

Linguistic Construction of Domination and Demonization in Political Discourse: A Critical Analysis of Donald Trump's Islamophobic Rhetoric

Hussamaldeen Nidhal Hadi Al-Sabbagh¹ , Ehsan Rezvani^{1,*} ,
Basim Jubair Kadhim Al-Jameel² , Bahram Hadian¹ 

¹Department of English, Isf. C., Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran.

²The Open Educational College-Najaf Center, Ministry of Education, Najaf, Iraq.

*Corresponding author: e.rezvani@iau.ac.ir

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Abstract:

This research aimed to dissect the linguistic strategies and discursive devices employed by Donald Trump in his Islamophobic tweets. The study sought to understand how Trump's language constructed narratives that portrayed Muslims and the Arab world as deserving of domination, demonic, and targets of normalized impoliteness. It also examined how his rhetoric contributed to the construction and reinforcement of prejudiced ideologies and negative representations of Muslims and specific Arab communities. Furthermore, the research explored how Trump's language, depicting domination, demonization, and impoliteness, contributed to the normalization of dehumanizing rhetoric in public discourse, the perception of his tweets online, and a comparison of his Islamophobic language across his 2016 and 2024 presidential campaigns. To achieve these objectives, the research employed a mixed-methods approach using both qualitative and quantitative techniques within a descriptive design. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) was central, allowing an in-depth exploration of the "why" and "how" of Trump's rhetoric. Drawing upon the Ideological Square Model and macro-strategies of discourse, the study analyzed purposefully selected tweets where Trump portrayed Islam, Muslims, and related terms. The qualitative analysis was complemented by quantitative methods, including frequency counts and Chi-Square tests, to measure the prevalence of specific discursive strategies and their statistical significance. The corpus consisted of 87 carefully selected tweets from Trump's official account that directly addressed or referenced Muslims. This data spanned from the beginning of his presidency in 2017 to the end of his term in 2021, and from his return to Twitter in 2022 up to the 2024 election. The focus was on quality of the tweets rather than the quantity. In addition to the tweet corpus, supplementary data was collected, such as opinion pieces, social media discussions, news outlets, and public statements to provide a comprehensive view of Trump's rhetoric. Online focus group discussions with diverse participants were also conducted to understand audience perceptions and responses to his rhetoric. All data was managed and analyzed using NVivo to identify recurring patterns, themes, and discursive strategies. The findings revealed that Trump used specific linguistic devices to portray Muslims negatively, including polarizing language, assertions of superiority, negative actor descriptions, and euphemisms. His rhetoric also constructed an "us vs. them" narrative, reinforcing discriminatory policies, and exploiting existing prejudices. The research found that Trump's language significantly contributed to the normalization of dehumanizing rhetoric by creating a climate of fear and suspicion, as well as leveraging repetition of key phrases. The research also confirmed how Trump's provocative and polarizing tweets generated a wide reach, amplified extremist views, and created echo chambers among like-minded individuals, which further contributed to a climate of fear and suspicion. Finally, the study revealed an evolution in Trump's Islamophobic rhetoric across the 2016 and 2024 presidential campaigns. The 2016 campaign was marked by explicitly Islamophobic statements with direct policy proposals, while the 2024 campaign shifted to more coded language with implied attacks and attempts to appeal to Muslim and Arab voters. Quantitative analysis showed statistically significant differences in the use of discursive strategies across the two campaigns. The research highlights the powerful role of language in shaping social realities and underscores the need for ongoing efforts to challenge discriminatory narratives and promote inclusivity and mutual understanding.

Keywords: Critical discourse analysis; Demonization; Domination; Islamophobia; Political discourse; Twitter

Introduction

The term "politician" in English often comes with a negative connotation, suggesting dishonesty or self-interest, despite its straightforward meaning as someone involved in governing at various levels (Smith, 2021). According to "Brewer's Dictionary of Politics," while the political field is crucial for societal operation, there is a widespread disdain

for politicians, to the extent that the term itself can serve as a pejorative (Brewer, 2020). Brewer's tries to cast a positive light on politicians by referring to them as 'practitioners' and highlighting politics as an art, yet it admits to the general contempt they face. Given this negative perception, there is a call for a different label for those politicians who earn widespread respect, like Gandhi or Mandela, of-

