

# MEDIA AND PUBLIC AGENDAS ON WAR ON TERRORISM IN PAKISTAN: A STUDY OF THE AGENDA SETTING ROLE OF PRINT MEDIA IN PAKISTAN

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## Abstract

Pakistani media have given a tremendous coverage to the issue of terrorism. The purpose of this study was to find the relationship between the print media and the public agendas on the issue of terrorism. The study supports the agenda setting theory which states that the audience agenda is influenced by media agenda. The daily *Jang* published more news about war on terrorism against the US and government policies and a result of this media agenda majority of its readers expressed an anti US opinion. On the other hand, the daily *Dawn* gave more coverage in favor of the US and Pakistani government point of view while giving coverage to the war against terrorism. As a result of the media agenda majority of the readers of the *Dawn* expressed their opinion in favor of the US stand on war on terrorism and supported the government policies to tackle with the militants' activities. It proves that the public agenda is influenced by media agenda.

Perhaps Terrorism is one of the most tricky, contentions and controversial terms we hear and use several times a day. The term was rarely heard before the incident of 9/11. The authors of *The Fine Art of Propaganda* termed terrorism as name calling which is one of the seven propaganda devices stated by the authors of the book (Lee, A.M. & E. B. Lee. 1939). Furthermore, Christopher Hitchens (1989), the then Executive Director of the Institute of Terrorism, USA stated this term in these words:

"Can I provide a universally acceptable definition of terrorism? I fear I have to say I can not. There is no universal agreement about who is terrorist. What do we mean by terrorism? The term, unfortunately, has no precise or widely accepted definition"(pp.148-149).

However, after the incident of 9/11, the world has almost accepted the official definition of the term as it is defined by the White House. The governments and the media of Pakistan are also following the same definition. In the words of Shoemaker and Reese (1996), media obey the ideology of their paymasters and especially rulers. According to this view, every activity of violence aimed to destabilize the efforts of the US

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government and military operations in different parts of the world to maintain peace is called "terrorism." In other words, all the activities of resistance against the US and/or its allies launched by Taliban, Al-Qaeda or any other group are also included in terrorism.

Being the neighbor of Afghanistan, one of the most dangerous places on the globe, Pakistan is suffering a lot of problems. The most important problem is terrorism. Pakistan has unluckily about 2000 kilometer boundary with Afghanistan. People on the both sides of the border have the same culture, language, dress, etc. They frequently cross the border several times a day. There is no mechanism to stop their movement. As per the claim of the US government, most of the Taliban and Al Qaeda leaders are living and operating their activities from the tribal areas of Pakistan. These areas are being attacked again and again by the American drones and NATO forces, as a result of which the general public opinion of the Pakistani people has become against the US.

Being a major partner of the US on war against terrorism, Pakistan is paying the highest cost in the world. A huge wave of terrorist activities has destabilized the country. Thousands of military personnel have been killed in these activities in the last eight years. Thousands of innocent people of Pakistan lost their lives in bomb blasts and militants' attacks. The country's economy is facing a huge deficit as a result of terrorist activities. The people of Pakistan gave their lives in this wave of terrorism. It seems that the country is being used as a sacrificial goat for war on terrorism by the western powers.

### ***Role of Pakistan in War against Terrorism***

On one hand, Pakistan has spent its whole resources in combating terrorism but on the other hand the country is being heavily criticized by a number of western powers, their politicians, parliamentarians, media men etc. for doing nothing in this regard. However, the American President George W. Bush has appreciated Pakistan's role in the war against terrorism by saying that it was making serious efforts to ensure peace and stability in the region. In his meeting with Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani on the sidelines of World Economic Forum on Middle East, President Bush lauded Pakistan's initiatives to curb the menace of terrorism and extremism, posing threat to the entire world

Bush appreciated the fact that the people of Pakistan were willing to fight against terrorism. (*Dawn*, May 19, 2008).

There is a long list of Pakistan's contribution in the war on terrorism. The Saudi born Zain al-Abidin Muhammed Hasayn Abu Zubaydah was arrested by Pakistani officials during a series of joint U.S. and Pakistan raids during the week of March 23, 2002. During the raid the suspect was shot three times while trying to escape capture by military personnel. Zubaydah is said to be a high-ranking al-Qaeda official with the title of operations chief and in charge of running al-Qaeda training camps. (*The News*, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2002).

