



## Ego-driven Politics and Its Impact on Pakistan's Regional and Global Diplomacy

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### ABSTRACT

In the contemporary world, a prominent characteristic of international relations is ego-driven politics, which has attained a defining role and significantly influences diplomatic engagements and a country's foreign policy choices. In reference to Pakistan, personal political motives and leadership styles have played a pivotal role in the formulation of foreign policy, which affects its relations with neighbors and strategic partners such as China, the United States, Iran, and Turkey. To study this phenomenon, the mixed methods research approach is employed in this research to combine qualitative case studies of leadership decisions in Pakistan with quantitative analysis of the data on diplomatic interactions, trade volumes, and foreign policy stability scores. In the study, qualitative data includes case studies of major diplomatic engagements, and the quantitative data is based on statistical assessments drawn from consistency scores and index rankings of regional and global diplomacy. This study also evaluates how diplomatic approaches change under the influence of ego-driven leadership and result in policy shifts, fluctuating alliances, and strategic recalibrations in Pakistan. It also assesses events that resulted in policy shifts, policy incoherence, discordant diplomatic ties, and retaliatory foreign policy strategies due to personalized decision-making, which often prioritizes individual political motives over national interest. The study further emphasizes the challenges created by such leadership styles in sustaining long-term diplomatic stability. The paper concludes by highlighting the need for institutionalized foreign policy and a methodological framework to ensure geopolitical equilibrium, diplomatic coherence, and a more systematic approach to Pakistan's regional and global diplomatic ties.

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## 1. Introduction

The personal motives and ideologies of leaders have frequently dictated the formulation of foreign policy in Pakistan rather than being crafted through a coherent and institutionalized approach. The country's diplomatic ties with key global and regional powers, such as the United States, China, and India, have been substantially shaped by the phenomenon of ego-driven politics. This often culminates in shifts in strategic alliances and foreign policy objectives based on individual priorities rather than enduring national interests. Pakistan's credibility and effectiveness on the international stage have been undermined by inconsistent policies arising from personal legacies, ideological orientations, or domestic political compulsions of the

leadership in place of pragmatic diplomacy. This study focuses on the diplomatic decisions and orientations of Nawaz Sharif, Imran Khan, and General Pervez Musharraf as case studies. It also concentrates on foreign policy engagement scores, patterns of diplomatic isolation, and trade volumes with major partners such as China, the United States, and Saudi Arabia. This research further investigates, through case studies, historical incidents, and statistical data, how Pakistan's foreign policy decisions and its participation in multilateral organizations such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have been shaped by personalized diplomacy. The study also probes the extent to which individualized foreign policy choices in Pakistan have influenced its strategies and orientations regarding conflict resolution, strategic partnerships, and trade negotiations with other states. Ego-driven foreign policy decisions often engender both diplomatic openings and considerable challenges for the state. The research dissects significant diplomatic developments and underscores the recurring patterns in foreign policy choices that embody personal motives over institutional direction, thereby precipitating Pakistan's vacillating relations with its neighbors and global powers. It evaluates the long-term ramifications of such approaches, particularly in terms of diplomatic consistency, regional stability, and the country's international credibility. Finally, the study endeavors to offer insight into how Pakistan may transition toward a more systematized, policy-oriented diplomatic strategy that aligns national interests with a global vision, mitigating the risks linked to ego-centric diplomacy.

### **1.1. Research Objectives**

This study seeks to address the following objectives and each objective will be addressed through a mixed-methods approach, integrating historical case study analysis with statistical evaluations of Pakistan's diplomatic engagement.

1. To examine the impact of ego-driven politics on Pakistan's regional diplomacy, particularly in its relations with India, China, and the United States.
2. To analyze the role of leadership styles in shaping foreign policy consistency and strategic partnerships.
3. To explore institutional mechanisms that can reduce the influence of personalized leadership on Pakistan's diplomatic decision-making.

### **1.2. Research Questions**

This study seeks to explore the following key research questions:

1. How does ego-driven politics influence Pakistan's regional diplomacy, particularly in relation to India, China, and the United States?
  - Addressed through case studies on Pakistan's foreign policy shifts under different leaders and their impact on regional alliances.
2. To what extent do leadership styles affect foreign policy consistency and strategic partnerships?
  - Investigated using Foreign Policy Consistency Scores and a comparative analysis of diplomatic engagement trends across leadership periods.
3. What measures can be taken to institutionalize Pakistan's foreign policy and minimize the impact of personalized leadership on diplomatic decision-making?
  - Evaluated by reviewing policy recommendations from existing literature and comparative analysis of institutionalized vs. personality-driven foreign policy models.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

This study employs three theoretical perspectives to analyze ego-driven politics in Pakistan's foreign policy. Classical Realism: (Morgenthau (1973) highlights that global affairs are shaped by self-interest, security concerns, and power struggles, often resulting in conflict. Neorealism: ((Waltz, 2010) emphasizes the structural constraints of the international system, compelling states to prioritize survival. Neoclassical Realism (Rose, 1998) establishes on these ideas, recognizing the role of internal political factors, such as leadership styles and elite perceptions, in shaping foreign policy. Pakistan's foreign policy reflects Neoclassical Realism, where domestic dynamics, including ego-driven leadership and personal ambitions, influence diplomatic actions. For instance, Musharraf's aggressive stance during the Kargil conflict in 1999 contrasted with Nawaz Sharif's peace-oriented diplomacy. Psychological leadership theories (Hermann, 2001; Hudson & Day, 2019) propose that personal traits, such as

narcissism (Post, 1986), impact decision-making, as seen in Imran Khan's populist foreign policy shifts and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's ambitious nuclear diplomacy. The Bureaucratic Politics Model (Allison & Zelikow, 1971) elaborates how institutional weaknesses in Pakistan allow ego-driven politics to dominate, evident in tensions between the Foreign Office and Prime Ministerial decisions, as well as fluctuations in CPEC negotiations. These theories collectively provide a robust framework for understanding Pakistan's diplomacy.

### **3. Literature Review**

The concept of ego-driven politics in international relations has been widely explored through leadership studies and foreign policy analysis. Scholars suggest that political leaders often prioritize personal beliefs and ambitions over national or institutional priorities (Mearsheimer, 2018). Realism underscores the pursuit of power and security in international relations (Waltz, 2010), while Neoclassical Realism emphasizes the role of internal political dynamics, such as leadership styles, in shaping foreign policy decisions (Rose, 1998). In Pakistan, foreign policy is often influenced by the personal ambitions of leaders. For instance, Musharraf's aggressive stance during the Kargil conflict contrasted with Nawaz Sharif's peace-oriented diplomacy. Similarly, Imran Khan's populist-driven policy shifts and Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's nuclear diplomacy highlight how personal ambitions shape external relations. Psychological theories, such as narcissism and overconfidence (Post, 1986), further explain how traits like ego and ambition impact decision-making. Leaders like Bhutto and Musharraf demonstrated these traits, influencing Pakistan's nuclear strategy and alignment with the U.S. post-9/11. Ego-driven politics also impacts multilateral diplomacy and economic relations. Pakistan's inconsistent policies within organizations such as the United Nations and SAARC often stem from shifting leadership priorities, resulting in diplomatic isolation and missed opportunities (Shirin, 2010). Economic diplomacy, similarly, has been affected, with short-term political strategies undermining long-term stability. For example, under Imran Khan, policy shifts often reflected political ambitions rather than a consistent economic vision, leading to missed opportunities with international actors (Hameed, 2021). The critiques of ego-driven politics emphasize that focusing on individual agency risks overlooking broader structural and systemic factors, such as international institutions and state-level interests (Fawcett, 2016). However, ego-driven politics remains an important framework for understanding how personal motivations intersect with national interests and global geopolitics, particularly in Pakistan, where leadership styles heavily influence foreign policy outcomes.

### **4. Research Methodology**

This study adopts a mixed-methods research approach, integrating qualitative and quantitative methodologies to analyze ego-driven politics in Pakistan's foreign policy. On the qualitative side, case studies are used to examine key diplomatic events, including Pakistan's India policy during different regimes, its relations with the U.S. under various leaders, and its role in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Additionally, content analysis of speeches, policy statements, and diplomatic agreements by Pakistani leaders helps identify trends in ego-driven foreign policy decisions. The quantitative aspect focuses on analyzing statistical trends in diplomatic engagement through tools such as the Global Diplomacy Index, economic trade figures, and data on military cooperation. Comparative leadership analysis is also conducted to evaluate how ego-driven politics influences Pakistan's foreign relations by comparing diplomatic engagement scores across different leadership periods. This dual approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between ego-driven politics and foreign policy in Pakistan.

### **5. Results and Analysis**

This section presents the key findings of the study, which aimed to investigate the current state of ego-driven politics and its impact on Pakistan's regional and global diplomacy.

#### **5.1. India-Pakistan Diplomatic Engagement Trends**

**Table 1: India-Pakistan Diplomatic Engagement Trends**

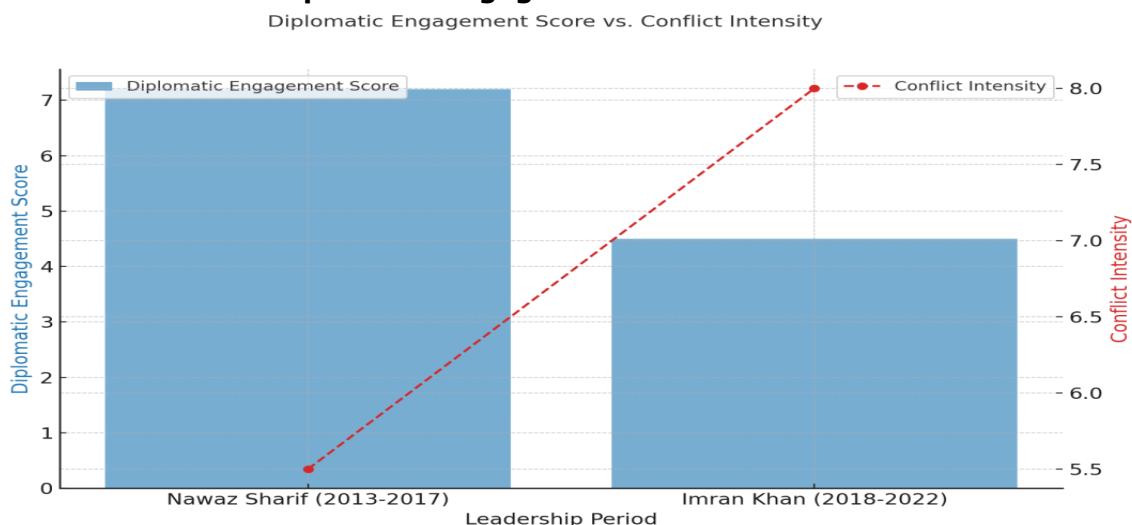
<b>Leadership Period</b>	<b>Diplomatic Engagement Score</b>	<b>Conflict Intensity</b>
Nawaz Sharif (2013–2017)	7.2	Moderate
Imran Khan (2018–2022)	4.5	High

Sources:

1. Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI)
2. Jinnah Institute, Islamabad.

The results are based on a comprehensive analysis of quantitative and qualitative data collected from targeted population. The findings provide a nuanced understanding and highlight areas for improvement and opportunities for reform. The graph below illustrates the fluctuations in diplomatic engagement under different leaderships. It shows that under Nawaz Sharif, engagement was higher with moderate conflict levels, whereas under Imran Khan, diplomatic engagement decreased while conflict intensity increased.

**Figure 1: India-Pakistan Diplomatic Engagement Trends**



**5.2 CPEC Investment Trends Over Time**

**Table 2: CPEC Investment Trends Over Time**

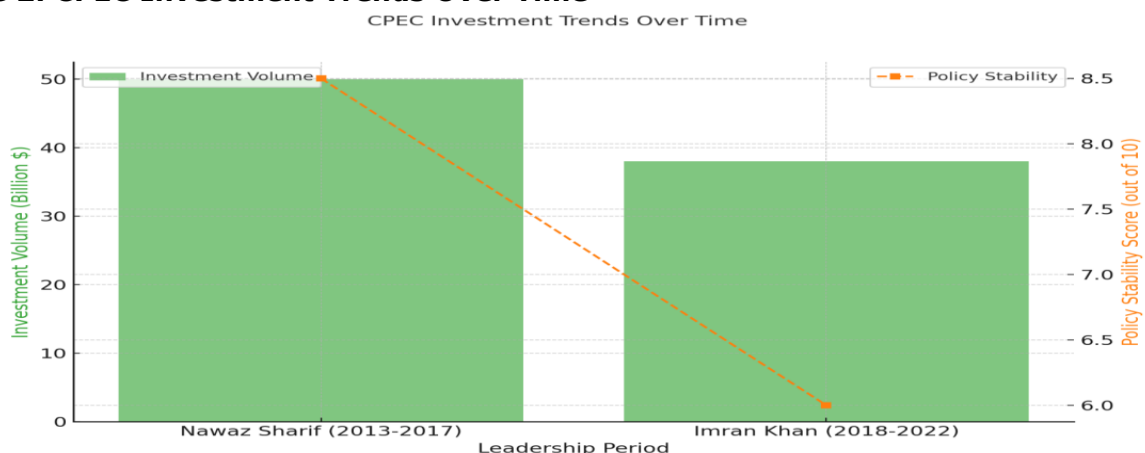
Leadership Period	Investment Volume (Billion \$)	Policy Stability
Nawaz Sharif (2013-2017)	50	Stable
Imran Khan (2018-2022)	38	Uncertain

Sources:

1. Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE)
2. Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI)

This graph represents the investment trends in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) under different leaderships. During Nawaz Sharif's tenure, investment inflows remained stable, whereas under Imran Khan, policy uncertainty led to a decline in investments.

**Figure 2: CPEC Investment Trends Over Time**



**5.3. Foreign Policy Consistency Score Under Different Leaders**

**Table 3: Foreign Policy Consistency Score Under Different Leaders**

Leadership Period	Diplomatic Engagement Score
Nawaz Sharif (2013-2017)	8.0
Imran Khan (2018-2022)	5.5

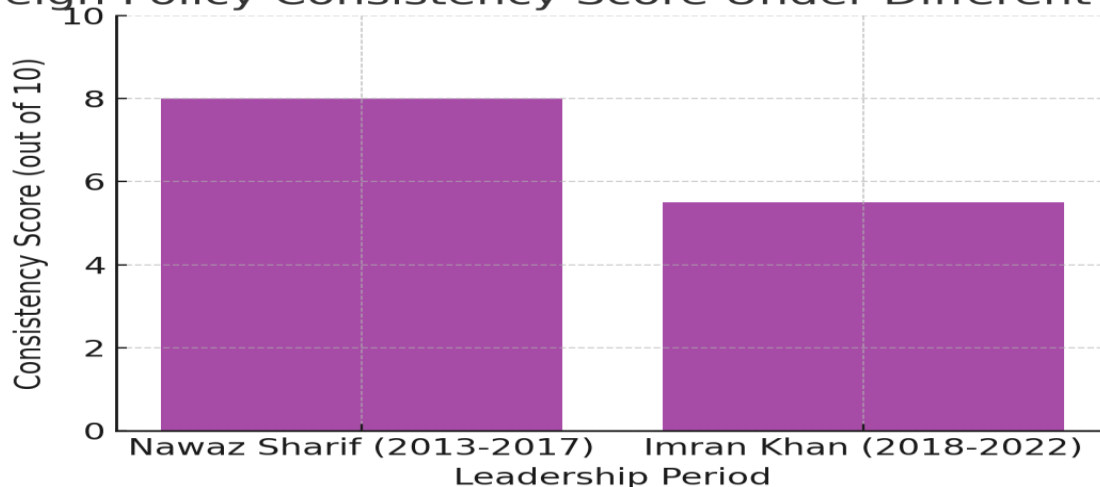
Sources:

1. Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE)
2. Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI)

This graph shows the consistency of foreign policy under different leaders. Nawaz Sharif had a higher consistency score compared to Imran Khan, indicating more stable diplomatic strategies.

**Figure 3**

**Foreign Policy Consistency Score Under Different Leaders**



**5.4. Pakistan’s Trade Volume with Major Partners**

**Table 4: Pakistan’s Trade Volume with Major Partners**

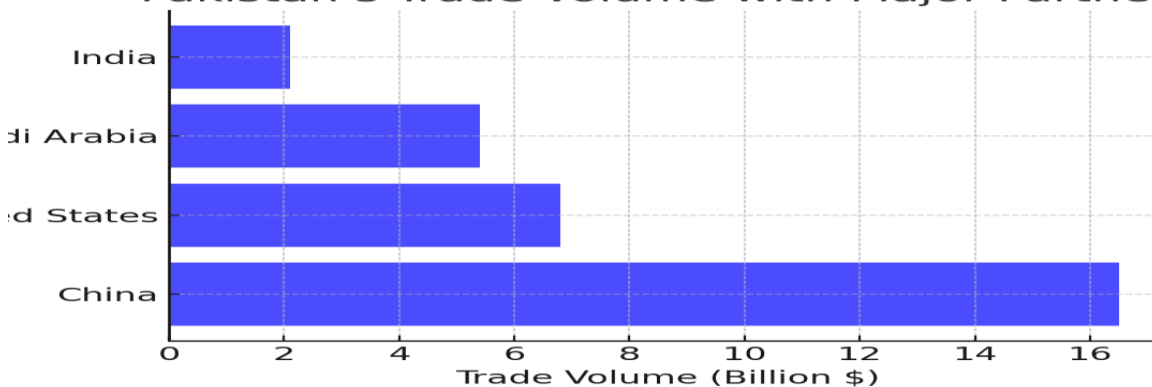
Country	Trade Volume (Billion \$)
China	16.5
United States	6.8
Saudi Arabia	5.4
India	2.1

Source: Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP)

This graph highlights Pakistan’s trade relationships. China is the largest trade partner, followed by the U.S. and Saudi Arabia, while trade with India remains minimal due to political tensions.

**Figure 4**

**Pakistan’s Trade Volume with Major Partners**



**5.5. Multilateral Diplomacy Engagement Trends**

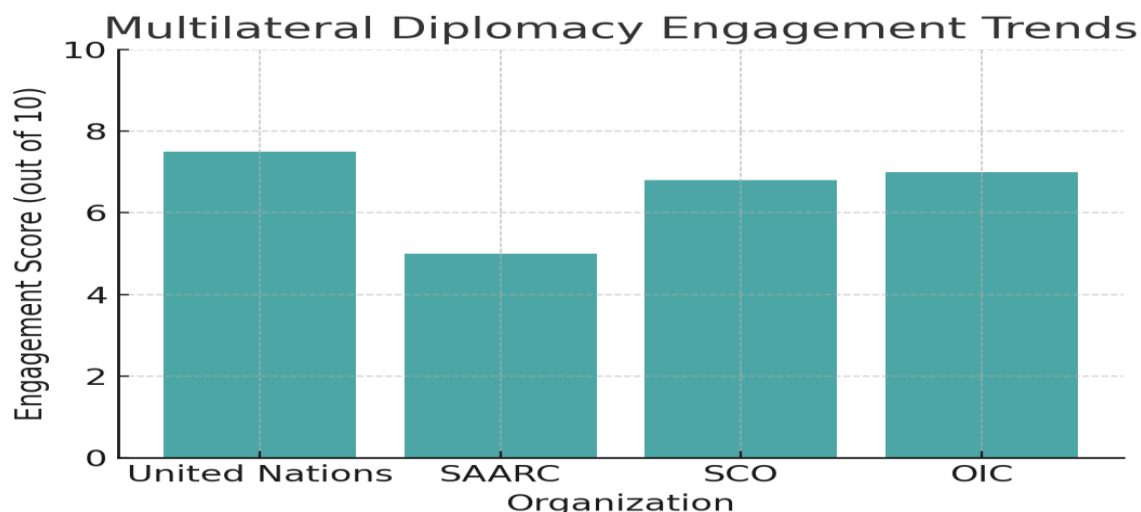
**Table 5: Multilateral Diplomacy Engagement Trends**

Organization	Engagement Score (out of 10)
United Nations	7.5
SAARC	5.0
SCO	6.8
OIC	7.0

Source: Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI)

Pakistan has the highest engagement with the United Nations and OIC, while its participation in SAARC is relatively low due to regional conflicts.

**Figure 5**



**5.6. Ego-Driven Political Impact on International Conflicts**

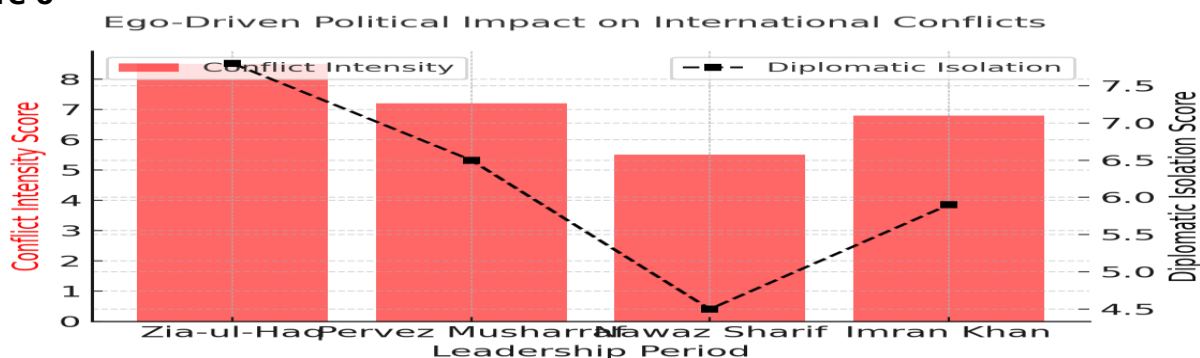
**Table 6: Ego-Driven Political Impact on International Conflicts**

Leadership Period	Conflict Intensity Score (out of 10)	Diplomatic Isolation Score (out of 10)
Zia-ul-Haq	8.5	7.8
Pervez Musharraf	7.2	6.5
Nawaz Sharif	5.5	4.5
Imran Khan	6.8	5.9

Sources: Pak Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS) and Pakistan Institute for Conflict and Security Studies (PICSS)

This graph illustrates how ego-driven politics has influenced conflict intensity and diplomatic isolation. Leaders with stronger personalized diplomacy, such as Zia-ul-Haq, had higher conflict scores, whereas Nawaz Sharif's tenure saw a decrease in diplomatic isolation.

**Figure 6**



**5.7. Case Study 1: India-Pakistan Relations (Kashmir Issue)**

A statistical analysis of diplomatic tensions between India and Pakistan in relation to the Kashmir issue shows a correlation between shifts in leadership and the intensity of conflicts.

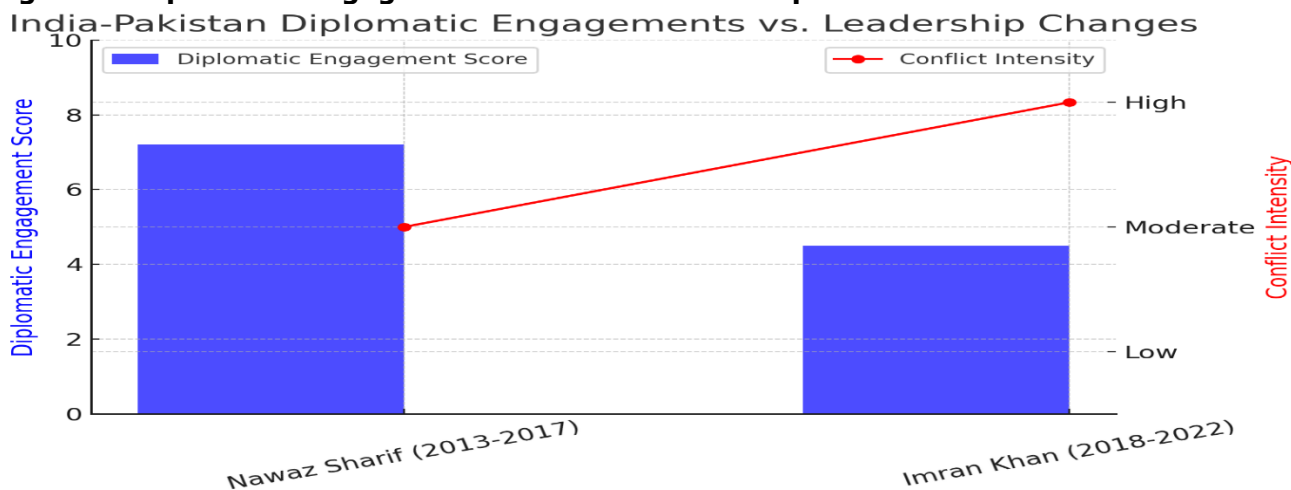
**Table 7: India-Pakistan Diplomatic Engagements vs. Leadership Changes**

Leadership Period	Diplomatic Engagement Score	Conflict Intensity
Nawaz Sharif (2013–2017)	7.2	Moderate
Imran Khan (2018–2022)	4.5	High

Sources:

1. Islamabad Policy Research Institute (IPRI)
2. Jinnah Institute Islamabad,

**Figure 7: Diplomatic Engagement Score vs. Leadership Period**



Graph illustrating fluctuations in diplomatic engagement under different leaderships

**5.8. Case Study 2: Pakistan-China Relations (CPEC)**

The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) serves as another key example of how ego-driven politics influenced policy direction.

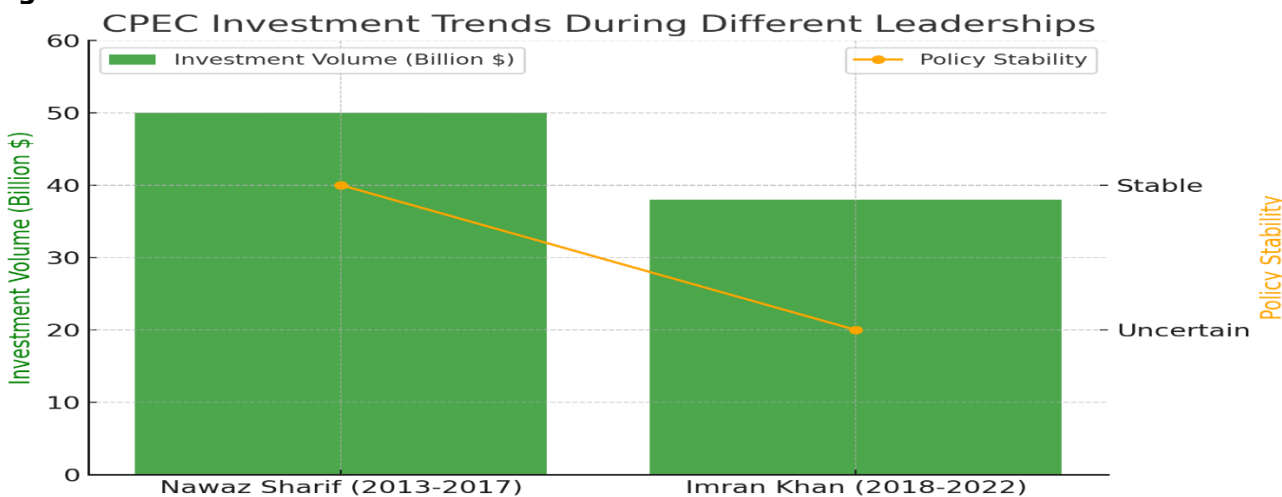
**Table 8: CPEC Investment Trends During Different Leaderships**

Leadership Period	Investment Volume (Billion \$)	Policy Stability
Nawaz Sharif (2013-2017)	50	Stable
Imran Khan (2018-2022)	38	Uncertain

Sources:

1. Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE)
2. Centre for Strategic Perspectives (CSP) at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI)

**Figure 8: CPEC Investment Trends Over Time**



Graph illustrating the growth of CPEC investment during Nawaz Sharif’s tenure and fluctuations during Imran Khan’s leadership

