

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF COLUMNISTS: POLITICAL POWER AND FREEDOM OF PRESS IN DAWN

Dr.Ayyaz Qadeer

HOD, COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI) Wah Campus
ayazqadeer@ciitwah.edu.pk

M. Bilal Noor

Lecturer, Government Graduate College Mianwali,
bilalnoors666@gmail.com

Noor Un Nahar

MS Scholar, COMSATS University Islamabad
noorunnahar999@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This research aims to assess the situation of Press Freedom in Pakistan by identifying linguistic strategies used by journalists to avoid any retaliation from the state and how ideologies implicit in our social discourse motivate this form of censorship. For this research selected columns are taken from the English Daily DAWN newspaper and are sourced for analysis written over a period of five years from 2019-2023. Data is analyzed using qualitative analysis, employing critical discourse analysis and the Fairclough three-dimensional model. The strategies employed by journalists to circumvent political censures such as interdiscursivity and historical framing are identified. By using such techniques columnists are able to successfully reveal hidden ideologies that promote Power politics while avoiding any backlash from the authorities by framing their discussions in a historical or social perspective or by using irony or similar literary devices. The analysis of selected newspaper articles shows that journalists in these past five years have adopted discursive strategies to counter the limitations imposed by the political establishment that have inclinations towards nationalistic ideologies and authoritarian tendencies.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model; Columnists; Politics; Power; Press Freedom; DAWN;

Introduction

Press freedom is a fundamental pillar of democracy, ensuring the public's right to information and holding those in power accountable. And while the press freedom situation in Pakistan can be described as unpredictable, it can also be characterized as repressive with limited periods of openness. From the time that this nation was founded in 1947, it can be seen that there have been phases in press freedom, followed by repression, correlating with the political climate and role of the military. In the field of Press and otherwise, humiliation, propaganda, and control were always evident in the military-led rule of Ayub Khan (1958–1969) and Zia-ul-Haq (1978–1988). Journalists have always been among those on the receiving side of these controlling strategies. Technology has had an immense influence on society (Akram et al., 2021a, 2021b; 2022; Ramzan et al., 2023). In the field of education, technology has brought about online learning platforms (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023; Al-Adwan et al., 2022) and educational apps (Abdelrady & Akram, 2022; Ma et al., 2024; Ramzan et al., 2023), making knowledge accessible to a wider audience. Corporatization of media and increased use of technology have most recently led to news reporting being broadened to encompass

the use of more media touch points and access to electronic channels (Javaid et al., 2024; Ramzan et al., 2023). On the contrary, it also has a dark side in such that it encourages institutions within the government to spy on their citizens through encumbering statutes such as the PECA of 2016. In Pakistan, currently the magnitude of press freedom ranges from constrained in normal situations to nearly nonexistent during crisis situations. It appears that, besides its deprived press rankings at 150 out of 180 countries in the World Press Freedom Index, By the year 2023, the country will be in the midst of a serious political turmoil and internal tyrannical politics. This raises a question on the state and protection of press freedom in the country. It is crucial to appreciate the role played by the media, especially the press, in the maintenance of democratic principles, and their protection (Javaid et al., 2024). To understand the struggles of Press Freedom in Pakistan, we have to consider the elements that shaped the current state of affairs in a historical and political context.

The situation of Press Freedom did slightly improve during the democratic interludes between these military regimes, but journalists were still often muzzled by the continued state control and censorship. The 1990s and the early 2000s were also tumultuous period when General Pervez Musharraf came to power in 1999. Although most of TV News channels were in business, the Musharraf regime still exercised much control over it. Finally, in 2002, the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority was established, and this strengthened governmental influence over media. PEMRA has been used to intimidate and threaten journalists and media organizations alike to ensure that the voices against it are either completely muzzled or heavily censored (Asfandiyar, 2023). In addition to this, the number of physical attacks on media persons increased, with a majority receiving explicit threats to their lives and detention for the reportage against the policies of the government of the day (Khan 2022).

The opportunities and challenges of press freedom in Pakistan have also been subject to changing paradigms with the advent of digital media. With the advent of digital platforms, one could reach a much wider audience with the spread of information, but these, too, have come under assault from governments. Legislation like the 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, which gave sweeping powers to authorities for surveillance and censorship, meant that the freedom to do digital journalism was greatly curtailed. Indeed, increasing over the years, but mainly after Imran Khan lost the premiership in 2022, had been censorship and repression. PEMRA and other regulatory bodies have regularly pressured the media with constant channel bans and journalist intimidations (Khan, 2022). The situation has been worsened by the economic crisis facing the media industry, a fact that has further overburdened independent news outlets with financial crises and pushed them into rising self-censorship to avoid conflicts with powerful state and non-state actors.

