

## IMPACT OF ELECTRONIC MEDIA ON POLITICAL SOCIALIZATION IN PAKISTAN (2008-2018)

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### Abstract:

*This study aims at exploring the impact of electronic media on political socialization in Pakistan from 2008-18. It is also intended to figure out that how social media is playing role in incorporating a new social culture in Pakistan. The Musharraf period in Pakistan had a special interest in boom of the media as many channels were given license for broadcast. Electronic media in Pakistan suffered more than other groups in the ongoing battle for promoting the democracy as one but defining component of political socialization over the years in Pakistan. Electronic media particularly private channel and social media after 2000 are not only a source of information but and great support to democracy in Pakistan. In the backdrop, this study through qualitative approach highlights that how, despite of limited resources and security issues, media workers through reporting, analysis, debate-discussions and watch dog roles contributed to new socio-political culture in Pakistan. Further, this study focuses that where media performed better role in initiating change, opinion building, and betterment of society and social change, at the same time it has incorporated intolerant and aggressive socio-political culture in Pakistan. In this way, this study critically analyses the social responsibility of electronic media in Pakistan.*

**Key Words:** Political, Socialization, Electronic, Media, Propaganda, Democratic, Educational, Institutions, Global image, Pakistan, Patriotism, Social, Injustice, Accountability, Digital, public emotions,

### Introduction

Political socialization has long been a subject of interest among philosophers, sociologists, and psychologists, who argue that behaviors, values, and traditions learned during childhood remain, embedded in an individual's consciousness throughout life. This makes political socialization a critical process that shapes a person's political attitudes and perspectives over time. Generally, defined, political socialization is the process through which individuals accumulate beliefs, norms, and moral orientations related to political systems. Although it does not rely on a singular, discipline-specific theory, political socialization borrows extensively from fields such as philosophy, anthropology, psychology, psychoanalysis, and sociology to understand how individuals internalize socially accepted behaviors throughout their lives (Greenstein, 1965).

Among the most influential agents of political socialization is the media particularly electronic media like television and radio which serves as a primary conduit for disseminating political information. These platforms significantly shape public opinion by framing national and international issues, and thus have a powerful impact on the collective political psyche of society. In the context of Pakistan, electronic media holds the potential to create a more informed, unified, and humane society. However, this potential has often been undermined by its use for state-led propaganda, especially during previous governments when public trust in electronic media declined due to biased and misleading coverage. The liberalization of the media landscape, with the rise of private TV channels and satellite communication, has since enhanced public awareness and fostered political consciousness. After two successful democratic transitions, the role of electronic media in Pakistan's political

socialization has grown substantially, producing both positive and negative outcomes. On one hand, media has promoted political accountability and civic awareness; on the other hand, it has also become a tool for political manipulation and partisan propaganda (Aftab, 2020).

The study aims to investigate the complex relationship between electronic media and socio-political change both globally and within Pakistan. It explores the chronological evolution, scope, and functional dynamics of electronic media in relation to political socialization. Specifically, it focuses on how media shapes and reshapes political opinions and behaviors in Pakistan through its roles in information dissemination, debate facilitation, analytical reporting, and acting as a watchdog. This qualitative research adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology and relies on content analysis from diverse sources including academic books, newspaper articles, TV broadcasts, social media platforms (Twitter, Facebook, WhatsApp, etc.), and public comments. The study draws on a wide spectrum of perspectives to critically assess the multifaceted influence of electronic media on Pakistan's political and social landscape.

### Literature Review

Lucien (2015) in *Political Socialization, toward Theory of Exchange* states that peer culture refers to the activities, values, and concerns adolescents share. Political socialization also takes place through peer group interaction when discussing political issues. Handle (2015) explains that socialization is the process through which an individual transforms into a social being who can interact within society.

John (2012) in *Political Analysis* highlights various agencies of political socialization, including peers, neighborhood, educational institutions, and mass media, which have a differential impact on political socialization. Agarwal (2011) notes that after family, educational institutions exercise the strongest influence on students' political socialization. However, mass media and family also play key roles. Ichilov (2004) discusses how political orientations are influenced by social and political environments, especially in conflict situations, and how ongoing conflicts affect youth political socialization. Thorson (2001) examines how the social structure of schools influences political socialization, emphasizing classroom environment and relationships between students and teachers. Gevan (2011) argues that without political socialization, individuals are less inclined to engage in political processes, highlighting the role of family, education, and exposure to politics.

