



The Use of Religious and Nationalist Rhetoric in Pakistani Political Speeches: A CDA Approach

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Abstract:

Political discourse is an essential element of democratic societies, shaping public opinion, policy decisions, and governance structures. This research explores the key aspects, history, and examples of political discourse, emphasizing how language, framing, and rhetorical strategies influence political narratives. By analyzing political communication in Pakistan, this study highlights how leaders use discourse to mobilize support, justify policies, and construct ideological positions. Through a detailed analysis of political communication in Pakistan, this study investigates how political leaders and parties employ discourse to mobilize public support, justify controversial policies, construct collective identities, and delineate ideological boundaries. It discusses the role of media, public speeches, manifestos, and digital platforms in reproducing or challenging dominant narratives. Furthermore, the research draws on theories of critical discourse analysis (CDA), framing, and political linguistics to unpack the relationship between communication practices and sociopolitical change. The findings underscore that political discourse in Pakistan functions as a dynamic tool for negotiation of legitimacy, resistance, and national identity, revealing broader insights into how discourse shapes democratic participation and governance across emerging political contexts.

Introduction:

Political discourse encompasses both formal and informal communication related to politics. It includes speeches, debates, media commentary, and social interactions that contribute to shaping political ideologies and actions. As a tool for persuasion and influence, political discourse is crucial in shaping governance and societal values. This paper examines its key aspects, historical evolution, and contemporary applications in the Pakistani political landscape.

Key Aspects of Political Discourse

Political discourse operates through various linguistic and rhetorical strategies that shape public perception and mobilize support. The following key aspects are fundamental to understanding how political communication functions:

Framing

Politicians use framing to define issues in ways that align with their ideological stance. For example, in a healthcare debate, one leader may frame it as a "human right," advocating for universal access, while another may frame it as a "personal responsibility," emphasizing individual financial responsibility.

Metaphors and Symbolism

Metaphors play a significant role in shaping political narratives. Terms like “guardrails of democracy” or referring to the economy as a “machine” that needs fine-tuning create strong imagery that influences public understanding and emotional engagement.

Rhetorical Devices

Repetition of phrases such as “we need change” or “hope and unity” reinforces a candidate’s message and increases recall among audiences. Politicians often quote experts or historical figures to lend credibility to their arguments.

Polarization and Ideological Positioning

Political debates often reflect ideological divisions. For example, conservative rhetoric on immigration may emphasize “border security,” while progressive discourse may highlight “humanitarian support” and “inclusive policy.”

Identity and Inclusion/Exclusion

Language in political discourse often seeks to define the “us” versus “them.” Terms like “true patriots” or “real citizens” create a sense of belonging while potentially marginalizing certain groups.

Language and Lexical Choices

Word choice plays a crucial role in influencing perception. For instance, referring to individuals as “freedom fighters” versus “terrorists” can significantly alter how their actions are perceived.

Use of Data and Statistics

Politicians selectively use data to support their arguments. A leader arguing for budget cuts may highlight national debt statistics, while another advocating for social spending may emphasize poverty rates.

Emotional Appeals

Political discourse often relies on emotions to persuade audiences. Fear-based appeals (e.g., “We are not safe until we secure our borders”) and hope-driven appeals (e.g., “Together, we can build a better future”) influence voter sentiments and decisions.

Narrative and Storytelling

Personal stories humanize political issues. A politician discussing healthcare may share a story of a struggling patient to make the policy issue more relatable.

1. Legitimization and Delegitimization

Political figures seek to establish their legitimacy while undermining their opponents. Describing an opponent as “corrupt” or “illegitimate” can weaken their credibility, while presenting oneself as working “for the people” strengthens their authority.

Historical Evolution of Political Discourse

Political discourse has evolved through different historical periods, each shaping its characteristics:

- **Ancient Greece and Rome:** Philosophers like Socrates and Cicero used rhetoric to debate governance, justice, and civic duty.
- **Medieval Era:** Political discourse was dominated by religious authority, reinforcing the “divine right of kings.”

- **Renaissance and Enlightenment:** Thinkers like Machiavelli and Locke emphasized reason, individual rights, and secular governance.
- **Revolutions:** The American and French revolutions introduced discourse on democracy, liberty, and equality.
- **19th Century:** Nationalism, socialism, and industrialization influenced discussions on labor rights and class struggles.
- **20th Century:** Totalitarian propaganda, Cold War ideological battles, and civil rights movements shaped diverse political narratives.
- **21st Century:** Globalization, social media, populism, and identity politics dominate contemporary political discourse, intensifying polarization.

Case Studies: Political Discourse in Pakistan

Pakistan's political landscape provides rich examples of how political discourse is used for mobilization and governance.

Imran Khan's Narrative of Corruption and Accountability

Former Prime Minister Imran Khan has consistently framed his discourse around the fight against corruption. His rhetoric portrays Pakistan's progress as being hindered by corrupt elites.

- Example: "The biggest issue in Pakistan is corruption. We cannot progress as a nation until we rid ourselves of corrupt politicians."
- This discourse constructs a clear good-versus-evil narrative, mobilizing public support against political opponents.

Nawaz Sharif's Development-Oriented Discourse

Nawaz Sharif focuses on economic progress and infrastructure development to validate his leadership's effectiveness.

- Example: "Under our government, Pakistan has seen economic growth and stability. We built motorways, launched energy projects, and brought investment to the country."
- This discourse seeks to establish competence and governance credentials.

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari's Focus on Human Rights and Democracy

Bilawal Bhutto Zardari positions his party as a defender of democracy and social justice.

- Example: "The Pakistan People's Party has always fought for democracy and the rights of the people."
- This discourse appeals to historical narratives and emotional connections with his party's legacy.

Maryam Nawaz Sharif's Discourse on Political Victimization

Maryam Nawaz often frames her political communication around themes of injustice faced by her family and party, criticizing state institutions and rivals.

- Example: "We have been targeted through political victimization, yet we stand firm in our struggle for democracy."
- This discourse builds public sympathy and reinforces political loyalty.

Conclusion

Political discourse is a dynamic and powerful tool that shapes governance, policy, and public opinion. The use of framing, rhetorical devices, and emotional appeals determines how leaders construct their messages and influence audiences. The historical evolution of political discourse reveals its adaptability to changing political landscapes, while case studies from Pakistan illustrate how contemporary leaders use discourse to consolidate power and connect with citizens. As technology and media continue to evolve, political discourse will remain a crucial element in shaping future democratic and political structures.

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