

Digital Authoritarianism and Democratic Backsliding in India

Kartikeya Srivastava

Department of Political Science, Sri Aurobindo College, University of Delhi, India

Email- backupdata262425@gmail.com

Abstract

This research analyzes the issues associated with massive digitalization in the last two decades in India, which is one of the largest democracies in the entire world. This case study of India shows how a boon in the form of digitalization, when not regulated properly, can turn into digital authoritarianism. Certain leverages or political influences can lead to the transformation of the digital welfare system into a surveillance model, defying the norms of a democratic regime and drifting apart from its original motive of inclusion to exclusion and overreach, leading to democratic backsliding. This harms the state-citizen relationship as it hinders their privacy without their consent, leading to a violation of fundamental rights and civil liberties. When the legal, political, and ethical framework is negatively manipulated by a digital governance model, it leads to a shift of the democratic regime to soft authoritarianism. It is very important to regulate the growing technology to ensure proper digital governance backed by strong data protection rights. This dissertation focuses on evaluating various policies taken out by the government, like the Aadhaar Act of 2016, data protection laws, etc., to examine Political narratives, the Intersection of state and technology, debunking the realities and actual motives and strategies to mitigate or counter them to prevent digital authoritarianism and democratic backsliding. An in-depth case study of India is done by examining the data from primary and secondary sources, hinting towards the urgent need for a strong constitutional and legal framework with robust data protection to restrict authoritarian use of digital power and ensure transparency.

Keywords: Digital Authoritarianism; Democratic Backsliding; Digital Governance; Surveillance and Privacy; Data Protection; Soft Authoritarianism; Rights

Introduction

Chapter 1 gives a brief background of the topic and explains what digital authoritarianism is and democratic backsliding and how they are interlinked. The hypothesis that is - India's digital welfare system and infrastructure, especially the Aadhar system, has unintentionally evolved into a mechanism of state surveillance and political control, thereby contributing significantly to democratic backsliding. Center problem and alternate questions will be discussed in this chapter. Further, the organization of other chapters as well as objectives of this dissertation along with Scope and significance of the topic will be highlighted.

literature review of the dissertation focuses on the conceptual framework of the key terms such as digitalization surveillance, digital authoritarianism, soft authoritarianism and democratic backsliding etc. This includes critical evaluation of existing scholars Based on global literature as well love Indian specific literature which focuses on Indian welfare system of UIDAI, other government apps and issues of surveillance and political control. Research gaps will be identified and addressed in this chapter along with a theoretical framework such as of Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality, Levitsky and Ziblatt's

theory of democratic backsliding, and critical data studies, which together help explain how digital infrastructures restructure power relations within democratic societies. Methodology will be more and less qualitative and interpretative in nature. Data collection method includes case study on Aadhar system, Internet shutdowns instances and saves the Internet movement. Secondary data from sources like UIDAI, V-Dem Institute, Freedom House, and other peer reviews are used to produce a simplified overview of the topic. Primary data from official sites of government, official guidelines, and circulars, as well as from parliamentary meetings, is taken for better credibility and fact checks.

Chapter 2 - historical evolution of digitalization in India

This chapter discusses about brief evolution of digitalization in India and its benefits. The welfare goal behind these advancements and other advantages will be analyzed. The timeline of significant Policies and acts such as Aadhar act, IT act along with constitutional and legal framework with important judgments will be covered.

Chapter 3 - digital authoritarianism

This chapter discusses these digital welfare policies which were meant to target problems of exclusion that ironically increased such problems and turned into tools of surveillance and government control. Various examples such as of

interoperability with private players which has resulted into leak of personal information to these players without consent, Sanchar Saathi app, WhatsApp controversy, and Pegasus spyware will be brought into limelight to support the hypothesis.

Chapter 4 - effect of digital authoritarianism on democracy and possible solutions

This chapter interlinks the digital authoritarianism issue whether its effect on democracy in context of India. Various cases of Internet shutdowns, misuse of information, misuse of various legal sections of constitution, Telangana election case of surveillance for a descriptive analysis. Issues of weakened legal framework by highlighting the landmark case of *Puttaswamy* ruling which suffers from structural limitations making it normative rather than enforceable in nature. Too much institutionalized digitalization reforms as well as people's dependency on them has made surveillance a new normal. Leading to transition of India from democracy to soft authoritarianism which is backed by factual sources stating reduce and democratic scores of India.

Introduction (chapter 1)

Technological development or digitalization has been a revolutionary achievement of mankind, which has transformed individuals' lives. It has made many imaginary or unachievable things possible, like establishing communication in any part of the world; it has modernized every sector, whether it is tertiary, secondary, or primary. Healthcare education, government services, and private services have improved and are now easily reachable to the common people. There are unlimited benefits of technological development, because of which this is said to be the greatest boon to human civilization, and it is now inseparable from any individual's life. With the growing digitalization all over the world, India also has a significant evolutionary history of digitalization, which started in the 1950s, that is, the post-independence period, saw the introduction of early computers. But the period of the 1980s to 1990s is said to be the early foundations of digitalization in India due to the expansion of the telecom industries and the rise of the IT sector. Rajiv Gandhi is viewed as the pivotal leader in this digital transformation, as under his leadership tenure, IT education was expanded, **the Centre for Development of Telematics (C-DOT)** in 1984 under Sam Pitroda was established to develop indigenous telecom technologies, the Number of PCOS phones was increased, Software technology parks were created in 1991, etc. These are one of the important factors because of which India has become one of the largest digital ecosystems in the world. Introduction of third-generation technology, such as AR, VR, AI, IoT, etc., in the 21st century has led to rapid Digital advancement and development in these countries. This was meant to increase welfare, administrative efficiency, transparency, and citizen inclusion. India saw its leap forward with the introduction of the Aadhar scheme in 2009, which introduced biometric

verification and gave citizens a unique identity, and provided a foundational layer for authentication in welfare schemes, banking, and public services. Later, this scheme was linked with Jan Dhan Yojana, which came to be known as the Jam Trinity. It accomplished one of the major milestones of the highest mobile penetration in the country, which caused a surge in data consumption, making India the world's largest mobile data consumer. 1st July 2025 marks the 10th anniversary of a very successful scheme, the Digital India, which introduced a modern and very competitive digital infrastructure, seamless flow of services, a better governance model, and digital empowerment. The main aim of the Aadhar Act, which came into effect in 2016, was to increase interoperability by linking it with the Digital Public Infrastructure, to ensure direct benefits of welfare schemes to people. DPI led to the introduction of government sites and apps like Digi Locker, E Kranti, and newly functioning UPI apps for quick online transactions. All these technological developments have impacted human lives in a positive way by reducing paperwork, searching for documents, saving time, increasing accessibility to healthcare, education, government schemes, etc., but there are several cons as well. Politics has changed this digital transparency and inclusion into a deepening risk of increased digital authoritarianism and democratic backsliding. It has unleashed its negative potential as these tools of advancement are being misused for surveillance and censorship and are also hindering privacy in many ways. This poses a significant threat to democratic norms and changes the States and their people's inter-relation dynamics as well. There are multiple ways in which power can be misused, and when it is done through technological means, it is known as digital authoritarianism. It has turned into a global issue as citizens complain that the data taken by the government is not limited to welfare use only, but is also used for surveillance without their permission, hindering their privacy. There are many means in which control can be exercised digitally by the government over the people. That violates the democratic norms due to a lack of accountability, transparency, etc., leading to democratic backsliding. Democratic backsliding is not simply authoritative centralization of power, but it unfolds itself legally and procedurally within the system, making it hard to detect. Its blend with digitalization has not only increased the detection problem but has also turned it into a manipulative asset, which makes people consider it a new normal. India is the largest democracy with one of the largest digital ecosystems globally, which will help us to comprehensively analyze the technological progress accompanied by democratic erosion. There is a trend of democratic decline in India. According to Freedom House, in 2024, India was rated partly free with a score of 66 out of 100, which is estimated to decrease further this year. India has become one of the leading countries in the number of Internet shutdowns and controversies related to encrypted information between WhatsApp and the Indian govt, Twitter and the Indian government, Pegasus spyware, and sharing of personal information with private players in the name of interoperability, depicting the threat of rising digital

authoritarianism, which is putting India's democracy in a back seat.

Literature review

Digitalization has undergone profound development over the last two decades and has contributed to state-citizen relations, welfare delivery, and governance, especially in developing countries like India with a high population, and the digital divide due to purchasing power parity, which depicts the gap between rich and poor, all demographically between cities and villages. This dissertation focuses on both sides of the coin, examining the interaction between digitalization in India and surveillance, privacy, and democratic backsliding.

Digital Governance and State Capacity

Scholars like Ho (2002), Moon (2002), and Bhatnagar (2004) highlighted the ways in which government can adopt an e-governance model for streamlining welfare deliveries, good governance, reducing corruption, and ensuring better effectiveness. Layne & Lee (2001) outlined a 4-stage model of E-governance. There are reports by PIB and [Invest India blog](#), which state that the Digital India mission has succeeded in its goals by acting as a pathway of inclusion, transparency, economic, and educational development. Direct studies on official government portals like JAM, PDS, DBT, etc. show that Digitalization has reduced leakages and ensures better welfare.

Digital Authoritarian Tendencies

Ndou & Shkoder (2004) highlighted the challenges faced by the developing countries to develop a proper e-governance model when intertwined with Nancy Bermeo's (2016) Concept of democratic backsliding, it is not the complete erosion of democracy but the gradual weakening of the roots or the core principles of democracy. Digital authoritarianism has altered the landscape of democratic structures in a way that makes it very difficult to fix the problem completely, leading to democratic backsliding (Feldstein, 2020). Researchers like Lok Niti-CSDS, Jayal (2021), have highlighted how digital IDs can be misused for monitoring the people, online censorship, and Internet shutdowns are used conveniently by the government to manipulate the political participation of the people or sabotage protests. This risks the transparency and the accountability of the government. Giorgio Agamben's State of Exception (2005) explains India's internet shutdowns—over 500 since 2012. Payal Arora's The Next Billion Users: Digital Life Beyond the West (2019) critiques "Digital India" as a control veneer, while Saugato Abraham's "The State of Surveillance in India: The Central Monitoring System" (2020) details opaque systems.

Organizations like Freedom House, The Economist Intelligence Unit (EIU), and the V-Dem identify early stages of democratic decline due to several issues and have also stated that India's democratic score, which is already in a depreciating trend, might continue to decline further.

Aadhaar and the Centralization of Data

Few scholars criticize the system of Aadhaar because, earlier, it wasn't mandatory but a voluntary identity. This compulsion can lead to mission creep, which is defined by scholars like Avani Kapur and **Wendy K. Mariner** as a phenomenon of overreach. When an organization goes beyond its goals and expands its original purpose without the permission of its stakeholders, it's known as mission creep. Khera (2019) and Radhakrishnan (2020) argue that Aadhaar can lead to exclusion. In India, there is a huge digital divide that still exists, and the biometrics of people, like fingerprints, tend to change due to several factors. Failure of authentication due to such issues can exclude the welfare beneficiaries.

Privacy, Constitutional Law, and Surveillance in India

Digital governance framework puts a big question mark on whether it can be regulated under constitutional legality. The **Puttaswamy v. Union of India** (2017) judgment was a landmark Indian Supreme Court decision that declared the right to privacy a fundamental right under Article 21 of the Constitution. This decision led to further debates on Aadhaar policies as well as data protection acts. Scholars such as Bhatia (2017) and Chandrachud (2019) Claim That India lacks a strong data production model, as many policies like the central monitoring system, NETRA, are based on surveillance models.

Resistance to Digital Authoritarianism and Theoretical Perspectives

NGOs, journalists, activists, and citizens are finding measures to resist the digital authoritarianism regime and prevent democratic backsliding. Digital creators are developing decentralized Internet models to promote Internet freedom. These strategies are based on literature works of scholars like James C. Scott's Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance (1985) captures subtle defiance, like Aadhaar hacks, while Antonio Gramsci's Selections from the Prison Notebooks (1971) theorizes counter-hegemony, evident in India's #SaveTheInternet (Rohit Datta's "Digital Activism in India: The #SaveTheInternet Campaign," 2018).
Literature Gap

The existing literature on India's digital governance is very fragmented. Majority think tanks address this topic with the technocratic approach where they mention how digitalization has revolutionized people's life and focus on positive aspects only whereas the existing critiques discuss about technological problems and digital divide. The misuse of existing technology is not often discussed and if it is discussed, examples of authoritative regimes such as China and Russia are taken. Limited importance is given to the digital ecosystem of democratic and welfare states like India.

A link is formed between how mass digitalization can lead to practices like surveillance causing digital authoritarianism further leading to democratic backsliding. Providing a broader framework of democratic erosion. Representing significant gap in literature.

