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## Nominalism and Post-Naya Pakistan: A Political Discourse

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### Abstract:

*This study explores the concept of nominalism within the context of Post-Naya Pakistan political discourse. Hobbes asserts that names are freely chosen words, according to him, names are arbitrary creations, not tied to the inherent nature of things but determined by human agreement. They do not naturally reflect objects' essence or qualities but are products of human will. Common names originate from human decisions to assign them to groups of specific objects, rather than from any inherent properties in the external world.<sup>1</sup> Nominalism is a philosophical stance that questions the existence of abstract entities beyond mere names and intersects with political discourse in ways that redefine narratives and power dynamics. In the aftermath of Naya Pakistan's formation, nominalist perspectives have gained prominence in shaping and critiquing political rhetoric, policy formulation, and societal expectations. This study analyses how nominalism influences the articulation of political ideologies, the construction of identity and the negotiation of power relations within the Pakistani socio-political landscape. This paper illuminates how nominalist principles contribute to shaping the contours of the contemporary political discourse in post-Naya Pakistan by examining key speeches, policy documents, and public debates.*

**Keywords:** Nominalism, Political Discourse, Post-Naya Pakistan, Ideology, Power Dynamics, Linguistic Analysis

### Introduction:

Nominalism in Hobbes's political theory deals with moral concepts. According to Hobbes, terms like "good," "bad," and "just" lack inherent, universal meanings and instead originate from subjective mental conceptions influenced by passions. Moral reasoning, Hobbes argues, is not

based on rational evaluation but on the fluctuating passions of individuals, making moral judgments unpredictable and varying between people and over time. This lack of consistent reference in moral terms prevents common agreement on rules, leading to behaviour driven by personal interests rather than shared standards. In Hobbes's view, this nominalist perspective extends to the state of nature, where individuals exist independently and prioritize self-interest over communal ties or societal harmony<sup>2</sup>. Nominalism in Pakistani political discourse can be understood as the recognition that political ideologies and identities are not fixed essences but are constructed and reconstructed through social and political interactions. This perspective challenges the idea of universal, essential truths that underpin political ideologies and instead emphasizes the fluidity and contingency of ideological constructs. In the post-Naya Pakistan context, this fluidity is evident in several ways: Firstly, the emergence of multiple political parties and movements with distinct ideological orientations has fragmented the political landscape. This fragmentation is not merely a result of differing policy preferences but also reflects broader shifts in how political actors define and articulate their ideological positions. For instance, parties may espouse ideologies ranging from traditional conservatism to progressive liberalism, often adapting their rhetoric and policy agendas to appeal to diverse constituencies. Secondly, the influence of regional and ethnic identities has become more pronounced in shaping political discourse. Pakistan's diverse ethnic landscape, encompassing Punjabis, Sindhis, Pashtuns, Baloch, and others, has historically influenced political mobilization and identity formation. In the post-Naya Pakistan era, regional and ethnic identities have intersected with ideological narratives, complicating the traditional binary between essentialist national identities and highlighting the plurality of Pakistan's political landscape. Thirdly, the role of religion in politics has evolved in complex ways. While Islam has historically been a central pillar of political discourse in Pakistan, interpretations of Islamic

principles and their application in governance have diversified. Political actors and parties now interpret Islam's role in public life through varying lenses, ranging from conservative interpretations to more progressive and pluralistic approaches. This diversity reflects the nominalist view that ideological positions, including those rooted in religious discourse, are contingent upon social and historical contexts rather than immutable truths. Nominalists believe that it falls to the social sciences to identify principles of human behaviour upon which to build institutions capable of effectively regulating interactions for the maximal benefit of each individual.<sup>3</sup> Countries, where institutions emphasize cultural identity, must also create supportive frameworks to strengthen politically defined identity.<sup>4</sup> The negotiation between traditional and modern values continues, with individuals navigating a complex landscape where their daily actions shape the evolving national identity. In this negotiation, Nominalism resides. Since the inception of Naya Pakistan, a significant philosophical undercurrent has emerged in political discourse, particularly concerning nominalism. Nominalism in the context of "Naya Pakistan" and its post-period can be examined through Nelson Goodman's concept of "worldmaking,"<sup>5</sup> which explores how humans construct their realities through language and symbols. This lens allows us to analyse how ideas and narratives about Pakistan's political and social transformations have been shaped, challenged, and reconstructed over time. Nominalism challenges traditional views by asserting that abstract entities have no independent existence beyond linguistic conventions. This philosophical stance has profound implications for how political ideologies are framed and justified, impacting the construction of national identity and individual identity and the dynamics of power within society. The term "Post-Naya Pakistan" encapsulates the aspirations and transformations sought under the leadership of Imran Khan, signalling a departure from established norms and a quest for a new national identity. This era is characterized by promises of reform,

