

Electoral Fairness in South Asian Democracy: Exploring the Role of Media and Civil Society

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Abstract

In South Asia, media and civil society play a complementary and significant role in the electoral context. This study aims to evaluate the role of media and civil society in ensuring electoral democracy in the Indian sub-continent by comparing relevant legal mechanisms. It employs a doctrinal legal research method for systematic review of laws and policies of the selected countries to substantiate the doctrinal approach of electoral democracy. In this qualitative research the authors have tried to understand the various actors of election and fairness. The media and civil society significantly contribute to checking electoral engineering, among other things. In democracy election is a campaign, a competition and source of political rivalry which is highly motivated from the role of the media and civil society. Lack of institutional clarity, administrative accountability, and effective role of media, electoral deviations are committed. Recently, it has been observed that non-formal sources of media also perform significant role during the electoral process. It suggests that the development of electoral democracy in the Indian subcontinent could not be handled properly unless there are uniform media norms based on information about electoral conspiracy, vandalism, and human rights violations, etc. whereas the perpetrator might be influenced by the techniques that apply in a country.

Keywords: Civil-society, Democracy, Deviation, Electoral, Fairness

1. Introduction

Electoral fairness is a basic pillar of democratic governance, securing that political competition is conducted without any unfair means (Siddiq & Ahmed, 2026). Such competition is formulated with a political party that is not influenced by biasness or undue influence. In the Indian sub-continent, such as Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan often face challenges in the electoral process due to institutional weakness, polarization, and public unawareness (Guha, 2002).

In spite of the formal adoption of a democratic system, elucidate regarding voter intimidation, misinformation, and media bias (Hunter, 2023). The minority and majority ethno political conflict becomes severe during the electoral campaign. In recent days it has been observed that the people are to die due to the electoral confrontation (Das, 2020). People thought that poverty, lack of understanding, and violence between different political, and ethnic groups make the democracy tougher for its succeed as well as impartial role of the institutional actors (Huntington, 1993). India has had elections since 1952 (Guha, 2002). It was expected that the pathway would be so easy to nourish democratic march (Guha, 2002).

A number of hurdles and negative actors had been identified which collectively degraded the smooth functioning of democracy. On the other hand, Pakistan, the other part of partition of India (Rahman, 2021) had to wait a bit long time to conduct first election. The first general election held in Pakistan in 1954. Practicing smooth transfer of power was not held in Pakistan (al Mujahid, 1971). It triggered the independence war of Bangladesh in 1971 (Rahman, 2021). The military took over the state



administration of Pakistan in 1958, 1977, and 1999 (Rizvi, 2004). Bangladesh experienced both civilian and military regimes over the first few decades of its existence (Ahamed, 2004). Most unfortunately, the march of democratic journey of Bangladesh has been transformed to authoritarian state administration within a few years of Independence. After 1991, it was expected that the will of the citizens would never be violated (Ahamed, 2004). The political parties throne into power in 2001 (Ahamed, 2004) and 2009, perceived themselves as the owner of state power (The Daily Star, 2012). They started a series of violation and anti-citizen steps. The rule of law disappeared (The Daily Jugantor, 2018). They started to think that they might do whatever they would like (The Daily Jugantor, 2018). The situation turned into a controlled democracy.

The citizens lost their fundamental rights, people did not get justice in Bangladesh, all the things were led by the representatives of the government. The concept of parallel government was established by the politicians. In all, the meaning of democracy was changed. The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute (2023) says that liberal democratic indicators are getting worse in South Asian countries, but the condition of India and Bangladesh are the worst. During the election of 2026 in India, it has been observed that the political party in power gets more coverage, usually covered all the political meetings, and get less courage to air false or vexatious news while against the opponents all might go and less coverage is given (Reuters, 2026). People are seen to die due to the electoral conflict among the political parties. Some news is not well circulated due to unseen power (Durie, 2026). Even the media houses are compelled to remove their news from the online portal or from the social media which severely affect the fundamental rights of the citizens of India (Durie, 2026). Freedom House (2023) says that people face continuous threat in getting political rights and civil liberties. In this work, it will be tried to understand the role of the media and civil societies for a free, fair, and impartial election.

