

# Media Power and the Rule of Law in the Rise of New Despotism: Lesson Learned from Indonesia, China, Russia, and Iran

Siti Raudhah Salma

Faculty of Social and Political science, Gadjah Mada University, Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta<sup>1,2</sup>

[Sitiraudhahsalma@gmail.com](mailto:Sitiraudhahsalma@gmail.com)



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## Abstract

**Purpose:** this study aims to seek an answer to these research questions: 1) "How do media power and the rule of law influence the rise of new despotism in Indonesia, China, Russia, and Iran?" and 2) "How does the new despotism affect the practice of good governance accountability principle in those countries?". This research attempts to identify the rise of new despotism in the world. It contributes to examining the implications of government policies regarding this phenomenon. **Method:** Multiple case study approaches from these countries are used to conduct qualitative research.

**Result:** The results respond to the call for new thinking about the concept of "New Despotism" in order to contribute to further studies regarding new despotism in developing countries. In addition, the findings of this research are expected to assist policymakers in developing and evaluating policies that address this circumstance.

**Conclusion:** This research can help to rebuild the accountability principle of a good governance system. Accountability in the context of public administration is being investigated since it is at the heart of government administration practice. It has long been a source of worry, particularly in policy-making.

**Keywords:** *New despotism, media power, public policy, democracy, Rule of law, despotism*

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## 1. Introduction

There has been little research into new despotism. Although some experts have studied the evolution of the idea of despotism, few have written about the growth of new despotism in the digital era. The globalization age has had a significant impact on many aspects of public life (Martin, Tyler, Storper, Evenhuis, & Glasmeier, 2018). It drives social changes, including the current way nations are governed by the utilization of technological development. Technology is the most rapidly expanding and has a direct effect on civilization. It is associated with technical developments that have an impact on modernization, including people's behavior in using the media (Adhilarso, Utari, & Hastjarjo, 2019). Today, power-sharing democracies are frequently choked and killed not only by social instability, economic collapse, political conspiracies, and military brutality, but also by twenty-first-century forms of power that have a lethal allure (Keane, 2020). This type of twenty-first century regime power is identified by Keane (2020) as "new despotism." It's characterized by the dominant role of media power and is prone to unexpected disruptions, digital revolts, and media storms. New despotisms are compelled to highlight the potential power of the weak in the form of media-enabled disruptions whose counter-narratives interrupt ordinary life and possibly threaten to dissolve the whole political system because they are based on digital communication networks. The relationship between the government and the news frequently takes the form of a sophisticated, mutually beneficial arrangement between

politicians and the media, in which negotiating power is shared by both parties (Prat, 2018). However, its strength can stem from its deft use of the media. The new element encompasses communicative abundance and instrumentalism to the fullest, in which violence is far more tamed and deliberate, with seduction replacing intimidation.

Furthermore, poligarchs, wealthy government officials, and wealthy business people amass enormous sums of money in their own pockets and in the family dynasties they rule over (Maley, 2021). They utilize lawful political power to obtain illegitimate economic wealth, but while their political power is apparent, their economic wealth is not (Magyar & Vásárhelyi, 2017). The existing predatory political-business alliances and state forces have taken over and hijacked political reform and democratic institution-building, which has resulted in the development of today's despotism (Kusman & Istiqomah, 2021). It succeeds in instilling allegiance in helpless subjects and loyalty to the dictator (Keane, 2020). It is a regime in which those in power recognize that public support for institutions can only last as long as people are loyal to those institutions. Therefore, they devise ways to foster such loyalty. In comparison to earlier tyrannies, dictatorships, and totalitarian regimes, the new despotisms are defined by their measured use of violence and how they conceal the fist of force in their pockets.

There are several aspects of good governance may suffer as a result of the concept of new despotism. Good governance is the process of assessing how public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources, and ensure the fulfillment of human rights in a way that is generally free of abuse and corruption while also respecting the rule of law (Pietersz, 2018). However, with the current despotism, there are violations of the rule of law and an unregulated power balance in the administration. The existing system of despotism lacks procedures that ensure public officials and political leaders are held accountable for their activities, including the use of public resources, openness of government, and media freedom, all of which are critical components of the accountability principle in good governance (Khotami, 2017). Therefore, sustaining the good governance principle of accountability by understanding the phenomenon's negative influence on a nation's governance is vital in order to promote governance reforms and develop condition aid on governance quality (Graham & Litan, 2003).

Against this background, this study aims to seek an answer to these research questions: 1) "How do media power and the rule of law influence the rise of new despotism in Indonesia, China, Russia, and Iran?" and 2) "How does the new despotism affect the practice of good governance accountability principle in those countries?". This research attempts to identify the rise of new despotism in the world. It contributes to examining the implications of government policies regarding this phenomenon. Essentially, this research responds to John Keane's (2020) call for new thinking about the concept of new despotism, which has revived the notion of "despotism" from old fashion and advances a new concept of human nature. When it comes to the policymaking process, the media serves as a communicator and has evolved into a tool for legislators to influence their colleagues (Kedrowski, 1996). For this reason, a country's new despotism must be examined because it has implications for various stakeholders and future policy decisions. Lastly, this research can help to rebuild the accountability principle of a good governance system. Accountability in the context of public administration is being investigated since it is at the heart of government administration practice. It has long been a source of worry, particularly in policy-making.

