

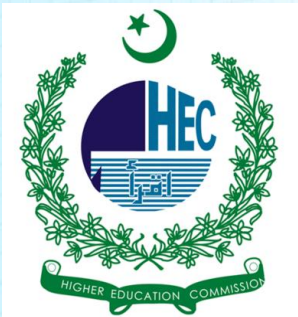
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**Constructing Climate Responsibility: A Critical Discourse Analysis of
Climate Change Narratives in Pakistani News Media**



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Abstract

Pakistan is a climate change hotspot and suffers from severe impacts of climate change including catastrophic flooding in monsoon 2022 and frequent winter smog. But, as severe as these threats may sound, the media at home still have a structurally inconsistent and linguistically split construction of climate responsibility. In this research, a mixed methods approach is used, combining the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) by Ruth Wodak with a Marxist political economy lens, and visual grammar analysis, to critically analyze the process of either passing on or pointing away the climate responsibility in the Pakistani news media. The analysis of the multilingual print, digital and broadcast archives in English and Urdu (2022-2025) shows the public sphere to be very fractured. Thematic criticism based on policy is given more weightage by elite English language outlets, as opposed to episodic, sensationalized and religious fatalistic narratives given greater weightage by mass-circulation Urdu outlets. The media takes part in systematically shifting its responsibility upwards to the Global North (Topos of Global Injustice) or downwards to the marginalised citizen (Topos of Individual Responsibility). Moreover, as the political-economic analysis reveals, there is "hegemonic silence" in the media sector, in which media companies bound by state advertising and by the massive advertising and greenwashing of companies and institutions in their own physical environment actively insulate the domestic industrial and political elites from any structural responsibility. Finally, the study suggests that linguistic integration, de-commercialization of environmental beats, and that rigorous ecolinguistic auditing of corporate greenwashing in Global South be implemented.

Keywords: *Climate Change Communication, Critical Discourse Analysis, Political Economy of Media, Greenwashing, Environmental Journalism, Global South, Pakistan.*

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1. Introduction

1.1 Climate Crises in Context of Pakistan

With the acceleration of ecological degradation around the world, the Global South has been more affected, and Pakistan is now being dubbed as the "ground zero of the climate catastrophe" by the state and media. Although Pakistan's contribution to GHGs is less than 1% of it, it always remains one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world which faces enormous socio-economic, infrastructural, and ecological destruction. As per the official language used in international climate change conferences, the country could lose as much as 9.1% of its GDP every year as a result of all three phenomena—fast glacial melt, severe heat waves and big monsoon floods.

Recent environmental achievements forcefully underline this existential threat, both in the form of acute and sudden disasters and slow onset emergencies. The devastating monsoon flooding of 2022 was a stark reminder of systemic vulnerabilities in the country, causing at least 1,700 deaths, an estimated 33 million people to be displaced, and bringing severe losses to infrastructure and agriculture valued at \$30 billion or more. Coinciding with this urgent humanitarian crisis, is the ongoing environmental crisis of winter smog in Punjab. Lahore has continuously remained the world's most polluted city and has been grappling with the annual smog crisis, when Air Quality Index (AQI) not only crosses the "hazardous" threshold of 328 but also at times reaches "severe" or "very severe" levels, resulting in public health warnings, school closures and "zero visibility" traffic hazards.

But as obviously as these ecological crises trend continuously, so the public awareness, political agenda-setting and policy-making around them are mediated – and often distorted – by the national news media environment. The direct translation of these complex phenomena by the media directly determines the cognitive and ideological processes in which the public deals with risk, apportioning blame and demanding systemic accountability.

1.2 Research & Problem Statement

Although the threat of climate change is an existential one, the narrative of climate change responsibility in the local media in Pakistan is structurally inconsistent, reactive and highly split along linguistic lines. The issue is that environmental reporting is only really used in cases of acute humanitarian crisis and not as a structural risks. As a result, the national discourse is diffused in two opposing directions: towards the far away global (Global North) and towards the less powerful local citizens (rural smallholder farmers). The mainstream media, by using these narrow lenses, defuses responsibility in these narrow ways and in so doing, creates a systematic blindspot for

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structural responsibility of political players in the domestic arena, industrial polluters, and corporate real estate capitalism, thereby preventing the creation of a unified public consciousness that has the ability to demand a systemic change of the environment.

