

Research Article

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Framing the Frustration: A Comparative Analysis of Print Media Coverage and Government Communication During the Government Employee Protests against the Pension Reforms and End Salary Disparities in Pakistan

Marriam Haseeb ¹ Syed Majid Hussain ²



Abstract: The purpose of this is to conduct a comparative analysis of the news media coverage, Government officials, and their communication during the protest of the Federal Government Servants (FGS), Federal Government Colleges Teachers Association (FGCTA), and the members of All Government Employees Grand Alliance (AGEGA). This research focuses on a detailed study of the protest organized by the Government Employees for the restoration of the tax rebate, changes in the pension rules, the end-salary-disparities and discrepancies in promotions, and the seniority system of the Government jobs. It will also investigate the comparative analysis of the crisis communication by the Government and the delaying tactics that flared the situation. The analysis of print media coverage was an understudy. The mainstream English newspapers of Pakistan are selected; The News International, Dawn News, and Express Tribune, the news articles were selected through purposive sampling techniques ranging from 2020 to 2025. A number of 27 articles were analyzed, 9 each from the three mainstream English newspapers. A data-driven assessment of Pakistani print media coverage from 2020 to 2025 reveals a predominant focus on worker narratives during pension reform protests. Employee-centric themes dominated approximately 70% of reporting, emphasizing protesters' resilience and policy demands, while government reform proposals and crisis management strategies received limited attention at 30%. The resulting narrative imbalance may have exacerbated social tensions and hindered consensus-building, suggesting urgent reforms toward equitable media representation of all stakeholders during contentious policy debates.

Key Words: Print Media Coverage, Government Communication, Government Employee, Pension Reforms, Salary Disparities, Federal Government Colleges Teachers Association (FGCTA), Members of All Government Employees Grand Alliance (AGEGA)

Introduction

The media is the fourth domain of the society. Public opinion and the dissemination of information are achieved through the media, which is composed of the radio, television, the internet, magazines, and newspapers. The media provides a variety of services that are helpful in different ways such as enabling public dialogue and conversation, political information, advertising, education, fostering, and civic spirit, which provides information that decisively enhances and undulates socio-political cognition. Some of their importance aids the sustenance and functioning of societies, in other words, needless to say, it has sustaining importance for society. Information that is civil from diverse domains is provided for contemporaneous up-to-date events, facts, and socio-political and world headlines are shown to audiences to keep them informed. It is the packet-sniffer who digs around and reveals every conceivable crime multi-corruption or nation in order to keep the power in check. Whether by symbolic or real armed

¹ MS Scholar, Riphah International University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

✉ marriam90@gmail.com

² MS Scholar, Riphah International University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

✉ muji_fast@hotmail.com

• **Corresponding Author:** Marriam Haseeb (✉ marriam90@gmail.com)

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political rebellion, this world has at all times been some sort of anarchy striving to find empires for joining seekers because it tirelessly works toward fulfilling some transforming objectives. In other statements, socially motivated change is a form of art through which people express their cultural needs while evoking social change and policy shifts (Ijaz & Waheed [2024](#)). An analogous scenario arose with FGS who form the foundational structure of the government. They documented sit-in demonstrations as a means of achieving their objectives.

The government employees that form a major part of the government mechanism, are fighting for their rights, initially, the issue remained indoors and the FGS reported written grievances to their concerned departments. However, their issues and concerns related to pension reforms, salary disparities, and other rights were not heard by their concerned headquarters, which led to a systematic approach. The AGEGA which has been operating since the 1970s as the Central Lecturer's Association (CLA) in the federal capital fighting for the rights of the FGS, has a well-versed reputation for its professionalism, had to come forward for their demands in 2013-14 for the higher timescale promotions, they continued to strive for the demands of the FGS. In the year 2020, after COVID-19, due to social media usage, people became more aware of the policy amendments that simply contradicted the constitutional rights of the FGS.

In the early 2020s, government employees in Pakistan united under the All Government Employees Grand Alliance (AGEGA) and initiated a series of protests aimed at securing improved compensation and reversing recent pension reforms. This movement encompassed more than one hundred unions and associations representing various sectors within government employment. The coordinated demonstrations took place in Islamabad as well as in provincial capitals, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction among public sector workers concerning their economic conditions and employment benefits.

