



NLP Persuasive Language Patterns in Competing Pakistani Political Discourses on X (Twitter) During Crisis (2023–2024): A Comparative Critical Discourse Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study is a qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of three Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) persuasive language patterns – reframing, presuppositions and metaphorical framing – in the X (Twitter) discourse of two leading Pakistani political personalities, one in government and the other in opposition, during Pakistan's political crisis of 2023–2024. Drawing on ten purposively selected X posts (five for each leader), the study explores the differential use of the same persuasive strategies from within and outside institutional power through Fairclough's (1992; 2003) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Bandler and Grinder's (1975) linguistic model from Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP). Findings suggest that both leaders use the same NLP toolkit but in systematically different ways: the opposition leader's discourse deploys these patterns to delegitimise state authority, build persecution narratives and sustain mass mobilisation, while the governing leader's discourse deploys them to construct institutional legitimacy, delegitimise the opposition and perform governance authority. The study proposes the Power-Position Hypothesis as a theoretically generalisable contribution to Applied Linguistics, Critical Discourse Studies, and digital political communication research: The proposition that NLP persuasive patterns in political discourse are systematically shaped by a speaker's structural position in the political field.



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Introduction

The political discourse has always been the key venue where power is exercised, disputed and reproduced. Politicians use X (previously Twitter) as a communication channel in the digital age to reach large audiences immediately with short, powerful messages that are not filtered by

traditional media. The micro-linguistic mechanisms via which this impact is produced have become a central subject of contemporary discourse studies.

The paper investigates a discursive formation full with theory: two political leaders on opposite sides of the institutional power spectrum talking through the same venue during the era of national crisis. The first is the leader of the main opposition party – imprisoned, legally restrained and organisationally stifled. The second is the sitting prime minister who must balance governing with the political narrative around a challenged administration. The same backdrop is the crisis period Pakistan, May 2023–September 2024, a moment of extreme political turmoil where X language became the principal tool for political survival and legitimation of governance for both figures.

The analytical framework is anchored in Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis and uses Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) as a linguistic-analytic lens. NLP—the scientific study of the language of highly effective communicators created by Bandler and Grinder (1975)—offers a vocabulary for discovering the micro-level persuasive mechanisms via which political language impacts cognition, emotion and behaviour. Three patterns are analysed: presuppositions, reframing and metaphorical framing.

The main point of the article is the Power-Position Hypothesis: compelling patterns of NLP in political speech are not just stylistic choices, but are systematically influenced by the speaker's structural position in the political field. The same patterns work differently—and generate distinct ideological outputs—depending on whether the speaker is protecting or questioning institutional power.

Literature Review

NLP as a Linguistic-Analytical Framework

Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) was created by Richard Bandler and John Grinder (1975) by modelling highly effective therapeutic communicators. At its heart, NLP is the identification of language patterns that speakers use to gently shape the cognitive and emotional states of their interlocutors. Some of the most analytically productive for political discourse are presuppositions, which embed ideological assumptions as shared common ground (Chilton, 2004); reframing, which repositions events within alternative evaluative frameworks (Lakoff, 2004); and metaphorical framing, through which political realities are structured by conceptual metaphors that make one interpretation appear natural and inevitable (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Together these patterns work below the threshold of conscious evaluation to achieve persuasive effects without explicit argument (van Dijk, 1998). The literature available shows a complete absence of applications to Pakistani political social media debate.

Critical Discourse Analysis and Political Language

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as developed by Fairclough (1992; 2003), Wodak (2001) and van Dijk (1998) sees discourse as a social practice that both reflects and constitutes relations of power. For Fairclough, discourse functions at three levels, simultaneously: as text (linguistic structures), as discursive practice (processes of production and consumption), and as social practice (ideological and institutional contexts). The political discourse in Pakistan has been

studied by scholars who have examined populism (Waseem, 2019), national identity (Talbot & Ara, 2012) and ideological polarisation (Zaidi, 2020). But these studies have looked at macro-level structures, rather than the micro-level techniques of persuasion. The present study tries to fill this gap.

