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## **HUMOUR AND IDEOLOGY: STYLISTIC AND STRATEGIC ANALYSIS OF PTI AND PML-N MEMES IN THE PAKISTAN ELECTIONS 2024**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper focuses on analysing political memes, specifically PTI and PML-N memes during Pakistan's election period of 2024 and the ideologies implied through those memes. The study tends to combine humour (a stylistic component) with ideology (a strategic element) to analyse political memes. Despite social media's growing influence, the stylistic and strategic use of memes in the 2024 elections remains underexplored. Therefore, the research objectives are to explore how humour is used stylistically in memes to attract viewers' attention and the political ideologies reflected in those memes, thereby affecting public perception. Qualitative methodology is used in this research study. In total, five political memes targeting PTI and PML-N are collected from social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. These memes are collected for the study, which is a stylistic and strategic analysis of political memes during the 2024 elections that convey ideology and are visually humorous. The memes are analysed using multimodal critical discourse analysis theory by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, which focuses on four primary levels of meaning: representational, interactional, compositional, and social and cultural context. The memes create sarcasm, mockery, and humour, directed towards the institutions, politicians, and the government. The practical implications of this study are that memes use humour to convey hidden ideologies and critique political opponents, helping viewers decode and critically analyse their content.*



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**Keywords:** *Humour, ideology, stylistic elements, strategic elements, political memes, Pakistan elections 2024, MCDA, public perception*

## **Introduction**

Social media has become one of the most significant platforms in political communication where voters learn, decode, and bargain political messages within modern-day politics. Social networks like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram have revolutionized how political participants form their publicity, propagate stories, and position their rivals. The memes have taken center stage among the various ways of expressing oneself using digital tools due to their potential to combine humour, creativity, and ideological message into small, highly shareable visuals. Memes are entertaining, as well as persuading, ridiculing, and identifying political alignment.

The **2024 general elections** in Pakistan were marked by the high use of political memes. **Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N)** were among the parties that were majorly using digital content to mobilize their supporters, build their legitimacy stories, and protest against other rival parties. The supporters of these parties also played a significant role in the creation of memes, which, in most cases, impacted the formation of the public discourse more efficiently and promptly than traditional media sources. Since the elections were polarized, memes were used as a tool by the followers to show allegiance, attack the adversaries, and spread party ideologies in a laughable but tactical manner. The culture of political memes that developed during the period of elections did not occur in an abrupt way; it was a continuation of a larger tendency in Pakistan where digitally active young people began to depend on memes as the prism through which political events can be viewed.

Although the memes seem to be light-hearted images, they are complicated multimodal texts that contain ideological connotations. They integrate stylistic features, various visual exaggerations, satire, irony, and intertextual allusions, with communicative goals, including partisan affiliation or persuading the masses. From the perspective of voters and particularly young people, memes serve as a fast and convenient political commentary. This causes them to be a pivotal point of linguistic and discourse-oriented studies, especially in the changing framework of multimodal discourse analysis and online political discourse.

Even though the literature on political memes has grown over the last few years, the Pakistani setting or context is relatively unexplored. The current literature is predominantly dedicated to general political communication, social media activism, or electoral behavior formation within the boundaries of digital platforms. However, the academic literature that examines the overlaps of



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stylistic devices of humour and ideological message in memes created during the 2024 elections is limited.

Most of the existing literature is focused on memes as cultural artifacts or a mirror of the collective opinions, yet very few authors dwell upon the linguistic, visual, and strategic creation of humour, as well as how these stylistic options help to spread political ideology. In the same manner, studies that deal with the way in which the audience perceives these memes and the effect of humour on their interpretations of political parties are also limited. Although the international academic literature has stressed the influence of memes in a democratic society, limited research has been conducted regarding the specific sociopolitical setting of Pakistan, wherein memes tend to be subliminal rhetorical devices used in a politically-charged environment.

Therefore, there is a definite and visible research gap associated with the topic of the multimodal, stylistic, and ideological analysis of PTI and PML-N memes that were produced specifically during the 2024 elections. The proposed study seeks to address this gap by providing a methodological inquiry that is based on the rhetoric of style, critical discourse analysis, and multimodal models of the memes that emerged during the 2024 elections in Pakistan.

This study has an academic as well as a social significance. It also has an academic contribution to the new debates in the field of digital sociolinguistics, multimodal discourse analysis, political communication, and internet studies. Through examination of memes as structured and meaningful texts, the paper reveals humour as not a mere tool of entertainment but as an instrument of strategy with ideological consequences.

The research further develops the knowledge of how humour is applied by political parties and their online communities to build solidarity, delegitimize the party opponents, and make subtle implications about the way political events are interpreted by the voters. Due to the high stakes and political polarization of the 2024 elections, the analysis of memes can provide an insight into the way digital audiences bargain on political discourse and how humour affects a sense of trustworthiness, competence, or corruption.

