

## PORTRAYAL OF ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM IN PAKISTANI NEWSPAPERS: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

The current study aims to critically analyze the discursive representation of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistani newspapers. Thirty newspaper articles were selected from the two prominent newspapers of Pakistan, Daily Dawn and The International News, from January to December 2023. The research used Fairclough's three-dimensional model to examine how lexical and grammatical choices used in newspaper articles shape public perception and impact societal attitudes, intergroup relations, and national security. The study found that Pakistani newspapers often frame Islamic fundamentalism not very negatively but somehow associate it with threats like terrorism. The research highlights the key themes contributing to the negative portrayal of Islamic fundamentalism, such as the association of Islam with violence, radical Islam, fear of Islam, terrorism, and the portrayal of ISIS and the Taliban. It demonstrates how language, beliefs, and power relations intersect to shape the narrative of Islamic extremism.

**Keywords:** Islam, Islamic fundamentalism, Islam in Print media, Islamist ideology and radical Islam

### INTRODUCTION

The goal of the movement is to establish a society governed by Islamic principles. Since Pakistan sees itself as an Islamic nation where the religion of Islam strongly influences its culture and politics, there has been a debate within Pakistan about the idea of Islamic fundamentalism, which refers to rigidly sticking to traditional Islamic beliefs and practices. Some people see fundamentalism as a danger to society and democracy, while others feel it is

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The present study analyzes lexical and grammatical choices employed in newspaper articles to investigate media, religion, and politics dynamics.

Islamic fundamentalism is generally associated with Islamophobia, which refers to the fear and prejudice against Muslims and links Islam to violence. The studies show that Islam is often associated with terrorism, extremism, and negativity (Hassan, 2017; Rubab, 2023).

Arshad (2021) asserts that discrimination against Muslims must come to an end. Muslims who are involved in policies that are perceived as challenging the West or altering global power dynamics are frequently labeled as "extremists" and viewed as a threat. Attacks on Islam and its followers are on the rise, often justified in the name of freedom of speech, creativity, or democracy. Negative language once used to describe communism is now being directed at Islam since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Media coverage tends to highlight unfavorable portrayals of Islam, shaping public perceptions of Muslims. Headlines often employ terms like "extremist" or "terrorist" when discussing Muslims (Mohideen, 2008).

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(Jamil, 2023). Banal Islamophobia refers to everyday forms of prejudice and discrimination against Muslims. These forms are often subtle and normalized while Ontological Islamophobia is a deeper, more existential form of prejudice. It questions the very being and essence of Muslims. It goes beyond mere dislike or fear and challenges the

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(Powell, 2018). When the media negatively portrays Muslims frequently, it reinforces the idea that Islam threatens stability. Political discussions also influence public attitudes. Some leaders gain support by playing on existing fears of Muslims. They pass laws targeting Muslims for national security reasons. Even if laws do not directly discriminate, this approach keeps bias against Muslim groups normal, portraying their bias as reasonable. The discrimination Muslims face every day, increasing hate crimes, and negative media and political

messages have created an ongoing bias against Muslims globally. Many Muslims feel marginalized and insecure practicing their faith openly without backlash. Addressing Islamophobia is important for promoting a just society where Muslim communities are welcomed. Islamophobia refers to treating Muslims unfairly due to their faith. It leads to discrimination against Muslims in various forms.

When people show Islamophobia, they act in biased ways against Muslims and Islamic beliefs. Their words and actions portray Muslims as scary or evil, taking away their humanity. Islamophobia promotes the idea that Muslims are a threat to national security.

