

Agenda setting and Framing of Elections during Musharraf Period in Pakistani Print Media (1999-2008)

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents a content analysis of editorials published by the elite English press of Pakistan during Pervaiz Musharraf's regime (1999-2008). It examines the trends of editorial agenda, policies of the selected press and diversity of issues regarding dictator led elections in Pakistan. In Pakistan, likewise other countries, elections involve a large number of people having varied attributes of political culture and the press connects them altogether with reference to the issues and events of the electoral process. The era of General Pervaiz Musharraf is of vast historical importance in the political system of Pakistan due to the changing issues and situations at both national and international level. The dictator follows the tradition set by the ancestor Generals to prolong the rule by using various types of elections (Referendum, Local Bodies and General Elections) as tactics. Each time these elections are claimed as the 'process of restoration of democracy'. This epoch is also said as the germination of 'freedom of press' and the 'birth of electronic media' in Pakistan. The study considers the postulates of 'agenda setting' and 'framing' to examine the editorial coverage of elections by English dailies Dawn, the News and the Nation. For each election of that regime, it considers the time period starting from the election announcement till government formation so that the entire course of the electoral process be examined through editorials. The time against each election under study is divided into 'pre-poll', 'polling' and 'post-poll' periods. The analysis deals with six categories of the contents; constitutional amendments, Accountability/eligibility of nominees, election campaign, election arrangements and code of conduct, polling process, election results and government formation. It explores that what are the major issues and events regarding elections that got attention of the press. How media gives priorities to cover electoral issues. It further investigates the consistency of editorial policy and the watchdog role playing by the selected press through their editorials. It unpacks the frames being used in the editorials to picture a certain image regarding these electoral issues.

Introduction

Studying elections through analyzing media coverage, regarding diverse range of electoral issues, is one of the popular and fascinating domains of research in the field of political communication. Elections are considered central to the process of democratization and involve a larger number of people in a country than any other social activity. Media ought to be responsible in connecting the election commission, contestants and electorates regarding the issues of the electoral process. The media of a sovereign state plays important role to inform, to educate, to guide, to entertain, to discuss, to mirror, to campaign, to judge and watch-dog during the elections. Democracy demands fairness, freeness, and openness of both the media and elections.

In promoting the democratic values and culture in a society, free and responsible role of media is ever demanded. The press with such values not only raises political consciousness among public by selecting certain issues and framing them, but also puts an extra legal check on the electoral system by criticizing and discussing the issues.

Political instability in Pakistan has been one of the major problems since its birth. Many times in its history, democracy has been sabotaged by the Army dictators who used the tactics of elections to prolong their rule. Pervaiz Musharraf took over in 1999, followed the footprints of previous Army rulers and conducted many elections that are resulted in the spread of his rule around ten years.

The present study intends to examine that what were the major issues and events regarding Local Govt. Elections (2001, 2005), Referendum (2002) and General Elections (2002, 2008) that got attention of the press during Musharraf regime? How media set priorities to cover these electoral issues? It further attempts to gauge the consistency of editorial policy of the selected press while covering each type of elections and the role of press as watch-dog.

Rationale for selecting elections during Musharraf regime (1999-2008)

All elections that are conducted during Musharraf regime are significant in the political history of Pakistan as these elections were known as process of 'restoration of democracy'. As a dictator, Musharraf practiced a variety of elections types like Local Govt. Elections, Referendum and General Elections as tactics to legitimize and prolong his rule. The Musharraf regime was considered as the era of apolitical alliances, party shifts, constitutional amendments, horse trading, electoral rigging, domestic violence, terrorism and foreign pressures. All practiced types of elections (Local Govt. Referendum and General Elections) have different and diverse range of issues involved in their conduct and result. Researchers have collected the data from the date of announcement of each election during Musharraf regime till the government formation after the declaration of results so that all major events and issues regarding electoral process are analyzed. Further, researchers have divided the case of each election into three segments of time as pre-poll, polling and post-poll in order to deeply observe the variety of issues in each phase through their editorial coverage.