The main purpose of this study is to discuss the intersection of humour and ideology in political memes that were made during the 2024 elections in Pakistan, specifically targeting political parties: PTI and PML-N. The research aims to explore the way linguistic and visual components are stylistically organized to create humour and how the stylistic device spreads ideological messages in a strategic way. In this way, the study seeks to uncover the underlying processes of voter perception in digital politics communication as guided by semiotic processes. The following research objectives are made to address the research questions:



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1. To analyze the stylistic and multimodal techniques, linguistic, visual, symbolic, and intertextual, used in PTI and PML-N memes to construct humour and disseminate ideological meanings.
2. To explore how these memes affect viewers' political perceptions, attitudes, and interpretations during the 2024 elections.

### **Research Questions:**

1. How do linguistic, visual, and multimodal elements in PTI and PML-N political memes work together to create humour and convey ideological messages during the 2024 elections?
2. In what ways do these political memes influence or shape voters' perceptions and interpretations of political parties and events?

### **Literature Review**

Political memes have been increasingly transformed over the years into an essential feature for social media networks and political dynamics. Most of these memes are humorous or sarcastic and are employed in expressing contemporary political incidents. According to Shifman (2014), in her article, "Memes in Digital Culture", she believes that for one to understand memes, they must understand how both the content creators and the viewers of the memes, and last but not least, the social and political environment within which digital participatory culture transpires.

Contrary to social media memes, which are viewed only as entertaining online jokes, political memes play a crucial role in people's attitudes toward politics. Memes reduce multidimensional politics into simple images which, although they may be cliché in some way, are easily recognizable and invoke a strong - and usually simplistic - rational or emotional response (Milner, 2013). This is true according to Milner (2013), who refers to memes as "textual poaching," and this suggests that meme users impose private or group political stances on mainstream messages. This adaptation can lead to the spread of political knowledge; much as memes are passed around and changed, thus becoming a way for the marginalized to engage in political discourse (Bayerl and Stoyanov, 2016).

As for the last decade, the spheres of political discourse have been significantly inclined towards digital platforms where memes are widely used for irony and persuasion. Political memes, visual social media posts that accompany humorous messages, are informative, persuasive propaganda tools that grab viewers' attention and convey party ideologies. For instance, during the 2018 elections, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), alongside Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), used memes on social media to target all voters. These creations raise awareness of the relation



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between politics and rhetoric in the exchange of messages, the construction of party images, and voters' perception. (Shabbir and Haider, 2023)

### **The Emotional and Cognitive Appeal of Memes:**

Political memes employ appropriate images and other culturally related texts to appeal to audiences' feelings and thoughts. Various analysts prove that memes attract a lot of attention in relation to the fact that they are funny or rather shocking, or else the information in them is a lie, in one point that overemphasizes their ability to elicit an emotional response. According to Highfield (2016) in his publication "Social Media and Everyday Politics", memes are effective because they make people discuss issues related to politics in a humorous way so that people can share their views. However, the use of images in memes enables the transmission of a political message in a concise manner while getting a quick response and message comprehension from the audience.

Similarly, Nita, Setiawan, and Lestari (2021) employed the framework of speech act theory in analysing how meme brings humour and meaning into it, where text, image, and context are used. From the study, they found out that memes encompass irony, satire, and hyperbole to comprise messages that are close to the perception of bias of the audience. In this sense, the researchers posit that this is not mere humour, but rather a strategic method through which viewers' manner of perceiving things, and their emotional response thereto, is managed. The study explains that memes exist in specific contexts, and people in that given culture often understand jokes, while those from other cultures will find it hard to comprehend.

### **Memes as Tools for Ideological Propagation and Polarization:**

Political memes are used to express individual opinions but are also capable of contributing to the creation of polarized group beliefs. Memes often contain stereotypes and are derived from ideological bias in language, which can cause polarization among the key users on social media (Ott, 2017). Ott (2017) notes that categorizing memes based on their content to any political side creates polarization, hence creates "us versus them" mentality. Consequently, this division can lead to what Sunstein (2018) refers to as the "echo chambers," meaning that people end up being exposed to more content that reinforces their existing beliefs and diversifies their perception.

Moreover, Khan (2024) looks at the rhetorical features of memes, like humour, hyperbole, and symbolism in visuals, which significantly contribute to the polarization of the parties. According to Khan, memes force people to adopt stances that are not limited to policies. Khan's study establishes that both humour and the appeal to emotions are crucial in political meme discourses. This is shown through analysing how the visual and linguistic features determine political stories and people's voting choices in Pakistan. Her work offers a basic approach to determine how



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political memes influence voters' perceptions of different issues and how they increase partisanship, especially during election campaigns like Pakistan's 2024 elections.

Additionally, Salikin and Sulaksono (2021) investigate the influence of political memes on the participation of new voters in the Indonesian presidential election in 2019. Their research reveals that political memes play an important role in raising political consciousness among novice voters to participate in the election period. Memes use humour and simple language, making political issues easier to understand, hence improving the youth's political participation. This work also points out that, through the mechanism of simplifying political communication, memes might help to increase the turnout of voters at an election.

The rapid conveyance of information through memes has proven to be an effective means for spreading misinformation. Memes often do not capture the required context and complexity in politically charged issues, hence users are likely to distort or oversimplify the realities of politics (Tandoc et al., 2018). As pointed out in the work of Tandoc et al. (2018), memes are incredibly malleable and, due to the lack of necessary context and subtlety, lead to the distortion or oversimplification of political truths. Memes are easily manipulated for political gain, with certain groups strategically employing them to shape public opinion. This deliberate spread of political memes has been witnessed during each election interval, whereby politicians use memes to spread prejudice or misinformation to manipulate voters' attitudes.

