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<b>Article:</b>	<b>Framing Victims: A Comparative Framing Analysis of Yemen and Syrian Conflict Victims in Pakistani Media</b>
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## Abstract

The current research scrutinizes how political proximity plays a vital role in the portrayal of conflict victims, happening in Yemen and Syria. Through the content analysis research demonstrate the victims of the Yemen conflict are more tinted than the victims of the Syrian conflict. In both the conflict, all the actors are having equivalent religious bonds with the reporting media of Pakistan. This study demonstrates the political proximity between the media of reporting country and actors of the conflict, direct strong effect on the framing of the conflict victims. The result demonstrates that Saudis is having a strong political relationship with Pakistan therefore in the Yemen conflict Yemen government (backed by Saudi Arabia) is demonstrated as more positive and Houthis rebels as negative. On the other side, Syria does not have a strong relationship with Pakistan so the Syrian war is demonstrated as the confusing war between different groups where no one is positively portrayed. The result demonstrates closer the political proximity between reporting country and conflict actor, the greater the chance that the actor will have highly empathized and opposite side framing will be highly brutalized.

**Keywords:** *Political Proximity, Yemen Conflict, Syrian Conflict, Victim, Framing, News Media*

## **Introduction**

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union world shifted from bipolar to unipolar, in the past when both the United State of America and the Soviet Union were in power, the world is considered to be bipolar. The shift from bipolar to unipolar brought an enormous misbalance in the world's political power system (Dahl, 2013; Joseph, 2014). The end of the cold war brought numerous conflicts in which millions of people died. From Asia to Africa number of conflicts are going on, including Afghanistan, Kashmir, Rohingya, Yemen, Syria, and many in Africa. In the contemporary satellite world, people only know those conflicts which are being depicted by the media (Joseph, 2014). The conflict which does not get the media attention is almost stealth conflicts, about which the common man does not know. For example, in Rwanda, millions of innocent people were killed but the rest of the world knew nothing about them because they were ignored by the media. Now the question comes to mind that why media depicts some conflicts heavily and why media ignore other conflicts (Banda, 2008). From journalistic standards of objectivity and neutrality media should show the suffering of every conflict victim similarly. Unfortunately, it is not happening, media prioritizing some conflict and their victims and ignoring other conflicts and their victims. Past researches have tried to give different answers about media such behavior. Some researchers believe that ideology is one of the important factors which guide the media to sympathize with some conflict victims and distance some conflict victims. People who are ideological more nearer to reporting media will get high sympathy and those who belong to the opposite ideology their suffering during the international conflict will be muted (Kothari, 2010). Similarly, some researchers believe that religious proximity between reporting media and conflicts actors is an important reason for their framing on media. Those conflict actors, which are having religious proximity with the reporting media will be emphasized and those who are having other religions will be neglected (Saleem, 2007). Some studies demonstrate that cultural ties between the reporting media and conflicts actors might play an important role in their framing. Sympathy framing will be reserved only for those victims who are culturally nearer to report media. Likewise, people from other cultures will have less empathy on the reporting media (Van Gorp, 2007). In the same way, few studies suggest that economic ties play an important role in the depiction of conflict victims in reporting media, if any actor in the conflict has strong ties with the media of reporting state that actor will be depicted as more innocent and sympathetic. Therefore several factors might become the reason for the depiction of conflict victims (Greenwood & Jenkins, 2015). Through a single study one cannot test all the factors therefore in this study two such conflicts are selected in which all the actors are Muslim thus the factor of religious proximity is controlled in this study. It means any variety in the framing of the Syrian and Yemen conflict will not be because of religious proximity. Similarly, both conflicts are happening on Arab soil, and the main actors in both conflicts are not only Muslim but are having similar cultures. Culture means people who speak the same language, same dressing, etc. Thus in this particular study, both religious and cultural proximities are also controlled. The important thing which will be tested in this paper is political proximity or bilateral relation which affects the framing of both the actors. As Saudi Arabia is having a very strong friendly relationship with Pakistan and also has good

economical ties, on the other side Syria is not having antagonistic relation with Pakistan but is equally not as affable relation as Saudi Arabia (Hamid Al-Watary, 2018). Consequently, the study will revolve around the two variables political relation (Independent variable) and framing (Dependent variable) in Pakistani media.

