Aggression as Political Identity: An Attitudinal Analysis of Selected Pakistani Political Parties' Tweets on 9th May Events

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Abstract:
The present study aims to examine how aggression is discursively constructed as political identity in PTI and PML-N tweets related to the 9 May 2023 events in Pakistan. While political aggression on social media is often discussed in terms of incivility or hate speech, less attention has been paid to evaluative aggression expressed through emotions, moral judgement, and event framing, particularly in English–Urdu partisan discourse. A qualitative discourse-analytic design was employed. A total of 34 publicly available tweets (17 PTI and 17 PML-N) were purposively selected and analyzed using Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, focusing on Affect, Judgement, and Appreciation. The findings reveal that aggression was systematically organized through evaluative meanings that constructed in-group legitimacy and out-group exclusion. PTI discourse primarily framed aggression as ethical resistance and victimhood, whereas PML-N discourse presented it as state-centered moral authority and criminal accountability. The study highlights and recommends the role of evaluative language in normalizing political aggression and sustaining polarized identities in digital political crises.

Keywords:
Attitudinal Analysis, Aggression, Discursively Constructed, Partisan, Ethics, Legitimacy

1. Introduction

Political discourse in contemporary digital spaces is increasingly characterized by heightened aggression, polarization, and moral confrontation, particularly during moments of political crisis. Social media platforms such as Twitter (presently X) facilitate instant reactions by political actors to unfolding events, allowing interpretations that are emotionally charged, morally evaluative, and ideologically positioned. In such contexts, language does not merely describe political reality; rather, it actively constructs it by identifying allies and adversaries, assigning blame, and legitimizing authority or resistance (Papacharissi, 2015; KhosraviNik, 2017).

The events of 9th May 2023 in Pakistan provide a significant case for examining these dynamics in which protests and attacks on government buildings caused strong public debate and polarized stories. Afterwards, social media became a primary venue where politicians attempted to explain, justify, condemn, or re-interpret what occurred. Some narratives framed 9th May as a false-flag operation and an instance of political persecution, while others presented it as an attack on the state and national integrity, largely reflecting the positions of major political parties. These opposing stories demonstrated heightened aggression, both in the way events were described, and in how moral responsibility was assigned.

Research on Pakistani political discourse had documented rising polarization, populist rhetoric, and antagonistic communication, particularly in online environments (Rasul & McDowell, 2019; Yousaf, 2020). Nevertheless, limited attention had been given to the evaluation of aggression through language, especially within the bilingual context of political discourse. Moreover, existing studies had rarely compared how ruling and opposition parties mobilized aggression to construct legitimacy, authority, or resistance during the same political event.

These gaps are addressed in the present study by examining how aggression is discursively constructed in PTI and PML-N tweets related to the events of 9 May. Rather than approaching aggression as explicit verbal abuse, the study treats it as a meaning-making practice realized through emotional positioning, moral condemnation, and evaluative framing of events. By analyzing the linguistic construction of aggression in both English and Urdu tweets, the study examines how aggression functions as a mechanism of political identity construction in partisan discourse and as a resource for political identity in both linguistic contexts.

2. Research Questions

The research questions, that guided the proposed study, are as follows:

1. How was aggression discursively constructed in PTI and PML‑N tweets related to the events of 9 May?
2. How did evaluative meanings contribute to political identity formation and the construction of in-group and out-group distinctions in partisan discourse?
3. How did PTI and PML-N differ in their discursive use of aggression across English and Urdu social media communication?

3. Significance of the Study

This study makes several important contributions to research on political communication and social media discourse. First, it demonstrates that political hostility often operates through evaluative language rather than overt abuse, extending existing scholarship on incivility and polarization. Second, it contributes to the study of Pakistani politics by offering a comparative analysis of ruling and opposition party discourse during a major political crisis. Third, by examining both English and Urdu tweets, the study highlights how aggression and political identity are linguistically shaped across languages, an area that has received limited scholarly attention.

4. Literature Review

4.1 Political Aggression in Digital Communication : Political discourse has been significantly reshaped by the emergence of social media. These platforms enable politicians to bypass traditional media channels and directly address mass audiences. Sites such as Twitter facilitate the circulation of emotionally charged political perspectives and as a result, contribute to increased polarization and aggression in political communication (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013; Papacharissi, 2015). Unlike earlier modes of political communication, online platforms allow politicians to respond instantly to unfolding events, which often intensifies emotional and moral messaging and deepens social and political divisions (Vaccari, 2015).

Previous research on online political aggression (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014; Gervais, 2015) primarily focused on incivility, hate speech, and explicit verbal abuse. These studies examined the use of hostile language in online comments and messages and linked such language to partisan divisions and the deterioration of political discussion. However, aggression was often conceptualized only as overt abuse, resulting in limited attention to more subtle ways in which aggression was embedded in political discourse.

KhosraviNik (2017) and Wodak (2015) argued that aggression can also operate through implicit evaluative practices, moral positioning, and strategic framing. This perspective emphasizes the importance of examining how meaning is evaluated and how political positions are constructed in discourse, particularly in contexts where legitimacy and identity are contested.

4.2 Social Media and Partisan Political Identity: Political identity is constructed through communicative practices that distinguish between in-groups and out-groups (Wagner, 2013). In contemporary politics, social media serves as a primary site for this process, where party loyalty is not only expressed but actively constructed through lexical choices, emotional appeals, and relational positioning (Bruns & Burgess, 2015).