Political memes posted on social networks can be studied using visual and semiotic analysis as well as discourse analysis. Visual rhetoric is a common approach that tries to analyse the use of images and texts, as well as cultural signs, to decode political messages (Rose 2016). She suggests in "Visual Methodologies: Part I, An Introduction to Researching with Visual Materials", that analysing the formal and signification aspects of memes can reveal hidden messages and politics. Gee (2014) also argues that discourse analysis is valuable in this context because it examines how language and symbols in memes reflect wider social ideologies and power dynamics.

Javed, Jamil, and Ahmad (2022) discuss the examples of memes with political connotation that are posted by Pakistani users on social media. They show that memes can effectively convey pertinent perceptions regarding political issues and candidates using specific techniques when creating memes. Hence, through exaggeration of the numbers, as well as the satire, memes provide an outlet for vocalization and plotting of opinion, most especially among the active social media generation. This research also accepted the role that memes played in the increase of division within politics through solidifying the relation between different groups, focusing on the role of memes in the establishment of political identities within the current discourse.

Furthermore, Soh (2020) states that memes are actually 'ambivalent objects' that are both humorous and subversive, making it easy for users to make institutional protest without raising fury. By analysing roughly 300 posts on Facebook, Twitter, and Reddit, Lockwood shows how



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memes allow for a process known as “mimetic chain” - a constant cycle of re-evaluation that converts dissent into understanding. These memes, therefore, create an observed public space where political debates can continue tactfully within periods of politically sensitive countries such as Singapore. Hence, the argument that comedy tools, such as social media, can improve the political process without aggression.

Suleman and Saleem (2024) examine how meme culture might function as an avenue of political speech and how it is employed on Facebook in Pakistan. They notice that political memes are not only a source of humour, but also a tool for sharing urgent social and political messages that address controversies and shift people’s attitudes. Memes are claimed by the researchers to be a manifestation of the outlet for politics where the masses can make an assessment of politics in ways that are out of the political norm and assimilate an evaluation of political events.

### **Visual Rhetoric and Symbolism in Political Memes:**

Visual rhetoric and symbolism are frequently examined as stylistic elements of political memes. According to Nissenbaum and Shifman (2020) in their book “Memetic Rhetorics: The Politics of Visual Culture Online”, memes employ cultural references and gestures significantly to portray political characters and themes in a way that will be easily understood by the target audience. For instance, politics are depicted with caricatures or imagery that give out the political personalities simplistically, using symbolic images to represent them and thus, represent simplicity to understand class politics through the images that are used in politics. This exaggeration can further deepen stereotyping and enrich ideological discourses as seen in memes, where politicians possess some dramatically distorted body part or where the background setting is associated with a given political stance (Edgerly & Thorson, 2021).

Irony, sarcasm, and humour play a vital role in political memes as they are often used to scrutinize political figures and events. According to Burgess and Baym (2020) in their book “Twitter and Society”, memes often use ironic and sarcastic tones to connect with audiences emotionally, prompting them to question and evaluate the content of the memes. Humour is highly effective on social media as it simplifies complex issues into more easily understandable forms. For instance, memes in relation to the COVID-19 outbreak and political responses frequently utilize humour to convey emotions such as frustration, anger, or cynicism towards government actions and public policies (Burgess & Baym, 2020).

Irony and sarcasm within memes are used as methods of ideological communication, enabling users to express political criticisms discreetly. As stated in Guerrero-Pico et al.'s (2021) book “The Politics of Humour on Social Media”, ironic memes act as a form of encoded messaging that resonates with specific groups who appreciate the humour. This method facilitates less direct and more subversive critiques, as the humour conceals the seriousness of the criticism, encouraging broader sharing and debate among audiences with differing ideologies.



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Intertextuality and cultural referencing are literary devices that enable memes to combine political messages with elements of popular culture. According to Milner (2020), intertextuality is a key aspect of memes, as they often remix and reuse existing cultural elements to offer commentary on contemporary political issues. Memes make use of references to well-known movies, TV shows, or viral images to dig into the audience's existing knowledge and emotions linked to those forms of media. Guerrero-Pico et al. (2021) give examples of memes that reframe famous scenes from films or TV shows to convey new meanings related to political situations, thereby enhancing the meme's relatability and impact.

The use of references to popular culture in political memes causes political messages to spread widely as memes are shared among online communities with mutual interests (Shifman, 2022). This method creates links between well-known cultural references and fresh political messages, resulting in memes that are easy to understand and captivating for a wide audience. Moreover, combining common cultural knowledge with political memes creates a sense of collective identity among individuals who share similar ideological views.

Textual and visual contrast is an important stylistic element in political memes, which helps to highlight specific messages. According to Edgerly and Thorson (2021), memes frequently use contrasting visuals or text to grab attention to hypocrisy or to criticize political controversies. For instance, a meme may present a politician's previous statements alongside their present actions, bringing to light any perceived contradictions or discrepancies in a manner that is easily recognizable to viewers. This juxtaposition reinforces critical viewpoints and adds depth to the meme, resonating swiftly with audiences.

