



unesco

With the support of the UNESCO
Multi Donor Programme
on Freedom of Expression
and Safety of Journalists (MDP)

Resource pack

Journalists' Guide to Ethical Election Reporting



**MediaMatters
for Democracy**

Policy Research & Advocacy Initiative

Resource Pack: Journalists' Guide to Ethical Election Reporting

The Journalists' Guide to Ethical Election Reporting has been developed by Media Matters for Democracy with support from UNESCO. This comprehensive resource is designed to equip journalists and information practitioners across Pakistan with the knowledge and skills necessary for ethical, responsible, and informed election reporting.

Written by

Majid Nizami
Mudassir Rizvi

Review and Edit by

Yasal Munim
Usman Shahid

Design by

Aniqa Haider

October 2023

Published by Media Matters for Democracy in October 2023 under Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>
Some rights reserved.

Table of Contents

Summary	5
SECTION 1	8
REPORTING GENERAL ELECTIONS	9
Chapter 1 – International Human Rights Framework and Safety of Journalists	9
Right to Take Part in Public Affair	9
Right to Free Speech	10
Safety of Journalists	11
Hate Speech	11
Challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence	12
Other Sources to Explore	12
Chapter 2 - Election Reporting in Pakistan and the Vital Role of Media	13
The Media's Role in Elections	13
Challenges Faced by Journalists	14
Rise of Social Media	16
Other Sources to Explore	19
Chapter 3 - Understanding the Legal Framework around Elections in Pakistan	20
Introduction	20
Constitutional Principles and Articles	23
Election System in Pakistan	21
The Election Process	22
Role of the Election Commission	23
Electoral Framework of Single Constituency	23
Election Commission of Pakistan, Code of Conduct	26
Codes of Conduct Issued for General Election 2023	26
Code of Conduct for National Media 2023	27
Code of Conduct for Political Parties 2023	28
Other Sources to Explore	29
Chapter 4: Voter Education and Awareness	30
Introduction	30
Electoral Rolls in Pakistan	30
Voter Eligibility in Pakistan	31
Vote Registration	31
Transfer of Vote	31
Correction of Particulars of a Voter	31
Deletion of Vote	32
Postal Voting	32
Other Sources to Explore	33
Chapter 5: Newsrooms and Editorial Best Practices	33
Introduction	34
Ethical Reporting	34

Social Media and Ethics	35
Fairness in Presentation of Candidates	36
Facts, Opinions and Hate Speech	36
Reporting on Public Surveys	37
Checklist for Reporting Public Surveys	38
Assessing Ethical Practices, A Checklist	39
Other Sources to Explore	39
Chapter 6: Sources and Representation in Election Reporting	41
Introduction	41
Ensuring Diversity in Information Sourcing	41
Diversity in Sources	42
Marginalized and Minority Voices	42
Checklist for Source Diversity	44
Representation of Women and Gender Minorities	44
Other Sources to Explore	45
Chapter 7 - Safety considerations during elections	46
Introduction	46
Safety of Journalists During Electoral Reporting	46
1. Physical Safety	46
2. Digital Safety	47
3. Legal Safety	47
4. Psychosocial and Psychological Safety	47
Protecting the Safety of Sources	47
Other Sources to Explore	48
SECTION 2	49
ELECTIONS AND DISINFORMATION	49
Chapter 8 - Understanding Electoral Disinformation and its Impact on Democratic Processes	50
Introduction	51
Information Disorder and Electoral Process	51
Implications of Electoral Disinformation	53
Some examples of election disinformation in Pakistan	55
Role of Media	56
Other Sources to Explore	57
Chapter 9 - Tools and Techniques to Counter Electoral Disinformation	58
Introduction	58
Filling Data Voids: A Journalistic Imperative	58
Fact-Checking and Countering Disinformation	59
Other Sources to Explore	60
Chapter 10 - Fact-Checking with Digital Precision: Tools and Techniques	61
Introduction	61
Tech tools that can aid fact checking and information verification	61
1. Google Image Search	61
2. TinEye Reverse Image Search	61

3. Google Fact Check Explorer	62
4. Amnesty International YouTube DataViewer	62
Listening in: Proactive monitoring of social media platforms	62
Collaborative Fact-Checking	63
Other Sources to Explore	63

Summary

Elections are the cornerstone of any democracy, serving as the voice of the people in shaping their government's future. In Pakistan, as in many other nations, the electoral process is not a single-day event but a complex series of stages. These stages are essential to ensure that every eligible citizen can exercise their right to vote freely, without fear, intimidation, or inducements. This commitment to a just, fair, honest, and legal electoral process is enshrined in Pakistan's 1973 Constitution and reinforced by international obligations, particularly Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. An election is the ultimate expression of fundamental human rights, including the right to movement, expression, association, assembly, and access to information. In this context, the media plays a central role in multiple capacities: as a source of authentic information about electoral rights and responsibilities, as a watchdog ensuring the integrity of the entire electoral process, and as an objective provider of information on political contestants' programs and manifestoes, enabling voters to make informed choices.

While social media has made communication and connectivity smoother and easier than ever before, it does, however, pose a set of complex challenges during electoral events, including disinformation campaigns, incitement to violence, political polarization and manipulative public relations campaigns. Information overload itself also leads to disinformation and deepens polarization in society. This is particularly concerning as an estimated 5.8 percent of the world's population uses social media, especially in relation to the rise in Artificial Intelligence, and frequency of gendered disinformation campaigns.

Electoral processes in Pakistan have been frequently overshadowed by controversy due primarily to enduring political instability and the historical oscillation of power between the democratically elected governments and the military regimes. The removal of prime ministers in the last two governments serves as a testament to the persistent political turbulence that has long gripped the state. However, the role of social media in both the general elections of 2018 and the ensuing political upheavals has left a seminal impact on the political landscape of Pakistan.

While digital evolution remains relatively new in the country, the increased accessibility to popular social media platforms has significantly influenced the way the public perceives their preferred political candidates. Pakistan is home to an estimated 241.71 million people, with 127 million registered voters as of July 2023.¹ At the start of 2023, the number of internet users stood at 87.35 million, of which 71.70 million use social media, amounting to 26.69% of the total population.² The most popular apps based on their bandwidth use in Pakistan are Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, and YouTube.³

1. Pakistan Population 2023 (Live). (2023). World Population Review. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/pakistan-population>.

2. Sadozi, I. (2023, September). Number of registered voters in Pakistan rises by 21m in four years. Retrieved October 24, 2023, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1776736>.

3. Telecom indicators. (2023, April). Pakistan Telecommunication Authority. Retrieved October 24, 2023, from <https://www.pta.gov.pk/en/telecom-indicators>.

The Purpose of This Resource Pack

This Self-Paced Learning Resource Pack aims to build the capacity of journalists and information practitioners, enabling them to:

- **Report Ethically and Responsibly:** Journalists will learn to report on marginalized communities, including gender and religious minorities, with sensitivity and fairness.
- **Develop Comprehensive Story Ideas:** The resource pack will support journalists generate story ideas and reporting plans for coverage of marginalized communities, fostering inclusive election reporting.
- **Enhance Digital Literacy:** Journalists will learn about tools and techniques to counter online disinformation, and improve their fact-checking skills along with developing an increased awareness of the different forms of MDM (misinformation, disinformation and mal-information).

Learning Objectives

This resource pack, includes information that will help journalists work toward achieving the following learning objectives

- **Constitutional and Legal Understanding:** Gain insight into the constitutional and legal foundations of elections in Pakistan.
- **Media Trends Awareness:** Understand current media trends in electoral reporting and identify opportunities for improved reporting.
- **Ethical Best Practices:** Familiarise oneself with ethical best practices when dealing with sources while reporting on elections.
- **Safety and Sensitivity:** Learn to prioritize the safety and sensitivity of both themselves and their sources in story planning and execution.
- **Combatting Disinformation:** Identify different types of electoral disinformation, their sources, and digital dissemination channels, and assess the impact of disinformation on the electoral process.
- **Verification and Fact-Checking:** Acquire skills in using tools and techniques for verifying and fact-checking digital information online.

Your Journey Begins

This resource pack is your guide to becoming a proficient and responsible election reporter. Each unit in this pack is carefully crafted to provide you with the knowledge and skills necessary to excel in your role as a journalist or information practitioner during election coverage. We encourage you to proceed at your own pace, ensuring a thorough understanding of each unit before moving on to the next. By the end of this self-paced learning journey, you will be better equipped to produce reliable and accurate news reports, present credible analyses, and tell stories ethically and sensitively. Moreover, you will be well-prepared to safeguard your physical, mental, and digital well-being as you navigate the complex world of election reporting.

SECTION 1
**REPORTING GENERAL
ELECTIONS**

Chapter 1 – International Human Rights Framework and Safety of Journalists

This section will introduce readers to the international human rights framework and the international standards on freedom of expression, upholding sanctity of the democratic processes, and ensuring safety of journalists.

Objectives

- Provide an overview of international laws on freedom of expression, and participation in public affairs.
- Understand the human rights framework for ensuring free and fair elections.
- Become aware of the international conventions on ensuring safety of journalists and prevention against hate speech.

The International human rights instruments are necessary to understand because they protect and provide basic rights of citizens, which thereby allow them to participate actively in any electoral process. The rights of citizens are interdependent and indivisible which means that one set of rights cannot be enjoyed without other rights. To ensure a meaningful electoral process, it is necessary to understand that the right to vote and be elected in genuine, periodic elections cannot be achieved till citizens are able to enjoy their right to freedom of expression, freedom of association, right to peaceful assembly and freedom of movement. These rights and principles are enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), and other relevant documents. States who are signatories to these human rights treaties and conventions are, therefore, required to respect, protect and fulfill human rights under international law.

Right to Take Part in Public Affairs

A human rights violation is a public interest issue, and public interest journalism is the professed mission of most journalists and media organizations. Therefore, it is imperative and logical for journalists to report ethically and responsibly on the electoral process. The following are the most relevant rights pertaining to elections and voting rights of citizens:

- **Article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁴**

1. Everyone has the right to take part in the government of [their] country, directly or through freely chosen representatives.
2. Everyone has the right to equal access to public service in the country.

4. United Nations. (n.d.). Universal declaration of human rights. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

3. The will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government; this will be expressed in periodic and genuine elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret vote or by equivalent free voting procedures.

- **Article 25 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights⁵**

Every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity, without any of the distinctions mentioned in article 2 and without unreasonable restrictions:

- (a) To take part in the conduct of public affairs, directly or through freely chosen representatives;
- (b) To vote and to be elected at genuine periodic elections which shall be by universal and equal suffrage and shall be held by secret ballot, guaranteeing the free expression of the will of the electors;
- (c) To have access, on general terms of equality, to public service in [their] country.

Further guidance on the interpretation of Article 25 of the ICCPR is provided under General Comment 25 of the UN Committee on Human Rights on “the right to participate in public affairs, voting rights and the rights to equal access to public service”.⁶

Right to Free Speech

A core component of holding free and fair elections is ensuring that States protect and respect freedom of expression of their citizens. The right is needed to ensure people have access to credible and expansive knowledge to help them make informed decision for their own future. Therefore, it is important to be aware of the following laws:

- **Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights⁷**

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

- **Article 19 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights⁸**

1. Everyone shall have the right to hold opinions without interference.
2. Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.
3. The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:

5. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights | Ohchr. (n.d).

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

6. UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), CCPR General Comment No. 25: Article 25 (Participation in Public Affairs and the Right to Vote), The Right to Participate in Public Affairs, Voting Rights and the Right of Equal Access to Public Service, 12 July 1996, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/453883fe22.html> [accessed 21 October 2023].

7. United Nations. (n.d.). Universal declaration of human rights. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>.

8. International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights | Ohchr. (n.d).

<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights>.

- (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others;
- (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.

General Comment No. 34 by the Human Rights Committee, which provides interpretative guidance on Article 19 of the ICCPR, recognizes that freedom of expression including “political discourse, commentary on one’s own and on public affairs, canvassing, discussion of human rights, journalism, cultural and artistic expression, teaching, and religious discourse”.⁹ It is important to note that the right to opinion is now universally considered an absolute right without interference, however the expression of opinions is not an absolute freedom and is subjected to some restrictions which are the subject of great legal and practical debate around the world.

Safety of Journalists

The ICCPR comprises a number of other obligations which ensures safety of journalists and these include Article 6 (inherent right to life), Article 7 (no one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment), Article 9 (right to liberty and security of person) Article 14 (right to fair trial), and Article 17 (no one shall be subjected to arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home or correspondence, nor to unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation).

In the last ten years, there has been an increase in international soft law. In October 2022, the United Nations Human Rights Council adopted a new resolution on the ‘Safety of Journalists’ which urges States to their utmost to prevent violence, intimidation, threats and attacks against journalists and media workers.¹⁰ The UN Human Rights Council has adopted similar resolutions in 2014, 2016, 2018, 2020, and 2021). Similarly, multiple resolutions and decisions on the safety of journalists have been adopted by the UN General Assembly (2014, 2015, 2017, 2019), the UN Security Council (2014), and UNESCO’s governing bodies and the International Programme for the Development of Communication (2014 - 2020).¹¹

Hate Speech

There is no unanimously agreed definition of hate speech under the international human rights law. The concept is, however, under discussion especially with regards to freedom of opinion and expression. The UN Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech¹² defines it as “any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor.”

9. UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), General comment no. 34, Article 19, Freedoms of opinion and expression, 12 September 2011, CCPR/C/GC/34 , available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4ed34b562.html> [accessed 21 October 2023]

10. UN Human Rights Council resolution on safety of journalists welcomes the windhoek+30 declaration. UNESCO.org. (n.d.-a). <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/un-human-rights-council-resolution-safety-journalists-welcomes-windhoek30-declaration>.

11. Krimmer, R., Rabitsch, A., Kužel, R., Achler, M., & Licht, N. (2022). Elections in digital times: a guide for electoral practitioners. UNESCO.

12. United Nations. (n.d.-b). What is hate speech?. United Nations. https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/understanding-hate-speech/what-is-hate-speech?gclid=CjwKCAjw7c2pBhAZEiwA88pOFzBbkwnpMVWXRliTbhNe5ENx7h0snHoaXHIp0854rzZcgEuAail.rNWRoC9qkQAvD_BwE.

The limitation on hate speech seems to demand reconciliation between two sets of values: allowing individuals to hold open debates by exercising their free speech while ensuring equal and non-discriminatory participation for all individuals. Balancing the two has been quite tricky. States are obligated under Article 20 of the ICCPR to prohibit any propaganda for war and any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence. This prohibits hate speech but does not criminalize it.

