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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 Karachi
- Debate Competition Sparks Insightful Discussions on the Impact of Fake News on Upcoming Elections
- The Thin Line between Freedom of Expression & Misinformation/Disinformation
- Steps Involved to Stop the Spread of Fake News

COVID-19 Dashboard (Pakistan)



Confirmed Cases
1,580,631



Active Cases
1,689



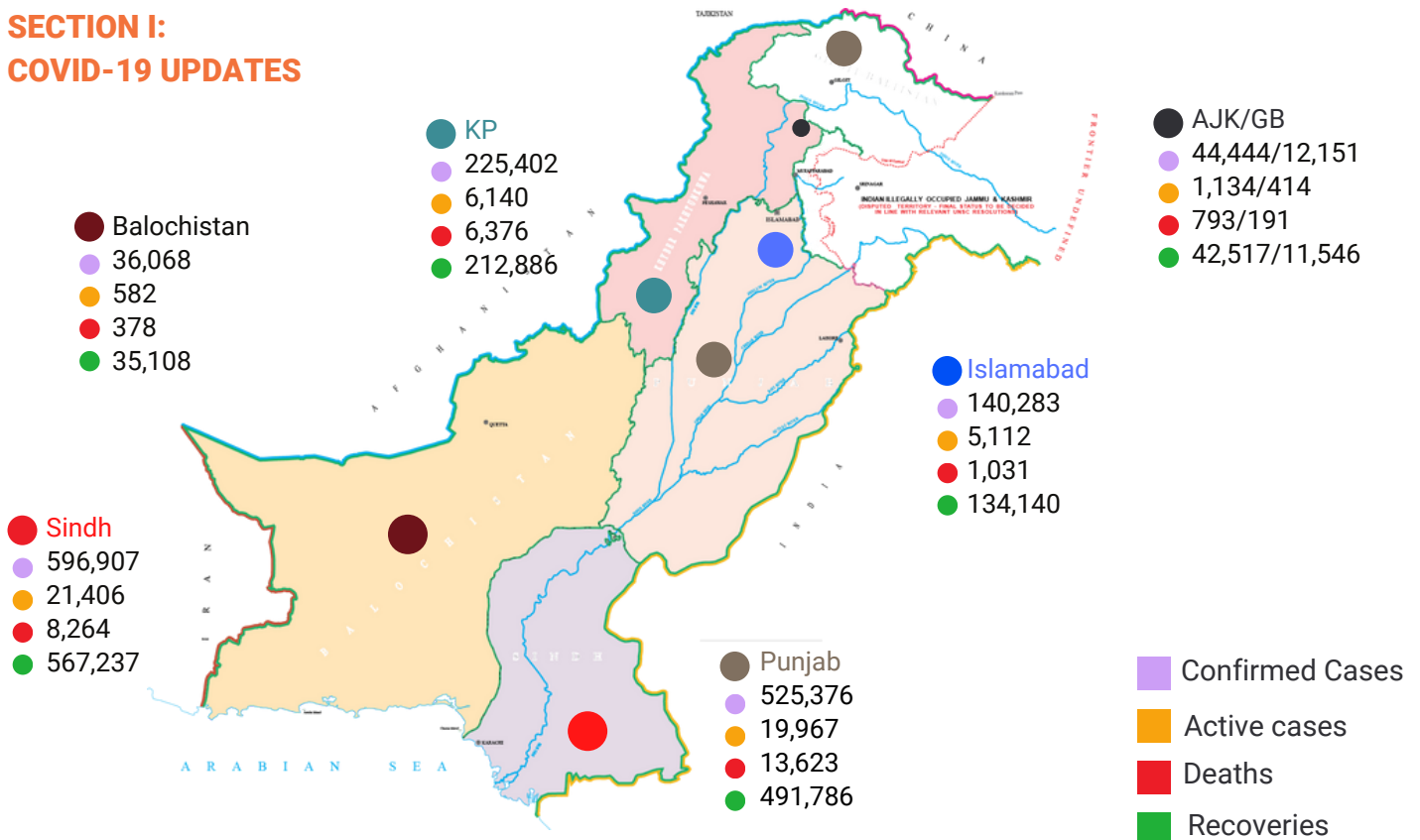
Deaths
30,656



Recoveries
1,548,286



SECTION I: COVID-19 UPDATES



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

SECTION II: KARACHI STRUGGLES WITH COVID-19 AS THE POSITIVITY RATE JUMPS TO OVER 28%

A health authority official reported that in Karachi, 30 out of 106 people screened for COVID-19 tested positive, resulting in a positivity rate of 28.30%. In contrast, the countrywide positivity rate was only 3%, with three out of 100 individuals testing positive for the virus.

The National Institute of Health (NIH) in Islamabad shared statistics that showed the COVID-19 positivity rate in three major cities - Karachi, Islamabad, and Peshawar - to be over 10%. Islamabad's positivity rate was 12.20%, with 25 positive cases out of 205 tests, while Peshawar had a positivity rate of 14.29%, with 14 positive cases out of 94 tests. In Lahore, the positivity rate remained at 4.14%, with 18 new cases of COVID-19 identified out of 435 tests. However, Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Balochistan, and Gilgit Baltistan had no cases of COVID-19 reported.

An official of the NIH suggested that COVID-19 cases were increasing due to a sub-variant of the Omicron variant of the SARS-CoV-2. Although the virus's spread is high, the hospitalization rate is low in the country, with only 18 people under treatment in the ICUs and high dependency units (HDUs).

The official suggested that the high positivity rate was due to people with symptoms being screened only, and the government has asked provinces and centers to increase testing to gain a more accurate understanding of the situation.

Source: [Geo News](#)

SECTION III:

DEBATE COMPETITION SPARKS INSIGHTFUL DISCUSSIONS ON THE IMPACT OF FAKE NEWS ON UPCOMING ELECTIONS