This study aims to critically analyze the role of media and civil society in safeguarding electoral integrity within South Asian democracies, specifically focusing on Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan. The objective is to conduct through how media organizations influence the methods by which free and fair elections are conducted and evaluate how much civil society organizations contribute to transparency, accountability, and political participation within all citizens. This study aims to identify and verify key challenges as like as media bias, misinformation, and political influences, that might undermine the integrity of election in the locality. The following research questions are addressed in the present study. First, the extent to which the medium influences electoral fairness in South Asia. Second, how civil society promotes transparent and accountable electoral processes. Third, the structural and institutional limitations affecting civil society efficacy and a comparison of their roles and impacts across the selected countries.

2. Literature Review

Bangladesh's democratic journey has been marked by both accomplishments and disappointments since its independence in 1971, with the country alternating between democratic and authoritarian administrations. The democratic process that began in 1991 initially appeared promising in terms of electoral democracy, but the quality of democracy deteriorated over the subsequent decades, and by 2014, electoral authoritarianism had taken hold (Riaz, 2019). Election violence in Bangladesh has carried both immediate and long-term repercussions on the body, mind, and broader social structure. It endangers human security by causing damage, death, and displacement, interrupting the livelihoods of the poor, and leaving victims with lifelong disabilities that create hardship for their families. Beyond physical harm, threats and intimidation instill fear and mental pain among those targeted, while election-related violence further exacerbates economic and social instability by

damaging property, infrastructure, and the environment (Omotola, 2011). Violence, irregularities, the exercise of physical and financial power, and the partisan or weak function of the Election Commission are among the key factors influencing Bangladesh's election process. The impediment to free and fair national elections in Bangladesh is fundamentally political rather than constitutional or administrative, with political parties themselves bearing responsibility for the country's persistent electoral challenges (Abdullah, 2018; Baized et al., 2025).

In Indonesia, the role of media and technology has been central to understanding electoral politics. Hill and Sen (2005) highlighted the relevance of the internet and new technologies in Indonesia's political transformation, particularly the regime's inability to manage emerging media technology. Building on this, Tapsell (2017) investigated the relationship between media oligarchs and Indonesian politics, drawing a clear connection between the growing concentration of media ownership under the Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono administration and its influence on elections between 2004 and 2014. The 2019 Indonesian election further demonstrated the growing role of digital platforms, as social media shaped voter interactions while concerns over misinformation and the use of political buzzers during the campaign period became prominent issues (Hui, 2020). However, media influence is not always a positive force. Party bias, media sensationalism, and political propaganda have frequently undermined election integrity and fueled public distrust and division. In India, the Bharatiya Janata Party's considerable advertising budget has led to charges of compromised journalistic ethics and reporting that allegedly favors the ruling party, while in Bangladesh, the government has utilized social media and artificial intelligence to spread disinformation, target opposition leaders, and influence voter decisions, thereby endangering election integrity (Tapsell, 2020).

Across South Asia, which comprises eight democracies largely following a parliamentary model of administration, elections serve as a crucial mechanism for political representation, policy execution, and accountability. Nevertheless, declining public trust in the democratic process remains a serious concern, as democratic legitimacy depends heavily on citizens' confidence in the honesty of election administrators. When this trust is undermined, the consequences can include decreased political participation, compromised institutional legitimacy, and civil disobedience (Guo & Acharya, 2024). In Pakistan, electoral politics have similarly been shaped by the influence of political parties on residents' perceptions of justice, and restoring voter trust requires addressing systemic flaws through institutional reforms (AL-Kubaisi et al., 2024). To strengthen electoral systems more broadly, scholars have proposed technological solutions such as blockchain-based voting using smart contracts, which hold the potential to eliminate inefficiencies and vulnerabilities in existing systems, provided that challenges related to scalability and latency are adequately addressed (Sahasra et al., 2023). Ultimately, election legitimacy rests on three interconnected factors: political freedom, election fairness, and the responsiveness of elected representatives to the people, with trust and democratic efficacy forming the foundation of any functioning democratic system (Wang, 2024).

