

Picturing Pakistan: Iconography, Framing, and the Persistence of Crisis in Western Print Media (2013-2022)

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Abstract:

This study examines the visual construction of Pakistan's international image in the Western print media through a comparative iconographic analysis of two political regimes: the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N, 2013 to 2018) and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI, 2018 to 2022). Using Panofsky's three tiered iconographical model i.e., pre-iconography, iconography, and iconological interpretation, the study undertakes a qualitative content analysis of 40 purposively sampled photographs (ten from each newspaper, one per year) published in The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Guardian, and The Times between 2013 and 2022. The analysis is anchored in Erving Goffman's Framing Theory and Immanuel Wallerstein's World System Theory, and is organized around four predetermined frames: political, social, economic, and technological. The findings show that Western print media construct a persistently crisis centred image of Pakistan, dominated by imagery of terrorism aftermath, protest, and humanitarian vulnerability, with only episodic representation of institutional competence i.e., most notably a single recurring counter image of Pakistan's first female fighter pilot. Comparison across regimes reveals continuity rather than transformation: the underlying visual grammar of instability is largely "regime resistant," shifting only from security centred framing under PML-N to governance and economy centred framing under PTI. The study concludes that Western photojournalism functions not as a neutral chronicle of events but as a symbolic mechanism that reproduces core periphery hierarchies, positioning Pakistan within a durable frame of developmental incompleteness even as it registers the country's resilience and cultural continuity.

Keywords: Visual Communication, Photojournalism, Iconography, Framing Theory, World System Theory, Image of Pakistan, PML-N, PTI, Comparative Media Analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

The Islamic Republic of Pakistan occupies a position of persistent interest to core global powers, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom. Pakistan is the world's fifth most populous country and home to the second largest Muslim population globally, and it ranks as the 34th largest country by area (United Nations FAOSTAT, 2019). Its territory encompasses some

of the world's oldest civilizations, including Mehrgarh in Balochistan and the Indus Valley Bronze Age settlements. Pakistan is widely regarded as a middle power: it maintains the sixth largest standing armed forces in the world, ranked tenth most powerful overall (Global Firepower Index, 2021), is the only Muslim majority state to hold declared nuclear weapons status, is a member of the Commonwealth of Nations, and is designated a major non-NATO ally of the United States (Burki & Ziring, 2021).

Mass media perform the societal functions of informing, educating, entertaining, and persuading, and among these functions, photojournalism occupies a distinctive place. As the fastest form of communication, photojournalism requires no literacy: even an illiterate audience can extract meaning from a photograph or image (Habib, 2025), which is why photojournalism is best understood as a subset of the broader field of visual communication (Caple, 2013). This study examines how Pakistan has been visually portrayed in four leading Western newspapers i.e., the Washington Post and the New York Times of the United States, and the Times and the Guardian of the United Kingdom, comparing coverage across two recent political regimes that of the Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) under Nawaz Sharif (2013 to 2018), and that of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) under Imran Khan (2018 to 2023).

The rationale for this focus rests on the established finding that news photographs play a vital role in shaping audiences' collective memory (Sylvester & Huffman, 2002). Pakistan's international image has long been

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shadowed by association with terrorism and instability: it was widely branded within global security discourse following the events of 11 September 2001 (US Government Publishing Office, 2016), the killing of Osama bin Laden in Abbottabad on 2 May 2011 (BBC News, 2016), and its repeated placement on the Financial Action Task Force's grey list on suspicion of financing terrorism, a designation that persisted into October 2022 (FATF, 2022). Despite Pakistan's ethnic and linguistic diversity, its geographic significance, and its emerging economy status, such narratives have tended to dominate its coverage. This study evaluates that coverage specifically through the lens of photojournalism, applying iconography as an interpretive tool to decode the layered meanings: factual, thematic, and symbolic, embedded within a decade of published images.

Objectives of the Study

To practically implement iconography as a tool for visually understanding the image of Pakistan in the West.

To explore the visual image of Pakistan in the United States' newspapers: the Washington Post and the New York Times and the United Kingdom's newspapers: the Times and the Guardian.

To comparatively study the visual representation of Pakistan in Western print media during the recent regimes of PML-N (2013-2018) and PTI (2018-2022)

Research Questions

Q1: Are the US and UK newspapers visually representing Pakistan as politically literate, technologically advanced, socially functional, and financially stable?

