

MEDIA OWNERSHIP, REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT, AND LAND  
CONVERSION IN PAKISTAN: A REVIEW OF POWER, URBAN  
EXPANSION, AND ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE

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**Abstract**

The increasing climate vulnerability in Pakistan is also accompanied by an accelerating and mostly unregulated conversion of agricultural and peri-urban areas to private housing societies. The paper reviews the intersection of media ownership concentration and real-estate interests on the basis of political economy, agenda setting, framing theory, and urban political ecology. It has been analyzed that the phenomenon of cross-ownership creates strong incentives of market withdrawal and encouragement of housing projects and silencing of prudent ecological reporting, making the conversion of land to be normalized and thereby restricting the ability of the populace to examine pollution hazards with critical attention. Investigative reports, regulatory records, and examples of cases show how the promotional discourse of the modern way of life and construction of the modern world is trying to conceal the ecological expenses of deforestation, sealing soil, disappearance of farmlands, and higher flooding risks, especially with the 2022 flood disaster. The review reasons that the alliances of these media with real-estates, which lead to regulatory capture, deteriorate journalistic independence and environmental governance. It concludes, that to combat the ecological risks in Pakistan, structural reforms, such as full disclosure of ownership, conflict-of-interest policies, and enhancement of independent environmental and media control mechanisms are important.

**INTRODUCTION**

Pakistan is among the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world that has recently become exposed to disastrous floods, rising temperatures, along with rising levels of cloud bursts and flash floods which taken together, have begun to expose large masses of the populace to displacement and loss (National Disaster Management Authority [NDMA], 2022; World Bank Post-Disaster Needs

Assessment, 2022). These climate shocks intersect with a rapid process of urban expansion: peri urban and rural agricultural lands are being converted into gated housing societies, often at the expense of tree cover, wetlands and riverine buffers that formerly reduced flood risk and moderated local climate (Saqib et al., 2024; Arslan, 2022). [afpak.boell.org](http://afpak.boell.org)+3 [ndma.gov.pk](http://ndma.gov.pk)+3 [thedocs.worldbank.org](http://thedocs.worldbank.org)+3

At the same time, the media environment in Pakistan demonstrates high rates of concentration and cross-ownership, and a number of large media conglomerates are currently vertically integrated with commercial operations incorporating real-estate projects and developer affiliates; this concentration brings about tangible conflict of interest which frames what is reported and what is omitted (Reporters Without Borders & Freedom Network, 2019; Raza, Saeed, & Ali, 2022; Maqbool, 2021). Practically, there are certain influential or powerful media owners or media groups that are publicly interconnected with high-profile housing projects (such as those related to large-scale development companies, like Blue World Group, and popular developers, like Bahria Town and Park View City), which illustrates how media ownership structures obscure the division between newsrooms and private money), demonstrating how ownership patterns blur newsrooms' separation from private capital (Blue Group, n.d.; Dawn reporting on Bahria Town and Park View City). Dawn+5rsf.org+5ojcmt.net+5

This review argues that in Pakistan the ownership patterns in Pakistan have created a structural incentive in favour of facilitating private housing development and silencing or marginalization of environmental news coverage in favour of the same, and collectively through policy and regulatory failures and media failures, to enhance the flood and climate risk in the urbanising regions. The rest of the paper builds up this argument on the basis of political-economy and media-effects structures, empirical case mapping and evidence on environmental effects and governance failures. rsf.org+1

Theoretical framework  
Political-economy approaches to the media focuses on the idea that editorial decision-making is determined by ownership and revenue imperative, and in this situation, when new organisations are integrated into larger corporate networks, content may serve not only to inform publics but also to reproduce the economic interests of owners (Maqbool, 2021). This model describes the actual motivation behind commercial interests and cross-sector ownership to make news sources have the real-estate projects appear as the symbol of

development and to play down the ecological price. file.pide.org.pk

The use of the agenda-setting theory would help us here since it demonstrates how the media set the priorities in the minds of people: what the media emphasize becomes what the public and policy makers think about, and what the media do not emphasize loses its political importance (McCombs & Shaw, classic framing literature summarized in MOM/RSF analyses). Agenda-silencing an extension of an agenda-setting is not only the coverage but also the systematic lack of coverage, in contexts of concentrated ownership, silencing can be organizationally produced rather than accidental (Reporters Without Borders & Freedom Network, 2019). rsf.org+1

