

A Comparative Analysis of Media Coverage of populist Leaders in India and Pakistan

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Abstract

This study scrutinizes newspapers coverage of populist leaders in India and Pakistan, directing on how newspapers frame Populist leaders during the pre-election and post-election. For that quantitative content analysis of four newspapers: Dawn (Pakistan), The News (Pakistan), The Hindu (India), and The Times of India (India) is used. Framing theory aids as the theoretical framework for examining the key discursive approaches. The "People-Centric" frame was mostly applied during the pre-election coverage of populist leaders in both India and Pakistan. In contrast, the "Anti-Elitist" frame appeared as the most common in post-election coverage. Moreover, there was a shift from the "Emotive Language" frame in the pre-election period to the "Demonizing Language" frame in post-election for the coverage of populist leaders of both countries. In the pre-election period, the tone of the newspapers was generally supportive, but it became more critical after the election.

Keywords: Political Populism; Media Framing; General Election; Content Analysis; Pakistan; India.

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Introduction

Populism has become an essential part of contemporary political communication, yet it remains a challenged and theoretically fluid phenomenon. Various Scholars theorize populism as a "thin-centered ideology" that can confer itself to assorted ideological traditions, although sustaining a main distinction between "the people" and "the elite" (Mudde, 2004; Canovan, 1999). Yet, populism is increasingly understood as a political style that constructs a moral opposition between a virtuous "people" and a corrupt "elite" (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; de Vreese et al., 2018).

Recent research highlights the forthcoming dimension of populism, defining how populist leaders rely on people-centrism, anti-elitism, and emotive language to gain support (Aalberg et al., 2017). De Vreese et al. (2018) further discriminate between complete, excluding, anti-elitist, and empty populism, and categorized by extensive appeals to "the people". This typology is predominantly beneficial for media analysis, to represent the technical and conversational elements underlined in news coverage.

Media Logic and Populist Visibility

The relationship between populism and media is formed by the wider progression of the mediatization of politics. Media firms tend to line up personalization, conflict, and emotional narratives that align thoroughly with populist communication approaches (Mazzoleni, 2008). As a result, populist leaders frequently gain disproportionate prominence, particularly during periods of political uncertainty and electoral competition.

Media coverage does not merely convey populist messages but vigorously forms them. The concept of media populism states to the combination of populist frames and language within journalistic descriptions themselves (Engesser et al., 2017). Both supportive and critical coverage can boost populist visibility, as negative reporting may support perceptions of elite aggression and fortify populist appeal (Esser et al., 2016).

In developing democracies, populism becomes predominantly significant because weak political establishments and socioeconomic inequalities generate constructive circumstances for populist mobilization. Populist leaders exploit these criticisms to utilized political support and promise to change and indebtedness. However, affective populism has both positive and negative effects (Ali et al., 2026).

In the context of Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, populist bombast commonly targets political elites and marginalized groups, while assembling support among urban youth and emerging middle classes (Kurlantzick, 2018). This situation provided space for Populist leaders to draw on narratives of

religious and cultural resurgence to merge political support. As compare to Western populism, which considered state institutions and political elites as threats to local communities (Bardhan, 2016).

Existing research rotates around the dynamic linking between populist leaders and media coverage in pre-election and post-election settings. Populist leaders, dependent on favourable media coverage, often employ anti-elite and people-centric strategies. However, when these populist leaders gain the power and become part of the elite themselves, to which extend, they sustain favoured media portrayal which becomes uncertain. This research studies news framing of populist leaders of Imran Khan and Narendra Modi. And compare the extent and nature of media coverage used for the populist leaders in the newspapers of India and Pakistan. Following are the objectives of the study:

- To analyze the media framing of populist leaders of India and Pakistan in Pre-election and post-election.
- To examine the variations in the framing strategies used in pre-election and post-election phases.
- To evaluate the role of media in constructing the mediagenic attributes of populist leaders in India and Pakistan through selected newspapers.

