

**Framing the Farmer's Protests:**  
**An Analysis of *Newslaundry* and *RepublicTV's* Coverage**

A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of Journalism

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Masters of Arts (Journalism Studies)  
at Concordia University Montreal, Quebec, Canada

July 2023

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CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

School of Graduate Studies

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Entitled: Framing the Farmer Protests: An Analysis of *Newslaundry* and *RepublicTV's* coverage and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts (Journalism Studies)**

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## ABSTRACT

### **Framing the Farmer's Protests: An Analysis of *Newslaundry* and *RepublicTV*'s Coverage**

Trisha Dangarwala

In late November 2020, tens of thousands of farmers marched to New Delhi, the capital of India, to oppose planned new agricultural regulations introduced hastily by Narendra Modi's BJP government in June 2020. Up to 250 million people throughout the subcontinent engaged in a 24-hour general strike in support of the farmers of India and their cause. This movement has received international attention and prompted the government to meet the protesters in December 2020, a first in Prime Minister Modi's six-year rule. Throughout the coverage of these protests, news media in India have been heavily divided. This research focuses on an analysis of the news frames mobilized in online coverage by independent news outlet *Newslaundry* and *RepublicTV*, one of India's most popular English-language news outlets. Using a frame analysis, this research concludes that the two news organizations greatly varied in their approaches to covering the protests. *RepublicTV* branded the farmers as 'uncooperative' and the leaders of the farmers' union as 'willing to do whatever it takes' to have the laws repealed. They were called 'anti-nationals' who brought 'shame' to the nation and the ideals of democracy. *Newslaundry*, on the other hand, highlighted the voices of the farmers and their plight during the protests and focused on fact-checking other outlets' coverage while emphasizing the importance of press freedom in India at such a polarizing time. This thesis also goes into detail about the current state of media in India and the rise of biased journalism in the industry.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my family for supporting me and helping me stay positive throughout my thesis composition. They have encouraged me at each step to continue my work with sheer determination. While they do live across the world from me, they have never failed to be there for me and support my research. Their unconditional love has really given me the push I needed to travel to Canada and pursue this degree.

My supervisor, Dr. Elyse Amend, has been essential in this thesis coming together. She has guided me at each step of my research and always encouraged me to push my boundaries during this time. I faced a lot of difficulties when I first started my proposal, but she made the process so much easier and streamlined for me. Her constant attention and support have allowed me to be proud of my work. I would also like to thank Dr. Andrea Hunter, who sat in on my proposal defense and boosted my confidence in my work and what I want to achieve with it. Her kind words have pushed me to complete my thesis to the best of my abilities. In addition, I shall thank Dr. David Secko, Paul Gott, and Aaron Derfel of the Journalism Department, Concordia University, for their insight and knowledge on journalism and journalism studies.

Coming to Montreal has been a wonderful experience for me. I was afraid before I made the move from Mumbai, India but I have met so many wonderful people throughout my time here who have fully supported me throughout this process. Together, we have shared many fun moments that I hold very close to my heart. These wonderful people are Manan Bhandari, Arnima Gaur, Reshma Narayan, Rafael Ruiz González, and Lousie Brun-Newhook. To conclude, I'd like to thank everyone who has supported me over the last two years, and express my gratitude to others who I didn't have the opportunity to recognize in the acknowledgments.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The Farmer's Protests in India was an important event in the country's modern history. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government faced a lot of backlash for the way these laws were passed in the *Rajya Sabha*, the representative of the states in the union legislature, also called the Council of States.

As reported by *The Wire* on September 21, 2020,

On Sunday, things hit a new low when the Bills were passed by a voice vote despite opposition MPs asking for a division, i.e., a recorded vote – which the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) clearly was not in a position to win. (Sahu, S.N.)

The news coverage that followed these protests mainly emphasized two different perspectives on the protest - one of the farmers participating in the protest, and one of the ruling government. The resulting stories spun contrasting narratives, leading to a lot of confusion, and making it difficult for the Indian public to navigate what was really happening.

The farmer unions were unhappy with the way they were being presented in mainstream media as well. A few weeks into the protest, farmer unions stopped allowing reporters from certain news organizations like *Zee News*, *RepublicTV*, and *ABP News* to enter their protest area for interviews. Farmers believed that the news media was twisting their motive for the protests—getting the government to repeal the laws—in their coverage. Throughout my experience as a reporter in India and as a consumer of news, I have come to understand the implications of such a divide in news coverage. I have seen the after-effects of this among my peers, in the way they consume their news and the opinions they form based on the news they have consumed.

The divide created by the news is more pronounced between Hindus and Muslims in India. The pro-Hindu coverage by mainstream media has led many Muslims to go as far as to use Hindu names to find jobs (Al Jazeera, September 8, 2022). While the Hindu-Muslim divide is not as prevalent within the Farmer's Protests and its reporting, the consequences of such divisive coverage have led to the farmers, who are participating in this protest peacefully, to be branded as 'violent mobs,' 'Khalistanis,'<sup>1</sup> and 'anti-nationals,' by traditional media outlets, among other terms.

This phenomenon within the Indian news has pushed me to pursue this thesis. Through this research project, I aim to highlight the growing differences between factual news and propaganda.

According to Herman and Chomsky's (2002, p. 2) propaganda model, concentrated ownership of the media, owner wealth, the profit orientation of the dominant mass-media firms, advertising as a primary income source, and the reliance of the media on information provided by governments can all work as filters in selecting content, thereby preventing anything that works against the interest of the big media firms from appearing before the public.

This thesis focuses on uncovering and comparing the frames mobilized by two very different Indian news media outlets—*Newslandry* and *RepublicTV*—in their coverage of the Farmer's Protests. Both news organizations have chosen different approaches to present said issue and hence have provided the public with divergent versions of "the truth." Through this research project, I hope to highlight the news frames the two outlets mobilized in their coverage, and further understand the sensationalistic

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<sup>1</sup> Khalistani refers to a supporter of a separatist movement seeking to create a homeland for Sikhs and establishing their own government.

framing of this event. While conducting my research, I came across many contrasting narratives between the two news outlets. There was also inflammatory language usage in some of the coverage that can create a negative impression of the farmers for the public. These observations lead me to believe that such coverage can have a divisive effect on the public that consumes this news, which can further public mistrust in the media.

Additionally, this research project aims to add to discussions about sensationalism and yellow journalism that are plaguing the Indian media today. Ideally, I hope to help build a foundation to combat this problem and, going forward, find effective solutions so that the Indian media can produce effective journalism for a public that is so diverse and vast.

There are many differing opinions about media practices in India. Still, most seem to come to the same conclusion: gaining clicks and views, and building a media monopoly often outweigh the importance of providing the public with fair, accurate, and unbiased coverage. Past research that has interviewed Indian journalists about practices in their organizations highlighted the fact that many admitted to going against journalistic principles, such as autonomy, public service, objectivity and ethics, to push a story out that will create noise and traffic on their platforms (Chadha and Koliska, 2016. p. 614).

As Chadha and Koliska (2016) note:

“...the economics of the India regional television landscape, wherein channels find themselves under considerable pressure to garner the highest television ratings points (TRPs), was frequently cited as a factor in journalists adopting a less than neutral stance, even in their coverage of ordinary stories. Reporters also repeatedly underscored that this economic imperative often resulted in stories being deliberately developed with an “angle” in mind, and that the information gathering associated with them was undertaken to support a certain, pre-determined conclusion. In other

words, such stories were deliberately conceptualized with a particular “slant” from the outset.” (p. 614)

This is why my research is focused on studying news frames mobilized in coverage surrounding the Farmers’ Protests in India in 2021. Using an inductive method of frame analysis, following Willemien Linström & Margaret Marais (2012) and James W. Tankard’s (2001) work on how news frames are formed, this research identifies the discursive differences in how two media organizations covered the 2021 protests.

Before achieving this deeper understanding of the news coverage, however, it is imperative to understand the three laws that spurred the Farmer's Protests. In the sections that follow, I detail these laws and their impacts on the farmers.

### **1.1 The farm laws and subsequent protests**

The 2021 Farmer Protests began as a response to three laws introduced by India’s Central government.

1. The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Bill, 2020 (Essential Commodities Amendment)
2. The Farmers Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Bill, 2020 (The Marketplace Law)
3. The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Bill, 2020 (The Contract Farming Law)

The Essential Commodities Act was originally introduced in 1955. This Act controls the production, supply, and distribution of certain commodities that are identified as essential. If an item is regulated under this Act, companies, and supermarkets cannot stockpile these items when there is a shortage. They also cannot

artificially increase the prices of these items. This list includes drugs (medicines), fertilizer, oil and oilseeds, hank yarn made from cotton, petroleum and its products, raw jute and textiles, fruits, vegetables, food crops, jute, and cattle fodder.

The new Essential Commodities Amendment in 2020 removed foods such as potatoes, cereals, pulses, oilseeds, and oil from the above list of essential commodities.

This means that unless there is a war or famine, or a significant price rise, these commodities will not be considered under the essential commodities list. Further, the new amendment said that the government cannot impose a stock limit, which means they could not stop a retailer or a supermarket from hoarding these items unless there is a 100 percent increase in the price of perishable goods and a 50 percent increase in the price of non-perishable goods.

Critics and farmers believed this would lead to an exponential rise in hoarding and the prices of these goods. A consequence of this many worried about was that the vast majority of the population would not have access to items like rice, wheat, potatoes, and onions because they could become too expensive to afford.

The Marketplace Law, also introduced in 2020, allowed farmers to sell their produce anywhere and not just in the state government-regulated markets or mandis where they were auctioned off to wholesale and retail traders. Through these regulations, the state government claimed they would ensure all farmers received a fair price for their produce. This law aimed to get rid of the middlemen in the process of buying and selling. All additional fees were also regulated by the state government.

The new law allowed farmers to sell their produce online within India, apart from outside state lines. The Central government believed that this law would give the farmers the freedom of choice to sell their produce in any way they desired.

Some critics and farmers took issue with the Marketplace Law for several reasons. Agriculture Marketing is a state subject under Schedule 7 of the Indian Constitution and the Central government has no right to amend this law. The state-run markets ensure that farmers receive a Minimum Support Price (MSP) for a quintal (100 kilos) of their produce. A quintal of rice paddy, for example, has an MSP of ₹2040 (approximately USD 26.10) for 2022-23. Selling outside of state-run markets would not give farmers the same MSP. The new Marketplace Law made no mention of an MSP and farmers were worried they wouldn't make the minimum price set by the state government.

Finally, the 2020 Contract Farming Law stated that farmers could enter into a 'written agreement' with anyone, including any company or retailer, and sell their produce according to the contract signed. Different specifications regarding the duration of the deal and the quantity and quality of the produce could be determined in this contract. Through this act, companies could set their produce price and convince farmers to sell it at that rate. The Central government believed that this law would further the interest of farmers and allow them to sell outside of the mandis.

This law was farfetched according to critics and experts. In India, 82 percent of farmers are marginal or small-scale farmers who farm on 2.5 to 5 acres of land. In case of a breach of contract, many critics worried such farmers would not be able to withstand going to court against supermarket chains. There was no protection for the farmers and

no mention of a fixed price of produce. Farmers believed this could lead to their exploitation.

When combined, these laws did not paint a favorable picture for the farmers of India. As written in *The New York Times*:

They (farmers) called for [Indian prime minister] Mr. Modi to repeal laws passed in September 2020 that would minimize the government's role in agriculture and open more space for private investors. The government said the new laws would unshackle farmers and private investment, bringing growth. But farmers feared that the removal of state protections, which they already considered insufficient, would leave them at the mercy of greedy corporations. (Mashal, Schmall and Goldman, November 19, 2021)

As reported by Al Jazeera (November 19, 2021) the farmer protests in India began in September 2020, after the government passed the three laws described above. Prime Minister Narendra Modi defended these laws stating that they would “unshackle” millions of farmers and help them get better prices for the commodities they sell. But farmers disagreed and blocked rail tracks. Bigger demonstrations took place around the country and farmers, along with truck and tractor drivers, reached the capital, New Delhi, on November 26, 2020.

The government refused to repeal the laws in November 2020, dismissing the farmers' fears that their wholesale markets would be abolished. Hours-long talks held in December 2020 between the government and the leaders of the farmers union did not provide a solution.

Many foreign leaders, including Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, weighed in on the Indian government's stance:

In a Twitter video message on November 30, 2020, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau also spoke of the protest: “The situation is concerning and we are all very worried about family and friends and I know that is a reality for many of you.

Let me remind you, Canada will always be there to defend the right of peaceful protest. We believe in the importance of dialogue and that is why we have reached out through multiple means directly to Indian authorities to highlight our concerns,” he said. (*The Hindu*, December 1, 2020)

After posting the message, the Indian government criticized Trudeau for being “ill-informed” about the issue.

On Tuesday, India's foreign ministry spokesperson responded to the "ill-informed comments by Canadian leader. "Such comments are unwarranted, especially when pertaining to the internal affairs of a democratic country," said Anurag Srivastava, spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs. "It is also best that diplomatic conversations are not misrepresented for political purposes." (*BBC News*, December 1, 2020)

Even when musician Rihanna, climate activist Greta Thunberg, and Meena Harris, niece of US Vice President Kamala Harris, have spoken on the issue, India's Foreign Ministry has urged them to ‘understand the issue’ before speaking on it.

For example, on February 2, 2021, Rihanna tweeted “why aren't we talking about this?! #FarmersProtest <https://t.co/obmIIKhK9S>.” On the same day, climate activist Greta Thunberg tweeted, “We stand in solidarity with the #FarmersProtest in India.

The Indian Government was not happy with these tweets, either, and this is how they responded.

“The temptation of sensationalist social media hashtags and comments, especially when resorted to by celebrities and others, is neither accurate nor responsible,” said the statement by the Ministry of External Affairs.

“Rihanna’s tweet also prompted responses from Amit Shah, India’s Home Affairs Minister, who tweeted that “no propaganda can deter India’s unity.” And renowned cricketer Sachin Tendulkar, using the hashtag #IndiaAgainstPropaganda, wrote: “India’s sovereignty cannot be compromised. External forces can be spectators but not participants.” (*The Guardian*, February 3, 2021)

The farmers held their ground even after more than 30 deaths on the national highways, mainly due to the cold. Finally, the Supreme Court, in January 2021, ordered an indefinite stay on the laws and said that it would hear the objections of the farmers and wished to protect them.

Every year on January 26, India’s Republic Day, the government organizes a ceremonious parade that is held at the Rajpath. It commemorates the adoption of the Indian Constitution in 1949 after India gained independence from the British in 1947. This parade pays tribute to India, its unity, and its rich cultural heritage. On January 26, 2021, the farmers planned their own Tractor Rally through the city of New Delhi to peacefully protest. Farmers had planned this rally to coincide with the government’s parade, which had been scaled back because of the pandemic. But as tanks paraded before Prime Minister Modi, tractors driven by protestors ran across the capital – some could be seen almost crushing police personnel standing in the way (Mitra and Regan, January 27, 2021). The maps below, originally published in the *Telegraph India* and *The Indian Express*, explain the three protest sites and entry points for the Tractor Rally.

According to *Newslandry*, when the farmers initially came to Singhu, the various factions, including the KMSC (Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee), agreed to combine under the banner of the SKM (Samyukta Kisan Morcha). This changed on January 26, when the SKM planned to conduct a tractor rally on the outskirts of New

Delhi on Republic Day, pictured in Figure 2. The KMSC argued that the farmers should enter Delhi, which they accomplished by riding their tractors to the Red Fort (Suresh, N. November 19, 2021).

This resulted in the death of one farmer, 40 security personnel injured, and nearly 200 farmers detained after 22 police complaints were registered by the Delhi Police. Farmer leaders said that the groups who engaged in violence and stormed the historic Red Fort to hoist a Sikh community flag were not part of the original movement. (Mitra and Regan, January 27, 2021). Nevertheless, the media coverage of the storming of the capital has shed negative light on these farmers.

*Newslandry* reported on the Tractor Rally by focusing on and critiquing how legacy media was covering the event. *RepublicTV* used the same images and videos of the conflict that broke out between the police and the protesters. They reran them throughout their coverage of the incident. Their coverage included terms such as ‘violent elements,’ and headlines such as ‘Open Violence on R-Day.’

On Republic TV, the anchors spoke about how the protesters were not farmers but hooligans with an “evil intention” of disrupting normal life. (David, January 26, 2021)

David also points out other narratives that were being broadcast on television on January 26, 2021, when news of the rally turning violent spread.

An *ABP News* anchor called the whole rally a blot on the nation on the joyous occasion of Republic Day. A reporter from *TV9 Bharatvarsh* brandished a bottle of alcohol which he scooped out of one of the tractors to make the claim that farmers were drinking and driving. (David, January 26, 2021)

In September 2021, more than 500,000 farmers gathered in Uttar Pradesh for the biggest rally in a months-long series of demonstrations.

On October 3, 2021, at Lakhimpur Kheri, Uttar Pradesh, three SUVs drove into a group of farmers protesting. Ajay Kumar Mishra, a union minister in the BJP cabinet, owned two of these vehicles. Ashish Mishra, the minister's son, was allegedly in one of the three cars, according to eyewitnesses. Eight people were killed as a result of the incident and the subsequent violence: four farmers, two BJP workers, the driver of one of the trucks, and a journalist, Raman Kashyap. Ashish Mishra was arrested on October 9, 2021, under various sections of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). Finally, in November 2021, Prime Minister Modi decided to repeal the laws.

A report by the BBC on July 2, 2022, mentioned that the farmers were ready to return to protesting, as some of their demands, such as guaranteed prices for key crops, compensation to the kin of farmers who died during the agitation, dropping criminal proceedings against them for burning paddy straw, and withdrawal of criminal cases registered against them for protesting, have still not been met. The government vowed to establish a committee with members from the federal and state governments, agricultural scientists, and farmer organizations to investigate MSP when it ultimately announced that it would repeal the regulations.

Farm leaders convened a meeting on July 3, 2022, to decide the next line of action. The meeting took place in Ghaziabad, near Delhi, and was attended by notable farm leaders, including Rakesh Tikait, who led the protests. (Chhabra. July 2, 2022)

On August 22, 2022, over eight months after the protests ended, more than 5,000 farmers gathered in the capital again. According to a statement from the Samyukta Kisan Morcha, the farmer's group that organized the demonstration in August, farmers were asking that the government guarantee a minimum support price for all products and pay off all farmer loans (Reuters. August 22, 2022).