Transformation of Indian welfare system like Aadhaar and Jam Trinity to tools of surveillance is covered along with legal and procedural measures. Landmark cases like *Justice K.S. Puttaswamy v. Union of India* (2017) are discussed in many literatures, but reasons of its ineffectiveness are overlooked. A detailed evaluation of these measures backed by certain events contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of digital authoritarianism and its link with democratic backsliding in India.

Central problem

The central problem here revolves around this duality - how can the pros of digitalization be balanced with its cons to tackle emerging soft authoritarian regimes like India? Increasing development and efficiency should be backed by data protection as well as individual rights. According to EIU's 2024 report, only 25 countries are under a proper democratic regime, and others are under a flawed democracy, a hybrid regime, or a total authoritarian regime. V-Dem Institute report (2018) categorized India as an electoral autocracy. This dissertation focuses on the detailed case study of India for a comprehensive understanding of the central problem.

Hypotheses - India's digital welfare system and infrastructure, especially the Aadhaar system, has unintentionally evolved into a mechanism of state surveillance and political control, thereby contributing significantly to democratic backsliding.

Central Question - How has India's digital governance model turned into means of surveillance and political control leading to its transition from democracy to soft authoritarianism?

Alternate questions

- How has digital governance aimed for inclusion resulted in the exclusion of marginalized groups?

- What has transformed the instruments of governance and welfare into political control?
- How can India's new policies be revolving around digitalization initiatives, such as E-Aadhaar, shape state-citizen relations?
- In what ways has the balance of power between citizens and the state been altered by the governance model shaping democratic accountability?
- Our democratic institutions in India are trying to adapt themselves to resist the authoritarian potential of digital power, or are they trying to use it for their own benefit?

Objectives

- To analyze the correlation between growing digitalization and trends of democratic backsliding in India.
- To evaluate the present-day governance and digitalization reforms under the constitutional and legal norms of India.
- To evaluate the political influence on digitalization affecting the civil liberties of the citizens.
- To propose reforms to mitigate issues related to democratic backsliding and maintain a balance between the pros and cons of digitalization.

Methodology

This dissertation employs a qualitative and interpretive research design that evaluates the data protection acts, digital development in India over the last 20 years, evaluation of various policies, and evolution of digital infrastructure and its impacts on state-citizen relationship, power dynamics, decentralization of policies, exclusion-inclusion of marginalized groups, as well as the welfare to surveillance shift. Qualitative analysis helps to analyze technological development's influence on rights, governance, and power. The approach of interpretivism is adopted to uncover the logical reasons behind the actual motive for the introduction of several policies in India. This will provide clarity between assumptions and facts by in-depth interpretation of the Aadhaar Act 2016, the Digital surveillance system, interoperability approach, etc. Secondary data from sources like UIDAI, V-Dem Institute, Freedom House, and other peer reviews are used to produce a simplified overview of the topic. Pivotal incidents like Internet shutdowns, biometric scans, and authentication failures of existing data are analyzed. Primary data from official sites of government, official guidelines, and circulars, as well as from parliamentary meetings, is taken for better credibility and fact checks. The later analysis is grounded in theoretical frameworks such as of Michel Foucault's concept of governmentality, Levitsky and Ziblatt's theory of democratic

backsliding, and critical data studies, which together help explain how digital infrastructures restructure power relations within democratic societies. Legal analysis is done directly from the Bare Acts and provisions under them, and a detailed study of landmark cases like **The Puttaswamy v. Union of India** (2017). Already existing interviews and surveys of tribal areas and marginalized sections are taken to understand the exclusion and digital divide. A brief comparative analysis of different states of India is done for understanding the concept of governance, asymmetrical power sharing, and loopholes. The methodology helps to analyze the actual benefits of digitalization and democratic facades due to digital authoritarian practices.

Historical evolution of digitalization in India (Chapter – 2)

India is one of the largest growing democracies in the world. It is a unique state with diversity and significant demography. India as a post independent nation focused on modernization and overall development. In the case of India, the word development wasn't used as a layman term instead it was based on the traditional philosophy of "Sarvodaya" given by Mahatma Gandhi and expanded by Vinobha Bhave which stated universal upliftment of all and social integration. India always had a solution do this the problem of inclusion of vast diversity, but the main challenge is the implementation of the process to achieve this solution which was unknown. Indian policies to a protracted extent were traditional in nature which made the process too much complicated as it was based on paperwork. Paperwork was not the only problem as a new problem emerged in the 1960s, which was of population boom. When these two problems combined, it led to a situation of administrative paralysis in India. Administrative paralysis It's a concept based on Weberian bureaucracy critique which states the inefficiency of bureaucracy because of too much rigidity and complexities in the process. Traditional manual methods made it tough to find the actual records of the people, making it difficult to penetrate the welfare policies. government offices loaded with millions of files and people too lost their paper documents which were very hard to recover. All these problems led to the introduction of a new problem for ghost beneficiaries. This led to massive leakages as it became impossible for the government to track people who truly needed those beneficiaries' vs those were not meant to receive them but were enjoying them. Another problem of ghost beneficiaries was of identity crisis; there are many people in India with the same names and surnames and traditional methods but could not recognize these differences. The manual governance gave rise to the gatekeepers who were mostly bureaucrats who took bribes, and all this concluded into zero accountability and zero transparency. The billion Indians with regional, cultural and linguistic diversity Increase pressure on government to bring some revolutionary measures to overcome these challenges.

Digitalization in India was not merely because of catching up with other developing or developed nations but India had no choice left instead of digitalization to improve the structural model off institutions, ensure transparency and accountability, maintain records of so many people and taking development to a new scale on a good pace. Hence, digitalization in India is said to be a technological fix as it wasn't based on choice, but it was based on need.

Digitalization resulted as a catalyst for change which led to evolution of governance and technology in different phases in India. These evolutionary phases we're guided by necessary preconditions for E governance such as a sound legal framework that is the basic prerequisite for any orderly society. The constitution is the cornerstone of India's legal framework and parliament has enacted many laws to further objectives enshrined in the constitution, but the dynamic society requires updating and enactment of existing laws to accommodate the evolutionary features. Another requirement for governance is a robust institutional mechanism for establishing the rule of law to get a strong and effective mechanism that the rights of the citizens are well protected. India has a drastic rich and poor divide along with its diversity which leads to ample of differences in the awareness level of the people. Hence decentralization or digital penetration it's very important in India so that all the communities can be uplifted and we are part of the governance model. Decentralization is the best way to carry all the functions closest to the citizens at the smallest unit of governance possible. Hence the aim of government was always to make governance citizens centric in nature. In governance projects, the focus must be on keeping the citizens at the center stage and using the technological tools to transform the interaction between the citizens and government for effective welfare delivery to all. One of the crucial conditions to implement is transparency and the right to information. Access to information empowers the citizens to demand and get information about public policies and programs, thus making the government more accountable and helps to strengthen participatory democracy and citizen centric governance. Another factor complimenting transparency is accountability. Accountability necessitates constant monitoring and evaluation which leads to effective administration which focuses on successful outcomes of laws, policies and guidelines etc. In a welfare state like India citizens have a variety of interactions with the government whether as a service provider, a regulator, as a provider of social and physical infrastructure etc. every citizen has a different demand and expectation which is a very challenging task to meet for any government. There are internal and external constraints which prevent the government from meeting the expectations of the people. Technological advancement turned into an effective solution to overcome external and internal constraints by establishing a two-way communication between government and citizens Where their grievances can be addressed. Another important aspect of penetration of technology is the process simplification which can be done by minimizing hierarchical tiers updating

and simplification of existing department manuals focusing on rationality so that government citizen relationship can be effectively redesigned backed by procedural, institutional and legal changes required.

Early Technological Foundations (1950s–1980s) - Web presence and beginning of new model of governance

This started after India gained its independence. India didn't have digital infrastructure, but this phase established the foundation of future digital India. In January 1947, to promote self-sustaining, scientific and technological growth, the national physical laboratory was set up followed by a network of 17 national laboratories focusing on areas of research. IBM Got involved in early 1950s by introducing Punch card machines and laying down the future prospectus for India. HEC-2M was the first digital computer installed in India, at the Indian Statistical Institute (ISI) in Kolkata in 1955. Early computers were used for research, calculation, and academic purposes but soon their actual potential was realized. In 1952, the first of the five institutes of technology, patterned after the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was set up at Kharagpur. 1st Prime Minister of India, Jawahar Lal Nehru believed that science and technology were crucial to the solution of India's problem in March 1958 the Lok Sabha passed the scientific policy resolution, acknowledging the role of science and technology for the advancement of the country many scientific and technological institutes were set up. To emphasize the value of scientific research, himself assumed the chairmanship of council of scientific and industrial research (CSIR). India's first indigenous computer was developed in 1960 by the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research (TIFR). The development began in the mid-1950s, and it was officially commissioned and named TIFRAC by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru in 1960. This computer was an essential milestone in India's technological history, reflecting the growing prowess in computer science and technology within the country. The Bhabha Committee, established in 1963, was responsible for development of department of electronics in 1970s. One of the essential cornerstones of this. Was establishment of NIC (National informatics center) in 1976. It became India's E governance models backbone as it provided infrastructure help as well as E governance support and solutions. For last four decades it is trying to bridge the digital divide and promoting Digital opportunities for sustainable development. It increased interoperability in this phase by facilitating sharing information between various government departments. The period of early foundations of digital technology in India created a strong base for future digital models. Telecommunication started to grow in this period and computerization herald government to improve its administration by partial inclusion of it in administrative work, marking a relative shift from total paperwork system to partially

maintained electronic records. Establishment of so many institutions which in future expanded technological innovation in India leading to rapid digital transformation.

Phase of IT and Telecom Revolution (1980 – 1999) - Phase of limited interaction and technological advancement

The period under Nehru's leadership was known as the computer era, but the second phase of evolution saw drastic development in the IT and telecom sector under the leadership of Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. He was known as 'Father of India's Information Technology and Telecommunication Revolution' and the architect of digital India. The center of development of Telematics was established in 1984 under his leadership which reduced India's dependency on foreign telecoms. It revolutionized communication in towns as well as villages. Sam Pitroda and Rajiv Gandhi worked together to establish a C-DOT. They shared a common vision of openness, accessibility, connectivity, networking, democratization, decentralization and as a result social transformation by bringing a diverse group of people on a common platform to interact and participate in overall development. There were too many developments in the field of technological innovation, privatization was encouraged, telecom Commission was formed in 1989, and PCOS/STDs were introduced as well. In the early 80's, India had 2 million telephones for approximately 800 million people, and the telecom industry was predominantly owned by the government. In 1984, computers were introduced into Indian Railways, transforming ticketing and operations and showcasing the potential of digital technology in public services. India's first nationwide satellite-based network, NICNET, was launched in 1986. The introduction of MICR-based cheque clearing and ATMs in 1990 revolutionized banking operations, making financial transactions faster and more efficient. NIC played a very important role in spreading awareness about informatics. It was reliable, efficient, time saving and helped to maximize the resources. NIC was responsible for ICT infrastructure development. It connected various institutions of government with each other and improved administration by facilitating electronic delivery. Computers were not just used for research purposes now but were used by the government for effective administration, managing data, and securing demographic essentials. Computers were also found in houses and offices as well. Telephones and PCOs were widely spread connecting Indian remote areas to global world as well. As India started to enter in the phase of globalization, Rajiv Gandhi with the help of government and private players started to develop software. This was another leaf forth after the computer revolution. In 1998, the Government of India declared information technology as the 'future of India'. In 1991, the duty levied on exporting computers to other countries was removed. Software companies were given tax relief for up to 10 years on export

profits. The economic crisis 1990 forced India to adopt privatization leading to decrease in the role of state Facilitating more foreign investment logical innovation. In 1999, ticket booking system irtc.co.in turned into one of the most spectacular initiatives. Increased investments led to the growth of the IT sector. Cities like Bengaluru became IT hubs attracting many multinational corporations in India bringing it in a limelight on the global stage. VSNL Replaced overseas technological communications and launched India's first and largest Internet service provider in 1995. After the same year, TRAI (Telecom regulatory authority of India) Was set up reducing the role of government in deciding tariffs. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Atal Vihari Vajpayee in 1999, many pro reforms were introduced boosting liberalization and entry of foreign players investing highly in Indian telecom markets. DTS Was later named as BSNL. The national task force on information technology and software development was formed in 1998. This national task force aimed to make India an information technological superpower in coming years by focusing on export and import of technology, Education and be governance etc. In 1999, a separate ministry of information and technology was established along with a new telecom policy which focused on expansion of telecommunication and modernizing it by giving an upper hand to private players as well. There was an increase in demand for digital services leading to high pressure on telecommunication services because of which new policies were introduced to expand and transform it as per the needs.

