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Abstract

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Keywords: Crisis Communication, Pakistan, Political Communication, Populist Communication, Thematic Content Analysis

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Title

Populist and Crisis Communication during Political Crisis: Thematic Content Analysis of Pakistani Politicians' Speeches

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Keywords:

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Abstract

Steering away from the Global North, this research focuses on Pakistan's dynamic and crisis-ridden political landscape. It specifically examines the intricate realm of populist and crisis communication strategies used by key political figures during the critical no-confidence vote of 2022. Through thematic content analysis of the speeches of prominent politicians – Imran Khan, Maryam Nawaz, and Shahbaz Sharif – it explores differences in both populist and crisis communication to identify unique communication styles and common elements in these speeches. This research goes beyond the Western geographic focus to reveal the intricate interactions between populist and crisis communication in a region facing significant historical and contemporary challenges. It adds valuable knowledge to the field of political communication by analyzing the subtle tactics used by politicians during crises, setting a base for further studies on how these strategies influence public opinion and political stability.

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Introduction: Communicating Populism

Academic interest in the relationship between media, communication, and populism is growing,

which is evident in the increasing attention given to this topic in the scholarly literature (Sengul, 2019). The media's role in the success of the populist radical right is both intricate and at times conflicting. There is a belief that the media plays a



significant part in bolstering the emergence of populist movements, as highlighted by Mazzolini (2008), who emphasizes the transformation of political discourse into a spectacle through the mediatisation of politics. While there have been some disagreements about the operationalization of populism, some researchers recognize the core of populist messages to be people-centrism, anti-elitism, and moralism (Olivas Osuna & Rama, 2021). Mudde (2004) defines populism as a 'thin-centered ideology', whereas Jagers and Walgrave (2007) emphasize the discursive nature of populism. Some focus on the performative nature of populism (Ostiguy, 2009), and others consider it a political strategy that is used by personalist leaders to attain and exercise power (Weyland, 2003).

Populism has been studied from both theoretical and empirical perspectives, however, Mudde's ideational approach has received a great deal of attention (Schürmann & Gründl, 2022). Moffitt (2016) defines populism as a political style that encompasses various elements. These include poor manners, an emphasis on crisis breakdown and threat, and appeals to the general public rather than the elite. According to Moffitt (2016), studying the political philosophies of populist actors can help us comprehend the performative elements of modern politics.

Populists have adopted a distinct political communication style, properly utilizing the opportunities provided by today's media landscape (Wodak, 2015). According to Kriesi (2017), political leaders' communication strategies expose their true ideological stances. Populists often create a narrative in the media where "popular truth and elite interests" collide (Waisbord 2018). "The messenger of populist communication" is the role played by the populist actor (Engesser et al. 2017). De Vreese et al. (2018) aim to investigate the different ways through which populism can be considered a communication phenomenon. They feel that populist ideas have to be appropriately expressed in order for the expected results to be achieved and thus affect the listenership. This is for populist ideas to be even more effective. In this regard, the ideational elements of populism can be better appreciated through considerations of communication, performance, and discourse. Sengul further says that this difference in opinions

over populists is due to the fact that one should consider both their communication strategy as well as the type of messages they convey. Discourse analysis is relatively less sophisticated compared to political tactics or ideological considerations from the empirical point of view (Olivas Osuna & Rama, 2021). It is extremely essential to observe populism in the light of political communication because their speech embodies the ideology that lies below it (Hawkins et al, 2012).

It is necessary to analyze the media and communication policies populist politicians engage in because the implications of such populist communication are serious. Some research studies have demonstrated the impacts of political populist discourse. For example, Heiss and Matthes (2019) discovered that people with strong opinions against immigrants have usually limited their sources of information to only those that confirm them. Similarly, Hameleers (2019) found that exposure to anti-immigrant right-wing populist discourse increases the likelihood that those who consider themselves to be relatively impoverished will activate negative attitudes regarding migrants. The significance of populist communication in the establishment and growth of populist parties is demonstrated by these instances.

