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Biased Media is a Threat to Democracy

good all the best luck

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Essay

“A biased media can distort public debate and erode democratic accountability,” said famous political theorist Robert A. Dahl in his book “On Democracy.” It is evident from the above-mentioned quote that when media becomes biased, it undermines the informed decision-making abilities of the masses and accountability, which are fundamental features of democracy, ultimately threatening democracy. Biased media poses a serious threat to democracy because it undermines the very principles of transparency, accountability and informed citizen participation that sustain democratic systems. When media outlets distort facts, selectively present information or favor particular political or economic elites, they weaken citizens’ ability to make rational choices and hold leaders accountable. This manipulation of public opinion often polarizes societies, fosters mistrust in democratic institutions and creates fertile ground for authoritarian tendencies. Harpoening

the informed decision making capabilities of masses is foremost manifestation of biased media is a threat to democracy. The other key indications of partisan media is a risk to democracy include: weakening of electoral integrity, erosion of public trust in institutions, suppression of minority voices and promotion of populism and authoritarianism. The undermining of accountability of powerful actors, marginalization of fact-based journalism and encouragement of mass disengagement in politics are also major signs of biased media is a threat to democracy. However, international community can ensure responsible use of media in order to strengthen democracy by promoting media literacy, consolidating legal and institutional safeguards against disinformation campaigns and ensuring ethical journalism standards. Hence, this essay will delve into the manifestations of biased media is a threat to democracy, as well as ways forward to ensure

responsible use of media in order to promote democracy.

To begin with, hampering the informed decision-making abilities of citizens is one of the clearest ways in which biased media threatens democracy, as it restricts access to accurate, balanced and diverse information that is essential for meaningful political participation. When media outlets selectively highlight certain narratives or distort facts, the masses are deprived of the knowledge required to evaluate policies, scrutinize leaders and hold institutions accountable, thereby weakening democratic responsiveness. Scholars have emphasized that free and independent media serve as a cornerstone of democratic societies by ensuring that citizens are well-informed and capable of making rational electoral choices. Pippa Norris in her book, "A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies," argues that when media outlets cease to provide accurate, balanced and

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diverse information, they weaken the capacity of citizens to make informed choices, thereby undermining the very foundation of democracy. Thus, biased media erodes the foundation of democratic governance by disabling citizens from making reasoned decisions in the political sphere.

Likewise, weakening of electoral integrity is a direct manifestation of biased media because when media outlets manipulate information, misrepresent facts or give disproportionate coverage to certain political actors, they distort the level playing field that is essential for free and fair elections. This distortion misguides voters, limits their access to impartial information and fosters polarization, all of which erode the credibility of electoral outcomes. Once citizens begin to doubt the fairness of elections, their trust in democratic institutions diminishes, paving the way for authoritarian tendencies. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt in their book, "How Democracies Die," depict that when institutions like media become

biased, they compromise electoral integrity by enabling manipulation of democratic process, weakening accountability and public faith in electoral process, ultimately hampering democracy in the longer run. Hence, biased media's role in eroding electoral integrity becomes a fundamental threat to democracy itself.

Similarly, erosion of public trust in institutions is a clear manifestation of biased media is a threat to democracy because institutions derive their legitimacy from the perception of fairness and neutrality in the eyes of citizens. When media outlets selectively present information or amplify partisan narratives, they create suspicion about whether institutions are acting independently or serving political interests. This suspicion gradually weakens institutional credibility, which is the foundation of accountability and rule of law in democratic systems. For instance, in Pakistan, media polarization during the political crises significantly eroded public confidence in the state institutions, as different channels

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portrayed these institutions as either partisan actors or tools of political manipulation, fueling distrust and weakening democratic accountability. Therefore, biased media directly damages the public's faith in institutional neutrality, which is indispensable for sustaining democracy.

Moreover, suppression of minority voices is a clear sign of biased media. It is a danger for democracy because when media platforms selectively amplify dominant narratives while ignoring or marginalizing dissenting or minority perspectives, they prevent inclusive political discourse that is vital for democratic legitimacy. This exclusion not only silences vulnerable groups but also skews public opinion in favor of entrenched elites, reducing the diversity of ideas necessary for informed decision-making. These media practices foster unequal representation, which ultimately undermines the principle of political equality on which democracy rests. Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky in their book, "Manufacturing Consent," opine that media

often operates through filters that filter out dominant political narratives. Consequently, when minority voices are suppressed through bias, inclusivity and plurality are essential for democracy. Furthermore, the influence of biased media is a clear sign of authoritarianism because when media prioritizes personal narratives or uncritically repeats dominant narratives, it weakens the critical discourse that is vital for democratic legitimacy. This manipulation undermines checks and balances, creating a culture where leaders appear as legitimate so-called experts. This manipulation perception enables leaders to accountability and erode democratic norms. Without Borders World highlights that politically

often operates through structural biases that filter out marginalized voices to serve dominant political and economic interests. Consequently, when minority perspectives are suppressed through biased media, it erodes inclusivity and pluralism, both of which are essential for sustaining democratic governance.

