Media Coverage of Balochistan Issues Vs Insights of Balochistanis: Thematic and Content Analysis of Top Issues of the Province

Abstract
This study investigates the relationship and contrast between the Balochistan issues as perceived by the people of the province and the issues highlighted by the national newspapers of Pakistan. The data was collected using the mixed method of content analysis and interviews. Balochistan students studying in Punjab and experts on the province were interviewed (n=12) in order to understand the key issues of Balochistan. Later, their responses were compared with the news stories (n=126) published in four major newspapers of Pakistan. The study conducted, on the basis of Agenda Setting and Framing theories found that the aspirations of the Balochistan people and the agenda and framing of the media were different. Even when they did seem to cohere on the topics, the viewpoints of the Balochistani people and the newspapers were conflicting, if not outright at loggerheads.

Keywords: Balochistan issues, Balochistan media coverage, Pakistan Newspapers, Balochistan Students in Punjab

1. Introduction and Background

Baluchistan is the largest province of Pakistan in terms of land and not only considered rich in mineral resources but also has a strategic location that makes it a hot bed for a tug of war between the local and regional powers. Being situated on the bank of Arabian Sea in South and bordered by Iran and Afghanistan in the West and North West respectively, Balochistan is probably Pakistan’s most strategically important province. The importance of Balochistan has increased manifold in the recent years after the conception of Gwadar’s deep-sea port, which is built with China’s assistance. The port in the South West of Pakistan is linked with China through China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), giving the trade between the two countries an enormous boost. Pakistan looks at Baluchistan as the pivot, on which it will base its future foreign and economic policy. Pakistan is looking at it in terms of strategic significance. Federal ministers of the current government, as well as the prime minister of Pakistan, have repeatedly stated that CPEC will be the game-changer for the country, and the region. They have more often than not stated that the Gwadar seaport will provide opportunities for more investment in the country as well as the province. However, what we learn from the people living in Balochistan is that HubCo is the only major project under the entire CPEC that is being built inside Balochistan while rest of the major projects is outside Balochistan (Ministry of Information, 2017).

In the given situation, the role of the national media is critical. While, there is a difference of opinions and narratives coming from the different sides regarding CPEC and the projects related to it, what is expected of media is that it must bring the facts before the people of Pakistan. With unbiased reporting, media may not only be able to keep the people fully aware of the real situation but it may also help create awareness in both the camps. On one hand, it can bring the Baloch nationalists, or other groups currently weary about CPEC, and on the other, it may highlight any highhandedness on the part of the federal government or other state institutions so that a national narrative may be built to protect the interests of the local people.

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CPEC is just one of the issues. Such is the euphoria about this project in the country that all the other major issues seem to have gone into the background. The real issues, which always circulate around the development and basic human rights in any part of the world, are hardly a topic of discussion anymore. CPEC has overshadowed all the other things, good or bad, going around in the province. Each time there is a terrorist attack on any of the major targets within Balochistan, the blame is immediately shifted on to the ‘foreign hand’, bent on sabotaging CPEC. It is noteworthy that CPEC was conceived in 2013 while terrorist activity in the province has been going on for several years now. There is an insurgency going on in the province. Many tribal leaders are in exile, either in Switzerland or in Afghanistan. Police, bureaucracy, security agencies, Punjabi settlers, gas pipelines supplying gas to Punjab have all been targeted by these insurgents. Then, there is a sectarian element to this violence too, and all this began way back in 1947, way before CPEC was first conceived (Rehman, 2014).

Media, therefore, has the responsibility to guide the nation in this hour of tense tug of war. By accurate and objective reporting, media may be able to highlight the real causes behind the discontent in the province. If it successfully creates a narrative in the nation that revolves around human development and basic human rights in the province, we might well be able to understand the challenges that Balochistan faces today and thus be able to not only protect the people of Balochistan from the exploiting classes, whoever camp they are in, but also secure CPEC, which is certainly critical to Pakistan’s economic future (Javaid, 2015).

Current study, therefore, focuses on whether the national media is highlighting these real issues of Balochistan or not. This study aims at providing a quantitative analysis of where the media is lacking and how it may improve its reporting on the province of Balochistan.