Greenberg (2009) finds that family, education, and mass media play significant roles in political socialization, shaping citizens' attitudes, beliefs, and values. Singh (1998) compares political socialization among boys and girls, noting that boys tend to be more politically socialized due to factors like family background and media exposure.

Ehsanul (1981) finds uniform patterns of political awareness and participation among teachers, parents, and students in non-public schools, with mass media exposure being a key factor in political awareness. Abdi (2014) argues that addressing the gender gap in politics requires policy interventions and awareness initiatives to enable women to influence political arenas. Sinha (2007) suggests that women's political participation can be improved through continuous campus training and extracurricular activities. Faulks (1999) defines political culture as a product of communicative power within the state and civil society, which influences political and economic elites.

Tedin (1974) emphasizes that families with a political background influence the political socialization of their children, but other agencies, like peer groups and media, also play important roles. Kuhn (2004) highlights that parents directly and indirectly influence political attitudes, with family communication environments being key to political socialization. Wackman (2014) suggests two types of family communication environments: concept-oriented and socio-oriented, both influencing political socialization through open or

harmonious discussions. Noor (2007) discusses how Muslims and Islam are often portrayed negatively in the international media, contributing to Islamophobia and distorted perceptions of Pakistan.

The international portrayal of Pakistan often highlights negative stereotypes, leading to biases against Pakistanis and influencing global perceptions of the country. Ott (1998) explains that interactive telecommunications allow global citizens to receive information, with media shaping public perception and influencing countries' international images. Rubin (1998) states that Pakistan's international image has been shaped by negative media portrayals, especially regarding terrorism and extremism. Christina Lamb's book *Waiting for Allah: Pakistan's Struggle for Democracy* offers a biased view of Pakistan's socio-political landscape, focusing on economic disparity and strained relationships with neighboring countries. Emma Duncan's *Breaking the Curfew* analyzes Pakistan's state and society, focusing on military power, corruption, and human rights violations.

A Quora comment by Jagdish Shetty reflects the global image of Pakistan, shaped by ignorance, propaganda, and certain truths about the country's political issues. Nasr (2001) discusses the rise of —Muslim Democracy‖ in countries like Pakistan, Turkey, and Malaysia, contrasting it with radical Islamic parties. Muslim democracy focuses on implementing religious reforms within a democratic framework, contrasting with radical Islamists who push for Sharia rule. Safdar (2012) explores media's role in strengthening democracy, particularly in Southern Punjab, where media plays a positive role in democratic processes. Camara (2008) argues that media is essential for democracy, playing a dual role in promoting democratic values while also facing challenges in enhancing democratic traditions.

Norris (2006) emphasizes that a free press is crucial for strong democracy, functioning as a watchdog and source of information. Jabbar (2003) highlights that communication technology has fostered democracy by improving awareness of human rights and the rule of law. Gans (2006) argues that new media, particularly social media, has empowered youth to participate in political change and diverse opinions.

Shah (2007) finds that media plays different roles in autocratic and democratic regimes, with more significant influence in democratic societies. Abram & Lewis (1995) analyze the impact of cultural and institutional determinants on economic growth in democratic countries. Shah (2009) emphasizes the importance of family communication environments in shaping political socialization, particularly through open discussions. McLeod (2013) links concept-oriented family communication to better civic and political skills, fostering political participation.

Existing literature often focuses on the positive or negative portrayal of Pakistan, but there is a gap in discussing the international media's impact on Pakistan's image and its political and economic consequences. This study addresses this gap by analyzing both aspects of media influence on political socialization.

