

Research Paper

Title:

Media Framing of Sunni-Shia Tensions in Pakistan

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Acknowledgments

I have no words to express my gratitude to my research supervisor Professor Daniel Paré. His all-out support and guidance enabled me to complete this project.

A very big thank you goes to my beloved wife Sarwat for her support and to my children Ahmad and Hassan for their patience as they missed several weekends and outings due to my research work.

I am also very grateful to the late Professor Mahmoud Eid. It was reading his work in the early stages of my graduate work that inspired me to conduct research on the topic covered in this Major Research Paper. I dedicate this work to his memory.

Abstract:

Since its founding in 1947, Pakistan has, for the most part, experienced a harmonious relationship between the two major sects of Islam; Sunni and Shia. However, in the wake of the July 1978 seizure of power by General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq and the 1979 Iranian revolution harmony between the Sunni and Shia began to erode. The sectarian divide between these two groups has social, cultural, and economic implications, the worst of which is marked by increased violence, religious intolerance, and growing numbers of sectarian terror groups. This major research paper (MRP) examines the framing of the divisions between the Sunni and Shia of Pakistan in four of the country's major domestic newspapers: *Dawn*, *The Nation*, *Daily Times* and *Express Tribune*. The findings emerging from a combined content and critical discourse analysis of some 145 articles from these newspapers identifies sectarianism, geopolitical and religious extremism as dominant frames. The coverage of the Sunni-Shia tensions reveals a positive coverage for Shia sect and neutral coverage for Sunnis. This finding is important because Sunni Shia violence is a major issue in Pakistan and some studies suggest that media frames this issue by hiding the identity of sectarian victims. Findings emerging from my study contribute to ongoing debate about framing sectarian violence in Pakistan by suggesting that in most cases the identity of the victims is revealed.

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1. Introduction:

Muharram, the first month in the Islamic Calendar, is the holiest month of the year for Muslims. Sunni Muslims mark the start of the new Islamic year through fasting and prayer, whereas for Shia's it is marked by a month-long ritual of sorrow and grief carried out in honour of the martyrdom of Husayn ibn Ali.¹ Although these rituals are not mutually exclusive, throughout history they have served as sources of conflict, giving way to heinous acts of violence.²

The Sunni–Shia divide has gained much media attention due to both the propensity of some members of these groups to engage in sectarian conflict and the increasing role of Shias in world politics (Abdo, 2017; Nasr 2006). Since the rise of Ayatollah Khomeini³ during its 1979 Islamic Revolution that brought a fundamentalist change to Iran, the country has played a notable role in international politics. Inafuku (2010, p.414) describes this period as a nodal point in the history of Middle East, asserting that:

one still sees its affects resonating both domestically in Iran and internationally. Ever since the 1979 Iranian Revolution, Iran has taken the lead in being the most powerful Shia Islamic state

This said, the role of other Middle East countries in Sunni-Shia relations cannot be ignored. The 2003 overthrow of Saddam Houssain's Sunni regime in Iraq by the U.S. and its allies led to the installation of a Shia government in Baghdad and a resultant civil war (Karsh and Rautsi, 2012;

¹ Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), was martyred in the Battle of Karbala in the year 61 of the Islamic Calender (680 A.D. in the Georgian Calender).

² The roots of Shia-Sunni hostility are anchored in a dispute about the succession to Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) and the leadership of Islam after his death (Mohammad 1998). According to Shia's, the Sahaba, the Companions of the Prophet, conspired after his death to dispossess his son-in-law (Ali), and after him his descendants, the imams, of their divinely ordained right to the Muslim community's leadership. In the Shia view of history, the Companions, and their successors, were hypocrites and usurpers who never ceased to subvert Islam for their own 33interests. Conversely, the Sunnis revere the Sahaba, and especially the Khulafa' al Rashidun, the four 'pious successors' of the Prophet (of whom Ali was the last), as second only to the Prophet in religious authority.

³ Khomeini was an Iranian religious and political leader, who in 1979 made Iran the world's first Islamic republic. See, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/khomeini_ayatollah.shtml

Baram, 2005). In 2006, the war in Lebanon between the Shia Hezbollah and Israeli forces led to Shia supremacy in the region. In Syria, Bashar al-Assad, the leader of the Alawite minority,⁴ survived the revolt by the Sunni majority in 2011 in part because of the alleged involvement of Iran. Writing in 2006, the Middle East analyst Vali Nasr suggested that, taken together, these events were indicative of a “Shia revival” that was further escalating the Sunni-Shia divide in the region (Nasr, 2006).

In Pakistan there long existed a seeming level of tolerance between members of the Shia and Sunni sects, as was evidenced by their having mutual matrimonial relations, performing their rituals together, and the sharing of mosques and the graveyards. In the wake of Iran’s 1979 theocratic revolution which, among other things, promulgated Shia law into state law with no exemptions given to its Sunni community (Jaffrelot, 2004), and the subsequent process of Islamization (i.e., establishing an Islamic state and enforcing Sharia law) initiated by General Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan in 1979, a rift surfaced in Pakistan between members of these two sects.⁵

The Iranian revolution had a strong emotional and psychological influence on Pakistan’s Shia, giving them a new visibility and a renowned impetus for asserting their identity. To this end, the emissaries of Tehran’s revolutionary regime helped Pakistan’s Shia to organize. In the religious sphere, many traditions took on Iranian characteristics, diluting the highly ritualistic South Asian imprint that had been in place prior to 1979 (Abbas, 2010 p.28). In Pakistan, a major rift emerged between the Sunni and Shia in June 1980 when General Zia introduced the *Zakat and Ushr*

⁴ The Alawites are a sect of the Ghulat branch of Shia Islam. See, *Primer on the Alawites in Syria* <https://www.fpri.org/article/2016/12/primer-alawites-syria/>

⁵ The Zia-ul-Haq regime was a combination of the mullah and military alliance wherein Islam was used to legitimize his dictatorial rule. The internal dimension of the Mullah-Military alliance was linked to the regime’s appeasement of right wing religio-political groups so as to remain in power. An external dimension was related to Soviet military presence in Afghanistan. Pakistan’s military encouraged Jihadis to fight a proxy war against the Soviet army thereby providing the Pakistani government plausible deniability of engagement in the standoff. One consequence of this activity was to enable Islamisation to develop strong roots within the country (Amin, 1982, p 25).

*Ordinance 1980*⁶ mandating that Zakat – a discretionary religious tax, or alms, that is a major pillar of Islam – be obligatory and collected by the state. Shias, who have historically viewed Zakat as a private matter based on a voluntary decision, responded by organizing a protest march towards Islamabad, sieging the federal capital for three days (Abou-Zahab, 2008), and calling upon Ayatollah Khomeini to intervene. In the end, General Zia signed an agreement with the Shia leadership who had close ties with the Iranian government, exempting Shias from the mandatory deductions of Zakat (Abbas, 2010).

Conservative Sunni groups were highly critical of the exemption, denouncing the Shia as heretics and demanding that Pakistan be declared a Sunni state (Abou-Zahab and Roy, 2006). Furthermore, the Zakat protests exposed the Shia community's increasing reliance on Tehran to organize and assert its demands (Nasr, 2000). In response, myriad Sunni groups formed to counter the perceived influence of Iran in internal Pakistani affairs which, in turn, catalyzed the rise of armed Sunni and Shia militant groups (e.g., Sipah-e-Mohammad⁷ on the Shia side, and the Sunni group Sipah-e-Sahaba⁸) as well as triggering unabated sectarian violence.

From the late 1980s throughout the 1990s Pakistan became the centre of a proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran (Stern, 2000; Pant, 2009; Abou-Zahab, 2008). During this time, two Pakistani cities, Parachinar and Hangu, were the centre point of Sunni-Shia clashes. At times the violence was so severe it resembled a civil war, with hundreds of lives lost, and both army and paramilitary forces being called in to maintain peace (Abbas, 2010). General Zia's government deliberately ignored both the Sunni Afghan militants and their local Sunni allies, and the violence they perpetrated against the Turi Shias of upper Parachinar who obstructed the use of their territory

⁶ See, <http://www.zakat.gov.pk/system/files/zakatushr1980.pdf>

⁷ See, <http://www.satp.org/satporgrp/countries/pakistan/terroristoutfits/SMP.htm>

⁸ See, <http://www.satp.org/satporgrp/countries/pakistan/terroristoutfits/Ssp.htm>

in the war against the Soviet-backed government in Kabul, Afghanistan (Saeed, 2014; Martin, 2007; Behuria, 2004). These clashes then spread to other provinces of Pakistan becoming particularly severe in the cities Karachi and Quetta (Zaidi, 2016b; Kabir, 2016).⁹

The emergence of Taliban of Pakistan and Afghanistan, Al-Qaeda, and other fundamentalist organizations has created deep rifts in Pakistan between members of these two sects, with Pakistani society suffering the consequences of this fallout. The explanation of Islamic law held by Sunni extremists is that only Sunni Islam is authentic Islam, and anyone who chooses another path is to be considered a heretic or blasphemer; religious crimes punishable by death (Abou-Zahab, 2002). Today, in Pakistan sectarian violence is prevalent in all four of its provinces, Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sind. However, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are the two provinces that have been most affected. In 2017, the Hazara and Turi tribes in the city of Parachinar, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were the most affected by terror attacks.

This major research paper investigates the media framing of the divisions between the Sunni and Shia in four English language Pakistani newspapers in order to identify the dominant frames associated with reporting about these divisions. Framing analysis is a tool frequently used to examine and make sense of media discourses in accordance with the notion that the manner in which news reports are framed reflects intentionality rather than something that is unconsciously adopted during communicative processes (Entman's 1991, 1993, 2000, 2007).

2. Literature Review

⁹ In the majority of instances of Sunni-Shia violence militant groups such as the Pakistani Taliban (known as Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan [TTP]), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ, Army of Jhangvi), Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP, also operating as Ahle Sunnat Wal Jamaat or ASWJ) and affiliated militant outfits are involved. All these militants belong to the Deobandi subsect of Sunni Islam (Fair, 2015). Deobandi ideology derives its strength from the revivalist movement started in Deoband, India by a Muslim scholar Shah Waliullah (1703–1762). The movement aimed at reforming Islamic practices with the purpose of improving the depravation and poor conditions of Muslims. One of the ideas was to stop people from Sufi practices that were seen as taking Muslims away from Islam (Siddiq, 2013, p. 5–6).

Media frames are interpretive and rhetorical tools embedded in media discourses and are manifest as macro- and micro-level constructs. As a macro-level construct, framing refers to a style of demonstration that journalists and other communicators use to present information in a way that resonates with the presumed underlying cognitive schemas among audience members. As a micro-level construct, framing describes how individuals use the material they obtain to form cognitive imprints about an issue (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007, p. 12). Reese (2001) affirms that one of the ways to understand the process of framing is to look at the ways in which audiences organize and make sense of events and issues.

Media frames are defined as a “main organizing objective or story line that delivers meaning to unfolding events” (Scheufele, 1999, p. 106). This said, it must be borne in mind that audience members are able to negotiate or reject the 'preferred' meaning advanced by a frame (Hall, 1980). Hence, framing is not uni-directional. Both media and individual frames must be considered when analysing news stories. Receivers of a news story form their view about the story's content based on a combination of factors including how the news story is framed and the individual's existing cognitive frames. The latter contributes to how readers and viewers interpret, and process information conveyed in news stories (Scheufele, 1999, p. 107). Reporters play an important role in the development of opinions among the public and when the focus is framed only negatively or positively toward the subject, other aspects of the story are excluded.

According to Chong and Druckman (2007), an individual's attitude has a major influence on how one interprets media messages. For example, if an individual hears a news story about the positives of having an abortion but has a strong belief against this medical procedure, the listener's overall attitude is not likely to be influenced by how the story is framed. Entman (1993, p. 52) explains that to frame a story is to “select some aspect of a perceived reality and make them more

salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation.” The media gives more coverage to a certain part of a story which, in turn, raises the importance of an issue (Entman, 1993, p. 53). Pan and Kosicki (1993) argue that by highlighting some aspects of an issue more than another, media framing helps authorities and citizens assess the causes of that very issue and respond accordingly.

To assist in the understanding of media framing, Entman (1993) outlines four debates relating to this concept. The first centers on audience autonomy. One of the key concepts in framing is the notion of “dominant meaning.” The latter “consists of the problem, causal, evaluative, and treatment interpretations with the highest probability of being noticed, processed, and accepted by the most people” and is vital to “debate[s] about audience independence in decoding media texts” (Entman, 1993, p. 56). Put simply, the dominant meaning can be identified by the framing of a situation that is frequently mentioned in the text and that is the most common opinion among the audience (Entman, 1993).

For example, Onyebadi (2016) analysed the framing of the 2011 targeted assassination of Osama Bin Laden by US navy seals in Pakistan’s two most popular English language dailies; *Dawn* and *The News*. Based on an analysis of 36 in-house editorials printed by each newspaper during 2011, he identifies the dominant frame as “negligence on the part of Pakistan’s government and security agencies” and goes on to note that the assassination of Osama Bin Laden negatively impacted diplomatic relations between Pakistan and the USA (Onyebadi, 2016, p. 112). Imad (2012), likewise examined the image of the USA on the basis of editorial frames conveyed in the three English language Pakistani newspapers with the largest circulation; *Dawn*, *The News*, and *The Nation*. Having looked at 497 editorials printed in 2011, Imad’s findings point to the advancing

of a largely negative portrayal of the USA in these newspapers that is anchored in economic issues, the war on terror, and diplomatic relations between Pakistan and USA.¹⁰

The second key debate identified by Entman centers on journalistic objectivity. For him, framing is an important concept, in part, because “journalists may follow the rules for ‘objective’ reporting and yet convey a dominant framing of the news text that prevents most audience members from making a balanced assessment of a situation” (Entman, 1993, p. 56). Echoing this view, Onyebadi (2016, p.112) contends that the use of a specific frame in news media eventually depends on the different aspects of a story including, “journalistic and newsroom norms and routines, cultural practices, the political ideology of media owners as well as individual reporters, the influence of political actors and the political administration and environment in which reporters operate.”