Moreover, looking at the national narrative regarding Balochistan, while sitting in Punjab, it seems that the province is all about minerals, strategic importance and a heap of desert dust. The narrative completely discounts the people actually living in the province who are as much humans as we, the rest of the Pakistanis, are. They also need basic facilities like education, healthcare, law and order, basic facilities, human dignity and, above all, security. Media’s role in such a situation should be to highlight these issues and the challenges that the province faces in the attainment of these basic needs.

1.2 Rationale for the study

Baluchistan is a restive province of Pakistan. At the same time, it is probably the most critical province considering its geostrategic location and the minerals that its land possesses. However, the region has largely remained neglected, sowing seeds of discontent among the masses. Media can play a major role in bringing the issues of the people of Balochistan to the fore. Being one of the four pillars of the state, the role of media in making Balochistan an issue of the masses cannot be neglected.

Media has the duty to highlight the issues that the people of Balochistan face. It is generally believed that the issues of Balochistan are neglected not only by the federation and the other provinces but also by the mainstream media. The impression has gained hold during the last ten years, starting from the ‘murder’ of Baloch leader Nawab Akbar Khan Bugti in August 2006. The subsequent insurgency, or rebellion, in the province has largely remained out of the sight of the common people of Pakistan.

The rationale behind this study is that it must be brought to the fore whether the allegations of bias and partiality in the reporting of Balochistan issues is baseless or well founded. Through this study, it may be ascertained to some extent how wide, if at all, is the gulf between the real issues of Balochistan and the issues highlighted in the mainstream media.

1.3 Objectives

1. To understand the real issues of Balochistan
2. To examine the issues highlighted in the national newspapers pertaining to Balochistan
3. To investigate whether the real issues of Balochistan are being highlighted in the national newspapers or not

1.4 Research questions
RQ1: What are the real issues of Balochistan as perceived by the people of the province?

RQ2: What are the issues being highlighted in the national newspapers pertaining to Balochistan?

RQ3: Is there cohesion between the real issues of Balochistan and the issues being highlighted in the national newspapers or not?

2. Literature Review

The literature sheds the light on the researches made by the researchers regarding the issues of Balochistan, Pakistan. Tate (1909) travelled the far and wide of Balochistan province in the colonial era when the Durand Line was hardly quarter of a century old while most of the province was still a desert.

Chaudhry & Zaidi (1994) have dug into the history of the Balochistan conflict in the immediate context of the partition of the subcontinent. They have discussed how the Muslim League policy towards the princely states within India actually cost it Kashmir and almost cost the states of Qalat and Bahawalpur after the independence. Their focus is the state of Qalat mainly and its owner at the time Mir Ahmad Yar Khan, who was looking to create a Greater Balochistan at the time of subcontinent’s independence but was deterred by all the major stakeholders in the game, including Pakistan, India and Britain. Similarly, Steenbergen (1997) discussed the prospects of spate irrigation in the region of Balochistan. The core emphasis was on institutional investments, manipulation of land formation processes and a river-basin perspective.

Collins et al. (2000) discussed the health sector employees’ problems in the province of Balochistan, Pakistan. It discusses how unlike the stability created by the rigid bureaucratic systems in various other developmental countries, Balochistan’s bureaucratic system was actually leading to ‘instability within stability’. In the same manner, Welcomme et al. (2001) discussed that in the South-western Sulaiman geological province of Balochistan, terrestrial detrital faces from the Bugti Hills region have yielded the richest Tertiary vertebrate faunas to be found in Asia thus far. New fossils from five successive and distinct ‘bone beds’ bridge the supposed Oligocene sedimentary hiatus within the Sulaiman geological province; the lowermost continental levels of the previously described Miocene Chitarwata Formation, known as the Bugti Member, are Oligocene in age in the Bugti area. Neither a mixture of heterochronic faunal elements nor endemism of any fauna is evident in this area. Additional micro-faunal material from the Bugti Member constrains an Oligocene age for the lower Chitarwata Formation in ZindaPir (northeast of the Bugti Hills). This Oligocene transition between the marine Kirthar (Eocene) and continental Siwalik (Miocene) deposits consists of a regressive fluvio-deltaic system occupying a vast floodplain. It represents an early-stage molasse in the palaeo-Indus Basin which drained western orogenic highlands resulting from the collision between the Indian and Eurasian plates.