Conceptualizing Populism

Researchers have identified populism through multiple theoretical lenses, using diverse methods and disciplinary Patterns (Aalberg et al., 2017; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Kaltwasser et al., 2017; Laclau, 2005; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). Generally, populism has been abstracted as an ideology, an informal or political style, and a strategy of political mobilization (Gidron & Bonikowski, 2013). Across these approaches, a shared emphasis lies in the antagonistic relationship between “the people” and political elites (Hovden, 2019). Despite its extensive use, populism remains conceptually contested. At its core, populism idolises “the people” as ethically pure and reliable, which considering them in opposite to self-serving elites (Majidifard, Fouladiyan & Yousofi, 2025).

Populism as Ideology

Mudde (2004), defines populism as a thin-centered ideology that divides society into two homogeneous and opposed clusters: “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite.” As a thin ideology, populism absences a comprehensive worldview and consequently attaches to more substantive ideologies such as socialism, liberalism, or nationalism

(Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2011). This flexibility allows populism to be obvious across the ideological range, encircling both left- and right-wing populism movements.

Similarly, Canovan (2002) symbolises populism as ideologically restricted yet symbolically powerful, accenting notions such as democracy. Other scholars underscore that populism revolves around three main actors: the people, the elite, and the populist leader (Wirth et al., 2016). From this perception, ideology purposes not as much of a coherent policy and more as a perceptive framework determining political clarification and action (Pankowski, 2010; Gidron & Bonikowski, 2013).

People-centrism establishes the standardising core of populist ideology. Populist leaders typically used simplified, language intended to resonate with ordinary citizens, also to indicate the authenticity (Decadri & Boussalis, 2020). This communicative strategy underscores immediacy to the public and strengthens claims of representing the “general will” against detached elites.

Populist communication style thoroughly depicts political, economic, and cultural elites as corrupt, self-interested, and disruptive to public welfare (Polk et al., 2017). Empirical studies prove that anti-elite and anti-corruption narratives suggestively forecast support for populist actors, mostly during electoral periods (Schulz et al., 2017; Geurkink et al., 2020). Media plays a critical part in intensifying these narratives by providing visibility to populist critiques and framing elite establishments as impassive or dishonest (Ernst et al., 2017).

Populism as Political Style

Populism has been theorized as a political style characterized by performative rhetoric, demonstrative appeals, and predicament narratives (Moffitt & Tormey, 2014). This approach highlights how populist actors exaggerate politics through dual moral framing, by generating “us versus them” dichotomy (Hawkins, 2009; de la Torre, 2012).

Populist rhetoric is typically emotional, slogan-driven, and mediated through mass and digital media, allowing leaders to promote direct, unmediated associations with audiences (Mazzoleni et al., 2003; Block & Negrine, 2017). Comparative research specifies that left-wing populism often adopts inclusionary language, while, right-wing populism tends to be exclusionary, which normally aims minorities and external groups (Hassan, 2020).

Populism as Political Strategy

A third major approach in literature to understand populism is a

political strategy, that focused on leadership, organization, and mass mobilization (Weyland, 2001; Gidron & Bonikowski, 2013). This viewpoint defines, populism as less about beliefs than political practice exactly, how charismatic leaders circumvent institutional intermediaries to secure direct support from largely chaotic supporters (Levitsky & Roberts, 2011; Kenny, 2021). And this approach underlines personalistic leadership, emotional mobilization, and flexible plan, allowing populists to changing political contexts (Madrid, 2008). So, populism is defined not merely as an ideological orientation but as a technique of exercising and supporting political power.

Although, the ideational, stylistic, and strategic approaches overlap, but emphasis on moral division and the significance of “the people” (Hawkins, 2010; Pappas, 2012). Excessively discursive descriptions risk theoretical overstrain, while morally ideological approach may minimise populism’s performative and organizational magnitudes (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). Identifying these issues, contemporary research progressively adopts an consolidative perspective, treating populism as a multidimensional phenomenon that syndicates ideology, discourse, and strategy (Filc, 2010; Barr, 2009). As Gidron and Bonikowski (2013) argue, admitting these theoretical divisions improves investigative clarity and reinforces empirical examination of populism across various political settings.

