

Media Monitor

May to October 2025



Summary



The monitoring period from May to October 2025 reveals that the Pakistani energy press landscape was caught between competing imperatives such as financial crisis management, renewable energy transition, and environmental accountability while struggling to provide the critical, independent reporting these complex challenges demand.

Between May and October 2025 Pakistan's energy beat continued to tilt between urgent short-term fixes and longer-term strategic shifts. The dominant storylines in mainstream English dailies were about the continuing solar rooftop expansion and policy frictions around net-metering and buyback rates; continued adjustments in gas/LNG sourcing and visible domestic gas shortages; renewed attention to IPP and energy-finance reforms; and persistent media coverage of coal (primarily Thar) and climate events (smog and heat episodes).

The six-month period was also characterized by a media landscape heavily focused on the financial and regulatory aspects of Pakistan's energy sector, with a notable surge in coverage related to climate and air quality. Analyzing coverage of the energy sector as it appeared in five major English-language dailies, the monitor finds that while the government's efforts to reform the power sector dominated headlines, critical scrutiny and in-depth reporting on the human and environmental impacts remained largely absent.

Even though the mainstream English dailies devoted substantial column space to energy matters, the coverage remained overwhelmingly reactive and government-centric. The dominance of official sources across all five newspapers underscores a troubling dependency on press releases and ministerial statements over investigative journalism. This pattern was consistent whether papers were covering IPP renegotiations, solar policy adjustments, LNG volatility, or climate action plans.

The media's failure to connect dots is particularly striking. Climate coverage surged during smog episodes and heat waves, yet rarely linked these crises to Pakistan's continued fossil fuel dependence or interrogated the contradictions between stated climate commitments and actual energy policy. Solar expansion was celebrated for consumer savings but seldom examined for its equity implications on non-solar households or strain on DISCO revenues. Thar coal received the most uncritical coverage, with environmental and social costs largely invisible in favor of capacity and cost-saving narratives.

Most significantly, the human dimension remained marginalized. Price hikes, gas shortages, and policy shifts were documented but rarely followed through with on-the-ground reporting on their impact on households, small industries, or vulnerable communities. The “he said, she said” pattern of political blame-trading substituted for structural analysis of systemic failures in distribution, pricing, and planning.

For Pakistan’s energy journalism to serve the public interest, newsrooms must invest in investigative capacity, diversify their sources beyond official channels, and commit to sustained, people-centered reporting that holds power accountable while contextualizing policy within Pakistan’s economic realities and climate obligations. The stakes – energy security, climate resilience, and social equity – demand nothing less.





Key Findings



Dominance of climate and air quality: This category saw the highest frequency of articles, driven by policy announcements (for example: IGCEP 2025–35 approval, petroleum levy hikes) and environmental concerns.



Energy finance and IPPS and oil and gas maintained significant coverage, reflecting ongoing national economic pressures, including tariff adjustments, subsidy debates, and volatile international fuel prices.



Solar coverage, while present, often focused on regulatory changes (such as net-metering adjustments) and their impact on consumers, signaling a shift from a “boom” narrative to one of “balance” and policy uncertainty.



Coal (Thar) remained the least covered topic, with articles primarily echoing official narratives on capacity and cost savings, lacking independent verification of environmental or social costs.



Journalistic gaps: The media largely failed to provide structural analysis, relying heavily on official press releases. Critical warnings from international financial institutions (IFIs) were often overlooked, and the direct impact of policy on consumers and industry was under-reported.

The report recommends a shift towards more investigative journalism, diversification of sources, and a greater focus on contextualizing energy policy within Pakistan’s broader climate commitments and economic realities.



Methodology

The monitoring report is based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis of media coverage from five major English-language dailies (Business Recorder, Dawn, Pakistan Today, Express Tribune and The News) between May 2025 and October 2025. Data was extracted and categorized into five core themes, and analyzed for frequency, key actors, sourcing strategy and dominant narratives.





Discussion and Analysis

Quantitatively, across the five monitored English language dailies including *Business Recorder*, *Dawn*, *Pakistan Today*, *Express Tribune* and *The News*, coverage strongly flagged renewables (solar/EV items), climate (smog/COP/policy), oil and gas (LNG, petrol/diesel), and energy-finance / IPP narratives. There were multiple cross-cutting stories, with many of the new items referencing more than one topic.