Framing theory of exemplifying these perspectives is the presentation of how mediated present development within interpretive lenses of "modern development", "model city living", or investment opportunity which dashes economic advantage and lifestyle yearning in the foreground and ecological destruction and social displacement in the background. The ownership incentives are converted to public meaning through the mechanisms of framing (metaphor, selection of source, imagery) and therefore the housing projects are framed as a progress story instead of a contentious land-use change (Entman; framing syntheses in the communication literature; Maqbool 2021 situates Pakistani talk-show priorities and content). Dawn+1

Lastly, the politics of urban space and Urban political ecology, elite-capture theories demonstrate that urban space is a product of power: decisions on land use, zoning, and infrastructure reflect elite negotiations and clientelist bargains, and they often parlor urban poor districts and ecological systems outside with environmental costs. In cases where the media elites are also the land developers, the same networks that inform news narratives can also determine the results of planning and regulation outcomes structurally reinforced loop of power, profit and policy capture. The example of Pakistani (Bahria, Park View, Blue World examples) shows the influence of elite interests on the urban structure and the outcome of governance. Dawn+1

## Historical evolution of media ownership in Pakistan

In Pakistan dramatic growth in the number of privately operated channels and electronic sources occurred since the liberalization of electronic media in the early 2000s, but, at the same time, this proliferation coincided with increasing concentration where a small set of groups capture large audience shares across television, print and digital domains (Reporters Without Borders & Freedom Network, 2019).

It is found by the increase in cross-media ownership as channels pursued more predictable sources of revenue advertising of real-estate developments is particularly profitable source of revenue in the Pakistani market, which encourages vertical integration and diversification in to non-media sectors. PIDE's analysis of the electronic media economy documents these structural incentives (Maqbool, 2021), while empirical surveys of journalists and audiences find persistent concerns about concentration and declining trust in editorial independence (Raza et al., 2022).  
rsf.org+2file.pide.org.pk+2

Over the last decade the political economy of mediations shifted more as proprietors expanded their portfolios in the spheres of education, banking and real estate ventures, generating the high margin and political power. These developments made new rationales around the newsroom restraint of issues threatening the other interests of the owners; reporting on illegal and conversion, cutdown sites in forest and regulatory anomalies and irregularities in regulatory process have a direct impact on the associated business lines and reputation capital. The outcome is in a media sector in which commercial logic and editorial judgment are loosely coupled.  
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## Mapping the media-real-estate nexus(cases and mechanisms)


A number of high-profile examples indicate how the owners of the media or their group affiliates are tied to large-scale housing development. Blue World News Media/Blue Group publicly lists Suno News and other media ventures alongside the Blue World City development, demonstrating vertical integration between media and real - estate promotion (Blue Group, n.d.; Blue World City, n.d.). On the same note, Bahria Towns have been repeatedly reported to be involved in collusion allegations and land transfers that have been disputed, showing the level of operation of private developers and networks of those in high places that will not be questioned by law enforcement, developer claims, and media reporting (Dawn investigative reporting; NAB probes reported in Dawn). Park View City and its contours (including legal scrutiny around riverine land and RUDA/Jurisdictional disputes involving Aleem Khan) provide another example of contested development where political

actors, developer claims, and media narratives intersect. These cases illustrate the mechanisms (owner statements, promotional programming, advertising, sponsored content) through which media can function as marketing platforms for development while minimizing critical scrutiny.  
Dawn+3bluegroupofcompanies.com+3youtube.com+3

Close mapping of editorial and advertising flows, ownership relations reveal patterns:(1) extensive paid promotion of projects across channels and online, (2) event coverage and lifestyle programming that normalizes gated-society life and (3) little investigative journalism as to land titles, environmental impact, or eviction where owner interests are involved. Combined, these factors prove that media make a lot of conspiracies in creating.

