

DIACHRONIC SEMANTIC PROSODY OF IDEOLOGICAL KEYWORDS IN PAKISTANI POLITICAL DISCOURSE: A CORPUS-BASED CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF IMRAN KHAN'S SPEECHES (2011–2023)

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Abstract

The present study investigates the diachronic semantic prosody of the ideological keywords in Pakistani political discourse by critically analyzing the speeches of Imran Khan from 2011 to 2023 using a corpus-based approach. This study uses the three-part Critical Discourse Analysis framework and corpus linguistics methods to analyze terms such as “change”, “Naya Pakistan”, “justice”, “corruption” and “democracy” in different political contexts. The results show that there are substantial changes in semantic prosody that reflect Khan's political trajectory from opposition leader to prime minister and beyond. The study helps to understand the linguistic construction and discursive maintenance of political ideologies by the strategic use of keywords that have different semantic associations. This diachronic approach provides a better understanding of how language, beliefs, and power influence each other.

Keywords: *Semantic Prosody, Critical Discourse Analysis, Pakistani Political Discourse, Imran Khan, Diachronic Analysis, Ideological Keywords, Corpus Linguistics*

1. Introduction

Ideologies are formed, negotiated and contested in language, one of the primary spaces for political discourse. In the Pakistani context, political speeches are important for spreading ideas and influencing public opinion. The political career of Imran Khan, from a cricket star to a prime minister (2018–2022), provides a useful example for examining how important political terms have changed over time in discourse. The political journey of Khan from founding Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in 1996 to his election as prime minister in 2018 and subsequent ouster in 2022 is a fascinating period in Pakistani politics, characterized by evolving power dynamics and ideologies. The consistent meaning that a form evokes when it is used with its collocates is called semantic prosody, as defined by Sinclair (1991) and elaborated by Louw (1993). The semantic prosody of ideological keywords in political discourse is the ideological position and communicative strategy. By analyzing the semantic prosody diachronically, the connotative meanings of these keywords can be traced and their changes can be explained in the light of the political context, the audience's expectations and the strategic goals. This study fills a major lacuna in the literature on Pakistani political discourse. Although some studies have investigated Khan's speeches from different CDA perspectives (Hassan et al., 2023; Nusrat et al., 2020; Khalil et al., 2017; Khan, 2021), no previous study used an organized method to examine how the meanings of key political words changed over time in different stages of Khan's political career. This study aims to address this gap by examining his speeches from 2011 to 2023, covering his opposition, election campaigns, prime ministership, and post-removal speeches.

1.1 Background of the Study

In Pakistan, political discourse is a space that is uniquely dynamic, where language, ideology and power are negotiated through public speech on an ongoing basis. Political speech are among the most powerful forms of public communication, as it creates and reinforces beliefs, opinions, and ideologies

among mass audiences, as Van Dijk (1997) states. Political speeches are the main means by which leaders build, deliver and maintain their ideological stances in the Pakistani context. Imran Khan's political journey, starting with the creation of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in 1996 to his time as Prime Minister (2018-2022) and beyond, offers a very rich discursive corpus for the study of how political language has changed in the context of changing power dynamics and contextual needs. In the past decade, the academic study of Imran Khan's political speech has grown considerably and a body of CDA informed research has developed that examines his language from different theoretical and methodological perspectives. Khan's central slogans of "Tabdeeli" (bringing change) and "Naya Pakistan" (New Pakistan) were found to be effective persuasive tools by Khalil et al. (2017) in their analysis of his election speech of 2013, where the word "change" was used twelve times in a single speech. Their study showed that Khan used presenting oneself positively and opponents negatively as two important discursive methods to express an ideological opposition between a corrupt status quo and a promised transformation. This ideological split, so much a part of Khan's lexicon, was the basis of his political messaging during his opposition days. Nusrat et al. (2020) furthered this exploration by examining the power dynamics that were present in Khan's Dharna speeches of 2014, a significant event in Pakistani political history when Khan rallied mass public support by holding a prolonged sit-in in Islamabad. Their study, using Fairclough's 3D model, revealed how Khan used pronoun choice, modals, vocabulary, transitivity, and interdiscursivity to assert and assertively assert power shown in speech and the influence behind it. The study also showed the intertextuality of Islamic and sports discourses in Khan's political appeals, which were set in the socio-cultural context of his Pakistani audience.

1.2 Research Objectives.

The study aims to achieve the following research objectives.

i. To find out the salient ideological terms that have been used repeatedly in the political speeches of Imran Khan from 2011 to 2023, focusing on the terms that have ideological salience in the Pakistani political context, such as "insaf," "tabdeeli," "Naya Pakistan," "sovereignty," and "democracy."

ii. To track the diachronic development of the semantic prosody of these ideological keywords in four different political periods: opposition (2011-2017), election campaign (2018), prime ministership (2018-2022), and post-removal discourse (2022-2023).

iii. To explore the changes in the semantic prosody of these keywords and how they reflect and shape changes in Khan's ideological positioning, power relations and strategic communicative goals in various political contexts, using the three levels of Fairclough's (1989, 1995) CDA model: the language used in the speeches, how the speeches were produced and understood, and their impact on society.

iv. To show how corpus linguistics and critical discourse analysis can be used in research by showing how a diachronic corpus-based approach can uncover ideological changes that would not be apparent in synchronic, single-speech analyses.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the corpus-based CDA method used in this study, the following research questions are used to guide the research.

- 1: What are the main political and ideological keywords used by Imran Khan's between 2011 to 2023, and which words most frequently appear with them in the speech collocation?
- 2: What were the changes in the semantic prosody of these ideological keywords in the opposition, election, prime ministerial and post-removal periods of Khan's political career?
- 3: What do the observed diachronic shifts in the semantic prosody of these keywords reveal about the changing ideological orientations, power relations, and strategic discursive choices in Khan's political speeches as analyzed through Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA?

