Media’s Projection Of Democratic Process: A Comparative Analysis Of Three Leading Pakistani Political Parties During Election 2018 In National Dailies

Dr. Nasim ishaq*

Head of Communication Studies Department, Governments Fatima Jinnah College Chuna Mandi Lahore, Pakistan

* Corresponding author: nasimishaq17@mail.com

The democratic continuity strengthens the public institutions and triggers the glimmer of hope for public prosperity. The current research focuses on the association between the print media and political parties in Pakistan. The basic purpose of this analysis is to examine that how the Pakistani dailies portray three of Pakistan’s parliamentary parties in their substances during the electoral process of 2018. Media has an abundant worth during the voting process because of its aptitude to frame the image of political parties, headship and affect the reader’s point of view. So the media and political affairs liaison become more multifaceted during the polling process. Media depends on political parties for an update while political leaders follow the media for profile-raising. Pakistan had its polling day to elect its 15th National assembly on 25th July, 2018. What remains to be studied is the contribution of print media in raising mass awareness, deep understanding, mass participation in the voting process and worth of democratic continuity? Did it initiate to sensitize the citizens about the worth of voting, critical thinking about present political parties manifestos and their earlier enactment? Did the depiction of electoral competition only relate to the portrayal of political party leaders, their clashes among each other or did it go beyond and drafted any opportunities and remedies to improve civic issues? The researcher has discussed this multi-faced rapport by analyzing the treatment of mainstream political parties (PML-N, PPPP, and PTI) in Pakistani leading dailies (Jang, Nawa-e-Waqt, Dawn and The News) by applying qualitative and quantitative content analysis techniques. The frequency, position and tilt of news stories regarding political parties published on the front page of the selected newspapers from 25th June 2018 to 25th August 2018 is studied, and editorials of the nominated dailies were qualitatively examined through framing.

Keywords: Democracy; Election 2018; content analysis; Print media; Framing;

ARTICLE INFORMATION

Received: 28 January 2020
Revised: 28 April 2020
Accepted: 01 May 2020
DOI: 10.31580/jpvai.v3i1.1297

INTRODUCTION

The media played a markedly role while providing a platform for diversified political discourses. Hope, positive visions, peace, prosperity and equality are directly connected to successive democratic transition. The democratic system cannot work and flourish in the absence of political parties (Akhtar, 2011). Like many other institutions of society, political groups are the quite vibrant groups but in Pakistani society this particular segment of society mostly manure by other powerful segments like military, bureaucracy and judiciary (Hussain & Kokab, 2013). People dependence at media enhance before polling; for getting news about political candidates and during polling. It’s the media that updated the masses about security condition, polling booth situation, tabulation as well as voters trend. The vital ingredient making democracy conceivable is the continuity of information. Consequently, national dailies have remained a leading substance of electioneering of major political parties and their supporters. Numerous scholars pointed out the strong association between democracies and the political parties (Muller & Strom, 1999; Strom, Muller & Bergman, 2006 as cited in Mushthaq, Baig & Mushitaq, 2018). Media is, clearly, of seriously significant in all the processes of engineering the thinking patterns. It also plays its part in sensitizing the masses about the worth to vote; those which most thoroughly align with their concerns, “ideology” and standards, “representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence” (Althusser, 2001, pp85-127). Sovereign judiciary, vibrant establishment, proactive media are the essential tools to flourish an operational democracy (Laohakosol & Walsh, 2011).

THEORATICAL FRAMEWORK

The Agenda-setting theory offers the foundation for the current study. Donald Shah, Maxwell McComb, LittleJohn and Foss (2008) explained the variables of theory in these words; “The ability to effect cognitive change among individuals, to structure their thinking—has been labelled the Agenda setting function of mass communication. Briefly, the mass media not be successful in telling us what to think but they are stunningly successful in telling what to think about” (293). This explicates the influence of media to set the trends “agenda” and elevate issues of mass importance. McComb and Shaw (1972) as quoted in Wogu (2008) narrated about the community fellows “audience not only learn about public issues through the media, they also learn how much importance to attach to an issue or topic from the emphasis the mass media place upon it”.

LITERATURE AND HYPOTHESIS

The strength of association between media and democratic practice can be comprehended through the lens of Oboh and Batta

Copyright © 2020. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.
Besley, Burgess and prat (2002) assert that “a free or non-captured media can affect political outcomes through three routes, namely: sorting, discipline and policy salience” (p.49). In the process of engineering democratic setup, it’s essential to provide valid and appropriate information to the electorate for taking accurate decision to select most appropriate political representative (Hallin and Mancini, 2004). This researcher further narrated their opinion in these words: “policy makers need accurate information about citizens, to respond to public concerns, to deliver effective services meeting real human needs, and also, in democracies to maximize popular electoral support to be returned to office.” The researcher has selected the news items; front page news and editorials because dailies are still basic instrument of mass communication. “At the beginning, print media (newspaper) was society’s primary instrument of mass communication and till today it is the log book of human affairs more than any other means of communication”. (Hynds as cited in Daramola, 2003, p. 120).

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Did Pakistani dailies give more prominence to scandalized news about political parties compared to other issues?
2. Is there any variance in the treatment in the English and Urdu newspapers?
3. Whether dailies gave progressive coverage about democratic process with suggestive stages or just critically analyzed the issues without asserting any solution?

