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EXPLORING POLITICAL LANGUAGE IN COUNTERTERRORISM POLICY: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PAKISTAN'S NATIONAL ACTION PLAN (2014)

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Abstract
The National Action Plan (2014) is a policy document outlining Pakistan's strategy to combat terrorism. This study aims to examine the use of political discourse strategies in the NAP to construct and legitimize state authority in counterterrorism efforts. Applying Paul Chilton's Political Discourse Analysis framework, which focuses on metaphor, spatial framing, and cognitive structuring, the research employs a qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis approach to analyze selected clauses from the NAP. The study is significant as it reveals the underlying ideological mechanisms that shape public perception and policy acceptance, offering valuable insights for scholars and policymakers in political communication and security studies. Findings indicate that the NAP employs militaristic metaphors and high-modality language to portray terrorism as an existential threat, thereby justifying strong state intervention. Spatial and cognitive framing creates clear us–them *divisions, positioning the state as protector and terrorists as enemies, reinforcing national unity. Moreover, procedural and authoritative language projects state competence and moral justification, strengthening public trust while limiting dissent. Overall, this analysis highlights the crucial role of discourse in shaping counterterrorism policies and their social impact, providing valuable insights for those involved in policy formulation and public communication.*

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The pervasive threat of terrorism has plunged Pakistan into a state of perpetual insecurity, posing significant challenges to public safety, governance, and the economy. In response to this urgent crisis, the government introduced the National Action Plan

(NAP) in 2014. This comprehensive strategy, employing administrative, military, and legal measures, was designed to combat terrorism in all its forms. The genesis of NAP can be traced back to the tragic attack on the Army Public School in Peshawar. This watershed moment galvanized the nation's resolve to confront both ideological and physical terrorism (Ruby, 2002).

It is still difficult to come up with a uniform definition of terrorism because different groups, governmental entities, and bodies choose definitions that fit their roles, goals, or viewpoints (Bruce, 2013). An essay argues that in order for philosophers to evaluate the moral implications of the changing character of war, they require a specific and unambiguous definition of terrorism. Such a definition ought to be critical and limited, clearly stating what constitutes terrorism's moral wrongs and defining which acts are included in this negative category (Meisels, 2009).

Understanding and defining terrorism risk is a complex task that requires a comprehensive approach. A study in this field offers valuable insights, presenting a set of standards that are deemed essential for any meaningful conceptualization of terrorism risk. These criteria, based on both theoretical and practical insights, draw from the researcher's personal experience with terrorism risk assessment and established principles from other fields of risk analysis (Aven & Guikema, 2015). Abbas (2008) notes the significant advancements made by the Taliban in Pakistan's tribal areas in terms of organizational strength, military strategy, and leadership ability.

Moreover, this study critically examines NAP through the lenses of institutional capacity, civil-military relations, and human rights considerations. In contrast, many previous analyses have approached NAP from a security-centric lens. This approach highlights how governance structures, such as [specific examples], and provincial coordination failures, such as [specific examples], have limited NAP's effectiveness due to a lack of community-based deradicalization.

1.6 Limitations

This study focuses on the National Action Plan (2014). The research emphasizes linguistic and discourse features without directly assessing the real-world implementation or outcomes of the policy.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The National Action Plan (2014) serves as a foundational policy in Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts; however, there is limited research on how its language functions to construct and legitimize state authority. Political discourse shapes public perception and power relations, but the specific discourse strategies and cognitive frameworks employed in the NAP have not been thoroughly examined. This study applies Paul Chilton's Political Discourse Analysis framework, which focuses on metaphor, spatial mapping, and cognitive framing, to address this gap by critically analyzing how the NAP's language mobilizes ideology, frames threats, and justifies counterterrorism policies. This analysis is essential for understanding the role of discourse in reinforcing state power and influencing public support.

1.3 Research Objective

To examine the use of political discourse strategies, including metaphor, spatial framing, and cognitive structuring, in the National Action Plan (2014) to construct and legitimize state authority in counterterrorism policy.

1.4 Research Question

How does the language of the National Action Plan (2014) employ political discourse strategies to construct, legitimize, and reinforce state authority in counterterrorism policy?