## **Research Methodology**

This study is based on Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA), guided by the knowledge of stylistics and a wider understanding of political communication. An organized method of analysing the construction of meaning, MCDA was invented by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996, 2006), which not only involves the language usage as the primary means of meaning construction but also includes visuals, layout, colour, gaze, symbols, and written text as the leading modes of meaning construction. Since political memes are strongly dependent on the interactions of these modes, MCDA provides a suitable, comprehensive, and adaptable theoretical perspective to study them.

Political memes are multimodal in their nature: they utilize images, captions, typography, intertextual allusions, and symbolic hints to create humour and deliver ideological information. The limitation of the traditional textual discourse analysis is that it fails to present the complexity of the visual-verbal. MCDA, on the other hand, enables the researcher to test the interaction between stylistic options (humour, exaggeration, parody) and strategic ideological signals



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(framing of political actors, alignment with party positions, symbolic references) to have an impact on audience interpretation.

Memes were popularized in the context of the 2024 Pakistan elections when alternative political commentaries were created not only by the official party teams but also by citizens who were active on social media. MCDA aids in exposing how these memes silently contribute to reinforcing political ideologies, confronting opponents, or developing perceptions, even when there is no direct or formal political message attached to them. This analytical method is, therefore, suitable and relevant to the goals of the study: to understand the stylistic apparatus of humour and the connection between humour and its ideological background.

#### **Key Constructs of MCDA Relevant to the Study:**

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) identified several layers of meaning, which are essential to the analysis of political memes:

- **Representational Meaning**

This refers to the visual representation of events, participants, and processes. In case of memes, this could be the image of political leaders, national symbols, facial expressions, or exaggerations of a text that adds to the humour and political opinion.

- **Interactive Meaning**

This aspect deals with the way in which the meme responds or locates the viewer. Gaze, distance, modality, and tone of textual captions are the elements that are observed to influence the way audiences emotionally respond to the meme or perceive the political message within it.

- **Compositional Meaning**

This entails the organization of the elements in the meme- layout, visual hierarchy (salience), balance, and framing. Such decisions define the first things the viewers see and the structure of the message. Thus, it makes the memes contribute to both the comic effect and the ideological persuasion.

- **Social and Contextual Meaning**

The memes should be viewed in the context of their sociopolitical situation: the events preceding the 2024 elections, party discourses, popular mood, and ideological conflicts. MCDA highlights that meaning is contextually constructed and, therefore, the researcher can make an interpretation about whether certain memes reinforce or challenge the political ideologies in Pakistan.



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A combination of these constructs makes the theoretical framework allow the multilayered interpretation of the way PTI and PML-N memes created during the election period convey both humour and ideology.

The presented research is based on a qualitative research design, as it is appropriate to investigate the subtle, context-sensitive, subjective aspects of the digital political content. Qualitative inquiry can be used to interpret meanings within texts and images. The qualitative method is most suitable as the type of artifact, which is political memes, is multimodal and must be interpreted instead of quantified.

The sample of the study includes political memes that target the main political parties of Pakistan, which are the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), during the 2024 general elections. Five memes were chosen carefully out of this general population to form the sample.

These memes were selected from social media platforms, namely Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, which are the main platforms where memes circulated during the election days. The chosen period is between November 2023 and April 2024, a period that is characterized by increased political activity, mobilization of campaigns, and discussions revolving around the elections.

The purposive sampling method is used as the sampling technique for this study. The approach is typical of qualitative research that employs the idea to identify information-rich cases that are most helpful in understanding the phenomenon that is being studied. The selected memes were specifically selected in accordance with the following criteria:

- They were aimed at PTI or PML-N political participants or party discourses.
- They included visual humour, satire, exaggeration, or style creativity.
- They were seen repeatedly or received great attention during the election time.
- They possess some dominant ideology.

The purposive sampling type is appropriate as the study is based on the scope of stylistic and strategic meaning-making, and not statistical representativeness.

#### **Data Collection Procedure:**

The political memes used in this paper were chosen purposively as the memes being analysed had a direct connection to the 2024 elections in Pakistan. It was found that three key social media platforms, including Twitter (X), Facebook, and Instagram, are the main platforms where political



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memes are circulated. The hashtags and keywords used to find memes that specifically relate to PTI and PML-N political discourse included election-related hashtags and keywords like #PakistanElections2024, hashtags like #PTI, #PMLN, and #GeneralElections2024. All the memes were then filtered to be relevant, only those that were created since November 2023 and April 2024 that had both visual and textual components and showed clear signs of humour, satire, or ideological message were shortlisted.

The samples of memes that were not related to politics, graphically clear, and those that did not possess multimodal characteristics were not considered. Out of the resulting refined pool, five memes were then chosen intentionally with the criteria that they reflected the current stylistic trends, were highly engaging, and had explicit ideological positioning during the time of the 2024 election.