Furthermore, promotion of populism and authoritarianism is a clear manifestation of biased media as a risk for democracy because when media outlets glorify strongman narratives or uncritically amplify populist rhetoric, they weaken democratic institutions by prioritizing personalities over principles. This coverage often delegitimizes opposition voices, undermines checks and balances, and creates a culture where authoritarian tendencies appear as legitimate solutions to complex problems. This manipulation of public perception enables leaders to bypass institutional accountability and erodes citizens' commitment to democratic norms. The Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index highlights that politically aligned and biased

media landscapes have fueled populist and authoritarian discourses by shaping news agendas to serve ruling interests. In short, biased media acts as a vehicle for populism and authoritarianism, ultimately endangering the stability and inclusivity of democratic systems.

Additionally, undermining accountability of powerful actors is a clear symptom of biased media that threatens democracy because when media outlets shield influential political, economic or military elites from scrutiny, they obstruct the flow of truthful information that citizens require to hold these actors answerable. By downplaying corruption, mismanagement or abuse of power, biased media creates an environment where those in authority operate with impunity, weakening the very foundation of transparency on which democratic governance depends. This selective reporting not only distorts public understanding but also reinforces elite capture of state institutions. For instance, the International Institute for Democracy and

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Electoral Assistance (IDEA) in its 'Global State of Democracy Report 2023' notes that biased media environments often reduce accountability by protecting dominant actors from criticism, thereby eroding institutional checks and balances. So, when media fails to challenge the misconduct of powerful actors, it directly undermines accountability, posing a grave threat to democracy.

In the same manner, the marginalization of fact-based journalism is a clear manifestation of biased media that threatens democracy because it replaces objective reporting with selective narratives that serve the interests of powerful groups, thereby depriving citizens of the accurate information needed to make informed choices. When facts are sidelined in favor of sensationalism, propaganda or partisan reporting, public debate becomes distorted, weakening accountability and eroding trust in democratic institutions. This distortion of truth not only manipulates public

perception but also undermines the very foundation of deliberative democracy, which depends on informed citizenry. The Reuters Institute Digital News Report 2023 shows that the declining visibility of factual journalism in favor of partisan or entertainment-driven content has deepened misinformation challenges, thereby weakening democratic resilience. Thus, the suppression of fact-based journalism by biased media directly translates into a democratic deficit where truth loses its central place in governance.

Further to this, endorsement of mass disengagement in politics is a clear manifestation of biased media that threatens democracy because when media outlets deliberately highlight divisive rhetoric, sensational stories or disillusioning narratives while downplaying substantive political debates, they foster apathy among citizens who feel their participation makes little difference. This withdrawal from political processes weakens civic engagement, undermines electoral participation

and ultimately erodes the legitimacy of democratic institutions. By alienating citizens from politics, biased media enables unaccountable elites to dominate decision-making without public scrutiny. Pippa Norris in her book, "Democratic Deficit: Critical Citizens Revisited", argues that media bias that breeds cynicism and detachment from politics significantly reduces citizens' trust and willingness to engage, thereby weakening democratic resilience. Hence, the role of biased media in encouraging ^{more} disengagement is a profound threat to the sustainability of democratic process.

In addition, enabling elite capture of information is a clear manifestation of biased media that threatens democracy because when media outlets prioritize the narratives of powerful political, economic or corporate actors, they suppress diverse perspectives and restrict citizens' access to impartial facts. This concentration of informational control allows elites to

shape public opinion in their favor, weaken accountability mechanisms and protect their interests at the expense of broader societal needs. As a result, democratic principles such as transparency, pluralism and equal participation are eroded, leaving the public vulnerable to manipulation. Herman and Chomsky in their book, "Manufacturing Consent", argue that media systems often serve elite interests by filtering information and marginalizing dissenting voices, creating a public sphere that favors domination rather than democratic deliberation. Therefore, the capture of information by elites through biased media is a direct threat to democratic integrity.

In the same way, when media shows selective empathy by excessively highlighting the grievances of certain groups while ignoring the broader public interest, it creates a biased narrative that undermines democratic balance. This one-sided coverage not only amplifies specific demands but also sidelines competing voices,

thereby distorting the true spectrum of societal concerns. This selective representation strengthens populist rhetoric, weakens rational policymaking and manipulates public opinion in favor of particular actors.

Robert M. Entman in his book, "Democracy Without Citizens," emphasizes that media framing that privileges certain demands while excluding others reflects bias that erodes the democratic idea of equal representation. Consequently, when empathy is selectively deployed to highlight particular demands of the public, it becomes a manifestation of biased media that threatens the inclusiveness and fairness essential to democracy.

