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The Metaphors of Populism: How Populist Political Leaders Use Specific Linguistic Tropes, Emotive Vocabulary, and Binary Oppositions in Modern Political Campaigns in Pakistan

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Abstract

*In this qualitative research, the rhetorical, metaphorical and linguistic strategies used by populist political leaders to create political reality, evoke public emotions and polarise public discourse during contemporary political campaigns in Pakistan are discussed. Although politics in Pakistan has institutional dynamics, electoral mechanisms, socio-economic factors, and others, it has yet to fully examine the cognitive and linguistic structures that constitute the basis of populist persuasion. This paper is based on a qualitative analysis of campaign discourse texts, which involves the analysis of official campaign speech transcripts, party manifestos, televised political speeches and party and official digital media archives of major political campaigns in Pakistan, and is grounded in Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The analysis shows that these three are the main linguistic strategies used in populist texts: (one) the use of strong metaphorical frames (medical, spatial-architectural, socio-religious, anti-colonial); (two) the creation of moralized dichotomy and contrast between a virtuous and a victimized collective (awaam) and a corrupt and treasonous elite (chors/dakoos); and (three) the use of high-arousal emotive vocabulary, which evokes feelings of collective betrayal, urgent crisis, national humiliation, and moral indignation. The results show that such linguistic resources will make difficult structural and economic problems look like attractive, emotional stories, and thus establish an affective relationship between the leader and the masses. In conclusion the paper states that these rhetorical tactics prove effective in mobilizing mass electorate around the elections, but they considerably contribute to hyper-polarization, undermine deliberate democratic consensus and limit the process of compromise-based governance in Pakistan's evolving democratic context. **The keywords:** Populism, Political Metaphors, Critical Discourse Analysis, Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Pakistani Politics, Political Communication, Binary Oppositions, Emotive Vocabulary, Secondary Source Analysis.*

Context and Background

Political populism is one of the most significant and dynamic developments in the world of politics in recent decades, having affected electoral arenas in both mature and developing democracies. Populism is often seen as an ideology, as an economic policy, or as an institutional movement, but its main mode of persuasion is essentially linguistic and discursive. Overall, the discourse of populism has changed remarkably in Pakistan over successive election cycles, from patronage-based patronage politics to hyper-mediated, charismatic and emotionally charged campaign communication. This performative rhetoric is heavily used in contemporary Pakistani political discourse, in the form of rally speeches (jalsas), untampered with digital communications, and mass media messages, which aim to disrupt existing political practices, avoid the need for party intermediaries and create an affective link between the political leader and the voters.

The history of political communication in Pakistan shows a continuous shift towards more polarized and antagonistic communication strategies. In the past, Pakistani political discourse has been dominated by regionalism, clientelism and institutions. As of late, political campaigns have become more populist, generating a sense of a perpetual national crisis, anti-establishment messages, and a moralized political discourse. Key political players on both sides of the political aisle have developed this style and it is now being carried out on campaign platforms, with political competition not only the fight between competing policy positions, but the battle of the honest, patriotic masses against the corrupt, self-serving ruling class. This change has changed the very nature of construction, communication and consumption of political realities in Pakistan.

The key to this change is the strategic use of language. The role of political discourse, linguistic framing and rhetorical performance in the construction of voters' cognitive perception, attitude and political behaviour is very central. By means of language tools and techniques including colourful and evocative conceptual metaphors, expressive vocabulary, and binary sentence constructions the populist leader offers voters cognitive shortcuts with which to make sense of macroeconomic problems, institutional erosion, and social inequities. With the Pakistani political landscape being dominated by media, and the media consumption habits of the country's citizens being heavily skewed towards short-form digital content and televised speeches, the performative style of political leaders becomes a crucial part of the public's perception of their stance and also how the political landscape is being played out.

Moreover, the rising apogee of the discourse of the populus has been a major driver in the polarization of Pakistani society. Populist communication polarizes intensely because it represents the political opposition as a 'moral opponent', a 'traitor', a 'threat to the nation', and not as a political opponent with a different ideology. There is a growing tendency for citizens to think of political engagement in terms of identity and "us versus them," as well as compromise being synonymous with betrayal and partisan loyalty being synonymous with moral rightness. To grasp the linguistic, metaphorical and rhetorical dynamics that shape this type of political discourse, it is therefore essential to understand the implications of these dynamics for democratic governance, voter behaviour and social cohesion in contemporary Pakistan.

Theoretical and Empirical Foundations

The literature of political communication has consistently highlighted the idea that language is not a simple tool for communication but one of the primaries means by which social reality is built, and power relations are maintained. The conceptual basis of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) holds that political discourses, party manifestos and public statements, among others, actively influence the public consciousness by further emphasizing certain aspects of reality while withholding others (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2015). This

language is marked by strong positive self-presentation (Us) and negative other presentation (Them), which form one-sided extremes of the populist construction in which the collective is portrayed as good and the "other" as bad (Wodak 2015).