According to Entman (1993, p.56), a better understanding of the difference between “including scattered oppositional facts and challenging a dominant frame,” facilitates the building of news stories that make each issue equally salient. In their 2013 nationwide survey of 395 Pakistani journalists Pintak and Nazir identified nationalism, religious identity and a growing sense of professionalism as shapers of their respondents’ worldview. More specifically, their findings suggest that the predominant goals of journalists working in Pakistan are defending national sovereignty and facilitating societal development (Pintak and Nazir, 2013). This said, media freedom in Pakistan has never been constant, with different regimes using legal and constitutional mechanisms to control the press, as well as to limit public debate and criticism. To wit, Pakistan’s blasphemy law has also been used against journalists (Imad, 2018; Siraj, 2009; Pintak and Nazir,

¹⁰ Imad (2012) identifies some editorials from *Dawn* as attempting to build a positive image regarding some issues (e.g., providing aid to Pakistan and economic issues), but notes that overall the pattern was negative.

2013).

The next framing-oriented debate identified by Entman (1993) pertains to content analysis. He states that content analysis has “the major task of determining textural meaning” and the identity of frames in the media (Entman, 1993, p. 57), warning that coders need to be aware of drawing conclusions about dominant meanings. Within the realm of media studies, the targeted assassination of Osama Bin Laden has also been frequently analyzed using content analysis (see, for example, Imad, 2012; Rafique, 2013; Onyebadi, 2016; Fair and Hamza, 2016). As noted above, such studies have tended to find that within Pakistani media reports the USA is often framed in a negative manner and as a foe to Pakistan.

Public opinion and normative democratic theory are the final element Entman addresses. He asserts that democratic process can be influenced by how issues are framed in the media. According to Fair and Hamza (2016, p. 578):

there has been some recent work on Pakistani public opinion about drones, there is very little research on how Pakistan’s media characterize the US drone program. This is an important gap in understanding the determinants of Pakistani popular perceptions of this program. Decades of research has shown that “news framing”, a process by which certain aspects of a complex concept are emphasized in political communications with others played down, influences individual cognition while forming political opinions.

These authors examined 742 editorials about the drone program from three English language Pakistani newspapers (*Dawn, The News, Nation*) and one Urdu newspaper (*Daily Express*) to analyze the news frames within them. They further compared the trends in these news frames to public opinion data collected by Pew between the spring of 2009 and 2014. According to Fair and Hamza (2016, p. 578):

most Pakistanis were unaware of the drone program, media coverage of the program expanded as drone strikes increased in frequency. Pakistani public opinion ‘strongly reflected the top media frames’, particularly those that are negative. This

is an ‘important finding suggesting that newspaper editorials are a good barometer of Pakistani opinions.

These findings are noteworthy because they reflect ongoing debates about how to analyze frames. It has never been an easy task to identify frames (D'Angelo, 2018; Carragee and Roefs, 2004). There are various studies that are unable to differentiate between story, topics, themes, or frames (e.g., Cissel, 2012; Chatfield, 2017; Linda, 2003). Reducing frames to story topics is problematic not least because a frame does much more “organizing” and “structuring” work (Reese, 2007). In such cases, the authors are open to the critiques that they have reduced “frames to story topics, attributes, or issue positions and disregard the concept of specific meanings of frames” (Carragee and Roefs, 2004, p. 28).

Furthermore, researchers have often shown the significance of studying a consistent set of frames (e.g., Kozman, 2017; Berinsky, 2006; Matthes, 2008). However, there is a general inclination to create a unique set of frames for every study. This “lack of disciplined approach” risks leading researchers to “easily find the evidence they are looking for” (Hertog and McLeod, 2001, p. 151). The comprehension of a specific topic or an event can be investigated through a specific frame, but it is important to connect individual frames with multiple association of framing strategies.

Issues are a public impression which signify extensive multifaced subjects including several actors with different discourse. According to Gamson and Modigliani (1987), an issue is a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about – i.e., the essence of the issue (Gamson and Modigliani 1987, p. 140). The particular aspects of an issue depend on the strategy chosen to convey the story. The influence of a framing strategy will be affected by the apparent reliability, validity and influence of the actors. Framing typology can categorize even

diverse framing strategies. Hallahan (1999) introduced seven framing types: framing of situations, attributes, choices, actions, issues, responsibilities, and news. Each type represents different aspects of an issue. For social issues all seven framing types may be relevant. According to Meriläinen and Vos (2013, p. 123):

The way in which an issue is framed shows how it is seen. When discussing an issue, different descriptions and arguments are used that emphasize different aspects of the issue. People are invited to see the situation in a particular light, which may affect their views on the issue. The choice of framing strategy will depend on the issue and the interests of the actor. The interplay of the actors in the debate may exhibit different types of framing.

The study of framing often is combined and/or conflated with agenda setting. Whereas framing focuses on the content of the news, agenda setting is concerned with how the news media shapes the agenda (Moy, 2016). Framing highlights certain aspects of an issue and makes them more prominent whereas agenda setting introduces the issue topic to increase its salience and accessibility (Weaver, 2007). These approaches have been investigated under the broad category of cognitive media effects (Scheufele, 2000, Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007). The pioneer of agenda setting research, McCombs and colleagues tested the proposal that by the day-to-day selection of news, the mass media effects the public agenda. The fundamental belief of agenda setting theory is that the importance of components in the news affects the prominence of those components among public (Carroll and McCombs, 2003). There are two orders of agenda setting. First order agenda setting, which is concerned with the prominence of objects like public issues, public figures, or companies and second order agenda setting which concerns itself with the prominence of the characteristics of those objects (Carroll and McCombs, 2003, p. 38). McCombs associates framing with second level of agenda-setting theory. According to Riaz (2010) framing and agenda setting techniques are used together to highlight media coverage of important issues in Pakistan. He writes:

Media outlets are playing significant roles in building public opinion on the issues by using framing and agenda setting techniques. The issue of toppling down and destabilizing the elected government of President Zardari by military and civil establishments was a hot topic for media, politicians, and audiences in the recent past. Newspapers gave extensive coverage to the issues of democracy and expected military takeover in their prime time talk shows and opinion pages.” (Riaz 2010, para 12).

A study by Chaudry and Ashraf (2012) used agenda setting and framing as tools to investigate editorial coverage of major electoral issues and events in Pakistan as reported in *Dawn*, *The News*, and *Nation*. The specific issues included in the study were, the Referendum on Pervaiz Musharraf as president of Pakistan (2002), Local Government Election (2001, 2005) and the 2002 and 2008 general elections (2002, 2008) which were conducted during the regime of Pervaiz Musharraf. The results suggest that reporting in *Dawn* and *The News* tended to be neutral or positive towards government policies, while *The Nation*, which published the largest number of negative editorials among the three papers, “criticized the Musharraf led stance with diverse range of frames” (Chaudry and Ashraf, 2012, p. 280). Jan (2013) investigated print media coverage of Pakistan’s leading political parties, Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz (PML N) and Tehreek-i- Insaf (PTI). Using content analysis of editorials, columns and letters to the editor in *Dawn* and *The News* he found that in the former the tone of the coverage and the language used tended to be neutral whereas coverage in *The News* was found to be favorable towards Tehreek-i- Insaf. The findings of this study are noteworthy insofar as in 2018 the Tehreek-i- Insaf defeated the ruling Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz party to win the Pakistan general elections

2.1 Media Framing of Sunni-Shia issue

The Arab Spring uprisings of late 2010 and 2011 saw widespread anti-government protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen, Syria, and Bahrain. Today, much of the instability in the region reflects, in part, divisions along Sunni-Shia sectarian lines. According to Mamouri (2013), much

of the Middle Eastern media simultaneously produces two different discourses: one aimed at the audience inside the Middle East and another aimed at the audience outside the region. He writes:

Protests in Bahrain are presented by the Iranian media as the revolution of a majority Shiite population against an autocratic Sunni minority, while the protests in Syria are described as the rebellion of a minority terrorist group against the legitimate government of President Bashar al-Assad. The media outlets opposed to Iran portray the situation in Bahrain as the rebellion of a despotic minority, tied with Iran, that threatens the territorial integrity of Bahrain and the interests of the Gulf region in general. The same media portrays the Syrian conflict as the revolution of the majority against the brutal regime of Assad, who is being supported by the terrorist Shiite groups from Iran, Lebanon and Iraq (Mamouri, 2013, para 6).

The Arabic Channel Al-Jazeera has been criticized for its coverage of Sunni-Shia tensions in Syria¹¹ and Bahrain. Al-Jazeera is a state-funded broadcaster owned by the government of Qatar. According to materials released via WikiLeaks in 2009, the Qatar government manipulated Al-Jazeera's coverage to benefit Qatari foreign policy (The Guardian, 2010; The Telegraph, 2010). For example, Al-Jazeera stands accused of underreporting the Shia protests in Bahrain,¹² not covering the September 2010 crackdown in Manama,¹³ and of siding with the Sunni kings of Qatar and Bahrain instead of supporting people of Bahrain in their struggle against autocracy (Lynch, 2013; Al-Rawi, 2015; Abdul-Nabi, 2015). Al-Jazeera has likewise been accused of siding with the opposition in Syria¹⁴ and of exaggerating, even fabricating, stories against the Shia regime of Bashar al-Assad (Barakat, 2011; Khatib, 2013; Abdul-Nabi, 2015). Gasim (2018) conducted a

¹¹ See, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-35806229>

¹² Bahrain is ruled by a Sunni king who's family holds the main political and military posts. The divide between the Shia majority and the Sunni minority has led to long-running tension in the kingdom, which has sporadically boiled over into acts of civil disobedience. See, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-14540571>

¹³ Civil unrest erupted in Manama, Bahrain's largest and capital city, in March 2011 shortly after the country's leader, King Hamad, imposed a three-month state of emergency in response to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates dispatching troops to Bahrain. See, www.cnn.com/2011/WORLD/meast/03/16/bahrain.protests/index.html

¹⁴ At the time of writing this major research paper, Syria's civil war is entering its sixth year. A conflict that began in March 2011 with peaceful protests for reform and rights has become a militarised confrontation, not just between the opposition and the Assad regime, but also among multiple factions. (Lucas, 2016, p. 12)

content analysis-based study of variations in Al-Jazeera coverage of the Yemen crisis,¹⁵ and identified negative news coverage of the Yemen war corresponding with the role of the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen.

The differing frames characterising reporting in the Middle East also are evident in Pakistani media. With this in mind, my study investigates how Pakistani print news media frame Sunni-Shia violence within the country. Zaidi (2016a) has examined the Pakistani print news media's coverage of faith-based violence and finds that Shia victims are seldom identified as Shia whereas Sunni victims almost always identified as Sunni. He further reports that, Shias are often presented as heretics, blasphemers, and foreign agents, and thus deserving of violence being done to them. According to Zaidi (2016a, p. 96):

Shia killing is reported by media as denial, obfuscation and justification. The media directly or indirectly claims that not Shias but “people”, “men”, “pilgrims” or “Hazaras” are being killed.¹⁶

Zaidi also contends that Pakistani media remains in a state of denial, failing to report the killing of Shias, and intentionally hiding the sectarian identity of Shia victims such that both Sunni's and Shias are framed as being equally involved in violence.

Drawing from interviews with different stakeholders, Mahsood and Kamran (2017) found that a majority of adherents to the Deobandi school of thought¹⁷ accuse the Iranian government of involvement in escalating sectarian violence in Pakistan. They believe that the Shia community has been colluding with the Iranian regime since the 1979 revolution, and that the Iranian

¹⁵ The conflict has its roots in the failure of a political transition that was meant to bring stability to Yemen following an Arab Spring uprising that forced its long-time authoritarian president, Ali Abdullah Saleh, to hand over power to his deputy Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. See, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-29319423>

¹⁶ Persecution of Hazara's is the organized discrimination, ethnic cleansing and genocide of the Shia Hazara people. They belong to Pakistan but also found in Quetta, Pakistan and Iran.

¹⁷ See footnote 10.

government continues to support the Pakistani Shia while promoting sectarian violence in the country. By contrast, the Shia participants in the study accused Saudi Arabia of fomenting sectarian violence in Pakistan (Mahsood and Kamran, 2017).

Some commentators maintain that a Shia genocide is taking place in Pakistan and that the media is under-reporting these events (Hussain, 2012; Zaidi, 2016b). For instance, Naqvi (2016, para 2) accuses Pakistani media of not covering Shia killings and identifying them “as sectarian or as non-religious accidental killings.” Private media outlets (e.g, Jang group, Waqt group, Dawn)¹⁸ have provided much airtime to fundamentalists and conspiracy theorists (Hussain, 2014), lest they find themselves being attacked by radicals (Ebrahim, 2014; Shahid, 2014). In addition, many media outlets are in a seeming state of denial about Shia killing, blaming Western countries and other actors for staging the Sunni-Shia dispute (ABNA, 2014). Such claims reflect, in part, the fact that the domestic media in Pakistan does not encourage ordinary Pakistanis to take ownership of these, and other, society-related conflicts (Boone, 2014).

