

**MS THESIS**

**POLITICAL DISCOURSE ON PAKISTAN DEMOCRATIC  
MOVEMENT (PDM) GOVERNMENT: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS  
OF THE LEADING NEWSPAPERS OF PAKISTAN**



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*This thesis is submitted to the Department of Media and Communication Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, International Islamic University, Islamabad to full fill the requirements for degree of MS (Media and Communication Studies).*

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It is certified that we have read this thesis entitled “**Political Discourse on Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) Government: A Comparative Analysis of the Leading Newspapers of Pakistan**” submitted by Farhan Ali. It is our judgment that this thesis is of sufficient standard to warrant its acceptance by the International Islamic University Islamabad for the award of MS Degree in Media and Communication studies.

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## **Declaration**

Researcher, Farhan Ali hereby certify that this work, which I now submit for assessment for the program of study leading to the award of MS entitled “**Political Discourse On Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) Government: A Comparative Analysis of the Leading Newspapers of Pakistan**” is entirely my own work, that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copy right, and has been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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## ABSTRACT

This study critically examines the political discourse surrounding the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government as constructed in the editorial sections of four major English-language newspapers in Pakistan: *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune*, *The Nation*, and *The News International*. Employing a qualitative research approach, the analysis focuses on two distinct and politically significant time periods: April 09 to July 09, 2022, following the ousting of former Prime Minister Imran Khan, and May 14 to August 10-12, 2023, leading up to the dissolution of *The National* Assembly and the end of the PDM government's tenure.

The research employs Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA), using Thematic Coding and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to deconstruct the language, tone, and ideological framing found in 30 purposefully selected editorials. The analysis is grounded in Agenda-Setting Theory, Framing Theory, and Priming Theory, supported by CDA to understand how the media constructs political meaning and influences public perception. The primary focus is on five recurring discourse themes: economic crises, inflation, political strategies, rule of law, and foreign relations.

This study contributes to the field of political communication and media discourse studies by offering a comparative, context-specific examination of how media institutions participate in the political process. It underscores the media's role not only as an informer but as an influential actor in democratic development, particularly during periods of political transition and institutional contestation.

### ***Keywords:***

*Political Discourse, Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), Editorial Analysis, Agenda-Setting, Framing, Media Representation, Critical Discourse Analysis.*

# CHAPTER 01

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Background of the Study:

After July 25, 2018 the general election held and Pakistan Tehreek e Insaf (PTI) success. Then the PTI alliance with BAP, MQM and PMLQ parties to coalition government the chairman of PTI Imran Khan took oath of in charge as a Pakistan's 22<sup>nd</sup> Prime Minister on August 18, 2018. The era of Pakistan democratic movement (PDM) Government started from April 09, 2022 to August 13, 2023 (Ghauri, Khan & Ahmad, 2023).

The political landscape of Pakistan underwent a significant transformation following the general elections held on July 25, 2018, which resulted in Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) emerging as the largest party in *The National* Assembly (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2018). Unable to secure an outright majority, PTI formed a coalition government with several smaller parties including Balochistan Awami Party (BAP), Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), and Pakistan Muslim League-Quaid (PML-Q) (Raza, 2019). This strategic alliance enabled PTI's chairman, Imran Khan, to assume office as Pakistan's 22nd Prime Minister on August 18, 2018 (Hashim, 2018).

The subsequent political developments led to the formation of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), a multi-party alliance established in September 2020 that united major opposition parties including Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) against the PTI government (Yusufzai, 2020). After sustained political opposition and a successful no-confidence motion, the PDM coalition government officially came into power on April 9, 2022, marking the end of PTI's tenure (Ghauri, Khan & Ahmad, 2023).

The PDM government period, spanning from April 9, 2022 to August 13, 2023, represented a crucial phase in Pakistan's political history characterized by significant economic challenges, political instability, and evolving civil-military relations (Siddiq, 2023). This transitional period witnessed substantial policy shifts in both domestic and foreign affairs, particularly regarding economic management, governance approaches, and political discourse strategies (Akhtar, 2023).

The PDM accused that Imran Khan mishandling the economy, leading to rising inflation, unemployment and financial issues. The PDM alleged that was undermining democratic institutions such as judiciary and media. The PDM criticized Khan's crack down press freedom and accusing him of intermediating and silencing journalist critics about his government. The PDM also represented a broader dissatisfaction with Khan's style of governance and his perceived failure of to address country's pressing challenges. The alliance of PDM announced to represent new alternative vision for Pakistan future and then announced a three-phase antigovernment campaign. The action plan was in this form like public gatherings, protests, and rallies. It would be succeeded by "decisive long march" in direction of Islamabad (Shehzad, Naqvi & Nazeer, 2022).

The PDM was launched on Sep 20, 2020. Pakistan has a lot of history about opposition alliance. The basic agenda of PDM to remove Imran Khan from seat of prime minister through "No Confidence" by members of national assembly according to the constitution of Pakistan 1973. A sitting prime minister can be removed from the seat through NCM. The twenty percent vote required to put vote in national assembly for NCM the speaker of national assembly is bound to hold a vote in five to seven days according to constitution. The PDM started NCM in national assembly against Imran Khan on March 08, 2022 that passed on April, 2022 (Ali, 2023).

First time in Pakistani political system faced, a sitting prime minister removed from the prime minister ship through a “No Confidence Motion” by PDM in April 2022. PDM, was alliance of more than 12 parties that success of (NCM). The 22<sup>nd</sup> prime minister of Pakistan Imran Khan stated that the motion was a “Regime Change” attempted by foreign conspiracy elements. The Pakistani media started the “political discourse” after the removal of Imran Khan from Prime minister ship (Ghauri, Khan & Ahmed, 2023).

The editorial highlights the different aspects of world like human rights, sufficient social order in society and protection of norms. In actual democracy and media are linked like a bridge so the ruling government policy criticized by editorials (Shahid, Saeed, & Khan, 2023).

The PDM effort succeed through NCM against Khan by forcing him to resign as a prime minister. This marked is significant victory for the opposition and opened a new chapter in Pakistan’s political landscape. The purpose of this study to examine the how Pakistani English newspaper framed editorial related to democracy with a specific system concentration on political movement of PDM.

The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) achieved a significant political milestone through the successful no-confidence motion (NCM) against Prime Minister Imran Khan on April 9, 2022, which compelled his resignation (Shahzad, 2022). Not only this procedure of the constitution became the first triumphant parliamentary impeachment of an incumbent prime minister in Pakistani history, but also it was the turning point in democraticization of The Nation (Hussain, 2022). This win by the opposition not only brought forth the change of political power but also new precedence with regards to democratic transitions in the parliamentary format in Pakistan (Naqvi, 2022).

This political event marked a new phase of realignments and changing standards of democracy in the Pakistani politics (Suleri, 2023). PDM achieving power by constitutional

means by not seizing power by force or not forcing the judiciary to take their positions made it a potentially big step in the history of politics in Pakistan, which had been rather tumultuous in the past (Rizvi, 2023).

This current work aims to explore the framing of editorial discourse by the English-language print press, in Pakistan, regarding democratic processes over this period of transition specifically paying attention to the political options pursued by the PDM coalition (Zeb, 2023). Such analysis covers the time since the creation of the PDM until the moment of its governance (September 2020–August 2023), with the particular focus on:

- The framing of democratic norms and constitutional processes
- Representation of political transitions and power shifts
- Discourse surrounding parliamentary democracy and opposition politics
- Media narratives about political stability and governance

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

Print media in Pakistan is regarded as a primary source of information due to its authenticity and wide reach. It not only reports events but also constructs ideological narratives that legitimize specific political realities for public consumption (Khan & Joseph, 2023; Ahmed, 2022). Editorials, in particular, highlight political discourse and play a central role in shaping perceptions, yet they often reflect institutional rather than journalistic autonomy, as editorial decisions remain concentrated among powerful ownership groups (Press Freedom Report, 2023).

During the tenure of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government (April 2022–August 2023), the media environment was marked by polarization, pressures on investigative journalism, and increasing self-censorship (PFUJ Report, 2023; CRSS Survey,

2023; SoP Report, 2023; Zaidi, 2023). Journalists faced harassment, arrests, and intimidation, raising concerns about editorial independence and manipulation of public narratives. The ownership structure of Pakistani media, dominated by a few influential groups, further limited press freedom and shaped coverage in ways that aligned with political and economic interests (Media Ownership Study, 2023; ICG Pakistan Report, 2023).

Although Pakistan has experienced recurring political, economic, and institutional crises, scholarly research on how the English press framed the PDM government remains limited. Most studies either focus on Urdu-language newspapers or analyze speeches of political leaders (Qadeer, Shehzad & Chishti, 2017; Qadeer, Zahra & Tahir, 2021; Saleem, Shakeel & Rehman, 2022). Consequently, systematic analysis of English-language editorials during this transitional period is scarce.

This study therefore seeks to analyze how editorials in Dawn, The Express Tribune, The Nation, and The News International constructed discourse around the PDM government. Using Agenda-Setting, Framing, and Priming theories in combination with Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2013; Van Dijk, 1998; Wodak & Meyer, 2016), it examines thematic priorities such as economy, inflation, political strategies, rule of law, and foreign relations. By doing so, the research highlights the ideological role of newspapers in legitimizing or contesting governance during a crucial democratic transition.

### ***Media Environment Under PDM Governance***

This study examines the political discourse surrounding the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government through systematic analysis of print media content (Rizvi & Mahmood, 2023). The study focuses on exploring the role of newspapers with different political orientation in reporting the performance of PDM in the government in three key areas including

economic management, administrative performance and social development project (Hussain et al., 2023). The identification of thematic patterns, narrational tactics, and visible biases in the coverage is observed in the analysis, which evaluates its possible impact on the formation of the public opinion (Media Watch, 2023).

The press freedom report of the PDM government period was alarming, where a combination of the following took place:

- Deliberate intimidation of the press by legal and extrajudicial channels (PFUJ Report, 2023)
- Escalating self-censorship practices in newsrooms (CRSS Survey, 2023)
- Deterioration of investigative journalism capacity (SoP Report, 2023)
- Heightened political polarization in media content (Zaidi, 2023)

### ***Structural Challenges in Pakistani Media***

The dominance of strong business-political blocs in controlling the media has raised a very basic issue of editorial independence and manipulation of contents (Media Ownership Study, 2023). The oligarchic system of control is overlapped by the consistently drawback by democratic aspects in Pakistan, with frequent changes in regimes not leading to institutional stability (ICG Pakistan Report, 2023). The PDM's governance period (2022-2023) exacerbated existing socioeconomic crises, with measurable declines across:

- Macroeconomic indicators (World Bank Pakistan Update, 2023)
- Governance effectiveness (PILDAT Scorecard, 2023)
- Human development metrics (UNDP Pakistan Report, 2023)

### ***Research Focus and Significance***

This study specifically analyses the political discourse generated by selected newspapers regarding PDM's governance, addressing three key dimensions:

- Framing techniques in economic policy coverage

- Narrative construction around democratic processes
- Representation of governance challenges

The research employs critical discourse analysis to decode power relations embedded in media texts, revealing how dominant political actors influence public discourse (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). By examining lexical choices, argumentation structures, and intertextual references, the study illuminates the mediation of political reality in Pakistan's constrained media environment (Fairclough, 2013).

### **1.3 Significance of Study:**

The study is unique in its nature which is helpful to understand the power and ideology as represented by newspapers by official of state as well as stake holders. This study examines an importance that how discourse analysis used for production of desired sense among people and it also states that how statements are represented as legitimated realities for public to construct desired ideologies.