anti-corruption drives, and a rhetoric of change aimed at addressing socioeconomic disparities and governance issues. Alongside these efforts, questions arise regarding the construction and negotiation of identities in this evolving landscape. Identity politics in Pakistan intersects with broader discourses of nationalism, religiosity, ethnicity, and regionalism. These intersections are not merely theoretical but profoundly impact political mobilization, policy-making, and societal cohesion. If identities are indeed discursively constituted, what implications does this have for our understanding of authenticity and selfhood? Foucault's notion of power-knowledge helps unpack how these identities are constructed, contested, and institutionalized through discursive practices and regulatory mechanisms. Nominalist narratives, as conceptualized in this study, refer to the reduction of complex social phenomena into simplistic, often binary categories or labels. In the Pakistani context, such narratives oversimplify identities, reinforcing dichotomies.

### **Methodology:**

This study employs a qualitative approach, drawing on a Discourse Analysis framework to analyze speeches delivered by key figures in the post-Naya Pakistan era. It focuses on identifying discursive strategies that reflect nominalist perspectives in political rhetoric and discourse. Discourse analysis explores how language and rhetoric construct realities, legitimize power structures and frame social norms. The era of "Naya Pakistan," inaugurated by Imran Khan's government, represents a pivotal moment in this ongoing narrative. Promises of reform and anti-corruption campaigns are accompanied by discourses that seek to redefine national priorities and recalibrate societal values. These narratives are not without contradictions, as evidenced by debates over political inclusivity and the role of the military in governance. This analysis focuses

on how language can challenge established labels and create new identities and meanings. It also examines how dominant narratives either assimilate or obstruct these efforts and how media portrays and discusses such alternative linguistic approaches.

### **The Philosophical Foundations of Nominalism**

To grasp the implications of nominalism in political discourse, it is essential first to delve into its philosophical foundations. In medieval nominalism, it is asserted that ideas, forms, and essences of things do not exist. Instead, all things exist solely as particulars. The concept of universality is considered merely a product of language.<sup>6</sup> During the Renaissance, humanism arose, promoting individual experience and expression. This movement contested the Church's authority and its rigid interpretations of reality. In the Western world, the Renaissance and Scientific Revolution ushered in a shift from essentialist and non-empirical approaches to nominalist and empirical ones.<sup>7</sup> Nominalism posits that the shared qualities among things are a construct derived from human perceptions and concepts.<sup>8</sup> It contrasts with essentialism.<sup>9</sup> Essentialism has two perspectives: ontological and conceptual. Ontological essentialism asserts that entities like 'water' possess inherent, unchanging qualities universally recognized. Conceptual essentialism, however, views classifications as subjective and context-dependent, suggesting that 'water' can vary in definition across cultures. In contrast, nominalism offers differing views: ontological nominalism argues against universal qualities in categories such as 'water,' emphasizing individual instances. Conceptual nominalism states language merely labels without reflecting universal truths, challenging conceptual essentialism's view of underlying essences. These viewpoints differ on whether universal essences or concepts exist beyond individual perspectives and language use.<sup>10</sup>

The plural and inconsistent ideologies observed in Pakistani politics can be viewed through the

lens of nominalism. Traditionally, Pakistani politics has been shaped by ideological movements grounded in universal principles such as Islamism, socialism, or secularism. However, the post-Naya Pakistan era has witnessed a shift towards a more fragmented political landscape, where diverse and sometimes contradictory ideologies coexist within the same political sphere. This fragmentation can be attributed to several factors, including disillusionment with traditional political paradigms, demographic shifts, and the influence of globalized communication networks. Nominalist tendencies in this context manifest as a rejection of monolithic ideological frameworks in favour of a pragmatic approach that prioritizes immediate concerns, local contexts, and adaptive policy-making.

