



Concerns of Political Parties of Pakistan in the Digital Age: Reconciliation or Fragmentation?

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Abstract

The present paper analyzes the digital discourse of the three leading political parties in Pakistan, including Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP), and Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), during the 2024 general elections. On the one hand, analyzing communication on Facebook and Twitter through official government channels, as well as reading manifestos of political parties of the future elections in 2024, the study determines whether the digital environment promoted reconciliation or increased fragmentation in the Pakistani political world. It has been found out that all the three parties employed social media to mobilize them as well as to directly communicate with voters, yet their messaging was mostly contentious. Dev-based growth and economic recovery were the core ideas promoted by PML-N that often engaged in digital conflicts with PTI; social welfare and constitutional democracy are the main priorities of PPP and it was eager to find a compromise between criticism and unification efforts but delegitimized opponents; populist anti-corruption rhetoric and strong focus on online activities were the core concerns of PTI that most often undermined the position of rivals. Despite certain convergence in structural reforms as revealed in manifestos, the virtual debate was likely to erupt polarization. The research findings indicate that the political landscape of Pakistan in 2024 was shaping up toward polarization, but there was sectional unity which can lead to unity provided it is used as a tactical advantage.

Keywords

Pakistan 2024 Elections, Digital Politics, Social Media Discourse, PML-N, PPP, PTI, Facebook, Twitter, Party Manifestos, Political Polarization, Reconciliation.

Introduction

The 2024 general elections in Pakistan were surrounded by the backdrop of a relatively new digital political landscape which begs questions whether online fighting ground by major parties creates reconciliation among nation or fragmentation. Political communication in Pakistan has shifted to social networks like Facebook and Twitter where the leaders of the party and their followers communicate with the people directly. Political use of social media was very active during the election period by the three major parties in the country- the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) (Saleem, N. 2025). This paper will therefore be a comparative report on the issues and narratives these parties have in the digital era through their 2024 election manifestos and official Facebook discussion. Assigning the focus on the issues presented in the agenda of each party on Facebook and Twitter, in the frames to

assess whether their online communication is the one which is promoting the level of political reconciliation or enhancing the level of divisions. As the paper concludes, the digital platform was found to enable the parties to reach the voters, emphasizing their interests and the hot-spot issues, but it also was found that partisan rhetoric dominated the digital platforms. There were also opportunities to find examples of calls to unity and healing, but this aspect does not prevail in the atmosphere of social media campaigning. In the sections that follow, we describe the individual parties' digital narratives and their manifesto focus areas, their response strategies, and the implications it has on political cohesion within the Pakistani democratic process.

2024 Elections and the Digital Battleground

The 2024 general election on 8 February occurred under controversial conditions such as reported interference and an intensely charged political atmosphere (Ghauri, M. J., 2025). However, the use of the digital space became a strategic combat region of such campaigns. Pakistan has more than 128 million Internet users, and in early 2024, several users experienced interruptions in mobile networks and the communication of social media data during the event of matter of politics. At least three times in January 2024, Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram were periodically inaccessible and the government blocked Twitter (now called X) indefinitely before the election date (Nasir, T., 2025).

What mattered most in the online battleground was not just campaigning but also framing the narrative. The process on the other hand was defended by PML-N and PPP supporters who also pointed out their own gains. The polarization of the political discourse was evident in real-time in Twitter and Facebook timelines. This background preconditions a deeper examination of which of these party's care about which issues more or less and what their attitude towards the reconciliation or conflict is because of the way each of them shared their views on the matter in the virtual space, especially on Facebook and Twitter as well as on their 2024 manifesto direction.

Literature review

Media control, censorship and the rise of digital authoritarianism

In Pakistan, the digitalization of the political sphere has been coupled with a stricter control of media and digital medium. A 2023 report on digital authoritarianism and digital-rights activism observes that the Pakistani government has developed a highly detailed legal framework (such as the Pakistan Telecommunication Act, the Fair Trial Act and the 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act - PECA) that allows it to impose significant online surveillance and content removal (Ahmed et al., 2024). The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) provides the agencies with unjustifiable powers to block and remove the content which include the Federal Investigation Agency and the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority, and the definition of the cybercrime given in the Act is ambiguous and is feared to be misused. Civil society organizations have thus condemned PECA and demanded the exact definition of cybercrimes and beefed-up checks. By examining the connection between religious populism and digital authoritarianism in Pakistan, the European Centre Populism Studies (ECPS) paper demonstrates how the country has long maintained an authoritarian political culture that has now transformed to the cyberspace: the ruling party and military establishment have weaponized digital space, where religious and nationalistic discourses serve to enable censorship and surveillance (KHAN, 2024). The authors claim that the populist regime of Imran Khan (2018-22) colluded with the military to crack down on the social media, incarcerate opponents and enact draconian laws; crackdowns were frequently justified under the pretext of defending Islam and Pakistani identity. They also show that there are a multitude of levels to which internet governance functions in Pakistan; whole network, sub-network, proxy and user, which enables authorities to censor content and suppress opposition (Smorgunov, 2014)

There is a contrasting view as seen through recent writings on the amendments to PECA in 2025. In a 2025 South Asia Monitor article it is stated that PECA 2025 aims to provide accountability instead of censorship: content removal is to be justified by law and an independent Social Media Protection Tribunal is established and a judicial review is guaranteed. In the article, it is believed that online platforms have a lot of control over the discourse of the people and there should be some kind of regulation to prevent spoofing and other harmful effects caused by online activities. But critics would say that despite all the judicial protections, the law has the potential to rein in digital spaces under state control and silence criticism. On the whole, the available sources demonstrate that political parties have to work in the environment where the state and military authorities enjoy

impressive control, and it is a cause of concerns regarding the elements of digital authoritarianism and censorship (Ahmed, 2023).