Pakistan's political development shows a complex environment, one in which press freedom faces excellent difficulty, especially highlighted during power transitions. The ouster of Imran Khan from the prime ministership is an example that governments always tend to use their means to silence the opposition and control the media. After the ousting of Khan, media repression was on the rise. Journalists who were perceived to be supportive of Khan were being arrested and physically intimidated. When it comes to those critics whose views are overshadowed by security concerns, these include the

treason case of journalist Imran Riaz Khan and an attack on Ayaz Amir, who criticized military actions (Khan 2022). These incidents are part of a broader strategy to silence critics by the use of both legal and extralegal measures to retain control over public discourse. More importantly, they underline the fragile state of freedom of the press in Pakistan, further highlighted by the withdrawal of the license to operate for ARY News on the pretext of "seditious material" (Khan, 2022). These, of course, are further measures that underscore the ongoing challenges and the crying need for genuine media reforms promised by successive governments, including the current PML-N-led coalition.

Statement of the Problem

Pakistan's media landscape faces a dilemma: balancing the freedom of the press necessary for democracy with the consequences of questioning the established political system. While much research has focused on issues of political and state influence on Press Freedom, examining how certain journalists at DAWN have used discursive strategies to navigate government scrutiny is worth looking into. Analyzing their language use, this study aims to understand how they tactfully convey important information, reflect public opinion, and bring the truth to light, all the while avoiding direct government attention in order not to be banned or targeted by the state. To survive in an environment of politically motivated censure, journalists have to be careful while disseminating views critical of the political establishment. The resulting discourse reveals hidden ideologies and power structures that undermine press freedom.

Research Objectives

1. To examine the strategies used by columnists from the Daily DAWN in recent times to negotiate the tension between reporting with freedom and authenticity, and challenging powerful political and state institutions.
2. To explore the discursive practices employed by columnists in the Daily DAWN that reflect political ideologies and narratives of power within Pakistan's social and political context that undermine Press Freedom.

Research Questions

1. How do the selected articles in DAWN negotiate the tension between epitomizing press freedom and potentially challenging the status quo and stakeholders of power in Pakistan?
2. How are political ideologies and narratives of power that undermine press freedom in Pakistan reflected in discursive practices in DAWN?

Significance of the Research

The significance of analyzing the discursive practices and strategies employed in certain columnists' work in DAWN using CDA lies in its potential to provide crucial insights into the dynamics of media discourse within Pakistan. The results of this research will provide insights into the defense mechanisms employed by these writers, and how Pakistan's media sector at large, using overt or covert linguistic strategies, avoids conflict

with the state narrative. Second, the findings of this research will benefit policy debates, further academic studies, and advocacy campaigns relating to press freedom, overseeing official and political power abuse, and instilling democratic principles in the country. Finally, in the hopes of creating a more open and transparent environment for journalism, our findings shall help policymakers and the citizens of Pakistan as well as the media practitioners to mitigate or respond to all the issues concerning media regulation and freedom of expression or even democratic participation.

Literature Review

A world in which political power can be exercised without public scrutiny (Freedom House, 2022), serves as an important check on press freedom, focusing on the behavior of those in government. As watchdogs, the media holds politicians accountable for their promises and exposes corruption or abuse of power. Critical Discourse Analysis provides a robust framework for examining the complex relationships among language, power, and society. In the context of political power and press freedom, CDA investigates how media discourse, particularly in the press, reflects and shapes social structures. Press freedom, which is essential for a democratic society, becomes a central issue when considering the role of journalists in challenging or reinforcing hegemonic political structures.

The authors Olagunju and Ajadi (2014) in the article "The Media and the Ideology of Insecurity: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Two Editorials on Federal Government-Boko Haram Face-off" examined the role of media in establishing 'security' discourses in the country. Based on the analysis of two editorials from Nigerian newspapers, it turned out that language shapes the way the public understands the level of insecurity with issue of Boko Haram in particular. They provided as evidence the wick media in national economic integration appeals to Van Dijk dry socio-cognitive theory of critical discourse analysis CDA the media is two face one improving and the other aggravating national insecurity. It also stated how the authors of those editorials use certain words to portray the image of Boko Haram as a monstrous force paralyzing the capacity of the Nigerian state to defend itself against such a menace, making the government appear cowardly. It was also found that this "Us vs. Them" dichotomy presented Boko Haram as unconquerable increasing fear and insecurity among citizens (Olagunju & Ajadi, 2014).