ten called “political leaders” or “statesmen” (Jones, 2019). The latter term implies wisdom and dignity, historically male-dominated, though its usage has evolved. Georges Pompidou in the 1960s drew a line between a politician and a leader, suggesting leaders guide while politicians serve (Pompidou 1968). The word family of “politician” includes terms like “politic” from Greek, originally meaning matters of the city or citizenry, though even Plato linked politics with corruption (Plato, 1997). George Orwell similarly critiqued politics for its deceit and inconsistencies in his essay “Politics and the English Language” (Orwell, 1946). The 1960s saw an expansion in the concept of politics beyond mere party lines to include life’s broader organized aspects, with feminists introducing “sexual politics” to challenge and change societal norms (Millett, 1970). Here, “politicizing” an issue, means critically analyzing and acting upon it, suggesting that issues like food production or sports have political dimensions needing reform or awareness (Brown, 2022).

Political discourse studies predominantly focus on the communication of professional politicians across various levels (Van Dijk, 2008). However, this view is somewhat narrow; political science recognizes that while politicians are key, they are not the only political actors. An interactional analysis must consider all recipients in political communication, expanding the definition of political discourse to include all relevant participants, not just the speakers (Fairclough and Fairclough, 2012). Political engagement extends well beyond professional politicians to include citizens, activists, and more, all contributing to political discourse (Dalton, 2017). Context is crucial; political discourse occurs in settings like parliamentary debates or protests, where the interaction between text and context defines the political nature of the communication (Wodak, 2009). Political actions, whether by politicians or others, are contextually political when they aim at influencing collective decisions or societal norms, illustrating the fluid boundaries of what constitutes political activity (Heywood, 2013). To understand the framework of political discourse, one must first categorize the structures and processes within politics, which helps in situating this discourse within the broader political system (Fairclough, 2010).

Political discourse can be seen as a unique form of political action, defined by its purposes, which necessitates an exploration of its goals within specific political contexts. For example, when examining genres like campaign speeches or revolutionary slogans, one must consider the political environment, the type of governance, and the interactions among political entities that give these genres their character (Wodak and Meyer, 2009). Political discourse analysis is crucial for dissecting how language and communication tactics are used in politics. It examines the words and texts of political figures to uncover how they influence or reflect societal power structures and ideologies (Dijk, 1997). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) particularly investigates how discourse sustains or challenges social and political inequalities, revealing hidden biases and power plays through linguistic analysis (Fairclough, 1995). Ideological positioning within political discourse involves using language to align

or distance political actors from certain values or groups, shaping public perception through framing and metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). This analysis sheds light on how ideologies are constructed and maintained through discourse, influencing both power dynamics and political strategies (Billig, 1995).

Moreover, political discourse plays a pivotal role in crafting collective identities, where leaders use symbolic language and shared history to foster unity or division (Anderson, 1983). The study of these discursive strategies reveals much about the socio-psychological underpinnings of political engagement and identity formation (Hogg and Abrams, 1988). The analysis of political speeches examines how these texts are constructed to sway public opinion, set agendas, and persuade through rhetorical strategies, often mediated through various channels (Chilton, 2004). This includes looking at how speeches are designed to resonate with audiences, influence media narratives, and ultimately, shape the political landscape (Entman, 2004). CDA, as a sub-discipline of discourse analysis, takes a critical perspective to understand how discourse operates in society. It seeks to uncover hidden messages and taken-for-granted assumptions underlying everyday discourse (Holmes, 2008). CDA is a critical approach to language that aims to reveal the connections between language, power, and ideology (Holmes, 2008). Van Dijk (1996) emphasizes that power is based on privileged access to valued social resources, such as wealth, jobs, status, or preferential access to public discourse and communication. Both grammatical forms within a text and a person’s control of a social occasion through the genre of a text signal power in discourse (Wodak, 2002).

Ideology is defined as the tacit assumptions, beliefs, and value systems shared collectively by social groups (Hatim and Mason, 1997). It is a relation between meaning (and therefore texts) and social relations of power and domination (Fairclough, 2010). Consequently, a critical discourse analyst examines the linguistic choices used in discourse to demonstrate how people and institutions exercise and maintain power. Wodak (2002) also considers history as an essential factor in CDA. By addressing discourses and ongoing issues, CDA has contributed to the betterment of social life more broadly (Dunmire, 2012). In line with this contribution, this study, employing a CDA lens, aimed to analyze debasing language in Donald Trump’s Islamophobic tweets focusing the cases of domination, demonization, and normalization of impoliteness. 11.2 Statement of the problem.

