

# Towards a New Paradigm on Post-Truth: Discourse and Affect

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>14</b>
1.1	The Buzzword - Post-truth . . . . .	15
1.2	Theorising Post-truth as Discourse . . . . .	17
1.3	Post-truth and Truthfulness . . . . .	24
1.4	Empirical Research on Post-truth . . . . .	28
1.5	Moving Forward . . . . .	33
<b>2</b>	<b>What is Post-truth?</b>	<b>34</b>
2.1	Introduction . . . . .	35
2.2	Literature Review . . . . .	39
2.3	Conclusion . . . . .	55
<b>3</b>	<b>Defining, Characterising and Analysing Post-truth Ideology: An Analytical Framework</b>	<b>57</b>
3.1	Introduction . . . . .	58
3.2	Post-truth – a Phenomenon? . . . . .	60
3.3	A Post-structuralist Approach to Conceptualising Post-truth: An Analytical Framework . . . . .	62

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3.4	Post-truth Discourse - 4 major claims . . . . .	64
3.5	Discourse Creation . . . . .	65
3.6	Dissemination and Acceptance of Post-truth Discourse . . . . .	85
3.7	5 Questions Addressed . . . . .	98
3.8	How is Post-truth Discourse Different? . . . . .	101
3.9	Conclusion . . . . .	104
<b>4</b>	<b>A Guide for Identifying Post-truth Discourse</b>	<b>107</b>
4.1	Introduction . . . . .	108
4.2	Conceptualisation and Operationalisation of Post-truth Discourse . . . . .	110
4.3	Case Study and Data Collection . . . . .	116
4.4	Types of Political Discourses in 2008, 2013 and 2018 . . . . .	129
4.5	Conclusion . . . . .	146
<b>5</b>	<b>Insights from South Asia – A Case of Post-truth Political Discourse in Pakistan</b>	<b>148</b>
5.1	Introduction . . . . .	149
5.2	An Interpretive Approach to Analysing Post-truth Discourses . . . . .	156
5.3	Post-truth discourses: Democracy and Terrorism . . . . .	159
5.4	Conclusion . . . . .	189
<b>6</b>	<b>The Effects of Post-truth Discourse on Perceived Truthfulness</b>	<b>193</b>
6.1	Introduction . . . . .	194
6.2	Post-Truth, Misinformation and Public Opinion: Past Research . . . . .	198
6.3	Research Design . . . . .	207
6.4	Results and Analysis . . . . .	213
6.5	Conclusion . . . . .	225

<b>7 Conclusion</b>	<b>227</b>
7.1 A Brief Recap . . . . .	228
7.2 Where do we go from here? . . . . .	236

# List of Figures, Graphs and Tables

Figure 1. Theoretical Framework for Re-conceptualising Post-truth

Figure 2. Randomisation Scheme

Graph 1.1. Effect of Emotion on Perceived Truthfulness for Treatment Group 1 and 2

Graph 1.2. Effect of Emotion on Perceived Truthfulness for Treatment Group 3

Table 1. Key Concepts for Re-conceptualising Post-truth Discourse

Table 2. List of Pakistani Newspapers

Table 3. List of Political Party Representatives in the National Assembly of Pakistan & Party Leadership

Table 4. Major Political Themes in Pakistani Newspapers

Table 5. Post-truth Vignette Set

Table 6. The Effect of a Post-truth Statement on Perceived Truthfulness

Table 7. The Effect of a Post-truth Statement on Emotion

Table 8. The Effect of Emotion on Perceived Truthfulness of a Post-truth Statement

Table 9.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 9.2. Statistical Balance

Table 10.1. - 10.3. Robustness Checks

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## Abstract

In this study, I re-frame the concept of post-truth as political discourse, dissociating it from the mainstream conceptualisation with misinformation and supremacy of emotionality influencing public opinion. This study performs four tasks. First, I steer the discussion on post-truth away from the ‘misinformation’ and ‘objective facts’ dichotomy, disassociating it from the overemphasis on misinformation and the fixation of ‘post’ to be something *after* truth which is inherently negative. Second, I delineate a theoretical framework contextualised within the ambit of political theory, and ideology and discourse analysis, to conceptualise post-truth discourse. Third, I develop an operational definition of post-truth discourse to be tested empirically. Fourth, I apply my theory to Pakistan as a case study, whereby I implement two empirical analyses: the first identifying post-truth discourse in newspaper reporting, and the second an experimental design investigating the effect of post-truth discourses on political behaviour.

I argue that post-truth discourse has significant effects on political ideologies’ polarisation, manipulation of public policy, and endangering democratic institutions’ trust. Among the main implications of my research, I describe how these behaviours have the potential to start democratic backsliding processes or undermine democratic institutions. Furthermore, I highlight the far-reaching implications of conceptualising post-truth as a political discourse for developing countries where political polarisation can have striking impacts on the field, such as elections, regime stability, and regime-society relationship. This study has attempted to re-conceptualise post-truth in a manner where the novelty of post-truth is questioned, the element of truthfulness is examined, and the conceptualisation of post-truth discourse is empirically tested. The shift in thinking about post-truth as a political discourse advances our understanding of post-truth and expands the scope of empirical work

in the field. It provides us with new tools with which researchers can dissect the populist discourses of our times.

# **Part I: Post-truth as Political Discourse**

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### Abstract

Post-truth became a buzzword in recent political times with the advent of Trump's presidency and Farage's bid for power during BREXIT. The word became so popular that the Oxford dictionary labelled it the word of the year in 2016. Post-truth continues to be discussed with misinformation and emotionality superseding factual claims in influencing public opinion. In this study, I argue that the concept of post-truth should be rethought, and engage in a discussion on the aspect of truthfulness concerning post-truth. I propose to shift the discussion on post-truth away from the dichotomy of misinformation-objective facts towards analysing post-truth with discourse and theorising post-truth as political discourse. The core research questions addressed in my study are: What is post-truth discourse and how can post-truth discourse be empirically examined? I develop a new operational definition of a post-truth discourse and apply it to Pakistan as a case study to identify and analyse post-truth electoral narratives through a mixed-method research design using qualitative

content analysis and survey experiments.

## **1.1 The Buzzword - Post-truth**

Post-truth has become a buzzword in the current political landscape, with phrases such as ‘post-truth era’ or ‘post-truth politics’ becoming a norm to describe the political domain in the current times. There is an alarming apprehension with the rise in post-truth – the affixation of ‘post’ to be something after truth, having a negative connotation, therefore the need to eradicate it. Most commonly, post-truth is associated with the rise in misinformation. There is an obsession with fake news and misinformation in conjunction with post-truth; the truthfulness of an account is secondary and is disregarded; rather, what is emphasised is the usage of emotional appeals to influence perceptions of individuals about how reality is experienced and the denial of ‘factual truth.’ Therefore, it only seems befitting that post-truth has been prominently discussed in light of Brexit claims of ‘taking back control’ or Trump’s claims of ‘draining the swamp.’ Such examples indicate the popularisation of the term post-truth in today’s political landscape.

What is a commonality underpinning the Leave campaigner’s rhetoric of Britain losing out by being in the European Union and Trump’s agenda of eradicating the elites? In the current literature on post-truth, these examples refer to the ideological supremacy of emotionality at the expense of ‘truth.’ There are three attributes which are usually highlighted in association with post-truth in the literature – the erosion of truth from the political domain, the replacement of reality with emotional appeals to influence public opinion, and the rise of misinformation at the expense of belief in objective, truthful information.

Post-truth is discussed in light of the rise of misinformation and fake news at the ex-

pense of truth – a phenomenon, an era, or a type of politics whereby truth has become secondary. Post-truth is an attack on the sanctity of politics and democracy. It is assumed that individuals inadvertently are persuaded to believe in narratives that seem convincing enough and that there is not an appetite for demanding truth, but instead believing in what feels right – this can be achieved by using persuasive tactics and refusing to back down from advocating a specific narrative. Such a discussion revolves around rhetoric attributed to the production factories of fake news and evil forces such as Trump or Farage, providing a narrow and restricted understanding of the concept. However, a significant limitation of such an understanding is the overemphasis on misinformation and fake news being associated with politics and the assumption that there is only one version of the truth which can be juxtaposed to false information – an objective truth, a factual claim. Anything beyond that is post-truth and, therefore, should not exist.

The limitation of such attributes is that they offer a simplistic model of public opinion where people can either be emotional or cognitive when the reality is that individuals are both. It is not to say that emotive appeals are not persuasive to induce belief. Instead, there is more to the discourse surrounding these examples than what is captured with the misinformation versus objective facts dichotomy. It is the constitutive element of discourse which becomes pertinent to analyse to understand why people are persuaded by such claims, as well as how such discourses can ground themselves in society. This requires constructing a model where the emotions are woven into an ideology that has both affective and cognitive components. It is within this domain, that my research study is grounded.

I argue that post-truth should be re-conceptualised. I propose a shift in thinking about post-truth from disassociating the fixation of 'post' to be something *after* truth, as well as the overemphasis on misinformation towards associating post-truth with *discourse*. It is



through a change in framing that we can understand post-truth in an alternative manner – the particularity of a post-truth discourse which shapes identities, perpetuates a specific worldview, and sustain a particular version of truthfulness. Such a shift in framing has two broad implications. First, this shifts the focus from conflating post-truth with misinformation and fake news to analysing post-truth as political discourse. This allows us to use it as a lens through which various aspects of discourse, such as misinformation, fake news, and so forth that have become the dominant defining aspects of the post-truth phenomenon, can be better situated, and analysed. Second, in ascribing specific attributes and dimensions to a post-truth discourse, an operational definition of post-truth discourse becomes possible, serving as a tool to identify the key features of a post-truth discourse when looking at real-world political rhetoric. This further extends the theoretical discussion on post-truth to its application empirically. The core research question addressed in this study is: What is post-truth discourse and how can post-truth discourse be empirically examined?

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section sets the ground for the shift in theorising post-truth - a type of political discourse. The second section discusses the aspect of the truthfulness of a post-truth discourse. The third section outlines how post-truth discourse can be employed in empirical research. The chapter concludes with the outline of this research.

## **1.2 Theorising Post-truth as Discourse**

Discourse forms a core feature in my conceptualisation of post-truth – the creation, dissemination, and acceptance of discourse. The theoretical framework developed in this study is contextualised within the ambit of discourse, a structural totality emerging from the ar-

ticulatory practice – articulation referring to any practice which establishes a relationship among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulation (Laclau and Mouffe, 2014, p.91). The word is suggestive of a socially constructed paradigm of language and structures through which knowledge is created, and individuals use this system to view and bring meaning to the world around them. In short, it can be referred to as a means of understanding the world – the practices, the rhetoric – how it comes to take root in society, informing practices and identities. Whereas the particularities of a post-truth discourse provide us with the tools to evaluate and categorise political discourses, claims, narratives, and accounts as post-truth, such attributes also facilitate our understanding of why specific discourses take root – the driving force behind the hegemonization of a discourse.

The discussion of post-truth concerning discourse is situated within the context of politics – in particular, the understanding of politics advocated by Mouffe (2005) and Schmitt (2008) where politics is based on the principle of exclusion. Politics refer to the antagonisms which structure a society excluding all other possible ways. Political discourse reflects the antagonistic identities and practices that ground themselves as part of hegemonic discourse. I theorise and identify how public discourses – particularly post-truth discourses are created and the means through which they become hegemonized. In light of discourse, post-truth encapsulates the mechanisms in which discourse is constructed, communicated, and accepted. It offers insights into the constitutive elements of discourse and the sustenance of such discourse – the purpose of the discourse and willingness to be accepted. Such a conceptualisation shifts the focus from the obsession over fake news and the dubious claims about it being novel and facilitates offering insights on the constitutive elements of post-truth, which can provide a more holistic understanding of post-truth.

In conceptualising post-truth *discourse*, I draw upon post-colonialism and subaltern studies, post-structuralist discourse theory, and socialisation theory. Post-colonialism and subaltern studies (Nandy, 1997; Said, 1978; Guha, 1997) offer insights into the power relations associated with creating specific types of narratives and their ability to take root in society. Within the post-structuralist discourse theory framework, I examine concepts such as discourse, identity, and hegemony developed by Laclau and Mouffe, Gramsci and Foucault (Laclau and Mouffe, 2014; Gramsci, 2000; Foucault, 1980). Moreover, I draw from Lacanian psychoanalysis to examine the measurable elements of post-truth discourse, by incorporating elements of lack and fantasy (Lacan, 1977). In completing this dimension, I use the fantasmatic logic described by Glynos and Howarth (2007) to analyse further how certain discourses can maintain their grip in society. Lastly, with socialisation theory, I draw upon the work of Mannheim (1952) and Zaller (1992) to analyse the resonance and acceptability of post-truth discourses. Integrating postcolonial and subaltern literature with post-structuralist discourse and socialisation theory becomes pertinent in conceptualising post-truth as political discourse and analysing the various attributes and dimensions of post-truth *discourse*.

Since post-truth has become a buzzword in the current political landscape, there is a presupposed assumption that it is a novel invention of politics. However, when examining the popular and narrow means of understanding post-truth, a case can be made for the novelty being overstated. The same can be said about the discursive approach I undertake to re-conceptualise post-truth as political discourse. There is much less novelty than the name implies, but a case can be made that this is a particularly egregious era. However, the shift in thinking about post-truth as a political discourse advances our understanding of post-truth. The diverse analytical frameworks provide critical concepts with which the

analysis of post-truth as political discourse is made plausible, providing us with new tools for researchers to dissect the populist discourses of our times. Therefore, my approach to re-framing the concept of post-truth proves timeless.

Specifically, I argue that analysing post-truth in terms of discourse, incorporating elements from three different analytical frameworks to develop a theoretical framework and an alternate definition for post-truth with discourse, is a novel way of conceptualising post-truth. I propose a description of the post-truth phenomenon contextualised within the ambit of discourse. In particular, I examine three moments of discourse – construction, dissemination and acceptance which allow me to develop a definition which encapsulates the post-truth phenomenon. Whereas the structure of discourse reflects how information is created based on specific knowledge regimes, the acceptability of the discourse is reflective of the entrenching of a discourse in the society, the hegemonization of discourse, and the subsequent influence of discourse on public opinion and perceptions. Therefore, the intertwining of these three moments captures the specificity of the post-truth phenomenon.

### **1.2.1 Attributes and Dimensions of Post-truth *Discourse***

To analyse post-truth as political discourse, this study focuses on three moments of discourse, creation, dissemination, and acceptance of discourse. Within the creation aspect, the emphasis resides on examining specific attributive traits and dimensions of post-truth discourse, the notion of truthfulness, and the role of emotionality. Within the dissemination and acceptance dimension, the emphasis is placed on examining the notion of trust, shared experience and media, specifically the rise of social media. I further argue that a post-truth discourse has two dimensions: it is a political discourse, and it is hierarchical in nature (encapsulates both a top-down and a bottom-up dimension of discourse creation and discourse

acceptance).

To analyse the moments, attributes and dimensions associated with post-truth discourse, the constitutive elements of a post-truth discourse need to be examined. It is here that I draw upon Lacanian psychoanalysis and the Logics of Critical Explanation approach to suggest that a post-truth discourse is a political discourse which embodies lack, fantasy, and emotionality, co-occurring to present a fantasmatic logic - such a composition makes the discourse persuasive and highlights the specific elements which can 'grip' the audience. The co-occurrence of all these elements presents a persuasive account more likely to be perceived as truthful. The persuasive nature of discourse is mostly associated with emotionality superseding the actual content of the narrative. I argue that the elements of lack and fantasy, though they are structured by emotionality, are integral in influencing the resonating capacity of an account. However, I argue that emotionality in a post-truth account is substantive in nature - its strategic use is essential in creating an experience for an individual. These elements narrate a specific version of reality, the purpose of which is to seek an audience which believes in them and perceives them to be truthful. The perception of truthfulness about post-truth discourse refers to the relativity of truth.

How can we identify and categorise a post-truth discourse? Here, the Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, the LCE approach and Rhetorical Political Analysis (RPA) become useful. These interpretive approaches help to grasp the attributive traits and dimensions of a post-truth discourse, particularly the logic and meaning-making that political rhetoric espouses. The discourse has to fulfil six necessary conditions which can be divided into four textual attributes and two dimensions:

- **Attributes:**

1. It has to address a specific lack

2. It has to provide a specific fantasy
3. It has to include emotionality to induce an affect
4. It has to posit a fantasmatic logic

- **Dimensions:**

5. It is political in nature
6. It has a two-way hierarchical dimension (top-down and bottom-up)

All these conditions are necessary but not sufficient on their own. The co-occurrence of steps 1-3 leads to step 4 - the fantasmatic logic operating in the construction of an appealing narrative. Step 5 builds upon the previous steps to highlight the political nature of the discourse. Lastly, step 6 becomes crucial, the political discourse is created to seek an audience, however, the acceptance of the discourse is equally important. It is the fulfilment of all these conditions which renders a discourse post-truth. Whereas the identification of a lack entails examining the aspirational and desiring aspect of identity, the fantasy entails examining the means through which the desire can be captured. Emotionality is a substantive element that is integral in analysing the context within which rhetoric is situated to induce experience and sustain a desire. It is used as a strategic tool to advocate a narrative; the interpretation of how emotionality is used is dependent on the reviewer – the broad range of how it can be used can entail the usage of specific words and phrases, the tone of the narrative, emotional cues, emotional acts, and so forth. The co-occurrence of these elements highlights the functioning of a fantasmatic logic which facilitates the logic of the political argument and the meaning-making that the political narrative espouses. The narrative is political, constructed to seek an audience, and indicative of a particular worldview it

propagates - the purpose being evoking both a sense of belonging with the lack and a sense of yearning for the fantasy, making the audience experience information rather than being passive recipients of it. In analysing affect, I turn to Blackman who argues that the turn to affect requires a rethinking of the concept of embodiment as a particular kind of process-in-practice' (Blackman and Venn, 2010). Post-truth discourses evoke a shared feeling of belonging and yearning, placing the individual within the context in which a narrative is being constructed. An emphasis is placed on identification with reasoning and scenarios, and the desire within the discourse is articulated such that the audience can understand the situation and experience it by placing themselves within it. Affect intertwines with discourse to illustrate how a logical political argumentation can create desire and recruit support.

I argue that post-truth discourses can create a social identity, which subsequently shapes an individual's public opinion on various socio-political issues. I suggest that a post-truth account is constructed in a manner whereby its sole purpose is to seek an audience, to be accepted as truthful and to be grounded as a viable reality. A post-truth discourse is such that it adopts a particular context and evokes a fantasy structured around a specific type of available knowledge and information, structuring, and addressing a lack in an individual accordingly, thereby creating and informing a specific ideal identity that the individual aspires of attaining. The post-truth narrative includes fantasmatic content, the aspirational identity that includes the elements of yearning and belonging disguised in emotionality. The yearning for a positive outlook and the shared experiences of the lack thereof. In a sense, the lack is being created alongside the fantasy in the creation of the discourse. Such a narrative claims to be the correct reality and espouses elements of idealism which render it the only truthful aspiration. The fantasy evoked through the narrative structures the lack in

a specific context and is not fixed. It is in constant flux with the advent of new information.

A post-truth narrative is such that it can construct and reconstruct identities to present specific versions of reality and fulfilment. The articulation of desire within the discourse, and its ability to make individuals experience the political argument, and evoke an emotional response influences the acceptance of the discourse as truthful. The right of choice illustrated in a narrative becomes the final element as it indicates the mechanism of achieving the desired outcome – what resonates with the audience. The three elements of a post-truth discourse shed light on the specific knowledge and identities which result as a consequence of it – the practices, the rhetoric, the hegemonization in society which fosters knowledge production and the system to view and bring meaning to the world as well as informing specific identities.

The identification of post-truth discourses focuses on examining two aspects of discourse: (i) the textual attributes - lack, fantasy, emotionality, and fantasmatic logic and (ii) the dimensions - political and two-way hierarchical. Furthering this analysis, to measure the effects of post-truth discourse on political attitudes and perceptions through a survey experiment, the focus will be placed on analysing the textual attributes in the discourse: lack, fantasy, and emotionality.

### **1.3 Post-truth and Truthfulness**

What is the relationship between truth and post-truth? Although a spontaneous response to post-truth entails that it is something beyond truth, I suggest that we must tread the ground carefully in analysing truth to post-truth. The discussion on truth in this study entails analysing three moments which are necessary to grasp the conceptualisation of post-truth



as political discourse: (i) the negation of the philosophical discussion on truth, (ii) the relativity of truth, and (iii) the shift of focus from truth to other aspects.

The premise of this study begins with dissociating 'post' with something *after* truth or having a negative connotation. A shift in understanding that the importance of truth in the context of post-truth is regarding the relevancy of truth – an individual's perception of what one values as being true. The negative connotation only forces us to discuss post-truth as the antithesis to the truth, which is a restrictive conceptualisation. This dissociation is necessary to move beyond the ascription of post-truth with misinformation and fake news. It is also needed because this study does not evaluate what truth means and then analyses post-truth from the juxtaposed position. Instead, the study proposes a shift in analysing post-truth as political discourse which is not dictated by a true-untrue dichotomy but focuses on analysing attributes and dimensions particular to the political discourse which is rendered post-truth.

Until now, the mainstream definition of post-truth restricted the types of narratives accepted as being post-truth – narratives mostly constituting fake news. The restriction becomes problematic when discussing post-truth in terms of discourses which do not conform to this conceptualisation. For example, the discourse on democracy which is premised upon the desire for 'true' democracy within Pakistani newspapers will not be categorised as post-truth. Instead, it would seem inappropriate because it does not conform to the popular understanding of post-truth. Post-truth refers to a political culture where debate and discussion are framed by emotions and irrationality rather than facts, and truthfulness is based on personal beliefs rather than a collectively shared epistemic criterion. In a sense, post-truth poses a threat to the ideals of liberal democracy. Therefore, the narrative around 'true' democracy is an antithesis of the post-truth phenomenon. However, is this a cor-

rect presupposition? Can the narrative on democratisation not be labelled as post-truth? It brings us back to the idea that the current definition of post-truth only forces us to understand the phenomenon from a specific lens – the dichotomy of fake news and objective facts, the supremacy of emotionality over objective truth. It does not provide the flexibility of understanding the specificity of post-truth.

On the other hand, the relevancy of truth in a discourse refers to the individual's perception of a particular discourse being true as opposed to the other; the understanding and consensus on what constitutes truth have become varied. Truth becomes a sedimentation of habit, a reality which people adjust to and accept over time because the specific narratives can grip the audience, making them experience and situate themselves within the discourse, evoking an emotional response. The variation of these experiences and emotional responses influences the perception of truthfulness for the citizens. How truth is understood is crucial in conceptualising post-truth – an alternative means and the dissociation of the fixation of the post with something after truth. This does not mean there is a depreciation of truth value in discourse; it only indicates that a priority is being placed on the relevancy of truth associated by an individual with a particular discourse. Therefore, post in post-truth is not something beyond the truth; this research study points to the idea that truth can be conceptualised differently. Such a shift allows us to widen the lens through which truth is discussed with the post-truth phenomenon.

The shift in discussion on framing post-truth as political discourse provides the basis for analysing specific constituents of discourse which render narratives as post-truth. In the context of Pakistan's political discourse, we see that the narrative on democratisation can also be labelled as post-truth because it exemplifies the constitutive elements of a post-truth discourse. The shift of analysis in discussing post-truth as a dichotomy between true-untrue

facilitates analysing diverse types of accounts which may be post-truth and not necessarily untrue.

Second, an aspect of post-truth discourse is the hierarchical nature of discourse - the top-down (who constitutes it) and the bottom-up (who accepts it) dimension. It is here that the notion of truth is introduced. To fully illustrate the functioning of a post-truth discourse, an integral component is analysing this hierarchical dimension - discourse is being created to seek a political audience, to seek a response. Such a response entails believing the discourse to be truthful for it to sustain. The resonating capacity of a discourse renders it to be accepted as truthful. However, it is essential to highlight that truth in this context is being discussed in terms of relativity - what feels right and what seems true become the deciding factors in accepting a post-truth narrative to be truthful. Truth as an objective notion which can be measured is irrelevant because the emphasis in discourse is placed on how truth is perceived and why it is perceived as such, rather than what truth is.

Third, truth is not the focal point of analysing post-truth discourse; rather, the analysis entails looking at other features and attributes of a post-truth discourse. It is here that the contribution of the frameworks of Lacanian psychoanalysis and the Logics of Critical Explanation (LCE) approach become pertinent in grounding the shift of discussion on post-truth as political discourse. This way, we can look at the essence of post-truth discourse — not necessarily about the outcomes of it (which I suggest are misinformation and fake news) but the attributes and dimensions of this political discourse. The introduction of the Lacanian psychoanalytic elements of *lack* and *fantasy* alongside the concept of *fantasmatic logic*, and the inclusion of *emotionality* provides us with the opportunity to argue that a post-truth discourse is created for a political aim - to seek a response. The political arguments within the discourse are contextualised within specific rhetorical situations and

are constructed to make citizens experience information and induce an affect. Defining post-truth as political discourse allows us to look at different dimensions of the discourse - misinformation, fake news, propaganda and so forth, without reducing it to these elements solely. I suggest that post-truth can become hegemonic, which entails that the reality is not post-truth anymore; it is the hegemonic discourse.

## **1.4 Empirical Research on Post-truth**

Most empirical research on post-truth emphasises the effects of misinformation, fake news, and motivated reasoning on political behaviour. Most experimental research focuses on the contrasting effects of fake news and corrective measures on political behaviour, and the influence of framing information on behavioural attitudes. Not only is this research mostly concentrated within the Western hemisphere, but there is also limited research that focuses on deciphering post-truth as political discourse. This study addresses this gap in the literature by conceptualising post-truth as political discourse and focusing on case studies contextualised in Pakistan. Such a theorisation of post-truth discourse allows the concept to be exported out of the Western hemisphere, applicable in any regional context, and empirically illustrated and measured. The use of Pakistan as a case study to evaluate the theorisation expands our knowledge about discourses in a Pakistani context and is insightful in providing the avenue to discuss discourses which can be rendered post-truth in non-western contexts but also allowing us to reflect on how we interpret specific discourses from a parochial lens. It also allows us to analyse the role of institutions in creating and disseminating post-truth discourses as well as taps into the post-colonial lens of understanding how power and knowledge contribute to the sustenance of specific post-truth discourses in

the country.

This study makes use of a mixed-method approach, combining post-structuralist discourse theory with empiricism to evaluate and measure the theory of post-truth as political discourse. Mixed-method research designs combine data collection and analysis techniques from qualitative and quantitative methodological streams. Most mixed-method research has emphasised linear sequential and parallel methodology components (Creswell and Clark, 2017; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009; Tashakkori et al., 1998), whereas others have advocated for integrative multi-method research for causal inference "involving an indefinite cycle of discovery and refinement" (Seawright, 2016). For this study, I employ an 'exploratory mixed-method research design' (Creswell and Clark, 2017) using a single case study of Pakistan, specifically the electoral discourse reported in newspapers. Through this research design, I seek to use the qualitative component of discursive analysis to develop and inform the survey experiment and expand the breadth of inquiry on post-truth discourse. The empirical study, therefore, serves both the 'development' and 'expansion' purpose of mixed-method evaluation designs (Greene et al., 1989). With this research approach, I collect qualitative data in the form of newspaper articles, analyse it for post-truth discourse, and building from it, I design a vignette survey experiment to evaluate the perceived truthfulness of post-truth narratives in Pakistan. Whereas the qualitative segment is the first step in testing out the conceptualisation of post-truth discourse and is useful in identifying post-truth discourses, the experiment segment expands the scope of inquiry into the effects of post-truth discourse on political behaviour. Part II of this study comprises the empirical chapters which are divided into two methodological approaches. Chapter 5 presents a discursive analysis of post-truth narratives in Pakistani newspapers. Chapter 6 builds on the findings from the previous chapter, and presents the results from a vignette

survey experiment measuring the perceived truthfulness of post-truth narratives.

### **1.4.1 Evaluating Post-truth Discourse – A Case of Post-truth Political Discourse in Pakistan**

Pakistani political discourse reported in newspapers presents a unique case study to evaluate post-truth accounts. The political discourse is an excellent starting point for assessing the prominent narratives that dominate the political sphere and tend to inform identities on critical political issues. Pakistan has witnessed multiple military coups with instances of democratically elected governments. The tumultuous change of institutions in the country has influenced the political discourse and informed citizens' identities and public opinion on the various forms of regime types and different political issues. Elections, in particular, are critical periods of influencing citizens' public opinion and function as opportunities whereby various institutions can significantly impact the creation of discourse. Therefore, for the study, I analyse Pakistan's electoral discourse in leading newspapers during election campaigns, a year before the election date in a specific National election year.

To identify post-truth electoral discourse in Pakistan, I rely on rhetorical political analysis (RPA) (Martin, 2013, 2016) incorporating Lacanian psychoanalysis and the Logics of Critical Explanation approach. A qualitative evaluation of a set of 1,205 news articles and opinion pieces that covered major incidents, trending political issues, and election speeches selected from the three major English newspapers (Dawn, The News International, and The Express Tribune) circulated in Pakistan over the period of three National election years (2008, 2013 and 2018) was conducted. The evaluation of political discourse in newspaper reporting resulted in identifying two prominent discourses categorised as post-truth: democracy and terrorism. Both these themes have dominated the political debate for the

most recent three National election years. They have created fissures in society – the ascription to specific identities, the advocacy for certain political parties and the polarised views on these topics.

### **1.4.2 Measuring the Effect of Post-truth Discourse on Perceived Truthfulness**

The discursive analysis and interpretive segment of the study assessed the theorisation of post-truth discourse, serving as a guideline for how post-truth discourse can be identified. Building on this, chapter 6 is premised upon the designing and implementation of an experimental research design to further develop an understanding of post-truth discourse, specifically measuring the effect of post-truth discourse on behavioural attitude. Through a vignette survey experiment, I measure the perceived truthfulness and emotional response associated with a post-truth account.

Why are certain accounts perceived to be more truthful than others? Here I ground my argument within the socialisation theory framework. Drawing from Mannheim (1952), I argue that the underlying mechanism of why people have different perceptions of a reality being true is because of the different exposure to information that they have been exposed to in their lifetime, the trust they associate with these information channels, and the sentiment they associate with these descriptors of reality. An imagined community is a better way to discuss the stratification in societies – individuals ascribing to a specific worldview share a similar sense of belonging and yearning as their counterparts. These communities within a society are structured around ascribing specific discourses to which they can relate, and it informs their identity and their practices. A post-truth discourse seeks to create this imagined community whereby citizens situate themselves within a rhetorical situation and

experience the political narrative. Emotionality plays a strategic role in making individuals experience information and inducing a sense of belonging and yearning, as well as evoking the sentiment of anger and/or hope. This coupled with the trust placed in the source of information influences the perceived truthfulness of a post-truth narrative. For this study, the experimental design specifically analyses perceived truthfulness concerning the elements of *lack*, *fantasy* and *emotionality*.

The experiment design for this study incorporates post-truth vignettes, which are broken up to identify those rhetorical combinations that prove most persuasive. I test the effect of variants of post-truth statements – a combination of the elements of lack, fantasy, and emotionality, on it being perceived as truthful by the respondent. The experiment is focused on determining the combined causal effect of the three attributes lack, fantasy, and emotionality on perceived truthfulness. The phrasing of the vignettes is intended to evoke a sense of belonging to the desiring element, the *lack*), and evoke a sense of yearning for the promise of fulfilment of the desire, the *fantasy*. *Emotionality* is used in conjunction with the two elements to induce appeal and affect which drives perceived truthfulness. The post-truth vignettes are based on the two post-truth discourses identified in Chapter 5: democracy and terrorism.

The main findings from the experiment are three-fold: (i) the persuasiveness of post-truth accounts varies across issues; (ii) a post-truth account influences an emotional response (anger or hope), and (iii) the perceived truthfulness of a post-truth account runs through the effect of the account on personal emotions. The theorisation of post-truth as political discourse allows us to test the effects of its attributes on individuals' behavioural attitudes. The results provide insightful knowledge on the effect of specific features and content of post-truth discourse which influences perceived truthfulness and evokes an emo-



tional response.

## 1.5 Moving Forward

This research study is a timely contribution to the literature on post-truth bridging post-structuralist discourse theory with empiricism to theorise post-truth as political discourse. Building upon this conceptualisation, the study makes use of an exploratory mixed-method research design using empirical data from Pakistan to test the theorisation of post-truth discourse using an interpretive discursive analysis of newspaper articles, alongside implementing an experiment to expand the scope of inquiry on post-truth discourse. Following the introductory chapter, Chapters 2 and 3 discuss the theoretical framework for re-conceptualising post-truth. They form the theoretical section of the study. Chapter 2 presents criticism of the current scholarship, and outlines the key concepts from the diverse analytical framework used to construct a theoretical framework for re-conceptualising post-truth as political discourse. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework in detail, grounding the alternative definition of post-truth as political discourse. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 are the empirical chapters. Chapter 4 outlines the guideline to identify and analyse post-truth discourses. Chapter 5 presents an analysis of the post-truth electoral discourse reported in Pakistani newspapers. Chapter 6 presents the results from the vignette survey experiment used to measure the perceived truthfulness and emotional response associated with post-truth accounts. The empirical analysis from the mixed-method approach broadens the breadth of examination of post-truth discourses. Chapter 7 is the concluding chapter which provides insights into the implications of re-framing post-truth as political discourse, advancing our understanding of the phenomenon.

# Chapter 2

## What is Post-truth?

### Abstract

The current research on post-truth has mostly focused on three aspects: (1) erosion of truth, (2) substitution of emotional appeals over truthful claims, and (3) rise of misinformation and fake news. Most empirical research builds on these attributes as well and mostly focuses on the effect of misinformation, framing and corrective strategies on political behaviour. This chapter engages with the several debates surrounding post-truth, offering a critique of the current literature which has opened up a set of questions which require attention to theorise post-truth as political discourse. Although the current scholarship provides a valuable starting point in discussing the post-truth phenomenon, in this study, I argue that post-truth is still not fully understood, and therefore, a re-evaluation and an innovative approach towards analysing post-truth is necessitated.

## 2.1 Introduction

The Oxford Dictionary defines post-truth as ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief’<sup>1</sup>. Despite being labelled as the word of the year in 2016, and the terminology post-truth gaining traction in recent years, the concept of post-truth as popularised in mainstream media has existed in politics for decades, raising the question of why the term carries such salience in current political times. It becomes essential to examine the novelty if any, that exists with post-truth – is there something new about post-truth or has it been overlooked as being ingrained in the political sphere for decades? And if it is the latter, then an explanation is required to understand why post-truth has become prominent in today’s landscape.

The current scholarship associated with the concept of post-truth has focused on three attributes: (i) the erosion of truth from the political domain, (ii) the replacement of truth with emotional appeals to influence public opinion, and (iii) the rise of misinformation at the expense of belief in objective truthful information.

For instance, Brexit’s claims of ‘taking back control’ (Hall, 2016), and Trump’s claims of ‘draining the swamp’ (Shear and Harris, 2016) are the most popular examples of illustrating post-truth in light of the aforementioned attributes. The emphasis is placed on emotionality whereas the truthfulness surrounding these narratives takes second place. Did the campaigners for the Leave campaign entrench the ideology that Britain was losing out by being in the European Union? Did they use emotional appeals to justify the losses that Britain faced without evidence for backing their claims? What about Trump and his denial of accepting facts? It is what he utters which is truthful and anything else simply does

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<sup>1</sup>Oxford Dictionary

not matter. What do all these instances have in common? In the current scholarship on post-truth, these examples reflect the ideological supremacy of emotionality at the expense of 'truth' – the narratives need to be convincing enough and resonate with the audience for them to be considered truthful and accepted. However, in a parallel context, if one were to label the rhetoric of change within the narrative on entrenching democracy in Pakistan as post-truth, it would not gain traction, rather would seem inappropriate because it does not conform to the popular understanding of what post-truth entails.

The question that then arises is why a discourse on democracy cannot be labelled as post-truth. Why can't the rhetoric of politicians in Pakistan who make promises of a better future championing true democracy during election campaigns cannot be equated to Brexit or Trump's claims of being post-truth? Is the narrative surrounding democracy not alluding to the notion that the true saviours of the democratic ethos will rid the corrupt elite by refusing to accept their failures rather than feeding the public with more hope if given another chance? The reason such a narrative is not palatable as being associated with post-truth is primarily that the current scholarship has continued to focus on misrepresenting facts and emotional appeals to fabricate 'objective truth.' Post-truth has continued to refer to a political culture where debate and discussion are framed by emotions and irrationality rather than facts, and where truthfulness is based on personal beliefs than a collectively shared epistemic criterion. In this way, post-truth poses a threat to the ideals of liberal democracy, and therefore, the narrative around democratisation is in stark contrast to what the post-truth phenomenon champions. Such a lens, however, restricts our understanding of what post-truth can entail.

A simplistic model of public opinion is projected where people can either be emotional or cognitive when the reality is that we are both at all times. Therefore, what is needed to

fully capture post-truth discourse is analysing (i) the constitutive elements of the discourse, and (ii) why such a discourse is grounded in society. This requires the construction of a model where emotions are not just switched on to drown out the thinking but are woven into an ideology that has both affective and cognitive components. This is achieved through the shift in discussion on post-truth as political discourse. The shift in discussion on framing post-truth as political discourse provides the basis for analysing specific constituents of discourse which render narratives as post-truth. The association of post-truth with discourse provides a lens through which we can comprehend why certain narratives take root in society alongside expanding our understanding of what can ‘appropriately’ be labelled as post-truth. Therefore, this study aims to fulfil two tasks: one, offer an alternative understanding of post-truth about discourse, and two, identify traits associated with the term post-truth to systematically assess whether a given piece of discourse warrants the term post-truth.

To say that misinformation, lying and the usage of emotional appeals is a novel phenomenon of the present political times is false, for conventional political campaigns have used lying and emotional rhetoric for persuasion as a tactic to influence voters. Machiavelli, a long time ago argued in *The Prince* that mendacity and an intention to deceive are both parts of a political strategy: “one sees by experience in our times that the princes who have done great things are those who have taken little account of faith and have known how to get around men’s brains with their astuteness” (Machiavelli, 1998, pp. 68-69). Objective facts have not suddenly become less prevalent, and neither has emotional rhetoric become more pronounced in the current political sphere. The intent of the practitioner has also not changed. The intent to deceive the public into accepting a statement as being true has been a political strategy for political agents. If these two components have always been associ-

ated with politics and are also prevalent in the current times, then why it is that post-truth in recent times is being discussed as being novel embroiling the political space? We should not begin with the assumption that post-truth is novel just because it has gained traction in recent times. Many of the components attributed to conceptualising post-truth have plagued politics for years. I argue that the recent scholarship has failed on two accounts – one, it assumes that post-truth is novel without examining the ‘how’ and two, there is a lack of engagement on how certain attributes about the political domain can be used to establish an understanding of post-truth which could indeed present itself as being novel.

The overemphasis on misinformation and fake news associated with post-truth restricts how post-truth can be comprehended. It focuses on the dichotomy that exists between one version of the truth which is juxtaposed to false information – an objective truth, a factual claim; beyond this is post-truth and should not exist. The question that arises is whether post-truth can only be studied about misinformation and the demise of truth from politics, or is there an alternative means of conceptualising post-truth? It is within this domain that I argue that post-truth should be re-conceptualised. I propose a shift in thinking about post-truth from dissociating it with misinformation and fake news to associating it with discourse.

This research study, therefore, aims to disengage from the notion of post-truth being novel (as has been understood in the literature – associating age-old characteristics with post-truth). Instead, it shifts the discussion on post-truth by theorising it as political discourse and testing out the theorisation using an exploratory mixed-method research design using empirical data from Pakistan. I argue that associating post-truth with discourse, incorporating elements from three different analytical frameworks to develop a theoretical framework and a definition for post-truth is a novel way of analysing the concept of post-

truth.

This chapter has two aims. First, discuss the current scholarship surrounding post-truth to highlight the shortcomings in conceptualising post-truth. Second, introduce the analytical frameworks on post-colonialism and subaltern studies, post-structuralist discourse theory, and socialisation theory to contextualise the theorisation of post-truth discourse. The theoretical framework is discussed at length in Chapter 3.

## **2.2 Literature Review**

This section will focus on engaging with the current scholarship on post-truth, highlighting the limitations of conceptualising and measuring post-truth. There are three strands of literature on post-truth which will be discussed: (i) erosion of truth from the political domain; (ii) replacement of truth with emotional appeals to influence public opinion, and (iii) the rise of misinformation at the expense of belief in objective truthful information

### **2.2.1 Post-truth – The Death of Truth?**

Post-truth would not be a matter of conversation if the truth were not relevant. However, the initial instinct when hearing the term post-truth is to associate it with the demise of truth – it has a negative undertone. The diminishing aspect of truth raises alarm bells about the repercussions of the decline of truth in politics and broader repercussions for democracy. The obfuscation of truthful information has been a political tactic, whether it is in the form of exaggeration or the understatement of information – a rose-tainted version of the information is communicated to the public to appeal to and eventually influence them in accepting the information. However, when the death of truth is discussed in light of

post-truth, the understanding is different. Ralph Keyes sheds light on this:

In the post-truth era, we don't just have truth and lies, but the third category of ambiguous statements that are not exactly the truth but fall short of a lie. Enhanced truth it might be called. Neo-truth. Soft truth. Faux truth. Truth lie. (Keyes, 2004, p. 15).

In a similar vein, Hyvönen refers to post-truth as “careless speech” (2018, p. 33) seeking to create confusion with the unwillingness to engage with other perspectives, and a reluctance to accept that speech has repercussions and words matter.

This ambiguity associated with the type of information being communicated also raises the question regarding the intent of the individual responsible for communicating a statement which can be categorised as being truth from a rose-tainted lens. It is here that Keyes further indicates the nature of the liar and emphasises the aspect of intent:

Even though there have always been lies, lies have usually been told with hesitation, a dash of anxiety, a bit of guilt, a little shame, or at least some sheepishness. Now, clever people that we are, we have come up with rationales for tampering with truth so we can dissemble guilt-free. I call it post-truth (Keyes, 2004, pp. 12-13).

Higgins provides a similar account of the nature of lying in a post-truth era, distinguishing the rise of a post-truth world from everyday practices of politicians whereby they lie and make promises they don't intend to keep; “this still expects honesty to be the default position. In a post-truth world, this expectation no longer holds” (2016, p. 9). From these two accounts, we can see how deception is a strategic part of the practitioner's exercise of



lying and there is little to no regard for the repercussions of lying. On the one hand, there is diminishing importance attached to truthful accounts, and on the other hand, there is a lack of regard for communicating false information.

The limitation of such an understanding pertains to the notion of ambiguous statements about truthfulness. There remains uncertainty over the claims that the ushering of a post-truth era somehow disrupted truth in a sense. The reasoning as to why the notion of creating confusion and sowing seeds to doubt is to be attributed to the post-truth phenomenon remains unclear. The diminishing aspect of truth in the political domain is an age-old phenomenon, whereby ambiguous statements are used as a tactic by various actors in positions of power to appeal to a specific audience. Furthermore, it remains unclear that the emphasis on creating doubt through ambiguous statements in a post-truth era is somehow different from the other usages of ambiguous statements in politics. It is essential to analyse the peculiarity of ambiguity within the context of post-truth to determine whether a) post-truth should be used as a replacement term for anything ambiguous, not exactly the truth but fall short of a lie, and b) the specificity of post-truth (if any exists).

