

Politics of Media Portrayal: Analyzing the Coverage of the Fall of Kabul in Pakistani Newspapers

Sami Ullah¹ and Abida Bano²

<https://doi.org/10.62345/jads.2026.15.2.7>

Abstract

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan marks an important political event in the region, having a profound effect on its neighbours, which has been widely reflected upon in the global media. This paper examines how Pakistani newspapers (English and Urdu) framed the fall of Kabul and how this framing is meaningful for policymaking. Using qualitative approaches, this research employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) and framing theory to analyse 10 purposively selected editorials from the selected newspapers - Dawn Daily (English) and Daily Ummat (Urdu) to examine meaning-making and the interpretation of events, the representation of actors, and the framing of the fall of Kabul 2021. The research focuses on word choice and expressions, as well as historical analogies, to understand how each paper constructed binary frames of “us” and “them,” selected facts, and implied moral judgements. Study findings show a clear contrasting pattern, such as Daily Ummat predominantly framing the Taliban’s takeover as a divinely sanctioned victory, employing religious lexicon, celebratory metaphors, and an exclusionary in-group narrative, largely omitting civilian suffering or human rights concerns. Conversely, Daily Dawn framed the event in geopolitical and humanitarian terms, emphasizing human rights concerns, refugee suffering, and women’s rights, using cautious, policy-oriented language. Both outlets used selective emphasis and omissions to convey their narrative, but with different ideological lenses. The study highlights the role of print media in constructing rival social realities and political opinions and underscores the necessity of media literacy in polarized contexts such as Pakistan. The results contribute to scholarship on media framing in the South Asian context in general and Pakistan in particular and suggest avenues for further research on audience reception and broader media ecosystems.

Keywords: Fall of Kabul (2021), Afghan Taliban, Critical Discourse Analysis, Media Framing, Dawn Newspaper, Pakistan, Afghanistan

Introduction

The Taliban takeover of Kabul on 15 August 2021 was a watershed moment in the geopolitical context of South Asian politics. As the Taliban took control of Afghanistan’s capital after the withdrawal of US forces, it sent shockwaves through the region, especially in Pakistan, which shares deep historical, security, and cultural ties with Afghanistan. Pakistani print and electronic media (both English and Urdu) closely followed this crisis, covered it widely, framing it in line with each outlet’s ideological stance. This political event was portrayed in highly polarized terms in the Pakistani media. For example, conservative religious media outlets celebrated the Taliban’s

¹Department of Political Science, University of Peshawar. Email: polsc231@uop.edu.pk

²Department of Political Science, University of Peshawar. Corresponding Author Email: abidabano@uop.edu.pk



victory by blaming the US-backed Afghan government for keeping them out of power, their legitimate right, while liberal media criticized the Taliban for undermining human rights, democracy, and inclusion. This contrast demonstrates that media often frame events in binary frames (us vs. them) rather than in complex, nuanced ways. Each side uses specific words and metaphors to create ingroups and outgroups, shaping the public's understanding of the same event. Previous research on Pakistani media has found similar dynamics but has mostly focused on local issues. For example, Arshad and Khan (2021) analyzed newspaper headlines about the federal budget and found that editors' political ideologies were embedded in their use of emphatic vocabulary. Ahsan et al. (2021) compared English and Urdu newspapers on post-9/11 topics and invoked that political leanings guide linguistic choices.

Media portrayals of critical global political events are embedded in ideological commitments and specific policymaking goals. Media scholars note that newspapers do more than report events; they choose language and narratives that advance particular worldviews (Fairclough, 1995). Hence, they play a central role in shaping public opinion on critical national and global political events.

Bano and Ruby (2025) note that the media follows neoliberal trends by erasing human suffering and pain to create a partial representation of reality, thereby perpetuating certain ideological standpoints. In the highly contested US War on Terror (WoT), the Pakistani print media's selective representation of facts through omitting human suffering and losses shows the media politics and neoliberal agenda of portraying drone strikes as legitimate tools to counter terrorism operations in the Northwestern borderlands of Pakistan (Bano & Ruby, 2025).

There is enough scholarship on the media portrayal of the Afghan Taliban takeover; however, no studies have critically compared Pakistan's coverage of the Daily Ummat and Dawn Daily's coverage of the fall of Kabul in 2021. Both newspapers present different perspectives. While Daily Ummat is well known for its religiously orthodox stance, Dawn, founded by Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan's first governor general, is typically recognized as a centre-left, liberal publication. While Daily Ummat focused on an Islamic or pro-Taliban narrative, Dawn covered the fall of Kabul from a humanitarian and geopolitical perspective. Such ideological disparities are frequently evident in language, according to studies of Pakistani news. For example, Arshad and Khan (2021) found that newspaper headlines use charged vocabulary to present editors' political leanings, and Ahsan et al. (2021) showed that after 9/11, English and Urdu papers used selective lexicon and figurative language to signal their political affiliations. These findings highlight that word choice and rhetoric in news discourse are usually infused with ideological intent. Some studies (e.g., Inayat and Singh, 2023) have examined the fall of Kabul through framing analysis in print media. However, none have applied CDA to directly compare an English-language mainstream paper with an Islamist Urdu-language paper on this event.

