

Does Media Exposure Affect Voting Behaviour and Political Preferences in India?

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Analysing the National Election Study data from 1996 to 2014, this paper examines the effect of media exposure on Indian elections to reach four main conclusions. First, in the last two decades, Indian electorates have been more exposed to the media than ever before. Second, in the 2014 elections, electorates with higher media exposure were more likely to vote for the Bharatiya Janata Party. Third, voters with higher media exposure were more likely to vote for the BJP in previous Lok Sabha elections as well, and, in that sense, the 2014 elections were no different. Fourth, media exposure influenced the political preferences of people. It also finds that electorates with higher media exposure were more likely to support economic liberalisation, but that it made no difference on social conservatism.

There is a refrain that the 2014 Lok Sabha elections was India's first real media election, or at least a "substantially mediatised" one compared to previous polls (Palshikar 2014). It has been argued that it was "media logic" and not "political logic" that determined the outcome of the elections, and the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) victory was largely due to its high-voltage media campaign. One political commentator even went to the extent of saying that what was truly historic about the 2014 elections was not so much the scale of the BJP's win as "the partisanship displayed by the media" (Bajpai 2014). Some have blamed the media for letting the public relations agencies of Narendra Modi's campaign influence their election coverage (Gandhi 2013), while others have argued that TV's obsession with Modi was a result of a "convergence between corporate ownership of the electronic media and Modi's corporate bank-rollers" (Khare 2014; Hasan 2014).

There may be some truth to these claims. However, we have no hard evidence to substantiate them. Their investigation requires varied methodological techniques and theoretical approaches, which is beyond the scope of this paper. While we will briefly touch on the people's perception of media favouritism and the BJP's effective campaign strategy, this paper has a very limited objective, and that is to find out whether media usage and voting preferences were correlated in the 2014 elections. Alternatively, the objective of this paper is to examine how an individual's exposure to the media affects her or his vote choice and political preferences.¹

An analysis of six rounds of National Election Study (NES) data between 1996 and 2014 leads us to make four general conclusions, and the paper is organised accordingly. First, in the last two decades, the Indian electorate has had more exposure to the media than ever before. Second, in the 2014 elections, electorates with higher media exposure were more likely to vote for the BJP. Third, voters with higher media exposure were more likely to vote for the BJP in previous Lok Sabha elections as well, and, in that sense, the 2014 elections were no different. Fourth, media exposure influences people's political preference. We find that electorates with higher media exposure are more likely to support economic liberalisation, but there is no such effect of media exposure on social conservatism. We test for these two variables because Modi has been mostly depicted as a "social conservative" and an "economic reformer".

Our paper is the first systematic effort to document the effect of media exposure on Indian elections, and aims to contribute to a large and growing literature on the effect of the news media on political attitudes and behaviour.² We rely on

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the most common method of determining the effect of the media – using data from surveys to measure the association between a respondent’s reported media exposure and his or her political views. We conclude by laying out the implications of our findings and suggesting approaches for future research.

Media Penetration in India

Most often, citizens learn about politics and the government of the day from the news they watch on television, read in newspapers, and come across on social media spaces. The earliest media studies discounted the effect of mass communications on elections, but more recent studies conclude that it can have a huge influence on election outcomes. As Table 1 shows, Indian electorates are more exposed to the media than ever before, and it becomes imperative to test the effect of this on elections. Time-series NES data corroborates that the media’s penetration into Indian society has increased significantly in recent years. Figure 1 reveals that the regularity with which voters watch news on tv has been gradually rising since 1996. The percentage of voters who watch tv news daily went up from 19% in 1996 to 46% in 2014. Not surprisingly, in these years, listening to radio news declined. Daily newspaper readership almost doubled, and the proportion of people who never read newspapers has come down by three times in the last two decades. This has been helped by the increasing literacy in the country. The male-female gap in the literacy rate and the urban-rural literacy gap have significantly been reduced in the last decade.

