

# Mass Media and Democratic Transitions

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The case of Pakistan

By

Pizwak Imtiaz

Submitted to

Central European University

Department of Political Science

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

Supervisor: Dr. Oana Lup

Budapest, Hungary

2016

## Abstract

Through this thesis, I attempt to contribute to literature on Political Communication in transitioning democracies, through the case of Pakistan. The study aims to understand the rise of a new successful party, the *Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf* (PTI) in the political arena, through its depiction of the mass-media. The objective is to witness the change in elite hegemonies through a democratic transition, and in a dynamic media environment, to speculate the role of mass-media in the process. The rapid evolution and maturation of the mass-media after its privatization in 2002, the rise of television talk-shows and rapid information dissemination, and the worsening security conditions in the country set the background of the study. Interpretative thematic analysis has been utilized using television news bulletins and talk-shows to gauge what *issues* were considered salient (agenda-setting) and how they were *framed* by the media. The results support the idea of a *social cascade*, which means that a number of successive events granted the media center-stage, whereby its portrayal of events reverberated with the general milieu in the country, to create a *wave* of change. Media's insistence on elements of *change*, *accountability*, *newness* reverberated with PTI's slogans of change, arguably granting it an advantage. This is therefore an attempt to dispel simplistic understandings of the role of the media, in a complex cognitive environment, emphasizing the intricate relationship between political actors, citizens and the mass-media in bringing about change.

**Key Words:** Mass-media, Pakistan, Transitional Democracies, New parties, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf

## **Acknowledgements**

This thesis is a result of the utmost support, encouragement and guidance of my supervisor, Oana Lup. I would like to thank her for her valuable insights, for always supporting and always understanding my inner apprehensions.

I would like to dedicate my work to my parents and to my respected teachers, in acknowledgement of their tireless support and belief in me. Lastly, I would like to thank my family and friends, my most magnificent support system.

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## Introduction

“New Pakistan Today! Beating all odds, Election Day arrives –voting 8am-5pm under the army’s vigil, over 86 Million Registered voters.” (The Nation; May 11 2013).

The year 2013 shall always remain instrumental in the chronicles of Pakistan’s history, wherein the country saw the completion of a democratic term in office, and successful elections for the first time in its history since 1947. The country, embattling military rule for most of its short existence (33 out of 69 years), witnessed not only the first peaceful transition to a second democratic term, but also the rise of a new political party (*Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf*)<sup>1</sup>, amid a range of traditional, hegemonic and established parties. This was history in the making, a significant break from the past, in a country that had previously oscillated between military dictators and traditional power-holders, change was welcomed and celebrated by all segments of the society. However, nowhere was this change embraced more fervently than among the new and dynamic mass-media community, who not only embodied the shift in discourse, but was the driver and disseminator of the transformation of the society. In a media environment of dynamic interplay between the political actors, the citizenry and the mass-media, a host of factors came together to create emblematic shift in the political scenario of the country; a telling insight in the unbridled complexities of a new media environment in transitioning democracies.

While the elections have been researched in reference to their role in the first ever transfer of a democratic regime, the mechanics of this change and its constituents remain

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<sup>1</sup> Imran Khan, revered national hero as the former cricket captain, and a famous philanthropist decided to join politics and formed the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in 1996, after his retirement from international cricket in 1992. The party failed to attract attention, and IK was able to only attain one seat in the national assembly in the 2002 elections under Gen. Musharraf. The party boycotted the 2008 elections, and it was in 2013 that it emerged the second largest vote taking party with 7.5 Million votes. Therefore, it shall be referred to as a new party, in terms of

uncharted. The role of the dynamic media environment and its effect on the rise of the PTI also remains an unexplored field in the context of the elections in 2013.

The success of this party and its portrayal by the media prior to the elections has been studied here. As its central research question, the thesis seeks to address *how mass media affect the success of new political parties in challenging the hegemony of established parties in a newly democratizing country?*

The research is pertinent towards understanding the phenomenal rise of a new party in the political horizon of Pakistan, and the role that media played in this process. Furthermore, it contributes to literature on transitioning democracies that tries to understand the pivotal role that media plays in consolidating the process of democracy. The aims to underlie the democratic transition of the media through this depiction, as a contender of values of pluralism and opening of the political arena; therefore it seeks to advance the scholarly understanding of how one affects the other, amid a constellation of factors acting in the political arena.

To address these issues, the research relies on qualitative research methods to fulfill the objectives of the study. Through a qualitative content analysis of television news bulletins and talk-shows, the proposed thesis seeks to understand the way the media portrayed events and how this shaped peoples' perceptions leading up to the elections in 2013. Analysis specifically concentrates on news agenda setting and framing. Media messages, its tone, the themes it highlights, framing of certain specific issues related to the elections and finally the depiction of the contending parties have been analyzed under a duration of a month leading up to the elections of 2013 (April 11-May 11). The research looked at 3 major news channels in Pakistan for content of news and evening television talk shows.

Overarching findings from the dense analysis indicate that the media was not partial towards a particular political party in its depiction; therefore the link between the party and media's framing of it is by no means linear. In the issues that were discussed, and the major themes that emerged out of the research, the emphasis of notions of 'change', 'newness', 'accountability', 'youth', and the negative portrayal of the status quo and traditional politics rendered support for the party ideology of PTI.

The most encouraging results from the analysis are indicative of a maturation process within the media, whereby a shift from events or *episodic* reporting to a more *thematic* form of reporting was observed. Nuanced and balanced inquiry indicated that the media's support for change was not merely superficial, but was reflective in its own functioning. Furthermore, the prominence given to highlighting values of civic participation and responsibility was emblematic to the change experienced in the form of an unbridled voter turnout in the elections. Media's traditional role of a watchdog reverberated throughout the analysis; in a country struggling with institutional consolidation, the media's scrutinizing power rendered support to the democratization process. The enthusiasm surrounding impending elections was reflected in media's reporting of events, whereby *marathon-style* bulletins and shows dominated all televisions. This was indicative of the importance granted to the elections both in the larger society, and in the cognitive environment in the country.

Research in political communication is divided on the role media can play in transitioning democracies. Whereas some studies indicate that media can facilitate the change, others are more skeptical of its abilities. This research also indicates that oversimplified notions of a linear link from media to democratization are not warranted. Therefore, it supports the idea of a *social cascade*, stating that a number of interconnected events and their framing in the media

brought about change; the events in real-time were reflected in the cognitive environment and vice versa. This research aims to contribute to literature on political communication in emphasizing the nuances and underlying complexities of the dynamic relationship between the mass media, political actors and citizens, dispelling notions of direct positive or negative impacts of one over the other.

The following chapter provided an in-depth insight into the history of Pakistan, delving into the critical junctures that has shaped contemporary events. This leads to the substantive literature review, which paves way for the theoretical framework guiding the study. Chapter 4 highlights the research design, and Chapter 5 describes the results of the detailed analysis, followed by discussion upon major findings.

## **Chapter 1: Pakistan through history**

This section delves into a historical analysis of the rocky road that the country has dwelled upon ever since its independence in 1947. In order to trace the engagement of certain specific institutions such as the mass-media, it is essential to understand underlying contexts that have caused them to manifest in a certain manner. Therefore, the historical context of the country, its struggle towards democracy, its institutions and their evolution, its civil society, and values are deemed pertinent towards this research. More specifically, this section aims at identifying the complex military-traditional party nexus in Pakistan, underlying its difficulties with democracy in 69 years of independence. The historical narrative is specifically centered on the evolution of the mass-media, especially pertaining to its privatization in 2002 under military dictatorship.

### **1.1 Normalizing the abnormal- Democracy and Dictatorship in Pakistan**

Pakistan's independence on August 14, 1947 brought into existence a state grappling with economic, political and structural crises. The constant threat from India as the powerful oppressive neighbor, and the dearth of resources created a state heavily dependent on military spending, whereby a centralized and alienated state emerged, with heavy reliance on foreign aid and military war power. These are the conditions ascribed to the oscillation between military dictatorships and democracy in the country.

Pakistan has seen four military regimes in its brief existence, the first regime headed by Field Marshall Ayub Khan between 1955 and 1967, the second under Gen. Yahya Khan between 1967 and 1971, the third under Gen. Zia ulhaq between 1977 and 1988 and the final headed by Gen. Pervez Musharraf from Oct, 1999 to 2007. The historical nexus between the military and traditional parties in Pakistan is unique, given the strength of the army and its control over

political affairs. Traditional parties have had a strong hegemony over political affairs in periods where democracy has been allowed to prevail.

Scholars have found the historical hegemony of the military to be the cause of a ‘siege mentality’ that prevails in the country, whereby external threats (from India) and internal ethnic diversity has led the country in the arms of authoritarianism multiple times (Jalal 1995). In addition to the continued dominance of the military, the traditionally landed elite enjoy hegemony over the political climate of the country whereby the state functions in the form of a ‘bureaucratic oligarchy’, with the convolution of the military and the traditional elite (Alavi 1972). This centralized form of power, resultant disparities and increased grievances was what led to the ultimate cessation of East Pakistan, which emerged as Bangladesh in December, 1971. Therefore, the role of this centralized set-up has not allowed a civil society to develop in a manner that would be conducive to democratic values. This means that institutions such as mass-media have had a constant up-hill struggle in order to establish themselves amid turbulent times in the country.

Singh and Bailey see the historical military-traditional elite nexus as a phenomenon unique to Pakistan, seeing it as a ‘praetorian democracy’ where the “military allows multiparty elections to determine who will staff the formal machinery of the government, while reserving for itself control over key domains of power” (Singh and Bailey 2013, p. 103). They consider it as an end-state, however, the end of Musharraf’s regime and the popular uprising against his regime by lawyers and media personnel is a contradiction to this theory, whereby non-conventional power sources claimed authority and became symbols of change. The current period underwent further change as the country witnessed the successful emergence of a new

political party (*Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf*) in the 2013 general elections, which defied traditional hegemonies by challenging family politics, corruption and the status quo.

## 1.2 Major Political Parties<sup>2</sup>

Although the political allegiances of the elite keep shifting historically, the major power stakeholders remain the Pakistan Muslim League (PML-Nawaz) led by the current Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led one after the other by the Bhutto family<sup>3</sup>. Religious parties such as the Jamat-e-Islami (JI), Mutahidda Majlis-e-Amal (MMA) have a limited vote bank, yet have enjoyed governance as coalition partners to almost every regime in power. Liberal parties such as the Muttahidda Quomi Movement (MQM), and Awami National Party (ANP) enjoy support in some parts of the country, and have time to time joined the central government as coalition partners ruling the provinces of Sindh and KPK respectively. Therefore, power has technically always oscillated between the mainstream parties, PPP and PML-n, with the other parties joining as coalition partners.

