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Pakistani journalism: at the crossroads of Muslim identity, national priorities and journalistic culture

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Abstract

A loosening of controls on the Pakistani media in recent years has meant the influence of Pakistani journalists is increasingly being felt in country's tumultuous internal politics and its relations with the West. That has sparked a backlash, which has made Pakistan among the most dangerous places in the world for journalists. Given the country's key strategic role, both in terms of South Asian regional geo-politics and in the broader global struggle against radical Islamist militancy, it is important to better understand the evolution of media culture in Pakistani society. A nationwide survey, replicating recent studies of Arab and Indonesian journalists, found that nationalism, religious identity and a growing sense of professionalism shape the worldview of Pakistani journalists, whose overarching goals include defending national sovereignty and facilitating societal development.

Keywords

culture, Islam, journalism, journalistic identity, media, nationalism, Pakistan, religion

Within hours of the announcement that Osama bin Laden had been killed by a US Special Forces unit, a firestorm erupted in the Pakistani media. Two questions dominated the front pages and the airwaves: 'How were US troops able to strike undetected and unchallenged in a military garrison town a stone's throw from the capital?' And, 'How

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was bin Laden able to hide for so long right under the military's collective nose?' Bound up in those questions was the strong suspicion that a conspiracy was afoot in both cases.

In the following days, as the political and military leadership remained largely silent, the Pakistani media drove the national dialogue, giving voice to the anger, fear and frustration felt across society. Journalists even took on the armed forces and security services, long taboo subjects, ultimately forcing the top generals to apologize and the chief of the notorious ISI (Inter-Services Intelligence) to stand before Parliament and offer to resign.

The incident was vivid evidence that Pakistan's raucous media is playing an increasingly powerful role in Pakistan's internal political debate.

Media landscape

For much of its history, Pakistan's media has been struggling to find its voice. A succession of autocratic leaders kept the nation's news organizations on a tight leash. In the mid 1980s, it was not unusual for government censors to filter every news item before publication, with offending stories ending up on the editing room floor. Reporters and editors became adept at writing between the lines. When incremental gains were achieved, they often disappeared with the next change of regime (Khan, 2011). A decade ago, the country had just one television network, PTV, which was run by the state. True media reform arrived with the military coup that brought General Musharraf to power in the late 1990s. He liberalized broadcasting laws and loosened controls on the print media (Ricchardi, 2012). In 2002, the country's first private television station, GEO TV, was launched. Ten years later, there were more than 90 privately-owned TV channels (*Pakistan: Media Overview*, 2012).

Musharraf later tried to reverse those reforms, but he was unable to dampen the new dynamic. Today journalists are reveling in freedoms that seemed improbable a decade ago. Where the print sector is contracting in the West, it continues to expand in Pakistan, bolstered by digital technologies and new media platforms. Media empires are expanding, providing financial stability – and a modicum of political protection – for journalists, though many of these companies are 'beholden to various political and military factions' (Ricchardi, 2012: 9).

After long periods of military rule, the press has evolved into a national debating forum, carving out a position at the core of public life (Ricchardi, 2012). Newspaper columnists and a handful of television hosts have acquired significant influence over public opinion – so significant that some have been accused of pushing their own agenda and being driven by 'egoism, self-exaltation and a false sense of importance and superiority' (Rias, 2011). This group gives voice to a strongly nationalistic worldview and is pejoratively referred to as the '*Ghairat* (Honor) Brigade', a reference to their 'patriotic' defense of Pakistan's national honor (Paracha, 2011).

Like the military, the country's religious leaders – long another taboo subject – are under increasing scrutiny. A generation of women editors and TV anchors is also coming to the fore, bringing a new dimension to the national debate.

But journalists in Pakistan face huge challenges. The country has been called the most dangerous place in the world for journalists (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2010). A

study of acts of media intimidation from 2005 to 2007 commissioned by the Panos Foundation found that government agencies were the biggest perpetrators, significantly eclipsing religious militants (Ninan, 2008). Intimidation on the part of powerful politicians, religious groups, the military, intelligence agencies and government agencies is rampant. That was underscored by the June 2011 kidnapping and murder of Syed Saleem Shehzad, a prominent investigative reporter who had previously alleged that he had been threatened by the country's powerful intelligence agency, the ISI (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2011). Editors have been the subject of *fatwas* from clerics who claim they printed articles offensive to the Muslim religion, which in some cases have also led to lawsuits or criminal charges (Reporters without Borders, 2008). Such threats are particularly worrying when viewed against the ongoing religious violence that has convulsed Pakistan. Tens of thousands of Pakistanis have been killed in acts of domestic terrorism in recent years. The week bin Laden was killed, Pakistani Prime Minister Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani blamed the Al-Qaeda leader for 30,000 Pakistani deaths (Ray, 2011). A network of press clubs across the country provides a limited degree of self-protection (Dickinson and Memon, 2011) but even those facilities have been subject to violent attacks (AHRC, 2011). In addition to direct intimidation of reporters and editors, the government has used a variety of methods to financially and legally harass media organizations (Campagna, 2007).

Purpose, rationale and context

In recent years, there has emerged a growing body of literature examining the question of whether there exists a set of universal journalistic values or a common journalistic culture that can be found in both the developed and the developing worlds. The core question in this debate is whether journalists around the globe look at themselves, their mission and the world around them through a common lens and aspire to a shared set of professional parameters or imperatives (Callahan, 2003; Deuze, 2005; Rao and Lee, 2005; Herrscher, 2002). Various studies have found distinct differences in the ways in which journalists in individual countries interpret their role (Donsbach and Klett, 1993; Hallin and Papathanassopoulos, 2002; ; Hanitzsch and Mellado, 2011; Hopmann et al., 2012; Romano, 2003). There have also been a number of surveys examining the values, beliefs, politics and worldview of journalists in Muslim majority countries, which consistently report that religion, local culture and a variety of other factors shape the ways in which Western journalistic mores are applied (al-Rasheed, 1998; Bekhait, 1998; Hanitzsch, 2005; Kirat, 1987; Ramaprasad and Hamdy, 2006; Ramaprasad and Rahman, 2006; Tash, 1983). However, there have been no major surveys examining the worldview and attitudes of journalists in Pakistan, which is home to one of the most vibrant emerging media sectors in the Muslim world.

The examination of journalistic culture in Muslim-majority countries takes place alongside an ongoing debate about the degree to which religion shapes worldview (Hayes, 1995; Layman, 1997; Wilcox, 1990). This debate has taken on a new dimension in the post-9/11 era; in the US, that discussion has extended to the question of the degree to which Muslim beliefs influence attitudes toward America and American policy (Mujani and Liddle, 2004; Tibi, 2001). In the case of Pakistan, researchers have found

that the formation of collective national identity begins in school, with a national curriculum designed to construct 'a single identity as a naturalized defining feature of the collective self', in which Islam is the unifying element in the national consciousness (Durrani and Dunne, 2010: 1).

In order to provide insights into how Pakistani journalists perceive their own identity, their mission and the role of the media during this critical period in Pakistan's political evolution, the authors surveyed 395 Pakistani journalists representing a cross-section of news organizations in five of the country's largest media centers. It was the largest such survey of Pakistani journalists to date. It largely replicates a survey first administered in the Arab world (Pintak and Ginges, 2008), which was modeled in part on a series of profiles of American journalists led by David Weaver, beginning in 1986 (Weaver and Wilhoit, 1986, 1991, 1996; Weaver et al., 2007) and several other surveys of journalists in the developing world (Ramaprasad, 2001; Ramaprasad and Kelly, 2003; Ramaprasad and Rahman, 2006). Those studies examined demographics, working conditions and the perceived role of journalists. The Arab and subsequent Indonesian (Pintak and Setiyono, 2011) surveys expanded the focus to include attitudes toward a range of regional and international issues, including US policy, regional politics and Islam. For Pakistan, the survey was updated and adapted to take into account region-specific issues.

