

Bulletin 26

26th, December, 2022

PAKISTAN CORONAVIRUS CIVACTS CAMPAIGN (CCC)

For over two years, Coronavirus CivActs Campaign (CCC) supported by the Open Society Foundation (OSF) debunked fake news, misinformation, and myths around COVID19.

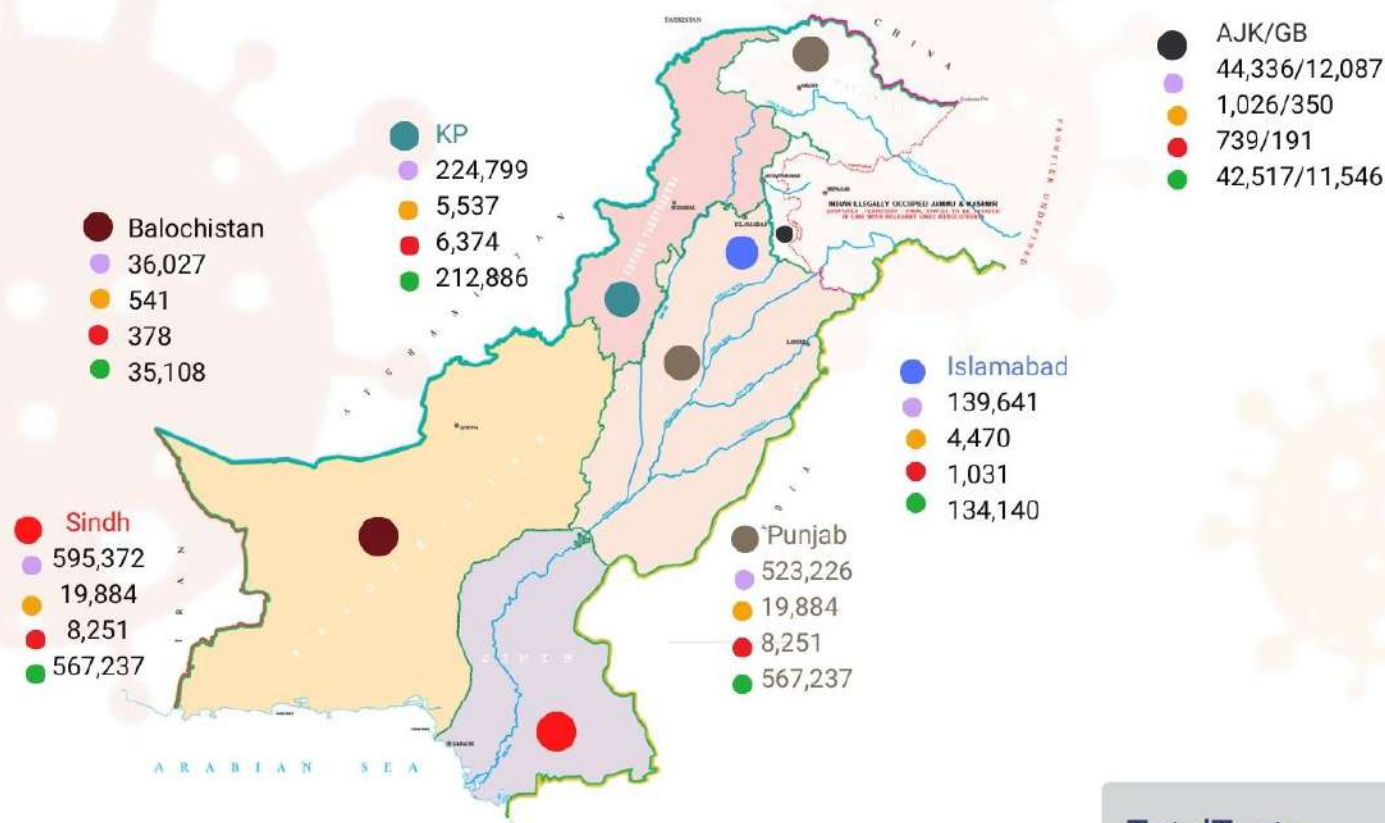
The campaign now focuses on building healthy information ecosystems where we will lead and support efforts to stop the spread of fake news and misinformation in Pakistan in a broader manner. The focus of our work might not necessarily be around Covid 19, unless, of course, we face a new wave. We plan to tackle fake news around health emergencies (remember, polio is still a challenge in Pakistan and fake news is responsible for creating perennial vaccine hesitation), politics, sociocultural taboos, and other similar phenomena.

WHAT'S INSIDE

- COVID-19 & Vaccination Statistics in Pakistan.
- The US brings back free at-home Covid tests as part of the winter plan.
- A Collaborative approach to deal with the effect of fakenews, misinformation and disinformation on freedom of expression stressed by experts.
- QUOTES.
- Deciphering Fake News and Its Implications.
- Steps involved to stop the spread of fake news.



