

PAKISTANI MEDIA COVERAGE OF MILITANCY IN BALOCHISTAN & KHYBER-PAKHTUNKHWA: REGIONAL BIASES IN TERRORISM REPORTING AND REPRESENTATION OF LOCAL GRIEVANCES VS SECURITY NARRATIVES

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18045583>

Keywords

Electronic media, Militancy, Imbalance Coverage, Socio-Economic Issues, Balochistan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistani media, content analysis, framing, agenda-setting, regional biasness.

Article History

Received: 11 October 2025

Accepted: 21 November 2025

Published: 19 December 2025

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Abstract

Pakistani media represent militancy in two conflict-affected provinces – Balochistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. Converging on local protests vs security chronicles, regional biases across media outlets (television, print, social media), how sentiment evolve over time. Using content analysis, show designs of foremost security inclosing, representation of local grievances, and biasness of media outlets. The term public perception is used when individuals or groups are thinking on or about some specific issues and events mostly where their personal interests or beliefs can hurt or addressed. The role of media is constructive for information or making positive perception for their users. Highlighting the public issues, political, socioeconomic and create the environment of awareness among people and put influence to policy makers. Balochistan is the largest province of Pakistan by land or territory. It has a very different socioeconomic and security issues. Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa also have the security and militancy issues. Both provinces are neglected by all the policy institutions. This observed that the main stream media not give proper coverage to their security, economic, political and social issues. In this study, revealed that national media ignore the issues of Balochistan and KPK Province regarding militancy and their grievances on terrorism and focused on the narrative of security and government institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan has a diverse media landscape in South Asia. All the media outlets and organizations have a limited freedom of expression. Government directly or indirectly controls the media through political parties and security establishment. the media (Electronic, print and social media) produce the news, current affairs and entertainment programs. The social media is not in control like other traditional media. Some of the social media accounts are also managed by the same traditional media outlets, government owned institutions. Pakistani media shapes

the public opinion for understanding the militancy and security. KPK and Balochistan have long history of insurgency, religious hatred, militancy, extremism, multiple complex local socio-economic grievances and political instability. Media only focused on security narrative (state), and local grievances (ethnic, resource disputes and political divisions). KPK and Balochistan witnessed the terrorism after Afghan war since the early 2000s and specifically when the 9/11 incident happened. Terror attacks like Army Public School (2014). The rise of terrorist networks like TTP, Lashkar

e Jhangvi, Indian and Afghan backed organizations, sectarian outfits, intelligence-based operations (IBOs) and complete war started in tribal areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan. The residents of those areas directly effected. During this time residents de-locate from their home and have a serious problem and grievances which are not addressed and their representation is not addressed by the media.

Pakistani media during the militancy creates the pressure on public and framed the long-term perception about the militancy and security. Despite the serious ness, they only protect the policy of state institutions.

The global studies explored the terrorism in Pakistan on western media, only on their own narrative of terrorism in a political context. These are understudied where the relationship of media and state narratives and their interests are same.

Media framing and Terrorism

Terrorism and media have a reinforcing relationship. Terrorism based on fear and media highlight violent events due to their dramatize news values. This creates the mistrust and insecurity to the public especially those areas which are effected by terrorism. The seriousness of this issue the academic analysis is limited specifically in Pakistani media-framing. Media reports on terrorism are limited and fact checking is weak.

Methodology

This research is qualitative, descriptive without numerical analysis. The patterns used are televised and social media coverage of some major terrorist attacks in Pakistan. The analysis focus on print and electronic media coverage especially in Geo, ARY, PTV. Events like Army Public School, Peshawar, Hazara Community Killings in Balochistan. For this article, available research of the decade has been critically reviewed. Qualitative research gives the researches a free space where they can analyze and interpret according to his thinkings and approach.

Security vs Grievance narratives: Media Framing

The most important statement in Pakistani media mainstream is the “Pakistan is a hard state or Security State”, dominant of security state narrative, especially in KPK and Balochistan. The KPK and Balochistan is

treated as a “very sensitive topic” in Pakistani media (LSE’s Polis Blog, June 8, 2020). The journalist often gives the coverage to state/ official – military perspective. Where the reality fogged and bias narrative prevailed. Media uses agenda setting techniques of framing, the focus is threat and instability relying on security sources.

Life risk for journalists

In KPK and Balochistan, journalists face hard time during reporting. They face life threats, harassment, or worse. The Freedom Network (2023) and Committee to Protect Journalists (2025), which advocates for press freedoms, said 53 journalists were killed because of their work between 2012 and 2022.

Downgrading of Grievances Narratives

Local representation, socio economic factors and political alien sometime back seated. A study compares Balochistan Time vs main stream media like Jung, Geo, Ary, PTV etc. shows the economic and governess grievances (like Gwadar Protest, Army Public School, Peshawar attack, Hazara Community Killings) national media framed similar incidents as a threat (pssr.org.pk Dec, 2014).

Social Media Mobilization

Terrorist organizations, nationalists exploit social media political and social grievances. Using TikTok, viral videos and disinformation to highlight resource exploitation and political exclusion. (Naveed Hussain Express Tribune, April 13,2025).

Pakistani Government or State does not have a counter narrative to address the real issues and grievances and lack of interest by national media. State call leaders’ conferences on KPK and Balochistan issues and media repeats this top-down voices rather than listening the dissenting voices.

Regional Biasness in Media coverage

The different treat in KPK and Balochistan reflects the biases in Media Coverage.

Balochistan (Forgotten): The narrative, political and social problems are missing from the main stream media focusing the terror and militancy and dominant provinces voices over shadowed. Media outlets largely based in Punjab and Sindh a little representation in KP and Balochistan.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Framed as Islamist Terror: In ideological terms KPK is framed as religious militancy. TTP, suicide bombings etc. emphasize over political and economic grievances. This framing gives the legitimacy to military operations which obscure governance failure.

Representation of Local Grievances vs State Security

In these two provinces of Pakistan media and journalist may lack of resources and dependent of security institutions for access. The editorial priorities are different and newsroom sensationalizing sometime abuse the human rights. The security narrative is dominant and also shapes the public opinion.

When media ignore local grievances of KPK and Balochistan, the reaction from the public is violent and policy response is security-based.

A noteworthy study in Russian Law Journal (2023) advocates for a strategic communication frame work in Balochistan to counter extremism. Media should be the part of dialogue and peacebuilding.

Recommendations

Media Reforms: The local journalism of Balochistan and KPK have the same representation like national media. Strengthen local journalists by funding, training and security support. From terrorism and militancy reporting investigative reporting should incentivize on economic reforms, governance and human rights.

Editorial Policies: Media especially newsroom ensure balanced reporting where all the matters will cover on socio economic grievances and security. avoid sensationalizing, violence.

Research and Monitoring: Civil society and academicians monitor media coverage on these issues and their representation can change the perspective in larger interest of Pakistan. This can lead to reforms in provinces.

Conclusions

Pakistani media is a combination of threat, heroism, political divisions, sensationalizing during the news reporting. The Pakistani media during the coverage of terrorism and militancy in Balochistan and KPK shows ideological biases. State security narrative dominates and local problems and grievances,

injustice and political polarization often marginalized. This imbalance reporting creates the fear, discomfort to the public. Limit graphic material which creates emotional exploitation.

To move forward, State, Government, Media, Civil Society, Military Establishment, must collaborate to each other to highlight all the issues and their solutions in a balanced form. Journalist should empower to report the actual stories of exploitation, resistance, social and economic problems and hope. Media can play a constructive and vital role for addressing the militancy causes and public problems and engage the community to resolve their issues.

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