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CONSTRUCTING AND CONTESTING WELFARE: POLITICAL NARRATIVES ON THE BENAZIR INCOME SUPPORT PROGRAMME IN SINDH

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Abstract

The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) is Pakistan's largest social safety net. It was launched in 2008 by the Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP) government. Since the beginning, opposition parties have objected to its name. Its early selection criteria faced criticism too. This study explores how the PPPP and its rival political parties construct and contest narratives about BISP, particularly in Sindh, and how these narratives shape the political perceptions and voting behaviour of its beneficiaries. For achieving the purpose, the study applies the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) with an interpretivist approach and a qualitative embedded case study design. Primary data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The data set consisted of one subject expert, five candidates, four from distinct political parties, namely the PPPP, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), Pakistan Muslim League-Functional (PML-F), and one independent candidate, who contested the 2022-23 local government elections. Structured interviews were also held with 20 purposively chosen beneficiaries. For secondary data, the study used official reports, academic studies and media coverage. All the data was examined through thematic and narrative analysis. The PPPP presents BISP as the legacy of Benazir Bhutto for social justice and women's empowerment, but opposition parties counter with accounts of politicization, patronage, targeting errors, and corruption. The MQM also alleges ethnic and regional bias in enrolment. On the other hand, beneficiaries showed their heavy dependence on the programme. They also linked the programme closely to the PPPP. About half of them reported that the programme had influenced their vote. As a result, findings disclose that BISP functions both as a safety net programme and as an electoral tool. To depoliticize the programme, the study recommends neutral branding and a legally protected budget. Its implementation should also be decentralized and accountable.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Since Independence in 1947, poverty has been a persistent challenge in Pakistan and successive governments have adopted social welfare and poverty alleviation policies. The biggest of these is the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP). It was initiated by the Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP) government in 2008 when the country was facing an economic crisis, shortly after former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto had been assassinated. The unconditional cash transfer scheme of BISP is primarily for low income women. The aim is to protect them from economic shocks and to strengthen their position in the household. The programme's declared objectives are poverty reduction and social progress. However, it has been charged numerous times with being politicized. The name has been attached to a political leader and party that are familiar to all, and, in its first year, the legislators determined who would get application forms. Due to these two features, critics (Ahmad, 2024; Waqas & Torre, 2020) have suspected that BISP was an electoral tool of the PPPP as well as a poverty alleviation programme. The PPPP portrays the programme as purely a welfare programme. But opposition parties deny that, and accuse BISP of being a tool of clientelism and vote banking. If political agendas take over, the programme's developmental aims can be weakened. Therefore, an understanding of the construction and reception of the competing narratives is essential to assessing BISP's real impact. It also helps explain the working of social policy in a polarized party system like Pakistan's.

This article asks: How do the PPPP and other political parties build and challenge narratives about BISP, and for what electoral ends? It has three objectives:

1.To identify and analyse the narratives that PPPP electoral candidates create about BISP including their themes, framing strategies, and electoral targets.

2.To analyse how the candidates of competing parties construct counter-narratives to the PPPP's portrayal of BISP.

3.To understand the beneficiaries' perceptions of the impact of these competing narratives on their political perceptions and voting behaviour.

The article uses the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF). It analyses interviews conducted in Sindh with five local election candidates, four from political parties and one independent, a subject expert and 20 beneficiaries. Its contribution to research on social protection and clientelism is two-fold. First, it examines the way in which competing parties tell different stories about the same programme. Second it takes into account how recipients receive these narratives, which is something that is not always considered when evaluating large programmes (Sarfraz, 2026). The findings are meant for those who design and implement poverty programmes, such as policy makers, international partners and civil society organisations. They may help make these programmes more effective and harder to use for political ends.

The rest of the study is structured as follows. It begins with a brief overview of poverty and social protection in Pakistan, as well as an outline of the design of BISP. The literature review then covers research on BISP and politics in Sindh. After that, the theoretical framework and methodology are set out. The findings are then presented and discussed. The conclusion ends with the recommendations, limitations and directions for future research.

2. Background: Poverty and Social Protection in Pakistan

2.1 Poverty Trends and Economic Context

Poverty in Pakistan has moved in cycles. It rose during the 1960s and fell in the 1970s and early 1980s. Estimates for the late 1980s and 1990s differ, largely because the studies that produced them used different methods. The incidence of poverty increased from 26.1 percent in 1990-91 to 32.1 percent in 2000-01, which reversed the decline of the 1970s and 1980s (International Monetary Fund, 2004). Over the longer run the economy shifted from a mainly agrarian base towards semi-industrialization, and the population grew from 33.7 million in 1951 to

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Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

241.49 million in 2023 (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Growth has not translated evenly into poverty reduction. Between 1958 and 1969, under Ayub Khan, gross domestic product (GDP) grew by an average of 5.82 percent and manufacturing by 8.51 percent. Yet this fast growth also widened regional and personal inequality and concentrated economic power in a few families (Khan, 2025). The 1970s brought nationalization and higher public debt. Growth slowed to 4.8 percent, inflation averaged 16 percent, and poverty and inequality rose. In the 1980s growth recovered to an average of 6.3 percent, helped by deregulation and foreign aid. It then fell to 3.5 percent in the 1990s as fiscal and external imbalances persisted, debt rose and poverty increased (Khan, 2025).

Growth picked up again between 2002 and 2007 under Pervez Musharraf's government. The PPPP government that took office in 2008 then faced the global financial crisis, high oil and food prices, rising militant violence and the 2010 floods. Over the five years to 2012-13 the economy grew by an average of only 2.9 percent a year, about half of Pakistan's long-term trend of around 6.5 percent (Government of Pakistan, Finance Division, 2013). Political opponents blamed the government for this record. For example, in his 2018-19 budget speech, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Finance Minister Miftah Ismail (2018, p. 2) described the economy his party inherited in 2013 as "collapsed", citing average growth of 2.8 percent and inflation of 12 percent over the previous five years. At the same time, the PPPP government passed the 18th Amendment, which the National Assembly adopted unanimously in April 2010, and it agreed the 7th National Finance Commission (NFC) Award, which divides revenue among the provinces using poverty and other criteria in addition to population ("Amendment in Article 160," 2020; Mehboob, 2020). In the 2010s, International Monetary Fund (IMF) stabilization programmes initially supported growth, but balance of payments crises returned in 2018-2022, and the war in Ukraine and the 2022 floods added further shocks.