Khan (2007) discussed the increase in ethnic violence in Balochistan, the reassembling of the Taliban forces in the north-western parts of the province. His paper Pakistan in 2006: Safe Center, Dangerous Peripheries primarily focused on Balochistan religious issues. Similarly, Memon (2007) discusses challenges faced by the educations system in Pakistan with a special focus on the province of Balochistan. He discusses the case of Balochistan where the private sector has played almost no role in the field of education and while the private institutions in Punjab, the most developed province of the four in Pakistan, for technical education accounted to 66.4% in 2007, the percentage of the same in Balochistan was just 1.5% at the time of the study.

Nazir (2008) discusses the problems of federalism in Pakistan. Her focus has been the early years of Pakistan when the social and constitutional relationships between the four (or five initially) provinces were actually established. It was the political developments of this early era that were going to set the path for the future of the federation in the country. Rehman (2008) discusses the relationship between the federation and the provinces during Bhutto era with the special focus on Balochistan. He has tried to analyse the reasons for regionalism in Balochistan and the demands and political objectives of the militant or political organisations that have been demanding separation or autonomy.

Lieven (2009) has been one of those writers most sympathetic to Pakistan and has discussed in detail the social and political issues pertaining to the country currently. He has dedicated a big portion of his book to the Balochistan
province as well. He has not only highlighted the issues that have been faced by the people of Balochistan but has also tried to understand the viewpoint of the Pakistani establishment.

Din (2010) discusses the need for the water reservoirs in Balochistan. He discusses how, with a mean annual rainfall of less than 100 millimetres in the south-west to just over 600 millimetre in the east, Balochistan is a province where the availability of clean drinking water is fast becoming a distant dream in most part of the province.

Pipes (2010) discussed the tensions between the province of Balochistan and Islamabad, the capital of the federation of Pakistan. The primary focus of the study is the ethnic insurgency in Balochistan and the federation’s theory that blames the Baloch sardars for the situation in the process and also blames the lack of integration of the Baloch people into the national narrative of the country. It also discusses the theory of the Baloch people that holds Islamabad responsible for the disintegration.

Khoso et al. (2011) discussed the issues faced by the women of Balochistan’s rural areas. Collecting data from 500 respondents in Balochistan’s five districts, Khoso’s research revealed that the women of Balochistan faced issues like Karo Kari and sexual harassment. It concluded that the women of Balochistan were not deprived of their basic rights but were also unaware of their rights. Anjum et al. (2012) entrepreneurship trends among the people of Balochistan and primarily focused on the women. Although the area of study was only Quetta, the capital of the province and by far the most advanced city of the province, it clearly gave an insight into the trends that are shaping up among the women of the province and might spill over into the other parts of Balochistan too.

Ainuddin & Routray (2012) focused on the ability and the institutional capacity of the Balochistan administration in coping with the earthquake situations in the province. It primarily focused the point that Balochistan was a region prone to earthquakes and the disaster could certainly affect the economy of the people of the region.

Butt (2012) discusses how and why Baloch and Brahui tribes always rose in revolt against the federation of Pakistan but the Pashtuns of Quetta and surrounding areas including Pishin, Quila Abdullah etc remained almost elusive in these revolts or demands for autonomy. She discusses the historical context of Baloch insurgency and holds federation’s highhandedness responsible for the problem that Balochistan poses to the federation of Pakistan today.

Grare (2013) has debated how the military operations in Balochistan have actually exacerbated the situation further instead of improving it. He has discussed how the introduction of Islamisation tactics has actually resulted in the state losing ground, instead of gaining it. He has also discussed in detail the regionalism in Balochistan and how the federal government has repeatedly ignored the just demands of the Baloch people.

Jaffrelot (2013) highlighted how the killing of certain Baloch leaders in the past and the betrayals with the Baloch Sardars in 1958 and later on actually created a situation for Pakistan where it is unable to deal with the Sardars due to the integrity the state has already lost while the youth is just not ready to talk, since it feels that its interests may not be guarded by the state.

