

Agenda-Setting Analysis of Media Representations: A Comparative Study of Islam and Muslims in *DAWN* and *The Times*

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Abstract—This study employs Agenda-Setting Theory to examine the portrayal of Islam and Muslims in two influential newspapers, *DAWN* (Pakistan) and *The Times* (United Kingdom). Utilizing a comparative content analysis, the research explores how media narratives shape public perceptions by emphasizing particular themes and attributes. The findings reveal a stark contrast in agenda-setting priorities: while *DAWN* foregrounds narratives of empowerment, resilience, and solidarity, *The Times* frequently frames Islam within a securitized discourse, linking Muslim identity to issues of integration and national security. Through the lens of first- and second-level agenda-setting, this study demonstrates how these divergent representations reflect broader socio-political ideologies, reinforcing or challenging systemic biases. Moreover, the analysis highlights how linguistic and thematic framing choices influence policy discourse, shaping public attitudes toward Muslims in their respective national contexts. By deconstructing editorial tendencies, this research contributes to the ongoing scholarly debate on media responsibility, cultural representation, and the role of journalism in fostering or mitigating Islamophobic sentiments. The study manages to underline the educative role of media in intercultural learning and policy development.

Index Terms—representation, Islam/Muslims newspaper articles, CDA, framing theory, agenda-setting theory

I. INTRODUCTION

The media's role in shaping public opinion and influencing societal discourse remains foundational in communication studies. Agenda-Setting Theory, a seminal framework introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972), posits that the media shapes not what people think, but what they think about. By determining the salience of specific issues, media coverage directs public attention and prioritizes societal concerns. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) argue that media systems not only reflect societal norms but actively shape public understanding of social issues. McQuail (2010) emphasizes the importance of mass communication theories in unpacking the relationship between media narratives and societal perceptions. This study employs Agenda-Setting Theory to investigate how two leading newspapers, *DAWN* (Pakistan) and *The Times* (United Kingdom), construct and propagate narratives about Islam and Muslims.

Islamophobia, a pervasive global issue, underscores the critical importance of analyzing media representations of Muslims (Jaber, 2022). Research has consistently demonstrated that securitized narratives in Western media frequently link Islam to extremism, perpetuating fear and prejudice (Ahmed & Matthes, 2017; Hajjat & Mohammed, 2023). Said (1997) covering Islam critiques how Western media often portrays Islam through the lens of violence and cultural antagonism. Richardson's (2004) analysis of British broadsheets similarly highlights a systemic tendency to frame Muslims as societal threats. In contrast, Poole's (2002) research on British Muslims suggests that inclusive and counter-stereotypical narratives have the potential to mitigate these biases and foster societal cohesion.

Agenda-Setting Theory is particularly pertinent in analyzing these narratives. At its first level, the theory examines which issues receive coverage, establishing their prominence in public discourse. At the second level, it explores how these issues are framed, influencing perceptions through the emphasis on specific attributes (McCombs, 2005; Ghanem, 1997; Weaver, 2007). Entman (1993) elucidates the framing process as one that selects and accentuates certain facets of reality to construct a preferred interpretation. For instance, the securitization of Islam—a framing mechanism depicting Islam as an existential threat—has often dominated Western media narratives, reinforcing prejudices and legitimizing exclusionary policies (Jackson, 2007). Conversely, empowerment narratives, which emphasize agency, resilience, and achievements, serve as a counterpoint, challenging reductive portrayals and promoting inclusivity (Ahmed, 2012).

Islamophobia, defined as irrational fear or hostility toward Islam and Muslims, manifests through discriminatory practices, stereotyping, and exclusionary policies (Said, 1997; Richardson, 2012). These portrayals perpetuate systemic

biases, often reinforcing societal anxieties and deepening divisions. By contrast, narratives focusing on interfaith collaboration, cultural contributions, and social solidarity hold the potential to challenge stereotypes and promote more inclusive discourse.

The application of the Agenda-Setting Theory allows for a critical examination of the prioritization and framing of issues related to Islam and Muslims. In the case of DAWN, this study identifies a recurring emphasis on empowerment and solidarity. The newspaper frequently underscores the resilience of Muslim communities and highlights success stories that counteract prevailing stereotypes. For instance, articles celebrating the achievements of Muslim women in science, politics, and business serve as a deliberate counter-narrative to global Islamophobic discourses. These narratives align with Entman's (1993) framing approach by selecting elements of reality that promote a more inclusive and constructive representation of Islam.

Conversely, The Times often frames issues related to Islam within a securitized and integration-focused paradigm. This tendency reflects broader Western media patterns that associate Muslim communities with challenges of assimilation and radicalization (Poole & Richardson, 2010; Ahmed & Matthes, 2017). By emphasizing stories of national security concerns and cultural clashes, The Times reinforces a perception of Muslims as "the other," perpetuating societal divisions (Van Dijk, 1998). Jackson's (2007) work on securitization elucidates how such narratives construct Muslims as existential threats, legitimizing policies and practices that marginalize these communities.

This study seeks to address these dynamics by analyzing DAWN's emphasis on empowerment alongside The Times' securitized portrayals (Morey & Yaqin, 2011). By juxtaposing these divergent narratives, the research highlights the socio-political contexts that influence editorial decisions. The contrasting media environments in Pakistan and the United Kingdom provide a unique lens to understand how cultural and political frameworks shape representations of Islam and Muslims.

