



## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF COVERAGE OF

## TEHREEK-E-LABAIK (TLP) PROTEST 2017 AND 2018 BY INTERNATIONAL NEWSPAPERS

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### Abstract

The study aims to compare directions of coverage given to the religious outrage of Islamist political party Tehreek-e-Labaik (TLP) of Pakistan in the international leading newspapers i.e. The Guardian, New York Times, China daily and Saudi Gazette in 2017 and 2018. For this purpose, the contents of each mainstream English newspaper of China, UK, USA, and Saudi Arabia for one month were selected. This research through content analysis employs the second level of agenda-setting to investigate how foreign media salience and policy agenda influence the perception of Pakistan in those countries. The findings identified a strong relationship between countries' foreign policy and media coverage. Results also reveal that each country's salience promoted inflated significance for Pakistan.

**Keyword:** *Religious outrage in Pakistan, International Media Coverage, Quantitative Content analysis*

### Introduction

Despite the unquestioned importance of international relations in mass media coverage, researchers of international relations still unable to understand the communication dimensions of international relations adequately and comprehensively.

Reports on mass media about international issues exert an impactful influence on public perception about other nations. Agenda Setting theory asserts the narrative that mass

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media is one of the key sources for the public perception of internationally important issues. (McCombs, 2005) Said that the central concept on Agenda Setting is issue salience within the context of international image International relations, international perceptions and public diplomacy often associated with "Nation branding" through media coverage (Zhang, 2012).

Gartner (1994) explained that media always works as an imaging agent in forming perceptions about countries as cited by Yousaf (2015). Pakistan's Geo strategic location has always been an attraction to the world due to which it has always been the part of world's media. There is never a chance when international media miss the opportunity to play the role of image agent for Pakistan.

There are several reasons why Pakistan's image facing challenges at foreign fronts i.e. economic threats, social and political unrest, etc.

Pakistan is an underdeveloped country with the lowest GDP growth rate but use to spend billion dollars in purchasing power due to which its economy never become stable. But the Geo-strategic location of Pakistan is pivotal for superpowers because of its decisive role in maintaining peace in the Asian region and world.

Utley (1997) said that visibility and valence imbalance in international news coverage exists for the various geographic region of the world in the US because a few Americans can directly contact with foreign countries as cited in (Zhan, 2012).

On foreign fronts, Pakistan always faces challenges in building her positive image throughout her history. Since independence, Pakistan's relations with the USA refer to bilateral but from the beginning, their relations remained haphazard because the USA wants domination and Pakistan wants to work on equal grounds.

Pakistan became the ally of US in the war on terrorism after 9/11 that helps to have better relations with the Western world and now due to CPEC, Pakistan is facing challenges with the Western world, as at first in 1983 it was the USA who wanted to develop the Gwadar deep-seaport but drop the idea due to soviet troops intervention in Afghanistan (Ahmad & Mi\*, 2017) .

On the other hand, In 2017 Pak -US relations started deteriorating when Trump urged India to increase its role in War on terrorism in Afghanistan that was an anti-Pakistan policy. Trump's statement led to rising anti-American sentiments in Pakistan as well. But soon after two months, trump tweeted to develop better relations with Pakistan. Again in 2018 Trump condemned Quetta attacks and criticized Pakistan by saying that Pakistan gave us nothing except lies and deceit due to which relations became worse.

Pakistan and China have close relationships with each other. Now both countries have reached high economic points including Deep-water port at Gwadar and also having free trade agreement.

Global indicator database of Pew Research Center, 2017 surveyed to find out the World's Leading Superpower and

asked people about the US and China. Pew declared that Pakistan has a more positive view of China than the US. According to the study, 81 % of Pakistani gave a positive view about China and only 11% of people were in the favor of US. Similarly, State-run media of China used to portray Pakistan positively in regional issues.

Pakistan is Saudi Arabia's closest ally and both countries have the best possible friendly relations. Both countries' relations were not good at the PPP government in Pakistan but after the PMNL government, both countries' relations again become friendly. Both countries have good relations but Saudi media didn't show friendly relations. This may be because most of the news in Saudi media came from Western news agencies which are always negative. That is why, seldom is the positive news in Saudi media about Pakistan. Most of the time they cover terrorist activities in Pakistan. English and Arabic dailies rely on Western agencies to feed news. (Mumtaz A. , 2013).