Religious populism and the politicization of digital space

The paper highlights that Pakistan authoritarian shift is linked to a religious populism. It observes that the populist party of Imran Khan justified its digital repression on the basis of protecting Islam and the nation. This discourse approach enabled the government and military to justify online monitoring and control. The authors also address this phenomenon in a wider global context: digital technologies may empower civil society, as well as enable the authoritarian regimes to polarize the society and destabilize democratic institutions. The research indicates that social media has served as a means of mobilization by the right-wing and left-wing populists across the globe and that political leaders in Pakistan have been utilizing such platforms to mobilize their fans and discredit their rivals. In this way, the imposition of religious populism on political space has promoted the politicization further and fragmentation (Ihsan & Saleem, 2022).

Political communication, coalitions and public discourse on social media

Scholarly research on Pakistani politics emphasizes the twofold aspect of social media: it can be applied to organizing coalitions and encouraging participation and engagement, but it can also be a divisive tool. 2023 research of Twitter statistics (2018-22) discovers that politicians in Pakistan are active online and that the opposition has a high online presence. The authors note a trend in increased convergence of opposition party audiences and see that there is a developing execution among them. In the study, it is observed that changes of political allegiances such as joining the opposition alliance or changes of politician's affiliation to the opposition group are indicated through online interactions. These trends indicate that digital media can support tacit coalitions and reconciliation of opposition parties.

The use of coalitional framework will be seen in Mitts, (Mitts & Staniland, 2022) as the authors investigate the Pakistani social media networks. They theories that on the internet, competition may be adequately conceptualized as alliances among political parties, media organizations, the military force and dissidents. Such coalitions will be able to pursue a common narrative or attack common enemies and may be implicit or overt. Based on Twitter and Facebook data of 2018-19, the authors identify networks of narrative agreement and contention and demonstrate the way that social media society mirrors (and, in some cases, anticipates) real-world political coalitions. Their study shows that social media, as a space, is both an arena of collaboration and competition and that movements in the online alignment can sometimes show changes in the political coalition (Iffat, 2022).

The coalition-building anti-fragmentation dynamics can also be seen through research on social media polarization. Examining Twitter interactions between 2018 and 2022, (Baqir et al. 2023) discover that politicians representing various parties engage in a large number of interactions with people, at the same time detecting homophilic ties and increasing mutual dependency of people following the politics of other parties. The authors draw the conclusion that social media data can offer a sufficiently complex insight into the mode of alliances and political dispersion.

The other aspect of online conversation is the hate speech issue and targeting of vulnerable groups. According to Report on use of online space in Pakistan, hate speech is targeted toward women, religious minorities, journalists and activists. The report observes that such online hate is generally representative of offline aggression and that aggressors are varied, with religio-political groups and adherents tending to target women and religious minorities, and government or military agents usually targeting journalists and activists. The harassment may extend to real-life violence and restricts their chances of interacting in the discourse. Such targeting is detrimental to the prospects of reconciliation and it leads to fragmentation.

Digital rights activism and prospects for reconciliation

Although digital authoritarianism prevailed, the literature is characterized by a number of countervailing forces. According to the digital-rights study, the opposition of the judiciary towards authoritarian practices in Pakistan has been fierce and this has led to a well-informed civil society. Digital Rights Foundation, Bolo Bhi, Media Matters for Democracy and other organizations conduct research studies, policy advocacy and build capacity to secure digital rights and ensure freedom of expression (Mir et al., 2022). These organizations pressure politicians, educate people, and offer judicial assistance to the victims of online bullying. Their actions are geared towards closing the

digital divide, having an inclusive access and prioritizing human rights in digital development. Digital-rights activists seek to counter overreaching mass surveillance capabilities and promote accountability in the name of political reconciliation and participation (Chatterjee, 2023).

The literature reviewed indicates that political parties in Pakistan operate within a digital environment where there are competing forces. The future of reconciliation or further fragmentation of the political parties in Pakistan will lie in the balance between suppressive authoritarianism, civic activism and the unfolding play of the online social discourse.

Methodology

Discourse Analysis of Social Media and Manifestos

The study uses a discourse analysis approach to focus on content and tone of messages transmitted by PML-N, PPP and PTI during the election period of 2024. The study used official statements given by parties, their election manifestos and posts given by the respective parties and leadership of them on their verified social media accounts (Facebook pages and Twitter handles).

In using discourse analysis, we looked at content (what issues or concerns are highlighted) as well as framing (how words are used to frame the party in relation to those opposing or the audience in general). The discussed methodology allows treating the above questions regarding the processes of reconciliation or the further fragmentation of political parties in the digital age in a qualitative way with the focus on three major parties.

PML-N Emphasizing Development and Confronting Rivals

Manifesto Priorities

The Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) focused its election manifesto of 2024 to recover the economy and develop infrastructure. PML-N being the ruling party before the caretaker government focused on its performance and released high targets to remedy the economic problems of Pakistan. The major promises were to attain 6 percent GDP growth, create new 10 million jobs, and curb inflation to single-digit proportions in five years (Arab News, 2024). PML-N extended a message of expertise and competence in development, and its manifesto essentially attempted to instill a belief in its own capabilities to deliver a blessed future of Pakistan (as the title of the manifesto implied) (Zaman, N, 2024).

