Media in Authoritarian and Populist Times: Post Covid-19 scenario

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Abstract— This paper is analytical in approach and draws various conclusions from the present-day media and its functioning. Media plays critical role in strengthening of Democracy but at the same time can be impediment also if not properly managed and given enough freedom to operate. Media is also called the fourth pillar of Democracy and gives space to criticism, dissent and questioning skill to electorate against the people in power. This paper argues that media in times of populism and authoritarianism is in for a serious overhaul and change. Media is very difficult to be found independent and working in conducive environment. Populism and authoritarians stifles dissent and criticism and manages the media in order to sell its own agenda. Post Covid-19 this phenomenon has gotten worse and the pandemic has aggravated the situation.

Keywords— Populism, Authoritarianism, Democracy, Covid-19.

I. INTRODUCTION

Whenever it comes to the media, it's important that the content be as impartial as practicable, free of political goals and biases, and that it has the primary function of factual informing, objectivity, and precision for the truth and incidents that exist, but there haven't been absolute views of media independence until now in either culture. It should be remembered that there were certain nations where media freedom was attempted to be respected to the utmost degree possible, with exceptions made under some situations. The core premise of democracy, however, is that the media must be free, independent, and capable of supplying the public with reliable, detailed, and timely information. As a result, the primary aim of the media is to educate people about the actions of public institutions, politics, defense, and citizen surveillance, among other things. As a consequence, the key functions of the media, which are: informational purpose, orientation, protection, propaganda, instructional, and recreational, are shaped correctly. While universality, reality, flexibility, objectivity, ethics, and social reciprocal power are the key features of the media in a democratic society (Curran, 2011).

While the media aids in the propagation of democratic ideals, it is also under the strict control of the government in authoritarian countries. Technological progress has brought about a drastic shift in everyday culture, but it has not neglected the media and other means of human contact. — The question now being raised by philosophers of mass communication is when and how often the media is in support of democracy. Whether media is putting government in a tizzy situation, is a difficult question to address, particularly in light of recent media changes around the world. In fact, as we all know, the media's key function, or primary task, is to generate and disseminate knowledge in society, regardless of the system or tools employed, but they are referred to as a media regime because they have traditionally developed structures, actors, standards, and even procedures (Tucker *et al,* 2017).

The media's presence in the world has expanded in the twenty-first century, where they now have a strong impact in politics and are therefore presented as a center of authority, but they still play the role of government and opposition repression, by attempting to make all of their actions visible. As a result, the media is now a vast

enterprise that hires individuals who are also seen as sources of fame and recognition.

II. MEDIA AND DEMOCRACY

The increasing use of digital messaging platforms to sway elections is also causing issues. Unlike social media sites, where the bulk of content is public, messaging systems are difficult to track and report on. As a consequence, there is a realm of correspondence that is untouched by election legislation and principles of honesty and justice. Artificial intelligence is now being used to moderate social media posts. Propaganda is delivered by automated chat bots. This raises doubts about secret agenda-setting force. Emerging discussions regarding the ethical, scientific, political, social, and legal ramifications of AI use must be related to freedom of speech in general, and elections specifically. In the plus side, emerging developments are improving access to information, which is a critical problem in elections. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has defined broad guidance on the issue. These guidelines include measures for Election Control Agencies, political parties and candidates, as well as legislative bodies that regulate media and Internet activities, to increase information access. Proposals for openness are also created for Internet firms and media organisations (Boler, 2010).

Media has advanced so much in the last two centuries, particularly with the advancement of science and technology, to be called the fourth power state, for which it is openly said that it is presented as the job controller of the three forces of the state. The media plays an important role in all cultures, whether democratic or not, but the role of the media in democratic societies is rightly emphasized. As a consequence, it is fair to assume that the media are an integral part of the social democratic system and one of the most significant factors in the growth of the digital age. It is reasonable that society (particularly new and democratic society) will be deprived of the most important instruments that affect the production of all facets of their lives without this important component. In the other hand, the government system will be without a weapon, or its most significant aspect, which has a direct effect on the system's ability to operate properly. However, the creation of free political life and new social ties is needed for the establishment of democracy. The general democratic system does not exist without free political life and sociopolitical ties. The value of political life in today's culture cannot be overstated (Carey, 2013).