The use of populist devices in the language is recorded in Pakistan as a reaction to their enduring socio-economic fears, institutional instability, and governance shortcomings. Systematic corruption is often presented as a 'cancer' or a 'virus' that 'sits like a parasite in a host body' (Mushtaq et al., 2021), providing easy-to-use diagnostic frames which have strong resonance with citizens who are socially and economically precarious. These metaphors are not just poetic flourishes; in Conceptual Metaphor Theory, Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argue that these metaphors shape human thought and action, including how people think about political issues and how they think about solutions.

Furthermore, Moffitt (2016) theorizes the performative basis of populism in Pakistan as the production of "bad manners" and crisis performance. Through deliberate violations of political etiquette, use of colloquial register and high arousal emotive vocabulary (including threats of national 'destruction' (tabahi) and appeals for 'liberation' (aazadi)), populist actors demonstrate their authenticity and alienate themselves from the formal political elite (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021). In this rhetoric, debates on complex policies are distilled into simple emotional stories, which perpetuate moral dichotomies that can make it very hard to achieve political consensus within democratic setting (Ahmed & Skoric, 2023).

Problem Statement

Modern Pakistani Political Science has tons of literature on institutional conflict, civil military relations, and electoral arithmetic but has never focused on what is the discursive engine that makes mass political persuasion possible. In Pakistan, politics analysis mostly focuses on the second-order effect of campaign communication instead of its first-order effect as a form of thinking and constructing politics. Therefore, the actual linguistic mechanisms (conceptual metaphors, moralized binary structures, high arousal affective vocabulary) that are employed in secondary political texts (campaign speeches, manifestos, official party declarations) is an analytically and empirically unexplored gap. Few studies have analysed the ways in which these textual techniques are used to help make the difficult and complicated issues of macroeconomics accessible in terms of moral narratives, or how local cultural idioms are deployed to provoke collective indignation. A systematic qualitative text analysis of those linguistic tropes is missing from political communication studies in Pakistan, which fails to elucidate how the language of the masses can create affective relationships with voters, and how it contributes to the polarization of socio-political dynamics across the country.

Research Questions

What are the fundamental metaphorical trope configurations of the political reality in contemporary Pakistani campaign discourses?

How do populist leaders portray and enforce the moral dichotomy between "the virtuous people" and "the corrupt elite" in the secondary campaign sources?

How is emotive vocabulary used to mobilise public emotions and to shape socio-economic crises in second hand political texts?

Significance of the Study

The study is an important contribution to the fields of political linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and communication studies as it introduces the theory of universal pop rhetoric to the specific socio-political landscape of South Asia. This study offers a rich, nuanced and localized view of political populism by exploring

how wide-ranging tropes of populism connect with Pakistani idioms, linguistic variations in the region, and socio-religious metaphors. The study is a qualitative textual analysis of secondary political sources like politicians' speeches used in the campaign, party manifestos and party statements, which reveals the cognitive and cultural setups that render populist persuasion so compelling to citizens in Pakistan. The study not only provides theoretical insights into Conceptual Metaphor Theory and political rhetoric, but also provides important insights into media scholars, political analysts, and policy researchers on the ways hyper-emotive and binary modes of language use shape public opinion, mobilize voters, and deepen political polarization in a changing democratic context.

Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT)

This work is based on Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980/2003) to help understand how political communication works beyond the surface level semantics. Metaphors are not just literary flourishes, says CMT, but they are fundamental mechanisms that help drive human thinking, seeing, and social doing. Lakoff and Johnson (2003) argue that human conceptual systems are all metaphorical, meaning that it is possible for people to experience abstract, complex domains of experience (target domains) in terms of more familiar, concrete, and physical domains of experience (source domains). Political issues like macro-economic stability, governance, institutional corruption, and national sovereignty are very abstract concepts which voters do not grasp directly in the realm of political communication. Political leaders fill this cognitive gap with previous, commonplace knowledge by invoking conceptual metaphors that anticipate how audiences will view the policy's failures and systemic crises (Charteris-Black, 2011; Lakoff, 2004).

The specific nature of the political campaign discourse in Pakistan makes CMT an essential analytical tool for understanding how socio-political reality is understood and represented in a variety of secondary campaign materials including rally speech transcripts (jalsas), political party manifestos and official statements made online. The world of medical source domains assumes a formative role in the populist leader's cognitive mapping: the nation becomes a patient, the corruption a disease, and the populist leader the necessary surgeon to remove the cancer, the tumour or the contagion (Charteris-Black, 2011; Mushtaq et al., 2021). Likewise, spatial and natural hazard metaphors - for example, the portrayal of political opposition as a 'tsunami' or 'flood' (sailaab) - are used to render the act of voting against the government as a 'fight against nature'. (Charteris-Black, 2011) Historical narratives and socio-religious idioms in Pakistan have a strong cultural impact on the political arena, where elections are conceptualized as the struggle between "truth" (haq) and "falsehood" (batil) or "slavery" (ghulami) of the political. CMT helps identify the cognitive mappings in secondary political documents, which describe how populist actors develop intuitive interpretive frames with emotional content and that make structural political issues and problems appear as moral issues and problems.

