



## MEDIA AND ELECTORAL POLITICS IN INDIA: ISSUES AND PERCEPTIONS

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**ABSTRACT-** This paper delves into the electoral politics in India and what role do media play in influencing the voter behaviour in India. Media is a very strong institution in any electoral democracy but its independence and integrity depends on how strongly it asserts itself to protect those very values and principles. This paper takes cue from respondents and voters about their perceptions regarding media and how media over a decade or so has tilted towards partisan politics. In this way, the cardinal principles of media get compromised and in the long run electoral democracy turns into autocracy. This study is representative only of Haryana State (India) and in Haryana only Fatehabad district constitutes the area of the study and in order to make this study more pervasive, the sample and area has to be increased to cover other States of India as India has a population of 135 crores.

**Key Words:** Electoral Democracy, Media, Politics, Haryana, Voter.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Institution is a social structure in which people cooperate and which influences the behaviour of the people and the way they live (Nurmi, 1988). Modern societies being dynamic in nature and functions have diverse institutional arrangements that have a unique purpose. These institutions are permanent and they do not cease to exist when one person is gone. There are defined rules and regulations of the institution that help it to regulate the human behaviour. These institutions even shape the thought process and act as catalysts to build an opinion with respect to the particular aspect (Lowndes, 2020).

India being the largest democratic setup on the globe has enshrined the democratic values in the Constitution of the country. The country has witnessed regular elections since the independence from the British rule. The country witness's regular elections including parliamentary and assembly elections (Hassan, 2020). In the recent times, the country also conducts the elections at local level. However, the conduct of elections should be free and fair and should be conducted in a transparent manner. For this purpose, media has been entrusted with the responsibility to monitor the elections and act as a medium for effective participation of the masses. Thus, it becomes an important aspect to gauge the performance and role of media in electoral processes of the country (Keshav *et al*, 2020).

However, it is necessary to know and find out how far the democratic institutions of the country are effective against the desired ends. Therefore, in this chapter, an attempt has been made to analyse the role of media in democratic functions and analyse the perception of respondents with respect to the working of media in electoral activities in the country (Sanjay, 2020). It may be retreated that the present study is undertaken to understand the role of media in electoral activities in India (Mathur, 2020). This study is primarily intending to present divergent viewpoint of the respondents, with respect to the efficacy and working of media as a watchdog machinery in the country (Khan & Adnan, 2020). After collecting the first-hand data and information from the respondents and secondary information contained in the research articles and published reports and other sources of information, the researcher has made an modest attempt here to present the analysis and interpretation of the data pertaining the various dimensions of the study.

### SAMPLE SIZE OF THE STUDY

The research problem addresses the issues related to democratic processes and role of media in democratic structure of India after 2014. The present study is explorative and analytical in nature. Therefore, all the eligible voters including male and female constitute universe or population of the study. The field of enquiry is too much large which requires a lot of energy, time and resources to select the sample. The study of whole demography of country including all democratic institutions is not feasible. Thus, the Haryana state has been taken as reference point in this study. However, it is not possible to

examine every item of the Universe/population. Therefore, the focus of the study will be to analyze the role of media in democratic structure of country both theoretically and empirically. The Fatehabad district of Haryana was selected as the sample due to following reasons:

- i. Haryana state has witnessed the highest voting turn-out (71.41%) percentage among the northern states in 2014 general election.
- ii. Haryana has witnessed the highest male voter turn-out (72.87%) among the northern states in 2014 general election.
- iii. Fatehabad has been selected, because the district falls under the Hisar division and the district has Sirsa as Lok Sabha Constituency.
- iv. As per 2009 report, Fatehabad district has highest number of voters (170602) in the state. Thus, it would be appropriate to know the voter-media exposure relationship between the two districts with distinct number of electorates.

Thus, for the purpose of the study, the exact size of the sample is 100 from Fatehabad district of Haryana. The results of the analyzed data pertaining to numerous dimensions of the sample size are presented here as under.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

