

**RESEARCH PAPER****From Symbol to Strategist: Reassessing Fatima Jinnah's Political Agency in the 1965 Presidential Election****<sup>1</sup>Maria Javed, <sup>2</sup>Ghulam Shabbir and <sup>3</sup>Madiha Abbas**

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**\*Corresponding Author:** [ghulam.shabbir@uog.edu.pk](mailto:ghulam.shabbir@uog.edu.pk)**ABSTRACT**

This study reassesses Fatima Jinnah's political agency in the 1965 presidential election against Field Marshal Ayub Khan. Existing scholarship often remembers her as Madar-e-Millat and as Muhammad Ali Jinnah's symbolic sister, while giving less attention to her strategic judgment, gendered resistance, and democratic opposition. The article applies a qualitative historical-analytical method, using election studies, feminist historiography, published primary materials, contemporary press reports, and secondary readings of the Fatima Jinnah Papers. The study finds that her candidacy involved calculated acceptance, constitutional rhetoric, national mobilization, careful handling of religious opposition, and principled resistance to an electoral system controlled by Basic Democracies. Future research should examine the Fatima Jinnah Papers directly, add Urdu and Bengali press evidence, compare her strategy with later women leaders, and move beyond commemorative biography toward evidence-based studies of Pakistani democratic opposition within South Asian civil-military conflict and gendered political memory debates more broadly.

**KEYWORDS** Fatima Jinnah, 1965 Presidential Election, Political Agency, Basic Democracies, Women's Leadership**Introduction**

The 1965 presidential election remains one of the most revealing contests in Pakistan's political history because it placed a military ruler, Field Marshal Ayub Khan, against Fatima Jinnah, a woman whose public authority had been shaped by the Pakistan Movement but whose political judgment has often been hidden behind commemorative language. The election was held under the Basic Democracies system, not through direct adult franchise. Its electoral college gave the incumbent state substantial leverage, yet the contest unsettled the regime because Fatima Jinnah converted symbolic memory into a public challenge to authoritarian rule (al-Mujahid, 1965; Hussain, 2018).

The older narrative of the election frequently remembers Fatima Jinnah as Madar-e-Millat, the Mother of the Nation, and as an extension of Muhammad Ali Jinnah's moral legacy. That memory is important, but it is incomplete. It explains why she possessed national legitimacy, but it does not explain how she used that legitimacy, why she accepted the Combined Opposition Parties' nomination after careful hesitation, how she framed democracy against military rule, how she handled religious attacks on women's leadership, or why her public response to electoral manipulation mattered after defeat (Awan, 2015; Sultana, 2011; Zaheer & Chawla, 2023).

This article rewrites the Fatima Jinnah story from a symbolic biography into an agency-centered political analysis. It argues that her 1965 campaign should be read as a sequence of strategic decisions made under severe institutional constraint. Her political role

cannot be reduced to male opposition leaders who searched for a unifying name; nor can it be reduced to a sentimental continuation of her brother's memory. She acted within the limits imposed by gender, age, state power, controlled media, religious criticism, and an indirect electoral system. Within those limits, she made choices that reveal political calculation (Aneeq, 2024; Pirbhai, 2017).

The article therefore asks a focused historical question: when the documentary and secondary evidence is read around the key decision points of 1964–1965, does Fatima Jinnah appear primarily as a symbol used by others, or as a political actor who used symbolic capital strategically? The answer advanced here is that symbolic authority and political agency were mutually reinforcing. Fatima Jinnah's authority as Jinnah's sister gave her access to public trust, but her choices converted that inherited moral authority into anti-authoritarian mobilization.

The argument is also relevant to the broader study of South Asian women's political leadership. Women who enter politics through family lineage are often read through sentiment, sacrifice, and domestic virtue, while men in comparable positions are examined through strategy, negotiation, and institutional calculation. Chatterjee's discussion of nationalism and the "woman question" remains useful because it shows how anti-colonial politics often placed women at the boundary between public mobilization and moral symbolism (Chatterjee, 1989). Fatima Jinnah's case confirms that symbolic femininity can open the public sphere, but it can also restrict the categories through which historians interpret women's actions.

