in theoretical perspectives of policy-media interaction model (Robinson, 2000), coupled with the core assumption of Wolfsfeld's (1997) political contest model, which explains the nature of media coverage on the basis of political environment, if government keeps control over [prevailing] political environment then media will be dependent on political/ governing elites, and will rely on their information. But, when government fails to control over political environment around any policy issue, then media will report the issue independently and will give more critical coverage to that particular issue, [ for instance, Yemen]. For this study, the researchers have outlined the following research questions.

- R.Q.1:** What is the potential effect of selected frames in determining the nature of reporting on the issues of Kashmir and Yemen?
- R.Q.2:** What is the media approach towards politically controlled issue of Kashmir?
- R.Q.3:** What condition provides media an opportunity to report policy issue[s] more independently?

## Research Methodology

For analyzing the media tendencies towards the issue of Kashmir [having policy certainty, and the government/ governing elites control debate over this policy issue], and Yemen conflict, which triggered policy uncertainty in policy circle of Pakistan, the researchers selected two Urdu language newspapers i.e. *Nawa-i-Waqt* and *Express*. For detail inquiry of the media role in policy issues in developing countries like Pakistan, the timeframe of the study



consists of three months [from July to September, 2016] for the issue of Kashmir, and from March to April, 2015 for Yemen conflict.

Using the coding sheet for data collection, the researchers applied census sampling and retrieved total 445 news stories [ 247 on the issue of Kashmir while 198 were reported on Yemen in both selected newspapers]. The collected news stories were examined on the basis of overall seven frames, whereas four frames were identified in the media coverage of Kashmir issue while three representative frames were identified for evaluation of the media coverage on Yemen conflict. Frames were identified to get a clear image of issues (Gamson and Modigliani, 1989), following the slant categories that help researchers to determine the media approach towards, particular, policy issues (Entman, 2007).

### **Findings of the Study: Discussion**

**R.Q.1:** What is the potential effect of selected frames in determining the nature of reporting on the issues of Kashmir and Yemen?

**Table 1. Distribution frames that shaped the media coverage on Kashmir conflict.**

Newspapers	Legitimate struggle	Abusing the rights of Kashmiri	Peaceful resolution	International communities' role	Total
<i>Nawa-i-Waqt</i>	63	31	19	21	134
<i>Express</i>	25	47	16	25	113
Total	88(36%)	78(31%)	35(14%)	46(19%)	247(100%)

$X^2(3, N=247) = 27.12, p < 0.002$

Frames	Supportive N%	Neutral N%	Oppositional N%
Legitimate struggle	<b>68(41)</b>	18(29)	02(10)
Abusing the rights of Kashmiri	64(39)	10(16)	04(20)
Peaceful resolution	23(14)	10(16)	02(10)
International communities' role	10(06)	24(39)	<b>12(60)</b>
Total	165(100)	62(100)	20(100)

$X^2(6, N=247) = 43.14, p < 0.01$

The above table 1, which consists of two parts, indicates the overall coverage of the Kashmir conflict in selected newspapers i.e. “*Nawa-i-Waqt* and *Express*”, which they were given to Kashmir conflict after the assassination of Burhan Wani. The findings [in part-I of the given table] display that one of the selected frames i.e. ‘legitimate struggle’ shaped high coverage [36%], which is followed by abusing the rights of Kashmiri, International communities’ role and peaceful resolution that generated 31%, 19% and 14% media coverage in selected newspapers of this study respectively.

The statistical results indicate a significant relationship among framing categories i.e. legitimate struggle, abusing the rights of Kashmiri, peaceful resolution and role of International



community [ $X^2(3, N=247) = 27.12, p < 0.002$ ]. These findings not only reveal significant relationship among selected frames, but out of the total four frames of this study, two frames including legitimate struggle of Kashmiri people for their right to self-determination, and abuses were framed high by selected newspapers, which clearly in line with Pakistan’s foreign policy objectives, which are designed at “safeguarding national security and geo-strategic interests, including Kashmir” (Foreign O.P, 2019).

The statistical results  $X^2(6, N=247) = 43.14, p < 0.01$  [ refers to part-II of the table No. 1] show that the substantial relationship between the selected frames and nature of coverage is existed. The frame of ‘legitimate struggle, comparatively, triggered higher supportive coverage (41%) in selected newspapers, which is followed by ‘abusing the rights of Kashmiri’ that shaped 39% supportive coverage out of total 247 news. Peaceful resolution frame generated 14% supportive, 16% neutral while 10% critical coverage. However, the frame “International communities’ role” dominated critical/ oppositional coverage by 60% and neutral by 39%, indicating that the selected newspapers of Pakistan were found more critical to the government on ground of its relationship with international community including the UN, US and other global political players, whose role was criticized by Pakistani media in the perspective of Kashmir issue.