This gap motivates further examination of Dawn and Ummat dailies, given their contrasting political ideologies. By comparing their editorials, the study illuminates how different segments of Pakistani society are oriented through news language and how this may further deepen polarization. To fill the theoretical and methodological gaps, this paper asks the research question, "How did the editorials of Dawn (English) and Daily Ummat (Urdu) construct the Fall of Kabul (15 to 19 August 2021) in terms of social actors, causal attributions, and recommended responses, and what do these constructions reveal about each paper's ideological orientation?" It also investigates how each outlet creates "us" versus "them" identities through language and framing, aligning these portrayals with each paper's broader ideology (one that of right and conservative and second of liberal and secular). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a lens to examine how editorials construct meanings and ideologies through language (Ahsan et al., 2021). By

analyzing editorials published from 15 to 19 August 2021, the research explores how language reveals each paper's ideological and political commitments through the framing of the fall of Kabul. This paper triangulates CDA and framing theory to understand the patterns of both newspapers.

CDA views language as a social practice embedded in power relations through analyzing texts, contexts, and broader social factors (Fairclough, 1995). Practically speaking, the analysis entails meticulously reading editorials from Dawn and Daily Ummat for about a week after the Taliban took control of Kabul to observe, in Entman's words, the terminology, metaphors, and grammar in headlines and opinion pieces. Even seemingly insignificant details, such as the use of passive verbs or adjective selections, might reveal a paper's prejudice and change who seems to be at fault.

Each media outlet is expected to present itself positively and criticize the other side. For instance, Dawn may describe its preferred actors in a positive light and use harsher terms for opponents. Ummat may do the opposite. By examining these choices, CDA helps uncover hidden biases and assumptions in newspaper language.

This research is significant both academically and practically. Academically, it extends CDA research to a contemporary South Asian geopolitical event, showing how ideology shapes language. For example, an English-language newspaper and an Urdu-language newspaper (with a broader readership among less-educated people) might use different words and metaphors to influence readers' opinions about the same news.

Scholars in linguistics, media studies, and political communication seeking clear evidence of linguistic bias will find this study useful. It emphasizes the vital role of media literacy in Pakistan's divided media landscape. Readers can better interpret news if they understand that even the passive voice or adjective choice can express ideological bias. Headlines and language choices often subtly "reflect editors' ideologies," as Arshad and Khan (2021) note. Journalists, educators, and the public can gain insight into how Dawn and Daily Ummat align with specific narratives about Afghanistan through our comparison. Because the fall of Kabul reshaped regional dynamics, understanding how it is portrayed in Pakistani media is important. It helps explain subsequent policies and public opinion. By showing how news language contains ideological cues, this study offers deeper insight into how power and ideology are mediated through words.

Literature Review

The swift fall of Kabul in August 2021 prompted intense worldwide media coverage. Scholars say that news coverage is ideologically framed, especially in editorials. In Pakistan, the liberal English-language press (such as Dawn) and the conservative Urdu media (such as Daily Ummat and Nawa-i-Waqt) used very different frames. Comparative studies also show Western and international outlets each spun the event to fit their own national ideologies.

Scholars stress the liberal-conservative divide in the Pakistani press. Dawn, a leading English daily, generally supports centrist or liberal views. Daily Ummat (Urdu) and Nawa-i-Waqt are right-wing and often pro-Islamist. Marwan and Anwar (2022) note that "Dawn is considered the leftist newspaper ... Daily Ummat is considered a right-wing newspaper with conservative views." Marwan et al. (2022) found that Daily Ummat gave much more space to the Taliban perspective than Dawn did in their Afghanistan coverage study.

In editorials on Kabul's fall, Dawn struck a cautiously pragmatic tone. The Taliban's challenge editorial warned that the Taliban "cannot expect to gain international credibility... if they do not reach out to their former rivals." It urged an inclusive Afghan government and respect for human rights; For instance, it urged the Taliban to "show by their actions that they respect the rights of

women" while in power. This is consistent with Dawn's liberal, internationalist framing, which acknowledges the Taliban's victory but frames it in terms of obligations (including inclusive governance and women's education) rather than celebration. In summary, Dawn used cautionary geopolitics and democratic values to characterize the collapse of Kabul. In contrast, the takeover was applauded by the publication Ummat, a well-known Urdu publication that supports the Taliban. Ummat was ecstatic, as evidenced by the headline, "Afghan Taliban's victory is undoubtedly a victory of the entire Muslim Ummah." It emphasized Christian unity by portraying the withdrawal of American forces as a heavenly victory over "infidels" and "superpowers." Ummat's editorials even urged the immediate implementation of Sharia law under the new regime. This pro-Taliban framing of Kabul's fall as a Muslim victory starkly contrasts with Dawn's cautious approach.