In the pages that follow I examine how four prominent Pakistani newspapers in Pakistan, *Dawn*, *The Nation*, *Daily Times*, and the *Express Tribune* framed Sunni-Shia tensions throughout 2017.

3. Methodology:

The Sunni-Shia sectarian divide is a burning issue in Pakistan that receives much media coverage. In order to investigate how this division is framed by the domestic print media, stories published about Sunni-Shia tensions in Pakistan’s four major English language newspapers – *The Nation*, *Dawn*; *Daily Times* and *Express Tribune* – and their respective online resources were analyzed.

¹⁸ Jang is Pakistan’s largest national Urdu-language daily. It has a circulation of some 800,000 copies daily, a readership exceeding seven million, and is published simultaneously from Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Quetta, Multan and London. Nawaiwaqt, the second largest Urdu daily, is published simultaneously from Lahore, Islamabad, Karachi and Multan. One of the oldest Urdu language newspapers in Pakistan, it has a close ideological connection with the Pakistan Movement. See, (Syed, 2008; Ricchiardi, 2012).

The decision was made not to incorporate Urdu language newspapers in the sample because:

1. It would have required that I translate newspaper articles into English in order to allow for comparisons with their English language counterparts;
2. Urdu language newspapers have a limited online presence.

Given these considerations as well as the time and resource constraints under which my research was being conducted, I opted to focus exclusively on English language Pakistani newspapers.

The four newspapers included in my study were selected for analysis because they represent different views along the ideological spectrum. The *Daily Times* represents a liberal left perspective, *The Nation* a pro-government right outlook, and both *Dawn* and *Daily Express* are left-of-center in their orientation. The research sample was drawn from news articles dealing with Sunni-Shia violence that were published by these newspapers in the period spanning January 1st to December 31st, 2017. This timeframe was chosen because it marks a period of heightened domestic conflict between the two groups (Rasool, 2017; Rediff, 2017; Welle, 2017). The articles comprising the sample were obtained from the newspapers' respective archives and websites as well as the Eureka database. They were identified on the basis of keyword searches. The search terms included: Sunni, Shia, Hazara, Parachinar, terror, and bomb. In total, 145 were articles were analyzed, i.e., 44 from *The Nation*, 42 from *Dawn*, 32 from *Daily Times* and 27 from *Express Tribune*.

The analysis of the texts involved a combination of content analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA). In analyzing the sampled texts, I made every effort to guard against researcher bias. This involved, among other things, regularly consulting with my research supervisor about the manner in which I was conducting my analysis as the process was unfolding. Once the article analysis phase was completed, I then made every attempt to ensure that all the interpretations I advanced were strictly made within the context of a combined content and

critical discourse analysis, and that these interpretations were firmly anchored solely in the evidence generated by the analyses (i.e., I actively sought to avoid speaking beyond my data). Entman (1993, p. 57) states that content analysis has “the major task of determining textural meaning” and the identity of frames in the media. He also notes that,

News frames are constructed from and embodied in the key words, metaphors, concepts, symbols, and visual images emphasized in a news narrative. Since the narrative finally consists of nothing more than words and pictures, frames can be detected by probing for particular words and visual images that consistently appear in a narrative and convey thematically consonant meaning across media and time (Entman, 1991, p. 6).

Content analysis is widely used to collect and analyze text with the aim of understanding the meanings ascribed to an issue within a given context (Krippendorff, 1982, p. 403). It is defined as “the systematic assignment of communication content to categories according to rules, and the analysis of relationships involving those categories using statistical methods” (Riffe, 2005, p.3). For example, Al-Rawi’s (2015) content-based study of protests in Bahrain identified the sectarian dimension as the dominant frame of social media reporting. Another study based on a quantitative analysis of the Canada-base *Globe and Mail* and the US-based *Washington Post* observed that these two newspapers, predominantly reported on Sunni-Shia relations within the context of a ‘terrorism frame’, and that such reports are overwhelmingly negative to Sunni and/or Shia Islam (Douai and Lauricelle, 2014, p. 21).

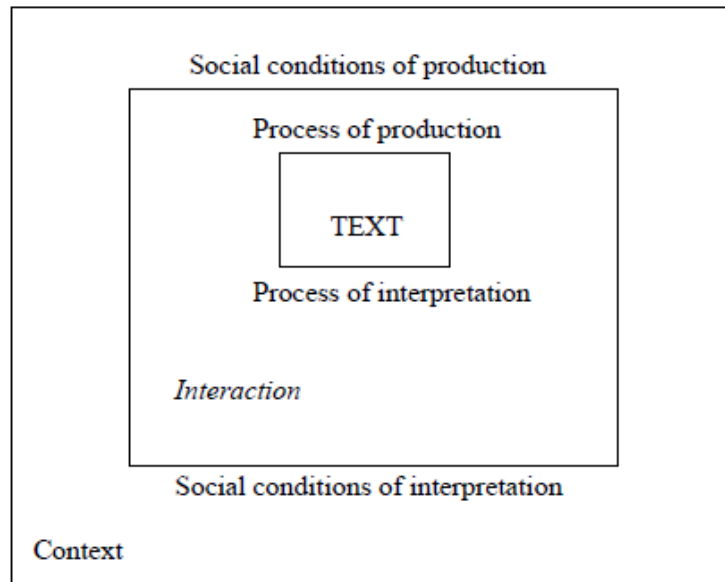
In order to complete the content analysis portion of my research undertaking, I used the MaxQDa software suite. The latter is one of the most comprehensive analysis programs which gathers, organizes, and examines data for qualitative, quantitative and mixed method research. The objective of the content analysis was to identify the frequencies of reporting, codes, and themes within the articles sampled from the four newspapers.

The second part of the analysis was rooted in critical discourse analysis. CDA entails “analysis

of the dialectical relationships between discourse (including language but also other forms of semiosis, e.g. body language or visual images) and other elements of social practices” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 205). The significance of CDA in media research is as diverse as the very fields of discourse studies and mass communication themselves. For example, in their examination of transcripts from six public meetings about the possible commercialization of genetically modified (GM) crops, Attar and Genus (2014) adopted CDA to analyze the framing of public engagement with technology in relation to power. In this instance, the use of CDA enabled the researchers to identify neo-liberal economic discourse. In his analysis of emigration to Israel, Cohen (2009) adopted CDA to examine the ways in which discourses are “used as political strategies aimed at demarcating the boundaries of the nation” among Israeli emigrants. Törnberg and Törnberg (2016), likewise, uses CDA to examine themes of representations around the words Muslims and Islam, and the portrayal of Muslims as a distinct group involved in conflict, violence and extremism in a 105-million-word corpus of a large Swedish internet forum.

The CDA portion of my study involved coding the contents of the sampled newspaper articles by hand in accordance with Fairclough's (1995a, 1995b, 2001, 2003) CDA framework. Fairclough distinguishes three stages of CDA (see Figure 1): description of text, interpretation of the relationship between text and interaction, and explanation of the relationship between interaction and social text (Fairclough, 2001, p.25). The latter was used as a tool to help identify the frames embedded in news texts.

Figure 1. The Critical Discourse Analysis Framework



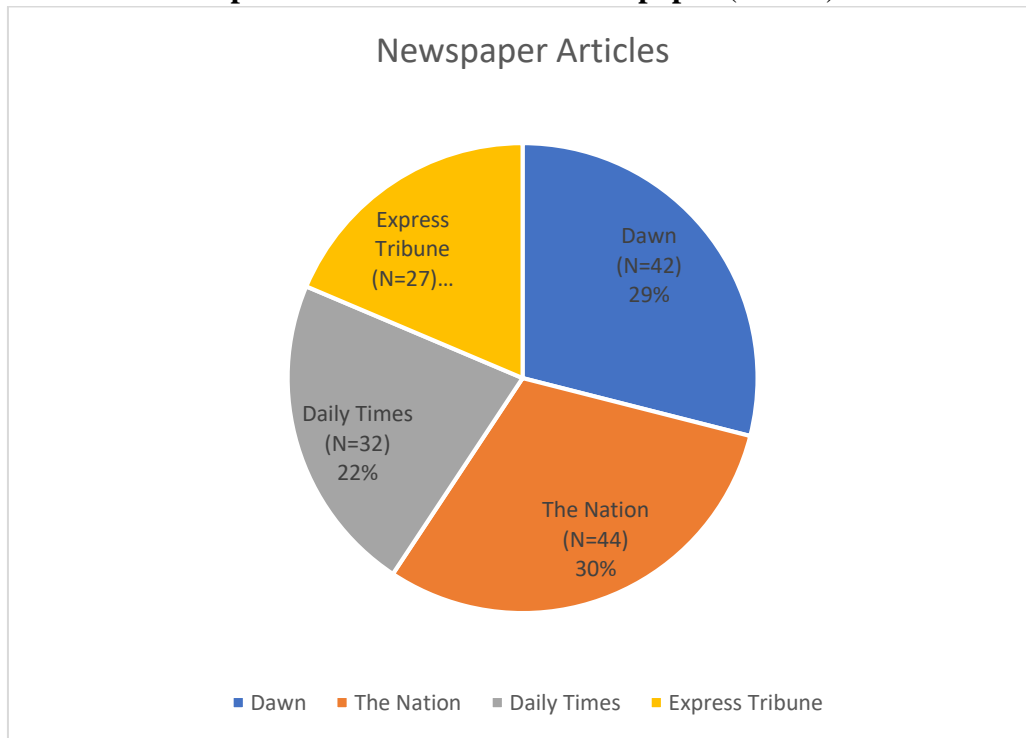
Source: Fairclough (2001, p.25).

Textual analysis using Fairclough’s (1995b, p.57) approach focuses on the “vocabulary and semantics, the grammar of sentences and smaller units and the sound system (‘phonology’) and writing system.” The linguistic analysis of news content combines lexical analysis, with analyses of sentence structure and presupposition. The strategies of rhetoric, repetition, hyperbole, metaphor and comparison are used for textual analysis that seeks to illuminate the exaggerated, underreported, positive or negative portrayals of Sunni-Shia tensions in Pakistani newspapers.

4. Results

The information presented below in Figure 2 shows the frequency of reporting about Sunni-Shia tensions within the overall sample. *The Nation* (30%, n=44) and *Dawn* (29%, n=42) accounted for the majority of Sunni-Shia related articles in the sample (N=145). The articles from the *Daily Times* and the *Express Tribune* made up the remainder of the sample, accounting for (22%, n=32) and (19%, n=27) of the sample respectively.

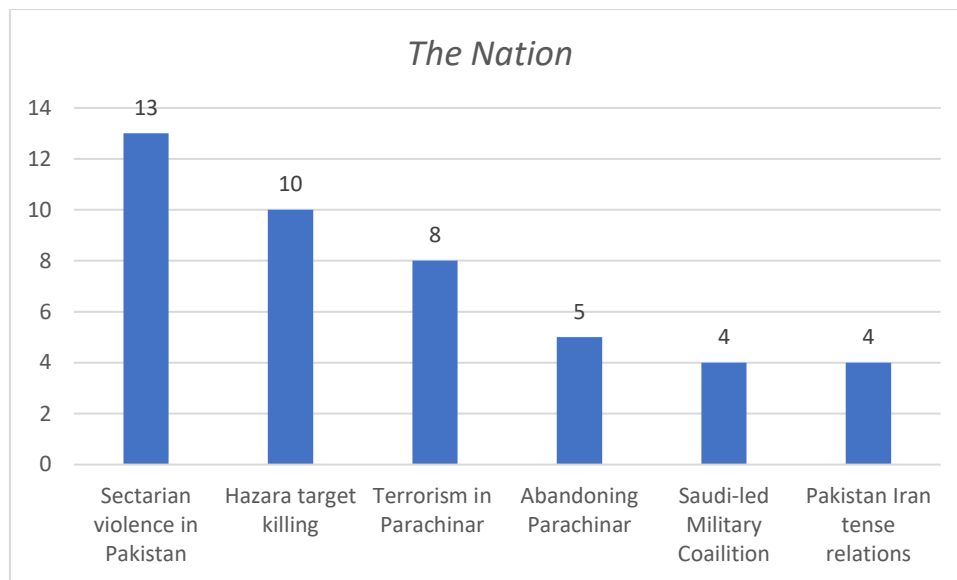
Figure 2: Number of Sampled Articles from Each Newspaper (N=145)



4.1 Findings Relating to *The Nation*

The analysis of the 44 sampled articles from the *Nation* identified six themes that, in turn, revolved around two frames: sectarianism and geopolitics (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Frequency of themes in *The Nation* (N=44)



Within the articles sampled from *The Nation*, thirteen were about sectarian violence in Pakistan that was not directly related to Hazara target killing and Parachinar. Within these articles a sectarian frame was evident. Some examples of how this particular frame is manifest in the thirteen articles include:

A member of the **Shia community** was shot dead apparently in a **sectarian** attack in Rizvia Society on Saturday (*The Nation*, Man killed in sectarian attacks, January 8, 2017).

It should be evident why such a drastic response is necessary; Pakistan's sitting Interior Minister claimed that '**banned sectarian organisations** could not be equated with other banned terrorist organisations' and hence, the former deserved some sort of leeway. He went on to say that the **Shia-Sunni conflict was 1300** years old, and thus not the current government's problem, and that past governments had allowed sectarian groups to contest elections too (*The Nation*, The sectarian Terrorists, January 12, 2017).