### **Problem Statement**

Religious and political proximities both have great relationships in the depiction of international conflict victims. It is highly dubious that either religious proximity or political proximity has more effect on the framing of conflict victims. Since 9/11 it is considered that religious proximity is the only factor that affects the framing of conflict victims. The key aim of current research, therefore, is to make the comparison that either religious proximity has more effect on framing or political proximity has more effect on the framing of conflict victims.

### **Research Question**

**RQ1.** Do Pakistani, Media use barbaric frames or native frames in depicting the victims of the Yemen & Syrian Conflict?

**H1.** Saudi Arabia will be framed as victims in Yemen Conflict and Houthi rebels will be depicted as the oppressor

**H2.** In the Syrian conflict, nobody will be depicted as a victim or oppressor

### **Literature Review**

The effect of religious proximity on the framing of victims mostly comes from the literature of terrorist events. During terrorist incidents media frames the victims and oppressors based on ideological proximity, political proximity, and religious proximity. For example, in many cases, studies provide clearly that the religious identity of any oppressor or attacker plays an important role (OGBUEHI, 2020). If that attacker belongs to the Muslim religion then the report is very intensive frequent and it does not count this incident as the effort of an individual but connect such incident with their religious ideology. Likewise, if some attacker is Christian or non-Muslim, then the act is presented as a mistake committed by an individual. Similarly, other factors also force the journalist to frame the actions. Sri Lankan Bombing which was done by a Muslim was presented very differently in both Indian and Pakistani Media. The religious identity of the attacker brought a very different framing in both India and Pakistan. Indian media presented this bombing as an international terrorist effort backed by Pakistan and Muslim ideology. On the other hand, Pakistan media presented this incident as an intentional effort by an Indian intelligence agency to create a difference between Sri Lankan Muslims and Buddhists. Similarly, an attack in New Zealand carried out by Christian at Mosque was presented in a very different way in most of the European media (Hoon, 2021b). The identical nature of the attack is carried by a Muslim was affiliated with

Muslim ideology, but the Newzeland act was mostly presented as an act of an individual having some psychological disorder (Hoon, 2021a).

Multi Proximity model is used in Media studies by Yang (2019) which demonstrates that media framing during terrorist incidents is based on three proximities. Three proximity includes ideological, bilateral relation, and other proximities (religious) proximities (Yang & Chen, 2019). Many researchers in their research work have tested this proximity model. This study will focus on the one prong of this model that is political proximity. In the same way, cultural proximity also plays an important role, in USA white female murderer is presented very differently as compared to black females. White females are more sympathized than black females. Correspondingly cultural proximity plays important role in international conflict. In Rwanda, millions of people died but they were ignored by the western media because it was happening on African soil which is quite different from the European culture. Likewise, ideological proximity also plays an important role. In 1983 Soviet Union shot down the Korean airplane, and a similar incident happened in 1988 when American shoot down the Iranian airplane. Both incidents were similar but results showed that both incidents were differently portrayed because of their ideological differences (Robert M. Entman, 2009). In the first accident, Korean air passengers were highly sympathized and humanized by the international media, but on the other hand, the Iranian passengers were portrayed as victims of mistake. The media used the "brutal killing" in the first incident but in the second incident, the media portrayed the Iranian passengers as killed by mistake (Robert M. Entman, 2009). The Entman summarized that while the Russian assault on Korean aircraft boosted empathy with the victims of Korean aircraft, in the Iranian case such understanding was absent. Farish & Yousafzai's (2020) research indicates that operation Zarb-e-Azb framing in Chinese and American media also showed that political proximity was one of the major reasons in showing operation Zarb-e-Azab as positive or negative. Chinese media has a strong bilateral relationship with Pakistan, therefore Chinese media portrayed Pakistan as the victim of operation Zarb-e-Azb. On the other hand, the USA was having a not strong political relationship with Pakistan, American authorities regularly showed reservations on operation Zarb-e-Azb (Farish & Yousafzai, 2020). The American media continually portrayed Pakistan as negative and did not portray Pakistan as the victim. Palestinian-Israeli Conflict was also one of the examples of media bias. Israel was presented as positive and victim of conflict by those media which are having good political relations with Israel (Viser, 2003). On the other hand, Palestinians were presented as victims and innocent by those media whose state is having good bilateral relations with Palestinian authorities. Even Uk media is depicted very differently from American media because Americans are having very strong political and economic relations with Israel, that why Israel was presented more positively by American media than the Uk media (Viser, 2003).

