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**Gender Salience without Institutional Marginalization:
A Corpus Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis of Women
Politicians in Pakistani English-Language Editorials 2009 to
2026**



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Abstract

This study examines how Pakistani English-language newspaper editorials represent women politicians in the contemporary period. A corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis combines 34 female-target editorials (14,326 words), a matched 34-editorial male-politician comparator (15,629 words), and 148 post-reliability target-participant clauses. Women are commonly represented as active political participants: Material processes account for 46.6% of clauses, and Actor and Sayer roles together account for 53.4%. The lexical comparison shows a different dimension. Women, woman and gender are among the strongest female-key items, indicating that explicit gender categorisation is markedly more salient in the female corpus. Collocation and concordance evidence, however, do not support a simple contrast between female personalisation and male institutionalisation. Maryam Nawaz and Shehbaz Sharif both occur in strong office-related lexical environments, while Benazir Bhutto's posthumous semantic field is largely shaped by event history. Taken together, the evidence points to conditional normalisation: substantial institutional political agency coexists with concentrated moments of gender salience.

Keywords: women politicians; Pakistan; newspaper editorials; corpus-assisted discourse studies; feminist critical discourse analysis; political agency; gender salience

Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Women's increased visibility in formal politics does not necessarily produce discursive equality. A politician may be represented through executive office, party leadership and institutional agency while also being positioned as a woman, daughter, dynastic successor, symbolic exception or target of misogynistic attack. The coexistence of these forms matters because it complicates an enduring assumption in research on gender and political communication: that women are primarily personalised whereas men are primarily institutionalised. Contemporary Pakistani politics offers an especially useful setting in which to test that assumption because women have occupied highly visible positions in party leadership, provincial government, diplomacy, parliament and opposition politics while political authority remains shaped by family parties, gender hierarchy and intense adversarial discourse.

Research on gender and political media representation has established persistent inequalities in visibility, topical emphasis and evaluative treatment, while also showing that the size and direction of these differences vary with political office, institutional setting, campaign context and media genre (Kahn, 1994; Ross, 2010; Trimble, 2017; Armstrong and Taylor-Robinson, 2024). This variation matters methodologically. A lexical contrast between female and male corpora may reflect gender, but it may also arise because one corpus contains an assassination, a chief-ministerial appointment, a party succession dispute or a judicial crisis that the other does not. Event and office context must be examined before a statistical difference is interpreted as an ideological gender effect.

Feminist critical discourse analysis provides a complementary reason for

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caution. Gender ideology is not limited to overt sexist wording; it can also operate through what institutional discourse treats as ordinary, legitimate or exceptional (Lazar, 2007). The absence of explicit gender words does not make a text gender-neutral, just as their presence does not by itself establish marginalisation. An editorial that condemns misogyny may contain dense gender vocabulary precisely because sexist political conduct is being criticised. The central question is how gender marking interacts with political agency, office, dynasty, event context and evaluative norms.

1.2 Rationale and Research Gap

Pakistani English-language editorials are a particularly valuable genre for this purpose. Unlike straight news reports, editorials speak through an institutional newspaper voice, select political conduct for evaluation and explicitly construct questions of legitimacy, responsibility and public consequence (Richardson, 2007). Recent Pakistan-specific research has documented underrepresentation and uneven treatment of women politicians in English-language newspapers, while also pointing to the importance of genre and political context (Nisar, 2018; Rubbani and Alkaff, 2025). Corpus-based evidence remains limited, however, on how women are represented when they become the sustained subject of institutional editorial judgement.

Editorials also work on a different temporal scale from episodic news. A single editorial may draw together prior events, reported speech, institutional responses and anticipated consequences in one argument. Intertextuality forms part of that evaluative work: a politician may appear through her own words, an opponent's accusation, a court or investigative report, or the newspaper's retrospective account. A negative proposition in a target-centred editorial is not automatically attributed to the newspaper. Speaker source and

evaluative target are checked before a feature is assigned to the institutional voice.

The study uses a matched corpus-assisted design covering 2009 to 30 June 2026. It examines representation at several linked levels: naming and reference, grammatical agency, evaluation, explicit gender and dynastic marking, intertextuality, lexical keyness and name-node collocation. These levels are organised by the research questions below so that the statistical and discourse-analytic evidence can be interpreted without treating every difference between the female and male corpora as a gender effect.

1.3 Significance and Contribution

Empirically, the study provides a multi-newspaper account of women politicians in institutional editorials during a period of expanded female visibility in Pakistani politics. The analysis retains politician-level and event-level composition, allowing executive office, parliamentary voice, party leadership, posthumous political memory and gendered controversy to be distinguished within the same corpus.

Its methodological contribution lies in combining clause-level discourse analysis with a matched male-politician comparator. Nomination, transitivity, appraisal and intertextual evidence are examined alongside keyness, dispersion, collocation and concordance. This design helps distinguish gender-related contrasts from differences produced by office, event or corpus composition, and it assigns less evidential weight to coding domains with weaker reliability.

The findings also refine the common opposition between gendered representation and political normalisation. Explicit discourse about women, sexism and dynasty becomes highly salient in some editorial contexts, yet

women continue to appear in institutional roles as Actors, Sayers, office-holders and policy subjects. The term conditional normalisation is used for this pattern: ordinary political and governmental representation remains substantial, while gender becomes consequential under identifiable political and discursive conditions.

1.4 Research Questions and Objectives

Research questions

RQ1. How do nomination, grammatical process and participant role, and evaluative positioning construct female politicians as political actors in Pakistani English-language editorials published between 2009 and 30 June 2026?

RQ2. When do gender, dynasty and intertextual reference become salient in contemporary editorial representation of female politicians, and how do these features coexist with representation based on office, party and governance?

RQ3. What does comparison with a same-period, same-newspaper male-politician corpus reveal about gender salience and institutional representation once politician, office and event composition are taken into account?

Objectives

O1. To establish the principal patterns through which female politicians are named, assigned agency or affectedness, and evaluated in the contemporary editorials, using nomination counts, transitivity, participant roles and appraisal as complementary indicators.

O2. To identify the distribution and discourse contexts of explicit gender and dynastic marking and intertextual reference, and to determine whether these features displace institutional political identity or operate alongside it.

