

**Public Opinion Shift, Post-Truth, and Hybrid Warfare:
Contextualizing The Nexus Of Post-Truth And Hybrid Warfare In
Pakistan**



By

Fatima Ayaz

(Registration No: 00000401601)

Department of Peace and Conflict Studies
Centre for International Peace and Stability (CIPS)
National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST),
Islamabad
(2024)

**Public Opinion Shift, Post-Truth, and Hybrid Warfare:
Contextualizing The Nexus Of Post-Truth And Hybrid Warfare In
Pakistan**



By

Fatima Ayaz

(Registration No: 00000401601)

A thesis submitted to the National University of Sciences and Technology, Islamabad,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in
Peace and Conflict Studies

Supervisor: Dr. Najimdeen Bakare

Central for International Peace and Stability (CIPS)
National University of Sciences & Technology (NUST)
Islamabad, Pakistan

(2024)


THESIS ACCEPTANCE CERTIFICATE

Certified that the final copy of MS Thesis titled “**Public Opinion Shift, Post-Truth, And Hybrid Warfare: Contextualizing the Nexus of Post-Truth And Hybrid Warfare In Pakistan**” written by **Ms. Fatima Ayaz** (Registration No. 00000401601), of **Center of International Peace and Stability** has been vetted by the undersigned, found complete in all respects as per NUST Statutes/ Regulations/ Masters Policy, is free of plagiarism, errors, and mistakes and is accepted as partial fulfillment for the award of Masters degree. It is further certified that necessary amendments as pointed out by GEC members and evaluators of the scholar have also been incorporated in the said thesis.



Signature: 

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Najimdeem Bakare

Date: _____

Signature (HOD): 

Date: _____

Signature (Dean/ Principal):  

National University of Science and Technology

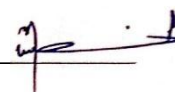
MS THESIS WORK

We hereby recommend that the dissertation prepared under our Supervision by Fatima Ayaz & Regn No. 00000401601


Titled: **“Public Opinion Shift, Post-Truth, And Hybrid Warfare: Contextualizing the Nexus of Post-Truth And Hybrid Warfare In Pakistan”** be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of MS Peace and Conflict Studies degree and awarded grade _____. _____(Initial).

Examination Committee Members

1. Name: Dr. Muhammad Makki

Signature: 

2. Name: Brig. Imran Rashid

Signature: 

3. Name: _____

Signature: _____

Supervisor's name: Dr. Najimdeen Bakare

Signature: 

Date: _____

COUNTERSIGNED



Head of Department

Date: _____

 ASSOCIATE DEAN
Centre for International Peace and Stability
National Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies
Islamabad

(Associate Dean)

Dean/Principal CIPS

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that the research work presented in this thesis, entitled “**Public Opinion Shift, Post-Truth, And Hybrid Warfare: Contextualizing the Nexus of Post-Truth And Hybrid Warfare In Pakistan**” was conducted by Ms. **Fatima Ayaz** under the supervision of **Dr. Najimdeen Bakare** No part of this thesis has been submitted anywhere else for any other degree. This thesis is submitted to the **Center of International Peace and Stability** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Field of **Peace and Conflict Studies** Department of Center of International Peace and Stability, National University of Sciences and Technology, Islamabad.

Student Name: Fatima Ayaz

Signature: _____

Examination Committee:

a) External Examiner 1: Name Brig. Imran Rashid

Signature: _____

(Designation and Office Address) HOD PKT

b) External Examiner 2: Name Dr. Muhammad Makki

Signature: _____

(Designation and Office Address) Assistant Professor, CIPS

Name of Supervisor: Dr. Bakare Najimdeen


Signature: _____

Name of Dean/HOD: Dr. Ansar Jamil

Signature: _____

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, **Fatima Ayaz** hereby state that my MS thesis titled “**Public Opinion Shift, Post-Truth, And Hybrid Warfare: Contextualizing the Nexus of Post-Truth and Hybrid Warfare In Pakistan**” is my own work and has not been submitted previously by me for taking any degree from National University of Sciences and Technology, Islamabad or anywhere else in the country/ world. At any time if my statement is found to be incorrect even after I graduate, the university has the right to withdraw my MS degree in **Peace and Conflict Studies**.

Student Signature:  _____

Name: Fatima Ayaz _____


Date: _____

PLAGIARISM UNDERTAKING

I solemnly declare that research work presented in the thesis “**Public Opinion Shift, Post-Truth, And Hybrid Warfare: Contextualizing the Nexus of Post-Truth And Hybrid Warfare In Pakistan**” is solely my research work with no significant contribution from any other person. Small contribution/ help wherever taken has been duly acknowledged and that complete thesis has been written by me.

I understand the zero tolerance policy of the HEC and National University of Sciences and Technology (NUST), Islamabad towards plagiarism. Therefore, I as an author of the above titled thesis declare that no portion of my thesis has been plagiarized and any material used as reference is properly referred/cited.

I undertake that if I am found guilty of any formal plagiarism in the above titled thesis even after award of MS degree, the University reserves the rights to withdraw/revoke my MS degree and that HEC and NUST, Islamabad have the right to publish my name on the HEC/University website on which names of students are placed who submitted plagiarized thesis.


Student Signature: _____

Name: Fatima Ayaz

Date: _____

DEDICATION

To Mama and Baba.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

First and foremost, I would like to thank Allah Almighty, the Most Gracious, and the Most Merciful, for helping me complete this task successfully.

This thesis could not have been possible without the exceptional guidance from my supervisor, Dr Najimdeen Bakare. I am thankful not only for his great academic advice, which always hits the mark and has helped me enhance my writing immensely but also for his patience and understanding when things were not right. Writing this thesis was an extremely overwhelming task mentally, and I am grateful that I had mentorship that helped me navigate this process.

I am also thankful to my GEC members, Dr Muhammad Makki and Brig Imran Rashid, for their cooperation and guidance. And to Dr Humaira Shafi for offering her guidance and support, which allowed me to stay determined.

Finally, I would like to offer my gratitude to my friend, Dua Shahid, for being a rock throughout this process and helping me work through spots where I found myself stuck. I am indebted to her constant support and caring nature for the completion of this thesis.

Contents

LIST OF TABLES.....	xi
LIST OF FIGURES	xii
ABSTRACT.....	xiii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1 Background	1
2 Problem Statement	2
3 Research Objectives	2
4 Research Questions	3
5 Research Significance	3
CHAPTER 1 LITERATURE AND FRAMEWORK	4
1.1 Literature Review	4
1.1.1 Public Opinion	4
1.1.2 Post-Truth	9
1.1.3 Hybrid Warfare	13
1.2 Theoretical Framework.....	18
CHAPTER 2 METHODOLOGY.....	21
2.1 Research Methodology	21
2.1.1 Survey	21
2.1.2 Expert Interviews	22
2.1.3 Limitation	24
CHAPTER 3 ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS.....	26
3.1 Outlining Data Collected	26
3.1.1 Demographic Data	26
3.1.2 Public Reliance on Different Information Sources for Understanding Current Affairs in the Country	28
3.1.3 Understanding Public Opinion: To What Extent Does the Public Agree with State Narratives on Certain Issues.	37
3.2 Understanding the Pakistani Information Environment.....	41
3.3 The State of Public Opinion in the Country and the Government’s Attempts at Managing It.....	43

3.4	Contextualizing Public Opinion Shift to a Post-Truth Environment.....	48
3.5	Post-truth and Hybrid Warfare; Indian Actions that Exemplify the Nexus in the Pakistani Context	51
3.6	Domestic Fault Lines: Understanding the Other Dimension of Hybrid Warfare Facing Pakistan that Manifests Itself in State-Society Relations	53
	CONCLUDING DISCUSSION	61
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	64
APPENDIX A	PLAGIARISM REPORT	73
APPENDIX B	SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE	74
APPENDIX C	INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE	77

List of Tables

Tables	Page Nos.
Table 2.1: List of Interviewees with Expertise and Research Interests.....	24
Table 3.1: Age of Respondents.....	27
Table 3.2: Region of Respondents.....	27
Table 3.3: Gender of Respondents.....	28
Table 3.4: Respondents Views About Usage of Facebook.....	32
Table 3.5: Respondents Views About Usage of Instagram.....	32
Table 3.6: Respondents Views About Usage of X (Former Twitter).....	33
Table 3.7: Respondents Views About Usage of Tik Tok.....	33
Table 3.8: Respondents Views About Usage of Threads.....	34
Table 3.9: Respondents Views About Usage of YouTube.....	34
Table 3.10: Respondents Views About Usage of Telegram.....	35

List of Figures

Figures	Page Nos.
Figure 3.1: Respondents Views about Newspaper Reading	29
Figure 3.2: Respondents' Views about Local Media.....	30
Figure 3.3: Respondents Views about International Media	30
Figure 3.4: Respondents' Views about Social Media Platforms	31
Figure 3.5: Respondents' Views about Local YouTubers	36
Figure 3.6: Respondents' Views about Local YouTubers	36
Figure 3.7: Respondents Most Viewed YouTubers	37
Figure 3.8: Respondents Views about PTI's Action	38
Figure 3.9: Respondents' Views about States Action in Balochistan	39
Figure 3.10: Respondents Views about Recent Elections Upheld Democratic Standards....	39
Figure 3.11: Respondents' Views on the Democratic Cycle have not been Disturbed	40
Figure 3.12: Respondents Views on State Actions on 9 th May	40
Figure 3.13: Respondents Views on State Measures against Balochi Protestors.....	41

ABSTRACT

Over the last few years, Pakistan has been embroiled in political turmoil that seems to be signaling a shift in public opinion vis a vis state narrative. A shift in public opinion that favors alternate points of view to the state's can symbolize a challenge in maintaining control over the national discourse and narrative, exposing fault lines in society that can potentially be exploited. This situation has become particularly dangerous as a result of the post-truth nature of today's information environment and the resulting post-truth and hybrid warfare nexus. The post-truth and hybrid warfare nexus has emerged as a contemporary security challenge for states and Pakistan is no exception. Therefore, there is a need to contextualize this nexus to Pakistan and the unique security challenges it faces, both in the form of external threats and internal strife. This study looks at the issue from a post-structuralist lens, enabling the fluidity of truth as a socially constructed phenomenon, using Foucault's work on truth and truth regimes, as the guiding theoretical framework. Foucault's idea of power and how it functions in a society, also allows the navigation of the post-truth-hybrid warfare nexus and how public opinion can act as a force within it. A mixed-method method approach to data collection was adopted in the form of surveys and expert interviews. The results of the study show that the country's media landscape is being dominated by social media platforms that have overtaken traditional news mediums, as a result, the state's role and influence have been reduced as compared to the past. Furthermore, the study concludes that while the use of social media for public opinion manipulation for the purposes of hybrid warfare remains true, it is genuine grievances of the people that manifest in fault lines that are exploited. The study also revealed that public opinion is pitted against the state narrative on several political and security issues, and coercive measures to deal with the situation might not be fruitful in the long run. A reorientation of the existing mechanisms of knowledge production, that determine what is considered truth in a society and what is not, has resulted from the democratization of media systems, leading to an attenuation of the state's capabilities to manage narrative and discourse in the country.

Keywords: Post-truth, hybrid warfare, information environment, public opinion, state-society relations, domestic fault lines

INTRODUCTION

1 Background

Over the last few years, Pakistan has been embroiled in yet another episode of political turmoil. After the end of PTI's government in April 2022 and Khan's arrest, protests erupted across the country that were subsequently crushed. The resulting mass arrests and extreme surveillance and censorship have created an atmosphere of fear and apprehension toward the state of democracy in the country. All of this is coupled with a dwindling trust in institutions (Jehangir, 2024) like the judiciary and military, and a brutal economic crunch (Ahmad, 2024). During this time the military has presented itself as the entity trying to fill the gap and bring back stability to the country, however this time around not with overarching success, as it has faced one of the toughest battles over narrative.

In Pakistan, the military establishment has been at the center of the regime of truth, with its narrative being held supreme over other sources. In "Pakistan the Garrison State" Ishtiaq Ahmed writes that the military was the strongest institution in the country, exercising "de facto veto powers over both internal and external policies" (Ahmed, 2013). He attributes this rise in power to Pakistan's evolution as a 'fortress state' and a society studded with garrisons in order to protect not just the military frontier but also the ideological, political, and sectarian ones (Ahmed, 2013). Civilian institutions remain meekly anchored within the polity, further bolstering the military's role in civil affairs and domination of the political system (Aziz, 2008). Now this near monopoly seems under threat, as a post-truth information environment causes fissures in the state's hold over the narrative in the country.

An observation of the social media space over the past two years shows there has been a persistent feeling of resentment specifically towards the military for its intervention in political processes leading to the removal of Imran Khan as Prime minister and later his arrest. These feelings were also demonstrated in protests across the country on 9th May when former prime minister Imran Khan was first arrested, as people chose to express their anger towards military affiliated installations rather than registering their protests in front of civilian authorities, signaling a shift in public sentiment towards the different arms of state. Over a year later, Gallup Pakistan's June-July 2023 survey found that, PTI enjoyed the highest

likeability rating amongst all political parties, Imran Khan had the highest approval rating at 60%, and twice as many stated that they would vote for PTI in a new election compared to the current ruling party PML-N (Gallup, 2023). This shows a sustained dissenting view has been held by the public towards the state's narrative of portraying PTI and Imran Khan in a negative light.

As these domestic issues transpire, the country remains locked in various struggles on the national security front. Whether its hostility from India from the East, Afghanistan from the West, a TTP resurrection fueled by support from terrorist groups in Afghanistan (UNSC, 2024), or contentions within the global power game, Pakistan is facing a myriad of different threats. Moreover, the nature of security threats facing the country is increasingly hybrid in nature, with everything from the unrest in Baluchistan to the FATF grey-listing being termed as consequences of hybrid warfare against Pakistan, predominantly from India (Ehsan & Shah, 2022).

Based on the aforementioned factors, it can be argued that the apparent sentiment shift in citizens vis a vis state narrative poses a challenge for the state when analyzed against the backdrop of a post truth and hybrid warfare nexus.

2 Problem Statement

The post-truth and hybrid warfare nexus has emerged as a contemporary security challenge for states and Pakistan is no exception. There is a need to contextualize this nexus to Pakistan and the unique security challenges it faces, both in the form of external threats and internal strife.

A shift in public opinion that favors alternate points of view to the state's can symbolize a challenge in maintaining control over the national discourse and narrative, exposing fault lines in society that can potentially be exploited.

3 Research Objectives

- a. Identifying the local, regional, and international actors driving the public sentiment shift in Pakistan.
- b. Establishing whether it is possible for state institutions to remain in control of the predominant narrative in an era of post-truth.

- c. Contextualizing the nexus of post-truth and hybrid warfare to Pakistan's security landscape.

4 Research Questions

- a. What are the local, regional, and international actors driving the public sentiment shift in Pakistan?
- b. Can state institutions remain in control of the predominant narrative in an era of post-truth?
- c. How will the nexus of post-truth and hybrid warfare play out in Pakistan's security landscape?

5 Research Significance

This study is significant because it localizes the issues stemming from a post-truth and hybrid warfare nexus to Pakistan, while a review of the literature shows that most of the research done in this regard is centered around Western security issues such as the Russia-Ukraine war. This study is also significant because the literature written on public opinion, post-truth, and hybrid warfare is mostly centered on the liberal democratic process, how it's endangered, and how to protect it from illiberal powers, while for people in much of the global south, including Pakistan that might not be the topmost priority. Therefore, the study will focus on the challenges a post-truth and hybrid warfare nexus poses to a country with an imperfect democratic process.

Chapter 1

LITERATURE AND FRAMEWORK

1.1 Literature Review

1.1.1 Public opinion

Public opinion can be defined as “a general measure of the directionality and strength of issue-specific views and sentiments held by a relevant group” (Glynn & Huges, 2008). The concept gained prominence during the era of the Enlightenment (Price, 1992). The linguistic roots of the term can be traced back to the French term “l’opinion publique” introduced by Renaissance writer Montaigne and was popularized in Europe as decision-making shifted from a purely monarchical system to more citizen-centered ones (Glynn & Huges, 2008). This term is considered a product of several chronological trends, increasing literacy rate, expansion of the merchant classes, the protestant reformation, and the spread of literature to the mass public through the printing press (Price, 2007). (Palmer, 1936) states that the modern conception of public opinion is traced back to the advent of liberal democracy. As a general understanding, Speier (1950) argues that public opinions especially on matters of concern regarding states are discussed outside the government by common people, and claims that their opinion influences or determines the actions, or structure of the government. In attenuated form, the government publicly explains its actions and decisions to enable the public to think and talk about them for the success of the government policy.

By the early 20th century, the term public opinion had become a part of the everyday political vocabulary, tossed around frequently by everyone from newspapers to politicians. However, the exact nature of this force and its functioning remained subject to debate and disagreement as pointed out by Walter J. Shephard in his work titled “Public Opinion” from 1909. Shephard described public opinion as a concept whose use in language had become unavoidable and the impact of its application felt everywhere and yet it remained unexplainable and so did the modes of its application, much like electricity in the early 20th century (Shephard, 1909). Public opinion as a concept has always invoked varying levels of acceptance and apprehension over the decades, as scholars argued whether the tools used to

gather public opinion could ever truly represent the phenomenon with accuracy as well as arguing about exactly what constitutes the “public” and its “opinion”, how can these notions be synthesized into actionable agendas.

In his article titled "Concepts of Public Opinion", Francis G. Wilson, highlighted that public opinion as a political force became significant towards the later stages in the history of the state, where opinions of a political nature had the ability to impact governmental conduct. In a society without a representative model of governance, as those envisaged by Hobbes and Locke, the participatory role of the public remains limited to obedience, rendering its opinion valueless in the larger scheme of things. However, democracy by its very nature depends on participation and the presence of choice, where individuals have the free will to choose, creating room for the consideration of public opinion as a political force. Wilson emphasizes that if we are to remove the notion of free will based on ideas that there are external and psychological forces or innate ideas that dictate every action of man, opinion will be rendered powerless and therefore non-vital to the political process (Wilson, 1933). Practically the power and freedom of choice and deliberation can be seen in politics and satisfying the wills of the public remains an integral part of a state's tasks. At the same time, he agreed with the notion that “Public opinion in democracies should be the final element in political life which gives significance to the activity of the state and the fact of membership in it” (Wilson, 1933), he also brought to light the summary issues in the conceptualization of the theory of public opinion.

He discusses the difficulties of defining who makes up the public, what constitutes ‘real’ public opinion, and how these two ideas interact with governance and governmental action. In this lieu he mapped out the discourse surrounding all these issues from multiple scholarly sources, for example, that of Lippman. He was a part of a larger syndicate of scholars that argued against the extensive usage of the public opinion phenomenon. In Lippman's view citizens or the public do not have the capacity to process their environment and the information they are being fed effectively since they are “not equipped to deal with so much subtlety, so much variety, so many permutations and combinations” (Lipman, 1921). His works take inspiration from Plato's ideas about state and society, specifically the allegory of the cave. Lipmann suggests that free will or choice is but an illusion, the public in fact does not make a deliberate or free choice rather it is heavily influenced by mass media and other actors similar to the men in the cave in Plato's allegory (Lipman, 1921).

While in Lipmann's view, the public is more of a spectator, Lowell presents a different definition of what entails a public, one where a homogenous view and majoritarian opinion a necessary pre-requisite, so that an individual is only part of the public when he or she agrees with the majoritarian opinion or else is a political outcast whose opinion does not matter (Lowell, 1919). Lowell believed strongly in the necessity of citizen participation for the success of democracy, he also acknowledged that the public may be swayed by temporary passions from time to time and therefore advocated for a representative model of democracy compared to a direct one (Lowell, 1919). Since he agreed with Lippman to the extent that mass media could be used to manipulate the public and therefore only representatives that are well-informed and educated should be allowed to make choices on behalf of the public. However, as far as the concept of public opinion is concerned, Wilson points out that this line of thought inevitably limits the function of public opinion in society, reducing it to a membership test for ascertaining whether an individual can be deemed part of the public at all (Wilson, 1933).

Another prominent scholar of the time, Dewey, who was inspired Aristotle's thoughts, was of the view that public opinion was integral to upholding democracy, despite human imperfections Dewey believed that systems could be improved in order to help realize the full potential of an informed public and its opinions. This would be achieved by the transformation from the greater society to the greater community signaling progress enabled by the use of logic and scientific method (Dewey & Rogers, 2012). On the surface the different opinions discussed here show a variety of scholarly views on public opinion, however, a pattern of caution towards reliance on public opinion can be perceived within these views. For example, Dewey's optimism and Lippman's pessimism regarding the potential of public opinion often lead to their work being looked at in contradiction with each other, however, Patricia Moy and Brandon Bosch, argue that in essence both these 19th-century philosophers are aligned. They quote Sproule to emphasize that both of them view the public in its current form as being incapable of intelligent political action without significant help from the state in terms of training in how to think (Moy & Brandon, 2013).

Some scholars did criticize this tendency of overtly destructive criticism of public opinion by intelligentsia at the time, Joseph R. Starr for example, stated his irritation with the way scholars had approached the issue of public opinion in the following words,

These men were little concerned with the improvement of public opinion. They demolished the old, unscientific conception of public opinion, and there they were content to let the matter rest. At the same time, their writings generally imply that popular government is in a deplorable state because of the weakness of public opinion. But they did not consider themselves bound to delve very far into the problem of how the public might be brought out of its retirement, and how public opinion might be made more effective (Starr, 1939).

He argued that instead of vague notions such as Dewey's idea that more knowledge will make people think logically and scientifically, or impractical suggestions of creating supreme court like agencies to decide what is true and interpret opinions for the public, as envisioned by Lippman, did not do much to find actual solutions to the problem of public opinion (Starr, 1939). In his view, drawn from observations of political parties in the UK in the 1930's, it would be best to utilize an existing institution, political parties, in order to create awareness of public affairs and offer a channel for the expression of public opinion (Starr, 1939).

Though Starr's ideas seem to be offering a solution, political parties tend to frame information in a way that prioritizes their interests by moving public opinion in their favor. Moreover, public opinion is often considered a main element in narrative construction by populist leaders, to shape, manifest, and reinforce their personal or political agenda. These leaders deliberately use public sentiments to strengthen their appeal and legitimacy and portray issues in binary terms like 'us vs them' to bolster their support (Moffitt, 2016). Muddle (2004) says their public opinion-building strategy not only mobilizes their followers but constructs a worldview that includes segments of people feeling marginalized or disenfranchised. However, populist leaders frame themselves as an advocate of people's common will but seek to undermine democratic institutions while framing public opinion (Taggart, 2000). Nevertheless, Public opinion always plays a crucial role during the phenomenon of rallying – especially in times of national crisis, disaster, or while facing any external threats. Basically, the 'rallying around the flag' effect refers to an increase in public support for political leaders in times of such events when the demand for unity and stability rises (Meuller, 1970). This effect underscores the significance of public opinion, which can be temporarily consolidated around a political leader or institution, often regardless of their prior popularity or standing in the political realm (Hetherington & Nelson, 2003). Leaders

further capitalize on this rallying effect to strengthen their legitimacy and push forward their policies that might face resistance.

Likewise, the fundamental issues in public opinion formation remain, namely the role of mass media and propaganda in manipulating it, despite the multiplicity of suggestions regarding how to improve public opinion and its function in democratic governance. Attitudes towards the role of media in public formation have evolved since, culminating in three primary theories regarding public opinion in contemporary times, agenda setting, priming, and framing, as outlined by Moy and Bosch (Moy & Brandon, 2013). While the debate around the veracity of public opinion and its implications for democracy remains ongoing even today, another challenge also persists in determining what constitutes public opinion. Determining public opinion is not a straightforward process since it is a socially constructed phenomenon largely influenced by the means and methods applied to achieve it (Herbst, 1998). Brooker and Schaefer say there are informal and formal means for measuring public opinion; such as elections, letters, straw polls, protests, media, interest groups, lobbying, and surveys respectively (Brooker & Schaefer, n.d). Strategically, leaders promote public opinion often by framing issues, using emotional terms, sensitizing the issues, and leveraging media channels to propagate their agenda widely for shaping perceptions and attitudes. In the article 'Shaping Public Opinion' the authors gave an illustration of how the Bush administration used rhetorical strategies to influence public opinion and perception for their support of policy on war on terror (Gershkoff & Kushner, 2005). However, rhetorical strategies involve a consistent and deliberate messaging campaign that frames public opinion on specific issues.

Now social media has become a central platform for the formation of public opinion. Political leaders and institutions skillfully use social media platforms to craft and disseminate their agenda that shapes their opinion or will in their favor. Gerbaudo (2018) posits that through social media, the direct engagement of political leaders enables them to propagate their messages with emotionally charged terms to shape public opinion. Social media serves as a tool of hybrid warfare, as it creates echo chambers where the users are continuously exposed to content that promotes or reinforces existing beliefs, opinions, and narratives, further solidifying and polarizing public opinion (Tufekci, 2017). When narratives gain traction, the actors dominate public discourse, making social media platforms not only a reflection of public sentiment but also act as a powerful tool of manipulation (Sunstein, 2001).

Conclusively, public opinion is increasingly being shaped and set within digital spaces, where state and non-state actors act as manipulators for their political gains. This is increasingly concerning due to a post truth information environment that has blurred the lines between truth and lies, making it difficult for the public to determine the veracity of information they are constantly bombarded with.

1.1.2 Post-Truth

Being named the word of the year in 2016 by Oxford dictionaries, post-truth, has become a frequent feature of social and political discourses or disproportionately discussed according to some scholars such as (Buffachi, 2020). In part this rise in debate and discussion on the phenomenon was caused by Trump's success in the 2016 US general elections, which caused concern regarding the rise of populism and the public's apparent indifference towards his propensity to stray from the truth on multiple occasions (Lacatus & Meibauer, 2020). Many scholars deemed this moment an example of the 'post-truth' nature of today's media and political environment, where the prefix 'post' does not represent a chronological sequence of events but rather a shift towards an era where truth has become insignificant (Macintyre, 2018; Dorosh et al., 2021)). Post-truth is defined in Oxford dictionaries as, "an adjective...relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" (Oxford Languages, 2016).

Darren G. Lilleker, states that the post-truth phenomenon explains the impact of factors like media reportage, interpersonal communication, and popular culture, in building a reality which is perceived to be truer than actual reality, emphasizing the enhanced capacity of perceptions in accepting something as true compared to factivity (Lilleker, 2018). Ignas Kalpokas argues a similar point in his book, "A political theory of post truth", what is accepted as true in post truth doesn't have anything do with whether its factually correct but rather it depends on the pre-existing opinions and emotional affiliations of the target population (Kalpokas, 2018). However, Kalpokas himself, as well as many other scholars have also argued that this is not necessarily a novel phenomenon (Kalpokas, 2018). After all as pointed out by Hannah Arendt, "No one has ever doubted that truth and politics are on rather bad terms with each other, and no one, as far as I know, has ever counted truthfulness among the political virtues" (Arendt, 1967).

Despite acknowledging the seemingly inevitable dichotomy of truth and politics, Arendt did differentiate between the modern and traditional lie. The traditional lie according to Arendt, was specific in its nature and target, in that it was not meant to deceive everyone and secondly, it is identifiable in history because it would usually cause visible incongruities or gaps (Arendt, 1967). On the other hand, the modern lie is targeted towards everybody, including the originator of the deception himself, and “are so big that they require a complete rearrangement of the whole factual texture...the making of another reality, as it were, into which they will fit without seam, crack, or fissure” (Arendt, 1967). Arendt wrote this at a time when post-truth as a terminology had not yet been introduced, though Buffachi argues that her definition of a modern lie fits the mold of post-truth quite well, since it’s main aim is to undermine frameworks that guide our conversations about truth (Buffachi, 2020). He therefore argues for an enhanced version of the definition stated in Oxford dictionaries,

Post-truth is a deliberate strategy aimed at creating an environment where objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion, where theoretical frameworks are undermined in order to make it impossible for someone to make sense of a certain event, phenomenon, or experience, and where scientific truth is delegitimized (Buffachi, 2020).

On the other hand, scholars like Colin Wight, have pointed out the post-structuralist discussions surrounding truth which deem it a social construct, naturally leading to a possibility of the existence of multiple truths or alternative facts (Wight, 2018). This line of thinking is in congruence with that of scholars like Foucault, who suggested that what is attributed the status of truth in a society is ultimately brought about through a regime of truth which varies across space and time (Foucault, 1980). Scholar like Thomas Kuhn, expand the notion of the multiplicity of truth to scientific facts as well, since scientific progress in his view, occurred through a change in paradigm and depends on facts established within that paradigm, which might be alternate to those in another paradigm (Kuhn, 1962). Wight argues that proponents of alternative facts today, such as Trump supporters, might be considered to be existing in a different paradigm to their opposition (Wight, 2018). Susana Salgado also emphasizes that inevitability of post-truth in a post-modern world,

The difference between modernity and postmodernity lies precisely in the proposal of an ontology of reality versus a construction of reality, that is, if reality pre-exists to be discovered or if it is instead constructed through subjective discourse and interpretation (Salgado, 2018).

Jayson Harsin suggests that the popularization of claims of a post-fact society and neologisms like ‘truthiness’ represent a cultural shift which is concurrent with the transformation of media and political apparatuses over the last few decades. Leading to the “complex reorganization of functions, among which are efforts to mobilize new digital “participatory culture” to proliferate truth games—that is, to generate an overall regime of post-truth” (Harsin, 2015). This shift has been further facilitated by a growing distrust in traditional institutions both media and political ones (Suiter, 2016; Marshall & Drieschova, 2018). Alongside a rise in skepticism against traditional institutions, the advent of web 2.0 has eroded the gatekeeping role of journalists in political communication, allowing politicians to connect with their electorate directly (Marshall & Drieschova, 2018). Herein lies the partial novelty of the post truth phenomenon, that political and social actors can now evade traditional structures and communicate with the public directly (Salgado, 2018).

Apart from this unfettered communication between political and social actors, and the public, social media has also caused an overflow of information that people are constantly bombarded with. Ari-Elmeri Hyvönen refers to this as the predominant crises of the meaning making process facing the public today, citing the issues caused by this during the pandemic, where common citizens faced challenges in determining relevant and factually correct data amongst all the misinformation and disinformation, which countered guidelines and data provided by public health authorities leading to much confusion (Hyvönen, 2022). Regardless, studies show that the public relies much highly on non-traditional news and information sources as was deduced through the results of a study carried out by Oxford university which showed that more than 50% of the respondents preferred to get their news through social media platforms, search engines such as Google or news aggregator websites (Newman, 2018).

Moreover, studies have shown how even the more educated segments of society can struggle to navigate the online news space, for example, a study done at the London School of Economics, showed that despite acknowledgement of the importance of traditional cues of reliability such as author, spelling mistakes etc., most respondents said they also relied on measures such as the number of shares, presentation of the story, number of articles discussing the story, and agreement with previously held views (Ho et al., 2017). This presents a dangerous trend as these measures don’t mean the content being spread is necessarily factually correct, in fact one study in 2018 analyzed how rumours cascaded in a

sample of nearly 3 million twitter users and found that, “False news reached more people than the truth; the top 1% of false news cascades diffused to between 1000 and 100,000 people, whereas the truth rarely diffused to more than 1000 people. Falsehood also diffused faster than the truth” (Vosoughi et al., 2018). When it comes to the formation of collective memory, often what is repeated gets remembered, so when false news is repeated by millions of people online solely based on impulse, it leads to the distortion of collective memory and opinion (Law, 2017).

The combination of this boom in reliance on social media, post-truth politics, and decreasing faith in authorities, has resulted in the emergence of an expressive populace charged with nativism, making way for illiberal forces and the spread of populist and nationalistic appeals (Suiter, 2016). Deligiaouri argues that both populism and post-truth result from a disappointed electorate which has adopted a sentimental approach to facts devoid of any critical elaboration on any issue (Deligiaouri, 2018). This issue is exacerbated by social media algorithms that are responsible for majority of the recommendations given to users, up to 70% in the case of YouTube (Hyvönen, 2022), since they push more sensationalist content, often conspiracist in nature, that satiates political biases (Starr, 2020). As audiences have shifted mostly to social media, where getting people to engage with content through likes and shares is critical, mainstream media channels such as Fox news in the US, have also increased reliance on sentimentality of news stories to improve their ratings, since in a post-truth environment, where truth is a matter of assertion, this is the only way to drive ratings (Suiter, 2016).

Two events that are found often in literature to showcase how the disastrous impact of post-truth politics and media, and their collusion with notions of populism and nationalistic sentiments, are the 2016 US elections and Brexit. In both cases often outlandishly incorrect claims were made in order to persuade the public, in the case of Brexit for example, a common misrepresentation of fact was made by suggesting that the UK sent £350 million per week to the EU, when in reality, the actual cost was less than the amount when rebates and EU spending on benefits the UK received were considered (Rose, 2017). The purpose overstating the cost to this extent was to make the case to the UK public that this money could be spent on services like the NHS, thus targeting them with emotional appeal, similarly Trump’s rhetoric during his election campaign also exploited the anger of the populace by reinforcing racist stereotypes and blaming violent crime on migrants to the US. For example,

in a speech early on in his campaign he claimed that Mexican migrants that were being sent were bringing with them drugs, crimes and rape, overstating not only the criminality amongst migrants and making it sound as if this is the intention of the Mexican state (Rose, 2017).

Harsin suggests this is a calculated strategy by resource rich elites, who aim to exploit the breakdown of mass audiences by encouraging skepticism towards traditional political, academic and journalistic authorities and creating multiple regimes of truth or an overarching regime of post-truth, which erodes the possibility of verifying truth therefore forcing people to rely on their preferred truth arbiters (Harsin, 2015). This skepticism towards traditional authorities has also opened the door for foreign media to significantly influence local politics, making way for information warfare. Scholars like (Dunay & Roloff, 2018) have studied how the Russian government has relied primarily on strategic communication to establish its importance in the international order, specifically in countries where it has some level of influence. Media channels such as RT act as the latest weapons in Russia's arsenal, helping project a unified image in contrast to a divided west to a global populace that seeks stability over all else (Dunay & Roloff, 2018). Reports from FBI investigations also found evidence of Russian bots spreading negative information about Hillary Clinton and positive information on Trump online during the 2016 election campaigns, leading to a distortion of public opinion (Vasu et al., 2018).

While these circumstances represent a unique set of challenges to nation states, many scholars have argued that post-truth represents an inevitable democratization of epistemology, a natural consequence of promotion of individual's inalienable rights in the Enlightenment and the adoption of democratic principle from ancient Greece, whereby, every person has a say in political affairs and a vote (Wight, 2018). Since post-truth exploits consensus based decision making, by using it to weaken consensus around truth itself (Buffachi, 2020), there exists a tension between democracy and post-truth's conceptualization of the democratization of epistemology (Wight, 2018). As states try to figure out ways to maintain internal cohesion and narrative control without putting democratic principles at risk, hostile actors can exploit the post-truth environment and social media proliferation as part of a hybrid warfare strategy.

1.1.3 Hybrid Warfare

Hybrid warfare is a contested concept, with varying definitions, but in essence, it represents a military strategy that combines conventional and unconventional approaches and blurs the

line between war and peacetime. Previous iterations of the term include 4th generation warfare from the 1990s, asymmetric warfare from the Cold War era, and even the Chinese concept of unrestricted warfare (Wither, 2016). The term ‘hybrid warfare’ had first appeared in a book titled “British Counterinsurgency in the Post-Imperial Era” in 1995 written by Thomas Mockaitis (Mockaitis, 1995). Later on, many authors used this term in order to refer to multiple military campaigns (Walker, 1998; Nemeth, 2002; Simpson, 2005). Their description of hybrid warfare is different from each other; however, it is right to say that they used the term hybrid warfare to indicate a type of warfare that is neither conventional nor irregular. Nevertheless, the explanation of the term hybrid warfare given by these authors was limited.

The first wide articulation of the term ‘hybrid warfare’ was a speech given by General James Mattis at a Defense forum back in 2005 (Hoffman, 2005). After this conference, both James Mattis and Frank Hoffman published a brief paper on the key term ‘hybrid warfare’. In this paper, the authors argue that future modes of warfare will be different, they gave this synthesis the name of hybrid warfare (Mattis & Hoffman, 2005). However, the concept was not fully developed in the paper, the authors did not give its definition but rather only described key characteristics of hybrid warfare. Right after two years, Frank Hoffman introduced the term to literature, when he published a seminal monograph and defined hybrid warfare in the following words: “Threats that incorporate a full range of different modes of warfare including conventional capabilities, irregular tactics and formations, terrorist acts including indiscriminate violence and coercion, and criminal disorder, conducted by both sides and a variety of non-state actors” (Hoffman, 2007). At that time, the author provided a well-developed definition of hybrid warfare. Moreover, this seminal monograph popularized the term among academic and military practitioners.

The concept of ‘Hybrid Warfare’ gained significant attention in the debates and many scholars reviewed and articulated their own definitions and opinions of it. The definition given by Hoffman is narrow, it only focuses on the merger of conventional and irregular forces in warfare. On the other hand, scholars view hybrid warfare as the simultaneous use of regular and irregular forces in the same operation. Military historians argue that it is not a novel concept as history is full of examples referring to hybrid warfare. For instance, a book widely cited for understanding this concept is “*Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex Opponents From the Ancient World to the Present*” written by Murray and Mansoor (2012).

The authors define hybrid warfare as a combination of conventional military forces and irregular forces including guerillas, insurgents, and terrorists, that can be both state and non-state actors with a common aim to achieve political purpose (Mansoor, 2012). This statement gained prominence in literature, and several authors continued to define the term as the combined and coordinated use of regular and irregular forces in a unified direction (Deep, 2015; Murray, 2017). Moreover, hybrid warfare can be viewed as an asymmetric approach that allows warring parties to achieve significant military goals with minimum cost (Danyk et al., 2017), both in terms of casualties and financial resources. Its main aim remains maximum damage to the opposition as is the goal of any military campaign and seeks to achieve this by causing damage to infrastructure, disrupting the economy, and causing aggrieved populations to move towards separatism, among other tactics. A balance between soft and hard measures during a conflict allows parties to target beyond military objectives and gain control over the mindsets of the target population, influencing the decision-making in the country and manipulating its core values (Danyk et al., 2017). Other military scholars found this concept battlefield-centric. In their opinion, hybrid warfare can be found at all levels of war in the contemporary world (McCuen, 2008; Jordan, 2008; McWilliams, 2009; Burbridge, 2013). These scholars have added some non-kinetic elements to the scope of the term and highlighted its strategic importance. As Glenn (2009) posits hybrid warfare is a kind of warfare where an adversary simultaneously adapts or employs a combination of (political, military, economic, social, and information means) with conventional, irregular, or disruptive warfare methods.

Hybrid warfare gained rejuvenated traction after the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014, in part because of the evolved nature of attack compared to previous notions of hybrid warfare such as guerilla warfare and terrorist activities. The new era of hybrid warfare, as showcased in Russia's attacks on Ukraine in 2014, includes a higher emphasis on non-military methods of warfare, such as "sponsoring political protests, economic coercion, cyber operations, and disinformation campaigns" (Wither, 2016). Russia is not alone in its deployment of an enhanced hybrid warfare strategy, in fact, IS (Islamic State) was able to cause a lot of disruption in European capitals more so through information warfare than acts of physical violence, as they were able to recruit thousands of people into their ranks by using sophisticated and high-quality social media campaigns (Giegerich, 2016). Now it is right to argue that Hybrid warfare is a combination of warfare where non-state and state actors

employ sophisticated conventional weapons and irregular tactics to achieve their personal interests.

Similarly, in the years that followed, the concept of hybrid warfare evolved at a rapid pace and gained new meaning in literature. Now scholars have often used this term to refer to non-violent actions including economic coercion, disinformation campaigns, election meddling, and cyber-attacks (Deni, 2017; Sahin, 2017; Shedd & Stradner, 2020). Likewise, NATO and EU define hybrid warfare as a combination of kinetic and non-kinetic means while maintaining a level below the threshold of full-scale traditional warfare with the aim of achieving political purposes (NATO, 2015; EU, 2016). This conceptual representation emphasizes the departure from the original approach where it was just a battle-centric concept. The contemporary scope of hybrid warfare is beyond the traditional concept of warfare, and it has blurred the division between war and peace. Understanding the components of hybrid warfare is crucial for defining its nexus with post-truth.

Likewise, information warfare is an essential component of hybrid warfare. Its main focus is to control and manipulate the information to impact the opinions, perceptions, decisions, and behavior of the public. Information warfare is a tactic that is utilized by two or more groups in the information environment (Porche et al., 2013). As there is no concrete definition of information warfare, military strategists define it as an integrated deployment, during any military operation in order to influence, disrupt, corrupt, or usurp the decision-making of the adversary forces (DOD, 2014). In this manner, it can be said that information warfare uses information itself as a sophisticated weapon against adversaries. However, this is a traditional definition of information warfare, it is only defined in terms of war. The advancement of technology and the advent of social media have exacerbated the reach and influence of information warfare. Now it has become a potent tool in the arsenal of modern strategies of hybrid warfare. As Giegerich (2016) argues that it is one of the main challenges, enabled by advancements in communication technology, poses to national security is that it does not fit the binary conceptions of peace and war that traditional military apparatuses deal with. Making it difficult to operate in these grey zones, especially when it becomes difficult to differentiate between economic and informational measures that are part and parcel of the usual interstate competitiveness (Wither, 2016) and a hostile attack on a country's values. In the present era, information warfare employs various tactics to control or manipulate the flow of information. Through this, actors can shape the narratives and behavior of the public.

(Caliskan & Cramers, 2018) say information warfare possibly uses a diverse range of tools for its employment, as it is inherently multidisciplinary and multidimensional. These tools involve cyber-attacks, propaganda, misinformation, disinformation, and psychological operations (Matt & Emily, 2003) to influence narratives, trust in institutions, and decision-making, and create confusion among the public. Under the banner of information warfare, propaganda is one of the main features that has been employed by the actors to achieve their purposes. Tylor (1995) states propaganda is the conscious, methodical, and planned decisions to utilize techniques for persuasion of the public to achieve targeted goals. Propaganda tends to disseminate misleading or unbiased information as part of information warfare. On the other hand, cyber warfare has also the same purpose in terms of information warfare, but it is more technical and narrower, it focuses on only disrupting and disabling the cyber systems and computers – it does not represent warfare only acts as a tool (Caliskan & Cramers, 2018). Likewise, disinformation and misinformation both are integral parts of information warfare, complicating the struggle between finding truth from falsehood thus changing the narratives of people. Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) disinformation is false information disseminated with the intention of causing harm and misinformation is information shared by people who do not recognize it as such. Unlike disinformation, misinformation is not created to cause deliberate harm or mislead (Wardle and Derakhshan, 2019). However, the terms propaganda, disinformation, and cyber warfare focus on influencing the opinions, perceptions, behavior, and motives of the target audience (Caliskan and Cramers, 2018). One of the prominent examples of information warfare from history is Nazi Germany's propaganda campaign during WWII, they utilized several tactics to control the public perception and to spread its ideology (Welch, 1994). Moreover, another example of information warfare from the contemporary era is the alleged Russian interference in the US 2016 elections (Mueller, 2019). The three key terms – propaganda, disinformation, and cyber warfare altogether form core strategies of information warfare making it a multifaceted approach to control and manipulate the information for personal gains under hybrid warfare.

Another prominent component of hybrid warfare is political warfare aimed at influencing political systems and policies for certain goals. George Kennan (1946) gives a definition of political warfare, as it is the employment of all the means in peaceful times to achieve national objectives. It involves the technique of diplomatic pressure, economic coercion, election meddling, and regime change (Robinson et al., 2018). Moreover, it includes the techniques of funding opposition groups, initiating political scandals, and enhancing

economic deficiencies to sway the outcomes in favor of the actor for further assisting in achieving strategic objectives (Caliskan & Cramers, 2018). The strategic aim of political warfare is to achieve personal objectives without going into military conflict, making it a covert but powerful foundation to carry out hybrid warfare (Lucas & Mistry, 2009). Furthermore, the application of political warfare can be seen in multiple examples taken from history and the contemporary era. During the Cold War, the United States engaged in political warfare to counter the Soviet Union's influence by supporting anti-communism regimes, funding opposition groups, and covert operations to topple or destabilize the Soviet government, moreover, US used diplomatic means to contain the Soviet Union both politically and economically by its Marshal Plan and Support for NATO (Gaddis, 2005). A modern example of political warfare is influencing organizations like FATF to create economic and political repercussions for countries for personal gains (Ekwueme & Bhagheri, 2019). Conclusively, political warfare encompasses broader strategies to destabilize and influence the adversary under the umbrella of hybrid warfare.

In addition to this, in the contemporary era, the emergence of Artificial Intelligence has revolutionized the concept of hybrid warfare. AI technologies are improving the effectiveness of information warfare by automation and amplification of the spread of propaganda, disinformation, and cyber-attacks (Elena & Ionut, 2021). Even Sheikh (2022) argues that the integration of AI into hybrid warfare has proven to be game-changing, now this combination has threatened the military superiority of the West. The engagement of AI in hybrid warfare will have drastic effects in the contemporary era. AI enables public behavior to be mimicked, influenced, and altered, it will be used to reshape the economic and social effects of hybrid warfare (Sheikh, 2022). AI can take hybrid warfare to another level, its algorithms can generate and spread fake news at a larger scale to specific demographic groups in no time, further creating deep fakes that tend to manipulate the perception and opinion of the targeted audience. It will further allow state and non-state actors to influence the narratives and behavior of the public with unprecedented precision.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

This research will utilize Foucault's power/knowledge theory as its theoretical framework, with particular emphasis on Foucault's concept of truth and truth regimes. This allows us to look at the issue from a post-structuralist lens, enabling the fluidity of truth as a socially constructed phenomenon and help us problematize the notion of post-truth itself.

Simultaneously, Foucault's idea of power and how it functions in a society, will allow us to navigate our examination of the post-truth-hybrid warfare nexus and how public opinion can act as a force within it.

Foucault's work on power dynamics in society departs from the traditional idea of viewing power solely as a means of domination. Instead, Foucault suggests that power is everywhere and even in relations where it might seem to be a one-way affair such as the relationship between a state and its people, it is in fact present in multiple forms and directions. Power functions in the form of a chain through a network like organization, circulating and never localized or accumulated like a commodity (Foucault, 1980b). The individuals in this case "are not only its (power's) inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application" (Foucault, 1980b). The net-like organization refers to society and its various facets that allow the exercise of power through a "system of differentiations", formed from social, economic, cultural, and linguistic differences as well as differences in competence, created by law or tradition (Heller, 1996). Inversely the social is also constructed through crisscrossing power strategies, that create and sustain the relations, homogeneities, and differences in society (Torfing, 2009).

The exercise of power, according to Foucault, is also dependent on the production and circulation of discourse or an economy of discourses of truth. Ideological supremacy for example, is but a result of the production and circulation of knowledge or discourse through effective instruments created by major power mechanisms in a society (Foucault, 1980b). Given this dynamic between power and discourse we can conclude a reciprocal relationship between the two as stated by Foucault, "We are subjected to the production of truth through power and we cannot exercise power except through the production of truth." (Foucault, 1980b). The new question that arises here is what constitutes truth and who has the authority to decide what is and is not true?

For Foucault there is no divine interpretation or source of truth that must be sought and deemed infallible, instead he suggests that there exists a political economy of truth. This political economy of truth involves the mechanisms of its production which are dominated by or exclusive to certain great economic and political apparatuses such as army and media, the

political and economic motivations behind this production, its distribution, consumption and the apparatuses that control these processes such as education and information systems, and the socio-political confrontation and debate to which it is subject (Foucault, 1980a). Each society has its regime or general politics of truth, “the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (Foucault, 1980a). These regimes can be discovered on the basis of the following criteria: what mechanisms are at play that distinguish true and false statements, how truth and falsehood are sanctioned, what techniques and procedures are put on a higher pedestal as sources of truth, and the status granted to those that are perceived as being sources of truth (Weir, 2008).

He goes on explain that the debate around criteria mentioned above constitutes the ‘battle of truth’, which has less to do with finding the truth and more with uncovering the political and economic motivations behind its production (Foucault, 1980a). In other words, this battle, that Foucault believes the intellectual should be engaged in, must be focused on changing the political, economic, and institutional regimes of truth production. Afterall, the production of truth and the exercise of power are interconnected and since in Foucault’s view power is a value-neutral force, which can be used in any direction to have a positive or negative impact and is not an end but rather the means to it, the possibility of counter conduct remains ever present. Even in the case where state machinery is the regime of truth, its ability to exercise power is not simply an effect it has on the population but rather the strategically motivated ways in which it reacts to the actions of its citizens through different means in order to achieve certain ends (Dean, 2009).

However, the present regime of truth is not unique in attempting such maneuvers and so the subject population is exposed multiple of them and can act against the strategic interests of the regime. This perspective enables the analysis of the post-truth and hybrid warfare nexus, and how a shift in narrative or discourse has the ability materialize into resistance, which can be limited to socio-political confrontations between state and society or lead to the collapse of the current regime of truth, altering the socio-political culture altogether. In an even more drastic scenario with the involvement of state and non-state actors alike, this shift can evolve into or strengthen militant movements as well as movements of succession. The conditions for such a shift in narrative can manifest from this nexus and public opinion can be avenue for observing this shift.

Chapter 2

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Methodology

This study is based on a mixed-method research approach, using layers of both quantitative and qualitative methods for data collection and analysis in order to get a holistic understanding of the public opinion, post-truth and hybrid warfare nexus. A mixed-method approach is appropriate because elements of both exploratory and descriptive research are integral to this study.

2.1.1 Survey

The first layer of methodology has to do with understanding the public's preference with regards to different sources of information, for understanding current affairs in the country. This helps in elucidating some aspects of the issue put forward in the research objective, "Identifying the local, regional, and international actors driving the public sentiment shift in Pakistan". This is done descriptively, through a quantitative analysis of data collected through a cross-sectional survey, in the form of an online questionnaire. A cross-sectional survey is used to capture the situation at a that specific point of time (Treadwell & Davis, 2019). and therefore, is appropriate to capture the public opinion at the present. There are several benefits to utilizing surveys for this purpose since they allow the measurement of unobservable data, in this case public preference, as well as collecting data from a larger population size remotely, which would not be possible through direct observation (Bhattacharjee, 2019).

The methodological process that has been followed constitutes three steps: 1) selection criteria 2) survey distribution and 3) codification and analysis of data. The selection criteria for this research is quite broad, since the target population is the Pakistani public, an ideal representation will include people from all age brackets other than children, all regions and genders, as long as they are Pakistani. One limiting factor is that this survey was distributed to people online through WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, and other platforms and therefore cannot access people that do not have access to these online avenues of information sharing.

The survey was also distributed physically to university students based in Islamabad. The distribution phase was facilitated by the snowballing technique by requesting participants to share it with their contacts. Once data had been collected it was cleaned and coded for quantitative analysis.

The survey questionnaire constitutes 15 questions and the layout is split into three portions. The first three questions pertain to demographic details of the respondents namely, age bracket, region of belonging, and gender. The next segment of questions utilizes the Likert scale to allow respondents to express how much they rely on each information source category to understand current affairs, these questions are supplemented with a follow up question each in which respondents state which names from each category do they frequent mostly.

Finally, the last question in the survey questionnaire seeks to describe any correlation that may exist between the public depending more on certain information sources and its stance on certain statements relating to the country's current political landscape. This question is designed to gather insights regarding the pulse of public opinion in the country on a limited number of issues, all relating to the current political chaos, the public's view of the state and their faith in the system of governance. These insights are relevant to the discussion on the second research objective for this study, "Establishing whether it is possible for state institutions to remain in control of the predominant narrative in an era of post-truth". The underlying assumptions in this case are that a non-affirmative response regarding each statement shows a deviation from the state narrative and secondly that some sources of information are more prone to the impacts of a post-truth environment than others. However, this single source of data in this regard is not sufficient to conclude any causal relationship between relying on said information sources and forming opinions not in line with the state's tune.

2.1.2 Expert Interviews

The online survey helps building an image of the current information landscape in Pakistan but in order to understand how and indeed to what extent, a post-truth and hybrid warfare nexus may play out in the country, expert interviews have been conducted. Expert interviews are an important tool with social science research because they provide insights into the inner workings of political processes along with all their nuances, without this subjective input

researchers would not be able to work out the causal mechanisms that produce certain outcomes through these processes (von Soest, 2022). Furthermore, the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format, which encourages an in-depth conversation, helping the interviewer and interviewee move from superficial discussions on a topic to multi-layered conclusions due to the flexible nature of the interview and the ability to ask follow-up questions (Kakilla, 2021).

The methodological process that has been followed constitutes three steps: 1) selection criteria 2) contacting interviewees and conducting interviews 3) codification 4) and analysis of data. These interviews sought various academics from major universities in Islamabad that belong to fields relevant to the topics at hand including strategic studies, mass communication, governance and public policy, and journalism etc. Respondents selected from this pool have the knowledge base to provide insights regarding hybrid warfare, post-truth, and public opinion from multiple different point of views, for instance a scholar of strategic studies and another from mass communications will look at the discussion from different vantage points, helping to build a holistic picture when all the responses are cumulated. Moreover, interviewing multiple academics from the same field but belonging to diverse backgrounds can help mitigate the bias that each expert might have on the subject.

Once the selected interviewees had been contacted, interviews were conducted in one of three ways, as per the interviewees' preference. Some interviews were conducted face-to-face, while others were conducted online through apps like Google meet and a couple of interviewees responded with a written response via email. In case of the third option, a semi structured format was made possible by communication through email and WhatsApp, where any follow up questions could still be asked, to ensure that all points of interest are covered in depth. The collected responses were coded (p number were assigned to each respondent when referring to responses shared by them) and then analyzed to gain insights regarding the research objective, "Contextualizing the nexus of post-truth and hybrid warfare to Pakistan's security landscape" as well as other aspects of the study including understanding the potential role of public opinion shift and manipulation in hybrid attacks and information warfare. The Table 2.1 below lists the experts that have been interviewed as well as their relevant areas of expertise/interest.

Table 2.1: *List of Interviewees with Expertise and Research Interests*

P#	Name	Institution	Expertise/Research interest
P1	Dr. Rubina Waseem	NUST	International Security, Strategic Studies, Contemporary Security Issues
P2	Dr. Amanullah Khan	Air University	Hybrid Warfare, International Politics, Pakistan's political and security affairs
P3	Dr. Syed Adnan Ather Bukhari	QAU	Strategic Affairs, South Asian security, Contemporary international politics and security
P4	Ms. Sadia Tasleem	QAU	Hybrid Warfare and Strategic Stability, Strategic Culture, Norms, Social Movements
P5	Mr. Zulfiqar Ali	NDU	Cyber Warfare, Artificial Intelligence, Digital Media & Politics, Globalization, South Asia Politics
P6	Dr. Ghulam Mujaddid	NDU	National Security, Strategic Stability, State-Society Relations, Social Conflict Analysis, Global Commons
P7	Mr. Junaid Jahandad	NDU	International Security, Strategic Studies, Middle Eastern Politics /Security
P8	Mr. Umair Pervez Khan	NDU	South Asian Security, Indian Strategic Culture, Kashmir Conflict, Hindutva
P9	Dr. Zahid Mehmood	Air University	Terrorism, Afghan Affairs, International Security, Militant Discourses
P10	Dr. Ayesha Siddiqua	NUML	Media Framing Practices, War/Conflict Journalism, Ethnocentrism, Peace and War Journalism, Cyber Hate
P11	Anonymous	Think tank	---
P12	Dr Ansar Jamil	NUST	Strategic and Security Studies

2.1.3 Limitation

Due to an issue with procurement of X's (Twitter's) developer API, sentiment analysis could not be performed on twitter data, which would have supplemented the survey in establishing the state of public opinion in the country and the extent to which it aligns with the state narrative. Sentiment analysis helps analyze textual data and gather insights from it that would otherwise be impossible to attain by quantitatively analyzing qualitative data.

This research intended to use sentiment analysis since social media platforms allow millions of people to express their opinions, emotions, and ideas, to support or reject opinions and

ideas of others as well as campaign around different social issues. Analyzing this type of data enables “the conversational or hierarchical nature of public opinion formation” to be covered (McGregor, 2019), which is difficult to do through survey research. While there are certain drawbacks of using data from social media such as a lack of representative sampling, scholars (Overby et al, 2017; Wang et al, 2012; Bollen et al., 2021) have utilized it to draw conclusion about public mood, opinion and sentiment and its impact on political and cultural issues..

Chapter 3

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following section on analysis and discussion has been derived from the primary data collected in the form of surveys and interviews, as well as news reports and other sources where relevant. The section is divided into three parts, each responding to one research question. Before delving into the analysis, it is important to outline the data collected from the surveys.

3.1 Outlining Data Collected

The survey received a total of 279 responses through online form filling as well as offline, physical forms distributed among university students at a few major universities in Islamabad. The quantitative data collected through surveys can be categorized into three categories, demographic data, data encapsulating the extent to which the public relies on different information sources, and public opinion on certain statements relevant to the current political climate in the country. The first category helps us establish the level of representation in the dataset.

3.1.1 Demographic Data

Table 3.1 shows the distribution of the sample based on age an overwhelming majority of the respondents, 89.2%, belong to the 15-30 year-old bracket, while 4.3% belong to the 31-40, 2.5% to the 41-50, and 3.9 to 50 and above ages. This can be attributed to the way in which data was collected since the survey was shared with university students and in family and friend networks and further spread to other networks through them, it reached people mostly of a similar age group who can be expected to share social networks with each other. On the other hand, table 2 shows a balanced representation of gender among the respondents, with 46.2% being male and 53.8% being female, and Table 4.1 shows a diversely represented set of respondents in terms of region, with 33.7% belonging to North Punjab, 18.3% to South Punjab, 12.2% to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, 1.1% to erstwhile FATA, 1.8% to Sindh, 3.2% to Karachi, 2.9% to Balochistan, 17.6% to Islamabad, and 9.3% to Azad Kashmir and Gilgit Baltistan.

Table 3.1: *Age of Respondents*

		F	P	V.P	C.P
Valid	15-30	249	89.2	89.2	89.2
	31-40	12	4.3	4.3	93.5
	41-50	7	2.5	2.5	96.1
	51-60	11	3.9	3.9	100.0
	Total	279	100.0	100.0	

Note: Frequency=F, Percent= P, Valid Percent= V.P, Cumulative Percent= C.P

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

Table 3.2: *Region of Respondents*

		F	P	V.P	C.P
Valid	North Punjab	94	33.7	33.7	33.7
	South Punjab	51	18.3	18.3	52.0
	KPK	34	12.2	12.2	64.2
	Erstwhile Fata	3	1.1	1.1	65.2
	Sindh	5	1.8	1.8	67.0
	Karachi	9	3.2	3.2	70.3
	Balochistan	8	2.9	2.9	73.1
	Islamabad	49	17.6	17.6	90.7
	GB & AJK	26	9.3	9.3	100.0
	Total	279	100.0	100.0	

Note: Frequency=F, Percent= P, Valid Percent= V.P, Cumulative Percent= C.P

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

Table 3.3: *Gender of Respondents*

		F	P	V.P	C.P
Valid	Male	129	46.2	46.2	46.2
	Female	150	53.8	53.8	100.0
	Total	279	100.0	100.0	

Note: Frequency=F, Percent= P, Valid Percent= V.P, Cumulative Percent= C.P

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

3.1.2 Public Reliance on Different Information Sources for Understanding Current Affairs in the Country

The next category of data has to do with establishing how much the Public relies on different information sources in order to make sense of current affairs in the country. A descriptive analysis of this data helps us answer the research question, “What are the local, regional, and international media actors driving the public sentiment/opinion shift in Pakistan?”. Which in turn helps us ascertain the extent of the state’s ability to control the narrative or discourse in the country.

Figures 3.1 through present the data acquired in the form of bar graphs and show that newspapers are the least preferred media of choice of the public, with 47.7% of the respondents saying that they do not use newspapers at all and 17.6% saying that they use them only slightly, putting the aggregate percentage of people that responded negatively to the notion of relying on newspapers as an information source at 65.3%. Despite its unpopularity as a medium of information dissemination, Dawn appeared to be the most popular choice for readers, with X out of the 279 responses stating that it is their newspaper of choice. Even according to the recent newspaper ranking, Dawn stands at the top position with the highest 59.50 ratings (SciMago, 2024).

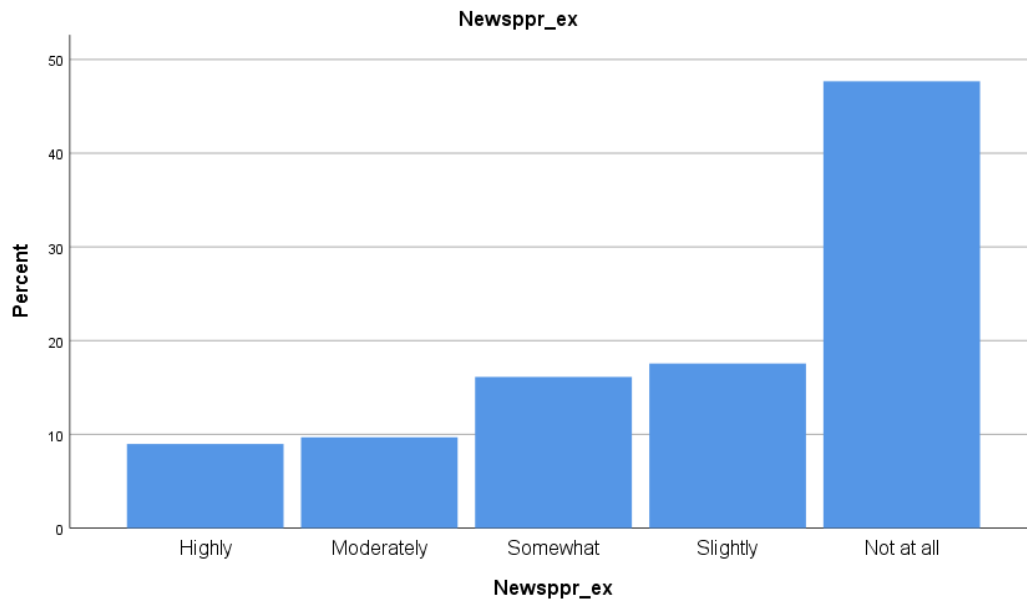


Figure 3.1: Respondents Views about Newspaper Reading

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

Media channels (Figure 3.2) had a more even spread of respondents across the different levels of reliance, with 19.4% relying highly, 17.2% moderately, 21.5% somewhat, 17.6% slightly, and 24.4% not at all. For the more popular answers regarding which media channels specifically were most watched, most respondents stated “ARY news” and “Geo news”. According to the MEDIAVOIR, As of June 2024, ARY News and Geo News are the most watched channels in Pakistan (MEDIAVOIR, 2024). Comparatively, figure 6 shows public reliance on international media channels which has a somewhat similar pattern to reliance on local media channels discussed before, with slight differences. Of the respondents, 19.7% relied highly on international media, while 23.3% relied moderately, 19.7% relied somewhat, 13.6% relied slightly, and 23.7% did not rely on them at all, with CNN and BBC being the most popular channels followed by Aljazeera. This suggests that the public perceives both local and international media channels as equally reliable sources of news on current events in the country, with no overwhelming preference or disdain for either.

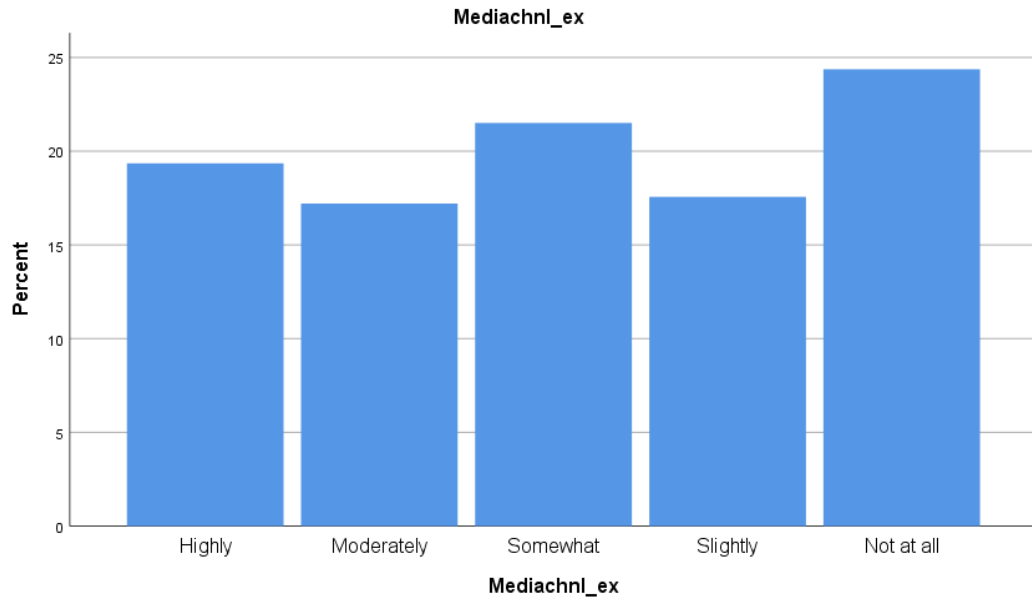


Figure 3.2: Respondents Views about Local Media

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

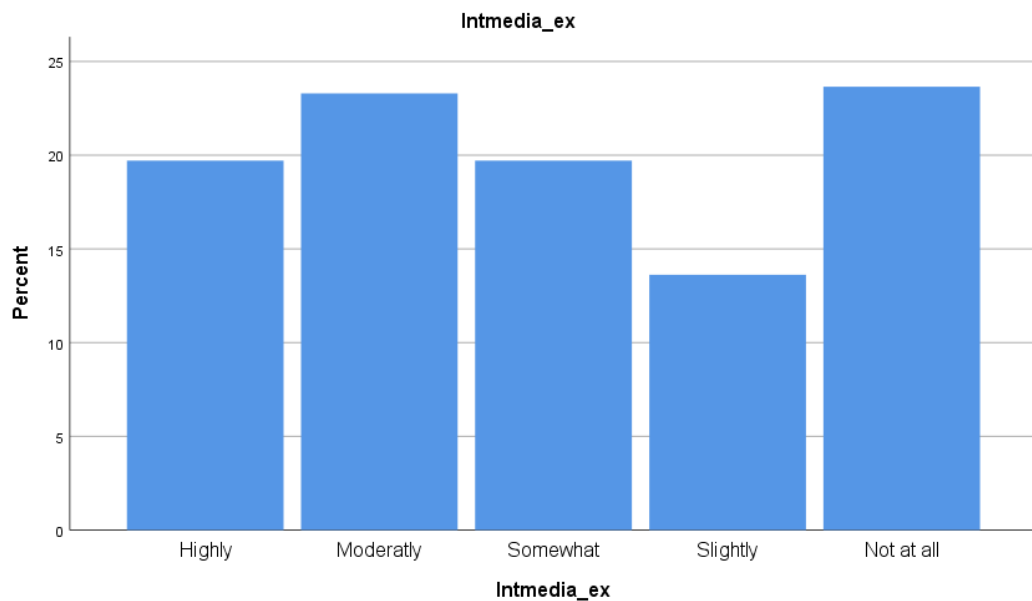


Figure 3.3: Respondents Views about International Media

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

Figure 3.3, which presents data regarding reliance on social media for information about current affairs, shows a much different pattern, with 42.3% of the respondents relying highly and 22.2% relying moderately on social media. This puts the aggregate percentage of people that responded positively to the notion of relying on social media as a credible information

source at 64.5%, a stark contrast to the response on using newspapers. News mediums such as newspapers and local media channels can be much more effectively controlled by the state compared to social media (Gehlbach & Sonin, 2008; Schleffer & Miller 2021), where news dissemination is democratized, and people can speak their minds under the cover of anonymity. With the public clearly preferring social media over other sources of information, it is evident that the state's control over narrative and discourse stands challenged.

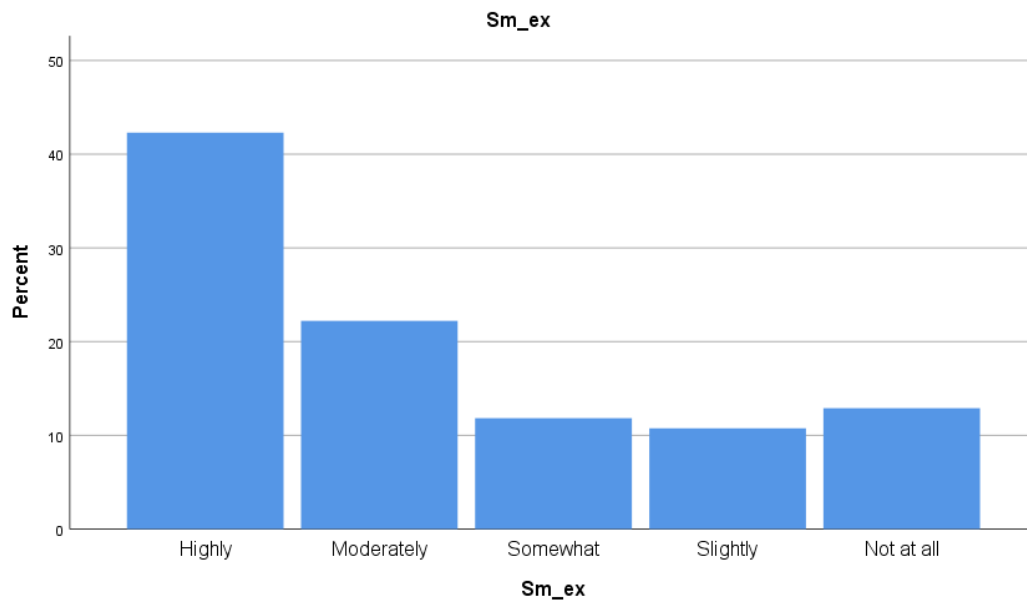


Figure 3.4: Respondents Views about Social Media Platforms

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

The survey further asked respondents about which social media platforms they use and with what frequency shown in Figure 3.4 above. This was achieved through the Likert scale as, asking respondents to specify if they used a specific app exclusively, mostly, to a lesser extent, or not all. Among social media platforms, Instagram turned out to be the most frequently used with 73.1% using it the most out of all and 4.3% using it exclusively. Followed by YouTube with 56.6% using it mostly and 3.2% using it exclusively, Twitter (X) with 25.4% using it mostly and 3.2% using it exclusively, and Facebook with 24.7% using it mostly and 1.4% using it exclusively. Detailed statistics regarding the frequency of use of each social media platform can be found in Tables 3.4 to 3.10.

Table 3.4: *Respondents Views About Usage of Facebook*

		F	P	VP	CP
Valid	Only this	4	1.4	1.5	1.5
	Mostly this	69	24.7	25.3	26.7
	Sometimes	113	40.5	41.4	68.1
	Don't use it	83	29.7	30.4	98.5
	No Social Media	4	1.4	1.5	100.0
	Total	273	97.8	100.0	
Missing	System	6	2.2		
Total		279	100.0		

Note: Frequency=F, Percent= P, Valid Percent= V.P, Cumulative Percent= C.P

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

Table 3.5: *Respondents Views About Usage of Instagram*

		F	P	V.P	C.P
Valid	Only this	12	4.3	4.4	4.4
	Mostly this	204	73.1	74.7	79.1
	Sometimes	39	14.0	14.3	93.4
	Don't use it	16	5.7	5.9	99.3
	No Social Media	2	.7	.7	100.0
	Total	273	97.8	100.0	
Missing	System	6	2.2		
Total		279	100.0		

Note: Frequency=F, Percent= P, Valid Percent= V.P, Cumulative Percent= C.P

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

Table 3.6: *Respondents Views About Usage of X (Former Twitter)*

		F	P	V.P	C.P
Valid	Only this	9	3.2	3.3	3.3
	Mostly this	71	25.4	26.2	29.5
	Sometimes	81	29.0	29.9	59.4
	Don't use it	103	36.9	38.0	97.4
	No Social Media	7	2.5	2.6	100.0
	Total	271	97.1	100.0	
Missing	System	8	2.9		
Total		279	100.0		

Note: Frequency=F, Percent= P, Valid Percent= V.P, Cumulative Percent= C.P

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

Table 3.7: *Respondents Views About Usage of TikTok*

		F	P	V.P	C.P
Valid	Only this	2	.7	.8	.8
	Mostly this	43	15.4	16.5	17.2
	Sometimes	41	14.7	15.7	33.0
	Don't use it	160	57.3	61.3	94.3
	No Social Media	15	5.4	5.7	100.0
	Total	261	93.5	100.0	
Missing	System	18	6.5		
Total		279	100.0		

Note: Frequency=F, Percent= P, Valid Percent= V.P, Cumulative Percent= C.P

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

Table 3.8: *Respondents Views About Usage of Threads*

		F	P	V.P	C.P
Valid	Only this	2	.7	.8	.8
	Mostly this	11	3.9	4.2	5.0
	Sometimes	27	9.7	10.4	15.4
	Don't use it	203	72.8	78.1	93.5
	No Social Media	17	6.1	6.5	100.0
	Total	260	93.2	100.0	
Missing	System	19	6.8		
Total		279	100.0		

Note: Frequency=F, Percent= P, Valid Percent= V.P, Cumulative Percent= C.P

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

Table 3.9: *Respondents Views About Usage of YouTube*

		F	P	V.P	C.P
Valid	Only this	9	3.2	3.3	3.3
	Mostly this	158	56.6	57.2	60.5
	Sometimes	85	30.5	30.8	91.3
	Don't use it	21	7.5	7.6	98.9
	No Social Media	3	1.1	1.1	100.0
	Total	276	98.9	100.0	
Missing	System	3	1.1		
Total		279	100.0		

Note: Frequency=F, Percent= P, Valid Percent= V.P, Cumulative Percent= C.P

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

Table 3.10: *Respondents Views About Usage of Telegram*

		F	P	V.P	C.P
Valid	Only this	2	.7	.8	.8
	Mostly this	5	1.8	1.9	2.7
	Sometimes	23	8.2	8.8	11.5
	Don't use it	214	76.7	82.3	93.8
	No Social Media	16	5.7	6.2	100.0
	Total	260	93.2	100.0	
Missing	System	19	6.8		
Total		279	100.0		

Note: Frequency=F, Percent= P, Valid Percent= V.P, Cumulative Percent= C.P

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

The survey further collected data on whether the public relied more on local or foreign YouTubers/influencers, presented in Figures 3.5 and 4.6 23% of the respondents said they highly or moderately relied on local YouTubers while 20.8% said the same for foreign YouTubers, similar to the case of media channels this shows that the public relies on foreign information sources almost the same as local ones, which seems to suggest that foreign actors have a similar influence in molding public opinion as local actors, foreshadowing a further challenge for the state's control over narrative in the country. The most frequently stated YouTubers have been compiled in the form of a word cloud in Figure 3.7, which reveals two insights, the first is that influencers with a more dissenting view, such as Imran Riaz Khan and Moeed Pirzada, are the most popular ones among the respondents and secondly that many of the names in the list represent extreme opposite sides of the political debate in the country alluding to the heightened polarization of society.

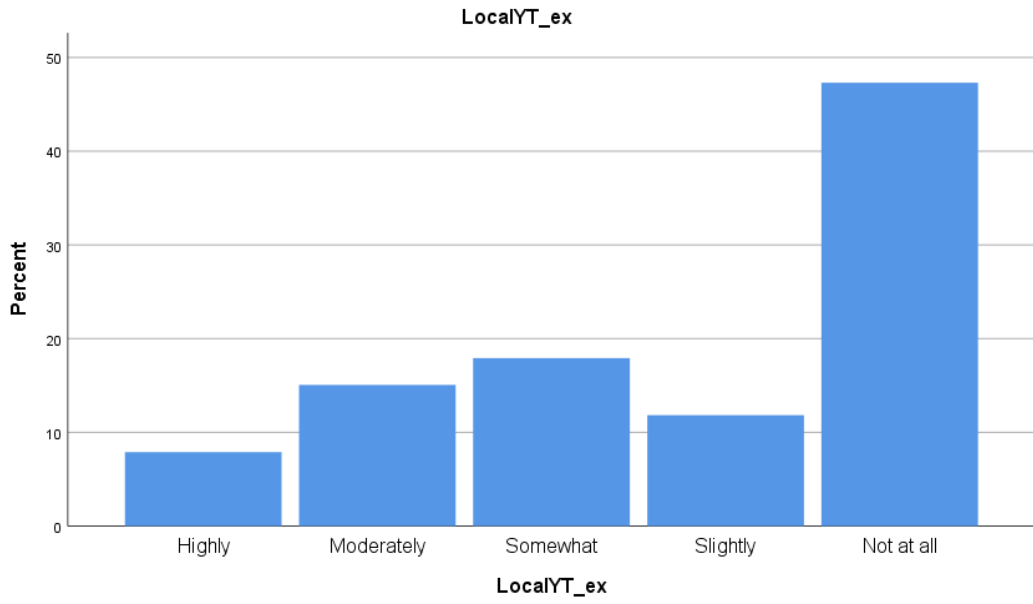


Figure 3.5: Respondents Views about Local YouTubers

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

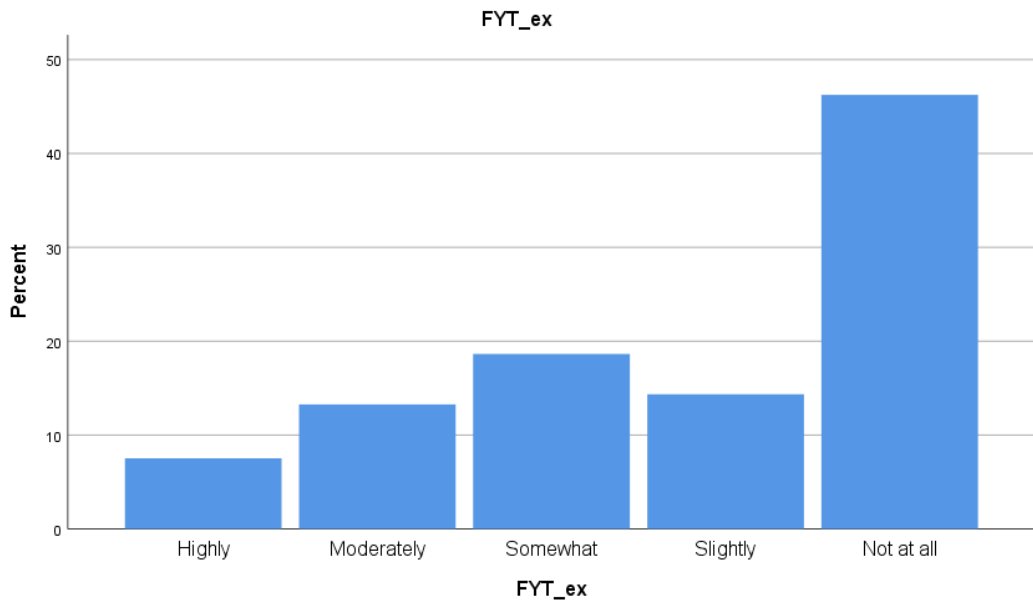


Figure 3.6: Respondents Views about Local YouTubers

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

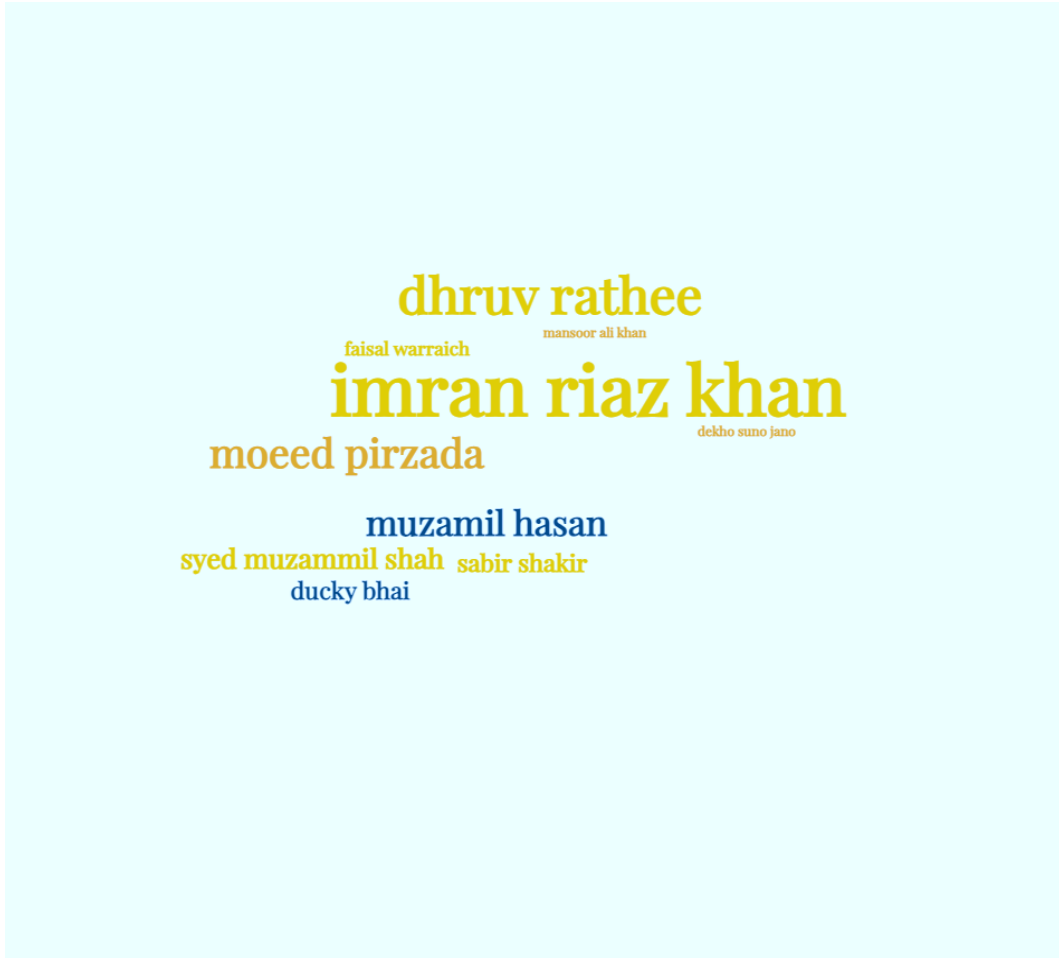


Figure 3.7: Respondents Most Viewed YouTubers

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

3.1.3 Understanding Public Opinion: To What Extent Does the Public Agree with State Narratives on Certain Issues.

The 3rd category of data collected through the survey was regarding public opinion. The following statements relevant to the current affairs and political situation in the country were stated in the survey and respondents were asked to select their level of agreement with the statement on a Likert scale.