The other aspect of the death of truth refers to the notion of relativity – what constitutes being truthful. Baggini outlines ten types of truth, but three are most relevant to understanding post-truth: eternal truths, creative truths, and relative truths. Eternal truths are a source of conflict and division; religion and scientific knowledge compete to offer competing realities (Baggini, 2017, pp. 14-16), thereby bringing into question what ‘the truth is. The creation of new truth requires more than just imagination, otherwise, the creation of truth can be substituted with not telling the truth; “just as words can change truths, new truths can change words” (2017, pp. 63-65). Arendt similarly suggests that “the deliberate denial of factual truth – the ability to lie – and the capacity to change facts – the ability to

act – are interconnected; they owe their existence to the same source: imagination” (1972, p. 5). Relative truths refer to the notion of no absolute truth, and the truth is contextual and interpretive (Baggini, 2017, p. 74). It is, evident from these accounts that the ‘death of truth’ is not meant to be taken in literal terms but is to be understood in terms of relativity – there is a death of truth if a culture of lying is normalised, and the value of truthful information is declining and is unimportant in influencing individual’s opinion. Similarly, it is the death of truth if there is a conscious effort by practitioners to compel people to believe in a statement which falls in the ambiguity domain – not entirely true yet falling short of a lie. Therefore, post-truth does refer to the diminishing importance of truth in persuading the public – although truth exists, it is unimportant in influencing the acceptability of a narrative by the individual. In the theorisation of post-truth as discourse, I draw upon this strand of literature and argue for the relativity of truthfulness in conceptualising post-truth as political discourse. Two questions arise from reviewing these accounts that this research study will address:

- Question 1: Is post-truth to be attributed to the conscious effort of an actor in creating a statement which is ambiguous and cannot be categorised as being a blatant lie – more like my version of truth versus your version of the truth?
- Question 2: Is there a culture of normalising lies – making it “a no-fault transgression” (Keyes, 2004, pp. 9-10), which is specific to the notion of post-truth?

### **2.2.2 Post-truth – An Emotional Rhetoric?**

What is the role played by emotions in defining post-truth? There is an antagonism between emotional appeals and truthfulness in discussing the notion of post-truth. It is ar-

gued that emotionality is used as a tool to subjugate truthful information – it can convey information as being true even if it is not; “truthfulness has never been counted among the political virtues, and lies have always been regarded as justifiable tools in political dealings” (Arendt, 1972, p. 4). Emotional appeals form the foundation of ensuring a statement made by the practitioner is compelling enough to induce belief in the statement as being true. Whether a case can be made that emotionality is only used to make “untruthful” information as being truthful or if it can also be used to make facts more appealing is debatable. The erosion of truth refers to the alarming concern about the diminishing and decreasing relevancy of truth in politics as a result of emotional rhetoric – truth does not matter as long as a narrative is convincing enough. McIntyre conceptualises post-truth as:

amounting to a form of ideological supremacy, whereby its practitioners are trying to compel someone to believe in something whether there is good evidence for it or not, thereby acting as a mechanism for the assertion of political dominance (McIntyre, 2018, p. 13).

The ideological supremacy of emotionality is intricately linked to rhetoric - “emotion is reclaiming primacy and the truth is in retreat” (d’Ancona, 2017, p. 31), and facts fail to provide people with a reality that everyone agrees on (Davies, 2016, par. 6). The erosion of truth in this post-truth world means that “language becomes purely strategic, without reference to anything other than itself” (McComiskey, 2017, p. 8). According to Orwell, “truth uttered by the enemy becomes untruth” (2017, p. 77) and “all propaganda is lies” (2017, p. 74). Rhetoric in a post-truth world prioritises ethos (trust and credibility) and pathos (emotions and values) at the expense of logos (logic and reason) (McComiskey, 2017, p. 20).

If everything is a socially constructed reality made possible through compelling emotional rhetoric, is there anything categorised as being false? Misinformation, propaganda news and misleading appeals based on emotion have always soiled politics and have been considered to be a persuasive technique to influence public opinion and foster polarization. In this sense, then, post-truth is not different or poses a paramount threat to the politics of today. To define post-truth or politics associated with post-truth, one has to question what the terminology refers to and analyse the role of emotionality to better grasp the concept of post-truth. It cannot merely be reduced to ideological supremacy of emotional rhetoric over factual claims. A further question arises from this strand of literature:

- Question 3: What is the role of emotionality in analysing post-truth and how does it relate to the diminishing relevancy of truth?

This question is important to understand the relationship between emotions, rhetoric, and truthfulness. I argue that in conceptualising post-truth as political discourse, emotionality plays a substantive role and is critical in the manner in which post-truth discourse is constructed and disseminated. Furthermore, the relativity of truthfulness is closely tied to the strategic use of emotionality in analysing post-truth discourses. I suggest that it is not the depreciation of truth value it is the outlook on what truth means and the role that emotionality contributes to in analysing the relative nature of truthfulness. In a sense, what is required from a conceptualisation of post-truth is the interrogation of 'truth' in itself – what does 'truth' mean when we discuss the notion of post-truth and how is emotionality intertwined in understanding this relationship? The questions about the relative nature of truthfulness and the role of emotions set the ground for discussing the first aspect of my theoretical framework analysing post-truth as political discourse, which is focused on the creation of discourse.

### **2.2.3 Post-truth – Misinformation and Resistance to Correction?**

Misinformation is a symptom of post-truth. Misinformation is intricately linked to the changing nature of lying and diminishing truthfulness in the political domain. About post-truth, this strand of literature is divided into three categories: (i) definitions associated with post-truth, (ii) resistance to correction of misinformation, and (iii) framing of information.

#### ***Conceptual Definitions***

Post-truth has come to be understood in terms of objective facts losing credibility in opposition to emotional rhetoric, paving the path for the infiltration of misinformation to influence public opinion. Emotions are placed in stark opposition to facts in the discourse on post-truth (Durnová, 2019). Objective facts here are referring to statements or incidents which are falsifiable – they can be proven right or wrong. Post-truth in light of this is offering narratives which are not falsifiable – the credibility and truthfulness of such narratives stem from the individual propagating it and the individual accepting it. It is not only misinformation, but post-truth has popularly been synonymised with variants of lying. This includes humbug (Black, 1982), bullshit (Frankfurt, 2009), and fake news (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Horne and Adali, 2017; Rochlin, 2017; Tandoc Jr et al., 2018). Post-truth politics is a specific style of ‘doing politics’ – a style that strategically relies on misrepresentations at best, and at worst, lies (Bilgin, 2017, p.55). A brief description of these terms will provide clarification on how misinformation is to be understood as being a symptom of the post-truth phenomenon. Kapantai et al. (2021, p. 1316) suggest three dimensions to understanding the concept of disinformation - facticity, verifiability, and motivation. Kuklinski et al. (Kuklinski et al., 2000, pp. 792-794) distinguishes between being uninformed (not having an accurate belief about the correct answer to a factual question) and being misinformed

(firmly holding a false or unsupported belief about the answer). Misperception has been defined as “factual beliefs that are false or contradict the best available evidence in the public domain” (Flynn et al., 2017, p. 128). Shin et al. distinguish between “misinformation being agnostic regarding the motivation of falsehood, and disinformation assuming that inaccuracy stems from deliberate intention” (Shin et al., 2018, p. 279). Frankfurt defines the term ‘bullshit’ as a deceptive misrepresentation which is indifferent to facts, whereby the “bullshitter does not reject the authority of the truth, he pays no attention to it at all making bullshit a greater enemy of the truth than lies” (Frankfurt, 2009, p. 18). Another variant of misinformation is the terminology humbug which is a “deceptive misrepresentation, short or lying, especially by pretentious word or deed or somebody’s own thoughts, feelings or attitudes” (Black, 1982, p. 24).

Fake news has become a vital component of the recent political struggle, a ‘floating signifier lodged in-between several opposing, antagonistic, hegemonic projects acting as a discursive weapon to impose the right viewpoint onto the world’ (Farkas and Schou, 2018, p. 302). Fake news “is a provocative headline that is shared and believed at face value, with no thoughtful investigation” (Rochlin, 2017, p. 388). Fake news can be defined as “news articles that are intentionally and verifiably false and could mislead readers” (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017, p. 213). It has also been discussed in terms of satire than real news with the focus on heuristics as the key persuasive element (Horne and Adali, 2017). On the other hand, the element of judgement always exists in deciding what a fact is and what to believe based on “the weight of evidence in the support of the fact relative to the weight of interpretation one puts on it” (Davis, 2017, p. 6).

Furthermore, it is important to note that misinformation and misperception cannot be defined in opposition to facts because how one defines the term ‘fact’ can change the per-

ception of what truthful information is. Therefore, when Enfield describes facts in terms of the statements that describe or assert those facts, and not always the facts themselves (2017, par. 8) it opens up the debate on characteristics which need to be focused on when defining post-truth politics – in this case, that includes the primary goal of making a statement which is to make people accept it and correspondingly accept the consequences as well. Similarly, Davis points out that incomplete information, selective information, and spinning to present a favourable interpretation of facts all count as misinformation (Davis, 2017, p. 8-29). Misinformation briefly has two integral components: (i) the nature of the information being false; and (ii) the intent of the practitioner, which is a firm acknowledgement of the false information by the practitioner. Therefore, when post-truth is associated with misinformation it is linked to the rise of deliberately false information persuasively disseminated to the audience with the intent that the public would consider it as being truthful. The strand of literature on misinformation still holds onto a classical representational conception of truth – an ultimate falsifiable truth which exists. This is because the literature on post-truth and the erosion of truth assumes that truth is indeed declining but the value of truth or the association of truth being considered as ‘righteous’ still exists. Where can we then draw a line of what misinformation is? And if we do not have a consensus on this definition, then can we discuss the proliferation of misinformation as being specific to post-truth? The limitations of these arguments raise two further questions that this study will address:

- Question 4: What does the rise in misinformation indicate about post-truth and how is it linked to the notion of truthfulness?
- Question 5: What is the role played by the public in sustaining discourses?

I argue that the emphasis on misinformation in contributing to the erosion of truth when discussing post-truth is overestimated and falls short in contributing to analysing the specificities of post-truth. On the one hand, empirical research about misinformation is a valuable starting point in studying political behaviour in the recent tumultuous political landscape, but on the other hand, this strand of literature falls short of contributing to our understanding of the specificities of post-truth. I suggest that we need to analyse whether citizens want to believe in truth but inadvertently are persuaded to believe in narratives which may suggest otherwise, or whether there is an appetite for not demanding truth, ascribing to value judgements and preference for believing in what feels right. The shift in discussion towards this aspect also facilitates our understanding of the type of discourses that take root in society and allows us to examine the prevalence of accounts of misinformation and lies. This also shifts the focus from a few characteristics linked to post-truth and allows us to examine a different dimension through which post-truth can be explained. The conceptualisation of post-truth with discourse needs to be such that encapsulates the social and political fabric of the society and does not focus on a piece of information. This sets the ground for the second aspect of my theoretical framework analysing post-truth as political discourse, which is focused on analysing the dissemination and consumption of discourses by the public. In addition to this, the mechanisms of how information is processed and sustained need to be analysed in detail to understand why a certain political discourse can sustain itself.

### ***Resistance to Correction of Misinformation***

The strand of literature associating post-truth with resistance to the correction of misinformation is driven by not believing the corrections to be factually correct. How misinforma-



tion has been defined has influenced the research designs which measure either its effect on political behaviour or the corrective strategies in influencing behavioural response. Subsequently, much empirical research has focused on the persuasive nature of misinformation in informing public opinion despite its veracity (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Garrett and Weeks, 2013), as well as the rich body of literature focusing on the heterogenous effect of corrective measures such as fact-checking and literacy interventions on behavioural attitudes towards misperceptions and misinformation (Bakir and McStay, 2018; Barrera et al., 2020; Badrinathan, 2021; Chan et al., 2017; Cook et al., 2017; Fridkin et al., 2015; Garrett et al., 2013; Guess et al., 2018; Jones-Jang et al., 2021; Lewandowsky et al., 2012, 2017; Lazer et al., 2018; Li and Wagner, 2020; Marietta et al., 2015; Nyhan and Reifler, 2010, 2013, 2015; Nyhan et al., 2020; Kuklinski et al., 2000; Wintersieck, 2017; Uscinski and Butler, 2013). In some cases, misperceptions are a result of the psychological threat of correcting them (Nyhan and Reifler, 2019; Steele, 1988).

Another dimension of empirical research on the effect of misinformation on political behaviour and behavioural attitude has focused on the interpretation of facts and the effects on public opinion (Davis, 2017; Gaines et al., 2007), the effect of emotions on the accuracy of political beliefs (Weeks, 2015), as well as the persistence in belief and opinions.

The aspect of persistence has been attributed to motivated reasoning (Flynn et al., 2017; Kunda, 1990; Meffert et al., 2006; Redlawsk, 2002; Redlawsk et al., 2010; Thaler, 2019), partisanship (Bolsen et al., 2014; Dalton et al., 1998; Ecker and Ang, 2019; Hobolt et al., 2021; Levendusky, 2013), prior attitudes (Gilead et al., 2019; Guess et al., 2018; Pennycook et al., 2018; Taber and Lodge, 2006; Taber et al., 2009; Ross et al., 1975; Wood and Porter, 2019; Wittenberg and Berinsky, 2020), as well as source credibility (Berinsky, 2017; Swire et al., 2017) which can lead to a confirmation of one's belief, resisting or avoiding opposing

information. The sense of identity and belonging to a particular narrative is crucial in ensuring a certain discourse is sustained.

Several experiments have been conducted which have assessed the persuasive nature of misinformation in informing public opinion, concluding the influence of persuasion can inform public opinion which cannot be undone through fact-checking and providing the voter with the correct factual claim (Barrera et al., 2020; Kuklinski et al., 2000), and in some cases can result in a backfire effect, whereby the corrections may result in an increase in misperception among the most strongly committed ideological groups (Nyhan and Reifler, 2010, p. 304). In terms of how misinformation is perceived by an individual, the “third person effect” (Davison, 1983, p. 3) demonstrates how individuals overestimate the effects of misinformation on out-group members than themselves or in-group. The belief that the information a specific group ascribes to as being truthful information as opposed to the other group’s belief in a separate form of information raises an important question about identification with a certain narrative. The aspect of identification is intertwined with trust when it comes to believing in information and considering it to be truthful – this is another criterion which will be looked at when examining the framework to conceptualise post-truth.

The proliferation of alternative facts in the political realm is facilitated by the persuasive capacity of the political actor associated with conveying the information on the one hand, and the trust the audience places in the credibility of the political actor on the other hand. Ecker and Ang conclude that misinformation has a continued influence on people’s memory and inferential reasoning after it has been retracted (2019, p. 253). The effectiveness of fact-checking on people’s opinions about information has produced varied results and has raised pertinent questions about the importance of facts in the political domain – is factual

information even important to influence the public? Whereas Barerra et al. (2020, p. 18) argue that the provision of correct statistical evidence is not sufficient to counter the effects of populist political campaigns, others have argued that providing a causal alternative which is associated with a correction of the information and fills the coherence gap can reduce the effects of misinformation (Lewandowsky et al., 2012; Nyhan and Reifler, 2015; Seifert, 2017). Therefore, this particular strand of literature has emphasized ascribing the post-truth phenomenon to the diminishing importance of factual and truthful information in the political discourse. Additionally, fact-checking can facilitate reducing misperceptions and creating a more informed citizenry, however, it is unlikely to change partisanship (Nyhan and Reifler, 2019, p. 222-244). The aspect of partisanship is linked to trust; an attribute which is also quite essential in understanding why a certain statement resonates with the audience. The aspect of trust and the influence it has on an individual's ability to believe in something as being truthful will be discussed at length in the next chapter.

Studies on misinformation shaping public opinion in the context of post-truth only refer to how successful political communication is manipulative and has the tendency to consolidate partisanship and foster polarisation; a phenomenon which is a testament to how politics has been conducted over time. There are several problems with defining post-truth in this manner. First, the emphasis on misinformation limits the domain of post-truth to be associated with false facts and truth, failing to capture the nuances which distinguish post-truth in comparison to conventional political campaigns where lying and persuasion through heightened emotional appeals is a tactic to influence voters. Second, the term alternative fact is misguided because it conflates having different perspectives of truth with the fundamental disagreement of what truth is. The denial of a perspective capturing the entire truth is not equivalent to denying that it does capture some truth. In a sense, a constructed

narrative is representative of a specific version of reality. There is no disagreement on the value of being true, but a disagreement on what version of the truth is valued as being true as opposed to another version.

Such a focus presents a gap in the literature whereby post-truth is operationalised as an independent variable which is not associated with misinformation, fake news, disinformation, alternative facts and so forth. This study addresses this particular gap by providing such a conceptualisation and subsequently measuring the effect it has on behavioural response. I operationalise post-truth and ascribe specific attributes to the term, analysing it in terms of political discourse, which is constructed to seek an audience, and embodies the textual attributes of lack, fantasy, and emotionality, co-occurring to present a fantasmatic logic, rather than conflating it with misinformation and alternative facts, thereby using post-truth as an independent variable whose effect on behavioural attitudes can be studied.

### ***Framing Information***

The strand of literature on framing information associated with post-truth focuses on the power of actors to impose interpretations of the world onto social and political life by wielding their considerable access to media technologies as well as how narratives are constructed.

The framing literature complements the studies on the effects of misinformation on political behaviour in analysing the post-truth phenomenon – the acceptance of certain socially constructed narratives is dependent on how it has been framed. The studies posit the effect of frames on behavioural intentions (Schuck and De Vreese, 2006) and public opinion (Graber and Graber, 1984; Haider-Markel and Joslyn, 2001; Jacoby, 2000; Lodge et al., 1995; Slothuus, 2008; Slothuus and De Vreese, 2010). Moreover, the effectiveness

of framing has been alluded to by several factors. For instance, the effectiveness has been studied with emotion (Aarøe, 2011; Gross, 2008; Lecheler et al., 2013). Aarøe (2011) suggests that the strength of a particular frame is dependent on the emotional reaction towards it (p. 208) – for instance, frames featuring concrete cases have stronger effects on opinions than thematic frames (frame which places an issue in a general context) because of the greater emotional response. Similarly, valence framing is likely to influence behavioural intentions and attitudes (Bizer and Petty, 2005; Bizer et al., 2011; Schuck and de Vreese, 2012). However, interpersonal conversations “can limit elite influence— only if those conversations involve cross-cutting groups or individuals exposed to alternative arguments” (Druckman and Nelson, 2003, p. 737). Whereas persuasiveness is important on the one hand in inducing belief in a statement as being truthful, equally important is whether the audience resonates with that statement. It is the latter which determines the success of effective communication of information. For instance, populist appeals which are effective elicit stronger emotions than non-populist appeals which influence the persuasive nature of such content (Wirz, 2018). Therefore, the importance of emotional responses is to determine the strength of the frame.

Similarly, a growing number of experimental studies suggest that news framing effects persist long after the initial exposure, however, the durability of such effects on public opinion depends on the exposure to competitive frames, the recency of exposure and the repetitive nature of frames (Chong and Druckman, 2007; Lecheler and de Vreese, 2013; Lecheler et al., 2015; Lecheler and De Vreese, 2016), as well as the differentiation between textual and audio-visual stimuli (Geise and Baden, 2015; Messaris and Abraham, 2001; Powell et al., 2015).

Moreover, public discourse has been restructured with the advent of social media with

trolling going mainstream, “degrading the quality of public discourse and consequently shaping politics; the 140 characters are hardly conducive to civil disagreement. They do, however, lend themselves to reactionary, paranoid behaviour” (Hannan, 2018, p. 219). The nature of misinformation diffusion also plays a role in how it sustains over social media; misinformation tends to be mutable and malleable as it diffuses through social media and therefore has a higher chance of recurrence (Shin et al., 2018).

I argue that the sense of identity and belonging to a particular narrative is crucial in ensuring a certain discourse is sustained. It is important to use emotionality as a strategic tool in making individuals experience information and induce affect to influence perceived truthfulness.

The discussion on the post-truth has thus far been contextualised within three intertwining strands of literature. The erosion of truth is accompanied by the rise in misinformation and alternative facts as a result of emotional rhetoric to produce compelling statements to induce belief in them as being truthful even when there is no evidence for it. These frameworks offer insights into the elements of information in today’s political realm, and how such information influences public opinion. Although they provide valuable insights into measuring political behaviour in current political times and the prevalence of specific types of narratives, they fall short in examining the specificity of post-truth. The shift in discussion of post-truth as political discourse remedies this problem. The discursive-empirical approach presented in this study provides an alternative understanding of post-truth by analysing three moments of post-truth discourse - creation, dissemination, and acceptance. In doing so, I draw upon the idea of relativity of truth, the role of emotions, and the changing media landscape discussed in the current strands of literature alongside incorporating the analytical frameworks of post-colonialism and subaltern studies, post-structuralist dis-

course theory, and socialization theory to theorise post-truth as political discourse.

## **2.3 Conclusion**

This chapter has engaged with the debates surrounding the post-truth phenomenon offering a critique of the current scholarship. The critique of the current scholarship has opened up a set of questions that require attention to further understand and re-conceptualise the post-truth as discourse. This study is undertaken with the assumption that the post-truth phenomenon has not been fully comprehended and that the current scholarship has taken a reductionist and minimalist approach to define the terminology post-truth. Although such an understanding provides a valuable starting point in analysing the various attributes that can be affiliated with the post-truth phenomenon, these attributes do not necessarily render post-truth as being novel (if such is the case). It is within these limitations that the puzzle for this study is contextualised. The puzzle is as follows: Post-truth is mostly discussed in light of the rise of misinformation and fake news at the expense of truth – a phenomenon, an era, or a type of politics whereby truth has become secondary. Post-truth is considered to be an attack on the sanctity of politics and democracy. The assumption is that there is only one version of the truth which can be juxtaposed with false information – an objective truth, a factual claim. Anything beyond that is post-truth and therefore should not exist. It paints individuals as passive recipients of the information who are inadvertently persuaded to believe in narratives that seem convincing enough to be truthful, that there is no demand for truth, instead the focus resides on believing in what feels to be truthful.

Therefore, as a means of expanding our understanding of the phenomenon, I propose to analyse it as political discourse. I draw on post-colonialism and subaltern studies, post-

structuralist discourse theory, and socialisation theory to contextualise the discussion on post-truth discourse moving forward. The synthesis of the core components stemming from the three analytical frameworks set the ground for analysing post-truth discourse. They are also useful in providing explanations for the two integral questions associated with understanding the post-truth as political discourse:

1. How is post-truth discourse created and communicated?
2. Why are people receptive to the post-truth discourse?

In doing so, I shift the conversation on post-truth away from the dichotomy of the misinformation-objective facts and emphasise analysing various attributes of post-truth discourse: (i) the three moments of discourse; (ii) the four textual attributes of discourse; (iii) the two dimensions of discourse; and (iv) the relativity of truthfulness. These four major claims intertwine to present an analytical framework theorising post-truth discourse and subsequently evaluating the theorisation through using empirical case studies contextualised in Pakistan. The next chapter engages with the core components of the three analytical frameworks, and the four major claims to develop a conceptual framework theorising post-truth discourse. It offers a means through which the ambiguity associated with post-truth can be disentangled and the framing of discussion can shift towards analysing it as political discourse.



## **Chapter 3**

# **Defining, Characterising and Analysing Post-truth Ideology: An Analytical Framework**

### **Abstract**

The prefix ‘post’ in post-truth assumes a negative connotation – post-truth is popularly understood to be something *after* truth and vilifying what truth encapsulates. Is such the case? I propose a shift in the framing of post-truth by developing an analytical framework to theorise post-truth as political discourse and steering away the discussion from the dichotomy of the misinformation-objective fact. I argue that post-truth discourse is to be understood as an umbrella term encompassing several textual attributes and dimensions. I further address the questions raised in the previous chapter and comment on the specificity of post-truth discourse. This chapter focuses on outlining and discussing the theorisation of post-truth

discourse. Such a theorisation opens up the avenue to analyse and dissect diverse types of political discourses.

### **3.1 Introduction**

The alarming concern with the rise of post-truth politics in the current times is specifically linked to the notion that 'post' in post-truth signifies vilifying what truth encapsulates, and the infiltration of misinformation and emotionality at the expense of truthful information has dire repercussions on democracies. Therefore, it only makes sense that the most prominent examples associated with post-truth are that of claims of the Leave Campaign in Britain – '£350m for the NHS'; 'take back control'; Trump's usage of 'alternative facts' and 'drain the swamp'; Pizzagate (a paedophilia ring linked to members of the Democratic Party); Holohoax horrors (revival of denial of Holocaust); anti-mask protests during COVID-19 pandemic. The current scholarship on post-truth majorly lies within the ambit of mainstream media which is focused on the ideological supremacy of emotionality at the expense of 'truth.' As argued in the previous chapter, such an understanding renders a partial and limited explanation of the post-truth phenomenon. This is further accentuated by the geographical contextualisation of such research which is conveniently thought to be applicable in the Anglophone world and nowhere else.

To re-conceptualise post-truth, I reframe the concept of post-truth as political discourse rather than misinformation. I apply my theory to Pakistan as a case study, expanding our knowledge beyond the Western-centred scholarship on the topic. This chapter presents the analytical framework to theorise post-truth discourse. It further addresses some of the questions that emerged during the critique of the current literature. The chapter also

engages in a discussion on the specificity of post-truth discourses.

Before I begin discussing the different means of understanding post-truth, some precautionary explanations require reiterations concerning the aims of this chapter. First, we should not begin with the assumption that post-truth is novel just because it has gained traction in recent times – many of the components attributed to conceptualising post-truth have plagued politics for years. Second, the recent scholarship is limited as it assumes that post-truth is novel without examining the ‘how.’ I steer away from the discussion on analysing the novelty associated with post-truth, suggesting that the framing of discussion surrounding post-truth has to change to better examine the term post-truth. In doing so, this study makes four major claims through which various attributes of post-truth discourse are analysed. Third, the post-truth phenomenon will be discussed as political discourse. Fourth, the basic premise of the theorisation lies in departing from the notion that ‘post’ has to be related to something after truth and has to be viewed in negative terms only. The ‘post’ in post-truth need not be looked at as offering a substitute for truth or indicating something beyond the truth. Instead, it needs to be understood in terms of an individual’s perception of what one values as being true. Lastly, the theorisation of post-truth discourse is operationalised to implement various forms of empirical research.

The next section presents the analytical framework to theorise post-truth discourse. This is followed by addressing some of the questions raised in critiquing the current scholarship on post-truth. The chapter concludes by commenting on the specificity of post-truth discourses.

### **3.2 Post-truth – a Phenomenon?**

What is a phenomenon? A phenomenon is understood as being a situation or an occurrence observed as existing for which an explanation is required. I suggest discussing the post-truth phenomenon in conjunction with discourse – to investigate how post-truth (political) discourse is created, disseminated, and accepted. When discussed in association with discourse, the post-truth phenomenon is understood in terms of the socially constructed paradigm of language and structures through which knowledge is created, and individuals use this system to view and bring meaning to the world around them. Therefore, emphasis is placed on analysing the types of political narratives that can be categorised as post-truth discourses and can inform identities and practices along with facilitating individuals in making sense of their surroundings. In examining post-truth as a phenomenon, a question about the temporal dimension arises. For post-truth to be a phenomenon it requires examining its constitutive characteristics and discerning the timeline for when it came into existence – it means discerning whether post-truth is new, a novel concoction of modern politics, has always existed but in more recent times increased in prominence, or lastly whether it has always been consistently present as part of the political sphere. I steer away from examining the temporal dimension of the post-truth phenomenon and instead acknowledge that the political landscape and political communication structures have changed over time which has influenced how citizens form opinions, experience information, and perceive reality. All these factors contribute to the understanding of the post-truth phenomenon in conjunction with discourse.

Since post-truth is not being discussed as a modern invention of politics the temporal dimension cannot be attached to the terminology. Could a case be made for post-truth existing throughout the course of politics? The answer to this is not that simple. My argument

suggests that there need to be certain characteristics present in the political domain for it to be associated with the post-truth phenomenon. If these attributes are analysed in the context of historical political communication, the post-truth phenomenon can be argued to have been present before the term was popularised in the mainstream media. In my argument, the phrase 'post-truth era' is not intended to reflect a temporal dimension, but is reflective of a political phenomenon associated with political discourse which has become prominent in the political sphere. It will often be used interchangeably with the phrase 'post-truth phenomenon'. The post-truth phenomenon is reflective of several elements (some of which can be categorised as being spectacles of recent times such as the rise in social media as a source of information dissemination) but most of the elements used in the conceptualisation of post-truth are age-old elements of the political fabric of the society such as emotionality used in the construction of narratives, the perception of truthful information, the biases present making narratives acceptable and so forth. Therefore, a post-truth era cannot be reduced to having a timeline for the initiation of the period, is looked upon as a process of constructing, disseminating, and accepting political discourses, and the elements associated with these moments as they emerge.

The construction of a theoretical framework to conceptualise post-truth discourse entails examining the mechanisms underlying political discourses, specifically three moments: creation, dissemination, and acceptance of discourse. In analysing the creation dimension, the emphasis is placed on examining two aspects: (i) specific textual attributes of post-truth discourse, and (ii) relevancy of truthfulness. In analysing dissemination and acceptance of discourse, the emphasis is placed on examining two aspects: (i) specific dimensions of post-truth discourse, and (ii) the intertwining of trust, shared experiences and social media influencing behavioural attitudes and perceptions. The key concepts for

re-conceptualising post-truth discourse are summarised in Table 1.

### **3.3 A Post-structuralist Approach to Conceptualising Post-truth: An Analytical Framework**

To conceptualise post-truth as discourse, I draw upon post-colonialism and subaltern studies, post-structuralist discourse theory, and socialisation theory to better grasp the constitutive attributes and dimensions associated with post-truth discourse. In the framework of post-colonialism and subaltern studies, I focus on the notion of power relations between the coloniser and the colonised, providing the reasoning for how narratives are structured in a specific manner, and their ability to ground themselves in a society (Bhabha, 1984; Cabral, 1974; Nandy, 1997; Mitchell, 1991; Said, 1978). The parallel perspective to the elite and imperialist discourse on power and hegemony provided by subaltern studies completes the post-colonial theoretical approach (Chakrabarty, 2000; Guha, 1982, 1997; Spivak, 2003, 2012). Moving to the post-structuralist discourse theory, I examine concepts such as discourse, identity, and hegemony developed by Laclau and Mouffe (Laclau, 2000, 2007; Laclau and Mouffe, 2014). To better grasp how discourse is constructed and can ground itself in society through discourse, I focus on the Gramscian notion of hegemony (2000) and the concept of power discussed by Foucault (1971; 1980; 2006).

Moreover, I draw from Lacanian psychoanalysis to examine the specificity of a post-truth discourse by incorporating elements of lack and fantasy which become essential in characterising and describing the particular attributive elements of a post-truth discourse (Evans, 2006; Fink, 1997, 1999; Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008; Lacan, 1961, 1977, 1979, 1991; Lapping, 2013; Laurent, 1995; Parker, 2005; Soler, 1995; Stavrakakis, 2002). In

Table 1. Key Concepts for Reconceptualising Post-truth <i>Discourse</i>			
Analytical Framework	Key Concept	Brief Explanation	Application to Post-truth <i>Discourse</i>
Post-colonialism and Subaltern Studies	Colonization of the mind	Linguistic control by the coloniser through co-optation and alteration of the colonised original cultures, values and knowledge, and the formation of similar codes of conduct allowing both the ruled and the ruler to survive. [Bhabha, Cabral, Nandy, Said]	Creation of Discourse
	Dominance without Hegemony	Contrasting perspective on hegemony - dissociating hegemony from being 'rule by consent' to it being dominance without consent. [Chakrabarty, Guha, Spivak]	Acceptance of Discourse
Post-structuralist Discourse Theory	Discourse	A socially constructed paradigm of language and structures through which knowledge is created, and individuals use this system to view and bring meaning to the world around them. [Laclau and Mouffe]	Creation of Discourse
	Hegemony	Domination by consent – a regime or practice which influences subjects through the intertwining of consent, coercion, and compliance. [Gramsci]  A consequence of political construction and struggle – discourses created in the process are reflective of the various subject positions. [Laclau and Mouffe]	Acceptance of Discourse
	Lacanian Psychoanalysis – Lack and Fantasy	Lack: A constitutive lack which the subject constantly strives to fulfil – the absence of jouissance (enjoyment) – an aspirational desire to fulfil the void of being.  Fantasy: A tool for reclaiming jouissance – provide meaning to the world for the subject, giving consistency to what the subject perceives as reality. [Lacan]	Creation, Dissemination and Acceptance of Discourse
	Fantasmatic Logic	It explains why a particular social practice or regime – a hegemonic articulation is able to maintain its 'grip' over the subjects. [Glynos and Howarth]	Creation, Dissemination and Acceptance of Discourse
Socialization Theory	Shared Experiences	The creation of a social identity based on shared experiences and a socialisation process an individual goes through. [Mannheim and Zaller]	Dissemination and Acceptance of Discourse

completing this dimension, it is useful to use the fantasmatic logic described by Glynos and Howarth (2007) for further analysis of how certain discourses can maintain their grip in society. Lastly, with socialisation theory, the focus of my analysis relies mostly on the work of Mannheim (1952) and Zaller (1992), to provide insights on the resonance and acceptability of certain political narratives – how exposure to the information environment influences the trust and credibility of an information source influencing the acceptability of the specific political narrative. These frameworks are chosen because their core concepts provide insights regarding the deconstruction of language, discourse creation, the affective dimension of discourse and the processes whereby discourse can influence political attitudes and behaviour. To enhance our understanding of the two facets of the theoretical framework on conceptualising post-truth discourse, which is the (i) creation of political discourse, and (ii) dissemination and acceptance of political discourse, the integration of these analytical frameworks proves vital in analysing post-truth as political discourse and examining the various attributes and dimensions associated with post-truth discourse. The discussion surrounding the conceptualisation of the post-truth discourse is premised upon two core questions which will be answered using specific elements in the aforementioned analytical frameworks. These questions are:

1. How is post-truth discourse created and communicated?
2. Why are people receptive to the constructed post-truth discourse?

### **3.4 Post-truth Discourse - 4 major claims**

An analytical framework to theorise post-truth discourse entails examining the various attributes and dimensions of discourse. In theorising post-truth as discourse, I make four



major claims:

1. Post-truth discourse has four textual attributes: lack, fantasy, emotionality and fantastasmatic logic.
2. Post-truth discourse has two dimensions: political and two-way hierarchical.
3. Post-truth discourse has three procedural moments: creation, dissemination, and acceptance of discourse, which embody the four textual attributes and two dimensions.
4. 'Post' in post-truth discourse does not refer to the negation of truth but emphasises the relative nature of truthfulness.

How are these claims interconnected in analysing post-truth discourse? To begin, the shift in discussing post-truth with discourse entails examining various features of discourse. These are the four major claims I propose in the study which tie together to facilitate our understanding of the post-truth phenomenon. I start with examining three moments of discourse: creation, dissemination, and acceptance, to grasp the nature of post-truth discourse. I incorporate post-structuralist discourse theory, postcolonial and subaltern studies, and socialisation theory to contextualise these claims and develop a better understanding of post-truth discourse by analysing the various textual attributes and dimensions associated with the discourse. The theory and application of post-truth as political discourse is presented in Figure 1.

### **3.5 Discourse Creation**

Within the creation aspect, I examine two features: (i) textual attributes and (ii) the relevancy of truthfulness. The language, which is the textual attributes are useful for identify-

ing and analysing post-truth discourses, as well as serving as a basis for operationalising post-truth discourse to measure its effects on political attitudes and perceptions. I draw on post-structuralist discourse theory, particularly discussing the notion of discourse and power, and Lacanian psychoanalysis, as well as post-colonial and subaltern studies to analyse language and the notion of the truthfulness of post-truth discourses.

## **I. Textual Attributes of Post-Truth Discourse**

### ***a. Discourse and Power***

The word discourse is suggestive of a socially constructed paradigm of language and structures through which knowledge is created, and individuals use this system to view and bring meaning to the world around them. In short, it can be referred to as a means of understanding the world. Discourse is the structural totality emerging from the articulatory practice – articulation refers to any practice which establishes a relationship among elements such that their identity is modified as a result of the articulation (Laclau and Mouffe, 2014, p. 91). This chapter is confined to discussing discourse with politics – political discourse. It is a discourse with a political undertone meant to influence one's opinion and attitude about societal issues or having a political agenda. For this study, politics will be understood in terms of Mouffe's (2005) and Schmitt's (2008) conceptualisation of politics. The broader consensus in the description of politics is to do with the principle of exclusion. For Mouffe, politics reflects a social reality whereby the society is organised as an outcome of a continuous political process (Mouffe, 2005, pp. 3-5). Politics refer to the antagonisms which structure a society excluding all other ways. Schmitt's concept of the political also alludes to the concept of exclusion – politics inherently embodies friend-enemy antithesis

(Schmitt, 2008, pp. 26-37). This distinction is reflective of conflicts that can arise between different identities and practices. Political discourse is intended to create specific identities which may appeal to specific segments of the population. This not only entails that multiple antagonistic discourses co-exist but that the resonance and acceptance of a certain discourse imply the rejection of the other.

With regards to power, the creation of discourse is premised upon the intersection of power, knowledge creation and truth (Foucault and Chomsky, 2006; Foucault, 1980; Dahl, 1957; Lippmann, 1946; Lukes, 1974). It is a systematic practice whereby the dominant group uses power to create a truth regime by imposing certain forms of knowledge, values, and discipline on subjects through objectification. The political actor does not play by the rules of the current knowledge game but changes the rules of the game to gain an advantage for oneself (Fuller, 2018, p. 59). Who are these agents? Political actors can refer to government and lead opposition figures for example. In other instances, they can refer to wider societal figures like prominent business figures or activists who tend to influence public opinion in favour of their narrative. Post-truth discourse is reflective of this power dynamic, specifically the top-down aspect of the two-way hierarchical dimension of post-truth discourse whereby there is an intent by the political actor to impose a certain form of knowledge with the strategic use of emotionality to make citizens experience information, evoke an emotional response, and induce belief. Emotionality is used as a strategic tool by the political actor to create a persuasive discourse and make citizens experience information. The interwoven discourse and power relation in this context provide insight into the capacity of a certain discourse to take root and become entrenched within a society, shaping the attitudes and opinions of the individual. This notion is reminiscent of Orwell's famous quote in his book 1984: "Who controls the past, controls the future. Who controls

the present, controls the past” (Orwell, 1994, p. 40). The post-truth discourse created by the powerful is intended to have political implications and is actively seeking an audience that perceives it to be truthful. Albeit from a quite different tradition, Zaller sheds insight on this aspect:

the political information carried in elite discourse is never just information, but an attempt to create a depiction of a reality that is sufficiently simple and vivid so the ordinary citizen can grasp it and such information is unavoidably selective (Zaller et al., 1992, p. 13).

The intertwining of power with discourse sheds light on the purpose of post-truth discourse which is to influence an individual’s attitudes and opinions as well as inform their identity. This discourse becomes a strategic manipulation – heresthethic (Riker et al., 1996, p. 9-10); political manipulation which makes use of several devices to reach a favourable political outcome. In this case, it is the specific textual attributes of lack, fantasy, emotionality, and fantasmatic logic that makes for a persuasive narrative. The effectiveness of this discourse is measured by the content it advocates its relevancy in society, its ability to make citizens situate themselves within the political narrative and its means of dissemination. All of these features are vital in maintaining power and entrenching a version of reality. The strategic use of emotionality becomes a critical component in making individuals experience information and instils a feeling of belonging and yearning. The analytical frameworks of post-colonial and subaltern studies and Lacanian psychoanalysis build on this notion of discourse and power and are useful to analyse the textual attributes of post-truth discourse and discuss how Rhetorical Political Analysis (RPA) can be employed to discern post-truth discourses.

***b. Post-colonialism and Subaltern Studies***

Postcolonial discourse theory draws upon diverse interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks, their strategies and techniques of critique such as post-modernism, feminism, critical race theory and post-structuralism – the emphasis being placed on humanistic inquiry. Colonial discourse is representative of the power relations between the colonised subject and the coloniser. Postcolonial theorists have used the notion of psychological manipulation of an individual, ‘colonisation of the mind’ through linguistic control to explain how the minds of the colonised through co-optation and alteration of their original cultures, values and knowledge, and the formation of similar codes of conduct allowed both the ruled and the ruler to survive (Bhabha, 1984; Cabral, 1974; Nandy, 1997; Mitchell, 1991; Said, 1978). This power relation is premised upon the construction of an identity of a colonised subject through language and culture. However, what is lacking in the construction of histories of the colonised is the role of the subaltern. The subaltern scholarship provides insightful discussion on power and hegemony which situates it in parallel to the elitist discourse most prominently present in the scholarship under the ambit of post-structuralist discourse theory. The contrasting analysis of these concepts brings to the fore ‘politics of the people’ (Guha, 1982, p. 4) – the domain of the politics is argued to be ‘structurally split and not unified, and homogeneous as elite interpretation had made it out to be (Guha, 1997, p. xiv). Therefore, the questions of power and hegemony need to be re-addressed from a post-colonial perspective – the examination of the relationship between ‘power and knowledge’ (Chakrabarty, 2000, p. 15) is thus necessitated. In terms of power, the ‘subaltern’ have to be incorporated ‘both as a measure of objective assessment of the role of the elite and as a critique of elitist interpretations of that role’ when discussing dominance (Guha, 1997, p. xvi). In terms of hegemony, there is an emphasis on dissociating this idea of a ‘rule by

consent’ – ‘dominance without hegemony’ (Guha, 1997, p. xviii).

The secular divide between age (adult vs. child) and sex (masculine vs. feminine) depicts the nature of the relationship between the British and the Indians, with the former adorning power (physical and psychological) related to the idea of being masculine, whereas Indians were considered to be infantile who had much to learn to progress, thus, the duty (white man’s burden) of the British to lead and salvage them from their uncivilised past. Cabral (1974) builds upon this notion by referring to the idea of how the rulers suppress the capacity of the colony’s culture to regenerate and progress – to bring forth the type of society the rulers want to form in the colonies. However, it is indeed this dichotomy that points out the differing patterns of knowledge production – the division between the elite and the subordinate, ignoring the role of the subaltern in the relationship. It fails to acknowledge that ‘moments of change should be pluralised and plotted as confrontation rather than transitions’ (Spivak, 2012, p. 3). Knowledge production and the way we ascribe meanings are a result of power dynamics, and therefore, in analysing the type of discourses that take root, it is essential to analyse not the role of the elite, but also the role of the ‘subaltern.’