During votes, these two rights – the freedom to vote and the right to express oneself – come into effect, calling attention to their interconnectedness. Voters of democracy should be encouraged to engage in forming the national agenda and cast their votes openly and based on a detailed knowledge of the candidates' political backgrounds and policy promises. Political dialogue and messaging, especially the role of the media in the polling process, have a huge effect on election results and their aftermath. Today, open, pluralistic, impartial, and healthy journalism's commitment to democracy is under unparalleled pressure. Many communities' confidence in existing political parties and news organizations is eroding. This is often followed by polarizing political rhetoric, which places peaceful elections and press freedom in jeopardy. Attempts by political actors to manipulate the media during elections threaten to complicate journalism's civic position at a time when it is still undermined economically in many countries. Around the same time, news institutions are being increasingly disintermediated: lawmakers use platforms other than the newspapers to directly access viewers, and voters exchange information directly amongst themselves. During a referendum, there is an avalanche of material other than journalism, including made-up news (Mason *et al*, 2018).

Election coverage, whether online or offline, has long been subject to efforts to sway it in favor of one political party while weakening yet. This deceptive tacticis also being bolstered with the usage of social networking and social networking to circumvent and undermine the integrity in credible reporting. These developments emerge at a time when the Internet has become the dominant outlet for political dialogue and intelligence collection for many people. Meanwhile, data derived from people's Internet use has become a highly valuable commodity that allows for micro-targeted ads based on computational research and is frequently under the radar of advertisers. Furthermore, algorithms prioritize emotive content, which promotes 'viral' content sharing over logical and fact-based political debate. The drastic rise in online misinformation further adds to the picture. There is already a need for media sources to publish journalistic material on a regular basis on the internet (while at the same time many people prefer not to pay for news). This places a burden on reporting's accuracy and competence. Due to media market pressures, well-researched political reporting is being replaced by simpler, more personal view material. When this is paired with social media's prioritization of feelings like fear and anger, voters could be more likely to vote based on behaviors rather than on political merit (Journell, 2019).

"A real poetry is the everyday paper," Walt Whitman said in 1852 (Williams & Carpini, 2011). This quotation was very accurate for more than a century, but its meaning has begun to shift today. But let us not concentrate on the manner in which the media distributes

news; rather, the emphasis in this segment would be on the role of the media in democracy. Democracy and the media are two very relevant issues and broad subjects to study since they each require a large volume of evidence and mechanisms that would be difficult to address in a single article. The media encompasses all methods of educating the public and conversing with them, including paper, sound, static and interactive imagery, radio, and television. The media's primary and overarching goal is to establish opportunities and conditions for contact and interaction among communities, classes, and social structures. In this respect, the media continues to be an influential factor in society that promotes information and culture. To clarify things, it can be argued that in the media, strategies or technological methods of public interpersonal contact are used to inform a culture, supplemented by a specific material. Today, the media plays a critical role in democracy, especially during the country's election process. In a democracy, depolarization of the media is especially important, since it is the media's financial freedom that allows them to conduct their work in an open, equal, and constructive way for society. So, in today's Western democracies, the idea may be generated that the media and the government are always at odds for their interests, and that this battle is being waged in the name of freedom. It can be like this in democratic democracies, where the media and the government are often at odds on a variety of topics. The government tries to protect and shut down the media, whilst the media refuses the closing, with the goal of accountability, disclosure, and so on (Jessop *et al,* 1984). As we have seen, the media plays a significant part in a democratic country; but, in order to fully comprehend the significance of the media in democracy, we must first understand the role of the media in democracy. As a result, democracy has proved to be the strongest form of government, as it has been able to represent a wide range of viewpoints and guarantee strong voter interest in decision-making. As a result, democracy is seen as a precondition for access to other societal problems, as well as a fundamental cornerstone and a more powerful instrument for human society's growth.