1.4 Significance of the Study.

Theoretically, the study is important in several aspects, namely: theoretical, methodological, empirical and pedagogical. Theoretically, the study is an original one as it introduces the diachronic dimension in the analysis of political discourse which has not been studied before in research on Khan's speeches (Hassan et al., 2023; Nusrat et al., 2020; Khan, 2021; Khalil et al., 2017). Previous studies have shown in great detail how CDA features like transitivity, modality, pronoun use and interdiscursivity operate in single speeches. Their synchronic orientation, however, does not enable them to account for the longitudinal change of the meanings of ideas methodologically, the study is significant as it combines the corpus linguistics tools, collocational analysis and semantic prosody mapping, with the interpretive model of Fairclough's model that examines language from three perspectives. The corpus-based approach enables patterns to be found in a much larger corpus of texts, such as more than 10 years of political speeches, and thus provides an empirical basis for claims of ideological change that would be speculative if based on qualitative reading. In practice, a study of the semantic prosody of key ideological terms like "insaf," "tabdeeli," and "sovereignty" over the past decade of political engagement uncovers the discursive processes by which consent is produced, opposition is discredited, and political identity is redefined. As Khalil et al. (2017) pointed out, it is important to be able to read the hidden ideological codes of political discourse so that ordinary citizens can be more critical in their reception of messages from political actors.

Finally, the study is also useful for language teaching in Pakistan. The analytical skills cultivated through CDA the ability to detect implicit ideological positions and to trace the evaluative associations of recurring lexical items are precisely the critical reading competencies that advanced learners of English must develop in academic and professional settings.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis and Political Speech

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a powerful approach to help us understand how language is connected to power and beliefs. Fairclough (1989) views discourse as a method that carefully studies how language, events, and texts are linked to society, culture, and social relationships. CDA is an approach studying processes of the construction and reconstruction of language in social relations, including the maintenance and/or challenge of power relations within discourse (Van Dijk, 1993). Fairclough's three-dimensional model of CDA (1989, 1995) allows for a comprehensive analysis of discourse, on three levels: text, discursive practice, and social practice. The textual level focuses on words, grammar, and how a text is organized. The discursive practice level studies how texts are created, shared, and used by people. The social practice level relates discourse with broader social and political concerns, ideologies, and power dynamics. A sub-field of CDA, political discourse analysis focuses on how politicians use language to assert power, to influence an audience, and to define ideologies. Van Dijk (1997) says political discourse includes spoken or written communication by politicians or about politics, political organizations, and political matters. Political speeches can have several purposes, namely to inform, persuade, mobilize, legitimize, and to create specific representations of reality (Chilton, 2004). Only people with the capacity to influence the public opinion can seek access to the power structures as Fairclough (2001) stresses, thus signifying that discourse is intrinsically linked to power.

2.2 Semantic Prosody in Corpus Linguistics

Semantic prosody is the positive, negative, or neutral feeling that a word gets from the words usually used with it. This idea was first presented by Sinclair (1991), who proposed that some words are associated with certain semantic contexts and thus have an atmosphere of meaning that goes beyond what they denote. It was later elaborated by Louw (1993) who defined semantic prosody as the overall meaning or feeling a word creates because of the words commonly associated with it. (p. 157). Semantic prosody may be positive, negative or neutral. Unpleasant or undesirable concepts are often used together with words that have negative meanings or feelings and pleasant or desirable concepts are often used together with words that have positive meanings or feelings. In the creation of textual coherence and the communication of implicit evaluations, semantic prosody is very important, according to Partington (1998). Stubbs (2001) also shows that semantic prosody is a systematic aspect of the sign system, which can be discovered by corpus analysis, and indicates the evaluative implications of words beyond their dictionary definitions. Semantic prosody is especially important in political communication because of the covert ideologies expressed. By using the words that have a particular semantic prosody, politicians can convey evaluations without having to actually say them, and sometimes even without actually saying them that are potentially controversial or that contradict their expressed stance (Stubbs, 2001). By studying the diachronic aspects of semantic prosody, a study of the ideological connotations of keywords in the context of different political contexts and different strategic objectives can be conveyed.

2.3 Previous Studies on Imran Khan's Political Discourse

While some studies have explored the political speech of Imran Khan through CDA perspectives, no study has systematically analyzed and investigated the semantic prosody of his political discourse. These studies are summarized in the Table 1 below and compared to the present research.

Table 1

Comparative Overview of Prior CDA Studies on Imran Khan's Speeches

Study	Year	Speech/Event	Theoretical Framework	Key Findings
Khalil et al.	2017	Election Speech, May 2013	Fairclough's 3D model; referential strategies; repetition; modality	Positive self/negative other-presentation; "change" repeated 12 times; ideology of tabdeeli
Nusrat et al.	2020	Dharna speeches, 2014	Fairclough's 3D model; power within/behind discourse	Pronoun use ('I'/'we') for power display; modal verbs; interdiscursivity (Islamic/sports discourse)
Khan, A.	2021	Maiden PM speech, Aug 2018	SFL; Halliday's meta-functions; transitivity; modality; tense	Material processes dominant; simple present tense; 'we' to reduce speaker-audience distance
Hassan et al.	2023	Pulwama incident speeches, Feb 2019	Fairclough's 3D model; keyword frequency analysis	Shift from 'I' to 'we'; keywords: Pakistan, terrorism, dialogue, stability; peace-oriented framing
Present Study	2025	Speeches 2011–2023 (corpus, 4 phases)	Fairclough's 3D model + Corpus linguistics (semantic prosody, diachronic)	Diachronic tracking of semantic prosody shifts across all career phases; cyclical ideological patterns

In 2019, Hassan et al. (2023) examined the speeches that Khan made on the topic of the Pulwama incident from the perspective of how he framed Pakistan as a peaceful nation opposing terrorism. According to their analysis, Khan used "I," "we" and "Pakistan" pronouns in a specific manner to present a particular image of Pakistan in the conflict situation. The study pointed out that Khan made a clear focus on the issues of peace, dialogue and anti-terrorism in her speeches by making certain lexical choices. Notably, the usage of the term "Pakistan" and the personal pronoun "I" were 16 times in his first speech, and "we" was raised to 20 times in his second speech, denoting a shift from individualism towards collective nationalism. Nusrat et al. (2020) have analyzed how power was displayed and practiced at the text, discourse and social level through Khan's dharna speeches in 2014. They found that Khan has used words like I or we to show he is in charge and engage the listeners and the second person pronoun to gain audience support, the modal verbs to show commitment and future actions and the use of interdiscursivity to integrate Islamic discourse into political rhetoric. The study showed how Khan built his power position with his language, by creating terms like "corrupt," "looters," and "culprits" that denigrated political opponents. Khan's speech was analyzed for persuasive strategies and ideological representation in a speech given during the election of 2013 by

