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A Critical Discourse Analysis of Manipulation and Control in Pakistani Political Rhetoric

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Abstract. This study that investigates how Pakistani politicians use language to manipulate and control public opinion. It explains that political speeches are carefully crafted to spread ideologies, consolidate power, and influence how the public thinks and reacts. The study uses Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a framework to examine these speeches. This model looks at how language is used to create meaning, how that meaning is spread, and how it affects society. Key areas of focus in the analysis are themes like nationalism



(fostering loyalty to the country), religious discourse (using religious references to gain support), and the construction of the "other" (creating an enemy or outsider to unite the public). The study also examines how politicians use ambiguity (vagueness or unclear language), repetition, and slogans to manipulate emotions and opinions. Ultimately, the study finds that political discourse in Pakistan is deliberately designed to shape how people perceive political issues and maintain the politician's hold on power.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), political rhetoric, Pakistani politicians, manipulation, control, Fairclough, nationalism, religious discourse.

Introduction

The critical role that political language plays in shaping the beliefs and ideologies of a society. Politicians are skilled at using language to craft specific narratives that can sway public opinion, advance their own political agendas, and reinforce their power (Geis, 2012). This is especially true in Pakistani politics, where the country's complex blend of political, religious, and national identities makes language a powerful tool for control. In Pakistan, politicians have a long history of using rhetoric to appeal to people's emotions, manipulate perceptions, and maintain their authority (Rasool et al., 2024). This often involves playing on themes like national pride, religious values, and creating an "us versus them" mentality by positioning certain groups or individuals as enemies or outsiders. By doing so, politicians can create a sense of unity and support among their followers, while alienating or discrediting their opponents.

The purpose of this study is to dive deep into how Pakistani politicians use these strategies to manipulate and control the masses (Jalal, 2014). The research uses Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore this. Fairclough's model allows the study to break down political speeches and look for hidden meanings and underlying ideologies. The focus is on key themes like nationalism (promoting loyalty to the nation), religious discourse (invoking religion to gain trust), and the construction of the 'other' (creating a common enemy to unite people). By analysing these elements, the study aims to reveal how politicians use language to maintain control and dominance in society (Simpson & Mayr, 2009). This study sets out to systematically analyze how Pakistani politicians do this. To achieve this, it applies Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Fairclough's model is particularly useful because it doesn't just look at what is being said but also examines the deeper social and ideological implications of that language (Janks, 1997). The model consists of three dimensions:

1. **Text Analysis:** This looks at the actual words and phrases used in political speeches.
2. **Discursive Practice:** This examines how these words and phrases are repeated and circulated in public discourse, influencing the way people talk and think about political issues.
3. **Social Practice:** This explores how these linguistic choices impact society, shaping power relations and maintaining the political status quo.



The study is particularly interested in three key themes that are commonly manipulated in political rhetoric:

1. **Nationalism:** Politicians appeal to national pride, framing themselves as defenders of the nation. This can unite people under a common identity while simultaneously discrediting opponents by labeling them as unpatriotic or threats to national security.
2. **Religious Discourse:** Given the strong influence of religion in Pakistani society, politicians frequently use Islamic references to strengthen their legitimacy. By positioning themselves as protectors of Islamic values, they win support and silence critics, who may be portrayed as anti-religious or immoral.
3. **Construction of the 'Other':** Politicians create a sense of unity by portraying certain groups (either internal political opponents or external countries) as enemies. This 'othering' strategy builds an "us versus them" mentality, where the politician presents themselves as the protector of the people against these perceived threats.

By analysing these themes, the study aims to show that language is not just a neutral communication tool. Instead, it's a deliberate instrument of manipulation used by politicians to shape public perception, control political discourse, and maintain power over the masses. Through these rhetorical techniques, Pakistani politicians manage to consolidate their authority, deflect criticism, and sustain dominance in a competitive political landscape.

Literature Review

It provides an overview of the key theories and studies that relate to how language is used by politicians to manipulate public opinion, particularly focusing on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, political manipulation, and Pakistani political discourse. Let's break down and expand on each part (Kress, 1990).

