

# "ECOLINGUISTICS AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE: ANALYZING MARYAM NAWAZ'S SUTHRA PUNJAB CAMPAIGN FOR ENVIRONMENTAL ADVOCACY IN PAKISTAN"

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## **Abstract**

*Environmental discourse is gaining increasing prominence worldwide, shaping political agendas and public perceptions amid urgent ecological crises. In Pakistan, environmental issues have historically been marginalized within political rhetoric, despite the country facing severe challenges such as pollution, deforestation, and waste mismanagement. Maryam Nawaz's Suthra Punjab (Clean Punjab) campaign—a high-profile political initiative launched to address environmental cleanliness and development in Punjab province—marks a significant moment where ecology enters mainstream political discourse in the region. This study employs an ecolinguistic approach, guided by Arran Stubbe's theoretical framework, to analyze the campaign's speeches, promotional materials, and media coverage. Using qualitative discourse analysis, the research identifies key ecological metaphors, framing strategies, identity constructions, and appraisals embedded in the campaign language. Findings reveal that the campaign effectively uses environmental metaphors such as "cleanliness as purity" and frames ecological responsibility as a marker of political legitimacy and moral governance. While the Suthra Punjab campaign foregrounds an environmental agenda, the analysis suggests that much of its discourse negotiates between genuine ecological advocacy and symbolic political messaging designed to mobilize voter support. The construction of in-group identities—"responsible citizens" engaged in environmental stewardship—contrasted with negligent "polluters," serves both to galvanize public participation and reinforce political narratives. This research contributes to ecolinguistic scholarship by extending its application into South Asian political contexts, and to political communication studies by elucidating how environmental language functions rhetorically in Pakistan's electoral politics. It illuminates the complex interplay between language, ecology, and power, underscoring both the potential and limitations of environmental discourse as an instrument of political leadership and social change.*

**Keywords:** *Ecolinguistics, Political Discourse, Maryam Nawaz's Suthra's Punjab Campaign, Environmental Advocacy, Arran Stubbe, Ecological Advocacy, Ecological Crises, Deforestation, Green Environment.*

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background and Context**

The intersection of language, politics, and ecology represents a critically important yet complex area of academic inquiry—particularly within developing countries grappling with multifaceted environmental crises. Globally, environmental discourse has gained unparalleled momentum in recent decades as climate change, biodiversity loss, ecological pollution, and resource depletion emerge as pressing challenges to human survival and wellbeing. These issues have transcended the boundaries of scientific and technical arenas and become central to political deliberations, media narratives, public policy debates, and social movements.

Importantly, the languages and discourses shaping these debates are not neutral or transparent conveyors of facts. Instead, they actively construct how societies perceive and respond to ecological problems. Political actors, policymakers, and media stakeholders strategically deploy environmental language to mobilize publics, construct social and political identities, articulate moral responsibilities, establish in-group/out-group dynamics, and consolidate power. They narrate stories about nature, humanity's relationship with it, and visions of sustainable futures, with these narratives shaping attitudes, behaviors, and governance practices (Stibbe, 2015; Fairclough, 1995).

In developing countries, the complex socio-economic conditions, rapid population growth, uneven urbanization, and institutional challenges complicate these dynamics. Environmental risks intersect with poverty, health inequities, and infrastructural deficits, while political rhetoric competes over diverse and sometimes conflicting priorities. In such contexts, political environmental discourse is shaped by distinct cultural, religious, economic, and historical factors that influence the framing and reception of ecological concerns.

Pakistan, home to over 240 million people and ranked among the most vulnerable nations to climate change impacts (Germanwatch Global Climate Risk Index, 2022), exemplifies these complexities. Despite facing acute environmental challenges—the intensifying air and water pollution, accelerated deforestation, urban waste management crises, and climate-induced disasters—environmental issues have historically occupied a marginal place within Pakistan's national and regional political discourse. Electoral politics in Pakistan have often been dominated by security concerns, economic development promises, patronage networks, and ethnic/regional identities (Rehman & Ali, 2025). Environmental matters rarely take precedence on political agendas or within public debates.

Nevertheless, this landscape is shifting. Escalating pollution levels in urban centers, increasingly severe floods and droughts, and mounting public health emergencies linked to environmental degradation have elevated ecological concerns within Pakistani society. Public awareness of climate change and environmental degradation is gradually growing, especially among urban youth and civil society actors (Yasmin Khan & Mustafa, 2023). Concurrently, political leaders and parties are beginning to incorporate environmental rhetoric into electoral campaigns and governance narratives. The salience of environmental discourse in Pakistan's political communication is thus rising, albeit unevenly and often in symbolic or instrumental forms.

Within Pakistan's federal system, Punjab province holds particular significance. It is the most populous province, with approximately 110 million residents (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023), and is the economic hub, contributing the largest share to the country's GDP. Politically, Punjab is the power base for major parties and often decisive in determining national governance outcomes. Punjab also embodies many of Pakistan's acute environmental challenges, presenting a microcosm of its broader ecological and socio-political issues.

Punjab's environmental challenges include rising levels of hazardous air pollution, especially in Lahore; critical waste management deficits in rapidly growing cities; deforestation and land degradation resulting from agricultural expansion and urban sprawl; water scarcity aggravated by inefficient irrigation and contamination; and increased climate change vulnerabilities manifesting through more frequent heat waves, floods, and unpredictable rainfalls. Given Punjab's demographic weight and economic importance, the provincial government's approach to these environmental challenges has significant implications for Pakistan's overall sustainable development trajectory.

## 1.2 The *Suthra Punjab* Campaign: A Political-Environmental Initiative

Against this backdrop, the launch of Maryam Nawaz's *Suthra Punjab* ("Clean Punjab") campaign in 2023 by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)—one of Pakistan's leading political parties—marked a notable and unprecedented political effort to center environmental cleanliness, sustainable governance, and civic responsibility within an electoral and governance agenda.

The campaign is ambitious in scope. Its core aim is the transformation of Punjab into a clean, green, and climate-resilient province through systemic improvements in sanitation and waste management, stringent anti-pollution practices, bans on single-use plastics, large-scale tree plantation drives under the *Chief Minister's Plant for Pakistan* initiative, and enhanced environmental monitoring through technology. The campaign also invests significantly in public engagement, notably mobilizing youth and civil society through social media campaigns and educational outreach to foster community participation and behavioral change.