The rise of fake news poses a grave threat to the proper functioning of democracies worldwide. To address this pressing issue, the Accountability Lab organized a thought-provoking debate competition at the MNS University of Agriculture Multan, which highlighted the significance of media literacy and responsible journalism, especially in the context of elections.

During the event, participants displayed their exceptional public speaking skills while showcasing their deep understanding of the topic. They elucidated how the spread of fake news can erode democratic institutions, polarize society, and even manipulate voter behavior.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Mirza Abdul Qayyum, Assistant Professor, MNSUAM, stressed the pivotal role of universities in instilling democratic values and developing an informed citizenry. He emphasized that educational institutions must equip students with the necessary knowledge and skills to navigate the intricate landscape of media and communications.

ANECDOTES

"I am Qamar Muhayyudin, an affiliated member of the Emerson University of Multan. Today, I had the privilege of attending an outstanding South Punjab Debating Competition showcasing remarkable contestants. The judging process was commendable, and the organizing committee and judges diligently fulfilled their responsibilities."

Qamar Muhayyudin

"In my capacity as a judge at the event, I must highlight the adverse impact of misinformation and fake news on society. The prevalence of misunderstandings is rampant due to a singular point of disagreement, and we must delve deeper into the issue to determine the reality. It is crucial to create awareness about this problem and take action to mitigate its effects."

Kinza Nazeer

“In the current era, it is imperative to address misinformation since it can result in the dissemination of dangerous rumors and stories. Instances of mobs gathering and killing someone are often seen in mainstream media as a direct consequence of the spread of misinformation. The advent of social media and its impact on public opinion, as witnessed during the US elections, has further magnified the significance of authentic information dissemination. Today's event serves as a testament to the need to differentiate between true, fake, and misinformation to establish a clear direction for the future.”