COVID-19 DASHBOARD (Pakistan)



Total Tests
31,034,892



LAST 24 HOURS: 7,221

Confirmed Cases
1,575,486



LAST 24 HOURS: 7

Critical Cases
661



LAST 24 HOURS: 0

Deaths
30,635



LAST 24 HOURS: 0

Recoveries
1,544,190



LAST 24 HOURS: 28

Vaccination Statistics

First Dose
139,625,531



LAST 24 HOURS: 3,852

Booster Doses
48,444,092



LAST 24 HOURS: 6,7255

Fully Vaccinated
132,271,095



LAST 24 HOURS: 7,514

Total Doses Administered
301,870,637



LAST 24 HOURS: 78,602

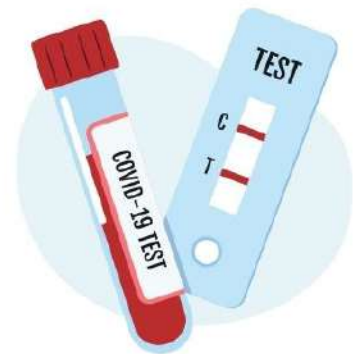
SOURCE : [Government of Pakistan](https://www.gov.pk)

THE US BRINGS BACK FREE AT-HOME COVID TESTS AS PART OF THE WINTER PLAN

US families are once more capable of ordering free at-home Covid-19 assessments as the government attempts to limit the spread of the virus this winter. The White House stated as many as four quick checks might be ordered from the government website CovidTests.gov. It announced that the test programme, which paused in September, might be restarted on Thursday, with deliveries beginning the week of 19 December. The decision comes as Covid infections rise ahead of the winter holidays.

The Biden management started sending free at-home tests in January; however, it stopped in September after more than six hundred million tests had been dispensed because Congress no longer approved the extra funding needed for the programme to continue. But the government is now using investment leftover from the American Rescue Plan, the Covid alleviation/relief bill passed last year, to pay for the tests, a US official told the BBC's US partner CBS. "We feel confident that we are going to have enough tests to get thru this round, four per household, in the coming weeks," a senior administration official told reporters on Wednesday; it's part of a broader White House plan to prepare for Covid this winter when some Americans are at an increased risk of catching the virus as they gather indoors for the holidays.

The White House hoped to encourage Americans to take at-home tests when symptomatic, before and after traveling for vacations and when visiting susceptible people. Covid cases, medical institution visits and deaths have all begun to rise in recent weeks. Some cities are calling on people to wear masks again in indoor spaces to prevent the spread of respiratory illness, while White House officials have urged Americans to get the latest Covid and flu jabs. Only 13.5% of those aged five and older in the US have received the updated coronavirus shot concentrated on the omicron variant, according to the CDC. In particular, highly contagious omicron sub-variant is now the dominant coronavirus strain in the US which is contributing to the uptick in cases.



Source: [BBC News](#)

EXPERTS SUGGEST A COLLABORATIVE APPROACH TO DEAL WITH THE EFFECTS OF FAKE NEWS, MISINFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Much like in the rest of the world, fake news and misinformation are now a significant threat to public discourse and democratic values in Pakistan. Online disinformation has created or amplified challenges regarding access to credible information, political polarization, manipulation of social media conversations, trust in the news media, health-related information, and hate speech. With an internet user base of around 8.5 million, the risks and impact of fake news and misinformation are exacerbated manifold.

With a focus on building a healthy information ecosystem, Accountability Lab Pakistan organized an awareness session on "The Effects of Fake News and Misinformation on Youth" at The University of Haripur and a panel discussion on "The Effects of Fake News Misinformation on Society and Role of Journalism" at Haripur Club.





The discussion centered around the key drivers and impacts of fake news and disinformation on society, especially our youth, and the importance of media literacy amongst citizens. Discussions during the session also focused on effective strategies and tools to counter misinformation.

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"Disinformation is fabricated information shared online or by other means with the intention to harm others. Misinformation and Disinformation have made it difficult to maintain a stable democracy. The only way to tackle misinformation and fake news is to educate ourselves and our youth about media literacy and the responsible use of media".

Dr. Abdul Mohemen - Dean, Department of Social Sciences, The University of Haripur

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Fake news plays a crucial role in fueling hate and extremism. The drastic advancement in digital media and communication technologies has increased the risk of spreading misinformation and disinformation. The significant proportion of Youth in Pakistan has made such issues even more intricate. With this advancement, the Youth needs to be taught about reliable search engines to identify and differentiate between authentic and fabricated information".

Mr. Muhammad Sadaqat - Senior Journalist, Daily Dawn

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"When news hits, journalists have to immediately put it on air in electronic media, which increases the risk of misinformation as they have little time to verify it with various credible sources. They have to deal with potential job losses and mistreatment from the management if they do not broadcast it on time, they take hardly any time to verify the news. This is one of the reasons that they have been facing criticism from the public".

