

Imran Khan, Maryam Nawaz, Shahbaz Sharif, Bilawal Bhutto and Aseefa Bhutto most popular Pakistani politicians on social media: research study

Study also shows politicians are better than their parties in digital political communication

PRESS RELEASE

ISLAMABAD: July 15, 2018: Individual politicians in Pakistan have more followers on their personal social media accounts than the official social media platform accounts of their political parties. This is revealed in a new research study on the digital footprint of Pakistani political parties and politicians ahead of the July 25, 2018 general elections titled “Parties Online: Political Communications and Digital Democracy in Pakistan”.

Conducted by Islamabad-based Institute for Research, Advocacy and Development (IRADA), which is focused on strengthening political and social development and defending civil liberties, the study shows that there are at least four Pakistani politicians who had over one million followers on their Facebook accounts and at least eight politicians who have over one million followers on their Twitter accounts.

The study shows that the PTI, PML-N and PPP leaders are most efficient users of Twitter for political communication while PTI and PML-N leaders are most resourceful users of Facebook. Imran Khan, Maryam Nawaz and Shahbaz Sharif are the most prolific and most followed Pakistani politicians on both Facebook and Twitter with their combined followership on both these social media platforms running into between five and ten million each. Bilawal Bhutto and Aseefa Bhutto perform well with around two million or more followers but have ‘only’ hundreds of thousands of followers on Facebook.

Two weeks before the July 25 elections, the top 10 most popular Pakistani politicians on Facebook are Imran Khan (PTI) with 8.120 million followers; Jahangir Tareen (PTI) – 3.139 million; Shahbaz Sharif (PML-N) – 2.080 million; Sirajul Haq (JI) – 1.127 million; Shah Mehmood Qureshi (PTI) – 975,529; Pervaiz Elahi (PML-Q) – 726,058; Maryam Nawaz (PML-N) – 666,003; Saad Rafique (PML-N) – 568,161; Mustafa Kamal (PSP) – 405,714; and Jawad Ahmed (BPP) – 354,914. Maryam is the only female in the top 10 most-followed Facebook followed politicians. Other politicians with over 100,000 followers on Facebook include Mian Aslam (JI) with 277,717 followers, Aseefa Bhutto (PPP) with 223,070 followers, Fauzia Kasuri (PSP) with 133,587 followers and Bilawal Bhutto (PPP) with 112,363 followers.

Two weeks before the July 25 elections, the top 10 most popular Pakistani politicians on Twitter are Imran Khan (PTI) with 8.058 million followers; Maryam Nawaz (PML-N) – 4.740 million; Shahbaz Sharif (PML-N) – 3.999 million; Bilawal Bhutto (PPP) – 2.738 million; Jahangir Tareen (PTI) – 2,522 million; Aseefa Bhutto (PPP) – 1.988 million; Shah Mahmood Qureshi (PTI) – 1.605 million; Saad Rafique (PML-N) – 1.496 million; Sherry Rehman (PPP) – 808,188 and Fauzia Kasuri (PSP) – 740,002. Four of the 10 politicians are female – Maryam Nawaz, Aseefa Bhutto, Sherry Rehman and Fauzia Kasuri. Other politicians with over 100,000 followers on Twitter include Sirajul Haq (JI) with 690,894 followers, Faisal Sabzwari (MQM-P) with 200,709 followers, Bushra Gohar (ANP) with 131,564 followers and Raza Haroon (MQM-P) with 101,621 followers.

The study looked at the questions of what is the basic digital footprint of political parties in Pakistan and how do they communicate online and what platforms, including social media, do they use and how successful are they in terms of their reach? The findings reveal that unlike individual politicians with larger followership of their personal social media accounts, Pakistan's 15 of the oldest as well as newest political parties have severe shortcomings in terms of political communication.

Other key findings of the study, conducted by researchers Adnan Rehmat and Aftab Alam, include the following:

- **Constitution:** Most parties do not share their constitution on their websites – so neither their members have access to information about procedures on internal elections and party structures nor do the public have access to basic information about the parties' mission, goals and objectives or party membership criteria.
- **Manifestos:** Most parties that have websites had uploaded their latest manifestos for the 2018 elections. However, most of the previous manifestos have disappeared, leaving citizens interested in comparative evaluation of two consecutive manifestos unable to do so.
- **Languages:** An overwhelming majority of political parties in Pakistan have their websites in the English language. Only two parties have bilingual (English and Urdu) websites while some have only Urdu websites.
- **Provincial outreach:** Not a single party, including those focused on provincial-focused nationalist, ethnic and linguist politics, have content in provincial languages such as Sindhi, Seraiki, Balochi, Pashto and Punjabi.
- **Leadership lists:** Most parties share the lists of their central leaders on their websites but half of the parties do not share lists of the leaders of their provincial chapters even though most parties have strong provincial-level political focus.
- **Decision-making:** Barely half of the parties share the lists of members of their central executive committee and general body. Most parties do not even share lists of their current legislators online.
- **Documentation:** Most parties are poor in archiving official party positions and decisions as most neither share minutes or details of the party's central executive committee meetings nor minutes or details of the party's general body meetings.
- **Focal persons:** Almost no party shares either the name of their communications focal person on their websites or even official party email address.
- **Audit reports:** Not even a single party surveyed shares either the latest or previous audited reports of the party's accounts and finances on their websites.

- **Social media:** Almost all parties in Pakistan are active on social media and maintain official Facebook pages and official Twitter accounts. It also appears that political parties prefer to use social media as the primary tool to communicate with their electorate instead of their website. Key leaders of most parties rely on social media platforms heavily to drive both party agendas and personal political communication.

The parties chosen for this survey include some of the oldest ones that have been elected to national parliament and provincial legislatures in this millennium such as Pakistan People's Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N), Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf (PTI), Awami National Party (ANP), Jamiat Ulema Islam-F (JUI-F), Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM), National Party Pakistan (NPP), Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party (PKMAP), Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q), Pakistan Muslim League-F (PML-F) and Qaumi Watan Party (QWP) as well as some relatively new ones including Pak Sarzameen Party (PSP), Awami Workers Party (AWP) and Barabari Party Pakistan (BPP).

The complete report with its detailed data and findings can be found on www.irada.org.pk

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