AUTHORITARIAN POPULISM IN DONALD TRUMP'S POST CEASEFIRE RHETORIC ON PAKISTAN AND INDIA: A FAIRCLOUGH'S 3D ANALYSIS OF TRUMP'S POST CONFLICT STATEMENTS

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Abstract

This study aims to critically investigate authoritarian populist strategies being employed by Donald Trump's ceasefire statements referencing India and Pakistan's armed conflict of May 2025. The data is qualitative, and it consists of all the ceasefire-oriented statements of Trump delivered in May and June 2025. The study has been conducted analytically, employing Fairclough's 3D model of CDA and the analysis has been conducted at three different levels, micro level, meso level and macro level analysis. The findings of the study indicate repeated use of textual strategies which add to in discourses. A repeated use of personal pronouns, skillful use of vivid imagery and alarming metaphors are being employed to brand his intervention urgent and crucial, the findings indicate centralization of power in himself and depict his persona capable of compelling the South Asian neighbors to stop the war. The finding also indicates the repeated attempts of hiding the agencies of Pakistan and India, an authoritarian populist strategy of portraying others as less important or the cause of problems. The study concludes that language plays key role in perpetuating authoritarian populism in conflict-based discourses, and it unpacks the strategies employed by the powerful leaders to claim success in securing peace. The study contributes to the broader debates on populism, authoritarian populism and the leveraging of trade as a disciplinary tool.

Keywords/ Phrases: Populism, Political Strategy, Discursive Practices, CDA, Discourse,
 Introduction

India and Pakistan are two powerful south Asian countries with a long border between them. They have a long history of mutual political antagonism, wars fought and numerous border skirmishes – all marked by their long-standing dispute over Kashmir. Pakistan and India both are nuclear states and any military escalation between them can have far reaching consequences not only for south Asia but for the world. Therefore, there have been multiple attempts at ceasefires, attempts to settle the dispute of Kashmir and peace brokering in order to get a safer LoC, the line of control, the border that both countries share along Jammu and Kashmir. Over the past few decades, since their independence in 1947 in fact, there have been multiple occasions of skirmishes, wars and diplomatic tensions among them. Multiple tensions have been diffused for the time being at least through various kinds of diplomatic and political actions.

The conflict of May 2025 between both countries, however, saw a departure from the way there would be mediations between them. This time, the US president Donald Trump claimed the credit for the ceasefire, downplaying any role of diplomats or state institutions. He reiterated his claims of brokering a ceasefire on multiple occasions – from posting about it on his social media site, Truth Social to talking on it in his speeches in Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The phrases such as "I brokered peace," "I stopped a war," and "I used trade as a policy for peace," were used by him multiple times thereby giving personal touches to what was achieved through diplomacy. The direct approach of talking to the masses fits squarely in the self-branding of Donald trump as a politically powerful leader. In doing so, he most often bypasses the traditional media while leveraging his influence directly through social media. In the ceasefire of IndoPak conflict, Trump portrayed himself capable of decisive actions. There was immense use of tropes for personal greatness and transactional diplomacy in his public

discourse. His discourse was also marked by downplaying the agencies of conflicting parties, India, Pakistan and other mediators like Saudi Arabia and UAE thereby portraying himself as a singular, authoritative populist. This moment, therefore, provides an opportunity for a case study to examine how discourse is used to construct power relations and frame ideologies in international relations.

Research Objectives

Key objectives that guide this study are as under:

- To explore dominant linguistic and rhetorical features that reflect and construct authoritarian populist ideology.
- To apply Fairclough's Three-Dimensional Model of CDA in systematically interpreting the text, discursive practices, and socio-political context of the speeches.

Research Questions

Drawing upon the objectives of the research, the study is aimed at addressing the following questions:

1. What are the dominant linguistic and rhetorical features present in Trump's statements regarding the Pakistan-India ceasefire?
2. How do these features contribute to the construction of an authoritarian populist persona?

Literature Review

Critical discourse analysis is not rooted in any single discipline, rather it is an interdisciplinary field where sociology, psychology and linguistics etc interact. It is aimed at critically evaluating any piece of text in order to identify the function that it does subtly or overtly. As Fairclough (1995) explains critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a way to investigate the presence of language, power and ideology in discourse. Language always perpetuates ideologies, sometimes overtly while many times subtly. These ideologies are shaped by the power relations. No one among the three is exclusive of others. Fairclough (1989) puts it that CDA is a critical tool for analysis; it is argued that: "Discourse is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them. In other words, it is socially constitutive as well as socially shaped: it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is constitutive both in the sense that it contributes to transforming it" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258; Gul et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2025).