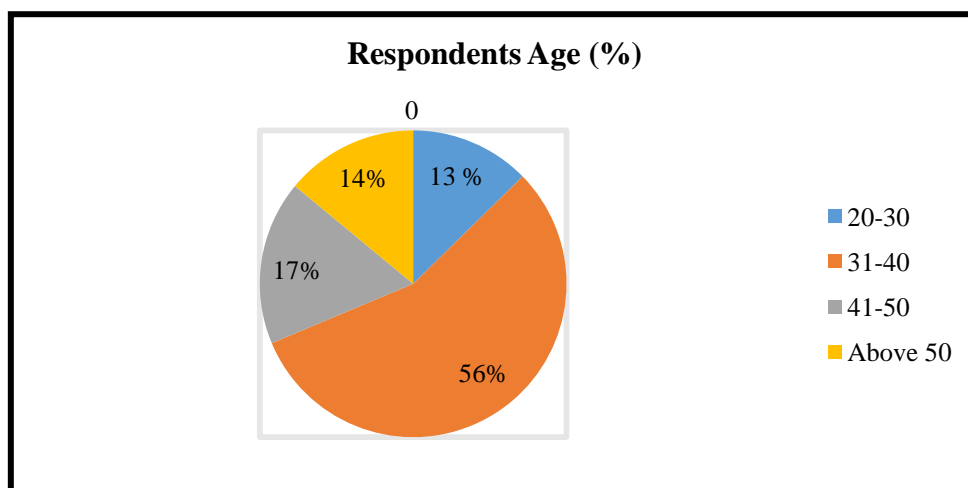
- To analyze and highlight the impact of media on elections in India by taking District Fatehabad Haryana, India as area of Study.
- To dig out the reasons as to why since 2014 media has been partisan in India and is seen as titling towards certain ideology.

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

**Table 1.1: Respondents Age**

S. No.	Respondents Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	20-30 Years	13	13.00
2	31-40 Years	56	56.00
3	41-50 Years	17	17.00
4	Above 50 Years	14	14.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Diagram 1.1: Respondents Age**



Age can be defined 'as a time period of human life measured by years from birth'. However, the eligibility age differs from one aspect to the other aspect. Likewise, the eligibility age for voting in India is 18 years. According to the above table, 13 (13.00%) of respondents belong to the age group of 20-30 years and 56 (56.00%) of respondents belong to the age group of 31-40 years. While as 17 (17.00%) of respondents belong to the age group of 41-50 years and 14 (14%) of respondents belong to the age group of above 50 years.

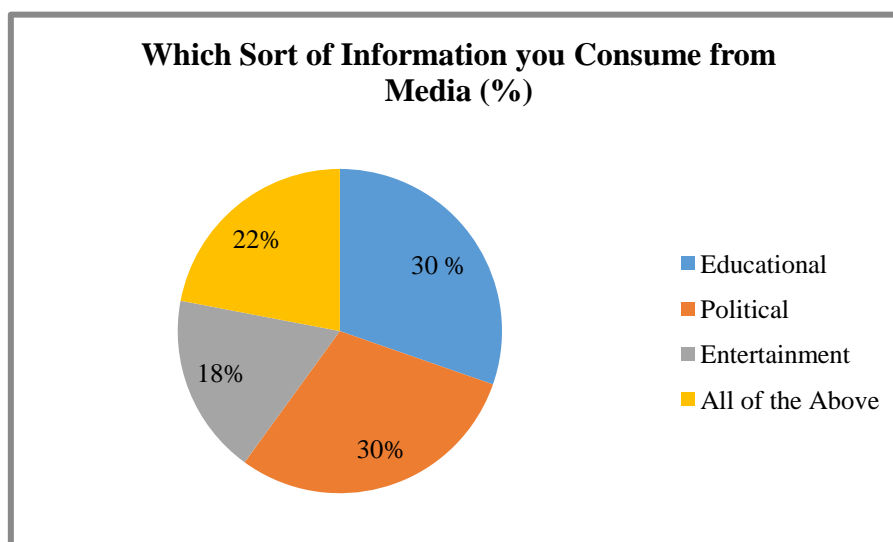
Thus, it can be inferred from the above data that people from all age groups are part of this study. While as younger generation 20-40 years is the active participant group of this study. Moreover, people above the 50's are also part of this study. Also, all the respondents of the study are eligible voters, because the respondents in the study include only those people who can vote or contest an election. Thus, it would be quite impressive to gauge the impact of media on the political opinion of eligible voters.

### PERCEPTION OF RESPONDENTS REGARDING ROLE OF MEDIA IN POLITICAL AND ELECTORAL ACTIVITIES IN INDIA

**Table 1.2: What sort of information do you consume from media?**

S. No.	Which Sort of Information You Consume from Media	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Educational	30	30.00
2	Political	30	30.00
3	Entertainment	18	18.00
4	All of the Above	22	22.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Diagram 1.2: What sort of information do you consume from media?**