Power, Position, and Discourse

The theoretical underpinning of the main claim of the present study, that the identical NLP persuasive patterns will work differently depending on whether the speaker is in a governing or an opposition position, is Van Dijk's (1998) socio-cognitive model of discourse and power. Power holders employ language to legitimise their authority, and those out of power use it to delegitimise present authorities and mobilise resistance (Bourdieu, 1991). This prediction is the empirical foundation of the Power-Position Hypothesis tested in the analysis below.

Methodology

Research Design

The study design is a qualitative comparative case study. The two cases are X speeches of a Pakistani opposition leader (IK) and the incumbent Prime Minister (SS) in the period May 2023–September 2024. The analytical technique consists of theoretically motivated close reading, informed by the NLP coding system and Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA. No corpus software or quantitative approaches are used, in line with the interpretive, theory-driven aims of the study.

Data and Sampling

Data comprise ten X posts — five from each leader — selected through purposive sampling to maximise variation across key crisis events, thematic content, and discursive register. All posts are verified from direct screenshots of live X accounts. Table 1 summarises the corpus.

Table 1: Data Corpus

Post ID	Speaker	Date	Crisis Phase
IK-1	Opposition leader	18 May 2023	Post-arrest crackdown
IK-2	Opposition leader	13 Nov 2023	100-day detention milestone
IK-3	Opposition leader	6 Feb 2024	Pre-election mobilisation
IK-4	Opposition leader	20 Feb 2024	Post-election contestation
IK-5	Opposition leader	5 June 2023	Post-arrest suppression
SS-1	Prime Minister	13 May 2023	Post-May 9 crackdown
SS-2	Prime Minister	9 July 2023	PTI suppression period
SS-3	Prime Minister	18 March 2023	Pre-arrest PTI confrontation
SS-4	Prime Minister	4 June 2024	Post-election governance
SS-5	Prime Minister	27 Sep 2024	UNGA governance address

Analytical Framework

Data Analysis

The three NLP patterns are operationalised as the main analytical categories:

- Reframing: Changing the apparent meaning of events by putting them in another frame of evaluation, without changing the facts.
- Presuppositions: Implicit assumptions presented as accepted truth, embedding ideological ideas as common sense.
- Metaphorical Framing: Deep-seated conceptual analogies that shape our view of political realities, rendering one interpretation as natural and inevitable.

Each post is examined via all three aspects of Fairclough's CDA: textual (NLP patterns in the language), discursive practice (creation and circulation on X), and social practice (ideological function within the framework of Pakistan's crisis).

Opposition Leader's Discourse (IK): Delegitimisation, Persecution, and Mobilisation

Post IK-1 — Nation-Capture Narrative (18 May 2023)

IK-1 — @ImranKhanPTI | 18 May 2023

Nine days after arrest — post-arrest crackdown period

Nation has been taken over by a bunch of crooks, criminals, duffers devoid of any ethics or morality. While the country sinks into its worst economic crisis esp unprecedented inflation and unemployment, all those in power are concentrating on how to crush the biggest and the only federal party by unleashing a reign of terror. Time for all citizens to raise their voices before it's too late.

✓ Verified post — @ImranKhanPTI

NLP Pattern Analysis

Reframing: Three simultaneous reframes are enacted: the government is reframed from a legitimate administration to an occupying criminal gang ('taken over by crooks'), the crackdown is reframed from law enforcement into 'a reign of terror' — invoking the Jacobin French Revolutionary period — and government priorities reframed as criminal negligence, by juxtaposing economic crisis against political suppression.

Presuppositions: 'The biggest and the only federal party' implies PTI's national supremacy as an uncontested reality. "Before it is too late" has the shared backdrop reality of both looming catastrophe and residual citizen agency.

Metaphorical Framing: 'The country sinks' uses a submersion metaphor — Pakistan as a vessel sinking under criminal misgovernance. The "reign of terror" places the crackdown in the lineage of previous tragedies that have been denounced.

Nine days after the arrest, IK-1 is still actively involved in the social practice of the ongoing narrative work, keeping the frame of persecution and expanding the mobilisation goal from PTI supporters to ‘all citizens’. The last imbedded command (‘Time for all citizens to raise their voices’) universalises civic resistance, without specifying its form, a typical Milton Model move.