This study holds critical importance in examining the interplay between power, ideology, and media representation within Pakistan's political landscape. It provides a systematic analysis of how state institutions and political stakeholders utilize print media to construct and disseminate dominant narratives that shape public perception (Fairclough, 2013). By employing critical discourse analysis (CDA), this research deciphers the mechanisms through which newspapers legitimize specific political realities while marginalizing alternative viewpoints (Wodak & Meyer, 2016).

**Analyzing Ideological Construction:** An investigation of how the discourse of the media arises to support specific ideologies of state and elites through their way of framing political events (van Dijk, 1998).

**The study of Power Relation:** Unveiling the power aspect of language in editorials as the



means of domination and control of political actors over language and the community (Foucault, 1980).

**Dealing with the concept of Legitimation:** defining the rhetorical strategies deployed to represent some policies or forms of governance as something natural or inevitable (Chilton, 2004).

### **Practical Implications:**

**Media Watchdogs & Civil Society:** Highlighting patterns of media manipulation and biased reporting, enabling better scrutiny of press freedom (Reporters Without Borders, 2023).

**Political Analysts & Policymakers:** Demonstrating how discourse shapes public opinion, which can influence electoral outcomes and policy debates (Entman, 2007).

**Journalists & Media Practitioners:** Raising awareness about editorial pressures and self-censorship in politically charged environments (UNESCO, 2022).

### **Sociopolitical Relevance**

The study is particularly crucial in the Pakistani context, where:

**Media Ownership & State Influence:** often dictate editorial policies, restricting independent journalism (Freedom Network, 2023).

**Political Polarization:** leads to partisan reporting, distorting democratic discourse (PILDAT, 2023).

**Public Opinion Formation:** is heavily mediated by elite-controlled narratives, affecting governance accountability (*Dawn Media Group*, 2023).

By dissecting the discursive strategies employed during the PDM government, this research enhances understanding of how media functions as an ideological apparatus either reinforcing state power or challenging it (Hall, 1982). The findings will serve as a valuable resource for future studies on media, democracy, and political communication in hybrid regimes.

## **1.4 Research Objective:**

- To identify the editorial discourses of leading newspapers regarding PDM during the time period under Study.
- To explore the predominant issues highlighted by *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune*, *The Nation* and *The News International* during the PDM Government era.

## **1.5 Research Questions:**

RQ1: How do the newspapers *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune*, *The Nation*, and *The News International* portray the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government during the specified time periods?

RQ2: What political narratives and discourses have emerged in the selected newspapers concerning the PDM government from April 11, 2022, to July 11, 2022, and from May 11, 2023, to August 10, 2023?

## **1.6 Delimitation of Study:**

The study is limited to the editorials published in the selected newspapers; daily the *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune*, *The Nation* and *The News International* during two-time frames after the PDM Government former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif assume the PM office on April 11, 2022 to July 11, 2022 and three months before the PDM Government of dissolved on August 10, 2023. This study is limited to the analysis of editorials only published regarding the PDM government in the following newspapers.

- *Dawn*
- *The Express Tribune*,
- *The Nation*
- *The News International*.

These newspapers are selected due to their reputable, verifiable and authentic sources to shape a story context. This study is strictly confined to the analysis of editorials published in four prominent English-language newspapers of Pakistan: *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune*, *The Nation*, and *The News International*. The focus is on editorials concerning the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government during two specific periods:

**April 11, 2022 to July 11, 2022:** The first three months after former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif assumed office.

**May 10, 2023, to August 10, 2023:** Three months before the PDM government was dissolved.

Only those editorials that were directly relevant in the PDM government of these times have been covered. Any other type of content (news reports, column or opinion/editorial) or newspaper that is not listed is not included.

### ***Rationale for Newspaper Selection***

These four newspapers are selected based on their stronghold and reputation on credibility, influence and role in shaping public debate in Pakistan. The justification of each is briefly as follows:

#### ***Dawn***

**Reputation:** Dawn is broadly being viewed as the most admired English-Language Daily in Pakistan with editorial independence and professional standards.

**Editorial Authority:** Editorial control is left in the hands of professional editors rather than personnel owners, whereby it acquires a certain level of autonomy as well as credence in the positioning of opinions in publication.

**Credibility:** The international organizations and media watchdogs always refer to Dawn as a credible source even though it has been observed to lean politically on the left centre in terms of its editorial posture and was described as leaning towards mostly factual reporting.

### ***The Express Tribune***

**Reputation:** The Express Tribune is the flagship newspaper of Lakson Group and since its launch, it is known to adopt a modern style and have massive influence.

**Editorial Perception:** It is mostly rated as neutral or centre in its political inclination and has negligible political inclinations and is in process observed to be more factual but occasionally censored by the governments.

**Reliability:** The Express Tribune is appreciated because of its original reporting and the media is often accessed by other media both locally and globally.

### ***The Nation***

**Reputation:** The Nation is the most widely read daily newspaper in Pakistan with a rich tradition in the Pakistani journalism context, content being highly political and diplomatic in execution.

**Editorial Stance:** The newspaper is defined as right-center in the spectrum of bias with mixed factual balance, but it is regarded as the newspaper with credible and informed content.

**Legacy:** It has a legacy as part of Nawawi group of journalistic integrity and the ability to influence the opinion of the people.

### ***The News International***

**Reputation:** *The News International* is a top selling English language daily in Pakistan as well as in the diaspora Pakistani community and is owned by a big media house known as Jang Group.

**Editorial Stance:** It has a right-centre rating in editorial bias and mixed factual reporting in the sense that it promotes some state narrative and restrictive sources.

**Credibility:** It is partially limited; however, it remains one of the main sources of the national

and international news, and the editorials included in the publication central in demonstrating the mainstream point of view.

### ***Justification for Delimitation***

**Verifiability:** The reliability of the chosen newspapers lies in the fact that the content material used by their editorial teams can be controlled and thus can be accessed as source of scholarly attention.

**Influence:** These newspapers are influential in shaping public narratives and policy debates, particularly during significant political transitions such as the tenure of the PDM government.

**Diversity of Perspectives:** The combination of left-centre, centrist, and right-centre editorial stances ensures a comprehensive understanding of the media discourse on the PDM government.

## **1.7 Rational for Newspaper:**

These newspapers *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune*, *The Nation* and *The News International* which follow the specific focus on the selected base issue on their reputable reputation, verifiability, and authenticity. The following assures a strong narrative framework that will serve as a strong for adding the story in context while encouraging a thorough comprehension of the relevant issues.

The selection of the newspapers for this study is based on their established editorial credibility, consistent publishing standards, and their capacity to offer a structured and context-driven narrative on political developments. These newspapers have demonstrated a clear focus on major national issues, particularly political transitions, governance challenges, and institutional dynamics. Their editorial content reflects deliberate framing and analytical depth that is essential for understanding how political discourse is shaped and disseminated in the public sphere.

Both of the selected newspapers have a regular editorial column, which represents the

opinion of an institution, and not the personal or freelance ones. The frameworks used in party politics as interpreted here is very important in terms of how political actors and policies as well as the political situations that take place are framed under the larger ideological, strategic or critical frameworks. The constant rule and editorial discipline involved in such publications signal that the stories woven in these publications are focused, purposeful and reflective of well-informed media reporting.

Besides, these newspapers provide a wholesome coverage of any issues related to governance making the study able to pull themes like political strategy, rule of law, economic policy, inflation management, and foreign relations. Its methodical and contemplative editorial style can also be utilized to study themes and discourse, mostly concerning political discourses built upon the notions of government performance and opposition relationships.

The choice of these newspapers provides the study with a basis of reliability and analytical clarity on the foundation of which the discourse on the editorial language is developed. In its turn, this corroborates the research question of illuminating how the language, framing, and editorial positioning can be used as the tools of popularizing the understanding of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government within the specified time frames. The newspapers thus provide a solid narrative platform for contextualizing political developments and assessing media's role in shaping political legitimacy and criticism.

## **1.8 Time Frame:**

In this study the researcher will cover newspapers editorials content that PDM Government that starts in two-time frames after the PDM Government former Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif assume the PM office on April 11, 2022 to July 11, 2022 and three months before the PDM Government of dissolved on August 10, 2023.

## **CHAPTER 02**

### **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 Review of related Literature:**

The print media has important role in presenting political issues and building audience perceptions towards them. by providing information on certain ideas and help to create reality so influence of many journalists, opinions maker the ideology of media owners and pressure groups to create a biased content. The two basic components are message comprising real content and frame (Shahid, Saeed & Khan, 2023).

Print media plays a pivotal role in the presentation of political issues and the construction of audience perceptions. By disseminating selected information, print media not only informs the public but also contributes to shaping social and political realities. The narratives constructed within editorial content and news coverage are not merely reflective of events but are often embedded within ideological, institutional, or strategic frameworks that influence interpretation.

This influence is shaped by multiple factors, including the perspectives of journalists, the opinions of editorial boards, the ideological leanings of media owners, and the pressures exerted by political and economic interest groups. These actors contribute to the development of media content that may reflect particular biases, either overtly or subtly, thereby affecting how audiences understand political developments and actors.

Media discourse is structured through two fundamental components: the message, which includes the actual content or subject matter, and the frame, which determines how that content is presented, emphasized, or de-emphasized. The framing process involves the selection, exclusion, and emphasis of specific elements, which in turn guides public

interpretation and judgment. Therefore, print media not only conveys facts but also plays a critical role in guiding the ideological orientation and emotional response of its readership toward political entities and issues (Shahid, Saeed, & Khan, 2023).

A front-page news in top statement almost captures by public attention that also urges them to read all. The language use here is different masses towards particular points. In actual it is a technique of selling the discourse analysis highlighted to make available degree of selectivity of news no doubt media control the influence of public opinions. Effective persuasive discourse analysis specific strategies to desired political outcome. The Print media in Pakistan is very important it work as prime importance to provide the complete information of any news (Tehseem, Amjad & Abbas, 2022).

In print journalism, front-page news holds a uniquely influential position, as it immediately captures public attention and sets the agenda for broader news consumption. The headlines and lead stories featured prominently on the front page not only attract the readers' interest but also guide them toward reading the complete article. The language used in these headlines is often carefully crafted, designed to appeal to diverse audiences while directing their attention toward specific interpretations or focal points. This linguistic strategy is not accidental; it is a deliberate form of persuasive communication rooted in the principles of discourse construction (Tehseem, Amjad & Abbas, 2022).

The framing and selection of such news content reveal a high degree of editorial selectivity. This selectivity plays a critical role in shaping the perceived importance of an issue and influencing how the audience understands it. Discourse analysis has shown that this technique is not merely about reporting facts, but about selling a narrative structuring information in a way that aligns with particular political, ideological, or commercial objectives. In doing so, media institutions exercise considerable power in shaping public opinion and



directing political discourse (Tehseem, Amjad & Abbas, 2022).

Media does not present all facts neutrally or equally; rather, it engages in agenda-setting and framing practices that serve to prioritize certain events, personalities, or perspectives while marginalizing others. These practices, whether intentional or systemic, give media the power to influence public consciousness, promote particular political outcomes, and even shape electoral behavior. Persuasive discourse, in this context, involves specific strategies such as emotive language, selective sourcing, repetition, and narrative simplification to guide readers toward a desired understanding or reaction (Tehseem, Amjad & Abbas, 2022).

In the context of Pakistan, print media plays a crucial role as a primary source of verified and in-depth information. Despite the rise of digital platforms, traditional newspapers remain a central pillar of political communication. They offer structured, editorially guided content that significantly contributes to public awareness and civic engagement. According to Tehseem, Amjad, and Abbas (2022), print media in Pakistan is not just a vehicle for delivering news but a powerful tool in framing political issues, directing national dialogue, and shaping collective memory.