A. What the coverage emphasized:

Solar boom & distributed generation tensions

The narrative surrounding solar energy during this period was defined by regulatory uncertainty and a policy pivot aimed at managing the financial strain on the national grid. The government's contemplation and subsequent postponement of adjusting the net-metering buyback rate (from Rs27 to Rs10) created significant policy ambiguity. Coverage highlighted the tension between promoting renewable energy and addressing the tariff cross-subsidy burden on non-solar users. Articles frequently discussed the need for a "fair balance" between prosumers and grid users, suggesting a shift towards self-consumption models and Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS). Key actors in this space were "regulators" and "energy experts", with the media often acting as a platform for policy debate rather than a source of independent analysis on the solar sector's long-term growth trajectory. The focus was less on the "solar boom" and more on the financial and equity implications of its integration into the existing power infrastructure.

Media reports continued to chronicle rapid rooftop solar adoption and local government solar pledges (household/tube-well solarisation). Coverage celebrated rollout and consumer savings but also recorded policy pushback (controversies over buyback rate cuts, inclusions/exclusions from incentive schemes).

Media framing tended toward the policy announcement / benefit narrative; far fewer stories interrogated systemic impacts - for example the strain on DISCO revenues, subsidy implications, or impacts on low-income households who cannot afford solar.



Energy finance, IPPs and the politics of contracts

Coverage of Energy Finance and Independent Power Producers (IPPs) was dominated by the government's aggressive push for power sector reforms, primarily centered on renegotiating contracts and managing the persistent circular debt. The media extensively reported on the revised agreements with IPPs, which aimed to convert dollar-indexed returns to a fixed rate in Pakistani rupees, projected to save trillions. However, a significant gap was the under-reporting of caution from international financial institutions (IFIs) regarding the "non-consultative" approach to these renegotiations. The narrative was heavily shaped by Government officials and Regulators, focusing on the claimed fiscal savings and the urgency of privatization efforts for DISCOs. The media often portrayed these moves as necessary financial breakthroughs without deeply interrogating the long-term impact on investor confidence or the true economic consequences of the revised contracts.

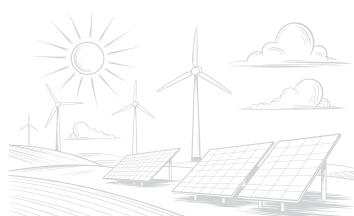
Stories about contract renegotiation, capacity payments and circular debt continued to run in business pages. Papers covered government steps to rework IPP returns and to privatise or restructure DISCOs.

Media coverage mainly echoed official positions or industry reactions; investigative or independent economic analysis was limited, mirroring the pattern in your sample monitor.

Oil and gas volatility and LNG management

The oil and gas sector coverage was characterized by volatility in international prices, domestic price fluctuations, and the ongoing struggle to manage supply and demand. Reports frequently detailed the fortnightly adjustments to petroleum prices and the impact of the petroleum levy hike, which was used to generate significant revenue for the government. A recurring theme was the gas surplus amid demand collapse, where steep tariff hikes led to a nationwide gas surplus, despite ongoing household load-shedding. The media also covered the strategic shift in crude oil sourcing, including negotiations with Russia. However, a critical omission was the lack of analysis on the human impact of rising fuel costs on daily life and the economy. Coverage of the perennial winter gas shortages followed a predictable "he said, she said" pattern between federal and provincial governments, failing to provide structural analysis of the underlying distribution and infrastructure issues.

Reports detailed shifting LNG schedules, deferred cargoes, spot market diversions and petrol/diesel price movements. Local coverage routinely recorded human impacts (transport fare adjustments, agriculture diesel demand) but rarely connected price moves to macro drivers (currency, global freight) in depth.



Coal (Thar) narratives: Progress vs. costs

Coal received the least media attention among the core topics. The narrative was overwhelmingly positive, focusing on the increased power generation from domestic coal sources and the claimed cost savings. Articles, often sourced from official press releases or industry-backed reports, highlighted the role of Thar coal in the energy mix and its contribution to national energy security. Private developers and government officials were the primary actors in this space. The media's coverage was criticized for its lack of journalistic balance, with a noticeable absence of independent scrutiny regarding the environmental and social costs associated with Thar coal mining and power generation. The focus on corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives by developers often overshadowed any critical examination of the long-term sustainability and climate implications of expanding the coal-based energy capacity.

Coal stories were fewer, with recurring themes: Boost in Thar generation, policy decisions to convert plants, and episodic reporting on accidents and local protests. Most coverage amplified official and investor optimism; sustained local-voice and environmental impact reporting was sparse.

