
Representations of Corruption in the English Print Media in Pakistan, 2011

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The present work examines how corruption is represented in English-language newspapers in Pakistan. It attempts to study the possible impacts of the media in shaping public perceptions of corruption, and of the role the media plays in supporting and motivating civil society's response to corruption. In particular, the language, styles and contexts employed by journalists and reporters when describing incidents of corruption will be scrutinized. These not only provide insights into how corruption is framed by the media, but are also important in understanding public attitudes towards corruption and society's expectations of the state. In the first two sections of this paper, the problems and benefits of having a watchdog media are discussed, with specific emphasis on reporting on corruption. Examples are used to explain that the recording the frequency of reports on corruption in television and newspapers does not provide us with an accurate measure of the actual incidence of corruption in a given region or sphere. This article then goes on to investigate its main concern and examines reports on corruption published in four different English daily newspapers during the year 2011. The methodology employed to study newspaper reports on corruption in this paper has benefited from many elements of discourse analysis. The paper considers the many implications and repercussions of the print

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media's representations of corruption, and the possible factors that are responsible for different media attitudes towards corruption. We conclude by assessing the role newspapers play in influencing public perceptions of corruption. This work argues that gaps exist in media coverage of corruption, as the links between individual and systemic corruption, and the relationship between the public and private sectors, are not sufficiently explored by the press; these gaps can amount to misrepresenting the issues involved. A number of suggestions are made for the improvement and regulation of the media's role in this regard.

I. Introduction

Corruption and the Media: An overview

The last year has seen the rise of popular movements and protests calling for an end to social and economic injustices across the world. Beginning with the Arab Spring in December 2010, the last few months have witnessed the emergence of figures such as the Indian activist Anna Hazare, and mass protests against corruption in countries including India, China, Brazil and Russia. In Pakistan, Imran Khan, whose political campaign has been based almost exclusively upon decrying Pakistan's corrupt leadership, found unprecedented measures of support and success at rallies held across the country. The results of Transparency International's report on corruption also created a sensation in the local media, as Pakistan was listed among the world's most corrupt nations.

The speed at which these movements for reform took root and spread, and their ability to function on an international scale has been attributed to the growth of social media platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, as well as to increased public access to television channels¹. The watchdog role of the media, and its capacity to inspire collective action has been a key subject under discussion in recent months. Many supporters have lauded the

positive impact of digital and print media in facilitating social revolutions. However, critics have drawn attention to the fact that the news media remains politicized and dependent on state institutions and/or the market for its success. This means that there is a constant risk that reporting on social and political issues is one-sided and biased, and that its dependency on public interest can result in an emphasis on scandal and sensationalism².

Another matter of concern is whether the media is operating within its stated goals of objectivity in its use of highly charged or emotive language and images designed to provoke a stronger reaction.³ It is also arguable that newspapers and other forms of media do not necessarily aim to bring change, and that their ability to do so should not be an index of their overall success and effectiveness. On the other hand, it is a widely held view that a government can only be held accountable if its citizens are well-informed: in this sense, the press provides an important source of support and motivation for reform⁴. However, the media's ability to motivate action for change has also been questioned on the basis that too much reporting on an issue can lead to the desensitization of the audience, which then comes to expect such events as a routine part of life. In this way, the media is seen to repress reaction, rather than encourage it. Similarly, reports which are misinformed or heavily biased can hinder development by obscuring problems that exist in a society. However this debate is framed, the role of the media in influencing public opinion cannot be denied, whatever the moral or practical considerations involved. This being said, the print media is increasingly left out of debates on the role of information in bringing social and political change. This raises some key questions regarding the motives and effectiveness of newspapers in disseminating information to the public.

This project will examine the different ways in which corruption is depicted in Pakistani print media, by studying and analyzing reports on corruption published in 2011 in four major

English language newspapers: *The News*, *Dawn*, *The Nation* and *The Express Tribune*. This paper aims to aid in understanding public attitudes towards corruption and how they have been formed. In particular, attention will be paid to the language and styles employed by newspaper reports on corruption, the sources of information and opinion these reports rely on, and the themes with which corruption is associated. Journalists, reporters and organizations measure corruption using a number of indices which point to the variety of definitions of corruption in circulation, and signal the disparate interests of organizations and individuals as they attempt to situate corruption within specific frameworks. Different conceptions of corruption can narrow and limit the identification and treatment of corruption in different ways, and risk the formulation of policies that do not wholly understand the multiple levels at which corrupt practices take place⁵. Studying the ways in which corruption is presented by the print media will allow us to assess the diverse range of attitudes that are adopted by journalists with regard to corruption, to analyze the motives and impacts of such reporting, and to reach a deeper understanding of the various roles it plays in shaping public perceptions of corruption and its place in society.

Some factors that influence perceptions and definitions of corruption

As suggested earlier, corruption can be defined in a number of ways according to an organization or an individual's needs. Transparency International, for example, describes corruption as the 'misuse of entrusted power for private gain'⁶. This is a broad definition that is able to include a range of public and private corrupt practices. This opposition between society and the individual, or between the public and private sphere, is to be found in most definitions of corruption. It is predicated on the assumption that corruption usually benefits a relatively small group of persons, or even just a single individual. Even so, most academic discussions on corruption will distinguish between

small-scale, personal or individual corruption, and systemic corruption, which is generally seen to occur on a larger scale.

