

## TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL

### THEME: SOCIO-ECONOMIC

#### 1. BACKGROUND/CONTEXT

In Pakistan, the mainstream leading political parties vie that no one can steer the country's economy better than them. The electoral win of the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) in 2018 was based on its commitment to promote the socio-economic development and to combat the rampant corruption and cronyism in the country's political and institutional settings. Then ruling government of PTI claimed to inherit considerable debts and shrinking foreign reserves from its predecessors and held them responsible for the country's economic downfall. The government believed that recovering the looted money will ease the economic burden but its anti-corruption drive did not prove to be effective as it did not pay heed to other corrupt practices in system. During the past few years of politics of Pakistan, it has been a common practice of the ruling party to hide its own inefficiencies and targeting the previous governments for their allegedly massive and unchecked corruption. The socio-political fabric of Pakistan remained vulnerable to propaganda and disinformation campaigns. In this view, the ruling government, in the efface of Transparency International report (2019), failed to prove its commitment to eliminate corruption. It tried to conceal its own inefficiency to curtail the corruption by distorting facts and placing the baggage of poor economy and increased corruption on the shoulders of previous government.

#### 1.2. WHAT HAPPENED

Based on the manifesto of inclusive economic growth, revolutionize social services, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's (PTI) leader Imran Khan took the charge of Prime Minister in August 2018. Despite his commitment to eradicate poverty and promote socio-economic development, doubt surrounded his anti-corruption drive as Pakistan faced a severe macroeconomic crisis in 2019. Some media reports<sup>1</sup> underlined that the bleak economy was inherited from poorly regulated financial system of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government. However, Khan's government refused to take the responsibility of economic woes and said the situation is caused by poorly governed financial system of the previous government of PML-N. It further held its predecessors responsible for the country's downgraded score in the Transparency International's (TI) annual Corruption Perception Index (CPI) report of 2019 where Pakistan fell one point below in comparison to 2018 score of 33 and slipped in the world ranking from the previous 117<sup>th</sup> to the 120<sup>th</sup> among 180 countries.

Former Special Assistant to the Prime Minister for Information and Broadcasting Firdous Ashiq Awan rejected the report accusing it "biased" and "unfair".<sup>2</sup> She framed her claims to mislead the nation and further added that the report was being managed by the "kings of corruption sitting abroad". She was

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<sup>1</sup> Malik, S. (2019, April 18). Pakistan's Economic Woes: The Way Forward. *The Diplomat*. Retrieved on October 15, 2022, from <https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/pakistans-economic-woes-the-way-forward/>

<sup>2</sup> (2020, January 24). PTI govt rejects corruption report, terms it 'biased'. *The News*. Retrieved on October 15, 2022, from <https://www.thenews.com.pk/latest/603509-pti-govt-rejects-corruption-report-terms-it-bias>

pointing fingers at the former Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, then the opposition parties termed the TI report a “charge-sheet” against the Khan’s government.<sup>5</sup>

**Thread**

**PMLN Economy** @PMLNEconomy · Jul 27, 2020

جہاں نواز شریف کے دور حکومت میں کرپشن انڈیکس 22 درجے بہتر ہوا تھا وہیں کرپشن سے پاک نیا پاکستان تحریک انصاف کی حکومت کے پہلے ایک سال میں تین درجے مزید گر گیا۔  
2012 کا کرپشن انڈیکس 139 تھا اور 2018 میں بہتر ہو کر 117 پر پہنچ چکا تھا۔  
لیکن 2019 پاکستان کرپشن انڈیکس کی فہرست میں



**Corruption in Pakistan** Reports by Transparency International

**Latest Rankings:**

Year	Ranking
2015	#117
2016	#116
2017	#117
2018	#117
2019	#120

**Best Ranking:** Benazir Bhutto, 1995, #39

**Worst Ranking:** Pervez Musharraf, 2006, #144

3 24 35

In this backdrop, Khan’s government launched a disinformation campaign to defend its commitment to accountability and anti-corruption narrative.

### 1.2.1. DELIBERATE DISINFORMATION

<sup>3</sup> (2020, January 25). PTI rejects Transparency International’s ‘contradictory’ corruption report. SAMAA. Retrieved on October 15, 2022, from <https://www.samaaenglish.tv/news/1956117/pakistan-pti-rejects-transparency-internationals-contradictory-corruption-report>

<sup>4</sup> (2020, January 24). Radio Pakistan. Retrieved on October 15, 2022, from <http://urdu.radio.gov.pk/24-01-2020/akfrdos-nransprnsi-anrnishnl-ki-rpor-mstrdkrdji>

<sup>5</sup> (2020, January 24). Govt rejects ‘biased’ Transparency International corruption report. Dawn. Retrieved on October 15, 2022, from <https://www.dawn.com/news/1530290/govt-rejects-biased-transparency-international-corruption-report>

In the view of Transparency International's CPI 2019 report featuring Pakistan's downgrade score and poor ranking among 180 countries, the then state ministers rejected TI's report based on false accusations. Former Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) Dr. Shahbaz Gil claimed that TI report has used old data from previous years i.e. 2017, 2018 and 2019.<sup>6</sup> A private TV channel ARY Digital endorsed this claim.



Similarly, Chairman Transparency International Pakistan Advocate Sohail Muzaffar claimed that data from previous years (2015, 2016, 2017) was used in TI report 2019 for reporting on Rule of Law indicator only. He further added that 'lowering of Pakistan score by one point does not reflect any increase or decrease in Corruption as it is within the standard margin of error which is 2.46%.<sup>7</sup> Hence, a big confusion was created on social media about TI report asserting it has used old data of some agencies/survey sources for its CPI 2019 report. But 'The News' conducted a thorough research and claimed that agencies involved in assessment of Pakistan CPI had used updated data and no agency had used 2015 and 2016 datasets for to serve the purpose.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Abbasi, W. (2021, January 28). Urdu News. Retrieved on October 15, 2022, from <https://www.urdunews.com/node/536301>

<sup>7</sup> (2020, January 26). Transparency International Pakistan. Retrieved on October 15, 2022, from <https://www.transparency.org.pk/pr/ti-pak-clarification-cpi2019.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Durrani, F. (2020, January 26). Did TI use old data for its CPI 2019 report?. *The News*. Retrieved on October 15, 2022, from <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/604336-did-ti-use-old-data-for-its-cpi-2019-report>

Advisor to PM Imran Khan on Interior and Accountability Shahzad Akbar rather compared Pakistan downgraded position with Canada, Britain, and the US and hailed government's efforts to curtail the menace of corruption.



The then state officials tried to hide government's incapability to curb corruption by accusing previous government. While commenting on TI report, Former Special Assistant to the Prime Minister for Information and Broadcasting Firdous Ashiq Awan accused corrupt mafia for spreading rumors against them.<sup>9</sup> Former SPAM Dr. Shahbaz also accused TI for granting favor to PML-N government and maintaining the CPI graph to a certain level during PML-N tenure.

<sup>9</sup> Kabir, U. (2020, January 23). *Pakistan slips three spots on Corruption Perceptions Index*. Geo TV. Retrieved on October 15, 2022, from <https://www.geo.tv/latest/268720-pakistan-slips-three-spots-on-corruption-perceptions-index>

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Dr. Shahbaz Gill ✓  
@SHABAZGIL

ٹرانسپیرنسی انٹرنیشنل پاکستان کے سربراہ کو جب کسی ملک کا سفیر لگایا گیا تو ہماری رینکنگ بہتر ہوگئی تھی لہذا اس پر زیادہ خوش ہونے کی ضرورت نہیں شہباز شریف لندن میں رنگیلی ٹوپی پہن کر گھوم رہے ہیں حضور ایسی رپورٹ آنے سے آپکے گناہ نہیں دھل جانے، اتنی دفعہ ڈیوڈ روز پر مقدمہ ہی کرتے آئے

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7:29 PM · Jan 24, 2020 · Twitter for Android

16 Retweets 98 Likes



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Dr. Shahbaz Gill ✓  
@SHABAZGIL

\*ٹرانسپیرنسی انٹرنیشنل نے نواز شریف گورنمنٹ میں کرپشن ہونے کے باوجود بھی کرپشن انڈکس کو ایک خاص نمبر پر برقرار رکھا گیا.

ٹرانسپیرنسی پاکستان چیئر نے ماضی میں نواز شریف حکومت کو ایچ دیا، اور اسی خدشے کا اظہار عمران خان صاحب نے 2017 کے رپورٹ کے بعد بھی کیا تھا.

