

Newspapers Monitoring Report

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Introduction

Journalism is supposed to provide a quality of information, and a wide range of perspectives and voices, to promote participation in public discussion. But, with every passing day, journalism, now generally known as media, is more and more driven by marketing and commercial pressures rather than an ethic of public service.

More and more people are concluding that dominant, agenda-setting, mainstream (elitist) media are a key obstacle to progressive social change. Besides, lack of a tradition of media criticism in Pakistan deprives the media organizations themselves of a mechanism for correction and reform.

Media have, in many ways, become the power structure and is positioned to exploit its enormous influence to advance both its own agenda and those of its government-business allies. The great mass of people (workers, peasants, artistes, students etc.) has minimal say on the major public issues of the day.

Society for Alternative Media and Research (SAMAR), an Islamabad-based non-profit organization, initiated an exercise to measure in centimeters/columns each and every news story and advertisement printed on front and back pages of mainstream English and Urdu newspapers to assess how the newspapers are plural as far as different voices and opinions are concerned.

The newspapers were selected randomly for scanning. The front and back pages of three English newspapers i.e. Daily Times, DAWN

and The News, and of three Urdu newspapers i.e. Daily Express, Jang and Khabrain were scanned minutely and measured during one month (15th June to 15th July) to ascertain how much space was occupied by which issue, topic and how much by advertisement.

The topics which were particularly monitored were war in FATA, bomb blasts, Pak-US relations, coalition governments and differences among coalition partners, statements by the president, prime minister, ministers, political leaders were covered under the head of government/politics, judges issue, lawyers movement and also social development issues such as health, education, infrastructure development, rural development, slums, poverty and unemployment etc.

The scanning showed that 92% space on front and back pages of three English newspapers (combined) were dominated by advertisement (42%), government/politics (26%), war on terrorism (10%) and international events (14%). News stories regarding social concerns occupied only 4% of the overall news space.

Advertisement, government/politics, war dominated 82% space on front and back pages of the three Urdu newspapers. Advertisement was 37%, government and politics 40%. Social issues occupied 11% space whereas international events got only 3% share of the overall news coverage.

In DAWN, 8742 cm/cl space was occupied by government/politics, judges issue and war (5313 cm/cl), and

advertisement (3429 cm/cl). However, social issues occupied only 703 cm/cl space on front and back pages of the newspaper during the whole month. Likewise, in Urdu daily Jang, 10667 cm/cl space was occupied by government/politics, judges, issue and war (5163 cm/cl) and advertisement (5504 cm/cl). Social issues were given 592 cm/cl space on front and back pages of the newspaper.

The newspapers gave front and back pages coverage to issues and events which were earlier reported by electronic media i.e. radio and television channels during their day and broadcasting. War in Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and adjoining areas, bomb blasts, Pakistan-US relations, war in Afghanistan and Iraq, coalition government partners' differences and conflicts, lawyers' movement, demand for General Musharraf's removal, among others, stood out on newspapers' front and back pages. Newspapers, in a sense following news TV channels, continued dedicating staff, space, resources and early attention making above mentioned top stories.

The increasingly war in FATA and the fierce political debate over PPP-PML (N) relationship and "restoration" of Chief Justice Mohammad Iftakhar Chaudhry drove intensive coverage by the newspapers. Taken together, the three continuing story lines war, PPP-PML (N) differences and lawyers' movement consumed a large portion of the newspapers' energy and resources, and nearly a third of the overall news space on front and back pages.

SAMAR did a more in-depth, comprehensive analysis of news coverage. It examined coverage every day for the entire month (15th June to

15th July). Hundreds of stories were examined. The results offer what we believe to be an astonishing view of what the mainstream media delivered in one month as well as insights into the priorities, tendencies and trends that helped define the news agenda. Among the key findings are:

- Front and back pages of the newspapers examined were dominated by largely quarter size advertisements. In some newspapers, even three fourth of front page was found occupied by advertisements.
- Advertisements inserted between news stories on front and back pages was a common trend except DAWN which did not allocate more than one-quarter on front page and two quarters (lower half) on back page.
- Particularly, front pages of both English and Urdu newspapers were dominated by a few mega-stories, such as war in FATA, politics and judges issue
- Front and back pages of Urdu newspapers were dominated by advertisement and stories on politics, judges' issue and fuel and wheat prices.
- English newspapers, particularly DAWN, covered the world on its front and back pages. Urdu newspapers, however, ignored what was happening in the world. The coverage of international events, except Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan, was only 3%.

- Rather it would be more accurate to say Urdu media covered some U.S. interests.
- The media and the public often disagreed about which stories were important. General feelings are that the most read front and back pages of particularly the English newspapers failed to deliver sufficient coverage of some basic bread and butter issues, such as rising fuel and flour prices.
- Rush Limbaugh's reference to the mainstream press as the “drive-by” media may be an ideologically driven critique, but in the case of several major stories during the month including federal and provincial budgets, the newspapers did reveal a tendency to flood the zone with instant coverage and then quickly drop the subject. They had a markedly short attention span except stories on war and judges' issue.
- Not a single news on culture, literature, science, medicine, archeological discoveries etc. was seen on front or back pages of all six newspapers scanned during the month.

A Narrower News Agenda

News consumers did not have more news to choose from. The news agenda was, in fact, quite narrow, dominated by a few major general topic areas. Together, coverage of war, bomb blasts, politics, lawyers' movement accounted for almost three-fourth quarters (78%) of the overall news

coverage in English newspapers and more than three-fourth quarters (82%) in Urdu newspapers.

And another chunk of that coverage involved one-time events, man-made and natural disasters such as torrential rains, floods, road accidents and crime.

A Limited Space for Global News

When the coverage of the world events was examined, it was dominated by geopolitical hot spots such as Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, Kashmir etc. However, global events were least reported on front and back pages of the Urdu newspapers.

The lack of broad and deep

international coverage is probably a function of several interrelated factors. The war and political issues perhaps soaked up much of the journalistic energy and resources or the readers were kept hostage to the political and financial interests of the newspapers' owners

Differences by Newspapers

There were some notable differences in news judgment among the media sectors, both in terms of subject matter covered and the diversity or breadth of the news. For example, there was diversity of news stories in DAWN. The News and its sister Urdu newspaper, Jang, however, focused

on political issues such as differences among coalition partners, judges' issue and lawyers' activities. Daily Times front pages were dominated by news stories on war and Pak-US relations. Urdu newspapers, particularly, covered rise in prices of fuel, electricity and flour.