Expansion of Digitalization and E-Governance in India (2000–2014) - Transaction phase with strong service delivery and digital infrastructure development

One of the most important tasks done in this phase was introducing a legal framework for all the digital reforms in the country by implementing the IT of 2000. This act introduced electronic signatures which are considered equivalent to physical signatures. It imposed a penalty on cyber-crimes by forming proper rules and regulations. This encouraged use of digital services as it guaranteed people to use legal actions. Their personal data is compromised, resulting in efficient delivery of services to people. **National Financial Switch (NFS)** Launched in 2003 increased ATM connectivity by connecting banks and ATMs all over the country. The state governments also developed their ego governance projects such as Madhya Pradesh developed Gyandoot project Providing agriculture information, redressal, grievance etcetera information to the people living in districts and rural areas. states like Andhra Pradesh Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh also introduced such reforms between 2002 to 2005 to maintain records of land ownership, facilitating urban and rural public, helps to interact with government without physical visits etc. to improve ego ordinance in their respective states. The national governance plan was announced in 2006. Its vision was to make all government services accessible to common life and ensure the availability of services to add affordable cost so that people

can meet their basic needs guaranteed by accountability and transparency. It was an overspecified task to introduce this plan with effective implementation. It required public private partnerships, a high-level Common Core digital infrastructure hardware networking such as Statewide area networks. state data sectors, common service centers and electronic service delivery gateways. a national fiber optical network throughout the entire country to ensure proper connectivity. Even the remote areas were not left out, and fiber networks were created with proper bandwidth. When the national E governance plan was introduced, there were 27 mission mode projects which are now 44 in number. These projects form the framework of NeGP. They are generally of three types that is central mission mode project which includes passport income tax the office venture etc. global state mission mode projects that includes commercial taxes E Panchayat treasuries transport PDS etc. and integrated mission mode projects which includes national eagle oneness service delivery gateway, social benefit, E codes and financial inclusion etcetera. All the MMPs are classified according to the definite scopes and have clearly defined objectives over specific timelines with measurable outcomes. There are 4 components of mission mode project:

1. **Capacity building scheme:** Under this scheme state governance mission teams were assembled which comprised of various professionals and experts who had immense knowledge in their department. They used to assess the departments and train officers as well as the decision makers so that they could use technical innovation efficiently and enhance their skills. A central capacity building management cell was also created so that it could monitor and coordinate Across the states. It is based on the lines of efficiency which carries A notion that technology alone cannot reform until the people behind technology aren't adequately trained.
2. **Awareness and communication:** This component focused on building her sense of ownership among the implementers so that they can actively contribute to all the initiatives, and nothing goes underutilized. Its other prime focus was to bridge the gap between technological advancement and citizens 'know- how' about it. A major awareness campaign was set up under this in remote areas and villages making NeGP an umbrella brand across the country.
3. **Impact and outcomes:** Department of Electronics and Information Technology (DeitY) Who was responsible for our implementation of E governance project and promoted digital infrastructure. it is also

responsible for evaluations and assessments of states by conducting E readiness of States and union territories with gifts a proper idea of digital infrastructure gaps disparities and areas of improvement etc. Defining the problems and measuring the outcomes resulted in better policies to strategize E governance. This holistic approach has helped not only in promoting digital governance but also ensuring transparency, reduced corruption, and better service delivery. The Department of Electronics and Information Technology is now upgraded and renamed as ministry of electronics and information technology in 2016.

4. **Standards and policies:** Standardization helps to establish uniform rules for all the digital and communication protocols ensuring security, a smoother experience for the users. Legally safeguarded by the policies makes it more secure and reliable, improving its scalability. This also brings e governance system out of situation into an interoperable structure where seamless information is shared among the departments and other platforms. This all makes it the backbone of mission mode projects.

The Biggest challenge in highly populated nation like India is to deliver E governance service to over 1 billion people. Challenges are not just limited to technology or infrastructure but also to the organizational level like legalization of rules and procedures, scale and awareness, transparency etc. National e governance mission was a solution to many of these arguments.

The other challenges discussed above of transparency and accountability was solved to a very extent by the introduction of right to the Information Act of 2005. Although in 1976 Supreme Court recognized right to information as a fundamental right in article 19(1a) of the constitution in the case of Raj Narayan versus state of Uttar Pradesh and later in 2002 the Freedom of Information act was also passed but it wasn't strong enough to implement successfully. RTI act of 2005 acts as a strong mechanism where citizens can request for the information regarding government and their records improving the state citizen relationship and making governments accountable using legislation which is an integral part of a democracy. Information requested under RTI must be provided to the petitioner within 30 days from the date of request or within 48 hours for cases of life and liberty. There are few exemptions under it, but overall, it has forced public authorities to adopt a proactive approach. In 2007, payment and settlement act was launched by the government in which RBI acted as regulator and supervisor of payments In India under a proper legal framework. With the increase and digitalization, there was an increase in cybercrimes and other illegal activities

which forced the government to take legal action against them, leading to amendments in the IT act of 2008 in the year 2008. They penalized These cybercrimes such as offensive messages, child molestation and also held the power to decrypt the information. in the same year an important report of E governance was published. This report was submitted under the second arc Commission which was formed in 2005 to reform the administrative structure of India. Around 15 reports were submitted covering topics such as right to information, E governance, public order etc. The second arc report clearly stated that their focus was not on east of east governance but on the latter part that is governance. It was never about just computers and mobiles but about proper administration and service delivery to citizens. The Digital part of governance is not just for translating the policies but to transform the basic structure of them and simplify all the complexities. One of the most important reports concerning E governance was the idea of SMART Governance. This was transformative in nature, and the word 'SMART' was used as mnemonic here. stands for simple, which means that the procedures which included a lot of paperwork and other complexities should be simplified so that citizens can easily understand them without any confusion. simplifying here doesn't mean that only the complexities of the final policies are removed but it also stands for simplification of rules and processes by establishing a single window service where people can easily access multiple government services through one designated portal. M stands for morals that governance is free of corruption based on ethical and honest principles keeping integrity as the soul of E governance. In physical process, bureaucrats are the administrators who were the gatekeepers which made under the table corruption easily possible but digitalization to an extent reduced such transactions. It emphasized that the decision makers shouldn't be guided by their personal motive but should follow ethical measures and choose what is right for everyone a here stands for accountable which means that government is clearly responsible for its decisions which is very important in a democratic country. With digitalization, easy to use grievance redressal mechanisms were introduced, establishing better checks and balances systems between citizens and government. Citizens could now track the status of their beneficiaries and could know who is responsible for their delays. R stands for responsive which is proportionally related to accountable factors as if government is accountable to their people, then it will be automatically responsive to their grievance redressal. Digitalization made this responsive feature of government quicker and more accurate in nature, adapting to the constant needs of society. It stands for transparency that the decisions made by the government should be open and clear in procedures. Citizens could now have a track after the seasons made by the government with better explanation that why and how it is happening or what it can lead to. This helped in shaping citizen state relationships by reducing secrecy in decision making and building trust with the citizens. Acts like the right to information play a crucial role and ensure the transparency of the government. In the same year, the national

service delivery gateway was launched to provide seamless interoperability by establishing a standard-based messaging switch through which various departments of government can communicate with each other. Aadhar act of 2009 was also introduced providing unique Biometric based identification number UID AI was also established in the same year responsible for collecting managing, securing and coordinating for essential data necessary for issuing Aadhaar numbers. This system was created to eliminate bogus beneficiaries and improve welfare development. This was further revolutionized and completely digitalize in 2016. In 2012, national policy of information technology was approved which aimed to make India an IT hub of language technology by adopting open sources. It supports the adoption and growth of ICT with other progressive innovations. This not only helped to create a skilled manpower but also helped India economically by attracting investment. The provisions of the national E governance plan were also implemented and aims under the national policy of information and technology were meant to achieve with the mutual coordination of state and center which clearly shows the emphasis given to better welfare delivery, decentralization, Inclusive, reliable and transparent E governance. In 2013, Government of India launched 'Meghraj' Which is the GI cloud initiative to modernize the old infrastructure of e governance by adopting cloud computing. It provided a common single platform which maintained all the secured data and applications which were earlier handled by different departments, making it easy to store and recover data. State and central governments' interoperability increased, making the system more flexible and citizen friendly. It not only reduced the cost but turned out to be a beneficial platform for disaster recovery systems. Cloud computing benefits were properly harnessed with the help of this initiative in 2013 government launched Mobile Seva initiative with focused on utilizing the mobile phones which were highly penetrated in the country for inclusive development. The government realized that mobiles are widely spread than computers and so they focused on delivery of public services through mobile devices. It was also realized that there is too much digital divide in the country and many people have devices but are completely unaware to use it and utilize the government policies with the help of SMS based services which weren't based on Internet helped people in remote areas without Internet access 2 access the services. Another feature was introduction of dial code which was based on the principle of interactive menu based services where people used to dial numbers navigated by government service through step by step many people didn't know how to read and write, hence, government introduced an interactive voice system where people could just listen to the recorded voice messages for the instructions. There is huge linguistic diversity in India, making it impossible to understand a single language. To solve this issue, the government introduced the services in the local language so that every person can understand and use them. This particular phase of digitalization was truly reformative in nature as various reforms were introduced on the legal basis for better service deliveries and data-driven governance. A

congenial environment was built focusing on capacity building enabling Prioritization of the initiatives. But in these developments roots of digital authoritarianism can also be traced especially when acts like Aadhar were introduced which focused on large data collection which was centralized in nature and identity based.

Digital India and Digital Public Infrastructure (2015–Present) - Transformation of E governance to digital state

Since 2014, India has shifted to a comprehensive model of digital governance. My gov.in was established in 2014 and aimed to form a link between government and citizens and promote the active participation of citizens. It is designed in 3 modes of participation that are 'do, discussed and disseminated'. Another major flagship initiative was taken by the Government of India on 1st July 2015 with the launch of digital India program. This program aimed to transform a country into a knowledge-based economy and digitally empowered society. In this initiative, governance was totally digitalized to modernize India's administrative framework and ensure that every citizen enjoys benefit of technological advancement. Cost-friendly digital infrastructure and seeking digital literacy to reduce digital divide. The country was divided into a single digital ecosystem where there are enhanced connectivity and interoperability between states as well as penetration and decentralization of technology reducing urban rural divide. There are 9 pillars of digital India:

1. **Broadband highways** - This pillar aims to provide digital infrastructure for all ensuring high speed Internet connectivity and universal access. It covered urban areas and the remotest part of the country.
2. **Universal access to mobile connectivity** - This pillar focused on connecting the nation with the help of mobile connectivity. It aimed for a better coverage and advanced reforms to increase the speed of the network such as the introduction of 3G-4G and 5G under this pillar, with the help of mobile services, individuals would be able to access public services and government would be able to practice ego and dance.
3. **Public interest access program** - This pillar aimed to strengthen common service centers in gram panchayats and convert post offices into multi service centers. This will create multi-functional endpoints for delivery of government services

4. **E governance** - Under this pillar government business process reengineering Was adopted identify the problem and map streamlined process to implement the solution and evaluate its success. It was required to be implemented by all the ministries. The main focus of E Governance was simplification of forms. better service delivery with the help of online repositories, integration of services and platforms, and automated public grievance redressal.
5. **E Kranti** - this pillar focuses on citizen centricity by improving the delivery of public services. Key focus is on time efficiency and reduction in complexities such as paperwork. This is made possible by integration of various departments of government.
6. **Information for all** - This ensures transparency to the citizens to the citizens Buy online hosting of required information and reports. Two-way messaging is done via SMS or emails informing citizens about the essential information. The government also engages citizens proactively with the help of social media.
7. **Electronics manufacturing** - Its prime focus is on 0 imports to reduce foreign dependency and boost the domestic economy. Electronic manufacturing can help in job creation and foster innovation.
8. **IT for jobs** - This program calls for training citizens from small towns For IT sector jobs, draining rural workforce by telecom administration suppliers so that they can cater their own needs and training service delivery agents to run suitable business conveying IT benefits.
9. **Early harvest programs** - Initiatives are taken for immediate impact such as biometric attendance.

Digital India mission was an umbrella program covering many aspects of digital governance and revolutionizing the way in which citizens can interact with government and essential services can be delivered. Policy making shifted to data-driven under this initiative.

The JAM Trinity initiative taken by the Indian government focused on direct benefit transfer of welfare schemes with

minimum leakages and middleman to foster inclusive growth it focused on financial inclusion as well. Three essential schemes under this Trinity are:

- Jan Dhan yojana, which focuses on universal access to bank accounts and bringing the unbanked population into formal financial systems.
- Aadhar yojana which focuses on targeted delivery of the welfare schemes to the citizens assisted by the unique biometric identification system to categorize them easily mobile connectivity offers digital platforms true those strengthen access to government schemes and promote digital literacy.