Table 1: Comparative Narratives of PML-N, PPP, and PTI in the 2024 Pakistan Elections Manifestos

Dimension	PML-N	PPP	PTI
Key 2024 Manifesto Priorities	Economic revival and infrastructure: Emphasized restoring high growth and jobs with ambitious targets (e.g. 6% GDP growth, 10 million new jobs). Pledged to curb inflation/unemployment and cut poverty from 38% to 25%. Massive focus on energy and infrastructure development – adding 15,000 MW to the grid and launching 10,000 MW in solar power projects to reduce electricity bills by 20–30%. Also promised closer ties with China and pro-business tax reforms (raising tax-to-GDP from ~10% to 13.5% by 2029) alongside privatization of loss-making state enterprises. Governance and legal reforms: Vowed to abolish the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) and revert constitutional Articles 62/63 to their original form (undoing later amendments) to reset electoral qualifications. Overall, PML-N projected itself	Social protection and “people’s economy”: Cantered on welfare policies for the poor and middle class. The manifesto proposed five pillars of a “People’s Economy” – ensuring macroeconomic stability, boosting public/private investment, protecting vulnerable groups, fixing fiscal imbalances, and managing debt prudently. Key promises included doubling real incomes for wage earners within five years, providing 300 units of free electricity to the poorest households, constructing 3 million housing units for women-led households, and delivering free primary healthcare nationally. It also pledged targeted support through Kissan	Islamic welfare state and institutional change: Framed a vision of Pakistan as a righteous welfare state inspired by the Islamic principles of the state of Madinah. PTI stressed rule of law, justice, and accountability as foundational values. Its manifesto proposed sweeping political reforms, including direct election of the Prime Minister (by popular vote instead of parliament) and reducing the parliamentary terms (National Assembly to 4 years, Senate to 5 years) along with partly direct Senate elections. PTI also vowed to establish a “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” to heal societal rifts and “bridge divides” in the country. Social services and anti-

Dimension	PML-N	PPP	PTI
	as experienced managers of the economy with plans for structural reforms and energy security.	(farmer) cards, Mazdoor (labourer) cards, and youth cards to aid agriculture workers, labourers, and young people. Rights and reforms: PPP committed to a Right to Food Act and a 1000-day nutrition program for new mothers. To fund its social agenda, it planned to abolish 17 redundant federal ministries (saving an estimated Rs300 billion) and phase out certain subsidies. The manifesto stressed defending provincial autonomy under the 18th Amendment, criminalizing enforced disappearances, overseeing intelligence agencies, and repealing colonial-era laws (e.g. reviewing the Army Act's controversial clauses). Climate resilience was also highlighted as a priority. In sum, PPP's platform focused on robust social safety nets, rights of marginalized communities, and devolved governance.	corruption: The party promised to broaden the tax net and revive key welfare programs it initiated while in power – notably expanding the Sehat Card health insurance scheme and reinstating the Ehsaas cash transfer program – as well as introducing a uniform national curriculum in education. PTI's manifesto put heavy emphasis on anti-corruption measures: pledging across-the-board accountability for white-collar crime through new provincial anti-corruption forces and an elite anti-corruption academy/training institution. In essence, PTI's 2024 platform blended populist welfare commitments with calls for systemic political overhaul and stringent anti-graft enforcement.
Social Media Discourse Themes	Outreach to youth; assertive tone: PML-N ramped up its social media campaign to target young voters (especially ~22 million first-time voters in 2024) on platforms like Facebook and X (Twitter). The party's digital content highlighted PML-N's governance achievements and promises, aiming to project competence and hope. The tone online was largely pro-stability and pro-development, coupled with sharp criticism of PTI's record. For example, PML-N messaging frequently blamed PTI for economic mismanagement and lawlessness; Maryam Nawaz – a key PML-N campaigner – even branded PTI a “terrorist party” in reference to alleged violence by PTI supporters on May 9, 2023. Such rhetoric, amplified on Twitter and	Multi-platform engagement; hope-driven messaging: The PPP's digital media strategy was expansive, mirroring its inclusive political message. PPP actively utilized Facebook, X (Twitter), Instagram, WhatsApp, and TikTok to connect with voters. According to the party's social media head, these platforms were used to communicate with two key audiences: (1) party loyalists – by sharing information on rallies, local events and inviting supporters to participate in campaign activities – and (2) the general public – by broadcasting “messages of hope” and	Digital-first, populist campaign: PTI effectively turned social media into its primary campaigning arena in 2024, especially as its public rallies were curtailed by arrests and media restrictions. The party ran a tech-savvy “guerilla” campaign on networks including Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok, capitalizing on its popularity among young, online-engaged Pakistanis. PTI's social media narrative was highly polarizing and incendiary. Imran Khan and his online surrogates cast the election in existential terms – a struggle of the people against a “corrupt elite” –