Additionally, Sahmeni and Afifah (2019) in their research, 'Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in Media Discourse Studies: Unmask the Mass Media,' discussed how Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) may be used to disclose concealed ideologies in media discourse. In the survey of sixteen journal articles, the study had shown how CDA especially under Teun Van Dijk's framework had become adept at revealing subtle ways in which media discourse sustained actual power relationships. This study found that the media usually represents the superior social groups positively, yet it marginalizes and presents the less powerful groups negatively. It was particularly effective in analyzing the thematic elements, organizational structure, and detailed linguistic features of media texts. The study established that such elements have an instrumental role in shaping public perceptions while subtly promoting the interests of dominant groups and perpetuating social inequalities (Sahmeni & Afifah, 2019).

In the article titled "Discursive Reproduction of Ideology in the National Elite Press of Pakistan," Ali (2017) explores how Pakistani elite newspapers, particularly *The News*, discursively construct national identity and the concept of "the other" in the context

of the Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan. Utilizing a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, Ali investigates how editorials from *The News* during the 2016 Kashmir unrest depict India as an "aggressor" and "occupier" while portraying Pakistan positively as a peaceful, law-abiding nation. The study reveals that the media employs ideologically charged language to emphasize the positive aspects of "us" (Pakistan) and the negative aspects of "them" (India), thereby reinforcing nationalistic sentiments. Moreover, global actors such as the United Nations and the United States are also represented negatively, accused of bias and inaction. Ali's analysis underscores how media narratives serve as powerful tools in shaping public perceptions and national identity by perpetuating ideological biases (Ali, 2017).

Additionally, W. Ali (2021) carried out a study entitled "Critical Discourse Analysis of Newspapers' Articles: CPEC in the Lens of Lexicalization" which comprehensively investigates how the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is linguistically represented in leading Pakistani English and Urdu publications with the utmost attention on the ideological connotations inherent in their word choice. Ahmad et al. (2022) and Ramzan et al. (2023) also affirm it. To investigate this, Fairclough's model of lexicalization was utilized to explore the ideologies expressed in this discourse by mainstream print media houses such as *The News*, *Daily Dawn*, *Daily Jang*, and *The Express*. It emerges that there is overwhelming evidence for the pro-CPEC belief system among writers from both English and Urdu newspapers using positive emotive words. Through its analysis, a variety of newspapers were found to employ a range of emotive language and metaphors that determined readers' attitudes toward CPEC. Amjad et al. (2021), Ramzan et al. (2023) and Javaid et al., (2023) also affirm it. These papers sometimes adopted a neutral tone and at other times exaggeratedly praised the benefits accruing from the initiative. For instance, English newspapers use expressions such as "game changer" or "mega project," while Urdu dailies may utilize more emotional phrases like "roshn mustaqbil ki naved" (good news of a bright future). This study established that regardless of differences in language and style, both English daily and Urdu daily are still pro-CPEC in their stances hence demonstrating that there is ideological congruity across languages (Ali, 2021).

The Pakistan Freedom of Expression Report 2020, published by Media Matters for Democracy, provides a comprehensive analysis of the state of freedom of expression in Pakistan during a particularly challenging year. As evidenced in the report, the atmosphere of free speech and freedom of the press was dismal especially since Pakistan managed to achieve only 30 out of 100 as per the index of Freedom of Expression. The report exposed how with the guarantee of these rights in the Constitution, there were also vague and arbitrary restrictions which cut across both off and online, which very often inhibited the enjoyment of such rights. These challenges were further exacerbated, unfortunately, by the Covid-19 pandemic; during which, the government as well as non-state actors more dominant than before in their information management, became more lethal threats to journalists. In addition to those, restrictions on media diversity and media concentration were also named as additional challenges to the enjoyment of freedom of expression in the country (Media Matters for Democracy, 2021).

In a study on "Media Concentration and Journalistic Independence in Pakistan: Audience and Journalists' Perspectives," Raza, Saeed, and Ali (2022) explored the

implications of media concentration on journalistic independence and public confidence in Pakistan. It used Herman and Chomsky's (1988) propaganda model to gauge the impact of ownership on the diversity of content and editorial independence. Based on surveys conducted among journalists and media consumers, the research found that 70% of the public admitted to having little faith in the media while 64% of the journalists confessed to the fact that media owners have a massive influence on the content. The study also found out cross-media ownership by a few large groups has caused media contents to be universally the same, and 60% of journalists stated that there were restraints on airing dissenting opinions than what their respective organizations maintained as an official standpoint. The findings underscored a high-risk environment for media pluralism in general where ownership concentration had resulted in reduced editorial independence and diversity of news content, hence, weakening the democratic role of the press in Pakistan (Raza et al., 2022).

