



## Coverage of Political Unrest in Pakistani English Newspapers: A Corpus-Based Content Analysis

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**Abstract:** *The newspaper is a traditional channel of information interchange between the public and the government, as well as a free platform for the general public to commend and criticize the actions and policies of the government. This article aims to study the frequency of lexical choices and positive and negative words in the news coverage of political unrest by Pakistani English newspapers using corpus-based content analysis. The data for analysis was collected from the official websites of three Pakistani English newspapers: Daily Times, The Nation, and Dawn. The collected data has been analyzed quantitatively using the corpus software AntConc. Twenty news items were selected for news corpus with purposive sampling from 5th April 2023 to 30th September 2023. The findings reveal that Pakistani English newspapers use more negative words in the coverage of political matters, which do not represent the subjectivity of the newspapers' publishers but provide trustworthy news about political uncertainty to the audience. Moreover, this study explores the agenda of Pakistani English newspaper media through the Agenda Setting theory by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw (1972). Additionally, this study demonstrates how much realistically Pakistani English publications depict political events that are causing uncertainty.*

**Key Words:** Corpus, Pakistani English Newspapers, Biasness, Frequently Used Words, Content Analysis

### Introduction

The news media, both printed and electronic, targets and has equal access to every section of the country, yet it has specific preferences and biases toward certain cities and regions. Many studies around the world have been conducted to investigate this form of media preference. Language and media link with each other since language is the only means by which media represents societal realities. Pakistani news media is under fire for being biased, particularly in promoting news about political parties and reporting various issues. The languages spoken in Pakistan have a significant impact on administrative divisions as well as cultural and sociopolitical structures, which have a significant impact on news. The newspaper serves as both a free forum for the general public to praise and critique the activities and policies of the government and a traditional means of information exchange between the government and the populace. Urdu and English are the two official languages of Pakistan. Pakistan's most widely spoken languages are Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Urdu, Saraiki, and Balochi. The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics reports that there were 707 newspapers published in Pakistan overall in 2019. Millions of English-language newspapers are sold every day throughout Pakistan, fostering strong viewpoints that support the Nation's democracy. Hazlett et al. (2016) claim that informed citizens and a healthy democracy cooperate in carrying out administrative tasks, and newspapers play a great part in informing the public.

Politics and media have a complicated and diverse interaction that influences public perception, shapes political discourse, and impacts the democratic society. According to Almond (1963), media plays an important role in the political socialization process, impacting the formation of individuals' political attitudes and ideals, particularly in fledgling democracies. English newspapers use various frames and repetitious sentences to create a good and bad impression of political parties, and government acts on the

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people. Khan (2021) stated that Pakistan's mainstream English newspapers greatly influenced the country's political landscape by providing factual information to the public and potentially rousing fury against the administration.

Political unrest, which is causing economic suffering, and the event of 9th May is a special matter of talk in this study to discuss political unrest in Pakistan. This is the leading socio-political issue in Pakistan, especially in the year 2023; Pakistan's economy is in miserable condition just because of unrest in the political atmosphere. The government in Pakistan cannot rule over for a specific tenure as opposition parties do not wait for the next election and have no respect for democracy and the constitution. The public and PTI supporters reacted extremely to the arrest of Imran Khan. As a result, the event of 9<sup>th</sup> May took place in Pakistan. The election commission in Pakistan has not been determined to announce a final decision for holding elections, and due to the delay in elections, there is a prevailing wave of uncertainty among the public.

Corpus linguistics is a systematic approach that is applied in the fields of media studies, political science, education, and social media analysis to analyze extravagant data. This approach depends on statistical performance in analyzing the language of the text, and it is gaining popularity for its varied tools and low risk of subjectivity. By using corpus linguistic methodologies, scholars have the ability to detect frequent patterns and changes in linguistic usage, including the occurrence of specific terms or expressions, the basic tone and sentiment carried in language, and the tools by which language is harnessed to express connotation. Online versions of newspapers are progressively used by everyone, particularly the young generation, to get access to news. Given the extensive availability of the internet, these platforms are tailored to accommodate a broad readership, furnishing up-to-the-minute information, editorial commentaries, in-depth investigations, and multimedia materials. It has been twenty years since online versions of newspapers appeared in the media marketplace (Jacobi, 2015). It is essential for newspapers to inform citizens about important societal matters in a proficient manner (Sheikh, 1993). Media has the power to alter and influence the world through its influential language. In essence, online English newspapers stand as pillars of information broadcasting, the digital realm to inform, educate, and authorize layman in an ever-changing world.