Methodology

The survey was administered in the spring and summer of 2010. There are no official figures on the total journalist population in Pakistan. Internews, a global media training organization that has significant projects in Pakistan, estimates the number at about 20,000, a figure supported by senior Pakistani journalists (Osama bin Javaid, personal communication, 2011; Matt Shelley, personal communication, 2011). The sample of 395 journalists therefore represented about 2% of the total estimated universe of Pakistani journalists. For context, the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press interviewed 547 US journalists and news media executives for the widely cited *The State of the News Media* survey published by the Project for Excellence in Journalism (Kohut and Doherty, 2006) and 1149 journalists were polled in the latest Weaver survey of US journalists (Weaver et al., 2007); respectively they represent approximately 0.5% and 1% of the population of US journalists. The geographic parameters of the Pakistan sample were roughly proportionate to the relative concentration of news organizations in each of the media centers: Islamabad (100), Lahore (106), Karachi (110), Hyderabad (30) and Peshawar (30).

A team of Pakistani researchers working under the co-author, a veteran Pakistani journalist and media scholar, approached a cross-section of journalists representing the major print and broadcast outlets in each city. Since this is a survey designed to assess the attitudes and values of *professional* journalists, purely online writers and bloggers were excluded from the sample, since no significant online-only news organizations have yet emerged in Pakistan. Journalists who work for established news organizations but who also happen to maintain a blog were included.

Press clubs in all five cities made their facilities available to conduct the survey interviews, but in many cases the researchers were required to visit newsrooms, in some cases

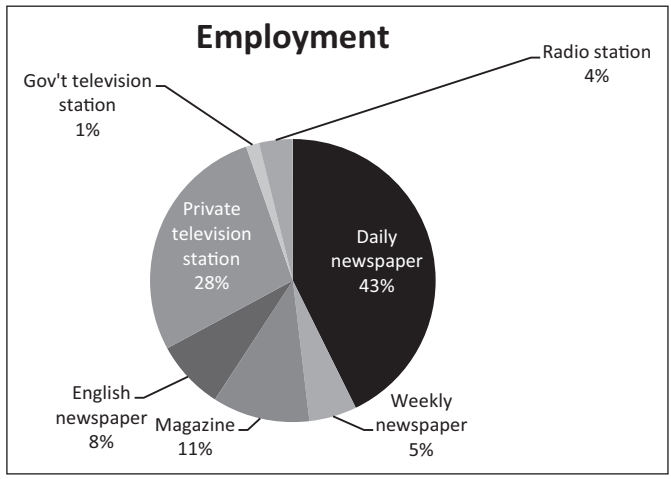

Figure 1. Employment.

leaving the surveys to be collected later, but more often sitting with the journalist and asking him or her the questions. Several senior journalists insisted on answering the questions by phone. Surveys were administered in either English or vernacular languages, depending on the preference of the individual journalist.

There are significant challenges inherent in conducting survey research in a nation such as Pakistan, where there are high levels of both suspicion and fear, whether of Pakistani officials, the militants or foreign governments. The latter is a primary reason Pakistani, rather than American, researchers administered the surveys in the field, though they were told the project was initiated by an American university and funded by a US foundation. The reaction of journalists asked to take part in the survey varied dramatically. Local journalists in smaller cities, such as Hyderabad, were far more enthusiastic than their counterparts in Lahore and Karachi. The researchers encountered questions such as, 'Are you conducting this for [the US security company] Blackwater or the CIA?' 'What are you getting in return?' 'Why are you doing it?' Conspiracy theories abound in the Pakistani media (Ricchardi, 2012) and some journalists, particularly those working for the vernacular press, speculated that the survey was being carried out to track down anti-American elements. That mindset contrasted with the view of other journalists, particularly in the English-language newspapers and at the leading TV channels, who expressed strong interest in the survey and in the possibility that such studies might help enhance the professional capabilities of Pakistani journalists. Publication of the top-line results of the survey in the *New York Times* (Pintak and Nazir, 2011) prompted a flurry of articles in the Pakistani media that reflected a similar split in worldview. It must therefore be acknowledged that a degree of self-selection may have taken place.

Nevertheless, the journalists responding to the survey represented a cross-section of the industry, with more than 40% from the vernacular language newspapers, 8% from English language newspapers and about 30% from television (Figure 1).

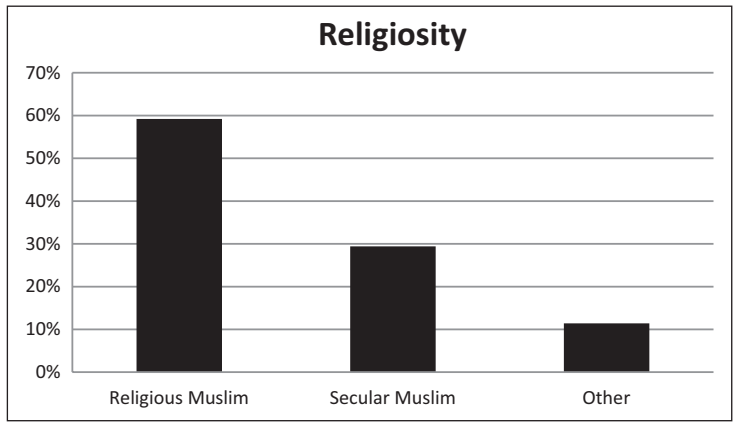

Figure 2. Religiosity.

Demographics

The survey found that Pakistani journalists are overwhelmingly Muslim, young, male and relatively inexperienced. Almost 96% of those surveyed were Muslim (the same percentage as the Pakistani population) and of those almost two-thirds self-identified as 'religious' versus just under a third who declared themselves 'secular' (Figure 2).[1] Almost 80% were under the age of 40, about 60% had worked in journalism for five years or less and just 12% were women.

Pakistani journalists are well-educated but, on balance, lack journalism training. An impressive 95% said they had completed an undergraduate degree, just under half said they took journalism courses in college, and about the same percentage had no journalism experience before being hired. Eighty-four percent reported making less than $500 per month (Figure 3). By global standards, their salaries are extremely low, but in the context of Pakistan, where the average person with a four-year degree is earning just over $100 per month and the salary of a university professor is about $400, the income is respectable (Irfan, 2008).

Findings

Religion, nationalism and journalistic identity

Religion and nationalism are the primary, sometimes competing, influences shaping the worldview of Pakistani journalists. However, there is also a significant emerging sense of professional identification.

To assess their sense of *personal* identity, the journalists were given a list of options and asked to select which most accurately completed the phrase, 'Above all, I am a …'. More than half chose 'Muslim' and just 17% said 'Pakistani', while only 2% named their regional ethnicity (Figure 4). Significantly, however, 27% of respondents said they were a journalist above all, which speaks to the advent of an overarching professional identity

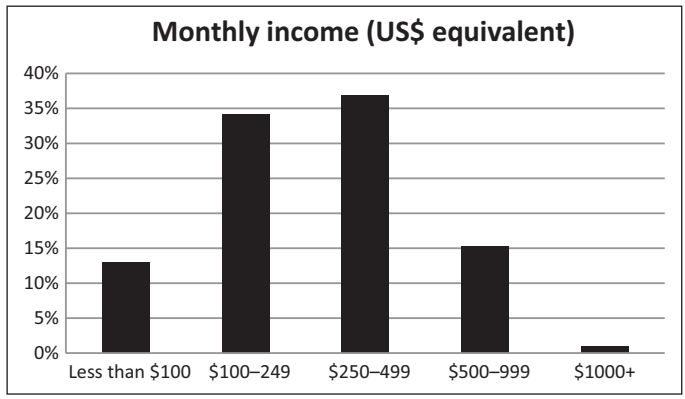

Figure 3. Income.