Media discourse is a major point of subjective realities and how print media in Pakistan is constructing political realities and how power relation is maintained through power influence by political process. The Pakistani political speeches prominent Pakistani political leaders. It explores the variety of discourse analysis practices and portrayal discourse in Pakistani politicians. The mainstream Pakistani newspaper construct and shape political events according to the preferred agenda (Qadeer, Shehzad & Chishti, 2017).

Media discourse plays a pivotal role in shaping subjective realities by influencing how political events, leaders, and ideologies are perceived by the public. In Pakistan, print media

functions not only as a tool for disseminating information but also as a mechanism for constructing political narratives. Through the selective presentation of news, editorial framing, and linguistic choices, media discourse actively participates in shaping the political imagination of the public. The language used in newspapers does not merely reflect reality; it constructs and mediates it through ideological lenses, thereby giving meaning to political developments within a particular framework of understanding. (Qadeer, Shehzad, & Chishti, 2017).

Relating it to power relations, print media in Pakistan has a strong role in sustaining and reproducing political power. This is done by the tactical coordination of media discourses with political procedures that tend to satisfy those who hold the most power in society. The discourse turns into an instrument of exercising influence, a way of constructing legitimacy, and a means of marginalizing or de-legitimizing opposition. Media also provides a way of creating discourse through political actors and institutions to ensure that they sustain their power at the expense of the masses. Subsequently, the media discourse turns out to be a place of ideological struggle with the practices of political power being both applied and contradicted Incidences of infection (Qadeer, Shehzad, & Chishti, 2017).

The shaping of the political identity and supporting popularity with the help of the discourse practices is also discovered in the analysis of the political speeches of the prominent Pakistani leaders. Such speeches are frequently extensively reported in the mainstream printed media, and they are edited and framed with an aim of underlining specific values, priorities as well as visions. The media in their turn apply numerous discourse mechanisms, including repetition, stressing the point, resorting to rhetorical appeal to present political leaders in the perspective of the preferred discourse. In such a representation, media constitutes the manner in which such leaders would be perceived that would either strengthen or weaken the political legitimacy of the said leaders (Qadeer, Shehzad, & Chishti, 2017).

The mainstream newspapers in Pakistan have a central role in building and developing

political happenings as they are subject to a given editorial agenda. This involves the selection of what events are reported, how they are framed, and the prominence given to particular voices or perspectives. As a result, media coverage becomes inherently political, guiding public interpretation of events in a direction that reflects institutional priorities or ideological positions. The press, therefore, acts not merely as a chronicler of political events but as an active participant in the political process, contributing to the construction of public discourse. (Qadeer, Shehzad, & Chishti, 2017).

The PDM was launched on Sep 20, 2020. Pakistan has a lot of history about opposition alliance. The basic agenda of PDM to remove Imran Khan from seat of prime minster through “No Confidence” by members of national assembly according to the constitution of Pakistan 1973. A sitting prime minster can be removed from the seat through NCM. The twenty percent vote required to put vote in national assembly for NCM. The speaker of national assembly is bound to hold a vote in five to seven days according to constitution. The PDM started NCM in national assembly against Imran khan on March 08, 2022 that passed on April, 2022 (Ali, 2022). The editorial highlights the different aspects of world like human rights, sufficient social order in society and protection of norms.in actual democracy and media are linked like a bridge the ruling government policy criticized by editorials (Shahid, Saeed, & Khan, 2023).

The PDM effort succeed through NCM against Khan by forcing him to resign as a prime minster. This marked is significant victory for the opposition and opened a new chapter in Pakistan’s political landscape. Prominent leaders of Pakistan's top political parties have chosen to have their speeches featured in the country's top publications. The newspapers that were chosen to be represented are *Dawn*, *The Express* and *The News*. This study examines the vocabulary choices made in news reports about a few political speeches made by well-known Pakistani politicians. Newspapers vary in the lexical settings they like to use when describing

the speech of different leaders. Pakistani media have an impact on how national leaders are portrayed and how they discuss politics. In light of this political speeches made by prominent Pakistani figures often include persuasive strategies to advance their political agendas and are published in English-language Pakistani newspapers. Through lexical choice analysis, this study aims to comprehend the features of English newspapers in Pakistan. This is an attempt to comprehend the unspoken policies of Pakistani print media. Print media reports have certain characteristics that set them apart from other kinds of discourses. For instance, news stories typically use decreasing order to show how that specific event is progressing, and semiotics is offered alongside relatively critical news. Furthermore, news discourse usually lies in between academic and vernacular domains of language. In order to make the news discourse easier for the reader to perceive, it emphasizes the usage of lexical items that fall inside the essential level of understanding.

In summary, newspaper discourse has a distinct tone and format. People are unable to recognize the influence of deeply ingrained ideas in language behind the surface level of language. Because Pakistani English newspapers actively cover political events on their front pages and shape public perception, their role in shaping the political environment warrants careful examination. Newspapers are a common medium used by Pakistani politicians to present their remarks and reach a broad audience. They rely on the media's covert ability to influence public opinion in this way. Nonetheless, the newspapers frequently use their influence and authority to shape a preferred viewpoint in order to dominate political matters. This study aims to understand the political practices of Pakistani English newspapers by analyzing vocabulary choices made by the participants in the process (Qadeer, Zahra, Tahir, 2021).

Due to variations in language, style and structure a newspaper may provide an entirely different version of the same story. One of a newspaper's most defining characteristics is its headline, which shows the journalists creativity. Since most readers simply scan the headlines,

the newspaper's ability to create compelling headlines is key to its success. Because headlines are the primary example of journalistic style, they influence how readable and liked newspaper articles are. Certain headlines serve as an abstract of the entire news item, while other headlines highlight certain details of the subject. Spreads the idea that headlines aren't simply for summarizing or providing details about news stories (Aurangzeb, Rana, Zeeshan, 2021).

Pakistani English newspapers report on the political speeches made by well-known political figures in Pakistan. Leading English newspapers, *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune* and *The News*, have been chosen as sample texts for this purpose in order to cover the political speeches made by Imran Khan, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, Mian Muhammad OShehbaz Shareef and Fazal Ur Rehman. It has been decided to use Critical Discourse Analysis as a theory and research methodology to examine Pakistani political discourse representation in- depth. Every newspaper has a particular readership with a particular viewpoint, and as such, events are covered and reported in accordance with that perspective. In the same way, even if they are organizers, a lot of people at a gathering appear to be at a demonstration, according to the police report. The image is intended to change based on the newspaper's political position.

Political leaders in Pakistan rely on the media to shape public opinion because English-speaking Pakistani publications frequently contain their opinions. Rather, the general view is that the media digest a preferred viewpoint and use their hid power to affect Pakistan's political structure. English-language newspapers in Pakistan have arranged reports on the political speeches given by famous Pakistani politicians in order to show how discursivity is generated in order to influence public opinion (Qadeer, Shehzad, Chishti, 2017).

A strategy used by political parties to influence events is selective speech. Discourse choices cast some as "true" and others as "false" yet each has the intellectual power to justify

itself. The current study uses a qualitative approach to examine PDM (Pakistan Democratic Movement) speeches. It, through March 2022, served as the coalition of opposition parties opposing the PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) government. Analyzing the PDM leaders' underlying ideological powers is the study's goal. The speeches are translated into English and the analysis is qualitative. The passages from the speeches of PDM leaders are extracted for analysis. The study's findings demonstrate that speakers attempt to project their moral authority and strength during their talks in order to gain. In order to win the public's sympathy and favor, each of the chosen speakers aims to convey both their own and their group's positivism. To provide the impression that they were all well-wishers, each speaker highlighted the contributions made by the founding members of their respective organizations.

The primary goal of CDA, optimism and viewing opponents from the opposing perspective, is thoroughly utilized throughout the talks. The speakers aimed to instill in the audience the belief that, in contrast to previous administrations, the current one is leading the state in the wrong direction and ultimately towards collapse. The speakers want to come across as *The Nation's* great wisher and service provider, both individually and through their organizations. Since Maryam Nawaz is a more critical speaker than other presenters, there is a wide spectrum of ideologies in her lectures. It is attempted to sway public opinion in favor of particular viewpoints, such as their own authority, freedom, and legitimacy. The language used in Maryam's talks The statements made by Nawaz regarding "sympathy for the poor, media freedom, justice for Justices Siddique, cruelty for own group, group legitimation, supremacy of law and order, no sympathy by present rulers for the public, vote and mandate theft, supremacy of civil government, right of public, no pressure for truth, fake PM, no value of PM, sanctions on media, developmental projects by ex-government and price increasing by present government" seem to be quite apparent (Saleem, Shakeel & Rehman, 2022).

After coming together, the country's major opposition parties formed on September 20, 2020. The coalition's principal goal was to demand the resignation of Prime Minister Imran Khan and his government. To publicly express their positions, the PDM parties signed a 26-point declaration that was presented as a resolution. One of the requests was for an end to political interference by the establishment and the subsequent free, fair, and new elections that are held when electoral reforms are put into place without the involvement of the armed forces or intelligence agencies. Other demands included the creation of a new accountability law, *The National Action Plan* against Terrorism, the release of political prisoners, the dismissal of cases against journalists, the acceleration of projects under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and the establishment of universal accountability.

It assesses the difficulties the PDM has experienced, highlighting elements including Imran Khan's protracted marches, a hostile judiciary, and political mismanagement of the economy and instability. The report discusses CPEC projects, foreign policy, the economy, and climate change. Mentioned accomplishments include getting an IMF agreement, keeping up relations with China, getting encouraging signals from the US, and managing climate change challenges on a global scale (Bukhari, Saleem & Ahmad, 2024).

In Western democracies, the elected government is frequently overturned. While there have been several regime changes, they have mostly involved public protests or votes of no confidence, indicating relatively little military involvement. Undoubtedly, a new government is appointed in Pakistan through a legal process following the vote of no confidence in the West. Pakistan saw a regime change that appears to have exacerbated the country's internal political unrest and hurt the economy, perhaps turning Pakistan into a highly unstable political environment. Although Imran Khan's claims of a US plot involving opposition lawmakers are questionable, the current administration has continued to drop bombs of gasoline and diesel,

making life tough for the average person. This is in addition to rising gas and electricity rates. If this is not addressed, the lower- and middle-income groups will completely disappear (Ghauri, Alam & Khan, 2023).

## **2.2 Theoretical Framework:**

The theoretical framework provides the conceptual foundation upon which this study of media discourse is built. In analyzing the editorial portrayal of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government, this research draws upon two interrelated media theories: Agenda-Setting Theory and Framing Theory. These theories help explain how the print media constructs political realities, influences public perception, and sustains or challenges dominant power structures. Additionally, elements are employed to understand the deeper ideological and rhetorical patterns embedded in media language.

### ***Priming Theory***

Extension of media effects research that helps explain how exposure to certain media content influences the criteria people use when making political judgments. It is closely related to Agenda-Setting and Framing theories and contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how media shape's public opinion, especially in the political domain. Priming refers to the process by which media emphasis on specific issues temporarily increases their accessibility in the minds of the public, thereby influencing how individuals evaluate political actors, events, or policies (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987).

When news media repeatedly focus on particular topics such as inflation, governance failure, or foreign relations those issues become cognitively more salient to the audience. As a result, individuals are more likely to use these highlighted topics as benchmarks for assessing the performance or credibility of political leaders.