1.5 Significance

This study highlights how the National Action Plan (2014) uses language to legitimize state authority in counterterrorism efforts. Applying Chilton's Political Discourse Analysis uncovers the ideological strategies shaping public perception and policy acceptance. The findings offer valuable insights for scholars and policymakers on the power of discourse in framing security issu

Additionally, broader socio-political factors influencing the policy's impact are beyond the study's scope.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the study, Pakistan instantly became involved in international counterterrorism efforts after the 9/11 attacks. It continued to play a vital role as a frontline ally because of its advantageous location, control over supply routes, and contributions to intelligence sharing (Ahmed, 2020).

The National Action Plan-backed execution of Operation Zarb-e-Azb had a significant incapacitation effect and resulted in a noticeable drop in violence. These findings hold up well and become much more apparent when considering the years following 9/11. The results support the claim that a coordinated military campaign and strong political support are crucial for a successful counterterrorism strategy (Rehman, Nasir, and Shahbaz, 2017). Although Pakistan has made significant strides in combating terrorism, the researcher notes that the bloodshed has persisted because the country has not been able to eradicate it. To date, there has been no clear vision for counterterrorism measures that successfully combine hard approaches and soft approaches (Feyyaz, 2020).

A study examines the achievements, difficulties, and ambiguities present in Pakistan's counterterrorism initiatives, drawing on a thorough analysis of pertinent subjects. Long-term military operations have been essential in dismantling terrorist organisations, which has led to a significant drop in terrorist attacks and the deaths they cause. However, there are also concerns about the duration of these benefits (Rahman, Sadiq, and Shah 2023). According to the other study, Pakistan is developing long-term counterterrorism plans and believes that combating terrorism is a crucial component of its national policy (Khalid, 2017).

According to the other study, Pakistan has been a key ally of the United States in the fight against terrorism (D'Souza, 2006). Pakistan has been conducting several operations against militant organisations in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and other parts of the nation since 2001 (Mir, 2018). One more study provides empirical support for the initiatives and preventive measures taken by Pakistani authorities, demonstrating that targeted, focused efforts can lead to a quantifiable decrease in terrorism nationwide (Mubashra, 2018).

According to the researchers, maintaining state security and combating terrorism in Pakistan while defending individual liberties and societal rights is a difficult task that calls for a well-rounded strategy (Baig et al., 2024). Javed (2007) states that terrorism is as old as humanity's innate desire to gain power in the name of preserving peace and security, making it a phenomenon that is not unique to the twenty-first century. Islamabad has experienced significant and ongoing acts of violence, extremism, kidnapping, targeted killings, and bombings since the 9/11 attacks. Another paper examines the effects of this inefficiency on regional, national, and global security, emphasizing how Pakistan's strategy's flaws have made it more difficult to address security issues both within and outside the nation. In its concluding analysis, the paper underscores the urgent need for Pakistan to formulate a more effective counterterrorism strategy, one that can comprehensively address the entrenched networks of militancy while ensuring long-term stability and security (Ahmed, 2014).

The War on Terror exacerbated militancy, religious extremism, suicide bombings, foreign intrusions, and internal displacement within the country, all of which endangered the lives of ordinary individuals, as this qualitative case study illustrates. The findings demonstrate that these impacts have had a substantial impact on Pakistan's social fabric, resulting in long-term instability. The study suggests improving coordination among the government, security forces, and intelligence agencies to ensure a cohesive and strategic approach to counterterrorism in Pakistan, thereby effectively combating terrorism and mitigating its negative impacts (Abbasi, Khatwani, and Panhwar 2020). The findings of one paper suggest that Pakistan needs to adopt stronger measures, including border fencing, improved law and order, and adequate resource allocation, to effectively counter terrorist threats (Irfan, Khan, and Naqvi, 2022).

3.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The research design for this thesis employs a qualitative case study approach to critically analyze the effectiveness of counter-terrorism policies in

Pakistan from 2021 to 2024, with a specific focus on the National Action Plan (NAP) and its implementation. The researcher plays a key role in the data collection and analysis process, ensuring the rigor and objectivity of the study. Data is collected through the analysis of government reports, NAP progress updates, parliamentary debates, security agency publications, and court rulings, supplemented by secondary sources, including academic articles and reports from policy think tanks. Content analysis and thematic coding are employed to identify implementation patterns, institutional coordination challenges, and the socio-political impacts of NAP during this period. This design enables the researcher to systematically evaluate the gaps between policy intentions and practical enforcement, providing a thorough and comprehensive understanding of the factors that have shaped the effectiveness of NAP in reducing terrorism and extremism in Pakistan (Abbas, 2015).