Parallels can be drawn between the dichotomy of lack and fantasy and the ‘colonisation of the mind’ - the power hierarchies which determine knowledge production. Whereas the notion of lack refers to an aspirational desire to overcome deficiencies and fill the void of one’s identity, the idea of colonisation of the mind becomes integral in understanding this lack. It is the linguistic control by the coloniser which facilitated co-opting and altering knowledge systems of the colonised, the subaltern which dictated knowledge production. This also then relates to the idea of how a lack is identified and associated with the fantasy - the tool through which closure is attained and the means through which desire can be

captured to fill the void. The dichotomies in the language used by the colonisers highlight the creation of both lack and fantasy. The post-colonial framework is insightful in analysing the relationship between discourse and power, particularly the top-down discourse creation dimension of post-truth discourses. The created discourse has political implications. It also helps contextualise post-truth discourses specifically in non-western post-colonial case studies where colonial thought is reflected within the mindset of the colonised intellectual (Fanon, 2007) and results in the exclusionary politics and norms entrenched within the society.

### ***c. Lacanian Psychoanalysis***

A brief description of the Lacanian approach to subjectivity and fantasy is needed to understand the constitutive textual attributes of post-truth discourse as well as why a certain discourse resonates with the audience resulting in the acceptance and belief in such a discourse.

Lacan's conception of the subject is shaped by the Freudian notion of *Spaltung* (splitting) – the subject is structured around a radical split:

The idea of a subject as lack cannot be separated from the subject's attempts to cover this constitutive lack at the level of representation by affirming its positive (symbolic-imaginary) identity (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008, p. 260).

Lacan deviates from Freud in conceptualising the subject, the subject cannot be reduced to the ego. Instead, the subject has to be understood as an “effect of the signifier” and not a substance – the subject only comes into being when a signifier represents them (Soler, 1995, p. 43). The concept of lack in Lacan's work alludes to an ontological status – “to

qualify something as empty implies that it could be alternatively full” (Fink, 1997, p. 52). *Lack* therefore is discussed as the lack of being – a constitutive lack which the subject constantly strives to fulfil.

Laurent illustrates the link that Lacan posits between the lack and the subject, as well as situating being on one end and meaning on the other end. Whereas the first lack refers to the fact that the subject cannot be wholly represented in the Other – there always will be a remainder which defines the subject’s being and it is this partial character which introduces the lack in the subject. However, there is a second lack discussed with the Other – the cause of desire. As soon as a subject can identify with a signifier, they are represented by one signifier for another – the lack is linked with an ideal – the master signifier. The moment where the subject can identify with such a signifier, they are petrified, recognising the lack they have within themselves, lacking the living part of their being that contains their *jouissance* (Laurent, 1995, pp. 23-35). The lack entails the “loss of certain possibilities and the formation of new ones” (Stavrakakis, 2002, p. 20). Therefore, the lacking subject cannot be separated from recognising that the subject is always attempting to cover this constitutive lack through continuous identification acts (Laclau and Zac, 1994; Stavrakakis, 2002). It is this constant strive of identification which sustains the lack in the subject, the re-emergence of lack and the failure of the identity to be consolidated “brings to the fore the irreducible character of this lack which in turn reinforces our attempts to fill it,” (Stavrakakis, 2002, p. 35). The concept of lack is associated with the concept of desire – “what is to be desired is obviously always what is lacking” (Lacan, 1961, p. 99). A desire for the lack only arises with the Other – desire does not have an object, but a cause which brings the desire into being, the cause of desire. Lacan defines desire as:

Desire is neither the appetite for satisfaction nor the demand for love. but the



difference which results from the subtraction of the first from the second—the very phenomenon of their splitting. (Lacan, 1977, p.219)

Desire is a constant search for something else, and there is no means through which it can be satisfied, in other words, become fulfilling, satiated, and eventually diminish. Fink elaborates on this notion of unfulfilling desire: “Desire . . . does not seek satisfaction, but rather its continuation and furtherance: more desire, greater desire! It wishes merely to go on desiring,” (Fink, 1997, pp. 90-91). Human desire has no object – “desire disappears when it attains its ostensible object,” (Fink, 1999, p. 51). It is here that the concept of *fantasy* becomes crucial. Fantasy is a tool through which an attempt to fulfilling a desire can be met and subsequently associated with fulfilling the lack of being. The isolation of the subject’s identification entails identifying the fantasy which corresponds to the lack which can bring forth *jouissance* (enjoyment) for the subject – it is this ‘Object (a) which is the other part of the subject, and also the second way of defining the subject’s lack’ (Laurent, 1995, p. 25).

A post-truth discourse evokes a fantasy of fulfilment by simultaneously propagating a reality which may prevail if the fulfilment is not attained. The attribute of fantasy in a post-truth discourse is intended to address a hindrance which prevents an individual from attaining the desired identity, highlighting the threat to the identity. This hints toward an important aspect of the framework which is concerned with understanding why varying forms of discourses simultaneously resonate with various segments of the audience. The individual does follow a path of logic in ascribing to a certain fantasmatic ideal, which is tied to the ability of the political narrative to make citizens situate themselves within the rhetorical situation. The type of discourse which resonates with an individual is the fantasmatic ideal for the particular individual. Logic, according to Laclau is:

a rarefied system of objects, as a grammar or cluster of rules which make some combinations and substitutions possible and exclude others, making it virtually synonymous with ... [the] category of discourse (Laclau, 2000, p. 76).

The Logics of Critical Explanation (LCE) is a conceptual framework within the field of post-structuralist discourse theory developed by Glynos and Howarth (2007) to be used as a tool to explain and critique the practices and regimes that constitute concrete objects of analysis – logic is the basic unit of explanation through which a problematised phenomenon in the social sciences can be explained (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, pp. 132-133). The logic of practice, therefore “comprises the rules or grammar of the practice, as well as the conditions which make the practice both possible and vulnerable” (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p. 136). On the one hand, logic offers a continuation of certain practices, and on the other hand, it also provides challenges for certain practices- the vulnerabilities associated with certain practices.

The process of the explanation involves the mobilisation of three separate yet interrelated types of logic – social, political and fantasmatic – which build upon and supplement Laclau and Mouffe’s conceptual framework of discourse theory. Social logic refers to certain social practices and how they become sedimented through a socialisation process. Subjects adhere to certain rules and practices to give meaning to the world around them and subsequently shape how they perceive reality. Political logic focuses on the emergence of regimes – the creation of discourse or an institution which sediments a social practice, institutionalisation of the social. The institutionalisation of a social practice also means that there is a possibility for contestation for a certain social practice or a political regime. The logic follows as such: if a new regime or a social practice becomes prominent, it presupposes the previous social order has been displaced. Why contestation occurs is linked to

the conditions whereby discourse in a post-truth era becomes possible. Fantasmatic logic builds upon this notion of continuity and contestation of social practices and regimes. It explains why a particular social practice or regime, a hegemonic articulation can maintain its 'grip' over the subjects (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p. 145) – the ability (or the inability) of a specific discursive formation to resist a change to a certain social practice and maintain its prominence. The operation of a fantasmatic logic is premised upon the Lacanian concept of the fantasy which plays a key role in 'filling up' or 'completing' the void in the subject and the central structure of social relations by bringing a closure (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p. 146). Fantasies in this sense provide meaning to the world for the subject, giving consistency to what the subject perceives as reality; fantasies are 'the support that gives consistency to what we call "reality"' (Žižek, 1989, p. 44). This also integrates the two specific dimensions of a post-truth discourse that is the discourse is political and two-way hierarchical. Post-truth discourses are reflective of a political aim and are constructed to seek an audience. It allows us to understand why subjects adhere to a certain discourse and practice. The varying narratives are structured to appeal to the audience, advocating a specific ideal. The acceptance of the discourse is dependent upon whether the ideal resonates with an individual and whether they believe in it. This also negates the presence of standardised practices and beliefs associated with one particular discourse. The ability of a narrative to challenge a standardised discourse feeds into the notion of how logic is malleable for every individual which steers them in a direction not necessarily aimed at following a singular standardised narrative.

An example to illustrate the fantasmatic logic at play lets discuss the 2016 EU referendum slogan 'take back control'. What is the fantasy underpinning 'take back control'? British society is enamoured by its colonial history which is overtly celebrated with stat-

ues in its major cities and covertly celebrated by the supremacy and pride associated with Britain being the colonial empire that has been internalised by generations of Britons. The slogan is contextualised within a specific rhetorical situation of nostalgia for the glory days when Britain was a colonial empire. Being in control entails reverting to the olden days of pride and glory – Britain on its own can be a superpower and exiting from the European Union will allow it to regain its supremacy. The fantasy refers to the identity of Britons – it brings to the forefront what Britons aspire to be and how they can achieve the goal. The desire articulated within this slogan by the Leave campaign refers to the sense of rightful ownership which can be captured by exiting the European Union. The appeal of the political actors was based upon the idea of British identity and what has been snatched away from them. The reminder of Britain's glory days and its position in the world system proved to be a successful fantasmatic ideal which resonated with the public – it aimed to fulfil the current void that the stagnation and the dampening that being part of the European Union has brought for the public. The message of Britain losing out and the years of degeneration as part of the union facilitated the citizens in situating themselves within the political narrative, to experience the information and to induce an emotional response. It can be argued that the citizens who voted to leave in the referendum did so as a means of capturing the desire for rightful ownership and reverting to Britain's glory days. 'Taking back control', therefore, refers to regaining the control and the position that Britain has lost in the international arena by being part of the Union. The role of emotionality becomes critical as it is through the strategic use of emotions that political arguments can be translated into an evocative narrative which can grip the audience. Emotionality can induce the feeling of belonging to the shared experience of losing out on control and position of Britain in the international arena, and the feeling of yearning for great power Britain is destined to.

***d. Emotionality***

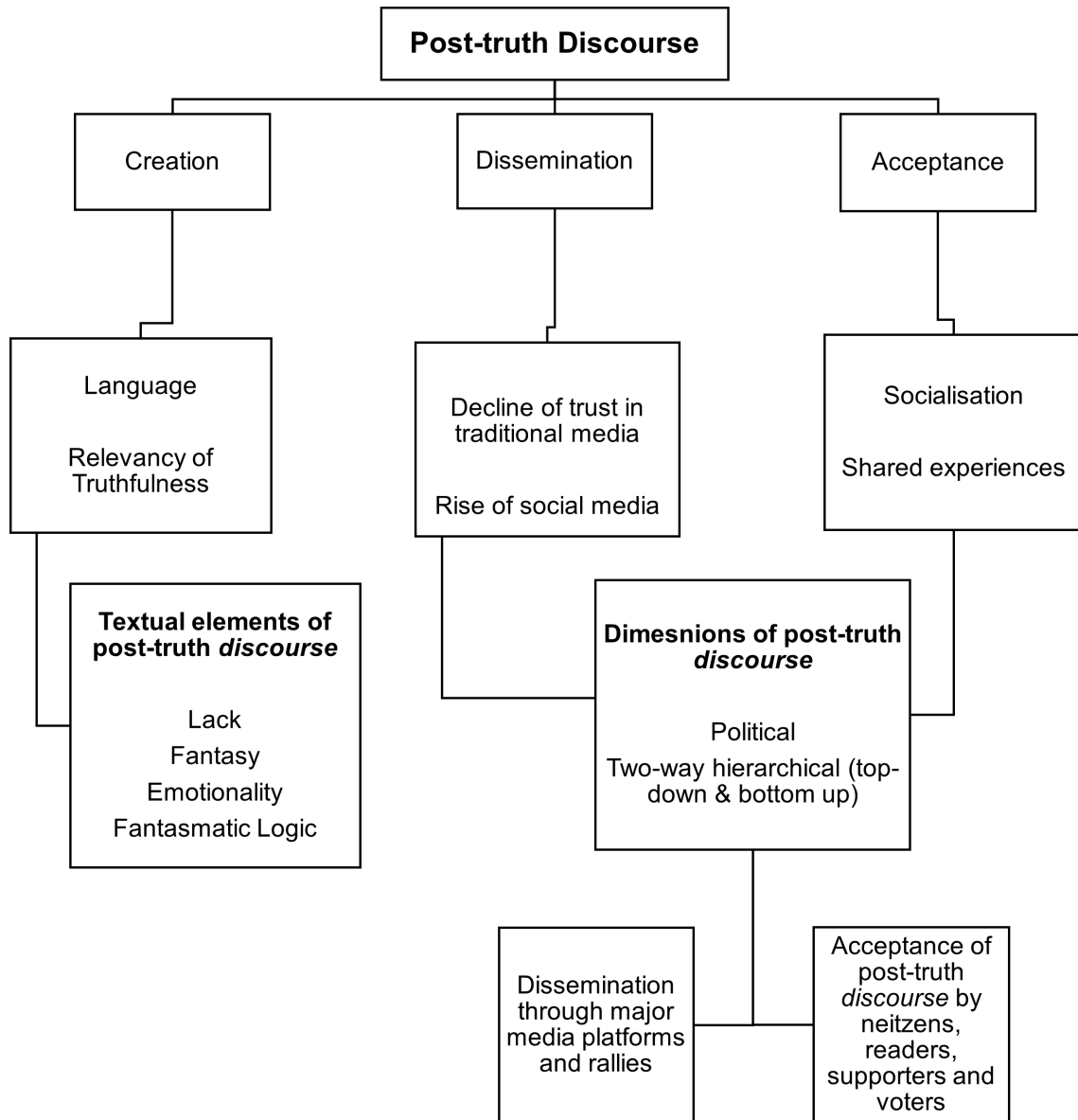
Another textual attribute within the language is emotionality which needs to be examined to understand its substantive nature. Emotionality is used as a strategic tactic in post-truth discourse to make individuals experience information, and not be passive recipients of it. The role of emotionality is to evoke a sense of belonging and create a social identity for the audience whereby they can understand and bring meaning to the world around them – an imagined community whereby the individuals have a shared understanding of the perception of what true means. I argue that discourse intertwines with affect in making individuals experience political argumentation and understand the scenarios for the discourse to be perceived as plausible. The strategic use of emotional rhetoric makes political argumentation within a specific context relatable and induces an affectual connection to the scenarios and experiences. Drawing from Blackman, the relationship between mind and body is relational and co-producing, and that affect is 'part of a process' (2012). Affective communication is a cornerstone for analysing the nature of post-truth discourses and the creation of subject positions to grasp human experiences. This aspect of affect facilitates our understanding of the role of emotional rhetoric within post-truth discourses. Post-truth discourses are structured by emotional rhetoric to induce affect whereby the audience situates themselves within the scenarios, experiencing the scenario to better grasp the logic underpinning the political argumentation which seeks to recruit support and articulate a desire. Belief is an essential component of post-truth discourse. The assumption that others share the same understanding and acceptance of certain knowledge reinforces their belief in a narrative which provides confirmation and reinforces their collective social identity. For example, the statement by a leader of a Pakistani Political Party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) during the electoral campaign for the 2013 National Election in Pakistan, 'May 11

is not merely a polling day rather it is a day of change destiny of the country and fate of people' ([Report, 2013o](#)) is testament to the notion of creating an identity based on a belief – the belief that a new Pakistan will somehow be the beacon of hope, change and progression that the status quo is lacking.

The problem faced in the current times is 'not the absence of truth, but its overabundance' ([Baggini, 2017](#), p. 14). The post-truth world is such that 'there is more and more information and less and less meaning' ([Baudrillard, 1994](#), p. 79). The purpose of emotions in a post-truth discourse is to provide a meaningful account and encapsulate arguments within a plausible narrative, whereby it seems convincing, and individuals can experience it. The language used in the discourse is reminiscent of Orwell's description of B vocabulary.

The B vocabulary consisted of words which had been deliberately constructed for political purposes: words, that is to say, which not only had in every case a political implication but were intended to impose a desirable mental attitude upon the person using them ([Orwell, 1994](#), p. 381).

Montgomery, for instance, discusses Aristotle's types of rhetoric in analysing Trump's discursive relationship to his base and concludes that ethos and pathos were the predominant styles prevalent in his political campaigns ([2017](#), pp. 619-639). In a similar vein, McGranahan, in her analysis of Donald Trump's campaign discourse, is suggestive that 'affiliative truths' become prominent as audiences respond in ways that are 'both affective and social in creating communities of both supporters and protesters' ([2017](#), p. 243). Affiliative truths tend to become a source of polarising communities based on societies which prescribe certain types of knowledge. This allows for the creation of an imagined community based on a narrative which can induce polarisation on a spectrum of issues, reinforcing



**Figure 1. Theory and Application of Post-Truth as Political Discourse**

their prejudices and biases against the ‘them.’ This becomes integral in understanding how the political actor manipulates language to normalise the relativity of truthfulness in today’s politics. Bernstein’s description of public language (Bernstein, 1959, pp. 311-32) outlines that the way language is used affects the way people assign value to the meaning of things, and symbolises their social identity. This alludes to another dimension of emotional rhetoric which emphasises the notion of believing in ‘what feels right.’ It is the relativism and the set of shared experiences associated with what constitutes truth and perceptions of reality which informs an individual’s social identity. This identity is reinforced by the collective identity presumed by the public ascribing to a certain reality. Sawyer succinctly describes how a certain narrative becomes satisfactory to the public:

Statements become true because this ‘network of agreement’ says it is true and any attempt to question the assertion is understood to be an attempt to undermine the entire system of knowing rather than questioning a discrete statement (Sawyer, 2018, p.56).

An effectively constructed discourse in this sense is supposed to take into consideration the tenets of this social identity and offer a narrative which will be persuasive. The strategic use of emotionality is to construct a reality which has an affective connection with the citizenry and facilitates them in bringing meaning to their surroundings. Post-truth discourses rely on emotional rhetoric to create and sustain desires, and to situate the audience within a context for them to experience it. Emotional rhetoric is the driving force in making the rhetoric effective. It is not just the narrative constructed by the political elites, nor the expectations of the audience, but how emotions are intertwined with political argumentation to induce affect, make individuals experience information and make political arguments



plausible. The personal situations of the audience are brought within the construction of a narrative and the emphasis is placed on identifying with reasoning, scenarios, and contexts.

## **II. Post-truth Discourse and Truthfulness**

Although post-truth is recently popularised, Keyes has referred to the term post-truth as the blurring of boundaries between truth-telling and lying, the third category of ambiguous statements (Keyes, 2004, pp. 12-13). Kalpokas's (2019) theory of post-truth builds upon this notion of ambiguity which has come to be associated with the term post-truth. The truth is not discarded entirely, however, it is the ideological supremacy of emotions which have taken precedence. Within the creation aspect, the notion of truthfulness comes into play in examining the prefix 'post' in post-truth. I argue that 'post' should not be taken as something beyond truth, nor should it be given a negative connotation, rather post-truth discourse brings to the fore the idea of relativity of truth and an individual's perception of what one values as being true – the meaning that individuals ascribe to a specific claim (Fischer, 2019, p. 142) which renders their belief in it as being truthful. The diminishing relevance of truth should not be viewed as the demise of truth value in politics, but as the fluidity of truthfulness. The purpose of this study is not to deny the existence of truth, nor to ascribe to a standardised notion of what truly constitutes. Instead, it suggests that the notion of truthfulness concerning post-truth discourse needs to be reevaluated to focus on its relativist nature, that is, analysing how individuals perceive reality and what it means for something to be considered as being 'true'. The value of truth still matters, however, what truth means for one individual as opposed to another varies. It is the social construction of knowledge and the meanings associated with specific claims which influence how individuals experience information and perceive reality. Post-truth discourses embody the

fantasmatic ideal and mobilise emotions to entrench a sense of belonging and yearning amongst the individuals.

The relativist view of what being truthful entails is that truth is historically and culturally bound – being truthful is dependent on the information environment an individual is socialised into. Sawyer writes:

A relativist, as an ideal type, is someone who claims that there is truth, not necessarily difficult to obtain, but holds that the truth is historically and culturally bound and therefore not the same for all people everywhere (Sawyer, 2018, p. 183).

A narrative, therefore, is an alternative form of evidence; ‘truth is a matter of evidence (Sim, 2019, p. 91) and if that evidence is provided through a narrative, the narrative has succeeded in being truthful. A coherent explanation presented by a narrative (about themselves or the environment) will remain memorable, and once it is internalised, will have always made sense. Emotionality feeds into the social confirmation and collective belief in a narrative which influences how information is experienced with post-truth discourses.

A closely related aspect of truthfulness is that of trust ascribed to the source of information as well as the emotional response triggered by the discourse. For example, the following statement from a Pakistani newspaper in 2013 which was articulated by the leader of a political party during an electoral campaign contains emotive content which seeks to make individuals experience the situation, and persuade them to believe in the narrative. The ultimate goal is voting for the political party which can guarantee redemption.

"May 11th will be the end of obsolete system and sun of new Pakistan will rise... start a golden era... completely change Pakistan according to the dreams

of the masses."<sup>12</sup>

A sense of belonging is evoked – vote for this party if you want to be part of the Pakistan of your dreams. In a similar vein, the statement in a Pakistani newspaper in 2018 during elections, hints at a specific imagined community which shares the same understanding of what truthful reality means: “Seize the moment of change”; “You, the people, have to decide if you want to carry on as it is or bring about a change,” (Yusuf, 2018). In this case, it is the words of this leader and the trust placed in the leader for delivering a new Pakistan and that can be achieved if this community votes to bring him into power.

A post-truth discourse can create new forms of knowledge and create rules for the evaluation of the new knowledge. Whereas the former refers to the idea of disagreement on what reality is, an alternative truth or multitudes of truths. The latter refers to an individual’s emphasis on the emotional response generated by the discourse which influences their belief in a reality being perceived as being the correct truth. Nietzsche’s conceptualisation of truth is important in understanding the relationship between post-truth discourses and the notion of truthfulness. Truth is defined as:

a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms (autonomy), and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations which have been enhanced, transposed and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins (Nietzsche, 1979, p. 84).

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<sup>1</sup>This statement is made by the leader of a Pakistani political party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) in an electoral campaign before the 2013 General Elections in the country.

<sup>2</sup>The Nation Report. [Imran sees a battle between Noon and Junoon](#). (2013, April 30). The Nation.

The relativity of truthfulness fits well with the prominence of what is termed as ‘alternative facts’ in the present times. An alternate reality does not have to succumb to being abstract in nature. It can also refer to certain factual claims on which people have differing opinions on and place different valence judgements. We are therefore faced with two sides of the coin in terms of what constitutes truth: two rival mobile armies, each with their firm, canonical and obligatory but ultimately incompatible versions. What is different about alternative realities being labelled as truth? The difference pertains to the nature of the discourse. People wanting to reject some claims, do so primarily because they share the same understanding and acceptance of certain knowledge, which reinforces their belief in a narrative, and what truth means for them, confirming and reinforcing their collective social identity. Another dimension of the relativity of truthfulness refers to values. Values are based on what is important for people, and while values may not change, ‘which values people prioritise can change’ (Berentson-Shaw, 2018, p. 45). Post-truth discourses can cultivate a set of values which dismantles the standardised truth regimes of the current status quo – the universally accepted norm of what constitutes being true. It has embedded in people the notion that truth is a social construct and what constitutes being true is based on an individual’s perception of reality. Truth as an objective notion which can be measured is irrelevant because the emphasis in discourse is placed on how truth is perceived and why it is perceived as such, rather than what truth is. Some of the examples highlighting this idea refers to the perceptions of what Brexit entails, climate change deniers, and the importance of masks to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The truthfulness of the narrative surrounding these examples has to do with the ability of the narrative to grip the audience, make them experience and situate themselves within the discourse, as well as an evocation of an emotional response.

The creation aspect of discourse serves as the basis for empirically identifying and analysing post-truth discourse in texts.

### **3.6 Dissemination and Acceptance of Post-truth Discourse**

Within the dissemination and acceptance aspect, I examine two features of discourse: (i) the two-way hierarchical nature of discourse, and (ii) the intertwining of trust, shared experiences and social media influencing behavioural attitudes and perceptions. I argue that a post-truth discourse is political, is created to seek an audience and has political implications. The textual attributes within the discourse, specifically lack, fantasy, emotionality, and fantasmatic logic become critical in analysing the political nature of discourse, as well as highlighting the two-way hierarchical nature. The attribute of emotionality is pertinent in analysing the purpose of a discourse and its ability to induce belief and foster a shared experience. The shared experience is tied to the feeling of belonging and yearning. Whereas those in power create a discourse with the intention of it becoming hegemonized and grounding a version of reality, it is the citizen's acceptance of a narrative which facilitates a discourse to take root.

Socialisation theory provides us with the tools to analyse the differing information environments influencing the perception of truthfulness which is closely tied to the notion of a shared experience. In parallel, post-structuralist discourse theory helps us analyse these different information environments and facilitate our understanding of the creation of different identities with discourse. Furthermore, post-structuralist discourse theory and the post-colonial lens are useful in analysing the notion of hegemony in the context of post-truth discourses which are competing to become hegemonic. This brings the two-way

hierarchical nature of discourse to the fore – a powerful actor is creating and disseminating the discourse; however, it is the receiver, the citizen who consents to believing in the discourse and accepting it to be truthful. The post-truth discourse facilitates creating a sense of belonging and yearning. The element of desire becomes critical here, it is not only the perception of truthfulness, but before it, the desiring element and the trust associated with the discourse come to the fore, and it dictates the shared experience, as well as the perception of believing a discourse to be truthful. Although truthfulness is an aspect of post-truth discourse, other features, such as emotional response, and trust are equally important.

## **I. Two-way Hierarchical Dimension - Discourse and Hegemony**

I argue that post-truth discourse is political, and has political implications. The two-way hierarchical dimension of post-truth discourse is closely related to the notion of hegemony. It refers to the top-down discourse creation and bottom-up discourse acceptance features of post-truth discourses. There are two meanings of hegemony associated with discourse which are discussed in this chapter. One originated in the writings of Gramsci and is a concept which signifies domination by consent. This type of hegemony refers to a regime or practice which influences subjects through the intertwining of consent, coercion, and compliance. This ideological domination of discourse operates through social structures of power such as social organisations, institutions, media, and education.

The 'normal' exercise of hegemony in what became the classic terrain of the parliamentary regime is characterised by the combination of force and consent variously balancing one another, without force exceeding consent too much. Indeed, one tries to make it appear that force is supported by the consent of the majority, expressed by the so-called organs of public opinion newspapers and

associations -which are, therefore, in certain situations, artificially increased in number. (Gramsci, 2000, p. 261).

The elite intellectual has been referred to as a group with the capacity to unify a social group and increase its awareness. The position of the elite in society becomes a crucial aspect in their ability to coalesce group interest and ensure the group is persuaded into accepting the narrative which has been created. This meaning of hegemony takes upon a class essentialist view and assumes that one class leads to another. This view of hegemony, on the one hand, ties in with the post-colonial literature on 'colonisation of the mind' - the linguistic control by the coloniser through co-optation and alteration of the colonised' original cultures, values and knowledge, and the formation of similar codes of conduct and practices allowing both the ruled and the ruler to survive, and on the other hand, highlights the erosion of consent which facilitated the domination and grounding of hegemonic discourses. Hegemony in the context of understanding post-truth discourse refers to advancing one form of interpretation over all other forms of interpretation about what truth means. In simpler words, hegemony is attributed to the dominant, normalised way of bringing meaning to the world – it is the undisputed acceptance of an idea to become common sense which is unchangeable.

The second understanding of hegemony is advocated by Laclau and Mouffe in *Hegemony and the Socialist Strategy Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* (2014) where they advocate the transition of the concept from the base/superstructure division in the society, restricting the concept to class essentialism and teleological history towards the logic of articulation and contingency. They broaden the scope of hegemony by coalescing notions of 'subject' and 'discourse.' Hegemony, therefore, is a consequence of political construction and struggle. Discourses created in the process are reflective of the various subject

positions. Discourse creates subjects and identities that are not a priori or fixed, but rather are in a continuous flux of being created and recreated. On the one hand, identities result in fixity as it presupposes a system, a structure, yet meanings are not static, they evolve, and therefore, the question that follows pertains to accounting for the fluidity of meaning. It is here that Laclau advances the notion of the limits of the structure to grasp the fluidity of meaning by highlighting the significance of the structure's limits – its incompleteness. However, a related issue has to do with the lack of chaos over the fluidity of meaning. How can we account for the partial fixation? It is here that Laclau (2007) describes the importance of empty signifiers and hegemony in politics. An empty signifier announces the possibility of marking the boundaries of the system, however in doing so it also indicates the impossibility of a closed system, and therefore it is this unstable character of the empty signifier that serves as a means of understanding hegemony. Specifically, Laclau states:

The meaning (the signified) of all concrete struggle appears, right from the beginning, internally divided. The concrete aim of the struggle is not only that aim in its concreteness; it also signifies opposition to the system. The first signified establishes the differential character of that demand or mobilisation vis-a-vis all other demands or mobilisations. The second signified establishes the equivalence of all these demands in their common opposition to the system.... (2007, p. 41).

This relation by which a particular content becomes the signifier of the absent communitarian fullness is exactly what we call a hegemonic relationship. The presence of empty signifiers – in the sense that we have defined them – is the very condition of hegemony (Laclau, 2007, p. 43).



In a sense, there is not a single hegemonic discourse that entrenches within a society, but rather the multitudes of discourses. In light of post-truth, the hegemony of discourse is dependent on the acceptability of the identity created by the discourse, the emotional response triggered by the discourse, and the trust associated with the discourse. Therefore, post-truth discourses are competing for becoming hegemonic, advancing an interpretation over all others to become the undisputed dominant interpretation. There are two components of hegemony which require attention. On the one hand, the framework assumes that discourse creation is driven by political actors, however, on the other hand, there is a firm acknowledgement that various discourses in parallel are creating identities and competing to become the dominant discourse. The undisputed nature of a specific discourse is only attributed to the segment of the population which ascribes to the given discourse.

How does post-truth discourse intertwine with power and hegemony? There are two answers to this question. First, the intertwining allows us to examine the process of creating a narrative and its purpose, along with understanding how various subject positions in society are created. Post-truth discourse has a political aim, and its ability to garner support is contingent upon its effectiveness. This ties in with the aspect of shared experiences, as well as the mobilisation of emotionality in text. Whereas the political actor creates a political discourse, the effectiveness is contingent upon inducing a shared sense of belonging and yearning which influences the perception of reality. On the other hand, discourses construct identities – antagonistic identities, each ascribing to a worldview and advancing it to become the undisputed dominant interpretation. There is a constant re-evaluation of discourse and ‘rhetorical redescription’ of narrative to persuade the audience to accept the new description, and adopt a new attitude towards the concerted action (Skinner et al., 2002, pp. 274-280). In this sense, discourse is always evolving, and its capacity to sustain and re-

tain support from the subjects is contingent upon its ability to be persuasive and resonate with the subjects. The varying subject positions in society are reflective of the multitude of antagonistic realities co-existing dependent on the acceptance of these realities as being truthful by specific segments of the population. The multiplicity of post-truth discourses competes to become the hegemonic discourse. There are two ways to look at it. One, there is not any one discourse which is hegemonic due to the disparate demands and identities which prevail. Two, each discourse is hegemonic in its own right (hegemonic among the community – the dominant discourse which is accepted as being truthful and hence informs the perceptions of the specific community).

Why and how are subjects receptive to such a discourse? To address this question we need to discuss two features: the affective dimension, making use of the Lacanian logic of fantasy and desire, developed by theorists such as Slavoj Žižek (1989), and further adapted in writings which link post-structural political theory and psychoanalysis: (Laclau and Mouffe, 2014; Glynos and Howarth, 2007; Stavrakakis, 2002), and socialisation theory intertwined with the concept of generations and creation of public opinion (Mannheim, 1952; Kahneman, 2011; Tilley and Heath, 2007; Zaller et al., 1992). Whereas the former allows us to reflect upon how social identity is created, and the role of emotionality in creating a plausible narrative, the latter allows us to understand how varying social identities correspond to certain discourses and influence the perception of reality.

The intertwining of power with discourse is pertinent in analysing the entrenchment of post-truth discourses. On the one hand, the creation of discourse is dependent on the political agents, however, on the other hand, it is equally important to acknowledge the normative interpretation of the discourse by the public. It is the receiver who has a role in sustaining a discourse by perceiving it to be truthful and accepting it, that is the bottom-up

aspect of the two-way hierarchical dimension of post-truth discourse. Foucault sums it up nicely when he says, “If it (discourse) should happen to have a certain power, then it is we, and we alone, who give it that power” (1971, p. 8). The certain meanings we give to life based on a specific discourse become important because we make it important by believing in it. The notion of shared experiences becomes critical in understanding how individuals experience and situate themselves within the discourse.

## **II. Trust, Shared Experiences and Social Media**

To analyse why certain discourses are believed to be truthful and can sustain, it is worth venturing into the territory of socialisation theory. This strand of literature focuses on the creation of a social identity based on shared experiences. Mannheim discusses the creation of social identity in terms of the ‘shared experiences’ the individual has with their cohort:

What does create a similar location is that they are in a position to experience the same events and data, etc. and especially that these experiences impinge upon a similarly stratified society (Mannheim, 1952, p.297).

The notion of shared experiences ties in with the belief in the plausibility of a narrative, and the ability of a narrative to grip the audience, and induce a sense of belonging and yearning. Emotionality within the discourse facilitates the creation of the shared experience. The disproportionate information environment impacts how one responds to a specific narrative and influences their perception of reality. The particular fulfilment an individual seeks and the resonance with the particular desire is dependent on the prior knowledge and identity of the individual. This is shaped by the socialisation process that an individual goes through (this could be through a variety of sources such as family, educa-

tion, national events and so forth), impacting what they perceive to be true. This perception becomes rigid over time but is socially constructed through the formative years of an individual (adolescence to late adulthood).

This socially constructed prior, a constructed identity, then impacts the individual's perception of what reality should constitute and also determines the future acceptance of discourse. Mannheim provides a good insight into how individuals perceive reality which informs their opinion. Although he argues that society is stratified into generations which are socialised with fundamental integrative attitudes and formative principles that dictate their decision-making, the concept of having a 'shared experience' (1952, pp. 276-320) is a key to understanding why certain discourses resonate with some individuals as opposed to others. This line of thinking resonates in the work of Tilly and Heath which discusses the decline in British national pride associated with generational effects and growing up in different information environments and being exposed to different events shape the pride associated with British-ness. For instance, they argue that "the 1980s saw the beginning of the end of the relative post-war economic decline of Britain, renewed confidence in the military power of Britain and that these generations were socialised during a period in which Thatcherism was the dominant ideology in Britain" (Tilley and Heath, 2007, p. 669). Another perspective about opinion formation is presented by Kuklinski et al. (1998) who argue that citizens formulate political judgement based on the information they receive, and having limited exposure to information can result in them becoming 'prone to bias and error in using the limited information they receive' (1998, p. 143). Although this limited information is mostly associated with partisan news, the concept can also be applied to a specific socialised knowledge system with which an individual is associated, which informs their perception of reality.

A closely related aspect of the notion of shared experiences is that of trust which influences the acceptance of a specific discourse. Trust relates to the credibility and reliability that individual associates with the source of information; “trust is a critical factor in assessing the credibility of new information” (Berentson-Shaw, 2018, p.42). An individual is more likely to perceive a narrative as being truthful if it is being presented by a source which they value as being more credible and reliable. And who do we choose to trust? According to Berenston-Shaw, “people rely on two types of social information to determine credibility: 1. Common interests or shared values and beliefs – a perception that the communicator and listener desire the same outcomes; and 2. Perceived expertise (not actual expertise)” (2018, pp. 64-65). The credibility of the messenger, the political actor comes through their ability to connect with the plight and the values of the audience. Political actors can refer to a wide array of figures in society: government and lead opposition figures, prominent business figures or activists, all trying to influence public opinion in favour of their narrative. Examples of this would be the vote leave campaign for Brexit regarding the additional £350 million NHS funding which could be achieved by leaving the EU or the climate change denial. For instance, the EU referendum can be ascribed to a combination of a decline in the trust of experts and politicians with social media reliance which emotionally charged the British public to make value-based decision making to a greater extent than before (Marshall and Drieschova, 2018, pp. 89-105).

The changing media landscape influences the feature of trust. The traditional forms of authority such as news media and political parties were once the only widely accepted sources for the dissemination of information. It is important to clarify here that the narratives communicated by traditional forms of authority to foster a form of reality may have been widely accepted, but that is different from labelling that form of a narrative as being

the only truth. The widely accepted narrative may inform someone's perception of what reality is, however, it would be incorrect to assume that reality is universal and unified. A caveat here is the rise of fringe political parties which should not be lumped together with the entrenched forms of traditional authority but can also be considered as an alternate source of information dissemination. An example here is the rise of the political party Tehreek-e-Labbaik in Pakistan in 2015. However, in recent political times, there has been one notable change in information communication: the privatisation of decision-making. The privatisation of news channels, the emergence of fringe parties along with the rise of social media has influenced how individuals consume information and the onus of responsibility which has shifted from limited traditional forms of authority to the individual. On the one hand, the increase in privatised news channels and free media has resulted in multiple narratives emerging about a particular subject. On the other hand, the rise of social media has transformed the consumption patterns of news for the individual. These platforms have increased the multiple constructed narratives to emerge and choose from.

The rise in the presence of competing alternative realities is attributed to the precedence of the valence judgements on what constitutes truth. The prominence of alternate forms of reality is gaining traction from sources which are replacing traditional forms of authority due to the decline in trust that people upheld with such outlets. The individuals have a choice in deciding which narrative is disseminated from a specific platform they want to ascribe to. This is intertwined with the ability of the narrative to grip the individual and facilitate the sense of experiencing information and resonating with the content. For instance, the process by which people understand a television message depends in part on the beliefs which they bring to it and crucially on how these beliefs are utilised (Eldridge, 1993, p. 256). The individual is encouraged to decide for themselves what true means for

them. Individuals are not passive recipients of the information. How individuals experience the information shapes their acceptance of a particular discourse. This decline of trust or a sense of shifting of trust from one particular traditional form of authority to other forms feeds into the relativity of truthfulness. An example to illustrate this idea of trust placed in a specific source can be associated with what the political party Tehreek-e-Labbaik in Pakistan was able to achieve in a brief period of 2015 – rallying for the supremacy of Islamic Shariah in Pakistan and garnering support for this ideal. The individuals supporting this notion believed in the rhetoric of the party: “Democracy will be subservient to Islam, of course. What sort of an Islamic system is this where the Shariah court is subservient to the Supreme Court?” (Yusuf, 2018). The trust placed in this source amounts to the belief in the narrative as well. The desire within this political narrative can create a collective sense of belonging and yearning, making citizens experience the rhetorical situation and inducing belief. However, equally important is the notion of trust placed in the source, and the mass gatherings for election rallies demonstrated this immense trust placed in the political party which influenced the truthfulness of the political narrative propagated by them.

Social media is increasingly becoming the dominant medium of communication and news dissemination as well as news consumption for the public. Citizens are more susceptible to believing in alternative forms of realities due to the transformation in how information is experienced in today’s time. Ball discusses how social media weaponizes bullshit – when people see something on their social feeds, they’re seeing information from their friends or relatives and since people tend to trust them over experts, they are more inclined to like and trust what they share on social media, and that is one way of continuously spreading misinformation (2017). The salience of the source is replaced by a new metric for determining what we need to know—that is, what my friends like’ (Seifert, 2017, p.398).

Pariser discusses the phenomenon of a “filter bubble”, which refers to the internet filters that are prediction engines, constantly trying to theorise about whom an individual is, creating a unique personalised universe of information; an individual does not choose to be a part of the filter bubble, as they would choose to watch partisan news on TV, rather the information they’re exposed is altered according to the individual’s activity on the internet (2011, pp. 9-11). The filter bubble on social media is perhaps reflective of the filter bubble people have created for themselves by choosing to interact with like-minded people and consuming information which reinforces their existing beliefs, however, the advent of social media has amplified this (Wintersieck, 2017, p. 204). Affiliative truths tend to function as a source of congregation and association with like-minded people. This phenomenon is reflective of the sociological phenomenon of homophily, which is a tendency whereby people congregate with others who are like them. Exposure to news on social media is dependent on one’s social network: ‘the power to expose oneself to perspectives from the other side in social media lies first and foremost with individuals’ (Bakshy et al., 2015, p. 1132), with polarisation in sharing news content being a consequence of the type of social network one has.

Since beliefs are linked to one’s sense of identity, any perceived challenge is often rejected. The aspect of persistence has been attributed to motivated reasoning (Flynn et al., 2017; Kunda, 1990; Meffert et al., 2006; Redlawsk, 2002; Redlawsk et al., 2010; Thaler, 2019), partisanship (Bolsen et al., 2014; Dalton et al., 1998; Ecker and Ang, 2019; Hobolt et al., 2021; Levendusky, 2013), prior attitudes (Gilead et al., 2019; Guess et al., 2018; Pennycook et al., 2018; Taber and Lodge, 2006; Taber et al., 2009; Ross et al., 1975; Wood and Porter, 2019; Wittenberg and Berinsky, 2020), as well as source credibility (Berinsky, 2017; Swire et al., 2017) which can lead to a confirmation of one’s belief, resisting or



avoiding opposing information. The sense of identity and belonging to a particular narrative is crucial in ensuring a certain discourse is sustained. The political actor can cultivate a culture whereby there is an objection towards expert opinion, truth, and evidence, to gain an electoral advantage (Fish, 2016, p. 211). This is accentuated by the prominence of social media taking centre stage as the source of all information. Politics is mediatized meaning that 'it has lost its autonomy, has become dependent in its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with mass media' (Mazzoleni and Schulz, 1999, p. 250). Media plays a crucial role in issue framing and allows for the sustenance of a narrative. The new media, internet and social media have indeed revolutionised the news industry by making a multiplicity of information and narratives accessible to the public. The narratives are tailored according to the identity of the individual. It is indeed the consumer who decides which sources to rely on and the narratives to believe in. The authoritative sources one previously relied upon for verification of information have either been diminished, distracted, disinterested or in some cases disappeared (Bomey, 2018). The information which circulates on the internet is rarely mediated by journalists or news media, which allows the political actor to disseminate their message directly to the public without being subjected to media selection or interpretation of events.

In sum, the dissemination and acceptance feature focuses on the relationship between shared experiences, trust, and the privatisation of decision-making.

Overall, I argue that post-truth discourse is political, is two-way hierarchical, employs strategic use of emotion, informs identities by referring to specific lacks and fantasies, espouses a fantasmatic logic, is aimed at seeking an audience, fosters a shared experience influencing the perception of truthfulness.

### **3.7 5 Questions Addressed**

The discussion on the analytical framework to theorise post-truth discourse has set the ground to address the five questions raised in Chapter 2:

- Question 1: Is post-truth to be attributed to the conscious effort of an actor in creating a statement which is ambiguous and cannot be categorised as being a blatant lie – more like my version of truth versus your version of the truth?
- Question 2: Is there a culture of normalising lies – making it “a no-fault transgression” (Keyes, 2004, pp. 9-10), which is specific to the notion of post-truth?
- Question 3: What is the role of emotionality in analysing post-truth and how does it relate to the diminishing relevancy of truth?
- Question 4: What does the rise in misinformation indicate about post-truth and how is it linked to the notion of truthfulness?
- Question 5: What is the role played by the public in sustaining discourses?

To begin a post-truth discourse refers to the account which is constructed expressing a specific viewpoint and ideal that is intended to evoke a feeling of shared solidarity with the content – the feeling of yearning and belonging. Yearning refers to the aspiration toward achieving an unfulfilled desire whereas belonging refers to the shared experience of the unfulfilled desire. A post-truth discourse is structured to respond to both of these aspects.