### **Operationalization, and Relationship with Political Socialization**

Media freedom and its reform have long been central to democratic discourse, attracting scrutiny from both governmental and non-governmental bodies. Recognized as an essential component of democracy, media liberty ensures transparency and accountability in governance. Many organizations have developed indexes and frameworks to evaluate press freedom, although the methodologies behind these evaluations are often ambiguous. Media plays a vital role in shaping mass culture through agenda setting, where public attention is directed toward issues emphasized by media coverage. This influence is compounded by the accessibility of information and the relevance of issues to the general population topics such as rising gas prices gain more traction and are retained in public memory due to their direct

impact. Moreover, media influences not only what people think about but also how they think about it, through the process of framing (McCombs & Shaw, 1972).

In Pakistan, the evolution of electronic media began with the historic declaration —This is Radio Pakistan on 14 August 1947, replacing All India Radio. Television was introduced in 1955, with Pakistan Television (PTV) commencing its first broadcast in 1964. Over the decades, PTV expanded, and the 1990s marked a turning point with the launch of the first private channel, Network Television Marketing (NTM). Initially, media content was heavily centered on state politics and government narratives, but by the 1960s and 1970s, programming diversified to include entertainment and sports. Since 2008, media in Pakistan has experienced increased freedom, though radio remains relatively underdeveloped. The Pakistani media landscape is characterized by linguistic and ethnic diversity; Urdu media dominates rural areas, while English-language media caters to urban and elite audiences.

The scope of electronic media in Pakistan varies significantly across regions. In conflict-prone areas like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) and the former Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), journalists often face threats, censorship, and violence, leading many to practice self-censorship for safety. These regions suffer from limited access to reliable information, highlighting the urgent need for improved journalist protection and training. Social media emerged as a powerful platform during President Musharraf's 2007 state of emergency, allowing citizens to voice dissent. Today, approximately 35 million Pakistanis use social media, with political parties such as the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leveraging platforms like Twitter to engage with the public and shape their political image (Riaz, 2020).

The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), established through the 2007 amendment act, oversees the regulatory landscape for electronic media. PEMRA enforces rules, regulations, and ethical codes across broadcast technologies, aiming to preserve state ideology and cultural values. The expansion of 24/7 news channels has increased the media's influence, yet its effectiveness in promoting democracy remains a contested issue. While the media does foster political awareness and informs citizens about their rights and electoral processes, a 2013 study suggested that its overall impact on democratic consolidation is limited (Husnain, 2013).

In terms of political socialization, the media in Pakistan has been criticized for sensationalism, particularly in its portrayal of terrorism and national security concerns. This one-sided representation shapes global perceptions of Pakistan, often portraying the country negatively, in contrast to India, which maintains a more favorable international image despite facing similar issues. Sensationalism, driven by the pursuit of high ratings, often overshadows balanced reporting, and breaking news is frequently exaggerated, undermining journalistic standards. Unlike media in more developed democracies, which prioritize public-interest issues with a balanced lens, Pakistani media tends to dramatize political conflict, employing emotional narratives. Dominant media conglomerates such as Geo TV, Dawn Media Group, and Lakson Group wield significant power through cross-media ownership, shaping public opinion and, at times, promoting political agendas. While these outlets possess the capacity to influence national discourse, they must prioritize responsible journalism and contribute to nation-building by fostering informed debate and democratic values.

### **Electronic Media and Political Opinion and Behavior in Pakistani**

Pakistan is a democratic country where every citizen has the right to vote, and that vote serves as a reflection of an individual's political beliefs, forming the foundation of the democratic process. It ensures the preservation of the people's will, allowing citizens to play a central role in shaping their nation's future. In today's digital age, media plays a critical role in fostering political awareness among the public, acting as a bridge between political parties