Other treaties with provisions for defining hate speech include The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD), The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW),¹³ and The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Challenges posed by Artificial Intelligence

In 2019, the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution¹⁴ on the right to privacy in the digital age. According to the resolution, the rights people have offline must be protected online, including the right to privacy, and acknowledged that emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, can impact enjoyment of human rights. General Comment No. 34 by the Human Rights Committee, which provides interpretative guidance on Article 19 of the ICCPR even protects “all forms of expression and the means of their disseminations” including “all forms of audio-visual as well as electronic and internet-based modes of expression.”¹⁵

It is interesting to note that the right to political participation comprises freedom of expression and presupposes that the voters “should be able to form opinions independently, free of violence or threat of violence, compulsion, inducement or manipulative interference of any kind”.¹⁶

Other Sources to Explore

- UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity. Link: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/safety-of-journalists/un-plan-action-safety-journalists-and-issue-impunity>.
- UNESCO’s Basic Texts Related to the Safety of Journalists (2023). Link: <https://www.unesco.org/en/safety-journalists/basic-texts>.
- Elections in digital times: a guide for electoral practitioners (2022). UNESCO. Link: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000382102>.

13. Pakistan ratified United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1996, The treaty obliges state organs, including the Election Commission of Pakistan among other state institutions, to support women’s equal participation in the electoral process. CEDAW requires “all appropriate measures” to be taken to “eliminate” discrimination and “ensure” equality for women in the political life of the country.

14. Human Rights Council Res. 42/15, Rep. of the Human Rights Council, 42nd Sess., September 9-27, 2019, U.N., A/HRC/RES/42/15 (October 7, 2019).

15. UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), General comment no. 34, Article 19, Freedoms of opinion and expression, 12 September 2011, CCPR/C/GC/34, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/4ed34b562.html> [accessed 21 October 2023]

16. UN Human Rights Committee (HRC), CCPR General Comment No. 25: Article 25 (Participation in Public Affairs and the Right to Vote), The Right to Participate in Public Affairs, Voting Rights and the Right of Equal Access to Public Service, 12 July 1996, CCPR/C/21/Rev.1/Add.7, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/453883fc22.html> [accessed 21 October 2023]

Chapter 2 – Election Reporting in Pakistan and the Vital Role of Media

Understanding the media's pivotal role in elections is essential for journalists and informed citizens. In this chapter, you will explore the significance of media in the electoral process, identifying key reporting areas, and comprehending how media promotes democratic values.

Objectives

- Provide impartial and investigation-based coverage of the electoral process.
- What factors media practitioners take into account to uphold journalistic standards and ethics in electoral reporting?
- The role played by the media in upholding democratic values and ensuring transparency during the election process.

The Media's Role in Elections

Media plays a pivotal role during elections for several compelling reasons. It serves as the primary source of information, facilitating transparency and accountability in the democratic process. Through comprehensive coverage, the media empowers citizens by keeping them informed about political candidates, parties, policies, and the overall electoral landscape. This information is essential for voters to make informed choices and decisions. The media also acts as a watchdog, ensuring the integrity of the electoral process. Journalists investigate and expose electoral malpractice, corruption, and any attempts to manipulate the outcome. By holding political contestants accountable, the media serves as a crucial check and balance, reinforcing the principles of free and fair elections. Moreover, the media creates a platform for political dialogue and public debate. It provides space for candidates to present their manifestos and engage with voters. This open discourse fosters democratic values by allowing diverse voices to be heard, encouraging civic participation, and promoting inclusivity. In addition to its informative and investigative roles, media influences public opinion.

Through news reports, editorials, and expert analyses, the media shapes and guides public discourse. Journalists' coverage of election campaigns, debates, and issues informs voters, helping them understand the implications of their choices. This coverage also encourages political candidates to address pressing concerns, ultimately enriching the democratic process. The media can also act as a bridge between voters and political contestants. It offers a platform for candidates to articulate their policies and engage with the electorate. By covering candidates' campaigns and statements, the media plays a critical role in disseminating information about the options available to voters. The media's significance during elections cannot be overstated. Its role in informing, scrutinising, facilitating public dialogue, shaping public opinion, and bridging the gap between voters and candidates underscores its vital role in ensuring the health of democratic elections.

Challenges Faced by Journalists

The news media in Pakistan, however, continues to face many challenges, including widespread misinformation and disinformation along with regulatory challenges, which restrains it from playing its role to the fullest in a democratic society. The enactment of different laws has had a direct impact on freedom of expression and press, in particular the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) 2016,¹⁷ Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Online Content Rules 2020,¹⁸ PECA Amendment Ordinance¹⁹ (now defunct) as well as attempts to introduce new regulatory mechanisms to bring the digital space under regulation through proposed drafts of Pakistan Media Regulatory Authority, Pakistan Media Development Authority²⁰ and OTT regulation strategies.

Regulatory Challenges: Online speech and intimidation of journalists through legal action has continued to be a challenge as the cybercrime law PECA,²¹ defamation laws²² and some sections of the Pakistan Penal Code, including sedition charges have been used to initiate investigations against journalists. From 2018 onwards, a number of cases related to punitive legal actions against journalists have been filed. This includes the examples of Shahzeb Jilani,²³ Bilal Farooqi,²⁴ Asad Toor,²⁵ Shahid Aslam,²⁶ Shaheen Sehbai, Wajahat Saeed Khan, Sabir Shakir and Moeed Pirzada.²⁷ While most of the cases have been quashed, dragging journalists to courts over their reporting and criticism of state institutions and involving them in exhaustive legal proceedings hamper them playing their role as a member of the media industry.

Hate Speech: Similarly, hate speech and targeted misinformation campaigns have also emerged as another form of threat affecting journalists' ability to freely express themselves online. When it comes to mainstream political discourse in Pakistan, women journalists²⁸ and members from the marginalized communities, particularly transgender individuals,²⁹ have been documented to face a higher risk of attacks, which often threaten their physical safety. A 2020 report, titled "Women Journalists and the Double Bind: The Self-Censorship Effect of Online Harassment in Pakistan", MMfD reported that 60% of the participants shared that they had faced some form of attacks,

17. Aziz, F. (2022). Rethinking the Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act: How cybercrime laws are weaponised against women. Retrieved 7 June 2022, from <https://hrcep-web.org/hrcepweb/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/2022-Rethinking-PECA-How-cybercrime-laws-are-weaponised-against-women.pdf>
18. PFUJ releases statement rejecting the recently passed Citizens Protection (Against Online Harms) Rules - Digital Rights Monitor. (2020). Retrieved 2 June 2022, from <https://digitalrightsmonitor.pk/pfuj-releases-statement-rejecting-the-recently-passed-citizens-protection-against-online-harms-rules/>
19. Islamabad High Court Quashes PECA Amendment Ordinance; Part of S.20 of PECA Also Unconstitutional - Digital Rights Monitor. (2022). Retrieved 7 June 2022, from <https://digitalrightsmonitor.pk/islamabad-high-court-quashes-peca-amendment-ordinance-part-of-s-20-of-peca-also-unconstitutional/>
20. PMDA to affect every citizen: PFUJ. (2021). Retrieved 7 June 2022, from <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/897748-pmda-to-affect-every-citizen-pfuj>
21. Pakistan: Three journalists face sedition charges under Cybercrime Law / IFJ. (2020). Retrieved 12 May 2022, from <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/pakistan-three-journalists-face-sedition-charges-under-cybercrime-law.html>
22. Pakistani journalists charged with criminal defamation over tweets in sexual harassment case - Committee to Protect Journalists. (2020). Retrieved 7 March 2022, from <https://cpj.org/2021/02/pakistani-journalists-charged-with-criminal-defamation-over-tweets-in-sexual-harassment-case/>
23. Baloch, S. (2019, May 18). *Case against journalist Shahzeb Jilani quashed due to lack of evidence*. DAWN.COM. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1483053>.
24. Ali, I. (2020, September 11). *Express Tribune journalist Bilal Farooqi arrested in Karachi for "defaming Pakistan Army"*. DAWN.COM. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1579118>.
25. *Journalist Asad Ali Toor booked for "maligning state institutions"*. The Express Tribune. (2020, September 15). <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2264105/journalist-asad-ali-toor-booked-for-maligning-state-institutions>.
26. Hussain, A. (2023, January 19). *Pakistan journalist held in alleged Bajwa tax leak case gets bail*. Freedom of the Press News | Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/1/19/pakistan-journalist-held-in-alleged-bajwa-tax-leak-case-gets-bail>.
27. *Pakistan: Four journalists accused of inciting unrest*. International Federation of Journalists. (2023, June 21). <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/pakistan-four-journalists-accused-of-inciting-unrest>
28. *Online Attacks Against Women Journalists*. (n.d.). Coalition for Women in Journalism. Retrieved October 22, 2023, from <https://www.womeninjournalism.org/testimonies/online-attacks-against-women-journalists>
29. Ghani, A. (2023, March). *PAKISTAN: Twitter no longer a space for discourse*. Digital Rights Monitor. Retrieved October 22, 2023, from <https://digitalrightsmonitor.pk/pakistan-twitter-no-longer-a-space-for-discourse/>

threats or harassment because of their profession: journalism. It found out that 10 percent more women said that they faced harassment and threats as compared to 2018.³⁰

Gendered Disinformation: Harassment, abuse and gendered disinformation campaigns are frequently used to target women and marginalised groups online. Gendered disinformation has a silencing effect on women and marginalised groups and makes it difficult for them to safely engage and participate in public spaces. A 2021 study revealed that 85% of women across the globe have experienced or witnessed online gender-based violence (OGBV), and the number rose to 88% in the context of Asia-Pacific.³¹ From morphed images to falsified videos, women in South-Asian countries face all sorts of anger from keyboard warriors. Given the fact that these threats often spill into physical space, it's very alarming as it puts their family & friends at risk as well. Journalists Asma Shirazi³² and Gharidah Farooqi³³ are two major examples that highlight the extent of threat posed by gendered disinformation and hate speech towards women in journalism either expressing their opinion in personal capacity or giving comments on a specific given issue through TV, print media, or social networking platforms. The coordinated disinformation and hate campaigns executed against journalists often involve highly insensitive and derogatory hashtags and posts. Such content, curated in the local language, tends to circulate on social media platforms for days, gaining higher levels of engagement and visibility.

Physical Attacks: Physical attacks on the media have remained commonplace in Pakistan, including murders, assaults, manhandling and abductions. At least 86 cases of attacks and violations against journalists and media practitioners were reported in Pakistan from May 2021 to April 2022.³⁴ These attacks included 13 legal cases filed against journalists, 13 cases of offline harassment, 11 instances of illegal detention, nine cases of attempt to murder, and nine cases of verbal threats. Women journalists remain particularly vulnerable when they are reporting on field, especially while covering political rallies. In April 2022, Zamzam Saeed and her team were beaten up and harassed during a political rally.³⁵ In 2019, two women journalists were harassed and forced to leave a long march organized by a religious political party.³⁶

The violence faced by journalists, while reporting on ground or in online spaces, and impunity for these crimes remains one of the greatest challenges to freedom of expression worldwide. A research carried out between 2012 to 2022 on the targeted killings of journalists in Pakistan found that there have been no convictions in 96 percent of cases.³⁷ This included the high-profile killing of Pakistani anchorperson Arshad Sharif in Kenya.³⁸

30. Khan, S., Shaukat, A., & Naeem, W. (2020). Women Journalists and the Double Bind: The Self-Censorship Effect of Online Harassment in Pakistan. Retrieved 7 June 2022, from <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nt9hTGPxdaoOqiZtsPouV66FdziLuwok/view>

31. Measuring the prevalence of online violence against women. <https://onlineviolencewomen.eiu.com/>. (2021, March 1).

32. DRF condemns the online attacks against Asma Shirazi. (2021, October). International Federation of Journalists. Retrieved October 20, 2023, from <https://www.ifj.org/media-centre/news/detail/category/press-releases/article/pakistan-online-harassment-storm-against-bbc-journalist>

33. Pakistan: Gharidah Farooqi Hit With Yet Another Wave Of Online Attacks. (2022, August). Coalition for Women in Journalism. Retrieved October 22, 2023, from <https://www.womeninjournalism.org/threats-all/pakistan-gharidah-farooqi-hit-with-yet-another-wave-of-online-attacks>

34. Freedom Network . (2022, May 3). *Women in media and digital journalists in the crosshairs of threat actors in Pakistan* . Freedom Network Pakistan Press Freedom Report – 2021-22. <https://www.fnpk.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/FINAL-Pakistan-Press-Freedom-Report-2022.pdf>.

35. Twitter. (2022). Twitter. Retrieved October 25, 2023, from <https://twitter.com/MurtazaViews/status/1515463947868151813>.

36. Yusuf, H. (2019, November 4). Protests & Women. DAWN.COM. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1514760>.

37. *No convictions in 96% of journalist killings in Pakistan: FN impunity report 2022* . Freedom Network - Defending Press Freedom and Freedom of Expression. (2022, October 27). <https://www.fnpk.org/no-convictions-in-96-of-journalist-killings-in-pakistan-fn-impunity-report-2022/#:-:text=The%20report%20is%20released%20on,which%20falls%20on%202%20November>.

38. Malalo, H., & Peshimam, G. (2022, October 25). *Pakistani journalist Arshad Sharif killed in police shooting in Kenya*. Reuters. <https://www.reuters.com/world/pakistani-journalist-killed-police-shooting-kenya-2022-10-24/>.

In recent years, attacks have been reported against not just individuals but media houses and media organisations too. In 2019, the Islamabad office of Dawn News was surrounded by a mob³⁹ and in February 2021, the Geo and Jang office in Karachi was attacked by protestors.⁴⁰

Rise of Social Media

Social media poses a set of complex challenges during electoral events, including disinformation campaigns, incitement to violence, political polarization and manipulative public relations campaigns.⁴¹ Information overload itself also leads to disinformation⁴² and deepens polarization in [society](#).⁴³ While disinformation may be a result of coordinated campaigns orchestrated by electoral players and their supporters, hate speech on online platforms during electoral events may sometimes originate from specific sections of the public, particularly in countries where ethnic volatility contributes to political instability.

In recent years, hate speech has been identified as a “precursor to atrocity crimes, including [genocide](#)”.⁴⁴ In the context of social media and electoral events, critical episodes of hate speech and incitement to violence have [emerged](#) from a number of developing South Asian markets, including Myanmar and Ethiopia, where tech companies have failed to counter concomitant challenges of elections either due to the lack of adequate moderation resources or prioritization of business over public good.⁴⁵ This has led to online violence jeopardising the physical safety of hundreds of individuals belonging to vulnerable ethnic groups in these regions. With the 2021 Facebook Papers revelations, it became evident that tech firms benefit heavily from negative engagement on their social networking sites, which is generated through potentially harmful or unlawful [content](#).⁴⁶ Meta also allocates 87% of its global budget for classifying misinformation for the US, leaving the rest of the world with a mere 13%. Brazil⁴⁷ and Turkey⁴⁸ are two major examples that highlight how large platforms such as Facebook and YouTube fail to counter the spread of disinformation or facilitate censorship of dissenting voices during elections.

Thus, the failure to acknowledge social, cultural, and linguistic nuances specific to foreign markets, particularly those across South Asia and Africa, further highlights how violence and other harmful material thrives on social media platforms due to the lack of efficient reporting mechanisms and tailored moderation measures by parent companies.