Rehman (2014) discusses how the successive Pakistani governments repeatedly exploited the Balochs and then used brutal force to suppress the insurgenacies. He also discussed the commitments given by Pakistan army and then the betrayals with the Baloch Sardars right after the independence of Pakistan. He highlights how the allegations of treason were often hurled at the Balochs, embittering the relations perhaps permanently. Arqam (2014) has discussed in detail how Karachi became the hotbed for Jihad, religious extremism, terrorism and ethnic violence. He has in detail discussed the Balochs of Karachi in his paper. Not only has he highlighted the deformed Baloch image in his paper, he has also written in some detail the Baloch connection of Karachi’s ethnic violence. His analysis of the city’s deep-rooted schisms of ethnicity, religious sects, economy, politics, and society has been widely cited for its detail and accuracy. The discussion on Baloch people living in Karachi provides a different dimension to the understanding of the Baloch people, when living outside their own province and taking part in the politics of the most dynamic city of Pakistan, with all its powerful economy and the slums that a huge part of its population lives in.

Siddiqa et al. (2014) have discussed the ancient trade links among the modern states of Pakistan, India, Afghanistan and Iran. They focused Pakistan in connection with three of its neighbours, India, Afghanistan and Iran, and
discussed how Balochistan was extremely relevant in trade and bilateral relations of Pakistan with all three of its neighbours.

Ashraf (2015) discusses the instability in Balochistan in the context of the interests of regional and global powers. He has worked in detail on the origin and causes of this instability. He has delved into the local problem and discussed the reasons that fail Pakistan in coping with this problem and turning around the situation that has only worsened over the years. Javaid & Jahangir (2015) discusses the Baloch nationalist movement and its causes and impact. Her study thoroughly considers the historical background of the Baloch people and sheds light on the policies of subsequent government of Pakistan – both civil and military – in placating the Baloch nationalism and how those policies failed.

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1. Agenda setting

McCombs (2002) says that Agenda-setting theory describes the ability (of the news media) to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda. The idea behind the theory is that if a news story is given more prominent position or appears more frequently in the news, the public will believe that the news is more important and has more significance.

The present research, therefore, tried to analyse how the agenda is being set in Pakistan’s national newspaper regarding the issues of Balochistan. There are three types of agenda setting: public agenda setting, media agenda setting and policy agenda setting. The scope of this study is limited to media agenda setting, in which the media’s agenda setting is treated as the dependent variable. Therefore, it includes agenda-setting as well as framing. The main idea behind agenda setting, as described by Scheufele & Tewksbury (2007) is that the formation of individuals' judgments directly correlates with the ease in which instances or associations could be brought to mind

3.2. Framing

According to Entman (1993), framing is mainly the selection of certain aspects of a subject to make the people focus on that particular aspect only. For example, highlighting one side of the story or providing people with information that has been selected on the basis of the cognitive schema that pre-exists in the minds of the editors, or those setting the agenda.

Framing is obviously the next step after the agenda-setting process. It focuses on the same issues for the further advancement of the same ideas, resulting in almost a complete blackout of the real issues of the people living in that area. Recent study is thus an effort to understand which newspapers, if any, are focusing the issues that are considered the real issues of Balochistan and which of them are neglecting them, and thus need to revisit their agenda regarding this most important province of Pakistan, vital for the durability and stability of Pakistan as an economically viable state.

4. Methodology

Current study is a comparative analysis of the real issues of Balochistan and the issues highlighted in the national newspapers. Hence, mixed method using both qualitative (interviews) and quantitative content analysis techniques were applied to conduct this research.