## Research Objectives

The objectives of the present study are given below.

1. To quantify the most frequently used words and to generate the word list of the most significant positive and negative words.
2. To highlight the ideological biases of Pakistani English newspapers in the representation of political uncertainty.

## Literature Review

Media plays a fundamental role in determining public opinion and influencing the sociopolitical part (Clifford G Christians, 2010). Obradevic (2023) conducted a study, "Political Communication and Traditional Media- An Inseparable Connection." The study highlighted the revolutionary influence of mass media on political communication, the involvement of conventional media in shaping public opinion, and the authority exercised by media organizations over public feedback. The study focused on the conceptual and theoretical analysis of political communication and traditional media. This study provided the results that traditional media in the form of press, radio, and television has changed political communication, which means that traditional media has the ability to influence public opinion. Since the evolution of Pakistan, it has gone through numerous political ups and downs. Pakistan's political history remained influenced by military, religious, and international power dynamics. Kronstadt (2018) reported in his report "Pakistan's Political Crises" that Pakistan confronted political instability in 2007 when Benazir Bhutto's killing, Pervez Musharraf's announcement of state emergency and security threats proceeded the public processions in the country. Military interference in political affairs raised the attention of the U.S. in Pakistan's unstable economy.

News media represents political issues in different forms of language and pictures. According to Lyengar (1990), news media considers both society and individuals as responsible for poverty. Another



experimental study was conducted by Helfer (2016), titled "How Politics Becomes News and News Becomes Politics. A Comparative Experimental Study of the Politics-media Relationship". In the study, the claims presented in the study were tested through the utilization of experimental data derived from elected politicians and political journalists in Switzerland and the Netherlands, which resulted in journalists picking up the political messages as exciting news, which makes the media's role more debatable.

The current study aims to bridge the gap by offering a corpus-based content analysis of the political unrest covered in Pakistani English newspapers. This research seeks to apply agenda-setting theory as a theoretical framework to ideologically perceive the lexical choices that are in positive and negative forms and uncover the agenda of Pakistani English newspapers. Carroll and McCombs (2003) presented two stages of agenda setting. The primary stage depicts the matters and concerns of common and official figures, and the next stage is about the features of the common and official figures. They believe that newspaper publishers are aware of public interest topics, have an agenda, and impact readers through consciously covered news items and stories. McCombs (1997) opined that news media do not set an agenda with their true intentions in the coverage of news; the publishers select the focused news, and it impacts the audiences' perception. This theory has long been used in research on mass communication. Mustaffa (2016) conducted a study to examine the Malaysian media's portrayal of the Iraq War issue and its influence on public perception through agenda-setting theory. In his study, it is revealed that one of the selected Malaysian English newspapers supported the people of Iraq in its coverage and delivered vigorous news about the Iraq War and its influence on culture, and it focused on the first level of agenda-setting theory. The other selected Malaysian English newspaper focused more on exaggerated matters as it did not practice the communicative policy and preferred profit earning rather than critically presenting the Iraq War matter.

## Material and Methods

A quantitative research methodology was used to conduct corpus-based content analysis. The main focus of this research is to find keywords that are frequently used in highlighting political issues related to news in newspapers. Quantitative content analysis helps to interpret the surface-level intentions behind the news coverage. The data for this study consists of political news items taken from online Pakistani English newspapers that were published from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2023 to 30<sup>th</sup> September 2023. Firstly, the researcher selected three English newspapers: Dawn, The Nation, and Daily Times, which are also published online. Dawn is a mostly circulated newspaper in Pakistan, having a large number of readerships. The researcher visited the websites of these newspapers. Secondly, the researcher prepared the corpus of collected data in separate files to analyze through AntConc corpus software. The code sheet was kept along with the data collection, containing all the relevant information specified in the code book. The code sheet recorded details of each unit of analysis for future analysis. Then, the researcher created a corpus of news items related to the selected theme from the newspaper's websites and copied them into a separate file. The phrases with dates and writer names at the top of the news items were removed from the saved text in order to avoid any problem with the accuracy of the frequency list. After that, a master file was created for analysis. The texts were organized by themes and newspapers, resulting in the development of a comprehensive corpus. Each news item relevant to the selected theme as a political matter is considered a unit of analysis, and the researcher has searched them through newspapers' official websites. The study was guided by the agenda-setting theory, which posits that the media sets the public discourse agenda. The researcher conducted a pilot study to test the methodology and ensure reliable results.

