

POLITICAL AFFILIATION, ACTIVISM AND IDEOLOGIES OF SINDH JOURNALISTS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract:

News media are believed to have a role in the strengthening and functioning of a democratic political system in any society or state. Hence, the political affiliations of news constructors (journalists) matter and deserve attention. This paper elicits and discusses the extent to which Sindh journalists relate themselves with political parties. For this empirical data was collected via a cross sectional survey of 576 journalists in Sindh province, Pakistan that presents key elements of their political affiliation, like being a member or supporter of any political party, and particularly what ideologies they follow. Moreover, the political affiliations of the journalists have been assessed in the context of their professional and demographic variables.

KEYWORDS: *Journalists; political affiliation; ideology; registered-to-vote*

INTRODUCTION

There is a significant body of media and journalism studies research which supports the proposition that the news media play a significant role in the functioning of democracy. The role of political journalism is especially important here. As Neveu points out, for example, in particular it is political journalists who contribute to the production of well-informed citizens; when well-informed citizens are enlightened and made active; they strengthen democracy (Neveu, 2002, p. 36). This is the rationale for an obvious and reciprocal relationship between news media and politics. However, McNair (2003, p. 12) goes further in this regard, saying that ‘In democratic political systems, the media function both as transmitters of political communication ... and as senders of political messages constructed by journalists’.

Therefore on the basis of the above arguments if we realize that on the one hand the media are significant to the functioning of democracy and on the other media workers are the constructors of political messages for audiences, then we can recognize with greater certainty that the political affiliations, if any, of the news media people matter, to a considerable extent, in the profession of news production. The political affiliations of news people deserve attention so that we may probe the effects of those affiliations especially on their professional objectivity, which is supposed to be as one of the basic imperatives of the journalism profession. However, before moving further we also need to consider the idea of McNair (1998, p. 75) saying that ‘pursuit of objectivity, in other words, does not mean freedom from political or ideological bias.’

In this way, this survey, because of the sensitivity of the question and privacy concerns of the journalists, simply attempted to elicit how and to what extent the journalist relate themselves with politics either as a member or supporter of a political party and what ideology they follow.

METHOD

A self-completion questionnaire was administered to all accessible print and electronic media organizations, and news agencies in Sindh province, Pakistan and all district-level press clubs. The sampling was purposive and opportunistic with the aim to include as many journalists as possible. Moreover the survey was inclusive of only those journalists who were regularly employed to work for newspapers, magazines, news agencies, public and private television and radio stations mainly with the professional role status as reporters, sub-editors or editors. The survey was conducted by field researchers who were to make sure that queries by respondents about questions could be answered properly and that completed questionnaires could be safely collected. The questionnaire ranged widely over various topics about journalists' careers, their, training and experience, the media organizations they worked for, their political affiliations, their attitudes to and use of new technologies their membership of press clubs and other organizations, educational backgrounds, and financial and working conditions. A total of 576 journalists filled questionnaires; and at the time of the survey, the total population of journalists in Sindh was estimated almost 2500. However, this number of journalists is inclusive of both those who were members of press clubs, and non-members of press clubs, working mainly at district level and to some extent at sub-district level. Further, almost three fifths (59 percent) of the sampled journalists were surveyed at press clubs, and remaining 38 per cent at workplaces and 3 per cent in their homes.

FINDINGS

Demographic Profile

TABLE1

Composition of journalists by demographic variables

	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	565	(98.1)
Female	11	(1.9)
Ethnicity/Mother language		
Sindhi	405	(70.9)
Urdu	104	(18.2)
Siraiki	24	(4.2)
Other	38	(6.7)
Religion		
Muslim	551	(96.7)
Hindu	14	(2.5)
Other	5	(.9)

