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## Pakistan Armed Forces Editorial Framing and Press-Military Ties

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### Abstract

*The article deals mainly with the framing of the Pakistan Armed Forces in Pakistan's English elite newspapers' editorials. Three of the very popular Pakistani newspapers i.e., Dawn, The Nation and The News were selected for this purpose. The editorials from 27 November 2010 to 27 November 2019 were studied to analyze the valence of Pakistan Armed Forces by applying quantitative content Analysis. 814 editorials in total were studied in the newspapers, 300 in Dawn, 346 in The Nation and 168 in The News by using a simple random sampling method. The result of the quantitative content analysis found that Pakistan Armed Forces were framed in the light of opposing valence in selected military tenures. The military regime of General Kayani received the maximum coverage as well as the maximum opposing coverage in all three military tenures i.e., Tenure I – General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani (27 Nov 2010 to 27 Nov 2013), Tenure II – General Raheel Shareef (27 Nov 2013 to 27 Nov 2016) and Tenure III – General Qamar Javed Bajwa (27 Nov 2016 to 27 Nov 2019). The study identified the fact that the mainstream English Newspapers were able to publicly criticize the Armed Forces during the period under review, showing that the Pakistani military is not able to wield influence on the press and the relationship between two of the most important institutions in Pakistan is not in the hands of the military. It spoke volumes about how rotten things were between two of the institutions of the State that matter; The Press and the Military.*

**Keywords:** Pakistani Press, Framing, Military Regimes, Content Analysis, Pakistan Armed Forces.

### Introduction

Media is considered as a significant political institution in democratic societies which acts as a major source of information for masses. Media adopts a particular style of selection and emphasis while presenting the information which ultimately shapes up the public opinion (Iyengar, 1991). The media is crucial in educating the public about the truth. Journalists gather the data in this regard, modify it, and then make it available to the public (Schäffner, 2004). The present study attempts to establish how the editorials of elite English Newspapers *Dawn*, *The News* and *The Nation* framed Pakistan Armed Forces as an institution. A vigilant press has the ability to monitor political figures and institutions that are expected to uphold transparency and accountability (Graber, 2009). The media serves as watchdog, provides a check on influential societal groups, particularly political leaders in both the public and private spheres (Norris, 2010).

The press plays a vital part in publicizing the significant issues at both national and international level. It is commonly acknowledged as the most responsible and reliable form of mass communication, surpassing other mass media in authenticity (Hassan, et al., 2013). The coverage by the press of urgent nature or situations that demand prompt action from the national government or the international community is considered especially crucial in developing nations (Odugbemi & Norris, 2010).

Editorials represent the comprehensive 'ideological stance of newspaper owners and managers', holding particular 'significance when analyzing the ideological role of news media' (Henry & Tator, 2002).

The Elite English Press has a distinct effect on audiences, because of the prominence of the English language and because it is the easiest way for foreigners to understand Pakistani opinions and responses. Given that English frequently serves as the language of government, the English-language press plays a crucial role in facilitating public access to official information and discourse (Dickinson & Memon, 2012). Despite having a limited readership, English newspapers in Pakistan are thought to have a much greater influence than the mainstream media because they target elites, policymakers, and the educated middle class. However, this influential position places a greater responsibility on journalists working in the English press.

Professional ethics play a vital role as guiding principles for journalists, ensuring the integrity of news material. These principles encompass decisions about which topics to cover (ensuring balance), maintaining accuracy, truthfulness, impartiality, fairness, and respecting individual privacy (Ditchey, 2011). The term "press freedom" refers to an unrestricted setting where the press is free to express its opinions without interference or intimidation. (Eribo et al., 1997). A free and diverse media does not guarantee that it will always support the national cause and act in accordance with the interests of the country. Many media discussions have been driven by discussions about press freedom or free speech, not only in developed democracies but also in semi-democratic or authoritarian nations (Davies et al., 2008). In such contexts, national security concerns often shape media narratives and priorities.