Later that year on September 11, 2002, Ramzi Binalshibh was arrested in Pakistan after a three-hour gunfight with police forces. Binalshibh is known to have shared a room with Mohammad Atta in Hamburg, Germany and to be a financial backer of al-Qaeda operations (*Dawn*, September 22, 2002).

On March 1, 2003, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed was arrested during CIA-led raids on the suburb of Rawalpindi, nine miles outside of the Pakistani capital of Islamabad. Mohammed at the time of his capture was the third highest ranking official in al-Qaeda and had been directly in charge of the planning for the September 11 attacks (*The Nation*, March, 2<sup>nd</sup> 2003).

In 2006, Pakistan was accused by NATO commanding officers of helping the Taliban in Afghanistan but NATO later admitted that there was no known evidence against the ISI or Pakistani government of sponsoring terrorism. The Afghan government also accused several times the Inter Services Intelligence (ISI) of providing help to militants. Some of the American senators have repeatedly blamed Pakistan of misusing the American aid money. Actually, the increased activities of the American military in Pakistan and neighboring Afghanistan corresponded with a great increase in American military aid to the Pakistani government. In the three years before the attacks of September 11, Pakistan received approximately \$9 million in American military aid. In the three years after, the amount increased to \$4.2 billion. A number of Western politicians and American senators have shown their concerns about the use of this money. It is said that large portions of this money were used to suppress civilians' human rights and to purchase weapons and the former rulers put a lot of money in their own pockets.

***Pak-US Relations***

Pakistan has had a long relationship with the U.S. During the Cold War Pakistan served the interests of the West, mainly the U.S., by providing logistic support and intelligence. Pakistan has played a tremendous role in supporting the Afghans and defeating the empire of the Soviet Union. The experiences proved that Pakistan has gained nothing for its loyalty to the U.S. The country or its people got no benefit for uncountable services for the US. We should not forget the fact that majority of the Pakistani people hate America because of its invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan and supporting Israel. . The continuous air attacks of the American jets on the tribal areas of the country have multiplied this hate.

Thousands of the innocent people and civil citizens have been killed in these attacks. Thousands of the military people have been killed either by the resistance of the local people or by the attacks of the NATO or American forces. The so-called extremism or terrorism can be a result of these 'non- terrorist activities'. It has nothing to do with the religion; it may be a revenge or reaction.

On the other hand, Pakistan is blamed a threat to global peace and security by some of the so-called western intellectuals. Pakistan's short history is evident that the U.S. supported the country only for its own strategic interests whether in defeating the Soviets or, as seems the case now, in defeating the terrorism. Because of its geo-political situation, neighboring with Afghanistan and Iran, Pakistan has a great significance for the US. The US involvement in the region came about as part of the Cold War strategy. Pakistan has played a major role in US foreign policy whether it was during the Cold War or the presently continuing War on Terror.

During the worst moments of these conflicts, Pakistan has always stood beside the U.S. and the U.S. by chance has found always a General at the helm of affairs in Pakistan --- from President Field Marshall Ayub Khan to General Zia ul-Haq and from him to General Pervaiz Musharraf. It appears that the U.S.'s own strategic interests were the only reason behind its long relationship with Pakistan. However, now the reigns of the power lies in the hands of a political party which has been elected in the February 2008 elections and the democratic government is again fighting and tackling terrorism as the leader of the ruling Pakistan

Peoples Party Benazir Bhutto was also assassinated in a terrorist attack. The government is following the policy of its predecessor by extending full cooperation to the US in war against terrorism.

There are two different view points in Pakistan regarding the war on terrorism. One view point is that of the government, either present or the former, and this view point states that yes, war against terrorism is our own war and we should fight against terrorism at any cost. The military leadership of the country also strongly supports the same stance. The ISI chief General Shuja Pasha stated in an interview that terrorists are our enemies, not of India (*Dawn*, January 7<sup>th</sup> 2009). According to this point of view, there is no way other than to fight against terrorism and extend our utmost cooperation to the US in war on terrorism. The torchbearers of this view point have some justifications regarding the Americans air strikes in the tribal areas. But majority of the public has other view point stating that the present war on terrorism is not our war. We are fighting others' war. According to this view point, the country should not behave like a puppet of the US because we are an independent nuclear power and we don't have any need of the US assistance or support. The followers of this viewpoint usually consider US as foe and not a friend at all. They think that we should say a big good bye to the US and this good bye will result in the end of terrorist activities in the country. The Pakistani media usually keeps a balance in projecting both of the view points.