**Table 2. Distribution frames that shaped the media coverage on Yemen conflict.**

Newspapers	Political process on Yemen	Impartiality	Policy Uncertainty	Total
<i>Nawa-i-Waqt</i>	28	45	36	109
<i>Express</i>	23	37	29	89
Total	51 (26%)	82(41%)	65(33%)	198(100%)
$X^2(2, N=198) = 21.35, p = 0.000$				
Frames	Supportive	Neutral	Oppositional	
Political process on Yemen	<b>29(55)</b>	13(19)	09(11)	
Impartiality	17(32)	44(66)	21(27)	
Policy uncertainty	07(13)	10(15)	<b>48(62)</b>	
Total	53(100)	67(100)	78(100)	
$X^2(4, N=198) = 69.21, p < 0.01$				

The overall media coverage on Yemen crisis, shows that the issue was reported high in the perspective of neutrality by both the selected newspapers. Their coverage, which was given in the political background of Saudi Arab backed military coalition, shows that the ‘impartiality’ frame dominated/ shaped the highest amount of media coverage i.e. 41%, followed by policy uncertainty [33%], and the frame of political process on Yemen that shaped 26% of the total 198 news stories on Yemen conflict.



The statistical results reflect that selected frames have noteworthy influence in determining the media coverage i.e.  $X^2(2, N=198) = 21.35, p=0.000$ , which influenced the media approach towards Yemen conflict [see second part of table No.3]. This second part of the above table reflects that how Pakistani media covered the issue of Yemen, especially in the context of policy matter. The findings show that one of the frames ‘political process on Yemen’ shaped higher supportive coverage i.e. 55% than the rest of two selected frames. The findings, on one side, show that the impartiality frame dominated the neutral or balance media coverage by 66%, while, on another side, the policy uncertainty frame shaped 62% critical/ oppositional reporting [78/198], which challenged the government policy stance on Yemen conflict. Statistically,  $X^2(4, N=198) = 69.21, p < 0.01$ , it can be argued there is substantial association among the selected frames and the nature of media coverage.

**R.Q.2:** What is the media approach towards politically controlled issue of Kashmir?

**Table 3. The influence of policy certainty over media coverage of Kashmir issue in selected newspapers.**

Newspapers	Supportive(N%)	Neutral(N%)	Oppositional (N%)	Total
<i>Nawa-i-Waqt</i>	93	32	09	134
<i>Express</i>	72	30	11	113
Grant Total	<b>165(67)</b>	62(25)	20(08)	247(100)
$X^2(2, N=247) = 107.03, p < 0.01$				
Policy Certainty	Supportive (N%)	Neutral (N%)	Oppositional (N%)	Total (N%)
Certainty	<b>153(93)</b>	46(74)	03(15)	<b>202 (82)</b>
Uncertainty	12(07)	16(26)	<b>17(85)</b>	45 (18)
Total	165(100)	62(100)	20(100)	247(100)
$X^2(2, N=247) = 136.18, p < 0.01$				

The table No.3 indicates how media deal with policy issues in Pakistan. The findings reflect that more supportive coverage was given to the conflict of Kashmir at the time of violence that surfaced after the killing of Burhan Wani in Indian held Kashmir. Both the selected newspapers, collectively, highlighted the issue of Kashmir more in the line of government’s policy i.e. 67%, followed by 25% neutral coverage while selected newspapers reported the issue of Kashmir critical [08% ] only, whereas the media criticized the government for its, seemingly, weak position on the issue at different international forums. Statistically, there is a significant difference in the distribution of three slant categories ( $X^2(2, N=247) = 107.03, p < 0.01$ ).

In second part of the table No.2 the researchers evaluate the impact of policy certainty on media coverage of policy issue [the issue of Kashmir]. Testing/ applying the policy-media interaction model (Robinson, 2000), the results obtained, show that the issue of Kashmir was framed high in the context of policy certainty i.e. 202 (82%) of the total 247 news that were reported in the context of policy certainty. The policy certainty, in case of Kashmir, shaped 93% supportive coverage. However, the issue of Kashmir was framed less in the context of



uncertainty i.e. 45(18%) news out of total 247 that were fallen in the category of ‘policy uncertainty’, which dominated, highly, the oppositional coverage by 85%. Hence supporting the Robinson (2017) arguments, saying that media will give critical coverage to policy issue when government lacks a clear policy line- triggers policy uncertainty. Statistically, the results show significant relationship between the policy certainty and the nature of media coverage i.e. ( $X^2(2, N=247) =136.18, p<0.01$ ), hence confirm the key assumption of policy-media interaction model as the findings indicate a significant stimulus of policy certainty over media coverage of the issue of Kashmir.