Crisis and Populism

Despite their growing popularity, populist parties may not be solely attributable to their populist rhetoric. Populist communication can be viewed as a tactic that depends on the specific context in which it is employed, as populism flourishes in specific social conditions (Hawkins et al, 2012). According to published research, populist movements typically start during times of distress. For instance, the global financial crisis may have contributed to the emergence of populist parties in Europe (Kriesi & Pappas, 2015). Similarly, the hyperinflationary crisis in Latin America in the 1980s led to the rise of neo-liberal populist leaders (Weyland, 2003). Mudde (2004) sees social crisis as somehow related to populism. According to Canovan (1999), when the political system's performance is unsatisfactory, populist parties become more attractive. Populism can be seen as a response to a political system that is not functioning properly (Meny & Saeul, 2002). According to Laclau (2005), populism arises from a

lack of representation, which he describes as an "unfulfilled demand" of democracy. In this perspective, the emergence of populism is seen as a logical consequence of the unmet needs within the population. According to Kriesi et al. (2006), populist parties receive their main support from individuals who are negatively impacted by modernization. These individuals, commonly referred to as the "losers of modernization," experience significant disadvantages in areas such as economics, culture, and social aspects, due to the effects of globalization.

Some studies (Moffitt, 2016; Kaltwasser 2011) consider crisis to be the core part of a populist belief system. Taggart (2004) draws a strong connection between populism and a phenomenon known as the 'sense of crisis.' This refers to the belief that society is on the brink of a major turning point, and if no action is taken, it will inevitably lead to the downfall of society. Therefore, economic, political, and societal conditions can lead to a rise in populism (Kriesi & Pappas, 2015).

However, it is important to note that crises do not just act as triggers or facilitators for populism; they are also shaped and portrayed by populist discontent and the narratives of blame that they construct (Olivas Osuna & Rama, 2021). Moffitt (2014) argues that social, political, and economic problems, along with the state's failure to resolve them, are often highlighted by populists to create a sense of crisis and create a divide between 'the people' and 'dangerous others'. Populists fuel a perception of a malfunctioning society and a threatening situation to draw populist support, which is a core element of the communication of populists (Schürmann & Gründl, 2022).

Politicians often create a sense of crisis to convince the public that the only alternative is their populist policies (Brubaker, 2017). Wirz et al (2019) also point out a sense of crisis is created by the dramatic communication style of populists, which leads to an increase in their persuasive power. A sense of urgency in a crisis situation and the need for immediate action further turn 'the people' against the elite and portray populists as defenders of 'the people' criticizing the elite for their actions (Moffitt, 2014). Populists do not only react to an existing crisis, they also cultivate a sense of crisis and cast themselves as the only solution to the crisis

(Brubaker, 2020). Populist actors can be considered as 'agents of discontent' (van Kessel, 2015) who utilize the power of crisis situations, so they can be considered political entrepreneurs who seek to broaden their support base by exploiting a crisis narrative (Schürmann & Gründl, 2022).

Moffitt (2014) identifies six stages of crisis performance: (1) identify failure; (2) elevate to the level of crisis by linking into a wider framework and adding a temporal dimension; (3) frame 'the people' versus those responsible for the crisis; (4) use media to propagate performance; (5) present simple solutions and strong leadership; and (6) continue to propagate crisis. Thus, the crisis is a politically mediated event (Taraktaş et al, 2022).

Not only populist leaders, but others who rival them also utilize a crisis discourse and stage the crisis performance (Stavrakakis et al, 2017). This crisis discourse lays the blame on 'nefarious others' and provides very simple solutions in defense of 'the people', which often elicits a similar response from political rivals and results in political polarization (Olivas Osuna & Rama, 2021). Hence, it is relevant to study populist discourse within a crisis context. While the analysis of political texts may not fully assess whether an objective crisis is being faced by society, one can analyze whether the negative framing of social situations through the combination of populism and crisis benefits political actors (Schürmann & Gründl, 2022).

The Pakistani Case

In Pakistan, politicians, religious leaders, and military generals alike have used populism to garner support for their actions. Faith and the promise of a better lifestyle have been used in Pakistan by populists. The basis of Pakistan, the Two-Nation Theory, rests on the idea that Muslims and Hindus are two distinct nations that cannot live together, making Islamic ideology central to Pakistan's existence (Majid et al, 2014). Fatima Jinnah, Qaid-e-Azam's sister, ran a populist campaign promising 'real democracy' to enforce 'people's will' in 1956 (Zaheer & Chawla, 2019). The first democratic populist leader of Pakistan was Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. He was a member of the landed elite and both his father and grandfather were active politicians during the British rule in India (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021). Bhutto was the first

populist leader who challenged both the civilian and military elite and asserted the rights of 'the people' by introducing the slogan of 'food, clothes, and shade' (Zahoor, 2017). His was a left-leaning populism formulated with staunch anti-capitalism and anti-corruption rhetoric (Yilmaz and Saleem, 2021).