Q2: Do the leading US newspapers present a negative image of Pakistan during the PML-N regime (2013-2018)?

Q3: Do the leading US newspapers present a positive image of Pakistan during the PTI regime (2018-2022)?

Q4: Do the leading UK newspapers present a negative image of Pakistan during the PML-N regime (2013-2018)?

Q5: Do the leading UK newspapers present a positive image of Pakistan during the PTI regime (2018-2022)?

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Visual Communication and Photojournalism

Visual communication is a mode of mass communication concerned with extracting meaning from images and graphics, and it exerts a direct effect on how audiences perceive reality (Panke, 2016; Allen, 2017; Schill, 2012). Photojournalism, as its most consequential subset, has been empirically recognized as among the most effective means of communicating truth (Chapnick, 1994). Frank Luther Mott, the journalism educator credited with coining the term "photojournalism" in 1942, argued that visual literacy is as important as verbal literacy. In an era of accelerating digital consumption, this claim has only gained force: research indicates that only a small proportion of audiences, around five percent, engage fully with written news text, whereas photographs capture the attention of nearly all readers (Kivekas, 2006).

Photo editors function as "visual gatekeepers," whose editorial choices about selection and presentation directly shape which events become visually newsworthy (Nilsson, 2017). The rise of citizen journalism and social media has complicated this gatekeeping function: ordinary users increasingly act as informal "gatecheckers," a shift that has expanded participation in visual news production even as it has, some scholars argue, diluted editorial originality (Schwalbe, Silcock, & Candello, 2015). Photojournalism's ethical dimensions have also received sustained scholarly attention, particularly regarding the tension between a photojournalist's duty to document and their humanitarian instinct to intervene in scenes of suffering (Kim & Kelly, 2010). Caple (2013) further proposed a compositional framework for analysing how photographs function in relation to accompanying news text, supporting, reinforcing, or extending the story's narrative, a perspective that informs this study's treatment of captions and background information as part of each image's meaning

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Framing Theory

Erving Goffman's Framing Theory holds that media guide audiences toward a particular interpretation of an issue by selectively highlighting certain attributes while suppressing others (Goffman, 1974). Framing thereby extends Agenda Setting Theory into the selective highlighting and silencing of specific attributes of an issue, individual, or country (McCombs, 1993). In visual terms, the tone with which an issue is represented constitutes its affective characteristic (Kioussis, Bantimaroudis, & Ban, 1999): in this study, that affective register includes color tone, the visual staging of a subject, and the relationship between an image and the story it accompanies. Framing Theory therefore supplies the study's central analytical premise that the US and UK newspapers examined here frame the image of Pakistan according to their own

institutional and national concerns, producing divergent, non-neutral visual accounts.

World System Theory

Immanuel Wallerstein's World System Theory (1974) describes the globe as structured around a dichotomy of core and periphery countries, in which core states as distinguished by higher levels of development, denser trade flows, and greater capacity for innovation which hold disproportionate power to shape global understanding of peripheral states. The United States and the United Kingdom function as core countries in this study, and their newspapers are treated as instruments through which that structural dominance is symbolically exercised over the representation of Pakistan, a peripheral state.

Table 1. The Level of Dominance: Core versus Periphery Countries

Core Countries	Periphery Countries
More developed and wealthier	Lower level of development and standard of living
Earlier to industrialize	Trying to industrialize
Tertiary based economy	Primary economy with some secondary development
Low population growth	Increasing population growth

Guided by these two theories, the study constructed four predetermined frames, each with two operational sub-frames, to structure image selection and analysis: (1) Technological : education/literacy and media advancement, and standard of living; (2) Political: democracy and religious tolerance; (3) Social: population management and health services; and (4) Economic: financial status and level of development.

Iconography as a Visual Research Method

Iconography, an interpretive method borrowed from art history, is established as among the strongest qualitative methods for extracting meaning from images (Below, 2010). Margolis and Pauwels (2011) define it as a systematic approach to classifying visual representations and

relating them to accompanying textual material, useful for uncovering the factual, thematic, and symbolic layers of meaning within an image. This study operationalizes Erwin Panofsky's influential three-tiered model (Panofsky, 1955): pre-iconography, the identification of an image's basic factual content; iconography, the interpretation of that content in relation to specific themes and conventions; and iconological interpretation, which situates the image's symbolic meaning within its broader historical and cultural context. As Belting (2013) argues, iconology in this final sense links visual representation to wider cultural and historical narratives, making it especially suited to research questions concerning national image.