A central demand of the employees was a 200 percent increase in house rent, medical, and conveyance allowances, based on the recommendations of the Pay and Pension Committee established in 2020, which have not yet been fully implemented. The protestors also called for the restoration of allowances in accordance with these guidelines, emphasizing significant disparities in remuneration and benefits between rank-and-file government employees and higher-ranking officials, such as judges and parliamentarians, who have historically received more substantial salary increases. Additionally, the demonstrators highlighted inequities between employees working in ministries and those in attached departments, advocating for a more equitable and consistent compensation structure across the public sector (Our Correspondent, [2024](#)).

The protest actions included marches from the Pakistan Secretariat to the Parliament building, sit-ins, and symbolic demonstrations such as the wearing of black armbands to express ongoing dissent. AGEGA leadership voiced strong criticism of the government's approach to public sector management, opposing privatization measures and advocating instead for improved administrative practices and institutional reforms aimed at enhancing efficiency and accountability. Beyond issues of salary and allowances, the protestors demanded the regularization of contract and daily wage workers, the reinstatement of employees dismissed under previous rightsizing policies, and the withdrawal of recent tax increases on salaries. They also firmly rejected proposed amendments to pension rules, insisting that any changes should apply solely to future recruits rather than existing employees.

Negotiations between AGEGA representatives and government officials failed to produce a mutually acceptable resolution, leading the alliance to threaten an indefinite sit-in outside the Parliament if their demands were not addressed by the specified deadline. These protests thus represent a significant episode of collective action among Pakistan's public sector employees, highlighting enduring concerns over compensation, employment security, and the broader implications of fiscal and administrative reforms (Junaidi, [2025](#)). This protest initially began on the provincial level and was led by FGCTA in Islamabad, and now the AGEGA, FGS, and FAPUASA have joined hands for their demands. These employees, under the banner of the AGEGA, had previously launched a protest across the province of Punjab and a sit-in in front of the Civil Secretariat in Lahore. The protestors asserted that the government does not possess the authority to alter the Government Servants Rules of 1973. They demanded that all recent amendments to

the civil servants' legislation be rescinded and that the provisions revert to those established under the original Government Servants Rules of 1973 (Correspondent, [2023](#)).

This research is intended to study the Pakistani news media's framing of the protests. A number of FGS employees protested on the main streets in the country which should have been presented in the mainstream media however, the inverse happened. The occurrence of these protests was considered a minor event, which was not properly addressed and thus turned into a crisis. The publics affected are not only the FGS, teachers, or Government but also the students whose future is at stake due to ongoing protests and suspending teaching activities in different schools in Pakistan.

The FGS comprise a large amount of the total employed population in Pakistan. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, the latest headcount of federal government employees in Pakistan is "1,374,911" as of December 2022. This number includes civilians, armed forces, and autonomous/semi-autonomous/corporations. However, the FGS head counts as "5,75,354" as per the Annual Statistical Bulletin of Federal Government Employees for (2021-22) (Haque et al., [2023](#)). This constitutes a major part of the governmental workforce.

Mainstream English-language newspapers in Pakistan have played a significant role in constructing political realities by selectively framing events. During the anti-government sit-ins, these media outlets employed dominant frames that contributed to shaping a constrained and partial interpretation of the political situation for the public (Khan et al., [2021](#)). That is why the population understudy constitutes the mainstream English newspapers.

Scholars of social and political movements argue that such movements exert a profound influence on public policy as well as political, social, and economic institutions. They are often credited with contributing to the overthrow of authoritarian regimes and prompting legislative reforms. Given their significant impact on societal structures, these movements have garnered considerable interest from both media and social movement researchers, as well as from politically active groups seeking to understand the mechanisms through which mass mobilization is achieved (Meyer, [2023](#)) (Smith, [2015](#)).

Research Objectives

1. Analyze framing in Pakistani news media coverage of pension reform protests, focusing on spectacle vs. substance.
2. Examine government communication tactics to legitimize reforms and counter-protest narratives.

Research Question

RQ1: How did Pakistani news media frame the government employee protests?

RQ2: How did the government's communication strategies differ from the media's framing of the protests?

Literature Review

The relationship between protest movements and the media is multifaceted and complex. The media functions as an intermediary, connecting protest movements with the broader public and thereby influencing public attitudes and perceptions, which in turn can affect the success or failure of protests. Media coverage often amplifies protest messages by drawing attention to social issues, thereby shaping public opinion either in favor of or against the demands for change. This dynamic highlights the media's significant role in framing protests and influencing their societal impact (Lakoff, [2004](#)).