Recent scholarship makes a stronger case for Fatima Jinnah's agency. Aneeq (2024), drawing on the Fatima Jinnah Papers as cited in published work, argues that her political dissent did not begin suddenly in 1964. Zaheer and Chawla (2019, 2023) describe her campaign through populist and anti-dictatorial frames. Pirbhai (2017) places her life in the longer genealogy of Muslim women's public activism. This article builds on these works by reorganizing the evidence around four moments of strategic judgment: acceptance of the nomination, campaign design, response to religious opposition, and reaction to electoral defeat.

The article also adds relevant Pakistan-focused scholarship by Ghulam Shabbir and co-authors. Their work on Jinnah's charismatic leadership, constitutionalism, religious identity, and ideological narratives of Pakistan helps situate Fatima Jinnah's 1965 campaign within the afterlife of the Pakistan Movement rather than only within the mechanics of one election (Shabbir et al., 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d; Shabbir, Jawad, & Hanif, 2022). This addition is important because her rhetoric in 1965 repeatedly returned to the moral grammar of constitutionalism, national identity, and the unfinished promise of the movement that had created Pakistan.

The study further situates the 1965 election within wider scholarship on Pakistan's authoritarian state formation. Jalal (1990, 1995) explains how the military-bureaucratic state limited representative politics in Pakistan, while Feldman (1967), Sayeed (1967), Burki (1986), McGrath (1996), Ziring (1997), and Haqqani (2005) show that Ayub Khan's regime should be read as part of a longer struggle over executive power, controlled democracy, religious legitimacy, and civil-military dominance. This broader literature helps clarify why Fatima Jinnah's campaign was not only a personal contest against Ayub Khan but also an early challenge to the political grammar of Pakistan's military-led constitutional order.

## **Literature Review**

The earliest academic discussion of the 1965 election treated the contest as a political event rather than as a sacred national memory. Al-Mujahid (1965) analyzed

Pakistan's first presidential election soon after it occurred, emphasizing the political structure and the Basic Democracies system. This contemporary account is valuable because it predates later commemorative literature and reveals how observers understood the election as a test of regime legitimacy, opposition unity, and controlled political participation.

A second body of work consists of commemorative and biographical writing. These accounts emphasize Fatima Jinnah's devotion to her brother, her public dignity, and her moral standing as the Mother of the Nation (Awan, 2015; Sharif, 2022; Sultana, 2011). Such writing helped preserve her memory in a society where women's political contributions are often marginalized. At the same time, it sometimes narrows her political life by treating her public action as an extension of familial loyalty rather than as a site of calculation and independent judgment.

A third body of scholarship focuses on electoral politics and the institutional structure of the Ayub era. Hussain (2018) provides a detailed account of the Combined Opposition Parties, the Basic Democracies electoral college, the campaign sequence, and the official results. Musarrat and Azhar (2012) place Basic Democracies within the broader history of decentralization reforms under authoritarian regimes, while Ayub Khan's own autobiography offers the regime's defense of controlled democracy and executive-led modernization (Khan, 1967). Rizvi (2012) and LaPorte (1969) situate the election within civil-military relations and the politics of a garrison state. These works help explain why the 1965 contest was not a normal democratic election but a struggle over the legitimacy of military-guided politics.

The most important recent scholarship shifts attention from institutional mechanics to Fatima Jinnah's agency. Aneeq (2024) argues that her political role in 1964–1965 should be read in relation to longer patterns of dissent and organizational engagement. Zaheer and Chawla (2019) interpret her leadership through populism and argue that she projected herself as the voice of the people against an authoritarian regime. Their later work presents her as a sustained opponent of Ayub Khan's dictatorship rather than as a reluctant symbolic nominee (Zaheer & Chawla, 2023). Pirbhai (2017) contributes a fuller biographical framework by presenting her as part of a broader history of Muslim women's public leadership and by resisting the reduction of her life to the role of "her brother's companion."

The gendered historiography of Fatima Jinnah is also shaped by the archive. Scholars have had to work with uneven evidence, scattered press coverage, published speeches, memoirs, and secondhand descriptions of the Fatima Jinnah Papers (Aneeq, 2024; Jinnah, 1987; Khan, 1976). This limitation is itself historically significant. The relative scarcity of direct documentary material about her private political thinking reflects the gendered inattention that the article critiques. Women's strategic decisions often survive through traces: correspondence, campaign behavior, hostile commentary, public rhetoric, and the anxieties of their opponents.