The objectives of this research are twofold. First, it explores how DAWN and The Times construct narratives about Islam and Muslims through agenda-setting and framing. Second, it examines how these narratives reflect and reinforce broader socio-political discourses within their respective contexts. By focusing on two distinct national settings, this study uncovers the ideological and editorial biases that underpin media coverage of Islam (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996; McQuail, 2010). This approach offers a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between media narratives, public perceptions, and policymaking.

Entman's (1993) framing theory provides a lens to interpret how these narratives are constructed and disseminated, while Gamson and Modigliani's (1989) work emphasizes the role of frames in shaping public attitudes. By examining the interrelationship between agenda-setting and framing, this study offers a nuanced analysis of how media representations influence societal perceptions of Islam and Muslims. These insights are particularly relevant for policymakers, media practitioners, and scholars seeking to address the pervasive impact of Islamophobia in contemporary discourse.

By employing Agenda-Setting and Framing Theories, this research bridges gaps in existing literature and highlights how editorial choices can perpetuate systemic biases or promote inclusive narratives (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Ghanem, 1997). The comparative analysis of DAWN and The Times contributes to a broader understanding of the media's role in shaping societal attitudes and underscores the importance of fostering equitable and representative media practices.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Agenda-Setting Theory forms the foundational framework for this research, offering a comprehensive analytical lens to evaluate how media influences public consciousness and sociopolitical discourse. First introduced by McCombs and Shaw (1972), the theory asserts that while the media does not dictate what individuals think, it profoundly shapes what they think about by selectively amplifying particular issues. This concept is operationalized at two distinct levels: the first focuses on determining the prominence of topics within public discourse, while the second examines how attributes or characteristics of these topics are emphasized to influence interpretation (Ghanem, 1997). Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) further refine this model, emphasizing that these levels function in tandem to shape both awareness and evaluative frameworks among audiences.

At the first level, the media spotlights specific topics, effectively directing public attention and shaping societal priorities. Poole (2002) observes that these editorial decisions are far from neutral, reflecting sociopolitical agendas aligned with institutional ideologies. Ahmed and Matthes (2017) argue that Western media frequently prioritizes narratives tied to national security, reinforcing dominant discourses that often depict Muslims as potential threats (Poole, 2018). Conversely, DAWN emphasizes narratives of resilience and global solidarity, reflecting its cultural and geopolitical positioning. For example, its coverage often features international collaborations aimed at combating Islamophobia, promoting a collective action narrative. In contrast, The Times demonstrates a preference for securitized frames, portraying Muslims within the contexts of cultural assimilation challenges and perceived threats to national stability. Van Gorp (2007) contends that such patterns in agenda-setting reflect broader sociocultural dynamics that shape editorial decisions.

The second level of Agenda-Setting Theory introduces framing as a pivotal mechanism through which media narratives shape audience perceptions. Entman (1993) defines framing as the process of selecting certain aspects of reality and magnifying their salience to encourage particular interpretations. Richardson (2004) extends this concept, emphasizing that frames are constructed through deliberate linguistic and thematic choices, embedding ideological subtexts within media narratives. DAWN, for instance, frequently employs empowerment frames, showcasing stories of Muslim achievements in fields such as education, science, and politics. Morey and Yaqin (2011) argue that such representations actively counter Islamophobic stereotypes and foster narratives of agency and inclusion. Conversely, The Times relies heavily on securitization frames, associating Islam with extremism and societal disruption. Shaheen (2003) notes that these frames reinforce stereotypes by perpetuating associations between Islam and conflict, thereby sustaining systemic biases within public discourse.

Framing theory provides further insights into how these narratives influence public attitudes and policymaking (Bennett & Entman, 2001). Gamson and Modigliani (1989) conceptualize frames as "interpretative packages" that structure how audiences perceive complex issues. For example, DAWN frames Muslim communities as proactive agents of change, constructing narratives that challenge reductive portrayals and emphasize resilience. In contrast, The Times frequently adopts "problem frames," casting Muslim integration as a contentious issue tied to societal tension. Jackson (2007) underscores that such frames not only shape public attitudes but also inform policy decisions, legitimizing exclusionary practices under the guise of national security.

Securitization theory, as articulated by Jackson (2007), offers a critical extension to the framing process. This theory posits that securitized narratives construct existential threats, often portraying Muslims as dangers necessitating extraordinary measures. Akbarzadeh and Smith (2005) highlight how these narratives perpetuate systemic inequalities, legitimizing discriminatory policies under the pretext of safeguarding societal stability. On the contrary, DAWN disrupts these dominant narratives by framing Islamophobia as a global human rights issue requiring collective action, as noted by Karim (2006). By promoting solidarity and interfaith collaboration, DAWN provides a counterbalance to the exclusionary narratives often perpetuated by Western media.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) complements agenda-setting and framing theories by uncovering the ideological underpinnings of media narratives. Van Dijk (1995) emphasizes that CDA reveals the implicit power dynamics embedded within text and discourse, shedding light on how media constructs and sustains societal hierarchies. Wodak and Meyer (2001) build on this, suggesting that CDA is instrumental in deconstructing the ideological structures underpinning media representations. Fairclough (2003) highlights CDA's methodological value in analyzing how DAWN and The Times construct narratives about Islam and Muslims, exploring both explicit content and implicit subtexts that shape public understanding.