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Political Framing

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) complements the cognitive lens of CMT by offering a framework for analysing the (textual) construction and/or reproduction of power, ideological polarization, and social division. Building on the theoretical work of Norman Fairclough (2010, 2013) and Teun A. van Dijk (1998, 2015), CDA sees language as a social practice that represents and reflects but also actively constructs social reality, institutional power relations and ideological conflicts. The three-dimensional model proposed by Fairclough (2010, 2013) is based on the analysis of three aspects of the text: text structure, discursive practice (text production and consumption), and social practice, which enables researchers to link micro-

level linguistic choices in secondary sources of campaigns to the macroeconomic and political contexts. At the same time, van Dijk's (1998; 2015) socio-cognitive theory focuses on the role of political elites in shaping the public's mental models through discourse, and on the process of politics asserting control over the public's memory, collective identity and political attitudes.

The "ideological square" is one of the central analytical concepts in van Dijk's (1998, 2015) theory, which is based on two primary communicative strategies: positive self-presentation of the in-group ("Us") and negative other presentation of the out-group ("Them"). This binary construction is produced through certain textual devices in the Pakistani popular discourse. The in-group is textually created as suffering and pure masses (awaam or insaf-peshdar), with the help of personal pronouns that denote 'in-group' inclusiveness (hum, humara), colloquial idioms, and the flat and 'plain-spoken' delivery that signals authenticity of belonging (Shah, 2024; Wodak, 2015). On the other hand, the out-group is denigrated by passivation, derogatory labelling, and pejorative epithets (chors, dakoos, mir jafars) which hold total responsibility for the national devastation on political opponents and entrenched establishment elites (Mushtaq et al., 2021; Shah, 2024). The analysis of secondary political documents through CDA reveals how political framing is used to turn policy debates in a zero-sum moral game, establishing a binary of opposition and reinforcing partisan loyalty and increasing the polarization of society (Fairclough, 2013; van Dijk, 2015).

Populism as a Performative Political Style.

To capture the embodied, communicative and aesthetic aspects of populist campaigning, this study also draws on the notion of populism as a performative style of politics as advanced by Benjamin Moffitt (2016). Moffitt (2016) goes beyond the classical definitions that portray populism as either an ideology or an economic program to consider it a communicative repertoire with three defining traits: the performative creation of a crisis, breakdown, or threat; the use of "bad manners" and unconventional language; and the appeal to a direct, unmediated relationship between "the leader" and "the people. This is more relevant for contemporary Pakistani political communication in which political authority has become synonymous with charismatic performance, aesthetics of mass rallies (jalsa culture), and live digital broadcasting (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021).

In Moffitt's (2016) performative approach, the leaders of populist movements are active manufacturers and perpetuators of an emergency state. The crisis is not only an objective external situation but a discursively enacted condition, achieved by the use of high-arousal emotive words and phrases, such as warnings of imminent "destruction" (tabahi), national bankruptcy, or moral collapse, implying that that "here and now" moment of crisis is a tipping point that demands radical action. To support this act, the representative from the populist side uses 'bad manners,' a deliberate violation of polite diplomatic discourse to incorporate confrontational slang, mock accent, insults and anti-establishment rhetoric (Moffitt, 2016). This is intentional pragmatics of political politics which serves as a strong assertion of authenticity for the leader in Pakistan, enabling him to assertively reject the "corrupt elite" and create a close interpersonal affective relationship with the masses (Shah, 2024; Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021). Combining Moffitt's performative framework with CMT and CDA allows for a comprehensive textual analysis of the nature of the interaction between metaphors, moral binaries, and affective performances in contemporary political persuasion in Pakistan as it is shaped by secondary campaign sources.

Research Methodology

This study uses the exploratory study of a purely qualitative research design with a method of secondary qualitative research and systematic evaluation. The key aim of this investigation is not to count the

frequencies of linguistic structures or to measure the results of the elections; therefore, qualitative textual analysis is chosen. The research is qualitative in nature and relies solely on the qualitative secondary sources which explore the way the populist political leaders in Pakistan discursively construct social reality, create collective emotion and enforce binary socio-political divisions in the process of electoral campaigning.

To develop the textual corpus for this study, some verified secondary sources are selected upon purposive qualitative sampling during the big political campaigns of the country in Pakistan. The corpus comprises three main types of secondary documentation, to provide broad scope of the communicative style of the populist discourse. First, it contains official transcripts and authenticated audio/visual recordings of important political rally speeches (jalsas) by prominent political leaders, which reflects the content of the speech, as well as the way it was presented. Second, the corpus also includes party political manifestos, policy statements and formal press statements produced during election campaigns, giving an indication of the ideologizing language in print. Third, the archive contains digitized e-mails, op-eds, and archived statements from social media from key politicians, capturing the direct, live method of contemporary digital campaigning.

This data analysis process combines the theories and methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and the six-step qualitative thematic analysis framework of Braun and Clarke. This analytical double approach guarantees a methodological rigor and, at the same time, critical depth. The process starts with data immersion, by reading and rereading speech transcripts, manifestos, and digital archives to become acquainted with the text contents. Systematic qualitative coding is done on the entire corpus after translation of the transcripts into English, if required, while maintaining idiomatic expressions in the original Urdu language. The coding process highlights three language indicators: (one) metaphorical categories (such as medical, spatial, socio-religious and martial tropes); (two) binary markers (only "pure people" and "corrupt elite"), and (three) emotive lexical choices (fear, anger, betrayal, moral restoration).