In Pakistan, social media has been identified as an important site for political mobilization, identity negotiation, and the ideological contestation (Rasul and McDowell, 2019; Yousaf, 2020). Political parties and leaders frequently employ emotional and evaluative language to mobilize supporters by evoking national pride, morals or fairness. However, relatively few studies examine how such discourse functions as aggression in the service of political identity construction, particularly in highly conflictual contexts.

4.3 Evaluative Language and Appraisal in the Political Discourse: To examine the relationship between aggression and political identity, scholars have turned to analytical frameworks that go beyond surface lexical choices to explore how meaning is evaluated in discourse. One important framework is the Appraisal Theory. It is helpful in analyzing how attitudes are shown, social relationships are created, and audiences are set by speakers or writers through language (Martin & White, 2005). Within this framework, the Attitude system—comprising Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation—enables analysts to identify how emotions, moral evaluations, and assessments of events are linguistically expressed.

Research on online political discourse has emphasized the need for us to discern the difference between inscribed and invoked evaluations. Aggressive meanings are often implicit and context-dependent rather than explicitly stated (Bednarek, 2010; Koller, 2012). Inscribed evaluations involve direct and explicit judgements, whereas invoked evaluations rely on implication, narrative sequencing, or metaphor to guide interpretation. This distinction is particularly relevant for Twitter discourse, where character limits encourage condensed and strategically crafted evaluative meanings.

4.4 Political Discourse and the Events of 9th May: Research on political dynamics in Pakistan has shown increasing polarization and affective antagonism, reflecting broader global trends in digital politics (Yousaf, 2020). Major political parties such as PTI and PML-N actively use social media to mobilize supporters, criticize rivals, and frame political events. However, much

of the existing literature focuses on election campaigns or protest movements in general, rather than on specific events that generate intense and immediate political contestation.

Public reactions were bitterly divided. PTI framed the events as political persecution and an abuse of state power, while PML-N characterized them as acts of lawlessness that threatened national order. Tweets produced by both parties offered insight not only into expressions of anger but also into strategic constructions of political identity, moral legitimacy, and claims to authority. Despite the significance of these events, limited research has been done to examine how aggression was discursively constructed as a form of political identity on Pakistani social media. There is limited understanding of how politicians employed language to influence emotions, construct moral evaluations, and frame events to favor in-groups while excluding out-groups.

4.5 Positioning this Current Study: In the present study, these gaps are addressed by examining aggression in PTI and PML-N tweets not merely as instances of incivility, but as discursive practices involved in political identity construction. Using the Attitude part of Appraisal Theory, the study analyses how Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation are used to create competing narratives about 9th May and to position political actors and groups. By comparing English and Urdu tweets from both parties, the study examines how aggression functions in linguistic and cultural contexts. In doing so, the study contributes to research on political communication by demonstrating that aggression can operate as a normative and ideologically meaningful mode of political discourse, rather than solely as a breakdown of civility.

5. Research Methodology

Qualitative discourse-analytic research design has been used to study the role of aggression in building political identity in Pakistani political discourse on social media. The research interprets the meanings embedded in political tweets about the 9th May events.

A total of 34 tweets were publicly available, comprising of 17 tweets from PTI and 17 from PML-N. Tweets were selected from official party accounts, leaders and their followers, in English and Urdu both, in order to illustrate the main and opposing narratives around 9th May, 2023.

In this study, analytical framework is based on Martin and White (2005) Appraisal Theory, particularly the Attitude system (Affect, Judgment and Appreciation) to identify explicit and implicit evaluative meanings related to emotions, moral judgements, and the framing of events. Tweets were analyzed to examine how political actors and groups are positioned, how in-group identities are reinforced, and how opponents are delegitimized through language. A comparative analysis of PTI and PML-N tweets was conducted to identify similarities and differences in the use of aggression as a resource for political identity construction.

6. Theoretical Framework: Attitude in Appraisal Theory

The study is based on Martin and White's (2005) Appraisal Theory, a comprehensible model for the study of evaluative meaning in discourse. The framework focuses on the ways speakers and writers demonstrate their attitudes and negotiate viewpoints and position audience. In particular, the study examines the interpersonal dimension of meaning, focusing on how texts not

only convey information but also express values, emotions, and ideological positions.

It shows how language evaluates people, actions, events, and things, making it useful for identifying explicit and implicit judgements and for analyzing positioning in public and political discourse.

6.1 The Attitude System: According to Martin and White, Attitude consists of three interrelated components: Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation. These components capture different forms of evaluation through which meaning is constructed in emotional, moral, and social terms.

6.1.1 Affect.

Affect refers to linguistic resources used to express emotions and feelings. It contains words that express anger, fear, pride, anxiety or satisfaction. These are in the form of emotional adjectives, verbs which describe thinking, adverbs, or behaviors that suggest someone's feelings. These emotions can either be written directly (inscribed) or implied through context (invoked). Affect is significant, because it encourages audiences to align emotionally with particular representations of events or actors.

6.1.2 Judgment.

Judgment concerns the evaluation of human behavior and character according to social and moral norms. It is used to assess whether individuals or groups are represented as capable, trustworthy, responsible, immoral, or illegitimate. Martin and White distinguish between social esteem (e.g., competence, normality, resolve) and social sanction (e.g., honesty, legality, moral propriety). Judgment functions as a key resource for praising or condemning actors, establishing authority, and defining boundaries of acceptable political behavior.