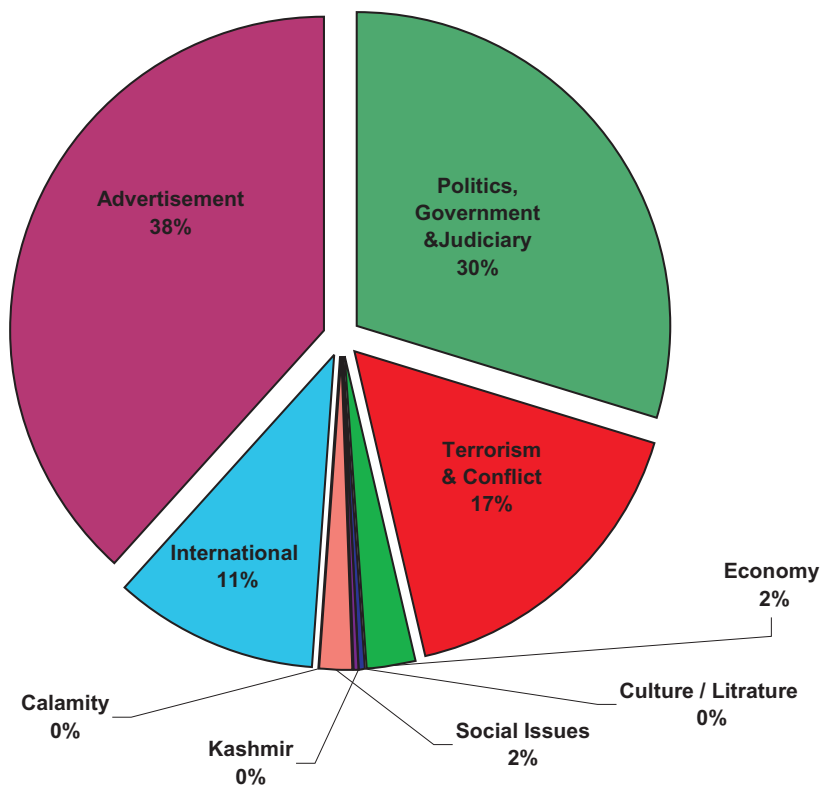
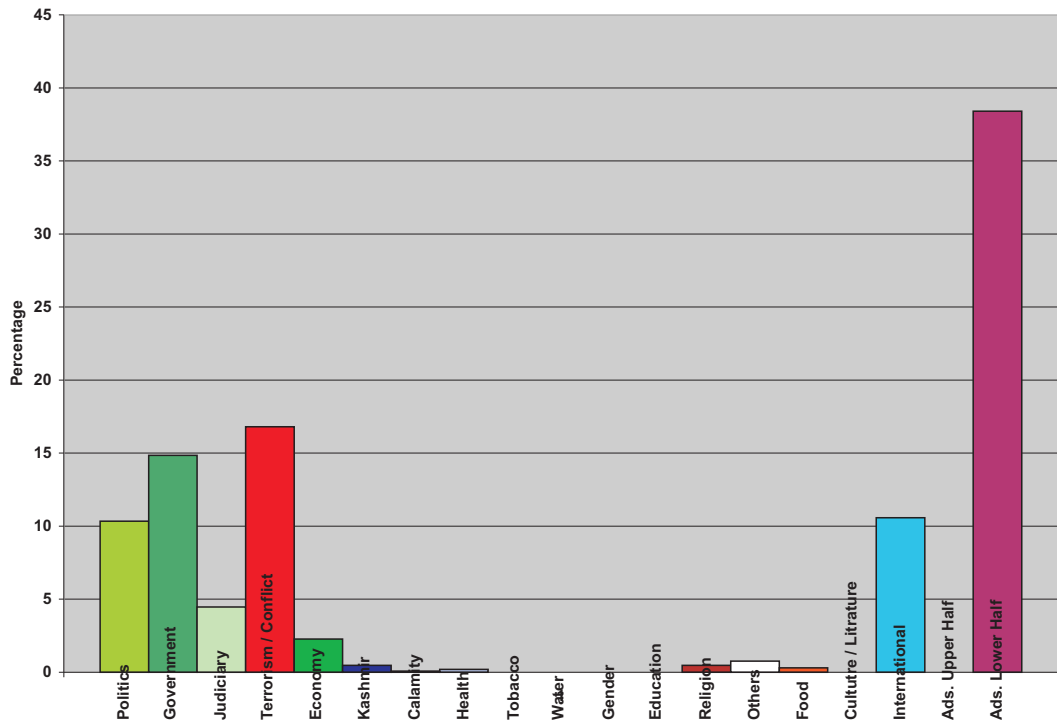
Newspapers and News Consumers

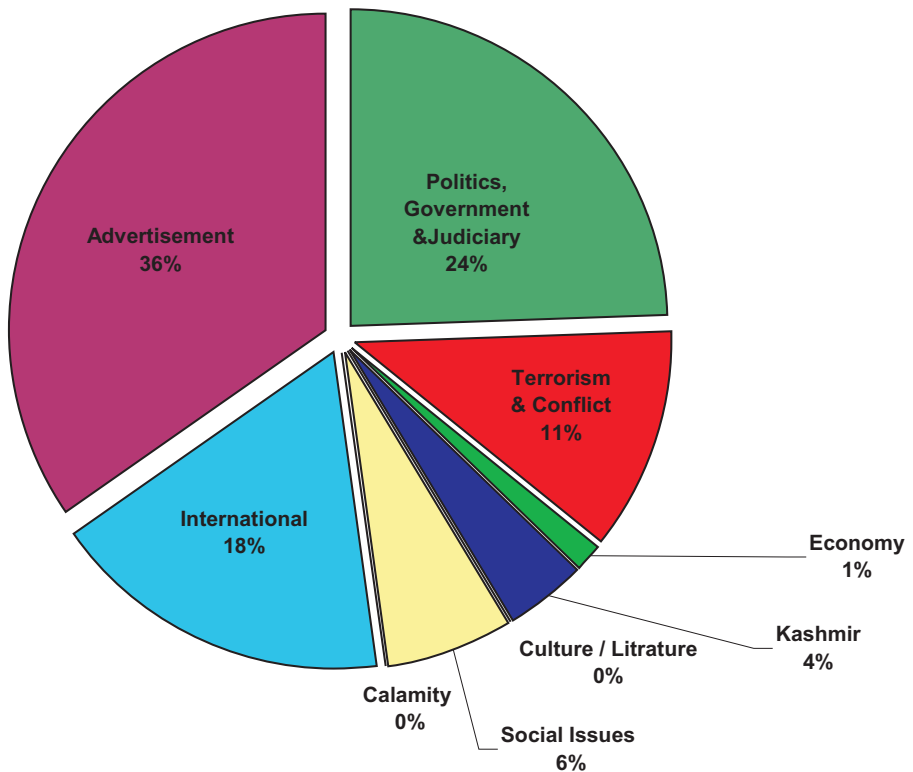
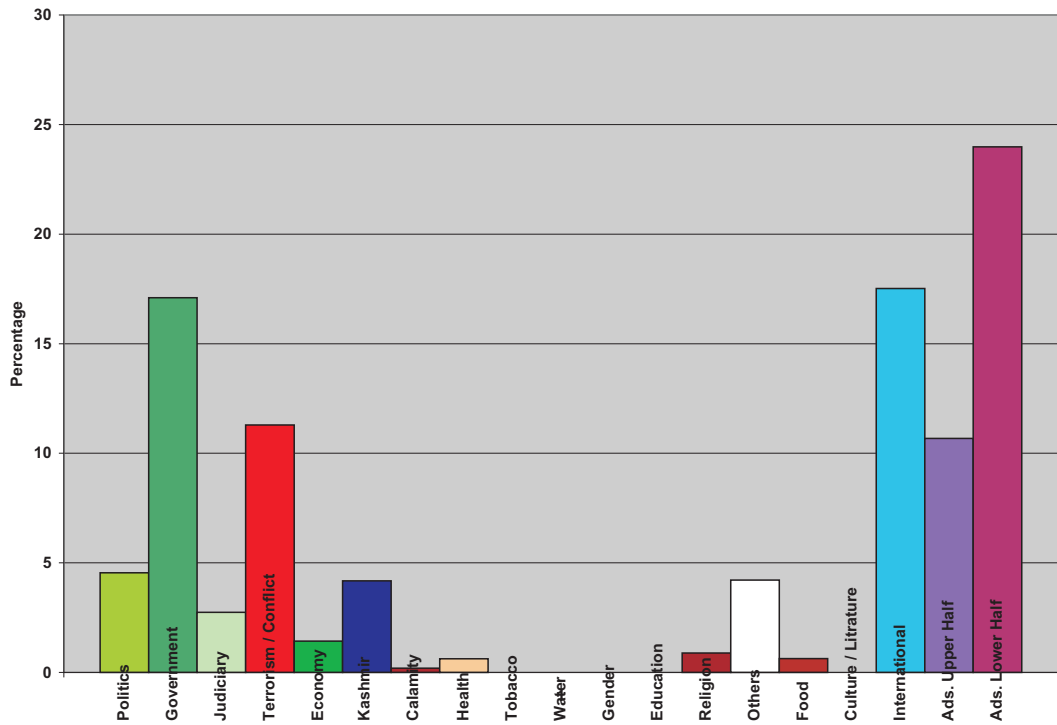
SAMAR also examined whether the public agreed or disagreed with the media over what constituted important news by analyzing contents of Letters to Editors largely published in English newspapers. Rising costs of living and price hike was the main concern of news consumers whereas newspapers gave priority to war and politics over consumers' concerns.