Rationale for selecting editorials of daily The News, The Nation and Dawn

This study considers the editorials and editorial notes of daily Dawn, The News and The Nation during the Pervaiz Musharraf regime (1999-2008). The rationale behind the selection of these newspapers is that all these appeared regularly during the period under consideration. These newspapers are popular icons of English press of Pakistan, having vast circulation and credibility among readers. These newspapers are playing important role in presenting national and international

issues following the editorial policies of their own. The editorial policy of a newspaper is better presented in the editorial, as it enjoys central place in a paper and captures relatively serious readers. Editorials differentiate one newspaper from the others by originally presenting the viewpoint of editor or owner (Saleem: 2010).

The role of editorial being echo of a newspaper is multidimensional especially in promotion of democracy, voter education and political socialization of general public. Researchers have selected the editorials of daily Dawn, The News and The Nation analyzing newspaper's policy, stance, framing and coverage of frequency in discussing the electoral issues during Pervaiz Musharraf regime (1999-2008).

Media and Elections

The relationship between media and politics has always been an important area of political communication. Media is responsible to inform, to educate, to provide a platform for public, to give publicity and channel for political advocacy in democratic societies. The press always focuses on politics and different political issues in their contents. Editorials are the element of newspapers which establish political character of any newspaper and also called 'Voice' of a newspaper (McNair, 2007)

New media has changed the traditional ways of working even in political sphere. Now-a-days, due to websites, blogs and other links of information politics is more interactive and concept of 'electronic democracy' or 'e-democracy' is more common. But still mainstream media is considered more credible as source of political news (Negrine, 2008).

An important aspect to determine media's role in framing politics is type of media that whether it is commercial or public TV news or tabloids versus quality newspapers, framing of politics will be different. But it is also important to know that in a country whatever the type of media is, media content is always in support of national interests (Strömbäck and Aelst, 2010). The newspapers make their own choices while giving coverage to the candidate, (Caliendo and McIlwain, 2006) examined minority candidates in both majority-minority and majority-white districts during the 2004 election cycle and revealed that the newspapers give coverage to candidates on racial basis, coverage of biracial and all-black elections is more likely to contain a racial frame than stories about all-white races.

If media can build the image of any party it can also distort some one's image while making choices, Rudd and Connew (2007) have discussed that in 2005 elections, a number of minor parties claimed that their poor performance on election night was due in part to the coverage their campaigns had received in the media, but there is always some logic behind covering election campaigns which does not necessarily disadvantage small parties. However, such coverage tends to be 'game-based' coverage – who's winning? Who's losing? Who are you going into coalition with? And there is no guarantee that this coverage will be favorable - even if it is 'fair'. The question here is that while making choices, how media

decide which candidate gets more attention than others or do they follow the hierarchy determined by the parties? (Aelst, Maddens, Noppe and Fiers, 2008) In other words, is the media's interest in a politician a consequence of media logic or of a party logic? As the study's multivariate analysis clearly indicates, both logics are relevant, with the party logic outweighing the media logic. However, the question remains to what extent the parties have already incorporated a media logic in the selection of their political personnel.

As far as the impact on the voters is concerned the Australian experience from the 1990 federal election campaign supports a 'modest impact' thesis, that campaign news, advertising and related activities reported in the mass media are significant among a number of secondary determinants operating beneath a primary, partisan influence on how most people vote (Forrest and Marks, 1999). Tworzecki and Semetko (2010) through a study suggested that in the context of more highly volatile electorates in the new democracies of East-Central Europe, campaign information in the news media plays a critical role in campaigns and electoral outcomes. Drew and Weaver (2006) stated important factors to determine voting behavior in four different U.S. presidential elections. According to them Radio, TV and Internet as well as interpersonal experience and demographic variables are also important factors that determine voting behavior of U.S. voters' decision. But another important point is also highlighted that Radio is the mostly used medium in U.S. for political awareness. Voter's choices and perceptions are indirectly determined by the media. There are other variables that make public's political views like positive and negative schemas, community and demographic characteristics (Kosicki, Becker and Fredin, 1994).

