

Third Level Agenda Setting Effects: Relationship of Media Coverage of Electoral Rigging Movement and Public Perception

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Abstract

This study describes the relationship of Network Media Agenda and Network Public agenda examining the coverage of electoral rigging issue which gained the momentum of a movement in Pakistan during post elections 2013 against the sitting government of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz's (PML-N). Social Network Analysis technique was used to analyze the data collected from two sources including: coverage of three leading Urdu dailies, Express, Dunya and Jang; Survey from 360 respondents of Lahore to explore the relationship among these agenda setting networks. QAP Correlation results indicate strong association between media agenda and public agenda about electoral rigging movement. Findings imply that media in Pakistan contributed significantly in shaping public perception during political movements.

Keywords: Network Agenda Setting, Social Network Analysis, Electoral Rigging,

INTRODUCTION

Elections – 2013 were considered very important in Pakistan’s democratic process. Because it was the first time in history that a democratic elected government completed its tenure and power was transferred through democratic process according to the constitution of Pakistan. In Elections 2013, a record voter turnout was seen. Overall voter turnout was 53-55% in which overall gain was 34% (Gallup Pakistan, 2013). The report of European Union Elections Observation Mission also declared this Elections-2013 more democratic than the previous elections. Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML-N) got supreme majority in these elections and formed the government in center. On the other side, Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) showed reservations on elections conduct. PTI Chairman Imran Khan blamed PML-N for rigging in elections. They continuously kept challenging elections-2013 results at different forums and staged protests against the conduct of elections and calling it the biggest rigged elections of Pakistan’s history. These protests and blames eventually came up with movement advanced toward Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan.

On 11th May, 2014, PTI organized a political procession at D-Chowk, Islamabad and launched a movement against alleged rigging in Elections-2013. After this procession, PTI started to show its power in different cities of country. 14th August, 2014 saw unprecedented movements in Pakistani politics. Pakistan Awami Tehrik (PAT) started “Inqalab March” (Revolution March) & PTI started “Azadi March” (Independence March) towards Islamabad. A large number of people followed them. After reaching Islamabad, the parties decided to stage a sit-in Islamabad, for the fulfillment of their demands. PAT ended its Sit-In, on 21st October,

2014, and PTI Sit-in was ended on 17th December, 2014 after a brutal terrorist attack on Army Public School, Peshawar.

The movement against electoral rigging has left serious effects on Pakistani Politics. The Movement resulted in the formation of a Judicial Commission for investigations on alleged electoral rigging during Elections-2013. On April 03, 2015, President Mamnoon Hussain issued an ordinance for the formation of a Judicial Commission. On April 08, 2015 Chief Justice Nasir-ul-Mulk formed a 3-member judicial commission. The Commission was headed by Chief Justice Nasir-ul-Maulk, while the other two members were; Justice Ameer Hani Muslim and Justice Afzal Khan. This was unprecedented as accountability of elections happened for the first time in Pakistan's political history. The three-member judicial commission initiated its proceedings on April 9, 2015 and presented its final report on July 03, 2015. The report said that there were irregularities on the part of the Election Commission but they did not constitute a reflection of a deviation from the public mandate (Judicial Commission Report, 2015).

Media coverage of this movement provides an interesting case to study the agenda setting function of the media. Media gave extensive coverage to this issue that seeks attention to be examined as a case of agenda setting. It was observed, during this movement, that the public was also interpreting this movement with different attributes which are always central to the agenda setting studies.

The Present study takes roots from Agenda setting theory. Agenda setting is mainly concerned with the media role in shaping public opinion. Since the beginning of the agenda setting model, it has been replicated in more than 400 studies (McCombs & Valenzuela, 2007). Scholars in Pakistan, have also explored different aspects of agenda setting theory (Yousaf et al, 2014; Ambreen, 2014; Jan et

al., 2013; Mahsud et al., 2011; Raza & Awan, 2013; Riaz, 2009). However, this study is going to test Network Agenda Setting Model proposed by Guo & McCombs in 2012. To date, not a single study is found on NAS model in Pakistan. So, this study will provide opportunities for Pakistani scholars to test new dimensions of agenda setting in Pakistan.