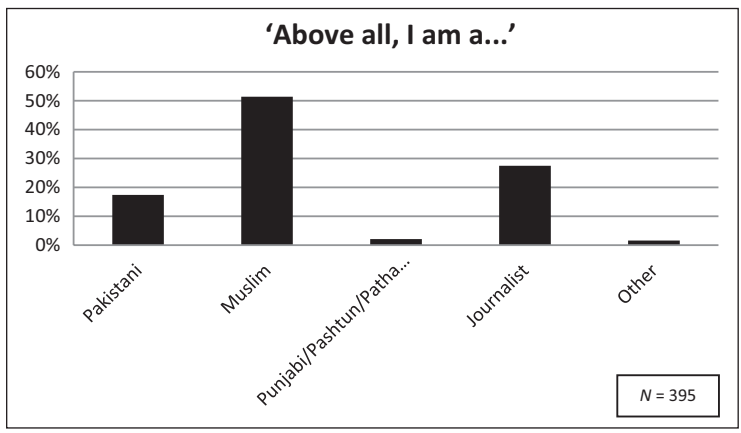

Figure 4. Self identity.

in the Pakistani news industry that transcends other aspects of identity and unites journalists in the kind of shared culture that studies have found fosters professional aspirations (Deuze, 2005).

The degree to which Islamic identity is tempered by other factors was also evident when the journalists were asked to which *geographic* group they most belonged: more than 60% said they identified first with the Pakistani nation versus just 26% who most identified with the Muslim world (Figure 5), essentially a reversal of the response to *personal* identity.

This complex sense of self is further reflected in the *political* identity of the journalists surveyed. While more than half the respondents personally identified as Muslims above all, only about a quarter politically identified as Islamists, while more than half saw themselves either as 'Liberal/Moderate' or 'Democrat', and another 15% identified as 'Nationalist' (Figure 6).

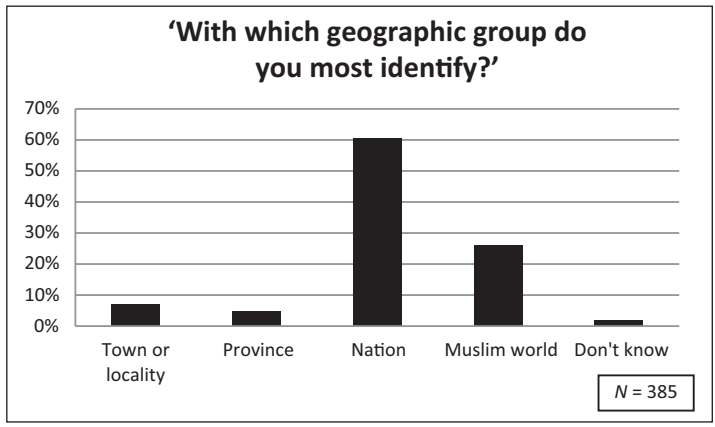

Figure 5. Geographic identity.

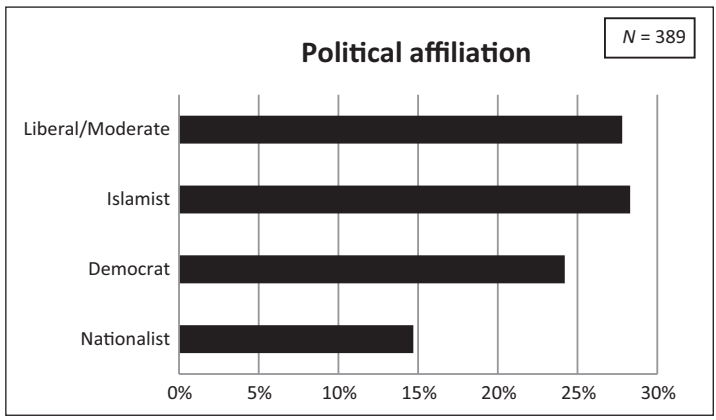

Figure 6. Political identity.

Islam in the newsroom

Religious identity, of course, does not necessarily drive political attitudes (Tessler, 2010). Despite their strong personal identification with Islam, the journalists surveyed exhibited mixed views when it comes to the role of religion in government. Three-quarters agreed that 'Belief in God is necessary for good moral values'; about half said 'Politicians who do not believe in God should not hold office'; and almost 60% said the government should not pass laws that contradict *Sharia* (Islamic) law. But at the same time, just over half said religious leaders should not influence voting (Figure 7). Essentially, they want Islamic values, not Muslim clerics, shaping government policies.

The journalists also exhibited skepticism when it comes to the pastoral role of clergy. Barely half said religious authorities are meeting the spiritual needs of society, and even fewer believe the religious authorities are effective in providing answers to social problems, family problems and the moral needs of the individual (Figure 8).

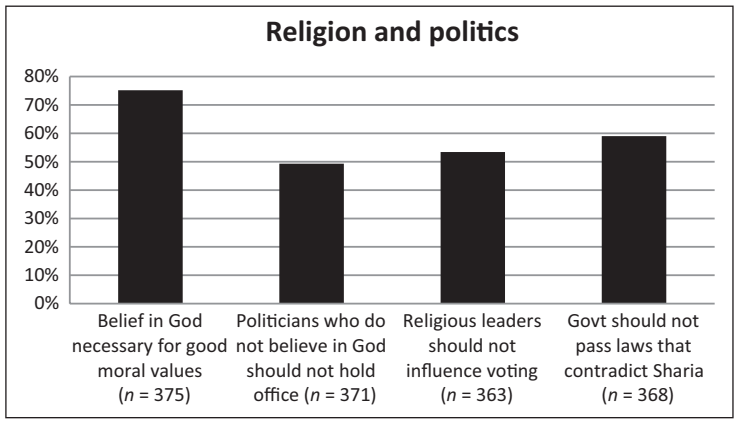

Figure 7. Religion and politics.

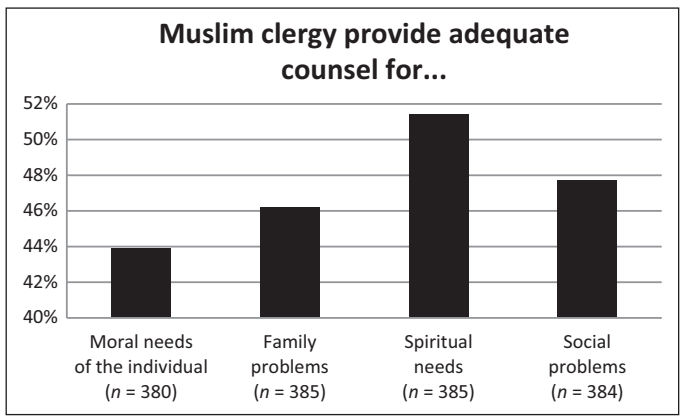

Figure 8. Role of the clergy.

A domestic agenda

Pakistani journalists see their primary mission as that of defending national sovereignty, preserving national unity and fostering societal development.

As noted above, Pakistani news media coverage of the bin Laden assassination combined outrage at the US violation of national sovereignty and anger at the government's failure both to stop the Americans and find bin Laden. That response largely reflects what Pakistani journalists see as their main job. More than 96% of respondents said the mission of Pakistani journalism is to 'analyze complex issues', and no issue is more complex than the multifarious relationship between elements within the Pakistani political establishment, military and intelligence agencies and the US on one hand and the forces of Islamist militancy on the other. More than 90% of respondents also included in that mission 'investigate government claims', 'defend Pakistani interests' and 'enhance national unity', all roles that came into play with the bin Laden controversy (Figure 9).