The term frame was coined by famous sociologist (Goffman, [1974](#)), in his pioneering Frame Analysis work. He used the term "frame" to refer to culturally established conceptions of reality that would enable individuals to interpret events and occurrences. He saw the world as a set of interpretive schemas. Conducting frame analysis one may assume a situation wherein there are multiple interpretations of reality and the task is to uncover the implicit and explicit understanding (Khan et al., [2021](#)).

Framing is a spin tactic that is used to limit meaning in order to give the reader a specific interpretation. Words or phrases in a text are part of a cognitive context, which is a mental pattern of beliefs, experiences, values, or information. The receiver is given a specific frame of mind by these words or phrases. "Avoid



picturing an elephant!" George Lakoff wrote a book titled "Know Your Values and Frame the Debate" (Lakoff, 2004). In this context, the word "elephant" represents the Democratic Party and evokes the frame associated with it, which includes all the Democratic Party stands for. One of the most cited definitions of media framing is from Entman:

Framing essentially involves selection and salience. To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (Entman, 1993).

It has been emphasized that media framing in Pakistan is a deliberate process where language, imagery, and narrative structure are strategically chosen to shape public perception of political events. Their work highlights that the media's portrayal of protests can significantly influence public opinion and even contribute to polarization within society. The framing process is rooted in foundational theories by scholars like Entman and Goffman, and it operates as a powerful tool for shaping collective understanding of political conflicts and protest movements. (Salahuddin, 2024)

During a frame analysis of English-language newspapers covering the 2014 anti-government sit-ins in Pakistan, the findings revealed that newspapers often selected frames that could provoke anger against the government, thereby playing a role in mobilizing public sentiment during the protests. The study also notes the use of metaphors and passive structures to either criticize political actors or obscure the agency behind certain actions. This selective framing contributed to a biased discourse, sometimes maintaining social injustice by foregrounding or backgrounding specific stakeholders and their actions (Khan et al., 2021).

While exploring the intersection of social movements and media activism in Pakistan, particularly the use of alternative channels like YouTube when traditional media is restricted. Their research demonstrates that protest-related content often employs nationalistic and religious themes, as well as iconic imagery, to garner sympathy and support. The study illustrates how activists and protesters use media framing to construct narratives that cast themselves as heroes and authorities as antagonists, further shaping public perception and mobilizing collective action (Usman & Mujaddid, 2023).

The protest coverage in Swedish newspapers reinforces the relevance of framing theory and the protest paradigm. Hussein's analysis shows that media frames not only focus on the spectacle of protests but also construct political actors and shape societal discourse through language and context. This approach, grounded in social constructivism, underscores the media's role in both reflecting and constructing public knowledge about contentious political events (Hussein, 2023).

While much of the literature focuses on protester-centric framing, studies also acknowledge the challenges governments face in communicating policy reforms. The underrepresentation of official narratives in media coverage is a recurring theme, often resulting in public confusion and prolonged unrest. The limited visibility of government rationales—such as fiscal sustainability or alignment with international standards hinders balanced public debate and consensus-building (Salahuddin, 2024). However, research on pension reform protests extends beyond Pakistan, revealing common patterns in media framing and government communication worldwide. An analysis of the European media coverage of pension reforms showed that news framing significantly shapes public attitudes by emphasizing either individual or collective responsibility and notions of justice. Their experimental study demonstrates that media frames influence citizens' support or opposition to reforms depending on whether the reforms are portrayed as fair or unjust, highlighting the media's powerful role in shaping policy debates on complex welfare issues (Linda, 2023).

Employers' associations have typically endorsed the process and content of pension reform, citing the pressing necessity to curtail all sources of state deficits and debts and to enhance competitiveness. They have articulated apprehensions regarding particular facets of pension reforms, such as the disparate access of employees to supplementary pensions, the critical matters concerning the sufficiency of income generated by pensions due to alterations in the public-private pension composition, and the insufficient protections for the assured rate of returns on pension fund investments, as demonstrated by the financial market collapse. The rapidity of the pension reform process in many nations prompts concerns regarding

the sustainability of these reforms, as it hinders a comprehensive debate on the various pertinent problems (Sarfati & Ghellab, [2012](#)).