Previous studies have mainly focused on populist leaders during pre-election periods, examining their communication strategies and media portrayal leading up to election. However, there is a prominent absence of research that broadly examines the changing aspects of Media coverage of populist leaders after election. By encompassing the analysis to include post-election phases, this research aims to discourse this gap and deliver a holistic understanding of how the media interrelates with populist leaders over time. Moreover, by examining media conduct towards populists in different stages of their leadership, this research aims to shed light on possible changes in media attitudes and coverage tactics. So, this study contributes to the existing literature by offering insights into the evolving connexion between the media and populist leaders, thereby enriching our understanding of the comprehensive dynamics of populism in modern political sceneries. Additionally, the insertion of language-based frames alone approach-based framing strategies provide a holistic viewpoint on media content relating to populist coverage.

Theoretical Framework

Framing Theory

Framing is the method of selecting certain aspects of a perceived reality and making them more prominent in a communication text. Which

accomplish four key roles: to define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest possible remedies (Entman, 1993). Expanding this perspective, Scheufele (1999) conceptualized framing as a dynamic process involving both media production and audience interpretation. Media organizations construct frames through editorial decisions, journalistic routines, and institutional norms, while audiences interpret these frames according to their existing beliefs and experiences. De Vreese (2005) argues that political news frames affect citizens' evaluations of political actors by highlighting specific issues, leadership qualities, and policy positions.

Drawing on Framing Theory, the present study argues that newspaper framing is not static but changes according to the political context. By comparing the coverage of populist leaders in India and Pakistan before and after national elections, this study examines whether newspapers systematically altered their framing strategies, language use, and evaluative tone in response to changes in political circumstances. This theoretical perspective provides the conceptual foundation for the study's research hypotheses and explains why significant differences in media framing are expected across the two election phases.

Methodology

This study quantitatively examined the media framing of populist leaders of India and Pakistan to identifying the framing strategies in both pre-election and post-election phases. Moreover, tone, and types of issues of populist leaders selected newspapers of both countries have been explored. In order to conduct an analysis, two English newspapers from Pakistan (Dawn and The News International) and two English newspapers from India (Times of India and The Hindu) are selected. The news stories of populist leaders of India and Pakistan published in selected newspapers e.g. Dawn and The News International, Times of India and The Hindu are selected as the sample of the study.

To investigate the framing of populist leaders in India and Pakistan, the time period of the study was defined as approximately one year, consisting of six months before and six months after the respective general elections. For Pakistan, the pre-election phase extended from 25 January 2018 to 24 July 2018, while the post-election phase covered the period from 25 July 2018 to 25 January 2019. For India, the pre-election period spanned from 11 October 2018 to 10 April 2019, and the post-election phase extended from 20 May 2019 to 19 November 2019.

For this investigation, a systematic sampling strategy was used, in which news stories were selected using a skip interval of one to generate a sample representing 50 percent of the population. Interval (systematic)

sampling involved selecting every *n*th unit from an ordered list to ensure even distribution and reduce selection bias (Krippendorff, 2018; Neuendorf, 2017). This study compares news stories published in both the India and Pakistan press in order to identify the shift of media framing in pre-election and post-election phases.

Content Categorization Scheme

Variable	Categorization/ Conceptualization	Operationalization
Tone	Supportive	If a story mirrored that the political leader had performed in a socially responsible way and had not involved in any offense. News story that emphasizes political struggle and enthusiastic gestures. Story makes favorable conditions for populist, considered supportive tone.
	Critical	If the story tended to not encouraging or admiring and capturing political leader as corrupt. Picturing conflicting, negative or harmful views supposed Critical Tone.
	Neutral	While if a story had an equal figure of paragraphs with a positive and negative tone e.g. If three paragraphs had a positive tone toward the populist leaders and another three had a negative tone, in such a situation the story was coded as neutral. In other words, if the story does not clearly have the supportive or critical aspects of the category selected as Neutral.

