Naveen Shodh Sansar (An International Refereed / Peer Review Multidisciplinary Research Journal)
RNI No.- MPHIN/2013/60638, ISSN 2320-8767, E- ISSN 2394-3793, Scientific Journal Impact Factor (SJIF)- 8.054,
April to June 2026, E-Journal, Vol. I, Issue LIV (54), ISO 9001:2015 - E2024049304 (QMS)

Fake News and Its Impact on Democratic Processes

Dr. Sudha Silawat (Retd.)* Dr. Tripat Chawla (Retd.) Aditya Vikram Singh*****

*Supervisor, Additional Director, Higher Education, Indore (M.P.) INDIA
** Co-Supervisor, Head and Professor, PMCoE, Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee Govt. Arts And Commerce College, Indore (M.P.) INDIA
*** Research Scholar, Devi Ahilya Vishvavidhyalaya, Indore (M.P.) INDIA

Introduction - Fake news, deliberately fabricated or distorted information masquerading as legitimate journalism, poses a profound threat to democracy in the digital age. Unlike mere errors or biased reporting, it thrives on deception—sensational headlines, manipulated images, and viral falsehoods designed to inflame emotions and manipulate perceptions. As social media platforms like WhatsApp and X amplify its reach to billions, fake news erodes the foundational pillars of democratic governance: an informed electorate, free discourse, and accountable institutions.Virat Kohli deactivates his Instagram account by self or via platform for a brief span of 26 hours and it becomes national news being covered by the most popular news channels of the country. Speculations surround his retirement, his relations with BCCI, his relations with his wife and everything that could possibly go wrong with him. A petty, irrelevant, unimportant and non-life risking information as such invited a million tweets, responses, reshares and mentions. This is how a basic fake and illogical information impacts lives of the population. Fake news refers to deliberately fabricated or misleading information presented as legitimate news, often spread to deceive audiences for political, financial, or ideological gain.

Key Characteristics:

- **Intentional deception**: Unlike honest mistakes or biased reporting, it's created with the goal to mislead.
- **Sensational style**: Uses alarming headlines, emotional language, and unverified claims to go viral.
- **Common formats**: Articles, videos, memes, or deepfakes mimicking real outlets.

Brief History: The term exploded during the 2016 U.S. election, but roots trace back centuries—think 1890s "yellow journalism" wars between Hearst and Pulitzer, which sensationalized the Spanish-American War. Today, social media supercharges it, with sites like Before It's News or manipulated Facebook posts.

In 2017, a hoax story claimed Pope Francis endorsed Donald Trump, shared millions of times before debunked. It originated from a satirical site but spread unchecked.

Algorithms favor outrage; humans share emotionally charged content 20x faster (per NYU study). Check facts via Snopes, FactCheck.org, or reverse image search—cross-reference multiple reputable sources.Spot red flags like no author, poor grammar, or URLs ending in .co/.lol instead of .org/.edu. Tools like Google's Fact Check Explorer help too.

Democracy hinges on voters making rational choices based on verified facts. When misinformation floods the information ecosystem, it creates chaos, exploiting cognitive biases like confirmation bias—where people embrace lies aligning with their views—and the illusory truth effect, where repetition makes falsehoods feel factual. In India, this dynamic has manifested dramatically: WhatsApp rumors of child kidnappers sparked over 30 lynchings in 2018, while AI deepfakes in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections, such as fabricated clips of Rahul Gandhi and Narendra Modi, swayed undecided voters and deepened communal divides. NCRB data underscores the scale—1,087 fake news cases in 2023 alone, up 27% from prior years—often tied to political polarization.

The relation is symbiotic yet destructive. Fake news preys on democracy's openness, bypassing traditional media gatekeepers to micro-target vote banks via caste, religion, or region. In Madhya Pradesh's 2023 assembly polls, edited videos falsely claiming Kamal Nath would scrap welfare schemes like LadliBehna alienated 1.3 crore women beneficiaries, bolstering BJP's hold. Globally, echoes abound: U.S. Pizzagate led to violence, and Brexit falsehoods on immigration fragmented the UK electorate. Psychologically, it triggers emotional reliance—anger spreads lies six times faster than truth—fostering echo chambers that harden loyalties, suppress turnout, and entrench populism over policy.Leaders' public images crumble under such assaults, as seen when doctored Delhi riot videos in 2020 fueled anti-Muslim sentiment, consolidating Hindu vote banks while alienating minorities. This not only rigs perceptions but erodes trust: Edelman's barometer shows 57% global news distrust, correlating with

democratic backsliding.

Yet, democracy's resilience offers countermeasures—fact-checking like PIB's 1,116 busts, IT Rules mandating platform accountability, and ECI's myth-busting registers. In a world of deepening infodemics, safeguarding truth is paramount; unchecked fake news doesn't just mislead voters—it fractures the shared reality democracies demand for survival.