After initial codes were created, they were clustered into larger conceptual units constituting the main discursive approaches of populist leaders. The candidate themes are then reviewed to check the accuracy of the analysis and coherence of themes within the raw text data. The themes identified through the CDA are explained in their socio-political context, thereby showing how particular linguistic mechanisms are used to exercise power, polarise and convince in Pakistan today.

Biological, Medical and Surgical Metaphorical Tropes.

Biological, medical, and surgical metaphors are widely used in populist political discourses in Pakistan. These conceptual frames are used by populist leaders to represent a real clinical phenomenon in an abstract way, as a governance problem of the institutions and socio-economic field. In secondary political texts, including political rally speeches (jalsas), party statements and media bulletins, systemic political corruption and other forms of patronage networks, as well as the opposition political coalitions are consistently described as life-threatening diseases, "cancers," or "tumors" eating away the state (Mushtaq et al., 2021). Populist rhetoric not only projects political opponents as ideological enemies with competing policy visions, but also as biological threats to the country, creating a sense of crisis in political discussion. This framing causes a cognitive reaction in the voter: a pathogen cannot be bargained or compromised with a pathogen must be eliminated for the survival of the host organism (Charteris-Black, 2011; Lakoff & Johnson, 2003).

Moreover, this biological conception influences the nature of the proposed solution. If corruption is represented as a general disease or rotting in the collective body politic, the populist leader is elevated to the status of a qualified surgeon who has the moral authority and expertise to carry out radical surgery. The

phrases 'surgery', 'purge' or 'cleaning the system' are often used in campaign literature to refer to proposed anti-corruption drives and administrative 'cleaning' (Mushtaq et al., 2021; Shah, 2024). This medicalized discourse is used to legitimate the abandonment of conventional democratic norms and institutional interactions, and to suggest an "abrasive political behavior" and "aggressive anti-corruption prosecutions" as remedies to eradicate the corrupt "cancer" before the state experiences "total system failure" (Moffitt, 2016; Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021).

Spatial, Architectural, and Environmental Metaphors

In addition to medical tropes, secondary campaign texts are also rich in spatial, architectural and environmental metaphors that are used to imagine the state of the state and the nature of political movements. The metaphors of architecture that emerge in the Pakistani political discourse are mostly pertaining to the 'System' or 'Nizaam' which is discursively constructed as an irredeemably broken, rotten, or ruined architecture. In contrast to proposals to tweak legislation or make institutional changes, populist rhetoric frames the current socio-political order as a building which needs to be completely torn down before a new foundation can be built (Mushtaq et al., 2021). The notion that working through the constitutional and institutional frameworks is ineffective is tied to the presence of such words as "purna nizaam" (the old, decaying system) which are juxtaposed with calls for a structural change.

At the same time, populist campaign texts employ water, storm and natural hazard metaphors for the mobilization of the masses politically. The most salient in current Pakistan's political scene is the notion of the political movement as a 'Tsunami' or an irresistible surge of popular revolution 'Inqilab' (Mushtaq et al., 2021; Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021). Through this process of naturalization of the raw and uncontrollable power of the elements of nature, political mobilization becomes unavoidable, a process that will remove the old political dynasty and institutional corruption from political power, which is also referred to as the power of natural elements (Charteris-Black, 2011). This 'kinetic framing' has two discursive functions: firstly, it gives the supporters confidence in the inevitability of their collective progress through history, and secondly, it warns the entrenched political elites that they cannot stop the popular tide (Lakoff 2004; Moffitt 2016).

Socio-Religious and Moral Metaphors

The socio-politically conservative atmosphere in Pakistan entails that the socio-religious and moral metaphors are among the strongest cognitive tools used in the texts of the campaigns of the populist. Historical narratives and moral framework from Islam are often used by populist leaders to legitimate their political platforms and delegitimize their opponents. An important instance of this trope is the vision of "Riyasat-e-Madina" as the paradigm of political, economic and moral governance (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021; Shah, 2024). Populist rhetoric exacerbates the moral dimension of such fundamental principles as social welfare, judicial accountability, and anti-corruption, and reads their contemporary consumption of social welfare schemes, court reforms, and anti-corruption laws through the prism of early Islamic governance (Mushtaq et al., 2021).

At the same time, the anti-corruption campaigns and political conflicts are presented in a martial or religious language, through the concept of "Jihad" (holy struggle) against corruption and moral decay (Shah, 2024). Because political elections are textually elevated from routine civil exercises to sacred duties, one's support for the populist movement is perceived as support for the truth (haq) and resistance to corrupt political dynasties is perceived as resistance to falsehood (batil) (van Dijk, 2015; Wodak, 2015). Such politicisation of the discourse sacralises political decisions into moral duty, which, in turn, makes political compromise a moral compromise and strengthens polarization in the society (Ahmed & Skoric, 2023; Fairclough, 2010).