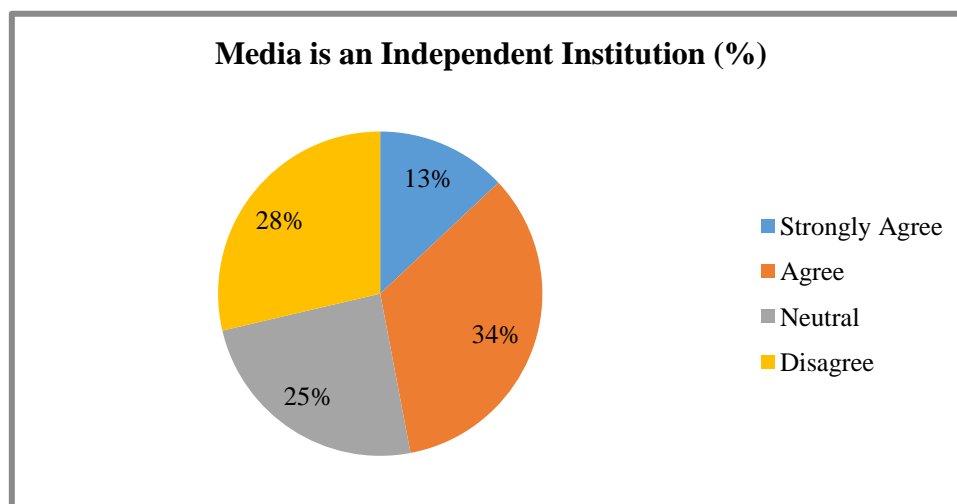
Media as a vehicle aims to deliver relevant and informative content. However, diverse alternatives with respect to the socio-economic and political information are available in the media most importantly in online and broadcast media. Modern media outlets are providing informative content in educational and political aspect. According to the above table, 30 (30.%) of respondents are following media for educational purpose and 18 (18%) of respondents follow media for entertainment purpose. While as 30 (30.00%) of respondents follow media for consuming political news and 22 (22%) of respondents follow media for educational, entertainment and political aspects.

The above data also stated that majority of respondents who follow media for political happenings across the globe mostly constitutes the male population with higher education. While as working professional respondents are following media for educational and political aspect. Also, women respondents have mostly used media for entertainment and educational purpose. Thus, it can be inferred from the above data that media (conventional and non-conventional) has diverse utilities that range from entertainment to education and political. Media in contemporary era also acts as a catalyst to disseminate the relevant knowledge and also educates the people with respect to their rights and duties.

**Table 1.3: Media is an independent institution in the contemporary era in India?**

S. No.	Media is an independent Institution	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	13	13.00
2	Agree	34	34.00
3	Neutral	25	24.33
4	Disagree	28	28.66
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Diagram 1.8: Media is an independent institution in the contemporary era in India?**



An institution is a social structure in which people cooperate and it also influences the behaviour of individuals. An institution has defined rules and regulations through which it can regulate the behaviour of individuals. According to the above table, 13 (13%) of respondents strongly agree and 34 (34%) of respondents agree that Media is an independent institution in the contemporary era in India. While as 25 (25%) of respondents have showed neutral stance on the above fact and 28 (28%) of respondents have disagreed on the fact that Media is an independent institution in the contemporary era in India.

Majority of male respondents mainly people with higher education have strongly agreed that Media is an independent institution in the contemporary era in India as compared to female respondents. While as employed respondents also agree on the above fact. Respondents with farming as profession have mostly remained neutral on the above fact. Thus, it can be inferred from the above data that to some extent people still agree that Media is an independent institution in the contemporary era.

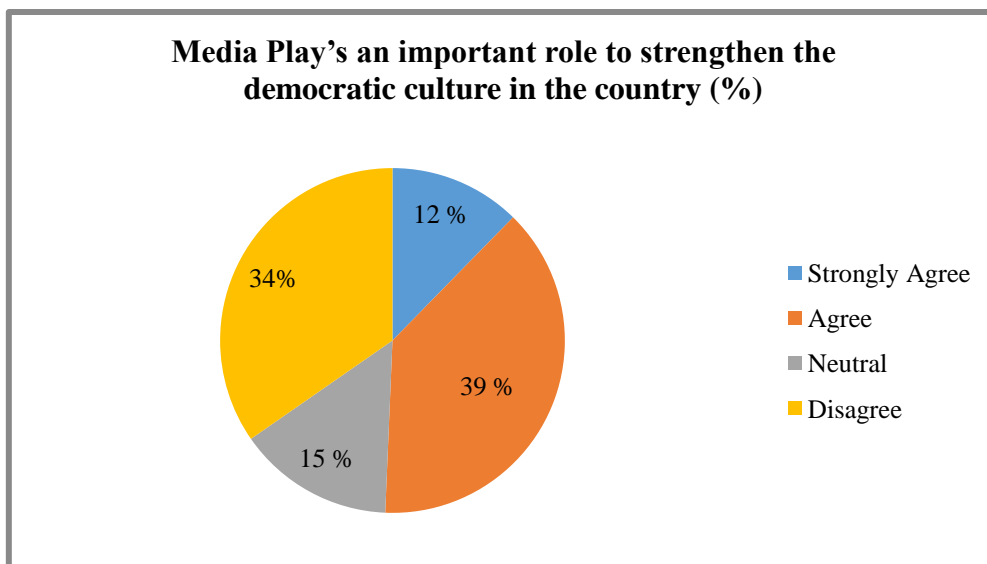
Media independence connotes the ability of media to take its decisions independently without interference from the external or other institutions. While as, there are two factors that tend to disrupt the independence of media namely; disruption and crisis. While as role of regulatory authorities (content providers, licence issuing authorities and platforms) heavily disrupts the independence of an institution. Thus, it is important to maintain the independence and neutrality of media in India for the healthy democracy. Media as an independent institution will be a guardian for people's rights and will act as a knowledge hub for people.