Daily Relations: Today's world has surrounding speculations on everything that floats on the internet. From a psychological viewpoint, fake news exploits cognitive shortcuts and emotions, leading to distorted beliefs, heightened anxiety, and societal polarization. Man as a social animal has a tendency to want to know of what the society is expecting and analysing. Confirmation bias makes people accept fake news aligning with preexisting views, ignoring contradictions. Illusory truth effect repeats lies until they feel true. Low analytical thinking correlates with higher belief in falsehoods, as less deliberation favors quick, biased judgments. Emotionally charged content spreads 6x faster than facts, with anger promoting partisan belief and anxiety amplifying doubt in corrections. Reliance on feelings over reason boosts fake news endorsement—studies show inducing emotional processing increases belief in hoaxes.Prolonged exposure triggers anxiety, depression, stress, and emotional fatigue, especially during crises like COVID-19 (49% reported worse well-being). It overwhelms coping, fosters paranoia, and heightens vulnerability via suggestibility and Barnum Effect (overgeneralizing vague claims).Echo chambers deepen divides, tying beliefs to identity and values, triggering defensive processing. This sustains "psychological tribes," eroding trust and rational discourse.

Fake news impacts democratic processes in ways that cannot be fully ever predicted. This paper has a psychological perspective to it as the human brain impact can never be analysed. In an era where information flows faster than ever, fake news has emerged as a stealthy saboteur of truth. Defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "false, often sensational, information disseminated under the guise of news," fake news isn't new—rumors and propaganda have shadowed human history. Yet, the digital age has supercharged its reach, turning smartphones into megaphones for misinformation. From fabricated headlines on social media to deepfake videos of politicians, fake news distorts reality, sows division, and undermines the cornerstone of democracy: an informed electorate.The phenomenon gained notoriety during the 2016 U.S. presidential election. A study by the Pew Research Center found that 64% of Americans believed fake news caused "a great deal" of confusion about basic facts. Stories like the debunked claim that Hillary Clinton ran a child-trafficking ring from a D.C. pizzeria (Pizzagate) amassed millions of views, fueling real-world violence when a gunman stormed the site. Similarly, in the UK Brexit referendum, false narratives about EU immigrants "swamping" the NHS spread unchecked, swaying undecided voters. These weren't isolated incidents; they revealed how fake news exploits cognitive biases, like confirmation bias, where people gravitate toward stories reinforcing their worldview. At its core, fake news thrives on algorithmic amplification. Platforms like Facebook and Twitter (now X) prioritize engagement—likes, shares, outrage—over accuracy. A 2018 MIT study showed false stories spread six times faster than true ones online because they're more novel and emotional. Bad actors, from state-sponsored trolls to clickbait farms in Macedonia, churn out content at scale. During the 2020 U.S. election, the FBI warned of foreign interference via fabricated videos claiming voter fraud. In India, WhatsApp forwards alleging Muslims spread coronavirus led to lynchings, eroding trust in institutions amid the world's largest democracy.

The impacts on democratic processes are multifaceted and corrosive. First, **polarization intensifies**. Fake news creates echo chambers, where voters consume tailored falsehoods. A 2021 study in *Nature* analyzed 560 million tweets and found exposure to misinformation deepened partisan divides, making compromise impossible. In Brazil's 2018 election, WhatsApp hoaxes accusing Jair Bolsonaro's opponent of corruption helped propel him to victory, but at the cost of fractured social cohesion.

Second, **voter suppression and manipulation** become tools of control. Disinformation campaigns target turnout: a 2016 experiment in the U.S. showed fake news about polling place closures deterred minority voters. In Myanmar, Facebook posts falsely blaming Rohingya Muslims for violence incited genocide, as documented by the UN. Democracies rely on free, fair elections; when facts fray, ballots bend to narratives.

Third, **erosion of trust** in media and government is perhaps the most insidious effect. Edelman Trust Barometer reports show global trust in news at historic lows—only 43% in 2023. When citizens can't discern truth, they disengage: turnout plummets, as seen in France's 2022 election where youth abstention hit 30%. Leaders exploit this cynicism; "fake news" becomes a slur to dismiss scrutiny, as Donald Trump wielded it over 30,000 times per Washington Post tallies.

Moreover, fake news hampers policy-making. During COVID-19, myths like "vaccines contain microchips" delayed herd immunity, costing lives and economies. Democracies need evidence-based governance; misinformation muddies debates on climate change, immigration, and inequality, stalling progress.

Yet, democracy's resilience offers hope. Fact-checking initiatives like FactCheck.org and Full Fact have debunked thousands of claims. Tech giants now label dubious content—Twitter's Community Notes crowdsources corrections. Education campaigns teach "SIFT" (Stop, Investigate source, Find better coverage, Trace claims),

empowering digital literacy. Regulations, like the EU's Digital Services Act, mandate transparency from platforms. In Taiwan, prebunking—exposing tactics before hoaxes hit—curbed Chinese disinformation during elections.