Feudal, Colonial and Slavery Metaphors

The third and final aspect of the metaphorical topography of Pakistani populism are feudal, anti-colonial and anti-slavery tropes. Secondary political texts often employ narratives of national sovereignty in terms of a memory of foreign subjugation and feudal oppression. The political opponents and the incumbent ruling coalitions are textually framed in terms of Ghulami (slaves), vassalage and foreign puppets or agents that work for an external power, at the cost of the dignity of the nation (Mushtaq et al., 2021; Shah, 2024). Historical post-colonial fears about national autonomy and self-determination are resonated by the populist rhetoric that conceptualizes foreign economic loans, international diplomatic arrangements and domestic political opposition as an issue of colonial exploitation (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021).

In addition, domestic political institutions are discursively connected to the feudal mode of exploitation, which considers traditional political families as "feudal lords" (zamindars/patwaris) who treat the state apparatus and the public resources as their personal property (Mushtaq et al., 2021). The populist leader is discursively framed as a liberator who is leading a movement to liberate the electorate from the "shackles of slavery" (ghulami ki zanjeerin; Moffitt, 2016; Shah, 2024) and calling on them to exercise their sovereign powers against both domestic elites and foreigners. In these historical and anti-colonial mappings, populist texts create a powerful narrative of liberation, which brings national pride into the political survival of the populist movement.

The oppositional dichotomy of "The Pure Mass" and "The Corrupt Class"

One such structural feature of populist campaign speech in Pakistan is the text production of an impenetrable and moralized division of the world into two opposed and homogeneous groups: 'the pure people' (awaam) and 'the corrupt elite' (Mudde, 2004; Wodak, 2015). By analysing secondary political archives like campaign speech transcripts (jalsas), political party manifestos and official digital statements, it becomes clear that "the people" are discursively created as an imamate, homogeneous and inherently virtuous collective (Laclau, 2005; Shah, 2024). These political communication texts represent a form of textual erasure of the internal divisions found among the citizens, whether socio-economic, regional, ethnic or otherwise. The awaam, on the contrary, is depicted as a single body whose fate is being denied justice, a justice that has been taken away from it by the oppressive, entrenched ruling class who are in power, one that faces economic deprivation and institutional neglect at the hands of this ruling class (Mushtaq et al., 2021; Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021). Populist leaders fashion "the people" as a pure and uncorrupted political subject; in this way, they produce an empty signifier in which they can have their own grievances expressed through a collective subject (Laclau, 2005).

At the same time, this dualism rests on a "moralizing" separation of political decisions. Whereas secondary political texts re-conceptualize political decisions as uncompromising, one-on-other moral tests, rather than as a debate about fiscal policy, administrative reform, or diplomatic strategy, this re-conceptualization can be found in both Fairclough (2013) and van Dijk (2015). Such socio-religious and nationalist binaries are regularly used in the campaign discourse to differentiate between "Haq" (Truth/Righteousness) and "Batil" (Falsehood/Evil), or "Patriots" (mohib-e-watan) and "Traitors" (ghaddar) (Ahmed & Skoric, 2023; Shah, 2024). Populist discourse makes every mundane political commitment sacred and thus positions neutral or bipartisan positions as morally unacceptable. Those who disagree with the populist movement and those who back other political parties are essentially textually classified not only as political opponents, but as partners in moral corruption and betrayal of the nation (Wodak, 2015; Moffitt, 2016). This comprehensive

moral stance stirs deep polarization of the electorate, and consensus and compromise on platforms are extraordinarily difficult to come by (Ahmed & Skoric, 2023).

The ability to align with other group members

The secondary campaign texts are used to reinforce the in-group alignment strategies and to create an authenticity and a cultural affiliation at the bottom level between the leader and the discursively developed "pure people" (van Dijk, 2015; Wodak, 2015). A first-textual method of doing so is through the strategic use of "we," "us" and "our" (hum, humara), which systematically obscures the distinction between individual leader and collective electorate (Fairclough, 2010; Shah, 2024). The leader's speech is not a command from on high, but a direct speech that is a mouthpiece for the collective will, suffering, and aspirations of the common folk (Moffitt, 2016).

Moreover, the use of localized proverbs (kahawaten), colloquial Urdu and regional linguistic register in populist communication is also highly prevalent to create a cultural intimacy and anti-elitist authenticity, as noted by Mushtaq et al., (2021) and Yilmaz & Shakil, (2021). The leader's use of confrontational, informal, and no-holds-barred language in the speech instead of the formal, bureaucratic, or more polished diplomatic style he has adopted rejects the norms of the "corrupt establishment" (Moffitt, 2016). When a leader uses familiar cultural idioms, humour, and addresses to the audience during rallies (jalsas) it indicates to voters that the leader is one of them. Because of this linguistic intimacy, the leader's in-group also feels a feeling of trust and confidence, knowing that the leader is in their space, understands their language and their struggles with systemic injustice (Charteris-Black, 2011; Shah, 2024).

