
Media-Democracy Relationship in Pakistan

_____ Taimur ul Hassan

The article explores the media's relationship with democracy in Pakistan. It analyses the newspaper coverage of civil society during General Pervez Musharraf's regime focusing on the year 2004. The article uses the content analysis approach and examines the direction of coverage given to civil society, which is truly considered the soul of democracy. It is clear that in democracy media prospers with democracy as the form promotes the latter and vice versa. In Pakistan, democracy is still struggling because of long spells of military rule in the country. Media has suffered as a consequence. Normatively, libertarian theorists say that media ought to give space to every segment of society, whereas Social Responsibility advocates demand that media must fulfill its responsibility towards society. In Pakistan, whether the media, newspapers in the present case, played that role by giving supportive voice to civil society will be looked into.

Introduction

Media is a vital element in building a state. It is considered to be the fourth pillar of a state; but this esteemed position is linked with great responsibility. The media's role should not be restricted to providing entertainment, it should also provide a platform to all sections of society so that they can openly discuss

their issues, problems and put forth their demands. The media should provide a voice to those whose voice is not heard. Not only this but media is also required to play the role of a guide - an honest guide – that shapes public opinion in a most positive way with respect to development of society and promotion of democracy. Libertarianism stresses upon equal voice to every segment of the society in order to promote democracy and to realize every individuals potential to grow as a productive human being. “Classical liberal theories suggest that the free press serves to strengthen the process of democratization and human development in the watchdog role.”¹ But owing to commercialization of media, not all voices are heard in the media. “There is a growing gap between the number of voices in society and the number heard in the media.”²

Media’s role in democracy should be that of a platform where people can have their say. It is said that democracy is a government of the people and by the people. If it is so, the opinion of people should matter the most, it should be essential in a democratic environment. Public opinion should be encouraged and respected in democracy so that the government remains answerable to people. If it is working against the will of people, it should be replaced, but only through the vote of people.

It must be acknowledged that power to people is conferred upon them by democracy, and it is media’s responsibility to inform people what they are eligible to do. But if some sections are not heard or are depicted in a negative frame, it would undermine democracy. There is no gainsaying that marginalization of any segment of society is not a useful practice because it amounts to suppressing a huge potential of societal growth. “It is rationally absurd that an intelligent, self governing community should be helpless victim of the caprice of newspapers managed solely for individual profits.”³ It is established that media holds the power to affect public opinion; thus, media should perform its role with utmost caution and care. In the matter of governance in

a democratic polity, its role assumes extra significance. "The fourth estate has been traditionally regarded as one of the classic checks and balances in the division of power."⁴ As a watchdog, it is media's foremost obligation to keep people informed about all the developments at the national and the international levels, so that people know what is happening around them. But, more crucially, as an agent of social balance, it is supposed to be unbiased and fair when dealing with different components of a democratic society.

It is a matter of critical debate that whether the media in Pakistan has been fulfilling its responsibilities in a democracy or not. Media is exceedingly commercialized, so it is generally understood that it is controlled either by the government or by those who are influential and wield financial power. The critics hold that rather than following the imperatives of social responsibility, it is working to serve the agenda of the few at the cost of diverse voices and opinions.

This raises concern because in a democracy, media is supposed to provide information to people in an impartial manner, letting them decide what is in their interest; it must not manipulate news or follow agenda of those at the helm. Surely, democracy prospers when people are given an unfettered space to express their views, articulate their demands and freely cast their votes to elect their representatives. Media is a broad platform with wide wings and tools to pave the way for sustainable and true democracy. It is the watchdog that halts the malfunctioning of democracy. How could democracy be promoted? Of course, it can only be done if the media, following pluralism, gives equal voice to every segment of society, in the true spirit of the theory of libertarianism. It is particularly true for a developing country like Pakistan that local communities and their organizations commonly known as civil society are heard in the media. "While media are a central part of local communication, local publics echo voices that primarily communicate through media".⁵ Media

with biased interpretation can only benefit a fraction of people but not people at large as they are deprived of their right to have unbiased, objective, accurate and balanced views. In democracy, civil society represents different voices, including women, youth, political parties, charities and NGOs, so going by the libertarianism, it needs to be properly and objectively covered. "A pluralistic society has many social groups, and therefore exhibits a plurality of many different voices, These may have different social perspectives and positions, but within a democracy all are allowed to speak and will have access to media".⁶

