Afghan Migration Coverage Of 2023: An Analysis From Pakistan

Farrukh Shahzad[1] , Tabinda Sadiq[2] , Tehmina Ashfaq Qazi[3]

Abstract:

The study has been designed to investigate the coverage of Afghan migrants in leading Newspapers of Pakistan. Afghan refugees are residing in Pakistan from the past 3 decades. The study focused on the news coverage of recent Afghan refugee migration from Pakistan following the government of Pakistan decision to send off undocumented migrants to Afghanistan. For Newspapers, daily Dawn, Daily Jang and Nawaiwaqt were selected. The studies use framing as a theoretical framework to analyze the treatment given to Afghan refugees in the selected press. The finding of the study indicates that the Nawaiwaqt gave more favorable coverage to Afghan refugees followed by Dawn and least was given by Daily Jang. While unfavorable treatment was highest in the coverage of Jang newspaper.

Keyword*s: Afghan migrants; framing; Dawn; Jang; Nawaiwaqt; treatment.*

Introduction:

Pakistan hosted around 3 million Afghans before 2021, of which 1.39 million are Proof of Registration (PoR) card holders, around 88,299 are Afghan Citizen Card (ACC) holders and the rest are considered unregistered.17 Adding 700,000 new[1] arrivals after 2021, the number of unregistered Afghans reached around 1.7 million. Around 4 million Afghans currently live in Pakistan. Because there is no clear categorization supported by refugee laws, UNHCR and the Pakistani government differ on the number of Afghans covered by their respective mandates. Although UNHCR works closely with the 6+Government of Pakistan, it only accepts POR cardholders and focuses its resources on refugees living in refugee camps, who represent only 31.3% of the registered POR population. Pakistan has handled the refugee issue in a unique way: a way that reflects the country's ideological foundations, the country's international obligations, and its unique geography. Pakistan adheres to the Jus Soli principle in granting citizenship (UNESCO, 2023)

Due to the deteriorating law and order situation in Pakistan, the Pakistani government has decided to send back around 1.7 million undocumented Afghan refugees. Pakistan recently announced that undocumented foreigners living in the country must leave the country by November 1, 2023 or face deportation. The government has launched a nationwide operation to deport illegal foreigners, most of whom are Afghans, after the voluntary departure deadline.

Literature review:

[1]Bahria University, Islamabad Pakistan.
[2]Bahria University, Islamabad Pakistan.
[3]Bahria University Islamabad, Pakistan.
Corresponding Author: Farrukh Shahzad, Bahria University Islamabad, Pakistan.

Immigration became a pressing political issue across various nations recently, largely due to multifaceted conflicts leading to a significant surge in migration crises. This rush, particularly evident in Europe, has been aggravated by a lack of consistent strategy. Recent studies have highlighted a widespread public desire for closer collaboration among states in handling migration streams, though the specific cooperative policy agendas favored remain unclear (Hussain et al. 2021.

Various censuses have revealed a variety of attitudes toward relocation, with a general tendency toward negative public observations. Notably, a 2006 report by the European Commission observed a growing negative perception of migration throughout Europe and highlighted prevalent sense of uncertainty linked with migration in European public surveys (Beutin, et al., 2006). This trend is perhaps unsurprising, given the significant influence of anti-elitist anti-immigration representatives and adverse media reporting on the public discourse surrounding migration in many European countries in recent years. Research conducted by the European-Commission has shown that both the citizens and immigrants perceive managements to have a adverse influence on migrant incorporation and advocate for closer collaboration within European Union countries in handling migrant and refugee flows (European Commission, 2011, 2014). Both groups also think that damaging press reporting of migrants contributes to the development of negative migrant labels, but they also see prospects to turn the tide and promote a more positive perception of migrants and their contributions to society by portraying migrants in a more truthful, objective, and realistic manner. (European Commission, 2011).

