

Analyzing the May 09 Demonstrations in Pakistan and the Role of Press: A Thematic Analysis of Dawn and The Express Tribune

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Abstract

On May 09, 2023, another former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mr. Imran Khan, Chairman of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), was detained by law enforcement agencies from the premises of the Islamabad High Court. Mr. Khan was arrested on corruption charges on account of Al-Qadir Trust. The arrest didn't sit well with the PTI supporters who initiated nationwide protests which turned into violent incidents. The media coverage and debates about the aftermaths of Mr. Khan's arrest ranged from 'peaceful protests', to the 'freedom of expression', to the 'political riots', to the 'violence'. Given the already polarized political atmosphere in the country, the media coverage of the incidents is divided into at least two clear dichotomies; protests and riots. This research paper is an attempt to explore how the daily Dawn and The Express Tribune have covered the incidents in their editorials right after the arrest of Mr Imran Khan. We have employed the thematic analysis, inductively, as a theoretical and methodological approach to unpack the editorial themes of the incidents. Our findings indicate that both the newspapers produced codes which construct the May 09 incidents in the aftermath of the arrest of Mr. Imran Khan as 'protests'. And, the narrative of 'riots' to label the public agitation has not been given space into the editorials under study by the newspapers.

Keywords: May 09 Protests, May 09 Riots, Arrest of Imran Khan, PTI, Thematic Analysis, Political Upheaval in Pakistan.

1. INTRODUCTION

Pakistan was engulfed in a huge incident on May 9th, capturing the attention of both the nation's and international communities¹. This essay seeks to present a straightforward journalistic description of the incident, putting light on what happened, how it was handled, and how it affected various parts of Pakistani culture. With opposing opinions and intense debates, the incident exposed the polarized aspect of the political scene and prompted concerns about the ruling political party's unity and future. This essay will also look at the government's reaction, the response of the public, and the steps taken to remedy the situation.

The May 9th incident that occurred in Pakistan elicited a wide range of reactions from the general people. Imran Khan Supporters and press freedom advocates sharply criticized the government's conduct, organizing protests and demanding Khan's immediate release². Another sector of the community, on the other hand, welcomed the government's move, citing worries over suspected instigation of violence during political demonstrations. These opposing opinions sparked heated arguments among society, highlighting the countries sharply divided political environment.

The event also sowed discord within the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). Several PTI leaders have separated themselves from Imran Khan, citing worries over his hardline approach³. This internal strife undermined the party's unity and prompted concerns about its capacity to effectively manage the changing political terrain. As a result of the events of May 9, more than two dozen PTI leaders, including close advisers to Khan, resigned from the party⁴.

¹ "Senior journalist Imran Riaz Khan arrested by FIA." *The Express Tribune*. February 02, 2023. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2398957/senior-journalist-imran-riaz-khan-arrested-by-fia> (accessed July 9, 2023).

² Ibid.

³ "Here is a list of PTI leaders who quit party up till now." *Geo News*. May 27, 2023. <https://www.geo.tv/latest/489164-here-is-a-list-of-pti-leaders-who-quit-party-up-till-now> (accessed July 9, 2023).

⁴ "List of leaders who quit PTI so far." *The Nation*. May 25, 2023. <https://www.nation.com.pk/25-May-2023/list-of-leaders-who-quit-pti-so-far> (accessed July 9, 2023).

Following Imran Khan's arrest and subsequent not-guilty plea to corruption charges, unrest remained in Pakistan. According to police sources, protests across the country resulted in a minimum of eight deaths and the detention of approximately 1,400 people⁵. As the situation deteriorated, the army head, General Asim Munir, vowed to bring all culpable individuals to justice and to prevent such horrific situations from happening again⁶.

In response to the May 9 event, the Prime Minister's Office issued a statement reiterating the government's "zero tolerance" approach regarding violence and disruption of the peace⁷. Rioting and attacks on military sites were severely condemned by the administration, which expressed sympathy with the armed services. It was made clear that any violation of military sites or public property would not be permitted, and anybody involved in the May 9 actions would face consequences⁸. The administration agreed to take legal measures, including military law, against those guilty of these atrocities. Furthermore, the statement emphasized the significance of enacting social media legislation to combat externally backed propaganda⁹.