### **Analysis:**

Understanding the impact of nominalism on power dynamics is essential for analyzing contemporary conflicts, transitions, and debates over legitimacy within complex sociopolitical environments. Nominalism influences power dynamics within military and political institutions, particularly in contexts of regime changes and the enforcement of grand narratives. By emphasizing pragmatic considerations over abstract principles, nominalist perspectives reshape how authority is perceived, alliances are formed, and policies are justified. This leads to shifts in military strategies, reinterpretations of historical narratives, and challenges to institutional stability or democratic governance. Instead of adhering to abstract principles or universal truths, nominalism encourages a focus on specific circumstances, outcomes, and immediate objectives. This leads military leaders to prioritize pragmatic considerations over ideological consistency, adapting strategies and alliances based on situational assessments rather than rigid doctrinal adherence. For instance, during regime changes, military forces often face the dilemma of

allegiance: whether to support an incumbent regime, an emerging political force, or to maintain neutrality. Mazari challenges the nominal neutrality claimed by various actors, including the military and certain institutions. She suggests that these entities, while professing neutrality, may in fact be influenced by short-term interests or external pressures.<sup>11</sup> Imran Khan uses the term "neutrals" to refer to the military establishment, suggesting that he sees them as a powerful entity shaping political outcomes.<sup>12</sup> On another occasion he said, "Allah did not allow us to be neutral as "only animals are neutral".<sup>13</sup>The term "neutrals" itself implies a nominalist perspective, where the label ("neutrals") is used to denote a group that holds significant power without necessarily essentializing their role or nature. This aligns with a nominalist perspective where neutrality is not a fixed state but rather a contested concept shaped by context and interests. Addressing a public gathering at Dir Scouts ground in Balambat area in Lower Dir district Imran Khan said that if Pakistan is surviving today it is because of a strong army. "Muslim countries including Somalia, Syria and Afghanistan are in crisis; however, Pakistan is saved because we have the most powerful army in the Muslim world"<sup>14</sup>. In an article featured in the Economist on January 4, 2024, Mr. Imran Khan labeled the events of May 9 as a "false-flag operation" falsely attributed to his party, the PTI.<sup>15</sup> This continuous flux in the stance indicates a nominalist notion. Nominalism influences the interpretation of power within military hierarchies. Rather than viewing authority as derived from a transcendent or universally accepted source, nominalist perspectives might emphasize power as contingent upon practical factors such as effectiveness in combat, political influence, or control of key resources. This pragmatic approach leads to shifts in alliances and strategies based on perceived benefits and outcomes rather than loyalty to abstract principles or historical precedents. In political institutions, particularly in the context of post-regime transitions (PTI), nominalism similarly affects power dynamics.

After the May 09 attacks, Law Enforcement Agencies (LEAs) detained and arrested prominent PTI leaders along with PTI supporters and others who streamed live videos of the attacks on social media. They face criminal charges under applicable laws nationwide. As a consequence, several PTI leaders have resigned from their positions, citing respect for the Pakistan Army and denouncing the violence of May 09, during press conferences.<sup>16</sup> Through the theoretical lens of Foucauldian analysis, the post-May 9th situation in Pakistan reveals intricate dynamics of power, discipline, and resistance. This perspective highlights the transformation of political discourse under Naya Pakistan, illustrating how ontological nominalism in political rhetoric masks underlying shifts in power dynamics and governance strategies, ultimately contributing to a scenario where individuals may experience a loss of free will in the face of state-imposed norms and narratives. Ontological nominalism, in the context of post-Naya Pakistan, contributes to the erosion of individuals' free will. As the state constructs a nominalistic reality through political rhetoric and governance strategies, it shapes ontological assumptions about power and governance. This construction limits the scope of individual agency and autonomy, presenting a facade of stability and progress that obscures underlying power dynamics. The detention of political leaders post-May 9th exemplifies disciplinary power in action. State institutions, as conduits of power, employ tactics of control to regulate dissent and consolidate authority. The shift in stance reflects negotiations within the power structure, altering public discourse and political strategies. The discourse surrounding detained leaders undergoes a transformation shaped by state apparatuses, media narratives, and legal frameworks. This discursive shift serves to legitimize state actions while delegitimizing dissent.