## Analysis and Interpretation

### Categories of News Items

The event will be held on 9 May, and there will be a reaction from other political leaders, the arrest of PTI leaders, and a matter of elections.

In the year 2023, Pakistan faced political ups and downs at extreme levels, and the media performed its constructive role in delivering crucial information to the public. The researcher took 20 news items from each selected newspaper using probability sampling in order to extract the most prominent words. The news items classify the theme of political unrest into four main categories: the event of 9<sup>th</sup> May, the reaction of other political leaders, the arrest of PTI political leaders, and the matter of elections in the

country. Pakistan's democracy and government are always under the supervision of the Army, and there is a big role of the Army in political unrest in Pakistan.

After Imran Khan's premiership in 2022, Mian Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif came into the government as prime minister of Pakistan, and due to the delay in elections, this government ended in August 2023. During this period, Imran Khan was arrested by NAB in May, and the reaction event of 9<sup>th</sup> May happened. Then, the caretaker government came for its specific time period, but elections were delayed for months. This political unrest caused the pathetic condition of Pakistan's economy in 2023. The 20 most repeatedly used words in the theme of political unrest are presented in the Daily Times newspaper.

### Frequency of Prominent Words

For a long phase, to measure words frequency was not a choice of most of the researchers in the field of research because it took a great effort and time. But the condition changed when text of books and newspapers got accessible online. Through the corpus tools it has become easier for researchers to measure the frequency of words. Frequency of prominent words is considered a pointer to point out the importance of words in the text.

**Table 1**

*The 20 most prominent words used in the theme of political unrest in the corpus of daily times online newspaper*

Words	Rank	Frequency	Range
Said	10	89	1
Imran	14	65	1
PTI	16	63	1
Khan	17	59	1
Elections	19	47	1
Pakistan	22	43	1
Punjab	23	42	1
Political	29	38	1
After	32	35	1
Against	34	34	1
Country	34	34	1
Law	34	34	1
ECP	39	32	1
Arrest	39	32	1
Election	43	29	1
Party	45	27	1
Police	45	27	1
Government	49	26	1
Court	51	23	1
Former	51	23	1

The table shows the appearance of (20) most prominent words out of (8962) total words in the news corpus, and these repeatedly used words show the qualified frequency that is at least 17 in the news corpus. Political unrest is a major issue in Pakistan, and the relative frequency of repeatedly used words highlights this issue. The word list signifies coverage of the event of 9<sup>th</sup> May, and prominent words show the concerns of political parties. The word Imran Khan occurred most frequently in the news of Daily Times; its relative frequency is 65 as he is the main reason for the political tug of war. The arrest of Imran Khan raised the anger of PTI supporters in public, and the reaction was very severe. The news related to the arrest of political leaders of PTI and violence in the reaction of the public become noticeable by analyzing that 'PTI,' 'Imran Khan,' 'arrest,' 'justice,' 'protest,' 'court,' 'leaders,' 'law' and 'statement' are published most frequently in the news related with 9<sup>th</sup> May event and arrest of the leaders. Other political party leaders gave different 'statements' in the reaction of 9<sup>th</sup> May. The interference of the Army in governmental and political affairs in order to discontinue the protests against Imran Khan is also vivid through the high-



frequency words. The Army forced the PTI workers to resign from the party with apology statements. A personal narrative is not disclosed in this matter in the Daily Times newspaper's news through high-frequency words. The list of high frequency of prominent words in the corpus of the news in Daily Times also depicts the matter of election in Pakistan. Words like 'election,' 'Pakistan,' 'ECP,' 'polls,' and 'Punjab' are published most frequently; these words depict the matter of election that is extended by ECP. The government ended in August, and a caretaker government came into rule, but the decision for election is still not final. Each word in Table 1 has an attribute that depicts news stories related to political unrest. In this newspaper, the leading words are related to statements of other political leaders about the 9<sup>th</sup> May event and holding the elections. The arrest of Imran Khan and protests from PTI workers brought about a political change in the worst conditions in Pakistan; the Daily Times published news related to categories of news items in a realistic and positive way.