39. Reporter, T. N. S. (2019, December 3). *Mob besieges dawn offices in Islamabad*. DAWN.COM. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1520079>.

40. Hashmi, T. (2021, February 21). *Geo and Jang Media Group's central office attacked by protesters in Karachi*. Geo News. <https://www.geo.tv/latest/336211-geo-and-jang-groups-central-office-attacked-by-protesters-in-karachi>.

41. Schmuziger, R., Lupion, B. L., & Meyer-Resende, M. (2019). Social media monitoring during elections. (2019). Open Society Foundations. Retrieved October 25, 2023, from <https://digitalmonitor.democracy-reporting.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/social-media-monitoring-during-elections-20190614.pdf>.

42. Menczer, F., & Hills, T. (2020, December). Information Overload Helps Fake News Spread, and Social Media Knows It. *American Scientific*. Retrieved October 25, 2023, from <https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/information-overload-helps-fake-news-spread-and-social-media-knows-it/>.

43. Human Development Report 2021-2022. (2022). Human Development Reports. <https://hdr.undp.org/content/human-development-report-2021-22>.

44. NoToHate Fact Sheets. United Nations. https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/notohate_fact_sheets_en.pdf.

45. MMfD expresses concern over Facebook's continuing failure to detect hate speech in ads. (2022). Digital Rights Monitor - Advocacy. Retrieved October 25, 2023, <https://advocacy.digitalrightsmonitor.pk/2022/08/01/mmfd-expresses-concern-over-facebooks-continuing-failure-to-detect-hate-speech-in-ads/>.

46. Downie, A. (2022, October). YouTube and Facebook letting Brazil election disinformation spread, NGO says. *The Guardian*. Retrieved October 25, 2023, from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/oct/20/brazil-election-disinformation-youtube-facebook>.

47. Iskit, C. (2023, March). TURKEY: Using the disinformation law as a weapon. Digital Rights Monitor. Retrieved October 25, 2023, from <https://digitalrightsmonitor.pk/turkey-using-the-disinformation-law-as-a-weapon/>.

48. Popli, N. (2021, October). The 5 Most Important Revelations From the 'Facebook Papers'. *Time*. Retrieved October 25, 2023, from <https://time.com/6110234/facebook-papers-testimony-explained/>.

However, it is not only the developing economies where social media has threatened or undermined the integrity of elections. Meta, formerly known as Facebook Inc., was found to have shared personal data of millions of its users across the United States with the now defunct political consultancy, [Cambridge Analytica](#).⁴⁹ The data was then used to build voter profiles in the 2016 US presidential elections. The massive data breaches, which involved about 87 million people, fetched Meta a fine amounting to \$5 billion by the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC).⁵⁰ This goes on to show how leading social media companies are capable of influencing or infiltrating electoral processes with the vast amounts of data they hold across their digital products in the world's foremost economies, despite powerful and autonomous state regulators routinely monitoring their practices.

When these issues are examined in the context of Pakistan, which lacks both political economy and the market power to hold Big Tech accountable for their negligence, it becomes evident that addressing the challenges posed by disinformation and hate speech necessitates collective efforts. This responsibility extends not only to state actors but also to grassroots initiatives aimed at educating the masses in basic digital investigative skills. However, with persistent legislation of draconian cyber rules, aimed at suppressing dissenting voices and surveilling citizens, impede the space for a dialogue on real issues in the country. The need for measures to counter online disinformation and hate speech becomes particularly urgent during electoral events, as social media cells operated by political parties, both within the country and abroad, tend to resort to disinformation against their opponents. During such times, it becomes increasingly important for journalists to be equipped with the right tools and knowledge to distinguish facts from misleading claims and debunk “fake news” efficiently.

Retrospectively, electoral processes in Pakistan have been frequently overshadowed by controversy due primarily to enduring political instability and the historical oscillation of power between the democratically elected governments and the military regimes.⁵¹ The removal of prime ministers in the last two governments serves as a testament to the persistent political turbulence that has long gripped the state. However, the role of social media in both the general elections of 2018 and the ensuing political upheavals has left a seminal impact on the political landscape of Pakistan.

While digital evolution remains relatively new in the country, the increased accessibility to popular social media platforms has significantly influenced the way the public perceives their preferred political candidates. Pakistan is home to an estimated 241.71 million people, with 127 million registered voters as of July 2023.⁵² At the start of 2023, the number of internet users stood at 87.35 million, of which 71.70 million use social media, amounting to 26.69% of the total population. The most popular apps based on their bandwidth use in Pakistan are Facebook, TikTok, WhatsApp, and YouTube.⁵⁴

49. Hern, H. (2018, May). Cambridge Analytica: how did it turn clicks into votes?. The Guardian. Retrieved October 25, 2023, from <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2018/may/06/cambridge-analytica-how-turn-clicks-into-votes-christopher-wylie>.

50. FTC Imposes \$5 Billion Penalty and Sweeping New Privacy Restrictions on Facebook. (2019, July). Federal Trade Commission. Retrieved October 25, 2023, from <https://www.ftc.gov/news-events/news/press-releases/2019/07/ftc-imposes-5-billion-penalty-sweeping-new-privacy-restrictions-facebook>.

51. Pakistan: A political history. (n.d.). Asia Society. Retrieved October 24, 2023, from <https://asiasociety.org/education/pakistan-political-history>.

52. Pakistan Population 2023 (Live). (2023). World Population Review. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/pakistan-population>.

53. Sadozi, I. (2023, September). Number of registered voters in Pakistan rises by 21m in four years. Retrieved October 24, 2023, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1776736>.

54. Telecom indicators. (2023, April). Pakistan Telecommunication Authority. Retrieved October 24, 2023, from <https://www.pta.gov.pk/en/telecom-indicators>.

The 2018 election marked a turning point in the electoral history of Pakistan, as the event witnessed leading political parties, including the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) and the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N), establishing a strong digital footprint to bolster their campaigns. It was the first time political parties used social media platforms to optimum capacity to exert electoral influence on the public and advance agendas against their opponents.⁵⁵ The stark shift in campaigning streams and communication channels associated with political parties arrived in the wake of increasing social media user base in the country, with the PTI registering about 50 million voters through its digital database and mobile app alone just weeks prior to the elections.⁵⁶ The pre-poll targeting of potential voters through strong campaigning by PTI's "social media cells" and advanced tech tools substantially facilitated its victory in the election.

When juxtaposed with the 2018 elections, the upcoming election illustrates a higher engagement and involvement of social media in terms of campaigning, especially in light of the recent developments in generative AI technology and the convenience thereof. With generative AI tools now at a user's disposal, the next election campaigns are more likely to witness a rapid rise in deployment of fabricated images, videos, and text posts curated exclusively with the objective of driving forward a certain political narrative. These potential challenges stand the risk of aggravating with the changes a popular social media platform such as Twitter has undergone over the past year since billionaire Elon Musk's acquisition.

Twitter, now known as "X", has already attracted intense regulatory scrutiny over its disposal of election integrity teams⁵⁷ and reinstatement of political advertisements⁵⁸ in the western markets. When analyzed in the context of Pakistan, where majority of the political discourse takes place on X, its failure is evident in combatting rampant disinformation and hate speech, particularly due to the lack of moderation resources for non-English languages. This allows harmful content (including hashtags) in local languages to thrive on the platform, with journalists, politicians, and supporters of certain political parties often bearing the brunt of coordinated disinformation campaigns.

In light of these developments, and with social media users having increased during the 2020 Covid-19 lockdowns in Pakistan,⁵⁹ the 2024 elections will also witness a stronger voter base online, which will help in understanding the pre-poll dynamics more effectively and reflect on the subsequent voting outcomes.

55. Jahangir, R. (2018, July). How political parties manipulate cyberspace for electioneering. Herald Magazine. Retrieved October 24, 2023, from <https://herald.dawn.com/news/1398599>.

56. Sayeed, S., & Drazen, J. (2018, August). How a phone app and a database served up Imran Khan's Pakistan poll win. Reuters. Retrieved October 24, 2023, from <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-pakistan-election-pti-analysis-idUKKBN1KQ00T>.

57. O'Carroll, L. (2023, September). Musk ditches X's election integrity team ahead of key votes around world. The Guardian. Retrieved October 24, 2022, from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2023/sep/28/elon-musk-ditches-x-twitter-election-integrity-team-key-votes-disinformation>.

58. Dang, S. (2023, August). X will allow political ads from candidates, parties ahead of US election. Reuters.

<https://www.reuters.com/technology/x-will-allow-political-ads-candidates-parties-ahead-us-election-2023-08-29/>.

59. Jahangir, R. (2020, April). Social media outlets see surge in number of Pakistani users. Dawn. Retrieved October 24, 2023, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1548993>.

Other Sources to Explore

- UN Plan of Action on the Safety of Journalists and the Issue of Impunity - https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/issues/journalists/2023-01-31/un-plan-on-safety-journalists_en.pdf.
- Media Literacy: A Guide for Professionals: A UNESCO guide to media literacy for informed and responsible journalism.
- Election and Media in Digital Times (2019). UNESCO - <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000371486>

Chapter 3 – Understanding the Legal Framework around Elections in Pakistan

Introduction

Understanding the legal framework governing elections in Pakistan is vital for journalists to provide accurate and informed coverage. This chapter delves into the constitutional and legal provisions that shape Pakistan's electoral process. Participants will explore the essential principles enshrined in the constitution, the role of the Election Commission, and key legal aspects. They will gain the knowledge necessary to critically assess the integrity of elections and ensure public confidence in the electoral process.

Objectives

- What are the fundamental principles of a credible election as protected by the constitution?
- How does the constitution empower the Election Commission of Pakistan?
- What are the relevant articles in the constitution concerning democracy and elections?
- How does the electoral system work in Pakistan's National Assembly, Senate, and Provincial Assemblies?
- What are the major steps in the election process, as outlined in the Constitution and Elections Act 2017?
- ECP's Code of Conduct and what it entails for local journalists in Pakistan

Constitutional Principles and Articles

Pakistan's electoral process is governed by fundamental principles enshrined in the constitution. These principles include the right to vote, free choice without fear, secret balloting, access to information, equal opportunities for political parties, accurate vote counting, and statutory provisions for integrity.

The following are the key constitutional articles related to democracy and elections in Pakistan include the following:

- **Article 15 (Freedom of Movement)**
- **Article 51 (2) outlines eligibility to vote**

60. The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, National Assembly of Pakistan (1973). Retrieved from https://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1549886415_632.pdf.

- **Article 16 (Freedom of Assembly)**
- **Article 51 (3) specifies the composition of the National Assembly**
- **Article 17: (Freedom of Association)**
- **Article 62 defines qualifications**
- **Article 19 (Freedom of Speech)Article 63 outlines disqualifications for membership of Majlis-e-Shoora (Parliament)**
- **Article 19A (Right to Information)**
- **Article 106 (1) deals with the constitution of Provincial Assemblies.**

Election System in Pakistan

The electoral system in Pakistan comprises the National Assembly, the Senate, and Provincial Assemblies. The National Assembly has 336 seats,⁶¹ with 266 directly elected by voters through the first-past-the-post system, 60 reserved seats for women, and 10 reserved seats for non-Muslims. In 2021, Senate comprised of 100 members, and the number will become 96 in 2024⁶² following the passage of the 25th Constitution Amendment Act.

The Senate consists of 96 members, elected by provincial assemblies through proportional representation using the single transferable vote method.

Provincial Assemblies are composed of general seats directly elected by citizens, with reserved seats allocated proportionally based on the total number of general seats secured by political parties. Here is the list of seats for provincial assemblies following the delimitation process completed by the Election Commission of Pakistan in September 2023:⁶³

Province	General seats	Reserved Seats for Women	Reserved Seats for Non-Muslims	Total
Sindh	130	29	9	168
Punjab	297	66	8	371
Balochistan	51	11	3	65
KP	115	26	4	145
Total	593	132	24	749

61. Preliminary Report Of Delimitation 2023. Election Commission of Pakistan. (2023, September 27). <https://ecp.gov.pk/delimitation-2023>.

62. Reporter, T. N. S. (2018, June 1). President approves FATA-KP merger bill. DAWN.COM. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1411320>

63. Preliminary Report Of Delimitation 2023. Election Commission of Pakistan. (2023, September 27). <https://ecp.gov.pk/delimitation-2023>.

The Delimitation of Constituencies Act, 1974 states that constituencies for general elections must be delimited after every census.⁶⁴ Constituencies are delimited with regards to the distribution of the population, existing boundaries of administrative units, public convenience among other factors. The Election Commission publishes a preliminary list of constituencies and invites representatives to share feedback. The Commission then makes amendments, alterations, modifications to the preliminary as deemed necessary and then it publishes in the Official Gazette the final report and the list of constituencies. The electoral body of Pakistan initiated the exercise of delimitation under Section 17 of the Elections Act, 2017 after the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics published the final results of the 7th Digital Population and Housing Census on 7th August 2023.⁶⁵

The Election Process

The election process in Pakistan follows a series of steps outlined in the Constitution and the Elections Act 2017. These steps include submission of nomination papers, scrutiny, appeals, publication of candidate lists, withdrawal of candidature, allocation of election symbols, and polling day. The Election Commission plays a critical role in overseeing these steps, ensuring fairness and compliance with electoral laws. Elections Act 2017: The legal framework for Pakistan's elections is established by the Elections Act 2017. It consists of 15 chapters and 240 sections. This act provides detailed procedures and regulations for each stage of the election process. Journalists must familiarize themselves with this act to refer to it in their stories, ensuring accurate and informed coverage.

Salient Features of Election Act

Postal Ballot: People with disabilities can cast their vote through postal ballot

Security Deposit: The amount for candidates has been increased to PKR30,000 for NA, PKR22,000 for provincial assemblies

Equal Votes: Candidates who secure equal votes are both elected on the same constituency.

Polling record security: For safe and secure retention of polling records, provision for tamper-evident bags has been made.

Election Expenses: Each candidate should open an exclusive bank account and make all transactions of his election expenses from it.

New Political Party: Law requires 2,000 members and PKR200,000 as fee for enlistment of a political party.

64. HOW TO DEMARK CONSTITUENCIES?. Election Commission of Pakistan. (n.d.). <https://ecp.gov.pk/how-to-demarc-constituencies>.

65. Preliminary Report Of Delimitation 2023. Election Commission of Pakistan. (2023, September 27). <https://ecp.gov.pk/delimitation-2023>.

Disqualification: Where a person has been convicted for any offense under this Act or has been found guilty of any corrupt or illegal practice by a Tribunal, he shall be disqualified for such period not exceeding five years as may be specified in the order from being, or being elected as a Member of an Assembly, the Senate or a local government.

Role of the Election Commission

The Constitution mandates the Election Commission of Pakistan to conduct free and fair elections. The Commission's roles include managing voter registration, candidate nomination, campaign regulation, election security, polling station setup, voter education, overseeing voting, announcing results, resolving conflicts, and contributing to electoral reforms.