In response to the May 9 event, the Prime Minister's Office issued a statement reiterating the government's "zero tolerance" approach regarding violence and disruption of the peace¹⁰. Rioting and attacks on military sites were severely condemned by the administration, which expressed sympathy with the armed services. It was made clear that any violation of military sites or public

⁵ Hussain, Abid. "Journalist Imran Riaz Khan still missing in Pakistan." *Al Jazeera*. May 23, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/23/journalist-imran-riaz-khan-still-missing-in-pakistan> (accessed July 9, 2023).

⁶ "General Syed Asim Munir, COAS visited Sialkot Garrison, today." *Inter Services Public Relations*. May 17, 2023. <https://www.ispr.gov.pk/press-release-detail?id=6537> (accessed July 9, 2023).

⁷ Shirazi, Iftikhar. "COAS vows 'orchestrated tragic incidents' of May 9 won't be allowed again 'at any cost'". *Dawn*. May 17, 2023. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1753903> (accessed July 9, 2023).

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Khan, Sanaullah. "Civil, military leaders decide to observe May 9 as 'Black Day' nationally". *Dawn*. May 16, 2023. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1753698> (accessed July 9, 2023).

¹⁰ Shirazi, Iftikhar. "COAS vows 'orchestrated tragic incidents' of May 9 won't be allowed again 'at any cost'". *Dawn*. May 17, 2023. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1753903> (accessed July 9, 2023).

property would not be permitted, and anybody involved in the May 9 actions would face consequences¹¹. The administration agreed to take legal measures, including military law, against those

Following the horrific occurrence that occurred on May 9, 2023, in Pakistan, the world community responded with condemnation. This incident involved some extremist events that sent shockwaves throughout the world, causing countries to show mixed reactions, and sympathy with Pakistan, and Imran Khan.

The United States has urged Pakistan to follow democratic values and the rule of law. White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre stated, "We are aware of the arrest of former Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan. As we have said before, the United States does not have a position on one political candidate or party versus another. We call for the respect of democratic principles and the rule of law around the world. So I would refer you to the government of Pakistan for any further information on that"¹². US Secretary of State Antony Blinken emphasized the need for respecting the rule of law in Pakistan, stating, "I have seen the reports that you have alluded to, and we just want to make sure that whatever happens in Pakistan is consistent with the rule of law with the constitution showing"¹³.

UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly expressed a desire for "peaceful democracy" in Pakistan, stating, "The UK has a longstanding and close relationship with Pakistan. We are Commonwealth

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Bhavsar, Karishma Pranav. "Imran Khan's arrest: 'US does not have positions... calls for respect of democratic principles; White House on Pakistan.'" *Livemint*. May 10, 2023. <https://www.livemint.com/news/world/imran-khans-arrest-white-house-reacts-to-chaos-in-pakistan-says-us-does-not-have-position-calls-for-respect-of-democratic-principles-11683675117708.html> (accessed July 9, 2023).

¹³ "How the world reacted to Imran Khan's arrest in Pakistan." *Al Jazeera*. May 10, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/10/how-the-world-reacted-to-imran-khans-arrest-in-pakistan> (accessed July 9, 2023).

partners. We want to see peaceful democracy in that country. We want to see the rule of law adhered to. I am uncomfortable to speculate any further without having a detailed briefing on that"¹⁴. Jeremy Corbyn, a prominent member of the British Parliament and former leader of the Labour Party, condemned Khan's arrest on Twitter, stating, "The arrest of former Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan, is a dark day for democracy"¹⁵.

Amnesty International expressed alarm over the "escalation in clashes" and urged Pakistani authorities to "exercise restraint." The organization stated, "The clashes unfolding between Imran Khan's supporters and security enforcement following the former prime minister's arrest risks several human rights violations"¹⁶. They also expressed concerns about the suspension of mobile internet service and the blockage of social media applications, stating that it "restricts people's access to information and freedom of expression"¹⁷.

