

Imbibing Pluralism? Analysis of Pakistan's Press

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Abstract: The article examines Pakistan's press' role in the development of democracy in the period of a military regime in 2002. It does so by analyzing the newspapers' coverage of civil society, which is the main factor in the nourishment of democracy in a country, by using content analysis technique. The article tries to find the direction of coverage given to civil society. In Pakistan, democracy is struggling because of bouts of military rule since its inception in 1947. As a side effect, media has tended to follow the military establishment and its political cohorts. Libertarian theorists say media should give space to every segment of society, whereas the proponents of Social Responsibility Model advocates that media should self-regulate with the aim to fulfill its responsibility towards society by laying emphasis on pluralism. Findings show that the press in the period under study gave supportive coverage to civil society, proving its movement towards pluralism and Social Responsibility, even under an authoritarian regime.

Keywords: Pakistan; Democracy; Authoritarianism; Press; Civil society

1. Introduction

The mass media is referred to as the fourth pillar of the state because of the power they wield and the oversight function they exercise. The media's key role in democratic governance has been recognized since the late 17th century, and remains a fundamental principle of modern-day democratic theory and practice. (Coronel, 2008, p. 3) English and American thinkers later in that century would agree with Montesquieu, recognizing the importance of the press in making officials aware of the public's discontents and allowing governments to rectify their errors (Holmes, 1991, pp. 21-65). The media in modern term is often regarded as being reflective of civic culture in a democracy. Tolerance, democratic principles and procedures are of vital importance for a sustainable democratic system. Media can play an important role in strengthening democracy by

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persistently highlighting these virtues. Media can provide people with reliable information and make them aware of different issues in the public arena.

Democracy must be exemplified in tangible Practices, routines, traditions carried out by individuals, group, and the society which can be pertinent for varied circumstances. Such practices give meanings to the ideals of democracy and they must be a routine matter of a civic culture. The interface among citizens is a foundation of the public sphere and the kinds of established rules and etiquette that shape such interaction either promote the practices of public discussion or contribute to their desertion. Across time, practices become traditions, and experience becomes collective memory; today's democracy needs to be able to refer to a past, without being locked in it. The media obviously contribute here by their representations of ongoing political life, including its rituals and symbols, yet increasingly also take on relevance as more people make use of newer interactive possibilities and incorporate these as part of their civic culture practices. The notions of participation, accountability, solidarity, tolerance, courage, etc. define democratic citizenship which can be reinforced by the media. The media has the ability to fortify public perceptions of what it means to be a citizen in a democracy.

Media and civil society doesn't have the same roles but sometimes fulfill the same functions. In both media and civil society there are the 'good' and the 'bad'. Biasness and partiality even if the media is independent can damage the credibility of the media. Distinction should be made between independence on the one hand and unbiased or impartial reporting and accuracy on the other. (Frost, p. chapter 5) Media should be judged on merit and its support for democratic principles.

Media contributes to social, economic and political functions of the society in this process it terms what Jurgen Habermas as regard as "public sphere". It is implicitly assumed that these 'basic' functions are not only valid in Western democracy but also valid for various political and cultural backgrounds (critical in this regard: Sparks 2000). Active participation of citizens is essential for democracy. The media should inform, educate and mobilize the public on the issue of governance. Media can promote peace and social consensus which can strengthen democracy. The media can be a tool to for meditation but sometime unfortunately, the media can exacerbate the crises by distorting facts. "peace journalism," which is being promoted by various NGOs, endeavors to promote reconciliation through careful reportage that gives voice to all sides of a conflict and resists explanation for violence in terms of innate enmities. Training and the establishment of mechanisms whereby journalists from opposite sides of conflict can interact with the other side,

including other journalists representing divergent views, have helped propagate peace journalism. (Gaber, 2009, p. 150)

The role of the press in disseminating information as a way of mediating between the state and civil society remains critical. Media can be used as an advocacy tool to promote various causes for general public's welfare for reasons such as 1) Mass media can communicate information to large groups of people 2) By regularly conveying information to important audiences, from the general public to government and international decision makers, the media plays a large role in shaping public debate 3) Creates an environment of political pressure 4) Convey general information, serving as a public education tool 5) Counter popular misconceptions and 6) Comment on an issue, providing an alternative viewpoint. (Coronel, 2008, p. 3) For instance, "A free press and the practice of democracy contribute greatly to bringing out information that can have an enormous impact on policies for famine prevention a free press and an active political opposition constitute the best early-warning system a country threatened by famine could have" (International Criminal Court, 2003)¹