## **Reimagining Identity in Post Naya Pakistan**

James E. Marcia's identity statuses framework provides a valuable theoretical lens to analyze how individuals, including political leaders in Pakistan, may respond to the changes and challenges imposed by their detention.

**Identity Achievement:** This status occurs when individuals have explored different options and have committed to a set of beliefs and values. In the context of detained political leaders, some may solidify their political ideologies and commitments despite the adversity they face. They might use their detention as a platform to reinforce their established political identity, presenting themselves as principled figures who remain steadfast in their beliefs despite state pressure.

**Identity Foreclosure:** Foreclosure happens when individuals adopt an identity without exploration or consideration of alternatives. In the case of political leaders, some might have their identities foreclosed by external forces (such as state detention), leading them to conform to state expectations or narratives to secure release or leniency. This could involve publicly aligning with state policies or disavowing previous positions to regain political relevance or personal freedom. In this state we see those who foreclose the door of negotiation.

**Identity Moratorium:** Moratorium describes a state where individuals are actively exploring different identities but have not yet made a firm commitment. Detention could force political leaders into a moratorium state, where they reassess their political beliefs and strategies under duress. They may use this period to reconsider their political stances, perhaps altering their discourse or strategies to navigate the political landscape under constraints. This state indicates neutrality.

**Identity Diffusion:** Diffusion occurs when individuals lack a clear direction or commitment to an identity and are not actively exploring alternatives. Detention could exacerbate identity diffusion among political leaders who feel disoriented or powerless in the face of state actions. They might withdraw from public discourse or activism, becoming politically inactive or disillusioned. In this case we see those who left politics.

## **Conclusion**

Political leaders and parties often adopt nominalist strategies to consolidate power or legitimize their rule. This involves selective reinterpretation of historical narratives, emphasizing specific achievements or grievances while downplaying contradictory evidence or competing interpretations. The enforcement of a grand narrative becomes a tool through which nominalist tendencies manifest in political discourse. Grand narratives, often constructed to unify a population under a common historical or ideological framework, are subject to reinterpretation and manipulation in a nominalist context. Political actors may selectively emphasize aspects of history or cultural identity that serve their interests, thereby shaping public perception and legitimizing their authority. In post-regime transitions, political parties or movements redefine national identity or historical narratives to align with their vision of governance or to justify policies. This leads to conflicts over the interpretation of history and the legitimacy of political institutions, as different groups assert competing versions of truth and justice based on nominalist interpretations. Furthermore, nominalism impacts the dialectical processes through which power dynamics are negotiated and contested within political institutions. Dialectics, in this context, refers to the interaction between competing ideas, interests, and power structures within society. Nominalist tendencies influence how these dialectics unfold by shifting the focus towards immediate gains,

pragmatic compromises, or the instrumentalization of ideological discourse. In the dialectics of power, nominalism undermines efforts to establish enduring institutional frameworks or consensus-based governance. Instead of fostering long-term stability or reconciliation, nominalist approaches prioritize short-term victories or the accumulation of power through expedient alliances and strategic maneuvers. This dynamics contribute to political instability or cycles of regime change as competing factions vie for control based on tactical advantage rather than ideological coherence. Nominalism intersects with broader debates about the nature of truth, authority, and moral principles within political and military contexts. The rejection of universals or transcendent norms in favor of pragmatic considerations leads to ethical dilemmas and challenges to traditional moral frameworks. In military operations, for instance, nominalist perspectives justify utilitarian calculations that prioritize military objectives or national interests over humanitarian considerations or international norms. Similarly, in political governance, nominalism erodes trust in institutions that are perceived as manipulating or selectively interpreting facts to maintain power. This undermines efforts to establish democratic accountability or the rule of law, as competing factions exploit nominalist tendencies to justify authoritarian practices or suppress dissent

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