A top UN official stressed the need to ensure all political figures in Pakistan are treated fairly and that due process is followed. The official's comments came hours after Khan was arrested¹⁸. In a statement, the European Union (EU) emphasized the need for "restraint and cool-headedness" in such "difficult and tense times" in Pakistan. The EU stated, "Pakistan's challenges can only be addressed and its pathway can only be determined by Pakistanis themselves, through sincere dialogue and in line with the rule of law"¹⁹.

¹⁴ "How the world reacted to Imran Khan's arrest in Pakistan." *Al Jazeera*. May 10, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/10/how-the-world-reacted-to-imran-khans-arrest-in-pakistan> (accessed July 9, 2023).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

The May 9 incident in Pakistan had a significant influence on the country, polarizing public opinion, causing internal tensions among the ruling political party, and sparking a wave of protests and turmoil. According to the Prime Minister's Office, the government's response reflected a strong commitment to maintaining peace and security, with a "zero tolerance" approach towards violence and disruption²⁰.

All these various aspects and dynamics of the same incident and its subsequent happenings encouraged the researchers to look into the editorial themes of the two prominent newspapers of Pakistan; *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune*. Both the newspapers because of their wider readership, upright editorial inclination and fair opinions have been taken as media representatives to explore how the Pakistani press have covered the issue and what kind of predominant themes they have produced around the arrest of Mr. Imran Khan and about the subsequent protests/riots. The researchers intend to determine whether the newspapers have portrayed the incidents (public agitation) as protests (the version of PTI) or riots (the version of the Government and law enforcement agencies).

Therefore, our research objectives are;

1. To explore the predominant themes produced by the *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune* in their editorial coverage of the arrest of Mr. Imran Khan and the subsequent incidents.

²⁰ Shirazi, Iftikhar. "COAS vows 'orchestrated tragic incidents' of May 9 won't be allowed again 'at any cost'". *Dawn*. May 17, 2023. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1753903> (accessed July 9, 2023).

2. To determine whether the newspapers have portrayed the incidents (public agitation) as protests (the version of PTI) or riots (the version of the Government and law enforcement agencies).

Our main research questions are;

- i. What are the predominant themes produced by the *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune* in their editorial coverage of the arrest of Mr Imran Khan and the subsequent incidents?
- ii. How did the selected newspapers portray the incidents in the aftermath of the arrest of Mr. Imran Khan on May 09, 2023?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

We live in a world where millions of events are happening simultaneously. Media organizations and institutions have employed thousands of people to observe these events and then report. The news media tells us what issues are important and which are not. We have never seen war conditions in Afghanistan Iraq, Palestine and Kashmir through our own eyes. Even then we have their pictures in our minds. Daily news from the media keeps us informed about the latest events and changes in the world beyond our reach. As a result, most of our perceptions of the phenomena, and the world, are second-hand realities created by media organizations. There are no assurances and no guarantees about the accuracy of the picture of the world²¹.

In an important study, while exploring the relationship between the public agenda and the agenda of print media on various issues in Pakistan, Riaz²² concluded that there was a strong relationship

²¹ Riaz, Saqib. "The Relationship between the Public and Print Media Agendas on National Issues in Pakistan." PhD diss., PhD thesis, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Allama Iqbal Open University, 2008.

²² Ibid.

between the public agenda and the agenda of the print media. There was a strong relationship between the public and print media agenda on four of the six study issues. The four issues were terrorism, judiciary crisis, India-Pak relations and Red Mosque. However, there was no relationship between the two agendas regarding food and energy issues. In our study, we intend to find out whether the editorial coverage of the May 09 incidents by the selected newspapers reflects the agenda/political narrative/version of the government (PDM) or it highlights the opposition's (PTI) agenda/political narrative/version.