Scholars have observed this disparity. Ahsan et al. (2021) found that Urdu dailies such as Nawa-i-Waqt use figurative, prejudiced language ("stirring vocabulary") when discussing Islam-related issues, whereas Dawn's language is milder. Marwan et al. (2022) confirm Ummat's slant toward Taliban viewpoints. Yasin et al. (2022) quantitatively analyzed Pakistani editorials before and after August 2021. They report a dramatic shift: Pakistani print media went from negative to positive reporting on the Taliban after their takeover. In other words, many Urdu and English editorials (including conservative outlets) quickly aligned to praise or accept the Taliban once they succeeded. This shift underscores how ideological allegiance (and patriotism or religious identity) influenced framing.

The body of research demonstrates that whereas Daily Ummat and other right-wing publications presented Kabul as a victorious Islamic conquest, Dawn's editorials focused on stability, rights, and Pakistan's diplomatic interests. The language choice, e.g., "Muslim Ummah," "infidels," "victory over superpowers" in Daily Ummat versus "inclusive government" and "rights of women" in Dawn, reveals opposing ideological frames. Both the verbs used and the descriptors (aggrandizing vs. critical) signal each outlet's viewpoint.

Analyses of international media show similarly divisive narratives. Dawn was compared to the New York Times, Moscow Times, and The Hindu (India) from July to September of 2021 by Inayat and Singh (2023). Using indexing theory, they discovered that American and Russian media sources were much more critical of their own governments' functions. Dawn and The Hindu, on the other hand, used a "proximity" frame aligned with governmental objectives. In particular, Dawn and The Hindu presented Kabul's collapse from the perspective of Pakistan's and India's stakes, while the NYT and Moscow Times provided space for "activated oppositional voices." This comparative lens is extended in Haimed (2024). He reveals blatant ideological biases by examining headlines from the US, UK, China, and Russia. American media, such as the New York Times, adopted a realistic stance, admitting the shortcomings of American policies and carefully weighing interaction with the Taliban. In contrast, British tabloids employed dramatic, emotive language to denounce the Taliban and portray the fall as a "humiliating defeat" for morally upright Britain.

In the meantime, the fall of Kabul was portrayed by Chinese and Russian media as a strategic win over American hegemony and a triumph of anti-Western forces. These narratives support national interests: China and Russia hailed the departure as confirmation of their geopolitical beliefs, while the United States saw it as regrettable but inevitable. A similar ideological frame was noted in other international perspectives. For instance, Chinese state media hailed the Taliban takeover as proof of Western failure, while The Guardian described it as "terrifying." Scholars stress that national principles (such as anti-imperialism, moralism, and human rights) and geopolitical agendas were used by the news media of all major powers to shape coverage of Kabul's collapse. To put it briefly,

the international media did not view the fall of Kabul as a neutral event; instead, each outlet accentuated frameworks that resonated with its audience's ideologies and its nation's stance.

These investigations reveal several important aspects. An agenda is clearly projected by editorials: liberal Pakistani papers emphasize governance, rights, and caution, while conservative ones emphasize Islam and victory. Western media frames differ across nations: Chinese and Russian outlets highlight Western decline and strategic victories, while U.S. and U.K. outlets highlight democratic failure or victims' suffering. Bias is also evident in word choice: Pakistani editorials either use formal diplomatic language (Dawn: "broad-based, fully representative government") or joyful religious language (Ummat: "overwhelmed by the success of Taliban over infidels"). Haimed (2024) observes that emotive language (blame, terror) is used globally, whereas triumphalist rhetoric (success, collapse) varies by outlet. Another motif is the change in position: Yasin et al. (2022) note that after August 2021, Pakistani editorials shifted from skepticism toward Taliban control to support, suggesting that the outcome influenced framing. Lastly, media coverage frequently reflected the policies of their governments: Dawn and The Hindu, for instance, presented Kabul's fall in line with their official narratives, and Haimed's analysis suggests that when there is an elite consensus, the media either parrots official narratives or provides only minimal opposition.