3. Methods

This study adopts a doctrinal legal research method that includes Bangladesh, India and Pakistan to find out the similarities and differences in practicing of democracy by providing the freedom of media and civil engagement (Siddiq, 2019). This study refers to primary sources such as constitutional provisions, statutory laws, regulations, and policy frameworks with regard to media governance, civil society engagement, and electoral processes in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan, and secondary data collection from different reliable sources such as United Nations Development Programme reports, elections observation committee, academic journals, civil society institutions and global database like

World Bank governance index and ratios of freedom of press. This study analyzed through thematic evaluation, emphasizing main ideas including electoral fairness, media influence, civil society engagement and organizational limitations, while comparative analysis supports identify patterns through countries; however, the study is confined by its dependence on secondary data and deviations in data accessibility, which may impact the depth and promptness of findings. The study process following several stages. Initially, relevant legal documents and policy papers from the selected countries are identified and gathered. Second, these materials are carefully analyzed to determine how the laws and institutions that govern the media and civil society affect the fairness of elections. Third, a comparative analytical method is used to find similarities and differences between the three jurisdictions, with a focus on how the media and civil society influence free and fair elections. Fourth, a thematic analysis is performed to identify ongoing problems, including media bias, misinformation, political influence, and institutional constraints. These themes are subsequently analyzed through the perspective of established democratic theories and academic perspectives.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Results

4.1.1. South Asian Democracy and its Contents

Democracy is a contested concept in political theory, with no single, uniform definition. The countries of the Indian subcontinent primarily rely on their constitutions to define the scope of democracy. Neither the constitutions of Bangladesh, India, nor Pakistan define democracy; rather, they provide a generic reference to democracy, which can be explained in terms of scholarly views of democracy. For example, the Bangladeshi constitution, in its preamble and article 11, stipulates democracy and mandates the promotion of human rights and public participation. On the other hand, the Indian constitution stipulates a democratic republic, enabling strong institutional mechanisms to conduct elections as stipulated in the preamble and articles 326-29, while the Pakistani constitution considers democracy as a content of objective resolutions as stipulated in the preamble, article 2A and annexure. All of these mean that the democratic content in these countries is holding one or two of the contents of procedural and substantive ideals of the mechanism. Joseph Schumpeter identifies procedural democracy as including free and fair elections, competition among candidates of election, and periodic transfer of power, while Rober Dahl identifies the substantive ideals of democracy as a situation in which contestation and public participation are present (Dahl, 2008; Schumpeter, 2013). From their standpoints, it is evident that democracy underscores political equality, people's sovereignty, the rule of law, accountability and transparency, civil liberties, political competition, and participation. A few of these elements of the democracy has been discussed hereinafter.

4.1.2. Rule of Law, Accountability and Transparency

The rule of law assures that people use their power in a way that is legal (Ahamed, 2004). O'Donnell (1998) argues that democracy entails horizontal accountability, suggesting the presence of independent institutions capable of evaluating executive authority and the role of the political mechanisms. The judiciary of Pakistan has archaeologically authorized military coups under the doctrine of necessity undermining constitutional supremacy (Newberg, 1995). Because people appreciated the law, it seemed like the constitution might be broken for political explanations for a small period. The Emergency imposed in India in 1975 showed that the Constitution's defenses weren't strong enough (Kapur, 2010). The constitutional tools had been used to violate basic rights (Kapur, 2010) though, the democratic journey was resumed in 1977, which affected the common rights of the

citizens of India and endangered the constitutional march. The emergency can be declared on the grave state necessity according to the constitution of India (The Constitution of India, 1949, Art. 352; Uyangoda, 2011). It is commonly argued that government of Bangladesh controls the procedure of the courts for the interest of the party in power (Riaz & Rahman, 2016). In these South Asian countries, the struggling democracy usually mean that the laws are less effective and protected, the weak and minorities are less privileged, the media in unauthorized controlled and civil society men are not properly heard, though the object isn't to stop the election.

