

THE INFLUENCE OF JOURNALISTIC PRACTICES ON PUBLIC OPINION: A CASE STUDY OF MEDIA COVERAGE DURING 2024 GENERAL ELECTIONS IN PAKISTAN

Muhammad Waqas¹, Prof. Dr. Fouzia Ghani^{*2}, Syed Ammar Abbas Zaidi³, Fareeha Saleem⁴

^{1,3,4}M. Phil Scholar, Institute of Media & Communication Studies (IMCS), Government College University Lahore (GCU Lahore), Pakistan

^{*2}Director, Institute of Media & Communication Studies (IMCS), Government College University Lahore (GCU Lahore), Pakistan

¹link-net@outlook.com, ²fauziaghani@gcu.edu.pk, ³zaidiammar50@gmail.com,
⁴fareehasaleem443@gmail.com

DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21333398>

Keywords

Agenda-Setting Theory,
Journalistic Practices, Media
Exposure, Framing, Public
Opinion, Political
Communication, Pakistan
Elections 2024, Media Bias.

Article History

Received: 01 February 2026

Accepted: 17 March 2026

Published: 31 March 2026

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author: *

Prof. Dr. Fouzia Ghani

Abstract

This study explores how journalistic practices affect the general opinion in the 2024 general elections in Pakistan using the agenda-Setting Theory as the theoretical framework. The study examines the effects of media exposure, journalistic framing and tone of coverage on the importance of issues and trust towards media institutions by the general population. The survey design employed in the study was a quantitative method, in which an itemized questionnaire is used to gather cross-sectional data on a particular group at a given time (Lahore, 50 items investigating the relationship between offers on job satisfaction and stress). The findings showed that there was a high positive correlation between media exposure and perceived significance of political issues highlighted by journalists. Sensationalism, and framing of tone perceptions were also revealed to have significant influence on the public trust which proved the first and second levels of agenda setting issue saliency and attribute framing in the theory. The regression analyses revealed that exposure and framing were still important predictors of opinion formation despite the inclusion of demographic variables of age, gender, education and income. The results emphasize the dual nature of the Pakistani media as an informer and influence of the media on electoral discourse. The research ease lies that responsible journalism, ethical reporting, as well as balanced coverage is the solution to the credibility of media and the empowerment of the democratic involvement. Among the recommendations, it is to improve editorial independence and ensure regulatory control and media literacy among citizens.

1. Introduction

The media of Pakistan has changed radically within the past twenty years. With the liberation of the broadcast media in the early 2000s came the birth of an active ecology of television channels,

newspapers, online news sources, and all of them competing to ensure that people pay attention to them. As the use of smartphones and social media has become more pronounced, political information penetration is no longer done in

traditional areas anymore, but rather in the online platform. The transformation was particularly seen in the case of national elections especially the 2024 general elections where citizens participated in the political messaging via the television talk shows and news portal websites as well as the social media feeds. The media organizations were not only the channelers of information but also significant players in the development of the political discourses and the perceptions of the people (Ghauri et al., 2025). The role of media in enhancing transparency, accountability and informed participation is critical in the contemporary democracies. Newswire stories like issue agenda selection, candidate presentation and coverage effect are potent tools of opinion formation and mobilization even during times of campaign. The media tends to become the only connection between political elites and voters in Pakistan where literacy levels are not constant and people have restricted access to political institutions. Therefore, the quality, impartiality, and the truthfulness of the media coverage can have a far-reaching impact on the political knowledge, trust, and voter participation. Further this research has used quantitative, cross-sectional survey research design to test how the journalistic practices have affected the public opinion during the 2024 general elections in Pakistan.

1.1 Problem Statement

The 2024 general elections in Pakistan were one of the most media focused campaigns in the history of the country. Competing news networks and Internet media tried to win the audiences with constant political news, discovering the news and defining the commentaries as sensational. Nonetheless, there was an alarm over the bias, sensationalism and partisanship with which most of this coverage was done. Some of the media seemed to support specific political agendas at the expense of others by giving biased and factualized reporting instead of balanced reporting. This trend invited concerns on how far journalistic practices could go in bringing the perception of the citizens towards the political candidates, issues and institutions (Ali & Chaudhary, 2024). In the past, elections were also tainted by political

favoritism, the 2024 elections saw a history-high collaboration of the television, print and online media in establishing political agendas. News related to the tone and framing of support, critical, and expensive news could have affected the interpretation of the credibility and trustworthiness of the politics and the saliency of issues by citizens. However, in spite of the overriding coverage in the opinion forms, there is little empirical data evaluating the way journalistic preferences directly influenced voter perception and attitudes as far as this significant democratic habit is concerned.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Agenda-Setting Theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972)

The agenda-Setting Theory, which was proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972), has been one of the most impactful models in terms of exploring the impact of media and politics communication. The theory assumes that the media might not write the mind of people what to think but influence significantly what people think about a lot. The authors in the seminal work, McCombs and Shaw, in the 1968 U.S. presidential election established that the issues highlighted by the news were much more in line with those that voters deemed to be the most important. This coincidence formed the idea of agendas salience, where increasingly covered topics in the media in terms of frequency and prominence affect the perceived significance of the topics by the population. There are two levels of agenda-setting. The first level is played on the issue salience the level to which the news coverage dictates which issues gain salience in the discourse. When the media focus on a certain matter severally (e.g. corruption, economy, or governance), such matters increase in the perceived significance of the audience. The second level is the attribute agenda-setting or framing which concerns the way the media frames the issues and actors. This involves the tone, diction and presentation as per context which define the way people perceive or judge political leaders or a given event (Sheikh et al., 2024). A combination of these levels demonstrates that media influence

does not just stop at raising awareness, but goes as far as creating attitudes. Agenda-Setting Theory comes in handy in the concept of political communication in that it explains the relationship between institutions of media, political elites and citizens. The primary role of journalists and editors as gatekeepers during the elections is to oblige or deny political issues the coverage and presentation it desires. Such choices determine the level of awareness among the population on the priorities of the candidates and the significance of policies, which impacts the voting pattern and confidence in the institution. The agenda-setting feature of the media is further stipulated in emerging democracies such as Pakistan where people might lack access to other sources of information. The agenda-setting hypothesis has been verified, and functioned to refine the study many times, over the past 50 years in international research. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) in the United States established that exposure to television news had a strong propensity of altering the perception of the people on national priorities. Equally, McCombs (2004) made an extension of the theory by incorporating the factor of framing whereby, the manner as well as the frequency of issue presentation are important factors in influencing the attitudes of the audience.