### **Data Analysis Procedure:**

Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis (MCDA) is used to examine the memes that pay attention to the four layers of meaning discussed by Kress and van Leeuwen (2006):

- **Representational Analysis:**

The visual participants, the political actors, the symbols, the facial expressions, and a textual element that generates humour and ideological position are identified.

- **Interactive Analysis:**

Analysis of the way the meme situates the viewer with the help of gaze, modality indicators, tone, and interactive humour.

- **Compositional Analysis:**

Examination of layout, framing, salience, and spatial organization to express what the meme not only reveals in the foreground but also in the background ideologically.

- **Contextual/Social Analysis:**

The meanings of the meme in the political context of the 2024 election cycle, party discourses, and popular discourse.

This stratified review reveals the pathways of cross-equilibrium between stylistic humour and ideological meaning, and the overall effect of these modes on voter perception.



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### **Ethical Considerations:**

This study is also based on the main ethical principles that should be followed in digital discourse research:

- Only publicly available data: No use of private profiles or closed content was made.
- None of the personal identifiers: The research concentrates on the political actors and the party stories, without mentioning the names of the ordinary citizens.
- Respect towards creators: Memes are not assigned personal identity to the creator, except when the creator is a famous person.
- Responsible interpretation: Analysis prevents defamation and admits that memes represent the opinion of the user and not the fact.

Public and anonymous online data do not usually demand any ethical approval, although the study adheres to overall principles of responsible online research.

### **Analysis**

This research aims to analyse the following political memes, more specifically targeting Pakistan's political parties, which are PTI and PML-N, during the 2024 election period. Memes are an important concept to understand how content producers, audience and the social and political environments of the digital participatory culture work (Shifman, 2014). The memes are analysed through the lens of multimodal critical discourse analysis, where its four main levels of analysis are focused, which are: representational meaning, interactive meaning, compositional meaning, and contextual meaning.



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## **Representation of Pakistani citizens' emotions after the announcement of the official election results**



*Figure 1: Depiction of election results on Pakistani citizens and their emotions*

Figure 1 primarily depicts the effects on the Pakistani citizens and their emotions because of the announcement of the 2024 election results. Initially, the representational meaning is analyzed, where the visual elements comprise the upper half of the meme, showcasing election results with Nawaz Sharif (PML-N) securing a majority of votes over the PTI candidate, Dr. Yasmin Rashid, who was leading the count before the announcement of the election results of 2024. The lower half shows an expressive person holding a microphone with an exaggerated gesture, supported by a group of onlookers beside him. This creates a humorous and cultural effect. The linguistic elements consist of the caption in Urdu, “تکاٹ” (failure), written with the PTI candidate, emphasizing her unsuccessful attempt. While “تام” (Success) stands connected to Nawaz Sharif, making people differentiate between success and failure in the political domain. The change in political news and a sensationalized emotional rant are used in comedic ways, juxtaposing the election outcome with a popular cultural meme. (Edgerly and Thorson, 2021)

In the first figure, interactive meaning is also explored. Visual engagement is created through the direct gaze of the person in the lower half, which engages the viewers because of his animated gestures and confident body language. This makes the audience associate with him emotionally and interpret his words as either humorous or genuine. The textual engagement is shown through the bold text in Urdu that grabs attention to the election's outcome.



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The compositional meaning is discovered as the shift in the meme is smooth from formal results to a humorous response to illustrate a flow of events. Memes are effective as they encourage people to participate in politics and express themselves in a humorous way (Highfield, 2016). The information value is that the election results are placed at the top half, indicating their significance and the political context, followed by the humorous reaction to this unexpected overturn. Salience is analysed as Nawaz Sharif's image is bigger and more prominent compared to the opponent candidate, emphasizing his success. Lastly, framing is seen by unifying the colour scheme of the two sections and the consistent use of the red and blue colours in the space, which creates two distinct yet interconnected narratives: the official and the popular.

Finally, the social context of the meme is that it provides an insight into how the citizens react to the political processes; visualizing people taking elections as an event that makes people emotionally charged, rather than a formal process. The tone is perhaps satirical and could be taken as a political commentary on Pakistan, which might be mocking the unstructured Political structure in Pakistan. The cultural context is identified as the bottom quote, which is a famous meme from Indian and Pakistani cricket references that people use to sarcastically express that there are major changes in something (Shifman, 2022). It has been seen that through political memes, appealing visuals are presented along with the content that goes on to include political sarcasm, and this format has been seen to be quite successful in making an appeal to the public to support a certain point of a party and in confirming the narrative of the party in question. (Shabbir and Haider, 2023). Its presence here signifies the political ideology intended to make the political message enjoyable and showcase the dramatic victory of Nawaz Sharif as well as how it influenced people emotionally.