A nation places significant importance on military capability as the primary safeguard for its security. The militarization of the country is deemed essential not just to deter external threats but also to manage the swiftly escalating domestic unrest resulting from the impact of globalization and economic disparities (Raza & Akbar, 2012). There is a dichotomy between the military and the media, as soldiers are focused on the combat aspect, while journalists specialize in communication. The political impact of a conflict hinges on how the fighting is reported, emphasizing the crucial role of accurate reporting for a battle to have significance on the global stage (Davies et al., 2008). The term "in the interest of national security" has given rise to controversy in the media regarding possible conspiracies being covered up. In response, the military fails to comprehend why media scrutiny should compromise the operational necessity for secrecy. Military image-building is a crucial component in fostering a positive national image because perception is reality and power. In times of conflict, tensions between the military and the media often revolve around the extent of censorship that the military should be permitted to enforce, particularly in small-scale military operations that do not pose a threat to national security (Boswell, 2009).

According to Bar-Haim (1996), the symbiotic relationships between the military and the media are structured around a triangle of concerns involving information access, censorship, and choices for real-time reporting from the front lines. These interests are inherently conflicting. The military seeks to maintain some control over information access, while the media demands unrestricted access to all information. The military regulates media content to prevent the release of information that could disrupt its operations, despite the media's push for the elimination of all forms of censorship. Furthermore, while the military aims to limit this freedom, the media seeks the highest degree of freedom to report directly from conflict zones in real-time.

Pakistan has a longstanding tradition of possessing a press that operates independently. The print media has found ways to communicate its dissatisfaction despite facing both open and concealed control throughout the majority of its existence. In reality, the print media has grown more tenacious and dedicated to press freedom as a result of these constraints. The military and the government held the belief that they could influence and manage the media whenever it strayed from what they deemed

to be in the national interest and align it with their specific political agenda. (International Media Support, 2009).

The media plays a crucial role in translating the military for society and conveying societal perspectives to the military. Emphasizing this, it becomes clear that the military needs to thoroughly review its interaction with the media and implement essential changes (acknowledging the potential need for adjustments by the media). This reassessment aims to rebuild a relationship wherein the military and the media can effectively collaborate for mutual benefit and the well-being of society at large. Building understanding, trust, fostering friendship, and potentially exploring collaboration are key aspects of this renewed relationship.

Through proactive engagement with the media, the military can enhance its utilization of the media's significant influence on public opinion (English, 2005). The historical dynamic between the military and the media has involved a blend of collaboration and conflict. Journalists aim to uncover and report the truth, while the military strives to manage the narrative. This inherent tension, coupled with the distinct goals and characteristics of individuals drawn to each profession, has led to numerous disagreements and a heightened level of mistrust. The embedded media policy, providing unprecedented access to the battlefield for the global media, primarily aimed to showcase the professionalism of coalition forces and counteract misinformation from adversaries (Rodriguez & Kerr, 2004).

Callanan (2007) suggested that there is a pressing need to enhance the understanding and collaboration between the mainstream military and the media. Embedded media function as the eyes and ears of a broader "press," which encompasses owners, executives, boards, producers, and anchors of news organizations. Author and Kim (2004) expanded on the fact that the United States has a history of tumultuous relations between the media and the military. The distinct roles, traits, and news-related objectives of these two organizations may contribute to explaining the possibility of conflict. They observed that the shared professional values and a dedication to public service make the collaboration possible. Martin (2006) revealed that if U.S. media operates within the constraints of military pooling, the military intervention tends to be portrayed by the media as enabling political change, resulting in initially favorable public opinion.

English (2005) looked into the significance of a strong military-media interaction. He claimed that while the military is aware that there will always be some degree of friction between the two institutions, it must think about how to lessen the effects of that conflict. Rodríguez-Salcedo and Watson (2017) provided a detailed exploration of the evolution of public relations in dictatorships. They investigated the impact of political history and systems on the development of public relations strategies in European countries that, after 1945, were under the rule of military dictatorships (Spain and Portugal), a military junta (Greece), and were aligned with the Soviet bloc. Utilizing a comparative historical methodology, the study challenged the prevailing perception that public relations operate exclusively within democratic frameworks.