1. PTI is acting against national interest.
2. State actions in Balochistan are effective.
3. The recent elections have upheld democratic standards.
4. The democratic cycle has not been disturbed.
5. The state has used appropriate measures against protestors from 9th May.

6. The state has used appropriate measures against protestors from Balochistan (January 2024).

The statements are written from the state’s point of view, agreeing with the statement shows that the respondent agrees with the state’s narrative on the issue while disagreeing suggests that they don’t. Figures 3.8- 3.13 show the results in the form of bar charts and a clear pattern can be observed across the statements showing that the public stands in disagreement with the state narrative on each statement, while the levels of disagreement may differ from statement to statement. The statement that has garnered the highest level of disagreement is that “The recent elections have upheld democratic standards”, with 58.4% strongly disagreeing and 7.5% disagreeing, bringing the aggregate percentage of people that disagree with the state’s perspective on the issue to 65.9%. 15.8% of the respondents chose to stay neutral on the issue, while only an aggregate of 18.3% agreed with the statement out of which 12.9% agreed strongly.

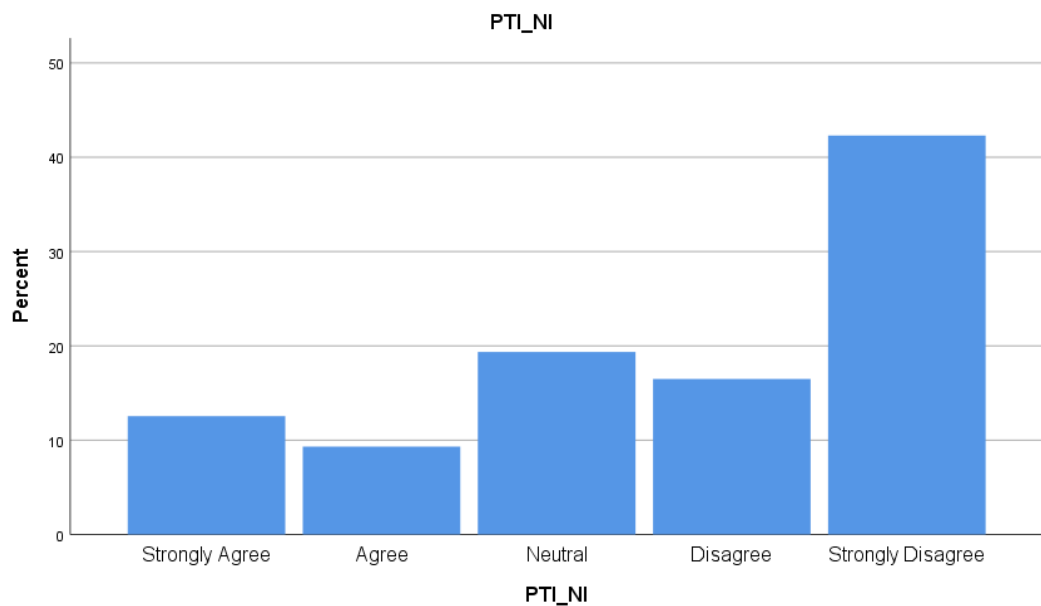


Figure 3.8: Respondents Views about PTI’s Action

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

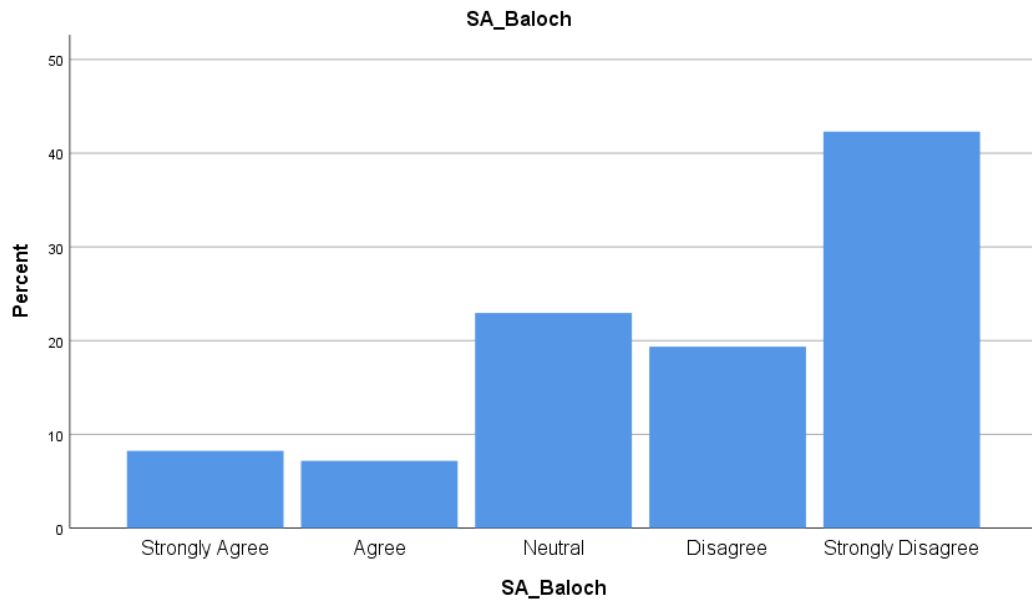


Figure 3.9: Respondents Views about States Action in Balochistan

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

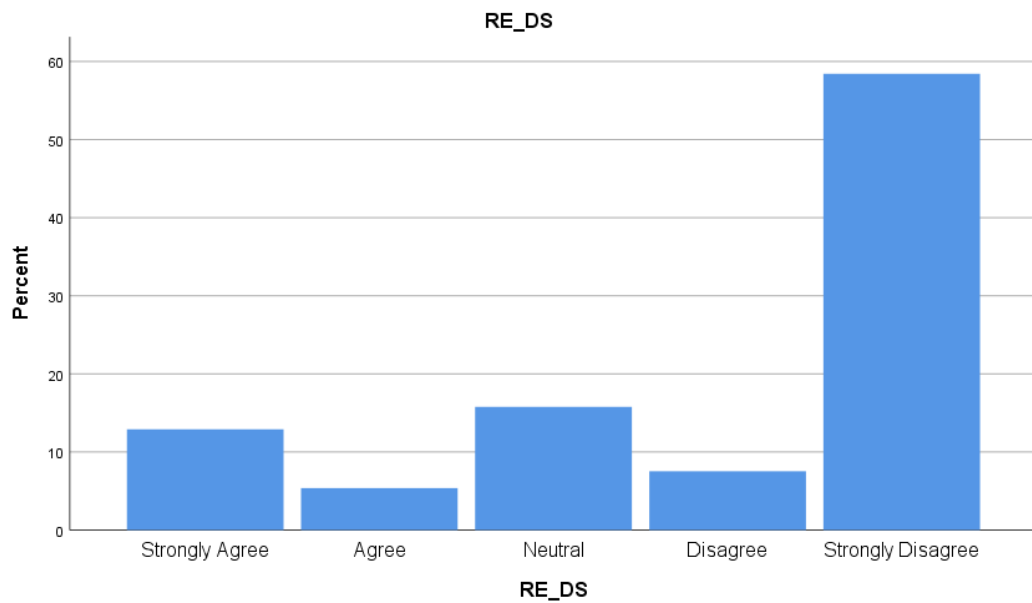


Figure 3.10: Respondents Views about Recent Elections Upheld Democratic Standards

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

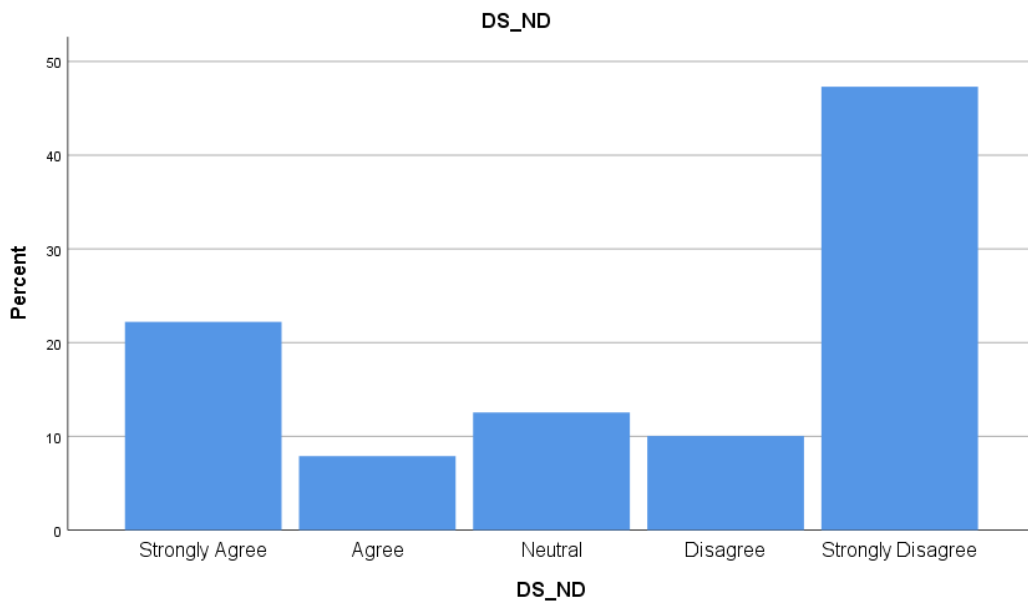


Figure 3.11: Respondents' Views on the Democratic Cycle have not been Disturbed

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

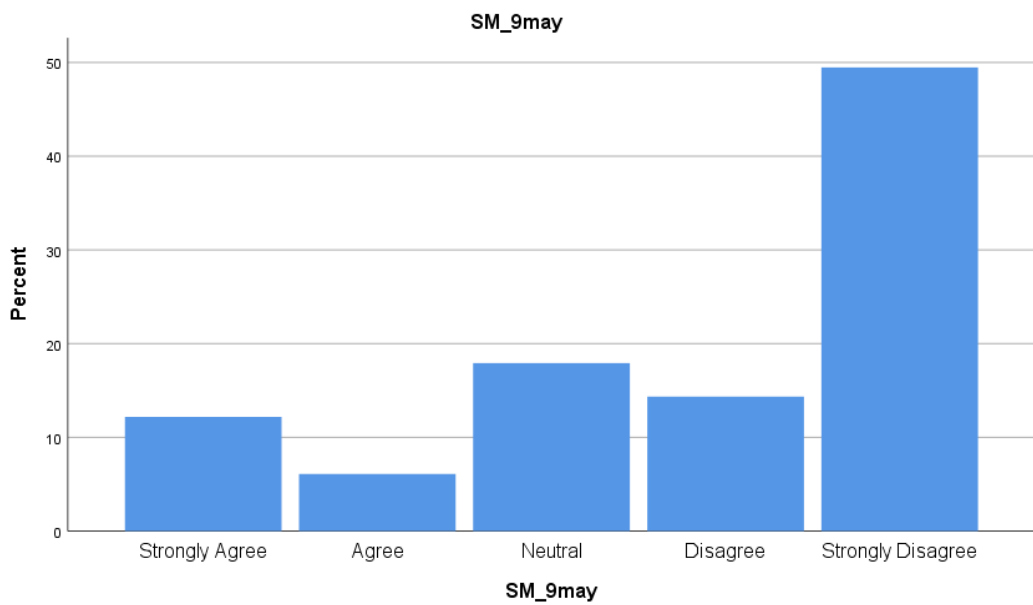


Figure 3.12: Respondents Views on State Actions on 9th May

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

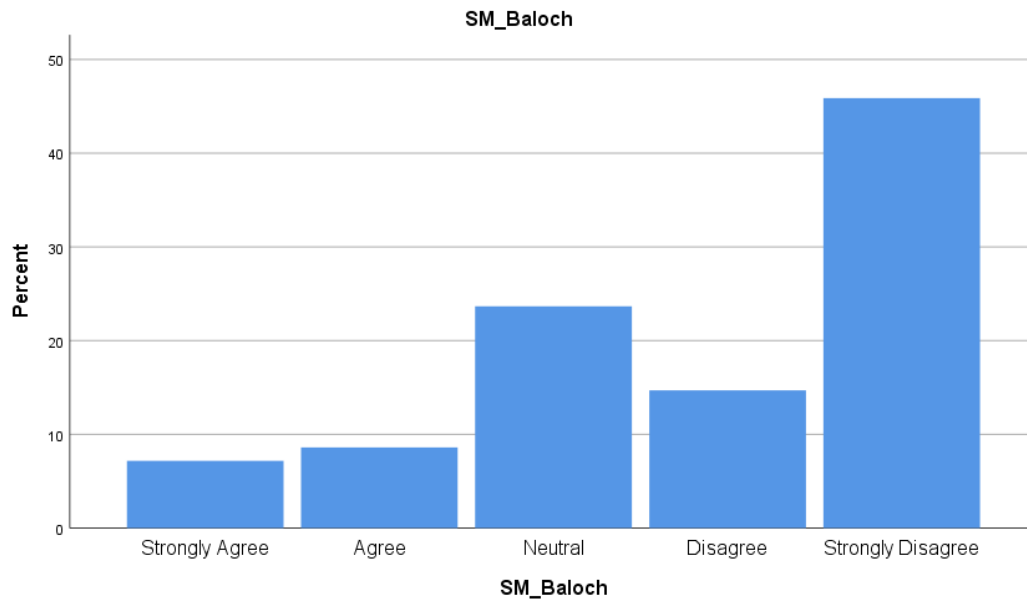


Figure 3.13: Respondents Views on State Measures against Balochi Protestors

Source: (SPSS Data Analysis)

3.2 Understanding the Pakistani Information Environment

As reflected in the responses to the survey, the public reliance on newspapers to understand current affairs in the country is extremely low compared to other sources while media channels have a slightly higher but, nonetheless low level of reliance as well. Moreover, there is little difference between the reliance on local and international media channels, suggesting the public does not particularly favor one over the other. These results arguably show that the state’s ability to control narrative and discourse in the country stands reduced since newspapers and media channels are the mediums of information dissemination which can be more effectively controlled (Gehlbach & Sonin, 2008; Schleffer & Miller 2021) compared to the much more popular avenue of information gathering among the respondents, social media. In the past even mammoth events, like the hanging of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, generated media reports that put the government’s point of view center stage, in this case for example, DAWN’s Urdu language paper ‘Hurriyat’, chose to print one picture of Bhutto and three of the man he was alleged of murdering, most local papers did not question the trials fairness, and even where an official of the press information department was not present, journalists self-censored their words to sound neutral (*No Morning English Daily Carried the News*, 2009). Today, the sheer volume of information and perspectives to view it from would cancel out the neutral stand of traditional journalists on the issue.

The indifference regarding preferring local media to international media suggests that the public does not think that either is a more credible source of information regarding issues in the country. The ideal situation for the state would be for people to give more credibility to local media channels, on which the state can practice a certain degree of control when it comes to what information is distributed and how it is framed. The Pakistan telecommunication agency (PTA) and the Pakistan electronic media regulatory authority (PEMRA) are the two primary institutions through which the state regulates the content and distribution of information. Despite the media landscape overflowing with private channels and newspapers, certain boundaries need to be heeded to in order to continue their broadcasting and while this is usually a more subtle phenomenon a prominent example from the recent political turmoil was news channels being completely barred from mentioning Imran Khan by name in any kind of reporting (Davies, 2023). This type of obvious handling of media entities has led the public to question their apparently independent status and therefore view them as mouth pieces for the government, concerned only with getting high TRPs through highly dramatic and emotive debates and discussions.

On top of this, Pakistan ranks low on the media freedom scale, currently ranking at 152nd position out of the 180 countries analyzed by “Journalists without borders” (Reporters without borders, 2024) and is notorious for the targeting and assassinations of journalists (Pakistan | RSF, n.d.), this repression is not attributed to the state alone but extends to most of the countries elite trying to influence the news in their favor. This explains the indifference of the public when it comes to attributing credibility to local versus international media channels when it comes to understanding current affairs in the country. While international channels may be giving the outsiders view and have their own agendas for running certain news, they are not incumbered by restrictions from the Pakistani state and the influence of local elites and so can be viewed as at least more independent than local news channels. The exposure to international media channels and the establishment of their place within local information spheres can be attributed to general rise of globalized communications and advancements in media technology (Matos, 2012).

These trends along with the aforementioned lack of credibility on local media, can help explain why the public has shifted to social media platforms as sources of news and information. Social media espouses a democratized information production and dissemination system, giving the opportunity of broadcasting to anyone that intends to do so, from the

government and its institutions to corporations and NGOs, to media houses and independent journalists, and even individuals that have no credentials except their wish to share their perspective on any given issue. Social media levels the playing field and gives everyone and anyone the opportunity to garner an audience and influence the public.

It creates space for alternative narratives to be presented unhindered and gives the public access to differing points of view, allowing them to build their own perspective. The advent of social media and its proliferation across the global population has also caused the post-truth phenomenon to blow up, establishing it as reality more than ever before (Su, 2022). So, more than just alternative points of view, the public now has access to “alternative facts” and “truths”, among which it often chooses based on how much it resonates with them personally and emotionally (Laybats & Tredinnick, 2016). Therefore, creating an environment where emotional appeal trumps factuality, streamlining the process of public opinion manipulation through propaganda as well misinformation and disinformation.

However, in the Foucauldian sense, these developments are merely a reorientation of the existing mechanisms of knowledge production, that determine what is considered as truth in a society and what is not. Whereas previously, the state through its control of institutions such as media and education inevitably controlled the mechanisms of knowledge production, now its capabilities seem to be attenuated because of the evolved nature of media systems. An example that showcases this phenomenon is the use of social media platforms to hold virtual political rallies in the face of government restrictions. In December 2023, PTI held an online rally garnering over 5 million participants, circumventing the state’s restrictions on political gatherings in the lead up to the elections coming up in February of next year, where Imran Khan gave a speech despite being in jail with the use of AI to mimic his voice (Hussain, 2023).