Shabbir and co-authors provide a useful supplementary frame for reading Fatima Jinnah's use of the Pakistan Movement's moral authority. Their analysis of Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah's charismatic leadership emphasizes constitutionalism and political vision as central to his authority (Shabbir, Jawad, & Hanif, 2022). Their comparative work on Jinnah and Gandhi links charisma to public persuasion and South Asian anti-colonial political culture (Shabbir et al., 2024b). These works are directly relevant because Fatima Jinnah's 1965 rhetoric did not rely simply on kinship; it invoked constitutional loyalty and the betrayed promise of democratic Pakistan.

Other related works by Shabbir and co-authors illuminate the religious and ideological vocabulary within which the 1965 contest unfolded. Studies of religious identity and political mobilization show how religious language was repeatedly used in British India

and Pakistan to mobilize communities and define political legitimacy (Shabbir et al., 2024c, 2024d). Their work on ideological narratives in Pakistan's formation further explains why the opposition between democracy and dictatorship in 1965 could be framed as a struggle over the meaning of Pakistan itself (Shabbir et al., 2024a). These studies do not replace the Fatima Jinnah-specific literature, but they strengthen the historical context in which her agency operated.

The gendered dimension of this argument is strengthened by feminist and social-historical scholarship on Pakistani women's politics. Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987) trace women's organized activism and the recurring constraints placed on women's public authority, while Jalal (1991), Weiss (1994), and Shaheed (2010) show that women's political agency in Pakistan has repeatedly been negotiated through the combined pressures of state power, religious discourse, and patriarchal respectability. Read through this literature, Fatima Jinnah's candidacy appears not as an accidental exception but as a critical moment in the longer history of women's entry into high politics under hostile ideological conditions.

Despite these advances, one gap remains. Existing scholarship establishes that Fatima Jinnah possessed agency, but it does not consistently organize the campaign as a sequence of strategic choices. This article therefore reads the evidence through decision points rather than through biography alone. The aim is not to claim new archival discovery, but to reorganize the available record so that calculated judgment becomes visible across the campaign's phases.

## **Material and Methods**

This study uses a qualitative historical-analytical method. It is qualitative because it interprets texts, public statements, electoral narratives, press reports, and historiographical arguments rather than producing statistical measurement. It is historical because the evidence is situated in the political context of Pakistan between 1947 and 1967, with particular attention to the Ayub regime and the 1965 presidential election. It is analytical because it does not merely narrate events; it identifies moments where Fatima Jinnah's agency can be observed in relation to institutional constraints.

The study draws on five categories of sources. First, it uses election-focused scholarship, especially al-Mujahid (1965), Hussain (2018), LaPorte (1969), and Musarrat and Azhar (2012). Second, it uses biographical and commemorative studies, including Awan (2015), Sharif (2022), Sultana (2011), Fatima (2014), and Pirbhai (2017). Third, it uses published primary and near-primary sources, including Fatima Jinnah's *My Brother*, the collection of her speeches and statements, Ayub Khan's autobiography, *Shahabnama*, and *Time* magazine's contemporary reporting (Jinnah, 1987; Khan, 1967, 1976; Shahab, 1999; *Time*, 1964). Fourth, it uses recent agency-centered interpretations by Aneeq (2024) and Zaheer and Chawla (2019, 2023). Fifth, it incorporates related works by Shabbir and co-authors on Jinnah, political charisma, religious mobilization, and Pakistani national identity.

Additional contextual sources were incorporated to strengthen the historical base of the article. Studies of Pakistan's early political system and military-bureaucratic development (Feldman, 1967; Jalal, 1990, 1995; McGrath, 1996; Sayeed, 1967; Ziring, 1997) are used to interpret the Basic Democracies framework as a system of controlled participation. Studies of Pakistani women's public life and gendered politics (Jalal, 1991; Mumtaz & Shaheed, 1987; Shaheed, 2010; Weiss, 1994) are used to interpret the religious and gendered attacks on Fatima Jinnah's candidacy.

The evidence was read through a decision-point framework. Four decision points were selected because they represent moments where Fatima Jinnah confronted real political alternatives: whether to accept the COP nomination; how to frame and organize a

campaign under the Basic Democracies system; how to respond to religious opposition against women's leadership; and how to react to a defeat widely associated with state manipulation. These moments allow agency to be assessed not as an abstract quality but as observable judgment under constraint.