Frames Approach Based Frames	People-Centric Frame Stressing merits of the people Flattering accomplishment of the people Indicating closeness of the people Treating the people as a discrete entity with common feelings, desires and will.	Politicians constantly pay special attention to the issues that the general public faces. Politicians may perform well without interacting with common citizens. The supreme rule in politics in our nation should be the will of the people. News covered populist communication, and above-mentioned appeals is considered people-centric frame.
	Anti-Elitist Frame Blame Game & Stereotyping Elite as untrustworthy Eliminating the elite from the people Perceived Elite as an enemy.	A small number of powerful interests who mostly care about themselves effectively dominate the government. Politicians using their authority in various decisions. Many of the individuals in charge of the government are corrupt. News stories which covered those elite neglects the people's interests and deprives them of their right to rule is considered the part of Anti-elite frame.
	Nationalism Frame Sense of Patriotism Ideal nation Preferring national interest	On difficult political matters, using the card of loyalty. Trust the opinions of the people as a whole, even when it comes to complicated political matters. News stories covered the expression of ultra-national positions. Focused on people of proposed community and generated the feelings of motherland. Or news highlighted the stories regarding anti national interest activities of populist leader.

	Moralism Frame Morally pure and fully unified liable for real or imaginary complaints Appealing action	Presenting that leader has a decent, honest character. The values and interests of the average person are similar. News stories in which populist leaders put themselves in a position of ethical judgment, and recommended ideal social life. Or doing activities which considered as abhorrent action.
	Personalization Frame Over-exposure of populist leader. Imaginary / superficial personality. Others	News stories about personal views, life style and routine of an individual are considered personalized frame. This is usually related to stories of human interest.
Language Based Frames	Demonizing Language Name Calling Using Slangs Sarcasm Hyperbole	Stories highly covered demonizing language of populist leaders including name calling and blaming. Persuading the people of the wrongdoings of past governments, resulting in the bankruptcy of several organizations is considered Demonizing language.
	Emotive Language I vs. We Emotional phrase Determine quotes	News stories appealing emotions and motivating the people. Allow listeners to respond more sympathetically to the speaker and to share his/her sentiments is considered as Emotive language.

Source: Explained by authors.

To do this, following research questions and hypotheses are designed:

- RQ1. What are the key framing strategies applied by the selected press for the populist leaders of Pakistan and India?
- RQ2. To what extent does the coverage to populist leaders vary in terms of supportive and critical coverage in the pre-election and post-election phases?
- RH1: The framing strategies significantly different in the pre-election and post-election phases.
- RH2: Populist Leaders receive more supportive coverage in the pre-election phase as compared to post-election.

Because the study analyses categorical variables, including framing categories and tone across independent groups of news stories published during pre-election and post-election periods, the Chi-square test of independence was employed. The Chi-square test is appropriate for examining associations between categorical variables and determining whether distributions differ significantly across independent samples (Field, 2018; Agresti, 2019).

Data Analysis and Discussion

The sample of the study was 527 stories. Total number of stories retrieved from Dawn were 146 which consist of 27.7% of the total data. Total stories repossessed from The News were 120 which encompassed of almost 22.8% of the total data. Stories retrieved from The Hindu were 110 which comprised of 20.9% of the complete data. The entire number of stories taken from Times of India was 151 which covered 28.7% of the overall data as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Frequency of News Stories by Newspapers

Newspaper	<i>n</i>	%
Dawn	146	27.7
The News International	120	22.8
The Hindu	110	20.9
The Times of India	151	28.7
Total	527	100.0

RQ1. What are the key framing strategies applied by the selected newspapers for the populist leaders of Pakistan and India?

Table 2. Distribution of Approach Based Frames Across Selected Newspapers

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Overall, the findings indicate noticeable differences in the framing patterns adopted by the four newspapers. The Anti-Elitist Frame was the most frequently employed frame in *Dawn* (44.5%) and *The Hindu* (40.0%), suggesting that these newspapers predominantly portrayed populist leaders through narratives emphasizing criticism of political elites and the establishment. In contrast, *The Times of India* relied most heavily on the People-Centric Frame (32.5%), highlighting populist leaders' close association with ordinary citizens and public interests. Similarly, *The News International* showed a relatively balanced distribution of frames, with the People-Centric Frame (30.0%) appearing slightly more frequently than the Anti-Elitist Frame (28.3%).