Boswell (2009) conducted a study on military-media relations in China, emphasizing the importance of rendering military news more audience-friendly, compelling, and appealing. The study underscored the necessity to promote innovation and reform in the dissemination of military news, aiming to enhance both effectiveness and the guidance of public opinion.

Corner and Parry (2017) observed that the swift evolution of media and military technologies persists, driven by the adaptation of military capabilities to emerging threats and changes in the public perception of military activities, such as the increasing inclusion of women in combat roles in some countries. In light of these developments, they emphasized the significance of examining the concurrent patterns of media attention and communicative practices.

The role of framing in news media is pivotal in shaping discussions and influencing the agendas for how issues are presented and debated in public opinion. The news media provides a platform for those in positions of authority to predominantly define ideological spaces (Gitlin, 1980). Framing, as conceptualized by Gitlin, is a mean through which this phenomenon can be organized and studied. Media frames, according to Gitlin, are "persistent patterns of cognition, interpretation, and presentation, of selection, emphasis, and exclusion, by which symbol-handlers routinely organize discourse, whether verbal or visual" (p. 10). These patterns manifest on various levels, encompassing personal frames of authors, institutional ideological frames, and frames held by the audience members themselves (Pan & Kosicki, 2001).

Curran (2002) recognized the validity of his earlier assertion that strong elite pressures influence the media, acknowledging the media's role as powerful ideological agents. However, he clarified that the media shouldn't be viewed as mere puppets of the establishment. The present study has been carried out in order to assess, if Pakistani English Press conforms to the government and military establishment while framing the issues pertaining to Pakistan Armed Forces or give the divergent opinions and critiques. The editorial treatment of Pak Armed Forces in Pakistan's Elite English Press (The News, Dawn & The Nation) during the three different military leadership tenures. For the editorial investigations following research question was formulated:

RQ: How is the image of the Pakistan Armed Forces portrayed in the editorials of elite English newspapers (Dawn, The Nation, The News) of Pakistan?

### Methodology

The present research is quantitative in nature and incorporates content analysis. Holsti's (1969) definition of content analysis states that it is a multipurpose research method which is ideally developed to objectively and systematically investigate any problem for drawing inferences. The main objective of content analysis is to explain the content's substance, draw inferences and determine its effects on the audience. Broadly speaking, content analysis is a reflection of journalistic efforts. After going through various methodological techniques (discourse analysis, journalist interviews), it can be stated that the selection of Classic Content Analysis serves as the optimal systematic approach for gauging press-military relations, specifically when analyzing how editorials of Pakistani English newspapers portrayed Pakistan Armed Forces.

By using quantitative research techniques, the valence categories were defined i.e., opposing, advocating and neutral. Each editorial was quantitatively analyzed within the context of valence (opposing, advocating and neutral).

News valence plays a crucial role in how events are reported because they show how reality is viewed and communicated through a process of repeated selection and emphasis (Entman, 1993; Gitlin, 1980). Undoubtedly, the valence defines messages associated with them and establishes a conceptual backdrop that makes it easier for people to comprehend, classify, and understand communications in line with the preexisting beliefs.

The views, attitudes, and reactions of an audience can be significantly influenced by valence. According to De Vreese and Boomgaarden's (2003) research, the valence attached to the frames might affect how the audience perceives the subject being framed. In this study the tone or slant of the editorial content was categorized into three categories with regards to Pakistan Armed Forces; Advocating depicted supportive content, opposing valence was tagged to the negative or critical content whereas, neutral text exhibited a balanced approach adopted by the editor towards Pakistan Armed Forces

Editorials of *The News*, *The Nation* and *Dawn* which had selected keywords related to Pakistan Armed Forces with three or more mentions published during three military tenures (Nov 2010 – Nov 2019) retrieved from online archives of each newspaper, were selected for analysis. The total

population consisted of 2382 editorials based on selected criteria. Out of which 860 editorials were identified in *Dawn*, 1051 editorials in *The Nation* and 471 in *The News*.