Post IK-2 — Martyrdom Chronicle (13 November 2023)

IK-2 — @ImranKhanPTI | 13 November 2023

100-day detention milestone — Khan in Adiala Jail since August 2023

100 days of illegal incarceration of Pakistan’s most popular leader. From being shot in an assassination attempt to his house being attacked, vandalized, tear gassed & now illegally incarcerated in a small cell while being denied access to justice, Imran Khan has stood on his principles and remained true to every word and claim of his. History will remember him for standing on the right side when it mattered, along with 10,000+ other prisoners of conscience, and those who sacrificed their lives for Pakistan’s Haqeeqi Azadi.

✓ Verified post — @ImranKhanPTI

Pattern	Analysis	in	NLP
Reframing:	The 100-day confinement is reframed from legal custody into a ‘illegal incarceration’ martyrdom account. The suffering inventory (shot, attacked, tear gassed, incarcerated) is recast not as political defeat but as character validation – ‘stood on his principles.’ But most important is how imprisonment is turned into history’s vindication: ‘History will remember him for standing on the right side.		
Presuppositions:	‘Pakistan’s most popular leader’ assumes election legitimacy as the fundamental aspect of his existence. ‘10,000+ other prisoners of conscience’ – a category used by Amnesty International, for example – presumes that all PTI inmates are political prisoners according to the international human rights standard.		
Metaphorical Framing.	By invoking the metaphor of martyrdom, Khan is placed in a global lineage of political prisoners who have been vindicated, without naming them, thereby enabling the viewer to make the connection. ‘Haqeeqi Azadi’ is an intellectual anchor metaphor, two words that ignite the whole liberation story with maximum compression.		

The 100-day memorial frame is a conscious rhetorical choice: round numbers establish ritual occasions that recreate collective pain and solidarity. The post turns a bureaucratic detention milestone into political martyrology — doing the ideological task of retaining loyalty under lengthy institutional siege. 1.8M views is a good indicator that the commemorative frame is a very powerful mobilisational trigger.

Post IK-3 — Sacred Duty and Pre-Election Mobilisation (6 February 2024)

IK-3 — @ImranKhanPTI | 6 February 2024

Two days before the February 8 general election — originally posted in Urdu, auto-translated by X

“Your vote is both a duty and a debt; both martyrdom and a guarantee of a better future. Learn how to ensure the proper use and protection of this vote in this video:”

✓ Verified post — @ImranKhanPTI

NLP Pattern Analysis

Simultaneous **reframing** of a single civic deed after quadruple reframing. Voting becomes (1) a moral duty, shifting it from an optional right to an inescapable obligation; (2) a debt, positioning the audience as already indebted to the cause; (3) martyrdom, elevating ballot-casting to shahdat, with its deep Islamic sacred resonance; and (4) a guarantee, attaching moral and spiritual weight to a promised future outcome.

Presuppositions: ‘Safeguarding this vote’ presume that the vote is under attack and needs to be defended, so cementing the election rigging narrative as a background assumption two days before polling – without specifically making the claim.

Metaphorical Framing: The two systems reinforce each other creating ‘double closure’. Sacred sacrifice (martyrdom as divine transaction) + legal contract (duty/debt/guarantee) seal up any psychological room for non-participation: not voting is at once a broken covenant and a defaulted legal debt.

It is in Urdu (the original target audience was the mass voter base, not elites or international audiences) and is complemented with a practical instructional film. This post blends emotional activation and behavioural coaching into a full pre-election persuasive package. The accompanying video has 1.9M views confirming exceptional viral reach in the last days before polling.