In an attempt to analyze the role of print media in Pakistan and India over the water dispute, Khan et al.²³ studied the portrayal of 'water dispute' in *The Nation* from Pakistan and *The Hindu* from India. Employing the content analysis, the researchers found out that both the selected newspapers; *The Nation* from Pakistan and *The Hindu* from India, gave huge coverage and a large space to the water dispute between Pakistan and India. However, *The Nation* gave more coverage to the water conflict as compared to *The Hindu*. Moreover, *The Hindu* supported its government more than the Pakistani newspaper supported its government on the water dispute. Drawing on the findings of this study, we intend to find out whether Daily *The Dawn* and Daily *The Express Tribune* supported and carried the version of the Government (PDM) or the opposition (PTI) regarding the May 09 incidents.

Paracha et al.²⁴ argued that during the peak time of the war on terror in the region and violent insurgency in Pakistan, the Pakistani news channels and newspapers heavily relied on international

²³ Khan, Abdul Wajid, Muhammad Naeem Javed, and Ghulam Safdar. "Role of Print Media in Pak-India Water Dispute." *Global Media Journal: Pakistan Edition* 10, no. 2 (2017).

²⁴ Paracha, Sajjad Ahmad, Muhammad Shahzad, Sajjad Ali, and Junaid Nazir. "To Analyze the News Contents of Electronic and Print Media in Pakistan, Whether Media is Terrorizing or Informing the Community." *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences* 3, no. 3 (2013): 59.

media and news agencies. In doing so, while they reported on the issues they actually created panic among the readers. The researchers claimed that newspapers' content was sensational and exaggerated and they relied on subjective news. The news about the insurgency in Pakistan and the war on terror were reported without being verified. While analyzing the news contents related to the militant insurgency in Pakistan and the war on terror the researchers explored whether the media were informing the citizens or terrorizing them. The study concluded that the media reporting was full of sensationalism and exaggeration in the era of the war on terror. Reporting about conflicts creates more terror in the minds of the audience. If the media is promoting sensationalism, then it will create panic among the readers and viewers. If there is no truth in the news, but only false news then it will discredit the objectivity of news and increase subjectivity.

Through this article, the researchers tried to find out how the media made the 'facts' out of outside sources of news. Using the observational method, the researchers tried to find out how the Pakistani media covered the war on terror. Checking the Pakistani media's reporting on the War on Terror, the researchers concluded that Pakistani media overwhelmingly rely on exaggeration and sensationalism. Facts and figures certainly go a long way when doing this type of reporting. This research proves one more thing when you rely on a source for news, you end up promoting their version only. The study at hand is an attempt to look into the themes produced by the selected two newspapers around the May 09 incidents. We intend to determine whether the newspaper toed the line of government sources or gave space to the opposition.

Studying the framing of Indo-Pakistan relations in the elite press of both countries Shaheen et al.²⁵ attempted to explore the type frames in the editorials regarding bilateral relations of the two

²⁵ Shaheen, Rizwan, Riffat Alam, Muhammad Junaid Ghauri. "Portrayal of Pak-India Relations in their Elite Press." *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review* 5, no. 2 (2021): 441-459.

countries. Employing qualitative content analysis, the researchers found out that from July 2015 to June 2017 *The Dawn*, a Pakistani newspaper, and daily *The Times of India*, an Indian newspaper, covered the bilateral relations quite extensively. The results of the study show that the *Daily Dawn* in its editorials employed supportive/positive and relatively neutral frames while commenting on the bilateral relations between the two countries. The frames in its editorials were hopeful and supportive of the overall situation. However, the frames in the editorials of *The Times of India*, on the other hand, were found to be relatively negative about the bilateral relations between the two countries. Most of the frames that were used by the newspaper in its editorials were pessimistic and blaming the rival country. The researchers argued that *The Times of India* toed the line of the Indian Foreign Office regarding Pakistan. Keeping in view the findings of this research, we intend to find out whether *Daily The Dawn* and *Daily The Express Tribune* supported the Government (PDM) or Opposition (PTI) version of the events of May 09.

The viewed literature suggests that the newspapers while covering various issues of national and/or international concerns, portray the issue with some special slant and angle. Our study is an attempt to find out whether the editorial coverage of the May 09 incidents by the selected newspapers reflects the agenda/political narrative/version of the government (PDM) or highlights the opposition's (PTI) agenda/political narrative/version.

3. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1.Data Collection and Sampling

Keeping in view the objectives of the study, we have purposively selected the first three editorials on the issue published by the *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune*. The reason behind selecting the initially published editorials is that the newspapers usually opine in a more succinct way right after

something significant takes place. Also on May 09 right after the arrest of Mr. Khan both the PTI supporters/party workers/leaders and spokespersons of the government along with the law enforcement agencies explicitly spoke out their versions and the media reported accordingly. However, within a few days, there was silence on the part of the PTI. The PTI leadership was silenced with no or very little media coverage. So, to have an equal amount and sort of coverage of the incidents we have confined our study to the first three editorials from each newspaper selected. Additionally, since this study follows a qualitative approach a smaller sample of three editorials from each newspaper will be sufficient to determine the editorial/thematic approach of the newspapers towards the issue.

3.2.Data Analysis; Thematic Analysis

We have employed thematic analysis, inductively, as a theoretical and methodological approach. Thematic analysis is simple and customizable approach as compared to other available tools. To achieve this, it analyzes data inductively (bottom-up) or deductively (top-down), testing hypotheses (top-down). Many well-known methods for analyzing qualitative data can be seen as specific examples of TA or as extensions of it. In most cases, a grounded theory will involve TA with the ultimate goal of taking a willing stance. In narrative analysis, TA is applied to specific interview formats in which subjects provide in-depth narrative accounts of their experiences²⁶.

Quantitative content analysis, which includes the terms "digital humanities," "text and data mining," and "big data," is a rapidly emerging academic field that can benefit from the use of TA. In this step, researchers create a coding system that identifies specific (combinations of) verbal

²⁶ Herzog, Christian, Christian Handke, and Erik Hitters. *Analyzing talk and text II: Thematic analysis*. Springer International Publishing, 2019.

expressions and counts the number of times they appear in the count data. Being a qualitative approach, TA leaves the choice of sample size to the discretion of the researcher²⁷.

Utilizing TA, scientists can learn how research participants (e.g., authors or interviewees) prioritize information, classify experiences, and form opinions. When it comes to qualitative data, the TA is responsible for deciphering the codes, themes, and patterns. Because of the ambiguity here, some interpretation is necessary. In order to deduce credible meaning from complex data, researchers classify and interpret it. Human readers engage in TA to try to pick up on subtleties in long text sequences by describing and analyzing language terms without resorting to quantitative methods. TA is useful for overcoming biases. A lot of discretion is required due to the intricacy of the data and the absence of well-defined classification criteria. Convincing others that the data set has been treated with due diligence can be challenging in TA due to the difficulty in documenting the process²⁸.

Therefore, keeping in view the suitability of the TA, as a theoretical and methodological tool, with research objectives we have employed the method inductively.

4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

4.1. Analysis on daily the *Dawn*

First editorial among the sample of the study was published by *Dawn* on May 10, 2023, under the headline; “The Die is Cast”. The editorial explaining the account of the 9th May incident reiterates the gruesome narrative of torture and violence that was inflicted on Imran Khan by “Punjab Rangers and not the Islamabad Police”. The article takes a positive side towards Imran Khan and

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

also reminds us how the military establishment and the government crossed the line and has lost trust in the public as hinted by the sentence he was “picked up for an entirely different reason”. It also talks about the fragile economic condition of the country with words like “economy on the ventilator” and how it will further “deteriorate” because of this political tug of war as suggested by words like “political meddling” and “political engineering”²⁹.

Following are the words and phrases that suggest a positive tone of the editorial towards Imran Khan. ‘hostilities’; negotiated breakthrough’; ‘political stalemate’; ‘picked up for failing to join a corruption investigation’; ‘picked up for an entirely different reason’; ‘Punjab Rangers not the Islamabad police’; ‘public anger’; ‘crossed lines no one dared before’; ‘political meddling’; ‘his words now carry a weight’; ‘greater public distrust’; ‘political engineering’; ‘economy on the ventilator’³⁰; etc.

So, keeping in view the words and sentences noted above as codes we can argue that the newspaper in this editorial has produced the themes of ‘protests’ and ‘victimization’ in the aftermath of the arrest of Mr. Khan as proclaimed by the PTI, its supporters and leaders. The newspaper did not give space to the government's version of ‘riots’ while opining upon the incidents.