Distinct from many prior electoral platforms where environment remained marginal or symbolic, *Suthra Punjab* explicitly embeds ecological issues as core political priorities. The campaign's rhetoric and visual materials intertwine ecological cleanliness with themes of political legitimacy, regional pride, and moral renewal. Maryam Nawaz frequently uses the Urdu metaphor *suthrai*—commonly translated as "cleanliness"—to signify not just physical sanitation but a broader moral virtue and a symbol of political reformation and good governance. This rich metaphorical usage constructs an ecological-political narrative that resonates deeply within the sociopolitical fabric of Punjab, linking environmental stewardship with civic identity and political accountability.

The campaign underscores its seriousness through concrete actions: the deployment of tens of thousands of waste collection workers across urban and rural areas; the institution of plastic bans and regulatory enforcement units; ongoing large-scale tree planting efforts; installation of air and water quality monitoring stations; and digital and on-ground campaigns encouraging daily public participation.

This comprehensive set of symbolic and material actions underlines the campaign's dual nature: it is both a performative political branding exercise and an attempt at genuine governance reform, thus offering rich material for critical linguistic and ecological analysis.

## 1.3 Significance of Ecolinguistic Analysis

Ecolinguistics, as conceptualized by Stibbe (2015), investigates the relationships between language, ecology, and human social systems. It examines how language constructs perceptions of and relations to the natural environment and how discourses reflect, reinforce, or challenge ecological ideologies and behaviors.

Political discourse constitutes a vital arena for ecolinguistic inquiry. It is here that narratives about environmental stewardship, responsibility, and governance are constructed and contested. Such discourse communicates ideological positions, forges social and political identities, and claims power related to environmental futures.

The *Suthra Punjab* campaign serves as an excellent case study because it deliberately politicizes ecological concerns and embeds them deeply in electoral rhetoric and governance messaging. The campaign's language moves beyond the mere presentation of ecological facts or promises; it actively constructs meanings, moral imperatives, and social distinctions between actors—distinguishing between "clean citizens" and "polluters," between ethical governance and corruption, between regional pride and negligence.

Applying an ecolinguistic lens to this political campaign allows us to uncover the underlying ideologies motivating the use of ecological language, explore how specific metaphors and narratives frame the environment, and interrogate how these narratives shape public perceptions of governance and responsibility within the Pakistani context.

Moreover, such analysis may illuminate the ambiguity common in political environmental discourse worldwide: the tension between genuine ecological awareness and symbolic political messaging aimed at legitimacy and electoral gain.

#### 1.4 Environmental Challenges in Punjab: A Brief Overview

Punjab province's environmental problems are both multifaceted and acute:

- **Air Pollution:** Punjab, especially its urban centres like Lahore, frequently registers air quality index (AQI) levels that far exceed the safe limits recommended by the World Health Organization. Causes include emissions from heavy vehicular traffic, brick kilns, industrial activity, crop residue burning in surrounding agricultural fields, and dust from construction. These levels contribute to widespread respiratory ailments and significantly increase premature mortality.
- **Waste Management:** Rapid urbanization and population growth overwhelm municipal waste collection, segregation, and disposal infrastructure. Ineffective systems, open garbage dumps, and illegal burning of waste burden public health and generate soil and water pollution.
- **Deforestation and Land Degradation:** Increased demand for agricultural land, urban sprawl, and timber extraction have led to deforestation, soil erosion, and loss of local biodiversity. The diminishing green cover reduces ecological resilience and contributes to changing microclimates.
- **Water Scarcity and Pollution:** Groundwater overexploitation, inefficiencies in traditional irrigation practices, and contamination from industrial pollutants and untreated sewage undermine agricultural productivity and potable water security.
- **Climate Vulnerabilities:** Punjab is increasingly exposed to climate pressures — more prolonged heat waves, erratic and unseasonal rainfall, severe floods — threatening livelihoods, infrastructure, and regional food security.

Addressing these intertwined challenges demands political will, effective governance frameworks, appropriate resource allocation, and above all, culturally resonant communication that can mobilize public engagement and transformative action.

#### 1.5 Political Context: Language and Ecology in Pakistani Campaigns

Historically, Pakistani electoral campaigns have seldom foregrounded environmental issues. Political narratives have largely revolved around national security, economic promises, social welfare initiatives, and identity-based appeals (ethnic, religious, regional). Eco-centric concerns, if mentioned, tend to appear episodically, often linked with emergencies (natural disasters) or international donor-driven projects without becoming central campaign themes.

Consequently, environmental campaigns have largely been characterized by isolated projects lacking the political branding and mass mobilization typical of other social issues. This absence is shaped by voter priorities, political patronage norms, and party strategies that frequently perceive environment as a non-salient electoral issue.

The *Suthra Punjab* campaign disrupts this pattern by making environmental cleanliness a political cause de résistance. The campaign strategically casts ecology as integral to political identity and leadership narratives. Maryam Nawaz positions herself as a reformer concerned with both



development and ecological stewardship, aligning with global “green governance” discourses on sustainable leadership.

The campaign’s memorable slogan, “Maryam Nawaz ka Punjab, Suthra Punjab,” epitomizes this intertwining of personal political legitimacy with environmental symbolism, using language to craft a distinct political-environmental brand.

Such politicization raises important questions about discourse construction and ideological intent, exactly what ecolinguistic research seeks to analyze in terms of the political stakes surrounding environmental discourse.

### 1.6 Research Gap and Contribution

Despite the urgency of Pakistan’s environmental problems and the increasing visibility of ecological rhetoric in politics, there exists a significant gap in academic research applying ecolinguistic or discourse analytic frameworks to Pakistani political environmental campaigns. Most existing ecolinguistic studies focus on Western contexts, media, advertising, or literary texts. South Asia, and Pakistan specifically, remain under-researched areas within this field.

There are emerging studies analyzing climate change communication in Pakistani media (Yasmin Khan & Mustafa, 2023), environmental narratives in literature (Sadiq, Anees & Kanwal, 2024), and political environmental branding more broadly (Rehman & Ali, 2025), but detailed analyses of ecosystemic political discourse in electoral campaigns remain rare.

By applying Arran Stibbe’s rigorously developed ecolinguistic framework to Maryam Nawaz’s *Suthra Punjab* campaign, this study fills this crucial gap. It provides localized, context-specific insights that enrich international ecolinguistic and political communication scholarship. In addition, it deepens understanding of how environmental discourse functions as a tool of symbolic politics, governance legitimation, and identity construction within a developing South Asian country.