O3. To compare the female and male corpora through keyness, dispersion,

collocation and concordance analysis, testing whether observed lexical differences support a gender-specific interpretation or are better explained by institutional role, party position, political biography or event context.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Gendered Political Mediation and Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

Gendered mediation research has long drawn attention to lower visibility, personalisation, emphasis on appearance or family, and competence double binds in coverage of women politicians. Classic studies of electoral news showed that women candidates could be evaluated through frames and emphases that differed from those applied to men, while later feminist media scholarship broadened the focus to the institutional conditions through which political authority is mediated (Kahn, 1994; Ross, 2010). Trimble's (2017) work on women prime ministers is particularly relevant because it shows how leadership, gender and national political context interact differently across political settings.

Comparative research also cautions against treating gender gaps as invariant. Armstrong and Taylor-Robinson (2024), for example, show that political office and institutional role can condition media treatment of women and men in cabinet positions. That qualification is important here because several women in the corpus occupy high-visibility offices. The relevant comparison is not simply whether women are gendered, but whether institutional and office-based framing is withheld from them relative to male politicians in comparable periods and publications.

Feminist critical discourse analysis offers a framework for interpreting such mixed patterns. Lazar (2007) conceptualises gendered power as both explicit and routinised, encouraging analysis of how social actors are positioned within

relations of authority, normality and legitimacy. In political editorials, grammatical agency is especially important. A systematic tendency to place women as Goals or passive objects while men appear as Actors and Sayers would support a strong asymmetry claim. Frequent female Actor and Sayer roles, by contrast, require gendered inequality to be located in more specific evaluative, lexical or contextual patterns instead of being inferred from political subject matter alone.

2.2 Political Agency, Appraisal and Institutional Legitimacy

Systemic functional transitivity provides a useful grammatical route into this problem because it distinguishes processes of doing, saying, sensing and being and identifies the participant roles realised by political actors (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). Appraisal theory adds a second layer by distinguishing evaluative meanings associated with affect, judgement and appreciation (Martin and White, 2005). Together these systems make it possible to separate the representation of a politician as politically active from the positive, negative or implicit evaluation attached to that activity.

2.3 Corpus-Informed and Comparative Discourse Studies

Corpus-assisted discourse studies add distributional evidence to close reading. Keyness identifies lexical items unusually characteristic of one corpus relative to another; collocation identifies repeated semantic environments around selected nodes; dispersion checks whether a pattern is widespread or produced by one or two texts; concordance analysis allows the researcher to test whether the statistical association supports the proposed interpretation (Partington, Duguid and Taylor, 2013; Mautner, 2009). For gender research, this sequence is particularly valuable because event composition can otherwise produce misleadingly strong lexical contrasts.

2.4 Editorial Genre, Political Biography and Comparative Controls

Pakistan-specific scholarship makes local contextualisation essential. Nisar (2018) shows how elite English-language press discussion of prominent women becomes a site for negotiating gender, national identity and public achievement. Work on Hina Rabbani Khar similarly documents the gendered scrutiny that may accompany women's entry into highly visible diplomatic office. Rubbani and Alkaff (2025) further report that women politicians are underrepresented in Pakistani English-language newspapers and disproportionately concentrated in shorter hard-news formats. The editorial genre examined here is smaller, but institutionally consequential: the woman politician is not merely present in a report but becomes the sustained object of the newspaper's own political evaluation.

Alkaff and Rubbani (2026) provide the closest recent Pakistan-specific point of comparison. Their critical discourse analysis of 488 news reports from two English-language newspapers finds increasingly negative framing of women politicians across three time periods. The present corpus differs in genre and design because it consists of unsigned institutional editorials and includes a matched male editorial comparator. It asks a complementary question about what happens when women become the sustained object of an editorial board's political judgement, where institutional office and agency may be more prominent than in episodic news coverage.

Explicit gender vocabulary also requires contextual interpretation. Repeated references to women or female identity may arise from journalistic categorisation, quoted speech or story selection; in editorials, the same vocabulary may occur because the newspaper is condemning sexism itself. A passage that names misogyny in order to reject a sexist attack is not

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analytically equivalent to one that legitimates the attack. Lexical salience, grammatical agency and editorial stance are consequently treated as distinct evidence streams, and stronger claims depend on their convergence.

2.5 Synthesis of the Literature

No single interpretive outcome is assumed in advance. Institutional agency, explicit gender marking, dynastic framing and matched lexical difference are analysed separately so that institutional normalisation, overt gendering and event-specific vulnerability can be identified without collapsing them into one measure. The three may, and in this corpus often do, coexist.

3. Data and Method

3.1 Corpus construction

The female corpus contains 34 complete institutional editorials published between 2009 and 30 June 2026 in Dawn, The Express Tribune, The News International, Business Recorder and Pakistan Today. The final whole-text lexical denominator is 14,326 words. Inclusion required an unsigned institutional editorial or an explicitly identified editorial-board text in which at least one named woman politician was substantively represented. Signed columns, duplicate records, generic women-in-politics editorials without a substantive named target, passing references and texts whose complete editorial body could not be established were excluded from the quantitative core.

The matched male comparator contains 34 institutional editorials and 15,629 words. Matching reproduces the female corpus by newspaper and calendar-year distribution: 21 Dawn texts, four Express Tribune texts, four The News texts, three Business Recorder texts and two Pakistan Today texts on each side. Male articles were selected to approximate political prominence,

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office and event function where possible. Matching is treated as a documented control, not as an experimental claim of perfect equivalence. Posthumous Benazir Bhutto editorials, in particular, have no genuinely equivalent male counterpart and are interpreted with explicit event-composition caution.

The comparator is used only for claims that it can defensibly test. Same-newspaper and same-year matching controls part of the register and historical variation, but it cannot make unlike political biographies equivalent. The male set functions as a structured reference corpus; it does not imply that each female editorial has an interchangeable male counterpart. This is especially important for Benazir Bhutto's posthumous editorials and for Maryam Nawaz's concentration in chief-ministerial coverage. In both cases, a lexical difference is discussed as gender-related only after plausible office and event explanations have been considered.