3.3 The State of Public Opinion in the Country and the Government’s Attempts at Managing it

Since the state can no longer exercise dominance in this space, alternative narratives have the opportunity to gain momentum, even though they may not have the same power as the state in the crude sense. The question then arises of whether alternative narratives have gained enough momentum in Pakistan to warrant this discussion in the country’s context. In order to answer this we can revert to the findings of the survey, specifically the section concerning

public opinion on certain statements on which the state has a clearly stated view. As discussed earlier, majority of the respondents disagreed with the state's frame of thought, for each of the 6 statements. It is important to note that the statement covered a diverse range of topics and issues, in order to minimize the impact of any political affiliation on the result of the study. Moreover, the dataset was diverse regionally as well, ensuring reduced chances of bias or over-representation of people from a similar background. Regardless of this there seems to be an overwhelming majority that stands opposed to the state view while simultaneously showing a high level of reliance on social media for understating current affairs in the country. Which suggests there may be a correlation between the two, a view that is further strengthened by the fact that the state itself agrees with it and has used this view as a justification to ban X (Twitter) in the country. In one statement the ISPR stated:

Social Media platforms are being used by specific political segments continuously to accuse Pakistan army and other institutions, emphasizing when they are asked to present evidence instead of acknowledgment, they responded with more accusations against the state, the retaliation with counteraccusation would trap society in a vicious cycle, instead of reason, facts, and citizen's rights. He added Article 19 of the Constitution of Pakistan no doubt protects freedom of speech, but it also prohibits attack on the integrity, security, and defense of the state under this freedom of speech, he clarified that the Constitution and laws do not tolerate anti-state propaganda (The Express Tribune, 2024).

Another, more subtle, indicator of public discontentment of the state can be perceived from the choice of Youtuber/influencer named most frequently in response to the question "Name some Youtubers/influencers that you follow to understand current affairs" in the survey. While the answers were fairly diverse, the most repeated name was "Imran Riaz Khan", followed by the Indian Youtuber "Druv Rathee" and "Moeed Pirzada". Based on this sample, it can be deduced that the most highly relied upon voices on social media for understanding current affairs in the country include two journalist-cum-YouTubers that are known to hold a more dissenting view to the current status quo's and an Indian. The impact of this seemingly dissenting directionality of popular discourse in the country should not be understated, as observed in the recent 2024 election in India.

Dhruv Rathee was actually hailed as the lead figure in a group of YouTubers that are being credited with influencing public opinion in India that eventually led to the BJP missing out on a majority win (ET Online, 2024). With the likes of “The Economist” reporting on role of various YouTubers involved in highlighting the dissenting narrative, for example one of Rathee’s most recent videos in which “he argued that India had slipped into dictatorship was viewed 32m times in just one month” (The Economist, 2024). This fresh example from the neighborhood does not bode well for the state’s ability to control the narrative in Pakistan, given that at least based on this survey, most people now prefer independent voices brought to them by social media platforms in order to understand the happenings in the country.

This particular data set from the survey also highlights the highly polarized nature of political opinions in the country, since most of the frequently repeated names belong to opposite ends of the political debate. This is another manifestation of a post truth information environment since scholars have linked post-truth to the increase in polarization and populism across the world (Giordano, 2020). However, states the world over, have so far failed in containing these effects of the post truth era, or maintaining hegemony over the national narrative, without significantly curtailing the freedom of expression of their publics. One example of this phenomenon is how India banned the social media app “TikTok” in the country following border skirmishes with the Chinese, forcing the 200 million Indian users off the platform (Germain, 2024). Government ministers justified the action by citing cyber security threats posed by a Chinese owned app accumulating such a vast audience and subsequent access to data (BBC, 2020). In the same lieu the United States government has been working on banning TikTok as well though many in the grey zone point out that this is not the whole picture and in fact. No connection has been proven between TikTok’s parent company and the Chinese government, with the company being headquartered outside China, not being available in the country and pulling out of Hong Kong following new regulatory laws (Tang, 2024). However, the app has disrupted the state’s hegemony on narrative building specially with regards to foreign and military policy issues such as the Israel-Palestine conflict (Harwell & Lorenz, 2023).

The Pakistani state banned Twitter in February 2024, around the same time national elections were held in the country, citing concerns about the site presenting threats to national security as well as “X’s refusal to accede to requests and comply with the Removal and Blocking of Unlawful Online Content (Procedure, Oversight and Safeguards) Rules 2021 (RBUOC

Rules)” (Aziz, 2024). The minister of interior stated, “The ban on X is imposed on the grounds of upholding national security, maintaining public order, and preserving the integrity of the nation, as X failed to adhere to the lawful directives of the government of Pakistan” (Shahzad, 2024). When asked regarding the efficacy of such an action by the state, interview P10 responded by saying that if the state’s purpose was to hamper the dissemination of information it deems to be against the national interest, then they have succeeded by introducing an additional barrier in the form of a VPN requirement, which many people will be apprehensive about using or simply unwilling to put in the effort just to access X. However, she went on to say “But, I think, effectively, you cannot counter this. In fact, it increases the confusion, and Hybrid warfare’s, main component, is ambiguity.”¹ The government however seems fixated on the idea that they can take back control of the information space by further coercive practices including extreme surveillance.

As uncovered in a recent court case in the Islamabad high court, the Pakistan telecommunication authority (PTA) has ordered private telecom companies to monitor and record all communications that happen through their networks and the data to be stored with “agencies”, under the “Lawful intercept management system” or LIMS. With the aim to enhance the state’s ability to crackdown on any spread information that the state deems to be “anti-state”, misinformation, or disinformation. The legality of this action is currently under question in the IHC as it is a severe breach of privacy and the open-ended nature of the criterion based on which the state can detain citizens makes anyone critical of state policies a legitimate target (Abbas, 2024).

However, the long-term impact of such policies and the extent to which they can help restore a semblance of a world before the notion of post truth exploded, remains to be seen both at home and abroad. The results of the survey do offer a glimpse of how this could go, showing that the level of discord between state and society remains despite all the coercive actions taken by the state. It is pertinent to note that several respondents were hesitant to fill out the form, fearing repercussions for the way they responded to the question of how much they agreed with the state narrative on certain issues. They only filled out the survey after reassurance that the survey is completely anonymous, so they need worry about being identified at any step of the research process. This whole exercise showcases that the state may have successfully turned the volume down on voices of dissent through fear instilling

¹ Dr. Ayesha Siddiqua (Associate Professor at NUML), June, 2024.

tactics however, it has not yet been successful in changing the tide of public opinion back in its favor. It is also worth noting that the survey reveals a level of disconnect between the state's understanding of the situation and the on ground reality since the platform banned turns out be far behind other in popularity among respondents.

The most used platform according to the survey, was actually Instagram, followed by YouTube, with X (Twitter) coming in third place. Instagram is a platform typically associated with lifestyle and entertainment content however like every other social media platform, people use it to present their opinions on a range of topics, often in the form of attention grabbing infographics and short form videos (reels). Interviewee P5 explained that “this type of content can actually have a bigger impact, because culturally we have become accustomed to sharing information and opinion through “memes” (a mode of social media post that uses imagery/short clips to convey a message through humor), shared widely on Instagram and Facebook, to a point where a “meme” can have a lot more impact than a wordy post.² Since the government perceives X (Twitter) to host networks with the most outwardly “anti-state” sentiments, where dissent seems to thrive, they have chosen to ban that. However, there is clearly no shortage of platforms to which the public can migrate, that is if they are not already using it, in order to get information on the country's current affairs.

From these findings, it can be deduced that the state is struggling to maintain control over the narrative in Pakistan; public opinion is pitted against the state narrative on various issues and news sources that have a higher level of regulation by the state are not the most popular choice by a great margin. However, as discussed earlier, it appears that this is a global challenge facing governments around the world, as they struggle to maintain dominance of the status quo over national discourse in the post-truth era. As compared to the past, where states were able to utilize media tools and propaganda to generate mass consent for their initiatives and skeptical voices were easily kept at bay by saturating the information space with nationalistic narratives. One of the biggest examples of this, shared by P1 is how the United States was able to create and sell the global terrorism narrative post 9/11 and beyond just influencing their own public's opinion was able to force the rest of the world to take a side. As a result, not only was the US itself able to start wars thousands of miles away but also created the space for terrorism to invoked in other conflicts for example the one in

² Mr. Zulfiqar Ali (Lecturer at National Defense University), May 2024.

Kashmir, where India has successfully converted the freedom fighters and secessionists into terrorists.³

3.4 Contextualizing Public Opinion Shift to a Post-Truth Environment

The information space today looks drastically different as social media has disrupted the near monopoly of the state on narrative creation and proponents of post-truth claim that this has emancipated the public. A case that exemplifies this phenomenon greatly is the American public's response to the most recent escalation in violence in the protracted Palestine-Israel conflict. The United States has been a critical ally for Israel over the years on both the diplomatic and military fronts, showcasing a bipartisan willingness to support it through thick and thin, a stance that was made possible only through overwhelming public support. However, the tide has turned over the last year, putting the democrat US government at odds with a majority of its constituents.

P4 attributed this significant shift in US public opinion to post-truth creating the space for alternative narratives to be heard, offering people a degree of emancipation. Exposure to diverse narratives and more importantly, uncensored and unedited footage coming directly out of Gaza and the West Bank have made people skeptical about their government's position as well as the way that legacy media has reported on the matter.

If we look at the at this current divestment movement in the United States on the U.S. campuses for sort of Palestine, it's very interesting that all this sort of, all this access to information and to social media has really empowered people, because now they can see through the reality and they can break out of this Zionist hold on the American politics, and they see what the mainstream media has been doing all over the years, continuously feeding them with information which the state wanted them to believe, as opposed to feeding them information which was based on truth...you see a large number of white Americans in this struggle, a lot of Jews, professors and students in this struggle, in this encampment on the campuses, because these people have really started questioning, okay, what does it mean for us as people, as citizens of the United States? Why do we fund all this health care and all these sort of educational programs in Israel, but not really doing

³ Dr. Rubina Waseem (Assistant Professor at CIPS, NUST), May 2024.

anything for our own people? Our people have to pay such huge children's bills and stuff like that, education is really, really costly in the United States, and the fact that money is going somewhere else. So all of this information, access to information, has really generated this debate, and in that sense I would say that it has turned out to be net positive in case of Palestine.⁴

P4 further elaborated that this specific case upholds the emancipatory claim because not only do the students protesting at these college encampments have the space to express themselves and listen to other point of views but they have been able to translate that into an actionable agenda. This is what completes emancipation, since people are able to unite around an agenda point and exercise power, according to her emancipation is not just,

About whether you are with the state or not, or against the state-led narrative. It is also about whether people do agree on a particular sort of agenda point, because if there is massive disagreement and if there are small pockets based on identitarian politics or other kinds of politics and everybody is shouting their own slogans, nobody is going to get anywhere.⁵

Another interviewee, P6, gave a similar point of view, suggesting that the exposure enabled by new media systems empowers the public to get free from the status quo and its overbearing narratives, moreover it is easier to recruit and gather people that agree with your point of view, and momentum can be built quickly for confrontation.⁶ Herein lies one of the fundamental issues created because of a post truth environment, that is, information often spreads like wild fire and is often accepted by the masses with little verification as long as it concurs with their pre-existing biases and world views. The acceptance of any particular piece of information or discourse then becomes dependent on the emotional appeal of its content or the content's origin, which is why post truth has been linked to a rise in populism across the globe. In fact, the term "post truth" came into the limelight after Trump's election back in 2016, leaving scholars searching for explanations for how someone that espouses ultra-nationalist and white supremacist ideology could appeal to a majority of the public.

⁴ Ms. Sadia Tasleem (Lecturer at Quaid-e-Azam University), May 2024.

⁵ Ms. Sadia Tasleem (Lecturer at Quaid-e-Azam University), May 2024.

⁶ Dr. Ghulam Mujaddid (HOD Strategic Studies and Assistant Professor at National Defense University), May 2024.

According to P11, this heightened need to prioritize catering to one's emotional biases before checking for factuality, can be explained through the cognitive dissonance theory:

The formulation of echo-chambers as the algorithms of social media platforms are designed in a way that keeps the user glued to the screen by keeping them in a digital bubble that shows them content that confirms their existing biases and beliefs. As the cognitive dissonance theory states, humans tend to feel discomfort when encountering data that could contradict their existing beliefs. The widespread usage of social media and the associated information overload foster an environment that solidifies a person's biases and existing beliefs, making a change in beliefs less likely, even if confronted with data and factual information that indicates otherwise.⁷

One rather unusual example of how easy it is to fall for misinformation because of the way we respond to information in general in the post truth era was shared by P1, featuring a blunder by the Pakistani representative in the UNGA at the time. Following an exchange of hostile statements at the UNGA between the Pakistan's then prime minister, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, and Indian envoy, Eenam Gambhir, where both blamed the other for the terrorism in the region, Maliha Lodhi brought up a picture of a young girl whose face had been speckled with shrapnel wounds (BBC, 2017). She claimed that the picture was that of a Kashmiri girl, who had suffered at the hands of indiscriminate violence by the Indian state in the occupied Jammu and Kashmir region. However, the Indians were quick to point out that this was false, and the picture actually belonged to a 17 year old Palestinian girl, who had gotten the injuries as a result of an Israeli attack. This was an easy to debunk falsification since the picture, captured by award-winning photographer Heidi Levine back in 2014 ("Kashmir Fake Photo: Fallout from the UN Speech by Pakistan's Maleeha Lodhi," 2017), yet a senior Pakistani diplomat missed it and fell for misinformation spread online.⁸

Which goes to show the extent to which a post truth information environment has ramifications; its impact does not depend on literacy, the level of education, or social class, rather it is a universally experienced phenomenon that is extremely difficult to escape or overcome. Another interviewee, P10, belonging to mass communications background,

⁷ Anonymous Researcher at an Islamabad based Think Tank.

⁸ Dr. Rubina Waseem (Assistant Professor at CIPS, NUST), May 2024.

explained the current state of concern surrounding post truth through the diffusion of innovation theory. She suggested that in reality, the post truth information environment has been on a gradual rise for quite some time now, however, we are feeling its impacts rather abruptly because of the technological disruption brought on by social media. She stated that “we are at the abuse level (of diffusion of innovation) with post-truth”, meaning that we cannot yet grasp how to deal with it and what its limitations are, at the moment we are simply trying to comprehend it on a case-by-case basis.⁹ Interviewee P5 also agreed with this sentiment by stating that rather than illiteracy it is a lack of awareness, more specifically, lack of awareness regarding ethics of using social media, that is the driving force of the post truth era and people “without even being aware, end up abusing social media rather than using it”.¹⁰

3.5 Post-truth and Hybrid Warfare; Indian Actions that Exemplify the Nexus in the Pakistani Context

This backdrop of an emotionally charged public, that has gained access to not just information from all points of view but rather the very mechanisms that produce and disseminate it, translates into a security concern of a non-conventional nature in the hybrid warfare facing the country. Most experts that were interviewed agreed that actors engaged in hybrid warfare against the country could exploit the post truth information environment to spread misinformation and disinformation in order to manipulate public opinion to turn against the state. The protests that occurred in early May 2024, in Azad Jammu & Kashmir and the Indian reaction in their aftermath is a good exemplification of this point of view. As pointed out by P8, “it was a protest vis-à-vis different commodities, vis-à-vis different, you know, rising prices. And it was a domestic protest. But they actually dubbed it as a separatist or a secessionist movement for that matter against Pakistan.”¹¹

Indian media, through both television and social media platforms, was quick to push the agenda that the protest was aimed at freedom from Pakistani administration. NDTV, a major news outlet, published on the issue stating, “The protests that started against inflation, high taxation, and electricity shortage have turned into a movement for rights and freedom across Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK)” (Masoodi, 2024), a framing that could not even be

⁹ Dr. Ayesha Siddiqua (Associate Professor at NUML), June, 2024.

¹⁰ Mr. Zulfiqar Ali (Lecturer at National Defense University), May 2024.

¹¹ Mr. Umair Perver Khan (Lecture at National Defense University), June 2024.

justified through the content in the rest of the article, where the chairman of traders Association Muzaffarabad and a leader in the protests was cited stating taxes and inflation as the primary motivation behind them.

While misleading framing is one way in which misinformation or disinformation is spread, another is by overflowing the information landscape with them in order to drown the other side on any given issue, to the point where search engines and platform algorithms push your narrative to the top whenever a user searches for relevant keywords. A strategy P1 suggested has been implemented quite successfully by the Indians, due to the combination of being greatly skilled in information technology and writing and publishing their point of view extensively. To elucidate on this, she detailed the narrative building surrounding Pakistan's nuclear arsenal,

If you Google it right now, Pakistan will appear in Google as the fastest growing nuclear arsenal. Google just works on an algorithm based, so whatever has been written a lot, that will be displayed, and Indians have written a lot to sell this narrative. There is one report that has been published by the Association of American Scientists and they publish their data annually that how many warheads one state owns. That is also a speculated figure because no country wants to tell that how many warheads they have. But that speculated figure has no difference between India and Pakistan. The pace is the same. I think often they put Pakistan a few warheads above. But that was also back in 2013. Right now, if you witness that, it is completely equal. So, this ties the race, obviously. So, what is the point of saying that Pakistan is the fastest-growing nuclear arsenal?¹²

In the same context, Indians have also been extensively promoting the Baloch separatism agenda, though it is not the only significant way that they have been supporting Baloch separatist factions. Other than the often talked about monetary assistance for these militias, interviewees also pointed out the ways in which India has expanded its outreach to the Baloch people by broadcasting TV/radio channels in the Balochi language. One example of this was shared by P2, who questioned the true intentions behind such a move, "All India Radio, I think in 2015 or 2016, they started Balochi services. Now, the All India Radio of

¹² Dr. Rubina Waseem (Assistant Professor at CIPS, NUST), May 2024.

Balochi services is published daily. So, what is it for? How many Baloch people are there in India?”¹³

This strategy of direct outreach to aggrieved populations in order to win them over has seen great success as was seen in the case of the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014. As pointed out by P1, “Russia did it very successfully because public opinion was in favor of it. More than 80% of people wanted to be unified with Russia.”¹⁴ So, this aspect of the hybrid warfare that India is engaged in against Pakistan should not be understated.

Moreover, in the context of this hybrid warfare, India has also been found outrightly manufacturing disinformation in order to malign Pakistan and its institutions as was uncovered by the EU Disinfo lab in 2020 pointed out P8. The independent investigation titled the “Indian Chronicles”, unveiled that over more than 15 years, a web of over 750 websites, more than 10 UN-accredited NGO’s as well as hundreds of registered domain names and fake personas registering those domain names, had managed to infiltrate EU governments as well as UN entities in order to further Indian interests (Alaphilippe et al., 2020). To achieve these objectives the network supported minority NGOs and think tanks, garnering institutional support for these NGOs, actively participating in human rights councils at the UN and Geneva, and disseminating content through fake media in over 97 countries targeting the reputation of countries like Pakistan and China, as well as inciting anti-Pakistan and anti-China sentiment in Europe’s institutional circles (Alaphilippe et al., 2020).

3.6 Domestic Fault Lines: Understanding the Other Dimension of Hybrid Warfare Facing Pakistan that Manifests Itself in State-Society Relations

Something that stands out in the aforementioned report is how the disinformation network specifically targeted minority groups in order to create damaging narratives regarding Pakistan. This alludes to a very critical aspect of hybrid warfare, which is that hostile actors will always take advantage of domestic fault lines in order to achieve their strategic objectives¹⁵ and Pakistan has no shortage of such fault lines as pointed out by several interviewees. When talking about the dissenting voices currently rising up against the state, for example the Pushtoon Tahafuz Movement, P4 states that,

¹³ Dr. Amanullah Khan (Assistant Professor at Air University), May 2024.

¹⁴ Dr. Rubina Waseem (Assistant Professor at CIPS, NUST), May 2024.

¹⁵ Dr. Zahid Mehmood (Assistant Professor at Air University), May 2024.

