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Six Monthly Media Monitor

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Introduction

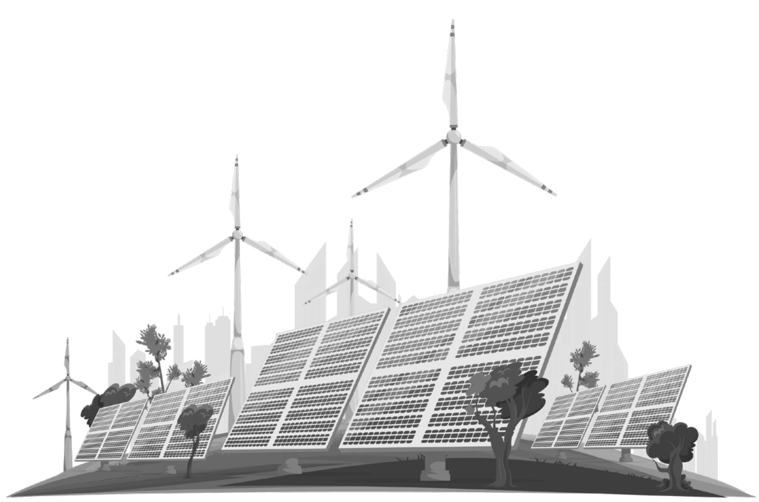
This bi-annual media monitor report, which covers the period November 2023 to April 2024, analyses how five newspapers covered the energy sector. Once again, we chose Dawn, Business Recorder, Express Tribune, The News and Pakistan Today's coverage of these pressing issues on their properties.

We examined the energy sector's key segments — coal, energy and finance, oil and gas, hydro-electricity and renewable energy. We also examined the sector's five key players and stakeholders — consumers, government, private developers, regulators and victims of energy policies.

We analyzed how the media covered these areas, breaking down how much attention in percentage was given to each sector or stakeholder.

This six-month report is unique in that during this period, Pakistan went from a caretaker government to an elected one in February, after a highly contentious election that saw the exclusion of the country's popular leader, Imran Khan. The coalition government led by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif inherited an economy in tatters with fears of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) default. It also faced huge challenges in all sectors, including energy and climate change as this period saw extreme weather events that impacted lives and livelihoods and despite pleas to the international community to compensate Pakistan, aid was slow to come.

The report is broken down by segment and presents the major stories in the six-month period that occurred. It then follows with an analysis of the media coverage of the segment and concludes with an overview.



No shelter from the storm

To say that climate change posed a threat is stating the obvious but a World Bank report in December showed the extent of it: the country's GDP could decline between 18 to 20percent by 2050 due to climate change. This is deeply distressing especially when you read that 8 out of 10 Pakistanis are worried about the escalating effects of climate change, with women and more educated people expressing fears the most. There is some distrust of climate issues, especially among the less educated, which shows a need for more awareness especially by the media on this issue beyond just reporting on climate-related disasters.

A Reuters story ahead of the February election reported on Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan People's Party (PPP), then considered the leading parties, climate policies in their manifestos, showing how they addressed global warming as a pressing concern. That this was done by an international wire agency demonstrates how local press did not prioritize this issue from an electoral point of view. The farmers quoted in this particular story, however, care very much about climate policies as they remain most impacted by it.

The media made some effort to report on the links between population growth and environmental disasters and the strain on the country's resources, showing how climate change is more than extreme weather events and how it impacts the economy and livelihoods.

Pollution, a perennial problem, posed particular challenges in Punjab where the smog was so bad November onwards, that the government imposed a 'Smog emergency' following Lahore High Court orders. Students had to wear masks in schools and the Provincial Disaster Management Authority banned burning crop residues. Fog issues caused massive delays in transport and raised food prices.

In April, Lahore was ranked the 7th most polluted city in the world with an air quality index (AQI) ranking of 155. (AQI levels of 100 and below are considered satisfactory.)

Global media descended in Dubai to cover the COP28 conference where at least 150 heads of state gathered to discuss how to accelerate action to meet the 2030 goals set under the Paris Agreement, like reducing greenhouse gas emissions and getting financial help to vulnerable countries.

One of the major steps was the launch the 513 million US dollar Loss and Damage Fund for vulnerable nations, something Pakistan had advocated for the year before after devastating floods ravaged the country, affecting 33m people, leaving 8m displaced and destroying two million homes.

Prime Minister Anwarul Haq Kakar attended the conference and called for executing the 100 billion US dollar commitments for climate finance to "ensure implementation of decisions by developing countries and to mitigate the impact of climate change" as reported by wire agencies. He also used the stage to update on Living Indus Initiative, a joint project with the United Nations (UN), aimed at restoring the natural ecosystem in the Indus Basin.