Level of education		
School	44	(7.7)
College	163	(28.5)
University	365	(63.8)
Mode of education		
As a private student	197	(36.3)
As a regular student	346	(63.7)
Name of academic institute		
University of Sindh, Jamshoro	198	(54.4)
Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur	99	(27.2)
University of Karachi, Karachi	48	(13.2)
Other	19	(5.2)
Age		
0-30 years (Young)	239	(42.1)
31-40 years (Mature)	213	(37.5)
Over 40 years (Old)	116	(20.4)
Monthly Income		
Less than 10,000 Rs.	217	(37.7)
Above 10,000 Rs.	168	(29.2)
No answer	76	(13.2)
Put (X) cross symbol	5	(.9)
Commented instead of revealing Income	110	(19.1)

See table 1 the typical Sindh journalist is male (98.1%), speaking the Sindhi language (70.9%) and following Islam as a religion (96.7%). Academically, the majority (63.8%) of the Sindh journalists is a university graduate, and the remaining earned their final degree from colleges (28.5%) and schools (7.7%). About their education, additionally it was observed that the majority (63.7%) had sought education as a regular student and the remaining (36.3%) as a private student. Regarding the name of the academic institute, the sampled Sindh journalists who had sought their final degree from university (365), among them the majority (54.4%) studied from University of Sindh, Jamshoro and the remaining from Shah Abdul Latif University, Khairpur (27.2%), University of Karachi (13.2%) and other various universities (5.2%). Moreover, the first highest proportion (42.1%) of the surveyed Sindh journalists is young - up to 30 years old -, and the second highest proportion (37.5%) between 31 to 40 years old. In the terms of salary, the highest proportion (37.7%) earned monthly less than 10,000 (ten thousand) PK rupees, and the second highest proportion (33.3%) either made no answer (13.2%), put a cross symbol (X) (0.9%), or wrote horrific comments in the questionnaire regarding their monthly remuneration (19.1%).

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Political affiliation

In response to the question about political affiliation (table 2) out of a total of 570 the proportion of more than one third (35.6%) Sindh journalists were found affiliated with some political party. However, in contrast the majority (64.4%) did not have any sort of affiliation with political parties. In this way the journalists in Sindh, to a great extent, resemble their professional counterparts in Korea where 64.0% (Auh, Lee, & Kang, 1998, p. 58) of the news professionals said that they had no political affiliation, and with those in Spain where 57.0% (Canel & Pique, 1998, p. 302) also denied having any political affiliation.

TABLE 2
Composition of journalists by political affiliation, ideology, vote registration and casting attitude

<i>Political variables</i>	Number	Percentage
Political affiliation		
Yes	203	(35.6)
No	367	(64.4)
Nature of affiliation		
Member	61	(30.0)
Supporter	103	(50.7)
Other	39	(19.2)
Registered to cast votes?		
Yes	544	(94.9)
No	29	(5.1)
Ever cast vote?		
Yes	490	(90.4)
No	52	(9.6)
Cast vote 2008 election?		
Yes	402	(82.7)
No	84	(17.3)
Political ideology		
Liberal	337	(59.8)
Moderate	193	(34.2)
Conservative	12	(2.1)
Other	22	(3.9)

Moreover about the political affiliation of the Sindh news people (See table 3) it was found that on average among newsroom journalists the ratio of politically non-affiliated journalists (32.7%) were higher than politically affiliated (30.7%); in contrast between news-reporting the proportion of politically-affiliated journalists (70.0%) was greater than politically not-affiliated (67.3%). In the context of the media organization type among print journalists the proportion of politically affiliated (65.5%) was higher than

those who were not affiliated (58.6%); whereas among the broadcast and wire-service journalists the proportions of those who were politically not affiliated (34.1% and 7.4% respectively) were bigger than those who were affiliated (30.5% and 3.9%).