Some studies that are conducted in on U.S. presidential elections illustrated the reasons of lack of public interest in political campaigning and minimal effects of media. Results show that media exposure and attention are little to do with political knowledge and awareness. Demographic variables are important predictors of political behavior and education level of voters is significant predictor. Another important reason of lack of public interest is increasing media choices due to cable and satellite. People are now more vulnerable to change channels if they do not like anything on any specific channel (Drew and Weaver, 1998). However, on the other hand some studies suggest that media coverage affect and determine voter's preferences among presidential candidates as well as all electoral process in US (Domke, Fan, Fibison, Shah, Smith and Watts, 1997).

Media has an impact on electoral process and democracy as Kellner (2005) while studying media and election 2004 has argued that several convergent trends intersecting US media and politics have seriously undermined U.S. democracy. The corporate control of mainstream media, which biases dominant media toward conservatives and profit; an implosion of information and entertainment and rise of a culture of media spectacle, which makes politics a form of entertainment; the rise of a right-wing Republican media propaganda and attack apparatus, which systematically deploys lies and deception to advance the agenda of conservative groups and interests; and an unparalleled assault on the press and manipulation of media by the Bush administration.

Literature review indicates the results of various studies that are conducted in different areas of media and elections. These researches have focused on media coverage of Local, General and Presidential elections and effects of electoral coverage on voting behavior of any specific country. However, the present study focuses on how Pakistani English newspapers covered Local Government Elections, General Elections and Referendum conducted during Musharraf regime (1999-2008). What was the point of difference of electoral coverage in these newspapers, how newspapers used different frames to cover elections and which newspaper remained more critical towards elections in their editorials?

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework (for elaborating the concepts under study, bridging the variables and providing foundations for the entire study in organizing the research questions, collecting data and analysis procedures) holds the theory of 'agenda-setting' and the concept of 'framing'.

Agenda setting theory is an idea that the media by their display of contents, come to determine the issue the public thinks about and talks about. So the media attention to an issue elevates its importance among the public (cited in Ishaq, 2002:180). Cohen (1963) states that it may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about" (cited in Tankard, 1992).

The founding researchers of agenda setting, Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972) also focus on the same ability and power of the media to make public to think about and talk about from the messages they receive. They argue that people tend to think more about the ideas presented in the media than about the ideas not in the media.

When we say that media has an impact on agenda setting, we mean that they have ability to choose and emphasize certain topics, thereby causing the public to perceive these issues as important. (Dominick, 2002: 543). Thus notion of agenda setting relies on the transfer of issues from the media to the public.

According to McQuail and Windahl (1993) agenda setting is a threefold concept comprised of the media agenda (policy ranking by importance in media contents), the public agenda (ranking in opinion surveys) and the policy agenda (rankings in the legislative bodies).

Majority of the agenda setting researchers are underlying two basic assumptions; 1) the media rather reflecting the reality, filters and shapes it; 2) media concentration on a few topics guides public to rank those issues more important than the others.

While discussing the power of media to set agenda through concentration of contents that it emphasizes by ignoring other, the issue of presenting these contents comes in. The concept of framing deals with the same issue. Framing of media contents means to present them in a way as to guide its interpretations along

certain forced lines. The basis of framing is that the media focuses attention on some events and places them within a field of meaning (Chyi & McCombs, 2004). The way in which an issue is presented is also a choice made by the journalists likewise they choose some issues to be placed in media agenda. Thus, a frame can be called as a way the media organizes and presents an issue to suggest its users about the social meanings attached in it (i.e. what to think about). Goffman (1974) the father of frame analysis, describes frame as cognitive structures which unconsciously lead the individual to what is to be noticed and which defines that situation for the individual.

In this research paper we attempted to measure the agenda priorities and framing of various electoral issues by the selected newspapers in their editorials and editorial notes during Musharraf regime. Which were the issues frequently covered by these newspapers? How (in which direction) they have framed these issues? What was the consistency ratio in the editorial policy of the selected newspaper while covering these issues? How much different types of elections affected the selection procedure and framing of the issues? The paper focuses only on analyzing the media contents and ignores the public perception of the issue importance and the social meanings drawn by the readers. The selected postulates of agenda setting and framing have helped us in interpreting the results of the study to answer the research questions about framing and agenda setting role the selected newspapers regarding electoral issues during Musharraf regime.

