

BULLETIN 30

PAKISTAN CORONAVIRUS CIVACTS CAMPAIGN (CCC)

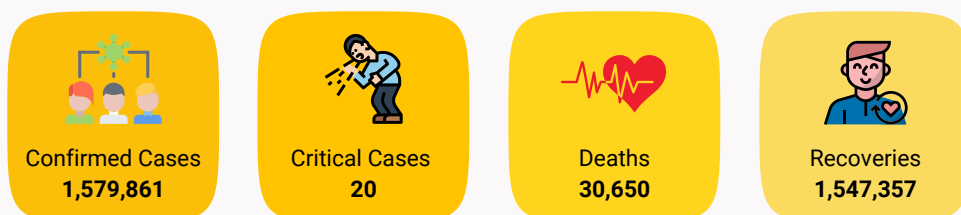
Preamble

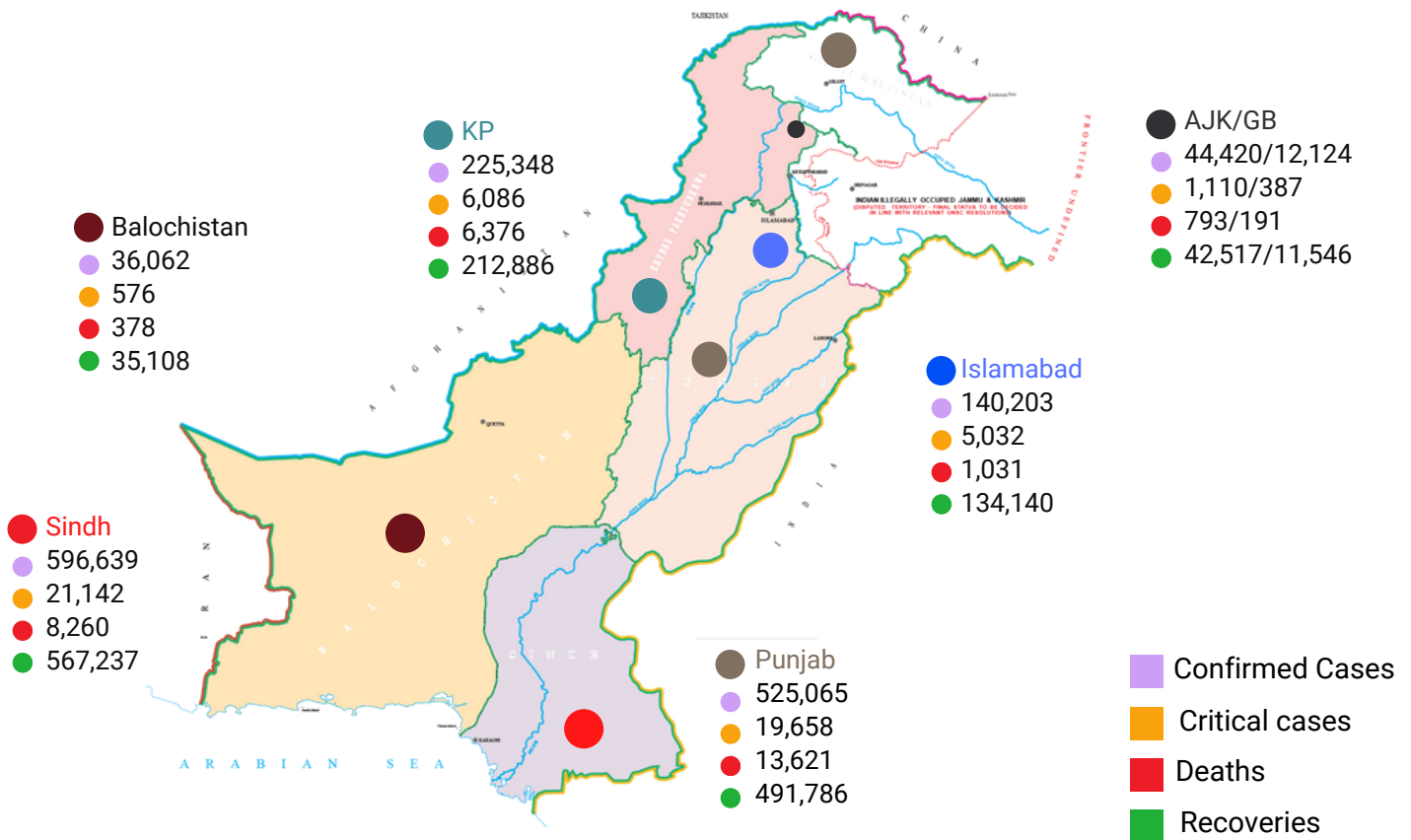
For over two years, the Coronavirus CivActs Campaign (CCC), supported by the Open Society Foundation (OSF), debunked fake news, misinformation, and myths around COVID-19. The campaign now focuses on building healthy information ecosystems where we will lead and support efforts to stop the spread of fake 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 Updates
- Role of Responsible Journalism to Counter the Effects of Fake News and Misinformation
- Steps Involved to Stop the Spread of Fake News
- Fake News and Upcoming General Elections