Table 1. Corpus composition and analytical denominators

Corpus component	Editorials	Words/units	Role in analysis
Female politician corpus	34	14,326 words	Primary lexical corpus
Matched male comparator	34	15,629 words	Gender-sensitive lexical comparison
Target-reference population	Not applicable	190 sentence units	Nomination/anaphora census
Target-participant population	Not applicable	148 clauses	Transitivity, roles, appraisal and discourse coding

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Note. The clause denominator remains 148 after whole-text lexical boundary reconciliation because the lexical correction did not alter the frozen clause master.

3.2 Reference identification and clause coding

At reference level, the female corpus produced 190 target-reference sentence units after explicit naming and unambiguous anaphoric continuations were adjudicated. These units were then normalised to clauses. Reference-only, possessive and nominalised constructions were retained for nomination and contextual discourse analysis but excluded from transitivity when the target did not function as a participant in the relevant finite clause. The resulting final population contains 148 target-participant clauses.

The clause population is distributed unevenly across eight women. Maryam Nawaz contributes 95 clauses, Benazir Bhutto 22, Kulsoom Nawaz 11, Shireen Mazari nine, Fehmida Mirza five, Sherry Rehman three, Hina Rabbani Khar two and Nusrat Bhutto one. This imbalance matters analytically. Aggregate percentages are checked against politician-level clusters, and patterns generated mainly by the Maryam or Benazir subsets are identified as such instead of being generalised to the entire female corpus.

Process type and participant role were coded using a Hallidayan functional framework (Halliday and Matthiessen, 2014). Processes were classified as Material, Verbal, Relational, Mental or Behavioural, and the focal politician was coded as Actor, Sayer, Carrier, Sensor or Goal/Affected as appropriate. Appraisal polarity and category were coded with reference to Martin and White (2005). Explicit gender marking, kinship/dynasty, intertextuality and legitimation were coded as additional discourse variables. The analytical architecture draws more broadly on Fairclough's critical discourse approach,

the discourse-historical emphasis on nomination and contextualisation, and van Leeuwen's legitimization framework (Fairclough, 1992; Reisigl and Wodak, 2009; van Leeuwen, 2007).

3.3 Corpus-linguistic analysis

For lexical comparison, word frequencies from the female and male corpora were compared using G^2 Log-Likelihood, with Log Ratio used as an effect-size measure. Significant items were not interpreted solely from statistical rank. Proper names, grammatical items and event-sensitive lexical fields were separated, document dispersion was checked, and concordance contexts were examined. Name-node collocation used a ± 5 -token window and logDice with pre-specified frequency and editorial-dispersion gates. These controls were designed specifically to prevent event composition from being recoded as gender causation.

The quantitative procedures are used together as complementary forms of evidence. Log-Likelihood indicates whether an observed frequency contrast is unlikely under equal relative frequency, whereas Log Ratio estimates the size and direction of that contrast. Neither statistic by itself establishes ideological significance. A term is treated as substantively gender-relevant only after its semantic content, dispersion across editorials and concordance environment have been examined. The same principle applies to collocation. A high association around one politician may indicate a stable semantic environment, but its interpretation still depends on the political office, biographical event and sampling concentration represented by that node.

3.4 Blind second-coding check and adjudication

Reliability evidence is reported directly. In the blind reliability sample, agreement was strong for process type ($\kappa = .842$) and participant role (κ

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= .852), moderate for intertextuality (κ = .526), but weak for fine-grained appraisal polarity (κ = -.086), appraisal category (κ = .074) and legitimization (κ = .129). Disagreements were adjudicated against full context before the final coding master was frozen. Process and participant-role results carry the greatest quantitative weight; appraisal and legitimization are used as qualified, context-supported evidence.

4. Results

4.1 Nomination: heterogeneous political naming and institutional identity

The final surface census contains 196 nomination forms, equivalent to 136.8 occurrences per 10,000 words. Pronoun and anaphoric references occur 82 times (57.2 per 10,000), giving 278 target-reference forms overall (194.1 per 10,000). Full-name, honorific-plus-surname, given-name-only and surname-only forms all occur at comparable rates, while office and political-role labels are somewhat less frequent. No single intimate or personalising naming form dominates the contemporary female corpus.

The individual naming categories reinforce that heterogeneity. Full names occur 42 times (29.3 per 10,000 words), honorific-plus-surname forms 43 times (30.0), given-name-only forms 40 times (27.9), surname-only forms 44 times (30.7) and office or political-role labels 27 times (18.8). These rates are close enough that no one naming strategy can plausibly be treated as the default representation of women politicians in the phase. Given-name reference is present, but it is not numerically dominant over surname, honorific or full-name reference.

The target distribution is highly uneven. Maryam Nawaz accounts for 95 of 148 target-participant clauses (64.2%), Benazir Bhutto for 22 (14.9%), Kulsoom

Nawaz for 11 (7.4%), Shireen Mazari for nine (6.1%), Fehmida Mirza for five (3.4%), Sherry Rehman for three (2.0%), Hina Rabbani Khar for two (1.4%) and Nusrat Bhutto for one (0.7%). Because Maryam Nawaz dominates the clause population, aggregate claims are checked against politician-level distributions before they are generalised to the contemporary female corpus.

Kinship and dynasty remain salient but do not displace office-based reference. The whole-text census contains 35 kinship/dynasty markers, equal to 24.4 per 10,000 words. These markers cluster around established political families, especially the Sharif and Bhutto lineages. They are best treated as an additional layer of political identity that operates alongside institutional reference.

4.2 Agency and political voice: action and speech before gender

Material processes form the largest process category, accounting for 69 of 148 clauses (46.6%). Verbal processes are the second-largest category at 23.6%, followed by relational processes at 17.6%, mental processes at 11.5% and behavioural processes at 0.7%. The distribution places action and speech at the centre of contemporary representation.

Participant roles produce the same general picture. Actor is the largest role at 33.1%, followed by Sayer at 20.3%, Goal/Affected at 18.2%, Carrier at 17.6% and Senser at 10.8%. Actor plus Sayer roles together constitute 53.4% of all target-participant clauses. Female politicians are more often represented as doing and speaking than as merely receiving action or carrying attributed qualities.