It is important to keep in mind that Transparency International's definition of corruption, and the information it provides, can be sometimes misleading as it is difficult to glean any details as to the nature of corruption from the all-encompassing statistics that the organization's surveys generate. The results of the survey are themselves also heavily impacted by depictions of corruption in the media, as Transparency International's most well-known report, the Corruption Perceptions Index, is based upon public perceptions of corruption rather than the measurement of corruption as an absolute value (a near impossible task). As the survey's results are in turn featured in reports in newspapers and other forms of news media, public perceptions of corruption increase. In this way, the watchdog organization and the media feed into and off each other, reaffirming each other's positions in a dangerously cyclical relationship. This being said, Transparency International's approach to corruption is generally considered to be a reliable one, as the survey also requires its respondents to cite instances of actual contact with corruption.⁷

It is also widely acclaimed for its ability to include different types of corruption which are often missed out by other organizations.

However, newspaper reports do not usually aim to provide comprehensive definitions of corruption, or to engage in debates on the concept of corruption in itself. Rather, they treat it as a secondary phenomenon that is the subject of newly discovered information to be published, and which usually relates to an important public figure or a recent event. As articles in newspapers generally focus upon a single aspect of a situation, corruption can often be obscured by other themes that take precedence because of their specificity, relevance or even

sensationalism. For example, newspaper reports suggest that the coercive strategies and practices of political parties such as the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) can be broadly classified as being corrupt since many of the party's activities that come under criticism are built upon the misappropriation of power.

However, this element of the party's activities is often marginalized as news articles derisive of the Muttahida Qaumi Movement will tend not to focus on its misuse of power, but on more striking elements of this corruption. These include the violence, gang-culture and ethnic discrimination that are also perceived to form a part of the party's activities, and that have come to be seen as a stereotypical feature of the organization⁸. Thus, the party is automatically associated with certain features such as ethnic clashes and exploitative practices in the name of ideological stances and identity, but not so much with the broader socio-economic phenomenon of corruption.

Other factors can also lead to distorted representations of corruption in the media. Public demands and expectations play a major role in determining the content of what is broadcasted or published by the media, which often responds to public requirements by focusing on topics of discussion that are in vogue at a given time. This is partly because the media is dependent on its audience and the market for its survival. In this sense, it is difficult for any kind of news media to maintain an ideal position of absolute objectivity as it is constantly responding to public needs and sentiments.

For example, the fact that President Asif Ali Zardari has always been notorious for his corruption, to the extent that he was popularly known as 'Mr. Ten Percent'⁹, and his long history of being involved in corrupt practices, may be one reason that has contributed to the increase in newspaper and television coverage of corruption during the current political regime. Although it cannot be denied that the Zardari government has been involved

in many instances of corruption, the extraordinary increase in reporting on corruption cannot be attributed to this fact alone, and is also the result of heightened social awareness about the phenomenon, and raised public expectations of corruption. Thus it is not possible to simply correlate the frequency of reports on corruption to its actual incidence.

The following table shows the number of articles containing the word 'corrupt' in the English daily, *The News*, over the last four years, and compares it with the results of Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) Survey for each year. In this survey, countries are scored on a scale of 1 to 10, where a higher score is indicative of a cleaner state and society. As can be seen from the table, the results of Transparency International's survey do not necessarily correlate to the frequency with which reports on corruption feature in the print media. Indeed, the data provided by Transparency International for the years 2009 and 2010 would suggest a substantial decrease in corrupt practices in Pakistan; however, if one is to judge by news coverage of the phenomenon, it would seem that corruption almost doubled over the course of the two years.

Table 1

Year	Number of articles in <i>The News</i> containing the term 'corrupt' ¹⁰	Corruption Perceptions Index Score (Transparency International)
2006	205	2.4 ¹¹
2007	243	2.5 ¹²
2008	264	2.4 ¹³
2009	386	2.3 ¹⁴
2010	730	2.5 ¹⁵
2011	715	Not yet published

Of course, as Transparency International itself acknowledges, the results of the Corruption Perceptions Survey are not absolute in their precision or scope. However, the organization is one of the most widely recognized, and the statistics it provides are relied on sufficiently to be cited in most studies of corruption. The sudden increase in reporting on corruption between 2009 and 2010 is therefore difficult to explain, and requires a more complex explanation than a simple increase in incidents of corruption. It may be that because the Zardari government was seen as being more corrupt, public expectations of corruption increased as the regime continued. Another factor is related to the fact that 2010 saw devastating floods affect many areas of Pakistan: the floods left millions of people homeless and had a crippling impact on the economy. Pakistan was the recipient of much foreign and local private aid during this period: the focus on the floods raised awareness about the mismanagement of funds and drew attention to the massive corruption in the government's relief efforts across the country.

Most importantly, however, the transition from the pseudo-democratic government under General Pervaiz Musharraf rule to actual democracy has allowed more freedom to the press as censorship decreased. This is a theory that has been often been put forward over the last couple of years: indeed, one newspaper goes on to admit and argue that,

'Zardari has spawned an entire genre of yellow journalism. He has never sued, jailed, or harmed anyone for levelling the basest and meanest allegations at him. Thus, in a way, he has encouraged the journalistic industry, which lives off his 'misdeeds.'¹⁶

In this sense, the transition from martial law to democracy, and from Musharraf's regime to Zardari's government, may have ironically have caused its own defamation by allowing almost unlimited freedom to the press.

It is particularly difficult to pin down and assess the impact of political or personal pressures in determining the content of the media, especially in periods of democratic government when censorship becomes 'invisible'. This is because the influence or control of political players over the media, especially private channels and newspapers, is rarely easy to quantify. The fact that most English language newspapers employ a number of reporters and journalists with different opinions and political leanings contributes to the difficulty of assigning narrow labels to newspapers. Additionally, editors of newspapers typically play a central role in deciding which material is to be published and which held back. This being said, the government and important political players have an important influence on the articles published by different newspapers, and can exert political and economic pressures on newsgroups as well as individual journalists. The Pakistan Media Watch, an organization that monitors corruption and inaccuracy in the press, reports numerous instances of the media succumbing to external pressures each month. It has been noted that corruption in the media, as well as yellow journalism, have both witnessed a dramatic increase in Pakistan¹⁷.

