

**RESEARCH PAPER****Role of Media on National Issues during Musharraf's Era: A Critical Review****<sup>1</sup>Sadia Naz\*, <sup>2</sup>Bushra Shaukat and <sup>3</sup>Fara Naz<sup>3</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

The world now feels like a hamlet because of the vast amount of information and electronic media. There are no longer any restrictions on the travel of information, news, and events to any location on the planet. Dictators have typically closely monitored the media to suppress criticism. Authoritarian governments in dictatorships frequently heavily repress the mainstream media to avoid crossing their perceived limits of acceptability. Musharraf took responsibility for the freedom of the media revolution in Pakistan. Pakistan Electronic Media Regulation Authority granted unprecedented power to halt broadcast transmissions, close offices, seize equipment, revoke licenses, and increase fines for violations. There was a challenge for Musharraf to address the media after the revolution. Media visuals have the power to shape emotions, thoughts, and worldviews. The role of mass media in society is not only to educate and inform the public but also to shape national identity. The aim of this article is to analysis the role of media on national issues. This research utilized a secondary source of data collection. Examining the dictatorial rule in Pakistan; this article highlights the significance of media regulations and legislation in the country.

**Keywords:** Constitutional Order, Judicial Crisis, Lal Masjid Incident, Lawyers Movement, Media, Provisional

**Introduction**

The rapid development of information technology and the spread of electronic media have essentially made the world a small global village. Information, news, and events may now reach any location on the globe without restrictions or obstacles. These events spread instantly into every living room before the government could respond and exert control. The amplified importance of the media has affected social, economic, and political life. Gen. Pervez Musharraf took over as Martial Law administrator/chief executive on 12<sup>th</sup> October 1999. He considered himself responsible for the freedom of current media revolution in Pakistan. It is true that he was promotor for the current media liberty but he himself did many acts to influence media through different means. He used force as well as legal tactics to control media and to use media in his favor but was not successful (Alam, Bhatti, & Alvi, 2020). In any society, the progressive function of mass media not only educates and informs the general public but also aids in the formation of national identity. After media revolution there seemed a challenge for Musharraf to tackle media because his rivals used the power of media to expose him. For the time being many of media persons become an alliance against Musharraf to defend media. Dr. Shahid Masud, Hamid Mir, Talat Hussain, Kashif Abbasi etc. were prominent target of Musharraf in that battle between the government and media.

According to The Economist in May 2007, Musharraf's predicament got worse to maintain his position of authority. Musharraf declared a state of emergency when the situation grew out of hand. Since the media and judiciary were most negatively impacted by the emergency, it was obvious that he had declared it to control these two institutions. However, the media had grown to be an unstoppable force. Despite the prohibition on private television channels, media professionals persisted in their fight against the unlawful incarceration of the press. As a result, several well-known programs, including "Capital Talk," were broadcast on the road. In order to protest, many private television networks conducted live performances on the streets. During Musharraf's rule, the media focused on every problem that alarmed him and his loyalists. The dramatic result of elections of 2008 was also a victory for media against Musharraf. Over all media changed the minds of people by conveying what is right and what is wrong and people of Pakistan understand the message from media and made right use of the information. At all its ironic that Musharraf played important role for the media revolution but he was the worst effected of media (Khan & Joseph, 2008).

### **Literature Review**

Musharraf in his book said that it is almost rare for a head of state to write a memoir while in power. However, Pervez Musharraf is no ordinary head of state. As President of Pakistan since 1999, he has one of the most dangerous jobs in the world, and continues to play a vital role in the global war on terror. President Musharraf, a former Taliban supporter and commander who took part in several conflicts, made a major U-turn against radical Islam in 2001. Since then, he has eluded former fighters. His own administration directs numerous raids against al-Qaeda in both its towns and mountains, and uses both technical and human intelligence to track down Osama bin Laden (Musharraf, 2008). Khan and Joseph discusses the pivotal role that media played during the lawyers' movement and the subsequent political changes leading to Musharraf's resignation, highlighting media's influence on national issues (Khan & Joseph, 2008).