6.1.3 Appreciation.

Appreciation focuses on the evaluation of things, processes, events, and abstract entities, rather than people. It is useful for evaluating political events without directly targeting specific individuals.

6.1.4 Inscribed and Invoked Attitude.

Within the Attitude system, evaluation may be either inscribed (explicitly stated) or invoked (implied through context). This distinction enables the identification of subtle and indirect forms of evaluation, especially in texts that appear neutral or descriptive on the surface.

7. Analysis

7.1 **PTI Tweets on 9th May in English:** To understand how opinions were expressed on social media by PTI officials, the Attitude framework of Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) was applied. Tweets from the PTI and PML-N regarding the events of May 9th were analyzed, with a specific focus placed on patterns of Affect, Judgment, and Appreciation. The research found that aggression did not merely come from explicit insults or name-calling. Instead, it was shown through carefully constructed evaluative positions that delegitimized opposing political actors. In this way, aggressive meanings were normalized and presented as legitimate within partisan political discourse. To maintain ethical standards and protect data integrity, only specific phrases from tweets were analyzed rather than entire tweets.

1.1.1 Affect: Emotions that cause people to feel like victims

The study analyzed 34 tweets posted between June 5, 2023, and December 19, 2023. The analysis revealed a prevalence of negative emotions, particularly shock, suffering, fear, and outrage. These emotions were often implied, not directly stated.

Tweet 1

"I have never asked our workers to indulge in violence in 27 years of my political career. Therefore, the events of 9th May first took me by surprise and then it did not take long for me to discover that the whole charade from my violent arrest to the arson to the Nazi era type crackdown, was pre-planned. The video of a renowned journalist confirms it all. This is why from day one, I have called for an independent investigation of the incident." **(1665765691109040128, 10:01 PM · Jun 5, 2023)**

Although explicit emotion words were limited, the phrase *"took me by surprise"* invoked shock**,** while *"violent arrest"* and *"nazi era type crackdown"* evoked fear and moral outrage. It made the speaker seem victimized of extreme oppression. Affect justified anger and resistance here.

Tweet 2

"Complete lawlessness prevails in the country at the moment.

The 20-year-old son of former PTI MPA, Muhammad Tariq Tarar from Mandi Bahauddin, was studying in Lahore and was not even involved anywhere during the May 9th protests. He was illegally arrested while he was sick. Under custody, he was severely tortured resulting in deterioration of his condition. Subsequently, he was admitted in a private hospital for 4 days. He was then moved back to jail where his condition is still precarious.

Similarly, police force stormed the house of district president PTI and member of the National Assembly, Haji Imtiaz Ahmad Chaudhry. The police broke the main door of the house, ransacked it, harassed the women, beat up innocent servants and abducted them. Whatever valuables they saw, they took away." **(1672952743038730240, *5:59 PM · Jun 25, 2023*)**

"The 20-year-old son… was illegally arrested while he was sick… under custody, he was severely tortured… his condition is still precarious. "This is a passage that evoked a sense of distress, empathy, and of indignation references to youth (*"20-year-old"*), illness (*"sick"*), and vulnerability (*"precarious"*). By extending the story to a family member, the tweet heightened the emotional suffering and made the conflict a humanitarian injustice.

7.1.2 Judgment: Delegitimization (Moral)

Negative social sanction, which identifies actions as wrong or immoral, was prominent in the above-mentioned tweets. The state's actions were often described as illegal, immoral and criminal, drawing a clear moral boundary.

Tweet 3

"Yesterday in its detailed verdict, the Supreme Court declared my arrest on 9th May completely unlawful and unconstitutional.

The protests that happened across the country post my arrest only took place after an illegal and unconstitutional act was committed by abducting me from the precincts of the High Court.

The question that needs to be asked is: Has anyone been held accountable for illegally arresting me? Was DG NAB or Interior Minister questioned for committing an unconstitutional act?

Instead, in reaction, when people came out and exercised their constitutional right to protest peacefully against my abduction, it was used as a pretext to start a crackdown against my party. Within 48 hours, over 10,000 of my workers and leaders were picked up and attacked.

Therefore, I reiterate, whenever any independent inquiry takes place, I will prove that from my arrest to the arson and then the crackdown, everything was preplanned only to keep me and my party out of the elections." **(1677704411525652480,** *8:41 PM · Jul 8, 2023)*

Negative Judgment of propriety and legality was explicitly inscribed by the statement "my arrest on 9th May completely unlawful and unconstitutional". By invoking the Constitution, the speaker positioned himself as lawful and morally legitimate while rejecting the state's actions. The aggression was expressed through moral superiority rather than overt insult.

Tweet 4

"Instead of making absurd accusations, the question that Shehbaz Sharif needs to answer is: Who gained the most from the events of 9th May?

I was abducted from the Islamabad High Court in the most humiliating way, as if I was some criminal. My lawyers and the IHC staff were also beaten up. It has been declared completely unconstitutional and illegal by the Supreme Court.

Has your government held anyone accountable for conducting an unconstitutional act?