## 1.3 The tumultuous 90s –Gateway for the LastMilitary Takeover:

The turbulent decade of the 90s saw a ruthless battle for power, between archrivals PML-n and PPP, with four subsequent governments failing one after the other. The decade was marred by corruption scandals, fierce political battles and a strong establishment that was behind the toppling of four military regimes. The public was faced with limited choice, both parties seemed equally corrupt and so the political climate towards the end of the 90s saw deep dissatisfaction and disenchantment with political parties. This was the climate under which Musharraf took to

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<sup>2</sup> Due to subsequent military dictatorships, arguably the first free and fair elections in Pakistan were conducted in 1971. Therefore, this section mainly explores to the political parties after this period, leading up to the current scenario. For a more detailed political history of Pakistan, see <http://asiasociety.org/education/pakistan-political-history>

<sup>3</sup> Currently led by Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, son of the slain leader Benazir Bhutto, who was assassinated during an election rally in 2007.

power, ousting the civilian government of Nawaz Sharif (PML-n) and exiling both major leaders, Benazir Bhutto (PPP) and Nawaz Sharif (PML-n). Musharraf's regime was marred by the war on terror and a politically repressed state, with limited or no effective medium of expression; leaving the recently privatized media as the only source of mass-dissemination.

The transition towards democracy arrived in these circumstances, with subsequent elections in 2008 and 2013. Due to the assassination of Benazir Bhutto (leader of PPP) in 2007, the political climate was in favor of her party, and they acceded to power in the 2008 elections. The election results from 2013 amid euphoric cries of 'change' in the country, saw a new dawn, whereby amid traditional parties, PTI (second largest vote-winning party at 7.5 Million) was able to achieve a sizeable mandate in the national assembly, and form government in one of the four provinces of Pakistan (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa).

#### **1.4 Long Walk to Freedom-Development of Mass-media in Pakistan**

The circumstances under which the media was privatized and its implications on the political scenario will be discussed in this section, after a detailed discussion of the historical progression of the Pakistan media.

The mass-media have been described by many as partners in the political process of a country. According to political communication scholars such as Katrin Voltmer (2006), the evolution of the mass media, the journalistic norms and ways of presentation as well as their relationship with political actors might differ with particular contexts in which they have evolved. Therefore, an understanding of the indigenous political culture needs to be ensured, especially in the case of transitioning democracies in order to understand the specific paths of media's evolution. Historic allegiances, struggles against repressive regimes, the degree of

independence after ending of repressive regimes, the adoption of specific norms over others, economic considerations and the emergence of new political elite in light of political vacuum are all major features pertaining to the evolution of mass media in Pakistan.

The relationship between mass media and governments is by no means a linear one in Pakistan, whereby a range of complex phenomena have been historically at play. Although subsequent dictatorships aimed to undermine the role of media by censoring newspapers through a brutal law called the Press and Publication Ordinance (1960)<sup>4</sup>, granting total control of press content to the government. The repressive policies of the martial law administration allowed very little critique; however the press of the time protested censorship in several ways, most famously by publishing blank spaces in place of articles that government had censored (Gustafson & Richter 1981). This is indicative of the constant struggle for freedom that journalists in the country continued to experience.

The regime of Gen Zia (1977-88) saw an increase in media scrutiny under the guise of his *Islamization*<sup>5</sup> policies. Journalists were condemned for any criticism on the regime, to the extent where arrests became everyday occurrences and journalists were at times publically lashed for criticizing the regime (Gustafson & Richter 1981).

The turbulent times of the 90s though democratic, saw a continuation of censorship and a resultant struggle by journalists, which culminated in several arrests and violent incidents. The

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<sup>4</sup> PPO was formally passed in 1963 by Field Marshall Ayub Khan the then chief martial law administrator. Under the guise of 'regulating' press activities, the ordinance basically brought the press under total control of the government, granting the government the right to forbid publications whenever deemed 'in the interest of the state'. For more on the Press and Publication Ordinance, see <http://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/pk/pk043en.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> Zia took over in the peak of the cold war, and the impending war against the Soviet Union in neighboring Russian. This was the time when *jihad* entered the political doctrine in Pakistan and the rest of the world, where these fighters were trained and supported in their fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan. The next decade saw an active policy of islamization in Pakistan, funded actively by the US and Saudi Arabia, and carried out fervently by Gen. Zia due to his own religious leanings. For more on the political aspect see, Weaver (2010).

beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the dawn of the Musharraf regime brought with it an added pressure to modernize, amid competing news and entertainment channels from rival India. Musharraf had already based his government on principles of ‘enlightened moderation’, and in order to add to his moderate image in the country, and to compete with rival forces in the region, he decided to privatize the media in a Media Privatization Ordinance, allowing private 24-hour channels to enter the business of media for the first time (Peshimam 2014).

Scholars regard that he probably did not anticipate an uprising against him, his ‘soft politics’ of promoting culture and moderation was hailed in the media at first, with limited or no criticism at first (Michaelson 2011). But as the media matured, and gained more momentum, so did its underlying values of freedom of expression. Plurality within the media industry resulted in the emergence of several television channels –a powerful break from the past where only the state-led channel (PTV)<sup>6</sup> dominated airtime. Whereas PTV remained the government’s mouthpiece in the subsequent years, the private media industry evolved in diverse directions, whereby competition among groups allowed several different allegiances.

Active criticism, political satire and commentaries of the dictator’s misuse of power started appearing in the several channels that had emerged in the political scene in only a few years after privatization, creating a conundrum for its own promoter. Although propaganda and censorship still marred the country, and journalists continued to face life-threats from the establishment or terrorist groups, a new and refreshing precedent had been set. Khan and Joseph (2008) study the mass media coverage of the lawyer’s movement against Musharraf in their work titled, ‘The Media take Center Stage’. They contend that it was through this unprecedented live

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<sup>6</sup> The Pakistan Television (PTV), established in 1964 remained the only channel in the country until private media groups were allowed to function after 2002.

coverage of the mass movement, which led to the unintentional outcome of increased expectation of accountability for the rulers. They ascribe the mass media activation as a ‘revolutionary change’ in the country, whereby for the first time, the actions of the dictator are visible to the masses, which led to the eventual rise in protests throughout the country. Therefore in an overall repressive dictatorial environment, the media was able to gradually become more conscious of its role, siding more and more with the changing political environment in the country (Michaelsen 2011).

Mass media gradually developed a stronghold over the political milieu of the country owing to its widespread coverage, with a viewership of 38 Million as of 2013 (Gallup Pakistan 2009). This truly brought the media to the center-stage, whereby pro-democratic fervor was a major part of its coverage. There was an apparent reverence attached to the media, which it capitalized on by constantly innovating by adopting new technologies. Furthermore, a plethora of news channels appearing in subsequent years supplemented the plurality of information sources.

#### ***1.4.1 The Talk-show Phenomenon- TV Analysts as the New Intellectual Elite***

In addition to the structural capacity building, the media also invested heavily in the individuals associated with the growing industry. Mass media attempted to innovate by building shows of global standards, as well as keeping in consideration the huge demand for analytical, critical commentary among the public, a talk-show culture emerged with new analysts and commentators gaining center-stage in the political arena. The ‘transformative power’ of the television was nowhere more apparent than in this talk show phenomenon that appeared in the decade of the 2000s (Gurevitch et al. 2009). Zaidi (2012) traces the emergence of media as the ‘new public sphere’ after the last dictatorial regime ended in 2008. He talks about the expansion

of public dialogue through a vibrant and dynamic set of media systems (both print and television), and the emergence of new intellectuals that garnered influence on the public:

Pakistan's new public intellectuals are television talk-show hosts, so-called analysts and journalists. These individuals have both an eager public listening to their observations, analysis and insights every day, often many times a day, and they have the extremely powerful medium of television, which has become the new public sphere. (Zaidi 2012)

These TV hosts became an overnight success, with people following their critical commentaries, and treating them with a celebrity-like respect. There seemed to be a cult of personality surrounding some analysts, which rapidly replaced newspaper column-writers as the new intellectual elite (Zaidi 2012). In fulfilling the increasing need for political analysis and critique, the intellectuals rapidly gained popularity and credence in the political environment. The evolution of mass media led to the development of talk-shows and the enhancement of the public sphere through the incorporation of new intellectual elites.

The talk-shows additionally provided avenues for political debate and discussion, inviting political representatives and encouraging healthy debates over issues of national interest. This feature of these shows was not only an innovative step away from traditional news reporting, but also a requirement of the times, when declining security situation deemed political debates in the public sphere quite impossible. Pakistan's decision to enter the global war on terror as allies of the United States in the year 2002, had far-reaching implications for the security situation in the country, with a massive rise in terror attacks, extremism and suicide attacks especially targeting civilians as repercussions for fighting terror hubs in Afghanistan. Situation in the country became especially bleak during the electoral campaigns of the 2013 elections, whereby terrorist organizations selectively threatened liberal parties, hindering their political campaigns. It was through the platform of prime-time talk-shows that political parties reached out to the public,

engaging with their opponents in ways that the public sphere did not allow. In Naqvi's (2011) words,

Political talk shows have pushed the boundaries of familiar and permissible political discourse set during the era of state-controlled television by bringing the various affinities and capacities of the parliamentary elite into more frequent and effective relief. (p. 100)

Additionally, in conjunction with the media's role as watchdog and an accountability mechanism, the government was held under strict scrutiny whereby every measure of the government was avidly criticized, and brought to the public's scrutiny. Amid dysfunctional accountability mechanisms, it is essential to see the media take its scrutinizing role very seriously.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

The review of relevant literature has been divided into the following sub-categories to facilitate a thematic examination of all aspects related to the proposed study: 1) Media and democratization i.e., understanding the process whereby media systems operate in transitioning towards democracies 2) Media privatization and independence (de facto and de jure) 3) Media agenda-setting and framing 4) Media's role in the electoral process 5) Media support for new parties 6) New media technologies 7) Development of a social cascade.

The literature review is an attempt to understand an underlying context of Pakistan's transition to democracy, by focusing on the scenario in the country, analyze and evaluate gaps in research pertaining to mass media and democratization in the realm of developing countries and to develop a framework facilitating the empirical framework of the study.