## **2. Literature Review**

### ***2.1 Evolution of Despotism***

The notion of despotism was extensively debated not just politically, but also in philosophy, philosophical history, religion, culture, economics, gender, what is now known as cultural anthropology or ethnology, and comparisons of states within and outside Europe throughout the eighteenth century (Richter, 2007). The term despotism derives from Greek, and in ancient Greek usage, a despot was a monarch who ruled over individuals who were naturally slaves or servants in a household. However, the term had political connotations for Aristotle, who stated, "Despotism is a perversion, the perversion of kingship" (Aristotle & Robinson, 1995). Thus, Aristotle defined despotism as the kind of kingship prevalent among barbarians, who readily surrendered to an absolute hereditary monarch since they were

slaves by nature (Richter, 2007). Furthermore, the terms "despotic" and "tyranny" were interchangeable on occasion; however, when examining the misuse of governmental power, Aristotle most frequently concentrated his emphasis on examining the political phenomena of despotism. According to Richter (2007), during the middle ages, renaissance, and reformation, despotism was the major concept employed to portray a monarch's tainted or perverted power. In any event, progressive revivals of Aristotelianism maintained the concept of tyranny alive, even if it was relegated to the margins of political discourse (Richter, 2007). Following that, Montesquieu (1799), a French philosopher, offers two theories of despotism that were initially proposed in the second half of the eighteenth century. It reeked of aristocratic concern over a French monarchy resembling an Asian empire. Montesquieu (1799) imagined a terrible tyranny characterized by fear, violence, isolation, and widespread poverty capable of supporting only a subsistence existence. Montesquieu saw despotism as a state in which people became attracted to their slavery not because of frightened obedience, but for the actual pleasure it provides (Boesche, 2017). According to al-Kawakibi (1899), in Europe, despotism was followed by revolutions and democracy, and when Western despots were deposed, fair governments took their place and established a state of affairs that the conditions had helped to establish. Furthermore, when Eastern despots were deposed, they were simply replaced by harsher forms of dictatorship. Throughout the history of western political theory, more than two millennia ago, despotism and tyranny were the regime categories most frequently employed to denote regimes defined by absolute political subordination of citizens controlled by a single person (Richter, 2007). Despotism was associated with perversion, distortion, and corruption in ancient Athenian thinking (Diken, 2021). According to Kamtekar and Lee (2003), despotism is a warped form of democracy.

Furthermore, De Tocqueville (1980), a French political philosopher, stated that administrative centralization was seen as another kind of democratic despotism because, due to Europe's fast industrialization beginning in the first part of the nineteenth century, administrative authority tended to be concentrated in democratic states. This development was accompanied by increased public infrastructure investment and an extension of the government's role in sectors like education and welfare (Takayama, 2020). As a result, the government possessed a huge tutelary power that was able to take charge of people's fates. In addition, from his perspective, the idea of freedom, notably freedom of the press and association, has a decentralizing effect that aids in the prevention of despotism. De Tocqueville (1980) considered these democratic types of despotism from another perspective and established the post-revolutionary theory of despotism. The idea of despotism keeps on developing throughout the twenty-first century, with distinct characteristics in contrast to the previous one. John Keane, a political theorist, offered a new concept of despotism that describes the phenomenon of democratic countries in this modern age. According to Keane (2020), "today's despotism is a new style of pseudo-democratic government headed by rulers skillful in manipulating and interfering in people's lives, garnering their loyalty, and obtaining their obedience". Despotisms are top-down power pyramids that defy political gravity by cultivating willing subservience and docility in their subjects Keane (2020) Montesquieu (1799) analyzed and warned against this modern despotism growing plump on the bourgeois culture of luxury, egoism, and avarice associated with unregulated market commerce. As a result, dictatorial necessity exists in the shadow of international politics of exception in our more economized and secure society, a world where the majority of people willingly obey despotic leaders.

Following the evolution of this notion, it was discovered that the old and new definitions of despotism introduced comparable bounds. Nonetheless, there is a distinction between them, as described by (Keane, 2020). First, the new despotisms thrive on patron-client connections. It enables people to obtain goods and services that are in short supply. Despotism mixes formal and informal rules. Second, in addition to concentrating private capital, wealth, and income, the new despotisms are plutocracies. The government is arranged into vertical pyramids of privilege and injustice known as "big business states," which are highly regulated accumulation regimes. Third, the emerging despotism's middle classes defy social science norms. There is no evidence that they want to follow in the footsteps of the early modern, independent-minded, property-owning citizenry. Fourth, elections are used to periodically gain public support. However, it shields the government from public scrutiny. The new despotisms conduct phantom elections. Fifth, the new despotism weaponizes our time's unfinished digital communications revolution. Television, radio, print, and digital platforms are the media of their political performances

and calculations. As a result, media power grows. Finally, the current despotism is characterized by wealth, executive power expansion, and a weakening of the rule of law. However, the system abuses people into servitude.

## ***2.2 Indicators of New Despotism***

### ***2.2.1 Media power***

"Media power" refers to the relationships that exist among individuals, institutional structures, and events that control the allocation of symbolic resources required to shape our awareness of, and hence our potential to influence in, the world around us (Freedman, 2015). The ability of a single organization or individual to command such a significant presence in and influence over the media environment, and hence the public sphere, has been referred to as media power. In this context, social power is defined as a social interaction between groups or institutions in which a more powerful group or institution (and its members) exert control over the actions and minds of members of a less powerful group. According to Schudson (2002), the media influences political results, particularly election outcomes in democracies, but it also influences legislative choices, bureaucratic infighting, and individual political success or failure.