1. Authoritarianism and Populism: Impact on Media

Populist political parties have grown in popularity around the world. Populist movements have been popular in many European countries, especially during the financial and refugee crises. In Greece, for example, Syriza, a left-wing nationalist party, was elected to power in 2015. The emergence of Haider's FP in Austria in 1999 marked the beginning of a successful right-wing populism. Hofer, an Austrian populist figure, was less than 1% of the way to becoming president in 2016. Following the rise and collapse of Fortuyn's right-wing nationalist party LPF in

2003, Wilders' Freedom Party has enjoyed significant political popularity in the Netherlands since 2006 (Kellner, 2016). Studies attempting to understand nationalist party popularity from the demand side of voters have mostly concentrated on demographics such as age, ethnicity, and educational attainment. Around the same time, an increasing body of research shows that nationalist proposals can be convincing on the supply side of the media. Despite accepting the media's role in understanding populism's popularity, no study has yet looked into the media's appeal to populism: Would it be real that people who hold populist views favor material that reinforces the causal and spiritual difference between "us" and "them"? People enjoy media coverage that articulates attitudinal-congruent views of social problems because it reassures a consistent portrayal of the self). People with populist views, in particular, are likely to self-select media material that expresses a social division between "us" and "them." Based on these observations, this article attempts to go beyond conventional demographic definitions of populist people by looking at how tastes for particular media content apply to multiple facets of populist attitudes (Castaldo, 2018). Essentially, this report examines scientific hypotheses about populist citizens' unusual media diet and desires. To do so, we must first comprehend how people and media can view social problems using populism as a context.

The spiritual and causal opposition between "the right ones" and "the guilty others" is at the center of populism. For various types of populism, this relational dimension may take on different forms. When populist ideas stress the average people's hostility to the elites, they can be represented as anti-establishment. Exclusionist ideas are nationalist ideas that stress the resistance of common, native people to cultural minorities or foreigners. People and media will view social problems in nationalist ways if they follow this logic. We suggest three forms of media populism for journalists to use when covering news events on the sender side: citizen centrality, anti-elites, and monocultural media populism. We connect these forms of media populism to two met dimensions that structure citizens' nationalist attitudes: antiestablishment and exclusionism, based on recent study. These conceptualizations allow us to analyze the connection between the attractiveness of populist policies promulgated by reporters on the transmitter end and citizens' populist perceptions on the receiving end (de la Torre(eds), 2018).

III. COVID-19 AND MEDIA

The SARS-CoV-2 virus epidemic has been classified as a serious global threat by the World Health

Organization (WHO). Global threats are intertwined, as the World Economic Forum's global risk study forecast in 2017. The COVID-19 outbreak (an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered human coronavirus) in particular demonstrates the importance of information dissemination in a disintermediated news cycle.The effect of this current intelligence environment can be seen in the case of the COVID-19 outbreak. The spread of intelligence has the potential to significantly affect people's attitudes and change the efficacy of government countermeasures. In this regard, models for predicting virus transmission are beginning to take into account the population's behavioral reaction to public health approaches as well as the connectivity patterns that underpin content use.