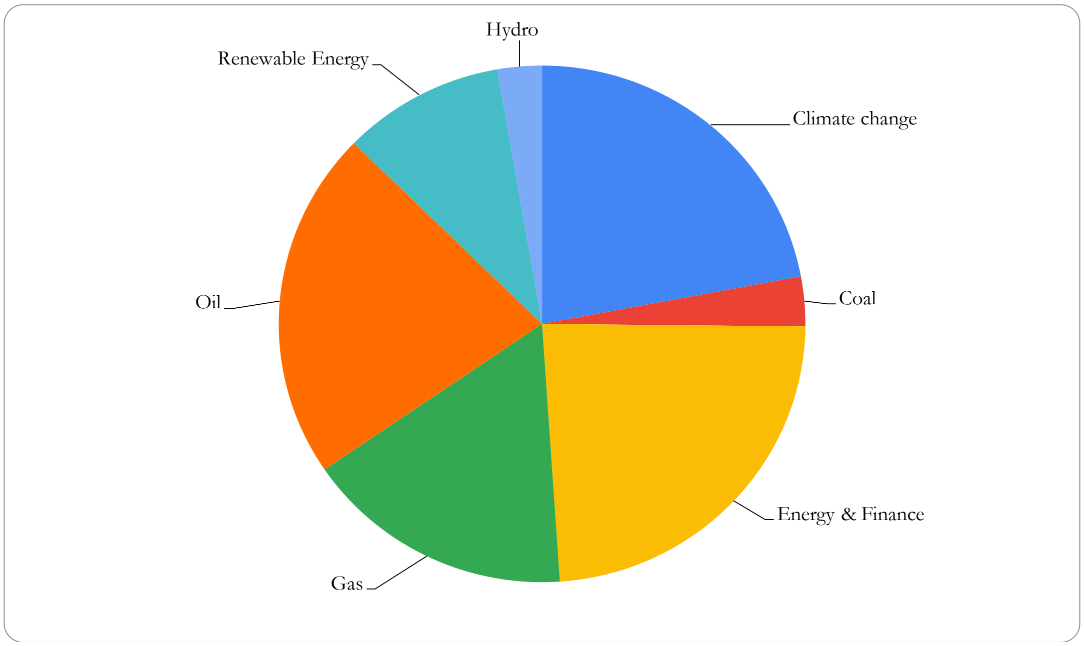
Also, at COP28, Pakistan's exploration and production companies — Oil and Gas Development Company (OGDCL), Pakistan Petroleum Limited (PPL), and Government Holdings Private Limited (GHPL) — signed the Decarbonization Charter, focusing on climate change and decarbonization goals; making a commitment to transition to sustainable energy.

All five papers gave substantial coverage to COP28, publishing wire stories from the event, reporting on Pakistan's active participation, detailing the negotiation process, vague commitments to move away from fossil fuels and criticizing the slow roll out of the funds pledged to vulnerable nations. This shows a far better understanding of how this issue ties into the economy, to people's livelihoods, health (malnutrition and food insecurity), education and the burden it places on the country's already weak infrastructure.

The media also gave coverage to international donors giving climate-specific aid like in April when USAID announced the provision of $10 million. Or when the Asian Development Bank also pledged five billion US dollars to support climate and sustainable development initiatives.

However, for all the diversity in opinion and reporting various stakeholders' point of view, where it lacked was from getting the voices of the victims across.

Segments Covered



Saviour or villan?

Against a backdrop of a crippling economic crisis, Pakistan continued to attempt to focus efforts in increasing coal-based power production to reduce its dependence on imported fuel sources like relinquished national gas (RLNG) for electricity. Thar coalfields are one of the largest deposits of coal in the world with one estimate reporting 175 billion tons of coal.

Almost half of direct foreign investment in the country has been in coal power projects over the last five years. For a cash-strapped country advocating climate mitigation, Pakistan was unable to avoid the largely China-funded coal projects. Two coal-fired projects were launched in 2023 in Tharparkar which would generate 11.24 billion units of low-cost electricity.

In December the media reported on the financial closure of a $2-billion coal-fired power plant in Tharparkar. The plant, run by Shanghai Electric Corporation is already operational and is using coal mined from Thar Coalfield Block-I. The total installed capacity of five commissioned Thar coal-based power projects has reached 3,300MW.

Pakistan's reliance on coal could also be seen in the federal government's approval of a 105-kilometer railway line connecting Port Qasim in Karachi to coalfield blocks in Tharparkar to facilitate coal transportation for power generation

Karachi Electric signed an MOU with Hubco in February to explore coal power generation and become reliant on indigenous resources.

Much of the media reporting addressed the issue from the lens of the country needing to meet its increasing power demands. An editorial in the Business Recorder in March, however, pointed to "the purported absence of fairness and transparency in the bidding process of long-term coal contracts." This echoes serious allegations made by outgoing caretaker energy minister who wrote a letter on reported corruption of buying coal under CPEC's Sahiwal plant wherein two suppliers were allegedly shown favors. Other coal suppliers are said to have registered their protests with the Chinese plant. These irregularities needed to be investigated further especially since they involve a plant run on imported coal at high costs.

The coal industry also witnessed the brewing of a crisis in December 2023 due to a delay in clearing an outstanding balance of 55 billion Pak rupees owed to Sindh Engro coal mining. The government would need to buy coal from the international market costing them 50 million US dollars a month. The media highlighted the government's mismanagement and inability to get a hold of its larger circular debt issue, placing all the burden on the hapless consumer.

Once again, the victims of these energy policies are ignored in the stories. They face exorbitant electricity costs because of inflated coal prices. This resulted in an additional burden of 4 billion Pak rupees a month and between 40 billion Pak rupees to 50 billion Pak rupees in the last 18 months, according to Business Recorder.

Of equal import is how coal mining poses a lot of dangers to its workers. The dismal condition of coal mines and the lack of safety for workers came into the limelight when 12 miners died in a gas explosion in Harnai district in Balochistan in March. It highlighted the high number of accidents, inadequate compensation for workers and lack of safety equipment along with dangerous working conditions. 60 coal miners had lost their lives in the first two months of the year according to media reports. Three coal miners were kidnapped in March in Duki by armed men. Once again, workers were at the bottom of the stakeholder ladder when it came to reporting their stories.