The depiction, classification, representation of migrants and migration hold significant importance, particularly when done by political figures who represent the populace and news media outlets whose authority relies on conveying truthful narratives and representing events accurately (Chalaby, 1998). Reportage and comments not only imitate ongoing proceedings, existing viewpoints but actively shape our understanding of these events' significance (Hall, 1997). The influence extends to how we observe refugees and migrants and a range of interpretations available regarding migration narratives. The analysis of US media highlights how the language used in immigration politics can influence perceptions, potentially hindering support for immigrant groups in accepting countries (Newton, 2008).

Portrayal on Murray Edelman concept of reduction signs; Newton illustrates the term; "immigrant"; encapsulates various societal perceptions and ideals (Newton, 2008).

Similarly, Australian research underscores the role of media stereotyping and categorization in shaping public opinion, often leading to prioritization of punitive immigration policies over concerns for migrant welfare (Bleiker et al., 2013).

Community stances concerning migration are not only imitated in but also inclined by news coverage. Though, the reception and interpretation of news accounts are also conditioned by the political and policy context (Boomgaarden, 2007).

Research suggests that media coverage can have significant effects on public perceptions, especially when the issue receives heightened visibility, and when the media messaging consistently presents biased or one-sided narratives. Moreover, studies in media effects have shown an increased probability of ferocity against social; that are portrayed either as culprits or victims of violence (Scheufele & Brosius, 2001).

The Reporting sometimes conflates asylum pursuers and refugees with other groups of migrants through inexact tagging. This confusion regarding terminology has become a significant central opinion for both persons advocating in contradiction of adverse mythologies related with asylum pursuers and refugees (Bleasdale, 2008). A philosophy of doubt surrounds

the reasons of asylum seekers, represented by the recurrent usage of terms like; fake asylum pursuer in conservative media. As questions about national border control and security gain prominence, the difference between allegedly unlawful and valid asylum seekers becomes a key justification for punitive public policy. The press increasingly portrays a migration scheme, and by extension, a nation, as being misguided, and bargained by immigrants, often depicted as disposed to to misconduct and violence (Kilby, Horowitz, & Hylton, 2013; Philo, Briant, & Donald, 2013). Some critics liken scandalous media reporting, anti-immigrant party-political orotundity, and aggressive community attitudes (Taylor, 2014).

It's crucial to recognize that although some news outlets may use the terms 'refugee' and 'migrant' interchangeably, these terms hold distinct meanings. According to the United Nations, refugees are individuals who have crossed national borders out of a well-founded fear of persecution based on factors such as race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion (Steimel, 2009). On the other hand, asylum-seekers are individuals who have crossed borders seeking protection but have not yet been granted it (UNESCO, 2016). Upon receiving protection, asylum seekers are recognized as refugees. In contrast, migrants are defined as people who choose to move across borders, either temporarily or permanently, without external compelling factors (UNESCO, 2016). Generally, Framing is important aspect to create awareness among people (Khan, M. Z. et. al., 2024).

Labeling refugees as migrants in media coverage is inaccurate and significantly influences public perception. It implies that refugees have voluntarily chosen to move, thereby downplaying the fear and threat of violence they face. The typical media portrayal of refugees often sidelines their voices, relying primarily on governmental perspectives (Greenberg & Hier, 2001). This limited representation of opinions restricts the breadth of viewpoints presented. To fully understand the impact of these representations on media framing, it's essential to examine the various sources and perspectives reflected in news articles. Awareness through media has an important role (Khan, D. M. Z. et. al., 2024).

Theoretical Framework

The study utilizes framing theory as its conceptual framework. Framing, as defined by Goffman (1974), involves the classification and categorization of information, enabling audiences to interpret and assign meaning to their surroundings. Entman (1993) further elaborates framing as the process of emphasizing certain aspects of reality within a text advocate for specific problem definitions, causal interpretations, moral evaluations, or treatment recommendations. Frames function as meta-communicative structures employing various rhetorical devices such as metaphors, lexical choices, images, symbols, and actors to convey implicit messages to media users (Gamson, 1995). Previous research has distinguished between issue-specific frames and generic frames, the latter encompassing structural features applicable across diverse topics and issues (De Vreese, 2005; Elsamni, 2016; Semetko & Valkenburg, 2000; Khurshid, A. 2018).