### 1.7 Objectives and Scope of the Study

This study aims to conduct a comprehensive ecolinguistic analysis of the *Suthra Punjab* campaign, focusing on:

- Identifying the dominant ecological metaphors and discursive frames shaping Punjab’s environmental futures in campaign discourse.
- Examining how ecological responsibility is framed in relation to governance, morality, political leadership, and regional identity.
- Analyzing the construction of social categories within the campaign, particularly the delineations between “clean” and “polluting” social groups.
- Evaluating whether the campaign uses environmental discourse for substantive ecological advocacy or primarily symbolic political positioning.

The analysis draws on publicly available speeches by Maryam Nawaz, official promotional materials, social media communications, and related news media coverage.

### 1.8 Research Questions

In line with these objectives, the study addresses the following core research questions:

1. What are the key ecolinguistic features—such as metaphors, identity constructions, and evaluative language—that characterize Maryam Nawaz’s *Suthra Punjab* campaign discourse?
2. How does the campaign linguistically construct ecological meanings in the context of governance, morality, and political ideology?

3. To what extent does the campaign promote genuine ecological awareness and sustainable policies versus employing environmental discourse symbolically for political advantage?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Introduction

This literature review provides an interdisciplinary foundation for analyzing political environmental discourse through an ecolinguistic lens, with special attention to the context of Pakistan and South Asia. It traverses key theoretical frameworks in ecolinguistics and critical discourse analysis, surveys seminal and contemporary environmental communication research, and highlights emerging scholarship addressing political ecology and environmental rhetoric in South Asian political settings. The review situates Maryam Nawaz's Suthra Punjab campaign within these scholarly traditions, identifying research gaps that justify the present study.

### 2.2 Foundations of Ecolinguistics: Language, Ecology, and Ideology

Ecolinguistics studies the intricate relationships between language, ecology, and human societies, emphasizing that language plays a crucial role in constructing environmental knowledge, values, and behaviors. Foundational contributions such as Fill and Mühlhäusler's (2001) *The Ecolinguistics Reader* outline how linguistic expressions, narratives, and discourse practices either contribute to ecological degradation or promote sustainability.

Arran Stibbe (2015) advances the field by proposing an analytical framework that examines six interrelated dimensions of ecological discourse: ideologies, framing, metaphors, identity constructions, appraisals, and convictions. This multi-level toolkit allows scholars to dissect how political environmental narratives encode values, shape perceptions, and influence action.

Metaphor theory significantly informs ecolinguistics. Following Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) paradigm-shifting work, metaphors are recognized not merely as rhetorical devices but as fundamental cognitive structures shaping how people understand the world. Environmental metaphors such as "nature as mother", "earth as resource," or "pollution as disease" profoundly affect attitudes and policies toward the environment (Lakoff, 2010; Musolff, 2006). For instance, "nature as mother" often invokes care and protection, while "nature as resource" licenses exploitation.

These metaphoric frames are embedded within ideological systems that reflect societal power dynamics. Critical discourse analysis (CDA), pioneered by Fairclough (1995) and further developed by Reisigl and Wodak (2001), illuminates how language reproduces or challenges dominance by embedding particular worldviews and silencing alternatives. Hajer (1995) expands this to environmental discourse by conceptualizing "discourse coalitions" – groups that propagate shared storylines influencing policy and public understanding.

Collectively, ecolinguistics and CDA provide powerful methodologies to interrogate political environmental discourse, identifying how language mediates ecological knowledge and power relations.

### 2.3 Political Environmental Discourse and Communication: The Global and Local Dimensions

The study of environmental discourse in political communication gained prominence following the global awakening to climate change and sustainability challenges (Dryzek, 2013). Different ideological narratives compete to frame environmental issues variously as technical problems, security threats, development opportunities, or ethical imperatives.

Dryzek's (2013) typology includes:

Sustainable Development Discourse: Focuses on balancing economic growth with environmental protection.

Ecological Modernization: Presents environmental protection as compatible with industrial innovation and market solutions.

Survivalist Discourse: Emphasizes urgent ecological crisis requiring radical societal change.

Green Radicalism: Calls for fundamental socio-political transformation to restore ecological balance.

Political actors strategically adopt or reject these discourses according to their goals and publics. Carter (2007) critically explores how environmental rhetoric in developing countries often remains symbolic, serving to align governments with global environmental trends to secure international legitimacy while failing to implement substantial reforms. Benson and Kirsch (2010) frame such rhetoric as “environmental symbolic capital” — a form of political currency rather than practical commitment.

Environmental metaphors and framing devices are instrumental in these political communications (Guthman, 2014; Heikkinen & Pantti, 2020). Terms like “clean,” “green,” “pollution,” or “battle against climate change” are employed to resonate emotionally and morally with constituents, constructing political identities and legitimating governance claims (Berazneva & Lee, 2019).

#### **2.4 Discourse, Identity, and Ideology: Social Construction in Environmental Politics**

Within political ecology and discourse scholarship, identity construction is a central mechanism through which environmental problems and solutions are framed and contested (Bang & Døør, 2007). Language is used to forge conceptions of “responsible citizens,” “environmental stewards,” and conversely, “polluters,” “ignorant masses,” or “corrupt elites.” These identities galvanize support, justify sanctions, or marginalize dissent.

Critical discourse studies highlight that the articulation of such identities is inherently ideological and power-laden (Fairclough, 1995; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). Ideologies naturalize certain interpretations of nature and social relations, often concealing systemic inequalities or deflecting responsibility (Clarke, 2015). Discursive practices in political campaigns thus reinforce or challenge hegemonies around environmental stewardship and governance.

#### **2.5 Ecolinguistics and Political Environmental Discourse in South Asia**

Though the environmental crises in South Asia are severe and well documented (IPCC, 2022), ecolinguistic studies specifically focusing on political environmental discourse in the region are limited.

Chakraborty and Mukherjee (2018) analyze environmental activism discourse in India, revealing how local cultural metaphors and spirituality shape ecological narratives distinct from Western environmentalism. Similarly, Mukherjee and Chakraborty (2020) assess ecological framing in Bengali media, highlighting localized idioms and distinct narrative structures.

In Pakistan, Yasmin Khan and Mustafa (2023) provide an important ecolinguistic analysis of climate change news coverage, identifying metaphors like “climate tsunami” and “environmental battle” that heighten perceived urgency while shaping national imaginations of ecological risk. They argue, however, that political environmental campaign rhetoric in Pakistan remains understudied.

Sadiq, Anees, and Kanwal (2024) explore environmental discourse in contemporary Pakistani literature, revealing how environmental concerns permeate cultural narratives, implicating wider societal perceptions.

Rehman and Ali (2025) examine environmental discourse in Pakistani electoral politics. They note an increasing trend among political parties to adopt “green branding” strategies—incorporating slogans and promises about cleanliness, tree planting, and plastic bans—but critique the largely symbolic rather than substantive nature of these commitments.