The media texts, which served as the sampling frame for this Content Analysis, were randomly selected from a span of nine years (November 2010 – November 2019) of Pakistani elite English newspaper's editorials related to Pakistan Armed Forces.

In this content analysis chose to restrict the scope of its sample collection to the specific period, which was arguably, the long enough for major changes in political & military landscape of the country in general and its international relations in the backdrop of War on Terrorism particularly.

A Simple Random Sampling approach was employed to select sample editorials. This method was chosen due to the substantial resources required for conducting a census of such extensive populations, coupled with the advanced capabilities of contemporary random sampling tools.

Every single paragraph of the editorial discussing the Armed Forces (Army, Navy, Airforce, FC & Rangers) was included in the study as a Unit of analysis. Coding represents the most labor-intensive and intellectually less engaging facet of content analysis. All selected sample editorials were analyzed from the valence point of view, according to a coding instrument that underwent refinement during a pretest.

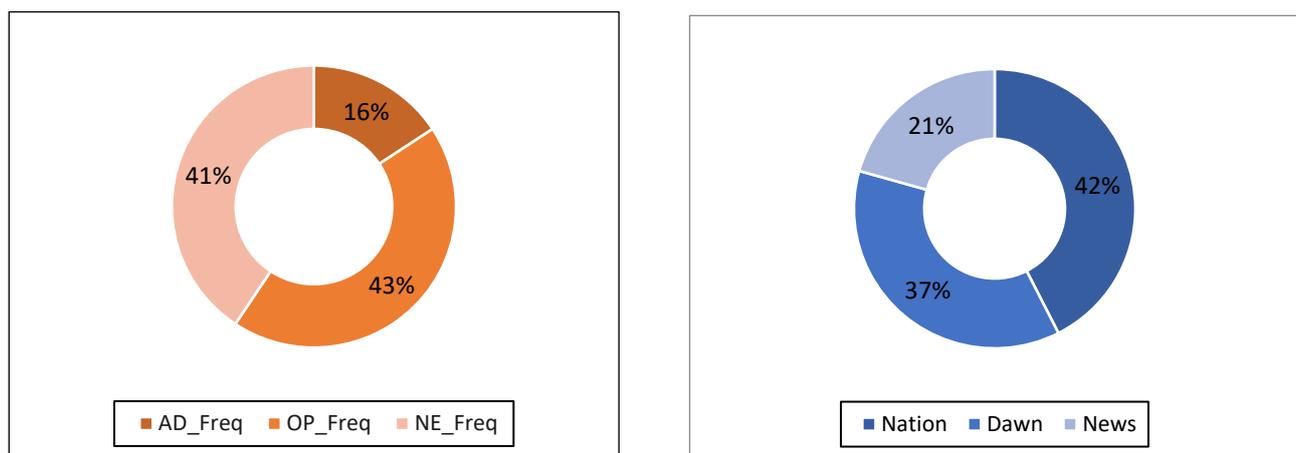
The reliability formula proposed by Holsti was computed to assess intercoder agreement. Demographic information code included: publication date, Name of Newspaper, mentions of the keywords and identified valence. After going through 10% of the randomly selected sample a list of Primary Categories complementing each frame was created inductively.

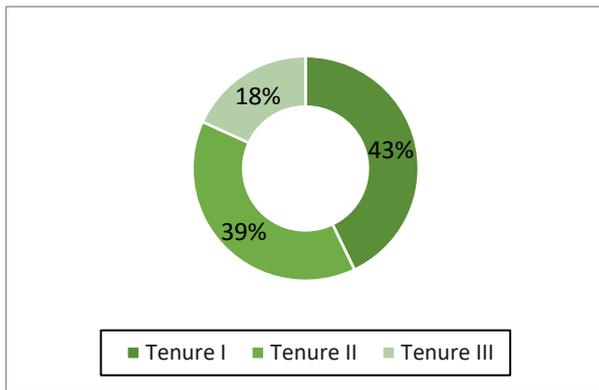
The reason for choosing newspapers such as *Dawn*, *News*, and *Nation* is that they were consistently published during the specified period. These newspapers are widely recognized as prominent entities in the English press of Pakistan, boasting extensive circulation and credibility among their readership.