### **2.1 Media and democratization:**

The role of media in democracies has been widely covered in literature, amid its importance in revolutionizing public discourse and creating a shift from traditional authority holders such as political parties, government and state institutions (Meyer 2002, Voltmer 2013, Carpini and Keeter 1996). The historical innovation in media technologies has transformed the political sphere enormously, more likely because of its tendencies in “disrupting existing paradigms and political orthodoxies” (Hackett and Zhao 2005: p. 2). Therefore the relationship between journalists, politicians and the public has shifted gears to include the gatekeeping role of the media, which has created new avenues for discussion and new means of accountability, creating new means to understand the effect of media on the political agenda, characterized as the ‘mediatization’ process in the field of Political Communication:

...the media has become more centrifugal than centripetal, shot through with multiple communication outlets, multiple voices and multiple issue agendas, all cycled (thanks especially to the ever-changing role of news values) and scene-shifted swiftly from one short time period to the next... (Brants and Voltmer 2011: p. 2)

Media in transitioning democracies, especially in light of the 3<sup>rd</sup> wave of democratization have been analyzed in terms of its role in galvanizing the process of change, affecting the process of regime change, reporting amid uncertain and turbulent times, and finally facilitating the consolidation to the democratic process (Voltmer 2013). Media's traditionally discussed roles as a source of diversity and plurality in the public sphere, as information disseminator and hence the controller of what meets the public eye, and as a watchdog for political actors are all reinforced by theorists of political communication while analyzing the role of media in transitioning democracies (Keane 1991; Curran 1991).

In understanding the manifestation of the complexities of the media environment in new democracies, Voltmer (2006) puts forth the concept of a *systems theoretical approach*, which states that a dynamic interaction between political actors, citizens, results in political communication (Blumer and Gurevitch 1995). In addition to an emphasis on the development of specific institutions (structural aspects) and their impact on the communication environment in a country, the underlying notion stresses upon the interdependence of these actors, stating that transitions entail a redefinition, and a reorientation of these interactions. This reorientation sometimes requires a radical shift from the past, a 'renegotiation of previously existing rules of operation', and may therefore result in a total break from the past, a reconfiguration of alliances, and the emergence of new elites, as was the case in Pakistan (Voltmer 2006; 6).

## 2.2 Privatization and Independence:

The creation of political plurality, independence from government scrutiny and manipulation and the establishment of institutions lead arguably to stability in the political arena. Therefore, it would be expected that a free and independent media would have a more *democratizing* impact on the public life. The link between media restrictions and authoritarian regimes is instrumental in light of the proposed research.

Sen et al. (2008) dispel the view that repressive regimes can fully control media messages through a historical analysis of the media environment in East Asian authoritarian regimes, alleging that neither is full control possible, nor does privatization of the media lead to immediate decline in the state's control over the country. This critique is a telling forewarning against a simplistic understanding of the effect of media over democratization; it effectively underlies specific contexts and other significant country-specific events to highlight differences in both political systems and media systems. Furthermore, they propose a systematic, shift or evolution towards opening of the media and its positive affect towards reducing government control and engaging more political actors. Literature on different authoritarian regimes confirms this notion, warranting that regimes may have a range of objectives and therefore different forms of government according to their particular interests (Diamond 1994).

Gunter and Mughan (2000) have analyzed the transition to democracy in Spain, Hungary, Russia and Chile in light of the role of mass media in the democratizing process. Through a systemic and evolutionary analysis of the media, they find that the government-initiated liberalization led to the declining support for the authoritarian and post-totalitarian regimes. The newly liberated media presented the public with a pluralist political sphere with adequate cues of

partisanship, democratic norms and values, creating room for dissent and critical debate which led to the creation of a new and vibrant civil society.

The case in Pakistan supports this assumption, whereby General Musharraf's accession to power and insistence on positioning himself as a champion of "Enlightened Moderation" triggered a policy to uphold liberal ideas of freedom of the press and free expression of thought (Zaidi 2005). Furthermore, it is also conjectured that the increasing technological innovation placed immense pressure on the regime to allow private media to function, amid existing international pressures (Ibid). Zaidi (2005) discusses the emerging media reforms in 2002 which effectively privatized media industry and allowed a relatively free press to operate in the country. As contended by Sen et al. (2008), the immediate effects of the privatized media cannot be deemed *democratic*, however a gradual shift in political discourse can be traced through the years, whereby the development of media systems and their maturity, an increase in Musharraf's power centrism and it being increasingly challenged in the media (resulting in sanctions), his disregard for all institutions and corruption made him unpopular to the point of his removal in 2007 (Ibid). Hanretty (2009) analyses the effect of de jure independence of media institutions on their de facto independence seeing the extent to which public broadcasters take decisions independent of government pressures, reaching the conclusion that the former has a positive and significant impact on the latter. Therefore, it can be expected that the 2002 media reforms in Pakistan garnered an effective shift towards creation of plural voices, their independence, and their maturity.

### **2.3 Media Framing and Agenda-setting:**

The agenda-setting and framing effects of the media systems has been widely covered in literature, pointing most interestingly towards its power in declaring the *newsworthiness* of

events, declaring who the protagonists are through a certain array of depiction, and foremost, declaring what attitudes to develop regarding these actors (Gitlin, 1980, Iyengar et al. 1982, Walgrave et al. 2007). Literature has analyzed the framing-setting power of the media, its effect on information processing and audience framing in painstaking detail, establishing formally the effect of framing on public discourse amid caution for specific contexts (Scheufele 2000). Therefore, the power of signifying certain portions of news and displaying them as news is crucial especially in understanding impending change in a political system. Although the ‘revolutionizing’ effect of mass media has been toned down by skepticism and competing claims regarding its impact on declining viewership (Robinson 1976), the significance of media framing is deemed essential for the purpose of this research amid the political vacuum in the country, and media being the sole information disseminator in the political arena.

However, most of the research on media framing focuses primarily on developed countries and therefore, transitioning democracies face a dearth of literature when it comes to media framing effects in general (Iyengar et al. 1982, Meyer 2002, Hallin and Mancini 2004, Brants & Van Praag 2006, Walgrave et al. 2007). For the purpose of this research, it would therefore be pertinent to look at mass media’s role in facilitating a transition to democracy in light of the underdevelopment of the political sphere.

## **2.4 Media and Elections:**

The role of media specifically during elections is considerably one of its most pertinent features as an agent of mass dissemination. Literature on media framing especially during elections has provided extensive insight into the ability of electronic and print media to influence vote choices, disseminate electoral information, and raise important issues (Mc. Combs and Shaw 1972, Weaver 1996, Baden and de Vreese 2008, Chong and Druckman 2013). Literature

therefore supports the effects of media framing on information processing, leading to the importance media enjoys in election periods throughout the world.

The frames generally associated with media coverage of elections resonate with issues of accountability, partisanship, economy, domestic and foreign issues keeping in consideration particularities of countries (Kiouisis et al. 2010, Dimitrova and Stromback 2006). The media thus provides an avid ground for discussion that may affect voter choices, candidate perception and information regarding political issues.

Dynastic politics, corruption and military regimes that have marred Pakistan historically have successively been repressive towards the media (Akhtar 2000). Akhtar contends that a ‘cultural ethos’ based on hierarchy and landlordism, has “successfully deflated, suppressed or absorbed the forces of change”, including mass media (p. 39). However, with the culmination of the Musharraf regime, and a shift of power amid a plurality of mass media sources, a change was experienced that caused a shift in these traditional hierarchies as manifested by the election results in 2013.

Through a quantitative content analysis of the media content on the election day in 2013, and qualitative interviews with major journalists, Peshimam (2014) concludes that the media reporting of 2013 created a sense of ‘euphoria’ in the elections, its unbiased advocacy for ‘change’ and democracy were major factors that led to the unprecedented voter turn-out in the country (55%).

## **2.5 Media Support for New Parties:**

Literature in Political Communication is rampant with positive linkages between traditional media sources and traditionally established parties (Hopmann et al. 2011, Jacobs

&Spierings 2016). Lucardie (2000) defines the emergence of new parties and the difficulties they may face in terms of political mobilization, challenges from historical and traditionally established institutions and their positioning in terms of other political parties. The establishment of ‘prophetic parties’ entails that they position themselves supporting an ideology different to or contrary to the ideology already employed by the mainstream parties which can only be achieved through alliances with other political elite, including the mass-media.

## **2.6 New Media Technologies:**

The democratic shift in Pakistan and the role of social media in mobilizing youth followership especially employed by the Pakistan Tehreek-Insaf (PTI) in the 2013 elections has been studied effectively by several scholars (Yusuf 2015, Ahmed and Skoric 2014). Studies analyze the electoral campaigns of PTI and other major parties in the elections and conclude that the successful twitter campaign of PTI was able to garner youth support and contribute to the changing environment in the country. However, the limited outreach of the social media (10% of the total population) and its confinement to only urban areas raises questions on the effective of social media in Pakistan.

## **2.7 Emergence of a *Social Cascade* –A step towards theory-building:**

Keeping in consideration the dynamic interaction of media with other major actors, the culminations of specific events, the structural changes in a country pertaining to transition from an authoritarian regime, the breaking and formation of new political elite; the main theoretical framework of the analysis draws on the framework of *social cascade* (Baumgartner et al 2008). The concept of a social cascade entails that change occurs through a period of time, whereby flow of information from various sources results in the precipitation of certain narratives that influence people’s opinions. The relationship among several distinct features at

the time lead to the creation of an environment that creates a ‘shift in issue-definition’ which is not linear or causal, but rather collective, therefore specific causes cannot be highlighted. This is employed as a guiding framework in Pakistan whereby an enabling environment is seen to have developed for regime change and the rise of PTI in Pakistan. Therefore a series of interconnected factors have been explored, without reducing the analysis to a simplistic understanding, the underlying complexities and nuances of the issue at hand have been recognized.

This research aims to understand the development of the media in light of the events contextualized above; its aim is to understand the unbridled change in the 2013 elections, through an analysis of frames used by the media to portray the party. Therefore, keeping in consideration the concept of non-linearity of media logic which states that the manifestation of media in a certain context depends on specific corollaries experienced by the country (Voltmer 2006), this analysis recognizes the complex web of events and structural changes that might have contributed to the phenomenon under discussion, positioning the role of media in the given situation.

In line with Voltmer’s (2006) *systems theoretical approach*, the specific events that shape a particular context, including the nature of the authoritarian regime, its relationship with media, the amount of dissent and the development of civil society, a case can be made regarding the manifestation of the dynamic relationship of media, actors and citizens in the context of Pakistan whereby the renegotiating of old alliances did lead to a radical shift from the past, and resulted in the creation of new elites in the form of the new media, the journalists that gained popularity as the intellectual elite, and the PTI itself as representatives of the youth.