**Table 1.9: Media is playing an important role to strengthen the democratic culture in the country?**

S. No.	Media Play's an important role to strengthen the democratic culture in the country	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	12	12.00
2	Agree	39	39.00
3	Neutral	15	15.00
4	Disagree	34	34.00

<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>
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**Diagram 1.9:** Media is playing an important role to strengthen the democratic culture in the country?

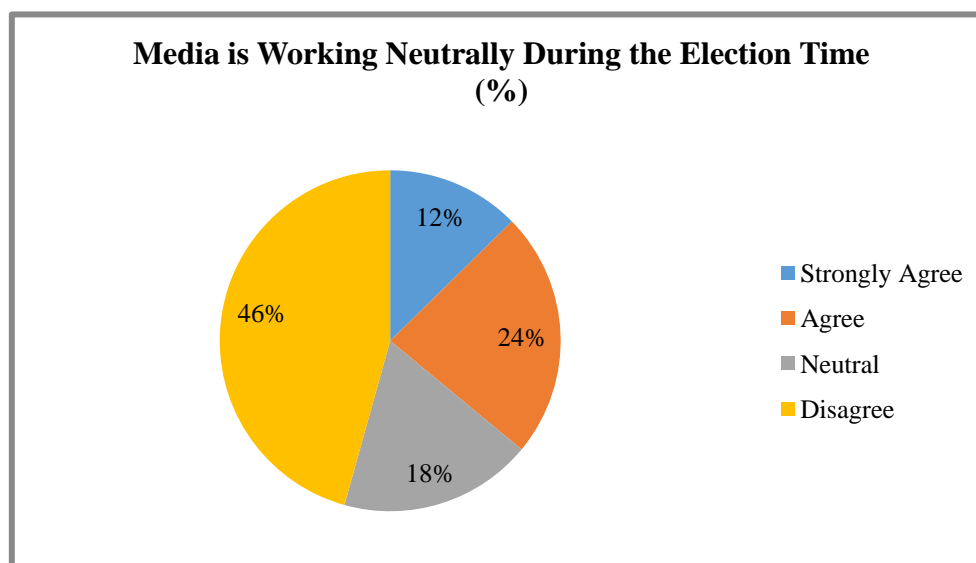


Democratic culture is defined as the desire and ability of individuals in a population to participate actively and freely in decision making process of the country. Democratic culture is characterized by active contribution, common good and construction of collective decisions. According to the above table, 12 (12%) of respondents strongly agree and 39 (39%) of respondents agree on the fact that Media is playing an important role to strengthen the democratic culture in the country. While as 15 (15%) of respondents have shown neutral instance on the above fact and 35 (35%) of respondents disagree with the fact that Media is playing an important role to strengthen the democratic culture in the country.

**Table 1.9.1: During the election time the media is work in a neutral manner?**

S. No.	Media is Working Neutrally During the Election Time	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	12	12.00
2	Agree	24	24.00
3	Neutral	18	18.00
4	Disagree	46	46.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Diagram 1.9.1:** During the election time the media is work in a neutral manner?



