

Research Article

Islamophobia in Global Media Narratives: A Qur'anic and Prophetic Counter-discourse

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Abstract

Islamophobia has increasingly influenced the representation of Islam and Muslims through securitized narratives, cultural othering, and selective patterns of visibility, particularly within Anglophone Western mainstream media and political-media discourse. This article presents a qualitative and conceptual examination informed by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore recurring narrative structures that shape Islamophobic portrayals in contemporary media communication. The study analyzes widely recognized media discourse trends to illustrate how particular framing strategies contribute to epistemic injustice, reinforce suspicion, and attribute collective responsibility to Muslim communities. In response, the article proposes a Qur'anic-Prophetic ethical framework as a normative resource for evaluating media narratives and encouraging responsible communication. The framework highlights key ethical principles—including justice, verification of information, respect for human dignity, and moral witnessing—as evaluative standards for assessing media practices. Building on these principles, the study outlines practical mechanisms through which ethical guidance may be integrated into media environments, such as strengthened verification procedures, editorial review processes that assess stereotyping risks, and language guidelines for responsible reporting. While presenting Islamic ethical teachings as a constructive moral perspective for media critique, the article also recognizes the diversity of interpretive approaches within Islamic thought and engages potential concerns about employing religious ethics in public discourse. It demonstrates that many of the proposed principles align with broadly shared normative values such as truthfulness, fairness, and respect for human dignity. By linking critical media analysis with Islamic normative ethics, the article contributes to contemporary discussions on Islamophobia and offers a practical framework for promoting more balanced and accountable public communication.

Keywords

Islamophobia in Western Media, Critical Discourse Analysis of Media Narratives, Qur'anic-Prophetic Ethical Framework, Media Framing of Muslim Communities, Ethical Standards in Journalism, Human Dignity in Media Representation, Media Accountability and Verification Practices

1. Introduction

Islamophobia is increasingly analyzed in contemporary scholarship not merely as an individual attitude or irrational

fear, but as a discursive and structural phenomenon reproduced through political rhetoric, institutional practices, and

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media representation [1, 14]. Within this perspective, Islamophobia functions as a system of meaning-production that repeatedly constructs Islam and Muslims as inherently suspicious, culturally incompatible, or uniquely threatening. Media institutions play a central role in sustaining this system: through recurrent framing choices, selective emphasis, and narrative repetition, public discourse may normalize interpretive templates that attach danger, disorder, or extremism to Muslim identity [2, 8].

This article narrows its scope to Anglophone Western mainstream media and political-media discourse, rather than “global media” broadly, because wide global claims often weaken analytical specificity and invite legitimate objections regarding representativeness. The study focuses on recurring narrative mechanisms—such as securitization, homogenization, selective visibility, and civilizational othering—that have been extensively documented in Islamophobia research and observed across contemporary media environments [2, 6]. Framing theory helps explain how media select and make salient particular aspects of reality in ways that structure audience interpretation and moral evaluation [4]. Postcolonial analysis further clarifies how older Orientalist binaries continue to inform modern representations of Islam as the West’s civilizational “other” [13].

The article’s principal contribution lies in integrating this critical media analysis with a Qur’anic–Prophetic ethical framework, treating Islamic epistemology and ethics not as a confessional add-on but as a normative vocabulary for evaluating media responsibility. Specifically, the study operationalizes four principles: *adl* (justice) as fairness in judgment and representation [10], *tabayyun* (verification) as epistemic discipline against rumor and misinformation [10], *karamah* (human dignity) as recognition of moral worth and equality [10], and *shahadah* (moral witnessing) as accountability in public truth-telling and moral narration [10]. These principles are presented as practical evaluative criteria that can inform newsroom standards, journalism training, and policy-oriented media accountability, while remaining open to engagement with secular ethical frameworks that prioritize accuracy, harm reduction, and equal dignity [4, 16].

This study addresses three questions:

How do Anglophone Western media narratives reproduce Islamophobia through recurring discourse and framing strategies?

What ideological assumptions and power relations sustain these representations?

