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M# 4

Biased Media is a Real threat to Democracy

Outline

1- Introduction

Thesis statement: The biased and irresponsible behaviour of media outlets poses a significant threat to country's democratic institutions and processes. Therefore, it is essential to establish and enforce media regulations to ensure a free and fair media.

2- How biased media is a real threat to democracy?

2.1 - The efforts of biased media to take down facts and square reporting undermines democracy.

→ Failure of media to report ongoing human rights violations in KP and Baluchistan

2.2 - Media's unwavering support for incumbent government and its flawed policies

→ Media downplayed negligence of government during the 2023 Pakistan floods

2.3- systematic suppression of voices of opponents and critical thinkers by biased media

→ E-media and print media do not bother to accommodate extra-constitutional common practices and censorships of specific speeches and articles

2.4- Selective accountability and yellow journalism by biased media fuels political polarization and erodes its trust

→ Biased coverage of 2023 Azadi March

2.5- Non-substantive debates on religious and racial issues give rebirth of sectarianism and racial grudges

→ The 2017 Faizabad sit ins and the 2020 Lahore Mosque attack fueled religious tension and racial divide

2.6- Biased media undermines trust of public in government through disinformation and propaganda

→ use of emotive language by media in fueling 2023 Political crisis^{controversy} in Pakistan

2.7- Creation of echo chambers, reinforcing existing beliefs and dividing society

2.8- Biased media sways public opinion and influences the voting decisions

→ 2023 Punjab by-elections

2.9- Media erodes civil discourse by fostering a culture of outrage and hostility

→ Biased media's 2023 Imran Khan vs. Government of Pakistan coverage

3- Ways to address the threats of biased media to safeguard democracy

3.1- Promotion of media literacy and critical thinking

→ case of "fake news" epidemic in US

3.2- Enforcement of PEMRA ordinance to regulate media

3.3- Balanced reporting and analysis

3.4- Protection of democratic values

3.5- Hold media outlets accountable for misinformation and biasness

4- Conclusion

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The Essay

"A free and independent press can be the lifeblood of democracy, but a biased one poses a serious threat to its very foundations."

"Media and Democracy" by Brian McNair.

In modern concept of nation state media is considered as a basic prerequisite of democracy. It is a quick tool of communication between government and citizens whereby they can exchange their view with each other. Similarly, media also keeps a stern check over the abuse of statutory power being saddled upon public servants. The unmatched services of media are appreciable.

But at the same time it also poses a serious threat to democracy due to its biasness and irresponsibility. The manipulation of media for flawed government policies, spread of misinformation, non-substantive

debates, yellow journalism and inapposite favoritism are the driving factors, that deteriorate the very foundations of democracy.

To begin with media's effort to take down fair and square reporting of certain incidents across the country. Both e-media and print media give hype to the incidents that generate ^{either} massive ratings or are their personal favourite. Biased Media did not bother to cover the human rights violations in KP and Baluchistan before sit ins. The biased behaviour of media outlets towards heart wrenching issues has discredited and disrespected the hardy earned little morale of democracy in the eyes of people. The ^{under-}coverage given to such incidents in daily running series of headlines has heedlessly blamed democracy for the ongoing rampant human violations.

Furthermore, the biased media also keeps lending their support unwaveringly to the flawed governmental policies. Media shamelessly spun such policies positively which do not serve any purpose. During 2023 Pakistan floods government did not take effective measures. The responsibility of the media was to highlight that issue, so that pressure could be exerted on the government to take effective measures and devise relevant policies. But just to be in good books of government biased media downplayed the negligence of government. Such negligence can lead to the erosion of democracy.

Similarly, the biased media also systematically suppresses the voices of opponents and critical thinkers. Different modes of media cover wandering accounts of extra-judicial killings, torture and enforced disappearances. But unfortunately,

the main channels of the biased media do not bother to accommodate the extra constitutional common practices on daily basis. Likewise, a set of articles or speeches in which are critical of either incumbent government or opponents go censor. Therefore, censor on free and open exchange of ideas poses a threat to democracy.

Moreover, selective accountability of biased media also erodes democratic foundations. Biased media coverage of 2023 Azadi March in Pakistan is a phenomenal example of media's biasness. Along with selective accountability, sensationalism and exaggeration over accuracy and objectivity also erodes public trust on media and threatens democracy.