They said that an increase in the target killings and attacks on Shia Muslims in various parts of the country was a conspiracy to disturb the peace being maintained by the law enforcement agencies and security organisations (*The Nation*, Demos against target killing, January 28, 2017).

Why is the killing of innocent civilians (who happen to be Shia) no longer a soul-wrenching episode in Pakistan? More pertinently, why is the **killing of Shia** (and other religious minorities) a mere inconvenience for our polity, deserving no more

than a token statement of meaningless condemnation? Why is the targeted killing of thousands of **Shias** a non-event for our constitutional and security apparatus? attacks (*The Nation*, The truth about Shia killings, April 2, 2017).

Sectarian tensions between **Sunni majority** and the **Shia minority** have particularly flared in the recent past in Parachinar and the surrounding areas (*The Nation*, 15 killed in Kurram as bomb hits bus, April 26, 2017).

Allama Nasir said that **Shia religious figures** and youth were being harassed and abducted all over Pakistan by law enforcement agencies. If they are criminals, produce them in courts, he said. He said that MWM Pakistan was against injustice (*The Nation*, Law enforcing agencies harassing Shias: MWM, May 9, 2017).

Since attacks on the **Shia community** are often overlooked and masked as attacks on the Pakistani people, protestors lauded Imran Khan for being the only political leader to visit the sit-in and own the problem of **sectarianism** (*The Nation*, All icing no cake, July 5, 2017).

The sectarian factor means that those supporting militancy also support this sectarianism, which creates especial difficulties in Pakistan, where the Shia are not only numerically significant, but where the Sunni majority has traditionally accepted them (*The Nation*, The conspiracy theory blasted, July 28, 2017).

The bomber struck **the Shia shrine** packed with worshippers in a remote village of the district in an apparent **sectarian attack** (*The Nation*, IS bomber kills 20 at Jhal Magsi shrine, October 6, 2017).

Shia community, which is slightly above 20 percent of the country's population, has been under constant attacks by **Sunni sectarian groups**, operating under umbrella organization **Tehreek-e-Taliban (TTP)** in recent years... Though it is true that **sectarian violence between Shia and Sunni militant groups** has a long history in Pakistan, attacks in recent times are one-sided. Ordinary Shia citizens of the country, going about their daily lives, become the victims of such heinous attacks (*The Nation*, Purge of Hazaras, October 10, 2017).

In the above passages we observe positive/empathetic coverage of the Shias insofar as they are portrayed as the victims of sectarian violence. With the exception of one article in this category in which a Sunni Sectarian group is blamed for violent attacks against Shias, the overall tone of the articles towards Sunnis was found to be neutral.

The ten articles in *The Nation* sample dealing with Hazara target killings also present a sectarian framing of the killings.

At least five members of Quetta's **Hazara community** were killed in a targeted attack by **unidentified assailants** on Friday, Waqt News reported... The **Shia Hazara** community has been a target of such sectarian attacks for past few decades. **No one had claimed responsibility for the attack** till filing of this report... t only shows the naivety of law enforcement agencies about how **sectarian organizations** work against minorities, especially **Shia Muslims** (*The Nation*, At least five injured as Hazara community January 7, 2017).

Unidentified armed assailants shot dead **two Hazara people** on Spini Road area here on Sunday. The gunmen, riding on a motorcycle, managed a **good escape** after committing the offense. (*The Nation*, At least five injured as Hazara community Jun 5, 2017).

For years, Balochistan has witnessed dozens of **sectarian-based** terror attacks and suicide strikes on the **Hazara Shia community members** (*The Nation*, Four Hazaras gunned down in Mastung, July 20, 2017).

Four Hazara community members including a woman were shot dead in a **sectarian attack** in Mastung on Wednesday morning. The driver sustained bullet injuries in the gun attack. The **assailants managed a good escape** after committing the grisly act (*The Nation*, Four Hazaras killed in Mastung, July 20, 2017).

Hazara community living in Quetta and its outskirts are the worst affected of violence against **Shia Muslims**. In an attack yesterday, **five Shia Muslims** including three members of Hazara community lost their lives to the firing of armed motorcyclists (*The Nation*, Purge of Hazaras, October 10, 2017).

In an attack yesterday, five **Shia Muslims** including three members of Hazara community lost their lives to the firing of armed motorcyclists (*The Nation*, Purge of Hazaras, October 10, 2017).

The question that needs urgent address is; when will the persecution of **Shia Muslims**, especially those belonging to Hazara ethnicity, be equated to the issues of national security? Are they children of some lesser god? (*The Nation*, Purge of Hazaras, October 10, 2017).

What one observes in these passages is the notion that Hazaras are being targeted, at least in part, because they are members of the Hazara Shia sect. Here too, Shias are presented positively/empathetically as victims of violence. However, among the articles in this category no mention is made of the identity of the attackers. In reporting about the violence, words like ‘unidentified attackers’ and ‘gunmen’ were used. This is an important observation because the use of such terms keeps the identity of the perpetrators of violence hidden when they may be either

directly or indirectly associated to anti-Shia organizations.

Within the eight articles categorized under the ‘Terror in Parachinar’ theme, the term ‘Parachinar’ was used 91 times, ‘sectarian/sectarianism’ 48 times, ‘Shia’ 40 times, and ‘Sunni’ 20 times. Within these articles one again observes evidence of Shias being portrayed as victims of sectarian-related violence. Some examples include:

The market lies in a **Shia dominated area** and is frequently visited by shopkeepers and vendors coming from far-flung areas of the agency to purchase fruit and grocery (*The Nation*, Big tatter hits peace, January 22, 2017).

At least 24 people were killed and 70 others injured on Friday when a car bomb exploded near an **Imambargah** in Parachinar, the main town of Kurram Agency, **Jamaat-ul-Ahrar (JuA)**, a faction of the umbrella **Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)**, claimed the responsibility for the attack - saying it was part of its operation Ghazi and the target was the Shia community (*The Nation*, Car-bomb kills 24 near Parachinar imambargah, April 1, 2017).

This blast in Parachinar comes less than a month after over fifteen people died as a result of a suicide blast next to a mosque in crowded Noor Market - in a **Shia majority area**. The targeted van on this occasion also had **Shi'ites** present within (*The Nation*, Another attack in Parachinar, April 26, 2017).

Five women and four children were among the 15 killed, while nine people were wounded in the explosion. The injured included four Khasadar official who were on way to perform census duty. **Jamat-ul-Ahrar**, a breakaway **Taliban faction**, said it was behind the attack on the **Shias**. Sectarian tensions between **Sunni majority** and the **Shia minority** have particularly flared in the recent past in Parachinar and the surrounding areas (*The Nation*, 15 killed in Kurram as bomb hits bus, April 26, 2017).

It was second attack **targeting Shias** in the area in the last 25 days as on March 31 a powerful explosion at the main bazaar of Parachinar had also claimed 20 lives and injured dozens of others. In January, a bomb planted in a busy vegetable market also killed 21 people. Both blasts were claimed by the **JuA** (*The Nation*, 15 killed in Kurram as bomb hits bus, April 26, 2017).

There is confusion regarding the target - scattered reports offer conflicting stories; some state that the members of the **Shia community in the van** were the main target, while others indicate that the census workers were the main reason for this explosion. A **Jamaat-ul-Ahraar** spokesperson has stated that both the minority community and the census workers were targeted (*The Nation*, Another attack in Parachinar, April 26, 2017).

The **victim** families and other members of the **Shia community** of the area, which was the target of the terrorist attack, have been holding a protest sit-in the main town of Kurram Agency for a week - since the day of attack that came a couple of days before Eid (*The Nation*, The right to respectable life demanded, June 30, 2017).

Within four of the eight articles in this category, responsibility for the attacks is attributed to Sunni-based sectarian terrorist organizations such as the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)¹⁹ and Jamat-ul-Ahrar (JuA).²⁰ This said, the negative portrayal of the latter organizations does not extend to Sunnis as a group. Put simply, the overall tone of the eight articles towards Sunnis writ large is neutral. It seems plausible that this observation is due to there being more knowledge about the latter terrorist organizations which, in turn, enables media to distinguish these entities from Sunnis as a whole. In the five articles dealing with the theme of abandoning the people of Parachinar the electronic media of Pakistan is blamed for not giving enough coverage to terrorist attacks in this region. The articles speak of a seeming silence or blackout of news relating to sectarian-related violence among electronic media. Examples of this include:

Parachinar, where the death toll from twin bombings has already climbed to 72, has completed a week of mourning and protests, amidst the leaders continued **indifference to the violence** in a city that has been the most victimised this year... The **state's indifference** to the **Parachinar Shia population** comes at a time when it is going out of its way to support Saudi Arabia in its military alliance that is increasingly revealing itself to be **anti-Shia** (*The Nation*, Abandoning Parachinar, June 30, 2017).

Shia community held a protest in Peshawar on Wednesday against the Parachinar twin blasts and government's alleged **indifferent** attitude towards the **victims** (*The Nation*, The right to respectable life demanded June 30, 2017).

¹⁹ Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is commonly referred to as the Taliban. It is comprised of some 13 militant groups and has as its stated objective resistance against the Pakistani state and army, enforcement of its interpretation of Sharia law, and unifying forces against the Nato-led presence in Afghanistan. See, <https://ctc.usma.edu/fixing-cracks-pakistani-talibans-foundation-ttps-leadership-returns-mehsud-tribe/>

²⁰ Jamat-ul-Ahrar (JuA) is a militant organization that split away from the TTP in 2014. In July 2017 the United Nations Security Council declared it to be a global terrorist organization. See, <https://www.voanews.com/a/pakistan-hails-un-listing-jamaat-ul-ahrar-ju-a-global-terrorist/3933098.html>

We've long **abandoned Parachinar** and thrown the locals at the mercy of the **jihadi groups** hungry for the blood of followers of any ideology that differs with their hardline brand of **Sunni Islam**. If we believe they'll stop at the **Shia**, we're grotesquely mistaken (*The Nation*, Abandoning Parachinar June 30, 2017).

Though a truce between **Shia and Sunni population** of the area was reached in 2011, till this day, the **Shia population** of the area is exposed to violent attacks led by various Sunni militant groups. Kurram Agency was paralysed because of the sectarian conflict from 2006 to 2011. However, the adverse effects of that fight and subsequent violent activities had impacted the lives of locals on multiple levels. One such front is the psychological one (*The Nation*, Psychological conditions, July 26, 2017).

Here we observe a juxtaposition of positive/empathetic coverage of Shias as victims of violence with coverage presenting the leaders of Pakistan, who are mostly Sunni, as indifferent to the plight of Shia people of Parachinar. This is noteworthy because Zaidi (2016a) claims that sectarian violence related to Shias has been obfuscated and Sunnis have been indifferent to Shia victims.

Four of the sampled *Nation* articles deal with the Saudi-led military coalition and its implications regarding Pakistani/Iranian relations. Here, Pakistan's relations with Saudi Arabia and Iran are presented using geopolitical and sectarian frames. The former is deployed in a manner that points toward the shift in the balance of power between Saudi Arabia and Iran and their respective efforts at exerting influence in the Parachinar region. The sectarian frame is manifest in one article in the 'Pakistan/Iran tense relations' theme in which Shia Muslims are labelled as agents of Iran. Some examples of this framing include:

Pakistan has told Iran that it was committed to friendship with the brotherly and will not become part of any **grouping targeting Tehran** amid reports that former army **chief Gen (ret'd) Raheel Sharif** might assume leadership of a Saudi-led military alliance of Arab countries, *The Nation* learnt. Senior officials said that **Iran had been assured that Pakistan considered Iran** as a friendly country and even if Raheel Sharif became part of the 39-nation alliance, the only agenda would be to defeat terrorism (*The Nation*, Pakistan committed to Iran friendship, January 11, 2017).

The Yemen venture is anathema to Pakistan because it violates the important principle of not getting involved in **intra-Arab disputes**. Also, Pakistan, itself undergoing unprecedented sectarian tension, would not like to choose between

Saudi Arabia and Iran, especially in a **sectarian conflict**. However, the military seems to have overcome its initial hesitation, and is apparently now seeking ways of bypassing the prohibition, so that it can intervene in Saudi Arabia's behalf (*The Nation*, Involving Pakistan, March 24, 2017).

The state's indifference to the Parachinar Shia population comes at a time when it is going out of its way to support **Saudi Arabia in its military alliance** that is increasingly revealing itself to **be anti-Shia** (*The Nation*, Abandoning Parachinar, June 30, 2017).

