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BULLETIN

Pakistan Coronavirus CivActs Campaign (CCC)

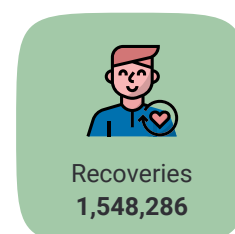
Preamble

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.

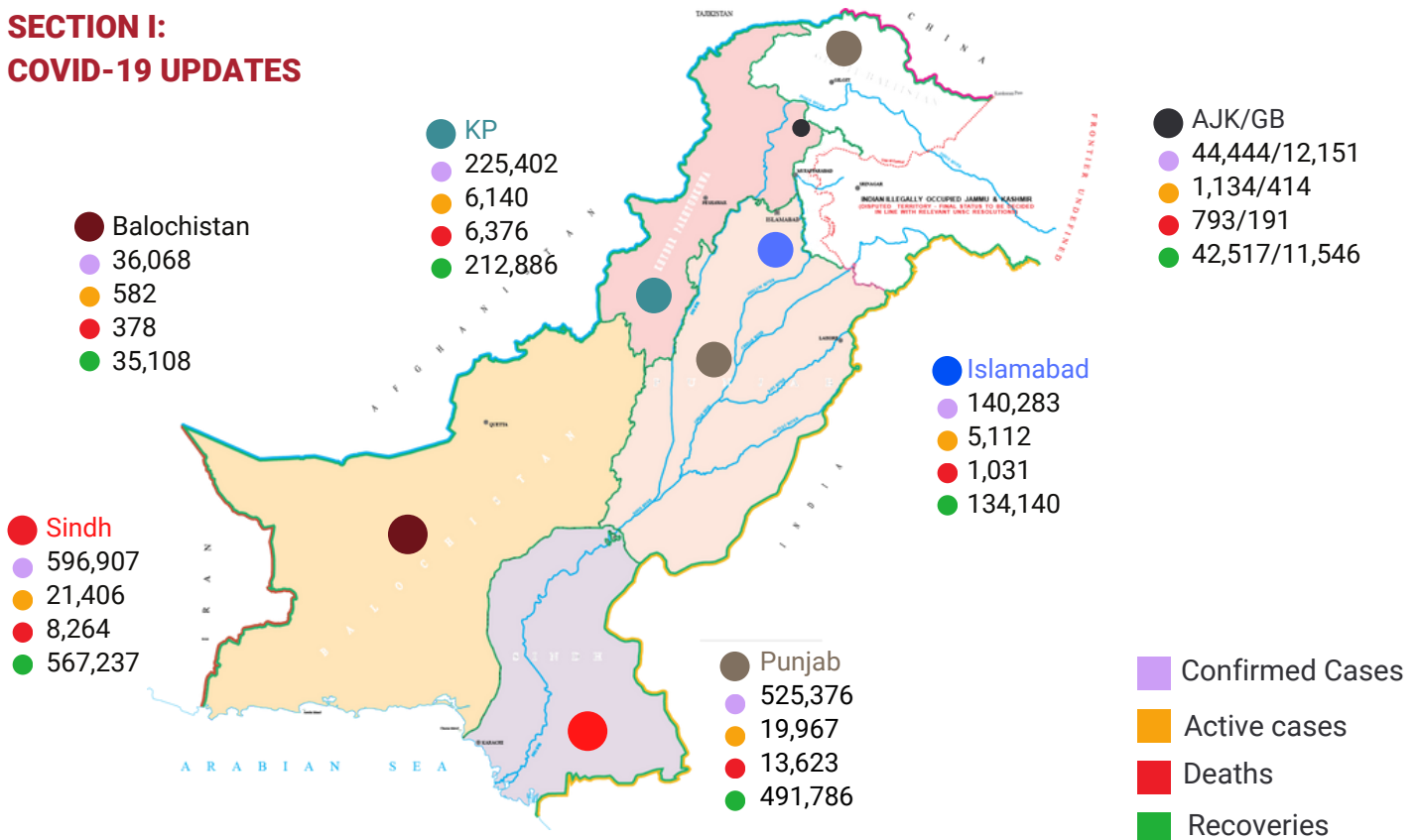
What's Inside

- Covid-19 Updates
- The Recent Rise of Covid-19 Cases In Pakistan
- The Consequences of Misinformation, Disinformation, and Fake News on Society
- Steps Involved to Stop the Spread of Fake News

COVID-19 Dashboard (Pakistan)



SECTION I: COVID-19 UPDATES



Source: [Government of Pakistan](#)
Last updated on 27-Apr-2023 - 08:00 AM

SECTION II: THE RECENT RISE OF COVID-19 CASES IN PAKISTAN

On April 6, 2023, the positivity ratio in the country was approximately 1.13%, with 5,144 patients tested. During the first five days of April, Punjab had the highest number of COVID cases, with 105, followed by Sindh, with 90 cases. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had around 18 cases, Islamabad recorded 21 cases, and Balochistan had nearly two cases. On April 5, 2023, about 3,562 individuals were tested, and 49 were tested positive, resulting in an average positivity rate of 1.38%. Moreover, 24 patients were in critical care. The government records indicated that on April 3, 2023, 2,946 tests were performed, and 47 positive cases were reported, with one death. The positivity rate was 1.60%, and 20 patients were in critical care. In addition, on April 3, 2023, approximately 2,965 tests were carried out, and 55 patients tested positive, with a positivity rate of 1.85%.