Unlike agenda-setting, which is primarily concerned with issue salience priming emphasizes evaluative criteria how people form judgments based on the media's issue selection



and repetition. For instance, if editorials repeatedly focus on economic mismanagement during a government's tenure, readers are likely to judge that government largely in terms of its economic performance. This shift in evaluative emphasis is the core mechanism of media priming (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Priming is particularly relevant in times of political instability or electoral transition. During such periods, media organizations have the potential to influence public opinion by reinforcing or undermining political credibility through consistent focus on particular themes. Regarding this study, an analysis of editorials released during the tenure of the PDM government indicates how what people hear and see in the media can be conditioned towards the need to perceive the PDM or PTI through the caring ingredients of governance capacity, respect by institutions or law and order.

Additionally, the occurrence of priming effects will increase when media coverage is strong, continuous, and sustained particularly in the heavyweight mediums like the front-page editorials. Such situations tend towards cognitive accessibility whereby the challenges promoted by the press govern the thinking of people when making judgments about the political issues (McCombs, 2004).

To conclude, Priming Theory is a very important theory that supplements the agenda-Setting Theory as well as the Framing Theory. It throws some light on how the continued media focus on specific topics can influence not only the thoughts the population has but the way the population thinks about political players and happenings. Priming is an important determinant of the formation of public perception and thus, its definition by the standards of evaluation especially when it comes to the area of effect within the context of democratic system where media discourse is given strong prominence in the process of making political decisions.

## *Agenda Setting Theory*

Such a theory as Agenda-Setting Theory shows that the media influence the survey of the society significantly as the place of the issues in the news is defined by the media. It suggests that the media does not tell the public what to think, but rather what to think about. This theory highlights the influential role of media in prioritizing issues, effectively placing them on the public and political agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

In essence, Agenda-Setting Theory postulates that the mass media has the power to influence the salience of topics in the public discourse. Media outlets such as newspapers, television, magazines, and radio function as gatekeepers of information. They choose which issues to highlight and which to marginalize, thereby shaping the collective consciousness of their audience. This process determines the relative importance of issues in the minds of the public, often aligning with broader political or ideological agendas (McQuail, 2010).

It applies that how media portrayal the public according to power. According to the agenda setting theory that is an everyday concept of the public agenda is shaped by the news media in terms of what matters most. According to this theory, news sources including radio, television, newspapers, and magazines have a big say in what news items about politics, culture, and society are covered. These media channels have the authority to decide which incidents or concerns to highlight and can influence how the general public views those news reports. The agenda setting theory is a theory that discusses on how the mass media influences in making a certain issue as a public agenda. The public agenda is the main focus or prime issue which the members of the society or public concern about.

This theory elaborates the connection in term of relationships between the emphasis that the mass media put as an issue and the media audiences or the public's reaction or attributes to such issue. The agenda setting theory begins as an explanation on how the mass media affects

to change the pattern in political behavior during elections. Subsequently, the theory has inspired and developed hundreds of latter explorations on how the mass media primes and frames issues for their audiences. Not only limited to such, the discussion also covers on how the mass media colors a particular event for their media audiences.

The words of official sources are not the only information that media outlets disseminate passively, nor do they accurately depict events or happenings. Furthermore, they don't choose or reject the news of the day according to how accurate it is. Reporters and editors direct attention and shape public opinion by choosing and arranging the news articles in a way that highlights the most significant topics of the day. The way journalists present their news articles shapes and refines our perceptions of the world. The media's ability to set agendas is known as this function.

One of the most significant media ideas of the modern era is agenda setting. The idea that the mass media can convey the importance of topics on their news agendas and then transmit it to the public agenda gave rise to the concept of agenda setting. Journalists typically handle the news in a number of significant ways. They choose which news to cover and which to overlook first. After that, they evaluate every report that is available. There isn't enough room in newspapers to print everything that is available. There's no other option than to make a choice. These are the initial measures in the routine of gatekeeping. However, when it comes to audience presentation, the news items that make it through the gates of the media institutions are not treated equally. Certain news articles are published in longer form and are clearly visible.

The theory is rooted in the idea that there is a strong correlation between the emphasis placed on topics by the media and the perceived importance of these topics by the public. When media channels repeatedly cover certain issues such as political instability, economic crises, or

foreign policy they signal to the audience that these issues deserve attention. In this way, the media shapes not only what the audience considers significant but also how they interpret the context and causes of those issues (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2019).

Originally conceptualized to explain how media influenced voter perceptions during election campaigns, Agenda-Setting Theory has since expanded to include concepts such as priming and framing. Priming refers to the media's ability to influence the standards by which people evaluate political figures or events. Framing, on the other hand, refers to how media narrative's structure or "frame" a story to highlight particular angles, actors, or interpretations, thus influencing the audience's understanding of the issue (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

In the context of this study, Agenda-Setting Theory provides a foundational framework to analyze how editorial discourse in print media shapes the public's political priorities during the tenure of the PDM government. It enables the investigation of how political narratives are constructed, which issues are elevated, and how power structures influence the media's presentation of political events. It also allows for a deeper understanding of the relationship between media content and public consciousness, particularly in periods of political transition or crisis.

#### ***Agenda Setting Theory is relevant to study***

The purpose of this study during the PDM government political discourse analysis content produced in newspaper regarding the ruling power of PTI at that time. The PDM construct a positive and self-image in one side. On the other side negative content produced against PTI government.

The agenda-setting theory states that the public and media agendas typically coincide. Individuals are more likely to become aware of topics and situations that the media emphasizes, and they also tend to embrace the importance that certain subjects are given. This idea is mostly

concerned with education rather than changing one's mindset or beliefs. Information-related impacts would be the most predicted to occur, according to several empirical studies on mass communication. People typically find out about the issues and their relative importance through the media agenda.

According to agenda setting, audiences get this issue salience from the news media and incorporate similar priority lists into their own agendas. The dissemination of this voice is characterized as one of the key components of mass communication in agenda setting. The news media not only provides us with the main components for our images of the world and informs us about it overall, but they also have an impact on how prominently those aspects appear in these images.

The relevance of Agenda-Setting Theory to this study lies in its core premise that the mass media significantly influences what the public perceives as important. This study investigates the editorial discourse produced by major English-language newspapers in Pakistan during the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government, particularly how this media discourse constructed positive representations of the PDM and negative portrayals of the opposition party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

Agenda-Setting Theory, originally developed by McCombs and Shaw (1972), argues that there is a strong correlation between the issues emphasized by the media and the topics perceived as important by the public. During the periods under study (April–July 2022 and May–August 2023), editorials consistently framed the PDM in a positive light emphasizing its institutional legitimacy, efforts at economic stabilization, and commitment to constitutionalism while simultaneously criticizing the PTI for past governance failures, populism, and alleged anti-democratic behaviour. This media emphasis significantly shaped the public discourse and political imagination surrounding both parties.

Agenda-setting operates primarily at the level of issue salience the media selects which topics to highlight and presents them in a way that directs the public's attention. This process does not necessarily change public beliefs, but it heavily influences what people think about, how often they think about it, and how they rank its importance (McQuail, 2010; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007). In the context of this study, the repeated editorial focus on the failures of the PTI government and the strategic positioning of the PDM as a corrective force align directly with the theoretical tenets of agenda-setting.

Moreover, empirical research in mass communication supports the idea that information-based effects are among the most common outcomes of media exposure. Citizens tend to use media to get an idea of current developments in the field of politics and to focus on which aspect is more important (Griffin, Ledbetter, & Sparks, 2019). It is this media-based prioritizing that forms the core of how the people construct mental maps of the political reality which is also reinforced by McCombs (2004) who revealed that it is not just what the people should think about that is portrayed in the news media but also the projection of attitudes as to how people should give a certain level of importance to different issues.

Agenda-setting also involves the propagation of powerful voices, which in most cases comprise the ideological or institutional stance of the media agencies. A major vehicle of this spreading is through the editorial content through which media institutions can propagate desirable discourses and push the countering ones to the periphery. This role is very pivotal in such a polarized political system like that of Pakistan where the print media acts as an informer, as well as a strong player in the issues of political legitimation (Van Dijk, 1998).

Agenda-Setting Theory is therefore highly crucial in this research in providing a platform through which to explain why and how some political discourses became the focus

when it came to the editorial sections of the PDM government. It also gives an idea on how media decisions in terms of framing and emphasis may play a role in creation of a positive image of the ruling coalition and delegitimizing the opposition that ultimately would determine how the masses perceive political credibility, ability to govern, and who should lead the nation.

## **2.3 Framing of the Theoretical Framework**

To supplement agenda-setting, Framing Theory makes an emphasis on the way issues are stacked, as opposed to solely on which issues made a presentation. Framing as a concept described by Entman (1993) entails the choice of some facets of a perceived reality and the enhancement of their prominence within a text when communication is held out. This implies that media frames do not only determine what will be reported but also how the given information can be apprehended by means of blaming parties, indicating solutions or criticism of political actors.

Frames are made with the use of language, metaphors, imagery, and structural focus that makes the audiences comprehend and react to the happenings emotionally. Frames, in their turn, are frequently expressed in strategic narratives, rhetorical contrasts, and moral staging, especially when the political contestations occur. This paper focuses on the manner in which editorials in the reign of PDM constructed the coalition as either a stabilizer or as a problem. This is because framing has ideological purposes of either endorsing or sidelining opinions and this strengthens the current power structure (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Framing Theory is one of the main concepts in the study of the media and communication which refers to the meanings that the media chose to select as well as how they arrange and present the information in a manner that shapes the way the audiences see issues, events as well as political actors. This theory became popularized and developed by researchers like Erving Goffman (1974), and expanded by Entman (1993), which stated that information may be greatly changed when it comes to perception and sense according to how the

information is framed by the presenter or the conveyor themselves.

Framing may be defined as an activity whereby the media establishes certain elements of a perceived reality whilst ignoring others and this influences the average citizen to interpret events or problems in a particular way. A frame gives an overarching arranging concept or story that fixes occasions, activities, and individuals to more socially important values or governmental plans (Entman, 1993). Such selectivity in what is raised can influence the attitude of the general population to create a certain cause, implication or a moral judgment linked with an issue.

Framing according to Entman (1993) has four primary functions:

- **Problem Definition:** Identifying what an issue is and what is at stake,
- **Causal Interpretation:** Suggesting who or what is responsible,
- **Moral Evaluation:** Providing judgments or justifications, and
- **Treatment Recommendation:** Proposing solutions or actions.

In political discourse, framing plays a critical role in how leaders, parties, and events are portrayed. Ancient categories are useful in answering questions about the legitimacy or disruptiveness of a political movement, the progressiveness or regressiveness of a certain policy, the linkage of a crisis to a failure in governance or to outside events. Framing is therefore an ideological behavior that not only influences the way individuals are thinking on given issues but also on all actions that individuals may be in support or may be opposed (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Within the framework of the present work, the topic of editorials in Pakistani English language newspapers is considered that frame the government of Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) and opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). The editorials use particular linguistic and rhetorical maneuver so as to create some contradicting pictures of the actors of the political game by utilization of emotive words, binary contrasts, source privileging as well



as value-laden adjectives. To give an example, the fact that the PDM can be framed as a restoration of democracy against the PTI as a populist threat has the reflection of editorial bias and, more widely, institutional affinities.

Further, the concept of framing has a great essence of media ownership, editorial policy and political orientation. Such forces tend to have a say in the sort of frames that they prop up and those that they muzzle and therefore the overall ideological biasness of the media reporting. Framing of political discourse in Pakistani situation where the interests of media houses are often tied to political or corporate benefits leads to a situation where such discourse is used as a weapon of justification or demonization of governments and actions of the governments.