3.2 Data Collection

Data for this study is collected using qualitative document analysis, focusing on official government publications, NAP implementation reports, parliamentary proceedings, Ministry of Interior updates, National Counter Terrorism Authority (NACTA) reports, and security agency press briefings issued between 2021 and 2024. Additionally, judgments from Pakistan's Supreme Court and High Courts related to the implementation of NAP are reviewed to assess the legal dimensions and accountability in security operations (Yousaf, 2020). Secondary data includes scholarly articles, policy papers from think tanks such as the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies (PIPS), and credible news reports, which are used to triangulate findings and ensure validity (Abbas, 2015).

3.3 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research approach using Critical Discourse Analysis based on Paul Chilton's Political Discourse Analysis framework. The primary data consists of selected clauses from the National Action Plan (2014). Data analysis focuses on identifying metaphors, spatial framing, and cognitive strategies used to construct and legitimize state authority. The findings are interpreted to reveal underlying ideological and power structures within the policy discourse.

3.4 Data Analysis

This study adopts close reading to examine how the National Action Plan (NAP) discursively constructs terrorism, extremism, and national security in Pakistan.

3.5 Theoretical Framework

Paul Chilton's *Political Discourse Analysis* (PDA) is a specialized branch of Critical Discourse Analysis that examines how political actors use language to construct, maintain, and challenge power relations. Chilton (2004) argues that political language is not neutral; it is purposefully crafted to influence cognition, shape ideological positions, and frame social realities. PDA focuses on the interplay between linguistic choices and political objectives, highlighting how language functions as a tool for persuasion, legitimization, and delegitimization within political contexts.

A central feature of Chilton's approach is the integration of metaphor theory, spatial cognition, and cognitive framing into discourse analysis. He demonstrates that metaphors—such as war, journey, or family metaphors—play a powerful role in shaping how people conceptualize political events and actors (Chilton, 2004). His spatial models illustrate how politics is conceptually mapped using notions like "left–right," "center–periphery," or " them," which can be further reinforced through military language ("frontlines," "enemy," "defense strategy"). Such linguistic strategies influence mental representations, guiding public perception and political alignment.

Chilton's PDA is particularly useful in analyzing political speeches, policy debates, and media discourse. By examining how political actors employ metaphorical and spatial language, researchers can uncover hidden ideological structures and power dynamics (Chilton & Schäffner, 2002). Military language, for example, often serves to frame political issues as urgent threats requiring decisive, sometimes aggressive, action—thereby legitimizing certain policies or silencing dissent. Through PDA, such rhetorical strategies can be critically unpacked, revealing the

cognitive and ideological mechanisms underlying political communication.

4.0 DATA ANALYSIS

"Implementation of death sentence of those convicted in cases of terrorism" (NAP, 2014). It can be examined through Chilton's (2004) framework, which highlights how political discourse employs strategic language to legitimize state actions and influence public perception. The use of the term *"implementation"* carries a procedural and authoritative tone, framing the action as a legal and necessary fulfillment rather than a controversial or debatable measure. The phrase *"those convicted"* constructs a moral and legal distance between the state and the individuals, positioning them as fully adjudicated wrongdoers. This reflects Chilton's emphasis on the *legitimization* function of political language, where careful lexical choice creates an image of state authority acting within lawful and justified bounds.

From Chilton's perspective, the expression *"cases of terrorism"* activates a strong ideological frame that invokes fear, urgency, and moral clarity. By labeling the offense as *terrorism*, the discourse uses a high-threat category that cognitively positions the offenders as existential enemies of the state and society. This reflects Chilton's integration of *cognitive framing* and *us–them* spatial metaphors, where "terrorists" are conceptually placed outside the moral and political community, thus legitimizing extreme punitive measures such as the death penalty. In this way, the NAP statement employs concise yet ideologically charged language to reinforce state authority, rally public support, and reduce space for dissenting views on capital punishment.

"Special trial courts under the supervision of the Army. The duration of these courts would be two years" (NAP, 2014). The statement uses institutional and military framing to project authority, urgency, and exceptional legitimacy. In Chilton's (2004) terms, this aligns with the *spatial and power mapping* function of political discourse, where the Army—positioned as a trusted and disciplined institution—is placed at the center of justice delivery. The adjective *"special"* signals that these courts operate outside regular judicial mechanisms, framing them as extraordinary measures for extraordinary threats. This serves a *legitimization* purpose, presenting the deviation from standard legal norms as both necessary and justified in the context of national security.