4.1.3. Media and Civil Society

The media and civil society play a vital role for the development of democratic journey (Diamond, 1999). The democratic criticisms and explanation of issues are highly controlled in south Asia which derogates the equal opportunity of expression of the citizens jeopardizing democratic rights (V-Dem, 2023). The authoritarian practice by the head of the states dictates them to become autocrat (Guriev & Treisman, 2022). The autocrat governments try to show that without him/her, none would be found to take over the power. The leaders of the power party men used to announce that Bangladesh was only safe at the hand of the head of the state. The media houses were either controlled or they deliberately circulated such news pointing out that the head of the government was pronouncing credible and legitimate theories (Center for Governance studies, January 17, 2021). Practically, these are the points of autocratic governance. In the eye of those political parties, none is competent and they were born to resume in state power (Al Jazeera, 2026). Democratic accountability suffers when media freedom goes down and constitutional guarantee of Freedom of expression disappears (Al Jazeera, 2026). The table 1 indicates the primary ways that civil society contributes to democracy, such as by monitoring elections, educating voters, and campaigning for reforms. It indicates that these activities make things more open and encourage people to get involved, but it also points out problems that make them less effective, such as political restrictions and shortages of financial support.

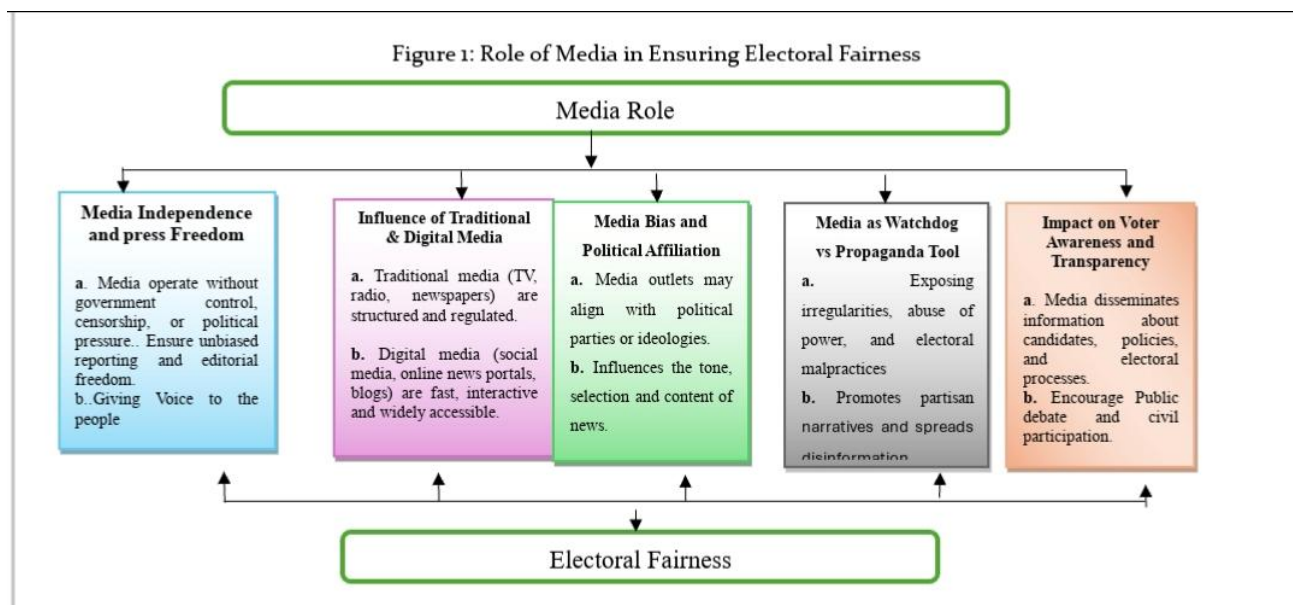


Figure 1. Role of Media in Ensuring Electoral Fairness

Source: Author's own compilation based on relevant literature (Ahmed, 2020; Dada, 2023; Johnson, 2011).