and the electorate. The influence of media on democracy is undeniable both at national and international levels as it shapes public opinion, resolves political tensions, and promotes civic engagement (McNair, 2017). The media, by framing issues and mobilizing sentiments, can reinforce democratic values or, conversely, distort perceptions depending on its objectivity. A clear example of media's influence was seen during the post-Pulwama incident tensions between India and Pakistan. While Indian media was largely biased, promoting nationalist rhetoric and portraying their captured pilot as a national hero, Pakistani media demonstrated relative maturity and neutrality, presenting the facts without inciting hatred and projecting a peaceful image of the country (Yousaf, 2017). This media portrayal helped unite the Pakistani public through messages of patriotism and national solidarity. However, media framing, often shaped by national interests, was used by both sides to sway public emotions through patriotic songs, references to past attacks like Mumbai and Pathankot, and dramatic storytelling, which ultimately created divergent public perceptions in both countries (Ahmad & Sheikh, 2020). In democratic states like Pakistan, media also plays a vital role in social change and public education. Recognizing its power, the Pakistani government has established regulations to guide and manage the rapidly growing private electronic media sector (PEMRA, 2021). Nevertheless, political interference and sensationalism like excessive use of "breaking news" have compromised the media's neutrality, as outlets compete for higher viewership using emotional narratives and sensational content. Despite this, electronic media remains crucial for societal development, bridging the gap between public concerns and political discourse. In many parts of the world, especially in non-democratic and developing nations, the media faces censorship and is often manipulated for political propaganda, restricting its ability to foster informed political participation. Conversely, in developed democracies, political communication is increasingly carried out via digital platforms. Political leaders, such as Imran Khan in Pakistan or Barack Obama in the United States, have effectively used social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube to directly communicate with the public, receive feedback, and shape political strategies. Obama's 2008 campaign is often cited as a milestone in digital political engagement, where the use of new media technologies significantly amplified his reach, reduced campaign costs, and strengthened his connection with voters (Stromer, 2014). Social media's capacity to present compelling narratives whether objective or biased has transformed political dialogue, enabling parties to engage voters, stimulate debate, and build support. Still, even in technologically advanced nations, digital media faces limitations and including misinformation, echo chambers, and manipulation, which can hinder the democratic process. Therefore, while media especially electronic and digital holds immense power in shaping democratic societies, its influence must be guided by ethical journalism and balanced regulation to truly serve as a pillar of democracy (Priser, 2011; Norris, 2006).

### **Impact of Electronic Media on Governance and Public Mobilization**

Media plays a vital role in shaping democratic societies by acting as a bridge between the government and the people. Often referred to as the fourth pillar of the state, media serves as a watchdog, holding public officials accountable, promoting transparency, and safeguarding democratic values. Through investigative journalism, the media has exposed corruption, inefficiency, and human rights violations, sometimes leading to the downfall of entire governments (Norris, 2006). By providing platforms for public debate and diverse viewpoints, media facilitates citizen participation in governance, particularly in election transparency and policy scrutiny. In Pakistan, the media has played an essential role in highlighting issues of social injustice, political accountability, and administrative inefficiencies. The introduction of the Pakistan Citizen Portal by the PTI government is one such example of efforts to enhance governance by directly connecting citizens with state

institutions, bypassing intermediaries. Measures such as promoting fiscal discipline and accountability evident in actions like the resignation of Finance Minister Asad Umar and limiting salary increases for high-ranking officials underscore attempts at institutional reform. Additionally, Pakistan's collaboration with international bodies like the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) demonstrates efforts to combat trafficking and enforce anti-encroachment laws, with media campaigns playing a crucial role in ensuring public awareness and participation. Judicial activism has also contributed significantly to Pakistan's political discourse, although not without its limitations (UNODC, 2020).

Moreover, media especially digital platforms has been instrumental in the rise of social justice movements such as the Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (PTM) and global campaigns like MeToo and TimesUp, which have given voice to marginalized groups and raised awareness about women's rights. However, when movements adopt anti-state rhetoric, traditional media often limits coverage, forcing activists to rely on digital media to sustain their narratives. Cases like the Kasur child abuse scandal gained national attention primarily due to extensive media coverage, which mobilized public pressure for justice. Overall, a free, fearless, and responsible media is indispensable for promoting good governance, ensuring accountability, protecting civil liberties, and fostering an informed citizenry (The News International, 2018).