Power trips without power

Whoever was to take the helm of governance following the elections knew that an unprecedented economic and energy crisis awaited them. Inflation was at 30.4 percent when Shehbaz Sharif took oath, frequent power hikes in the interim government period too had placed a burden on consumers. The high cost of electricity dominated headlines in this six-month period with a focus on how the government was dealing, or not dealing, with the issue.

During its rule as interim government, distribution companies (Discos) sought National Electric Power Regulatory Authority's approval for transfer of 22.56 billion Pak rupees burden to power consumers. Discos cite factors like variation in capacity, variable operation and maintenance, additional recovery on incremental sale, use of system charges as reasons for power price hike.

Issues around the power tariff proved to be a recurring feature in the six months from consumers' pleas against inflated bills to utility companies like Lahore Electric Supply Company (LESCO) discovering more power pilferers or the hikes in the tariffs itself, which saw protests across the country. Power theft was another common story as was utility companies threatening dire consequences to thieves and defaulters. There was significant coverage of inflated bills, the energy crisis and the need for inclusive fiscal strategies to address Pakistan's debt crisis in the form of op-eds and editorials.

Nepra in its annual report for 2023 wrote that Pakistan's economic growth rate declined to 0.29 percent in the previous fiscal year owing to increased electricity tariffs. That same month SITE Association of Industry in Karachi the near zero supply of gas was making it impossible to function. There was no letting up for the interim, and then Sharif-led government.

The caretaker government in November notified the five-year National Electricity Plan 2023-27, under which the government said it would ensure 100 percent energy access to all by 2030, while the share of indigenous resources in the generation mix will increase to 60 percent and 75 percent by fiscal year 2025 and fiscal year 2030.

The government's tenuous relationship with industrialists would come to the fore when the latter demanded a withdrawal of a raise in gas and power tariffs demonstrating the challenges governments face when trying to enforce difficult decisions. Much of this tussle between the government and what it considers its constituents impacted negotiations with the IMF, the institution making demands on increasing taxes, power tariffs etc to stabilize the economy.

IMF exerted pressure on the government to raise prices of gas and power, a demand it has been making for at least four years with pushback from Pakistan, which has consistently struggled to hold defaulters or power thieves accountable. The government rejected in January request made by federal power division to block passports and national identity cards (CNIC) of defaulters saying it does not address the core issue of why this issue exists in the first place. The government, meanwhile, raised gas prices by 41 percent in January to meet demands. That same month, media reported that consumers were expected to face a significant per unit increase of 4.66 Pak rupees in their January 2024 electricity bills because of an increase in the prices of fuel used in power generation.

However, the IMF's focus on pricing and cost reduction reforms led to frequent and significant price adjustments in the electricity market, again placing burdens on consumers and businesses.

The federal government agreed to an IMF proposal in February to privatize Discos through a long-term concession model being practiced in Turkey. But there was little in the media explaining this Turkish model and if it would address the issue of operational mismanagement.

The media's reporting of the impact of the fluctuating global oil prices on people often saw the phrase "petrol bomb" being used. The government dropping a petrol bomb before Eid, for example, is an example of how the 9.66 Pak rupees per liter increase was described. This was at a time when the IMF was pushing the government to impose a general sales tax of 18 Pak rupees per liter on petroleum products.

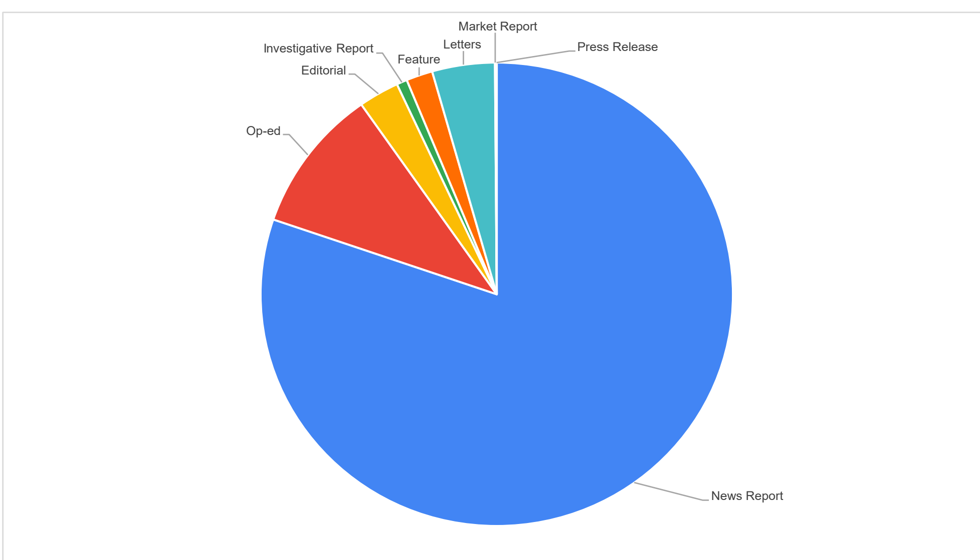
Protests over load-shedding erupted throughout Pakistan including in Gilgit Baltistan where residents complained of 22 hours of load-shedding in March which led to productivity and business losses. For its part NEPRA tried to address this issue by, for example, fining five distribution companies 250 million Pak rupees for unannounced load shedding.

In April, the World Bank gave a 1 billion US dollar loan for the 2,160 megawatts Dasu hydropower project which the Tribune reported as "a crucial initiative aimed at integrating cheaper electricity into Pakistan's energy mix and showcasing the nation's resilience against adversaries." This was likely a reference to two terrorist attacks targeting Chinese workers on the site that caused delays in the project. This is the third major financing by the lender and a reminder of the dependency Pakistan has on international lenders. The World Bank now estimates the cost at 4.9 US billion dollar, a 13 percent increase from its original estimate.