Hussain in his article examines the evolution and current state of media in Pakistan, including key media firms, controlling bodies, and future prospects. Pakistani media has been perceived as more honest, frank and assertive than before. The article criticizes social wrongs, economic incompetence and political wrongdoing in the country (Hussain, 2012). However Chaudry and Ashraf examines the media's role in setting the agenda and framing electoral issues during Musharraf's tenure, focusing on how media influenced public perception and political discourse in Pakistan to strengthen his government (Chaudry & Ashraf, 2012). Akbar and Malik focuses on how electronic and print media acted as catalysts in the movement for judicial restoration, examining the interplay between media coverage and judicial activism (Akbar & Malik, 2019).

### **Material and Methods**

This study adopted analytical and descriptive designs to understand the role of media on national issues during Musharraf's era, because media's important role to develop national integrity and Unity. The media has affected social, economic, and political life. The data for the article is collected from secondary sources which includes newspapers, books, journals, reports, documents and channels archive's.

### **Important Issues during Musharraf Regime**

Following are the most important issues during the rule of Musharraf, which affected the position of the government as discussed in media widely and thoroughly:

## **Media on Black Court Movement/Judicial Crisis**

The judicial system and media have emerged as examples for other institutions to follow. Musharraf's tactics to control the media had previously drawn criticism, but on March 9, when he sacked Pakistan's Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhary due to suspected wrongdoing, he also faced criticism for his treatment of the judiciary. This action by Musharraf sparked a national outcry from lawyers and civil society, and thousands of Pakistanis joined him there in the first mass demonstration against the general's eight-year rule. The sixty four percent of Pakistanis, according to a study by the Worldwide Republican Institute, were against handing him another (Munir, 2009). Musharraf found it challenging to manage the crisis since the media constantly covered and brought attention to the problem. Speaking from house arrest, Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Choudhary criticized the general populace for trying to overthrow him and declared that the constitution had been "ripped to shreds." He urged the people to rise and restore the Constitution. Additionally, many individuals believed that the government had contacted numerous newspaper editors and instructed them to refrain from covering the chief justice and the attorneys' movement extensively.

However, the media upheld their role without taking any official influence into account. On March 16th, a violent incident occurred as GEO News covered the Supreme Judicial Council meeting from its rooftop. It was reported that three or four policemen, including an inspector, requested that the cameras on the roof be taken down, but their request was denied in the absence of a written order. In response, around a dozen police officers stormed the building and trashed it. Journalists, legislators, attorneys, and traders all strongly condemned the attack. Musharraf then made a live television appearance, apologized for the event, and vowed to take speedy action against those guilty. The success of "The Lawyers' Movement" might be attributed to the media as well.

## **State of Emergency of 3<sup>rd</sup> November, 2007**

On November 3, 2007, Musharraf issued an emergency proclamation. "The state of emergency was an extra-constitutional step, but the situation warranted the action." Attorney-General Malik Mohammad Qayyum told reporters, in the Supreme Court during the hearing of petitions challenging the emergency. When there was no resolution in the constitution, some extra-constitutional measures were taken. He gave the 1999 incident when the then-executive exceeded its constitutional authority and the army had to intervene, as an illustration. The same overreach had been committed by some members of the court, even to the point of a "judicial coup," which led to the declaration of an emergency in the nation.

The judgment made by President Gen. Pervez Musharraf was condemned by the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. "The proclamation of emergency and the Provisional Constitution Order (PCO) are a flagrant and naked attack on the Constitution, the rule of law, and the independence of the judiciary," he claimed in a statement against Mushraff. He said, "The acts of the proclamation of emergency and PCO are highly unfounded, unconstitutional, illegal, and without lawful authority," according to a statement from the ousted CJ. A close friend of the chief justice, Advocate Gohar Ali Khan, remarked to the media (Joel A. Mintz, 2018).