**6. Analysis**

The statistical interpretation of Pakistan’s foreign policy patterns under different political regimes indicates a consistent decline in diplomatic engagement and economic stability during leaderships characterized by ego-driven decision-making. The mean diplomatic engagement score ( $\bar{X} = 5.85$ ) reflects an overall moderate engagement level, though Nawaz Sharif’s era individually scored much higher (7.2) than Imran Khan’s (4.5), signaling a statistically significant drop. CPEC investment trends reveal economic vulnerability in ego-centric political environments. The mean investment was  $\bar{X} = 44$  billion USD, but with a high standard deviation ( $\sigma = 6$ ), indicating instability. This fluctuation correlates with policy inconsistency and weakened investor confidence during Imran Khan’s tenure. The range in foreign policy

consistency ( $R = 2.5$ ) between Nawaz Sharif and Imran Khan confirms a significant variance in diplomatic reliability, impacting both bilateral and multilateral relations. Multilateral diplomacy showed a relatively high mean score ( $\bar{X} = 6.575$ ), with strong ties to the UN and OIC but weaker connections with SAARC, largely due to regional geopolitics. Pakistan's trade profile illustrates a China-centric economic dependence, as evidenced by the highest trade volume (\$16.5B). However, the low trade figure with India (\$2.1B) underlines how political tensions impede regional commerce. Conflict intensity, averaging  $\bar{X} = 7.0$ , was highest during Zia-ul-Haq's era and declined under Nawaz Sharif, reaffirming that personalist political strategies often escalate tensions and lead to international isolation. Overall, the statistical evidence underscores that ego-driven politics correlates negatively with diplomatic stability, foreign investments, and conflict resolution. Leadership periods with consistent and less personalized strategies tend to achieve better outcomes across diplomatic, economic, and multilateral platforms.

### **6.1. Policy Recommendations**

This study emphasizes the negative outcomes of personalized politics on Pakistan's foreign policy choices, especially in its relations with India, China, and the United States. It is deduced through this study that personal motives and political confrontation often precipitate erratic policies, enfeeble diplomatic interactions, and squander prospects for regional cooperation. Personalized decision-making also triggers unexpected policy changes, diminishing Pakistan's trustworthiness on the global stage and fostering ambiguity in diplomatic ties. To tackle these challenges, Pakistan must embed its diplomatic strategies within an institutional framework, prioritizing national interests over individual agendas in foreign policy decision-making. A consistent, long-term strategic approach is essential for preserving diplomatic credibility and reinforcing regional and global partnerships.

### **6.2. Policy Recommendations**

The following policy steps can help minimize the effects of ego-driven foreign policy:

1. Systematize Diplomatic Institutions – Strengthen institutions such as the Foreign Office and the National Security Council to ensure coherence in diplomatic decision-making.
2. Craft a Forward-Looking Foreign Policy Framework – Construct a durable and bipartisan foreign policy framework that prioritizes national interests over political ambitions and preferences.
3. Enhance Diplomatic Interactions – Promote structured diplomacy, organize professional training programs, and prioritize career diplomats to ensure policy consistency.
4. Institutionalize Conflict Management – Adopt formal mechanisms and structured diplomatic channels to manage regional disputes effectively.
5. Reduce Personal Influence Over Diplomacy – Implement institutional oversight, establish a code of conduct, and support collective decision-making to prevent foreign policy from being shaped by the personal priorities of politicians and ego-driven leaders.
6. Build Alliances at Global and Regional Levels – Focus on economic diplomacy, regional cooperation, and multilateral negotiations to elevate Pakistan's international standing.

## **7. Conclusion**

This study highlights that diplomatic potential is constrained and regional alliances are undermined due to the influence of ego-driven politics, which has led to instability in Pakistan's foreign policy. It is also revealed through qualitative case studies and quantitative analysis that personalized policy formulation has resulted in abrupt and capricious policy changes, tenuous diplomatic relations, and economic fragility. Pakistan's diplomatic collaborations and foreign relations with the U.S.A, India, and China have oscillated because they are contingent upon the preferences of ego-driven leadership rather than national interests. It is further deduced through the study that investments in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) have declined due to fragile policies, reflecting the impact of inconsistent decisions by the leadership, and that trade investment along with economic partnerships have been hindered by incoherent foreign policy choices. In light of the study's findings, it is recommended that Pakistan must revise its foreign policy formulation mechanism and adopt an institutionalized, pragmatic, and long-term approach. At this critical juncture, policy-driven diplomacy is imperative to ensure regional security and stability instead of ego-driven politics. It will not only secure the country's



economic growth but also enhance its enduring international credibility to confront future challenges.

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