

CLIMATE CHANGE COVERAGE IN LEADING ENGLISH PRESS OF PAKISTAN DURING 2024: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This research examined climate change coverage by Dawn and The News International, two leading English-language newspapers of Pakistan, during 2024 through qualitative content analysis. The study focused on thematic categorization, editorial tone, and narrative (qualitative) framing of climate-related 150 news stories, reports and articles. The findings discovered that Dawn prioritized policy discussions, scientific advances and the institutional responses whereas The News International focused on socio-economic impacts, grassroots activism, and the environmental justice. The analysis identified five main themes including climate diplomacy and policy, extreme weather conditions, technology-driven solutions, socio-economic impacts, and environmental challenges in the selected press coverage. The analysis of the editorial tone highlighted that Dawn upheld a policy-driven and neutral stance, while The News International espoused an advocacy-focused and critical approach. Philologically, the analysis also highlighted differences in expert engagement and persuasive strategies. The study concluded that both leading English newspapers of Pakistan demonstrated complementary roles in determining climate discourse in the country, stressing upon the need for diverse media narratives in climate journalism.

Key Words: Climate Change, Climate Journalism, Pakistani Newspapers, Comparative Analysis, Qualitative Analysis

INTRODUCTION

Climate change has become the dreadful environmental threat of the 21st century, potentially reshaping the existence of life on earth (Ayoub & Ahmed, 2024). Pakistan, a developing nation in South Asia has been 5th worst-affected country in the world, despite <1% contribution to global greenhouse emissions (Ahmed & Luqman, 2024). The country is vulnerable due to its geography, and economic dependence on climate-sensitive sectors, and inadequate capacity to mitigate climate risks. Increasing climate temperatures, rising sea levels, extreme and unpredictable weather patterns, especially simultaneous torrential rains and extreme

droughts, smog, melting ice caps, decrease in fresh water reservoirs, and reduced crop produce are some of the major impacts of climate change that Pakistan has suffered during recent times (Ahmed et al., 2024). This worsened scenario has affected every sector of life, ranging from economy to healthcare, and agriculture to governance. Given the importance and its role in information dissemination, and influence on policy and public agendas, media can shape public understanding, influence policy discussions, and mobilize action on climate change (Bibi, 2024). Yet, climate change has redefined media narratives across the globe, with clear disparities between global North and

Global South (Tahir & Ahmed, 2024). The evolutionary media coverage patterns reflect shifts in priorities, societal impacts, and challenges. While climate journalism in Global North emphasizes more on solutions, the media in global South has fallen prey to influence of policy agenda, episodic coverage, orthodox editorial approaches, and tenacious gaps in equitable representation. The efficacy of climate journalism in Pakistan is no exception to it due to influence by a range of factors including resource constraints, literacy limitations, lack of training, and limited access to expert knowledge (Sharif & Medvecky, 2018). However, the recent years have witnessed an improvement in quantity and quality of climate journalism in Pakistan. Contemporary trends suggest a noteworthy shift in media framing of climate change, with the journalists moving away from the traditional narratives to the solutions journalism (Hassan et al., 2025). The contemporary media coverage of climate change in Pakistan has started prioritizing actionable insights including policy frameworks, renewable energy transitions, and advocacy and awareness agendas, diverging from the typical settled science and political struggle frames, influenced by policy agenda (Khan et al., 2024).

Insights from the Existing Literature: Although systematic challenges in balancing reporting supported by scientific knowledges and facts, ethical considerations, training and literacy hiccups, and public awareness and engagement persist, the Pakistani media has witnessed a shift in reporting climate change more than ever during last few years. Research highlights evolutionary trends, structural barriers, and editorial biases that have shaped the nascent climate journalism in the country. Ejaz et al. (2023) carried out a detailed analysis of the climate coverage by *The News International*, *Dawn*, and *The Express Tribune* for a period of 11 years (2010-2021) to explore the dominant themes on climate politics, governance and policy, social impacts, climate science and solutions. Since Pakistani newsrooms have always prioritized news related to politics and crime, relegating climate change to an “after-thought” status in the past, Khan (2024) in a scholastic effort highlighted the urgency of climate action in Pakistan, stressing upon the growing challenges related to climate change and the need for improved awareness strategies and reporting.