METHODOLOGY

The current research considers all front page news and editorials published in the four leading English and Urdu dailies i.e., Dawn and The News (two English language dailies), Jang and Nawa-i-Waqt (two Urdu dailies) from June 25th, 2018, to 25th August, 2018, a time period of one month before and after general election 2018 in Pakistan. The researcher used purposive sampling.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF CATEGORIES

The concerns were divided into five categories: significance of democracy; awareness about participating in voting process; performance of election commission of Pakistan, accountability process and coverage of main stream three political parties. All news contents (front page news and editorials) associated to primary function of media to go beyond and drafted any opportunities and remedies to improve civic issues (Curran & Gurevitch, 1991; McNair, 2002; Obot, 2013; Wolfesohn, 2002).

Table 1 indicates that out of total of 647 Front page news, in the leading English dialectal newspapers 245 (37.86%) and in the national language (Urdu) newspapers 402 (62.1%) news were printed.

Table 2 points out that out of the total 647 news published in leading newspapers from 25th June 2018 to 25th August 2018 about general election in Pakistan, 326 (50.38%) news were printed on issue “Portrayal of political party leaders” which is highest compared to all other categories. The “Apprehensions about pre and post poll ragging” issue is the second most covered issue with 112 (17.3%) news. 125 (19.3%) news were published on the issue of “Political parties faced biased victimization”, 50 (7.3%) news were published on “Sensitize the citizens about the worth of voting” and least covered issue was “Report the party manifesto and previous performance” with 34(5.25%) news items.

Table 3 indicates that 112 editorials were published on the issues; out of 112, 32(28.57%) were published in Dawn; most of them positive, suggestive and appreciating the voters to choose the political candidates with their free will. 21(17.8%) editorials were printed in Jang, most of them neutral, providing information as a commentary.
and suggestive stance for all including NAB, ECP and care taker government to play their fair and transparent role.39(33%) editorials published in Nawa-i-Waqt, most of them highlighted the political victimization of PML-N, biased attitude of NAB, pre and post poll ragging issues as well as problems faced by duty officers at counting and at time of delivery of results.26(22%) editorials were published at The Nation , most of them highlighted the unfairness of judiciary, care-taker government and pointed out the systematic marginalization of leading political parties previous civic development projects by media and other segments of society.

**Table 4: Issue-wise Analysis of English and Urdu Newspapers**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Portrait of political parties</th>
<th>Apprehension about pre and post poll ragging</th>
<th>Biased victimization</th>
<th>Sensitive the citizens about voting</th>
<th>Report the party manifesto and previous performance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>English</strong></td>
<td>133(39.5%)</td>
<td>42(40.7%)</td>
<td>57(47%)</td>
<td>13(41%)</td>
<td>7(31.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Urdu</strong></td>
<td>163(56.9%)</td>
<td>61(60.3%)</td>
<td>64(53%)</td>
<td>18(57.1%)</td>
<td>15(68.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>286</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N1=252 English dailies  N2=311 Urdu dailies

The results of table 4 gives a comparison of Urdu and English dailies treatment to the issues about democratic process of 2018. Out of 252 news stories covered by English national dailies, 133(39.5%) news were on issue of “portrait of political leaders”, 42 (40.7%) were available on issue of “apprehensions about pre and post poll ragging”, 57 (47%) news were printed on “biased victimization”, 13 (41.0%) were about “sensitize the citizens about the worth of reporting” and only 7(31.8%) front page news stories were issued on “political parties manifesto and previous performance” issue while contrary among total of 311 news covered by Urdu newspapers, 163(41.5%) news were on issue of “portrait of political leaders”, 61 (60.3%) were available on issue of “apprehensions about pre and post poll ragging”, 64(53%) news were printed on “biased victimization”, 18 (59.0%) were about “sensitize the citizens about the worth of reporting” and only 15(68.2%) front page news stories were issued on “political parties manifesto and previous performance”.

The results show that media gave the maximum coverage to the politician-oriented narrative, in which some of politicians repeatedly blamed each other without evidence even at highly sensitive issue as The Nation wrote “Without the shred of evidence, that the PMLN government “to please western power” had deliberately weakened the pledge on the finishity of prophet hood, in exchange of hiding his corruption. Imran Khan actively fanning the flames”.

Very interesting findings were shared by Dawn by mentioning that Balochistan seemed missing in the national political engineering (3-7- 18 Dawn) because the leading political parties least focused at arranging their corner meeting, political power shows and the most significantly sharing any prominent agenda to address Balochistan issues at priorities. Dawn also observed and penned the key issue “The countries major political parties are so dominated by personalities who appear to be a permanent part of the political landscape is certainly disappointing from a democratic perspective”.

**CONCLUSION**

Peace, prosperity, fair and equal rights are normally connected to transparent democratic process in every nation. Unfortunately in Pakistan, the engineering of democratic practice is not much bright. To deeply comprehend them fully very critical administrative and systematic transformations are essentials to implement. International democratic organizations emphasize that media has a leading role in gauging mass awareness for civil rights to equally participate in polling process. Media can perform a very significant character in spreading information that can endow readers to take an independent decision to select a responsible political candidate and then take an action; to cast a vote at polling day. If the media executes its act as fair, unbiased and responsible role of enlightening and reporting the democratic process it can be quite focal in bringing social transformation for the rights of masses.

The aim of current study was to categorize the role of Pakistani print media about issues of democratic process in Pakistan. The consequences pinpoint that framing on the issues of democratic process in both English and Urdu newspapers were quite disappointing from a democratic perspective appear to be a permanent part of the political landscape. The major political parties are so dominated by personalities who arrange their corner meeting, political power shows and the most significant sharing any prominent agenda to address Balochistan issues; health facilities, free education, public transport, drinkable water, jobs, clean environment etc. The researchers have discovered 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).
References:


