

Political crisis in Pakistan 2022 - An Analysis of National Narratives on Twitter

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Overview:

Taking a detailed look at the top trends that featured on the Pakistan trends panel in the last few months, G5iO undertook an in-depth discourse analysis of the country's Twitter sphere with a particular focus on the ongoing political turmoil. We looked at not only what kinds of political trends held the most appeal across the majority of Pakistani social media users, but also what kind of sub-topics received the most attention within this domain.

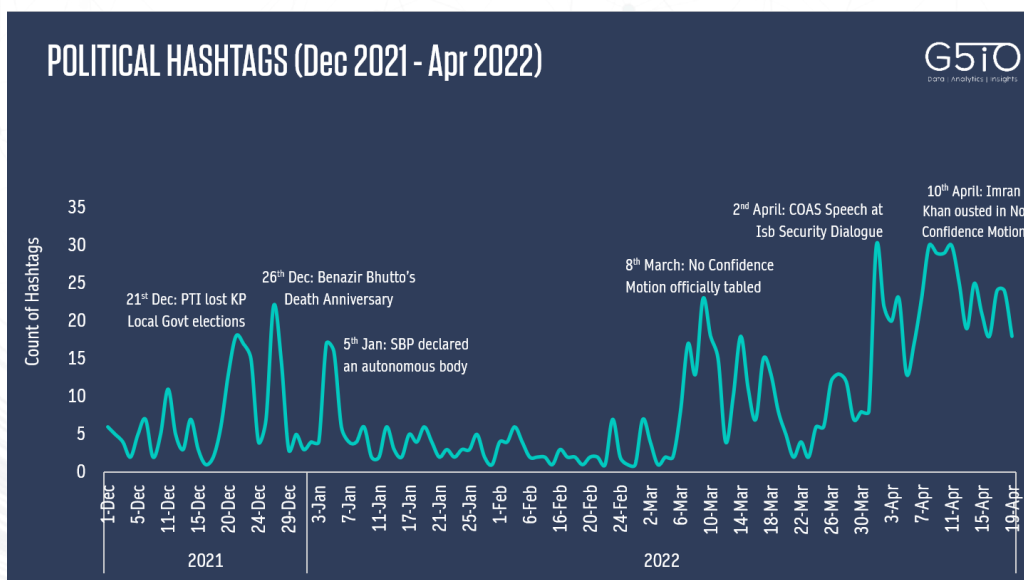
Methodology:

To get a comprehensive look at the most popular and influential trends, we took a sample of the top 5 hashtags on the Pakistan Twitter panel every 4 hours from 1st December 2021 to 20th April 2022.

After excluding keywords or phrases without the Hashtag (#) symbol, our primary dataset comprised of 3356 hashtags. We identified political hashtags which were then coded into subcategories based on a rigorous discourse analysis of both the overall context and deeper underlying subtext, by dividing trends related to Religion, Partisan politics, the Judiciary and Civ-Mil relations etc.

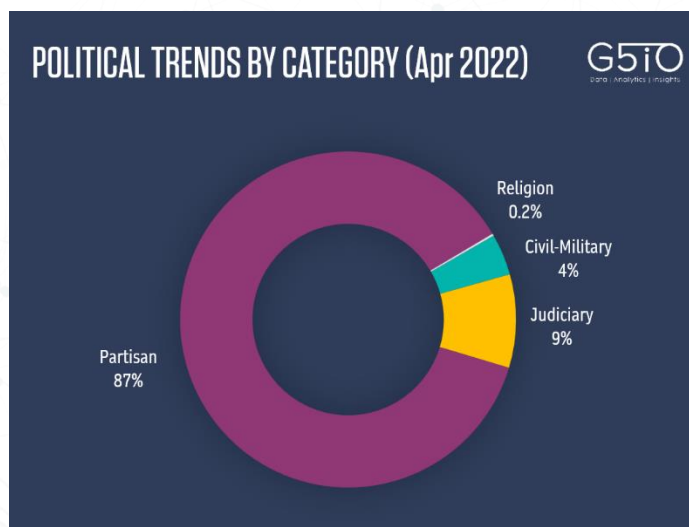
Frequency of Political Trends:

Mapping the last 5 month's combined trends on politics, there existed a general lull in political discourse following the then ruling govt's staggering loss in the KPK by-elections. This continued until the tabling of the No Confidence Motion against PM Khan and his govt on 8th March, followed by a sharp and sustained increase in political discourse. It is interesting to note that while much of the online discourse related to politics (and especially the NCM) had gradually declined by the end of March, COAS General Bajwa's speech at the Islamabad Dialogue marked a significant turning point with both the tenor and magnitude of politics related trends changing significantly.



Narratives in Political Trends:

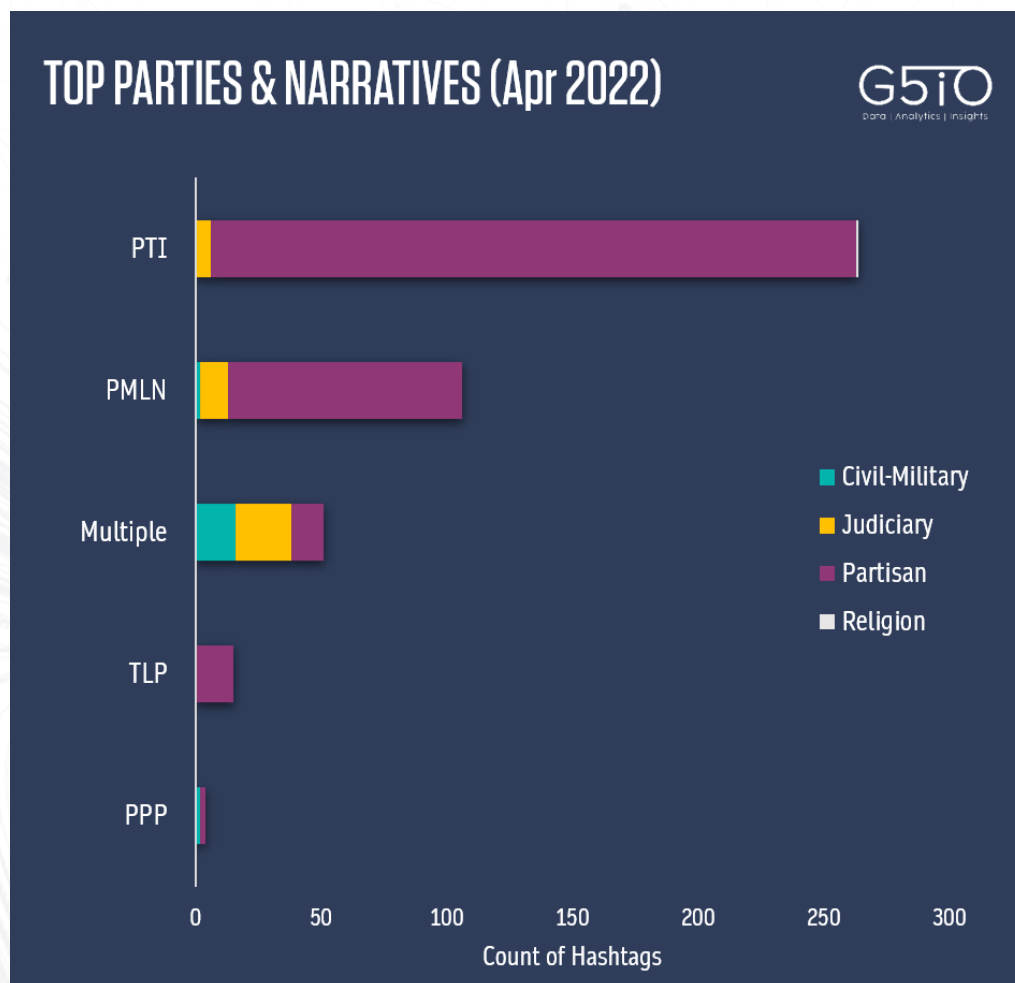
Zooming in on April which saw one of the sharpest and most polarizing increases in online political discourse, we wanted to see where the most prominent politics related hashtags stood when viewed across party lines and specific narratives. Our goal was to estimate (a) which of Pakistan's political parties remained the most prominent across Twitter during this month and (b) which political narratives were employed most frequently by them. Based on this sample, our findings show that trends related to partisan politics comprised more than 87% of all politics related trends and campaigns online, followed by Judiciary related trends at 9% and civ-mil related trends at 4%



Top Parties in Political Trends:

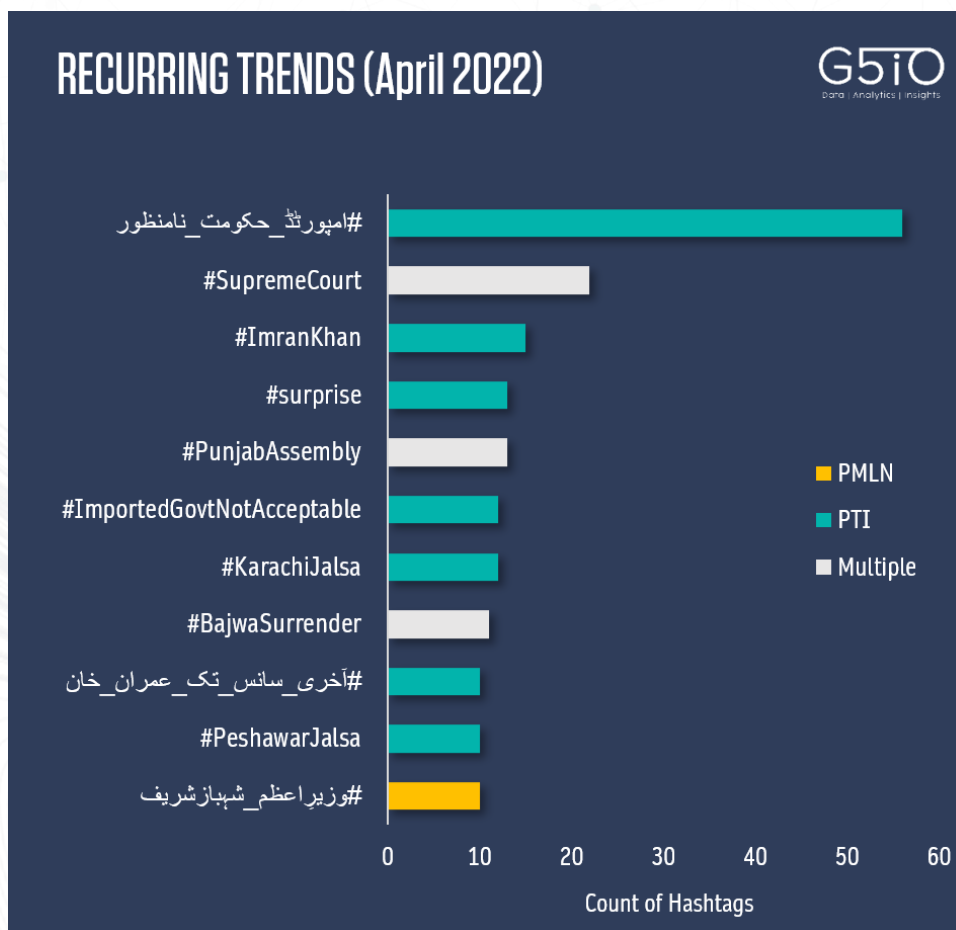
Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf (PTI) dominated the twitter space with more than 300 Hashtags comprising mostly partisan politics. A major chunk of Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz's (PMLN) narratives was also partisan however with still less than half the number of trends pushed by the PTI.

Whereas trends directly related to both the PTI and PMLN comprised around 74% of the most prominent politics related hashtags, around 8% comprised of trends which weren't as clearly defined along party lines. These included some of the most polarized narratives which trended this month, specifically those pointing towards both growing civil-military rifts and the politicization of the judiciary which comprised a broad mix of organic and artificial actors. Even taking these into account, however, the entire space was still mostly occupied by the PTI and (to a lesser extent) PMLN - Parties which eclipsed both the PPP and TLP across the social media landscape in April 2022.