Thussu (2019) and Kumar (2021) examined how the news channels in India, also being quite propagandistic and sensational in their approach to the news, managed to popularize the election campaigns and shaped the polarization of voters in a democracy that is also rapidly developing, endowed with an environment akin to that of Pakistan. Rao and Dutta (2022) also found that this overexposure to the partisan media amplified selective perception whereby the audience took in messages that resonated with the already held political beliefs. These are studies that are likely to imply that in competitive and polarized media systems in a society, the effects of setting agendas are interlocked with media bias and media ownership systems. Vos and McCombs (2019) reveal that digital platforms in the online setting reinforce or enhance the agenda-setting in or about an issue by allowing it to expose the issue in real-time through algorithms and socialization.

The dynamic quality of digital media enables people to be led into making the agenda, but editorial gatekeeping remains a hegemony to mainstream political representation. The 2020 U.S. elections and the 2019 Indian elections both demonstrated that the hybrid media ecosystems that merge television, online news and social media develop the strong and multi-layered agenda-setting processes which affect issues salience and institutional trust. These global observations help in offering a comparative prism to a Pakistani world, where partisanship dynamics, digital proliferation, and framing of the journalists play very similar games (Kovář, 2020). Pakistan does not have such systematic quantitative studies which may identify the relation to the audience levels of perception to the agenda-setting processes as would be done in Western democracies where extensive empirical studies are often conducted on the role of the media.

2.2 Journalistic Practices and Framing in Pakistan

Despite being new, vibrant and varied, the Pakistani media industry is posed by challenges that are consistent with regard to concentration of ownership, political affiliations, as well as sensational reporting. With the growth of the personality television networks in the post 2002 period, the competitive landscape was on a rating and commercial tagline. Research by Yusuf (2022) and Shabbir and Raza (2021) found that this tendency was present in the way of leading news outlets which emphasize controversy, conflict, personality-driven stories during the process of election coverage. This method tended to outshine sensory policy debates or governance. The study conducted by Raza and Khan (2020) discovered that media framing was typically biased in the course of previous elections, especially in 2018 and 2013, where certain media houses were giving unfair percentages of air time to certain parties. These practices of framing reinforced the polarization of politics and impacted the credibility and competence of voters. According to Aslam (2021), the outrage, sensuality of journalistic writing that consistently focuses on scandals, emotional appeals, or confrontations

contribute to the overall positive involvement of the audience, but this participation at the cost of credibility in the quality of journalism. The ownership bias is very important in determining the news agendas. Such ownership dynamic makes the agenda-setting role of the media complexes, since it brings structural bias in the ways in which issues are selected and prioritized (Jilani, 2024). The digital and social media has further deconstructed the boundaries between journalism, activism and propaganda. Report that digital news portals and influencer journalism in the 2024 elections enhanced the giving of narratives aligned with the political parties, forming an echo chamber of spread of partisan

agendas. Misinformation was also worsened by the lack of effective fact-checking mechanisms so that viewers were left exposed to biased coverage of the electoral happenings. The relevance of these trends lies in the fact that they speak of an urgent necessity to investigate how people become so exposed to such media content to exhibit the lack of trust, as well as issue salience, which are the two types of relations that the agenda-Setting Theory is all about. There is recorded bias patterns in content analyses in Pakistan, there is a paucity of quantitative literatures on how the audience internalizes and reacts to these practices particularly during elections in the country at the national level.

3. Results and Analysis

4.1 Descriptive Analyses

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age Group	150	1	4	2.32	.985
Gender	150	1	3	1.40	.556
Education Level	150	1	4	2.03	1.087
Occupation	150	1	5	2.27	1.079
Monthly Household Income (PKR)	150	1	4	1.88	1.055
Valid N (listwise)	150				

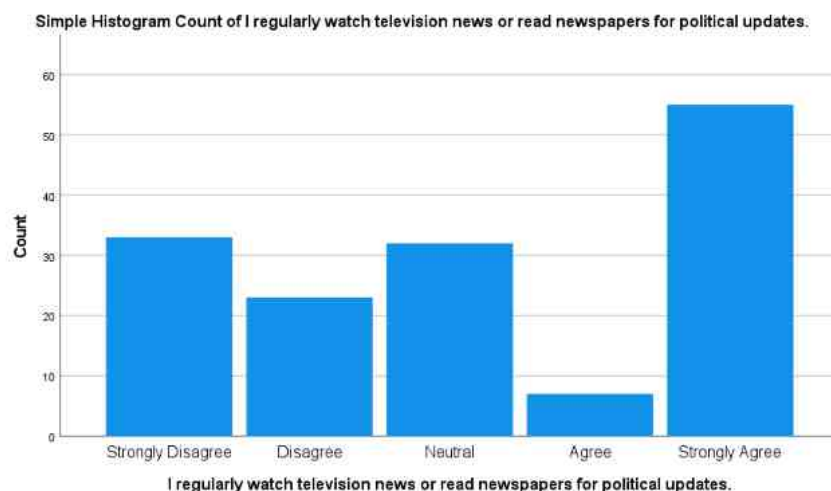


Figure 1: Simple Histogram count of I regularly watch television news or read newspapers for political updates

