

Reporting for Duty: How A Network of Pakistan-Based Accounts Leveraged Mass Reporting to Silence Critics

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September 1, 2020



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1 Summary

On August 31, 2020, Facebook suspended 103 Pages, 78 Groups, 453 Facebook accounts, and 107 Instagram accounts for engaging in coordinated inauthentic behavior. As it notes in its [takedown report](#), Facebook attributed this network to individuals in Pakistan. Facebook shared a portion of this network with the Stanford Internet Observatory on August 28. In our investigation, we find that the network engaged in mass reporting: the coordinated reporting of accounts ostensibly for violating a platform’s terms of service. The network encouraged users to mass-report accounts that were critical of Islam and the Pakistani government, and in some cases accounts that were part of the Ahmadi religious community. The network also had messaging praising the Pakistani military, along with some Indian military fan Pages and Groups of unclear purpose. The network appears to have primarily targeted Pakistanis and Indians; posts were in Urdu, Hindi, English, and Punjabi. Facebook reports that 70,000 accounts followed at least one of the Pages and 1.1 million accounts belonged to the Groups.

This is not the first public suspension of coordinated activity in Pakistan. In April 2019 [Facebook suspended](#) a network of accounts linked to the Inter-Services Public Relations wing of the Pakistani military. [According to DFRLab](#), that network “represented a significant influence operation, apparently aimed at boosting support for the army inside Pakistan and boosting support for Pakistan abroad.” Additionally, [reporting shows](#) that Pakistani politicians work directly with prominent social media trolls to get pro-Pakistan hashtags trending on Twitter. The information operation component of the network we analyze here does not appear to be as sophisticated nor as high quality as the 2019 takedown or the kind of hashtag trending activity previously linked to Pakistani political parties.

Key takeaways:

- Since May 2020 the suspended network coordinated mass reporting of Facebook and Instagram accounts that were perceived to be critical of Islam, critical of the Pakistani government and military, or linked to the Ahmadi religious minority. Accounts shared links that brought users directly to Facebook’s site to report a specific account or account photo. The network claimed over 200 successes, but we are unable to confirm whether these accounts were taken down due to reporting. Some accounts, such as those that had intentionally insulting fake names, were clearly in violation of Facebook’s identity policies.
- The network used “Auto Reporter,” a Chrome extension to automate reporting. The creator of the extension said explicitly on Facebook that he created the product for “Accounts like anti-Islamic, anti-Pakistani or even groups and pages which is a great threat on social media.” The network and related users provided tutorials to create fake accounts for reporting and to quickly open many tabs to expedite reporting.
- Many Pages and Groups posted Pakistani nationalist content, praising the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI, Pakistan’s intelligence agency) and ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party. Posts also criticized India’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi,

often mocking Modi's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The network included several Indian Army fan Pages and Groups, which had primarily positive messaging about the Indian military and government. We are unclear what the objective of these entities was.



Figure 1: A now suspended Group

2 Political Background on Pakistan

Pakistan is a weak parliamentary democracy with a history of coups and military rule. A general election in 2018 resulted in the second-ever transfer of power between civilian governments, with Imran Khan and his political party Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) elected into office. Pakistan has an enduring inter-state rivalry with India, in part due to the dispute over the territory of Kashmir; India and Pakistan have fought multiple wars, and the risk of another war remains substantial. Pakistan's ruling party PTI and the opposition political party Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) are the most significant domestic political parties in the country. Pakistan's army also exerts enormous influence over the country's domestic politics. A number of social movements, religious organizations, and armed groups are also influential in Pakistani politics.

Various parts of Pakistan continue to see lethal violence. Islamist and separatist militant groups carry out attacks against state forces and civilians, including religious minorities. Violent clashes between the Pakistani security forces and terrorist and separatist groups have decreased over the past two years, while the frequency of clashes between the Pakistani and Indian armies along the border in the region of Kashmir has increased. A number of religious groups, as well as unaffiliated local groups, have targeted religious minorities in the country, such as Ahmadis, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, and Shias; another major target of religiously motivated violence tends to be civilians accused of blasphemous speech and actions against Islam. Journalists also remain at risk of violence by state authorities and non-state groups.

Social media is widely used in Pakistan, including Facebook and its family of platforms such as WhatsApp and Instagram. The Pakistani government, military, political parties, religious organizations, and armed groups have an extensive presence on Facebook platforms. The Government of Pakistan has

a number of laws, including the 2016 Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act, to prosecute citizens for social media-related violations, including content deemed against the state and Islam.

3 Summary Statistics

The part of the network suspended by Facebook and shared with the Stanford Internet Observatory (SIO) included 54 Pages, 66 Groups, 283 profiles, and 96 Instagram accounts. Given that many of the Groups were private, we were not able to collect data on their activity through CrowdTangle, an analytics platform owned by Facebook.

3.1 Facebook Pages

Many of the 54 suspended Pages had names that showed Pakistani patriotism (e.g., Pakistan Support Pak Army), although a few Pages' names indicated a political leaning towards India. Several Page names explicitly referenced account reporting. While some of the Pages had thousands of followers, a majority of the Pages had fewer than 1,000.

Page Name	Transliterated Page Name	Creation Date	Number of Followers
میں پاکستان کا مالک ہوں	Min Pakistan ka Maalik Hon	Aug. 23, 2019	30,956
Muiahid Markhor		Nov. 21, 2019	19,052
Indian Air Force - Air Warriors - Touch The Sky With Glory		Aug. 7, 2018	3,805
Pakistan Support Pak Army		Aug. 4, 2017	3178
شیر کا نشان بیخورتوں کی پہچان	Sher Ka Nishan Beghairatan Ka Pehchan	June 23, 2018	2,229
The Muiahid Markhor		Nov. 2, 2019	1500
भारतीय सेना मेरी जान	Bhaareteey sena meree jaan	Mar. 20, 2019	927
Ratnavalli Talari		Nov. 21, 2018	882
کوہ نور	Koh Noor	Jan. 8, 2020	786
Hindi News		Dec. 13, 2016	759
نمرہ راجپوت	Numra Raibut	June 4, 2020	704
Indian army Lovers		May 8, 2016	696
Khalistan zindabad		Feb. 29, 2020	689
پاکستان کے رکھوالے	Pakistan ke Rakhwale	Oct. 29, 2019	651
Pakistan Defender		Aug. 17, 2019	571
میری پہچان پاکستان	Meri Pehchan Pakistan	Mav 5, 2020	542
Pakistan Defense Fighter Official		Aug. 10, 2020	475
Beautiful pakistan and azad kashmir		Feb. 23, 2020	301
Pak cyber force		Oct. 3, 2019	228
A forever business owner		Sept. 6, 2018	151
Health & Nutrition/Skin & Beauty Care Products		June 17, 2018	136
Save Humanity		Sept. 25, 2017	136
پاکستان کے سپاہی	Pakistan Ke Sepas	May 14, 2018	117
Globally business FLP		Aug. 16, 2019	107
Report Anti- Islamic and Anti Pakistan FB Links		Feb. 1, 2020	103
دل سے پیار پاکستان	Dil Se Para Pakistan	Mar. 12, 2020	78
Vishwakarma Photography		July 7, 2017	70
Hawk EyEd		July 18, 2020	69
Pvar tune kva kiva		Apr. 25, 2017	53
PTV Sports2		Oct. 13, 2019	35
Waheed TV		Jan. 13, 2020	34
Muhammad Naeem		Oct. 1, 2019	26
Team Mujahid Markhor		Mar. 14, 2020	25
Funnv Videos Ke Duniva		Aug. 30, 2019	18
Patriot		Mar. 13, 2020	18
Ajay Borkar		Aug. 7, 2018	15
Awareness of Pakistani youth generation		May 28, 2020	15
ISI Defenders		Mar. 14, 2020	14
Gumnaam Sindhi		Jan. 2, 2020	9
Nagesh Shukla		Feb. 23, 2019	7
शिवभक्त प्रतीक पाटील	Shiv Bhakt Prateek Patil	June 28, 2018	4
Ajay Kumar Rathor		Jan. 10, 2018	2
Village Miva Ji Kandi		Sept. 16, 2019	2
Ajay Kumar		Mar. 26, 2018	0
Ajay Kumar		Oct. 6, 2017	0
AMAZON Prime Offer		Apr. 29, 2020	0
AMAZON Special CollectionS		Apr. 29, 2020	0
Romio		Oct. 23, 2018	0
Army lovers		NA	NA
Deal rival		NA	NA
Hind ki sena		NA	NA
Pak Armv Fichter		NA	NA
Pak army hamari jan		NA	NA
Piri Saab Official		NA	NA