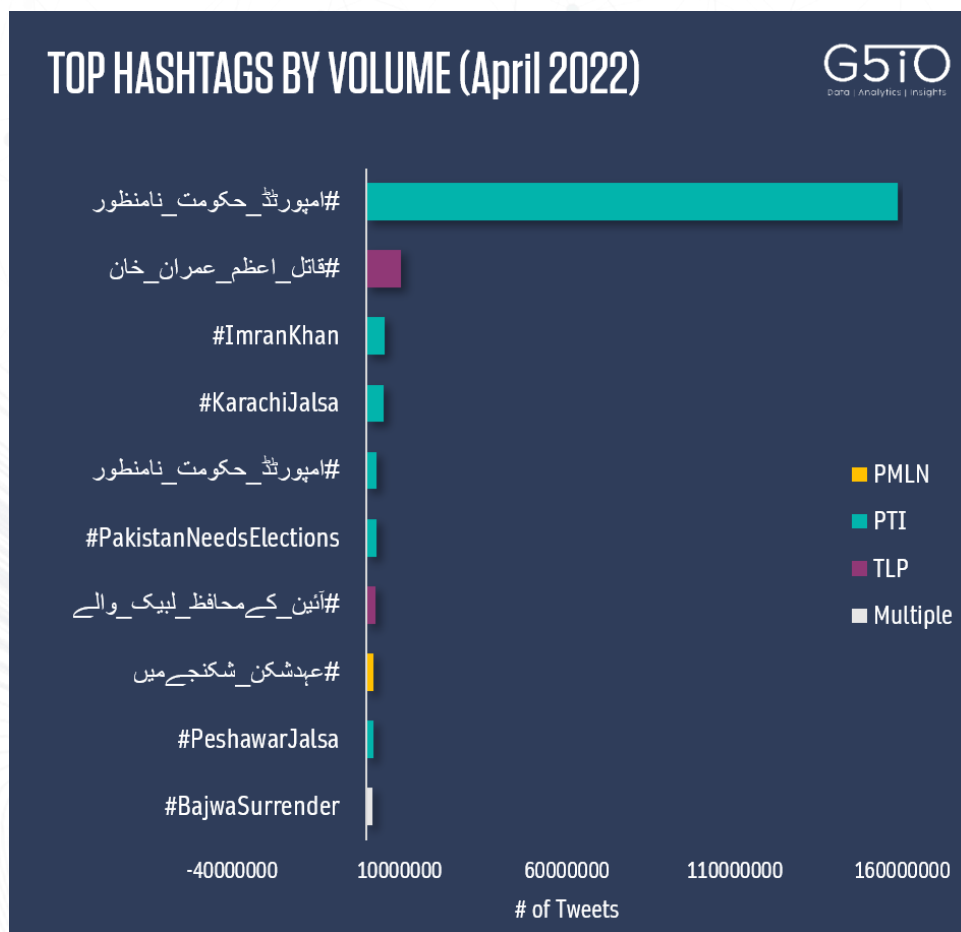
Most Recurring Political Trends:

Taking a closer look at these hashtags, we wanted to see the most recurring issues that consistently trended throughout April 2022. As anticipated, the most recurring hashtag was related to the ouster of Imran Khan and PTI's rejection of the new government. #SupremeCourt was the second most recurring hashtag in our dataset indicating how the politicization of the judiciary and its ensuing criticisms had taken center stage amidst the ongoing political turmoil. Out of the top 11 most recurring hashtags, 7 were trended by the PTI testifying their dominance over one of the most polarized and impactful times in Pakistan's political history.



Top Political Trends by Volume of Tweets:

Similarly, while the previous graphs looked at the number of politics related hashtags as representative of the number of campaigns or issues politicized by each party, categorizing these hashtags by raw tweet volumes even further confirms PTI's dominance over the digital sphere. For instance, the hashtag #امپورٹنگ_حکومت_نامنظور dwarfed all other hashtags by an unprecedented margin, by more than 16 million tweets. Thus, making it one of the biggest hashtags in Twitter's history. The second trend based on raw volume was run by TLP once again testifying to their ability to gain a strong presence on the Pakistani twitter panel at will.



Conclusion

On the whole, our analysis shows that:

- April 2022 saw an unprecedented level politically charged discourse on the Pakistani digital space
- Throughout this month, PTI dominated this space with tweets volumes in the millions while pushing its known brand of highly charged partisan politics
- Despite captivating considerable attention, Civ-Military hashtags comprised a much smaller portion of the overall political discourse that took place this month online

Authors



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