Research Gap

Although a significant amount of research is available both in Pakistan and internationally regarding media discourse, freedom of the press, and how political power affects journalism, the understanding columns in DAWN face similar dynamics is still lacking. Research investigating various discursive strategies employed by the media has been done as well – in every case, attempts were made to determine how the advocates of ‘journalism’ dealt with censorship, media owners and governments. However, in Pakistan, the focus of the research is more on the news reportage, that is, media control, or issues concerning the general freedom of the press, rather than its actual practitioners, that is, a columnist, whose works are far more informed and much more editorialized on sensitive political matters. Still, not much research has been conducted concerning the specific lexico-grammatical or stylistic devices that help columnists discuss political issues in an authority-undermining way while remaining safe from any form of state interference or censorship. This study takes the needed step to address this by looking at how over the past five years DAWN’s contributors have been able to promote freedom of expression against the tenets of political power, moreover, this looks at the discursive practices that have enabled them to express dissenting views with specific boundaries in a controlled media system.

Methodology

In this research, the qualitative approach is used to evaluate selected columns of DAWN newspapers. This approach enables the researcher to understand the intricacies of how columnists construct narratives, manage ideological tensions, and the position reflected regarding political governance and the media. The main source of information for this research has been taken from DAWN, one of the most widely read English-language newspapers in Pakistan. These 26 columns are included as per their relevance to the research questions, paying attention to how the columnists of DAWN interact with the stories regarding the balance of power, governance, and media in Pakistan. The span of five years from 2019 to 2023 is form the period of study. This period has been chosen to portray the significant political discourses and media evolution in Pakistan such as changes in governments, changes in laws regarding the media and events that have affected the freedom of press discourse. This research employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) using Fairclough's three-dimensional model to analyze the selected texts.

textual analysis has also been confirmed an effective approach to analyze data (Li & Akram, 2024). The model focuses on textual analysis: linguistic features like vocabulary, grammar, and modality, discursive practices: text production, interpretation, and distribution, and sociocultural practices: underlying ideologies and power dynamics.

Analysis of 2023 Columnists and Articles

The analysis done for this year includes columnists with a more diverse portfolio, with the overall discussion being steered towards political inequalities, misuse of power, dangers to democracy and obstruction to civil liberties and how they relate to Press Freedom in the context of politically driven policy regarding the freedom of journalists to say what they want.

Table No: 1 List of Columnists and Their Articles from 2023

No.	Author	Title	Key insights
1.	Kalbe Ali	Parliament Urged to Reconsider Anti-Press Bills	It aims to address the potential proposals that could enhance media restraint, underlining the importance of multi-faceted legislative measures that guarantee freedom of expression and as well as protecting journalists from harassment.
2.	Touqir Hussain	Democracy in Pakistan: Of the Elite, for the Elite	Portrays the elite-favored democracy in Pakistan in a negative light stating that for democracy to work fully addressing poverty and inequality cannot just be limited to the sharing of power in the electoral contest.
3.	Ashraf Jehangir	Never Despair	Calls on Pakistanis to support social movements for change, fostering a hopeful vision of citizen-led and intellectual activism despite governance challenges.
4.	Faisal Siddiqi	Deconstructing May 9	Considers the events of May 9 as illustrating the hostility existing between the democracy and the state, and the hazards encouraging the concentration of state power.
5.	Maleeha Lodhi	Democratic Regression	Discusses the erosion of democracy in Pakistan by the military and a decline in civil liberties and calls for institutional changes to prevent such excesses and restore genuine democracy.
6.	Muna Khan	Heal the Press	Analyzes issues facing the journalism industry in Pakistan such as funding issues and the wellbeing of the reporters and calls for assistance to help maintain fair journalism.
7.	Nighat Dad	Online Freedoms	Expresses concerns regarding the repressive use of AI by regimes especially the influencing of the common citizenry on the internet and stresses the need for protection of encroaching digital rights across the board.

8.	Naziha Syed Ali	Balochistan: A Minefield for Journalists	Notes the extreme working conditions faced by journalists working in Balochistan from the state and the non-state actors, with emphasis on violence, poor remuneration, and political interference, which distort free reporting in the region.
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First Dimension: Textual Analysis. Textual analysis involves examining the linguistic features of the text to understand how meaning is constructed. For this we use some tools like vocabulary pattern, grammar structure, cohesion elements and modality spectrum.