Civil society refers to the collective of non-governmental organizations, community groups, and associations that operate independently of the state and the market. It fosters civic engagement,

promotes social justice, and advocates for public interests. Civil society is essential for strengthening democracy and enhancing community resilience (UNESCO; 224th session of the Executive Board: 8-23 April, 2026). It plays a core role in electoral of a democratic country which influences the accountability of the governments and social justice that can help to ensure the fairness of election in every country. They usually pronounce their in-depth knowledge regarding a particular issue which motivates the opinion of others (Mohyeddin, 2024). During election they digs out various loopholes from the manifesto of the political parties which elaborates and dissects the internal political commitments that motivate the opinion of the general voters. During electoral campaign it impacts much to the opinion of the common voters for electing a particular candidate. Figure 1 shows the most important parts of the media's role in making sure elections are fair. These include media bias, the influence of traditional and digital platforms, media independence, and the media's role as a watchdog or propaganda tool. It shows how these things affect how much voters know, how open elections are, and how trustworthy elections are overall.



Figure 2. Role of Civil Society in Democratic Processes
Source: Author's own compilation based on relevant literature

4.1.4. Political Competition and Equality

Voting power is indivisible and indispensable part of democracy (Siddiq and Ahmed, 2026; 4). In democracy principle free and fair election is a prerequisite while it might be classified as a political competition (Siddiq & Ahmed, 2026). The political parties nominate candidates with their emblem as their representative in the constituencies and they used to pronounce a number of dreams and aspirations before the general voter to cast vote for them. The party which gets highest vote acknowledged as the winner. The meaning of casting vote includes the expectations of the citizens. The state mechanism usually arranges this competition among the political parties. The voters cast vote according to their free will (Islam, 2015). The high ups of the political parties are sometimes called in for conducting a debate with others in open floor. Their words are circulated among the whole nations through the media. Media plays a pivotal role in such case. Every political party should get equal opportunity to pronounce their manifesto and commitments (Islam, 2015). Intimidation, coercion, administrative biasedness should not be prevailed in the society and the election Commission is supposed to ensure such environment. Political terrorism in no way be allowed (Islam, 2015). Now-a-days media has taken a diverse color. Once it was only the TV channels or the well-established print news and dailies (Islam, 2015). A number of circulation methods have been emerged. The social media

platforms, YouTube channels, individual video clips, radio, various personal online media, besides foreign and national media have seen to work in the society (Hunter, 2023). Transmission of impactful words as well as conspiracies are rapidly circulated which either increase or decrease the general support. Sometimes media spread fake news to decrease the reputation of a political party (Hunter, 2023). The impartial circulation of news is significantly important.

4.1.5. Institutional Transparency (Court, police, ECB)

The concept of institutionalism is yet to develop in south Asian region. India had more organized mechanisms but during the Indian government the situation has deteriorated. The movement in Kashmir, Asam, Mizoram, Meghalaya and Nagaland has reiterated the failure of Indian government while the authoritarian head of the state became reckless to suppress the voice of the common people, especially the minority communities (Mistree et al., 2024). The courts still work, but they don't do as good of a job of stopping people from abusing their position. The election commissioners are in charge of the elections, but everyone doesn't trust them. There are dedicated bodies to curb corruption, but they don't get employed independently, very often, even they might lose job. Unless institutional format is developed, no democracy would be properly developed (Bermeo, 2016). The political governments conspire their opinion through the domestic's higher courts in the region. The apex courts seldom pronounce the justice with courage. Moreover, the courts legalize the wrong works of the political authoritarian government. It had been observed that a Chief Justice was compelled to leave the country due to pronouncing justice and collision of opinion with the head of the executive and the legislative (Tam, 2024). During this time, the courts, election authorities, and anti-corruption agencies can't stop the executive branch from doing what it wants. O'Donnell (1998) pronounced that democracy requires institutional agents capable of preventing abuse. Judicial institutions in South Asia have encountered political pressure or institutional restrictions (O'Donnell, 1998).