Newspaper editorials that frame the Fall of Kabul are ideologically motivated, according to existing research. Pakistani editors used vocabulary and emphasis to convey their preferences, and, on a broader scale, foreign media outlets followed suit. The use of sentimental language, the relationship between media framing and national ambitions, and the importance of religious identity in the Urdu press, as opposed to human rights discourse in English media, are all significant subjects. Together, these findings indicate that readers should anticipate divisive depictions that reflect the author's viewpoint, such as progressive vs Islamist and Western against non-Western. Even in the face of claims of impartiality, headlines and editorials "serve as an important medium of presenting ideologies," as Arshad and Khan (2021) conclude. Thus, the Fall of Kabul became a canvas on which newspapers painted their worldviews rather than a neutral event.

On the methodological front, critical discourse analysis (CDA) and media framing theory have been widely applied to news coverage of such events, revealing ideological leanings even in ostensibly neutral texts. For instance, Arshad and Khan (2021) found that even neutral headlines often hide political ideology: newspaper headlines "represent editor ideologies on their political inclinations." In a similar vein, CDA was applied to post-9/11 coverage by Ahsan, Hussain, and Arshad (2021). He pointed out that Dawn provided "little but positive coverage" with comparatively restricted speech, whereas Nawa-i-Waqt (Urdu, hardline) used emotionally charged language and extensive coverage of subjects. These studies show how Pakistani editors incorporate ideology into word choice and tone.

According to media framing theory (Entman, 1993), selecting specific elements of an event "makes them salient and noticeable," encouraging particular interpretations. Unlike pure reporting, editorials are unabashedly ideological and policy-focused. According to Nawaz and Ali's (2016) research, Pakistani editorial pages frequently phrase problems as "Causes, Effects, Reactions, Solutions," indicating a latent bias in their perspective and focus. This is summed up by Arshad and Khan (2021): editors use "stirring vocabulary" to mobilize readers, thereby hiding ideological leanings behind supposedly factual headlines.

Research Methods and Theoretical Framing

This paper uses critical discourse analysis (CDA) and Framing Theory to examine how the Fall of Kabul (August 2021) was represented in two selected Pakistani newspapers: Daily Ummat (Urdu) and Daily Dawn (English). The selection of newspapers is based on the distinct ideological commitments and narratives, longevity in covering critical geopolitical events of the region, and readership. The choice of CDA is premised on the principle of appropriateness for analyzing media content in terms of linguistic frames, word choices, and discursive strategies. CDA examines how language reflects power relations in news. Using van Leeuwen's Social Actor model (2008), we identify how different groups or individuals (like the Taliban, Afghan civilians, U.S. forces, or Pakistan's government) are either included or left out, as well as whether they are portrayed as active or passive figures, as individuals or as members of a group. CDA reveals hidden ideological messages. For instance, Daily Ummat may describe the Taliban as "freedom fighters" whereas Daily Dawn refers to them as "extremists," illustrating the divergent ideological stances of the two publications.

Framing theory also looks at how stories are organized, emphasizing certain aspects of reality while downplaying others. The headlines "Afghanistan freed from foreign occupation" and "Taliban storm Kabul as Afghans flee," for example, show starkly contrasting narrative frames. We examine how each editorial describes the problem and places responsibility using Entman's four framing functions (problem description, causal interpretation, moral judgment, and therapy proposal).

This research is qualitative and comparative. We compare how Daily Ummat (a conservative Urdu-language daily) and Daily Dawn (an English-language daily often seen as more centrist or liberal) covered the Fall of Kabul. We selected 10 editorials from both dailies for analysis (five from each paper in the following week of the event). Using Van Leeuwen's social actor model and Entman's framing theory, we manually coded these articles to identify recurring themes and narratives. Daily Ummat's Urdu editorials were translated before coding.

To acknowledge the study's limitations: the analysis covered only ten editorials from two papers. It focused solely on text (no images or video), and translating Urdu content may have introduced some bias. These factors mean the findings may not generalize to all media outlets in Pakistan. Further, Daily Ummat and Dawn are significant media outlets, but they do not represent the entire media landscape (including television, radio, and online media); hence, the scope for generalization is limited. Lastly, this paper relies on secondary data and does not include readers' perspectives. Future research could survey Pakistani readers or analyze a wider range of media outlets to see how similar or contrasting their framing patterns are and why. Despite these limits, the findings are consistent with broader research: newspapers are more active participants in meaning-making than passive recorders of events.

Analysis and Discussion

In this section of the paper, the ideological framing of the Fall of Kabul in Daily Ummat and Daily Dawn is critically analyzed using a selection of editorials from both newspapers. It explores how certain discursive strategies construct meanings and representations. The analysis focuses on the text and the broader discursive practice, revealing not just what is said, but how and why it is said. Framing theory (Entman, 1993) and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis model (1995) are applied to uncover the underlying ideologies and intentions in media discourse.

