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# THE DISCURSIVE FRAMING OF NATIONAL IDENTITY: A COMPARATIVE CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE ELECTION VICTORY SPEECHES OF IMRAN KHAN AND NAWAZ SHARIF

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**Abstract**
*The speeches of political victors are the most important moments to provide the leaders with an opportunity to construct national identity and show ideological vision. The dissimilarity between the political styles of Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif is a valuable location in Pakistan to study the discursive constructions. In this study, the author examines the linguistic and ideological techniques used by the two leaders to make national identity when they delivered their victory win speeches. Based on the qualitative design and utilizing the Critical Discourse Analysis, the study explores the textual, interpersonal, and contextual characteristics of both speeches. The review uses Fairclough model and thematic coding to determine the key tendencies. Results indicate that Khan builds national identity based on moral reform and empowerment of people whereas Sharif bases it on the development, stability and continuity of institutions. The study concludes that the two leaders appeal to the one nation but the discursive approach they both assume is different in terms of ideological orientations along which narratives of national identities are constructed.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Political orations are important places where leaders build ideological grounds, create mass sentiment and shape national identity. It has been found out that political discourse is not merely an explanation of social truth but is a constructive way of how citizens perceive the nation, citizenship, and its collective identity (De Cillia et al., 1999). Victorious speeches are especially significant in electoral terms, given that leaders use this speech to establish priorities, grant legitimacy, as well as indicate future paths of governance. This enables these speeches to constitute potent platforms of knowing how national identity is constituted in time of critical political moments discursively. The victory speeches of the national leaders of Pakistan in the countries where politics is at the center of influence in making up the public opinion offer a beneficial insight into the rivalry and ideological narratives and images of the country.

Although, the world is highly scholarly on the subject of national identity and political discourse, it has not paid much attention to how Pakistani political leaders develop national identity in their official speeches. The existing literature about political communication in Pakistan is usually centered on media framing, populism, or campaign rhetoric (Shah, 2021), but there are limited studies on how leaders themselves linguistically construct unity, nationhood, and collective purpose ideas. Moreover, there is a lack of comparative research studies that examine opposite discourse styles, e.g. populist and institutionalist narratives. This difference is especially significant when it comes to explaining the contrasting political

communication strategies of Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif two of the key figures in the modern politics of Pakistan.

This study aims at examining the concept of national identity that Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif create in their speeches on election victory using linguistic, rhetorical and ideological appeals. The research uses Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in an attempt to explore how both leaders create national identity, tap into emotions, and justify the political power. In juxtaposition, the research seeks to unearth the ideological basis on which these two leaders, of a populist orientation and an institutionalist orientation, created images of national unity and nationhood. This research is important in a number of ways. To start with, it is relevant to the literature on the political communication subject, as it brings into focus the discursive processes that leaders use to create national identity. Political speech, as previous studies indicate, has a key role in determining the common values and building social unity (Ruzicka & Beaudon, 2017). Second, the research adds to the body of CDA-related studies in South Asian politics because the leadership communication of Pakistan is underrepresented in the scholarly literature. Third, the comparison between two ideologically different leaders gives the insight into how various traditions of politics populism and institutionalism influence different constructions of the nation. This analogy adds to the theoretical knowledge on the expression of national identity in transitional democracies.

### 1.1 Research Objectives:

To examine how the two leaders framed the idea of national identity discursively in their election victory speeches.

To analyze how their discourses differ in symbolizing the concept of one nation and what strategies they had used to represent their ideologies.

### 1.2 Research Questions:

How has the two leaders framed the notion of national identity discursively in their election victory speeches?