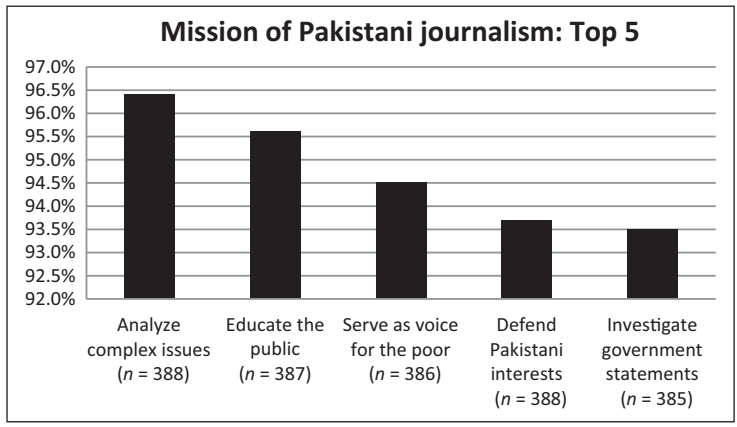

Figure 9. Mission of Pakistani journalism.

But the Pakistani media's relationship with the government is not primarily one of confrontation. Rather, there is a strong echo of the 'development journalism' of Southeast Asia, in which media and government partner for the good of the nation (Shafer, 1998). That can be seen in the other most commonly cited missions: 'educate the public' and 'serve as a voice for the poor' (Figure 9), as well as those in the next tier: 'enhance national unity', 'use news for the social good', 'transform society', 'support national/regional development' and 'foster Pakistani culture' (Figure 10).

While willing to harshly criticize the government, Pakistani journalists are not overtly working for political change; the idea that journalists should 'encourage political reform' and 'lead political change' fell sixteenth and seventeenth on the list respectively. Conversely, the overwhelming majority took the position that journalists should 'just report what happened' (Figure 11), more than half said they should support government policies and barely 40% said the media should be an adversary to the government. That is not to say Pakistani journalists blindly support the political and social status quo. Two-thirds of those surveyed agreed that 'Pakistani society must be gradually improved by reforms', while one-third indicated they believe that how society is organized 'must be radically changed'. Only 1% said reform is not needed (Figure 12).

At the same time their strong commitment to nation and religion could be seen in the desire to 'encourage civic engagement' (87%), 'protect Islamic tradition' and 'encourage spiritual values' and 'support the Kashmiri cause', all at about 84% (Figure 13).

Terrorism

In the view of Pakistani journalists, nothing is a greater threat to their nation than terrorism, identified as such by almost a third of those surveyed. One man's terrorist may be another man's freedom fighter, but Pakistani journalists appear concerned about the violence wracking their society, whether from Islamist militants or political party thugs or the US government. This view was articulated in a column by Javid Husain in *The*

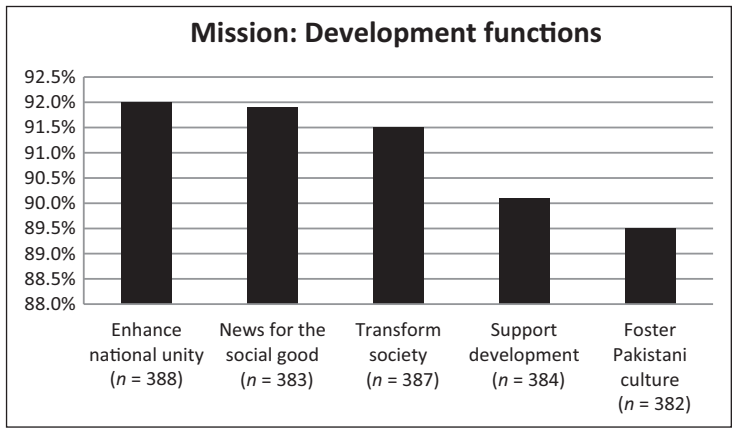

Figure 10. Mission: development.

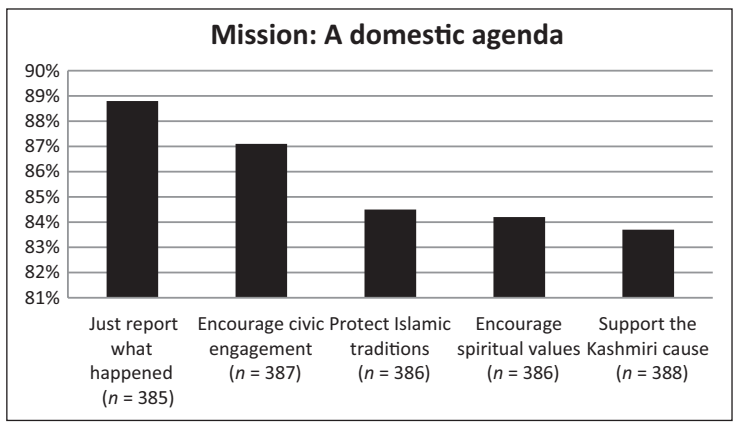

Figure 11. Mission: a domestic agenda.

Nation, a religiously conservative daily that has become increasingly anti-American in recent years:

> Any group which uses violent means for political ends must be dealt with an iron hand. The terrorists who target innocent people and valuable national assets are among the worst enemies of Pakistan. The same conclusion applies to those groups which operate from our territory to launch terrorist attacks against other countries. (Husain, 2011)

That position tracked with the response when the journalists were asked to choose which of four types of violence they considered to be terrorism. Significantly, more than 80% named the 2008 Mumbai hotel attacks carried out by the Pakistani militant group Lashkar-i-Taiba, followed closely by the beheading of American journalist Daniel Pearl by Al-Qaeda's Khaled Sheik Mohammed, both the work of radical Islamists. But at the same

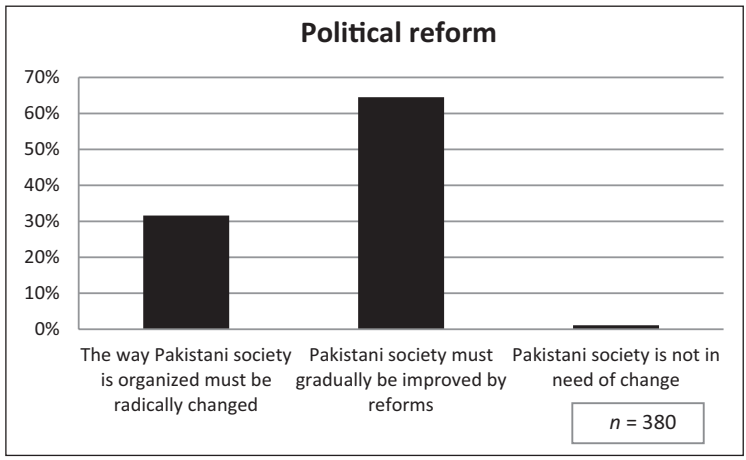

Figure 12. Political reform.

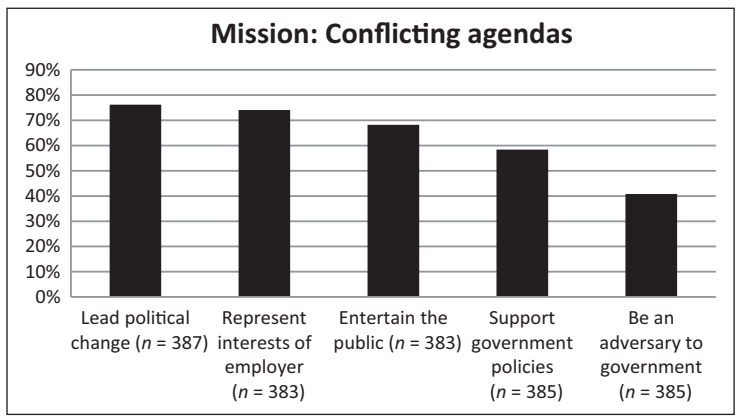

Figure 13. Mission: conflicting agendas.

time, the majority of the journalists also classified as terrorism US drone attacks on Islamist militants and the 2010 US military operation in Kandahar, Afghanistan (Figure 14). In short, radical Islamist terrorism, even if carried out by Pakistanis against arch-rival India, roughly equated to American military attacks.

