

Khabarnak: Satirizing Current Affairs Television in Pakistan

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Pakistan's media environment changed significantly after 2002, when military ruler Pervez Musharraf initiated the privatization of the country's state-run television industry. Dubbed as a new era of economic liberalization and religious enlightenment, post-9/11 Pakistan saw the mushrooming of private television channels and intense competition among media groups for advertising dollars and viewership. The sudden success of the new TV channels came from the news and current affairs programs, proven to be a powerful force, and a serious threat to the powers that be. Journalists, anchors, and producers quickly came under crossfire from the political and religious forces who used all resources at their disposal to muzzle the criticism. Despite the state's liberal policies towards the media, the space for critical and honest discourse continues to shrink, and is becoming increasingly literalist in approach. Drawing from ethnographic research at Geo TV studios in Lahore, this paper will explore how political discourse coalesces with fun and humor in postcolonial Pakistan.

As the public grows skeptical of the news and weary of the once popular political talk shows, satirical shows such as *Khabarnak*, are playing a key role in the spectrum of news and current affairs analysis television. In this paper the ethnographic gaze focuses on the team who produce Pakistan's most-popular news-based comedy show, Geo's *Khabarnak*. The paper will explore how the team of *Khabarnak* negotiates their commitment to satire and pursuit of criticism with the multiple constraints faced by those who create current affairs television in Pakistan. Living in challenging times for Pakistan, with war annihilating lives, violence becoming increasingly commonplace, hospitals and other basic institutions not functioning, generating humor and satire are a profound act of creation to counter the political quagmire of Pakistan.