Khalil et al. (2017). Khan found that he used twelve times the word “change” and that he had methods to make himself look good while making his rivals look bad that he used to build his ideological stance. The study indicated that the negative attributes given to the opposition party were paralleled with the socio-cognitive “us versus them” dimension mentioned by Van Dijk (1991) who was used as a tool in the study. The study by Khan (2021) focused on the first speech by Khan as the prime minister in 2018 in the perspective of Systemic Functional Grammar. The analysis showed that Khan predominantly used material processes to show actions and goals, simple present to make contact with the present situation and first person pronouns to feel closer and more connected to the listeners. There were 4,748 words in the speech, mapped across 217 sentences, of which the simple present tense was the most abundantly used. This suggests a desire by Khan to make his promises and commitments concrete, rather than abstract, as he attempts to keep them in line with the current reality

2.4 Gap in Literature and Theoretical Contribution

The recent scholarship from Pakistan has started looking beyond the studies specifically on Khan to consider the wider field of CDA in political and institutional discourse to offer a methodological backdrop to the present study. Through a frequency analysis, collocational analysis and Mutual Information (MI) significance values, Khan and Zaki (2022) thus created a massive collection of 1.28 million words taken directly from official government and policy papers of Pakistan for two decades, and unveiled the language ideologies lying in national level policy. As is crucial for the present study, their study shows that a statistical mathematical score (MI score) of 3.0 or higher is the benchmark used to prove that word patterns collocational relationships in a corpus-based discourse analysis of Pakistani texts, which they adopt as the methodological standard for the present study. Additionally, their application of the concept of ‘evaluative polarity’ in the official Pakistani discourse, as outlined by Mautner (2016), what they call the semantic prosody or discourse prosody of the official discourse, offers a useful methodological forerunner to the keyword-level analysis of semantic prosody used in the present study. Their work holds significance from the perspective of this research because of their theoretic proof that corpus-assisted CDA is not only feasible, but can also be analytically fruitful in the Pakistani sociolinguistics context where Urdu and English meet and give rise to unique collocational environments that benefit a systematic corpus investigation.

Complementing this methodological development, Nazeer, Yousaf and Anwar (2023) undertook a corpus-based study of how political language in Pakistan changed during the internet and social media age by analyzing a multi-source corpus comprising of speeches, newspaper articles, tweets and government archive texts from various years and political parties. Using NLP assisted analysis in conjunction with the discourse-analytical approach, they were able to identify that the political language of Pakistan has changed significantly over time in terms of emotional involvement (mostly positive/encouraging), vocabulary richness, sentence structure and sentiment polarity (most of the times positive/encouraging), and rhetorical techniques (mostly positive/encouraging). Their findings support the point of the current study that the political discourse in Pakistan is not fixed, but is systematically linguistically altered or changed by altering political contexts and audience configurations. Their study is analytically important because they have shown that diachronic corpus analysis of various data sources is possible and useful in the context of Pakistani political discourse, especially in a multilingual context where public communication is a daunting task in Pakistan. Unlike the studies mentioned earlier, however, Nazeer et al. (2023) are not explicitly interested in the semantic

prosody of particular ideological keywords, nor in following the language of one political figure through a longer, longitudinal trajectory. These constraints further illustrate the niche in the expanded research field of analyzing political speech using large collocations of text data Pakistan that the current study falls within.

The literature on Pakistani politics and in particular on the speeches of Imran Khan is devoid of any systematic diachronic analysis of the semantic prosody. While CDA has been used in studies of particular speeches or particular periods, it has not been used to look at the changing connotative meanings of particular ideological keywords throughout Khan's political career. To fill this gap, the current study adopts a three-dimensional CDA model by Fairclough and corpus linguistics methodology to study the diachronic semantic prosody of the ideological keywords in the speeches of Khan between 2011-2023. From a theoretical standpoint, this research is part of the ongoing merger of CDA and corpus linguistics, adding to the successful use of corpus-based methods to enrich the work of CDA in the analysis of patterns in large corpora without losing its attention to the connection how words, authority, and political beliefs connect. In terms of research methods, it shows why it matters to a diachronic approach to the analysis of ideology which might not be apparent from a synchronic analysis of a particular speech or period. The difference becomes even deeper when one recalls that the existing studies of Khan's discourse address only isolated moments: that of the 2013 election speech (Khalil et al. 2017); the 2014 Dharna (Nusrat et al. 2020); the maiden speech of 2018 (Khan 2021); and the Pulwama addresses of February 2019 (Hassan et al. 2023). All of these studies are based on the three-dimensional model of Fairclough (1989, 1995) and all of them yield unique insights into the linguistic processes of power and ideology in Khan's particular political settings. But the methodological strengths of these studies the detailed, context-sensitive analysis of specific texts are also their weaknesses: none of these studies, not even the four, follows Khan from the position of opposition leader to the elected prime minister to the ousted politician. It is against this backdrop that the present study comes into play, using the corpus-linguistic notion of diachronic semantic prosody, a language perspective that is absent from the majority of previous studies on the subject. It is in fact within this time frame that the present research takes place, relying on the corpus-linguistic concept of diachronic semantic prosody, a perspective that has not been explored by most of the studies conducted on the topic.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study adopts an integrated theoretical framework which combines Fairclough's three-part model for Critical Discourse Analysis alongside corpus linguistics approaches to semantic prosody. This integration allows for a comprehensive study of Khan's discourse, both by looking closely at word choices as well as the social and political contexts.

3.1 Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of CDA

This research uses Fairclough's (1989, 1995) three-part framework. This approach assumes that language functions on three levels: as an actual text, as a process of communication, and as a piece of wider social behavior, and social behavior. It uses three main steps to study language: describing it, interpreting its meaning, and explaining its social impact. First, the textual analysis examines basic language patterns like vocabulary and grammar. Next, the communication analysis looks at how texts are created, shared, and read in particular contexts. At the social practice level, the analysis relates discourse to broader social and political contexts, ideologies, and power relations.

3.2 Analyzing keywords in political speeches

The corpus linguistics methodology offers tools to systematically analyze the collocations and semantic prosody of the ideological keywords in a large corpus of speeches. The concept of semantic prosody, as presented by Sinclair (1991) and Louw (1993), is used as the basis for this study. The changes in the collocations of the ideological keywords over time can be used to trace the changes in their semantic prosody and, therefore, in the ideological positions they represent. The diachronic dimension shows how the connotative meanings of keywords evolve in response to shifting political contexts, audience expectations, and strategic goals.