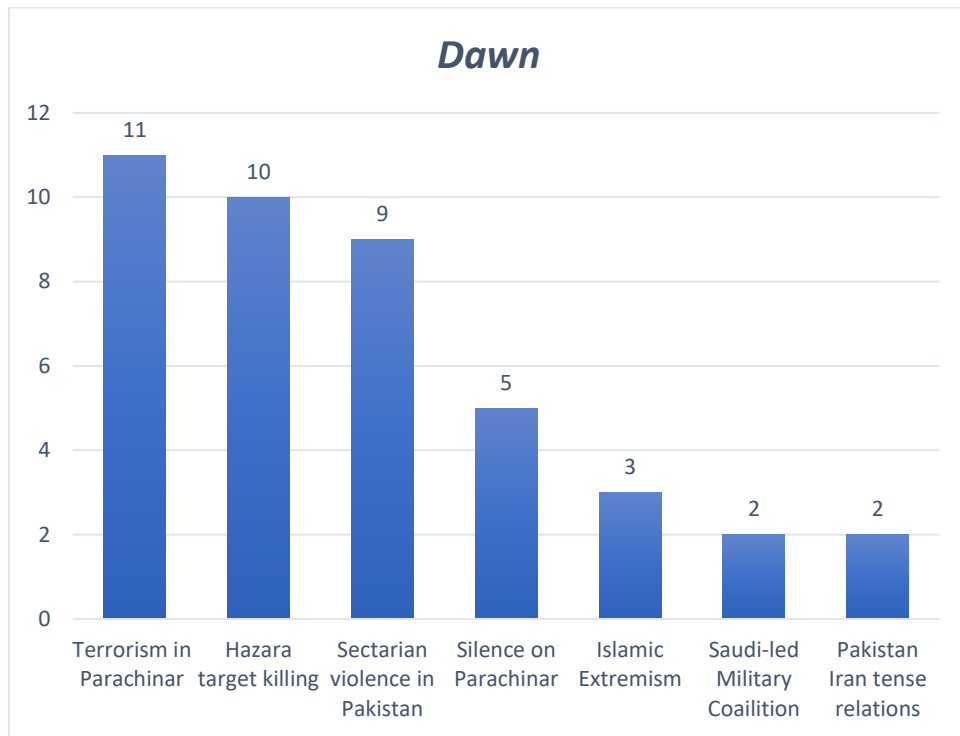
At the same time, they also claimed that all **Shia Muslims of Pakistan** are agents of **Iran** (*The Nation*, All icing no cake, July 5, 2017).

Overall, the tone of the coverage of Shias among the sampled articles from *The Nation* is positive/empathetic, presenting this group as victims of sectarian violence. By and large, the tone towards Sunnis is neutral. That is, when Sunnis are mentioned they are presented in neither a positive or negative light. This would seem to challenge Zaidi's (2016a) findings which states that Shia identity is hidden when they are being attacked.

4.2 Findings Relating to *Dawn*

The analysis of the 42 sampled articles from the *Dawn* newspaper identified seven themes that, in turn, revolved around three frames: sectarianism, religious intolerance and geopolitics (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Frequencies of themes in *Dawn* (N=42)



As noted above, Parachinar is a hot bed of sectarian violence, and most of the victims are Shia. The quantitative analysis of the sampled *Dawn* articles dealing with the Parachinar (N=11) revealed that the term ‘Parachinar’ was used 122 times, ‘sectarian/sectarianism’ 44 times, ‘Shia’ 39 times, and ‘Sunni’ 24 times. Within the articles in this this category, editorials about the attacks in Parachinar throughout 2017 portray Shias as victims. The following examples are illustrative of this observation:

Of the wider region attacks in **Shia-dominated Parachinar** are invariably seen through the **prism of sectarianism** and the militants claiming such attacks

themselves emphasise a **sectarian motive**. Indeed, from Al Qaeda to the banned TTP to overtly **sectarian groups** such as the Islamic State and **Lashkar-e-Jhangvi**, the **sectarian dimension** is central to radical Islamic militancy (*Dawn*, Parachinar bombing, January 22, 2017).

The Friday bombing, likely aimed at inflicting **maximum harm** ahead of the weekly congregation at a nearby **Shia Imambargah**, further crystallised what has long been clear about the violence in the Parachinar region of Kurram Agency: militancy with an overtly sectarian dimension” (*Dawn*, Carnage in Parachinar again, April 1, 2017).

The **Shia community** of this small town on **Friday suffered twin tragedy** when at first 23 people were killed in a car bomb blast near an Imambargah at midday and later another person died after security forces opened fire on a crowd trying to hold a demonstration in front of the political agent's office in protest against increasing **terrorist** attacks (*Dawn*, 23 Killed in blast near Parachinar imambargah, April 1, 2017).

The Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR) of Pakistan Army statement which was released later on Wednesday asserted that sectarian and ethnic colour was being given to the spate of incidents in Parachinar. This statement dangerously furthers the narrative that extremist groups come up with following every terror attack targeting religious minorities. The 'don't say **Shias** were killed, say Muslims were killed' mantra enables the hands of the perpetrator. **Lashkare- Jhangvi** that vows to 'rid Pakistan of **Shias**' claimed responsibility for the Parachinar bombing. When the perpetrator proudly accepts responsibility for an attack - it is the height of impoliteness to pretend you don't know why that aggression happened (*Dawn*, Hostile elements giving secular colour to terrorist incidents in Pakistan, June 29, 2017).

The claim of responsibility by **Lashkari-Jhangvi al-Almi**, one of the most **violent extremist groups** in Pakistan that openly flaunts its gruesome record of **sectarian killings**, leaves no doubt of the motive, if there ever was any (*Dawn*, Parachinar protest, June 30, 2018).

Decades of inertia towards **sectarian militants** in Kurram Agency have now culminated in 2017, with the **Lashkar-e-Jhangvi** and its affiliates attacking Parachinar in January, March, and June (*Dawn*, Parachinar pains, July 2, 2017).

Parachinar is a **Shia-dominated town** and terrorists are aware that any activity carried out by them will target the maximum number of **Shias**. This is likely to lead to Shia-Sunni conflict and destabilisation. 2017 has been a bloody year for the people of Parachinar, a town in the tribal area of Kurram Agency. There have been four incidents of suicide bombings this year which claimed the lives of many people but mainly those **belonging to the Shia sect** (*Dawn*, Ghouls and ghosts, July 23, 2017).

In these passages we observe suggestions that the killings in Parachinar have sectarian motives, and the Shias are portrayed as an aggrieved party. This said, one article in this category refers back to events in 2007 in which Sunnis had violence inflicted upon them by Shia protesters.

In April 2007, participants of a **Sunni procession** in upper Kurram, raised objectionable slogans against the Shia. The Shia reacted and staged a protest procession in Parachinar. Some people fired at this procession and this led to **sectarian clashes**, which subsequently spread to other parts of the Agency. In November, violence erupted again after unidentified people attacked the central mosque in Parachinar, where Sunni were offering Friday prayers. Hundreds of people from both sects were killed during these clashes and 40 villages were destroyed (*Dawn*, Ghouls and ghosts, July 23, 2017).

This particular passage is noteworthy because it the sole instance in the entire sample of news articles in which Shias are framed as assailants and Sunnis as victims.

An article in the *Dawn* sample penned by Jibran Nasir in July 2017 questions the lack of sympathy evinced by Sunni clerics towards their Shia brethren and calls upon these religious leaders to show unity with Shia victims of Parachinar. He writes:

as religious leaders from the Shia sect travelled from all corners of Pakistan to reach Parachinar, it was saddening to see that no prominent Sunni cleric had arrived to show solidarity. It again made me question the concept of sectarianism: is it aided more through sect-based attacks or is it due to our lack of concern for the victims based on their sects? (*Dawn*, Blood, Tears and Parachinar, July 23, 2017).

This portrayal of Sunni clerics as indifferent towards Shia victims of Parachinar is noteworthy because Shias were the victims of sectarian violence and feeds the narrative of Sunni's being indifferent to the plight of Shias.

Taken together, the analysis of the sampled articles from *Dawn* points to a positive or empathy evoking portrayal of Shias in Parachinar that is characterised by descriptions of the sect as 'victim', 'sufferers of violence', 'non-violent', and as victims of terrorist attacks. This would seem to challenge Zaidi's findings as Shias are identified and portrayed as victims of sectarian violence.

There are five articles relating to the silence on Parachinar theme. The following examples are demonstrative:

The silence and negligence of our leaders in face of our tragedy is of criminal proportions' (*Dawn*, My home Parachinar was attacked, June 28, 2017).

After blackout by mainstream electronic media, the social media became voice for the protesters, who were mourning as well as asking the government some serious questions about their security following Friday's massacre that killed 72 and injured more than 300 in Parachinar, Kurram Agency (*Dawn*, Social media gave voice to Parachinar protests, June 29, 2017).

The simplest way to alienate a people, to make them feel less equal than others, is to remain indifferent to their pain and suffering (*Dawn*, Parachinar Protests, June 30, 2017).

AS we all know, Despite the best efforts of the mainstream press - twin blasts tore through Parachinar recently, killing scores. Parachinar in turn proved to be part of a hideous week that saw attacks on police in Quetta and Karachi, and a massive oil tanker disaster in Bahawalpur (*Dawn*, Parachinar Pains, July 2, 2017).

That didn't happen. And as is usually the case, if something is not making news on television, the government is also least likely to bother about it (*Dawn*, Blood, tears and Parachinar, July 23, 2017).

There also are five articles in the *Dawn* sample in which the Pakistani mainstream electronic media is critiqued for not giving enough coverage to the terrorist attacks in Parachinar. Within these particular articles we observe positive/empathetic coverage of Shias which asserts that these media outlets only began to cover sectarian based killings of Shia in Parachinar after the Chief of Army Staff, Qamar Javed Bajwa, came to negotiate with Shia protesters about a security plan. For instance, in one of these articles Jibran Nasir writes,

The COAS concluded successful negotiations with the protesters agreeing principally to their demands for a better security plan. The media which chose neither to cover the plight of the blast victims nor the protests at least follows up on the implementation of the security plan (*Dawn*, Blood, Tears and Parachinar, July 23, 2017).

Ten of the sampled articles from *Dawn* were about the Hazara killings, with the latter being framed as sectarian-based. Within these articles the word 'Hazara' was used 68 times, 'Shia' 29

times, 'Hazara community' 22 Times, 'sectarian/ sectarianism' five times, and 'Sunni' twice.

Examples of how the sectarian theme is manifest in the ten articles are presented below.

Five members of the **Shia Hazara community** were injured when gunmen on two motorcycles attacked their vehicle near the Killi Mubarak area on Spiny Road on Friday **The outlawed Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Al- Aalami** claimed responsibility for the attack---. Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Abdul Razzak Cheema told Dawn. 'It appears to be an attack of sectarian nature,' he said. (*Dawn*, Five Shia Hazaras injured in attack, January 7, 2017).

A man and his young sister belonging to the **Shia Hazara community** were gunned down in the Spiny Road area on Sunday, police said (*Dawn*, Shia Hazara Sibling Gunned down in Quetta, June 5, 2015).

Four members of a **Hazara Shia** family, including a woman, were gunned down and a man was injured in an attack on the Quetta-Karachi National Highway near Mastung on Wednesday (*Dawn*, Four members of Hazara family shot dead, July 20, 2017).

Four members of the **Shia Hazara community**, among them a 12-year-old boy, were killed and two others injured in an attack in Kuchlak (*Dawn*, Four Shia Hazaras Gunned Down, September 11, 2017).

On Sunday, yet another family of the **Shia community** was targeted in Kuchlak as they were travelling to Quetta A man and his young sister belonging to the **Shia Hazara** community were gunned down in the Spiny Road area on Sunday---. 'It appears to be a case of targeted killing,' Regional Police Officer Abdul Razzaq Cheema said. (*Dawn*, Hazara Killings, September 12, 2017).

Five people, among them three members of the **Shia Hazara community**, were killed and another was injured... 'It was a **targeted sectarian killing**,' a senior police officer said, adding that the victims were travelling without security (*Dawn*, Three Shia Hazara dead among five killed in Quetta, October 10, 2017).

The NCHR is doing research on the issues of **ethnic Hazara Shia community** in Balochistan and how their lives had been affected by the killings of their community (*Dawn*, NCHR meets Hazara community members, December 13, 2017).

Two coal miners belonging to the **Shia Hazara community** were killed and another two injured when the van they were travelling in came under fire in the western bypass area on Friday (*Dawn*, Two Shia Hazara killed in Quetta Gun Attack, December 23, 2017).

In the above passages one observes members of the Shia Hazara community portrayed in a positive/empathic light that frames them as victims of sectarian-based violence. The portrayal of

Sunnis has been neutral. We also observe only one instance for which responsibility for an attack is claimed by a specific sectarian organization; in this case the banned Sunni-Deobandi Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Al- Aalami (LeJ) which is a Sunni based banned organization.²¹

Within the *Dawn* sample nine articles were about sectarian violence in Pakistan. These articles speak of the attacks inflicted upon Shia community of Pakistan. Some examples are provided below.

An expatriate who had returned to the country to attend marriage ceremony of his brother was gunned down in a suspected **sectarian attack** in Nazimabad on Saturday (*Dawn*, Expat shot dead in ‘sectarian’ attack, January 8,2017).

The killing of a teacher belonging to the **Shia community** in the Gulistan-i- Jauhar area of the city just a day after the murder of a community member in Orangi sparked protests against the government over the renewed wave of 'sectarian' killings (*Dawn*, Protest against renewed series of ‘sectarian’ killings in Karachi, January 26, 2017).

A **Shia cleric and his wife** were shot and wounded by assailants near here on Wednesday, in what an official described as a terrorist attack, arguably the first ever of its kind in the communally peaceful region of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) (*Dawn*, Cleric, wife wounded in AJK gun attack, February 16, 2017).

According to reports, the pilgrims were de-boarded near the border for a security check which irked leaders of **Shia organisations**, who then along with the passengers held a protest in the area (*Dawn*, Protest against 'injustice' to Shia pilgrims near border, November 3, 2017).

In the above passages one observes coverage that is positive/empathetic towards members of the Shia community insofar as they are framed as victims of sectarian-based violence. There is no mention of Sunnis, so the tone is considered as neutral.

The three articles dealing with Islamic extremism revolve around the religious intolerance prevalent in Pakistan and some of the ways in which it has affected and jeopardized religious and sectarian minorities in the country. Some examples are provided below.