RESEARCH GAP

Early large scale research on Pakistan's Western media image concentrated on news stories, editorials, opinion pieces, and caricatures rather than photographs. Khan (2008) examined the editorial coverage of Pakistan in three American newspapers to test media conformity theory, concluding that cultural differences produced a general bias against Muslims. Durrani and Sheikh (2010) and Durrani (2018) examined the pictorial image of Pakistan in Newsweek and Time around the 9/11 period and, later, the Times over three decades, using content, semiotic, and narrative analysis. Yousaf (2015, 2017, 2020) compared Pakistan's image across US and Chinese media, students' attitudes, and social media spaces, finding that US media generally portrayed Pakistan as socially intolerant and biased against Islam. Siraj (2008) applied a peace-journalism lens to coverage of the Pakistan and India conflict; Ghizali and Bajwa (2020) examined the image of Pakistan through the gaze of editorial cartoonists; and Shabir, Hussain, and Iqbal (2014), studying editorials in the New York Times and the Washington Post, found contrary to most similar studies as a comparatively positive portrayal. Fan and Shahani (2016) documented that Pakistan's country image is itself perceived as distorted by its own citizens, owing to international media representation. Despite this substantial body of work, a decade long, image based comparative study of Pakistan's visual representation across the PML-N and PTI regimes using iconography rather than textual or editorial analysis had not previously been undertaken. This study addresses that gap.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopts qualitative content analysis in conjunction with iconography as its guiding research methodology, appropriate to the study's aim of visually evaluating how Pakistan is depicted in core-country newspapers. Qualitative content analysis addresses the denotation of images, the plain description of what an image depicts, while iconography addresses their connotation, or implied meaning (Methodsplace, SAGE). The central research question guiding the study is: How has the image of Pakistan been portrayed in the Western print media over the last decade?

Each image was analysed through Panofsky's three levels: at the pre-iconographic level, the researcher identified the factual content of the image's foreground and background; at the

iconographic level, the researcher recorded the image's facts (publication date, author, place, and photographer), its published caption, and relevant background information; and at the iconological level, the researcher interpreted the image's symbolic meaning and situated it within its historical and geopolitical context.

Universe, Population, and Sampling

The universe of the study comprises all images representing Pakistan published by the Times, the Guardian, the Washington Post, and the New York Times. The population consists of every such image published between June 2013 and February 2022. Given the impracticality of analysing the full population in interpretive depth, the study employed non probability purposive sampling, an accepted approach for studies requiring close qualitative reading over broad statistical coverage.

Sample and Unit of Analysis

The final sample comprised 40 images: one image per newspaper per year across the ten-year span, evenly divided as ten images from each of the four newspapers and twenty images from each of the two regimes. The unit of analysis is the individual published image of Pakistan.

Table 2. Sample Distribution by Newspaper, Year, and Regime

Newspaper	PML-N: 2013–17	PTI: 2018–22	Total
The Washington Post	5	5	10
The Guardian	5	5	10
The New York Times	5	5	10
The Times	5	5	10
Total	20	20	40

Within each regime, one image was selected per newspaper per year, so that both the PML-N period (2013–2017/18) and the PTI period (2018–2022) are represented by five images from each outlet. Images were selected purposively according to the four predetermined frames described in section 2.2.2, ensuring that the sample captured the technological, political, social, and economic dimensions of Pakistan's coverage across the decade.

RESULTS

Across the forty images analysed, a consistent pattern of frame distribution emerged. The political frame proved the most dominant visual category: scenes of protest, street agitation, bomb aftermaths, grieving communities, security operations, and visibly pressured leadership recur throughout both regimes. Closely following was the social frame, manifested predominantly through humanitarian imagery as vulnerable children, health campaigns, and mourning rituals that produced what might be called a humanitarian gaze, in which Pakistan

appears as a struggling yet compassionate nation. Economic imagery reinforced this same pattern of fragility: markets were shown after bomb blasts, rural landscapes outnumbered urban skylines, and infrastructure frequently appeared damaged, while financial centres, industrial advancement, and large-scale economic modernization were rarely, if ever, foregrounded. The technological frame was, by a wide margin, the least represented: across the entire sample only one image, Figure 4, discussed below, offered an unambiguously positive depiction of technological or institutional competence.

Representative Case Analyses

The five cases below, drawn from the 2013 to 2014 opening years of the sample, illustrate the range of visual coding identified across the full dataset and are representative of the dominant patterns discussed in section 4.2.