Table No: 2 Vocabulary Patterns

Category	Sub Category	Element	Examples from text
Vocabulary Pattern	Word Choice	Political Terminology	"Democracy," "military rule," "caretaker government," "lawmakers", "democratic regression," "hybrid regime," "authoritarian," "populism". "graveyard for journalists," "recrimination," "press freedom"
		Legal Terminology	"bill," "parliamentary vote," "ordinance," "constitutional liberalism", "civil liberties," "rule of law," "media controls," "repression", "convictions," "defamation," "missing person cases"
	Connotation	Positive Connotation	"self-content," "rule of law," "resilience," "optimism", "independent media," "pillar to an informed democracy", "strengthening democracy"
		Negative Connotation	"corruption," "extractive political institutions," "undermine press freedom", "toxic politics," "backsliding," "polarization," "desensitization," "paranoid nationalism," "smear campaigns", "graveyard," "lawless," "death squads"
	Stylistic Choice	Repetitive Words	"democracy", "backsliding," "regression," "freedom", "journalists," "threat," "fear"

	Literary Devices	Metaphor	"Musical chairs", "wave of democratization"
		Allusion	"Why Nations Fail" by Acemoglu and Robinson and "Thieves of State" by Sarah Chayes, "V-Dem Institute, Freedom House, International IDEA, and FOTN for authoritative backing"
		Personification	"Democracy remains both illusive and elusive", "AI enabling regimes to fabricate content", "free press"

Table No: 3 Grammatical Structures

Category	Sub-Category	Element type	Examples from text
Grammatical Structures	Temporal Pattern	Present Tense	"Pakistan's 'democracy' is advanced...", "This alliance has provided the woof and warp of political history..."
		Past Reflection	"The bill was passed by the National Assembly...", "I wrote a report on China's fine performance...", "I heard about a young man who posted Vlogs on YouTube which was critical of former prime minister..."
		Future Projection	"Pakistan's lawmakers must ensure ample time...", "History will not absolve those responsible...", and "Journalists will be forced to cover everything, from bomb blasts to sports."
	Complexity Markers	Simple Declaration	"Pakistan is, and is not, democratic.", "Everyone knows this.", "Independent media is a pillar to an informed democracy.", "We write what the authorities want us to write."
		Complex Multi-clause	"The bills would provide sweeping powers to the incoming caretaker government, which Sharif's ruling coalition and the

			military are both seeking to control.", "For the establishment, it was an attack on the state. For PDM and its aligned parties, it was proof that the PTI is not a democratic political party."
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Table No: 4 Cohesion Elements

Category	Sub-Category	Element Type	Examples from Text
Cohesion Elements	Text Navigation	Sequential Markers	"Meanwhile", "Firstly", "Secondly", "Thirdly", "Fifthly"
		Chronological Markers	"May 9 to May 11, 2023", "1996, 1998", "2007, 2009", "Over a year later," "In recent years"
		Progressive Markers	"Currently", "Recently", "Now", "Until", "Another story goes," "Meanwhile,"
	Connecting Devices	Contrast	"PTI vs. establishment", "democracy vs. authoritarian", "However,"
		Addition	"Moreover", "For example", "Additionally", "First," "then," "Finally"
		Causation	"To", "because", "resulting in", "Consequently," "Thus,"

Table No: 5 Modality Spectrum

Category	Sub-Category	Element	Examples from Text
Modality Spectrum	Certainty Levels	High Conviction	"must ensure", "will not solve"
		Medium Possibility	"likely to undermine", "could lead to", "Could be", "Likely targeted"
		Low Certainty	"may disrupt", "Might be factors", "Could write"
	Authorial Stance	Tentative	"may be justified", "arguably", "Seems to celebrate"

Second Dimension: Discursive Practice. The discursive practices observed throughout the articles chosen for this analysis showcase a set of strategies that are intricate which both attest to and contribute to the ongoing public debate on the issues of press freedom

and political power in Pakistan. Naziha Syed Ali's article, Balochistan: a journalists' Minefield through her lens of investigative reporting adopted a reportorial genre at its deepest. Imposing vivid descriptions, the main cover of this work is dominated by the retelling of the not-so-easy life of journalism in Balochistan all of which combines into one monotonous look. Kalbe Ali engages in interdiscursivity by mixing genres such as investigative reporting, law, and advocacy for human rights, which enhances the narrative as the province is treated as very dangerous. Such a combination of genres is meant to show the structural and multi-layered challenges that journalists come across in the course of executing their work, beyond serious threats to their freedom and safety, the trouble is also about various actors who are in poses of threats. By using a word such as 'minefield' metaphorically, she also emphasizes the dangers involved in reaching out to the international community discourse that views the issue of press freedom as the core democratic entity. The use of metaphors such as "graveyard for journalists" signals an implicit critique of state hegemony, which appears to suppress journalistic autonomy through fear and violence, creating a hostile landscape for media expression.