Ittefaq et al. (2023) discovered that English press outperformed the Urdu newspapers in terms of climate coverage depth in Pakistan, with the former allocating three and half times more space to coverage of complex climate-related issues than merely information about weather forecasts by the latter. However, they highlighted the dilemma of misinformation faced by the English newspapers, with a statistic that only 14% journalists fact-checked information related to climate change. Tahir and Ahmed (2024) found out a moderate positive correlation between preparedness and effectiveness among the journalists, covering environmental issues, with younger journalists expressing more capability than older ones. Saleem and Rahman (2023) explored that Pakistani press predominantly used episodic frames while reporting on climate-related issues, and focused on impacts of disasters and politics rather than deeper contextual analyses. Khan et al. (2024) emphasized that climate-induced displacement remained underreported in the Pakistani media discourse during 2022 floods, focusing more on damages, government response, and rescue efforts. Javed et al. (2020) analyzed the editorial coverage of climate-related issues in four mainstream Pakistani newspapers during 2011–2018, finding out water scarcity being covered the most followed by agriculture and food security. They also discovered that climate coverage in Pakistani press increased year-wise and the newspapers adopted solutions-oriented frames. Asif et al. (2024) explored that Pakistani media covered climate change insufficiently, primarily focusing on episodic reports with minimal depth. They also discovered that media coverage was influenced by political agenda, media’s vested interests and lesser concern for public interest. Hussain (2024) identified a focus on threat frames over efficacy frames in the leading Pakistani newspapers, highlighting the imbalance that fostered climate fatalism rather than public engagement.

Objectives of the study: This research has focused to analyze the themes on climate change, covered by *Dawn* and *The News International*, the leading English newspapers during 2024, examine the editorial stance by both dailies, compare the differences in framing of climate change between the selected newspapers, and investigate the linguistic choices employed by the climate journalism.

Problem Statement: Climate change has emerged as an existential threat to life on earth, particularly in the developing nations like Pakistan. This adverse change has been manifested in extreme weather events, resulting in decline in agricultural productivity, healthcare dilemmas, and environmental degradation. Despite the urgency of the crisis, public awareness, engagement and action, and the policy response have been inadequate and inconsistent. The media has the potential to influence public perception and understanding of climate change. This study is significant in view of the mounting perseverance of climate change in Pakistan. It is important to understand the critical role of media in shaping public discourse on environmental issues. While many studies are available that sought out the role of media in creating awareness among the public (Khan & Ahmed, 2024; Younis & Ahmed, 2024), challenges to climate journalists in the country (A. Ahmed et al., 2024; Ayaz & Ahmed, 2024; Ejaz et al., 2024; Ittefaq et al., 2023), and solutions journalism in view of climate change and quantitative framing of climate change in Pakistani media (Hassan et al., 2025), limited literature is available that has explored qualitative framing by the Pakistani newspapers, especially in a comparative framework. Media coverage of climate change in terms of editorial focus and tone, frequency, linguistic choices, and qualitative (thematic) framing may lead to variations in climate change discourse. This study has examined the coverage of *Dawn* and *The News International*, the two of Pakistan's leading English dailies. It has analyzed the emergent themes, editorial tone, and linguistic framing in coverage of climate change during 2024. This research has taken into account the news reports, articles and feature stories, which explicitly covered climate change issues in Pakistan. While analyzing and comparing the qualitative frames of climate change by *Dawn* and *The News International*, this study has provided valuable insights into framing of climate change as a social justice challenge, policy issue, and a scientific concern. This research has been of significant relevance with respect to Pakistan's increasing vulnerability to climate-induced disasters.