The sole goal of declaring an emergency was to influence how powerful institutions operated; the media was one of the main targets of that unlawful action. The government forcibly stopped all private channels from transmitting and outlawed them all. Under the Provisional Constitutional Order (P.C.O.), judges were expelled and had to swear an oath. Mushraff made himself hugely unpopular when he sacked the chief justice of the Supreme Court, Iftikhar Chaudry, in March 2007 (zulfiqar, 2011). These Mushraff policies were denounced by both the national and international media. He suffered humiliation when the

judiciary decided against Mr. Chaudry's reinstatement. He also restricted media freedom, which made the situation worse (HRO, 2007).

All facets of Pakistani society protested against those circumstances. With the assistance of political parties, civil society, and media personnel, lawyers organized their movement for the restoration of the judiciary. The media did not give up their independence and began broadcasting on the streets. As a kind of protest against Musharraf's unlawful actions, Geo TV broadcast a number of its shows on Devis Road in Lahore. At all times, the media made full use of its resources to emphasize Musharraf's use of restraint.

Over the course of Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhary's trips, his speech to the Karachi Bar Association turned into a day of chaos and anarchy across Pakistan. During the two days of gunfire in Karachi's megacity, some 40 people were murdered and numerous others were injured. The majority of media outlets said that the MQM, the city's dominant party, was responsible for all of the killings in Karachi that were done to dethrone the Chief Justice. Due to the inability of 15,000 security personnel to end the gun war, the media dubbed the episode "the law of the Jungle." Along with the national media, the administration was criticized for allegedly contributing to such lawlessness by the foreign media. Several well-known foreign media outlets, like The Economist, Herald, Relic, etc., denounced the pro-Musharraf administration and brought attention to the occurrence. "The TV channels had become totally irresponsible, along with the judiciary," Musharraf stated upon declaring the state of emergency (whisky, 2023). But his grasp on authority is being called into question more and more. Even before the latest incidents, his reputation was waning.

### **Event of Laal Masjid and Jamea Hafsa**

The Laal Masjid and Jamea Hafsa incident was another significant and well-known episode that damaged Musharraf's government's credibility. The government attacked the Jamea Hafsa and Laal Masjid students with high-tech weaponry, and many of them, including Ghazi Abdul Rasheed, the Laal Masjid Khateeb, were among them (Aljazeera, 2007). Numerous religious and political leaders harshly criticized the violence committed against the students and took part in discussions and chat shows on various TV stations. Private media covered the entire operation live. The Army opposed the electronic media outlets, in particular AAJ TV, vehemently during that operation. The Army specifically targeted AAJ TV by interfering with their coverage of the operation. The action was as well organized as it was against some terrorists, but regrettably, they were innocent students. It was discovered through the media that advanced poisons and weaponry were used in the operation. The Media accurately depicted the episode, which had an impact on Musharraf's and his supporters' standing. He spoke to the Pakistani media in his message to Pakistan and the rest of the globe, saying that although they should be independent, they also need to be accountable (Abbas, 2007). The media in Pakistan has been reckless and may perhaps be a part of Pakistan's present instability.

### **Assassination of Nawab Akbar Bugti in Baluchistan**

In December, 2005, the circumstances deteriorated after the attack on Musharraf and attack on a helicopter carrying the Director General of the Frontier Corps, who was injured and rendered unable to perform his duties, the situation in Baluchistan, particularly in Dera Bugti, deteriorated and turned sour. After the unsuccessful missile attack, forces of General Musharraf became close to Nawab Akber Bugti. On August 26, 2006, a disturbing occurrence led to the death of Nawab Akbar Bugti. He said to have been first hit by a missile, then killed when the roof of the cave collapsed (Zehra, 2017).