### Data Presentation and Analysis

The present study will unfold, to what extent Pakistani elite print media restrains itself from reporting against the military establishment and national policies.

**Figure 1:** Overall portrayal of Pakistan Armed Forces in the editorial coverage of Pakistan's elite English newspaper.





The valence of coverage was coded as Advocating (Ad\_freq), Opposing (Op\_freq) and Neutral (Ne\_freq) for the Pakistan Armed Forces. Out of 814 editorials, 128 (16%) were advocating, 355 (43%) were opposing, and 331 (41%) were neutral.

The data were categorized into three different military leadership tenures. A sum of 349 (42.9%) editorials was published in Tenure I (General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani), 317 (38.9%) appeared during Tenure II (General Raheel Sharif) and 148 (18.2%) in Tenure III (General Qamar Javed Bajwa).

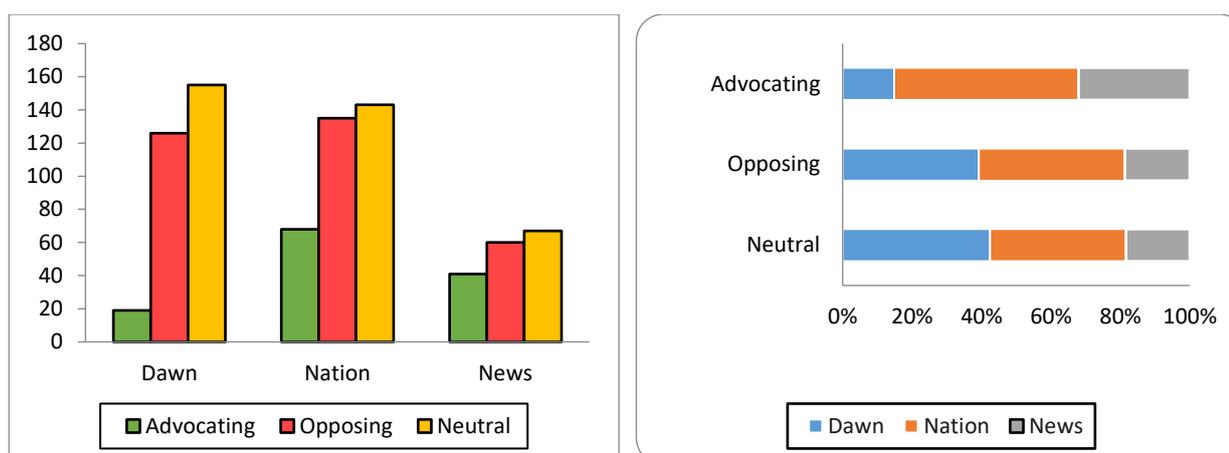
Amongst three selected Pakistani elite English newspapers (*Dawn*, *The News* and *The Nation*), '*The Nation*' ranked top as it published 346 (43%) editorials followed by *Dawn* 300 (37%) and *The News* 168 (21%).

**Table 1:** Frequency of Valence of Armed Forces Editorial Coverage in 'Dawn', 'The News' and 'The Nation'

**N= 814**

Newspapers	AD_Freq	OP_Freq	NE_Freq	Grand_Freq
Dawn	19 (6%) 15%	126 (42%) 39%	155 (52%) 42%	300
The Nation	68 (20%) 53%	135 (39%) 42%	143 (41%) 39%	346
The News	41 (24%) 32%	60 (36%) 19%	67 (40%) 18%	168
	128	321	365	814

**Figure 2:** Frequency and Comparison of Valence of Armed Forces Editorial Coverage in ‘Dawn’, ‘The News’ and ‘The Nation’



*The Nation* published a total of 346 editorials out of which 138 (40%) appeared in Tenure I, 137 (39%) in Tenure II and 71 (21%) during Tenure III. In *The News*, a sum of 168 editorials discussing the Pakistan Armed Forces was published, from which 87 (52%) were in Tenure I, 50 (30%) in Tenure II and 31 (18%) in Tenure III. Overall, 300 editorials appeared in *Dawn*, within that 124 (41%) were in Tenure I, 130 (43%) in Tenure II and 46 (15%) in Tenure III.