1.3 Research Objectives

Three major goals are used to guide this study in critically deconstructing the processes by which media narratives create environmental accountability:

1. To investigate how the language bifurcation of English and Urdu press frames climate discourses, by mapping the argumentative warrants (topoi) to displace and/or hold accountable the states in the context of climate vulnerability.
2. To analyse the visual grammar used in disaster journalism to understand how photography contributes to gendered and vulnerable disaster identities, aesthetics of trauma and paternalistic state narratives in the context of ecological crises.
3. To examine the manner in which cross media ownership, dependency of state advertising and corporate real estate green washing leads to what can be described as a "hegemonic silence" that acts to suppress systemic domestic critique on ecological issues.

1.4 Research Questions

This research sets out to answer the following main research questions, in accordance with the research objectives outlined:

1. What is the discourse construction and attribution of climate responsibility and blame in the elite English language and mass-circulation Urdu language news outlets during climate acute crises?
2. What are the differences between the ways in which visual and photographic depictions of environmental catastrophes are rendered in linguistic boundaries and how do they visually construct moral agency vs. passive victimhood?
3. What are the systemic domestic environmental critiques that are framed and suppressed in the context of the underlying political economy of the Pakistani media market, which involves the processes of cross media ownership, corporate advertising budget and state financial dependence?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is very important because it brings together two important aspects – linguistic analysis and political-economic analysis – that have been lacking in Global South media research. Although there are many studies that have examined media framing, this study shows the need to combine Ruth Wodak's

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Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) and to include a Marxist political economy perspective. Through the mapping of the text (what is being said) as well as the economic mapping of the text (who is paying for what is being said), in this study, the highly fragmented public sphere in Pakistan is cognitively and ideologically illuminated in a comprehensive manner. Finally, it provides important information on the institutional blockages to ecological literacy in the developing world and gives clues as to how to move forward with structural media reform.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Global North vs. Global South Climate Politics in Media

The geopolitical split between the Global North and South is a growing aspect of the discursive struggle to hold governments accountable for climate. There is a considerable amount of literature on climate justice in the international context, which focuses on the media construction of a "southern environmental victim" to generate a demand for global justice. Media framing often reflects state diplomacy at international meetings, e.g., United Nations Conference of the Parties (COP) (Chernobrov, 2022). For example, developing countries use global forums to put their very small historical emissions into the background and bring their disproportionate vulnerability to climate disasters to the fore (MEHRUNNISA & PILLAI, 2025).

In recent times, COP27-Sharm el-Sheikh was widely hailed by the media in Pakistan as a big "diplomatic coup" and a triumph for "global climate justice," with state emissaries hailed as heroes for their successful negotiations surrounding the historic Loss and Damage fund. In this format, the press portrays the Global North as being responsible and guilty of the ecological plundering that the developing world has suffered, not only historically, but also financially. But moving on to COP29, literature draws attention to the frustration of the editors regarding the lack of materialisation of the pledges (Shoukat et al., 2025). At the same time, there is significant critique by scholars and international donor actors of this purely externalizing-framework of blame. There is an emerging counternarrative in political science that attributes the "global injustice" and "diplomatic victimhood" discourses to being a strategic tool used by the ruling elites of the Global South. Domestic leaders, by controlling the debate about international climate reparations, manage to get foreign help and engage in a gradual process of deflecting attention from their own economic mismanagement, systemic state corruption and ineffective climate adaptation strategies (Shah et al., 2025).

2.2 Media Representation of Environmental Crises in Pakistan

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Media is a significant source to spread any message to the people. In the realm of domestic, academic assessment of the environmental journalism in Pakistan shows that the media in Pakistan is more or less divided (Adnan, 2025). This gap in the way that climate crises are communicated is well known in the existing literature, and has been compared in great detail, as illustrated by the Journal of Media Horizons. This bifurcation is between the elites in English language media and mass circulation Urdu language print and electronic media (Raza et al., 2022).