Source-traceable examples show how these categories operate in context. In the Pakistan Today editorial on Maryam Nawaz's 2024 maiden address as Punjab chief minister (P4-021), the target is coded successively as Sayer when

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her reconciliatory address is foregrounded, Carrier when the first-woman-chief-minister status is predicated, and Actor when development projects are attributed to her executive action. By contrast, the Hina Rabbani Khar example in 'Women rising' (P4-009) places her as Goal/Affected within criticism of sending a woman minister abroad. The contrast demonstrates that the coding does not infer agency from prominence alone: the grammatical role changes with the proposition in which the politician participates.

Extract 1 (P4-021, Pakistan Today, 27 February 2024): "That Maryam Nawaz struck a reconciliatory note in her maiden address to the Punjab Assembly as Chief Minister was a breath of fresh air."

Extract 2 (DAWN-WP-0031, Dawn, 10 August 2019): "Ms Nawaz was doing a good job as a crowd-puller". The clause was coded for political capacity rather than gender.

The 18.2% Goal/Affected share nevertheless remains substantively important. It is concentrated partly in event clusters involving assassination, arrest, misogynistic attack and institutional targeting. The coexistence of high Actor/Sayer representation with a meaningful Goal/Affected share illustrates why a binary active/passive description would be insufficient: the same phase contains ordinary political agency and moments of pronounced vulnerability.

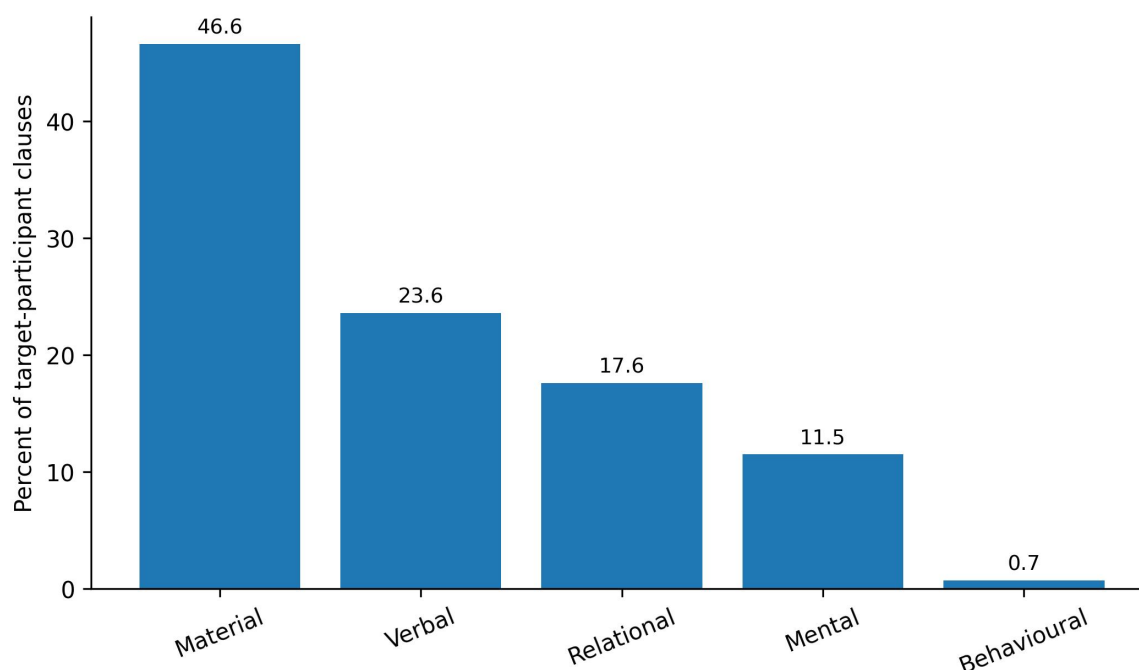
Table 2. Process-type and participant-role distributions

Dimension	Category	n	%
Process	Material	69	46.6
Process	Verbal	35	23.6
Process	Relational	26	17.6
Process	Mental	17	11.5
Process	Behavioural	1	0.7

Dimension	Category	n	%
Role	Actor	49	33.1
Role	Sayer	30	20.3
Role	Goal/Affected	27	18.2
Role	Carrier	26	17.6
Role	Senser	16	10.8

Note. Percentages use the 148 target-participant clauses as the denominator.

Figure 1. *Process-type distribution*



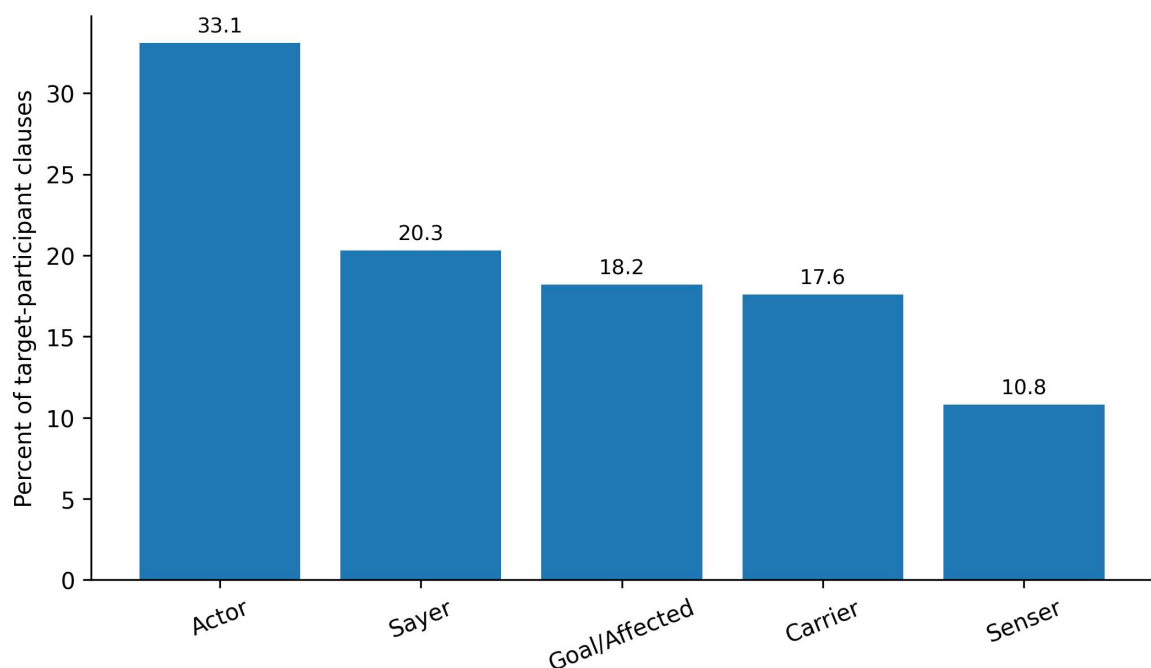
4.3 Appraisal: evaluative scrutiny with reliability caution

Appraisal is dominated by neutral or implicit evaluation, which accounts for 56.1% of the 148 clauses. Negative appraisal constitutes 30.4%, positive appraisal 12.8% and mixed appraisal 0.7%. Capacity is the largest specified appraisal category, followed by normality/status and propriety. The overall profile indicates that much of the discourse remains institutionally descriptive or implicitly evaluative even when editorials adopt strong positions on

particular political acts.