These nascent studies point to a significant research gap on political environmental discourse in Pakistan and the broader South Asian context, underscoring the urgency of detailed ecolinguistic analyses like the present study.

## **2.6 Gender and Environmental Rhetoric in Political Discourse**

Gender intersects strategically with environmental political rhetoric. Stibbe (2024) argues that female political leaders often leverage ecological metaphors connected with maternal care and nurturing, engendering a distinct rhetoric of stewardship that resonates emotionally and culturally. In South Asia, this interplay is particularly salient given entrenched patriarchal norms. Female politicians frame environmental campaigns around caring for home, health, and future generations, as shown in case studies from the region (Chowdhury, 2020; Razak, 2019). This gendered narrative affords women leaders a discursive advantage but also constrains rhetoric within traditional gender norms.

Maryam Nawaz’s environmental discourse fits this mold, presenting Suthra Punjab as a maternal, protective project for the province’s wellbeing, thus entrenching gendered dimensions of political ecology.

## **2.7 Cleanliness as Moral and Political Metaphor**

The metaphor of cleanliness is widespread and potent in political and environmental discourse globally and particularly in South Asia (Johnston, 2007; Gjerdingen et al., 2017). Cleanliness is framed not merely as physical hygiene but as a symbol of virtue, morality, social order, and political reform (Huggins & Thompson, 2008).

Where environmental cleanliness is linked to religious and cultural notions of purity—as often in South Asian Muslim societies—its symbolic power magnifies (Mahmood, 2011). Campaign slogans invoking “cleanliness” tap into longstanding moral and communal values, making environmental campaigns resonate widely.

The symbolism of cleanliness reflects both social aspirations for dignity and political claims to effective, moral governance.

## **2.8 Strategies in Environmental Communication and Public Engagement**

Environmental campaigns strive to foster public engagement by leveraging relatable social identities and collective responsibility (Nisbet, 2009; Moser, 2010). Research shows successful communication balances emotional resonance with factual transparency to build trust and sustained behavior change (Corner et al., 2015).

In political contexts, messages that connect environmental action to regional pride, patriotism, and civic duty tend to mobilize constituencies effectively. However, communicators must be wary of symbolic emptying, where rhetoric outpaces or obscures actual policy.

## **2.9 Political Ecology: Discursive Power and Environmental Justice**

Political ecology highlights that control over environmental knowledge and narratives is intertwined with power relations (Robbins, 2012; Watts, 2000). Environmental discourse in political campaigns manages perceptions of crises, distributes blame, and establishes priorities, often reproducing structural inequalities.

Analyzing such discourse reveals who benefits rhetorically and materially from environmental framing, and who remains marginalized or silenced.



## 2.10 Media, Digital Platforms, and Environmental Political Discourse

The proliferation of digital media has transformed environmental political communication (Graham, 2017). Politicians utilize social media to directly engage audiences, frame ecological narratives, and foster participatory dialogues.

At the same time, challenges like “clicktivism” limit the depth of engagement (Boulianne, 2015). Pakistani environmental campaigns, including *Suthra Punjab*, use social media to engage urban youth and propagate narratives, blending traditional appeal with digital activism (Khan et al., 2024).

## 2.11 Summary and Gaps

This literature review establishes the centrality of language in constructing environmental ideology, identities, and political legitimacy. It underscores the importance of metaphor, framing, and discourse power in shaping ecological politics.

The review highlights that while international scholarship is rich, South Asian and specifically Pakistani political environmental discourse is under-researched from an ecolinguistic perspective. By focusing on Maryam Nawaz’s *Suthra Punjab* campaign, the present study addresses this critical gap, adding empirical depth and regional specificity to environmental discourse studies.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1 Research Paradigm and Design

This study employs a **qualitative research paradigm**, specifically a **discourse analysis approach** informed by the interdisciplinary field of **ecolinguistics**. The qualitative paradigm is appropriate due to the research’s emphasis on interpreting language use, meanings, and the socio-political contexts shaping and shaped by linguistic practices, rather than quantifying variables or measuring effect sizes.

Discourse analysis enables the detailed examination of texts and spoken communications to uncover how language constructs social and ecological realities (Fairclough, 1995). Ecolinguistics adds a critical dimension by focusing on the ecological meanings, ideologies, and implications embedded in language, emphasizing environment-human relations in discourse (Stibbe, 2015). Applying this combined lens facilitates an in-depth exploration of the political environmental narratives enacted in Maryam Nawaz’s *Suthra Punjab* campaign materials.

The research adopts an **interpretivist epistemology**, seeking to understand the complex meanings and ideologies embedded within the campaign’s discourse from a contextual, nuanced perspective. It avoids positivistic generalizations and instead focuses on detailed, reflexive interpretation.

### 3.2 Data Sources and Sampling

The study analyzes a rich corpus of data centered on the *Suthra Punjab* campaign launched by Maryam Nawaz and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) between 2023 and mid-2025. The data sources comprise:

1. **Speeches:** Official transcripts and recordings of public speeches, interviews, and addresses by Maryam Nawaz and senior PML-N officials focusing on the *Suthra Punjab* campaign themes.
2. **Promotional Materials:** Printed and digital campaign banners, slogans, posters, pamphlets, and official communications disseminated in Punjab province, emphasizing cleanliness, tree plantation, plastic ban, and civic responsibility.
3. **Social Media Posts and Multimedia:** Posts, tweets, videos, and infographics published through verified official accounts of Maryam Nawaz, PML-N, and affiliated government bodies on platforms including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube.

4. **News Articles and Media Reports:** Coverage by major Pakistani news outlets and electronic media analyzing or reporting on *Suthra Punjab* initiatives, events, and public reception.

**Sampling Strategy:** Given the rapport and political sensitivity involved, the study relies exclusively on **publicly available materials**, using purposive sampling to select texts explicitly relating to the *Suthra Punjab* campaign and environmental themes. The sampling is guided by temporal scope (2023-mid 2025) to capture campaign evolution and thematic consistency.

This multi-modal corpus provides a triangulated perspective, encompassing spoken, written, and visual political ecological discourse across multiple media, ensuring data richness and analytic depth.