By synthesizing agenda-setting, framing, and critical discourse analysis, this research establishes a multifaceted framework for examining the divergent narratives of DAWN and The Times. Moore et al. (2008) underscore the importance of analyzing media representations within the context of Islamophobia, asserting that such analyses illuminate the media's role in perpetuating or challenging stereotypes. Shoemaker and Reese (1996) emphasize that understanding these processes provides critical insights into how media narratives influence societal attitudes and inform policymaking. This theoretical synthesis offers a robust foundation for investigating the interplay between media, public perceptions, and sociopolitical structures.

The implications of this framework extend beyond theoretical inquiry, offering practical insights for policymakers and media practitioners. Scheufele and Tewksbury (2007) argue that understanding framing and agenda-setting is crucial for developing communication strategies that foster inclusivity and counteract prejudice. Van Gorp (2007) further suggests that media practitioners can adopt alternative frames to challenge dominant narratives and promote social cohesion. By critically analyzing the editorial approaches of DAWN and The Times, this research contributes to a broader understanding of the media's role in shaping public discourse, highlighting actionable pathways toward equitable and representative media practices.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study mainly employs a qualitative research design, integrating qualitative content analysis with quantitative metrics to examine how DAWN and The Times construct narratives about Islam and Muslims. This approach facilitates a comprehensive exploration of thematic and structural elements in media texts while providing measurable insights into patterns of coverage, framing, and prominence.

A. Data Collection

The analyzed articles span from 2016 to 2024, a period marked by pivotal global and regional events shaping discourse about Islam and Muslims. Key events include the 2016 Brexit referendum, which intensified debates on immigration and multiculturalism (Goodwin & Heath, 2016). The 2017 U.S. travel ban targeting Muslim-majority countries, exemplifying institutional Islamophobia (Aziz, 2024) and the global refugee crisis, particularly the influx of Syrian refugees, which amplified narratives of security and cultural integration (Betts, 2016). Concurrently, the rise of populism and far-right ideologies in Europe and North America heightened anti-Muslim rhetoric in political and media discourses (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). These developments coincided with increased media focus on terrorism, systemic

discrimination, and cultural tensions, providing a rich context for analyzing the evolving narratives during this transformative period.

B. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The article selection process began with an initial data set of 500 articles, refined through purposive sampling guided by stringent inclusion and exclusion criteria. This rigorous process resulted in a final data set of 44 articles, with 22 from DAWN and 22 from The Times.

Inclusion Criteria:

Articles explicitly discussing Islamophobia, radicalization, integration, or cultural identity were prioritized for inclusion.

Narratives addressing societal and policy implications, such as terrorism, multiculturalism, and systemic discrimination, were also considered.

Balanced portrayals of Muslims, encompassing both positive and negative representations, were included to capture a diverse range of perspectives.

Opinion pieces, editorials, and news reports were selected to ensure a wide narrative scope.

Exclusion Criteria:

Articles unrelated to Islam or Muslims—such as generic political news lacking thematic relevance—were excluded.

Brief articles under 200 words, which lacked analytical depth, were also omitted.

Duplicate coverage was removed, retaining only the most detailed or impactful articles.

Non-English articles were excluded to maintain linguistic consistency in the analysis.

Boolean search strategies were employed, using keywords like “Islamophobia,” “radicalization,” “integration,” and “cultural identity” to ensure precision. Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT) further refined these searches by excluding irrelevant content.

These methodologies, drawing from Ahmed and Matthes (2017) and Creswell and Poth (2018), ensured thematic richness and methodological rigour in the selected data set.

C. Research Questions

The study answers the following research questions:

1. How do DAWN and The Times prioritize issues related to Islam and Muslims through their coverage?
2. What linguistic and ideological patterns emerge in their representations?
3. How do these patterns influence societal perceptions and policy-making in Pakistan and the United Kingdom?

These questions are pivotal in unpacking the broader implications of media framing for interfaith relations and societal cohesion. While DAWN often serves as a platform for narratives of empowerment and solidarity, The Times frequently situates Islam-related issues within a securitized framework. Such distinctions underscore the power of media to shape public discourse and highlight the potential for agenda-setting practices to either reinforce systemic biases or challenge prevailing stereotypes.

D. Qualitative Content Analysis

The qualitative analysis was guided by deductive coding frameworks rooted in Agenda-Setting and Framing Theories. Articles were systematically categorized into three thematic domains:

Islamophobia: Instances of bias, stereotyping, or exclusionary narratives.

Empowerment: Coverage emphasizing resilience, agency, or success within Muslim communities.

Socio-Political Challenges: Narratives addressing systemic barriers, integration efforts, or policy implications.

The coding process adhered to protocols established by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Hsieh and Shannon (2005), ensuring consistency and reliability. Two independent coders analyzed the data, achieving an inter-coder reliability score of 0.85, indicative of strong agreement and analytical rigour. This approach facilitated a nuanced understanding of thematic construction and framing dynamics.

E. Quantitative Metrics

Quantitative analysis complemented the qualitative findings by providing measurable insights into media representation patterns.

Key metrics included:

Frequency of Coverage: Quantifying the number of articles addressing each thematic category.

Prominence: Analyzing placement across front pages, editorial sections, and secondary sections.

Linguistic Features: Conducting word frequency and sentiment analysis to identify recurring terms and dominant frames.

This quantitative layer enabled the identification of both overt trends and subtle patterns, enriching the overall analysis.