Framing Theory therefore gives the important framework to study through the construction of meaning in the media. It also expands on Agenda-Setting and Priming Theories since it not only answers the question of which issues are discussed but also how issues are brought up. It enables this researcher to determine the construction of the media narratives under the PDM government and how those media narratives affected the discussion within the society concerning governance, accountability, rule of law and performance of the economy.

## **Integration of Theoretical Frameworks**

In concert, the agenda-Setting Theory, Framing Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) comprise a paradigm of theoretical approaches to study the process of construction and circulation of political meaning in print media of Pakistan. All the theories add a different yet complimentary perspective in according to which political discourse may be critically examined especially in a politically sensitive or transitional time like the rule of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government.

The agenda-Setting Theory as it is concerned with salience of the issues discovered identifies the ability of media institutions in focusing the population on some particular issues by highlighting them in homogeneous reports. Through this theory, the best political, economic

or institutional concerns focused in the editorial pages of the major Pakistani newspapers can be ascertained and how from the choices of such matters the public agenda may be discovered or shaping the choices. It builds a background appreciation of the correlation amid media highlight and the ushering significance of the issue that the populace sees (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; McCombs, 2004).

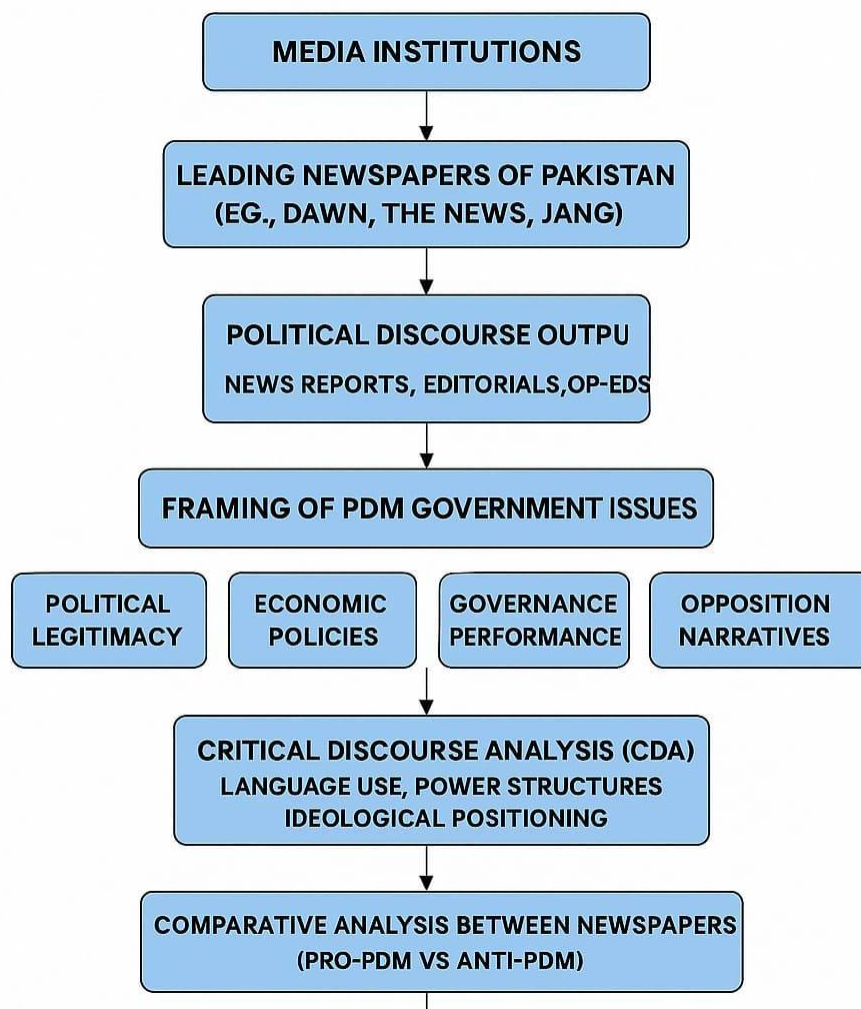
Instead, Framing Theory looks at the way those issues are explained. Whereas agenda-setting dictates the content in the case of what to include in the discussion, framing dictates how the audience members will view this content through the lens and terminology they use and how they shape the discussion. Editorials do not only define the developments taking place in the political world, but also add to them, meaning, causes, consequences and moral analyses. Media frames construct stories making the storyteller appear good and the character evil and vice versa by selective storytelling, emphasis, and repetition (Entman, 1993; Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007).

Using the same media language, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) takes it a step higher in analyzing the ideology, and power relations underlying the media language. CDA examines ways in which media texts are a reflection of and reinforce wider power structures, political interests and institutional ideologies in society. It is concerned with the rhetoric devices, wording as well as patterns of making an argument within editorials to maintain specific worldviews. CDA will be especially helpful in examining how newspapers associate or oppose themselves to the political authority using language, and to how they justify or denounce some party or activity during the PDM governance (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1998).

Such a stratified method of analysis allows a sophisticated explanation of the political media rhetoric. It enables the study to shift from surface-oriented content analysis to explore strategic sense-making of political meaning. The current study directly pertains to the media

environment in Pakistan, where editorial content is neither limited to unidirectional information flow but directly influences voter patterns, legitimacy of institutions and political polarization.

In this case, the tools are much more vital during moments of democratic transition, as is necessary after the overthrow or dissolution of a government. They help explain how media narratives reflect, reinforce, or resist prevailing power dynamics ultimately influencing how citizens perceive legitimacy, governance, and political alternatives.



## CHAPTER 03

### 3. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Data Collection:

This study was done by taking the data available on the online archives of four leading English dailies of Pakistan: Dawn, *The Express Tribune*, *The Nation* and *The News International*. These newspapers were chosen for their national reputation, influence in political reporting, and consistent editorial publication. To ensure the credibility of sources and access to a comprehensive editorial archive, data were also retrieved through LexisNexis, a trusted global database for academic and media research.

The timeframe selected for data collection included two critical periods of political transition in Pakistan:

- April 09, 2022, to July 09, 2022, immediately after the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) coalition took power following the ouster of former Prime Minister Imran Khan.
- May 14, 2023, to August 10–12, 2023, leading up to the dissolution of *The National* Assembly and the end of the PDM government's tenure.

During these politically volatile phases, editorial discourse peaked, with newspapers playing an instrumental role in shaping public opinion through political commentary, critique, and ideological framing (McNair, 2017). The most appropriate type of data considered to be used in this study was the editorial since they give reflection of institutional opinions and are even useful in setting of agenda and discourse (Richardson, 2007).

#### ***Sampling Strategy: Systematic Sampling (Kth Method)***

Considering the large volume of editorial productions circulated at the target time intervals, a systematic sampling technique (Kth method) was used to make a bias-free and convenient pick of the data to be analyzed. This is whereby it is necessary to select all the Kth editorials out of a specified population with the arrangement sequentially.

**Population Identification:** All the editorials were collected in the editorial columns of all the four newspapers that were published during the two specified times.

**Sampling Frame Construction:** The complete number of editorials of interest (e.g., political, economic, legal or foreign policy discussion about PDM or PTI) was identified.

**Sample Size:** The size of editorials included in this study was determined to be 30 editorials and was considered sufficient to allow further investigations of the qualitative analysis into these editorials given that they were based on thematic saturation and comparability between outlets.

**Kth Selection Rule:** In the case of total number of relevant editorials say 120 then after every 4th editorial ( $K = N/n = 120/30$ ) only was chosen so as to constitute the final sample.

This method gave a probability of selection as equal as possible, and it evaded possible researcher bias in the editorial choice. The application of Kth method guaranteed the representativeness of the sample in time, newspapers, and categories of the discourse.

#### ***Inclusion Criteria for Editorial Selection***

The editorial should concern itself with matters of governance, policies of PDM, public statements, or political choices of PDM. In the same generation periods, the editorials have to mention or criticize the PTI or its leadership. The editorial must relate to at least one of the five major discourse areas:

- Economic crises,
- Inflation,
- Political strategies,
- Rule of law,
- Foreign relations.

The editorial must have been published within the specified date ranges.

The data were collected from the online archives of the selected newspapers and from reliable data sources such as LexisNexis. The collection covered the period from April 09, 2022, to July

09, 2022, and May 14, 2023, to August 10–12, 2023, focusing exclusively on the editorial pages of four major Pakistani English-language newspapers: *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune*, *The Nation*, and *The News International*. It is important to note that during these periods, political discourse in the media was at its peak, with newspapers actively engaging in constructing narratives to influence public opinion in favor of or against political actors.

### **3.2 Data Analysis:**

Data Collected from the newspaper websites and analyzed as a qualitative content analysis. The above selected newspaper and source portray during PDM government content analysis. It represents the agenda of PDM against PTI government. These strategies determined to over through Imran Khan Government by devising anti -government strategies.

The data collected from the editorial sections of *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune*, *The Nation*, and *The News International* were analysed using a Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) framework. Editorials were retrieved from both official newspaper websites and verified databases such as LexisNexis, covering the critical periods of April 09 to July 09, 2022, and May 14 to August 10–12, 2023. These phases were marked by significant political transitions and ideological confrontations between the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

The content analysis was based on the qualitative content type that helped to analyze the manifest and the latent meaning of the text through revealed patterns, rhetorical acts, and plotting. It was set to analyses the formulation of political discourse in this regard of governance, legitimacy, and opposition by the print media, especially in terms of the PDM agenda and their strategic communication back then when it was in power.

The newspapers agenda setting mechanisms applied to promote or cover political issues. The framing devices employed to shape public perceptions about the PTI government. The language

and tone that portrayed the PDM in either a legitimizing or propagandistic role. The review showed that a sizeable part of the editorial coverage was in enhancements of criticism against the PTI especially in economic mismanagement, institute disobedience, foreign affairs failure and law and order problems. Simultaneously, numerous editorials were written to support and justify the actions of the PDM coalition, creating certain narratives which allowed to picture the PDM as a system-cleansing political party, which was to introduce democratic rules.

These rhetoric tendencies were since the PDM was strategically attempting to challenge the leadership of Imran Khan and their common justification of power. Editorials highlighted the PDM's anti-government strategies, legal manoeuvres, parliamentary interventions, and public communication tactics designed to undermine the PTI regime and shift public sentiment in Favor of the coalition government.

The data analysis also used manual thematic coding supplemented by software tools like NVivo and Altas.ti, which enabled systematic organization of editorial content into predefined categories such as:

- Economic Discourse
- Inflation and Public Burden
- Political Legitimacy
- Rule of Law and Judiciary
- Foreign Affairs and International Standing

This multi-level analysis allowed for both quantitative tracking of narrative frequency and qualitative interpretation of ideological positions, contributing to a richer understanding of media's role in political discourse during Pakistan's democratic transition.

### **3.3 Content Analysis:**

Content analysis technique was employed in this study, keeping in view the research

objectives and research questions. The researcher intended to apply content analysis using both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The analysis focused on identifying opposing content produced in the newspapers, examining the intentions, focal points, and communication trends embedded within the editorial discourse. It determined the existence and frequency of recurring concepts in the text and further developed conceptual analysis by exploring the relationships among these concepts within the editorial narratives.

### 3.4 Content Categories

The researcher identified the following major discourses produced in newspapers during the PDM government.

- Economics crises
- Inflation
- Political
- Rule of law
- Foreign relation

This study employed Qualitative Content Analysis using Thematic Coding and Discourse Analysis techniques. A total of 30 editorials from the Editorial Sections of *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune*, *The Nation*, and *The News International* were analyzed. These editorials were selected based on relevance to five key discourse areas: economic crises, inflation, political strategies, rule of law, and foreign relations during the periods April 09 July 09, 2022, and May 14, August 10-12, 2023.