Any independent investigation will find that you and your band of crooks and money launderers, who were petrified of losing elections to PTI, were behind the mayhem caused on 9th May and the crackdown against PTI that followed. Lastly, you cannot fool anyone by making these nonsensical and ridiculous statements just to drive a wedge between Pakistan's biggest political party and the establishment only so that you can save billions that you've stolen from the people of Pakistan." **(1678061823000469505, 8:21 PM · Jul 9, 2023)**

Here aggression was expressed by inscribed negative Judgment. The moral character of the opponent was attacked by words such as "crooks" and "money launderers". Cowardice and illegitimacy were displayed by "Frightened".

Tweet 5

"Yesterday in its detailed verdict, the Supreme Court declared my arrest on 9th May completely unlawful and unconstitutional.

The protests that happened across the country post my arrest only took place after an illegal and unconstitutional act was committed by abducting me from the precincts of the High Court.

The question that needs to be asked is: Has anyone been held accountable for illegally arresting me? Was DG NAB or Interior Minister questioned for committing an unconstitutional act?

Instead, in reaction, when people came out and exercised their constitutional right to protest peacefully against my abduction, it was used as a pretext to start a crackdown against my party. Within 48 hours, over 10,000 of my workers and leaders were picked up and attacked.

Therefore, I reiterate, whenever any independent inquiry takes place, I will prove that from my arrest to the arson and then the crackdown, everything was preplanned only to keep me and my party out of the elections." **(1677704411525652480,** *8:41 PM · Jul 8, 2023)*

The voice of aggression was allowed to be expressed indirectly and legal accountability was demanded.

7.1.3 Appreciation: How Facts were made into Conspiracy and Oppression

Appreciation is used to evaluate what happened around 9th of May as deliberate and unjust.

Tweet 6

"I have never asked our workers to indulge in violence in 27 years of my political career. Therefore, the events of 9th May first took me by surprise and then it did not take long for me to discover that the whole charade from my

violent arrest to the arson to the Nazi era type crackdown, was pre-planned. The video of a renowned journalist confirms it all. This is why from day one, I have called for an independent investigation of the incident." **(1665765691109040128, 10:01 PM · Jun 5, 2023)**

Calling it a "charade" is a negative evaluation of deception; "pre-" shows intent. This frames the events as a conspiracy rather than spontaneous unrest, justifying an aggressive counter-response.

Tweet 7

"Chairman Imran Khan repeatedly demanded an independent investigation of the 9th May arson. He reiterated his stance that it was a false flag operation. He argues that it has since been used as a pretext to launch a crackdown against PTI and to trample on all fundamental human and civil rights. This video proves how 9th May false flag operation was in fact a conspiracy against PTI."

#PTISMT **(1707825916934533597, 11:33 PM · Sep 29, 2023)**

A strong negative evaluation of the event was given by this statement. The speaker was allowed by Appreciation here to affirm that violence was beyond the PTI supporters, to resist.

Tweet 8

"Complete lawlessness prevails in the country at the moment.

The 20-year-old son of former PTI MPA, Muhammad Tariq Tarar from Mandi Bahauddin, was studying in Lahore and was not even involved anywhere during the May 9th protests. He was illegally arrested while he was sick. Under custody, he was severely tortured resulting in deterioration of his condition. Subsequently, he was admitted in a private hospital for 4 days. He was then moved back to jail where his condition is still precarious.

Similarly, police force stormed the house of district president PTI and member of the National Assembly, Haji Imtiaz Ahmad Chaudhry. The police broke the main door of the house, ransacked it, harassed the women, beat up innocent servants and abducted them. Whatever valuables they saw, they took away." **(1672952743038730240, *5:59 PM · Jun 25, 2023*)**

The statement criticizes the government as a whole, framing aggressive politics as a justified response to systemic failure.

7.1.4 Inscribed and Invoked Attitude in Aggressive Positioning

The tweets contained a variety of terms such as "illegal," "crooks," and "unconstitutional." In these tweets, Attitude was invoked by highlighting suffering, asking rhetorical questions, and selecting specific details. The tweets were made to seem factual and fair, but strong judgments were also reinforced. Aggression was built through repeated references to illegality, immorality, and conspiracy.

Overall, the language used in tweets shows that aggression formed a discursively constructed political identity. By appealing to emotions, PTI supporters were framed as victims. The opposition was called "illegal" and the party claimed to be fighting against "conspiracies". It generated a powerful political mood in which hate became actual violence. It justified resistance, reinforced group solidarity, and made political differences sharper around May 9th.

7.2 Attitudinal Analysis of Urdu Tweets on 9th May

The present study used Martin and White's (2005) attitude system to analyses PTI Urdu tweets about the May 9th events. The analysis showed how aggression was built with language that called out suffering, moral blame, and conspiracies. Like the English tweets, aggression was not only direct insults; it showed up in repeated patterns of judgment.

7.2.1 Affect: Emotional Resistance, Suffering and Hope

A key feature of the Urdu tweets was the high use of feelings like resilience, suffering, hope, and defiance. These emotions were often delivered together, encouraging people to have the same political feelings.

Tweet 1

"Sanam Javed ka jail se khat

Awam bashaoor hai aur shaoor ki taqat ko jail ki salakhein nahi rok saktien.

9 May ko le kar har kisi ki zaban par chand sawalat hain, unhi mein se kuch Sanam ne bhi poochne ki jasarat ki hai.-Hum se press conference mangne walon pehle qanoon sazon se isteefa mango."