The Election Commission of Pakistan publishes the official schedule for elections to the National and Provincial Assemblies in the National Gazette, typically within 30 days after the President announces the election date.

1. The election process comprises nine steps:
2. Submission of nomination papers by contesting candidates (around one week duration).
3. Scrutiny of nomination papers of contesting candidates (one week duration).
4. Objections or appeals on decisions of election officers.
5. Decision on appeals by appellate tribunals.
6. Publication of a revised list of the candidates contesting the election in designated constituencies.
7. Withdrawal of candidature.
8. Publication of the final list of contesting candidates.
9. Allocation of election symbols to the contesting candidates.
10. Polling

Electoral Framework of Single Constituency

Pakistan's electoral framework follows the principle of equal rights for all citizens to contest elections. Eligibility criteria for candidates have evolved with major legal and regulatory amendments. These changes encompass factors like education, age, religion, and more. The initiation of a general election signals the start of the electoral process.

The election process can be divided into three distinct stages, Pre-Voting or Pre-Election Period, Election Day, and Post-Election Period.

The Pre-Voting or Pre-Election Period comprises the following:

- 1. Delimitation of Electoral Constituencies:** Delimitation is a process of drawing of boundaries electoral constituencies for National and Provincial Assemblies comprising equal number of people in geographically compact areas, having homogeneous physical features,

2. Electoral Rolls: It is a compilation of citizens who are eligible and legally register to vote in an electoral constituency.

3. Voter Education: Voter education means all forms of information or communication either by Election Commission or civil society which is meant to educate citizens on their roles and responsibilities in an electoral process and enable their informed participation. However, for any information and communication to qualify as voter education, it has to be free from political partisanship.

4. Appointment of Training of Election Officials: Election Commission is custodian of the integrity of the quality of elections and relies on the executive authorities to perform certain duties including conduct of nomination process of the candidates, supervise voting and counting processes at the polling stations and manage election result completion processes at the constituency level. For this purpose, the Election Commission appoints Election Officials such as District Returning Officers, Returning Officers, Assistant Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, Assistant Presiding Officers and Polling Officers. In addition, the Election Commission also forms monitoring committees to monitor election campaigns at the constituency levels comprising government officials and also depute security officials drawn from armed forces, paramilitary forces and police to perform security duties at the constituency and the polling station levels.

5. Allocation of Election Symbols: The Election Commission allocates to political parties an election symbol for use in their election campaigns that the voters can easily identify, understand, acknowledge and recognise on ballot papers at the time of casting their votes. It is easy for a party or a candidate to ask their voters, especially in places where people cannot read or write, to vote for a symbol that they can recognise. This facilitates accurate choices.

6. Nomination Process: In Pakistan like many other countries, citizens cannot contest an election on their own. They have to be nominated by a proposer from the national and provincial constituency that they seek to contest election in as well as a seconder of the nomination. The process involving filing of nominations, scrutiny by ECP-appointed Returning Officers to scrutinize whether the proposed candidates fulfill the qualifications as contained under Article 62 of the Constitution and they are not afflicted by any disqualification as enshrined in Article 63 of constitution, an opportunity to voters of the constituency to file an objection to the nomination and decision by Returning Officers to declare nominations as valid is referred to as the nomination process., The process is conducted concurrently but separately for each National and Provincial Assembly constituency. Once the nomination process is completed, a list of candidates along with their election symbols, which shows their party affiliation is issued for every constituency (Form-32).

7. Election Campaign: After the completion of the nomination process, political parties and candidates have at least 28 days to campaign and canvass for votes.

The Election Day comprises the following:

1. Voting: The action that involves voters actually going out to the polling stations and marking

ballot papers in secrecy to choose the candidate of their choice is called voting. The Election Commission is bound by the law to fix at least 8 hours for the purpose and is empowered to extend polling hours already fixed at one or more polling stations in exceptional circumstances to be recorded in writing but such decision shall be taken at least three hours before the close of the poll. Generally, the Election Commission allocates nine hours (8:00 am to 5:00 pm) for voting. Three types of polling stations are set up: male polling stations, female polling stations, and combined polling stations for both men and women to cast their votes in separate polling booths.

2. Counting: This means counting of a vote at every polling station that leads to the preparation of **Form-45: Result of the Count**. The form includes the candidate-wise total of votes polled at the polling stations along with the number of registered votes, total numbers of votes polled (along with the gender disaggregation at combined polling stations and number of votes excluded from the count.

3. Tabulation (Preliminary Results): After the counting at polling stations is completed, the Presiding Officers, who supervise the voting and counting processes at the polling stations, electronically transmit and/or transport the results to the office of the Returning Officers, who are responsible to prepare **Form-47: Provisional Consolidated Statement of the Results of the Count**. This is generally called preliminary or unofficial result, which contains the total number of votes polled to each candidate at all polling stations in a constituency, along with details of total number of voters registered in the constituency, including its gender disaggregation and total number of votes polled in a constituency along with its gender disaggregation. The preliminary results are legally required to be finalized by 2AM on the night of the polls and in exceptional circumstances 10AM the next day.

The Post-Election Period comprises the following:

1. Consolidation of Results: The consolidation of results simply is preparation of **Form-48: Consolidated Statement of the Results of the Count Furnished by the Presiding Officers** by the Returning Officer in every constituency that additionally includes candidate-wise tally of postal ballots and total number of ballots that are rejected after a thorough review of ballots that were excluded from the count at polling stations. The consolidation of results is legally required to be completed within three days of the poll. However, when a recount requested by any of the candidates has been approved by the Returning Officer, the consolidation proceedings must be finalized within **7 days** in case of National Assembly constituency and **5 days** in case of a provincial assembly constituency.

2. Publication of Officials Results: After receiving Form-48 from the Returning Officers, the Election Commission prepares **Form-49: Final Consolidated Result** for each constituency, containing the name of the contesting candidates, their party affiliation, if any, and number of valid votes polled to each of them. However, the name of the winning candidate is published in the official gazette only after s/he furnishes the details of election expenses incurred on the election campaign. All other candidates are legally required to submit their details of election expenses within thirty days of the poll.

Additionally, the post-election process also involves the following processes:

- ECP scrutiny of election expenses submitted by the candidates
- Setting up of election tribunal by ECP and hearing of petitions
- Annual submission of assets and liabilities
- Annual submission audits of political parties
- Parliamentary discussion on electoral reforms

Election Commission of Pakistan, Code of Conduct

The Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP), in line with its mandate, has the authority to issue and publish codes of conduct that outline specific guidelines and rules for various stakeholders involved in the electoral process. These codes of conduct play a vital role in ensuring a fair, transparent, and orderly election. Under Section 233 of the law, the ECP is empowered to frame and gazette codes of conduct for contesting candidates, political parties, election agents, polling agents, security personnel, election observers, and media personnel. These codes serve as a set of ethical and legal standards that participants in the election process are obliged to adhere to. Below, we will delve into the significance of these codes, their implications, and their applicability.

The ECP has the authority to revoke the accreditation granted to media personnel, which allows them to access polling stations for covering the voting and counting processes. Additionally, access to the offices of Returning Officers for reporting on the preliminary and consolidated results can also be restricted for media personnel who violate the code of conduct.

Codes of Conduct Issued for General Election 2023

The Election Commission has issued two codes of conduct for media to be followed during General Election 2023. The code of conduct becomes effective right after the dissolution of assemblies or completion of their terms.

The following codes have been issued.

- Code of Conduct for National Media 2023 - Applicable to all print and electronic media, any media person (freelance or affiliated with any media entity), any newspaper, channel operating official accounts on digital media and social media influencers.
- Code of Conduct for International Observers/Media 2023 - applicable to any person observing and reporting the electoral process as an individual or as a member of a local group/organization or International Election Observation Mission.
- Code of Conduct for National Observers – applicable to any person observing and reporting the electoral process as a member of a local group/national organization.
- Code of Conduct for Political Parties - applicable to all political parties, their representatives, contesting candidates as well as election agents.

Code of Conduct for National Media 2023

1. During the election campaign, the content floated on print, electronic and digital media, shall not reflect any opinion prejudicial to the ideology, sovereignty, dignity or security of Pakistan, public order or the integrity and independence of the judiciary of Pakistan and other national institutions.
2. Allegations and statements which may harm national solidarity or may create law and order from the issuance of election schedule till the notification of returned candidate shall be strictly avoided on print & electronic media and by any media person, newspaper and channel operating official account on digital media and other social media influencers.
3. The content on print & electronic media, any media person, newspaper, channel operating official accounts on digital media and social media influencers shall not include any aspect which might be construed as personal attack on candidates or political parties on the basis of gender, religion, sect, caste, baradari etc. In case of violation, legal action shall be taken against the violator.
4. If a candidate makes an allegation against another candidate, the media should seek comments and verification from both the sides by providing fair opportunities to both the parties.
5. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), Press Information Department (PID), Cyber Wing and Digital Media Wing of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MoIB) shall monitor the coverage given to political parties and candidates for their election campaigns through electronic channels, print and social media. The above authorities shall submit to the Commission details of payments made by the political parties and candidates within 10 days after poll day.
6. The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA), Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA), Press Information Department (PID), Cyber Wing and Digital Media Wing of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MoIB) shall assist the Election Commission in implementation of this Code of conduct. They shall further provide at any time, any information required by the Election Commission on Pakistan in discharge of its constitutional duties.
7. The government and law enforcing agencies shall provide due protection to media persons, and media houses to maintain their freedom of expression as their fundamental rights.
8. No print, electronic and digital media shall run campaigns of candidates and political parties at the cost of public exchequer.
9. The journalists or print, electric and digital media, social media influencers and media houses throughout the election period shall launch Civic and Voter Education programs which shall be inclusive especially focusing marginalized groups such as women, transgender, youth, minorities and differently abled persons to maximize voter turnout and ensure their participation in electoral process.

10. In light of Section 182 of the Elections Act 2017, any media person on print, electronic and social media shall refrain from projecting election campaign of any candidate or political party during a period of forty-eight hours ending at midnight following the conclusion of the poll for any election.

11. Any media person from print, electronic and digital media shall not obstruct the election process in any way and shall display their accreditation cards provided by the Election Commission.

12. Print and electronic media and any journalist, newspaper, and channel on their official accounts on digital media, and social media influencers shall refrain from entrance and exit polls or conducting any kind of surveys at any polling station or constituency which may influence the voters' free choice of casting vote or hinder the process in any way.

13. Only accredited media persons shall be allowed to enter a polling station (along with camera) for making footage for the voting process only once. They shall ensure secrecy of the ballot and shall not make footage of the screened off compartment. However, media personnel shall be allowed to observe the counting process without making any footage of the process.

14. During coverage of the polling process, media persons shall not obstruct directly or indirectly in any pre-election, election and post-election process.

15. The media shall not air any unofficial result of a polling station until one hour is passed after the close of poll.

16. Broadcasters will air results after one hour of polling ending with clear disclaimer that these are unofficial, incomplete and fractional results which should not be taken as final results until Returning Officer has announced the result of the constituency. In case of any violation, ECP may direct concerned authorities for appropriate action.

17. In case of violation of this Code of Conduct, the Election Commission of Pakistan reserves the right to withdraw accreditation of an individual/media organisation. The authority to determine the violation also rests with the Election Commission of Pakistan.

Code of Conduct for Political Parties 2023

The Code of Conduct for Political Parties and Contesting Candidates contains clear guidelines for the way they should act during the election process especially while campaigning, engaging in publicity, holding processions. A separate section has been added for what sort of behaviours they can't engage in during the polling day. Overall, they have been requested to refrain from propagating any opinion, or act in any manner prejudicial to the ideology of Pakistan, or the sovereignty, integrity or security of Pakistan, or morality or public order, or the integrity or independence of the judiciary of Pakistan, or which defames or brings into ridicule any Government institution including the judiciary and the Armed Forces of Pakistan. They have

been instructed to maintain public order, refrain from maligning the Election Commission, not offer gifts or gratifications or inducements to any person to contest or not to contest as a candidate, extend their support to law enforcement agencies for ensuring the safety and security of election material, provide equal opportunity to its qualified members both men and women to participate in electoral processes, emphasize and encourage women participation in the election process.

For polling agents, the Code of Conduct ensures that they uphold the principles of democracy during polling. They have been instructed to display their badges (identity card) containing their name, candidate's name, their national identification number, name of constituency and number and name of polling station on their chest all the time during the polling day however, the badge or identity card shall in no case reflect the party of the candidate.

Other Sources to Explore

- Election Commission of Pakistan's official website - <https://www.ecp.gov.pk/>
- The Constitution of Pakistan (1973)
- Elections Act 2017 (Updated Version)
- The Elections Act 2017 Powers and Responsibilities of the Election Commission of Pakistan (2018). PILDAT.

Chapter 4: Voter Education and Awareness

Introduction

Voter and civic education is necessary to ensure that all constituents, including both men and women, understand their rights, their political system, and how and where to cast their vote. To make the voting process more inclusive and successful, it is imperative for voters to understand their rights and responsibilities and cast legally valid ballots. Voter and civic education is more critical in countries where political situations are quite volatile as elections might have an unprecedented impact on their future.⁶⁶

Objectives

- Become aware of the eligibility criteria to become a voter in Pakistan
- Learn about transferring vote, delete vote, and changing particulars of vote
- Learn about registering as a new voter
- Electoral Rolls in Pakistan

Electoral rolls, also called voter lists, are prepared, managed and updated by the Election Commission periodically for elections to the National Assembly, Provincial Assemblies, and local governments. It's a compilation of citizens in Pakistan who are eligible and legally registered to vote in an electoral constituency. A complete and accurate electoral roll is a prerequisite for a credible election as it ensures all citizens, who are eligible to vote, are able to use their right to vote in any election. Every citizen in a democratic system has to be aware of the process of vote registration and find out where they can cast their vote on Election Day.

Voter Eligibility in Pakistan

The Constitution of Pakistan under Article 51(2) defines that a person is entitled to vote if they meet the following criteria:

- a. S/he is a citizen of Pakistan;
- b. S/he is not less than 18 years of age;
- c. Her/His name appears on the electoral rolls; and
- d. S/he not declared by a competent court to be unsound mind.

It is important to note that a National Identity Card is necessary for a person to register as a voter, which also establishes citizenship and age of the voter. .

66. United Nations. (n.d.). Chapter 5: Voter and Civic Education. UN Women. <https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps/publication/Chapter5.htm>

Vote Registration

The Pakistani law states that a voter can be registered to vote at one of the two addresses on the National Identity Cards – Permanent Address or Current Address. The choice of the voting address is made at a time people apply for the first NIC at NADRA Registration Centres or NADRA's Mobile Registration Vehicles.