### *Significance of the Study*

The role of media and especially, print media has been accepted throughout the globe. We can't live without media. We perceive the picture of the world, as the media present to us. We have some specific pictures of the world issues in our minds because of media. This study has been designed to investigate whether and to what extent print media play role to influence public regarding the issue of the terrorism. Although a number of research studies have been conducted in the developed countries on this area, but perhaps this study is the first ever study of its kind and nature in Pakistan.

### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this research project was to investigate the relationship between the public and print media agendas on the issue of terrorism in Pakistan. Content analysis as well as the survey research was

adopted for this study. Content of the two newspapers, daily *Jang* Rawalpindi and daily *Dawn* Islamabad was analyzed for this study for one year. (From May 1<sup>st</sup> 2007 to April 30<sup>th</sup> 2008). The reason for the selection of these newspapers is that the former one is the largest widely circulated newspaper of Urdu in Pakistan while the later one is the largest widely circulated English daily of the country. Both newspapers have a strong professional reputation covering almost all of the important issues of the country as well as the important issues of the world. They have engaged a sufficient number of highly qualified senior and professional journalists in their organizational structures. The main reason for the time period is that the issue of the study remained dominant in the Pakistani print media almost constantly throughout the period of the research study. The content analysis of the front and back pages of the newspapers was done on the alternate days. The content analysis of the daily *Dawn* was conducted of the newspapers published on even dates (2, 4 6, etc.) and the content of the daily *Jang* was analyzed on the odd dates (1, 3, 5, etc.). Hence the content of a total number of 182 copies of daily *Dawn* and 183 newspapers of daily *Jang* was analyzed thoroughly and the news on the issues of the study were counted and their length was measured in centimeters per column.

### Variables of the Content Analysis

#### ***Frequency and Length***

News stories published about the issue of the study on the front and back pages of the sample newspapers were counted and their length was measured in centimeters per column.

#### ***Slant***

The slant of the news stories published about the issues was also analyzed in terms of favorable, unfavorable and neutral. The slant was measured by analyzing the coding unit of analysis that is paragraph.

#### ***Frame***

It means how a news story was framed. Whether it was depicting US as our friend or foe or neutral etc? The frames of the news stories were measured in terms of friend, foe and neutral. These were measured on the basis of the contextual unit because the whole news story was a contextual unit.



***Source***

The source of the news stories was also recorded as official, unofficial and others etc. This variable has been included because of the vital role of the gatekeepers in the news making process.

***Placement***

The placement is also a very important factor in agenda setting study. It means where the news story was placed in the newspaper. In this study, the placement was divided into four categories. These are as under:

1. Front Page upper half
2. Front Page lower half
3. Back Page upper half
4. Back Page lower half

The paragraphs of the news stories were the coding unit of the content analysis. These were counted in terms of favorable, unfavorable and neutral. The whole news story was the contextual unit of analysis in this study and frames were measured on the basis of this unit. Framing was measured through contextual units of analyses.

A survey of three hundred (300) regular readers of these newspapers (150 readers of each newspaper) was conducted in Islamabad. The list of the regular subscribers was obtained from the management of these newspapers. The sample of 300 respondents was selected equally among the seventeen residential sectors of Islamabad. Although the sample was selected from Islamabad and not from the other areas of the country but even then it represents the trend of the whole country. The residents of this city have come from nooks and corners of the country and they virtually represent the population of the whole country. Keeping in view this fact, it can be said that to a greater extent, the sample of the study represents the newspaper readership of the whole country. The results of the survey research were then compared with the results of the content analysis.

***Variables of Survey Research******Source of Information***

The respondents were asked to tell the most important source of information about the issue of terrorism. The options were given among print media, electronic media, interpersonal channels and any other source of information.

### ***Formation of Opinion***

Formation of opinion of the newspapers' readers was measured through a question and its results were correlated with the slant of the newspaper coverage.

### ***Discussions with Family and Friends***

This is our every day experience that we discuss the important issues of the day with our family members, colleagues and friends. The respondents were asked whether and to what extent they discussed the issue of terrorism with their family, friends and colleagues.

### ***Findings of the Study***

#### ***Frequency of the News Stories Published***

During the study period of one year the daily *Jang* published 316 news stories on its front and back pages about the issue of terrorism while the daily *Dawn* donated the number one coverage to the issue of terrorism by publishing 479 news stories on its front and back pages during the period of one year (on alternate days).