F. Justification for Qualitative and Quantitative Metrics Approach

The qualitative and quantitative metrics design integrates depth and breadth in analyzing media narratives. Qualitative content analysis captures nuanced framing, while quantitative metrics reveal generalizable patterns. This

triangulation aligns with Krippendorff's (2004) and Neuendorf's (2017) recommendations for enhancing methodological validity and reliability. By synthesizing these approaches, the study achieves a more holistic understanding of how media influences public discourse on Islam and Muslims.

By adhering to established qualitative and quantitative metrics research principles, this methodology provides a strong foundation for analyzing media representations of Islam and Muslims.

IV. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This section is divided into three thematic areas: Islamophobia, empowerment, and socio-political challenges. The findings are based on an analysis of 44 articles—22 each from DAWN and The Times—to explore how these newspapers frame narratives about Islam and Muslims. The analysis is contextualized within Agenda-Setting and Framing Theories, focusing on the salience and attributes assigned to Islam-related coverage, as well as the broader ideological implications of these portrayals.

A. Islamophobia

The issue of Islamophobia is addressed in both newspapers, yet their framing and focus diverge significantly. The Times frequently constructs Islamophobia within a security framework, portraying Muslims as potential threats to national stability. The securitization of Islam is evident in headlines such as "Radicalized Muslim youths pose a growing danger to the UK" (The Times, 2022), which reinforces a narrative that equates Islam with extremism and societal discord (Jacobsen, 2011). These articles often appear on front pages or in national security sections, reinforcing their high salience and shaping public discourse through agenda-setting mechanisms. The consistent focus on radicalization narratives at the first level of Agenda-Setting Theory signals an editorial prioritization that overshadows alternative representations of Muslim identity.

By contrast, DAWN presents Islamophobia as a global issue rooted in systemic discrimination rather than a domestic security concern. Coverage frequently highlights Western policies, hate crimes, and socio-political discrimination against Muslims. For example, the article "World Day to Combat Islamophobia Observed" (DAWN, 2021) positions Islamophobia as a human rights violation, calling for international solidarity and institutional reform. This framing shifts the discourse from threat perception to victimhood and resistance, aligning with second-level Agenda-Setting Theory, which emphasizes the attributes and contextual framing of an issue. Articles in DAWN often feature terms such as "solidarity," "resilience," and "global action," fostering a collective identity that counters Islamophobic narratives (Akbarzadeh & Smith, 2005).

Critical Theoretical Insights

First-Level Agenda-Setting: The Times assigns high salience to terrorism-related issues, influencing public fears and reinforcing negative stereotypes. The repetitive focus on security concerns constructs Islam as a potential threat, shaping the public's cognitive associations between Muslim identity and radicalization. This strategic placement of articles in high-visibility sections ensures that security-related concerns dominate the media landscape, leaving little space for counter-narratives that depict Muslims in neutral or positive contexts.

Second-Level Agenda-Setting: DAWN adopts a counter-framing approach, where Islamophobia is framed as a global injustice requiring collective intervention. Through the recurrent use of themes such as discrimination, resilience, and cultural integrity, DAWN fosters empathy and an awareness of structural biases against Islam and Muslims. By framing Islamophobia within a human rights discourse, it challenges the security-driven narrative of The Times, seeking to shift public perception from fear to solidarity.

These divergent approaches reflect broader socio-political influences. The editorial stance of The Times is shaped by post-Brexit anxieties, rising nationalist rhetoric, and migration concerns, where Islamophobia becomes intertwined with debates on national identity and security (Goodwin & Heath, 2016). Meanwhile, DAWN aligns its discourse with transnational human rights advocacy, particularly in response to Western foreign policies, travel bans, and increasing political rhetoric targeting Muslim communities (Aziz & Esposito, 2024). The ideological underpinnings of these contrasting frames highlight how media representations of Islam are shaped by geopolitical contexts rather than objective reporting.

TABLE 1
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ISLAMOPHOBIA COVERAGE

| Aspect | DAWN Example | The Times Example | Interpretation |
|--------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Topic Salience (1st Level) | "Global efforts to combat systemic Islamophobia highlight Muslim resilience" (DAWN, 2021). | "Radicalized Muslim youths pose a growing danger to the UK" (The Times, 2022). | DAWN highlights solidarity and systemic discrimination, while The Times focuses on security threats. |
| Attribute Emphasis (2nd Level) | Attributes of global bias and solidarity (DAWN, 2021). | Attributes linking Islam to extremism and terrorism (The Times, 2022). | Reflects cultural and political editorial priorities. |
| Contextual Focus | U.S. travel bans, global refugee crises (DAWN, 2021). | Domestic radicalization, security threats (The Times, 2022). | Contextual examples shape audience interpretations and reinforce narrative frames. |
| Linguistic Patterns | Words like "resilience," "solidarity," "global action" emphasize community strength (DAWN, 2021). | Phrases like "growing danger" and "radicalized youths" invoke fear (The Times, 2022). | Editorial choices reinforce distinct ideological and audience priorities. |
| Placement in Newspaper | Editorials or international sections advocating global justice (DAWN, 2021). | Front-page headlines highlighting security risks (The Times, 2022). | Placement reinforces the perceived urgency and importance of the topic. |
| Impact on Public Perception | Encourages collective resistance against Islamophobia (DAWN, 2021). | Reinforces fears about Muslim communities (The Times, 2022). | Frames influence societal attitudes and policy approaches toward Muslims. |

By comparing the agenda-setting priorities of DAWN and The Times, this analysis demonstrates how media institutions serve as ideological gatekeepers, shaping public discourse through selective coverage, linguistic framing, and thematic emphasis. While The Times perpetuates Islamophobia as a security issue, DAWN reorients the discourse towards resistance, resilience, and institutional discrimination. The implications of these findings extend beyond news reporting, influencing public sentiment, policy formulation, and cross-cultural relations.