The point introduces a temporal frame that mitigates potential public or institutional resistance. By setting a fixed time limit, the discourse conveys a sense of control and temporality, suggesting that such extraordinary measures will not undermine democratic norms indefinitely. Chilton's notion of *cognitive framing* is evident here—the language reassures the public while preserving the ideological "war footing" against terrorism. Furthermore, linking the courts directly to the Army reinforces an *us–them* dichotomy, where the state, backed by its strongest military institution, is positioned against an externalized, dangerous enemy. This linguistic structure strengthens public alignment with state authority and diminishes space for legal or human rights critique.

"Militant outfits and armed gangs will not be allowed to operate in the country" (NAP, 2014). The statement employs strong prohibitive language to convey authority, control, and zero tolerance. In Chilton's (2004) terms, this reflects the *legitimization* function of political discourse, where the use of categorical modal construction (*"will not be allowed"*) leaves no room for negotiation, portraying the state as an unequivocal enforcer of order. The nominal grouping of *"militant outfits and armed gangs"* combines two categories associated with violence and illegitimacy, creating a powerful *us–them* frame that positions these actors outside the lawful, moral, and political community.

The spatial reference *"in the country"* reinforces a cognitive boundary between a secure national space and external or internal threats. Chilton's spatial cognition model explains how such phrases map ideological borders—here, the statement projects a vision of the nation as a protected territory where illegitimate actors have no place. By coupling militant and gang actors together, the discourse unifies different forms of violence under a single threat category, intensifying the perception of danger and justifying decisive state intervention. This phrasing not only communicates a security policy but also reinforces a national identity that is safeguarded through the exclusion of perceived enemies.

"NACTA, the anti-terrorism institution, will be strengthened" (NAP, 2014). The statement employs

an institutional reinforcement frame that aligns with Chilton's (2004) view of political discourse as a tool for legitimizing state authority. The naming of *NACTA* (National Counter Terrorism Authority) and its description as *"the anti-terrorism institution"* works to establish the body as the central, official defender against terrorism, thus evoking trust and credibility. The passive construction *"will be strengthened"* shifts focus away from the agent acting and towards the institution's enhanced capability, presenting improvement as inevitable and unchallenged. This framing serves to assure the public that the state is not only responding to threats but also upgrading its capacity to neutralize them.

The label *"anti-terrorism"* functions as a cognitive trigger that activates a national security schema, aligning the institution's mission with collective safety and moral righteousness. In Chilton's terms, this creates a strong *us–them* dichotomy—NACTA represents "us," the protectors of the nation, while "them" refers to terrorist actors positioned outside the moral order. By using language that emphasizes enhancement rather than creation, the discourse conveys continuity, stability, and institutional maturity. This strengthens public perception of the state as proactive and capable, while also implicitly framing terrorism as a persistent threat that necessitates constant vigilance and resource allocation.

"Strict action against the literature, newspapers and magazines promoting hatred, extremism, sectarianism and intolerance" (NAP, 2014). It uses an assertive enforcement frame that aligns with Chilton's (2004) notion of political discourse as a means to project state authority and moral guardianship. The phrase *"strict action"* carries a high-modality, non-negotiable stance, signaling a zero-tolerance approach toward identified discursive threats. Listing *literature, newspapers, and magazines* as targets draws attention to the communicative channels through which ideological influence spreads, framing these media not as neutral information sources but as active participants in harmful agendas. This reframing transforms media into ideological battlefields, legitimizing state intervention in the communicative domain.

The grouping of *"hatred, extremism, sectarianism and intolerance"* constructs a cumulative category of moral and social threats, activating a cognitive frame that positions these discourses as inherently dangerous to national unity. In Chilton's terms, the language establishes an *us–them* dichotomy, where "us" represents the state and citizens committed to peace, and "them" are those disseminating divisive ideologies. By targeting publications rather than only individuals, the statement broadens the scope of responsibility, implying that the fight against terrorism extends into controlling narratives and symbols. This aligns with Chilton's view that political actors use discourse to define ideological boundaries, reinforce collective identity, and justify expanded state powers over information flow.

"Choking financing for terrorists and terrorist organizations" (NAP, 2014). The sentence employs a metaphor of physical restriction—*choking*—which, in Chilton's (2004) framework, functions as a powerful cognitive device to conceptualize the disruption of financial resources as a form of direct combat. This metaphor reframes economic measures into the language of force, aligning with a *war on terror* schema that equates financial control with battlefield victory. By targeting *terrorists and terrorist organizations*, the discourse constructs a unified threat category, reinforcing the *us–them* dichotomy where the state acts as a protective agent, cutting off the enemy's lifeline.