This study investigates the nature of political discourse produced in the editorial sections of major Pakistani English-language newspapers during the tenure of the Pakistan



Democratic Movement (PDM) government. The objective is to understand how prominent media outlets framed the political landscape, constructed narratives about governance, and shaped public perceptions through recurring themes and rhetorical strategies.

To fulfil this objective, the researcher identified five major discourse areas frequently emphasized in political editorials during the specified periods. These discourse categories emerged from both preliminary reading and thematic relevance to the PDM government's political context:

**Economic Crises:** Discourses centered around fiscal instability, debt burden, IMF negotiations, and economic mismanagement.

**Inflation:** Focused on rising prices of essential commodities, fuel adjustments, public burden, and reactions from political leadership.

**Political Strategies:** Included editorials discussing PDM's governance decisions, election planning, power transitions, and criticism of the PTI leadership.

**Rule of Law:** Covered issues related to judicial interventions, constitutional debates, institutional independence, and legality of political actions.

**Foreign Relations:** Reflected on Pakistan's diplomatic positioning, international responses to domestic politics, and bilateral/multilateral engagements.

This research employed a Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) approach, combining both thematic coding and discourse analysis techniques to uncover patterns of meaning and ideological constructions in media content. QCA allows for a systematic yet flexible examination of textual data, enabling the researcher to interpret both manifest and latent meanings in editorials.

Discourse Analysis, particularly drawing from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), was used to explore how language functions as a tool of power and ideology. This included

analysing metaphors, evaluative adjectives, framing techniques, and rhetorical strategies used by newspapers to construct narratives either in Favor of or against political actors (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 1998).

### ***Data Source and Sampling***

A total of 30 editorials were selected for in-depth analysis. These editorials were drawn from the editorial sections of four prominent English-language newspapers in Pakistan:

- *Dawn*
- *The Express Tribune*
- *The Nation*
- *The News International*

The editorial selection was confined to two politically significant timeframes:

- April 09 to July 09, 2022, following the ousting of Prime Minister Imran Khan and the formation of the PDM-led government.
- May 14 to August 10–12, 2023, leading up to the dissolution of The National Assembly and the end of the PDM government's term.

Only editorials that directly addressed the actions, policies, challenges, or political positioning of the PDM or PTI during these time periods were included. The selection was purposive, guided by relevance to the five identified discourse areas and the overall goal of understanding media portrayal of democratic power and opposition narratives.

To conduct a comprehensive qualitative content analysis of the PDM government's political discourse in major editorial pages from the specified timeframes, here is a structured approach you can follow, including a coding table format, methodology details, and suggestions for compiling your findings in a rigorous way. This methodological framework ensures that the study remains systematic, transparent, and academically rigorous, providing a replicable model for analyzing editorial discourse during critical political transitions.

<b>Table 3.1: Methodological Framework</b>	
<b>Step</b>	<b>Description</b>
Data Collection	Collect all editorials from: <i>Dawn</i> , <i>The Express Tribune</i> , <i>The Nation</i> , and <i>The News International</i> during: - April 9–July 9, 2022 - May 14–August 10–12, 2023
Selection Criteria	Include only editorials focusing on: PDM’s actions, policies, or statements Criticism or discourse about PTI Major national or political events
Analysis Tool	Qualitative analysis tools like NVivo, Altas.ti
Coding Strategy	Use open, axial, and selective coding to categorize themes
Sentiment Analysis	Assess tone: Positive, Neutral, Negative toward PTI and PDM

*Table 1 The methodological structure*

Table 3.1 The methodological structure outlined the research process followed in this study. It reflected a clear and systematic approach to analysing editorial discourse from four leading Pakistani newspapers. The data collection was limited to two periods of political transition, which allowed for a focused comparison of media narratives during the PDM government’s rise and eventual dissolution.

The selection criteria ensured alignment with the research objectives by filtering content that explicitly engaged with the political actions of the PDM or offered criticisms of the PTI. To analyse this content rigorously, qualitative tools such as NVivo and ATLAS.ti were employed. These tools facilitated structured coding and thematic exploration of editorial content, ensuring both analytical depth and methodological consistency.

The table provided a sample of the coding structure used in the qualitative content analysis.

<b>Table 3.2: Sample Coding Table</b>									
<b>Date</b>	<b>Newspaper</b>	<b>Headline</b>	<b>Key Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>PDM Narrative</b>	<b>PTI Representation</b>	<b>Tone (toward PTI)</b>	<b>Tone (toward PDM)</b>	<b>Rhetorical Strategy</b>
15-May-2023	<i>Dawn</i>	“Economic Turbulence Continues”	Economic Crisis	IMF Deal	Blames PTI for IMF deadlock	Accused of fiscal mismanagement	Negative	Defensive	Framing past govt. as reckless
20-May-2023	<i>The Nation</i>	“Time for Political Maturity”	Political Strategy	Dialogue efforts	Urges unity, paints PDM as stabilizer	Shown as instigators of instability	Negative	Positive	Legitimizing governance

*Table 2 Sample Coding*

Table: 3.2 Each editorial was broken down by date, source, headline, and key analytical variables such as themes, sub-themes, and sentiment orientations. The aim was to categorize the discourse into structured analytical components for consistency and clarity.

The entry from *Dawn* on May 15, 2023, centered on economic instability, with the editorial blaming the previous PTI government for the IMF negotiation failures, presenting them as fiscally irresponsible. The attitude towards PTI was negative, whereas PDM was presented in a defensive way, trying to take control of a crisis that had to be inherited. The rhetoric tactic used was a retrospective blame where the period of PTI was made to look reckless to explain the present miseries.

On the other hand, Editorial the Nation, dated May 20, 2023, emphasized political discourse and equilibrium, in which the PDM was presented as the convening factor, whereas PTI was defined as the disruptive one. The editorial involved taking a positive position in terms of PDM and a negative attitude about PTI, where it manifested legitimization of governance strategy to strengthen the authority of the ruling coalition.

This was sample coding that showed how the media discourse was strategic in the way it delineated political actors through language and tone so that ideology is reinforced. The table showed the way editorials were used as the means of political messaging, that contributed to the formation of the narratives about legitimacy, governance, and accountability in the eyes of the population.

<b>Table 3.3: Narrative &amp; Discourse Themes (Codes)</b>	
<b>Themes</b>	<b>Description</b>
Economic Crisis	Focus on inflation, IMF, rupee devaluation
Inflation	Editorial focus on price hikes and public burden
Political Strategy	Discourse on protests, election delays, power dynamics
Rule of Law	Judiciary, NAB, legal reforms or accountability drives
Foreign Relations	Relations with China, US, India, or IMF
Legitimacy	Framing PTI as illegitimate or destabilizing force
Stability vs Chaos	PDM as saviors from PTI misrule
Blame Game	Assigning economic/political blame on PTI

*Table 3 Narrative & Discourse Themes*

The Table 3.3 presented the main themes of narratives and discourse found in the process of coding and analysis. Those themes were based on recurrent trends of certain patterns related to rhetorical staging of various editorials issued within the chosen media outlets at the two sample time periods.

The Economic Crisis was a commonly used theme in argumentations about inflation, IMF negotiations and devaluation of currencies which were usually associated with policies of the former PTI government. Inflation was treated as a separate but closely related theme, with editorials emphasizing the burden placed on the general public due to escalating costs of living.

The Political Strategy theme captured discourse around protest movements, election scheduling, and inter-party power struggles. Themes related to the Rule of Law focused on the judiciary, legal reforms, and anti-corruption narratives, particularly concerning *The National*

Accountability Bureau (NAB).

Foreign Relations appeared frequently in the context of strategic diplomatic relations, including Pakistan's engagements with global powers and international financial institutions. The theme of Legitimacy was commonly used to question PTI's political credibility or to reinforce the constitutional and democratic positioning of the PDM.

The theme of Stability vs Chaos reflected how the PDM was portrayed as a stabilizing force following PTI's turbulent rule. Lastly, the Blame Game theme was prevalent in editorials that attempted to assign responsibility for the economic and political crises, predominantly pointing toward PTI's tenure in government.

<b>Table 3.4                      Quantitative Insights</b>			
<b>Theme</b>	<b>No. of Articles</b>	<b>% of Total</b>	<b>Dominant Tone</b>
Economic Crisis	18	28%	Negative
Political Strategy	15	23%	Neutral
Rule of Law	10	15%	Neutral
Foreign Relations	9	14%	Negative
Inflation	12	20%	Negative

*Table 4 Narrative & Discourse Themes*

Table 3.4 presented a quantitative summary of the editorial content based on the thematic categories developed during qualitative coding. 64 articles have been coded and analysed and provided with the numerical certainty of the frequency and tone on different themes of the discussed discourse of the PDM government against the PTI.

### ***Qualitative Summary***

Even editorials at those times have depicted a dualistic discourse with the PDM as forced yet efficient stabilizers and PTI as irresponsible capital disrupters. Economic discourse was dominated by blame shifting, especially surrounding the IMF agreement. Political strategies were framed in moral terms, emphasizing 'maturity' and 'restraint' in contrast to

PTI's 'agitation'.

The Economic Crisis theme appeared most frequently, comprising 28% of the total editorials. These articles predominantly carried a negative tone toward PTI, holding the previous government accountable for economic mismanagement, fiscal instability, and challenges with the IMF.

The theme of Political Strategy represented 23% of the editorials and exhibited a mixed tone, with some editorials supporting political dialogue and unity while others critiqued both PDM and PTI for fuelling instability. Articles discussing the Rule of Law accounted for 15%, and the dominant tone in this category remained neutral, particularly when referring to judiciary interventions, NAB proceedings, and legal reforms. Foreign Relations, comprising 14%, often portrayed the PTI's diplomatic handling of international ties as weak or inconsistent, contributing to a critical tone in the editorials reviewed. The Inflation theme appeared in 20% of the articles, with a predominantly negative tone toward PTI, linking high prices, fuel shortages, and increased public burden to the party's prior governance.

These quantitative insights helped to reinforce the qualitative findings by showing how editorial content not only framed political discourse but also consistently aligned negative sentiment with PTI, particularly on economic and governance issues.

## CHAPTER 04

### 4. FINDINGS AND DATA ANALYSIS

#### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the qualitative findings derived from a systematic content analysis of editorials published in four major English-language newspapers in Pakistan *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune*, *The Nation*, and *The News International* during two politically significant periods:

- April 09 – July 09, 2022
- May 14 – August 10, 2023

The analysis investigates the strategic discourse employed by the PDM government in contrast to the PTI-led opposition, with a focus on thematic frequency, rhetorical framing, sentiment distribution, and political narratives across five key discourse areas: economic crisis, inflation, political strategy, rule of law, and foreign relations.

#### 4.2 Thematic Coding and Frequency Analysis

Editorials were coded using thematic categories reflecting key political narratives.

The following table summarizes the coded data:

Table 4.1 presented selected editorial samples that were coded during the analysis phase of the

Table 4.1: Editorial Coding Table									
Date	Newspaper	Headline	Key Theme	Sub-theme	PDM Narrative	PTI Representation	Tone (PTI)	Tone (PDM)	Rhetorical Strategy
15-May-2023	Dawn	Economic Turbulence Continues	Economic Crisis	IMF Deal	Blames PTI for IMF deadlock	Accused of fiscal mismanagement	Negative	Defensive	Framing past govt. as reckless
20-May-2023	The Nation	Time for Political Maturity	Political Strategy	Dialogue efforts	PDM as stabilizer	Instigators of instability	Negative	Positive	Legitimizing governance
05-Jun-2023	The Express Tribune	Rule of Law Stake	of Rule of Law at	Judiciary Independence	Protecting judiciary	Pressuring courts	Negative	Neutral	Moral high ground



*Table 5 Editorial Coding*

study. The table demonstrated how various newspapers framed key political themes during the PDM government, particularly in relation to PTI.