Research shows that English newspapers (Dawn and The Express Tribune) have mostly used 'thematic' and 'system-level' frames. The idea of these elite publications is to link localized domestic climate events (such as urban flooding or smog) to the broader global governance frameworks, macro-policy failures and scientific data and appeal straight to the literate, urban professionals, policymakers and international donor agencies (Saleem, & Rahman, 2023). On the other hand, there is literature which shows that Urdu language media (such as Daily Jang) and local broadcast channels (such as City 42) almost totally employ episodic, event-oriented reporting (Farsi, 2025). This stylistic difference is not a linguistic choice, but much more an attitude of mind. There is a lot of criticism against Urdu newspapers for their emphasis on visual drama, human miseries in the immediate vicinity and religious narratives that are fatalistic (Ashfaq, 2025)c. Episodic reporting serves as a means of disconnecting immediate environmental disasters from their systemic, anthropogenic and political-economic causes by labelling them as isolated, seasonal events or even as "divine trials." Hence the literature highlights the need to have such a bifurcated reporting to be avoided so as to have a cohesive national understanding of climate change, and to make scientific messaging of climate change very effective with the mass circulation audience (Iftikhar et al., 2026).

3. Methodology

This research employs a strong mixed-methods research design in a qualitative epistemology, to systematically deconstruct the environmental narratives that are highly hierarchical in the Pakistani media landscape. The central analytical framework is Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) that is particularly suited to question the historical contexts, institutional power relations and systemic inequalities which are structurally incorporated in media texts (Wodak, 2015). The use of DHA allows the study to chart the complex linguistic moves (referential nominations, predications, argumentative topoi) by which editorial boards take on or evade the responsibility for climate change.

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But since news today is multimodal, it would not be enough to analyse the text alone and grasp the entirety of the ideological force of news reporting on disasters. Hence, a quantitative and qualitative multimodal visual framing analysis (MVA) is added to this qualitative textual analysis, based on Kress and van Leeuwen's (2006) underlying grammar of visual design. This mixed methods approach fully bridges the gap between the textual ideology and the visual framing of photographic journalism, by examining the structure of the pictures – active versus passive positioning of the subject, aestheticization of trauma, and spatial structurings of the state actors. This twofold approach is all the more necessary to unravel mediated realities in the Global South, where the literacy rates differ significantly and visual imagery can have as much, or even more, cognitive resonance as the related written text.

For this study, the data corpus was carefully collected using purposeful sampling of the media market in Pakistan to reflect the linguistic, structural and political-economic split in this market. The time range of the archives is from 2022 to 2025 which is an important period and includes several key environmental events. In particular, the data has recorded the catastrophic monsoon floods in 2022, geopolitical negotiations during COP27 (Sharm el-Sheikh) and COP29, and the extreme and recurring winter smog events in Lahore from the end of 2024 till the beginning of 2025.

The corpus is split into three different media strata in order to cover the fractured public sphere in comprehensive manner. First, the elite, English-language print and digital newspapers, Dawn, The News International and The Express Tribune were chosen for being historical newspapers which have created policy debate and been appealing to international donor agencies. Second, the print and digital newspapers (both in Urdu) having mass circulation namely Daily Jang, Daily Express, and Nawa-i-Waqt were included, as they have a wide readership in the country and impact on the general mass. Lastly, prime-time news bulletins and special reports from local broadcast television channels with heavy, sensationalist programming (like City 42, Lahore News HD) and from the national corporate (like Ary News) and Pakistan state-owned (Pakistan Television or PTV) channels were sampled. The diverse selection of corpora offers the empirical basis that is needed to make comparisons between the ways in which climate change is translated to different socioeconomic and linguistic groups.

Data analysis was done using rigorous multi-staged coding process. In the first phase, textual archives (editorials, op-eds, and news reports) were coded for overall macro-strategies of the coverage: "thematic (system level, policy)" and "episodic (event level, localized)". In the second phase, the DHA framework

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was put into action, with a manual extraction and mapping of particular argumentative topoi (e.g., Topos of State Incompetence, or the Topos of Fatalism), in order to establish the precise nature of the ideological warrants that were used to make a blame attribution.

At the same time, the quantitative visual corpus – which includes photographs published during the floods of 2022 and the ongoing crises – was analysed in depth using metrics. Images were coded in the category of analysis determined by the researcher, which are Human Interest, Economic and Political frames. The analysis focused on the number of graphic images (dead bodies, strong emotions of grief etc.) and coded the gendered representation of human subjects according to their depicted agency (active and passive). This systematic procedural mapping makes it possible to compare the editorial intent with the actual ideological impact of the media coverage with a very structured approach.

3.1. Theoretical Framework

In order to deconstruct media discourses about the climate emergencies in Pakistan in a systematic way, this study adopts Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) as the main methodology and a linguistic framework. For this research, DHA (Damage, Harm and Fraud) is a highly important branch of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) that focuses on the need to bring in the historical, socio-political and institutional contexts in which texts are produced and consumed (Wodak, 2015). DHA understands that language can never be considered objective; it is a battleground of social struggle that is always negotiated in terms of power, identity and ideology.