In the past, Pakistan's courts have permitted the military to utilize its power when it was necessary (Newberg, 1995). The 2013 impeachment of Sri Lanka's Chief Justice showed that the executive branch was getting in the way of the judiciary's independence (Uyangoda, 2011). The politicization of judicial appointments in Bangladesh has raised apprehensions over the integrity of institutions (Riaz & Rahman, 2016). In India, while judicial independence is legally protected, there has been an escalation of debate around executive supremacy in nominations and selective rejoinders to politically salient matters (Jaffrelot, 2021). In the democratic states, the executive branch plays a good role to administer the state. But the way institutions are set up frequently makes the executive branch more centralized. The political party who remains in power used to manipulate the administrative branch of the state while the bureaucrats also want to be used (Alam & Teicher, 2012). During the parliamentary election most of the government officer becomes electoral officers creating conflict of interest (Akter, 2023). In all of the three countries the civil servants are found to show illegal allegiance causing a questionable election. The part that used to throne never go against them as well (Akter, 2023).

4.1.6. Laws and Policies on the Selected Contents of Democracy

In democratic state practice constitution is accepted as the highest authority and safeguard to the citizens. Media plays a tremendous role in such case. It plays a role creating accountability both to the citizens and self-conscience. Self-conscience is regulated by the internal practice of the media houses as well as the personal view of the journalist. In addition to that, there are other issues which contribute to electoral role and mechanisms. In India, Bangladesh, and Pakistan it has been observed that original constitutionalism is seldom followed by these states. Constitutional obligation for democracy is seen through fundamental freedom, commitment to fundamental rights, adult franchise, religious practice, and mechanisms to ensure the rule of law (Kapur, 2010). According to Article 8 of

Pakistan's Constitution, the president can fire topple down the parliament (Rizvi, 2018). In the constitution of Pakistan, president could abolish the parliament and it was set as a check and balance of power (DeVotta, 2004). In Bangladesh the caretaker government system was introduced but due to opposing by the political parties, it was abolished with the intervention of the court setting a bad precedent in the democratic history of Bangladesh (Riaz & Rahman, 2016). There are some other countries in South Asia who conduct election through federal format of government (Krämer, 2012). The Constitution's wording alone never can ensure democratic behavior. It needs citizens' good will to perceive the solemn expression of the constitution.

4.1.7. Legal Framework on Media Laws in Bangladesh, India and Pakistan

A. Bangladesh

There are a number of laws in Bangladesh to regulate the media sector. Since Media is playing a vital role in a state which is also identified as the fourth state according to its mighty roles. The constitution of Bangladesh as a mother law extends various fundamental rights which confer the power to codify several special laws. The media men are accountable for their works (Press Council Act, 1974). IN 1975 the independence of media was snatched and subsequently it was restored in 1976 (Newspapers (Annulment of Declaration) (Repeal) Ordinance, 1976). Though the media shall have full independence, they also shall have to follow the legal provisions (Printing Presses and Publications Act, 1973, ss. 08 & 10). Publishing and false and fabricated news in the state is an offence and a punishment for 14 years jail might be inflicted (The digital safety Act, 2018 and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Act, 2006, a 57). Moreover, there are Copy Right Act 2006 to ensure copy rights, Right to Information Act 2009 for seeking information from the government offices and the Penal Code which collectively try to make the media accountable as well as sketched the outline of media related works. For cyber related offence the media men and the wrongdoers are punished (The Cyber Security Act, 2023).