The method also uses gendered historiographical critique. It asks why certain acts are interpreted differently when performed by women. A male politician's decision to use symbolic capital, avoid an unnecessary religious debate, or preserve moral legitimacy after defeat might be described as strategic. Similar behavior by Fatima Jinnah has often been described as moral, maternal, or sentimental. This article therefore reads the same evidence with attention to gendered interpretation (Chatterjee, 1989; Tariq & Tariq, 2021; Zaidi, 2021).

The study has clear limitations. It does not claim independent consultation of the entire Fatima Jinnah Papers. Its discussion of archival material relies on published descriptions and quotations by Aneeq (2024). It also does not systematically examine Urdu-language newspapers, Bengali-language sources from East Pakistan, or private correspondence beyond what has already been published. These limitations do not invalidate the argument, but they require caution. The article should be read as a structured reinterpretation of available evidence rather than a claim of complete archival reconstruction.

## **Results**

The analysis produces six findings. First, Fatima Jinnah's political formation before 1964 made her a more experienced actor than the passive-symbol narrative allows. She had participated in the Pakistan Movement, managed public visibility within the gendered norms of nationalist politics, assisted refugee and women's welfare activity after 1947, and developed a public voice around constitutionalism and national responsibility (Jinnah, 1987; Khan, 1976; Pirbhai, 2017). Her memoir *My Brother* is not merely a family recollection; its careful attention to political timing, medical secrecy, and administrative detail reveals a mind accustomed to decision-making under pressure.

Her pre-1964 public life also complicates the assumption that she suddenly entered politics at the request of opposition parties. Aneeq (2024) shows that her political dissent had roots in the 1950s, including her disillusionment with the direction of post-Jinnah Pakistan. The interruption of her 1951 radio speech, widely understood as an attempt to control her public criticism, signaled that the state already regarded her voice as politically sensitive (Awan, 2015). Thus, her later challenge to Ayub Khan was not an accidental interruption of private life; it was the most visible moment in a longer pattern of political disagreement.

Second, her acceptance of the COP nomination was strategic rather than automatic. The Combined Opposition Parties formed a broad coalition that included ideologically diverse groups, from left-leaning nationalists to religious parties. Their inability to agree on a male party leader made Fatima Jinnah's candidacy attractive because she could stand above factional competition (Hussain, 2018). Yet her value to the coalition does not erase her own calculation. The published discussion of letters and political appeals before her nomination indicates that she weighed competing advice and accepted only after recognizing that her symbolic capital could become an effective democratic instrument (Aneeq, 2024).

This finding is strengthened by comparison with scholarship on charismatic authority in South Asia. Shabbir, Jawad, and Hanif (2022) emphasize that Muhammad Ali Jinnah's authority rested not only on personal magnetism but on constitutional purpose and political discipline. Shabbir et al. (2024b) similarly read South Asian charismatic leadership

as an interaction between moral authority, organization, and mass persuasion. Fatima Jinnah's candidacy worked through a similar structure. Her charisma was inherited in part through the Jinnah name, but its political force depended on how she attached that name to democratic restoration rather than personal entitlement.

Third, her campaign rhetoric shows purposeful design. She linked the 1965 contest to the unfinished democratic agenda of the Pakistan Movement. This allowed her to attack Ayub Khan's rule as a betrayal of Pakistan's constitutional promise without presenting herself as a dynastic claimant. Her campaign emphasized parliamentary democracy, direct elections, adult franchise, and the moral responsibility of the state to the people (Hussain, 2018; Zaheer & Chawla, 2019). This was a precise rhetorical choice. It converted reverence for Quaid-i-Azam into criticism of authoritarian rule, while protecting her from the charge that she sought office merely because of family name.

Fourth, the campaign operated under severe structural disadvantage. The Basic Democracies system concentrated presidential selection in an electoral college of approximately 80,000 Basic Democrats, many of whom were dependent on state patronage (al-Mujahid, 1965; Hussain, 2018). Ayub Khan defended his controlled political system as a correction to instability, but its effect was to weaken direct popular sovereignty (Khan, 1967). Musarrat and Azhar (2012) show how authoritarian decentralization could appear participatory while remaining politically managed. In this context, Fatima Jinnah's ability to mobilize large crowds in East and West Pakistan demonstrates that her campaign was not merely symbolic; it created public pressure outside the regime's controlled electoral mechanism.