A post-truth discourse is political in nature and has political implications. The intertwining of discourse and power becomes prominent in analysing the role of the political actor in creating a discourse which seeks an audience. The emphasis is not placed on blatant

lies, but on the way, that discourse is structured. The textual attributes of post-truth discourse - lack, fantasy, emotionality, and fantasmatic logic co-occur to present arguments as plausible narratives. The strategic use of emotions and Lacanian psychoanalytic elements are critical components in creating a discourse through which individuals can experience information. Therefore, it is not that the political actors intentionally create ambiguous statements. In discussing post-truth as political discourse, the focus should be placed on the textual attributes of discourse, and how it ties in with the notion that the political aim of the discourse is purposeful. It is the multitude of antagonistic discourses which exist in parallel each offering a specific fantasy and addressing a specific lack which allows for the disagreement on truthful narratives.

I dissociate my analysis of post-truth discourse from the notion of 'post' being something negative and referring to the culture of normalising lies or the rise in misinformation. The shift in the framing of post-truth as political discourse, it can serve as an overarching umbrella which allows for the existence of symptoms such as misinformation, fake news, propaganda, populist discourse and so forth. In analysing post-truth discourses, truthfulness ought to be analysed as being a relativist. The element of emotionality ties in with this relativist nature of truthfulness. Each discourse envisions offering the only fantasy which can address the lack in the subject offering closure and fulfilling the desire and aspiration they aim for. But it is indeed the inability to entirely achieve the desiring aspect of a fantasy fully – the incompleteness of the lack which makes an individual continue aspiring for fulfilment. The emphasis is on 'my version of truth versus your version'. The only plausible way of resolving the tension and claiming the aspiration is through the belief in one specific version of reality – the supremacy of a beatific dimension of fantasy which aims at 'promising fullness once an obstacle is overcome' juxtaposed to a reality which

will sustain a status quo with the continuation of lacks if ‘obstacle proves insurmountable – horrific dimension of fantasy’ (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p. 147). A post-truth discourse evokes a fantasy of fulfilment by simultaneously propagating a reality which may prevail if the fulfilment is not attained. The attribute of fantasy in a post-truth discourse is intended to address a hindrance which prevents an individual from attaining the desired identity, highlighting the threat to the identity.

For a post-truth discourse to resonate with the audience, it has to offer identification with what the audience is aspiring to achieve in their lives, and provide the offer of fulfilment for that aspiration. Fantasy needs to be considered as the overarching means of trying to provide meaning and resolve the lack an individual associate with their identity. It is the tool through which desire can be captured. The inclusion of emotionality in such a discourse facilitates the creation of a plausible narrative that an individual is likely to identify with and believe in it to be truthful.

A post-truth discourse has a political implication - it can become hegemonic - to take root as ‘the’ ultimate means of understanding the world. It is two-way hierarchical (incorporating both top-down and bottom-up dimensions). The political actor constructs narratives which are intended to seek reception, and therefore, the persuasive nature of discourses is an important tenet. The political manipulation which takes place through the usage of emotionality becomes a crucial component of post-truth discourses. Emotionality permeates the narrative evoking a sense of belonging and yearning, and inducing affect. The discourse is structured to create an identity which an individual desire and aspires for and can situate within. On the other hand, a post-truth discourse also entails reception. It is constructed to achieve an aim, to persuade a specific audience to believe and accept it as being truthful.

### **3.8 How is Post-truth Discourse Different?**

The concept of post-truth which has predominantly been analysed in terms of misinformation, emotions, and opposition to the truth to date has to be rethought. Once we move beyond these features, we are left with analysing the prefix 'post' in a different light where the priority is not being placed on what constitutes truth and falsehood. Once the truth is considered just one of the various priorities that accompany the creation of discourse, it paves the path for grounding the conceptualisation of post-truth as political discourse. It is this type of discourse whereby the emphasis is not placed on dichotomising truth-post-truth, but analysing various textual attributes and dimensions of discourse which render it post-truth. The question that then arises is about the specificity of a post-truth discourse.

I answer this question with caution. This study aims to put forth a means through which the concept of post-truth can be rethought. I fulfil that aim by suggesting that the concept of post-truth should be examined in terms of discourse. Building on this shift in the framing of post-truth, I outline features of such discourse. I suggest a post-truth discourse is such which embodies all of the six conditions outlined earlier. These conditions can be divided into the four textual attributes of lack, fantasy, emotionality, and fantasmatic logic, and two dimensions of the political and two-way hierarchical nature of the discourse. For a political discourse to be identified as post-truth these conditions must co-occur. In doing so, I dissociate from the dichotomy of truth-post-truth and instead reorient the discussion on the features of discourse which can facilitate our understanding of post-truth political discourses. They can further shed light on how transformations in society influence the creation, dissemination, and acceptance of the discourse, and examine how the co-occurrence of certain features renders the creation of post-truth discourses.

The analysis of why incidents of misinformation, emotionality and populist discourses

are more prominent can be better grasped by analysing the various features of post-truth discourse. It also facilitates our understanding of how the transformations in society have influenced how discourses are created, the meaning-making process, as well as how they are experienced, and accepted. Post-truth discourses present a contextual relevant argumentation, illustrating the means through which desire can be captured. The plausibility of the argumentation takes centre stage which draws upon emotional rhetoric to illustrate the logical underpinning of common sense and the aspect of desire to induce belief. The elements of yearning and belonging are intertwined with emotionality and function as instruments which facilitate the construction of the narrative. The yearning for the desire and the belonging and shared experiences of the current identity. The role of political actors and the citizens is interconnected in understanding post-truth discourses. The creation of knowledge comes at the behest of exercising power – the antagonistic worldviews allow for a multitude of realities to co-exist, and it is indeed the audience who exercises their right of choice, accepting the discourse to be truthful. The resonance of the argumentation within the discourse is equally important as creating the desire to persuade the audience. The multitude of constructed narratives is structured around different subject positions and creates different forms of identities advocating certain interpretations of realities, each competing towards becoming the dominant interpretation.

Post-truth discourses create specific ideal identities, a specific version of reality which acts as a means of capturing desire and providing a specific meaning to the world surrounding an individual. The various textual attributes and dimensions of post-truth discourses allow us to fully grasp the means through which new forms of knowledge and political narratives are constructed, the means through which they are communicated, and the means through which they are accepted. For example, the discourse on terrorism within Pakistani

newspapers between the years 2007-2018 fits the criteria of a post-truth discourse. The discourse is reflective of the desire of being a 'good' Muslim and the promise of salvation in the afterlife. The overarching fantasy to capture this desire refers to the establishment of a Caliphate based on Islamic principles whereby the acts of terrorism are justified for the greater cause. The intertwining of emotional rhetoric with the fantasy of a Caliphate creates a shared experience amongst those involved in these attacks of belonging to the agenda of implementing an Islamic state and a yearning for the desire to restore and glorify Islam through the creation of the Caliphate. This shared experience sheds light on how violence is justified as a means to achieve the goal. It is the socialisation of individuals in believing that the true Islamic state can only be implemented through the removal of liberal forces from the country. This is the means through which the desire of being a 'good' Muslim can be fulfilled. The fantasmatic logic within the political argumentation is most visibly seen in articulating the means of acquiring the status of a 'good' Muslim through the establishment of an Islamic state. The intertwining of emotions with political argumentation induces affect, makes individuals experience information and make political arguments plausible. The personal circumstances of those involved in these attacks are situated within the narrative and an emphasis is placed on identifying with reasoning and scenarios. The strategic use of emotionality in the narrative is tied to the appeals to the 'greater cause' which can be summed as the duty of every Muslim to participate in the struggle of establishing a Caliphate. The desire for the awards in the afterlife is articulated for the audience to grasp the context and experience it by situating themselves within the narrative. The co-occurrence of discourse and affect within the account of terrorism illustrates how political argumentation can create desire and recruit support. The leaders of the terrorist organisations are creating such a political account to recruit terrorists within

their organisation. The discourse is political and reflects the two-way hierarchical nature. It further highlights the necessary textual attributes necessary for a political discourse to be identified as post-truth.

On the other hand, a non-post-truth discourse would be any type of political discourse which is unable to fulfil the necessary six conditions. A fitting example of this is the account of saving £350m a week for the NHS once Britain left the European Union. That is a completely false statement, a piece of misinformation which cannot be equated with being a post-truth political discourse as it fails to feature the necessary conditions and is built on the notion of truthfulness equated to objective and factual information.

### **3.9 Conclusion**

The theorisation of post-truth discourse is based on four major claims which intertwine with the key concepts from the analytical frameworks of postcolonial and subaltern studies, post-structuralist discourse theory, and socialisation theory. This chapter outlined the alternative lens through which post-truth can be analysed in terms of discourse. The mainstream definition of post-truth is restricted to the narratives mostly constituting fake news and emphasises the notion of truthfulness. This especially becomes problematic when discussing narratives and incidents which do not ascribe to the popular understanding of post-truth politics within and outside the Anglophone world. This shift in framing dissociates post-truth to be analysed from an objective facts-misinformation dichotomy and instead focuses on the attributes and dimensions of post-truth discourse. I argue that post-truth discourse should be understood as political discourse embodying six necessary conditions which can be divided into textual attributes and dimensions of discourse. It is the co-occurrence of



all the features which render discourses post-truth. I suggest that the conversation has to shift from dichotomising discourses, and instead focus on analysing the implications of the prominence of such discourses on political behaviour, attitudes, and perceptions.

The next chapter presents the guideline to identify, evaluate and analyse the key features of a post-truth discourse when looking at real-world political rhetoric. This forms the basis for expanding the scope of empirical research on post-truth. I evaluate the theorisation of post-truth discourse using the case study of Pakistan. I evaluate Pakistani newspapers to identify and analyse Pakistani post-truth electoral discourse between the years 2007-2018.

## **Part II: Post-truth Discourse in Pakistan**

# **Chapter 4**

## **A Guide for Identifying Post-truth**

### **Discourse**

#### **Abstract**

I develop a guideline for assessing post-truth discourses. In doing so, I develop an operationalisation of post-truth discourse and implement the operational definition to evaluate real-world political rhetoric and narratives for post-truth discourses. I use the case study of Pakistan, specifically, Pakistani newspapers for post-truth discourses using the guideline. This chapter outlines the case study, data collection methods, the coding strategies, and discusses the mixed-method research design implemented to empirically identify, analyse, and measure post-truth discourses using the political narratives in Pakistani newspapers. The chapter concludes by briefly discussing prominent Pakistani electoral narratives in newspapers which form the basis for the two empirical cases: (1) analysis and categorisation of post-truth electoral discourses, and (2) a vignette survey experiment to measure the effects

of post-truth discourse on political attitudes and perceptions.

## **4.1 Introduction**

I translate the theoretical definition of the previous chapter(s) into an operationalisation. I use the operationalisation as a guiding principle to be employed in empirical research. Whereas Part I of the study focused on laying the foundation for theorising the shift in discussing post-truth as political discourse, Part II of the study is focused on translating the theorisation into an operationalisation employing a mixed-method approach. This chapter focuses on outlining the method - the guiding principles of identifying post-truth discourse and research design for implementing a mixed-method approach to evaluate post-truth discourses in political texts and the influence of such discourses on citizens' political attitudes and perceptions. The theorisation of post-truth as discourse enables us to both observe post-truth discourses in the world and to design it in a research study to observe its effects. It is essential to acknowledge that the task of operationalising post-truth discourse comes with its limitations and difficulties - the nuances of discourse are not easy to capture in a metric empirically.

To make the theoretical framework accessible and to expand the scope of empirical research on post-truth, the following chapters illustrate how post-truth discourses can be identified, measured, and analysed through the proposed guideline. I use an exploratory mixed-method research design using the case study of Pakistani newspaper discourse, combining post-structuralist discourse theory with empiricism to evaluate real-world political texts and narratives for post-truth discourses. The application of the Logics of Critical Explanation approach is one such example of bridging post-structuralist discourse theory

and empiricism. Following suit, the mixed-method approach allows me to collect qualitative data, which is newspaper articles, and implement Rhetorical Political Analysis and a Lacanian psychoanalytical reading of newspaper articles to identify and analyse post-truth discourses. Having a data set of post-truth discourses within a Pakistani context allows me to use it for different forms of empirical research, in this case, an experimental design to measure citizens perceived truthfulness associated with a selected sample of post-truth discourses. On the one hand, the theorisation of post-truth as political discourse enables us to observe and analyse political discourses in the real world. On the other hand, and equally important is that such a theorisation opens up the empirical avenue of designing and implementing research studies whereby the effects of post-truth discourses can be observed.

Critical discourse analysis allows us to examine how language functions and meanings are created in varying social contexts. Such an interpretive approach is integral in identifying and analysing post-truth discourses in newspaper reporting to better grasp the type of narratives that are being created which inform differing identities. Building from this identification and analysis of post-truth discourses, I am able to design a vignette survey experiment to measure political attitudes and perceptions related to post-truth discourses. The theorisation of post-truth as political discourse proves pivotal and timeless whereby the attributes and dimensions of it allow us to evaluate various forms of real-world rhetoric as well as incorporate these features into diverse forms of research designs to measure political attitudes and opinions.

Whereas the qualitative segment of the empirical analysis is useful in exemplifying diverse types of post-truth discourses, the experimental segment broadens the scope of inquiry on post-truth by using post-truth discourse as a unique variable of interest whose effect on political attitude and perceptions can be measured. Chapter 5 presents findings

from the discursive analysis of Pakistani newspaper articles, identifying distinct types of post-truth electoral discourses between the years 2007 – 2018. This interpretive approach is useful in illustrating the theorisation of post-truth as political discourse and serves as a guidebook to be applied in differing research approaches. Building from this, Chapter 6 presents findings from a vignette survey experiment measuring citizens' perceived truthfulness of post-truth discourses in Pakistan, thereby displaying one of the various research approaches in which post-truth discourse can be used to study attitudes. In a sense, discursive empirics highlight the distinct types of post-truth political discourses that co-exist in the real world.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the conceptualisation of post-truth discourse which is translated into an operational definition. The second section outlines the data collection mechanism and discusses the case study. The third section outlines and discusses the main electoral themes in newspapers that were coded during the data collection process. This section also acts as a precursor to Chapter 5 which is based on analysing the selected themes in greater detail to ascertain the categorisation of post-truth discourses.

## **4.2 Conceptualisation and Operationalisation of Post-truth Discourse**

Discourse theory focuses on understanding and interpreting socially produced meanings instead of seeking objective causal explanations, and this is achieved by analysing how political forces and social actors construct meanings within incomplete and undecidable social structures (Howarth, 2000; Laclau, 2000). The focus is on explaining and understanding

the conditions under which discourses are created and contested. There is not a single prescriptive methodological approach for conducting theoretically informed research on discourse. Instead, there are various guiding principles identified by scholars which guide the conduct of discourse theoretical research (Glynos and Howarth, 2007; Howarth, 2000; Laclau, 2000). Discourse analysis can be best understood as a 'set of methods and theories for investigating language in use and language in social contexts' (Wetherell et al., 2001). The application of discourse theory to empirical research topics is contingent upon the particular problem researchers are focusing on, modulating, and articulating their concepts accordingly.

How does Lacan's concept of the subject, lack and fantasy tie in with post-truth discourse? Lacanian psychoanalysis is a useful tool to examine and analyse the logic within post-truth rhetoric and to understand the functioning of desire through discourse. It facilitates in exploring how language and rhetoric highlight the incompleteness and the desire within a political narrative and the ways through which the desire can be captured. The Lacanian theory is useful in understanding how the intertwining of affect with discourse exemplifies the ability of logical political argumentation to create desire and recruit support. Emotional rhetoric within the political narrative operates to invoke desire and create a sense of the shared experience of belonging and yearning for the desire.

For Lacan, the concept of lack is understood as a lack of *jouissance*, and it is this reclamation of *jouissance* which is offered through ascribing to fantasy, or more aptly put "the fantasmatic promise of – and desire for – its recapture" (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008, p. 262). Therefore, for a particular narrative to resonate with the audience, the content needs to be such that it provides the individual with a means of diminishing the lack they assume is inherently present with their identity to the Other, and it is the constant strife

for overcoming this lack, the desire to fill the void, does the subject then attempts to act and replicate an ideal. A fantasy, therefore, should be understood as a “schema linking the subject to a socio-political reality with a reference to the object-cause of desire” (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008, p. 262) – imitating a fantasmatic ideal. The role of fantasy is, therefore, to fill up or complete the void in the subject and the structure of relations to bring about a closure (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p. 146). Fantasies in this sense provide meaning to the world for the subject, giving consistency to what the subject perceives as reality; fantasies are ‘the support that gives consistency to what we call “reality”’ (Žižek, 1989, p. 44). fantasy operates to bring forth a closure for a subject’s identity, “promising fullness once an obstacle is overcome - the beatific dimension of fantasy – or which foretells of disaster if the obstacle proves insurmountable, which might be termed as the horrific dimension of fantasy” (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p. 147). The only plausible way of resolving the tension and claiming the aspiration is through the belief in one specific version of reality – the supremacy of a beatific dimension of fantasy which aims at ‘promising fullness once an obstacle is overcome’ juxtaposed to a reality which will sustain a status quo with the continuation of lacks if ‘obstacle proves insurmountable – horrific dimension of fantasy.’

The discourse arising from beatific fantasy allows for the construction of social identity for an individual which offers redemption as well as signalling the horrific dimension of the fantasy, propagating a reality which may prevail if the fulfilment is not attained. An example to explain this is the narrative surrounding the 2016 US elections, in particular, the slogan ‘drain the swamp’. What is the fantasy underpinning ‘drain the swamp’? It entails glorifying American exceptionalism – the American dream and the supremacy of American values. The desire being articulated within this political narrative is to reinstate true



American values and exceptionalism. It is tied with ridding off the corrupt elite who have damaged the ideal of American exceptionalism. It is to emphasise the primacy of Americans and American values over the degenerate society that America has become. America can only be great again if 'true' Americans can come into power. Hence, the fantasy of 'draining the swamp' is an overarching means of capturing the desire and promising fulfilment. The ability of the narrative to translate common sense into logical argumentation, make individuals experience the information and evoke a commonly shared feeling of belonging to the situation and yearning for the desire facilitates entrenching the discourse. This becomes an integral component in analysing how and why the audience accepts discourse. Therefore, the construction of such a social identity becomes a necessary condition for a discourse to become entrenched and accepted by the audience, for it to sustain and subsequently influence public opinion, attitudes, and preferences.

It is both the 'interpretation' and the 'act of interpretation' (Lacan, 1991, pp. 228-229) which facilitates the articulation of desire in research – the categorisation of a post-truth discourse. Whereas interpretation is conceived as examining the attributes of lack, fantasy, fantasmatic logic and emotionality structuring the narrative to act as a post-truth discourse, it is indeed the 'act of interpretation' – the individual – who identifies with a lack and ascribes their desire to a specific narrative which renders it being truthful. The interpretation of a discourse confronts us with the otherness – *jouissance* embodied as something that which we can never attain and that which we cannot ever get rid of (Žižek, 1989, p. 164). The affective communication through a narrative evokes a shared experience, placing the individual within the context of the political narrative so they are able to identify with logical reasoning and experience scenarios. The articulation of desire within a political narrative is to grip the audience and bring to the fore personal situations so that support

can be recruited through political argumentation. The Other becomes important in empirical analysis because it is the confrontation with the Other that influences how we ascribe meaning to discourses – the way we identify desires and fantasies. Lapping reflects upon her experience as an interviewer:

This experience of otherness confronted me with my incompleteness, the gap in my ability to perform as a researcher... because I am in a sense overwhelmed by her otherness, I attribute my lack to her: she reduced me to a dull social science interviewer, she was being defensive (when in fact it is the unconscious relations between signifiers that constitute these interpretations)... this experience of lack is articulated in writing the field notes (2013, p. 377).

It is essential to understand the specific meanings we associate with these textual attributes influences our interpretation of post-truth discourses and the truthfulness associated with them. It is also how the discourses are interpreted that can signal our lack (as researchers) in the way we analyse the specific discourses. Frosh and Baraitser argue that “narrative sense is always made post hoc, and in relation to research is always a process of the researcher re-reading the subject’s discourse to even it out, to find anchor points for it and consequently to make it safe and orderly” (Frosh and Baraitser, 2008, p. 355). Therefore, the role of psychoanalysis in empirical research requires us to examine the discourses to make sense of them – how meanings are produced and why do they sustain. Parker alludes to the idea of fixing meanings through repetition which grounds discourses: it is indeed the “process of fixing meaning through repetition of certain signifiers in their function as quilting points or master signifiers, which is that the process of anchoring occurs

retroactively through the insistence that ‘this is the way things are, that it is not subject to challenge or dissent’ (2005, pp. 169-170).

The creation aspect is specifically concerned with identifying, interpreting, and analysing the textual attributes in a post-truth discourse. Whereas Lacanian psychoanalysis provides us with an outlook on the textual attributes of post-truth discourse, debates on discourse and power within post-structuralist discourse theory and post-colonial and subaltern studies facilitate our understanding of the dimensions of post-truth discourse, its political nature, and the two-way hierarchical nature. To translate this conceptualisation of post-truth discourse into an operational definition, I argue that post-truth discourse embodies four textual attributes, namely (1) lack, (2) fantasy, (3) emotionality, and (4) fantasmatic logic, and two dimensions, namely (5) the discourse is political, and (6) the discourse has a two-way hierarchical dimension (top-down and bottom-up). Each attribute is intricately linked and overlapping. The political rhetoric and argumentation associated with post-truth discourse embody the articulation of a desire which evokes the feeling of belonging and yearning. The intertwining of pathos structured by fantasy is complimented by the logos of the rhetorical situation which exemplifies the features of a post-truth discourse.

To assess real-world political texts and narratives for post-truth discourses, it becomes essential that these textual attributes and dimensions are interpreted within a specific contextual environment. Applying discursive analysis, specifically the implementation of Rhetorical Political Analysis (RPA), I can conduct a Lacanian psychoanalytic reading of newspaper articles, and highlight these textual attributes in Pakistani newspapers to exemplify post-truth electoral discourse in the country. RPA facilitates in analysing the logical argument within a text (Finlayson, 2007) as well as the emotional dimension of texts (Martin, 2016). Whereas the interpretation and analysis of the textual attributes lack, and fantasy

create a plausible narrative, it is fantasmatic logic that ties the arguments within the narrative together, and the element of emotionality which is the driving force in inducing the feeling of belonging and yearning - the fantasmatic space, invoking a desire to restore the symbolic order. Psychoanalytic analysis in conjunction with emotionality is critical in analysing post-truth discourses as it facilitates our understanding of how emotions in a narrative can 'affectively orient individuals to their personal situations by identifying with reasonings, characters, as well as expressed feelings' (Martin, 2016). It is not the act of stirring emotion but how the specific narrative can 'articulate desires in terms that permit audiences to grasp a situation and place themselves in it' (Martin, 2016).

The implementation of Rhetorical Political Analysis and Psychoanalysis furthers the scope of empirical research on analysing post-truth discourses and affective strategies in the political domain. It allows us to grasp the context of political argument and meaning-making that emerges from a discourse. This in conjunction with Lacanian psychoanalysis and the Logics approach grounds our understanding of the composition and appeal of post-truth discourses.

## **4.3 Case Study and Data Collection**

### **4.3.1 Case Study**

The case study is Pakistani newspapers, specifically three major English newspapers (Dawn, The Nation, and The Express Tribune) circulated in the National Election Years of 2008, 2013, and 2018. I evaluate the content of 1205 newspaper articles from these newspapers. The content evaluated in newspaper reporting is based on two sources: statements by politicians and opinion pieces by individuals reflecting on statements by politicians. The

inclusion of both aspects of newspaper content gives us the opportunity to evaluate the nature of the narrative – the type of image which is painted through the narrative and what the audience is exposed to. The constructed narratives are aimed at creating and re-creating specific identities which are therefore influenced by how the newspaper content covers a specific topic. The inclusion of both types of newspaper reporting in the database is to identify a variation (if any) that exists in how specific political narratives are constructed, aimed at creating specific forms of identities. The implementation of a discursive analysis of political texts, newspapers, in this case, is one way of evaluating the presence of post-truth discourses.

I do not claim to analyse the entirety of political narratives in Pakistan, nor presume that post-truth discourses exist within a Pakistani context. The implementation of this discursive analysis is to explore the presence of post-truth discourses in the selected newspapers in Pakistan. However, the decision to include Pakistan as a case study is one means of contributing to the emerging literature on post-truth by shifting the focus towards ethnically and religiously diverse, politically stable developing democratising countries. The insights gained from evaluating newspaper articles in Pakistan can prove to be interesting and important in several ways. There are four reasons for choosing Pakistan as a case study.

First, the core of my theorisation of post-truth is premised upon discourse. Therefore, the focus of the first empirical illustrative case study is premised upon implementing the operationalisation of post-truth discourse to act as a guideline through which Pakistani newspaper articles in three National election years: 2008, 2013 and 2018 can be analysed for post-truth discourses. Pakistan serves as a viable and excellent case study whereby this particular conceptualisation of post-truth as political discourse can be examined. Pakistan has had a history of military coups with instances of democratically elected governments.

Such a fractured political history has shaped public opinion on the forms of regime type as well as informing identities surrounding political narratives on various issues. The political discourse presents itself as a good starting point for evaluating prominent discourses that dominate the political sphere which tends to shape identities during an election period. These discourses have been informed by the evolution of the Pakistani political domain where the institutions of military, dynastic politics and grassroots mobilisation have impacted the type of narratives that emerge about various political issues. Therefore, the political discourse in Pakistan is insightful in analysing how various political narratives surrounding elections are shaped, whether the chequered political history of Pakistan has implications on the process of creating political narratives, and subsequently whether such narratives have post-truth elements. Moreover, evaluating the content of the political narratives in three different election years helps us gauge if political discourse evolves over time and if there is a variation in the prominence of discourses surrounding each election. This activity opens up the avenue for replication studies in various contexts whereby varying discourses can be evaluated for being post-truth.

Second, to date, the research on post-truth has not turned to South Asia and there can be several reasons for this: the parochial assumption that post-truth is not applicable in a non-western context, the choice of the researcher to conduct an empirical study in a context they are familiar with and so forth. Choosing Pakistan as a case study, therefore, not only dissociates from the parochial assumption that post-truth cannot be studied in a non-western context but also opens up the space for analysing particular discourses that are post-truth in the specific parochial case of Pakistan. It furthers this idea of how post-truth discourses are multitude and are shaped by certain contextual underpinnings. For instance, the discourse on democracy and terrorism is particular to the case of Pakistan. They provide insights into

the role played by several actors that shape the debate about these issues in Pakistan and can be claimed to be post-truth in nature due to the narrative that they propagate.

Third, the various institutions in Pakistan, especially the military, dynastic political elite, and *Jihadists* have an immense influence in shaping the political debate in the country. This also means that Pakistani discourse is extremely varied, and provides an excellent case study to analyse these discourses over time especially through the tumultuous political landscape to discern if post-truth narratives exist, and how they influence citizens' beliefs in them.

Lastly, taking into consideration the post-colonial lens, how power and knowledge are intertwined and the tropes that exist about political elites, Pakistani discourse in light of this nexus paints a perceptive picture of how certain discourses can ground themselves in the society, and that till date the undertone of post-colonial narratives continues to span the political discourse in the country. There are indeed several lessons to be gained from the case of Pakistan to grasp the nature of post-truth discourses which span the political domain in the country but also facilitate us in reflecting on how we interpret discourses.

Whilst other forms of media (e.g., television news coverage or social media news coverage) would have provided an interesting case study, there are several reasons for focusing on newspapers here. First, newspapers offer a clear expression of positions on various political and social issues, therefore it acts as an extensive source to evaluate the prominent themes that have emerged over a specified period and dominated the political debate. Second, the wide readership of the selected newspapers indicates how a political narrative can be disseminated and sustained across a wide population, exposing the population to the major narratives that occupy the political debate. Third, written texts are amenable to discourse analysis ([Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002](#)) which facilitates the task of categorising

texts and narratives as post-truth. Therefore, newspapers have been chosen to evaluate the content to identify the main themes and narratives that spanned the political debate during the three electoral years in Pakistan: 2008, 2013 and 2018. Once the themes have been identified, the next step involves evaluating and analysing the themes to ascertain post-truth accounts in newspaper articles.

### **4.3.2 Mixed-method Approach**

The implementation of an 'exploratory mixed-method research design' (Creswell and Clark, 2017) is useful in developing and expanding the scope of inquiry on empirical research on post-truth. In Chapter 5, I implement Rhetorical Political Analysis and a Lacanian psychoanalytic reading of Pakistani newspapers to analyse the distinct types of post-truth discourses. The chapter provides an extensive discussion on two types of post-truth discourses, namely discourses on democracy and terrorism that are categorised as post-truth using the criteria outlined in this chapter. The critical evaluation of these articles facilitates our understanding of the diverse types of narratives that can be categorised as post-truth discourses. Whereas this sets the foundation for testing the theorisation of post-truth discourse, it also sets the ground for further empirical analysis. Therefore, in Chapter 6, I implement a vignette survey experiment, building from the findings in the preceding chapter to analyse post-truth discourse as a unique variable of interest. I measure the perceived truthfulness of post-truth discourses through the survey experiment. Whereas most scholarly attention has been paid to two central features of 'post-truth politics': the adherence of citizens to claims that are objectively false but politically congenial, and the propagation of such misinformation on social media, this particular survey experiment is the first of its kind to analyse the effect of post-truth discourse on political behaviour. The use of Pakistan



as a case study further broadens the scope of inquiry on empirical research conducted on post-truth.

### **4.3.3 Data Collection**

The transformation in technology and media has influenced how information is consumed within the political domain of Pakistan. Like many other countries, Pakistan is also witnessing a transformation in the media landscape with the advent of social media and the priority placed on private decision-making. Social media is increasingly becoming the dominant medium for news consumption for the public (Valeriani and Vaccari, 2018), especially in the light of rapid penetration of information technology in developing countries (Valenzuela et al., 2021). In the case of Pakistan, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) has been the harbinger for campaigning extensively on social media (Khalid, 2020; Khurram, 2021). These changes in the media landscape have influenced how individuals consume information and form an opinion about various social and political issues. The youth in Pakistan was heavily mobilised using social media before the election of 2013 (Ali, 2013b). Similarly, the rise of fringe parties such as Tehreek-e-Labbaik (Roohan, 2021) and alternative sources of information dissemination (Ali, 2013a) influenced the type of political narratives that dominated the election landscape. However, these are recent changes that have taken place and it is difficult to measure the impact such transformation has had in the last few years.

For this study, I focus on print media specifically. This does not diminish the role that technology, the emergence of social media, the privatisation of media, and the role of state and non-profit provision of media play in influencing the forms of political narratives that dominate the political landscape. However, the purpose of Chapters 4 and 5 in particular is

to identify the types of post-truth discourses that emerge in one type of media - print media. Newspapers rather than social media are typical cases to study the impact of post-truth on political behaviours among the population in developing countries. In 2008, the Pakistani internet population was just 7 per cent of the entire population, which grew to 15 per cent by 2018 <sup>1</sup>. The nationwide distribution of newspapers in Pakistan makes a stronger case for analysing political narratives that are widely disseminated amongst the population through newspapers. The decision to analyse newspaper data makes the argument stronger to biases as access to the internet is still highly limited.

This involves creating a data set of newspaper publications which will be used as the content for assessing post-truth political discourse in Pakistan. The extensive reviewing of newspaper articles will lead to the outlining of the prominent themes which were present during the electoral years in Pakistan. Once the key themes have emerged, the next step involves assessing those themes for post-truth - analysing for the attributive traits and dimensions of post-truth discourse. Print media, such as newspapers provide an excellent starting point in analysing post-truth discourses.

The newspaper articles chosen are as follows:

1. Newspaper reporting of major news items and election speeches
2. Opinion pieces corresponding to the major news item and election speeches (in 1)

Through purposive sampling of news reporting of major events and specific election speeches before the General Elections of 2008, 2013 and 2018 in Pakistan, prominent themes and the narratives associated with the themes are outlined. The newspaper articles reviewed span the entire year before the specific election date (for example if the National

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<sup>1</sup>[World Bank](#)

election is on 25 July 2018, newspapers are collected from 25 July 2017). The starting dates of newspaper collection depend on when the National election in a specific year was scheduled for.

The steps in the data collection are as follows:

1. Newspaper Selection: 3 English newspapers have been chosen based on their widespread circulation and the largest readership <sup>2</sup>. The newspapers are listed in table 2.
2. News Selection: A total of 1205 news articles and opinion pieces were read in their entirety. Through the careful description of newspaper content surrounding news about major incidents and trending political issues in the election year, two types of news items are collected. The two categories of news items are listed below:
  1. News about major incidents and trending political issues spanning the entire year before the specific election date for the National elections held in Pakistan in the years 2008, 2013 and 2018. The news items in the selected articles corresponded to aspects associated with politics, economy, military, international and foreign relations, healthcare, education, and social welfare.
  2. The election speeches by prominent leaders of the three major parties as covered by the newspaper. The political parties are chosen based on their proportion in both the national and provincial assemblies. The Government of Pakistan is a federal government established by the Constitution of Pakistan as the governing authority of the four provinces (Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) as a parliamentary democratic republic. The legislative branch of the government known as the parliament constitutes two houses: the National Assembly and the Senate. The

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<sup>2</sup>[Press Reference](#)

National Assembly (NA) which is the lower house has 342 members, out of which 272 are elected directly by the people, and 70 seats are reserved for women and minorities. The Senate, which is the upper house, has 104 senators who are elected indirectly by the members of provincial assemblies for a six-year term. The selection of leaders of political parties for the analysis is based on the proportion of representation of 10 per cent or more of each party in the National Assembly which is directly elected by the citizens in the 2008, 2013 and 2018 governments. This representation is also mirrored in the Senate (listed in Table 2). The political candidates whose political speeches are chosen for analysis are the prominent figureheads of each party. Since the party structures vary, different labels have been used to refer to these leaders – president, chairperson, leaders in the National Assembly and the Senate, however, the commonality among all these leaders is their prominence as the face that citizens associate a party with (listed in Table 3).<sup>3</sup>

3. Excerpts from opinion pieces corresponding to the trending news items (a) and election speeches (b).

This has resulted in the creation of two data catalogues:

1. Catalogue of prominent news items about major incidents, trending political issues and election speeches of prominent political candidates from the major political parties during the specific electoral year, which dominated political discourse.

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<sup>3</sup>Benazir Bhutto is an ex-Prime Minister of Pakistan (1988-90 and 1993-1996) and has been associated as the prominent figurehead of Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP). However, the change in leadership names for the same party in 2013 and 2018 are due to the assassination of Benazir Bhutto in 2008 whilst she was campaigning. Therefore, for the analysis of electoral speeches, the names of leadership changed after 2008, despite Benazir continuing to be a prominent leadership figure to date for the party.

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## Table 2: List of Pakistani English

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Names	Launch Year
Dawn	1947
The Nation	1986
The Express Tribune	2010

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**Table 3: Proportion of Representation of Major Political Parties in the National Assembly (NA) and Party Leadership**

Year	Political Party	NA Seats	Vote %	Party Leadership
2018	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)	156	31.82	Imran Khan
	Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N)	55	24.35	Nawaz Sharif Shehbaz Sharif
	Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP)	55	13.03	Bilawal Bhutto Zardari Asif Ali Zardari
2013	Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N)	126	32.77	Nawaz Sharif Shehbaz Sharif
	Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP)	33	15.83	Bilawal Bhutto Zardari Asif Ali Zardari
	Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI)	28	16.92	Imran Khan
2008	Pakistan Peoples Party Parliamentarians (PPPP)	91	30.79	Benazir Bhutto
	Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N)	69	19.65	Nawaz Sharif Shehbaz Sharif
	Pakistan Tehrek-E-Insaf (PTI) boycotted elections in 2008	-	-	Imran Khan

2. Catalogue of opinion pieces on the prominent news items about major incidents and trending political issues, as well as election speeches in the year of the General Election.

The reason for two types of data collection is to evaluate the pattern of discourse that emerges during an electoral year as well as discern whether there is a differing pattern in how narratives are constructed through the main newspaper reporting and how opinion piece authors construct a narrative on a specific theme. Whereas the main newspaper reporting relies on reporting the incident or the election speech verbatim, the opinion piece column is a reflective piece on a specific theme. Since newspapers are being evaluated as being the medium of information dissemination, it is crucial to assess the type of narrative which is created around an incident in both the main newspaper content and in an opinion piece column. The main newspaper reporting in all of the chosen newspapers does not indicate a partisan leaning, however, the partisan viewpoints are visible through the writings of the opinion piece authors that contribute to all these newspapers. The variation in content can be insightful in determining the pattern of news coverage which dominates the political discourse, emerging in various sources, yet being post-truth in nature. It also provides insights into the actors who are responsible for the construction of narratives which includes but is not exclusively limited to the political elites and the opinion piece columnists in this case.

Why English newspapers? I select English newspapers for three primary reasons. First, English is one of the official languages in Pakistan, yet only a better-educated population can read it. English newspapers represent a highly conservative selection of the population that common wisdom would expect to be less exposed to post-truth statements. By choosing English newspapers, I can examine and analyse the various political themes that have

emerged over the varying National election years, and comment on the post-truth nature of the political narratives in the sample. Second, English newspapers are widely circulated in Pakistani mega-cities, which can play a magnifying role in spreading post-truth discourses. Third, the three selected English newspapers are among the most influential and well-read outlets in Pakistan, which also represent an extreme case selection on the readership scale. This last point is fundamental as the presence of post-truth discourses in widely read newspapers would also place possible higher weights on content production and topic discussions in society are among the highest shares in the country.

This data collection process facilitates in the creation of a data set of all the prominent political narratives reported within newspapers during the three National election years. This rich source of data is then used to identify post-truth discourses associated with some of the prominent political narratives. The next section outlined the coding mechanism for creating the data set and analysing the data for post-truth discourses.

#### **4.3.4 Coding**

The articles included for analysis purposes followed a four-step coding and analysis process:

1. All newspaper articles were read in their entirety to identify the main themes that the articles corresponded to – politics, economy, military, international and foreign relations, healthcare, education, and social welfare.
2. The second reading of these newspaper articles looked closely at identifying the issues within the main themes (for example, if an article focused on politics, which was then sub-divided into categories such as electoral campaign promises, incumbent

government incompetency, future of political parties, criticism of politicians and so forth.) This sub-division was further divided into smaller categories (for example, the category of electoral campaign promises is divided into the specific political parties and their mandates, and so forth). This second sub-division aims to target the specificities in the text required for the evaluation of attributes and dimensions of post-truth.

Once the texts are coded, the next two steps involve the analysis of the coded text through the lens of Rhetorical Political Analysis, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and the Logics of Critical Explanation. Moreover, each narrative is analysed in light of the two dimensions of a post-truth discourse: political and two-way hierarchical. This activity allows us to separate texts which can be categorised as post-truth.

3. A descriptive note is constructed based on the main political themes and the corresponding political narratives that emerged from the newspaper articles.
4. The political narratives which indicate the presence of attributive traits and dimensions associated with post-truth discourse are further analysed.

The various narratives surrounding the National election offer insights into the antagonistic discourses which dominated the political sphere. The coded categories are attached as an appendix (Appendix 2). Through this coding procedure, the data set is structured to provide information on the distinct types of political narratives that emerged in the selected newspapers. It further provides us with political texts which can be analysed through the lens of discourse analysis. In particular, I draw upon Rhetorical Political Analysis, Lacanian Psychoanalysis, and the Logics of Critical Explanation to analyse the various political



narratives for attributes and dimensions of post-truth discourses. In analysing these political narratives, an emphasis is placed on evaluating the logical political argumentation, the rhetorical situation, the articulation of desire, the identification of textual attributes of lack, fantasy, fantasmatic logic within the narrative, the strategic use of emotionality, the two-way hierarchical dimension, and the overarching political nature of the narrative. Descriptive notes which do not conform to these guidelines are removed from further analysis and discussion of post-truth discourses. The next section briefly outlines the description based on the major themes reported in newspapers across the three National election years. This descriptive note-taking activity lays the ground for further analysis of political narratives that can be categorised as post-truth discourses.

#### **4.4 Types of Political Discourses in 2008, 2013 and 2018**

The coding process resulted in the categorisation of major themes which dominated the political debate before the National election. A total of 9 political themes were identified. A descriptive note around each theme has been developed to provide an overview of the political narratives which spanned the political debate. The descriptive notes act as a preliminary sorting exercise to highlight whether certain political narratives embody the attributes and dimensions of post-truth discourses. The next chapter engages in an in-depth analysis of the two discourses which have been identified as post-truth through this sorting exercise: democracy and terrorism - the establishment of a Caliphate. The major themes are listed in the table below and are also briefly discussed subsequently.

**Democracy and Democratisation:** The narrative surrounding democracy is the alternative that is advocated as opposed to dictatorships which have embroiled Pakistan since its

<b>Theme</b>	<b>Year</b>
Democracy and Democratization	2008, 2013, 2018
Incompetent Incumbent Government	2013, 2018
Seizing Power	2013, 2018
Terrorism	2008, 2013, 2018
Patriarchy	2008, 2013, 2018
Panama Case	2018
Provinces - Degradation and Neglect of Provinces	2013, 2018
External Influence in Pakistan's Affairs	2008, 2013, 2018
Minorities	2013, 2018

inception. The promise of prioritising the citizen's right to choose their elected representatives – honouring the role of the voter and advocating a disdain for the imposition of a rule which negates the supremacy of a citizen's right of choice can be succinctly summarised as True democracy stands for a government in which the people's will prevails. It stands for justice, equality, accountability, and transparency. It ensures the rule of law and supremacy of the constitution. It paves the way for good governance, which in return gives the people peace, progress, and prosperity. If a system of government lacks these basic features, then it is not a democracy, but a mockery of democracy (Waziri, 2013). An essential component of establishing true democracy was the notion of holding free and fair elections.

**Incompetent Incumbent Government:** The narrative surrounding incumbent governments are advocating for the eradication of corruption and insincere leadership. The race to seize power comes at the expense of the welfare of citizens which prevents the advancement and progression of the country and its citizens. The narrative of removing incompetent leadership was most prominent in the political campaign of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI).

"PTI chairman said that the people in streets were confronted by hardships just because of the apathy of these so-called political leaders who remained in power many times but did nothing for remedy of the public" ([Report, 2013r](#)).

"How can a party which has repeatedly failed in the past be given another chance? ([Ghumman, 2013](#))".

"Coming hard on PML-N and PPP, he said that both parties could not deliver and does not deserve another chance" ([Report, 2013o](#)).

"Imran Khan said the 'old' political parties that had been playing 'musical chairs' in power corridors failed to produce new leadership during the last 25 years" ([Correspondent, 2013c](#)).

"It is not just in the case of PPP. The other political parties whenever in power have also betrayed the people's trust" ([Waziri, 2013](#)).

"The country cannot afford another spell of the democracy by incompetent leaders politically and economically, he said adding that incumbent rulers have proved themselves the biggest obstacle in making Pakistan a real democratic country" ([PPI, 2013a](#)).