Out-Group Othering & Dehumanization

Unlike the positive in-group representation, the texts in secondary campaigns systematically other and moralize the opponent, political families and institutional elites (van Dijk 1998, 2015). This negative other presentation is mainly mediated via pejorative labelling, derogatory nicknames and humiliating epithets (Mushtaq et al., 2021; Wodak, 2015). Political opponents are rarely called by their official names or titles and words such as "chors" (thieves), "dakoos" (robbers), "mir jafars" (traitors), and "darakht-e-gandim" (corrupt branches) are frequently used in campaign texts (Shah, 2024; Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021). The constant use of disparaging terms helps to dehumanize and delegitimize the political rivals: their whole political careers are characterized by criminal enterprise and moral bankruptcies (Charteris-Black, 2011; van Dijk, 2015).

Further, othering is also enhanced by the syntactic way of othering (through passivation and selective agency attribution in secondary texts; Fairclough, 2010; van Dijk, 1998). If macroeconomic inflation, institutional decay or foreign policy issues are mentioned, the campaign texts arrange sentences to fix the exclusive moral responsibility and give the agency of the whole affair to the "corrupt ruling class" (Mushtaq et al., 2021). National suffering is discursively constructed as the direct intentional result of "elite greed and treason" (Moffitt, 2016), while global economic pressures or structural administrative deficits are stripped away. The systematic framing of the actors of other groups as malicious parasites exploiting the state fosters deep public resentment, legitimizing strong emotions and feelings of outrage, and justifying the complete political cleansing of the existing ruling class (Ahmed & Skoric, 2023; Wodak, 2015).

The crisis construction and high-arousal rhetoric

Populist communication is rooted primarily in the discursive creation of a crisis of the acute kind, one that can break with normal political processes and hence legitimate radical political action (Moffitt, 2016). Populist leaders use high-arousal negative emotion words in secondary campaign documents (rally

speeches, political party statements, and digitized campaign speeches) to persuade voters that the country is on the verge of complete collapse (Wodak, 2015). The use of extreme lexical items like *Tabahi* (total destruction/ruin), *Loot-maar* (plundering/pillage), and threat of national bankruptcy/humiliation of the nation are integrated in the discourse of campaign texts, rather than making them policy issues that can be resolved over time through gradual legislation (Mushtaq et al., 2021; Shah, 2024). In this way, populist discourse places the socio-political context in the realm of an unprecedented emergency and thus promotes a feeling of urgency among citizens (Ahmed & Skoric, 2023).

It is a rhetorical style that carries high arousal which performs a cognitive-communitive role in political campaigning. It is noteworthy that saturated crisis framing thereby replaces policy-oriented debate with increased emotional reactivity – as Conceptual Metaphor Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis shows (Charteris-Black, 2011; Lakoff, 2004; van Dijk, 2015). Repeated use of the phrases "sold out" for national sovereignty and "looted to the bone" for the economy can leave voters with the impression that moderate, institutionalist politics is too weak or is not trustworthy (Fairclough, 2010; Moffitt, 2016). Crisis further propels the populist leader to the role of a non-traditional Savior, one who can fix and save the state from imminent destruction, by means of his/her aggressive and alternative strategies (Moffitt, 2016; Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021).

Nostalgic and Restorative Framing

In response to the anxiety induced by the constant crisis construction, secondary political texts use powerful rhetoric of nostalgia and restoration aimed at collective hope, pride and moral purpose (Charteris-Black, 2011; Wodak, 2015). Populist campaign messages often evoke a golden age and claim to bring back the nation's lost honour, sovereign dignity and international respect (Shah, 2024; Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021). The theme of "*Khuddari*" (national self-respect and sovereignty) appears as a central element in this restorative narrative of Pakistani campaign communication, where it is textually contrasted with the national humiliation perpetrated due to foreign dependency and corrupt ruling dynasties (Mushtaq et al., 2021; Shah, 2024).

This stance of restoration is a powerful emotional call to the voters. Populist texts create a sense of greatness, purity and national self-reliance in exchange for the political commitment of the voter (Laclau, 2005; Wodak, 2015). Enunciated slogans such as 'break the chains of subservience' or 'stand on their own feet' reflect the post-colonial aspirations for total independence in the present context of electoral contestations (Mushtaq et al., 2021; Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021). Voting is therefore not only a matter of political choice but a "nationalistic and historic duty" to "restore the rightful heritage and moral standing" of the nation on the international stage, as the campaign narrative would have it (Fairclough, 2013; Shah, 2024).

Riding the waves of grievance and resentment

In addition to evoking fear and providing consensual hope, populist campaign texts begin to validate the socio-economic grievances of the voters and turn passive anxiety into active, directed moral outrage (Ahmed & Skoric, 2023; Wodak, 2015). The moral corruption of the designated political elites is directly connected in political campaign texts with the micro-level economic issues, including inflation, unemployment, raising the utility rates, and administrative corruption (Mushtaq et al., 2021). In contrast to socio-economic stress caused by complex global market dynamics, structural fiscal deficits or institutional inertia, populist rhetoric provides a simple, personalised explanation: the public suffers; but the public doesn't suffer because of a complicated global market, because of a structural fiscal deficit or because of institutional inertia: it suffers because some corrupt ruling class has stolen its resources (Moffitt, 2016; van Dijk, 1998).