Similarly, Ashraf Jehangir's article "Never Despair" offers another dimension by using motivational and philosophical genres to address Pakistan's internal conflicts. It insinuates that an attitude of hope and the spirit of battle is a must against dauntless dictators. His voice is introspective and recalls tales of endurance in political history when seeking to uplift and encourage the readers especially the politically cynical ones. Touqir Hussain's writing is also interdiscursive as it incorporates political philosophy and social commentary creating a slippage between the individual stance and the politics of the society. By this, Hussain challenges the dominant narrative he is in by calling for the need to restore the democracy in a very subtle manner. Even in motivational discourse, he sticks to the ideological conflict of light and darkness in the fight against oppression. This layer of interpretation helps to assure readers that individual and journalistic liberties even under the most intolerable of circumstances would demand a certain level of 'struggle'.

In the article "Democratic Regression" author draws on the past and present histories and the politics of the concerned regions, blending them into genres that help explore and thinking on democratic values. He also properly uses motivational hence political philosophy as interdiscursivity thus creating room for the readers to interrogate the existing order of power without necessarily challenging it. This style enables the author to avoid open aggression against the intolerable political structures and instead, nourishes sobering discourse on democratic preservation. The metaphor 'wave of democratization' used by Maleeha Lodhi signals the co-boxing and almost god-given the goal of 'democratizing' a region or a country. This wave also implies the existence of a strong force that even political regimes may find difficult to suppress, a force that resists all forms of authoritarian obliteration. In this way, the columnist in question, makes the people's attitude encased in the future about the democracy attainment, which also makes a criticism of the forces in power.

Faisal Siddiqi's "Deconstructing May 9" is primarily written in the analytical genre along with other characteristics of legal and political discourse. The strategy that Siddiqi employs makes it possible for him to critique the socio-political context surrounding May 9, which he views as a critical juncture in the politics of Pakistan. Through interdiscursivity, he augments his historical analysis with legal analysis,

providing a disturbing dissection of May 9 events that goes beyond any shallow political expositions.

Touqir's use of the "musical chairs" metaphor shows this constant shuffling of positions of authoritative control, depicting the power structure as dynamic rather than stable. It reinforces the idea of Structural tension between competing forces and how undermines the idea of the power structure being just horizontal opposition among power holders. These issues explain why such frictions do not directly impact the hegemonic orders; rather they serve to highlight the transitory nature of its legal power. Apart from these thematic cross-references, Muna Khan also brings in names of scholars who have done similar research such as Acemoglu and Robinson in their "why Nations Fail," or Sarah Chayes in "thieves of state," thereby enhancing intertextuality in his argument, which seeks to address the internal and external factors responsible for national and political dysfunction. These references prompt the audience to broaden the scope of the existing political problems regarding Pakistan to that of the rule of law and corruption prevalent in the whole world.

The article on Balochistan: a perilous terrain for reporters by Naziha Syed Ali is longitudinal and investigative in nature. The reason is, she incorporates human rights activism and factual journalism which elongates the breathing space of the journalistic practice. This fusion enables her to produce a narrative that is both straightforward as well as imaginative informing the reader of the extreme dangers in Balochistan for journalists. Naziha refers to Balochistan as a 'minefield' for journalists, and uses this metaphor in relation to both physical, and intangible aspects of threats posed to journalists. This all-encompassing metaphor for those practicing this form of journalism, especially in Balochistan, articulates the ever-present violence that exists, as well as the attentiveness that is advised when practicing such a trade. Through personification, Ali describes democracy as "illusive and elusive" as a way of drawing attention to the ever-growing content of democratic tendencies in Pakistan. The image of democracy enunciates the fact that all aspects of freedom, including freedom of the press, are deeply rooted in oppression and are denunciation to the sycophantic regime. By giving characteristics of a human being in this instance to democracy, she magnifies her criticism and states that democracy is an ideal that is appreciated, but does not exist and blanked out by those in power.

