

INTERNATIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE OF THE ‘REGIME CHANGE’ IN PAKISTAN: A COMPARATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Pakistan saw yet another major political upheaval in 2022 when a democratically elected prime minister was deposed through a “vote of no-confidence” orchestrated by almost all political parties in the country. The political alliance namely Pakistan Democratic Alliance (PDM), an alliance of the political parties which otherwise had, apparently, been at logger heads with each other by having different political manifestoes, claimed the deposition of Mr Imran Khan, the then PM of Pakistan and Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek e Pakistan (PTI), as a “success of democracy”. However, the PTI claimed the process of “no-confidence motion” was a foreign conspiracy helped by local elements in the country. Mr. Imran Khan and the PTI leadership labelled the whole process as a “regime change”. The whole political scenario gained a lot of media attention around the globe. This paper is an attempt to explore and analyze the nature of coverage given to the change of government in Pakistan by international media. We have employed content analysis quantitatively and qualitatively to analyze the news coverage of the Al Jazeera (Qatar), Daily Sabah (Turkey), and The Express Tribune (Pakistan) given to the issue. We have found out that all of the news media outlets reported the issue by remaining neutral, factual and by not taking any sides of the political parties involved. The selected news media outlets did not support the political narrative of PTI or PDM. However, the Daily Sabah slightly favoured Mr. Imran Khan as a politician.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout the 75 years of Pakistan, many times our country went through regime changes. For the first time, our sitting prime minister, on 3rd April 2022 was removed from power through a vote of no confidence motion by the Parliament (Bokhari,

2022). Pakistan went through a huge downfall. However, the Parliament’s deputy speaker did not accept the motion by announcing it as a plan against Pakistan by the US to punish it for disobeying their unlawful order of giving them army bases so that

they can attack Afghanistan. Afterwards, Imran Khan suggested the President to terminate the National Assembly and start new elections. Pakistan's supreme court took this up in a Suo-moto case as well as a five-member bench announced the then government's decision illegitimate and instructed to execute the task by the National Assembly of 'No-Confidence Motion', the outcome of which was the ousting of Imran Khan, the Prime Minister, from the authority. As a result, a lot of scholars alerted the nation about the possible economic effect of this on the public. The opposition's account of worsening economic conditions and PTI's unsuccessful take on fulfilling all the promises, were uncovered when the public was pushed even more into economic as well as financial by obeying the instructions of the IMF-International Monetary Fund (Ahmar, 2022).

As a result, PMLN was unable to stabilize the country so their fame went down. Imran Khan took the narrative of the foreign conspiracy (Cheema, 2022) to the public. Imran Khan accused the Pakistan system for not noticing the dangerous step that Pakistan's political system took. While blaming the current government and the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), he deplored that giving the control of the country to the dishonest politicians who would bring downfall to the economy and status of Pakistan. According to him, along with the economy of Pakistan, the 'neutrals' would also be affected by not understanding the downfall that Pakistan is going to face (Shehzad, 2022).

According to Imran Khan, removing him from the authority was a really wrong move that the superiors of politics and military made. After removing Imran Khan from a no-confidence vote against the PTI government, Pakistan has experienced a huge downfall politically and in more ways. During his whole interview, Imran Khan frequently said that he was ousted from the position due to his visit last year on 21st February to Russia and his great (absolutely not) response to the United States' appeal for army locations in Pakistan for training in Afghanistan. Imran Khan's statement was rejected by the United States of America, however, the larger part of Pakistan aims to believe his statement, increasing his status even more (Khaliq, 2022). He began a campaign of election as well as a protest to see the response of the people so that they back him up,

after being removed. Imran Khan began fresh, active and effective marches throughout Pakistan. He gave his word that he will change the nation and build a "new Pakistan". He repeatedly highlighted "change in Pakistan" in his interviews as well as speeches. Along with using the words "election demand", he revealed everything about the current government and the corruption before as well as the reasons behind his removal, his win etc. Imran Khan repeatedly used those types of words as well as phrases which would catch people's attention for example "who was he?" Moving on, last year on 28th July, Raja Pervaiz Ashraf, National Assembly Speaker, accepted 11 leaves of politicians from PTI who left their spots after the vote of no-confidence in the outgoing Prime Minister. All of this created a lot of issues in the country. The politicians are just creating a huge disturbance around the country and everything is out of balance. Due to all of this, there is an economic crisis (Ghauri et al., 2023).