The media reported on the government's inability to move towards reform and effective policies but allegations of corruption, favoritism in handing out contracts dogged them.

For example, allegations of corruption regarding the bidding process for a 880-megawatt hydropower project in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in February is a small example of practices that have not been streamlined.

Types of Content



Few avenues of hope

At least 120 nations vowed to triple renewable energy by 2030 at UN talks in December. The pledges were a reminder of how solar, wind, hydroelectric need to urgently replace coal, oil and gas — which are heating up the planet — and achieve the goal of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Against this backdrop the caretaker government was criticized for its inability to produce sufficient renewable energy which led to price hikes in power, causing the burden on consumers and businesses. While there is an understanding on the need for clean energy, projects around this experience a lot of bureaucratic issues like delays in getting approvals and a lack of proper timelines in the bidding process.

Asian Development Bank's approval of 250 million US dollars in November for the improvement of its power transmission network in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would likely provide some respite to the provinces. The project was aimed at providing "national grid stability, energy security, climate resilience and increased transmission capacity to deploy sufficient, reliable, clean, and cost-effective energy for sustainable economic growth" as Dawn reported.

There was a lot of interest in electronic vehicles given the high cost of fuel so Chinese car manufacturer BYD's decision to enter the Pakistan e-vehicle market in March was met with a lot of excitement. It launched a version of its plug-in sedan at a lower price point, creating a buzz among consumers. This move to cleaner transportation, potentially reducing carbon emissions and improving the export potential in the mobility sector. According to BR research in April, "half a million EVs on roads will save half a billion dollar a year on fuel import" but the prevailing economic uncertainty means hurdles in investment in EVs. Concerns were also raised in December about the high costs associated at the EV charging stations.

Although the government tried to incentivize solar, it did not receive bids demonstrating the challenges it faces in streamlining the process.

Then there are issues like delays. The World Bank funded Sindh solar energy project has been extended to 2025 because it received 23 percent of the 100 million US dollar funds. The Water and Sanitation Agency in Punjab said it wanted to shift to solar, an announcement they've made since 2021, but there was no follow up in the media about the timeline. The Sindh government said it wanted to tax solar panels in the province, a move which was met with much criticism.

But there seemed to be small wins: Twelve wind power project in Thatta, part of CPEC, were connected to the national grid, creating 20,000 jobs and reported to curtail around 2-million-ton carbon emissions.

While the government was trying to create tax incentives for local solar manufacturers and also creating competition among bidders for Pakistan's first floating solar project, we learned about scams in solar panel imports.

One was the 2022 case of a 70 billion Pak rupees established trade-based money laundering scandal through the import of solar panels. A Senate Standing Committee in November heard about this scam where, in the absence of sales tax on local supply and duty on import, solar panels had emerged as high-risk items for over-invoicing and trade-based money laundering. The committee said banks involved in the scam should have been heavily fined.

Pakistan Customs also detected money laundering worth 16 billion Pak rupees under the guise of solar panel imports in December.

The hurdles of doing business in Pakistan are best illustrated in the example of the Foreign Renewable Energy Forum (PFREF), a group of foreign investors in the energy sector, writing to army chief General Asim Munir, asking him to remove bureaucratic hurdles facing the installation of 13 wind and solar power projects which can produce 600 megawatts of electricity and can result in the investment of 600 US million dollars.

On the face of it, prime minister Shehbaz Sharif said all the right things about renewable energy, advocating all ministries, especially energy, use renewable sources for power generation to reduce reliance on imported fuels. In situations like this, the media becomes passive recipient and does not push harder to ask questions on a tangible timelines or action plan. As a result, government officials' statements read like press releases.

In the private sector, KE said in November that it will add 640 megawatts of renewable electricity to its energy mix over the next two years through solar power and wind power projects.

Little left to burn here

Israel's war in Gaza following the October 7 attack by Hamas, caused fears of oil supply and formed the backdrop of price fluctuations. There was a lot of media attention on Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC+) decisions on production cuts, for example, in November 2023 and how that would impact the market and prices Despite a recent rise, oil prices fell for a seventh consecutive week in December, indicating a prolonged period of market instability. The geopolitical tension was felt across the world as attempts were made to stabilize prices. Pakistanis were impacted as petrol prices went up. The government said it wanted to attract foreign investments and enhance local production in a bid to reduce dependency on fuel imports.

The caretaker federal cabinet approved in October up to 3900 percent increase in the fixed monthly charges and 194 percent increase in consumer rates for natural gas respectively. Petroleum division issued the new summary with approved hikes for different categories as advised by the Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority (OGRA). This would prove to be a big blow for consumers struggling to make ends meet in dire economic conditions.

But there was no let-up in price hikes. Business owners and industrialists protest 220 percent gas tariff increase within the previous year alone, urging the new government to provide relief.

The federal petroleum ministry warned that the gas sector's circular debt may surge by 275 billion rupees if gas prices are not increased further. In April the World Bank report warned the circular debt of Pakistan's energy sector will reach 5.5 trillion rupees by the end of fiscal year 2023-24.

The discovery of a new gas reserves in the Dharki area of Sindh in January as well as in the sensitive area of Kohlu block in Balochistan in February raised hopes for future exploration opportunities given the dire need.