The military also plays a significant role in populism in Pakistan to maintain its influence (Awan, 2013). For instance, Islamization was utilized at an immense scale by the military dictator Zia-ul-Haq, as he constituted the Federal Shariat Court and formulated the Hudood ordinance (Shakil & Yilmaz, 2021). The Sharif family is another major political actor in Pakistan, who rose to prominence during the era of the military dictator Zia ul Haq. Zia supported the Sharifs' party PML-N against the left-wing Pakistan People's Party.

On the contrary, Imran Khan comes from the upper-middle class and pursued politics after he retired as a cricketer. He is the iconic sportsman who won a World Cup for Pakistan. In his book, Khan frequently repeats his being Muslim, showing that he aligns with the religious sentiments of the conservative populace. He founded a reformist political party, PTI, promising to deliver justice to the people (Yilmaz & Shakil, 2021). Until the elections of 2013, PTI was a personality-driven party that attempted to gain a foothold in Pakistani politics, but with little success (Mulla, 2017). In 2014, Imran Khan launched his campaign against the Sharif government. His protest, known as 'dharna,' garnered extensive media coverage. The protest was held in the Red Zone of Islamabad, which is a sensitive area near the parliament of Pakistan. Khan demanded an independent inquiry into allegations of rigging in the elections of 2013. Governance and corruption are frequently featured in Khan's use of language. Khan became a populist, Islamized brand against the corrupt elite, and maintained that he entered politics for 'the people' (Shakil & Yilmaz, 2021). In the 2018 elections, Khan stressed the accountability of the corrupt to get rid of dynastic politics in the country (Hassan, 2020).

This paper takes the 2022 no-confidence vote in Pakistan's parliament against the then Prime Minister Imran Khan. Khan was ousted from

power through the country's first successful no-confidence vote on 10 April 2022. Since its inception, Pakistan has been battling several crises - political, economic, military, etc. - but surrounding the no-confidence vote was a new political crisis, and politicians from various parties delivered fiery speeches throughout the crisis. Several political parties formed a coalition, named Pakistan Democratic Movement, against Khan's ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party.

The PDM was founded in 2020 with the objectives of addressing issues related to governance, advancing democracy, and looking into claims of anomalies in the electoral process. Supported by prominent leaders from opposition parties such as the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), and others, the movement seeks to bring disparate political ideologies together in an effort to uphold democratic values. The PDM had a significant impact on the political conversation prior to significant events, such as the 2022 no-confidence vote. It provided the backdrop against which powerful politicians developed their communication strategies. Comprehending the role and operation of the PDM is essential to understanding the political climate of the era. This will assist in placing the employment of crisis and populist communication tactics into the larger political framework.

Pakistan's political environment is very complicated, characterized by historical as well as modern difficulties, which is why understanding the communication tactics used by political leaders becomes crucial. Political discourse gets more complex when populist and crisis communications occur during pivotal events, such as the 2022 no-confidence vote. This study seeks to fill the gap in the literature by analyzing the speeches made by three important political figures—Shahbaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz, and Imran Khan—during this crucial period. Disentangling the intricacies of populist and crisis communication within Pakistan's political system is the primary issue, providing significant new insights into the strategies politicians employ to guide and influence public opinion during emergencies. There are two ways in which this study contributes to the literature. Firstly, unlike other studies that have examined solely Imran Khan, this one compares

and contrasts the populist themes of three politicians from Pakistan's two main political parties. Secondly, it looks in-depth at the effects of crisis-related communication and how populist messaging interacts with it.

Methodology:

Populist Communication

Studies on populist communication became more common during the previous decade. Past studies (Caiani & Graziano, 2016; Cranmer, 2011; Hawkins & Silva, 2016) have used several methods to study populist communication and have developed several techniques to measure this phenomenon. This research uses thematic content analysis to identify elements of populism and crisis in the speeches of prominent politicians of Pakistan during the no-confidence vote in 2022. Thematic content analysis differs from traditional content analysis. The former is concerned with flexible units of analysis based on different themes of meaning, while the latter is more statistical and relies on fixed units of analysis. In thematic content analysis, one semantic unit can fit more than one theme (Wilbraham, 1995). This method increases the validity of the investigation as opposed to automated analysis since data is analyzed by human coders who are well aware of the political context and fully understand the language used (Aslanidis, 2017). While this technique does have its disadvantages, they are mostly related to labor intensity (Järvinen, 2022). Hence, it is crucial to unitize the data in such a way that eases the coding process. However, the validity of the outcomes must also be considered when selecting a unit of analysis, which is one of the most crucial decisions.