Climate and air quality

Climate and air quality was the most frequently covered topic, reflecting a growing, albeit often reactive, media focus on environmental issues. Coverage was broad, encompassing the approval of the IGCEP 2025–35 (touted to save \$17bn by removing high-cost projects), the push for carbon levies and green taxation, and the immediate crisis of smog and heatwaves. Key actors included “government officials and regulators”, often in the context of policy announcements and directives. The media reported on initiatives like the Lahore Qalandars’ climate action pledge and the push for solarization projects. However, much of the coverage was event-driven and reactive. While the IGCEP approval was framed as a climate-friendly move, the media rarely connected the dots between the continued reliance on fossil fuels (Oil and Gas, Coal) and the long-term climate commitments under the Paris Agreement.

Coverage of smog, AQI spikes, and policy responses (smog action plans, subsidies for residue management) was substantial. Climate entries often appeared as episodic crisis reporting (smog/heatwave), plus some policy tracking (COP-linked statements). Some outlets (notably *Dawn*'s analytical pieces) produced more people-centric narratives

B. Notable / Recurring Narratives and Representative Lines

“Solar adoption has cut peak grid demand by (this much percentage).”

This is repeated across pieces as positive consumer story, rarely interrogated for DISCO impacts.

“Government renegotiation will save billions in capacity payments”.

Mostly reflected in financial pages, with limited coverage of investor reaction or contract implications.

“LNG cargoes deferred/diverted”.

Recurrently reported, often from supplier statements or regulatory notes rather than independent analysis.

Human impact mentions (fare hikes, local protests, minor accidents) appear across the 5 newspapers but are typically short reports not followed up with deeper local reporting.

C. Patterns (high-level) of Reporting per the News Outlets

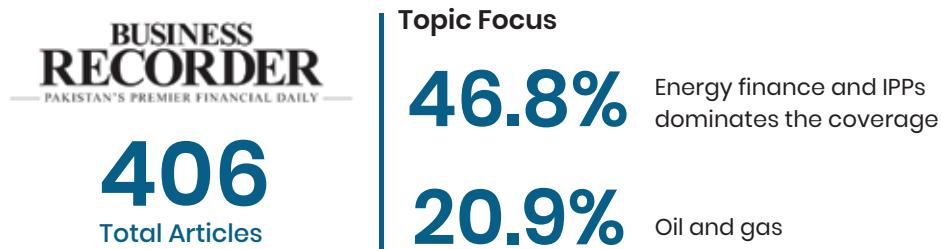
Business Recorder: Heavier on energy/finance, IPP/contract items and analysis pieces.

Dawn: Stronger in climate and investigative or explanatory pieces (human impacts, policy probing).

Express Tribune: Frontline reporting on market/price swings and LNG adjustments.

The News / Pakistan Today: A mix of consumer impact pieces and event coverage; less in-depth follow-ups.

1. Individual Newspaper Analysis



This suggests a strong focus on the financial and commercial aspects of the energy sector, consistent with its business-centric mandate.

Key Actor Focus

The paper heavily features regulators and government officials, indicating a focus on policy and market regulation.

Dominant Narratives

Narratives are often technical and market-driven, focusing on tariff adjustments, regulatory decisions, and financial performance.

DAWN

257

Total Articles

Topic Focus

37.0%

Climate and air quality is the highest-covered topic

36.2%

Energy finance and IPPs

This shows a more balanced approach, giving significant weight to environmental and long-term policy issues alongside financial concerns.

Key Actor Focus

Government officials are the most cited, but the presence of energy experts and regulators is also strong, suggesting a more diverse sourcing strategy that includes expert commentary.

Dominant Narratives

The narratives often touch on broader policy implications, such as the impact of Thar coal expansion on local communities and the long-term financial health of the sector.

PAKISTAN TODAY

101

Total Articles

Topic Focus

43.6%

Climate and air quality is the clear leader

27.7%

Energy finance and IPPs

Key Actor Focus

The focus is heavily on government officials and regulators, suggesting a reliance on official announcements, despite the high environmental focus.

Dominant Narratives

The narratives are often brief, with a notable number of articles being op-eds or based on international reports, indicating a higher proportion of commentary and analysis relative to hard news.