**Table 2**

*The 60 most prominent and repeatedly used words in the news corpus of theme political unrest in the nation online newspaper*

Words	Rank	Frequency	Range
Pakistan	13	94	1
Minister	14	86	1
PTI	17	77	1
Government	19	70	1
Khan	19	70	1
Prime	22	65	1
Elections	28	54	1
Imran	28	54	1
Police	33	46	1
Court	34	44	1
Country	39	41	1
Political	44	38	1
National	47	33	1
Chief	49	31	1
Order	49	31	1
Against	57	28	1
Chairman	57	28	1
Arrest	61	27	1
PPP	65	25	1
Constitution	68	24	1

In the table-2 there is, the frequency of (the 20) most repeated and prominent words is presented out of a total (of 12164) words. The highest frequency is (94) 'Pakistan,' while the lowest frequency in this table is (24) 'security.' The word 'Pakistan' is mostly used in the statements of the prime minister of Pakistan and in the full name of PTI, as well as in describing the widespread protests across the country. Analyzing these frequently used words according to the news categories; the researcher has labeled them separately. Words like 'Pakistan,' 'PTI,' 'Imran,' 'Khan,' 'arrested,' 'against,' 'national,' 'country,' 'security,' 'courts,' 'economic,' and 'leaders' fall in the category of the event of 9<sup>th</sup> May, which also includes the reaction of other political parties and the arrest of PTI supporters. The word 'security' frequently appeared in the news corpus, as in the event of 9<sup>th</sup> May, Pakistan faced an internal security challenge. Protestors broke the cameras, hit public properties, and attacked radio stations and the core commander's house, but Islamabad security was out of the scene.

The high frequency of these words depicts that The Nation newspaper covered these news stories with more focus. Other frequently used words 'elections', 'delay,' 'commission,' 'caretaker,' 'national,' and 'general' fall under the category of elections. The Nation covers the news related with the theme of political unrest in an analytical and truthful manner.

**Table 3**

*The 20 most prominent and repeatedly used words in the news corpus of the theme of political unrest in Dawn Online Newspaper*

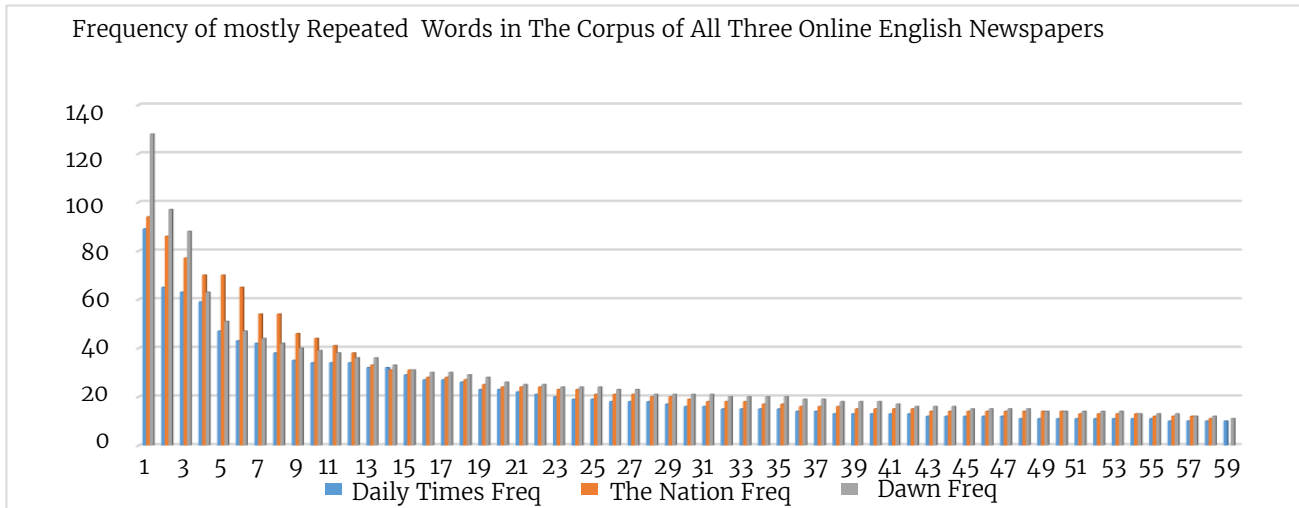
Words	Rank	Frequency	Range
said	13	128	1
court	16	97	1
PTI	19	88	1
elections	25	63	1
Imran	34	51	1
government	36	47	1
arrest	38	44	1
against	40	42	1
under	42	40	1
ECP	44	39	1
Minister	46	38	1
justice	48	36	1
political	48	36	1
constitution	54	33	1
delimitation	59	31	1
assembly	62	30	1
National	62	30	1
article	66	29	1
Commission	70	28	1
supreme	76	26	1