²¹ LeJ al-Alami is a Sunni militant organization belonging to Deobandi school of thought. LeJ is opposed to IS which belongs to Salafi sect but both are hardline anti- Shia. See, Zahid (2017).

The problem is not confined to a few universities; this is a story of every campus. People are becoming more sensitive about their religious and sectarian identity---. In southern Punjab, for instance, shrines and Sufism were a form of religious expression that people took as cultural expression; but now, even in that 'city of saints', intolerance is rising, expressed in a narrow religious social context. In this process of the transformation of religious expression, **religious and sectarian minorities are suffering greatly** (*Dawn*, Tracking Extremism, April 23, 2017).

The banned outfits network is ‘a mix of Sunni and Shia sectarian or terrorism outfits, global terrorism organisations operating in Pakistan, and separatists in Balochistan and Sindh’ An examination of some user profiles linked to these banned outfits indicates **open support of sectarian and extremist ideology**. A few of these profiles have also publicly 'liked' pages and groups related to weapons use and training (*Dawn*, Banned outfits in Pakistan operate openly on Facebook, May 30, 2017).

But what Pakistan absolutely must not tolerate is messianic radicalism that encourages the **killing of innocents after labelling them kafirs**. Whether a group is anti-Pakistan (IS, Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan), or pro-Pakistan (Afghan Taliban, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad) is irrelevant. Every group that calls for violence against civilians inside or outside national borders should be banned. A victory of religious fanatics would ensure limitless suffering and the destruction of every Muslim society on this planet (*Dawn*, Is IS actually bad, unislamic, October 14, 2017).

Within the three articles from which the above examples are drawn, religious and sectarian minorities – this includes the Shia – are framed as victims of religious intolerance. The coverage of the Islamic extremism in *Dawn* adopts a ‘negative’ tone towards Sunni-based sectarian organizations that is manifest through the use of terms such as ‘extremism’ and ‘violence’.

Two of the articles within the *Dawn* sample deal with the Saudi-led military coalition and its implications for relations between Pakistan and Iran. These relations have a geopolitical and sectarian dimension. The geopolitical frame points towards the shift in balance of power between Saudi Arabia and Iran and their respective efforts aimed at gaining regional influence. Within this frame it is observed that a propensity for the violence inflicted upon the Shia is viewed as revenge for their being loyal to Iran and fighting against ISIS militants in Syria. Some examples from this category of articles include:

There are reports that Iran is knee-deep in Parachinar, recruiting Shia locals for Syria via its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. That Pakistani citizens be used as cannon fodder for the grisly Assads is intolerable (*Dawn*, Parachinar pains, July 2, 2017).

Some of us even have the gall to claim they deserve their fate for allegedly being more loyal to a hostile Iranian government than to their own (*Dawn*, Surrendering Parachinar, July 3, 2017).

What complicates matters today is the perception of Shia militants helping out in Syria in the war against IS. In practice, this means that most attacks conducted in Parachinar are described as retaliatory attacks to avenge one form of killing or another (*Dawn*, Ghouls and ghosts, July 23, 2017).

Iran's warm relations with India, the targeting of Shia minorities in Pakistan by terrorist outfits, Kulbhushan Jadhav's entering Pakistan through Iran and Pakistan's acceptance of the lead role in the Islamic Military Alliance which excludes Shia controlled Iran, Iraq and Syria have all negatively affected diplomatic relations between the two neighbours (*Dawn*, Border politics, May 30, 2017).

Islamabad's termination of peaceful nuclear cooperation, competition for influence in post-Soviet Afghanistan, Iranian 'interference' with Pakistan's Shia community, cross-border events in Iranian and Pakistani Balochistan' (*Dawn*, A dark age, June 11, 2017).

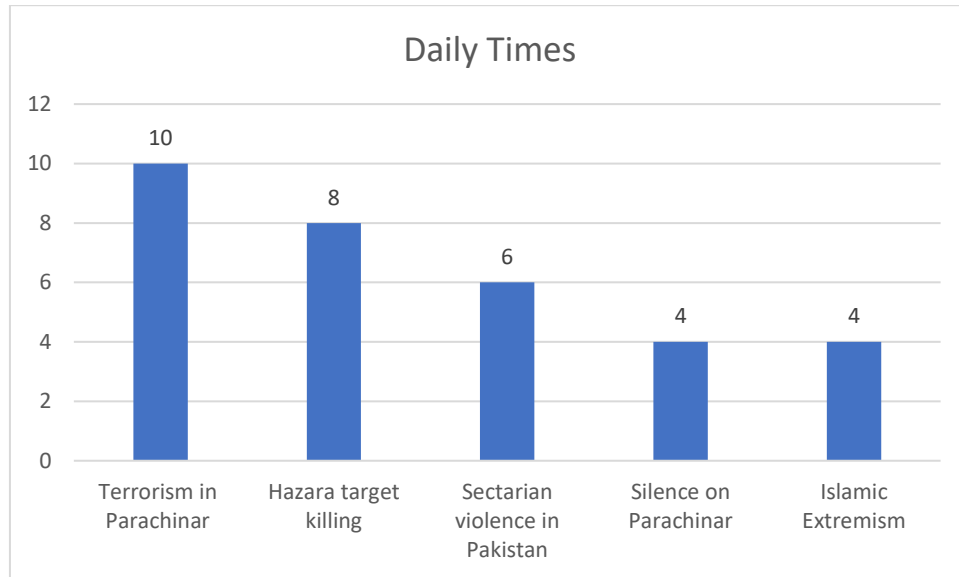
In these passages one sees that Iran is portrayed as recruiting Shias from Pakistan to participate in the war in Syria. This, in turn, has the effect of framing Pakistani Shias as loyal to Iran and helping militants in Syria against Islamic militants. Pakistan's increasing ties with Saudi Arabi and the appointment of General Raheel Shareef as a head of Saudi-led Alliance which Iran views as a Sunni Alliance are portrayed as reasons of tensed relations between Iran and Pakistan. In my opinion this finding is noteworthy because inclusion in Saudi led Alliance might increase the influence of Saudi Arabia in Pakistan and decrease Iran's role which together could potentially serve to escalate Sunni-Shia tensions.

4.3 Findings Relating to *Daily Times*

The analysis of the 32 articles comprising the *Daily Times* sample identified five themes that, in turn, revolved around four frames: sectarianism, religious intolerance, ethnicity and geopolitics

(see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Frequencies of themes in *Daily Times* (N=32)



Within the ten articles falling into the ‘Terrorism Parachinar’ theme, the term ‘Parachinar’ was used 99 times, ‘sectarian/sectarianism’ 12 times, ‘Shia’ 21 times, and ‘Sunni’ 4 times. The sectarian frame is evident in each of the articles comprising this thematic category. Some examples of how this frame is manifest in the ten articles include:

A bomb blast ripped across a market place killing 17 and injuring over 50 people. The explosion occurred early in the morning at the Eidgah Market when people flocked to the area to buy fruits and vegetables (*Daily Times*, Blast in Parachinar, 25 dead over 50 injured, January 21, 2017).

The **Shias** of Pakistan have borne the brunt of terrorism. That Parachinar is ‘remote’ in public imagination, located in the misgoverned tribal areas results in little coverage by the mainstream media. Only two months earlier, **Lashkar-e-Jhangvi** claimed responsibility for a bomb explosion that claimed at least 24 lives at the local vegetable market. In 2015, another 25 lives were lost in the same market, targeted in a similar manner. Twin explosions ravaged the city in June 2013 killing at least 50 people while injuring 122 others. Terrorist outfits - in this case, **Jamaat-ul-Ahraar (JuA)** - proudly claim the **sectarian nature** of their operations (*Daily Times*, Parachinar lives matter, April 1, 2017).

Shia majority of Upper Kurram has been sandwiched between the **anti-Shia** Haqqanis and Afghan Taliban on Afghan side and a mix of terrorist outfits like **Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP)**, **Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ)** etc. in Central and Lower Kurram---. arachinar being the headquarter of Kurram Agency and the central city **in Shia majority** Upper Kurram, has been under attack by these terrorist outfits since 2005. (*Daily Times*, What makes Parachinar hotbed of terrorism, April 2, 2017).

Parachinar is known to be the small city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where natives are two major sects i.e **Shia and Sunni**. The area faces threat and violence for officials and terrorism. As reported that in last week of Ramazan, two bomb blasted in Parachinar that took 72 lives and 250 injured. But shockingly, before previous Friday, another blast witnessed that forced people to go for strikes and sit-ins against this heinous crime. They carried out sit-ins and strikes calmly in the hard month of Ramazan while keeping fast (*Daily Times*, Civilian for Parachinar, August 6, 2016).

Within this category of articles Shias in Parachinar are portrayed in a positive/empathetic manner insofar as they are presented as being the principal victims of sectarian-based violence. Although Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ), and Jamaat-ul-Ahraar (JuA) are all Sunni-based sectarian organizations that have claimed responsibility for attacks in Parachinar, the negative manner in which these organizations are portrayed does not extend to Sunnis as a whole. Indeed, within the articles in question, Sunnis are largely portrayed in a neutral manner.

Eight articles in the *Daily Times* sample dealt with Hazara target killings, each of which framed the issue using a sectarian frame. Some examples from this category include:

A section of mainstream media tends to hide the **Shia identity of the victims**. They are described simply as 'Hazaras', giving a purely ethnic colour to the violence. The fact is that Hazaras are not being targeted for their ethnicity - but for **their Shia faith**. The **sectarian militant outfit Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ)**, that claims responsibility for almost all attacks on this community, has also vowed to 'rid' Pakistan of **Shias**. Therefore, it should be clear that the violence against the community is triggered through **sectarianism** and not ethnicity (*Daily Times*, Hazara-Shia under attack once more, June 6, 2017)'.

Even among the **Shias**, it's the **Hazaras of Quetta** who are facing the worst kind of **persecution**. They are regularly targeted by **Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ)** and other banned terror organisations. Since 2003, Hazaras are being targeted. Most notables

among those attacks are the 2013 explosion which killed 115 and wounded 270 Hazaras and the 2013 Kirani Road bomb attack which killed 73 and wounded 180 Hazaras. The attitude of the state towards suffering of Hazaras can be judged from the fact that once Aslam Raisani (the then Chief Minister of Balochistan), after attack on Hazaras, said 'Population of Balochistan is in millions, 40 dead in Mastung, is no big deal, I can send truckload of tissue paper for the aggrieved to wipe their tears.' (*Daily Times*, Conscious hypocrisy, September 29, 2017).

Five people were killed a gun attack on Quetta's Kasi Road. Three of them were **Shia Muslims** from the **Hazara community** (*Daily Times*, Hazaras under attack, again, October 10, 2017).

Gun attack on Quetta's Kasi Road left three persons dead who had been identified as **Shia Muslims** from the Hazara Community' (*Daily Times*, Five Hazaras Gunned down on Quetta's Kasi Road October 10, 2017).

According to police, the vehicle was ambushed and directly fired bullets killing at five Hazara Shia on the spot. The armed motorcyclists were able to flee the crime scene unheard. In a recent wave of sectarian violence that has been happening for more than a decade, Hazara Shia community has proven to be the worst affected community so far (*Daily Times*, Five Hazaras Gunned down on Quetta's Kasi Road October 9, 2017).

This is not the first time that people of the **Hazara community** have been killed but shockingly, the community that belongs to the **Shia sect** of Islam has been frequently targeted by various **Sunni terrorist groups** including **Tahreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, ISIS, and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi** in Pakistan (*Daily Times*, Hazara genocide, November 21, 2017).

As the above passages show, within the articles categorized as falling under the 'Hazara target killing' theme, the sectarian dimension is central in the reporting. The Hazaras are portrayed as victims of violence perpetuated by Sunni based sectarian organizations like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ). This results in a positive portrayal of the Shia, and of neutral portrayal of the Sunnis.

In addition to the sectarian frame, elements of an ethnic frame also are evident among four of the 8 articles comprising Hazara killings theme.

The brutal **sectarian** and **ethnic** violence faced by Balochistan on a regular basis. Balochistan' besieged Shia **Hazara minority** have been the focus of relentless attacks by the banned extremist militant group Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (*Daily Times*, Balochistan's unending violence, June 12, 2017).

This city is like a melting pot which takes in itself people of all religion, races and **ethnicities** and integrates them into the community. This is the reason that people in large numbers came out today and showed their solidarity with the murdered Hazara woman (*Daily Times*, Violence in Charlottesville through the eyes of a Pakistani. August 15, 2017).

Armed men opened fire on a vehicle killing at least five members of the **ethnic** Hazara Shia community, police said. According to police, the vehicle was ambushed and directly fired bullets killing at least five (*Daily Times*, 5 Hazaras gunned down on Quetta's Kasi road. October 9, 2017).

Not only in Pakistan, the **Hazaras** undergo enormous hardships, widespread discrimination and cruel displacement in Afghanistan and Iran also. Although in Afghanistan, they constitute the third largest ethnic group, they have been facing indiscriminate maltreatment and violence by the dominant Pashtun community. Unidentified armed men opened fire on a vehicle killing at least five members of the **ethnic Hazara Shia** community, police said... It shows that people of **ethnic** Hazara were a great social and economic asset for Balochistan. But despite having these qualities, life remains miserable and constantly dangerous for them... In January 2013, a snooker club in Quetta most frequented by youth of the **ethnic** Hazara community was made a target of a suicide attack which killed more than 96 people. After a month, at least 84 lives of the **ethnic Hazaras** were cut short in suicide bombing taking place in a crowded vegetable market mostly used by the ethnic group (*Daily Times*, Hazara genocide, November 21, 2017).