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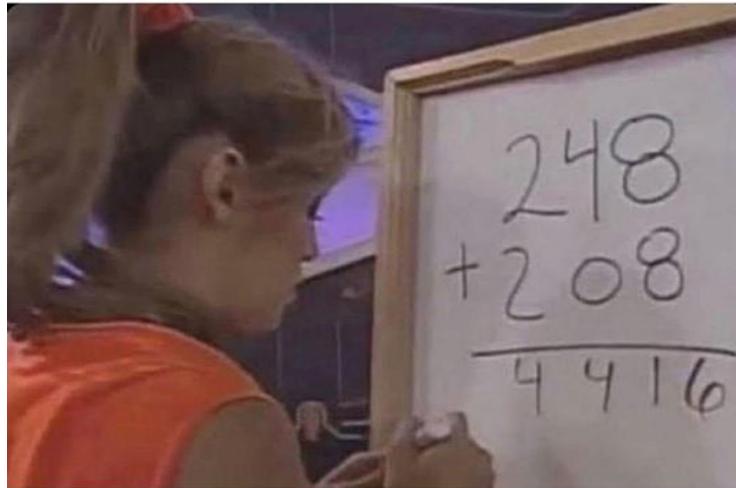
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### **Mocking the credibility of the election authorities through miscalculation**

ELECTION COMMISSION OF PAKISTAN COUNTING  
PMLN VOTES



*Figure 2: ECP girl miscalculating  $248 + 208 = 4416$*

In Figure 2, the representational meaning is shown through visual representation, where a girl is miscalculating the added numbers ( $248 + 208 = 4416$ ), whereas the actual result is 456. The caption at the top is "ELECTION COMMISSION OF PAKISTAN COUNTING PML-N VOTES," associating the meme with a particular political narrative. Using humour, it is indicated that the ECP has allegedly miscounted the votes in favor of PML-N. It implies the phenomenon of rigging and unfair practices during the 2024 elections.

Interactive meaning is displayed in the above figure 2 as the girl's error catches the attention of the audience and produces an amusing effect, reflecting the meme as shareable and relatable amongst the people. The direct reference to the "ECP" and "PML-N" engages the audience by associating the obvious mathematical humorous mistake of the girl with a specific political controversy of the elections of 2024. Framing of authority is depicted by juxtaposing the girl's error with an important body of institution, ECP, which taints its image and ideology of conducting fair elections in Pakistan (Edgerly and Thorson, 2011). It invites the viewers to raise questions about its voting process.

Thirdly, the compositional meaning is explored through the minimalistic design of the meme with only one image and a precise text at the top. This ensures that the message is clear and understood (Rose, 2016). The salient feature is the miscalculated result, grabbing the viewer's attention.



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Framing includes the contrast between the text (the institution) and the humorous visual (a simple math error), which highlights ECP's incompetence in a serious process.

Lastly, the cultural context of the meme expands on the scepticism of Pakistanis about elections being fair, a prominent issue in Pakistan's electoral history. This demonstrates the public's angry reaction and their distrust. The hyperbole of the simple math sum error satirically criticizes the authority institutions and figures. Additionally, the social context is the political discourse revolving around the 2024 elections, indicating the opposition parties accusing PML-N or ECP of rigging the votes, making them corrupt or laughably flawed, and challenging institutional credibility.

#### **Highlighting the perception of political victimization and constant targeting**



**Figure 3: "Even if I breathe, an FIR [First Information Report] is filed"**

The representational meaning in Figure 3 has the image showing a concerned and distressed Imran Khan, an important politician and leader of the political party, PTI, with his hand placed on his head. This signifies his disappointment and is part of the visual representation. The caption in the image is "Saans leta hun to FIR kat jaati hai" (Translation: "Even if I breathe, an FIR [First Information Report] is filed"), which employs hyperbole (Nissenbaum and Shifman, 2020) to humorously demonstrate his prevalent state in prison. The meme suggests that Imran Khan is under



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constant threats of legal cases, implying that he is way too often targeted legally. This represents him as a victim of systemic and political pressures, correlating with his supporters' viewpoints.

The interactive meaning is shown in the meme as the disturbed expression of the figure creates an emotional empathy amongst the viewers, along with a humorous effect. The language of the text is informal and even refers to people who watch the memes and are familiar with Imran Khan's Politics and struggles. The hyperbole of a case filed against him with his every breath displays his relatable condition, making the meme accessible and shareable within a wide range of audiences. It creates a two-sided effect; supporters will think it captures the leader's fight the best, while critics could consider it a sarcastic portrayal of a victim (Khan, 2024).

Furthermore, the compositional meaning is analysed as the image has text at the bottom, while the distressed figure at the top is also noticeable. The yellow text contrasts with the dark background, making the caption visible and easier to understand. The most salient component is Imran Khan's concerned face, attracting the audience's attention prior to reading the caption. The framing constitutes only Imran Khan, concentrating on his emotions and constant struggles in the political domain. The layout establishes a balance between the visual and textual elements, confirming the message of his efforts and situation resonates smoothly.

The cultural context of the meme surrounds the FIRs and legal cases, which are common in political opposition in Pakistan. The hyperbolic text implies frustration and anger within Imran Khan's supporters, who view it as unfair charges against him. The social context consists of the political discourse of the 2024 elections, where Imran Khan could not take part himself because of being in prison and facing legal challenges. It also creates polarization ideology in the Pakistani political sphere, where one side is composed of solidarity within supporters, and another is perceived as humour by opponents (Ott, 2017).