#LettersFromPrison #ReleaseWomenPrisoners **(17349596646424816395, 8:33 PM · Dec 13, 2023)**

The statement "awam bashaoor hy aor shaoor ki taqat ko jail ki salakhain nhi rok sakti" invoked defiance and resilience by opposing *"shaoor ki taqat"* (the power of awareness) against *"jail ki salakhain"* (prison bars). Even without specific emotion words, the contrast increases moral courage. Affect here justified resistance and portrayed being jailed look like political strength.

Tweet 2

"9 May false flag operation ki aar mein hazaron begunaah qaid Pakistanio mein do medical college ke tulba Nasrullah Khan aur Ali Sikandar Butt bhi shamil hain, unhon ne jail se Imran Khan ke naam khat likha hai jis mein kaha hai ke qaid-o-band ki saubatain aur zulm sirf is liye bardasht kar rahe hain kyunke Pakistan ki wahid umeed Imran Khan hain.

Pakistan!

Datay rehna, mazboot rehna, muttahid rehna, pur-azm rehna, pur-umeed rehna, himmat rakhna, hosla rakhna. Jeet sach ki hogi, jeet haq ki hogi! Agli manzil haqeeqi azadi! InshaAllah."

#PakistanUnderFascism **(17302676622858424618, 9:48 PM · Nov 30, 2023)**

"qaid o band ki saoobtain aor zul sirf is liye bardasht ker rhy hain kio k Pakistan ki wahid umeed Imran khan hain." This utterance invoked themes of suffering and sacrifice. Being jailed was linked to a national struggle. In this context, aggression was framed as moral endurance rather than hostility.

"data rehna, mazboot rehna, mutahid rehna, purazam rehna , purumeed rehna." These repeated commands were used to build hope, determination, and solidarity.

7.2.1 Judgment: The Illegality, Injustice and Moral Condemnation

Like the English tweets, judging negative social norms was involved. Politicians and state bodies were perceived as being unjust, unlawful, and morally bad.

Tweet 3

"Sanam Javed ka jail se khat

Awam bashaoor hai aur shaoor ki taqat ko jail ki salakhein nahi rok saktien.

9 May ko le kar har kisi ki zaban par chand sawalat hain, unhi mein se kuch Sanam ne bhi poochne ki jasarat ki hai.

-Hum se press conference mangne walon pehle qanoon sazon se isteefa mango."

#LettersFromPrison #ReleaseWomenPrisoners**(17349596646424816395, 8:33 PM · Dec 13, 2023)**

The statement "hum se press conference mangne walo pehle kanoon sazoo se istifaa mango" inscribed negative judgment of propriety and is implied hypocrisy. It said people who demand answers have no moral authority.

Tweet 4

"Police ne @HaleemAdil ko mazeed teen muqadmat mein giraftar kar liya, Haleem Adil Sheikh ki 9 May ke muqadmat mein zamanat manzoor ho chuki

hai --- muqadmat mein naamzad Ali Zaidi, Aziz GG, aur digar PTI chhor chuke hain." **(1737098585068454235, 6:12 PM · Dec 19, 2023)**

Although it sounded factual, it was a judgment of wrong actions suggesting unfair persecution. The contrast between being legally cleared and remaining arrested was used to imply that injustice was occurring without proof.

Tweet 5

"9 May ko bator bahana sirf Tehreek-e-Insaf ko torne ke liye istemal kiya ja raha hai.

Guzashta roz Sialkot se Umar Dar aur un ki walda aur MLA Hamid Raza ne election larne ka elaan kiya to raat ko un ke ghar chape mare gaye.

Lahore se Mian Ibad Farooq 7 mah se fauj ki hiraasat mein hain, lekin guzashta roz un ke bhai aur biwi ne election larne ka elaan kiya to aaj police un ke ghar pohanch gayi.

Aisi saikron misalein samne hain. Chief Justice sahab ne ab tak "aghwa baraye bayan" ke khilaf Barrister Aitzaz Ahsan ki petition nahi lagayi." **(1737059230673186930, 3:36 PM · Dec 19, 2023)**

The phrase "aghwa baraye bayan" illustrates that arrests were perceived to be forced abductions, not lawful. The state action was presented as criminal rather than administrative.

7.2.2 Appreciation: Situating 9th May as Conspiracy and Political Suppression

Appreciation was extensively used to evaluate the events of 9th May and subsequent state actions. These events were framed by the dominant evaluative pattern as planned, deceptive, and politically motivated.

Tweet 6

"9 May London Plan ka hissa tha, mujhe ghair aaini tor par pakra gaya, London Plan Nawaz Sharif ko lane, humein jelon mein dalne aur Tehreek-e-Insaaf ko khatam karne ke liye tha, election PTI hi jeete gi, khadsha hai kahin ye election se bhag hi na jayein, Imran Khan ki samat ke doran media se guftagu.." **(1731591506702537111, 1:29 PM · Dec 4, 2023)**

The event was distorted and promoted as part of a planned conspiracy according to this statement "9th may London plan ka hisa ta". In referring to "London plan," intentionality was given to the event and it was implied that it was out of control. Aggressive criticism was supported by the praise here as uncovering hidden truths.

Tweet 7

"May false flag operation ki aar mein hazaron begunaah qaid Pakistanio mein do medical college ke tulba Nasrullah Khan aur Ali Sikandar Butt bhi shamil hain, unhon ne jail se Imran Khan ke naam khat likha hai jis mein kaha hai ke qaid-o-band ki saubatain aur zulm sirf is liye bardasht kar rahe hain kyunke Pakistan ki wahid umeed Imran Khan hain.