For the purpose of analysing the narratives of climate change in this study, three particular discursive strategies pointed out by the DHA framework were operationalized:

1. This is the referential/nomination strategy which looks at the naming and categorisation of particular social actors, phenomena and events linguistically. The analysis, for example, examines the language used to describe the state (as a "rational administrative body" or as a "reactive entity"), the language used for the description of citizens (as "stubble burning culprits") and the language used for the nomination of environmental crises (as a "gas chamber" or "seasonal anomaly" for Lahore's smog event).
2. Predicational Strategies are closely related to nomination and the specific qualities, traits and characteristics given to the named actors. This is essential in the process of acquiring moral agency. DHA can reveal if the media portrays the state as an active heroic actor in flood

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rescues, and/or whether the passive powerless victims are marginalised citizens whose lives are overwhelmed by the natural tragedy of a flood.

3. At the heart of this research is the analysis of what are called argumentation strategies (topoi), that is, highly conventionalised argumentative schemes, warrants or rules of conclusion, which link the premises of an argument to a particular claim. This study examines how media uses topoi (e.g. Topos of Global Injustice or Topos of State Incompetence) in the recurrent and maps them, assessing the logic that the media uses to apportion blame, dodge internal party political responsibility and create moral arguments about environmental responsibility.

Political economy of media from a Marxist perspective. Although DHA can reveal the discursive strategies that appear in the text, knowing the "why" behind the particular narratives prevailing in the media industry needs to be explored through examining the structural forces shaping the media industry. Hence, the study is supplemented by a Marxist Political Economy perspective on media. This perspective is based on the basic premise that "the ideas of the ruling class are based in the final instances on the ideas of the ruling class" (Marx & Engels, 1973) and sees mass media as an effective ideological tool aimed at safeguarding the interests of the capitalist class and maintaining the structural status quo.

If we consider the situation of the Pakistani media market then it is a corporate monopoly market. Jang Group and Dawn Media Group, as other legal entities, are diversified family empires and the top eight media houses have an overwhelming 68% of the cross media audience share on television, print and digital platform. These media giants are closed to commercial principles and within a framework of market-driven system, they structurally disincentivize environmental reporting. Overall, climate journalism has not achieved high audience figures or significant corporate advertising dollars, and thus is under-resourced, marginalized and/or seen as a low prestige job. Rather, editors focus on political spectacles with high conflict levels and on "breaking news" to attract corporate advertising.

Importantly, it's a theoretical perspective that adds the idea of "Hegemonic Silence" in environmental reporting. The silence is kept in place with a double dependency. Firstly, the media are highly dependent on the state advertising subsidy, the government of which often uses it as a stick and carrot approach to censor domestic environmental criticism. Secondly, the media is in the pockets of the advertisers of large corporate polluters, particularly big real estate developers. Corporations practice massive financial leverage and

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through multimodal greenwashing make sure that the media actively silences structural criticism of deforestation, appropriation of land for agriculture and depletion of groundwater, thereby camouflaging capital accumulation as national progress.

4. Data Analysis

4.1 Media Archive Mapping: Structural and Linguistic Bifurcation

The most obvious and immediate discovery in the textual archives is how drastically different the structure and language of Pakistani environmental journalism is. The empirical data shows there is a systematical difference in editorial policies which work solely with the language of its target groups and which ultimately produces two alternative cognitive realities for different groups of people. Thematic contextualisation is not something that the elite English newspapers, like Dawn try to avoid; quantitative linguistic analysis of the print archives shows that they actively make an attempt to contextualise their reporting in this manner. About 13% of the environmental stories in 'Dawn' do connect domestic climate anomalies to larger system dynamics, such as macro-policy failures, transboundary climate dynamics, and international governance dynamics. This way of presenting climate change is fundamentally attractive to policy elites and urban professionals that think of climate change as a structural problem that can be acted upon.