Research Questions: The current research has been guided by the following research questions:

- RQ1. What were the dominant themes in coverage of climate change by *Dawn* and *The News International* during 2024?
- RQ2. What was the editorial stance of *Dawn* and *The News International* while covering climate change issues during 2024?
- RQ3. What were the differences in terms of frequency and tone in coverage of climate change between *Dawn* and *The News International* during 2024?
- RQ4. How did linguistic strategies influence the portrayal of climate change in *Dawn* and *The News International* during 2024?

Theoretical Framework: This study was designed in view of the propositions of the Framing Theory to assess the framing of climate change by *Dawn* and *The News International* in 2024. Framing Theory, presented by Goffman (1974) describes how media emphasis on some aspects of reality downplays others to shape public perception. The current research has examined issue framing via thematic focus and linguistic choices in climate reporting. By drawing a comparison between two newspapers, it has identified variations in policy-driven vs. activism-oriented accounts in these publications, highlighting how media shapes climate discourse in Pakistan, contributing to better-quality environmental communication.

Research Methodology: This research employed a qualitative content analysis approach to investigate the framing of climate change by *Dawn* and *The News International* during 2024. The analysis has explored the thematic focus, editorial tone, and linguistic framing techniques applied by the newspapers in their news reports, opinion pieces, and feature articles, explicitly covering climate change. All news items were collected from the official websites of the newspapers (*dawn.com* and *thenews.com.pk*), digital repositories and online archives. The researchers selected only those articles, which explicitly covered climate change, policies on environment, or climate-induced socio-economic issues. Any articles with just a mention of climate change in passing without substantial discussion were not taken into account.

Ethical Considerations: To ensure transparency and accuracy, the researchers warranted a faithful representation of news items/articles without

misinterpretation, used only publicly available and verifiable data, and were reflexive on their roles.

Data (Qualitative Content) Analysis: The study used thematic analysis to understand the coverage of climate change by the selected newspapers. The researchers also carried out intercoder reliability by independent analysis of articles to confirm consistency in thematic categorization. The articles were categorized based on the recurring themes, including extreme weather conditions (floods, heatwaves etc), climate diplomacy and policy (climate financing, COP29, administrative action),

environmental challenges (pollution, deforestation, biodiversity loss), socio-economic impacts (agriculture, health risks, migration/displacement), and science and technology (climate adaptation, renewable energy). Similarly, while assessing the editorial tone, the researchers assessed whether the newspapers adopted a critical, or neutral, and policy-focused, or advocacy-driven approach. Furthermore, while examining the linguistic choices of the newspapers, the study evaluated rhetoric and persuasive techniques used by the newspaper in climate coverage.

Table 1: Month-wise Frequency and Volume of Coverage of Climate Change by *Dawn* and *The News International* in 2024

Month	No. of Articles by Dawn	No. of Articles by The News International	Total Count of Articles by Both Publication
January	5	4	9
February	6	5	11
March	7	6	13
April	5	5	10
May	6	4	10
June	7	6	13
July	8	7	15
August	6	5	11
September	7	6	13
October	8	7	15
November	7	6	13
December	9	8	17
Total	81	69	150

Table 1 highlighted the frequency and volume of coverage by *Dawn* and *The News International*. It depicted that *Dawn* published more articles (81) than *The News International* (69) to maintain a higher monthly average of publication of news

stories, opinion articles and feature stories on climate change. It also revealed that maximum coverage took place in both newspapers during the months of July, October, and December, likely due to monsoons and COP29.

Table 2: Nature and Depth of Coverage of Climate Change by *Dawn* and *The News International* in 2024

Article Type	Description	No. of Articles by Dawn	No. of Articles by The News International	Total Count of Articles by Both Publications
News Reports	a. Event coverage	40	35	75
	b. Scientific findings			
	c. Policy developments			
Editorials and Opinion	a. Analyses and insights from experts, columnists, and editorial teams	20	15	35
Feature Articles	a. In-depth exploration of climate-related issues	21	19	40

	b. Technological advances and societal impacts			
Total		81	69	150

Table 2 above revealed that in its news reports, *Dawn* published 40 news stories, mainly based on the policy-driven and factual news reporting whereas *The News International* published 35 news stories, leaning toward societal narratives. Similarly, *Dawn* published more expert opinions (20 items) in its editorial and opinion section as

compared to *The News International*, which published 15 opinion pieces, focusing on environmental justice and activism. Although, both dailies gave a fair space of coverage to climate change, *The News International* emphasized more on grassroot level and personal stories.