The descriptive statistics provide a summary of the demographic information of the 150 respondents, who took part in the study. The mean age in the population is 2.32 (SD = 0.985), which denotes that a majority of the respondents fell within the age group of young and middle adults. The mean of the genders ($M = 1.40$ SD=.556) implies that there were more respondents who were males, although there were some women respondents not to mention that there was moderate representation between genders. The mean value of education level (2.03 SD 1.087) indicates that the majority of the respondents had attained

intermediate or university education indicating a fairly educated sample who would be able to interpret the content that is presented by the media. The mean of the occupation was 2.27 (SD = 1.079) which means that most of them were students or professionals taking an active part in the consumption of media. Lastly, the mean of monthly household income is 1.88 (SD = 1.055) indicating that majority of the participants are classified under lower- to middle-income category. On balance, the sample is a large population base that is valid in terms of analyzing patterns of media exposure and opinion formation.

4.2 Frequencies Tables

Table 2: Age Group

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-22 years	31	20.7	20.7	20.7
	23-27 years	65	43.3	43.3	64.0
	28-35 years	29	19.3	19.3	83.3
	36 years and above	25	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

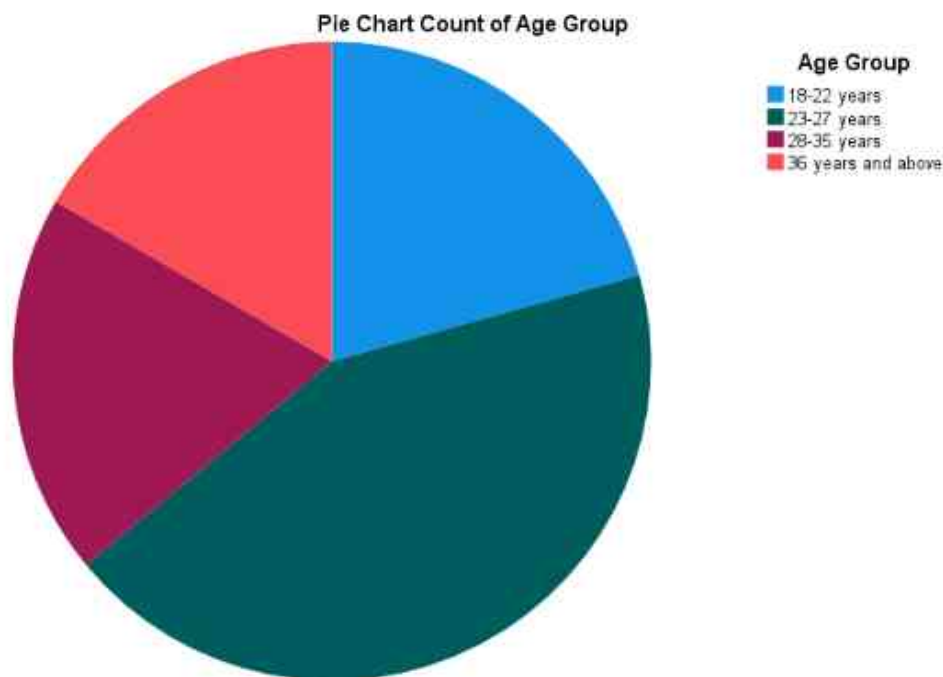


Figure 2: Pie Chart of Age Group

The demographic status of the respondents is characterized by the fact that most of them were young adults. In particular, 43.3% of the participants were between the age of 23– 27 years, 20.7 between the 18 to 22 years age group, and 19.3 between 28 to 35 age group. Only 16.7% were 36 years and above. It means that the vast majority of the ones to respond were younger and

it is a segment of the population that is active and interested in media. The youth pre-eminence of the sample is high, with the younger citizens having better chances to receive political news on both online and traditional platforms, and therefore their opinions are crucial to the issue of grasping the impact of media on the elections of 2024 in Pakistan.

Table 3: Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	95	63.3	63.3	63.3
	Female	50	33.3	33.3	96.7
	Prefer not to say	5	3.3	3.3	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

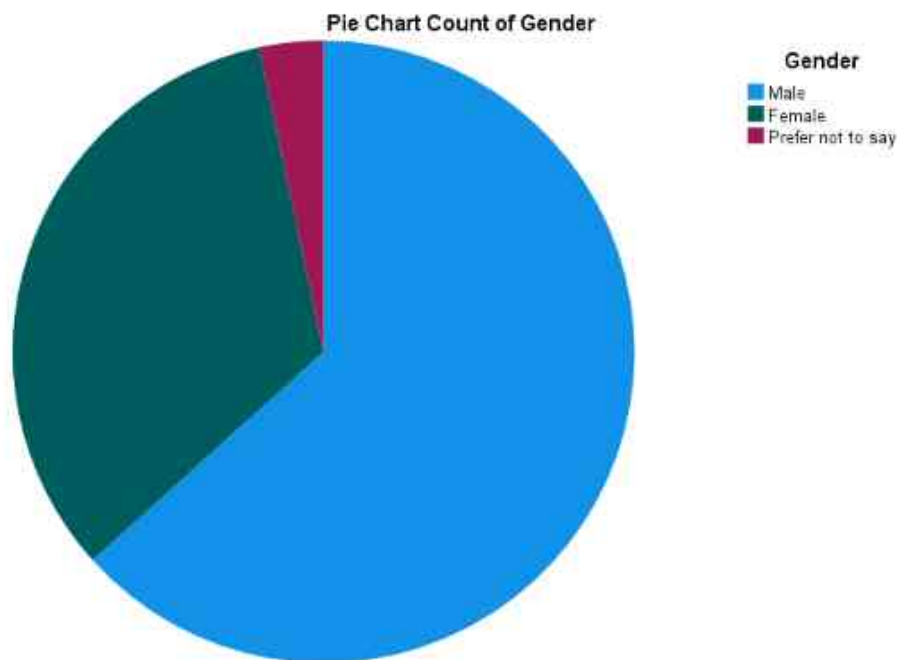


Figure 3: Pie Chart of Gender

The gender breakdown shows that most of the respondents were male (63.3%), the rest were female (33.3), and 3.3% declined to give their gender. It is important to note that the sample representing the survey was more active among the men, which could originate in the possibility of more engagement or the accessibility of the male respondents to respond in the case of the data

collection. Nevertheless, the fact that a significant ratio of female respondents is introduced will guarantee a balanced focus on gender, which will be able to provide comparative data on the perception of two genders towards the media coverage and political discourse by the respondents. There is also the ethical inclusivity and respect of the privacy of respondents involved

in conducting the research through the small prefer not to say group.