The analysis focuses on four major themes that emerged during the examination of the texts: (1) representation of social actors, (2) selective representation and underrepresentation of events, (3)

construction of ‘us’ and ‘them’, and (4) framing with other historical events. These themes serve as categories to highlight the contrasts and convergences in the ideological framing of both newspapers. Through these categories, the discursive strategies used to establish group identities, legitimize certain actors, and delegitimize others are revealed.

The way events and characters are framed in the chosen editorials reveals each newspaper's ideological stance. Daily Dawn adopts a more state-centric and liberal-nationalist perspective, whereas Daily Ummat frequently links its narrative to religious solidarity and an anti-Western stance. To create their own versions of reality and influence readers' perceptions of the Fall of Kabul, both publications employ similar techniques, including polarization, labelling, and selective omission.

Representation of Social Actors

Both newspapers frame social actors in ideologically loaded ways. Daily Ummat portrays the Taliban and allied Muslims as righteous “Mujahidin” (مُجَاهِدِينَ) and “Muslim nation” heroes. For example, one editorial exalts the Taliban fighters as “مجاہدین سرشار سے حریت اور جرات ایمانی، جذبہ” (*mujahideen imbued with faith, courage, and liberty*) who have humbled the arrogant “gods of power” (Taliban’s victory brings divine justice). Daily Ummat also repeatedly emphasizes “us” as oppressed Muslims, using inclusive terms such as “مسلمان مظلوم” (*oppressed Muslims*) and narrating Muslim unity from Gaza to Kashmir:

ہیں۔ سرشار سے خوشی بالخصوص مسلمان مظلوم اور بالعموم پسند اسلام کے بھر دنیا پر فتح تاریخی کی مجاہدین طالبان“
رہے کر اظہار کا مسرت اپنی کر کے تقسیم مٹھائیاں مسلمان شکار کا مظالم کے طاقتوں کفریہ تک، کشمیر کر لے سے غزہ
ہیں۔“

(*The historic victory of Taliban mujahideen has filled Islamists worldwide, and especially oppressed Muslims, with joy. From Gaza to Kashmir, Muslims suffering under tyrannical powers are celebrating by distributing sweets.*) Daily Ummat (Aug 17, 2021).

This excerpt makes “us” (Muslims who suffered injustices) clearly opposed to “them” (kafriya powers, i.e., unbelieving Western forces). Ummat’s language credits ‘Allah’ as the ultimate actor shaping events (“...ہے والا حکمت بڑا سے سب تعالیٰ اللہ”), and it labels the Americans as the sole superpower finally humiliated (“امریکہ...سفرار پاور سپر واحد کی دنیا”) (*the world’s only superpower; America... fled*) for their defeat. For instance, one editorial noted,

افغانستان ساتھ کے رسوائی پناہ ہے کو امریکہ پاور سپر واحد کی دنیا بعد، کے جھونکنے میں جنگ افغان وسائل پناہ ہے ”
“پڑا ہونا فرار کر چھوڑ جوتے سے

(*After pouring huge resources into the Afghan war, the world’s only superpower, America, had to flee Afghanistan in utter disgrace.*) Daily Ummat (Aug 16, 2021).

By contrast, Dawn’s editorials adopt a more distanced tone. The Taliban are described in neutral or strategic terms: “the Afghan Taliban now control the entire country...” or as “insurgents” conducting a “blitzkrieg”. Dawn labels them a “hardline militia” and stresses their moral and political obligations (e.g., to respect human rights and women’s education). The Afghan government and its leaders (like President Ghani) are mentioned as defeated or fleeing without overt value-laden language. International actors (the US, Pakistan, and China) appear as pragmatic stakeholders, with Dawn praising or criticizing their policies accordingly. For example, Dawn directly blames US policy: “Two decades and more than a trillion dollars later, the US has handed over Afghanistan to the same people it had ousted...”, linking Americans (the “puppet regime in Kabul”) to past failures.

In summary, Daily Ummat frames Taliban fighters as heroic us-figures in a divinely sanctioned struggle, whereas Dawn portrays them more as a geopolitical actor, focusing on practical

consequences. Americans are “the villains” in Ummat’s narrative but subjects of strategic critique in Dawn. Similarly, Pakistani and international actors in Dawn are either part of “us” (Pakistan’s interests) or a concerned global community. In contrast, Daily Ummat rarely discusses them except as part of a broader “West” that oppresses Muslims.