How do their discourses differ in symbolizing the concept of one nation and what strategies did they use to represent their ideologies?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Backgrounds: Discourse, Power and Ideology

The major theoretical focus of studying political speech is the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The research on the foundations posits that discourse can not be viewed independently of power structures and ideological constructions (Van Dijk, 2018). Political texts are not simple reflections of social reality, but they create this reality through the ideological justification of certain ideologies. Wodak (2018) also adds that the social identities are made by political discourse via strategies of nomination, predication, and argumentation. These discursive expertise are particularly acute in electoral situations, and leaders want to consolidate audiences, mobilize them, and legitimize power. On the same note, Fairclough and Fairclough (2012) point out the rhetorical appeal of political discourse and that political leaders frame issues and vision of the future in a tactical way so as to influence public opinion. Combined, these frameworks define discourse as one of the most important processes in which political actors define national identity.

### 2.2 National Identity in the Politics of the Word

National identity is perceived to be a dynamic and discursively negotiated construct. It is believed by scholars that political speeches are important in terms of explaining common ethical values, memory, and the future of the country (De Cillia et al., 1999). It has been found that leaders often rely on historical accounts, symbolism, and we-language in establishing the sense of belonging (Ruzicka & Beaudon, 2017). South Asian political identities tend to be created through the association of national solidarity and democratic stability, development, and moral governance (Khan, 2020). In addition, national identity does not exist in a single form; it differs within ideology. Political elites as Bayram (2010) observes, are selective in their definition of identity when they are inclined to these ideological orientations and policy priorities. In this way, the formation of national identity in politics is political, value-focused and fundamentally embedded in the relations of power.

### 2.3 Discursive Politics of Political Leaders

Much literature has been analyzed on the way in which rhetorical and linguistic strategies are employed by political leaders to authorize power. Perrin et al. (2020) show that leaders often use inclusive pronouns, emotional appeal, and moral judgments to form cohesiveness and underline the common cause. On the same note, Charteris-Black (2011) states that metaphor is also a potent rhetorical tool in crafting political discourses especially metaphors of struggle, journey and renewal. All these discursive tactics serve to frame national problems and place leaders as change agents. Moreover, political speeches tend to be based on the interpersonal strategies that help to regulate the connection between the leader and the people. According to Yu (2022), such relational work like gratitude, humble, or common struggle make leaders more credible and create emotional resonance. Another research also mentions the application of evaluative language to place leaders in a moral and ideological perspective (Caldarone, 2018). The main purpose of political discourse is in general informative, persuasive, mobilizing and legitimizing.

### 2.4 Institutionalist Political Communication and Populism

Research differentiates between populist and institutionalist discourse, in which people are split into the people and the corrupt elite, and the governance, stability, and development discourse. According to Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser (2018), people-centered rhetoric, emotive appeals, and moralized narratives are some of the arguments used by populists to build legitimacy. Their rhetoric tends to put an accent on the innocence and righteousness of common people and depict elites as people with no moral values. It goes in line with the results of Van Dijk (2018), who found that populist rhetoric tends to reduce the world of politics to moral extremes. On the other hand, institutionalist discourse is concerned with continuity, institutional performance and bureaucratic legitimacy. Siddiqui (2019) shows that the adoptability of technocratic or pragmatic tones by leaders emphasize development projects, governance systems, and democratic standards to build trust. South Asian leaders tend to incorporate promotion of economic development and administration stability as the main constituents of national identity (Shah, 2021). The varying discursive styles: populist and institutionalist these styles determine the manner in which the leaders express unity and belonging in the process of political transition.

Although, a lot of the research has been conducted in the world in the analysis of political discourse, there is still little research in the comparative analysis of how Pakistani leaders construct national identity. The state of existing research is to pay attention to the media representation or political ideology instead of direct political speeches. Besides, not many studies intimately compare populist and institutionalist discourse in the Pakistani context through the CDA frameworks. Thus, the victory speech given by Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif addresses a critical gap in the statistics of research, providing us with the insights into the discursive construction of national identity by rival political ideologies during the most critical political events.