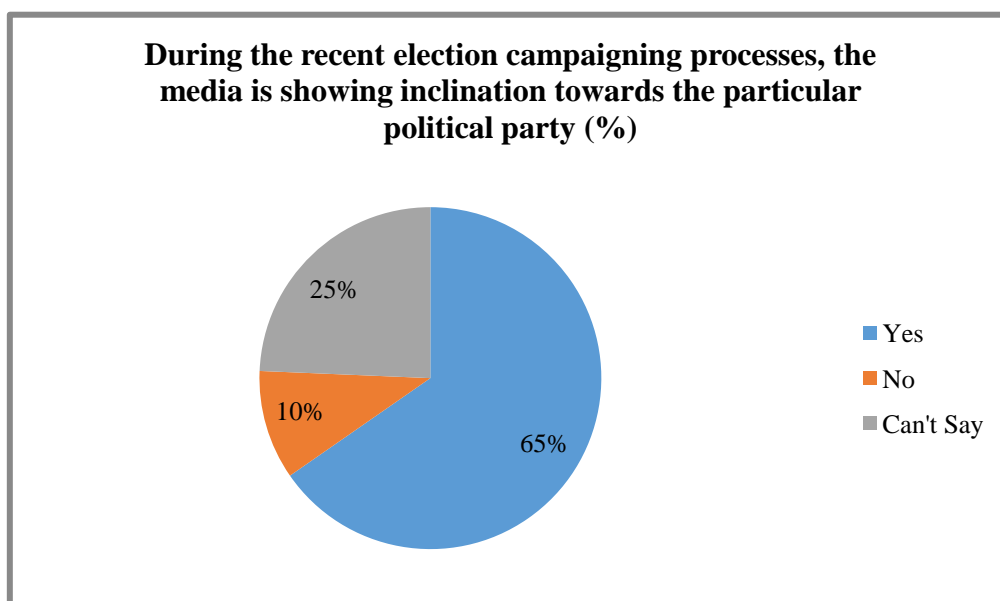
Neutrality is defined 'as a state of not supporting or helping either side in a conflict or disagreement'. Accordingly, neutrality in journalism states that 'news or stories should be reported in an unbiased and impartial manner'. Neutrality means reporting all sides of an issue without favouring anyone of them. According to the above table, 12 (12%) of respondents strongly agree and 24 (24%) of respondents agree that Media is working neutrally during the election time. While as 18 (18%) of respondents remained neutral on the above fact and 46 (46%) disagree with the fact that Media is working neutrally during the election time.

The above data has also stated that respondents mainly with higher education and employed respondents disagree with the fact that Media is working neutrally during the election time. However, majority of the respondents disagree with the above fact. Thus, it can be inferred from the above data that media is not working in neutral manner during the election period and it has inclination towards a particular political party. Thus, there is need to bring objectivity in practice, because objectivity makes people passive receipts of news and stories rather than critics and aggressive analysers.

**Table 1.9.3: Do you think that during the recent election campaigning processes, the media is showing inclination towards the particular political party?**

S.No.	During the recent election campaigning processes, the media is showing inclination towards the particular political party	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	65	65.00
2	No	10	10.00
3	Can't Say	25	25.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Diagram 1.9.3:** Do you think that during the recent election campaigning processes, the media is showing inclination towards the particular political party?



Election campaign is an organized effort of a political party that seeks to influence the voting behaviour of eligible voters during the election process in the country. Other than political parties, media is also playing an important role to shape the voting behaviour of the people. According to the above table, 65 (65%) of respondents agree that during the recent election campaigning processes, the media

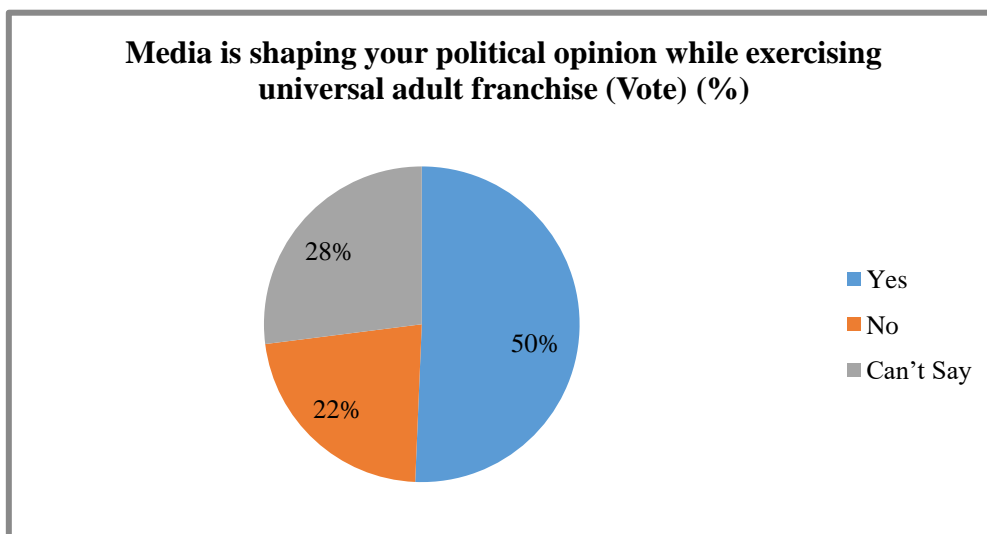
is showing inclination towards the particular political party, while as 10 (10%) of respondents did not agree with the above fact. Also 25 (25%) of respondents have remained neutral on the fact that the media is showing inclination towards the particular political party during the election process.