Mr. Muhammad Sadaqat - Senior Journalist, Daily Dawn

"People are drastically exposed to social media. Many social media influencers have millions of reach in a few hours, while the most prominent print media like DAWN and THE NEWS have a few lakhs in an entire day. Since most social media influencers have their own biases, their followers are also more vulnerable to being influenced by misinformation. Social media laws should be formulated with an immediate effect to combat the infodemic".

Mr. Shaikh Fakhar Alam - Communication Specialist/Media Advisor - Elementary & Secondary Education Department, KP.

DECIPHERING FAKE NEWS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Fake news is a deliberate spread of misinformation and often has an ulterior motive for political, social, economic or personal gains. It is an expression that is fabricated systematically, disseminated in an organized manner and appears to be true. Such stories consist of nonfactual facts and sources.

From affecting electoral behavior and influencing conditions of wars to promoting divisive narratives advancing specific vested interests, fake news has emerged as the threat multiplier in a digitally interconnected world.

The motivation behind disseminating fake news by media houses stems from the attraction for sensationalism among the audience. Each burning geopolitical issue accompanies a set of versions amplified by digital media to the detriment of factual realities. No later was this visible than during the COVID-19 crisis that, besides bringing deaths to millions worldwide, steered debates on the multiple cooked-up theories about its origin to cover up countries' mismanagement of the global health crisis. This fueled anti-Asian racism in the Western world and other strained U.S.-China relations.



Disinformation has a broad history during war times as psychological warfare helps legitimize and strategize the war. Since Russia invaded Ukraine in February, the war has been fogged by new brands of fake news and disinformation campaigns. The "[Ghost of Kyiv](#)", as was boasted and celebrated by millions on digital and social media for months, was a supposed folk hero fighter pilot credited with shooting down more than three dozen Russian fighter jets. However, little did millions know that videos of the 'legendary' pilot circulated online were actually about a video game simulation in 2008. The "Ghost of Kyiv" was found to have no existence.

Over the last decade, fake news and disinformation campaigns have also shown a detrimental impact on the electoral behaviors and results of elections in different countries. In 2016, a conspiracy theory was manufactured and flouted by Twitter bots during the U.S. Presidential elections accusing the then Democrat Nominee Hilary Clinton and John Podesta, the White House Deputy Chief of Staff, of child trafficking. This convinced a 28-year man, who, in his quest to self-investigate the [theory](#), fired three shots with a semi-automatic rifle inside a Pizzeria in Washington. He believed this act would save children trapped in sex slavery.



In 2018, similar sensationalist news circulated in Pakistan indicating that former Premier Nawaz Sharif had hired the services of Cambridge Analytica. The report claimed it was to ensure that his political party wins the 2018 General Elections. However, there was insufficient data to back the claims published in the report.

False blasphemy accusations have surrounded Pakistani society and have contributed to exacerbating the country's polarization. In April 2013, a 23-year-old boy, Mashal Khan, succumbed to vigilante justice in his alma mater, Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan. The allegations of posting blasphemous content online proved inaccurate, but a young man lost his life to hate powered by fake news.

In a similar unfortunate display of barbarism, a Sri Lankan national, Priyantha Kumar, lost his life in the Pakistani city of Sialkot. This happened when an angry mob took it upon themselves to make him atone for his alleged blasphemous remarks.

The information disorders and ulterior motives to construct public opinion are a recipe for deadly propaganda. Throughout history, fake news has been used to alter political discourse, spread xenophobia and has been proven detrimental to the organic process of forming public opinion. In Goebbels, the Nazi's Chief propagandist's view, "If you tell a lie big enough and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it."

The minister, through his propagation of anti-Semitic sentiment, was able to pave the path for the holocaust and change the course of history for the European Jews. With the digital penetration in South Asian Countries, India and Pakistan, fake news influenced the states' behavior during the Pulwama Crisis in 2019, even bringing two nuclear-armed countries to war. Digital space was overwhelmed with fake news, set the stage for another battlefield, and fueled the anti-Pakistan sentiment across India. In times of war, it helps the populist leaders to garner support for confrontation.

Given the damaging results of fake news on peace, social stability, human rights, and democracy, it is essential to understand fake news and learn to differentiate between fake and the realities.

The spread can be countered by incorporating media literacy into the national curriculum and by encouraging critical thinking in citizens. Research around the vulnerabilities fake news narratives exploit and their root causes must be explored and examined to understand its ramifications.

HOW TO STOP FAKE NEWS

CONSIDER THE SOURCE

click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.



READ BEYOND

Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks, What's the whole story?



CHECK THE AUTHOR

DO a quick search on the author. Are they credible? Are they real?



SUPPORTING SOURCES?

Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story?



CHECK THE DATE

Reposting old news stories doesn't mean they're relevant to the current event.



IS IT A JOKE?

If it is too oldish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.



CHECK YOUR BIASES

Consider if you have your own beliefs could affect your judgement.



ASK THE EXPERTS

Ask a librarian, or consult a fact-checking site.