TRIBUNE

THE EXPRESS

286

Total Articles

Topic Focus

47.2%

Energy finance and IPPs is the overwhelming focus

21.7%

Climate and air quality

Key Actor Focus

The paper is heavily reliant on government officials and regulators, similar to the Business Recorder, reinforcing a focus on policy and government action.

Dominant Narratives

Dominant Narratives: Narratives center on the immediate impact of government decisions, such as ministerial statements and labor-related news, often framing issues around the government's performance.

THE NEWS

INTERNATIONAL

135

Total Articles

Topic Focus

41.5%

Energy finance and IPPs is the dominant topic

27.4%

Climate and air quality

Key Actor Focus

The paper has the highest proportional focus on government officials, but also a notable focus on private developers, suggesting a keen interest in the business and political dynamics of the energy sector.

Dominant Narratives

Dominant Narratives: Narratives include long-form economic features and opinion pieces, indicating a mix of in-depth analysis and breaking news.

2. Comparative Analysis/Insights for all 5 Newspapers



Dominance of Financial News: **Business Recorder** and **Express Tribune** are the most financially focused, with nearly half of their energy coverage dedicated to energy finance and IPPs (**46.8%** and **47.2%**, respectively). This highlights their role as primary sources for business and market-related energy news.



Environmental Focus: **Pakistan Today** and **Dawn** show the strongest proportional focus on environmental issues, with climate and air quality being their top-covered topic (**43.6%** and **37.0%**, respectively). This suggests these outlets are more aligned with broader policy and sustainability debates.



Oil and Gas Coverage: **Business Recorder** leads in oil and gas coverage (**20.9%**), reflecting its detailed reporting on market and supply chain dynamics.



Solar Coverage: **Pakistan Today** has the highest proportional coverage of solar (**14.9%**), indicating a greater interest in the renewable energy transition compared to other outlets.



Coal (Thar) Coverage: **Dawn** dedicates the highest proportion of its coverage to coal (Thar) (**6.6%**), suggesting a more consistent focus on this specific, controversial energy source, likely including the social and environmental angles often associated with the paper.



Overall Trend: All five newspapers prioritize energy finance and IPPs and climate and air quality as their top two or three topics, confirming that the media narrative is dominated by the twin pressures of fiscal crisis and environmental concern. The difference lies in the degree of emphasis placed on each.

3. Comparative Analysis of Sourcing Strategy

The data clearly indicates a pervasive reliance on government sources across all five newspapers, confirming the observation from the main report that coverage is heavily driven by official narratives and announcements.

Reliance on Government Sources

Highest Reliance: **The News** shows the highest proportional reliance on government sources at 59.3%, suggesting that a majority of its energy-related articles are directly sourced from or focused on the actions and statements of government officials.

Broad Reliance: **Pakistan Today (51.5%)** also shows a very high reliance, followed by **Express Tribune (45.8%)**, **Dawn (44.0%)**, and **Business Recorder (42.1%)**. The fact that the lowest reliance is still over 40% underscores the media's dependence on the government as the primary source of energy news.

Reliance on Independent Experts (Energy Experts)

Highest Reliance: **Business Recorder (17.5%)**, **Express Tribune (16.8%)**, and **Dawn (16.0%)** show the highest proportional reliance on energy experts. This suggests these outlets are more likely to seek out independent commentary and analysis to contextualize or critique government policy.

Lowest Reliance: The News shows 0.0% reliance on energy experts in its top three cited actors, indicating a strong preference for official and industry sources over independent analysis.

Reliance on Regulators

Highest Reliance: **Pakistan Today (20.8%)** and **Express Tribune (19.2%)** lead in citing regulators, reflecting a focus on the technical and administrative decisions of bodies like NEPRA and OGRA.

Reliance on Private Developers

Unique Focus: **The News** is the only paper where Private developers appear in the top three cited actors, with a significant **9.6%** reliance. This highlights its unique focus on the business and industry perspective, often featuring the concerns or achievements of private sector players.

The comparison confirms a strong systemic bias toward official sources across the media landscape. **The News** is the most government-centric, while **Business Recorder** and **Dawn** are the most likely to incorporate independent Energy Experts to provide a counter-narrative or deeper analysis. The high reliance on government sources across the board reinforces the main report's finding that the media often lacks the critical distance needed for investigative reporting, instead acting as a conduit for official policy announcements.