Table shows a few examples of media outlets, their owners and the housing societies they own

Media outlet/ Owner	Linked project (developer)	Evidence (link +type)	What the evidences hows	APA citation (for in-text)
Blue Group/ Suno News (Blue Group)/ Saad Nazir	Blue World City	Suno News Urdu story about Blue World City consortium bidding (article). sunonews.tv <a href="https://sunonews.tv/urdu/pakistan/1730367748-6905">https://sunonews.tv/urdu/pakistan/1730367748-6905</a> (news item)	Corporate news content linking Suno/Blue Group activities and public promotion of Blue World City; demonstrates vertical integration and promotional coverage in Urdu.	(Blue Group of Companies, n.d.)
(Blue Group of Companies, n.d.)	Blue World City	Blue World City official site (project promo). The World Bank Docs <a href="https://blueworldcity.com/">https://blueworldcity.com/</a> (developer site)	Developer's official marketing and promotional materials (used by media to create advertorial content).	(Blue World City, n.d.)
Suno News (events) / Blue World	Blue World City	YouTube: Blue World City / Suno co-hosted public events (video). YouTube <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXaLlDqmo4Y">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kXaLlDqmo4Y</a> (video)	Video showing event sponsorship/promotion where Suno/Blue-related media appear with developer messaging – direct advertorial-style evidence.	Blue Group of Companies, n.d.)

<p>NuqtaDigital/ Malik Riaz</p>	<p>BahriaTown (multiple projects)</p>	<p>Dawn investigative reporting on Bahria Town governance/land controversies. dawn.com <a href="https://www.dawn.com/news/1823529">https://www.dawn.com/news/1823529</a></p>	<p>Investigative reporting documenting alleged illegal transfers, governance problems, and the scale of Bahria's projects – evidentiary basis for governance claims.</p>	<p>(Khan, 2019 / Dawn, 2024)</p>
<p>ARY/ARY Laguna promotional content/ Salman Iqbal</p>	<p>ARY Laguna (DHA City / Laguna project)</p>	<p>ARY Laguna official promo pages / YouTube channel. arylaguna.com+ 1 <a href="https://arylaguna.com/">https://arylaguna.com/</a> ; <a href="https://www.youtube.com/@arylaguna">https://www.youtube.com/@arylaguna</a></p> 	<p>Official promotional content showing media- brand tied promotional material for an aspirational housing project; useful for showing advertorial framing.</p>	<p>(ARY Laguna, n.d.)</p>

**Consequences for journalism**

An obvious impact is a loss of a separate environmental beat in most Pakistani newsrooms as editorial managers are implicitly and explicitly pressured against doing in-depth reporting that might jeopardize commercial interests. When media outlets rely on lucrative advertising and owner investment in real estates, editorial managers are not only pressured not to do in-depth reporting but also implicitly and explicitly so such reporting would undermine commercial interests (Raza, Saeed, & Ali, 2022)

Stories of deforestation, a form of illegal conversion of agricultural land or ineffective environmental protection usually have low coverage, or the story is told in a manner that prefigures the positive impact of development. ojcmnt.net

The media coverage of the 2022 floods was widely criticized both as missing sustained, locally- based reporting, and due to the tendency to drop attention once the immediate news cycle has finished, as was

the case with many news outlets, who opted to report on humanitarian response instead of continuing their investigative efforts to determine the underlying causes of the natural disaster, including land conversion, deforestation and blocked drainage (Media Matters Pakistan analysis; Commonwealth analysis; MDPI framing analysis). These coverage dynamics suggest a combined effect of ownership structure and news priorities to generate less pressure on environmental governance reforms towards the electorate.

mediamatters.pk+2commonwealth.sas.ac.uk+2 Promotional language: modern living promotion and luxury amenities construction culture abroad effect is the manufacturing of consent to construction culture and the promotion of the same in news features, advertorials and social media construct a common narrative that houses cultures necessitate large-scale conversion of farmland and floodplains. bluegroupofcompanies.com+1