The Nationalism Frame was moderately represented across all newspapers, ranging from 13.7% in *Dawn* to 20.9% in *The Hindu*. The Moralism Frame and Personalization Frame were comparatively less frequent, indicating that ethical appeals and personalized portrayals of political leaders received relatively limited emphasis in newspaper coverage. The overall Chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between newspapers and framing strategies, $\chi^2 (12, N = 527) = 52.65, p < .001$. This finding suggests that the distribution of framing strategies differed significantly across newspapers, reflecting variations in editorial priorities and framing practices in the Indian and Pakistani press. As far as the Language Based Frames were concerned, amongst the four selected newspapers, the Demonizing Language Frame, was used the most (88 times) 60.3% by the “Dawn” followed by “The News” which used it (42times) 35.0% and “The Hindu” which used it (49 times) 44.5% also “Times of India” used it (62 time) 41.1% in the news stories of populist leaders of India and Pakistan (Table 3)

Table 3. Distribution of Language Based Frames Across Selected Newspapers

Newspaper	Demonizing Language <i>n</i> (%)	Emotive Language <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>n</i>
Dawn	88 (60.3)	58 (39.7)	146
The News International	42 (35.0)	78 (65.0)	120
The Hindu	49 (44.5)	61 (55.5)	110
The Times of India	62 (41.1)	89 (58.9)	151
$\chi^2 (3, N = 527) = 29.04, p < .001$			

The findings reveal clear differences in the use of Demonizing Language and Emotive Language across newspapers. *Dawn* employed the Demonizing Language Frame most frequently (60.3%), indicating a greater tendency to portray populist leaders through critical, confrontational, or negative language. In contrast, *The News International* relied predominantly on the Emotive Language Frame (65.0%), emphasizing emotional appeals and persuasive rhetoric in its coverage.

Similarly, *The Hindu* (55.5%) and *The Times of India* (58.9%) also used the Emotive Language Frame more frequently than the Demonizing Language Frame, suggesting that Indian newspapers were comparatively more inclined to present populist leaders through emotionally engaging narratives rather than overtly hostile language. Overall, emotive language constituted the dominant framing strategy across the selected newspapers, whereas demonizing language was comparatively less frequent.

The overall Chi-square analysis indicated a statistically significant relationship between newspaper and language-based framing strategy, $\chi^2(3, N = 527) = 29.04, p < .001$. This result demonstrates that the choice of language-based frames varied significantly among the selected newspapers, highlighting differences in journalistic style and editorial approaches toward reporting on populist leaders in India and Pakistan.

RQ2. To what extent does the coverage to populist leaders vary in terms of supportive and critical coverage in the pre-election and post-election phases?

In the time of “Pre-Election Pakistan”, total 119 news stories were published. In which, 96 news stories, with 80.6% were supportive, 14 (11.7%) news were critical and only 9 (7.5%) news stories were neutral in the coverage. The majority of news were supportive (80.6%), indicating a strong favourable bias in newspaper coverage during the pre-election period. Critical and neutral tones were significantly less common, making up 11.7% and 7.5% of the coverage, respectively. While, at the time of “post-election Pakistan”, 45 news stories, with 35.7% were supportive, 32 (25.4%) news were Critical, and 49 (38.9%) news stories were Neutral. Total 126 news stories were published for the coverage of populist leaders of India and Pakistan. There was a notable shift in tone post-election, with supportive coverage dropping to Critical news increased and neutral news rose. This suggests a more balanced or critical approach in post-election reporting compared to the pre-election period as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Tone of Newspaper Coverage During Pre-Election and Post-Election Periods

Election Phase	Supportive <i>n</i> (%)	Critical <i>n</i> (%)	Neutral <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>n</i>
Pakistan(pre-election)	96 (80.6)	14 (11.7)	9 (7.6)	119
Pakistan(post-election)	45 (35.7)	32 (25.4)	49 (38.9)	126
India (pre-election)	71 (61.7)	29 (25.2)	15 (13.1)	115
India (post-election)	41 (39.0)	46 (43.8)	18 (17.1)	105
$\chi^2 (6, N = 465) = 41.87, p < .001$				

A similar pattern was observed in India. During the pre-election period, supportive coverage constituted 61.7% of all news stories, exceeding both critical (25.2%) and neutral (13.1%) coverage. However, following the election, critical coverage increased to 43.8%, surpassing supportive coverage (39.0%), while neutral reporting also increased slightly (17.1%). These findings indicate that Indian newspapers became considerably more critical of populist leaders after the election than during the campaign period.