Similarly, a comparative study of European news media framing of retirement age reforms finds that media outlets often highlight protester grievances and social unrest, while government rationales such as fiscal sustainability receive less prominence (Linda et al., [2024](#)). This selective framing can heighten public resistance and complicate reform implementation, paralleling the dynamics observed in Pakistan.

Studies of protests in France, India, and beyond show that media framing of social movements tends to emphasize demonstrators' emotions, demands, and confrontations with authorities, often at the expense of contextualizing government policies or economic constraints. For instance, research on the 2023 French pension reform protests reveals that citizen journalists and mainstream media foregrounded protest actions and police clashes, amplifying public frustration and shaping polarized narratives (Ng & Carley, [2023](#)). The Indian 2019 CAA/NRC protests and global movements like Black Lives Matter similarly illustrate how media framing can mobilize public sentiment but also risk oversimplifying complex policy issues (John, [2024](#)).

Framing theory and agenda-setting concepts are widely applied in international contexts to understand how media shapes public discourse on contentious reforms. The framework of problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendation remains foundational in analyzing media portrayals of protests and government communication globally (Entman [1993](#)). Moreover, media system dependency theory suggests that in complex policy matters such as pensions, citizens rely heavily on media for information, making framing effects particularly potent (Linda, [2023](#)).

Across countries, governments face difficulties in effectively communicating the necessity and benefits of pension reforms amid public resistance. The underrepresentation of government perspectives in media coverage is a recurrent issue, leading to public confusion and prolonged unrest (Linda et al., [2024](#)). The International Labour Organization's report on pension reforms during global economic crises emphasizes the importance of social dialogue and transparent communication to mitigate conflicts (Sarfati & Ghellab, [2012](#)).

On the other hand, the Government bears an ample amount of cost on the part of training, recruitment, and hiring of each government servant. According to the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics—The cost of paying these employees is about Rs 3 trillion, and pensions cost about Rs 1.5 trillion. Project workers; people working in government companies, and other organizations, cost approximately another Rs 2.5 trillion. The total expenditure on military salaries in Pakistan amounts to approximately Rs 1 trillion. Since its introduction in 1983, the Basic Pay Scale (BPS) system has undergone twelve revisions to adjust compensation levels (Haque et al., [2023](#))

However, implementing pension reforms can be a challenging task as it involves balancing the long-term sustainability and affordability of pension provision with the short-term negative consequences for (parts of) society, whose access to pension benefits may be reduced or postponed. These short-term negative consequences can lead to resistance from the affected individuals and groups, making it difficult to gain the public support that is crucial for the success of a reform measure. A well-informed electorate that understands the need and underlying considerations for reform is therefore essential (Linda, [2023](#)).

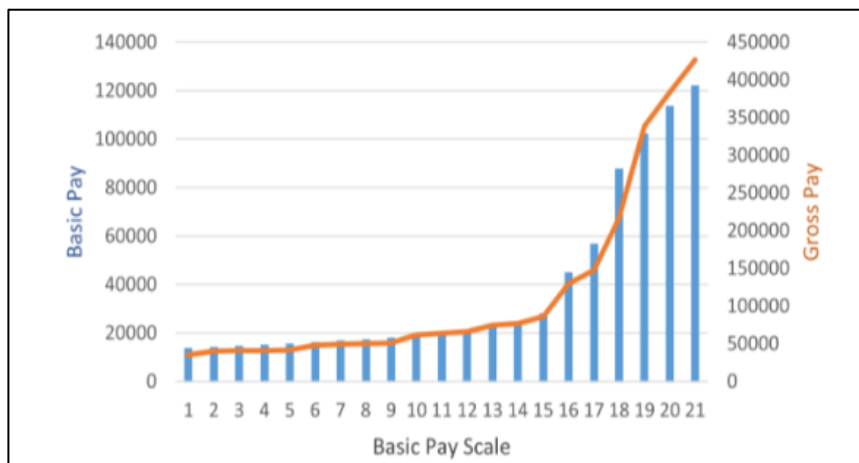
Currently, the government has proposed a substantial increase in defense spending, with a significant portion allocated to employee-related expenses, including salaries and allowances. Recent budget proposals indicate salary increases for armed forces personnel ranging from 22 to 25 percent, reflecting efforts to address previous stagnation in pay adjustments and to reduce disparities within the pay structure. These increments are part of a broader defense budget that has seen consistent year-on-year growth, underscoring the government's prioritization of military expenditure within the national fiscal framework. The most recent revision of the Basic Pay Scale (BPS) system occurred in 2022. However, these periodic updates have not been grounded in contemporary human resource management principles aimed at developing modern public sector incentive structures aligned with current market conditions and management needs. Instead, the system continues to rely on a legacy framework characterized by ad hoc pay and pension committees that address compensation issues primarily through the addition of various