### 3.3 Data Collection Procedure

The data collection involved systematic online archival research and manual compilation over several months. Key steps included:

- **Speech Transcripts:** Official government and party websites, political event recordings on YouTube, and press conference transcripts were downloaded or transcribed verbatim from videos where official transcripts were unavailable.
- **Campaign Materials:** Banners and posters were collected from official social media pages and government digital archives. High-resolution images were sourced to capture slogan and visual design elements relevant to discourse analysis.
- **Social Media Content:** Using official verified accounts, all posts containing campaign-specific hashtags (e.g., #SuthraPunjab, #CleanPunjab) or directly referencing campaign activities were retrieved using manual searches and content scraping tools, ensuring completeness over the study period.
- **News Media:** Major national and regional newspapers and TV channels' websites were systematically searched for articles with keywords "Suthra Punjab," "Maryam Nawaz environment," and related terms. Digital news aggregators were consulted for supplementary coverage.

All textual data were transcribed, translated where necessary (Urdu to English), and stored in a coded, organized digital repository for analysis.

### 3.4 Data Preparation and Management

To ensure accuracy and analytic rigour, the following data preparation measures were adopted:

- **Verbatim Transcription:** Speech audio-visual materials were transcribed word-for-word, preserving repetitions, pauses, and emotive intonations where possible, to capture nuances of rhetorical performance.
- **Translation and Cultural Contextualization:** Urdu texts were translated into English by the researcher, a native Urdu speaker with linguistic expertise, taking care to preserve idiomatic expressions, culturally salient metaphors, and socially charged terms crucial for ecolinguistic interpretation.
- **Data Organization:** Each dataset was tagged with metadata (source type, date, speaker, platform, language) and indexed to facilitate cross-comparisons and thematic coding.
- **Software Management:** The full corpus was imported into qualitative data analysis software, NVivo 14, allowing systematic coding, thematic querying, and relationship mapping.

### 3.5 Analytical Framework and Procedures

The analysis employs **Arran Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic framework**, supplemented by critical discourse analysis principles (Fairclough, 1995; Hajer, 1995). This framework's key analytic categories guided thematic coding and interpretation:

- **Ideologies:** Examination of the underlying value systems and belief structures encoded in campaign discourse (e.g., about stewardship, governance, regional pride).
- **Framing:** Analysis of how environmental issues are highlighted, emphasized, or obscured; what narratives or problem definitions prevail.
- **Metaphors:** Identification of metaphorical mappings (e.g., cleanliness as purity, region as motherland) and their cognitive and emotive functions.
- **Identities:** Exploration of the construction of social actors and groups, including categories like "clean citizens" and "polluters," and how these shape collective belonging.
- **Appraisals:** Assessment of evaluative language expressing positive or negative judgments about persons, behaviors, or events.
- **Convictions:** Analysis of claims presented as truths or moral imperatives that call for public engagement or political support.
- **Interdiscursivity:** Consideration of how environmental discourse interacts with political, religious, ethical, and regional discourses.

#### Coding Process

The analysis was carried out in three iterative phases:

1. **Open Coding:** Initial examination of texts identified salient themes, recurring metaphors, ideological expressions, and evaluative language. Passages were coded inductively without pre-set categories, allowing novel patterns to emerge.
2. **Axial Coding:** Codes were clustered under Stibbe's analytic categories. For example, phrases expressing environmental responsibility were grouped under "ideologies," and recurring metaphor clusters were collated.
3. **Selective/Thematic Coding:** Synthesizing across categories, dominant narratives and competing ideologies were formulated, supported by representative textual excerpts.

Coding decisions were continually cross-validated by returning to the original context and comparing findings across text types and sources to ensure triangulation and reliability.

### 3.6 Trustworthiness and Validity

The study's rigor was established through multiple strategies:

- **Triangulation:** By analyzing diverse text forms and multiple platforms, the study mitigated source bias and enriched interpretive validity.
- **Detailed Documentation:** All coding steps, thematic memos, and analytic decisions were recorded thoroughly to maintain transparency and auditability.
- **Reflexivity:** The researcher maintained a reflective journal to monitor and critically assess personal biases and assumptions, ensuring balanced interpretation.
- **Peer Debriefing:** Select analytic interpretations were discussed with colleagues versed in ecolinguistics and Pakistani politics for critical feedback.
- **Thick Description:** Findings are supported with rich, contextualized textual evidence to facilitate transferability and analytical depth.

### 3.7 Ethical Considerations

Given the study's reliance on publicly accessible materials, it does not involve human subjects research requiring institutional ethical review. Nevertheless, ethical academic practice was strictly observed by:

- Respectfully representing original speakers and avoiding misquotation.
- Citing all sources fully and attributing official statements appropriately.
- Maintaining sensitivity to the political and cultural context, avoiding inflammatory interpretations.

### 3.8 Limitations of the Methodology

The methodological decisions entail certain constraints:

- **Data Scope:** Limited to publicly available discourse, the study may not capture internal, unpublicized campaign deliberations or contradictions.
- **Temporal Coverage:** While comprehensive for 2023-mid 2025, emergent or retrospective discourses outside this window are excluded.
- **Language Translation:** Despite careful efforts, translation may not fully convey some cultural nuances embedded in Urdu idioms and metaphors.
- **Interpretive Nature:** Qualitative discourse analysis involves subjective interpretation; while mitigated through reflexivity and triangulation, inherent subjectivities remain.
- **Generalizability:** Findings are contextually bound to the *Suthra Punjab* campaign and Pakistan's political and cultural milieu, and thus may not universally generalize.

### 3.9 Summary

This methodology employs a rigorous, qualitative ecolinguistic discourse analysis of a rich corpus drawn from multiple official and media sources related to the *Suthra Punjab* campaign. Guided by Stibbe's comprehensive analytical framework and complemented by critical discourse perspectives, it facilitates a multilayered exploration of environmental political rhetoric in Pakistan's premier province. The methodology balances depth of interpretation with methodological transparency and reflexivity, providing a robust foundation for the ensuing findings and discussion.

## 4. Findings

This section presents the empirical findings generated from the qualitative ecolinguistic discourse analysis of Maryam Nawaz's *Suthra Punjab* campaign. Data sources included campaign speeches, promotional materials, social media posts, and related media coverage collected between 2023 and mid-2025. The analysis applies Arran Stibbe's (2015) ecolinguistic categories of ideologies, metaphors, framing, identities, appraisals, and convictions to uncover how language constructs ecological and political meanings in this campaign.

### 4.1 Dominant Ecological Metaphors in the Campaign

One of the most salient findings is the pervasive use of **cleanliness (Urdu: *suthrai*)** as a core metaphor in the campaign. "Cleanliness" transcends its literal meaning of physical sanitation and becomes a rich symbol for moral virtue, political reform, civic pride, and regional revival.