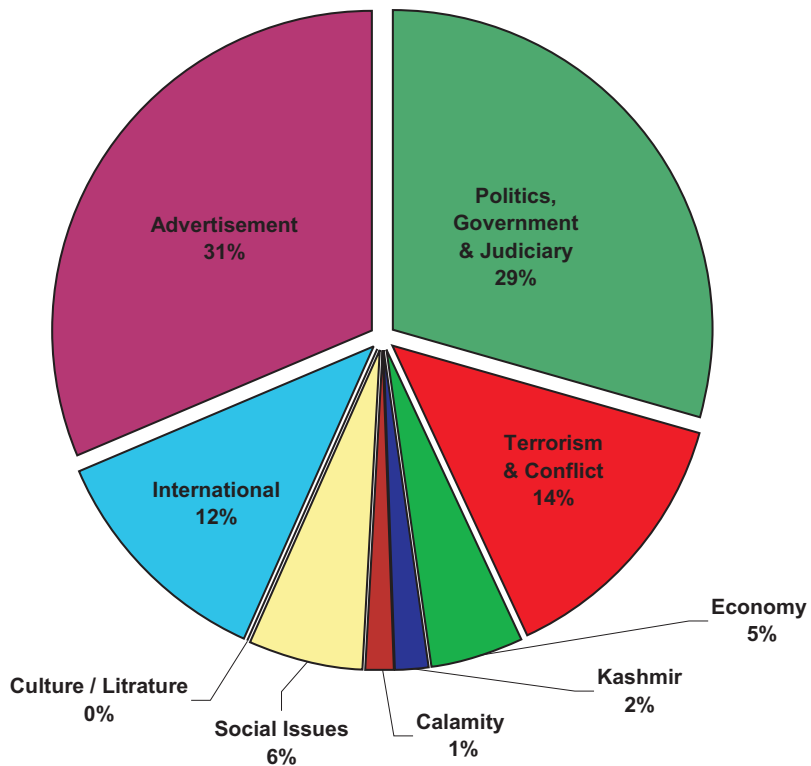
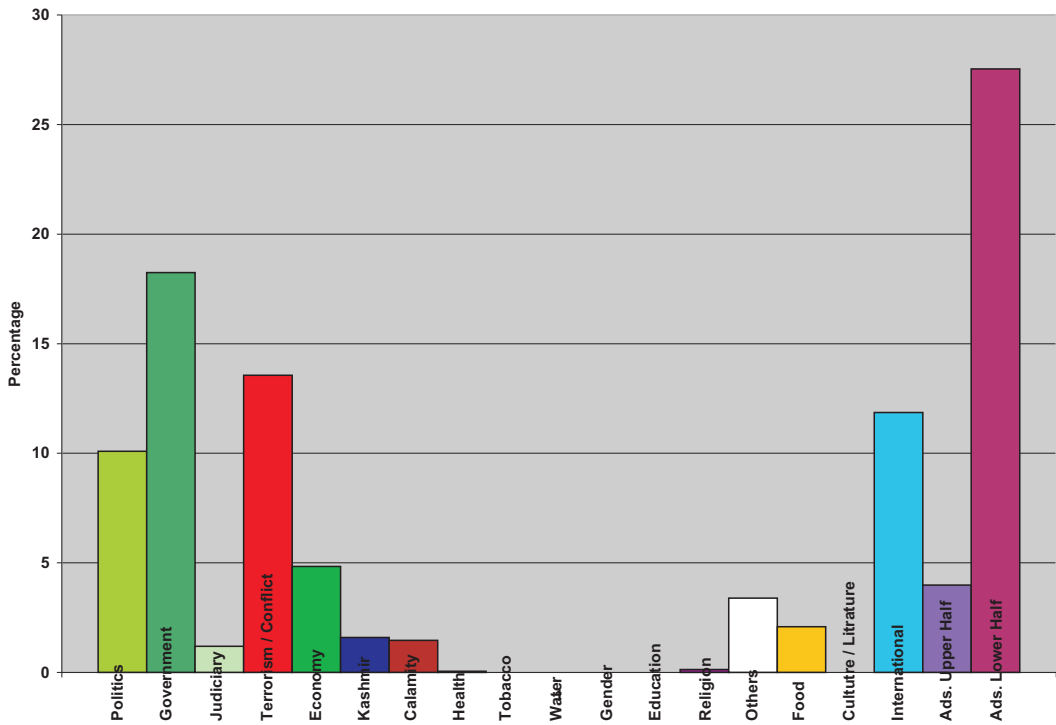
As was the case with many of the topic areas that got little coverage in the newspapers, the common characteristic that defines these

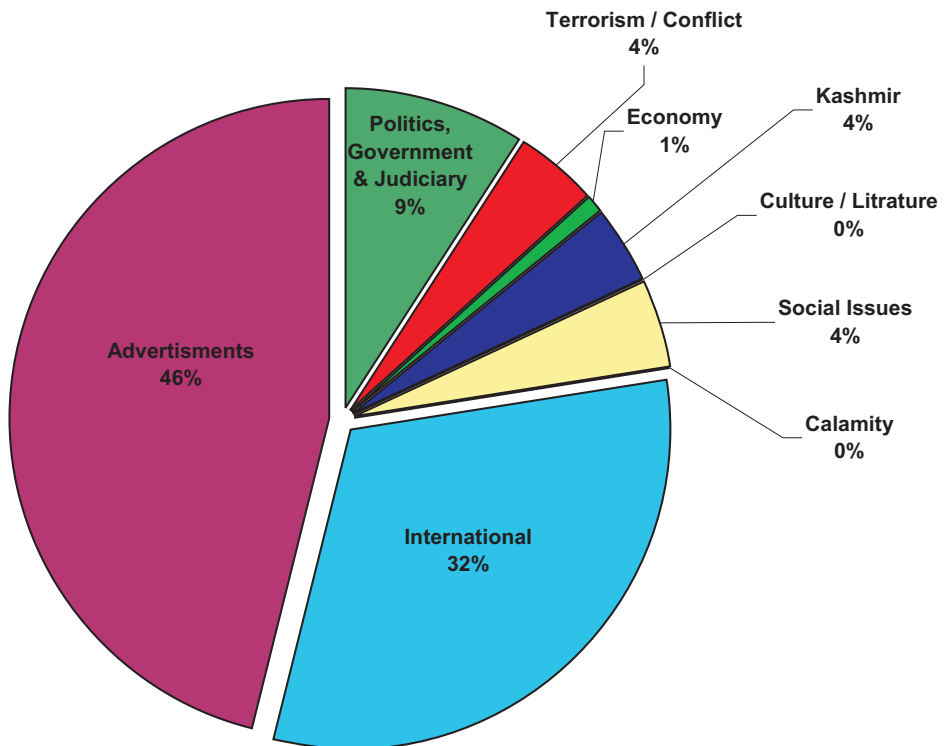
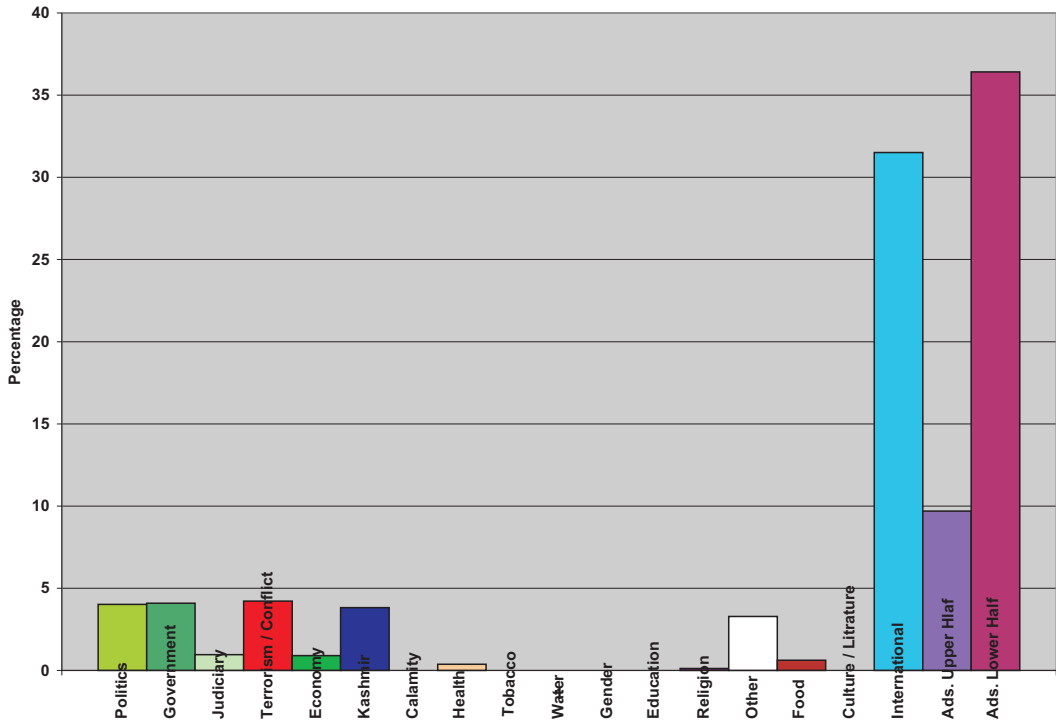
particular stories, including the price hike is that they speak to the nuts and bolts of daily existence, such as health and money. There were some subjects that the newspapers seemed far more interested in covering than the public said they were interested in following.