3.3 Integration of CDA and Corpus Linguistics

The project combines CDA and corpus linguistics in this study as a solution to the shortcomings of each approach when used alone. CDA provides a theoretical framework for the understanding of the construction and reconstruction of how language connects to society, power dynamics, and political beliefs. CDA is often criticized for looking at too few texts and subjective interpretation (Widdowson, 1995). Corpus linguistics overcomes these limitations by offering empirical evidence of linguistic patterns in texts. However, corpus linguistics has been criticized for its lack of attention to social context in favour of linguistic form (Fairclough, 2003). CDA does this by offering a structure for relating linguistic patterns to their social and political contexts. This integrated method lets us deeply and thoroughly examine collocations and semantic prosody, and the interpretation of these patterns within the shifting political landscape, power dynamics, and ideology.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This study combines two different styles of research: a data-driven, number-focused analysis (looking at word patterns) and deeper meaning-focused analysis (looking at social context). Combining them makes sense because each method's strengths make up for the other's weaknesses. Corpus analysis provides organized and reliable evidence about which words commonly occur together and the meanings they create in a large collection of text. CDA helps explain these language patterns by connecting them to social, political, and ideological situations. The design is based on the methodological integration paradigm proposed by Fairclough (2003), who believes that CDA can be enhanced by the use of corpus-assisted approaches, which provide quantitative linguistic evidence to support the qualitative interpretation.

The study is diachronic, with data from four sub corpora, each defined by a different time period. The longitudinal design is crucial for the study's main goal of tracking the semantic prosody of ideological keywords throughout Khan's political trajectory. The research is carried out in three analytical stages,

namely describing the text itself, interpreting how it is communicated, and explaining its impact on society. This follows Fairclough's three-step model. A quick summary of this entire research setup can be found in the Table 2 below.

Table 2

Summary of Research Design

Design Component	Specification	Rationale
Research Approach	Both number and meaning based corpus analysis are used together	Using two methods together gives stronger and more reliable results than using only one method
Research Orientation	Diachronic; four-phase longitudinal corpus	Tracks ideological change across time; enables comparative cross-phase analysis
Theoretical Model	Fairclough's (1989, 1995) three-dimensional CDA model	Connects textual features to discursive and social practices
Analytical Concept	Semantic prosody (Sinclair, 1991; Louw, 1993; Stubbs, 2001)	Reveals implicit evaluative meaning and ideological positioning in lexical choices
Data Type	Transcribed political speech corpus (~200,000 words)	Sufficient scale for collocational analysis; covers all major political phases
Corpus Software	AntConc (frequency, collocates, KWIC); WordSmith Tools (keyword analysis)	Industry-standard freeware enabling reproducible corpus analysis
Validity Measures	Tree checking methods two researchers agreed on ($\geq 85\%$); of result; findings matched with real event	Makes the analysis reliable and confirms results using real political facts

4.2 Collection and Organization Of Speech Data.

This study analyzes the major speeches of Imran Khan from 2011 to 2023, which spans his entire political career. The speeches were taken from reliable sources such as official government publications on the website of the Pakistan Prime Minister's Office, live speeches recorded on YouTube, verified press transcripts from popular Pakistan-based news platforms such as Dawn, Geo News, and ARY News and published academic analyses of specific speeches (Khalil et al., 2017;

Nusrat et al., 2020; Khan, 2021; Hassan et al., 2023). Only speeches that had two or more independent verified sources were included to ensure textual authenticity.

The collected speeches were transcribed, cleaned and compiled into a corpus using AntConc corpus analysis software (Anthony, 2022). The final corpus is made up of about 200,000 words, which are divided into four sub corpora representing the various political phases. Table 3 below summarizes the structure of the corpus.

Table 3

Corpus Structure: Subcorpora by Political Phase

Phase	Period	No. of Speeches	Approx. Word Count	Key Speech Events
Phase I: Opposition	2011–2017	28	~55,000	2011 Lahore rally; 2013 election speeches; 2014 Dharna addresses
Phase II: Election Campaign	Jan–Aug 2018	14	~30,000	PTI election manifesto addresses; pre-election rallies; television interviews
Phase III: Prime Ministership	Aug 2018–Apr 2022	45	~85,000	Maiden PM speech (Aug 2018); Pulwama speeches (Feb 2019); parliamentary addresses; UN speeches
Phase IV: Post-Removal	May 2022–Dec 2023	22	~30,000	Post-removal press conferences; public rally speeches; judicial hearing statements
Total	—	109	~200,000	—

4.3 Identification of Ideological Keywords

The methodology of identifying the ideological keywords for analysis was followed by two stages: computational frequency analysis and qualitative ideological assessment, which was used by Stubbs (2001) for the analysis of the keywords in the political discourse of Pakistan by Khalil et al. (2017) and Nusrat et al. (2020).

For Stage One, word frequency lists were created for each subcorpus using AntConc. The content words were extracted and keyword analysis was performed by comparing the frequency distribution with a reference corpus of general Pakistani news discourse, excluding grammatical function words. Statistically significant keyness scores ($\log\text{-likelihood} \geq 6.63$, $p < 0.01$) were used to select words as candidate ideological keywords.

The candidate keywords were then qualitatively assessed in terms of their ideological significance with respect to: (a) Khan's declared political ideology and PTI's manifesto positions; (b) the results of previous CDA studies of Khan's speeches (Khalil et al., 2017; Nusrat et al., 2020; Khan, 2021; Hassan et al., 2023); and (c) the general trends of ideological contestation in Pakistani political discourse as reflected in the scholarly literature. The keywords that were found in several political phases but with possibly different collocational environments were prioritized, because they are most likely to show diachronic semantic prosody change.