Many of the challenges lie in clearly thought out policies. The government in February, for example, said it was reconsidering privitization of two LNG plants that were signed by the Nawaz government in 2013 with Qatar.

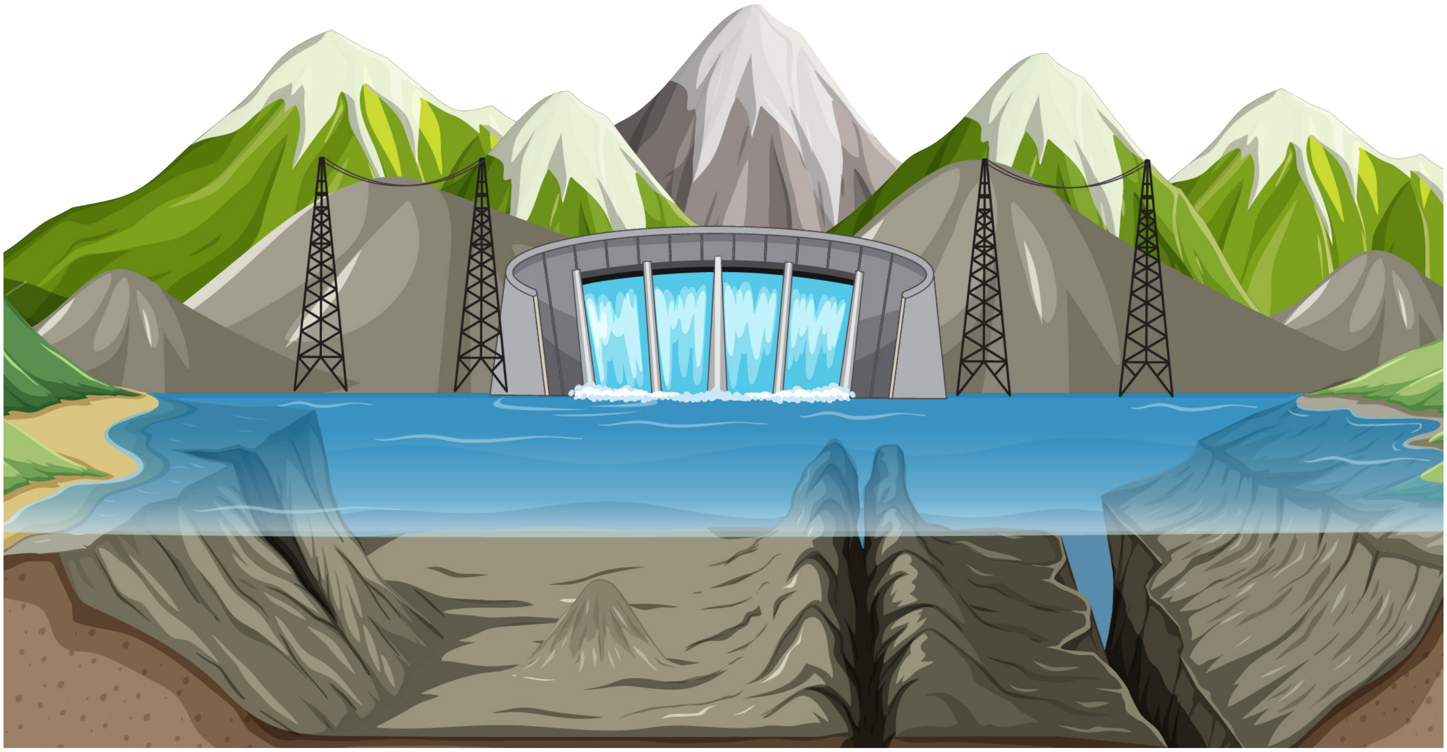
The much-delayed gas pipeline with Iran was in the news at the start of 2024.

Iran extended the deadline by 180 days in January to complete the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline project and warns of international arbitration if Pakistan fails to abide by the new deadline. The agreement for this gas pipeline was signed in 2009 was meant to supply 750 million to 1,000 million cubic feet per day of gas. While Iran completed the construction on its end in 2011, delays in Pakistan continue, as it is believed the country fears US sanctions; in March it asked for a waiver from sanctions. In April it began work on the 80km portion of the pipeline from Gwadar to a connection point in Iran.

The Sui Southern Gas Company warned of a 50 percent decline in Pakistan's indigenous gas reserves by 2027 and encourages prudent practices for gas utilization.

Indigenous oil reserves of Pakistan see a steep drop from 224 million barrels in 2022 to 193 million barrels in 2023.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announces the implementation of the Weighted Average Cost of Gas (WACOG) formula to blend local gas with imported RLNG. Media reports speculated that while the gas prices may reduce in Punjab, they could increase in remaining provinces which could create tension. The News reported that the implementation of the WACOG formula is reported to increase domestic gas tariff by 91 percent and decrease industrial tariff by 25 percent.



Death by water

Pakistan is only able to store 10 percent of its annual river flows against the world average of 40percent. The media reported Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA) saying in November that the completion of under-construction projects will improve the water and hydel power situation. The carryover water capacity will increase by a fortnight to 45 days with an addition of 9.7m acre-feet water storage.

WAPDA claimed at the end of 2023 that it generated about 34 billion units of "low-cost, clean, and green hydel electricity" – 2.2 billion units more than they year before. WAPDA hydel electricity costs only 3.51 Pak rupees per unit and it constitutes about 30 percent of the total electricity provided to the national grid.

Work on the Balakot Hydro power project was reportedly in "full swing" according to the Business Recorder in December 2023. The project, which is expected to complete in 7 years, would bring an annual income of 15 billion Pak rupees to KP and provide jobs to 1,400 people, according to Pakhtunkhwa Energy Development Organization.