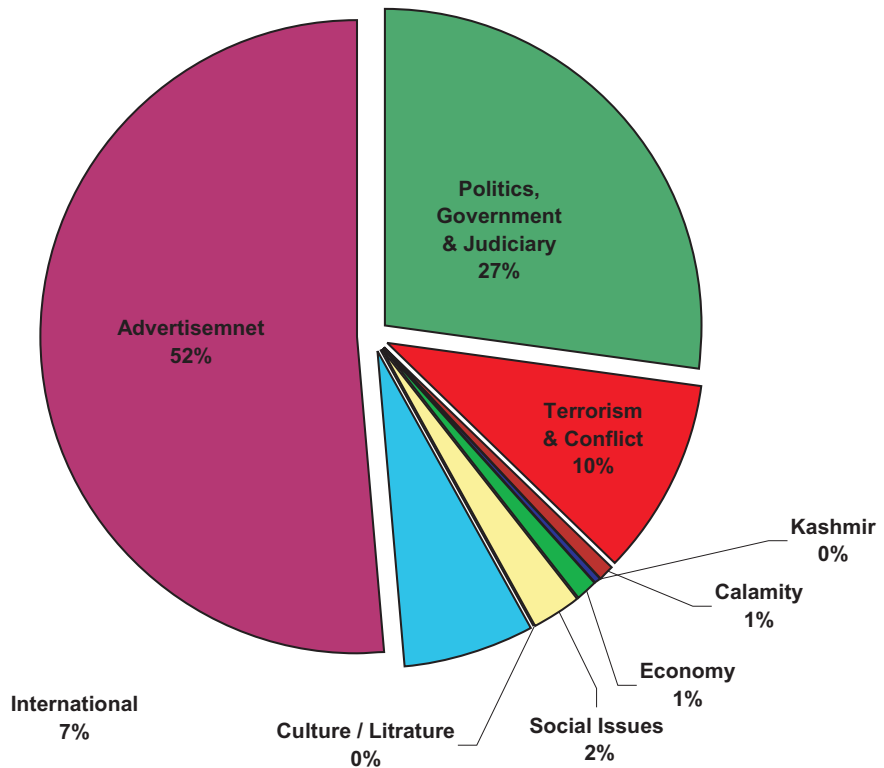
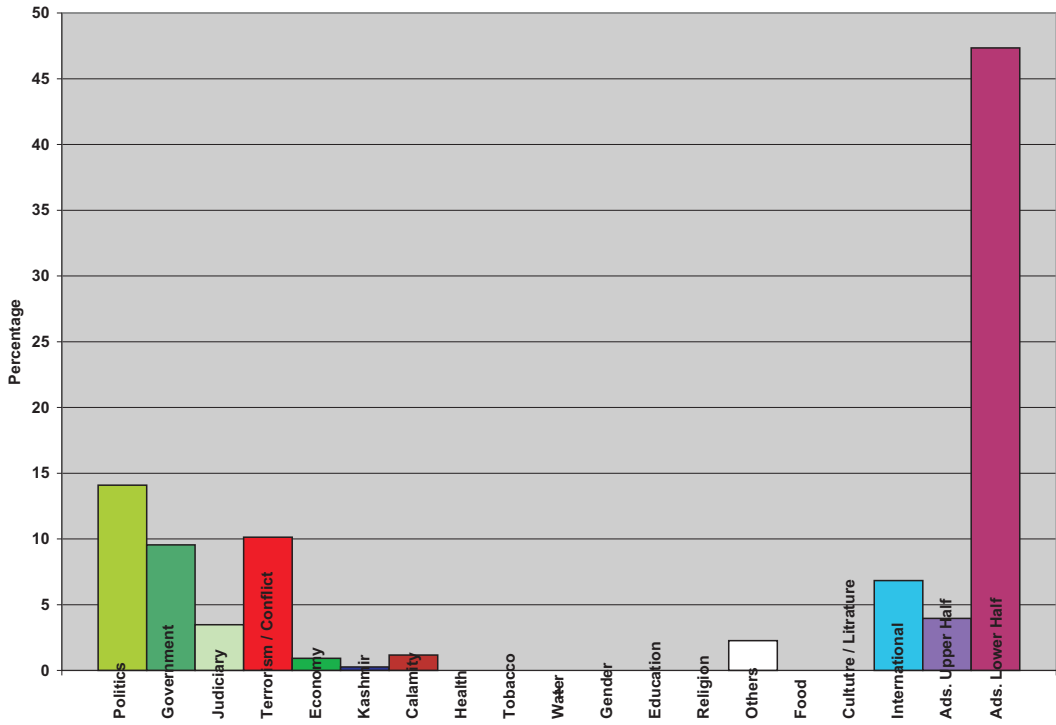
During the scanning, it was found that there was no Letter to Editor's column in Urdu newspaper, Khabrain. It seems the newspaper do not want feedback from its readers.