To support and strengthen democracy the media should move away from the government control and private interests. As John Corner rightly observes, media freedom is routinely invoked to indicate "a desirable absence of constraint on the media industries themselves, rather than ... the desirable conditions for members of a democratic public to access a range of information and to encounter and express a range of views". (Sen, 1999) In order to do that the media has to become financially viable and exercise editorial independence to promote diverse voices and opinion which will serve the public interest. The public interest is defined as representing a plurality of voices both through a greater number of outlets and through the diversity of views and voices reflected within one outlet. (Baker, 2002, p. Chapters 3 and 4) The media can play a positive role in democracy only if there is an enabling environment that allows them to do so. They need the essential expertise and a mechanism for accountability. In Des Freedman's formulation, media policy refers to the "formal as well as informal strategies, underpinned by specific interests, values and goals that shape the emergence of mechanisms

¹ *Coalition for the International Criminal Court, September 2003, "NGO Media Outreach: Using the Media as an Advocacy Tool"* .

designed to structure the direction of and behavior in particularly media environments” (USAID, 2009).¹

Since the 1990s, the prevalent way of thinking about regulating the media in terms of a social service paradigm and its anticipating democratizing role, has shifted to a set of ideas and practices that treat it as a market-driven enterprise predominantly shaped by economic and technological imperatives from the 1980s onwards. (Cuilenburg & McQuail, 2003, pp. 181, 197-198) The media should also be accessible to as wide a segment of society as possible. Efforts to help the media should be directed toward: the protection of press rights, enhancing media accountability, building media capacity and democratizing media access. State has an important role in creating a viable environment for the media to carry out its functions without friction. In countries such as Germany, where press freedom receives constitutional recognition, courts have held that press freedom can both necessitate, as well as preclude, state intervention (German Law, 1949).² The term “press freedom” may thus be used to indicate the special recognition that courts and governments afford the media in democratic societies, necessitating particularly compelling reasons for any form of restraint, particularly prior restraints on publication (Baren, 2005, p. Chapter XII). This makes it very easy for stakeholders other than the government to strengthen the role of the media in the society. Hence, both state and non-state actors contribute different understandings and knowledge, through their interaction, in the framing of the media policy agenda and the shaping of the principles and rules that govern the policy-making process (Feintuck & Varney, 2006, p. Chapter 6).

Political actors and interest groups with distinct and competing preferences respond to and act within particular structural contexts defined by technological, economic, institutional, political and societal parameters (Freedman, 2008, pp. 1-6). The government taking all the stakeholders on board should devise a mechanism to design and implement code of conduct and ethics for the media for a healthy democratic society. The need arises for Monitoring of the media performed by specifically mandated authorities, all designed to bring about normative and behavioral change. (Considine, 2006, p. 15) The stakeholders other than the government needs to actively participate in the development and promotion of free and responsible media otherwise the government can create its monopoly which

¹ U.S. Agency for International Development Washington, D.C. (2009) *Center for Democracy and Governance Bureau for Global Programs, Field Support, and Research.*

² Article 5 of the German Basic Law (1949).

can result in restriction of media and eventually threatening democracy. Finally, the press can act as the metaphorical “ombudsman”, investigating the actions not only of public bodies but also powerful corporations and individuals. (Dahlgren & Sparks, 1991) This leads to the process of accountability which is a foundation for a healthy civil society and democracy.

Furthermore, analysis of the policy effectiveness of all media and communication policy is suffused, even if implicitly, by normative expectations of the media’s role in society, which are ultimately founded upon different strands of democratic theory. (Curran, 2005, p. 122) Policies concerning the media are formulated at different levels of government. (Anagnostou & Smith, 2010, p. 2010)

The article examines the role of press, which has remained under pressure for most of time in Pakistan because of government policies, with adverse effects on its ability to be pluralistic, with regard to civil society which is a critical factor in strengthening democracy. It takes non-governmental organizations as the case study and analyses the coverage given to them in the regime of former President Pervez Musharraf.