The trouble with the reporting on hydropower projects for example, is that they are sourced only from the government's perspective. For example, the media reported on the WAPDA chief wanting to expedite work on Diamer Bhasha and Dasu hydropower plant but doesn't provide any details except his visit to the site. This limited reporting due to perhaps access issues does not inform audiences in any way.

On the other hand, a story by Dawn in April on the temporary closure of Neelum Jhelum hydropower project was a good example of in-depth reporting, citing several sources and providing a timeline. Since it was commissioned in 2018, this project has generated 19.829 bn units of electricity and then 1.54 billion units since it resumed electricity generation in August last year.

In March the government said it would set up an energy regulatory body in Gilgit-Baltistan for exploitation of hydropower potential. This was against the backdrop of the controversial approval of the 40MW hydropower project Hanzel in Gilgit, whose project capacity was increased without getting the due official approvals. Its cost increased from 121 billion Pak rupees in 2021 to 20.23 billion Pak rupees in December 2023.

Gilgit-Baltistan was also in the news for demanding its share of water user charges as well as net hydel profit of Diamer Bhasha Dam.

The government's loudspeaker

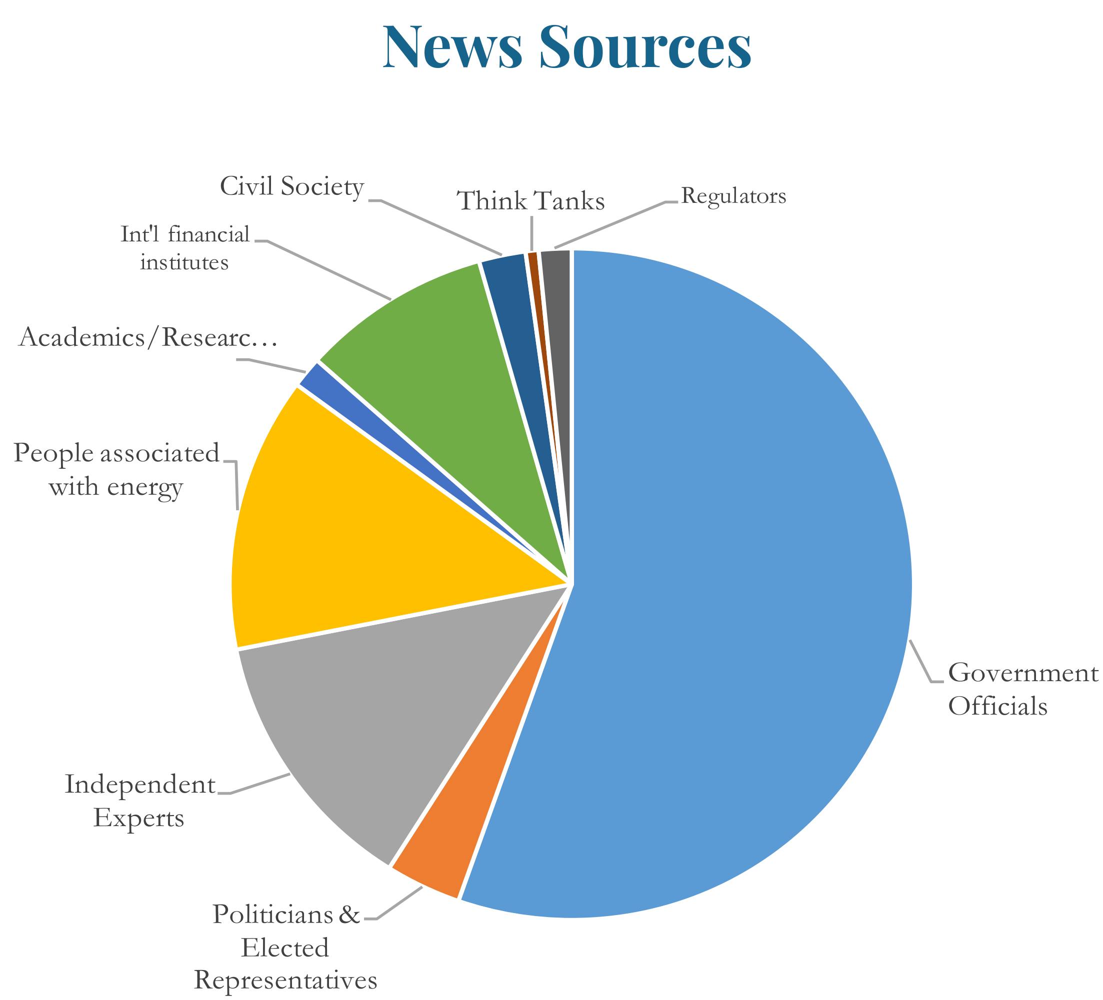
Pakistan's media is often accused of bias by audiences who want journalists to "just report the facts." However, in this present age of technological innovation which has disrupted how consumers receive information, facts become the first casualty; everyone has their own set of facts now. Mainstream media today competes with influencers, TikTokers and Vloggers who cater to audiences stuck in their information silos wanting "news" that confirms their point of view.

As numbers for a print reading and TV watching audience begin to shrink in Pakistan, and the number of digital natives rises, the press is not the gatekeeper of information anymore and the newsroom reflects that.