Figure 2: Suspended Pages. NA indicates the Page was taken down before SIO received the URL.

The Pages were created over four years, with the earliest Page, Indian army Lovers, first posting in early 2016. The most prolific Page was The Mujahid Markhor (translates to "snake-eating Mujahid"), which had posted 807 times since the end of 2019.

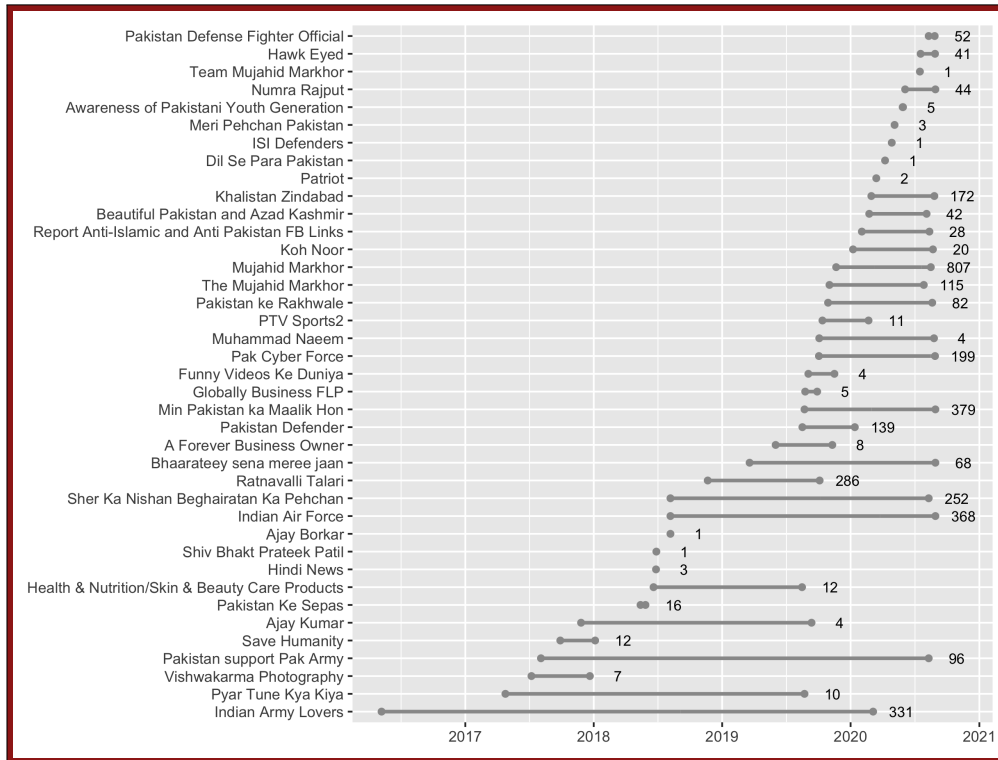


Figure 3: Page activity over time, including dates of first and last post for each Page. Numbers indicate the total number of posts by the Page. Pages that had no posts or were removed by the time of analysis are not shown. Some of the Page names are transliterated from Urdu and abbreviated. Source: CrowdTangle.

The average interaction on a post was correlated to the number of posts each Page made. With 807 posts, Mujahid Markhor received more than 200 interactions (a tally of Likes, Shares, comments, and reactions) on average on each post. The other popular Pages included Min Pakistan Ka Maalik Hon, Sher Ka Nishan Beghairatan Ka Pehchan, and Pakistan Support Pak Army.

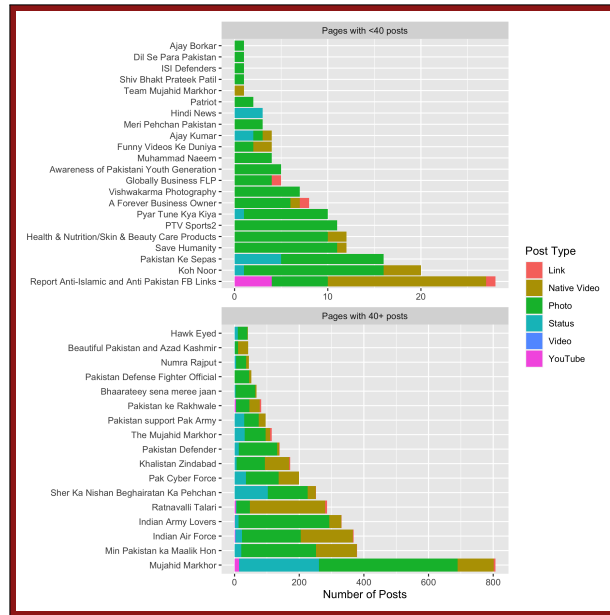


Figure 4: Number of posts disaggregated by post type. Pages that had no posts or were removed by the time of analysis are not shown. Source: CrowdTangle.

The majority of posts by these Pages came in the form of photos or videos. For instance, more than 400 of the posts made by Mujahid Markhor were photos. Across all Pages, videos, followed by statuses and photos, received the highest engagement from the audience, with 90, 72, and 57 interactions on average, respectively.

3.2 Facebook Groups

The same themes appeared in the Groups, where Group titles referenced Pakistani and Indian patriotism, and account reporting. The most popular Group was Indian Peramiltry [sic] Force, which was created in late 2018 and had more than 300,000 members. Forty-three out of the 66 Groups were private, which made assessing their activity more difficult. One of the Groups, Khalistan zindabad, was created as early as 2012.