## Research Methodology

This study examines the discursive portrayal of national identity by Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif in their speeches on their triumph in the election. In order to accomplish this objective, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) research design was selected. CDA represents a popular methodology of investigating the way, in which language presents and creates power relations, ideologies, and social identities (Fairclough, 2015; van Dijk, 2016). The following research methodology is used in the study, as it entails the research design, data selection, analytical framework, procedures, reliability and validity strategies and ethical considerations.

### 3.1 Research Design

The research design used is qualitative interpretive design based on CDA. The qualitative methods are ideal in analyzing the trends of meaning, representation, and ideology in the mass discourse, especially in political oratory (Wodak & Meyer, 2016). The qualitative design, as the study is meant to examine how national identity is discursively constructed as opposed to being quantified, provides the study with the depth, situational sensitivity, and language insight. The choice of CDA was prompted by the fact that it does not only analyze the features of

text but also links them to social, political, and ideological frameworks (Fairclough, 2015). In this combination, it is possible to conduct an in-depth study of the way in which discursive strategies determine the perception of national identity.

### 3.2 Data Source

The data comprises of two election victory speeches; the 2018 victory speech by Imran Khan and 2013 victory speech by Nawaz Sharif. Such speeches were selected since they are the defining moments in the history of the country when the leaders share their vision of what the nation should be like and appeal to the populace in a way that unites them. The purpose of all the speeches of victory is often a conscious rhetoric design, intended to create collective identity, legitimize authority, and ideological purpose (Chilton, 2004). The sampling was selective and based on the qualitative sampling, which emphasizes the relevance rather than the number of participants (Patton, 2015). The speeches were both found in credible public archives and transcribed to be analysed.

### 3.3 Analytical Framework

This study is based on the analytical premise of Fairclough 3-dimensional model of CDA. Textual analysis, discourse practice, and sociocultural practice are the (1) textual, (2) discourse, and (3) sociocultural practices that are included in the model (Fairclough, 2015). The framework makes it possible to study linguistic characteristics, the discourse production and distribution, and the political environment. In the case of thematic organization, the thematic analysis method by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied together with CDA to detect the repetitive themes through discursive themes about the national identity. Each of the themes was subjected to the three dimensions of CDA as follows:

**Ideational Meaning**: The representation of national identity, unity and ideology.

**Interpersonal Meaning**: Leader positioning and the positioning of the audiences.

**Textual/Discursive Strategies**: The construction of meaning through rhetorical, linguistic and structural options.

This mixed methodology provides a systematic and theory-based interpretation.

### 3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

Its analysis had four steps. It was decided to read both speeches over again to become familiar with the content and tone of the speech. Second, original codes were formed according to recurrent patterns in language, including the pronoun use, metaphors, evaluative language, and the allusions to national integration. Third, codes were classified into the wider themes that embodied the discursive framing of the national identity by the leaders. Fourth, the themes were analyzed using the CDA framework to get deeper ideological meanings. The focus was placed on lexical preferences, sentence construction, modalities, intertextual citation as well as rhetorical tools. To find the differences and similarities in the discourse of the leaders, the comparative analysis was carried out. It was an iterative process that enabled the researcher to revise interpretation but still be grounded on the data.

### 3.5 Reliability and Validity

The study was guided by existing practices of CDAs and procedures of thematic analysis to yield rigorous methodology (Wodak & Meyer, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2006). The systematization of the coding and cross-validation of themes and textual evidence enhanced reliability. To increase validity, linguistic results were directly connected with socio-political environments, which is a vital action in CDA (van Dijk, 2016). Interpretive credibility was also determined by triangulation of language, theme and contexts.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

The research uses entail political speeches of the public, which are not hidden and do not need ethics permission. However, ethical research conduct was upheld by proper representation of the speeches, referencing of all sources and political bias interpretation was not allowed. The discussion is strictly scholarly with no support or disapproval given to any political party or leader.