There are two ways voters in Pakistan can check their registration. First is sending their CNIC number to **8300** and they will receive an automated response with the name of the electoral area, block code and serial number. Polling stations are set up in government buildings such as schools, health clinics among others. Information pertaining to polling stations becomes available three to four weeks before Election Day. Second, all registered voters can visit their respective District Election Commissioner's office, where the final electoral roll is available. The addresses or contact information of the DEC's offices across the four provinces can be found on the Election Commissions [website](#).

Transfer of Vote

Registered voters who wish to change their polling station must visit the office of the District Election Commissioner for the inclusion of their name to the electoral roll. They will be issued **Form-21: Enrolment/Transfer of Vote** which contains questions such as area where the applicant wants to be registered, name, father's name, NIC number, date of birth, etc. The staff at the DEC office may be requested to assist in filling of the Form-21, which is signed and submitted to the same office. A receipt is also issued to the applicant. After due verifications, the name is included in the electoral rolls. Voters can verify their polling station information at least 30 days after the submission of application.

Correction of Particulars of a Voter

If a registered voter finds an error in their basic credentials such as their name, father's name or any spelling mistake, then they can approach the office of District Election Commissioner for correction. Such a voter will be issued **Form-23: Correction of Particulars of a Voter**, which contains specific questions regarding the type of correction that is required. The staff at the DEC office may be requested to assist in filling of the Form-21, which is signed and submitted to the same office. The correction can be verified at least 30 days after the submission of application.

Deletion of Vote

If there is a voter who has died or surrendered their Pakistani nationality, then Form 22 (Application for Deletion of Vote) must be acquired and submitted to the District Election Commissioner's office. Form 22 may also be used to file an objection against a voter by a voter or voters of the same area on grounds that the voter is not entitled to be registered in that area. After an official enquiry to ascertain the veracity of the objections, appropriate change is made to the electoral rolls.

Postal Voting

Pakistani law allows its citizens to cast their vote by post too. This facility is, however, extended to the following registered voters:

- a. People in service of Pakistan along with their spouses and children who are not registered as voters in the areas of their duty;
- a. People including police appointed for the performance of any duty in connection with an election at polling station;
- a. People with any physical disability who are unable to travel and hold a national identity card with a logo for physical disability;
- a. People detailed in a prison or held in custody.

Other Sources to Explore

- Electoral Education: A Basic Citizenship Attribute in a Culture of Participatory and Representative Democracy (2022) - UNDP
<https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-10/studiu-educatie-electoral-En-g.pdf>.
- Civic education for an informed electorate (2020)- United Nations Peacekeeping - <https://peacekeeping.un.org/en/civic-education-informed-electorate>
- Human Rights and Elections-A Handbook on International Human Rights Standards on Elections (2021)- United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner - <https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/Human-Rights-and-Elections.pdf>.

Chapter 5: Newsrooms and Editorial Best Practices

Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of journalism, maintaining high standards of ethics and editorial practices is of paramount importance. This chapter is designed to equip journalists with essential best practices for ethical reporting and provide insights into newsroom environments during election reporting. Journalists will learn how to ensure their stories are accurate, fair, and independent, especially when dealing with marginalized groups. We will also examine real examples of local election reporting to enhance understanding.

Objectives

- What are the ethical considerations for journalists, particularly when reporting on marginalized groups?
- How can journalists address ethical dilemmas in their reporting?
- What lessons can be derived from local reporting examples on elections?
- How can journalists improve their reporting strategies, especially when dealing with difficult sources and situations?
- To help journalists understand how social media reporting, independent reporters, and other emerging technologies are redefining the role of editors and impacting information ecosystem

Digital media and changing roles of editors and reporters

Editors play a vital role in electoral journalism. They are responsible for selecting, editing, and publishing news stories about elections. They also oversee the work of reporters and ensure that the news coverage is accurate, fair, and balanced. The role of the editor in electoral journalism has changed and evolved in the digital age. In the past, editors were primarily concerned with producing print and broadcast content. However, today's editors must also be able to manage and produce digital content, such as websites, social media, and podcasts. In addition, the digital age has led to a proliferation of information sources, including both traditional and non-traditional media outlets. This has made it more challenging for editors to filter out misinformation and disinformation. It also requires editors to have a deep understanding of the different platforms and how to produce content that is engaging and informative for each platform.

More significantly, a number of digital reporters now have to play the role of editors themselves. This is because digital newsrooms are often smaller and more streamlined than traditional

newsrooms. As a result, reporters are often responsible for both reporting and editing their own stories. This means that digital reporters need to develop editorial capabilities, such as fact-checking, writing clear and concise headlines, and editing their stories for accuracy and fairness. It is thus essential for digital reports to develop a keen eye for editorial decision making, they have to be well aware of news ethics, their organizations' editorial policies and pay attention to how other news organizations edit their stories. Peer review and feedback is also essential in the digital age, and reporters can improve their editorial judgment by getting regular feedback from other reporters and editors. Ask other reporters and editors to review your stories and give you feedback. This feedback can help them to improve their editing skills.

By developing their editorial capabilities, digital reporters can ensure that their stories are accurate, fair, and balanced. This is especially important in electoral journalism, where it is vital that voters have access to accurate information about the candidates and the issues.

Ethical Reporting

Ethical journalism is the cornerstone of responsible reporting during elections. Journalists must adhere to a set of core principles to maintain integrity and impartiality. In the digital age, ethical challenges for editors and reporters have increased. Digital platforms have created new opportunities for journalists to reach and engage audiences, but they have also posed new ethical challenges. One of the biggest challenges of election reporting in the digital age is the spread of misinformation and disinformation. Journalists must be vigilant in fact-checking and verifying information before reporting on it, especially when it comes from social media. They should also be mindful of their own biases and avoid reporting on information in a way that could amplify it or give it legitimacy. Another challenge is the pressure to generate viral content. Social media platforms reward users for creating and sharing content that is engaging and attention-grabbing. This can lead to a focus on quantity over quality, and can incentivize journalists to sensationalize stories or report on information that is not yet fully verified. Despite these challenges, there are a number of editorial best practices that journalists can follow to ensure that their election reporting is accurate, ethical, and informative.

- Avoid expressing your personal opinions or beliefs in your reporting. Present all sides of an issue fairly and accurately. Avoid using language that suggests you favor one candidate or party over another. Give equal coverage to all candidates and parties, regardless of their size or popularity.
- Accurately and fairly report on the statements and positions of all candidates and parties. This means avoiding misquoting or misrepresenting any candidate or party. It also means providing equal coverage to all candidates and parties, regardless of their size or popularity.
- Avoid using inflammatory language or imagery that could incite violence or hatred. This means avoiding language that could be perceived as targeting or discriminating against any particular group of people. It also means avoiding imagery that could be perceived as glorifying or promoting violence.

- Avoid expressing your personal opinions or beliefs in your reporting. Present all sides of an issue fairly and accurately. Avoid using language that suggests you favor one candidate or party over another. Give equal coverage to all candidates and parties, regardless of their size or popularity.
- Accurately and fairly report on the statements and positions of all candidates and parties. This means avoiding misquoting or misrepresenting any candidate or party. It also means providing equal coverage to all candidates and parties, regardless of their size or popularity.

Avoid using inflammatory language or imagery that could incite violence or hatred. This means avoiding language that could be perceived as targeting or discriminating against any particular group of people. It also means avoiding imagery that could be perceived as glorifying or promoting violence.

Be mindful of the order in which you present information about political entities in your news programs. Be sure to rotate the order in which you present information about candidates and parties to ensure that no one entity is given undue prominence.

Avoid wearing or displaying clothing, badges, stickers, or items related to a party or candidate. This is important to avoid any perception of bias.

Social Media and Ethics

Journalists today share their world with bloggers, influencers, and avid social media users. Influencers on social media sites refer to individuals who have a substantial number of trusting, engaged followers. In the past, they predominantly appeared as experts on topics such as sports, gaming, fashion, among others but more recently, they have been shaping up to become digital opinion leaders as they produce more meaningful and political content. Their engagement with their users and followers have proven to be more successful than other forms to not just spread information but also influence opinions of people within their social networks.⁶⁷ They have, however, often received backlash for not following or adhering to journalistic ethics or being able to maintain partiality or neutrality in their political commentary of any event. The growing phenomenon has ultimately led to many journalists becoming influencers. In Pakistan, the field has remained dominated by male journalists and content creators who have made their YouTube channels and share their commentary on social media regularly. This includes Imran Riaz Khan, Mansoor Ali Khan, Orya Maqbool Jan among others.

As the world moves from traditional media to digital media and social media, the role of editors has substantially changed and considerably sidelined. The algorithm of social media sites has emerged as the world “editor-in-chief” as it continues to shape the reading and information

67. Riedl, M., Schwemmer, C., Ziewiecki, S., & Ross, L. M. (2021, November 9). The rise of political influencers-perspectives on a trend towards meaningful content. *Frontiers*. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fcomm.2021.752656/full>.

consumption habits of the social media users across the globe. Facebook, YouTube, Instagram scan and analyze the information provided by any given user, take into account all pages and posts they have liked or interacted with, what time of posts they share, and then rank the posts in the precise order they believe the user will find worthwhile.⁶⁸ The nature of algorithms has, however, turned them into extremely controversial and dangerous tools.

Fairness in Presentation of Candidates

Ensuring fairness in presenting candidates is essential to uphold the principles of impartial journalism. All political parties and candidates competing in elections must have equal access to the media. If one candidate participates in a program related to a particular constituency, others should also be given the opportunity to participate or receive equivalent coverage through multiple reports. Hosts or reporters should invite candidates or party representatives' guests to various programs, including news, debates, interviews, and political information programs. When a candidate from one political party is invited to participate, other candidates should also be invited when possible, or equivalent opportunities should be offered. Journalists, editors, and all individuals involved in production must be careful not to provide any candidate an unfair advantage over others.

Any participant in the election process has the right to request a correction for any news that has been broadcast with incorrect information. This correction is especially relevant if the inaccurate information could potentially infringe upon the rights or interests of the concerned participant. The accuracy of information is paramount in responsible journalism. All information must be thoroughly verified using at least two reliable sources. When in doubt, journalists should refrain from sharing unverified information to prevent the spread of rumors and misinformation. Hosts and anchors must carefully choose experts for their programs, particularly when dealing with experts who might be closely aligned with a particular political stance. Precision is key in reporting election rallies, and detailed information about the event's location, subjects discussed in speeches, and attendee reactions should be provided. When sharing visual content, journalists should avoid making estimations about the number of people attending a political rally. Instead, sharing wide shots allows the audience to draw their own conclusions.

Gendering electoral reporting

Balanced and fair representation is particularly important especially when reporting on women politicians and politicians belonging to minority communities. Women politicians are more vulnerable being negatively stereotyped in the reporting which has an impact on their online and offline presence. Pakistan has a troubling history of attacks on women politicians, ranging from threats and online abuse to fatal incidents. In 2007, a woman minister was shot dead by a fanatic for not wearing 'Muslim clothing',⁶⁹ in the remote area of Dir many attacks were reported against

68. Ethical journalism: Back in the news. UNESCO. (2021a, April 24). <https://en.unesco.org/courier/july-september-2017/ethical-journalism-back-news>

69. Woman minister killed by fanatic. DAWN.COM. (2007, February 20). <https://www.dawn.com/news/233951/woman-minister-killed-by-fanatic>.

women councillors and candidates⁷⁰ in 2009. Perveen Junejo, a former member of the Sindh Assembly, said that she was coerced by her husband at gunpoint to resign from her post⁷¹ in 2014. In 2018, a female candidate in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa used pamphlets to campaign in areas where her safety was compromised. Even Benazir Bhutto, Pakistan's first and only woman prime minister, despite her political pedigree, was assassinated during an election campaign.

In proceedings of the assemblies, male politicians have often made misogynistic remarks against women politicians based on their body weight⁷² or some simply referring to them as “garbage”.⁷³ Media's coverage of the suffragettes focuses on appearance, bodies, sexuality of women politicians which in turn paves the path for their online trolling, bullying, stalking, doxxing and harassment.⁷⁴

Facts, Opinions and Hate Speech

Journalists must be adept at distinguishing between facts and opinions. Facts can be categorized into established, plausible, and potential facts. Opinions, on the other hand, differ from facts. Hate speech is a pressing ethical dilemma in election campaign coverage. It has the potential to incite hatred and intolerance, and journalists often find themselves at a crossroads. In situations where hate speech poses risks to individuals, communities, or the nation as a whole, one ethical approach is to refrain from broadcasting or publishing such statements. However, accurately reporting instances involving hate speech is also essential for early detection and addressing potential social conflicts or human rights violations within the campaign landscape.

Hate speech covers a spectrum of expressions and may be exhibited in various forms in online spaces, such as text and images. It may also target an individual on the basis of other characteristics, including language, economic or social origin, and physical attributes. Hate speech, when deployed with disinformation, can perpetuate discrimination, stigmatization and physical violence against a given group under target.⁷⁵

In Pakistan, hate speech is given different definitions under two laws: The Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act 2016 and PEMRA's Code of Conduct. PECA's clause on hate speech remains quite vague, unclear, and lacking definition of hate speech. However, the electronic media code of conduct defines hate speech in broadcast content as “Any expression that may incite violence, hatred or discrimination on the basis of religion, ethnicity, colour, race, gender, origin, caste, mental or physical disability.”

With the increasing convenience and accessibility afforded by advanced technologies, hate speech has emerged as a significant challenge for governments and social media companies around the

70. Khan, A., Yousaf, Z., & Naqvi, S. (n.d.). Women Politicians Navigating the 'Hostile Environment' in Pakistan*. IDS Bulletin. <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/index.php/idsbo/article/view/3100/3101>.

71. Reporter, T. N. S. (2014, September 23). PPP MPA claims husband forced her resignation at gunpoint. DAWN.COM. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1133714>.

72. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1263544>.

73. Editorial, I. (2023, July 26). Khawaja Asif, your sexism is showing - again. <https://images.dawn.com/news/1191951>

74. https://mlkrook.org/pdf/Hafeez_Shahbaz_20.pdf

75. Hate speech and real harm. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/hate-speech/understanding-hate-speech/hate-speech-and-real-harm>

world. Classifying and countering hate speech is particularly demanding in non-English-speaking markets, where moderation resources often prove insufficient for overseeing local languages.⁷⁶ As in other South Asian markets, these shortcomings allow hate speech to thrive unchecked on popular social networking platforms, including Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter, in Pakistan. The situation is further exacerbated by the absence of digital literacy and digital investigation tools among journalists and the general user base in the country.