Post IK-4 — Presupposition Stacking and Post-Election Contestation (20 February 2024)

IK-4 — @ImranKhanPTI | 20 February 2024

12 days after the disputed February 8 election — message relayed through family from Adiala Jail

Founding Chairman Imran Khan’s message through his family from Adiala Jail: — PMLN’s journey from “vote ko izzat do” to “boot ko izzat do” is perhaps the mother of all u-turns. — Elections 2024 were characterised as the mother of all riggings (Pre-Poll, Election Day and Post-Poll Riggings), whereby there was an attempt to decimate a party, not allowed to hold rallies, its symbol taken away, its workers abducted and forced to denounce support, and yet, it beat all the odds to emerge victorious after which all illegal tactics and methods were employed to steal the public mandate. — Pakistan has also now seen the mother of all selections, where criminals have been given a clean chit in their cases, while Imran Khan has been booked under hundreds of bogus cases & sentenced to

30 years in prison under frivolous charges. — We have substantial amount of evidence of election rigging, also provided to us by the officials who conducted the elections. — It is high time that sense prevails. Honour the public will and respect their mandate before we become a laughing stock in front of the world.

✓ Verified post — @ImranKhanPTI

NLP Pattern Analysis

Re-framing: three simultaneous re-frames: election result re-framed from a completed legal process into 'the mother of all riggings'; Khan's legal cases re-framed through the contrast 'criminals given clean chit / Khan booked under bogus cases'; PML-N's democratic identity re-framed through inverting their own historic slogan (vote ko izzat do' → 'boot ko izzat do') — a masterclass in compact delegitimation.

Presuppositions (Stacked) This post is an example of presupposition stacking – many embedded assumptions per bullet point. 'Were described as the mother of all riggings' (passive voice) shares epistemic authority across an anonymous group. The phrase 'All illegal tactics' assumes that they are illegal. We have strong proof presented by officials who ran the elections ' combines four assumptions together . Rigging happened . proof is substantial . Evidence is convincing . Even insiders affirm it .

Metaphorical Framing: The 'mother of all' structure is repeated three times (u-turns, riggings, selections), transforming an idiom into a structural metaphor system which classifies every phenomenon stated as historically unparalleled in its wrongness. 'Selections' instead of 'elections' is a condensed metaphor that in one phrase strips the result of democratic legitimacy.

The mediated setting of production—a jail message passed through family—is itself rhetorically significant, evoking the heritage of resistance literature and prison writing. The numbered bullet structure mimics an official evidence summary, performing epistemic authority while offering maximal emotional content. Published 12 days after the election, it calls the upcoming Sharif government illegitimate even before it is sworn in officially.

Post IK-5 — *Totalitarian Comparison and Supreme Court Challenge (5 June 2023)*

IK-5 — @ImranKhanPTI | 5 June 2023

27 days after arrest — peak period of PTI family member arrests under collective punishment

How long will the SC allow complete violation of fundamental rights of anyone linked to Pakistan's biggest political party? We are now living in the dark ages. Nazi Germany era law of kin punishment is being practiced against PTI. In other countries where this barbaric law was imposed, was in totalitarian states like Stalin's Russia, North Korea and China during the cultural revolution.

✓ Verified post — @ImranKhanPTI

NLP Pattern Analysis

Reframing: the post has the most radical reframing of all in the IK corpus. The crackdown on PTI is recast not just as political persecution but explicitly Nazi-era Sippenhaft (kin punishment), then expanded to Stalin’s Russia, North Korea and Mao’s China. The first rhetorical question reconstitutes the Supreme Court from a disinterested constitutional arbiter into a complicit enabler of rights breaches.

Presuppositions ‘Complete violation of fundamental rights’ presupposes a thorough and systematic violation. The phrase ‘we are now living in the dark ages’ presupposes a common experiential reality of civilisational retreat. There is no justification to be made for the description of ‘this brutal law’ as self-evident.

Framing **metaphorically:**

A cascading totalitarian analogy: Dark Ages → Nazi Germany → Stalin’s Russia → North Korea → Mao’s China. Each step increases the delegitimisation and the variety of regimes (fascist, communist, authoritarian) makes the practice the defining characteristic of totalitarianism itself, rather than of any particular ideology.

The embedded infographic from @SalmanKNiazi1 describing Sippenhaft does intertextual legitimisation — bringing in outside scholarly input to ground what might seem incendiary in the historical record. Comparing IK-1 (reign of terror, 18 May) to IK-5 (Nazi/Stalin analogy, 5 June), we see a clear rhetorical escalation: the metaphorical stakes are consistently raised as the crackdown intensifies over the post-arrest period.