## Data Analysis

### Theme 1: National Unity as Moral Restoration

Imran Khan elaborates national identity as moral and institutional reform project. He is the symbol of how Pakistan is a country that is victimized by corruption, injustice, and lack of morality. It is portrayed as a country that is a victim of the misdeeds of the elite,

and it has to be reborn by moral leaders. His words about repairing the system, combating corruption, and creating a just society offer the national unity as the one that can be attained only with the help of the moral cleansing. Therefore, integrity, justice and accountability is associated with national identity. He puts Pakistan in context of change in case moral values are returned. Such a representation places him as the catalyst of national renewal, which incorporated unity in a story of shared moral obligation.

Imran Khan positions himself as a reformer that is moral and takes the stance of a principled honest leader acting on behalf of the ordinary citizens. His application of the inclusive pronouns, we, our people, our nation, serve to provide power distance and to establish solidarity. He addresses marginalized groups directly, including; the poor, overseas Pakistanis and those without justice, making himself the champion of those groups.

He is assertive but collective and implies that he is a figure of authority due to the service of the people as opposed to authority. His legitimacy is enhanced by his role as a person who is in line with the moral desires of the people. The interpersonal relationship he develops is that in which he is a reliable mentor who takes the nation to the path of change.

Khan applies metaphors of struggle and cleansing and of fight, clean up, stand together often to define the national unity as a moral mission. The use of repetition in phrases like inshaallah we will makes it rhythmic and certain. He appeals greatly to Islamic and welfare oriented vocabulary, which fits national identity with the religious and humanitarian values. Discursively he employs the presence of contrasts in time (for 30 years... but now... etc.) to indicate that there is a break with the past and his leadership is a new beginning. The narrative framing establishes unity as an end and as a channel of moral regeneration and discursively presents Pakistan as a nation that can undergo a moral regeneration, together as a people.

**Theme 2: Development and Stability National Identity**

Nawaz Sharif constructs national identity in terms of development, progress and economic stability. He talks about Pakistan as a prosperous nation that works towards infrastructure and being recognized worldwide. He refers to roads, energy projects, industrial growth, and continuity of development frequently, and shows national unity in terms of material progress. The ideational framing of Sharif stresses upon stability, experience and continuity of the state. The nation identity is attached to the economic performance and political stability. He creates unity not as a moral struggle but as a continuation of the same developmental process by the way he creates the picture of the nation already on its course of development during his previous reign. Sharif uses a statesman tone which is paternalistic. When he speaks of himself using pronouns as I will ensure, my government will and our achievements, he can be classified as an experienced leader who has already achieved results before. The interpersonal relationship that he builds is hierarchical but comforting; he poses as a the keeper of national improvement. His calls are usually to the young generation, the business fraternity, and the working Pakistanis, symbolizing cohesiveness in terms of economic involvement. The construction of Sharif is a steady and stable political leader who provides stability and tranquility in leadership. This is unlike the more activist tone of Khan where interpersonal meanings vary among leaders.

Sharif uses the repetition of vote ko izzat do and puts the right interpretations of democracy and development as interdependent. The discursive strategies employed in his speech are lists, numerical claims, and achievements (ended load shedding, completed CPEC projects) as the means of focusing on reliability. He quite often applies the construction and growth metaphors, like the one of building the future, laying the foundations, moving forward. Such metaphors mean togetherness in terms of collective development. His discussion is less religious and more performance-based in its language and national identity is placed in a technocratic narrative of development.

**Theme 3: One Nation by Populist Inclusion vs. Formality Institutionalism**

**Imran Khan: Populist Inclusion**

Khan makes the country appear as a homogeneous group of common people who are oppressed by the elites corrupting life. He creates a dichotomy between the people and the corrupt system, and the unity is

coming out of political purification and empowerment of ordinary people. His language is populist and personal. He creates a low proximity between him and the populace by use of direct address and appealing to emotion. This strengthens the sense of belonging to masses and not to institutions. Khan resorts to definite binaries and the vocabulary that is emotionally motivated (rich vs. poor, elite vs. people). His speeches are based on movement verbs, such as rise, change, fight, to give an articulation of a collective upwards movement. This generates an inclusive polarized national identity.