The privatization of the media and the opening up of institutions led to a gradual evolution towards its development. General Musharraf's policies of enlightened moderation, the need to present a feasible international image, and international competition opened doors for this radical shift from the past. Furthermore, with the passage of time, the declining security in the country, and development of media institutions, mass media gained considerable influence as the sole representatives of the public discourse, both as opposition to the repressive government (in the absence of effective oppositional parties), and the platform for plural voices (Punathambekar, Kumar 2015). This can help explaining why new actors such as PTI emerged successful in the media discourse with relative effortlessness, taking up space amid traditional actors, and eased into the political arena in light of the 2013 elections.

Media development led to its recognition and formalization as custodians of democratic values in the context of the impending elections, in 2008. The plurality within the media industry in the form of a number of private channels launched after 2002 entailed a range of opinions and discourses were available to the public, with some channels being more successful in breaking the hegemonic discourse of the past. Despite the dictator's stronghold and especially censoring of the media in 2008, it sided with democratic consolidation and national integration providing a solid front against the repressive regime (Zaidi 2012). Since the political environment in the country was supportive of change in light of growing frustration towards corruption, successive military dictatorships and increasing public awareness, the role of the media facilitated the change rather than establishing the writ of the status quo. Rise of television talk-shows and a more critical media, established a novel precedence, whereby television journalists became the new intellectual in the country, followed by a large audience.

Against the background of the gradual consolidation of the media, the emergence and increase in popularity of PTI could be understood from the perspective of Paul Lucardie's (2000) typology of new parties. The reformation of PTI in 2013 can be understood under the framework of a 'Prophetic party'. According to Lucardie (2000), prophetic parties position themselves supporting an ideology different to or contrary to the ideology already employed by the mainstream parties, which is impossible in a country like Pakistan if not for the support of the mass-media. The security threats in the country leading up to the elections in 2013, and the resulting impedance of on-ground campaigns brings the role of the seminal media to the fore. PTI's carving of a new identity and the need for differentiating it from the old ideology was therefore achieved through the themes highlighted in the media, which reverberated in the public sphere through the media, and vice versa. This connection between the media and the PTI, whereby media's highlighting of issues that gain saliency in the public, vis-à-vis the rise of PTI is pertinent towards the study.

Using the concept of framing and agenda-setting, and media's ability to shape the cognitive environment, the study aims to understand the role that these factors played in creating a particular set of agendas in light of the elections in 2013. Specifically, the aim is to identify the themes that dominated the campaign discussion and how were they presented. This supports the claim that in light of the wave of change disseminated in the country after the end of Musharraf's regime and the completion of the first ever democratic term (2008-2013), the political environment saw an unbridled shift in agenda, from a preceding decade of political vacuum and repression emerged a vast array of dialogues, facilitated and guided by mass media.

Keeping in consideration the limited reach of media technologies in most of the country, the proposed research is skeptical towards the effect of social media, in light of the limited

coverage, taking instead a wider look at the political spectrum through analysis of television shows.

In light of the detailed analysis of literature discussed in the preceding sections, the research will be a novel attempt in analyzing the role of media in supporting and influencing the rise of PTI, and facilitating the transition to democracy in the process. Furthermore, in understanding the specificities of cultural context in the manifestation of these institutions in a transitioning democracy, the research is an avid contribution to literature on democratization and political communication.

## Chapter 3: Research Design

In this section I present the process of the research design, the method of data collection and ultimately, the process of data analysis.

### 3.1 Insights on qualitative framing analysis

Qualitative interpretative techniques were considered most appropriate to understand the unfolding of events and specific issues by the Pakistani media prior to the 2013 general elections in order to gauge the rise of PTI. The usage of qualitative content analysis has been deemed appropriate as it deals with the process of attaching meaning and significance to the data, analyzing themes and narratives emerging out of a particular set of data (Hennink et al 2010). As the research attempted to delve into *meanings* and in-depth media narratives that gave rise to the emergence of PTI in the *context* of the impending elections and the broader conditions in the country, it was essential that the meaning embedded within the media's portrayal be gauged through a thematic analysis. Nuances in issue reporting, the selection of certain issues over others and the media's approach towards these was seen to be appropriately captured using thematic content analysis. According to Halperin and Heath (2012),

Qualitative content analysis assumes that it is possible to expose the meanings, purposes and motives embedded within the text...it is generally more sensitive to the context in which the texts are produced. (p. 319)

The research question aimed to understand the role of the media in galvanizing support for PTI, therefore, in order to understand the media's *depiction* of the party, agenda-setting and framing were especially focused upon. Media agenda-setting concerns its ability to attribute saliency to certain events and issues over others, opening avenues of discussion centered on them. Media framing provides a 'social meaning' to events, hence depicting how they are experienced by a certain number of viewers (Oliviera & Papacharissi 2008). It was therefore

pertinent towards gaining an understanding of how a collective of people received information, regardless of whether or not this information ultimately affected the outcome of the elections in 2013. An in-depth analysis of existing literature on theoretical preconceptions regarding mass-media and democratization laid special focus on media's ability to raise certain specific issues and frame in ways that effect the cognitive environment. Therefore, the media's depiction of the political parties, and its referral to certain issues over other was given special focus. The following questions emerged out of the literature review:

- *What specific issues were raised by the mass-media leading up to the elections in 2013?*
- *How did the mass-media portray traditional parties (Pakistan Muslim League, Pakistan People's Party) in the time leading up to the elections in 2013?*
- *How did the mass-media portray the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf in the time leading up to the elections in 2013?*

Major focus was on understanding the way themes were presented, and certain factors were emphasized over others to see the *framing* of events and issues. The use of language (metaphors, emotions, and sarcasm), the presentation of facts and contexts and the overall set-up of programs was analyzed for each issue separately, to understand the motifs of the election coverage in 2013.

### **3.2 Data Collection**

The study chose three leading news channels of Pakistan in order to analyze the media's selection and portrayal of specific events and political parties in the event of the 2013 elections. The selected channels are: Geo News (Market share=22.4%), ARY News(MS=5.3%) and

Express News (MS=3.6%)<sup>7</sup>. These channels were particularly selected for their massive viewership and popularity among the Pakistani public (Gallup 2013).

The duration of the study was one month prior to the elections; since this is the peak of election campaigning and electioneering in the media, and the public is most receptive to political events, this duration was deemed suitable for analyzing the objectives of the research. Data was accessed through online archives of news bulletins and television shows.

### ***3.2.1 News bulletins and their selection:***

The research aimed to analyze the prime-time coverage of news during the election campaign period, in order to gauge the issues raised during the time. The news bulletins were therefore deemed most important in understanding the agendas set by specific new channels. The research therefore analyzed the everyday news bulletin (9 pm) for a month leading up to the elections, understanding the issues that make news and their framing by the chosen channels.

### ***3.2.2 Talk shows and their significance:***

As the research aims to understand the prominence laid on issues pertaining to elections as compared to other facts, it was envisioned that in addition to daily news bulletins, the primetime television shows (8pm-9pm) should also be analyzed to understand the specific way issues are being selected and framed. The importance of news analysts and their stronghold on the politics in Pakistan has been adequately captured in Chapter 1. Therefore, in light of the

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<sup>7</sup> According to the Gallup 2013 Cyber Newsletter, the news channels selected remain the top most-watched channels in the country.

**Geo News**, owned by the largest media group in the country (Jang Group), is the first private news channel in the country (Est. 2002). It is known for its strong stance against the dictatorial regime of Gen. Musharraf and was therefore banned temporarily in 2007. It remains the pioneer news channel, with the most followed news talk-shows and analysis and a moderate conservative leaning.

**ARY News**, launched in 2004, represents the activist/sensationalist media in the country, with its intense government scrutiny and focus on corruption scandals. It is known for its rivalry against the media giant, Geo.

**Express News**, an intermediary of the Express Media group was launched in 2008 represents a soft, center-left leaning. See Yusuf (2013) for more information.

importance of these analysts towards arguably changing the political climate of the country and emerging as the new political elites, it is essential to understand how issues were framed by them.

The research aimed to delve into primetime show, to analyze the subjects chosen (priming) and the way they were framed. Therefore, three prime-time TV talk-shows were analyzed in addition to the existing news bulletins to fully understand the election coverage in Pakistan. The shows were all telecasted four days of the week and the duration of their analysis was also one month leading up to the elections:

*Capital Talk (Geo News)*: Hosted by acclaimed journalist Hamid Mir, this is the oldest and most watched talk-show in the country. Hamid Mir is widely popular in the country due to his refined views on issues, and he remains an established figure in the mass-media industry.

*Off the Record (ARY News)*: Kashif Abbasi, a renowned journalists hosts this show, said to focus more on a sensational more provocative form of reporting.

*Live with Talat (Express News)*: Live with Talat is conducted by Talat Hussain, widely acclaimed in his capacity as a balanced and sophisticated journalist. The show most times focuses on important issues rather than sweeping events, trying to uncover underlying patterns and an avid critical commentary.

The evening talk-shows comprised of about 16 shows in the duration of a month, in addition to the everyday news-bulletin for the election month (April 11-May11).

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The process of data collection naturally culminated in the process of data analysis. Analysis was conducted following Hennink et al.'s (2011) concept of cyclical data analysis, which uses a mix of deductive and inductive techniques, deductive themes bring derived out of the research questions and inductive through the analysis itself.

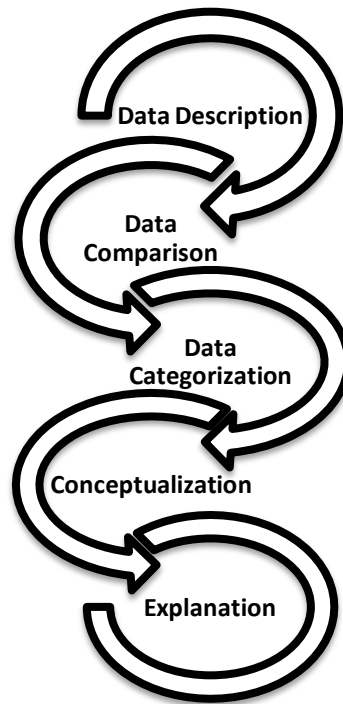


Figure 1 Diagram of Analysis (Hennink et al. 2011:238)

The data analysis was undertaken following the cyclical process of analysis suggested by Hennink et al.; whereby, the operations went from an initial *description* of codes/themes identified under the research question and emerging out of the process of analysis, through a process of *comparison* whereby similar processes were compared across the data, followed by an attempt at *categorization* of smaller codes to form broader *themes*, in order to understand the story and process of interpretation and presentation of issues. The final stages of

*conceptualization* and *explanation* were guided by the formation of a broader story or narrative and tying up the narrative with the larger conceptual framework, envisioned through literature review (2011: chapter 10).