Group Name	Creation Date	Private?	Number of Members
indian peramilitary force	Dec. 4, 2018	yes	303,600
All Gk/MATH REASONING DAILY CURRENT AFFAIRS [BEST QUESTION]	Mar. 9, 2017	yes	209,300
i Am with Indian army	Dec. 9, 2017	no	78,100
" बीएसएफ और आर्मी " we salute u jai hind (अपने 100 फ्रेंड्स को जोड़ें)	Dec. 5, 2015	yes	63,100
hindustan vs khalistan	Oct. 3, 2018	yes	29,800
INDIAN ARMY FANS GROUP	Dec. 18, 2018	no	20,700
KHALISTAN ZINDABAD	Sept. 1, 2012	no	7,400
Pakistan Cyber Fighters	Mar. 26, 2020	no	4,200
Jai hind	Sept. 25, 2017	no	३,600
ISI Defenders	Mar. 11, 2020	yes	2,100
PAK ARMY FIGHTER- پاک آرمی فائٲر	Mar. 11, 2020	yes	1,900
Great Indian army	Aug. 6, 2017	yes	1,800
Team Mujahid Markhor	Mar. 11, 2020	yes	1,500
پاکستان کے رکھوالے	Jan. 8, 2019	yes	1,300
Pak_Cyber_Reporting_Team	May 13, 2020	yes	575
پاکستان اک عشق اک جنون	Apr. 10, 2020	no	559
ہم سب کا پاکستان	Mar. 27, 2020	no	419
Pakistan support Pak Army	Aug. 4, 2017	no	300
اسلام میری پہچان - پاکستان میری جان	Feb. 9, 2020	no	224
We troll Afghanistan and Pakistan	Apr. 18, 2018	yes	111
پاکستان کے رکھوالے	Oct. 21, 2019	yes	78
محافظ پاکستان	Mar. 24, 2020	yes	74
~Access Stars~	Dec. 6, 2013	yes	42
Blue star operation 2020	May 2, 2018	yes	35
sex group	Nov. 6, 2017	yes	33
Pakistan Cyber Force Death squad	May 1, 2020	yes	22
\$WE R TEENAGERS\$	Feb. 7, 2015	yes	21
💖💖 Kashmir bany ga Pakistan 💖💖	Aug. 8, 2019	no	20
Bad boys Dheeru and Sumit	Sept. 10, 2017	yes	16
Hum Sab Ka Pakistan	Jan. 17, 2018	no	13
DHANGAR Boys	Jan. 9, 2017	no	10
indian army	June 18, 2016	no	10
team of cobra	Aug. 1, 2018	no	9
Friends Who Like TGP Solutions	Sept. 3, 2016	yes	8
Friends Who Like ABP Majha	Oct. 13, 2016	yes	7
JNVU Friends	Feb. 9, 2017	yes	7
	Feb. 28, 2020	no	7
admins..	May 11, 2018	yes	5
Indian army	June 18, 2016	yes	5
Student मित्र	May 19, 2017	yes	5
jatti	Dec. 6, 2016	yes	4
my life my style my rules	Jan. 27, 2015	yes	4
Sagar machin tools. morbi	Feb. 22, 2017	no	4
We support indian army	July 11, 2019	no	4
prince	July 9, 2015	yes	3
Report Anti Islamic & Pakistan FB Links	Feb. 1, 2020	yes	3

Figure 5: Suspended Groups. We anonymized one Group name.

3.3 Facebook Profiles and Instagram Accounts

Facebook shared 283 profiles and 96 Instagram accounts with SIO. The Instagram accounts appeared to be primarily personal accounts. In Facebook's takedown report they note that many of the accounts pretended to be Indians.

Dozens of the Facebook profiles, however, were administrators, and among the most active posters, of the Groups. One account that was involved in eight Groups used a meme as its Facebook profile picture; comments on the photo noted that the profile had been suspended by Facebook in the past.

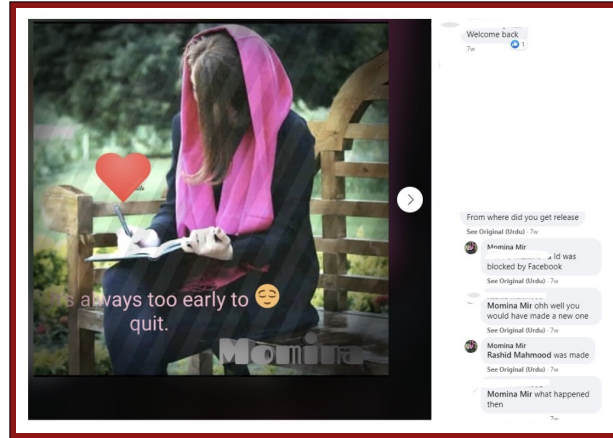


Figure 6: An account that was involved in eight Groups in the network. In the comments she says that her account was previously suspended.

As seen in the figure below, dozens of the profiles were in multiple groups that appeared to be thematically clustered (i.e., Groups ostensibly related to India such as Jai hind and I am with Indian army shared overlap; Pak Cyber Warrior Official and other cyber-team related groups similarly shared members).

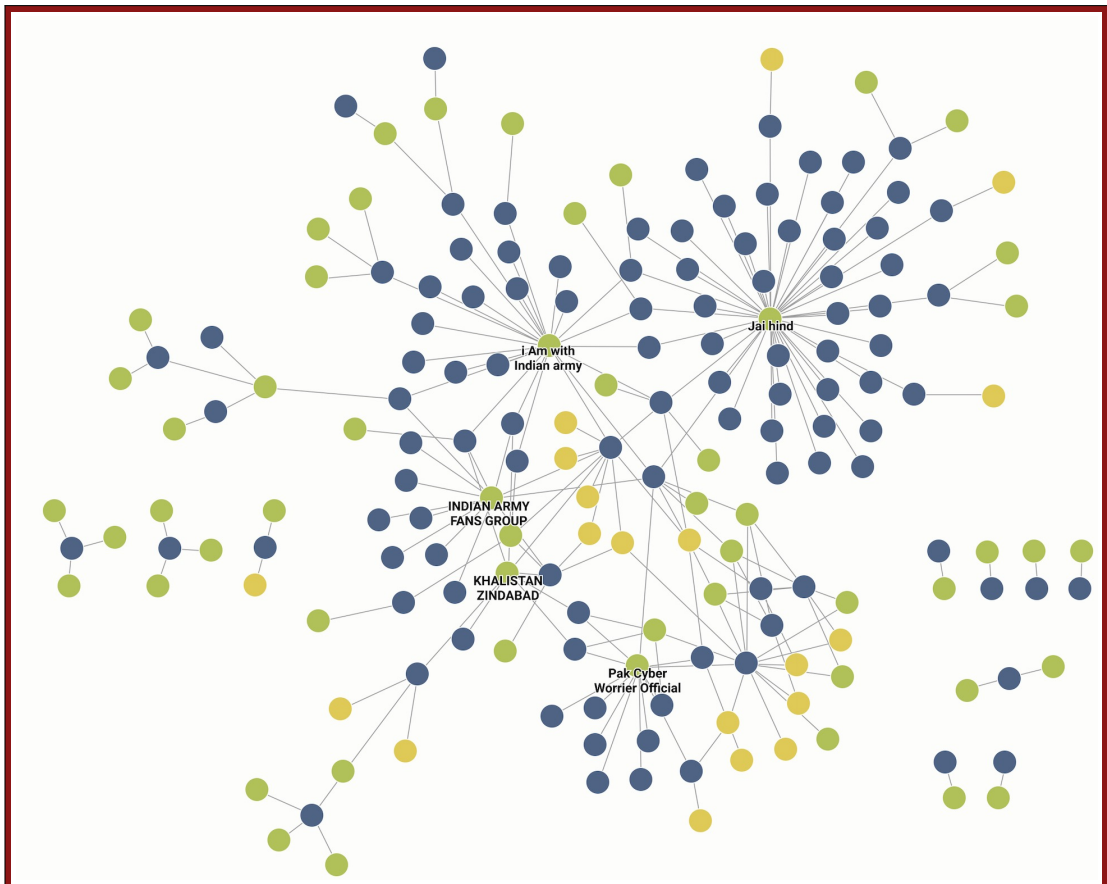


Figure 7: The relationship between some of the Groups (green), Pages (yellow), and profiles (blue) in the network. This figure was made with Maltego and Social Links.