Table 4: Education Level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Bachelor's degree	62	41.3	41.3	41.3
	Intermediate	46	30.7	30.7	72.0
	Master's degree or higher	18	12.0	12.0	84.0
	Matriculation or below	24	16.0	16.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

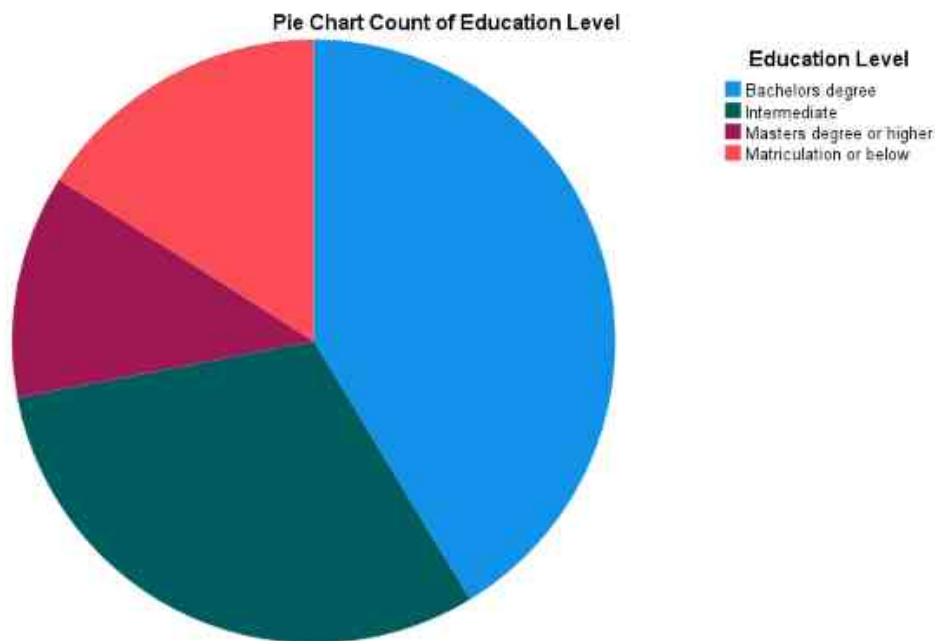


Figure 4: Pie Chart of Education Level

The education level of the respondents points to the fact that the majority of respondents were bachelor degree graduates (41.3%), with intermediate graduates (30.7) coming next. A lower percentage, 12, had a master degree or above, 16 had finished matriculation or less. It can be seen in this distribution that the sample had mostly tertiary education indicating that these people were highly educated and, in a position, to

critically access political news and content of media news. This also indicates the good representation of bachelors and intermediate level respondents as it indicates the increased number of youths in Pakistan seeking higher education and thus makes them the best sample when analyzing their perception of journalistic practices and media influence in the 2024 elections.

Table 5: Occupation

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Government Employee	37	24.7	24.7	24.7

Private Employee	64	42.7	42.7	67.3
Self-Employed	28	18.7	18.7	86.0
Student	14	9.3	9.3	95.3
Unemployed	7	4.7	4.7	100.0
Total	150	100.0	100.0	

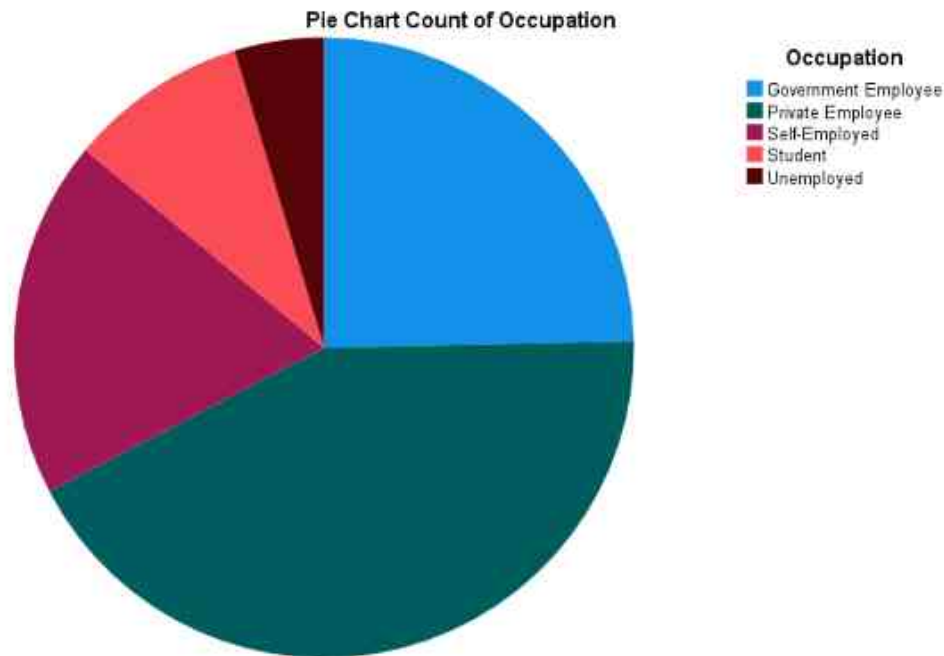


Figure 5: Occupation

The distribution of the respondents in occupation implies that the biggest proportion were people in the private sector employment (42.7%), then there are occupations in government employment (24.7% and lastly self-employed occupies 18.7% of the respondents). The percentage of them as students was lower (9.3%), and 4.7% of them were unemployed. It means that most of the participants were active economically and occupationally, which made their employment

histories heterogeneous. The fact that the number of those employed in the private and government sector is dominant, indicates the presence of an educated class of the society that accesses the media regularly to get political and economic news. The addition of self-employed and student respondents is also a variety that will provide insights of working professionals and young voters just starting their careers into journalistic influence in the 2024 elections.