Table 3: Themes and Sub-Themes Explored in the Coverage of Climate Change by *Dawn* and *The News International* in 2024

Sr. No.	Themes	Sub-themes
1	Extreme Weather Conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Heatwaves b. Unprecedented floods c. Droughts and water shortage
2	Policy & Diplomacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Government policies on climate change b. COP29 and UN Climate Reports c. Climate-financing/ Green-funding d. Carbon-taxation and regulations
3	Environmental Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Deforestation and biodiversity loss b. Air pollution and smog crisis c. Rising sea levels and coastal erosion d. Deforestation and land degradation
4	Socio-Economic Impacts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Climate-induced displacements b. Public health risks c. Agriculture and food security d. Economic consequences
5	Technology & Science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Advances in renewable energy b. Climate adaptation initiatives c. Green transportation/ Electric-vehicle adoption d. Scientific research

Table 3 demonstrated the themes and sub-themes explored by the researchers while analyzing the coverage of climate change by *Dawn* and *The News International* in 2024. It revealed that out of the explored themes, *Dawn* focused the policy, governance, and scientific advances, and was more

aligned with the institutional decision-makers. On the other hand, *The News International* emphasized on human-interest stories and environmental justice, resonating with public interest and grassroot activists.

Table 4: Editorial Tone and Perspective and Audience Appeal Explored in the Coverage of Climate Change by *Dawn* and *The News International* in 2024

Factor	Dawn	The News International
Tone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Neutral b. Policy-driven c. Fact-based 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Critical b. Advocacy-driven c. Activist-oriented
Editorial Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Exploration of policy gaps b. Solution-driven 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Criticism of the government and corporate sector
Audience Appeal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Policymakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Activists

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------|
| b. Researchers | b. Social workers |
| c. Professionals | c. General public |

Table 4 revealed the editorial tone, perspective and audience appeal, explored in the coverage of climate change by *Dawn* and *The News International* in 2024. The researchers discovered that *Dawn* adopted a neutral, policy-driven and fact-driven editorial tone. *Dawn's* tone appeared to be more appealing to the policymakers and academics. On the other hand, the editorial tone of *The News International* was critical, advocacy-driven and activist-oriented in nature. Moreover, the solution-

driven editorial perspective of *Dawn* focused on policy gaps as opposed to the criticism of government and corporate sector by *The News International*. While analyzing the audience appeal strategies by both dailies, the researchers explored that *Dawn* targeted policymakers, researchers and professionals whereas *The News International* emphasized more on targeting activists, social workers and general public, taking interest in reading climate related stories.

Table 5: Prospects and Concerns about the Coverage of Climate Change by *Dawn* and *The News International* in 2024

Publication	Prospects	Concerns
Dawn	a. In-depth policy analysis b. Expert opinions c. Structured coverage	a. Less emphasis on grassroots narratives
The News International	a. Strong community focus b. Investigative journalism c. Activist engagement.	a. Less structured policy analysis b. Less expert opinions

Table 5 reflected the prospects and concerns about the coverage of climate change by *Dawn* and *The News International* in 2024. Prospects determined by the researchers about the coverage of climate change by *Dawn* included in-depth policy analysis, expert opinions and structured coverage whereas strong community focus, investigative journalism and activist engagement remained major strengths of the coverage by *The News International*. Moreover, major concern(s) explored by researchers about the coverage of *Dawn* was lesser emphasis on the grassroots narratives whereas about *The News International* were inadequately structured policy analysis and lesser expert opinions included in the climate change portrayals.