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a multidisciplinary approach that views language as a form of social practice. CDA scholars argue that language is not neutral but is shaped by power relations in society (Waugh et al., 2016). Norman Fairclough's three-dimensional framework of CDA, which includes text analysis, discursive practice, and social practice, is particularly useful in uncovering how language is used for domination and control (Ulinuha et al., 2013). Fairclough's approach emphasizes that discourse is shaped by social and political contexts. In political speeches, discourse functions as a means to legitimize authority and maintain control over the masses (Fairclough, 2003). This framework will guide the analysis of the linguistic strategies employed by Pakistani politicians to manipulate public opinion. CDA is a multidisciplinary approach that views language as more than just a means of communication. It considers language as a powerful social tool that reflects and shapes societal power structures. In this view, language is not neutral—rather, it is shaped by the power relations in society. This means that the way people talk and the language they use can reinforce social hierarchies, inequalities, and control. One of the leading scholars in CDA, Norman Fairclough,



developed a framework that is particularly useful for studying how language serves as a form of domination and control in political contexts (Van Dijk, 2015). Fairclough's approach is crucial in political discourse because it helps uncover the ways politicians use language to legitimize their authority and maintain control over the public. In other words, political language is not just about communicating policies or ideas—it's about controlling how people think and react, especially in complex societies like Pakistan, where national, religious, and political identities intersect.

Manipulation in Political Rhetoric

The study of manipulation in political rhetoric has a long history, with many scholars examining how politicians use various linguistic strategies to influence their audience (Martin, 2013). Political manipulation refers to the deliberate use of language to deceive, persuade, or control public opinion. The literature shows that politicians use a range of strategies, including:

- **Ambiguity:** Politicians often use vague or unclear language to leave their statements open to interpretation. This allows them to avoid being pinned down on controversial issues, while still giving the impression that they are addressing them.
- **Repetition and Slogans:** Repeating key phrases or slogans helps to reinforce a particular message or ideology. For example, slogans like "roti, kapra, aur makaan" (bread, clothing, and shelter) in Pakistani politics create simple, memorable messages that resonate with the masses.
- **Emotional Appeals:** Politicians often appeal to emotions such as fear, pride, or anger to manipulate the public. For instance, invoking national pride or fear of external threats can rally support, even if the underlying issues remain unaddressed.
- **Framing the 'Other':** This is a common manipulation tactic where politicians create a clear divide between "us" and "them" (the 'other'). By framing a certain group, ideology, or nation as an enemy or threat, politicians can unite the public against a common adversary. This strategy is prevalent in Pakistani political discourse, where opponents are often depicted as threats to national or religious values.

This part of the literature review shows that manipulation is not always about lying but can be about shaping how people interpret reality (Korn, 1997). Politicians carefully craft their language to influence how people think about particular issues, sometimes without the public even realizing they are being manipulated (Bennett, 2016).

Pakistani Political Discourse

Pakistani politics has a unique character marked by strong emotional, religious, and nationalistic themes (Durrani & Dunne, 2010). The literature suggests that politicians in Pakistan frequently use rhetoric that invokes:

- **Nationalism:** Politicians often appeal to national pride, especially in relation to conflicts with India or issues of sovereignty. For example, speeches may invoke historical events or national heroes to rally public support.

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- **Religious Sentiments:** Since Pakistan has a strong Islamic identity, politicians often use religious references to connect with the masses. By presenting themselves as defenders of Islam, they gain legitimacy and make it difficult for opponents to criticize them without appearing anti-religious.
 - **Construction of Enemies (Internal and External):** Pakistani politicians often construct both internal (political opponents, minority groups) and external (foreign nations like India or the West) enemies to rally the masses. This “us vs. them” narrative helps to unify the public behind the politician’s agenda while marginalizing dissent.

It provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how political rhetoric is used for manipulation and control in Pakistan (David, 2014). CDA, particularly Fairclough's model, offers a useful lens for analyzing how language is used to promote political agendas, reinforce ideologies, and maintain power. Additionally, the section on political manipulation shows how politicians use rhetorical strategies such as ambiguity, repetition, emotional appeals, and the construction of the 'other' to influence public opinion. Finally, the review of Pakistani political discourse highlights the specific cultural and historical factors that shape the rhetoric in Pakistan, focusing on nationalism, religion, and the creation of enemies as key elements in political manipulation (Toor, 2005).

Methodology

This study employs Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) model to dissect political speeches of prominent Pakistani politicians, focusing on the linguistic strategies used to manipulate public opinion and consolidate power. The methodology is divided into three interconnected stages: Textual Analysis, Discursive Practice, and Social Practice, each exploring different dimensions of discourse (Carbaugh, 2007).