B. India

The government of India has tremendously outlined the laws related to media. The constitution of India also has manifested the fundamental rights while some other laws are working on the issue (The Constitution of India, 1949). The Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867 (PRB Act) is a foundational legislation in India designed to regulate printing presses and newspapers, preserve copies of books/newspapers printed in India, and ensure their registration (ss. 5 & 19D). India outlines the functions of the press Council which primarily aimed at preserving press freedom and improving standards of newspapers and news agencies. It empowers the Council to foster public confidence, ensure ethical reporting, and address complaints while adhering to democratic principles (The press Council Act, 1978). Legal sanction has been imposed for information technologies, cable television media, media ethics which collectively contribute to state democracy (Hunter, 2023). The telecommunication process, activities regarding information technology, right to information in India has made specific laws so that their contribution to electoral process might not affect and impact wrongly (Nath, 2019). The table 1 has been attached to understand the laws and its vows.

Table 1. Legal Frameworks

No.	Bangladesh	India	Pakistan
1.	Constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh, 1972, Art. 39 (core foundation of media freedom in democracy)	Constitution of India, 1949, Art. 19 (foundation of media freedom in democracy)	Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973, Art. 19 (nation of media in democracy)
2.	Press Council Act, 1974, Sec. 06 & 13 (regulation & accountability of media)	Press and Registration of Books Act, 1867, Sec. 05 & 19D (transparency and declaration of publisher)	Press and Publications Ordinance, 1963 (control rather than freedom)
3.	Printing Presses and Publications Act, 1973, Sec. 08 & 10 (discipline and regulation in media sector)	Press Council Act, 1978, Sec. 13 (ensures freedom of press)	Press Council of Pakistan Ordinance, 2002, Sec. 08 & 09 (promote responsible journalism)
4.	Newspapers (Annulment of Declaration)(Repeal) Ordinance, 1976, Sec. 04 & 05 (shut down media outlets)	Information Technology Act, 2000, Sec. 66, 67 & 69A (used for national security/public order)	PEMRA Ordinance, 2002, Sec. 20, 27 & 33 (heavy state oversight on TV and radio)
5.	ICT Act, 2006, Sec. 57 (publishing false/obscene/defamatory information)	Cable Television Networks Regulation Act, 1995, Sec. 05 & 06 (prevent false and misleading content)	Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation Act, 1973 (prevent false and misleading content)
6.	Digital Security Act, 2018, Sec. 21, 25, 29 & 31 (restricting media freedom)	IT (Intermediary Guidelines & Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, Rules 03 & 09 (accountability in online journalism)	Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA), 2016, Sec. 20 & 37 (controlling online journalism and social media)
7.	Cyber Security Act, 2023 (new replacement/updated framework)	Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) Act, 1997	Freedom of Information Ordinance, 2002 (access to collect any data)
8.	Copyright Act, 2000, Sec. 14, 36, 72, 73 & 82 (concept, infringement of copyright, civil remedies and fair dealing provisions)	Copyright Act, 1957, Sec. 14 & 52 (fair dealing & copyright ownership)	Right to Access Information Act, 2017, Sec. 03 & 07 (media expose corruption)
9.	Right to Information Act, 2009, Sec. 06, 07 & 08 (transparency & accountability)	Right to Information Act, 2005, Sec. 03 & 06 (investigative journalism)	Protections of Journalists and Media Professionals Act, 2021 (protecting media workers)
10.	Penal Code, 1860, Sec. 124A & 499-500 (limit misuse of media freedom)	Indian Penal Code, 1860, Sec. 124A & 499-500 (limit misuse of media freedom)	Pakistan Penal Code, 1860, Sec. 124A & 499-500 (limit misuse of media freedom)

Source: Author's own compilation based on relevant laws

C. Pakistan

In the constitution of Pakistan fundamental freedoms regarding expression and information has been guaranteed. Article 19 protects freedom of speech and press, subject to reasonable restrictions like national security or morality. Article 19A grants citizens the right to access information in matters of public importance (Larik et al., 2024). Press and Publications Ordinance, 1963 was introduced to enlarged to ensure the independence of media though it was found a mechanism of restriction (Raza et al., 2022). The TV media, print media, information technology, cable networking, right to information which are also codified for the betterment of the citizens charter and there are certain restriction mentioning the safety reason (Raza et al., 2022).