These media portrayals do not exist in a vacuum; they contribute to real-world socio-political outcomes, shaping migration policies, counter-terrorism strategies, and public attitudes toward Muslim communities. As such, understanding these framing mechanisms is critical for addressing bias, misinformation, and the role of journalism in reinforcing or challenging systemic discrimination.

B. Socio-Political Challenges and Media Framing

The socio-political challenges encountered by Muslims are central themes in both DAWN and The Times, yet their presentation reflects fundamentally different priorities and contexts. DAWN highlights systemic barriers and discriminatory policies, frequently emphasizing the global manifestations of Islamophobia and their role in perpetuating inequalities. An article titled "Muslims and the Politics of Exclusion" (DAWN, 2022) critiques Western immigration policies and discriminatory laws, framing them as structural injustices requiring comprehensive reform. Karim (2006) contends that such narratives serve to expose institutional inequities while fostering collective resilience, a cornerstone for communities in Muslim-majority societies. Furthermore, DAWN broadens its discourse by addressing the global refugee crisis, portraying it as symptomatic of systemic neglect and discrimination, as seen in its coverage of displaced Muslims in conflict zones.

In contrast, The Times focuses on integration challenges, often framing these as cultural incompatibilities or failures within Muslim communities. An article titled "The Integration Debate: Bridging Divides" (The Times, 2021) asserts, "The failure of Muslim communities to integrate threatens the social fabric of Britain." Al-Natour (2020) critiques such narratives, noting their role in perpetuating stereotypes of cultural incompatibility while shifting the burden of societal tensions onto marginalized groups. This framing reflects first-level agenda-setting by prioritizing integration debates, sidelining systemic critiques, and reducing complex societal issues to simplistic cultural explanations. Additionally, The Times frequently employs securitized narratives, associating socio-political issues with national security concerns. Such narratives frame Muslims as potential threats, heightening public fears and reinforcing cultural stereotypes, as demonstrated in coverage related to terrorism and radicalization.

(a). Critical Evaluation

DAWN excels in spotlighting systemic oppression; however, Shaheen (2003) critiques that its globalized focus can overshadow localized challenges, such as sectarianism within Pakistan. This imbalance may make the critiques less relevant to local audiences and overlook local socio-political factors that also shape Muslim experiences. Conversely, The Times perpetuates exclusionary stereotypes by framing socio-political challenges predominantly through an assimilationist lens. Al-Natour (2020) emphasizes that this approach reinforces the portrayal of Muslims as resistant to integration, deflecting attention from structural inequities and perpetuating marginalization. Moreover, securitization intensifies Islamophobia by framing Muslim identities as inherently linked to threats against national stability.

Both newspapers fail to incorporate intersectional analyses critical for understanding compounded socio-political challenges faced by Muslim communities. Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) highlight that reducing multifaceted identities to singular narratives limits public comprehension of the diversity within Muslim populations. For instance, the challenges faced by Muslim women navigating systemic discrimination and cultural expectations remain under-examined in both publications.

(b). *Theoretical Tie-Ins*

First-Level Agenda-Setting: McCombs and Shaw (1972) argue that media emphasis on specific topics influences public perceptions of their importance. The Times employs this principle by prominently featuring integration debates, often framing them as urgent societal issues. For example, headlines such as "Communities Divided: The Integration Crisis" (2021) and "Assimilation or Conflict: A Nation's Dilemma" (2020) consistently appear on front pages and opinion columns, emphasizing cultural divides. This sustained focus directs public scrutiny toward Muslim communities, aligning them with perceived societal threats. Furthermore, this framing reinforces exclusionary attitudes by elevating integration issues while neglecting systemic barriers. Such narratives are embedded within broader post-Brexit anxieties, where debates around national identity and cultural preservation dominate the socio-political landscape, amplifying perceptions of cultural incompatibility as central to societal tensions.

Second-Level Agenda-Setting: Entman (1993) posits that the attributes prioritized within media frames play a decisive role in shaping audience interpretations and responses. DAWN operationalizes this principle by emphasizing systemic injustice and global solidarity. For example, articles critiquing Western immigration policies or highlighting global refugee crises frame these issues as manifestations of structural inequities, fostering empathy and advocating for collective reform. These attributes resonate with audiences by presenting Muslims as victims of systemic oppression and advocates for justice, encouraging support for inclusive policies.

Conversely, The Times amplifies attributes of cultural incompatibility and securitization, often linking Muslim communities with integration failures or security threats. Headlines such as "Radicalized Threats Persist Amid Rising Muslim Populations" (2021) and "A Cultural Divide: Britain's Integration Struggles" (2020) reinforce exclusionary ideologies by framing Muslims as societal disruptors. This approach amplifies public fears and legitimizes policies targeting cultural assimilation and heightened security measures. The differing attributes foregrounded by these newspapers illustrate how second-level agenda-setting not only informs public perceptions but also shapes attitudes toward policy-making, particularly in contexts like post-Brexit Britain, where debates on immigration and national identity dominate public discourse.