#### ***Length of the News Stories***

The space (length) given to the news stories about the issues of the study was measured in centimeters per column. The normal width of a column in the Pakistani newspapers is four centimeters. This is important to mention here that the visual coverage of the issues in shape of pictures was also included in the measurement of the length of the news stories. The daily *Jang* donated a space of 8921 centimeters column to the issue of terrorism while the issue got coverage of 14372 centimeters column in the daily *Dawn*.

#### ***Slant***

The figure 1 elaborates the slant for the issue of terrorism in the daily *Dawn* and the daily *Jang*. The *Dawn* donated 48 percent news coverage favorable for the issue of terrorism, 32 percent coverage unfavorable for the US and 20 percent neutral.

On the other hand, the daily *Jang* gave 39 percent coverage favorable for the US, 43 percent slant was given against the US while its 18 percent coverage was neutral. Here we can see a clear difference between the policy of English and Urdu journalism about the issue of terrorism.



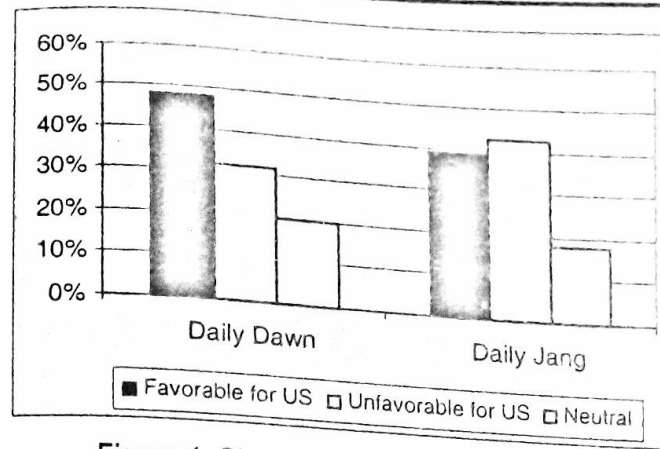


Figure-1: Slant for the issue of Terrorism

Being the largest widely circulated English newspaper of the country, the *Dawn* gave more coverage in favor of the US (and government's) policies and less coverage against the policies of the US (and the government) while the daily *Jang* gave more coverage against the US policies and the less coverage favorable to the US. One of the possible reasons of this difference might be that the *Dawn* has a greater number of foreign readers within and outside the country while the *Jang* is a popular newspaper in the masses of Pakistan and the both newspapers might have followed their readers' agenda regarding the issue of terrorism.

### Framing

Framing was also measured about the issue of the terrorism in terms of friend and foe. The table 1 elaborates the picture of framing for the issue of the study.

Table-1: Framing of the issue

Newspaper	US as Friend	US as Foe
Dawn	259	220
Jang	136	180

As apparent from the table 1, the *Dawn* published 259 news items on its front and back pages about the issue of terrorism in which the US was portrayed as a friend of our country while 220 news stories depicted the US as foe or enemy. The ratio was opposite in the daily *Jang* which published 136 news items showing the US as friend while the newspaper published 180 news stories portraying the US as foe. Here, again a difference can be seen between the policies of the two newspapers. Here this is important to mention that the readership of the two newspapers is

totally different. The *Dawn* is usually read by the elite class, foreigners, diplomats, etc. while the *Jang* is the newspaper of the general masses. The reason for the difference of the policies of the newspapers might be a result of their readership. As apparent from the table 2, the chi square test between the friend and foe frames for the US shows that there was a significant difference between the two frames in both of the newspapers (chi square = 3.69; p.055 for the *Dawn* and chi square = 7; p.008 for the *Jang*).

Table-2: Chi-Square Test Statistics for the framing of the issue of terrorism

	Framing of Terrorism in Dawn	Framing of Terrorism in Jang
Chi-Square (a,b)	3.690	7.013
df	1	1
Asymp. Sig.	.055	.008

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 239.0

b. 0 cells (.0%) have expected frequencies less than 5. The minimum expected cell frequency is 157.5

### Sources of Information

News stories are always based on the sources of information. The reporters have to rely on their sources for news. The sources always keep their own interest while giving information to reporters. Hence, the sources of information play a key role in media agenda setting which ultimately results in public agenda setting. During the preparation of the code sheet of the content analysis of this study, the variable of the news sources was also included that was divided into three sub-categories; official, un-official and others. The official sources were taken as the relevant official persons giving the information to media while the un-official sources included the private sources of the reporters. The news items coming from the other media or the analyses of the journalists were included in the third category called as 'others.'