Many families remain poor because of structural factors. The large landowners dominate much of the rural economy and long-standing landowners and industrial elites have influenced policy in their favour (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024). Financial constraints, illiteracy, gender inequality, inflation and exposure to floods and environmental degradation contribute to the issue. These recurring shocks show the need for a robust social protection system.

2.2 Social Welfare before BISP

Prior to British rule social welfare was based on religious and community practices like zakat (almsgiving) and waqf (endowments). After independence in 1947, Pakistan faced severe socio-economic problems, and the arrival of millions of refugees made them worse. Voluntary organizations carried out most of the early welfare work, while the government sought international assistance to build a formal social welfare system. The Village-Aid and Urban Community Development programmes were the main early initiatives (Carlson, 1960).

In the 1980s the Orangi Pilot Project in Karachi became an internationally known community-based model for low-cost sanitation, housing, microfinance, education and health. The Zakat system was established by law in the same decade, and Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal (PBM) followed in the 1990s. In the early 2000s Pakistan adopted a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper. Later, the 18th Constitutional Amendment moved responsibility for social protection to the provinces, and provincial schemes such as the Punjab Social Protection Authority and the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Health Card followed. Decentralization was meant to bring policy closer to people. In practice, it produced a fragmented system of overlapping and poorly coordinated programmes.

2.3 Design and Scale of BISP

The Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) was launched in July 2008 as a federal unconditional cash transfer scheme, introduced in response to the global financial crisis and to

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Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

the loss of household purchasing power caused by rising food and oil prices. It was the biggest social safety net introduced in the history of Pakistan with a first year budget of Pakistani Rupees (PKR) 34 billion. It became a statutory body under the Benazir Income Support Programme Act 2010. The primary objective was to guarantee a minimum income to the poorest households and boost the empowerment of women by directly paying cash to female household members (Aneesa et al., 2019).

The core of the programme is the unconditional transfer known as Benazir Kafaalat, which is paid every quarter to the female head of the household. The amount has been raised several times, from PKR 3,000 per quarter to PKR 8,500, then to PKR 13,500, and most recently to PKR 14,500. BISP also runs conditional transfers. Waseela-e-Taleem links payments to the primary school enrolment and attendance of children aged 5 to 12; by February 2018 it had been expanded to 50 districts (Wasif, 2018). Ehsaas Nashonuma targets stunting among children under 23 months and among pregnant women. Other schemes have offered small loans (Waseela-e-Haq), vocational training (Waseela-e-Rozgar) and help with health costs (Waseela-e-Sehat). Apart from these, BISP provides emergency cash after terrorism, conflict and disasters. A Hybrid Social Protection Scheme, piloted in December 2023, supports households that no longer qualify for unconditional aid.

Beneficiary selection has changed several times. In the first year (2008), each member of parliament received 8,000 application forms to distribute in his or her constituency. The National Database and Registration Authority (NADRA) verified eligibility, and payments were sent by post. This discretionary process was suspended in April 2009 and replaced by the Poverty Scorecard (PSC), a World Bank-approved proxy means test that uses 23 variables on household assets and expenditure ("Income Support Programme," 2009). The survey data make up the National Socio-Economic Registry (NSER), which holds information on more than 27 million households (Hasan & Masood, 2024). Although the registry was used as a shock-responsive tool during the 2022 floods, more than 2.2 million households in the bottom 40 percent of the population are not registered (Majoka et al., 2024).

Payments moved to a Biometric Verification System (BVS) under a "One Woman One Account" principle. The BVS was piloted in March 2017. It reached 80 districts by February 2018 and nearly 90 percent of beneficiaries by the end of 2018, and a simplified digital system was launched in October 2019. Beneficiaries collect payments through about 20,000 biometric agents and 2,000 BVS ATMs. Fraud controls include real-time biometric checks against NADRA records and geo-fencing. The eligibility rules exclude households with a member in government employment or on a government pension, more than 3 acres of agricultural land or 80 square yards of residential land, another source of income, or a machine-readable passport.

Funding has grown sharply. BISP's allocation rose from PKR 34 billion in 2008 to PKR 102 billion in 2015 and PKR 460 billion in 2022. It stood at PKR 471.09 billion in FY 2023-24 and rose to PKR 598.718 billion for FY 2024-25 (Hashmi, 2024). Enrolment also grew, from 3.5 million families in FY 2008-09 to 5 million in FY 2009-10 ("Income Support Programme," 2009) and about 5.63 million by December 2017. The programme now covers more than 9.3 million families under Kafaalat, and the government plans to extend coverage to 10 million. The programme is supported by the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and a new loan of US$330 million has been secured from the ADB, which is expected to strengthen BISP's institutional capacity (Wani, 2024).

3. Literature Review: BISP and Politics in Sindh

This section discusses the published research on the political aspects of the BISP. It includes the programme's political beginnings, the reform of beneficiary targeting, its connection to women's political participation, delivery and governance

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
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ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

challenges, and the issue of its name. The last part sets out the gap this study fills.

3.1 Political Origins of the Programme

The programme is named after Benazir Bhutto (Benazir Income Support Programme, 2024). In a Business Recorder report ("PPP Slams Move," 2019), this choice is the most defining aspect of the programme's political identity. Between 2008-09 and December 2012, the PPPP government spent over Rs 2 billion on media campaigns for BISP (Nangiana, 2013). Those who criticized this spending argued that it made a state service appear like a PPPP programme, and that the programme's survival depended on the party's electoral success (Ahmad, 2024; Waqas & Torre, 2020).

The selection of beneficiaries was done via parliamentarians in 2008-09. Legislators became the main gatekeepers of registration, as each member of parliament distributed 8,000 application forms (Section 2.3). At this stage, the criteria used were quite general: (i) monthly income was less than PKR 6,000, and (ii) no significant agricultural land and no public sector employment. This provided the legislators with a great discretion (Jalal, 2017). As mentioned by Durr-e-Nayab and Farooq (2014), this initial design allowed the programme to be open to political interference. The same issue has been identified in one study done in Sargodha, Punjab. The beneficiaries selected by parliamentarians were often not the poorest and, in fact, many did not meet the criteria of selection (Waqas & Torre, 2020).