Last but not least, when media extends undue support to dynastic politics at the national level, it reinforces elite dominance by glorifying political families rather than encouraging merit-based leadership, which directly threatens democratic fairness. This bias shapes public perception by presenting dynastic figures as the only legitimate

leaders, thereby restricting political competition and silencing alternative voices. Such / this selective promotion creates a cycle where political power remains concentrated within families, undermining inclusivity and accountability in governance. A striking example can be seen in Pakistan, where the Bhutto and Sharif families have consistently received disproportionate media attention, shaping political narratives in their favor while overshadowing non-dynastic leaders. In short, this selective focus reflects a clear manifestation of biased media that ultimately threatens democracy by sustaining elite capture and restricting genuine political pluralism.

Manifestations of the biased media that threaten democracy have been mentioned in the previous discussion. However, solutions to ensure responsible use of media in order to consolidate democracy will be explored in the upcoming paragraphs.

Firstly, promoting media literacy is essential for ensuring responsible

use of media because it enables citizens to differentiate between credible information and misinformation. By strengthening critical thinking skills, it helps people resist propaganda and manipulation, thereby protecting the democratic right to informed decision-making. Media literacy also fosters accountability by allowing citizens to question biases in media narratives, which is fundamental for democratic transparency. A notable example is Finland, where the government integrated media literacy into its national education curriculum, making it one of the most resilient countries against fake news and disinformation campaigns, thereby safeguarding electoral integrity and inclusive democratic debate. Thus, this demonstrates that embedding media literacy in society not only protects democracy from disinformation but also empowers citizens to engage in democratic processes with responsibility and awareness.

Secondly, strengthening legal and institutional safeguards against disinformation campaigns is vital for ensuring the

responsible use of media because it provides citizens with a protected information space free from manipulation. By ensuring accountability for those who spread falsehoods, such safeguards reduce the chances of public opinion being shaped by propaganda rather than facts. They also enhance transparency in media systems, which is necessary for maintaining electoral integrity and public trust in democratic processes.

The Council of Europe's report on Information Disorder highlights that strong legal and institutional mechanisms are essential to counter coordinated disinformation efforts that undermine trust in democratic institutions. Hence, this shows that robust safeguards not only curb the manipulation of public opinion but also ensure that media serves as a pillar of democracy rather than a tool of distortion.

Thirdly, ensuring ethical journalism standards can guarantee responsible use of media because it obliges journalists to follow principles of accuracy, fairness

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and impartiality, which are essential for an informed and engaged citizenry in a democracy. When media professionals adhere to ethical norms, they minimize sensationalism, resist political or corporate pressures and provide citizens with fact-based information that supports transparent decision-making. Ethical journalism also strengthens public trust in media institutions, thereby enhancing democratic accountability and discouraging the spread of misinformation. The UNESCO report, "Journalism, Fake News and Disinformation," stresses that adherence to professional ethics in journalism is crucial for safeguarding truth and promoting democratic governance. Therefore, this shows that embedding ethical standards in journalism not only ensures responsible media use but also secures the role of media as a watchdog of democracy.

Lastly, encouraging pluralism and diversity in media content can ensure responsible use of media because it provides space for multiple perspectives, prevents dominance of a single viewpoint and allows citizens to

access balanced information necessary for democratic participation. A pluralistic media environment reduces polarization, ensures inclusion of marginalized voices and strengthens accountability by broadening public debate. It also helps safeguard democracy by creating conditions where no group can monopolize narratives to manipulate public opinion.

Karppinen in his book, "Rethinking Media Pluralism," argues that true media pluralism is not just about the number of outlets but about ensuring diversity of content and viewpoints to support democratic discourse.

Consequently, this indicates that encouraging pluralism and diversity in media content not only promotes responsible media use but also secures the role of media as a guarantor of democratic inclusivity.

In a nutshell, this essay has shed light upon the indications of biased media that threaten democracy, alongside solutions to guarantee responsible use of media in order to consolidate democracy.

The endorsement of mass disengagement

in politics is the main sign of biased media that threatens democracy. Enabling elite capture of information, showing apathy to highlight genuine demands of public and supporting dynastic politics at national level are also major manifestations of biased media that restrict democratic governance.

However, the world community can ensure responsible use of media in order to strengthen democracy by ensuring ethical journalism standards and encouraging pluralism and diversity in media content.

Biased media threatens democracy by distorting facts, promoting partisan agendas and limiting citizens' access to truthful information, which weakens their ability to make informed choices.

Democracy erodes not only through violent coups but also when institutions are gradually weakened by misinformation and partisan manipulation, roles often facilitated by biased media. States across the globe can guarantee effective and efficient use of media in order to strengthen democracy by

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implementing aforementioned ways forward
in true letter and spirit.