allowances. Despite these shortcomings, the recurrent adjustments to the BPS since its inception in 1983 reflect an ongoing, albeit limited, effort to maintain fair and competitive remuneration for public sector employees over time. The 2022 revision serves as the latest effort to recalibrate the scale in accordance with prevailing economic indicators and the organization's strategic considerations. This iterative process of revision demonstrates an organization's responsiveness to changing circumstances and its dedication to maintaining equitable compensation practices.

Figure 1

Comparison of Gross and Basic Salaries of BPS 1–22



Note. Lifetime Cost Of Public Servants – 2023, Pakistan Institute of Development Economics PIDE.

The BPS system continued with the socialist one-pay scale structure across the public sector. PIDE conducted a study on the perks and benefits of Civil service employees, PIDE concluded that as assumed, Civil servants are not at a salary disadvantage when compared to their counterparts in the private sector (see Figure 1). PIDE unpacked the compensation package of the civil service employees and found there is a lot more that was never reflected on their salary slips (Haque et al., [2023](#)).

The social contract between the state and its citizens is fundamentally grounded in the provision of security, welfare, and prosperity—core elements of human security. These interdependent factors necessitate a strengthened emphasis on service delivery to ensure effective governance. The civil service functions as the operational backbone of the state, and its efficiency directly influences the government's ability to fulfill its essential responsibilities. At the time of independence, Pakistan inherited a limited administrative framework comprising 95 civil servants and approximately 300 Class-I officers. Despite scarce resources, this foundational cohort succeeded in restoring order, establishing systems of taxation and communication, and formulating a long-term development agenda. During the 1960s, they were recognized as "agents of change" and the "engine of growth and development." However, over time, institutional decline set in, rendering the once-admired legacy a distant memory. Although numerous commissions have since been established to pursue civil service reforms, these initiatives have largely failed to bring about substantive improvements in service delivery (Jamil, [2023](#)). However, the FGS are protesting for their basic rights, which were actually given by the constitution. These agents of change work hard and are resilient but the overall system of the country is sometimes questioned which affects their work output. This study revolves around the Comparative Analysis of Print Media Coverage and Government Communication during the FGS Protests against the pension reforms and the end of salary disparities in Pakistan, the gap in this study may constitute around knowing the FGS's own perceptions through surveys and focused group interviews along with the mainstream news media perceptions can be studied.

Methodology

In order to systematically investigate how government employees protest against pension reforms and salary disparities in Pakistan, a quantitative research methodology was used where initially content analysis was done, which is one of the most widely used methods for measuring and analyzing media texts

(Kerlinger, 1966) (Dominick, 2003) (Wimmer, 2003). Quantitative data analysis is used to measure the frequency and characteristics of the sample content. In Neumen’s (2005) words ‘frequency simply means counting whether or not something occurs and, if it occurs, how often’. In this study RQ1 and RQ2 were answered by applying quantitative content analysis to measure and compare the frequency of various framing strategies being used by the print media; and also to understand the role of AGEGA leadership in portraying the FGS demands positively, and compelling the Government to address their grievances, an interview of the former President of AGEGA was also done. Three prominent English-language newspapers—The News International, The Express Tribune, and Dawn News—the study used a quantitative content analysis methodology.

The news media in Pakistan can be broadly categorized into two groups, namely the Urdu media and the English media. Previous studies indicate that the English news media is favored by the liberal population and targets policymakers, politicians, the affluent class, civil and military bureaucracy, professionals, and educated individuals. Conversely, the Urdu press has a broader readership, particularly among the lower middle class who have primary to secondary education levels (Ejaz et al., 2024).

To ensure representativeness and reduce selection bias, news stories published between 2020 and 2025 were chosen using purposive sampling, were relevant to the frequent occurrences of protests, and were reported by the media. A number of 27 articles were analyzed, 9 each from the three mainstream English newspapers. Every article was coded for particular frames, categories, and themes pertaining to the discourse around pension reform, government communication, and protest representation. Key rhetorical and technical devices, including word choice, metaphors, exemplars, headlines, and sources, were identified throughout the coding process. This allowed for the quantification of frame prevalence within and between newspapers as well as the identification of recurrent patterns. By using accepted quantitative content analysis protocols, this method allows the study to compare media representations, characterize communication content, and spot prevailing framing trends across time.