Still, challenges persist. AI-generated deepfakes, like a 2023 video of Ukrainian President Zelenskyy "surrendering," blur lines further. As we approach global polls in 2024-2026, from U.S. midterms to India's Lok Sabha, the stakes are high. Fake news doesn't just mislead; it fractures the shared reality democracies demand.

In sum, fake news is democracy's kryptonite, weaponizing lies against deliberation and vote. Combating it requires vigilance: tech accountability, media literacy, and cross-partisan fact-seeking. Only then can the marketplace of ideas flourish, ensuring power rests with the people, not the fabricators.

Fake News And Indian Democracy: Democracy remains vital in today's misinformation-saturated world, serving as a resilient framework to counter lies, empower citizens, and safeguard collective decision-making.Misinformation floods social media, eroding facts and fueling division, as seen in India's WhatsApp lynchings and Madhya Pradesh election hoaxes from prior examples. Democracy provides structured avenues—like free press, elections, and courts—to verify truths and hold deceivers accountable. Without it, autocrats exploit rumors unchecked, turning public discourse into manipulation tools.In an era of deepfakes and viral falsehoods, democracy prioritizes voter agency through universal suffrage and debates. It encourages digital literacy via public education and fact-checking bodies, helping citizens like those in MP discern edited videos from reality. This bottom-up scrutiny prevents echo chambers from dictating policy, ensuring diverse voices challenge elite narratives.

Democratic institutions—independent judiciary, election commissions—act as firewalls against fake news onslaughts. They enforce transparency, as in India's responses to 2023 MP voter fraud claims, and adapt via laws like the IT Act. Robust checks and balances foster trust, unlike fragile regimes where one lie can topple stability.Leaders in democracies face periodic accountability, compelling them to combat misinformation proactively. Global examples include EU's Digital Services Act mandating platform fixes. This iterative process strengthens societies, turning crises like Delhi riots or MP violence into reforms rather than suppressions.

Fake news has repeatedly undermined India's democracy by inciting violence, polarizing voters, and eroding trust in elections and institutions.

WhatsApp Lynchings (2018): Rumors on WhatsApp claimed child kidnappers were in villages, leading to over 30 mob lynchings across states like Maharashtra, Tripura, and Assam. Victims included innocents like a government worker debunking rumors himself. This fueled public fear, distracted from governance, and pressured platforms like WhatsApp to limit forwards, highlighting how misinformation bypasses traditional media gatekeepers.

2019 General Elections: Both BJP and Congress spread hoaxes: WhatsApp messages falsely claimed Congress leader promised money to Pulwama bomber's family, while others accused BJP of war-mongering. A fake Election Commission circular suggested NRIs could vote online. These swayed public opinion in key states like Uttar Pradesh, where 20,000+ pro-BJP groups targeted castes/religions, polarizing voters and amplifying communal divides.

2020 Delhi Riots: Fake news exacerbated clashes during Citizenship Amendment Act protests, with doctored videos and claims of attacks on Hindus sparking riots that killed 53, mostly Muslims. Shared via WhatsApp and Facebook, these inflamed tensions between pro/anti-CAA groups, leading to arson and vandalism—exposing how disinformation turns policy debates into violence and questions state policing.

2024 Lok Sabha Elections: AI deepfakes proliferated: BJP shared a video of jailed opponent Rahul Gandhi "singing" mockingly; Congress altered Modi's speeches to criticize corporates. Over 584 fact-checks debunked verified accounts (including BJP handles) spreading falsehoods. Rahul Gandhi alleged 1.5 lakh fake voters in one constituency, claiming rigged polls—further eroding faith in the Election Commission.

These cases foster polarization, suppress minority voices, and boost vigilantism over rule of law. A 2025 study notes fake news erodes trust, incites communal violence, and challenges laws like IT Act amid free speech tensions. Responses include fact-checkers like BOOM and guidelines, but enforcement lags in India's mobile-first landscape.

General Human Analysis: Human brain works on intuitions over analysis and succumbed to misinformation and false areas even when the outside perspectives are large enough to put into their head. Familiarity and repetition makes may into one's brain and helps them to re believe what they have been hearing. Fake news and rumours have been a part of Indian propaganda since a very long time. It is analytical on how these games influence human brain and depict outcomes that can be extremely unfair in the very end. Repetition creates the illusory truth effect: brains process familiar info as easier and thus truer, even if false. Confirmation bias favors matching beliefs; emotional content (fear, anger) boosts sharing without checks. Low analytical thinking relies on gut feelings, embedding errors via misattribution.

Repeated claims like "vaccines contain microchips" or cause infertility spread rapidly. Emotional fear made them believable; one study showed prior exposure increased sharing by raising perceived accuracy, delaying vaccinations despite facts.In U.S. elections, repeated "Pizzagate" lies (Clinton child ring) led believers to storm a pizzeria.