This structural disadvantage becomes clearer when the Basic Democracies system is read against the broader scholarship on Ayub Khan's regime. Feldman (1967) and Sayeed (1967) show that the regime tried to convert executive control into a language of guided political participation, while Jalal (1990) and McGrath (1996) link such institutional engineering to the deeper weakening of parliamentary democracy. Fatima Jinnah's campaign therefore challenged both a candidate and a constitutional mechanism designed to filter popular sovereignty through a controlled electoral college.

Contemporary press coverage supports this interpretation. Time (1964) reported that her campaign rhetoric had become sharp enough to disturb the incumbent and that public meetings were noisy, charged, and politically consequential. Such reporting matters because it was produced during the campaign rather than after her death. It shows that observers recognized her as an active challenger, not simply as a revered national elder. Hussain (2018) similarly records the scale of her political reception, especially in East Pakistan, where opposition to Ayub's centralizing rule was already strong.

Fifth, the religious attack on her candidacy reveals calculated restraint. Ayub Khan's supporters sought religious opinions against a woman leading a Muslim state, but this strategy was politically risky. Some religious authorities supported the argument against women's leadership, while other scholars and religious parties eventually defended her candidacy or at least accepted it as legitimate (Sultana, 2011). Shabbir et al. (2024c) show that religious identity has often functioned as a mobilizing political language in South Asian history; Shabbir et al. (2024d) similarly emphasize the persistent interaction of religious and secular dynamics in Pakistani identity. The 1965 campaign is a concrete example of that interaction.

Fatima Jinnah's response was not to enter a theological contest on the state's terms. She did not allow the election to become primarily a doctrinal debate about women's authority. Instead, she kept the focus on democracy, constitutionalism, and anti-dictatorial politics (Aneeq, 2024; Sultana, 2011). This was not silence in the sense of weakness. It was calculated ambiguity. By refusing to over-answer the religious attack, she prevented the

regime from shifting the campaign away from authoritarianism and toward gender propriety. In gendered political environments, strategic avoidance can be as important as direct confrontation.

Sixth, her response to electoral defeat preserved political legitimacy. The official results gave Ayub Khan 63.31 percent of the electoral college vote against Fatima Jinnah's 36.36 percent, but allegations of state manipulation, patronage, intimidation, and official advantage remained central to the historical memory of the election (Hussain, 2018; Zaheer & Chawla, 2023). Shahab (1999), writing from within the political culture of the period, provides a useful reminder of the role of state resources and bureaucratic influence. Fatima Jinnah did not possess an independent party machine capable of sustaining mass resistance after the defeat, and the COP's unity weakened. Yet she publicly questioned the fairness of the contest, thereby preserving the moral force of opposition.

The political consequences of the election exceeded the result. The campaign exposed the vulnerability of the Basic Democracies system, made civil-military dominance publicly contestable, and demonstrated that a woman outside conventional party machinery could become the central figure of national opposition (LaPorte, 1969; Rizvi, 2012). Her later death in 1967 became surrounded by controversy and political suspicion, a fact that reflected the charged status she had acquired in the public imagination (Fatima, 2014). Whether or not those suspicions can be historically proven, the controversy itself shows that she was not remembered merely as a ceremonial figure.

The final finding concerns historiography. Fatima Jinnah's symbolic titles have preserved her memory but have also disciplined interpretation. Madar-e-Millat is an honorific of affection, but it has sometimes encouraged scholars and popular writers to place her within maternal sacrifice rather than strategic politics. Zaidi (2021) shows how her maternal image has continued to circulate in collective memory, while Tariq and Tariq (2021) connect her role to later women's leadership, especially the gendered reception of Benazir Bhutto. The problem is not that symbolic language is false; it is that symbolic language becomes inadequate when it prevents historians from recognizing political agency.

### **Analytical discussion: Symbol, strategy, and democratic opposition**

The relationship between symbol and strategy is the central interpretive problem in Fatima Jinnah's 1965 campaign. In the commemorative imagination, the titles Madar-e-Millat and "sister of the Quaid" often appear to explain her political significance completely. Yet political symbols do not operate by themselves. They require selection, timing, audience, language, and institutional placement. Fatima Jinnah's importance lay in her ability to transform moral memory into political argument. She did not campaign as a dynastic heir demanding obedience; she campaigned as a custodian of constitutional purpose, which made her symbolic authority available for democratic opposition rather than personal entitlement (Pirbhai, 2017; Zaheer & Chawla, 2019).