Results and Discussion

As per the quantitative content analysis conducted where the print media the three prominent English-language newspapers—The News International, The Express Tribune, and Dawn News— were analyzed through Purposive sampling ranging from the year 2020 to 2025, the codes were identified and categorized into major themes. Table 1 shows the prominent themes identified through Data analysis of the print media.

Table 1
Themes Identified through Quantitative Data Analysis of the Print Media

S. No	Themes
1.	Employees Concerns
2.	Employees Demand
3.	Employees Determination
4.	Employees Solidarity
5.	Government's Communication
6.	Government's hard-line stance
7.	Government Questioned

In Table 1 the themes are arranged in alphabetical order. The terms or the themes used will be discussed in detail to let the reader decipher the operational definitions, and identify and comprehend the results and findings, which is the sole purpose of this research.

The expression "Employee concerns" is operationally defined in this study, as the FGS concerns including equitable treatment, implications of Government actions, and Concrete commitments. The denomination of "Employees Demands" explicitly depicts the FGS demands including financial security, revoking Pension reforms, improved employment conditions, no temporary resolutions, and identifying permanent solutions to their problems. The next idea of "Employees Determination" represents the objectivity of the employees to be determined and persistent in their demands and not leave the grounds until their demands are fully met in the form of a written agreement.



The phrase "Employee solidarity" depicts the Employee's direct action and building solidarity to pressure the government for the acceptance of their demands. However, the theme of "Government Communication" was identified and measured depicting the efforts made by the Government and its designated officials to manage the crisis that prevailed since 2020.

The appellation of "Government Hard-line Stance" articulates the Government's policy to hard-line stances against the protestors, where they used uncompromising and rigid moves as reported in a Dawn news article; The AGEGA leadership was sent to Kot Lakhpat Jail, prompting the alliance to call for a protest that resulted in the closure of schools and colleges (Correspondent, 2023). Finally, the locution "Government questioned" is operationally defined as how the FGS questioned the Government regarding their rights. To study the frequency of appearance of the prominent themes in the text of the print media see Table 2.

The FGS issues, such as fair treatment, the effects of government activities, and tangible commitments, which are described as the theme of "Employee concerns", were observed 10 times. The FGS demands—financial stability, reversing pension reforms, better working conditions, no short-term fixes, and finding long-term answers to their issues—are clearly portrayed in the title "Employees Demands" acquired a frequency of 14. Whereas, the third concept, "Employees Determination," mentioned frequency to be 15, refers to the impartiality of the workers' determination, persistence, and refusal to leave the premises until their demands—in the form of a written agreement—are fully satisfied.