TABLE3
Distribution of journalists by political affiliation and selected variables

<i>Selected variables</i>	Political affiliation		Total (%)
	Yes (%)	No (%)	
Journalist type			
Newsroom	61(30.0)	120(32.7)	181(31.8)
News-reporting	142(70.0)	247(67.3)	389(68.2)
Total	203(100)	367(100)	570(100)
Organization type			
Print media	133(65.5)	215(58.6)	348(61.1)
Broadcast media	62(30.5)	125(34.1)	187(32.8)
Wire-service	8(3.9)	27(7.4)	35(6.1)
Total	203(100)	367(100)	570(100)
Media language*			
English	7(3.4)	51(13.9)	58(10.2)
Non-English (Sindhi/Urdu)	196(96.6)	315(86.1)	511(89.8)
Total	203(100)	366(100)	569(100)
Ideology**			
Liberal	128(63.4)	207(57.8)	335(59.8)
Moderate	55(27.2)	136(38.0)	191(34.1)
Conservative	6(3.0)	6(1.7)	12(2.1)
Other	13(6.4)	9(2.5)	22(3.9)
Total	202(100)	358(100)	560(100)
Age group			
Till 30 years (young)	77(38.3)	161(44.4)	238(42.2)
31-40 years (mature)	75(37.3)	136(37.5)	211(37.4)
Above 40 years (old)	49(24.4)	66(18.2)	115(20.4)
Total	201(100)	363(100)	564(100)
Education level †			
School/college	86(42.8)	119(32.4)	205(36.1)
University	115(57.2)	248(67.6)	363(63.9)
Total	201(100)	367(100)	568(100)

* $\chi^2=14.56, p=0.000, df=1$; ** $\chi^2=11.11, p=0.011, df=3$ † $\chi^2=5.60, p=0.018, df=1$.

In terms of media language, among English-language media news people, the proportion of politically non-affiliated journalists (13.9%) were higher than affiliated (3.4%); against it among non-English media journalists the proportion of politically affiliated news people (96.6%) was greater than not-affiliated (86.1%). It was also interesting to know that among those who were ideologically liberal, conservative and

‘others’ the proportions of politically affiliated journalists (63.4%, 3.0% and 6.4% respectively) were bigger than those who were not-affiliated (57.8%, 1.7% and 2.5% respectively). However on the contrary, among ideologically moderates the proportion of politically not-affiliated (38.0%) was greater than affiliated ones (27.2%).

From the perspective of age, among young ones the proportion of politically-not-affiliated news-workers (44.4%) was larger than politically-affiliated ones (38.3%). In contrast among older age category the proportion of politically affiliated (24.4%) was greater than not affiliated (18.2%); whereas, in the category of mature journalists the proportions of both politically-affiliated (37.3%) and not-affiliated (37.5%) were equal. Finally, in the perspective of education the results showed that those who were educated at school and college level among them the proportion of politically affiliated journalists (42.8%) was bigger than not-affiliated (32.4%). However, among the university educated news people the proportion of politically not-affiliated journalists (67.6%) was higher than affiliated ones (57.2%).

In summary, the findings highlighted that on average the news-reporting journalists are more politically affiliated than newsroom workers. In media type print journalists highly politically affiliated than their broadcast and wire-service colleagues. One of the reasons for print journalists to be more affiliated with political parties may be, that in the course of its evolution in the Indo-Pak sub-continent journalism has been employed as one of the key means to mobilize the masses against colonial rule in order to achieve independence, and therefore those who aspired to enter journalism considered it a mission rather than just a profession. And therefore this mindset, even after independence from the rule of English colonialism and the partition of India and Pakistan, seems to have been kept alive among print journalists there. However, the privately-run broadcast media are, comparatively, still a recent phenomenon in Pakistan, which have developed and mushroomed since 2000. In addition, the development of broadcast media in private ownership and the prevailing political environment is different from the colonial period. Therefore, the developing broadcast media-corps seem less politically-affiliated than their print media counterparts.

Further, it seemed that the level of political affiliation is comparatively lower among English language media journalists than non-English language media journalists. The findings also show that ideologically moderate journalists were less politically affiliated than those who were ideologically liberal, conservative or ‘other’. Moreover, the level of political affiliation was also comparatively lesser among young age journalists than older age ones. Finally, the findings show that the university educated journalists comparatively have lesser inclination towards having affiliation with any political party than those who were school/college educated. In this way these findings support the idea that the level of education also plays a key role in enlightening the news people regarding the ethics of their profession; as highly educated journalists seem to be detached from political affiliation which could be a great force for higher standards of quality and

objectivity in the work of the news media in Sindh. In addition, as table 2 indicates, among those who were politically affiliated, the nature of that affiliation varied. Just over a quarter (30.0%) admitted membership in a political party; and half (50.7%) said they were just supporters; the remainder, almost one fifth (19.2%) had ‘other’ than these types of political affiliations.