Addressing Islamophobia is a different challenge than promoting human rights. Regardless of religion (Yousafzai, 2021). Promoting a just community needs challenging attitudes that spread fear or hatred towards Muslims. When any group's humanity is denied, justice becomes harder. Overcoming Islamophobia is key to building a society where all

can live as equals (Qamar, 2019). There have been derogatory terms used, such as Islamic terrorism, Islamic fanaticism, Muslim radicals, Islamists, and political Islam (Yousafzai, 2021). To use Fairclough's phrase, the proliferation of Islamophobic language is a "linguistic form of domination and manipulation." For fairness and impartiality, people should practice critical language awareness when encountering prejudiced language. Attacks on Islam and Muslims are growing in number, all in the name of democracy, free speech, and artistic expression. Negative phrases that were formerly designated for communism have been replaced with ones demonizing Islam and its adherents since the fall of the Soviet Union. Within Pakistani society, Islamic fundamentalism—which is sometimes characterized by a rigid affiliation to traditional Islamic ideas and practices—has served as a source of conflict as well as identity. It emerged in various shapes, ranging from peaceful religious groups supporting traditional values to radical ideologies promoting extremism and violence.

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The discursive representation of Islamic fundamentalism in newspapers unveils the interplay of power, ideology, and discourse and highlights how media shapes public opinion (Benzehaf, 2017). In Pakistan, Islamic Fundamentalism has been a source of conflict due to rigid adherence to the conventional culture-specific interpretation of Islamic teachings. Previous research focused on representing Islamic fundamentalism, mostly in the Western media. There has been limited exploration of Islamic fundamentalism in Pakistani newspapers. This study investigated many aspects of this portrayal in the Pakistani print media to address the need for thorough critical discourse analysis and shed light on the complexities, potential biases, and socio-political consequences of this representation. The study examines how the linguistic choices used in the print media discourse portray Islamic Fundamentalism and how this discursive representation shapes societal attitudes, intergroup relations, and national security.

Research Questions

1. How does the language used in print media portray Islamic Fundamentalism?
2. How do the linguistic choices in print media portraying Islamic Fundamentalism impact

societal attitudes, intergroup relations, and national security?

### **Literature Review**

Islamic fundamentalism is a political and societal ideology in which proponents adhere strictly to early interpretations of Islamic texts. As the media significantly influences people's perceptions, it constructs reality through carefully selecting coverage choices. In Pakistan, the media has extensively covered the Taliban's involvement, which has played a crucial role in shaping the national perception of them (Hussain & Munawar, 2017). The Taliban is widely considered to be a negative force despite occasionally engaging in constructive activities. Major newspaper editorials blame the Taliban for the rise of extremism in the country, creating an image of them as the driving force behind the spread of radical ideologies. However, individuals' personal experiences and social circles still play a significant role in shaping their perspectives, in addition to media portrayals (Bouma, 2016). It analyzes this topic deeply and covers it based on broader social and political situations.

The newspapers often investigate factors contributing to extremism, such as political problems, economic differences, and historical issues. Daily Dawn aims to provide a deeper understanding rather than just sharing sensational news. It offers diverse opinions to its readers and strives to provide context rather than just sensation. It examines fundamentalism and explores the underlying causes of radicalism, such as feelings of injustice, poverty disparities, and historical factors. It presents multiple perspectives on complex issues, encouraging readers to think critically. International News focuses on world events. The newspaper reports on many problems related to religious extremism. This includes the impact on stability between regions. It also includes efforts to stop terrorism. Diplomatic ties are another issue. International News often emphasizes Pakistan's part in fighting radicalism. It acknowledges the problems Pakistan has within its borders. The paper covers a wide range of topics dealing with Islamic extremism. It highlights the challenges to counterterrorism and regional balance. International News looks at Pakistan's role in battling radicalism. It also notes the difficulties Pakistan faces in fighting this threat internally. The paper could endorse state initiatives

to spread a milder form of Islamic identity (Cervi, 2020).

Terms like Islamophobia and Radical Islam show the Western agenda to show Islam and Muslims negatively. This fear-based messaging reflects the Western view of Islam and Muslims. Being against Islam is common in the West. He says responding with counter-narratives can defend Islam and Muslims. He says that in America, Islam is linked to racial crimes, and Muslims are given a negative identity. Popular culture rarely shows Muslims accurately. Arabs are often shown as killers, rapists, or fanatics. The media also portrays them as rich but dumb abusers of women. Carr's (2014) research found that Islam and Muslims are usually shown negatively as cold, greedy terrorist villains looking to destroy the West. Associating hate speech with jihad also became common (Hanan, 2018).