(c). *Broader Context*

The divergent narratives in DAWN and The Times reflect the distinct socio-political environments in which they operate, directly influencing their editorial priorities. DAWN, embedded in a Muslim-majority context, prioritizes critiques of systemic oppression and global Islamophobia, aligning its narratives with pan-Islamic solidarity and collective resistance. For instance, its coverage often highlights the impact of Western immigration policies and global refugee crises, portraying them as manifestations of systemic injustice. This framing resonates with geopolitical discourses within the Islamic world, emphasizing themes of global justice and mutual advocacy among Muslim communities.

Conversely, The Times, shaped by the socio-political dynamics of post-Brexit Britain, frames integration as the unilateral responsibility of marginalized groups. The paper's focus on cultural preservationism frequently manifests in narratives that emphasize cultural incompatibility, as seen in its securitized portrayals of Muslim communities. For example, its editorial stance often links integration challenges to societal tensions, reflecting exclusionary ideologies prevalent in Western political discourse. These differences underscore how socio-political contexts shape media agendas, influencing the salience and attributes of issues presented to their respective audiences.

TABLE 2
COMPARATIVE FRAMING OF SOCIO-POLITICAL CHALLENGES

| Aspect | DAWN Example | The Times Example | Critical Interpretation |
|--------------------|--|---|---|
| Framing Approach | "Muslims and the Politics of Exclusion" (DAWN, 2022). | "The Integration Debate: Bridging Divides" (The Times, 2021). | Contrasts systemic critiques with assimilationist narratives. |
| Policy Focus | Critiques discriminatory travel bans (DAWN, 2022). | Frames policies as responses to cultural clashes (The Times, 2021). | Highlights divergent perspectives on systemic and cultural factors. |
| Security Narrative | Collective resilience against Islamophobia (DAWN, 2022). | Links Muslims with national security risks (The Times, 2021). | Securitization reinforces public fear and legitimizes restrictive policies. |

This comparative analysis highlights significant disparities in media framing, demonstrating how agenda-setting influences public discourse and policymaking in Muslim communities.

C. *Comparative Implications on Public Discourse and Policy*

This section explores the broader implications of agenda-setting practices by DAWN and The Times on public discourse and policy-making, highlighting how the framing choices of these newspapers shape societal attitudes and drive political action.

(a). *Impact on Public Discourse*

The framing strategies employed by DAWN and The Times profoundly shape public narratives about Muslim communities. DAWN emphasizes systemic injustice and solidarity, constructing a narrative of resilience and collective advocacy. For instance, articles such as "Global Leaders Condemn Islamophobia" (DAWN, 2023) align with global

efforts to dismantle stereotypes and promote justice. Karim (2006) contends that such framing positions Muslims as victims of systemic oppression while simultaneously portraying them as agents of resistance, fostering empathy and inspiring solidarity. This approach exemplifies second-level agenda-setting, wherein DAWN emphasizes attributes of resilience, injustice, and systemic critique to shape audience perceptions of equity and justice.

On the contrary, The Times employs first-level agenda-setting to amplify narratives of integration challenges and security threats, placing these themes at the forefront of public discourse. For example, headlines like "Integration Crisis Deepens Amid Rising Tensions" (The Times, 2021) prioritize societal tensions, framing Muslims as cultural outsiders. Al-Natour (2020) critiques this framing, noting its tendency to reinforce exclusionary ideologies and foster societal divides.

While DAWN cultivates a narrative that encourages inclusivity and systemic reforms, The Times often legitimizes policies that prioritize cultural conformity and securitization. Richardson (2004) argues that such divergent framing practices reflect broader socio-political priorities, with DAWN advocating for global solidarity and The Times perpetuating nationalistic anxieties. Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that integrating these contrasting levels of agenda-setting into a broader analysis could provide deeper insights into their respective influences on public perceptions and policymaking.

The securitization of Muslim identities in The Times also contributes to policy frameworks that reinforce surveillance and exclusionary practices. The Prevent strategy in the UK, for instance, has been heavily influenced by narratives linking Muslims to national security risks. Betts (2016) argues that securitized media narratives often hinder inclusive immigration reforms by framing refugees and migrants as threats to societal stability. Similarly, Saeed (2007) observes that such framing translates into real-world consequences, leading to increased surveillance and stigmatization of Muslim communities.

(b). Policy Implications

DAWN

The systemic framing of Muslim-related issues by DAWN contributes to policy advocacy rooted in inclusion and equity. By highlighting global refugee crises and discriminatory immigration policies, DAWN advocates for reforms aimed at dismantling institutional barriers. For instance, its sustained focus on international Islamophobia has sparked conversations within the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), urging member states to take collective action against discriminatory practices. Modood (2007) underscores that such systemic framing aligns with second-level agenda-setting, wherein attributes of justice and reform influence policy discussions and drive collective advocacy.

However, Shaheen (2003) critiques that DAWN's emphasis on global narratives can sometimes obscure pressing domestic issues, such as internal sectarian tensions in Pakistan. Addressing localized challenges could further enhance the depth and relevance of DAWN's policy advocacy, ensuring a more comprehensive engagement with both global and regional concerns.

The Times

In contrast, The Times employs securitized narratives that influence policies reinforcing surveillance and control of marginalized communities. Articles linking Muslim populations to national security risks support measures like the Prevent strategy in the UK, a policy criticized for its disproportionate focus on Muslim communities. Saeed (2007) highlights that such securitized framing exemplifies first-level agenda-setting, where the prominence of security concerns overshadows discussions of systemic inequities and broader social reforms.