How can Qur’anic–Prophetic ethics be operationalized as actionable guidance for journalism practice and media policy?

The article is written for scholars of Islamophobia and media studies, journalism educators, newsroom professionals, and policy actors concerned with ethical public communication. While some readers may object that religious frameworks cannot persuasively guide media ethics in plural societies, the study argues that Qur’anic–Prophetic ethics can be

translated into publicly accessible standards truthfulness, fairness, verification, and dignity that complement rather than replace secular codes of journalism ethics [16]. In doing so, the article seeks to move beyond descriptive critique toward a normative framework that is both analytically grounded and practically relevant.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design using a conceptual, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)-informed approach to examine how Islamophobic meanings are produced and normalized within Anglophone Western mainstream media discourse. The study is interpretive rather than corpus-driven; it does not aim for statistical generalization but seeks to identify recurring narrative mechanisms documented in Islamophobia scholarship and evaluate them through a normative Qur’anic–Prophetic ethical lens [1, 2]. Texts and illustrative narratives were selected purposively based on recurring patterns of threat framing, generalization of Muslim identity, and discursive repetition across mainstream media contexts.

3. Theoretical Framework

Four interrelated theoretical lenses guide the analysis: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Framing Theory, Orientalism, and Securitization Logic.

CDA provides the main framework for examining how discourse constructs social “common sense” and legitimizes ideological hierarchies. It is particularly relevant to media portrayals of Muslims because it highlights how categorization, generalization, and presupposition can institutionalize suspicion and marginalization [5, 15].

Framing theory, on the other hand, explains how media make selected aspects of reality more salient, thereby shaping interpretation and moral evaluation [4]. The study uses this lens to analyze how Muslim identity is repeatedly attached to specific interpretive scripts, especially in contexts of security, immigration, and national belonging [9].

Orientalism is used to interpret civilizational binaries in which Islam is represented as the West’s threatening or inferior “other,” producing historical continuity between colonial knowledge hierarchies and contemporary media narratives [7, 13].

Securitization logic helps interpret how media discourse converts Muslim identity into a “threat category,” legitimizing exceptional measures such as surveillance and suspicion [6]. This lens clarifies how the politics of security becomes embedded in narrative representation, shaping how Muslims are publicly imagined.

4. Scope and Selection Criteria

The study focuses on Anglophone Western mainstream media discourse, which has played a central role in shaping post-

9/11 and post-2015 public narratives about Islam and Muslims [6, 8]. The analysis draws on purposively selected illustrative media narratives and recurring discourse patterns that have been widely documented in Islamophobia scholarship [2, 12].

Illustrative narratives were selected where Islam or Muslims were explicitly referenced as collective subjects rather than solely as individual actors. Particular attention was given to texts that employed threat framing or securitized language linking Muslim identity to danger, instability, or social disorder. The selection also prioritized narratives that generalized or homogenized diverse Muslim populations into a singular ideological category, thereby reducing theological, cultural, and political complexity. In addition, emphasis was placed on stereotypical patterns such as claims of cultural incompatibility or civilizational panic, especially where such representations appeared recurrently across different contexts and time periods. This focus on discursive recurrence ensured that the analysis addressed structural and patterned representations rather than isolated incidents.

This purposive strategy supports interpretive rigor by grounding the analysis in recognizable and repeatedly documented discourse mechanisms while maintaining a qualitative and conceptual research design [3].

5. Analytical Procedure

The analysis proceeds through three interrelated interpretive stages. First, recurring Islamophobic narrative patterns are identified across mainstream media discourse, including securitization framing, cultural othering, and selective moral outrage. This stage focuses on recognizing patterned representational mechanisms rather than isolated instances. Second, these patterns are interpreted through the study's theoretical lenses—Critical Discourse Analysis, framing theory, Orientalism, and securitization logic—in order to clarify their ideological function, discursive structure, and broader social impact [4, 5, 13]. Finally, the identified discourse mechanisms are evaluated normatively through Qur'anic–Prophetic ethical principles, which function as operational criteria for justice, verification, human dignity, and moral accountability in public representation [10].