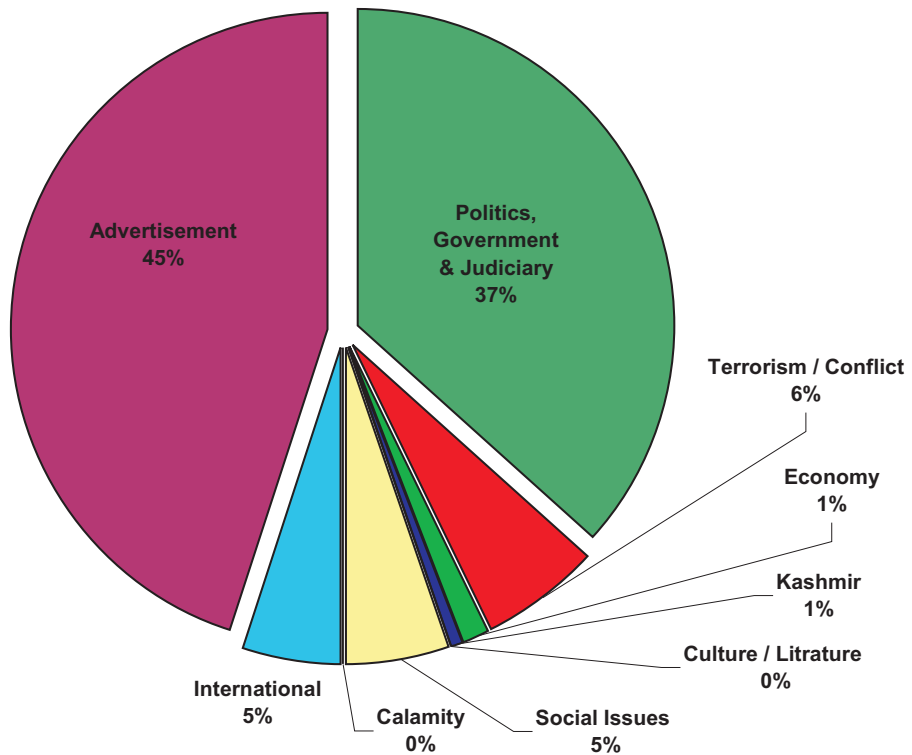
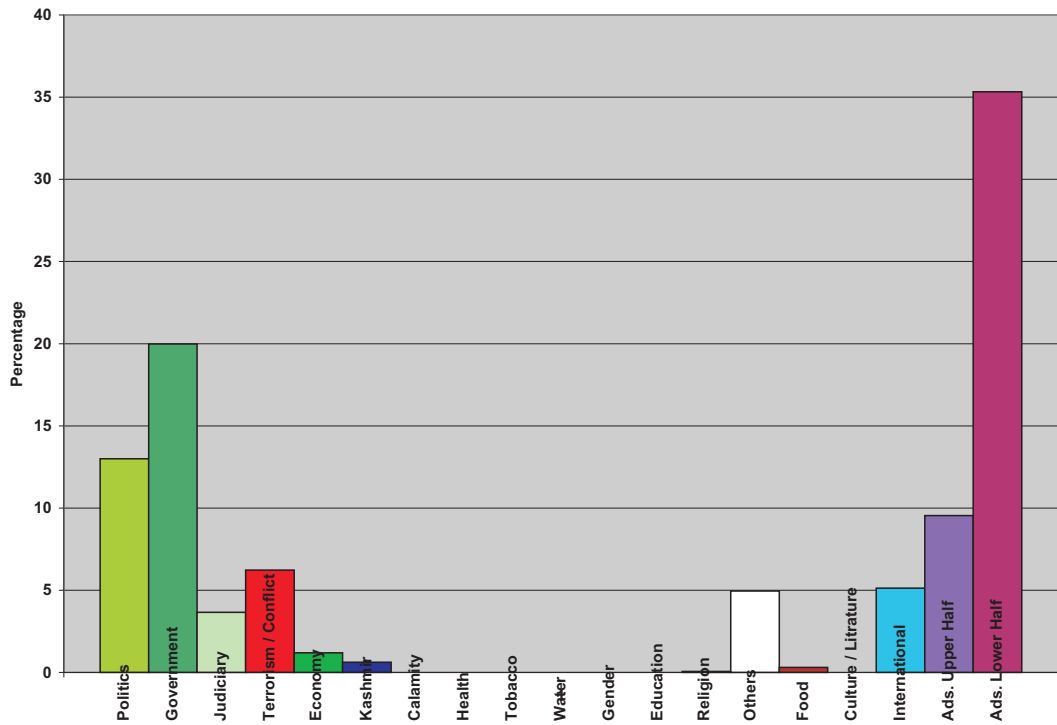


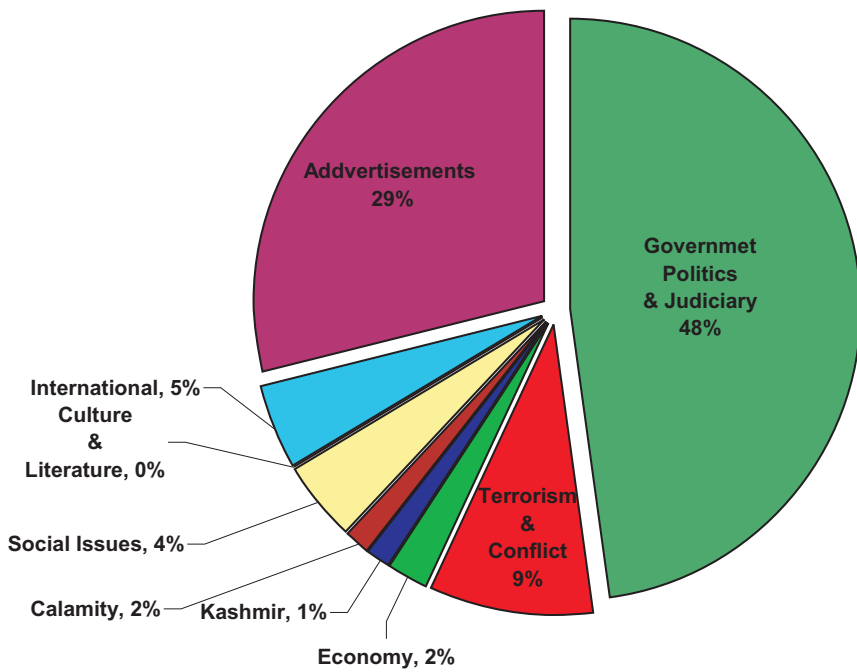
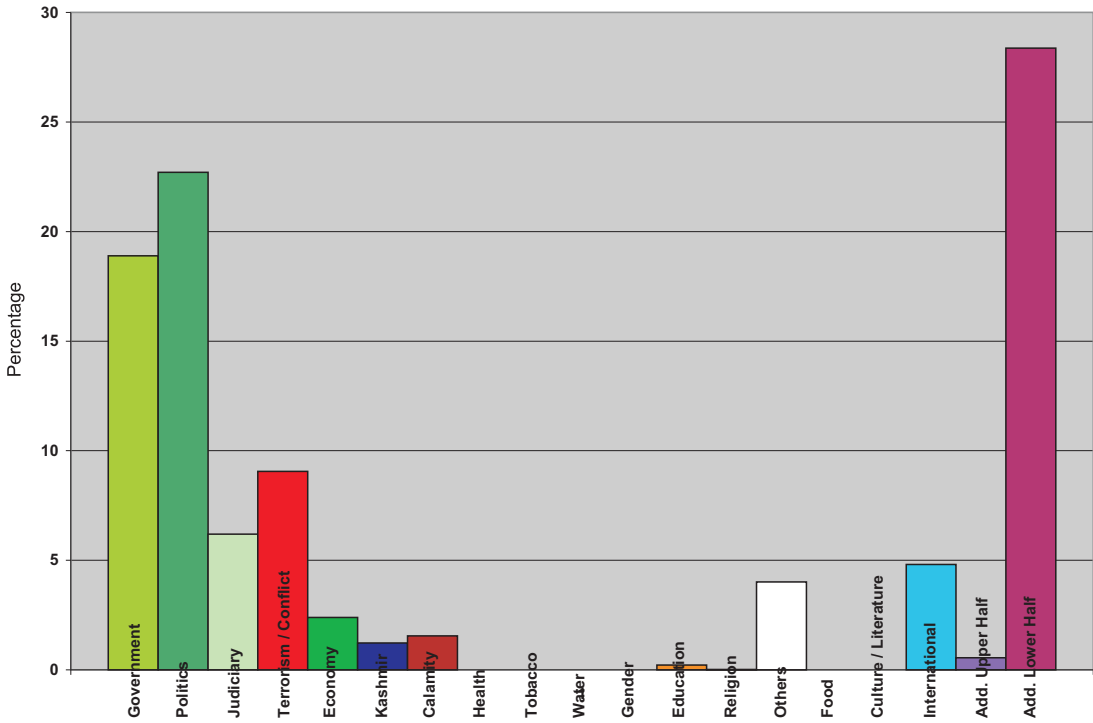