This distinction is essential because Ayub Khan's regime also used national symbolism. The regime claimed order, development, modernization, and stability as the true fulfillment of Pakistan's needs after the supposed failures of parliamentary politics. Ayub's own narrative in *Friends Not Masters* presents controlled political reform as a rational response to disorder (Khan, 1967). Talbot (2010) similarly shows that Pakistan's early decades were marked by recurring tensions between democratic promise and state-building anxieties. Fatima Jinnah's campaign challenged this regime narrative by insisting that stability without popular sovereignty was not national recovery but political dispossession.

Her campaign therefore created a counter-frame. The government framed the election as a choice between order and chaos; Fatima Jinnah framed it as a choice between constitutional democracy and authoritarian control. The Basic Democracies system was central to this debate. It allowed the regime to claim consultation while denying direct popular participation. In that sense, the system offered participation without sovereignty. Fatima Jinnah's criticism of that structure made her campaign a broader judgment on the architecture of military-guided politics (al-Mujahid, 1965; Hussain, 2018; Musarrat & Azhar, 2012).

The East Pakistan dimension is particularly important. The strength of her reception in East Pakistan cannot be explained only by reverence for the Jinnah family. It reflected deeper dissatisfaction with centralization, uneven representation, and the political economy of the Ayub regime. Her campaign allowed diverse grievances to find a common democratic language. This does not mean that she solved Pakistan's federal problem, but it shows that her rhetoric travelled beyond personality and entered the field of institutional critique (Hussain, 2018; LaPorte, 1969).

Fatima Jinnah's gender also sharpened the contradictions of the regime. Ayub Khan's supporters could not easily attack her moral standing without appearing to attack the family of the founder of Pakistan. At the same time, they could not ignore the challenge she posed. The turn to fatwa politics was therefore an attempt to shift the contest from legitimacy to propriety: not whether military rule was democratic, but whether a woman could lead a Muslim state. Her refusal to be trapped by that question preserved her strategic frame and prevented the state from reducing the election to gendered discipline (Aneeq, 2024; Sultana, 2011).

This episode also reveals why Shabbir et al.'s work on religious identity and political mobilization is relevant. The contest over Fatima Jinnah's eligibility was not a marginal controversy; it showed how religious arguments could be activated to settle political questions in a modern Muslim polity (Shabbir et al., 2024c). At the same time, religious politics did not move in one direction. Some religious actors supported her, demonstrating that Islamicate political language was contested rather than uniform. This complexity supports Shabbir et al. (2024d), who argue that religious and secular dynamics in Pakistan have been mutually entangled rather than neatly separated.

The same episode also speaks to the gendered politics of religious legitimacy. Jalal (1991) and Shaheed (2010) argue that Pakistani women's rights and political participation have often been negotiated through state-sponsored religious idioms rather than through a stable democratic commitment to equality. Mumtaz and Shaheed (1987) and Weiss (1994) similarly show that women's public action in Pakistan has required careful navigation of respectability, nationalism, and religious authority. Fatima Jinnah's refusal to turn the campaign into a theological debate can therefore be read as a strategic decision to keep the central question on democracy and dictatorship, rather than on the doctrinal legitimacy of women's rule.

The evidence also invites a more careful reading of her post-defeat conduct. It is tempting to judge political agency only by institutional success. By that standard, she lost. But historical agency in an authoritarian electoral structure cannot be measured only through office-holding. She exposed the regime's vulnerability, helped delegitimize the Basic Democracies model, and preserved a democratic memory that later opposition movements could draw upon. Zaheer and Chawla (2023) are therefore correct to see her challenge as part of a longer anti-dictatorial trajectory rather than as an isolated electoral failure.

The controversy surrounding her death in 1967 further demonstrates the political intensity created by the 1965 contest. Fatima (2014) documents why the absence of an

autopsy and the speed of burial produced suspicion among supporters and relatives. The point here is not to endorse an unverified claim about the cause of death. The historical point is that public suspicion itself emerged because she had become a politically charged figure. A merely ceremonial national mother would not have generated the same degree of anxiety, rumor, and contested memory.

The source limitations should also be treated as part of the result. If Fatima Jinnah's strategic thinking is harder to reconstruct than that of male leaders, this is not only a problem of missing papers. It is a problem of historical attention. Archives often preserve women's political action in indirect form because their agency was filtered through family roles, hostile press, state suspicion, and male-controlled organizations. The historian must therefore read patterns of decision-making, not only explicit declarations of intent. Such a method does not invent agency; it asks where agency is visible despite archival silence.