Methods

The study uses content analysis to analyses the data as this method is useful to extract meaning from the content (Krippenddorff, 2018). Systematic sampling technique was used in selection of the news stories. Contextual unit was the stories related to Afghan refugees, while recording unit was the headline and intro of the news story. News stories published from 1st October2023 to 31st January 2024 were selected for analysis. The selected news stories content was analyzed for the treatment given to the issue were favorable, unfavorable, and neutral. The study selected three National Dailies of country, Daily Dawn, Daily Jang and Nawa-i- Waqt. Daily Dawn was selected as it is the one most prestigious elite press which has influence on national and

International issues. Similairy, Daily Jang is the oldest and popular urdu Newspaper in the country and have a greater on public opinion formation. Nawaiwaqt is also the oldest newspaper in country and this paper has been instrumental in Afghan issues since Soviet era (Hussain et al. 2021).

Key terms Operationalization

Framing Emphasis on some aspects of a particular event or issue may appear more prominent in newspapers compared to others.

Treatment Coverage of the Afghan refugees, what topic and issues are highlighted and how the salience is emphasized.

Favorable. News Story containing positive attributes such as issues, problems faced by Afghan refugees. Their sufferings have been given coverage.

Unfavorable. News Story containing negative attributes such as security issues, Terrorism etc, with reference to the Concerns surrounding Afghan refugees include security issues, terrorism, overpopulation, economic crises, and rehabilitation.

Neutral. News Story contains impartial contents related to the Afghan Refugees

Table

Table1.1

Treatment	Dawn	Daily Jang	Nawaiwaqt
Favorable	30%	16%	47%
Unfavorable	19%	43%	14%
Neutral	51%	41%	39%
	100%	100%	100%

Table 1.1 presents the treatment of the coverage in Dawn, Daily Jang and Nawaiwaqt during the selected time period. The results indicate that in Dawn, the Neutral Frame got the highest coverage (51%) while the Favorable Frame got 30% coverage. The lowest coverage was received by the unfavorable frame (19%). The results indicate that in Daily Jang, the Favorable Frame got the highest coverage (43%). Meanwhile, the Neutral Frame got slight less coverage (41%). The lowest coverage was received by the unfavorable frame (19%).

Discussion and Analysis

The present study was focused to analyze the nature of coverage given to Afghan refugees by the selected print media of Pakistan after the government of Pakistan decision to send off the undocumented refugees to Afghanistan. The study found that the selected media outlets gave extensive coverage to Afghan refugees. The coverage given by Dawn was most neutral and favorable where issues of Refugees were given more coverage where unfavorable attribution given to refugees was very less. The coverage of Afghan refugees by Daily Jang in the selected timeframe showed unfavorable coverage was given the highest coverage followed by the Neutral Frame while favorable coverage received the lowest coverage in Daily Jang. The Nawaiwaqt gave more favorable coverage to Afghan refugees by highlighting the issues and problems faced by them. The second highest frame was Neutral in the coverage of the Nawaiwaqt and unfavorable was least in the coverage of the newspaper. The selected media outlets most highlighted the plight of Afghan Refugees namely accommodation, civic issues, education and intimidation. However, the Daily Jang also highlighted the attribution of security

with these refugees as part of security problems in Pakistan. The study has provided insight into how afghan refugees are being covered by the Mainstream Print Media of Pakistan. This may be useful the policymakers and media scholars to understand the portrayal of Afghan refugees in Pakistan and can help in policy formation. The study has some limitations. It is proposed that future studies can include electronic media and social media to have multifaceted insight of both traditional and social media treatment of Afghan refugees.

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