

PERSPECTIVE OF NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ON PTI'S PROTEST IN ISLAMABAD IN NOVEMBER 2024: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This work investigates national and global media's perspectives on the PTI (Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf) protest in Pakistan's capital; Islamabad in November 2024, using Van Dijk's CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis). Focusing on headlines of newspapers from local, regional and national level and also from abroad the paper discusses the power of media in forming public opinion and political legitimacy by their narratives. The results reveal two diametrically opposite narratives: whereas Pakistani media largely delegitimized the demonstration framing PTI supporters as violent troublemakers, in contrast, foreign media concentrated on state repression and human rights abuses, and portrayed the protesters as victims of autocratic abuses. The influence of media discourse on public opinion and constructed political realities concerning controversial issues. Also, the study illuminates the influence of ideological position and media bias accentuating the power relations between them in their news. This research article adds to the discussion of media's influence, both at home and abroad, through providing an understanding of the role of media in the portrayal of political movements in Pakistan.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis (CDA), protest, global media, national media, ideology, political discourse, human rights

Introduction

Media's influence in creating the public perception of political events is one of the most well-researched topics particularly in the frame of political movements and protests. In November 2024, a Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf (PTI) led protest of the country's capital took much interest of national and international media. However, the varying representations of this protest in various media houses reflect underlying power dynamics, ideological perspectives and political affiliations. Understanding how these narratives are constructed is very crucial for evaluating the role of media in political discourse.

Subsequently, Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) theoretical framework is employed for this study to examine how national and global media portrayed PTI's protest. Critical discourse analysis (CDA), is particularly useful in uncovering power structures, biases, and ideological influences entrenched in the discourse used by media. By doing the analysis of the headlines from different national (*e.g., Roznama Jang, Express News, The Express Tribune, The Dawn*) and international (*e.g., BBC Urdu, CNN, Al Jazeera, The Guardian*) news agencies, this aims to unveil the ways in which the protest was depicted.

Research Questions:

1. How did national and global media outlets frame PTI's protests in Islamabad in November 2024?
2. What political and ideological influences can be observed in the language and framing out of these media reports?

Significance of the Study

The study contributes to the expanding body of research on media discourse analysis by bringing up how various media perspectives can impact political narratives. The findings will be significant in understanding the broader implications of media framing in politically sensitive events, precisely in developing democracies like Pakistan.

Literature Review

The role of media is pivotal and equally crucial in crafting public opinion and shaping political discourse specifically in the midst of political movements and protests. The representation of the protests by different news agencies can have significant impact on how these politically charged events are perceived both nationally and internationally. This part of the study reviews existing literature on media discourse analysis, the role of national vs global media in political remonstrations and the application of Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework in political reporting.

Media Discourse and Political Protest:

Scholars over the period of time have extensively studied and examined how media shapes narrative around political activities especially protests. Various studies suggest that media reporting often reflects the ideological stance of the publication, leading to variations in framing between state-backed and independent media (Entman, 1993; Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Studies on media coverage of protests in authoritarian and hybrid regimes (e.g., Pakistan, Turkey, and Russia) indicates that state-aligned media outlets are more inclined to delegitimize protest by stressing violence, chaos, and lawlessness, on the other hand independent and global media houses often focuses on human rights violations and state repression (Tarrow, 2011; Bennett & segerberg, 2013).

Moreover, in the case of Pakistan, media representation of protests has largely been influenced by political affiliations and state control (Ashraf & Arif, 2019). Researches on previous political movements in Pakistan, similarly the Lawyers' Movement (2007-2009) and Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf's sit-in back in 2014, shows that media often aligns its coverage with the government in power stance (Riaz, 2021). Such trend is anticipated to be reflected in the media coverage of PTI's November 2024 protest, where nation and international news agencies framed the event in a different manner based on their political and ideological inclinations.

National vs. Global Media Framing of Political Protests:

Already conducted studies highlights substantial differences between national and global media in their depiction or narration of protests. Particularly national media of politically polarized countries, often serves as a mouthpiece of government narratives, projecting protests as a threat to stability (McCurdy, 2012). On the other hand, global media, sometimes critical of state actions, may also exhibits biases based on foreign policy interests (Couldry, 2003)

For example, research on media reporting/coverage of the Arab Spring, Hong Kong Protests, and Black Lives Matters Movements demonstrates how media in various regions selectively point out certain aspects of protests (Harlow & Johnson, 2011; Poell & Dijk 2018). The western media in particular, tends to frame protests in authoritarian states as struggle for democracy, while underplaying similar movements in Western countries (Kenic, 2011).