6. Limitations

As a conceptual and interpretive study, this article does not claim comprehensive coverage of all Western media outlets or all possible Islamophobic narratives. Its purpose is to clarify recurring discourse mechanisms and offer a normative ethical framework for evaluating representation. Future research may extend this approach through defined empirical corpora, comparative outlet sampling, and systematic coding procedures for broader descriptive precision [2, 3].

7. Results

This section presents the main discourse patterns through which Islamophobia is reproduced in Anglophone Western mainstream media narratives. The results are organized thematically and interpreted through the study's analytical framework (CDA, framing, Orientalism, and securitization). Across the selected illustrative narratives, Islamophobia appears not only as overt hostility but as a normalized structure of meaning-making that shapes how Muslim identity is publicly imagined and morally evaluated [2, 15].

8. Securitization Framing: Islam as a Permanent Threat

A central finding is the frequent association of Islam and Muslims with danger, terrorism, and public insecurity. In many mainstream news environments, Muslims appear most prominently within security-related reporting, creating what framing theory describes as a repeated interpretive script in which Islam becomes symbolically tied to threat [4]. Such framing does not merely describe violence; it positions Muslim identity itself as a social risk, a discursive process consistent with securitization logic [6].

This mechanism is reinforced through lexical patterns that attach religious identity to violence in ways that are not equally applied across other groups. Scholarship on media discourse demonstrates how terrorism coverage has historically relied on labels and narrative shortcuts that link “Muslimness” to extremism while individualizing or depoliticizing other forms of violence [9, 12]. The result is an unequal representational burden in which Muslim identity becomes publicly legible primarily through suspicion and securitized interpretation [2, 8].

8.1. Cultural Panic Narratives: “Sharia Threat” and Civilizational Anxiety

A second recurring pattern is the portrayal of Islam as culturally incompatible with “Western values,” often framed through civilizational panic narratives that treat Muslim social presence as an existential challenge. Within this logic, Islam is represented less as a religion and more as a political invasion. Orientalism helps explain this discursive mechanism: Islam is repeatedly constructed as the West's threatening “other,” marked by presumed irrationality, authoritarianism, and moral inferiority [13].

This framing is frequently mobilized through simplified representations of “Sharia,” where Islamic law is reduced to punitive stereotypes and presented as a symbol of barbarism or tyranny. Such reductionism reflects how discourse can remove historical complexity and interpretive diversity, turning a legal-ethical tradition into a fear-object [7, 8]. Media explanations of Sharia often circulate through sensational language

that amplifies cultural fear while obscuring scholarly nuance and internal debates within Islamic jurisprudence [13, 12]. In framing terms, this pattern constructs Islam as a cultural “problem,” while positioning the West as the sole site of moral modernity [4].

8.2. Homogenization and Identity Reduction: Muslims as One Political Body

A third finding is the recurring homogenization of Muslims into a single ideological category. In this framing pattern, global Muslim diversity—ethnic, theological, political, and cultural—is collapsed into a unified threat identity. CDA conceptualizes this as a form of ideological simplification: discourse reduces complex social realities into manageable categories that support exclusion and control [5, 15].

Media narratives frequently generalize “Muslims” as if they share uniform political intentions, moral beliefs, or cultural behaviors, thereby transforming religious identity into a collective political suspect. Research on British press representation has shown how Muslims are often depicted through narrow stereotypes, with limited variation in characterization across coverage contexts [2, 8]. This reductionism allows the media to portray Muslims not as citizens with plural identities but as a social bloc whose presence requires monitoring and containment [12].

8.3. Selective Visibility and Unequal Moral Recognition

A fourth pattern is selective visibility: Muslim presence in media discourse is frequently amplified in stories that confirm suspicion (security threats, radicalization, social disorder) while being minimized in stories that reflect ordinary life, professional contribution, or intellectual pluralism. This creates a representational imbalance in which Muslims are “hyper-visible” as threats and “invisible” as complex social actors [2].