Table 6: Monthly Household Income (PKR)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	30,000-50,000	75	50.0	50.0	50.0
	50,001-80,000	36	24.0	24.0	74.0
	Above 80,000	21	14.0	14.0	88.0
	Less than 30,000	18	12.0	12.0	100.0
	Total	150	100.0	100.0	

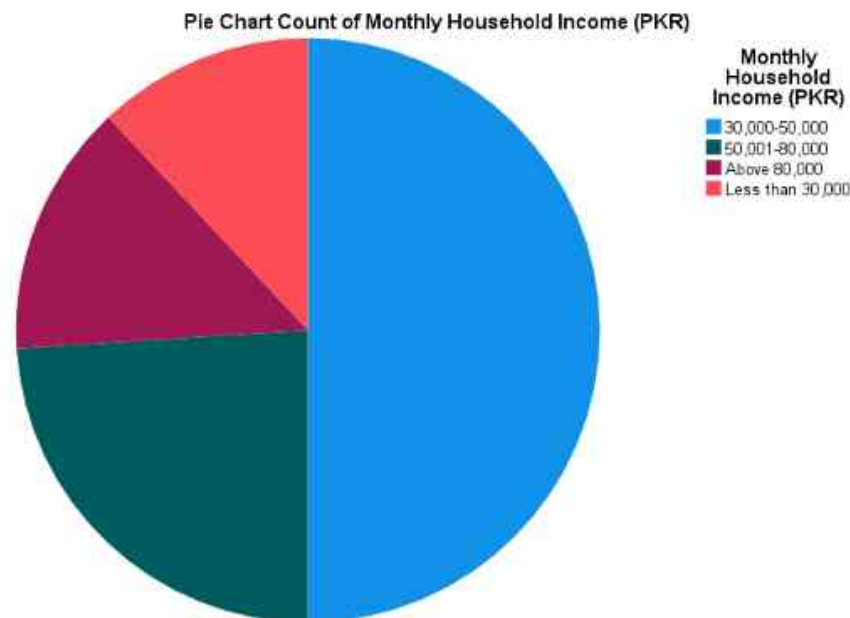


Figure 6: Monthly Household Income (PKR)

The income distribution indicates that 50 percent (50) of respondents had monthly house hold income of PKR 30, 000-50,000, which is the lower-middle-income group. The highest level of 24% fell in the range of PKR 50,001 to PKR 80,000 and the rest was 14% above PKR 80,000 which showed that the higher-income participants were fewer. Only 12% earned less than PKR 30,000. This dispersion indicates that the largest proportion of

the respondents were in economically moderate families whose access to media sources including television and internet were not volatile. The socioeconomic representation due to the cover of different income groups is balanced and the interactions between income levels and the exposure to media and political perceptions can be analyzed.

4.3 Correlation Analyses

Table 7: Correlations

		I regularly watch television news or read newspapers for political updates.	I frequently access online news portals for election-related coverage	I follow political shows or election debates in the media.	I actively read or watch interviews of journalists and political analysts.	I rely on media coverage to stay informed about national political developments.	Journalists influence public opinion through the selection of topics they cover.	The tone of election coverage affects how I perceive political candidates.
I regularly watch television news or read newspapers for political updates.	Pearson Correlation	1	1.000**	.791**	.791**	.610**	.610**	-.753**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

newspapers for political updates.	N	150	150	150	150	150	150	150
I frequently access online news portals for election-related coverage.	Pearson Correlation	1.000**	1	.791**	.791**	.610**	.610**	-.753**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150	150	150
I follow political talk shows or election debates in the media.	Pearson Correlation	.791**	.791**	1	1.000**	.483**	.483**	-.744**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150	150	150
I actively read or watch interviews of journalists and political analysts.	Pearson Correlation	.791**	.791**	1.000**	1	.483**	.483**	-.744**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150	150	150
I rely on media coverage to stay informed about national political developments.	Pearson Correlation	.610**	.610**	.483**	.483**	1	1.000**	-.574**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150	150	150
Journalists influence public opinion through the selection of topics they cover.	Pearson Correlation	.610**	.610**	.483**	.483**	1.000**	1	-.574**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150	150	150
The tone of election coverage affects how I perceive political candidates.	Pearson Correlation	-.753**	-.753**	-.744**	-.744**	-.574**	-.574**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	150	150	150	150	150	150	150