Throughout these protests, farmers have felt misrepresented and termed 'anti-nationals' by many in the news media. During these protests, the farmers refused to let some journalists into their camps outside the capital of the country because they were afraid of the narratives these journalists would create.

About a kilometre away, down the highway blocked by trucks and lorries, Newslandry met Indrajeet Singh, a Punjabi standup comedian based in Delhi. He is from a family of farmers, Indrajeet said, and therefore felt obliged to join the protests.

Aghast at how some media houses were covering the protests, he printed posters in English, Hindi, and Punjabi, that read: "Zee News, Republic, Aaj Tak. Don't cover us. You are fake news. #GodiMedia." (Suresh, December 1, 2020)

While the farmers wanted to be covered by the "national" media, they did not want *RepublicTV*, *Aaj Tak*, or *Zee News* to report on their protests. They believe these channels have misreported their protest and distorted their intent. They showed a clear dislike towards so-called 'Godi' media, and were not open to talking to journalists about their woes. 'Godi Media' is a term coined by journalist Ravish Kumar of the NDTV news channel. It refers to some media outlets that produce biased coverage and speak in favor of the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government<sup>2</sup>. 'Godi' in Hindi

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<sup>2</sup> The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is a conservative Indian political partnership led by the

means ‘lap,’ referring to these outlets as ‘lapdog media outlets’ and mouthpieces of the Narendra Modi government.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Approach**

### **2.1 The History of Journalism in India**

Journalism in India existed before the country became independent of British rule in 1947. James Augustus Hicky started the first Anglo-Indian newspaper in India in 1780, named the *Bengal Gazette*.

Many Indian freedom fighters started to publish news in vernacular languages, but there were heavy censorship laws in place to control the press. The British Government introduced laws such as the Censorship of Press Act (1799), Licensing Regulations (1823), The Licensing Act (1857), The Registration Act (1867), The Vernacular Press Act (1878), The Newspapers (Incitement to Offences) Act (1908), The Indian Press Act (1910), and the Indian Press (Emergency Powers) Act (1931). These laws allowed the British government to impose restrictions on what the press reported. It did not allow the publication or circulation of new newspapers until they were licensed by the government. Newspapers that were published in local languages were extremely critical of the

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Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The NDA was founded as a coalition to fight the national elections in May 1998 to establish an anti-Indian National Congress coalition. It was led by the BJP and comprised a number of regional parties.

government as compared to the European press. So the Vernacular Press Act (VPA) was designed to 'better control' the vernacular press and effectively punish and repress seditious writing (The Hans India, March 13, 2015).

The British government aimed to curb any revolts or protests against it, so they tried to keep the press from reporting on anything that might anger the public and incite a revolution. *Indian Express* has written a detailed account of how freedom activists and leaders illegally shared information through secret radio messages and cyclostyled sheets.

Some underground publications, such as *The Programme*, *Biplabi* (The Revolutionary), and handbills such as *Azad Student* (Free Student) worked secretly after authorities imposed restrictions on major publications:

The publications which emerged from underground in 1942 and 1943 greatly varied in their sources, their areas of distribution, and of course, their contents. The first category comprised publications that were issued by semi-official All-India Congress organizations for the purpose of coordinating the Quit India movement. The second category comprised ephemeral publications issued locally to draw attention to particular issues, to attach particular social or occupational groups to the Congress cause, or to disrupt the smooth operation of factories, mills, and government offices. A third category, which comprised periodical bulletins and newspapers, was aimed at a wider readership of Congress fellow-travelers and sympathizers. It is this third category which can be thought of as underground journalism proper. (Greenough, 1999, p. 18)

After independence from British rule, there was one government-run news channel, Doordarshan, that was started on September 15, 1959. News reports at the time implied that Doordarshan was used, especially during the Emergency, to disseminate government propaganda. The Emergency was in effect from June 25, 1975, until March 21, 1977. Then-Prime Minister Indira Gandhi proclaimed a national state of emergency for multiple reasons—the India-Pakistan war of 1971, the severe drought crisis, and the

harm it had done to the government. The order provided the prime minister the power to rule by decree, permitting the cancellation of elections and the suspension of civil rights.

Introduced on July 24, 1991, during the tenure of eighth Prime Minister Chandra Shekar Singh, the Liberalization, Privatization, and Globalization (LPG) policies aimed at attracting more foreign investment and making the economy more market- and service-oriented. The aim was to open the economy to the world and boost the private sector in the country. This led to the beginning of the privatization of the media industry. As Chadha (2017) says, the changes in the Indian media were:

...stimulated by a combination of factors such as the rise in consumer incomes and literacy levels, the import of new technologies, growth of advertising, and limited regulatory oversight from the government, the Indian media industry has evolved into a powerful economic enterprise over the past two decades. (Chadha, 2017, p. 140)

Starting in 1995, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government further opened up the airwaves for broadcasters. New media barons emerged, such as Subhash Chandra, Ramoji Rao, Prannoy Roy, Raghav Bahl, and Kalanithi Maran, who created domestic TV networks (Khanna, September 27, 2017).

Between 1963 and 1997 the number of daily newspapers also increased by nearly three and half times, whereas there was a fourfold increase in aggregate circulation. After a low growth phase extending from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s, the number of dailies grew at a rate of about 9 percent between 1976-78 and 1985-87 (Nair, 2003, 4183).

## **2.2 The Current State of the Indian Media**

After decades of heavy censorship during British rule and during Indira Gandhi's time as prime minister, the freedom of the press in India has been questioned again in recent years. According to the 2023 World Press Freedom Index, the country's ranking has fallen from 140 to 161 since 2019.

The Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) Institute, an independent institute and the headquarters of the V-Dem project based in Sweden at the University of Gothenburg, releases a yearly report studying democratization. While the Democracy Report has previously referred to India as a democracy, the 2023 report now characterizes India as an electoral autocracy.

There is an imbalance in reporting within the Indian news media. This is evident in the way some media reported the oxygen shortage in India during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic when the deadly Delta variant of the virus was ravaging the country. Some TV news channels reported that this shortage was because of the farmers' protest, though the supply was short due to poor health infrastructure. *The Wire* published an article about this crisis and how different media outlets reported this news.

Pro-establishment website OpIndia had published an article claiming that it had accessed a letter from Inox Air products to the Central government. The letter from Inox Air products reportedly stated that vehicles carrying oxygen were having to "travel an additional distance of 100 km from their unit in Modinagar, Uttar Pradesh to reach hospitals in Delhi due to the farmer protests" at Singhu and Ghazipur border. On Wednesday morning, TV channels like ABP and News 18 Hindi alleged that the farmers' protest was the reason for the oxygen delay. ABP News' morning show had a segment titled "Farmers protest behind the insufficient supply of oxygen in Delhi?"

Around that time, Republic was also broadcasting news about the purported INOX Air Products letter "accessed" by the channel. The news channel's anchor said that it was "shocking" that "20,000" farmers were moving towards the Tikri border, when "oxygen supply companies are

saying that they are having to travel 100 kilometers additionally. (*The Wire Analysis*, April 2021)

But the farmers deny these allegations. Videos on social media posted by Asian News International (ANI) have shown them making way for oxygen tanks.

The Samyukta Kisan Morcha, a representative body of several protesting farmer unions, said on Wednesday they have kept a way open for emergency services since day one of their agitations. "A false propaganda is being spread against farmers that they have blocked the roads and not letting oxygen into Delhi. This is completely false news. Yes, we are protesting but not against Covid-19 patients, corona warriors, or common citizens. We are against the government's discriminatory policy on agriculture," it added." (*The Times of India*, April 21, 2021)

In an interview with Breaking Points, a US-based YouTube channel, former CEO of Twitter Jack Dorsey talked about the many requests the social media giant received from the Indian government regarding journalists that were critical of the laws. As reported by *Forbes India* on June 13, 2023,

During the protests, the government had asked Twitter to remove over 1,000 accounts related to the agitations. It alleged that many were run by overseas supporters of the Khalistan movement while some were backed by Pakistan. Twitter initially suspended some of the accounts. However, it later restored them after informing the government that it considered the contents to be acceptable free speech.

India, for example, was a country that had many requests around the farmers' protests, around particular journalists that were critical of the government, and it manifested in ways such as 'we will shut Twitter down in India', which is a very large market for us, 'we will raid the homes of your employees', which they did, 'we will shut down your offices, if you don't follow suit.' And this is India, a democratic country. (Tripathi, N. June 13, 2023)

### **2.3 Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Media Feud**

Ever since the re-election of Prime Minister Modi and his Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2019, there has been growing government control over what journalists in India can and cannot publish, along with growing propaganda in the media.

As noted above, just last year the BJP-majority government asked Twitter officials to censor 52 tweets that mostly criticized India's handling of the second surge of the COVID-19 pandemic. The tweets, which are no longer accessible in India, include those posted by Congress MP Revanth Reddy, West Bengal minister Moloy Ghatak, actor Vineet Kumar Singh and filmmakers Vinod Kapri and Avinash Das (*The Scroll*, April 24, 2021).

In November 2021 alone, the Press Council of India registered 51 complaints filed against the media, including accusations of false or defamatory news. It also received 13 complaints from journalists that their rights had been curtailed (Hussain, December 27, 2021).

Data journalist and *Columbia Journalism Review* fellow Paroma Soni discovered that in 2020, the Indian government requested Twitter to erase around 10,000 posts, up from around 1,200 the year before:

“There has always been a coordinated strategy to paint everyone who disagrees with the government as an enemy of the nation,” Pranav Dixit, a technology reporter for BuzzFeed News, says. “The only difference now is that Modi is far more social media-savvy than his predecessors.” Cheap internet and big telecommunications infrastructure boomed in India right around the time he took office. “Modi knew that he could sway millions of people with a single tweet,” Dixit says. “He has very deliberately and systematically built a right-wing online ecosystem that benefits his party.” (Soni, December 14, 2021)

For journalists in India, there is often uncertainty, insecurity, and fear while doing their job because of how they are treated in the country. A Reporters Without Borders report in 2021 named India as one of the five most dangerous countries for journalists, with four journalists killed for their work during that year. These journalists were covering localized crime activities.

The Indian media has reached the edge of a precipice. The quality of its news and its credibility has been falling for quite some time now. There has been a significant rise in censorship, and sedition laws being used against opposition politicians, students, journalists, authors, and academics.<sup>3</sup> The following excerpt from an article by Kashmir Media Service (KMS) reports on the way the law of sedition is being used in India:

The range of seditious expressions in these cases ranged from simply holding posters to social media posts to raising slogans and personal communications. For instance, in October last year, three Kashmiri students were charged with sedition in Agra for allegedly “posting celebratory messages” on social media after Pakistan’s victory over India in a T20 cricket match. (Hari, 2022)

Sometimes media ownership also gets in the way of what stories are reported and how they are presented to the public. In terms of ownership, politicians as well as business groups increasingly control regional-language channels (Chadha and Koliska, 2016, p. 611). Media owners’ political and religious affiliations have been known to prevent certain stories from being reported, even if other news channels are covering them. As stated by Guha Thakurta (2012) and Pandalai (2014), while the involvement of

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<sup>3</sup>The Supreme Court decided on May 11, 2022, to halt sedition proceedings while the prosecution reexamines the cases. The top court decided that no new First Information Reports (FIR) for sedition would be filed and that all ongoing proceedings would be suspended.

businessmen and politicians in regional news channels may be motivated by commercial considerations to some extent, it is primarily motivated by their desire to have a voice and garner support for specific political and economic agendas (Guha, Thakurta, 2012; Pandalai 2014).

As Ahmed Raza (2020) also states:

With more than 75,000 newspapers and well over a 1,000 satellite channels in several languages competing against each other for their survival, overt political allegiance becomes a tool for media to target politically and ideologically inspired viewers. The period between 2009-2019 has seen an unprecedented TRP race.<sup>4</sup> Leading media houses in India have been covering issues in accordance to a strict ideological allegiance and a steadfast commitment to a political party. (Raza, 2020)

For example, Reliance Industries Ltd. (RIL) owns the news conglomerate Network 18. When Amit Shah was promoted to president of the Bhartiya Janata Party, TV18 was instructed to edit out references to the criminal charges of murder, kidnapping, extortion, and illegal surveillance he faced in 2010.

## **2.4 The rise of sensationalism within the media**

Additionally, the notion of immediacy is often given higher importance in Indian newsrooms than objectivity or even public service. One study found that immediacy was the one value that was more or less universally acknowledged [by journalists] as playing a significant role in news production (Chadha & Koliska, 2016, 613).

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<sup>4</sup> Television Rating Point (TRP) is a tool used to calculate the viewership of a TV channel and determine its popularity. The Broadcast Audience Research Council, India (BARC) releases a weekly report through which one can see the rating given to each television channel. It keeps track of the time and program that a viewer watches on a given day, through a device that is connected to Direct-to-Home (DTH) Services in each household. The average is then calculated over 30 days to determine a channel's viewing rank. The TRP race occurs between news channels to garner the highest ratings.

It is about who can get the ‘meatiest’ scoop out first and get the most views and traction from the public. This tendency was at play in coverage of the above-mentioned oxygen shortage in Delhi during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and led to accusations that farmers were blocking deliveries of medical supplies. Some media outlets are quick to label a ‘bad guy’ and a ‘good guy’ early on in their reports and some use more divisive words, like calling farmers “anti-nationalists” and referring to Sikhs as “terror groups.” This excerpt from an article in *The Wire* accurately describes this problem:

A farmer from Amroha, Sukhdarshan Singh, believes that when labels such as ‘Khalistani, Pakistani’ are used to reference the communities participating in the protests, they are meant to provoke one community against the other. (Aswani, March 4, 2021)

Words like “Khalistani” and “Pakistani” tend to sensationalize a story and are used to get readers’ attention and the most views for the outlet. Chadha and Koliska (2016) point out that

...reporters also repeatedly underscored that this economic imperative (garnering highest TRPs) often resulted in stories being deliberately developed with an “angle” in mind and that the information gathering associated with them was undertaken to support a certain, pre-determined conclusion. (Chadha and Koliska, 2016, p. 614)

India and Pakistan have had political tension between them since the partition of India in 1947, creating separate countries for Hindus and Muslims. Both countries wanted to include the state of Jammu and Kashmir within their borders, and this dispute continues today. The rising tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities in the country also make this a sensitive issue that needs to be reported carefully.

The form and presentation of the content is sensationalized in a way to grab eyeballs and has revamped the entire concept of news. Objectivity as the focal news value has undergone a complete makeover. From the conventional idea of reporting without adding perspectives, news has become more fancy and perspectivized. (Jaggi, 2009. p. 5)

So, when news channels find themselves under pressure to garner higher ratings, some stories are written in a way to push a certain ‘angle’ to increase their TRP ratings:

Aggressive journalism evolved over time as an offshoot of post-globalization when electronic media began live telecasting of news in 24-hours format. Initially, the media remained engaged in covering the news round the clock in order to create awareness among viewers. But, with the spike in numbers of private channels after 2000, a new pattern of attracting the viewers towards their own channel by spreading the news quickly emerged. Sensationalized stories, media trials became common on channels. (Raza, 2020)

Another example of such reporting is how *RepublicTV* reported the death of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput in June 2020. The actor, who suffered from depression, committed suicide at his residence in Mumbai early one morning. But *RepublicTV*, India’s most-viewed TV news channel, had another angle in mind. They pushed a conspiracy that his girlfriend murdered him with the involvement of other Bollywood actors and politician Aditya Thackeray, the son of Chief Minister of Maharashtra, Uddhav Thackeray. The State government of Maharashtra and the Central government of India were not politically aligned during this time. The hour-long nightly debates and media trials on this subject, while the COVID-19 pandemic was wreaking havoc across India, were hardly helpful, and took away much-needed attention from the problems the country was facing.

## **2.5 Digital Media in India**

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism released a report on Indian media in 2021 and stated that:

Indian media is extremely diverse, with thousands of outlets operating in multiple languages. Much of the media is controlled by large, for-profit corporations, many of them privately held, and mainly funded by advertising. But these business models are being disrupted by a rapid shift to online consumption – and the impact of COVID-19. (Krishnan, 2021, 134)

The internet penetration rate in India also went up to nearly 45 percent in 2021, from just about four percent in 2007. Although these figures seem relatively low, they mean that nearly half of the country's 1.37 billion population had access to the Internet in 2021 (Galpaya et al., 2021).

According to the same 2021 Reuters report, India is one of the strongest mobile-focused markets in their global survey, with 73 percent of the population accessing news through smartphones and just 37 percent via computers. India has more than 600 million active internet users, many of whom access the internet only through mobile phones – aided by low data charges and cheap devices. (Krishnan, 2021. p.134).

The same report also mentions that legacy media outlets are up against fierce online competition from emerging digital firms that value independent journalism. Many rely on non-profit revenue streams including grants, reader donations, and subscription fees.

Digital-born brands such as *Newslaundry* are entirely driven by subscriptions and donations. *The Wire* takes strong editorial positions that are anti-establishment and investigative in nature, while *Newslaundry* eschews editorial positions altogether and believes in portraying diverse viewpoints from the ground. *The News Minute* caters specifically to news from South India while *The Quint* aims to build community partnerships

through its citizen journalism initiatives and fact-checking services, in addition to regular news. (Krishnan, June 15, 2022)

The Coronavirus pandemic has also expedited the digitization of news in India. Long lockdowns in the country forced newspapers to stop printing, leading news media outlets to publish on their websites and their social media platforms. From the outset of the pandemic, media organizations around the world had to quickly restructure their work processes, as staff had to stay at home during times of lockdown or work restrictions. Online video conferences replaced in-person team meetings, and journalists used business work platforms in dispersed networks instead of direct cooperation in the newsroom. Video interviews were often done via Zoom instead of sending out teams or getting interviewees to a studio. (Quandt & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021).

The pandemic has hit print circulation and decreased advertisements, leading companies to slash salaries, cut jobs, and close editions across the country due to the drastic decline in economic activity in one of the world's strictest lockdowns, as reported by multiple international news organizations. The industry has also had to cope with reduced government and commercial advertisement spending, which fell by more than half since the start of the pandemic. Leading news channel NDTV announced salary cuts for a time, while online publication *The Quint* furloughed staff and was forced to close its planned TV division after three years of unsuccessful attempts to get a broadcasting license (Krishnan, 2021, 134).