Research Questions

This study focuses on following four research questions;

RQ1. Was there a difference in the editorial coverage of selected elections in English newspapers during Musharraf regime?

RQ2. Which election frames got the maximum newspapers coverage during Musharraf period?

RQ3. How did the frequency of election frames change over different time periods (Pr-Polling, Polling and Post-Polling) of election process?

RQ4. Which newspaper performed the watch-dog role regarding the coverage of selected elections during Musharraf regime (1999-2008)?

Methodology

To answer the research questions this study has used both quantitative and qualitative content analysis. Three English daily newspapers The News, The Nation and Dawn are selected in this study because these newspapers have high no. of circulation in Pakistani society. This study comprises of all editorials and editorial notes that are published in The News, The Nation and Dawn during different elections of Prevaiz Musharraf period 1999-2008.

Researchers used six frames to examine electoral coverage that were measured on presence/absence basis. These frames are Constitutional Amendments (editorials regarding constitutional amendments, Legal Framework Ordinance, devolution

plan, electoral reforms, election orders, their acceptance, impacts, public and politician's views, and any type of discussion and analysis about them), Accountability and Eligibility of Nominees (editorials regarding the accountability and eligibility of politicians and nominees, NAB policies, actions, rejection of applications of the defaulter nominees and any type of discussion about the accountability and nomination process), Electoral Campaign (editorials regarding the campaign announcement, ethics and rules of campaign, usage of media channels, election meetings, campaign expenditures, campaign duration and any type of concerns about election campaign), Electoral Arrangements and Code of Conduct (editorials which deals with the subject of election arrangements, code of conducts issued by the Election Commission of Pakistan regarding political parties, candidates, election campaigns, media coverage and monitoring the electoral process).

Polling (editorials discussing the polling day process, opening and closing of polling, polling management, polling security, law and order, polling stations and the issues related to the polling day of any election) and Results and Government Formation (editorials regarding the election results, their time of compilation, announcement of results, government formation process, the trends of political parties and candidates during the process of government formation. This category also includes the meetings of newly formed governments and the oath taking ceremonies).

For qualitative analysis, researchers intended to study that which newspapers played watch-dog role during elections? By watch-dog role, researchers meant that which newspaper was more critical to cover electoral issues during this time period. To measure this, researchers divided overall tone of editorials into three directions, positive, negative and neutral that is again coded on presence/absence basis.

Positive means it favors the govt. stands, policies and actions. If it attempts to promote the public opinion in favor of government and positively portray its plans. Negative means it is critical towards the govt. stand, policies and actions. If it negatively portray govt. plans and criticize the issue in its analysis along with suggestions. Neutral means if its general stance is simply interpretative without having any 'positive' or 'negative' element.

Results

Table 1. Editorial Coverage of Elections in Pakistani English Newspapers during Musharraf Period (1999-2008)

Elections	The News	The Nation	Dawn	Total Editorials
Local Govt. 2001	67 (23.9%)	68 (17.3%)	33 (22.4%)	168 (20.5%)
Referendum 2002	43 (15.3%)	71 (18.1%)	13 (8.8%)	127 (15.5%)
General Election 2002	57 (20.3%)	92 (23.4%)	43 (29.2%)	192 (23.4%)
Local Govt. 2005	50 (17.8%)	64 (16.3%)	20 (13.6%)	134 (16.3%)
General Election 2008	63 (22.5%)	97 (24.7%)	38 (25.8%)	198 (24.1%)
Total	280 (100%)	392 (100%)	147 (100%)	819 (100%)

Based on the Table 1, results indicate that there was a significant difference in the editorial coverage of elections in Pakistani English newspapers during Musharraf period. Newspapers published total 819 editorials on elections, out of which The Nation published maximum editorials 392, whereas The News published 280 and Dawn published 147 editorials on elections during this time period. One interesting fact is that The Nation and Dawn discussed the General Election 2002 than the other elections in editorials 92 (23.4%) and 43 (29.2%) respectively whereas The News published more editorials 67 (23.9%) on Local Govt. elections 2001. It was common that during all elections that were conducted during Musharraf period The Nation published more editorials 68 (17.3%), 71 (18.1%), 92 (23.4%), 64 (16.3%) and 97 (24.7%) than The News and Dawn.