The second editorial within the sample of Daily the *Dawn* was published on May 11, 2023, under the headline; “Digital Backslide”. The editorial talks about the predicament of the internet in Pakistan and it presents a very sad picture as is depicted in phrases like “abysmal state of internet governance”. The editorial mentions that in the domain of information and communication technologies we are presenting “a largely grim picture”. Our 15% people do not have basic internet

²⁹ “The die is cast”. *Dawn*. May 10, 2023. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1751959/the-die-is-cast> (accessed; July 9, 2023)

³⁰ Ibid.

access and those who have they are dealing with “slow speeds”, “unreliable connectivity” and sometimes people also have to face “state-sanctioned blockade”³¹. The article holds the government to be responsible for the internet condition in the country.

Following are the words and phrases that point out the negative terms “mobile internet and social media shutdown”; “quell unrest”; “abysmal state of internet governance”; “uncertain”; “a largely grim picture”; Pakistan trails far behind the world population”; “lacking even basic access”; “slow speeds”; “unreliable connectivity”; “state-sanctioned blocks”; “state institutions are primarily culpable”³².

So, keeping in view the words and sentences noted above as codes we can argue that the newspaper in this editorial has produced the themes of ‘poor governance’ and ‘victimization’ in the aftermath of the arrest of Mr. Khan as proclaimed by the PTI, its supporters and leaders. The newspaper did not give space to the government's version of ‘riots’ while opining upon the incidents.

The third editorial within the sample of Daily the *Dawn* was published on May 12, 2023, under the headline; “Deus Ex Machina”. The editorial seems to have a sarcastically negative tone towards Imran Khan. This is also evident from the title “deus ex machina” which is translated as ‘God from the machine, referring to the unexpected help he received in a difficult situation. The editorial presented different angles of Imran’s arrest and how he was saved from the “state’s grasp” with the help of the CJ of the Supreme Court. The tone of the editorial was negative apparently towards Imran Khan as it’s evident from sentences like “he should not expect special treatment” and how the other leaders have “braved such tests and passed”. The article concluded by reminding Mr

³¹ “Digital backslide”. *Dawn*. May 11, 2023. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1752255/digital-backslide> (accessed; July 9, 2023)

³² Ibid.

Khan of his responsibility towards his people that “he must condemn in clear words the violence that broke out after his arrest and ensure there will be no more of it”³³.

Following are the words and phrases that showed a negative tone of the editorial towards Imran Khan “be singularly blessed; unceremoniously bundled out; a rule that has previously been upheld in other high-profile cases.; while talking about the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court the editorial mentioned “overly sympathetic to the PTI’s worldview”; referring to the bail it said “speed at which he secured” bail was very fast which “contrasts sharply” with other leaders. And, “politically motivated”; not expect special treatment; “he must now face the charges”; “ordeals of several past prime ministers”³⁴.

This is an interesting finding that after the first two editorials the *Dawn* changed its tone from pro-Imran Khan (criticizing his arrest) to anti-Imran Khan (suggesting he brave his arrest like other leaders). Keeping in view the words and sentences noted above as codes we can argue that the newspaper in this editorial has neither produced the themes of ‘protests’ and ‘victimization’ nor the ‘riots’ and ‘violence’ in the aftermath of the arrest of Mr Khan. However, the editorial tone is not in favour of Mr. Imran Khan. The newspapers seem to be suggesting Mr Khan to face the circumstances and ask his supporters to avoid ‘violence’. Nevertheless, the newspaper did not give space to the government's version of ‘riots’ while opining upon the incidents.

4.2. Analysis on daily *The Express Tribune*

³³ “Deus ex machina”. *Dawn*. May 12, 2023. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1752255/digital-backslide> (accessed; July 9, 2023)

³⁴ Ibid.