According to the same Reuters report on the Indian news media landscape published in 2021, despite the growing popularity of digital media with their surveyed audience, which tends to lean towards an urban and educated population, television

remains the most popular information source overall. India has altogether 392 news channels, dominated by regional language channels and private players. A culture of 24/7 news channels operating on 'breaking news' models and polarized debates often distort and sensationalizes the news (Krishnan, 2021).

News media in India has always been very competitive; to get ahead of the other channels, [RepublicTV is not unfamiliar with spinning narratives to maximize viewership.](#) [The editor-in-chief and managing director of RepublicTV was also named as accused in a TRP \(Television Rating Point\) scam in 2021,](#) where he was allegedly conspiring to rig the channel's TRP ratings.

This is why researching both digital and traditional media is essential. This lightning-fast technology is why digital news organizations are at the forefront of the dissemination of news to the public.

## **2.6 The Media Outlets in Question**

*RepublicTV* was launched on May 6, 2017, by famous Indian journalist Arnab Goswami, who also served as editor-in-chief for *Times Now* and *Economic Times* (ET) from 2006 to 2016. Republic TV also runs Hindi and Bengali broadcast channels, *Republic Bharat* and *Republic Bangla*. Their website 'republicworld.com' runs news articles and clips from Goswami's television channel, *RepublicTV*. Goswami is popular among the Indian public for holding hour-long nightly debates on the subjects he believes are of national importance.

He invites panelists who support opposite causes of the issue at hand and then makes them debate about it on live television. These debates often lead to more

controversy and end in screaming matches between the panelists involved. There have been instances where these spokespeople are provoked so they end up stirring controversy while on live television.

There have been instances on Goswami's show where he has outwardly referred to the farmers as 'mobs, goons, anti-nationalist and anti-social.' These are broad generalizations that harm the way the public views them and these protests.

According to its website, "*Republic TV* has nationalism at its core, the pursuit of truth as its guiding principle, and imbibes the fearlessness to investigate, dig out, and broadcast that truth to fix accountability for a billion." They have also claimed to be "India's first independent media tech company" (RepublicWorld, 2022).

Goswami's channels' news reports and debates have shown ample evidence of being in favor of the ruling party, the BJP. For example, in January 2021, after the events of the Republic Day, as stated in an article by the DigitalDesk of his news organization, Goswami announced a 'Nationalist Collective' that "will be reaching out to Nationalist citizens, groups, across India to create a committed group of Indians who will pre-empt and fight every attempt at targeting the Nation. While celebrating every aspect of India's diversity, the Nationalist Collective will emphasize the need to connect all Indians with the glue of Nationalist fervor, Nationalist spirit, Nationalist pride, and Nationalist common intent" (Digital Desk, December 27, 2021).

According to the 'About Us' section on *RepublicTV's* website, "Seeped in hard-hitting opinion and wound with interactive news content and formats, Republic World

follows the principle of breaking the news and breaking the silence” (RepublicWorld, 2022).

On the contrary, *Newslaundry* is a reader-supported, independent online-only news media company. As stated on their website, in an industry driven by corporate and government interests, they strongly believe in the need for an independent news model, and a free and accountable press. They are an ad-free news outlet and also mention that ‘you get to bypass the digital clutter and go straight to the story.’ Created by Abhinandan Sekhri in 2012, *Newslaundry* also focuses on holding other news outlets accountable—their stories in the media are also driven by that belief. They enable the audience to identify the difference between propaganda and actual news by pointing out discrepancies in the coverage of other mainstream and digital media outlets.

They do not run ‘Op-Eds’ or have an editorial board because they “believe that on matters of policy, governance, law, rules and suchlike, different people can have varying rational views” (Sekhri, A. May 31, 2021).

“We believe that each individual can have their point of view and, if and when it’s expressed in, say, an article, it must carry the name of that individual, whether they be a *Newslaundry* employee or a contributor.”  
(Sekhri, A. May 15, 2021)

They have a dedicated YouTube show called “*TV Newsance*” that highlights the stories of the week and how different right-wing media have reported on them. While this series is light-hearted in tone, it highlights the discrepancies between the facts and what right-wing media has reported. All stories are fact-checked and reported with utmost accuracy.

Reporter Nidhi Suresh of *Newslaundry* was still covering the Hathras rape case a year after it had occurred to bring to light the plight of the family whose daughter had lost her life to this heinous crime. The incident happened on September 14, 2020, in the Hathras district of Uttar Pradesh, when four men of a higher caste gang raped a 19-year-old Dalit woman. She succumbed to her injuries in Delhi two weeks later. The case and its handling received a lot of criticism and spurred protests in the state by activists and the opposition government.

This coverage is an example of how thorough *Newslaundry* is with its news reporting. They were still reporting diligently on this issue while *RepublicTV* was focused on the farmer's protest and how the farmers were troubling the ruling government.

I have chosen these two outlets because of how differently they operate due to their opposing business models and political views. *RepublicTV* is a traditional media outlet that relies on the advertising model of funding, while *Newslaundry* is a reader-supported independent news organization that does not run any kind of ads to maintain its independent reporting.

## **2.7 Theoretical approach**

Journalism is the dissemination of true and fact-based information that is relayed to the public through various media. Without the concept of truth, journalism is just a range of stories that may or may not hold value in society.

According to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007, p. 12), “the primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing.” People use the news as a point of conversation and discussion within their

circles. Such conversations foster relatedness and connectivity among members of a community.

The newspaper, as the first regularly published and generally distributed publicly available vehicle for news, was a cultural form of special significance to democracy because it was through the newspaper and public gathering places that “the public sphere” came into being (Schudson, 2019, p. 4). This public sphere has made the democratic role of journalism possible.

Journalistic values have come to be viewed as comprising the ideological foundation of professional journalism whereby journalists have come to subscribe to a collective understanding of the nature of their work globally (Chadha & Kolisa, 2016, p. 609). Kovach and Rosenstiel (2007) describe these in their book *The Elements of Journalism*:

- Public service: Journalists perform a public service by acting as watchdogs and actively gathering and disseminating information.
- Objectivity: A journalist’s ability to be objective, unbiased, fair, and impartial makes news credible.
- Autonomy: Journalists need to be independent, free, and autonomous in their profession.
- Immediacy: Journalists have an innate feeling of immediacy, actuality, and speed.
- Ethics: Journalists have a sense of ethics, validity, and legitimacy.

With 24/7 news coverage in India, there is a possibility for journalists caught in this endless news cycle to expedite certain steps in the process of reporting to make their deadlines and be the first to break a story.

The pressure to produce online news in almost real-time has led to loss of accuracy and checking (Hargreaves, 2003, 12), journalists who rarely leave the newsroom (Phillips Citation2009), and even report stories before they happen (Davies Citation2009). Stories are “heavily dependent on pre-packaged news” from PR material and wire services (Lewis et al. 2006, 3), a practice Davies (2009, 59) describes as “churnalism.” (Le Masurier, 2015, p.139)

Through Kovach and Rosenstiel’s concepts, this research comments on how both *RepublicTV* and *Newslaundry* adhere to these principles of journalism. These concepts guided me to understand the nature of coverage and the route these outlets took to report on the protests. The concepts of immediacy, ethics, public service, objectivity, and autonomy also guided how I conceived of the frames that emerged in the two news outlets’ coverage of the farmers' protests.

As Kovach and Rosenstiel’s concepts set a basis for what is “expected of the media,” this has left me wondering about the authenticity and integrity of the media in my country and leads me to ask the following research questions:

1. What news frames arise in the coverage of the farmer's protest between traditional broadcast outlet *RepublicTV* and digital outlet *Newslaundry*?
2. What is the difference between how these outlets mobilize these news frames?
3. What do these differences say about the journalistic norms and standards of these outlets during the coverage of the protests?

### **Chapter 3: Method**

#### **3.1 Research Method**

This thesis is centered on the coverage of the Farmers' Protests in India. Its goal is to find the differences between the way two specific news organizations—*RepublicTV* and *Newslaundry*—have framed the protests that took place in India in 2020 and 2021. These two outlets have published different versions of the same story, which risks confusing the public. With this in mind, this research uses frame analysis to explore how the frames present in the coverage differ between the two outlets and may lead to divergent interpretations of the same events. Robert Entman (1993) states

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. (Entman, 1993)

Using an inductive frame analysis, I identified keywords and concepts that occurred in the news reports during the study period and investigated frames using James W. Tankard's (2001) method, which I explain further below.

Since I am comparing the coverage between two news outlets, I considered a frame analysis to be most suitable to answer my research questions. As pointed out by Goodman and Goodman (2006) in their media framing analysis of news coverage of biosolids, news frames can influence audience perceptions of important issues: Many researchers agree that framing is important to risk communication because what is included and excluded often defines the issues and risks for the public thereby affecting their perceptions (e.g., Lundy and Irani, 2002; Bridges and Nelson, 2000; Andsager,

2000). In fact, studies have found that audiences often think about issues as they are framed in the media (Pan and Kosicki, 200; Goodman & Goodman, 2006, p. 362).

Margaret Linström and Willemien Marais (2012) in their paper '*Qualitative News Frame Analysis: A Methodology*' have listed the following steps for investigating news frames: (1) choosing a topic/medium, (2) determining a time frame, (3) drawing a sample, (4) identifying a unit, (5) selecting of frame typology, (6) operational definitions, and (7) identifying news frames.

During this thesis, I went through all seven stages mentioned. I chose to analyze the Farmer's Protests and how two different news outlets covered them. Next, I determined a time frame. I chose six different events related to the Farmer Protests and studied coverage during a one-to-three-week timeframe for each of the events. These time frames were chosen to include ample information and coverage from both news outlets for each chosen event. Collectively, this research focuses on media coverage spread out over the year-long protests. The next steps are to choose a sample from this determined time frame and identify a "unit." Linström and Marais (2012) note that "the unit of analysis in frame analysis often is individual news articles which appeared in the selected newspaper during the selected study period" (2102, p. 29). So, after multiple readings of the news articles I gathered, I conducted an inductive selection of frames. Next, forming an 'operational definition' of the news frames as described by Linström and Marais (2012) involves defining precise descriptions for the news frames that articulate how they came about. Finally, identifying the news frames "can only begin once the 'groundwork' (steps 1-6) has been laid. The identification of news frames requires the researcher to know 'how' to look for frames, as well as 'what' to look for

when identifying frames” (Linström and Marais, 2012, p. 30) According to Tankard (2001), the steps involved in a framing study are as follows: “Make the range of possible frames explicit, put the various possible frames in a manifest list, develop keywords, catchphrases, and symbols to help detect each frame, use the frames in the list as categories in a content analysis, and get coders to code articles into categories” (p. 102). The empirical approach offered by Tankard (2001, p. 101) suggests a list of 11 framing mechanisms or focal points for identifying and measuring news frames:

1. Headlines
2. Subheads
3. Photos
4. Photo captions
5. Leads
6. Source selection
7. Quotes selection
8. Pull quotes
9. Logos
10. Statistics and charts, and
11. Concluding statements and paragraphs.

### **3.2 Events of the protest analyzed**

This research investigated the online coverage from the *Newslaundry* and *RepublicTV* websites of the following incidents that occurred during the farmer's protests.

Event	Date of Occurrence	Research Period
The farmers march towards the capital, New Delhi	November 25, 2020	November 25, 2020- December 10, 2020
The Republic Day incident	January 26, 2021	January 26, 2021 - February 4,

and the farmer’s Tractor Rally		2021
The aftermath of the tweet Rihanna made regarding the protests.	February 2, 2021	February 2, 2021 - February 24, 2021
The farmers were blamed for the oxygen shortage during the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic.	April 20, 2021	April 20, 2021 - May 8, 2021
The Lakhimpur Kheri incident	October 3, 2021	October 3, 2021 - October 17, 2021
The repealing of the laws	November 19, 2021	November 19, 2021 - December 14, 2021

Table 1

After forming the research period for the six events I chose to include in this study, I was able to segregate the news reports I collected based on the news frames I discovered, and highlight the differences between the two news organizations. Following elements noted by Tankard (2001), my analysis focused on the attitudes, ideas, and direct quotes that were reported on by the two news organizations. These elements helped me determine which side of the story these news organizations were supporting and the narratives they chose to highlight for the general public.

News frames can have both individual and societal effects, as explained by deVrees,

The consequences of framing can be conceived on the individual and the societal level. An individual level consequence may be altered attitudes about an issue based on exposure to certain frames. On the societal level, frames may contribute to shaping social-level processes such as political socialization, decision-making, and collective actions. (deVrees. 2005, p. 52)

Both news outlets archive all their articles on their websites. To retrieve the news articles about the farmer's protest-related events I have chosen to focus on, I used the two websites' search functions. I used relevant keywords such as "farmers protest" 'Tractor Rally,' 'Rihanna's tweet,' "Lakhimpur Kheri," and so on, to retrieve articles published by these two outlets about the events. I paid attention to the length of the articles and how many articles were published under each 'Event' category during my research period, as listed in Table 1. I analyzed a total of 336 news articles - 267 from *republicworld.com* and 72 from *newslaundry.com*. The articles written on *republicworld.com* were shorter, with a word count of approximately 400 words, whereas the articles on *newslaundry.com* were longer with an approximate word count of 1000 words.

The process of analyzing these articles was tedious and involved multiple readings of the material published by both news outlets. I went through the news articles according to the dates they were published on. I also noted the style and length of the news reports.

Using a spreadsheet, I formed a table that listed the details of the articles I analyzed - the headline, the date of publishing, parts of the story that I identified under a particular news frame using keywords and storylines, if sources were mentioned and who those sources were according to the information that was attributed to them in the articles, the kind of imagery used in the news articles and any other details from the article I found significant to reach my conclusions.

Entman (1993, p. 52) suggested that frames in the news can be examined and identified by 'the presence or absence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped

images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgments.’ As de Vrees also writes,

Millions of citizens turn to the news media daily, and ‘the media’ is a cornerstone institution in our democracies. One influential way that the media may shape public opinion is by framing events and issues in particular ways. Framing involves a communication source presenting and defining an issue. Frames in the news may affect learning, interpretation, and evaluation of issues and events. (de Vrees, 2005)

News framing determines the basis of public opinion. When it comes to making informed decisions, it is essential for citizens to have an overview of a particular situation that is accurate and well-researched. According to Entman, “frames call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions.” ((Entman, 1993, p. 55) By doing a comparison between *Newslandry* and *RepublicTV*, I aim to highlight ‘both sides’ of the Farmer Protests coverage, instead of allowing one side to ‘obscure’ the other.

#### **Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion**

This section of the thesis will cover the results of the frame analysis based on the coverage events chosen for this study, as described in Chapter 3.

After I searched both news websites, *newslandry.com*, and *republicworld.com*, for relevant articles, I analyzed them to find consistent narratives throughout the coverage. I categorized examples from these articles under the frames I found and formed a description for each one. I looked for particular words such as ‘violent,’ ‘mob,’ ‘Khalistani,’ and ‘anti-national,’ among others, different storylines, headlines, imagery

and the sources mobilized in these articles to help explain the contrasting coverage between the two news outlets.

I constructed the timeline to cover the year-long protest and stressed major events that highlighted the differences between both news outlets and how they decided to inform their audiences.

I first noticed such trends during the reporting of the Tractor Rally. *Newslaundry* reported the event when it was peaceful and going according to plan, while *RepublicTV* only chose to show the Tractor Rally when it started to get violent and interfere with the Republic Day celebrations on January 26, 2021. The different frames discovered in the two outlets’ coverage of each of the six events focused on in this research are detailed in the sections below.

**4.1 Event 1: The Farmers Reach New Delhi on November 25, 2020.**

Research Period (November 25, 2020- December 10, 2020)

News Organization	<i>RepublicTV</i>	<i>Newslaundry</i>
Number of articles	20	14
News frames present	1. A <b>helpful</b> government. 2. <b>Detrimental Opposition</b> parties. 3. <b>Uncooperative</b> farmers.	1. Mainstream reporting as <b>incomplete</b> 2. The Farmer’s <b>concerns as valid</b>

Table 2

**RepublicTV**

Following searches using relevant keywords on *Republicworld.com* between November 25, 2020- December 10, 2020, I retrieved 20 news articles that reported on the

farmers reaching New Delhi on November 5, 2020. The articles on this website are mostly short-form news articles, with word counts ranging from 300-500 words, that provide an overview of the ongoing protests. *RepublicTV's* articles generally place more emphasis on the political side of these protests and how the farmers were disrupting daily life in the area while disregarding all COVID-19 protocols. The articles do not quote any farmers involved in the protests. Instead, they only use quotes from the government and police personnel. The only sources mentioned in these articles appear to be close to the government and the police as no sources close to the farmers were used in the *RepublicTV* coverage. The farmer's side of the story has barely been reported on.

After analyzing the 20 news articles published on *Republicworld.com*, I have observed the occurrence of the following news frames.

**a. A helpful government**

This frame is associated with coverage that uses positive language to support government activities and responses to the protests. *RepublicTV* reported on the government in a positive light and highlighted how the government was paying the most attention to the farmers' demands and trying to address their concerns as effectively as possible. For example, one article from December 1, 2020, noted the Central Government "is continuously trying to resolve their concerns, he (Prime Minister Narendra Modi) expressed confidence that the farm laws will facilitate an increase in their incomes." Similarly, another article stated: "The Union government's move to prepone the talks with farmers' unions comes a few hours after Prime Minister Narendra Modi directly reached out to them during his public address in Varanasi" (Oka, A. December 1, 2020).

Yet another article mobilized this “helpful government” frame by highlighting the steps officials have taken to appease the farmers:

As per sources, the Centre gave a detailed presentation to the farmers' associations during the third round of talks to clear the air about the three agrarian laws. Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar, Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and MoS Commerce Som Parkash are representing the NDA government during the deliberations. Sources added that the Centre assured the farmers that the Agricultural Produce Market Committees and the Minimum Support Price system will continue. (Varma, A. December 1, 2020)

In this excerpt, *RepublicTV* is reiterating that these laws are beneficial for the farmers and are being misunderstood by them. They have endorsed the government's stance on these laws, in an attempt to reinforce the public's trust and present the government in a favorable light, as can be seen again in the following three examples:

This type of coverage has excluded neutral or negative reporting on the ruling government. The sources used to report on the ongoing events are attributed to being close to the ruling government, as seen in the following examples: “According to sources, the government also hinted at setting up a committee which will include representatives of farmers, agricultural experts and its own representatives. However, the farmer leaders reportedly rejected the Centre's offer.” (Varma, A. December 1, 2020)

Sources added that the Centre assured the farmers that the Agricultural Produce Market Committees and the Minimum Support Price system will continue. (Oka, A. December 1, 2020)

According to sources, Congress leader Bhupinder Singh Hooda is using his influence over khap panchayats to reach out to Jat MLAs. (Methri, G. December 1, 2020)

There is no mention of sources close to the farmer unions. Most of the articles analyzed have paid a lot of attention to what the government is doing about the protests. There is a lack of perspective and balance in this reporting because there is minimal

coverage of the farmer's side of the story. The explanation of the farm laws they have provided mobilizes words like 'freeing,' and 'empowering' the farmers.