Table 2. Coverage of electoral frames by Pakistani English Newspapers during Musharraf Period (1999-2008)

Frames	The News	The Nation	Dawn	Total Editorials
Constitutional Amendments	37 (13.2%)	42 (10.7%)	18 (12.2%)	97 (11.8%)
Accountability and Eligibility of Nominees	34 (12.1%)	56 (14.2%)	15 (10.2%)	105 (12.8%)
Electoral Campaign	46 (16.4%)	67 (17.0%)	22 (14.9%)	135 (16.4%)
Electoral Arrangements and Code of Conduct	61 (21.7%)	82 (20.9%)	35 (23.8%)	178 (21.7%)
Polling	52 (18.5%)	75 (19.1%)	27 (18.3%)	154 (18.8%)
Results and Government Formation	50 (17.8%)	70 (17.8%)	30 (20.4%)	150 (18.3%)
Total	280 (100%)	392 (100%)	147 (100%)	819 (100%)

Table 2 answers the second research question. Here the researchers examined that which electoral frames were used by Pakistani English newspapers to discuss elections. Results of frames indicate that overall the frame of ‘electoral arrangements and code of conduct’ was discussed more 178 (21.7%) in The News, The Nation and Dawn. However, other frames were also quite common: ‘constitutional amendments’ 97 (11.8%), ‘accountability and eligibility of nominees’ 105 (12.8%), ‘electoral campaign’ 135 (16.4%), ‘polling’ 154 (18.8%) and ‘results and government formation’ 150 (18.3%).

One interesting finding is that The News, The Nation and Dawn discussed the same frame ‘Electoral Arrangements and Code of Conduct’ more than the other frames with the frequency of 61 (21.7%), 82 (20.9%) and 35 (22.3%) respectively.

Table 3. Coverage of election in different time periods in Pakistani English Newspapers during Musharraf Period (1999-2008)

Time-Period	The News	The Nation	Dawn	Total Editorials
Pre-polling	81 (28.9%)	128 (32.6%)	46 (31.2%)	255 (31.1%)
Polling	97 (34.6%)	133 (33.9%)	56 (38.0%)	286 (34.9%)
Post-polling	102 (36.4%)	131 (33.4%)	45 (30.6%)	278 (33.9%)
Total	280 (100%)	392 (100%)	147 (100%)	819 (100%)

Table 3 asked the third research question how the frequency of coverage changed over different time periods of elections process. Results indicate that polling period was the time most frequently discussed by The Nation and Dawn with the frequency of 133 (33.9%) and 133 (33.9%) whereas, The News published more editorials 102 (36.4%) during post-polling period. Overall, the polling period discussed more in editorials 286 (34.9%) than pre-polling 255 (31.1%) and post-polling 278 (33.9%) period.

Table 4. Comparative topical coverage of elections in Pakistani English Newspapers during Musharraf Period (1999-2008)

Newspapers	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Total Editorials
The News	160 (55.7%)	53 (22.1%)	67 (22.8%)	280 (34.1%)
The Nation	103 (35.8%)	160 (66.9%)	129 (44.0%)	392 (47.8%)
Dawn	24 (8.3%)	26 (10.8%)	97 (33.1%)	147 (17.9%)
Total	287 (100%)	239 (100%)	293 (100%)	819(100%)

Table 4 indicates that overall newspapers published more neutral editorials 293, negative 239 and positive 287 on selected elections. However, The Nation published more editorials 392 (47.8%) as compared to The News and Dawn that was 280 (34.1%) and 147 (17.9%) respectively. The Nation published more negative editorials that were 160 (66.9%) whereas The News published 53 (22.1%) and Dawn published 26 (10.8%) negative editorials. The News published more positive editorials 160 (55.7%) whereas The Nation published 103 (35.8%) and Dawn published 24 (8.3%) positive editorials. Dawn published more neutral

editorials 129 (44.0%) and The News and The Nation published 67 (22.8%) and 97 (33.1%) neutral editorials on electoral issues.