2. Methodology

Within this time horizon, 2002, the researcher’s hypothesis is that more supportive coverage is given to NGOs than non supportive. Methodology was content analysis, in which coverage of NGOs was analyzed after codifying the unit of analysis, which was total content in Urdu and English newspapers in 2002, into the categories of ‘supportive and ‘non supportive’ based on the themes of NGOs being anti-Pakistan, foreign agent and anti-Islam for ‘non supportive’ and development agent, agent for democracy and intolerance for ‘supportive’. After quantitative data they were qualitatively analyzed.

3. Findings

In the year 2002, 112, out of which 42 were non-supportive and 70 supportive. Following tables illustrate the coverage pattern of newspapers.

January 2002

	Total	Supportive	Non Supportive
	16	5	11
INSAF	1	1	
Pakistan	1		1
NAWA E WAQT	1		1
JANG	2		2
KHABRAIN	1		1
The News	1	1	
The Nation	3		3
Dawn	5	3	2
Others	1		1
Editorial	1		1
Article	1		1
News/Reports/Stories	14	5	12

February 2002

	Total	Supportive	Non Supportive
	10	7	3
NAWA E WAQT	1	1	
KHABRAIN	2		2
Pakistan	1	1	
Dawn	5	4	1
The News	1	1	
News/Reports/Stories	10	7	3

Note: no article, editorial or feature was published in this month.

	Total	Supportive	Non Supportive
	2	2	
Pakistan	1	1	
Dawn	1	1	
News/Reports/Stories	2	2	

March 2002

Note: no article, editorial or feature was published in this month.

April 2002

	Total	Supportive	Non Supportive
	14	9	5
DIN	1		1
KHABRAIN	1	1	
INSAF	1	1	
Dawn	5	5	
The News	2	1	1
The Nation	2	1	1
Others	2	1	1
News/Reports/Stories	14	9	5

Note: no article, editorial or feature was published in this month.

May 2002

	Total	Supportive	Non Supportive
	12	10	2
NAWA E WAQT	1	1	
KHABRAIN	3	2	1
Dawn	4	4	
The Nation	3	3	
Others	1		1
News/Reports/Stories	12	10	2

Note: no article, editorial or feature was published in this month.

June 2002

	Total	Supportive	Non Supportive
	12	6	6
NAWA E WAQT	2		2
KHABRAIN	1		1
INSAF	3	1	2
Pakistan	2	1	1
Dawn	3	3	
Others	1	1	
News/Reports/Stories	12	6	6

Note: no article, editorial or feature was published in this month.

July 2002

	Total	Supportive	Non Supportive
	15	5	10
DIN	1		1
KHABRAIN	2		2
INSAF	2	2	
Pakistan	2		2

JANG	1		1
Dawn	4	2	2
The News	3	1	2
Editorial	1		1
Article	1		1
News/Reports/Stories	13	5	8

August 2002

	Total	Supportive	Non Supportive
	11	5	6
Din	1		1
Pakistan	2		2
Dawn	4	1	3
The Nation	2	2	
The News	1	1	
Others	1	1	
News/Reports/Stories	11	5	6

Note: no article, editorial or feature was published in this month.

September 2002

	Total	Supportive	Non Supportive
	7	6	1
KHABRAIN	2	2	
Pakistan	2	2	
JANG	2	1	1
The News	1	1	
News/Reports/Stories	7	6	1

Note: no article, editorial or feature was published in this month.

October 2002

	Total	Supportive	Non Supportive
	10	9	1
JANG	3	3	
The News	2	2	
The Nation	2	1	1
Dawn	2	2	
Others	1	1	
News/Reports/Stories	10	9	1

Note: no article, editorial or feature was published in this month.

November 2002

	Total	Supportive	Non Supportive
	3	2	1
NAWA E WAQT	1		1
JANG	1	1	
Dawn	1	1	
News/Reports/Stories	3	2	1

Note: no article, editorial or feature was published in this month.

Total in 2002: 112

Total News/Reports/Stories published in 2002: 108

Total Articles published in 2002: 2

Total Editorial published in 2002: 1

In the year 2002, 112, out of which 42 were non-supportive and 70 supportive.

H1: More supportive coverage was given to NGOs than non supportive.

Ho: Not more supportive coverage was given to NGOs than non supportive.

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