4 Tactics

4.1 Mass Reporting

A prominent feature of this network was the coordinated reporting of Facebook and Instagram accounts that were seen as anti-Islamic or critical of Pakistan. Troll armies with names like Voice of Islam would push posts to Groups and Pages in the network, encouraging users to report up to 80 profiles at a time, with tips on how to do so quickly and with direct links to the reporting sites. Their motivation, as stated in the About section of one Group, was “complete elimination of all blasphemous prophets, saints, companions, and other enemies of Islam.” We identified 208 profiles that this network targeted that are currently down, but we cannot determine whether the network was responsible for the suspension; indeed, many of the suspended accounts appear to have violated Facebook’s policies around using intentionally insulting fake names.

We observed several private Groups – some with just a handful of members, some with several hundred members – that appear to have been places where leaders of a given troll army coordinated on whom to report.

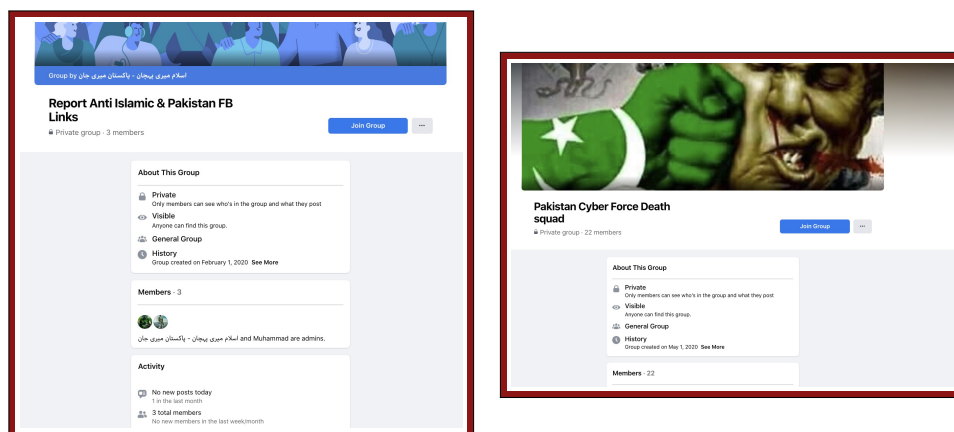


Figure 8: A private Group, with just three members, called Report Anti Islamic & Pakistan FB Links. Right: A private Group called Pakistan Cyber Force Death squad, with 22 members.

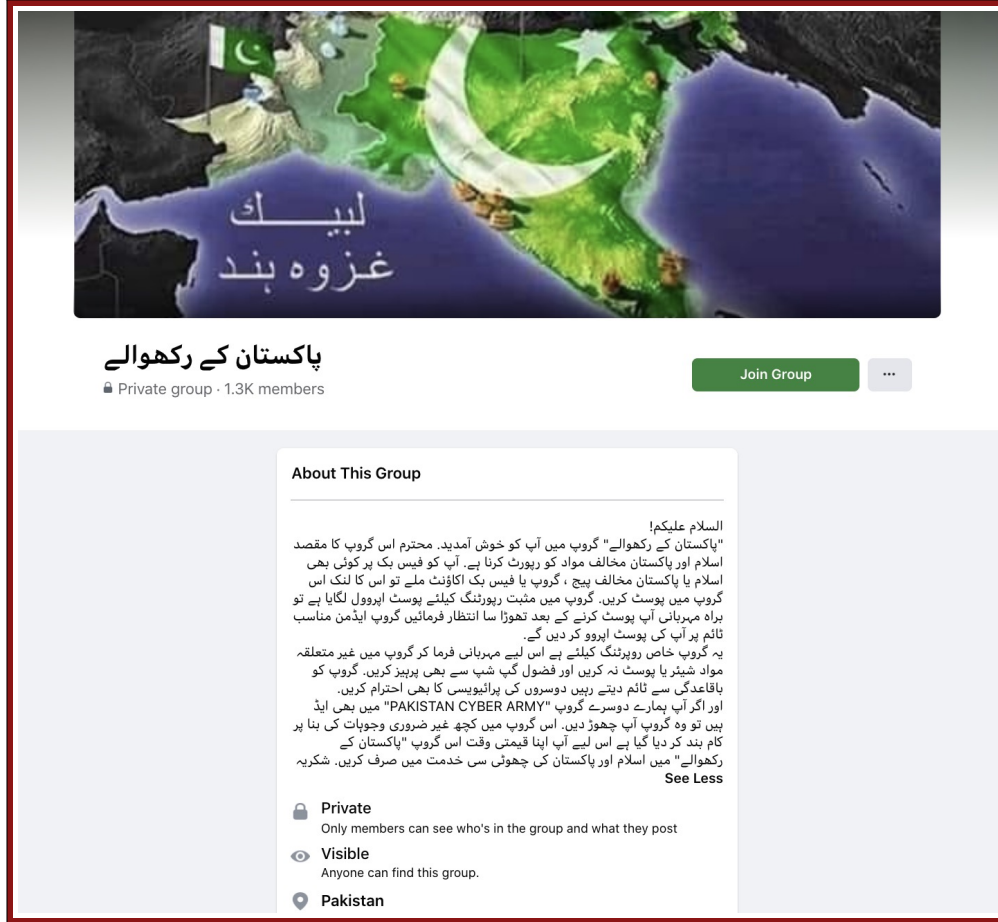


Figure 9: A Group called پاکستان کے رکھوالے ("Guardians of Pakistan").

The About section of the Group Guardians of Pakistan translates roughly to:

Hello! Welcome to the "Guardians of Pakistan" group. Dear, The purpose of this group is to report anti-Islam and anti-Pakistan content. If you find any anti-Islam or anti-Pakistan page, group or Facebook account on Facebook, post the link in this group. If the group has post approval for positive reporting, please wait a bit after you post. The group admin will approve your post at the appropriate time. This group is for special reporting so please do not share or post irrelevant content in the group and also avoid spam gossip. Give the group regular time and respect the privacy of others. And if you are also an admin in our other group "PAKISTAN CYBER ARMY" then leave that group. The work in this group has been stopped for some unnecessary reasons, so spend your precious time in this group "Guardians of Pakistan" in the small service of Islam and Pakistan. Thanks

Group instructions specified that individuals should only use fake accounts when reporting, and that each member must have at least two fake accounts.