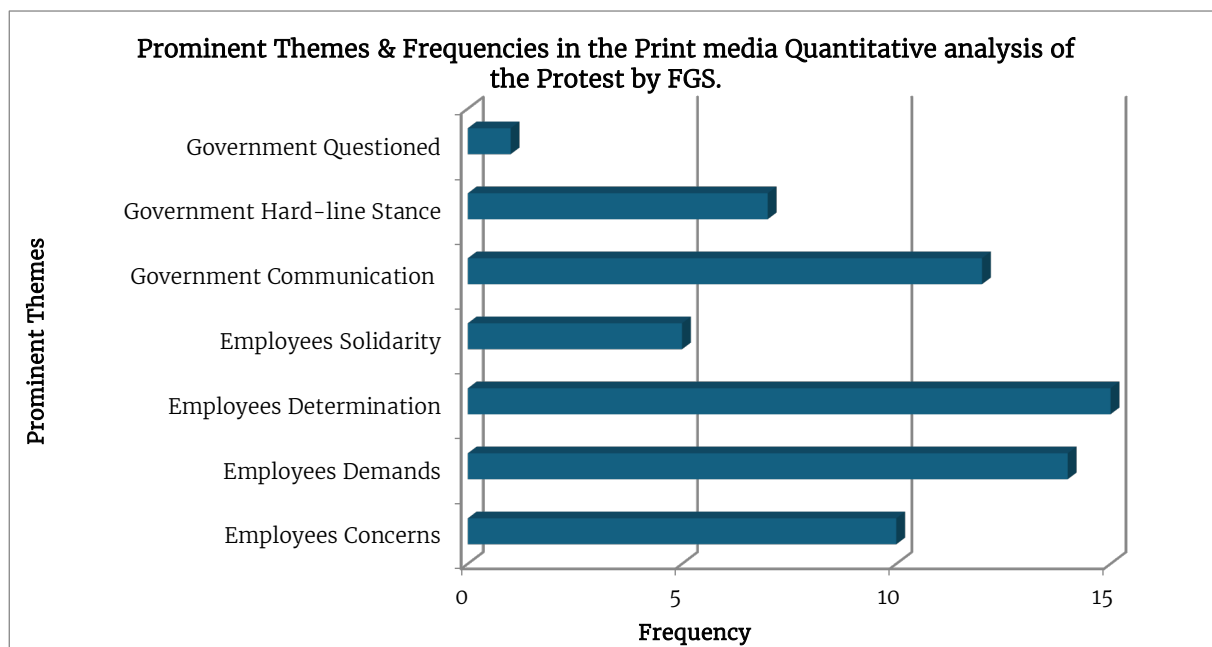
Table 2

Themes and their Frequencies Measured by the Quantitative Data Analysis

S. No	Themes	Frequency
1.	Employees Concerns	10
2.	Employees Demand	14
3.	Employees Determination	15
4.	Employees Solidarity	5
5.	Government's Communication	12
6.	Government's hard-line stance	7
7.	Government Questioned	1
	Total themes as per the Quantitative data analysis	64

Figure 2

The Frequency Table depicts Projecting themes Identified through Coding and Categorizing from the Print Media of Prominent English-language Newspapers (The News International, The Express Tribune, and Dawn News).



The term "Employees Solidarity" depicted a frequency of 5. However, the theme of "Government Communication" was recognized and measured; illustrating the efforts made by the government and its appointed personnel to manage the issue was observed in 12 contexts of the print media. The term "Government Hard-line Stance" refers to the government's policy of taking hard-line attitudes against protestors by employing uncompromising and strict government acts, which was framed to a frequency of 7 in different articles.

Finally, the phrase "Government questioned" acquired a frequency of themes as 1. As per the analysis of the aforementioned data regarding the frequency of the prominent themes, the newspapers and print media framed the frustration of the FGS in a logical manner as it has been observed that the major themes of Employee concerns, employee demands, Employee Determination and Employees Solidarity constitute a major part of the total frequencies observed i.e. 44/64 that is 69% of the prominent themes.

However, the Government's role and initiatives that would have played a major role in addressing the grievances of the FGS and managing effective crisis communication during the protests were not witnessed by the print media, which created chaos and prolonged the protest. The collective frequencies of the Government's initiatives or propagation were observed as 19/64 which is 30%, depicting the role of the Government's communication during the protests. As per the results generated, Employee determination has been observed as the most prominent theme and at the highest frequency. To understand the occurrence of themes converted to a frequency chart in the print media see Figure 2.

As per the data analysis of the print media from the prominent newspapers, similar themes were analyzed, whereas the number of articles remained the same. It has been observed that the Tribune has reported the protest at maximum, the frequency of repetition of collective themes was around 33/64. In Dawn News, the frequency of studied themes was 16/64 and The News International reports depicted the frequency of 15/64. Accumulatively that forms 51.5%, 25%, and 23% respectively (see Table 3).

Table 3
Measuring the frequency of the prominent themes with reference to each newspaper

S.No.	Themes	Tribune	Dawn	The News International
1	Employees Concerns	7	3	4
2	Employees Demand	5	2	2
3	Employees Determination	7	2	2
4	Employees Solidarity	8	2	3
5	Government Communication	3	6	2
6	Government Hard-line Stance	3	1	1
7	Government Questioned	0	0	1
		33	16	15