To be specific in Pakistan's case, past studies show that global media outlets such as BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera are more likely to emphasize and highlight state repression and human rights violations, contrary to that Pakistani national media often In Pakistan's case, past studies show that global media outlets such as BBC, CNN, and Al Jazeera tend to emphasize state repression and human rights violations, while Pakistani national media often mimics its voice same as the government narratives (Khan, 2020). This contrast is expected in the coverage of PTI's 2024 November's protest, where Pakistani national media maintains its focus on law and order concerns, while international media bring up government crackdowns and allegations of human rights violations.

Application of Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in Media Studies:

Where there is a language there is discourse, Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides strong framework in developing understanding the relationship between language, power, and ideology in media discourse. CDA has often been used to analyse how media constructs political stories, especially in protest movements (Van Dijk, 2001; Wodak & Meyers, 2009).

Media CDA Several studies have used CDA to examine biased language, framing strategies and power relations in the reporting of (Richardson, 2007; Fairclough, 2013). Van Dijk (1998: 200) in turn argues media discourse is an eloquent product of underlying power relations, where elite-owned media 'have a role in constructing' public opinion through lexicalization, syntactic patterns and ideological position.

But in case of Pakistan as well, CDA has been used to analyze the portrayal of political movements, ethnic conflicts and civil-military relationship in the media (Mehboob, 2015; Yousaf & Ahmed, 2021; Gopang & Bughio, 2017). These studies show how in the state-controlled narrative, the national media falls in line with a very different perspective that is reported through independent and global channels.

Applying Van Dijk's CDA framework to PTI November 2024 protest coverage will also assist in revealing power relations, media imbalances, and ideological effects influencing this discourse.

Methodology

This study follows a qualitative discourse analysis, using Van Dijk's (2005) Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework to investigate the national and international newspaper headlines on PTI protest in Islamabad of November 2024. The approach consists of the following stages:

Data Collection:

Data was collected by summarizing headlines from top national and international media. The analyzed newspapers are: Roznama Jang, Express News, Dawn, The Express Tribune (Pakistan), BBC Urdu, The Guardian, CNN, Al Jazeera, Washington Post etc. There were 25 national and international news headlines to provide diversity in media representation.

Categorization of Headlines:

The headlines gathered were analyzed for tone, language, and ideological placement. In addition, the categories were negative framing, positive framing, and neutral framing of the protest that was the subject of the study.

Analytical Framework:

Van Dijk's CDA model is adopted to examine patterns of language use, power relations and ideological predispositions. Though we also looked at lexical selection, syntactic patterns, presuppositions and discursive decisions taken on by specific media.

Comparative Analysis:

Comparative study on national and international newspaper headlines. On top of that the research looks at how state-controlled vs. nonstate-controlled media diverged in framing the protest.

Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis Model:

The applied model in this research is Teun A. Van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that primarily concerns about the relationship between language, power, and ideology in the use of language. "Van Dijk (1998, 2006) argues that media discourse is not just a reflection of social and political reality but rather actively contributes to its construction. Narratives are the way in which media can make actors legitimate or illegitimate, which

dominant ideologies are sustained and what public perceptions are made through a selective use of language.

In particular, Van Dijk's (1998: 36) CDA framework is helpful for studying news media as it enables us to understand how language structural features, discursive strategies and more general socio-political topics are used to depict political events. The present study applies Van Dijk's (1993) critical discourse analysis three-dimensional model, composed of:

Analysis of the Text (Micro-Level): Use of Language:

Van Dijk's three-dimensional does a textual analysis at the micro-level as it studies language such as the lexical, sentence structure, metaphors, and presuppositions. The textual analysis piece of this research looks at how the national and international media utilize particular terminologies to define the protest of PTI as a violent chaos and extremism or as a justifiable political struggle.