Confirmation bias in partisans ignored debunkings; anger from in-group sources solidified false memories via continued influence effect.

In the digital age, fake news has become a potent weapon in electoral warfare, exploiting the human psyche to sway vote banks—those blocs of voters mobilized by shared identity, ideology, or grievance. Psychologically, it preys on cognitive vulnerabilities like confirmation bias, emotional arousal, and the illusory truth effect, turning fleeting doubts into entrenched loyalties. As voters cluster into echo chambers, fake news doesn't just inform; it reprograms beliefs, polarizes communities, and entrenches vote banks, often at democracy's expense. This 800-word exploration draws on psychological principles and real-world patterns to unpack how misinformation reshapes electoral landscapes.At its core, fake news leverages **confirmation bias**, where individuals favor information aligning with preexisting views. Voters in ideologically homogeneous vote banks—say, rural conservatives or urban progressives—gravitate toward hoaxes reinforcing their worldview. A fabricated story claiming an opposition leader "funds terrorists" resonates with anti-minority sentiments in a Hindu nationalist vote bank, ignored even when debunked. Repetition amplifies this via the **illusory truth effect**: brains equate familiarity with validity. Studies show repeated exposure makes lies feel factual; in India's 2023 Madhya Pradesh elections, AI-cloned voices of leaders like Kamal Nath falsely vowing to scrap welfare schemes circulated endlessly on WhatsApp, solidifying BJP supporters' distrust without evidence.

Emotional hijacking accelerates the process. Fake news thrives on **fear, anger, and disgust**, emotions that bypass rational scrutiny. Neuroimaging reveals amygdala activation during outrage-inducing content, prioritizing sharing over verification. Anger spreads falsehoods six times faster than facts, per MIT research. In polarized vote banks, this cements loyalty: a deepfake video of a rival "mocking the poor" ignites fury among low-income voters, binding them to the attacker's camp. During India's 2019 polls, WhatsApp hoaxes alleging Congress payoffs to a bomber's family whipped up nationalist fervor, herding undecided Hindus into BJP ranks. The result? Emotional priming locks voters into tribal "us vs. them" mindsets, where defection feels like betrayal.

Polarization deepens through **echo chambers**, algorithmic silos on platforms like Facebook and X. Here, selective exposure reinforces biases; a 2021 *Nature* study found misinformation widens partisan gaps by 20-30%. Vote banks harden as groups consume tailored fakes: Muslim voters see amplified "anti-CAA violence" claims, entrenching opposition support, while Hindu groups view "love jihad" conspiracies, bolstering ruling coalitions. In Madhya Pradesh's 2023 assembly race, edited videos targeting Shivraj Chouhan and Kamal Nath fueled caste divides—OBCs vs. tribals—splintering swing voters into rigid blocs. Psychologically, this triggers **backfire effects**: corrections boomerang, strengthening false beliefs via cognitive dissonance.

The **continued influence effect** ensures damage lingers post-debunking. Even knowing a story is fake, people incorporate it into reasoning—a "sins of memory" flaw where source misattribution blends truth with fiction. U.S. Pizzagate believers persisted in conspiracy theories despite facts, mirroring Indian lynchings from child-kidnapper rumors. In elections, this sustains vote bank mobilization: post-2024 Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi's "rigged polls" claims via alleged fake voters endured, galvanizing Congress's urban youth base against the Election Commission.

Vote banks suffer **identity fusion**, where misinformation fuses politics with self-concept. Social identity theory explains how threats to the group (real or fabricated) heighten in-group favoritism. Fake news portraying "illegal immigrants swamping jobs" unites working-class vote banks against liberals, as in Brexit or Trump's base. In India, 2020 Delhi riots amplified by doctored videos fused Muslim voters with anti-BJP sentiment, while Hindu groups doubled down on majoritarianism. Anxiety from constant exposure erodes mental resilience, fostering **learned helplessness**—voters disengage or cling harder to "their side," suppressing turnout or critical thinking.

Quantitatively, impacts are stark. Psychological profiles link low analytic thinkers (per Cognitive Reflection Test) to higher fake news susceptibility, skewing rural, less-educated vote banks. A Warwick University study tied prolonged exposure to anxiety spikes, reducing nuanced policy engagement. Platforms exploit this: microtargeting via data profiles delivers personalized psy-ops, as Cambridge Analytica did, herding undecideds into extremes.

Yet, this psychological siege weakens democracy. Solidified vote banks prioritize loyalty over merit, enabling populist demagogues. In MP's post-poll Shivpuri violence over "fake voting," feuds turned deadly, fracturing local coalitions. Globally, it erodes trust: Edelman's 2023 barometer showed news distrust at 57%, correlating with populist surges.