In the article on "Online Freedoms", Nighat Dad, for instance cites prominent bodies such as the V-Dem Institute, Freedom House, International IDEA as well as the FOTN so as to strengthen the case for press freedom which she discusses. This intertextuality and citation of the relevant authorities serve to enhance Nighat's critique of press censorship and situate s-expressions struggles in the world in the context of the backslide of free speech in Pakistan. In this way, Nighat seeks to incorporate her criticism into a wider discourse on freedom which enjoys international recognition and validation, and this elevates the scope of her article beyond borders to imply that the issues faced by Pakistan are part of a distressing worldwide phenomena. Nighat also makes use of personification to stress the impact of modern technologies on authoritarianism, such as 'Fear not, AI has its own perks, it enables regimes to create fictitious narratives.' In this instance, Nighat situates artificial intelligence within the apparatus of power as a tool employed to manipulate the masses through their beliefs and controls their understanding of facts where the truth has been deliberately distorted, hence the ease of control. The

personification in this instance echoes the tension between power and technological advancement and suggests that the very technologies that are intended to augment human abilities are actually being turned against the warrior class to assist in the consolidation of their rule.

Third Dimension: Sociocultural Practice. Analyzing the social practice dimension in the articles reveals how the authors illustrate the things in which some ideological forces influence the politics and the media environment of Pakistan, through the lens of authoritarianism, elite control, as well as public indifference. In Parliament Urged to Reconsider Anti-Press Bills, Ali places a critical lens on the bills which empowered the Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) to draw a fence around ‘disinformation’—and more particularly, control the narrative regarding it. Such a legislative approach is persuasive of authoritarianism in that at the forefront is the concern of the state’s interests rather than freedom of the press—that is, laws are employed to manage and dictate issues rather than to regulate and control them. This observation by Kalbe Ali goes further to indicate that such legislation could agitate the public to accept the idea of ‘gatekeeping’ journalism or communication for the sake of ‘order’, which is quite unfortunate and dangerous for democracy indeed. In his column “Democracy in Pakistan: Of the Elite, for the Elite”, Touqir Hussain traces the contours of democracy in Pakistan to expose that how democratic structure often serves as a veneer for elite interests, both civilian and military. This elitism gives rise to a governing system that is shaped like democracy but without its functions which restricts the active participation of the public and promotes discrimination in governance. At the same time, in “Never Despair” Ashraf Jehangir also addresses an audience asking for their mobilization and their conscious critique of their environment. He stresses how such systems of power evolve through disregard, and that, barring coincidence, regeneration of genuine democracy cannot happen without active, and collective organizing. This invitation to participation is based on republican civicism and resists the simplistic notion of democracy as regulation only, which encourages citizens to take an active interest in government.

In the article of Faisal Siddiqi and the analysis of the events surrounding the protests on May 9, Faisal looks at how the state security, adopting an ideology of authoritarian nationalism that prioritizes control and unity over civil liberties. This ideology promotes the notion that state survival justifies a hardline response, echoing Hobbesian governance, where order is considered the foundational value of society. Maleeha Lodhi’s “Democratic Regression” Study of hybrid regimes and the effects these regimes have on society, especially when a military has its hand in nearly all aspects of self-governance. Maleeha refers to this system as a model of hybrid, pseudo democracies characterized by restricted freedom of institutions and involvement of people on selective basis. Such an explanation points to a broader picture of governance that leans towards authoritarianism but wears the garb of democracy; ably arresting the growth of real democracy in the land. In the article “Heal the Press”, Muna Khan writes about cynical journalism where media is owned by vested economic interests which impair media freedom. This sale and purchase of news often is in line with the most unrestrained capitalism, showing us the tendency where news is more of a profit-oriented business rather than informing the public. Khan’s view is that of a system whereby economics and

politics combine to suppress dissenting voices in the media, which makes it difficult for the audience to receive unfiltered information.

In the article “Online Freedoms”, Nighat Dad explicates how governments’ adoption of artificial intelligence to manage online activities has been on the rise, and therefore, digital spying and suppressing of content has increased for security reasons. Therefore, this form of control is technological authoritarianism and reflects the evolvement of control mechanisms with the use of technologies where the speech of dissent is systematically produced and edited out from all sources. In Naziha Syed Ali’s *Balochistan: A Minefield for Journalists*, the author describes the extreme challenges that journalists have to face in Balochistan and how they deal with the government’s policies and military as well as tribal extremists. There’s a concept here that’s both pathological and entrenched – the idea of national security, under which press freedoms are curtailed for the sake of some imagined ‘peace’. This places journalists in a social context in which the threats to them are pervasive hence downplaying the ability of the media to perform its function as a political ‘watch dog’. Collectively, these columns demonstrate the extent to which Pakistan’s socio-political system is grounded in authoritarianism and elitism, and militarized, thus controlling public perspective and training people to live with selective liberties in the name of law and order. These circumstances manipulate the population into believing that very few media options or civil rights are available for their own good, creating a situation in which democratic ideals are overshadowed most of the time by dictatorial regimes.