Framing theory helps explain how such selective emphasis shapes moral recognition: audiences repeatedly exposed to a limited set of narrative associations develop stable expectations that influence perception and empathy [4]. Orientalist structures deepen this imbalance by portraying Muslim suffering or vulnerability as less morally urgent or less publicly grievable than non-Muslim suffering [13, 7]. In practice, this can produce unequal hierarchies of victimhood, where Muslim communities are represented as suspicious even when they are victims of violence or discrimination [1, 14].

8.4. Epistemic Injustice: Suspicion as “Common Sense”

A final major result is the normalization of epistemic injustice: Muslims are often treated as unreliable narrators of their own reality and as morally suspect sources within public discourse. This occurs when Muslim voices are represented as

biased by default, while dominant institutional voices are treated as neutral and authoritative. CDA explains this through power-as-knowledge dynamics, where authority and legitimacy are unequally distributed through discourse structures [5, 15].

This pattern becomes visible when Muslim perspectives on discrimination are dismissed as “sensitivity” or “victimhood,” while Islamophobic claims are treated as concerns about “security” or “integration.” In such contexts, the public sphere becomes epistemically unequal: Muslim knowledge and testimony are denied credibility, while suspicion becomes normalized as rationality [2, 12]. This epistemic imbalance is one of the key mechanisms through which Islamophobia reproduces itself without necessarily requiring explicit hate language [1, 14].

9. Discussion

The results demonstrate that Islamophobia in Anglophone Western mainstream media discourse is not limited to isolated stereotypes or accidental bias, but often functions as a structured set of representational mechanisms that shape public “common sense” about Islam and Muslims. Through repeated framing and discourse patterns—particularly securitization, cultural othering, homogenization, and selective visibility—Muslim identity becomes publicly legible through suspicion and threat [2, 4, 15]. This section interprets these findings through the theoretical lenses of CDA, framing theory, Orientalism, and securitization logic, and then evaluates them using a Qur’anic–Prophetic ethical framework operationalized through justice (adl), verification (tabayyun), human dignity (karamah), and moral witnessing (shahadah) [10].

9.1. Islamophobia as Discursive Power: CDA and the Normalization of Suspicion

CDA helps clarify how Islamophobia becomes normalized even without explicit hate speech. The media’s routine discursive practices—selection of topics, repetition of labels, and unequal credibility assignment—can shape public assumptions about Muslims as inherently suspicious [5, 15]. When security discourse becomes the dominant frame for interpreting Muslim identity, suspicion is presented as rational, while Muslim dignity becomes negotiable. This finding aligns with scholarship showing that Islamophobia operates not only through negative descriptions but through representational structures that stabilize inequality and exclusion over time [2, 12].

Such normalization is politically consequential. When Muslims are repeatedly framed through threat narratives, audiences may internalize interpretive shortcuts that influence voting behavior, policy support, and social relations. Framing theory explains that once such templates become stable, they affect how new events are interpreted, even before evidence is evaluated [4]. In this context, the public sphere becomes epis-

temically unequal: dominant institutions gain narrative authority, while Muslim voices are treated as suspicious or biased. Islamophobia thus becomes a form of discursive governance, shaping which subjects are treated as trustworthy citizens and which are treated as potential risks [6, 9].

9.2. Ethical Evaluation Through Justice (Adl): Fair Representation and Collective Blame

The first Qur'anic principle that addresses Islamophobic framing is justice (adl). The Qur'an commands moral fairness even under social pressure and requires ethical integrity in judgment and testimony [10]. Applied to media representation, adl demands that Muslim communities not be treated as collectively responsible for the actions of individuals or for global political conflict. The securitization framing identified in the Results section—where Muslim identity itself becomes the location of threat—violates this ethical requirement by shifting blame from specific actors to an entire religious population [2, 8].

Justice in representation also challenges unequal moral labeling. Media narratives frequently apply identity-linked language to Muslim violence while using individualized language for comparable violence committed by non-Muslim actors [9, 12]. From the standpoint of adl, ethical reporting requires proportionality, consistent standards of classification, and restraint in collective generalization. This is not merely theological ethics; it overlaps significantly with secular journalism principles emphasizing fairness, non-discrimination, and harm reduction [16].