Table 4

Ideological Keywords Selected for Diachronic Semantic Prosody Analysis

Keyword (English)	Urdu Equivalent	Ideological Significance	Keyness Score (log-likelihood)	Appears in Prior Studies
Change	Tabdeeli	Core PTI slogan; contrast with status quo	142.3	Khalil et al. (2017); Nusrat et al. (2020)
Naya Pakistan	Naya Pakistan	Vision slogan; new political order	118.7	Khalil et al. (2017); Khan (2021)
Justice	Insaf	PTI's founding value; accountability	134.5	Nusrat et al. (2020); Hassan et al. (2023)
Corruption	Fasaad / Corruption	Central anti-opposition narrative	127.9	Nusrat et al. (2020); Khalil et al. (2017)
Democracy	Jamhooriyat	Contested concept in Pakistani political history	98.4	Nusrat et al. (2020); Hassan et al. (2023)

4.4 Analytical Procedure

The analysis was carried out in three phases, following Fairclough's three-dimensional model (1989, 1995). This staged process enables a systematic connection between the linguistic analysis at the textual level and the broader discursive and social contexts, rather than the reductionist approach of considering language as an autonomous system, distinct from the power relations and ideological formations that create and are created by discourse.

Table 5

Analytical Procedure: Three-Stage CDA Framework Applied to Semantic Prosody

Stage	CDA Dimension	Analytical Operations	Theoretical Grounding
1	Text (Description)	Finding words that appear near key words; grouping them by meaning; deciding whether each keyword has a positive, negative, or neutral feeling in each phase; then comparing across all phases	Sinclair (1991); Louw (1993); Stubbs (2001); Partington (1998)
2	Discursive Practice (Interpretation)	Looking at when and why speeches were made; identifying who they were aimed at; finding links and discourses; explaining how language choices connect to social and political goals	Fairclough (1989, 1992, 1995); Khalil et al. (2017); Nusrat et al. (2020)
3	Social Practice (Explanation)	Contextual mapping of semantic prosody shifts onto political events; analysis of power relations and ideological functions; explanation of how discourse constructs and is constructed by political context	Van Dijk (1993, 1997); Fairclough (1989, 2003); Hassan et al. (2023); Khan (2021)

Collocates were systematically extracted and categorized for each of the five keywords in each subcorpus in

Stage 1 (Textual Analysis / Description). Using AntConc, a window of five words before and after each target word was extracted. The scores of Mutual Information ($MI \geq 3.0$) and log likelihood ($\log\text{-likelihood} \geq 6.63$) were computed to determine the statistically significant collocates. Collocates were then grouped into semantic fields (negative political characterization, positive aspiration, governance/policy, accountability/legal reform). The overall semantic prosody rating for each keyword in each phase was based on the predominant semantic field of significant collocates in that phase.

In Stage 2 (Discursive Practice Analysis / Interpretation): Analysis of speech production contexts and communicative purposes of speeches with each keyword were explored. This stage was used to interpret the relationship between the textual patterns identified in Stage 1 and the specific discursive contexts in which they were produced, drawing on the documented political events and contexts associated with each phase, as found in previous CDA studies (Khalil et al., 2017; Nusrat et al., 2020; Khan, 2021; Hassan et al., 2023). Intertextual and interdiscursive features like references to Islamic discourse, historical parallels and other political texts were identified and analyzed in relation to their ideological functions.

Stage 3 (Social Practice Analysis / Explanation) linked the patterns found in Stages 1 and 2 to the social and political backgrounds of each stage. In this step, changes in word meanings were carefully linked to changes in Khan's political position and the overall political situation in Pakistan. The ideological implications of these changes were then discussed in the context of the power relations of Pakistani politics, using Van Dijk's (1993) framework of understanding the relationship between discourse and power relations.

4.5 Validity and Reliability

Four steps were taken to make sure the analysis was accurate and dependable. First, multiple methods were double checked by achieved by combining quantitative corpus analysis (frequency counts, collocate extraction, MI scores, log-likelihood statistics) and qualitative CDA (interpretive analysis of discursive and social practices) that cross-validated the results. Second, inter-coder reliability was checked by having two trained applied linguists researchers independently code a randomly selected 20% of the collocational data. A statistical test (Cohen's kappa) was used to see how closely the two researchers agreed which was 0.87, which is above the threshold of $\kappa \geq 0.80$ for substantial agreement. Disagreements were settled by discussion and re-analysis. Third, we checked our findings by matching the word patterns with real historical events and official political records from each time period. Fourth, to keep our theory consistent, we made sure all of our explanations strictly followed Fairclough's standard three-step analysis model and semantic prosody theory.

5. Findings and Analysis

This section shows how the language and word meanings changed over time which is organized by keyword. For each keyword, the semantic prosody of the four political phases is analyzed by looking at the actual text how the language was used in conversation, and its broader impact on society. The key collocates per phase are summarized in tables to ensure transparency of the corpus evidence and to make the diachronic shifts visible.

5.1 "Change/Tabdeeli" (2011–2023)

The word "change" (and its Urdu equivalent "tabdeeli") is at the heart of Khan's political story since the inception of PTI in 1996. The semantic prosody of our diachronic analysis shows important changes in its meaning during various political periods. The key collocates per phase are given in Table 6.

Table 6

Diachronic Semantic Prosody of “Change/Tabdeeli”: Key Collocates by Political Phase

Political Phase	Key Collocates (Top 8)	Dominant Semantic Field	Semantic Prosody
Phase I: Opposition (2011–2017)	real, system, status quo, corrupt, looters, future, bring, revolution	Oppositional transformation; anti-establishment	Strongly positive (aspirational contrast)
Phase II: Election Campaign (2018)	we, PTI, my, bring, vote, mandate, deliver, promise	Agency/identity; electoral mobilization	Positive (self-referential; PTI-metonymic)
Phase III: PM Period (2018–2022)	system, governance, implementation, difficult, process, time, reform, institutions	Governance/policy implementation; institutional reform	Complex (positive aspiration + implementation challenges)
Phase IV: Post-Removal (2022–2023)	real, again, struggle, people, revolution, fight, imported, stolen	Renewed oppositional transformation; delegitimization	Strongly positive (reverts to Phase I pattern + loss/resistance)

Note. Collocates extracted using AntConc within L5/R5 span. MI \geq 3.0; log-likelihood \geq 6.63 ($p < 0.01$).

During the opposition period (2011-2017), the word “change” was mostly associated with negative connotations of the current political system and positive connotations of the future political change. The semantic prosody was very positive, and “change” was always associated with a positive future state from a corrupt state. In their study of the speeches made during the dharna in 2014, Nusrat et al. (2020) report that Khan often used terms that framed “change” as the solution to corruption and mis governance, establishing a binary opposition between the negative present and the positive future. Khalil et al. (2017) also found twelve examples of “change” in the 2013 election speech, all of which involved positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation strategies.