Prime Minister’s Discourse (SS): Legitimisation, Delegitimisation, and Governance

Post SS-3 — Fascist Exposure and RSS Category Metaphor (18 March 2023)

SS-3 — @CMShehbaz | 18 March 2023

Pre-arrest period — Zaman Park clashes between PTI supporters and police

If anyone had any doubt, Imran Niazi’s antics of the last few days have laid bare his fascist & militant tendencies. From using people as human shields to throwing petrol bombs at police to leading ‘jathas’ to intimidate judiciary, he has taken a leaf out of the RSS book.

✓ Verified post — @CMShehbaz

NLP Pattern Analysis

Reframing Political confrontation is reframed as the revealing of pre-existing fascist inclinations (‘laid bare’ – uncovering what was already there). Khan is changed from political adversary to an RSS operative, the most maximally delegitimising analogy in the Pakistani socio-political milieu, activating overtones of Hindu nationalist paramilitary violence and anti-Muslim ideology.

Presuppositions. ‘If anyone had any doubt’ assumes that doubts were possible but are now definitely addressed — allowing for sceptical people but shutting down the

opportunity for continued ambiguity. ‘Laid naked his fascist & militant tendencies’ implies that they were there from the start, but concealed. **Metaphorical framing:** The comparison with the RSS serves as a category metaphor (Lakoff, 1980) where Khan is categorised into an existing ideological category with its own set of attributes (religious extremism, paramilitary violence, Indian nationalism) without having to argue for each one separately. ‘Laid bare’ is an exposure/nakedness metaphor, making revelation sound like objective discovery, not political claim.

Published before the May 9 arrest (March 2023), this piece plays an important temporal role: it pre-emptively constructs the fascist framing before the circumstances that would legitimise the subsequent crackdown. Sharif’s branding of Khan as fascist and RSS-aligned in March helps him create the discursive ground to frame May 9 protests as orchestrated fascist violence rather than spontaneous political protest. Using ‘Imran Niazi’ instead of ‘Imran Khan’ is a delegitimising move in itself, robbing Khan of his adopted political surname.

Key comparative finding — SS-3 vs IK-5

SS-3 (March 2023, RSS/fascist contrast) is a direct parallel to IK-5 (June 2023, Nazi Germany/Stalin comparison). Both use totalitarian category metaphors. Each is culturally calibrated differently: IK recalls a European totalitarianism familiar to worldwide audiences; SS employs a South Asian fascist (RSS) most relevant to Pakistani home setting. One of the most important empirical findings of the study is this symmetry of totalitarian comparison from opposite power positions.

Post SS-1 — Anti-Terrorism Reframe and Institutional Authority (13 May 2023)

SS-1 — @CMShehbaz | 13 May 2023

Four days after May 9 protests — government crackdown in full operation

I have given law enforcement apparatus a target of 72 hours to arrest all those involved in facilitating, abetting and perpetrating the disgraceful incidents of arson, ransacking, sabotage & damaging public & private properties. All available resources including technological aid & intelligence are being deployed to chase down these elements. Bringing these people to justice is a test case for the government. Their cases will be tried by the anti-terrorism courts.

✓ Verified post — @CMShehbaz

NLP Pattern Analysis

Reframing: Three reframes at once: May 9 protests are reframed from political protest to an organised criminal conspiracy (‘facilitating, abetting and perpetrating’— constructing a legal chain of culpability); protesters are reframed as fugitive elements (‘chase down these elements’— dehumanising, hunted); and political activity is reframed as terrorism (‘anti-terrorism courts’— the gravest available legal category).

Presuppositions: ‘The deplorable incidents’ implies evaluation as the consensus shared by all, not the description of the government. ‘Bringing these people to justice is a test case’ presumes that the government wants to pass that test, and that justice means prosecuting them.

Metaphorical Framing A sustained military-operational metaphor system: ‘target of 72 hours,’ ‘deployed,’ ‘chase down,’ ‘technological aid & intelligence’ – framing the government’s response as a precision counter-terrorism operation, positioning the PM as commander-in-chief rather than political manager.