D. Gaps in Coverage

Lack of Investigative Reporting: Coverage is heavily reliant on official press releases and single-source reports, leading to a lack of critical scrutiny and independent verification of government claims (e.g., savings from IPP renegotiations). Lack of investigative follow-up means announcements and policy decisions often received single-source reporting or PR-driven summaries; few outlets dug into long-term implications.

Limited Focus on Human Impact: The media frequently reports on price fluctuations and policy changes (e.g., petroleum levy, gas shortages) but rarely delves into the direct economic and social impact on consumers and industry workers. Limited local voice and environmental reporting means that coverage mostly reproduced official claims; sustained on-the-ground reporting on health, groundwater, displacement and remediation was rare.

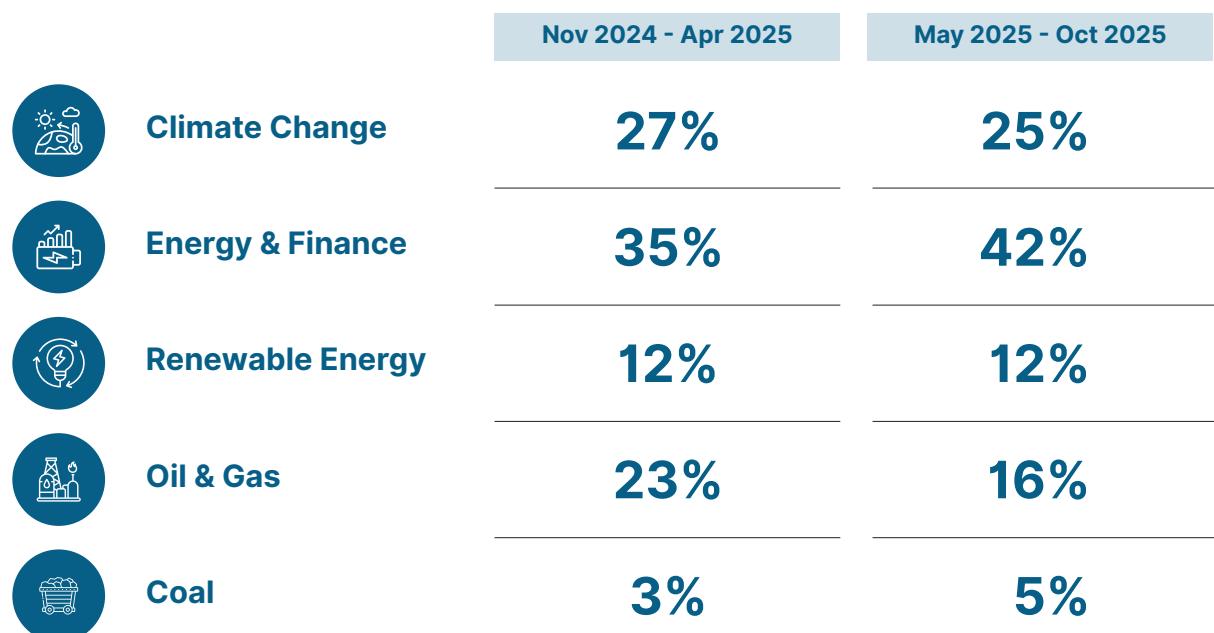
Absence of Structural Analysis: Coverage often follows a 'he said, she said' pattern (e.g., provincial vs. federal blame for gas shortages) without examining the underlying structural issues in the energy sector (e.g., circular debt, transmission losses).

Under-reporting of International Caution: Critical warnings from international financial institutions (IFIs) regarding policy changes (e.g., IPP contracts) are often overlooked or under-reported in the mainstream media.

Poor data transparency: Inconsistent numbers (e.g., various net-metering capacity figures) were reported without clarifying definitions (installed vs. grid-connected vs. approved).

Siloed reporting: Climate, energy finance and human impacts rarely linked. Few stories connected policy moves to household outcomes or to Pakistan's NDC/climate commitments.

Comparison of Media Coverage



E. Editorial Recommendations

- **Increase Investigative Journalism:** Newsrooms should dedicate resources to independently verify government claims and scrutinize the implementation of major reforms.
- **Prioritize Human-Interest Stories:** Reporters should focus on the impact of energy policy on daily life, exports, and employment to provide a more balanced view.
- **Diversify Sources:** Journalists must actively seek out voices from independent experts, civil society, and affected consumers, moving beyond official handouts and industry lobby groups.
- **Contextualize Policy:** All reporting on energy policy should be framed within the context of Pakistan's broader economic challenges and climate commitments.