The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, 2020 aims at freeing the farmers from the constraints of the state Agriculture Produce Market Committees whereby they would be able to sell their produce anywhere. Meanwhile, The Farmers (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, 2020 protects and empowers farmers to engage with processors, wholesalers, large retailers, exporters for farm services. This entails the provision of contract farming. On the other hand, The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act, 2020 specifies that the supply of foodstuffs including cereals, pulses, potato, edible oilseeds, and oils shall be regulated only under exceptional circumstances. (Oka, A. November 30, 2020)

This explanation of the three farm laws clearly outlines the benefits and does not make much of an effort to explain why they may be detrimental to the farmers and their incomes. The concerns of the farmers are only addressed at the end of some news articles published by *RepublicTV*.

#### **b. Detrimental opposition parties**

This frame is associated with coverage that implies the involvement of opposition parties to incite the farmers against the ruling government. Here, the opposition is blamed for spreading 'misinformation' and 'lies':

The Union government's move to prepone the talks with farmers' unions comes a few hours after Prime Minister Narendra Modi directly reached out to them during his public address in Varanasi. Allaying the apprehensions of the farmers regarding the Mandi system and Minimum Support Price, he accused the opposition of spreading lies. (Oka, A. December 1, 2020)

One *RepublicTV* article, for example, reports on how the opposition is conspiring to overthrow the state government of Haryana:

The BJP leadership is confident that it is not the farmers doing politics over the laws but it is the Opposition who are using the farmers, to target the Haryana government. (Methri, G. December 1, 2020)

This type of coverage does not include any positive coverage of the opposition. They are held responsible for pointing out that the new farm laws are detrimental to farmers and causing havoc among farmers during these protests. There are no sources close to the opposition that have been used to verify their claims against the opposition parties and their attempts to ‘hijack’ the protest:

Congress has been contending that the laws are anti-farmer and will impact the concept of minimum support price (MSP). However, the Centre has repeatedly assured that the MSP mechanism will continue to exist even after the new reform laws. Moreover, the new laws will give the farmers the freedom to sell their produce outside of the Mandis, as against the earlier compulsion to sell only through Mandis, while having the option to sell through Mandis too if the farmers want to. (Kamath, P. November 26, 2020)

This excerpt from *RepublicTV*'s coverage points out the discrepancy between what the Congress Party is trying to highlight versus how the ruling government has addressed the issue for the farmers. *RepublicTV* reiterates how the laws increase the opportunity for farmers to sell out of state-controlled markets. The issue the Congress Party is talking about has not been mentioned here. Reporters for *RepublicTV* are promoting the idea of the Congress Party instigating the farmers against the ruling government when there is no need for it, as these laws are beneficial for the farmers.

Prime Minister Modi also accused the opposition of spreading these lies in a public address in Varanasi, Uttar Pradesh. Even the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) has been accused of ‘targeting’ the BJP during this time. This type of coverage is focused on how the opposition parties are ‘coming after’ the ruling government and ‘meddling’ with their

efforts to resolve the issues between them and the farmers, painting the opposition parties in a negative light which might sway public opinion to think of the ruling government positively.

### **c. Uncooperative farmers**

*RepublicTV*'s coverage barely includes quotes directly from the farmers or union leaders. There is no mention of sources close to the farmers throughout this coverage either. The articles instead imply the farmers are stubborn, violent, and uncooperative, despite the BJP government's efforts to address their concerns.

Referring to the farmers' clash with the police on the first two days of the protest with "...protesting farmers picking up one of the metal barricades and tossing it off over a river-bridge," *RepublicTV*'s coverage includes several explanations of why the police used tear gas, water cannons, and *lathi* charge<sup>5</sup> during this tense time. Some articles explain it was to 'disperse' the crowd, some say it was to 'control' the crowd, and some have reported about this as a reaction to the way the protestors have behaved at various borders of the national capital, New Delhi. The "uncooperative farmers" frame is also obvious in the following excerpts:

However, an intense and tense situation was witnessed at the Delhi border on Day 1 and Day 2. On Day 2, visuals at Shambhu, Punjab-Haryana border, showed protesting farmers picking up one of the metal barricades and tossing it off over a river bridge, to which the police retaliated by lathi-charging, water-cannon and tear gas. (Navashree, N. November 28, 2020)

The 'Delhi Chalo' agitation has seen a standoff between thousands of farmers marching mostly from Punjab and Haryana towards the national capital and the police resorting to the use of tear gas and water cannons to prevent them from proceeding further. (Oka, A. November 28, 2020)

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<sup>5</sup> The Hindi word 'lathi' means 'baton.' This is used by the police for crowd control. The word 'baton' has been replaced by 'lathi' and hence the word 'lathi charge' comes about.

Farmers refused to back off from their 'Delhi Chalo' march and were seen standing at various points of Punjab-Haryana with dramatic visuals seen at Shambhu, Tikri, Singhu checkpoints. The Police, while trying to control the mob, fired at least eight rounds of tear gas shells and used water cannons. (Kamath, P. November 27, 2020)

The coverage refers to this protest as an 'agitation,' and a 'stir,' which have negative connotations and may negatively influence the public to believe that the farmers are the real 'troublemakers' in this ordeal. One article even referred to these farmers as 'peasants.'

Several former sportspersons including Padma Shri and Arjuna awardees have extended their support to the agitating farmers and said they will return their awards in protest against the "force" used against the peasants en route to Delhi. (Press Trust of India. December 1, 2020)

The usage of the word 'peasant' could be perceived negatively, as the word was used in the Middle Ages to describe people that were 'low-status, poor, and unsophisticated.'

This type of reporting has only included coverage of the farmers that represent them as being unreasonable or disagreeing to meet with the government to address their concerns. *RepublicTV* has not taken the important step of relaying the farmer's concerns and in turn, has reduced this to just a few sentences towards the end of their news reports.

The examples below help to explain this further.

The farmers have expressed apprehension that the Centre's farm laws would pave the way for the dismantling of the minimum support price system, leaving them at the "mercy" of big corporates. (Pandya, J. December 1, 2020)

Concerns have been raised about the possible exploitation of farmers by big corporates and the applicability of the MSP. (Oka, A. November 29. 2020)

I have previously explained the concerns of the farmers and critics of these laws and it is evident that one or two sentences do not cover the issues completely. These sentences do not provide a complete explanation of the farmer's protests and why they are happening. They have trivialized the aftereffects of these laws and do not provide an in-depth explanation of why farmers think these laws are detrimental to them and the agricultural industry in India.

### **Newslaundry**

Following searches using relevant keywords on *newslaundry.com* between November 25, 2020- December 10, 2020, I retrieved 14 news articles that reported on the farmers reaching New Delhi on November 5, 2020. *Newslaundry* follows a more long-form journalism format with a word count range of 1,000-1,700 words. The news articles on *newslaundry.com* are heavily detailed and do not typically follow the inverted-pyramid structure. Their sources are primarily the farmers participating in the protest. They have not quoted any police or government sources throughout this coverage. This could be due to their farmer-centric stance on the issue, as most mainstream news channels were already covering the government's response to the protests. Their 'Media Shots' category of news articles is solely focused on how other legacy media organizations reported on the protest, and they reported that other outlets largely appeared to be following similar patterns as *RepublicTV*.

After analyzing the 14 news articles about this subject, I have observed the following frames.

#### **a. Mainstream reporting as incomplete**

*Newslaundry* has predetermined categories of articles surrounding the subject. Their ‘media’ category of stories covered mainstream media’s narrative of the protests. They compared the stories published in both digital and print media with what their on-the-ground reporting found.

The article “‘Media has lost our trust’: Why protesting farmers are angry with ‘Godi media’” also explored how the farmers felt while watching the narratives being circulated in the news about them.

“The farmers’ anger towards the media is not “impulsive, surface-level,” Karandeep Singh said. Instead, the movement is experiencing an erasure of trust.

“We are being failed at many levels. Governments are built on the trust of the people, but they have failed us. A security personnel is someone we should be able to trust but they have failed us,” he said, referring to how the police had used water cannons and teargas to stop the farmers from reaching Delhi.” (Suresh, N. December 1, 2020)

*Newslaundry* has also provided detailed accounts of how the farmers participating in the protest have expressed their distrust and outrage towards the ‘Godi’ media. In the article ‘Farmers are angry with ‘Godi Media’ for demonizing them. TV channels double down’ published on December 2, 2020, *Newslaundry* reported,

“Zee News, Republic, Aaj Tak. Don’t cover us,” declared a poster at the Singhu border protest. “You are fake news. #GodiMedia.”

“We aren’t stupid,” Indrajeet Singh, a standup comedian who has been protesting at Singhu, told *Newslaundry*. “We have been watching what anchors like Anjana Om Kashyap and Arnab Goswami say about us. We don’t need their help or coverage.” (Priyadarshini, A. December 2, 2020)

This story further notes how the TV coverage of the protest was extremely politicized and missed the point. Here are the hashtags *RepublicTV* was displaying on their broadcast channel.

The show flashed hashtags such as #FarmersRejectPolitics and taglines such as “Farmers reject politics, talks back,” “Every attempt at politicization fails.” (Priyadarshini, A. December 2, 2020)

While *Newslaundry* does not necessarily use the term ‘Godi Media’ directly to refer to such mainstream outlets, they have chosen to quote farmers and other protestors who use the expression to criticize these news organizations. For example, in the article ‘‘Media has lost our trust’’: Why protesting farmers are angry with ‘Godi media’ they explain how the term “is a constant refrain in conversations with the farmers and their slogans.” The farmers use it to describe *RepublicTV*, *Zee News*, *ABP News* and *Times Now*. It is important to note here that there could be consequences to them repeating the term through source quotes in the headlines and f articles. The repeated mobilization of this term may paint a preemptive negative picture of these news organizations for members of the public who do not watch mainstream news.

**b. The farmer’s concerns as valid**

*Newslaundry’s* coverage that mobilizes this frame includes stories that are longer and more detail-oriented.

The articles ‘A matter of trust: Why farmers want MSP written into law’, ‘Why landless and marginal farmers are the backbone of farmer protests’, and ‘‘We’ll turn Delhi into Punjab’’: Meet Singhu’s women protesters’ go into detail about why the farmers were protesting, how they went about their daily lives at the protest site, and how

the women of the protest were living in their makeshift homes at the border of New Delhi.

As one nears the Singhu protest site, it is impossible not to be struck by a sea of turbaned heads. At first glance, one mostly sees men. Look closer, however, and small groups of women are scattered throughout. They not only participate in protest activities, shouting slogans and carrying placards, but also oversee the making and distribution of food. (Suresh, N. December 10, 2020)

Addressing the concerns of the farmers and relaying this to the public was vital in the coverage of the protests. It offers the public an opportunity to make an informed decision and also adds more context to an already tense situation.

The government says the new farm laws will give farmers more choice in where and to whom to sell their produce. The protesters fear the laws will push small and marginal farmers into penury.

Gurmail Singh, a Mazahabi Sikh belonging to a Dalit caste, is a landless cultivator and farm worker in Rauke Kalan village, located in Nihal Singwala tehsil in Punjab's Moga district. He survives by leasing land, something he may find harder to do once corporates establish bigger farms. (Yadav, A. December 4, 2020)

When the introduction of such stories into the public forum is done well, it can add a lot more context to a situation, appealing to the public to do more of their own research and not accept other incomplete media narratives. The imagery in these articles allows the reader to humanize the farmers and attempts to build a connection between the readers and the farmers. Photo essays are a common occurrence in their coverage of the protests. These photos have captured moments of the protest that are not shown on mainstream media. They are images of the farmers at the protest site and glimpses of their life during this time. There are images of the protest site, tractors parked on the streets, farmers holding large banners, farmers pictured engaging in board games, among

other activities. These images give readers a ‘window’ into the protest site and the people behind the movement. It could help build sympathy for the farmers and their movement.

Throughout this coverage, they have maintained a pro-farmer stance while not mentioning anything negative about the government.

**4.2 Event 2: The Republic Day incident and the Farmer’s Tractor Rally on January 26, 2021.**

Research Period (January 26, 2021 - February 4, 2021)

News Organization	<i>RepublicTV</i>	<i>Newslaundry</i>
Number of articles	51	17
News frames present	1. <b>Violent</b> farmers. 2. The Delhi Police as <b>saviors</b> . 3. Farmer Union Leaders as <b>unrelenting</b> . The <b>nation and democracy in peril</b> .	1. ‘Locals’ protesting as <b>illegitimate and affiliated with the government</b> . 2. Big Media as <b>unreliable</b> . 3. Journalists in <b>danger</b> .

Table 3

Following searches using relevant keywords on *republicworld.com* between January 26, 2021 - February 4, 2021, I retrieved 51 news articles that reported on the Republic Day incident and the Farmer’s Tractor Rally on January 26, 2021. There are several grammatical and spelling issues in the coverage. Information about the incident on January 26, 2021, is repeated several times throughout the 50 articles I analyzed. The reports are vague and mention only half of the details in them. Reporters have mentioned ‘visuals’ and quotes, but have not linked them or provided a source for the reader to verify the information.

Some stories have a political spin and do not add new information, despite the number of articles that have been written. These stories account for just a sentence or two about the political issue and repetitive information about the Rally and its aftermath. This description implicates the farmers and makes the police look like they ‘saved the day.’ The analysis of these articles resulted in the following frames.

**a. Violent farmers**

The majority of the articles with this frame have deemed the farmers responsible for the carnage that occurred on January 26, 2021. Headlines such as “Open Violence Breaks Out At Farmers' Tractor Rally; Promise Of Peaceful Protest Shattered,” “Farmers Invade Iconic Red Fort & Plant Own Flag; Shocking Violence Witnessed Across Delhi” and so on, lead the reader to believe that this ordeal was caused by the farmers, unprovoked, especially on India’s 72nd Republic Day. Terms such as ‘agitation,’ ‘violent mobs,’ and ‘vandals,’ have pushed a narrative that has villainized the farmers and their intentions of the protest.

Even after clear instruction, that no flags except the Tricolour will be used, the farmers not only put flags of the unions but also marched with flags on bikes. Shocking visuals show that farmers climb atop Red Fort and put their flags on its podium. (Navashree, N. January 26, 2021)

The excerpt above emphasizes how the farmers did not comply with the rules the Delhi Police set for the Tractor Rally. Using the words like ‘even after’ and ‘not only’ suggest disobedience and disregard for the rules.

Some stories imply that the farmers broke barricades and entered the capital city despite the police’s instructions, but then fail to give the reader any explanation of what caused the events of the Tractor Rally to turn sour.

In a clear violation of the conditions laid down by the police, farmers were seen carrying sticks and riding horses. Thereafter, the anti-farm laws protesters entered the premises of the Red Fort and unfurled their own flags from its ramparts. (Oka, A. January 27, 2021)

The reporters have used the same descriptions of the rally and the clashes between police and the farmers toward the end of most news articles and have even stopped summarizing the farmer's demands and concerns with the laws, which were initially present in the first few articles of this research period. These steps show the ignorance of the news outlet toward the farmers and their side of the story. It is not a balanced portrayal of the issue.

The protesting farmers on January 26 entered the national capital from three routes emanating from the Singhu border, the Tikri border, and the Ghazipur border, as Delhi Police gave their nod for a peaceful protest. However, despite Samyukt Kisan Morcha's assurance and Delhi Police's conditions for the tractor march, violence broke out as the farmers entered Delhi. The protesting farmers with their tractors broke the barricades and cemented barriers at Delhi's Mukarba Chowk, prompting Delhi Police to use tear gas shells against them. (Navashree, N. January 28, 2021)

Throughout these articles, no quote or source represents the farmer's side and their explanation of the day's events. The reporters have not appeared to investigate the cause of the mishap and have only provided an overview of the situation and political developments arising from it. The attention of this news organization seems to be focused on the ruling government's response to this event and how the opposition is supporting the ongoing violence, while not addressing the question of why this occurred in the first place.

#### **b. The Delhi Police as saviors**

This frame explores news articles that state how the police handled the aftermath of the Tractor Rally going awry. It describes how the Delhi Police only meant to ‘retaliate’ to the protestor’s actions.

In an attempt to control the situation, the Delhi Police used tear gas to disperse the farmers gathered at the location, even as the farmers proceeded to destroy barricades and other impediments in their path and violated the pre-designated route. (Rohatgi, G. January 26, 2021)

This bit highlights actions that painted the farmers in a negative light. The farmers ‘destroying barricades and other impediments in their path’ have made the movement look violent, and imply they would go to any lengths to achieve their agenda despite being given a route and time to support their cause. The article gives the reader information through police sources, but none through farmer sources.

The Home Minister of India, Amit Shah, visited the injured police which made headlines - “Amit Shah Meets Delhi Police Injured In Farmers' Riot; Yogendra Yadav Now Plays Victim.” This headline has already labeled the incident a ‘riot’ and how farmer union leader is ‘playing a victim.’ The negative narrative for the farmers begins before the reader can even get to the body of the story. This news article reported on the meeting between Amit Shah and the police, and how the Delhi Police Personnel would be given bravery awards for their service, however, there is no information on why some protestors deviated from the route they were permitted to travel on. It also included a questionable explanation of the farmer union leader, Yogendra Yadav, which will be discussed further under the frame ‘Insulting Farmer Leaders.’

The description of the incident has been used in many articles analyzed during the given research period. This description further states that the Delhi Police were

outnumbered after they ‘permitted’ the protestors to enter the capital city on January 26, 2021. According to the reports, some protestors then went on to disobey the orders and:

...overran Delhi, with a group of them breaching Red Fort's ramparts and planting their flag atop its podium. One of the protesters breached the Red Fort and unfurled a saffron flag and a yellow flag bearing the holy Sikh symbol atop the dome of the Fort. (Navashree, N. January 27, 2021)

The excerpt regarding the Sikh holy flag being hoisted atop The Red Fort was fact-checked by *Newslaundry*, which *RepublicTV* has failed to mention. According to *RepublicTV*, all of the measures the Delhi Police took were to retaliate and control the ‘mob.’ Despite the injuries and being outnumbered, the police saved the day and protected the citizens in the capital city.