The news media has the capacity to influence people's opinions (Gene Zucker, 1978). As a result, the greater a country's media power, the greater its capacity to influence or affect individuals. In his comprehensive account of communication power, Castells (2009) expands on this line of thought, arguing that "communication networks are the fundamental networks of power making in society" due to the importance of information and communication processes in influencing minds and securing legitimacy (p. 426). According to Castells (2009), the media do not in and of themselves wield power, but rather "contain the region where power relationships are negotiated between conflicting political and social actors" (p. 194). If the media were to fulfill its democratic purpose, it would give people with a varied variety of opinions and perspectives, rather than just the restricted spectrum represented by those in positions of political power (Schudson, 2002). As a result, it is possible to argue that media influence is critical to the expansion of media power. Because digital media is a primary site of confrontation between large, powerful oligarchs and citizens desiring rapid and significant change, digitalization is pulling on the media, politics, and society in two directions (Tapsell, 2017).

Media influence can be supported with the phenomenon of rising media ownership (Freedman, 2015) and complete Censorship and surveillance system (Robbins & Henschke, 2017). Censorship and surveillance erode trust between citizens and their governments. According to Robbins and Henschke, mass, opaque internet surveillance enables rulers to detect patterns of behavior unknown to the ruled but is inherently incompatible with assuring popular consent (2017). The media is an important platform for fighting inflexible power systems. This type of power is based on the idea that people are often swayed by media influence and that concentrating too much power in the hands of a single organization or person (or a limited group of persons) is undesirable and undemocratic (Freedman, 2015). According to Freedman (2015), media power is best understood as a relationship between numerous interests fighting for a variety of purposes including legitimacy, influence, control, prestige, and, increasingly, profit. Because of their concentrated power and political influence, media oligarchs have an impact on the growth in media influence power, which can impair media pluralism. Media power models also show that media pluralism is crucial, which may be quantified using a media power index (Prat, 2018).

### ***2.2.2 Rule of law***

One of the essential foundations upon which any high-quality democracy is constructed is the rule of law. The democratic rule of law protects civil and political rights as well as freedom, confirming the political equality of all citizens and restricting possible abuses of governmental authority (O'donnell, 2004). Only when the rule of law increases democratic elements such as rights, equality, and accountability can the government be responsive to the interests and needs of the largest number of people. The rule of Law Indicator examines the connection between the state and its people in terms of fundamental human rights and freedoms being upheld and respected. This indicator assesses whether

there is widespread infringement of legal, political, and social rights, including those of individuals, organizations, and institutions. Furthermore, according to Brian Tamanaha, the rule of law is an extraordinarily elusive word that gives birth to a widespread divergence of understandings and is analogous to the notion of the good in the sense that everyone is for it but has differing perspectives on what it is (Bingham, 2007). It is assessed based on the protection of property, the security of people, and the independence and effectiveness of the court (Versteeg & Ginsburg, 2017).

There is no "rule of law" or "rule of laws, not man." Sometimes, all that exists are people in various roles interpreting norms that, according to certain predetermined criteria, fit the criterion of being universally recognized law (O'donnell, 2004). Such a condition plainly outperforms a Hobbesian state of nature or the formulation and application of laws at the whim of a despot. This finding is introduced as the "iron law of oligarchy." According to the iron rule of oligarchy, when organizations reach a certain degree of complexity, they ultimately give way to an oligarchy of elite control (Jantzen, Østergaard, & Vieira, 2006). Furthermore, the law operates regardless of whether the organization is democratic or dictatorial or what its political or non-political goals are. This phenomenon results from the organization's need to maintain constant command and control of administrative administration in order to achieve its goals, as well as the growth of politically sophisticated social elites inside the organization. The rule of law is seen not only as a general element of the legal system and the performance of the courts, but also as the legally-based governance of a democratic state ((O'donnell, 2004).

### **3. Methodology**

Multiple cases in Indonesia, Russia, China, and Iran are examined concerning the concept of new despotism in this study. Thus, the research employs a qualitative approach to achieve its goal. Unraveling complex phenomena or unknown ones is the primary purpose of this tool (Njie & Asimiran, 2014). In qualitative research, the goal is to describe, interpret, verify, and evaluate (Peshkin, 1993). In addition, qualitative studies' inherent flexibility (data collection times and methods can be changed as the research progresses) adds to the assurance that what has been going on is truly comprehended (M. J. Allen & Yen, 2001). Qualitative research is a good fit for this topic because it provides a more in-depth look at the issue at hand. The approach used for this research is multiple case study analyses. In academia, the case study approach is the most frequently utilized approach for qualitative researchers (Baskaranda, 2014). In addition to the single-unit focus, in-depth descriptions of phenomena, a focus on real-life settings, and the use of numerous data gathering methods are key features of case study techniques (Njie & Asimiran, 2014). It is common for case studies to include comprehensive qualitative narratives that help explain the complexity of real-life events that may not be represented by experimental or survey research (Zainal, 2007). This ensures that the issue is viewed through various lenses rather than a single lens, allowing for the discovery and comprehension of multiple facets of the event (Babbie, 2020). As a result, this study focuses on four nations: Indonesia, China, Russia, and Iran, to delve into the complex power dynamics inside these countries. Although there is substantial existing literature on the old concept of despotism in China, Russia, and Iran, there has been no research in Indonesia. However, none of these four countries has conducted a new study on the present notion of despotism identified by John Keane. Anjarwati, Juantara, and Harjo (2022) These four countries have distinct governance systems, allowing for a variety of perspectives or comparisons and parallels to the advent of modern despotism in each. Furthermore, official media surveillance is expanding in these countries, which might aid in a more in-depth examination of the phenomena of media power.