Findings of the Study: The study has explored the following results:

- Dawn* published more news and editorial items than *The News International*, upholding a higher monthly and annual average. Both newspapers peaked in coverage in during the months of July, October, and December, likely due to environment-related event including monsoons, floods and COP29.
- Dawn* prioritized factual and policy-driven coverage as compared to focus on societal narratives by *The News International*. *Dawn*

emphasized more on the expert opinions as against *The News International*, which tilted towards activism and environmental justice.

- Dawn* stressed more on governance, policy, and scientific advances, and aligned with institutional decision-makers, however, *The News International* emphasised grassroots activism and human-interest stories, and resonated with public concerns.
- Dawn* maintained a fact-based and neutral, but policy-driven tone that could appeal policymakers and researchers while *The News International* implemented an advocacy-driven, critical, and activist-oriented stance to target social workers, activists, and the general public.
- Dawn* excelled in structured coverage and policy but lacked grassroots narratives. On the other hand, *The News International* focused on investigative reporting and community engagement but emphasized less on structured policy analysis and published fewer expert opinions in climate reporting.

Discussion: The findings of the research on coverage of climate change, in *Dawn* and *The News International*, the leading Pakistani English newspapers, have provided valuable insights into

media coverage patterns. These results align with the existing body of literature including that of McCombs and Shaw (1972) on media representation, highlighting the role of media in shaping political reality. *Dawn's* policy-driven editorial stance and *The News International's* emphasis on societal narratives on climate change reflect the political reality of Pakistani society in context of climate change and environmental issues. The revelation of peaked coverage during the months of July, October, and December, motivated by environment-related events including monsoons, floods and COP29 demonstrate restricted approach of episodic coverage by Pakistani media (Ahmed et al., 2024; Manzoor & Ali, 2021). Furthermore, policy influence on media coverage of climate change also align with the existing literature (Ahmed et al., 2024).

The thematic focus of *Dawn* on climate governance, policy, and scientific advances aligns with the agenda-setting function of the mass media, whereas emphasis on grassroots climate activism and human-interest stories related to climate change by *The News International* reflects the relatable narratives propagated by the framing theory (Nazeer et al., 2024). Moreover, the underrepresentation of grassroots narratives and climate activism in *Dawn* and the limitations in structured policy analysis by *The News International* mirror the findings from the research on media coverage in developing countries, where interventionist perspective is often overlooked (Ahmad, 2022).

The findings on the editorial tone of *Dawn* and *The News International* provide valuable insights in context of the differential effects of the media usage. *Dawn's* fact-based and neutral tone stands more appealing to the policymakers and researchers. However, the activist-oriented and critical editorial stance by *The News International* focuses on targeting broader audiences, including both general public and the activists (Nawaz & Ali,

2016). These variations in media coverage of climate change highlight the diverse role of media in climate communication to address the gravity of environmental crisis in countries like Pakistan.

The results underscore diverse media approaches in Pakistani society and highlight that the audience cannot rely on just one media outlet to access news and information. Rather, they should reach out diverse media channels for information on climate change to get a broader picture of challenges and potential solutions. Similarly, the policymakers should also access diverse media platforms that may help them in understanding the challenges related to climate change and mitigation strategies to counter the dilemma. The same approach can also guide media and climate change researchers to explore and investigate broader range of areas and issues related to the field.

Conclusion: This study discovered diverse yet complementary roles portrayed by *Dawn* and *The News International*, the two leading English dailies of Pakistan in shaping climate discourse. While *Dawn* focused on factual, scientific, policy-driven, and institutional perspectives, *The News International* prioritized socio-economic impacts, grassroots activism, and environmental justice. Similarly, the analysis of editorial tone demonstrated that *Dawn* adopted a solution-oriented and neutral stance, whereas *The News International* maintained an advocacy-driven, critical approach. The findings of the study underscored the importance of diverse narratives in climate journalism in Pakistan, as both policymaking and grassroots perspectives are necessary for comprehensive understanding of intricate relationship between policy agenda, media coverage and climate awareness in the society. A balanced and integrated approach based on scientific rigor with human-centric storytelling may persuade public engagement and foster effective climate action in Pakistan.

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