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### **Criticizing the government's administration for daily life inconveniences**

کل اگر پشاور موڑوے پر اس کی گاڑی میں پڑوں  
ختم  
بوجائے تو اس کا ذمہ دار کون ہوگا؟



*Figure 4: Shehbaz Sharif & Bilawal in a meeting with text about running out of petrol*

In Figure 4, the visual elements of the representational level consist of the meme showing two important Pakistani politicians, Shehbaz Sharif and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari. Their expressions indicate some serious discussion, where Bilawal is wearing a mask, displaying some caution. The text sarcastically (Burgess and Baym, 2020) blames political leaders for trivial situations like a car running out of fuel in the middle of the motorway, criticizing the government. This emphasizes that political actors are to be blamed for issues amid the daily struggles of the citizens. Shehbaz Sharif is gesturing as if explaining something, creating his image as a problem solver. On the other hand, Bilawal Bhutto is very likely passive and has a secondary role in the situation.

On the interactive level, the meme delivers a sarcastic tone, and a rhetorical question attracts the audience's attention, causing them to consider blaming the politicians for personal problems. A balance is created in the frame where the setting seems to be formal, but the situation expressed is informal.

In Figure 4, the compositional meaning is discovered with Shehbaz Sharif being the prominent figure and an exaggerated gesture, depicting him as the major target for criticism by people. Alternatively, Bilawal Bhutto has a secondary position, but is sitting next to him, showcasing the coalition of both political parties for the purpose of the 2024 elections. The black and white colours enhance the satirical tone by making the image appear serious for a funny context.

The cultural context of the meme shows public's dissatisfaction associated with political parties and issues such as inflation or lack of resources. This coincides with the wider frustrated emotions



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during the 2024 elections. The social context is of Pakistan 2024 elections, with PML N and PPP targeting PTI (opposition) implicitly, as the joke is the car running out of fuel particularly on Peshawar motorway which is under PTI government's management. Therefore, it blames this party for such minor inconveniences, reflecting underlying ideology of connecting every other issue with the present government (Shabbir and Haider, 2023).

### **Derogatory representation of a political figure**

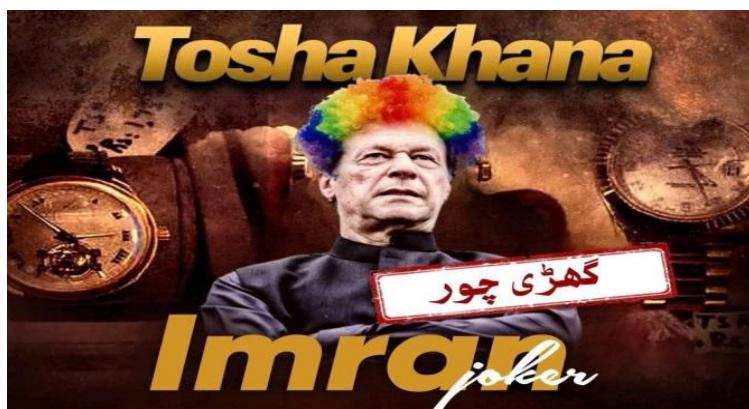


Figure 5: Imran Khan as a clown with text written, "Tosha Khana" and "watch thief"

Firstly, the representational level of meaning in Figure 5 is analysed with visual representation focused on the former Prime Minister Imran Khan, portrayed as wearing a clown's wig. This indicates mockery and being depicted as a clown instead of being taken seriously as a leader. He is surrounded by some watches in the meme, which is directed towards the "Tosha Khana" case in which he was accused of using state gifts (luxury watches) for personal benefit. The label "کھڑی چور" (translated as "watch thief") further adds to his allegation of corruption. The textual elements are highlighted with the phrase "Tosha Khana" in bold, emphasizing a reminder of his controversy. Moreover, "Imran" is followed by the word "joker," which questions his integrity and seriousness as a leader (Edgerly and Thorson, 2021).

On an interactive level, the meme has satirically attacked Imran Khan, grabbing the audience's attention towards his present scandal, with people being familiar with his case. Even if someone is not aware of it, after viewing this meme, that person would become curious and search for this specific case. The sarcastic tone but humorous clown image invites the audience to question his leadership qualities (Tandoc et al., 2018).



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The compositional meaning of the meme has Imran Khan as the central figure and focus of criticism. The text "گھڑی چور" ("watch thief") is surrounded by expensive watches, establishing a connection between him and his controversy. The Wig is brightly coloured like a clown, along with the dull brown background, which visually stimulates mockery. The bold fonts for "Tosha Khana" and "Imran Joker" attract the viewer's attention towards the under discussion political narrative.

The cultural and social context of the meme refers to Imran Khan's implication in the Tosha Khana scandal that took place during his rule and after launching an operation against him. It shows that opponents within the political domain and from the public are trying to dent his reputation during the 2024 elections. The connection of Imran Khan with a clown brings into spotlight his seriousness as a political leader as well as his honest and sincere position. The meme is most likely shared by the political opponents to influence the voters' opinions and portray Imran Khan's reputation as untrustworthy and corrupt, showing the ideology behind the sharing of this meme (Tandoc et al., 2018).