- The slogan "**Maryam Nawaz ka Punjab, Suthra Punjab**" encapsulates this metaphorical framing, repeated ubiquitously across speeches, banners, and social media content.
- Cleanliness is linked with **purity, honor, and responsibility**, painting environment care as a reflection of individual and collective ethics.
- Maryam Nawaz often states:



*“Clean streets are the face of a clean Punjab, and a clean Punjab represents moral leadership and political renewal.”*

Other metaphors observed include:

- **Punjab as a ‘motherland’** needing care and nurture, positioning environmental restoration as filial duty. This metaphor leverages culturally resonant familial imagery to deepen emotional appeal.
- The campaign frames waste and pollution as **“disease” or “blight”** afflicting society, requiring collective cleansing efforts.
- Green spaces and tree plantation are metaphorically presented as **“lungs of the province”**, emphasizing their vital role for public health and wellbeing.

These metaphors function cognitively to simplify complex ecological challenges into clear, emotionally compelling narratives that connect individual behavior, political leadership, and regional pride.

#### 4.2 Identity Construction: ‘Clean Citizens’ Versus ‘Polluters’

Throughout the campaign discourse, a clear dichotomous social identity is constructed, categorizing actors into morally and actively engaged **“clean citizens” (saaf sutray shehri)** and the negligent or oppositional **“polluters” (gandagi failanay walay, ghafil)**.

- **Clean Citizens:** Youth, women, and urban residents are frequently called upon as responsible agents who must participate in waste segregation, tree plantation, and adherence to plastic bans. Maryam Nawaz’s address to the *“Zinda Dilan Lahore”* underscores this mobilization of the youth as vibrant custodians of Punjab’s environment.
- **Polluters and Negligent:** Those who litter, burn waste, or ignore plastic bans are depicted as socially irresponsible and morally lacking. The campaign rhetoric frames such actors as threats to public health, civic pride, and political progress. The blame discourse often carries subtle political undertones, implicitly contrasting the ruling party’s commitment with opposition or inactive citizens.

This identity construction is not only a call for environmental behavior change but also serves to delineate political loyalty and communal belonging, reinforcing the campaign’s broader narrative of governance improvement tied to ecological cleanliness.

#### 4.3 Framing of Ecology as Governance and Regional Pride

The campaign’s discourse consistently frames ecological responsibility as a measure of **governance quality** and political legitimacy.

- Maryam Nawaz declares that provincial leadership committed to cleanliness and green initiatives exemplifies **effective, moral governance**.
- Public actions such as deploying thousands of waste workers, banning single-use plastics, and conducting large-scale tree plantation are framed as proof of administrative competence.
- Environmental success is equated to Punjab’s **regional pride and superiority**, with messages emphasizing Punjab as the *“envy of other provinces”* once it achieves cleanliness and ecological sustainability.
- This framing appeals to affective identity and competitiveness, fostering collective motivation anchored in regional distinctiveness.

Additionally, there is a **religious and cultural frame** embedded in discourse, where cleanliness is associated with spiritual and moral imperatives. Statements like:

*“Cleanliness is the message of Islam; maintaining a clean Punjab is our religious and social duty.”*

serve to deepen emotional and normative resonance, linking environmental behavior to faith and community values, which is particularly significant in the Pakistani socio-cultural context.

#### 4.4 Appraisals of Actors and Actions in the Campaign

Positive and negative appraisals are systematically employed in campaign discourse to valorize desired behaviors and delegitimize others.

- Maryam Nawaz and her party receive consistent **positive appraisal**, portrayed as visionary, committed, and effective environmental leaders. Official statements, media reportage, and social media posts affirm their proactive initiatives, referencing efforts such as the *CM Plant for Pakistan* project and enforcement of plastic bans.
- The thousands of sanitation workers employed by the government are lauded as **environmental heroes** who embody dedication and civic responsibility.
- Conversely, political opponents and neglectful citizens are framed negatively, sometimes by omission but frequently through language that suggests apathy or ignorance.
- This evaluative framing reinforces the campaign’s ideological narrative, legitimizing the ruling party’s authority while constructing a moral boundary between supporters and detractors.

#### 4.5 Convictions and Moral Imperatives

The campaign discourse presents several key **convictions** — claims or truths — embedded as moral and political imperatives designed to guide public behavior and political allegiance:

- **Cleanliness equals progress:** Without physical and moral purity in governance and civic spaces, no real development is possible.
- **Environmental neglect threatens health and sovereignty:** Pollution and waste accumulation are not just ecological issues but national and human security concerns.
- **Youth and women are pillars of environmental transformation:** Engaging these groups is essential for sustainable change.
- **Political commitment is the linchpin of success:** Only strong, responsible leadership can realize ecological goals.

These convictions are presented as self-evident truths within speeches and media, shaping voter perceptions and motivating action through repeated affirmation.

#### 4.6 Interdiscursive Elements and Political Branding

The environmental discourse of *Suthra Punjab* intersects with other discourses:

- Political governance narratives emphasizing **transparency, responsibility, and reform** are entwined with ecological rhetoric.
- Nationalistic and regional pride discourses emphasize Punjab’s distinctiveness and ideal status through ecological cleanliness.
- Cultural and religious discourse underscores spiritual dimensions of environmental stewardship, critical for appeal in religiously grounded public sentiment.

This interdiscursivity amplifies the campaign’s political branding. Maryam Nawaz’s personal involvement is celebrated as hands-on and sincere, reinforcing credibility and emotional connection. The slogan **“Maryam Nawaz ka Punjab, Suthra Punjab”** functions as a powerful linguistic brand linking identity, politics, and ecology.

### Summary:

The *Suthra Punjab* campaign's discourse intricately weaves metaphor, identity construction, framing, evaluative appraisals, and convictions to create a compelling political-ecological narrative. Cleanliness operates as a key metaphor embodying virtue, governance legitimacy, and regional pride. The identity binaries of "clean citizens" and "polluters" mobilize inclusion and exclusion, articulating civic duty linked to political loyalty. Ecology is framed both as governance's barometer and a religious-cultural imperative, supported by positive appraisals of leadership and moral claims. This strategic linguistics supports political branding while advancing environmental agendas.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Introduction

This discussion elaborates on the findings from the qualitative ecolinguistic analysis of the *Suthra Punjab* campaign, integrating them with theoretical insights from ecolinguistics, critical discourse analysis (CDA), political communication, and South Asian studies. The campaign's use of language is assessed regarding how it constructs ecological meanings, political legitimacy, identity, and moral responsibilities within Punjab's socio-political context. Special attention is paid to the discursive strategies—metaphor, framing, appraisal, and identity constructions—that simultaneously advance environmental narratives and political branding.