The numerous case study enables the researcher to compare and contrast situations. Because comparisons will be conducted, the instances must be carefully picked to forecast similar or opposing outcomes (Yin, 2003). By depending on idea convergence and results in verification, this data gathering and comparison increases data quality (Shih, 1998). Thus, this study will examine various cases, including variables in the concept of New despotism, from the viewpoints of law and media power. The data will be obtained from a variety of sources, including existing literature, John Keane's book "The New Despotism" as the main reference, the Southeast Asia Freedom of Expression Network (SAFENET) reports, the Supreme Audit Agency of the Republic of Indonesia, the Ministry of Justice of the People's Republic of China website, the Nation People Congress of the People's Republic of China website, Iran data portal website, the state Duma of Russia Federation website, and existing news

media platforms such as British Broadcasting Corporation ( BBC News ), Reuters, and the guardian. To avoid bias and inaccurate information, this data is derived from reliable sources such as reputable media news platforms and government agencies' official websites. The data collected are based on the relation to the indicators of media power and rule of law and it is then are examined with the notion of a new despotism.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1 Media power Influence

Media power in the new despotism is dominated by indicators of Media influence (Castells, 2009). Looking at John Keane's concept of new despotism and its relation to Indonesia, the strong media power can be seen to be one of the tools of repression in this era instead of using direct brutal force. The government's skillful exploitation of media, especially online media and social media networks, defines modern despotism. It is distinguished from state propaganda by the preservation of democratic components such as a free press. Table 1 shows how media power is maintained in Indonesia, Russia, China, and Iran in order to influence the establishment of new despotism.

Country	Media Influence
<b>Indonesia</b>	Indonesia large media industries consist of only few number of dominant elites such as Chairul Tanjung (Trans Corporation), Hary Tanoesoedibjo (Global Mediacom), Eddy Sariaatmadja (Emtek), the Bakrie family (Vision Media Asia), Surya Paloh (Media Group), James Riady (BeritaSatu), and Dahlan Iskan which are the eight media conglomerates. With their positions in political parties or as politicians, such as ex-Ministry of economic which is Chairul Tanjung, ex-ministry of state owned enterprise which is Dahlan Iskan, United Indonesia Party chairman Hary Tanoesoedibjo, ex-chairman advisory board Golkar and Nasdem party member Surya Paloh and Aburizal Bakri as an ex Golkar party chairman. Their involvement in both media industry and politic have considerable clout to affect state policy.
<b>Russia</b>	The government utilizes technology to track, censor, and redirect internet traffic under the 2019 "sovereign Internet" bill, for example, raising worries about arbitrary and extrajudicial blockage of valid content. Fines for violation with data storage requirements were increased to six million rubles (USD\$ 78,700) in December 2019. Russian authorities have ordered the blocking of internet services and platforms in recent years due to non-compliance with Russian legislation. Censors must constantly adjust to this resistance under despotism. Surprisingly, it encourages them to utilize digitally networked media not only for propaganda and control, but also in ingeniously "democratic" ways.
<b>China</b>	A massive censorship and surveillance system, known in China as the Golden Shield Project, was launched by the Ministry of Public Security in 2000 in order to restrict content, identify and locate individuals, and provide immediate access to personal records. The Great Firewall, also known as China's internet censorship system and referred to officially in China as the Golden Shield, has been in

	place since 2000. Only a few Chinese-language anti-Communist Party websites were initially blocked by the Firewall, which was later expanded to include more. However, more websites were gradually restricted in which all digital data traffic in and out of the nation is filtered and regulated by these countrywide electronic barriers, which are managed by ISPs, specially designed network computers, or routers. The Central Leading Group for Internet Security and Informatization (CLG), a policymaking and implementation organization tasked with dealing with internet-related concerns, reported to the Administration of China (CAC) in 2014. The Publicity Department and the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television regularly intervene in program content across the country. For example, ordering channels to restrict the duration and intensity of entertainment shows, carrying state-approved news items, and, in challenging situations, disregarding audience ratings when determining program schedules. CNN and other foreign satellite networks are not widely available and are subject to occasional shutdowns.
<b>Iran</b>	In November 2019, Iran's terrified rulers shut down internet access to 95 percent of the population while allowing government departments to continue using the internet via their National Information Network, a restricted domestic digital infrastructure known colloquially as the "halal net." Despots apply political pressure on national and foreign information technology corporations to censor, filter, and regulate the rising volumes of data transmitted on the internet because they fear popular opposition. In addition, blocking Social media platforms headquartered in the United States, such as Twitter, Facebook, and YouTube, are frequently circumvented by tech-savvy Iranians utilizing Virtual Private Network (VPN).

As seen in table 1, the owners of Indonesia's media corporations have close relations to political parties and have been nominated for government positions. Some media proprietors also enter politics by creating political parties and placing their cadres in government posts. Similar to the political world, media firms are increasingly becoming dynasties: progressively passed down to family members. Certain opinion leaders now dominate channels, reducing the range of viewpoints there. When media proprietors engage the political sphere, they do it for commercial reasons. As a result, media owners, particularly those who are also political elites, not only control the media and information creation, but also wield authority over numerous media regulations. One example is the difficulties in updating Broadcasting Law after 2009, which contends that media digitalization is resulting in a more oligarchic media structure. Digitalization allows wealthy, strong media corporations to access a wider audience. In a free market, conglomerates are vulnerable to external influences (Baker, 2006). As a result of a concentration of ownership, the interests of the working class are marginalized and content is standardized (D. S. Allen, 2005); (McChesney, 2012). There are no rules in Indonesia to prevent the consolidation of media ownership, according to Tapsell (2017), because of the political structure that favors the New Order oligarchs. In this context, ownership refers to the many kinds of governance associated with certain ownership arrangements, while media owners are the persons and businesses that have control over their company (Schlosberg, 2016). Historically, news organizations have been seen as institutions that serve the interests of governing elites (Garnham, 1979). Media proprietors are rapidly purchasing rivals, merging with other companies, and investing in digital media and communication infrastructure. Global media corporations have not dominated the Indonesian market and are not the industry's primary drivers. National media corporations, on the other hand, have grown in power and influence. Tapsell (2017) explained how governments, elites, and oligarchs are aware of this

and are pushing back through control of digital spaces, whether through the consolidation of digital businesses, crackdowns on individuals through laws and regulations, or emphasizing the role of digitalization as a space to tighten surveillance and security.