Political activism

1. Enfranchisement

The term political activism in the context of this study is used to distinguish between those journalists who are registered to cast their votes in elections in Pakistan and those who are not yet registered to vote. As table 2 indicates, out of a total of 573 journalists above ninety percent (94.9%) responded that they were officially registered to cast a vote; however the remaining small proportion (5.1%) was not registered.

Moreover, as table 4 shows, among newsroom journalists those who were not-registered-to-vote (62.1%) were two times higher than those who were registered-to-vote (30.1%). In contrast among news-reporting professionals the proportion of registered-to-vote journalists (69.9%) was greater than those who were not-registered-to-vote (37.9%). Further, among print journalists it was found that the proportion of registered-to-vote (62.9%) journalists was higher than not-registered-to-vote (31.0%); on the contrary among broadcast and wire-service journalists the proportions of not-registered-to-vote journalists (51.7% and 17.2% respectively) were greater than those who were registered-to-vote (31.6% and 5.5%). The findings also revealed that among young journalists the proportion of not-registered-to-vote (79.3%) was greater than those journalists who were registered-to-vote (40.0%). Contrarily, among mature age the proportion of registered-to-vote news workers was bigger (38.5%) than those who were not-registered-to-vote (20.7%). Whereas among the older age group no journalist was found not-registered-to-vote. In summary, the findings show that news-reporting journalists were politically more active than their newsroom colleagues. In terms of journalist type, print journalists were comparatively more politically active than their broadcast and wire-service counterparts. Other it was observed that the older age journalists compared to younger ones were more politically active.

TABLE 4
Distribution of journalists by registered-to-vote and selected variables

<i>Selected variables</i>	Registered-to-Vote		Total (%)
	Yes (%)	No (%)	
Journalist type*			
Newsroom	164(30.1)	18(62.1)	182(31.8)
News-reporting	380(69.9)	11(37.9)	391(68.2)
Total	544(100)	29(100)	573(100)
Organization type**			
Print media	342(62.9)	9(31.0)	351(61.3)

Broadcast media	172(31.6)	15(51.7)	187(32.6)
Wire-service	30(5.5)	5(17.2)	35(6.1)
Total	544(100)	29(100)	573(100)
Age group †			
Till 30 years (young)	215(40.0)	23(79.3)	238(42.0)
31-40 years (mature)	207(38.5)	6(20.7)	213(37.6)
Above 40 years (old)	116(21.6)	0(.0)	116(20.5)
Total	538(100)	29(100)	567(100)

* $\chi^2=11.51, p=0.001, df=1$; ** $\chi^2=14.16, p=0.001, df=2$; † $\chi^2=18.71, p=0.000, df=2$.

2. Ever-casted-Vote or Not?

In addition to enfranchisement or disenfranchisement, further of the political activism among Sindh journalists, according to the table 2it was found that out of a total of 542 the majority (90.4%) reported that they had ever cast a vote in an election. Exercising to enfranchisement at such a high level indicates that the Sindh journalists belong to a politically ultra-active class of the society which understands the advantages and responsibilities of electoral participation. Additionally, (see table 5) it was indicated that among newsroom workers the proportion of those who had ever voted (26.7%) was greatly lesser than those who had not (61.5%). Conversely, among news-reporting professionals the proportion of those who had voted (73.3%) compared to those who had not ever voted (38.5%) was bigger. Further, among “young” journalists the proportion of those who had ever cast a vote (38.2%) was smaller than those who had never voted (55.8%); whereas, in contrast in the “older” category the proportion of vote-casting news-workers (23.3%) was higher than the percentage of those who had never cast a vote (5.8%). However, among the mature age group the proportions of both those who had ever-voted (38.4%) and not ever-voted (38.5%) were equal. Finally it was observed that among the school/college educated ones the proportion of those who had ever-voted (36.9%) was higher than those who had never voted (21.2%); on the contrary, among the university educated the proportion of who had never voted (78.8%) was greater than those who had voted (63.1%). Thus the findings indicated that on average, news-reporting journalists are more politically ultra-active than newsroom journalists. And political activism prevailed more among older age journalists than their younger age colleagues. Similarly, the school/college educated journalists were found more politically ultra-active than their university educated colleagues.