### **Electronic Media and Political Socialization**

Political socialization plays a vital role in shaping societies, and the media has emerged as a central agent in this process (Norris, 2006). Among various forms of media, electronic media particularly television and radio has had a profound impact on everyday life, functioning not only as a primary source of information but also as a powerful tool in fostering political awareness. The press contributes significantly to democratic development by promoting informed citizenship and encouraging democratic values through its cultural and political programming (Gunther & Mughan, 2000). While media has often been associated with catering to individual interests, its broader influence lies in disseminating knowledge crucial for national development and sustaining democratic systems. In countries like Pakistan, where democracy is still evolving, the formation of effective public opinion remains central to political progress (Husnain, 2013). Since gaining independence, Pakistan has faced numerous socio-political and economic challenges, including religious and ethnic tensions, wars, and the traumatic separation of East Pakistan in 1971 (Riaz R. , 2018). Throughout these turbulent times, the media has not only survived but played a consistent role in nation-building and moral guidance, despite facing censorship and regulatory constraints (Siraj, 2009).

From the early presidential regimes of Iskandar Mirza and Ayub Khan (1958–1971) to General Zia-ul-Haq's authoritarian rule (1977–1988), and later General Pervez Musharraf's military-led government (1999–2008), media outlets navigated a landscape dominated by political instability and fluctuating democratic norms. Under Musharraf, however, the media industry experienced significant liberalization with the launch of private news channels, which expanded public access to information and enhanced political discourse (Thussu, 2007; Zaheer, 2025). The rise of digital technology further accelerated the flow of information, allowing the media to play a watchdog role by exposing corruption and holding political systems accountable (Freedom House, 2002; Zaheer, 2025). As a result, media has become a mirror reflecting societal realities albeit sometimes blurred while simultaneously shaping cultural, political, and economic consciousness. Press campaigns and political communication have enhanced public engagement, while traditional media such as radio has historically educated illiterate populations and raised awareness about societal developments. The management of the media during Pakistan's four martial law periods varied, but in each case, the press remained a key player in public life (Hussan, 2017). In the

21st century, as democracy in Pakistan continues to evolve, the media's role in fostering transparency, civic education, and political participation is more crucial than ever (Zaheer D. M., 2025). The integration of journalistic practices with modern information technology has revolutionized public access to data, empowering citizens and strengthening democratic norms (Khan & Joseph, 2011; Zaheer D. M., 2025).

### Conclusion

This assessment critically evaluates the role of media in shaping political socialization within Pakistan's democratic framework. It explores how media coverage influences public perception by reporting both political shortcomings and the state's stance, while offering civil society a visible path to participate in democratic discourse. Using an in-depth analytical approach, this study highlights the media's embedded position in Pakistan's cultural and political environment, reinforcing the idea that the press functions as the "fourth pillar" of the state. However, such a position is inherently tied to the media's capacity for accountability and responsibility. The assessment argues that the media's role should not be limited to entertainment; rather, it must provide an inclusive platform for dialogue where all societal segments—especially the marginalized—can express their concerns, grievances, and demands. It emphasizes that democracy is sustained when the media serves as a conduit for public opinion, ensuring that people's voices are respected and the government remains answerable to its citizens. The findings indicate that, although the media holds the potential to empower the public, its increasing commercialization and influence by powerful individuals or state institutions compromise its objectivity. Critics argue that if media fails to align with the people's interests, it should be held accountable through democratic means such as elections. Furthermore, the study reveals that the media in Pakistan often serves the interests of a privileged few, undermining diverse perspectives and ignoring broader social responsibilities. It calls for leadership, including figures like Imran Khan, to initiate media reforms and establish creative, autonomous platforms akin to those in advanced democracies. Such reforms should aim at filling institutional gaps, improving journalistic integrity, and promoting Pakistan's image as a peaceful, tolerant, and economically developing nation. The misrepresentation of Pakistan in global narratives fueled by its role in the war on terror and associated religious extremism has caused significant damage, despite the country's sacrifices. Yet, the rise of electronic media offers a renewed opportunity to reshape both domestic and international perceptions. Responsible journalism and strategic communication are essential to presenting Pakistan as a stable and progressive country. Findings from this research underline the need for a more structured approach to media development in Pakistan. While there is growing awareness about the importance of improving the country's image, coordinated action remains lacking. Therefore, it is recommended that further research be conducted on the structure and function of national media, with emphasis on reassessing the role of the private press, enhancing reporting standards, and establishing independent regulatory systems to monitor media performance. These steps are crucial for ensuring that the media truly serves democratic ideals and contributes meaningfully to national integration and political development.

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