Dr. Usman Jamshaid

SECTION IV:

THE THIN LINE BETWEEN FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION AND MISINFORMATION/DISINFORMATION

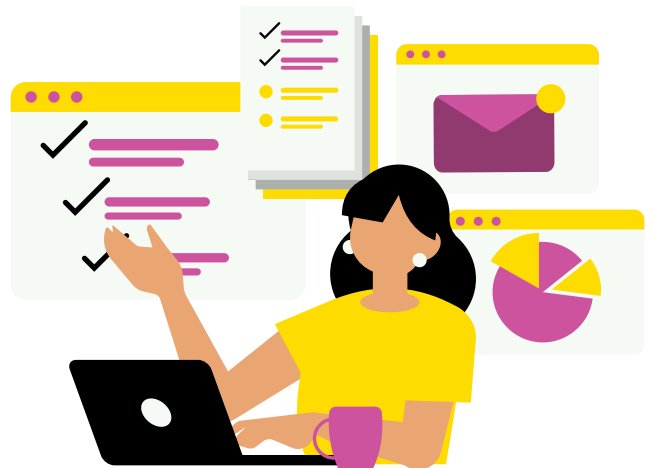
Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right that allows individuals to express their opinions, beliefs, and ideas without fear of censorship or retribution. It is a cornerstone of democratic societies and essential for the functioning of an open and free society. However, in recent years, the spread of misinformation and disinformation has raised questions about the limits of freedom of expression.

Misinformation refers to false or inaccurate information that is spread unintentionally, while

disinformation is deliberately false or misleading information that is spread with the intention of deceiving people. The thin line between freedom of expression and misinformation/disinformation lies in the intention behind the expression.

While freedom of expression protects the right to express opinions and beliefs, it does not protect the dissemination of false information. This is because false information can harm individuals and society as a whole. Misinformation and disinformation can have serious consequences, such as undermining public health efforts, eroding trust in democratic institutions, and inciting violence.