Countering requires **prebunking**—inoculating minds against tactics via education—and boosting **metacognition** (thinking about thinking). Taiwan's approach curbed Chinese fakes; India could scale fact-checkers like BOOM. Democracies must foster media literacy to loosen fake news's grip on psyches, lest vote banks become misinformation fortresses.

The reason why major politicians are worried about their image on social media and how they are fulfilling public promises is because the programming in a voter's mind would be accordingly affected. Public Relation agencies and the other digital marketing firms are gaining surplus business because of the propaganda that surrounds

multiple world leaders and their portraits. Leaders like Donald Trump, Narendra Modi, Kim Jong Ungh are all in traps of their identity and maintenance of a falsehood light. The case of the Epstein files has charred the image of major politicians and now the ground breaking task of rebranding and reimaging has begun. This ultimately will impact their vote banks and how they stay in power.

In democratic politics, a leader's public image serves as the emotional glue binding vote banks—cohesive blocs of supporters defined by caste, region, ideology, or class. Crafted through speeches, media, and symbolism, this image influences voter loyalty by evoking trust, aspiration, or fear. Positive portrayals expand vote banks by attracting swing voters, while negatives erode them, fragmenting support. Fake news amplifies these dynamics, weaponizing perceptions to fabricate scandals or heroes overnight. Public image acts as a cognitive shortcut for voters overwhelmed by policy details. Psychological research shows voters evaluate leaders on traits like competence, empathy, and integrity, often prioritizing these over platforms. A strong image—think Narendra Modi's "Vikas Purush" (development man) persona—resonates with aspirational middle-class and rural Hindu vote banks, promising stability and growth. Surveys like Lokniti-CSDS post-2019 reveal Modi's 45% approval drove BJP's sweep, pulling OBCs and upper castes into a consolidated Hindu nationalist bloc. Conversely, Rahul Gandhi's image as "Pappu" (foolish) has shrunk Congress's dynastic vote bank, with satirical memes reinforcing perceptions of inauthenticity among youth.Media mediation intensifies this. Newspapers and TV shape "mediated leader effects," where positive coverage boosts party support by 5-10% during campaigns, per European studies. In India, Shivraj Singh Chouhan's "Mama" (maternal uncle) image in Madhya Pradesh welfare schemes like LadliBehna cemented women and tribal vote banks, securing BJP's 2023 win. Regional leaders like Mamata Banerjee leverage "Didi" (sister) empathy to hold Bengal's Muslim-Bengali vote bank against BJP incursions. Image builds through rituals: Modi's yoga poses signal cultural revivalism, fusing Hindu pride with personal branding to retain 80% core supporters.Vote banks solidify via identity fusion. Social identity theory posits leaders embodying group values trigger loyalty; Yogi Adityanath's monk-warrior image galvanizes upper-caste and aggressive Hindutva voters in UP, evident in 2022 assembly gains. Charisma expands peripheries: Arvind Kejriwal's "common man" in muffler endeared Delhi's poor, flipping AAP into a Dalit-urban vote bank. Negative images reverse this—Manmohan Singh's "silent PM" caricature alienated Congress's middle-class base by 2014, halving seats.

Yet, fake news turbocharges vulnerabilities, exploiting psychological frailties like illusory truth and confirmation bias. It crafts alternate realities, harming leaders by eroding trust instantaneously. In MP's 2023 polls, AI voice clones falsely depicted Kamal Nath scrapping Ladli Behna, sparking outrage among 1.3 crore women beneficiaries—BJP's key vote bank. Repetition via WhatsApp made the lie "feel true," costing Congress Chhindwara despite Nath's legacy.

Deepfakes and edits amplify scandals. A fabricated 2024 Lok Sabha clip showed Rahul Gandhi "singing" mockingly, shared by BJP handles, reinforcing his inept image and depressing urban youth turnout. Conversely, Congress-altered Modi speeches criticizing "crony capitalists" backfired, hardening business vote banks against them. Pizzagate-style hoaxes, like 2019 claims of Congress paying Pulwama bomber's kin, fused patriotism with BJP loyalty, polarizing Muslims further into opposition camps.

Emotional warfare ensues. Fear-mongering fakes—like doctored Delhi riot videos portraying Hindus as victims—bolstered BJP's 2020 narrative, retaining Hindu vote banks amid 53 deaths. Anger spreads sixfold faster, per MIT; leaders smeared as "anti-national" hemorrhage neutrals. Backfire effects doom corrections: debunkings entrench biases, as with Nath's "fake voters" claims post-MP loss, alienating even moderates.

Quantitatively devastating, fake news slashes approval by 15-20% overnight. Cambridge Analytica-style microtargeting tailors attacks: rural WhatsApp blasts hit low-literacy vote banks hardest. In Shivpuri's 2023 post-poll clash, "fake voting" rumors ignited caste feuds, fracturing local BJP alliances.