### Environmental impacts of real-estate expansion in Pakistan

Turning farmland into housing societies is a direct contributor to food-security risks. Multiple analyses and

commentaries demonstrate that already Pakistan has lost considerable acreage of fertile lands to housing development, and scholars have predicted that a further loss to housing development will require Pakistan to increase food imports and deter the livelihoods of rural residents (Arslan, 2022; Saqib et al., 2024). These papers report the degree and motivators of conversion speculation, high returns of developers, and weaken enforcement, which jointly threaten long-term agricultural capacity

afpak.boell.org+1  
At the city level, sealing of the soil and replacement of the vegetated surface with impervious concrete enhance heat-retention (urban heat islands) and decrease infiltration, exacerbating both heatwave and flood risks. Remote-sensing and land-cover studies of Pakistani cities measure the rapid growth of the built-up areas and related thermal anomalies associated with unplanned urban growth (remote-sensing case studies and Land Use Policy findings). The government and technical briefs associate amplified impermeability to deepen floods in urban areas, which has a direct technical pathway between land conversion and disaster vulnerability (NDMA brief; Land Use Policy). sciencedirect.com+1

In addition to this, clearing of the sites by deforestation, wetlands and river buffers removal to support development undermine landscape resilience. A large biodiversity destruction and multiplied climate risks are the effects of large-scale, unregulated housing growth, which is investigated and reported by journalists and regulators of other projects like Bahria Town, with allegedly irregular transfer of land, cutting down of trees, and encroachment of wetlands (Dawn investigative reports; NAB probe coverage). These impacts multiply climate risks and degrade biodiversity.Dawn+1

### Regulatory capture and governance failure

The legal and institutional record shows repeated instances where regulatory processes have been contested, reversed, or circumvented. Official lists of

illegal housing schemes and court rulings (RUDA, LDA, CDA notifications) indicate that many societies operate in ambiguous legal spaces while receiving, at times, retrospective regularization or political protection (RUDA lists; Dawn reporting on Park View legal controversies). High - level accountability investigations and media reports document alleged collusion between developers, local officials and political elites, and international press has chronicled how elite real-estate actors use legal and political leverage to consolidate assets patterns consistent with regulatory capture. ruda.gov.pk+2Dawn+2

Where the owners of media or their political supporters are the subject of investigation, these results are different: some legal investigations are initiated ( NAB inquiries ), but they are not consistently enforced, and the coverage of such investigations is usually packaged in a way that puts the emphasis on foregrounds of procedure or politics instead of environmental harms. The exposure of recent cross-border accountability practices by finance implies the transnational aspects of elite real-estate networks and the boundaries of local regulation without political will. Dawn

### Discussion

The facts gathered in this review indicate an organizational connection between centralized media ownership, real-estate growth, and environmental destruction in Pakistan. The concentration and cross-ownership of media creates incentives and abilities to encourage the development of housing and silence any alternative environmental voices; mega-conversion of land then increases climate vulnerability by conversion of permeable surfaces, drainage capacity and natural buffers. The recent 2022 floods and evaluations of this event serve as the prime illustration of how land-use choices and governmental failures contribute to the development of disasters instead of them being purely natural occurrences (World Bank PDNA; NDMA sitreps). thedocs.worldbank.org+1

This dynamic creates feedback loops: promotional coverage normalizes conversion; normalization lowers political will for enforcement; weakened enforcement enables further conversion ultimately producing greater exposure to climate risk and

undermining long-term ecological and food security. Addressing these interlinked problems therefore requires policy measures that go beyond journalistic reform alone: robust conflict-of-interest rules, transparent ownership disclosures, stricter enforcement of land-use and environmental laws, and independent media oversight mechanisms are all necessary to break the loop.rsrf.org+1

### Conclusion

Media ownership that intersects with real-estate development is not merely a question of newsroom ethics; it is a structural force that shapes urban form and environmental governance in Pakistan. The evidence reviewed here ownership mappings, case reporting on Bahria and Park View, land-conversion studies, NDMA/PDNA flood assessments, and analyses of media coverage patterns together show how concentrated media power can contribute to the normalization of ecological destruction and to failures in environmental governance. Until media ownership transparency, anti-conflict regulations, and environmental enforcement are strengthened, Pakistan will remain vulnerable to disasters compounded by the very development narratives that many media outlets help to amplify. This review calls for cross-sector reforms and for future research that systematically maps ownership → coverage → policy outcomes with multimodal content analysis, longitudinal governance tracing, and regional case studies. ndma.gov.pk+3rsf.org+3Dawn+3

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