Overall, the findings suggest that newspapers in both Pakistan and India were more likely to provide favourable coverage during election campaigns but adopted a more critical and balanced tone once elections concluded. The overall Chi-square analysis indicated a statistically significant association between election phase and the tone of media coverage, $\chi^2 (6, N = 465) = 41.87, p < .001$, demonstrating that the tone of newspaper coverage varied significantly between the pre-election and post-election periods.

RH1: The framing strategies significantly different in the pre-election and post-election phases.

People Centric Frame was used in 98 (65.9%) news stories. While in the post-election time 53 (35.1%) news stories used People Centric Frame for the coverage of populist leaders. Combining both periods, there were 151 news stories used People Centric Frame.

Table 5. Comparison of Approach-Based Frames in Pre-Election and Post-Election Period

Frame	Pre-election <i>n</i> (%)	Post-election <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>n</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>
People-Centric	98 (64.9)	53 (35.1)	151	6.31	.012
Anti-Elitist	79 (38.5)	126 (61.5)	205	10.83	.001
Nationalism	40 (52.6)	36 (47.4)	76	3.78	.052
Moralism	35 (63.6)	20 (36.4)	55	5.41	.020
Personalization	30 (75.0)	10 (25.0)	40	10.83	.001

This frame saw a higher usage in the pre-election period compared to the post-election period, indicating a stronger emphasis on people-centric narratives during the campaign phase. Anti-Elitist Frame was used in 79 (38.5%) news stories that published at the time of pre-election. And at the post-election time 126 (61.5%) news stories used anti-elitist frame. Total 205 news stories were published. Anti-Elitist Frame was more prevalent in the post-election period, suggesting that anti-elitist sentiments became more pronounced after the election, possibly as a reaction to the outcomes or to consolidate the support base. Chi-Square *p*-value of Anti-Elitist Frame is .001, so the *p*-value is much less than 0.05, leading us to reject the null hypothesis for the anti-elitist frame. There is a significant increase in the use of this frame post-election.

For the coverage of populist leaders of India and Pakistan Nationalism Frame was used in 76 news stories. In which, 40 (53.7%) news stories were published at the time of pre-election. While, 36 (47.3%) news stories were published after the election. The use of nationalism framing remained relatively consistent across both periods, with a slight decrease post-election. This indicates that nationalism was a stable theme throughout the election cycle. Nationalism Frame Chi-Square *p*-value is .052, so the *p*-value is slightly above 0.05, indicating a marginal significance. While we cannot strongly reject the null hypothesis, there is a suggestion of a difference that might be explored further with a larger sample size or additional data.

Moralism Frame was used in 55 news stories for the coverage of populist leaders of India and Pakistan. In the pre-election time, there were 35 (63.7%) news stories were published and 20 (36.3%) news stories were published after the election. This frame was used more in the pre-election period, showing a decline post-election. Moralism may have been a more compelling strategy during the campaign to appeal to voters' ethical values. Moralism Frame Chi-Square *p*-value is .020, which is less than

0.05, leading us to reject the null hypothesis for the moralism frame. This indicates a significant reduction in the use of this frame post-election.

Personalization Frame was used in 40 news stories. In which, 30 (75.0%) news stories were published in the pre-election phase. And 10 news (25.0%) were published in the post-election phase. The personalization frame was used more during the pre-election period, suggesting a tactic to humanize candidates or issues to garner personal voter connection before the election. Chi-Square p-value of Personalization Frame is .001, which is much less than 0.05, so we reject the null hypothesis for the personalization frame. There is a significant decrease in the use of this frame post-election.

Based on (RH1), the findings indicate that several framing strategies differed significantly between the pre-election and post-election periods. Specifically, statistically significant differences were observed in the use of the People-Centric Frame ($\chi^2 = 6.31, p = .012$), Anti-Elitist Frame ($\chi^2 = 10.83, p < .001$), Moralism Frame ($\chi^2 = 5.41, p = .020$), and Personalization Frame ($\chi^2 = 10.83, p < .001$). These results suggest that newspapers significantly altered their framing of populist leaders across the two electoral phases. In contrast, the Nationalism Frame did not differ significantly between the pre-election and post-election periods ($\chi^2 = 3.78, p = .052$). Although the result approached statistical significance, it exceeded the conventional alpha level of .05, indicating that the use of nationalism remained relatively stable across the election cycle. Therefore, RH1 is partially supported, as significant differences were found for four of the five approach-based framing strategies, whereas the Nationalism Frame did not exhibit a statistically significant change. (Table 5)