On the other hand, the Urdu language press and local broadcast media are stuck in an ideology of episodic reporting focusing on events. Mass circulation Urdu newspapers, such as Daily Jang, have given the impression, confirmed by this information, that 99% of environmental and weather anomalies are completely isolated and episodic while only 1% are thematic and scientific. This is a division of structure that essentially determines the ideologies of mediation of disasters. Localised human suffering and highly sensationalised tragedy are the staple ingredients of the Urdu press as is immediate visual drama. Through the lens of the mass media, weather-related events that occur from time to time, like the annual Lahore smog or seasonal urban floods, can be treated as isolated events and divorced from their systemic political-economic root causes, which are common to all, and are now the driving force behind anthropogenic global warming. This bifurcation of language and structure is undermining the provision of an integrated ecological literacy to the public in Pakistan – while the elite debate on policy, the masses are given a continuous loop of out of context humanitarian tragedy.

4.2 Discursive Topoi: Argumentative Topographies of Blame

By applying the DHA framework, it is possible to recognize the way that media outlets use very conventionalized argumentative schemes (topoi) to fabricate

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responsibility, shift responsibility and curate a nationalistic unity. A total of four predominant discursive topoi are identified from the analysis, which are spread throughout the media.

Table 1 *Systematic Mapping of Discursive Topoi in Pakistani Environmental Reporting*

Discursive Topos	Underlying Argumentative Warrant	Dominant Media Outlets	Key Linguistic Expressions and Metaphors	Ideological Function and Systemic Effect
Topos of Global Injustice	Developing nations with low emissions are owed compensation by historically polluting capitalist powers.	Dawn, The News, Government-run media, The Express Tribune	"Ground zero of climate catastrophe," "climate reparations," "blatant injustice," "loss and damage."	Builds nationalistic unity; demands international grant-based finance; occasionally masks local governance failure.
Topos of State Incompetence	Local infrastructure failure, urban corruption, and administrative apathy transform weather hazards into disasters.	Dawn, The Express Tribune, The News International	"Urban planning shortcomings," "mere paperwork," "reactive approach," "governance failure."	Demands domestic institutional accountability, regulatory reforms, and judicial intervention.
Topos of Fatalism / Nature	Ecological disasters are uncontrollable natural cycles or expressions of divine will.	Daily Jang, Daily Express, local Urdu broadcast channels	"Divine trial," "natural disaster," "uncontrollable natural havoc," "seasonal weather	Silences anthropogenic causes; pacifies public outrage; shifts focus to immediate humanitarian

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			anomaly."	relief and state charity.
Topos of Individual Responsibility	Environmental degradation is caused by poor public civic habits, littering, and rural agricultural practices.	Daily Jang, local broadcast TV, Punjab government statements	"Stubble burning culprits," "public civic negligence," "littering," "crop residue burning menace."	Shifts the burden of environmental compliance onto marginalized groups; shields industrial and corporate capital from regulations.

The **Topos of Global Injustice** is an argumentative scheme with an obvious Marxist and climate-justice warrant: If a developing country is the victim of catastrophic ecological harm while the capitalist countries that are historically responsible for the climate change causing such harm are responsible for negligible amounts of emissions, then a duty is owed to compensate the victim. Heavily used by the English press and state authorities in international events such as COP27 and COP29, it is a topos that builds a narrative of environmental victimhood on the part of the nation. Media framing was done in favour of celebrating the efforts of Climate Minister Sherry Rehman for presenting Pakistan as "ground zero of climate catastrophe". Through endless repetitions of words such as 'climate reparations', 'blatant injustice' and 'loss and damage', the media powerfully asks for international 'grant and finance' and at the same time, perhaps even by design, it distracts from governance failures at home and mismanagement of the climate change adaptation plan. This topos, mostly used by the English language media (*The Express Tribune* and Dawn) and state watchdogs, is based on the warrant that a state, which does not execute environmental rules and does not control corruption in urban areas, has the direct responsibility to make natural natural disasters deadly. Judicial interventions were being used in the Lahore smog crises and the media heavily weaponised them to validate this framing. The press echoed the criticism Justice Shahid Karim of the Lahore High Court (LHC) made in his remarks about the government's "mere paperwork" approach and the fact that it only "takes action when the court is apprised of the environmental matters. This topos is reinforced visually and textually as the state's hypocrisy, such as

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the vehicle operated by the state (like Speedo buses) which emit black smoke with impunity, is exposed, thereby depriving the state of any moral authority to police the private polluters.