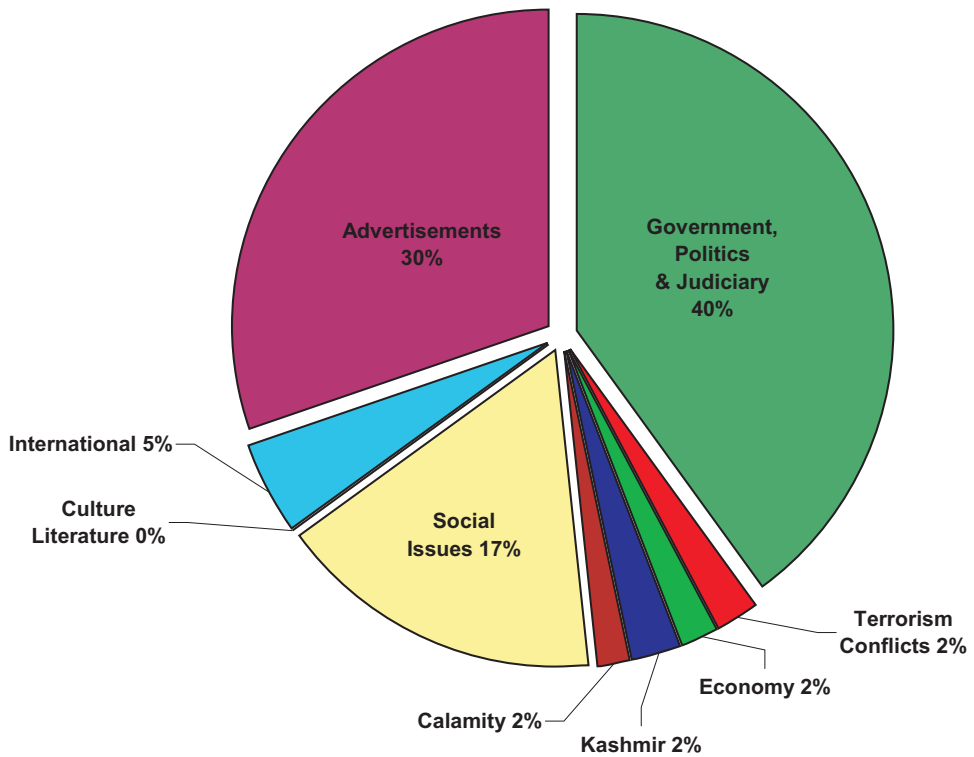
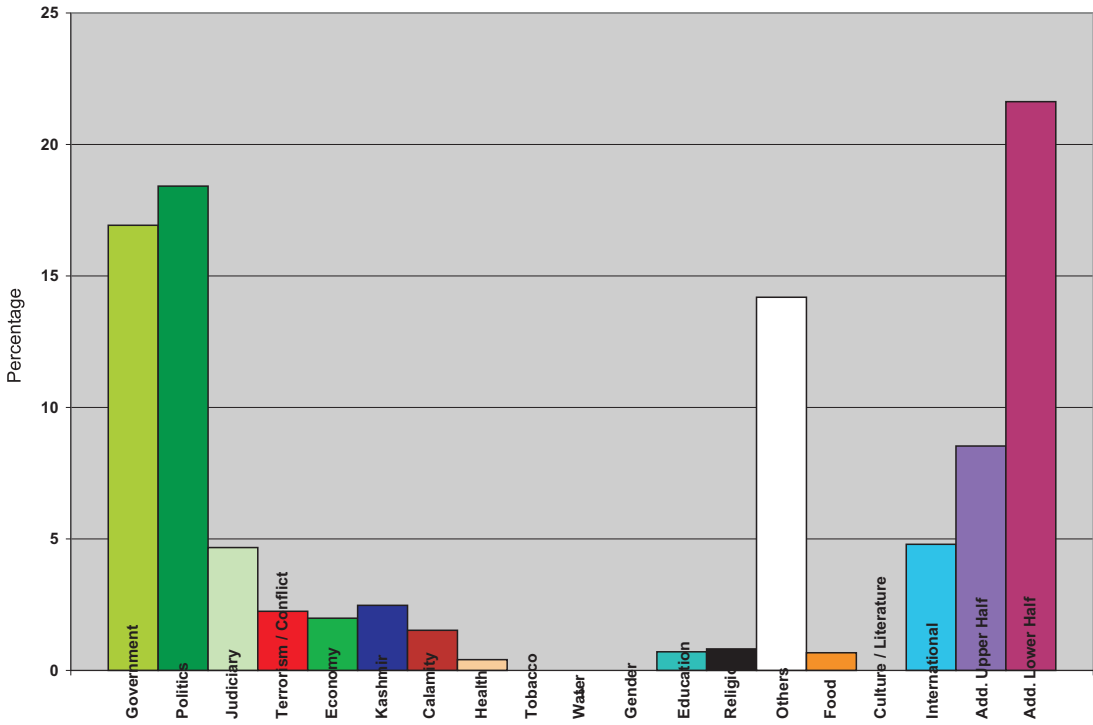


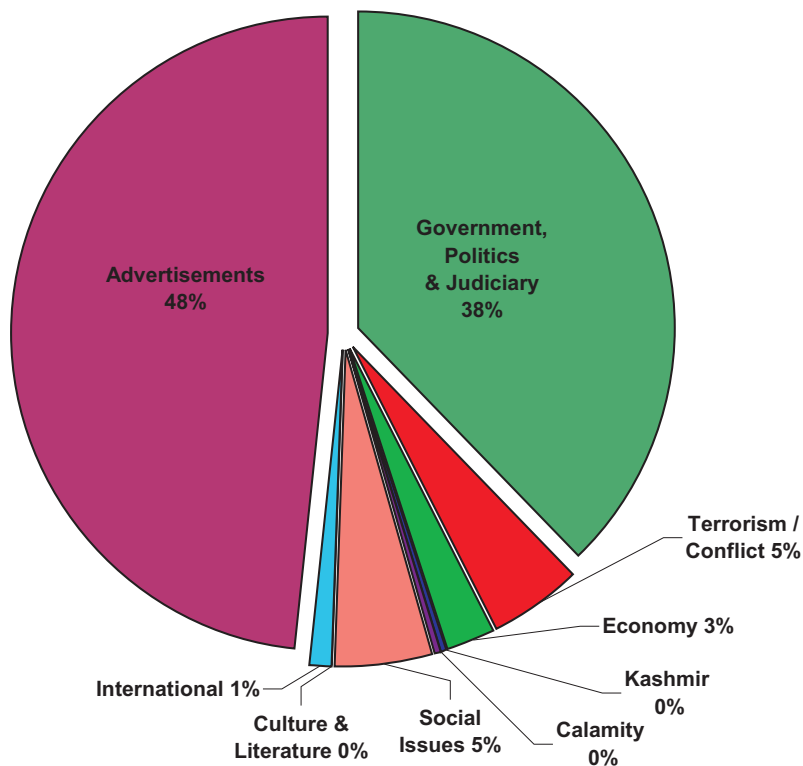
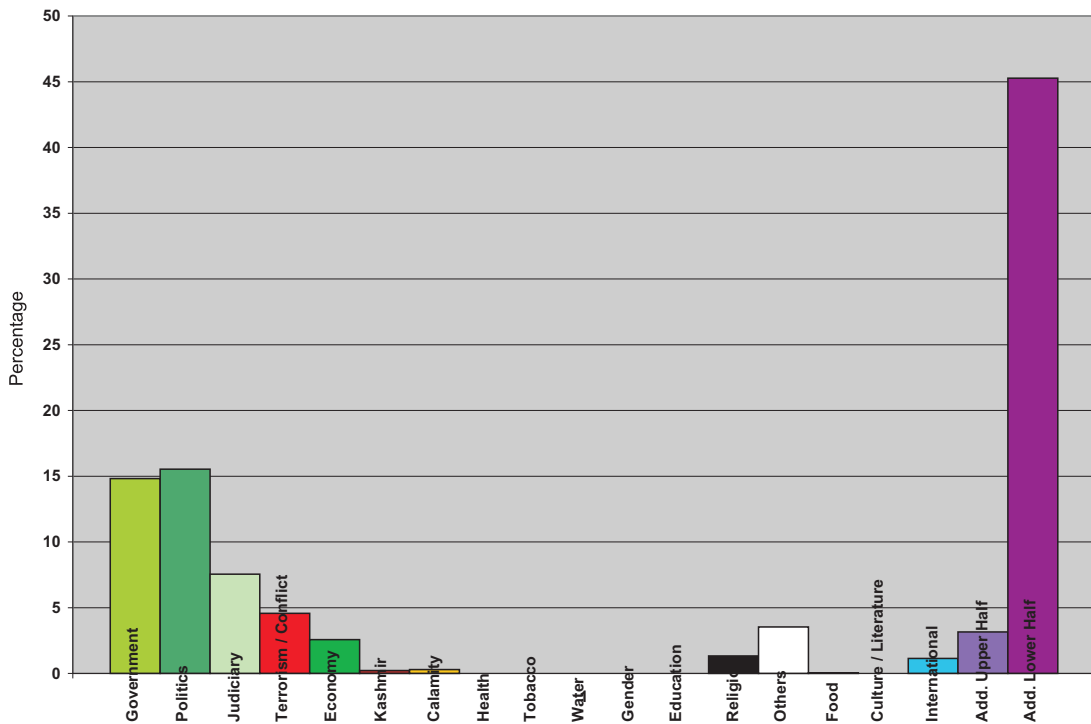