Discussion and Analysis

This paper was aimed at analyzing the editorial coverage of electoral issues by the elite English newspapers of Pakistan during Pervaiz Musharraf regime (1999-2008), looking specifically at the issues regarding each election under study, their contextual and procedural frames. Another concern of the study was to compare the newspaper coverage frequency, framing of the issues and their editorial policy consistency during Referendum, Local Govt. and General Elections. The results presented above show differences and similarities in this regard.

Pervaiz Musharraf followed his ancestor dictators by prolonging and legitimizing the rule through the conduct of various forms of elections. These elections (Referendum 2002, Local Govt. 2001, 2005 and General Elections 2002, 2008) kept engaged the public, institutions and media, in their controversies, conduct, alliances, legal amendments and outcome, which made the military dictator able to extend his rule and win the so called (engineered) public mandate. Mass media outlets of this era were enjoying considerable freedom of expression as a mouthpiece of the society, which by addressing, analyzing and criticizing the dictatorship performed the role of responsible media at one extent and the role of exhaust pipe on the other. The vocal behavior of media outlets provided the public with opportunities of their mental catharsis, resultantly avoiding any noteworthy uprising against dictatorship.

The selected elite English press published 819 total editorials for discussing the issues of elections under study. Hence, the press stayed vocal during elections by reporting, explaining, analyzing, discussing and criticizing various dimensions involved in the process and conduct of the selected elections. By comparing the contribution made by the selected newspaper in this regard, we found daily the Nation with a major lead (392 editorials) than the News (280 editorials) and Dawn (147 editorials). The Nation belongs to well known 'Nawa-i-Waqt' group of publications claiming them as protectors and promoters of ideology of Pakistan. From the beginning of the Musharraf regime, this group consistently remained an active watchdog of his legal position, policies, actions and performance for the country. Daily The News belongs to 'Jang Group of Publications' that declare having no editorial policy. The News remained expressive with second largest frequency of editorials on electoral issues but its stance was found pro govt. Daily Dawn claims to be neutral and results of the present study has also shown the neutral stance of the Dawn in covering elections of Musharraf regime.

Researchers found the General Elections (2002, 2008) the most discussed agenda of the selected press in contrast with Local Government and Referendum. Both General Elections 2005 and 2008 were discussed 192 and 198 times respectively by the all three dailies under analysis. Referendum 2002 got more editorial attention of the press than Local Government Elections 2001 and 2005. One major reason for this tendency is that both General Elections and Referendum involve

the entire electorate of a state in the activity with uniformity of issues, controversies, process and effects of the election results. Both these types of elections can be called a national level activity that usually happens nationwide on a single day. Hence, the public participation and involvement in them is much higher than the local govt. elections. Another reason is that local government elections were executed in many phases in Pakistan so the lengthy process was not that much boomed as an event. Elections of local bodies carry local issues and involve the communities at regional level. On the same basis, the newspapers have given them least priority in the media agenda. One other interesting fact is that Local Govt. Elections 2001 were discussed more frequently than the Local Govt. Elections 2005 and the difference is because of two reasons; 1) that in 2001 the Musharraf administration approved the Local Government Ordinance and Devolution Plan, 2) the Local Government Elections 2001 were the first elections conducted by Pervaiz Musharraf and were called as 'the process of restoration of democracy' in the country.

For a detailed insight, we divided the process of elections into three periods and found that the 'polling' time remained more in the media agenda than the 'pre polling' and 'post polling' period. All the selected newspapers published 286 editorials to discuss the issues of polling period. While editorials published during the 'post polling' period were nearest in the frequency of editorials during 'polling' period. It is evident from the results that the News multiplied its expressiveness with the proceeding process of elections, while The Nation published more editorials on the issues of 'polling'. The policy of Dawn in converting the issues into media agenda was found uniform during each phase of elections process.