Political events that are not directly related to the media can also impact the media's coverage of a particular phenomenon: Imran Khan's emphasis on corruption in his speeches at various rallies has contributed to the growth in public interest in corruption over the last few years. In this sense, the phenomenon can become highly politicized as it is used as a tool in blame games where politicians level allegations of embezzlement, nepotism and bribery at each other. As can be seen, a number of factors influence the way that the media portrays a given situation or theme. It is therefore important to keep in mind that portrayals of corruption in newspapers do not necessarily reflect ground realities, but are indicators of social and political forces, and how the public, as well as international and domestic political figures, respond to the phenomenon. The next section of this paper

analyses descriptions of corruption in the Pakistani print media, and discusses the information they may yield about Pakistani politics, media and society today.

II. Representing Corruption in Pakistani Newspapers¹⁸

Describing Corruption

Although newspaper articles and reports do not offer any comprehensive definitions of corruption, several themes emerge in relation to it. These suggest that in the majority of newspaper articles, corruption is commonly associated with acts of bribery, nepotism, fraud and embezzlement. As can be seen, with the exception of nepotism, the activities linked with corruption relate directly to the misappropriation of fiscal resources. In the mainstream media, therefore, the term 'corruption' generally implies financial corruption rather than intellectual or moral depravation, although there are of course some exceptions. Out of 400 articles surveyed, only 17 referred to morality in any sense of the word and only 3 explicitly referred to moral and intellectual corruption in isolation from financial corruption. However, these articles were not written by journalists or reporters, but rather, were in the form of letters to the editor.

Terms that were repeatedly applied to corruption included 'wide-ranging', 'rampant' and 'widespread'.¹⁹ Similarly, phrases such as 'yet another' and 'again and again' were widely deployed and showed how unsurprising, never-ending and unstoppable corrupt practices were seen as being.²⁰ Corruption was often treated like a fast-spreading illness that was impossible to curb: 7 articles described corruption as a 'plague' while another article spoke of the phenomenon as a 'social and economic disease'²¹. Still another article described corruption as a 'cancer', pointing to the difficulty of combating its growth and to its degenerative impacts²². The imagery of disease, stagnation and degeneration hinted at the perceived 'rot'²³ in society and the institutional

infrastructures, and the subsequent need for revival and reform. The unjust and dangerous effects of corruption on society were also underlined by the use of adjectives signalling violence and invasion. Thus a total of 30 articles described corrupt officials and politicians as 'looting', 'pilfering' and 'plundering' the country's resources. In contrast to the violent activities of the corrupt individual, Pakistan was presented as a inert, inactive entity. A closer look at will make this more clear. The excerpt below has been chosen for its impassioned style which makes it easier to pick out the major themes being played upon:

Since ambitious generals have ruled this nation for more than half of its history, they have taken the lion's share of the loot and plunder to which this nation has been subjected, sometimes through blatant corruption and sometimes through legalized corruption [...] other perks and privileges that senior armed forces officers enjoy and the standard of living to which they have become accustomed are simply disgusting for a poor country like Pakistan.²⁴

Words such as 'ruled', 'subjected' and 'poor' present a passive image of Pakistan, which is, it seems, unable to defend itself from its own rapacious elite. The phrase 'lion's share of the loot and plunder' suggests that there are a number of aggressors fighting over Pakistan's (lifeless) body. The corrupt generals that Javed Husain refers to are shown as being both crude and shameless ('blatant') as well as subtle and deceptive ('legalized corruption') in their greed for money and other privileges that are not theirs by right. These views are echoed in many editorials, letters to the editors of newspapers, and newspapers' opinion section.

Corruption has also been viewed as an act of betrayal, and has been equated with treason. This is partly on the grounds that Pakistan's population is for the most part a poor and disenfranchised population, and corruption is especially

unjustifiable in these circumstances. However, another reason why corruption is often seen as being equivalent to treason is that money from corruption is commonly perceived to be leaving the country. This is evidenced by multiple references to 'Swiss bank accounts' and 'foreign assets' in various articles. The 'flight of capital'²⁵ in this way is a commonly cited source of institutionalized corruption. It is Pakistan as a sovereign nation that is being betrayed according to many writers: one newspaper article describes corruption as being a 'threat to the country's sovereignty that had made Pakistan dependent on the US, the IMF and the World Bank'.²⁶ This implies that corruption weakens Pakistan's position as a sustainable and autonomous state, and that in turn, these factors disable the country from making any decisions about its interests or taking any stances about its future independently.

The theme of betrayal is reinforced and made more emotive by references to the Quaid-e-Azam and his thwarted vision of Pakistan's future. It should be stressed that invoking the ideology and 'vision' of such figures was not restricted to Pakistan alone: in discussions of corruption in India, Anna Hazare referred to the fact that he was following in Mahatma Gandhi's religious ideology in 5 out of 12 articles reporting on Hazare's campaign that were examined for this paper.²⁷ Indeed, Arundhati Roy denounces Hazare's lack of 'secularism' in a compelling article published in *The Hindu*, in which she criticizes Anna Hazare of 'aggressive nationalism'.²⁸ In much the same way as Hazare, various Pakistani politicians and writers calling for change have connected their ideologies and political stances with the Quaid-e-Azam and Allama Iqbal on different occasions.²⁹

The idea that Pakistan today is a far cry from Mohammad Ali Jinnah's dream is a recurrent theme in discussions on corruption. One newspaper article claims that had Jinnah lived to oversee the 'building' of Pakistan, the country would not be facing many of the evils that it does today³⁰. In common with many other articles,

this too finds the notion of a single individual who will be able to 'save Pakistan' very appealing: the need for a strong and competent leadership is emphasized by references to Malaysia's Mahathir Mohamad and Indonesia's Suharto. Most significantly, the author, Bilal Hussain, asks 'Can we find a leader like [Hazrat] Umar today?' His own answer to this question is, 'I have serious doubts'. The reference to the Muslim caliph suggests that a leader of unsurpassed honesty and competence is required to bring Pakistan back from the brink of ruin. However, this article is also inherently practical, in that although it admits that corruption is a serious setback that hinders the development of the country, it claims that there are other more compelling problems in Pakistan:

the basic problem is not just corruption. Rather, it is incompetence: those who run the country are incapable of doing what is expected of them.