One editorial within the *Daily Times* sample contradicts claims of there being an ethnic dimension to the Hazara target killing, with the author writing,

A section of mainstream media tends to hide the **Shia identity of the victims**. They are described simply as '**Hazaras**', giving a purely **ethnic colour** to the violence. The fact is **that Hazaras** are not being targeted for **their ethnicity** - but for their **Shia faith**. The **sectarian militant outfit Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ)**, that claims responsibility for almost **all attacks on this community**, has also vowed to 'rid' Pakistan of Shias. Therefore, it should be clear that the violence against the community is triggered through **sectarianism and not ethnicity** (*Daily Times*, Hazara Shia under attack once more, June 6, 2017)'.

The editorial further elaborates,

The act of not completely mentioning the identity of the victim strengthens the perpetrators' hands. When the killer proudly claims responsibility for the attack on a minority group, mentioning the victim's religious identity is as important as naming the terror group behind the attack. Media should clearly name the identity of both the perpetrators and the victims. And it is time for the government to end its policy of tolerance towards banned sectarian outfits and act against them (*Daily Times*, Hazara Shia under attack once more, June 6, 2017).

The author of the editorial contends that when it comes to Hazara target killings the addition of word ethnic Hazara downplays the sectarian dimensions of the violence and may be used with the intention of hiding the Shia identity of Hazara victims. This is noteworthy because it supports the claims of Zaidi (2016a) that identity of Shias is obfuscated.

In sum, the tone of the eight articles comprising this category of the *Daily Times* sample is positive/empathetic towards Shias insofar as the coverage portrays them victims of violence. As for the Sunnis we observe not much mention which results in their being presented in a neutral manner.

The four articles comprising the ‘Silence on Parachinar’ thematic category deal with the mainstream Pakistani electronic media’s failure to cover the seven days of mass protests in Parachinar that took place between June 23 and June 30, 2017 in reaction to frequent bomb blasts. Examples of how the sectarian frame is manifest in the articles categorized in this theme are provided below:

Protestors in Parachinar with Bodies of **Victims** on the road. National Media turns a blind eye. **Sectarian** outfits continue to attack **Shias**", wrote M Jibran Nasir, a Karachi-based lawyer, in one of his tweets (*Daily Times*, Parachinar lives matter, April 1, 2017).

How, for one, is it acceptable that for 7 days, the **Pakistani electronic media** blatantly refused to cover mass protests in the aftermath of an attack that targeted and killed nearly a 100 **Shia** Turis and constituted the **seventh** such attack in **Parachinar in just 6 months**? Perhaps it is unreasonable to expect basic human empathy for the victims by media moguls, but surely our ratings-obsessed television channels could have thought it worth their while to cover non-stop protests by thousands? Some of course chose **self-censorship**; but the fact that some committed journalists were turned away at the gates of Kurram Agency only deepens the suspicion that state censorship was involved (*Daily Times*, Parachinar and censorship, July 3, 2017).

The state in Kurram, while not speaking an overtly **sectarian language**, has actively disadvantaged and endangered the **minority Shia community** in pursuit of strategic objectives in Afghanistan (*Daily Times*, Parachinar and censorship, July 3, 2017).

It is a bitter reality that an attack on **Shias** in Quetta and Parachinar fails to bring forth the optimum level of national remorse, media coverage and censure (*Daily Times*, Conscious hypocrisy, September 29, 2017).

The tone of these passages from the *Daily Times* is positive/empathic towards Shias insofar as they are presented as being left to the mercy of Sunni sectarian groups. By contrast, the Pakistani state is framed as being indifferent to the plight of Parachinar Shias.

Four articles were categorized as falling into the ‘Islamic Extremism’ theme. The contents of these articles focused on the ways in which minorities – Shia and others – have suffered at the hands of extremist elements of Pakistani society. The dominant frame within this theme is religious intolerance. Some examples of how this frame is manifest in these articles include:

Despite allegations of foreign funding by the likes of Saudi Arabia, Iran and India, one has to concede the fact that the perpetrators and victims of this **faith-based violence** were all Pakistani citizens (*Daily Times*, On the religious sentiments, March 21, 2017).

Religious intolerance in Pakistan has shaped itself into a complex issue, difficult to justify who is responsible for the sectarian or social violence. Mostly religious intolerance starts from primary schools to Universities and Madaris. Being an Islamic county, obviously, every effort is done to prove Islamic supremacy. **Hindus, Christians, Ahmadis and Shia communities** face religious hatred (*Daily Times*, Pakistan-a country of particular concern, November 5, 2017).

The **state of Pakistan** is allegedly responsible in creating this monster of **religious fanaticism**. Considering the multi-diversity of Pakistani society, its socio-economic disparities and **sectarian-religious** differences, the state should have owned the religious institution from the day one of Islamisation. It had to register and regulate the mosques and seminaries and bring the **religious curriculum** in the mainstream of education to sync with the modern world (*Daily Times*, Islamic radicalism haunts Pakistan, December 4, 2017).

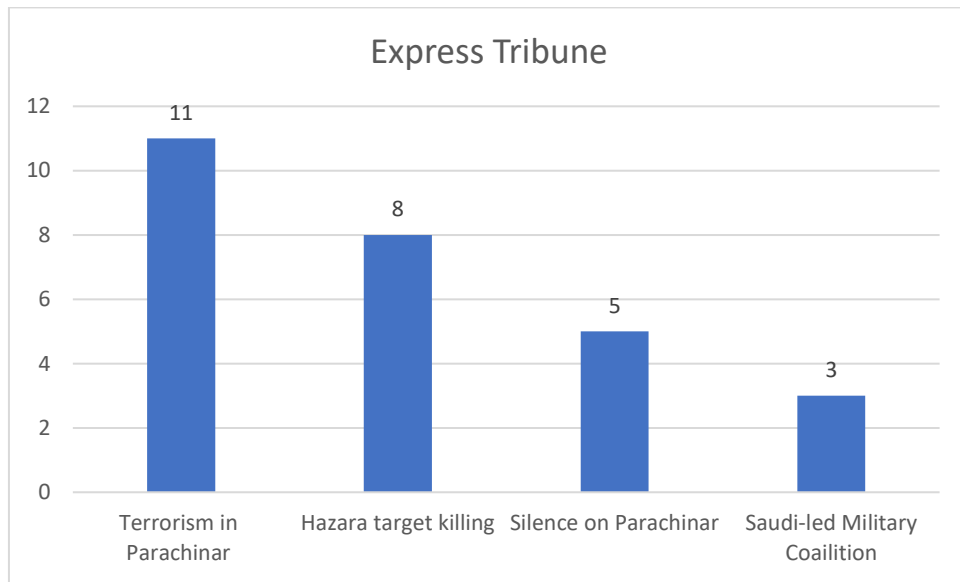
The message conveyed in the above passages suggests that the Pakistani state is responsible for contributing to religious intolerance, and Islamic extremism in particular, because the curriculum of religious seminaries is not aligned with modern education. The tone of the eight articles comprising this portion of the *Daily Times* sample is positive/empathic towards Shias insofar as they are portrayed as bearing the brunt of Islamic extremism. Sunni’s on the other hand are

portrayed as perpetrators of Islamic supremacy.

4.4 Findings Relating to *Express Tribune*

The analysis of the 27 articles comprising the *Express Tribune* sample identified four themes that, in turn, revolved around two frames: sectarianism and geopolitics (see Figure 6).

Figure 6: Frequencies of themes in *Express Tribune* (N=27)



Within the sampled *Express Tribune* articles, eleven were categorized as falling into the ‘Terrorism in Parachinar’ theme. These articles speak of Shia killings resulting from sectarian violence. Some examples include,

Kurram Agency had been a hotbed of **sectarian violence**, but of late harmony was restored between **the Shia and Sunni** communities due to concerted efforts by the authorities. The **bombing** came at a time when tribesmen from both communities, who had fled **communal violence**, are returning to their native towns (*Express Tribune*, Bomb wrecks crowded market in Parachinar, January 22, 2017).

Jamaatul Ahrar, a splinter group of the outlawed **Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan**, claimed credit for the deadly bombing in Parachinar, which came less than two months after a bomb ripped through the main vegetable market in the same city on January 21... A car cruised through the market and pulled up outside the main entrance to the Imambargah where it detonated with an ear-splitting bang,' eyewitness Manzar Hussain told The Express Tribune. The entrance is reserved for

female members of the **local Shia community**. Security officials confirmed it was a suicide car bombing (*Express Tribune*, 23 killed, over 100 injured as blast rocks Parachinar, March 31st, 2017).

The Kurram tribal district is known for **sectarian clashes** between **Sunnis and Shias** who make up roughly 20 percent of Pakistan's population of 200 million, and it has also been a stronghold for the **Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan** as well as its factions (*Express Tribune*, 10, including children killed in Kurram blast, April 25, 2017).

The death toll in Parachinar twin bombings rose to 72 on Sunday while the sit-in against firing on protesters continued unabated for the third day (*Express Tribune*, Parachinar death toll tops 72, June 26, 2017).

Killings of the **Shia** community have been one of the major challenges in the last decade. Hundreds of **Shias are targeted** in every incident and the frequency of occurrence is always getting higher. From mosques to vegetable markets, there is no place where they feel safe or take a breath of relief (*Express Tribune*, Blood on streets, June 30, 2017).

A predominantly **Shia population** that is surrounded by a turbulent Afghan border from three sides has witnessed much bloodshed this year alone even if the decade-old sectarian conflict is kept aside. Around 133 people have been killed and 555 injured in the first six months of the year. Almost all the attacks in Parachinar city, that has faced the brunt of these attacks, have had a similar pattern which points towards a security failure despite the presence of a large number of security personnel and extensive measures adopted (*Express Tribune*, Whose lives matter? July 1, 2017).

The message conveyed in the above passages suggests that Shia have been the target of sectarian attack. The tone is positive/empathetic towards Shias insofar as they are victims of violence. Sunni's are portrayed as neutral.

The target killing of Hazaras also is presented via a sectarian frame. Within the sampled articles, eight were about the targeted killing of members of the Hazara minority.

Those arrested or charged with killings of **Hazaras** have nearly all had affiliation with **sectarian terrorist groups**, which are based in Punjab, but operate in rest of the country. In the past eight years, 123 attacks resulting in 776 killed and 1,115 injured had been claimed on **sectarian grounds** (*Express Tribune*, Fear and loathing returns for Quetta's Hazara community, October 16, 2017).

Four people belonging to the **Hazara community** were killed and two others severely injured in an attack by armed men in the Kuchlak area on Sunday evening

(*Express Tribune*, Highway attack: Four Hazara gunned down in Kuchlack, September 10, 2017).

Two members of the **Hazara community**, including a woman, were gunned down in the Spini area of Quetta on Sunday afternoon. According to security sources, **unidentified armed men** opened fire on a motorcycle on Spini road, killing two members of the community on the spot (*Express Tribune*, Two Hazara community members gunned down in Quetta, June 4, 2017).

At least five people, including members of the **Hazara community**, were killed as unidentified men opened fire at their vehicle in Quetta's Kasi Road early Monday morning. **Sectarian violence** has claimed thousands of lives in Pakistan over the past decade. Hundreds of **ethnic Hazaras, who are Shias** by sect, have been killed in targeted bombings and drive-by shootings over the past few years in Balochistan (*Express Tribune*, 3 Hazaras among 5 dead in gun attack on Quetta van, October 9, 2017).

The tone of the eight articles in this category is positive/empathetic towards Shias insofar the coverage portrays Shias as victims of sectarian violence. As for the Sunnis we observe a neutral tone. It also should be noted that within these articles no mention is made of the identity of the attackers. Instead, phrases like 'unidentified gunman' or 'no group accepted the responsibility' were used. This is an important observation because such metaphors hide the identity of the assailants and became the incidents of target killing. It also hides the motive behind killing, and in so doing disassociate the violence from possible Sunni connections. This would seem to support Zaidi (2016a)'s assertion that the identity of assailants often is being hidden in Pakistani media reports of sectarian violence.

Five articles in the *Express Tribune* sample fell into the 'Silence on Parachinar' themes. Here too, the sectarian frame was evident.

Sadly, Pakistan is a country where all citizens are considered equal by law, yet targeted **victimisation and killings** continue to surface. In the last five years, several major bomb blasts have happened, targeting the Parachinar community. There seems to be **no voice** for these since our mainstream **electronic and print media** is keenly focused on populist political coverage (*Express Tribune*, Blood on streets, June 30, 2017).

A twin blast just before Eid has triggered a protest, a sit-in that has lasted for eight days now. The demands of the protestors are that of justice and to be treated like the rest of Pakistan. Even the compensation package announced by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif that came a week after the incident was rejected. Why was the **government absent** for so long that the citizens of the state had to ask to be treated as equal citizens of the country... On social media, comparisons have been drawn between three tragic incidents of Quetta, Parachinar and Bahawalpur. Even those that have previously rejected such comparisons have questioned the motives of the political government and asked why are some lives treated more important than others? (*Express Tribune*, Whose lives matter, July 1, 2017).

The tone of the five articles in this category is positive/empathetic towards Shias insofar as they suggest that the Shias of Parachinar have been victimized, abandoned by state, and are not being treated equally. The tone is negative towards mainstream media and state insofar as the former and latter are portrayed as being indifferent to the sentiment of the local people. Sunni's are portrayed as neutral here.