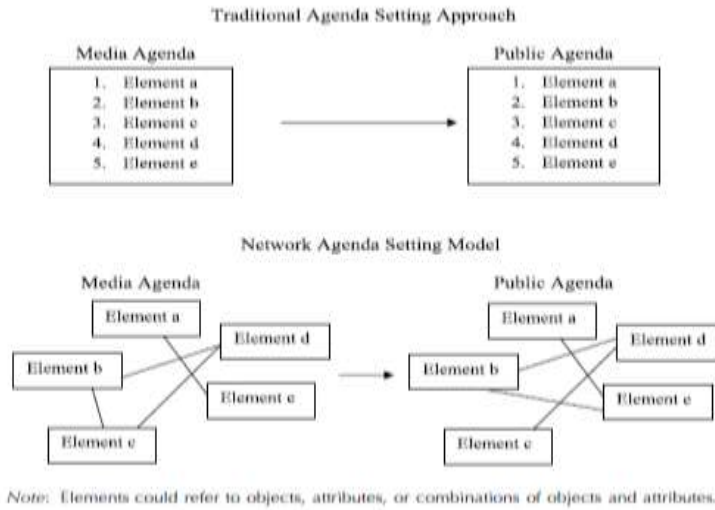
Emergence of Agenda Setting Approaches:

Role of mass media in the presentation of political issues and objects and its perception among the audience has been central among the agenda setting scholars for the last four decades starting from the ground-breaking Chappell Hill study in 1968 (Graber, 2005; McQuail, 2010; Baran & Davis, 2010). The traditional or first level of agenda setting studied agenda as a set of objects and issues (Dunaway et al., 2007; Walgrave et al., 2008; Muin, 2011; Sheaffer & Weimann, 2005; Lee & Hahn, 2014). Where, the objects are public issues, but they could be other items or topics, such as the agenda of political candidates during an election (McCombs, 2005). This debate on the media agenda continued which led to assess the way media give treatment to objects and issues. This discussion emerged as an attribute's media provides to issues and objects. This scholarship turned the focus from object agenda to attribute agenda. In other words from first level to second level of agenda setting (Writh et al., 2010; Seltzer & Dittmore, 2009; Soroka, 2002; Rill & Davis, 2008; Zhang, 2012). For each object on the agenda, there is an agenda of attributes that influences our understanding of the object (McCombs, 2005).

A recent development in Agenda Setting research is Network Agenda Setting Model proposed by Guo & McCombs in 2012. This model asserts that “the salience of the network relationships among objects and/or attributes, in addition to the rank-order of

individual elements, can also be transferred from the media to the public”. This expanded perspective on the bundling of objects and attributes has been termed as third level of agenda setting (Guo & McCombs 2011a & 2011b; Vargo et al., 2014; Guo et al., 2012; VU et al., 2014; Cheng & Chan, 2015).

Model 1: The Comparison of Traditional Agenda Setting Approach and Network Agenda Setting Model



Source: Guo (2012)

Network agenda setting as a third level approach need to be studied more extensively to extend this mode of scholarship as it seems more innovative. Therefore, this model was used to study the role of media for influencing public perception.

Hypotheses of study take roots from Network Agenda Setting Model. Followings statements are hypothesized.

RQ1: How did media associate different attributes for covering elections-2013 during electoral rigging movement?

RQ2: How did public associate different attributes about elections-2013?

H1: Media network agenda about electoral rigging will positively associate with the network agenda of public.

Methods & Measures

Research design of present study applies triangulation of methods. Present study was conducted in three stages. Firstly, media agenda was measured by analyzing news stories related to elections-2013 on front & back pages of three leading Urdu Newspapers; Daily Express, Daily Dunya and Daily Jang from 11th May, 2014 to 17th December, 2014 (N=964). Secondly, survey was conducted from 360 stratified-conveniently selected respondents from Lahore city.

Measures:

For analyzing news stories and editorials, content sheet was formed. In social network analysis, unit of analysis is dyad: A combination of two ties and their relational ties. In order to measure connections and their relational ties, a set of six elements was constructed for Elections-2013; Rigging, Accountability, Returning Officers, Corruption, Four Constituencies, & Election Commission (Annexure – I). Elements were constructed according to pilot study on randomly selected 20 newspapers.

Content Analysis

In this stage, universe of the study was Urdu Newspapers of Pakistan. Three leading papers were selected; Daily Jang, Daily Dunya, Daily Express from 11th May, 2014 to 17th December, 2014 (N=654). Further, only front and back pages were selected as sample. Unit of analysis was news stories related to Elections-2013. Categories and their relational ties were coded as per instructions. Pilot study was done on 10 newspapers. Inter-coder reliability between two coders was obtained 0.85 by using Holsti's formula.