The first editorial among the sample of the study was published by the daily *The Express Tribune* on May 11, 2023, under the headline; “Arrest and Aftermath”. The editorial has a positive tone towards Mr Imran Khan. It says that the government’s decision to arrest Mr Imran Khan was unnecessary as described in words like “unwarranted” and came at a “wrong time”. The editorial mentions that the arrest has instigated, “clashes among the institutions of the country”, and this is not good for the stability of the country. The manner in which this whole activity was conducted by highly geared up “commando action” has raised questions on the legality of the operation as described in the words “questions of legality”³⁵.

Following are the words and phrases that identify this editorial as having positive tone towards Mr. Imran Khan ‘upped the stakes’; ‘unwarranted’; ‘wrong time’; ‘social media brawl with ISPR’; ‘paramilitary forces’; ‘questions of legality’; ‘clash among the institutions’; ‘not bode well for the stability and security of the country’; rangers’; ‘high gear in commando action’; ‘landed him in dire straits’³⁶.

Therefore, keeping in view the words and sentences noted above as codes we can argue that the newspaper in this editorial has produced the themes of ‘poor governance’, ‘illegality’ and ‘victimization’ in the aftermath of the arrest of Mr. Khan as proclaimed by the PTI, its supporters and leaders. The newspaper did not give space to the government's version of ‘riots’ while opining upon the incidents.

Similarly, the second editorial within the sample of daily *The Express Tribune* was published on May 12, 2023, under the headline; “De Jure Relief”. The editorial of *The Express Tribune* on May

³⁵ “Arrest — and aftermath”. *The Express Tribune*. May 11, 2023. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2416186/arrest-and-aftermath> (accessed; July 9, 2023)

³⁶ Ibid.

12, 2023, noted the written piece in support of former Prime Minister Mr Imran Khan, who has been critical of the country's powerful military since being ousted by a no-confidence vote in April 2022. The editorial described that the Supreme Court ordered the immediate release of the head of PTI, calling the separate quarantine operation at the IHC premises on May 9 illegal and ultra vires, which has become a longed-for comfort in a turbulent environment. The editorial shows the personal disposition of the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), a coalition of 13 parties, that the coalition government may have political anger with Mr Khan and his party, the fact that they are willing to comply with court orders has sent the right signal that a thaw is underway. Its directive to knock on the door of the IHC, cemented the practice of some valid observations, such as, "How can anyone be deprived of the right to justice?"; "What dignity does a court have if 90 people force their way into it?" and, "How can anyone be arrested from a court?"³⁷.

Following are the words and phrases which identifies the positive dimension of editorial toward Mr Imran Khan such as 'It was a great piece of de jure relief for Imran Khan'; 'The Supreme Court's order to immediately release the PTI chief'; 'IHC premises as illegal and ultra vires'; 'NAB or the federal government is responsible for this extra-legal and unlawful detention'; 'The top court's ruling to reverse the arrest of the PTI chief'; and 'Imran were forthcoming in obliging the court orders'; The editorial noted the blunt words of chief justice of Pakistan in the favor of Imran Khan "Read our lips, (because) every word counts." Now is the time to reconnect the parts of the law and move forward for a political solution³⁸.

³⁷ "De jure relief". *The Express Tribune*. May 12, 2023. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2416247/de-jure-relief> (accessed; July 9, 2023)

³⁸ Ibid.

Hence, keeping in view the words and sentences noted above as codes we can argue that the newspaper in this editorial has produced the themes of ‘oppression’, ‘poor governance’, ‘illegality’ and ‘victimization’ in the aftermath of the arrest of Mr. Khan as proclaimed by the PTI, its supporters and leaders. The newspaper did not give space to the government's version of ‘riots’ while opining upon the incidents.

The third editorial within the sample of daily *The Express Tribune* was published on May 13, 2023, under the headline; “A Messy Turf”. The current editorial of *The Expresses Tribune* entitled “A Messy Turf” was published about the federal cabinet, PTI Chairman Mr Imran Khan, and the role of the Pakistani high judiciary regarding the current political scenario in Pakistan. The whole editorial of *The Express Tribune* indicated to be pro-Mr. Imran Khan. Consequently, the editorial mentioned the statement of the judiciary about the antagonism between PDM and PTI with the affectionate declaration. Furthermore, the editorial specifies the rebelling role of PDM towards the judiciary and taking action against Mr Khan and his party. It evaded a Supreme Court order to hold elections in Punjab. Perhaps, this is the only stimulus that the federation is considering emergency measures and getting away with under the cover of suspending fundamental rights. Likewise, a ruthless crackdown on the opposition has further complicated the messy turf as dozens of PTI leaders have been detained³⁹.