The codes developed initially through the research question were the discussion in the media on: corruption, dynastic politics, one party against another, the dimension of *change* and the targets of it (*youth*). This was considered to be the preliminary set of codes that guided the initial process of analysis. However, as the analysis matured, the codes were regrouped and finally evolved into larger themes such as the emphasis on *values*, the concept of *newness*, *the challenge to the status quo*, etc., identifying the underlying nuances as salient issues and how they were framed was exposed.

The process of analysis was based on extraction of quotations and narratives built out of the data, whereby the research was guided heavily by the data. The codes were developed through the inductive process of analysis and were subsequently gauged as broader themes as patterns falling in the greater conceptual framework of the questions raised under the research question. Rigor was maintained through consistency and reflexivity in the data, whereby a convention was followed as the analysis was gradually carried out towards the process of conceptualization.

### **3.4 Validity and Reliability**

The concept of validity arises both at the stage of data collection, as well as its analysis pertaining to notions of selection bias and personal subjectivity impacting the process of research.

The process of ensuring reliability was made possible through a process of description of individual codes and their meanings. This was deemed especially important as a necessary precondition for establishing the reliability aspect of the research, in addition to describing the process of analysis to aid further research. As aptly put by Halperin & Heath (2012):

Qualitative researchers must provide their readers with a detailed account of the coding 'protocol', including how conclusions were reached.... All research needs to be accompanied by accounts of how it was really done... Analysts must reveal how they negotiated complex procedures to deal with the messy reality of the scenario being studied. (p.328)

As interpretative qualitative analysis inherently involves the assigning of meanings to narratives and quotations and therefore a process of co-creation of meanings, the concept of *reflexivity* was kept under consideration throughout. This entails that I was aware of my own biases and preconceptions, and was therefore conscious of my own impact on the process of the research and its analysis. As the idea was to understand the kinds of issues raised under the given period of study, it made sure that reflection on selection of the issues (corruption, traditional party) deemed important be carried out. Therefore, this helped me realize my biases against age-old hegemonies in Pakistan, a factor that I was conscious of throughout the course of the analysis.

### **3.5 Limitation of the Study**

The choice of data collection and the unit of analysis stand to be the major limitations of the research. Owing to the importance of television channels and their significant role in revolutionizing the political arena, the study focuses entirely on television and does not incorporate newspapers as a source of data. It is conjectured that the role of television channels is most pertinent to the framing of issues, presenting politicians mobilizing the public, especially pertaining to electoral coverage (Gurevitch et al. 2009, Wolfe et al. 2013). This is consistent with

the environment in Pakistan, whereby television audience reaches up to 124 Million as of 2014 (Gallup Pakistan 2014). The duration of the study is considered appropriate due to the one month prior to the elections being the peak time of electoral activity, and therefore it is considered the perception regarding PTI would be most effectively presented during this time.

Furthermore, as the analysis focuses entirely on the media's depiction of events during the elections, it does not claim knowledge of the role that the other actors, i.e. citizens and political actors played in the phenomenon. The aim is to heighten the role that mass-media played in the electoral success of PTI and the dissemination of elements of change in the country, however, further research should be conducted to delve deeper into the roles of other major stakeholders, the populace and the government played in this complex interplay.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis

The series of events described in subsequent chapters, including a lawyer's movement against the dictator, the growing concern for and discontentment against rising corruption, the war on terror and its heavy economic and security implications for the country, the privatization and liberalization of the mass-media and a newfound activism among the mass-media as well as the judiciary were factors that paved way for the removal of the military dictator and subsequently created space for the rise of a new political party in the political horizon of Pakistan. The issues are therefore examined in real time, and then their framing in the media in shaping the cognitive environment has been analyzed to understand the role that the newly liberalized media played in the transition that the country experienced. Reliance on several factors lends support to the concept of *social cascade* which indicates that a plethora of events create conducive environment for a change to occur, causing a systematic shift in the political arena, which is both caused by media reporting and framing of the phenomenon, and affects the framing in a certain direction (Baumgartner et al. 2008). This is true for the case of Pakistan, where the emergence of new elites in the media industry, the judiciary and the lawyers pooled resources to bring about change. The findings from the analysis, described in detail in the following sections uphold the idea of a cascade, whereby a *surge* in events led to the emergence of PTI on the political horizon of Pakistan, therefore the underlying theoretical concept for the study is the social cascade concept as presented by Baumgartner et al. (2008).

### 4.1 Reporting on Issues –Setting the News Agenda:

Different channels in their respective news bulletins and prime-time talk shows happened to highlight some important issues of ideological significance pertaining to the impending elections. Regardless of everyday events, these values were highlighted through thematic talk-

shows and were framed in a way so as to engage the voter. These issues arguably might not directly strengthen the position of PTI, but indirectly seem to inform the voter to engage them in the political process. The major issues that PTI raises throughout its campaign seem to be reverberated in the media as salient, and therefore there seems to be a certain amount of coherence. Media's minute by minute coverage of rallies and the repetition of major highlights also seem to strengthen the party's stance. For instance, Imran Khan's<sup>8</sup> six major pledges to the people in a rally on March 23, was heard and lauded across media channels, and was referred to again and again, amid several issue that were discussed in times to come:

I will always speak the truth to the people of Pakistan.

The PTI government that will come into power, I promise that we will try to end tyranny.

I will never take my money out of Pakistan.

I will never take personal benefit from being in government, nor will my relatives be allowed to benefit from my being in power.

I will protect your tax money.

We will stand together with every Pakistani in or outside Pakistan. (Imran Khan, *The Express Tribune* 2013)

This has been connected with the concept of media's role in strengthening democracy in a transitional system, whereby issues that are historically suppressed from public forums are now highlighted by the mass media. It is indicative of the power media holds, and also points towards the evolution it undergoes vis-à-vis the whole nation. It also resonates with the concept of the social cascade developed in the theoretical section, whereby a number of different yet interconnected events paved way for change; these issues have been categorized below.

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<sup>8</sup> Shall be alternatively referred to as IK.

#### **4.1.1 Highlighting Civic Values: Voting Awareness and Bringing Youth to the Political Fold**

Media's contribution to the political culture, in terms of raising political awareness, and creating a sense of civic responsibility has been explored in this section. Especially pertaining to the impending elections, there seemed to be a certain level of responsibility that media realized, as medium for dispelling information among its viewers. Being a strong aspect in democratic societies, this virtue of the media arguably positively impacted the democratization process in Pakistan, whereby cues of participation, importance of voters and citizens' responsibilities were highlighted. Specifically, the focus on 'young voters' seemed to render support to emerging discussions on *change* and youth as drivers of change in the country, which was also the differentiating factor on which PTI based its campaign.

There seemed to be an amount of reverence attached to the whole electoral process among all TV channels studied in the analysis. The importance of vote was portrayed through several discussions in the talk shows, several individual campaigns run by TV channels urging people to vote and raising awareness, and was also apparent in the overall structure of programs conducted during the election period.

There was recognition for the media's role to *educate*, *inform* and *galvanize* the voter; this was approached through special, on-ground coverage from far-off constituencies, airing of special campaign video clips and showing fervent speeches to raise excitement, and a special movie screening (Chameli; Geo News) based on youth and its ability to bring about change in the country. The opening and ending sequence of almost all talk-shows included motivating words on the power of vote, "you would be weakening the country by not voting on the 11<sup>th</sup>!" (Abbasi ARY News; April 30).

Media channels were aware of, and quite actively pursued special initiatives to galvanize the common voter, including in-depth analysis and small catch-phrases appearing on screen throughout the day ('Every vote counts', 'vote for change', and 'vote for a new Pakistan'). It was anticipated that youth vote could be the driver of an unexpected change in the country, and therefore all media groups seemed to dedicate a significant amount of energy in galvanizing this youth vote. In-depth commentary on the voter turnout and the need for an increased voter turnout could be observed especially towards the last days of the electoral process, whereby voters were repeatedly being informed on voter registration, identification of their polling booths and other important voting criteria. Voters were educated on their rights to question their candidates and making informed decisions. Hamid Mir (Capital Talk; Geo News) conducted an awareness campaign through far-off constituencies in the country, dispelling notions of deteriorating security situations particularly in the northern areas. Talat Hussain (Live with Talat; Express News) aimed to raise awareness by conducting a show in his local constituency, visiting each candidate and asking questions that a 'common man' would ask; a unique way of creating awareness to question the candidate. The use of religious sentiments to galvanize voters was also observed whereby Abbasi (Off the Record; ARY News) conducted a show specifically with religious leaders who urged the public to vote, framing the process of vote as a religious obligation for all citizens of the state.

Geo News employed new techniques of amalgamating the entertainment industry with the news media to increase voter interests and engage new voters. This was done through special programs with celebrities and youth icons inspiring people to vote, and airing of special movies that raised spirits and increased awareness. Programs based on the concept of change, and who brings about change emerge that frame change as *unity* and commitment to the country, aimed at

educating the median voter and engaging them to come out to vote on the election day (Capital Talk; May 1). This was seen to imply that a united front needs to be put up to collectively steer the country out of shadows, with prominent personalities such as singers Shehzad Roy<sup>9</sup> and Jawad Ahmad<sup>10</sup> depicted as symbols of the nation's pride. These famous personalities, though already established and revered among the public utilized the mass-media platform to motivate youth voters and this arguably was more favorable to the campaign strategies of PTI, who had direct messages of change, newness and a creak from the past reverberating in their slogans.

This insistence on galvanizing the youth vote indicates that the media went beyond its traditional responsibility to instill values of civic participation, especially among the new voters. The overwhelming results of the elections, with a 10% increase in voter-turnout from the previous elections of 2008 might be an outcome of this overarching support for bringing in new voters into the fold, among many other interceding factors at play.

#### ***4.1.2 Electoral Campaigns & Voting Patterns***

In addition to motivating and galvanizing voters and informing them regarding impending elections, media channels occasionally delve upon traditional voting patterns in Pakistan, highlighting the aspects that communities consider essential in order to vote. In addition to the current situation in the country, the media houses are seen to highlight the party manifestos and ideologies, essentially linking voting decisions to manifestos of individual parties. Therefore, the discussion around voting patterns most essentially is focused around the types of voters, and their selection of candidates, delving at the same time over the party campaigns and their influence on the voters. Therefore, the agenda is set around what parties

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<sup>9</sup> Shehzad Roy a famous singer is also closely linked to Imran Khan's PTI.

<sup>10</sup> Famous singer.

have to offer, these have been framed in several different ways in order to critically evaluate party campaigns. There are a few crucial themes highlighted, which appear to be at the epicenter of this discussion: *Personality-centered choices*, *Manifesto centered choices*, *Biradari*<sup>11</sup> (*community*) *choices*, *Change-driven choices*. These major themes mostly dominate the discussion on voting patterns, with occasional references to the *accountability* frame especially in conjunction to the new ‘wave’ or ‘change’ driven choices.