It is interesting that that Hussain's definition of incompetence here follows so closely the definition of corruption provided by Transparency International. Both are seen as the products of a disjuncture between the public expectations or duties of officials, and their actual practice. Hussain argues that it would be better to have a corrupt but competent leadership (as in Malaysia and Indonesia) than one that is incompetent. However, if this point of view is examined in relation to the common definition of corruption as the misuse of power entrusted to an institution or individual by the public, then it would seem that incompetence is also a form of corruption, as it does not yield the results expected by the populace, and that are the public's due. It is true, Hussain concedes, that Jinnah's vision of Pakistan was not of a state riddled with corruption, but personally, he writes, 'I would insist on competence to deliver good governance as a minimum criterion for leadership positions, if I can't have both.'

Incompetence was an issue that featured in many articles on corruption, although most writers did not go as far as Hussain in

finding one to be significantly worse than the other. Rather, the two were most often seen as operating in tandem: corrupt practices, especially nepotism, were seen as allowing and encouraging incompetence to flourish. A total of 25 articles linked corruption with incompetence, and claimed that the two factors were to blame for the debilitation of governance in Pakistan. Incompetence was not always perceived as a result of laziness, but also a demonstration of pure ineptitude. It was expected that corrupt practices would be seen as relying on cleverness and cunning, and that corrupt politicians would generally be viewed as being sly. However, none of these terms ('cunning', 'clever' or 'sly') were found in any of the articles under examination. On the other hand, 5 articles assumed a direct relationship between corruption and stupidity, calling corrupt officials 'stupid'³¹, 'foolish'³² and 'dull'³³, in various articles. Like incompetence, stupidity and dullness were considered to be unforgivable characteristics in officials and politicians, given Pakistan's current situation and the power and responsibility entrusted to these individuals.

Two other articles that mentioned Jinnah also rather dubiously brought Islam into the discussion. One reported on Shahbaz Sharif, the Chief Minister of Punjab, addressing an inaugural ceremony for an organization assisting the blind³⁴. In this speech, Shahbaz Sharif drew attention to the fact that Pakistan was not as the Quaid had envisioned it. Sharif then went on to underline the importance of honesty, insisting that the virtue would be rewarded by God. Although Mr. Sharif's sentiments may have been to his credit, it seems that he was thereby negating the need for governmental change and suggesting that moral integrity was not able to be appreciated in Pakistan in its current state of affairs. In this sense, the statement made to the press came across as lacking any hopes of future improvement. The second article that mentioned Islam as well as Mohammad Ali Jinnah was a report covering an awards ceremony held by the Human Rights Society of Pakistan (HRSP)³⁵. In this report, it was stated that the HRSP declared a 'Jihad'

against corruption. However, the use of a specifically Islamic ideology to fight corruption is questionable as it excludes other religions or competing ideologies from being equipped to rid institutions of corruption. This being said, it should be clarified that both these instances featured in newspaper reports rather than analytical articles, and presented the views of the speaker at an event rather than those of the reporter.

Normally, there is no perceived connection between religion and corruption (or its eradication). However, 24 articles out of the total 300 analysed make explicit reference to Islam and religious ideologies. Despite the fact that 2011 saw one of the biggest corruption scandals emerge in connection with the Minister of Religious Affairs, Hamid Saeed Kazmi, none of the articles dealing with the Haj scam mention Islam or religion. In fact, the most common instance of drawing on people's religious sentiments and affiliations seemed to take place in public rallies. Politician after politician from an array of political parties invoked Islam in order to garner support and to denounce corruption. However, the most common usage of Islamic ideology and principles was made by leaders Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaaf (PTI), Jamaat-i-Islami, and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N).

Each emphasized the lack of religious integrity of rival politicians in efforts to defame and discredit them, and to draw attention to the apparent purity of their own Islamic principles. As noted earlier, such recourse to specific ideologies runs the risk of alienating minorities and people with varied beliefs. Even the PTI's mentions of 'Islamic socialism' and religious tolerance was questionable during one rally, as Imran Khan hastened to add that he was not a 'follower of secularism or Gandhi'.³⁶ Whatever the personal beliefs of a politician, this kind of explicit distancing from certain ideologies can lead to the growth of hostility towards them among the party's supporters. Moreover, the careless usage of terms suggests that many unlinked phenomena or ideologies are connected, thus misrepresenting issues. For example, a speech on

Islamic socialism and eradicating corruption, followed by insisting that he was not a 'secular' man, caused Imran Khan to imply that secularism, social inequality and corruption were somehow linked. In a similar vein, one individual stated, in a letter to the editor of *The News*, that corruption was 'especially' unwarranted in 'a Muslim society' such as Pakistan. Moreover, corruption could also be eliminated by limiting oneself to 'halal' practices and adopting the 'Islamic way of life'.³⁷ While the role of religion in defining morality for many is not disputed, this paper suggests that such solutions defy universal application and exclude minority groups, often implying that problems in non-Muslim societies, or sectors of society, cannot be solved.

