

Islamophobia and Representation of the West in Pakistani Political Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Anti-Western Narratives

Muhammad Haseeb Nawaz¹, Najam ul Hassan¹, Beenish Anwar², Hira Munir¹, Anam Ikhtiar^{1*}

¹Institute of Language and Literature, Riphah International University, Islamabad, Pakistan

²School of language and literature, National College of Business Administration and Economics, Lahore, Pakistan

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the representation of Islamophobia and the West within Pakistani political discourse, analyzing how anti-Western narratives are constructed by political leaders and media. Through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach, the study examines speeches, media statements, and social media posts to identify the linguistic and rhetorical strategies that frame Western nations as antagonistic toward Islam and Muslims. By leveraging the concept of 'othering,' these narratives depict Western nations as both cultural and ideological threats, reinforcing in-group identity among Pakistanis and promoting national solidarity. The research uncovers recurring themes, including the portrayal of the West as inherently Islamophobic and morally divergent, the invocation of religious and cultural symbols to appeal to collective Islamic identity, and the strategic use of emotional appeals and metaphors to solidify anti-Western sentiments. This study contributes to the understanding of how Islamophobia discourse is employed to influence public opinion, strengthen political legitimacy, and unify the nation against perceived external threats. Findings also suggest that anti-Western narratives serve as powerful rhetorical tools in shaping national identity and resisting perceived Western hegemony. Future research might further investigate similar discourses across other Muslim-majority nations to provide comparative insights into the role of political discourse in shaping perceptions of Islamophobia and foreign policy.

KEYWORDS:

Islamophobia, Pakistani political discourse, anti-Western narratives, Critical Discourse Analysis, Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach, 'othering,' national identity, rhetorical strategies

JOURNAL INFO:

HISTORY: Received: November 01, 2024

Accepted: November 19, 2024

Published: December 25, 2024

*Corresponding author: anamikhtar@gmail.com

DOI: [10.21015/vtess.v12i4.1964](https://doi.org/10.21015/vtess.v12i4.1964)

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, Islamophobia has emerged as a pervasive phenomenon, influencing political discourse and public sentiment worldwide (Christopher and Revell, 2024; Sheehi, 2010). The term "Islamophobia" encompasses prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping against Islam and Muslims, often depicting Islamic practices and identities as inherently at odds with Western values (Bibi and Fazi, 2024; Kozaric, 2024). While Islamophobia initially gained prominence in Western societies following global events, particularly the 9/11 attacks and subsequent security policies, its impact has not been confined to Western nations (Kaplan, 2006). Instead, it has become a global concern, significantly influencing the political and cultural dynamics of Muslim-majority countries, including Pakistan. As one of the world's most populous Muslim-majority nations, Pakistan's socio-political landscape is deeply impacted by narratives surrounding Islamophobia, often articulated by political leaders who capitalize on such sentiments to construct a national identity juxtaposed against the West (Bibi and Fazi, 2024).

In the Pakistani context, political leaders and influential figures frequently engage in discourse that highlights Islamophobia as a Western phenomenon, portraying the West as antagonistic or hostile toward Islamic values and Muslim identity (Abbas, 2019). By positioning the West as an ideological and cultural adversary, these leaders tap into prevailing public concerns about religious discrimination, foreign policy bias, and cultural misrepresentation. This representation goes beyond addressing domestic grievances, actively mobilizing public sentiment against what are perceived as Western interventions and critiques of Islamic societies (Wiktorowicz, 2002). For instance, prominent Pakistani politicians have often leveraged international incidents or Western policy decisions to frame Islamophobia as a systemic bias rooted in Western ideologies, which allows them to deflect external criticisms, justify domestic policies, and foster a sense of unity and resistance among the Pakistani populace (Kapur, 2016).