A final implication concerns Pakistani political personality studies. The history of Muhammad Ali Jinnah has been repeatedly examined through constitutionalism, leadership, charisma, strategy, and institutional design (Shabbir, Jawad, & Hanif, 2022; Shabbir et al., 2024b). Fatima Jinnah's history should be studied with comparable categories. Doing so does not diminish Quaid-i-Azam's significance. It corrects the imbalance by recognizing that Fatima Jinnah was not only the custodian of his memory but also an interpreter of his constitutional legacy in a new authoritarian context.

This approach also changes how her political legacy should be taught. Rather than presenting her simply as a revered figure of national affection, textbooks and university courses should place her in the history of elections, opposition politics, women's leadership, civil-military conflict, religious controversy, and democratic resistance. This integrated treatment would move the subject from tribute to analysis and would make Fatima Jinnah visible as a historical actor, not merely a commemorative image.

## **Conclusion**

This article has argued that Fatima Jinnah's 1965 presidential campaign should be read as political strategy rather than passive symbolism. Her candidacy was possible because of her public memory as the sister of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, but its historical significance lies in how she used that memory. She accepted the COP nomination after deliberation, transformed the Pakistan Movement's constitutional legacy into an anti-authoritarian campaign, mobilized across both wings of the country, managed religious attacks without surrendering the issue of democracy, and challenged the legitimacy of a controlled electoral process after defeat.

The findings do not deny the importance of symbolism. Symbolic capital was central to her political appeal. The point is that symbolic capital can be used strategically. In Fatima Jinnah's case, the Jinnah name became a resource through which she articulated a democratic critique of military rule. Her gender did not make her apolitical; rather, it shaped the conditions under which her politics had to be expressed, attacked, and later remembered.

The addition of scholarship on Jinnah's charisma, religious mobilization, and Pakistani identity strengthens this interpretation. Shabbir and co-authors show that leadership in South Asian Muslim politics often worked through a combination of constitutional language, moral authority, religious identity, and national ideology (Shabbir et al., 2024a, 2024b, 2024c, 2024d; Shabbir, Jawad, & Hanif, 2022). Fatima Jinnah's 1965 campaign belonged to this historical world. Her role was not simply to borrow charisma from her brother, but to redirect that charisma toward democratic accountability.

A fuller history of Fatima Jinnah must therefore move beyond commemorative biography. It must read her as a political actor whose decisions were made under the overlapping pressures of gender, authoritarian rule, religious argument, institutional manipulation, and national memory. Such a reading not only revises one episode in Pakistan's electoral history; it also improves the historiography of women's leadership in South Asia.

### **Recommendations**

First, future researchers should consult the complete Fatima Jinnah Papers directly. The present argument relies on published interpretations of archival material, especially Aneeq (2024). Direct consultation would allow historians to reconstruct the chronology of correspondence, party negotiations, campaign planning, and personal decision-making with greater precision.

Second, the 1965 election should be studied through multilingual sources. Urdu newspapers, Bengali-language newspapers from East Pakistan, private pamphlets, local campaign materials, and oral histories could significantly deepen the analysis. The reception of Fatima Jinnah in East Pakistan, Karachi, Punjab, and smaller provincial centers may not have been identical, and regional comparison would clarify how her message traveled.

Third, scholarship should compare Fatima Jinnah with later women leaders in Pakistan, particularly Benazir Bhutto, but without reducing either woman to family inheritance. Comparative research should ask how women leaders transform kinship-based legitimacy into independent political authority, how they manage religious critique, and how they navigate male-dominated party structures (Tariq & Tariq, 2021).

Fourth, Pakistani political biography should adopt an agency-based method. Male leaders are routinely examined through strategy, factional negotiation, institutional location, and rhetorical calculation. Women leaders deserve the same level of analytical seriousness. Fatima Jinnah's public image as Madar-e-Millat should be retained as part of historical memory, but it should not prevent careful study of her strategic role.

Fifth, university curricula should present the 1965 presidential election not only as an episode of electoral manipulation but also as a case study in women's political agency, civil-military conflict, constitutionalism, and democratic opposition. Such a revision would make Fatima Jinnah visible not only as a national symbol but as an active participant in Pakistan's struggle over democratic governance.

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