Out of the newspapers examined, the most references to religion in relation to fighting corruption occurred in *The Nation*, followed by *The News*. However, it was in the latter that the most violent forms of resistance, and even the involvement of the military, in fighting corruption were demanded. Similarly, it is also *The News* which tends to refer to groups which it deems to be in the wrong in the most dramatic and often crude language. Indeed, one rather confusing article featured in *The News* refers to 'the foul and obnoxious' practices of Indians, claiming that Indian cricket fans have a 'history of violently reacting'. The reason that this article is linked to corruption is because the writer, Tariq Butt, takes it upon himself to warn the corrupt government that they will earn the 'scorn' of the nation if they act upon their plot to 'choke' or 'mangle' the reception of the TV channel, Geo Super, on the day of a cricket match.³⁸ It is no coincidence that Geo is owned by the same group that own *The News*.

The News was also one of the few English newspapers that reported calls from the Hizbut Tahrir (HT) to 'sincere elements in the armed forces' to remember their duty to establish a Khilafah in Pakistan, and to take up the fight against the capitalist system and to replace 'both democratic and dictatorial rulers' of the past.³⁹ Apart from the fact that this was an undemocratic demand, the

vague reference to 'sincere' members of the armed forces to join in the struggle to remove all pre-existing systems comes across as rather destructive and violent, and suggests a political connection between the HT and the Pakistani Army.

Similarly, among the newspapers sampled, it happened to be in *The News* that two articles were published in which Abdul Sattar Edhi called for the Chief of the Army Staff, General Ashfaq Parvez Kiyani to take over 'the reign of power for six months to set things right'⁴⁰. At a gathering held at the mausoleum of Begum Nusrat Bhutto, Edhi announced that the corrupt who had taken money from Pakistan 'ought to give it to the Army Chief of Pakistan so that he could help' the country.⁴¹ The arbitrary nature of such announcements cannot be ignored. The only criticism of this story that was published came in a two line letter to the editor from France, which briefly stated that Edhi should realize that fighting corruption was 'not the military's job'⁴².

Who is Corrupt? Depicting Politicians, the Military and Government Institutions

It has already been stated that the vast majority of reports and articles on corruption examined focused primarily on financial corruption. To this it may be added that instances of such corruption were almost consistently linked with government institutions, and individuals and organizations that were associated with them in some manner. Reports which dealt with corruption in private enterprises were hardly to be found. Indeed, it was discovered that references to the private sector were mostly used in order to provide a comparative view of the public sector: in such comparisons, politicians, government institutions and employees invariably fared worse than their private counterparts. One letter to the editor of *Dawn* cites a trend among civil servants leaving the Civil Superior Service (CSS) to join the private sector, noting that this phenomenon has 'seen a definite increase' over the last few years, implying the disillusionment that people

experience in the civil service, and the comparative appeal that the private sector now holds.⁴³

The writer, a civil servant himself, initially authored an article entitled, 'I am corrupt, honestly!' as a response to growing public anger against the country's corrupt bureaucracy. Far from denying the fact that corruption was rampant in the civil service, Syed Saadat admitted that most civil servants ended up becoming involved in corrupt activities. However, it is interesting to note that even within a single structure like the bureaucratic civil service, different levels of corruption are ascribed to various sectors and bodies. For example, Saadat points to the ease with which officials in the police, customs, railways and land administration departments are able to indulge in corrupt practices. The fact that different levels of corruption – stretching over a range of areas and across a wide scale – are seen to exist can be problematic, as it suggests that corruption should be judged according to the scale on which it is practiced.

Although Saadat's writing is satirical and does not provide any single solution or judgement on the problem of corruption, it does suggest that some structural and systemic flaws encourage corruption. For example, the low wages of new civil servants are criticized as they force people to alternative routes to making money. Secondly, and most importantly, Saadat points out the fact that much of this corruption would not be possible were it not for the fact that the public (the same public that criticizes and denounces corrupt officials) is complicit in such malpractices. One of the reasons, Saadat writes, that customs officials are able to make money, is because 'the wonderful citizens of Pakistan are so eager to evade taxes'.⁴⁴

Syed Saadat also claims that 'the perception created by the media and society is that the bureaucrat is successful, rich and classy. He is somebody who drinks classy wine and smokes Cuban cigars'.⁴⁵ The stereotypical image of corruption, therefore, is not

limited to single acts of fraud or embezzlement, but generates the idea of an entire lifestyle, characterized by decadence and imported luxury goods. In this way, the emphasis shifts from corrupt individuals to encompass their surroundings, and most notably, their families. In this regard, there are many references to individual politicians or bureaucrats who accumulate wealth for their relations, and who create powerful networks based on familial ties. These are not limited to Pakistan alone: newspapers covering the events of 2011 report on the corruption of the Gaddafi regime in Libya, where Gaddafi's children 'carved out spheres of influence and were seemingly treating the country as their personal fiefdom'.⁴⁶ Another article mentions that in Russia, a shockingly high number of 'government contracts are granted to private businesses with family ties to public workers'.⁴⁷ Writing in *Dawn*, Robert Fisk notes that in Syria, the Assad family must 'cleanse its family name' in order to survive, since the regime has been 'corrupted by its own family'.⁴⁸

In Pakistan, personal relationships and nepotism play no less of a role in interfering with the transparency of public processes and transactions. One letter to the editor states that 'the PPP is the Bhutto family's party, the PML-N is the Sharif family's party, and so on'.⁴⁹ In many articles, corrupt individuals are seen as forming teams, usually based on blood relationships. These include references to the 'Chaudhry Brothers',⁵⁰ 'Sharif brothers',⁵¹ as well as the 'Zardari-Gilani duo'.⁵² It seems that such networks of support are crucial for corruption to flourish, as they enable less prominent members of a family to take the blame for some of the scandals that may have been exposed, and 'flee' to another country. One relevant article refers cynically to the fact that General Pervez Musharraf's family, as well as countless 'senior bureaucrats', possess dual nationality, and are able to escape from recompense if their crimes are taken up in court.⁵³ Alternatively, powerful members of a family are also able to provide protection to relations who have been accused of wrongdoing.