As this is a study of spoken language, the unit of analysis in this study is adopted from Foster et al (2000), who defined their analysis of speech unit (AS-unit) as "a single speaker's utterance consisting of an independent clause or sub-clausal unit, together with any subordinate clause(s) associated with either". In this AS-unit, an independent clause refers to a clause that contains a finite verb. A sub-clausal unit comprises one or more phrases that can be expanded into a complete clause. A subordinate clause, on the other hand, includes a finite or non-finite verb and at least one additional clause element. All three speeches

analyzed in this study are in Urdu, and being proficient in Urdu, the researcher, who carried out the coding process himself, can fully recognize all the above-mentioned elements in the speeches.

To measure populist communication, the framework of Mazzoleni and Bracciale (2018) is followed. They categorize populist messages into three categories: appealing to 'the people, attacking the elite, and ostracizing others. Adopting their framework, this study analyzes populist communication on three indicators: people-centrism, anti-elitism, and exclusion of 'dangerous others'.

People-centrism is measured by identifying communication that is aimed at the general public and when the politician talks in the name of the people. It does not necessarily mean that 'the people' are mentioned; instead, their homogeneity is emphasized, their positive qualities are highlighted, and they are praised. Statements claiming the speaker to be a representative of the public and fulfilling their needs are also coded in this category. Furthermore, if the people are framed as victims, it is also included in this indicator. Examples of people-centrism in the Pakistani context include mentioning the religion of the citizens, their patriotism, and even their youth as Imran Khan frequently appealed to the youth in his speeches.

Anti-elitist communication highlights the negative personality traits of the elite, including the political class and economic elite. They are portrayed as not belonging to the people. Pakistani politicians have frequently framed other politicians as corrupt and 'robbers' and having no credibility. Similarly, criticism of the media is also included in this. Recently, in his speeches during the no-confidence vote, Imran Khan attacked the military, which is also coded as anti-elitism. Finally, any statements against the judicial system, which are often condemned by Pakistani politicians, are also included in anti-elitism.

To measure exclusion, references to some outside group or dangerous 'others' posing a threat to the people are coded. These outsiders pose a threat to the society and their religious or moral values. In Pakistan, the West and India are often cast as outsiders and dangerous for the nation, so references to these were also coded in this category.

Additionally, terror attacks and security threats are also included in this.

Crisis-Related Messages

There is a significant body of literature that establishes a connection between crises and the rise of populism (Moffitt, 2014; Taggart 2004; Laclau, 2005). Laclau (2005) even considers crisis to be necessary for populism. A crisis is typically a pivotal moment in a dangerous situation that is marked by significant disruption. This pivotal moment requires swift decision-making, which usually presents both the potential for conflict resolution and the potential for conflict escalation (Schürmann & Gründl, 2022).

This study adopts the framework developed by Schürmann and Gründl (2022) for detecting crisis-related messages. They identified four core features of crisis-related messages:

- Urgency: Fast action is required in a negative situation.
- Dramatization: A negative situation or its consequences are dramatized by the communicator.
- Societal consequences: Consequences of a negative situation are highlighted (for instance, for the citizens, the poor, or the state, etc.)
- Identification of failure: A negative situation occurred due to a failure in the past.

While it is true that all crisis messages inherently reflect a pessimistic perspective on the current state of society, which is not sufficient. To be considered as a crisis message, one of these four characteristics must also be present in it.

A codebook (Appendix A) based on these two frameworks for populist and crisis messaging is developed in this study. General guidelines regarding the coding process are outlined at the beginning of the codebook. The codebook is divided into two parts. The first one is populist communication and the second one is crisis communication. Each part is divided into categories, which include explicit definitions and examples. In the codebook, the coder indicates whether an element exists (1) or not (0).