Populism is a complex concept and is not as simple and easy to define clearly. However, there are a number of different definitions attributed to it by different scholars. Mudde & Kaltwasser (2017) defines it somehow like this "Populism is a contested and multifaceted concept, but at its core, it involves the dichotomous division of society into "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and often positions a charismatic leader as the true representative of the people." Another definition of what populism is, is given by Moffit (2016), "Populism is defined as a form of political rhetoric which (a) places a moralistic notion of 'the people' (or alternative signifiers) at the center of its rhetoric; (b) argues that there is a nefarious 'establishment' conspiring against the interests of 'the people'; and (c) declares the presence of crisis to generate political support." But here our focus is a sub type of populism which is Authoritarian Populism. This kind of populism is unleashed by populist political leaders in their language use and is characterized by the portrayal of themselves as sole savior of people. Hall, (1985); Wodak, (2015) argues, authoritarian populism, a specific subtype, combines this populist logic with authoritarian tendencies such as centralization of power, attacks on media and judiciary, and appeals to law and order.

Peace talks and the ceasefire declarations studies have made the discourse analysts identify recurring features such as the emphasis on leadership, framing outcomes as historic,

and the minimization of adversaries' contributions (Cap & Okulska, 2013). These rhetorical moves help the speaker position as an agent of peace and stability. As Chilton (2004) and (Ilyas et al.,2025) highlight political leaders often employ specific rhetorical strategies to frame their roles in conflict resolution and diplomacy. These strategies serve not merely to inform but also to legitimize their actions, claim moral authority, and shape public opinion. In post-conflict contexts, language is used to construct narratives of peace, victory, or transformation, often obscuring the complexity of underlying political dynamics.

Flusberg et al. (2018) note that Trump often constructs diplomatic success through personalization— "I did this," "I stopped that"—which aligns with the populist strategy of centralizing credit and simplifying international processes. As the analytical work on Trump's other political and global discourses exists, the application of 3D model of CDA will help analyze his speeches concerning the ceasefire on multiple levels. The textual analysis will focus on the analysis of his word choices and sentence structure as well as his rhetorical strategies. The discursive practice will help analyze how his speeches were disseminated (Twitter, Press briefings) and the sociocultural practice of the analysis will uncover the ideological functions of his discourse on the ceasefire.

Research Methodology

Fairclough's model investigates discourses through a three-layered investigative framework. First of all, the model runs the selected texts through the first level of analysis called Textual analysis. This phase of analysis is called micro analysis. It examines the textual features of the texts, i.e. the vocabulary usage by the text producer, its grammatical structure and the metaphors being used. The next stage in the 3-dimensional analysis is discursive practice, the analysis on meso level. This is concerned with the critical investigation of the ways the texts were produced, disseminated and consumed in the press, academic circles and in the public. The final stage in the 3-dimensional analysis investigates the social practice. In other words, this stage of analysis tries to unpack the ways the discourse perpetuates political or social ideologies as well as how does it challenges certain established concepts. All of these three levels of the analysis have been applied in the critical analysis of Donald Trump's ceasefire discourse.

The collected texts are stored in digital format and cataloged chronologically to maintain coherence and enable contextual interpretation.

The analysis of research data follows three levels of Fairclough's model:
a) Textual Analysis
b) Discursive Practice
c) Social Practice

Textual Analysis

Each selected text is first analyzed at the micro-linguistic level, focusing on: Lexical choices (e.g., nationalistic, Populism-oriented, or peace-oriented terms) Syntactic structures (e.g., imperative sentences, passive constructions, pronoun use) Rhetorical devices (e.g., repetition, binaries, metaphors) Modality and evaluative language (e.g., certainty, judgment) This level of analysis helps in the identification of dominant linguistic patterns and rhetorical strategies employed.

Discursive Practice

This level examines how Trump's discourse: References or reshapes other discourses (e.g., media narratives, historical conflicts) Constructs an "us versus them" dichotomy Labels his identity as a peace-broker and sole savior Reflects populist communication strategies (e.g., directness, emotional appeal, and self-greatness) The analysis pays close attention to audience targeting, intertextuality and the construction of legitimacy and authority.