This approach creates a political climate that normalizes cultural conformity over systemic equity, as evidenced by the implementation of increased border controls and citizenship tests designed to enforce cultural assimilation. Inglehart and Norris (2016) observe that these narratives exacerbate societal fears, shaping restrictive immigration policies such as caps on asylum seekers and heightened visa requirements. Betts (2016) further argues that media-driven securitization legitimizes exclusionary policies, such as those restricting family reunification for migrants. These policies, informed by securitized portrayals, deepen societal divides and perpetuate the marginalization of Muslim identities.

TABLE 3
COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

| Aspect | DAWN | The Times | Implications |
|----------------------|---|--|---|
| Framing of Muslims | Victims of systemic oppression, agents of resilience (DAWN, 2023). | Cultural outsiders, security threats (The Times, 2021). | Shapes inclusive vs. exclusionary public attitudes. |
| Policy Advocacy | Promotes reforms addressing systemic inequities (e.g., refugee support). | Supports securitized policies targeting Muslim communities (e.g., Prevent strategy). | Influences equity-focused vs. control-oriented policymaking. |
| Narrative Focus | Systemic issues such as global Islamophobia (DAWN, 2023). | Integration challenges and security risks (The Times, 2021). | Highlights divergent socio-political priorities in media framing. |
| Agenda-Setting Level | Second-level: Focuses on systemic attributes and solidarity (DAWN, 2023). | First-level: Highlights integration and security as dominant themes (The Times, 2021). | Reflects contrasting methods of influencing public discourse and policy priorities. |
| Long-Term Effects | Encourages global solidarity and collective action. | Reinforces societal divides and exclusionary ideologies. | Shapes enduring public perceptions of Muslim identity and belonging. |

The comparative framing practices of DAWN and The Times reveal the profound influence of first- and second-level agenda-setting on public discourse and policymaking. While DAWN fosters solidarity and systemic reform through second-level agenda-setting, emphasizing attributes of justice and collective resilience, The Times amplifies security and integration themes through first-level agenda-setting, prioritizing issues of cultural conformity and securitization. This dichotomy reinforces exclusionary ideologies in The Times while promoting global solidarity in DAWN.

Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) underscore the importance of nuanced media representations in fostering inclusivity and dismantling systemic inequities. However, the contrast between DAWN's advocacy for equity-driven reforms and The Times' emphasis on securitized policies highlights the need for cross-media analyses to understand their broader socio-political implications. Future research should employ longitudinal methodologies and cross-cultural comparisons to evaluate the sustained effects of these narratives on both policy formation and public attitudes. Betts (2016) recommends further examining the direct influence of media portrayals on refugee policies, particularly in shaping the framing of migrants as threats or contributors, a perspective crucial for advancing equitable and informed policymaking.

V. DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study underscore the divergent approaches of DAWN and The Times in framing Muslim-related issues, addressing how second-level agenda-setting in DAWN emphasizes systemic injustice and solidarity, while first-level agenda-setting in The Times amplifies narratives of integration and securitization. This contrast has far-reaching implications for public discourse, such as fostering inclusivity versus reinforcing exclusion, and for policy making, as evident in DAWN's advocacy for global equity and The Times' alignment with securitized immigration policies.

By employing contrasting agenda-setting techniques, both newspapers shape societal narratives and policy directions. For example, DAWN's consistent coverage of global Islamophobia and systemic discrimination has contributed to international discourse on anti-Islamophobia policies, while The Times' securitized framing has played a role in influencing public perceptions that support counter-terrorism measures such as the UK's preservation strategy. These distinct approaches demonstrate how media agenda-setting can shape policy discussions and public sentiment in significant ways. The Times uses first-level agenda-setting to highlight integration failures and national security concerns, reinforcing perceptions of cultural incompatibility and threats to stability. In contrast, DAWN's second-level agenda-setting constructs Muslims as victims of systemic discrimination and as advocates for justice, promoting transnational cooperation and equity-driven reform.

However, while DAWN offers a strong counter-narrative to Western media portrayals, its empowerment discourse largely omits intra-Muslim challenges, such as sectarian divides, gender inequality, and political repression within Muslim societies. Articles focusing on Muslim resilience often fail to acknowledge systemic inequalities within Muslim-majority states. This omission creates an oversimplified empowerment narrative that lacks critical engagement with local injustices. As Shaheen (2003) and Poole (2002) argue, failing to address internal inequalities can weaken the legitimacy of empowerment discourses, making them appear selectively constructed rather than holistically inclusive.

Conversely, The Times' securitized framing presents Muslims primarily through the lens of integration difficulties and security concerns, though there are occasional instances where the newspaper highlights the positive contributions of Muslim individuals in fields such as politics, business, and science. Articles featuring successful Muslim professionals or community initiatives provide a counterbalance, albeit a limited one, to the dominant securitized framing, marginalizing discussions on discrimination, systemic barriers, and the positive contributions of Muslim communities. This agenda perpetuates exclusionary policies by aligning public attitudes with restrictive immigration laws and counterterrorism measures. However, the editorial choices of The Times should not be viewed in isolation from audience expectations and national security discourse in the UK, which have increasingly shaped how British media represents Muslim identity (Richardson, 2004).