During the 2018 election campaign, the semantic prosody of “change” was shifted to make Khan and PTI the only agents of change. This change is a reflection of Khan's strategic move from change as an abstract concept to change as something that is uniquely deliverable by PTI. By 2018, “change” was no longer a slogan, but a metonym for Khan and his party.

The semantic prosody of “change” experienced its greatest change during the prime ministership of 2018-2022. It became linked to government policies, practical challenges, and efforts to reform institutions his change is reflected in Khan's first speech, which was analyzed by Khan (2021), where the term ‘change’ is linked to certain policy areas such as governance reform and economic transformation. The semantic prosody became more complex, both positive aspirations and recognition of implementation difficulties were a pragmatic adjustment demanded by the realities of governing.

After his removal (2022-2023), the semantic prosody of “change” shifted back to its Phase I opposition pattern, and collocates of loss, struggle, and resistance were added. This is a return to opposition politics, and “change” is now used as a contrast to the negative present, rather than as a description of the government's current policy. This pattern shows that the meaning of key words keeps changing as Khan's political situation changes over time.

5.2 “Naya Pakistan” (2013–2023)

The slogan “Naya Pakistan” (New Pakistan) became a key part of Khan's political rhetoric in about 2013 and has continued to be a prominent one since then. The key collocates per phase are given in Table 7.

Table 7

Diachronic Semantic Prosody of “Naya Pakistan”: Key Collocates by Political Phase

Political Phase	Key Collocates (Top 8)	Dominant Semantic Field	Semantic Prosody
Phase I: Opposition (2013–2017)	dream, vision, Quaid’s, welfare, state, principles, Islamic, hope	Abstract idealism; nation-building aspiration	Strongly positive (aspirational/utopian)
Phase II: Election Campaign (2018)	governance, institutions, economy, health, education, reforms, build, deliver	Concrete policy agenda; institutional development	Positive (aspirational + policy-concrete)
Phase III: PM Period (2018–2022)	building, challenges, difficult, time, process, achieve, struggle, promise	Governance implementation; managing expectations	Complex (positive + implementation realism)
Phase IV: Post-Removal (2022–2023)	dream, vision, lost, regain, stolen, fight, again, people	Loss and resistance; renewed aspiration	Positive + Elegiac (aspiration + loss + resistance)

During its initial use (2013-2017), “Naya Pakistan” was mostly used with abstract ideals and values. Khan in his election speech of 2013, created a vision through the lens of the principles of Quaid-e-Azam and the ideals of a welfare state, using the term “Naya Pakistan”. The semantic prosody was strongly positive and aspirational, and the phrase was a contrast to the current Pakistan and not a description of any specific program. In the 2018 election campaign, the semantic prosody became more concrete, with more policy elements, as Khan had to shift from vision to governable proposals. As prime minister, “Naya Pakistan” acquired collocates of struggle and implementation challenge, as

analyzed by Khan (2021). After losing power, the phrase again became hopeful, but now also carried meanings of loss and the desire to regain power, reflecting Khan's personal and political situation after removal.

5.3 “Justice/Insaf” (2011–2023)

“justice” (insaf in Urdu) is an integral part of Khan's political ideology and is also part of the name of PTI. The key collocates per phase are given in Table 8.

Table 8

Diachronic Semantic Prosody of “Justice/Insaf”: Key Collocates by Political Phase

Political Phase	Key Collocates (Top 8)	Dominant Semantic Field	Semantic Prosody
Phase I: Opposition (2011–2017)	accountability, corruption, rule of law, system, independent, judiciary, equal, rigging	Legal accountability; anti-corruption	Strongly positive (demand for systemic reform)
Phase II: Election Campaign (2018)	social, welfare, poor, rights, equal, state, all, citizens	Social justice; inclusive welfare	Positive (expanded: legal + social dimensions)
Phase III: PM Period (2018–2022)	system, reform, institution, implement, deliver, challenge, process, courts	Justice system reform; policy delivery	Complex positive (aspiration + institutional challenge)
Phase IV: Post-Removal (2022–2023)	injustice, accountability, corrupt, fight, denied, system, false, persecution	Victimhood; systemic injustice; resistance	Negatively contrastive (justice denied vs. justice sought)

During the opposition period, the term “justice” was mostly associated with corruption, accountability, and legal reform. Khan frequently used the word “justice” when demanding accountability for alleged electoral fraud, and “justice” was the solution to an unaccountable system, as Nusrat et al. (2020) explain. In the 2018 election campaign, the semantic prosody of the concept was extended to social justice and welfare, thus reaching other population groups. “justice” was co-located with institutional reform and policy implementation as prime minister, which is a shift from demanding to delivering justice. The semantic prosody was the most radical change, as “justice” became more often associated with terms of denial, persecution, and resistance, which helped to build Khan as a victim of injustice and delegitimize the new government.

5.4 “Corruption” (2011–2023)

“corruption” has been a key theme in Khan's political narrative since he entered politics. The key collocates per phase are given in Table 9.

Table 9

Diachronic Semantic Prosody of “Corruption”: Key Collocates by Political Phase

Political Phase	Key Collocates (Top 8)	Dominant Semantic Field	Semantic Prosody
Phase I: Opposition (2011–2017)	rulers, system, looters, money, plunder, end, fight, mafias	Negative characterization of political elite	Strongly negative (opponent-defining; oppositional)
Phase II: Election Campaign (2018)	system, institution, end, reform, accountability, change, tackle, eradicate	Systemic imperative; reform priority	Negative (systemic framing; reform-oriented)
Phase III: PM Period (2018–2022)	system, reform, accountability, mechanism, process, implement, challenge, NAB	Anti-corruption policy; institutional accountability	Negative + policy-positive (problem being addressed)
Phase IV: Post-Removal (2022–2023)	regime, government, rulers, looters, imported, thieves, fight, return	Opponent characterization; delegitimization of new government	Strongly negative (reverts to Phase I + intensified)

During the opposition era (2011-2017), the word “corruption” was mostly used in conjunction with negative connotations of political opponents and the current system, and it was the negative defining attribute of the opposition. The words used by Khan, such as “looters” and “mafias” near the word “corruption” create a strong negative semantic field, as reported by Nusrat et al. (2020). The semantic prosody shifted from individual characterization to systemic critique in the 2018 election campaign, and the word “corruption” was expanded from a property of specific opponents to a structural feature that requires institutional reform. The semantic prosody was more complex as prime minister, with the collocation of “corruption” with policy mechanisms and accountability institutions, indicating a shift from a campaigning to a governing frame. Once out of office, the semantic prosody shifted back to its Phase I usage, and “corruption” was again used as a characterization of political opponents, but with greater intensity against the new government.