4.1. Interviews

In order to explore the real issues of Balochistan, interviews were conducted with the common people of Balochistan as well as some experts. The experts lived both inside and outside of Balochistan but they had done extensive research and reporting on the province. Keeping in view the limited resources for conducting this study, interviews of Baloch students - residents of Balochistan but currently living in Lahore for their studies - were conducted. These students may be considered as representing the struggling classes of Balochistan who are looking for ways to educate themselves by travelling to the province of Punjab, which is often demonised by nationalists in their province.
The students were chosen from various districts of the province so that a perspective from a wide range of regions within Balochistan could be obtained. These students were from Turbat, Khuzdar, Nushki, Dera Bugti, Gwadar, Dera Murad Jamali, Quetta and Jafarabad. The experts were from various walks of life, and had served Balochistan in different capacities. Usman Qazi is a playwright and intellectual, currently associated with development projects under United Nations. Ali Arqam is a researcher and journalist, currently working for English-language magazine Newsline. Aziz Jamali is a senior bureaucrat and has served at various important positions in the province. Abid Mir is a senior journalist and editor of Daily Azadi, a newspaper with wide circulation in Balochistan.

4.2. Content Analysis

In order to compare the real issues of Balochistan with the issues highlighted in the national newspapers, the content considered was the news stories and features published in four major national dailies of Pakistan, including two English dailies i.e. The News and The Express Tribune, and two Urdu dailies, Daily Jang and Daily Dunya, for a period of three months, starting from August 1, 2016 to October 31, 2016.

The reason for the selection of the newspapers is primarily their vast circulation in the Punjab, the most influential province of Pakistan due to its population size and dominant number of seats in the National Assembly. All these dailies have considerable circulation in Sindh and the federal capital, so they may provide a peek into the overall media narrative prevalent in the major urban centres of Pakistan, i.e. Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad.

After analysing content of interviews and newspaper stories published on the issues of Balochistan, the researcher allocated codes various issues for a systematic research. To avoid similarities, the codes were categorized in different themes in order to have fewer content themes from a larger textual material obtained from interviews and news stories (Weber, 1990). Eight themes of both the newspapers and the interviews were made and then compared with each other, illustrated through graph and table.

5. Findings

The total number of interviewees was 12, out of which 8 were Baloch students studying in Lahore while four were experts who had served Balochistan in different capacities. The total number of news stories and features published in four newspapers from August 1, 2016 to October 31, 2016 were 126. Below is the table illustrating the findings numerically.

Table 1: Comparison of Balochistan issues highlighted in newspapers and interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sr. No.</th>
<th>Themes of issues</th>
<th>Issues highlighted by interviewees</th>
<th>Issues highlighted in newspapers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Missing persons and mutilated bodies</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Development issues</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>83.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Disenchantment of masses from political process</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Political Disunity</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Provincial autonomy and centre-province relations</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>75.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Terrorism</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Presence of military</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>41.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Delegitimizing of Baloch people’s cause through media coverage</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>33.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 shows the issues discussed during the interviews and in the newspapers in the second column. The third column shows frequency-wise responses and fourth column represents percentages wise responses of interviewees. Fifth and sixth column shows frequency of issues recurring in news articles and the percentages of that issues dedicated to a subject by the newspapers.

6. Qualitative Analysis

6.1. Themes from the interviews

Researchers conducted interviews of Baloch students as well as the experts from Balochistan or experts on Balochistan in order to understand what the real issues of the province according to them are. All the interviewees were cooperative enough to discuss openly what they thought about the problems and the solutions to these problems in their eyes.

However, some of the students were not ready to share their details, like their names and other credentials for the study. In order to let them express their thoughts freely, I had to turn off the camera and recorded their statements on a notebook.

6.1.1 Missing persons and mutilated bodies

Total of 75% interviewees highlighted issue of missing persons as forced abduction of people, who are picked up randomly by the state security forces and then are never to be found. They expressed although the government of Pakistan acknowledges a very small number of people being missing in the province, the actual number of missing people is somewhere around 30,000 while another 8 to 9 thousand mutilated bodies have been found so far, which makes the number somewhere around 38,000 to 40,000 approximately. There is no love for the Sardars of Balochistan who have been exploiting Balochistan for decades, but at the same time experts also feel exploited by the state of Pakistan, they claimed.

6.1.2 Development issues including infrastructure, education and health

Three out of the five poorest districts of Pakistan according to a report released by Ministry of Planning, Development and Reform are from Balochistan (Dunya news, 2017). 83.3% interviewees expressed that they do not find any schools for miles in the province. Either students have to come to Punjab and Karachi for pursuing studies or they just give up on studies completely. Experts claimed that the poverty index in Pakistan overall has improved.
from 2004-05 to now but Balochistan has always remained poor and the overall changes in the country in poverty indices, or prosperity indices, has had little to no effects in Balochistan.