When it comes to Pakistan, I think most of what is happening in Pakistan is based on very genuine grievances. There isn't really sort of, most of these struggles they talk about how people have been abducted, how people have been sort of, how there is no sanctity for their lives, or how they are depressed and humiliated at the hands of the state institutions. None of this is based on lies. It is based on lived experience. And if it's based on lived experience, then no matter whether they are being told by another actor outside of Pakistan to say this or not, these are legitimate complaints, these are legitimate concerns, they will remain valid irrespective of who is supporting whom.¹⁶

Another interviewee, P6, suggested that the state refuses to hear the genuine grievances of the people or give them due consideration, instead it expects to be praised despite not delivering in terms of performance on the promises it has made to the people,¹⁷ a view also echoed by P2.¹⁸ Further problematizing the notion of hybrid warfare facing Pakistan, P11 argued that,

It is pertinent to realize that the establishment has used this very term to suppress dissent and legitimate criticism by discrediting opposing viewpoints and to justify its acts of going beyond its mandate. People from marginalized areas asking for their rights have been termed as agents of foreign powers waging a hybrid war against the country. Genuine criticism of the establishment of national policies is also framed as a hybrid war effort, thus legitimizing stringent measures under the guise of protecting national security, potentially infringing on civil liberties and freedom of expression.¹⁹

This view was echoed by P4 as well, drawing a parallel between the motivations of the Pakistani state and those of imperialist powers in hyper-securitizing the information environment;

These are very interesting tactics to divert people's attention from the real problems to the idea that there is this hybrid war going on. I think

¹⁶ Ms. Sadia Tasleem (Lecturer at Quaid-e-Azam University), May 2024.

¹⁷ Dr. Ghulam Mujaddid (HOD Strategic Studies and Assistant Professor at National Defense University), May 2024.

¹⁸ Dr. Amanullah Khan (Assistant Professor at Air University), May 2024.

¹⁹ Anonymous researcher at an Islamabad based Think Tank.

unfortunately, in the history of Pakistan, we have always seen that people have been made to believe in inflated threats, exaggerated threats, so that they give up their freedom. For a long time, it was India's threat now because there is a shift in the military's own thinking about whether we can actually compete with India or not, like in a direct war. So there is this shift from that threat of conventional war to this new threat of hybrid war, and the entire politics of securitization plays out in order to keep hold and keep control over power and keep control over your own populations. I think this is not only true for Pakistan, this is also true for places like empires and imperialists.²⁰

These insights portray the other angle of the battle of narratives Pakistan currently finds itself locked in; while there is one happening at the inter-state level another is happening between state and society. Where the state is being challenged by the increased popularity of dissenting opinion, as visualized using survey data earlier in the chapter. It can be argued that recent events have reduced the ability of state and state institutions to act as the bearers of the regime of truth in the country, a view that was supported by several of the interviewees. In particular the role of the military establishment when it came to crafting the national narrative has been damaged in recent years, whereas earlier they had a standing in country which could be called sacred, as expressed by P1.²¹ P11 laid the various tools and mechanisms which had allowed the military establishment to create such a standing,

Over the years, it has continued to assert a narrative that the military is a guardian actor between the corrupt political class and the general public, thus seeking to legitimize its foray into the governance affairs of the country. It has always dominated national security matters and, to a greater extent, Pakistan's foreign policy preferences as well. This has been enabled by dominating key pillars / dominant forces of the state. Public perception has been shaped using dramas, songs, movies, and documentaries, both directly in the form of content generated by ISPR and indirectly by embedding narratives in private and government productions. Other tools that have been used include the curriculum taught in schools, patronage of

²⁰ Ms. Sadia Tasleem (Lecturer at Quaid-e-Azam University), May 2024.
²¹ Dr. Rubina Waseem (Assistant Professor at CIPS, NUST), May 2024.

religious scholars, the print and electronic media, intelligence agencies, and a network of knowledge-producing entities such as think tanks.²²

One interviewee, P5, suggested that in today's information environment, there was no specific regime of truth and whatever control the establishment could have had has been damaged because of an inconsistency in their actions, comparing the situation in Pakistan to that in Russia or China,

It is also very variable. It can depend on situation to situation. With changing times, this role also changes. It also may be, it also depends on the leadership. But again, on the other hand, if you take an example of Russia, and how they control, that is a classic example, or even China for that matter. They have more of a consistent role when it comes to the role of establishment in constructing that truth.²³

Another, P9, suggested that it was the inability of the state institutions to stay in step with the rapid changes in society that has caused them to lose their footing when it comes to narrative control, they are simply operating at a different wavelength to the rest of society.²⁴ While P6, argued that this decline in narrative control has come about because of people's lived experience contradicting their held beliefs about the establishment,

I think that two or three years ago, if we look at it in simple terms and thoughts, the army had a respectful standing amongst the people. The reason for that is that the people genuinely liked the army. The second reason was that they didn't know about the truth. They didn't have the experience. Now the direct experience has increased. They have started to know them better.²⁵

He further supported this argument by explaining that the state naturally has to maintain a good image in order to manufacture consent for its policies, as envisioned by Noam Chomsky, and is always in a tussle with forces that push public opinion in the other direction, however this can only be maintained when the state and its organs act sincerely in the interest of the country.

²² Anonymous researcher at an Islamabad based Think Tank.

²³ Mr. Zulfiqar Ali (Lecturer at National Defense University), May 2024.

²⁴ Dr. Zahid Mehmood (Assistant Professor at Air University), May 2024.

²⁵ Dr. Ghulam Mujaddid (HOD Strategic Studies and Assistant Professor at National Defense University), May 2024.

Centripetal forces are positive and take you inside the state. Centrifugal forces take you out. Therefore, there is a constant need in a state to have positive information. We don't call it information warfare. It is a positive need. Image building. Manufacturing consent. But the state has to be sincere. If the interest of the state is in the blood and bones of the people, and this is usually the case, then this is a different matter. This is not normal. Now, Manufacturing Consent did not write anything negative. It said that this is a requirement. But it did say that the consent should not serve your purpose. It should serve America as it should serve the country.²⁶

On the other hand, P4, believes that on top of people's lived experiences, it is the nature of today's information environment that taken away the state's monopoly over manipulating public opinion to maintain their power,

There has never been, in that sense, an environment based on truth. We have had a history that was sort of, we have had a historical narrative which was shaped by state institutions entirely based on very deeply emotive truth as opposed to objective realities...Now when we are talking about this nexus of power and knowledge creating structures that produce certain ideas as truth, yes the establishment has had that kind of power, it had control over the production of knowledge, it still has control over production of knowledge in some ways, at least in the traditional medium, which is like through education and other stuff. However, information technology and people's access to all these social media platforms, and the idea of this boundary between the urban and rural space is diluting the metropolitan area somewhere else in the world, and that boundary or that binary is diluting over a period of time, and of course there's a lot of osmosis taking place in terms of information, and establishment control over that regime of truth is clearly getting challenged.²⁷

Based on responses to interview questions, it can be deduced that when it comes to a national narrative, there is no stable regime of truth in the country today, though there were mixed

²⁶ Dr. Ghulam Mujaddid (HOD Strategic Studies and Assistant Professor at National Defense University), May 2024.

²⁷ Ms. Sadia Tasleem (Lecturer at Quaid-e-Azam University), May 2024.

reactions to whether the military establishment should have held this position in the first place. While some argued that this was inevitable due to the kind of security landscape Pakistan has and because other arms of state, primarily politicians, did not step up to the occasion. Others argued that this control was motivated by greed for more power but now that a lack of credibility, brought about due to the events of the past two years, has formed cracks in said control, they are struggling to keep hold of it. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the governments primary response to rising dissent has been to ban the social media platform X (Twitter), detain, often extrajudicially, people that were actively voicing dissent or protesting, and further augmenting surveillance on private communications between citizens. The strategy seems to be crush dissent using a variety of fear tactics and waiting for the raging sentiment to die down, which may work but the extent of its sustainability remains questionable, expressed P4,

We have started seeing this emergence of a counter-hegemonic narrative coming up in the mainstream, and it's going to eventually become much more visible, stronger, and unless like, unless crushed for a while, and that is also a possibility, but then it might reemerge after a few years, however there's always going to be a counter-hegemonic movement.²⁸

Most interviewees argued that trying to crush dissent using coercive measures and banning platforms is not a feasible long-term solution and instead the state narrative should be competing in that space for discourse with alternate narratives. As expressed by P5 “If you are concerned about anti-state narratives, then you have to build the narrative of pro-state or national integration. Compete in the same playground.”²⁹ Within the same context, P11 stated that the state’s attitude towards public opinion, especially as it is expressed online, needs to change and that it should be considered when making policy decisions, which is not currently the case,

The public opinion expressed in traditional media is already censored and controlled. However, the inability of the establishment or the government to enforce similar censorship on social media has led to this dismissive attitude of terming the youth as ‘ill-informed’ or ‘keyboard warriors’ or ‘trolls.’ Out of all available mediums, social media has offered the most emancipation

²⁸ Ms. Sadia Tasleem (Lecturer at Quaid-e-Azam University), May 2024.

²⁹ Mr. Zulfiqar Ali (Lecturer at National Defense University), May 2024.

for the public's narratives, and it has become so powerful that it has an impact on the situation on the ground. We have examples of the Arab Spring, the ongoing Israeli aggression in Gaza, the recent elections in Pakistan, etc. Public opinion should definitely be considered the highest priority during policymaking, as it is the general public that faces the consequences of the policies. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, we see a disconnect between the public and policies, as policies are formulated by the ruling elite, which is predominantly from the upper strata of society.³⁰

However, it is important to remember that given the post truth nature of today's information environment, it is becoming increasingly difficult for the layman to differentiate between fact and fiction in online discourses. In this regard, P10 suggested that the only long-term solution to this issue is not through banning the dissemination of ideas through certain platforms but to enhance media literacy in the country from a grass roots level. She believes this can be achieved through a public-private partnership which works towards inculcating media literacy as a subject in schools and early education. The reason why such a move cannot come from the government was stated to be that,

The public will see everything in a negative light, if it comes from the government. I think that the government should do a lot of work and without being the face of it. So, the government should some award funding to such projects. The problem of the government is that they have to score their own points. But to counter this post-truth, I think if the government does not give this information with its credentials, then it will be more acceptable. So, they need to work in a non-formal way.³¹

Most interviewees seemed cognizant of the fact that the state's reputation has been damaged badly in recent years and it will extra-ordinary measures in order to rebuild this trust. The public opinion shifting against the state, as evident from findings of the survey, is symbolic of the regime of truth concerning nationalistic discourses being dismantled and driven by genuine grievances as suggested by most interviewees. While it is true that we can see the post truth-hybrid warfare nexus play out in real time through the several examples of Indian attempts to spread disinformation against Pakistan, the common view amongst experts

³⁰ Anonymous researcher at an Islamabad based Think Tank.

³¹ Dr. Ayesha Siddiqua (Associate Professor at NUML), June, 2024.

interviewed was that these operations are enabled because of domestic fault lines. Therefore, addressing genuine grievances of the population is the only way to fortify the nation against the threats of informational and political warfare, alongside enhancing media literacy to root out the negative impacts of post truth.

Coercive measures, though they seem to be the way most states have chosen to go down, cannot keep the state in control of discourse in a sustainable manner. Social media and post truth have altered the way information is disseminated and received, altering the mechanisms of power/knowledge production. The state must now compete with alternate narratives in a level playing field and back their words with actions, since traditional avenues of information dissemination that allowed the state to promote grand narratives and the seemingly existential threat of the other to stay in power, have lost their audience to media systems where even a nobody can dismantle these narratives by showcasing the other side of the story.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The popularity of social media as a primary information source on current affairs across the globe has disrupted previously established channels of knowledge production and dissemination. Traditional mediums such as newspapers and state broadcasters as well as heavily regulated electronic media channels are not as popular as social media among the public as data gathered for this study has revealed. Further the osmosis of knowledge between international and local spheres due to globalization seems to have eroded any preferential status given to either local or international media in regard to information about current affairs in the country. These findings point towards a media landscape in which the state's role and influence has been reduced as compared to the past.

As deduced from the literature and a consensus of expert interviewees, today's information environment can be deemed as post-truth. While this is not necessarily a novel phenomenon the technological advancements in media systems and the advent of social media have intensified its reach and impact. A post-truth environment, defined by consensus of interviewees, is one where truth becomes insignificant or irrelevant and emotional appeal transcends the need for factual accuracy. Its primary merit is that it creates the space for alternative narratives to be shared and received, offering people some degree of emancipation from purely state-controlled narratives. However, as pointed out in several expert discussions, the lack of media literacy and irrelevance of truth mean that this claim of emancipation is problematic. The public lacks the awareness to perceive the difference between an alternative point of view and misinformation or disinformation. This aspect of a post truth environment heightens the risk of hostile actors, engaged in hybrid warfare, using media platforms to manipulate public opinion in order to achieve their strategic goals against the state.

Several interviewees gave recent examples of Indian disinformation attempts from the Pulwama attacks to the fall of Kabul, to the recent civil protests in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, to showcase instances of the social media space being utilized for hybrid warfare objectives. However, a significant point of consideration here is that hostile actors are able to successfully operate in this space because there are existing domestic fault lines to exploit. The condition of state-society relationships in the country has worsened after the recent episode of political turmoil in the country following the ouster of ex-prime minister Imran

Khan. There was considerable outrage against state institutions and people seemed to crowd around narratives holding the establishment responsible for orchestrating the ouster because Khan was supposedly not staying in line as dictated.

While this outrage seemed to many the first instance of such outright revolt and anger against state institutions, experts rightly pointed out that was not entirely the case. The secession of East Pakistan in 1971 was in part supported by a clash of narratives, in which the state ultimately lost, losing its power over the region simultaneously. It is pertinent to note that this happened in a time where the public did not have access to avenues like social media, and yet the state could not stay in control of the popular narrative. This leads us to the point that genuine grievances of the population, which a few experts pointed out was the case especially for the people in more “troubled” areas like Balochistan and erstwhile FATA, need to be addressed effectively in order to counter foreign manipulation of the narrative against the state. The overuse of the term “hybrid warfare” was also called into question in this context, given the state’s, media’s, and academia’s propensity to consider any form of dissent or dissenting point of view as a potential hybrid warfare tool instead of focusing on addressing its concerns.

Based on the research in this study, this approach to the narrative war might not prove to be successful, since public opinion, as determined from responses to the survey, is pitted staunchly against the state. A majority of the people disagree with the state narratives on a variety of different issues, symbolic of a fall from the status of regime of truth in the country, which many experts believed state institutions, namely the military, held until a few years ago. This coupled with the fact that the state has resorted to banning twitter, viewed by most experts as a short-sighted policy, and heavy surveillance and censorship, seems to suggest that the state is losing the battle on the narrative front. However, this raises the question of whether the state can ever regain its position as the ultimate settler of national discourse and narratives, given the post-truth nature of today’s information environment.

Here the framework for this research, Foucault’s power/knowledge theory, can provide vital insights. According to this theory, power and knowledge form a loop with one reinforcing the other such that, in order to be powerful, one has to be in control of the apparatuses of knowledge production and dissemination and in order to get that control one has to assert dominance over society. While the state continues to enjoy ultimate authority and dominance through its ability to exert power and control, the democratized nature of today’s information

systems, in other words social media platforms, means that the state or for that matter any entity cannot effectively control them.

The state still has access to coercive measures, which we can see it utilizing across the globe, however, it is yet to be seen how far the efficacy of such measures that curtail the freedom of speech and thought will stretch. Expert interviewees believed that state's must come clean to their populations and uphold accountability and transparency in order to gain back their trust. In this process they must let go of their own usage of propaganda and emotionally charged narratives, which will be a significant challenge. However, without looking towards pre-emptive, out of the box solutions, state institutions will find themselves at the losing side in the battle of discourses.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abbas, Z. (2024, July 2). *The surveillance system keeping tabs on millions*. DAWN.COM; DAWN.COM. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1843299>
- Ahmed, A. (2024, January 20). *Pakistan faced worst economic crisis in 2023, says Human Rights Watch*. DAWN.COM. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1807228#:~:text=ISLAMABAD%3A%20Pakistan%20of%20aced%20one%20of>
- Ahmed, I. (2020). *Pakistan, the garrison state : origins, evolution, consequences (1947-2011)*. Karachi Oxford University Press.
- Alaphilippe, G. M. A., Adamczyk, R., & Grégoire, A. (2020, December 9). *Indian Chronicles: deep dive into a 15-year operation targeting the EU and UN to serve Indian interests*. EU DisinfoLab. <https://www.disinfo.eu/publications/indian-chronicles-deep-dive-into-a-15-year-operation-targeting-the-eu-and-un-to-serve-indian-interests/>
- Arendt, H. (1967, February 17). *Truth and Politics*. The New Yorker. <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1967/02/25/truth-and-politics>
- Aziz, F. (2024, April 25). *The ministry of (dis)information and the ban on X*. DAWN.COM. <https://www.dawn.com/news/1828972>
- Aziz, M. (2007). *Military Control in Pakistan*. Routledge.
- BBC News. (2020, June 29). *India bans TikTok, WeChat and dozens more Chinese apps*. BBC News. <https://www.bbc.com/news/technology-53225720>
- Berelson, B. R., Lazarsfeld, P. F., & McPhee, W. N. (1954). *Voting: A study of opinion formation in a presidential campaign*. University of Chicago Press.
- Bhattacharjee, A. (2019). *Chapter 9 Survey Research | Research Methods for the Social Sciences*. Lumenlearning.com. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/suny-hccc-research-methods/chapter/chapter-9-survey-research/>
- Bishop, M., & Goldman, E. (2003). *The Strategy and Tactics of Information Warfare*. Contemporary Security Policy, 24(1), 113-139.
- Bollen, J., Mao, H., & Pepe, A. (2021). *Modeling Public Mood and Emotion: Twitter Sentiment and Socio-Economic Phenomena*.” Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media 5, no.1: 450-453. <https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v5i1.14171>
- Brooker, R. G., & Schaefer, T. (Year). *Methods of measuring public opinion*. In R. G. Brooker & T. Schaefer (Eds.), *Public opinion in the 21st century*.

- Bufacchi, V. (2020). Truth, lies and tweets: A Consensus Theory of Post-Truth. *Philosophy & Social Criticism*, 47(3), 019145371989638. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453719896382>
- Burbridge, Dean A. 2013. *Employing U.S. Information Operations Against Hybrid Warfare Threats*. Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania: United States Army War College.
- Caliskan, M., & Cramers, P.-A. (2018). What do you mean by “hybrid warfare”? A content analysis on the media coverage of hybrid warfare concept. *Humanities and Social Sciences Reviews*, 1(4), 23-35. <https://doi.org/10.31175/hi.2018.04.02>
- Davies, C. (2023, June 8). Why Imran Khan has disappeared from Pakistan’s media. *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-65831780>
- Dean, M. (2009). Three Conceptions of the Relationship between Power and Liberty. In S. R. Clegg & M. Haugaard (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Power* (pp. 177–193). Sage.
- Deep, Alex. 2015. “Hybrid War: Old Concept, New Techniques.” *Small Wars Journal*. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/hybrid-war-old-concept-new-techniques>.
- Deligiaouri, A. (2018). Discursive construction of truth, ideology and the emergence of post-truth narratives in contemporary political communication. *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*, 14(3), 301–315. https://doi.org/10.1386/macp.14.3.301_1
- Deni, John R. 2017. “More of the Same in Response to Russia?” Carnegie Europe. <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/74811>.
- Dewey, J., & Rogers, M. L. (2012). *The public and its problems: An essay in political inquiry*. Penn State Press.
- Dorosh, L., Astramowicz-Leyk, T., & Turchyn, Y. (2021). The impact of post-truth politics as a hybrid information influence on the status of international and national security: the attributes of interpretation and the search for counteraction mechanisms. *European Politics and Society*, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23745118.2021.1873041>
- Ekwueme, E., & Bhagheri, M. (2019-2020). Money cleansing and effectiveness of FATF coercive measures: An overview. *Amicus Curiae*, 1(2), 274.
- ET Online. (2024, June 5). *Dhruv Rathee factor? How YouTubers ruined Modi-led BJP’s game in Lok Sabha elections 2024*. The Economic Times; Economic Times. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/elections/lok-sabha/india/dhruv-rathee-factor-how-youtubers-ruined-modi-led-bjps-game-in-lok-sabha-elections-2024/articleshow/110722407.cms?from=mdr>
- Express Tribune. (2024). DG ISPR Major General Ahmed Sharif Highlights 'X' Ban in Pakistan. You tube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LWfYxPozrVY>.
- Foucault, M. (1980a). Truth and power. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *POWER/KNOWLEDGE Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (pp. 109–133). Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1980b). Two lectures. In C. Gordon (Ed.), *POWER/KNOWLEDGE Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (pp. 78–108). Pantheon Books.