5.5 “Democracy” (2011–2023)

The term “democracy” is used in a complex manner in Khan's political rhetoric, especially in the context of Pakistan's military interventions and disputed elections. The key collocates per phase are given in Table 10.

Table 10

Diachronic Semantic Prosody of “Democracy”: Key Collocates by Political Phase

Political Phase	Key Collocates (Top 8)	Dominant Semantic Field	Semantic Prosody
Phase I: Opposition (2011–2017)	true, real, people’s, rigged, fake, system, stolen, demand	True vs. false democracy; electoral fraud	Ambivalent (positive ideal vs. negative reality)
Phase II: Election Campaign (2018)	institutions, process, strengthen, system, people’s, true, restore, mandate	Democratic institution-building; process legitimation	Predominantly positive (institutional strengthening)
Phase III: PM Period (2018–2022)	strengthen, institution, system, process, reform, deliver, protect, consolidate	Democratic consolidation; institutional reform	Consistently positive (governing frame)
Phase IV: Post-Removal (2022–2023)	true, real, people’s, regime, conspiracy, fight, assassinated, imported	Democracy under threat; conspiratorial framing	Ambivalent/negative (reverts to Phase I + threat narrative)

The diachronic development of “democracy” is more complicated than the other keywords, because of the ambivalent semantic prosody of the opposition periods. In the opposition period (2011–2017), “democracy” was combined with other oppositional terms, such as “true” and “rigged”, creating an ambivalent semantic prosody in which democracy as an ideal was positively valued, while democracy as a practice was negatively characterized. In the speeches of the dharna of 2014, Khan often employed this contrast to assert his own commitment to democracy and challenge the legitimacy of the current democratic system, as Nusrat et al. (2020) report. In 2018, the semantic prosody shifted to a more consistently positive tone as Khan had to appear as a viable democratic contender and ease fears about his dedication to democratic institutions during the election campaign. In the governing frame, “democracy” gained strengthening and consolidation collocates as prime minister. After the removal, the semantic prosody returned to Phase I ambivalence, and the removal was accompanied by conspiratorial collocates that suggested the removal was an assault on true democracy.

6. Discussion

In the political context, the diachronic study of semantic prosody in the ideological keywords of Imran Khan can be seen to show several notable patterns which can help aid the understanding of political discourse, ideology and power in the Pakistani context.

6.1 Cyclical Pattern of Semantic Prosody Shifts

The most surprising is the cyclical nature of semantic prosody changes in relation to Khan's political stance. The ideological keywords, on the other hand, are used primarily as contrasts to the negative present. When they are in power, they are statements of the policy implementation process. When they lose power, they change to their opposition function. This cyclical pattern is seen in all five keywords analyzed, but in different ways. This pattern is a demonstration of the capacity to use ideological terms in new political contexts and political ends. These keywords do not have fixed meanings, but rather change their semantic prosody to perform different communicative functions in different political roles. This flexibility enables political actors to keep their ideology intact while adjusting their discourse to the changing situation. The cyclical pattern also shows the performative nature of the ideological keywords in political discourse, which actively create and recreate the meaning of ideology in accordance with the changing political context, rather than merely reflecting the pre-existing ideological position.

6.2 Strategic Deployment of Semantic Prosody

The analysis reveals the semantic prosody of ideological keywords in various political contexts and periods of time in Khan's use. On the other hand, the negative semantic prosody of "corruption" and the positive semantic prosody of "change" and "Naya Pakistan" are used to create a clear binary between the negative present and positive future. These keywords are more complex in their semantic prosody, and are used to manage expectations and recognize implementation challenges. When the power is taken away, the opposition patterns are used to re-establish the binary and to mobilize support. This also shows that political speakers carefully shape their message according to who they are talking to. The changes in semantic prosody are not only related to the changes in Khan's political status, but also to the changes in his target audiences. On the other hand, the main audience is supporters and potential supporters to be mobilized. The audience grows to include international observers, implementation partners and critics. Once the power is gone, the audience is once again turned into supporters and remobilized. The changes in the audience affect the semantic prosody of the ideological keywords. This matches Van Dijk's (1993) view that people intentionally change how they speak or write to fit their current social situation and audience.

6.3 Ideological Coherence and Adaptability

Although there are considerable changes in the semantic prosody from one period to another, there is a basic ideological continuity in Khan's discourse. The dichotomy of "corrupt" rulers and "clean" alternative, "old" Pakistan and "Naya Pakistan", "fake" and "true" democracy remains constant throughout. It is not the binary of ideology itself that changes, but the way it is conveyed in the semantic prosody of keywords. Khan's coherence and adaptability enable him to be ideologically consistent while adjusting to the political environment, to be stable while being flexible. The ideological coherence also implies more fundamental structural changes in the political discourse in Pakistan. The dichotomy between "corrupt" elites and "pure" people, "imported" and "authentic"

political forces, “fake” and “true” democracy is not unique to Khan, but is a part of a broader political discourse in Pakistan. What is innovative about Khan is how he has applied these patterns to his own political project by using the strategic placement of ideological keywords, as noted by Khalil et al. (2017), Khan's discourse is essentially geared toward building himself up as the one and only agent of real change.

6.4 Implications for Understanding Political Power

The diachronic study of semantic prosody has important implications for the understanding of the construction, maintenance and contestation of political power in discourse. The development of semantic prosody is a reflection how power dynamics are built, shifted, and reshaped through language as political situations change. Conversely, the negative semantic prosody of words such as “corruption” helps to discredit the current power holders and open up room for other power. The more complex semantic prosody is used to legitimize the new power holders and to manage expectations in power. When power is lost, the opposition patterns are used to delegitimize the new power holders and to make room for a return to power.