YouTube and Twitter, for example, provide users immediate access to an unparalleled volume of news, which may amplify speculation and false facts. Algorithms mediate and promote content promotion and thereby knowledge spread by taking into account users' interests and attitudes. This move away from the conventional news model has a major effect on the creation of collective perceptions and story framing; it also has an impact on policy-making, political communication, and the evolution of public debate especially when topics are contentious. Users on the internet are more inclined to collect evidence that reinforces their worldviews, disregard contrary information, and create divisive communities around shared narratives. Furthermore, where there is a lot of polarization, disinformation will quickly spread. Fake news and false facts, according to some reports, can spread faster and farther than fact-based news. This, however, may be a platform-specific influence. Since political discourse sometimes returns to marking opposition reporting as inaccurate or false, the concept of "Fake News" may be insufficient. The effect of the social media environment on the perception of polarizing issues is also being explored in COVID-19. The empirical literature addresses a broad spectrum of topics relevant to modern infodemics, such as the dynamics of hate speech and conspiracy theories, the effects of bots and artificial profiles, and the dangers of misinformation in terms of distribution and opinion shaping (Cinelli, 2020).

The outbreak of COVID-19 has been lethal, and the federal government, as well as state governments, are trying to resolve this public health epidemic. However, it illustrates that elected governments will take a risky autocratic turn in times of crisis. In this case, media plays a vital position in a democracy, as it has been envisioned as a forum for impartial knowledge and critical-rational debate. In periods of crisis, the health of a country's media can therefore be measured (Aalberg & Curran, 2012).

Even so, corporate ownership over most media outlets ensures that they become a part of the state's ideological machinery. Many issues surround the COVID-19 epidemic, including ill-equipped public health facilities, pandemic policies, and a lack of coordination and funding for the most disadvantaged. There are critical problems that need to be discussed, but the mass media, with a few valiant exceptions, seems to be forgetting its political position. A key example is the demonization of migrant workers and a marginalized population thus failing to criticize the lack of action to assist these groups in dealing with the crisis (Singh, 2020).

IV. CONCLUSION

The pandemic poses a challenge to an economy that is still in decline, necessitating a rigorous inquiry beyond official narratives. The media, on the other hand, is worried with its own economic condition. Print media, in particular, is struggling with a lack of resources, shrinking advertising, and concerns over declining sales and readership. Many journalists are risking their health to report the COVID-19 crisis due to fears over work stability, insufficient resource resources, and police abuses. The morale of fair and conscientious journalists is not improved by this situation. Some media organizations have already started lowering salaries; an expansion of the lockdown could intensify the crisis.However, the wider media's position during the pandemic was not an overnight move. It's been noticeable for quite some time. Over the last three decades, the media in India has grown exponentially, making it one of the world's largest media markets.Since most people are at home during the lockdown, there is a natural rise in television use. People are searching for COVID-19-related facts on a variety of media outlets, but the information offered is far from accurate and does not contribute to a critical reasoned debate. Instead, the media has become a propaganda and sensationalism weapon. COVID-19's dissemination has been linked to a Chinese conspiracy by several TV news sources. In such a "positive" setting, news about the mass migration of workers and the markaz was mainly broadcast for its dramatic value. If it hadn't been for the devoted on the field, the real condition would not have gotten coverage in the first place. It has also been influenced by the coalition between religious fundamentalism and neoliberalism. Its key characteristics are profit, the advancement of majoritarian viewpoints, and the suppression of marginalized perspectives.What part do governments play in such a situation, and what is journalism supposed to accomplish? To prevent building a future that threatens to destabilize society, now is the time

to reflect on and analyze the position of capitalism, the state, and the media. Can the pandemic have a huge effect on culture and governance models? Will we see increased attempts to create unity and collaboration, or will we see increased monitoring and policing as the new normal? These are the kinds of questions that our media should be asking.Corporate influence over most media outlets often ensures that they become a tool of the state's ideological machinery. Many issues surround the COVID-19 epidemic, including ill-equipped public health facilities, pandemic policies, and a lack of coordination and funding for the most disadvantaged. There are critical topics that need to be addressed, but the mass media, with a few brave exceptions, seems to be forgetting its political position. A main example is the demonization of migrant workers and a marginalized population thus failing to condemn the lack of steps to assist these communities in coping with the crisis.

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