Reporting on Public Surveys

Public surveys are an important source of information about public opinion during election reporting. They can provide insights into voter preferences, issue salience, and voter turnout. This information can be helpful for both voters and journalists. For voters, public surveys can help them to understand where the candidates stand on the issues that matter most to them and to make informed decisions about who to vote for. Public surveys can also help voters to understand how likely people are to vote in the upcoming election and to encourage them to vote if they are not already planning to do so. For journalists, public surveys can provide a valuable source of information for their reporting. Journalists can use public surveys to write articles, produce news segments, and create other content that informs the public about the election. However, it is important for journalists to report on public surveys accurately and responsibly. There are a number of reasons why this is important:

- Public surveys can be used to manipulate public opinion. For example, a candidate may release a poll that shows them to be leading in the race in order to discourage their opponents' supporters from voting.
- Journalists need to be aware of this and to report on polls in a way that does not amplify their effects. Public surveys can be inaccurate. For example, a survey may have a small sample size or it may be biased. Journalists need to be able to assess the credibility of public surveys before reporting on them.
- Public surveys can be misinterpreted. For example, a journalist may report that a poll shows that a candidate is leading in the race, but they may fail to mention the margin of error. This could lead voters to believe that the race is already over, when in fact it is still close.

By knowing how to report on public surveys accurately and responsibly, journalists can help to inform the public and promote voter participation. Following are some international best practices that will help reporters report ethically and professionally on surveys.

- Be aware of the potential for bias in the survey findings. Surveys can be biased for a variety of reasons, such as the wording of the questions, the selection of respondents, and the way the survey is conducted. Journalists should be critical of surveys and should consider the potential for bias when reporting on the findings.

76. Popli, N. (2021, October). The 5 Most Important Revelations From the "Facebook Papers." TIME. Retrieved October 22, 2023, from <https://time.com/6110234/facebook-papers-testimony-explained/>

- Report on the survey findings in a fair and balanced way. This means giving equal weight to all sides of the issue and avoiding editorializing or using sensationalized language.
- Be transparent about the survey methodology.⁷⁷ This includes providing information on the sample size, sampling method, margin of error, and date of the survey.
- Provide context for the survey findings. This includes explaining the issues that were surveyed, the population that was surveyed, and the key findings of the survey.⁷⁸
- Avoid overstating the significance of the survey findings. Surveys are just one snapshot of public opinion and should not be treated as definitive predictions of the outcome of an election.⁷⁹
- One of the most challenging aspects of reporting surveys are the visual elements that are created for digital stories. Infographics and multimedia content can go viral. At the same time, it is often difficult to include basic details like methodology within the infographics. To make sure that the infographic are not misleading, improve the clarity of infographics and multimedia content in digital stories about surveys by providing interactive references to methodology, context, and other details.

Checklist for Reporting Public Surveys

When reporting on public surveys during elections, consider the following questions:

- ✓ Have you provided context for the survey results and ensured accurate reporting?
- ✓ Is the language used in your reporting neutral and free from sensationalism?
- ✓ Have you investigated the credibility of the survey and reported on potential biases?
- ✓ Is your reporting based on a single survey, or have you considered multiple surveys and expert opinions?

Assessing Ethical Practices, A Checklist

- ✓ Is the information provided accurate and fair?
- ✓ Does the story uphold the public interest?
- ✓ Does it offer protection and fair representation for marginalized groups?
- ✓ Have ethical dilemmas been addressed in the reporting process?

77. IFJ tips for media on Elections Reporting - International Federation of Journalists . (n.d). https://www.ifj.org/fileadmin/user_upload/IFJ_Guidelines_for_Media_on_Elections_Reporting_final.pdf.

78. Posetti, J., Aboulez, N., Bontcheva, K., Harrison, J., & Waisbord, S. (2020). Online violence against women journalists: a global snapshot of incidence and impacts. UNESDOC Digital Library. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000375136>.

79. Macdowall, I. (1993). In Reuters Handbook for Journalists (p. 33). story, Butterworth-Heinemann.

Other Sources to Explore

- Ethical Journalism: back in the news (2017). UNESCO. Link: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000255359>
- Journalism, fake news and disinformation: Handbook for journalism education and training (2018). UNESCO. Link: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1641987?ln=en>.
- Ethical Guidelines for Journalists (2016). United Nations Communications Group. Link: https://www.unicef.org/afghanistan/media/2136/file/afg-publication_UN%20Ethical%20Guidelines%20for%20Journalists%20-%20English.pdf%20.pdf.

Chapter 6: Sources and Representation in Election Reporting

Introduction

In this chapter, we delve deeper into the questions of information sourcing and representation in election reporting. The aim is to emphasize the importance of diversifying sources and ensuring balanced representation, particularly with regard to marginalized and minority communities. Additionally, we explore the critical role of public surveys in providing a comprehensive understanding of the election process and discuss best practices in reporting survey findings. Furthermore, we address issues related to the representation of women and gender minorities, highlighting the importance of combating negative stereotypes in media coverage.

Objectives

- Understand the significance of diverse sourcing and its impact on election reporting.
- Identify best practices for reporting public survey results during elections.
- Recognize the challenges and biases related to the representation of women and gender minorities in media.
- Learn strategies to counteract negative stereotypes in election reporting.

Ensuring Diversity in Information Sourcing

Diversity in Sources

A fundamental practice among journalists in election reporting is to ensure a diverse range of sources. This diversity enhances the authenticity of news stories by providing a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences. It counters implicit biases and fosters a more comprehensive understanding of the election landscape.

Marginalized and Minority Voices

While sourcing information, it is crucial to include voices from marginalized and minority communities. These communities often face unique challenges and have distinct viewpoints that must be represented in election reporting. The inclusion of these voices contributes to a more inclusive and equitable media landscape.

Checklist for Source Diversity

To ensure a well-rounded and inclusive approach to sourcing information in election reporting, consider the following questions:

Check List for Reporters

- ✓ Have you actively sought out sources from various socioeconomic backgrounds to capture a diverse range of perspectives?
- ✓ Have you actively sought out sources from different political parties?
- ✓ Are the voices of ethnic minorities, religious minorities, and indigenous communities included in your story?
- ✓ Are young people and students, who often have unique perspectives on political issues, included as sources in your reporting?
- ✓ Have you engaged with sources from different geographical regions within the constituency or country to reflect regional diversity?
- ✓ Have you considered including voices from experts or activists who focus on issues related to social justice, human rights, and civic engagement?

Representation of Women and Gender Minorities

Gender-sensitive and inclusive reporting has emerged as a key principle of reporting accurately and in a balanced manner. The media has a critical role to play in ensuring coverage which is complete, diverse and reflective of a world as seen through the eyes of all genders and minorities. Journalists should play their part in ensuring that men and women are portrayed as equally valued and diverse, rather than re-enforcing problematic gender-based stereotypes.

There is almost an equal number of men and women in the world, but in news media women are only a subject of approximately a quarter of all reporting. Studies have, however, shown that women are underrepresented, especially in stories related to the economy, finance, and politics.⁸⁰ In media coverage, women are often quoted in gender-related stories and identified by their family roles rather than their personal or professional identities. According to the 2020 Global Media Monitoring Project report,⁸¹ it was noted in Pakistan that only 18% of news sources comprised women sources, and the number dropped to 10% when it came to stories about economy, finance, and politics. Women were mostly quoted in gender-related stories. The media portrayal might be

80. Ross, K., Jansen, M., & Women, media, and politicsBürger, T. (n.d.). *The media world versus the real world of women and political representation Questioning differences and struggling for answers*. Women, media, and politics. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1502640/FULLTEXT01.pdf>.

81. Global Media Monitoring Project . (2020). (rep.). Who Makes the News? Pakistan-National Report .

an extension of the patriarchal nature of Pakistani society that affects the participation in public life of women and people who identify with gender minority groups, such as transgender persons. The study also found that 40% of women subjects in media coverage were identified by their family role instead of their personal or professional identity. In comparison, only 8% of men were identified as someone's father or brother etc. Although it is challenging to resist the pervasive, casual stereotypes that see women as child carers or sexual objects, it is critical for journalism to produce complete and diverse coverage that accurately mirrors our societies.

The negative stereotyping of women and gender minority groups is also an issue which denies them dignity and equal rights. A stereotype is defined as a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image of a person based on their identity or profession. Stereotypes are offensive or problematic when they are negative, for example corrupt police officers or associating all people of an ethnicity with stupidity or associating all members of a faith with terrorism, because these negative stereotypes rob each member of that group of their dignity. Negative stereotypes are often learned from society and reflect ingrained biases or embedded values. This skewed representation is influenced by the patriarchal nature of society. Negative stereotypes of women and gender minority groups are pervasive in media coverage. It is essential to distinguish between facts and opinions in reporting and to refrain from perpetuating harmful stereotypes. Journalists play a crucial role in countering these biases. The negative stereotyping of women and gender minority groups in media coverage can have a number of negative consequences, including:

- **Denying them dignity and equal rights.** When women and gender minority groups are consistently portrayed in a negative light, it can reinforce harmful stereotypes and make it more difficult for them to be treated with dignity and respect. It can also make it more difficult for them to access opportunities and resources, such as jobs, education, and healthcare.
- **Contributing to violence and discrimination.** Negative stereotypes can lead to violence and discrimination against women and gender minority groups. For example, if women are constantly portrayed as being weak or submissive, it can make them more vulnerable to violence. And if gender minority groups are constantly portrayed as being dangerous or threatening, it can lead to discrimination against them.
- **Silencing their voices.** When women and gender minority groups are not seen or heard in the media, it can silence their voices and make it more difficult for them to advocate for their rights. It can also make it more difficult for the public to understand their experiences and perspectives.

In addition to these negative consequences, failing to report on gender and minorities in a fair and accurate manner can also have a number of negative impacts on journalism itself. For example, it can:

- **Reduce the credibility of the media.** When the media fails to represent the diversity of society, it can lose the trust of its audience.
- **Limit the range of stories that are told.** When the media focuses on a narrow range of stories and perspectives, it can lead to a distorted view of the world.

- **Make it more difficult for the audience / readers to understand complex issues.** When the media fails to include the voices of women and gender minority groups, it can make it more difficult to understand complex social and political issues.

Five Key Principles of Gender-Sensitive Reporting⁸²

Balance the presence of women and men in media coverage

Avoid stereotyping

Give equal voice to women and men

Use gender-sensitive language

Covering issues related to gender equality must be mainstreamed in the news media. The media must strive to be gender-sensitive and inclusive but it can also play an integral role in raising awareness about women's issues and concerns about gender equality.

Covering issues related to gender equality must be mainstreamed in the news media. The media must strive to be gender-sensitive and inclusive but it can also play an integral role in raising awareness about women's issues and concerns about gender equality.

Selection of sources:⁸³ Journalists must make an effort to ensure balanced representation of women and men to ensure their reporting accurately reflects the society and takes into account views and concerns of all genders.

Journalists should try to:

- Ask equal number of women and men for their opinions on different topics
- Cover issues which hold particular importance to the lives of women
- Make an effort to include voices of people who are least visible in media
- Always consider gendered dimensions of all major news stories
- Ensure balanced representation of all genders in visual and multimedia stories

82. Ellena, M. and Honchar, O. (no date) *Guidelines for gender and conflict-sensitive reporting*, UN Women – Europe and Central Asia. Available at: https://eca.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2019/07/guidelines-for-gender-and-conflict-sensitive-reporting_europe (Accessed: 30 October 2023).

83. *Gender-sensitive reporting*. FPU Knowledge Quality. (n.d.). <https://kq.freepressunlimited.org/themes/gender-equality/gender-in-media-content/gender-sensitive-reporting/>.

Eliminate gender stereotypes:⁸⁴ A gender stereotype is a preconceived idea where women and men are assigned characteristics and roles limited by their gender. These stereotypes particularly influence society's expectations from a certain gender and the way people see and understand their own gender.

Journalists must, therefore, should:

- Ensure their coverage is holistic and realistic
- Refrain from assigning generalised characteristics to people on the basis of their gender
- Not make any gender-based assumptions
- Treat all their sources and subjects with dignity and respect
- Remain sensitive and avoid gendered use of images

Use of language:⁸⁵ Our language is reflective of how and what we think, and interpret the world. The words we use reflect our assumptions about our values, gender roles, abilities, and capacities. In order to be equal, women and men must be seen and heard to be equal. This means eliminating language which misrepresents, excludes or is not cognisant of the rights of women.

For this, journalists must:

- Avoid using 'he' as a generic pronoun
- Avoid using 'man' as a generic noun
- Avoid gender-specific words
- When describing character of a woman, question yourself if you would use these words to describe a man
- Refer to a woman as her own person and not in relationship to someone else

Other Sources to Explore

- Guidelines for Gender-Sensitive Reporting in Pakistani Media" by United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women)
- Media, elections and gender - Study on media coverage of elections with a specific focus on gender equality (2018). Council of Europe. Link: <https://edoc.coe.int/en/media/7612-media-elections-and-gender-study-on-media-coverage-of-elections-with-a-specific-focus-on-gender-quality.html>.
- How to incorporate a gender perspective in your elections reporting (2023). International Journalists' Network. Link: <https://ijnnet.org/en/resource/how-incorporate-gender-perspective-your-elections-reporting>.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

Chapter 7 – Safety considerations during elections

Introduction

In the realm of journalism, electoral reporting is a critical and high-stakes endeavor. Journalists play an integral role in disseminating information and shaping public opinion during elections. However, this crucial task comes with its unique set of challenges and risks. Journalists covering elections often find themselves on the frontlines, navigating physical, digital, legal, and psychological threats. This chapter delves into the multifaceted aspects of ensuring the safety of journalists during electoral reporting. It equips journalists with the knowledge and strategies required to safeguard themselves against potential hazards and maintain their well-being throughout the election coverage.

Objectives

- Understand the diverse threats that journalists can encounter while covering elections.
- Gain insights into strategies for enhancing physical safety during election reporting
- Learn best practices for bolstering digital security and protecting sensitive information.
- Comprehend the legal safety measures available to counter threats of criminal persecution.
- Explore techniques for maintaining psychological well-being in the face of high-pressure reporting.

Safety of Journalists During Electoral Reporting

Journalists undertaking electoral reporting can face a myriad of threats, ranging from physical harm to digital attacks and even psychological stress. In the pursuit of disseminating unbiased information and upholding democratic principles, journalists must navigate the following key aspects of safety:

1. Physical Safety

Ensuring physical safety is paramount for journalists covering elections. Threat actors may target journalists in various scenarios. To mitigate these risks, consider the following measures:

- Alter your daily routine to avoid predictability.
- Plan and select your companions, such as drivers or fixers, with care.
- Carry protective gear when covering potentially volatile situations.
- Identify violent actors and understand their motivations.

- Familiarize yourself with safety assistance resources in your region.

2. Digital Safety

In today's digital age, journalists are vulnerable to online threats and attacks. Protecting your digital presence is crucial. Here are some steps to enhance your digital safety:

- Review the personal information available on your public and private social media accounts.
- Back up your device to minimize the information on your cell phone before heading out for election coverage.
- Manage and restrict access to content on your social media accounts.
- Utilize a virtual private network (VPN) for secure internet traffic.
- Communicate with sources using end-to-end encrypted messaging apps.
- Enable two-factor authentication and employ password managers.

3. Legal Safety

Journalists may encounter threats of legal persecution, wrongful police cases, and intimidation under cybercrime laws. In such situations, legal safety is essential. Consider the following avenues for legal protection:

- Contact legal aid services for journalists facing legal threats.
- Reach out to the Pakistan Bar Council's Journalist Defence Committee.