The second most pressing issue of Balochistan is the lack of basic facilities. Balochistan don’t have water supply there, power supply, education, nothing at all. For a population of over 33 million, they have only two engineering universities and one medical university. Even those universities are so far from many of the cities in the province that people avoid going there and instead prefer coming to Punjab since we do not have a good road infrastructure inside Balochistan. One another issue, according to experts, is lack of investment in human development.

6.1.3. Political disenchantment of the masses

Four interviewees expressed political disappointment as one of the main issues of Balochistan. They voiced that Balochi people do not believe in the political system anymore. They have no hopes in democracy and they do not ever come out for voting which shows how little the people trust the electoral process. The interviewees spoke that people believe that electoral system and legislation does nothing. Now this is a kind of stalemate. People do not believe in political process and thus the political process becomes a farce. Had people tried to force their way into the political process, things might have been different but now they’ve grown so sceptic to this so-called democracy that they don’t even bother what’s happening on the election day.

6.1.4. Political disunity

A total of 41.67% people spoke about political disunity as major reason of Baluchistan’s problems. The province is largely tribal and the tribal leaders have their own petty issues to settle. They ditch each other. They would never stand together for the sake of Balochistan. All they need is power, but for themselves alone. They cannot share power. They claimed that Political disunity has been the major reason for Baluchistan’s woes. Pathans and Balochs have discord on geography, regions, language, and to be honest in all political matters. Pathans are generally better off and therefore they have had more benefit in keeping things the way they are. On the other hand, Baloch people hardly have a voice to be heard in the centre. Because of this division, we are never able to put up a joint front.

6.1.5. Provincial autonomy or centre-province relations

A total of 75% experts expressed provincial autonomy as a major problem Balochistan is facing. Balochistan poverty, literacy rate, health, infrastructure, water problem would have all resolved if the resources had been utilised by the province and distributed among the people. Provincial autonomy is a huge problem. Royalty for resources is less than that of Sindh and the Punjab and center controls everything.

6.1.6. Presence of military

Military involvement is biggest problem for the province according to 41.67% of the interviewees. They expressed that any presence of military outside of the border areas and any intervention by them in any matters whatsoever, apart from the border security, creates a discourteous feeling among the masses for them. In the case of Balochistan, the local community abhors this presence even more. Militarisation is the biggest problem in the eyes of experts.

6.1.7. Media coverage

33.33 % interviewees thought that media is being used for delegitimising Balochistan case. There was a term used by the Palestinian Intifada movement for the Western media: Media Apartheid. Media misrepresent the issues by blaming Afghan and Indian intelligence agencies for everything that happens in Balochistan. Instead of verifying the claims made by security establishment or those in power, they immediately buy the theory and start parroting the mantra fed to them about Baloch nationalist militants getting support from Pakistan’s enemies. The media does some coverage of the Bad Governance issue, but without any deep analysis. The others receive varied degrees of mention, in the face of strict censorship imposed by the state, quasi-state and non-state actors. They told media covered specific incident when a Jirga sentences a woman to death, which is incorrect we all know, but not when a Jirga actually discusses the real issues of Balochistan. A Grand Jirga held February 2016. It demanded the ouster of
foreign refugees from Balochistan. Even the representatives of the parliament and from federal government attended this Jirga. However, media did not cover it at all.

7. Discussion and Analysis

The situation, as illustrated by the statistics above, is quite bleak to say the least. The newspapers are hardly ever in line with the aspirations and demands of the people of Balochistan and this widens the gap between the people of that province and the people of other provinces, since media is the only credible source of information that people living out of Balochistan would refer to.

Table 1 clearly shows that the agenda of the national newspapers is far removed from the real issues of Balochistan. Data shows that the missing persons’ coverage was less on the media agenda while this issue is the closest to the hearts of Baloch people as expressed by the experts and Balochistan people. With around 30,000 people missing and thousands of mutilated bodies found during the last few years from a population of 33 million, it is a national trauma for that community. However, newspapers not discussing this issue is a clear proof of the negligence that the Baloch people always complain about.