Dimension	PML-N	PPP	PTI
	Facebook, exemplified PML-N's dominant narrative of experience vs. chaos – i.e. presenting itself as the bringer of stability and depicting PTI as a disruptive force. Overall, PML-N used social media in 2024 to energize its base with success stories from past tenures and to undercut PTI's credibility through pointed attacks.	empathy for struggling communities across Pakistan. The tone of PPP's online discourse was generally constructive and inclusive. Posts and tweets often highlighted the party's commitments to social justice, minority rights, and federal unity (reflecting manifesto themes), and showcased relief efforts or development projects in Sindh province as examples of PPP governance. While PPP did engage in rebutting opponents (for instance, pointing out PTI's governance failures or PML-N's economic lapses), its social media language tended to be less combative and more policy-focused. This measured, issues-driven approach on digital platforms aimed to portray PPP as a mature voice of reason and compassion in Pakistani politics.	and routinely denounced PML-N and PPP leaders as corrupt or traitors in viral posts. The tone on PTI's channels was one of defiance and victimhood: they popularized slogans like "Haqeeqi Azadi" ("true freedom") and fuelled conspiracy claims that the establishment was subverting the people's mandate. PTI supporters dominated Twitter trends with aggressive hashtags targeting the "imported government" (their label for the incumbent PDM coalition). Innovative tactics: Facing a media blackout on Imran Khan, PTI's team embraced novel digital tools – conducting virtual rallies on social platforms and even using AI-generated audio deepfakes of Khan's voice to deliver speeches to supporters' smartphones. This unprecedented use of artificial intelligence to mimic Khan grabbed attention and kept the party's base mobilized despite his imprisonment. In sum, PTI's 2024 digital discourse was confrontational, anti-establishment, and grassroots-driven, leveraging every online means (from Facebook livestreams to WhatsApp groups) to bypass traditional media and rally its mostly young follower base.
Stance on Reconciliation vs Fragmentation	Coalition with allies, exclusion of PTI: PML-N demonstrated a willingness to reconcile and partner with PPP and other former rivals as long as they shared an anti-PTI stance. After a hung parliament result, PML-N moved swiftly to form a coalition government with PPP (and smaller parties), indicating a priority for unity among "like-minded" forces. In contrast, PML-N categorically ruled out	Consensus-driven, but firm on principles: PPP consistently took a stance of bridge-building and dialogue in 2024. Both before and after the election, PPP leadership called for parties to "work together" in the national interest. With no party winning a majority, PPP became a kingmaker and negotiated a coalition	Confrontation and political isolation: PTI adopted a markedly fragmentation-oriented stance, shunning compromise with the other major parties. Imran Khan declared he would not form any coalition with what he termed the "corrupt" parties – explicitly rejecting alliances with PML-N, PPP, or even MQM. True

Dimension	PML-N	PPP	PTI
	any understanding with PTI, which it portrayed as an unlawful and destabilizing movement. During the campaign, PML-N leaders openly vilified PTI – Maryam Nawaz’s description of PTI as a “terrorist party” exemplified this refusal to reconcile. The party’s narrative framed PTI’s 2018–2022 rule as an aberration marked by chaos and insinuated that national stability required excluding PTI from power. PML-N often invoked the spirit of the Charter of Democracy (its past accord with PPP) to stress democratic unity (minus PTI). Thus, on the spectrum of reconciliation vs fragmentation, PML-N favoured unity within the old mainstream (PML-N, PPP, etc.) but a hard line against Imran Khan’s PTI, blaming the latter for polarizing the country.	with PML-N, agreeing to support PML-N’s prime ministerial candidate in exchange for power-sharing (e.g. securing the Presidency for a PPP nominee). Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari explicitly stated that compromise and “give and take” were necessary to “save the democratic and parliamentary system” – signalling PPP’s commitment to reconciliation among democratic forces. However, PPP’s openness had limits: it aligned with PML-N in marginalizing PTI. Bilawal noted that while PTI was technically the largest party, it “said that it would not talk to anyone”, which in PPP’s view justified moving on without PTI. In essence, PPP championed an inclusive, coalition-based approach (even attempting to bring PTI on board initially, according to some reports) but ultimately sided against PTI when Khan refused dialogue. PPP’s stance can be seen as pro-unity (among parties willing to engage) and wary of those perceived as destabilizing to democracy.	to this, after the election PTI sought to form government with small religious parties instead, rather than partner with its longtime rivals. This intransigent posture reflected PTI’s narrative of a lone crusade against a venal establishment. While PTI’s manifesto included the idea of a “Truth and Reconciliation Commission” to heal societal wounds, in practice Khan’s rhetoric and actions did little to foster political reconciliation. PTI leaders intensified accusations of fraud and injustice – for example, alleging the election was “stolen” and deriding the PML-N/PPP coalition as “mandate thieves” after results were announced. Such language and refusal to engage with opponents underscored PTI’s role in deepening polarization. In summary, PTI positioned itself in 2024 as an outsider unwilling to legitimize or cooperate with the established parties, favouring a combative stance over any calls for unity.

Sources: *Manifesto summaries are based on PILAT’s overview of party manifestos (The News International, Feb 4 2024). Social media insights are drawn from discourse analysis and news reports (Arab News, Feb 7 2024; Dawn, Jan 16 2024; The Guardian, Feb 13 2024). Political stance observations reference post-election reporting (Al Jazeera, Feb 13 2024; Dawn, Feb 20 2024).*

Social Media Discourse

On the social media, the PML-N heavily relied on the two axes messaging, which implies presenting the development successes and taking a fiercely-worded stand against the PTI. A content analysis of Facebook pages of the parties revealed that PML-N mostly used the page to report on development projects and government programs in line with its manifesto (Saleem, N., 2025).

PML-N social media strategy therefore walked a fine line between appearing to offer a positive agenda and to discredit the opposition. This kind of language contributed little to reconciliation efforts; rather, to supporters of the language it would strengthen an ongoing, and equally simplistic, us versus them climate.

Table 2: Social-media discourse (Election 2024) comparison of PML-N, PPP & PTI (Twitter)