4.1.8. Findings of the Study

Media impacts over the society, makes various bodies accountable to the citizens, and influences to take decision on a certain issue. Under such circumstances, a media is called the fourth estate. The media plays a vital role during the electoral campaign and electoral process which also strengthen the democratic journey of the states. It has been observed that the media in the region are performing partial responsibility. The states governments used to control the activities of the media, and corruption among media houses also destroy their ethical values to utter the truth. False and fabricated messages are spread over the society to manipulate the electoral sanctity.

In Bangladesh, the terrorism and memories of the Independence war are highly capitalized and the media men are found biased. They telecast and print news according to their choice and favoritisms. Moreover, the use of Artificial Intelligence is also kicking up the concept of well-established media houses. In India religious biasness and minority-majority crux has been observed in last few elections and electoral processes. Engineering in vote counting is also remaining as electronic Voting machine sometimes fails or is manipulated. In Pakistan, Militarized state administration is struggling with transmission of news and accountability. The politics and use of democratic rights are nurtured there with false ideology. For conducting free, fair, and unbiased election to establish democracy is highly required. Ethical role of the journalists and ethical practice are seldom found in the states. Most of the journalists and media houses play a motivated role and announce their own views as a general one.

4.2. Discussion

The social context of the state is highly polarized into two different parts (Islam, 2013). The total political parties affiliated in the state vitally divided into two broader dichotomies (Islam, 2013). Some political parties used to classify as the follower of religious impartiality usually is known as leftist block. Other is leaned to religious belief usually classified as the rightist block. There is another ideology based on the independence movement (Jahan, 2014). One bigger political party claims that they are the only performer in the independence war while they used to classify other against the war (Jahan, 2014). These types of allegations strengthen the bipolarism which creates never ending distance in a state. Political conflict occurs during the electoral campaign (Jahan, 2014). Supporters of the political parties become judgmental and impose their opinion and decision causing severe conflict among them (Islam, 2015).

5. Conclusion

The analysis indicates that media independence is crucial for the integrity of democracy, particularly in ensuring free, fair, and credible electoral processes in South Asian democracies. The findings of this study show that both the media and civil society are crucial for making fair elections. However, their effectiveness is greatly limited by political influence, weak institutions, and a lack of accountability. This study indicates that media in Bangladesh, India, and Pakistan are frequently operating under disparate levels of control or pressure, leading to biased reporting, misinformation, and inequitable coverage of political figures. Civil society organizations also make a positive contribution by monitoring elections, teaching voters, and pushing for reforms. Nonetheless, the electoral process continues to face numerous structural and institutional challenges, such as deficiencies in evidence gathering, corruption within investigative agencies, excessive influence of powerful elites, and loopholes in current legal frameworks (Hossen, 2025). These countries used to content almost 200 cores of people whose fate are frequently operated by the politicians who becomes elected. Though, they are elected through the direct vote of the citizens, the process of election commensurate with the free-fair-impartial electoral process.

The study additionally reveals that the rise of digital media has created both advantages and risks as well. It has made information easier to get to, but it has also made it easier for false information to spread. The electoral environment in the region shows a trend of democratic erosion, where openness, fairness, and independence of institutions are not always respected. Based on these findings, a number of suggestions are made. First and foremost, media independence and speech freedom ought to be safeguarded through increased legal protections and less political interference. Second, in order to safeguard fundamental rights and combat the dissemination of false information, it is necessary to alter the standards that govern digital platforms and the media. Third, civil society organizations should be granted greater authority to accomplish their responsibilities of monitoring and advocating by giving them legal protection, financial support, and easier access to the electoral process. Fourth, the police, election commissions, and other electoral institutions must be strengthened to function independently and fairly. Finally, in order to combat misinformation and cultivate an informed electorate, it is essential to promote ethical journalism, public awareness, and digital literacy. Enhancing the combined roles of media and civil society, with institutional reforms, is crucial for promoting election fairness and preserving democratic government in South Asia.

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