The choice of the active, dynamic verb *"choking"* creates an image of urgency and immediacy, evoking a sense of ongoing action rather than passive monitoring. In Chilton's terms, this reflects a high-modality commitment, signaling that the state is not merely regulating but actively constricting hostile capabilities. The focus on *financing* expands the battlefield beyond physical conflict to the economic sphere, portraying counterterrorism as a multi-dimensional effort. This framing legitimizes broader state interventions in financial systems and conveys that combating terrorism requires strategic disruption of all support networks, not just direct armed engagement.

"Ensuring against re-emergence of proscribed organizations" (NAP, 2014). The sentence uses the language of prevention and permanence, aligning with Chilton's (2004) view of political discourse as a means to project long-term authority and strategic control. The verb *"ensuring"* implies a guarantee of state action, conveying high modality and certainty,

while *"against"* signals active opposition. This framing positions the state not merely as reactive but as a vigilant protector, safeguarding the nation from potential threats before they materialize. The phrase *"proscribed organizations"* draws on legal terminology, framing these groups as already illegitimate, outside the law, and beyond the bounds of acceptable political or social activity.

The inclusion of *"re-emergence"* introduces a temporal dimension that acknowledges past threats while asserting control over the future. In Chilton's terms, this functions as both a *cognitive frame*—reminding the public of previous dangers—and a *spatial mapping*, where such groups are conceptually kept outside the national space. By focusing on prevention rather than confrontation, the discourse shifts attention to strategic, sustained vigilance, legitimizing continuous surveillance and control measures. This aligns with Chilton's idea that political actors frame threats in ways that justify ongoing state intervention, reinforcing an enduring *us–them* division between lawful society and banned entities.

"Establishing and deploying a dedicated counterterrorism force" (NAP, 2014). The statement uses institutional and militaristic framing to project authority, capacity-building, and decisive action. In Chilton's (2004) terms, the verbs *"establishing"* and *"deploying"* are high-modality action markers that signal purposeful, immediate, and organized measures. The adjective *"dedicated"* reinforces the notion of specialization and unwavering commitment, suggesting that ordinary security measures are insufficient for the magnitude of the threat. This framing positions the counterterrorism force as an elite, mission-focused body—conceptually aligned with the *us* side of the *US–them* dichotomy—which embodies the state's determination to confront and neutralize terrorism.

The term *"counterterrorism"* activates a strong ideological and cognitive frame associated with national defense and survival. Chilton's *spatial mapping* concept applies here, as the force is imagined as a protective barrier positioned between society and the perceived external/internal threat of terrorism. The combined emphasis on creation (*establishing*) and mobilization (*deploying*) portrays the state as both a builder of capacity and an active combatant, reinforcing a "war footing" schema. This not only legitimizes resource allocation and organizational expansion but also fosters public confidence in the state's proactive stance against existential dangers.

"Taking effective steps against religious persecution" (NAP, 2014). The sentence uses a proactive and moral framing that aligns with Chilton's (2004) view of political discourse as both a tool of governance and a means of identity construction. The verb phrase *"taking effective steps"* communicates purposeful and result-oriented action, implying capability and determination. The noun phrase *"religious persecution"* invokes strong moral condemnation and positions the state as a defender of fundamental rights and social harmony. This choice of language also functions as *legitimization*, framing the policy not as political expediency but as a moral obligation rooted in justice and equality.

From Chilton's perspective, the prepositional phrase *"against religious persecution"* creates a clear *us–them* boundary, where *us* represents the state and all religious communities entitled to safety, and *them* are the perpetrators of intolerance and discrimination. The discourse operates on both a cognitive and ideological level—it appeals to national unity while reinforcing the state's role as a moral authority. The focus on *effective* steps, rather than just steps, conveys high modality and a promise of tangible results, which strengthens public trust and signals seriousness. This aligns with Chilton's argument that political actors frame issues in ways that morally and strategically justify state intervention.

"Ban on glorification of terrorists and terrorist organizations through print and electronic media" (NAP, 2014).

The sentence "Ban on glorification of terrorists and terrorist organizations through print and electronic media" uses prohibitive and preventive framing that fits with Chilton's (2004) view of political discourse as a means of controlling ideological space. The word *"ban"* is a high-modality term that signals absolute restriction, leaving no space for negotiation or ambiguity. It positions such representations as morally and politically unacceptable, reinforcing the *us–them* dichotomy in which they-the terrorists are stripped of any positive symbolic value. By specifically targeting *print and electronic media*, the statement identifies and

delegitimizes the communicative channels that could normalize or romanticize extremist actors.