This divergence highlights how media institutions function as ideological actors, reinforcing particular narratives that influence policy formation and social cohesion. While DAWN constructs a unifying global Muslim identity, it risks overlooking intra-community struggles. Meanwhile, The Times perpetuates a securitized view of Muslim identity, reinforcing policies that target minority populations and restrict cultural plurality.

Policy Implications and Editorial Constraints.

The impact of DAWN and The Times extends beyond public discourse to real-world policy shifts. The Times' securitized framing aligns with the prevention strategy in the UK, which has been shaped by media narratives linking Muslim communities to radicalization risks (Betts, 2016). Research indicates that prevention disproportionately targets Muslim individuals, reinforcing racialized security frameworks (Saeed, 2007). Similarly, The Times' focus on integration debates aligns with immigration restrictions, including family reunification bans, increased deportations, and tougher visa requirements (Modood, 2007).

However, DAWN also faces editorial and audience constraints that shape its coverage, much like The Times, though in different ways. While The Times operates within a Western media landscape that prioritizes national security narratives and public anxieties about integration, DAWN must navigate sensitivities within Muslim-majority societies where discussions on sectarian divisions, gender rights, and internal political conflicts may be constrained by cultural and political norms. Due to its editorial stance, DAWN effectively challenges Western Islamophobic narratives, but it may also forgo critical engagement with intra-Muslim issues that risk controversy among its readers. While it promotes

Muslim solidarity, it neglects intra-Muslim discrimination, sectarian conflict, and gender inequality within Muslim-majority societies. Its framing of Muslim resilience against Western bias does not engage critically with domestic power structures that also contribute to systemic inequalities. As Jaspal and Cinnirella (2010) argue, empowerment narratives that ignore internal hierarchies risk appearing selective rather than holistic.

Moreover, both newspapers operate within specific ideological and geopolitical contexts that influence editorial choices, and these contexts have evolved over time in response to shifting socio-political landscapes. For instance, The Times has adjusted its framing of Muslim-related issues in light of rising populist movements and heightened concerns over immigration post-Brexit, reflecting broader anxieties about national identity and security. Similarly, DAWN has had to balance its coverage between advocating for global Muslim solidarity and addressing regional political sensitivities, particularly as debates over religious extremism, sectarianism, and governance have intensified in South Asia. These evolving contexts shape editorial priorities, reinforcing certain narratives while constraining others. The Times caters to a British readership influenced by national security discourse, while DAWN's audience is more aligned with narratives of pan-Islamic solidarity and anti-imperialism. These audience-driven constraints shape how each newspaper presents its framing choices, reinforcing selective coverage priorities (Richardson, 2004).

VI. CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

This study highlights the multifaceted influence of agenda-setting in shaping both public discourse and policy formation, demonstrating the distinct yet interrelated ways in which DAWN and The Times frame Muslim-related issues, highlighting both the strengths and limitations of DAWN and The Times in their portrayals of Muslim communities. DAWN employs second-level agenda-setting, fostering solidarity and systemic reform, whereas The Times utilizes first-level agenda-setting, prioritizing integration and securitization. However, both newspapers face editorial and audience constraints that shape their framing choices. While DAWN counters Islamophobic narratives, it lacks critical engagement with internal Muslim inequalities. Meanwhile, The Times constructs a securitized Muslim identity, influencing restrictive policies on migration and integration.

Limitations

Although methodologically robust, the study acknowledges several limitations:

The focus on two newspapers may limit the generalizability of findings across broader media landscapes.

The 2016–2024 time frame excludes earlier and more recent developments influencing media narratives.

Reliance on keyword-based selection might omit relevant articles employing alternative terminology or framing.

Despite these constraints, the study's methodological rigour ensures credible and reliable findings.

Future research should examine the longitudinal impact of media framing on policy adoption, while also accounting for the evolving role of digital media trends and audience engagement. The rise of social media, online news platforms, and algorithm-driven content dissemination has altered the way audiences interact with media narratives, potentially amplifying or mitigating traditional agenda-setting effects. Future studies could explore how digital engagement metrics, such as shares, comments, and algorithmic visibility, shape public discourse differently from print media, while also considering linguistic limitations, as this study primarily analyzed English-language sources. The exclusion of non-English media may have led to an incomplete understanding of how these issues are framed in different linguistic and cultural contexts, using mixed-method approaches, including content analysis of media narratives over extended periods, public opinion surveys to track shifts in perception, and policy-tracing methodologies to establish direct links between media coverage and legislative or policy changes. Additionally, comparative case studies across different geopolitical regions could provide deeper insights into how similar framing strategies influence policy outcomes in diverse sociopolitical contexts. Additionally, the study's reliance on print media sources limits its ability to capture the evolving nature of discourse on digital and social media platforms, where agenda-setting and framing mechanisms may differ significantly. Future studies should integrate analyses of online news, social media discussions, and audience engagement patterns to gain a more comprehensive understanding of media influence. Furthermore, the editorial policies and potential biases of news organizations must be critically examined. While DAWN and The Times reflect distinct ideological orientations, their editorial decisions are also shaped by institutional priorities, political affiliations, and market-driven concerns. A deeper exploration of these factors could provide further insights into the structural influences on media framing. It will be crucial in assessing the broader implications of media framing on both public perception and policymaking, particularly in contexts where securitization and integration debates dominate national discourse. Additionally, expanding research into alternative media sources, digital platforms, and audience reception could provide a more comprehensive perspective on agenda-setting in contemporary discourse.

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