Having suffered from dictatorship, democracy still remains popular among the common folks of Pakistan. Media has tried to contribute to the growth of an infant democracy in the country, but its role, as widely understood, remains inadequate. Looking at the hurdles the media faces in the promotion of democracy, it may not be wrong to say that the media has played into the hands of a few and set the agenda on their behalf. It is imperative, therefore, that in view of the above arguments, it adopts a social responsibility model in order to fulfill the requirements of a pluralistic civil. "Social Responsibility Theory emphasizes the need for an independent press that scrutinizes other social institutions and provides objective, accurate news reports."⁷ In a developing country like Pakistan where democracy is still taking roots, this imperative is doubly justified.

The article examines the role of press in Pakistan with regard to civil society which is a critical factor in strengthening democracy in Pakistan. It takes non-governmental organizations as the case study and analyses the coverage given to them in the regime of former President Pervez Musharraf which was ostensibly supported by NGOs when he assumed power but later the General turned against them. Since the newspaper industry depends to a large extent on official advertisements, the researcher's assumption is that the newspaper took a negative

view of NGOs in that period, especially in the year 2004, when the tide was high against NGOs.

Methodology

It could be hypothesized that the national newspapers have portrayed a negative image of one segment of the civil society, NGOs. Coverage of NGOs was analyzed after codifying the unit of analysis, which was all news, articles, editorials and features in Urdu and English newspapers in 2004, into the categories of 'supportive and 'non supportive' based on the themes of NGOs being 'anti-Pakistan', 'foreign agent' and 'anti-Islam' for 'non supportive' and 'development agent', 'agent for democracy' and 'tolerance' for 'supportive'. Data was qualitatively analyzed.

Findings

February 2004

Source	No.	Supportive	Non-Supportive
NAWAY-i- WAQT	1		1
JANG	1		1
Dawn	2	1	1
Others	1		1
News/Reports/Stories	5	1	4

Note: no article, editorial or feature was published in this month.

March 2004

Source	No.	Supportive	Non-Supportive
JANG	1	1	
Dawn	1	1	
Other	1		1
News/Reports/Stories	3	2	1

Note: no article, editorial or feature was published in this month.

April 2004

Source	No.	Supportive	Non-Supportive
KHABRAIN	2		2
DIN	1		1
JANG	1		1
Dawn	3	3	
The News	1		1
Others	2	1	1
News/Reports/Stories	10	4	6

Note: no article, editorial or feature was published in this month.

June 2004

Source	No.	Supportive	Non-Supportive
DIN	1		1
Dawn	1		1
Others	3	3	
News/reports/Stories	5	3	2

Note: no article, editorial or feature was published in this month.

July 2004

Source	No.	Supportive	Non-Supportive
DIN	2	1	1
Pakistan	2		2
Dawn	2	1	1
The News	1	1	
Others	4	3	1
News/Reports/Stories	11	6	5
Editorial	1	1	
Article	1		1

September 2004

Source	No.	Supportive	Non-Supportive
NAWAT-i-WAQT	2		2
DIN	1		1
The Nation	1		1
Others	4	2	2
News/Reports/Stories	8	2	6
Article	1		1

Note: no editorial or feature was published in this month.

October 2004

Source	No.	Supportive	Non-Supportive
DIN	2	1	1
Pakistan	1	1	
JANG	1		1
The News	1	1	
Dawn	1	1	
Others	11	6	5
News/Reports/stories	17	10	7
Article	1	1	

Note: no editorial or feature was published in this month.

November 2004

Source	No.	Supportive	Non-Supportive
JANG	1		1
Dawn	1	1	
Others	2		2
News/Reports/Stories	4	1	3

Note: no article, editorial or feature was published in this month.

December 2004

Source	No.	Supportive	Non-Supportive
KHABRAIN	1	1	
NAWA-I-WAQT	1		1
The Nation	1	1	
The News	1		1
Dawn	3	2	1
Others	2	1	1
News/Reports/Stories	9	5	4

Note: no article, editorial or feature was published in this month.