3.2 Targeting Reform and Continuing Interference

The payments were temporarily suspended due to worries about selection by parliamentarians. These worries also contributed to the introduction of World Bank-supported proxy means testing (International Monetary Fund, 2010), the Poverty Scorecard. The scorecard was supposed to make selection more evidence-based and impartial.

Ahmad (2024) argues that the reform simply altered the nature of political interference, but did not eliminate it. Ahmad further found that BISP survey team members were all PPPP members in Nowshera district, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which resulted in biased selection in favour of party members' households. Respondents also said that some of the members of PPPP were holding senior positions in BISP offices. Ahmad (2024) called this a common problem of governance reform in politically weak environments, where the power holders find new ways to exert influence when they lose their previous avenues.

3.3 BISP and Women's Political Participation

There are two studies that relate BISP and women's political engagement. In Sanghar district, 85.4% of the respondents of the survey reported that BISP has granted women greater freedom to vote. In the past, the decision on women's voting was largely made by their heads of household or influential local men (Behan & Khatwani, 2024). In the same study, in focus group discussions, women reported that their political affiliations had changed in favour of the PPPP due to BISP, commonly referred to as the "Benazir Card". According to Jalal (2017), BISP had a positive impact on the socio-economic status of women, their political awareness, their mobility and their ability to participate in elections.

Election results in Sanghar show how the PPPP's position changed over four elections. In 2002, the Pakistan Muslim League-Functional (PML-F) won all three National Assembly seats. In February 2008, five months before BISP was launched, the PPPP won one National Assembly seat and two of six provincial seats. In 2013 it won four of nine seats and added a fifth in a by-election. In 2018 it won all three National Assembly seats and split the provincial seats evenly with the Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA), losing one of them by 146 votes (Election Commission of Pakistan, 2002, 2008, 2013; "Results of PA and NA Seats," 2018). So the party's gains in Sanghar were gradual, and they began before BISP existed.

3.4 Delivery Problems and Governance

News reports from Badin and Rahim Yar Khan document problems at the point of payment. In

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

Badin district, agents have continued to make illegal deductions of Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,500 from quarterly stipends. Low literacy and unfamiliarity with ATMs leave many rural women open to this exploitation ("In Badin Agents Continue," 2024). In Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab, retailers have been reported to deduct Rs 500 to Rs 1,500 from each Rs 7,000 payment (Haq, 2023). Beneficiaries also spend heavily on transport and time. This is because awareness of the scheme is poor, there is no simple referral and complaints system, and BISP has no offices at the grassroots level. The system is not designed with women's needs in mind (Cheema et al., 2016; Guven et al., 2024).

Central overhead costs are small by comparison. In FY 2023-24, of BISP's PKR 471.09 billion allocation, PKR 5.1 billion went to employees and administration and PKR 22 million to media communication (Hashmi, 2024). Administration therefore took about 1 percent of the budget.

Audits have also flagged payments to ineligible recipients. In 2023, the Auditor General told the Public Accounts Committee that Rs 19 billion had been paid to about 143,000 government officials (Asad, 2023). The audit for FY 2023-24 reported Rs 141 billion in irregularities. This included Rs 116.95 billion paid to more than three million beneficiaries without a registered family CNIC (Khattak, 2025). The 2019 review removed 820,165 people from the programme, and 14,730 of them were government employees. Sindh had the highest number of government officials receiving BISP ("BISP Beneficiaries Included," 2020). Estimates of targeting error are high as well. When the target is the population below the official poverty line, inclusion error is 55 to 64 percent and exclusion error is 77 to 82 percent (Gazdar & Khan, n.d.).

These problems sit within wider governance weaknesses. BISP operates without a consistent national social protection strategy. It is also run centrally and is not integrated with provincial efforts (Institute of Policy Studies, 2024). Policy is shaped by elites whose interests often override those of other groups, and public spending is biased in their favour as a result (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024). Weak accountability in decentralised service delivery has long limited the quality of public services in Pakistan (Mohmand & Cheema, 2007). At the provincial level, coordination among Baitul Mal, Social Welfare, the Social Protection Authorities, and Zakat and Ushr is poor, and this leads to duplication. BISP's thin local presence also limits direct outreach (Guven et al., 2024).

3.5 The Contest over the Programme's Name

The contest over the programme's name intensified after Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) came to power in 2018. The PTI had called for the resignation of the heads of BISP and Pakistan Bait-ul-Mal before the 2018 general elections (Tanoli, 2018). PTI's allies in Sindh complained that the PPPP was abusing the scheme in 2019, and it is said Prime Minister Imran Khan concurred with them regarding the renaming of the scheme. The PPPP promised to take on the fight. The government further announced it would not change the name of BISP, but BISP would operate under the new programme titled "Ehsaas" (Mahmood, 2019; "PPP Slams Move," 2019).

After the change of government in 2022, PPPP minister Shazia Marri told the Senate that PTI had removed Benazir Bhutto's name from the programme for political gain. She also said PTI had spent Rs 77 million erasing the name from the BISP card and had excluded more than 850,000 beneficiaries without a proper survey ("PTI Govt Removed Benazir's Name," 2022). A PPPP women's wing leader has argued publicly that PTI benefited most from BISP by including non-deserving people (Gul, 2024). In 2024, BISP Chairperson Senator Rubina Khalid condemned attempts to rebrand the scheme (Achakzai, 2024). The dispute over the programme's name and legitimacy was therefore still active in 2024.

3.6 Research Gap

Existing studies examine BISP's targeting performance (Durr-e-Nayab & Farooq, 2014; Jalal, 2017), clientelism in selection outside Sindh (Ahmad, 2024; Waqas & Torre, 2020)

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

and women's voting in a single Sindh district (Behan & Khatwani, 2024). Media reports record the public dispute over the programme's name. None of the studies reviewed here compares how competing parties tell the story of BISP, or how beneficiaries in Sindh receive those stories. This study addresses that gap. It applies the Narrative Policy Framework to interviews with candidates from several parties, an expert and beneficiaries.

4. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In this section, theory and methods of study are presented. It starts with the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF) which is used to examine the political aspects of BISP. It then discusses the research approach, design, data collection, sampling, participants, analysis and ethics.

4.1 Theoretical Framework

The study uses the NPF to analyse the construction and contestation of narratives on social welfare programmes in Pakistan, especially the BISP. The framework rests on a basic concept. Policy problems are narrated by political leaders, the media or other groups, and they are told to achieve political, social or economic ends. In this perspective, a policy is also a story, and a story influences the thinking and action of the public on politics (Shanahan et al., 2018).

The NPF lists four key components of a policy story. The first is the setting, which refers to the social, political and economic context of a policy. For BISP, the setting is Pakistan's history of poverty, political conflict, elections and inequality, particularly in Sindh.

The second element is the characters. Typically, NPF research categorises them as heroes, villains and victims. In BISP stories, the hero is often the party that has initiated the programme, framed as the saviour of the poor. The villains can be opposition parties that attack the programme or corrupt officials, and the victims, or beneficiaries, are the poor. The actors involved are the PPPP and subsequent governments, opposition parties, programme managers, beneficiaries and the public.

The third is the plot, which is the sequence of events that relate a problem to a proposed solution. BISP plots address issues of poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, political allegiance and criticism of politicization. The fourth is the moral of the story, the policy message the story conveys. One version sees cash transfers as offering a just and efficient approach to poverty alleviation and the empowerment of women. A different one views the same transfers as a vote-buying policy that fosters dependence.

Two additional ideas from NPF research are also used in the study. Narrative coalitions consist of individuals or groups of individuals (including media outlets, civil society groups and political parties) who are aligned with or against a narrative. The study explores the alignment of such actors around BISP and their impact on public opinion and policy. Audience reception is the extent to which a story appeals to and convinces an audience. This idea enables the study of the ways in which recipients and the public view leaders' stories and the impact this has on political engagement.

These elements are applied to the stories that the PPPP and other actors tell about BISP. The investigation explores the ways in which each narrative is constructed to earn votes and to support or oppose the programme. It also asks what beneficiaries and voters do and think as a result of these stories. The NPF is suitable for this purpose because it helps to record the meanings that have been given to the programme and its position in the broader political debate. These meanings would be excluded from a technical assessment of poverty outcomes.

4.2 Methodology

The methodology aimed to demonstrate the interaction among political stories, electoral action and a social welfare programme. The subsections below outline the methods and procedures employed to provide an answer to the research question.

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An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

4.2.1 Interpretivist Approach

The study adopts the interpretivist approach, which holds that individuals create their own understanding of reality and assign significance to social events. Therefore, the approach works particularly well with the questions it poses on how political leaders tell BISP stories, BISP beneficiaries' meaning making and the impact of this meaning on their political attitudes and actions. The study focuses on why and how political stories work, and therefore the questions it addresses are interpretive, and evidence is qualitative.

4.2.2 Research Design: Qualitative Embedded Case Study

A qualitative design was selected to gather rich descriptions of political narratives of BISP. Qualitative approaches are appropriate when there is a social problem that is complex and outcomes are determined by the context and the perceptions of various groups.

Within this design, an embedded case study is used. The main case is BISP, which is studied in the political context of Sindh. It contains three embedded units of analysis: narratives created by the PPPP; counter-narratives created by opposition political parties; and the attitudes and experiences of BISP recipients, especially in terms of political influence. The exploration of these units in combination enabled a detailed examination of the programme in its real political and social context. It also enabled the identification of the relationships between the factors that influence the programme's perception.

4.2.3 Data Collection

Primary and secondary data were used in the study.

Two types of interview were used to gather primary data. Key informants were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. These included local politicians from various political parties, who were queried on their perspectives of BISP, their methods of storytelling and the political outcomes they believe are likely to result, as well as an academic who is an expert in social policy, poverty and political science who gave analytical and contextual information. The semi-structured format allowed the researchers to follow up on the themes that arose and address the key questions.

BISP beneficiaries were interviewed using a structured approach and this standardized approach ensured that the same questions were asked of all the beneficiaries. The questions covered four areas: what beneficiaries knew about BISP; which political leaders they held responsible for the programme; whether they perceived political influence in its delivery; and whether they linked any change in their political affiliation or voting to the programme.

A wide selection of secondary sources was consulted in order to give context and check the primary data and add other perspectives. These comprised academic papers on policy narratives, clientelism, social protection and poverty in Pakistan, government reports and official BISP and Ehsaas documents, policy briefs and evaluations, reports by various national and international research bodies, think-tanks, the World Bank and the IMF, and newspaper, television news, and online opinion pieces used to analyse public debate and the political framing.

4.2.4 Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling was used for identification of participants. This non-probability approach allows the researchers to select informants who have first-hand experience with the phenomena and can provide detailed and relevant information (Palinkas et al., 2015).

In the semi-structured interviews, the local politicians were selected from those active in the main parties of Sindh. The two criteria used for their selection were: involvement in BISP discussions or implementation and representation of constituencies with many beneficiaries. The expert was chosen due to his knowledge and experience in the field. The beneficiaries for structured interviews were selected to represent a variety of experiences and opinions, including by place (urban and rural), length of time on benefits, and by socio-economic status.

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

4.2.5 Participants

The study interviewed five political actors, all of whom had contested the 2022-23 local government elections in Sindh. Four were party candidates, one each from the PPPP, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI), Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and Pakistan Muslim League-Functional (PML-F). The fifth stood as an independent. One academic specialist was also interviewed. The PPPP view is based on one interview with a local government representative and so it may not reflect the party's full position. This was partially remedied by party statements and media reporting. Twenty BISP beneficiaries were selected purposively from urban and rural areas of upper and lower Sindh. Because each party is represented only by one interviewee, districts and official positions are omitted to preserve interviewees' anonymity. The sample is not statistically representative of Sindh. Table 1 lists the participants by code, and these codes are used when interview material is quoted in Section 5.

Table 1 Participants

Code	Category	Affiliation	Interview type
P1	Local government candidate (elected representative)	PPPP	Semi-structured
P2	Local government candidate	PTI	Semi-structured
P3	Local government candidate	MQM	Semi-structured
P4	Local government candidate	PML-F	Semi-structured
P5	Local government candidate	Independent	Semi-structured
E1	Academic specialist	Assistant Professor	Semi-structured
B1 to B20	BISP beneficiaries, urban and rural, upper and lower Sindh	Not disclosed	Structured

Face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted in February-May 2025 in Sindhi and Urdu. They each took approximately 45-80 minutes. Interviews were audio recorded with participants' consent and transcribed and translated into English by the researchers.

As for positionality, the researchers are residents of Sindh with a strong interest in the region's socio-economic policy. To reduce the risk of bias, they kept a reflexive stance throughout and checked claims made in interviews against official government reports and independent audit data.

4.2.6 Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analysed using two intertwined methods. Thematic analysis was the first one. NVivo was used for coding, with deductive codes based on the NPF categories and inductive codes that appeared during the coding process. The analysis was conducted in six stages: familiarization with the data, initial coding, development of themes, review of themes, defining and naming themes, and writing up (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researchers identified recurring themes, main ideas and conflicting interpretations of programme narratives, political influence and recipients' experiences through this process.

The second was narrative analysis. With the NPF as a guide, the researchers analysed the narrative of each of the political actors in terms of characters, setting, plot and moral. This step made it possible to analyse BISP narratives as a way of fulfilling political agendas.

4.2.7 Ethical Considerations

The research was conducted using ethical guidelines of qualitative social science research. Prior to the beginning of the interviews all participants signed informed consent forms. They were informed that this was a voluntary process and that they could withdraw at any

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

time without penalty. Other measures taken to safeguard the participants from any potential political or social consequences included ensuring anonymity and confidentiality throughout the process and removing any identifying data or replacing it with codes when transcribing and analysing the data.

5. Findings

This section reports the findings of the research design set out in Section 4. The primary data come from semi-structured interviews with political actors from the PPPP, PTI, MQM and PML-F, one independent candidate and one expert. Structured interviews were also held with 20 BISP beneficiaries. The background comes from the secondary sources reviewed in Sections 2 and 3. The findings follow the Narrative Policy Framework (NPF), so they trace how narratives about BISP are built, disputed and received.

5.1 The dominant narrative: BISP as a legacy of empowerment and social justice (PPPP)

BISP is a visionary social safety net in the PPPP narrative committed to poverty reduction and women's empowerment. It is also Benazir Bhutto's legacy.

The PPPP respondent, an elected local government representative, emphasized the programme's roots. BISP was launched after the advent of the PPPP in 2008, and is intended to provide women with unconditional cash transfers (UCTs) and shield them from economic shocks (P1, PPPP). The respondent felt it was completely fitting that the programme was named after Benazir Bhutto. In this view, the name was a symbol of her belief in empowerment, equality and social justice rather than a political move (P1, PPPP).

The respondent said that BISP is a transformational programme, which impacts 9-10 million families in the country, particularly in Sindh. The respondent had observed women spending the money on basic necessities like food and education of their children. Independent studies were also cited to demonstrate an improvement in targeting over time (P1, PPPP). In this story, the programme is a lifeline: children are better fed, women are empowered, and communities are stronger.

The respondent did admit some early issues, such as recommendations by political leaders. However, three subsequent measures were said to have minimised leakage and cronyism: the national socio-economic register, the digital payments (said to reach over 97% of the recipients) and the third-party verification. The differences in the number of recipients in the region were attributed to "real poverty differences" as poverty is more serious in Sindh (P1, PPPP). Throughout, the focus was on helping the poorest, whatever their political party.

Strong emphasis was given to women's empowerment. The respondent pointed to the benefits of paying the female head of household. Women gain a financial identity, for example through registration for a Computerized National Identity Card (CNIC), and they gain greater mobility (P1, PPPP).

5.2 Counter-narratives: politicization, clientelism and inequity

The counter-narratives came mainly from the opposition candidates (PTI, MQM and PML-F) and the independent candidate. Parts of the expert interview and the beneficiaries' experiences supported them. Their focus was politicization and problems in how the programme operates.

5.2.1 BISP as a tool for patronage and electoral gain

Every opposition interviewee, and the independent candidate, said firmly that BISP is politicized and that the PPPP uses it as a political tool. The PTI respondent said "everyone here knows it", with reference to the PPPP's election commitments to increase the scale of BISP and its relationship with votes (P2, PTI). The MQM respondent stated that BISP is branded as a "PPPP initiative", and is being used for "consolidating rural Sindhi votes" (P3, MQM).

The independent candidate took it one step further. In this account, the PPPP "has directly associated its identity with the program, using the name of Benazir Bhutto" (P5,

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

Independent), making it more a political brand than a social justice initiative.

When asked if pressure for their vote was an issue, beneficiaries responded in a variety of ways. But about half indicated that BISP influenced their vote, typically in favour of parties perceived as safeguarding or enhancing BISP (beneficiary interviews). The PML-F candidate described beneficiaries who felt "obliged to vote for PPPP in order to 'pay her debt'" (P4, PML-F). The independent candidate reported women who feared losing their stipends if they did not vote for PPPP candidates, and union council heads who had warned them that payments could stop (P5, Independent). The expert also cited the Pakistan Institute of Legislative Development and Transparency (PILDAT) as observing that the programme is used for political purposes (E1, Expert).

5.2.2 Targeting flaws, transparency and corruption

All the opposition accounts criticized Poverty Scorecard (PSC) targeting, and the expert and the independent candidate agreed with this criticism. The independent candidate cited studies that found high under-coverage, with 52.6% of eligible people left out, and high inclusion errors, with 73.6% of payments going to non-poor households (P5, Independent). The expert described deserving families who were left out while better-off families received BISP. Survey failures were often the cause. For example, eligible people were sometimes out at work during the survey (E1, Expert). According to the MQM respondent, the 2019 "purge" resulted in the exclusion of just a handful of beneficiaries in PPPP-held Sindh, pointing to political protection (P3, MQM).

Reports of corruption and mismanagement were common. The independent candidate pointed to an audit revealing that Rs 19 billion was misused. Government officials had been taking money and women had been pressured to pay money or bribes to agents (P5, Independent). The PTI respondent referred to an audit finding of Rs 141 billion in irregularities, including payments to individuals without a valid CNIC (P2, PTI). The MQM respondent also mentioned audits demonstrating illegal payments (P3, MQM). The independent candidate also stated that there was no effective grievance process (P5, Independent).

Politicization of implementation was also reported. The MQM respondent said that PPPP leaders at the grassroots level steer enrolment towards party sympathizers. In this account, application forms reach people through party channels instead of public registration (P3, MQM).

5.2.3 Ethnic and regional bias (MQM)

The MQM narrative described unequal implementation along ethnic lines. It claimed that Urdu-speaking urban constituencies in Karachi and Hyderabad receive far lower enrolment than the rural Sindhi areas that support the PPPP. The respondent called this systematic discrimination aimed at marginalizing MQM areas, and said that more is spent on rural areas than on the cities (P3, MQM).

5.2.4 Calls for reform and depoliticization

The opposition respondents called strongly for reform. The PTI respondent said the party had tried to depoliticize the programme by using the non-partisan, state-run "Ehsaas" title (P2, PTI). The MQM respondent asked for five changes: merit-based and transparent selection, a neutral name, independent monitoring, reassessment of beneficiaries and proportional distribution between provinces (P3, MQM). The independent candidate gave the longest list. It included need-based, non-political welfare, neighbourhood panels (as opposed to political activists) to decide on the selection, laws that linked payments to poverty indicators, improved targeting, complaint systems, and connections with skills training (P5, Independent).

5.3 Beneficiary perspectives: a lifeline tied to politics

The 20 beneficiaries shared their first-hand experience of the programme.

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

Most believed BISP was started by Benazir Bhutto or the PPPP, although a few younger respondents linked it to PTI's Ehsaas programme. Answers about who runs BISP today varied. Some named the Prime Minister or the federal government, and others named the PPPP or PTI (beneficiary interviews). The PPPP's original branding is strongly remembered. Awareness of later changes is partial.

The majority of the respondents indicated that politicians from the PPPP, PTI and PML-N talk about BISP, especially during election periods. This was referred to as vote buying by some. Others viewed BISP as a support that the state has to give. About half said BISP had an impact on their vote because they felt loyalty to parties that supported or expanded BISP. The others indicated that it did not influence their choice (beneficiary interviews).

The programme was appreciated by all the recipients for its assistance to the poor women. They were paid PKR 6,000 to 14,500 every quarter, and some of the households had education stipends as well. The most common issues were delayed payments and benefit amounts not adjusted for inflation (beneficiary interviews). The expert concurred that the stipends were too low, and recommended increasing them to at least PKR 50,000 per quarter (E1, Expert).

5.4 Expert perspective: duality and systemic problems

The expert saw two sides to BISP. It is an excellent poverty alleviation programme, and people in rural Sindh value it highly for its benefits. But there is a political part to it, too. The expert cited PILDAT reports of misuse for political purposes and had seen politicians making use of the programme during elections, including a by-election in Tharparkar (E1, Expert).

Regarding voting behaviour, the expert said that political messages relating to votes and BISP benefits have an impact on women in rural areas where literacy levels are low. These messages may also contain inaccurate information, e.g. that votes are monitored (E1, Expert).

The expert also noted that it was not a good idea to name a poverty programme after a politician, even in honour of the work of Benazir Bhutto. This was because the name influences people and turns the programme into a political issue, especially in Sindh (E1, Expert).

In the expert's view, targeting has serious inconsistencies. Deserving families are excluded, and wealthier people such as landlords receive assistance. Government checks catch some verifiable cases, such as government employees, but poor documentation lets others go unpunished (E1, Expert).

The expert judged the stipends far too low given inflation and recommended a large increase. For the long term, the expert recommended ending cash transfers, comparing them to making people beg. Cash transfers do not empower women socially, the expert said, because male relatives often control the money. The expert recommended programmes that build women's economic, educational and social capacities instead (E1, Expert).

The expert's suggestions came in stages. The programme needs to be renamed and should be more transparent and have better stipends in the near future. Planning a long-term shift to programmes to empower women and to tackle structural issues is also needed (E1, Expert).

5.5 Synthesis through the Narrative Policy Framework

Data reveal varying and sometimes divergent stories surrounding BISP. The NPF components provide a means of structuring them.

5.5.1 Characters

The dominant story is about the vision of Benazir Bhutto and the party that carries out her vision, the PPPP. The heroic action is BISP. The villain is harder to locate. The interviewee in the PPPP did not refer to any opponent as a villain and spoke mainly about Benazir Bhutto's vision and the programme's impact. Rather, it

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

was the party's public statements, set out in Section 3.5, which cast PTI as the party that sought to erase Benazir Bhutto's legacy and scale back aid payments to the poor. In the opposition and the expert accounts, the roles are reversed. There, the PPPP and corrupt officials are the villains using the programme for electoral purposes.

The poor women and children are the primary beneficiaries of BISP. Their acceptance of the story and of the help matters politically. They are also the victims when the system fails, such as with exclusion and exploitation.

5.5.2 Setting

The setting is Pakistan, and more specifically rural Sindh. The region has a high poverty rate and complicated social and political relations. The influence of large landowners is significant, elections are competitive and literacy and awareness are low.

5.5.3 Plots

Each group tells a different story. The PPPP plot is one in which responsible government realizes the vision of a leader to lift the oppressed, empower women and provide basic social protection. The opposition plot is one of political deception. In it, a welfare programme is captured for electoral clientelism through corruption, inefficiency and unequal distribution, often at the expense of the truly poor, or of particular ethnic or political groups. The plot of the beneficiaries is more complicated. They get help when they need it, but they may not get enough or it may come too late. The relief is real. Despite this, many believe it is connected to political favour, which may impact their allegiance or their vote.

5.5.4 Morals

The PPPP views BISP as a must-have programme for social justice under the party and believes that it should be continued and expanded under the party's banner. The opposition, on the other hand, sees BISP as a flawed politicized institution. It requires depoliticisation, transparency, better targeting and neutral branding or it should be incorporated within a more comprehensive national neutral framework. The expert's moral is different again. While BISP is a useful stopgap, it is not a permanent poverty alleviation programme or a pathway to empowerment. It needs to progress towards developmental programmes and rectify its political and operational deficiencies.

5.5.5 Narrative coalitions and audience reception

The PPPP and its supporters are a coalition that advocates BISP as a successful legacy welfare programme. There is a counter-coalition, comprising opposition parties (PTI, MQM, smaller ones) and critical voices of civil society, which emphasizes politicisation and flaws.

The PPPP's account of BISP's origin and its link to Benazir Bhutto is generally accepted by recipients, and some beneficiaries feel politically loyal to the PPPP as a result. Their reception of this account is also shaped by delays, small payments and corrupt middlemen. These experiences result in frustration and demands for change. In most cases the programme's name has become synonymous with a political leader for the recipient.