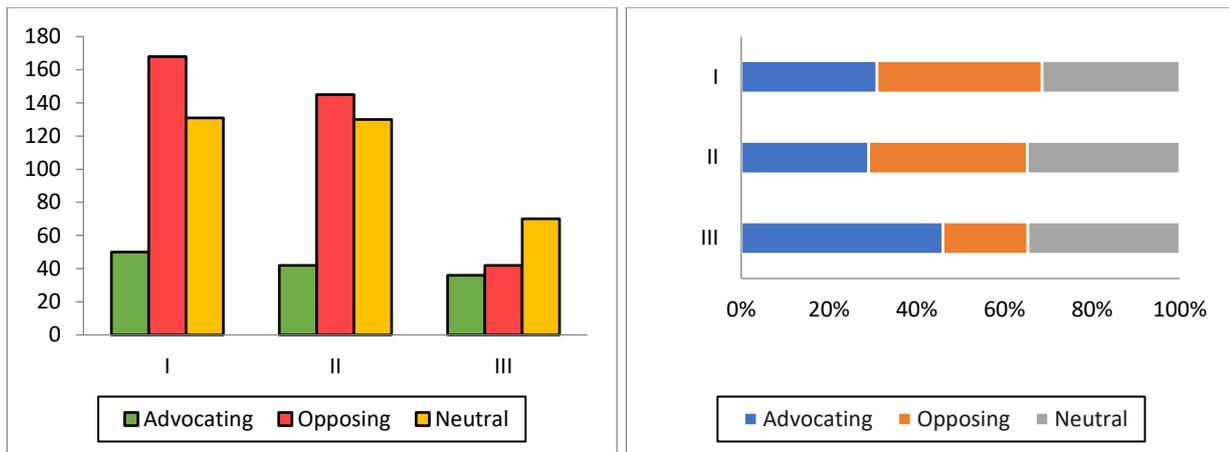
During Tenure I out of a total of 349 *The News* published the highest number of Editorials 87(25%) followed by *The Nation* 138 (40%) and *Dawn* 124 (35%). In Tenure II out of 317, *The Nation* took the lead and published 137 (43%) editorials next was *Dawn* 130 (41%), and lastly *The News* published 50 (15%). Likewise in Tenure III out of 148 again *The Nation* provided massive coverage as 71 (48%) editorials were published. *Dawn* stood second with 46 (31%) and *The News* at third with 31 (21%).

**Table 2:** Frequency of valence of all the Military related Editorials published in three different Tenures

N= 848

Tenures	AD_Freq	OP_Freq	NE_Freq	Grand_Freq
Tenure I	50 (14%) 39%	168 (48%) 47%	131(38%) 40%	349
Tenure II	42 (13%) 33%	145 (46%) 41%	130 (41%) 39%	317
Tenure III	36 (24%) 28%	42 (28%) 12%	70 (47%) 21%	148
	128	355	331	814

**Figure 3:** Frequency Valence of military-related editorials published by ‘Dawn’, ‘The News’ and ‘The Nation’ with respect to Tenure



In Tenure I, a total of 349 editorials was published which were comprised of 50 (14%) advocating, 168 (48%) opposing and 131 (38%) neutral. During Tenure II overall 317 editorials were published which incorporated 42 (13%) advocating, 145 (46%) opposing, and 130 (41%) neutral. There were 148 editorials in tenure III with 36 (24%) advocating, 42 (28%) opposing and neutral 70 (47%) valence.