Public Survey

For measuring public perceptions, a survey was conducted from the population of Lahore. The reason behind the selection of Lahore city is the great importance of this city for Pakistan. Lahore is the capital city of the Pakistani province of Punjab, the second largest metropolitan area in the country and an important historical center in South Asia. All these factors provide enormous reason to conduct survey from this city.

Sample size was 360. Stratified-convenient sampling technique was used. Strata were made on the basis of Gender and Location. For this purpose, Lahore divided into nine administratively towns. 40 respondents from each town were selected. Furthermore, sample was subdivided into 20 Males and 20 Females from each town. Four research assistants were trained for data collection including one female. All these research assistants were graduated in Mass Communication from University of Gujrat. They were trained for two days. Efforts were made to control personal biases in data collection.

Survey Instrument

As Guo (2012) suggests mind map technique of survey for testing NAS model. Researcher developed a mind map diagram, containing open ended circles for examining associations of public minds about Elections-2013. Respondents were asked to fill circles with their views about Elections-2013. Open ended responses were coded according to predefined categories in Stage-I of content analysis. For making instrument more reliable, two pilot studies on sub sample of 18 (1 Male & 1 Female from each town) were conducted. Changes were made in layout and structure of diagram and sheet.

After data collection, according to the nature of study, and predefined categories of elements, matrices containing 6 rows & 6

columns were created about Elections-2013. Ucinet was used for data analysis. Quadratic Assignment Procedure (QAP) Correlation test was applied to symmetrical matrix data. In making results more accurate and reliable, matrices datasets were randomly permuted during QAP correlation test.

Results

Findings highlight that the issue of electoral rigging gained much attention of Pakistani print media. Three leading Urdu dailies gave high coverage to this issue. Daily Dunya presented more stories (347) than other two dailies; Express (324), Jang (293).

Table 1: Matrix of Elements associations about Electoral Rigging based on News Stories of three Urdu Dailies (N=964)

	Election Commission	4 Constituencies	Returning Officers	Corruption	Accountability
Election Commission					
4 Constituencies	55				
Returning Officers	32	23			
Corruption	56	57	21		
Accountability	163	108	31	86	
Rigging	163	97	38	94	266

Table 1 represents the matrix results of elements' associations among different elements about electoral rigging in news stories of three dailies; Express, Dunya & Jang. Therefore, table shows the result of 964 news stories related to elections-2013 from 11th May, 2014 to 17th December, 2014. These findings highlight that the rigging and accountability were mentioned together in 266 out of 964 stories. The frequency is much higher than other networks of elements. Moreover, election commission has 163 ties with both accountability and rigging. It reveals that media showed elections-

2013 as a rigged election and election commission is responsible for it. Electoral rigging should be investigated and election commission should reform.

Figure 1 Diagram of Elements' Ties about Electoral Rigging based on News Stories of three Urdu Dailies (N=964)

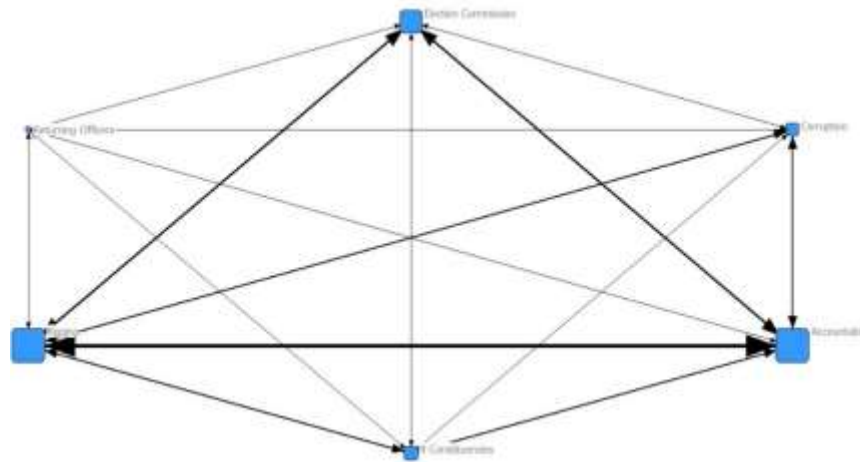


Figure 1 visualizes table 1 for highlighting network picture about electoral rigging in 964 news stories of three Dailies. The figure clearly demonstrates the subgroup structure of rigging, accountability and election commission. Rigging has strong ties with accountability and election commission. Election commission has also strong ties with both these elements. This triangle structure demonstrates the association of these elements in the network agenda of media about electoral rigging. The agenda of media found bigger size of rigging and accountability. So, these are the central elements of this network agenda. They have more ties than other elements in the table.