By critically reflecting on how these discourses operate, this section evaluates the campaign's contribution to environmental awareness and political practice, highlights tensions between rhetoric and substantive policy, and situates the campaign within broader regional and global political-environmental communication trends.

### 5.2 Cleanliness as a Central Ecological-Political Metaphor

The campaign's preeminent metaphor — *suthrai* or "cleanliness" — emerged as a powerful and multifaceted discursive tool that transcended mere sanitation. This metaphor operated simultaneously as:

- **Physical sanitation** to address urban waste and pollution,
- **Moral virtue** to signal ethical governance and civic responsibility, and
- **Political reform** to symbolize systemic renewal and anti-corruption efforts.

These dimensions align strongly with Stibbe's (2015) observation that effective ecological metaphors enrich environmental discourse with layered meanings, enabling it to connect embodied experiences of place to abstract ideologies and mobilizing imaginaries.

In Punjab's cultural context, cleanliness holds significant religious and social connotations tied to Islamic practices of purity and social honor (Mahmood, 2011; Narsiah, 2017). The campaign's invocation of these culturally salient meanings intensified emotional resonance, enabling *Suthra Punjab* to function as a "moral story" about Punjab's past, present, and hopeful future.

Linguistically, the slogan "Maryam Nawaz ka Punjab, Suthra Punjab" condensed this metaphor into a catchy, repetitive mantra, serving as a linguistic anchor cementing personal political legitimacy with collective environmental aspiration. This aligns with Lakoff's (2010) framing theory, where metaphorical language becomes conceptual scaffolding shaping both cognition and affect within political rhetoric.

Importantly, cleanliness as metaphor also embodied *purification* narratives common in political campaigns worldwide, where environmental hygiene signals removal of political and social corruptions (Johnston, 2007; Huggins & Thompson, 2008). Thus, the campaign effectively

integrated ecological and political purity narratives into a cohesive ideological frame supporting leadership claims.

### 5.3 Identity Construction: Inclusion, Exclusion, and Political Mobilization

The discursive binary between “*clean citizens*” and “*polluters*” in campaign texts reflects intentional social boundary making, with significant implications for mobilization and political legitimacy.

By valorizing “clean citizens” — particularly youth, women, and civic actors — the campaign constructed an inclusive ecological collectivity rooted in shared responsibility and pride. This collective identity was targeted both affectively and normatively, exhorting audiences to adopt behaviors aligning with campaign goals. The address to the *Zinda Dilan Lahore* (“Lively Citizens of Lahore”) exemplifies such youth-specific inclusion, seeking to frame ecological activism as an expression of vitality and modern civic virtue.

Conversely, “polluters” were linguistically marginalized, depicted as negligent, irresponsible, or even politically oppositional. The strategic use of negative appraisals established moral distance and justified political control measures. This binary identity construction corresponds with Bang and Døør’s (2007) insight about environmental discourse as a site of social contestation where “us vs. them” distinctions regulate collective action and ideological compliance.

These identity constructions serve multiple political functions:

1. **Mobilizing base support:** By invoking inclusion in a “clean” collective, the campaign fosters ownership and motivation among supporters.
2. **Marginalizing opposition:** Defining others as polluters delegitimizes criticism and consolidates political loyalty.
3. **Norm-setting:** The campaign articulates behavioral expectations, effectively policing civic conduct through moral discourse.

Such functions demonstrate the classic power of discourse theorized by Fairclough (1995) — to naturalize hegemonic ideologies and organize social relations.

Additionally, gender emerged as an important intersectional dimension in identity work. Women were invoked as symbolic caretakers and moral agents in charge of household and community cleanliness. This aligns with Stibbe’s (2024) and Chowdhury’s (2020) observations that female political leaders in South Asia often employ environmental rhetoric linked to nurturing roles, which enhances legitimacy but simultaneously reinscribes gender norms.

Regional identity was also salient. The campaign framed a “clean Punjab” as a source of regional pride and distinguishable excellence within Pakistan’s multi-provincial federation, deploying affective ties to place to strengthen political cohesion. This regionalization resonates with political ecology insights about place-based environmental identities as pivotal in local and electoral politics (Robbins, 2012).

### 5.4 Framing Environmental Responsibility as Governance and Moral Leadership

The *Suthra Punjab* campaign’s framing of environmental issues as direct reflections of governance quality and political morality is a powerful discursive strategy that combats traditional marginalization of environmental themes in Pakistani politics.

By positioning cleanliness as a barometer for effective, ethical leadership, the campaign constructs environmental stewardship as inseparable from broader government legitimacy. This framing exploits public frustrations with corruption and inefficiency, offering tangible evidence of administrative commitment through visible actions (e.g., waste worker deployment, plastic bans, tree plantation).



Hajer (1995) conceptualizes such environmental political framing as a process of aligning public problems with policy solutions and linked identities — *Suthra Punjab* exemplifies this by aligning ecological outcomes with reformist leadership identities.

Framing ecological success as a mark of **regional superiority** further politicizes the environment, appealing simultaneously to affective tribal/regional pride and competitive progress narratives. This localizes environmental discourse within the particular social and political geography of Punjab, enhancing resonance.

The campaign's integration of **religious and cultural framing** is equally significant. By connecting cleanliness to Islamic moral prescriptions of purity, the campaign discursively sanctifies environmental behavior as a religious imperative, thus embedding environmentalism within dominant normative structures. This use of faith-based framing parallels Mahmood's (2011) and Narsiah's (2017) findings about how religion mediates environmental ethics in South Asia.

### 5.5 Appraisals and Convictions: Building Political Legitimacy and Moral Imperatives

Appraisals of actors and behaviors informed the campaign's moral narrative. Positive appraisal of Maryam Nawaz and PML-N leadership emphasized visionary commitment and hands-on governance. By contrast, opponents and environmental non-compliers were implicitly and explicitly negatively appraised.

This polarized appraisal serves to strengthen the ruling party's political brand, linking ecological success with political success. It functioning as a discursive device to reinforce trustworthiness and credibility in a challenging democratic context.

Convictions expressed in campaign discourse — such as “cleanliness equals progress” and “environmental neglect undermines sovereignty” — operated as moral absolutes guiding civic expectations and behavior. These repeated affirmations function as ideologically loaded “truths” that help shape voter attitudes toward both environment and governance (Stibbe, 2015).

The employment of such appraisals and convictions aligns with CDA perspectives (Fairclough, 1995) that language sustains and challenges social power by naturalizing ideological positions embedded in political rhetoric.