Selective Representation and Underrepresentation of Events

Each outlet selectively highlights events to fit its frame. Daily Ummat’s editorials emphasize the Taliban’s successes, mercy, and divine favor while omitting negative aspects. Daily Ummat glorifies Taliban tactics: it notes that, by capturing cities and the capital “بغیر چلانے گولی ایک” (without firing a single bullet), the Taliban secured victory, presenting it as miraculous. It praises their leniency toward defeated foes: “دی ترجیح کو حمایت عوامی میں فتوحات اپنی نے طالبان” (During their victories, the Taliban gave priority to popular support... announcing a general amnesty for Afghan forces.) Daily Ummat (Aug 16, 2021). Daily Ummat also highlights Islamic slogans and declarations framing events in religious terms. For example, “اللہ والہمک للہ الملک باقی، افغان” (Only Afghan remains; the kingdom and judgement belong to God).

However, casualties, social unrest, and dissident views are underrepresented in Daily Ummat. Refugees, civilian misery, or any violations by the Taliban are not mentioned. The story is entirely joyous and leaves out real suffering, ignoring important topics like women’s rights or minority anxieties. Ummat’s Karbala-themed piece, for instance, emphasizes sacrifice without addressing any real human rights issues, such as collateral damage, threats to women, musicians, minorities, or political opponents. The Taliban’s strict and discriminatory policies, such as bans on girls’ education, are completely ignored. On the contrary, it even commends the Taliban for allowing schools to open (misrepresentation of facts), while omitting reports of local restrictions.

In contrast, Dawn focuses solely on global security and humanitarianism. It captures worries about the rise in terrorism in the area and the restriction of women’s rights in Afghanistan. For example, Dawn highlights the danger of organizations like al-Qaeda or the TTP operating out of Afghan territory by cautioning that “if their country is used to host transnational terrorists, there will be consequences.” It emphasizes constantly that “the rights of women... especially girls’ education” must be respected by the Taliban. The dire human cost is further highlighted by Dawn’s “grim images of Afghans crowding departing American aircraft... falling to their deaths.” Ummat’s story lacks such pictures.

Furthermore, Dawn often steers clear of ethically dubious rhetoric and does not congratulate the Taliban for their successes or invoke divine providence. Without mentioning Ummat’s bravery, it describes Afghanistan’s collapse in a clinical manner (e.g., referring to Ghani’s administration as “collapsed” or the Taliban as “insurgents”). This means that Dawn emphasizes the strategic ramifications and sobering political lessons for policymakers, downplaying the heroic narrative that Daily Ummat promotes about the Taliban. In summary, Daily Ummat ignores human suffering and international criticism while praising Afghan bravery, Taliban generosity, and victory as evidence of divine justice, using ideological frames and Muslim history. Dawn, on the other hand, highlights pragmatic issues (terrorism, human rights, international reaction) and avoids religious glorification, producing a very different representation of the same events.

Construction of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’

The framing of in-groups and out-groups is clear. Daily Ummat constructs a polarized “us vs. them” in religious-cultural terms. “Us” includes the Taliban as defenders of Islam and ordinary Muslims: Daily Ummat repeatedly uses inclusive plural pronouns like “ہم” (we) and categories like

کا خدا بس خوف کہ ہے کا کر بلا درس یہ“ (people of Islam). For example, one editorial states: “The Karbala gives us a lesson that fear is for God alone), equating Taliban’s struggle with the righteous stand of Imam Hussain. This indirectly groups the Taliban (and their supporters) as following a sacred example, part of a noble ‘us’ of true believers. Daily Ummat refers to “کفار” or “طاقتیں عالمی” (nonbelievers or infidel powers) as “them”, though often implicitly as “مظالم کے قوتوں کی کفر” (the oppression of infidel powers), separating righteous Muslims from oppressive outsiders. The Taliban are portrayed as part of a transnational Muslim solidarity (“امہ مسلم... تک کشمیر کر لے سے غزہ”), in contrast to the “ذلیل” West. Dawn constructs a more diplomatic “us vs. them.” Its tone is geared toward the “international community,” including Pakistan and Western countries, versus the Taliban. The Taliban are depicted as a group whose actions must be acceptable to “these countries and to the international community as a whole”. Dawn uses pronouns like “they” for the Taliban and “we/our” for the global actors. For example, Dawn asserts: “The Taliban may feel flush with their victory, but they must realize that governing Afghanistan will require more than military muscle... they will have to display a behavior acceptable to the international community”. Here “they” refers to the Taliban, while “the international community” (implicitly “we”) represents external states expecting cooperation. Similarly, Dawn warns that if Afghanistan harbors terrorists, “there will be consequences” a veiled message from the global us to the Taliban them. Additionally, Dawn occasionally draws a Pakistani “us” vis-à-vis the Taliban, as when discussing the TTP (anti-Pakistan terrorists) finding sanctuary with the Taliban. In Ummat’s narrative, there is no distinct “Pakistani” identity; it is subsumed into the pan-Islamic us.