This tendency of corrupt individuals to operate in groups has been noted by numerous articles in the newspapers surveyed: 5 articles on corruption refer to 'gangs', 8 to 'corrupt and powerful groups' and another 21 employ the term 'mafia' in relation to corrupt and exploitative individuals.⁵⁴ The use of such language signals the dangers of threatening or questioning the deeds of such powerful, close-knit groups and implies that they use methods of terrorizing vulnerable segments of society in order to achieve their goals and maintain their status in society. 'Gang' and 'mafia' suggest that these groups are immensely powerful, and are able to respond with violence to any individuals who dare to question the legitimacy of their actions. This appears to be an accurate assessment of the ways in which corrupt persons function, and corrupt practices are able to flourish without much public intervention or disturbance.

At the same time, the use of terms such as 'gang' 'criminal' and 'mafia' also highlights general perceptions of corrupt people as being protected and unassailable, immune to all attacks. Indeed, many articles referred to the 'black law'⁵⁵ by which corruption was allowed to go unchecked, and suggested that corrupt individuals receive the 'protection and patronage' of politicians as well as government officials, especially the police.⁵⁶ Unfortunately, while this may be a true reflection of common attitudes towards corruption, the media's reiteration of such terminology may serve to confirm these views of an impenetrable network of corruption, and further entrench apathy in response to social and economic evils and malpractices. It seems as though emphasizing the weaknesses and vulnerability of corrupt systems, rather than their invincibility would make them easier to be tackled and challenged by individuals in civil society. Interestingly, it is notable that while bureaucratic structures, government institutions and public sector services in general are repeatedly referred to as being inherently corrupt, civil society and individuals are hardly ever shown as being complicit in corruption. Similarly, very few instances of corruption are to be

described first-hand; rather, it is mostly ascribed to distant individuals and political elites.

The fact that the bureaucracy is viewed as being one of the most corrupt structures in Pakistan has been supported by the findings of Transparency International Pakistan (TIP), which lists the Land Administration Department and the Police as two of the most corrupt institutions in the country. An examination of newspapers in Pakistan shows that the police and 'patwaris' are most commonly accused of exploiting weaker individuals. In the past, TIP had been criticized for not including the military in their surveys. 2011 was the first year that corruption in Pakistan's Armed Forces were also examined by the organization. Surprisingly, newspaper reports on TIP's National Corruption Perceptions Survey claimed that the military was typically seen as being one of the least corrupt and most professional of Pakistan's institutions.⁵⁷ Another look at the organization's report may help to explain this phenomenon. Firstly, this was partly due to the fact that the institution had never been included in the survey previously and thus did not receive a comprehensive treatment: this limitation was admitted by Syed Adil Gilani, the head of the organization.⁵⁸ Secondly, the fact that the military ranked number 9 on a list of 10 institutions does not mean that it is necessarily perceived as being one of Pakistan's least corrupt institutions, as it managed to figure on a top ten list. Thirdly, and most importantly, a closer reading of Transparency International Pakistan's report will show that the organization bases its results on the public's perceptions of corruption, and states that such perceptions are dependent on the extent of the surveyed population's dealings with the institution. In the data provided in the National Corruption Perception Survey (2011), it can be seen that the military was the institution with which which people interviewed for the survey had the least contact (only 3% of the total interviewees) in 2011.⁵⁹ Looked at in this context, it is evident that the military's low position on the Corruption Perceptions Index is due to the fact that most people do not rely

directly on the military or its related institutions for the provision of public services.

The Media and the Private Sector

Moving on from media representations of corruption in the military, bureaucracy and other public sector institutions, there appears to be a conspicuous lack of information, in the newspapers examined, on instances of corruption in the private sector. Should this silence be taken to mean that there is relatively little corruption in private enterprises? Indeed, is our definition of corruption applicable to private sector ventures? More precisely, is it relevant to discuss the 'misappropriation of public funds' with regard to private businesses? In recent times, the private sector has been put forward as a solution to end corrupt practices and to increase transparency and efficiency in services that would otherwise be provided by the public sector.⁶⁰ In Pakistan, with the decline of government institutions and departments such as Pakistan Railways, Pakistan International Airlines and even the Health Sector, private companies have increasingly come forward and opted to take charge of, or at least work in tandem with, public institutions.

This means that the private sector is now responsible for providing many public services, including transport, pharmaceuticals and even some telecommunication services. In this sense, it seems that the definition of corruption as provided by Transparency International is too narrow to fit the bill now that public and private funds have become so difficult to disentangle. However, because organizations such as Transparency International have not adjusted their criteria for what constitutes corruption, and do not incorporate the private sector into their Corruption Perceptions Index, the presence of corruption in private enterprises is often obscured. Moreover, the amount of power and control that private businesses and corporations are able to exert over the public via their ownership of newspapers and news channels, is usually forgotten or ignored. Similarly, as

private businesses often help to fund election campaigns for different politicians, and are frequently connected to the military, politicians and bureaucrats, the 'backdoor' involvement of the private sector in running the country and determining political outcomes is an extremely important and powerful force. From this it follows that the applicability of terms such as corruption to the private sector is not only appropriate but very necessary.