Sample

As this study aims to analyze the populist and crisis communication aimed at the general public during a crisis situation, i.e. the no-confidence vote saga in Pakistan, speeches of politicians are taken as a sample. The no-confidence vote took place in the parliament of Pakistan on 10 April 2022, in which the then prime minister Imran Khan was ousted from power. Therefore, speeches were taken from a time period of two weeks before the no-confidence vote and one week after it. The reason for such a short time period is to assess the communication pattern within the crisis situation and also because most heated speeches appeared in this timeline. While Pakistan has suffered many crises since it came into being in 1947, the no-confidence vote of 2022 is the latest in the series of political crises – the effects of which can still be seen.

In Pakistan, politicians rallies are attended in large numbers and therefore one public speech by Imran Khan is taken as a sample along with one speech by Maryam Nawaz, who has emerged as a popular opponent of Imran Khan. One speech by Shahbaz Sharif, who was elected as the prime minister of Pakistan after the no-confidence vote by the parliament of Pakistan, is also selected. All three speeches fall within the selected timeframe. While both Shahbaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz belong to PML-N, they are by far the strongest and most-followed leaders on the PDM side. In addition, PML-N has the leading position in PDM. The rationale behind selecting these three leaders is that they are the most followed in Pakistan and their speeches are attended by thousands and watched on screen by millions at a time.

Results

The dataset for this analysis consisted of three influential Pakistani politicians: Imran Khan (IK), Maryam Nawaz (MN), and Shahbaz Sharif (SS). Each of these leaders played a pivotal role during the no-confidence vote, making their speeches particularly significant. In total, three speeches were selected for analysis, comprising a combined total of 375 Analyses of Speech Units (AS-units). The distribution of AS units in the dataset is as follows: Imran Khan contributed 177 AS units,

Maryam Nawaz had 159 AS units, and Shahbaz Sharif had 39 AS units.

The elements of populist communication were dissected into sub-elements or themes. People-centrism was represented by four sub-elements or themes: personal references, religious references, nationalist references, and victimization of people. Anti-elitism was represented by anti-politics, anti-media, anti-judiciary, and anti-military. The exclusion of dangerous others was represented by the exclusion of India, the US/West, and security threats.

Overall, 78.4% of the AS units coded contain at least one element of populist communication.

Crisis-related messages, however, are less prominent, at 20%. Table 1 provides a comprehensive overview of the frequency of each element in the dataset. The most prominent element is anti-politics, comprising 50.4% of the total dataset, followed by nationalist references (18.4%) and personal references (15%). Within the crisis-messaging category, dramatization stands out at 11.2%. Notably, while anti-India rhetoric is common among Pakistani politicians, only one AS-unit (from Imran Khan’s speech) explicitly excluded India as a dangerous entity. Intriguingly, anti-media references and mentions of security threats are entirely absent.

Table 1

Frequency of AS-units containing elements of populist and crisis-related messages

| Variable | Dimension | Single element | AS-Units | Frequency (in %) |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|----------|------------------|
| Populist communication | People-centrism | Personal references | 55 | 15.0 |
| | | Religious references | 34 | 9.0 |
| | | Nationalist references | 69 | 18.4 |
| | | Victimization | 23 | 6.1 |
| | Anti-elitism | Anti-politics | 189 | 50.4 |
| | | Anti-media | 0 | 0 |
| | | Anti-judiciary | 9 | 2.4 |
| | | Anti-military | 8 | 2.1 |
| | Exclusion of dangerous others | India | 1 | 0.2 |
| | | US/West | 36 | 9.6 |
| Security threats | | 0 | 0 | |
| Crisis-related messaging | Urgency | 25 | 6.6 | |
| | Dramatization | 42 | 11.2 | |
| | Societal consequences | 16 | 4.2 | |
| | Identification of failure | 11 | 2.9 | |

Imran Khan emerges as the politician with the highest prevalence of populist communication, with 92% of his speech containing at least one element of populism. His emphasis on people-centrism (61.5%) and anti-elitism (47.4%) underscores his approach. Maryam Nawaz follows closely, with 72.9% of her speech categorized as

populist, focusing predominantly on anti-elitism (66%). Shahbaz Sharif exhibits a comparatively lower prevalence of populist messaging (38.4%), with a greater emphasis on anti-elitism (25.6%). Across all speeches, anti-politics emerges as the dominant theme. Imran Khan and Shahbaz Sharif utilize nationalist references to connect with their

audience, while Maryam Nawaz employs more personal references within the context of people-centrism.