According to the results, the *Dawn* published 348 news items from the official sources while its 112 news items were based on unofficial sources. Eighteen news items were based on other sources. On the other hand, regarding the same issue the *Jang* published 200 news stories from the official sources, 106 news stories from the unofficial sources and 10 stories from the other sources. Here, we can see that most of the news items on the issue of terrorism come from the official sources. There might be several reasons for the reliance on the official sources. It might

be the case that the media usually follow the official line of the government. It might be the reason that the official sources are more reliable for the coverage of the sensitive issues like terrorism.

### *Placement of the News Items*

Placement of a news story is a key function in media gatekeeping which ultimately results in media agenda setting. A news story published on the front page of a newspaper definitely has many times more impact on the readers than a news story which is published in the inner pages. Keeping in view the research methodology of this project, the placement was divided into four categories. These were front page upper half, front page lower half, back page upper half and back page lower half.

As evident from the figure 3, the daily *Dawn* published 29 percent news stories about the issue of terrorism on the upper half portion of its front page, again 29 percent news items on this issue on the lower half portion of its front page, 32 percent news on the upper half portion of the back page and 10 percent news items on the lower half page of the back page. In other words, the newspaper published 58 percent news on its front page and 42 percent news on its back page. On the other hand, as apparent from the figure 4, the *Jang* published 39 percent news on the issue on the upper half portion of its front page, 16 percent news on its lower half front page, 32 percent news on its upper half back page and 13 percent news on the lower half portion of its back page. Hence, the *Jang* published 55 percent news on the issue of terrorism on its front page and 45 percent news on its back page.

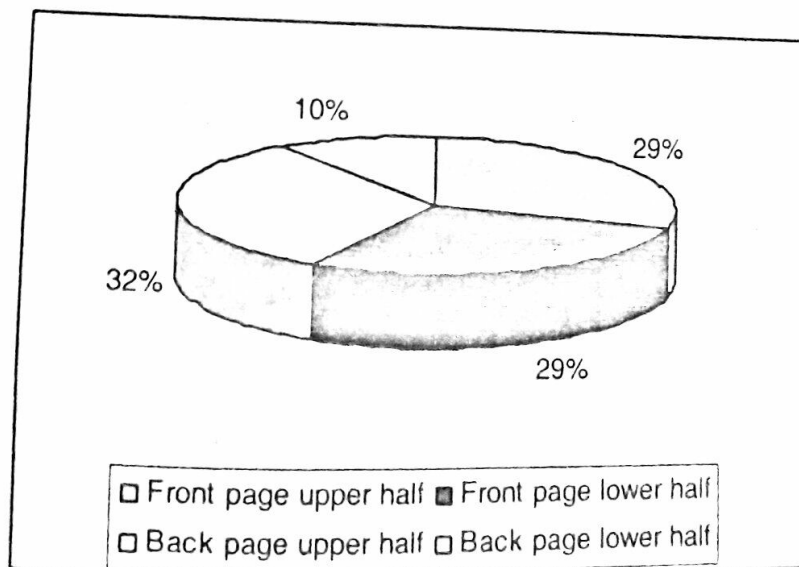


Figure-2: Placement of news stories on the issue of Terrorism in Daily Dawn

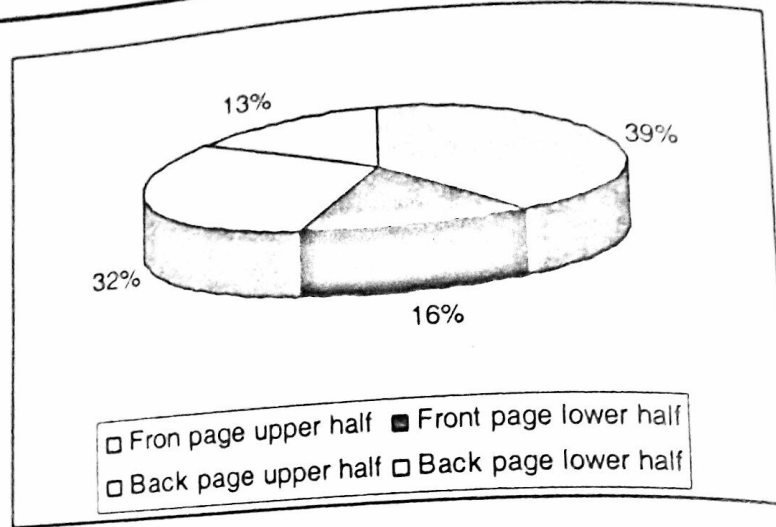


Figure-3: Placement of news stories on the issue of Terrorism in Daily Jang

The ratio of the coverage of the issue of the both newspapers is very close. This similarity might be a result of following the world wide accepted news values by the both newspapers.