4. Psychosocial and Psychological Safety

Journalists often operate in highly stressful conditions, which can take a toll on their mental well-being. Particularly during elections, they may face violence and traumatic experiences. To promote psychological safety, follow these guidelines:

- Address personal matters and set expectations before departing for assignments.
- Be aware of your strengths and triggers.
- Prioritize your basic needs during reporting.
- Acknowledge and normalize feelings and physical reactions.
- Stay hydrated and take breaks in high-stress moments.
- Trust yourself and prioritize personal safety.
- Share experiences with friends and colleagues.
- Engage in regular exercise and self-care routines.

Ensuring safety during electoral reporting is not only a professional responsibility but also a personal one. By comprehensively addressing the physical, digital, legal, and psychological aspects of safety, journalists can conduct election coverage more effectively while safeguarding their well-being.

Protecting the Safety of Sources

While journalists are on the front lines of election reporting, it's essential to recognize that their sources may be equally vulnerable to threats and retaliation. Sources often share valuable

information, sometimes at great personal risk, to shed light on electoral processes, irregularities, or controversies. As journalists, it's our duty to protect the safety and identity of these sources. Here are some key considerations:

- **Confidentiality:** Assure sources that their identities and the information they provide will remain confidential. This trust is critical for them to come forward with important insights.
- **Secure Communication:** Use secure and encrypted communication methods when interacting with sources. Encourage the use of messaging apps with end-to-end encryption, like Signal or WhatsApp, to protect sensitive conversations.
- **Anonymity:** If a source wishes to remain anonymous, respect their request. Avoid disclosing any identifying information, even inadvertently, in your reporting.
- **Secure File Sharing:** If sources provide documents or files, ensure secure methods for file sharing. Use encrypted file-sharing services or tools.
- **Digital Safety for Sources:** Advise sources on digital safety practices to protect themselves from potential repercussions for sharing information.

Ethical Considerations

Maintaining the safety of sources isn't just a practical concern; it's also an ethical imperative. Journalists have an ethical responsibility to minimize harm and protect those who provide information, especially when it involves sensitive topics like elections. Remember these ethical principles:

- **Informed Consent:** Clearly explain the potential risks to sources before they provide information. Let them make an informed decision about sharing their insights.
- **Do No Harm:** Strive to minimize any harm that might come to sources as a result of their cooperation. This includes protecting their identities and ensuring that no harm befalls them due to their engagement with your reporting.
- **Independence and Neutrality:** Maintain your independence and neutrality as a journalist, even when working with sources who may have specific political or personal interests. Your primary allegiance should be to the truth and the public's right to know.

Remember that in the realm of election reporting, safeguarding both journalists and their sources is essential for maintaining transparency, accountability, and the free flow of information.

Other Sources to Explore

- Taking Action to Protect Journalists by International Media Support. Link: https://www.mediasupport.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/IMS-Safety-approach-pdf.final_web_.pdf.
- Elections Reporting Toolkit by International Journalists' Network. Link: <https://ijn.net.org/en/toolkit/elections-reporting>.
- Journalist Safety: Elections (2022). Committee to Protect Journalists. Link: <https://cpj.org/journalist-safety-elections/>.

SECTION 2
ELECTIONS AND
DISINFORMATION

Chapter 8 – Understanding Electoral Disinformation and its Impact on Democratic Processes

Introduction

In today's digital age, the spread of disinformation is a growing concern, especially during electoral periods. Journalists play a crucial role in identifying and countering disinformation to protect the integrity of democratic processes. This chapter delves into the sources, types, and effects of disinformation in the context of elections, shedding light on its potential implications for the electoral and democratic process.

Objectives

- Recognize the different forms of electoral disinformation, from fabricated stories to hate speech, and understand how they can influence elections.
- Grasp the implications of disinformation on the trustworthiness of the electoral process and democratic institutions.
- Develop critical thinking skills for identifying and addressing electoral disinformation.

Information Disorder and Electoral Process

Electoral disinformation is a pressing concern in the digital era. It is defined as the intentional creation and dissemination of false, misleading, or manipulative information related to political actors, issues, or processes during an election. This is typically done to influence voters' choices and behaviors.

There is no universally accepted definition of disinformation as no one definition has been sufficient to explain the multiple and different contexts in which concerns regarding disinformation may arise, including issues related to electoral process, public health, conflicts, or even climate change.⁸⁶ The term has been used by the International Telecommunication Union and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to describe false or misleading content that can cause specific harm, irrespective of motivations, awareness or behaviours.⁸⁷ Disinformation can be spread by both state and non-state actors and has a significant impact on a broad range of human rights, undermining responses to public policies or amplifying tensions.

86. United Nations. (n.d.). *Countering disinformation*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/countering-disinformation> .

87. *Journalism, "fake news" and disinformation: A handbook for journalism education and training*. UNESCO. (2021, May 7). <https://en.unesco.org/fightfakenews>

In today's digital age, electoral events, too, have evolved with the prevalence of social media as it offers various tools for political engagement and enables voters to connect directly with the electoral candidate of their choice. It also plays a critical role in influencing the outcomes of an election by shaping the popular narrative in the mainstream political discourse. It has been reported that in 2023, 4.9 billion people across the globe used social media, which means one in three people worldwide socialize on different social media platforms.⁸⁸

However, with increased accessibility and convenience come more complex challenges. The significance of social media in strengthening political participation and knowledge sharing during electoral events cannot be denied, but the challenges persisting from electoral systems, along with the complex algorithmic infrastructures at tech companies, necessitate more robust mechanisms to ensure election integrity. While disinformation campaigns are not new to electoral events, they have scaled up significantly with the availability of advanced tools, which are manipulated by electoral candidates to influence the “marketplace of ideas” online.⁸⁹

The threats and challenges to electoral processes have been further complicated with the arrival of generative artificial intelligence (AI). This technology has facilitated cheap production of audio, image, and video that are exceptionally convincing and more likely to mislead uninformed social media users, especially those who lack digital literacy or are not familiar with basic digital investigation techniques. The phenomenon is already being documented and critically analyzed⁸⁹⁰ for its potential role in the forthcoming elections in various states around the world, including Pakistan and India.

In the United States, AI-generated media featuring prominent political figures, including Joe Biden and Hillary Clinton,⁹¹ has garnered significant attention, which highlights AI's profound and far-reaching implications even in some most developed economies. It also emphasizes the necessity of establishing regulatory frameworks and increasing public awareness to safeguard the integrity of electoral events more than ever before. In the 2016 US presidential election, Russian operatives used social media to spread disinformation about Hillary Clinton and to promote Donald Trump's candidacy.⁹² In the 2017 French presidential election, a sophisticated duplicate version of the Belgian newspaper *Le Soir* was created and used to spread false information about Emmanuel Macron.⁹³ And in the 2018 Indian general election, WhatsApp was used to spread misinformation about candidates and political parties.⁹⁴ These examples illustrate how electoral

88. Shewale, R. (2023, September). *Social Media Users — Global Demographics* (2023). DemandSage. Retrieved October 24, 2023, from <https://www.demandsage.com/social-media-users/>.

89. Puddephatt, A. (2019). *Social media and elections*. UNESCO Digital Library. Retrieved October 24, 2023, from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000370634>.

90. West, D.M. (2023, May). *How AI will transform 2024 elections*. Brookings. Retrieved October 24, 2023, from <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/how-ai-will-transform-the-2024-elections/>.

91. Fitzwilliam, H. (2023, September). *How AI could sway voters in 2024's big elections*. Chatham House. Retrieved October 23, 2023, from <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/2023-10/how-ai-could-sway-voters-2024s-big-elections>.

92. *Elections in Digital Times: A Guide for Electoral Practitioners*. UNESCO. (2022). https://unesdoc.unesco.org/in/documentViewer.xhtml?v=2.1.196&id=p%3A%3Ausmarcdef_0000382102&file=%2Fin%2Frest%2FannotationSVC%2FDownloadWatermarkedAttachment%2Fattach_import_72f09c8b-5b8e-436a-8951-dac7ce4ebfc9%3F_%3D382102eng.pdf&updateUrl=updateUrl5698&ark=%2Fark%3A%2F48223%2Fpf0000382102%2FPDF%2F382102eng.pdf.multi&fullScreen=true&locale=en#Elections-in-Digital-Times_WEB_20230522.indd%3A.39035%3A9366.

93. *Ibid.*

94. *Ibid.*

disinformation can be used to manipulate public opinion and undermine the integrity of elections. Disinformation campaigns can target voters with false or misleading information about candidates, issues, or the electoral process itself. This information can be designed to sow discord, suppress turnout, or influence voters' choices.

Disinformation has different formats in the way it is spread especially during electoral processes, therefore it is important for journalists and media practitioners to understand them:⁹⁵

- **Coordinated inauthentic behaviour:** This occurs when actors coordinate and collaborate with the use of fake accounts to mislead people. Internet trolls who seek to harass, provoke or intimidate users engage such actors to generate a distraction or discord. An example would be deploying of “troll farms” or “troll factories”⁹⁶ to get their content to trend on social media.
- **Clickbait:** It refers to marketing, advertising or information material which generates interest and gets more engagement with the use of sensationalist content in either image or headline.
- **Computational Amplification of Disinformation:** This occurs when bots or fake accounts share or promote content which contributes to any disinformation campaign.
- **Astroturfing:** This is another form of online manipulation of content. It occurs when an organised activity which is intended to create a false impression of a widespread grassroots movement in support or in opposition to something but is in reality initiated and controlled by a concealed group or organisation.

Implications of Electoral Disinformation

Electoral disinformation has wide-ranging consequences that profoundly affect the electoral and democratic processes, as well as the broader society. Understanding these implications is crucial for journalists reporting on elections. Here are some key areas where electoral disinformation can have a detrimental impact:

Undermining Trust in the Electoral Process and Institution

Electoral disinformation can significantly undermine public trust in the integrity of the electoral process, including election institutions and mechanisms. When voters are exposed to false or misleading information about electoral procedures, such as claims of widespread fraud or manipulation, it can erode their faith in the fairness and legitimacy of the election.

Moreover, when disinformation targets the credibility of election authorities or institutions, it

95. Elections in Digital Times: A Guide for Electoral Practitioners. UNESCO. (2022). https://unesdoc.unesco.org/in/documentViewer.xhtml?v=2.1.196&id=p%3A%3Ausmarcdef_0000382102&file=%2Fin%2Frest%2FannotationSVC%2FDownloadWatermarkedAttachment%2Fattach_import_72f09c8b-5b8e-436a-8951-dac7ce4ebfc9%3F_%3D382102eng.pdf&updateUrl=updateUrl5698&ark=%2Fark%3A%2F48223%2Fpf0000382102%2FPDF%2F382102eng.pdf.multi&fullScreen=true&locale=en#Elections-in-Digital-Times_WEB_20230522.indd%3A.39035%3A9366.

96. B. Martin-Rozumilowicz and R. Kužel, 2019, pp. 10-11. Available at https://www.ifes.org/sites/default/files/ifes_working_paper_social_media_disinformation_and_electoral_integrity_august_2019_0.pdf.

fosters a perception that these bodies are corrupt or manipulated for political gain. This not only undermines the trust in the electoral process but also raises doubts about the democratic system as a whole. Journalists play a critical role in countering this aspect of disinformation by fact-checking and reporting on the accuracy of electoral processes and outcomes. Providing accurate and transparent information helps maintain public trust in the democratic system.

Influencing Voter Behavior

Electoral disinformation can be “used to manipulate voters' emotions, exploit their fears and prejudices, and undermine their trust in the electoral process”.⁹⁷ Misinformation campaigns can exploit fears, provoke anger, or even encourage apathy among voters. For example, spreading false stories about a particular candidate's criminal background or unethical conduct can sway voters' preferences and choices. Disinformation can also discourage voters from participating in the electoral process. When voters believe their vote won't make a difference due to alleged fraud or manipulation, they may opt not to vote at all. This can lead to lower voter turnout and negatively impact the legitimacy of the election results. Journalists must remain vigilant against the emotional manipulation inherent in electoral disinformation. Providing well-researched and balanced reporting helps counteract the emotional ploys of disinformation campaigns.

Polarizing Society

Disinformation often takes an “us versus them” approach, driving a wedge between different political groups and parties. By creating divisions, tensions, and conflicts, electoral disinformation can lead to a highly polarized political landscape. In a polarized society, individuals are less likely to engage in constructive dialogue and compromise. Instead, they become entrenched in their positions, making it difficult for political leaders to find common ground or work together. This not only hinders effective governance but can also lead to political instability and social unrest. Journalists can help mitigate this polarization by providing impartial and balanced reporting that focuses on issues and solutions rather than inflaming divisions.

Threatening Peace and Stability

One of the most severe implications of electoral disinformation is its potential to incite violence, extremism, or terrorism. False narratives that stoke hatred or division can lead to physical confrontations, civil unrest, or even acts of terrorism. Disinformation can also escalate international tensions when directed at neighboring countries or communities. Maintaining peace and stability is essential for the functioning of a healthy democracy. Journalists must be aware of the potential for disinformation to provoke violence and extremism and should exercise caution when reporting on sensitive topics or situations. Reporting responsibly can help prevent disinformation from escalating conflicts and crises.

In summary, electoral disinformation is a serious threat to democratic processes and social

97. *Elections in Digital Times: A Guide for Electoral Practitioners*. UNESCO. (2022). https://unesdoc.unesco.org/in/documentViewer.xhtml?v=2.1.196&cid=p%3A%3Ausmarcdef_0000382102&file=%2Fin%2Frest%2FannotationSVC%2FDownloadWatermarkedAttachment%2Fattach_import_72f09c8b-5b8e-436a-8951-dac7ce4ebfc9%3F_%3D382102eng.pdf&updateUrl=updateUrl5698&ark=%2Fark%3A%2F48223%2Fp0000382102%2FPDF%2F382102eng.pdf.multi&fullScreen=true&locale=en#Elections-in-Digital-Times_WEB_20230522.indd%3A.39035%3A9366.

cohesion. Journalists have a responsibility to confront this challenge by providing accurate and unbiased reporting, fact-checking, and debunking false narratives. By doing so, they play a crucial role in preserving public trust in elections and democracy while mitigating the potential for violence and polarization.

Some examples of election disinformation in Pakistan

Misleading Videos

After the General Election 2018, a video started circulating on social media which claimed to show a woman rigging the elections. The video was viewed over 150,000 times in four days. The original video has been removed but a version remains online and can be viewed at <https://shorturl.at/GIJX1>. A fact-check by AFP⁹⁸ revealed that the video was used repeatedly over the years to claim there was rigging in Pakistan, including elections in Karachi in 2008. Such videos have the potential to allow people to challenge the overall democratic processes at play in the country, as well as serve as confirmation bias for voters and citizens, including political parties, who believe that the elections were rigged.