Imran Khan's speeches contain a notable presence of crisis-related messaging, with urgency (12.4%) and dramatization (12.9%) being

prominent. Maryam Nawaz also incorporates crisis elements, albeit to a lesser extent, particularly emphasizing dramatization (11.96%) and identification of failure (3.7%). In contrast, Shahbaz Sharif's speech notably lacks any crisis-related messaging.

Table 2

Comparison of elements of populist and crisis messaging by leader (in percentage)

| | Imran Khan | Maryam Nawaz | Shahbaz Sharif |
|-------------------------------|------------|--------------|----------------|
| Populist communication | 92 | 72.9 | 38.4 |
| People-centrism | 61.5 | 20.1 | 15.3 |
| Anti-elitism | 47.4 | 66 | 25.6 |
| Exclusion of dangerous others | 20.9 | 0 | 0 |
| Crisis-related messaging | 27.1 | 16.9 | 0 |
| Urgency | 12.4 | 1.8 | 0 |
| Dramatization | 12.9 | 11.9 | 0 |
| Societal consequences | 6.7 | 2.5 | 0 |
| Identification of failure | 2.8 | 3.7 | 0 |

Discussion and Conclusion

Pakistan's political landscape has long been shaped by a series of historical and current crises, serving as the stage for the rise of populist communication. From its very beginning, Pakistan has struggled with a range of challenges, including political, economic, and military issues. The no-confidence vote of 2022 introduced yet another layer of crisis, creating a political turmoil that provided fertile ground for populist rhetoric. This connection between crisis and populist communication is in line with existing literature, which suggests that populist movements often flourish in times of crisis. The results of the analysis shed light on the intricate web of populist communication in Pakistani politics, revealing the strategies employed by key political figures during the critical juncture of the 2022 no-confidence vote. Populism, as a communication phenomenon, was evident across all analyzed speeches, with varying degrees among the leaders.

Imran Khan, who has strategically crafted a populist, Islamized brand (Shakil & Yilmaz, 2021), positioned himself as the defender against a corrupt elite. The prevalence of populist elements in his speeches, focusing more on appeals to the people, aligns with the framework proposed by de Vreese et al. (2018). His most frequently used references were nationalist, followed by personal

references. He portrayed the Pakistani nation as a victim of elitist policies, particularly those of the previous governments and political elites. The victimization theme in Khan's speeches, absent in his opponents' rhetoric, underlines his commitment to portraying 'the people' as the focal point of his political agenda. This highlighted the dichotomy between the common citizen and the perceived corrupt elite, resonating with the global populist wave. This aligns with the thin populism concept, which focuses on the immediate needs and concerns of the people. Khan, in a display of complete populism, criticized various elite groups such as the judiciary and the military. Considering his past affiliations with the military, it is surprising that he would be critical of them. His strategic use of anti-military, anti-politics, and anti-US rhetoric was evident during the no-confidence vote. He charged that the US, the military, and his political rivals were planning to overthrow him. This analyzed move could have been a bid to shift the blame for his impending demise. Even after losing his throne, Imran Khan went on to portray himself as the hero of the people. This was reflected in the amount of support he continued to garner across Pakistan.

Maryam Nawaz, however, revealed a mature style of populism. Her populist discourse was less exclusionary because she devoted less attention to

exclusionary features in her speeches although she resorted much more to anti-elitist themes. Shahbaz Sharif was the least populist. The numerous terms he used were characteristic of traditional politics, and he had the most anti-elitist manner of communication among all populist features. Shahbaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz avoided the populist anti-elitist rhetoric by not using any phraseology involving foreign powers like America or the West. The necessity of Pakistan to seek assistance from the US to deal with its severe economic crisis might have shaped this strategic decision both leaders were willing to support joining the new cabinet and had resumed their relations with the army. One of their favorite targets for anti-political rhetoric was their main political opponent, Imran Khan. Imran Khan was the main target of their comments, which they said had damaged the country and endangered Pakistan's ties with the US and other countries. Imran Khan's populist speech, particularly his portrayal of himself as a savior, was condemned by these two people. This range of rhetorical strategies demonstrates Pakistan's various methods of political communication. It is unprecedented that they used so much anti-elitist hate speech and solely spoke about Imran Khan, even if they had used populist rhetoric in the past. This would have to do with Islamophobia and Imran Khan's self-portrait as a rescuer, who beforehand had communicated mostly against the opposition as "corrupt, thieves, and responsible for the downfall of the country."