There is hardly any investigative journalism in the English-language print media anymore. In our analysis of the six-month period, we counted 7 investigative stories in Business Recorder, 4 in Dawn and 1 in The News. This is a dismal indictment on the quality of journalism and is likely because of poor resources in terms of staff. Reporters today have several beats and are spread too thin so the stories are not done because there's no one to do them or they don't have the time to do them because they have to file more stories than before.

This explains why so much of the media coverage was about events, conferences, official statements rather than features and analyses about, say, the degrading environment, who/what it impacts, and how. It is easier to report the aforementioned, and requires less leg-work but it does not necessarily adequately inform the public.

Nonetheless, it is rather remarkable that against this backdrop of job insecurity in the media, reporters and editors manage their jobs with little support. They are rarely given any skill-based trainings by their employers, or safety equipment, or perks compared to their colleagues in TV.



This background is necessary to understand as we delve into examining how much coverage was given to segments in the energy sector. Time, staff and space constraints all likely play a role here.

We begin with energy and finance which received the most coverage at 23.8 percent. This is understandable as this period was one of Pakistan's worst economic crisis and everyone was impacted by the energy crisis. Fears of an IMF default loomed; when Pakistan received its first payment, and began to implement tough decisions based on their recommendations, political instability heightened. However, in this scenario the consumers, community and victims of energy policies did not get the media attention they deserved as stakeholders impacted by these decisions. While they were reported on it was passive — i.e. their voices were lumped as "the public" while government officials were given preference. While it's understandable their statements will be sought on important governance matters, the reporting is lopsided when other voices — like critics or naysayers — are left out.

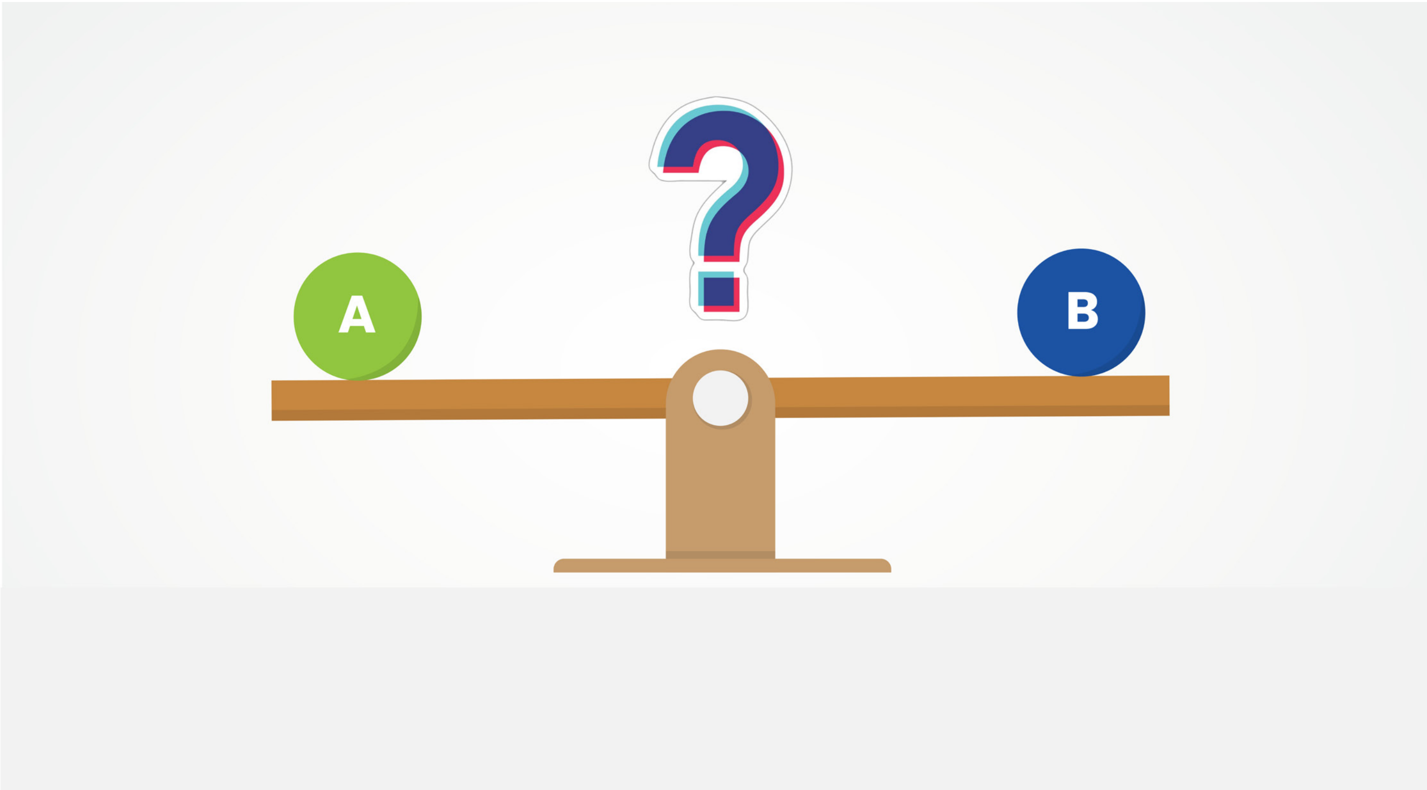
Climate change constituted 22.1 percent of media coverage and comes in as the second most covered segment. Some newspapers gave it more importance than others like Dawn newspaper whose coverage constituted 42.9 percent of the total. Dawn also included climate activists as a source, the only publication to do so. This demonstrates an editorial policy and staff cognizant of the threats posed by climate change and its commitment to highlight the issues.

Oil was the third most covered story at 21.9 percent followed by gas with 16.5 percent.