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10:13 PM · Jan 25, 2020 · Twitter for iPhone

305 Retweets 5 Quote Tweets 1,501 Likes



Nonetheless, Pakistan's economy, as per TI reports, continued to deteriorate in the following years. In 2019, Pakistan slipped in scores and went up in ranking. Its score slipped from 33 in 2018 to 32 in 2019 whereas its ranking escalated from 117 out of 180 countries in 2018 to 120 out of 180 countries in 2019.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, TI lowered Pakistan's overall score from 31 in 2020 to 28 in 2021 and downgraded its ranking from 124/180 in 2020 to 140/180 in 2021.<sup>11</sup> After TI issued its recent report, the PTI government faced a wild criticism and backlash from the opposition party members on social media.

<sup>10</sup> Transparency International. CORRUPTION PERCEPTIONS INDEX: PAKISTAN. Retrieved on October 15, 2022, from <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2018/index/pak>

<sup>11</sup> Buhkari, H. & Shakoori, A.R. Pakistan and the Transparency report. *The News on Sunday*. Retrieved on October 15, 2022, from <https://www.thenews.com.pk/tns/detail/929085-pakistan-and-the-transparency-report>

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**Murtaza Solangi** @murtazasolangi

Imran Khan used to show Transparency International reports to mock PPP and PML-N to promote his anti corruption mantra. Now under his watch Pakistan has climbed up corruption index 16 ladders and reached 140 index.

**Ansar Abbasi** @AnsarAbbasi · Jan 25  
BREAKING: Transparency Intl released global CPI 2021. Damning report against Pakistan for huge rise in corruption. Compared to last year, Pak's ranking massively dropped from previous 124 to present 140 out of total 180 countries. Click for details سننے  
youtu.be/kwi6x\_OKhJM

10:20 AM · Jan 25, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

**SenatorSherryRehman** @sherryrehman

ٹرانسپیرینسی انٹرنیشنل کی کرپشن پرسپیکشن انڈیکس اس حکومت کے خلاف چارج شیٹ ہے۔ کرپشن میں پاکستان کا 16 درجے اوپر جانا اس حکومت کے بیانے کو بے نقاب کرتا ہے۔ 2020 میں دنیا بھر میں پاکستان کرپشن پرسپیکشن انڈیکس میں 124 نمبر پر تھا۔ 1 سال کے اندر پاکستان 140 ویں نمبر پر آ گیا ہے۔ 1/2

Translated from Urdu by Google

Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index is a charge sheet against this government. In 2020, Pakistan was ranked 124th in the Corruption Perceptions Index worldwide. Within a year, Pakistan has been ranked 140th. 1/2

**Tweet**

**Shehbaz Sharif** @CMShehbaz

During PM Nawaz Sharif's government, corruption decreased despite the massive development, which was the result of transparency, good governance & legal reforms. Now corruption has hit an all-time high despite the fact that no worthwhile development has taken place.

**Shehbaz Sharif** @CMShehbaz · Jan 25  
Corruption rampant in 'Naya' Pakistan of "anti-corruption Mujahid". According to Transparency International, PTI govt has broken all records of corruption in the last 20 years. Among Asia-Pacific region, Pakistan has unfortunately been ranked as the 5th most corrupt country.

11:16 AM · Jan 25, 2022 · Twitter for iPhone

586 Retweets 44 Quote Tweets 1,440 Likes

**SenatorSherryRehman** @sherryrehman

کرپشن ختم کرنے کی دعویدار حکومت نے 16 ممالک کو کرپشن میں پیچھے چھوڑ دیا ہے۔ دوسری طرف مشیر احتساب کا استعفیٰ اس بات کا ثبوت ہے کہ کرپشن کم نہیں، بڑھی ہے۔ احتساب صرف مخالفین کو نشانہ بنانے کے لئے ہے۔ اس حکومت کی کرپشن سے اب عالمی ادارے پردہ اٹھا رہے ہیں۔ 2/2

Translated from Urdu by Google

Claiming to end corruption, the government has left 16 countries behind in corruption. On the other hand, the resignation of the Accountability Advisor is proof that corruption has not decreased, it has increased. Accountability is only for targeting opponents. International institutions are now uncovering the corruption of this government. 2/2

While commenting in recent TI report (2021), former PM Imran Khan said that government had taken steps against corruption. He further lamented that “those who committed corruption are sitting abroad instead of facing cases in their own country.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>12</sup> (2022, January 25). TI report dents PTI's 'anti-graft' narrative. *The Express Tribune*. Retrieved on October 15, 2022, from <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2340350/ti-report-dents-ptis-anti-graft-narrative>