Regarding power and influence, cases from Russia, China, and Iran provided explanations for the phenomenon of media power through media influence. While censorship tools are powerful tools of repression for media power, despotisms keep their secrets well hidden. Besides, secrecy is required for them to function successfully as top-down modalities of power. The regime's use of modern information technology to monitor, suppress, and exploit local and international citizens is shifting the power balance between democracies and autocracies (Polyakova & Meserole, 2021). Subjects must be kept in the dark via a system of secrets and tightly controlled information flows, which are governed by extraordinarily well-coordinated political dos and don'ts. For instance, extensive electronic monitoring systems termed officially in China as the Golden Shield (*jīn dùn gōng chéng*) but often referred to as firewalls abroad, are the most well-known censoring techniques utilized by the emerging despotisms. This wide system of censorship control affects what information is in and out of the country. In China, the Publicity Department and the State Administration of Radio, Film, and Television regularly intervene in program content across the country. As a result, people are brainwashed to see only what the government wants them to see, leading them into voluntary servitude.

Similar to China, the Russian government is known for their wide censorship program which held a huge dominance in the media power characterized by the new despotism. Russian authorities have ordered the blocking of internet services and platforms in recent years due to non-compliance with Russian legislation. Censors must constantly adjust to this resistance under despotism. Surprisingly, it encourages them to utilize digitally networked media not only for propaganda and control, but also in ingeniously "democratic" ways. Technology-based censorship does not stop at information transmission. It can also affect equipment confiscation or digital storage and transport (Tanczer, McConville, & Maynard, 2016). The overarching goal of such approaches is to garner public support, to entice digital activists into a cat's cradle of praise, condemnation, and control, all in the name of rulers serving the people.

The most cunning despotisms go beyond firewalls, information censorship, and official propaganda, relying on cutting-edge internet "smart filtering" systems. In the case of Iran, despots apply political pressure on national and foreign information technology corporations to censor, filter, and regulate the rising volumes of data transmitted on the internet because they are afraid of popular opposition. Instead of a total ban on these sites, the official news agency Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) is experimenting with filtering measures for what it characterizes to as "illegal and immoral" content. This has the extra benefit of considering public communications as an early warning system, raw material for comprehensive monitoring, and even a virtual steam valve for venting criticisms. Governments have refined these surveillance tools in order to identify, track, imprison, and harm political dissidents ((Larry Diamond, 2010); (Rebecca, 2011)). While censorship prevents collective action, surveillance intimidates them. The 'chilling effect' of government monitoring can cause citizens to fear legal or extralegal repercussions for actions deemed controversial or disruptive (Stoycheff, Wibowo, Liu, & Xu, 2017). The mainstream media serves, propagates, and aids in the reproduction of existing power relations and the ruling elites' societal interests.

In conclusion, it can be seen that the New media has produced a secondary gaze that travels in different ways along the power and surveillance axis than traditional surveillance approaches. This may be seen firmly applied in China, Russia, and Iran, for example, through their programs and legislation aimed at providing total monitoring systems for their population. A huge censorship and surveillance system are designed to limit information, identify and locate individuals, and offer instant access to personal records to keep its populace under check. This system restricts access to information entering and leaving the nation while brainwashing residents through pro-government media and hindering outside media influence from entering the country. Surveillance serves as a balancing force in a mediated society. The subject of the gaze is at a disadvantage in surveillance since they are usually unaware that they are being watched, resulting in unbalanced power distribution (Mann & Ferenbok, 2013). As



Foucault (1995) points out, the problem of the modern state is keeping track of and disciplining large groups of people. Foucault's panopticon Foucault (1995) is a powerful metaphor for institutional power distribution based on the fear of being viewed.

#### 4.2 Absence of rule of law

The Rule of Law Indicator assesses the relationship between the state and its citizens in terms of the protection Baskarada (2014) and respect of fundamental human rights and freedoms. The table 2 examined several cases regarding the abuse of rule of law power in Indonesia, Russia, China, and Iran. The following are two indicators of an absence of rule of law: Civil and political rights are intertwined with the absence of civil and political freedom. These cases are gathered from existing laws and regulations in the following countries that match up to the indicator and show how the existing rule of law is used in the growth of the new despotism.

Country	lack of Civil and political rights	lack of Civil and Political freedoms
<b>Indonesia</b>	Law (UU) Number 11 of 2020 of Job Creation Law is a bill proposed to create more jobs, however, it was faced by significant contentious bills that limit employees' rights. These articles include Article 54 regarding employer status with no limit on contract workers, article 88 regarding workers wage where several policies regarding wages were removed, article 79 on workforce holiday which was reduced to a one-day rest period for six working days, article 90 & 91 removing sanctions for employers who do not provide wages, and article 169 removing workers' rights to apply for dismissal if they believe they have been mistreated.	Amendments to Law 11 of 2008 on Information and Electronic Transactions, as Revised Law (UU) No. 19 of 2016 (ITE). Due to the imprecise terminology used in the statute, there are various contentious provisions in the legislation. These clauses includes article 26 clause 3 with the word " irrelevant ", which can allow for information censorship, article 27 clause 1 & 3 with no clear parameter of what constitutes " decency" and " defamation," article 28 clause 2 with an ambiguous parameter for " hate speech ", which puts religious and ethnic minorities at risk, article 29 making people who report possible violence to the police more vulnerable to prosecution, and article 36 with an unclear variable for " hate speech ", which puts religious and ethnic minorities. Moreover, Article 40 clauses 2A and 2B can be used as a justification for the government to shut down the internet, as happened in Papua in 2019, and the government can choose to shut down the internet without any judicial oversight. Finally, article 45 clause 3 states that people suspected of distributing defamatory content can be