Total in items 2004: 73

Total News/Stories/Reports published in 2004: 68

Total Articles published in 2004: 3

Total Editorials published in 2004: 2

In the year 2004, 73 stories were analysed out of which, 38 were found to be Non Supportive while 35 were supportive. Three articles were discovered, of which two were Non-Supportive.

In February 2004, five stories were covered, four Non-Supportive and one Supportive.⁸ The Daily Dawn published a double-column supportive story dated February 27, "Action against girls' killers demanded", which reported that around 100 women rights activists staged a protest demonstration at Aabpara Chowk, Islamabad to condemn the kidnapping and murder of two minor girls in Karachi a few days ago.⁹

The Daily Jang published a double-column story dated February 19 that said that Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz had said that there should be a code of ethics for the NGOs and the government would bring a law for NGOs. He stated that all NGOs required registration and NGOs' funds utilization should be transparent. The Daily Nawa-i-Waqt on February 27 published a single column story, which was Non-supportive. Similar Non-Supportive stories appeared in The Daily Express on February 7 and Daily Dawn on February 30, in double columns each.

Moving into March, the researcher found three stories, one Non-Supportive and two Supportive.

The Daily Jang published a single-column story on March 1, which related to a civil society protest against the culprits in the 'Dr Shazia's case'. The participants demanded a quick inquiry into that case.¹⁰

Urdu Daily Sahafat published a double-column story dated March 10, in which Chairman Jamiat Ahle-Hadith Sajid Mirr was reported as saying that NGOs were working against Islam. He expressed his views that NGOs were working for the 'Jewish

lobby' and had an 'anti-Islam agenda'. He said NGOs were loyal to their Western masters.¹¹

In April 2004, 10 stories were collected, out of which 6 were non supportive while 4 were supportive.

The Daily Times published a three-column story dated April 18, "Women prisoners long for jail in home districts". According to it, an NGO providing legal aid to women prisoners had said that these prisoners were sick and depressed because of being imprisoned far from their homes.¹²

Daily Khabrain published a single-column story dated April 18, in which Hafiz Saeed said that NGOs were 'spoiling the faith of Muslims' in the name of social welfare.¹³

The News published a single-column story on April 18, "Hafiz Saeed slams foreign NGOs". Hafiz Saeed accused the NGOs of 'spoiling the faith of people' in the name of welfare of mankind.¹⁴

Dawn published a supportive three-column story dated April 17, "NGOs liaison can better serve women cause". It said sector-wise networking of civil society organizations within themselves could highlight the issues that the government ignored or did not prioritize in their routine business.¹⁵

Dawn published a supportive double-column story dated April 23, "Call to resist IMF, WB policies". It told that representatives of various NGOs and affected people of WB, IMF-sponsored projects staged a protest demonstration in front of the World Bank.¹⁶

The Urdu Daily Express published a non supportive double-column story dated April 30. Minister for Social Welfare Sughra Imam said 144 NGOs were inactive in Punjab. Many NGOs existed only on paper. Strong action should be taken against the

dummy NGOs. These NGOs were increasing their bank accounts but doing nothing for social welfare. The Daily Din published a negative double column story dated April 30. This contained the same statement of Minister for Social Welfare Sughra Imam. Daily Khabrain published a single-column story and Jang published a double-column story on April 30, carrying the same statement.¹⁷

In June 2004, five stories were collected, out of which, 2 were non-supportive and 3 supportive.

The Daily Times published a single-column story dated June 25, headlined, "NGOs demo outside NWFP assembly". According to the story, the representatives of NGOs and tribal people demonstrated in front of the NWFP Assembly to protest against the attack in Bannu on a NGO van in which a woman worker and driver were injured.¹⁸

The Daily Din published a single-column 'letter to the editor' dated June 13. The letter was against the NGOs role in Pakistan. The writer criticised the NGOs that they were promoting 'vulgarity in the name of marathon race'. He also told that the local NGOs were also trying to do 'politics in the name of human rights'.¹⁹

The Daily Times published a supportive double-column story dated June 2. Headline was, "Women must learn to complain about sexual harassment." It said women were brought up to be shy and timid, which meant that they did not complain or protect when offences were committed against them.²⁰

In July 2004, 8 stories were collected, out of which 6 were supportive and 2 non supportive. One article was also found, which was non supportive.