## **Discussion**

The results indicate that political memes depicting the 2024 elections of PTI and PML-N served as a source of humour and an instrument of political ideology. Using Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, one can easily depict that the humour of these memes is carefully achieved through visual exaggeration, symbolic interpretation, selective framing, and brief captions. These stylistic effects are not just entertaining but also constructive of political meanings, partisan identities, and simplified commentary transferred through Internet users.

Through examination of the five memes, humour is served in varied ways, based on the political target. The memes about Imran Khan tend to emphasize his court cases or exaggerate the elements of his image, which has become a sign of opposition to state activities. Contrastingly, memes on PML-N leaders focus on political failures, political privilege, or incompetence. It confirms previous arguments that comedy can be used to simplify political pressures through easily consumable modes of humour (Gibson, 2020; Shan and Sarkar, 2023).

The representational meanings demonstrate intentional placing of images of political actors as victims, villains, or comic figures, which is consistent with the findings of studies worldwide regarding the fact that political memes often depend on caricature descriptions to affirm the existing beliefs (Gibson, 2020; Shan and Sarkar, 2023). Interactive meanings, i.e., gaze, facial expression, and even tone, are used to draw the viewers into the joke to have a feeling of mutual



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understanding. It is consistent with the idea of Highfield (2022) that memes promote an in-group belonging and a shared political identity.

In composition, there is a direction of attention by way of salience, contrast, and strategic positioning of text or image. This confirms the idea of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) that the layout and visual hierarchy are the key to multimodal meaning-making. Memes simplify an ideological message by grounding the complexity of politics in the background and foregrounding humour to fast-track processing of digital content. The social and contextual connotation is indicative of the political temperature of the 2024 elections, including the frustration of the economy, governance, and legal scandals, and election anxieties, all of which found their presence on online platforms. Just like in the case of Ahmed and Skoric (2022), the memes are miniature commentaries that boil down larger political matters into snapshots that are emotionally appealing.

Such findings go in line with other international studies that reveal that political memes are currently more often used as political instruments, and not only as a joke (Milner, 2020; Bhoopathi, 2022). In Pakistan, the results are in line with the new research reporting the impact of memes on youth attention and forming the attitude among people (Ullah and Malik, 2021; Javed, 2023). In contrast to the previous Pakistani research, which focused primarily on memes as cultural products, this research demonstrates how stylistic choices contribute to the creation of ideological positions, and they support global trends regarding the fact that memes are becoming a part of political communication schemes (Soh, 2021; Proferes et al., 2022).

The study supports the usefulness of MCDA in the analysis of political online texts. The intersection of humour and ideology is portrayed by the four layers of meaning, i.e., representational, interactive, compositional, and social. This adds to more general theoretical work integrating stylistics with a political discourse analysis (Machin, 2020; Bateman et al., 2022) and to the recent arguments that memes must be discussed as elaborate ideological artifacts (Ross and Rivers, 2020; Yus, 2023).

Additionally, several memes were found to have complex multimodal structure, although they are simple to observe. Accurate framing, intertextual allusions, and strata of satire demonstrate intentional composition. The second aspect focused upon is that most memes have dual focuses as much as they are ridiculing political actors, they are also addressing inflation, accountability, fairness, and transparency. This confirms new arguments that political humour is becoming more complex and contextual in the present day (Jia and Chen, 2023). Also, the memes against PTI and PML-N are marked by civic frustration, which could indicate a movement toward citizen-focused criticism, instead of a partisan-based one as in other digital democracies (Sokolova, 2022; Flores, 2024).



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## Conclusion

This research explores the stylistic and ideological construction of political memes of PTI and PML-N in the 2024 Pakistan elections through Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis. The results indicate that the political memes are not just entertaining internet objects but are effective multi-modal texts because they strategically combine visual characteristics, language, and cultural symbols to communicate ideological messages. Through the analysis of five exemplary memes, the study proves that humour, satire, exaggeration, and framing can influence political interpretation by viewers.

The study is relevant to the field of research of digital political communication because it shows how memes are condensed ideological commentaries that capture and perpetuate societal opinion. It broadens the use of MCDA in the Pakistani political texts by depicting how the notions of representational, interactive, compositional, and contextual senses together expose the ideological processes of humour. A more subtle insight into the way that digital youth community users' political content is also revealed by this study, indicating that the formation of political identities, loyalties, and perceptions of voters can be indirectly influenced by memes.

Nonetheless, the study has several limitations. To begin with, the sample size is small, and the findings are confined to five memes, thus making the generalizability of the sample findings limited. Second, it restricts itself to publicly spread memes and not the party-generated material, which might not capture strategic communication created by official digital teams. Third, memes are always subject to interpretation, and meanings can turn out to be different according to the political orientations or cultures of viewers.

Further studies are necessary to involve larger data sets and widely different genres of memes in various languages and platforms. It could be comparatively studied on how humour operates in different political situations in South Asia. In addition, considering the audience reception analysis (interviews or digital ethnography), it would be possible to examine the way in which various groups grasp political humour. Lastly, another opportunity that could be explored further is the influence of AI-generated memes on the construction of ideological narratives.

In general, this research shows that political memes in the 2024 Pakistan elections are an effective style and ideological texts. They summarize the feelings of people, political affiliations, and cultural criticisms in compact, comical formats and hence, represent a significant element of the political communication today in Pakistan.



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