The increased reliance on the Anti-Elitist Frame during the post-election period suggests that media narratives shifted from campaign-oriented image construction to greater scrutiny of governing elites. This finding aligns with Ernst et al. (2017), who argued that anti-elitist discourse becomes more salient when populist leaders confront institutional constraints after assuming office. Similarly, Esser et al. (2016) noted that media organizations frequently transition from amplifying populist rhetoric during campaigns to emphasizing governmental accountability after elections. The present findings extend this argument by demonstrating that this transition occurs consistently in both Pakistan and India despite differences in political systems.

To know the language-based framing strategies of applied by the selected press of India, categorized into Demonizing Language Frame and Emotive Language Frame, during both pre-election and post-election phases. Following are the details:

Table 6. *Comparison of Language-Based Frames in Pre-Election and Post-Election Periods*

Frame	Pre-election <i>n</i> (%)	Post-election <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>n</i>	χ^2	<i>p</i>
Demonizing Language	96 (39.2)	149 (60.8)	245	10.83	.001
Emotive Language	171 (60.6)	111 (39.4)	282	10.83	.001

Table 6 presents that in the pre-election setting Demonizing Language Frame was used in 96 (39.2%) news stories. And Emotive Language Frame was used in 171 (60.6%) news stories. While, in the post-election time Demonizing Language Frame was used in 149 (60.8%) news stories and motive Language Frame in 111 (39.4%) news stories. Out of 527 (100.0%) news stories Demonizing Language Frame was used in 245 (46.5%) news stories and Emotive Language Frame in 282 (53.5%) news stories. Chi-square, P-value is .001, much less than 0.05, allowing us to reject the null hypothesis for the emotive language frame. This indicates a significant decrease in the use of emotive language post-election compared to pre-election. Based on the hypothesis (RH1) and the chi-square p-values for language-based frames, Demonizing Language Frame ($P < .001$) shows a significant increase post-election, suggesting a shift towards more negative framing after the election. And Emotive Language Frame ($p < .001$) shows a significant decrease post-election, indicating a reduction in the use of emotionally charged language after the election.

In summary, Tables 5 and Table 6 provide valuable perceptions of framing strategies used by the selected newspapers in covering populist leaders before and after election. The findings from both tables suggest a discernible shift in media coverage from pre-election to post-election periods. Each cell and summing them up, for "Approach Based Frames" and "Language Based Frames" the P-values show statistically significant results, indicating that there is a significant difference between frames, and time periods. The chi-square tests confirm that there are significant associations between these variables, suggesting that the framing of populist leaders significantly differed in pre-election and post-election phases. Hence the RH1 is supported.

RH2: Populist Leaders receive more supportive coverage in the pre-election phase as compared to post-election.

The tones are categorized as supportive, critical, and neutral. Table 7 shows that the tone of the total 273 (51.8%) news stories was Supportive in their nature. In which, 180 (34.2%) news stories were published at the

time of "pre-election". While 93 (17.6%) news stories were published in "post-election" time period. The supportive tone is significantly more prevalent in the pre-election period, with 34.2% of the coverage compared to 17.6% post-election. This indicates a strong media bias in favor of populist leaders during the campaign phase, which decreases substantially after the election.

While the tone of 168 (31.9%) new stories was Critical. In which, 54 (10.2%) news stories were published at pre-election time and 114 (21.6%) news stories were published after the election. Critical coverage was mostly high in the post-election period, cumulative from 10.2% pre-election to 21.6% post-election. This recommends that the media accepts a more inspecting stance towards populist leaders after the election, possibly reflecting a change towards accountability.