Renewable energy received 9.9 percent of the media coverage which seems low given that most of the government and official statements were about the need to invest in renewable energy – from electronic vehicles to solar, but stories about those subjects specifically were low. On solar, there was coverage about the scandal involving their import or how government officials wanted their minister to use solar - This again highlights dependence on government sources for stories rather than in-depth reporting.

Coal received 3.2 percent of the coverage and most of it was around interest in investing in coal mining in Tharparkar or the problems faced due to the high price of coal imports. While safety at coal mines is an important issue it only surfaced when there were accidents. This once again highlights the hierarchy that media attaches to who it considers as important sources for storytelling.

Hydropower received the least media coverage with 2.7 percent, a little less than what coal garnered.



Who matter most - and least?

It is no surprise that the government dominates the chunk of sourcing coming in at 54.2 percent. Given the precarious time period, with economic and political instability, it makes sense for the government to be the "go-to" source and have their perspective. However, the analysis shows that there is rarely any challenge to their narrative, in the form of questions from reporters or diverse sources to present another perspective. This comes dangerously close to resembling a state media and not one run by a democratic one, however flawed its composition.

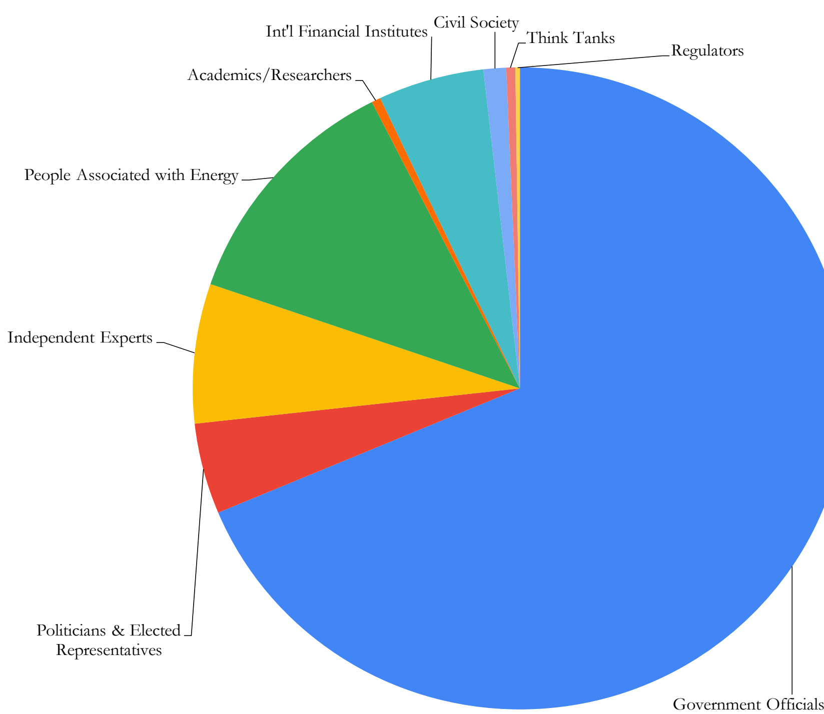
The reliance on government or officials is a common thread throughout which goes against the principle of objectivity and fairness in journalism. If weight is given to their perspective and drastically less to the subjects impacted by their policies, the audience is not informed. And an ill-informed audience cannot make the right decision when it comes time to vote.

There is a small difference between the second and third place in news coverage, the private developer with 18.9 percent and the regulator at 13.9 percent. Here, we learned about the problems they faced in dealing with the government, the bureaucratic delays in sorting their contract or payments, for example rather than the impact their projects may have. If the story involved prospective projects for example where the government was projecting the positive contribution said project would bring, the private developer was given space to repeat the same sentiment. There was rarely any fact-checking. This is especially important as stories about irregularities or allegations of corruption that emerged were about past projects, i.e. questions were not raised in the press at the time.

The consumer and victims of energy policies received around five percent of news media coverage — the consumer got 5.4 percent while the latter received 5percent. However, it was largely through the lens of fluctuating prices of fuel, gas etc. Undoubtedly the cost of living and inability to make ends meet impacted people but the reporting did not adequately show how. Did parents have to stop their child's schooling, for example? What changes did various families make to adjust to the challenging time?

The community came in at the bottom with 1.9 percent of the media coverage. Some of the communities featured were in remote places like mountainous areas, impacted by extreme weather for example. Here access may have been an issue which is why we see little media representation of vulnerable communities. This is not true for farmers, however, impacted by air quality in Punjab. They were poorly represented during the period where smog was so poor, stories were done from how it was impacting day-to-day life in urban areas and not long-term consequences for farmers, traders etc.

Key Actors



Conclusion

The government remains the main source of information and dominates how stories about energy are conveyed. A part of this may be the limited resources available in the newsroom but it also highlights the limited understanding of these issues. In this six-month period, only 30 features were published among the five papers, the majority of them (20) in Dawn. The legacy outlet seems most committed to getting the stories out but it was still reliant on the government and official stance in its everyday reporting of the energy sector.

With the transition from interim to a new government, it was natural that the focus would be on policy-making but there was little on offer to help the audience understand better. A part of the problem is that the English-language print audience is elite so newsrooms tend to give preference to powerful decision-makers, in this case the government and private sector. Politicians and elected representatives, who audiences voted to represent them, do not figure high in the news media coverage. There is thus no real accountability as governments make decisions without much debate, in the press or Parliament. The press becomes passive rather than an active member of the estate meant to hold the powerful to account.