Figure 1 — Economic and Political Vulnerability (The Washington Post, 2013)



Figure 1. Civilians survey the aftermath of a bomb blast at Qissa Khawani Bazaar, Peshawar.

Photograph: A. Majeed / The Washington Post, 29 September 2013.

Published: 29 September 2013 · Authors: Tim Craig and Haq Nawaz Khan · Place: Peshawar, Pakistan · Photographer: A. Majeed (Craig & Khan, 2013)

Caption: "Pakistani shop owners gather at the site of a bomb explosion in the city of Peshawar on Sept. 29, 2013."

Four men in traditional shalwar kameez are shown clearing debris and surveying a collapsed market, coded through posture and dress as civilians rather than officials. The powerful midday blast that the image documents destroyed multiple shops, injured over 100 people. No state authority is visible in the frame. Iconologically, the image situates Pakistan within a narrative of disrupted economic life and civilian led recovery in the absence of institutional response as a pattern the study finds is repeated throughout the decade whenever markets, streets, or public spaces appear in the sample.

Figure 3 — Humanitarian Resilience within Developmental Constraint (The New York Times, 2013)



Figure 3. A child receives a polio vaccine in a modest domestic interior, Karachi. Photograph accompanying Donald G. McNeil Jr., The New York Times, 21 July 2013.

Published: 21 July 2013 · Author: Donald G. McNeil Jr. · Place: Karachi, Pakistan (Donald G. & McNeil Jr., 2013)

A child lies on a bare cement floor as an adult administers vaccine drops, while a second child is

shown nearby with a school notebook. The unpolished floor, absence of furnishing, and functional household objects situate the scene within a modest domestic interior. Iconologically, the photograph constructs a dual message: it documents active healthcare delivery and communal caregiving, while simultaneously signalling constrained living standards. Pakistan appears socially engaged and resilient, yet materially and structurally challenged, a combination the study terms "managed vulnerability," in which compassion and developmental deficit are visually inseparable.

Figure 4 — Technological Competence as Exception (The Times, 2013)



Figure 4. Ayesha Farooq, Pakistan's only female war-ready fighter pilot, attends a briefing at Mushaf base, Sargodha. Photograph: Zohra Bensemra, in Robin Pagnamenta, *The Times*, 14 June 2013.

Published: 14 June 2013 · Author: Robin Pagnamenta · Place: Sargodha, Pakistan · Photographer: Zohra Bensemra (Pagnamenta, 2013)

Caption: "Ayesha Farooq, 26, Pakistan's only female war ready fighter pilot, attends a briefing with colleagues at Mushaf base in Sargodha, north Pakistan, June 6, 2013."

Uniformed personnel, including a woman pointing to a location on a large paper map, are shown in an orderly, wood panelled briefing room. The organized setting, coordinated uniforms, and analytical engagement with the map evoke technical literacy, institutional discipline, and gender inclusion within a professional domain. This photograph is the single most consistently cited counter example across the entire forty image sample: it is the study's clearest instance of a technologically and institutionally competent image of Pakistan, standing in direct contrast to the crisis oriented imagery that otherwise dominates the dataset. Its analytical significance, however, lies precisely in its exceptionalism as technological advancement appears condensed into an isolated institutional space rather than diffused across the broader visual record.

Figure 5 — Grief and the Normalization of Violence (The Washington Post, 2014)



Figure 5. Gravedigger Taj Muhammad adjusts wreaths at the Rahman Baba graveyard, Peshawar. Photograph: Mohammad Sajjad, in Ishaan Tharoor, *The Washington Post*, 23 December 2014.

Published: 23 December 2014 · Author: Ishaan Tharoor · Place: Peshawar, Pakistan · Photographer: Mohammad Sajjad (Tharoor, 2014)Caption: "Pakistani gravedigger Taj Muhammad adjusts wreaths on a grave at the Rahman Baba graveyard in Peshawar, Pakistan, Dec. 20, 2014."

A man sits beside a flower and foil covered grave mound in a rural cemetery, his posture bent and reflective. Further grave markers extend into the background. Published shortly after the 2014 Peshawar school attack, the image iconologically encodes collective mourning and the normalization of violence within Pakistani society, anchoring the country within a frame of unresolved extremism and social trauma, a motif the study finds recurs at multiple points across both the PML-N and PTI periods.