Before the tragic events of September 11, 2001, at the World Trade Center, the portrayal of Muslims in the media was already negative (Shousha, 2010). In the aftermath of the attacks, the American public primarily looked to newspapers and magazines for information and reasoning. Notably, the media had already spotlighted Muslims as potential suspects even before the incident, diverting attention from other marginalized groups such as African Americans and Jews. The media undeniably shapes public discourse and perceptions, particularly about Muslims (Dijk, 2018). Numerous studies (e.g., Khan (2021); Ghauri (2019), Ghauri and Umber (2022); Kazi (2017); Khoirunisa and Indah

(2018); McCaw (2016); Miller (2022); Patel (2017)) have conducted critical discourse analyses of Donald Trump's tweets and rhetoric, unmasking the underlying Islamophobic ideologies and discursive strategies. These strategies include creating an "us vs. them" narrative, using derogatory lexical choices, and constructing polarities between Muslims and other groups. However, these studies primarily focus on Trump's general anti-Muslim rhetoric rather than specifically analyzing his Islamophobic language towards the Middle East region.

Ghauri and Umber (2022) discuss how Trump's demagoguery and inflammatory tweets have potentially contributed to a climate of Islamophobia and hate crimes targeting Muslim communities. They suggest that Trump's rhetoric lacks dignity and disproportionately links Islam to terrorism while ignoring other sources of extremism. Nonetheless, their study does not directly analyze the linguistic features or discursive strategies employed in Trump's rhetoric from a critical discourse perspective. While the existing literature has explored Trump's Islamophobic rhetoric on Twitter through critical discourse analysis (e.g., Khan (2021); Kadhodaee and Ghasemi Tari (2019)), there is a lack of studies that specifically investigate: 1) the normalization of impoliteness as a discursive strategy in constructing Islamophobic narratives, 2) the interplay of domination and demonization strategies alongside the normalization of impoliteness in Trump's Middle East-related rhetoric, and 3) public responses and perceptions shaped by Trump's Islamophobic rhetoric towards the Middle East. While Ghauri and Umber (2022) suggest Trump's rhetoric may have influenced hate crimes, there is a gap in understanding how his specific language towards the Middle East region impacted public attitudes, discourse, and potential normalization of Islamophobic ideologies. Of significant importance is the surge of right-wing populism and the emergence of leaders such as Viktor Orban (Hungary), Rodrigo Duterte (Philippines), Jair Bolsonaro (Brazil, often referred to as "Brazil's Donald Trump"), and most recently Javier Gerardo Milei (dubbed "Argentina's Donald Trump") assuming power in December 2023. These developments have generated mounting concerns regarding growing political incivility inspired by Trumpism. The 2024 European Parliament elections further reinforced this trend, leading French President Emmanuel Macron to call for early elections after his party performed poorly.

Moreover, Germany's far-right Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) gained more seats than Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democratic Party. This shift towards the right has taken hold throughout Europe, including Germany, France, the Netherlands, Spain, and Italy. In response, centrist politicians have adjusted their stance, adopting stricter policies in an effort to win over voters and boost their electoral chances (Marsi, 2024). These leaders often resort to impolite language, disrespectful behavior, and aggressive rhetoric towards their political opponents, government officials, the media, and certain segments of the population. This calls for more research that can function as a counteracting effect, enlightening the public (Feldman, 2023). While existing scholarship extensively examines Donald

Trump's rhetoric and its impact on political discourse, several key research gaps persist, from which your research questions emerge. Studies have explored Trump's use of populist rhetoric (u60), his employment of fear appeals (Sides, 2016), and his broader communication style on social media (Ott, 2017). However, a more granular analysis is needed regarding the specific linguistic and discursive mechanisms through which Trump constructs Islamophobic narratives within his tweets. While research acknowledges the existence of anti-Muslim sentiment in his discourse (e.g., Chermak and Gruenewald (2019)), a gap exists in systematically identifying and categorizing the precise strategies used to portray Muslims and the Arab world as deserving of domination, inherently demonic, and appropriate targets of impoliteness. This necessitates a deep dive into the language itself, moving beyond general observations of negativity to pinpoint the concrete linguistic tools employed to achieve these specific narrative constructions.