This streamlines the harmony of populist messages and crisis discourse and maybe catches the strategic decisions made by political leaders in the middle of the cacophony surrounding the vote of no-confidence. Thus, Imran Khan has also shown thoughtful strategy with his comprehensive plan that combines aspects of populism and crisis management. Most of the time, this focus on urgency is consistent with the idea that populists use a sense of urgency and the need for quick action to support their political narrative when things are at a breaking point. Although Maryam Nawaz does not avoid populist vocabulary, she opts to incorporate messages about issues in a more moderate manner. This strategic decision illustrates the astute strategy of not becoming too melodramatic and at the same time being

successful in upholding credibility. Shahbaz Sharif uses more of a conventional method of communication and does not use overt crisis rhetoric. It is also pretty ironic that the newly appointed prime minister after the no-confidence vote, Shahbaz Sharif did not raise this issue during his speech. It is essential to comprehend how crisis messaging impacts political rhetoric. There is every reason to be alarmed that Shahbaz Sharif never talks about crisis-related issues during his speeches, not to mention when such issues were rife during the lead-up to the vote of no confidence. Intentional speech exclusion can be a deliberate attempt to present stability and confidence over chaos in a situation with heightened sociopolitical instability and uncertainty. This deviation from the long-used crisis messaging approach makes the political communication strategies complicated and, therefore, necessitates further investigation into the motivations behind those choices and possible effects on public opinion and political outcomes.

This study is cognizant of the dynamics of Pakistani politics but examines speeches presented by competitive political parties. An important limitation is that the military - an important actor - has received too little attention in literature. Although relevant, the temporal focus of the study on a crisis underscores the need for longitudinal analyses also involving various military and political leaders in order to provide an adequate understanding of political communication during crises. The interfusion of populism and crisis communication in the political context offers avenues for further research. Due to the strategies involved in public leaders' decisions, a more in-depth study into the conditions that will guide them will be necessary.

It will also be insightful to know how crisis differentials in intensity and populist rhetoric influence political outcomes and public opinion. For instance, future research can look into the long-term effects of populist communication on public opinion and political stability in order to understand the fuller implications of populist communication during crisis periods. Knowing how populist leaders manipulate and leverage crises to serve political purposes can also guide strategies for adequate political communication in different scenarios. As a form of political

communication, research in this area should go beyond non-verbal and visual elements that are noticeable in populist oratory but also extend into other aspects of performance within political communication. An analysis of gesture use, symbolism, and other non-verbal communication should be analyzed to make better sense of how populist leaders construct and communicate their messages. This paper contributes to the growing corpus of populism literature in unraveling the complex link between populist features and communications about crises. It captures the conscious decision makers politicians have been making in trying to cut their way through the uncertain political landscape while highlighting

the performative nature of political communication.

Altogether, the findings, based on a close analysis of speeches delivered during the vote of no-confidence, substantially contribute to our knowledge of populist rhetoric in moments of crisis and supply some critical new insights into Pakistani political communication dynamics. This study, therefore, sets the stage for further investigation into the long-term impacts of populist communication on public opinion and political stability, thereby adding to a much more comprehensive understanding of political communication in many situations.

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Appendix A

Codebook

| | Elements | Description |
|-----------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Populism | People-centrism | The politician talks in the name of the people. Their positive qualities are highlighted, and they are praised. Statements claiming the speaker to be a representative of the public and fulfilling their needs are included. Code if the people are framed as victims. Include all religious, nationalist, and personal references that address the people and aim to express closeness to the people. |
| | Anti-elitism | The political class, media, judicial system, and the military are criticized. They are portrayed as detached from the people and harmful to them. They are also framed as acting against the interests of the people. |
| | Exclusion of dangerous others | References to India and the West / US as a threat to the country or its people are included in this. Any outsider that poses a threat to the moral, cultural, or religious values must also be coded in this category. Also includes terror organizations and terror attacks. |
| Crisis | Urgency | Quick action is required in a negative situation and indecision can have adverse consequences. This is an important point and there is a chance to solve or worsen the problem. Irreversible situations are also included in this. |
| | Dramatization | There is an explicit dramatization of a negative situation or its consequences. This involves the use of such language that creates a dramatizing effect, including adjectives, superlatives, and phrases. |
| | Societal consequences | There is explicit mention of the consequences of the negative situation for society or certain parts (for instance, the poor). These include losing their democratic rights, losing their sovereignty, economic consequences, etc. |
| | Identification of failure | A failure is identified as the cause of a certain negative situation. |