Pakistan!

Datay rehna, mazboot rehna, muttahid rehna, pur-azm rehna, pur-umeed rehna, himmat rakhna, hosla rakhna. Jeet sach ki hogi, jeet haq ki hogi! Agli manzil haqeeqi azadi! InshaAllah.

#PakistanUnderFascism **(1730267622858424618, 9:48 PM · Nov 30, 2023)**

This phrase "9 May false flag operation ki aar mai hazaro begunah qaid Pakistani" evaluated the event as a false pretext used to justify repression. The term *"false flag operation"* carried strong negative valuation and framed the event as deceptive and manipulative.

The praise "Pakistan ki wahid umeed" made one leader special at the expense of others. It portrayed loyalty as a key to survival of the nation.

7.2.3 Inscribed and Invoked Attitude

Urdu tweets used many invoked attitudes and metaphors, slogans, and legal terms. Explicit evaluative terms (*"ghair ayini, false flag, agwa"*) were balanced with implied meanings from the order of the story and focused on victims. This mix showed principled discourse and strong aggression toward opponents.

Some patterns were shared by Urdu tweets with those in the English ones. Aggression came from moral resistance, not verbal violence. Endurance was improved by the talk through feelings. Opponents were found unjust through judgment. May 9th was put forth as a planned conspiracy through praise. Aggression was made a sign of political identity by all these judgments, boosting group solidarity and normalising tough talk as needed against oppression.

7.3 Attitudinal Analysis of PML-N Tweets in English on 9th May

The PML-N tweets were analyzed using Martin and White's 2005 attitude system, reflecting at how feelings, judgments, and praise were used to create aggression, assign responsibility, and give political legitimacy to the PML-N view around May 9th.

7.3.1 Affect: Moral Shock and Grief and Condemnation

Emotions of shock and grief were often implied rather than named in tweets. These feelings of suffering were used to build a sense of hope and defiance among supporters. A strong connection to a common political cause was created by focusing on these shared emotions.

Tweet 1

"The terrible events that took place on 9 May involved burning government property, torching the Radio Pakistan building, and attacking critical installations. Is this politics?"

@Marriyum_A **(1666497032679219227, 10:27 PM · Jun 7, 2023)**

Calling the events "terrible" constituted a negative feeling that made the readers feel emotional before they know details, pushing them to condemn.

Tweet 2

"PM Shehbaz Sharif breaks down in tears as he meets the families of the martyrs. He vows to bring the perpetrators of the 9th May attack to justice." **(1661390901996863494, 8:17 PM · May 24, 2023)**

The phrase "breaks down in tears," displayed feelings by creating grief, empathy and seriousness. The Prime Minister's emotional involvement was demonstrated. The feeling supported the government's position by associating it with national mourning. Another phrase "martyrs" carried greater emotional weight, as it demanded respect and mourning, and indirectly discredited those associated with the violence.

7.3.2 Judgment: Criminalization and moral Condemnation

Judgment, especially negative social condemnation, was a key tool in the tweets. The discourse presented perpetrators as criminals and illegitimate, whereas it presented the state as lawful and righteous.

Tweet 3

"The terrible events that took place on 9 May involved burning government property, torching the Radio Pakistan building, and attacking critical installations. Is this politics?"

@Marriyum_A **(1666497032679219227, 10:27 PM · Jun 7, 2023)**

The phrases, "burning government property, torching Radio Pakistan building, and attacking critical installations." were used to show criminal behavior. The question "Is this politics?" was used as negative judgment to say the actions were not truly political.

Tweet 4

"PM Shehbaz Sharif breaks down in tears as he meets the families of the martyrs. He vows to bring the perpetrators of the 9th May attack to justice" **(1661390901996863494, 8:17 PM · May 24, 2023)**

This statement *"He vows to bring the perpetrators of the 9th May attack to justice."* inscribed positive judgment of the Prime Minister's role. It lauds the Prime Minister as responsible and moral. Simultaneously, it reinforced negative judgment of the perpetrators as criminals.

7.3.3   Aggression here is made lawful, seen as accountability, not emotion

Appreciation was used to evaluate the events of 9th May not merely as isolated incidents but as attacks on the state and national infrastructure.

Tweet 5

"The terrible events that took place on 9 May involved burning government property, torching the Radio Pakistan building, and attacking critical installations. Is this politics?"

@Marriyum_A **(1666497032679219227, 10:27 PM · Jun 7, 2023)**

The phrase *"attacking critical installations."* presented the events as serious national damage, which transformed the unrest into a security threat.

Tweet 6

"PM Shehbaz Sharif breaks down in tears as he meets the families of the martyrs. He vows to bring the perpetrators of the 9th May attack to justice."

"#azmat e shohda convention **(1661390901996863494, 8:17 PM · May 24, 2023)**

The hashtag *"#azmat e shohda convention"* exalted the actions of the state demonstrating heroism.

7.3.4   Inscribed and Invoked Attitude

Written judgment and rhetorical questions were used in tweets, making the talk factual and solemn.

Unlike PTI, here aggression was built on state morality, not resistance. Through feelings, the government represented grief and care. By judging, it classified opponents as criminals. By praising, it showed the events as attacks on national integrity. Aggression became a tool to claim control, justify policies, and protect law and honour after May 9th.