Political bias involves the altering of information to make a political candidate more attractive. Media bias highlights political bias in reporting of political topics and representation of politicians. Media is using propaganda model to manufacture the political policies through manipulation of mass media. Thus, it is evident from the above data that media is not neutral and it has indulged in favouritism rather than equal treatment of all the political parties and politicians. There are various reasons that have augmented the inclination of media towards a particular political party. The reasons include lack of effective legal mechanism to maintain the neutrality of the media and monetary supplements from the political parties.

**Table 1.9.4:** Do you think that media is shaping your political opinion while exercising universal adult franchise (Vote)?

S.No.	Media is shaping your political opinion while exercising universal adult franchise (Vote)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	50	50.00
2	No	22	22.00
3	Can't Say	28	28.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Diagram 1.9.4:** Do you think that media is shaping your political opinion while exercising universal adult franchise (Vote)?



Political opinion consists of desires, wants and thinking of the population with respect to the particular issue. Political opinion may be related to government policy making or civil aspects of the government. According to above table, 50 (50%) of respondents agree and 22(22%) of respondents disagree with the fact that media is shaping their political opinion while exercising universal adult franchise (Vote). While as 28 (28%) of respondents have showed neutral stance on the above fact.

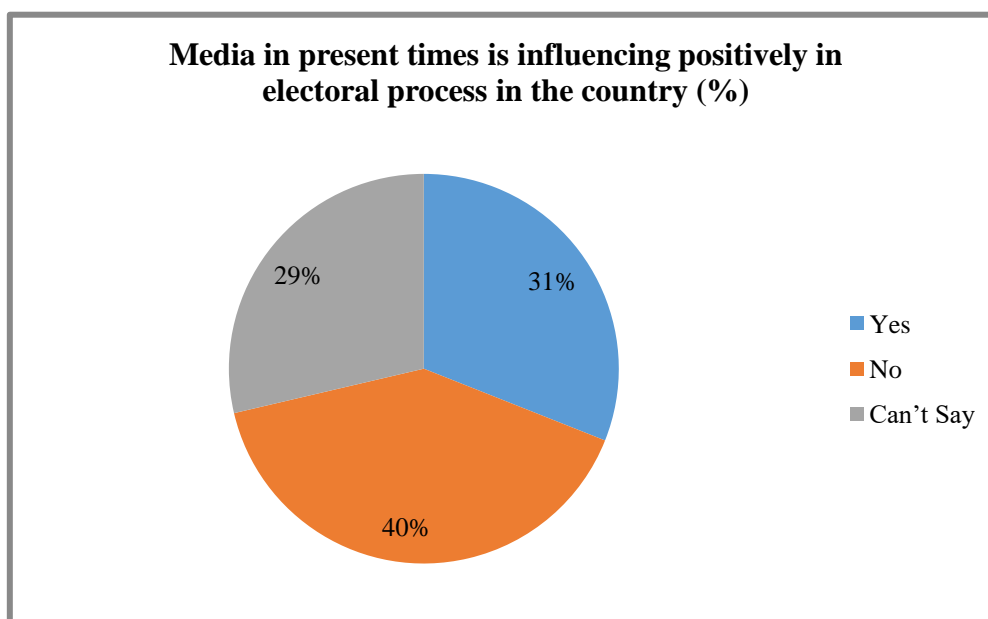
Thus, it can be inferred from the above data that media is playing an important role to shape and strengthen the thought process of the citizens. Media also acts as a catalyst to boost the political knowledge of the eligible voters. However, it is evident from the data that respondents with education below senior secondary are more inclined towards the fact that media is shaping their political opinion. Thus, media is helping in strengthening the democratic fabric of the country. Media has wide range of implications in a democracy as they have radically altered the way in which government institutions are operated. Media has also redefined the way elections are contested and how citizens are engaged in politics. Thus, media disseminates tremendous amount of political content including shaping the political opinion of people regarding voting.

**Table 1.9.7: Do you think that media in present times is influencing positively in electoral process in the country?**

S.No.	Media in present times is influencing positively in electoral process in the country	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Yes	31	31.00
2	No	40	40.00
3	Can't Say	29	29.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>



**Diagram 1.9.7:** Do you think that media in present times is influencing positively in electoral process in the country?