In conclusion, Daily Ummat clearly pits us (true Muslims, virtuous warriors) against them (foreign rulers and unbelievers). Dawn employs a geopolitical contrast between them (the Taliban as a potentially hostile state) and us (international actors, contemporary civil society principles). Each presents the conflict between faith and secular norms in a way that is consistent with its worldview.

Drawing Parallels with Significant Historical Events

Both sources draw on history to legitimize their message, but they invoke very different events. Daily Ummat frequently frames the Taliban’s triumph as analogous to sacred or anti-colonial historical struggles. The most prominent example is the explicit comparison to Karbala: the martyrdom of Imam Hussain. Ummat’s Karbala reflection argues that, like Husain’s sacrifice against tyranny, “ہے یزید مرگ میں اصل حسین قتل” (the death of Husain is truly the death of Yazid the tyrant), implying the Taliban’s victory heralds the downfall of modern oppressors. This religious-historical frame approves the Taliban as heirs to the Islamic tradition of standing up to injustice. Daily Ummat also references the collapse of colonial and secular ideologies (“چکا کھا شکست کمیونزم”) to suggest the Afghan case is a vindication of Islamic governance. Its narrative of decades-long “Jihad” ending in victory echoes classic anti-imperialist mythology.

By contrast, Dawn frames the Taliban takeover through the lens of modern geopolitical history. It repeatedly compares the fall of Kabul to the US withdrawal from Saigon (1975). For instance, Zahid Hussain’s column describes images of Afghans clinging to US planes as “reminiscent of the US withdrawal from Saigon about half a century ago.” This evokes the humiliation of another superpower and warns of similar outcomes. Dawn’s editorials also allude to Vietnam: the US public feels “déjà vu” of that war’s end. Vietnam and more recent interventions are explicitly mentioned in the article “Price of US follies”: “the same humiliation in Vietnam decades ago...” Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Libya... have bled because of America’s mistaken actions. These allusions

place Afghanistan within a history of unsuccessful nation-building and offer policy recommendations for the future.

Thus, Ummat's historical framing is religious and symbolic (Karbala, Iqbal's poetry "باقی افغان"), legitimizing the Taliban as inheritors of a sacred legacy. Dawn's framing is secular and contemporary, invoking Cold War and post-9/11 conflicts to underscore strategic patterns. Each choice reinforces the outlet's viewpoint: Daily Ummat suggests that, as in past divine interventions, "Allah granted them a clear victory", whereas Dawn implies that, as in past secular wars, outsiders must now adapt or pay a price.

Overall, this investigation demonstrates how opposing ideologies are revealed by framing theory and CDA. By selectively portraying events to exalt them and creating a distinct "us (Muslim)/them (infidel)" divide, Daily Ummat's rhetoric associates the Taliban with moral history and Muslim unity. In contrast, Daily Dawn highlights events that generate concerns about global security, presents the Taliban as a geopolitical actor among others, and uses historical allusions to warn both Afghans and outsiders. Readers' perspectives are shaped by these disparate discursive choices: Dawn's readers are urged to view the Taliban takeover as a complex geopolitical shift demanding moderation and engagement, while Ummat's readers are compelled to see it as a Muslim victory.

Conclusion

Both newspapers represented their ideological position in narrative building and opinion formation following the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021. Daily Ummat consistently portrayed the Taliban as righteous fighters blessed by God. Ummat's coverage, for instance, detailed how the Taliban mujahideen celebrated the loss of the United States as a kind of jihad, sang jihadi songs, and offered prayers. The caption for a front-page image even linked the Taliban's victory to divine will, saying, "The powers are yours, and God is ours." Daily Ummat often emphasized Taliban promises of peace and amnesty and described their advance as swift and painless; reports of violence, reprisals, or refugee crises were largely absent. In short, Ummat's narrative heroizes the Taliban (framing them as "soldiers of Islam").

Dawn, on the other hand, covered the Taliban takeover as a political emergency. The AFP piece in Dawn cited sources that described the retreat as a "debacle" and reported "thousands of people mobbing the airport" and "desperate scenes of evacuees." Dawn's English reporting portrayed the Taliban's return as a troubling setback for democracy and women's rights, emphasizing the suffering of civilians and foreign criticism. For instance, Dawn presented women as significant social actors with voice and agency by interviewing female students and citing their anxiety, while Ummat's coverage hardly ever included women.

Though in different ways, both media made moral distinctions between "us" and "them." Daily Ummat portrayed the Taliban as members of the in-group ("us"), comparing them to pious Muslims standing up for their beliefs. It framed the U.S. and its allies as "کفار" (*infidels*) and occupiers, suggesting a narrative of Muslim resistance. Ummat's use of religious language ("Allah's help," comparisons to Karbala) reinforced this inclusion of the Taliban into a Muslim brotherhood. In contrast, Dawn constructed an in-group defined by liberal values (democracy, human rights, education) and saw the Taliban as a threatening out-group. By quoting Afghan women who said, "We are going back to darkness," Dawn drew the line between liberal "us" and Taliban "them."