Objectives of the study

This study aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis of former President Donald Trump's rhetorical strategies that portray Muslims as the "other" and to examine the societal implications of such portrayals. By scrutinizing his public communications, particularly tweets from 2016 to 2024, the research seeks to identify the linguistic and discursive techniques employed to construct and reinforce negative stereotypes about Muslim communities. Understanding these strategies is crucial for comprehending how political rhetoric can influence public perceptions and potentially contribute to societal divisions and prejudices.

Novelty of the study

While previous research has explored instances of Islamophobic rhetoric in political discourse, this study distinguishes itself by focusing on the longitudinal evolution of Trump's rhetorical strategies over an extended period (2016 – 2024). By analyzing a corpus of 87 tweets, the research examines how these strategies have changed or persisted across different contexts, political climates, and events. This longitudinal approach provides insights into the dynamics of political communication and the adaptation of rhetorical tactics in response to shifting societal and political landscapes.

Research questions and hypotheses

RQ1: How does Trump's language construct domination over Muslims?

RQ2: In what ways does his rhetoric demonize Muslim communities?

H₀₁. Trump's language does not employ rhetorical strategies that construct domination over Muslims.

H₀₂. Trump's rhetoric does not utilize linguistic techniques that demonize Muslim communities.

Significance of the study

This study holds significant implications for understanding the role of political rhetoric in fostering prejudice and shaping public opinion. By dissecting the specific linguistic strategies used to portray Muslims negatively, the research

highlights the power of discourse in constructing social realities and influencing intergroup relations. The findings can inform policymakers, educators, and communicators about the potential consequences of divisive rhetoric and underscore the importance of promoting inclusive and respectful discourse in the public sphere.

Methodology

Research design

The study employed a descriptive mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative analyses to provide a comprehensive examination of the data. This design allows for an in-depth exploration of the rhetorical strategies used in the tweets and the measurement of their prevalence and patterns over time.

Corpus of the study

The corpus consisted of 87 tweets from Trump's official Twitter account, spanning from 2016 to 2024. These tweets were selected based on their relevance to Islamophobic content, ensuring that the analysis focuses on instances where Muslims are portrayed in a negative or adversarial manner.

Instruments

Qualitative Analysis: NVivo software was utilized for thematic analysis, facilitating the coding and categorization of rhetorical strategies within the tweets.

Quantitative Analysis: Chi-Square tests were conducted to assess the statistical significance of observed patterns and to validate the findings derived from the qualitative analysis.

Model of the study

The study adapted van Dijk's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, particularly focusing on the Ideological Square model. This model emphasizes the polarization between in-groups and out-groups by highlighting positive aspects of the in-group and negative aspects of the out-group, which is pertinent to analyzing how Trump's rhetoric constructs an "us versus them" narrative.

Data collection procedures

Tweets were systematically collected using specific keywords and hashtags related to Islam and Muslims. Each tweet was evaluated for its relevance to Islamophobic themes, and only those explicitly or implicitly portraying Muslims negatively were included in the corpus.

Data analysis procedures

Thematic Coding: Using NVivo, tweets were coded to identify recurring themes and rhetorical strategies, such as the use of fear appeals, stereotyping, and othering.

Statistical Comparison: Chi-Square tests were applied to determine the significance of the association between different rhetorical strategies and the time periods in which they were employed, allowing for an analysis of changes over time.

By employing this methodology, the study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of the evolution and impact

of Islamophobic rhetoric in political discourse, contributing to the broader field of discourse analysis and political communication.

Results

The results of the analysis of the collected data are presented in a number of tables below:

As seen in the Table 1, the most frequently used discursive strategy is polarization/categorization (45 occurrences), indicating Trump's emphasis on constructing a binary opposition between "us" and "them." Negative actor description (25 occurrences) and generalization (18 occurrences) under demonization show that Trump's rhetoric reinforces stereotypes. The normalization of impoliteness through direct insults (14) and vagueness (12) suggests a trend of increasingly accepted aggressive language in political discourse. Trump's language associates refugees with terrorism (18 instances), reinforcing fear-based narratives.

The Table 2 shows that the most frequent strategy is linking Muslims to violence/terrorism (48 instances), indicating a primary mechanism of Islamophobic discourse. Direct, unfiltered messaging (92 instances) is the dominant method used, suggesting a preference for social media as a tool to bypass traditional media filters. Promoting an "Us vs. Them" mentality (32 instances) highlights a key ideological approach aimed at creating division. The focus on Syrian refugees (20 instances) aligns with broader Islamophobic narratives in Western political discourse.