The polarity distribution should not be overinterpreted because appraisal was the weakest reliability domain. The negative share does not warrant a simple conclusion that women politicians are generally represented negatively. Negative evaluation clusters around particular actions, controversies and rhetorical episodes, while a majority of clauses remain neutral or implicit. The reliability hierarchy gives greater inferential weight to process and participant-role findings than to fine-grained appraisal distinctions.

Figure 2. *Participant-role distribution*



4.4 Gender and dynasty: concentrated but consequential

Explicit gender marking occurs in 11 clauses (7.4%) and kinship/dynasty in 15 clauses (10.1%). Intertextuality is substantially more common at 37 clauses (25.0%). Whole-text lexical evidence adds an important qualification: 107 explicit gender/sexism markers occur across 15 of the 34 editorials, equivalent to 74.7 per 10,000 words. Gender vocabulary is lexically prominent but

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concentrated in a subset of the corpus.

The Sherry Rehman and Fehmida Mirza cases make the same point at discourse level. A Dawn editorial involving Sherry Rehman (DAWN-WP-0020) explicitly discusses the gendered implication of treating a woman senator as if she were entering a male-coded political space, whereas the Fehmida Mirza editorial (DAWN-WP-0030) represents her primarily as a Sayer in a constitutional and devolution argument. These examples are analytically useful because they occur in the same broad contemporary phase but activate very different representational dimensions: explicit gender contestation in one case and institutional parliamentary voice in the other.

Extract 3 (DAWN-WP-0020, Dawn, 15 June 2017): "Ms Rehman pointed out — very rightly — that her gender was immaterial to her office."

Extract 4 (DAWN-WP-0035, Dawn, 24 April 2022): The editorial condemns "such offensive language" directed at Pakistan's first woman foreign minister, distinguishing quoted misogyny from the newspaper's own stance.

Extract 5 (P4-009, The News International, 14 December 2022): "the government for sending Khar – Pakistan's state minister for foreign affairs – to Saudi Arabia"

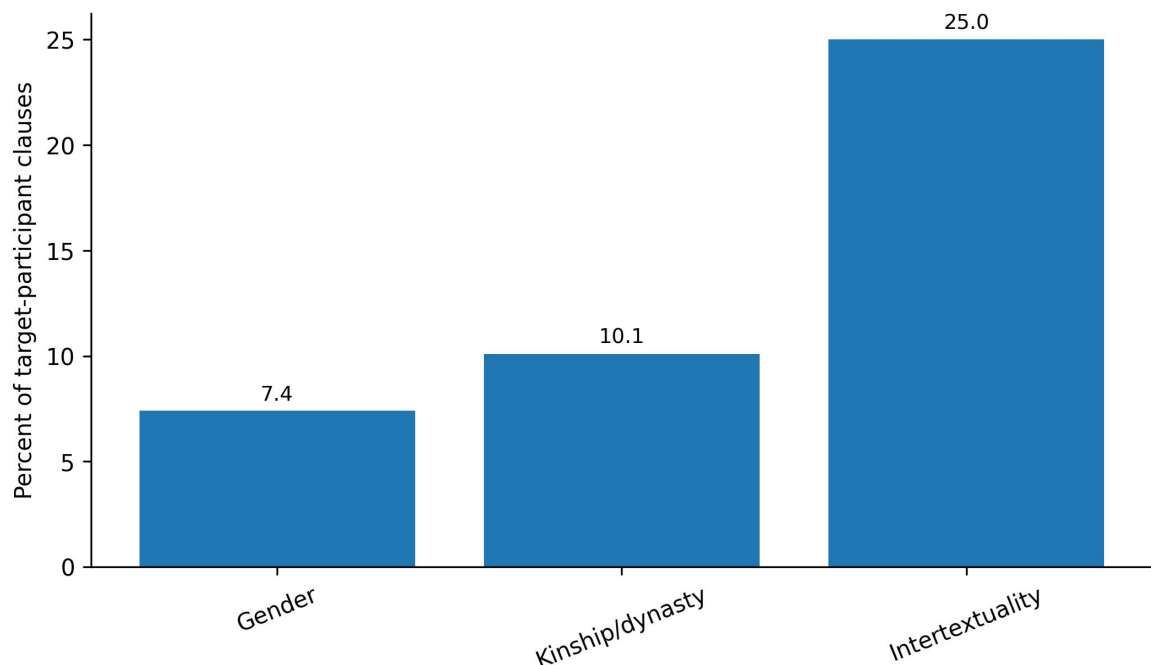
This combination of low clause-level prevalence and high local lexical density suggests that gender is not the default organising frame of every editorial. Instead, it becomes strongly foregrounded in texts whose subject includes misogyny, sexist remarks, symbolic female office-holding or gendered public attacks. Many other editorials represent women through ordinary party, governmental and policy language without sustained gender marking.

Table 3. Discourse indicators and reliability hierarchy

Variable	Result	Reliability / interpretive status
Appraisal: Neutral/implicit	83 / 148 = 56.1%	Qualified; fine-grained appraisal reliability is weak
Appraisal: Negative	45 / 148 = 30.4%	Qualified
Appraisal: Positive	19 / 148 = 12.8%	Qualified
Explicit gender marker	11 / 148 = 7.4%	Stable descriptive result
Kinship/dynasty	15 / 148 = 10.1%	Stable descriptive result
Intertextuality	37 / 148 = 25.0%	Moderate reliability
Process type κ	.842	Strong
Participant role κ	.852	Strong
Appraisal polarity κ	-.086	Weak
Appraisal primary κ	.074	Weak
Intertextuality κ	.526	Moderate
Legitimation κ	.129	Weak; qualitative priority

Note. Reliability values refer to the blind reliability exercise used to adjudicate the coding framework before the final results were frozen.