The tone of the editorial is cleared with the following attached words and phrases ‘Imran Khan has spent his day at the IHC mired in litigation’; ‘Relief package for the head of PTI’; granting bail in all 10 cases’; ‘Wrongful arrest by the NAB’; ‘The federal cabinet is reportedly considering imposing a state of emergency to cover up political differences’; ‘every unrested activity in nation

³⁹ “A messy turf”. *The Express Tribune*. May 13, 2023. <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2416443/a-messy-turf> (accessed; July 9, 2023)

is belong to PDM'; 'It is the responsibility of PDM leadership to choose to change their minds'; 'Its policy of tail-teasing and hurting the opposition has not worked'; 'The suspension of internet services and the wild surge of the rupee and a new price spiral are factors that are brewing civil unrest'; 'The government can neatly emerge from the crisis by taking the constitutional route of holding elections immediately after the budget meeting'; 'To bring impulsive PTI on the same page'; 'There is no point in driving the country into anarchy on the premise of self-interest'⁴⁰.

So, keeping in view the words and sentences noted above as codes we can argue that the newspaper in this editorial has produced the themes of 'oppression', 'poor governance', 'illegality' and 'victimization' in the aftermath of the arrest of Mr. Khan as proclaimed by the PTI, its supporters and leaders. The newspaper did not give space to the government's version of 'riots' while opining upon the incidents.

5. CONCLUSION

At the outset of this study, we intended to explore the predominant themes produced by the *Dawn* and *The Express Tribune* in their editorial coverage of the arrest of Mr Imran Khan and the subsequent incidents. Also, we wanted to determine whether the newspapers portrayed the incidents (public agitation) as protests (the version of PTI) or riots (the version of the Government and law enforcement agencies). Keeping in view the words and sentences noted in the first two editorials from the sample of Daily The *Dawn* as codes, it can be concluded that the newspaper in its editorial coverage of the arrest of Mr Imran Khan and the subsequent incidents has produced the themes of 'poor governance', 'protests' and 'victimization'. This is the theme of the political narrative produced and propagated by the PTI, its supporters and leaders. The newspaper did not

⁴⁰ Ibid.

give any space to the PDM government's version of 'riots' while opining upon the incidents. However, there is an interesting finding that after the first two editorials the *Dawn* changed its tone from pro-Imran Khan (criticizing his arrest) to ant-Imran Khan (suggesting he to brave his arrest like other leaders). Keeping in view the words and sentences noted in the third editorial it can be concluded that the newspaper in this editorial has neither produced the themes of 'protests' and 'victimization' nor the 'riots' and 'violence' in the aftermath of the arrest of Mr. Khan. However, the editorial tone is not in favor of Mr. Imran Khan. The newspapers seems to be suggesting Mr Khan to face the circumstances and to ask his supporters to avoid 'violence'. Nevertheless, the newspaper did not give space to the government's version of 'riots' while opining upon the incidents.

Similarly, drawing on the words and sentences noted in all three editorials from the sample of daily *The Express Tribune* as codes it can be concluded that the newspaper in its editorial coverage of the arrest of Mr Imran Khan and the subsequent incidents has produced the themes of 'oppression', 'poor governance', 'illegality' and 'victimization' in the aftermath of the arrest of Mr Khan as proclaimed by the PTI, its supporters and leaders. The newspaper did not give space to the government's version of 'riots' while opining upon the incidents.

So, drawing on the thematic analysis of the editorials from both the newspapers the study concludes that both the newspapers produced codes which construct the arrest of Mr. Imran Khan and subsequent incidents as 'protests'. The narrative of 'riots' to label the protests has not been given space in the editorials under study by the newspapers.

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