National stability

Just as terrorism is viewed primarily through a domestic prism, the other key threats to the nation cited by Pakistani journalists also underline their primarily national agenda. Terrorism as a threat is followed closely by 'political instability' and the 'economy'. And although the survey was completed before the fallout over the bin Laden assassination, it

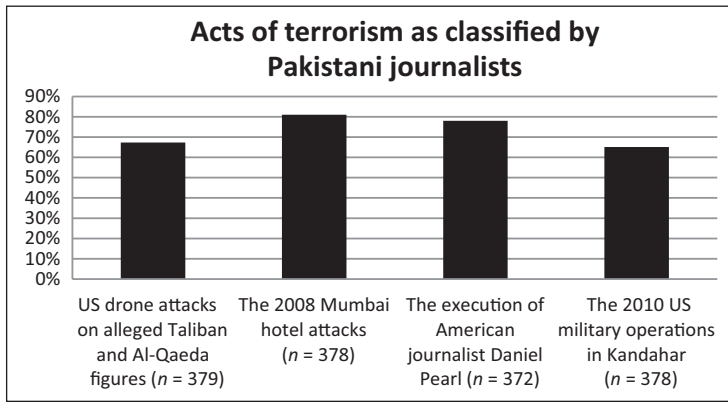

Figure 14. Terrorism.

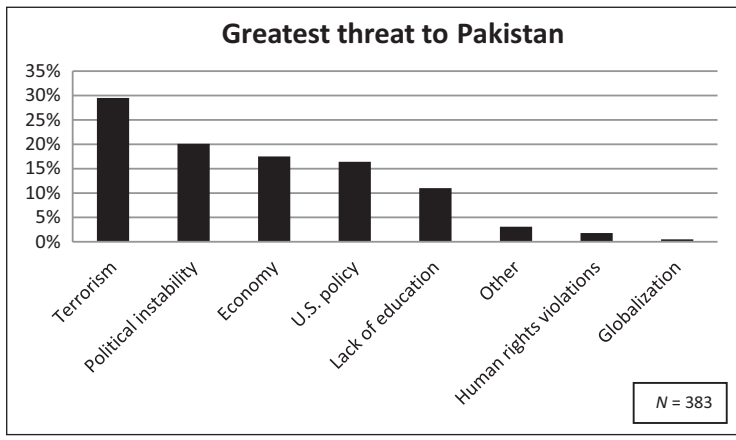

Figure 15. Greatest threat to Pakistan.

is noteworthy that 'US policy' fell fourth on the list of threats, just above 'lack of education' (Figure 15).

That domestic priority, underpinned by a desire to foster societal development, was similarly evident when the journalists were asked to rank the most critical issues facing the nation. Contrary to what might be expected, given the conflict on Pakistan's borders, 'Afghanistan' ranked near the bottom, seen as less of a priority than even the environment. Likewise, despite the constant debate over American drone strikes on Pakistani soil, US military operations were also well down the list.

The issues at the top of the journalists' agenda were those centering on national development. Pakistan has one of the world's lowest literacy rates (CIA, 2012), in the single digits among women in the Federally Administered Tribal Area (FATA) (FATA Secretariat, 2009), and more than half of the journalists ranked 'education' as the most important issue

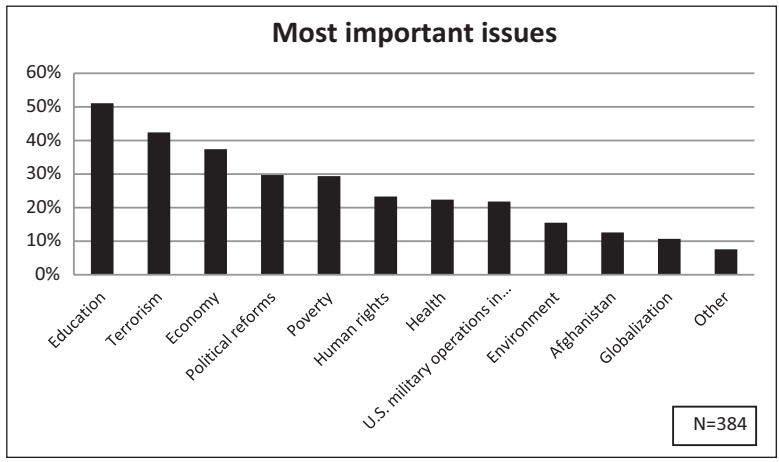

Figure 16. Most important issues.

facing the nation, followed closely by 'terrorism' and the 'economy', with 'political reforms', 'poverty', 'human rights' and 'health' rounding out the list (Figure 16).

Professionalism and values

As noted above, more than a quarter of those surveyed saw themselves as journalists first and Muslim or Pakistani second. That emerging professional identity says much about the evolution of the news industry. But, as one researcher noted, 'Professionalism in the Pakistani media is more of a self-concept than a reality' (Khan, 2011: 256). This may help explain why the journalists have a mixed view of the state of their profession and are so candid about the causes. The majority see the main challenge to Pakistani journalism coming not from the government, Islamist militants or the US government, which many Pakistanis see as a threat (Kohut, 2011; SANA, 2011), but from their own lack of professionalism, lack of ethics and corruption, as well as pressure from media owners and threats of violence (Figure 17).[2] 'One of the challenges faced by the Pakistani media is that we are lacking in trained journalists,' according to Pervez Khan, a journalism professor at Kohat University of Technology (personal communication, 2011). This concern with a lack of professional standards is underlined by the first objective of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (2011): 'To raise the status and improve the qualification of all the members of the journalistic profession.'

While issues tied to a lack of professionalism may be seen as the primary challenge to the industry, threats of physical violence ranked fourth in the list of threats and the issue of government control remains a concern. Despite the major reforms of the past decade, just 40% of those surveyed believe the Pakistani media is becoming freer, only about a third say they personally feel freer to do their job, and roughly the same number believe the news organization for which they work is 'doing an outstanding job informing the public' (Figure 18).

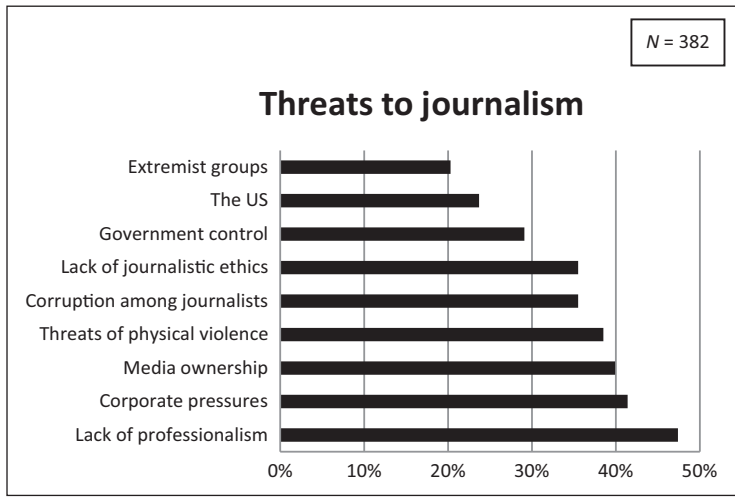

Figure 17. Threats.

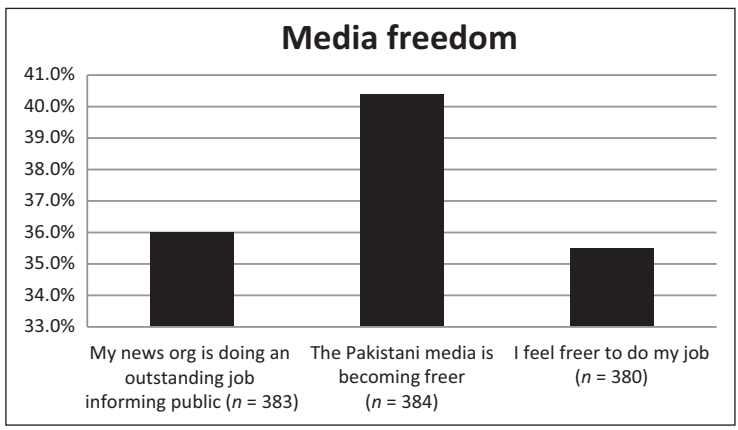

Figure 18. Media freedom.