Poole (2010) asserts that Western portrayals of Islam and Muslims post-9/11 are steeped in fear, often associating them with negative characteristics. Western academics marginalize Islam and Muslims. Muslim women are portrayed as "terror mothers," breeding more terrorists against the West along with men. All this subtly others and separates Muslims from others. He indirectly links the issue of extremism to the selection of imams. It suggests that having the wrong people in certain roles could lead to increased extremism and division within society. Imams have a significant influence on their followers' beliefs, so the message they convey is important. Misinterpretation of religious teachings is connected to various issues within society. Often, the issues related to religious leaders are overlooked, which can disrupt community harmony. (Ibrahim, 2012). The story of how Islam became seen as a source of fear and threat in the media began with Iran's 1979 revolution. Scholars note that the old Islamic threat emerged again when a Western ally, the Shah of Iran, was overthrown. Quickly, the Cold War view of communism vs democracy was revised to include Islam vs the West. One researcher says the revolution gave Western media a reason to develop Islam as a new enemy based on past tension. An analysis of British press coverage of Muslims from 2000 to 2008 found they were often associated with words like "terrorist, extremist, Islamist, suicide bomber, fanatical, fundamentalist, and militant." Ultimately, Islamists (or fundamentalists) emerged as seen as political and security threats. And Islam as an ideological and global cultural threat. The

development of portraying Islam as a political and cultural phenomenon constituting a threat also fed into the roots of Islamophobia. While the view of Islam as a threat underlies Islamophobia. In media, this generalized fear is shown through views distinguishing self from others as historically true differences between Westerners and Muslims. Western media increasingly presented Islam and its followers using negative words like terrorism, fundamentalism, extremism, terrorists, and fundamentalists. These fit the constructed story of violence being part of Islam, making it a threat to the West. The negative words some writers use, unintentionally or not, and that spread through media may create terror/insecurity and raise tensions between Muslim and non-Muslim communities in the West (Matthes, 2017). Studies also label Muslims as intolerant, misogynistic, violent, and cruel. Post-9/11, Western portrayals of Islam and Muslims use fear-based language and symbols. Most negative traits are linked to Islam and Muslims. Muslim women are shown as restricted and oppressed with limited views. Associating hate speech and #jihad with Muslims is another common negative portrayal. It is believed that Muslims use speeches and jihad to spread violent Islamic ideology. Western ideology aims to bring peace, while Muslims supposedly try to disrupt harmony created by the West through forceful means (Javaid, 2022). Tools used to show Muslims as deviating from norms and dangerous include descriptions, commonplaces, word choice, othering, polarization, consensus views, metaphor, comparison, and claimed authority. Emerging themes in this negative portrayal included Islam and militancy, radical Islam, Islamophobia, terrorism and Islam, Taliban ideology, and depictions of ISIS. The study concludes that negatively representing Islam and Muslims is common in American print media. This subtle weapon is skillfully used to propagate a desired image for political gain (Moosavi, 2015). Since 9/11, much media has focused on Islam disrupting the global order. Terms may reinforce ideas or phenomena the writer wants to draw attention to. Using these terms likely reinforced negative stereotypes regardless of context. Frequent use of the terms strengthens earlier prejudices and fears about Islam and Muslims. The media focuses on Muslim extremes without showing typical Muslim life and legitimizes terrorists as representatives of Islam, whether Muslim or not. Terms like "moderate Islam" or "moderate Muslims"

faced wide criticism. Liberal, modern Muslims may appear to be discussing extremism, indirectly differentiating them from traditional, extremist, Islamist Muslims. The researcher focused on terms discussed as used by media. Each identified term was searched as a keyword to compare frequencies discussed in earlier studies. On a worldwide scale, Western media uses harsh terms like terrorist, destroyers of peace, Taliban, and those who carry out acts when talking about Islam and Muslims. This keeps spreading stereotypes and biased views. The Western press favors some races and spreads stereotypes when portraying Islam and its followers. Muslims are often seen as traditional and a possible threat to Western values. This negative portrayal of Islam, along with common Islamophobic tones in Western media, follows Said's idea of us vs. them (Ghauri, 2019). It separates the Western and Islamic worlds, often as opposites. These findings underline the urgent need to address biased and stereotypical views in how media represents Islam and Muslims. It is important to recognize the potential effects of spreading such negative narratives. Previous research by these scholars also found this. They consistently saw Muslims shown in a way that was always the same and resistant to change. A large part of how the issues were framed focused on them being either "for" or "against" something. This highlighted some things but downplayed others. Regarding Muslims in the West, the media representation aligned with Said's view that they show Muslims as inferior and incompatible, needing guidance from the superior West. Globally, harsh words like "terrorists" were used when talking about Islam and Muslims, spreading stereotypes. The press exhibited racial biases separating the Islamic and Western worlds as us vs them (Siraj, 2023).

### **Research Methodology**

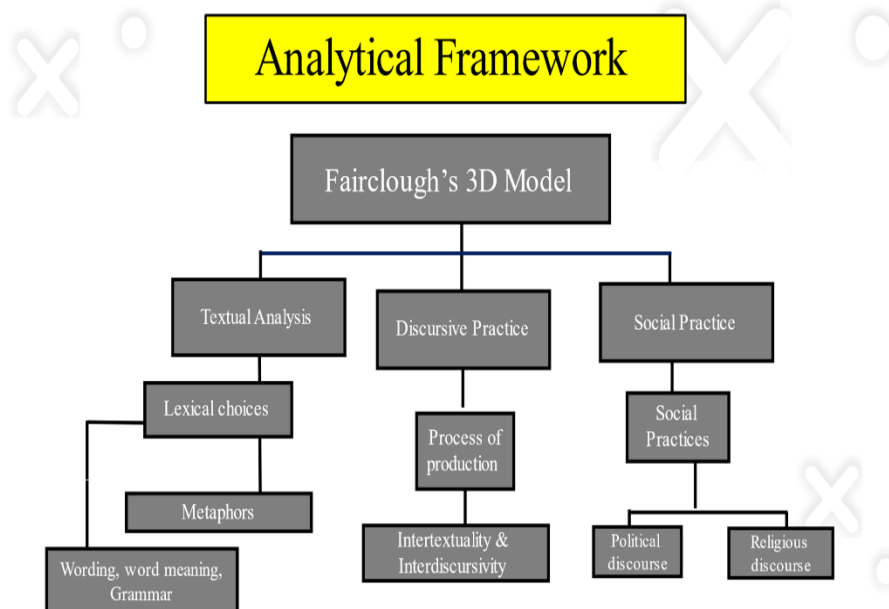
The study adopted a descriptive qualitative research approach, specifically employing Critical Discourse

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. Fairclough’s three-dimensional model is used to analyze the articles. It analyzed the linguistic strategies used by the authors in the articles. It will analyze the articles at three levels: description, interpretation, and explanation. Textual analysis refers to analyzing the language, focusing on lexical choices, grammar, symbols, metaphors, etc. Interpretation

involves examining intertextuality and interdiscursivity. Sociocultural analysis analyzes the use of language influenced by social practices. As a result, Fairclough’s three-dimensional model was utilized to deeply examine the linguistic strategies used by authors in Pakistani print media to portray Islamic Fundamentalism.



**Text analysis**

Fairclough believes (1992) that lexical choices are important in constructing and conveying ideologies, identities, and social relations with discourse. Linguistic patterns and lexical choices are used in the discourse to represent what is portrayed in the text. Zafar (2017, para 1) describes Muslims as “terrorist, Islamist, suicide bomber and militant, fanatical, fundamentalist, extremist and militant.” Islam is often unfairly associated with terrorism. Islamic fundamentalism urges the global community to combat racism and disrespect towards Islam. In a news article, Anwar ul Haq Kakar, the caretaker prime minister of Pakistan between 14 August 2023 and 4 March 2024, urges for the prevention of all terrorist activities and calls for an end to Islamic radicalization in India (Nadeem, 2019, para 2). He was concerned about the threats to Indian Muslims and Christians posed by far-right groups. Kakar opines that these groups put their safety and well-

being in jeopardy. Surveys have also found that Muslims felt more unfriendly attitudes from others after 9/11. Militant attacks are often depicted from a

religious perspective in news articles, directly relating them to Islamic beliefs. (Haneen, 2017, para 3). Lexical choices such as terrorism, extremism, threats, endangerment, and militants are used to link Islam and Muslims with violence and radical behavior. Victimization and discrimination like islamophobia, hate crimes, and prejudice emphasize the unfair treatment and attitudes towards Muslims, portraying them as victims. Religious and ethical judgments such as offensive, disrespectful, insulting, blasphemy, and inhuman cruelty are perceived as harmful and irrelevant to Islam (Hiba, 2023, para 1). According to Fairclough (1992, p. 198), the analysis of "wording" involves comparing the ways meanings are expressed in different types of text and identifying the interpretative perspective that underlies this expression. Contrasting terms like

*freedom fighter* and *terrorist* have been predominantly used in the text to represent staunch believers of Islam. "Fighting for freedom is different from carrying out attacks. People who fight for their country should not be labeled as terrorists. Freedom fighters seek self-rule for their country, while terrorists simply aim to harm people. It's important to address misconceptions, such as the belief that Muslims are responsible for spreading hate. The use of emotive and moral language, like invoking fear of terrorism and threatening dominance, elicits strong emotional responses."

The following metaphors are used to portray Islamic fundamentalism in newspaper articles. It was represented as a *growing threat*. The authors represent the Far-right and fascist groups of Muslims as a threat to society. Over time, more people join them and are influenced by their manipulative words (Anwar, 2022). Misconceptions about Muslims are often portrayed as a *distorted lens*. This harms many individuals by creating fear and negative attitudes towards Muslims. It spreads false beliefs that depict Muslims as threatening, rather than as ordinary people. These unjust views are widespread and prevent communities from embracing and understanding their Muslim friends and neighbors who also reside there.

The Islamophobic narrative being spread by various actors, including mainstream media and policymakers, refers to how stories and discussions shape people's perceptions of Islam and Muslims. This suggests how the way things are talked about can encourage negative attitudes towards Muslims (Boland, 2021). News reports often share alarming stories about Muslims, such as forced marriages, honor killings, and violence associated with Muslim groups. These kinds of media stories help perpetuate the idea that Muslims are generally angry and serious people. The stories can give the impression that Muslims will often react with anger or violence when their religion is questioned or criticized.

The authors strategically used passive voice to conceal the identity of the social actors. For instance, "The girls were abducted and compelled to convert their religion from Hinduism to Islam" emphasizes the abduction of girls for forced conversion to Islam while concealing the identity of the agent. This generalizes the negative portrayal of Muslims. It is important to note that Islam does not condone enforcement, and practicing Muslims would never force girls to convert to Islam.

### **Discursive practice**

#### **Intertextuality and interdiscursivity**

Fairclough (1992) argues that a text does not exist in isolation but rather influences or contributes to a broader array of meanings within a given discourse, whether intentionally or inadvertently. There are various instances of manifest and latent intertextuality. Manifest intertextuality includes direct references to press briefings, political speeches, policy statements, and so on. In the articles, the authors have cited statements of people holding important political positions. For instance, in one article, the statement of the OIC Secretary-General, Hissein Brahim Taha, was cited, indicating that we must always tell the world about international law. International law clearly says no promoting hate against religions. We have to always say to apply international law on this important rule right away. The statement of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MoFA) indicates that the act was meant to provoke and show fear of Muslims. It hurt the feelings of Muslims everywhere. Such acts of discrimination against Muslims and disrespect for Islam cannot be allowed even when saying it is free speech, thoughts, or protest. Statement by UN Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion The lines of the text indicate that "Since 9/11, more people think badly of Muslims and those who look Muslim. This fear has grown hugely. In times when some groups face shutting out, fear is common, and trust is low, Muslims may feel others think the worst of them. Donald Trump stated that they must strongly stop radical Muslim terrorists, or our great nation will be in danger. If we are not hard on violent extremists following Islam, the lives and protection of our amazing country could be at risk. We need to act against dangerous radical Islamic extremists strongly, or the life and security of our wonderful nation may be threatened. The lines of the text refer to "false propaganda," and the worry of getting hurt refers to bigger social issues. The words point to wider community stress and problems over changing faiths or different faiths mixing in the area. The text "made-up reports," along with fear of death, suggests difficulties between religions locally. Comparing the Quran burning in Sweden to something a Danish far-right leader did before hints at a past act. The text indirectly recalls another Quran fire by linking the Swedish case to an earlier similar thing done by someone from Denmark's far-right group. The lines of the text refer to the famous ruling