Political party (official page & examples of posts)	Observed posts & election-period themes (Feb 2024)	How the discourse aligns with the research article & tone analysis
PML-N (X @pmln_org)	• Praise for leadership & return of Nawaz Sharif: on 29 Feb 2024 the official feed celebrated Nawaz Sharif taking the oath in the National Assembly and predicted that his return would restore Pakistan's prestige. • Attacks on Imran Khan: another post blamed Imran Khan for deliberately pushing the country toward destruction in 2022 and said Shehbaz Sharif led a coalition out of crises; a separate tweet mocked Khan for complaining to the IMF and reminded followers of allegations such as the £190 million case and the Tosha Khana wrist-watch scandal. • Denouncing PTI & questioning patriotism: posts accused PTI of wanting Pakistan's support only when in power and of trying to destroy the country to save its politics and accused the party of hooliganism in the National Assembly, noting that it accepted election results where it won but cried rigging where it lost. • Governance & development messaging: several posts promoted Maryam Nawaz's quick actions as new Punjab CM, claiming she took initiatives in the first 48 hours and promising that "Punjab will rise again"; another long post highlighted her visit to the Green Pakistan Initiative and listed agriculture and environmental projects (irrigation for Cholistan, modern farm equipment, tree planting, transport projects). • Procedural/coalition updates: PML-N highlighted that Sardar Ayaz Sadiq had submitted nomination papers for Speaker of the National Assembly. • Disinformation correction: when a fake account claimed the party had ended its alliance with the Istehkam Party, the official PML-N account issued a "fake news alert" within an hour. • Call for boycott: on 14 Feb 2024 the party posted "This isn't the first time they have done this... @CareemPAK showing its true colours again... Shameful" using the hashtag #BoycottCareem.	• Development & economic narrative: the research article notes that PML-N's manifesto promised economic recovery (6 % GDP growth, 10 million jobs) and infrastructure projects. The official posts reinforce this narrative by showcasing development initiatives (Green Pakistan projects, "Punjab will rise again"). • Combative tone toward PTI: the article highlights Maryam Nawaz's combative style, labelling Imran Khan a thief and reminding audiences of the £190 million case. The Feb-2024 tweets mirror this rhetoric by mocking Khan's IMF complaints and corruption cases and denouncing PTI as unpatriotic. • Statesmanlike posts vs. insults: the article observed that Shehbaz Sharif's posts were more statesmanlike while Maryam's were scornful. Similarly, the feed contains both policy-oriented posts (development updates) and aggressive messages attacking PTI. • Coalition & reconciliation: while the party promoted coalition procedures (Ayaz Sadiq's nomination) and later offered to work with all parties, most posts during the campaign remained combative. • Use of social media for narrative control: issuing a fake-news alert to debunk a boycott rumour and launching #BoycottCareem illustrate the party's use of digital platforms to manage perceptions. Overall, PML-N's social-media discourse blended developmental messaging with personal attacks, reflecting a strategy that the article describes as primarily competitive and fragmentary rather than reconciliatory.
PPP (X @MediaCellPPP)	• Calls for a 'charter for the economy': during a dinner hosted by Shehbaz Sharif on 28 Feb 2024, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari proposed a charter for the economy, national consensus and electoral/judicial reforms. • Coalition & procedural updates: another	• Issue-oriented and coalition-friendly discourse: the research article notes that PPP's manifesto emphasised doubling real incomes,

Political party (official page & examples of posts)	Observed posts & election-period themes (Feb 2024)	How the discourse aligns with the research article & tone analysis
	post about the same dinner reported that Shehbaz nominated Ayaz Sadiq as Speaker and Bilawal nominated Ghulam Mustafa Shah as Deputy Speaker while again advocating the charter for economy and reforms. • Cross-party engagement: on 29 Feb 2024 the account shared a photo of Aseefa Bhutto Zardari meeting Maryam Nawaz in the parliament. • Parliamentary legitimacy: another tweet celebrated newly elected MNAs taking the oath. • Organizational focus: on 27 Feb 2024 the party announced a committee for the presidential campaign comprising Yusuf Raza Gillani, Raja Pervez Ashraf, Syed Khursheed Shah and Syed Naveed Qamar.	universal healthcare, women's empowerment and protection of minorities and that Bilawal used social media to advocate the restoration of mobile services and to criticize PTI's hypocrisy. The posts examined show little personal mud-slinging; instead, they promote consensus (charter for economy, judicial reforms) and highlight parliamentary processes (oath taking, nomination of speaker and deputy speaker). • Promotion of reconciliation: by documenting Aseefa Bhutto's meeting with Maryam Nawaz, the party projects an image of cross-party cooperation. This aligns with the article's observation that PPP often called for dialogue and national consensus, though it set conditions such as accountability for the May 9 riots. • Moderate tone: none of the posts reviewed contain abuse; they focus on policy proposals and organizational updates. The article similarly describes PPP's digital presence as issue-oriented and less vitriolic than its rivals. The emphasis on reforms, rights and welfare in the manifesto is consistent with the party's restrained social-media messaging.
PTI (X @PTIofficial)	• Victimization narrative: on 29 Feb 2024 Barrister Gohar complained that the party was broken, its election symbol removed and its leader imprisoned for 31 years yet "people proved that Imran Khan is the real leader" (#میںٹیٹ / #MandateThieves). • Attacks on rivals: another post quoted Umar Ayub saying "N-League and PPP are frauds... we cannot sit with them because they have imprisoned our leader and oppressed our workers". • Accusing the Election Commission: PTI claimed it had no hope in the Election Commission, alleging that its symbol was given to another party and that Form 47 was used to rig results. • Stolen-mandate rhetoric & call for protest: Abuzar Niazi argued that a parliament without a real mandate cannot impose taxes; he said stealing the mandate is the biggest treason and urged transparent investigations before forming a government. Another post said PTI held positive	• Populist and confrontational discourse: the research article describes PTI's manifesto as promising an Islamic welfare state, direct election of the prime minister and a Truth & Reconciliation Commission. It also notes that PTI's digital campaign framed the party as a victim of a "fascist" regime, promoted hashtags like #PakistanUnderFascism, claimed a stolen mandate and urged protests. The posts above mirror these themes: they portray PTI as oppressed (broken party, jailed leader), cast PML-N and PPP as frauds, allege electoral rigging via