Textual Analysis

The first step, Textual Analysis, involves a meticulous examination of the language used in political speeches. This stage aims to identify rhetorical strategies like ambiguity, repetition, slogans, and appeals to nationalism and religion (Chapp, 2012). Ambiguity allows politicians to avoid direct commitments, repetition reinforces ideological messages, and slogans create a memorable emotional impact. The speeches are transcribed and subjected to linguistic scrutiny to detect these patterns, revealing how politicians craft their discourse to manipulate perception.

Discursive Practice

The second stage, Discursive Practice, examines how these linguistic elements are not just isolated textual choices but part of broader social and ideological processes (Baxter, 2010). This involves analyzing the production, distribution, and consumption of political rhetoric. Here, the study investigates how speeches are crafted for specific contexts—such as election campaigns or parliamentary debates—and how media outlets and public discourse amplify these strategies to propagate ideologies. This stage also looks at how different audiences receive and interpret the political messages, deepening our understanding of how political elites shape public discourse.



Social Practice

The final stage, Social Practice, explores the broader societal and political implications of political discourse. This step considers how the language used by politicians affects public perception, consolidates political control, and reinforces social norms and ideologies. By evaluating the long-term impact of political rhetoric on the masses, the analysis uncovers how discourse functions as a tool of power in shaping political realities and maintaining dominant narratives

Analysis and Discussion

Nationalism as a Tool of Manipulation

Pakistani politicians often invoke nationalism to create a sense of unity among the populace while simultaneously constructing a narrative of external threats. The speeches of prominent politicians, such as former Prime Ministers, frequently emphasize Pakistan's sovereignty, independence, and resistance to foreign intervention. This nationalistic rhetoric serves to solidify their image as defenders of the nation and its values. One example is the use of slogans like "Pakistan Zindabad" (Long live Pakistan) in political rallies. Such slogans reinforce national identity and align the politician with the ideals of patriotism. Nationalism, in this context, is manipulated to rally public support and marginalize opponents, often labeling them as traitors or agents of foreign powers.

Religious Discourse and Ideological Control

Religious rhetoric is another powerful tool used by Pakistani politicians to manipulate the masses. By aligning themselves with Islamic values and principles, politicians can appeal to the deeply religious sentiments of the population. This creates a binary between the 'righteous' politician and the 'immoral' other, often casting opposition parties as anti-Islamic or unpatriotic. In speeches, references to religious figures, verses from the Quran, and Islamic history are often employed to legitimize policies and actions. This discourse not only strengthens the politician's authority but also silences dissent by framing opposition as a threat to Islamic identity.

Constructing the 'Other' and Marginalization

The construction of the 'other' is a common strategy used by Pakistani politicians to create division and foster support for their own agendas. This often involves portraying political opponents, minority groups, or foreign nations as threats to national or religious security. By creating this 'us versus them' dynamic, politicians can manipulate public opinion to view them as protectors of the nation's values. For example, speeches often depict India as an eternal enemy, invoking historical grievances to unite the population against a common adversary. This tactic diverts attention from internal issues and frames political agendas as necessary for national defense.

Repetition, Slogans, and Emotional Appeals

Repetition and slogans are central to political rhetoric. Repeated phrases create familiarity and foster acceptance of particular narratives. In Pakistani politics, slogans such as "roti, kapra, aur makaan" (food, clothing, and shelter) have been used by politicians to appeal to the basic needs of the population, while also implying that their opponents have failed to meet these needs. Emotional



appeals, particularly to national and religious pride, are used to generate a sense of belonging and loyalty. By appealing to emotions, politicians can obscure critical thought and rational debate, ensuring that their narrative dominates public discourse.

Conclusion

This study has investigated the intricate ways in which Pakistani politicians use language as a tool for manipulation and control. By focusing on key linguistic strategies—such as invoking nationalism, employing religious discourse, constructing the ‘other,’ and using slogans and repetition—the research has shed light on how these rhetorical techniques serve to reinforce political authority and marginalize opposing viewpoints. The analysis, guided by Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, reveals that political rhetoric in Pakistan goes beyond mere communication; it operates as a sophisticated mechanism for exerting control and shaping public perception. Politicians leverage these linguistic strategies to craft narratives that bolster their legitimacy and sustain their dominance. For instance, appeals to nationalism and religion resonate deeply with the public, creating a sense of unity and identity that supports the politician’s agenda while sidelining dissenters.

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