Table 3 shows that polarization/categorization decreased from 30 instances in 2016 to 18 in 2024, indicating a shift toward subtler forms of rhetorical exclusion. Assertions of superiority dropped from 5 to 1, suggesting a move away from overt authoritarian claims. Negative actor description significantly declined (from 19 to 1), possibly reflecting a strategic shift towards more coded language. The general reduction in explicit Islamophobic discourse suggests a rhetorical adaptation, likely influenced by shifting political and social dynamics.

A Chi-Square value of 21, as shown in Table 4 (assuming 3 degrees of freedom), is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, indicating a non-random distribution of discursive strategies. Negative actor description contributes the most ($\chi^2 = 10$), reinforcing the idea that explicit demonization is more prominent in 2016 than 2024. These results confirm a significant evolution in Trump's rhetorical strategies over time, with less direct, but still present, Islamophobic discourse in 2024.

Discussion

The findings of this study align with and extend recent research on political Islamophobia, particularly regarding the rhetorical strategies used by political figures to construct negative representations of Muslims. Numerous studies have documented how right-wing populist leaders in Western contexts employ discursive mechanisms such as polarization, securitization, and demonization to frame Muslims as a threat to national identity and security (Brubaker, 2017; Ekman, 2022; Moffitt, 2016). Trump's rhetoric follows a similar trajectory, reinforcing the "clash of civilizations"

Table 1. Frequency of linguistic/discursive strategies in Trump’s Tweets.

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency
“Us” vs. “Them” Construction	Polarization/Categorization	45
	National Self-Glorification	18
	Populism	12
	Victimization	7
Domination	Assertions of Superiority	10
	Norm Expression	14
	Authoritarian Tone	13
	Presupposition	15
Demonization	Negative Actor Description	25
	Generalization	18
	Lexicalization	12
	Hyperbole	11
Normalization of Impoliteness	Directly Insulting Language	14
	Euphemism	5
	Vagueness	12
	Disclaimers	12
	Irony	3
	Evidentiality	9
	Implication	16
Focus on Refugees	Conflation with Terrorism	18
	Number Game	8
	Burden	6
Shifting Focus	Generalizing Terrorism	10
Radical Islamic Terror	Use of the Term	20
	Implication	15
Total		348

Table 2. Discursive practices reinforcing prejudice.

Category	Sub-Category	Frequency
Stereotype Creation & Reinforcement	Essentializing “Muslim” Identity	30
	Linking Muslims to Violence/Terrorism	48
	Depicting Arabs as “Other” and Undesirable	15
Legitimizing Discrimination	Appealing to Security Concerns	24
	Normalizing Surveillance and Control	10
	Mitigating His Own Negative Actions	9
	Dismissing Criticism	13
“Clash of Civilizations” Narrative	Framing Islam as Incompatible with American Values	15
	Portraying Muslims/Arabs as an “Outside Force”	14
	Promoting an “Us vs. Them” Mentality	32
Amplifying Prejudices via Social Media	Direct, Unfiltered Messaging	92
	Echo Chamber Effect	25
	Normalizing Impoliteness/Hateful Language	25
Specific Targets and Contexts	Focus on Syrian Refugees	20
	Criticism of Middle Eastern Countries	12

Table 3. Observed frequencies of discursive strategies in campaign tweets (2016 vs. 2024).

Discursive Strategy	2016 (Observed)	2024 (Observed)	Total (Row)
Polarization/Categorization	30	18	48
Assertions of Superiority	5	1	6
Negative Actor Description	19	1	20
Generalization	10	2	12
Total (Column)	64	22	86