Table 2: Matrix of Elements Ties' Frequencies about Electoral Rigging based on Survey Responses of Public (N=360)

	Election Commission	4 Constituencies	Returning Officers	Corruption	Accountability
Election Commission					
4 Constituencies	8				
Returning Officers	17	7			
Corruption	44	12	18		
Accountability	46	12	15	31	
Rigging	76	16	32	84	79

The Table 2 highlights that the corruption and rigging was bundled together 84 out of 360 times (23%) in network agenda of public about the issue of elections-2013. Further rigging was bundled 79 (22%) times with accountability and 76 (21%) times with election commission. These findings show that public associated rigging and corruption with elections-2013. They emphasized accountability for electoral rigging and corruption.

Figure 2: Diagram of Elements' Ties about Electoral Rigging based on Open Ended Responses of Public (N=360)

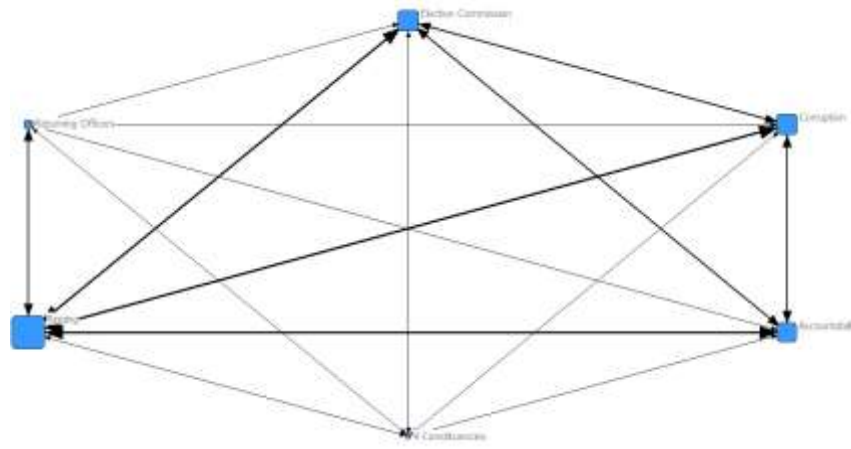


Figure 2 visualizes table 2 for highlighting network picture about electoral rigging in network agenda of 360 respondents. The figure highlights that rigging has strong ties with corruption, accountability and election commission. Election commission also has ties with corruption and accountability. In this figure, bigger size of rigging show that it is the central element in the explicit network agenda of public about electoral rigging. It has most ties with other elements.

Study provides support for agenda setting effects about electoral rigging issue. Figure 1 and 2 reveals that the media agenda about electoral rigging is much similar to public agenda (Figure 3). Elements emphasized by media along with their associations, are same to the public agenda about electoral rigging. QAP correlation results also provide significant association between newspapers' stories and public agenda ($r=0.701$, $p=0.052$).

Discussion

Pakistan is a country, where democracy is in its infancy. In its 68 years of independence, it observed three long martial law rules. However, now democracy roots are becoming strong in Pakistan. After 2002 general elections, power is being transferred only through electoral system. General elections- 2013 was considered very important for country political history. In these elections PML-N got supreme majority in federal and Punjab province. On the other side, PTI emerged as second largest political party in the country. Soon after the elections conduct, PTI blamed PML-N for electoral rigging and theft of public mandate. PTI strongly protested against electoral rigging in elections tribunals, Supreme Court and finally in street protests.

During this political movement against electoral rigging, media coverage was seemed very helpful for promoting PTI cause. All newspapers and mainstream media gave excessive coverage to PTI processions, conferences and tweets. Issue of electoral rigging was observed to discuss in columns, editorials and media talk shows very much. Present study was based to examine the role of media in promoting electoral rigging issue among the perception of public. For examining this role of media in political communication, framework of agenda setting theory was used.

Agenda setting theory is considered the most influential theory in mass communication research. It has become a dominant approach in study of political communication research. The recent work of Guo & McCombs (2011) has turned the focus of agenda setting research towards third level of theory. This level is also called as Network Agenda Setting Model (Guo, 2012). Table 1 indicates that rigging and accountability were much emphasized by media and they were excessively linked with one another. Hence, findings provide answer to RQ1. It implies that media in Pakistan actively engaged in selecting and associating different attributes and issues during a political movement. It signifies the importance of media in political situation of Pakistan.

Furthermore, Figure 2 reveals only rigging as central element of public network agenda about electoral rigging. Public associated this element with accountability, corruption and election commission. It addresses the RQ2 that public actively construct image of political issues in their minds. And associate different issues with other issues, objects and attributes in their minds.