However, no death was recorded, although 14 patients were in critical care. Similarly, on April 2, 2023, 3,836 patients were tested, and 55 patients tested positive, resulting in a positivity rate of 1.43%. Around 26 patients were transferred to critical care without any death. Moreover, on April 1, 2023, approximately 6,011 patients were tested, and 87 patients tested positive, with a positivity rate of 1.45%. About 25 people were in intensive care, and no deaths were reported. According to the National Command and Operation Center (NCOC), Pakistan has recorded 1,579,968 confirmed COVID cases and 30,651 deaths. However, 212,886 patients have recovered. Sindh has reported the most COVID cases, with 596,666 confirmed cases, and 8,260 patients have died. Punjab has reported 525,110 confirmed cases, with the highest number of deaths at 13,622. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has recorded 225,355 cases with 6,376 deaths, while Balochistan has had 36,064 patients test positive and around 378 deaths. Islamabad has recorded 140,217 positive cases, and 1,031 patients have lost their lives.

Source: [The News International](#)

SECTION III:

THE DEVASTATING CONSEQUENCES OF MISINFORMATION, DISINFORMATION, AND FAKE NEWS ON SOCIETY

Disinformation, misinformation, and fake news have caused multiple devastating consequences in Pakistani society. In today's polarized media landscape, it seems like everyone claims to be a journalist, spreading all kinds of fake news on social media platforms. Unfortunately, concerned authorities have not taken adequate measures to address this problem. Responsible journalism on social media is hard to find, as many people post videos, news, and personal information of specific individuals, politicians, or institutions solely to gain views and money.



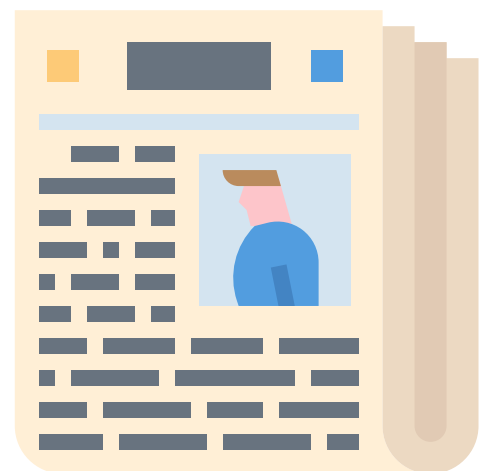
As a result, social media platforms are often used to spread hatred against specific genders, individuals, or minority groups. The dissemination of fake information and hate speech against religious minority groups has exacerbated their circumstances. Social media platforms have also been used to spread fake news, leading to blasphemy accusations. The case of Mashal Khan is a prime example of how false accusations of blasphemy were linked to social media platforms. In this case, fake accounts were used to defame and accuse him, which was verified by the police after the death.

Mashal Khan was an exceptional student. He stood out among his batchmates and often immersed himself in reading Greco-Roman philosophers, engaging in intellectual debates and discussions.

However, his peers were uncomfortable with his popularity on campus; they launched a malicious campaign against him, spreading rumors that he had posted blasphemous content online. The fake news spread quickly; unfortunately, a mob attacked him in his hostel room on the same day and beat him to death. Mashal's story is heartbreaking because fake news claimed the life of an exceptional individual in a matter of seconds.

In the documentary "[Murder on Campus: The Story of Mashal Khan](#)" by BBC News, a friend of Mashal's recounted how the mob that beat Mashal to death was contended and urged others to join to receive in. Mashal's father discussed how his son was innocent and had been killed for speaking out against the inefficient university administration. [Mashal](#), a 23-year-old Abdul Wali Khan University student, was falsely accused of blasphemy and lynched by the mob in 2017.

According to a report by [Dawn](#), 89 citizens have been killed in 1,415 blasphemy accusations and cases since 1947. Mashal's story is not an isolated case. [Junaid Hafeez](#), a Fulbright alumnus and university lecturer, was also accused of blasphemy; after accepting his case, Rashid Rehman, his initial lawyer, was fatally shot in 2014. Hafeez had earned his master's degree from an American university and returned to Pakistan to work for the betterment of his country. However, he was arrested and sentenced to death in 2013.