### **c. Farmer Union leaders as unrelenting**

This frame was observed in coverage that positions farmer union leaders as unwilling to compromise, and that uses insulting or defaming language to discredit them. The following excerpt from the news article “Amit Shah Meets Delhi Police Injured In Farmers' Riot; Yogendra Yadav Now Plays Victim” perfectly describes what falls under this frame.

Meanwhile, "Farmer leader," "Political activist" & "Swaraj India chief" Yogendra Yadav has alleged that the BJP troll army has launched a hate campaign against him." Yogendra Yadav had cut a sorry figure after the violence, appearing on TV and attempting to express how disheartened he was that matters had got out of hand, seemingly intent on continuing the charade of being a farmer leader. (Pandya, J. January 28, 2021)

The purpose of this type of news reporting could be to discredit the union leaders and further paint the farmers in a negative light. The use of quotation marks while referring to the leader appears to be sarcastic and undermines his authority as a leader of

the union. This is implied through the wording “...seemingly intent on continuing the charade of being a farmer leader.”

Misrepresented details can lead the reader to believe that these leaders support the violence that took place and will go to any lengths to achieve their motive.

Even as violence broke out, farm union leader Rakesh Tikait has denied reports of violence and claimed that the march is peaceful. BKU leader Rakesh Tikait said that the Centre should repeal the farm laws and farmers will continue to protest. (Navashree, N. January 26, 2021)

This coverage is incomplete and omits the fact that there were parts of the rally that did not see this violence and were peaceful. However, *RepublicTV* still labeled the entire movement as ‘violent.’

#### **d. The nation and democracy in peril**

Articles that carry this frame highlight how the Tractor Rally going awry on India’s 72nd Republic Day was ‘shameful’ for the country to witness. The language used in the article “Delhi Violence: 9 Teams Formed By Delhi Police To Nab Culprits; Paramilitary Under Command” published on January 28, 2021, describes the Tractor Rally as a ‘shocking anarchy’ that gripped New Delhi on Republic Day.

On Republic Day, shock gripped the nation as thousands of farmers who had promised to hold a peaceful tractor rally on the occasion of Republic Day within the national capital turned rogue waving swords and sticks and breaking through the barricades of their designated rally route entered Central Delhi, shameful visuals. (Verma, A. January 28, 2021)

The use of words like ‘turned rogue’ and ‘shameful visuals’ imply how the farmers have damaged so much more than just some barricades and vehicles in the capital city. It implies disobedience to the law and disrespect for the nation and its citizens. The

farmers have been proclaimed as the ‘villains’ of this story and are capable of going to any lengths to achieve their agenda.

By reiterating that the Tractor rally went awry on the 72nd Republic Day of India, a day that is paramount to independent India, *RepublicTV* is reminding its readers to be intolerant of the rampage the farmers have caused.

In a shocking development on India's 72nd Republic Day, one of the protesting farmers breached the Red Fort and unfurled a saffron flag and a yellow flag bearing the holy Sikh symbol atop the dome of the Fort on Tuesday, as the farmers' tractor rally turned violent at several points in Delhi. (Karthikeyan S. January 26, 2021)

The article has particularly mentioned the Sikh flag. According to Dr. Navdeep Kaur in his study ‘Role of Sikh Memory in Farmers’ Protest in India 2020-21: A Study’ the significance of the flag comes from the Sikhs from Punjab and Haryana who have led the movement.

The farmers from Punjab were ‘Jat Sikhs’ who held the protest from the front. Farmer unions in Punjab started state-wide agitation against the bills by protesting at local *chowks*, railway stations, and toll plazas across the state. It continued for three months. However, as the Modi government remained unmoved and unimpressed, Punjab and Haryana farmers’ unions gave a call to all farmers for “Delhi Chalo” to move to New Delhi to protest in the national capital. (Kaur. N. April 18, 2022)

One quote used in the article “After Delhi Violence, Singhu Locals Protest Demanding Farmers Leave; Cops Play Peacemaker” conveniently describes the trope *RepublicTV* is trying to spread:

What happened on January 26th was a direct attack on the Constitution and Democracy of India. One should speak up against what happened. They should rise above politics. “What happened with Delhi Police is wong [sic]" another local said.” (Prabhu S. January 28, 2021)

Disregarding the typo in the quote with the word ‘wrong,’ this quote further endorses the trope of farmers being violent, disrespectful, and behaving like a mob. Adding that the locals of the protest site said this, *RepublicTV* further established that even citizens agreed with their views.

*RepublicTV* repeatedly used terms like ‘shocking,’ ‘shameful,’ and that farmers “...delivered a national insult hoisting a religious flag from the ramparts of the Red Fort, a place reserved for India's Tricolour” (Pandya, J. January 28, 2021).

Through this narrative, they also perpetuated the image that the farmers were being disrespectful towards the nation while violating the rules the police had set for the Tractor Rally.

### **Newslaundry**

Following searches using relevant keywords on *newslaundry.com* between January 26, 2021 - February 4, 2021, I retrieved 17 news articles that reported on the Republic Day incident and the Farmer’s Tractor Rally on January 26, 2021. Compared to RepublicTV’s online articles, the coverage throughout these 18 articles has been more detailed and farmer-centric.

#### **a. ‘Locals’ protesting as illegitimate and affiliated with the government**

There are five articles out of the 18 that were about the clashes that happened between the ‘locals’ that lived at the Singhu and Tikri border and the farmers that set up their protest sites at these points on January 28, 2021, and January 29, 2021. The articles include detailed accounts of the incident and all the articles have quotes from the people who live there and their problems with the protest. The articles include the names,

occupations, and pictures of people interviewed for the story and their accounts of what occurred on these days.

In the article ‘Who told protesting farmers to leave Tikri on January 29? Locals say a mob mobilised by BJP’ *Newslaundry* has interviewed people that live near the protest site. These people have been pictured in the article and *Newslaundry* has tried to fact-check and verify what these locals have said.

Most of them said the farmer protest wasn’t inconveniencing them in any major way. The only problem they faced was that they had to take longer routes home since the police have barricaded many roads in the area. Some of the shopkeepers, however, did complain that customer footfall from nearby areas like Kachchi Colony has dwindled, hurting their businesses.

“Since many of us have our shops and businesses here we face problems fetching raw materials,” said Naveen Kumar, a Tikri resident. “We sincerely urge the government to take back the laws.”

Asked about the mob, another villager, Sandeep Kumar, said, “It was claimed that they were from the area. But we know no one from our area joined the mob. They were all politically-affiliated.” (Priyadharshini, A. February 4, 2021)

The article ‘Singhu attack: Farmers ask why the police stood back’ published on January 31, 2021, also covers the clashes between ‘locals’ of the protest site and the farmers.

“Twenty women were inside the tent when the stones started raining on us,’ Kulwinder Kaur said, recounting the January 29 attack on farmers protesting against the Narendra Modi government’s farm laws at Singhu on Delhi’s border. The ‘ladies only’ tent was pitched at the entrance to the protest site, and housed 15-20 women.

When the attack happened, Kulwinder recalled, an elderly woman of around 70 was bathing in a curtained corner. “Our volunteers rushed in and saved her,” she said, adding that as the women began running out, another round of stones rained.” (Suresh, N. January 31, 2021)

While *RepublicTV* has written only one article on the clashes between the locals and the farmers at the protest site and has not interviewed these ‘locals’ for their story. *Newslaundry’s* coverage is far more detailed and provides the reader with more context of the incident. One article even linked to a story reported by an independent fact-checking news organization *Alt-News* to highlight this. *Alt-News* was launched by Pratik Sinha and Mohammed Zubair in 2017 to combat fake news. The organization’s sole aim is to verify news that is floating on the internet and on mainstream media. By adding this element, it enables the reader to be able to verify information on their own. It helps with building trust and credibility for *Newslaundry*.

**b. Big Media as unreliable**

This news frame was present in the fact-checking elements in these news articles. These articles help provide the reader with details about the incident that have not appeared in the coverage by *RepublicTV*. The article “‘You cannot unsee us’: Driving with farmers during the tractor rally’ goes through the events of the day on January 26, 2021. The reporters were on the ground and witnessed what was going on first-hand.

Within an hour, the news began pouring in on social media that the farmers from all three of Delhi’s borders – Singhu, Tikri and Gazipur – had deviated from the route assigned to them by the police, and were forcing their ways into Delhi. The police teargassed and lathi-charged the protesters. By 2 pm, the farmers had entered Red Fort and unfurled the Nishan Sahib, the Sikh religious flag.

News channels labelled the rally as “violent” and “chaotic,” even as a form of “anarchy.” At least one farmer died.

However, the scene at Singhu was peaceful. When asked about the violence, a policeman on duty was clueless. “No, as you can see, it is peaceful here and the farmers are following the right route,” he said. “But then this protest is so large. How can one know what happens in another corner?” (Suresh, N. January 27, 2021)

Another article ‘ABP Ganga says a village near Singhu is hurting from farmer protests. It’s nowhere near Singhu’ has called out news channel *ABP Ganga* for reporting wrong information about the unrest between the ‘locals’ of the protest site and the farmers that have been camped out since November 29, 2020.

ABP Ganga published a report on January 31 titled “The Story of Singhu Border: Reality Check of Kisan Andolan Site”. The latter half of the 21-minute report on YouTube focused on problems supposedly faced by the people of Karala village due to the blocked border. Aastha Kaushik, the reporter, stressed that the protest had caused an “economic crisis” for the villagers.

However, there were glaring factual inaccuracies in the report. A Google Maps search shows that Singhu does not lie on the way to Haryana, Uttar Pradesh or Delhi from Karala. The village is 24 km southwest of Singhu, and not the “Kisan Andolan Site” or “Farmers Protest Site” as the title of the video proclaims. (NL Team. February 1, 2021)

While analyzing this, I realized the amount of information I was missing about the incident. *RepublicTV’s* coverage was limited to how the protest was violent, a shame for the nation, and the ‘anarchy’ the nation had to witness, while *Newslaundry* focused more on the farmers and their perspective on the incidents that occurred. But for readers of *Newslaundry*, this perspective could be the only one they are fully aware of if they do not consume mainstream news media. Since *Newslaundry* does not pay much heed to the political side of these issues, some readers may not know the full extent of the situation.

### **c. Journalists in danger**

Press freedom in India has come under scrutiny in recent times. According to the 2023 Press Freedom Index, India slumped by 11 places from its position of 150 last year. As India is placed at 161 this year, this issue must be addressed. *Newslaundry* did so in some of their coverage by using the “journalists in danger” frame.

The article “‘A mistake is not a crime’: Press fraternity protests sedition FIRs<sup>6</sup> (First Information Reports) against six journalists’ published on January 31, 2021, is about journalists Rajdeep Sardesai, Mrinal Pande, Zafar Agha, Vinod Jose, Paresh Nath, Anant Nath being charged with

...sedition and criminal conspiracy, and promoting enmity for reporting and tweeting on the death of a protester during the Republic Day tractor rally organized by farmers protesting against the Narendra Modi government’s farm laws. (Kumar, A.)

Navreet Singh, the protestor that lost his life when his tractor overturned after he drove into a police barricade, was initially reported to be shot dead by the police.

According to the news article,

The Caravan had suggested, based on an eyewitness testimony, that Navreet was likely shot by the police. Sardesai, Pande, and Agha indicated the same in their tweets. Sardesai had also said on live TV that Navreet had been shot in the head. In an evening broadcast, he clarified that he had jumped the gun and that the police’s version, that Navreet died after his tractor overturned, “appears much more credible than what the protesters are claiming”. He later deleted his tweet and also posted the police’s denial; Pande and Agha deleted their tweets as well. (Kumar A. January 31, 2021)

The article “‘Intent to intimidate’: Newspaper editorials on sedition case against journalists and Tharoor’ published on January 30, 2021, entails opinions of three leading English newspapers on the matter - *The Indian Express*, *The Hindu*, and *The Times of India*.

*RepublicTV* has not reported on this issue at all. Their stance on this matter was unclear among all the news articles they published about the protest being violent.

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<sup>6</sup> First Information Report (FIR) is a written document prepared by the police when they receive information about the commission of a cognizable offence. It is a report of information that reaches the police first in point of time and that is why it is called the First Information Report. It is generally a complaint lodged with the police by the victim of a cognizable offence or by someone on his/her behalf. (Commonwealth Human Rights Initiative)

**Further Observations:**

While *Newslaundry*'s reporting appears to be thorough, they do not talk about the government's version of the incident. They do not report on the police personnel injured during the 'clashes' between the farmers and the police. This may be done in an effort to 'complete' the story and provide their reader with a less-reported perspective.

Eyewitnesses/interviewees have been pictured and *Newslaundry* has attempted to verify claims made in the interviews. The number of articles written about the 'locals' that were affiliated with the government is evidence of bias towards the farmers making its way to the surface.

**4.3 Event 3: The aftermath of the tweet by musician Rihanna on February 2, 2021, regarding the protests.**

(Research Period February 2, 2021 - February 24, 2021)

News Organization	<i>RepublicTV</i>	<i>Newslaundry</i>
Number of articles	71	10
News frames present	1. A <b>global conspiracy</b> against India. 2. India is able to <b> fend for itself</b>	1. <b>Press Freedom</b> as important. 2. The farmers <b>cannot be silenced.</b>

Table 4

On February 2, 2021, Rihanna tweeted “why aren’t we talking about this?! #FarmersProtest <https://t.co/obmIIXhK9S>.” On the same day, climate activist Greta Thunberg tweeted, “We stand in solidarity with the #FarmersProtest in India.

Musician Rihanna posted this tweet on February 2, 2021, to bring attention to the farmer's movement after reports of an internet cut-off in the area came out. As noted in Ch. 1, climate activist Greta Thunberg joined the list of international personalities that tweeted about the protests. Soon after her tweet, she released a digital toolkit that detailed how citizens can amplify the protests online as well offline. This toolkit then led to the arrest of activist Disha Ravi among others. She was arrested for being affiliated with Greta Thunberg's Friday's for Future<sup>7</sup> movement. She had edited small parts of the toolkit that Thunberg had published to amplify the Farmer's Protest both online and offline, which led to her arrest and being charged with sedition and criminal conspiracy.

### **RepublicTV**

Following searches using relevant keywords on *Republicworld.com* between February 2, 2021 - February 24, 2021, I retrieved 71 news articles that reported on the tweets, the arrest of activist Disha Ravi, and other journalists in India. An analysis of these articles resulted in the following frames.

#### **a. A global conspiracy against India**

This frame is present throughout the articles I have analyzed. When it came to musician Rihanna's tweet, even the news organization's editor-in-chief Arnab Goswami released a statement in response to the "half-baked statements" about the ongoing farmers' protest:

"I bet Rihanna doesn't know the full form of MSP. It's both frightful and appalling that some semi-literates are propping her up as a farmers' leader," Arnab

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<sup>7</sup> Fridays For Future is a youth-led and organised movement that began in August 2018, after Greta Thunberg and other young activists sat in front of the Swedish parliament every schoolday for three weeks, to protest against the lack of action on the climate crisis. ([fridaysforfuture.org](https://fridaysforfuture.org))

said, adding "We don't need Rihanna, Greta, or Lilly Singh to tell us how to run our country. We have an elected government. The unelectables are showing their frustration by supporting the foreign hand." (Kapoor, C. February 3, 2021)

This editorial statement has set the precedent for any *RepublicTV* coverage that mobilizes this "conspiracy" frame. They reiterate that 'foreign celebrities' have no reason to 'meddle' in the country's affairs, and that the tweets collectively are part of an international conspiracy against India. With the use of the term 'unelectables' Goswami is talking about the Opposition parties that are speaking in favor of the tweets. The repetition of the statement issued by the Ministry of External Affairs in all the articles that talk about Rihanna's tweet almost forces the readers to go along with this narrative and discredit the people who are trying to bring more attention to the farmer's movement.

The part of the statement from the MEA (Ministry of External Affairs) that is published reads as follows,

"The temptation of sensationalist social media hashtags and comments, especially when resorted to by celebrities and others, is neither accurate nor responsible," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a curt statement. The ministry also said the Parliament of India passed the reformist legislation relating to the agricultural sector, and noted that some of the vested interest groups have tried to mobilize international support against India. (Kapoor, C. February 3, 2021)

The article "Jaishankar Reacts To Expose On Greta Thunberg's 'toolkit', Alleges 'it Has Revealed A Lot' published on February 6, 2021, explicitly calls Greta Thunberg's 'toolkit' a "global conspiracy" and follows it with the statement mentioned above. It may be important to note that there are grammatical errors in the subheadline of this article. This toolkit was created to amplify the farmer's movement and to increase support both online and offline.

There is also a particular sentence used in all the articles that report which Indian celebrity or politician has reacted to Rihanna's tweet. It reads as follows,

The tweet comes in the backdrop of an almighty row over pop sensation Rihanna and climate activist Greta Thunberg commenting on the ongoing farmers' protest on the outskirts of the national capital Delhi. (Narayanan, K. February 4, 2021)

This sentence emphasizes the divide between the Indian government and the 'foreign celebrities' that have 'waded' into the matter.

When Greta Thunberg published a toolkit to her Twitter to help amplify the protest, youth activist and co-founder of the Indian chapter of Fridays For Future Disha Ravi was arrested. She was charged with sedition for editing the toolkit.

*RepublicTV* has published 30 articles that report on the arrest and court proceedings of Disha Ravi. The articles have not failed to note in detail who is for and against her arrest. Out of the 46 published articles, there are several that repeat the same information about how she was arrested and what this toolkit is about. *RepublicTV's* claims of how this toolkit was created by a Khalistani organization do not appear to be supported by any other sources or hyperlinked news articles. The reader is unable to discover more information about this claim through their reporting.