Figure 10: A Group called Pak_Cyber_Reporting_Team.

The About section of the Group Pak_Cyber_Reporting_Team translates roughly to:

Pakistan Cyber Reporting Team Reporting Team Rules [...] Only reporting links can be shared in the reporting group - Members will write Done after reporting the link Inform the admin in case of emergency Facebook, Twitter will identify all kinds of Islam, Pakistan, anti-military and biased accounts, pages, groups - and their links and screenshots will be sent to the admin's inbox with a screenshot, after checking it will be shared for reporting. No links will be reported except for links provided by admins. You have to use your fake account for reporting, account creation procedure will be explained, if you need help creating account you can contact inbox. Each member will have at least 2 fake accounts - You may not ask any person for personal information. In case of violation of the rules, you can be removed. Strictly follow all member rules ADMIN_TEAM PAK_CYBER_REPORTING_TEAM

Many of the suspended assets link themselves to something called the Pakistan Cooperative. It has a [website](#), which posts content praising the Pakistani military, and a [suspended Twitter account](#). It is linked to the Facebook Page [Ideology Of Islam & Pakistan](#), which is not included in this takedown but similarly organizes mass reporting. It refers to its team as the Defenders of Islamic Ideology of Pakistan.

Administrators of the more exclusive private Groups would then push reporting requests to public Groups, and include instructions on how to do

so quickly. It appears they often reported accounts for allegedly using hate speech or being a fake account.



Figure 11: A post from a suspended account to the Group **ہم سب کا پاکستان** (“Pakistan of all of us”). The post provides shortened links that take the user directly to Facebook’s reporting site. In this case, users are encouraged to report many different parts of the same account (e.g., profile photos, cover photos). The video shows users how to quickly open many URLs at once. The text says, in part, “please report this arrogant page as much as possible.” The targeted Page expresses pride in being an atheist.

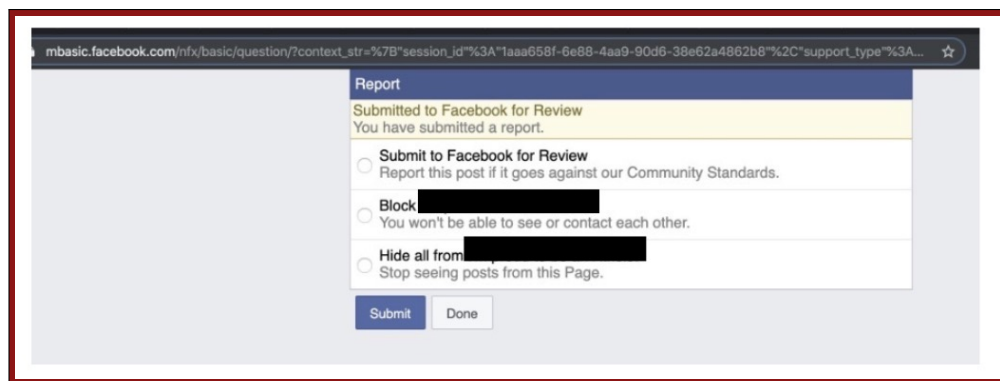


Figure 12: Links from the post in the Group take users directly to Facebook’s reporting site for the particular account.

Mass reporting mobilizers frequently boasted about their supposed successes. For example, a troll army called Defenders of Islamic Ideology of Pakistan claimed to have gotten accounts suspended on the Group **پاکستان اک عشق اک جنون** (“Pakistan: A love, a madness”). The post includes the name of the accounts and the link so that users can see for themselves that the accounts are down. To reiterate, however, we are unable to verify whether these accounts

came down because of actions taken by this network.



Figure 13: A post from Defenders of Islamic Ideology of Pakistan boasting about its claimed success. The text translates roughly to, “[...] This anti-Pakistan account has been closed due to the hard work of patriotic Pakistani brothers. All of your friends should speed up the work in the same way so that other accounts, groups and pages on Facebook that are anti-Islam and anti-Pakistan can be closed. Friends who want to join in this mission They can in the inbox. #DefendersofIslamicIdeologyofPakistan.”

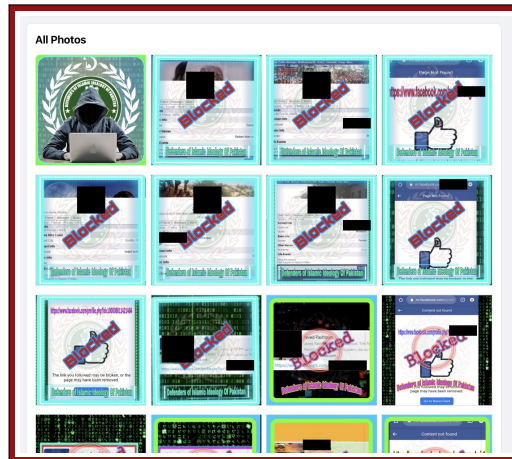


Figure 14: Posts from the Page [پاکستان کے رکھوالے](#) (“Guardians of Pakistan”). This is one of the Pages where users were asked to report accounts. The images show the administrators boasting of successes.

It does not appear that ordinary individuals who helped to report accounts received any concrete benefits; they appear to have reported out of a feeling of patriotism and service to Pakistan, and service to Islam.

4.1.1 Who Was Reported?

One suspended account (Muhammad Awais) reported prominent Pakistani human rights activist [Mohammad Jibran Nasir](#) and an Ahmadi Muslim association account. Both are currently live. Awais reported several other Ahmadi accounts as well.

We identified 208 accounts this network reported that are currently down, though as noted above we have no evidence that this network was responsible for account suspension. None of the URLs for these accounts, which often provided user names, were recognizable to Pakistan experts who worked on this report. Most of the user names were those of individuals. A few had usernames like “allah the rapist” and “proud to be an atheist” (we have modified the usernames slightly to anonymize the accounts).

4.1.2 Auto Reporter Chrome Extension

Facebook informed us that users in this network used a Chrome extension called [Auto Reporter](#) to accelerate the reporting process. The extension was published by an entity called Tigerzplace in August 2019 (though an earlier version existed in 2018) and, according to the Chrome Web store, has over 2,000 users. Given a profile ID, Page, or Group, the extension generates an abbreviated link with the TinyURL domain, which leads to a Page that reports the entity. (We observed many such TinyURL links throughout the network that allowed users to report an account with one click.) One or more of these links can then be inputted into the extension, which proceeds to report the corresponding accounts. A delay time between the reports can be specified, and a delay of one minute is used after every ten reports, presumably to avoid activity that Facebook would identify as suspicious. An additional feature advertised in the Chrome Web Store description is the ability to directly load

reporting links from the Pakistan Cyber Defense server. The description also emphasizes that the extension should not be used maliciously, and that its potential abuse is mitigated by Facebook’s process to screen the reports.