Harm extends beyond polls. Sustained fakes foster cynicism, shrinking vote banks via disengagement—Edelman data shows 57% media distrust correlates with 5% turnout dips. Leaders pivot defensively: Modi dismisses critiques as "fake news," preserving his strongman image but risking overreach.

Mitigation demands proactive image armor: prebunking via influencers, rapid fact-checks (e.g., BOOM), and authentic counter-narratives. Taiwan's resilience against Chinese fakes offers lessons; India's IT Rules mandate traceability.

Ultimately, public image is vote banks' lifeblood—fluid yet fragile. Fake news doesn't just dent reputations; it reprograms loyalties, turning assets into liabilities. Leaders mastering authentic branding while navigating digital minefields thrive; others watch empires crumble pixel by pixel.

Ultimately, fake news doesn't steal votes; it reprograms minds, turning fluid electorates into psychological silos. Breaking these demands understanding the brain's frailties—not just tech fixes.

Fake News Analysis: Fake news inundates India's political landscape, with NCRB data showing 1,087 reported cases in 2023—a 27% surge from 858 in 2022—primarily under IPC Section 505 for spreading alarming rumors. This proliferation, amplified by social media's 535 million users (80% accessing news via WhatsApp/Facebook), erodes

electoral integrity, polarizes vote banks, and fuels violence, backed by stark statistics.

India generates 1 in 6 global fake news pieces, per UNESCO-Ipsos, with a 214% misinformation spike during COVID-19. Statista's 2023 survey of 86,000 respondents found 85% of urban Indians encounter "suspicious" news weekly, 38% from verified pages, and 70% via one verified handle (NewsChecker). PIB busted 1,116 fakes by 2023 (up from 704 in 2022), mostly political. States lead: Telangana (275 cases, +4%), UP (198, +35%), Maharashtra (136, +106%). ISB study pins X/Facebook as top spreaders across politics/religion.

Deepfakes peaked: BOOM fact-checked 584 AI-misinfos, including BJP's Rahul Gandhi "singing" parody and Congress-altered Modi speeches. 93% urban Indians want platforms regulated during polls (Ipsos-UNESCO). WhatsApp's 300M+ users forward unchecked content 5x more than globally, swaying 20-30% undecideds per Lokniti-CSDS.

Fake child-kidnap rumors triggered 30+ lynchings (2018), 81% WhatsApp-linked. NCRB's 27% case rise correlates with communal clashes: Delhi 2020 riots (53 deaths) from doctored videos; MP 2023 Shivpuri (3 killed) over "fake voting." 85% face online hate, blaming social media (64%).

Misinfo widens divides: 57% distrust news (Edelman 2023), dropping turnout 5% in affected areas. Partisan fakes boost loyalty—BJP WhatsApp groups (20K+ in UP 2019) hardened Hindu banks; Muslim blocs consolidated anti-BJP post-CAA hoaxes. MP 2023: AI clones cost Congress women voters (1.3cr Ladli Behna fears).

Metric	2022	2023	% Change
NCRB Fake News Cases newslaundry	858	1,087	+27%
Telangana Cases newslaundry	264	275	+4%
UP Cases newslaundry	147	198	+35%
PIB Busted Fakes data	704	1,116	+59%
Urban Suspicious News Encounter statista	-	85% weekly	-

Fake news rigs perceptions: Kamal Nath's 55L "fake voters" claim post-MP 2023 fueled ECI distrust, galvanizing opposition. 2019 polls: Bomber payoff hoax herded Hindus to BJP. Deepfakes sway 10-15% swing votes (GNET 2024). Polarization entrenches: *Nature* models show 20% partisan gap widening.

Lynchings cost Rs 100cr+ policing (2018); riots billions in damages. Distrust hampers policy—vaccine hesitancy from microchip myths delayed India's herd immunity.

India's infodemic demands action: IT Rules trace origins, but enforcement lags. Fact-checkers like BOOM debunk 100s weekly, yet 70% persists via forwards. Statistical escalation signals crisis—without curbs, politics devolves to post-truth battles.

Measures Taken By Indian Government To Curb Fake News: The Indian government has implemented a multi-pronged strategy to combat fake news in politics, blending legal frameworks, institutional mechanisms, and tech interventions while balancing free speech under Article 19(1). These measures target digital platforms, media, and government-related disinformation, with heightened focus during elections.

Key Legal Frameworks

1. **IT Rules 2021**: Mandates a Code of Ethics for digital news publishers, requiring self-regulation and grievance redressal. Intermediaries (e.g., WhatsApp, X) lose safe-harbour immunity if they fail to remove misinformation swiftly or trace originators. Section 69A empowers blocking content threatening sovereignty, public order, or elections.
2. **IPC Section 505**: Criminalizes statements causing public alarm or enmity; NCRB logged 1,087 cases in 2023 (up 27%).
3. **Proposed Updates**: Parliamentary panels recommend defining "fake news," mandatory fact-checking units in media houses, higher fines, and AI content labeling/ licensing.