One of the important reforms which is crucial for jam Trinity as it helps, and direct benefit transfer is the Aadhar Act of 2016. This act digitalizes the Aadhar system by providing virtual IDs and inclusion of KYC services. Demographic and biometric information were collected from the citizens. This reduced paperwork and handling of documents facilitated the delivery of services 2 the people who are meant to receive those services by eliminating fraud and leakages, making it easier to avail government beneficiaries. In the same year, unified payment interface was introduced revolutionizing digital payments by enabling instant transactions in cashless manner, reducing Physical currency handling problems. In 2017 Umang the app was launched which integrated various government systems like Digi locker, Aadhar, Pay-gov etcetera. This improved overall transparency and helped end digital inclusion. It offered a more secure platform to save essential information of citizens and is paperless in nature as well. In 2018, platforms such as Ayushman Bharat were launched for better health care delivery, and the court's mission mode project was launched to improve efficiency through digitalization of court process. In 2019, a national strategy for artificial intelligence was adopted for data-driven governance. In 2020, the COVID pandemic changed all dynamics because of lockdowns leading to acceleration in digitalization. People and government, both became completely dependent on digital services apps such as Aarogya Setu ,CoWIN and E Sanjeevani enabled better healthcare delivery. Digitalization helped India to combat with real time crisis and highlighted the advanced level of welfare governance in the country. Several other initiatives such as national digital health mission in 2021, open networks and Aarogya Setu in 2022 have been taken to democratize the digital markets and enhance interoperability for seamless flow of information. Many other initiatives such as the digital personal Data Protection Act of 2023 ensure privacy and consent. In the last two years, India has staged global push by exporting India's governance model globally. There have been several state-level reforms. development of large-scale digital infrastructure and integration of pensions, education and

finance in digital governance systems. These initiatives have totally changed the ego governance ecosystem in India and has transformed it into a next stage that is digital state. In 2026, AI has been dominating every other field. It has been adopted in anticipatory governance as well. It is easy to predict future trends and risk with the help of advanced AI models enhancing the readiness of the government towards such critical risks. AI has automated move up most of the digital works, reducing cost, time and human errors. It has overall improved the quality of each governance. Hence, phase of 2014 till present can be classified into 3 sub phases:

- Phase A (2014 – 2016) - Development of large-scale digital infrastructure and identity.
- Phase B (2017 - 2019) - Service integration or Platformization phase.
- Phase C (2020 – 2026) - AI and algorithmic driven data governance face.

However, this transformation also raises concerns regarding privacy surveillance, exclusion, and democratic accountability. There are several critics Over expansion of digital infrastructure leading to raising concerns about the shift from E governance to digital authoritarianism.

Digital Authoritarianism (chapter 3)

Neither surveillance nor authoritarianism are new terms. They have been prevalent since ancient history and evolved gradually. In the form of spies and other networks, it was used to monitor people, curb revolutions and keep an eye on oppositions as well. But digitalization has played the role of a catalyst by speeding up the evolution of both surveillance and authoritarianism beyond imagination. Now it is not just driven by a human network which was physical in nature but has no strings attached now making it widespread, dangerous and difficult to identify. There are several theoretical frameworks which can be linked with the contemporary problems of digital authoritarianism, such as Michel Foucault's concept of the *Panopticon*. This story was originally given by Jeremy Bentham in the 18th century, very discussed panopticon structure in a cell. According to him, the structure is a tower around cells from where the inmates can be monitored 24/7, but they are not able to see that they are monitored by someone. Michael Foucault elaborated on this classical theory of panopticon by stating that this is how the modern systems work to establish a powerful framework of surveillance and control. There is a psychological impact on the citizens because the theory states that surveillance shouldn't be known to the people who are being seen, thus making citizens confused that whether they are under observation or not regulating their behaviors and making governance automated and self-regulatory in nature. Digitalization was and is considered a boon, but it is crucial to

examine how it got evolved into curse and started being misused on a massive scale. digitalization played a key role in Arab Spring revolution which happened in 2010. This revolution was also known as “the Facebook revolution” as Internet social media played a key role in the success of this revolution. People in Arab countries like Libya, Egypt and Tunisia etcetera were fed up with their regime because of human rights violations, corruption and other kinds of brutality, hence they revolted against the current regime. Social media not only portrayed the atrocities done by government and police internationally, but influencers and activists worked together 2 plan the protest and coordinate the time, place come my location and the procedure that how should carry the protest. This was known as positive activism and delivered real time content and changed the complete trend of revolution. Regional censorship didn't mean anything for the activists as no one was able to curb their voices and with the help of digital advancements, they were able to Showcase the entire protest in front of the whole world connecting elites, people from various countries and taking this problem to a next level where international organizations like the UN also intervened. After seeing this huge success, people started recognizing and using digitalization to state their opinions, criticize the government and demand more accountability. But the evolution of digitalization and its expansion didn't stop here. The developments in technological advancement in the last 10 years are more than what the world achieved in the last century. Currently we are living in an AI-driven and algorithmic scenario. The expansion of big data analysis and digitalization has affected and molded governance as well. The earlier problems of censorship, surveillance which were expected to reduce because of digitalization has ironically expanded in a way that even after social media and all other platforms, citizens are either not able to recognize this surveillance or have accepted this as the new normal because it has blended in their life alongside digitalization. In some cases, these censorship models are legalized and selective in nature. criticizing the government is said to be anti-national in these selective censorship models. Unlike Arab Spring, the activists who try to raise their voices against the ruling government I'm not able to gather any support but are easily chased down by the government with the help of digitalization. Surveillance has become very prevalent in the last few years. Digitalization has availed many new opportunities and capabilities but has also introduced a new set of problems which are not specific to some regions because digitalization has penetrated successfully in most of the total population of 8 billion. Like digitalization, digital authoritarianism also has its own evolution.

Evolution of Digital authoritarianism

Authoritarianism always existed in the form of Legal restrictions, burning newspapers, radio and media. With the help of spies, police and other means surveillance used to happen. freedom of people and organizations was selectively restricted or curbed. Authoritarianism is a very old concept, and

hence its foundations can be tracked in the pre-digitalization phase. Digitalization has changed the characteristics of authoritarianism. Earlier it was visible, evident, restricted to a region and slow to execute. Now it is perfectly blended, making it invisible or sub transparent, and it is not limited to a specific boundary. In the early Internet era, which was from the post 90s to 2000s, saw development of mild roots of digital authoritarianism as the government experimented with surveillance and also started blocking some sites. The complete potential of digitalization wasn't unleashed until that time. The period of late 2000s to 2016 Lay it down the base of digital authoritarianism. There was huge mobile penetration, expansion of technology, and the rise of big data and social media was seen. The surveillance system also expanded as the government also started analyzing the same data. New features such as biometrics were introduced for identification. Private players and their active role in digitalization can't be ignored in this phase. A huge load of misinformation was spread at this time. People could not identify such instances as government used digital platforms to shape their narratives and track their dissent by analyzing all kinds of data available to them. This was not limited to the authoritarian regimes like Russia and China but also started affecting the democracies. Misinformation was used as a tool for manipulation. Social media platforms were flooded with plenty of misinformation. Echo chambers originated in this time which deeply affected the reasoning and thinking of the citizens as the content they used to receive digitally was based on their values and emotional logic. This polarized people's way of thinking and it polluted the whole digital ecosystem. The progressive and informative digital world evolved into a digital disorder because of so many false narratives and complications going on affecting democratic regimes as well. 2016 United States presidential elections Brexit and Many other instances show that how dynamics are changed because of false narratives and disinformation campaigns. The next phase is from 2016 to present where all the surveillance activities in the last phase gain more precision because of the introduction of AI and algorithmic technological advancements. It is elementary to strategize further control or ideological dominance over people as algorithmic advances offer predictive models which can identify what is intent of the people. The predictive model was meant to achieve a proactive governance to tackle the crime and the future uncertainties, but it is being used to flag the people Vulcan go against the government's propaganda. It also goes through biases as people are challenged over their actions which they have not yet Committed but are predicted to happen based on their behavior this doesn't go by the actual actions because of which it is a serious threat two people if search law and order is manipulated by wrong people for their selfish motives leading to bad governance. It raises ethical questions as this can be misused not only to defame someone but also off the opposition competitors. Censorships are no longer just confined to social media or journals as when people get a slight hint that there are chances of them being monitored by someone as many are actually aware that there is too much centralization

in many states, they put themselves into self-censorship where they do not tend to keep their views on any public or even private platforms where their contradictory views or opinions can be leaked, recorded or conveyed putting them under several threats. This fear has censored the actual voices of people. Threat is not just from the government which will track them but from the society they live in as well because opinions of people are polarized and manipulated by false information, various agendas and propaganda and mere assumptions. Algorithms has created a bubble where people tend to get their views and thoughts validated which makes them lose their discretionary power as they are not able to see or analyze the other side but are motivated just by their social medias algorithm which shows them what they want to see. The government of nearly every country is using such power to manipulate a large chunk of the population and completely radicalize their thoughts that there is no space left for discussion or criticism. Government even doesn't need to interfere or track anyone Because when such niche opinions reach to people with staunch mentality shaped by social media logic and agendas leads to inter-group violence. In fact, there are studies stating that AI is 70% likely to agree with your views until it's a total factual error. these problems of modern digitalization era are curbing people to raise real problems, even the victims of some atrocity fear to say that openly because of notions which will portray them as anti-government and several social groups will arise justifying the atrocity done with victim was right which is again validated in their social media platforms feeds and narratives. This will multiply the problems of the victims, giving them psychological breakdown as well. Hence, digitalization has evolved in a way that its potential to establish a good governance is turning into bad governance such that even democratic nations are shifting towards soft authoritarianism. To analyze the problem of digital authoritarianism and surveillance in detail, case study of India has been taken to analyze the gradual shift from democracy to authoritarianism where digitalization acts as a catalyst. This not only shows that Surveillance is there but also forms a positive correlation between digital authoritarianism and democratic backsliding.

The case study of India

The Telegraph act, information technology act, NETRA system

The Telegraph act of 1885 stands to be the bedrock of surveillance in India stop this act was established to maintain imperial state surveillance and authority and later on with digitalization it got evolved giving powers to the government that they could now intercept messages in the interest of public safety and national security. This is stated under Section 5(2) Of the act. The major loophole of this act is that it is not transparent in nature because of its incomplete definition which does not clearly state what is the matter of public emergency. Moreover, it lacks a strong judicial oversight or legal procedure

to safeguard the misuse, giving authorization power in the hands of executives. In the landmark case of public union of civil liberties versus Union of India in which Supreme Court intervened and recognized the excessive power under the section leading to violation of privacy. It mandated some judicial safeguards, but they just remained mere guidelines which aren't codified. This showcases that post-colonial India is still affected by precolonial instruments forming the logic of modern-day surveillance practices. Later on, technological innovation started pacing up, and the Internet was introduced, diversifying the scope of surveillance. India became the country with one of the highest mobile penetrations and a large digital ecosystem. Use of computers, new operating systems, and cloud storage along with mobile phones network increased. The IT act of 2000 was introduced as a legal framework for digital control. Its primary objective was to facilitate commerce and payments safely by monitoring cyber-crimes. Section 69 of this act empowers government to have direct as well as indirect surveillance power which allows them to monitor and decrypt any type of information stop the law came to play a positive role by safeguarding the public from cybercrimes and ensuring security but it faces critiques Similar to the Telegraph act. It lacks a proper system of checks and balances because of lack of transparency enabling overreach and misuse of power by executives. In 2008 India witnessed one of the most brutal terror attacks In Mumbai which was called as the system shock. The government recognized that there is an immediate need to expand power under the IT act of 2000 to prevent devastating terror attacks. Born after the 2008 Mumbai attacks, NATGRID - the National Intelligence Grid aggregates data from financial, immigration, and telecommunications records to pre-empt security threats. It was conceived as a master database that would give intelligence agencies seamless access to the widest possible range of citizen data. The union government formed a multilayered authorization over traffic data for security purposes. Traffic data stands here for the metadata that is data of data. The central monitoring system was established in 2011, which led to the expansion of cyber security. It was very much different from the NSA, which required court approval to spy on someone's phone and personal data. The working of the central monitoring system was different as no such permission or intervention of courts was required to access the messages, calls, and other data. No request even from the service provider is required to enable direct access to personal information to the government. The problem with such a system is that it is very vast in itself and thus is easily misused. The arguments state that allegations of counter terrorism are being too much normalized in the routine life that state is able to target the people who they want and frame them for their own motive by accessing their private information. The network traffic analysis system (NETRA) was Developed under DRDO 2 recognize the pattern and keywords which are suspicious in nature. To find these trigger words this system follows A funnel model where everything coming from that funnel is analyzed. Hence, this puts a contradiction in the working of the government to ensure security as citizens receive security in

exchange for their privacy. Vast amounts of communication and interactions are analyzed of millions of innocent citizens 2 catch those trigger words. Few high-risk targets are found on the cost of leakage of private information of innocent citizens. The problem under this system is not just limited to transparency or overreach but Also around the false positives that is based on the accuracy of this automated system which is flawed this system often fails to identify the simple context as people in there general life use some words fetch can get them flagged under this technology as it is based on identification of keywords. For example, a student is discussing on the topic of genocide which includes words like bomb kill etc. that can be flagged under this system. This is one of the most problematic features which is combined with over collection of data with inadequate accuracy.