The theme is indicative of the non-fulfilment of electoral campaign promises aimed at uplifting the welfare of society. The incompetency of an elected leader results in the devaluing of a citizen's livelihood and the promise of removal of incumbent leadership is appealing to the audience who feel the non-fulfilment of promises by political actors has hampered their livelihood.

"But their game is over now. Their match-fixing politics is going to be defeated by the people in the elections" ([Report, 2013p](#)).

**Seizing Power:** The fear of losing power is the driving force underlying the various mechanisms employed by political parties to ensure that they can sustain their power and continue their tenure. Under the guise of democratic rule and the harbinger of hope for the betterment of the country's future, the underlying ploy is to seize power for personal gains. The mechanism of seizing power is plenty – dynastic politics, patronage politics and short-term electoral alliances.

Dynastic politics establishes a stronghold of a family in politics it resembles an autocracy aimed at serving the interests of the family rather than the citizens. The prominent examples of dynastic families dominating the political sphere are the Sharif family (Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz; PML-N) and the Bhutto family (Pakistan People's Party; PPP). Dynastic parties often have a 'family seat' ([Report, 2013d](#)) in various constituencies.

"Dynastic families have turned into political mafias and only two families think that ruling the country turn by turn without doing any good for the people is their right" ([Report, 2013n](#)).

"A sense of dynastic entitlement dominates the country's political culture. In this situation, elections become merely an instrument for the control of means of patronage" ([Hussain, 2013b](#)).

"The PPP has crowned Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, the scion of the Bhutto family, as the new party head" ([Memon, 2013](#)).

"PML-N is largely viewed as a 'family limited company which is being run by the Sharif family" ([Malik, 2018b](#)).

Patronage politics operates on the principle of providing a service to sustain a position in the political sphere – the relationship is based on providing favours to the party’s supporters, friends, and relatives as an incentive to continue working for the party as opposed to operating on a merit system. This alienates a segment of the population which does not support a given political party and the asymmetrical relationship between the citizens and the political party impedes the welfare of the overall citizenry.

"An electable is defined as one who has the ability to win an election in a Pakistani political environment by exercising patronage. The power of patronage he draws from his wealth and feudal or semi-feudal hold on his constituents. As the electable spends a substantial amount of money and resources during elections, he expects to get it back whilst in power and it is difficult to do so by fair means. So, the very foundation of our politics that is being promoted is based not as much on performance as on expediency" ([Masood, 2018](#)).

"The inclusion of some political heavyweights - the much-prized ‘electables’ has helped the PTI gain more traction in the established political power circles" ([Ali, 2013b](#)).

"There is only a difference of shade among the political parties participating in the electoral race. It is not a battle of ideas or even of political values. It is an obscenely crude power struggle among the vested interest groups that have dominated Pakistan’s political scene" ([Hussain, 2018d](#)).

"The key to Manzoor Wattoo’s strength in NA-147 is his mastery of patronage politics in a rural area where political parties have a negligible role. “Jobs,”

Khurram Jahangir said, explaining in a word the primary driver of politics in the area" ([Almeida, 2018b](#)).

"Many candidates serve meals - rice with meat cooked in huge cauldrons - twice a day to supporters and offer cups of steaming green tea" [Report \(2013j\)](#).

"The Sharifs were able to entrench themselves in Punjab because they used their provincial government to extend patronage, favours and expand their support base" ([Nasir, 2012](#)).

"In rural areas, contesting candidates hardly reach out to individual voters. Very often they negotiate with the biradri and factional leaders. The outcome of these negotiations is often a mix of personal gain for the local leader and the community's collective interest" ([Report, 2013a](#)).

The presence of short-term electoral alliances also falls under the ambit of patronage politics and is a means of acquiring power for personal gains. This is most commonly done through "seat adjustment" ([Yasin, 2013](#)) where two amicable parties agree not to split their vote against a stronger third party.

"The Pakistan Muslim League-Functional (PML-F) chief Pir Pagara has decided to form a 'grand alliance' before the upcoming elections and has decided to leave the Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP) out of it" ([Report, 2012b](#)).

The desire of acquiring power is reflective of the continued struggle for remaining in a powerful position.

**Terrorism - Establishment of a Caliphate:** Terrorism has embroiled Pakistan for decades. The eradication of terrorism is an electoral claim every political party makes

during campaigning, however, incidents of terrorist attacks during electoral campaigning and otherwise have remained rampant. The act of terrorism and the attack on political parties by terrorist organisations underpins a singular message – that of creating Pakistan as an Islamic state. It is the degeneration of Islamic values and the adoption of Western ideals of democracy which are destroying Pakistan's identity. Therefore, the elimination of political parties that advocate for 'liberal' values and governance systems like democracy can lead to Pakistan being an Islamic state. The radicalised notion of what identity Pakistan as a state should advocate is the vision that terrorist organisations espouse as being the betterment of Pakistan. It is the degeneration of Islamic values which has impeded development and it is only through becoming an Islamic state that Pakistan can be a great power. The underlying vision which is visible in the terrorist ideology is the advancement of radicalised Islamic values and the creation of an Islamic state – terrorist attacks are glorified and praised as part of the struggle for creating an Islamic state. The violence is justified for the greater cause.

"The TTP mainly targeted so-called progressive and liberal political parties - namely the MQM, ANP and PPP" ([Report, 2013l](#)).

"On Sunday, the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan again announced their resolve to continue murderous attacks on three political parties - the PPP, ANP and MQM - on ideological grounds and added that they did not expect any good from the other parties either" ([Rehman, 2013b](#)).

"After the date for elections was announced, the anti-democratic, dictatorial mindset made itself visible in the shape of the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to try and snatch the right of representation from certain political parties thought

to have their roots among the people” (Hussain, 2013a).

Acts of terrorism have been rampant throughout the three electoral years and most of the narrative around terrorist attacks has referred to the ideology of an Islamic state which has underpinned these attacks. The theme of terrorism is noticeable in the newspaper content as a stark opposition to the theme of democratisation which is aimed at advocating for a specific form of governance.

**Patriarchy:** Patriarchal norms in Pakistan have persisted and their prominence during elections pertains to two aspects: (i) lack of women representation in politics, and (ii) restrictions on women participating in elections. Examples of patriarchal norms surrounding elections are numerous.

"In 2013, women in parts of at least eight constituencies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were barred from casting votes"(Liaqat et al., 2018).

"For decades, not a single woman in this dusty village surrounded by wheat fields and orange trees has voted. And they aren't likely to in the May 11 elections either. The village's men have spoken. It's the will of my husband, said one woman, Fatima Shamshad. This is the decision of all the families" (Report, 2018).

"Local elders and tribesmen didn't allow women to cast vote at combined polling stations in Torghar. "Our traditions and culture don't allow us to send women to polling stations and that is why women didn't cast vote like the past," said a local man, who attended a jirga" (Report, 2013k).

Although patriarchy presents itself as an entrenched dilemma in Pakistani society which requires structural reforms to be eliminated, the narrative surrounding patriarchy in news-



paper reporting is not indicative of a lack or a fantasy. The political discourse surrounding patriarchy is negligible which further sustains the problem. Patriarchy is not addressed in political discourse which also is a reason why it does not become a rallying appeal during elections - the problem however is also sustained by political parties who are failing to mobilise women and excluding them from their manifestos – “parties have to realise that, if for no other reason, it is in their electoral interest to mobilise these citizens to vote” ([Report, 2013k](#)); “It took 6,500 disenfranchised women of Paaikhel tribe 46 years to get back their right to vote - thanks to a tribal jirga” ([Report, 2012a](#)). Incidents like these should be the new norm rather than an exception.

**Panama Case:** This theme overlaps with the theme of seizure of power and the fear of losing power. The Panama Papers case refers to the leak of documents which unravelled how the rich and powerful individuals use tax havens to hide their wealth ([Cheema, 2018](#)). Many political leaders came into the limelight about the leaked information. The incumbent Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was one of the individuals on the list. Nawaz Sharif had come to power in 2013 and the Panama case resulted in his disqualification in 2017.

"The ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has now been convicted and punished by an accountability court in the Avenfield Flats Reference. In addition to imposing a hefty pecuniary penalty, the court sentenced the PML-N supremo to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment for owning assets beyond his known income. His daughter Maryam has been awarded 7-year imprisonment for “aiding, assisting and abetting” him. His son-in-law retired Captain Safdar has also been given a one-year jail term. Maryam Nawaz, who is Nawaz Sharif’s political heir apparent, is also ineligible to contest the upcoming polls. This corruption reference was one of the four references filed against Nawaz Sharif

and other members of the Sharif family in the accountability court by NAB in compliance with the Panama case verdict delivered by the apex court last year. The apex court had directed the accountability court to conclude these references within six months. However, it took the court almost one year to finally decide this reference" ([Malik, 2018a](#)).

The disqualification and the corruption charges against the incumbent Prime Minister presented themselves as an obstacle for the Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) to regain power in the next election: "This verdict will certainly add to the troubles of embattled PML-N on the eve of general elections. This truncated party appears to be in no position of making any significant breakthrough in these polls" ([Malik, 2018a](#)).

The disqualification was met with an outcry for justice with the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President Nawaz Shariff, the disqualified Prime Minister stating that the entire judicial system needed to be overhauled "because justice being delayed or denied is among the major public issues" ([Memon, 2017](#)), hence, initiating his 'movement for justice' which is being viewed as a campaign to contain the rising influence of the judiciary in the national affairs ([Malik, 2018c](#)).

The superior judiciary choosing to narrowly interpret the terms 'Sadiq and Ameen' – the application of the controversial constitutional provision through an ambiguous legal procedure to disqualify the incumbent Prime Minister ([Malik, 2018e](#)) stirred the debate on judicial reforms. In a similar vein his daughter, Maryam Sharif criticised the judiciary: "Wow! What justice!" she exclaimed sarcastically. "Well done judges, what a show of justice!" Accusing the judiciary of targeting Sharif, Maryam said seven out of the 17 judges of the apex court have been hearing cases against her father alone ([Newspaper, 2018](#)).

The disqualification was followed by various ministers from PML-N being targeted for

corruption charges and a looming perception of PML-N being politically victimised before the 2018 elections became apparent. Accountability should not be used as a tool to do ‘political engineering in the country. All political parties must be offered a level-playing field in the next general elections (Malik, 2018). This raised two important debates: (i) on making the incumbent government accountable for their failings and prioritising the welfare of the citizen, which is ignored in the pursuit of power; and (ii) on raising concerns about the purpose of accountability drives which "have more been the typical witch-hunting exercises victimising one’s political opponents for obvious reasons” (Malik, 2018a).

"Accountability has usually been used as a means through which to target and eliminate ‘troublesome’ politicians" (Javid, 2018a).

"First it was Nawaz Sharif’s conviction and now the noose is tightening around former president Asif Ali Zardari. The plot is getting thicker. It is all happening in the name of accountability, providing convenient cover to what many describe as a creeping ‘judicial martial law’" (Hussain, 2018f).

The Panama papers case gave rise to the “give respect to vote” (vote ko izzat dou) slogan which became a prominent theme for the PML-N election campaign of 2018 to counter the avalanche of lawsuits, blames, and accusations of corruption resulting in the dismissal of Mian Nawaz Sharif from power (Najam, 2018). The rhetoric of honouring the vote and respecting the citizen’s choice in electing their leader – this was in response to the superior judiciary’s decision to disqualify the Prime Minister and was therefore meant to act as a rallying cry for establishing civilian supremacy, “after pretending to be a miserable victim of the perceived military-judiciary nexus in the country” (Malik, 2018b).

"However, in the perspective of Pakistan's political history and the behaviour of political parties towards their voters, the other side of the slogan needs equal attention. If the vote should be respected so are the voters. It indeed is a clever move by the PML-N to demand respect for votes without respecting the voters' genuine expectations from their representatives" (Najam, 2018).

"For example, the PML-N's slogan to 'give respect to voters' is not really about the democratic rights of the electorate; in fact, it is driven by the sense of 'entitlement' of an all-powerful dynastic leadership that considers itself above the law - one which has never given respect to the vote in its quest for the pedestal of power. Why didn't we hear this slogan earlier? 'Respect for the vote' reminders are only issued when the law strikes the leadership" (Hussain, 2018d).

"Lambasting the ongoing accountability process against himself and his family, former prime minister and PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif has said: "You can't run a country if you have two or three parallel governments. This has to stop. There can only be one government: the constitutional one" (Almeida, 2018a).

"During the four years when he was in power, Sharif seldom attended parliamentary sessions. His slogan "give respect to the vote" sounds hollow, given his utter contempt for the elected forums" (Hussain, 2018b).

"It is evident that the PML-N would go into the election campaign playing the victim card and on the slogan of 'giving respect to the vote.' However phoney this mantra may sound, it has helped Sharif maintain his mass popular support base in Punjab" (Hussain, 2018a).

This theme ties together with the seizure of power and incumbent government highlighting the degeneration of citizens' welfare at the behest of incompetent leadership.

**Provinces - Degradation and Neglect of Provinces:** This theme refers to an ongoing debate in the political sphere about the lack of development across regions in various provinces – specifically it refers to the neglect of Baluchistan as a province, the lack of attention given to the region of Southern Punjab, the lack of development in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK).

### ***Baluchistan***

"The ongoing military operation had worsened the situation in Baluchistan. The systematic exclusion of Baloch moderate parties resulted in political violence and the intensification of the tensions between Islamabad and Baluchistan. The 2008 elections will further alienate the moderate Baloch and Pakhtoon political forces from the centre" ([Baloch, 2008](#)).

"Expressing dissatisfaction over the situation in Baluchistan, the BNP chief said there was still bloodshed in the province. Mengal also said that if the Kashmiris were to be given the right to self-determination, the same should also be given to the people of Baluchistan" ([Report, 2013i](#)).

"Baluchistan is the heart of Pakistan. "We have to make our heart strong and energetic. Shahbaz said the prevailing law and order situation in Baluchistan was not satisfactory, but he expressed the hope they would succeed in bringing peace to the province" ([Baloch, 2013](#)).

### ***FATA***

"These elections mean a lot to us. It means identity, basic civil and judicial rights access to high and supreme courts, and right of political activities," Wazir said referring to the lifting of a decades-long ban on political gatherings and tribesmen's access to the Peshawar High Court and the Supreme Court following the merger with K-P province" ([Report, 2019](#)).

### ***GB & Kashmir***

"Our fate-politically, economically, legally - remains in the hands of Islamabad, thanks to the quirks and tragedies of history," says Tahir Hussain, a Skardu resident. "We might have nothing to say - we will not be voting - but the next election will matter. The new government in Islamabad could help enshrine or remove our rights. "This region Baltistan, which operates under the de facto administration of Pakistan, has no identity, no constitution, no system, no freedom of expression, no impartial judiciary, no free media, no free movement, no human rights, no rights of the vote and no freedom of expression" ([Report, 2013c](#)).

### ***South Punjab***

"The emergence of the Junoobi Suba Mahaz has supposedly ignited the fire that is to engulf the core of the PML-N and burn the party to ashes. The predictions are solidly based on history even if the idea of a new province carved out of Punjab is at a nascent stage. This agenda in the current sense is restricting the PML-N and others and achieving a bargaining position with the power brokers, regardless of whether an election is held or not" ([Rehman, 2018a](#)).

This theme also ties together with the seizure of power and incumbent government highlighting the degeneration of citizens' welfare at the behest of incompetent leadership.

**External Influence in Pakistan's Affairs:** This theme is reflective of Pakistan's relationship with countries in an international environment. It is also indicative of the misperceptions that people have about Pakistan as a country.

"He told that people would not vote for secular parties in coming elections because they knew that if voted to power such parties would implement US agenda" ([Marwat, 2013](#)).

"The government has only tried to appease the US and its supporters and is not serious about resolving key national issues to thwart people's miseries - particularly in the tribal region," he said ([Report, 2012a](#)).

"The government is operating under an American agenda. And without permission from the US, they will not initiate negotiations with the Taliban" ([Ali, 2013b](#)).

"I have always maintained that Pakistan's helplessness in the face of external pressure is overstated and that there is no need for its government to be all that subservient to the outsider. If it had the will to say no, it could say no, and no disaster would result. That will is lacking primarily because it does not have an adequate support base among its own people. Nor does it realise that if it did reject external advice because that advice went against its national interest, its defiance would generate public support. If such assertion of national independence and honour invited suspension of foreign aid, it might well be time the

government and the people of Pakistan learned to live within their own means" (Syed, 2007).

"The US is currently playing a game of run-with-the-hare-and-hunt-with-the-hound in this region in the name of War on Terror. In fact, the broader US strategic interests have somehow converged with India's security doctrine in this region. Therefore, we can observe both 'strategic partners' jointly calling the shots in Afghanistan to the disadvantage of Pakistan. It is a fact that militancy has mushroomed in Pakistan since the US invasion of Afghanistan" (Malik, 2018d).

**Minorities:** This theme is reflective of the discrimination and the categorisation of minorities as second-class citizens in Pakistan. Most minorities in Pakistan are religious in nature; within Islam, sectarian minorities are also prominent. Common suffering of all minorities is violence and institutional discrimination perpetuated against them due to the unwelcoming attitude of society against them or an ideological difference stemming from religion.

"Various political parties, including PPP and MQM, staged protest rallies on Sunday to condemn the Joseph Colony incident in which more than 150 houses of Christians were torched by an angry mob over the alleged blasphemy" (Israr, 2013).

"Earlier in Quetta, a suicide bomber drove his explosive-laden car into a paramilitary checkpoint right near Alamdar Road - a predominantly Shia neighbourhood of Quetta. "The bomber wanted to target the Hazara community on



Alamdard Road,” Capital City Police Officer (CCPO) Mir Zubair Mahmood told journalists" ([Zafar et al., 2013](#)).

"A group of people protesting the Karachi killings blocked traffic at Liaquat Bagh in Rawalpindi for over two hours on Monday. The protest organised by the All Pakistan Shia Action Committee brought together over 100 people. They were carrying placards and chanting slogans against the government and law enforcement agencies for their failure to protect the people, particularly the Shia community" ([Report, 2013h](#)).

"In the mad race for power that has affected participants and spectators alike, nobody seems to be bothered about the havoc being wrought by intolerance-driven violence. For several months, the 20 or so Ahmadi families living in village Shamsabad, in Chunian tehsil of Kasur district, not far from the Punjab capital, have been subjected to harassment and violence by the majority community because of their belief" ([Rehman, 2013a](#)).

"Atif Mian, a world-renowned economist of Pakistani origin currently based at Princeton University, was appointed to the EAC considering his impeccable credentials, only for the decision to be met with a storm of disapproval. The problem with Prof. Mian’s appointment was not his suitability for the post, which is beyond question, but because of his faith. The fact that Prof. Mian is an Ahmadi automatically disqualified him from holding any public office in the eyes of the more reactionary elements of Pakistani society, who wasted no time in kicking up a fuss on social media” ([Javid, 2018b](#)).

"With the slogan of ‘Labaik ya Hussain,’ and a tent as their election symbol

in the forthcoming general elections, Majlis-e-Wahdat-ul-Muslimeen (MWM) - the leading political group for the Shia community - hopes to put up a tough competition against its political opponents in Karachi. The party is testing its political strength for the first time with 140 candidates on the National and provincial assembly seats across the country" ([Khattak, 2013](#)).

Whereas acts of violence are reported in newspaper articles, the political narrative constructed by politicians or op-ed columnists rarely engages with the aspect of minorities in the country, and therefore it has never dominated political discourse.

The descriptive notes for each theme act as a sorting exercise to engage in depth with the themes which are indicative of post-truth attributes and dimensions. These themes are selected for further evaluation and analysis in the subsequent chapter.

## **4.5 Conclusion**

To test the theorisation of post-truth discourse, the operationalisation of the terminology is necessitated. This entails identifying the attributes and dimensions of post-truth discourse. In this chapter, I develop an operational definition of post-truth discourse to be empirically tested. I chart out a guideline through which political narratives can be categorised as post-truth discourses, and further outline the data collection procedure, coding strategies, and introduce the case study for implementing the mixed-method research design to empirically test the theorisation of post-truth discourse. The guideline will be used in the two research approaches implemented in Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 to exemplify distinct types of post-truth discourses in newspaper reporting, as well as to measure the effect of post-truth discourses on political behaviour. Whereas the discursive analysis will be useful to

identify, evaluate and analyse diverse types of post-truth discourses, the survey experiment will broaden our understanding of the implications of post-truth discourses on political behaviour. The implementation of the exploratory mixed-method research design in the following chapters acts as a means for developing and expanding empirical inquiry on post-truth. The next chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the two prominent post-truth discourses in Pakistani newspapers surrounding elections: democracy and terrorism.

## **Chapter 5**

# **Insights from South Asia – A Case of Post-truth Political Discourse in Pakistan**

### **Abstract**

The first empirical case study is premised upon identifying distinct types of political narratives in newspaper reporting during three National election years in Pakistan and analysing these political narratives for post-truth attributes and dimensions through a discursive analysis. I rely on Rhetorical Political Analysis, and the Logics approach and adopt a Lacanian reading of newspaper articles to analyse and dissect the varying types of post-truth discourses that surround an election in Pakistan. This chapter discusses two prominent post-truth discourses in newspaper reporting: democracy and terrorism - establishment of a Caliphate. The qualitative discursive analysis sets the ground for further empirical inquiry

into post-truth discourses. The interpretive approach implemented in this case study is useful in illustrating the theorisation of post-truth as political discourse and serves as a guiding principle to be applied in differing research approaches.

## **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on further exploring the operationalisation of the term post-truth discourse by analysing the political narratives in newspaper articles. I apply the theorisation of post-truth discourse to the case of Pakistani newspapers circulated during three National election years. This is to analyse the post-truth discourse that is most prevalent during an electoral cycle. Two particular discourses have been identified as embodying attributes and dimensions of post-truth discourse which will be discussed in detail in this chapter: the discourse on democracy and democratisation, and terrorism - establishment of a Caliphate.

As previously established in the preceding chapters, I theorise post-truth discourse through four major claims:

1. Post-truth discourse has four textual attributes: lack, fantasy, emotionality and fantastasmatic logic.
2. Post-truth discourse has two dimensions: political and two-way hierarchical.
3. Post-truth discourse has three procedural moments: creation, dissemination, and acceptance of discourse, which embody the four textual attributes and two dimensions.
4. 'Post' in post-truth discourse does not refer to the negation of truth but emphasises the relative nature of truthfulness.

To support my claims, I draw upon post-structuralist discourse theory, specifically Lacanian psychoanalysis and the Logics of Critical Explanation, post-colonialism, and socialisation theory. I argue that the shift in discussion on post-truth should focus on discourse, and to analyse post-truth discourse, various attributes and dimensions of discourse need to be analysed.

I begin with evaluating three moments of discourse: creation, dissemination, and acceptance, to grasp the nature of post-truth discourse. Within the creation aspect, I examine two features: (i) textual attributes and (ii) the relevancy of truthfulness. Whereas the textual attributes highlight features of a language through which post-truth discourses can be identified, the relevancy of truthfulness bring into perspective the relativity of truthfulness associated with political narratives. Within the dissemination and acceptance aspect, I examine two features of discourse: (i) the two-way hierarchical nature of discourse, and (ii) the intertwining of trust, shared experiences and social media influencing behavioural attitudes and perceptions. I argue that a post-truth discourse is political, is created to seek an audience and has political implications. The textual attributes of lack, fantasy, and fantasmatic logic become crucial in analysing the political nature of the discourse. The textual attribute of emotionality becomes pertinent in understanding how the discourse can induce belief and evoke shared feelings of belonging and yearning. Whereas those in power construct a discourse with the intention of it becoming hegemonized within society, the acceptance by the citizens facilitates the entrenchment of the discourse. Overall, I argue that post-truth discourse is political, is two-way hierarchical, employs strategic use of emotion, informs identities by referring to specific lacks and fantasies, espouses a fantasmatic logic, is aimed at seeking an audience, fosters a shared experience influencing the perception of truthfulness.

I turn to discourse analysis to illustrate the theorisation of post-truth discourse in real-world rhetoric and political texts. I apply a Rhetorical Political Analysis (RPA), Logics of Critical Explanation (LCE), and a Lacanian psychoanalytic reading to newspaper articles to categorise political narratives in newspapers as post-truth discourses. To analyse a political narrative and categorise it as post-truth requires that the narrative embodies the attributive traits and dimensions of a post-truth discourse: the textual attributes of lack, fantasy, emotionality, and fantasmatic logic, alongside the two dimensions: political nature of discourse, and the two-way hierarchical (top-down and bottom-up) aspect of discourse. The intertwining of RPA with Lacanian psychoanalysis and Logics facilitates in exemplifying the essence of post-truth discourses - the rhetorical situation and context in which the political argumentation takes place, the logical underpinning of the argumentation, the articulation of desire, and the means of capturing the desire. These interpretive approaches foreground the empirical identification of post-truth discourses in various forms of political texts.

A brief recap on the selection and codification method. I carried forth purposive sampling of news reporting of major events and specific election speeches and evaluated 1205 newspaper articles from the three major English newspapers (Dawn[D], The Nation[N], and The Express Tribune[ET]) circulated in Pakistan during the National election years of 2008, 2013 and 2018. The newspaper articles reviewed span approximately the entire year before the specific election date (for example if the National election is on 25 July 2018, newspapers are collected from 25 July 2017). The starting dates of newspaper collection depend on when the National election in a specific year was scheduled for. The periodisation of collecting newspapers facilitates the creation of a data set of newspapers that can be analysed for varying political narratives surrounding elections and gauging the consisten-

cies and variations in the development of such narratives. Such a data set provides a rich source of political texts which can be analysed for exploring the attributes and dimensions of post-truth discourse. The different contexts of elections in these years present specific rhetorical situations in which political narratives are situated. I reviewed major incidents and trending political issues and election speeches to create a discursive note on the major thematic narratives that were prominently discussed. I identified and coded 9 themes: (1) Democracy and Democratisation, (2) Incompetent Incumbent Government, (3) Seizing Power, (4) Terrorism, (5) Patriarchy, (6) the Panama Case, (7) Provinces - Degradation and Neglect of Provinces and (8) External Influence in Pakistan's Affairs, and (9) Minorities. The coding scheme can be found in Appendix 2. I then created a descriptive note on all themes. The discursive note is further assessed to identify attributive traits and dimensions associated with post-truth discourse. The descriptive notes which highlight such attributes are then analysed extensively to illustrate the various aspects of post-truth discourse. The two discourses analysed in this chapter embody post-truth attributes and dimensions and are discussed in the following sections.

Descriptive notes provide the basis for examining the textual attributes and dimensions of post-truth discourses. From the nine political narratives identified and analysed in the selected sample of newspapers, only two prominent discourses emerged which can be categorised as post-truth. The rich data set of distinct political narratives in newspapers provide us with political texts which can be further analysed through an interpretive discursive approach. The purpose of creating descriptive notes is to analyse the political narratives for logical political argumentation, the rhetorical situation, the articulation of desire, the identification of textual attributes of lack, fantasy, fantasmatic logic within the narrative, the strategic use of emotionality, the two-way hierarchical dimension, and the overarching po-



litical nature of the narrative. Descriptive notes which do not conform to these guiding principles are removed from further analysis and discussion as they cannot be categorised as post-truth.

An example of a descriptive note which does not illicit post-truth attributes and dimensions in newspaper reporting is on patriarchy. The theme of patriarchal norms in Pakistani newspaper reporting can be most visibly seen in political participation, which refers to either the lack of women's representation in politics or restrictions on women participating in elections. Although patriarchy presents itself as an entrenched dilemma in Pakistani society which requires structural reforms to be eliminated, the political discourse surrounding patriarchy is negligible in newspaper reporting and during election campaigns which further sustains the problem. Some of the examples of these patriarchal norms are visible through the following newspaper reporting on political participation: "In 2013, women in parts of at least eight constituencies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were barred from casting votes"([Liaqat et al., 2018](#)); "For decades, not a single woman in this dusty village surrounded by wheat fields and orange trees has voted. And they aren't likely to in the May 11 elections either. The village's men have spoken. It's the will of my husband, said one woman, Fatima Shamshad. This is the decision of all the families" ([Report, 2018](#)); "Local elders and tribesmen didn't allow women to cast vote at combined polling stations in Torghar. "Our traditions and culture don't allow us to send women to polling stations and that is why women didn't cast vote like the past," said a local man, who attended a jirga" ([Report, 2013k](#)). The problem is also sustained by political parties who are failing to mobilise women and excluding them from their manifestos – "parties have to realise that, if for no other reason, it is in their electoral interest to mobilise these citizens to vote" ([Report, 2013k](#)); "It took 6,500 disenfranchised women of Paaikhel tribe 46 years to get back their

right to vote - thanks to a tribal jirga” (Report, 2012a). Incidents like these should be the new norm rather than an exception. The political narrative surrounding women’s political participation is limited in its scope and is focused on reporting on numbers, rather than articulating a political argumentation on patriarchal norms. The reporting on patriarchy is not contextualised within a rhetorical situation, does not indicate the articulation of a desire, does not illicit a two-way hierarchical dimension, nor provides a narrative for the identification of lack, fantasy, fantasmatic logic and emotionality.

The descriptive note-taking activity allows us to examine real-world political texts and rhetoric for features of post-truth discourse. The exploratory interpretive approach within this case study demonstrates the analysis of distinct political narratives in newspapers to identify the presence (if any) of potential post-truth discourses within the context of the Pakistani National election period.

I focus on print media specifically. Although a case can be made that the evolution of technology, the emergence of social media, the privatisation of media, and the role of state and non-profit provision of media have influenced the production and sustenance of political narratives dominating the political landscape. However, newspapers rather than social media are typical cases to evaluate post-truth narratives in developing countries. In 2008, the Pakistani internet population was just 7 per cent of the entire population, which grew to 15 per cent by 2018 <sup>1</sup>. The nationwide distribution of newspapers on the other hand makes them a stronger medium of dissemination to examine political narratives that are widely disseminated amongst the population. I have chosen to analyse English newspapers specifically in this case study for three reasons. First, English is one of the official languages in Pakistan, yet only a better-educated population can read it. These newspapers

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<sup>1</sup>World Bank

represent a highly conservative selection of the population which common wisdom would expect to be less exposed to 'post-truth' statements. By choosing English newspapers, I can analyse, examine, and comment on the post-truth nature of the political narratives in the sample. Building on this, second, English newspapers are widely circulated in the mega-cities of Pakistan which increases the exposure that post-truth political narratives are likely to have. Third, the selected newspapers for this study are among the most influential and well-read channels of information in Pakistan which represents an extreme case selection on readership scale <sup>2</sup>. This last point is critical because the presence of post-truth discourses in widely read newspapers also potentially places a higher weight on the political topics discussed in the society amongst the highest shares in the country. Although Pakistani newspapers do not have a partisan leaning, a dimension which is more visible in news channel and social media platforms, the selected sample of newspapers do indicate the specific contextual argumentation as well as the audience targeted through the rhetoric which we need to be mindful of when analysing post-truth discourses within newspaper reporting. This chapter does not aim to discuss the political narratives surrounding elections in Pakistan in its entirety, nor does it aim to analyse the political discourse of Pakistan in its entirety. Instead, this chapter aims to exemplify how certain political texts and narratives surrounding an election as discussed in the selected newspapers can be categorised as post-truth.

The next section of the chapter presents an overview of how Rhetorical Political Analysis, Lacanian psychoanalysis and Logics of Critical Explanation is employed in analysing post-truth political discourses. Following this, an extensive discussion and analysis of two post-truth political discourses in Pakistani newspapers are presented: democracy and

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<sup>2</sup>[Press Reference](#)

democratisation, and terrorism - establishment of a Caliphate. Whereas the discourse on democracy is premised upon the notion of 'change through democracy,' the discourse on terrorism is premised upon the notion of 'establishing a Caliphate'. These discourses illustrate a continuation of a similar pattern of post-truth discourse throughout the three electoral years in Pakistan. This chapter concludes by analysing the insights and implications of post-truth discourses in Pakistan.

## **5.2 An Interpretive Approach to Analysing Post-truth Discourses**

Discourse analysis is a means through which language in use and patterns can be analysed in a particular social context. Linguistic analysis of texts involves a multi-step approach such as analysing whole-text language organisation, clauses combination, clauses, and words (Fairclough, 2021). In analysing newspaper texts, this acts as the foundation to implement critical discourse analysis. I further employ RPA and Lacanian Psychoanalysis to examine and analyse post-truth discourses that emerge from newspaper reporting.

Rhetorical Political Analysis (RPA) paves the path for systematically investigating political rhetoric and argumentation to better understand political action (Finlayson, 2007). An important facet of this endeavour is analysing the rhetorical situation or the context in which argumentation takes place to grasp how common sense can be articulated into a logical and coherent political argumentation. In the case study of Pakistani newspapers, elections are a critical period in which debate is taking place with the agenda of coming into power. It is not only the election period but also the types of newspapers and subsequently, the readership analysed which inform the specific political argumentation. In this

sense, the newspapers themselves can be argued to be actors that articulate specific political arguments which shape identities. The interplay of the election period, the types of newspapers and readership facilitate our understanding of how political narratives are structured and adapted in a particular manner to be persuasive and appealing to the audience. The implementation of RPA facilitates identifying how common sense is constructed and adapted to compose an argument to create meaning and induce belief. Such an analysis of political narratives, texts, and claims ties in the affective and rational reasoning in analysing political arguments. With RPA, I focus on the rhetorical context and the coherence of a logical argumentation portrayed through a political narrative.

Building from RPA, I rely upon Lacanian psychoanalysis and The Logics of Critical Explanation approach to analyse the attributive traits and dimensions of post-truth discourses. Psychoanalysis has long been used to analyse discourse. In particular, Lacanian psychoanalysis is a useful tool to understand the logical underpinning of post-truth rhetoric and grasp the functioning of desire through discourse. According to Lacan, 'the function of language in speech is not to inform but to evoke' (Lacan, 1977), and it is the desire which is evoked. Martin (2016) suggests that 'psychoanalysis permits us to grasp how rhetorical speech helps make public sense by shifting weight and directing force'. A Lacanian psychoanalytic reading of political texts helps ground the meaning that emerges within a discourse. A Lacanian approach facilitates exploring 'scenarios in which desire is invoked via signifiers, images and fantasies that offer up sites for identification. Words and arguments, visual performances, or the attraction of 'jouissance' capture subjects and commission paths for affective investment" (Martin, 2016) binding the three registers, the Imaginary, Symbolic and the Real. It sheds light on how language and rhetoric illustrate the incompleteness and the desire, and the ways through which the desire can be captured.

The post-truth discourse is produced for an audience, to capture their attention. The dimension of affect becomes crucial here. Drawing from Blackman ([Blackman and Venn, 2010](#); [Blackman, 2012](#)), who argues that affect is a process, the intertwining of discourse and affect facilitate our understanding of the nature of post-truth discourses. Affective communication evokes a shared experience, placing the individual within the context of the narrative so that they can identify with reasoning and experience scenarios. Affect intertwines with discourse to exemplify how a logical political argumentation can create desire and recruit support. The logical argumentation and the use of emotionality within such a discourse are to evoke a sense of belonging and yearning - a means through which incompleteness can be diminished. To explore the symbolic identification - 'identification with the very place from where we are being observed, from where we look at ourselves so that we appear to ourselves likeable, worthy of love' [Žižek \(1989\)](#). I examine the aspect of desire within the political account of democracy and terrorism. The examination of political narratives for the element of lack and fantasy helps us understand the desire being created through discourse. The Lacanian theory is a useful tool to facilitate our understanding of how rhetoric operates to invoke desire.

The combination of RPA with Lacanian psychoanalysis helps us understand the essence of post-truth discourses, the political rhetoric and the argumentation associated with it. The articulation of desire within a political narrative evokes the feeling of belonging and yearning. However, it is not only pathos structured by a fantasy, but also the logos underpinning the rhetorical situation which exemplifies the attributes of a post-truth discourse. The next section analyses two post-truth discourses, namely democracy and terrorism in light of RPA, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and the Logics approach to understand meaning-making and the evocation of desire. Additionally, the analysis will highlight the operation

of fantasmatic logic within the discourse, alongside the political and two-way hierarchical dimension of the discourse. In analysing the discourses on democracy and terrorism, I exhibit how psychoanalytic insights can inform rhetorical analysis.

### **5.3 Post-truth discourses: Democracy and Terrorism**

The discourse on democracy and terrorism has dominated the electoral debate for several years. The varying political landscape of Pakistan between 2007-2018 has shaped these discourses and the political argumentation which has taken centre stage.

#### **5.3.1 Discourse on Democracy**

The discourse on democracy in Pakistani newspapers has been prominent throughout the various electoral years. However, the narrative around democracy and democratisation has shifted depending on the type of political actors that have been prominent during these years in the political realm. The features of lack, fantasy and emotionality reflect this transformation. The fantasmatic logic underpinning the political narratives on democracy has also been shaped by the varying information environment, but there is a common thread which is visible within the logic of transitioning to democracy which has been sustained over the years.

The political narratives on democracy highlight the desire for 'change' about democratisation and what it entails. The struggle for democracy has been a common theme present in the political discourse surrounding elections in all the electoral years: 2008, 2013, 2018. The overarching fantasy refers to the constitution of government which is elected by the public – the honouring of a citizen's right to elect representatives they want to govern the

country along with a sincere leadership which delivers on its promises and works for providing welfare to its citizens. The fantasy of redemption structures a reality whereby the individual's rights will be honoured and respected – where the individual will have the means to thrive. This particular fantasy being espoused by political elites refers to the 'ego-ideal' from whose perspective the current situation is being apprehended. In 2008, it was the political parties opposing martial law, and in 2013 and 2018, it was the new entrant in politics opposing the incumbent politicians. The discourse on democracy varies in its articulation, its targeted audience, and the symbolic order which is being reinstated. For Lacan, 'the role of the fantasy is to sustain desire not fulfil the desire. Desire is what emerges when demand is not being met (Lacan, 1977). In the discourse on democracy, the notion of desire is associated with the advent of democratisation taking root and the freedoms, rule of law, and will of the people which subsequently follow.

The overarching lack within the discourse, therefore, refers to the degeneration of society socially, economically, and politically which has resulted in the hampering of development and progress along with a low quality of life for citizens. It refers to the degenerate condition of Pakistan and the impediment of advancement as a result of incompetent rulers and the garb of power at the expense of the neglect of the welfare of citizens. It also refers to the freedoms – social, political, and economic which are unattainable in the status quo. The appeal by the political elites to the audience and the fantasy of democratisation are structured around this unfulfilled desire. It is based on advocating the new schemes and policies developed to improve the country's situation and put it on track for enhanced development, pulling people out of misery and providing assurance that they will be the guarantors for the betterment of the public. The fantasy is closely related to jouissance which is experienced while sustaining the desire, and since the sustenance of desire entails sustaining it as



unsatisfied, jouissance can often be experienced as suffering (Glynos, 2001). Democracy acts as a promise for citizens to honour their vote and their right of choice – to give them the liberty and freedom to exercise their right of choice and the powers that come with it – the power of holding elected representative leaders accountable. It is through the exercising of the vote which places individuals at the fore of deciding their fate and allows them to elect representatives who can offer redemption to them in the form of policies implemented for the welfare of the citizens. On the one hand, there is the desire for 'change' for a democratically elected government to take root, but in parallel, the desire is sustained through the continuous suffering of the status quo where the desire is unmet. In the discourse on democracy, this suffering is reminiscent of an outlook of a society which provides them with the opportunity to flourish – this can only happen if there is sincere leadership which honours the citizen's welfare and rids them of the insincere and corrupt leadership which has degenerated the society.

Although the overarching narrative on democracy alludes to the desire for 'change' and the promise of honouring the citizen's right to choose an elected representative and hold them accountable for their actions which is the basis of a democratic state, the inconsistencies in the symbolic order with regards to the entrenchment of democracy vary across the different electoral years. The fantasy of consolidation of democracy evokes the ultimate horror of the incompleteness of the symbolic order. The fantasy of democratisation structures the desire for 'change' in the sense that citizens believe that in the absence of the military and the corrupt and incompetent incumbent political leaders, a democratic state which ensures citizens' welfare and their freedoms would follow. The role of emotionality becomes pertinent in inducing affect through the use of words and phrases within the text but also through physical demonstrations which are reported within the political accounts.

It is the evocation of the feeling of belonging and yearning which is articulated through the way an affective political argumentation within the discourse is narrated.

Let us begin with analysing the discourse on democracy in 2008. Before the 2008 National election, it “was the first time in 60 years of Pakistan’s life that an army chief was elected president” (Asghar, 2007)[D]. In October 2007, “Pervez Musharraf won a one-sided election for another five-year term from a truncated parliamentary electoral college amid boycotts and protests” (Asghar, 2007), a day which has been labelled as a “black day” (Asghar, 2007) saw protests staged by opposition parties demanding that General Pervez Musharraf resign “before the people of Pakistan throw him out of power” (Report, 2007a)[D]. The participants in the rallies chanted slogans in favour of Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif - “Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif will return with the power of the people of this country,” Mr Rabbani said (Report, 2007b)[D]. In November 2007, General Musharraf<sup>3</sup> enacted an emergency rule (Report, 2007c)[D] where “he staged a coup against his own office as president and, acting as the army chief, promulgated a state of emergency, imposed martial law, suspended the Constitution, sacked and placed under house arrest judges who had held their heads high and declined to bend the law to suit his whims and wishes” (Syed, 2007)[D].

Within this account of democracy, the perils of military interference disrupt the symbolic order, highlighting the experiences of ordinary citizens. The imposition of martial law does not recognise the choice of citizens, their freedoms, their will, and the freedom of institutions which can guarantee these freedoms. The fantasy of democratic rule is constructed in response to this by the various political leaders who invoke the desire for what democracy could bring. The military’s interference in politics and the imposition of martial

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<sup>3</sup>General Pervez Musharraf is a retired General who became the President of Pakistan between 2001 until 2008.

law infringe upon the right of people to choose representatives they would want to govern their country. It is the absence of the right to exercise their choice of an elected representative and civilian rule. The fantasy structures and sustains the desire for the entrenchment of democratic rule in opposition to the current status quo of martial law which highlights the lack of the infringement of freedoms of citizens. The narrative offers a rational argumentation and logical explanation and is not reliant on overt sentiment only. The social and political freedoms act as the fantasmatic markers where the absence of the military allows for civilian rule to flourish, and the separation of powers in the political realm is made possible for citizens' right to choose to take root. The fantasy provides a logical rationale by invoking desire and identifying something which is blocking experiencing *jouissance* (enjoyment). It paints a picture whereby the *Other*, and in this case, it is the military, has stolen the *jouissance*. The fantasy of democracy makes sense because the political parties joined hands to denounce military interference. It highlights the distinction between us and them. Whereas us refers to those who favour democracy, and us refers to the military. A military is a fantasmatic object, transgressing the symbolic order and evoking the horrific scenario of martial law. The reference to the 'troika' intensifies the democratic fantasy in response to a situation of failed identity by invoking the desire of restoring the symbolic order through the abolishing of military interference.

"...it is a piece of architecture that is intrinsically unstable and that constitutes a frontal assault on democracy. Instead of politicians drawing strength from the power of the people, a troika would make them lean on the armed forces. With parliament and the judiciary subservient to the troika, the country would once again be subjected to military dominance as has been the case in the past. The will of the people would be subordinate to the will of the troika and Pakistan

would continue to be a security state" (Masood, 2018)[ET].