9.3. Verification (Tabayyun): Epistemic Discipline Against Moral Panic

A second core principle is verification (tabayyun). The Qur'an explicitly instructs believers to verify information rather than amplify rumors that may cause harm [10]. In media discourse, tabayyun functions as an epistemic ethic: the demand that claims about Islam and Muslims be treated with rigorous scrutiny, contextual validation, and avoidance of sensational shortcuts.

Moral panic narratives—such as cultural takeover frames and “Sharia threat” discourses—often rely on speculative association rather than precise legal, historical, or sociological understanding. Tabayyun requires that media institutions resist converting complex issues into fear-symbols and that journalists avoid rumor-driven narratives that intensify stigma [12]. In practice, tabayyun aligns closely with professional standards of accuracy, verification protocols, correction transparency, and responsible sourcing [16]. Thus, Qur'anic epistemic ethics can reinforce journalistic credibility rather than oppose it.

9.4. Human Dignity (Karamah): Rejecting Dehumanization and Hierarchies of Victimhood

The Qur'anic principle of human dignity (karamah) affirms moral equality and rejects civilizational hierarchy [10]. This ethical foundation directly challenges patterns of selective visibility and unequal moral recognition identified in the Results section. When Muslims are represented primarily as threats or outsiders, their dignity is reduced to conditional acceptance; they are granted legitimacy only when they conform to dominant expectations of “acceptable Islam” [7, 13].

Karamah also challenges hierarchies of victimhood. Selective empathy in media narratives produces unequal public mourning: some suffering is framed as tragic and universal, while other suffering is contextualized as expected or politically secondary [1, 14]. Ethical representation, grounded in karamah, demands that Muslim lives be treated as fully human, morally grievable, and socially complex. This emphasis is compatible with broader human rights discourse and liberal ethical traditions that stress equal dignity and non-discrimination [16].

9.5. Moral Witnessing (Shahadah): Accountability in Public Narration

The fourth principle is moral witnessing (shahadah), which frames communication as accountable testimony. The Qur'an describes a moral community as one that bears witness to truth and justice in society [10]. Applied to media ethics, shahadah suggests that journalism is not merely descriptive but morally consequential: it participates in constructing public reality and in shaping who receives moral recognition.

When media discourse normalizes suspicion toward Muslims, it contributes to social harm by legitimizing exclusion and surveillance as reasonable. Moral witnessing demands that public narration resist distortion, uphold truthful testimony, and recognize structural injustice rather than treating it as marginal. In this sense, the Qur'anic-Prophetic framework does not simply critique Islamophobic language but calls for ethical responsibility in how public truths are constructed and circulated [5, 15].

9.6. Engaging Secular and Liberal Objections: Public Ethics Beyond Confessional Claims

A central objection from secular media scholars may be that religious ethics cannot serve as a universal framework for media practice in plural societies. However, the framework proposed here can be articulated in publicly accessible terms. Justice, verification, and human dignity are not sectarian values; they overlap with widely accepted norms of journalism ethics such as accuracy, fairness, accountability, and harm reduction [16].

Rather than replacing secular ethics, the Qur'anic–Prophetic framework provides an additional normative language that strengthens media accountability where minority communities face systematic suspicion. The value of this contribution is not that it imposes theology into policy, but that it demonstrates how Islamic moral reasoning can participate in shared ethical discourse and inform responsible representation [1, 14].

9.7. Diversity Within Islamic Ethics and Contemporary Muslim Media Practices

Although the Qur'anic–Prophetic framework is ethically coherent, Islamic moral reasoning is not monolithic. Scholars differ in how they prioritize values such as harm prevention, public welfare, and interpretive authority, especially when applied to modern institutions like media. Recognizing interpretive diversity strengthens the framework by acknowledging internal debate (ikhtilaf) and the possibility of ethical contestation within Islamic thought [11].