		detained during the investigation phase
		On April 4th, 2020, the National Police Headquarters issued Telegram Letter No. ST/1100/IV/HUK.7.1/2020, asking police to watch internet and act against "hoax spreaders" and those who attacked the President and his administration.
<b>Russia</b>	On May 4, 2021, numerous notable members of the United Russia party and other Duma factions filed and presented Bill No. 1165649-7 to the head of the State Duma. The bill seeks to make it illegal for Russian citizens to be elected (as State Duma representatives) if they participate in the activities of organizations that have been classified as extremist or terrorist by a court. The law specifically says that such limitations may be imposed not just on Russian nationals, but also on Russian permanent residents and stateless individuals. Another new law dealing with "undesirables" modifies the Russian Criminal and Criminal Procedure Codes to make it easier to initiate criminal cases based on claims of links to unpleasant organizations. Police invaded the inaugural federal gathering of municipal deputies in Moscow in March 2021, detaining over 200 guests and charging them with the administrative charge of engaging in the actions of "undesirable groups." Explanatory notes accompanying these two bills	The existing Russian lèse majesté legislation is being enforced and is aimed against people who disrespect President Vladimir Putin. Penalties may vary between 300,000 rubles (\$4,700) and 15 days in jail. A second law levies penalties of up to 1.5 million rubles (\$23,000) for websites that provide "untrustworthy socially relevant material."

	<p>indicate that their authors intend to increase the toxicity of organizations on the Russian authorities' banned list and to bar Russian activists from participating in capacity building and access to education abroad offered by some of the organizations already on the list of "undesirables," or face criminal prosecution and sanctions. Furthermore, the third bill seeks to make it illegal for leaders, staff members, and supporters of extremist groups to run for parliament.</p>	
<b>China</b>	<p>The Sharp Eyes, or "Xueliang Project," which was started in 2015 by nine government entities, is the most well-known data fusion effort in China. The program builds on the Skynet 2005 initiative's infrastructure, which focuses on monitoring public spaces in cities, and extends it to rural regions. Sharp Eyes gathers information from a wide range of sources. These include commercial and government-owned surveillance cameras, both with and without facial recognition capabilities, as well as vehicle and license plate identification cameras.</p>	<p>In Article 105 of China's Criminal Code. Organizing, plotting, or acting to subvert the state's political power and overturn the socialist system, as well as incitement to subvert the state's political power and overthrow the communist system by rumors, slander, or other methods, are all illegal. Despite the fact that China's constitution purports to protect the right to free speech and expression, laws like this one empower the government to stifle all criticism. Activist bloggers and journalists in China frequently face subversion charges.</p>
<b>Iran</b>	<p>The "Cyberspace Users Rights Protection and Regulation of Key on-line Services", wide brought up because the "Protection Bill" (hereafter 'the Bill'), or in Persian as Tarh-e Sianat (طرح صیانت) can disrupt access to international services, threaten internet neutrality and would place management over Iran's web infrastructure, and most significantly web gateways, within the hands of the military and security</p>	<p>Former Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's cabinet authorized a strategy plan devoted to national security and online crime in February 2009, laying the groundwork for what is now known as Iran's Cyber Police, or FATA. Over the next two years, Iran's Police Unit began incorporating cyber-policing into its operational scope, and on January 23, 2011, FATA was established as an</p>

	<p>agencies. This is a concerning trend in a nation where Internet shutdowns and other ways of restricting Internet access have become regular tactics of silencing dissent. The Article 85 clause utilized for its passage delegated decision-making authority over the Bill's implementation to a small group of MPs working behind closed doors.</p> <p>Lastly, article 19 is very worried by the strong rush to approve and execute this Bill, as well as Parliament's complete disdain for the rights of all segments of Iranian society.</p>	<p>autonomous force inside the Iranian Police Force. Seyyed Kamal Hadianfar, the current leader of FATA, has been in charge since 2011. Their mandate is to enforce regulations that prohibit "creating conflicts among socioeconomic strata of the people," "disseminating fraudulent polls," and "disturbing public opinion."</p>
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As illustrated in table 2, the concepts of civil and political rights deprivation and civil and political liberties under the rule of law might impact the establishment of new despotism. This demonstrates that the rule of law is being misused. First, the case shows a lack of civil and political rights in Indonesia. For example, the government promotes the Job Creation Law in order to streamline the process of doing business in Indonesia and boost national investment; however, it eliminates criteria for environmental effect study and provides the central government approval authority. Patron-client ties between politicians and business interests, as well as laws that favor oligarchs and distort citizen rights, are wrapped sophistically. The Job Creation Law is a variation on the current economic growth paradigm, which pursues economic deregulation and favors large investors, notably in mining, plantations, and the media. It limits public engagement in environmental impact studies and the evaluation commission of environmental analysis, an auxiliary group made up of intellectuals and environmental activists that have been replaced by a central government-run assessment agency. This regulation allows large corporations to grow their operations while minimizing the negative environmental impact on the world. Furthermore, not only does this law abide by environmental rights, this legislation has numerous provisions (no. 54, 79, 88, 90, 91, and 169) that were confronted with large contentious measures that limit employees' rights.