Despite that, the journalists believe they are doing a much better job than their American and European counterparts by most measures, ranking Pakistani media as much more fair and independent than US or European news organizations. Only on that issue of professionalism do Pakistani journalists defer to their Western counterparts, with three-quarters of respondents giving high marks to the professionalism of US and European journalists compared to just 44% for their own industry (Figure 19).

The controversy over the publication by European and US news organizations of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad, and the more recent uproar over the 'Innocence of Muslims' film that sparked riots across the Middle East and South Asia, underscored one of the fundamental divides between journalists in much of the West and

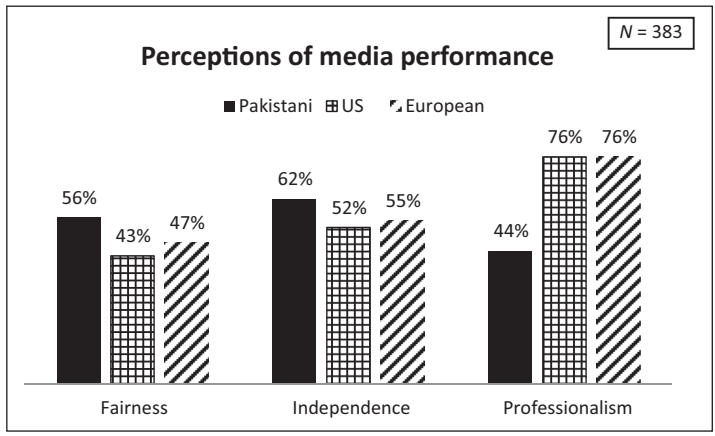

Figure 19. Media performance.

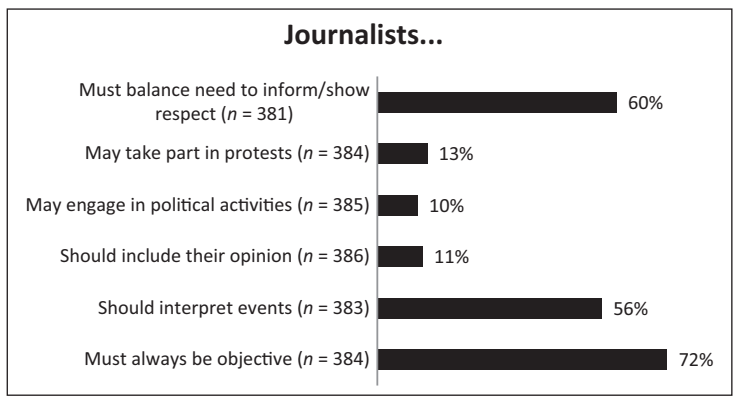

Figure 20. Journalistic activity.

the Muslim world: a fierce dedication to the freedom to publish (Lundberg, 2011) versus the view that journalists must be sensitive to the views of others. Almost 60% of survey respondents said journalists must balance the need to inform with the need to show respect (Figure 20), a finding that is in line with the results of similar studies in other parts of the Muslim world (Pintak and Ginges, 2008; Pintak and Setiyono, 2011).

This is just one example of how Western standards of journalism do not always fit neatly into the worldview of journalists elsewhere. Various surveys of journalists in the developing world have noted a gap between the professional aspirations, or self-view, of journalists regarding the classic benchmarks of Western-style journalism, such as objectivity and balance, and the empirical realities on the ground. Many of these studies have found that the adoption of Western-style journalistic mores is impacted by the social and political environment in which the journalists of a particular nation operate (Shahidi, 2006) and, in some cases, those Western-style news values are simply not appropriate

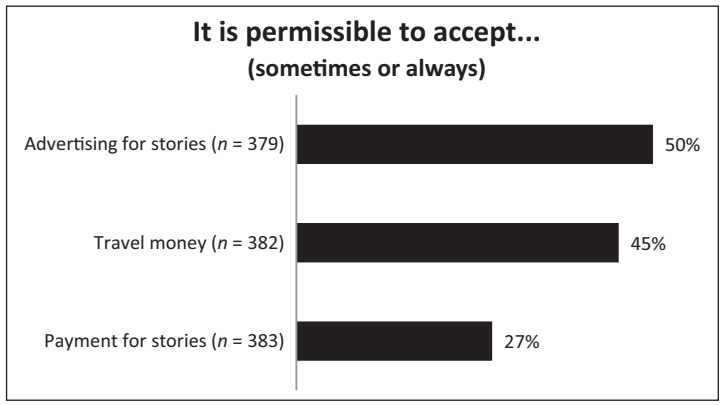

Figure 21. Ethics.

given local political realities (Brooten, 2006; Shafer and Freedman, 2003). As Meyer observed in a study of journalism codes of ethics: 'There may be instances where the ethical standards for journalists are certainly valid but also a practical luxury' (2011, 5).

In this, Pakistani journalists are no different. When it comes to Western-style journalistic values and standards, apparent contradictions abound. The overwhelming majority voiced support for the idea that a journalist must always be objective but just over half said journalists should interpret events for the audience, and 11% said a journalist should include his/her opinion in the story. Similar percentages endorsed the idea that journalists may take part in protests or engage in political activities (Figure 20) that are seen as undermining objectivity by many Western journalists.

The aspiration for objectivity among Pakistani journalists also ran headlong into the realities of poor pay, few expenses and the battle for economic survival in the Pakistani media sector. Fully half the journalists said it was permissible to accept advertising in return for positive stories, almost as many said they would accept travel money and about a quarter condoned direct payments for stories (Figure 21).

Attitudes toward the US

The furore over the bin Laden assassination masks the reality that the US is not considered by Pakistani journalists to be public enemy number one, as often perceived in the West (Ellick, 2010; Tavernise, 2010). Three-quarters of the journalists surveyed held a (very/somewhat) favorable opinion of the American people and more than half felt the same way toward the US as a whole, though, not surprisingly, less than one quarter had a (very/somewhat) favorable view of US policy (Figure 22).

Even though, as noted above, US military operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan were not a priority issue for Pakistani journalists, when it comes to their attitudes toward America, they are the key irritant.

Overwhelming majorities said US forces should not be allowed to operate in Pakistan; that America is playing a negative role in the region; that no benefits can justify

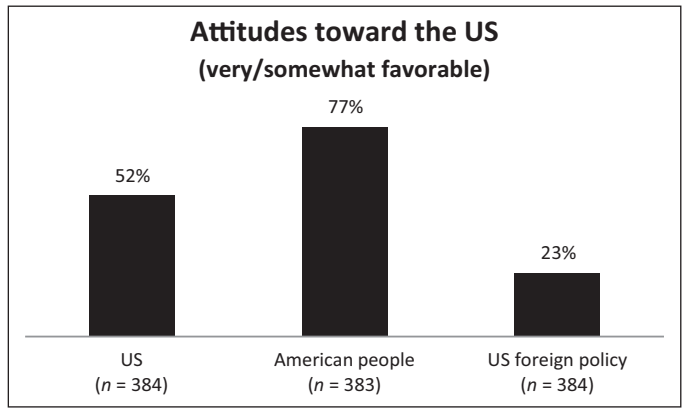

Figure 22. Attitudes toward the US.