7.4 Attitudinal Analysis of PML-N Urdu Tweets 9th May

This part again used the attitude framework developed by Martin and White in 2005 to examine the Urdu tweets associated with PML-N about May 9th. It showed how aggression was built through moral criticism, emotional appeal to national sacrifice, and framing of events as rebellion against the state. Unlike PTI discourse, this aggression supported the state's authority, laws, and nationalism.

7.4.1 Affect: Grief, Moral Shock and Patriotic Emotion

Urdu tweets used many emotions, especially sadness, respect, anger and shock which come from 9th may events referring towards national symbols and remembering martyrs.

Tweet 1

"Afsoos, hamaray shuhada ki qurbaniyon ko zail kernay ki nakam koshish ki gayi. Shuhada ki nishaniyon ko mismar kiya gaya, sarkari amlaak ko nuqsan pohnchaya gaya. Woh log jo hamari hifazat kailiye sarhadon par mamoor hain unki imarton ko jalaya gaya. 9 May ka din qaum kabhi na bhula sakay gi.

- Wazir-e-Azam Shehbaz Sharif"

#ShehbazThanksNation **(1690789785122570242, 11:17 PM · Aug 13, 2023)**

Regret or sadness was meant by the word "afsos" and a negative feeling was displayed. By mentioning "shohdaa ki qurbaniya", mourning and respect were brought out. Collective trauma was created by the statement "9th May ka din qom kabhi nhi bhula saky gi". The event was made unforgettable, strong

condemnation was amplified by the discussion, and strong retaliation was justified.

Tweet 2

"Hum 9 May walay nahi, 28 May walay hain"

@NawazSharifMNS #Khush_Aamdeed_NawazSharif (**1715594708641038433, 10:03 AM · Oct 21, 2023**)

People were made to feel proud of their nation as well as a clear moral difference was shown by this slogan "hum 28 May waly hain 9 May waly nhi". A strong emotional line was created by the tweet by saying we are true to 28 May, not to 9th May.

7.4.2   Judgment: Criminalization, Treason, Moral Exclusion

Judgment, especially when it involved negative social sanctions, was the main theme. Political opponents were not only criticized but cut off from normal political life.

Tweet 3

"Mulk kay konay mein fasaad barpa karnay wala takhreeb kaaron ka tola. Jo gunda gardi kay zor par apni baat manwanay par yaqeen rakhta hai. Adalton par hamlay hon, police walon ko 'phenta' laganay ki dhamkiyan ya sanihah 9 May, in ki tareekh intishar phelanay se bhari pari hai. Yeh party riyasat kay liye kisi cancer se kam nahi jis ka ilaaj karna zaroori hai." (**1717416717490573675, 10:43 AM · Oct 26, 2023**)

People, who caused unrest, were strongly condemned by the phrase "mulk k kony mai fasad berpaa kerny wala takhreeb karo ka tola" and were referred to as "takhreeb kar" saboteurs. The language was very aggressive and political opponents were seen as a danger.

A very harsh judgment of party's legitimacy was shown by the phrase "yeh party riyasat ky liye kisi cancer sy kam nhi".

Also, a lasting moral image was created by the statement "inki tareekh intshaar phelaany sy bhari pari hy", describing aggression as a basic and ongoing trait rather than a temporary one.

Tweet 4

"Sanihah 9 May baghawat thi aur baghawat ki koi maafi nahi hua karti. Jin logon kay khilaf shawahid samnay aa chukay hain jo logon ko riyasat par hamlay kailiye uksa rahay hain unhein qanoon kay mutabiq saza milni chahiye." (**1720007658781249614, 2:19 PM · Nov 2, 2023**)

The statement "saniha 9 may baghawat thi aor baghawat ki koi maafi nhi hoa kerti" clearly showed a negative judgment of legality and morality. The use of the word "baghawat" (rebellion) took the event out of the realm of normal protest and placed it in the world of treason.

7.4.3   Appreciation: Transforming 9th May as an Attack on the State and National Assets

Appreciation was widely used to evaluate institutions, events, and actions, as 9th May was seen as a direct attack on the state and its integrity.

Tweet 5

"9 May ke roz Radio Pakistan ke Chagai studio aur is ki building ko aag lagayi gayi is se pehle 2014 mein PTV pe ek giroh hamla awar hua. Pakistan Television broadcaster aur Radio Pakistan sirf Pakistan ki buildings aur idaray nahi hain balkay yeh ek asaasa hain."

— Wazir-e-Ittelaat Maryam Aurangzeb (**1685551875410542593, 12:24 PM · Jul 30, 2023**)

A positive value was given by this statement "radio Pakistan aor Pakistan television "sirf amarten nhi balkeh qomi asasa hain" by putting state institutions among national wealth and giving a more negative value to attacks on those institutions. Physical damage was turned into symbolic national

violation by Appreciation. 9th May was also shown as a corrupt move, a manipulation of destruction, not as a political expression.

Tweet 6

"PM Shehbaz Sharif breaks down in tears as he meets the families of the martyrs. He vows to bring the perpetrators of the 9th May attack to justice."

"#azmat e shohda convention **(1661390901996863494, 8:17 PM · May 24, 2023)**

The hashtag positively valued the state's narrative by framing the response as honouring sacrifice and national dignity. This positive Appreciation of the state's commemorative action indirectly devalued the opposing side.