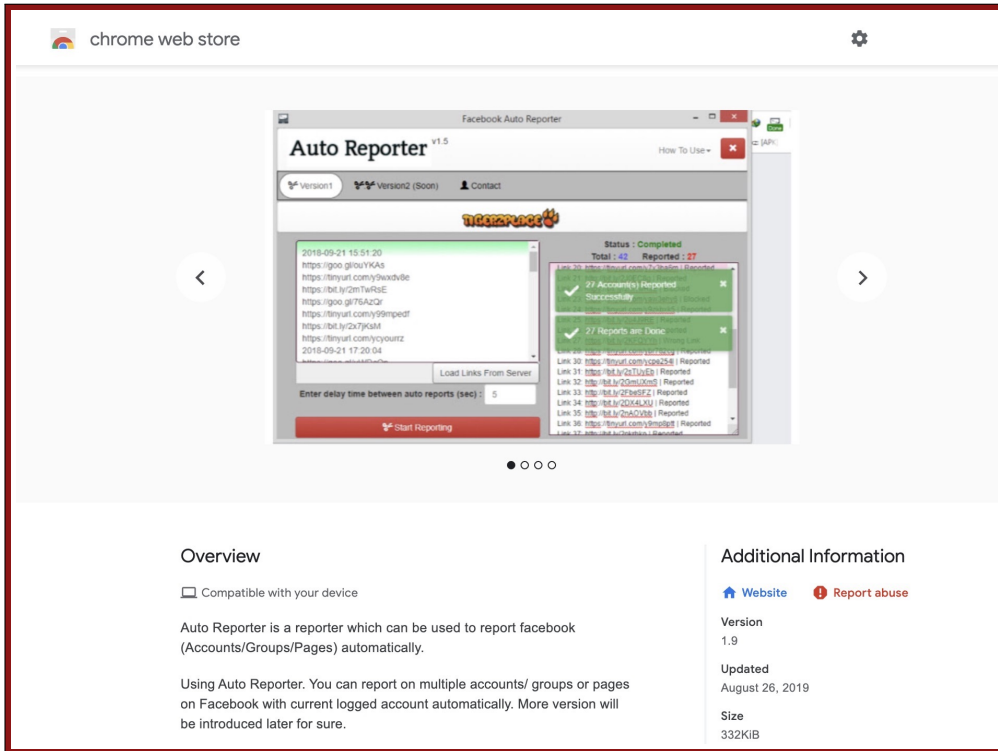


Figure 15: Content from Auto Reporter’s Chrome Web Store presence.

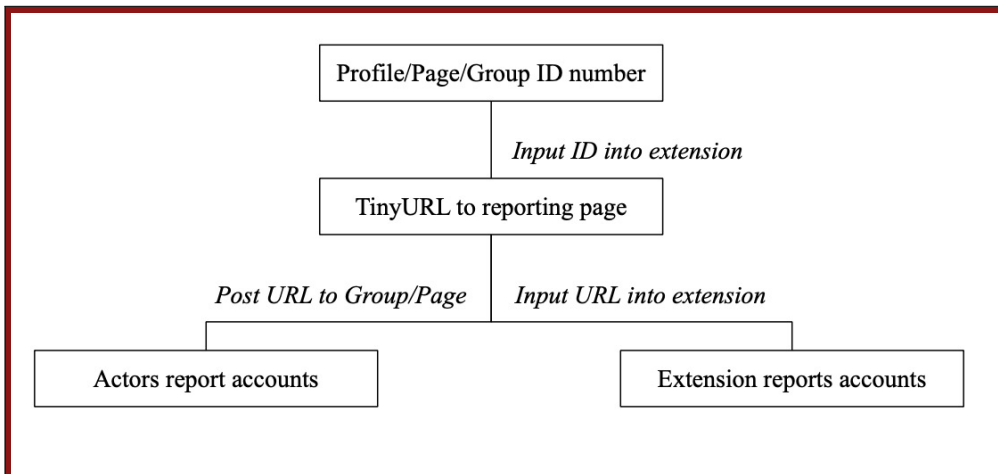


Figure 16: How the Auto Reporter Chrome extension functioned.

Additional Feature :

You can also load reporting links from PCD (Pakistan Cyber Defense) server if you are just a reporter for them or even a helper and want to help out the community to remove all the bad, offensive and fake accounts, groups or pages from Facebook. You only need to add the extension to your chrome browser and open it. Once loaded just click 'Load Links From Server' and it will automatically pick all the links submitted by the PCD to your reporter. Then just start reporting, and that's it. The Reporter will start reporting on links one by one (Safely).

User Agreement

I, the creator is not responsible for the use of the tool by users in any bad or abusive at all. I made this tool to get rid of accounts which is fake or even pages that are insulting, spreading hate speech or making any threat to country, person, or religion. So I am not responsible for other user's action using this tool. They can come up with some third party technique and abuse the tools But For my part, after a lot of thought., I concluded that it is likely that *something* I worked on in *some* way may be used to harm someone else and I have no control over that. However I made it in such a way to prevent any bad use at all so all reports are still checked by Facebook Team. I'll also make sure that in future no one can use this tool which can lead to any abusive use. But still I don't have any control over the internet user so I am not fully responsible for any other use then the one I made this for. :)

You bear the full responsibility of your actions and acknowledge that this software was created for educational purposes only.

Figure 17: Description of the extension from the Chrome Web Store.

However, the extension developer's definition of abuse is different from the definition social platforms use. The extension is explicitly marketed with the intention of suspending accounts that profess beliefs that go against Islam or Pakistan. A [tutorial](#) posted to the [Tigerzplace YouTube channel](#), "How to report on Anti-Islamic Pages /Account /Groups on Facebook," elaborates on its motivation in its description: "This video is for all those users who stands against those people who are spreading non sense stupid post about Islam. They are enemies of us and we will fight up to the mark. Stand with us and report on all such pages, groups and ids." In other tutorials, Facebook Pages titled "Ban islam" and "Stop Islamization of the world – SIOTW" are used to demonstrate the use of the extension. Although parts of the screenshare are blurred out, it appears that the developer identified these Pages from Groups and Pages where anti-Islam entities are shared for mass reporting; he visits these Groups and Pages to find examples. In one post promoting Auto Reporter, the developer explains the targets of the extension in response to a comment: "Accounts like anti-Islamic, anti-Pakistani or even groups and pages which is a great threat on social media."



Figure 18: Comment on a post from Nasir Ali, the extension developer. In response to a question, Ali says that the extension can be used for anti-Islamic accounts which are “a great threat on social media.”

We identified the developer of Auto Reporter as Nasir Ali, who, according to his Facebook profile, is Pakistani and the founder and CEO of Tigerzplace. He is also listed as the tech contact for the tigerzplace.com domain. Ali frequently posts Anonymous and pro-Pakistani imagery to his timeline. His Facebook profile also lists him as a web developer at Pak Cyber Experts, whose Facebook Page contains anti-India, anti-Modi, and pro-Pakistan content. In a post from 2014, Pak Cyber Experts encouraged its followers to report 18 anti-Islam Pages. In addition to Auto Reporter, he shares Tigerzplace YouTube tutorials to automatically mine bitcoin, use WhatsApp without a phone number, and create Facebook accounts with obscured profiles or without a last name.