Imran Khan's removal caused the rise of petrol, diesel, gas and electricity prices. In case this does not get better, there will be no room for middle as well as lower income classes. The people do not like the taxes forced on them under the 2022-2023 federal budget to save Pakistan from poverty as well as economic loss. Although the imports have not reduced. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, who imposed strictness to reduce irrelevant government amounts, threw a grand dinner, at the Prime minister house, for the combined gatherings' leaders. This reveals how the upper class is not helping or being careful at a time when there is an economic crisis in the country as well as when the elites asked the people to not spend unnecessarily and they themselves are hosting extravagant parties. Even the conferences held in Islamabad are costing millions (Ghauri et al., 2024).

One of the major consequences of the regime change was murder of a journalist named Arshad Sharif, another journalist who survived a murder attempt named Hamid Mir and the third journalist who has kept his unbiased image in the journalism world of Pakistan. Arshad Sharif was a newscaster, investigative journalist as well as a critic. He worked with diverse media channels since 1999, for example: daily The Dawn and Daily the News Weekly Pulse, Dunya News, ARY News Channel and Aaj News. He

directed news at Aaj News and Dunya News before becoming company chief of ARY News Islamabad. He became a host of a political show 'Kyun' at Dunya News, later shifted to Dawn news and led a show 'News Reporter'. Then at last, he associated with ARY media group where he managed his popular news talk show 'Power Play'. Not only this but he had his own YouTube channel too 'Arshad Sharif Official'. His worked for about two decades. He was also Pakistan's military's critic in later years (Abbas, 2022; Agahi Awards, 2018; Feleke & Madowo, 2022; Hussain, 2022). Arshad Sharif was with the PTI and against the PMLN. He was also with the army before the removal of Imran Khan as prime minister and was against the Pakistan army's role behind this whole activity. He was murdered in Kenya during his voluntary-exile, in October 2022 (Ahmed et al., 2024).

Considering the importance of the incident, we have attempted to explore and analyze how did the selected international news media cover the 'regime change' in Pakistan in their news coverage during April 2022. Therefore, our main research questions are as follows;

- How did the selected news media outlets including; the Al Jazeera, Daily Sabah, and The Express Tribune cover the 'regime change' in Pakistan in their news coverage during April 2022?
- What are the predominant themes highlighted by the selected news media outlets regarding the 'regime change' in Pakistan in April 2022?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ghauri et al., (2023) has explained that in March and April 2022, Pakistan faced yet another political disruption when the current government was overthrown in the name of a "no confidence motion" which was jointly launched by almost all of the political parties. The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) said the success of the NCM, was the victory of democracy, while the prime minister of Pakistan Imran Khan stated that this attempt was the result of a scheme due to external and internal factors. Both PDM and PTI have used twitter to spread their points about "regime change in Pakistan" "Political discourse is widely and passionately debated, supported, criticized by internet users across

the country. This study is an attempt to investigate and analyze the prevalent themes in the political discourse generated by the twitter accounts of selected politicians. Second, to investigate and analyze the general themes of public opinion reactions related to the "regime change" from April 10 to April 14, 2022.

Considering the research objectives, thematic analysis is used as theoretical and methodological tool to explore and analyze university themes in the political discourse and public reactions reflects, supports and reproduces Mr. Imran Khan's "political discourse" on "regime change" in Pakistan in April 2022. The alliance of 15 political parties, including PMLN, PPP and JUIF, said that the NCM's success was its war victory of national democracy country while Prime minister and chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf PTI, Imran Khan that this move was result of the scheme against his government initiated by domestic and foreign elements. This "political change" is referred to as in the study as "regime change" in Pakistan.