As Arundhati Roy has convincingly argued in her excellent article criticizing the anti-corruption activist Anna Hazare, 'I'd rather not be Anna', the private sector needs to be recognized as potentially exploitative, now that it is increasingly being entrusted with power and public funds. Although Roy writes with reference to India, the following excerpt from her article has relevance in almost every country today:

'At a time when the State is withdrawing from its traditional duties and Corporations and NGOs are taking over government functions (water supply, electricity, transport, telecommunication, mining, health, education); at a time when the terrifying power and reach of the corporate owned media is trying to control the public imagination, one would think that these institutions — the corporations, the media, and NGOs — would be included in the jurisdiction of [an anti-corruption] bill.'⁶¹

Roy goes on to claim that the relentless attacks against the Indian Government, and the accusations of corruption that the public sector is forced to accept every day, are aimed at weakening the state structure, and to allow the public sector to be taken over by giant corporations and private businesses that are essentially not answerable to the public. As Talha Jalal, writing for Pakistan Media Watch, has pointed out, the majority of Pakistani media groups (including those under discussion in this article), are privately owned, and largely driven by 'corporate interests'.⁶² Jalal

argues that this has resulted in the 'commodification of news and a disregard for media ethics' and has caused a greater emphasis on corruption scandals in the government and judiciary.⁶³ It is indeed unusual to find a reference to corruption in the private sector: of the 300 articles under examination for this project, only 5 mention the involvement of private actors in incidents of corruption. Only 3 of these articles refers explicitly to Pakistan: the other two deal with corruption in China and Russia, and were provided to Pakistani newspapers by international news agencies.⁶⁴ One article that relates to Pakistan deals with an instance of Pakistan International Airlines' (PIA) land being rented out illegally to a private company: the focus of this article remains an institution that is explicitly public sector.⁶⁵

One obvious point of corruption in the private sector would be of tax evasion: however, in the 300 newspapers surveyed, a handful of articles are concerned with individuals not paying their taxes: out of these only 2 (the last of the 5 mentioned in the above paragraph) acknowledged the role played by private individuals in tax evasion: for the rest, the blame fell squarely on politicians, and officials in the government's taxation departments. Except for the 2 articles that spoke vaguely of tax-evasion in a general sense, all other articles ignored the role played by private individuals and private companies in committing tax fraud altogether y treating tax evasion as a political and governmental crime only.⁶⁶ This article argues that with the increasing involvement of the private sector in managing public funds, and being entrusted with 'public' power, existing definitions of corruption need to be revised and broadened so that they are able to include the abuse of power and money by private actors. Presently, however, Pakistani media seems to be focused upon the public or governmental face of corruption scandals only, and does not seek to unravel the involvement of private sectors.

One reason for this may be the fact that private companies own most media channels and newspapers in Pakistan. As Pakistan

Media Watch points out, the Pakistani media is far from being free of corruption, and is replete with cases of yellow journalism, slander, misreporting, and aggression that is tantamount to the issuing of threats.⁶⁷ Ansar Abbasi, a journalist for *The News*, has come under regular attack from media analysts and watchdog organizations such as Pakistan Media Watch, for offences that range from misinforming the public, shallow and sensationalist reporting, as well as attempts to directly influence ongoing trials in courtrooms. As many newspapers have expanded over the last few years and set up associated television channels, so too have their 'corporate interests' increased, as well as the amounts of financial resources they are able to command (and that are at stake). It may further be argued that, given organizations and companies that play central roles in shaping public perceptions and informing the population, the media is indeed entrusted with public office and power. In this sense, any instance of misinforming the public or playing upon this power, can be classified as corruption on the part of the media.

III. Taking the blame

Finger Pointing

It has often been noted that a culture of 'finger-pointing' exists in almost all political circles, and is an indispensable tool for politicians seeking to gain support from the general public. In the newspaper articles surveyed for this project, there were 16 references to 'mud-slinging' and 'finger-pointing'.⁶⁸ However, it should be noted that it is not only individuals in the public eye who participate in such blame games. Most newspapers and television channels have one bias or another, as they are often supported by certain politicians, or in some cases, have been targeted by others. At the same time, it is important to keep in mind that the majority of newspapers allow a certain degree of flexibility and difference of opinion among their reporters and columnists, and thus cannot be treated as monolithic entities propagating a single point of view.

This being said, an examination of the general biases shown by the newspaper articles under discussion may allow us to make some basic assumptions about the political leanings of different newspapers.

The System or the Individual?

As has already been discussed in Part II, corruption is commonly associated with public sector and governmental institutions rather than private enterprises. However, it does not follow on from this that the system, rather than individuals, are seen as being flawed. On the contrary, the majority of articles point to the presence of corrupt and dishonest individuals in otherwise functional and unproblematic systems. In this sense, the general perception seems to be that unreliable, money-hungry individuals, who are placed in positions which afford them some degree of power, are responsible for destroying state institutions, as they effortlessly siphon off public funds to line 'their own pockets'.⁶⁹ Articles attempt to identify the 'most corrupt' individuals in a given system; this implies that corruption of different kinds should be judged and treated differently, and that certain instances of the phenomenon are excusable.⁷⁰ However, this is not to say that the general populace of Pakistan is depicted as being corrupt. Indeed, it seems that the vast majority of Pakistanis suffer due to the actions of a few individuals. This sentiment is echoed in most newspaper articles, whether they are expressing the opinion of the writer, or narrating speeches made by politicians. A good example of this view is the following sentence, spoken by a leader at a Jamaat-i-Islami 'anti-corruption caravan':

[the speaker said that] the country was a victim of the corrupt practices of the ruling clique which had taken the national institutions to a virtual bankruptcy.⁷¹

This is perhaps the most common view of the common man, who falls prey to predatory politicians and government officials. As most media corporations are heavily dependent on their markets,

they tend to focus on scandals and to publish sensationalist accounts of the personal lives of individuals that are designed to increase readership, resulting in the commodification of the news. However, such news stories do little to reveal the actual causes or roots of problems that affect Pakistan's economy, society and institutions on such a large scale. Focusing on individual crimes obscures systematic flaws that may lead to corrupt practices, such as low wages, lack of computerization, untrained individuals and exploitative or illogical legislation. It is questionable how much good exposing isolated acts of corruption will do in the larger scheme of things, as no long-term or structural solutions to these problems can be offered if the systems of institutions which breed corruption are to be ignored.