The News published a single-column letter dated July 15, "Attacking NGOs activists". It pointed out the recent attack on the

activists of the internationally known NGO Khwendo Kor to say the least was a cowardly criminal act. In view of the close proximity of the scene of the incident to the troubled tribal areas, the attackers believed that it was 'Jewish and Christian money' that finances these NGOs and therefore should be opposed.²¹

Dawn published a double-column supportive story dated July 13. "NGO criticizes rights violations". It said that the Society for Human Rights and Prisoners Aid had expressed concern over large-scale violations of human rights in the NWFP and had appealed to the government to take measures to improve the situation.²²

The Daily Pakistan published a double-column non supportive story dated July 3. It related to Wafaq-ul-Madaris that blamed the NGOs for involving in 'anti-Islamic activities'. The Wafaq blamed in a public gathering that NGOs were funded by the 'Jewish lobby' and 'Qaidianis' were partners of these NGOs.²³

The Daily Din published a scathing article on July 14. The article was written by Hafiz Shafiq-ur-Rehman. He wrote that the government always opposed the NGOs in Pakistan. He claimed that a few years back, the NGOs established a network in Pakistan and started 'anti-Pakistan' and 'anti-Islam' activities. NGOs were also 'enemies of human rights' and had done nothing in this sector. They had made millions dollars in the name of social welfare but done nothing for the poor and the needy people. 'Good news' was that the government of the Pakistan had started an 'operation against NGOs' and it was highlighting their 'evil activities and evil plans'. The government's action was highly appreciable because the 'Americans are supporting the NGOs'. NGOs were funded by the foreign powers.²⁴

The writer went on to say that NGOs worked for the 'Western secret agencies'. Mostly NGOs had a 'wicked plan' and they were not accruing any benefit to Pakistan. NGOs were

promoting 'Western culture and values' in Pakistan and their mission was to 'detract Pakistan's youth'. "Like terrorist organizations and the drug mafia, the NGO mafia is very strong and has strong connections in the establishment."

The Daily Din published a double-column supportive story dated July 16, which said that the NGOs had started a countywide campaign for the repeal of Hudood Ordinance. It cited some NGO members as blaming religious leaders for doing politics in the name of Hudood Ordinance.²⁵

The Daily Times published a single column story dated July 20, "NGOs warned against obscenity". The MMA warned the NGOs against spreading what the MMA considered 'vulgarity' and 'obscenity' in the name of welfare activities. The 'warning' was issued by an office-bearer of the MMA during a ceremony.²⁶

Dawn published a six-column story dated July 24, "Soomro hints at plan to regulate NGOs working". It said that the federal government conceded before the Senate that there was no monitoring of thousands of NGOs working in the country, especially those funded by the international donors. He said that at present there was no law governing the NGOs, which could control their direct funding from the international donor agencies.²⁷

The Daily Pakistan published a non-supportive double-column story dated July 3, which concurred with Wafaq-ul-Madaris that blamed the NGOs that they were involved in 'anti Islamic activities'. Similarly, The Daily Sahafat published a non supportive story on July 15.²⁸

In September 2004, six stories were published, out of which 5 were non supportive and one-supportive. One article was published which had anti-NGO.

NGOs role in highlighting the issue of tents of army farms in Okara, Punjab, was focused.

The Daily Sahafat published a double-column story along with photographer on September 15, which related to an NGO's protest against the government and the MMA in front of the parliament house, Islamabad. NGOs snubbed the government and MMA dialogue on the Hadd Laws. They criticized the government for negotiating with the MMA – a religious conglomerate whose aim was to undermine the women rights.²⁹

Daily Nawa-i-Waqt published a non supportive double-column story on September 15. This quoted Farmers Welfare Organization as saying that NGOs were behind the 'Okara farmhouse conflict'. It blamed the NGOs for giving 'support to muzaras (tenants)' in the dispute over the military farmhouse. They blamed that NGOs were trying to 'create a gap' between the army and the public.³⁰

The Daily Awaz of Jang Group of Newspapers too published the same statement by Farmers Welfare Organisation in double columns on the same day, i.e. September 15.