Fengler's (2020) study of the Ukraine conflict in 13 different countries revealed that European countries also depicted the conflict with different frames which suit their state interest (Fengler et al., 2020). The result demonstrated that the framing of the Ukraine conflict changed from one country to another, which might be the result of the geographical, cultural, and political

proximity of the reporting country with Ukraine. The result also indicated that more prominent and intense coverage was found in those countries that were having close geographical proximity with Ukraine. Those countries who were geographical away from Ukraine gave little attention to the conflict, like Portugal and Netherland. Economic proximity was also found a great reason for framing conflict victims in Polish and German media, because of their strong economic ties with Ukraine, their media depicted the conflict in accord with economic ties (Fengler et al., 2020). Domestic and regional politics also played important role in the depiction of the Ukraine conflict; some of the countries framed the issue according to their EU policies.

In the perspective of the Syrian refugee catastrophe in Europe, the study examined how news stories about the Syrian refugee disaster are presented by media in Greece and Macedonia, two neighboring countries on the Balkan migrant route (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018). By applying framing theory as an investigative framework, this study exercised Benson's (2013) paradigmatic "security/threat" and "humanitarian/victim" frame dichotomy. The framing analysis of six publish media outlets in Greece and Macedonia (N = 660) examined the diversity of subframes and frame, result indicates depiction of Syrian refugees were presented negatively in both the European countries. Most of the stories in both media represented the refugee as a social burden. However, in some stories, they were also depicted, as potential terrorists. Only in a few stories, refugees were presented as positive, especially in Greece Newspaper (Bosilkov & Drakaki, 2018). The result demonstrates that both political and media system does affect the framing of any victims in international conflict. The question of objectivity and neutrality has its place but is quite beneath the political and cultural proximity.

### **Yemen and Syrian Conflict**

In January 2011 the university students in Sana came out on the streets they were protesting in the streets for change and bribery of the current government. This all happened because President Abu Saleh was unable to provide the necessities to the common people of Yemen. But this protest finally emerged in armed conflict between the government forces and Houthi rebels (Winter, 2011). March 2015 was the worst ever year in Yemen's history when the civil war began. The two main actors of the conflict are Houthis Rebels and the Government of President Abdul Rubu Mansoor Al Haadi. Houthi Rebels are being supported by Iran and the Yemeni government is being supported by Saudi Arabia along with another foreign actor (Gros, Gard-Murray, & Bar-Yam, 2015). Saudi Arabia's intrusion internationalized this issue. Yemen is most of its history is surrounded by the shadow of civil wars. Starting from 1962 up till now many conflicts have emerged in Yemen. But current civil war got much more attention than the previous incident (Al Dosari & George, 2020). Yemen is a poor country and these civil wars and conflicts brought more suffering to the common man. The involvement of Iran and Saudi brought more ethnic division in Yemen which might cast more damage to the economically poor Yemen. Some conflict analyst believes that the Yemen conflict is a proxy war between two ethnic power Iran and Saudi.

Syrian conflict commenced in March 2011 as a part of a series of Arab Spring. The condition in Syria became out of control in May 2011, while the President Asd government reacted with a forceful crackdown through the military to end the protest (Heydemann, 2020). This crackdown eventually converted into a civil war. This also provided great hope and a chance for the jihadist group to find a good to operate. The Syrian conflict is almost similar where president Bashar al Assad does not want to quit the government and the opposition side blames Bashar al Assad for corruption and other charges (Hellmueller & Zhang, 2019). In this case, Iran is backing up President Bashar al Assad, and rebels are being supported by the international forces.