#### **4.1.3 Manifesto Politics –The Change Factor**

The use of the *change* frame was quite apparent in the discussion pertaining to electoral campaigns and party manifestos. Discussion was centered on raising questions regarding the credibility of candidates, as opposed to the name of the party as winning elements of an election. Programs were wholly dedicated to party manifestos at times (Geo: April 12, ARY: April 30, May 1) which is reflective of the importance given to these documents in a country where rarely voters are exposed to them while making choices. While some shows focused on a constructive approach, highlighting manifestos and their differences for all parties (with a purpose to inform and educate), others seemed to be more critical of traditionally established parties, using the *change* frame to narrate the issues under discussion. As mentioned in Kashif Abbasi’s show on ARY: “These empty promises do not seem to be working for the people anymore, as they all seem to be after *change* this time around” (May 1).

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<sup>11</sup>*Biradari* or family which entails the belonging to a specific community is a major (probably the most) important factor which motivates peoples votes in Pakistan’s rural agrarian bases. Wealthy leaders from former feudal families that hold traditional positions in rural hierarchies are mostly voted in these regions, where most of the times these feudal lords control the whole community, are the sole providers, are the money-lenders and job-givers to these societies. Lack of government infrastructure and education cause these people to live in a vicious circle, breaking of which seems impossible considering the hegemony of these feudal lords which have been historically the formal (winning every elections due to no opposition, people forced to vote because they are indebted to the wealthy landlords) and informal rulers of these areas.

Questions were critical of the age-old manifestos of historical parties (PML-n, PPP) based on their ‘sacrifices’ for the country, and demanded a swift, relevant and credible response for the solution of issues faced by the people. As extrapolated by one news analyst,

It is time for parties such as the PPP to go beyond the historical narrative of citing their Bhutto’s achievements and sacrifices<sup>12</sup> to win popular votes; this is time for change and accountability. (Capital Talk Geo News; April 12).

Here there is a clear shift from the original position, as envisioned by Voltmer (2013), whereby the mass-media decided to highlight issues it deemed essential to the ‘public interest’, rather than safeguarding the age-old hegemonies of the past. The repeated mention of *change* here was an inevitable support for the politics of PTI, which was depicted as an issue-based party as compared with other traditional ones. This was an advantage it gained out of its politics of differentiation, as discussed by journalists in all talk shows under observation. Therefore, arguably, the issue-based approach put forth by PTI and the emphasis on issues at the level of the media both reverberated in the election campaigning process.

#### **4.1.4 Personality Politics**

The issue of personality politics was more complex, and was reported as such. Whereas all television analysis aimed to denounce the stronghold of personalities over Pakistani politics, unlike the debate with manifestos, this debate held every party equally responsible. Media analysts seemed to criticize the ‘personality cults’ that are formed around party leaders, emphasizing the need for individual scrutiny of candidates and issues, rather than the charisma of

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<sup>12</sup> The Pakistan People’s Party’s founder and the then popular Prime Minister of the Country, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was unlawfully removed from office and hanged under the military regime of Gen. Zia ulhaq (1976). His daughter, Benazir Bhutto and chairman of the party at the time was assassinated during an election rally in 2007, which created a sense of grievance and loss felt throughout the country, reminding people of her father’s untimely death and her own *sacrifice* for the nation. Popular support for the Bhuttos led to a cult of personality around them, which to this date continue to render the PPP votes in every election, despite its visible shift from the Bhutto ideology and cases of mighty corruption. For more on the Bhutto name, see Humayun (2010).

the leader. Two major themes were used to refer to this issue, *personal charisma* and *dynastic politics*.

Personality as personal charisma was mostly used to refer to the chairman of PTI, Imran Khan as his revered position as the famous cricket captain, and the beloved philanthropist was identified several times, both using a negative and a positive tone. The positive references to Imran Khan attached feelings of ‘hope’, ‘heroism’, ‘bravery’ and ‘dedication’ when referring to the leader. The usage of such words as described here rendered a positive image to him which led to a massive appeal that he held among the public during the time. Furthermore, references to his self as ‘incorruptible’, ‘national hero’ among other phrases led to a sense of awe attached to him. This is arguably one factor behind the popularity of PTI itself, and it seemed to be highlighted by the media itself. Despite criticism of the party at several points, the aura around Imran Khan as the incorruptible, dedicated leader seemed to be present throughout. Media seemed to be leading and facilitating the creation of this cult, at times. This was apparent during media coverage of Khan’s accident during a rally in Lahore on May 7<sup>th</sup>, where he fell from 15 feet from the stage sustaining serious injuries and suspending election activities. The coverage of this unfortunate event centered on emotional songs for the fallen leader, calls for prayers and minute by minute reports and special programs outside the hospital (Hamid Mir; May 8). Although party officials and IK himself tried to dispel this centrality around his persona, media seemed to be highlighting it, by referring to his cricketing days of glory and his services for the country (rather than PTI’s services). Talat Hussain’s talk show coverage seems to disagree with mainstream media in this regard, whereby a more objective approach was observed, oftentimes criticizing Khan for his hold over the party. On the whole however, the reverence and respect

that Imran Khan holds as a leader seems to be a major factor behind the success of PTI and was positively reported by the media.

The subject of dynastic politics on the other hand, was dealt with a heavy hand among all media groups analyzed. This issue was framed in a way to highlight the stronghold of ‘families’ over the politics in Pakistan. One news channel did through its eye-catching headline asking “Can a common man contest elections amid the dynasties in Pakistan?” (ARY News; May 1). The rhetoric was largely initiated by Imran Khan in his several election rallies, and was largely carried forward by the media houses in news as well as talk shows. This was also framed as the *rich vs. poor* dilemma, whereby the rich continue to maintain their ‘age-old’ hegemony over the poor. Imran Khan highlighted this aspect in campaigns, presenting himself as a ‘common man’, with no former entitlement to wealth and status as opposed to the industrial and land-holding elites that dominate the PPP and PML-n, this was supported by the media.

#### ***4.1.5 Biradari Politics***

The case of Biradari politics was inadvertently mentioned as a reality by most television talk shows. It was displayed as something to be taken for granted, framed in a sense to describe the reality of Pakistan’s rural areas, rarely was it questioned if ever.

An important caveat in this regard was Talat Hussain’s nation-wide on-ground transmissions (Express News), where he framed the issue around voters rather than the politicians and their campaigns. This is an essential break from other forms of coverage and arguably the most sophisticated and realistic analysis of voting patterns throughout the country; indicative of the journalistic prowess of the team. From highlighting the plight of rural Sindhi bonded laborers to local *biradari* members in South Punjab, he reminds the viewers of the

inflexible and sticky nature of our voting patterns. Despite this over-arching mentions of ‘change’ and ‘waves of tsunami’ on television channels, Hussain brings in the realities of the rural parts of the country. Although he mentions the motifs of *change* to his interviewees asking if they have felt this wave of change that engulfs the rest of the country, it is apparent that these respondents have far-reaching problems, solutions to which are more complex than this “seemingly superficial” call for change (Talat Hussain Express News; April 26).

This discussion indicates to the maturation of the mass-media as the process of transition gains momentum. The support for values rather than episodes brings issues such as above in the political discussion whereby the media questions the existing hierarchies in the country.

#### ***4.1.6 Personality vs. Party Frames***

The television shows analyzed repeatedly offer a dichotomy between highlighting the personality of leaders versus highlighting party manifestos and services to the country, a discussion that is not unique to Pakistan, but is apparent throughout the world. This entails that individual candidates rely on either personality cues, or party cues to gain recognition among people. This issue was framed in a way so as to give more importance to the party factor, as opposed to the personality factor. News shows seemed to be concerned with *educating* people regarding local candidates, and their party manifestos rather than brushing over the party leaders’ names as has been the general tradition in the country. This was manifested through shows dedicated to discussions on the need for distributing party tickets correctly, rather than asking for votes on the basis of imminent personalities. There was a breakdown of individual party manifestos and a constant discussion over them in most media shows that were analyzed. Additionally, visual clips and information boxes appearing on screen-sides throughout the day

aimed at not only informing people about candidates in their areas, but also regarding the manifestos that each party envisioned.

#### ***4.1.7 Newness as a winning formula***

One of the most repeated and evenly reverberated themes across all channels of mass-dissemination was that of an ‘impending change’, a ‘new wave’ and an anticipated ‘revolution’ in the political arena, possibly emanated after the success of PTI’s political slogan; ‘tsunami’. As is characteristic of the mediatization logic, this concept reverberated equally among political parties, the civil society and among the media; therefore tracing its exact origins is a complex task. However, the thrust with which it was carried forward by news headlines, election marathon transmissions and talk show taglines makes the media’s attention crucial to this discussion. The concept of newness mostly focused upon the ideology and rise of PTI, as opposed to the ‘old’ elite in the country. Newness was framed in the following ways across bulletins and talk shows under analysis, with a positive tone: *New as breaking the hegemony of the old elites*, *New as modern* (with reference to the Western democracies), and with a negative tone: *New as immature*.

The emergence of a new wave of politics, breaking older elite structures was apparent throughout news coverage and talk show agendas before the election period. The issue was framed to focus upon the role of PTI as a new ‘non-entity’ which has challenged traditional hegemonies and broken traditional bonds. The media groups seemed to recognize this as an important achievement, using metaphors and phrases to highlight the importance of this task. One journalist for instance refers to this phenomenon as the “breaking of traditional parties

*Somnat*”<sup>13</sup> (Capital Talk; April 25). Hassan Nisar, a well-regarded TV analyst referred to the emergence of PTI as “the most important juncture in the history of Pakistan, after the separation of Bangladesh and the hanging of ZA Bhutto!” (Capital talk Geo News; April 25). The use of adjectives was an interesting determinant, whereby older parties were oftentimes represented as ‘tested’, ‘old stakeholders’, ‘corrupt’, and ‘experienced in the devious art of politics’.

PTI’s refusal to form alliances or coalition with any of the major parties was also largely held as proof of its transparency. This seemed to be taken both negatively and positively. Mir showed clips of Khan’s rally towards the beginning of his show, where he accuses the major parties (PPP and PML-n) of being in a coalition despite overtly being enemies “When the Chief Justice attacked Zardari (PPP), who ran for his help? (The crowd chants) Nawaz Sharif (PML-n)!” (Capital Talk; April 25). The reference to this footage at the very beginning of the show was reflective of this media house’s partiality towards this aspect of Khan’s politics.