**Nawaz Sharif: Structural Institutionalism**

Sharif is building unity by the continuity of the institutions and esteem towards the democratic processes. He highlights constitutionalism, good governance and development through rule bound leadership. Sharif puts himself in the role of a statesman related to the formal legitimacy of offices and democratic institutions. His is a serious but moderate tone. Sharif appeals to the national identity through the use of institutional references (parliament, democracy, constitution) to place national identity within the framework of state and not popular mobilization. He opposes chaos to development meaning that order and institutional discipline create unity.

**Comparative Interpretation**

The thematic CDA presents two types of discursive national identity framing:

**Imran Khan**

Makes unity be a moral reform, empowerment of people and a struggle as a collective.

Adopts the populist style based on the emotional, moral, and inclusive words.

Forges the national identity as re-born, cleansed and righteous.

**Nawaz Sharif**

Unity Frames unity as progress, growth, and stability of institutions.

Formal, Technocratic, statesmanike style.

Makes national identity stable, continuous, institution-denoting.

The ideological means these two leaders use to proclaim the one nation are also different, as Khan appeals to transformational populism, and Sharif depends on developmental institutionalism. Their variation in CDA patterns reveals how the political leaders define the national identity not just in terms of content but also in terms of rhetorical structure, interpersonal stance, and discursive strategies.

**Findings and Discussion**

The discursive analysis of the speeches delivered by Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif about their election victory shows that their views on national identity are quite dissimilar. Three themes were identified; (1) national unity as a moral restoration (Imran Khan), (2) national identity as development and stability (Nawaz Sharif), and (3) a differences of approaches between populist inclusion and institutional continuity. Although both leaders tried to represent the concept of one nation, they appealed to different language and ideological alternatives. Khan preempted ethical renewal, the anti-corruption discourse, and populist solidarity, but Sharif was focused on democratic stability, economic growth, and institutional legitimacy. The results of the study reveal that Imran Khan employs national identity as a moral project. His constant emphasis on corruption, justice, and reforms of the society creates cohesiveness on the basis of moral change. This is in line with a populist narrative that separates the society into ordinary and corrupt elites. It is a discourse that builds national belonging out of emotional appeal and moral urgency, which support a transformative vision of the nation.

On the other hand, Nawaz Sharif conceptualizes national identity by developing it using development discourse. He creates unity through the progress and institutional trust by emphasizing infrastructure achievements, economic stability, and policy continuity. His presentation of ideas places the citizens at the center of a common development process, with identifying with a nation being based on government and economic achievements as opposed to moral conflict.

These opposing frames illustrate the ways various political ideologies define one nation. The discourse offered by Khan aims at mobilizing the public mood, and that of Sharif aims at reassuring and stabilizing.

Both systems build the national identity, though in a different way, one of them is symbolic and emotional, the other is administrative and developmental.

The results go hand in hand with the argument of Fairclough (2015) that political discourse creates social identities through the careful presentation of problems, actors and solutions ideologically. The framing by Khan is related to the popularization of populist polarization that van Dijk (2016) clarifies as the polarization of a set of political actors presenting the us vs. them dichotomy to cause supporters to unite. His use of inclusive pronouns and moral words is too strong to argue with this structure. The same tendencies have been noted in the literature on the utilization of moral stories by political leaders to justify reformist agendas (Chilton, 2004). The language used by Sharif aligns with the literature on how developmental rhetoric is used to build contemporary national identities. Wodak and Meyer (2016) mention that economic success and institutional heritage are one of the reasons why leaders appeal to their ability to build a nation and demonstrate themselves as a trustworthy individual. This model is reflected on the stability, democracy, and infrastructure emphasis by Sharif. His rhetorical approach can be defined as such suggested by Chilton (2004) as managerial discourse, which is supposed to depict the sense of competence and continuity.