In the above table, the total words in the news corpus are (14013); the researcher found (500) most repeated words, and then by omitting conjunctions, prepositions, articles, and other minor words, the 20 most repeated words are presented in the above table. The frequency of the word 'said' (128) has been used in the speeches and statements of the politicians, and its attributes show that this newspaper publishes the statements of the politicians very realistically. There is also defined that Article 245 is not used with its entire power to support the province in the event of 9<sup>th</sup> May. Analyzing these frequently used words like 'said,' 'court,' 'PTI,' 'Imran,' 'arrested,' 'against,' 'under,' 'justice,' and 'article' fall into the first three categories that are related to the arrest of Imran Khan, the event of 9<sup>th</sup> Ma, and the reaction of other political parties and PTI supporters. Other frequently used words like 'elections,' 'minister,' 'national,' 'commission,' 'national,' and 'ECP' published in the news corpus, which describes the fourth category of the matter of election is discussed in The Dawn newspaper and word 'election' is mentioned (63) times that represents the issue of delay in elections holding and allegations of PTI workers on ECP (Election Commission of Pakistan) as responsible for the delay in elections in Pakistan. There are also some news items related to announcements from the ECP to hold elections, but eventually, they proved false.



**Figure 1**

Frequently used words in the theme of political unrest in three online english newspapers



In this graph, the frequency of mostly repeated words is presented in the corpus of all three selected newspapers. The horizontal axis shows the rank of the high and low-frequency words, while the vertical axis shows the frequency of mostly repeated words. The frequency of the first few words of the corpus of the Dawn newspaper is higher than that of The Nation newspaper. The word 'elections' is used most frequently in the news corpus of the Daily Times newspaper. This figure shows the overall frequency of the 20 most repeated words. Some words are used commonly in these online newspapers, but their frequency is not the same. The researcher has shown through this graph that in the corpus of The Dawn, the newspaper has published high-frequency words, which are also different from the vocabulary of the other two newspapers.

**Occurrence of Negative and Positive Words**

The researcher has analyzed the occurrence of negative and positive words in keeping with opinion words of Minqing Hu (2004), they are written off as words treatment in social media. The researcher has found topmost 10 positive and negative words from the news corpus of three selected online English newspapers. The positive and negative words are presented, with their frequency, in three selected online English newspapers separately.

**Table 4**

The topmost ten positive and negative words in the news corpus of Daily Times Newspaper

Positive Words	Frequency	Negative Words:	Frequency
Justice	18	Arrest	32
Situation	16	No	15
General	15	Corruption	14
High	14	Accused	11
action	12	Violent	10
Order	11	Protests	9
Free	8	Crisis	6
Trust	8	Uncertainty	6
Legal	7	Poor	6
Power	5	Corrupt	6

In the news corpus were (204) positive words (2.06%) out of the total (8962) words. The researcher has presented (10) topmost positive words in the news corpus. Other words like 'legal,' 'free,' 'trust,' and 'power' are used with positive connotations in the sense of 'under the law,' 'growth,' at liberty,' 'freedom from doubt,' at 'grasp' and 'potential.' The contextual study of these words shows that they are published with positive connotations. There were (220) negative words (2.45%) in the corpus of the newspapers out

of a total (8962) words. Another word, 'arrest' (32), has been used in the term 'confined,' and it relates to Imran Khan and his corruption case. Some other negative words like 'violent,' 'uncertainty,' 'poor,' and 'corrupt' have an extremely negative connotation. These words are used in the context of 9<sup>th</sup> May protests and attacks on civil property.