News reports include quotes from ministers that liken the activist to terrorists:

In a shocking comparison, 3-time BJP MP PC Mohan on Sunday, likened climate activist Disha Ravi to terrorists - Ajmal Kasab and Burhan Wani - whom he pointed out were 21, similar to the jailed activist. (Karthikeyan, S. February 14, 2021)

Instead of questioning her arrest and the charges, *RepublicTV* chose to delve into WhatsApp chats between Greta Thunberg and Disha Ravi to establish connections

between them and Khalistan Group, Poetic Justice Foundation, ‘exposing’ a global conspiracy. The reporters for this website have cited ‘sources’ that uncover details such as:

...MO Dhaliwal of Poetic Justice Foundation, who is associated with the Khalistani organization had contacted Nikita Jacob through his Canadian colleague Puneet and their collective motive was to create Twitter storm ahead of Republic Day. (Rohatgi, G. February 15, 2021)

There is no mention of who these sources are close to. It appears as though *RepublicTV* has not investigated these claims for themselves.

Further, while listing the updates Greta Thunberg made to the toolkit, RepublicTV has used headlines such as ‘Slander against India remains,’ ‘Republic Day Plot Whitewashed’ after they claim to have ‘exposed’ the international propaganda in the previous version of the digital toolkit.

Climate and environmental activist Greta Thunberg on Thursday shared an "updated toolkit" for the ongoing farmers’ protest against Centre's agriculture laws, after deleting the previous one which exposed the international propaganda against India. The updated document is a toned-down version of the deleted one which was titled 'Global Farmers Strike- First Wave.' (Digital Desk. February 4, 2021)

*RepublicTV* has tried to discredit those that have spoken about the matter and categorized them as ‘vested interest groups that are trying to enforce their agenda’:

Teen climate activist Greta Thunberg and US Vice President Kamala Harris' niece are among several people from the international community who have come out in support of the farmers' protest against the Centre's new agriculture laws, though in most cases their remarks can't be seen as any more than taking cognizance. (Kapoor, C. February 3, 2021)

**b. India is able to fend for itself**

This frame occurs hand-in-hand with the “conspiracy” one listed above. It details how the Indian government has done everything in its power to help the farmers settle this matter. Reporters have included statements and details of the protest in these articles that broach how the Indian government has indulged in several rounds of debate with the farmer unions and there is still an impasse on the two sides.

While the last round of talks lasted for nearly 5 hours, the farmers claimed that the two sides sat face-to-face for less than 30 minutes. Maintaining that there was no problem in the three agrarian laws, Union Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar categorically said that the Union government is ready for another meeting only if the farmers want to discuss this proposal. (Kapoor, C. February 3, 2021)

This paragraph is present in most news articles that report on the responses of Indian celebrities and politicians to Rihanna’s tweet, reiterating how the laws were only passed after “a full debate and discussion”:

In a strongly-worded statement, the MEA made it clear that the farm reforms were enacted by the Parliament after a full debate and discussion. Maintaining that only a very small section of farmers have reservations about these laws, it mentioned that the Centre has not only conducted 11 rounds of talks with farm unions but also offered to keep the implementation of the laws on hold. (Vachhatani, J. February 3, 2021)

The coverage of this frame has been used to remind readers which side they should be on. The recurring use of the same Republic Day Violence description within these articles too, continues to be maligning for the farmers and tarnishes the motive of the protest.

As India celebrated its 72nd Republic Day, the farmers' tractor rally which was planned on nine pre-decided routes turned violent at points. Some farmers forcibly entered Central Delhi, clashing with Delhi police and planted flags at the Red Fort. The entire area saw chaotic scenes for hours as the protesters threw stones at police and damaged vehicles. (Banerjee, S. February 3, 2021)

**Further Observations:**

*RepublicTV's* coverage also placed emphasis on the hashtags used by the celebrities to tweet in favor of the government, **#IndiaTogether** and **#IndiaAgainstPropoganda**.

Bollywood actor Suniel Shetty has come out in support of the statement and has condemned the dangerous 'half-truth' and also used hashtags - **#IndiaTogether** and **#IndiaAgainstPropaganda**. (Banerjee, S. February 3, 2021)

She took to Twitter and accused the 'Khalistanis' of breaking the country. She used the **#IndiaAgainstPropaganda** hashtag as well, as a clarion call. (Banerjee, S. February 3, 2021)

How frequently new articles are published makes them frivolous as no new information is being added to them. There are instances throughout the coverage of *RepublicTV* where articles contain information on a situation which is then recycled to create other news articles, thus adding no new knowledge on the subject.

The articles also appear to have only superficial information without any independent investigation into the subject being talked about. The Disha Ravi and Republic Day incidents coverage are examples of this practice.

**Newslaundry**

Following searches using relevant keywords on *newslaundry.com* between February 2, 2021 - February 24, 2021, I retrieved 10 news articles that reported on the tweets, the arrest of activist Disha Ravi and other journalists in India. An analysis of these articles resulted in the following frames.

**a. Press freedom as important**

*Newslaundry* decided to pursue another angle to the story around the aftermath of the tweet and the toolkit. When Greta Thunberg published the toolkit to help amplify the protest, youth activist and co-founder of the Indian chapter of Fridays For Future, Disha Ravi was arrested. She was charged with sedition for editing two lines of it. Out of the 10 stories published on the website, five of them are on this incident and how her arrest was problematic. Apart from the details of her arrest and the toolkit, *Newslaundry* has noted how the Delhi Police said the toolkit was created to tarnish India's image and incite violence in the country.

The article 'Why Disha Ravi's arrest should worry independent media platforms' is an opinion piece that addresses the situation of the free press in India. This editorial implies that the Modi government goes after people that speak against it.

Whenever there is dissent, agitation, protests against the government, seek out "andolanjeevi" and spin a conspiracy theory about what they had planned. It doesn't matter if they were even present when the supposed crime took place. Moreover, in this era of "atmanirbharta," or self-reliance, any association with a "foreign" organization automatically makes you a suspect. (Sharma, K. February 18, 2021)

An 'andolanjeevi' is a Hindi term used to describe someone that 'thrives on protests' and is always participating in them. This angle of the story is relevant at a time when India's press freedom is at its worst. India has fallen below Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, which is ranked 152 out of 180, according to the World Press Freedom Index 2023 report.

#### **b. Tenacious farmers**

This frame is omnipresent in *Newslaundry's* coverage of the protest. They have been reporting from the ground throughout the duration of the protest and this instance was no different.

The article “‘Why is it wrong?’: Singhu farmers ask why media is upset if they get support globally’ published on February 24, 2021, is an example of this. Reporters asked farmers about the tweets that were made in their favor and how they felt about it. Some farmers were not even aware of the toolkit that Greta Thunberg published. This fact seems to have been omitted by the reporters of *RepublicTV*.

Tajender Punia from Haryana was a rare exception. He had seen both the tweets, Rihanna’s and Greta’s. “I just want to say one thing: why is it wrong to talk about someone’s rights?” he asked. (David, S. February 24, 2021)

On February 1, 2021, Twitter "withheld" 250 accounts in India after receiving a court order from the Ministry of Electronics and IT and law enforcement organizations. Among these were the accounts of a farmer association, activists, and the *Caravan*<sup>8</sup> magazine. The reason given for blocking these accounts was to maintain law and order. However, Twitter later reinstated these accounts on the same day. This prompted the Ministry of Information Technology to issue several warnings to Twitter. They ordered the company to restrict over 1,100 accounts, tweets, and hashtags, and threatened that failure to comply with these warnings could result in legal action against the company.

The government’s digital clampdown did not end here. In the first week of February, it asked YouTube to take down two Punjabi songs about the farmer protests. The songs, Ailaan by Kanwar Grewal and Asi

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<sup>8</sup> *The Caravan* is an independent, subscriber-based Indian news magazine that practices long-form narrative journalism with a focus on politics and culture. It claims to be the first long-form narrative journalism magazine in India.

Vadangey by Himmat Sandhu, are no longer available on the platform. (Munjil, D. February 22, 2021)

In the article ‘‘You ban our songs, we’ll make new ones’’: Kanwar Grewal won’t stop singing of farmer protests’ *Newslaundry* interviewed a farmer whose song was one of the two that was taken down on YouTube. He was asked about the song and why it could have been taken down.

‘‘Firstly, the song was taken down without giving us any intimation. We sent a mail to YouTube and were told that it violates the government’s guidelines,’’ said Harjinder Laddi, the producer of the song and Grewal’s brother. ‘‘After that we mailed them multiple times but got no satisfactory answer. We even asked them to specify which department of the government contacted them and what they said the violation was.’’ (Munjil, D. February 22, 2021)

Through these stories, *Newslaundry* is highlighting the spirit of the farmers during this time. This excerpt signals how they tried to get their message to the public through various means and relentlessly sought after the reason for the video being taken down. This story shows readers how motivated the farmers are to get their intent and message out to the rest of the world.

#### **4.4 Event 4: The Farmers being blamed for the oxygen shortage in New Delhi during the second wave of COVID-19**

Research Period (April 20, 2021 - May 13, 2021)

This section does not have as many articles as the other events that fulfill the need for it to be a standalone frame, but the narrative relayed to the Indian public at this time is essential to note. While the textual coverage does not give much information apart from blaming the protest for the delay of the oxygen reaching New Delhi, this aligns with the pattern of *RepublicTV* bad-mouthing the farmers. First, they were called ‘violent’ by the

news organization; then they were called ‘uncooperative,’ and now they were blamed for the oxygen shortage in the nation’s capital with only one document—an unverified letter from an oxygen supply company — used as evidence for this claim. This ties into the other frames I have found that malign the farmers and their intent. As for *Newslaundry’s* coverage, it follows the same pattern of reporting on the ‘other’ side - here it is the patients that are affected by the lack of oxygen supply during this time.

News Organization	<i>RepublicTV</i>	<i>Newslaundry</i>
Number of articles	3	7
News frames present	1. The farmers as a <b>public health/COVID-19 risk.</b>	1. Citizens need <b>help.</b> 2. <b>Cooperative</b> Farmers

Table 5

**RepublicTV**

Following searches using relevant keywords on republicworld.com between April 20, 2021 - May 13, 2021, I retrieved three news articles that reported on the farmers being blamed for the oxygen shortage in New Delhi during the deadliest COVID-19 wave in India. An analysis of these articles resulted in the following frames.

**a. The farmers as a public health/COVID-19 risk**

These articles cover the oxygen crisis very briefly, but point out other information in more detail, like how the protest was blocking emergency vehicles, and how the BJP and state government of New Delhi ‘attacking’ each other for this situation. The coverage blamed the farmers for the delay in oxygen supply to the hospitals in New Delhi, citing a letter from an oxygen supply company called INOX Air Products the outlet had got a hold of.

As the national capital waits for critical Oxygen supply, over 20,000 protesting farmers are moving towards Tikri Border from different parts of Punjab thereby blocking the highways. The protesting Kisan Union 'Ugrahan' has given a call to farmers to gather at Tikri Border. This comes on the back of a prominent supplier of Oxygen for hospitals in Delhi stating that its truck was delayed by over two hours as a result of the protest call given by the farmers, this at the Singhu border. (Prabhu, S. April 21, 2021)

The other two *RepublicTV* articles that covered this event recounted how the ruling government blamed the Chief Minister of New Delhi for the shortage.

As the national capital struggles with an acute shortage of oxygen, the BJP has attacked the ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) for the looming shortage of oxygen supply in Delhi hospitals. BJP leader Amit Malviya on Wednesday hit out at Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal and his cabinet for the situation. Amit Malviya remarked that the Delhi CM and his ministers should ensure the supply of oxygen in hospitals. (Prabhu, S. April 21, 2021)

While these articles have detailed why there is a shortage, no new information was published after this story. No sources from the farmer's movement were contacted to verify this claim.

On Monday, the Delhi government set up a 24-member committee to ensure "rational" use of oxygen for the treatment of COVID-19 patients. An order issued by the Health Department said the 'Oxygen Audit Committee' will identify areas of wasteful consumption.

The consumption of oxygen has undergone a quantum increase with the admission of a large number of serious patients who require oxygen support, it said. Delhi Deputy Chief Minister Manish Sisodia on Tuesday said the Centre should be "sensitive and active" in handling the situation so that there is no clamour among states over its supply. (Press Trust of India. April 21, 2021)

### **Newslaundry**

Following searches using relevant keywords on newslaundry.com between April 20, 2021 - May 13, 2021, I retrieved seven news articles that reported on the farmers being blamed for the oxygen shortage in New Delhi during the deadliest COVID-19 wave in India. An analysis of these articles resulted in the following frames.

**a. Citizens need help.**

These articles focus more on the patients that were affected by the oxygen shortage, not just in New Delhi but also in Uttar Pradesh. Among these articles, one investigates a monetary scam being run by an individual who preyed on the urgency of his victims' situations and stole money from them. These victims were promised oxygen cylinders, but they were never delivered.

The article "If we get Covid, it's Modi's fault': Why farmers at Delhi's borders aren't leaving' published on May 13, 2021, caters to the farmer's perspective of this issue. Reporters have interviewed the farmers at the site and covered various topics - COVID-19 protocols for the protest site, if the protests should have been called off, and the future of the protest.

Elderly people are also given Vitamin C and Vitamin D tablets every day. After every langar, farmers are given kadha, a herbal tea that is supposed to boost immunity. This concoction has been recommended multiple times by the government, including Modi, but again there is no scientific basis that it helps with Covid.

"Moreover, we have a team of 40 doctors attending to the protesters," Rajewal added. "We have 10 oxygen cylinders and 10 beds on standby. If anyone gets fever, we immediately give them medicines to bring it down." (Suresh, N. May 13, 2021)

**b. Cooperative Farmers**

*Newslaundry* addressed the farmers being blamed for the shortage of oxygen in New Delhi and debunked the claim altogether by including images of the paths the farmers cleared for the oxygen tanks and emergency vehicles. There is no political coverage of this issue like *RepublicTV* has done where they constantly have articles published about what every political leader has to say about the issue.

Even as the BJP accused the farmers of blocking the route, the Samyukth Kisan Morcha, the umbrella group of farmer leaders, cleared one side of the highway to ensure the free movement of oxygen tankers, ambulance and emergency services. (Suresh, N. May 13, 2021)

This statement is also supported by images of the barricades the Delhi Police has placed at the protest site which made it harder for the emergency services to enter the city.

**4.5 Event 5: The Lakhimpur Kheri Incident**

Research Period (October 3, 2021 - October 17, 2021)

News Organization	<i>RepublicTV</i>	<i>Newslaundry</i>
Number of articles	95	16
News frames present	1. A <b>competent</b> government. 2. A <b>disingenuous</b> opposition.	1. <b>Remembering the deceased.</b>

Table 6

**RepublicTV**

Following searches using relevant keywords on republicworld.com between October 3, 2021 - October 17, 2021, I retrieved 95 news articles that reported on the Lakhimpur Kheri incident that resulted in eight deaths - journalist Raman Kashyap, two

BJP workers, and four farmers. An analysis of these articles resulted in the following frames.

**a. A competent government**

Out of the 94 articles that were published, only four covered the incident and its details, while the rest were focused on the political consequences of this incident. The Uttar Pradesh government is shown to have the investigation under control. Their efforts to solve the crimes and find the drivers of the vehicles were listed at the bottom of most news articles, right below a brief description of the event. The article ‘Lakhimpur Violence Accused Ashish Mishra Appears Before Police Day After Skipping Summons’ published on October 9, 2021, is an example of this:

Violence broke out in Uttar Pradesh's Lakhimpur Kheri district on October 3 leading to the death of 8 persons including 4 farmers. Immediately after the horrific incident, UP CM Yogi Adityanath promised that the state government will expose the elements involved in the incident and take strict action against them. As per the FIR lodged by the UP police on Monday, Ashish Mishra and 15-20 unknown accused persons have been booked under IPC Sections 120B, 147, 148, 149, 279, 302, 304A, and 338.

Apart from an SIT<sup>9</sup>, the state government constituted a single-member Commission of Inquiry of Justice (retd.) Pradeep Kumar Srivastava to probe the Lakhimpur violence. As per a notification issued on October 6, the commission has to complete its probe within a period of two months. Moreover, the UP police formed a 9-member monitoring committee led by DIG (Headquarters) Upendra Agrawal in connection with this case. So far, the police have arrested two suspects- Luvkush and Ashish Pandey. (Oka, A. October 9, 2021)

This excerpt does not fail to mention how the chief minister of the state Yogi Adityanath will take strict action against the accused. It is important to note that the BJP

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<sup>9</sup> Special Investigation Team

also has a majority in the state government of Uttar Pradesh. The description of the incident is also extremely vague and does not begin to cover what happened.

Contrastingly, during the death of Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput in June 2020, *RepublicTV* tried their best to implicate the government of Maharashtra and the then chief minister's son, who are not a part of the BJP, for Rajput's untimely death. Headlines such as 'Sushant Singh Rajput Death: Somebody In Mumbai Police Helping Rhea, Says Family Lawyer' were being published while the headlines for stories about this incident highlighted how the Uttar Pradesh police are doing their best to arrest the suspects.

Another example is from the article 'In UP's Lakhimpur Kheri, Violence Erupts During Farmers' Protest; 6 Dead, Several Injured' published on October 3, 2021, which mentions the police presence right after the incident:

Visuals accessed by Republic TV indicated heavily armed forces of the UP Police who are deployed to monitor and take hold of the situation while farmers continue to protest. (Jha, S. October 3, 2021)

There are 20 articles that report the arrests, the tightening of security, and the 9-member Special Investigation Team (SIT). The article 'Lakhimpur Violence: UP Police Forms 9-member Monitoring Committee As Probe Intensifies' chronicles this committee and how it was formed under pressure from the opposition parties.

Amid pressure from the opposition, the state government constituted a single-member Commission of Inquiry of Justice (retd.) Pradeep Kumar Srivastava to probe the Lakhimpur violence. As per a notification issued on October 6, Governor Anandiben Patel exercised powers conferred by Section 3 of the Commissions of Enquiry Act to appoint this inquiry panel whose headquarters will be based in Lakhimpur-Kheri. Most importantly, the commission has to complete its probe within a period of two months. (Oka, A. October 8, 2021)

There was also an article dedicated to informing the public how Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath felt about the incident. Titled 'CM Yogi Calls Lakhimpur Kheri Incident 'unfortunate'; Vows To Punish The Guilty,' it reports:

Taking cognizance of the Lakhimpur Kheri incident, Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath on Sunday dubbed it as 'unfortunate'. The BJP leader asserted that the UP government will dig deep and find out what led to the incident. He added that strict action will be taken against those found guilty. (Singh, S. October 3, 2021).