Aadhar act

The Aadhar act was introduced in 2009 under a United progressive alliance. The union identification authority of India (UIDAI) Was formed and held responsible for managing the Aadhar system let's talk the chairperson of this project was Nandan Neil Ghani who is the co-founder of Infosys. The Aadhar act aimed for inclusion, easily implementing welfare by delivering the benefits of government schemes. Before the Aadhar system, there were a lot many difficulties in delivering the beneficiaries due to the presence of a complex system which was based on paperwork making it impossible to manage a vast population. Aadhar card came to simplify this complicated system by acting as a rainbow card which not only focuses to give beneficiaries but also stands as the unique identity of citizens of India. Now its role is expanded and is linked with driving license, subsidies, passports, pensions etc. India faced problem of exclusion due to the vast coverage and misidentification of people There were multiple boogers identities who used to avail the government benefits repeatedly even if they're not on the list. Sometimes, people used to take those benefits multiple times than the official limits. The third act of 2016 aimed to provide direct benefit transfers by linking it with the famous jam Trinity which stands for Jan Dhan Aadhar, and mobile system was to an extent digitalized under this act aiming for financial inclusion and introducing by biometric system. The biometric identification system of Aadhaar involves iris scan, face picture and fingerprints etcetera making it one of the largest biometric databases. The problems which arise fake Aadhar begin from its founding stage has it operated without any parliamentary action for around 7 years biometrics and data from millions of people was collected in this period and another aspect is central identity data repository where all the biometric information is stored. This acts like a honey pot which tracks hackers who could misuse this data in a couple of ways. Aadhar system promises for inclusion, but it leads to exclusion of people because people those who are elderly or disabled and are unable to provide their biometrics can't use this system. The government made the Aadhar system mandatory for every citizen of the country to

avail the benefits. Some famous cases from places like Jharkhand where laborers get their fingers dunned and this leads to biometric authentication failure because of which they're not able to access the welfare provided to them by the government even the old and poor face same problem due to worn and torn fingers. Many people in our country who are extremely poor completely rely on government schemes for their survival by accessing their necessities, but when they are denied all such access, it leads to worst results. A small girl in Jharkhand died because her family was denied off access of food due to barometric failure. Aadhar is connected to not just food rations but with multiple other things like ATMs, flights, hospital, SIM card etc. these activities give rise to the surveillance issues where systems like Aadhar can track far more revealing information which can be catastrophic for an individual.

Mission creep

Mission creep is a phenomenon where there is a gradual shift from the original objectives during the course of campaign. When legal, parliamentary and justifiable policy policies are introduced to combat certain existing problems in society, but later they are being used beyond their objective for other different things as well. When these policies overdue and turn into unplanned long-term commitment, it is referred as mission creep India has been facing this problem which is internationally recognized. Aadhar system had its original purpose to distribute direct welfare to people and eliminate bogus identities, but it accelerated quickly with the expansion of Aadhar system database. hospitals, schools' scholarships, death certificate, pensions and many other registrations are included in the biometric attendance system of Aadhar. Its expansion led to a mass criticism when the government made it compulsory to link Aadhar with pan cards for income tax. The gowns failing to link with Aadhar will be deemed invalid. Hence, Aadhar was not just limited to poor people but was compulsory for nearly all the people, whether rich, middle class or poor. Moreover, SIM cards were also linked with Aadhar. The government conveniently described this as a model of increasing interoperability between public and private spheres for more productivity and coverage. Now the e-KYC framework allowed private players such as banks insurance companies, telecom operators etc. to access the information through Aadhar random mobile numbers without any formal registration was shared to these private players and even the political parties used them to target people by promoting themselves via calls. Access to such information of around 1.4 billion people in 2 private firms is very risky as it can leak all the potential information. This created an overall network which is very hard to dismantle and so the people accepted it as their new normal because of which it is not often talked about such kind of surveillance and authoritarianism that goes within the system normal life. These are some deliberate and intentional actions taken but leakages we're also from improper handling issues. In 2018 around 200 government websites

accidentally made the Aadhar data public which could be easily accessed by anyone if they even Google it the situation went 1st when journalists tracked down a WhatsApp group where people used to sell Aadhar card for ₹500. They had a whole procedure set where they used to provide a login ID username and all the information after the payment was done. There have been so many cases in states like Jharkhand where public pensions were accidentally released and other cases of similar cases. In India, lot of population works for their subsistence and aren't properly educated leading to awareness gaps, cultural transfer in our country hasn't shown positive results pause the older people in our society struggle to adapt with the new technology further adding on to the list of unaware population. This matter should be taken seriously but instead the first chairman of UIDAI who is also CEO of Infosys justifies monitoring system under Aadhar saying that People already get into risk of losing their privacy when they buy smartphones and it is hypocrite nature of people those who put allegations on Aadhar due to privacy risks. This statement was highly condemned by the public by quoting the example of Rwanda genocide where people were found and murdered by tracking their digital IDs. Section 47 of Aadhaar was highly criticized as well because of its double standard which stated that no one can file a complaint in court if they have suffered any type of harm under this act. All these problems reduce the accountability of authorities. Moreover CCTV cameras in India are now equipped with modern technology which stands for facial recognition technology That uses high quality cameras to monitor people this technology was introduced so that car number plates were the offenders can easily be traced, child trafficking can be reduced and easy management of large crowds can be done these technology are useful only when they are in right hands because And without their consent pub this is being used to install fear in people who go against and use their freedom of speech and expression there is one more potential risk that any innocent can be traced down with such surveillance system and can be framed as a scapegoat in any circumstances . The FRT technology in India Isn't uniform everywhere, many places have this technology in damaged cameras, bloody lenses leading to Inferior performances. The accuracy rate of such technology in India is around 2% and this is actively used by police to identify the protesters. They record thousands of protesters and then try to match their photos of the available data they have from various social media sites and government databases and then try to identify the closest from these images and track the person down. Imagine the level of accuracy with such an inefficient system they would achieve. This is an ethical disaster for the people of the country. During COVID-19, apps like Aarogya Setu were introduced to mark the people around your kilometer radius who are suffering with the disease or are vaccinated. Data collected under the guise of public health includes location and health information, which can lead to broader surveillance.

KS Puttaswamy judgement

The judgment in Puttaswamy V union of India stands out as a landmark case recognizing privacy as a fundamental right under article 21 of Indian constitution. The background of the case lies in the implementation of the Aadhar act with added mission creep as discussed above. There have been other cases as well as Karak Singh versus state of UP and MP Sharma VS Satish Chandra. Their judgments were overruled in the Puttaswamy case by guaranteeing constitutional protection to right to privacy; the Supreme Court stated that existence of surveillance system might be for betterment of citizens and differ in actual intent. This kind of governance cannot be enforced on the cost of personal liberty and freedom of people. This hinders the intellectual privacy of people separating them from their potential to think. It acts as a psychological bond because people think that they are being watched Taking away their liberty to think freely by installing fear of private information getting leaked. The worst part is that modern day digital surveillance blends nicely with the normal lifestyle of people maintaining its secrecy, ensuring that no one is aware of it. With modern developments like GPS face recognition technologies, datafication of people and data mining can give unlimited capability to government leading to authoritarianism in a panopticon way. According to the judgment, the Supreme Court realized the risks that modern technology poses to privacy. There are multiple examples in the global world that justifies the potential risk of digitalization and its seamless power in state control. Legality, legitimacy, necessity, balancing, and procedural safeguards are important restraints on privacy violations.

There are many loopholes in this judgment, making it theoretical rather pragmatic in nature. It follows structure with three main principles that is proportionality, legality and legitimacy. The judgment says that if any law made by executives passes this three full test, then it is just a nature creating a biggest legal loophole because state often uses words like matter of national security or national emergency you cover up their actual intent and easily bypass through this threefold test. There is no particular body as well 2 specifically look at such problems and implement the privacy standards. Maximum power and authority in such cases generally lies with the executive without any independent scrutiny leading to misuses of privacy through excessive surveillance. There is too much technological innovation in the 21st century which has increased the overall complexity to overlook this broad issue under a limited legal framework. The complexities are multiplying because the innovation process is too quick for the judiciary to adapt and make active laws accordingly. There are too many the Gray areas that a proper legalization it's also very tough and due to low awareness and technological gap in India Baba many people are not able to even though that's what is going on with them which is hindering their privacy and what can they do about it. As discussed earlier, the central data system of the country is so vast and already has too much data off citizens, making it complicated to undo the risk of bad surveillance. The judicial process is slow but new policies are coming every year like the Data Protection Act of 2023 which

protects the personal digital data but contains a very broad exemption for the state stayed without any consent can monitor personal data for providing benefits. The problem of informational privacy lacks transparency in executive policies and legal norms. The term chilling effect is crucial to be understood in the context of digital authoritarianism. It is the change in behavior other psychological impact on the people because of their constant fear of state surveillance. Because of this, people tend to self-censor themselves as they fear that they might face repercussions for stating their beliefs. People are afraid you enter this swamp as no one wants to pay the social, procedural, and financial costs in such cases. The legal system is itself a cause of the chilling effect here. It is very difficult to interpret laws because there are too many in number and the language is also complicated, restricting people from stating anything. They know that they are being monitored and are unaware of what constitutes a violation which puts them at risk. In the case of Shreya Singhal versus union of India which took place in 2015, the safeguards against decentralized take down orders. Section 66 grants police the power to arrest people if they have said something offensive in nature. The court stated that this is a violation of freedom of speech and expression under article 19 as the term offensive itself is very subjective and vague in nature there is no such legal definition that can draw a clear line of what comes under the term offensive. The reasonable restrictions under article 19 are based on Specific level of threshold which is being crossed not just because it is offensive. Sedition and hate speech to this threshold are clearly defined under it. Hence, this shows that even after landmark cases like Puttaswamy Vs union of India cover there are internal contradictions in the legal system making it easy for executive to overuse their power and blanket some of the legal provisions to bypass them adding on to digital authoritarianism.

The Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023 and The Telecommunications Act, 2023

With technological advancements covering every individual's want, a personalized atmosphere lined up with their choices and preferences. Hence, government and business entities identified this demand of people and worked on fulfilling it by processing their data. This will help businesses increase their sales and engagement. To give a personalized experience to the people, their private data is required to be processed. Now this can be a matter of severe violation of fundamental rights that is right to privacy as unchecked processing can lead to disastrous results. There are personal data regulation laws in India like it act of 2000 but there was no such law for data protection. The digital personal data protection act was passed in 2023 in the Indian parliament. Along with India, it is applicable outside for those you are selling goods and services in India. It draws a line that private data should be collected only after the consent of that particular individual, there should be transparency which can be maintained by demanding the information on processing which should be given to the user, a strong grievance system should also be there add for people below 18 years of age,

parental consent will be required. The problem with this act is the exemptions under it, for example if the government collects private data and processes it then there is no provision that they should get rid of that data instead they can store that data forever. This is also a part of mission creep as data is stored more than its purpose. The government can demand information from its interoperable private players like Google and meta, which will provide them with information without informing the users. Its exemptions are there in the right to Information Act as well because government can deny people their requests for further information by calling it under larger public interest. The other problem is appointing the members of the data protection board which is done by executives leading to biases and puppet control of the members by the government. It has less safeguards than the GDPR act of the European Union. In the Data Protection Act of 2023, individuals are not given the right to data portability and the right to be forgotten. The other crucial act is the telecommunications act of 2023 which decolonized the Telegraph in 1885. It allowed modernization by mandating biometric authentication for Sims to expand R&D and provides a hybrid infrastructure for both public and private sphere. The core issue of this act is that it is still based on the roots of colonial mindset you used to monitor the public with Telegraph act, and this act has modernized their surveillance methods. The shocking part is that it came two years after the judgment of puttaswamy V union of India ignoring its constitutional standards. Colonial government did that same thing by using words like public emergency and safety to legalize the surveillance added in present world public interest is also added in the vocabulary. the most controversial section of this act is section 20(2) which allows government to block telecommunication services and intercept people's private data. Limits the scope of the act. There were certain requirements laid down by Supreme Court under case of PUCL versus union of India in 1996 to safeguard the privacy of an individual such as the data intercepted by government should be destroyed once it has fulfilled its motive stop surprisingly none of these the requirements are stated in the telecommunication act Lowering checks and balances giving power to government leading to digital authoritarianism. Under these laws, Biometric identification is forced, and Internet shutdowns are formalized.