Moreover, a prominent Pakistani politician, Salman Taseer, was murdered by his security guard in 2011 for supporting Christian woman Asia Bibi, who was accused of blasphemy by her neighbors, illustrating how many people have lost their precious lives due to blasphemy accusations. It is often difficult to prove anyone innocent in blasphemy cases, as their lawyers are frequently killed or abducted. The blasphemy laws were codified by India's British rulers in 1860 and were expanded in 1927. Pakistan adopted these laws after the partition, which are strict, sentencing anyone who insults the religion to death. Unfortunately, many people have been falsely accused and killed, such as Priyantha Diyawadanage, a Sri Lankan national who was attacked and murdered by a mob outside his factory in Sialkot after being falsely accused of blasphemy. This highlights the danger of misinformation and disinformation, which are not limited to news authenticity or unreliable sources of information. In countries like Pakistan, where freedom of speech is not always practiced according to the constitution and is controlled and limited, misinformation and disinformation can lead to the loss of precious lives.

Disinformation and fake news are on the rise in Pakistan, as evidenced by the targeting and killing of the Ahmadi community. Many Ahmadis are in exile and seek political asylum in other countries due to the constant persecution they suffer in Pakistan.

How to Overcome Misinformation, Disinformation, and Fake News?

To overcome misinformation, disinformation, and fake news, it is essential to handle the situation with the following steps:

Verify the source of information:

In the era of social media, news can spread within seconds. Therefore, before sharing, posting, or sending it to others, it is crucial to check where the news originated and how it was developed. In addition, checking the source's reliability can double-check the facts and authenticity of the news.



Consider the impact:

It is essential to consider the impact and effect of the news before disseminating it. Is the news about harming a specific individual, community, or minority group already at risk? As responsible users/citizens, we should consider the normative backgrounds and principles that allow us to share this information with other people. If the news contains sensitive information that can put an already marginalized ethnic or religious group at risk, it is essential not to share such content.

Objectives behind the information:

News viral on social media often has specific objectives, especially concerning politics or a political figure. Viral posts might be created with the aim of political scoring. A well-informed social media user will always prefer to check the objectives of the information.

Hoax:

If certain information encourages you to share it, check if it includes spelling mistakes and if the sender claims to be a part of a social media platform. If so, it is essential not to share it with anyone. During these times when social media plays a crucial role in sharing information, woke activism, and whistleblowers, it is essential to understand that social media can also be risky.

It can be used to defame a particular individual and to harm a specific minority group. We, as users, should be cautious while sharing information, posts, and opinions on social media. Dissenting voices is not a crime, and there should be enough space for every citizen, regardless of ethnicity, gender, and religion, to express their organic thoughts. We must acknowledge that only pluralistic societies progress, and bringing acceptance and tolerance can create a safe space for everyone.

Way Forward:

Governments and institutions must take appropriate measures and implement policies in light of the devastating impacts of disinformation, misinformation, and fake news on society. Social media content creation must adhere strictly to community guidelines.

The judicial system in Pakistan requires serious reform. No one should be sentenced to death based on rumors or false accusations. Blasphemy cases should undergo a thorough investigation and verification process to save many innocent lives.

Furthermore, there is a dire need to amend the blasphemy law by seeking input from global Islamic scholars. The constitution guarantees individuals' lives, and any mob or group dictating to take someone's life should face strict punishment according to the laws. Our curriculum and education system must teach students about other religions and their practices worldwide, including Pakistan. Teachers, parents, and individuals have a significant role in countering this immediate challenge. Our society must embrace diversity, and our educational institutions, specifically Universities, must become research centers, as modern research can lead us away from these medieval practices and ways of thinking.



Picture courtesy: Pexels

SECTION IV:

STEPS INVOLVED TO STOP THE SPREAD OF FAKE NEWS

Following are some effective steps that can be taken to stop the spread of fake news:



01

Educate Yourself:

Take the time to understand what fake news is, how it spreads, and the consequences it can have on individuals and society. Be aware of your own biases and try to approach news sources with a critical eye.



02

Verify the Source:

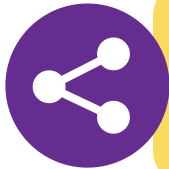
Verify the source of the news before sharing it with others. Check whether the source is reputable, trustworthy, and has a history of producing accurate news.



03

Check the Story:

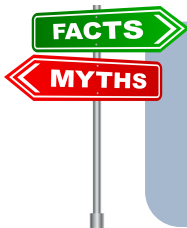
Before sharing a story, verify its authenticity by checking other sources to see if the story is being reported by reputable news outlets. If a story seems too outrageous or sensational, it is worth taking a few minutes to check its authenticity.



04

Don't Share Without Checking:

Resist the urge to share news stories immediately without verifying their accuracy. Sharing fake news only helps to spread it further and can cause harm to individuals and society.



05

Use Fact-Checking Tools:

Utilize fact-checking tools to verify the accuracy of news stories.



06

Report Fake News:

Report fake news to the social media platforms, websites, or news outlets where it is being shared. Social media platforms have become major distribution channels for fake news, and they are beginning to take action to prevent the spread of false information.



07

Encourage Critical Thinking:

Encourage friends and family members to think critically about the news they consume and to verify its accuracy before sharing it with others. By following these steps, individuals can play a significant role in stopping the spread of fake news and promoting the sharing of accurate information.