The anti-terrorism court designation is the post’s most ideologically consequential step at the social practice level: it takes events from political discourse (where they can be contested on civil liberties grounds) to security jurisdiction (where they cannot). This operational direction, publicly posted on X, delivers maximum transparency and resolution at the same time – the PM seen to personally and publicly command the crackdown.

Key comparative finding — SS-1 vs IK-1

SS-1 (13 May) and IK-1 (18 May) both address the same five-day crisis window. IK-1 re-frames the government as criminal occupiers; SS-1 re-frames PTI members as terrorist criminals. Both utilise the same criminal lexicon to delegitimise the other. This verifies the Power-Position Hypothesis: the same linguistic strategy, performed from opposite institutional positions, creates diametrically opposed ideological outcomes.

Post SS-2 — State-Military Solidarity and National Security Reframe (9 July 2023)

SS-2 — @CMShehbaz | 9 July 2023

PTI suppression period — context of alleged Khan threats against Army Chief General Asim Munir

Imran Khan continues to engage in a vile, sinister & malicious campaign against COAS General Syed Asim Munir. His trick of using the proxies to threaten the Army Chief of an assassination attempt has been badly exposed. After his methodically planned attack on the State symbols failed, he is clearly desperate & wants to coerce his way back into power, little knowing that the time of his politics of intimidation, violence & hatred is over. Through such highly condemnable antics, he is only exposing himself, the core of which is defined by putting his personal interest (power grab) over everything else. The people of Pakistan and the political parties stand behind their Army Chief & the armed forces like a rock & will thwart any attempt and conspiracy at undermining their prestige, honour and integrity.

✓ Verified post — @CMShehbaz

NLP Pattern Analysis

Reframing: Khan’s political rhetoric becomes an assassination conspiracy (‘vile, dark & wicked campaign’). His political ambition is repackaged as a ‘power grab’ — perfectly echoing IK’s narrative of the government having ‘taken over’ the nation but in reverse. Most importantly, the Army is reconceptualised as an above-politics national institution, rather than a political actor, with ‘the people of Pakistan’ posed as its natural defenders — implicitly excluding PTI from both the people and the political parties.

Presuppositions ‘His trick has been badly exposed’ posits three challenged claims as facts: Khan utilised proxies, purposefully, and has been caught. ‘Little knowing’ assumes Khan is working in ignorance of a truth that the listener and Sharif share — presenting the speaker as superior in knowledge.

Metaphorical portraying: “Like a rock” uses the geological solidity metaphor — immovable, permanent, natural — portraying the state-military partnership as a natural structure rather than a political alliance. The temporal finality of the phrase ‘the time of his politics is over’ constructs Khan’s political defeat as a natural and permanent end.

This role also ideologically merges civilian governance with military institutional authority — the PM openly promising to defend the Army Chief, thereby conflating opposition to the military with resistance to the nation itself. SS-2 vs IK-2 (all July-November 2023 jail period): IK-2 constructs Khan as a martyr in principle, whose suffering legitimises him. SS-2 constructs Khan as a desperate conspirator, whose exposure delegitimises him. The very same period yields dramatically opposing characterisations, largely dependent on power position.

Post SS-4 — Zero Tolerance, Cancer Excision, and Governance Construction (4 June 2024)

SS-4 — @CMShehbaz | 4 June 2024

Three months into second Sharif premiership — post-election governance period

There is zero tolerance for corruption, inefficiency and incompetence. My decision to abolish Pakistan Public Works Department (PWD) is a step towards removing the rot that is eating our system like a cancer from within. I am fully committed to building a more honest, dedicated and efficient bureaucracy that will deliver high quality public service and raise standards of governance.

✓ Verified post — @CMShehbaz

NLP Pattern Analysis

Reframe: A bureaucratic administrative choice is reframed as ethically important national surgery. “Zero tolerance” turns governance from pragmatic management into an absolute moral duty. ‘Removing the rot’ recontextualises institutional inefficiency as an organic disease that must be excised. ‘Building a more honest bureaucracy’ makes reform a construction project.