Political party (official page & examples of posts)	Observed posts & election-period themes (Feb 2024)	How the discourse aligns with the research article & tone analysis
	discussions with all parties except those benefiting from rigging (PML-N, PPP, MQM) and announced a historic protest on 2 March. • International & human-rights framing: the party's "Global Pakistan" news update listed top stories – chants for Imran in the National Assembly, "Imran Khan & Bushra Bibi standing strong in the face of fascism," US lawmakers writing to the Biden administration about electoral fraud – and used hashtags such as #PakistanUnderFascism and #GazaGenocide.	Form 47 and insist that only real mandate holders can govern. • Mobilization & rejection of reconciliation: by promoting a "historic protest" and using hashtags like #MandateThieves and #PakistanUnderFascism, PTI emphasizes mobilization rather than compromise. The article observed that despite proposing a Truth & Reconciliation Commission, PTI rejected coalition offers and prioritized protests. • Internationalization & human-rights framing: the party's posts link domestic grievances to global narratives of fascism and human-rights abuses, which the article notes as part of PTI's strategy to garner sympathy. Overall, PTI's social-media discourse during the election was highly polarizing, depicting rivals and institutions as corrupt and illegitimate, thereby deepening fragmentation.

The official X feeds of the parties involved in Pakistan's 2024 election show that the research article is correct in concluding that social media increased divisions, with PML-N using both developmental and post-attack posts, PPP being more consensual, and PTI being more focused on confrontational messages. These online approaches, which were to mobilize supporters, further disunited politics instead of fostering reconciliation.

Table 3: Comparative Analysis of Pakistani Political Parties' Digital Discourse (Feb - May 2024) Facebook

Analytical Dimension	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)	Pakistan Party (PPP)	People's Pakistan League-Nawaz (PML-N)
1. Primary Thematic Focus (As per Research)	Populist Anti-Corruption & Systemic Overhaul: Focus on "Haqeeqi Azadi," victimization, and dismantling a corrupt status quo.	Social Welfare & Constitutional Democracy: Emphasis on social safety nets, rights, and democratic resilience.	Development & Economic Recovery: Highlighting past and promised economic projects, stability, and competence.
2. Evidence from Facebook Posts	- "Mandate Theft" infographics. - Hashtags: #ReleaseImranKhan, #RiggingExposed. - Framing opponents as "thieves" (#MadamThiefMinister). - Narrative of persecution (Posts on May 9, 2024).	- Tributes to Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's legacy (#SalamShaheedBhutto). - Focus on development in Sindh. - Statements from Bilawal/Zardari advocating for judicial	- Posts on development projects and economic goals (Implied in research; specific project posts not heavily featured in the provided

Analytical Dimension	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)	Pakistan Party (PPP)	People's	Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)
		probes and democratic unity. - Celebration of coalition-building and President Zardari.		screenshots, but tone aligns). - Focus on governance and stability post-election. - Countering PTI's narrative (e.g., sharing FAFEN report).
3. Language & Tone (As per Research)	Confrontational, Defiant, and Victimhood-Driven: Uses inflammatory language (e.g., "thieves," "fascism"). Most likely to use personal attacks and spread outrage.	A Mix of Conciliatory and Critical: More measured tone, but will critically engage opponents on policy and democratic principles. Uses constitutional and welfare-oriented language.		A Mix of Statesmanlike and Partisan: Official accounts and Shehbaz use a more developmental, unity-focused tone. Other leaders (e.g., Maryam) use sharper, more confrontational language against PTI.
4. Evidence from Facebook Posts	- Direct accusations: "فسطائیت" (Fascism), "چور مانتیٹ" (Mandate thieves). - Aggressive hashtags: #MadamThiefMinister. - Mobilizing language: "کوون دکھاو" (Show up, everyone!).	- Use of formal titles: "Chairman", "President". - Calls for judicial accountability and democratic unity. - Celebration of legacy and sacrifice (#SalamShaheedBhutto).		- Official posts focus on policy and governance. - The sharing of the FAFEN report is a factual counter-narrative, a more technocratic rebuttal than emotional.
5. Stance on Reconciliation (As per Research)	Conditional and Unilateral: Rhetorically supports national healing (e.g., Truth Commission) but in practice, sets preconditions that delegitimize opponents. Rejects power-sharing.	The Most Openly Conciliatory: Advocates for dialogue and national unity, often positioning itself as the mature, stabilizing force willing to coalesce for "national interest."		Strategically Conciliatory: Extends offers of unity when politically necessary (e.g., post-election coalition) but quickly blames PTI for being an obstacle to reconciliation.
6. Evidence from Facebook Posts	- Total rejection of the election results and the resulting government. - No observed posts calling for dialogue with opponents; focus is solely on mobilization against them.	- Explicit call for a "judicial probe" into May 9 2024, framing accountability as a path to justice, not just revenge. - Celebration of coalition formation as a		- Nawaz Sharif's post-election call for a coalition government (Cited in research; not in screenshots). - Subsequent narrative that PTI is

Analytical Dimension	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)	Pakistan Party (PPP)	People's	Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)
		patriotic - President Zardari's message on Pakistan prosperity.	duty. Zardari's propelling towards	the "hurdle" to reconciliation (Cited in research). - Post highlighting multi-party meeting to form government in Punjab.
7. Digital Strategy & Mobilization	Grassroots Mobilization & Counter-Narrative: Relies on viral hashtags, mobilization calls (#ProtestOnFriday), and documenting alleged fraud (Form 45 vs. Form 47).	Legacy Building & Policy Advocacy: Uses platform to promote its governance record in Sindh, policy ideas, and its role as a responsible political entity.		Top-Down Narrative Control: Focuses on promoting its leadership, official achievements, and countering opposition claims through official reports and statements.
8. Evidence from Facebook Posts	- Use of #ProtestOnFriday. - Detailed, shareable infographics on "stolen seats". - Instructions to supporters to guard votes.	- Posts about Bhutto's legacy and current leadership. - Coverage of Bilawal's media interactions.		- Sharing of the FAFEN report to debunk PTI. - Post on government's performance under PM Shehbaz.