This news frame is just one more way *RepublicTV* shows its support for the ruling government. By noting how the 'BJP leader asserted' that the Uttar Pradesh government will 'take strict action' against the perpetrators, he is reinforcing that the ruling government and its leaders are doing everything in their power to bring justice to the people that lost their lives on October 3, 2021. This constant show of support is evidence of their alignment with the BJP.

**b. A disingenuous opposition**

This frame was present in many of the 70 articles published on *republicworld.com* that reported on political leaders from the Opposition parties traveling to the incident site, Lakhimpur Kheri, to meet with the families of the victims. These articles contained information about the politicians and when they would reach the site. Somehow, *RepublicTV* always managed to find a way to criticize the Opposition parties. They reiterate which leaders had been detained by the Uttar Pradesh police in the same articles for breaching the Section 144 imposition.<sup>10</sup> This ties into the previous frame of the police

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<sup>10</sup> Section 144 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) of 1973 authorizes the Executive Magistrate of any state or territory to issue an order to prohibit the assembly of four or more people in an area. According to the law, every member of such 'unlawful assembly' can be booked for engaging in rioting. (Business Standard)

having been in control and outsiders need not interfere. The article 'Lakhimpur Violence: Section 144 Imposed, Entry Of Politicians Banned Amid Eight Deaths' reports:

Acting on the rising tensions in Lakhimpur, section 144 has been imposed in the district on Sunday night along with additional police deployment. Entry of political leaders into the district has been banned and heavy deployment of police has been made in surrounding districts too. Opposition leaders like Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Deepender Hooda (Congress), Sanjay Singh (AAP) and Chandrashekhar Azad (Bhim Army) have been detained enroute to Lakhimpur, while SP chief Akhilesh Yadav has been placed under house arrest in Lucknow where clashes resulted in eight deaths on Sunday. (Karthikeyan, S. October 4, 2021)

This quote from the article 'Priyanka Gandhi Attends Final Rites Of Lakhimpur Farmer Victims; Pays Respect To Deceased' indicates how *RepublicTV* subtly reported on how the opposition was disingenuously using the incident for political gains through Gandhi's outspoken criticism, as she is part of the Congress political party.

On Sunday, Vadra addressed a 'Kisan Nyay' rally in Varanasi and accusing Centre of 'shielding' Union Minister Ajay Mishra and his son Ashish Mishra in the Lakhimpur violence. "Last week, the son of Union MoS (Home) mowed down 6 farmers with his vehicle. Families of all the victims said they want justice but all of you have seen that the Govt is shielding the minister & his son," said Vadra.

They have also published the following articles that imply the Opposition is taking advantage of the situation. 'Lakhimpur Kheri Violence: Oppn Taking Advantage Of The Situation, Alleges UP Min Raza' published on October 5, 2021, 'Opposition Using Lakhimpur Kheri Incident For Political Gains Ahead Of UP Polls: BJP Min' published on October 11, 2021, and 'Political tourism' | Lakhimpur Kheri Violence: UP Minister Says 'politicians Running There For Photo-ops.'

They have also reported on how the opposition attacked the BJP at every available opportunity. Published on October 7, 2021, the article ‘SC Takes Cognisance Of Lakhimpur Kheri Incident, CJI-led Bench To Hear Matter On Thursday’ reported:

The incident has triggered a major political storm with opposition parties accusing the BJP government in Uttar Pradesh of shielding the culprits. (Press Trust of India. October 7, 2021)

### **Further Observations:**

The death of journalist Raman Kashyap, was not acknowledged in *RepublicTV's* coverage. He is only named in one article, but his cause of death is not investigated.

There are multiple mentions of ‘sources’ throughout this coverage, that have only provided information about the UP police and how they questioned the accused, Ashish Mishra, about his whereabouts on the day of the incident. These sources have revealed the questions the police asked him.

Union Minister Ajay Mishra's son Ashish Mishra has been detained by the police on Saturday for his alleged involvement in the October 3 Lakhimpur Kheri incident which resulted in eight deaths, sources have told Republic, adding that he may soon be arrested. Earlier in the day, Ashish appeared before UP SIT (Special Investigation Team) in connection with the violence.

According to Republic Media Network sources, the cops grilled Ashish Mishra on his location on last Saturday and whether he has any evidence to support his claim that he was not on the spot when two vehicles ran over farmers. He was reportedly asked questions like - “How true are the allegations against you?” and “Where were you during the time of the incident?” (Joshi, K. October 9, 2021)

Similar to the coverage of the Tractor Rally, RepublicTV's sources are close to the police and the government. There are no sources that represent the farmer's side of the story. The eight deceased have only been acknowledged as casualties of the incident and have not been written about, much like the farmers were not written about in the Tractor Rally coverage.

### **Newslaundry**

Following searches using relevant keywords on newslaundry.com between October 3, 2021 - October 17, 2021, I retrieved 16 news articles that reported on the Lakhimpur Kheri incident that resulted in eight deaths - journalist Raman Kashyap, two BJP workers, the driver of Minister Ajay Kumar Mishra, and four farmers. An analysis of these articles resulted in the following frames.

#### **a. Remembering the deceased.**

Out of the 16 articles published on the website, eight stories were centered around the people who lost their lives after the events of October 3 in Lakhimpur Kheri, Uttar Pradesh. These stories included information about their families, images of their homes and family members, and also recounted their last days before the incident. In the article "Will anyone care about a mere driver's life?": Lakhimpur driver worked for Ajay Mishra for 6 years' Nidhi Suresh and Shivangi Saxena report.

At around 10 am on October 3, Hari Om called his mother and promised her that he would bring back medicines for his father. That was the day he attended the wrestling match with Ashish Mishra, as confirmed by video footage from eyewitnesses.

At 6 pm, his family tried to call him but his phone was switched off.

The family spent nine hours frantically trying to locate him. The panic first set in when Hari Om's uncle informed the family that violence was taking place and Ashish Mishra's name was involved. "Our uncle saw it on the TV and told us," said Maheshwari Mishra, Hari Om's sister.

That's when they began frantically watching TV for updates and making calls to whoever they thought could help. Finally, at 1 am on October 4, Rajnikanth Mishra and Hari Om's uncle went to the district hospital at Lakhimpur Kheri town. There, Rajnikanth recognised his cousin's body.

Later that morning, Rajnikanth called Hari Om's mother and told her that her son was dead. His body was taken to his family's home at 11 am." (Suresh and Saxena. October 7, 2021)

Another article titled "Aren't we also farmers?": Families of BJP workers killed in Lakhimpur deal with grief and anger' published on October 9, 2021, by Nidhi Suresh and Shivangi Saxena reported that:

On the morning of October 3, Shyam had tea at home and then left at around 8 am for Banveerpur, around 25 km away. He was going to attend a wrestling match being organized by Ashish Mishra at Banveerpur, which is also the hometown of Minister Ajay Kumar Mishra.

At around 4 pm, news began pouring in about violence at Tikunia, barely two km from the site of the wrestling match.

"Many people from our village had gone to see the dangal," said Balak Ram. "So, we started hearing from different families in our village itself about the violence."

At 5 pm, Shyam's friend Karan Singh received a phone call. "I was told that Shyam was injured," he told Newslaundry. "There was a lot of confusion. Videos started pouring in. Then I was informed that he's being brought to Lakhimpur for treatment."

At 9 pm, Karan reached the emergency ward at the Lakhimpur Kheri district hospital. But as soon as he reached, he was called to the postmortem ward." (Suresh and Saxena. October 9, 2021)

A third article titled 'Two farmers attended their first ever protest in Lakhimpur on October 3. It was also their last.' includes excerpts from the families of the two

farmers that talk about the day the incident occurred and how one of these farmers ended up being right in front of the vehicle that rammed into the protest on this day.

Nachhattar Singh wound up at the protest after hearing that his son planned to attend.

On October 3, his son Jagdeep Singh, 32, made up his mind to attend the protest taking place at Lakhimpur Kheri's Tikunia. The gathering was scheduled for October 3 to protest against the arrival of deputy chief minister Keshav Prasad Maurya at a wrestling event in union minister Ajay Mishra's hometown.

So, at around noon, Nachhattar tied a green turban on his head, hopped onto a motorcycle with his friend Balwand Singh, and set off for Tikunia.

Five hours later, Jagdeep was scrolling through social media websites on his phone when he realised that violence had taken place at the Tikunia protest site. The family began to panic. By 7 pm, Jagdeep saw photos of his father's dead body on social media.

In the days that followed, videos of the incident clearly showed how a Mahindra Thar, belonging to union minister Ajay Mishra, rammed into the protesting farmers. An elderly man in a green turban was thrown onto the bonnet of the car, which did not slow down. (Suresh and Saxena. October 8, 2021)

The coverage of deceased journalist Raman Kashyap was more detailed.

*NewsLaundry* interviewed his family members who were suspicious of the circumstances of his death. While some news outlets reported that he had succumbed to his injuries during treatment, his father maintained that he was run over by a car and dragged and that the wounds on his body were indicative of the same.

Following his death, Kashyap's family has disputed media reports trying to build a narrative that the journalist was beaten up by farmers. They also accused an Aaj Tak reporter of forcing a false narrative.

In an interview with journalist Ranvijay Singh, Kashyap's brother said a reporter from Aaj Tak had claimed that the postmortem said that Kashyap had been hit with sticks and lathis. The brother pointed out that

the family had seen Kashyap's body in the mortuary; further, Kashyap's postmortem report has not been released yet. (NL Team. October 6, 2021)

This news frame is fully dedicated to the people that died as a result of the incident at Lakhimpur Kheri. These articles have not listed anything about the arrests the Uttar Pradesh police made or how they are promptly responding to the situation. This news frame adds much needed information to the gaps that were left within *RepublicTV's* coverage of the incident.

### **Event 6: The repealing of the laws**

Research Period (November 19, 2021 - December 14, 2021)

News Organization	<i>RepublicTV</i>	<i>Newslandry</i>
Number of articles	27	7
News frames present	1. A <b>caring</b> prime minister	1. <b>Mixed</b> farmer responses

Table 7

### **RepublicTV**

Following searches using relevant keywords on republicworld.com between November 19, 2021 - December 14, 2021, I retrieved 27 news articles that reported on the repealing of the three farm laws that the farmers were protesting since November 2020. An analysis of these articles resulted in the following frames.

#### **a. A caring prime minister**

This news frame is present in multiple articles RepublicTV published about Modi's announcement on November 19, 2021, that the farm laws would be repealed, and how opposition parties and Bollywood celebrities welcomed the decision. There was only

one article that lists the contents of Prime Minister Modi's announcement, while the other 26 were about the politicians and celebrities who 'welcomed' the decision, and those who said otherwise.

Articles titled 'Arvind Kejriwal Welcomes Centre's Decision To Repeal Farm Laws, Salutes Nation's Farmers,' 'Farm Laws Repealed: Samyukt Kisan Morcha Welcomes Centre's Move, Demands Guarantee On MSP,' 'Mayawati Welcomes Withdrawal Of Farm Laws; Seeks Compensation For Kin Of Deceased Farmers,' 'As PM Modi Announces Repeal Of Farm Laws, Bollywood Stars Welcome 'wonderful News'' were all published on November 19, 2021, and mention how the Prime Minister chose to make this announcement on the auspicious day of Guru Nanak Jayanti,<sup>11</sup> a day of great importance for the Sikh community. Most of the farmers that participated in the protest were from the Sikh community.

On the occasion of Guru Nanak Dev Jayanti, Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the nation and pointed out Government initiatives taken for the benefit of the country's farmers. Before making the massive announcement repealing the three farm laws, the Prime Minister said that the Central Government has given top priority to agriculture development, and farmer welfare. PM Modi marked that the Centre has increased Minimum Support Prices (MSP) and created record government procurement centres. (Kagrana, B. November 19, 2021)

This excerpt from the article 'Centre repeals Farm Laws: PM Modi Highlights Farmer Welfare Initiatives, Says 'top Priority Given To Agriculture' placed special emphasis on the day he made the announcement while adding how much the prime minister cared for the prosperity of the farmers and the agricultural sector.

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<sup>11</sup> Guru Nanak Jayanti is celebrated to mark the anniversary of the first Sikh Guru who played an important role in shaping and strengthening the Sikh community. ([www.livemint.com](http://www.livemint.com))

Prime Minister Modi's address is included in each article published during this time.

Addressing the nation on Friday morning on the occasion of Guru Nanak Jayanti, PM Modi said the three laws were for the benefit of farmers but "we couldn't convince a section of farmers despite best efforts." Lamenting that the Centre could not convince farmers, he also declared that a committee comprising the representatives of the Union and state governments, farmers, scientists, and economists will be formed to make the MSP more efficient. (Methri, G. November 19, 2021)

One article included interviews with two farmers at the Ghazipur border between New Delhi and Uttar Pradesh. However, this article did not include the interviewees' names or photographs.

Another farmer at the protesting site told Republic TV, "This is the biggest happiness of our lives, only we know how we resided by the road for over eleven months." Speaking of farmers' intentions hereafter, he said, "there are many more issues right now, we had not been protesting only against the Bill here. We had come for the Bill but now we need to save the country. This is just the beginning." (Jha, S. November 19, 2021)

At the end of some articles, *RepublicTV* included an explanation of the three laws and briefly described the protests. They also did not fail to mention the deliberations that were conducted between the unions and the government:

Earlier in September 2020, the Parliament passed the three farm laws including The Farmers' Produce Trade and Commerce (Promotion and Facilitation) Act, The Farmers' (Empowerment and Protection) Agreement of Price Assurance and Farm Services Act, and The Essential Commodities (Amendment) Act. As a result, protests erupted all across the country and thousands of farmers were seen protesting at the Delhi border areas further demanding the repeal of these.

The Centre also made several attempts to establish a negotiation with the farmers but nothing seemed to work and now after a year-long of

protests, the Centre has decided to withdraw the farm laws. (Bishay, N. November 19, 2021)

This news frame notes that the Prime Minister cares about the farmers and that, unfortunately, he could not ‘convince’ a portion of the farmers that the laws were beneficial for them and the agricultural sector. The unnamed farmers that were interviewed expressing their gratitude also add to the praise of the ruling government that *RepublicTV* is so fond of doing.

### **Newslaundry**

Following searches using relevant keywords on newslaundry.com between November 19, 2021 - December 14, 2021, I retrieved seven news articles that reported on the repealing of the three farm laws that the farmers were protesting since November 2020. An analysis of these articles resulted in the following frames.

#### **a. Mixed farmer responses**

This frame was present in the seven news articles that newslaundry.com published during this research period. In one article titled ‘‘We deserve more than just words’: No celebrations at Tikri, just suspicion and silence,’ reporter Supriti David interviewed farmers at the Tikri border who revealed they were suspicious of the announcement and would not believe it until the decision was passed in the parliament. Contrary to *RepublicTV*, the quotes and interviews with farmers in these articles were assisted by their names and photographs.

Farmers were gathered before a stage, while a group of girls sang to celebrate Guru Nanak Gurpurab. No one was talking about Modi’s announcement. This was the prevailing mood all day; Modi’s promise was immediately disregarded while the main response was suspicion. (David, S. November 19, 2021)

This article provided readers with more context of why the farmers at the Tikri border were not celebrating as much as the farmers at the Singhu border.

Tathagat Tulsi, a 24-year-old master's student from Bihar, was among the farmers camped out at Tikri today. He described the sense of community at the protest site saying that while celebrations might have taken place at the sister site in Singhu, none would be seen here since Tikri's farmers are poorer.

“There are more small and marginal farmers here than Singhu. We automatically have more to lose,” said Tathagat.” (David, S. November 19, 2021)

*Newslaundry*, however, does not only highlight the more skeptical responses from farmers; they also interviewed farmers at the Singhu border who were happy and celebrated the announcement. The article ‘In photos: Over a year later, farmers depart Singhu for their homes’ published on December 11, 2021, includes images of the farmers leaving the protest site to return to their homes. The story-telling format of the news articles is engaging and provides the reader with more nuanced information. *Newslaundry* has also published one news article that recounts how news anchors and news channels have reacted to the announcement of the repeal.

So, according to *RepublicTV*, the government cares for the farmers and is trying their best to help but the Opposition parties and international celebrities are ‘intruding’ within India’s personal matters. The farmers are not making this job any easier by being ‘violent’ and ‘uncooperative’ while causing mayhem for the Delhi government by not following COVID-19 protocols. The laws the government passed for the farmers are good for them and the farmers ‘fail to understand this.’

According to *Newslaundry*, the farmers largely do not like the new laws. They do not trust the government to meet their demands about the MSP and will continue to protest until their demands are met. They report that the government is interfering with the protest and the traditional media is not reporting all the facts to the Indian public.

The difference between how these two organizations covered the protest is not only the contrasting narratives they have pointed out, but also the manner in which they went about covering it. Attributing to identifiable sources, fact-checked and long-form news articles, detailed ground-reporting and interviews with the farmers were tactics applied by *Newslaundry* to aid their reporting, while *RepublicTV's* unnamed sources, political commentary reporting, redundant news articles that mostly follow the inverted pyramid method of reporting have brought it to report the protest in the manner they did.

The format of *RepublicTV's* articles was monotonous and made them a task to research. I found myself reading the same kind of information multiple times but in different articles throughout the research of each 'event' category. *Newslaundry's* fewer but longer articles that were written in a narrative and story-telling format made them far more interesting to read and analyze.

### **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

The goal of this thesis was to look at how the Farmer's Protest that occurred in India between 2020 and 2021 was framed in the media. Specifically, it sought to address the following three research questions:

1. What news frames arise in the coverage of the farmer's protest between traditional broadcast outlet *RepublicTV* and digital outlet *Newslaundry*?

2. What is the difference between how these outlets mobilize these news frames?
3. What do these differences say about the journalistic norms and standards of these outlets during the coverage of the protests?

This concluding chapter describes how the frame analysis found answers to these questions and includes a brief discussion of what these results indicate about journalistic norms and standards.

As the results presented in Ch. 4 indicate, the two media outlets investigated in this research, *RepublicTV* and *NewsLaundry*, present two very different versions of the Farmers' Protests. While *RepublicTV*'s articles largely focused on the government's response and supporting it, *NewsLaundry* rarely concentrated on official narratives and instead used its coverage to amplify the stories of those affected by the protests and the laws. While the reporters individually may not be responsible for the overall narrative, the news outlets as a whole should be cognizant of the kind of information they relay to the public and how it may be interpreted. As Kovach and Rosenstiel explain, this is done through good use of the material that forms the basis for the story.