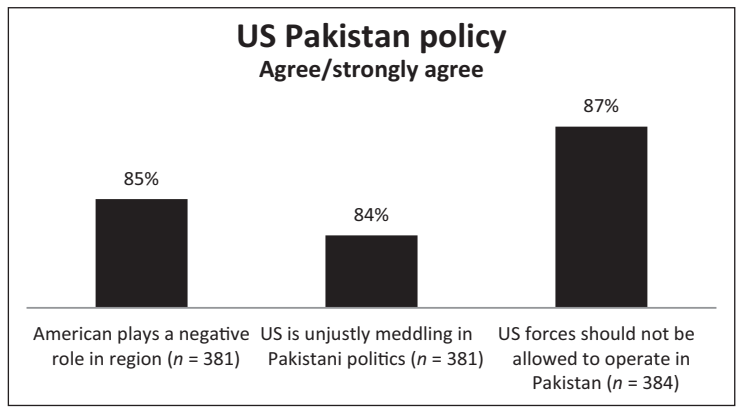

Figure 23. US Pakistan policy.

the presence of US troops in Afghanistan; that the US is unjustly meddling in Pakistani politics (Figure 23); and that no benefits can justify the US-led war in Afghanistan (Figure 24). 'There is no objective journalism when it comes to that topic,' according to Dr Altaf ullah Khan, a journalism professor at the University of Peshawar (personal communication, 2011).

Even so, the picture is not completely black and white. Almost half said the US is involved in the region 'out of a sincere desire to help' and they showed a surprising amount of trust in President Obama, with 61% indicating they believe he is 'genuine about an Afghan withdrawal' (Figure 24).

The journalists also give the US the benefit of the doubt when it comes to the $200 million in US aid that poured into Pakistan following the 2005 Kashmir earthquake (USAID Pakistan, 2011). Just over half agree/somewhat agree that the aid was designed to generate goodwill among Muslims, but 63% agree/somewhat agree it was a 'sincere

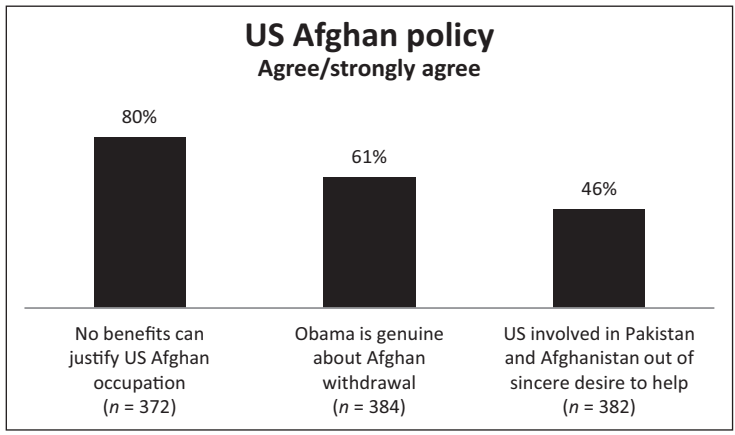

Figure 24. US Afghan policy.

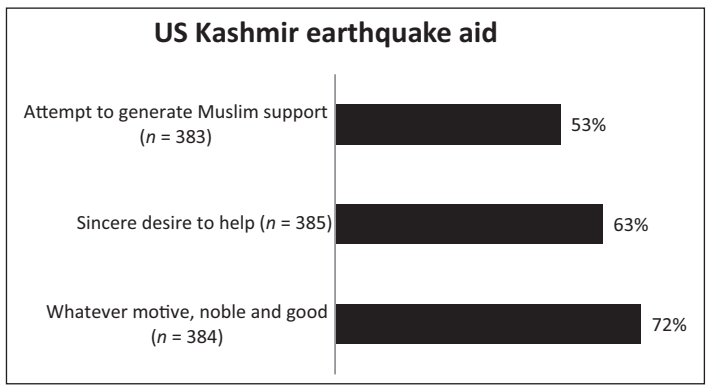

Figure 25. Earthquake aid.

desire to help' and almost three-quarters agree/somewhat agree that 'whatever the motive', the aid was 'noble and good' (Figure 25).

The journalists were less convinced about US efforts to foster democracy in the Muslim world. The survey was conducted prior to the so-called Arab Uprising that overthrew several long-time Middle East autocrats. Almost three-quarters of respondents disagree/somewhat disagree with the statement, 'The US spreads democracy out of a sincere desire to help Muslims', and more than half disagree/somewhat disagree with the idea that 'US support for the spread of democracy is a good and noble thing' (Figure 26).

Islam and attitudes

The question of the degree to which religiosity drives attitudes has been widely discussed in recent years, particularly in the context of Islam, democracy and international

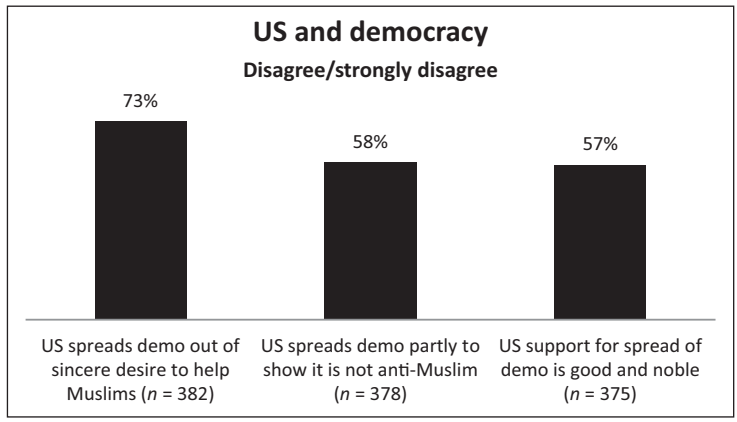

Figure 26. Democracy.

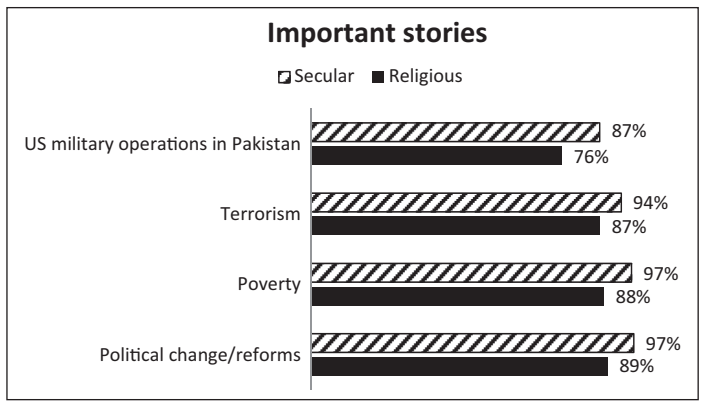

Figure 27. Important stories ('secular' vs. 'religious').

relations. The Arab Barometer survey, the largest study of religiosity and political worldview in the Middle East, found that 'the civic values and predispositions of individuals who favor a political role for Islam are overwhelmingly similar to those of individuals who favor a separateion of religion and politics' (Tessler, 2010: 221) and that whereas religiosity tends to bolster conservatism in more secular societies, this is less true in more religious societies (Tessler, 2002).