From Chilton's perspective, this discourse functions as both *spatial mapping* and *cognitive framing*. The ban symbolically removes terrorists from the realm of cultural legitimacy, ensuring they remain outside the conceptual boundaries of acceptable public narratives. The inclusion of both *print* and *electronic* media demonstrates an awareness of multiple spheres of influence, reinforcing the idea that the fight against terrorism extends beyond the physical battlefield to the symbolic and ideological domain. This aligns with Chilton's argument that political actors shape public consciousness by regulating not only actions but also representations, thereby safeguarding the ideological integrity of the state's counterterrorism narrative.

"Administrative and development reforms in FATA with immediate focus on repatriation of IDPs" (NAP, 2014). The sentence combines governance and humanitarian framing, reflecting Chilton's (2004) view that political discourse often blends policy with moral imperatives to secure public legitimacy. The pairing of *"administrative and development reforms"* signals both structural change and socio-economic improvement, projecting the state as capable, organized, and forward-looking. The spatial reference to *"FATA"* situates the reforms geographically, framing the region as a priority area requiring integration and transformation. By emphasizing *reforms* rather than repairs, the discourse projects a sense of progress and modernity, legitimizing state authority in historically marginalized spaces.

It introduces urgency and humanitarian concern, placing displaced persons at the center of policy action. In Chilton's terms, this functions as *cognitive framing*—humanizing the discourse to foster empathy while reinforcing the state's role as a moral and protective actor. The term *"immediate"* conveys high modality, suggesting a swift and decisive response, while *"repatriation"* implies restoration of both dignity and normalcy. This aligns with Chilton's argument that political actors use discourse to construct an image of responsive governance that is simultaneously addressing security, development, and humanitarian needs, thereby strengthening the *us* (state and citizens) versus *them* (instability and displacement) dichotomy in a constructive rather than punitive way.

"Communication network of terrorists will be dismantled completely" (NAP, 2014). This statement employs high-modality and militaristic framing that aligns closely with Chilton's (2004) view of political discourse as a tool for asserting state dominance and strategic control. The subject *"communication network of terrorists"* defines the enemy's infrastructure in explicitly operational terms, mapping it as an organized, threatening system rather than a loose association. This framing transforms the intangible realm of communication into a tangible target, legitimizing its destruction. The use of the modal *"will"* and the adverb *"completely"* signals absolute certainty and finality, leaving no room for partial measures or negotiation.

From a Chiltonian perspective, the verb *"dismantled"* evokes the imagery of deconstructing machinery or fortifications, reinforcing the *war on terror* schema where the state neutralizes the enemy's operational capabilities. This language also performs *spatial mapping*—positioning the terrorist network outside the lawful and secure communicative space of the nation. By targeting the means of coordination rather than only individuals, the statement frames the state as proactive, attacking the structural roots of terrorism. This aligns with Chilton's argument that political discourse often extends the battlefield into symbolic and infrastructural domains, ensuring the enemy is both ideologically and operationally marginalized.

"Measures against abuse of internet and social media for terrorism" (NAP, 2014). It employs preventive and technological framing, reflecting Chilton's (2004) view that political discourse can extend the conceptual battlefield into new domains. The term *"measures"* suggests organized, institutionalized actions, while *"against"* conveys direct opposition, framing the state as actively resisting a defined threat. By labeling the activity as *"abuse"*, the discourse positions the internet and social media not as inherently problematic, but as tools being misused by hostile actors—thus preserving their legitimacy while delegitimizing certain uses. This framing reinforces the *us–them* dichotomy: *us* as lawful users and protectors of technology, and *them* as terrorists exploiting these platforms for malicious purposes.

The phrase *"for terrorism"* activates a security-based cognitive frame, situating digital spaces within the

broader *war on terror* schema. The targeting of both *internet* and *social media* acknowledges multiple layers of communication networks, broadening the state's control narrative to include virtual and symbolic arenas. This discourse functions as both *spatial mapping*—treating cyberspace as a national security zone—and *legitimization*, justifying expanded state surveillance and regulation of online platforms. By framing these measures as necessary to prevent terrorism, the statement positions technological governance as an integral component of national defense.