This topos, which dominates the Urdu press (Daily Jang, Daily Express etc.), is based on the warrant that environmental crises are either a natural phenomenon of the seasons or a "test" of God, that is, they are a matter of "acts of God". It is a form where human agency is denied and where domestic political and/or corporate actors are not blamed. In the context of smog reports, this is evident if media reports on the severity of air pollution due to natural temperature inversions or transboundary winds and thereby appears to normalize the situation as an unavoidable "fifth season. The Urdu press, in the name of traditional cultural values by portraying floods and droughts as "natural havoc" or as "tests of the Almighty" renders the entire discourse of the events to be one of immediate state charity and prayer, which effectively puts a lid on public anger and quiets anthropogenic causes.

The Topos of Individual Responsibility is a very subtle topos, based on the warrant that the environment is ruined by the bad civic habits, litter and polluting practices of the ordinary and marginalized citizen. This framework is clearly used to redistribute environmental compliance responsibilities downwards. For instance, the media has been sensationalizing the issue of "stubble burning" by smallholder farmers in rural areas as a major cause of the smog in Punjab during the winter. Although empirical measurement has indicated that farming residue burning is responsible for 20% of smog whereas urban transport sector, which has low quality fuel, is responsible for 83% of smog, the media wrongly blames the farmers. The media actively fetches the powerful industrial polluters, brick kiln cartels, corporate automotive lobbies, and shields them from structural accountability by portraying the rural groups that are marginalised due to the environmental, social and financial consequences of their burning as "stubble burning culprits".

5.3 Textual and Visual Discourse Analysis: DHA Strategies and Mediated Representations

Specific referential/predicational strategies are also examined and the multimodal visual grammar that is part of disaster reporting, to further clarify the construction of environmental responsibility.

Textual Strategies: In English-language editorials, the referential construction of climate change is as a policy problem, and the state is frequently predicated as a rational but defective administration. In the case of air quality, for instance, there are bureaucratic nominations, such as the "Punjab Environment

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Protection Agency (EPA)" and plans to create "green buffer zones. The vocabulary is all positive and action-oriented, and seems to be a state that can be remediated technically. However, Urdu broadcast television is based on sensationalism and metaphors of historical traumas. Even the channels, such as City 42, used an exaggerated and referential nomination in the intensity of the smog in Lahore, saying: "Once again, Lahore has become a gas chamber. Such broadcast discourse portrays the smog as an active and aggressive predator, and the citizens as passive and helpless victims by calling the city a "gas chamber" and saying that "Lahore suffocates under the same sky. There are rare exceptions to this however, such as using youth as active environmental citizens ("every sapling is a small protest") but in the main the public are presented as having resigned to inevitable suffering.

Table 2 *Quantitative Visual Framing Analysis of Disaster Coverage (2022 Floods corpus)*

Visual Analytical Dimension	Dawn	The News	Express (English)	Express (Urdu)	Nawa-i-Waqt	Jang	Combined Visual Corpus Metrics
Human Interest Frame (Count)	165	139	153	143	175	156	931 (43.18% of corpus)
Economic Frame (Count)	157	91	127	77	78	81	611 (28.34% of corpus)
Political Frame (Count)	61	59	63	173	99	159	614 (28.48% of corpus)
Depiction of Dead Bodies	0	1	3	7	9	11	31 photos
People Grieving Over Dead	4	7	9	10	11	17	58 photos
Active Female Subjects (%)	—	—	—	—	—	—	32.00% (117 of 366 subjects)
Passive Female Subjects (%)	—	—	—	—	—	—	68.00% (249 of 366 subjects)
Active Male Subjects (%)	—	—	—	—	—	—	70.00% (341 of 487 subjects)
Passive Male Subjects (%)	—	—	—	—	—	—	30.00% (146 of 487 subjects)

The visual framing (Kress & van Leeuwen) of the visual corpus around the

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floods 2022, shows deep ideological mechanisms to be at work.

- The visual data shows that political frame is highly focused in Urdu language newspapers with 70.2% of the combined political frame images and only 29.8% in English language newspapers; while Urdu newspapers, such as Daily Jang, focus on pictures of political elites, army soldiers and government officials doing 'food drop' and 'helicopter rescue. This provides a pictorial narrative of paternalistic state rescue, and an active response to systemic critique of infrastructure failure, substituting a display of heroic state charity. In addition, there was an ethical split on the aesthetic of trauma: while English language newspapers daign to publish pictures of grievance and death only if there is any actual damage to the structure, Urdu language newspapers displayed many graphic images of grief and death (Jang published 11 photos of dead bodies and 17 of extreme grief), and made systemic climate risks into a short-term spectacle of human tragedy to elicit sympathy, not political reflection.
- The photographic corpus demonstrates a very gendered representation of climate vulnerability through the application of visual grammar, under the names of passivity and vulnerability. Female subjects are almost always passive (68% passive vs 32% active), they are always depicted as crying mothers, waiting outside aid tents or as blank expressions looking into the camera lens. By contrast, males vastly outnumber the females (70% active) and are featured as active, leading figures, operating rescue boats, constructing dikes, and talking with state officials. This visual distribution is thus not only actively reinforcing the patriarchy in terms of it visually claiming that climate adaptation and crisis management are only male affairs, but it also serves to frame women as helpless victims of climate crisis, and thus the ultimate passive victims of climate adaptation and crisis management.