Social Practice

Lastly, the discourse is situated within the broader socio-political and ideological context:

How does Trump's discourse align with or challenge U.S. foreign policy narratives? How authoritarianism and populism are ideologically reinforced? What implications does this have for global diplomacy, especially in South Asia?

This step connects the discourse with larger structures of power and global political ideologies.

DISCUSSION

Textual Analysis

According to Fairclough (2001), textual analysis in discourse analysis examines vocabulary, grammatical features of discourse, modality, use of metaphors, and rhetorical devices to uncover ideological tendencies. The statements of Trump have been analyzed in a chronological way and their analysis allows for a close reading of how they try to establish power relations.

May 10, 2025 – Truth Social

"After a long night of talks mediated by the United States… India and Pakistan have agreed to a FULL AND IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE."

Among many stylistics choices common to the Trump's social media posts is the use of unusual capitalization. The May 10th statement of him shows "*FULL AND IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE*" being capitalized. This strategic use of emphatic capitalization has been used to foreground the vulnerability of situations. Analysis of specific capitalizations is key to the textual analysis of discourses. Similarly, Trump has used emphatic adjectives "Full" and "Immediate" in order to describe the situation as urgent and total. To the populists, the use of such adjectives is common as they help them in crafting narratives that appeal to the public. According to Moffit (2016), this phenomenon aligns with populist tendencies of turning diplomatic negotiations into a matter of individual success.

May 11, 2025 – Truth Social

"I would substantially increase trade with both India and Pakistan…"

Trump's transactional framing of diplomacy has been foregrounded in this statement. There is a use of the conditional 'would' in order to convey both a promise and a threat. He positions trade as an important incentive for getting compliance. There is also first-person pronoun "I" being used which reaffirms his personalization of politics. Trump's use of economic discourse subsumes diplomacy as it is consistent with his America First agenda (Bacchi, 2020). The first-person pronoun "I" reaffirms his personalization of politics.

May 12, 2025 – White House Remarks

"Trade is a big reason why they stopped fighting."

Trump's causal construction reduces the complex decision of two independent states only to a single explanatory variable, trade. Such simplification of complex diplomatic or political phenomena mirrors populist rhetoric, which relies on direct causal attributions to claim personal success. The generic term 'big reason' has been used to minimize nuance and position Trump's economic leverage as the only decisive factor (Fairclough, 1995).

May 14, 2025 – Riyadh Speech

"My administration successfully brokered a historic ceasefire… I used trade to a large extent to do it."

The above statement of Trump has evaluative adjectives ("historic" and "successfully") used to elevate his role. There is once again the use of first-person pronoun "I" which serves to reinforce his centrality and a use of the phrase "used trade" shows trade as a weapon in making the conflicting parties agree to his demand. It shows how conventional diplomacy has

been bypassed through the trade. This Aligns with Lakoff's (2004) idea of authoritarian metaphors, where the strong leaders use tools to discipline others. There is also a symbolic weight in this statement, as being given in Riyadh, it situates itself in the broader Middle Eastern geopolitics.

May 18, 2025 – Truth Social

"India and Pakistan were on the brink of nuclear war. We stepped in. We got the job done."

The above statement of President Trump has a deliberate use of apocalyptic imagery, *Nuclear War, a discursive strategy deployed to heighten the stakes of his intervention*. There is also the repetition of brief declarative clauses (We stepped in. We got the job done.'). They echo campaign slogans and stresses decisive action. This phenomenon reflects Wodak's (2015) observation that populist rhetoric thrives on crisis dramatization.

May 21, 2025 – Campaign Rally (Florida)

"We prevented a war between two nuclear nations. That's called leadership."

A direct linkage has been developed in this statement by the text produce between the tragedy avoidance and the catastrophe. the performative phrase of "*that's called leadership*" is being given to assert authority while presupposing approval from the audience. Trump's collective pronoun we merge his leader's persona with the American people, enacting Laclau's (2005) idea of populist equivalence between leader and publics.

May 24, 2025 – Newsmax Interview

"One of the wars—India, Pakistan—I settled that up with trade."

Trump carefully uses colloquial phrases always in his statements. One such is in the above statement "settled that up". This trivializes an international dispute of high concern into the domain of everyday negotiations, thereby portraying himself as a sole dealmaker. The narrative expunges the agency of India and Pakistan, portraying them as passive actors controlled through trade leverage (Harvey, 2005).

May 28, 2025 – Press Conference

"I used tariffs and trade to convince both countries. They listened."