Figure 3. *Gender, dynasty and intertextuality*



4.5 Intertextuality: reported voices and institutional evaluation

Intertextuality is present in one quarter of the clauses, reflecting the role of reported statements, official discourse and prior political claims in editorial evaluation. Legitimation strategies also occur frequently in the coding, but weaker reliability means that legitimation is best used qualitatively. The strongest conclusion is that contemporary editorials repeatedly anchor evaluation in institutional authority, democratic norms, moral judgement, political consequences and historical precedent.

Extract 6 (P4-003, Express Tribune, 28 December 2010): *"In this letter, she said that she had been told that the establishment would try to get rid of her."*

4.6 Lexical distinctiveness: gender salience with event-composition controls

The matched female and male comparison produces the clearest evidence that explicit gender categorisation is disproportionately characteristic of the

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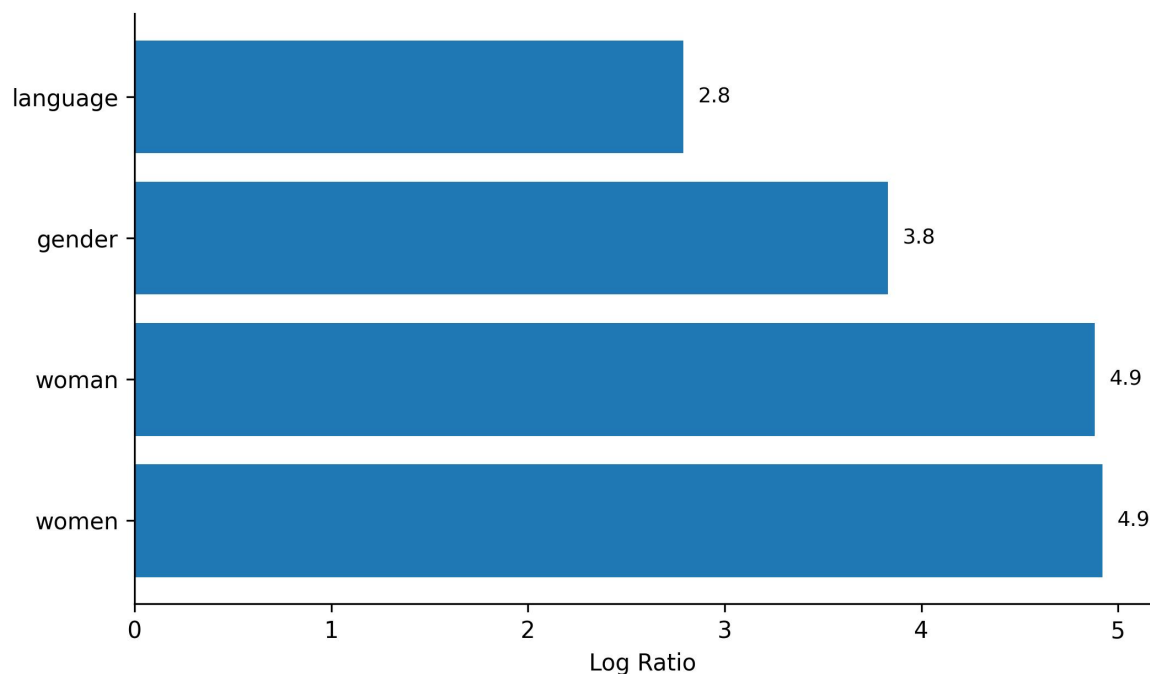
female corpus. Women occurs 41 times in the female corpus but once in the male corpus ($G^2 = 52.39$; Log Ratio = +4.92). Woman occurs 13 times in the female corpus and not at all in the male comparator ($G^2 = 19.18$; Log Ratio = +4.88). Gender also favours the female corpus strongly (Log Ratio = +3.83), while language is female-key at a smaller but still substantial effect size (Log Ratio = +2.79).

These are stronger candidates for a gender interpretation than event-sensitive terms. Vocabulary such as killing, Rawalpindi, police, report, investigation and anniversary is highly influenced by the post-assassination Benazir Bhutto subset. Those words are legitimate statistical differences between the corpora, but they cannot support a general claim that female politicians are represented through death, victimhood or criminal investigation.

Gender-semantic and event-semantic items behave differently in the comparison. The female-key status of women, woman and gender remains substantively relevant because the terms directly categorise or discuss gender. The Benazir-related vocabulary of crime, investigation and commemoration has a more immediate biographical explanation: those editorials were prompted by an assassination, subsequent inquiries and anniversaries. Treating both kinds of keyness as equivalent evidence of gender stereotyping would overstate what the corpus can support.

Male-key vocabulary is subject to the same control. Comparator texts contain their own clusters around economic management, protest, party competition, judicial conflict and executive authority. Keyness is used here as a route to potentially meaningful contrasts, not as a causal verdict. A gender interpretation is most defensible when a distinctive item also has clear gender-semantic relevance, adequate dispersion and concordance support.

Figure 4. *Selected female-key substantive items by Log Ratio*



4.7 Collocation: matched institutional environments across female and male nodes

Name-node collocation provides a direct test of whether women are lexically detached from institutional political office. Maryam Nawaz's strongest stable collocates include Punjab (logDice 11.63), Nawaz's (11.59), chief (10.56) and minister (10.09). The combination of Punjab, chief and minister places her in an unmistakably executive and governmental semantic environment.

The male nodes provide a useful counterpoint. Shehbaz Sharif has three stable collocates under the frozen rule: Sharif's (logDice 11.631), prime (10.696) and minister (10.061); Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari has chairman (12.337) and PPP (11.263). These associations were calculated under the same ± 5 -token, frequency and dispersion procedure used for the female nodes. Maryam Nawaz and Shehbaz Sharif both occupy strongly institutional lexical environments, while Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari's environment is organised around

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party leadership. The comparison does not sustain a simple female personalisation and male institutionalisation division.