#### **Results of the Survey Research**

Survey research was an integral part of this research project. As described earlier, a sample of 300 newspaper readers (150 readers of each newspaper of the study) was selected and interviewed regarding their opinion about the issue of the study. Three questions were asked from the respondents about the issue regarding their most important source of information, their opinion about the issue, and their discussion with friends and colleagues.

#### **Source of Information**

Sources of information play a pivotal role in the agenda setting of the public. The respondents were asked to tell the most important source of information regarding the issues of terrorism. The respondents were given the following four options:

1. Print media
2. Electronic media
3. Interpersonal Communication
4. Any other

We can see a similar pattern regarding the source of information among the readers of the daily *Dawn* and the *Jang*. As apparent from the figure 5, for the majority of the respondents, print media was the most important source of information about the coverage of the issue of

terrorism. Fifty nine (59) percent readers of the *Dawn* and 62 percent readers of the *Jang* stated the print media as the major source of information regarding the issue of terrorism. However, 33 percent readers of the *Dawn* and 31 percent readers of the *Jang* described the electronic media as the most important source of information regarding the said issue. Some eight percent readers of the *Dawn* and seven percent readers of the *Jang* stated the interpersonal communication as the major source of information about the issue of terrorism.

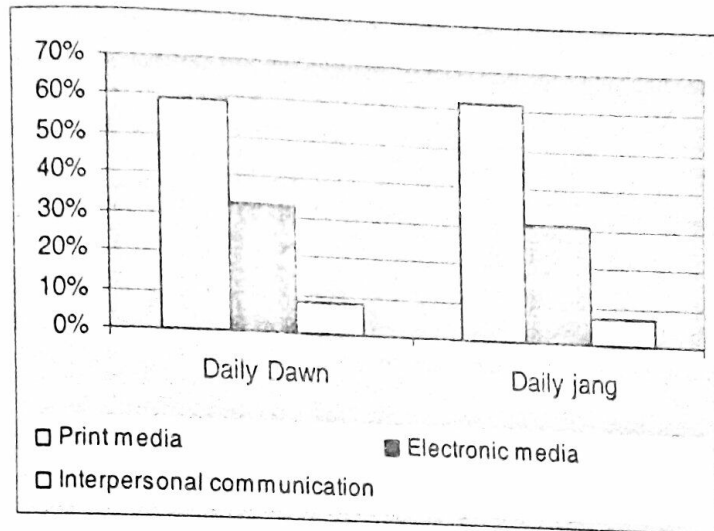


Figure-4: Source of information about the issue of Terrorism

#### *Opinion of the Newspaper Readers about the Issue of Terrorism*

The slant of the newspapers towards the issues of the study was measured during the content analysis and its results have already been described earlier. To investigate the effects of the slant on the newspaper readers, their opinion towards the issues of the study was measured through the survey research. Table 3 describes the responses of the respondents in this regard.

As evident from the table 3, 58 percent readers of the *Dawn* were found in favor of the US policies regarding the issue of terrorism. However, 29 percent readers' opinion was anti-US on this issue. Thirteen percent readers were not clear about the issue. On the other hand, the opinion of the majority of the readers of the *Jang* (52 percent) was anti-US, a reasonable number of people (35 percent) were found as pro-US regarding the issue of terrorism while again 13 percent readers of this newspaper were not clear about their opinion on the issue.

Table-3: Opinion of the Newspaper Readers about the issue of Terrorism

Readers	Pro-US	Anti-US	Not Clear
Dawn	58%	29%	13%
Jang	35%	52%	13%

The findings of the public opinion of the newspaper readers strongly correlate (+.78) with the results of the content analysis of this study. The slant of the *Dawn* towards US was found more favorable in the content analysis and as a result its maximum readers showed a pro-US opinion about the issue. Opposite to this, the *Jang* published more news on the issue of terrorism which were unfavorable to the US, therefore its maximum readers expressed their opinion as anti-US. The finding supports the theory of agenda setting which is the focal point of this study.