4.2 Indian Army Fan Pages and Groups

The network included several Indian Army fan Pages and Groups. Some of these entities, like the Page “Indian army Lovers,” posted purely positive content about the Indian Army. It is unclear how these Pages fit into the

objectives of the network. One possibility is that the network used these Pages to identify Indian Army supporters who they would then mass report, though we have no evidence to support this hypothesis. Another possibility is that the actors behind the network aimed to subtly put some content aligned with their ideology into these networks. Some Pages were generally pro-India but had a handful of posts that were critical of Modi.

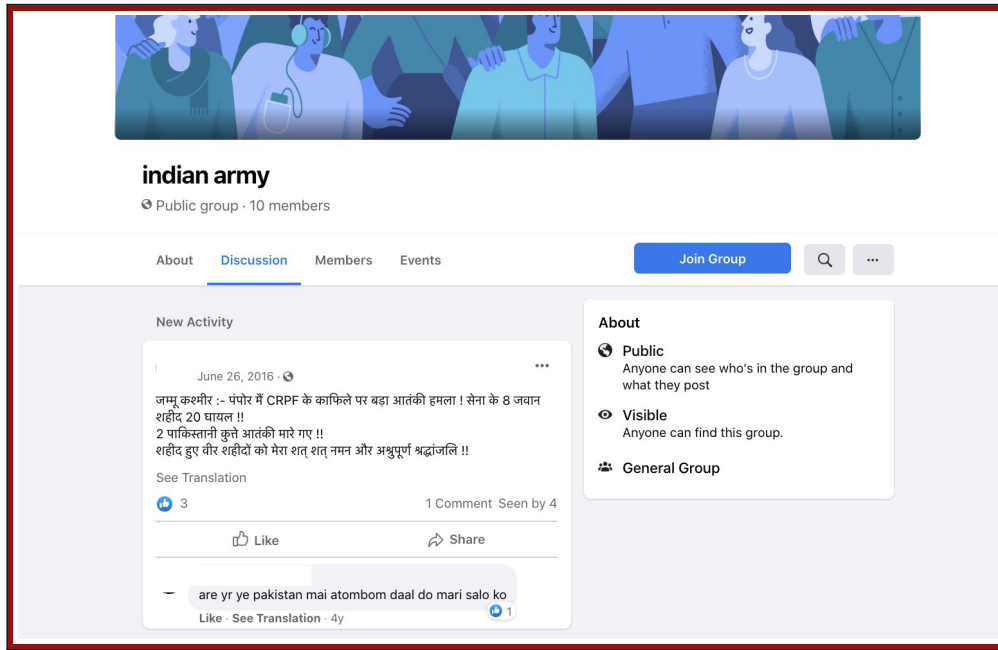


Figure 19: A pro-India post from the Group indian army. The post says, “Jammu Kashmir :- Big terrorist attack on CRPF convoy in Pampore! 8 army soldiers martyred and 20 injured!! 2 Pakistani dogs terrorists killed!! My tribute and tearful tribute to the martyrs of the martyrs!!”

5 Themes

5.1 Pro-Pakistan Government/Military Content

The main theme across the Pages and Groups was Pakistani nationalist content: content praising the military and ISI, and supporting Pakistan in its rivalry with India. There was also content elevating the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party and criticism of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) party.

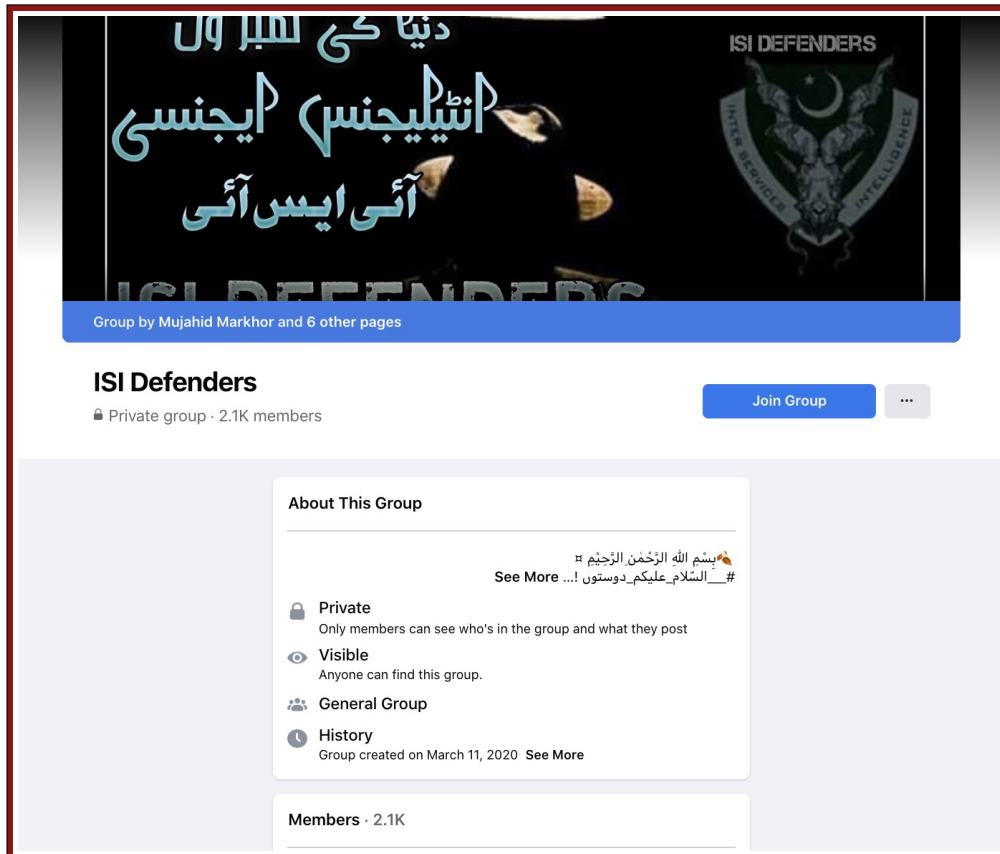


Figure 20: A now-suspended Group called ISI Defenders.

One Page, I am the owner of Pakistan (translated), criticized those who are critical of aides to the Pakistani Prime Minister and shared information from the Pakistani government about, for example, flood control centers in Karachi and government cybersecurity initiatives.

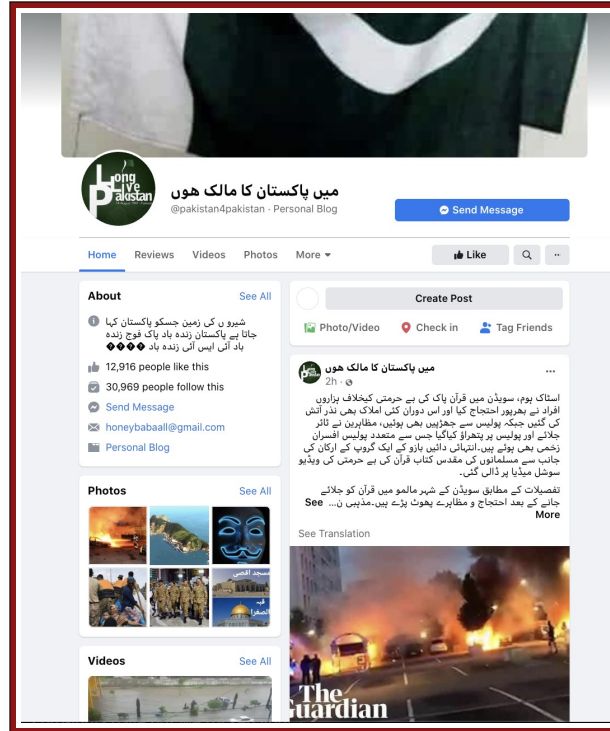


Figure 21: The title of this Page translated to “I am the owner of Pakistan.”