Benazir Bhutto's semantic environment is very different. Assassination (logDice 12.22) and anniversary (11.75) are among her strongest stable collocates because the Benazir subset is heavily posthumous. This pattern is analytically real, but a gender-victimhood interpretation would be methodologically unsound because the male comparator does not contain an equivalent posthumous leadership case. Event composition is the dominant explanation.

Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari is associated with chairman and PPP, indicating party-organisational leadership. Imran Khan produces a strict-threshold null result: no lexical collocate passed both the pre-specified frequency and editorial-dispersion gates. Keeping that null result is methodologically important because male political representation is also heterogeneous and cannot be reduced to a single institutional baseline.

Table 4. Name-node evidence and claim controls

Comparison	Evidence	Defensible interpretation	Claim to avoid
Maryam Nawaz	Punjab 11.63; chief 10.56; minister 10.09	Strong executive/governance semantic environment	Women are less institutionally framed than men
Benazir Bhutto	assassination 12.22; anniversary 11.75	Posthumous/event-conditioned environment	Assassination collocates prove gendered victimhood

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Comparison	Evidence	Defensible interpretation	Claim to avoid
Shehbaz Sharif	Sharif's 11.631; prime 10.696; minister 10.061	Strong office/governance environment comparable in type to Maryam	Office language is uniquely male
Bilawal Bhutto- Zardari	chairman 12.337; PPP 11.263	Party-leadership / organisational environment	All male nodes share the same institutional frame
Imran Khan	No collocate passes the strict threshold	Dispersed semantic environment; null retained	Threshold should be relaxed to force a comparison

Note. Female and male collocates are reported from the frozen name-node comparison under the same frequency-plus-dispersion rule; Imran Khan's null result is retained without threshold relaxation.

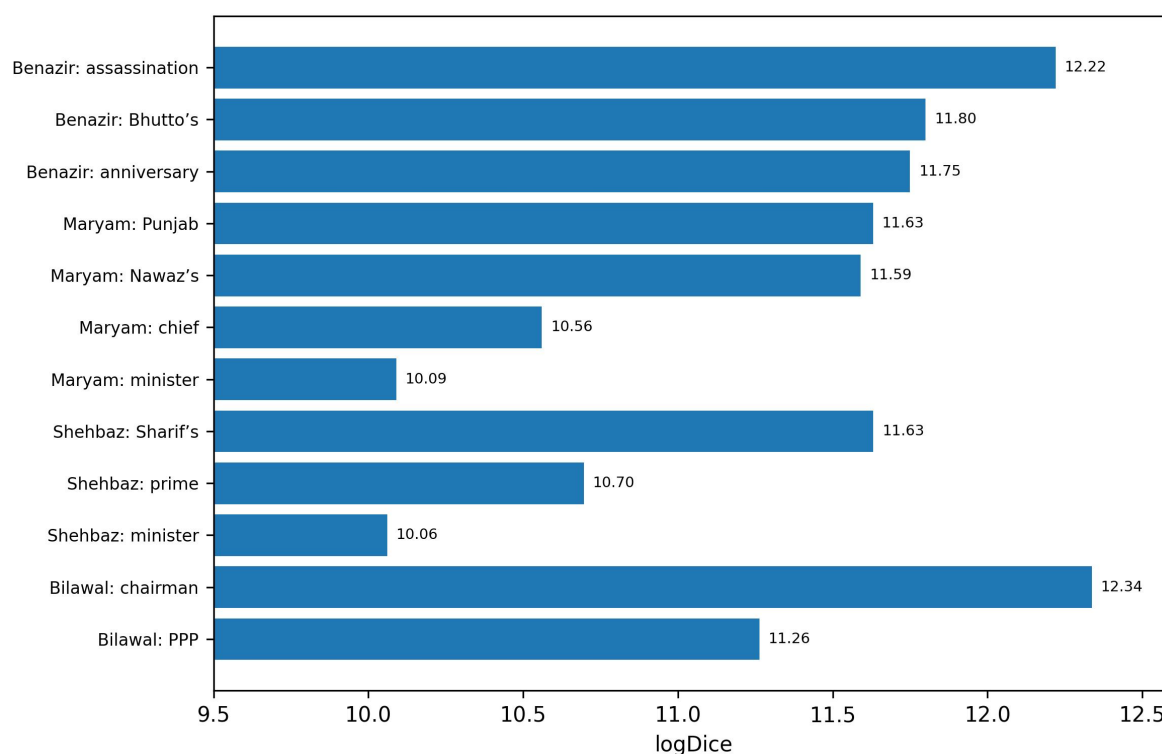


Figure 5. Selected female and male name-node collocates meeting the frozen threshold.

5. Discussion

The grammatical evidence is consistent with conditional normalisation. Material processes are the largest category, Actor is the most frequent participant role, and Actor plus Sayer account for more than half of the target-participant clauses. Women politicians are thus regularly represented as doing and saying things within institutional politics: governing, proposing, demanding, arguing, warning and intervening. Their representation is not organised mainly around being acted upon or described by others.

Lexically, however, explicit gender categorisation remains distinctive. Women, woman and gender are markedly more characteristic of the female corpus than of the matched male editorials. This does not negate the agency finding. A chief minister or party leader can be represented through the

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ordinary language of office while particular controversies simultaneously make her womanhood, the misogyny directed at women politicians or the symbolic significance of female office-holding highly visible.

This pattern qualifies a strong personalisation thesis. Maryam Nawaz and Shehbaz Sharif both attract office-centred collocational environments, with chief/minister and prime/minister respectively structuring their local lexical contexts. Political office matters on both sides of the comparison. What distinguishes the female corpus is less an absence of institutional language than the additional presence of explicit gender discourse in specific controversies.

The nomination census supports the same conclusion. Given-name-only reference occurs, and in context it may index familiarity or political branding, but its overall rate does not exceed surname, honorific-plus-surname or full-name reference; office labels are also recurrent. Contemporary women are consequently named through personal, dynastic and institutional forms within the same editorial field. That mixture is more accurately described as conditional normalisation than as categorical personalisation.