Discursive Strategies (Meso-Level): Media Framing

The meso is focused on discourse techniques—such as framing, narrative construction, and rhetorical devices. Here are just a few of the various ways of media entities will frame a political event, whether to promote, diminish, or modify some particular feature. As an example, the national media in Pakistan saw the protest as a security challenge, while the global media saw it as a state repression or oppression. This dimension allows us to assess the ideological character of media based on the choice of sources, tone and emphasis on themes.

Socio-Political Context: (Macro-Level) Analyzing Power and Ideology:

At the macro level, CDA analysis addresses overarching politico-social structures that influence discourse. This involves deconstructing how government ownership of media, political alliances, historical context and international power relations contribute to the content of news reports. In a country like Pakistan where we frequently see media fears having political and military influences pressure, the national news agencies may go along with government position. On the other hand, international media, influenced by competing ideological paradigms and geopolitical contexts may offer an alternative narrative, focusing on democracy and human rights.

By integrating these three levels of analysis, Van Dijk's model provides an overall framework to comprehend how discourse becomes political reality. This study employs 3D, analytical model of Van Dijk to deconstruct disparate representations of PTI's protest as shown on Pakistani national media and as represented in the Global media to reveal the power dynamics, ideological penetration and tactical constructions of discourses to construct particular image of public.

Analysis and Discussion

This section will analyze how the national and the international media covered PTI protest in Islamabad November, 2024. Based on the framework provided by Van Dijk (1998) on CDA, the study analysis the language, structure of the discourse and ideological positioning, relationship of power and the contextual and the background knowledge of media text (newspapers headlines in a variety of newspapers). The findings of this analysis demonstrate a disparity between the national and transnational media discourses to create different discursive strategies tailored to present the image of the protest in the public domain.

National Media Framing: Delegitimization and Criminalization

PTI's protest was for the most part delegitimized by the Pakistani national media, which depicted it as a violent, state-destroying, flawed movement. Sensationalist language and negative framing was seen in headlines touting chaos, criminality, and the protest's flop

Portraying Protesters as Agitators and Disrupters:

- National media headlines in Roznama Jang, Express News and Dawn painted the protest as violent, unlawful, and a breach of the peace:
- "RSF expresses grave concern over attack on Rangers in Hyderabad" Daily Times - (Shar persandunne Rangers Rangers par gadi charhadi 3 shaheed)
- 'Grand operation, muzahireen muntashir, saikron giraftaar' (Express News) – (Grand operation, protesters dislodged, hundreds arrested)
- 'Purtashadud kaarwaiyan na-qabil e qubool, Instehari tola inqilab nahi khoon rezi chahta hai' (Express News) – (Violent acts of rebellion cannot be accepted, the fleeing faction wants bloodshed, not revolution)

The above-mentioned headlines used negative words like "Shar pasand", (extremists), "inteshari tola" (trouble makers), and "saikron giraftaar" (hundreds arrested) to present a dark image of PTI's protesters. The terminology links the protesters with anarchy, terrorism and violence, and enhances a state narrative of restoring law and order.

Ridiculing and Undermining the Protest

A few newspaper headlines employed sarcasm and mockery to depict the remonstrations as ineffective and failed that follows under:

- "*Final call dene wale dum daba kar bhaag gaye*" (Roznama Jang) – (The ones giving the final call ran away)
- "*Bhaagne walon ki gariyan apas mein takra gayi, final call miss-call ban gayi*" (Roznama Jang) – (The escapees' cars collided; the final call turned into a missed call)
- "*D-Chowk protest ends in PTI retreat*" (Express Tribune)

These statements imply cowardice and incompetence of the PTI leaders suggesting they abandoned their supporters in the protest. Such framing aligns with pro-government narratives, discouraging public sympathy for the movement.

Global Media Framing: State Repression and Human Rights Violations:

Contradictory to that, international media mainly focused on the state violence, human rights abuses, and mass arrests presenting PTI's protest as a democratic struggle to exercise their constitutional right of protest against the authoritarian regime in the country.