Table 5
Distribution of journalists by ever cast a vote and selected variables

<i>Selected variables</i>	Ever-cast-vote		Total
	Yes (%)	No (%)	
Journalist type*			
Newsroom	131(26.7)	32(61.5)	163(30.1)
News-reporting	359(73.3)	20(38.5)	379(69.9)

Total	490(100)	52(100)	542(100)
Age group**			
Till 30 years (young)	185(38.2)	29(55.8)	214(39.9)
31-40 years (mature)	186(38.4)	20(38.5)	206(38.4)
Above 40 years (old)	113(23.3)	3(5.8)	116(21.6)
Total	484(100)	52(100)	536(100)
Education level†			
School/college	180(36.9)	11(21.2)	191(35.4)
University	308(63.1)	41(78.8)	349(64.6)
Total	488(100)	52(100)	540(100)

* $\chi^2=25.44, p=0.000, df=1$; ** $\chi^2=10.32, p=0.006, df=2$; † $\chi^2=4.42, p=0.035, df=2$.

In summary, the overall picture painted here demonstrates that the journalists in Sindh identify themselves more as voters than as adherents of any political parties. However, it cannot be assumed that they are free from political bias. In particular, the substantial proportion of the journalists remains unpaid and underpaid as discussed earlier. Therefore, they remain exposed and may be easily lured by the politicians or political parties which always want to publicize and propagate their agendas through journalists; because according to McCargo (2002, p. 106) power-holders offer a range of services (including financial incentives and political protection) for journalists, who in turn reciprocate with favorable coverage. Therefore, it is hard to say that journalists in Sindh are completely detached from the tactic of politics because on the one hand journalism itself is an element of politics (Schudson, 2003, p. 166) and on the other it has been found commonly that ‘journalists are influenced by politicians, and the political systems within which they work’ (McNair, 1998).

Political ideologies

Regarding the political ideologies of Sindh journalists, table 2 shows that out of a total of 576, three fifths (59.8%) were liberals, and over one third (34.2%) were moderates. Whereas, remaining percentage (6.0%) mentioned to be conservatives (2.1%) and ‘other’ (3.9%). In this way the majority (59.8%) of Sindh journalists who identified themselves as liberal is consistent with Weaver and Wilhoit’s (1986, p. 25) findings which indicated that ‘journalists often have been characterized as social reformers who are likely to be more left than right on the political scale.’ Further. Weaver and Wilhoit (1986, p. 30) state that ‘with regard to the political attitudes of U.S. journalists we find a left-leaning tendency.’ In other literature available regarding the political leanings of the journalists, McMane (1998, p. 196) found that French journalists tended to place themselves both left of centre and to the left of their organization. And in Britain, journalists are more likely to be Labour rather than Conservative. When Henningham and Delano conducted a survey of British journalists to find out how they planned to vote at the next general election, 57% said Labour, whereas only 6% said Conservative, (Henningham & Delano, 1998, p. 151). In addition, there is as well a left-wing positioning among journalists in Spain (Canel & Pique, 1998, p. 302). To sum up, the findings regarding Sindh journalists

support the thesis that journalists everywhere, for the most part, lean more towards the left-wing political pole rather than the right-wing political pole.