Internet shutdown in India

one of the most concerning for a democratic state like India is achieving maximum number of cumulative Internet shutdowns in entire world which is 920 in number. This showcases the rise of digital authoritarianism in India as Internet shutdowns showcases governments strong authority by exercising Internet controls. Again, the motion of public security can be used as a gimmick to hide the actual intent of political control and suppression of dissent. many Internet shutdowns in India adding to protest which shows the clear strategy of the government to form a vacuum of information amongst the

protesters stopping them from coordinating and gathering. In Gujarat, shutdowns took place because Patidar community people demanded reservation in government jobs and to prevent mobilization of these protests, the government ordered an Internet shutdown by officially justifying it as maintaining law and order to prevent rumors. Manipur is facing communal tensions, but media coverage of the current situation of Manipur is meager because of cases of Internet shutdowns there and restriction of citizen journalism leading to very low visibility of protests. In this way government can easily hide their failures and add a lot of population in our country totally rely on Internet only cover so by cutting the Internet supply government can easily create an information vacuum. The famous farmer protests of 2024 over three laws faced similar treatment; their government disrupted the Internet to prevent protest happening on a larger scale as many farmers were not able to reach their destination of protest. The government also practiced censorship simultaneously by blocking social media accounts and links of activists, journalists, and farmer leaders who were supporting the protests. This hinders the unity of nation as most of the farmers were Sikhs which created a narrative and a feeling of Resentment amongst them that their voices are being silenced because they belong to minority. internet Shutdowns can be integrated with physical repression as well as violating basic freedom and fundamental rights of the people.

Pegasus spyware, meta-Controversy, Sanchar Saathi

Pegasus spyware was developed by an NSU group in 2010 which belongs to Israel and acts as a watchdog which is able to hack both Android and iOS system tracing their data which includes photos videos conversations etc. The person whose mobile device is hard stays completely unaware of the fact. Reports stated that this spyware were used in India to track the top journalists, ministers, judges and other up here people of the nation. The Supreme Court appointed an independent committee to investigate this serious issue which it recognized as a severe case of mass surveillance because not only were the top people monitored but all the citizens data wasn't threatened. So much data can be used for political manipulation to add erasing the competition to stay in power. Such measures are a grave threat to democracy. In 2023 apple used threat notification which clearly stated that these attackers using spyware are state sponsored. In India, the government didn't accept the allegation, and parliament was blocked to discuss it showing that how the accountability graph has been reduced. Platforms like meta, which owns Facebook, and WhatsApp provide end-to-end encryption technology. A stalking case took place when better challenged government on their demands of traceability which weakens their end-to-end encryption model. Meta stated that they won't change their privacy guidelines, adding would rather leave the country because they guarantee their users with privacy which can be violated if granted traceability to the state institutions. This is an ongoing case in India where state and private corporations are not on the same

page. This is seen as a sky-high intervention of the state in the digital system, putting up questions of motives of government behind it. The Sanchar Saathi initiative was taken in 2023 which aimed to combat the problem of stolen phones by tracking the devices. The problem with Sanchar Saathi was that it demanded a large amount of personal data to avail the service which gave rise to critique of too much centralization in the hands of government. so many tensions Arrows marking shift from rapid digitalization 2 gradual digital authoritarianism raising concerns over proper governance.

There are so many policies and acts revised in this phase of digitalization raising serious questions on their motives, implementation, and legitimacy. Many believe that this is harming the soul of democracy by marking a shift towards authoritarianism as the new scope of the policies is giving too much power to government leading to centralization and increase in their capability they are able to control information add violate freedom through these policies without any loose ends by normalizing these in regular routines or in the name of public security . Increased surveillance on both online and offline activities of people he's promoting direct state surveillance and problems of Internet shutdowns can isolate those states or cities hiding the actual government failure reducing the accountability and transparency expansion of laws like UAPA in which individuals are in the same slab as of organizations after 2000 amendment where we can face extended detention without filing charges. All these measures put the people of the nation on the back seat where they undergo chilling effect, fear raising their voices against government due to fear of criminalization and are even not able to identify the problem within the system sometimes. All these things are putting them in self-censorship. In a democratic nation people are the actual rulers but now their rule has become passive encouraging democratic backsliding where gradually their freedom it's curbed, reduced accountability and transparency, imbalance of power between judiciary executive and legislature and lastly opposition losing them to challenge those in power. Digital authoritarianism holds a positive correlation with democratic backsliding. It can act as a tool for democratic erosion. In the next chapter, we will analyze that how digital authoritarianism has led to democratic backsliding in India which is not immediate but gradual in nature posing threat to constitutional norms, legality and governance.

Democratic backsliding (chapter 4)

The term democratic backsliding was used roughly around 50 years back when the democratic system in the countries used to collapse due to certain authoritarian change in power or military coup leading to the ruling by decree. Later, the meaning of the term democratic backsliding completely evolved as it was no more about the hard power but gradual decay of democracy within the system making it nearly invisible in nature. There are many reasons which play a role in erosion of democracy by weakening the main pillars and in these institutions of

democracy accelerating its decay and leading to gradual shift to soft authoritarianism. Digitalization please crucial role in democratic backsliding forming a positive correlation between them. In the previous chapter, it is analyzed that rapid digitalization shifted the aim of stayed and style of governance which is not focused on true principles of democracy rather than prioritize the innovation over accountability. digitalization has become a two law of the elites to reduce their competition and one democratic ways by targeting the main pillars of democracy goodbye weakening opposition and media with the help of extended monitoring capacity and surveillance, suppresses protests and can easily Dominate the agenda setting and the elections through AI and digital manipulation. It is easy to implement indirect censorship through self-censorship and expand power through polarization. The balance of power has tilted in favor of executives because of the algorithmic potential of the executive to perform mass surveillance and indirectly affect the judicial and bureaucratic process. Weakening of civil liberties it's done in multiple ways which aren't recognized as they're perfectly blended in the system switched off government shares asymmetrical power as citizens are totally unaware off the surveillance and monitoring practices which is harming their civil liberties reducing the transparency and molding state citizen relationships in a way harmful for a democratic society. To analyze more about democratic backsliding, it is very important to know the theoretical framework.

Theoretical framework of democratic backsliding

Steven Levitsky and Lucan Way in their book about competitive authoritarianism which came in 2010 talked about the post-Cold War era where democracies emerged with grey areas leading to semi-authoritarianism regimes. In the book, they explained that our democracy lies on the surface which is just like elephants' tusks that are visible but not actually used for eating. These tend to appear as democratic from outside because regular elections are held in opposition; media is there but within the system unfair dominance of incumbents lie leading to origination of the core idea of uneven playing field. This concept talked about the undue advantages of ruling parties leading to structural imbalance. The incumbents don't need to commit fraud or take illegal risks to stay in power but can constrain opposition to staying under legal framework. Oppositions are defamed and laws are manipulated in a way that they favor incumbents, State resources have access in the hands of the ruling party and media is used as a campaign tool through Regulatory measures leading to self-censorship stop ruling party often becomes a bigger party in terms of finance as well affecting the elections from inside by buying political representatives of opposition party and spending excessively throughout the year on campaigns, social media and Trolls. All the elections are mostly held in a genuine way where people's votes matter just like in a democracy, giving opposition a real chance to win but due to these factors the probability of their

coming into power decreases. This doesn't eliminate them from the competition but gives incumbents an upper hand over them, affecting their real chances of success. Hence, competitive authoritarianism is present within the system, making it harder to detect which leads to reserve competition, making it unfair in nature.

Nancy Bermeo identified six ways governments quietly hollow out democratic institutions without ever formally abolishing them. First, there is executive aggrandizement, whereby instead of grabbing power abruptly, politicians adopt a more subtle approach and gradually build up a level of power that eventually makes parliamentary and judiciary systems of control ineffective. Also related to this phenomenon is judicial capture, whereby the judiciary loses its autonomy and becomes politicized through appointments and judgements favorable to the ruling party. Politicians still hold elections, but such elections are manipulated through various methods, including redistricting, introduction of tough voter ID requirements, and changes in the rules of the electoral process that tilt the advantage to one party. Media independence is eroded through defamation cases, withdrawal of ads, and selling media houses to politically affiliated individuals. NGOs, activist groups, and other civil society organizations that oppose the incumbent government are constrained through licensing challenges, restriction of foreign aid, and monitoring. In addition, the whole idea of checks and balances is weakened by lack of parliamentary oversight and weakened enforcement of accountability measures. What Bermeo adds to this discussion is that backsliding doesn't usually involve a coup. Backsliding entails paperwork.

Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018), in *How Democracies Die*, Discussed on democratic backsliding and erosion of norms. They stated that the means of death of democracy have changed and people do not realize what is happening around them. In the robust norms, the constitution doesn't work as it is meant to be and fails to maintain checks and balances whereas institutions become a strong political weapon, changing the tilt in the elections in favor of those who control those institutions. The authoritarian elites who tried to kill democracy from inside are known as democracies assassins. Levitsky and Ziblatt discussed the indicators of authoritarianism, guardrails of democracy and rule of political parties as gatekeepers to let democracy survive for a longer period. They talked about how populist figures can be cautioned off by their behaviors, proving them a threat to democracy to add the need for strong opposition for proper checks and balances with the legal spirit of the constitution. Political parties act as gatekeepers of democracy, keeping extremists away from excessive power. There are certain ways to dismantle democracy, and these tactics are used by authoritarians to stay in power. Gerrymandering it's practiced giving political group advantages by manipulating the electoral boundaries So that they can earn more actual seats than they are meant to have in proportion to total electoral vote share. They try to capture the

representatives in judiciary and media to gain legal support and practice their soft authoritarianism smoothly without much hindrance with judgments going in their favor. They use many tactics to keep such people in their pockets by using tax agencies and anti-terror statutes to prosecute the people who were not in favor of them. Corruption is also practiced gathering loyalists with the help of many powers. All these things are done gradually because of which they are too much normalized over time, leading to democratic backsliding in the real world, but ideally the formal structure remains democratic.

Andreas Schedler's gave the popular concept of menu of manipulation in 2002 which presented various kinds of democratic regimes such as semi democracy, liberal democracy, electoral democracy, electoral authoritarianism and closed authoritarianism. He said that even in the advanced democracies democratic norms aren't perfectly realized, and there is discrimination on both inside and outside the party system done by electoral institutions. He gave this pragmatic concept because there's a gaunt line in democracy and authoritarianism adds most of the teams in modern day are not clearly democratic nor fully authoritarian in nature. He said that foggy zone stays because it is hard to determine the level of democratic backsliding another team that if it is a flawed democracy or turned into an electoral authoritarian regime. To hold the democratic spirit of a regime, he gave the concept of The chains of democracy and multiplication by zero the chains of democracy Is a normative structure holding the seven important requirements in democracy which are required at every stage that is empowerment, free supply, free demand , inclusion, insulation, integrity and irreversibility. Following this concept of Democratic Change another concept of multiplicity of by zero came where he stated that if any of these seven chains is violated then multiply the whole thing with 0 because all the other six chains would break and we'll be of no use giving 0 results. This is what happens in authoritarian regimes. Their leaders in power try to break these chains and make the voters and their choices toothless, allowing themselves to be above the law. The goal of the authoritarian regime is to make these appear as a real power struggle between them and the opposition so that it doesn't look like a total sham like that in completely totalitarian regimes. They try to create a struggle that no one can ignore but outcomes are already determined by various strategies which they use to exclude the opposition from real competition to get in power reducing their probability to a very extent fracturing their actual chance. Other tactics such as repression, fraud, and tutelage where even if the opposition wins in a specific area, they can perform limited actions only. Fareed Zakaria has described regimes that are "routinely ignoring constitutional limits on their power and depriving citizens of basic rights and freedoms" as "illiberal democracies." Illiberal are they surely, but democratic? He tried to give a solution for these problems by giving the one step off chain which can be analyzed by the observers to accurately identify whether the government in this state has crouched the

threshold 2 clearly identify their true nature without being blindfolded by them.