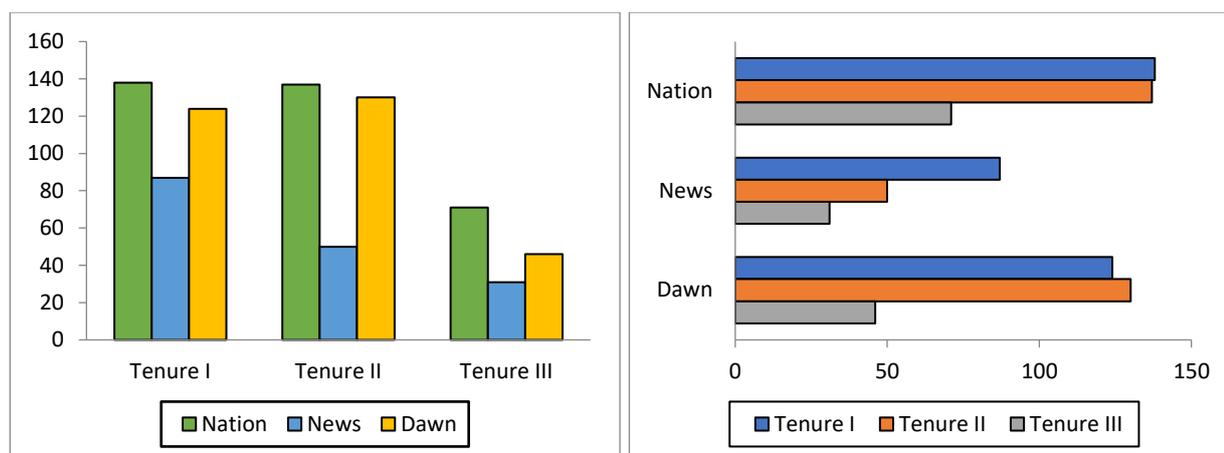
The pattern of coverage observed for Advocating editorials in each tenure suggested that maximum Advocating Valence was displayed in Tenure I with 39% followed by 33 % in Tenure II and 28% in Tenure III. Like Advocating Valence, the Opposing and Neutral slants also dominated in Tenure I with 47% and 40% respectively. There were 41% opposing editorials published in Tenure II and 12% in Tenure III. Neutral frequencies in Tenure II were 39%, whereas in Tenure III it was 21%.

**Table 3:** Frequency of Pakistan Armed Forces coverage by ‘Dawn’, ‘The News’ and ‘The Nation’ in three different tenures.

**N= 814**

Newspapers	Tenure I	Tenure II	Tenure III	Grand_ Freq
The Nation	138 (40%) 40%	137 (39%) 43%	71 (21%) 48%	346
The News	87 (52%) 25%	50 (30%) 15%	31 (18%) 21%	168
Dawn	124 (41%) 35%	130 (43%) 41%	46 (15%) 31%	300
	349	317	148	814

**Figure 4:** Frequency and comparison of Pakistan Armed Forces coverage by ‘Dawn’, ‘The News’ and ‘The Nation’ in three different tenures



*The Nation* published a total of 346 editorials out of which 138 (40%) appeared in Tenure I, 137 (39%) in Tenure II and 71 (21%) during Tenure III. In *The News*, a sum of 168 editorials discussing the Pakistan Armed Forces was published, from which 87 (52%) were in Tenure I, 50 (30%) in Tenure II and 31 (18%) in Tenure III. Overall, 300 editorials appeared in *Dawn*, within that 124 (41%) were in Tenure I, 130 (43%) in Tenure II and 46 (15%) in Tenure III.

During Tenure I out of a total of 349 *The News* published the highest number of Editorials 87(25%) followed by *The Nation* 138 (40%) and *Dawn* 124 (35%). In Tenure II out of 317, *The Nation* took the lead and published 137 (43%) editorials next was *Dawn* 130 (41%), and lastly *The News* published 50 (15%). Likewise in Tenure III out of 148 again *The Nation* provided massive coverage as 71 (48%) editorials were published. *Dawn* stood second with 46 (31%) and *The News* at third with 31 (21%).

## Discussion and Conclusion

The present research deals with the quantitative Content analysis of Editorial coverage by *Dawn*, *The News* and *The Nation* from 27 Nov 2010 to 27 Nov 2019 having the keywords describing Pakistan Armed Forces i.e., Army, Military, Navy, Air Force with the appearance frequency of three or more than three times in the entire editorial.