These themes are not stated by the journalist but are shown, or revealed, in how the journalist treats the material—using the right quote, showing the right camera shot on TV, or describing the look two people give each other when they are not talking. (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014. p.225)

The frames that were present in *RepublicTV*'s coverage showed a consistent narrative of them being aligned with the government. *RepublicTV* has been supportive of the BJP's ideologies since its beginning in 2017. The editor-in-chief Arnab Goswami has been known to show unwavering support for the BJP and Prime Minister Modi. News outlets and magazines such *ThePrint* and *The Caravan* have reported on how the BJP

government spoke in Goswami's favor when he was arrested in 2020 for an abetment to a suicide case.<sup>12</sup>

The coverage of the Lakhimpur Kheri incident and the Tractor Rally were also examples of how *RepublicTV* remains pro-government in its approach to reporting. While *Newslandry* chose to conduct eyewitness interviews, interviews with the family of deceased journalist Raman Kashyap, and interviews with people who were present at the Red Fort on January 26, 2021, *RepublicTV* consistently published articles about the minister accused of the killings denying the allegations, hailing the Uttar Pradesh government and its response to the accident on October 3, 2021, and how the Tractor Rally was 'shameful' for the nation. Their ignorance of the farmers' perspectives on the events is evident. *RepublicTV* could have chosen to pursue this issue with the same vigor as when they chased celebrities in their cars, asking them about their drug usage allegations.

He [Deputy Commissioner of Police Sangram Singh Nishandar] warned the media against chasing any vehicles henceforth but if anyone was found violating it, he threatened to seize the vehicles and take action against the drivers of those vehicles.

This comes a day after a video of a popular news channel's reporter went viral on the internet. In the video, the media persons were seen chasing the car of Bollywood actor Deepika Padukone, who was issued a summon by the Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) to join the probe into a drugs case linked to Sushant Singh Rajput. (The Tribune. September 27, 2020)

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<sup>12</sup> Arnab Goswami was named in a suicide note written by architect Anvay Naik who designed his studio. Goswami and the other accused owed the victim money according to his suicide note that they were named in. Goswami was granted an interim exemption from appearing at the magistrate court for hearings until April 16, 2021. He was seeking an independent investigation from the Crime Bureau of India. New updates have not been reported on since March 2021.

There are instances where *RepublicTV* has not professionally verified the information they have published. Minute details such as the number of people that died during the protest kept changing between the articles. They first reported 750 deaths during the protests, then 700. The quotes they have used in their reporting are not investigated or verified before publishing. They are not attributed to anyone by name. There is clear use of sensationalism in the news coverage by *RepublicTV* through the imagery and jarring headlines they publish. The images used in the article especially for the coverage of the Tractor Rally and Lakhimpur Kheri incident were of the clashes that ensued, farmers and police personnel running amok, burned cars that had overturned, the faces of various political leaders with stoic expressions on their face, inflammatory headlines that mention how the Opposition is deterring the efforts of the BJP or how the farmers ‘invaded’ the Red Fort in New Delhi. They have blurred the lines between news and entertainment.

Kovach and Rosenstiel talk about sensationalism and why news organizations might resort to it in their reporting:

In an increasingly crowded media environment, the most precious commodity of all becomes attention. To gain it, and hold it, some publishers have resorted to the political version of sensationalism: to fear monger, to employ stereotypes and labels that marginalize and demean one’s antagonists. (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p. 56)

*RepublicTV*, despite its popularity as a news source, has lower trust scores than legacy print and television brands – and the highest levels of distrust. According to the Reuters Institute Digital News Report published in 2021, despite being the fourth highest source of news in TV, radio, print, and online, it is the least-trusted news source among the news outlets researched, falling way below *The Indian Express*, *The Hindu*, and *The*

*Times of India* among others. In 2023, it is still the fourth most popular source of news for TV, radio, and print, and fifth in the online news category. It has managed to increase its brand trust percentage from 54% to 58% since 2021 and has overtaken *Scroll.in* and *The Wire*. This may be attributed to the growing right-wing ideology propagated by the ruling government. (Krishnan, 2021, p. 134).

*Newslaundry's* coverage is starkly in contrast to that of *RepublicTV*. Their reporting appears researched, investigated, and verified. They avoid uncritically covering and repeating government and official statements and lay emphasis on the public-interest function of journalism through such reporting. While *RepublicTV* covered the *protests*, *Newslaundry* managed to cover the *protestors—the actual people at the heart of the protests*. Their sources were either named or pictured in the articles they published. They specified name changes for the purpose of anonymity as well. According to Kovach and Rosenstiel in their book *The Elements of Journalism*,

This clear and detailed identification of sources is the most effective form of transparency news publishers have at their disposal, and it forms the basis of a more open relationship with the public. (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014. p.133)

The elements of journalism as described by Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) are immediacy, autonomy, objectivity, public service, and ethics. Based on the evidence presented in Chapter 4, in what follows are some observations on how the two outlets adhered to these elements in practice, in their coverage of the Farmers Protests.

Immediacy: *RepublicTV* publishes articles very frequently. They published 19 articles on November 19, 2021, when Prime Minister Modi announced the repealing of the laws. However, these articles only provided information about the political back and

forth between the BJP and other Opposition parties. On January 26, 2021, they published 24 articles about the Tractor Rally in New Delhi going awry. Similarly, these articles covered the political reaction to the incident and the shame brought to the nation by the farmers. As noted by *Newslaundry*, only 8 articles were published on October 3, 2021, when eight people lost their lives in Lakhimpur Kheri, Uttar Pradesh.

*RepublicTV's* concept of immediacy overrides that of public service and ethics. They prioritize publishing more news online over taking some time to fact-check their statements or add more context to newer developments. Instead, they publish these developments as they are, without any verification or added context.

Boczkowski's (2010) study of online news production found that speed and the expectation of instantaneity, along with real-time awareness of what the competition was doing, have led to imitation and a paradoxical lack of diversity in news journalism even while the amount of journalism has increased. Natalie Fenton (2010, 561) describes the contemporary work ethic of news journalism as "speed it up and spread it thin." (Le Masurier, 2015, p.139)

*Newslaundry* seems to have taken a different approach to the immediacy value in its coverage of the Farmer's Protests. While they did not publish as frequently as *RepublicTV*, their news articles were more detailed and had been researched thoroughly. Their story-telling form of journalism is proof of their extensive work on the ground. I believe they practice "slow journalism," a news subculture based on dissatisfaction with the mainstream press's journalism quality. Slow journalism aims to produce a decent, clean, and fair output. (Le Masurier, 2015)

Le Masurier explains how the pressure to deliver the news because 'the public need to know' and the importance of 'immediacy' is driving the journalism industry. She explains that "in an era of fast and instantaneous journalism and concerns about the

deleterious effects of speed, it can be easy to lose sight of the other kinds of journalism being practiced, other temporalities for its production. A counter-discourse and practice has been emerging in recent years from journalists, editors, publishers, and commentators interested in slowing journalism down.” (Le Masurier, 2015, p.138)

*Newslaundry* published an extensive article, ‘Lakhimpur Kheri violence: Eyewitnesses recall what they saw on October 3,’ about the Lakhimpur Kheri incident two days after the incident on October 5, 2021. Despite this two-day delay, the article included more information than the eight articles that *RepublicTV* published on October 3, 2021, out together. Their reports at the beginning of the protest are fewer than those published by *RepublicTV* but they tackle issues that needed to be addressed, like why the farmers were protesting or why the MSP is so important, and why the farmers were so adamant about making sure it stays. Such contextual and in-depth information has the ability to help the public form their own opinions of the protest and not taint the movement. The farmers realized what was happening and decided not to let “Big Media” have access to their protest site anymore.

Kovach and Rosenstiel have talked about how journalist’s first and foremost responsibility should be the truth and that “in the first hours of an event, when being accurate is most difficult, accuracy is perhaps most important. It is during this time that public attitudes are formed, sometimes stubbornly, by the context within which the information is presented.” (2014, p. 73) This means that accuracy and being as close to the truth as possible is essential to keep in mind while trying to report an incident as soon as it happens.

The digital age adds pressures in both directions to this process of searching for functional or conditional truth. The first pressure is speed. In the context of gathering news, speed is almost always the enemy of accuracy. It offers those who seek to report less time to check facts. This is why cable news channels that report continuously (such as CNN and Fox News) tend to report more erroneous information than the broadcast channels (NBC, CBS, or ABC) that have hours to vet their reports for a single network evening newscast. (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p. 73)

Autonomy: *RepublicTV* follows a traditional ad-based model. They currently receive funding from various private investors. Arnab Goswami and current BJP minister Rajeev Chandrashekhkar started this channel in 2017, before Chandrashekhkar relinquished his stake in May 2019, leaving Goswami as the majority stakeholder. *RepublicTV* was billed as India's first independent media station, promising to 'democratize' news and compete with global media titans while remaining staunchly pro-India. They have always had the reputation of being pro-BJP and pro-Hindutva.<sup>13</sup>

On February 24, 2022, Goswami conducted an interview with Yogi Adityanath, the current Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, a city that holds immense religious sentiments for Hindus. Goswami had previously referred to Adityanath as 'illiterate' and as someone who should "get his mental balance checked." The same day, the government of Uttar Pradesh leased his network a new 18,821 square-meter (four-and-a-half acre) plot for another studio in Noida.

According to the agreement, ARG Outlier Media will pay a premium of Rs 29.88 crore to the UP government for the Noida plot. It says that the network paid Rs 5.97 crore of this before the agreement was inked. The rest was split into 10 half-yearly instalments, scheduled neatly through Adityanath's second term; they start in June 2022 and end in December 2026. (Tiwari, A. November 21, 2022)

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<sup>13</sup> Hindutva (literally "Hindu-ness") is a modern political ideology that advocates for Hindu supremacy and seeks to transform India, constitutionally a secular state, into an ethno-religious nation known as the Hindu Rashtra (Hindu nation). Hindutva is the official platform of the BJP. (South Asia Scholar Activist Collective)

It is no secret where the channel's political affiliations lie and they make no effort to hide it. This reflects in their reporting and the narrative they chose to show their audience. Their autonomy only knows one way - the BJP way.

*Newslaundry* is the complete opposite and has been transparent about its funding. The article 'Who owns Newslaundry?' explains the full breakdown of the ownership. They do not run ads on their website or on their social media channels. It is a subscription-based organization that aims to tackle the Indian media's reliance on ads and audience traffic for money.

Throughout the coverage of the protests, they did not focus on government narratives, but rather on the farmers affected in the process. The outlet has not held back on expressing its distaste for the government's treatment of the farmers. But more importantly, they have tried to stay true to their goal of addressing the Indian media's lack of independence. Their service satisfies the criteria of journalism - to inform, entertain, and educate the audience and their coverage is autonomous and independent.

However, when it comes to being unbiased, it is very noticeable that *Newslaundry* did not report on the government's perspective of the story. They have continued to report from the farmer's perspective and dedicate their coverage to accounting the farmer's woes. While this may not be 'balanced' coverage either, it is still more productive than what *RepublicTV* publishes about the government. They have added more context and tried their best to inform the audience about the consequences of the three laws and the subsequent protests. It is filling in the information gaps that traditional media has left during their coverage. They attempt to advocate for the people in India that are almost always forgotten about or never properly accounted for in an effort to uphold

the values of good journalism. This helps to dispel misinformation by adding new perspectives and ideas to the public forum for the Indian citizens to unpack themselves to make an informed decision.

Objectivity: *RepublicTV*, on its website, claims to “have nationalism at its core, the pursuit of truth as its guiding principle and imbibes the fearlessness to investigate, dig out and broadcast that truth in order to fix accountability for a billion.” Their allegiance to the ruling government has already been established, but the news frames I discovered during this research provide further examples of this allegiance to the BJP. Their news reporting leans on the side of the government and what the Opposition parties are saying about it. The lack of balance between the two sides of this protest is evident. So, it can be argued their coverage is not unbiased, fair, nor impartial.

*Newslaundry*, in the article ‘On bias, objectivity, and where *Newslaundry* falls on the ideological spectrum,’ claims to be a ‘constant work in progress to achieve a more complete worldview. Journalism is the primary pursuit of the organisation – that’s all about facts, accuracy, and public interest storytelling.’ They have addressed how their reporters individually might be biased, and how the biases and beliefs of their reporters are spread across the political aisle, and not hidden from their readers. Through this, they want a “more inclusive office where the most diverse experiences can come together and create an environment where we all learn from each other and from our subscribers.”

They go on to explain how they try to mitigate these individual biases:

Our podcasts and hangouts are a device for such growth. On our podcasts, you can hear the voices of our editors and reporters unfiltered as an exercise in transparency. Our hangouts and Zoom calls with subscribers do the same and also allow us to scrutinise ourselves through news consumers’ perspectives – they are brutally honest and polite. Our biases,

prejudices and worldviews are there for all to see so each individual's work can be viewed and adjusted for our inevitable objectivity handicap. (Sekhri, A. December 17, 2021)

They reported on the wrongdoings of the government during the Farmer's Protests but also did not forget to hold the farmers accountable for their participation in the clashes that occurred during the protests. While *RepublicTV* labeled the whole movement as violent, *Newslandry*'s position was that the entire movement cannot be labeled violent because of a small group of people that misbehaved.

Kovach and Rosenstiel explain how fact-checking and verification of information are essential for the survival of journalism.

In the end, the discipline of verification is what separates journalism from entertainment, propaganda, fiction, or art. Entertainment—or its cousin “infotainment”—focuses on what is most diverting. Propaganda selects facts or invents them to serve the real purpose: persuasion and manipulation. Fiction invents scenarios to get at a more personal impression of what it calls truth. (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014. p.115)

Kovach and Rosenstiel's statements on verification and objective journalism talk about how “the impartial voice employed by many news organizations is not a fundamental principle of journalism. Rather, it is a device news organizations use to highlight the fact that they are trying to produce something obtained by objective methods.” They further explain how verification and fact-checking solidify this objectivity. “This neutral voice, without a discipline of verification, often is a veneer atop something hollow” (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014, p.120)

Public Service: While *RepublicTV* actively gathers and disseminates information to its audience, its coverage of the Farmer's Protest suggests it acts like a watchdog on behalf of the government instead of the citizens of India, as Kovach and Rosenstiel's

public service element of journalism is meant to do. *RepublicTV's* coverage was not critical of the government on how the farm laws were passed, nor how the government still allowed Minister of State Ajay Mishra to be employed after his son was involved in the brutal death of farmers at Lakhimpur Kheri. They were selective in who they held accountable and then went on to defame those held accountable, both online and on their television broadcast. It appears that they believe public service is informing the audience on how Opposition parties, or global interlopers, are trying to sabotage the ruling government.

*Newslaundry* describes itself as having the value of public service at its core. Their journalism is for their subscribers and they have detailed this on their website in the article 'On bias, objectivity, and where Newslaundry falls on the ideological spectrum.' They aim to never compromise the facts because they owe their subscribers that. *Newslaundry* believes that these subscribers have transformed the subscription-based news model once considered impossible. While this may hold true for *Newslaundry*, it is not a proven theory with other subscription-based outlets. A lot of the Indian population is left out of the small segment of the public that is subscribed to them. This includes individuals who may not have access to the internet or do not possess the media literacy to unpack the news as reported by *Newslaundry*.

For example, by advocating for the farmers and the eight people who died in Lakhimpur Kheri, *Newslaundry* has aided the ones affected the most by the circumstances. They provided a voice to the ones that other outlets like *RepublicTV* chose to ignore. They have been the voice for the voiceless. According to Kovach and Rosenstiel (2014), this is essential for good journalism:

As history showed us, it more properly means watching over the powerful few in society to guard, on behalf of the many, against tyranny.

The purpose of the watchdog role also extends beyond simply making the management and execution of power transparent, to making known and understood the effects of that power.” (p.194)

Ethics: *RepublicTV's* surface-level style of reporting and constant updates with little to no new information do not aid their credibility or their ability to report legitimate news. Their articles are redundant, the people quoted in them apart from politicians and government officials are often not named nor pictured. They do not independently verify the information they publish and often have several typing errors in their articles and Their sources are always close to the police or the government.

According to Kovach and Rosenstiel, (2014) “journalists who select sources to express what is really their own point of view, and then use the neutral voice to make it seem objective, are engaged in deception. This damages the credibility of all journalistic enterprise by making it seem unprincipled, dishonest, and biased” (p.120).

*Newslaundry's* in-depth style of reporting, independent fact-checking, and transparency during the reporting process make them appear more credible to the reader. While this may not equate to actual credibility, they make an effort to note when interviewee statements have been verified, and include interviewee names and/or photographs. They include corrections in news articles that have misreported details or include a note that says the article will be updated as new information emerges.

As Kovach and Rosenstiel note, the process of good journalism is just as important as the final product itself. *Newslaundry's* efforts to gain trust through its

reporting practices are comparatively better than that of *RepublicTV*. They are more transparent in their approach and make an effort to gain their viewer's trust. The fact that they were able to successfully keep interviewing the farmers throughout the protest is also an example of their credibility.

Journalism is an act of character. Given that there are no laws, no regulations, no licensing, and no formal self-policing practices governing journalism's production—and because journalism by its nature can be exploitative—a heavy burden rests on the ethics and judgment of the individual news gatherer, and the organization that publishes the work. (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2014. p. 293)

Combined with the results of the news frame analysis described in Chapter 4, these news values and their usage have led me to conclude that *RepublicTV* is an unreliable source of news and their coverage of the Farmer's Protests should be taken with a grain of salt. In an industry where such practices are common, *Newslaundry* has emerged as a strong front for the "other side"—in this case, the farmers' perspectives that *RepublicTV* largely chose to ignore. *Newslaundry*'s reporting was thorough and fact-checked, and they provided their audience with a well-rounded view of a story. Their slow news model served them well.

Since this thesis only covered the textual coverage of the protests and did not analyze multimedia content, such as the *Newslaundry*'s video series and podcasts and *RepublicTV*'s television broadcasts, further research is needed to analyze how the multimedia coverage of both outlets will differ from their textual coverage. Through this research, I hope readers are inspired to continue the conversations surrounding news frames and their implications in real life. To rectify the current situation of the Indian media, I believe monetary investments into the news industry and reducing reliance on

ads and clicks for revenue can play a vital role. Media literacy is an important concept that should be learned early on to enable readers to combat the ‘fake news’ influx that comes from unreliable news sources. It can lead people to discover news organizations like *Newslaundry* that try their best to adhere to the elements and good values of journalism.

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