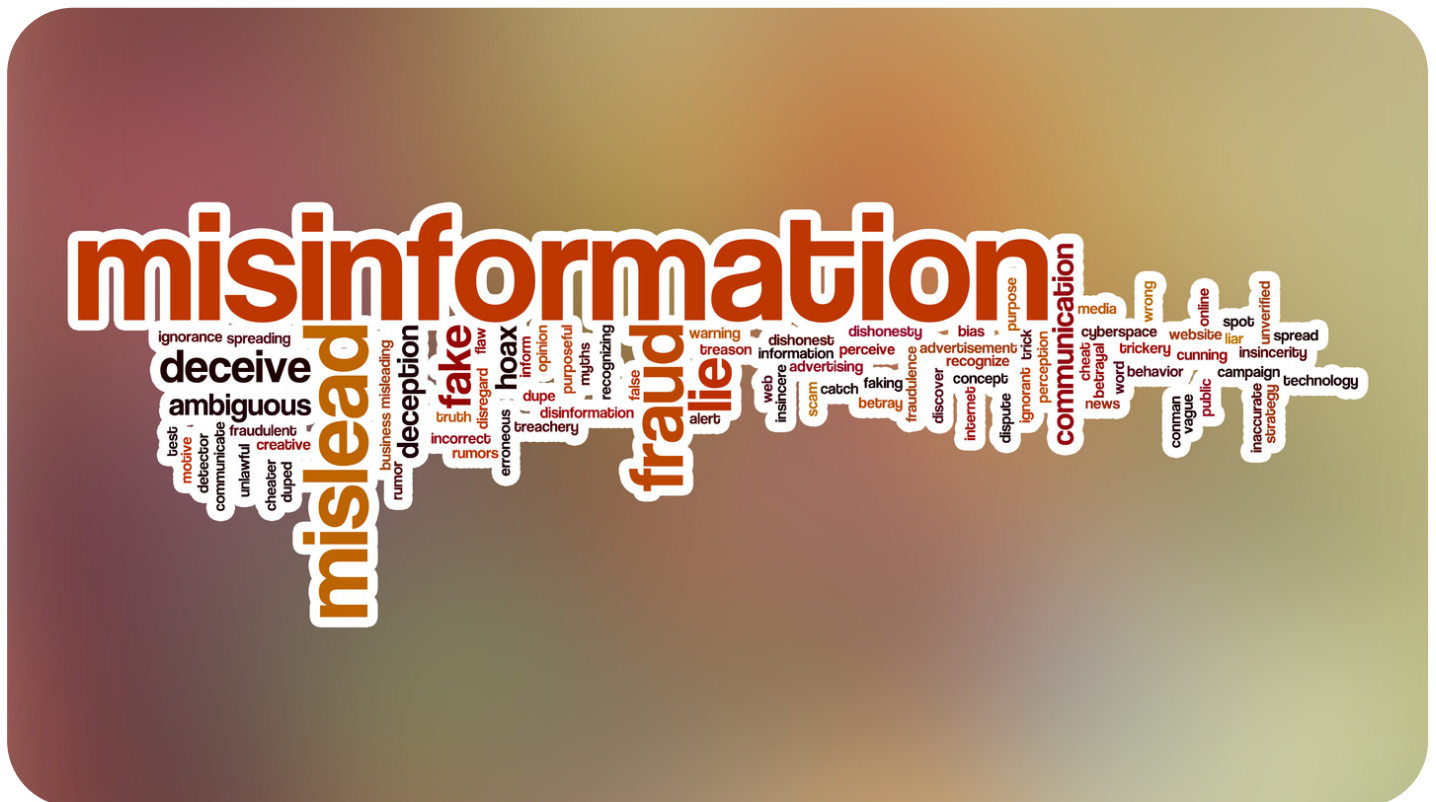
It is therefore important to distinguish between legitimate expressions of opinion and deliberate attempts to mislead or deceive. This can be a difficult task, as the line between the two can be blurry. However, there are certain criteria that can help to identify false or misleading information, such as the reliability of the source, the verifiability of the information, and the existence of corroborating evidence.



It is also important to note that freedom of expression is not an absolute right. It can be limited in certain circumstances, such as when it infringes on the rights of others, such as hate speech or incitement to violence. In the case of misinformation and disinformation, limits can also be placed on freedom of expression in order to protect public health and safety or to prevent harm to individuals or society as a whole. In order to strike a balance between freedom of expression and the need to combat misinformation and disinformation, it is important for individuals, media organizations, and governments to take responsibility for their actions. Individuals should be critical consumers of information and should take steps to verify the accuracy of information before sharing it.

Media organizations should strive to maintain high standards of journalistic integrity and avoid sensationalism and clickbait. Governments should also take steps to combat misinformation and disinformation, such as through education campaigns, fact-checking initiatives, and regulations on social media platforms.

While freedom of expression is a fundamental right, it is not absolute. The spread of misinformation and disinformation poses a serious threat to individuals and society as a whole. It is important to strike a balance between freedom of expression and the need to combat false and misleading information in order to protect public health, safety, and democratic institutions. By taking responsibility for our actions and working together, we can promote a society that values freedom of expression while combating misinformation and disinformation.



Picture courtesy: Pexels

SECTION V:

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:

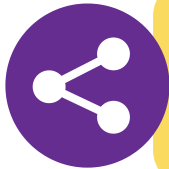
Verify the source of the news before sharing it with others. Check whether the source is reputable, trustworthy, and has a history of producing accurate news.



03

Check the Story:

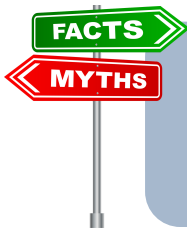
Before sharing a story, verify its authenticity by checking other sources to see if the story is being reported by reputable news outlets. If a story seems too outrageous or sensational, it is worth taking a few minutes to check its authenticity.



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.