Democratic backsliding due to digitalization with case study of India

In the previous chapter, digitalization was deeply analyzed, showcasing the potential threats of Rapid technological development to democracy. Shoshana Zuboff, the age of surveillance capitalism: the fight for a human future at the new frontier of power Which came up in 2019 is decisive to understand how digitalization is contributing to democratic backsliding. Zuboff has pointed out a form of control which goes deep down to human behavior and their preferences. He came to this conclusion after finding that big companies like Google discovered that there is so much information which can be mined. data analytics is on a rise and is integrated with politics for the benefits and political games of incumbents will stop there is a traditional method used in states which are bending towards authoritarianism is that people tend to show that they are with the ruling party but when they actually food, the results are different. This is one way of showing retaliation and opposing the government, which acts as a lifesaver for democracy and makes it difficult for the ruling government to know the depths of opposition. This production has apparently ended due to surveillance of capitalism. Fair users are termed as products, and their data has byproducts. This not only predicts their behavior but also modifies it to the earlier resilience method; it can be easily debunked if the government has information of what the users are searching predicting their future behaviors leading to violation of basic freedom. The freedom to decide future it's violated because of algorithmic dominance the digital traces are interpreted by the algorithm, and targeted content is sent to the people shaping their views and leading to generation of new digital footprint which shapes their opinions and behavior. The reports of the wisdom institute race India as one of the worst auto cruisers, keeping it equivalent to totalitarian countries like China and Pakistan which is ruled by military coupe. The freedom report states that India's global freedom score is 626 out of 100 and is reducing in the coming years. India has underperformed in many factors amongst those the two important factors are political rights and civil liberties. The Media is called the protector of democracy and press media. It is one of the most important of all the other kinds of media to spread information, and it is also part of evolving traditional media. All the other previous reports are complemented by the press freedom rank of India which is 151 out of 180 countries. there are several factors which are pushing India towards democratic backsliding and shifting its power to soft authoritarianism are now evident and globally recognized which as well is not good news for a largest democracy and progressing nation like India. Digitalization has boosted the speed of democratic backsliding and has worsened its

traceability. in previous chapter various case studies of India are there including government schemes and acts, protests, landmark judgments and direct information from government circulars which violate their own judgments and trespass the constitutional legality. A lot of misuse is done by the government to mold governance into the tools for surveillance. In 2026, reported by RTI is published which has stated that around 13% of the petitions filed by people are refused to them only by ministry of Home Affairs. India has so many other ministries as well and imagine how much information are people exempted off. the official records and portals just highlights the increase in number of RTI's filed by the people showing a great leap in progress and portrays them as their key highlights but there are so many of them denied as well Showing that this is not just used for safeguard of people but is now being used as a tool of state. Below is the table with number of exemptions over the span of years from 2020 to 2024.

Period	Exemptions
2020-21	12,486
2021-22	14,236
2022-23	16,027
2023-24	15,753

Annual Use of the Privacy Exemption Under Section 8(1)(j) of the RTI Act (2020–21 to 2023–24). Source: Central Information Commission.

Garg, M. (2025, July 25). *India's Data Protection Act: A shield for privacy or a tool for state surveillance?* Tech Policy Press. <https://www.techpolicy.press/indias-data-protection-act-a-shield-for-privacy-or-a-tool-for-state-surveillance/>

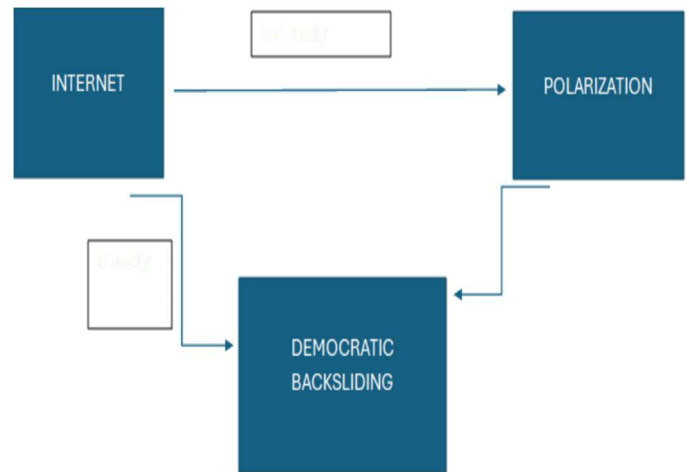
Many such more cases are there such as:

The Bhima Koregaon Case — Digital Evidence Manipulation

In 2018, violence in Maharashtra took place where a Dalit person was killed and at least three were injured so around 16 people were arrested accused of inciting the Bhima Koregaon violence and amongst them were 5 very well-known human rights activists and few other known personalities. Their phones and laptops were tapped by the police which claimed that they were linked to terrorist organizations and My list conspiracy of kill the current Prime Minister. They all were arrested and put in jail without any trial under UAPA act. Under UAPA act, it is very difficult to approach to codes and for a long period of time many of them were denied of bail amongst them was stance swami who had been denied of fail multiple times despite of his deteriorating health and died at the age of 23 in judicial custody. A lot of debates were going on in favor of the issue and against

the issue that proper investigation had never been held Until the arsenal forensic reports came in 2022. Sentinel 1A cybersecurity firm along with the New York Times and other journals like karma collaborated and found the gaps supported by arsenal reports. According to the reports a malware was put in their laptop Around 20 months ago and it was a Trojan malware carried out by a commercially available NetWare malware will stop many more important information about defendants browsing websites, Gmail etc. were gathered which revealed that no evidence suggests that they were on to something like this claimed by the police. Later, letters came out suggesting that the files were accessed and edited in police custody, and there were uncertain timestamps and missing hash values which are important at the time of seizure under the IT act of 2000. This shows that the acts like UNFPA's are used as political tools to add digitalization is a more convenient path to implement such acts with the convenience of government. Judiciary also fails her because of many reasons including legitimacy, corruption and right for scenic capacities which is ultimately violating the civil rights of the people and motivating people to go under self-censorship by installing the fear off search brutal consequences like in Bhima Koregaon case where evidence was fabricated and planted with the help of surveillance then through digitalization. The real Trojan was not the virus but the laws made by straight for welfare of the people which leads to expansion of surveillance and weaponizing of privacy which is the cornerstone of democracy breaching the privacy of people through various on paper positive manifestos is the real Trojan which is not in their propaganda in their working marking a shift towards soft authoritarianism because it is within the system.

India has seen one of the largest amounts of mobilization and Internet penetration in the last few ears. Internet penetration voice considered as a factor official for advancement of the state but has turned into a weapon of the state. Weaponization of Internet has affected democracy directly and indirectly direct measures discussed in the last chapter such as direct surveillance, control activities etc. but there are indirect ways as well leading to polarization then democratic backsliding.



Even when the Internet was not as widespread as today in India, A report by the guardian came in 2018 claiming that the Congress party in 2014 used Cambridge Analytica to harvest and successfully mined data of millions of Facebook users without their consent. This scandal was even before the Pegasus spyware and till today's time everything has evolved and is shaping people's behavior directly. WhatsApp became one of the most used apps by Indians and source of mince information there political this information seems to spread like a fire. Later, algorithmic involvement games which created echo chambers for their people get the content which feeds their opinions hiding the other side of the coin. Various official social media handles of political parties try to see each other's political party leaders and are supported by troll channels. This leads to authorization where people get divided into various parts supporting their own political groups backed by the information from echo chambers and WhatsApp leading to decline in unity. They see other people with different views as inferior or anti-nationalists. This acts as a successful distraction for the government where people are engaged within themselves, ignoring the major changes taking place in the state. This opportunity is utilized by the government to erode democratic institutions in their favor by introducing central monitoring systems, bribing or threatening journalists, and judicial representatives in their support. An indirect form of permission is taken by the people in the name of conspiracy theories justifying the need of government actions which they have taken such as Internet shutdowns and arrests of opposition leaders and media journalists by portraying them enemies to the country. A similar thing happened during the BJP rule during COVID-19. When international media criticized the government for not able to handle the pandemic effectively criticizing the exports of Indian vaccines 2 the citizens of India we're facing the shortage of vaccine. Even the regional media criticized the governments respectively for negligence of government and controversial decisions in such crucial times. For example, in Uttar Pradesh, oxygen cylinders were provided only when mandated by the government. At that time, there was an urgent need for oxygen cylinders but due to search demand

and proceedings the hospitals and patients were not able to access the oxygen cylinders, leading to more demises. The other trick used in governance for distracting people this distracting them from the important topics by focusing on other things going on in the country or outside the country. As soon as the tragedy is and crimes or debunks of corruptions come in limelight, government suppresses these topic by sabotaging media channels and social media accounts making some other thing as trending to divert the attention of the people the money power issue isn't being talked about very often on media channels and most of the common people relying on news channels are unaware about this. The reasoning of government to their experiments on people harming their civil liberties is banned by the echo chambers and Allah polarization tactics making public accepting this as new normal and ignoring the problems. This is how our democracy is fractured as Internet helps to spread a narrative which is usually pro government in nature and then polarization takes place where political rivals are seen as anti-nationals and unity is harmed leading to justification of the issues violating it takes off democracy such as record-breaking Internet shutdowns and arrests of journalists and other activists with no proper explanation.

The Manipur violence

the violence in Manipur started in May 2023 Over a court's judgment regarding scheduled tribes. This has led to communal violence in Manipur further resulting in about 140 days of Internet shutdown which is one of the longest in India after Jammu and Kashmir. Many people have already lost their lives in this violence and are displaced from their original places word Indian media channels are not covering these because of censorship issues. The issue flared when a naked parade video came on social media where two women from a tribal group where being paraded Naked by the mobs add reportedly 1 was raped and killed filling the people will immensely anger and outburst demanding justice for them. Government didn't intervene and there was no official statement on it and Internet shutdown added to the problems of government as this problem didn't get highlighted for a very long period of time as it was unable to reach the audience due to Internet shutdowns failing to gather support. After a long halting, this video finally got circulated and enough attention that the Prime Minister had to make a statement on this video and directed actions against the accused people. The Manipur violence gained more and more attention, but the government didn't accept its failure and pause illegal immigration, poppy cultivation under the land issues as the cause of this problem. Democracy is about assuring social inclusion sense of security to the citizens but in the case of Manipur it was totally opposite moreover the Manipur High Court ordered several restrictions even after the Internet services were restored blocking some websites, hotspots VPNs and other accessible services. According to Human Rights Watch, this is the violation of basic human rights of people, and

this has already led to a huge incurred loss of health care, education, and economy. The self-proclaimed cultural leaders and morphs are controlling the law and order of the state, students are not Able to access their educational materials present online and fill examination forms or appear for them, doctors are using manual methods which has low success rate because AI driven machineries or other helps aren't available due to Internet shutdown. Similar Internet shutdown problems were faced in Kashmir where the time period of Internet shutdown was 552 days and later on a landmark case of **The Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India (2020)** Game bringing Internet shutdowns under judicial scrutiny and dueling out indefinite Internet shutdowns the Supreme Court stated measures which needs to be fulfilled for Internet shutdown at a place but later on when Internet shutdown was practiced in Rajasthan and Punjab this landmark case was referred as toothless as in the state of Rajasthan, Internet shutdowns were carried out to prevent cheating and examination and later on when RTI was filed it was found that the committee didn't even meet and record findings in deciding Internet shutdowns. Secondly, the officers appointed in the committee review the cause of Internet shutdowns as per the Supreme Court judgment of our colleagues of the officials you gave shutdown orders.

Introduction of fact check unit (FCU)

In 2024, the Bombay High Court struck down Rule 3(i) (II)(A) and (C) of information technology at amending the rule 3(1)(b)(v) Which states that fact checking unit has power if it is related to government business and is misleading in nature. If the intermediary fails to do so as per the guidance of the Fact Check unit, they could lead to loss of safe harbor protection under section 79 of the IT act. Majority came as a critique of this amendment to find it goes beyond the reasonable restrictions of fundamental right off right to freedom of speech and expression. Critics believe that fact checking unit is based on very vague and subjective guidelines which can be used by government to control it and claim the content as fake leading to its removal which is against them. The platform providers cannot have control on the content creators or the third parties, but the amendments put pressure on them as they might lose the safe harbor resulting into a chilling effect where the government can shape, they're working by installing fear of criminalization of platforms. Kunal Kamra, who is a stand-up comedian, known for making political satires, got famous in this case. His video was also taken down, and he received death threats after that and despite of all of this he faced five hours accusing him what defamation of political figures which is ironic in nature as the people giving online death threats to him faced no proceedings. He said that the Sahyog portal created by government allows police to breach privacy of people and bypass the legal safeguards to take down the content which is fake according to their subjective opinions. According to him all the departments work for executives and there is no balance

of power left in the country, and he managed to defend his satire by calling it necessary for democracy as a tool of critique to those in power to maintain the system of checks and balances. This campaign posed a question in front of people that whether the government is trying to silence the opposition. A similar problem of taking down the content was phased by big firms like meta, X Corp, the Proton etcetera in Karnataka, and many corporate giants challenged the rules and cautioned the people against this oversight mechanism used by government.