5.4 The Political Economy of the Climate Narrative: Hegemonic Silence

It is important to analyse the Pakistani media landscape using a Marxist political-economy prism to understand the overall structural reluctance to go for environmental critique in a systemic manner. The media is firmly embedded in a capitalist system characterized by high degree of concentration, financial dependence on the state-corporate advertising industry, and by the capture of the regulation by corporate interests, which are all geared towards the accumulation of corporate capital and not the protection of ecology.

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Table 3 *Cross-Media Ownership and Dominant Climate Discourse Framing in Pakistan*

Conglomerate	Outlets	Control Structure	Share	Discourse Framing Style
Jang Group	Daily Jang, The News International, Geo TV Network	Legally operated under Independent Media Corporation (Pvt) Ltd; Mir family holds majority shares (95%).	27.00 %	Bifurcated: Episodic, religious-fatalistic in Daily Jang; thematic, policy-centric in The News.
State-Owned Group	PTV, PBC, Associated Press of Pakistan (APP)	Fully controlled and financed by the federal government of Pakistan.	10.22 %	Nationalistic, development-focused; emphasizes state mitigation campaigns while marginalizing structural critiques.
ARY Group	ARY News, ARY Digital	Private corporate ownership with diversified commercial interests.	10.06 %	Episodic, reactive; prioritizes high-conflict political coverage over environmental issues.
Express Group	Daily Express, The Express Tribune, Express News	Controlled by private commercial investors with diversified interests.	8.28%	Highly bifurcated: Sensation-heavy disaster reporting in Daily Express; scientific-responsibility in The Express Tribune.
Samaa Group	Samaa TV, Samaa Digital	Private corporate ownership, heavily	5.92%	Episodic, event-driven; focuses on urban municipal issues during

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		dependent on commercial advertising.		seasonal crises.
Dunya Group	Dunya TV, Daily Dunya	Owned by industrial conglomerates with diversified financial interests.	2.83%	Episodic, reactive; climate change framed through immediate economic consequences.
Nawa-i-Waqt Group	Nawa-i-Waqt, The Nation	Traditional family-owned media house with nationalistic editorial leanings.	2.32%	Highly nationalistic; frames disasters through domestic resilience and transboundary blame.
Dawn Media Group	Daily Dawn, Dawn News TV, CityFM89, Dawn.com	Operated under Pakistan Herald Publications (Pvt) Ltd; controlled by Haroon-Saigol family.	1.79%	Thematic, policy-oriented, and scientific-responsibility; highly critical of domestic governance.

Cross-Media Ownership: The media market in Pakistan is very monopolized. The eight leading media houses account for 68% of the cross media audience share. These are not just journalistic forums or outlets, but family businesses with multiple businesses. Like Dawn Media Group, Jang Group with its mammoth 27% audience share is linked to huge commercial interests. These conglomerates have a business model and there is no space for environmental journalism. The environmental beat does not get the ratings that are possible from political infighting so it is under-resourced. The editors under tremendous commercial pressures are unable to act as "watchdogs" for the environment because they must print the hottest forms of coverage in order to attract corporate advertising.

In addition to private capital, media companies are profoundly dependent on

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the state advertising and government subsidies in their financial survival. This dependence has been used historically as a tool to make it more difficult to criticize the government. A blatant example of this carrot and stick censorship was when the federal government banned its advertisements on Dawn's print and broadcast outlets, without warning, from 2024 to 2025, after it had been critical of the state policies. Even independent outlets, which have traditionally been able to hold their own, feel an economic pressure to conform their editorial line, even to the extent of self-censoring criticism of environmental issues in the country for the survival of their businesses.