Institutional Bodies

1. **PIB Fact Check Unit (FCU)**: Debunks Central Government-related fakes; busted 1,116 in 2023 (up 59% from 2022). Operates on "Find, Assess, Create, Target" (FACT) principle.
2. **Press Council of India (PCI)**: Enforces Norms of Journalistic Conduct against defamatory/misleading print content via inquiries and censure.
3. Election Commission of India launched "Myth v/s reality register" for 2024 Lok Sabha pollsto proactively counter election misinfo. They run awareness campaigns and monitors social media.

Platform-Specific Actions

1. **Electronic/Print Media**: NBSA/CBFC issues advisories, warnings, apology scrolls, or off-air bans for Programme Code violations.
2. **Social Media Directives**: Platforms must appoint India-based compliance officers, remove harmful content within 36 hours, and enable traceability during probes. 2024 advisories targeted deepfakes in polls.

Recent Developments (2024-2025)

1. November 2025 Rajya Sabha statement by Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw affirmed strengthened frameworks against AI deepfakes impacting democracy.
2. State-level pushes, like Karnataka's draft bill (up to 7 years jail, Rs 10L fine), though criticized for vagueness and press curbs.

These have curbed some spread—e.g., ECI's interventions debunked 100s of 2024 deepfakes—but critics note selective enforcement, vague definitions risking censorship, and lag against WhatsApp virality (70% fakes persist via forwards).[from prior] Ongoing reforms

emphasize transparency over blanket bans.

Conclusion: Fake news has evolved from fringe nuisance to existential threat for Indian democracy, weaponizing psychological vulnerabilities to fracture vote banks, tarnish leaders, and erode institutional trust. As explored—from WhatsApp lynchings in Madhya Pradesh to AI deepfakes in 2024 Lok Sabha polls—its proliferation (1,087 NCRB cases in 2023, up 27%) exploits confirmation bias, illusory truth, and emotional outrage, polarizing castes, religions, and regions into rigid blocs. Leaders' images crumble under fabricated scandals, while unchecked social media virality sways 20-30% of undecided voters. Yet, this crisis underscores democracy's resilience: structured accountability via elections, courts, and fact-checkers like PIB's 1,116 busts offers antidotes where autocracies falter. Looking ahead to 2026-2030, the trajectory hinges on technology's double-edged sword. AI deepfakes will surge—BOOM's 584 election fact-checks pale against generative models churning personalized psy-ops at scale. By 2027 Lok Sabha polls, quantum leaps in voice/video synthesis could fabricate "live" leader speeches, microtargeted via voter data, amplifying MP-style hoaxes (e.g., Kamal Nath's welfare scrap lies) to flip 10-15% swing seats. WhatsApp's 500M+ users, 70% forwarding unverified content, will remain ground zero, but X/Facebook algorithms may prioritize outrage further, per ISB findings. Rural low-literacy vote banks—OBCs, tribals—face highest risk, with 85% weekly "suspicious news" exposure fueling vigilantism over ballots.

Positive shifts loom if proactive. Government measures—IT Rules 2021's traceability, ECI's Myth vs Reality Register—must scale with AI labeling mandates and blockchain provenance for political ads. Prebunking campaigns, inoculating via "SIFT" (Stop, Investigate, Find, Trace), could cut belief by 30%, as Taiwan halved Chinese disinfo. Digital literacy in schools, targeting 300M youth, might halve rural susceptibility by 2030, loosening echo chambers. Platforms face reckoning: EU-style Digital Services Act equivalents could fine non-compliant giants 6% revenues, forcing demonetization of fakes.

Psychologically, future-proofing demands metacognition training—apps gamifying bias detection to counter emotional hijacks. Public image management evolves: authentic holograms, VR townhalls for leaders like Modi or Kejriwal rebuild trust, outpacing smears. Vote banks may fragment positively, with data-savvy millennials (40% electorate by 2029) prioritizing policy over tribe, diluting caste polarizers.

Challenges persist: selective enforcement risks weaponizing laws against opposition, as Karnataka's draft bill hints. Global headwinds—U.S. midterms' deepfake floods—will export tactics. Economic fallout mounts: riots cost billions; distrust stalls reforms like CAA or farm laws. Optimistically, India's 1.4B democracy, battle-tested through 2019/2024 upheavals, holds unique strengths. Diverse media (500+ channels), 900M voters, and cultural skepticism ("sadak pe aao") foster organic corrections. By 2030, hybrid human-AI fact-checkers could process 1M claims daily, restoring 20% eroded trust (Edelman 57% low). Leaders embracing transparency—e.g., ECI live voter roll audits—reclaim narrative control.