Table 1 is again a statistical manifestation of what Pakistani media is always accused of: that it is focused on the power struggle while the issues of general people are largely neglected by it. The situation is almost the same throughout the country, but it comes off as a starker reality in case of Balochistan.

Themes show that the common people of Balochistan feel disgruntled about the political process and their disenchantment with the political process is very high, if not complete. However, the newspapers give this issue no space in their reporting.

Province-centre relations are given somewhat due consideration by the newspapers, as it appears in Fig 1, but if dug a little deeper, and focus is shifted on to the descriptions of the news stories published during those 3 months, instead of just the numbers, it surfaces that the newspapers are looking at this issue too from the centre’s perspective, and consequently getting discredited in the eyes of the Baloch people.

Terrorism issue was the matter given due importance in newspapers but not even discussed by the interviewees. Which shows terrorism is on high agenda of media but it also illustrates that the Baloch people do not consider terrorism an issue at all. They believe that terrorism is only the result of certain policies and thus what needed to be focused was not the result but the policies.

Data shows that the presence of military in Balochistan, and its dominance on the political front, is a major issue of the province according to the locals and experts but the newspapers did not discuss it at all.

Table 1 reveals one of the most interesting subject that media has lost all its credibility according to at least 33% of the respondents but the newspapers have failed to introspect. Not only have they remained negligent in highlighting these issues, but also now being accused of committing ‘media apartheid’ of the Baloch people by delegitimizing their struggle.

8 - Conclusion

The study ‘Comparative analysis of the real issues of Balochistan and the issues highlighted in the national newspapers’ results showed that the issues highlighted by the newspapers and the ones raised by the experts and the students interviewed were poles apart to say the least. They did not seem to be in any sync at all.

To investigate first research question, researchers listed themes extracted from the interview texts of the Balochistan people and experts secondly after content analysis of selected four newspapers themes were drawn from news stories and features for a fruitful comparison.

To explore third research question ‘Is there cohesion between the real issues of Balochistan and the issues being highlighted in the national newspapers or not?’ comparative analysis was exercised which revealed that some issues like missing person, disenchantment from political process, political disunity, infrastructure, education and health
are the issues strongly pinned by interviewees as real issues of Balochistan but, unfortunately was not extensively covered by newspapers.

However, terrorism was a subject matter in 46.03% news stories and features published repeatedly in newspapers but was totally out in the interviewees’ discussions indicating terrorism nowhere in Balochistan. There are two kinds of terrorism in Balochistan. One is ethnic; the other religious and sectarian. But a person relying solely on the newspapers would probably never get an idea of the very basic fact that there are two kinds of terrorism, let alone trying to fathom which incident was which kind. Because the newspapers ignore, or at least avoid, highlighting this basic distinction between the two kinds of terrorism, a common man would never be able to understand the gravity of the situation. However, none of the interviewees listed terrorism as one of the five biggest problems facing Balochistan. Upon asking, they responded that terrorism was only the result of certain policies, and thus the policies needed to be listed as a problem, not the result.

Military presence in Balochistan was on the priority of 41.67% interviewees but was not present on newspapers agenda. What media is doing in Balochistan’s case is that it is delegitimizing the cause of Balochistan or the people of Balochistan by being selective in its reporting, to say the least, or outright biased, to say the most according to text analysed received from interviewees. The reporting on Balochistan in Pakistani newspapers is, as can be seen from this study, is almost completely removed from the reality. Total of 33.33% experts and Balochistan people considered Delegitimization of their cause as serious matter but newspapers covered this issue 0.00%.

8.1 Recommendations

- The newspapers in Pakistan need to revisit their agenda and framing in case of Balochistan.
- The reporting needs to be more objective, impartial and reality-based.
- Media needs to highlight the issues of Balochistan impartially so that it may be able to earn some credibility in the eyes of the Baloch.
- Media can actually be a source of conflict resolution through its unbiased reporting. It must fulfil its national duty in case of Balochistan too.

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Media Coverage of Balochistan Issues Vs Insights of Balochistanis: JRSP, Vol 57, Issue 2(July-Dec 2020)


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