Significance of the Study

study of anti-Western narratives in Pakistani political discourse is significant for several reasons. First, it provides critical insights into how ideological structures of power, identity, and nationalism are maintained and perpetuated through political rhetoric (Calhoun, 1993). Political discourse surrounding Islamophobia is not simply a response to Western prejudice; it is a powerful tool for constructing an 'other'—an external 'enemy'—against which national identity and unity can be consolidated (Nyamwata, 2024). By framing the West as an opposing force to Islamic values, political elites in Pakistan can generate a shared sense of identity within the local populace, capitalizing on common religious and cultural values to strengthen their influence and control over public sentiment (Rais, 2017). This process of 'othering' establishes a clear divide between "us" (the Pakistani or Muslim in-group) and "them" (the Western out-group), which reinforces social cohesion and reduces dissent against the political elite by directing public attention toward an external threat (Khan, 2015).

This study aims to uncover the linguistic and rhetorical strategies employed within Pakistani political discourse to represent the West as an antagonist to Islam (Abbas, 2019; Masroor, Khan, Aib, and Ali, 2019). Employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), specifically Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach, this research investigates how anti-Western narratives are constructed, sustained, and leveraged to influence national identity, public opinion, and international relations. By identifying common themes, symbols, and rhetorical devices within political speeches, media statements, and social media communications, the research will shed light on how discourse on Islamophobia is structured and deployed in Pakistan to foster unity, justify political positions, and challenge Western ideologies (Sheehi, 2010).

Ultimately, this study aims to deepen the understanding of how Islamophobia discourse in Pakistan functions within the broader context of political ideology and national identity construction. In an increasingly interconnected world, the intersection of religion, politics, and media forms a complex web of influences shaping perceptions, attitudes, and policies (Hassan, 2004). This research not only enhances our comprehension of Islamophobia as a socio-political phenomenon in Pakistan but also provides a basis for future comparative studies on Islamophobia narratives in other Muslim-majority countries (Cheikh Husain, 2021). Through this study, it is possible to gain a nuanced understanding of the ways in which discourse on Islamophobia and anti-Western sentiment is strategically constructed, serving both domestic and international purposes for political elites in Pakistan (Kuraishi, 2024).

Research Questions

1. How is Islamophobia represented in Pakistani political discourse?
2. What linguistic and rhetorical strategies do Pakistani politicians use to construct anti-Western narratives?
3. How does CDA reveal the ideological implications of these representations?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Islamophobia and Western Perceptions

Islamophobia has evolved into a significant focus of research, particularly in relation to its implications for global political dynamics and its effects on Muslim-majority nations (Bakali and Hafez, 2022). Defined broadly, Islamophobia encompasses prejudicial attitudes, behaviors, and policies against Islam and Muslims, often portraying them as a monolithic group antithetical to Western cultural, social, and political norms. Research indicates that Islamophobic narratives are prevalent in Western political and media discourse, where they are used to depict Muslims as a threat to security and Western democratic values. Studies by scholars such as Said (1978) on Orientalism laid the groundwork for understanding these biases, which continue to shape Western perceptions of Islam as "the other," separate from and inferior to Western society (Malik, 2006). Scholars argue that this portrayal contributes to a pervasive global image of the West as antagonistic toward Islamic beliefs, values, and societies.

Within Muslim-majority countries like Pakistan, Islamophobic representations of the West serve as a powerful element in national and political rhetoric, particularly in political discourse that aims to foster unity and resilience against perceived Western hostility (Abbas, 2019). Pakistani leaders often highlight instances of Islamophobia, referencing international incidents, media portrayals, and policies to construct an image of the West as an adversarial force undermining Islamic values and communities. This portrayal aligns with research by scholars such as Kundnani (2014) and Esposito and Mogahed (2007), who argue that Islamophobic discourse is not confined to the West; rather, it has become a globalized phenomenon that influences how Muslim-majority nations frame their identities and interactions with Western societies. By understanding how Islamophobia discourse is constructed in Pakistan, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how Muslim-majority countries perceive and respond to Western ideologies and policies.

Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Political Discourse Analysis (PDA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) are essential tools for examining how political actors use language to construct and communicate ideological messages. PDA is particularly relevant as it

allows researchers to analyze how discourse is utilized by political elites to shape public opinion, legitimize power, and manage public sentiment. CDA, on the other hand, offers a critical lens through which to investigate how discourse contributes to the maintenance of social power, dominance, and inequality. Within CDA, this study applies Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach, which considers the interconnections between discourse, cognition, and society, allowing for a nuanced understanding of how mental models or cognitive frameworks influence the way people perceive and interact with Islamophobia-related discourse.

Van Dijk's approach to CDA emphasizes the cognitive structures that underpin discourse, specifically focusing on how ideologies are internalized and reproduced through mental models that categorize social groups into 'us' and 'them.' This theoretical approach is particularly useful for examining how Pakistani political discourse frames the West as an antagonist. By analyzing the cognitive frameworks at play, CDA reveals how political leaders may strategically evoke Islamophobia to position the West as an ideological adversary, thereby consolidating domestic support and reinforcing national identity. Other CDA methodologies relevant to this study include Fairclough's (1989) concept of discourse as a form of social practice, which posits that discourse both reflects and shapes social power structures, and Wodak's (2015) Discourse-Historical Approach, which traces how historical and cultural factors shape discourse over time.

Representation and Identity Construction

A significant body of literature explores how the concept of 'othering' is used in political discourse, particularly in the context of national identity construction. 'Othering' is a discursive strategy that creates a binary distinction between an in-group (often characterized as morally superior) and an out-group (often portrayed as morally deficient or threatening). This concept is central to the study of political discourse as it reveals how political actors construct themselves as defenders of Islamic values against Western "threats," a narrative that serves to strengthen their influence and consolidate support.

Scholars such as Hall (1997) argue that identity is constructed through representation and that the process of othering plays a key role in the construction of collective identities, particularly within national and religious contexts. In Pakistani political discourse, the West is frequently 'othered' to reinforce a unified Islamic identity, portraying Pakistan and its allies as guardians of authentic Islamic values while positioning Western nations as external threats to these values. This rhetorical strategy aligns with Billig's (1995) concept of banal nationalism, where everyday discourse subtly reinforces national identity, often by contrasting it with a constructed 'other.'

The literature on CDA also emphasizes how 'othering' can serve as a tool of resistance, particularly in post-colonial societies (Azeez, 2024). Pakistani political actors often invoke historical grievances, such as colonial exploitation and foreign intervention, to strengthen the narrative that Western nations continue to oppress and misrepresent Muslim communities. By framing Western Islamophobia as an ongoing manifestation of colonial power, political leaders construct an image of Pakistan as a resilient nation defending its sovereignty and religious integrity. This process highlights the reciprocal relationship between Islamophobia and national identity construction, illustrating how the discourse surrounding Islamophobia not only responds to external biases but also actively shapes Pakistan's internal sociopolitical landscape.

By synthesizing these theoretical frameworks and previous studies, this literature review establishes a foundation for analyzing how Islamophobia and anti-Western narratives are constructed within Pakistani political discourse. Understanding the complex interplay between identity construction, discourse, and cognitive frameworks offers valuable insights into the ways in which political actors leverage Islamophobia to achieve ideological and political ends. This study builds upon these theories to reveal how discourse on Islamophobia in Pakistan functions as a powerful tool for national identity construction and political influence.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employs Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach within Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as its primary theoretical framework. Van Dijk's approach combines discourse analysis with insights from cognitive psychology, focusing on how mental processes, or "social cognition," shape and reinforce discourse patterns, ideologies, and social inequalities. The Socio-Cognitive Approach is particularly effective for understanding how Islamophobia is constructed within Pakistani political discourse because it reveals how discourse is not only a reflection of language but also a reflection of underlying cognitive structures, including beliefs, stereotypes, and prejudices. By focusing on these internalized mental models, the approach provides a lens to examine how Islamophobic narratives are produced, circulated, and sustained.