The posts of Facebook examined support the argument of the research article that post-election discourse on social media fosters political fragmentation well, where PTI, PPP, and PML-N have employed social media to cement division. Although the policy convergence could be observed to an extent in the manifestos, the online activity makes the polarization more acute, aiming at emotional appeals and strengthening the partisan divisions instead of aiming at something more authentic, true reconciliation.

Stance on Reconciliation

Interestingly, the PML-N top leadership did raise the possibility of a political consensus when confronted with a hung parliament. Following an election which produced no single party majority, Nawaz Sharif made an unusually conciliatory speech publicly on 9 February 2024. Since PML-N lacked a sufficient number of seats to form a government by its own, Nawaz appealed to all the parties, including those who had lesser numbers with the support of his arch rival Imran Khan, to join hands to form a government through a coalition (Arab News, (2024)

How sincere this desire was, or whether it was a mere ploy to isolate PTI, is arguable but this portrayed PML-N in terms that were seemingly willing to forgive the opposition so long as it would forget.

PPP Advocating Social Welfare and Constitutionalism

Manifesto Priorities

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) designed its 2024 manifesto with a focus on broad social welfare programs and the enhancement of democratic institutions. As a left of centre party with a history of populist rhetoric (roti, kapra, makaan) - food, clothing, shelter - PPP doubled up on pro-people's initiatives. The range of issues covered by the manifesto, including economic stability, human rights, all underlies the attempt by PPP to position itself as the party of progressive values that was committed not only to the bread-and-butter issues but also to constitutional democracy.

Social Media Discourse

On social media, the use and action of PPP were less forceful and more concerning issues than its opponents but did not avoid political battles. Analysis of the Facebook pages revealed that PPP was more inclined to give focus to their liberal and people friendly policies and as such the party tended to use its page to update citizens on its welfare policies and vision (Ghauri, M. J., 2025). The given thematic concentration implies the use of agenda-setting on socio-economic issues via digital means as well as mobilization by PPP.

Nonetheless, PPP did not shy away in fighting with opposition parties in the online domain. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, a younger generation leader is active on Twitter (X) and other social media venues to take part in political debates sometimes in a witty and sarcastic tone.

The message was reflected in the PPP social media messages that established the party as a stabilizing opinion with the national interest and economic recovery as its primary focus rather than self-interest.

Stance on Reconciliation

Of the three parties, PPP especially has been the most vocal in making the proposal of a politics of reconciliation (the term is perhaps most famously synonymous with Zardari). Regarding the digital era, PPP is represented by its efforts of reconciliation though its calls to dialogue and unity on several matters.

By paying attention to this on Twitter Facebook, PPP demonstrated that it had these values of unity and dialogue and that it supported that.

PTI Championing Accountability and Mobilizing Outrage

Manifesto Priorities

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) went into the 2024 election with a manifesto that envisioned broad ambitions to reshape Pakistan and that has Pakistan as a welfare state that upholds Islam values. Its manifesto at its base set forth the establishment of the state based on the constructs of Riyasat-e-Madina (the State of Medina) with focus on Islamic values, justice, and Islamic welfare system (The News International, 2024)

Overall, it can be seen that the manifesto offered by PTI had all the trappings of populism, namely populist justice and populist welfare, coupled with an anti-establishment, systemic change agenda which made PTI sound like the party of revolutionary change to its supporters.

Social Media Discourse

The use of social media by PTI was by far the most active and confrontational of the major parties making it an iconic movement driven by online activism. As the authorities have clamped down on most of its rallies by banning them, jailing its leaders or by going missing, PTI used the social media as the main channel via Facebook, Twitter (X), YouTube and WhatsApp networks to stay in touch with the world and maintain coordination. A research paper that analyses the 2024 campaigns said that all parties were extensive users of Facebook, but it was PTI which communicated more about voter awareness and political victimization on its page than other parties (Baqir et al., 2023).

The nature of online discussion in PTI was vehemently divisive in a certain sense. It has endeavoured to create polarization of the electorate developing a clear moral dichotomy between the PTI and all who oppose it being part of the evil corrupt elitists. This aspect of information warfare added weight in the process of reconciliation since those involved felt demonized and disinformation made the entire process fail due to lack of trust.

Stance on Reconciliation

Although the confrontational stance was taken, PTI has expressed, albeit as mere rhetoric, the need to reconcile the nation, specifically to the state institutions and societal healing. On the ground, Imran continued with his claim of being ready to engage in discussions with all people in the name of holding free elections, but in the next breath, he imposed conditions that other people could not accept (e.g. the early date of elections or the departure of a particular official). He infamously remarked that he would prefer to address the real stakeholders (an allusion to the military) than address what he termed as corrupt political leaders in PDM (Times of India. (2024). This position undermined the possibility of PTI-PDM normalization.

Comparative Analysis Converging and Diverging Digital Narratives

In comparing and contrasting PML-N, PPP and PTI it is clear that each party has responded differently to the digital-age narratives, although, there are several elements that each of these parties have shared in similarities as to how social media has altered their political messaging.

Commonalities**Direct Voter Engagement**

Each of these three parties was made use of social media as a direct communication channel to the voters by eliminating the old middlemen. The 2024 electoral was the most digitalized in the history of Pakistan and the top leadership of both parties were leading the campaigns online posting speeches in rallies, the launch of the manifesto and the refutation of the other party members.

Manifesto Rhetoric vs. Online Rhetoric

All parties in their manifestos presented solutions to the core problems of Pakistan and some of these overlapped. A certain level of consensus on some reforms was surprising at the policy level. These conflicting priorities were exaggerated in the virtual state to stand out in the mindsets of the voter (Gibson & Ward, 2009). Consequently, the closeness in the manifestos was loomed by the strategic communication that became concerned with the differences.