This research effort is an attempt to explore and analyze the dominant themes of political discourse generated through the Twitter accounts of selected politicians. Second to explore and analyze the dominant themes in public reactions related to "regime change" from April 10 to April 14, 2022. With the research objectives in mind, analyze Thematic analysis is used as a theoretical and methodological tool to explore and analyze emerging themes in "political discourse" and "public relations" to the level regime change" in Pakistan. Political leaders have long recognized how using mass media helps them maintain order. For example, Roman emperors decorated coins with their own symbols and important military victories. More recently, autocratic leaders have asserted control over mass media to consolidate their power. Social media has increasingly become an important arena not only for political communication but also for political conflict.

At the end of 2014, more than 76 % of world leaders active Twitter or Facebook accounts. Many online networks of leaders and their supporters reflect important real life political divisions. When and why leaders adopt social media is an important and an unanswered question. Social media offers world

leaders a new platform to disseminate messages, mobilize voters and persuade citizens. The gatekeeping role of journalists has diminished, competition for users' attention has increased and content can easily go viral. At the same time, the use of social networks can limit and influence the behavior and how political institutions shape the strategic communication behavior of the world leaders. We find little support for the hypothesis that social media adoption by leaders is higher in rich countries or that this process is driven by electoral pressure. However, there is clear evidence of a relationship between social unrest with leadership responses (Barbera & Zeitoff, 2018). Due to the ever-evolving tools and mechanisms of social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Social media has quickly become the primary space for political discussion and ultimately political persuasion, value can easily become a product (Manning et al., 2017).

Diehl et al. (2016) explored social media platforms as a new medium through which political views can be disseminated on a broader scale and how social media users interact can create diverse networks, thereby exposing them to variety of opinions that can ultimately convince them to change their political views. Researchers say that although only a third of social media users find the time important in political debate, social media sites ultimately play role as "agents of quality" catalyst allows people to express their feelings political views, along with other beliefs. Even if they don't express it right away, they may gradually feel comfortable expressing their thoughts when they belong to the right social group that share the same beliefs.

Aslan (2022) claimed that as they go through a deep financial as well as economic crisis and increasing pressure by Imran Khan's presence in the opposition, the growing political leadership will increase their association with the army and embrace a way of balancing their relationships with China, the United States, Russia, Middle East as well as North African (MENA) politics. The new government quickly left its confrontational address toward the United States in order to obtain more IMF funding. At the same time, it benefitted from the improved connections within the Gulf area to assure they are regularly provided with natural gas from Qatar as well as

financial support from Saudi Arabia, at the same time also speed up the progress of CPEC projects. Pakistan's new Finance Minister at once went to Washington right after his meeting and is trying to obtain more IMF funds from the \$6bn bailout package confirmed in 2019. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif went to Saudi Arabia for the same purpose. After his visit, Saudi Arabia confirmed again, in a joint statement, its commitment to back up Pakistan financially by increasing its deposit of \$3 billion in the Central Bank of Pakistan. As regards to Pakistan's immediate financial requirements, we should see that Turkey's current economic situation will restrict its capacity to access any big advantages (Aslan, 2022).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

Considering the major research objective, the researchers have selected Al Jazeera (Qatar), Daily Sabah (Turkey) and The Express Tribune (Pakistan) to explore and analyse the coverage and the predominant themes highlighted by the selected news media outlets regarding the 'regime change' in Pakistan in April 2022.

We have selected the very first news item that appeared in the selected news media outlets after the 'regime change' in Pakistan on April 8 and 9 2022. This is how, our sample size three news stories from the three news media outlets. The researchers have selected the following news items as units of analysis for this research paper; from Al Jazeera, "Pakistan is once again on the brink", from Daily Sabah "A parliamentary wolf in democratic sheep's clothing" and from daily Thee Express Tribune we have selected "...after the regime change".