1.3. ABCDE FRAMEWORK

Actor	Behavior	Content	Degree	Effect
Primary actors: State ministers	Transparency: the primary actors involved in this campaign did not hide their identity	Harm: the content of campaign was not harmful or endangering human life	Audience: the content's targeted audience was the ordinary citizens	Human rights: content has not threatened physical well being or safety of individuals but created political polarization and misperception.
	Intent: the content and the behavior of the primary actors reflected a clear intent to vilify opposition and TI	Languages: the language used by the main actors was accusatory and manipulative	The Targeted: the content was tailored to target the opposition party	
	Authenticity: Primary actors used false accusation and manipulated the information i.e., unlawful techniques of communication	Expression: the content consisted of wrong information and baseless allegation, hence could not be protected under freedom of expressions and information	Platform: Twitter and TV channel (ARY digital) were the platforms used to distribute the misleading content	
	Dependency: the primary actors did not perform on behalf of any other party	Truthfulness: the content was fallacious and consisted of untrue claims which could not be verified after	Virility: The virility of content did not suggest an inauthentic boost to online engagement	

		issuance of a detailed research report by media		
	Infrastructure: Backend communication was evident from the coordinated actions of primary actors who aimed at vilification of same target	Synthetic: The content was deceitful and accusatory	Scale: The scale of campaign suggested it is an ongoing campaign	
		Narratives: The content was aligned with campaign's narrative of false accusations		

1.4. ABCDE FRAMEWORK BASED ANALYSIS

ACTORS

The primary actors in this case were the government’s ministers, including Dr. Firdous Ashiq Awan, Dr. Shahbaz Gill and Shahzad Akbar. They were not affiliated to any private, nongovernmental organization or proxy of a foreign government. The main platform actors used for the dissemination of disinformation was Twitter whereas the TV channel that took lead in this regard was ARY.

BEHAVIOUR

Through this case study, it was noted that accusation and distortion of facts were the basis of the entire campaign. The primary actors involved did not disguise their identity. They deliberately and knowingly disseminated false information, which were later proven wrong after investigation conducted by a media outlet i.e. The News. Any back-end coordination was evident from the state ministers coordinated Tweets endorsing and defending their party agenda. The behavior and activities of the primary actors showed clear intent of accusation and damaging opposition’s image.

CONTENT

The content/information, in this case, was shared without any evidence. And by the time, the investigations proved the information wrong. The content was verifiably untrue and was clearly aligned with the known disinformation narrative i.e., accusing opposition and manipulation of the facts shared by



IT. The content in this case has been disseminated in English and Urdu in accusatory tone. The content was based on falsification of facts and libel, so it cannot be protected under fundamental freedoms of expression and of information.

#### DEGREE

In this case, the campaign targeted the reported international civil society organization and opposition parties, particularly PML-N. By disseminating accusatory and false information, an environment was created against opposition party members to fool the ordinary citizen about their own performance in the development of the country. The content was distributed through social media i.e. Twitter and news channels e.g. ARY TV that is rumored to be pro PTI media outlet. The scale of the campaign involved multiple actors and platforms, thus specified it was a single ongoing operation.

#### EFFECT

The content disseminated as part of this campaign had a serious impact on the climate of debate in overall society as it created political polarization by propagating false and accusatory information. Though the content did not threaten individuals' health, physical wellbeing, or medical safety, it sought to undermine opposition party's image.

#### DIAGNOSIS

The campaign was analyzed under all elements of the ABCDE framework, i.e., actor, behavior, content, degree, and effect. The primary actors originated a deliberate campaign and falsified information was amplified on social media. The actors' messages on social media were in line with falsified and manipulative narrative. The precision with which this coordinated campaign was conducted points to the inauthentic behavior and back-end coordination. The primary actors involved used deceptive statements, propagated false narratives and fabricated facts to tarnish the image of opposition party.

Based on the aforementioned facts and analysis, this campaign has been identified as **'Disinformation/Propaganda'**.

#### CONCLUSION

The campaign, by promoting fabricated news, had direct impact on the image of opposition party. It has also questioned the authenticity of Transparency International by alleging the external influence in the TI report on Pakistan. This campaign, an ongoing operation that has endorsed the same false narrative regarding TI reports issued in years ahead, would have snowball effect on the political polarization in the country.