Table 7. Comparison of Coverage Tone in Pre-Election and Post-Election Periods

Tone	Pre-election <i>n</i> (%)	Post-election <i>n</i> (%)	Total <i>n</i> (%)
Supportive	180 (34.2)	93 (17.6)	273 (51.8)
Critical	54 (10.2)	114 (21.6)	168 (31.9)
Neutral	33 (6.3)	53 (10.1)	86 (16.3)
Total	267 (50.7)	260 (49.3)	527 (100.0)
$\chi^2 (2, N = 527) = 53.72, p < .001$			

Total 86 (16.3%) new stories are Neutral in their tone. In the pre-election time 33 (6.3%) news stories were show Neutral tone for the coverage of populist leaders of both countries and 53 (10.1%) news storis were published in post-election time. Neutral coverage also increases post-election, from 6.3% to 10.1%. This indicates a trend towards more balanced reporting after the election, where the media might present information more objectively.

In general, it appears that the press of both countries is more supportive in the pre-election times as compared to post-election times. There is a distinguished change in tone from supportive to other tones after the election This suggests that the tone of the selected newspapers in coverage of populist leaders may diverge depending on the timing comparative to the election cycle, with more supportive coverage leading up to the election. The Chi-square test revealed a statistically significant association between the election phase and the tone of newspaper coverage, $\chi^2 (2, N = 527) = 53.72, p < .001$, indicating that the tone of media coverage varied significantly between the pre-election and post-

election periods. These findings provide empirical support for Research Hypothesis 2 (RH2), demonstrating that populist leaders received significantly more supportive coverage during the pre-election period than in the post-election period.

The overall tone across both countries and election time phases time tended to be supportive, advised that a significant portion of news coverage was positive or favourable. The study finds that coverage of populist leaders is significantly more supportive during the pre-election phase, where populist leaders receive favourable attention as part of the political buildup (Pappas, 2012; Mudde, 2007). There was a prominent change in tone from Pre-Election to Post-Election in both newspapers of Pakistan and India. In Pakistan, there was a decline in supportive tone and an increase in critical tone in post-election phase. In India, the supportive tone also decreased, while the critical tone increased in post-election phases. The increase of critical tone in the post-election period in both countries indicated a more scrutinizing approach by the media towards the government or political events after the election. While, the distribution of a neutral tone remained relatively consistent across time periods, with a slight increase in the post-election phase. Neutral tones indicated a more objective and unbiased reporting style. The shift in tone post-election suggested that news coverage becomes more evaluative and critical after the political landscape has undergone change. This could be influenced by policy decisions, political developments, or public reactions.

Conclusion

The diverse nature of media framing, highlighting differences in frames, tones, and attributes in different time periods and specific contexts (pre-election/post-election). These variances propose a potential media approach, audience targeting, or changes in public interest that form media narratives. Understanding these progressions is critical for knowing media impression and its impact on public perceptions and opinions. Newspapers emphasis more on image building, charisma, and campaign narratives during the pre-election phase, while the post-election phase shifts attention to administrative performance, policy implementation, and accountability. The pre-election phase in newspapers focuses on candidate promotion, campaign plans, and promises, while the post-election phase shifts focus to policy implementation, performance evaluation, and governance challenges. Media coverage in the pre-election phase highlights the personal appeal and emotional rhetoric of populist leaders, while the post-election phase shifts focus to their governance performance, decision-making, and policy execution. Populist leaders are thus enclosed as reliable voices of the people and receive favourable introduction that

intensifies their promises and personal attributes. However, once they are in power, the media's attitudes shift from extension to accountability. Post-election coverage becomes more critical, and focused on governance, performance, and policy faults. This evolution highlights the media's dual role, while it intensifies populist rhetoric during election campaigns, and confirms watchdog function of media by scrutinizing those in power after the election. Consequently, the bond between media and populist leaders is not static but dynamic, shifting from support to critique reliant on the political situation and democratic prospects.

Recommendation

The following recommendations for future research:

1. By selecting social media instant of newspapers can intensifying the body of knowledge on framing theory, future researchers will be able to scrutinise the different approaches of the populist coverage.
2. Research on the factors that affect the media content, such as the editor's influence, politicians' influence, or interest groups' influence in shaping media content and the selection of topics and frames for the coverage of populist leaders.
3. Qualitative approaches can offer, more applicable intuitions into the framing and narrative structure of populist leaders. The findings of this study are valued, but may not completely reflect the exertion and composite nature of populist media representation.

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