Moreover, regarding the ideology of Sindh journalists (See table 6) among newsroom workers the proportion of moderates (42.5%) was higher than liberals (24.3%) and conservatives (33.3%). On the contrary among news-reporting staffers the proportion of liberals (75.7%) was greater than conservatives (66.7%) and moderates (57.5%). From the perspective of organization type, among print media journalists compared with moderates (58.0%) and conservatives (50.0%) the greater proportion was liberals (62.9%). Conversely, among wire-service journalists the proportion of conservatives (25.0%) was higher than moderates (8.3%) and liberals (4.2%). And in broadcast media the proportion of moderates (33.7%) was bigger than liberals (32.9%) and conservatives (25.0%). In the consideration of the media ownership type among private media journalists the proportion of liberals (96.7%) compared with both moderates (90.2%) and conservatives (83.3%) was bigger; whereas, among state-run media journalists the proportion of ideologically conservative news professionals (16.7 %) was greater than both moderates (9.8%) and liberals (3.3%).

TABLE 6
Distribution of journalists by political ideology and selected variables

<i>Selected variables</i>	Political ideology			Total (%)
	Liberal (%)	Moderate (%)	Conservative (%)	
Journalist type*				
Newsroom	82(24.3)	82(42.5)	4(33.3)	168(31.0)
News-reporting	255(75.7)	111(57.5)	8(66.7)	374(69.0)
Total	337(100)	193(100)	12(100)	542(100)
Organization type**				
Print media	212(62.9)	112(58.0)	6(50.0)	330(60.9)
Broadcast media	111(32.9)	65(33.7)	3(25.0)	179(33.0)
Wire-service	14(4.2)	16(8.3)	3(25.0)	33(6.1)
Total	337(100)	193(100)	12(100)	542(100)
Ownership type†				
Private	326(96.7)	174(90.2)	10(83.3)	510(94.1)
Government	11(3.3)	19(9.8)	2(16.7)	32(5.9)
Total	337(100)	193(100)	12(100)	542(100)

* $\chi^2=18.94, p=0.000, df=2$; ** $\chi^2=11.63, p=0.020, df=4$; † $\chi^2=12.12, p=0.002, df=2$.

In summary, the findings indicate that on average newsroom workers are more moderate, while the news-reporting journalists tend to be more liberal. The results further reflected that on average the print media journalists are more liberal and broadcast media journalists are more moderate; whereas the wire-service journalists follow more to conservatism ideology. And media ownership-wise the private media journalists

ideologically are more liberal; whereas the state-run media news-worker is more conservative.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Considering the thesis that news media, particularly political journalism, have a role in the strengthening of democracy, it was attempted to assess that the political affiliation, enfranchisement, and the ideologies followed by Sindh journalists. In the results, it was found that the typical Sindh journalist (64.4%) is not affiliated with any political party. However, those who were politically affiliated (35.6%, n=203) among them half (50.7%) were supporters of any political party and just 30.0% had been members; whereas the remaining 19.7% had affiliation of any 'other' nature. Further, almost all (94.9%) were not only enfranchised but also they had cast votes in elections. Ideologically, the typical Sindh journalist is first liberal (59.8%) and then moderate (34.2%).

Regarding political affiliation, it was further found that news-reporting journalists compared with newsroom workers on average were more affiliated with political parties. Print media journalists had relatively been more affiliated than broadcast and wire-service media journalists. The findings also show that the Sindhi and Urdu media journalists compared with English media journalists on average had more affiliation with political parties. Ideologically, liberal thought journalists were more politically affiliated than conservatives. In age, it was observed that young age journalists were less politically affiliated than older age journalists. Finally, compared with university educated journalists the school/college educated journalists had a more political affiliation. About enfranchisement, compared with newsroom workers the news-reporting journalists were more enfranchised. Further, print media journalists were more enfranchised in comparison to broadcast and wire-service media journalists. Age wise older age and mature journalists were more enfranchised than young age journalists. In the terms of ideologically, the newsroom journalists were more moderates; whereas news-reporting journalists were more liberals. Moreover, print journalists were more liberal; whereas broadcast journalists were more moderate and the wire-service journalists were more conservative. Finally, media organization ownership wise, private media journalists were more liberal, and the government media journalists were more conservative.

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