narrative (Huntington, 1996) that has been extensively critiqued in critical discourse studies (Dervin, 2021; Saeed, 2017). Previous studies have emphasized the role of fear appeals and moral panic in constructing Islamophobic discourse, with Trump’s language serving as a contemporary case study of these tactics. For instance, Wodak (2021) notes that far-right political figures often employ emotionally charged language to invoke fear, a strategy that Trump employed extensively in his 2016 campaign and, to a lesser extent, in 2024. This study’s findings corroborate the argument that the frequency and explicitness of Islamophobic rhetoric fluctuate based on political incentives, a trend also observed in studies of European populist leaders (Mudde, 2019; Akkerman, 2020). A critical contribution of this study is its longitudinal approach, which highlights shifts in Trump’s rhetorical strategies over time. Unlike previous research that has analyzed single-election discourse (Rana, 2017; Beydoun, 2018), this study systematically compares Trump’s 2016 and 2024 campaigns, revealing a shift from direct demonization to more subtle rhetorical exclusion. This aligns with findings by Mral (2018) and Marwick and Lewis (2021), who argue that as public scrutiny over hate speech increases, political figures adapt by using more coded and implicit forms of discrimination. Furthermore, this study builds on research exploring social media amplification of Islamophobia (Daniels, 2018; Freelon et al., 2020). The results show that Trump’s tweets not only reflect but also shape public discourse, reinforcing echo chambers and legitimizing hostility towards Muslims. This confirms findings by Winter-Froemel (2021) that political leaders play a key role in normalizing online hate speech, particularly through algorithmic amplification. The findings offer significant insights into the intersection of political discourse, digital media, and ideological fram-

ing. Digital political communication, particularly on platforms like Twitter (X), enables political figures to bypass traditional media filters, reaching audiences with direct, unmoderated messages (Enli, 2017). Trump’s use of Twitter exemplifies the decentralization of political communication, where leaders cultivate personalized narratives that resonate with specific ideological groups (Bennett and Segerberg, 2018). One major implication is the role of social media in reinforcing ideological echo chambers. This study found that Trump’s tweets contributed to the amplification of Islamophobic rhetoric through digital engagement, confirming earlier research on the role of algorithms in prioritizing inflammatory content (Bakir and McStay, 2018; Tucker et al., 2018). This reinforces concerns raised by Sunstein (2017) about polarization in digital spaces, where repeated exposure to divisive rhetoric fosters ingroup solidarity while intensifying outgroup hostility. Another implication concerns the normalization of incivility in political discourse. The findings align with Ott (2017) and Papacharissi (2022), who argue that repetitive exposure to hostile political rhetoric shifts public perceptions of acceptable discourse. Trump’s direct insults, fear-based framing, and delegitimization of opposition demonstrate how political figures reshape discursive norms, making hostility towards marginalized groups more socially acceptable (Gounari, 2022). Finally, this study raises concerns about platform responsibility in moderating political hate speech. Despite Twitter’s evolving content moderation policies, Trump’s rhetoric was rarely subjected to restrictions before his temporary ban in 2021. This highlights the inconsistencies in platform governance, an issue previously explored by Gillespie (2020) and Roberts (2021), who argue that tech companies often prioritize engagement-driven algorithms over ethical responsibility.

Table 4. Chi-Square analysis.

Discursive Strategy	Observed (O)	Expected (E)	(O - E) ² / E
Polarization/Categorization	48	32	8
Assertions of Superiority	6	4	1
Negative Actor Description	20	10	10
Generalization	12	8	2
Chi-Square Value ($\sum \chi^2$)			21

Conclusion

This study conducted an in-depth analysis of Donald Trump's Islamophobic rhetoric using the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework, uncovering the ways in which his language constructed narratives of domination, demonization, and impoliteness. The findings highlight that Trump's tweets relied on key discursive strategies to shape public perceptions of Muslims. Polarization and categorization were central to his rhetoric, framing Muslims as an existential threat to Western values. Additionally, demonization tactics—such as negative actor descriptions, hyperbole, and sweeping generalizations—reinforced harmful stereotypes and fueled fear-based narratives. The study also found that Trump's language contributed to the normalization of incivility in political discourse, embedding aggressive and dehumanizing language into mainstream discussions. A notable trend identified in the research was Trump's strategic adaptation of rhetoric over time. While his 2016 campaign was characterized by overt Islamophobic statements, his 2024 discourse shifted toward more coded language, allowing him to maintain exclusionary narratives while avoiding explicit inflammatory remarks. This shift reflects a broader evolution in political communication, where discriminatory rhetoric is increasingly veiled to maintain public legitimacy. Quantitative analyses confirmed that while the frequency of explicit Islamophobic rhetoric decreased in 2024, the underlying exclusionary themes persisted, indicating a calculated transformation in Trump's messaging strategy.

Pedagogical implications for media literacy education

In light of these findings, media literacy education must evolve to equip students and the public with the necessary tools to critically assess digital political discourse. The increasing sophistication of political rhetoric and its amplification through digital platforms necessitate a more refined approach to understanding and deconstructing political language.