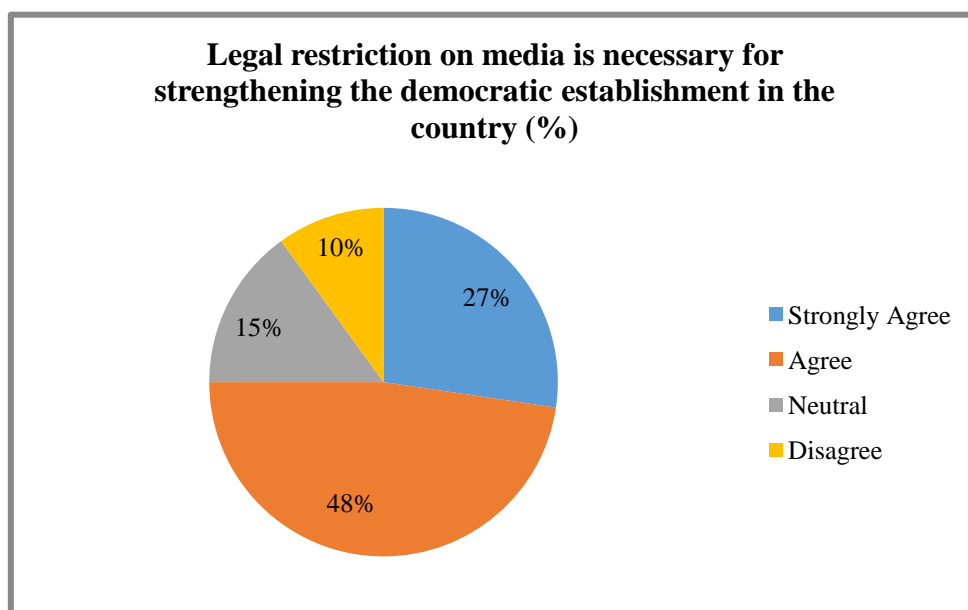
Media is a powerful means for spirited democracy. The basic principles of democracy are that media should enjoy maximum freedom and minimum restrictions should be imposed from the government institutions. Media has to play a role of regulator to the government and guardian of democracy. In the contemporary era media is playing an important role to advance the political knowledge of people. Media educates the people regarding the procedures in an election process. According to the above table, 31 (31%) of respondents agree and 40 (40%) of respondents disagree with the fact that Media in present times is influencing positively in electoral process in the country. While as 29 (29%) of respondents remained neutral on the above fact.

The data also stated that respondents with education level below the senior secondary are showing neutral stance on the above fact, while as respondents with technical qualifications have shown disagreement on the above fact that Media in present times is influencing positively in electoral process in the country. Female respondents have mainly attributed their opinion in favour of the fact that Media in present times is influencing positively in electoral process in the country. Thus, media in present times is playing an important role in terms of socio-economic and political development of the country. Media as a medium is helpful to some extent with respect to the dissemination of relevant information to the people. Media enhances the knowledge of people by providing information and it generates the political consciousness among the people. In terms of polity, media is an important mechanism that acts as a catalyst to disseminate the political knowledge to the people.

**Table 1.9.8: Legal restriction on media is necessary for strengthening the democratic establishment in the country?**

S. No.	Legal restriction on media is necessary for strengthening the democratic establishment in the country	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	27	27.00
2	Agree	48	48.00
3	Neutral	15	15.00
4	Disagree	10	10.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Diagram 1.9.8:** Legal restriction on media is necessary for strengthening the democratic establishment in the country?



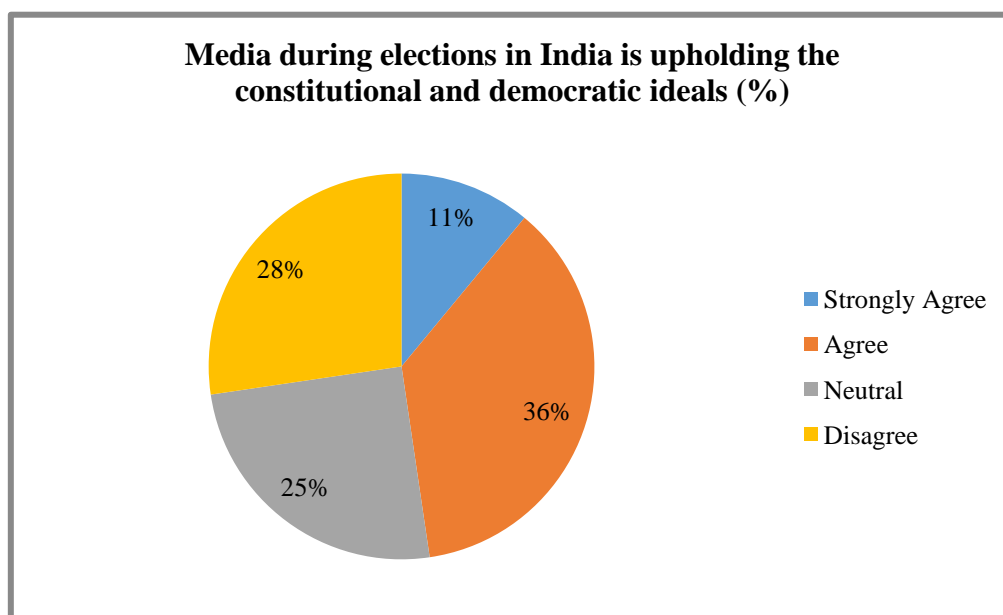
In a democratic establishment, media enjoys more freedom as compared to authoritarian regimes. However, there are various reasonable restrictions on media imposed by certain legislations and constitutional Articles. The legal restriction is must for promoting the harmony, integrity and public order in the country. According to the above table, 27 (27%) of respondents strongly agree and 48 (48%) agree with the fact that Legal restriction on media is necessary for strengthening the democratic establishment in the country. While as 15 (15%) of respondents have shown neutral stance and 10 (10%) of respondents disagree with the fact that Legal restriction on media is necessary for strengthening the democratic establishment in the country.