6. Discussion

This section compares the results with the literature reviewed in Section 3.

6.1 How Far the Evidence Supports Each Narrative

Some numbers that were referred to by respondents were cross-checked with published sources. The PTI respondent gave a figure of Rs 141 billion, which matches the Auditor General's report for FY 2023-24 (Khattak, 2025). In that report, Rs 116.95 billion was paid to more than three million beneficiaries who had no registered family CNIC. The audit classes these as unverified payments and makes no finding of theft. The independent candidate's figure of Rs 19 billion is also documented. In 2023 the Auditor General told the Public Accounts Committee that this amount had gone to about 143,000 government officials (Asad, 2023).

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

The same candidate quoted error rates of 52.6 percent and 73.6 percent. These are the under-coverage and over-coverage rates that Jalal (2017) estimated from 2011 BISP survey data in an unpublished senior essay. Later estimates also show high error rates. Using HIES 2018-19 data, Gazdar and Khan (n.d.) put inclusion error at 55 to 64 percent and exclusion error at 77 to 82 percent when the target is the population below the official poverty line. The World Bank found that more than 2.2 million households in the bottom 40 percent were missing from the NSER (Majoka et al., 2024).

The MQM claim that few beneficiaries were removed in Sindh during the 2019 review has been difficult to justify, at least for government employees. Of the 820,165 people removed nationally, 14,730 were government officials, and Sindh had the highest number of government officials receiving BISP ("BISP Beneficiaries Included," 2020).

So the opposition's claims about targeting failures and audit findings are largely supported by published evidence. However, in audit language the term "irregularities" can refer to cases where no money was stolen. No published data was available to assess whether there was ethnic bias in enrolment, so the MQM's allegation could not be checked. The PPPP's assertion that later reforms lessened political influence is partly supported. Parliamentary selection was replaced by the NSER and biometric payments. However, Ahmad (2024) and the audit findings show that the problems continued in other forms.

6.2 Politicization by Design

The literature and the interviews go in the same direction. The programme was named after the late leader of the party and more than Rs 2 billion was spent on publicity (Nangiana, 2013). During the first year party legislators also determined who the beneficiaries were (Jalal, 2017). These decisions linked BISP to the PPPP from the beginning. This study thus contends that the political use of BISP started from the very design of the programme, and subsequent cases of misuse feed into the problem that already existed. The Poverty Scorecard closed the most direct channel. Still, there is evidence of party-dominated survey teams (Ahmad, 2024) that suggests that influence extended to the survey and enrolment stage, where it persisted. The MQM respondent's account of forms reaching people through party channels fits this pattern.

6.3 Beneficiaries and Voting

In this study, about half of the beneficiaries indicated that BISP had an impact on their voting. A higher number of 85.4 per cent has been reported by Behan and Khatwani (2024) in Sanghar. The two studies are difficult to compare since they asked different questions. While Behan and Khatwani questioned whether BISP gave women greater voice, this study questioned whether the programme had an impact on party choice. Both of the results may be true. Women may have more freedom when voting, while only some of those receiving BISP link party choice to the programme.

Results of Sanghar elections as discussed in Section 3.3 are in line with Behan and Khatwani's assertion that BISP consolidated PPPP support among women. However, seat results alone cannot separate that effect from other causes. Possible causes include local defections to the PPPP and family candidate networks. Another is the PML-F's joining the GDA in 2018. The gains of the PPPP also started before BISP came into existence. The study therefore does not use Sanghar as a basis for any causal statement regarding votes and seat results.

The limits of the PPPP narrative are also visible in the beneficiary accounts. The PPPP's branding seems to have been successful because the recipients recall the party that launched the programme. Nonetheless, some described the payments as assistance the state owes them, and half stated the programme had no impact on their vote. The branding has fixed the programme's origin in beneficiaries' minds. Its effect on how most of them vote is much weaker.

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

6.4 Empowerment and Exposure to Exploitation

The impact of BISP on women is unevenly distributed. The literature reports gains in political voice, mobility and status (Behan & Khatwani, 2024; Jalal, 2017). Paying women directly has also put them in new danger. Agents take Rs 1,000 to Rs 1,500 per payment in Badin ("In Badin Agents Continue," 2024). Retailers in Rahim Yar Khan demand up to Rs 1,500 (Haq, 2023) and the independent candidate spoke about the pressure put on women to pay bribes. The expert also noted that the funds are often at the disposal of male relatives. Rural women are more vulnerable due to lack of literacy and unfamiliarity with ATMs. These are real but partial gains for women, as they rely on accountable local delivery and a working complaints system as much as on the transfer itself.

6.5 Political and Developmental Priorities

Through its Benazir Kafaalat cash transfer, BISP supports approximately 9 million households (Benazir Income Support Programme, n.d.). Despite this, political interests shaped the programme's design and marketing from the outset, and they also affected how it was implemented. The reforms, including the NSER and digital payments, were intended to minimise political manipulation. The interviews and secondary sources demonstrate that influence persisted in more subtle ways. Two examples are biased survey teams and campaigning with messages that imply payments are contingent on a party remaining in power.

The budget data aid in identifying where the losses occurred. Administration received nearly 1 per cent of the allocation for FY 2023-24, while media got a negligible amount (Hashmi, 2024). These shares are low for a cash transfer programme, and there is little evidence of leakage at the centre. Larger losses are at the point of targeting and at the point of payment. Agents take deductions from payments. Money is given to ineligible people, while other households are missing from the registry. BISP is the least successful at the local level in terms of delivery and verification.

These weaknesses are indicative of broader governance issues. Pakistan does not have a consistent national social protection strategy (Institute of Policy Studies, 2024). Local accountability is also low (Mohmand & Cheema, 2007), and public spending is influenced by elites (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024). Apart from this, the programme's partisan name and PPPP origin make it difficult for other parties to embrace it long-term. Consequently, it is in danger with every change of government. The developmental intent of the programme and the electoral interests connected to it were difficult to untangle in the renaming dispute of 2019.

7. Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Findings

This study explored the narratives created and challenged around BISP by the PPPP and the opposition parties, and the impact of these narratives on the lives of BISP beneficiaries. Read through the Narrative Policy Framework, the data show two broad narratives that largely oppose each other. The PPPP considers BISP as a visionary social safety net for poor women. It connects the programme to the political history of the Bhutto family and to its own claim to stand for social justice. The programme is effective in this account: it reaches a large proportion of poor families in Sindh and it has transformed their lives. The hero is the PPPP and the heroic act is BISP.

The counter-narratives come mainly from the PTI, MQM and PML-F as well as one independent candidate. They are partly supported by the expert respondent and some of the beneficiaries. They focus on politicization, clientelism and delivery failures, and they cast the PPPP as the villain, playing politics with the programme. The charges specific to PPPP are that it builds a vote bank under BISP's brand name, that voters are pressured, and that there are errors in the beneficiary lists, both inclusion and exclusion. The opposition also accuses the programme of mismanagement, lack of transparency and

JOURNAL FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES
An International Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

corruption. The MQM also alleges ethnic and regional discrimination in enrolment. All of them conclude with a call for depoliticizing the programme. Most claims of targeting errors and irregular payments are backed up by published audits and targeting studies. It was not possible to substantiate the allegation of ethnic bias.

There was a mixed response from beneficiaries. All 20 respondents had a positive attitude towards BISP as a support to poor women and most pointed to Benazir Bhutto or PPPP as the source of BISP. Approximately half indicated that the programme had had some impact on their voting decision, typically in favour of a party they expected to support or defend the programme. The rest indicated that it made no difference as far as they were concerned. Some of them called the payments something the State owes the poor, and they gave no party the credit. They complained about late payments, amounts not matching the inflation rate and deductions by agents. The branding of PPPP has influenced the beneficiaries' understanding of the origin of the programme. However, it was not the deciding factor for about half of those interviewed.

The NPF made it possible to show how these narratives are constructed through characters (heroes, villains, victims), the setting (poverty and political competition in Sindh), the plots (fulfilled legacy, political manipulation, beneficiary hardship), and the morals (continue BISP under the PPPP, reform or merge BISP, or move beyond cash aid). The results of the study collectively suggest a programme which serves two purposes. It gives cash to poor women, and it is also an electoral asset for the party that claims credit for it.

7.2 Recommendations for Depoliticizing Poverty Programmes

The study makes eight recommendations. Their goal is to improve the effectiveness and equity of programmes like BISP, to sustain them for the long-term, and to minimise opportunities for political manipulation.

The first one is branding. Social protection schemes should not be named after a party or a political figure, and existing schemes may be renamed in the course of time. It would be easier for all the parties to take ownership of the programme if the name is neutral. It would also be more difficult to manipulate the programme as a partisan instrument.

Second, the design of the programme, the selection of beneficiaries, monitoring and grievance handling should be entrusted, where possible, to institutions that are not subject to political influence. Civil society organisations and the local community must also play a part in this.

Targeting needs further attention as well. The Poverty Scorecard and the NSER should be improved to reduce exclusion and inclusion errors. Survey procedures should be open and impartial. Selection criteria should be published, and people who were wrongly left out (or wrongly included) should have an easy way to lodge a grievance.

Budgets are a fourth area. The law should tie social protection budgets and planning to poverty data and national goals. That way, funding would not depend on the preferences of whichever party is in power.

Cash transfers must also be connected to other human capital programmes such as health, education and nutrition (e.g. Waseela-e-Taleem, Nashonuma). They should also have linkages with economic programmes like skills training and support to microenterprises under Waseela-e-Haq and Waseela-e-Rozgar. Such connections should allow households to move out of cash assistance.

Delivery should be more decentralised. Local governments and community groups should be involved in the needs assessment and the delivery of the services in open and accountable processes. This would help to cut down reliance on the centralised and politically connected channels.

Public campaigns need to explain to beneficiaries and the general public that social protection is a responsibility of the state, and a citizen's right, irrespective of who is in power. If the public sees the payments in this way, the public link between aid and party patronage may weaken.

ISSN (Online): 3006-2071 | ISSN (Print): 3006-2063
Volume 4 • Issue 6 • October 2026

Finally, it is necessary to conduct third-party performance and financial audits on a regular basis, and to publish their results.

7.3 Limitations

The study has several limitations. Access to senior politicians and officials was difficult, and this narrowed the range of elite opinion it could capture. Political actors may also have given self-serving or strategically selective accounts. The researchers tried to limit this by drawing on several sources and reading the data critically. Respondents, including beneficiaries, may have given answers they thought were socially acceptable. Because this is a qualitative case study, the findings are specific to their context and cannot be generalized statistically to Pakistan as a whole. They may still transfer to similar programmes elsewhere in Pakistan or abroad. The researchers' own background and views may also have shaped the interpretation of the data in ways that were not fully conscious.

7.4 Areas for Future Research

The results of this study provide some lines of further research. A large-scale quantitative study could estimate the electoral impact of BISP in various regions and elections while adjusting for other social, political and economic factors. Comparative work may be done with other social protection programmes in Pakistan including PBM and the provincial schemes or with cash transfer schemes in other developing countries. It would ask how far each has been politicized, and what steps have been taken to depoliticize. Political rhetoric on BISP and beneficiaries' attitudes towards BISP could be followed under successive governments in a longitudinal study. This would demonstrate trends over time.

Other questions focus on particular reforms and actors. Knowing the impact of the NSER and the Biometric Verification System on reducing clientelism and enhancing targeting would be helpful. Media coverage should also be studied, including how BISP is being addressed in mainstream and social media, and how it influences public opinion and politics. In addition to the payments, in-depth qualitative research may look into the impact of BISP on women's autonomy in decision-making, their social mobility and their exposure to new risks. The issue of 'elite capture' in BISP and other programmes also needs study: how it happens, how widespread it is, and how it affects the outcomes of these programmes.

Declaration on the Use of AI Tools

The authors designed this study, chose the theoretical framework and methodology, and collected and analysed all the data. Claude (Anthropic), an AI tool, was used within Microsoft Word to help with the language of the manuscript. It pointed out errors in grammar, clarity and flow, and suggested corrections, some of which were short rewordings or the splitting of long sentences and paragraphs. It was also used to check revised sections against earlier drafts for changes in meaning. Authors reviewed every suggestion and accepted or rejected it. The authors take full responsibility for the content of this article.

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