Delhi currently is facing high rates of crimes and abandonment issues, a fake news has been floating on the kidnapping of 500 girls which became a major concern in most Indian families wherein girls were not even allowed to return to their colleges. After the total floating fiasco, the entire thing came out to be fake, facts were unchecked and it came to be promotional event for a Bollywood movie. This is how Indian citizens are impacted and can

Ultimately, fake news thrives in cynicism's shadow; combating it revives democracy's essence: informed deliberation. India must lead—pioneering "truth infrastructure" blending regulation, tech, and education—to ensure 2047 centenary dawns on empowered, not manipulated, citizens. The marketplace of ideas can flourish anew, turning misinformation's chaos into democratic renewal.

References:-

1. Gnan Ganga Alliance. (2025, March 24). *Impact of fake news: An Indian electoral perspective*. https://gnanaganga.alliance.edu.in/entities/publication/321645fb-2c93-45b4-8dd4-f5b89df297df
2. Internet Just Society. (2021, February 6). *India's struggle against fake news*. https://www.internetjustsociety.org/indias-struggle-against-fakenews
3. India Today. (2025, August 1). *Lok Sabha poll rigged, we've proof: Rahul Gandhi's big charge at Congress event*. https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/lok-sabha-polls-were-rigged-weve-documents-rahul-gandhis-big-charge-at-congress-event-2765
4. BBC News. (2018, July 19). *India lynchings: WhatsApp sets new rules after mob killings*. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-44897714
5. Global Network on Extremism & Technology. (2024, September 10). *Deep fakes, deeper impacts: AI's role in the 2024 Indian general election and beyond*. https://gnet-research.org/2024/09/11/deep-fakes-deeper-impacts-ais-role-in-the-2024-indian-general-election-and-beyond/
6. Research and Reviews: Journal of Medical Sciences. (2025, March 30). *Examining the gaps in India's legal accountability https://rrijm.com/index.php/RRIJM/article/view/146*
7. Pulitzer Center. (2018, December 12). *How WhatsApp fuels fake news and violence in India*. https://pulitzercenter.org/stories/how-whatsapp-fuels-fake-news-and-violence-india
8. National Public Radio. (2018, July 16). *How the spread of fake stories in India has led to violence*. https://

www.npr.org/2018/07/17/629896525/how-the-spread-of-fake-stories-in-india-has-led-to-violence

9. NDTV. (2023, November 19). *1 burnt alive, 2 shot dead: Madhya Pradesh families clash over fake voting*. https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/1-burnt-alive-2-shot-dead-madhya-pradesh-families-clash-over-fake-voting-4589808
10. Times of India. (2025, July 12). *Kamal Nath claims 2023 assembly poll results influenced by 8 fake voters*. https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/bhopal/kamal-nath-claims-2023-assembly-poll-results-influenced-by-8-fake-voters/article
11. Hindustan Times Tech. (2018, June 24). *Inside WhatsApp's fake news problem in India: When rumours lead to killings*. https://tech.hindustantimes.com/amp/tech/news/inside-whatsapp-s-fake-news-problem-in-india-when-rumours-lead-to-killings-story-3
12. BOOM Live. (2023, November 21). *Madhya Pradesh polls: Fake edited videos target Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Kamal Nath*. https://www.boomlive.in/fact-check/madhya-pradesh-elections-fake-news-edited-videos-shivraj-singh-chouhan-kamal-nath-23563
13. The Hindu. (2025, October 18). *Congress leader slams detention of two journalists from M.P. over publication of 'fake news'*. https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/madhya-pradesh/congress-leader-slams-detention-of-two-journalists-from-mp-over-publicatio
14. News18. (2019, July 29). *Fake WhatsApp message of child kidnaps causing mob violence in Madhya Pradesh*. https://www.news18.com/news/tech/fake-whatsapp-message-of-child-kidnaps-causing-mob-violence-in-madhya-pradesh-2252015.html
15. The India Forum. (2021, December 17). *Disinformation: A new type of state-sponsored violence*. https://www.theindiaforum.in/article/disinformation-new-type-state-sponsored-violence
16. National Herald India. (2018, June 26). *Fake social media messages fuel latest mob lynchings in India*. https://www.nationalheraldindia.com/opinion/fake-social-media-messages-fuel-latest-mob-lynchings-in-india
17. Vhora, M. (n.d.). *The impact of fake news on well-being: A psychological and philosophical perspective* [PDF]. University of Warwick. https://warwick.ac.uk/research/spotlights/digital/fundedprojects/mahek_vhora.pdf
18. Frontiers in Psychology. (2024, August 29). *Processing of misinformation as motivational and cognitive factors*. https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/psychology/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1430953/full
19. Martel, C., Pennycook, G., & Rand, D. G. (2020, October 6). Reliance on emotion promotes belief in fake news. *PubMed*. https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/33026546/
20. National Center for Biotechnology Information. (2024, November 17). *Findings and discussion*. https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC11575416/

****