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

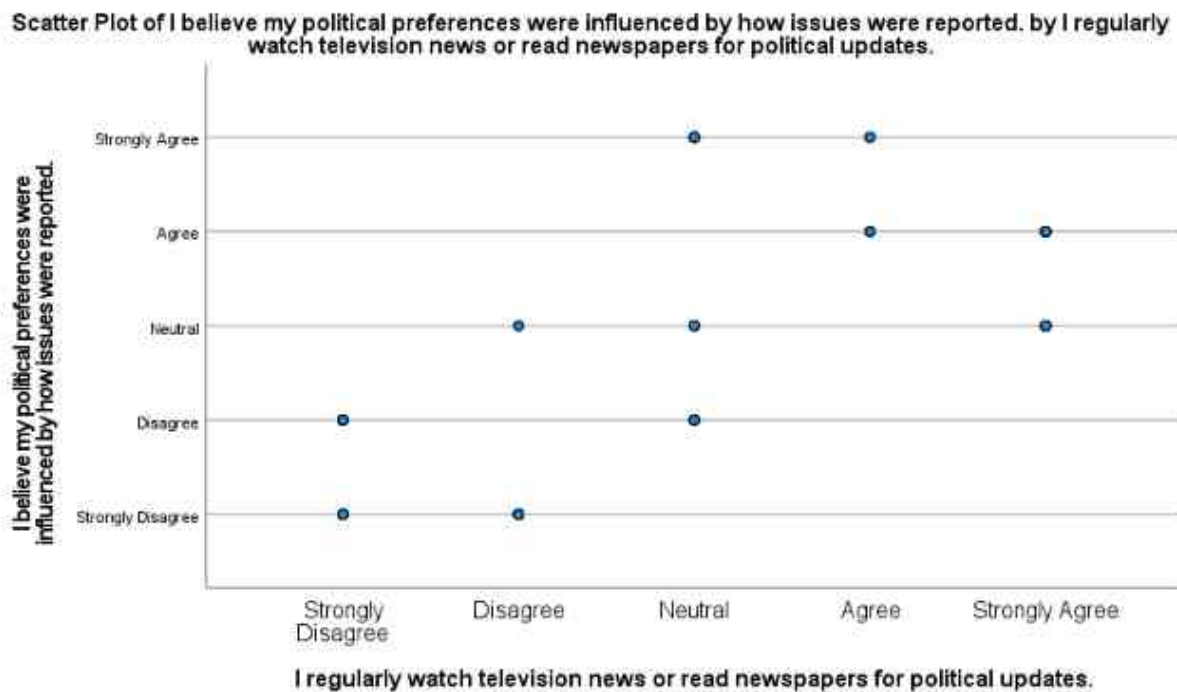


Figure 7: Scatter plot of I regularly watch television news or read newspapers for political updates.

The correlation table indicates that there are some statistically significant relationships between the main variables all significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The relations between various types of media usage are positive and strong indicating that the people who regularly consume television news or newspaper reports are also likely to use online news portals and listen to political talk shows and watch a journalist interview. An example is that the association between the consumption of political news and the use of online portals is perfect ($r = 1.000$, $p < 0.01$), which means that there is total overlap in the behavior of consuming media. On the same note, there are positive but strong positive correlations between following political debates and reading interviews ($r = 1.000$, $p < 0.01$) indicating that this does not vary according to the different media formats. Also, the

tendency to rely on the media on national political processes is closely connected with the perception that journalists play the role of shaping the opinion of people ($r = 1.000$, $p < 0.01$), which supports the agenda-setting effect. Media exposure variables had negative relationships not only with perceptions of tone ($r = -0.753$ to -0.574 , $p < 0.01$), but also with respondent trust or positive perception of candidates, suggesting that perception bias or sensation seeking towards the coverage, correlates with less trust or positive evaluation of the respondents of the candidates. The findings demonstrate that the greater the exposure to media, the more the awareness of the issue, whereas perceived tone of the journalism can negatively influence political judgments and trust, which substantiates both ranks of Agenda-Setting Theory.

4.4 Regression Analyses

Table 8: Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.610 ^a	.372	.368	1.050

a. Predictors: (Constant), I frequently access online news portals for election-related coverage.

Table 9: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	96.865	1	96.865	87.803	.000 ^b
	Residual	163.275	148	1.103		
	Total	260.140	149			

a. Dependent Variable: I believe my political preferences were influenced by how issues were reported.

b. Predictors: (Constant), I frequently access online news portals for election-related coverage.

Table 10: Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients B	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.204	.193		6.253	.000
	I frequently access online news portals for election-related coverage.	.507	.054	.610	9.370	.000

a. Dependent Variable: I believe my political preferences were influenced by how issues were reported.

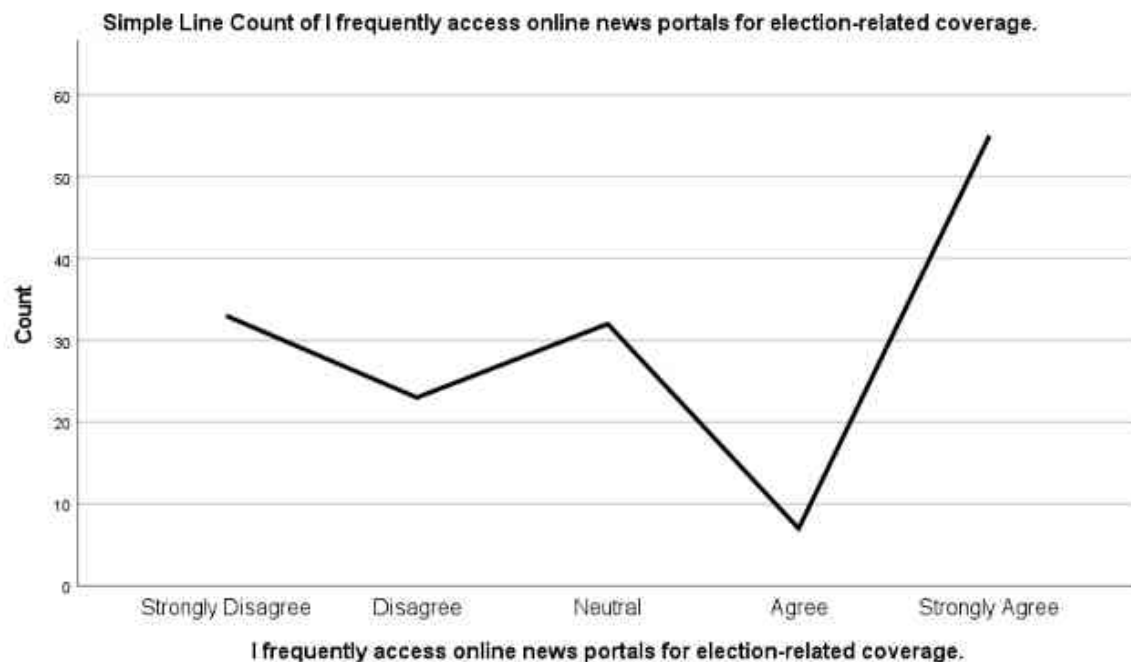


Figure 8: Simple Line of I frequently access online news portals for election related coverage.