The above data also stated that male respondents with higher education strongly agree that legal restriction on media is must for strengthening the democracy in the country. However, female respondents have mostly shown neutral stance on the above fact. Thus, it can be inferred from the above data that legal framework is must for effective and transparent functioning in the country. However, Article 19 (1) (a) guarantees the *freedom of speech and expression*. The said article does not provide a direct link to freedom of media. Thus, there is need to dawn such a mechanism that will impose reasonable restrictions on media to strengthen the democratic culture in the country.

**Table 1.9.9: Media during elections in India is upholding the constitutional and democratic ideals?**

S. No.	Media during elections in India is upholding the constitutional and democratic ideals	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Strongly Agree	11	11.00
2	Agree	36	36.00
3	Neutral	25	25.00
4	Disagree	28	28.00
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Diagram 1.9.9:** Media during elections in India is upholding the constitutional and democratic ideals?



Media is an important institution in a democracy. The survival and success of Indian democracy owes a great deal to the vigour and vibrancy to the media. Democracy as a form of government which is being elected by and for the people of country has various ideals including free and fair election, active participation of people and protection of rights of people. Accordingly, constitutional ideals include socio-economic and political equality and justice. Thus, media has been armed with the responsibility to uphold these democratic and constitutional ideals. According to the above table, 11 (11%) of respondents strongly agree and 36 (36%) of respondents agree that Media in India is upholding the constitutional and democratic ideals during the elections. While as 25 (25%) of respondents have shown neutral stance and 28 (28%) of respondents have disagreed that Media in India is upholding the constitutional and democratic ideals during the elections.

## II. CONCLUSION

Media refers to a vehicle or means of message delivery system to carry a message to the audience. Media as a medium plays an important role to educate the people, entertain the people, socialize the people, and impart relevant political consciousness among the people. The existence of media in India dates back to ancient time; however, digitalization has incorporated the new forms of media including online media and broadcasting media. Media is being considered as an important pillar of the Indian democracy; thus, it plays an important role to strengthen the democratic establishment in the country. However, due to course of time media lost its independence to some extent. There are various factors responsible for the interference in the functions of media; these factors include political interference, bureaucratic interference and excessive legal restrictions. Social media impacts the behaviour of citizens and hence their voting patterns (Mohanachandran & Govindarajo, 2020)

According to the above data, respondents mainly with higher education and more importantly media fraternity respondents strongly agree that media is playing an important role to strengthen the democratic culture in the country. While as students are also agreed on the above fact. Respondents with education below senior secondary level have disagreed on the above fact. Media is also taking bold initiatives in the form of 'live TV discussion' and 'debates' on various issues pertaining to the participation of people in democratic process of the country. Thus, media is an important stakeholder in India which is playing an active and important role to strengthen the democratic culture in the country (Roblek *et al*, 2020).

The above data also indicates that respondents associated with media are suggesting the checks on political parties, while as respondents employed in government and public sector suggest the need of "personalized legal framework, check on political parties and audit of media agencies" for maintaining the neutrality of media during the electoral process in the country. The above data clearly states that media is

not working neutrally as various factors are affecting its functions. However, there is need to bring the political consciousness and personalized legal framework for the effective functioning of media. Media has been entrusted with the responsibility to play a major role in keeping the citizenry abreast of current events and raising awareness of the current issues. The above data also indicates that employed respondents and female respondents are strongly agreed on the above fact that Media's role is changing in the recent times from enabler (informing voters with relevant electoral information) to the promoter of particular political party. While as those respondents who remain neutral on the above fact mostly constitutes the female. Thus, media is changing its sides and a cease to exist the institution of neutrality and impartiality.

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