6.5 Comparison with Previous Research

This study's results back up and build upon earlier research on Imran Khan's political speech. The present study is an extension of Hassan et al. (2023) who identified the strategic pronoun shifts and keyword patterns in Khan's speeches from Pulwama, and extends these patterns into a broader diachronic context. The present study extends the work of Nusrat et al. (2020) by showing the power-displaying functions of Khan's linguistic choices in the 2014 Dharna and how these choices are integrated in a longer pattern of semantic prosody adaptation in the political phases. This research builds directly on that work of this, as it documents the persuasive power of “change” and “Naya Pakistan” in the election speech of 2013 and how the semantic prosody of these terms evolved throughout all the subsequent phases. The present study extends Khan (2021) by analyzing the change to material processes and governing discourse in the 2018 maiden speech in a cyclical diachronic pattern, which cannot be analyzed by the synchronic analysis alone. Importantly, the analytical consistency of these four previous studies, all of which are used Fairclough's (1989, 1995) three-step framework for analyzing language and social context CDA model and all of which provide results for the use of pronouns, modal verbs, lexical choice, and ideological framing that are directly comparable across phases, has allowed the present study to triangulate its diachronic findings against a coherent body of independently produced synchronic evidence. The collocational patterns identified in the corpus analysis and the discursive patterns reported by these previous studies are good corroborative evidence for the semantic prosody shifts identified in Tables 6-10. The results also corroborate and validate the results of the bigger corpus-based study of Pakistani political and institutional discourse. Our method of analyzing how words pair together is proven reliable by Khan and Zaki's (2022) study, which examined Pakistan's language education policies. Their discovery that language ideologies are consistently embedded in evaluative collocational patterns in institutional texts in Pakistan is similar to the present study's finding that political ideologies are consistently embedded in the semantic prosody of the political keywords in political speeches in Pakistan. The results of this study are in line with the results match what Nazeer et al. (2023) discovered, which is that the political discourse of Pakistan is systematically changing in terms of vocabulary, sentiment, and rhetorical technique in various temporal and contextual contexts. The recent corpus-based research in Pakistan

in general has provided a growing empirical basis for the argument that diachronic corpus analysis is not only a methodological choice but an analytical imperative for the study of the dynamic and context-sensitive nature of political language in Pakistan.

6.6 Theoretical Implications

This study has some theoretical implications for the integration of CDA and corpus linguistics as follows. They show how corpus-based methods can be used to improve CDA's capacity to detect patterns in large corpora. They show how semantic prosody can be used as a link between linguistic form and social context in CDA. They stress the importance of diachronic analysis in the research of political discourse as a dynamic phenomenon. They also show the importance of employing both quantitative and qualitative approaches in discourse analysis, the quantitative CDA revealing patterns and the qualitative CDA explaining them in social and political terms. The theoretical results support the new paradigm of corpus-assisted CDA by showing that the three-dimensional model of Fairclough (1989, 1995) and systematic collocational analysis and semantic prosody tracking is a methodologically sound and theoretically sound way to understand how political beliefs and ideas are created, changed, and expressed in political discourse over time. All these are analytical windows on the same phenomenon, that is, the strategic use of language to create, sustain and challenge ideological meanings in the Pakistani political context, as analyzed by Nusrat et al. (2020) in the analysis of power in discourse through the use of pronouns, modal verbs and transitivity, by Khalil et al. (2017) in the analysis of persuasive self-presentation through referential strategies and repetition, by Khan (2021) in the analysis of SFL meta-functions through material processes and tense choice, and by Hassan et al. (2023) in the analysis of keyword frequency and lexical framing through collocational patterning. The present study adds to this collective theoretical picture by offering a diachronic framework that sheds light on the interaction of all these individual linguistic mechanisms over time, thereby revealing the cyclical patterns of semantic prosody evolution that characterize the dynamic ideological signature of Khan's political discourse.

6.7 Limitations of the Study

There are several shortcomings of this study. Some shortcomings of this study should be noted. First, the analysis is based on five ideological keywords that were selected based on their frequency and their ideological significance, other keywords with different patterns could have been selected with other criteria. Second, the four sub corpora of the corpus are a simplification of complex political realities. Third, the analysis is based on written transcripts, which do not reflect important non-verbal aspects such as intonation and gesture. Fourth, the study focuses only on Khan's discourse and does not compare it to other political actors. A comparative analysis could be used to determine if the patterns found are unique to Khan or more common in the Pakistani political discourse. The study, however, offers some insights into the diachronic semantic prosody of the ideological keywords in the Pakistani political discourse despite its limitations.

7. Conclusion

The present study has explored the diachronic semantic prosody of the ideological keywords in Pakistani political discourse by critically analyzing the speeches of Imran Khan from 2011 to 2023 using a corpus-based approach. The study has shown that the semantic prosody of the key ideological terms has changed significantly in various political contexts, and has identified important patterns in

this change. The analysis of five ideological keywords “change/tabdeeli,” “Naya Pakistan,” “justice/insaf,” “corruption” and “democracy” shows a consistent cyclical pattern of semantic prosody shifts that correspond to Khan's political position. On the other hand, these keywords are used mainly as contrasts to the negative present. They become descriptions of the implementation of policy when they are in power. When they lose power, they change to their opposition function. The cyclical pattern is an indication of the ideological value of the keywords, as it can vary in the political context and strategic goals, which is in line with the theoretical assumption that the semantic prosody is not a stable property of the lexical items, but a dynamic feature that changes over time, depending on the changing discursive context. The study has shown the semantic prosody of ideological keywords in the context of various political uses of Khan. This strategic use emphasizes the performative aspect of the ideological keywords in political discourse, which are actively creating and reproducing ideological meanings in relation to the changing political context. Although there are substantial changes in semantic prosody, a fundamental ideological unity is maintained throughout Khan's discourse, which is both stable and flexible, a combination that is crucial for political longevity. The results are of great importance for the study of the construction, maintenance and contestation of political power in terms of discourse. Theoretically, the study shows the usefulness of the combination of CDA and corpus linguistics. Methodologically, it shows the potential of diachronic corpus-based analysis to uncover patterns that are not uncovered by synchronic analysis. The analysis is presented in the Findings section in comprehensive tables of collocational evidence, which make the analysis transparent and replicable, and thus contribute to the further development of the methodology of corpus-assisted CDA. Future research directions include the inclusion of more keywords, better periodization, multimodal analysis of speech delivery, and comparison of the cyclical patterns of other political actors in Pakistan to see if the patterns are unique to Khan or representative of the Pakistani political discourse.

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