against Salman Rushdie for his book and violent protests globally over sketches in a Danish publication shaped perspectives that Muslims are those who will react harshly if their faith is questioned in any creative works, even in fiction. A 70-year-old British man named Mohammed Asghar was sentenced to death in another country for alleged blasphemy. He had a known mental illness. People in the UK were upset about this. The higher the figure of Muslims in one's thoughts, the more distress their presence causes. Mohammed Asghar had been accused of insulting religion. His daughter was very angry in a newspaper interview. This was because he had been shot while in jail. (Irfan,2014, para 3).

### Social practices

Fairclough (1992) believes that interdiscursivity can be applied to various levels, i.e., the societal order of discourse, the institutional order of discourse, and the discourse type. Advocacy for an international legal framework: Newspaper writers want global laws to stop faith disrespect and the spreading of hate. The Organization of Islamic Co-operation asks member countries to work with one voice. It encourages actions together to stop such events. International law and obligation: Pakistan referred to global law, saying countries must stop deliberately causing religious hate, bias, and attacks. This shows that many worldwide agree that minorities and their faiths need protection from discrimination or violence due to religion. Pakistan brought up worldwide rules stating that nations should prevent intentionally stirring up dislike, unfair treatment, and harm based on belief or faith. This mirrors a broader agreement globally on the need to safeguard religious groups and stop faith-motivated unfairness and attacks.

**The resolution calling for legislation:** The bill put forward by the Minister in charge of Parliament asks to make ruining holy items from religions against the law. This includes sacred texts, important figures, worship sites, and followers. The proposal shows a plan to safeguard feelings about faith and encourage respect for all beliefs. The resolution tabled by the Minister calls for making it a crime to desecrate symbols like books, people, places of worship, and believers for any religion. **International Day to combat islamophobia**, Mentioning the global day against the fear of Muslims, which Pakistan's ex-leader Imran Khan and the OIC group of Muslim nations support, stresses the worldwide focus on the

matter. It emphasizes the importance of Muslim countries sticking together.

### Discussion/ Results

Based on the above analysis, it can be observed that Islamic fundamentalism is not very negatively portrayed in Pakistani newspapers but somehow links Islamic fundamentalism with negative connotations by using different linguistic choices and language, which aligns with Hanan's (2018) argument that Islam and Muslims are mostly linked with the terrorism and even islamophobia. After the 9/11 incident, foreign countries' media, especially US print media, portrayed Islam and Muslims negatively, which hurt the image of Muslims all over the world. Therefore, the language that newspapers use impacts the reader's perception of Islam. The study's findings reconcile with Powell's (2018) argument that using different linguistic choices and language in articles can carry certain ideologies and target a specific pragmatic purpose. Similarly, Noshina (2021) has pointed out that Muslims are unfairly treated based on their religion in other countries. The depiction of Islam and Muslims in Pakistani Media portrayal of Islam and Muslims in Pakistani media is an important topic that deserves further examination. The research highlights the main factors that are responsible for taking Islamic fundamentalism in that way, including Islam and violence, radical Islam, fear of Islam, terrorism and Islam, and the portrayal of ISIS and the Taliban. It demonstrates how language, beliefs, and power relations intersect to shape the narrative of Islamic extremism. The study focused on only two newspapers, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the chosen timeframe for data collection may not capture all relevant developments in the discourse on Islamic fundamentalism. A more holistic analysis of this study could be achieved by using digital media platforms and journalists' interviews.

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