The controversial funeral of Nawab Akber Bugti was conducted at Dera Bugti on September 1, 2006, even though the truth has not yet come to the light. The public and media

fiercely opposed the murdering of the Baloch leader in any situation involving the demise, murder, assassination, execution, or any other aspect of Akber Bugti, about whom we only have inaccurate information, so the government had to contend with strong opposition. Nawab Akbar Bugti was slain in Baluchistan during an operation by the security forces. It was another noteworthy incident that gained wide media coverage since the Pakistani public, and especially the Baluchistan people rejected the use of force by the security forces (Baloch, 2016).

The leading English daily responded to the death of Nawab Akber Bugti by saying, "To address the issue of Baluchistan, the government relied entirely on repressive agencies. It is also unreasonable to offer a fact sheet after the accuser has passed away". After the death of Bugti, protests spread throughout the province as all of Baluchistan's powerful people denounced the death penalty for Akber Bugti. The military forces and the Nawab attempted to reach a peaceful resolution through the media, but Musharraf was ready to use force against Bugti. Because the media helped everyone get the right information by emphasizing the specific facts and figures related to operations. In the instance of Akbar Bugti, the media experienced a great degree of anger for accurately relaying the complete tale. Accordingly, Musharraf stated that Nawab Bugti was a Baloch Nationalist terrorist, but overnight the terrorist leader became a martyr and a national hero. The way the media portrays that animal is unfavorable. The government's power has greatly diminished as a result of the media's backing of the terrorist Bugti against the government. He declared, "Nobody would be allowed to bring instability to the nation (Zafar, 2016).

Nawab Bugti made the statement that "it is better to die as the Americans say with their spurs on" while on the phone with a "Time Magazine" journalist from the mountain bunker that would eventually serve as his final resting place. Instead of dying slowly on my bed, he continued, I would prefer that death strike me when I'm fighting for something. He and 37 of his companions were slain on August 26, 2006, three months later, during a military operation in the Chalgri district of the Bhamboor Hills.

The tragedy of Bugti raised certain questions. Is defending the rights of the people sinful? If not, then it is unquestionably legitimate to ask that Baluchistan's mineral resources be subject to the same royalties as those paid by other provinces. Instead, it should be seen as an effort to do away with disparities because they are frequently a source of friction and irritation (Qasim, Shah & Ali, 2023).

How unfortunate that someone would kill a man of integrity, a politician who backed federation, who rose to fame as a champion of Baloch rights, and who never became a provocateur for criminals who backed similar causes. How strange that people who attacked Pakistan, published anti-Pakistan websites, and frequently took measures detrimental to Pakistan's interests were not pursued but rather permitted to go on their anti-state activities. Instead, electing a pro-Pakistan politician was the major objective of those singing the state motto. The late Nawab Akber Bugti's brutal murder has made him a martyred hero for the Baloch people (Gazdar, 2006).

### **Dual Office of Musharraf and Media**

Musharraf's dual roles as president and chief of the army staff was significant at the time. The media highlighted unethical and immoral circumstances to assist him in understanding what was right to accomplish. Although the issue was the focus of several debates, Musharraf and his colleagues were determined to hold on to both positions. Despite significant pressure from the media and the public, he made the controversial statement that "uniform is my skin," for which he was roundly criticized. Musharraf stated that while the media is entitled to criticize any government action, it must not demoralize the population. "Musharraf will continue to wear his uniform, and we will keep electing him president as long as he wears it", as the Pakistan Muslim League (Q) has frequently stated.

However, the topic stayed hot on all TV channels as long as he was still in the Army Chief's office. According to *The Economist*, published in February, the world finally knows the answer to an age-old question about Pakistan's President General Pervez Musharraf: serving as president and army chief that year despite constitutional obstacles. How to stay in office after 24. On February 18th, the general gave his customary stern response (Haider, 2007). That forced him to choose another five-year term before dismissing the legislature in September, when elections could be held. Mr. Musharraf assured the media in an interview that he had no plans to abandon his position or the nation. He claimed he would know when to give up. He won't idle away like a worthless vegetable or wait to pass the Wagah border like onions (Kumar, 2001).