The primary aim of the research was to investigate the portrayal of Pakistan Armed Forces during three military Tenures; Tenure I – General Ashfaq Pervez Kayani (27 Nov 2010 to 27 Nov 2013), Tenure II – General Raheel Shareef (27 Nov 2013 to 27 Nov 2016) and Tenure III – General Qamar Javed Bajwa (27 Nov 2016 to 27 Nov 2019) from the valence perspective in the editorials of selected elite English newspapers.

A sample of 814 editorials published in *Dawn*, *The News*, and *The Nation* was chosen for quantitative content analyses in order to better understand the press-military ties during the period under study.

The research question addressed the depiction of the Pakistan Armed Forces in the editorials of prominent English newspapers in Pakistan, namely *Dawn*, *The Nation*, and *The News*. The analysis focused on the editorial portrayal of the Pakistan Armed Forces from valence perspective while categorizing the content into Opposing, Advocating and Neutral categories. The maximum number of editorials painted Pakistan Armed Forces with the Opposing color, whereas advocating slant was less than one-fifth of the selected sample and the neutral editorials were slightly lesser than the opposing ones. The portrayal of the Pakistan Armed Forces was dominantly ‘opposing’ during General Kayani’s Military Tenure while General Shareef Tenure was marginally less opposing than his predecessor. The military tenure of General Bajwa was visibly advocating in comparison to the other two regimes. Here it is worth mentioning that the selected tenure of General Bajwa was prior to the extension. General Shareef’s tenure was perceived as most favorable for the military due to the

General's strong stance on strengthening the democratic process. He was the only General within the selected research time period who did not prefer to take an extension. However, the findings of the editorial analysis were not aligned with this idea. In order to evaluate the differences between general perceptions and findings of editorial analysis the researcher deep-dived into the incidents/happenings and significant updates during this specific time frame to further investigate the reasons.

During Tenure I (General Kayani), the main incidents included, the Salala Attack, Attacks on Forces and Soft Targets, Enforced Disappearances, TTP Talks, Musharraf Trial, OBL Raid, Memogate, drones, the Karachi Operation, Allegations of Supporting Terrorists, the Mehrangate, Democratic Practices, US Demand for Operations in the order of frequency. While in Tenure II (General Shareef) the most discussed incidents were Karachi Operation, Operation Zarb-e-Azab, Military Courts, Musharraf Trial, Attacks on Forces/Soft Targets and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf & Pakistan Awami Tehreek Protest (PTI-PAT Dharna). During Tenure III, under General Bajwa's leadership, there was a notable reduction in the editorial coverage of Pakistan Armed Forces. Concurrently, this period exhibited the lowest level of opposition in valence towards the military. The significant topics during this period were; the Saudi-led Islamic Military Alliance, Military Courts and Intrusion in Civil Domain.

A review of events during three military administrations revealed that in the initial tenure (Tenure I – General Kayani's Tenure), Pakistan's participation in the War on Terror not only placed its Armed Forces in the spotlight but also embroiled them in contentious issues that were subsequently portrayed in a dissenting light by the country's mainstream English Press. The pattern of the coverage clearly indicates the policy of Elite English Newspapers and the existence of freedom of the Press which is very frequently questioned by foreign media and other related organizations. Newspapers openly criticized the Armed Forces, implying that in Pakistan military does not control the press, and the relationship between these two significant pillars of society was not led by the military.

Onyebadi (2016), in his analysis of the editorial framing of the OBL raid, anticipated that Pakistani newspapers would be influenced by socio-cultural, political, and patriotic considerations in shaping their editorial and news policies. Contrary to his expectations, his findings revealed that *Dawn* and *The News* were more focused on holding their government accountable for security lapses and negligence during the Navy Seals' invasion, despite the substantial budget allocations for national defense in the country. Evidently, it can be stated that these findings complement the results of the present study which reiterates the dominant opposing portrayal of Pakistan's Security establishment by its elite English Press.

The dominance of opposing valence suggests a media discourse was not aligned with state-centric narratives, highlighting the underlying tension between Pakistan's elite English press and the Armed Forces.

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