### **Pakistan Relation with Saudi Arabia and Syria**

Pakistan's foreign policy is pretty confusing in the Syrian conflict because there are too many actors involved in the conflict. On one side Pakistan has strong political and economic relation with China and quite a fair relation with Iran, and these two countries are supporting president Assad and their sitting government. That is why Pakistan's stance is not so directed and clear (Ramani, 2016). Similarly, Pakistan does not have a very strong economic and political relationship with the Syrian government as Pakistan has with China and Saudi Arabia. Pakistan took too long to record its stance on the Syrian issue, first, the real response came from the Pakistani side during the Summit of Non-Aligned Movement held by Iran in August 2012. Pakistan does not support any actor in the Syrian conflict and is strict its old stance based on nonintervention in any international conflict. Pakistan resists any forceful government transformation in Syria (Ramani, 2016). Pakistan held the same stance in the United Nations too, on the issue of Syria. Pakistan compliments the independence and geographical integrity of Syria. Pakistan's response has been cautious. Neutrality is the right policy on Syria considering that close friends are pursuing conflicting interests in Syria.

On the other hand in Yemen situation is rather different. Pakistan's close allies and economic friend Saudi Arabia is personally involved in the conflict. In the Yemen war, Pakistan did not participate directly but Pakistan continually affirmed the Saudi stance on the Yemen conflict. Pakistan strongly condemned the attack on Saudi soil (Wolf, 2021). Pakistan foreign office on March 2020 condemned the attack on Saudi Arabia and criticized the Houthis rebels for this attack; similarly attack launched by Saudi in March 2018 was condemned by the Pakistani foreign office. On the other side, Pakistan never condemned any attack from Saudi Arabia on Yemen territory. The foreign office said: "The Government and people of Pakistan reiterate their full support and solidarity with the leadership, the government and people of Saudi Arabia against any threats to its territorial integrity and the Harman Sharifain (religious places) (Ahmed & Akbarzadeh, 2020).

### **Methodology**

In pursuing to examine the framing of Yemen and Syrian conflict two English newspapers were selected from Pakistan. One incident from each conflict was selected. These incidents were selected because most of the causalities happened during this time. Two months reporting after one attack was taken as a sample from each conflict. Just to check the frame Robert Entman's four



functions of frames were selected. In his work, Entman recommends analyzing frames identifying an issue, event, and actors (e.g. individuals, groups, nations, etc.). Following each is identified; Entman advocate identifies frame functions to analyze the frame. Frame functions comprise of four steps: defining problematic effects/conditions (Problem/What is going on?); identifying cause/agent (Why?/Who?); endorsing remedy (What to do?/How to resolve?/What is suggested?); conveying moral judgment (Evaluation. Who is good, bad, neutral, etc.? What is right and wrong? Why is it right or wrong?). To identify the function of frames content analysis was used (Robert M Entman, 2007).

### Population & Sampling

The population consists of all the English elite newspapers from Pakistan. The sample chosen is *The News* and *Daily Dawn* from Pakistan.

#### Attack by Party A (Houthis)

January 2020 Attack by Houthis

#### Attack by Party B (Saudi Coalition)

September 2019, Air Strike by the Saudi-Led Military Coalition

#### Syria Conflict

#### Attack by Party A (Bashar Al Asad Government)

21 August 2013 Chemical attack

#### Attack by Party B (Opponent Regime)

September 2017 US-Led Strike killed many civilian

### Results and Finding

The result indicates that most stories of the *Daily Dawn*, and *The News* gave more coverage to the Yemen Conflict; on the other hand Syrian conflict got very little coverage, which also endorses the assumption that conflict which is politically more proximate to the media will get more coverage than the other conflict. As Saudi Arabs is having a strong political relationship with Pakistan then Syria, as a result, Yemen conflict got more coverage than the Syrian conflict. Almost 70 stories got a place from the Yemen conflict in both *Daily Dawn* and *The News*. On the other hand, just 37 stories got the place in both leading English dailies of Pakistan. Among both the dailies, *Daily Dawn* gives more prominent coverage as compared to *The News*.

Newspaper	Yemen Conflict	Syrian Conflict	
The News	33	17	50
Daily Dawn	37	20	57
	70	37	107

## Responsibility Frame

In the responsibility frame, it is highlighted that which actors of the conflict are responsible for the conflict. In both the conflict framing is quite mystifying, mostly story not putting the responsibility clearly on any actors. In most of the stories, it is depicted that both conflicts are proxy wars between the two Muslim countries Iran and Saudi Arabia, who want their hegemony in the Arab world. However, in the Syrian conflict, most of the responsibility is put on the Asad regime and their government. On the other hand in the Yemen conflict, very less stories put the responsibilities on the current Yemeni government. In Yemen, case responsibility is put mostly on Houthis rebels.