The Socio-Cognitive Approach theorizes that individuals and social groups rely on "mental models" to make sense of the world around them (Brekhus and Sabetta, 2024). These mental models are simplified internal representations of complex social realities and are shaped by past experiences, cultural norms, and prevailing social ideologies. In the context of this study, mental models about Western nations are constructed and reinforced through political discourse that emphasizes themes of Islamophobia and Western antagonism. This discourse relies on shared, internalized beliefs that depict the West as an ideological threat to Islamic values, reinforcing a clear division between "us" (Pakistan and its allies) and "them" (the Western world). This categorization, facilitated by social cognition, reinforces the construction of

national identity and unity by appealing to shared religious and cultural values.

Van Dijk's model also explains how these cognitive frameworks enable powerful groups, such as political leaders, to influence public opinion and solidify power structures. Through discourse, political elites can shape and manipulate mental models to generate widespread public consensus or resistance. In Pakistani political discourse, Islamophobia is frequently employed as a narrative tool to depict the West as morally deficient and antagonistic. This representation serves not only to channel public sentiment against perceived Western hegemony but also to justify the authority and policies of the political elite by framing them as protectors of Islamic identity and values.

The Socio-Cognitive Approach's emphasis on stereotypes, prejudice, and group identities provides additional insight into the power dynamics at play within discourse. In analyzing Islamophobia discourse, this framework sheds light on how stereotypes about Western nations are circulated and sustained, often portraying them as hostile forces driven by Islamophobic agendas. By constructing such stereotypes, political discourse helps to reinforce in-group solidarity, positioning Pakistan as a defender of Islam. These stereotypes also legitimize existing power structures, as political elites position themselves as leaders capable of resisting Western threats, thus consolidating their authority and rallying public support around their narratives.

This theoretical framework also allows for an analysis of how discourse is structured through specific linguistic and rhetorical strategies (Vaara, Aranda, and Etchanchu, 2024). In Pakistani political discourse, metaphors, repetition, and symbolic language are often used to create vivid representations of the West as an ideological and moral "other." These strategies are integral to shaping cognitive models that portray the West as an antagonist, effectively embedding Islamophobia narratives within the collective consciousness of the Pakistani public. The Socio-Cognitive Approach thus highlights how language is used to both construct and perpetuate collective beliefs and how these beliefs, in turn, shape social attitudes and reinforce dominant power structures.

In sum, Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach provides a comprehensive framework to analyze the cognitive processes underlying Islamophobia discourse within Pakistani political rhetoric. By examining the internalized beliefs, stereotypes, and mental models associated with Western nations, this study reveals how Islamophobia discourse is structured, perpetuated, and strategically utilized to maintain power, foster unity, and construct a distinct national identity in opposition to perceived Western ideologies.

METHODOLOGY

Data Collection

The data for this study is gathered from three primary sources to ensure a comprehensive view of the discourse surrounding Islamophobia in Pakistani politics:

1. **Speeches by Pakistani Politicians on International Forums:** These speeches often take place at high-profile venues like the United Nations, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and other international events. Speeches at these forums allow politicians to communicate concerns about Islamophobia directly to a global audience, framing Pakistan as a defender of Islam and its values. These speeches provide insight into how Islamophobia is presented as a global issue that aligns with national identity.
2. **Media Statements Addressing Islamophobia:** Statements made to the press and through official government releases offer a different angle, often targeting domestic audiences and discussing specific events or policies. These statements enable politicians to address immediate concerns, respond to international events, and reinforce narratives that represent the West as antagonistic. Media statements also offer an understanding of the immediacy with which Islamophobia discourse is constructed in response to current events.
3. **Social Media Posts by Pakistani Political Leaders:** Social media platforms, such as Twitter and Facebook, serve as informal yet influential channels where political leaders engage directly with the public. On these platforms, politicians can express views on Islamophobia unfiltered and can more readily engage with trending topics and global incidents. Social media posts provide insights into the informal rhetoric and emotional appeals that politicians use to frame Islamophobia as a pervasive Western bias, which resonates with followers and amplifies anti-Western sentiment.