Highlighting Government Crackdown and Human Rights Abuses:

Headlines from the international media outlets such as, BBC Urdu, The Guardian, CNN, and Al Jazeera framed the protest as the state repression, excessive force and violation of basic civil rights:

- "*Pakistan Army and police accused of firing on Imran Khan supporters*" (The Guardian)
- "*Pakistani authorities accused of cover-up killings of protesters*" (CommonDreams.org)
- "*Massacre, says Imran Khan-led PTI as 450 get arrested in Pakistan's government crackdown*" (Deccan Herald)
- "*Pakistan Army told to shoot on sight as protest turns deadly*" (Thestar.com.my)

The usage of terms like “massacre,” “Shoot on sight,” and “cover-up killings” constructs a narrative of state’s brutality, portraying PTI as victim of oppression rather than perpetrators of violence. Such choice of words aligns with Western media’s conventional framing of political protests in the authoritarian states, where opposition party or groups are often depicted as democratic forces resisting state’s tyranny.

Emphasizing Internet Blackouts and Press Censorship:

Nonetheless, a few international media houses have also brought the press suppression and digital media blackouts in the spotlight which was imposed by the government in power:

- *"Pakistan charges journalist with terrorism after reporting on protest"* (VOA, 28-11-2024)
- *"Capital on lockdown, internet blackouts, and protesters clashing with police. What's going on in Pakistan?"* (CNN)
- *"Dead but not counted: Hidden victims of Pakistan's latest political clash"* (Al Jazeera, 4-12-2024)

With internet blackout and imposing censorship, journalist arrests, and information suppression, these news headlines reinforce the image of Pakistan’s government as authoritarian and restricting democratic freedoms. Such kind of framing resonates with international audiences familiar with global pro-democracy movements in the world.

Comparative Analysis: Contrasting National and Global Media Narratives:

Lexical Choices and Framing Differences

Media Type	Framing	Example
National Media (Pakistan)	Protestors as criminals, extremists and law breakers	Shar pasandon ne rangers par gari charhadi (Extremists rammed a vehicle over rangers)
	Protestors failed and humiliating	“Final call miss-call ban gayi” (Final call turned into a missed call)
	Justification of state actions	“Grand operation, Sairkron giraftaar” (Grand operation led to hundreds of arrests)
Global Media	Protestors as victims of state repression	“Massacre says PTI” / “Pakistani forces accused of killing protesters”
	Government as authoritarian and suppressive	“Pakistan Army told to shoot on sight”
	Focus of human rights and press freedom	“Pakistan charges journalist for terrorism”

Power and Ideological Positioning

Pakistani national media largely supported the state narrative, legitimizing government actions against protesters while ridiculing PTI's efforts. However, global media positioned PTI as victims of state repression, aligning their discourse with Western democratic values and human rights concerns. Such divergence in the coverage of the event reflects Van Dijk's CDA ideology and principles, where power dynamics have direct effects on media discourse in shaping narratives to favor ruling political elites or ideological alignments.

Discussion: Implications of Media Representation

The study results display a striking divergence between national and international media over how they covered PTI's November 2024, sit-in in the Pakistani capital, revealing the ideological and political bias pervading through media discourse. Even though broadcast media in Pakistan largely delegitimized the protest and attempted to present PTI supporters as uncompromising extremists and disruptive elements word and give legitimacy to the actions of the state which are necessary in order to maintain peace and order. Through specific vocabulary and language, the national media worked to help support the government narrative and thereby to encourage the general public, mainly nationalist- identifying one, from sympathizing with the protesters. Yet the international press portrayed the protest as a political fight and a constitutional right for the people to wield in the face of state oppression, focusing on human rights abuses, the censorship of the press, and mass detentions. Such differential portrayal in fact carries ocular public opinion or perception and political legitimacy and international diplomatic implications. National media's negative depiction probably diminished national sympathy for the protest, but global media's spotlight on the Government's use of force, human rights abuses, and press freedom might have affected international scrutiny and foreign policy responses.

Conclusion

This study uncovers medias salient role in constructing narrative on the popular level through the pretense of political protests discourse. The national and international media coverage of the PTI dharna in Pakistan's capital provides an excellent example of how language is employed in order to maintain and construct varying discourses on power, violence and legitimacy. Drawing on Van Dijk's (1992, 1993) model of CDA, it has demonstrated how ideologies are encoded in discourse and shaping public opinion and political action.

With digital media platforms transforming journalism, scholars need to attend to the ways evolving media discourses and these platforms contribute to publics' understanding of issues and their political import more generally. Knowing how these dynamics operate is important for maintaining accountability in the media, democratic integrity, and an informed public in a hyper-polarized landscape.

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