A video of a Pakistani politician started circulating on social media site, Facebook, on 31st May 2023 in which it was being claimed that he has announced his support towards a political rival, after showing dissatisfaction with the governance of the former PM. It is interesting to note that the government in which the PM was elected comprised opposition parties in the country, including the party of the same politician. MMfD's team conducted a fact-check of the video and found that it was originally posted on August 29, 2017.⁹⁹ The purpose of circulating an older video seemed to be to create differences between the alliance of the governing parties.

A video started circulating on Facebook on 24th May 2023 claiming to be of a former Prime Minister announcing a decrease in petrol prices. The post garnered 1,200 likes and 317 comments, and was shared 65 times. The post has since been deleted. The video was circulated at a time when Pakistan was experiencing a fuel crisis as their fuel prices reached record high. The purpose of such a video was to create confusion among the people. MMfD's team¹⁰⁰ conducted a fact-check of the video and found that it was originally posted on **14th July 2022**. The PM had indeed announced a decrease in petrol prices at the said date but it was being used and circulated out of context.

98. AFP (2018) No, Viral Video does not show cheating in Pakistan's National Elections
<https://factcheck.afp.com/no-viral-video-does-not-show-cheating-pakistans-national-election>

99. Media Matters for Democracy Launches "Sachee Khabar" a fact checking initiative on Twitter to counter online MIS/Disinformation. Media Matters for Democracy. (n.d).
<https://mediamatters.pk/media-matters-for-democracy-launches-sachee-khabar-a-fact-checking-initiative-on-twitter-to-counter-online-mis-disinformation/>.

100. Ibid.

Fake Tweets

On August 21, 2018 a screenshot of the webpage of Pakistan's most widely circulated English-language newspaper Dawn was shared online. The falsified screenshot claimed that a politician withdrew a corruption petition against a political rival after becoming allies. The news started circulating in August 2018 after that politician was sworn into power and became an elected member of the National Assembly. The politician himself shared the screenshot and threatened to take legal action against the newspaper not realizing that it was imposter content.

An official government notification started circulating on social media sites on May 23, 2023, and it was later picked up by some news organizations claiming that Pakistan will observe a public holiday on May 25, 2023. It said that the holiday was being observed in light of Martyrs' Day. The news was even picked up and taken up by almost all news channels and even some digital websites. After the news started doing rounds, former Pakistan Information Minister dispelled it during a press conference.¹⁰¹ She remarked that disseminating fake news is not only unethical and illegal but it is also a disservice to the nation. Hence, it is the responsibility of everyone to reject irresponsible behavior.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

In May 2023, a series of violent protests erupted across Pakistan against the arrest of a former prime minister. During the time, an image of a non-identifiable woman standing in defiance of the rioting police emerged; it was viewed over 230,000 times. Even the official social media page of the PM's political party shared it. A closer inspection of the image by France 24¹⁰² revealed that the picture was generated using AI. The technology has faced difficulty in generating hands as there is no separation between the fingers, the background remains blurred and there is no symmetry of the helmets and uniforms worn by the Anti-Riot police of Pakistan. The creator of the image shared that he made it using MidJourney and while it was fake and based on the resilience of a Lahore-based influencer whose video went viral after she threw her scarf in front of the police during a protest in Lahore.¹⁰³ Her video was real but the image wasn't.

Role of Media

Media can serve as a credible and authentic source of information that empowers voters to make informed choices during elections. By upholding journalistic standards and ethics, the media ensures that the information it provides is accurate, impartial, and reliable.

101. *No public holiday on May 25, clarifies Mairiyum Aurangzeb*. thenews. (2023, May 23).

<https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/1073208-no-public-holiday-on-may-25-clarifies-mairiyum-aurangzeb>

102. BAHL, V. (2023, May 17). Truth or fake - Pakistan political turmoil: These "PTI protest" images aren't real. France 24.

https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/truth-or-fake/20230517-pakistan-political-turmoil-these-pti-protest-images-aren-t-real?utm_term=FRANCE24&utm_campaign=twitter&utm_source=nonli&utm_medium=social

103. Ibid.

Fact-Checking and Verification: Journalists verify the accuracy of information before reporting it, ensuring that voters receive credible and reliable information. This commitment to fact-checking prevents the spread of false or misleading data.

Balanced Reporting: Professional and ethical news media strives for impartiality, presenting diverse perspectives on electoral issues. This balanced reporting allows voters to weigh the pros and cons of different candidates and policies objectively.

Open Access to Information: The media acts as a conduit for information, ensuring that voters have access to candidates' platforms, policy proposals, and campaign promises. This access empowers voters to make choices aligned with their values and priorities.

In-Depth Analysis: Media offers in-depth analysis of election-related topics, providing context and a comprehensive understanding of the issues. This depth of analysis helps voters make informed political decisions.

Media's contribution to the provision of authentic information and its role in verifying, balancing, and analyzing information are essential in helping voters make informed choices during elections. It enhances democratic values by ensuring that the information available to voters is both accurate and comprehensive, ultimately strengthening the democratic process.

Other Sources to Explore

- Elections in digital times: a guide for electoral practitioners. UNESCO
- How to prevent disinformation from creeping into your elections coverage (2023). International Journalists' Network
- Journalism, 'Fake News' & Disinformation Handbook for Journalism Education and Training (2019). Unesco -
- Counteracting electoral disinformation: practical guide for organizations and electoral bodies (2022). UNESCO.

Chapter 9 – Tools and Techniques to Counter Electoral Disinformation

Introduction

In the digital age, countering electoral disinformation is a critical aspect of responsible journalism. This chapter delves into the essential tools and techniques that journalists can employ to combat the spread of false information during electoral processes. These tools are invaluable for fact-checking, identifying data voids, and ensuring the accuracy of information. Learning to navigate these resources is vital for maintaining the integrity of reporting.

Objectives

- What are data voids and how do they affect the information ecosystem
- Why fact checking is important and how can it be done
- Which tools can help journalists fact check different kinds of data

Filling Data Voids: A Journalistic Imperative

Data voids represent a pervasive challenge in today's information landscape. These voids materialize when high-quality, credible information on a particular topic is either scarce or difficult to access. Journalists frequently encounter these gaps, particularly during electoral reporting, where the urgency of timely, accurate information is paramount. Data voids can emerge for various reasons. In the wake of a recent event, the lack of substantial information is expected, as the event's details are still unfolding. However, data voids can also stem from a presumption that everyone possesses certain fundamental knowledge, which might not always hold true. To navigate these challenges effectively, journalists can adopt some strategies recommended in IJNet's election coverage toolkit:

1. Fill the Gaps with Quality Information: Journalists should make a concerted effort to bridge data voids with high-quality, reliable information. This means actively seeking out sources, conducting interviews, and collecting data to ensure that their reporting remains comprehensive and accurate.

2. Be Honest and Transparent: An essential journalistic principle is honesty and transparency. Journalists must acknowledge and communicate what is known and, equally crucial, what remains unknown about a situation. By clearly delineating these boundaries, they avoid inadvertently propagating misinformation.

3. Understand Audience Queries: Journalists must attune themselves to the questions and concerns of their audiences. Often, the public's queries reflect what they find essential or confusing about a topic. Paying attention to these questions can guide journalists in addressing the most pertinent information gaps.

4. Repeat Credible Information: To reinforce the credibility and reliability of their reporting, journalists should not hesitate to reiterate known and verified information in various formats. Repetition serves to emphasize the validity of the data while helping the audience better grasp and retain essential facts.

Fact-Checking and Countering Disinformation

Fact-checking is an indispensable journalistic process, aiming to verify information and provide an unbiased, accurate analysis of a claim. It is especially important during elections, where public opinion and decision-making hinge on access to reliable and truthful information. While the direct impact of corrections might be limited, fact-checking serves as a potent tool to rectify critical pieces of election-related information manipulation.

The foundation of fact-checking rests on a fundamental question: "How do we know that?" Poynter, a leading institution in journalism, has laid out a comprehensive guide for fact-checking information in elections, encapsulating the process within three key steps:

1. Finding Fact-Checkable Claims: The initial step involves identifying claims circulating on various platforms, including social media, mainstream media, and political statements, which warrant verification. To select a claim for fact-checking, journalists must consider specific criteria:

- **Virality:** To assess the claim's extent, reach, and spread. Claims that have gained substantial traction are often of greater significance and merit closer scrutiny.
- **Source:** Evaluating the source of the claim is crucial. Who shared it, and what's their credibility? Understanding the origins of a claim can reveal potential motivations and biases.
- **Nature:** Examining the nature of the claim is vital. Claims that possess the potential to incite violence or provoke strong emotional responses require urgent attention.

2. Finding the Facts: Once a claim is chosen for fact-checking, the next step involves a rigorous search for the best available evidence regarding the claim. This includes an evaluation of the reliability and credibility of sources.

3. Correcting the Record: After gathering the necessary facts, fact-checkers proceed to assess the veracity of the claim.

Other Sources to Explore

- Balancing act: countering digital disinformation while respecting freedom of expression: Broadband Commission research report on 'Freedom of Expression and Addressing Disinformation on the Internet' (2020) UNESCO.
- Elections Reporting Toolkit by International Journalists' Network. Link: <https://ijnet.org/en/toolkit/elections-reporting>.
- Guide to Investigating Digital Threats: Disinformation (2023). Global Investigative Journalism Network.

Chapter 10 – Fact-Checking with Digital Precision: Tools and Techniques

Introduction

Journalists can leverage cutting-edge tech tools to fact-check and verify information. This chapter is dedicated to unveiling a diverse range of technological resources designed to aid journalists in their mission to ensure accurate and unbiased reporting during elections. By mastering these tools, journalists can strengthen their capacity to combat disinformation.

Objectives

- Understand the significance of utilizing technology in the field of election reporting.
- Explore a variety of tech tools available for fact-checking and information verification.
- Understand how social media monitoring tools can help verify and track disinformation campaigns.
- Familiarize yourself with MMfD's specialized tools for analyzing content on Facebook and TikTok.
- Achieve a practical understanding of these tools through demonstrations and videos

Tech tools that can aid fact checking and information verification

1. Google Image Search

Google Image Search is an invaluable tool for journalists seeking to trace the origins of photos or videos. It helps verify the credibility of visual content, a crucial aspect in the age of digital manipulation and disinformation.

How it works: Journalists can simply upload an image or paste its URL into the search bar on the Google Images website. The search engine will then provide a list of visually similar images from around the web. By analyzing these results and their context, journalists can often determine the original source of the image or video.

Video Tutorial - Google Image Search Tutorial

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LshVj2Z0bF4>)

2. TinEye Reverse Image Search

TinEye Reverse Image Search is another valuable tool for fact-checking visual content. It not only reveals an image's source but also sheds light on its history – crucial for verifying the authenticity of images.

How it works: Journalists upload an image to TinEye or provide its URL. TinEye then scans its extensive database to identify where else this image has appeared online. This helps determine the image's longevity, previous uses, and whether it has been manipulated or edited.

Video Tutorial - TinEye Reverse Image Search Tutorial

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQw4w9WgXcQ>)

3. Google Fact Check Explorer

Google Fact Check Explorer simplifies the process of verifying claims and finding existing fact-check results related to specific persons, topics, or issues.

How it works: Journalists can use this tool by entering a specific query into the Google Fact Check Explorer. The tool will then provide a list of fact-check results, highlighting claims that have been evaluated by credible fact-checking organizations.

Video Tutorial: [Google Fact Check Explorer Tutorial](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABCDEFG>

4. Amnesty International YouTube DataViewer

The Amnesty International YouTube DataViewer is a resource for verifying the authenticity of videos. It enables journalists to determine if a video or parts of a video have been previously uploaded online.

How it works: Journalists can input the URL of a video into the YouTube DataViewer. The tool analyzes metadata and cross-references it with known video sources. This aids in confirming the originality of a video and detecting any tampering.

Video Tutorial: [Amnesty International YouTube DataViewer Tutorial](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZYXWVUT>

Listening in: Proactive monitoring of social media platforms

Proactive monitoring of social media, including platforms like YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, is a critical component of electoral reporting. It enables journalists to swiftly detect and counter disinformation, upholding the accuracy and integrity of election-related news. In the context of electoral reporting, early detection is crucial. Proactive monitoring allows reporters to identify false narratives as they emerge and take immediate action. This real-time response ensures that the public receives accurate information, safeguarding the credibility of election reporting.

Proactive monitoring also contributes to public awareness. By delivering verified, fact-based content, journalists empower voters to make informed decisions during elections. This, in turn, fosters an engaged and well-informed electorate. Tracking the sources of misinformation is another vital aspect of proactive monitoring. Journalists can uncover the origins of false claims, shedding light on the motives behind such disinformation. This deeper understanding benefits electoral reporting by providing a more comprehensive view of the election landscape.

Furthermore, proactive monitoring enhances the fact-checking process. Journalists can cross-verify claims, assess source credibility, and conduct thorough investigations using the wealth of data available on social media. This results in more accurate and reliable election reporting. Addressing disinformation on multiple social media platforms simultaneously is a key advantage of proactive monitoring.

For readers interested in delving deeper into the realm of proactive monitoring for electoral reporting, they can participate in MMfD's training on various tech tools that can facilitate proactive listening of social media. These sessions cover various tools and techniques essential for monitoring social media effectively, ensuring the accuracy and integrity of election reporting. From utilizing Twitter for News and Twitter Advanced Search to mastering tools like Tweetbinder and Fedica, participants will gain a comprehensive understanding of tracking and fact-checking in real time. Additionally, a presentation on Constructed Narratives based on MMfD's research will reveal insights on identifying organized disinformation campaigns on Twitter. Analyzing Facebook is made more accessible through the Facebook page analyzer, offering in-depth analysis and data gathering capabilities. YouTube Data tools and TikTok Hashtag Analyzer provide valuable resources for scrutinizing video content and trends on these platforms. Follow MMfD's social media pages and websites for details on upcoming training sessions.

Collaborative Fact-Checking

Collaboration is a powerful strategy against electoral disinformation. Journalists, civil society organizations, and election management bodies can join forces to fact-check and counter disinformation more effectively. While journalists often lead fact-checking initiatives, successful efforts often result from multi-stakeholder collaborations. Collaborative efforts with different stakeholders can bring together a diverse range of expertise and resources. Journalists, as information gatherers, can partner with civil society organizations (CSOs) and election management bodies (EMBs) to create a powerful synergy. CSOs often possess valuable research and advocacy skills, while EMBs contribute to the credibility and trustworthiness of fact-checking efforts. Collective efforts have the potential to reach a larger audience. This scalability is especially crucial during election periods when the volume of false narratives tends to surge.

Other Sources to Explore

- Fact-Checking and Verification: Navigating the Misinformation Landscape in Pakistani Newsrooms and Beyond (2023). Media Matters for Democracy.
- Google Fact Check Tools. Google News Initiative. Link: <https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/resources/trainings/verification/google-fact-check-tools/>
- Verification Handbook: For Disinformation And Media Manipulation. European Journalism Centre