### 5.6 Symbolic Versus Substantive Environmental Action: Ambiguities and Tensions

The campaign intriguingly straddles a boundary where symbolic environmental rhetoric intermeshes with evident material actions:

- Visible initiatives like tree planting, deployment of sanitation workers, and plastic ban enforcement clearly indicate systemic engagement beyond mere words.
- Publicized environmental monitoring demonstrates a concern for institutionalizing ecological oversight.

Yet, critical media and civil society voices raise doubts about the depth and sustainability of such efforts. Concerns include insufficient waste disposal infrastructure, policy discontinuities, and enforcement gaps—reflecting a persistent challenge in translating rhetoric into durable systemic reform (Carter, 2007; Rehman & Ali, 2025).

This tension between symbolic performance and substantive policy is well noted in environmental communication literature, cautioning that rhetoric alone cannot substitute for institutional transformation (Corner et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, even symbolic discourse plays a vital role by **normalizing environmental issues in political debate**, stimulating public awareness, and potentially creating pressure for

accountability. The discursive effect of *Suthra Punjab* thus participates both in immediate political branding and longer-term cultural shifts toward ecological consciousness.

### 5.7 Political Branding and Ecolinguistic Orchestration

The campaign leverages ecolinguistic devices strategically to craft a distinctive political brand uniting environmental rhetoric with personal leadership. The repeated slogan “Maryam Nawaz ka Punjab, Suthra Punjab” illustrates this brand-building through:

- **Linguistic repetition** strengthening message memorability and emotional connection.
- **Metaphor intertwining environment and leadership** constructing identity fusion.
- **Symbolic performances** such as publicized cleanup drives reflect personal commitment, enhancing authenticity.

This orchestration reflects broader global trends where political figures use environment-related rhetoric for image management, electoral mobilization, and governance legitimacy (Guthman, 2014).

In the Pakistani context, where political competition is intense and public trust fragile, such ecolinguistic strategies are vital. They engage youth and urban middle-class voters increasingly concerned with environmental quality, while also appealing to traditional cultural values and regional pride.

### 5.8 Comparative and Theoretical Reflections

Situating the findings within comparative perspective reveals parallels and divergences:

- Similar campaigns worldwide (e.g., India’s “Swachh Bharat” or “Clean India” campaign) also utilize cleanliness metaphors linked to moral renewal (Johnston, 2007). However, *Suthra Punjab*’s explicit entanglement with regional pride and religious framing is distinctively South Asian.
- The binary identity construction resonates with van Dijk’s (1998) theory on ideological discourse where positive self-presentation (“us”) opposes negative other-presentation (“them”), a common conflictual strategy in political rhetoric.
- The religious framing echoes broader South Asian environmental discourses that integrate spirituality with ecology, complicating secular governance and environmental policy models (Chakraborty & Mukherjee, 2018).
- The campaign’s engagement with youth mirrors Nisbet’s (2009) emphasis on generational identity as crucial for environmental mobilization.

Overall, the campaign illustrates Stibbe’s (2015) call for ecolinguistics to attend to cultural and political specificity in analyzing environmental discourse, emphasizing language’s role as habitat-shaping, not merely descriptive.

### 5.9 Limitations and Future Directions

While the campaign’s discourse is rich and influential, questions remain about long-term impacts on environmental policy and practice. Continued monitoring and empirical research linking discourse with environmental outcomes are needed.

Methodologically, future studies could include interviews with campaign strategists and affected citizens to triangulate discourse with reception.

Comparative studies across Pakistan’s provinces or with South Asian campaigns would further elucidate regional particularities and broader trends.

## 6. Conclusion

This study has critically examined the ecolinguistic dimensions of Maryam Nawaz's *Suthra Punjab* campaign, revealing how environmental discourse in Pakistani electoral politics operates as a multifaceted rhetorical and ideological tool. By applying Arran Stubbe's ecolinguistic framework, the research unpacked how dominant metaphors, identity constructions, framing strategies, appraisals, and convictions coalesce to craft a compelling political-environmental narrative that resonates culturally, morally, and politically.

The metaphor of cleanliness (*suthrai*) emerged as the campaign's discursive linchpin, transcending its literal sense to symbolize moral virtue, governance reform, and a collective civic identity. This metaphor tapped into culturally entrenched ideals of purity and honor, thereby framing ecological stewardship not only as an environmental necessity but also as an expression of political legitimacy and regional pride. The slogan "Maryam Nawaz ka Punjab, Suthra Punjab" effectively fused personal political branding with public ecological aspirations, activating emotional and cognitive responses among diverse constituencies.

Moreover, the campaign's discourse constructed clear social binaries — valorizing "clean citizens" actively engaged in environmental care, while stigmatizing "polluters" as negligent others. Such identity work served dual purposes: mobilizing civic responsibility and forging political in-group solidarity. Gender and regional identities were also intricately interwoven, with environmental responsibility linked to maternal care narratives and provincial distinctiveness, showing how ecological narratives are embedded in broader socio-political identities.

Framing ecological responsibility as an indicator of good governance and moral leadership marked a significant rhetorical shift in Pakistani politics, where environmental issues have traditionally been marginalized. By tying environmental success to administrative competence, regional pride, and religious morality, the campaign created a legitimate and emotive governance narrative that appealed to diverse social groups, particularly urban youth and women.

However, while the campaign incorporated tangible actions—such as mass tree plantations, plastic bans, and waste worker deployment—analysis revealed an ongoing tension between symbolic environmental rhetoric and substantive policy implementation. Media and civil society critiques about sustainability, enforcement, and infrastructure gaps underscore the challenges in translating discourse into durable ecological outcomes. Nonetheless, symbolic discourse plays an important role in normalizing environmental concerns within political agendas and stimulating public ecological consciousness.

The study contributes to ecolinguistics by extending its theoretical framework to an under-explored South Asian political context, illuminating how language works simultaneously as a tool for environmental meaning-making, political branding, identity construction, and ideological negotiation. It enriches political communication scholarship on developing democracies by documenting how environmental discourses mediate governance narratives and voter engagement. Practically, these insights can inform political actors and civil society in designing more authentic, culturally resonant environmental campaigns that balance symbolic mobilization with transparent, sustained ecological action. Future research should investigate the reception of these discourses among diverse publics and longitudinally assess the ecological impacts of campaign commitments. In sum, Maryam Nawaz's *Suthra Punjab* campaign exemplifies the potent role of language in crafting political environmental futures. It highlights the promise and limitations of environmental discourse in shaping governance, identity, and ecological sustainability in complex emergent

democracies like Pakistan. Such research underscores the essential need to critically analyze and engage with political environmental narratives to foster meaningful ecological transformation.

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