Dynasty complicates the picture further. Maryam Nawaz is repeatedly located within the Sharif family and PML-N succession structure, while Benazir and Nusrat Bhutto are embedded in the Bhutto lineage. Yet family reference does not erase political agency. In Maryam Nawaz's material it coexists with executive office, governing decisions, public statements and judgements of capacity. Dynastic reference is neither reducible to sexist personalisation nor analytically neutral; depending on context, it may function as a resource of legitimacy, a constraint on autonomous identity, or an ordinary feature of party organisation.

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The Benazir Bhutto subset illustrates why historical-event control is necessary. Assassination, commemoration and investigation predictably generate lexical fields that would not appear in ordinary government editorials. A frequency comparison alone could exaggerate the gender significance of death, crime and investigative vocabulary. Concordance evidence instead supports an event-composition reading unless independent evidence links those terms to a wider gender pattern. Matching reduces confounding, but it cannot remove biography or event history from political discourse.

Misogyny-related editorials pose a different interpretive problem. High frequencies of woman, women or gender may signal sexist discourse, but they may also result from the newspaper explicitly criticising sexism. Several texts in this corpus make misogynistic political remarks the object of editorial condemnation. Gender vocabulary must be read together with source voice and stance; naming misogyny is itself gender discourse, but it is not equivalent to endorsing the misogyny being reported.

Reliability places clear limits on the weight assigned to each analytical layer. Process type and participant role show the strongest independent agreement and can sustain quantitative comparison. Fine-grained appraisal and legitimation are less stable, especially where evaluation is implicit or several legitimating logics overlap. These categories are used as contextual evidence, not as independent quantitative proof. Interpretation is correspondingly more cautious where coding reproducibility is weaker.

The findings extend Pakistan-specific work in two respects. Research on news coverage has established underrepresentation and gendered treatment, but it does not show how institutional editorials represent women once they become the sustained subject of the newspaper's political judgement. Here,

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office, action and political voice are prominent. The matched male corpus also shows that some apparent gender differences are shared office or event effects. The more distinctive female pattern lies in the additional explicit discourse about womanhood, misogyny and the conditions under which women exercise political authority.

Alkaff and Rubbani's (2026) news findings and the present editorial findings are best understood as genre-specific evidence that addresses different analytical settings. Their 488-text study reports increasingly negative framing across news reports; the editorial corpus examined here contains substantial Actor/Sayer agency and strong office-based semantic environments for several women. Both findings can coexist because the sampling frames and analytical units differ. A direct comparison of news and editorials would be required to establish whether the contrast itself is a genre effect.

Conditional normalisation names this coexistence of ordinary political representation and episodic gender salience. Women are routinely located within the language of office, party, governance, speech, responsibility and institutional conflict, yet gender becomes sharply visible when events activate misogyny, dynastic succession, symbolic firsts or gendered vulnerability. Contemporary editorial discourse is neither uniformly gender-neutral nor uniformly sexist; the visibility of gender changes with political context while women's institutional agency remains substantial.

Several limitations qualify the interpretation. The 34-editorial corpus is intentionally conservative and cannot represent every Pakistani English-language newspaper or every political episode involving women. Maryam Nawaz accounts for almost two thirds of the clause population, so politician-

specific composition remains important even after target-level checks. Matching by newspaper and year reduces some variation in the male comparator, but it cannot fully equalise political office, biography or event structure. Appraisal and legitimation also have weaker reliability than transitivity and participant roles, so they are not used as stand-alone proof. The study is limited to institutional editorials and does not examine audience reception, newsroom production, authorial intention or media effects.

6. Conclusion

The study examined 34 Pakistani English-language institutional editorials about women politicians published between 2009 and 30 June 2026, together with a matched 34-editorial male comparator and 148 post-reliability target-participant clauses. Political agency is the clearest grammatical pattern: Material processes account for 46.6% of clauses, Actor is the largest participant role, and Actor plus Sayer together account for 53.4%. Contemporary women politicians are not predominantly represented as passive objects.

The strongest lexical gender result is different in kind. Explicit terms such as women, woman and gender are markedly more characteristic of the female corpus than of the male comparator. Their distribution is concentrated, especially in editorials dealing directly with misogyny, sexist speech and the significance of women occupying political office. Gender is salient, but it does not function as the universal frame of the corpus.

The name-node comparison further qualifies broad claims about personalisation and institutionalisation. Maryam Nawaz and Shehbaz Sharif both have strong office-centred semantic environments; Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari is represented through party-leadership vocabulary; Benazir Bhutto's

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posthumous field is strongly event-conditioned; and Imran Khan has no stable strict-threshold collocate. The evidence supports a layered model in which gender, office, dynasty, party role, biography and event composition jointly structure representation.

For corpus-assisted feminist media research, the broader implication is methodological as well as substantive. Statistical difference is only the starting point for interpretation. Dispersion, concordance, participant-role analysis and matched contextual comparison are needed before a lexical contrast can sustain a gender-causal claim. Under those controls, the contemporary Pakistani editorial corpus shows substantial normalisation of women as political actors while also making gender explicitly visible at moments when political authority and gender hierarchy intersect.

The study is limited by the deliberately conservative size of the 34-editorial corpus, the dominance of Maryam Nawaz in the target-clause population, and the fact that matching newspaper and year cannot fully equalise office, biography or event structure across female and male politicians. The weaker reliability of fine-grained appraisal and legitimation also requires those findings to remain descriptive. These constraints define the next comparative step: testing whether conditional normalisation persists in larger genre-matched corpora while retaining politician- and event-level controls.

Statements and Declarations

Ethical considerations

Ethical approval was not required because the study analyses publicly available institutional newspaper editorials and does not involve human participants, private personal data, human tissue, or intervention.

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Data availability

A supplementary source manifest lists the 34 female-target editorials by corpus ID, date, newspaper, title, target politician(s), and canonical source location. Complete copyrighted article bodies are not redistributed. Derived frequency tables, coding summaries, and analytical decision rules may be shared subject to legal, publisher, and journal requirements.

AI disclosure

Generative AI tools were used for drafting assistance, language editing, citation-checking support, document formatting and figure preparation. The author reviewed and verified the manuscript, sources, coding and reported results and takes full responsibility for the content. The corpus, inclusion decisions, coding decisions and quantitative results were not generated by AI tools.

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