Therefore, the emergence of PTI and its rapid accession to popularity was regarded with a sense of ‘hope’ and ‘expectation’ by most media groups. The use of poetry and songs in the beginning of television talk shows was another novel technique used by media groups to raise excitement levels. This was done by running snippets from election rallies, highlighting major slogans by top leadership. Furthermore, through inviting celebrities and famous icons (Geo News, May 1) to news shows and talking about the impending elections, the media was seen to take a step towards challenging old boundaries between entertainment and news media.

Interestingly, this new style of reporting and the whole rhetoric based on *change* seemed to make certain older elites uncomfortable. For instance, the likes of Pervez Bashir who is chief

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<sup>13</sup> A Hindu temple in ancient India, the destruction of which symbolizes the end of the Hindu empire and marks the beginning of a new dynasty in ancient India.

editor of the country's major Urdu newspaper *Jang*, represented the old elite in Capital Talk. In a discussion centered around youth and its role towards galvanizing change, he accused the whole media of “trying to force and beg the youth voters to come out, because the party that you are trying to bring to power (presumably PTI) has no ground, no solid manifesto, mature voters will vote regardless of your pleas, and immature ones will stay inside” (Capital Talk Geo News; May10). Mir asks him to clarify, making the point that the appeal is to raise voter turnout and not to support a particular party. However the apparent irritation in Bashir's tone is a clear depiction of the unease that these historical elites have with both PTI and this new style of media as symbols of mass dissemination.

Framing of newness as *immaturity* too reverberated throughout the political reality as depicted by the media groups. PTI was at times negatively referred to, as ‘immature’, ‘untested’, and ‘naïve’, owing also to the presumably younger voter associated with the party. This was seen amid major criticism of Imran Khan himself as “an immature and emotional politician, who lacks political prowess at times” (Live with Talat; May 10). Journalists belonging to all channels, although sympathetic towards the ‘untainted’ aspect of PTI, were especially critical of its lack of experience nonetheless. As remarked by Abbasi in his show to a PTI representative, “Do you have winning candidates in Balochistan?” (Off the Record; April 25) journalists seemed skeptical towards Khan's claims of a ‘clean sweep’ in impending elections, questioning his choice of ticket distribution, strategies pertaining to specific constituencies and overall inexperience in the political arena.

New as *modern* and progressive, was another aspect of this theme covered by all media groups, by depicting Khan as representative of modern values of democracy. This was indicated through media coverage of Khan's challenge to Nawaz Sharif (leader of PML-n and his major

contender) to participate in a political debate according to the GOP pattern of the US. This was met with hesitation and dismissed by PML-n, which was negatively reported by the media.

Talat Hussain of Express News stressed upon the need for a more in-depth understanding of the elements of change readily advocated by other news channels and journalists. In his report on dynastic politics, *biradari* votes and other problems faced by the rural voter, (April 27; “The role of Families in Pakistani Politics”) he analyzed the issue of dynastic politics in hairsplitting detail through his journey throughout the country, highlighting the countless array of influential families that dominate each of these regions. The issue was framed as an analysis of the dominant leading families of Pakistan, regardless of their party allegiance, which interestingly has changed throughout centuries. This technique not only does well to inform the voter, but also presents a complex motif of Pakistan’s socio-political fabric whereby a mere rhetoric of ‘change’ cannot in reality change the on-ground situation in the country. He advocated clearly the notion, of *change*, but demanded a rather deeper understanding of it. This indicated to the point that although the 2013 elections might render a change in the electoral votes by bringing a certain party to the core, but changing the inner fiber of the country is a different task altogether. Unlike other media groups, Hussain’s rhetoric stressed upon the need for a more complex understanding on the part of parties such as the PTI; a thought-provoking analysis.

The elements of change that reverberated so fervently through all arenas of public discourse in the elections lent support to the change ideology preached by PTI. However, the media coverage of the impending change and its framing of issues pertaining to the change factor emphasize a more nuanced understanding of what change means and what it entails for the socio-cultural fiber of the country.

#### ***4.1.8 Accountability & Corruption***

The issue of corruption and the need for accountability among all administrative features of the government including the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), the caretaker government and the previous government in power (Pakistan People's Party) was understood as an important theme throughout the narratives of the mass-media. Furthermore, the need for transparency within parties in terms of candidate selection and ticket allocation also emerged as an overarching theme.

Criticism over corruption scandals of the out-going government was a common aspect among all channels. One channel (ARY News) focused on reporting explicitly on corruption scandals in news bulletins, and the prime-time talk-shows dedicated a considerable air-time to discussions explicitly centered on these scandals. A total of three programs were dedicated to discussions on tax-evasion scandals of politicians, the ineffectiveness of the ECP and the inefficiency of the caretaker government. The programs relied on facts and figures quoted by panelists, majorly based on prominent journalists, and discussed how such names have been allowed to contest elections despite existing scandals. The program was systematic in its critique, analyzing the historically inept bureaucracy and the corrupt politician and seemed informative in terms of its awareness raising features; it risked being biased, for lack of a court decision against those vilified. Hamid Mir of Geo chose to emphasize the voter's plight in order to highlight corruption. He travelled to the far-off district of Larkana in rural Sindh, which is the historic stronghold of and the personal constituency of the rulers of the out-going ruling party, PPP. The program, with visuals of the poverty and destitute at the hub of PPP had a massive impact to its credibility, as voters historically supporting them seemed to be disenchanted with the party. Comments such as, "They did not even visit the graves of our martyred soldiers!", "They did not

invest in the area” and “They kept looting us in the name of Benazir and Bhutto”, are a telling commentary on the failure of the government and the level of criticism that the new media openly displayed when referring to them (Hamid Mir; May 6).

Differences within media groups are reflective of different values and partiality in their individual capacities. For instance, although news coverage in all groups focused on reporting inefficiencies of the caretaker setup and the administrative cadres of the government, the talk-shows followed different agendas emphasizing different features of the same phenomenon. Whereas Abbasi of the ARY News focused on the corruption scandals, Mir of Geo and Hussain of Express News focused on highlighting the plight of the common voter, by reporting from different areas of Pakistan and highlighting individual constituencies. This is a primary differentiation between those analysts that focused on more mud-slinging and sensational form of reporting from their own studios (Abbasi), and those who chose to assess the situation on ground and focus on the larger plight of the country’s citizens (Mir, Hussain).

Although rarely discussed in terms of corruption, PTI did benefit from its *newness* as mentioned above. The party was seen to use this element in its campaigns quite a lot, to accentuate its role as a wave of change and a distinct force against all corrupt forces, urging people to recognize this distinction. As quoted by Mir in his show: “A nation that forgets the distinction between good and evil reduces itself to oblivion.” (Imran Khan Capital Talk; April 25, 2013).

#### ***4.1.9 Challenging the status quo –the continued dominance of the Military***

The underlying discourse of mass-media in Pakistan has been one of challenging the repressive status quo, and fighting towards the freedom of press. These shades were common

throughout the narrative that the media created, which grants it special focus in a context where the status-quo and particularly the hegemony of the military establishment is something rarely discussed in the public domain. Media news bulletins generally framed the status quo as a negative, censoring entity often used to implicitly refer to the army or traditional power-holders (landed elite, dynasties).

The discussion around Musharraf's trial<sup>14</sup>, which culminated in the latter half of April, 2013, dominated news coverage and talk-show discussions. The issue was largely presented as an exuberant success of the civil courts against the military dictator; the accountability frame was most apparent whereby the dominant narrative stated that everyone, even the all-powerful dictator, should be held accountable for his crimes. The issue was largely one-sided, with the media supporting headlines such as, "Is the law different for a dictator?" criticizing the house arrest of Musharraf and demanding a 'normal trial' for him instead (ARY News; April 18). Analogies with the Bhutto trial in 1978 where Bhutto was hanged without due access to fair court proceedings, provided a contrast with the treatment of politicians versus that of the dictator (Geo, ARY). Images and videos of these arrests presumably helped raise emotions among the public in a very one-sided analysis of news events.

The coverage in the case of Hussain (Express News) was more nuanced and objective, in that he hoped to understand the impact of this treason trial. As in all cases, the focus was on the issue at large rather than the persona of Musharraf. A systematic and detailed analysis of the implications of a treason trial on the political arena was conducted, whereby half the abettors of the dictator are now prominent politicians with current political parties was an interesting

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<sup>14</sup> Gen. (Retd.) Pervez Musharraf who had ruled the country as a military dictator for 8 years (1999-2007), returned to Pakistan amid impending elections to contest elections as a new political party. Upon his return however, he faced charges of Treason for enforcing Martial Law and suspending the country's constitution.

anecdote amid largely emotional coverage. This was linked to values of importance of granting justice, and the importance of ‘due process’ to even disliked personalities, which is an eminent value in a democratic society. This mature analysis was therefore a telling feature that a country needs to inculcate towards a democratic transition.

#### ***4.1.10 Discussion on media as tools of electoral campaigning***

The political vacuum created due to the weakening security situation in the country amid its participation in the war on terror is ascribed as a major reason behind the centrality of the media in the political discourse during 2013.

In light of the worsening security situation in the country, the media realized its seminal role as symbol of mass-dissemination. In addition to large-scale coverage of political party campaigns such as discussion on their manifestos and stances, an overall more objective discussion on the types of campaign, the merits of some kinds over others and the role of the media in disseminating and propagating election information was also observed. As discussed in the awareness section, the media was aware of its role and fulfilled it affectively.

Furthermore, a sophisticated discussion on negative campaigning, and the value it generates for the average voter was also an intriguing aspect of the election coverage, indicative of the maturity of the media groups and a trend towards more thematic and general discussion. Abbasi (April 24) organized a debate around the importance of negative campaigning, whereby some participants talked about the objective merits and others about the demerits of it. The overall conclusion drawn from the discussion was that negative campaigns although harmful in general, are a source of information and therefore should be allowed to prevail.

## 4.2 Reporting on Political Parties –Testing the Political Climate:

The slogans of change put forth by the PTI resonated with those of the changing political environment in the country, whereby the media implicitly lent recognition to the new party as drivers of change and challengers of the status quo. This is further extrapolated in the following sections, in accordance with the framework established by Paul Lucardie (2000).

There was no overarching evidence supporting any media group's partiality towards a particular political party. However, the subtle differences in coverage of each major party, was reflective of the overall political climate, which arguably was a mixed consequence of the overall situation in the country.