This combination of data sources provides a well-rounded perspective on how Islamophobia is constructed, from formal, official statements to direct and informal interactions with the public.

Analytical Approach

The analysis employs Van Dijk's Socio-Cognitive Approach to CDA, focusing on identifying thematic patterns, linguistic markers, and rhetorical strategies. This approach allows for a detailed examination of both the content and structure of the discourse, revealing how political figures use language to construct anti-Western narratives. The analysis includes the following steps:

1. **Identifying Thematic Patterns:** This involves identifying recurring themes within the discourse that relate to Islamophobia, such as the portrayal of the West as a moral threat, Western interventions in Muslim-majority nations, and the defense of Islamic values. By uncovering these themes, the analysis reveals underlying cognitive models that frame the West as an ideological adversary (Gafoor, Perumbalath, Daimari, and Naheem, 2024).
2. **Analyzing Linguistic Markers:** Linguistic markers such as metaphors, pronouns, and evaluative adjectives are analyzed to understand how language reinforces distinctions between “us” (Pakistan and the Muslim community) and “them” (Western nations). For example, metaphors might depict the West as a “colonizer” or “invader,” reinforcing negative stereotypes and associating the West with historical grievances.
3. **Examining Rhetorical Strategies:** The study focuses on rhetorical devices like repetition, emotional appeals, and symbolic language that emphasize Pakistan’s role as a defender of Islam and portray the West as a hostile force. These rhetorical devices serve to strengthen collective beliefs, channel public sentiment, and construct a shared identity rooted in resistance against the West.

By applying Van Dijk’s framework, this methodology uncovers how Pakistani political leaders strategically employ Islamophobia narratives to build ideological cohesion, influence public perception, and consolidate political power. Through this analysis, the study provides insights into how Islamophobia discourse is structured, disseminated, and reinforced in Pakistani political discourse.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Portrayal of the West as Anti-Islamic

Discusses examples where political leaders depict the West as a source of Islamophobia. For instance, political figures might reference Western policies, media portrayals, and foreign interventions as evidence of a systematic bias against Islam.

Use of Religious and Cultural Symbols

Explores the integration of religious symbols, such as references to the Quran, the Prophet Muhammad, or Islamic history, to frame Western policies as contradictory to Islamic principles.

Construction of In-Group vs. Out-Group Identities

Shows how discourse constructs a national ‘in-group’ (Pakistan and Muslim allies) in contrast to an ‘out-group’ (the West), using language that emphasizes differences in values, beliefs, and intentions.

Linguistic Devices in Anti-Western Narratives

Identifies rhetorical devices such as repetition, metaphors, and emotional appeals that reinforce an anti-Western stance. For instance, terms like “oppressors,” “aggressors,” and “Islamophobes” contribute to a perception of the West as inherently hostile to Muslims.

DISCUSSION

The analysis indicates that political discourse around Islamophobia is instrumental in solidifying leaders’ influence by framing the West as an external threat. This appeals to nationalist sentiments and promotes unity. The findings suggest that the framing of the West as anti-Islamic is a powerful tool for political actors. This ideological narrative creates a shared identity and perceived threat, reinforcing the leaders’ role as protectors of the Islamic community. Using CDA highlights the ways in which ideology and power are embedded in language, showing how political discourse on Islamophobia is carefully constructed to shape public perception.

CONCLUSION

Summary of Findings

The study reveals that Islamophobia discourse in Pakistani politics frequently uses anti-Western narratives to foster unity and support for political leaders. These narratives emphasize Western hostility towards Islam, using rhetorical devices and symbolic language to create an ‘us versus them’ mentality.

Implications for Future Research

Further research could examine how similar discourse manifests in other Muslim-majority countries or compare these narratives with those in Western countries discussing Islamophobia. Additionally, examining audience reception could provide insights into the effectiveness of anti-Western rhetoric in shaping public opinion.