The Daily Nation published a three-column story on September 24. "NGOs careless attitude", which claimed that despite getting hefty funds for improving the health sector, the NGOs had adopted a very careless attitude towards the alarming issue of rapidly spreading viral disease hepatitis etc that had affected the whole country along with the twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad.³¹

The Daily Times published a supportive double-column story on September 20, "Private certification body to publish NGO list ". It said a private certification body called the Pakistan Centre for Philanthropy was going to publish a directory of NGOs to help

Pakistani philanthropists channel funds to priority welfare projects.³²

The Daily Din published a non supportive article on September 10. The article was written by Hafiz Shafiq-ur-Rehman and the title was 'The Mirror'. The writer, who is a staff writer of newspaper, criticized the NGOs' role all over the world. He claimed every country was concerned about the NGOs and their 'secret' activities. Especially in the third world, NGOs were 'anti-state', 'anti public' and 'anti society'. The writer claimed that 'NGOs were behind the 9/11 World Trade Centre attack' 'NGOs played a key role in preparing the ground for the US attack on Afghanistan and Iraq'.³³

NGOs, he continued, had a strong network in Pakistan and 'foreign powers' were using them to achieve their goals. Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) and other famous NGOs were being used by these 'foreign powers'.

The Daily Times published a four-column story on September 9, "Attacks on NGOs in Kabul inevitable", which quoted a government minister as saying that attacks on aid organizations in Afghanistan were inevitable.³⁴

The Daily Nawa-i-Waqt published a very damaging double-column story on September 10. The headline was, "America starts spying Pakistan through NGOs. It said America had started spying the Public Accounts Committee meetings. According to this news, NGOs members joined the meetings of the Public Accounts Committee and provided information to America."³⁵

In October 2004, total stories 16; negative stories 7; positive stories 9; one supportive article.

The Daily Express published a supportive double column story on October 29. The Human Rights and Women

Empowerment Commission made a statement that there should be a change in the traditional thinking of the society about women. The Daily Awaz carried a negative double-column statement on October 13. Hafiz Saeed stated that foreign NGOs were destroying 'Islamic values' and 'social norms'. This he stated while visiting a teaching institute in Lahore. He told the media that Islam gives guarantee of human rights but NGOs are portraying Islam as a terrorist religion.³⁶

The Daily Din published a supportive article on October 11. The article was written by Nasif Awan, who said that in Pakistani society women are victims of traditional thinking. "In the West, women have more respect. In our society, women are still facing multiple problems and violations of human rights. Many NGOs are working in Pakistan for women rights. A few of them are promoting 'vulgarity' in the name of women rights but others are working for a good cause."³⁷

The Daily Din published a negative double column story on 10 October. A reporter revealed that NGOs are involved in smuggling of the dead human bodies. He added that when American started the war against terrorism in Afghanistan and people started dying in the war then a few NGOs started that business.³⁸

The Daily Kainat published a supportive three-column story on October 9. The newspaper also published different photographs of a rally against honor killings in Pakistan.³⁹

Participants of the rally claimed that more than 4, 000 cases were filed in the name of honor killing in Pakistan. Members of different NGOs also demanded of the government to take notice and implement a new law in which women rights should be protected.

Daily Mashriq published a double-column story on October 9, which told readers about an NGOs' rally against honor killings. Many NGOs members including Asma Jahangir and Aitzaz Ahsan condemned honor killings. Around 75 NGOs participated in the protest in Islamabad.⁴⁰

The Daily Times published a three-column story on October 9, which covered the protest by Citizens Action Group against the proposed bill on honor killings. On the same day the News published the same news in three columns.⁴¹

The Daily Jang published a non supportive double-column story on October 19. It pointed out that a new mafia has appeared in the country, which kidnapped innocent and women. In the earthquake areas, NGOs were behind the kidnapping of women and children. The Daily Dawn published a single-column story on October 19. The headline was, "HR organizations allege dumping of bodies in the Neelum River." A Kashmiri human rights body criticized the rescue teams for allegedly throwing bodies into Neelum River along with debris.⁴²

The Daily Express published a negative double column story on October 13. The Federal Minister for Special Education said that NGOs progress was insignificant and they were doing nothing for social welfare. She criticized the NGOs for 'presenting six million rupees' to Mukhtaran Mai.⁴³