In Telangana, a very famous electoral issue has been all over Internet where a petition challenged election Commission of India stating that around 50 black voter entries have been deleted in 2015. In 2024, this was followed by another news stating that around 130 crores occupy I lost by the citizens of Telangana in the election month due to cyber-crimes. This was done through KYC updates, fake calls, and redeeming award points. The state of Telangana also saw the electronic voting experiment which was condemned by many due to hacking wrists and manipulation of actual ballots. Last year, a famous video of opposition leader Rahul Gandhi circulated where he alleged BJP of vote theft by giving the example of Karnataka constituency where showed the discrepancies and voter list and fraudulent voters in the electoral rule. Although this is a very controversial take because allegations were massive claiming that 25,00,000 fake voters were added in Haryana and there are so many other states in India requiring attention on the same matter. Election Commission of India was condemned but the people against Rahul Gandhi condemned him for the misinformation and baseless allegations on election Commission of India. This shows that the use of digitalization with bad intent for governance can create too much chaos hiding the actual truth. In the state of West Bengal during the election time, there is spread of too much misinformation. The National Crime Record Bureau states that Bengal accounts for the highest number of fake social media cases nationwide and the capital of Bengal, Kolkata. It's a hub of more than 50% of fake information that comes out from West Bengal. The spirit of electoral democracy is violated every time in the Bengal elections as there is too much misleading content leading to formation of communal narratives influencing voters by installing fear leading to multiple cases of violence every year during election time. In West Bengal Trinamool Congress party members and BJP party members allege either each other's that they try to track down information and location each other's politicians and social workers 2 threaten them and ransacked their places 2 eliminate the competition in elections with the introduction of AI and deep fakes, there has been increase in circulation of fake videos and audios influencing the voters and attacking opposition leaders leading to disinformation. This shows that West Bengal Faces security risks and unfair measures during the time of elections. the gaps Election Commission is not able to fill the gaps goodbye properly monitoring search issues and more criticism rules against election Commission of India when the National Informatics Centre came with a new tender of introduction of face

recognition technologies, drones with high quality equipped cameras to do live webcasting of voting and counting process instead of regulating such tender which can cause legal and constitutional harms by violating the rights to privacy and the spirit of free and fair elections, the election Commission of India came in favour of this proposal and demanded to implement it in maximum number of polling stations which was turned down by NIC due to their incapability restricting them to 5 to 10% of polling stations only. Face recognition technology has already been misused by the government to recognize the faces of protesters in the Kissan Andolan and other popular Protests. Establishment of CCTV polling stations can lead to manipulation and several others breaches affecting the voter behavior and reducing actual chance of opposition to win with the help of this symmetric data can also be centrally stored which becomes vulnerable as can be easily attacked by the hackers this might affect the voter turnout By creating chilling effect, nullified the relevance of secret ballot as might Hooters keep in mind that they are under surveillance and make their choices accordingly and lastly the face recognition technology in India has high amount of glitches and failures which can flag the legitimate voters at fraud due to technical error or lack of clarity. The incomplete proposals without proper implementation and safeguard rules actors key factors in democratic backsliding where the digital tools are the real catalyst speeding up the authoritarian process by creating a 360° surveillance system manipulating a large chunk of population at once by staying invisible under the legal and constitutional system making the population accept it as a new normal. But we live in a globalized world, and digitalization has advantages as well, such as it has connected us to different parts and voices from various corners of the nation and the entire world. The loopholes left by the government are more unseen and unchecked by the people ruled by the government but easily come to limelight in front of international media and institutions tarnishing the image of the country and deterioration in global standards. Various multinational corporations working in India also challenge search breaches which brings they are tussled with government in limelight. With the rise of authoritarian tactics backed by digitalization, there is a rise in number of people who raised their voices against them with the help of digitalization to bring reality out. All these actions can turn into our solution to restore democracy and ensure a system of proper checks and balances.

Possible resistance and solution

James C. Scott's seminal work, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (1985) Adopted a micro approach of resistance which is based on the experience from routine life in Malaysian village stop he said that a mass there's assistance is impossible every time as everyone it doesn't have proper means to support it hence they try to stay out of it. Lack of resources, institutional support and fragile livelihood demotivates people 2 take part in such revolution. Hence, instead of getting in direct confrontation defiance, use the

tactics of survival by everyday resistance and try to sabotage the system by staying in it. This approach was adopted by the presence of Sedaka village in Malaysia and later on these tactics are adopted by people in the modern world to quietly survive the exclusion without open control station. In Indian states of Bihar and Jharkhand where people are mostly engaged in labor works get their fingers turned leading to exclusion from Aadhar based welfare as they aren't recognized. In such a case, the tactic of collusion is used where the beneficiaries and workers coordinate with each other and use identity cards or credentials of neighbors or family members to obtain the beneficiaries which are necessary for their survival life food. In the state of West Bengal, many Aadhar cards have been found dumped in the ponds which is a symbol of mass scale refusal against the system. Hacks and counterfeiting techniques are also used according to Scott R for medium of internal resistance. The trend toward using "masked Aadhaar UIDAI-backed feature that reveals only the final four digits of a user's ID has become a quiet but powerful tool for people worried about identity theft and data privacy. By advocating masked IDs, QR-code verification, and offline XML files, the UIDAI has technically provided a way to curb data leaks. From a sociological perspective, this is a classic example of what James C. Scott calls "tactical compliance." Citizens aren't breaking the law; they are simply navigating the existing rules to minimize their digital footprint in a system that originally sought to maximize data collection. By choosing masked authentication whenever it isn't strictly mandatory, individuals are effectively reclaiming a degree of privacy, limiting how much personal information the state or private entities can extract from them. It is a subtle way of working within the system to protect oneself from its more invasive potential." In states like Jammu and Kashmir and Manipur where a very long period of Internet shutdown has been witnessed, citizens use various VPN sites or apps present to access. According to Scott, this is a method of repressive connectivity beneath the information silence which allows persistent connection and communication to seek attention towards structural subordination done by the state.

Antonio Gramsci gave the concept of hegemony and counter hegemony where he stated that the elite class try to justify its hegemonic nature to maintain power with the help of consent and fractured logic that appears to be deeply embedded in common sense making it acceptable and universal. The people in power use various types of deception to portray their judgments as ideal judgments. Then comes the Organized resistance to hegemony, which is known as counter hegemony. Groups of individuals dive in every state pointing out the problems of hegemony through deception and argue that a shift of ideological common sense is required. A new historic block is created with the alliance of different groups, intellectuals, workers who tried to win hegemony which is called as war of position where building of new frameworks and institutions is encouraged to change the ideological and cultural common sense of people. Ranchi believed that even if the alternate

institutions emerged and laws changed but the mentality of people doesn't change, then the old hegemonic system will return. India faces the similar problem as government is able to convince people off the various digital India missions the attack characterized as mission creep but citizens I convinced that they are safe under those initiatives it is important to spread awareness as the intellectual groups are fostering for alternate techniques to resist such initiatives. Modern web 3 and blockchain technologies our key tool of the passive resistance as unlike web 2 services, web three services store information in different pieces instead of saving all in one server blockchains like Ethereum allows no one to edit or delete the data and hence it is save for the voices of activists and journalists which can be raised without any hindrance they have full freedom of speech on such blockchains as the original author or government unlike the platforms like X apps like Mastodon consists of thousands of independent servers so if even the government bans the particular server in India, many other servers tend to operate regardless and user can use VPN or change their digital location to the server which is not in the states jurisdiction and stay on that app communicating with the real world.

Layne & Lee's Four-Stage Model of E-Government (2001) Conceptualize the evolution of e governance in which the first stages of catalog, where government establish online presence then comes transaction, we're government establishes its interactive capabilities allowing some communication with citizens. The third stage is vertical integration, which is a top-down approach where government takes control of the digital system to enhance its administrative efficiency and coordinate with each other in a decentralized way to analyze citizens' data. The last stages of horizontal integration which involves seamless interoperability unified interface through single portals allowing citizens to access multiple services and allows government to coordinate with various departments and agencies simultaneously. Moon's Five-Stage Model (2002) Elaborated the previous maturity by adding two-way communication and political participation and grouping vertical and horizontal integration to a single face allowing citizens to be more actively involved in the whole digital governance system. These two theoretical frameworks show that digital empowerment can be used by the government for surveillance but automatically give way to the public for conveying their grievances to government through online portals. This makes the government accountable to the people. Government failing to show accountability leads to week grievance redressal and failure which is easily visible and recognizable by public and global institutions putting pressure on government to stay accountable to the people maintaining democracy. India is struggle between the same tug of war where digitalization this proved effective for welfare delivery and alleged for its surveillance issues. Although there are many controversies regarding politicizing judiciary and the debatable collegium method of election, but people still have faith in the judicial system of India. Digitalization has led to the formation

of quotes speeding up judgment and transparencies as life judgements are being given. Several important judgments similar to that of supreme courts Shreya Singhal judgement where the online speech is protected by the constitution of yeah and platforms without orders issued by court. Judiciary still ads as a savior of people by keeping check on arbitrary powers of executives and legislatures. Multinational corporations like WhatsApp aren't ready to compromise their terms and policies even after facing the pressure from governments. This ensures privacy and security of user data with the help of encryption. The continuous notifications and advertisements of search applications stating that the data is fully protected and encrypted which cannot be accessed by anyone except the user shoots up the confidence of people Adding on relative pressure on the central actors who are trying to facilitate digital authoritarianism. Various international organizations like Amnesty International and Freedom House regularly report the Internet shutdowns diverting attention towards India's democratic backsliding automatically constraining digital authoritarianism by setting normative benchmarks. With the rise of echo chambers, there is a rise of content creators and social media influencers who are trying to break these echo chambers by dropping regular updates of what is happening in different parts of the country and resisting the authoritarian acts of the government. #Save the Internet movement became a trending movement in 2016 which was a campaign Against net neutrality. The various telecom companies proposed different pricing for their Internet services and the Facebook free basics in 2016 offered free Internet access to limited websites only violating the net neutrality which could create a controlled digital ecosystem in future. This movement curved the foundational possibilities of the controlled ecosystem at that time. Many search hegemonic actions get highlighted on various social media platforms leading to active engagement of the mass population. Earlier, print media was considered watchdogs of democratic institutions but in the contemporary world social media acts as informal watchdogs of democratic institutions by holding the authorities accountable. Gradually they are turning from an alternate source of information to the main source of information. democratization of artificial intelligence infrastructure they suggested to limit the problems of its misuse; decentralization of the Internet can prevent its fragmentation and harmonized data protection by strengthening the existing laws or making new ones. Indian computer emergency response team cybercrime says Penal Code provisions along with global institutions like Interpol United Nations and International Telecommunication Union are working on strengthening digital infrastructure and developing various strategies 2 counter cybercrimes and ensure cybersecurity with proper advisories and alerts to prevent hacking, frauds and harassments. The telecom regulatory authority of India it's also responsible for regulation of consumer protection and ensuring transparency Limiting the scope of digital authoritarianism. Synthetic content can be regulated with advanced facial and voice recognition technology to debunk fake videos. In the upcoming Bengal

elections, election Commission of India has ordered to regulate the fake AI driven data as watermark or labeling of VI data has been mandatory. By establishing various independent review committees, digital literacy and stringent fines, the checks and balances can be kept on both government and other people misusing the tools of digitalization for their own advantages. The rise of independent platforms and journals has become the gatekeepers of people by raising their voices and mobilizing their support to them.

Conclusion

India, being the largest democracy, has recorded one of the highest numbers of penetration of mobile and other digital services. India is a diverse country with a high amount of economic and social gap and digitalization to bridge these gaps by connecting the remote areas of the state as well. Gradually, rapid digitalization became a tool of digital surveillance alongside welfare. The policies began to overdo then they're more for regeneration posing threats to civil rights of the people. The Theoretical framework for all of the dissertation suggests that digitalization can act as a catalyst in democratic backsliding by staying in the system. Electoral democracy will be there, but actual results will witness the erosion of democratic norms abolishing the real chances of opposition and people to raise their voices and give fair competition. Weaponization of data through data mining is nearly invisible for the public to recognize it. Aadhar act and the mission creep related to mass surveillance apart from welfare delivery has crossed the Threshold of constitutional morality. Internet shutdowns in various parts of the country, Pegasus spyware and removal of critics from digital platforms as proven the presence of soft authoritarianism in the country digitalization can indirectly create polarization and lead to democratic backsliding by shaping the behaviors of the public, predicting them and installing fear so that they have no real choice other than self-censorship . Global standards and international institutions see this as an institutional crisis of the world's largest democracy, referring to it as the dying of democracy. Controlling media through indirect measures portrays censorship in the country. Algorithmic and AI-driven platforms have led to an increase in fake notions and relatives across the country distracting people from real emergencies and making it difficult to identify the truth. The above dissertation has evaluated that the government schemes taken out for inclusion have resulted in two exclusions in practical use. Yet there are different ways to counter such hegemonic practices and prevent democracy of India from further backsliding and restore it successfully. Independent social media platforms, blockchains, journals, MCS and other international organizations along with opposition challenge the hidden motives of the government pressurizing it to stay fair and accountable. There are other successful models in global south as well Similar to the Aadhar system. India can learn from these models off like Estonia

which is designed for privacy by including X Rd. system where citizens can see that who has accessed their data and by ensuring transparency and accountability unlike centralized data collection model of India, Uruguay is able to successfully create an inclusive digital model with strong democratic institutions. India has seen failures in implementing its judicial landmark cases but with digitalization and digital literacy India's legal framework is evolving and trying to fill the gaps created maintaining hopes of the public. India is under a tug of war situation there the question arises that can the Republic pass the test where technology itself in the end is a tool, and will this tool be used to control the regime or to challenge those who are controlling the regime.

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