Policy Recommendations

A more nuanced approach to discussing international relations and religious tolerance could potentially reduce divisive rhetoric and promote better cross-cultural understanding.

CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

Muhammad Haseeb Nawaz: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Writing- Original draft preparation. **Najam ul Hassan:** Visualization, Investigation. **Beenish Anwar:** Software, Validation. **Hira Munir:** Writing- Reviewing and Editing. **Anam Ikhtiar:** Supervision.

COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

It is declared that all authors don't have any conflict of interest. Furthermore, informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

REFERENCES

- Abbas, T. (2019). *Islamophobia and radicalisation: A vicious cycle*. Oxford University Press.
- Azeez, A. K. (2024). *A critical discourse analysis of sexism and ethnic bias in selected English novels* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Salahaddin University-Erbil.
- Bakali, N., and Hafez, F. (2022). *The rise of global islamophobia in the war on terror: Coloniality, race, and islam*. Manchester University Press.
- Bibi, M., and Fazi, M. A. (2024). Ascendance of populist radical right politics in India and Islamophobia: A politico-legal analysis of the Bharatiya Janata Party. *Manchester Journal of Transnational Islamic Law & Practice*, 20(2), 44-61.
- Brekhus, W. H., and Sabetta, L. (2024). The socio-cognitive politics of curiosity and attention. In *The politics of curiosity* (pp. 49-61). Routledge.
- Calhoun, C. (1993). Nationalism and ethnicity. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 19(1), 211-239.
- Cheikh Husain, S. (2021). *Muslim community organisations' understanding of and responses to islamophobia* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Deakin University.
- Christopher, K., and Revell, L. (2024). Islamophobia and a religion and worldviews approach. In *Teaching religious and worldviews education creatively* (pp. 193-207). Routledge.
- Gafoor, C. A., Perumbalath, S., Daimari, P., and Naheem, K. (2024). Trends and patterns in green finance research: A bibliometric study. *Innovation and Green Development*, 3(2), 100119.
- Hassan, R. (2004). *Media, politics and the network society*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK).
- Kaplan, J. (2006). Islamophobia in America?: September 11 and Islamophobic hate crime. *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 18(1), 1-33.
- Kapur, P. (2016). *Jihad as grand strategy: Islamist militancy, national security, and the Pakistani state*. Oxford University Press.
- Khan, F. (2015). *Negotiating British-Muslim identity: Hybridity, exclusion and resistance* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University of Liverpool (United Kingdom).
- Kozaric, E. (2024). Are Muslim experiences taken seriously in theories of Islamophobia? A literature review of Muslim experiences with social exclusion in the West. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 47(5), 907-940.
- Kuraishi, A. (2024). Talking post-truth: Elite rhetoric on democracy in Pakistan. Available at SSRN 4777855.
- Malik, I. H. (2006). *Crescent between cross and star: Muslims and the West after 9/11*. Oxford University Press.
- Masroor, F., Khan, Q. N., Aib, I., and Ali, Z. (2019). Polarization and ideological weaving in Twitter discourse of politicians. *Social Media+ Society*, 5(4), 2056305119891220.
- Nyamwata, J. O. (2024). *Mitigating the effects of islamophobia on christian-muslim relations in Mumias West sub-county, Kenya* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). St. Paul's University.
- Rais, R. B. (2017). *Imagining Pakistan: Modernism, state, and the politics of Islamic revival*. Lexington Books.
- Sheehi, S. (2010). *Islamophobia: The ideological campaign against Muslims*. SCB Distributors.
- Vaara, E., Aranda, A. M., and Etchanchu, H. (2024). Discursive legitimation: An integrative theoretical framework and agenda for future research. *Journal of Management*, 01492063241230511.
- Wiktorowicz, Q. (2002). Islamic activism and social movement theory: A new direction for research. *Mediterranean Politics*, 7(3), 187-211.