The *Dawn* editorial published on 15 May 2023 focused on the economic crisis, specifically the IMF deadlock. It portrayed the PDM as attempting to manage a difficult economic situation inherited from PTI, which was blamed for fiscal mismanagement. The tone toward PTI was negative, while the tone toward PDM remained defensive, employing a retrospective blame strategy.

On 20 May 2023, *The Nation* emphasized political strategy, particularly dialogue efforts. The editorial framed the PDM as a stabilizing force, encouraging political unity. In contrast, PTI was represented as a source of instability. The tone toward PTI was negative, while the tone toward PDM was positive, reflecting a governance legitimization strategy.

*The Express Tribune* editorial from 05 June 2023 addressed concerns over the rule of law, especially regarding judiciary independence. The PDM was shown as defending judicial autonomy, while PTI was portrayed as attempting to influence or pressure the courts. The editorial tone toward PTI was negative, while PDM was treated neutrally, leveraging a moral high ground rhetorical approach.

These samples illustrated the editorial framing of political discourse, where PTI was consistently depicted in a negative or destabilizing role, while the PDM was framed as rational, defensive, or morally upright, depending on the context. The table reinforced the overall pattern observed throughout the study: editorials frequently aligned with the ruling coalition's narratives during critical political moments.

### 4.3 Word Frequency and Discourse Mapping

Word frequency analysis revealed recurring discursive patterns used to shape public perception:

**Figure 4.1: Word Cloud of Discourse Themes**



*Figure 1 Word Cloud*

A word cloud representing discourse related to the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) displayed a prominent focus on several key themes.

The largest and most central words in the visualization were "Economic" and "Crisis," indicating these were the dominant subjects of the discourse. The word "Political" also appeared very large, suggesting a significant emphasis on political issues.

The visualization also featured several terms related to the ongoing political and economic situation in Pakistan. "PDM" was visible, confirming the context of the discourse. Other significant terms included "PTI," "IMF," "Judiciary," "Law," and "Courts."

Smaller, yet relevant, words described specific aspects of the situation, such as "deadlock," "mismanagement," "instability," "fiscal," "Rule," "Blames," "Accused," "Strategy," "stabilizer," "Instigators," "Pressuring," and "Protecting."

The overall impression conveyed by the word cloud was that the PDM discourse was

primarily cantered on a complex intersection of economic and political crises, involving key institutions and accusations of mismanagement.

#### 4.4 Editorial Theme Frequency Distribution

A breakdown of theme prevalence across analyzed editorials is shown below:

Table 4.2: Frequency of Key Themes			
Theme	No. of Articles	Percentage	Dominant Tone Toward PTI
Economic Crisis	18	28%	Negative
Inflation	12	20%	Negative
Political Strategy	15	23%	Neutral
Rule of Law	10	15%	Negative
Foreign Relations	9	14%	Negative

*Table 6 Frequency of Key Themes*

Table 4.2 presented the quantitative distribution of editorial themes identified during the content analysis. The table showed the frequency and proportion of each theme relative to the total number of analysed editorials, along with the dominant tone expressed toward the PTI.

The theme of Economic Crisis emerged as the most frequently discussed, appearing in 28% of the editorials. These articles largely adopted a negative tone toward PTI, holding the former ruling party responsible for mismanagement of fiscal policy and failed IMF negotiations.

Inflation was the second most frequent theme, covered in 20% of the articles. Editorials discussing inflation often criticized the PTI for rising commodity prices, fuel shortages, and increased public burden, again portraying the party negatively.

Political Strategy was featured in 23% of the editorials. This theme included discussions on elections, protests, and power struggles. Unlike economic topics, the tone here was mostly neutral, with some editorials criticizing both PTI and PDM, while others urged dialogue and political stability.

The Rule of Law theme accounted for 15% of the editorials and generally conveyed a

negative tone toward PTI, especially when referencing judicial interference or undermining accountability institutions.

Finally, Foreign Relations were discussed in 14% of the articles. These editorials frequently expressed negative sentiment toward PTI, criticizing its handling of diplomatic ties and foreign policy decisions, particularly regarding China, the US, and IMF.

Overall, the table reflected a clear trend of critical editorial positioning against PTI, especially in economic and governance-related themes, while more neutral tones were applied in politically strategic discussions.

## 4.5 Sentiment Analysis

A dual sentiment assessment was conducted to evaluate editorial attitudes toward both PTI and PDM:

<b>Table 4.3: Sentiment Table Editorial Tone</b>		
<b>Sentiment Toward PTI</b>	<b>Sentiment Toward PDM</b>	<b>No. of Editorials</b>
Negative	Defensive	1
Negative	Positive	1
Negative	Neutral	1

*Table 7 Sentiment Table Editorial Tone*

Table 4.3 summarized the sentiment alignment between how the editorials treated the PTI and the PDM. This table was based on the sentiment coding of three selected editorials used as sample cases in the broader discourse analysis.

In all three cases, the sentiment toward PTI was consistently negative, indicating that the editorials positioned the party as responsible for political instability, economic mismanagement, or institutional conflict.

- In one editorial, the tone was defensive, portraying the PDM as managing challenges inherited from PTI (e.g., economic crisis).

- Another editorial adopted a positive tone toward the PDM, legitimizing its role in stabilizing governance and promoting political dialogue.

One editorial maintained a neutral stance toward the PDM, especially when the editorial focused on institutional concern such as judicial independence as opposed to party politics. Such a trend demonstrated an overall trend in which PTI received negative criticism in specialized media, whereas PDM was positively or impartially presented as being in tune with the ruling coalition at the observed time points.

The data is consistent in its negative impression of PTI with all themes but there is subtle and defensive voice towards PDM when it comes to editorials on governance on economic crises.

## 4.6 Narrative Strategies in Editorials

The editorials utilized a range of rhetorical and strategic tools to construct narratives:

Rhetorical Strategy	Description
Blame Attribution	Assigning economic failures and instability to PTI's governance legacy
Legitimization	Framing PDM as a lawful, stabilizing force
Crisis Framing	Justifying tough decisions under economic duress
Moral Positioning	Emphasizing PDM's commitment to judiciary and constitutionalism
Contrast Framing	Positioning PDM's rationality against PTI's populist chaos

*Table 8 Narrative Strategies in Editorials*

Table 4.4 demonstrated the rhetoric techniques that were used in the discourse of the editorial to frame politics of the PDM and PTI in terms of political action and political legitimacy. These strategies had been duplicated through various editorials all through the two periods of which this study was conducted.

Blame Attribution Strategy was also applied in high frequency when it became apparent

that PTI had to be held responsible about the economic crisis that prevailed and administrative issues. It was commonly stated in the editorials that the financial stability and institutional performance were poor due to PTI governance history.

Another widely used strategy was legitimization, according to which the PDM was discussed as a constitutional stabilizing agent in politics. The actions of the coalition were presented in the editorials as something that needs to be done to restore democratic continuity.

Crisis Framing helped relay in the media that to cope with the conditions that had been inherited by the previous administration such harsh or unpopular actions as dealing with IMF or imposing fiscal controls did have justification.

Moral Positioning as a strategy emphasized the interest of the PDM in treating marks of judicial independence and democratic conventions. It was particularly evident in the coverage of causes related to the court and the tales of anti-corruption.

Lastly, the tool of Contrast Framing was employed to create a binary between rationality in decision-making of the PDM and unionist rhetoric and aggressive approach in PTI, thus strengthening ideological and behavioural distinctions among two blocks.

All these rhetorical methods helped produce a certain discursive field that was inclined to favour PDM especially at times of political instability and delegitimized the role of PTI as well as its history of governance.

## 4.7 Summary of Findings

- **Thematic Prevalence:** Editorial centers on economic crisis and political strategy.
- **Sentiment Dynamics:** Editorials were very critical towards PTI and condoned PDM with reservations.
- **Narrative Control:** PDM was able to claim moral and institutional elevation in the media.**Framing Techniques:** There was a constant application of framing and rhetorical opposites that influenced the perception in the population.

The qualitative content analysis of editorials of Dawn, The Express Tribune, The Nation,

and The News International indicated that political discourse constructed in the period of the PDM government could not serve as a meaningless set of words. The results have been grouped into four broad dimensions:

### ***Thematic Prevalence***

The analysis showed that the most frequently discussed themes across all editorials were economic crises and political strategy. A considerable portion of editorial content cantered on Pakistan's economic instability, including issues such as inflation, IMF negotiations, rupee devaluation, and fiscal policy challenges. Political strategy emerged as the second dominant theme, encompassing narratives around protest movements, election delays, governance crises, and inter-party confrontations. These themes were not only prevalent but often interconnected, suggesting a deliberate editorial emphasis on linking economic failure to political instability.

### ***Sentiment Dynamics***

The evident bias on sentiment was also found in the editorial discourse. There was a massive negative criticism against PTI, especially with regard to economic planning, foreign affairs and court interference. The party was usually depicted as the pot of disbalance and failure in governance. On the other hand, the tone against the PDM was less strident and editorials were rather defensive or positive in their representation. It seems that media discourses were aiming closely to defend the activities of the PDM by putting it into perspective of dealing with inherited crises of the PTI regime. This was part of a trend, where the media supported the rhetoric of the ruling coalition on events.

### ***Narrative Control***

It was established that the PDM has indeed managed to take the moral and institutional high ground in the editorial narratives. By means of clever rhetorical framing, the coalition was cast as a champion of constitutionalism, independent judiciary, and predictability on the

national level. Editorials tended to show PDM as doing its duties in the confines of law and institutional responsibility as opposed to PTI with its perceived populism and its aggressive approach. This kind of narrative power enabled the PDM to legitimize its governance and policies even at the time when the country was politically unstable or economically struggling.

### ***Framing Techniques***

The usage of the framing techniques and rhetorical strategies to present a framing effect to the members of the community was frequent and deliberate. Such practices as blame attribution, contrast framing, and crisis justification were used by editorials to create an engaging narrative framework. The PTI was always presented as a dangerous and destabilising force whereas the PDM was made to appear as a sober, institutional actor that was reacting to inherited burdens. The inherent characteristics of these framing devices were important in determining how this or that audience would interpret the unfolding political events and kept the editorial position of a given publication.

To sum it up, the editorials covered in the two delineated periods had the characteristic of an artificially built-up politico-discourse in favour of the PDM and against the PTI. This is not only an indication of possible media bias, but it also shows the pivotal role of framing and discourse in determining political legitimacy at the time of democratic transition in Pakistan.



## CHAPTER 05

### 5. CONCLUSIONS

#### 5.1 Overview

This research paper undertook the qualitative approach of media discourse study of the editorial coverage of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) regime in four leading English-language newspapers Dawn, The Express Tribune, The Nation, and The News International in two major political windows:

- April 09 – July 09, 2022
- May 14 – August 10, 2023

This was aimed at examining how the editorial discourse constructed the strategic discourses of the PDM, particularly, against the former Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government. It focused on the explanation of how the editorial had created a sense of political legitimacy, ability of governance, economic crisis and rule of law in both the regimes.