PTI was mainly associated with 'change', 'newness' and 'representatives of youth' by the media channels. Since the aura of elections was such that the metaphor of 'change' was also associated with the electoral process in general, this might have rendered an inadvertent advantage to the new party. This was consistent with Lucardie's (2000) contention regarding Prophetic parties, whereby the new parties aim to distinguish themselves from older stakeholders and this new identity is facilitated by the convolution of the party with new elites. Media reporting majorly centered on the persona of Imran Khan and the aspect of youth associated with the party. Media's repeated reference to 'divided households' was another affect that the 'wave of change' that PTI brought to the political scenario. Although they were divided on the affect that this might have, with ARY News offering a pro-PTI optimistic standpoint and Hussain being more cynical of this 'wave', all media houses agreed upon a change in discussions inside households after the rise of PTI. Even the likes of Hussain who was generally against simplistic notions of change, accepted that "there are multiple party voters within a single household this time around, due to the rise of PTI."

Reporting regarding PTI should also be looked at in terms of the coverage of *election rallies* and the reporting surrounding them. Although all major political rallies were covered by all media channels, there was an aspect of ‘newness’ attached with PTI rallies too. For instance, its usage of new technology, motivational songs, etc., was celebrated as a new break from the past. In addition to Imran Khan’s existing popularity, his speeches and promises were widely telecasted in news bulletins. Although characteristic of election coverage, this arguably enhanced the party’s efforts come about as a mainstream contender as previously they did not hold this privileged position.

Another aspect that reporting on PTI that resonated across media houses was the fact that it really confused the result, a naturally traditional anticipated result turned into an uncertain circumstance, this was echoed through energetic comments in marathon transmissions hours before the elections started, “if the turnout exceeds 50%, PTI would win simple majority” (commentator in Express News’s election marathon; May 10).

PTI’s refusal to sit with anyone (coalition) was also quite unprecedented; this brings to light the traditional coalitions that form in this country whereby at the end of the day, all politicians end up ruling country together. This also made the natural coalition between PML-n and PPP harder this time around, as public was made more concerned and conscious of this aspect of Pakistan’s politics. Therefore, electoral commentary by journalists expressed the ‘uncomfortable’ position that PTI has put the older parties in, whereby they were made to openly criticize each other more clearly than in previous elections.

In light of the depiction of other parties, the information was quite nuanced and well-balanced highlighting merits and weaknesses evenly, with the sole exception of the out-going

governing party, PPP. PPP faced enormous criticism upon its 5 year performance from all media houses, and this brought to fore the media's role in ensuring accountability in the country.

### 4.3 Discussion

This section aims at conceptualizing the emergent themes, in order to understand a pattern that emerges out of the thematic analysis described above. It includes both the overarching findings and a general discussion linking them to major findings from existing literature.

The foremost emergent theme from the analysis strengthens Baumgartner's (2008) argument that a dynamic interaction of interconnected events led to an unintended drive for change in the country. This *social cascade* results in change from a range of information sources, whereby issues popular in elite discourse (television talk-shows) seem to attain saliency among the public. The idea of a 'surge' mean the source of the change is complex. The underlying motifs that guide such patterns emerge out of specific contexts such as gradual progression towards democracy, privatization of mass-media, growing disparities, breaking of traditional hegemonic structures, a pro-democratic civil consciousness, etc. Therefore, a more nuanced approach is valuable. The sections below describe generally emergent concepts; this is the story of the maturation of the media in a transitioning democracy, and its framing of new political elite in the process.

Despite subtle differences among different news channels, there is a clear shift towards reporting of issues rather than events throughout; therefore, a more *thematic* rather than *episodic*

or event-based reporting has culminated in a more conscious public<sup>15</sup>. This is perhaps the most important finding of the analysis, which is emblematic of the gradual maturity that mass-media has gained in Pakistan, through its emergence in 2002 to its coverage of the 2013 elections. Coverage was in general engulfed with undertones, and motifs that showed the complexity of issues, rather than a linear form of reporting. Although the choice of issues raised differed across media groups, in general the talk-show discussion presented an avid, detailed and nuanced criticism. The idea was centered around the presentation of underlying patterns, rather than report on events, as is apparent in coverage of voting patterns in the country, the ‘definition’ and implications of ‘change’ and the merits and importance of accountability in a democratic country.

The link between a progression towards democracy, and a more nuanced, theme-centric media can therefore be made with help of existing literature, whereby a progress towards democratization entails that media becomes more responsible in analyzing issues rather than isolated events. This is indicative of mass-media’s role as a policy derivative in a competitive media environment, whereby parties are rated and compared on their policy stands. The diversity within media in the form of rivalry and competing narratives of different news channels adds to the nuance in the political environment. This renders the election process even more importance, as party representatives are then seen to pay special attention to media presentation of their issue stands. The fact that these issues being discussed at a normative level were more focused upon the idea of change and breaking from the vestiges of the past grants uneven advantage to PTI as representatives of this change.

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<sup>15</sup> Episodic coverage is defined as the broadcasting of specific events and episodes as opposed to thematic coverage, which entails that the bigger theme, the abstract picture or larger phenomena be studied. Whereas the latter is often associated with a more mature and balanced form of coverage, the former may also be the same, depending upon the way the issue or event is framed and how it is linked to actors, as will be discussed in the analysis below. For more information on the episodic and thematic types of coverage, see Papacharissi & Oliveira (2008).

The universal role of media as an accountability mechanism is clearly observed in the analysis, whereby media is generally more critical of the government, highlighting its flaws more than other traditional parties. There seems to be repeated references towards the 5-year performance of the government, with the media consciously informing the public regarding its ups and downs. Furthermore, in line with transitioning democracies in general and institutional consolidation in particular, it was seen that the media displayed significant attention to the development of these aspects. Therefore, in its evolution towards maturation, it seems to highlight issues such as the need for capacity building in the election commission, the police and security agencies, and other governing bodies.

Although the type of analysis that is more common in Pakistan inadvertently reveals journalist biases and skepticism regarding one or more parties, there is an apparent recognition for the need for *objectivity* among all media channels and news analysts. This is understood as a primary value that media should follow as an end, regardless of existing cleavages and complex realities.

The issue of terrorism and rising security threats did indeed give media uneven level of attention and center-stage that it employed into introducing marathon networks and more proactive coverage than usual. Therefore, the role of media as an exclusive platform for information dissemination is apparent in its self-recognition, as well the importance other parties attached to it in terms of heavy campaigning and online advertisements.

The idea of a political vacuum discussed earlier which entails that the media remained the sole source of information disseminator holds true in this backdrop, whereby political actors gave it massive importance as a link to the public amid impending elections. ‘Media

presentation' is typically considered important, however since most issues raised reverberate with concepts of 'change', 'challenging the status-quo' and 'ending corruption', inadvertently the party has to gain most from media's center stage was PTI.

There is an exuberance attached with the notion of elections, and this is adequately captured and reinforced by 'euphoric' marathon transmissions. Therefore, the co-creation of meanings entailed that the energy and euphoria present in the public reverberated in the media and vice versa. This meant that the importance attached with the elections was partly due to the significance the media houses granted them, owing to their dedicated transmissions.

Keeping in consideration the positive effects of media framing on the electoral process and the rise of PTI described above, it is essential that the role of media not be overstated. The plurality within the media channels and their internal differences are indicative of the evolution of mass-media, whereby the gradual increase in plural choices and voices of dissent results in differing approaches to reporting. This means that commercial interests, personal rivalries and other factors might actually repress the process of media maturation. Furthermore, it might be that media merely reflected the cues already existing in the political discourse, and thus simply projected them on the cognitive environment of the country.

## Conclusion

The opening up of the privatized media industry in Pakistan, and its role in inspiring change as well being an instrument of it, is a historically unprecedented fact. The media's active gate-keeping role and its expansion beyond traditional hegemonic power holders changed the rules of the game during the 2013 elections. The sense of civic duty raised the electoral turnout of the country (55%, highest since the 1970s), and aided the transition towards democracy with a more conscious and informed public. Amid this *wave* of change that engulfed the country, a new political party emerged in the political spectrum of the country, amid the traditional hegemonies that had clouded it since independence in 1947.

The research study delves into qualitative analysis, with a purpose to analyze the link between media's portrayal of events and the rise of a new political party, PTI that challenged the hegemony of existing parties in Pakistan. Media was seen to play an active role in the political awakening of the country, owing to its gradual transition to democracy after the end of military dictatorship in 2008. The declining security situations in the country rendered the media center-stage, and its presentation of events and framing of issues, especially those reverberating with concepts of 'change' were deemed essential to the rise of PTI.

The study finds support for the theory of a social cascade (Baumgartner et al. 2008), whereby media framing of issues, and their occurrence in real time is inter-linked in an intricate manner, meaning that a complex set of inter-related events; the media privatization, the end of a repressive regime, the gradual evolution of a civil society whereby media journalists became important elites, the wave of *change* in the county amid growing disparities, the declining security conditions, etc. gave rise to the emergence of PTI. The data does not indicate an explicit partiality of the media to a particular political party; however, media's emphasis on certain issues

such as the need for ‘change’, ‘accountability’, ‘values’, ‘anti-dynastic politics’, ‘newness’ and a well-focused campaign on voter awareness, civic duty especially targeting youth audience, seems to have given inevitable support to the new and youth-driven PTI, whose slogan of ‘new Pakistan’ reverberates with the media.

Although the issues and agendas covered in the media seem more nuanced than a more simplistic issue versus situation understanding; it seems to engage with its own responsibilities, taking its role as an accountability mechanism very seriously, especially with regards to the government. It therefore attempts to form an identity amid increasing popularity and viewership, providing real-time scrutiny to the public as subsequent government institutions move towards gradual consolidation in an unprecedented manner, in this transition towards democracy. A debate on media’s inherent values, its objectivity, and its own importance is seen to develop as a backdrop of the issues it raises.

This thesis is a novel attempt at understanding the rise of PTI in the politics of Pakistan, and especially the role that media as a major component of change played in this scenario. This is therefore an unprecedented attempt to understand the change in the country, and the mass-media, and its link with the newly establishing political elite, an aspect that has not been explored in the past. However, as the analysis focuses merely on one aspect of the dynamic spectrum (media portrayal), it does not delve into the citizen’s response, and the political actors’ response to the content displayed on the media, or vice versa. Perhaps an attempt can be made in the future to understand the audience’s response and the actions of the politicians in shaping the rise of PTI.

Furthermore, the research contributes to the larger literature on political communication in transitioning democracies, and the complexities of several features that affect this transition and the even complex interaction of political actors, citizens and the media in this scenario, shaping the transformation of the country. Amid the under-researched role of media in transitioning democracies, this is an attempt to dispel simplistic understandings of causes, and stresses upon the need for a more complex, multi-faceted and context-driven approach to understanding the complex underpinnings of media logic in the political climate.

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