- Gaddis, J. L. (2005). *The Cold War: A new history*. Penguin Books.
- Gehlbach, S. Sonin, K. (2008). Government Control of Media. CEFIR, <https://www.wallis.rochester.edu/assets/pdf/walliseminarseries/GehlbachSoninRochester2.pdf>.
- Gerbaudo, P. (2018). *The Digital Party: Political Organisation and Online Democracy*. Pluto Press.
- Germain, T. (2024, April 27). *The ghosts of India's TikTok: What happens when a social media app is banned*. *Www.bbc.com*. <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20240426-the-ghosts-of-indias-tiktok-social-media-ban>
- Gershaneck, K. K. (2020). Political warfare: The People's Republic of China's strategy "to win without fighting." *Journal of Advanced Military Studies*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.21140/mcu.j.2020110103>
- Gershkoff, A., & Kushner, S. (2005). Shaping public opinion: The 9/11-Iraq connection in the Bush administration's rhetoric. *Perspectives on Politics*, 3(3), 525-537. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592705050340>
- Giordano, A. (2020). Post-Truth, Polarization and Other Emotional Threats to Democracy. *Nordicum-Mediterraneum*, 15(2). <https://doi.org/10.33112/nm.15.2.2>
- Glenn, Russell W. 2009. "Thoughts on "Hybrid" Conflict." *Small Wars Journal*. <https://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/188-glenn.pdf>.
- Harsin, J. (2015). Regimes of Posttruth, Postpolitics, and Attention Economies. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 8(2), 327-333. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cccr.12097>
- Harwell, D., & Lorenz, T. (2023, November 2). Israel-Gaza war sparks debate over TikTok's role in setting public opinion. *Washington Post*. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/11/02/tiktok-israel-hamas-video-brainwash/>
- Heller, K. J. (1996). Power, subjectification and resistance in Foucault. *SubStance*, 25(1), 78-110. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3685230>
- Hetherington, M. J., & Nelson, M. (2003). Anatomy of a Rally Effect: George W. Bush and the War on Terrorism. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 36(1), 37-42.
- Ho, R., Li, X., Marot-Achillas, T., Mortlock, C., & Zeng, H. (n.d.). *The Truth Behind Fake News Insights into the perceived trustworthiness of news and its link to policy decisions*. Retrieved January 18, 2021, from <https://info.lse.ac.uk/staff/divisions/Teaching-and-Learning-Centre/Assets/Documents/GROUPS-papers/GROUPS-2017/Group-9-The-Truth-Behind-Fake-News.pdf>
- Hoffman, Frank G. 2007. *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars*. Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies.

<https://rm.coe.int/information-disorder-report-november-2017/1680764666>

- Hussain, A. (2023, December 18). *Pakistan's Imran Khan delivers AI-generated speech to campaign from prison*. Al Jazeera. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/12/18/pakistans-imran-khan-delivers-ai-generated-speech-to-campaign-from-prison>
- Hyvönen, A.-E. (2022). Platforms of Post-Truth: Outlines of a Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. In S. MCGLINCHEY, L. S. F. LIN, Z. S. BALCI , & P. VERNON (Eds.), *Global Politics in a Post-Truth Era* (pp. 15–29). E-International Relations. <https://www.e-ir.info/publication/global-politics-in-a-post-truth-age/>
- Ignas Kalpokas. (2019). *A Political Theory of Post-Truth*. Cham Springer International Publishing.
- Javaid Jehangir. (2024, May 4). *Crisis of public trust in governance*. Brecorder; Brecorder. <https://www.brecorder.com/news/40301648#:~:text=In%20Pakistan%2C%20we%20have%20witnessed>
- Jordan, Larry J. 2008. *Hybrid War: Is the U.S. Army Ready for the Face of 21st Century Warfare?* Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: U.S. Army Command and General Staff College.
- Kakilla, C. (2021). Strengths and Weaknesses of Semi-Structured Interviews in Qualitative Research: A Critical Essay. *Preprints*. <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202106.0491.v1>
- Kashmir fake photo: Fallout from the UN speech by Pakistan's Maleeha Lodhi. (2017, September 30). *BBC News*. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-41427929>
- Kennan, G. F. (1948). The sources of Soviet conduct. *Foreign Affairs*, 25(4), 566-582. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20030001>.
- Kuhn, T. (1962). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. University of Chicago Press.
- Lacatus, C., & Meibauer, G. (2020). Introduction to the special issue: Elections, rhetoric and American foreign policy in the age of Donald Trump. *Politics*, 41(1), 026339572093537. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263395720935376>
- Law, A. (2017). Post-truth and fake news. *Media Education Journal*, 61, 3–6. <https://rke.abertay.ac.uk/en/publications/post-truth-and-fake-news>
- Laybats, C., & Tredinnick, L. (2016). Post truth, information, and emotion. *Business Information Review*, 33(4), 204–206. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0266382116680741>
- Lilleker, D. G. (2018). Politics in a post-truth era. *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*, 14(3), 277–282. https://doi.org/10.1386/macp.14.3.277_2
- Lowell, A. L. (1919). *Public opinion and popular government*. Longmans, Green.

- LUCAS, S., & MISTRY, K. (2009). Illusions of Coherence: George F. Kennan, U.S. Strategy and Political Warfare in the Early Cold War, 1946-1950. *Diplomatic History*, 33(1), 39–66. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44214002>
- MARSHALL, H., & DRIESCHOVA, A. (2018). Post-Truth Politics in the UK's Brexit Referendum. *New Perspectives*, 26(3), 89–106. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26675075>
- Masoodi, N. (2024, May 12). "Azadi": Huge Protests, Clashes With Cops In Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir (D. Achom, Ed.). NDTV.com. <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/azadi-say-protesters-amid-clashes-with-cops-in-pakistan-occupied-kashmir-5644583>
- Matos, C. (2012). *Mass media and globalization*. ResearchGate; unknown. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/276025568_Mass_media_and_globalization
- Mattis, N. James and Frank G. Hoffman. 2005. "Future Warfare: The Rise of Hybrid Wars." Proceedings, November 2005: 18–19.
- McCuen, John J. 2008. "Hybrid Wars". *Military Review* Mar/Apr 2008 88(2): 107-113.
- McGregor, Shannon C. 2019. "Social media as public opinion: How journalists use social media to represent public opinion." *Sage Journals* 20, no. 8: 1070-1086. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1464884919845458>
- Mcintyre, L. (2018). *Post-Truth* (pp. 1–16). The MIT Press.
- McWilliams, Sean J. 2009. *Hybrid War Beyond Lebanon: Lessons from the South African Campaign 1976 to 1989*. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College.
- Mediavoir. (2024). Top News Channels in Pakistan. Retrieved July 24, 2024, <https://www.pakistantvratings.com/top-news-channels-in-pakistan/>.
- Mockaitis, Thomas R. 1995. *British Counterinsurgency in the Post-imperial Era*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Moffitt, B. (2016). *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation*. Stanford University Press.
- Moy, Patricia and Bosch, Brandon, "Theories of public opinion" (2013). Sociology Department, Faculty Publications. 244. <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/sociologyfacpub/244>
- Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2017). *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Mueller, J. E. (1970). Presidential Popularity from Truman to Johnson. *American Political Science Review*, 64(1), 18-34.
- Mueller, R. S. (2019). Report on the investigation into Russian interference in the 2016 presidential election. U.S. Department of Justice.

- Murray II, William C. 2017. *Hybrid Warfare Dilemmas in the Middle Colonies during the American Revolution*. Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: School of Advanced Military Studies, United States Army Command and General Staff College.
- Murray, Williamson, and Peter R. Mansoor (eds). 2012. *Hybrid Warfare: Fighting Complex*
- National Public Opinion Poll Report. (2023). In *Gallup*. Gallup Pakistan. <https://gallup.com.pk/post/35354>
- NATO. 2015. NATO's Response to Hybrid Threats. Last updated March 16, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_156338.htm#:~:text=To%20deter%20hybrid%20threats%2C%20NATO,its%20deterrence%20and%20defence%20posture.
- Nemeth, William J. 2002. *Future War and Chechnya: A Case for Hybrid Warfare*. MA Thesis, Monterey, CA: Naval Post Graduate School.
- Newman, N. (2018, May 30). *Overview and Key Findings of the 2018 Digital News Report*. Reuters Institute Digital News Report. <https://www.digitalnewsreport.org/survey/2018/overview-key-findings-2018/>
- No morning English daily carried the news. (2009, April 3). DAWN.COM; DAWN.COM. <https://www.dawn.com/news/454904/no-morning-english-daily-carried-the-news>
- Opponents from the Ancient World to the Present. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- Overbey, Lucas A., Scott C. Batson, Jamie Lyle, Christopher Williams, Robert Regal, and Lakeisha Williams. 2017. "Linking Twitter sentiment and event data to monitor public opinion of geopolitical developments and trends." In *Social, Cultural, and Behavioral Modeling: 10th International Conference, SBP-BRiMS 2017, Washington, DC, USA, July 5-8, Proceedings 10*, pp. 223-229. Springer International Publishing, 2017. DOI:10.1007/978-3-319-60240-026
- Oxford Languages. (2016). *Oxford Word of the Year 2016*. Oup.com. <https://languages.oup.com/word-of-the-year/2016/>
- Pakistan / RSF*. (n.d.). Rsf.org. <https://rsf.org/en/country/pakistan>
- Palmer, P. A. (1936). Public opinion in political theory. In C. Wittke (Ed.), *Essays in history and political theory: In honor of Charles Howard McIlwain* (pp. 230–257). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Price, V. (1992). *Public opinion*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Price, V. (2007). The public and public opinion. In W. Donsbach & M. W. Traugott (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of public opinion research* (pp. 7-24). SAGE Publications.
- Reporters without borders. (2024). *Index / RSF*. Rsf.org. <https://rsf.org/en/index>
- Robinson, L., Helmus, T. C., Cohen, R. S., Nader, A., Radin, A., Magnuson, M., & Migacheva, K. (2019). The growing need to focus on modern political warfare (RB-10071). RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_briefs/RB10071.html

- Roloff, R., & Dunay, P. (2018). The Age of Post-Truth: State Influence and Strategic Communication - Contemporary Security Challenges on Europe's Eastern Flank. *Connections: The Quarterly Journal*, 17(2), 19–35. <https://doi.org/10.11610/connections.17.2.02>
- Rose, J. (2017). Brexit, Trump, and Post-Truth Politics. *Public Integrity*, 19(6), 555–558. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10999922.2017.1285540>
- Sahin, Kaan. 2017. “Germany Confronts Russian Hybrid Warfare.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/07/26/germany-confronts-russian-hybrid-warfare-pub-72636>.
- Salgado, S. (2018). Online media impact on politics. Views on post-truth politics and postpostmodernism. *International Journal of Media & Cultural Politics*, 14(3), 317–331. https://doi.org/10.1386/macp.14.3.317_1
- Schleffer, G. Miller, B. (2021). The Political Effect of Social Media on Different Regimes. *Media and Democracy*, Summer, 77-103. <http://dx.doi.org/10.26153/tsw/13987>.
- SciMago. (2024). Country Media Ranking: Pakistan. Retrieved July 24, 2024, https://www.scimagomedia.com/rankings.php?country=Pakistan&total_size=20&order=overall&ord=desc.
- Shah, H. J., & Ehsan, M. (2022). Hybrid warfare: emerging challenges for Pakistan. *Journal of Contemporary Studies*, 11(2). <https://jcs.ndu.edu.pk/site/article/download/234/176/203>
- Shahzad, A. (2024). Social Media Platform X Blocked in Pakistan over National Security. Reuters, April 18, 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/pakistan-blocked-social-media-platform-x-over-national-security-ministry-says-2024-04-17/>.
- Shedd, David R. and Ivana Stradner. 2020. “Putin Is Winning Russia’s Hybrid War against America.” National Review. <https://www.nationalreview.com/2020/12/putin-is-winning-russias-hybrid-war-against-america/>.
- Sheikh, H. (2022). AI as a Tool of Hybrid Warfare: Challenges and Responses. *Journal of Information Warfare*, 21(2), 36–49. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27199968>
- Simpson, Erin. M. 2005. Thinking about Modern Conflict: Hybrid Wars, Strategy, and War Aims. Paper presented to the Annual Meeting of the Midwest Political Science Association, Chicago.
- Speier, H. (1950). Historical development of public opinion. *American Journal of Sociology*, 55(4), 376-388.
- Starr, P. (2020). The Flooded Zone How We Became More Vulnerable to Disinformation in the Digital Era. In W. L. Bennett & S. Livingston (Eds.), *The Disinformation Age Politics* (pp. 67–92). Cambridge University Press.
- Su, Y. (2022). The Study of the Influence of Social Media on PostTruth Era. *Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 664.

- Suiter, J. (2016). Post-truth Politics. *Political Insight*, 7(3), 25–27. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2041905816680417>
- Sunstein, C. R. (2001). *Republic.com*. Princeton University Press.
- Șuşnea, E., & Buță, I.-C. (2021). Artificial intelligence in hybrid warfare: A literature review and classification. *Journal Name*, 17(1), 294-302. <https://doi.org/10.53477/2668-2001-21-37>
- Tang, D. (2024, March 14). *US lawmakers see TikTok as China's tool, even as it distances itself from Beijing*. AP News. <https://apnews.com/article/china-unitedstates-tiktok-chew-2d851c716d6454d7c87762a056604c7a>
- The Economist. (2024, May 23). *India's YouTubers take on Narendra Modi*. The Economist; The Economist. <https://www.economist.com/asia/2024/05/23/indias-youtubers-take-on-narendra-modi>
- The European Commission. 2016. FAQ: Joint Framework on Countering Hybrid Threats. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/MEMO_16_1250,
- Thirty-fourth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2734 (2024) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities . (2024). In UN. UNSC. <http://undocs.org/S/2024/556>
- Torring, J. (2009). Power and Discourse: Towards an Anti-Foundationalist Concept of Power. In S. R. Clegg & M. Haugaard (Eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Power* (pp. 108–124). Sage.
- Treadwell, D., & Davis, A. (2019). *Introducing communication research : paths of inquiry* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Tufekci, Z. (2017). *Twitter and Tear Gas: The Power and Fragility of Networked Protest*. Yale University Press.
- Vasu, N., Ang, B., Jayakumar, S., Faizal, M., & Ahuja, J. (2018). *FAKE NEWS: NATIONAL SECURITY IN THE POST-TRUTH ERA Policy Report*. https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/PR180313_Fake-News_WEB.pdf
- von Soest, C. (2022). Why Do We Speak to Experts? Reviving the Strength of the Expert Interview Method. *Perspectives on Politics*, 21(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s1537592722001116>
- Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, 359(6380), 1146–1151. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559>
- Walker, Robert G. 1998. *Spec Fi: The United States Marines Corps and Special Operations*. MA Thesis, Monterey, CA: Naval Post Graduate School.
- Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922).
- Wang, Hao, Doğan Can, Abe Kazemzadeh, François Bar, and Shrikanth Narayanan. 2012. "A system for real-time Twitter sentiment analysis of 2012 us presidential election cycle."

In Proceedings of the ACL 2012 system demonstrations, Republic of Korea, 8-14 July, pp. 115-120. Jeju: Association for Computational Linguistics. <chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://aclanthology.org/P12-3020.pdf>

Wardle, C., & Derakhshan, H. (2017). *Information Disorder: Toward an Interdisciplinary Framework for Research and Policymaking*. Council of Europe.

Weir, L. (2008). The Concept of Truth Regime. *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 33(2). <https://doi.org/10.29173/cjs608>

Welch, D. (1994). *The Third Reich: Politics and propaganda*. Routledge.

Wight, C. (2018). Post-Truth, Postmodernism and Alternative Facts. *New Perspectives*, 26(3), 17–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2336825x1802600302>

Wu, F., Huberman, B.A. (2008). How Public Opinion Forms. In: Papadimitriou, C., Zhang, S. (eds) *Internet and Network Economics*. WINE 2008. Lecture Notes in Computer Science, vol 5385. Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-540-92185-1_39

APPENDIX A

PLAGIARISM REPORT

Thesis submission by Fatima Ayaz, supervised by Dr Bakare.docx

ORIGINALITY REPORT

4%	3%	3%	2%
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

PRIMARY SOURCES

1	dione.lib.unipi.gr Internet Source	<1 %
2	www.ndu.edu.pk Internet Source	<1 %
3	dokumen.pub Internet Source	<1 %
4	open.metu.edu.tr Internet Source	<1 %
5	etd.uwc.ac.za Internet Source	<1 %
6	etheses.dur.ac.uk Internet Source	<1 %
7	eprints.leedsbeckett.ac.uk Internet Source	<1 %
8	Kjetil Rommetveit. "Post-Truth Imaginations - New Starting Points for Critique of Politics and Technoscience", Routledge, 2021 Publication	<1 %

APPENDIX B

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

This is a completely anonymous survey.

1. Select your age bracket

<15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+
-----	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-------	-----

2. Which region do you belong to?

North Punjab	South Punjab	Karachi	Sindh	Islamabad	erstwhile FATA	KPK	AJK	Balochistan	Gilgit Baltistan
-----------------	-----------------	---------	-------	-----------	-------------------	-----	-----	-------------	---------------------

3. What's your gender?

Male	Female	Other
------	--------	-------

4. To what extent do you rely on newspapers to understand current affairs in the country?

Select one option						
Highly	1	2	3	4	5	Not at all

5. Which newspapers do you read most frequently?

6. To what extent do you rely on media channels (Geo, ARY, etc) to understand current affairs in the country?

Select one option						
Highly	1	2	3	4	5	Not at all

7. Which news channel do you watch most frequently?

8. To what extent do you rely on International media channels (Al-Jazeera, BBC, CNN, SKY, etc) to understand current affairs in the country?

Select one option						
Highly	1	2	3	4	5	Not at all

9. Which international news channels do you watch most frequently?

10. To what extent do you rely on Social media (twitter, Instagram, facebook) to understand current affairs in the country?

Select one option						
Highly	1	2	3	4	5	Not at all

11. How regularly do you use each platform?

	Only use this	Mostly use this	Use it sometimes	Do not use this	Don't use social media at all
Facebook					
Instagram					
Twitter					
TikTok					
Threads					
YouTube					
Telegram					

12. To what extent do you rely on local youtubers to understand current affairs in the country?

Select one option						
Highly	1	2	3	4	5	Not at all

13. To what extent do you rely on foreign youtubers to understand current affairs in the country?

Select one option						
Highly	1	2	3	4	5	Not at all

14. Name some Youtubers/influencers that you follow to understand current affairs?

15. How much do you agree with the following statements? (1 = highly, 5 = not at all)

1. PTI is acting against national interest.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

2. Civilian governments are less efficient than military dictatorships.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

3. State actions in Balochistan are effective.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

4. The recent elections have upheld democratic standards.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

5. The democratic cycle has not been disturbed.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

6. The state has used appropriate measures against protestors from 9th May.

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

7. The state has used appropriate measures against protestors from Balochistan (January 2024).

1	2	3	4	5
---	---	---	---	---

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

Interview questions:

1. Would you define today's information environment in Pakistan and globally as being post truth?
2. What is your view/opinion about the notion that a post truth environment offers people emancipation from state-controlled narratives?
3. Would you consider this as net positive?
4. In Pakistan the establishment has always had a key role in shaping the national narrative especially regarding issues of national security. In your view, is it considerate to label the establishment as the regime of truth in Pakistan?
5. Do you think there has been a significant rise in animosity against this notion? Has the public opinion shifted regarding considering the establishment a regime of truth amongst other state actors such as politicians?
6. To what extent do you think actors engaged in hybrid warfare against the country, can manipulate public opinion to their devices and how have recent political events impacted this situation?
 - a. Which local, regional, and international actors do you see using the post truth information environment to engage in information warfare against Pakistan?
7. In the context of hybrid warfare, do you think a post truth environment plays a significant role, given the amount of disinformation and misinformation that prevails?
8. Public opinion, especially as expressed online, is often disregarded in policy discussions since it is considered hyperbolic and attributed to "keyboard warrior" or "trolls". In your opinion does public opinion as a force of change have enough power to warrant consideration when making policy, in the context of our political culture and circumstances?
9. The state has banned twitter, a popular social media website, seemingly to counter narratives it deems to be "anti-state" in nature. Do you think this is a feasible and effective way to counter "anti-state" narratives?

10. How do you see the post-truth and hybrid warfare nexus playing out in the future, both in Pakistan and globally?