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Biased Media is a Real Threat to Democracy

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Democracy fundamentally relies on the decisions of informed and well-aware citizens. Media, which serves as a primary source of information between the government and the public is expected to provide accurate and unbiased information. However, when this primary pillar is compromised by bias, it not only distorts the flow of information but also undermines the very foundation of democratic governance. The rise of biased media characterized by manipulation of information, biased and selective reporting, sensationalism and favouritism towards certain democratic parties poses a significant threat to the credibility of democracy. By distorting reality through curating information and framing issues to align with specific agendas, biased media undermines the integrity of democratic institutions.

Before diving into the main argument of the topic, a sound understanding of the role of media in democracy is vital to build up the base for further arguments. Media plays a multifaceted role in any democratic society. As the main observer and capturer of democracy, the media plays the central role in scrutinizing government actions, exposing corruption and holding those in power accountable for their deeds. The role of media is extremely critical because it ensures that the citizens of a nation have enough access to the information necessary to make informed decisions, which is the base of democratic participation. In a democratic

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system, the media also serves as a platform for debate, allowing a diversity of voices and perspectives to be heard.

However, the media's role in democracy is not without challenges. With the growth of internet and social media, emerging of different platforms and the rise of 24-hour news cycles has led to an increased competition for audience attention. Many media organizations began to focus on attracting audiences by catering to certain ideological viewpoints leading to a decline in journalistic standards.

A prime example of this is news channels like Fox News and Sky News, on international level, which are known for their selective reporting rather than providing a balanced coverage. The pursuit of these ratings and competition has unfortunately led to the rise of biased media which fails to adhere to ethical standards of media reporting, hence, posing serious threats to democracy.

One of the most significant threats posed by biased media is the manipulation of information. In a democratic society, citizens rely on the media to provide accurate, unbiased and comprehensive coverage of the political events so that they are able to make informed decisions about their leaders and policies. However, when media outlets become biased, they may selectively report facts, often distorting them and may even omit critical information which

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cater to their bias. They may present stories or news in a way that aligns with their ideological and political perspectives.

"A prime example of this is the 2016 United States presidential elections in which various media outlets were criticized for their biased reporting, which contributed to misinformation among voters."

By the spread of inaccurate information as mentioned in the example, a significant portion of electorate in US were being misinformed about key issues like healthcare and foreign policy. Due to all this chaos, the electorate made some poorly informed decisions, hence, undermining the democratic principles of an informed electorate.

The mistrust of citizens on democratic institutions due to biased media is a profound threat with serious consequences. The biasness of media not only undermines the public confidence in themselves but also cast doubts on critical democratic institutions, such as the government and judiciary. In Pakistan, for example, the issue of biased media undermining trust in democratic institutions is evident in the coverage of country's political controversies and judicial matters.

"A notable example of this is media's handling of the Panama Papers case in 2016, which implicated Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his family in allegations of corruption."

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In the stated example, media coverage was highly polarized, with different news channels and outlets aligning with either the government or the opposition parties. Some media channels provided unbalanced reporting, which instilled public distrust in both media and the judiciary. For instance, while some media platforms emphasized the allegations and called for accountability, while others criticized the judicial process, calling and portraying it as politically motivated.

Favouritism towards certain political groups in media coverage is another significant threat to democracy as it distorts public's understanding of political realities and undermines the principle of impartiality which is essential for democratic functioning. When media channels align with specific political ideologies or parties, they often present information in a manner that favours their preferred side, while misrepresenting opposing viewpoints. This bias can distort public perception, creating unfair advantages for certain political personalities while undermining others. The biasness towards certain political parties is clearly visible in Pakistan media where some channels are biased towards PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf) by Imran Khan while some channels prefer PMFN (Pakistan Muslim League Noon) led by Nawaz Sharif. The threat posed by favouritism in media extends beyond influencing election outcomes. It also impairs the broader democratic system by creating a

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polarized media environment where constructive dialogue is replaced by selective favouritism.

Following the above argument, due to the favouritism of certain political parties, Media bias can significantly impact election outcomes by shaping public opinion through selective (and often misleading) coverage. This manipulation can occur through the portrayal of candidates, the emphasis on certain issues or the suppression of critical information. By aligning with specific political parties, media channels can influence voter's perception and decision, hence, affecting the fairness of elections and questioning the fairness of democratic system.

"In Pakistan, for example, In 2018 elections, media outlets were accused of showing bias towards Imran Khan and PTI".

Several media channels were noted for their positive coverage of Imran Khan's campaign, highlighting his promises and achievements while criticizing the performance and policies of opposition parties such as PMI-N. This preferential treatment in media coverage was said to have contributed to shaping public perception in favour of PTI.

There is no denying the fact that media bias indeed poses

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a severe threat to the credibility and integrity of democracy, however, these media biases could be addressed and entered to better manage the democratic system. Although, the prevalent nature of media bias in the contemporary society is a very serious task to handle but certain strategies could be implemented to better manage the media bias. One of the most effective way to combat media bias is through promotion of media literacy. Educating the public about how to critically evaluate news sources and recognize bias is crucial. Programs that teach individuals how to identify selective reporting and biased framing can empower them to make more informed judgements. Also, encouraging individuals to consume news from a variety of sources can help mitigate the effects of media bias.

To conclude, biased media is a formidable threat to democracy, distorting public perceptions and undermining electoral integrity. When media outlets favour particular political agendas and manipulate information, they erode the foundation of democratic engagement and fairness. Ensuring media impartiality is not just a matter of journalistic ethics but a fundamental necessity to preserve the integrity of democracy.