The Page Mujahid Markhour, and its **associated (still live) YouTube channel**, disseminated content centered on the Pakistan military. Posts and videos were critical of India and praised the feats of ISI. There were also conspiracy theories about the Illuminati and Bill Gates.

The most-viewed video in this network came from Mujahid Markhour. It showed an improvised explosive device attack on Afghan security forces in Afghanistan, with a poem laced with religious imagery praising the Taliban’s faith and resolve. Some of the comments were similarly pro-Taliban.



Figure 22: The Page Mujahid Markhour. “Markhor” is an animal and the mascot of the Pakistani intelligence services.

5.2 Anti-BJP/Modi Content, and Messaging Bolstering the Khalistan Movement

We observed content critical of the BJP, Modi, and the Indian Army, and messaging that supported the Khalistan movement.

Posts mocked Modi’s handling of COVID-19, with statements such as, “You cannot find India’s name in the top 40 coronavirus safety countries. Work doesn’t happen just by talking.”



Figure 23: A post from the Page Indian Air Force - Air Warriors - Touch The Sky With Glory. The post says: “You cannot find India’s name in the top 40 coronavirus safety countries. Work doesn’t happen just by talking. The situation is getting increasingly worse. At least do something now?”

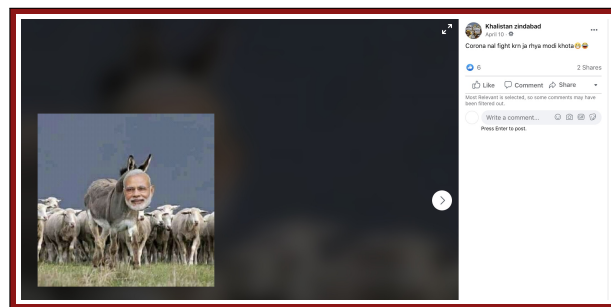


Figure 24: A post from the Page Khalistan Zindabad. The caption, written in Punjabi, translates to, “Modi the donkey going to fight corona.”

In addition to the COVID-19 posts, the network also made claims that Indian soldiers frequently raped and killed civilians.

Also critical of the Indian government was a page called 'Khalistan zindabad' (@freekhalasa2020), which promoted the separatist Khalistan movement in Punjab, India. The Khalistan movement is an effort to create a new state called Khalistan in the Punjab region of India to serve as a homeland for Sikhs. The movement began in 1940, reaching a fever pitch in the mid-1980s with the assassination of Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and the bombing of Air India Flight 182, before waning in the 1990s. However, the Khalistan movement is still active in India, with some militant groups arrested as recently as 2018; Punjab Chief Minister Captain Amarinder Singh **attributed recent separatist activity** to Pakistan’s ISI.

Khalistan zindabad posted primarily pro-Khalistan and anti-India content. According to Facebook’s Page Transparency feature, all six of the Page’s administrators are in Pakistan. Posts accused the Indian Army of corruption,

paid homage to “martyrs” of the Khalistan movement, and criticized Modi. Posts supported the US-based group Sikh for Justice — including the group’s referendum campaigns on Khalistan secession. One video on the Page showed separatists raising the Khalistan flag over the Punjab Deputy Commissioner’s office. Content from Khalistan zindabad’s associated Group — hindustan vs. khalistan — was shared in a generally anti-Indian Army Facebook Group, Jai Hind. Within this dataset, content discussing Khalistan was used primarily by Pakistani users to bolster anti-India narratives.

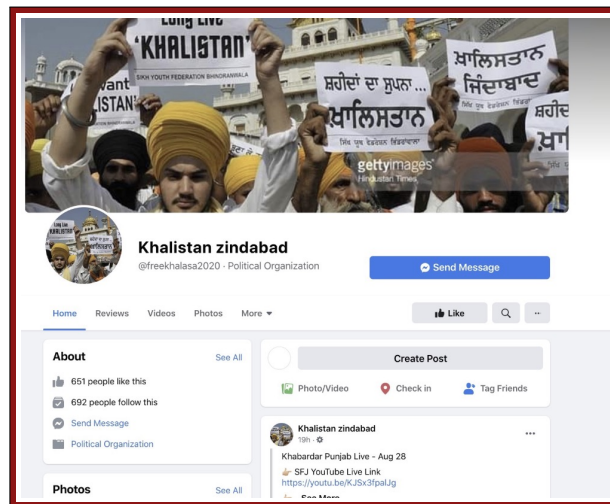


Figure 25: The Khalistan zindabad Page.



Figure 26: Posts from the Page Khalistan zindabad

5.3 Miscellaneous

We observed additional themes in the network:

- Content critical of religious and ethnic minorities.



Figure 27: This cartoon depicts the Pashtuns of Karak (a district in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) rejecting The Pashtun Tahafuz Movement (a social movement for Pashtun human rights). The cartoon shows the PTM members escaping the Pakistani army but killing someone else and blaming it on the Pakistani army. This cartoon was posted to the Group پاکستان اک عشق اک جنون اک (“Pakistan: A love, a madness”).

- Content critical of political scientist Christine Fair. One post said that she writes “against Pakistan and the Pakistani army.”
- Anti-Semitic content.
- Pages and Groups with spam-like posts – for example, advertising multilevel marketing schemes.



Figure 28: A post from a now-suspended Instagram account claiming incorrectly that Obama attended a Forever Living Products training in Brazil.

6 Conclusion

We have documented a network of social media accounts originating in Pakistan that posted Pakistani nationalist messages and criticized the Indian government. We have also highlighted how mass reporting networks operated, with Group and Page administrators mobilizing social media users

to report accounts that were Ahmadi, or critical of Islam or the Pakistani military/government.

It is worrying that the “Auto Reporter” Chrome extension remains on the Chrome Web Store at the time of writing, and has existed since at least August 2019. The extension developer additionally has a live YouTube channel where he provides tutorials on how to use the Chrome extension and engage in activities such as creating WhatsApp accounts without a phone number. We hope Google will work to block this and similar extensions, and ban the developer from the Web Store and YouTube.

While we do not know who was behind this operation, we note the repeated invoking of duty towards religion and nation for mass reporting. We also observed a post on the network that stated that a member of one of the mass reporting teams had died, and that not only was he a hardworking, effective “patriot” who worked on social media reporting of “subversives”, but that he also worked with “agencies” (implying either intelligence or military) on the ground. At the same time, the quality of the disinformation content did not rise to that of a previously Pakistani military-attributed takedown. We hope Pakistan researchers and reporters will investigate this network further.

The Stanford Internet Observatory is a cross-disciplinary program of research, teaching and policy engagement for the study of abuse in current information technologies, with a focus on social media. The Observatory was created to learn about the abuse of the internet in real time, and to translate our research discoveries into training and policy innovations for the public good.