The obvious use of coercion (convince') depicts transactional politics. The use of past tense in his statement 'they listened' trivializes India and Pakistan as subordinate pupils who agreed to Trump's authority. This imitates Orientalist dynamics (Said, 1978), portraying Eastern nations as responsive only to U.S. commands.

June 3, 2025 – Truth Social

"They were ready to shoot planes, and we calmed it down."

Trump has used sensational imagery "shoot planes" and pacifist metaphor "we calmed it down". The sensational imagery has been used to show the gravity of the conflict, while the calming down of war by his leadership brands him a sole savior. The statements of trump on India and Pakistan conflict are mostly in informal register that mimics conversational storytelling, making the narrative accessible to populist audiences (Taggart, 2000).

June 6, 2025 – Campaign Stop (Texas)

"That war was going to be big, but I stepped in, and they stopped. It's because we have influence."

The use of evaluative adjectives "big" and first-person actions "I stepped in" dramatizes agency. He has used the phrase 'we have influence' to universalize his personal action into collective American might, conflating national identity with his leadership. This demonstrates nationalist populism (Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018).

June 10, 2025 – White House Briefing

"We called both leaders and made it clear — no war if you want trade."

Trump's above statement has used direct reported speech to dramatize the coercive bargaining process. He has also used the conditional 'no war if you want trade' exemplifying zero-sum transactional logic. This kind of discourse merges trade discourse with security discourse, reducing diplomacy to a commercial contract (Fairclough, 2010).

June 14, 2025 – Fox News Interview

"I told them—cut it out or lose business with us. Worked like a charm."

This statement of Donald Trump is styled like a parental command and therefore it positions him like the boss. The use of colloquial idiom '*worked like a charm*' belittles international politics into a casual anecdote, paralleling Trump's populist register. Usage of threats ('lose business') emphasizes economic coercion as the foundation of President Trump's authoritarian populism (Wodak, 2015; Gill et al., 2025).

Discursive Practice

Following Fairclough's (1995) conceptualization of discursive practice, this is the area of analysis that directly examines how texts are produced, disseminated, and consumed, as well as the interdiscursive and intertextual relations that contribute to their production and interpretation. Unlike the textual analysis of vocabulary, grammar or lexical choices, or even rhetorical strategies, discursive practice connects an individual's use of these linguistic forms to the wider institutional and media ecologies which sections of the text circulate within. With respect to Donald Trump's statements following the ceasefire in the India–Pakistan conflict, the discursive practice analysis illuminated a number of production strategies (i.e., how the statements were constructed, and how delivered), distribution strategies (i.e., the different spaces that the statements occupied: media, platforms, and so on), and consumption strategies (i.e., how the takes were interpreted by domestic audiences, and by international audiences). This section shall separately outline each of these strategies, while framing Trump's use of discourse within the broader set of dynamics associated with populist political communication, campaign performance, and media recontextualisation.

Trump's rhetoric appeared in various contexts, including social media posts on Truth Social, formal White House briefings, press conferences, campaign rallies, and media interviews. Each context influenced the style and tone of his statements as well as the intended audience.

On Truth Social, which became his platform of choice after his Twitter ban, Trump used a style marked by short phrases, capitalization, and dramatization. For example, on May 10, 2025, he wrote: "*India and Pakistan have agreed to a FULL AND IMMEDIATE CEASEFIRE.*" The capitalization had two effects: it emphasized the urgency of the ceasefire and mimicked online populist styles, where strong typography replaces rhetorical emphasis (Ott, 2017). By creating these posts himself, Trump bypassed traditional editing, managing both the message and its emotional impact.

At campaign rallies, Trump relied on repetition, humor, and interaction with the audience. On May 21, 2025, at a rally in Florida, he stated: "We prevented a war between two nuclear nations. That's called leadership." This performative phrasing ("That's called leadership") illustrates what Ekström and Patrona (2011) describe as political performance, where the leader portrays political successes as evidence of charisma. Rallies enabled Trump to personalize foreign policy, positioning the India–Pakistan ceasefire as his achievement instead of a result of bureaucratic negotiations.

White House briefings and press conferences lent an official touch to his claims. For instance, on June 10, 2025, he claimed: "We called both leaders and made it clear, no war if you want trade." Delivered in a government setting, this statement combined presidential authority with a simple message. Fairclough (2010) notes that this combination of institutional

language and populist tone is a prime example of interdiscursivity, where different genres mix to create new forms of communication(Qadus et al., 2025; Habib et al.,2024).