**Table 5**

The topmost ten positive and negative words in the news corpus of The Nation Newspaper

Positive Words	Frequency	Negative Words	Frequency
General	24	Against	28
Other	20	arrest	27
Defense	11	terrorism	10
Situation	11	violent	10
Consultations	10	sentence	10
Support	10	Accused	9
Action	9	Attacked	8
Clear	9	Short	7
Ensure	9	Corruption	6
Power	6	Ransacking	5

In the news corpus, there were (12164) total words (314) positive words (2.58%) and (358) negative words (3.94%) found it. The first column shows that a positive word like 'other' is used with positive connotations, not because of its meaning but because its usage in the context makes it nonnegative. Words 'clear,' 'ensure,' 'support,' and 'power' are entirely positive in their terms of meaning. The workers of PTI protested against the arrest of Imran Khan and damaged not only the public properties but also burnt the corps commander's house violently. It was a situation which was not controlled by authorities in power. There are also presented (10) negative words with frequency in the third column of the table. It is found that the word 'against' has been used 28 times in the matter of Imran Khan's arrest in a corruption case. PTI workers claimed that cases against him were completely proofless, and they called it propaganda against him.

**Table 6**

the top ten positive and negative words in the news corpus of The Dawn Newspaper

Positive Words	Frequency	Negative Words	Frequency
Justice	36	Against	42
Order	20	Delimitation	37
Other	18	Over	19
High	14	Protests	16
Hold	13	Dissolution	9
Statement	13	Attack	8
Trust	13	Accused	7
Situation	12	Allegations	7
Power	11	Unlawful	7
Take	19	Violation	7

In the corpus of Dawn newspaper, there were (276) positive words (1.96%) out of the total (14013) words. The table presents the topmost (15) positive words. The highest frequency (36) is 'justice,' and it is used with a positive connotation in the PTI workers' appeal for justice, and it is used in the sense of 'fair play' and equity. In the third column of the table, the researcher has presented (15) topmost negative words. There are (310) negative words (2.21%) out of total (14013) words. The researcher has looked into the context of these negative words and it is observed that words like 'attack' (8), 'unlawful' (7), and 'against' (47) are used with negative connotations in the sense of illegal or opposing actions and claims in the situation of protests and arrests of PTI leaders as well as delay in general elections in Pakistan. The last word, 'violation' (7), is also used with negative connotations in terms of distrust of Imran Khan and his motives for the country.





## Conclusion

The news stories on the subject of political unrest were analyzed through a corpus-based content analysis approach. The use of language was formal in the newspapers, and it dispelled the erroneous belief that the regular employment of negative vocabulary in newspapers signifies a predisposition or intention to influence. Rather, it proposes that such linguistic choices frequently mirror the severe truths and complexities of the socio-political environment in Pakistan. Through faithfully depicting these truths, newspapers fulfill an essential function in cultivating well-informed civic discussions rather than provoking distrustful outlooks. This study explored the fact that the most frequently occurring words reveal the linguistic choice of newspaper publishers. By adhering to a dedication to objectivity and accuracy, English newspapers in Pakistan uphold the ethical standards of journalistic practice and play a role in promoting societal stability and well-informed civic participation. It is revealed through this study that the Dawn newspaper is more assertive in its language use to highlight political issues. This assertiveness can be seen as an image of Dawn's commitment to addressing and bringing consideration to critical political matters in a direct and impactful manner.

The study's conclusion is covered by the following findings.

- The use of negative vocabulary in newspapers is not driven by a desire to influence public opinion but rather reflects the harsh realities of Pakistan's political landscape.
- Dawn newspaper's assertive language use in highlighting political unrest demonstrate its commitment to addressing critical matters in a direct and impactful way.
- The analysis of frequently occurring words reveals the linguistic preferences of newspaper publishers, highlighting their obligation to objectivity and accuracy.

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