Moreover, the biased media outlets keep themselves entailed in non-substantive debates on religious and social issues. Such debates lead to sectarianism and racial grudges. Biased media coverage and non-sensical debates on 2017 Faisalabad sit-in fueled religious tensions. Similarly, on the 2020 Lahore Mosque attack, media coverage and debates perpetuated anti-Shia sentiments and sectarian divide. The increased radicalization, grudges and sectarian divide erodes democratic values like tolerance and equality.

The biased media also spreads false information regarding various aspects. Such propagandas and false information can undermine trust of masses in government. For example, the biased media coverage played a significant role in Pakistan's 2023 ^{controversy} political and economic crisis. The news channels used emotive language

which amplified the controversy, eroding trust in institutions and exacerbating political instability. By promoting a distorted narrative biased media has contributed in undermining democratic process.

Further, the tendency of biased media to create echo chambers, reinforce existing beliefs and societal divide poses a significant threat to democracy. By presenting information in a way that confirms viewers' existing, media outlets perpetuates limited exposure to diverse perspectives. This creates a fragmented civil discourse, where individuals are only exposed to information that reinforces their own biases.

As a result, society becomes increasingly divided, with individuals retreating into their own ideological silos. These ideological silos are a threat to democratic values.

Likewise, biased media also influences voting decisions by presenting selective information. This undermines democracy by creating an uninformed electorate. In the 2023 Punjab by-elections, biased media ^{coverage} swayed public opinion, favoring certain political parties. Voters were misled by sensationalized headlines and emotive appeals. As a result, the electoral outcome was influenced, threatening the integrity of the democratic process.

Additionally, biased media spreads hate and anger, hurting civil discourse. It fosters a culture of outrage and hostility. In 2023, the coverage of Imran Khan vs. government is a prime example of media's biasness. The media outlets took sides and presented only one view. As a result people lost interest in media and institutions, causing harm to the very fabric of society.

Ultimately, the erosion of civil discourse poses a threat to democracy.

The threats posed by biased media to democracy are clear, but it's not all doom and gloom. Instead some ways can be used to eliminate these threats to safeguard democracy.

Firstly, promoting media literacy and critical thinking is crucial to addressing the threats of biased media to democracy. By educating citizens to critically evaluate information, identify biases and recognize manipulation, public can be empowered to make informed decisions. For example, the "fake news" epidemic in US misled a lot of people. In response US launched a combination of fact checking initiatives, media literacy programs and regulatory efforts. The establishment of the "News Integrity Initiatives and the Honest Ads Act" combated this fake news epidemic, ^{thus} protecting democracy.

Further, PEMRA ordinance enforcement is crucial to regularize media. Licensing and regulation ensures compliance and ethical standards. There should be a check and penalization of channels to curb hate speech and misinformation. This fact checking mechanisms verifies information and promotes accuracy. By enforcing these ordinance and fact checking methods Pakistan can ensure a more balanced and responsible media landscape which in turn eliminates threats to democracy.

Similarly, balanced media reporting and analysis are essential components in protecting democratic values and safeguarding democracy from threats posed by biased media. A balanced media landscape presents a diverse perspectives, allowing citizens to make informed moves. Responsible journalism prioritizes accuracy and truth over

sensationalism. Media outlets must acknowledge and disclose biases to maintain transparency to protect democracy.

Moreover, media outlets must be held accountable for spreading misinformation and biasness. Independent fact-checking bodies should monitor media content. Further, regulatory frameworks should enforce strict standards for accuracy. There should be demand of corrections and apologies on false information from media outlets. As a result, accountability builds trust and transparency which protects democracy.

In conclusion, biased media poses a significant threat to democracy. It erodes trust, fuels polarization and undermines informed decision making. Similarly, it fosters a culture of hostility and outrage which harms democratic values. To safeguard democracy, media

literacy, fact checking and accountability are essential. Regulatory frameworks and independent media outlets can promote balanced reporting. By addressing biased media, democratic values can be protected and a well-informed citizenry can be ensured. Ultimately, a healthy democracy depends on responsible and diverse media landscape.