COVID-19 Dashboard (Pakistan)





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

SECTION I: COVID POSITIVITY JUMPS AS 168 CASES SURFACE IN A SINGLE DAY

On March 24th, the national positivity rate for COVID-19 crossed three percent, the highest number of cases since September 2022, according to National Command and Operations Center (NCOC) data. About 168 new cases were reported during a single day.

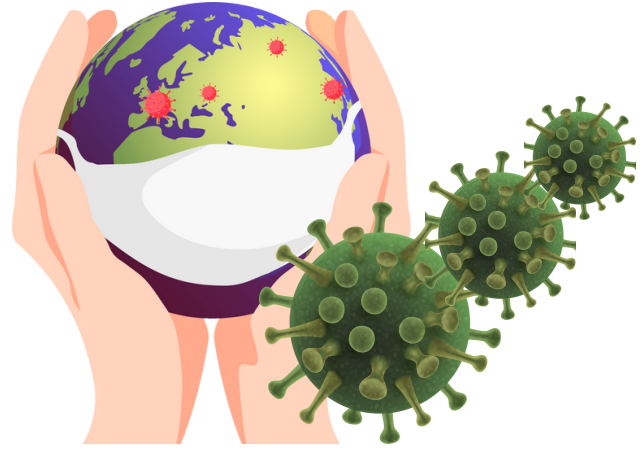
Karachi and Islamabad, two major cities of Pakistan, surpassed the covid positivity rate of 5 and 6 percent, respectively, on March 24th.

While talking to the DAWN, NCOC member Dr. Shahzad Ali Khan said that the recent mutations in the virus have primarily caused the rise in COVID cases. He further advised people not to panic as the new strain's mortality rate was meager.

One death has been reported in the last 24 hours. As per the NCOC data, the national positivity rate was 3.02pc, whereas, in Rawalpindi, Karachi, and Lahore, they are 2.61pc, 6.11pc, and 5.51 pc, respectively.

Dr. Khan is also the Vice Chancellor of the Health Services Academy. According to him, the hike or decrease in the cases will continue as the transmissibility fluctuates with the arrival of new strains of the virus.

According to Dr. Khan, individuals under middle age who are in good health need not worry about contracting the virus as they are unlikely to experience severe complications and symptoms. However, Dr. Khan warned that those over 65 or those with conditions such as blood pressure, diabetes, kidney problems, or cancer should exercise caution. Although cases increased before summer last year, the situation remained controlled, and the number of deaths was minimal.



Dr. Khan advised people to wear masks in health facilities and other public places and to avoid crowded areas as the virus is currently only spreading from person to person. Unlike in 2020, when the virus was also spreading through objects like utensils, clothes, and currency notes, the virus is currently only spreading through human contact.

The Minister for National Health Services, Regulations, and Coordination, Abdul Qadir Patel, stated that the virus situation was under control. As per the minister, the government has strengthened the role of Border and Health Services to handle any sub-variants of COVID-19. Additionally, all entry points have established surveillance systems, and arriving passengers are being subjected to rapid testing and screening at all airports.

Published in Dawn, March 24th, 2023.

SECTION II:

EXPERTS EMPHASIZED YOUTH TO GET FAMILIAR WITH THE IMPACT OF FAKE NEWS ON POLITICAL DISCOURSE TO MAKE THE RIGHT CHOICES

Accountability Lab Pakistan arranged a Seminar at the Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science, and Technology (FUUAST) Islamabad to discuss the key drivers of misinformation and fake news and its potential impact on the upcoming General Election in Pakistan. The Seminar focused on highlighting the role of youth in elections. The event was moderated by Assistant Professor, Incharge Department of IR & Mass Communication, Dr. Uzma Siraj. Dr. Ijaz Shafi Gilani, Founder and Chairperson of Gallup Pakistan, and Dr. Uzair Ahmed Rana, Script Editor, Senior Program Producer of PTV Home., were among the key guest speakers. The event was attended by students, teachers, and media personnel from various print and electronic media houses.