This is a discursive way of handing over clear and identifiable targets to the electorate to blame their own misfortunes upon (van Dijk, 2015; Wodak, 2015). Secondary campaign materials give voters something to focus on - a type of psychological clarity and release - in terms of political enemies and established campaign figures of the establishment (Charteris-Black, 2011; Laclau, 2005). When a populist movement emerges, it can be a platform for addressing real grievances by giving ordinary individuals a sense of agency and purpose as they fight for a cause they see as fair and just (Ahmed & Skoric, 2023; Shah, 2024). As a result, affective mobilization can transform socio-economic deprivation into strong political loyalty and consequently increase the rate of political participation, as well as affectively polarize political discourse (Ahmed & Skoric, 2023; Fairclough, 2010).

Populist discourse that is right-of-center/Nationalist

Comparing the thematic differences across secondary political archives of Pakistan, right-of-center nationalist populist narratives and left-of-center regional populist narratives have been found to diverge (Adeney, 2016; Sheikh, 2018). The right-of-centre populist discourse, which is mainly based on a national movement of moral reform, builds its core strength on the themes of anti-corruption, moral purification, national sovereignty (khuddari), and socio-religious restoration (Jaffrelot, 2015; Rais, 2017). Political corruption is also represented not just as an administrative problem but as an existential moral problem that is threatening to the moral basis of the state in secondary campaign materials such as transcripts of speeches delivered at a rally (jalsas) and the official manifesto declaration (Ahmed & Khalid, 2020; Wilder, 1999). Medical and socio-religious metaphors are employed in right-leaning populist discourses to make the fight against the corrupt ruling dynasties a "moral crusade" to "cleanse the body politic" and "teach the people how to govern themselves according to the principles of justice and accountability" in history, as stated by Adeney (2016) and Rais (2017).

Moreover, the nationalist-populist right's success in building a sense of national identity depends in large part on the tropes and narratives of anti-colonialism and sovereignty (Lieven, 2011; Talbot, 2012). During the secondary campaign discourses, domestic economic problems are correlated with foreign intervention and the subservient state of the country (ghulami); opposition to international dependency and restoring self-respect (khuddari) (Jaffrelot, 2015; Sheikh, 2018). In this nationalist prism, internal divisions in the state are downplayed and a collective identity is formed of "the honest masses" against a globalized, corrupt ruling elite (Adeney, 2016; Lieven, 2011). A positive and high-arousal political rhetoric mobilizes emotions, a process that is largely achieved in the right-of-centre populist discourse, which is seen as a test of patriotism and moral rectitude, and the populist leader as the guarantor of national honor and sovereign independence (Khalid & Ahmed, 2020; Rais, 2017).

The critical discourse of the left and regions.

In contrast, populist discourse on the left in Pakistan and regional populist discourse focuses on themes of structural inequality, anti-feudalism, provincial autonomy and economic exploitation in its secondary campaign texts (Jaffrelot, 2015; Sheikh, 2018). In contrast, the conceptualization of political suffering in regional and left-leaning campaign literature is more class-based and place-based, rather than moral and corrupt (Talbot, 2012; Wilder, 1999). The key objective of secondary sources on regional political platforms is to attack traditional feudalism of the vadera/khans/sardars and centralism in the bureaucracy, and to claim that the socio-economic difficulties of the localities are the direct consequence of a system of "exploitation" by the central federal elites (Adeney, 2016; Jaffrelot, 2015). The discursive style aims to appeal to the voters

through martial, economic, and regional metaphors, which is designed to mobilize the voters based on their feelings of regional pride and historical grievances and their constitutional rights (Sheikh, 2018).

Additionally, left-of-center and regional populist speech employs the cultural idioms and regional linguistic registers to create an in-group identity based on the rights of the people (Khalid & Ahmed, 2020; Lieven, 2011). Regional populist texts explicitly acknowledge structural inequities between the federal centre and peripheral provinces to represent the interests of the “marginal” classes and to demand greater autonomy, resource sharing and representation for the provinces (Adeney, 2016; Talbot, 2012). It is not only a corrupt political elite that is out grouped, but also an abstractive central system that takes away the economic and cultural sovereignty of the local people (Jaffrelot 2015; Sheikh 2018). Secondary textual synthesis is helpful in examining the core features of populism (metaphors, binary oppositions and emotive language) that are adaptively employed across ideologies to meet local political agendas in Pakistan (Khalid & Ahmed, 2020; Rais, 2017).

Simplified Rhetoric is an example of a double bind.

The qualitative results of this study show that the main strength of populist rhetoric is to radically reduce the cognitive load of the electorate. The features of modern government, macroeconomic management, structural reform and institutional checks and balances are complex processes which need a high degree of technical expertise to be fully understood. A society in development, with different levels of literacy, historical socio-economic concerns and a distrust of institutions, can manifest in such a way that a socio-economic theory or policy can not have an immediate emotional response. Populist leaders fill this void with colourful conceptual metaphors, moralized binary forms and highly evocative vocabulary, which ensures the translation of the abstract problems of governance into digestible narrative forms. Populist rhetoric works by mapping real-world (concrete) source domains, such as biological diseases, physical ruin or moral betrayal, in to abstract target domains, fiscal deficits, inflation and institution gridlock, leaving citizens with a quick cognitive shortcut. The content of complex multi-causal problems is presented discursively, while eliminating the structural complexity and only reconstructing them as emotionally engaging stories of good versus evil.