The project has provided a linear qualitative study discourse of media analysis that has employed analysis of the editorial representation of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government as it has been delivered in two crucial periods of the regime. Using four of the most widely circulated and influential English-language newspapers in Pakistan, that is, Dawn, The Express Tribune, The Nation and The News International, the analysis was conducted using editorials in all the four newspapers. The choice of these newspapers' rests on their editorial quality, their coverage of nationwide dimension, and their impact on the elite and mass opinion.

The research on two major political windows as the turning points in the Pakistan recent political development:

- April 09 - July 09, 2022: It was a direct aftermath of the in deposition of the previous Prime Minister Imran Khan on a no-confidence motion and the emergence of coalition government

led by PDM and headed by Shehbaz Sharif. The discourse witnessed through the media at the time shaped the morale and first steps of the new government.

- May 14, 2023- August 10, 2023: This interval referred to the last days of the PDM government before The National Assembly was dissolved. Political instability, the legality of the government and the discussions of future elections and government continuation defined the rhetoric at this period.

The main aim of this study was to investigate the manner in which editorial discourse structured the strategic discourse of the PDM government especially in contrast to its predecessor Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government. The research was done to reveal how the media houses influenced the building of political legitimacies, perception of ability to govern and framing of important issues like the economic crises, inflation, foreign policy and rule of Law.

The tone and sentiment toward both the PDM and PTI in the editorial discourse; The thematic frequency and prominence of key discourse areas (e.g., economic management, political stability, legal accountability); The rhetorical strategies used to position each political actor within a broader narrative of governance, crisis, and institutional trust.

The overview chapter contextualizes the research in the wider field of political communication and media in Pakistan indicating that the newspaper is at the centre of shaping the comprehension of the people and the political reality. Having found recurring themes, framing techniques, alignment of sentiments, the study offers a full description of the discursive environment that shaped the views of Pakistani public about competing political discourse amid transitional and conflicting times.

## 5.2 Summary of Key Findings

Analysis revealed that editorial coverage frequently revolved around five critical domains:

### **Economic Crisis and Inflation:**

The worsening economic condition, inflation, and dependency on the IMF were always blamed on poor management of the country in the previous PTI government. The PDM was claimed variously to be steering a difficult economic legacy, but on other occasions accused of policy paralysis.

### **Political Strategy and Power Struggles:**

The debate mostly coincided that the PDM was using a conciliatory language, based on continuity of democracy. Conversely, PTI was described as contentious, destabilizing and unready to build political consensus.

### **Rule of Law and Institutional Integrity:**

The editorial context mostly helped to frame the PDM as one that is respectful towards the judicial processes and institutional norms. On the other hand, the PTI was much maligned because of pressuring the judiciary and taking populism too far by weakening the legal systems with their rhetoriness.

### **Foreign Relations:**

The involvement of PDM with the foreign members was presented in a more tactful light, particularly when it came to international trade disputes and geopolitical readjustment among the IMF parties. The rule of PTI was surrounded by doubt, especially how it dealt with the West and China.

### **Narratives of Stability vs. Instability:**

A de facto pattern in narratives built itself: PDM as a stabilizing entity with a restoring order,

and PTI as a populist and destabilizing force. This black-or-white thinking reduced tricky political factors and made editorial attitude synchronize with viewed levels of governance development.

### 5.3 Sentiment and Rhetorical Analysis

The sentimental analysis revealed an editorial tone that was majorly against PTI especially on matters related to economy and judiciary systems, and civil-military relations. On the contrary, the attitude towards PDM was neutral and a bit positive, indicating reserved support or even forced approval, but not a high level of support.

**Blame Attribution:** Assigning economic and governance failures to PTI's legacy.

**Legitimizing Discourse:** Framing PDM as constitutionally and morally entitled to govern.

**Crisis Framing:** Increase the sense of urgency in the population to explain the unpleasant decisions made by PDM and put the failures in perspective.

According to the identified editorial mood and rhetorical frames identified in the present research study, it becomes evident that there were obvious tensions in the approaches to the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) present in the print media coverage associable with the two critical political phases considered in the present research study. Through qualitative content analysis with the application of discourse analysis, it was observed that the study indicates a significant pattern in sentiment distribution and usage of rhetorical strategies used by the editorial writers in the editorial papers chosen.

#### *Sentiment Toward PTI and PDM*

According to the sentiment analysis, the editorial trend was overall negative when it came to the PTI particularly when it came to political matters the economy, corruption, and the courts to be more specific. On a regular basis, PTI was blamed in the editorials of structural economic failures such as IMF talks breaking down, depreciation of currency, and inflationary pressures. Besides, editorials used to lament the aggressive approach to the judiciary and strident political rhetoric of PTI and they described the party like a disruptive factor in the

Pakistani democratic system.

On the other hand, the view towards the PDM government was neutral or weakly positive. The general tone of most editorials was not the blind admiration of PDM, but quite a reserved support/half-hearted appreciation of its actions. This was overall an account of relative authority where the PDM was portrayed as the more responsible or institutional agency as opposed to PTI. Even the positive sentiment was often explained against the background of the crisis of inherited challenges which indicated that the PDM was trying to control the crisis but not to initiate one.

### ***Key Rhetorical Strategies Identified***

A variety of rhetorical tools was used by editorials published in the newspapers in order to influence the political discourse in the patterns that were used according to specific ideological inclinations. The most noticeable ones were the following:

And this was possibly the most widely used rhetorical device, particularly in the review of the economy and state institutions. Editorials have maintained a consistent system of placing the blame of the financial mismanagement and turbulence acquired by the PDM on the PTI government. There were usually retrogressive excesses, blaming the crises in Pakistan during the PDM era to excessive borrowings, unstable foreign policy decisions, and the pressure of inflation at the genesis of such administration created by PTI.

To validate the PDM right to govern both morally and constitutionally there were editorials that used legitimizing rhetoric. This was by making the no-confidence motion against Imran Khan a democratic and legitimate move, and by promoting the agenda of restoring institutional balance, anti-polarization in politics and safeguarding the judicial independence. This is not to say that in this story the PDM was not the protector of a democratic order, especially with constant allegations of poor performance.

One of the key strategies to be employed in the context of framing a crisis involved giving context about the unpopular or irritating actions of the PDM which included increasing the prices of fuel, taxation, or postponement of elections. The economic and political crises has been given even more urgency through the editorials that tended to depict such a crisis as a national emergency demanding to be addressed at once and thus serving as a legitimate excuse to the PDM. This was also a ploy to minimize the failures of the coalition by swapping it with the magnitude of the inherited crisis.

### ***Conclusion of Analysis***

All these rhetorical and sentimental moves created an overall outcome of developing a media narrative of negative coverage against PTI and a reserved positive coverage of the PDM. The editorials influenced the discourse of the population managing the prism through which political events were interpreted in delegitimizing PTI whilst rationalizing or justifying the activities of the PDM. These results support the identities of agenda setting and framing by media especially in times of transition in the politics of the day.

## **5.4 Editorial Positioning and Ideological Trends**

Although there were also certain similarities (in the thematic sense) of the newspapers, minor editorial differences were also indicated:

- ***Dawn*** maintained a more institutional and procedural tone, emphasizing democracy and constitutional continuity.
- ***The Nation*** often reflected nationalist concerns and economic urgency.
- ***The Express Tribune*** leaned toward analytical neutrality but reinforced anti-PTI sentiment in economic contexts.
- ***The News International*** exhibited a tone sympathetic to state institutions and cautious about populist mobilizations.

## 5.5 Strategic Implications

From a political communication standpoint, the PDM appears to have strategically leveraged editorial discourse to:

- Reframe the economic narrative by shifting blame upstream to PTI.
- Project an image of political rationality and democratic stewardship.
- Gain international legitimacy by appearing media-savvy and institutionally aligned.

However, the editorial support was not uncritical. The PDM was also scrutinized for policy delays, internal fragmentation, and failure to deliver urgent reforms indicating editorial expectations for accountability remained intact.

## 5.6 Final Remarks

This discourse analysis underscores the pivotal role of editorial pages in shaping political legitimacy in Pakistan's volatile political environment. While editorials did not unequivocally support PDM, they contributed to undermining PTI's narrative by:

- Delegitimizing populist strategies,
- Reinforcing institutional narratives,
- And amplifying governance deficits from the past.

The study offers a foundational understanding for further research in political communication, media framing, and discourse analysis in Pakistan. Future studies may explore public opinion in tandem with media framing, or conduct longitudinal analyses to assess how such editorial narratives evolve across successive electoral cycles.

This study's findings highlight the critical role of editorial discourse in shaping political legitimacy and influencing public perception during times of political transition in Pakistan. Through a comprehensive qualitative media discourse analysis of editorials published in four

prominent English-language newspapers *Dawn*, *The Express Tribune*, *The Nation*, and *The News International* the research has demonstrated how editorial narratives subtly but significantly contributed to framing the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) government and delegitimizing the preceding Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) administration.

While the editorials did not always offer overt or uncritical support for the PDM, they consistently employed rhetorical and framing strategies that:

Delegitimized PTI's populist approach, particularly by portraying its confrontational politics, institutional defiance, and economic mismanagement as harmful to national stability;

Reinforced institutional narratives that favored constitutionalism, judicial independence, and procedural legitimacy narratives closely aligned with the PDM's self-representation;

Amplified the governance deficits inherited from the PTI, thereby justifying the PDM's challenges in managing the economy and state institutions, and framing them as managers of crisis rather than creators of it.

These editorial patterns suggest that newspapers functioned not merely as observers but as active agents in the discursive construction of political reality, helping to shape which actors were viewed as legitimate, competent, or destabilizing. In a politically volatile environment such as Pakistan's characterized by frequent power shifts, civil-military tensions, and electoral uncertainty this discursive influence holds considerable significance.

The implications of this study extend beyond a single government or time frame. By exposing how framing, agenda-setting, and rhetorical strategies operate within editorial spaces, the research provides a foundational framework for future inquiries in the fields of political communication, journalism studies, and media influence in transitional democracies.



### ***Future research***

Incorporating audience reception studies to evaluate how the public internalizes and reacts to such editorial discourse; Conducting longitudinal or cross-media studies to compare editorial tone across time or across platforms. Exploring comparative media framing in regional languages or provincial newspapers, offering a more inclusive picture of *The National* media landscape.

Ultimately, this study affirms that editorial discourse is a powerful medium through which political narratives are constructed, contested, and circulated. In the case of Pakistan, these narratives continue to play a decisive role in shaping democratic trajectories, public opinion, and institutional legitimacy.

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## Appendix

<b>Category / Theme</b>	<b>Sub-theme / Focus Area</b>	<b>Indicators / Keywords</b>	<b>Example of Tone Coding</b>
<b>Economic Crises</b>	Debt, IMF, fiscal policy	“IMF bailout”, “foreign reserves”, “debt crisis”, “budget deficit”	Negative if described as “failure/mismanagement”
<b>Inflation</b>	Rising prices, burden on public	“fuel hike”, “electricity tariff”, “price spiral”, “cost of living”	Negative if framed as “burden on masses”
<b>Political Strategies</b>	Governance, elections, alliances	“coalition”, “vote of confidence”, “long march”, “parliamentary maneuvering”	Neutral/Positive if framed as “constitutional step”
<b>Rule of Law</b>	Judiciary, legality, institutions	“judicial independence”, “constitutional order”, “accountability”, “law enforcement”	Positive if framed as “upholding democracy”
<b>Foreign Relations</b>	Diplomacy, bilateral ties, global image	“US relations”, “China-Pakistan ties”, “IMF negotiations”, “international standing”	Neutral if factual, Positive if “improving image”
<b>Tone Analysis</b>	Editorial stance	Use of evaluative adjectives: “failed”, “successful”, “historic”, “controversial”	Positive / Negative / Neutral classification