Data Analysis; Content Analysis

The researchers have employed content analysis quantitatively and qualitatively to analyze the sample of the study. Content Analysis can be defined in many ways such as it can be any specific procedure designed to examine the content of certain recorded information or it can be defined as a research technique making similar and correct references from data to their content or a fairly typical definition would be that content analysis is a method of studying and analysing the medium of

communicating in a systematic; all content under consideration is to be treated in the exact same manner, only a single set of guidelines have to be used to evaluate the complete study, Objective; the researcher's personal bias should not affect the findings, and that if another researcher conducts the study then it should yield the same results, and lastly Quantitative; that is the goal of the content analysis is an accurate representation of a body of messages but overall keeping everything in mind, the basic and most obvious concept of the Content Analysis would be that it's the done to clarify the stance of the particular study and figure out exactly what the content is favouring (Wimmer & Dominick, 2010). Keeping in mind the objectives of this research, we have used both quantitative and qualitative content analysis.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Analysis on the Al Jazeera

Following pages contain content analysis of the selected news items published on the Al Jazeera; First news item among the sample of the Al Jazeera was published under headline; "Pakistan is once again on the brink". While conducting the quantitative content analysis the researcher found out that Al Jazeera in a 57 words introduction expressed how Crisis is out of question in Pakistan and that a competition between Imran Khan and the Military is very unusual but further states that this feud will result in the regime change and that this will hurt the military's political role but won't completely write them off.

As for the qualitative analysis, Al Jazeera with a very clear voice of tone reported that it's a face-off between the "Authoritarian Populist" Imran Khan and the Military. They also mentioned how this face off has its own "Novelty to it" and that even in the most "dramatic scenario" only a regime change will be the after come, they also mentioned that this will only "weaken the military's political role but won't completely result in an annihilation".

Analyzing both quantitative and qualitative content analysis shows that Al Jazeera opposed the military's political role with statements such as; but even in the most dramatic scenario, it will likely end with not much more than regime change and some further weakening – though not annihilation – of the

military's outsized political role, but at the same time the time used by Al Jazeera was not in favor of Imran Khan as well.

Analysis on the Daily Sabah

Following pages contain content analysis of the selected news item published in the Daily Sabah; First news item among the sample of Daily Sabah was published under headline; "A Parliamentary wolf in democratic sheep's clothing". While studying the quantitative content analysis the researcher found out that Daily Sabah expressed that it offers a thorough overview of Pakistan's political climate, emphasizing a story of advancement, disappointments, and outside influences. In light of the vote of no confidence against Prime Minister Imran Khan, it highlights worries about corruption in state institutions, foreign meddling, and the manipulation of democratic processes. The author highlights Khan's accomplishments throughout his term, casts doubt on the Supreme Court's function, and provides proof of American meddling. A tribute to Khan and a plea for cooperation around a common vision for Pakistan are included in the piece's conclusion. This analysis offers a thorough content analysis that addresses several facets of Pakistan's political landscape.

As for the qualitative analysts It looks at things like how growth and failures are cyclical, how resilient people are, and resilience of the state, institutional corruption, foreign meddling, and democratization process manipulation. The research casts doubt on the Supreme Court's authority and draws attention to evidence of U.S. meddling while critically examining how the vote of no confidence against Prime Minister Imran Khan was handled. It also lists the accomplishments of Khan's administration and ends with a tribute to him that highlights the need of maintaining harmony and deference to state institutions. In the context of Pakistan's present affairs, the content analysis explores political intricacies, outside influences, and the perceived threats to democratic values overall.

Analysis on daily The Express Tribune

Following pages contain content analysis of the selected news item published in daily The Express Tribune;

First news item among the sample of daily The Express Tribune was published under headline; "After the Regime Change". Jinnah's Pakistan, which ought to have been a shining example of democratic systems, competent leadership, the supremacy of the rule of law, transparency, and acceptance for all religions and ideologies, is quickly becoming a nation where corruption and nepotism are rampant, the economy is in disarray, and politics has become illegal. When society structures and institutions are being destroyed by excessive favoritism, hunger for power, and a lack of leadership maturity.

The regime change in Pakistan has been attributed to political opportunism by the PDM and PPP to maintain their power and avoid elections. This has led to a surge in the PTI's popularity, as corrupt and criminal elements have fought against a party that advocates for rights to vote, justice, merit, accountability, rule of law, and good governance. This has resulted in the erosion of ethics and values, as the judiciary and constitution are under attack by parties attempting to deny PTI's return to power. The nexus between 'mafias' for political power and patronage is a reality, and fighting with the superior judiciary is a significant gamble. The coalition government's confidence in their victory may be misplaced.