The survey found a similar outcome among Pakistani journalists. The self-identified 'religious' and 'secular' Muslim journalists agree on a wide range of issues facing their society and profession. They generally concur on the most important elements of the mission of Pakistani journalism, although the 'religious' Muslims give higher priority to 'protect Islamic tradition' than their secular counterparts (95/67%), to 'enhance national unity' (94/86%), to 'encourage spiritual values' (91/73%), and to 'foster Pakistani culture' (90/85%). For the most part, the reasons for those differences are relatively

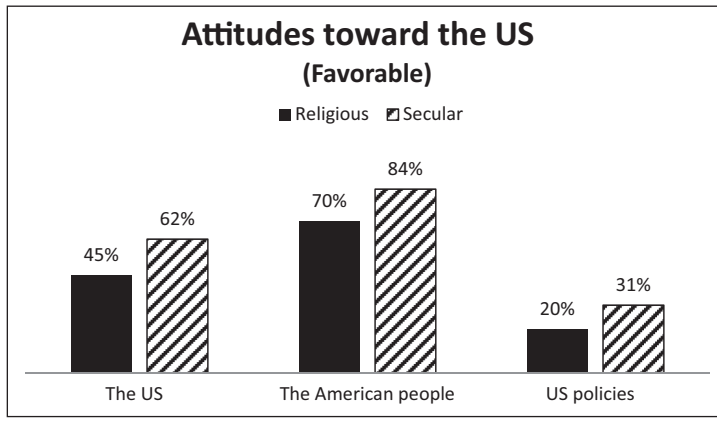

Figure 28. Attitudes toward US ('secular' vs.'religious').

predictable. Less apparent are the reasons 'religious' journalists gave higher priority than 'secular' ones to 'simply report' (92/85%), 'represent the interests of the employer' (80/71%) and 'support government policy' (62/52%).

The 'religious' journalists also gave slightly less priority to the importance of covering stories on 'political reform,' 'poverty,' 'terrorism' and – counter-intuitively – 'US military operations in Pakistan', yet, when asked about threats to Pakistan, they agreed with the 'secular' journalists that 'terrorism' is the greatest threat today, although they are less concerned about political instability (Figure 27).

By virtually every measure, the 'religious' Muslim journalists hold views toward the US that are far more negative than those of the 'secular' group. Ninety percent of the 'religious' journalists say the US plays a negative role in the region, compared to 75% of 'secular' journalists. They rank US policy right behind terrorism as the greatest threat to the region ('secular' journalists rank it tied for fourth), are far more cynical about American motives for providing aid to the region and just 20% have anything good to say about US policy in the region. Yet, although their views are more negative, 70% of the 'religious' journalists have a positive attitude toward the American people, almost half have a positive attitude toward the US as a whole and the majority believes President Obama is sincere in his desire to withdraw from Afghanistan (Figure 28).

It is in the area of religion that the differences between the self-declared 'religious' and 'secular' journalists become most apparent. Eighty-seven percent of 'religious' journalists agree it is necessary to believe in God in order to have moral values versus 60% of the 'secular' journalists. Twice as many 'religious' journalists indicate those who do not believe in God are unfit to hold office (63/31%), and only 20% of 'religious' journalists believe civil laws should be allowed to contradict *Sharia* law versus 43% of 'secular' journalists. And although fewer 'religious' journalists than 'secular' oppose clergy influencing elections, the percentage of 'religious' journalists who oppose such involvement is still sizeable, at 45% (versus 63% of 'secular' reporters).

Finally, when it comes to the role of clergy in society, even many religious Muslim journalists are skeptical, with just half indicating that religious leaders are meeting the

moral needs of society and providing convincing answers to family problems, and slightly more giving them good marks for resolving social and spiritual issues (57% and 60% respectively), which still leaves a sizable portion of 'religious' journalists critical of the clergy's role.

Conclusion

The survey provides more evidence to support Weaver's conclusion that '[t]here are strong national differences that override any universal professional norms or values of journalism around the world' (2004: 145–6). There is clearly a growing sense of professionalism within Pakistani journalism, evident in the fact that more than a quarter of the respondents identified first as a 'journalist', but their self-perceived mission and their application of Western-style journalism norms are influenced by religion, nationalism and the economic realities of Pakistan today. Western-style journalism culture is just one element in a collective identity in which Islam is embedded in a decidedly nationalistic worldview.

Pakistani journalists are finding their voice after a long period of repression as their industry begins to take its place as a 'fourth estate' that impacts on the body politic. While willing to challenge the government and the security forces, they see their primary task as explaining the complexities of Pakistani politics and society rather than overtly seeking political change. They see themselves as continuing to operate under tight strictures and are critical of the lack of professionalism they see as pervading their industry. Yet they also firmly believe that objectivity must be blended with interpretation, opinion, and a need to show respect to the subject of the story. Such a stance is in keeping with the theory that social and cultural environment impacts on the approach of media in a given nation state (Pantti et al., 2012) and the belief, as reported among Burmese journalists, that Western-style 'objectivity' should be 'an ideal toward which to aspire rather than a standard against which to be judged' (Brooten, 2006).

Pakistani journalists are largely in synch with the Pakistani public when it comes to the greatest challenges facing the country. Recent public opinion polls have found that Pakistanis cite the economy and terrorism as the biggest problems facing the country, with 93% of those polled indicating that the Taliban and Al-Qaeda are a serious problem (Charney, 2010), and nearly half indicating that the government is not doing enough to fight terrorism (Ray, 2011), which largely tracks with the response of the journalists. While critical of the government, they favor gradual reforms, with more than half supporting government policies. And although they are not overly anti-American, they do see defense of Pakistani interests as one of their top priorities and overwhelmingly want the US to stop meddling in Pakistani affairs. Islam has its place in the newsroom, but it does not dominate the worldview of Pakistani journalists, who are as critical of the clergy as they are of the government.

Implications

The survey is the latest in a series providing empirical evidence that seems to argue for the notion of a common aspiration for freedom of expression and journalistic independence

(Josephi, 2007) but against the emergence of a 'global journalism ethic' (Ward, 2005) or the practicality of a Universal Code of Journalism ethics, based on the Western model (Herrscher, 2002). Like journalists in other parts of the developing world where the chains on media freedom are being loosened, Pakistani journalists are carving out their own approach to the profession; shaping journalistic values born elsewhere to fit local culture, mores and realities; aspiring to greater freedom and a higher level of professionalism but eschewing the combative approach found in the US and some parts of Western Europe. Rather, theirs is a synthesis of Western practices and the development journalism of Southeast Asia: objective but respectful, independent but cooperative. As in other parts of the Muslim world (Pintak, 2009; Pintak and Setiyono, 2011; Steele, 2011), this approach is, in part, expressed within the idiom of Islam. Where the journalism revolution in the Arab world has given birth to a profession focused on aggressively driving political and social change (Pintak and Ginges, 2008), Pakistani media is emerging as an independent force more focused on fostering societal development.

The desire to improve professionalism in the industry as evinced in the survey responses underlines the huge need for capacity-building in the journalism sector, both in terms of professional skills and around issues of ethics and responsibility. But the fact that survey respondents gave high priority to functions such as defending Pakistani interests and supporting development is a reminder that Western media development organizations must avoid the temptation to try to clone Pakistani journalists in the image of Western journalists.

Meanwhile, the strong strain of nationalism seen among Pakistani journalists indicates that nation still trumps all else. Islam may be the dominant religion in the Pakistani newsroom, but it does not dictate the journalists' worldview; they are as skeptical of the clerics as government functionaries or the US government. What does seem to dominate all else is the journalists' concern about the domestic terrorism wracking Pakistani society, a view found as readily among self-described 'secular' Muslim Pakistani journalists as those who self-identify as 'religious' Muslims. That preoccupation has implications for the Pakistani government of the day, for US forces in Afghanistan and for the Islamist movements flexing their muscles inside the nation's borders.

Declaration of conflicting interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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Notes

1. Under ideal conditions, respondents are asked a series of measures of religiosity, which have been adapted specifically to measure Muslim religiosity, such as mosque attendance, frequency of prayers, alcohol use, etc. (Hill and Hood, 1999; Krauss et al., 2007; Wilde and Joseph, 1997). While the secular/religious dichotomy is subject to individual interpretation, a variety of scholars and survey researchers have used self-identification when it was not possible to employ more detailed measures of religiosity. Asking respondents to self-identify with regard to religiosity is an accepted practice in survey research (Bilgrami, 1992; Jelen, 1993).

When the survey instrument used in the Pakistan journalist survey was tested in other regions earlier, strong objections to such personal questions about religiosity led the researchers to opt for the more general self-identifier

2. Respondents were allowed to choose more than one, thus percentages total more than 100.

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