#### **Discussion with Family and Friends**

Discussion with family and friends is also a part of the agenda setting. When we receive some information from the media about an issue and we feel it important, we usually discuss it with our friends, family members and colleagues at our work places. In the first phase, we receive information from media, in the second phase we discuss it with our family and friends, in the third phase they discuss it with their friends and colleagues, and hence agenda setting of the media travels in many phases. When people discuss an issue with their friends and family members, it means that the issue was important to them among a long list of the other issues. Interpersonal channels also play a more pivotal role in the developing societies of the world like Pakistan where people heavily depend on each other for information, discussion and guidance. Hence they can quench their thirst of information regarding some issue. Keeping in view this social phenomenon, a variable of discussion with friends and family members was included in the survey questionnaire. The results are being presented in the following lines.

The figure 6 elaborates the responses of the respondents (readers of the both newspapers) regarding their discussion with family members, friends and colleagues on the issue of terrorism. As evident from the figure, 26 percent readers of the *Dawn* and 27 percent readers of the *Jang* stated that they discussed the issue of terrorism with their family, friends and colleagues very greatly while 28 percent readers of the *Dawn* and 25 percent readers of the *Jang* said that they discussed this issue with their



family, friends and colleagues greatly. Some 21 percent readers of the first newspaper and 27 percent of the later newspaper stated that they discussed this issue to some extent while 25 percent readers of the *Dawn* and 21 percent readers of the *Jang* stated that they didn't discuss this issue with any body else.

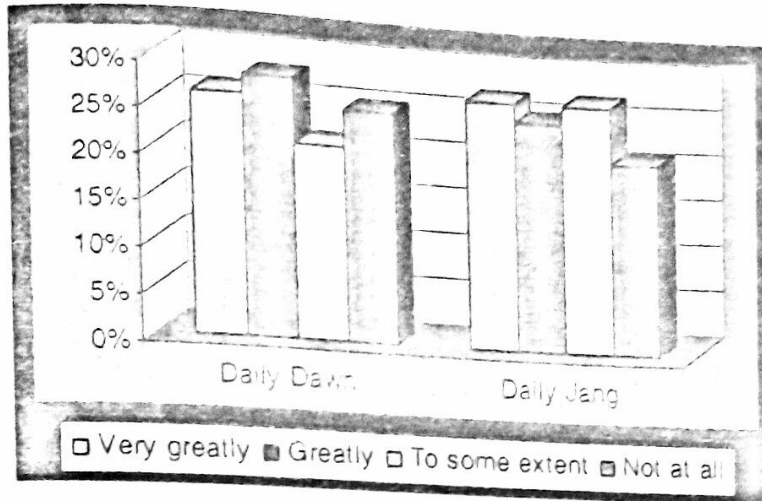


Figure-5: Discussion with Family and Friends regarding the issue of Terrorism

If we calculate the sum of the first three categories, we come to conclusion that more than 75 percent readers of the newspapers discuss this issue with their family members, friends and colleagues, more or less. The results are also consistent with the results of the content analysis as well as with the results of the ranking order of the issues as described by the respondents. This is a proof that the media agenda setting works regarding the issue of terrorism.

### Conclusion

Terrorism is a difficult phenomenon to understand and to tackle with. Pakistani media has played a balanced role in giving the coverage to both of the main viewpoints on war against terrorism. Media are considered as mirror of the society and this study supports this idea. Pakistani media are depicting the true picture of the society. The study supports the agenda setting theory which states that the audience agenda is influenced by media agenda. The daily *Jang* published more news about war on terrorism against the US and government policies and as a result of this media agenda majority of its readers expressed an anti-US opinion. That is why the anti-US point of view on war against terrorism is also called as the popular point of view. On the other hand, the daily *Dawn* gave more coverage in support of the US and Pakistani

government point of view while giving coverage to the war against terrorism. As a result of the media agenda majority of the readers of the *Dawn* expressed their opinion in favor of the US stand on war on terrorism and supported the government policies to tackle the militants' activities. It proves that the public agenda is influenced by media agenda. Therefore this is the responsibility of the media organizations to play a most responsible role in controversial and sensitive issues like war against terrorism. Media should also play their role in bridging the gap between the two viewpoints on war against terrorism. The war against terrorism needs unity and harmony of the nation and media can play its role in this regard.

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