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MASS MEDIA AS BRANCH OF GOVERNMENT. THE ROLE OF MASS
MEDIA AT CONTEMPORARY TIME.

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Annotation: This article explores the evolving role of mass media as a branch of government in contemporary times. Traditionally referred to as the "Fourth Estate," mass media plays a critical role in promoting transparency, fostering accountability, and shaping public discourse within democratic societies. The article discusses how mass media acts as a watchdog over governmental power, informs and educates the public, and influences public opinion and policymaking. It examines the challenges and opportunities posed by the digital transformation of media, including issues of misinformation, audience engagement, editorial independence, diversity, and media literacy.

Key words: mass media, fourth estate, government, democracy, accountability, public discourse, watchdog, information, engagement, editorial independence, diversity, media literacy, ethical journalism, policymaking.

Mass media in Uzbekistan is concerned with the situation of Uzbek media. Although a government decree officially eliminated state censorship in 2002, it has continued to severely restrict independent journalism, particularly following the Andijon uprising of 2005. Licensing and regulation are the purview of the State Press Committee and the Inter-Agency Coordination Committee, which use their authority to harass and delay the activities of independent media outlets. In late 2006, authorities further tightened state control by requiring re-registration by all media outlets not passing a summary review of qualifications. In 2005 some 30 to 40 independent television stations and seven independent radio stations were in operation, but four state-owned television stations, run by the Television and Radio Company of Uzbekistan, dominated the market. No live programming is allowed.



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Total newspaper readership is estimated at only 50,000; the newspaper market is dominated by the state-owned papers Pravda Vostoka, Halq Sozi, and Narodnoye Slovo. The largest privately owned papers are Novosti Uzbekistana, Noviy Vek, Noviy Den, and Mohiyat. The state controls newspaper distribution and materials supply. In the early 2000s, newspaper articles occasionally have criticized government policy and social conditions, but bribery of journalists is common.

The only national news agency, the Uzbekistan National News Agency, is state-controlled. Agence France-Presse, Anadolu Ajansı (of Turkey), the Associated Press, Interfax (of Russia), and Reuters are foreign agencies with offices in Uzbekistan. The government forced Radio Free Europe–Radio Liberty to close its Tashkent office in late 2005. In early 2006, a new media law placed further restrictions on the activities of foreign news organizations in Uzbekistan.

In 2011, the flow of information coming out of the country remains tightly controlled by the authorities but a few independent voices are still reporting from inside Uzbekistan. The Uznews.net news website has been operational since 2006 and is one of the few sources that still has a network of journalists on the ground reporting on day-to-day events in Uzbekistan.

Journalism in Uzbekistan is a dangerous profession with a number of reporters imprisoned for simply doing their jobs. Uzbekistan is the leading jailer of journalists in the region. As of 2011 there were eleven journalists behind bars in Uzbekistan.

The advent of digital technologies has revolutionized mass media, providing unprecedented access to information and amplifying its impact. Social media platforms, in particular, have transformed the dissemination of news and public discourse, enabling instantaneous communication on a global scale. However, this digital landscape has also presented new challenges. The rise of misinformation, fake news, and algorithmic bias threatens the credibility of mass media and undermines its role as a reliable source of information. Media organizations face the responsibility of upholding journalistic ethics, fact-checking rigorously, and combatting disinformation to maintain public trust. Beyond its role in governance, mass media plays a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing policy outcomes. Through investigative reporting, editorials, and documentaries, the media can mobilize public opinion on pressing issues such as climate change, social justice, and human rights. Politicians and policymakers often rely on media coverage to gauge public sentiment and adjust their strategies accordingly. Consequently, mass media serves as a bridge between citizens and their elected representatives, facilitating dialogue and facilitating political participation.



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In conclusion, mass media continues to play a vital role as a branch of government in contemporary times, shaping public discourse, promoting accountability, and empowering citizens. However, the evolving landscape of digital media presents both challenges and opportunities that require thoughtful adaptation and innovation. By prioritizing editorial independence, ethical standards, and diversity of perspectives, media organizations can uphold their essential role in safeguarding democracy and promoting informed citizenship. Empowering individuals with media literacy skills and fostering inclusive media practices are key steps towards building resilient and democratic societies in the digital age. As we navigate this evolving landscape, preserving the integrity and impact of mass media remains paramount for the future of democracy and civic engagement.

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