Finally, study found evidence to support NAS model in Pakistan. It highlights that media network agenda about electoral rigging has strong influence on public agenda about electoral rigging ($r=0.701$,

$p=0.052$). These findings support NAS model proposed by Guo (2012) which asserts that the salience of the network relationships among objects and/or attributes, in addition to the rank-order of individual elements, can also be transferred from the media to the public. Further it is evident that media network agenda can influence agenda of public as it is found in previous studies on Network Agenda Setting Model (Guo & McCombs, 2011a & 2011b; Cheng & Chan, 2015; Vu et al., 2014 and Vargo et al., 2014). Moreover, findings also support previous findings of agenda setting effects on object level (Kwong et al., 2014; Du, 2008; Muin, 2011; Seltzer & Dittmore, 2009; Yousaf et al., 2014; Ambreen, 2014; Zhang, 2012, Mahsud et al., 2011; and Raza & Awan, 2013) and attribute level (Rill & Davis, 2008; Du, 2008 and Writh et al., 2010). Hence, **H1** that “Media network agenda about electoral rigging will positively associate with the network agenda of public” is approved. These findings make a claim that media in Pakistan is very active and has significant influence on public perceptions of issues. It can be used for gaining positive political objectives for democratic development of country.

Finally, present study claims that media network agenda about a national issue like electoral rigging is effective. Media played a significant role in shaping public perception of electoral rigging issue. That is why; PTI demand for judicial investigations of electoral rigging was fulfilled with the formation of judicial commission headed by Chief Justice Nasir-ul-Mulk. To date of writing, this Judicial Commission (2015) has published his final inquiry report. This report rejected all three allegations of PTI about electoral rigging. These three main allegations of the PTI were included; organized rigging in the 2013 general elections, non-transparent polling and theft of the public mandate. It is also noteworthy, that soon after the elections-2013, Gallup Pakistan

Report (2013) and EU Elections Observation Mission Report (2013) declared Elections-2013 free and fair and more democratic than previous elections. Despite the accuracy, elections-2013 was made suspected and rigged in the public agenda by media. It shows the agenda setting power of media in Pakistan.

Conclusion

It is concluded that media played vital role in shaping public perception about electoral rigging in general elections-2013. Study provides empirical evidence for NAS effects of media on public perceptions about electoral rigging issue. Finally, it is argued, on a national issue like electoral rigging, a single public agenda can be shaped by media. Pakistani media role in political movements has become crucial. This is a healthy indicator for democratic freedom in Pakistan.

Limitations of Study

Although, in this study it has been attempted to test NAS effects in Pakistan but it should be viewed with several limitations. Firstly, due to time limits, fewer categories were made about network elements. Secondly, due to lack of research culture in Pakistan, open ended mind map technique had to face serious difficulties in its application.

For Further Research

Despite the several limitations, present study provides enormous opportunities for media scholars in Pakistan. It expands NAS Model in Pakistan. First of all, future researchers should test this model with more categories of objects, attributes and issues. Furthermore, it should be tested with other related concepts like 'need for orientation', agenda building & political advertising for examining a comprehensive picture of Network Agenda Setting effects.

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Annexure – I: Elements about electoral rigging & their definitions

Element	Definitions for Coding
Rigging.	if a link establishes between rigging and elections
Accountability.	accountability, electoral investigations, re-elections, judicial investigations of elections, and reforms of election system
Returning officers	Returning officers, Presiding officers, Election Commission Crew.
Corruption	Corrupt election, unfair, fraud, cheat, deception, 35 puncture, fun, irregularity, mismanagement, & elapses
Four Constituencies	NA-110 Sialkot, NA-122 Lahore, NA-125 Lahore & NA-154 Lodharan.
Election commission of Pakistan	Election Commission of Pakistan, ECP

Annexure – II: Elements about PML-N government & their definitions

Element	Definitions for Coding
Family Politics	family politics, Nawaz-Zardari Partnership, Mukmuka (deal), monarchy, and aristocracy
Injustice.	injustice, imbalance, inequality, cruel system, Police Gardi (Police Terrorism), Gullucracy, Gullu Butt, lack of merit
Go Nawaz Go	Slogan of Go Nawaz Go, Prime Minister Resign
Corruption	Corrupt, Tax Defaulters, Qarz Khoor (Debited), money laundering, businessman,
Accountability	Accountability of government & PML-N, trial, punishment for PML-N
Rigging	if a link establishes between rigging and PML-N