Moreover, both speeches show national identity is negotiated and not determined in terms of discourse. This confirms the perspective of national identity as a narrative that was created by Hall (1996): historical, political and ideological circumstances. The fact that the leaders resorted to various metaphors, as the metaphors of struggle and purity developed by Khan and the metaphors of construction and progress developed by Sharif, illustrates how language may be used as an instrument of packaging conflicting visions of the country. These results have significant implications to political communication in Pakistan. To begin with, they emphasize that the national identity is strategically constructed by political leaders to advance their ideological objectives. The discourse by Khan favors a moral community that desires to be united to pursue a change, but that of Sharif focuses on institutional integrity and continuity of development. These disparities demonstrate that political rhetoric is an extension of the ideological differences that exist in the nation.

Second, the study demonstrates that national identity is not only mentioned but also created by the discourse. Language usage, metaphors used, use of pronouns and rhetoric forms of expression all help to develop the way in which the citizens see themselves as being attached to the nation. Fairclough (2015) claims that discourse is a manifestation of social reality as well as a device of its creation. Finally the results indicate that the political unity messages can have various roles based on the political orientation of the leader. Populist discourses can be mobilizing to the citizens but polarizing and developmental discourses may be stabilizing, but uninspiring. These differences are essential in interpreting the political discourses today and their effects on the masses.

**Conclusion**

This comparative Critical Discourse Analysis determined the discursive construction of national identity in the election victory speeches of Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif. The research question was to discuss how both leaders constructed the concept of one nation and the discursive practices that they used to advocate their ideological perspectives. As it was found, even though both leaders appealed to national unity, they approached the issue using entirely different representational, interpersonal, and rhetorical appeals and practices, which are characteristic of different political ideologies and leadership approaches.

The results show that the conceptualization of the national identity in the Imran Khan discourse is a moral and ethical undertaking, created by the use of justice, accountability, and reforms narratives. In line with the existing studies on populist political communication (Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2018), Khan used moralized binaries, inclusive pronouns, and emotive appeals to build unity by creating a joint fight against corruption. His imagery of fighting and cleansing are similar to the words of Van Dijk (2018) that an ideological coherence is developed by the populist leadership that places the people in opposition to the corrupt elite. This national identity is constructed on the basis of change and renewal with citizens being agents of a moral mission to reconstruct the nation. On the contrary, the discourse by Nawaz

Sharif situated the concept of national identity in terms of development, stability and continuity of institutions. His focus on the infrastructure, economic development, and democratic order is the managerial and technocratic form of political communication that the past literature determines as one of the typical features of institutionalist leaders (Siddiqui, 2019). The recurrent mentioning of success, state institutions, and democratic standards by Sharif is congruent with the argument by Wodak (2018) that formal and bureaucratic language is frequently employed by the actors in politics to build credibility and demonstrate the stability of the situation. In contrast to the populist inclusivity of Khan, Sharif held an interpersonal approach that was inclined towards the hierarchical voice that established him as a seasoned leader focused on national development by using the institutional and gradual channels.

The comparative analysis shows that national identity is not predetermined but discursively constructed, based on the ideological inclinations of the leaders and strategic uses of language. This confirms the results of other works on CDA that reveal that national discourses are crafted by selective accounts of the past, ethics, and politics (Richardson & Wodak, 2013). Khan discursively forms unity as a by-product of an ethical reform and mass action, whereas Sharif forms unity as a by-product of economic continuity and democratic stability. Both discourses attempt to bring together, but they create different versions of belonging to the nation. On the whole, the present study can be regarded as a contribution to the research on political discourse because it demonstrates how the leaders of Pakistan employ specific discursive strategies to construct the images of the national identity during the crucial political events. These results highlight how discourse is significant in influencing the views of the masses, mobilizing and legitimizing political power. Future studies can build on this analysis by adding other multimodal attributes, audience reaction or cross-country comparisons to gain more insight into the linguistic construction of national identity by political leaders in modern democracies.

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