Newspaper	Yemen government Responsible	Houthis Responsible	Mix	Asad Responsible	Opposition Responsible	Mix
The News	05	10	18	07	03	07
Daily Dawn	07	08	22	08	04	08
	12	20	40	15	07	15

## Solution Frame

Entman's four functions of framing the solution presented in any story are also very helpful in depicting the frame. For example in Yemen conflict Houthis believe that change is the only solution to end the crisis, on the other hand, the Yemeni government believes that illegitimate agitation and resistance are the problems. For the Yemeni government, the solution is to end this gun resistance. Most of the stories of *Daily Dawn* have presented the solution which is mixed however most stories are depicting the solution which the Yemeni government is endorsing which is to end the resistance. The other daily *News* is also showing a similar pattern. Both the English dailies criticized Saudi Arabia for their intervention in this conflict but also presented Iran as negative for backing proxy wars. However, on the other hand in the Syrian conflict, Assad is mostly held responsible for the entire crisis and most of the stories do depict that Assad should give up the government to find a diplomatic solution to the existing crisis in Syria. The other group and international forces are also held responsible for this but most of the stories do have a fire depiction that Assad is the main cause of this crisis and like other Arab leaders he should also quit the control.

Newspaper	Yemen government Solution	Houthis Solution	Mix	Asad Solution	Opposition Solution	Mix
The News	16	04	13	02	10	05
Daily Dawn	15	06	16	10	04	06

### Morality and Moral Judgment Frame

The last framing function is moral judgment; morally words will be very important. Morally loaded words are aggressor, terrorist, etc. are used for which actor in the conflict. The result depicts that mostly in both the conflict nobody was presented as the hero, in both the conflict both the actors of the conflict are portrayed as negative, however, the Asad government is presented more negative than the Saleh government in Yemen. Most of the negative and loaded words were used for the Asad government. However, the other actor is also not positively portrayed that show that most of the journalist depicted the real picture of both the conflict but the Syrian government is presented more negatively as compared to any other actor in the conflict. This could be the reason for the alleged nuclear attack, which brought Asad's character as more villain in the Syrian conflict.

Newspaper	Yemen government Negatively Portrayed	Houthis Negatively	Mix	Asad Solution Negatively portrayed	Opposition Negatively portrayed	Mix
The News	10	14	09	11	03	03
Daily Dawn	09	12	16	12	04	04

### Conclusion

The overall result depicts that the Pakistani media maintained the objectivity of the journalism and depicted the true picture of both the conflict. The objectivity of journalism demands that journalists should not be biased and should not tilt toward one party. These two conflicts show a balance reporting, however, in coverage, the Yemen conflict was given more

space than the Syrian conflict. One of the possible causes that Pakistan's friend Saudi Arabia is involved in the conflict might be the reason for such depiction. On the other hand, Pakistan has a neutral relationship with the Syrian government that why Syrian was not given as much coverage as given to the Yemen conflict. Secondly in the responsibility frame, Houthis are held responsible during the Yemen conflict, it might be because they are fighting against a sitting government that is backed and supported by the international states and Saudi Arabia. Houthis are also attacking Saudi Arabia, Pakistan have very strong economic and political relation with Saudi Arabia. Similarly, Muslim top religious' holy places are there. On such grounds, it might be concluded that Houthis are presented as negative and also put the responsibility of conflict on their shoulders. Pakistan government and their foreign officer spoke person condemned every attack by Houthis on Saudi land. This political proximity between Pakistan and Saudi Arabia could be the reason for Houthi's depiction as negative in Pakistan English dailies. On the other hand, our no allies are involved in the Syrian conflict directly so that is why the framing of the Syrian conflict was quite different. In the Syrian case, the rebel forces are not as negatively portrayed as Houthis are portrayed in Yemen. Instead of a sitting government, President Assad is strongly criticized for their irresponsible attitude. The overall result shows that political proximity plays an important role in the depiction of conflict victims in any international conflict.

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