The Daily Nawa-i-Waqt published negative double column story on October 13. The newspaper published the name of an NGO and alleged that the NGO was involved in human smuggling and targeted innocent girls. The NGO did all this in the name of the fashion show and cultural promotion. The NGO is working in the Lahore Cantonment. Similarly, the Daily Express on October 29 published a non supportive double column story.⁴⁴

The Daily Jinnah published a four-column story on October 9. It reported that Citizens Action Group shouted slogans as they carried a coffin symbolizing the victims of honor killings during a demonstration on Friday. Hundreds of human rights and civil society representatives marched against honor killings and rejected the proposed government bill against honor crimes. They demanded that government pass an effective law to curb the menaces of honour killing.⁴⁵

The Daily Awaz published a negative single column story on October 9 related to women rights supporters arrested during their protest against the honor killing bill in front of the parliament house. The Daily Nawa-i-Waqt published a single-column story on October 9. Women rights supporters were arrested. It was about the same event.⁴⁶

In November 2004, total stories: 9, non supportive 4, supportive 5.

The Daily Express dated November 5 2004, three column story non supportive; The Daily Dawn dated: November 4, 2004 a double column supportive story; The Daily Express dated: November 19, 2004 a double column non supportive story, The Daily Jang dated November 6, 2004, a double column non supportive story. This brings us to December, 2004 coverage of NGOs.⁴⁷

The Daily Khabrain published a positive double column story on December 4. The newspaper carried a story about a kidnapped for missing woman, her name was Shazia and she was missing or the last few weeks. The NGOs blamed that the tribal jirga kidnapped her and the NGOs also demanded a police inquiry.⁴⁸

The Daily Nation published a positive single column story on December 2. The headline was, "NGOs observe International

AIDS Day” The AIDS Day themed “Women, Girls HIV and Aids” was observed in the provincial metropolis. ⁴⁹

The Daily published a three-column story dated December 15. The headline was, “Ministry criticized for not monitoring NGOs”. The National Assembly’s Standing Committee on Planning and Development criticized the Environment Ministry for not monitoring the activities of NGOs working for the preservation of environment. ⁵⁰

The Daily Times published a supportive double-column story on December 30. “ Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP) slams NGO workers murder”. The attack on Aga Khan Foundation Chitral offices highlighted the government inefficiency to deal with the people instigating such criminal activity, said Hina Jilani. ⁵¹

The Daily Dawn published a supportive double-column story on December 30. “The Punjab NGOs Coordination Council has urged the NWFP government to take action against the elements that attacked the Chitral office of Aga Khan Foundation. ⁵²

The Daily published a positive three-column story on December 22. “Cooperation between the government and the NGOs urged”. Punjab Information Secretary Taimur Azmat Usman emphasized the need for close cooperation between the government and NGOs for the solution of people’s problems. ⁵³

The Daily News published a negative single-column story on December 22. “ Bogus NGOs be pointed out”. Punjab Information Secretary Taimur Azmat Osman has said the collective use of resources and the area specification among the NGOs working in any partiwar field will lead to achieving stipulated objectives easily. ⁵⁴

Daily Express published a negative double-column story on December 22. The headline was, "Punjab Information Secretary says bogus NGOs to be pointed out". He told the media men that the NGOs that were working in Punjab had no communication with each other. The NGOs should do their own accountability.⁵⁵

The Daily Nawa-i-Waqt published a non supportive single column story on December 6. The headline was "NGO distributes unethical literature in the Federal Government schools in Islamabad." It informed that NGO had also distributed women pads in the schools and colleges and gave books to the students. These books contained unethical pictures and literature.⁵⁶

Conclusion

It is clear from these findings that the newspapers did take a negative view of NGOs but the ratio between non supportive and supportive is not significant. So it can be deduced that the press in Pakistan has incrementally developed a pro democracy attitude, despite the fact that it has worked most of the times under authoritarian set-ups. This is an encouraging trend, which is crucial from the perspective of development of democracy in Pakistan. Libertarianism and social responsibility are evident in this case. With the advent of TV channels, a future inquiry could be devoted to find out as how have these channels performed with respect to media-democracy relationship in Pakistan.

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