



Local media in Pakistan contributes to **peaceful elections**

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On 25th of July 2018, the Pakistani national elections are taking place. A turbulent time for the media considering the fact that the elections are usually accompanied by a lot of violence, obstruction of voting, disinformation and pressure on media outlets. Supported by Free Press Unlimited, local media outlets in Pakistan are taking their responsibility to contribute to peaceful and fair elections and improve the coverage.

Pakistan holds a dire position as one of the most hostile media climates in the world*. In the run-up to the elections, violence against journalists and media outlets is increasing. Independent and reliable media are being pressured. In the last couple of months there have been internet and social media shut downs. Both a violation of some of the most important fundamental rights of the citizens of Pakistan such as: the right to information, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, guaranteed under the Constitution of Pakistan.

Role of the local media

Free Press Unlimited and her local media partners believe that a wide, balanced and well informed coverage of the 2018 national elections is essential. Our local media partners take their responsibility to contribute to peaceful elections and providing fact-based news from under reported areas in Pakistan.

This is how:

- Digital Rights Foundation strives for online and offline inclusivity of all minorities during the elections. “We monitor the instances of fake news and misinformation on political platforms but also conduct election observations of polling stations from the prism of inclusivity of women, disabled persons and transgender persons,” says Maryam Saeed, programme director at Digital Rights Foundation.
- Bytes For All launched the national campaign ‘I You We Peace Pledge’. Furthermore, with PakVotes – a digital media tool- they monitor elections irregularities. Shahzad Ahmad, Director at Bytes For All: “Following the horrible attacks a few weeks ago we started this campaign to urge people to pledge for peace. This means supporting peace by voting for peace. So not voting for parties who promote hate speech or discrimination of certain minorities.” Shahzad continues: “We were surprised by the amount of support we received in

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such a short time. Even some right wing politicians signed and supported the pledge. It is heartwarming to see so many people stand for peace in country where elections are overshadowed with violence and hate.”

- Pakistan Press Foundation focusses on monitoring election related violence against Pakistani media and improving the quantity and quality of the elections coverage. To achieve the latter they trained journalists throughout the country. The rules and regulation and do's and don'ts of election covering were just a few of the topics that were covered in the trainings. “A lot of journalists didn't know the journalistic ethics or what fact-based reporting is, so the trainings were an eye-opener for everyone”, says Owais Aslam Ali, director at Pakistan Press Foundation. And as a founding member of the Free and Fair Election Network in Pakistan, they also trained 1,000 journalists in Karachi to become election observers. Two hours prior to the elections, the observers start their day by inspecting and observing the polling stations.

The disinformation regarding the elections and pressure on traditional media in Pakistan has been quite extreme this year. Boris van Westering, project leader at Free Press Unlimited says: “We're very proud of all our Pakistani media partners. It's admirable and impressive to see the great lengths our partners go through to deliver reliable news and information to people of all ethnicities, religions and languages.”

**According to Freedom of the Press report published by Freedom House, Pakistan is 141st place on the list.*

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CONTACT DETAILS

Weesperstraat 3

1018 DN Amsterdam

The Netherlands

T: +31 20 8000400

E: info[at]freepressunlimited.org

IBAN: NL92 INGB 000 000 7676



PARTNERS

greenhost.



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