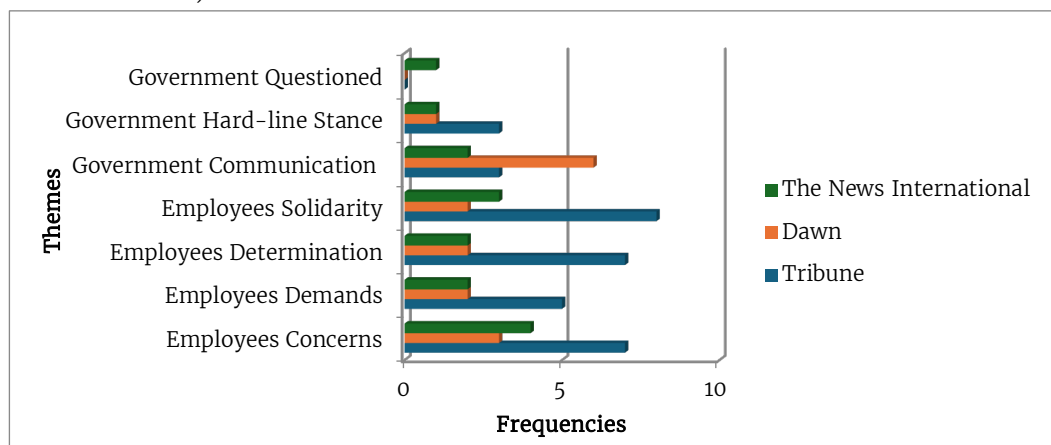
Note. Themes and their frequencies were measured by the Quantitative Data Analysis with reference to their occurrence in each Newspaper under study (The News International, The Express Tribune, and Dawn News).

Inversely, if we look at the in-depth analysis of each newspaper with reference to the mentioned prominent themes, The Tribune reported the FGS Employees Concerns, Employees Demands, Employees Determination, and Employees Solidarity at a higher frequency i.e. 27/33 that is 82% of the accumulative themes whereas, 18% of the themes depicted the Government stance to resolve the conflict through communication. However, the analysis of the Dawn news articles represents 56.3% of the themes in FGS support and 43.7% of the themes in Government support. Lastly, The News International depicted 73% of the themes in FGS Employees' support whereas in the Government's support, only 27% of themes were objectively observed.

While converting the tabulated data into a frequency chart, these results depict the following findings displaying a comparative analysis of each newspaper framing strategy.

**Figure 3**

The Frequency Table depicts Projecting Themes and their Occurrence Identified through Coding and Categorizing from the Print Media of Prominent English-language Newspapers (The News International, The Express Tribune, and Dawn News).



Collectively if

we consolidate the data above, the analysis shows that "Dawn" news reported more themes in favor of the Government i.e. 43% of the total themes emphasize that the Government wanted to resolve the crisis with communication and with a hard-line stance i.e. dealing the matter with power when needed. However, The Tribune and The News International depicted these themes in a comparatively low frequency i.e. 18% and 27% respectively. Here if we refer back to the RQ1 and RQ2, the conducted data analysis and the studies show that the agenda of FGS, AGEGA, and FAPUSA was depicted in its true essence by The Tribune and The News International, however Dawn News focused more on the Government lead agenda where they focused more on the themes of dialogues, government's likings to resolve the conflict smoothly whereas, the use of force was not depicted in its true essence in the themes observed.

Conclusion

The quantitative analysis of print media coverage from 2020 to 2025 shows a clear emphasis on employee perspectives during the protests against pension reforms in Pakistan. Employee-related themes accounted for nearly 70% of coverage, highlighting their determination and demands, while government communication and initiatives were underrepresented at just 30%. This framing amplified protesters frustration and grievances while downplaying the government's efforts to address the crisis. As a result, media coverage likely contributed to public confusion and prolonged unrest, underscoring the need for more balanced reporting during periods of social and policy conflict.

Governments worldwide often struggle to clearly convey the importance and advantages of pension reforms in the face of public opposition. A common challenge is the limited visibility of official viewpoints in media coverage, which frequently results in public misunderstanding and extended periods of social unrest (Linda et al., 2024).

Governments worldwide often face challenges in effectively communicating the necessity and benefits of pension reforms amid public resistance. The frequent underrepresentation of government perspectives in media coverage contributes to public confusion and prolonged unrest. Similarly, John Jolyne illustrates how media framing can galvanize public sentiment while simultaneously risking the oversimplification of complex policy issues (John, 2024).

The analysis shows that The Express Tribune reported the most on the protests, focusing predominantly (82%) on employee concerns and demands, with limited coverage of government communication (18%). Dawn offered a more balanced portrayal, with 56% of employee-focused themes and 44% highlighting government efforts to resolve the crisis through dialogue and measured force. The News International also emphasized employee perspectives (73%) over government (27%). Overall, Dawn leaned toward the government's narrative, while The Tribune and The News International prioritized protester viewpoints. This variation underscores how media outlets differently frame the conflict, shaping public perception of the protests and government response.

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Annexure 1

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