After 9/11 Pakistan has become one of the most important countries of the region, later on, CPEC added a lot to it as the mentioned project would be game-changer and may make Pakistan a hub of economic activities in the coming years. Following the importance of Pakistan in the entire region, international media pays a lot of attention to it. The agenda of each country's media is influenced by Diplomatic relations, socio& political interest towards that country. I want to study that did the change of relations of Pakistan with these countries influence the agenda-setting role of these countries' media

towards particular events of Pakistan. Therefore, in this study, I analyzed the coverage of protests of the same religious group (TLP) in 2017 and 2018. The content of 4 mainstream newspapers of China, USA, UK, and Saudi Arabia are analyzed for one month through purposive sampling quantitative content analysis.

The selection of the newspapers depends on their prominence in the region. We choose China's daily as China is the main stakeholder due to CPEC, Saudi Gazette because of our bilateral relations with Saudi Arabia and The Guardian & New York Times due to their interest in Pakistan due to its geo-strategically location. The purpose of the study is to find out the difference in coverage of both events happened in 2017 and 2018.

### **Literature Review**

Elite driven nature of foreign coverage ultimately leads to the public whose foreign affairs opinions based on their elite cues which filtered the media content. It is further claimed that manipulated media coverage about foreign affairs can make the public liable to be influenced by misinformation that can take them towards the wrong perceptions and decisions related to the foreign affairs (Aday, 2014).

Media's effect based on the type of foreign policy and its directions (Hulme,2001). She said that the media's impact on the policymaker has decreased while the foreign policy has more influence on modern media coverage.

The study of Siraj (2015) claimed that generally, newspapers in the United States reflect the US ideology

towards the world. He further confirms with his finding that media content influenced by the government's foreign policy towards the international sphere. Similarly, Shabir, Hussain, & Iqbal (2014) found out that from Feb 2008 to Jan 2010 two leading newspapers of America covered Pakistani news very positively as per the foreign policy of America towards Pakistan. Feb 2008 to Jan 2010 was the duration in which both countries had good relations and America was supporting Pakistan in the Pak-Afghan war. The positive portrayal of Pakistan in the two American elite newspapers shows that the American media supported the American government's point of view (policy) towards Pakistan. Siraj (2015) said that US media only portray those countries positively with which they have close interest otherwise US media always played bias. Yousaf (2015) in his study of Framing Analysis of Coverage in the U.S. and Chinese News Media claims that foreign policy, vested political interest, and mutual relationship with the countries playing a great role in shaping the frames of both countries' media.

He further explained that according to their relation with Pakistan, China's media showed a positive image of Pakistan in their news stories. Other than that China's media is used to talk all about mutual interests of both countries and they always acknowledged wholeheartedly all the contributions of Pakistan towards the international campaign against terrorism, attending refugees from Afghanistan, stability, and peace efforts with neighbors county India and regional security.

British media's case is different as compared to China. In British newspapers, there were years in which weighted headlines tone was positive towards Muslim minorities than the negative one (Bleich, Stonebraker, Nisar, & Abdelhamid,2015). Which proves that portray of Muslim image in British media is complex actually.

Seib author of "The Al Jazeera Effect," said that if policymaker wants to take advantage from media organization then they need to cooperate with media organizations rather than to compete with them as cited by (Arnold, 2011). By highlighting the names of "Voice of America" and "Deutsche Welle", Seib said that both of them are the most relevant tools for foreign policymaking. It means if foreign policymakers want to play with the public sphere then media is the best choice.

As the English newspapers of Saudi Arabia e.g. "Arab news" and "Daily Gazette" rely on international news on Western news agencies due to which Pakistan based opinion of the Saudi generation is formed by the Western news agencies that can never be positive (Mumtaz,2013). The same is the case with Saudi Arabic newspapers.

Jihad Fakhreddine (2004) claimed that in Arab world media owners consider that media is a tool of political influence as cited in (Kent & Palmer,2015). They don't consider that media is a commercial investment. He further explained that Al Jazeera's openness of opinion is an exceptional case; this is not the case for all Arab media.