Presuppositions ‘The rot that is devouring our system’ (present continuous) presupposes that the rot is active and ongoing, and attributes the systemic corruption to the inherited period, without naming the prior administration. ‘Raise standards of governance’ assumes

the current standards are below the aim.

Metaphorical Framing: Two successive metaphor systems are employed to produce a full medical-then-architectural narrative: cancer/rot (diagnostic and excision) and then construction (rebuilding). Together: diagnosis → surgery → reconstruction—the governing equivalent of IK’s liberation arc: captivity → resistance → daybreak. Both leaders deploy progressive story metaphors, but the institutional position affects the domain from which they draw.

The SS-4 is the turning point in the discursive move from crisis management to governance creation in the Sharif corpus. With Khan in jail and the election behind him, Sharif’s rhetorical goal is no longer to delegitimise an opponent but to forge the legitimacy of his own administration. The three-sentence format — moral principle, specific action, forward commitment — achieves decisiveness: principle expressed, action executed, future promised.

Post SS-5 — Economic Rescue Narrative and International Legitimacy (27 September 2024)

SS-5 — @CMShehbaz | 27 September 2024

UNGA79 — six months into second Sharif premiership; Pakistan’s IMF stabilisation programme

Since assuming office, in March this year, the progress and prosperity, of my 240 million people, has been my singular focus. We have taken difficult, but necessary decisions that have rescued our economy from collapse; restored, macroeconomic stability; controlled fiscal deficits, and strengthened our reserves. As a result, inflation has come down to a single digit, and the prospects, for economic growth, have revived. #UNGA79

✓ Verified post — @CMShehbaz

NLP Pattern Analysis

Reframing: Measures of austerity that are being criticised are reframed as "difficult but necessary decisions"—a selfless duty to the country. To be “rescued from collapse” is to reinterpret the economic inheritance as an emergency already in place, to ascribe near-catastrophe to the prior time without naming it. ‘My 240 million people’ shifts the PM-citizen connection from electoral to custodial/parental. The most condensed ideological statement in the SS corpus.

Presuppositions: ‘Since assuming office in March, the progress and prosperity of my 240 million people has been my undivided focus’ requires three things: that progress happened, that it was the outcome of Sharif’s effort and that it began at a point implicitly contrasted with what came before. “Rescued from collapse” implies that the economy was collapsing before he stepped in.

Metaphorical Framing Three systems converging build a national redemption story: rescue (from collapse), revival (biological restoration of latent growth prospects) and restoration/strengthening (structural repair). Together: economy dying → saved → healed → strengthened — placing the government as the required agent of national survival.

The SS-5 is the only post in the whole corpus addressed to both home and international audiences. Delivered at the UNGA, the most internationally prominent venue available to a Pakistani head of government, it serves as Pakistan's creditworthiness for foreign investors and IMF monitors while building economic competence for home audiences. The PM's image at the UN platform attached to this post performs functions of international legitimacy that the content alone cannot achieve

Discussion: The Power-Position Hypothesis

The examination of 10 validated posts over two leaders, five crisis phases, and an eighteen-month time frame offers consistent empirical evidence for the Power-Position Hypothesis. Both leaders employ the same three NLP persuasion patterns – reframing, presuppositions and metaphorical framing with similar frequency and proficiency. But the ideological outputs vary systematically with institutional position. Table 2 presents the main comparison findings.

Table 2: Comparative NLP Pattern Deployment

Pattern	Opposition Discourse (IK)	Governing Discourse (SS)
Reframing	Government → criminal occupiers; crackdown → reign of terror; election result → theft; vote → martyrdom	Political protest → terrorism; Khan → RSS fascist; political speech → assassination conspiracy; austerity → selfless duty
Presuppositions	State illegitimacy as given; PTI's electoral supremacy as uncontested; persecution as established fact; evidence of rigging as confirmed	Protest criminality as given; Khan's defeat as accomplished; Army's above-politics status as natural; economic rescue as established
Metaphorical Framing	Liberation arc: captivity → resistance → historical dawn; totalitarian comparison (Nazi, Stalin, North Korea); sacred sacrifice (martyrdom, divine transaction)	Legitimation arc: disease → excision → construction; totalitarian comparison (RSS, fascist); national salvation (rescue, revival, restoration)

These findings enhance van Dijk's (1998) socio-cognitive paradigm by providing the mechanism through which power position influences discourse: it drives the directional orientation of NLP persuasive patterns. The same pattern – reframing – is a tool of delegitimation in the hands of those outside power and a means of legitimisation in the hands of those within power. This is not a matter of individual rhetorical style, but of structural position within the political field (Bourdieu 1991).