“Zero tolerance for militancy in Punjab" (NAP, 2014). It employs absolute and high-modality language that aligns with Chilton's (2004) view of political discourse as a means of projecting uncompromising authority. The expression *"zero tolerance"* conveys a categorical stance that leaves no room for negotiation, partial measures, or exceptions, framing the state's approach as both decisive and morally justified. The noun *"militancy"* condenses a range of violent and subversive activities into a single, negatively charged concept, activating a threat frame that legitimizes strict enforcement. By geographically specifying *"Punjab"*, the discourse uses *spatial mapping* to identify a key territorial focus, signaling both regional prioritization and localized containment of the threat.

The combination of *absolute modality* and *specific spatial reference* creates a strong cognitive frame that positions the state as both vigilant and territorially strategic. The statement implicitly constructs an *us–them* dichotomy where the *us*—the lawful citizens and the state—must be protected from the *them*—militant actors—within a clearly defined region. This also functions as *legitimization*, suggesting that extraordinary vigilance is justified in Punjab due to either its symbolic or strategic importance. Such language reinforces public perception of the state as capable of targeted, high-intensity action while sustaining the ideological "war footing" central to counterterrorism discourse.

"Ongoing operation in Karachi will be taken to its logical end" (NAP, 2014). The statement uses progressive and goal-oriented framing that aligns with Chilton's (2004) view of political discourse as a tool for legitimizing sustained state action. The phrase *"ongoing operation"* suggests continuity, resilience, and a long-term commitment, positioning the state as persistent in its efforts to restore order. The geographic reference to *"Karachi"* employs *spatial mapping* to localize the operation, reinforcing the perception of a targeted intervention within a key urban center. The modal *"will"* conveys certainty and authority, ensuring the audience that the mission is not open-ended but bound by a clear trajectory toward resolution.

From a Chiltonian perspective, the phrase *"logical end"* serves a legitimizing function by implying that the operation follows a rational and sssssssssnecessary sequence of actions leading to an inevitable, justified conclusion. This cognitive framing reassures the public that the state's military and law enforcement measures are not arbitrary but guided by coherent strategic reasoning. The choice of *logical* rather than *final* or *complete* also softens the potentially harsh connotations of force, recasting the operation as reasoned and inevitable rather than purely repressive. This combination of spatial specificity, high modality, and rational justification strengthens the *us–them* dichotomy, positioning the state and citizens as aligned in a shared quest for order against disruptive elements.

"Balochistan government to be fully empowered for political reconciliation with complete ownership by all stakeholders" (NAP, 2014). This statement employs empowerment and inclusivity framing that aligns with Chilton's (2004) emphasis on political discourse as a means of shaping perceptions of legitimacy and unity. The phrase *"fully empowered"* conveys high modality, suggesting unrestricted authority and capacity granted to the provincial government. The geographic reference to *"Balochistan"* applies *spatial mapping*, focusing attention on a specific region historically associated with political tensions, thereby situating the discourse within a national integration framework. By coupling empowerment with *"political reconciliation"*, the statement frames the process as cooperative and peace-oriented rather than confrontational, appealing to a moral narrative of harmony and resolution.

The phrase *"complete ownership by all stakeholders"* constructs a cognitive frame of inclusivity and shared responsibility. This language diffuses agency across multiple actors, signaling that reconciliation is not

solely a state-imposed measure but a collectively endorsed process. It also performs a *legitimization* function, portraying the initiative as democratically grounded and representative of diverse interests. By framing reconciliation in terms of empowerment and ownership, the discourse softens the *us–them* divide that often characterizes security policies, instead reframing former oppositional groups as potential partners within the broader *us*. This aligns with Chilton's argument that political discourse can strategically shift frames from conflict to cooperation to achieve policy goals.

"Dealing firmly with sectarian terrorists" (NAP, 2014). It exhibits a high-modality and security-oriented frame, consistent with Chilton's (2004) view that political discourse often employs strong, unambiguous language to project authority and resolve. The adverb *"firmly"* functions as a modality marker, reinforcing the state's uncompromising stance and reducing interpretive flexibility. The term *"sectarian terrorists"* explicitly categorizes the threat, invoking both ideological (sectarian) and criminal (terrorist) identities. This dual labeling works as a *spatial and ideological mapping device*, linking the targeted group to broader security and stability concerns while also embedding them in a moral narrative of illegitimacy and social danger.