According to The Express Tribune (2013) world's news section featuring the hard news events of Pakistan like international relations, political development, and terrorist attacks in large numbers while the soft diaries and lifestyle news featuring disproportionately. As per their mutual relations with the country, international media applauded sensitive issues thoroughly while the soft news stories are showing a more screwed picture. E.g. The Sydney Morning Herald newspaper covered Pakistan's fashion week ceremony in this way: "Designers shrug off militant violence for Pakistan's fashion week".

Governments need media for publicity and to generate public opinion according to their interest. This tie of government and media leads to the reporting of political issues according to countries' relations. International relations also influence the media to shape foreign policy in the minds of the public (Coban, 2016).

### **Theoretical framework**

According to the Pakistan Economic Survey, 2018 Growth rate of Pakistan has increased by 4.8 percent in the last five years. Due to strong economic growth and restoring the confidence of investors, Pakistan trying herself to taking out of IMF and re-entering the international market. In the current situation, Pakistan has strong bilateral and economic relations with China, Saudi Arabia, and a tense situation with Western countries.

The second level of Agenda-setting theory has applied to this study, as the theory suggests that media can people what to think about.

The theory is relevant to the study in context as the second level of agenda-setting of media tells the public what to think about. So, it's important to understand how countries' media made perceptions of the public based on their relations with the respective countries. This study assumed that foreign affairs have a great influence on the decisions of the media managers which played an important role to determine the direction of the contents. so this study employs how with the change of government between 2017 and 2018 changes Pakistan's relations with these countries and how the direction of media changed in both years regarding TLP protest.

Hypotheses

H1. Western Media is portraying the negative image of Pakistan.

H2. Saudi media is objective than Western and Chinese media.

H3. Chines media is more positively biased for their coverage of Pakistan.

**Research Questions**

RQ 1. Which media gave more positive coverage to these protests?

RQ 2. Did the change in relations affect the nature of coverage?

RQ 3. What was the difference in coverage of Western media in 2017 and 2018?

**Research Methodology**

This study analyzed the difference in coverage of Tehreek-e-Labaik (TLP) Protest 2017 and 2018 by international leading newspapers i.e. The Guardian, New York Times, China Daily, and Saudi Gazette about the portrayal of Pakistan concerning this issue. Time Duration of the study for Faizabad sit-in of Tehreek-e-Labaik is 5 November 2017 to 5 December 2017 and for Asia Bibi case Dharna of Tehreek-e-Labaik is 31 October 2018 to 29 November 2018. All the news articles published on international pages of international mainstream newspapers of one month of each year 2017 and 2018.

Sample of the study based on all the news articles of international pages of international media covering TLP protest selected from the 240 newspapers of the mentioned period through purposive sampling.

As the same pattern of news coverage of TLP was observed that is why by developing coding sheet content analyzed quantitatively through content analysis.

To check the reliability, the direction of the content was ranked on three points scale: Positive/ Supportive to Pakistani Cause, Negative/ Opposite to Pakistani cause, and Neutral/ balanced coverage. Coverage is positive if news headlines showing a Controlled situation by authorities, positive image of Pakistan as an Islamic country, and use of words in headlines like protest instead of religious protest, protesters instead of religious protestors, and clashes instead of violent clashes.

News coverage is negative if it is showing worst or uncontrolled situations of law and order, using negative words in headlines like violent clashes instead of protest, religious or

extremist protestors instead of protestors and threats from fundamentalists. Coverage is neutral if the news is based on just facts and figures about the protest which is neither showing positivity nor negativity.

**Findings and Interpretations**

**Table 1: Frequency of Coverage given to TLP protest of 2017 and 2018**

<b>Region of Media</b>	<b>Newspaper Name</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of News</b>
<b>Western Media</b>	New York Times/The Guardian	2017	7
		2018	9
		Total	16
<b>Chinese Media</b>	China Daily	2017	0
		2018	0
		Total	0
<b>Saudi Media</b>	Saudi gazette	2017	6
		2018	10
		Total	16

Frequency of the coverage given to TLP sit-in 2017 and 2018 protests by international mainstream media prescribed in Table 1. According to table 1, Western media gave more coverage to the 2018 protest than the 2017 protest. Similar was the case with Saudi Arabia. In 2017 Western media published 7 news articles and Saudi Gazette wrote 6 news articles to cover TLP protest while in 2018,9 news articles were published by Western media and 10 stories were published by Saudi Gazette. China Daily didn't cover the TLP protest in both years.