Figure 6 — Democratic Volatility (The Guardian, 2014)



Figure 6. Supporters of Imran Khan and Tahir-ul-Qadri enter the headquarters of Pakistan Television (PTV), Islamabad. Photograph: Aamir Qureshi, in Jon Boone, The Guardian, 1 September 2014.

Published: 1 September 2014 · Author: Jon Boone · Place: Islamabad, Pakistan · Photographer: Aamir Qureshi (Boone, 2014)

Caption: "Supporters of Tahir-ul-Qadri and Imran Khan enter the HQ of the state-owned Pakistani Television Corporation (PTV)."

A crowd of men, led by a boy carrying a makeshift shield and pole, advances through an institutional corridor during the 2014 anti-government sit-in that briefly forced PTV off air. The improvised protective gear, forward momentum, and breached government corridor iconologically encode institutional rupture and democratic volatility. The image typifies the Guardian's recurring emphasis, throughout the sample, on protest and institutional confrontation as the primary visual register through which Pakistani politics is rendered legible to UK readers.

Comparative Analysis by Newspaper

Among the two US outlets, the Washington Post most consistently emphasized terrorism aftermath, damaged public space, and mourning, producing a predominantly crisis-oriented portrayal across the sample (as in Figures 1 and 5). The New York Times adopted a comparatively layered approach: while social hardship and developmental themes remained visible, particularly through health-related imagery such as the polio campaign (Figure 3), its frames also incorporated resilience, caregiving, and social responsibility. Overall, the study finds that US newspapers constructed Pakistan primarily as a society managing political instability and developmental struggle, with limited attention to technological advancement.

Among the two UK outlets, the Guardian emphasized political mobilization, protest, and institutional confrontation (as in Figure 6), visually coding Pakistan as politically turbulent even where the underlying events reflected democratic participation. The Times, by contrast, offered the sample's most institutionally positive imagery, including the female fighter pilot photograph

(Figure 4), which foregrounded organizational discipline, technical competence, and gender inclusion; even so, the Times' coverage of security and leadership crises elsewhere in the sample reinforced the broader instability narrative. Across all four outlets, stylistic differences coexisted with a shared structural tendency to privilege crisis and vulnerability over institutional strength or economic modernization.

Regime Comparison: PML-N versus PTI

A central finding of the study is that the transition from the PML-N government to the PTI government did not produce a substantial transformation in Pakistan's Western visual image; the dominant visual grammar proved largely "regime resistant." During the PML-N period (2013-2018), imagery heavily emphasized terrorism aftermath, graveyards, and protest movements, anchoring Pakistan within narratives of unresolved extremism and internal democratic turbulence, with only occasional positive institutional representation such as Figure 4. During the PTI period (2018-2022), explicit terrorism imagery declined, but representations of political protest, governance tension, and economic strain, including inflation and public hardship, remained visually dominant; the anticipated shift toward reform oriented or internationally integrated imagery did not substantially materialize. Instability therefore did not disappear under PTI so much as migrate from a security centred register to a governance- and economy centred one, while pandemic era imagery (2020-2021) extended rather than replaced the study's established humanitarian frame.

DISCUSSION: THEORETICAL IMPLICATIONS

Framing Theory: Crisis as the Dominant Visual Paradigm

The findings strongly support Framing Theory's account of media as selecting and rendering certain aspects of reality more salient than others (Entman, 1993; Goffman, 1974). Political representation across all four newspapers was overwhelmingly mediated through protest, confrontation, and leadership under visible pressure, rendering Pakistani democracy legible chiefly as contestation rather than institutional consolidation; even formal leadership portraits tended to individualize authority rather than illustrate systemic governance. The social frame, exemplified by the polio vaccination imagery in Figure 3, produced what Chouliaraki (2006) terms "managed suffering": a mode of representation that humanizes its subjects while simultaneously reinforcing an implicit hierarchy between observing and observed societies. The technological frame remained, as noted above, almost entirely episodic; condensed into isolated institutional imagery such as Figure 4 rather than diffused across the broader visual record, while the economic frame operated largely through absence: the scarcity of images depicting industrial modernization or infrastructural expansion itself constitutes, as Hall (1997) argues of meaning making generally, a significant representational omission.