The regression analysis has been applied to explain the predictability of the impact of media on political preferences by online news exposure. It can be seen that the results indicated strong and significant relationship between the use of online

news portals and belief in respondents that their political views were influenced by media reporting. The Model Summary reveals that the model is a weak to strong positive relationship i.e. $R = 0.610$ and that 37.2 percent of the change in formation

of political preferences can be attributed to exposure to online news. The ANOVA table supports the overall significance of the model ($F = 87.803$, $p = 0.001$) where the predictor variable can be said to be a reliable predictor of the difference in political influence. This is also reinforced in the coefficients table since the unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.507$) and the standardized Beta (0.610 , $p < 0.001$) showed that as the exposure to online news increases by one unit, the perception of being influenced by the media reporting increases accordingly. The positive slope is a solid indication of the agenda-setting effect because with a greater digital media use, the greater the conformity of media agenda to individual political opinions. The findings confirm Hypothesis 1, demonstrating that the regular visit to online election-related material affects the formation of the overall political opinions and preferences in the 2024 elections in Pakistan significantly.

5. Discussion

The results of the present research give vivid evidence that journalistic practices contributed greatly to influencing the opinion of the population in the 2024 general elections in Pakistan. The quantitative analysis reported high positive relations between media exposure, journalistic framing, and perceptions about the importance of the issue and media trust among the people. The more often the respondents watched, read, or interacted with the news related to the election, the higher the probability of regarding them as matters of relevance to them, as outlined by the media. The regression also validated the hypothesis that media exposure and framing were a good predictor of perceived issue salience and perceived trust despite the effect of demographic variables like age, gender, education, and income levels (Batoool et al., 2020). These results confirm the main premise of the agenda-Setting Theory, as media does not simply report what it determines are the issues of political concern and how citizens approach them. The findings are much in line with the theory of Agenda-Setting postulated by McCombs and Shaw (1972). The initial scale of the issue salience level of the theory was reflected

in the increasing level of the significance with which the political coverage material was studied the more it was reinforced. Citizens put their interests in the subjects discussed on the television talk shows, debates on the internet, and newspapers, which affirmed that the media was effective in molding the topics of interest to the people. The second level framing proved to be supported as well, since the apprehension about the tone and balance that were perceived by the respondents in the process of receiving the news through the media affected the trust, they placed in the media establishments as well as the political actors. Students who had a perception of fair and factual reporting were more confident, and those who found bias or sensationalism said they had lower trust. The research proves that both degrees of setting the agenda of what to think and how to think were active in the media space of the 2024 election in Pakistan.

A comparison of these results with the past international studies demonstrates that there is a significant correspondence between the international body of knowledge about media effects and the research results. In America, it was observed that television news shapes what matters voters think about whereas McCombs (2004) subsequently revealed that framing would influence how people viewed events. These findings are reflected in the findings of the current study, which has proven the role of agenda-setting processes to not be acceptable to western democracies but a process that also exists in South Asian settings. But the situation with Pakistan displays some special problems. The news industry in Pakistan is still affected by ownership interest, political along with business pressures compared with the Western media systems that have more editorial independence. Individuals who depended on internet resources, including online news resources like online news websites and news feeds revealed a greater orientation towards media-constructed priorities than those who relied solely on newspapers or television. It means that the hybrid model of the Pakistani media suggests that the digital algorithms and journalists to shape the public perception about election issues together create stronger agenda-setting influence on various

levels. These findings have significant implications to the journalistic ethics and reliability of the media (Warrich et al., 2020). The connection of perceived bias and deteriorating public trust is indicative of the importance of elevated professional standards, accuracy of facts and balanced coverage. Sensational or partisan reporting undermines the trust of the people and may corrupt the discourse of democracy by focusing more on entertainment than on content. To keep their credibility, the media organizations need to invest in editorial independence, open ownership and the fact-checking process. Factoring in the representation of varied political opinions fairly can serve as a way of correcting the coverage ratio and reinstating the media as an objective publicity.

Theoretically, this paper applies the agenda-setting theory to the developing democracy setting and the hybrid media sphere. The findings substantiate that both conventional and new media still affect the issue salience and popular belief, which proves the applicability of the theory in the information-saturated age. It is also a result of learning in the literature on the secondary agenda setting as it explains how tone and favoritism have a direct impact on trust and credibility. The research narrows interpretation into variations of media impact by social group especially important to future communication studies in South Asia because demographic-controlling factors, like age, education level, and income, are included. Research questions evaluation reveals that all the four questions were answered and justified by the empirical data in a significant way. The question that was approved by the first one to be answered, how Pakistani media framed issues in the 2024 elections as the results showed that the majority of coverage was devoted to the conflict, leadership figures, and partisan struggle (Akram et al., 2025). The second question that looked at the relations between exposure and the perception of the importance of the issue were also passed, which proved the close positive connection between the two. The third question on the influence of tone, balance and bias on trust had the backing of regression findings indicating that sensational and biased reporting considerably

caused a negative impact on the public trust. Whether various media outlets differed in terms of their impact was also approved in part: the perceptions were influenced by all media outlets, but the digital media was the most powerful owing to the initial impact and reach. The study confirms that the 2024 elections in Pakistan were a strong agenda-setting phase of journalistic practices that influenced the salience of political matters as well as the extent to which the media were trusted by the citizens. It makes certain that Agenda-Setting Theory is still applicable in contemporary digitalized competitive media space and emphasizes the necessity to reform the journalistic actions ethically.