The economy has collapsed, and the supremacy of law and good governance has suffered. The regime transition has resulted in significant expenses, such as a drop in the rupee's worth against the US dollar, a spike in necessities prices, and depletion of foreign exchange reserves. Some ruling class members have chosen to remain quiet and support those who want to rig elections to maintain power at the cost of democracy. It remains to be seen how those equipped with faith and conviction will take on "mafias" and prevent the nation from heading into an inevitable disaster.

These government agencies have now come to light, a year after the regime transition, due to their disregard for their responsibilities and their careless utilization of power. In a same vein, the news media, the corporate elite, and political parties have all come under fire for their willingness to overlook political opportunism, nepotism, and corruption. There's no way to resolve the current deadlock until

Pakistani citizens urge the parties involved to abstain from nepotism, corruption, hunger for power, and political opportunism. Pakistan's future is in jeopardy because catastrophic consequences await if this nation suffers due to the careless, self-centered, and unwise actions of its stakeholders.

Findings from the quantitative and qualitative content analysis indicate that people did support Imran Khan, citing things like the fact that the country went through a whole cycle to remove him from office, but he didn't give up. However, the language and tone employed to announce this news were unfavorable.

Conclusion

At the outset of this study, we aimed to explore the coverage of regime change in international press and to analyze the narratives and the predominant themes produced by these newspapers regarding the regime change in Pakistan during April 2022.

The findings showed that the dual approach of quantitative and qualitative content analysis reveals a nuanced stance taken by Al Jazeera in its coverage of the military's role and the position of Imran Khan. The analysis indicates that Al Jazeera adopted a critical perspective on the military's involvement, emphasizing the likelihood of regime change and a reduction in its political dominance. This suggests a stance against the military's out sized political role, aligning with a narrative of change, although not radical annihilation. However, the doubt arises when examining Al Jazeera's position on Imran Khan. On one hand, statements referencing a "US based news outlet" and the publication of a "diplomatic" letter suggests a narrative in favor of Imran Khan. These details that were provided in the cypher insinuated that US administration sought and pre planned the thought of removing Khan from power, creating a storyline sympathetic to the former prime minister. The ambivalence in Al Jazeera's coverage, endorsing in the military's role while simultaneously signaling support for Imran Khan, underscores the intricacies of media narratives in geopolitical contexts. It reflects the versatile nature of media outlets navigating complex political landscapes, where nuanced perspectives may coexist within the same narrative.

In conclusion, the comprehensive dual analysis, combining both quantitative and qualitative

perspectives, unveils a multifaceted portrayal of Pakistan's political landscape through the lens of Daily Sabah. The quantitative content analysis reveals a narrative that intricately weaves the tapestry of political nuances, emphasizing the trajectory from Imran Khan's accomplishments to the challenges posed by a vote of no confidence. It sheds light on concerns about corruption, foreign meddling, and the manipulation of democratic processes, offering a thorough overview of the political climate.

On the qualitative front, the research delves deeper into the cyclical nature of growth and failures, the resilience of both people and the state, institutional corruption, foreign meddling, and the manipulation of the democratization process. It critically examines the handling of the vote of no confidence against Prime Minister Imran Khan, casting doubt on the authority of the Supreme Court and presenting evidence of U.S. meddling. The analysis concludes with a tribute to Khan and a plea for cooperation around a common vision, emphasizing the need for harmony and deference to state institutions.

The quantitative analysis, focusing on the succession from Imran Khan to Shahbaz Sharif, provides a structured narrative of key political events. It covers the political transition, electoral dynamics, challenges post-election, and the immediate reactions and unrest following Shahbaz Sharif's election as Prime Minister. This synthesis encapsulates the intricate web of political developments, offering a comprehensive understanding of the broader context of Pakistan's present affairs.

In essence, the dual analysis serves as a holistic exploration of Pakistan's political intricacies, addressing external influences, perceived threats to democratic values, and the resilience of the state and its people. It underscores the importance of a nuanced perspective, capturing both quantitative trends and qualitative insights to paint a complete picture of the evolving political landscape.

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