Emotional and Ideological Appeals

The emotional appeals employed on social media by all parties were to mobilize their supporters but different parties chose somewhat opposing emotions: pride and nostalgia among PML-N (e.g., in the past when Nawaz led development efforts), hope and empathy among PPP (e.g., those who received benefits of PPP governmental initiatives), and anger and defiance among PTI (e.g., injustices against PTI).

Differences**Thematic Focus**

The digital stories of each of the parties were built around two aspects, that is of strength or foundation ideology: - PML-N built itself as a party of experience and development. Its social media messages, as well as the statements made by its leaders, kept mentioning the projects (roads, power stations) and economic goals. Therefore, the story developed by PTI was the most polarizing of the three because it made a conscious effort to undermine the others to render them illegitimate as part of an unjust status quo.

Use of Language and Tone

PMLN and PTI exhibited more intense use of name calling and personal attacks over the internet than PPP (though PPP was not innocent on this count too). The PML-N jabs at PTI rallies unified its old electorate but could not succeed in attracting the virgin voter who is not happy with this mud hurling. Such a relatively civil style made PPP more acceptable as a coalition partner but not so sexy to the digital community who is in search of high drama.

Digital Savvy and Campaign Innovation

PTI is deemed by many to be the first political entity in Pakistan to seriously and effectively incorporate social media as an adjunct to the political process (a trend that was set as early as the period 2011-2013). The blocking of X (Twitter) made it harder for PTI to communicate, but did not impact PML-N and PPP, which have access to state media or traditional networks, to the same extent.

Approach to Fact and Post-Truth Politics

The digital age has washed away the boundaries between truth and propaganda. Opponents of PTI accuse it of i) setting up troll farms and ii) spreading fake news (both of which are denied by PTI, which calls this accusing it of mere enthusiasm). The PML-N and PPP parties also have special social media teams which at times spread unverified reports (such as the rumours about personal life of Imran or splits within PTI).

Reconciliation or Fragmentation in the Digital Age?

The data of the 2024 election campaign in Pakistan indicates the existence of a fractionally divided political discourse, with occasional appeals to unity made by leaders. Social media became a kind of a two-edged sword since on the one hand it democratizes access to information by providing each party with a platform where its vision can be proclaimed; on the other hand, it has amplified the role of polarizing propaganda and may frequently condense a complex political issue to a viral soundbite. The dynamics of how the parties communicated online during this time indicate that digital media usually escalated some conflicts rather than getting rid of them (Gul, K., 2025).

As an example; suppose, Imran Khan and Nawaz Sharif talked to each other tomorrow, then armies of trolls would dig out old tweets where they had called each other traitors, and this creates a deterrent effect on leaders attempting reconciliation, as the online response will differ sharply with bad and nasty.

Glimmers of Reconciliation

In spite of these headwinds however, reconciliation has not been a total non-starter. Importantly, it is making everything understand that Pakistani crises (e.g., its economic collapse, security threats, etc.) need some degree of unity in order to overcome.

The same internet technology that tears apart can be used to unify so long as it is utilized on a different level. Reconciliation does not necessarily arise out of a spontaneous care on social media, but by engaging in practical work in closed spaces which is later transformed into a new discourse in the open.

Impact of Digital Public on Reconciliation

It should be taken into account that political leaders now pay special attention to digital audience. They do their actions in front of their followers and despair of criticism in case they seem weak or compromised. To shift instead toward reconciliation, leaders would have to shift that discourse in a potentially dangerous direction: one that challenges them to shift away from casting opponents in the worst possible light, and choose cooperation over a policy of out-and-out opposition.

Consequences and Looking Forward

The cost of continued fragmentation is expensive. The elections of 2024 instead of solving the political conflict, as some analysts predicted, have not resolved the political confrontation. The other hopeful possibility is the three parties resolving to communicate some form of unity on the electoral reforms or economic rescue plans and selling them collectively to the people via social media, and again it is a far status quo, but not impossible to do in case the current situation of things makes it necessary.

Conclusion

The mainstream parties in Pakistan are on the brink of a new era of digitalization. The 2024 election practice indicates that politics was deeply divided but also that they come together when it was necessary to do so. A general comparative analysis of PML-N, PPP, and PTI shows that the three parties possess the ability to bring together and the propensity to disintegrate, i.e., there is an inability to unite and an inability to unite. The best, and perhaps only, path toward the attainment of a healthier democratic conversation is to work toward that objective consciously: by easing off the fiery rhetoric, engaging in good faith discussions, and using digital sources to enlighten rather than excite. Only in this way, it is possible to respond to the question of planning the political life as the choice between Reconciliation or Fragmentation with the leaning towards cohesive political environment. At this point, the response is ambivalent, namely that no one knows yet, and the trail towards reconciliation in a digital democracy continues, although at the counterpoint towards polarization.

Recommendations for Future Research

Future research may expand on this study by employing comparative designs to respond to the question of how reconciliation strategies in Pakistan are similar to other political settings within developing democracies.

Comparative Studies

Reconciliation strategies in Pakistan and other emerging democracies should be explored as a way of pin-pointing some similarities and contrasts.

Methodological Expansion

Adopt mixed methods techniques, including archival analysis and elite interviews, survey data to get both institutional and popular responses.

Longitudinal Research

Monitor several electoral cycles and determine how the politics of reconciliation change and affect the process of democratic consolidation.

Interdisciplinary Inquiry

Synthesize law, sociology, and conflict solving views to enhance the knowledge about the impact of reconciliation on political culture.

Focus on Political Behaviour

Examine the role of reconciliation in the process of coalition building, party politics, and political trust in democracy.

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