Social Practice

The 3D model of CDA given by Fairclough conceptualizes language use as ideologies promoting or a challenging tool. If a look is taken at Trump's ceasefire discourse, it is evident that he emphasizes his role being the problem solver and India and Pakistan are shown as war mongers. Donald Trump's post conflict statements are less of responsive statements, more of his own political image building endeavors instead. He also advances Nationalist vibes mixed with crisis inflation and that whole strongman leader image. All layered over old-school colonial ideas about who gets to call shots globally.

Donald Trump's discourse highlights the main logic of authoritarian populism: personalizing politics and the dramatization of crisis. Trump, throughout his ceasefire statements, stresses on the nuclear threat in India vs Pakistan war and his repetition time and again that they were *"on the brink of nuclear war"* (May 18, 2025), exemplify the authoritarian populist strategy employed by the political leaders in their discourses. According to Hall (1998), authoritarian populism is used as a strategy by the political leaders to gain consent among the masses by creating a state of crisis and then producing their leadership as being the lone solution. His very strategy has been adopted by Trump as he amplifies the risk of a nuclear clash, and this offers him a chance to legitimize his intervention both as crucial and urgent. This crisis performance of Donald Trump fits in the theory of Moffit (2016) that the populist leaders thrive on the crisis narratives while ensuring masses that their leadership has huge importance in solving the crisis. In the ceasefire context, Trump is not just reflecting on a ceasefire but he is trying to construct a narrative where his leadership stands alone between chaos and order.

Another dimension on which authoritarian populism relies is the erosion of institutional legitimacy in order to establish personal authority. Donald Trump repetitively frames the ceasefire not as a result of diplomatic negotiations or institutional endeavors but as the outcome of his swift and direct action. This said phenomenon is reinforced in his statements such as *"I told them—cut it out or lose business with us. Worked like a charm"* (June 14, 2025). Trump sidelines conventional channels of diplomacy as well as the governments of Pakistan and India in his ceasefire statements to prove that it is his own leadership that made the ceasefire brokering possible. This kind of personalization of power and achievement resonates with the Goodwin and Eatonwell's (2018) characterization of populism that the populist leaders centralize authority to sideline the formal diplomatic institutional efforts.

Findings, Recommendation

The micro level of analysis revealed various features in his discourse. It found out that trump has excessively used personal pronouns such as "I" and "We" to emphasize his unavoidability. He has used descriptive imagery on multiple occasions such as "shoot planes" and "on the brink of nuclear war" to present his intervention as the most crucial thanks to the gravity of situation. The repeated use of active sentences while hiding the agencies of India and Pakistan have been found to be the hallmark of his ceasefire discourse. This way he has personalized power while portraying the conflicting countries as commands obeying children. The study has found out that all his ceasefire-related statements given in May and June use linguistic features which reinforce his authority as a sole savior.

The discursive practice of the study revealed a mixed reaction to the ceasefire discourse. Conservative media outlets such as Fox News and other American channels termed Trump as a peace broker and guarantor of global stability, while the media outlets in India such as NDTV, Republic Bharat called out Trump for his authoritarian leveraging of trade and maintenance of U.S. political hegemony.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study mainly gave its energies to the critical investigation of authoritarian tendencies present in the post conflict rhetoric of Donald Trump on India and Pakistan. Authoritarian populism is one dimension in the broader political theory of populism and this study endeavors to unpack it through the deployment of Fairclough's critical tool of the CDA. Future research studies may be conducted analyzing West vs East Power relations while the same 3D model may be deployed or Van Dijk's critical approach might come to help. Moreover, this study has drawn its conclusions from the available data of reactions to Trump ceasefire rhetoric. The future studies may give focus to the audience-based analysis. And they may focus on surveys' conduction for a more objective critical conclusion. Finally, this study does not compare authoritarian populist tendencies of Trump with any other political statesman and therefore, there exists a room for the future researchers to take it forward by comparing authoritarian discursive strategies of Trump with other leaders, such are Imran Khan, Modi and Erdogan of Turkiye.

This research study was guided by the quest for the unpacking of populist ideologies in Donald Trump's Post-conflict ceasefire rhetoric on India and Pakistan. The statements of trump clearly show centralization of power, passivization of the India and Pakistan's agencies and portrayal of his role as indispensable and catastrophe thwarting. The study uses Fairclough's 3D model of CDA to critically analyze how his statements have authoritarian populism embedded inside them.

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