Amongst the selected frames, the editorial coverage for 'electoral arrangements and code of conduct' issues was positioned at top as media agenda. The dailies were also found expressive to discuss 'polling' and 'results and govt. formation' related issues with notable frequency. The issue of 'constitutional amendment' were given least priority in content agenda of these newspapers, may be because of sensitivity of the issue and the hidden pressures from the dictator led administration. Politicians in Pakistan are very influential because of their socio-economic position in the society as well as their business links (i.e. through advertising of their businesses) with the media industry. This factor is evident from the least editorial coverage of the frame 'accountability and eligibility of nominees' by the selected newspapers.

The overall editorial policy of the press was found mainly 'neutral' in tone or the press was found inclined in favoring the position, policies and stance of the dictatorial government of Pervaiz Musharraf. The critical tone of the editorial coverage was found only in 239/819 editorials. So, from the result it is apparent that the selected press was not performing the watchdog role up to the expected level, may be due to multidimensional hidden pressures raised by the dictatorial administration. Analysis of individual editorial policy of the selected dailies yielded that the Nation was not only more expressive but also a leading critic of the issues in dictator led elections. Daily the News wrote more pro government editorials in comparison with the others. Dawn was found consistently neutral in

tone and less expressive as well. Therefore, it can be claimed that the selected dailies followed their editorial policies in a consistent way while discussing the electoral issues during Pervaiz Musharraf regime.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the editorial coverage regarding Referendum (2002), Local Govt. (2001, 2005) and General Elections (2002, 2008) conducted during Pervaiz Musharraf regime (1999-2008). The study considered the case of elite English press of Pakistan and selected daily The News, The Nation and Dawn for analysis due to their diverse editorial policies and vast circulation among readers. The regime of Pervaiz Musharraf was more controversial and critical because of considerable media freedom in this period than the past. It was not the first time that an army ruler ruined the democracy in the country and took over the state affairs. This era was considered important phase of political history of Pakistan not only because of national issues but also due to the geopolitical position regarding US global war on terror after 9/11 incident. Musharraf decided to be one of the major allies of US in this war on terror in Afghanistan, which made him more controversial at national level. He practiced the tactics of conduction all three types of elections in order to be stable and acceptable for Pakistanis. These elections got prominent press attention. The press made free choice to select and frame these electoral issues according to their editorial policies.

Overall, the selected press remained expressive in discussing, analyzing and criticizing the electoral issues but The Nation positioned itself at top by publishing editorials in this regard most frequently.

The selected press, as a whole, remained either 'neutral' or 'positive' towards government policies, actions and performance. Press did not played the expected role of watchdog by publishing more critical editorials on election issues. The Nation again stood at the top by publishing most editorials of 'negative' stance and criticized the Musharraf led elections with diverse range o frames. The News was found pro government and the daily Dawn published 'neutral' postured editorials more frequently.

Among all three types of elections under study, both the General Elections (2002, 2008) were more in the media agenda than the others because it involved nationwide public and form central government of the country. Referendum 2002 resulting Pervaiz Musharraf as President of Pakistan but surprisingly press was found less vocal and less critical than the other elections issues. The Nation persist its lead of editorial frequency and critical tone in the case of Referendum 2001.

All the selected newspapers discussed the 'polling' phase of electoral process more frequently than the 'pre' and 'post' polling period of election process. The frame of 'election arrangement and code of conduct' and 'polling' were more in the media agenda as compared to the other selected frames.

The paper has attempted to analyze the media agenda, consistency of editorial policy and framing stance of The News, The Nation and Dawn regarding electoral issues during Pervaiz Musharraf regime (1999-2008). In future, studies comparing Musharraf regime with the other dictators (Ayub Khan, Yahya Khan and Zia ul Haq) regarding electoral issues and their press coverage can yield interesting results.

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