The most dire form of this hegemonic silence is the real estate conglomerates' takeover of the media, as in the case of Bahria Town. Large-scale private housing developers are one of the national's biggest advertisers. Malik Riaz, Asia's largest private real estate development company Bahria Town is a case in point to this Marxist critique. The massive extensions of Bahria Town are fraught with severe environmental conflicts such as the violent eviction of rural farming communities, destruction of natural drainage systems and formation of extreme urban heat islands. Finally, it is observed that due to this fast growth of built-up in Lahore and Karachi resulted in the localized land surface temperature (LST) in these areas which has increased from 33°C to 34.8°C as observed from remote sensing data. In spite of the obvious ecological damage, the media goes on a crickets campaign when it comes to criticism. This silence is maintained by direct media ownership: when Malik Riaz was under investigations for corruption, he started a TV channel called BOL News and later Nukta solely as a corporate PR channel. To that end, real estate corporations spend millions on multimodal ecolinguistic greenwashing, on social media. The advertising campaigns use extremely deceptive "green, modern, smart living" tags, "developed around a huge green area" to cosmetically conceal the brutality of the massive land conversion, deforestation and water exploitation. The mainstream press, totally dependent on such huge marketing budgets, refuses to cover the marginalized farming communities and actively portrays these environmentally damaging real estate projects as national "progress" and middle-class "modernity" – thereby making the destruction of the environment a desirable social investment in capitalism.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Analytical Synthesis

The Discourse-Historical analysis, which was analyzed in the wider political economy of Pakistani media, finds an intensely polarized and structurally disjointed public sphere which is not capable of developing a single and

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politically powerful discourse on climate. The bifurcation of the language of the press helps in the segregation of environmental debate; media outlets in English deliver theme-based critique on policy-making that resonates with the elite and international donors, Urdu language outlets appease the mass public through episodic sensationalism, trauma aesthetics and religious fatalism.

Most important, the media are an ideological instrument that has an ongoing and systematic cover-up operation that hides structural failures in the home country. The state and corporate media are able to divert blame from the industrial polluters or the agricultural cartels or the real estate capitalism, in a clever way, either towards the "bad" other, situated far away on the Topos of Global Injustice, or towards the "bad" other, situated close by in the form of the marginalized local citizen, on the Topos of Individual Responsibility. In an age of rapidly worsening climate crisis, the traditional, market-driven media narrative in Pakistan has proved to be inadequate to serve as an independent ecological watchdog, when it comes to financial leverage and state advertising manipulation and corporate real estate greenwashing.

6.2 Structural Reforms along with Alternate Discourses

A complete change of discourse and structure of the media and its regulation is needed to break down these entrenched barriers. The following pathways are recommended for media practitioners, civil society proponents and policy makers:

Media organisations need to deliberately and editorially try to bridge the gap in climate discourse related to language. Urdu language print and broadcast media urgently need to shift from episodic disaster-oriented to thematic solution oriented environmental journalism. It can be done practically by providing easy-to-understand, localized Urdu stories from the complex science climate data. If the media can clearly link local weather phenomena, like crop failures or urban smog, with national policy failures, and not with "divine will," it can establish a real, popular and bottom-up ecological literacy that could place local governments on notice.

De-commercialisation and Specialised Training: The environmental beat needs to be de-commercialised, and made to be a specialised department with ample resources, rather than a marginalised and low-prestige assignment. Media houses should make efforts to train their reporters in science as they should learn from academic institutions and NGOs. Moreover, there is an urgent need to develop digital journalism platforms independent, donor supported and community supported, and particularly attuned to the issue of domestic industrial pollution, illegal real estate encroachments and mismanagement of municipal wastes of which advertising boycott is never a

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threat.

Regulatory Action and Ecolinguistic Audits: Systemic Reform in need of Aggressive Regulatory Intervention. Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) should implement strict regulations for a fixed percentage of the total non-commercial prime-time broadcast of a week to be in public service mode with a focus on climate adaptation and accountability. Further, the allocation of state advertising needs to be completely transparent and free from editorial control so as not to be used as a political censorship instrument. Lastly, in order to fight against the subtleness of corporate greenwashing, civil society organizations and independent academic researchers have to regularly hold multimodal ecolinguistic audits and make them public. Through the Press Council of Pakistan and the consumer protection courts, advocacy groups can take action on the issue of truth in advertising by mega developers, and demand accountability from some of the biggest corporate polluters in the climate crisis.

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