**R.Q.3:** What condition provides media an opportunity to report policy issue[s] more independently?

**Table 4. The influence of policy certainty over media coverage of Yemen conflict**

Newspapers	Supportive (N%)	Neutral (N%)	Oppositional (N%)	Total
<i>Nawai-i-Waqt</i>	28	36	45	109
<i>Express</i>	25	31	33	89
Grant Total	53(27)	67(34)	78(39)	198(100)
$X^2(2, N=198) =28.68, p=0.01$				
Policy Certainty	Supportive (N%)	Neutral (N%)	Oppositional (N%)	Total (N%)
Certainty	<b>39(74)</b>	26(39)	09((12)	74 (37)
Uncertainty	14(26)	<b>41(61)</b>	<b>69(88)</b>	<b>124 (63)</b>
Total	53(100)	67(100)	78(100)	198 (100)
$X^2(2, N=198) =97.48, p<0.01$				

Contrary to Kashmir conflict, the Yemen crisis was reported high in the context of policy uncertainty, showing that Pakistan failed to take a clear and timely policy stance over the issue of Yemen. The above table No. 4 shows that the selected newspapers gave, comparatively, more critical/ independent coverage to the issue of Yemen i.e. 39%, which is followed by neutral coverage (34%) and supportive coverage (27%). In later case, the selected newspapers supported some of the aspects of government. Statistically speaking, there exists a significant relationship among the slant categories i.e.  $X^2(2, N=198) =28.68, p=0.01$ .

However, the second part of the table indicates that how Pakistani media had taken the Yemen conflict, especially in the context of Muslim’s countries’ coalition to fight with terrorism that triggered policy uncertainty in policy circle of Pakistan. The findings reflect that policy uncertainty shaped 124 (63%) news coverage out of total 198 news stories being published on the issue of Yemen in both selected newspapers. The policy uncertainty dominated the critical or oppositional coverage by 88% and neutral coverage by 61% that, clearly, support Robinson (2017) who argues that policy uncertainty will trigger critical coverage [on policy issue]. Similarly, the policy certainty shaped more supportive coverage in the case of Yemen conflict i.e. 74% out of the total 53 supportive news stories on the issue of Yemen. These findings support the key assumption of policy-media interaction model (Robinson, 2000), arguing that media will tow government’s policy line when there exists



policy certainty. Statistically it is proved that the policy certainty has a significant relationship with the nature of media coverage  $X^2(2, N=198) = 97.48, p < 0.01$ .

## **Conclusion**

To conclude the overall discussion on the first two tables that are related to the first research question of the study, it can be argued that the selected frames have significant effects on the nature of media coverage as legitimate struggle of Kashmiri, in case of Kashmir conflict, not only shaped high media coverage as compare to the rest of three selected frames, but also dominated the supportive category. These findings support the key arguments of policy-media interaction model (Robinson, 2000) as it was reported that the selected newspapers towed the policy line of government while reporting the politically controlled issue of Kashmir-supporting Wolfsfeld's (1997) political contest model also, which sees the effect of politically control environment over media coverage.

Unlike the Kashmir conflict, the Yemen conflict shaped more oppositional coverage, whereas the frame impartiality dominated the overall coverage on the issue of Yemen. However, the policy uncertainty [as a frame here], comparatively high critical media coverage and the frame 'political process on Yemen' dominated the supportive coverage on Yemen conflict.

Summing up the discussion on third table [relating to the second research question], the study found that the politically controlled issue of Kashmir is covered more in the context of government policy line, supporting the key assumption of policy-media interaction model (Robinson, 2000). The supportive tendencies of media were reported, mostly, in the context of policy certainty, leading the media to highlight the conflict in policy objectives of Pakistan. Referring to the third research question, it can be argued that the Yemen conflict shaped more critical coverage in Pakistani media as the findings highlight the critical approach of the selected newspapers towards the issue of Yemen, whereas the media criticized government for its uncertain policy line on the issue of Yemen. These findings are in line with another core assumption of Robinson (2017), arguing that the policy uncertainty will trigger critical media coverage.

For future researchers, the authors outline some of the limitations of this study as it is theoretically limited to policy-media interaction model, and, to some extent, to political contest model. Methodologically it is restricted to content analysis, focusing on quantitative measures. Hence, further studies may also be conducted qualitatively to examine the media-government relationship, especially on the issue of Kashmir.



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