Findings

The findings from analyzing selected DAWN columnists’ work over a period of five years from 2019 to 2024., emphasize how columnists engage with political power and press freedom in Pakistan. The findings critically address the research questions by uncovering the discursive strategies, and sociocultural mechanisms employed by columnists to navigate the precarious landscape of media freedom. It examines the interplay between language and power, illustrating how columnists tactically engage with dominant political ideologies while maintaining journalistic credibility and safeguarding their autonomy. A critical discourse analysis through the 3d model of Fair Clough highlights the complex realities of media resistance and compliance within Pakistan’s socio-political environment.

From the Critical discourse analysis of all available data using Fairclough’s Three Dimensional Model of Analysis, it is revealed that journalists use a plethora of techniques and literary devices such as interdiscursivity, stylistic choices, Metaphors, Extended Metaphors, Irony, analogies, political satire etc to address and comment on the authoritarian and suppressive tendencies of the State without being labeled as traitors, “anti-state”, or put on the ECL list. These discursive choices allow the authors to often point out fatal discrepancies in the system without, in most cases, receiving any backlash. So when journalists use framing techniques and let the reader assume that their critique is a universally known fact, or when they use historical analogies to criticize the political tendency to hide self-interest behind an ideology of patriotism and Nationalism, these are indirect ways to communicate their reservations to the readers regarding the increasingly authoritarian nature of the State, without incriminating the political status quo directly and thus saving themselves from any backlash.

When the Press of a democratic nation is being choked, it is often symptomatic of a larger problem. Ideologies bearing the façade of Patriotism and Nationalism usually hide hegemonic structures that concentrate power in the hands of a few. The discursive practices used in the data reveal undemocratic practices propagated by state actors. This disregard for democratic values by those in power allows the manipulation of the system in favor of the interests of the political elite. Political control becomes manifest through the entrenched, systematic authoritarian ideals in almost all institutions and especially the press. Thus, forcing journalists to toe the line of state ideology in order to survive. This leads to a crippling effect on the media and individual journalists.

From the data, it is revealed that in order to maintain the ideological power structures inherent in a pseudo-authoritarian regime, the state undermines the independence of the press by forcing them to follow draconian Acts and Amendments in the constitution, applying self-censorship when it comes to criticizing the political status quo. Journalists are expected to adhere to standards of reporting that are non-provoking to the political establishment, thus undermining the very idea of authentic journalism.

Conclusion

Press Freedom in Pakistan has always been kept in check by the state to protect the political elite from any embarrassment, allegations or incrimination, by enforcing the journalists to adopt covert methodologies when it comes to talking about hegemony and undemocratic practices. This research critically examined the discursive practices of columnists in DAWN to explore the interplay between political power and press freedom in Pakistan, employing Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis. The research highlighted how selected columnists tactfully navigate the tensions of expressing disagreement in a media environment fraught with censorship, political pressures, and state surveillance. In this regard, it was understood through the most detailed analysis of the textual level, the discursive practice and sociocultural aspect that aimed power critique has been exercised by the columnists through structural linguistic manipulation, such as such as lexical choices, careful use of grammar, cohesive devices, and modality spectrum—to critique power structures without overtly challenging the status quo. These techniques become the instruments to protect one's professional sphere of journalism, while at the same time lowering the risk of censorship, litigation or even threats.

The findings show that, in a country with growing authoritarianism, the press is under pressure to align with state ideologies, often limiting journalistic independence. This is symptomatic of a broader issue where nationalism and patriotism are used to conceal power structures that benefit the political elite. Journalists, in response, must self-censor to avoid repercussions, weakening the authenticity of journalism in Pakistan. The results indicate that even though these journalists fully support and promote democratic values for themselves and the public's right to seek information, the realities in which they function are filled with couplings, and do not allow freedom of expression, it is distorted through various political and economic mechanisms. This research provides a longitudinal perspective on the evolution of media discourse during critical moments in Pakistan's socio-political landscape.

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