This cognitive condensation is a fundamental change in the public perception of politics as “causality” and “accountability”. Detailed policy evaluation is replaced by a call for moral cleansing when systemic corruption is presented as a “cancer” or a “tumour”, or when macroeconomic instability is seen as being solely caused by the “looting” of a corrupt ruling class. The problems of the 'structures', which are more complex, like tax base deficits, sovereign debt commitments, or bureaucratic inefficiency, are not explained as administrative challenges, but as the direct consequence of moral corruption and betrayal by the elite. In this discursive rendering, voters will feel the explanatory power in this translation, but it is an oversimplified one. It confirms their own socio-economic experience of grievances and provides an immediate diagnosis, and a readily identifiable scapegoat. Thus, the purpose of populist communicative efforts is not to provide institutional answers, but to frame the political situation as a moral story of a good person versus a bad one, the former needing to destroy the latter.

Potential impacts on democratic governance

Hyper-simplified emotive rhetoric is a very strong weapon for mobilizing voters, but its short- and long-term impacts on democratic processes in Pakistan are extremely destabilizing. The rigid binary opposition, that is the moral distinction between “the pure people” (awaam) and “the corrupt elite”, is a revolutionary transformation of political competition. If one's fellow citizens are intellectually defined as "moral enemies,"

"traitors" or "biological pathogens," the very idea of democratic pluralism is being called into question. Opposition, toleration, and political bargaining and compromise are essential ingredients of democratic governance. But when populist rhetoric turns political engagement into a moral or religious obligation, compromise is no longer seen as a sensible requirement of parliamentary democracy, or as a moral weakness towards evil.

This all-encompassing moral system reinforces negative emotions among the voters, creating distinct "social enclaves" where identities are and remain mutually exclusive. Hyper-emotional reactivity replaces deliberate and evidence-based public debate with high arousal crisis rhetoric and warnings of national ruin (tabahi). Political tolerance and tolerance towards society are heightened, political opposition is viewed in a zero-sum way and societal hostility is increased. Both sides in parliament and state institutions are highly polarized, slowing legislative activity, making it more difficult to reach consensus on key national policy issues, and encouraging political party participants to avoid constitutional processes and opt for populist street mobilization and confrontation. Finally, the hyper-emotive and binary language of populism challenges cultural and institutional norms that foster democratic deliberation, leading to a volatile political climate in which the stability of democracy, the continuity of institutions, and an atmosphere of national unity and solidarity is constantly in jeopardy.

Summary of Core Findings

This study has initiated a comprehensive qualitative textual analysis of secondary campaign sources to get insight into the discursive and cognitive machinery that underpins the political communication in the context of modern populism in Pakistan. The central results indicate that three intertwined linguistic strategies are related to populist persuasion: vivid conceptual metaphors, rigid binary oppositions, and high-arousal emotive vocabulary. Second, the analysis shows that the populist campaign texts are saturated with tropes from the biological-medical realm, the realm of the space/architecture, and the socio-religious realm, all that are centered on the concept of corruption as an infectious disease, the space/architecture as an edifice in ruins, and the moral purity as the struggle against the notion of subservience (ghulami). Second, such campaign texts systematically construct an antagonistic moral dichotomy that renders the people a unified, pure and victimized mass while marginalizing political rivals by disparaging their terminology, passivizing them, and dehumanizing them. Third, the strategic use of high-arousal crisis terms works to reframe general socio-economic fears into specific moral outrage and provides healing comfort from an idealized national identity. These linguistic devices make the complex reality of structures easier to understand through emotionally engaged story telling that creates an affective connection between leader and masses.

Theoretical Contribution

Theoretically, the study adds to the fields of political linguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and communication studies by introducing the classical models of Western political and discursive analysis to a non-Western and post-colonial political arena. It integrates Conceptual Metaphor Theory (CMT) with CDA and performative models of populism, to show how the universal populist tropes shift according to the local cultural, historical, and socio-religious contexts. It emphasises that in post-colonial democracies such as Pakistan, the populist discourse is not just a simple left-right divide but has strong localized idioms and post-colonial sovereignty concerns, regional linguistic registers and sacred historical narratives that run deep within it. In presenting the interaction of these local linguistic elements with the global styles of popular music, the analytical value of CMT and CDA is improved, thus providing a more sophisticated, cross-cultural approach to the analysis of political rhetoric in the Global South.

Recommendations for future research.

This study suggests that the expansion of this study should take qualitative approach in the future and explore the recently used digital platforms and algorithms in Pakistan. Future research should explore how populist metaphors and moral binaries are discursively constructed in digital meme culture, in short-form video rhetoric, such as on TikTok and YouTube, and in encrypted messaging networks like WhatsApp. Moreover, artificial intelligence and deepfake technology offer crucial new opportunities for examining the impact of automated content creation, micro-targeted campaign messaging, and algorithmic amplification on the scope, pace and emotional tone of the populist discourse. This is the exploration of new digital terrains that will give us important insights into the ways in which linguistic framing and affective mobilization will influence voting behaviour, polarization, and the future of democratic governance in Pakistan and elsewhere in the region.

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