In Russia, Duma Bill No. 1165649-7 amends the Russian Criminal and Criminal Procedure Codes to make it simpler to commence criminal procedures based on accusations of ties to undesirable organizations. While Russian authorities have used these laws and practices legitimately to combat violent extremism, they have also used them to target individuals and organizations that pose no real threat and are simply politically inconvenient, preferentially enforcing anti-extremism measures against nonviolent people who hold critical views of the government. As a result, this can limit political rights for civilians who hold different views of the government. The Despots of our era employ far more sophisticated versions of the same tactic of oppressive toleration. That is why the new despotisms do everything they can to conceal the physical and emotional harm they inflict on their chosen opponents. Moreover, Despots consider digital communications a valuable resource for assessing people's thoughts, concerns, anxieties, and grievances, as well as a platform that makes it far simpler for governments to communicate with inhabitants and enhance their governance. For instance, the China Sharp Eyes initiative, launched in 2015 by nine government institutions, is China's most well-known data fusion initiative. As the major purpose of this system is to enact total monitoring infrastructure, this might lead to a loss of civil rights on privacy. Similarly, in the case of Iran, the "Cyberspace Users Rights Protection and Regulation of Key Online Services" can disrupt access to international services, jeopardize internet neutrality, and place control over Iran's web infrastructure, particularly web gateways, in the hands of

the military and security agencies. This is a troubling trend in a country where Internet shutdowns and other methods of limiting Internet access have become common methods of suppressing criticism. Moreover, this law restricts accountability and jeopardizes transparency.

Second, the indicator, lack of civil and political freedoms, shown in the new despotism is characterized by the government's adept exploitation of media, particularly online and social media networks. It differs from governmental propaganda in that it retains democratic features such as a free press. As shown in Table 2, the cases are possible abuse of freedom of speech by the existing laws. For instance, consider the Indonesian government's recent implementation of cyber police. National Police Headquarters issued Telegram Letter No. ST/1100/IV/HUK.7.1/2020 on April 4, 2020. These virtual police have previously been used, leading to an increased society's distrust and dread. Instead of being viewed as a dilutive measure, the government is viewed as repressive. Regardless of the so-called democratic norms advocated for freedom of speech, many grow reluctant to criticize the government. In addition, the media power held by despots in Indonesia is supported by the existing "information and electronic transaction law." Because of the vague wording, the Information and Electronic Transaction law has regularly utilized them to harass or intimidate powerful critics.

According to a CSIS study, most Information and Electronic Transaction Law incidents involved high-ranking officials against ordinary citizens, such as politicians, businessmen, and religious leaders. Because the law is ambiguous and powerful people can use it against the weak, legitimate criticism can be construed as "defamation" or "hate speech". This uncertainty silences government opponents since individuals are afraid of being prosecuted if they express their views online. As a result, the right to free expression has been severely harmed. According to a study performed by indicator Politic Indonesia, 47.7 percent of respondents agreed that people are now scared to voice their thoughts, and 29.4 percent of respondents did not feel free to criticize the government any more. Moreover, the findings demonstrate that leaders who are denied access to information under modern tyranny need intelligence. It's impossible to say that Russia has ever been a really liberal democracy. Government methods include harassment and threats against the country's independent media, which does not have an independent judiciary. Individuals who publish content online that displays a "clear disdain for society, the state, the official state symbols of the Russian Federation, the Russian Federation Constitution, and entities exercising state authority" may face fines and prison terms under the law known as "Russian *lèse majesté* law." Insults aimed towards Putin are criminal under the law and carry severe penalties. Similarly, in China, Article 105 of the Criminal Code prohibits organizing, plotting, or acting to undermine the state's political power and overthrow the socialist system, as well as inciting others to undermine the state's political power and overthrow the communist system through rumors, slander, or other means. Despite the fact that China's constitution pretends to safeguard the right to free speech and expression, regulations such as this one allows the government to quash any criticism. In China, activist bloggers and journalists are regularly charged with subversion.

Moreover, in the case of Iran, the implementation of Iran's Cyber Police or FATA is used to abuse law in the repression of opposition voices. However, there is a lack of information about how FATA carries out investigations. Iran seems to depend less on the harsh instrument of mass filtering and more on alternative means of controlling information availability. Data poses a risk to both digital rights and freedom of peer surveillance for marginalized communities. In order to rule intelligently, despotisms depend on free flows of information that come from below. As a result of these observations, the rule of law should be seen not just as a general element of the legal system and the performance of the courts, but also as the legally based rule of a democratic state (O'donnell, 2004). However, even in countries with established democratic regimes, the rule of law may be compromised (O'donnell, 2004). For example, the following are some of the major ways the rule of law may be hampered in Indonesia, Iran, Russia, and China: The flaws in existing laws. Despite recent advances, there are still laws, judicial standards, and administrative rules in Indonesia that favor oligarchs and distort citizen rights such as employees, have an exploitative environmental impact, and impair independence in battling corruption. However, these resulted in harming civil and political rights. Furthermore, as seen in the case studies (Table 2), some of the laws enacted contain vague language that might be utilized by specific interest groups to oppress or abuse.

Meanwhile, in China, various laws in place carefully limit people's criticism of the government, and they are accompanied by harsh consequences. Similarly, as seen in the case studies (Table 2), Indonesia, Russia, and Iran have built rigorous systems of control and legislation used to persecute some groups opposed to the government. These defects, in turn, confirm all people's political inequity and limit possible abuses of governmental authority. Similar to China, the Russian government is known for its wide censorship program, which held a huge dominance in media power characterized by the new despotism. The government can utilize technology to track, censor, and redirect internet traffic under the 2019 "sovereign Internet" bill.