World System Theory: Core-Periphery Visual Hierarchies

Consistent with Wallerstein's (1974) model, the study's findings indicate that core-country media do not merely report on peripheral states such as Pakistan; they participate in constructing global hierarchies of visibility. The recurring emphasis on instability, humanitarian struggle, and political turbulence reflects what Escobar (1995) calls "development discourse," in which non-core nations are visually coded as incomplete modernities. Crucially, the resulting portrayal is not wholly antagonistic: it instead reflects what Said (1978) identifies as patterned representation, in which recurring motifs sediment into a recognizable geopolitical imagination, Pakistan emerges as resilient yet troubled, capable yet unstable, and active yet peripheral. The repetition of instability across outlets and years, rather than isolated editorial choice, is what gives this pattern its structural force (Rose, 2016).

CONCLUSION

This study set out to interrogate how Western print media visually constructed the contemporary image of Pakistan between 2013 and 2022. Through a systematic iconographical analysis of forty purposively selected photographs published in the Washington Post, the New York Times, the Guardian, and the Times, it demonstrates that Pakistan's visual representation in core-country media is structured less by episodic regime change than by durable framing logics anchored in crisis, developmental limitation, and peripheral modernity. The contemporary image of Pakistan that emerges from this decade of coverage can be summarized as:

Politically unstable, yet democratically active engagement is visible, but is most often rendered through crisis.

Socially resilient, yet structurally vulnerable, humanitarian imagery humanizes Pakistani subjects while reinforcing a developmental deficit narrative.

Technologically capable only in isolated institutional contexts, while competence is real, but visually rare and episodic.

Economically fragile as financial stability is seldom shown; fragility is implied through the recurring absence of imagery depicting industrial or infrastructural progress.

Emotionally intense and culturally rooted as grief, resilience, and communal solidarity recur as consistent, legible motifs.

This representation is not uniformly negative, but it is disproportionately crisis centred, and the transition from the PML-N to the PTI government did not substantially alter the underlying pattern. Methodologically, the study demonstrates that iconography, more commonly applied within art history can be productively extended to contemporary news photography to reveal how ostensibly neutral images construct layered political meaning. Substantively, it contributes a decade-long, image-based comparative account to a research literature on Pakistan's international image that has previously concentrated on text, editorials, and cartoons, and it adds to a limited body of visual communication research concerning nation state representation in the Global South more broadly. Over ten years of coverage, Western newspapers have not merely reported

on Pakistan; they have consistently situated it within a peripheral modernity under scrutiny, allowing limited and controlled glimpses of progress while sustaining the enduring power of images to shape how nations are seen.

Limitations of the Study

The 2013 to 2022 timeframe, while enabling regime comparison, excludes the earlier post-9/11 period that fundamentally shaped Western visual narratives about Pakistan, meaning the patterns identified here may reflect legacies not directly observable within the study window (Omondi, 2024).

The exclusive focus on print newspapers does not capture how visual representation operates across digital platforms, social media, or broadcast news, which increasingly shape contemporary public perception (Putra et al., 2025).

The study analyses images directly rather than audience reception; it does not empirically document how viewers interpret the frames identified, a dimension left untested (Ademolu, 2023).

The four predetermined analytical frames, while theoretically grounded, may constrain interpretive openness and privilege certain narratives over emergent or culturally specific visual logics (Geise, 2025).

Purposive sampling of forty images, one per newspaper per year, ensures structural balance across outlets and regimes but cannot capture the full visual archive of a decade of coverage, privileging interpretive depth over claims about proportional frequency (Parveen & Showkat, 2020).

Recommendations for Future Research

Extend analysis beyond print to digital journalism, television news, and social media, where contemporary visual news consumption increasingly occurs.

Undertake comparative cross national studies examining how Pakistan is visually constructed in non Western media systems (Chinese, Middle Eastern, African, or South Asian), to test whether peripheral visual coding is a distinctly Western phenomenon.

Extend the timeline backward into the post-9/11 decade to assess historical continuity or evolution in Western visual framing of Pakistan.

Integrate mixed-method approaches, pairing qualitative iconography with computational or machine learning assisted image analysis to map frequency patterns and compositional trends at scale.

Incorporate postcolonial visual theory to more fully unpack how contemporary visual representations echo colonial-era imaginaries of gaze and power.

Pursue focused studies on thematic sub-domains such as gender representation, religious imagery, youth portrayal, or military iconography to reveal micro patterns within the broader national image framework

Incorporate audience reception research through experimental designs, focus groups, or survey-based framing studies, to assess how repeated exposure to particular visual codes shapes international audiences' perceptions of Pakistan

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