The example within this account on democracy which makes it most rhetorically effective is associated with the narrative around freedom of judiciary which is a cornerstone for any democratic entity. The affective strategy within this account is provoking symbolic identification. Affect is articulated through emotionality which is not only referring to specific words and phrases within newspaper reporting but also to physical acts such as protests and sit-ins whereby the citizen can experience the information. Some of the examples of this strategy include the following acts: the staging of protests against the dictatorial rule and in response to the “judicial crisis” (Syed, 2007)[D] whereby “participants of the rally burnt the effigy of General Musharraf” (Report, 2007b)[D]; the “demand for restoring democracy in countries like Pakistan” (Iqbal, 2007)[D]; “express solidarity with the legal fraternity, the media and for the independence of the judiciary (Report, 2007a)[D]; using appeals like “PPP’s chairperson Benazir Bhutto was the last hope for the restoration of democracy and civil rule in the country” (Wasim, 2007)[D]; political parties like the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) “boycotting the 2008 polls saying that participation would be tantamount to legitimising Musharraf’s unconstitutional role” (Ali, 2013b)[D]. These acts are conducted to make a statement and sell a narrative about the need to restore democratic rule where the citizen’s vote will be honoured which is currently being discredited with martial law being placed in the country. These acts aim to evoke a sense of belonging amongst the public and act as a means whereby they can persuade the public to believe in the gains that a democratic civilian will bring – freedom of choice which is every citizen’s right and has been revoked by the imposition of a military dictatorship. The question that remains to be asked is whether a “country can remain a country under dictatorship” (Shafi, 2007)[D] – the underlying theme of advocating for the fantasy of restoring democracy. It is

not just the personal intention of political elites nor the expectations of the citizens, but the affective dimension of the narrative is situated within the situation crafted by the narrative itself.

As we move to the 2013 National election year, the narrative on democracy shifts to focus on the ideals of the will of the people:

"True democracy stands for a government in which the people's will prevails. It stands for justice, equality, accountability, and transparency. It ensures the rule of law and supremacy of the constitution. It paves the way for good governance, which in return gives the people peace, progress, and prosperity. If a system of government lacks these basic features, then it is not a democracy, but a mockery of democracy" ([Waziri, 2013](#))[N].

Within this account of democracy, the perils of incompetent incumbent leaders disrupt the symbolic order, highlighting the experiences of ordinary citizens. The waning of democratic rule and the lack of accountability for elected leaders is most prominently discussed. There are references to the non-fulfilment of the promises that elected politicians made during their campaigning about the development and progression the society socially and economically.

"The country has drifted deeper into abysmal political chaos and economic uncertainty. The common man's life could not be more miserable with uncontrolled food and energy shortages, unabated violence, and countrywide lawlessness" ([Ahmed, 2013](#))[N].

The fantasy of democratic rule is constructed in response to this by the new entrants in the political domain and referred to the incumbent civilian rule as a dictatorial rule. It

was primarily the dynastic politics followed by military interference which dominated the narrative of regaining control. There is a contrast from the 2008 narrative which focused solely on removing a military dictator from politics and restoring democracy. However, a reference to military interference remains a constant reminder of the dark days when military intervention risks the lack of freedom and right of choice, the reasons for which can be summarised as follows:

"In reality, the fact remains that the military remains a powerful political actor in Pakistan...the military continues to exercise considerable influence over the defence and foreign policy in Pakistan and this is unlikely to change any time soon...the fact that the military has chosen not to directly interfere in politics in the past decade does not necessarily mean that it no longer can do so, nor does it imply that it has not played a role behind the scenes" (Javid, 2017)[D].

"What we are facing today is the creation of dictators. Had they not attacked the civil side, the country would not have faced the grievous problems." He claimed the PML-N position now is quite different from the 2008 elections when their "hands were tied" and a military man was calling shots to suppress his party" (Zia, 2013)[N].

"The country cannot afford any further dictatorship which is dangerous for its survival" (Zia, 2013)[N].

"The informal power exercised by the military is a constant threat to civilian rule in Pakistan which also feeds into the recurring lack associated with the individual. The threat of military interference is compounded by the incapacity

of civilian rulers to establish their legitimacy amidst meagre governance and allegations of corruption. Therefore, the rhetoric of change surrounding the 2013 elections was built on the notion of removing the 'corrupt politicians' and 'circus lions' and referring to 'the day of accountability' (Haq, 2013)[D] with the appeal of asking individuals to elect a new leadership which can bring about a change in the country and put it on the road of progression.

"The sad part of the story is that Pakistanis have been betrayed several times in the name of democracy. Dictators have intervened on the pretext of cleaning the mess created by the politicians to let democracy flourish. While the politicians seek power by making big claims of serving the cause of democracy. In reality, they have served no one - neither people nor democracy. Instead, they have feathered well their nests at the cost of the people" (Waziri, 2013)[N].

The dictatorial rule which mirrored the interference of the military in politics infringes upon social and political freedoms, and the welfare of citizens. It is the absence of welfare which becomes the focal point of debate. The fantasy structures and sustains the desire for 'change' through the entrenchment of a 'true' democratic rule. The desire was prominently advocated by the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf (PTI) which gained traction in 2013 and continued to dominate the political sphere in the subsequent electoral cycle as well. In the rhetorical situation in which the discourse on democracy in 2013 and 2018 was predicated, we see a shift in the ego-ideal and the targeted audience. The political elites espousing a 'true' democratic rule refer to the new entrants in the political realm, the PTI from whose perspective the current status quo is being apprehended, and the targeted audience, the youth. The fantasy of entrenching a democratic state sustains the desire for 'change' and a better future for the youth of the country who are portrayed to be those affected.

The word 'change' acted as a master signifier and was referred to in conjunction with *inquilab* (justice) for the people who have suffered at the hands of the corrupt leadership – the removal of incompetent incumbent leadership referring to mostly the two dynastic political parties, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP). Imran Khan, the leader of the PTI blamed the incumbent governments of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) as "equally responsible for difficulties the people suffered" (Correspondent, 2013b)[D]. The narrative offers a rational argumentation and logical explanation as well as references to emotionally charged rhetoric. The narrative focused on restoring democracy and holding leaders accountable for their actions. It also used emotional tactics of referring to the sacrifices made by the political parties in the struggle for democracy and alluding to the glorious foundation of creating Pakistan as a democratic state. The emphasis is placed on the supremacy of civilian rule over a dictatorship for the country's survival (Zia, 2013)[N]. PML-N leader, Nawaz Sharif during a meeting stated that "the continuity of democracy is the right of the people and Pakistan cannot afford any unpredictability right now. He termed elements trying to derail democracy "followers of dictatorship" and said they were placing the country's future at stake" (Manan, 2014)[ET].

Accountability acts as the fantasmatic marker where the removal of incumbent leaders allows for 'true' democracy to flourish. The fantasy of 'true' democracy provides a logical rationale by invoking desire and identifying something which is blocking experiencing jouissance. It paints a picture whereby the *Other*, and in this case, it is the incompetent incumbent leaders, have stolen the jouissance. The logical argumentation for the democratic rule to flourish makes sense because the new political party's mantra was on voting out the dynastic families in the next election. The emotional appeal surfaced in the usage of spe-



cific words and phrases such as “inquilab” (Correspondent, 2013a)[ET] – justice; “million-man march” and “Safar-e-Inqilab-e-Pakistan” (Report, 2013m)[ET] – a reference to the strength of people’s choice and the journey towards justice and accountability; “tsunami” (Ali, 2013b)[D] a – a reference to the revolution which will take place with swarms of people voting for new leadership, sweeping the incompetent incumbent leaders out of power; “waiting for upcoming May 11 for the last 17 years” (Report, 2013q)[N] – a reference to the period that the incompetency and corruption have continued for, causing the degradation of the society and hampering the livelihood of the citizenry and emphasising on the need of the hour to take control back in their hands by removing insincere leadership; “Naya Pakistan - One Pakistan” (Malik, 2018b)[N] – a reference to a new socio-political order based on equality, social justice, accountability and pluralism. Along similar lines, the act of staging a “march for democracy” (Report, 2013g)[D] and referring back to “restoring Jinnah’s true democracy” (Report, 2013m)[ET] are meant to advocate for a better governing system by glorifying the ideals of a democratic state as envisioned by Jinnah – the founding father of Pakistan. The ideals refer to an inclusive and impartial government, freedom of law, religion, and equality for all <sup>4</sup>. It is through reminiscing of the good days that politicians evoked a sense of community amongst the audience – appealing to them for the glory days by making the incumbent leaders accountable and exercising their right to vote cautiously. Most of the rhetoric emphasised the word ‘change’ and a ‘new Pakistan’ as can be seen from the examples below.

"We will bring out the real change if the people elect us" (Khan, 2013a)[D].

"Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz chief Nawaz Sharif said on Monday that a new Pakistan would be built if his party came to power(Report, 2013e)[D].

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<sup>4</sup>Constitution of Pakistan Constituent Address, 1947

"May 11 is not merely a polling day rather it is a day of change destiny of the country and fate of people" ([Report, 2013s](#))[N].

Even within this narrative, a distinction between us and them is significant. Whereas us refers to those who favour democracy, change and hope, they refer to the incompetent incumbent leaders who have led to the abysmal state of the citizens. The incompetent incumbent leaders are a fantasmatic object, transgressing the symbolic order and evoking the horrific scenario of the waning of democracy. The reference to dynastic families, and corrupt leaders intensifies the democratic fantasy in response to a situation of failed identity by invoking the desire of restoring the symbolic order by getting rid of these leaders. What is fascinating is that even the dynastic political parties rallied around a similar narrative, referring to the sacrifices their parties have made for the struggle for democratising Pakistan, using partisanship as an emotional tactic to evoke a sense of belonging amongst the audience for who can deliver 'true democracy' – "The murderers of Quaid-i-Azam and Benazir Bhutto (BB) Shaheed now want to eliminate us as well (but) I don't care for my life. The world knows that the PPP has laid down lives for democracy" ([Raza, 2013](#))[D]. We see tension amongst the political elites during this year where the new entrants rally for ridding of the incumbent incompetent leadership and changing the political landscape, and the incumbents also advocating for a similar change.

Why the usage of 'change' and its association with a 'new Pakistan'? The narrative of democratisation offers a governance system which honours the individual's right to choose freely and independently – making an informed decision about the leadership which will sincerely put forth citizens' welfare as a priority instead of personal gains. A new Pakistan can only be formed if there is a removal of corrupt politicians and dynastic families which have ruled the country for decades replicating an autocratic rule, stripping people of their

right to hold leaders accountable and plunging the country into an abyss. The failure on part of the incompetent incumbent leadership to deliver on its promises forms the premise of introducing 'change.' The word change here is referring to two aspects: one, a change in the leadership, and two, a change in the outlook of the country; both changes refer to the creation of a prosperous country which leads to the improved livelihood of the citizenry.

"People want change. They want a change in the system, not just a change of faces" ([Report, 2013j](#))[D].

The rhetoric of accountability and rule of law formed the crux for the rhetoric of change – the reiteration of the strength of an individual's vote, the emphasis placed on placing power in the hands of the common people, and the references to a new socio-political order acted as markers of emotional appeal. Additionally, two developments in the political sphere fed into the rhetoric of change surrounding the 2013 and 2018 electoral years: (i) the emphasis placed on the role of youth in elections; and (ii) the rise of fringe parties. With regards to the former, the appeal surrounding the future of the country, prosperity and livelihood of the citizens was targeting the future generation – people who will continue suffering if a change is not implemented. The fact that “over 25 million youth” ([Ali, 2013b](#)) would exercise their right to vote in the upcoming electoral cycles, acted as a compelling reason to target this audience with the rhetoric of change and what a new Pakistan could mean for them. The latter aspect, the rise of fringe parties put forth the idea of 'change' in perspective – the emphasis placed on the power of people's right of choice and the demand for the supremacy of rule of law made the incompetency and corruption of the previous leadership part of the political conversation. Whereas PTI was the harbinger of introducing the idea of political change, the Pakistan Awami Tehreek (PAT) and Tehreek-e-Labaik (TLP) bolstered the power of *dharnas* (a non-violent sit-in protest) to reinforce

the power the citizens had in regaining control by exercising their right to vote for sincere leadership which can put the country on the road to transformation and progress.

These developments highlight the specificity of the rhetorical situation in which the desire for 'change' is articulated. It not only alludes to the entrenchment of a different system but also the effectiveness is premised upon certain actors. The targeted audience as we see within these two elections is mainly the youth, many of those voting for the first time in the elections. The political argumentation features the removal of incumbents, those who cannot be trusted with the welfare of the citizens. Instead, the focus is on gaining the trust of the audience and making them part of the situation for the political argument to ground itself. Examples of this are seen from the leader of PTI who is targeting the youth to place their trust in him because he is a new entrant in politics, fighting for the people of Pakistan who have been ignored at the expense of power-hungry incumbents.

"Imran said, May 11th will be the end of obsolete system and sun of new Pakistan will rise... start a golden era... completely change Pakistan according to the dreams of the masses" ([Report, 2013o](#))[N].

"I assure you that PTI is going to make a new Pakistan" ([Khan, 2013a](#))[D].

The affective strategy within this account is provoking the symbolic identification with the notion of change, specifically about the incumbent leadership as well as seeking trust with those who are the outsiders in this election. The entry of new political parties, and fringe parties bring to the fore the means of capturing desire. This can be summed up in this quote: "Ads for Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Imran Khan - looking to make a breakthrough at the May 11 polls - offer voters a "new Pakistan" with his PTI party symbol, a cricket bat, swiping away corruption and propelling the country into the future" ([AFP](#),

2013a)[ET]. There is a logical argumentation underpinning the rhetoric of change. It is the removal of dynastic and incompetent leaders which can pave the path for the citizen's welfare to take precedence. The incumbents are untrustworthy, and their removal is the only way through which 'true' democracy can take root.

The intertwining of logos with pathos is most visibly seen in articulating a logical argument of the constitution of 'true' democracy with the emotional rhetoric aimed at inducing affect and making the citizens part of the whole experience. This is most visibly seen through this quote by the PTI leader, Imran Khan in one of his election rallies: "Seize the moment of change." "You, the people, have to decide if you want to carry on as it is or bring about a change" (Awan, 2013)[N]. The affective dimension is situated with the narrative of change and the notion of 'true' democracy which became the rallying point before the elections.

Moving to the 2018 National elections, and the discourse on democracy. There is a continuation of the narrative from 2013 which focuses on the risks of incompetent incumbent leaders disrupting the symbolic order. The weakening of democratic rule and the lack and incompetency of incumbent leaders is prominently discussed. A crucial difference with this election has to do with corruption cases filed against the incumbent PML-N leadership which won the 2013 election. The 2018 election also followed the disqualification of the sitting Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif. This context further accentuated the rhetoric of change for a new Pakistan. The context becomes relevant in discussing the fantasy of democratic rule and the logical underpinning of the notion of change and the entrenchment of a 'true' democracy. From the 2013 election, the fantasy of democratic rule refers to both restoring and consolidating democracy as the "second consecutive transition from one elected government to another was being made, a significant milestone indeed in the coun-

try's rocky democratic political journey" (Hussain, 2018d)[D]. The fantasmatic marker of accountability of elected leaders and their disregard for the welfare of the public remains consistent. The desire is being constructed upon the degradation of the social and economic aspects of the citizen's quality of life. The fantasmatic ideal of democratisation alluded to the progress of the society under sincere leadership and holding incumbent politicians accountable for the degeneration of the society by bringing them to justice.

The most prominent narrative surrounding the election was advocated by the chairperson of PTI, Imran Khan who demanded for the incumbent Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif resign amid corruption charges and being an autocratic leader:

"Our struggle is not just 'Go Nawaz Go'... it is 'Go System Go, Imran said, adding that the current system of the country thrived on corruption and nepotism. Everybody will be equal in Naya Pakistan" (Report, 2014)[N].

"The PTI chairman accused Mr Sharif and Mr Zardari were putting up a noora kushti (tug-of-war) against each other to deceive the people" (PPI, 2013b)[N].

It was successive *dharnas* (sit-ins) by the PTI over the results of the 2013 elections (Javid, 2018c)[D] which set the premise of struggling for democratisation as the basis of electoral campaigning for 2018. It is the promise of a free and democratic state that is being espoused by Imran Khan who appeals to the public by advocating for a 'sustained struggle' and illuminating that the role of elected leaders is not to attain power for personal gains but to deliver on promises and serve the citizens. The emphasis was placed on "rule of law and accountability as being two important pillars of a liberal democracy (Hussain, 2018c)[D], an aspect which had been disregarded by the PML-N government which was elected in 2013 – "the PML-N's disregard for real political work will darken democracy's prospects"

([Rehman, 2018b](#))[D] because of “a lack of crucially required reforms resulting in waning public faith in democracy” ([Hussain, 2018b](#))[D]. The fantasmatic ideal propagated was based on the progression of the society under a leadership which prioritises the citizens over personal gains – Imran Khan’s rhetoric aimed to induce a sense of belonging amongst the audience regarding the loss of the meaning of their vote – the dishonouring of the citizen’s vote for the incumbent government which failed its citizens in delivering upon its promises. The appeal for the audience focused on regaining control over their choices and holding the government accountable for its disregard of the promises made to advance the public’s welfare. This can be seen through the following examples of election rally speeches reported in the newspapers:

"We'll bring back the looted money of these corrupt and greedy rulers from abroad and spend it for the welfare of the people, who are even deprived of health and education services due to their corruption" ([Khan, 2013b](#))[D].

"The former rulers gave nothing to the masses but embarrassment, poverty and unemployment" ([Mustafa and Barq, 2013](#))[N].

"Those who had damaged the system could not make it better" ([INP, 2013](#))[N].

The discourse presents a logical argumentation on what democracy could entail under PTI’s leadership, and what the fight and struggle are for. In addition to logic, emotional rhetoric takes centre stage. Appeals of correcting the system and the disadvantaged status quo which have caused the suffering of the citizenry are woven into the narrative of ‘true’ democracy. emotionality was used in various manners from staging successive peaceful sit-in protests and appealing to the audience using partisanship, and also rhetorical references

to the glorious history of creating Pakistan in the name of democracy by illuminating the loss the citizenry was suffering from at the hands of a non-democratic regime.

It is the current misery, low quality of life of the public, the degeneration of society socially, economically, and politically, along with the failure of the incumbent government to prioritise citizens over their gains. The rhetoric of change is based on advocating the new schemes and policies which are developed to improve the situation of the country and put it on track for enhanced development, pulling people out of misery and providing assurance that they will be the guarantors for the betterment of the public. Some of the examples in the text are listed below:

"President Zardari and his 'brother' Nawaz Sharif had completed their tenures and they both failed to rid the masses of poverty and unemployment. Peace, stability, and a corruption-free society could only be established through justice, but the former rulers promoted the 'thana and patwari culture' for their vested interests instead of serving the masses, the PTI chief observed" ([Report, 2013f](#))[D].

"The rulers had also miserably failed to launch any welfare project for poverty-stricken masses. The incumbent governments had failed to deal with militancy and restore peace" ([Report, 2013p](#))[N].

"It also has something to do with the lack of principles and a democratic ethos. Even when elected, there is little focus on governance and delivering on promises" ([Hussain, 2018e](#))[D].

The references to a degenerate society riddled with poverty, unemployment, corruption, and deprivation of health and education are indicators of the impeding circumstances im-



pacting the livelihood of the individual. The desire for redemption is structured around the rhetoric of change – the promise for a better and new tomorrow – “to make Pakistan great again,” (Almeida, 2018a)[D]. It is the absence of an opportunity which could improve their livelihood – a void which keeps the individual unfulfilled, dissatisfied, and frustrated: "The country cannot afford another spell of the democracy by incompetent leaders politically and economically, he said adding that incumbent rulers have proved themselves the biggest obstacle in making Pakistan a real democratic country" (PPI, 2013a)[N]. But it is also the inability to entirely achieve the desire which sustains the desire. The fantasy of democracy is intended to fill the void present in the absence of a democratic governance system which impacts the livelihood of an individual – it is aimed at providing meaning to the world for the individual, providing consistency to what they perceive reality to be. The fantasy operates to bring forth a closure for a subject's identity, “promising fullness once an obstacle is overcome – the beatific dimension of fantasy (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p. 147). In the case of democracy, this represents the desire for 'change' that ranges from restoring democracy to removing corrupt politicians, to consolidating democracy. The fantasy works in two ways; a) it creates a sense of yearning – this yearning is a multitude: choosing freely, and independently; redemption from the degenerate status quo, regaining control to serve their interests; and b) it emphasises the sense of belonging – a shared experience. The discourse is structured in a manner which induces affect. The promise of an improvement on the status quo of the country – the progression of Pakistan socially, economically, and politically, and the entrenchment of a sincere leadership which prioritises the welfare of the citizens. The narrative on democracy that promises hope can provide a meaningful account and is relayed as being plausible. The context in which a narrative is constructed becomes important.

In parallel, the horrific dimension refers to the sustenance of a status quo with the continuation of the lack of the ‘obstacle proves insurmountable,’ (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p. 147). In the discourse on democracy, the obstacle refers to the inability of the ‘change’ advocated through a democracy being unable to take root, either because of the ‘internal obstacle’ (the enemy within), (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p. 150) or because of external obstacles. External obstacles include interference of the military in politics, corrupt leaders, and their incompetency, which have resulted in the degradation of the livelihood of the individual. Internal obstacles include conservative ideals which are intertwined with religious values which are in contrast to some of the values that democracy espouses. The narrative on democracy reflects ideals of redemption, progress, freedom, and welfare, providing the tools to achieve it and offering closure to the desire. On the other hand, the discourse on democracy highlights the presence of other forms of identities in parallel – the opposing identities which are informed by other discourses. These identities refer to Islamist discourse on democracy being the antithesis to Islam, or religious conservatism which is in stark opposition to the ideals propagated by the fantasy of democracy. It is worth noting here how the horrific dimension of fantasy plays out. For example, women’s mobility in public spaces, freedom which comes through the implementation of a democratic rule but stands at odds with a society’s conservative ideals which are intertwined with religious values whereby a woman’s position is within the household or requires a certain level of purdah (veil) in terms of segregation between men and women.

Overall, although the discourse on democracy and democratisation refers to the desire for the entrenchment of freedoms, and prioritising of citizens’ welfare, different election years provide the context for a meaningful political argumentation and logic for the desire for ‘change’ which comes through democratisation. The discourse on democracy offers

contextualised logical political argumentation, illustrating a plausible narrative, which informs identities. The meaning-making from the discourse is highlighted through the different National election years. From 2008 to 2018, there is a visible transformation in the political elites espousing for the fantasy of democracy which is formulated within varying rhetorical situations (from the context of military rule to the context of incumbent rulers). The desire for 'change' and what it entails also varies accordingly to the specific context in which the argumentation is taking place (from a transition to a democratically elected government to the entrenchment of 'true' democracy). Along a similar vein, we see how logically articulated political argumentation intertwines with emotional rhetoric to create an affective narrative, evoking the sentiment of belonging and yearning.

Democracy acts as a promise for citizens to honour their vote and their right of choice – to give them the liberty and freedom to exercise their right of choice and the powers that come with it – the power of holding elected representative leaders accountable. It is through the exercising of the vote which places individuals at the fore of deciding their fate and allows them to elect representatives who can offer redemption to them in the form of policies implemented for the welfare of the citizens. One of the identities informed by this discourse is that about the individual liberties and freedoms alongside the rights that come from exercising one's vote – specifically that of holding the government accountable. The fantasmatic markers deployed in constructing an affective narrative refer to accountability – holding the incumbent government responsible and making them answerable to the citizens whose vote was dishonoured. The fantasmatic marker can be further categorised into the removal of incompetent leaders, eradication of dynastic and patronage politics, free and fair elections, removal of corruption, and removal of military interference. The fantasmatic label acts as the tool through which the fantasy grounds itself.

The thematic narrative of democracy is most prominently discussed as opposed to terrorism in opinion pieces and the pattern of the narrative surrounding democracy remains similar to that of political elites as captured within newspaper reporting. The rhetoric of democracy captures the essence of the promise of a change and a prosperous Pakistan, along with highlighting the obstacles that are present to hinder the consolidation of a democratic ethos. These obstacles are most prominently referred to as military intervention and corrupt political elites. Some of the quotes below reflect a similar pattern of political argumentation which is visible through main newspaper reporting as discussed previously:

"The common man's life could not be more miserable with uncontrolled food and energy shortages, unabated violence and countrywide lawlessness" ([Ahmed, 2013](#))[N].

"The sad part of the story is that Pakistanis have been betrayed several times in the name of democracy" ([Waziri, 2013](#))[N].

"Even when elected, there is little focus on governance and delivering on promises" ([Hussain, 2018e](#))[D].

"Instead of politicians drawing strength from the power of the people, a troika would make them lean on the armed force" ([Masood, 2018](#))[ET].

"In reality, the fact remains that the military remains a powerful political actor in Pakistan" ([Javid, 2017](#))[D].

"There are still those dark forces that do not believe in democracy" ([Masood, 2018](#))[ET].

It is the rhetoric of change associated with democracy in order “to make Pakistan great again” (Almeida, 2018a)[D] and to create a new Pakistan based on a democratic ethos which is created as per the dreams of the masses - “Naya Pakistan - One Pakistan” (Maliq, 2018)[N]. The rhetoric of accountability underlies this notion of change that is demanded and promised through the advent of democratisation. The overall narrative emerging from the discourse surrounding democracy has to do with the alleviation of degenerate livelihoods of the people and how the change in a governance system – consolidation of democracy and democratic ideals can bring forth the closure to one’s identity; fulfilment of a desire to be able to prosper. The narrative of democracy as captured in opinion pieces also reflects upon the notion of true democracy acting as a promise to honour the citizen’s right of choice, the supremacy of accountability and rule of law, and act as a means of establishing a governance system which caters to the welfare of the people. Therefore, the pattern of discourse as presented in the main section of newspapers and opinion pieces overlap with the type of narrative that they propagate surrounding democracy. This activity was necessary and is a good exercise to evaluate the types of narratives that emerge around certain issues in newspapers – gauge whether the pattern of narratives emerging may vary in constructing identities in the ways that they are discussed in the main section of newspapers and opinion pieces.

The discourse on democracy exemplifies the conditions for a post-truth discourse. It is political in nature and seeks an audience. The right of choice lies within the audience – the means through which an obstacle can be overcome and result in the accomplishment of the yearning for the aspirational desire of fulfilment. A quote from the discourse on democracy highlights sums this up succinctly: “...democracy and autocracy will fight it out in Islamabad to determine the destiny of a new Pakistan. . . no one will gift you freedom on

a silver platter. You'll have to snatch it through a sustained struggle" (Mansoor, 2018)[D]. It is created by varying political elites and is being received by various segments of the population. The transitions between different election years highlight the variants of audiences being targeted with the rhetoric. A prime example of this has to do with the 2013 National election when the youth was highly mobilised to rid the incompetent incumbent leadership. The discourse becomes rhetorically effective because can create a fantasy to restore the symbolic order and provoke symbolic identification with the notion of change and a new Pakistan. The lack being addressed within the discourse is mostly situated within the domain of economic crisis and the waning of citizens' welfare. The fantasy of democracy and democratisation is situated within this situation and is constructed to sustain the desire for change and a better tomorrow. The fantasmatic logic underpinning the discourse portrays the logical argumentation of the means through which democratising, and the advent of 'true' democracy will fulfil the promise of a better tomorrow. Emotional rhetoric is the driving force in making the rhetoric effective. It is not the narrative of political elites, and the expectations of the audience, but how emotions are intertwined with political argumentation to induce affect, make individuals experience information and make political arguments plausible. The personal situations are brought within the construction of a narrative and the emphasis is placed on identifying with reasoning and scenarios. The discourse on democracy effectively demonstrates this. The desire is articulated so that the audience grasps the situation and experiences it by placing themselves within it. The intertwining of discourse and affect within the account of democracy demonstrates how political argumentation can create desire and recruit support.

### **5.3.2 Discourse on Terrorism - The Establishment of a Caliphate**

With the discourse on terrorism, there are two points which require attention: (i) most of the discussion on terrorism in newspapers has focused on the number of casualties in terrorist attacks along with highlighting names of some of the political parties that have been targets of such attacks during the electoral campaigning cycles; and (ii) there is a limited reporting on the reasoning behind such attacks – the claims have referred to the specific group which orchestrated the attack declaring responsibility alongside a brief message for why they targeted specific political parties and politicians associated with the parties. Therefore, to evaluate and categorise the narrative emerging from Terrorism, the analysis was built around the second aspect– the brief statements throughout the different National election years which will be discussed below. These statements mostly refer to the establishment of a Caliphate in Pakistan. Unlike the chronological order of the development of a post-truth discourse on democracy, in the case of this particular discourse, there has been a consistent political narrative which has been sustained over the years.

The political narrative on the establishment of the Caliphate highlights the desire of becoming a 'good' Muslim. The audience ascribing to such a desire chooses to attack and eliminate a certain faction of the society to acquire redemption and proclaim to be conducting violent acts to reach the status of being a 'good' Muslim. The context in which the political argumentation takes place is specific for the people engaged in terrorist attacks who are convinced by the identity propagated by the narrative of achieving the supremacy of Islamic values in the state of Pakistan. The overarching lack within this political narrative is, therefore, referring to this aspiring identity of being 'good' Muslims. The denouncement of liberal values and freedoms that democracy promulgates which has led to the degenerate state of affairs in the country paves the way forward in capturing the desire. The crisis

that the country is going through socially, politically, and economically has to do with the diminishing importance and practice of religion. The absence of implementation of Sharia law has rid the state of being a true Islamic state and it is only through the removal of liberal forces from the country, can the desire of being 'good' Muslims be fulfilled.

The overarching fantasy refers to the creation of an Islamic state based on the principles of Sharia law. The fantasy underpinning the establishment of the Caliphate narrative is the promise of salvation which is accomplished through the construction of an Islamic state based on the Sharia law and Islamic principles – the acts of terrorism being justified for a greater cause. The fantasy creates a sense of yearning – the desire for restoring and glorifying Islam by establishing the Sharia law, restoring the Caliphate – the establishment of Pakistan as an Islamic state entrenching Islamic principles in both the governance of the country as well as the permeation of Islamic ideals and values throughout the society. It also emphasises the sense of belonging – the shared experience amongst the individuals who are involved in terrorist activities and the agenda of implementing an Islamic state. It is the element of shared experience here which acts as a means of understanding how violence can be justified as a means to achieve a goal – the struggle is for achieving the supremacy of religious ways of governing and leading lives and the permanence of such an understanding, the socialisation of individuals in believing that any struggle (violent or not) in the name of Islam is a step closer to achieving salvation facilitates the rationalisation of using violence.

This fantasy being espoused by extremists refers to the 'ego-ideal' from whose perspective the current situation is being apprehended, and what can be done about it. The violent gesture captures attention – it is a visible and public statement of the struggle. It is the fault of liberal forces which are responsible for the degenerate state of the country as they have



adopted democracy, the un-Islamic way of living life. It is only through the destruction and elimination of such forces can the country prosper, and individuals engaged in terrorist attacks can claim to be 'good' Muslims and be rewarded in the afterlife for the struggle they waged in the name of restoring Islam and rallying for the supremacy of Islam in the country. The fight is against these forces to establish a prosperous state. The *jouissance*, the prevailing suffering due to the unfulfilled desire is reminiscent of an outlook of a society which provides them with the opportunity to be 'good' Muslims who can seek salvation in the afterlife - this can only happen if an Islamic state is established and the removal of liberal democratic forces which has degenerated the society, and created an obstacle for the establishment of a Caliphate. The targeted audience, those who partake in terrorist attacks are the harbinger of establishing the supremacy of Islamic principles.

I turn to Glynos (2001) in analysing the fantasy's 'conceals–evokes' dimension. In the case of terrorism, the fantasy structures the subject's desires and actions in a way that they believe in a prosperous afterlife. However, what the fantasy conceals as 'true' desires falsely represents reality, which in this case is the fact that democracy is the antithesis to the creation of an Islamic state. A democratic system is a fantasmatic object transgressing the symbolic order and evoking the horror situation of an 'un-Islamic state. In the process, the realisation of the fulfilment of the desire, the increased accessibility makes the desire horrible. The fantasmatic element evokes the ultimate horror of the incompleteness of identity. As Glynos (2001) points out, the evocation of horror serves an ideological function, with the fantasy being transgressive to the symbolic order to maintain consistency with the discourse. It evokes the secret enjoyment of the prospect of violence in the form of terrorist attacks in this case. The acts of terrorism intensify the fantasy of creating an Islamic state which is being threatened by democratic rule. In parallel, such a fantasy restricts the plu-

ralist value of democracy. The desire of being a 'good Muslim' is not pinned upon acts of violence, but on how one leads their life according to Islamic values.

Although incidents of terrorism have been multiple, references underpinning the fantasy of creating an Islamic state are not highlighted frequently. The narrative motivating terrorist attacks can provide a meaningful account of the reality that can be achieved if there is an elimination of the current democratic system which is labelled as being 'anti-Islamic' by the terrorist groups who have claimed responsibility for the majority of terrorist attacks taking place in Pakistan during the electoral campaign cycle. Some of the references which have emerged in newspaper reporting are as follows:

"Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) assumes responsibility for the blast and threatens to launch attacks directed at the secular parties of Pakistan, namely, ANP, Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) and later, Pakistan People's Party (PPP)" ([Report, 2013i](#))[D].

"The TTP is opposed to secular democracy in principle, viewing it as incompatible with Islamic belief, and their dislike of the secular PPP, ANP and MQM" ([AFP, 2013b](#))[D].

"The Taliban have called for rewriting the Constitution by Islamic sharia" ([Report, 2013b](#))D.

"The militants have even termed democracy un-Islamic" ([Khosa, 2013](#))[D].

There is a clear indication of how democracy is antithetical to what Islam and Sharia's law stand for and the justification of persistent attacks on the same political parties that continue to advocate for the consolidation of democracy. The fantasy surrounding the

discourse on democracy and the establishment of a Caliphate is antagonistic in the political discourse captured in newspaper reporting – whereas the narrative around democracy is rarely presented in juxtaposition to Islam, the reverse is indeed true – Islamic Sharia law is always presented as being anti-democratic, appealing to the conservative forces in the country. The desire or reclaiming the supremacy of Islam in Pakistan comes at loggerheads with the identity associated with democracy – the obstacle to achieving a ‘true Islamic state in this case is the democratic set-up of the country and the continued efforts of political actors to consolidate democracy.

The discourse is rhetorically effective as it can create the fantasy in response to the failing identity of being a ‘good’ Muslim, invoking the desire for a better afterlife to restore the symbolic order. The discourse on terrorism exemplifies the conditions for a post-truth discourse. The discourse is being created by leaders of terrorist organisations who seek followers. The lack being addressed within the discourse is mostly situated within the domain of a failing identity of not being a ‘good’ Muslim and the desire to be captured refers to salvation in the afterlife for accomplishing the mammoth task of creating an Islamic state. The fantasmatic logic underpinning the discourse portrays the logical argumentation of the means through which the construction of an Islamic state will fulfil the promise of achieving enough to be labelled as the saviours of Islam. The promise of closure will be fulfilled once the obstacle is overthrown – the individuals targeted, the proponents of ‘liberalism’ and ‘western ideals’ is necessary to reach the end goal. The nostalgia about establishing a state based on Islamic principles, the absence of which will continue to haunt them resulting in their discontentment, and the closure to their identity will remain unfulfilled if they do not engage in this act of terrorism for the greater cause.

The fantasy of establishing an Islamic state through acts of terrorism presents a reality

which can capture the desire of being a 'good' Muslim and the promise of rewards in the afterlife<sup>5</sup>. The rhetoric of establishing a state based on Sharia law and Islamic principles, the supremacy of Islam over western ideals of democracy and liberalism are used as a justification for conducting violent acts. The degeneration of society is being derailed by not following the teaching of the religion, Islam which has been contaminated with liberal values derailing the citizens from leading their lives according to Islamic principles. On the other hand, the horrific dimension of fantasy operates in the continuation of the status quo, with liberal political parties advocating for the consolidation of democratic principles in the country. It is the persisting inability to entirely achieve the desiring aspect of a fantasy fully, to be a 'good' Muslim and secure awards in the afterlife, the incompleteness which sustains the desire.

The intertwining of logos with pathos is most visibly seen in articulating a logical argument of the constitution of an Islamic state based on Sharia law with the emotional rhetoric of being a 'good' Muslim. The vision of a true Islamic state is built on Islamic principles emulating a Caliphate and the purpose of every Muslim to wage a struggle to achieve this goal to reclaim the fulfilment of their desire of serving in the greater cause of establishing a governance system and implementing a lifestyle per the teachings of the Holy Quran is indicative of how the fantasmatic logic operates within the discourse of terrorism. The intertwining of emotions with political argumentation induces affect, makes individuals experience information and make political arguments plausible. The personal circumstances

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<sup>5</sup>The concept of the after-life is prominent in Islam – the way Muslims lead their lives (according to the principles of Islamic teaching determine how their after-life will be, whether they will go to heaven or hell). The proponents of terrorism manipulate this notion of the afterlife by justifying terrorist acts with Islamic principles and advocating the fantasy of being rewarded in the afterlife for establishing an Islamic state. No religion, including Islam, does not preach violence, hence, the usage of violence needs to be questioned as actually practising the ideals of Islamic teaching or a mere tool to achieve a goal, maligning a religion in the process.

are situated within the narrative and an emphasis is placed on identifying with reasoning and scenarios. emotionality in the narrative is intertwined with appeals to the 'greater cause – the underlying message of it being the duty of every Muslim to participate in this struggle to achieve what they are destined to achieve. Acts of violence are justified in the name of the 'greater good' - the desire of becoming a 'good' Muslim by accomplishing the goal which they are destined to accomplish. The affective strategy within this discourse is the symbolic identification with terrorist attacks to reach a state of redemption. The context of the political argumentation and the fantasy created within this context feeds into the affective dimension of the discourse. It is not the extremist's point of view nor the expectations of the followers, but the context in which the narrative is structured which makes the discourse plausible. The discourse on terrorism effectively demonstrates this. The desire for the awards in the afterlife is articulated so that the audience grasps the situation and experiences it by placing themselves within it. The intertwining of discourse and affect within the account of terrorism demonstrates how political argumentation can create desire and recruit support.

## **5.4 Conclusion**

This chapter continued the discussion on understanding the operationalisation of the term post-truth discourse and applied the theorisation to Pakistani newspaper articles. I analyse two post-truth discourses, namely democracy and terrorism by drawing on RPA, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and the Logics approach. The task of discerning post-truth discourses is not a swift process. It requires focus and attention to details of analysing the political accounts for various textual attributes and dimensions associated with post-truth dis-

course. Out of 9 major political themes, only 2 themes passed the evaluation stage of being categorised as post-truth discourses as they fully fulfilled the conditions of a post-truth discourse. These discourses also indicate the policy implications that will unravel with the entrenchment of post-truth identities. The discourse on democracy and terrorism both highlight two sides of the coin on policy outcomes - the framing of specific identities which translate into specific types of systems to take root in society.

A post-truth discourse is such that it adopts a particular context and creates a fantasy in response to a specific scenario, structured around a specific type of available knowledge and information, evoking a desire that the audience aspires of attaining. In the case of terrorism, the yearning for an Islamic state is an aspirational desire to fulfil the desire of being a 'true' Muslim so that salvation in the afterlife is promised. In the case of democracy, the usage of 'change' and its association with a 'new Pakistan' highlighted the means through which the individual's right to choose freely and independently could be ensured. The fantasmatic content, the aspirational identity propagated through the narrative is inclusive of the elements of yearning and belonging which are structured by emotional rhetoric, intended to induce affect, and make the audience experience the scenarios and understand the reasoning. The element of yearning refers to the desire of achieving an identity that will result in fullness-to-come – the identity which will replenish the void, and it also is indicative towards the horrific dimension of the yearning – the incompleteness that will prevail if the desire remains unfulfilled. Fantasy is a tool used to create and sustain a desire. The intertwining of emotional rhetoric with political argumentation induces affect, making individuals experience information and making political arguments seem plausible. The audience's personal circumstances are situated within the narrative. An emphasis is placed on identifying logical reasoning and scenarios within political argumentation. The

discourse on democracy and terrorism effectively demonstrates this. The desires in both discourses are articulated so that the audience grasps the situation and experiences it by placing themselves within it. The intertwining of discourse and affect within the account of terrorism demonstrates how political argumentation can create desire and recruit support. The affective strategy becomes effective when the political argumentation can create desire and recruit support.

The framework I develop allows us to examine why certain political narratives entrench themselves in society and are accepted and believed to be truthful. Such framing then offers an innovative approach to analysing political accounts as well as policy narratives, subsequently categorising them as post-truth in any given context. Post-truth narratives have certain attributes associated with them and they can be qualitatively assessed and labelled as such. A Lacanian psychoanalytic reading of political texts helps understand meaning-making within a discourse and facilitates exploring scenarios and contexts in which desire is evoked. It illuminates how language and rhetoric illustrate the incompleteness and the desire, and the ways through which the desire can be captured. Affect and discourse interact to demonstrate how a logical political argument can elicit desire and support, making political narratives seem plausible. Psychoanalysis broadens our understanding of how political rhetoric affectively organises subjectivity. The logical argumentation and use of emotional rhetoric within such a discourse are intended to evoke a sense of belonging and yearning - a means of lessening incompleteness. The Lacanian theory is a useful tool for understanding how rhetoric works to elicit desire.

The shift of analysing post-truth with discourse allows us to discuss distinct types of political narratives and steers the discussion away from the production factories of fake news and extremist forces such as Trump or Farage. It paves the path for analysing some of the

obvious examples such as the War on Terror, anti-vaccination, and climate change denial through the new theoretical lens which focuses on the textual attributes and dimensions of post-truth discourses. Whereas this chapter was solely focused on qualitatively assessing for post-truth discourses in newspapers, the subsequent chapter builds upon this analysis to broaden the scope of empirical research on post-truth. In the next chapter, I analyse the results of a vignette survey experiment to measure the effect of post-truth discourse on political attitudes and perceptions.



## **Chapter 6**

# **The Effects of Post-truth Discourse on Perceived Truthfulness**

### **Abstract**

The second empirical study builds upon the qualitative discursive analysis presented in the previous chapter. I use the identified post-truth discourses to formulate vignettes to be used in the survey experiment. The experiment measures the effect of post-truth statements on political attitudes and perceptions, specifically, perceived truthfulness associated with post-truth vignettes. It also examines the role of emotions in influencing perceived truthfulness. There are three main findings from the experiment: (1) the persuasiveness of post-truth statements varies across issues; (2) a post-truth statement influences an emotional response (anger or hope); and (3) the perceived truthfulness of a post-truth statement is, as anticipated, fuelled partly by emotion. Through this case study, I broaden the scope of empirical research conducted on post-truth, by suggesting that post-truth discourse is a

unique variable of interest whose effect on political attitudes can be measured.