#### **4.3 Impact to Good Governance**

Good governance may be described in a variety of ways depending on the institution. How governments and other social institutions interact with one other, how they interact with people, and how decisions are made in a complex society are the subject of this book (Graham & Litan, 2003). When it comes to making important decisions, determining who is participating in the process, and establishing the accountability mechanisms, governance is a vital part of the process. So, governance is more than deciding where to go; it is also about deciding who should be involved in the decision-making process and in what capacity (Graham & Litan, 2003). Five Good Governance Principles defined by the UNDP include legitimacy and voice, direction, performance, accountability, and fairness. Looking at the repercussions of the growth of new despotism, the ideals of accountability in good governance can be severely harmed.

The principles of accountability consist of both accountability and transparency codes in order to fulfill these principles. Accountability, as a system, is essential for attaining responsible government. Accountability mechanisms ensure that public authorities and public organizations stay on the right track (Bovens, 2010). In the face of the growth of modern despotism, the country lacks a system of checks and balances or independent bodies to the administration. There is no transparency from above in implementing and discussing policy; therefore, no participation or scrutiny from below. This is due to the fact that it is a top-down power pyramid that resists political gravity. Transparency and accountability are two of the most basic tenets of good governance in which both are interconnected ideas. There are demands for increased transparency and accountability in both the public and private sectors when striving to eliminate corruption and improve governance (Osborne, 2004). When a tiny interest elite group seizes a country's media power, this can lead to a biased or misdirected flow of information from leaders to followers through controlling media exposure and content. Additionally, transparency and accountability are viewed as critical antidotes to corruption, which otherwise weakens government and management. The rise of media power leads to the growth of patron-client relationships, as well as control of commodities produced in the hands of the government and wealthy business people. Transparency necessitates allowing individuals to look into processes and understand why choices are made. Osborne (2004) stated that transparent working methods decrease the potential for corrupt behavior and the reasons for others to suspect wrongdoing.

There is dimension of accountability that needs to be fulfilled by public institution (Khotami, 2017). Results shows that accountability law and honesty in the principle of good governance are negatively stained because of the rule of law traits that favors oligarchs. There is unclear institutional standard and enforcement. The rule of law is used as a tool of repression in this modern era of despotism, whereas, even though democratic elements are present, people are still vulnerable to misuse of the law. This section focuses on the degree to which private citizens and government authorities adhere to formal legal restrictions (Lips, 2003). A fundamental principle of the rule of law is that power should only be used in accordance with the law (Dicey, 1915). Democracies thrive when groups and interests in society are engaged and conflicted with one another via democratic procedures, and they are interdependent: accountability necessitates transparency, and equal enforcement of laws creates important issues of accountability and transparency.

## **5. Conclusion**

The concept of new despotism is still fresh in many people's minds; however, it can be seen quietly taking root in many countries. Indonesia, Russia, China, and Iran are all examples of modern despotism

that can be explained by media power and the rule of law. With the help of several cases, it is possible to discern media power in Indonesia due to the country's media business and existing media policy. Thus, media owners, particularly those who are also political leaders, control not only the media but also a wide range of media rules. Meanwhile, Russia, China, and Iran use modern monitoring techniques to control and limit the media industry. The media's credibility is bolstered by the government's easy access to information. New despotism's concept of voluntary servitude is based on the ability of defined elite interest groups to control media coverage in and out of the country.

According to the main results of the rule of law in Indonesia, Russia, China, and Iran, this new despotism is followed by a patron-client relationship. The rule of law may be viewed as a repressive tool used to control the media, people's criticism or dissent, and create rules that serve the ruling class, also known as the Poligarchs. Furthermore, many laws contain ambiguous terminology that can be abused by irresponsible parties, particularly elites, in order to subjugate people's voices and minds. These outcomes have the potential to put a country's ideals of good governance in jeopardy (Musa, 2022). The key findings indicate that accountability principle is under attack. These are critical areas for assisting governance changes and developing conditional assistance for governance quality. Improving service quality and empowering individuals are both critical, but the latter is highly context-dependent. In response to this context and findings, there are several policies recommendations as follows; First, Increasing the effectiveness of checks and balances. Oversight or "watchdogs" in the executive and judicial systems can improve policy execution and prevent abuses. An ombudsman system through which residents may file complaints and reports may also be beneficial; however, citizens must be assured that their concerns will not be retaliated against and that their reports will be considered seriously. Secondly, re-evaluate current policies that are contentious or have unclear and biased effects by enlisting the help of many stakeholders, including those opposed to the government. Lastly, create regulations to guarantee the independence of both the media and the media regulator. Furthermore, having equal rights to govern the exposure of independent media in order to prohibit the one-sided flow of information may lead to media pluralism and hegemony. Lastly, fund, recognize, and provide an enabling environment for the private sector and non-profit media across all channels to limit political involvement with the media and underlying regulatory ambiguity.

This study can contribute to existing studies on despotism in developing countries. In addition, it adds to existing research on media power and the rule of law. Finally, it may be used to assist policymakers in evaluating current policies and developing new policies to address the urgency of these challenges. This study employs a number of case studies in only four countries, all of which are in Asia. More extensive research lessons could be learned if future research supports more nations from different continents such as Europe, Antarctica, North America, South America, Australia, and Africa to discover how the emergence of this thought differs or is comparable to strengthen arguments regarding the rise of new despotism. Furthermore, because this research is conducted qualitatively, future quantitative research on this study can be conducted for more precise growth measurement.

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