There were three articles that fell into the 'Saudi-led Coalition' theme, each of which manifest a geopolitical frame. This framing is evident in the following passages from the articles

Firstly, Iran and Saudi Arabia should be convinced to avoid promoting a particular sect in the regional countries. Both of them should keep their ideologies within the boundaries of their countries and stop funding specific religious seminaries or organisations in foreign countries to increase their influence. Secondly, they should dispel the impression of being in a proxy war in the Middle East. Both the countries should agree on taking action against all militants' groups despite their sectarian affiliation (*Express Tribune*, Saudi-Iran rivalry aside, does Muslim world need military alliance? April 24, 2017).

Observers believe that newest Saudi-led block is to counter Iran's growing influence in Syria, Iraq and Yemen. Iran, which also shares a 900-kilometre border with Pakistan, has serious reservations over General (ret'd) Raheel's selection as the head of the Saudi-led military alliance of Muslim countries to combat terrorism (*Express Tribune*, Pakistan left with limited options in Saudi-led Islamic military alliance, May 26, 2017).

It is tough for Pakistan to convince Saudi Arabia and Iran to keep their ideologies aside and not interfere in each other's affairs, particularly in the presence of influential players like the US and Russia in the region. Pakistan has to decide that whether it should withdrawing from the IMAFT and damages its relations with a close ally like Saudi Arabia, or whether it can annoy Iran by being a part of it

(*Express Tribune*, Pakistan left with limited options in Saudi-led Islamic military alliance, May 26, 2017).

The tone of the three articles in this category suggests that ties of Pakistan with Iran are in difficult conditions after Pakistan joined Saudi-led coalition. Iran believes that this Saudi-led Alliance is sect-specific and aimed at countering Iran influence in Yemen, Syria and Iraq. This is noteworthy because in the context of the heightened sectarian tensions in Pakistan, perceived Iran influence within Pakistan often is advanced as a rationale for retaliatory violence against Shias.

5. Discussion

In terms of frequency of appearance, the three most dominant frames identified in the articles sampled from Pakistan’s four leading English language newspapers were sectarianism, geopolitics, and religious intolerance (See Table 1).

Table 1: Frequency of frames

Frame Identified	<i>The Nation</i>	<i>Dawn</i>	<i>Daily Times</i>	<i>Express Tribune</i>
Sectarianism	35	34	28	24
Geopolitics	8	4		3
Religious intolerance		3	4	

According to Entman, the dominant meaning attempting to be conveyed in a news report can be identified by the framing of a situation that is frequently mentioned in the text and that is the most common opinion among the audience (Entman, 1993).²² Sectarianism was the most identified frame in the sampled articles. Geopolitics was second, and religious intolerance third. This said, it must be noted that two or more of the frames were often found within the same articles. For instance, the geopolitical frame tended to be paired with the presence of the sectarian and/or religious

²² Entman (1993: 56) elaborates from framing perspective that “dominant meaning consists of the problem, causal, evaluative, and treatment interpretations with the highest probability of being noticed, processed, and accepted by the most people”.

intolerance frames insofar as reporting about the violence inflicted upon the Shia either implicitly or explicitly suggested that it amounted to revenge for their perceived loyalty to Iran and fighting against Islamic militants in Syria.

The information presented below in Table 2 lists the seven themes identified in this study. Not surprisingly, not all the themes were present across the four sampled newspapers. For example, none of the articles sampled from the *Daily Times* and *Express Tribune* contained themes relating to Pakistan-Iran relations.

By contrast, the tone of the sampled articles was uniformly positive/empathetic in the portrayal of Shias. This positive tone was associated with the use of words such ‘victims’, sufferer of violence’, or ‘non-violent’. The Sunnis, on the other hand, are not much mentioned in the sampled articles. Indeed, and the overall tone in portraying Sunnis was found to be neutral. This neutrality was manifest through news articles adopting neither a negative or positive attitude toward this sect and avoiding directly allocating blame to Sunnis for violence or conflict. This said, the Sunni-based Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Jamat-e-Ahrar (JuA), and Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LeJ) are all portrayed as violent organizations responsible for acts of sectarian violence in Parachinar, Hazara and other parts of Pakistan.

Table 2: Theme Frequency in Sampled articles

Theme	<i>The Nation</i>	<i>Dawn</i>	<i>Daily Times</i>	<i>Express Tribune</i>
Terrorism in Parachinar	8	11	10	11
Hazara target killings	10	10	8	8
Sectarian violence in Pakistan	13	9	6	0
Silence on / Abandoning Parachinar	5	5	4	5
Islamic extremism		3	4	0
Saudi-led Military Coalition - Islamic Military Alliance to Fight Terrorism (IMAFI)	4	2	0	3
Pakistan Iran tense relations	4	2	0	0

Some commentators maintain that Shias are under attack in Pakistan and that the media is

under-reporting these events (Hussain, 2012; Reick, 2016; Zaidi, 2016b). For instance, Naqvi (2016, para 2) accuses Pakistani media of not covering Shia killings and identifying them “as sectarian or as non-religious accidental killings”. Likewise, Zaidi’s (2016a) examination of the Pakistani print news media’s coverage of faith-based violence found that Shia victims are seldom identified as Shia. The findings of my research lend partial support to this claim. In the sample of articles, I analyzed found that Shias are, by and large, being identified as such but that there are cases in which the sect is not mentioned.

The reporting in the sampled articles also engaged with the failure of mainstream Pakistani electronic media to give coverage to sectarian-based killings of Shia in Parachinar. Here, the sampled articles gave coverage to heartbroken locals of Parachinar during their protests after bomb attacks. These articles equated of the media silence about Parachinar with the Pakistani government abandoning locals and being indifferent to their plight. This observed criticism also was a critique of elite mainstream discourse at the time which centred on the government ignoring this issue. As such, this finding would seem to challenge Entman’s (2004) assertion that news frames constantly draw on elite mainstream discourse insofar as the criticism advanced in this instance was a direct critique of elite mainstream discourse.

6. Conclusion

This study sought to examine the media framing of Sunni-Shia tensions in four leading English language newspapers in order to ascertain whether the portrayals of these groups favored one sect over the other. The findings emerging from my research show that tone used for Shia is positive and empathetic. They are portrayed as victims of sectarian violence. This positive tone was associated with the use of words such as ‘victims’, ‘sufferer of violence’, or ‘non-violent’. The Sunnis, on the other hand, are not much mentioned in the sampled articles. Indeed, and the overall

tone in portraying Sunnis was found to be neutral. This neutrality was manifest through news articles adopting neither a negative or positive attitude toward this sect and avoiding directly allocating blame to Sunnis for violence or conflict.

The findings of my research challenge Ziadi's claim that Shia victims are seldom identified as Shia in Pakistani news reports. In the sample of articles examined for my analysis, I found that Shias are, by and large, being identified as such but that there are cases in which the sect is not mentioned. My findings partially support the claim of some scholars' findings that identity of assailants is kept hidden in some cases and they have been referred as anonymous perpetrators of violence. My findings also reveal the role of Iran and Saudi Arabia in escalating sectarian tensions in Pakistan. The inclusion of Pakistan in Saudi led coalition appears to be one of major factors of tense relationship between Pakistan and Iran while Pakistan relations with Saudi Arabia increased manifold over the years which may further escalate sectarian tensions in Pakistan.

The limitations of this study are that only one-year media coverage regarding framing of sectarian tensions, January to December 2017 was considered and only 145 articles analysed. The statistics could be improved if more articles would have been analysed and period under study was extended. My focus has been online newspapers as it was too difficult to get hard copies of all the newspapers. It would be particularly fruitful to include online and offline newspapers of Pakistan in any future studies of a similar nature.

Further study on Sunni-Shia violence in Pakistan is vital to address this issue which has cost innumerable lives. The proxy war between Saudi Arabia and Iran can be an interesting topic which has a direct role in escalating sectarian related violence in Pakistan. I have only considered English newspapers as these are more readily accessible online than their Urdu language counterparts and doing so saved me from having to translate Urdu language articles into English. However,

considering Urdu language newspapers can be very exciting as general public in Pakistanis read Urdu newspapers or watch Urdu news channels. Almost all major Urdu news channels now have websites which could be a best source for comparative study based on print media and electronic media.

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Appendix A

Table 1: List of articles in *The Nation* samples

1	Editorial, Nation (April 26, 2017). Another Attack In Parachinar. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/26-Apr-2017
2	Buneri, Nadir (April 1, 2017). Car-bomb kills 24 near Parachinar imambargah. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/01-Apr-2017
3	Reporter, Staff (April 26, 2017). 15 killed in Kurram as bomb hits bus. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/26-Apr-2017
4	Editorial, Nation (July 1, 2017). Protests in Parachinar. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/01-Jul-2017
5	Mahmood, H., and Buneri. N. (January 22, 2017). Big terror hit tatters peace. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/22-Jan-2017/big-terror-hit-tatters-peace
6	Editorial, Nation (July 10, 2017). Parachinar Incident, A Bold Move. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/10-Jul-2017/parachinar-incident-a-bold-move
7	Reporter, Staff (June 24, 2017). 45 Shoppers killed in twin Parachinar attacks. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/24-Jun-2017
8	Javid, Hasan (July 2, 2017). The silence on Parachinar. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/02-Jul-2017
9	Editorial, Nation (July 5, 2017). All Icing, No Cake. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/05-Jul-2017
10	Sardar, Khursheed (June 30, 2017). Abandoning Parachinar: Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/30-Jun-2017/abandoning-parachinar
11	Reporter, Staff (June 30, 2017). Right to respectable life demanded. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/30-Jun-2017/right-to-respectable-life-demanded
12	Reporter, Staff (January 23, 2017). Parachinar blast flayed. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/23-Jan-2017/parachinar-blast-flayed
13	Shahid.K.K. (April 4, 2017). Salafi NATO and Shia eclipse. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/04-Apr-2017/salafi-nato-and-shia-eclipse
14	Niazi, M.A. (March 24, 2017). Involving Pakistan. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/24-Mar-2017/involving-pakistan
15	Sharaf.S.S. (April 15, 2017). Islamic Military Alliance against terrorism. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/15-Apr-2017/islamic-military-alliance-against-terrorism
16	Reporter, Staff (August 20, 2017). Unidentified man kills close aid of Fazlur Rahman. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/20-Aug-2017/jui-f-leader-shot-dead-in-di-khan

17	Alam, Iftikhar (May 23, 2017). Pakistani sympathisers split over Saudi-Iran spat: Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/23-May-2017/pakistani-sympathisers-split-over-saudi-iran-spat
18	Ali, Shafqat (January 11, 2017). Pakistan committed to Iran friendship. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/11-Jan-2017/pakistan-committed-to-iran-friendship
19	Ali, Shafqat (April 26, 2017). Pakistan fails to convince Iran on Saudi-led alliance. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/26-Apr-2017/pakistan-fails-to-convince-iran-on-saudi-led-alliance
20	Editorial, Nation (May 5, 2017). Upsetting Iran. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/05-May-2017/upsetting-iran
21	Najam, Durdana (November 13, 2017). Remodelling relations. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/13-Nov-2017/remodelling-relations
22	Rasool, Saad (April 2, 2017). The truth about Shia killings. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/02-Apr-2017/the-truth-about-shia-killings
23	Malik, M.R. (February 21, 2017). Battleground Pakistan. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/21-Feb-2017/battleground-pakistan
24	Reporter, Staff (February 18, 2017). Rulers accused of pursuing 'good Taliban, bad Taliban' policy. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/18-Feb-2017/rulers-accused-of-pursuing-good-taliban-bad-taliban-policy
25	Reporter, Staff (January 8, 2017). Man killed in 'sectarian attack. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/08-Jan-2017/man-killed-in-sectarian-attack
26	Reporter, Staff (January 28, 2017). Demos against target killings. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/28-Jan-2017/demos-against-target-killings
27	Editorial, Nation (June 12, 2017). Pakistan's Western Problem: Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/12-Jun-2017/pakistan-s-western-problem
28	Editorial, Nation (January 12, 2017). Sectarian Terrorists. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/12-Jan-2017/sectarian-terrorists
29	Rasool, Saad (January 15, 2017). Good sectarian, bad sectarian? Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/15-Jan-2017/good-sectarian-bad-sectarian
30	Beg, M.A (January 13, 2017). The terrible mindset. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/13-Jan-2017/the-terrible-mindset
31	Khan, Sharif (October 6, 2017). IS bomber kills 20 at Jhal Magsi shrine. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/06-Oct-2017/is-bomber-kills-20-at-jhal-magsi-shrine
32	Reporter, Staff (May 9, 2017). Law enforcement agencies harassing Shias: MWM. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/09-May-2017/law-enforcement-agencies-harrassing-shias-mwm
33	Editorial, Nation (July 26, 2017). Psychological disorder. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/26-Jul-2017/psychological-disorders

34	Reporter, Staff (June 29, 2017) Efforts start to fail enemy's sectarian design. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/29-Jun-2017/efforts-start-to-fail-enemy-s-sectarian-design
35	Editorial, Nation (June 26, 2017). Bittersweet. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/26-Jun-2017/bittersweet?show=470
36	Reporter, Staff (July 21, 2017). Gunmen kill two in Quetta. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/21-Jul-2017/gunmen-kill-two-in-quetta
37	Editorial, Nation (October 10, 2017). Purge of Hazaras. Retrieved from: https://nation.com.pk/10-Oct-2017/purge-of-hazaras
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