Furthermore, Islamophobia cannot be addressed solely through external media critique. Muslim media practices themselves may reproduce internal problems—sectarianism, nationalism, or political propaganda—that require ethical self-critique. Qur'anic–Prophetic ethics therefore functions not only as a corrective to Western representation but also as a universal accountability model that can improve media responsibility within Muslim communities and institutions.

10. Conclusion

This study examined how Islamophobia is reproduced and normalized within Anglophone Western mainstream media discourse through recurring representational mechanisms such as securitization framing, cultural othering, homogenization of Muslim identity, and selective visibility. Interpreted through CDA, framing theory, Orientalism, and securitization logic, the findings demonstrate that Islamophobia frequently operates not only through explicit hostility but through routine patterns of language and narrative emphasis that stabilize suspicion as “common sense” [2, 4, 5, 15]. These patterns contribute to epistemic inequality by limiting Muslim credibility, shaping moral recognition unevenly, and influencing public attitudes toward belonging, citizenship, and security [6, 12].

In response, the article proposed a Qur'anic–Prophetic ethical framework operationalized through justice (adl), verification (tabayyun), human dignity (karamah), and moral witnessing (shahadah) as a normative lens for evaluating media representation and addressing Islamophobia ethically and epistemically [10]. These principles offer a structured framework that can inform practical media practice through verification-centered reporting, stereotyping-risk editorial review, and language guidelines consistent with professional journalism ethics [16]. Although religious ethics may face secular objections in plural societies, the analysis demonstrates that Qur'anic–

Prophetic values overlap substantially with widely shared ethical norms such as fairness, accuracy, accountability, and harm reduction, making the framework relevant beyond confessional contexts [16].

Finally, acknowledging interpretive diversity within Islamic ethics and the complexity of contemporary Muslim media practices strengthens the article's credibility by avoiding idealization and demonstrating ethical reflexivity. Future research may build on this conceptual framework through systematic corpus-based studies, comparative outlet sampling, and empirical evaluation of newsroom interventions aimed at reducing stereotyping and improving representational justice [3]. Overall, the study contributes to Islamophobia and media ethics scholarship by bridging critical media theory with Islamic normative ethics and offering actionable guidance for more responsible public communication.

11. Practical Implications for Journalism, Media Institutions, and Policy

The Qur'anic–Prophetic ethical framework outlined in this study can be operationalized through concrete professional and institutional practices within journalism and media governance. For journalists and reporters, this framework emphasizes the avoidance of collective generalizations that treat Muslims as a single political or ideological actor. Ethical reporting requires careful verification protocols—particularly in security-related coverage—so that allegations, associations, and identity markers are not amplified without sufficient contextual validation, consistent with the principle of tabayyun. Proportional language should be applied across comparable acts of violence to prevent unequal moral labeling, and Muslim experts should be included as authoritative sources in relevant discussions rather than being positioned solely as “community representatives” responding to crisis narratives.

For editors and newsroom leadership, the framework encourages the implementation of internal review mechanisms that assess potential stereotyping risks before publication. Standardized editorial language guidelines can help reduce civilizational panic narratives and avoid sensational framing that reinforces suspicion. Additionally, newsroom training initiatives should address Islamophobia, framing effects, and narrative harm in order to cultivate awareness of how representational patterns influence public perception and social cohesion.

Within journalism education and policy institutions, this framework supports the integration of Islamophobia and representation ethics into media literacy curricula. Institutions should promote transparent corrections procedures for misinformation and encourage accountability standards centered on anti-dehumanization and equal dignity. By embedding these principles into institutional practice, media organizations can

strengthen their commitment to fairness, accuracy, and responsible public communication.

These recommendations demonstrate how Qur'anic-Prophetic ethics can be translated into newsroom-level standards and institutional practices, thereby reinforcing its relevance for media professionals, educators, and policymakers [16].

Abbreviations

CDA Critical Discourse Analysis

Author Contributions

Muhammad Saleem Sarwar: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Resources, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there are no financial, personal, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the research, analysis, or interpretation presented in this study.

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