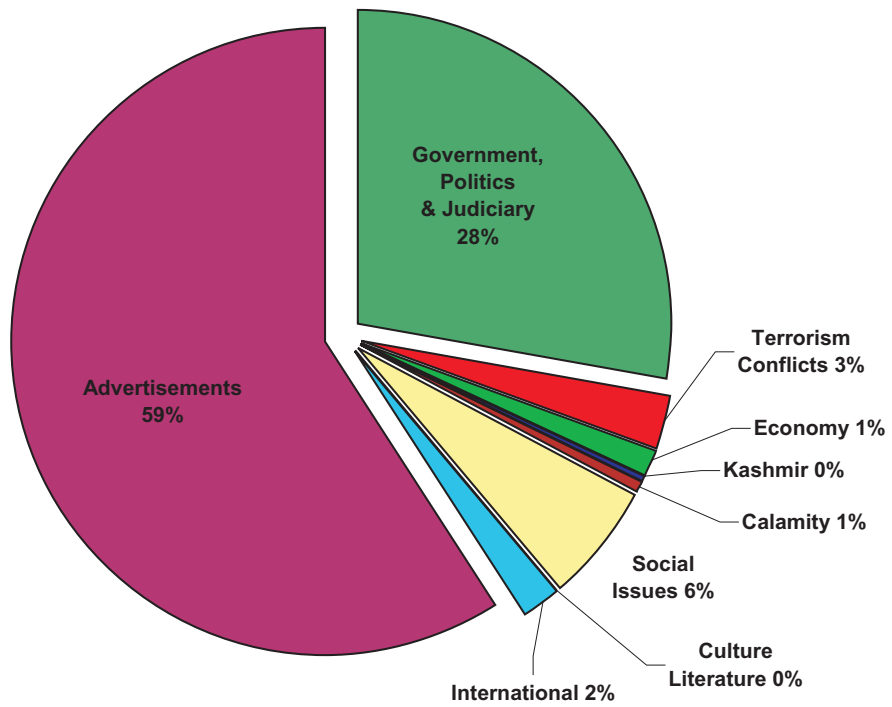
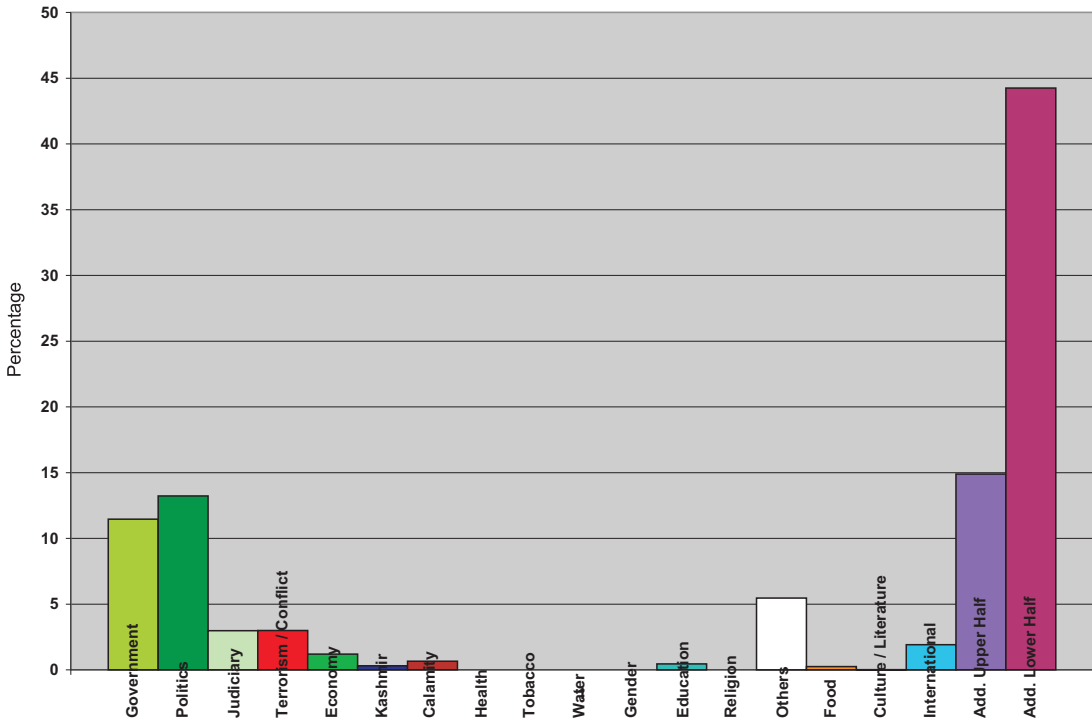