## **6.1 Introduction**

To further explore the theorisation of post-truth discourse and examine its implications, I build on the discursive analysis presented in the previous chapter to design and implement a vignette survey experiment. Through this experiment, I operationalise post-truth attributes to measure the perceived truthfulness of vignettes featuring post-truth attributes. Whereas the discursive analysis proved useful in examining the various features and dimensions of post-truth discourse to analyse and illustrate the distinct types of post-truth discourses that have emerged during elections in Pakistan, the experiment furthers the inquiry on studying the effect of such discourses on citizens' political attitudes. I operationalise three post-truth textual attributes: lack, fantasy, and emotionality to measure perceived truthfulness. I further investigate the role of emotions (anger and hope) in influencing perceived truthfulness. Emotional rhetoric becomes a crucial driving force in creating an appealing narrative whereby the political narrative resonates with the audience, and they can experience the information. Emotionality is a key mechanism for measuring the perceived truthfulness of post-truth statements. Since these textual attributes have been identified in the text during the discursive analysis, they present a viable opportunity to be integrated into an experimental design whereby their effect on political attitudes and behaviour can be studied. I create vignettes using these textual attributes and design an experiment where political narratives were broken to identify the post-truth rhetorical combination of these attributes that prove most persuasive to influence perceived truthfulness.

The recent empirical literature on post-truth has attempted to study it through the lens of

misinformation and corrective strategies in influencing public opinion (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Barrera et al., 2020; Marietta et al., 2015; Nyhan et al., 2020). Other studies build upon ‘motivated reasoning’ argumentation (Flynn et al., 2017; Meffert et al., 2006; Redlawsk et al., 2010), and examine the role of social media (Pariser, 2011) in perpetuating and sustaining misinformation. This is because post-truth has thus far been defined and conflated with the dichotomy of the misinformation-objective fact which has subsequently influenced empirical research on the effects of the post-truth phenomenon on political behaviour. A shortcoming of this literature is that it has mostly inferred the existence of the post-truth phenomenon through resistance-to-correction and related experiments. It misses a mark in discussing *post-truth* as a unique variable of interest which may influence political attitudes and behaviour. Another shortcoming of empirical research on post-truth is that it is mainly contextualised within the Western hemisphere and conveniently thought to be applicable only in the Anglophone world.

This experiment, therefore, contributes to the gap in the literature by proposing to measure the effect of post-truth attributes on political attitudes and broadening the scope of empirical research on post-truth by using the case of Pakistan. My findings yield insightful knowledge on the attributes of a post-truth discourse which are likely to be accepted as truthful, and the role that emotions play in influencing perceived truthfulness.

Why is truthfulness an important dimension to study? The belief in a particular narrative is linked to accepting the narrative to be truthful. I argue that the resonating capacity of the statement and the perceived truthfulness comes from two aspects: (1) the shared experience with the narrative, and (2) the emotional response to the narrative. Post-truth discourse allows for a multitude of antagonistic political narratives to co-exist and inform varying subject positions and identities. The lack of agreement on what constitutes truth,

and the standards of what truth entails influences the varied perception of truthfulness. It also indicates a plurality of values associated with what being true means for an individual.

As previously argued, post-truth discourses are political, seek an audience and embody a contextualised political argument to capture desire. The discourse is intended to induce experience and affect so that the content of the narrative resonates with the citizens, they deem it plausible, believe in it and accept it to be truthful. These discourses elicit how common sense is translated into logical political arguments to create meaning and induce belief. The intertwining of logical argumentation with emotional rhetoric induces a shared feeling of belonging and yearning whereby the citizen can experience the information and situate themselves within the political narrative. The perception of truthfulness is associated with the resonance of the information within a political argument. Therefore, to examine the persuasive nature of post-truth statements, the first step involves measuring the specific textual attributes within the narrative which are likely to influence the perceived truthfulness.

The implementation of an exploratory mixed-method approach in this study facilitates developing and expanding the conceptualisation of post-truth discourse, moving from illustrating the types of post-truth discourses within newspaper reporting through a discursive analysis towards investigating the effect that such discourses can have on citizens' political attitudes through an experiment. Through this experiment, I seek to examine the role of certain post-truth attributes in a political narrative in influencing perceived truthfulness, as well as the emotional response triggered by the political narrative. I further examine whether the emotional response also influences perceived truthfulness. This experiment indicates one of the many ways in which the theorisation of post-truth discourse can be operationalised, broadening how we understand the implications of such discourse.

I surveyed a sample of 800 respondents from five urban districts in Pakistan. Although

the persuasiveness of post-truth narratives varies across issues, I find positive effects of emotions and truthfulness on a post-truth narrative. This experimental research design opens up the discussion on future empirical research conducted on post-truth. It provides a means through which post-truth discourse can be used as a unique variable of interest whose effects on political behaviour can be measured. It shifts the focus from analysing post-truth with accounts of misinformation and fake news towards analysing attributes of post-truth discourse. Moreover, it proposes an operational definition of post-truth discourse featuring measurable attributes whose effect on political behaviour can be measured.

The main findings for this study are three-fold: (1) the persuasiveness of post-truth statements varies across issues; (2) a post-truth statement influences an emotional response (anger or hope); and (3) the perceived truthfulness of a post-truth statement is, as anticipated, fuelled partly by emotion. In conclusion, theorising post-truth as a discourse allows us to test the effects of its attributes on individuals' perception of political discourses to be true. My results are insightful in analysing the specific content of post-truth accounts which are crucial in determining perceived truthfulness, as well as the role of emotions with post-truth affecting political behaviour. These positive results open up an avenue for furthering empirical work on the implications of post-truth discourse on political behaviour.

The remainder of the chapter proceeds as follows. Section one discusses the various approaches and recent empirical findings on post-truth and political behaviour outlining the shortcoming of such empirical research. It also introduces the conceptualisation of post-truth as political discourse. Section two outlines the research design, providing relevant contextual details on the use of political discourse to be used in the vignette survey experiment, the data collection method, the experimental design, and the content of vignettes. Section three outlines the main experimental results of the effects of post-truth statements

on the perceived truthfulness of the statements. Section four concludes with a discussion of the implications of the findings.

## **6.2 Post-Truth, Misinformation and Public Opinion: Past Research**

Current empirical research on post-truth has focused on the effect of misinformation, framing, and corrective strategies on political behaviour. This is primarily because post-truth to date has been conflated with objective facts losing credibility at the expense of emotional rhetoric making way for the increased infiltration of misinformation influencing political behaviour. Fake news has become a central component of the recent political struggle (Farkas and Schou, 2018), popularly synonymised with the post-truth phenomenon (Horne and Adali, 2017; Rochlin, 2017; Tandoc Jr et al., 2018), subsequently influencing much empirical research on studying its effects on political behaviour. Similarly, post-truth has also been synonymised with variants of lying. This includes humbug (Black, 1982) and bullshit (Frankfurt, 2009). Other related conceptualisations have focused on defining the specific tenets of disinformation (Kapantai et al., 2021, p. 1316), differentiating between being uninformed and being misinformed (Kuklinski et al., 2000, p. 792-794), as well as differentiation between misinformation and disinformation (Shin et al., 2018, p. 279).

Subsequently, therefore, much empirical research on post-truth has focused on the persuasive nature of misinformation and fake news in informing public opinion despite its veracity (Allcott and Gentzkow, 2017; Garrett and Weeks, 2013). Similarly, there is a rich body of literature focusing on the heterogenous effect of corrective measures such as fact-checking (Barrera et al., 2020; Fridkin et al., 2015; Garrett et al., 2013; Guess et al.,

2018; Marietta et al., 2015; Nyhan and Reifler, 2010; Nyhan et al., 2020; Wintersieck, 2017), literacy interventions (Badrinathan, 2021; Jones-Jang et al., 2021; Lewandowsky et al., 2017), digital advertisements (Bakir and McStay, 2018), debunking (Chan et al., 2017; Lewandowsky et al., 2012; Nyhan and Reifler, 2013, 2015) on behavioural attitudes towards misperceptions and misinformation. Whereas persuasiveness is important on the one hand in inducing belief in a statement as being truthful, equally important is whether the audience resonates with that statement. It is the latter which determines the success of effective communication of information. For instance, populist appeals are effective if they elicit stronger emotions than non-populist appeals which influence the persuasive nature of such content (Wirz, 2018).

Another dimension of empirical research on the effect of misinformation on political behaviour and behavioural attitude has focused on the interpretation of facts and the effects on public opinion (Davis, 2017; Gaines et al., 2007; Uscinski and Butler, 2013), the effect of emotions on the accuracy of political beliefs (Weeks, 2015), as well as the persistence in belief and opinions (Nyhan and Reifler, 2019; Steele, 1988).

The aspect of persistence has been attributed to motivated reasoning (Flynn et al., 2017; Kunda, 1990; Meffert et al., 2006; Redlawsk, 2002; Redlawsk et al., 2010; Thaler, 2019), partisanship (Bolsen et al., 2014; Dalton et al., 1998; Ecker and Ang, 2019; Hobolt et al., 2021; Levendusky, 2013), prior attitudes and informedness (Gilead et al., 2019; Guess and Coppock, 2020; Li and Wagner, 2020; Pennycook et al., 2018; Taber and Lodge, 2006; Taber et al., 2009; Ross et al., 1975; Wood and Porter, 2019; Wittenberg and Berinsky, 2020), as well as source credibility (Berinsky, 2017; Swire et al., 2017) which can lead to a confirmation of one's belief, resisting or avoiding opposing information. The sense of identity and belonging to a particular narrative is crucial in ensuring a certain discourse is

sustained.

Whereby this strand of literature has yielded fruitful insights on the influence of misinformation and corrective strategies on political behaviour, it also presents a gap in studying post-truth. The limitation of the empirical research here is a lack of focus on conceptualising the terminology post-truth and operationalising it through empirical designs. I address this particular gap through this experimental design whereby I shift the discussion on post-truth away from misinformation and towards features of discourse. In doing so, I operationalise post-truth discourse featuring specific attributes whose effect on behavioural response can be measured. I introduce post-truth discourse as an independent variable of interest in empirical research. Such a shift in theorising about post-truth allows us to examine the various aspects of discourse through which we can understand political behaviour.

The constitutive features of a narrative influence its resonating capacity and citizens' behavioural response. I argue that the rhetorical combination of the features lack, fantasy and emotionality allows us to analyse which rhetorical combinations prove to be more persuasive than others in influencing the perceived truthfulness of post-truth statements. Each textual element is structured to inform an identity and evoke an emotional response which translates into believing that the narrative is plausible and truthful. Through this experiment, I measure the influence of the textual attributes and the role of positive and negative emotional responses (hope and anger) on the perceived truthfulness of post-truth statements.

The theoretical underpinning of my argument is that the incorporation of the textual attributes of lack, fantasy and emotionality creates a plausible political argumentation within a specific context, seeking to induce belief in the plausibility of the argumentation. The sole purpose of the rhetoric is to maintain a grip on the audience by depicting a desire and



inducing affect to persuade them in accepting the narrative to be truthful. For the political rhetoric to be perceived as truthful it has to resonate with the citizens who can situate themselves within the political narrative and situation which is being communicated. The rhetorical context within a political narrative becomes pivotal in making citizens experience information. The perceived truthfulness will be dependent on the ability of the specific textual attributes to resonate with the citizens.

Having discussed the differing ways in which the post-truth has been discussed thus far in the scholarship, alongside the limitations of the current literature, in the next section, I provide a brief description of the textual attributes of post-truth discourse. This is to better grasp the creation of vignettes in the experiment, as well as understand the persuasive capacity of the attributes in influencing perceived truthfulness.

### **6.2.1 Textual Attributes of Post-truth Discourse and Persuasion**

I provide a brief description and examples of the three textual attributes of post-truth discourse, namely lack, fantasy, and emotionality which form the basis for the experimental design to capture perceived truthfulness. I will draw upon the discursive analysis presented in the previous chapter to elucidate examples of statements which reflect these textual attributes that are subsequently used to create vignettes.

#### **Lack**

The attribute of lack refers to an aspirational desire articulated within a political narrative. In newspaper reporting on the political narrative of democracy and terrorism, this attribute can be identified in the following examples:

**Example 1:** “The rulers had also miserably failed to launch any welfare project for

poverty-stricken masses. The incumbent governments had totally failed to deal with militancy and restore peace" ([Report, 2013p](#)).

**Example 2:** "The TTP is opposed to secular democracy in principle, viewing it as incompatible with Islamic belief" ([AFP, 2013b](#))

In example 1, the lack is situated within the domain of the economic crisis and the waning of citizens' welfare as a result of incompetent rulers and the garb of power. The desire articulated is for 'change' about democratisation and what it will bring forth. In example 2, the lack is situated within the domain of a failure of the identity of not being a 'good' Muslim. The desire articulated is for salvation in the afterlife which can only be attained by creating an Islamic state and eliminating democracy.

Both these examples provide a logical argumentation and are contextualised within specific rhetorical scenarios. The persuasive capacity of this attribute is associated with its ability to evoke a sense of belonging to the articulated desire and to generate an emotional response to the situation being described within the narrative. For this rhetoric to resonate and be perceived as truthful is dependent on whether citizens can situate themselves within the political narrative which is being communicated.

## **Fantasy**

The attribute of fantasy refers to the means of capturing the desire and addressing the lack. In newspaper reporting on the political narrative of democracy and terrorism, this attribute can be identified in the following examples:

**Example 1:** "True democracy stands for a government in which the people's will prevails. It stands for justice, equality, accountability, and transparency. It ensures the rule of law and supremacy of the constitution. It paves the way for good governance, which in re-

turn gives the people peace, progress, and prosperity. If a system of government lacks these basic features, then it is not a democracy, but a mockery of democracy” (Waziri, 2013).

**Example 2:** "The Taliban have called for rewriting the Constitution by Islamic sharia" (Report, 2013b).

In example 1, the fantasy is situated within the domain of entrenching a 'true' democracy and the subsequent welfare and freedoms which will follow. The fantasy of democratisation structures a reality whereby the individual's rights will be honoured and respected and where the individual will have the means to thrive. It alludes to the desire for change and a better tomorrow. In example 2, the fantasy is situated within the domain of establishing a Caliphate based on Islamic principles which pave the path for leading life per the teachings of Islam. It presents a reality through which the desire of being a 'good' Muslim and the awards in the afterlife can be achieved. The degeneration of society can be explained through the presence of liberal values of democracy which is derailing the citizens from leading their lives according to Islamic principles.

Both these examples of fantasy provide a logical argumentation of the means through which desire can be captured. They are contextualised within specific rhetorical scenarios of democratisation and the establishment of a Caliphate. The persuasive capacity of this attribute is associated with its ability to evoke a sense of yearning for the articulated desire as well as generate an emotional response to the situation being described within the narrative. For this rhetoric to resonate and be perceived as truthful is dependent on whether citizens can situate themselves within the fantasy which is being articulated through the political narrative.

## **Emotionality**

The attribute of emotionality is pivotal in making a narrative appealing and plausible. It ties with both the attributes of lack and fantasy within a political narrative to induce the feeling of belonging and yearning, respectively. Examples of emotionality in political narratives within newspapers refer to specific words and phrases that accentuate the attributes of lack and fantasy and make them appealing and make citizens experience the information so that they deem it plausible. In newspaper reporting on the political narrative of democracy and terrorism, this attribute can be identified in the following examples:

**Example 1:** Regarding the attribute of lack in the political narrative on democracy, which referred to the despair in absence of a democratic rule and references to incompetent leadership, the attribute of emotionality was reflected in phrases such as “biggest obstacle” (PPI, 2013a), “*noora kushti* (tug-of-war) against each other to deceive the people” (Khan, 2013b).

**Example 2:** Regarding the attribute of fantasy in the political narrative on democracy, which referred to the notion of change of the governance system to rid of despair, the attribute of emotionality was reflected in phrases such as “*inquilab*” (Correspondent, 2013a) – justice; “million-man march” and “*Safar-e-Inqilab-e-Pakistan*” (Report, 2013m) – a reference to the strength of people’s choice and the journey towards justice and accountability; “*tsunami*” (Ali, 2013b) – a reference to the revolution which will take place with swarms of people voting for a new leadership, sweeping the incompetent incumbent leaders out of power.

In the creation of vignettes, the attribute of emotionality is a constant feature alongside the attributes of lack and fantasy. The vignettes are therefore created in a manner which captures the persuasive capacity of textual attributes of lack and fantasy on perceived truth-

fulness. Whereas both attributes tied with emotionality aim to resonate with the citizens to induce a feeling of belonging or yearning, a vignette which features lack, fantasy and emotionality provides the holistic political argumentation and the rhetorical situation. Such a vignette offers the articulation of a desire and the means to capture the desire within a specific context. It is created to make citizens experience the situation and identify with logical reasoning. Emotional rhetoric is pivotal in making the narrative seem plausible and inducing affect. The sole purpose of the rhetoric is to maintain a grip on the audience by depicting a desire and inducing affect to persuade them in accepting the narrative to be truthful. It is the 'shared experience' [Mannheim \(1952\)](#) with the information, the feeling of belonging and yearning which is created through the narrative which influences citizens' perception of the truthfulness of political narratives.

This experiment is a means through which we examine the persuasive capacity of the textual attributes. To measure the effectiveness of these attributes on perceived truthfulness, I design an experiment featuring vignettes based on these textual attributes.

1. Expose individuals to rhetorical combinations of post-truth textual attributes (post-truth treatment – the independent variable); and
2. Measure the perceived truthfulness of the rhetorical combinations of post-truth textual attributes (dependent variable)

This study tests out two main hypotheses. The primary goal of this study is to measure the perceived truthfulness of post-truth statements and examine the relationship between emotions and the perceived truthfulness of post-truth statements.

I identify three measurable attributes of post-truth narratives: lack, fantasy, and emotionality. I propose that post-truth statements' perceived truthfulness is maximised by the

presence of all these attributes.

*H1: A statement is most likely to be accepted as true if it contains all the elements of lack, fantasy, and emotionality.*

My second hypothesis draws upon the aspect of emotionality – the evocation of a particular sentiment (anger or hope) which influences the perceived truthfulness of a post-truth statement. In particular, I propose that the sentiment of anger is related to the attribute of lack (the unfulfilled aspirational desire – a negative association with a statement), and the sentiment of hope is related to the attribute of fantasy (means of fulfilling the desire – a positive association with a statement).

*H2a: An individual is more likely to ascribe the anger sentiment to a statement comprising the attributes of lack and emotionality*

*H2b: An individual is more likely to ascribe the hope sentiment to a statement comprising the attributes of fantasy and emotionality.*

My third hypothesis tests the interaction between emotion and post-truth discourse on perceived truthfulness.

*H3: The effect of post-truth statements on perceived truthfulness is stronger where it moves respondents further from anger to hope.*

Having outlined the theoretical framework and hypotheses to be tested, the next section outlines the research design where I discuss the context of the case study, sample, data, and experimental design.

## **6.3 Research Design**

### **6.3.1 Context of the Case Study**

Pakistani political discourse reported in newspapers presents a unique case study to evaluate post-truth narratives. Newspaper reporting on prominent political themes and topics surrounding an election is an excellent starting point for analysing the political narratives which dominate the political sphere and tend to inform identities on important political issues.

Pakistan has witnessed multiple military coups with instances of democratically elected governments. Such a chequered political history has influenced the citizen's public opinion on the various forms of regime types, as well as informed their identities surrounding various political narratives on different political issues. This also means that the political discourse has been polarised on key issues – most prominently democracy, terrorism, and the incumbent government's incompetency become crucial rallying issues for political parties during electoral campaigning. Elections are usually considered to be crucial periods where an individual's perceptions and decision making is being shaped by the surrounding information environment. The rhetorical part of campaigning acts as a crucial baiting opportunity for the leaders to not only create awareness amongst the population about the pertinent political and social issues but also as a window of opportunity to sell their agendas to the public – this period is usually a year before the election date.

The vignettes used as the post-truth treatment in the experiment are based on the discursive analysis presented in the previous chapter. There are four vignette sets used in the experiment highlighting the narrative on democracy and terrorism. The first set of vignettes refers to the incompetency of incumbent leadership in providing welfare to the public. The

second set of vignettes refers to the absence of a true democracy. The third set of vignettes refers to the role of the military in hindering the consolidation of democracy. The fourth set of vignettes refers to terrorism and the creation of an Islamic state which is the antithesis of democracy. These themes are defining aspects of Pakistani political discourse which is informed by decades of military rule, phases of Islamisation, and the struggle for democratic consolidation. The selection, codification, and analysis of these vignettes to be categorised as post-truth are outlined in detail in Chapter 4.

These political narratives broaden our understanding of what constitutes post-truth. The operationalisation of post-truth discourse featuring three textual attributes facilitates measuring the effect of post-truth features on political behaviour and broadens the scope of empirical research that has been focused on the US and almost exclusively in Western industrialised nations. Pakistani electoral discourse is one of the many case studies that provide insights into the varying post-truth narratives that can exist and have political implications.

### **6.3.2 Sample**

The vignette experiment is conducted through a phone survey by M&A Research Solutions in Lahore, Pakistan. A database of phone numbers is acquired through a telecommunication company. There are 5 urban districts in Pakistan which were targeted to recruit a sample of registered phone users: Chakwal, Mandi Bahuddin, Muzaffargarh, Toba Tek Singh and Vehari. Everyone in these districts who was a registered user of the telecommunication company received a text message to take part in an upcoming survey. A database of phone numbers was constructed listing the registered users who agreed to take part in the survey. From within this database, the sample of 800 was randomly selected to secure gender



balance. Respondents for the survey are selected by listing that they are eligible (are at least 18 and possess a National Identity Card). Once this is confirmed, the enumerator seeks oral consent from the respondent to conduct the survey.

The sample is representative of the low-middle-income urban population in Pakistan who are familiar with the political landscape of the country. The main concern with the experiment is to analyse the results which are based on randomising the treatments.

### **6.3.3 Experimental Design**

The experiment design for this study incorporates post-truth vignettes which are broken up to identify those rhetorical combinations that prove most persuasive and are accepted as being truthful. I test the effect of variants of post-truth statements – a combination of the attributes of lack, fantasy, and emotionality, on it being perceived as truthful by the respondent. I also test the effect of emotion on the perceived truthfulness of a post-truth statement. There are four post-truth vignette groups (PT-1, PT-2, PT-3, PT-4). PT-1 - PT-3 include vignettes on Democracy, and PT-4 include vignettes on Terrorism. Within each vignette group, there are four statements, each corresponding to the specific experimental condition. There are four experimental conditions:

- T1 = Lack & Emotionality
- T2 = Fantasy & Emotionality
- T3 = (T1 + T2)

T3 = Lack, Fantasy, and Emotionality

- Control = Lack

An aggregate post-truth statement (T3) combines all three textual attributes: lack, fantasy, and emotionality. The phrasing of the statement is intended to evoke a sense of belonging to the lack (resonance with the desire), and evoke a sense of yearning for the fantasy (fulfilment of desire). The experiment is focused on determining the combined causal effect of the three attributes on perceived truthfulness. On the other hand, T1 and T2 only highlight the textual attributes of lack and fantasy separately to test the effectiveness of the separate attributes in a statement which influences perceived truthfulness. It also allows us to navigate which attributes play a significant role in making T3 effective in inducing truthfulness – the aggregate post-truth treatment. The attribute of emotionality is constant in all three treatments because emotionality is critical to structure both the lack and fantasy in making the statement appealing. The control group features the attribute of lack only, the desire which is to be taken as a baseline for a post-truth narrative. For this experiment, I compare the aggregate post-truth statement (T3) with other variant statements (T1, T2 and Control). The vignettes are listed in appendix 3. An example of the vignettes is in Table 5. The treatment is assigned as follows:

- Do you believe the statement to be true?
- On a scale from -10 (extremely angry) to 10 (extremely hopeful), how do you feel about the above statement?
- Do you associate this statement with a politician or a newspaper political columnist/analyst? 1. Politician. 2. Political Columnist/Analyst
- Do you trust the [source] who communicated this statement? 1. Completely trust - 6. Completely do not trust

<b>Table 5. Post-truth Vignette Set 1</b>
[T1] The democratically elected incumbent rulers have miserably failed to launch any welfare project for poverty-stricken masses and have also tremendously failed to deal with militancy and restoration of peace in Pakistan. The common man’s life could not be more miserable with uncontrolled food and energy shortages, unabated violence, and countrywide lawlessness.
[T2] People want change, a change in the system not just a change of faces. A new democratic leadership which will end the obsolete system so Pakistan can start a golden era according to the dreams of the masses. The power to change the misery of people lies with the people themselves, they need to seize the moment of change by trusting and voting for a new leadership.
[T3] The democratically elected incumbent rulers have miserably failed to launch any welfare project for poverty-stricken masses and have also tremendously failed to deal with militancy and restoration of peace in Pakistan. People want change in the system not just a change of faces, competent leaders, and a true democracy so that Pakistan can start a golden era according to the dreams of the masses.
[Control] The democratically elected incumbent rulers in the country have not sanctioned any welfare projects for the citizens in the country during their tenures. They have also not dealt with the issue of militancy and violence in the country, energy shortages and lawlessness.

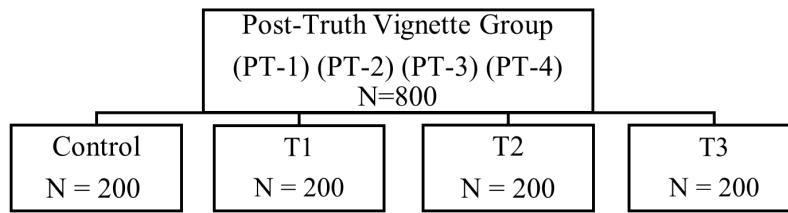
Each post-truth vignette group: PT-1, PT-2, PT-3, PT-4 – was randomly assigned a treatment condition (T1, T2, T3, Control). All respondents had an equal chance of being in any of the treatment groups for any group of post-truth vignettes. Therefore, all choices of respondents were independent of their previous choices. The randomisation achieved balance on key variables. The descriptive statistics and the randomisation balance is reported in Appendix 4. I report the mean and the standard errors in each experimental group. I also report the p-values from t-tests of the difference in means between the control and each of the three treatment groups, and F-statistics from tests of joint significance. I observe balance on all the variables. Figure 2 illustrates the randomisation scheme. The experiment design has been registered with EGAP-OSF <sup>1</sup>.

### 6.3.4 Measurement of Explanatory Variables

The main dependent variable is perceived truthfulness. To ensure comparability and simplicity, the measurement of perceived truthfulness has been re-scaled to range between 0

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<sup>1</sup>[OSF-EGAP Registration](#)



**Figure 2. Randomisation Scheme**

and 1, where 0 represents ‘Completely Untrue’ and 1 represents ‘Completely True’. The post-truth vignette is read out to the respondent, and then the respondent is asked the extent to which they accept the statement to be truthful. There is no prior information provided to the respondent before they are exposed to the treatment.

The variable emotion is measured on a scale of -10 to 10, where -10 is anger and 10 is hope. The reason for a linear scale with an anger and hope dimension is that the intended measure is the dominant emotion (anger or hope) that is associated with a given textual attribute in a statement. The attribute of lack expresses the unfulfilled desire. The resonance with the lack is likely to be projected as having an anger sentiment associated with it. The attribute of fantasy expresses the means to capture the desire. The resonance with the lack is likely to be projected as having a hopeful sentiment associated with it. Therefore, it is only befitting that respondents are provided with one scale with the anger/hope dimension whereby anything from -1 to -10 is reflective of an anger sentiment, and 1-10 is reflective of a hopeful sentiment to measure the dominant emotion underpinning the perceived truthfulness of T3: the aggregate post-truth treatment group.

Control variables include several socio-demographic variables including age, gender, marital status, employment, and the highest level of education attained.

## **6.4 Results and Analysis**

I analyse the effect of post-truth treatments and emotions on perceived truthfulness, as well as the effect of post-truth treatments on trust and the effect of decision-making on perceived truthfulness.

### **6.4.1 Effect of Post-truth Statements on Perceived Truthfulness**

To test the first hypothesis, I estimate the effect of a post-truth statement on perceived truthfulness (T3: lack, fantasy, and emotionality, to be perceived as more truthful than the other treatment groups). I argue that T3 is likely to be perceived as more truthful than T1 (lack and emotionality), T2 (fantasy and emotionality) and Control (Lack).

I pool the post-truth statements (independent variable) and the dependent variable (truthfulness) for each respondent for the four experimental conditions and eliminate missing values. The dependent variable is the question: Do you believe this statement to be true? Truthfulness is measured on a scale of 0 – 1, where 0 is Completely Untrue and 1 is Completely True. I run an OLS regression model to test for the effect of post-truth statements being perceived as truthful. I also compare the results of perceived truthfulness across the four post-truth vignette groups (PT-1, PT-2, PT-3, PT-4).

I report null results for all treatment arms across Model 1 in Table 6. The null findings do not dismiss the notion that the individual elements of post-truth statement lack, fantasy, and emotionality and can create an appealing narrative. The variations in significance levels for Models 2-5 indicate the persuasive nature of individual elements of lack and fantasy. Whereas Models 2 and 3 illustrate a positive correlation between lack and perceived truthfulness (T1), Models 3 and 4 illustrate a positive correlation between fantasy and perceived

**TABLE 6. The Effect of a Post-truth Statement on Perceived Truthfulness**

ISSUES	Pooled Issues	Incompetent Incumbent Leadership	Hindering 'True' Democracy	Role of Military	Terrorism and an Islamic State
VARIABLES	Model 1 Truth	Model 2 Truth1	Model 3 Truth2	Model 4 Truth3	Model 5 Truth4
Lack and Emotionality (T1)	0.014 (0.010)	0.029** (0.009)	0.022* (0.009)	0.011 (0.008)	-0.009 (0.010)
Fantasy and Emotionality (T2)	-0.001 (0.010)	-0.040*** (0.009)	0.028** (0.009)	0.016* (0.008)	-0.006 (0.010)
Lack, Fantasy, and Emotionality (T3)	-0.000 (0.010)	-0.030** (0.010)	0.053*** (0.009)	0.005 (0.008)	-0.018. (0.010)
Constant	0.652*** (0.007)	0.724*** (0.006)	0.684*** (0.006)	0.683*** (0.006)	0.513*** (0.007)
Observations	3,184	3,184	3,184	3,184	3,184
R-squared	0.001	0.022	0.012	0.001	0.001

**Note:** Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, . p<0.1. Model 1 illustrates the results of the pooled variable truthfulness across all post-truth vignette groups. Model 2 - Model 5 illustrates the results of the variable truthfulness in specific post-truth vignette groups (PT-10-, PT-2, PT-3, PT-4). The reference category is the Control group (Lack).

truthfulness (T2). Overall, the post-truth statement (T3) is positively correlated in Model 3 only. Although the results across Models vary, such results are nevertheless expected given the wide array of topics being discussed and their significance in the case study context. This, however, does not diminish the significance of the overall effect of post-truth attributes on perceived truthfulness of a post-truth narrative.

First, I suggest that if a political statement has either lack or fantasy in co-occurrence with emotionality, the perceived truthfulness of the account is more likely as the account resonates with the individuals and they can relate to the political narrative. The context of the experiment becomes pertinent here. The vignettes in this experiment are reflective of political issues which have dominated the electoral landscape for years and shaped citizens' perceptions. The resonating capacity and the likelihood of perceived truthfulness of these

statements are based on the individuals relating to the political narrative.

Model 2 is reflective of the theme of democracy, specifically, the inefficiency and incompetency of incumbent and corrupt leaders which have pushed the country into an abysmal state (lack)To emerge from this status quo, a change in terms of true leadership and the prioritising of citizens welfare is needed (fantasy). The results indicate that T1 and T2 are significant separately, however, since both of them are in opposing directions, the results for T3 are nullified. As for T1 (lack) being perceived as more truthful is indicative of the resonance of frustration of the population in terms of the absence of a decent quality of life and the lack of welfare projects which can improve the misery faced by people at the hands of corrupt and incompetent leaders – a sentiment which is prominent in the statement. However, the significance of T2 (fantasy) as being perceived as untruthful, provides insights into the specificity of fantasy in this context. The fact a change in the system or leaders is often viewed with scepticism because of the chequered history of Pakistan which has witnessed power transitions amongst several political parties and military regimes, yet has not seen an improvement in the welfare being provided to citizens. Therefore, promises in terms of changing systems and leadership are usually scorned because they are considered to be a hoax, a reality which may never be fulfilled, hence, influencing the perceived truthfulness associated with such hollow statements. The results do provide insights on the specific type of issues which are more likely to be perceived as truthful because of their resonating and relatability capacity – whereas some discourses paint an endearing picture, others are hollow and lack enough appealing quality can be portrayed as being sincere and truthful.

Model 3 is reflective of the theme of democracy, specifically, the role played by incompetent leaders in hindering the consolidation of ‘true’ democracy and betraying people’s

trust (lack). In contrast to the hardships faced by the citizenry at the hands of apathetic political leaders, a ‘true’ democracy stands for the will of the people, where their welfare is catered for, and elected leaders fulfil the promises made to the citizens of the country (fantasy). The results indicate small positive effects for both T1 and T2 and positive significant results for the aggregate post-truth treatment (T3). The significance of T3 aligns with the theoretical framework, the combination of the elements of lack, fantasy, and emotionality is more likely to be perceived as truthful. The particular theme embodies both lack and fantasy, a logical transition of illustrating misery as well as how the misery can be uprooted. This particular result is insightful because it allows us to reflect on the way a specific narrative is constructed which reflects it being an ideal example of a post-truth narrative.

Model 4 is reflective of the theme of democracy, specifically, the role played by the military in hindering the consolidation of democracy (lack). To ensure the consolidation of democracy, there must be only a constitutionally elected government without any military interference (fantasy). The specific content in this set is considered to be controversial and sensitive given the historical role of the military in Pakistan, which then becomes a crucial point of analysis when interpreting null results. Theoretically, the null results are unexpected, however, the null results for the lack specifically indicate what people are likely to embrace in public debate. The role of the military in aiding the civil authority is the most crucial aspect in explaining the entrenchment of the military within the executive as well as the delegitimising process of the political forces and is a viable alternative source of governance in the public eye. Historically, the military was “integral to state building and became central to state survival” (Rizvi, 2000, p. 6). Such a role, therefore, is reflective of the military deriving its moral legitimacy from its self-acquired role of providing stability



and bringing progress to the nation (Siddiqa, 2007, p. 47). In this specific case, the insignificant results for T1 and T3 indicate the unwillingness to comment on the military because of the status it occupies in the country, as well as the reluctance in voicing an opinion during a recorded survey. Such a vignette also provides insights into the types of political narratives which despite embodying post-truth features are likely to yield null results because of the specific sensitive content they refer to. The small significant result of T2 (fantasy) is in response to the statement about a constitutionally elected government, without references to the military. The likelihood of this particular statement being perceived as truthful aligns with the idea of the specific issues which resonate with the audience but also the willingness to engage in a conversation which is not directly critical to the military establishment.

Model 5 is reflective of the theme of terrorism, specifically, the attacking of progressive liberal political parties which impede the establishment of an Islamic state (lack) due to the advancement of democratic ideals. To ensure the prosperity of Pakistan, the establishment of an Islamic state per “Islamic Sharia” is needed (fantasy). This particular vignette is another example of a sensitive and controversial topic. Although the results for T1 and T2 are null, the results also indicate the untruthfulness of the statements, indicating the unwillingness in voicing support for terrorist attacks. The slightly significant effect of T3 is also reflective of the unwillingness to support terrorist attacks for the establishment of an Islamic state.

There is insightful knowledge to be gained from the variation in issue content and the specific results emerging from them – the particularities of the content and the specific context in which an experiment is fielded need to be accounted for to analyse how specific issues create post-truth discourses and their resonating capacities with the audience. There

are lessons to be learnt about what people are willing to embrace in public debate. To analyse why certain features are more persuasive than others, another possible trajectory from this research should focus on the sedimentation of the textual features – the resonating and relatability component of lack and fantasy and whether the resonance remains constant or changes over time. A longitudinal survey experiment can facilitate understanding the sustenance of certain post-truth discourses and the underlying element which produces a long-lasting impact on the perception of the truthfulness of a particular discourse. Second, to measure whether certain post-truth features are more likely to influence perceived truthfulness, future research needs to adjust weights on all elements to measure the extent to which some elements have a more persuasive capacity than others. For instance, implementing a multi-arm trial to gauge the effectiveness of the element which is most persuasive in driving the perception of a post-truth account to be truthful. Third, these findings suggest that to understand the perceived truthfulness of post-truth statements, the focus may need to shift to the mechanism underpinning perceived truthfulness. This is where H2 becomes crucial, the role played by emotions in influencing perceived truthfulness.

#### **6.4.2 Role of Emotion on Perceived Truthfulness of Post-truth Statements**

The variable emotion is tested in two different manners. Firstly, as a dependent variable, to gauge the effectiveness of the post-truth statement on the emotional response, and secondly, as a moderator to measure the strength of emotion on the perceived truthfulness of post-truth statements. In general, the variable emotion is used to illustrate the dominant emotion (anger or hope) both as a dependent variable and the effect of emotional response on perceived truthfulness.

**Table 7. The Effect of a Post-truth Statement on Emotion (Anger or Hope)**

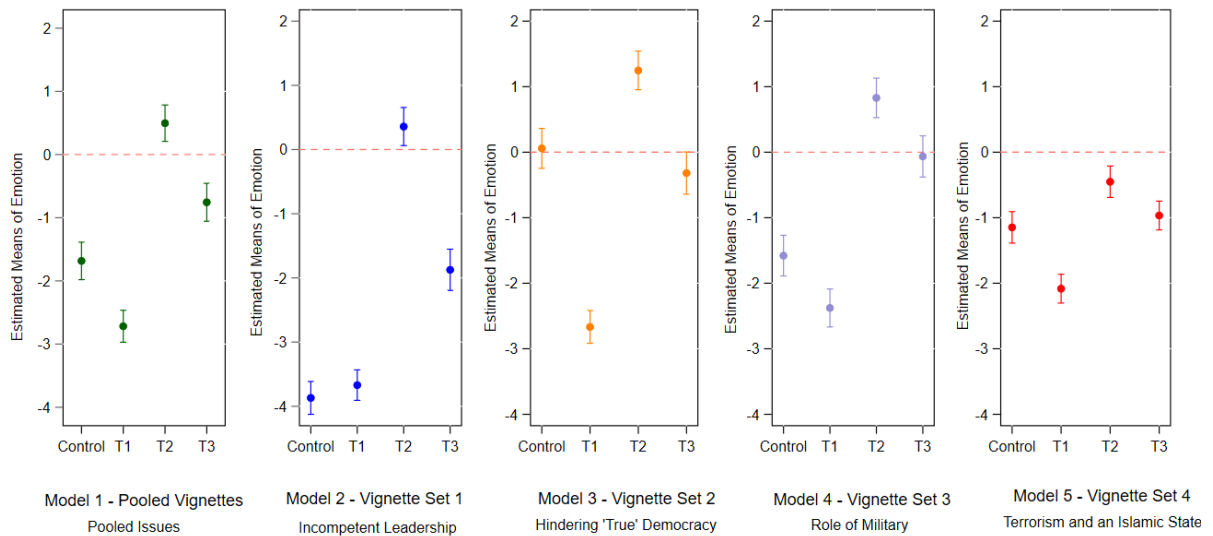
VARIABLES	Model 1 Emotion	Model 2 Emotion1	Model 3 Emotion2	Model 4 Emotion3	Model 5 Emotion4
Lack and Emotionality (T1)	-1.034*** (0.199)	0.199 (0.178)	-2.725*** (0.201)	-0.798*** (0.217)	-0.935*** (0.166)
Fantasy and Emotionality (T2)	2.181*** (0.211)	4.226*** (0.200)	1.189*** (0.216)	2.408*** (0.221)	0.696*** (0.173)
Lack, Fantasy, and Emotionality (T3)	0.929*** (0.215)	1.995*** (0.209)	-0.377. (0.226)	1.514*** (0.225)	0.181 (0.166)
Constant	-1.684*** -0.151	-3.869*** (0.130)	0.058 (0.155)	-1.579*** (0.158)	-1.147*** (0.122)
Observations	3,184	3,184	3,184	3,184	3,184
R-squared	0.078	0.160	0.102	0.076	0.031
VARIABLES	Model 1 Truth	Model 2 Truth1	Model 3 Truth2	Model 4 Truth3	Model 5 Truth4
Lack and Emotionality (T1)	0.014 (0.012)	0.033* (0.014)	0.032*** (0.009)	0.036*** (0.010)	-0.021. (0.011)
Fantasy and Emotionality (T2)	-0.004 (0.010)	-0.026* (0.011)	0.024** (0.009)	0.016. (0.009)	-0.007 (0.011)
Lack, Fantasy, and Emotionality (T3)	0.006 (0.011)	-0.020 (0.013)	0.054*** (0.009)	0.009 (0.009)	-0.017 (0.011)
Emotion	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.005** (0.002)	0.006*** (0.001)	-0.002 (0.002)	0.008*** (0.002)
Lack and Emotionality (T1)*Emotion	0.000 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.002)	0.011*** (0.002)	-0.009** (0.003)
Fantasy and Emotionality (T2)*Emotion	0.012*** (0.002)	0.016*** (0.002)	-0.003. (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)	0.009** (0.003)
Lack, Fantasy, and Emotionality (T3)*Emotion	0.006** (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)	-0.003. (0.002)	0.011*** (0.002)	0.003 (0.003)
Constant	0.650*** (0.008)	0.706*** (0.009)	0.684*** (0.006)	0.680*** (0.007)	0.522*** (0.007)
Observations	3,184	3,184	3,184	3,184	3,184
R-squared	0.016	0.045	0.022	0.038	0.031

**Note:** Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, . p<0.1. Model 1 illustrates the results of the pooled variable truthfulness across all post-truth vignette groups. Model 2 - Model 5 illustrates the results of the variable truthfulness in specific post-truth vignette groups (PT-1, PT-2, PT-3, PT-4). The reference category is the Control group (Lack). Emotion as a variable is measured on a scale of -10 to 10 (anger to hope).

**Table 8. The Effect of Emotion on Perceived Truthfulness of a Post-truth Statement**

VARIABLES	Model 1 Truth	Model 2 Truth1	Model 3 Truth2	Model 4 Truth3	Model 5 Truth4
Lack and Emotionality (T1)	0.014 (0.012)	0.033* (0.014)	0.032*** (0.009)	0.036*** (0.010)	-0.021. (0.011)
Fantasy and Emotionality (T2)	-0.004 (0.010)	-0.026* (0.011)	0.024** (0.009)	0.016. (0.009)	-0.007 (0.011)
Lack, Fantasy, and Emotionality (T3)	0.006 (0.011)	-0.020 (0.013)	0.054*** (0.009)	0.009 (0.009)	-0.017 (0.011)
Emotion	-0.001 (0.002)	-0.005** (0.002)	0.006*** (0.001)	-0.002 (0.002)	0.008*** (0.002)
Lack and Emotionality (T1)*Emotion	0.000 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.002)	0.011*** (0.002)	-0.009** (0.003)
Fantasy and Emotionality (T2)*Emotion	0.012*** (0.002)	0.016*** (0.002)	-0.003. (0.002)	0.005** (0.002)	0.009** (0.003)
Lack, Fantasy, and Emotionality (T3)*Emotion	0.006** (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)	-0.003. (0.002)	0.011*** (0.002)	0.003 (0.003)
Constant	0.650*** (0.008)	0.706*** (0.009)	0.684*** (0.006)	0.680*** (0.007)	0.522*** (0.007)
Observations	3,184	3,184	3,184	3,184	3,184
R-squared	0.016	0.045	0.022	0.038	0.031

**Note:** Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, . p<0.1. Model 1 illustrates the results of the pooled variable truthfulness across all post-truth vignette groups. Model 2 - Model 5 illustrates the results of the variable truthfulness in specific post-truth vignette groups (PT-1, PT-2, PT-3, PT-4). The reference category is the Control group (Lack). Emotion as a variable is measured on a scale of -10 to 10 (anger to hope).