**Table 2: Direction of coverage given to TLP protest in 2017**  
**Newspaper**

Newspaper Name	No. of News	2017- FaizAbadSitin					
		Positive		Type of News		Neutral	
			%	Negative	%		%
<b>New York Times/The Guardian</b>	7	0	0%	7	100%	0	0%
<b>China Daily</b>	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Saudi Gazette</b>	6	1	16.66%	2	33.33%	3	50%

Table 2 shows the ratio of the coverage given to the protest of TLP in 2017 by mainstream media of West, China, and Saudi Arabia. According to the table, Western media published 7 news articles and all news articles were portraying a negative image of Pakistan. Western media gave 100% negative coverage to the 2017 sit-in of TLP. China Daily didn't cover the 2017 sit-in of TLP. While a total of 6 news articles was published by Saudi Gazette related to TLP sit-in 2017, 01 news article was positive (16.66%), 2 news articles were negative (33.33%) and 3 news articles gave neutral coverage(50%).

Overall coverage given by Western media to 2017 sit-in of TLP was 100% negative while Saudi Gazette gave 16.66% positive, 33.33% negative, and 50% neutral coverage.

**Table 3: Direction of coverage given to TLP protest in 2018**

Region	Newspaper Name	No. of News	Type of News					
			Positive	%	Negative	%	Neutral	%
<b>Western Media</b>	New York Times/The Guardian	9	4	44.44%	4	44.44%	1	11.11%
	China Daily	0	0	0%	0	0%	0	0%
<b>Chinese Media</b>								
<b>Saudi</b>	Saudi gazette	10	0	0%	5	50%	5	50%

The ratio of the coverage given to the protest of TLP in 2018 by the mainstream media of West, China, and Saudi Arabia showed in Table 3. According to the table, Western media published 9 news articles in which out of 9 articles 4 (44.44%) news articles were positive, 4 (44.44%) were negative and 1 (11.11%) news article was neutral. China Daily didn't cover the 2018 Dharna of TLP. While a total of 10 news articles was published by Saudi Gazette related to TLP protest in 2018 there wasn't a positive news article, 5 news articles were negative (50%) and 5 articles gave neutral coverage (50%).

Overall coverage given by Western media to 2018 countrywide clashes of TLP was 44.44% positive, 44.44% negative, and 11.11% neutral .while Saudi Gazette gave 0% positive, 50% negative and 50% neutral coverage and China daily didn't cover the protest.

Table 2 and 3 shows the ratio of the coverage given to the protest of TLP in 2017 and 2018 by the mainstream media of west, China, and Saudi Arabia. According to the table, collectively Western media in 2017 and 2018 gave 25% positive coverage, 68.75 % negative, and 6.25% neutral coverage. Chinese media didn't cover protests in both years. However

Saudi media published 6.25% positive news articles, 43.75% negative, and 50 % neutral.

### **Discussion**

Western media were positive towards Pakistan when they were allied but mostly they portrayed Pakistan negatively. It is suggested that Western media needs to be neutral about Pakistan's problems. This much strong and negative agenda of Western media doesn't suit Western media as wire of news came from west to all over the world. They need to be flexible and neutral and coverage needs to be on merit because Western media shape the international agenda. They need to be fair and more objective towards the world's problems. The same is the case with China. If Western media is negatively biased then chines media is positively biased which is again not objectivity. China and Pakistan relations are always close and friendly since 1951 and relations become stronger after CPEC which is a flagship project of chines president XI JINPING. The findings of this study show that it seems to be not suitable for China to publish any news regarding Pakistan in their newspaper which is showing chaos in Pakistan because that would not be suitable for China's "one seat one belt project". Arab/ Saudi media's policy doesn't match with their foreign relations of Saudi Arabia towards Pakistan. This could be due to the reason that most of the Arab media collect foreign news from Western news agencies.

### **Conclusion**

Key findings show that Western newspapers gave more negative coverage to the 2018 religious outrage in Pakistan as

compared to the 2017 outrage due to estrangement foreign policy towards the west. On the other hand, China's media showing development in Pakistan in both years and Saudi media is more or less neutral towards Pakistan.

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