It is also telling that Pakistanis in such scenarios are most often referred to as the 'masses',⁷² an undifferentiated group of individuals with little or no autonomy, political affiliations or social leverage. Articles that call for change commonly demand that the masses 'rise' and 'revolt'⁷³ against an equally vague enemy, the 'corrupt elite'.⁷⁴ Unfortunately, the vast majority of individuals who come into contact with such terminology will distance themselves from such broad (and dismissive) labels. It is unlikely that the reader of a newspaper will identify him or herself as 'the masses'; similarly, the chances of a corrupt individual recognizing himself as the 'corrupt elite' are very low. Thus it is argued that a more specific and careful approach to different forms of corruption, and different segments of society, is needed. Newspapers attempting to encourage positive steps towards eliminating corruption need to recognize the different elements that comprise society, and to focus on creating awareness on *how* corruption is to be fought. This would require the acknowledgment that all individuals in a society are complicit in acts of corruption even they do not initiate them. Focusing on channels of reform and control (such as police reports, registering cases in local courts, informing others in your community) and

seeking justice through legitimate channels in order to strengthen them would be more helpful.

This paper argues that emphasizing 'revolution' and 'revolt' as potential solutions in a country that has democratic institutions would serve only to weaken their functions. Instead, informed decisions and pushes for reform of existing structures should be promoted. Moreover, the spreading of awareness about problems such as corruption is simply not enough in Pakistan: channels for change, and to provide justice, need to be reappraised and strengthened, and made more accessible to ordinary citizens. In this way, popular desire to change 'the way things are', and to put widespread frustration raised by awareness of different problems, may be put to more effective and constructive use.

Who talks about corruption?

An examination of the surveyed articles shows that all four newspapers tend to use similar sources to inform their readers about incidents of corruption. It is assumed that interviews with powerful individuals are most likely to attract public attention. One of the benefits of this style of reporting is that individuals who occupy positions of responsibility are made more visible: this can exert pressure on such officials to take positive action against corruption. It also often means that individuals who have been directly involved in corruption or related scandals are exposed to the public. At the same time, reporting that relies too heavily on a single set of views comes with its own set of disadvantages.

Sources of corruption related facts and opinions have a direct bearing on the ways in which issues and possible solutions are perceived and understood by readers. Spokespersons for organizations in which corruption has been discovered often try to downplay the scale on which it has occurred. Specific individuals are also made scapegoats in order to save an entire institution or group of people from falling into disrepute, and to give the impression of efficient, reparatory steps being taken against

wrongdoing. However, as has been discussed earlier in this paper, placing the blame on individuals can obscure systemic or organizational flaws and prevent widespread change at a deeper level.

Another negative aspect of focusing on powerful individuals and people who are directly incriminated in corruption is that such reporting leads to the view that change is impossible to attain from below. Most articles surveyed quoted the opinions of judges, ministers and well-known politicians and leaders. Similarly, experiences of corruption at a 'lower' level are not recounted: only instances of 'massive' corruption and embezzlement are recorded and made public. This suggests that the experience of the 'common man' is not valid or directly connected to and impacted by the 'high-end' corruption that takes place. In this way, the discussion on corruption and subsequent anti-corruption action becomes limited to an elite group of individuals who possess certain kinds of power. Ordinary citizens are thus given the impression that they are excluded from playing any significant role in the eradication of corruption in the spheres that they are most likely to encounter it. In this way, focusing on a minority of powerful individuals can increase the feeling of apathy in a population. This paper suggests that recording the experiences and opinions of ordinary citizens will be beneficial to the growth of a responsible and active civil society that feels directly involved in the public sphere, by being represented in the press.⁷⁵ In this sense, it is arguable that one of the reasons that Anna Hazare gained such an impressive following across the world is that he appealed to the general public, embodying and reflecting the average man.

Conclusion and Recommendations

While the importance of newspapers and the media in general in raising awareness about corruption and encouraging anti-corruption activity cannot be denied, this paper suggests some

basic steps that can increase newspapers' efficiency and integrity in this role.

- Newspaper reporters should engage in more investigative reporting that explores and explains the structure of institutions, in order to help understand systemic corruption.
- To the same purpose, emphasis should be laid on organizations and systems rather than individuals. This will also avoid the dangers of scape-goating.
- Articles should incorporate a broader range of opinions and experiences, and not merely focus on an elite with political powers and advantages.
- Newspapers should invest in trained reporters who will produce well-researched articles rather than assuming the existence certain trends and thereby merely propagating them. Well-informed articles will also help to point to specific measures and channels to fight corruption on a popular level, rather than creating the impression of a dead-end situation.
- Self-censorship of newspapers can help curtail the use of violent language, and discourage factually incorrect reporting.
- Newspapers should provide more information about their own commitments and interests, as well as business linkages, in order to allow readers to assess their content more fairly.
- Finally, greater interaction between the Urdu and English press will help to promote the flow of

information and to decrease the polarization of opinion between their respective readerships.

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