The statement performs a *legitimization* function by framing action against these groups as necessary for the protection of social cohesion and national unity. The language choice closes the possibility for neutrality or negotiation, reinforcing a binary *us–them* model in which the state and its citizens are positioned as the moral "us" against the dangerous "them." This framing not only mobilizes public support for decisive measures but also constrains counter-discourses that might call for alternative approaches. By employing compressed, categorical, and high-modality language, the statement reflects Chilton's notion that political discourse can condense complex socio-political issues into morally charged, action-oriented imperatives.

"Formulation of a comprehensive policy to deal with the issue of Afghan refugees, beginning with registration of all refugees" (NAP, 2014). The statement reflects Chilton's (2004) observation that political discourse often employs formal, procedural language to project control, rationality, and institutional authority. The term *"formulation"* signals a deliberate and structured governmental process, while *"comprehensive policy"* conveys inclusiveness and long-term scope, framing the state as both capable and proactive. By specifying *"beginning with registration of all refugees"*, the clause introduces a clear sequencing of actions, which serves as a *temporal structuring strategy* in discourse—presenting the policy as systematic and manageable. This step-by-step framing reassures the public of state oversight while subtly normalizing surveillance and regulation of refugee populations.

From a spatial and ideological mapping perspective, the reference to *"Afghan refugees"* identifies a specific out-group, potentially activating socio-political narratives tied to security, resource allocation, and national identity. While the language is less overtly adversarial than in other NAP clauses, it still positions refugees as a "policy problem" requiring state intervention, thus legitimizing administrative control. The procedural and bureaucratic tone functions as a soft power mechanism—minimizing overt hostility but embedding a governance logic that aligns with Chilton's idea of discourse as a tool for both persuasion and social ordering. By structuring the clause around rational planning rather than emotive appeal, the policy projects neutrality, even as it implicitly reinforces state authority over marginalized groups.

"Revamping and reforming the criminal justice system" (NAP, 2014). The statement employs Chilton's (2004) concept of *legitimizing discourse* by presenting state-led structural change as both necessary and beneficial. The repetition of similar action verbs—*"revamping"* and *"reforming"*—creates rhetorical reinforcement, signaling urgency and depth of transformation. This lexical choice frames the existing system as outdated or inadequate, thereby justifying intervention without detailing specific shortcomings. The lack of explicit agents (no mention of "who" will conduct the reforms) functions as a *passivization strategy*, which Chilton notes can depersonalize responsibility while preserving the perception of unified state authority.

It positions the state as the sole legitimate actor capable of modernizing justice mechanisms, thus reinforcing power centralization. By using technical and process-oriented language rather than emotive terms, the discourse appeals to rationality, projecting

governance competence. This aligns with Chilton's mapping function, where political discourse situates institutional reforms within a broader framework of national security and public trust. The absence of explicit timelines or measurable goals also reflects a strategic vagueness—common in policy rhetoric—which allows flexibility in implementation while sustaining public support through the promise of systemic improvement.

Findings

- The National Action Plan employs metaphorical and militaristic language to frame terrorism as an existential threat, legitimizing strong state intervention and exceptional measures.
- Spatial and cognitive framing in the NAP constructs clear *us–them* divisions, positioning the state as protector and terrorists as external or internal enemies, which reinforces national unity and justifies counterterrorism policies.
- The discourse strategically uses high-modality and procedural language to project state authority as both capable and morally justified, enhancing public trust and minimizing space for dissent.

Conclusion

The National Action Plan (2014) employs a range of political discourse strategies that serve to construct and legitimize state authority in Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts. Through metaphor, spatial framing, and cognitive structuring, the policy language positions terrorism as a clear and present danger that requires decisive and comprehensive state action. This linguistic framing reinforces a strong *us–them* dichotomy, aligning the state and its citizens against perceived internal and external enemies. Such discourse not only legitimizes harsh security measures but also fosters public support by presenting the state as a capable and morally justified actor in the fight against terrorism.

Furthermore, the NAP's use of high-modality and procedural language conveys a sense of urgency, control, and systematic governance, which strengthens perceptions of state competence and accountability. The framing techniques embedded in the policy discourse effectively narrow the scope for alternative narratives or critiques, consolidating a dominant security paradigm. This study highlights the critical role of language in shaping political realities. It underscores the importance of analyzing policy texts to understand better how power and ideology operate in counterterrorism frameworks.

Recommendations

Policymakers should adopt more inclusive and transparent language in counterterrorism policies to balance security concerns with respect for human rights, thereby fostering broader public trust and reducing alienation.

Future policy documents should consider addressing the complexities of affected communities by avoiding overly simplistic *us–them* dichotomies, promoting dialogue and reconciliation alongside security measures.

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