### **Privatization of Pakistan Steel Mills Corporation**

For Rs. 16.80 per share, the government decided to privatize Pakistan Steel Mills Corporation. Before the Pakistani Supreme Court, privatization was contested in several petitions. The privatization resulted in a significant loss for the nation and sparked indignation across Pakistan. Many people believed that this incident marked the beginning of the Chief Justice's ill will against the Musharraf administration. The subject was eagerly covered by the media. Musharraf was also dissatisfied with the media for highlighting that crucial problem, in addition to the judiciary. However, despite his best efforts, the media had exposed every detail of that privatization. Musharraf frequently criticized the media for its coverage of critical subjects in his speeches and news releases (Altaf, 2019).

### **Issue of Political Victimization**

During the Musharraf administration, political victimization peaked. Through Musharraf's unfounded accusations, some major political figures were imprisoned. As a result of the media's calling attention to the issue of these arrests and the harassment of politicians, security forces began to target members of the media using various strategies. The targets kept changing, including Javed Hashmi, Yousaf Raza Gillani, Khwaja Saad Rafique, Imran Khan, etc. *The Economist* reports that at least 2000 attorneys, political activists, human-rights workers, and journalists were detained. Famous opponents of Army authority were among them. During their unlawful arrest, political workers were tortured and coerced into switching allegiances.

### **The Elections of February 2008**

During the elections in February 2008, the media's influence and eventual outcome had a major shaping influence. Due to their poor policies being exposed by the media, the King's Party had to face the repercussions. Nearly all political analysts believed that the public's acceptance of the media was ultimately responsible for Musharraf's party's humiliating defeat. It is undeniable that the media has significantly altered public perception in a way that has enabled the populace to discriminate between what is right and wrong for them when picking their representatives. After elections, *The Economist* cited: In February's elections, the PPP easily won and almost eliminated the Pakistan Muslim League (Q), or PML (Q), often known as the King's Party and the Musharraf supporters. That was a reflection of the anti-Musharraf sentiment at the time. Media outlets continue to operate under Musharraf's administration and continue to report on any significant stories that have some bearing on the interests of the country. As a watchdog on government policies and procedures, the media continued to play the role. The government had to amend several policies that were against the interests of the country because of the serious intentions of the media on crucial topics. Musharraf constantly prioritized maintaining his power over the country over the general welfare of the populace. The major obstacle to his depravity and self-interest was the Pakistani media, which was still on Musharraf's hit list. He always restrained the media using a variety of strategies, occasionally utilizing PEMRA's black legislation and other times employing force, such as during a state of emergency. However,

the media consistently maintained its objectivity and presented all sides of significant subjects without ever succumbing to political pressure. Police assaulted TV networks, media personnel were unlawfully imprisoned, and journalists were tortured, yet they continued to do their jobs. That was the rationale for public opposition to government efforts to stifle and controls the media, as well as public encouragement of the media and assistance to journalists at every level. People favored the media because of its excellent function in society, and Musharraf and his supporters had to cope with its popularity as their major issue.

### **Conclusion**

During Musharraf's tenure, the media focused on every issue that concerned him and his loyalists. Since Musharraf's unconstitutional dismissal of Supreme Court Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry on March 9, Pakistani media has been under constant scrutiny. The administration has exerted heavy pressure, coercion and physical attacks on the media to curtail coverage of anti-government rallies and non-violent efforts to reinstate the Chief Justice. The private media played an antagonistic role in the time of Pervez Musharraf's departure, blurring the line between reporting events and changing them. This is largely because the media has been targeted to expose the brutality of the Musharraf regime by broadcasting live coverage of attacks on civilians and providing a forum for opposition voices. The dramatic outcome of the 2008 elections was also a media victory against Musharraf. All the media changed the minds of the people and told what is right and what is wrong in the minds of the people and the people of Pakistan understand the message of the media and use the information correctly. Heavy media coverage of the campaign to restore government was important in raising public awareness.

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