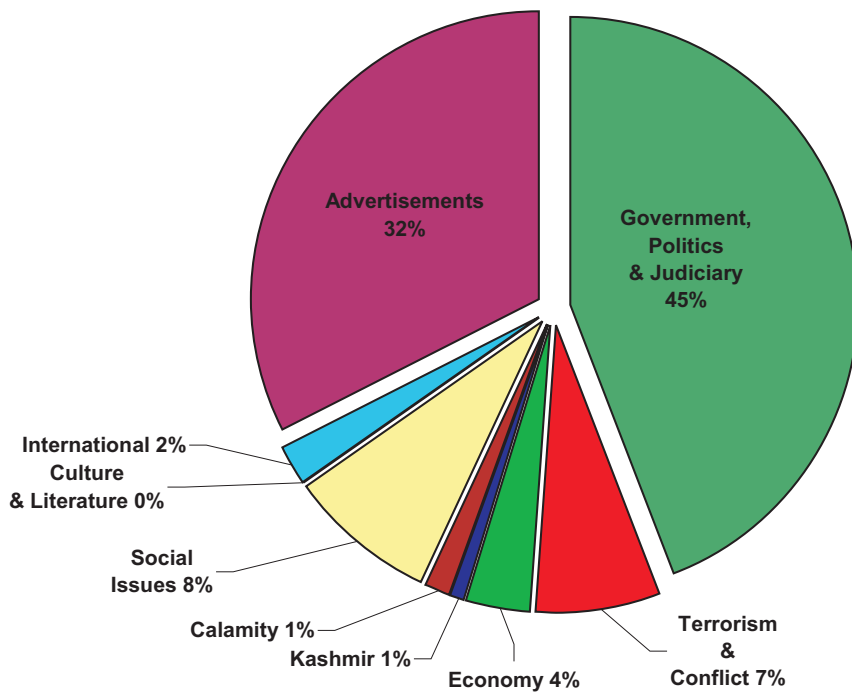
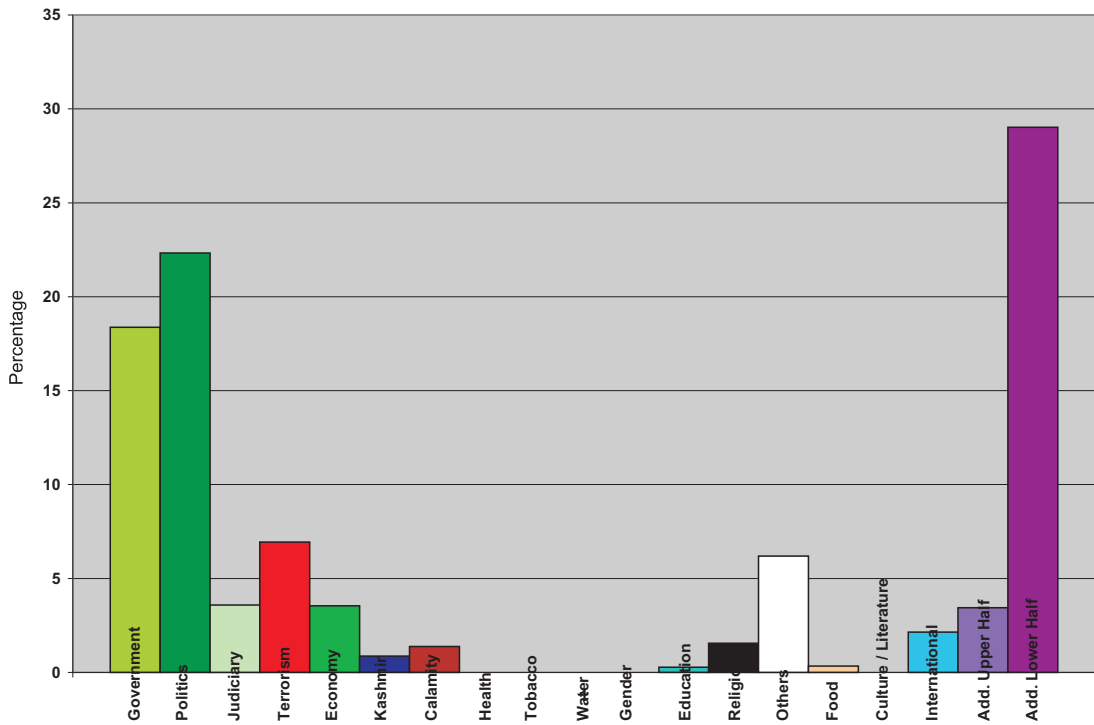


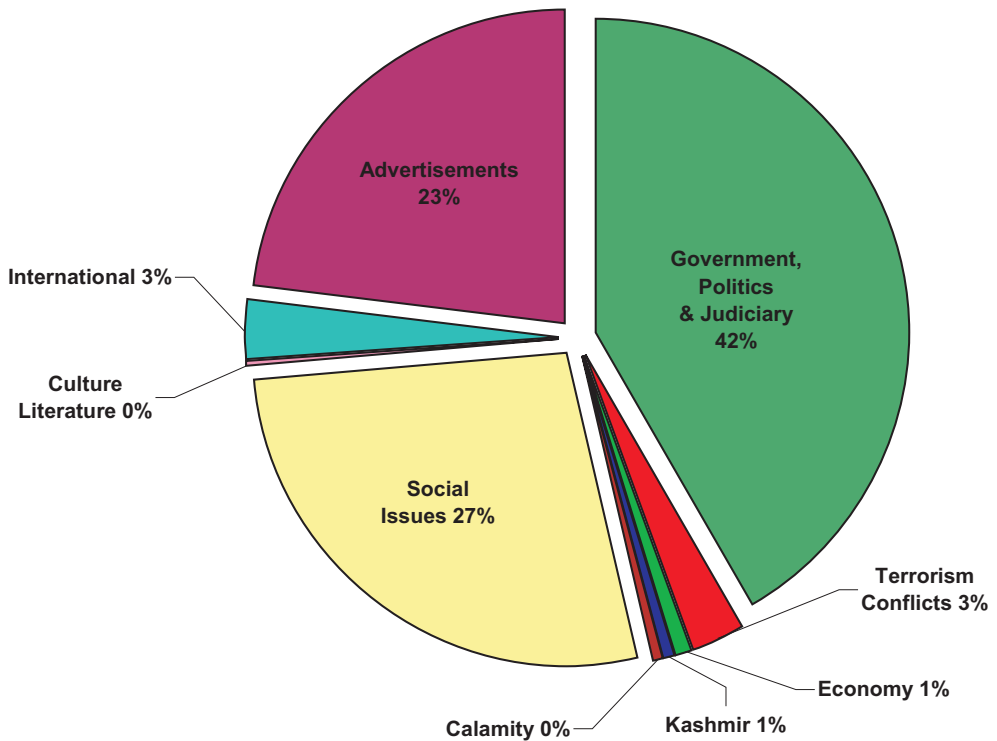
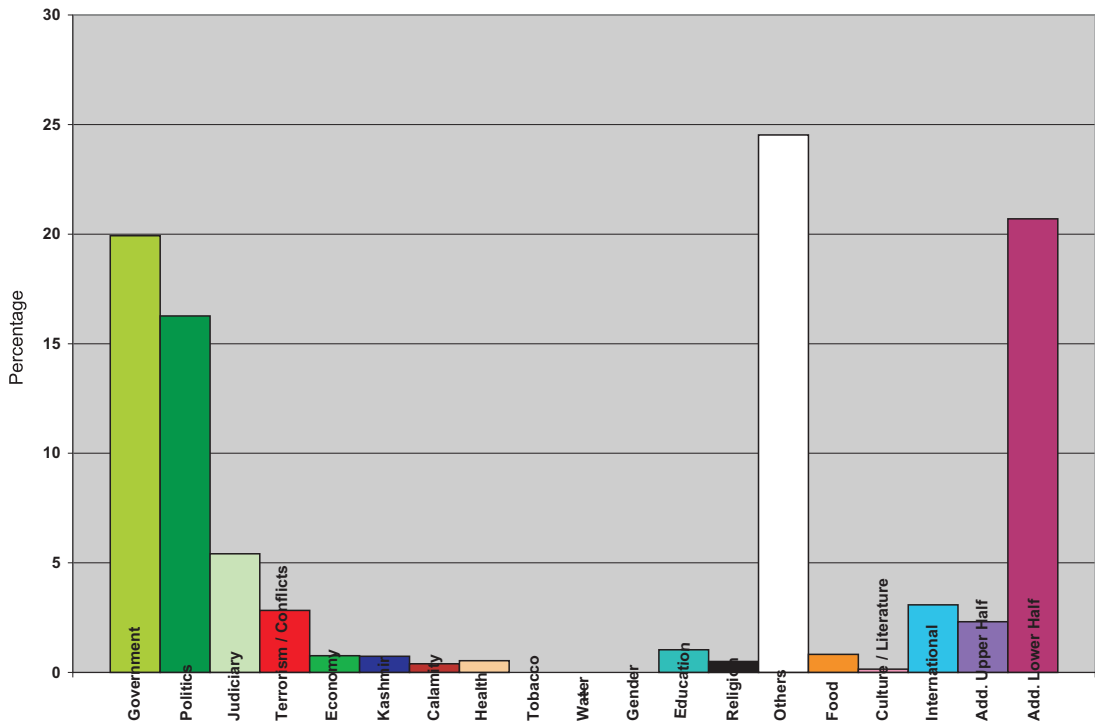














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