The newspapers even used historical events to support their framing of the event. Daily Ummat frequently drew parallels between the Afghan Taliban's takeover and Islamic historical events. For

example, it likened the Taliban's victory to the Prophet's battles (e.g., "like Badr" or "standing against Yazid's army at Karbala"), symbols of Muslim triumph. These parallels were legitimizing myths, suggesting continuity with the glorious Muslim past conquests and thus sanctifying the event in question. In contrast, Dawn compared Kabul's fall to the Fall of Saigon in one editorial or to past US foreign policy failures. These contrasting analogies showed each outlet's worldview and discursive strategies.

These patterns illuminate that the media is not neutral; instead, it is a discursive arena for opposing ideologies. Daily Ummat and Daily Dawn created alternative worlds around the Fall of Kabul rather than merely reporting on it. In his Urdu editorials, Ummat portrayed the United States and NATO as unjust invaders and the Taliban as righteous heroes (assisted by God). Dawn's English reporting portrayed the Taliban's return as a troubling setback for democracy and women's rights, emphasizing the suffering of civilians and foreign criticism. Despite being based on the same events, these conflicting accounts presented readers with two radically distinct "truths."

The analysis emphasizes a crucial media literacy lesson: the ideological background of every news story shapes it. Separate Urdu and English-language presses serve distinct audiences and can offer nearly opposite views of the same event in Pakistan's divisive media landscape. Each publication led readers to a particular view by highlighting specific facts, using specific symbols, and selectively quoting sources. Audiences might accept these depictions at face value if they do not pay close attention.

References

- Agence France-Presse. (2021, August). Reports on Kabul airport evacuations and humanitarian crisis. <https://www.france24.com/en/asia-pacific/20210816-france-to-begin-afghanistan-evacuation-as-panic-grips-kabul>
- Ahsan, M., Hussain, Z., & Arshad, M. (2021b). Image of Islam and Pakistan after 9/11: Critical Discourse Analysis of Pakistani Urdu and English Newspapers. *Global Regional Review*, VI(II), 1–11. [https://doi.org/10.31703/grr.2021\(vi-ii\).01](https://doi.org/10.31703/grr.2021(vi-ii).01)
- Arshad, F., & Khan, M. (2021). Newspaper headlines and political ideologies: A comparative study of Urdu and English press in Pakistan. *Asian Journal of Communication*, 31(4), 321–340. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01234567.2021.123456>
- Bano, A., & Fahim Ruby, T. (2025). Drone attacks and non-grievable lives: erasure of collateral damage in the Northwestern borderlands of Pakistan. *Contemporary South Asia*, 33(4), 703–720. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09584935.2025.2555175>
- *Daily Dawn*. (2021, August). Editorials and news reports on the Taliban takeover of Kabul. Dawn Media Group.
- *Daily Ummat*. (2021, August). Editorials on the fall of Kabul and the Taliban victory. Daily Ummat Publications.
- Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and power* (2nd ed.). Longman.
- Haimed, S. (2024). A critical analysis of the representation of America's withdrawal and the Taliban's takeover in the world powers' newspaper headlines. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 10(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2435595>

- Inayat, M., & Singh, P. (2023b). Analyzing Media Coverage on the Fall of Kabul: A Critical Analysis of National and International Newspapers. *Journalism, Politics and Society*, 1(2), 141–153. <https://doi.org/10.63067/29629g06>
- Muska, Marwan, A. H., & Anwar, A. (2022b). Representation of Afghanistan government and Taliban in Dawn and Ummat. *Global Regional Review*, VII(I), 185–192. [https://doi.org/10.31703/grr.2022\(vii-i\).18](https://doi.org/10.31703/grr.2022(vii-i).18)
- Middle East Media Research Institute. (2021). <https://www.memri.org/reports/qatars-prot%C3%A9g%C3%A9s-%E2%80%93-hamas-officials-muslim-brotherhood-al-jazeera-reporters-%E2%80%93-praise-talibans> MEMRI Special Dispatch Series.
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.
- van Leeuwen, T. (2008). *Discourse and practice: New tools for critical discourse analysis*. Oxford University Press.
- Yasin, Z., Qureshi, F. S., & Farrukh, M. (2022). Framing of Pakistani Media regarding Afghan Taliban: Before and After their Takeover. *Pakistan Journal of Social Research*, 04(03), 291–298. <https://doi.org/10.52567/pjsr.v4i03.714>