**Figure 3. Estimated Means of Emotion Across all Treatments**

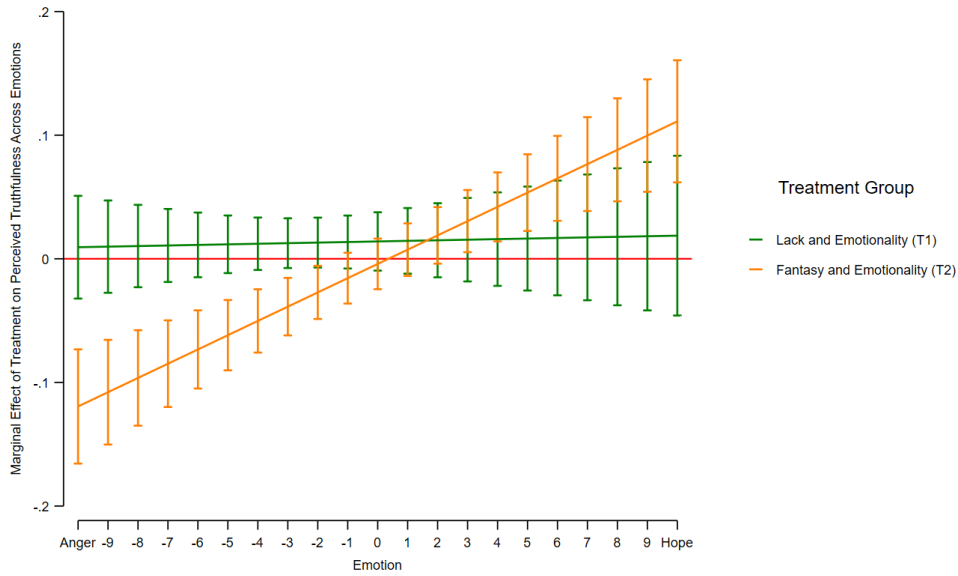
The second hypothesis measures the relationship between emotions and post-truth statements. To measure the effectiveness of the post-truth statement on emotion, I run an OLS regression model, reported in Table 7. Since the control group features the attribute of lack, it is an anger generator. We should generally expect the positive effects of post-truth treatment groups on emotions. As expected, the textual attributes of lack and fantasy evoke an emotional response. Treatment 1 has a significant effect on emotions as seen in Models 1,3, 4 and 5. The balance of scale on emotions is towards anger, confirming H2a (an individual is likely to ascribe an anger sentiment to the statement containing lack and emotionality). Similarly, Treatment 2 has a significant effect on emotions as seen in Model 1-5, where the balance of scale on emotions is towards hope, confirming H2b (an individual is likely to ascribe a hope sentiment to the statement containing fantasy and emotionality).

Which attribute is therefore influencing the dominant emotional response for T3? To determine this, I plot an estimated means of emotion across all models (Graph 1). Graph 1

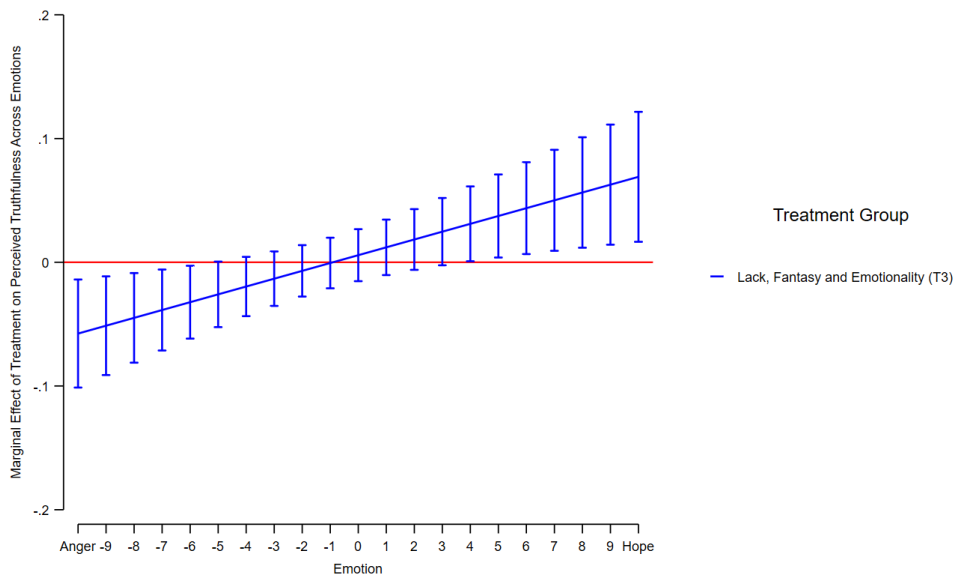
indicates that the attribute of fantasy (T2) is predominantly influencing the post-truth treatment (T3) as opposed to the attribute of lack (T1). Treatment 2 shifts the scale of emotions towards the sentiment of hope. Therefore, the dominant emotional response for Treatment 3 (Lack, Fantasy, and Emotionality) moves on the scale more towards the sentiment of hope.

To build upon these results, my third hypothesis measures the strength of emotion on the perceived truthfulness of post-truth statements. The emotion scale from -10 to +10 with anger and hope on the opposite sides. This is so we can measure the strength and direction of emotion on perceived truthfulness associated with the post-truth statements featuring the attributes of lack and fantasy. We should expect that Treatment 2 featuring the attribute of fantasy should shift the balance of the emotional scale towards the positive direction of hope, whereas Treatment 2 featuring the attribute of lack should shift the balance of the emotional scale towards the negative side direction of anger. I run an OLS regression model for the pooled variable emotion and perceived truthfulness, reported in Table 8. As expected, I report that the T2 narrative shifts the balance of emotions on the scale towards the positive direction of hope and is markedly more likely to be believed. However, the T1 narrative does not affect emotion and its perceived truth value is low across all models. It can be argued that the sentiment of hope is markedly associated with the attribute of fantasy which influences the perceived truth value of the statement. For the T3 narrative, the overall effect of emotion on perceived truthfulness is significant. The balance of emotions on the scale is directed towards the sentiment of hope. We can postulate that the attribute of fantasy which is generating a hopeful reaction is influencing the perceived truth value of

the T3 narrative. It is the attribute of fantasy which has a markedly greater gripping feature and is likely to shift the balance of emotions towards a hopeful reaction generating



**Figure 4.1 Conditional Marginal Effects of Treatment on Perceived Truthfulness Across Emotions (T1 and T2)**



**Figure 4.2 Conditional Marginal Effects of Treatment on Perceived Truthfulness Across Emotions (T3)**

**Note:** Figure 4.1 indicates that T2 (fantasy) is significant as opposed to T1 (lack). Therefore, the significance of T3 is being driven by T2 in Figure 4.2.

a greater likelihood of perceived truth value.

Based on this regression, I plot a margins plot (Graph 2) to identify the interaction effect of emotion (Anger and Hope) on perceived truthfulness for the post-truth statements. Treatment T1 incorporates the attribute of lack, hypothesised to be ascribed to the sentiment of anger. Treatment T2 incorporates the attribute of fantasy, hypothesised to be ascribed to the sentiment of hope. In Graph 2.1, Where the T2 narrative can generate hopeful reactions, it is markedly more likely to be believed. Where it generates anger more than hope, it is less likely to be believed. This is not true of the T1 narrative, whose perceived truth value is the same, and usually quite low (Graph 1) regardless of its emotional impact. Emotions can have a reversed direction. Whereas the attribute of lack can generate angry reactions, it is also likely that the resonance of lack triggers the sentiment of hope (despite being angry, one is hopeful for the desire to be fulfilled). In a similar vein, the attribute of fantasy can generate hopeful reactions, it is also likely that the resonance of fantasy triggers an anger response (the inability of the fantasy to resonate with the individual whereby they are angry that the fantasy which is being propagated is unable to fulfil their desire). T3 (Lack, Fantasy, and Emotionality) is a combination of T1 and T2. To interpret the results for T3, we need to identify the dominant emotion (anger or hope) which is influencing the perceived truth value of T3. In Graph 2.2, where T3 is likely to generate more hopeful reactions, it is markedly more likely to be believed than when it generates angry reactions. It is the attribute of fantasy which influences the hopeful reaction and the perceived truthfulness of the post-truth statement. A fantasy acts as a tool to fulfil the lack that is highlighted within a political narrative. It is the means through which desire can be captured and therefore is ascribed the sentiment of hope. It is structured in a manner whereby it can 'grip' the audience and make them hopeful.



## **6.5 Conclusion**

Through this experiment, the scope of empirical research on post-truth has broadened. I implemented a vignette survey experiment to operationalise the theorisation of post-truth discourse to measure political attitudes. Recent literature has attempted to study post-truth through the lens of misinformation, built upon ‘motivated reasoning’ argumentation and examined the role of social media in perpetuating and sustaining misinformation. I deviate from such studies and propose to operationalise post-truth discourse as a unique variable of interest. I focus on three textual attributes: lack, fantasy, and emotionality to operationalise post-truth discourse. I measure the effectiveness of persuasion of the rhetorical combinations of these attributes on perceived truthfulness. The mixed-method approach is instrumental in creating vignettes through discursive analysis of newspaper articles whose effect on citizens’ political behaviour can be measured using an experimental design. It is, therefore, a first-of-its-kind study which combines elements of post-structuralist discourse theory and empirical research contextualised in South Asia, in particular Pakistan.

The experiment yields three insightful findings. First, the persuasiveness of post-truth accounts varies across issues which are important in terms of understanding why certain post-truth narratives can ground in society as opposed to others - it is the resonating capacity of the narrative as well as the implications of voicing an opinion on specific issues in the public realm. Second, a post-truth account influences an emotional response (anger or hope). The textual attributes of a post-truth discourse yield different emotional responses. Whereas anger is associated with the element of lack, hope is associated with fantasy. Third, the perceived truthfulness of a post-truth is, as anticipated, fuelled partly by emotion: it is those who react to PT discourse with the hope that is more likely to believe it. The affective dimension of a post-truth account is integral in analysing political behaviour and

opens up the avenue to further study how personal emotions intertwine with a post-truth account in influencing public opinion.

This study also raises pertinent questions about the notion of the truth about perceived truthfulness, as well as the synonymisation of persuasiveness with truthfulness, and the role of trust in post-truth accounts. First, the relative nature of truth is still the focus when we discuss measuring perceived truthfulness, which is the perception of truthfulness varies from issue to issue, from individual to individual which is also reflected in the results produced by this experimental study. Second, post-truth accounts intend to be persuasive to be accepted to be truthful, an outcome that this experimental study has investigated, but in parallel, these accounts are also inducing affect, another dimension which influences the acceptance of narratives to be truthful. Therefore, it is not that persuasiveness is a synonym for truthfulness, but that persuasiveness is intended to inform truthfulness. Third, trust is an integral component in accepting a narrative to be truthful, as is emotionality. However, these two elements are independently impacting the causal chain of post-truth accounts being perceived as truthful. The experiment has only focused on the element of emotionality, however, future studies can focus on the relationship between trust and post-truth accounts, as well as the relationship between trust, emotion, and perception of truthfulness associated with post-truth accounts.

In sum, this study has illustrated how post-truth discourses can be employed as a unique variable of interest in experimental settings to measure its influence on citizens' political behaviour. This is made possible through the conversational shift in understanding the concept of post-truth as political discourse. Such a tool provides the foundation to investigate the effects of post-truth discourse on political behaviour, and opens up an avenue for further empirical research on moderating post-truth discourse.

# Chapter 7

## Conclusion

### Abstract

This study is inherently interdisciplinary and uses a mixed-method approach to explore the effects of post-truth accounts on citizens' political beliefs. In this study, I re-frame post-truth as political discourse, dissociating it from the mainstream conceptualisation with misinformation and supremacy of emotionality influencing public opinion. I translate the theorisation of post-truth discourse into an operational definition employing a mixed-method approach for empirical analysis. I apply my theory to Pakistan as a case study to identify and analyse post-truth political narratives in Pakistani newspapers and implement a vignette survey experiment to broaden the scope of inquiry into the effects of post-truth discourse on political attitudes and perceptions. I argue that post-truth discourse has pertinent political implications on political ideologies' polarisation, manipulation of public policy, and endangering democratic institutions' trust. Among the main implications of my research, I describe how these behaviours have the potential to start democratic backsliding processes

or undermine democratic institutions. Furthermore, I highlight the far-reaching implications of conceptualising post-truth as a political discourse for developing countries where political polarisation can have striking impacts on the field, such as elections, regime stability, and regime-society relationship.

## 7.1 A Brief Recap

Post-truth has become popularised in the recent political landscape, mostly being used in conjunction with misinformation and fake news. The focus on post-truth continues to be on misrepresenting facts and emotional appeals to fabricate ‘objective truth.’ The current scholarship on post-truth majorly lies within the ambit of mainstream media which is focused on the ideological supremacy of emotionality at the expense of ‘truth’; the focus has largely resided on three attributes: (1) the erosion of truth from the political domain, (2) replacement of truth with emotional appeals to influence public opinion, and (3) the rise of misinformation at the expense of belief in objective truthful information. The problem with ascribing post-truth with these traits is that it automatically conflates ‘post’ with being iniquitous and having a negative connotation. Such a conception provides a partial and restricted understanding of post-truth. Such a conceptualisation has also informed most of the empirical research, focusing mostly on the effects of misinformation, fake news, and motivated reasoning on political behaviour. Most experimental research has been focused on the contrasting effects of fake news and corrective measures on political behaviour, as well as the influence of framing information on behavioural attitudes. A similar shortcoming of research on post-truth has to do with the contextualisation of such research – mostly focused within the regional context of the Western hemisphere conveniently thought to be

applicable in the Anglophone world and nowhere else. This study contributes to these gaps in the literature.

In this study, I re-frame post-truth as political discourse dissociating it from the mainstream conceptualisation with misinformation and supremacy of emotionality influencing public opinion. In doing so, this study contributes to the scholarship in four primary ways.

First, a shift in the framing of discussion on post-truth. I propose to analyse post-truth with discourse, specifically the textual attributes and dimensions of such discourse. The dissociation of 'post' to be something *after* truth allows us to move beyond the ascription of post-truth with misinformation and fake news. It is also needed because the purpose of this study is not to evaluate what truth means and then analyse post-truth from the juxtaposed position. In doing so, post-truth discourse is put forth as an umbrella term through which various kinds of discourses can be analysed and better contextualised. Through this shift in analysis, the domain of post-truth will not be limited to the production factories of fake news and extremist forces such as Trump or Farage. Instead, the discussion of some obvious examples such as the War on Terror, anti-vaccination, climate change denial, denial of scientific facts about smoking and so forth can be analysed through the new theoretical lens which focuses on attributes of discourse and does not rely on the fake news versus objective truth dichotomy. The more common examples associated with post-truth can be re-examined as being post-truth discourses because of the constitutive elements which are idiosyncratic to post-truth, and not because they are examples of fake news, hence, post-truth.

In examining the notion of truthfulness concerning post-truth, I suggest that there are three moments of truthfulness which need to be analysed. First, the negation of the philosophical discussion on truth allows us to move beyond the truth-post-truth dichotomy to

focus on analysing specific attributes and dimensions of discourse which render it post-truth. Second, truthfulness is introduced into the analysis when analysing the relationship between a political actor and the citizens concerning post-truth discourses and examining why certain political narratives are accepted as opposed to others. I argue that post-truth discourse is political and seeks an audience. This opens up the debate on how truthfulness is being perceived, the role of affect and the notion of experiencing information. The understanding and consensus on what constitutes truth have become varied, however, this does not entail the depreciation of truth value. The relativity of truthfulness comes to the fore. Lastly, truth is not the focal point of conceptualising post-truth, instead, it is the textual attributes and dimensions which become pertinent in analysing post-truth discourses and feed into the operationalisation of post-truth discourse to be empirically tested.

Second, I delineate an analytical framework contextualised within the ambit of political theory, ideology, and discourse analysis to theorise post-truth discourse. In theorising post-truth as discourse, I make four major claims: (1) Post-truth discourse has four textual attributes: lack, fantasy, emotionality and fantasmatic logic; (2) Post-truth discourse has two dimensions: political and two-way hierarchical; (3) Post-truth discourse has three procedural moments: creation, dissemination, and acceptance of discourse, which embody the four textual attributes and two dimensions; (4) 'Post' in post-truth discourse does not refer to the negation of truth but emphasises the relative nature of truthfulness.

I argue that these claims are interconnected. Within the creation aspect, I examine two features: (i) textual attributes and (ii) the relevancy of truthfulness. I draw upon post-structuralist discourse theory, post-colonialism, and subaltern studies to analyse the concepts of discourse and power, and Lacanian psychoanalysis to analyse the persuasive and gripping nature of the discourse, alongside examining the role of emotions in creating an

appealing discourse. Within the dissemination and acceptance aspect, I examine two features: the two-way hierarchical nature of discourse, and (ii) the intertwining of trust, shared experiences and social media influencing behavioural attitudes and perceptions. I analyse the relationship between discourse and hegemony to understand the top-down discourse creation and bottom-up discourse acceptance features of post-truth discourses. I suggest that post-truth discourses are political, seek an audience, and have political implications. The textual attributes lack, fantasy, and fantasmatic logic embodied within the discourse illustrate the incompleteness and the desire, and ways through which the desire can be captured. The role of emotionality becomes pertinent in creating a political discourse which seeks an audience. For an audience to accept a political narrative, the resonance with the desire becomes pertinent. It is here that I venture into the territory of socialisation theory to examine the notion of shared experiences to analyse how a post-truth discourse entrenches society.

Third, I develop an operational definition of post-truth discourse for empirical analysis using a mixed-method research design to identify and measure post-truth discourses. The current empirical research has mostly inferred the existence of the post-truth phenomenon through resistance-to-correction and related experiments. It misses a mark in discussing post-truth as a unique variable of interest which may influence political behaviour and attitudes. The operationalisation of post-truth discourse allows the concept to be exported out of the Western hemisphere, applicable in any regional context, as well as be empirically illustrated and measured. I rely on the Lacanian psychoanalytic framework, the LCE approach and Rhetorical Political Analysis (RPA) as a first step. The interpretive approaches are insightful to examine and analyse the textual attributes and dimensions of the discourse, particularly the logic, meaning-making and contextual argumentation to capture desire, in-

duce experience and affect. I argue that there are six conditions that are necessary but not sufficient on their own that render a discourse as post-truth: (1) lack; (2) fantasy; (3) emotionality; (4) fantasmatic logic; (5) political; (6) two-way hierarchical. These conditions can be thought of as steps which build onto one another. The co-occurrence of steps 1-3 leads to 4 - the fantasmatic logic operating in the construction of an appealing narrative. Step 5 builds upon the previous conditions to highlight the political nature of the discourse. Lastly, step 6 becomes crucial, the political discourse is created to seek an audience, however, the acceptance of the discourse is equally important.

This operationalisation serves as a guideline through which discourses can be evaluated and analysed for post-truth features. Therefore, in this study, I employ an exploratory mixed-method research design for empirical analysis. Such an approach is useful to develop and expand the theorisation of post-truth discourse. On the one hand, the qualitative dimension, which is the discursive analysis is insightful in examining the various features and dimensions of post-truth discourse to test the theorisation. On the other hand, the quantitative analysis, in this case, the experiment furthers the inquiry on the effects of post-truth discourse on political attitudes and facilitates our understanding of the implications of post-truth discourse in politics.

Fourth, and a major contribution of this research is to contextualise the empirical cases in South Asia, thereby broadening the scope of theoretical and empirical research on post-truth. I apply my theory to Pakistan as a case study, whereby I implement two empirical analyses: the first identifying post-truth discourse in newspaper reporting, and the second an experimental design investigating the effect of post-truth discourses on political attitudes and perceptions.

I use Pakistani newspaper articles as a primary case to investigate political narratives



and themes that can feature post-truth attributes, and be categorised as forming post-truth discourses. The motivation to contextualise the case studies in South Asia, particularly, Pakistan was informed by the lack of research on post-truth outside the Western hemisphere. But it also serves as an opportunity to discuss and analyse a specific context which embodies post-truth attributes and dimensions and helps us understand how contextual political argumentation and meaning making to capture desire take place. It also provides an opportunity to test the diverse ways in which the operationalisation of post-truth discourse can be empirically applied. An extensive evaluation of 1205 English newspaper articles from three major newspapers (Dawn, The News International, The Express Tribune) over three National election years (2008, 2013 and 2018), resulted in an in-depth analysis of political narratives surrounding an election. This resulted in an extensive discussion of two post-truth discourses that emerged within newspaper reporting: (1) democracy and democratisation; and (2) terrorism - establishment of a Caliphate.

The particular narratives through the three Election years feature a transition of power between several types of elites, the proliferation of social media, and incidents of mass mobilisation. These features of the political fabric of Pakistan provide a specific context in which meaning making from the discourse on democracy and terrorism has been created. The desire for democracy and a promise of 'change' and 'hope' enunciated from the discourse is not only juxtaposed to differing identities, but the meaning of the desire evolves through the years. In a similar vein, the discourse on terrorism features rhetoric where democracy is espoused to be the antithesis of an Islamic state. The political narratives on democracy and terrorism stand in juxtaposition to each other indicative of different forms of identities that they generate – each ascribing to a particular knowledge system to bring meaning to the world, seeking an audience. The specific contexts in which meanings are

generated, identities are formed, and desires are enunciated open up the avenue to engage in a discussion on various forms of political discourses that can be rendered post-truth. Such analysis proves to be insightful to analyse how contextual political argumentation informs specific subjective identities and evaluates whether the source of discourse creation informs differing identities. It also facilitates our understanding of how the political narrative can entrench society. The discursive analysis, therefore, provides the foundation for analysing post-truth discourses in various contexts to better grasp the varying types and the implications of such in societies.

Building on this discursive analysis, to study the implications of post-truth discourse, I designed and implemented a survey experiment. The shift from qualitative interpretive analysis to a quantitative empirical analysis required an adaptation to the operationalisation of post-truth discourse which can be measured. Therefore, through this experimental design, I measure the effect of three textual attributes of post-truth discourse: lack, fantasy, and emotionality on perceived truthfulness. I further measured the role of emotions (anger and hope) in influencing perceived truthfulness. Since the textual attributes can be identified within a political text, they were used to create vignettes in the survey. I implemented a post-truth vignette survey experiment where political narratives were broken up to identify the post-truth rhetorical combinations that prove most persuasive to be perceived as truthful. I surveyed a sample of 800 respondents from five urban districts in Pakistan. Although the persuasiveness of post-truth narratives varies across issues, I find positive effects of emotions and truthfulness on a post-truth narrative. The current experimental research design opens up the discussion on future empirical research conducted on post-truth. It provides a means through which post-truth discourse can be used as a unique variable of interest whose effects on political attitudes, perceptions and opinions can be measured.

The operationalisation of the term post-truth discourse put forth in this study has broadened the scope of theoretical and empirical research on post-truth and highlighted the use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to identify and measure post-truth. Whereas the theoretical operationalisation features an in-depth analysis of post-truth discourse, the operationalisation of post-truth features through a survey experiment features how the effect of post-truth rhetoric on political attitudes can be measured. This opens up the avenue for future empirical work featuring attributes of post-truth discourse. The case study of Pakistan has extended the discussion on post-truth beyond the Anglophone world where the idea of post-truth became popularised.

Overall, this is a first-of-its-kind study, bridging post-structuralist discourse theory and empiricism to develop a framework to analyse post-truth and using empirical data from Pakistan to test the theorisation of post-truth discourse. I offer an alternative lens through which post-truth can be analysed. This study has attempted to re-conceptualise post-truth in a manner where the novelty of post-truth is questioned, the element of truthfulness is examined, and an extensive analysis of features and dimensions of post-truth discourse are discussed. The shift in the framing of discussion on post-truth as political discourse is a valuable means of advancing our understanding of post-truth. The empirical analysis through a mixed-method approach furthers our understanding of post-truth discourse. The use of Pakistan as a case study allowed for a context-specific analysis of the types of post-truth discourses and the implications of such on political behaviour, broadening the horizons in which post-truth is recognised.

## 7.2 Where do we go from here?

Post-truth is increasingly becoming a topic of scholarly interest, however, the discussion on post-truth is by far not complete and there are several aspects associated with the topic which require further examination. This study only opened up a discussion on rethinking the concept of post-truth. The shift from conflating post-truth with misinformation and emotionality to analysing post-truth with discourse is a way in which we can re-evaluate our understanding of the concept thus far. In doing so, this study was not only able to develop an analytical framework to theorise post-truth discourse but also conduct theory-led qualitative and quantitative empirical research. The mixed-method research design and the contextualisation of empirical research in Pakistan have broadened the scope of theoretically informed empirical research on post-truth.

Although the study is a timely contribution to the literature on post-truth both theoretically and empirically, placing the study in a potential broader framework, the conceptualisation of post-truth discourse also has several natural paths ahead.

First, the theorisation of post-truth discourse can be used to further investigate multiple types of post-truth discourses that emerge in varying contexts. Theoretical operationalisation is a useful lens through which many kinds of political discourses can be examined and analysed. It also provides the basis to further examine the hegemonization of post-truth discourses, and the lessons that can be learnt by incorporating a Subaltern lens in juxtaposition to post-structuralist discourse theory in examining how such discourses are constructed and their implications.

Second, post-truth discourse can be used as a variable of interest in experimental-based studies. The variable can be operationalised to measure citizens' political behaviour, attitudes and public opinion using various contexts and case studies. It can be further used

in studies analysing the role of political parties influencing politician's political behaviour in communicating post-truth rhetoric, the persuasiveness (intensity and character) across post-truth and non-post-truth discourses on political behaviour, the role of trust and emotions associated with post-truth rhetoric in influencing political behaviour, and so forth.

Third, the theorisation allows us to investigate the implications, especially focusing on the rise of authoritarian populist rhetoric and democratic backsliding. Further study on the dimensions and textual attributes of post-truth discourse allows us to investigate the mechanism through which specific realities can take root and inform identities. The relativity of truthfulness, the multitude of desires, and the role of affect can be analysed to understand the authoritarian rhetoric and the popularisation of extremist political parties in the current political landscape.

### **Post-truth Discourse and Democratic Backsliding**

Post-truth discourse can have pertinent political implications on political ideologies' polarisation, manipulation of public policy, and endangering democratic institutions' trust. Among the main implications of my research, I argue that post-truth discourses pave the path for authoritarian discourse to take root and have the potential to start democratic backsliding processes or undermine democratic institutions. The re-conceptualisation of post-truth with discourse is useful because it takes into account the various means through which discourse is created for consumption – the production and reproduction of identities; and places an equal emphasis on how discourse can be hegemonized in a society – the acceptance of certain practices and meanings by which world is understood by individuals. The conditions for post-truth discourse indicate towards a multitude of subject positions and identities being formed. This then raises serious concerns about the types of political

narratives that can entrench in society.

Post-truth discourse has the potential of being hegemonized. Hegemony is a consequence of political construction and struggle – discourses created in the process are reflective of the various subject positions; discourse creates subject – identities that are not a priori or fixed, but are in a continuous flux of being created and recreated. Therefore, there is not a single hegemonic discourse which entrenches society, the multitudes of discourses are all competing forms of hegemony, advancing an interpretation over all others to become the undisputed dominant interpretation. It is the tension between force and consent which makes it possible for the resonance of certain fantasmatic narratives as opposed to others; why certain realities are considered truthful whereas others are not; how certain identities are formed in response to discourse and reproduced through the acceptance and the hegemonization of it. In the case of hegemonized post-truth discourses, the undisputed acceptance of an idea to become common sense which is unchangeable is not limited to only a single discourse, there are multitudes of post-truth discourses, all competing forms of hegemony, advancing an interpretation over all others to become the undisputed dominant interpretation. Instances of democratic backsliding are one of the prime examples of what the hegemonization of a post-truth discourse can entail - it is the legitimacy that is given to an alternative reality, the ultimate truth by an audience which perceives it to be truthful.

Examples of the Leave Campaign in Britain, Trump's usage of 'alternative facts, Pizzagate (a paedophilia ring linked to members of the Democratic Party), Holocaust horrors (revival of denial of Holocaust) and anti-mask protests during COVID-19 are some of the most common examples used to indicate post-truth. However, such examples rarely refer to the ideological constitutive component of the discourse and use a narrow misinforma-

tion/objective facts lens to assess the proliferation of such political narratives. The theorisation of post-truth discourse provides an alternative lens through which these discourses can be analysed and the mechanism for their entrenchment better understood. These narratives also provide insights into how authoritarian discourses are created and the implications of such. The misinformation-objective facts dichotomy provides a partial understanding of the composition and dissemination of such narratives, as well as a lack of reasoning on how they are entrenched in society. Therefore, to comprehend this fully, the association of post-truth with discourse proves to be a useful tool to contextualise political argumentation and understand the role of affect and desire which induces experience with the citizens. Furthermore, conceptualising post-truth as a political discourse can have far-reaching implications for developing countries where political polarisation and the normalisation of authoritarian rhetoric can have striking impacts on the field, such as elections, regime stability, and regime-society relationship.

In conclusion, this manuscript has opened up a discussion on rethinking the concept of post-truth with discourse and argued that post-truth discourse can be used as mobilising strategies, radicalising ideologies, and polarising discourses, endangering democratic institutions.

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# **Appendix**

## **Appendix 1: Newspaper Articles**

### **Newspaper Articles**

## **Appendix 2: Coding Scheme for Newspaper Articles**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Files</b>	<b>References</b>
• Electoral campaign promises	0	0
• ANP	2	2
• BNP electoral campaign promise	1	1
• Class	3	9
• JI electoral campaign promises	1	12
• JUI-Fazl electoral campaign	1	4
• Domestic violence bill	1	1
• MQM electoral campaign promises	2	13
• PML-N electoral campaign promises	4	113
• PPP electoral campaign promises	5	53
• BB character	3	6
• BB death	3	10
• Liaqat Bagh - a garden of nightmares	2	3
• PTI electoral campaign promises	4	101
• External influence in Pakistan's affairs	3	21
• Foreign advice necessary for Pakistan's survival	2	4
• Improving America's image amongst Pakistani masses	2	2
• Misperceptions about Pakistan	2	7
• negative repercussions of external or foreign advice taken by Pak govt	2	7
• Fringe Parties	0	0
• Tahirul Qadri rhetoric - protests and demands	3	58
• TLP	3	7
• Incumbent govt incompetency or lack of fulfilment of promises	4	60
• Country's economy = strength of country	1	1
• PML-N future	2	69
• 'aliens'	2	5
• Dawn leaks	1	3
• Honour the vote - voter role	2	14
• Nawaz and military	2	3
• Panama case	2	18
• Shahbaz Sharif and campaigning	1	1
• PPP future	2	5
• PPP strategy	2	9
• Media & narrative	3	12
• Alternate facts	1	1
• Electoral slogans and manifesto	3	14
• Social media and elections	2	9
• Songs and narratives	1	8
• Military	0	0
• Military coup - military interference - Musharraf	6	96
• Praises and criticisms for the military	5	21
• Minorities	3	12
• Ethnic tensions	1	1
• Shia vote bank	1	5

• Transgender community	1	3
• Pakistani identity	2	4
• Islamic ideology and Pakistan identity	2	9
• India-Pak relationship	1	3
• Pakistan-India Peace process	1	2
• Religion and politics	1	1
• Patriarchy	3	20
• Liberal democracy and sharia and women's rights	1	1
• Relationship between women and state	3	49
• Women and media narrative	1	3
• Politician's and political parties criticism or character assassination	0	0
• Criticism of Tahir ul Qadri	3	16
• Foul language	1	1
• JUI-Fazl criticism	1	1
• MQM criticism	2	7
• PML-N criticism	3	100
• PPP criticism	6	92
• PTI criticism	5	93
• Provinces	0	0
• Baluchistan	3	30
• FATA	2	5
• GB and Kashmir	3	8
• KPK	1	8
• South Punjab province	1	4
• PTI rhetoric	0	0
• Change	4	76
• Corrupt politicians	3	14
• Merit	1	4
• Youth	4	41
• Restoration of democracy	6	98
• Accountability and democracy	2	17
• Democratic consolidation	2	27
• Free and fair elections	6	164
• Delimitation	1	17
• Election boycott	3	19
• Poll rigging	5	36
• Security	1	1

## Coding Schema

• Small election campaigns	1	2
• Voter turnout	4	41
• Youth and elections	4	23
• Free judiciary	3	13
• Judiciary role - Suo moto or accountability	5	37
• Praises for the judiciary and lawyers	2	6
• Freedom	1	1
• Liberal vs. democratic forces	1	1
• Proportional representational democracy	1	1
• Rhetoric of change	4	60
• Route to power	0	0
• Dynastic politics	5	66
• Establishment	6	31
• Patronage politics	3	33
• Biradri	2	6
• Electables	4	32
• Electoral alliance	5	141
• MMA - JI - JUI-F	2	7
• Party defection and turncoats	2	3
• Personalities	1	2
• Political polarization	1	1
• Power	4	13
• Troika	1	4
• Social movements	3	7
• Populism	1	3
• PTM	1	6
• Terrorism	5	114
• Electoral violence	5	114
• Lal Masjid	1	3
• State sponsored terrorism	1	1
• Support for religious fundamentalism	3	16

## Coding Schema

## **Appendix 3: Post-truth Vignettes**

<b>Set 1</b>
<b>Lack (Control)</b>
The democratically elected incumbent rulers in the country have not sanctioned any welfare projects for the citizens in the country during their tenures. They have also not dealt with the issue of militancy and violence in the country, energy shortages and lawlessness.
<b>Lack and Emotionality</b>
The democratically elected incumbent rulers have miserably failed to launch any welfare project for poverty-stricken masses and have also tremendously failed to deal with militancy and restoration of peace in Pakistan. The common man's life could not be more miserable with uncontrolled food and energy shortages, unabated violence, and countrywide lawlessness.
<b>Fantasy and Emotionality</b>
People want change, a change in the system not just a change of faces. A new democratic leadership which will end the obsolete system so Pakistan can start a golden era according to the dreams of the masses. The power to change the misery of people lies with the people themselves, they need to seize the moment of change by trusting and voting for a new leadership.
<b>Lack + Fantasy and Emotionality</b>
The democratically elected incumbent rulers have miserably failed to launch any welfare project for poverty-stricken masses and have also tremendously failed to deal with militancy and restoration of peace in Pakistan. People want change in the system not just a change of faces, competent leaders, and a true democracy so that Pakistan can start a golden era according to the dreams of the masses.
<b>Set 2</b>
<b>Lack (Control)</b>
The trust between the public and the government has been impacted because the democratically elected political leaders have been apathetic towards the hardships of the people in the country. There is an absence of a true democracy which involves having a strong leadership that can bend the rules to get things and deliver on their promises. True democracy can only prevail where the elected government regulates the will of the people and delivers on its promises.
<b>Lack and Emotionality</b>
The people in streets are confronted by hardships just because of the apathy of these so-called democratically elected political leaders who have remained in power for many times have done nothing for remedy of the public. They have betrayed the people's trust by not providing welfare to the citizens. The incumbent rulers have proved themselves the biggest obstacle in making Pakistan a real democratic country.
<b>Fantasy and Emotionality</b>
True democracy stands for a government in which the people's will prevails and their welfare is catered to, strengthening the trust between the leadership and the public. It stands for justice, equality, accountability, and transparency. It ensures the rule of law and supremacy of the constitution. True democracy can only prevail when the vote of a Pakistani citizen is honoured and respected, where the elected leader delivers on their promises on making Pakistan prosperous.
<b>Lack + Fantasy and Emotionality</b>
The people in streets are confronted by hardships because of the apathy of these so-called democratically elected politicians who have remained in power for many times but have done nothing for remedy of the public, betraying people's trust. True democracy stands for a government in which the people's will prevails. It stands for justice, equality, accountability, transparency, ensuring the rule of law and supremacy of the constitution. True democracy can only prevail when the vote of a Pakistani citizen is honoured and where the elected leader delivers on their promises on making Pakistan prosperous.



<b>Set 3</b>
<b>Lack (Control)</b>
The military has not directly interfered in politics in the past decade however, it has played a role behind the scenes during a democratically elected governments tenure, interfering in the functioning of a true democracy. Military interference in the political sphere impacts the social, political, and economic rights of the citizens in the country as well as the proper functioning of democracy.
<b>Lack and Emotionality</b>
The country cannot afford any further military interference in politics which is dangerous for its survival socially, economically, and politically, and a hindrance to democracy and dishonouring the right of the citizen to elect its leaders. The social and political rights of a citizen in the country are curtailed with military interfering in the politics.
<b>Fantasy and Emotionality</b>
For a true democracy to prevail where the democratic rights of the electorate are respected there can only be one government: the constitutional one. Elected representatives are the only solution to prevent military from interfering in politics. You can't run a country if you have two or three parallel governments. This has to stop.
<b>Lack + Fantasy and Emotionality</b>
The country cannot afford any further military interference in politics which is dangerous for its survival socially, economically, and politically, and a hindrance to democracy. You can't run a country if you have two or three parallel governments. This has to stop. For a true democracy to prevail where the democratic rights of the electorate are respected there can only be one government: the constitutional one.
<b>Set 4</b>
<b>Lack (Control)</b>
Democracy is considered to be un-Islamic according to terrorist groups who advocate for the establishment of Pakistan to be an Islamic state based on Islamic values. They do not attack liberal and secular political parties that advocate for democracy rather propose for reevaluation of the basis on which Pakistan was established.
<b>Lack and Emotionality</b>
The terrorists attack the so-called progressive and liberal political parties which are deemed as impeding the establishment of an Islamic state by advocating for democracy which is in opposition to the Islamic values.
<b>Fantasy and Emotionality</b>
Terrorists only attack the so-called progressive and liberal political parties which propagate democracy which has led to the degeneration of the Pakistani society. It is only through suppressing them and advocating for the establishment of Pakistan as an Islamic state based on Islamic values in accordance with "Islamic Sharia" that prosperity can be brought to the country.
<b>Lack + Fantasy and Emotionality</b>
The terrorists attack the so-called progressive and liberal political parties which are deemed as impeding the establishment of an Islamic state by advocating for democracy which is in opposition to the Islamic values. This has led to the degeneration of the Pakistani society. Pakistan can only prosper by advocating for an Islamic state in accordance with "Islamic Sharia".

## **Appendix 4: Descriptive Statistics, Statistical Balance and Robustness Checks**

**Table 9.1. Descriptive Statistics**

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Max
Gender	3,184	1.498744	0.500077	1	2
Age	3,184	32.20729	7.304068	18	58
Married	3,184	1.920854	0.317099	1	4
Education	3,184	9.330402	3.479504	3	17
Employed	3,184	7.469849	4.895422	1	16

**TABLE 9.2. Statistical Balance between Treatment and Control groups**

	(1) Control	(2) 1	(3) 2	(4) 3	t-test Difference	t-test Difference	t-test Difference	t-test Difference	t-test Difference	t-test Difference
Variable	Mean/SE	Mean/SE	Mean/SE	Mean/SE	(1)-(2)	(1)-(3)	(1)-(4)	(2)-(3)	(2)-(4)	(3)-(4)
Gender	1.501 {[]0.018{[]}}	1.507 {[]0.018{[]}}	1.498 {[]0.017{[]}}	1.490 {[]0.018{[]}}	-0.006	0.003	0.011	0.009	0.017	0.008
Age	32.058 {[]0.264{[]}}	32.444 {[]0.256{[]}}	32.081 {[]0.261{[]}}	32.244 {[]0.255{[]}}	-0.386	-0.024	-0.187	0.363	0.200	-0.163
Married	1.920 {[]0.013{[]}}	1.937 {[]0.010{[]}}	1.909 {[]0.011{[]}}	1.918 {[]0.012{[]}}	-0.017	0.011	0.002	0.028	0.019	-0.009
Employed	7.244 {[]0.178{[]}}	7.394 {[]0.173{[]}}	7.579 {[]0.169{[]}}	7.648 {[]0.173{[]}}	-0.150	-0.335	-0.405	-0.185	-0.255	-0.069
Education	9.465 {[]0.124{[]}}	9.302 {[]0.126{[]}}	9.362 {[]0.122{[]}}	9.198 {[]0.121{[]}}	0.163	0.104	0.267	-0.060	0.104	0.163
N	763	795	824	802						
F-test of joint significance (F-stat)					0.598	0.675	1.366	1.165	1.089	0.292
F-test, number of observations					1558	1587	1565	1619	1597	1626

**TABLE 10.1. Effect of a Post-truth Statement on Perceived Truthfulness**

VARIABLES	Truth
Lack and Emotionality (T1)	0.016 (0.010)
Fantasy and Emotionality (T2)	-0.002 (0.010)
Lack, Fantasy and Emotionality (T3)	0.002 (0.010)
Gender	0.016 (0.011)
Age	0.002** (0.001)
Married	-0.018 (0.012)
Education	X
Employed	-0.002* (0.001)
Constant	0.493*** (0.073)
Observations	3,184
R-squared	0.051

**Note:** Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$ , .  $p < 0.1$

**TABLE 10.2. The Effect of a Post-truth Statement on Emotion (Anger or Hope)**

VARIABLES	Emotion
Lack and Emotionality (T1)	-0.989*** (0.196)
Fantasy and Emotionality (T2)	2.167*** (0.199)
Lack, Fantasy and Emotionality (T3)	0.931*** (0.204)
Gender	-1.622*** (0.205)
Age	0.008 (0.010)
Married	0.481* (0.244)
Education	X
Employed	-0.025 (0.016)
Constant	-1.492 (1.210)
Observations	3,184
R-squared	0.169
Robust standard errors in parentheses. *** p0.001, ** p0.01, * p0.05, . p0.1	

**Note:** Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, . p<0.1

**TABLE 10.3. The Effect of Emotion on Perceived Truthfulness of a Post-truth Statement**

VARIABLES	Truth
Lack and Emotionality (T1)	0.015 (0.012)
Fantasy and Emotionality (T2)	0.000 (0.010)
Lack, Fantasy and Emotionality (T3)	0.011 (0.010)
Emotion	-0.004* (0.002)
Lack and Emotionality (T1)*Emotion	0.001 (0.002)
Fantasy and Emotionality (T2)*Emotion	0.013*** (0.002)
Lack, Fantasy and Emotionality (T3)*Emotion	0.007** (0.002)
Gender	0.024* (0.011)
Age	0.001* (0.001)
Married	-0.016 (0.012)
Employed	-0.002* (0.001)
Education	X
Constant	0.474*** (0.072)
Observations	3,184
R-squared	0.063

**Note:** Robust standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05, . p<0.1