7.4.4   Inscribed and Invoked Attitude

The discourse was based on an inscribed attitude, where the use of overtly evaluative words ("baghawat, takhreeb kar, cancer, gunda gardi" were used. This was supported by invoked attitude through history, slogans, and martyr references.

Overall, aggression in these Urdu PML-N tweets was framed as a justified defense of the state rather than emotional revenge. Grief and nationalism were brought by the discourse with affect; opponents were criminalized with judgment; 9th May was portrayed as a state attack with appreciation. Aggression became a core part of political life, showing loyalty to the state. The opposition was rejected by the discourse and disposed as a rebellion.

8. Discussion

This study examined how aggression was shaped as political identity in PTI and PML‑N tweets about the 9th May events, using the Attitude system of Appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005). The results revealed that aggression in Pakistani political social media was not mainly in explicit abusive language but was systematically organized in affect, judgment, and appreciation. These patterns revealed clear ideological orientations and competing claims to legitimacy.

Affect was the key to political alignment in both English and Urdu tweets, but it differed between PTI and PML-N. Mostly negative affect—shock, suffering, fear, endurance—was used by PTI tweets, often implied rather than named. PTI was built by this strategy as morally wounded victims, eliciting sympathy from the audience.

PML-N, on the other hand, revolved around grief, patriotism, moral shock, and national trauma. The state's stance was supported by these feelings and 9th May was made to appear as a national tragedy rather than as a political dispute. Affect was used by PTI to justify resistance; it was used by PML-N to support authority and control.

Judgement was the most common attitudinal resource, showing its importance in political aggression. Negative social sanction was frequently used by PTI to judge state institutions and opponents as illegal, unconstitutional, corrupt, or morally illegitimate. Through these judgments, aggression appeared as a principled response to injustice rather than hostility. Positive judgment was kept for the self-claiming legality and moral restraint.

Judgment was placed at a higher level by PML-N, actively excluding opponents. They were labelled criminals, saboteurs, rebels, or "cancer" to the state. Opponents were removed from legitimate democratic debate by such extreme negative judgments, positioning them as existential threats. Aggression here was not resistance but moral condemnation and criminalization.

For PTI, the 9th May events were consistently framed through appreciation as a false-flag operation—a well-planned deception and a conspiracy against the opposition. By shifting blame away from the party's supporters and portraying the violence as externally orchestrated, aggression was rationalized as both revealing the truth and defending democracy.

PML-N on the contrary did not see PTI this way, rather those events were seen as an attack on national assets, institutions and sovereignty. By considering state buildings and security installations as national symbols, any damage to these installations was perceived as a national assault. The seriousness of the incidents was heightened by Appreciation. Thus, the same event was discursively rewritten either as political victimization (PTI) or as rebellion against the state (PML-N).

It was shown by the analysis that invoked evaluation was relied on more by PTI—aggression was presented with suffering, rhetorical questions, and implied injustice—to appear factual, legalistic, and moral.

Overt inscribed attitude was preferred by PML-N, labeling PTI as rebels, terrorists, saboteurs, or traitors. Ambiguity was eliminated and a hard moral binary was created. How the degree of aggression could be strategically shaped, either implicitly or explicitly, to fit ideological goals.

Overall, Pakistani political X (formerly known as Twitter) was a core tool for political identity formation. Aggression was framed by PTI as ethical resistance, based on victimhood, moral superiority, and democratic struggle. Aggression was also framed by PML-N in terms of the state-centered moral authority through nationalism, legality and protection of sovereignty.

A display of force on both sides was normalized as legitimate, justified, and even necessary through repeated patterns of affect, judgment, and appreciation. Aggression therefore moved beyond simple emotional outburst or hate speech, becoming an ordered evaluative stance that defined who belonged, what was a legitimate role, and who had to be excluded.

The usefulness of evaluative analysis for understanding political aggression beyond straightforward insults or hate speech was shown by this study, using the Appraisal theory's Attitude system. The interplay between emotion, morality and framing of events, that created polarized political identities on social media, was identified by the findings. This research contributed to political discourse studies by showing that aggression was embedded in evaluative meaning and sustained by systematic linguistic choices.

9. Conclusion

How aggression was discursively built as political identity in PTI and PML-N tweets, considering the 9th May events, was explored by this study, using appraisal theory (Martin & White, 2005). By analyzing affect, judgment, and appreciation, surface hostility was looked past by the research to reveal deeper ideological work in aggressive political discourse on social media.

The aggressive nature of PTI and PML-N discourses was not merely reactionary or emotional; it was systematically structured through the use of evaluative language. Aggression was mainly presented by PTI tweets as ethical resistance, built on victimhood, injustice, and moral endurance. PTI portrayed itself as wounded yet morally justified through invoked affect, while the opposition was delegitimized through negative judgment as corrupt and illegitimate. The 9th May events were reshaped by Appreciation as conspiratorial and planned, allowing aggression to appear as exposing truth rather than incitement.

In contrast, PML-N discourses framed aggression as a form of state-bound moral authority. Using grief-oriented and patriotic affect, strong negative judgment, and framing the 9th May events as rebellion and an attack on sovereignty, the opposition was criminalized and morally excluded from legitimate political space. Aggression thus functioned as a tool to assert legality, protect national integrity, and justify the punishment of dissent.

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