The strongest empirical evidence in support of this theory stems from three particular cross-post comparisons. Both SS-1 and IK-1 – posted within five days of each other in response to identical occurrences – use criminal jargon to delegitimise the opponent: IK names government 'crooks and criminals' SS demands demonstrators 'criminal elements' should be convicted in anti-terrorism courts. The same rhetorical method results in dramatically opposing ideological products. Secondly, both IK-5 and SS use totalitarian category analogies. IK cites Nazi Germany and Stalin's Russia; SS uses the RSS and fascism. The cultural calibration of each comparison is instructive—IK's comparisons have worldwide human rights resonance; SS's have internal

Pakistani ideology resonance—suggesting skilled rhetorical understanding of audience. Third, IK-2 and SS-2 (both from the mid-crisis detention period) give starkly opposed views of the same political figure: IK-2 portrays him as a principled martyr whose suffering vindicates him; SS-2 depicts him as a desperate conspirator whose exposure confirms his illegitimacy.

Another important result relates to the temporal arc of the discourse of each leader. IK's posts exhibit a strategic rhetorical escalation throughout the crisis period, from 'reign of terror' (IK-1, May 2023) to an explicit comparison to Nazi Germany (IK-5, June 2023) to an international human rights framing (IK-2, November 2023) to presupposition stacking and historical inevitability (IK-4, February 2024). SS's posts tell a diverse story: from early crisis management (SS-3, March 2023), to crackdown authority (SS-1, SS-2, 2023), to governance construction (SS-4, SS-5, 2024). These opposing arcs demonstrate that the deployment of NLP patterns is not static, but rather adapts strategically to changing political settings – further corroborating the premise of the Power-Position Hypothesis that structural position influences rhetorical function.

Our findings further show platform-specific amplification of NLP processes. The compacted form of X – rewarding conciseness, emotional strength and shared structure – generates conditions in which assumption stacking, in particular, works with increased effectiveness. A reader skimming quickly through a timeline cannot consciously think about each embedded assumption in the bullet-point structure of IK-4; the ideological assumptions are absorbed before the critical apparatus can engage. This platform-adapted presupposition loading could be a distinctly digital-age phenomenon in political persuasion that existing discourse theory does not yet sufficiently account for.

Conclusion

This work has proven that NLP-based persuasive language patterns are a systematic aspect of Pakistani political discourse on X, used with equivalent complexity by both a ruling and an opposition leader at a common era of acute national crisis. A theoretically generalisable finding has been produced by comparing ten verified posts. The same NLP patterns – reframing, presuppositions and metaphorical framing – work as instruments of legitimisation in governing discourse and as instruments of delegitimation in opposition discourse. The Power-Position Hypothesis is the fundamental theoretical contribution of the study.

There are three consequences. For Applied Linguistics, the study shows that the systematic vocabulary of NLP patterns operationalised within CDA is a useful tool for the micro-level analysis of political persuasion in compressed digital texts, complementing existing macro-level approaches to ideology and identity. For research on political communication it shows that power asymmetry is not only a contextual background but a shaping force in the operation of persuasive mechanisms: the same toolbox generates contrary ideological outputs depending on who wields it and from where. The result that platform affordances exacerbate presupposition loading raises significant issues for digital democracy studies regarding the capacity of individuals to engage critically with political language in high-speed social media environments.

However, the ten-post sample of the study, although appropriate for the amount of qualitative analysis undertaken here, constrains greater generalisability. Future study should extend the corpus and involve other NLP patterns, notably pacing and leading and embedded instructions.

It should also apply the Power-Position Hypothesis to different political dyads and country contexts so as to gauge the transferability of the concept beyond Pakistan.

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