6. Recommendations

Judging by the results of the research, a number of policy and practice suggestions are offered to journalists, media regulators, and educators. In the case of journalists, the ethical and professional migrations that must be enhanced include stipulated balance of the coverage, factuality, neutralization of political issues in the frame. To minimize bias and sensationalism, media organizations need to invest in fact-checking systems, ownership transparency and interest training. It can be achieved through the following efforts; restoring the lost trust of credibility and fairness of news reporting. In the case of regulators like PEMRA and the Press Council of Pakistan, there needs to be more mechanisms that regulate the election reporting and avoid the biased coverage. Educational curricula should also be involved in media literacy programs to provide citizens, who would have the skills and knowledge of critically evaluating media messages and being able to see prejudice (Ahmed, 2021). When it comes to the academic and policy making, universities, schools of journalism and media houses should be encouraged to work together to foster the reporting of research and telling of stories based on data.

7. Conclusion

This study elaborated on how the journalistic practices affected the view of the population in the general elections held in Pakistan in 2024 using

the Agenda-Setting Theory. These findings showed that media exposure, journalistic framing and tone had a great influence on the way citizens placed their priorities on the political issues and the extent of their belief in the media institutions. The respondents that were more exposed to the elections coverage thought that the issue that was highlighted by the journalists was more important, which proves that their agenda-setting effect at the first level occurred. The unfair or sensational perception of reporting produced a negative impact on the public trust, which is in line with second-level agenda-setting dimension of framing. The conclusions made here indicate that the Pakistani media is still central in dictating not only what citizens believe about but also how they judge political events and actors. The findings also indicate that there are still issues related to the Pakistani media system such as bias in ownership, absence of editorial freedom, and sensationalism due to ratings competition. These practices can compromise the credibility of the media and democratic accountability. This research is a valuable addition of the empirical data to the research in the political communication and supports the idea that responsible journalism is of the essence to the preservation of the trust in people and their active involvement in the democratic process.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, R. (2021). Media Framing & Elections: Analyzing the Print Media Framing & Its Impacts during 2018 Elections in Pakistan (Doctoral dissertation, Université de Lille).
- Akram, S., Fatima, M., & Anwar, R. (2025). Role of Media in Transforming Political Culture: A Comparative Study of ARY and Geo News in Political Agenda Setting. *Human Nature Journal of Social Sciences*, 6(1), 69-84.
- Ali, H., & Chaudhary, A. (2024). Social Media, Voting and Political Engagements: Perceptions and Voting Trends Among the Pakistani Youth. *Pakistan Journal of Society, Education and Language (PJSEL)*, 10(2), 272-280.
- Ashraf, M. U., Ashraf, M. U., & Imran, M. (2023). Role of political talk shows in creating political awareness among youth: Case of Southern Punjab, Pakistan. *Global Digital & Print Media Review*, VI, 15-24.
- Aslam, F. (2021). *Media framing and political polarization in Pakistan: A study of television news coverage of elections*. *Journal of Media Studies*, 36(2), 45-62.
- Batool, S., Yasin, Z., & Batool, A. (2020). Role of social media in democratization in Pakistan: An analysis of political awareness, efficacy and participation in youth. *International Review of Social Sciences*, 8(9), 144-161.
- Cheng, Y. (2021). Setting the Agenda: Mass Media and Public Opinion. *International journal of communication (Online)*, 1712-1715.
- Dutta, P., & Rao, S. (2022). *Agenda-setting and framing effects during the 2019 Indian general elections*. *Media, Culture & Society*, 44(3), 560-578.
- Ghauri, M. J., Kausar, F., Bukhari, S. N. H., & Taj, M. (2025). Political Canvassing in the Digital Age: Analyzing the Use of Facebook by Major Political Parties in Pakistan During the 2024 General Elections. *Journal of Media Horizons*, 6(3), 1496-1511.
- Iyengar, S., & Kinder, D. R. (2024). *News that matters: Television & American opinion*. University of Chicago Press.
- Jilani, A. (2024). Analyzing the Portrayal of PTI's Legitimacy and Identity by the Pakistani Print Media During the 2024 General Elections (Doctoral dissertation, Department of Sociology, Forman Christian College (A Chartered University)).
- Kovář, J. (2020). A security threat or an economic consequence? An analysis of the news framing of the European Union's refugee crisis. *International communication gazette*, 82(6), 564-587.

- Kumar, S. (2021). *Media populism and the Indian elections: An agenda-setting perspective*. Global Media and Communication, 17(3), 295-313.
- Maurer, M. (2022). The agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media: von Maxwell E. McCombs und Donald L. Shaw (1972). In Schlüsselwerke: Theorien (in) der Kommunikationswissenschaft (pp. 187-199). Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden.
- Sheikh, M. A., Ashraf, Z., Mir, B., & Akhtar, S. (2024). Mediatization's Impact on News Media Trust and Credibility: A Comprehensive Analysis of Viewer Perceptions. International Journal of Social Science Archives (IJSSA), 7(2).
- Varughese, A. M. (2024). Faith Revival in Kerala: The 2019 Parliamentary Election and Beyond. In Hindu Nationalism in South India (pp. 62-85). Routledge.
- Vos, T. P., & McCombs, M. (2019). *The continuing power of gatekeeping in the age of social media*. Journal of Communication, 69(5), 582-601.
- Warrich, H. U. R., Ashfaq, M., & Rehman, S. U. (2020). Conglomerates in Pakistani Media Industry: Exploring the Effects of Non-Journalistic Ownership of Media Companies. Global Regional Review, 1, 151-159.
- Yusuf, H. (2022). *Sensationalism and political bias in Pakistani newsrooms: The erosion of journalistic ethics*. Media Asia, 49(1), 47-59.