While addressing the seminar, Dr. Ijaz Shafi Gilani reiterated, "all political parties and the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) require Socio-Political and Digital contracts to ensure free and fair elections.

While Dr. Uzair Ahmed Rana addressing the participants, said that a "real news" outlet, such as a major newspaper or television network, may make mistakes. Still, it does not intentionally set out to spread misinformation. Journalists reporting authentic news have a code of ethics that includes using credible sources and vetting them. However, disinformation is created to deceive. It can be presented like real news and may copy the formats of other news sites to make it look more authentic. Their purpose is usually to get "clicks" and generate advertising revenue or to promote the political viewpoint of their owners. The students of mass communications should always follow the five 5W1H to verify any news.

President Gallup Pakistan, Dr. Ijaz Shah Gilani remarked that fake news occurs more these days and directly influences the electoral process. The youth is yet to be made aware of the precise impact of fake news. The students need to get familiar with the political history of Pakistan and fake news.

A significant impact was observed in the 2018 elections due to fake information fueled by various political parties. This majorly happened because of social media access. Therefore, it is crucial to educate yourself and get familiar with the political process, and only then will you be able to make the right decision in the electoral process.

The guest speakers stressed the need to introduce substantial mechanisms to counter the misinformation shared on social media. The importance of the active participation of youth during the elections was also discussed in detail.



Anecdotes



"There is a difference between misinformation and disinformation. Misinformation is inaccurate information we don't know about; disinformation is deliberate and spread to mislead others. In today's era, we are mainly affected by disinformation. Elections and other social issues can be swayed by misinformation. Today's workshop enlightened us on different paradigms to counter fake news. It's imperative to see any information or post carefully before sharing it. We should analyze it before spreading it, whether authentic or inauthentic. We should not believe any information without carefully analyzing it with the help of available tools (explained in today's workshop)".



"You have to be careful that someone is not bringing false news to you. Knowing the right thing is very important. If you know what's right and wrong, if someone comes to you with incorrect information, you can immediately recognize and refuse it".



"Today's panel discussion focused on the impact of misinformation, disinformation, and fake news on elections. We learned how to distinguish general information from fake news. Eleven elections have been held in Pakistan in the last 50 years. The eleventh election is different from the previous elections due to the significant influence of social media. One must only believe in authentic news and use search engines to differentiate between fake and genuine information".



"You should check whether the data, news, or information you receive is authentic. I advise the students to focus on acquiring ethics and knowledge. The youth should also avoid political prejudices".



IMPACT OF DISINFORMATION AND FAKE NEWS ON THE UPCOMING GENERAL ELECTIONS IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan is preparing for its upcoming general elections. Like in many other countries, there is a growing concern about the potential influence of disinformation and fake news on the democratic process. The spread of false information can sway voters' opinions and undermine the election's integrity. This is a serious issue that can have far-reaching consequences for the future of Pakistan, but some steps can be taken to combat it, particularly by the country's youth.

Disinformation and fake news are not new phenomena in Pakistan, but they have become more prevalent in recent years, thanks in large part to the rise of social media. False information can spread quickly on platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp, and it can be difficult to distinguish between what is real and what is not. This is particularly true when the information reinforces existing biases or confirms preconceived notions.

The potential impact of disinformation and fake news on the upcoming election could be significant. False stories could damage the reputation of political candidates, create false narratives, and influence voters' opinions. This could lead to a distorted understanding of the political landscape, ultimately undermining the legitimacy of the democratic process.

One way to combat disinformation and fake news is to encourage critical thinking and promote media literacy among Pakistan's youth. By teaching young people to question what they read and evaluate the sources' reliability, they can become more discerning information consumers. This can help them to identify false stories and misinformation and to develop a more nuanced understanding of the political landscape.

Another way to combat disinformation is to promote transparency and accountability in the media. Journalists and media organizations should be encouraged to fact-check their stories and report on their information sources. This can help to counteract false rumors and to promote accurate reporting.

Finally, Pakistan's youth could play an essential role in combating disinformation by being active and engaged citizens.

This can involve participating in political discussions, volunteering for campaigns, and engaging in civic activism. By doing so, they can help to counteract false narratives and to promote a more informed and engaged citizenry.



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.