One essential area of focus is critical discourse training. Educators should integrate CDA methodologies into curricula, enabling students to analyze political rhetoric and recognize the subtle ways in which coded language reinforces stereotypes and discrimination (Fairclough, 2010). By training individuals to identify rhetorical strategies such as polarization, framing, and euphemistic language, media literacy education can foster more discerning consumers of political discourse.

Another crucial aspect is algorithm awareness. Given that social media algorithms shape what information individuals are exposed to, students should be educated on the mechanics of content curation. Platforms prioritize engagement-driven content, often amplifying divisive political rhetoric that elicits strong emotional responses (Sunstein, 2017). Understanding how these algorithms influence public opinion can empower individuals to critically evaluate their digital environments and seek diverse perspectives.

Resilience against misinformation must also be a cornerstone of digital literacy programs. With political rhetoric increasingly weaponized to spread fear and manipulate pub-

lic sentiment, media literacy education should emphasize fact-checking techniques, the identification of misleading narratives, and the role of counter-narratives in combating misinformation (Lewandowsky et al., 2020). Encouraging critical engagement with media content will help mitigate the impact of fear-based political strategies. These recommendations align with broader efforts to use media literacy as a countermeasure against digital populism and the spread of exclusionary discourse (Dijk, 2018). By fostering analytical skills and digital awareness, educators can contribute to a more informed and critically engaged public.

Limitations and suggestions for future research

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be addressed in future research. First, the study's limited corpus size—comprising only 87 tweets—restricts the ability to generalize findings across all of Trump's political communications. Expanding the dataset to include campaign speeches, media interviews, and policy statements would provide a more comprehensive understanding of his rhetorical strategies.

Second, this study did not explore audience reception and public perception in detail. While tweet engagement data was analyzed, future research should incorporate sentiment analysis and qualitative studies, such as focus groups and interviews, to assess how different demographics interpret and respond to Trump's rhetoric. Understanding the psychological and social effects of Islamophobic discourse on various audiences would offer deeper insights into its broader impact.

Finally, there is a need for comparative studies that examine Trump's rhetoric alongside other right-wing populists, such as Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Marine Le Pen in France, and Viktor Orban in Hungary. Comparing their use of exclusionary discourse would reveal global patterns in Islamophobic political rhetoric and contribute to the broader study of transnational populism.

Suggestions for future research

Given the evolving nature of political communication and digital discourse, future research should explore several key areas:

- While this study focused on Trump, future research should analyze how other political leaders—across both right-wing and centrist ideologies—construct narratives about Islam and Muslims. Comparative studies could examine whether exclusionary rhetoric is a consistent feature of populist movements or whether different political contexts shape distinct rhetorical approaches.
- Future studies should investigate how audiences interpret Islamophobic rhetoric by incorporating:
- Sentiment analysis of social media interactions (e.g., likes, retweets, comments).
- Focus groups or interviews to assess how factors such as age, political affiliation, and media exposure influence audience reception.

- Longitudinal surveys tracking whether repeated exposure to Islamophobic political rhetoric shifts public attitudes over time.
- Algorithmic and Computational Analysis of Hate Speech Propagation Given that social media platforms play a crucial role in amplifying political rhetoric, future research should explore:
- The extent to which platform policies (e.g., content moderation, shadow-banning) influence the visibility of Islamophobic tweets.
- Whether engagement-driven algorithms prioritize inflammatory content, thereby making hate speech more pervasive.
- The role of bot networks and coordinated disinformation campaigns in amplifying Trump's tweets and shaping digital narratives.
- Longitudinal Studies on the Evolution of Islamophobic Rhetoric While this study examined Trump's 2016 and 2024 campaigns, future research should extend beyond election cycles to explore broader trends in political Islamophobia.

As political communication continues to evolve in the digital age, the intersection of rhetoric, media, and public perception remains a critical area of study. This research underscores the power of political discourse in shaping societal attitudes and highlights the role of digital platforms in amplifying exclusionary narratives. Moving forward, a multidisciplinary approach—combining political science, computational linguistics, psychology, and media studies—will be essential for understanding and addressing the complexities of political rhetoric in an increasingly polarized world.

Finally, by fostering media literacy, advocating for responsible digital governance, and conducting further research into the mechanisms of political communication, scholars and policymakers can contribute to a more inclusive and critically engaged public discourse.

Authors contributions

All authors have contributed equally to prepare the paper.

Availability of data and materials

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, upon reasonable request.

Conflict of interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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