Table 1: Media Penetration in India

Television	The number of TV news channels increased to 393 in 2014 from 241 in 2009. Of a total of 246.7 million households, 60.7 million are DTH subscribers registered with private service providers According to Census of India figures, TV ownership increased from 32% in 2001 to 47% in 2011.
Newspapers	There are more than 12,500 daily newspapers today, compared to around 8,500 in 2009. Total certified circulation of newspapers increased from 38.4 million copies in 2006 to 48.29 million in 2012. Newspaper readership increased from 296 million in 2006 to 340 million in 2012. Five Hindi newspapers, four regional language ones, and one English newspaper are in the list of top 10 newspapers according to readership.
Internet	Internet subscription saw a massive increase from 12.8 million in 2009 to 21.6 million by 2013; 143 million people access the internet through mobile phones. Of a total of 246.7 million households, approximately 10% have computers/laptops, and one-third of those with computer/laptops are connected to the internet. Facebook: In 2010, India had 8 million users. The company claims to have crossed 100 million users in March 2014, of which 84 million are active users. Twitter: The estimates ranged between 18 and 33 million at the end of 2013.
Telephone	Tele-density increased from 2.86 per 100 people in 2000 to 73.32 in 2013. The number of mobile phones increased from 35.6 million in 2004 to 867.8 million in 2013.
Radio	There are 242 private FM radio stations in the country. Radio had an audience of around 158 million people in 2012. Of a total 246.7 million households, 20% has a radio/transistor.

Sources: Registrar of Newspapers in India, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Telecom Regulatory Authority of India, Census of India, and various newspaper reports.

Figure 1: Increasing Media Exposure in India since 1996



Source: Time series NES 1996-2014.

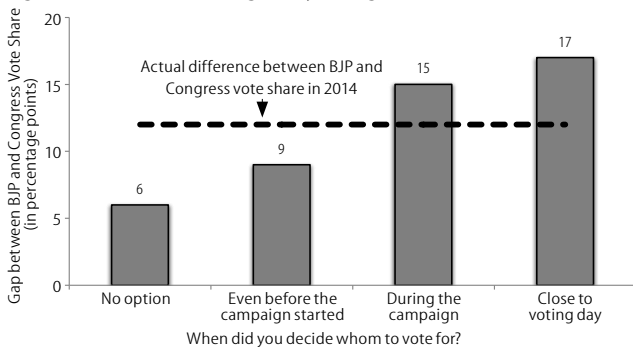
Apart from the traditional media (television, print and radio), the last decade has witnessed the growing influence of the internet and social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, YouTube, and so on. In the 2014 elections, most political parties and leaders made an attempt to reach out to voters through these new forms of media. They redesigned their official party websites to make them more interactive, and opened accounts on various social networking platforms to reach out to more voters, especially young ones who are believed to be more technology savvy (Doron and Robin 2013; Chopra 2014).³ There were certainly more internet subscribers and users during the 2014 elections than there were during the previous elections. However, if we compare the internet’s current reach with that of tv, print and radio, its role seems to be relatively minimal, if not irrelevant. The Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) surveys conducted between July 2013 and May 2014 revealed that more than 80% of the respondents did not use the internet for obtaining news, and only 5% used it daily. As far as social media usage was concerned, just about one in 10 voters reported having a Facebook account and only 3% a Twitter account. Among the few voters who had Facebook accounts, only about one in three used it on a daily basis. Among Twitter users, daily usage was even less at one in five. When these respondents were asked how often they used their accounts for keeping abreast of political news, only about one-third said they use them often and more than half said they never use them for obtaining news. Given that the penetration and use of the internet and online social networks is still low in India, in our opinion, the effect of social media on elections is greatly exaggerated, at least for now.

Modi, Media and the Message

The long-standing dictum that Indian elections are not won on television may still be true, but the country had never witnessed such a media blitzkrieg as in the 2014 elections. Many political parties ran extravagant media campaigns. According to a newspaper report, the BJP’s campaign cost may have been around Rs 5,000 crore. It also said that in the run-up to the elections, the BJP had booked 15,000 hoardings across India for up to three months; bought the most prominent ad slots across national, regional and vernacular newspapers for 40 days; and bought about 2,000 spots a day across Hindi, English, and regional news, general entertainment, and sports channels.⁴

An NES 2014 survey asked respondents about when they made up their mind on whom to vote for. Figure 2 shows that the respondents who made up their mind during the campaign or very close to the voting day were more likely to vote for the BJP. The difference between the BJP and Congress vote share was highest among those who made up their mind very close to voting day. The respondents were also asked whether they were aware of opinion polls predicting the victory or loss of some party in the Lok Sabha elections. Though less than one in four respondents seemed to be aware of opinion polls, the BJP had an advantage over others among those who said they were aware of opinion polls. These points illustrate the potentially crucial role the media may have played in swinging voters' decision. However, the NES data shows that the BJP won more votes than any other party among respondents who had made their voting decision before the election campaign and were not aware of opinion polls.

Figure 2: BJP's Lead over Congress by Timing of Decision to Vote



Source: NES 2014.

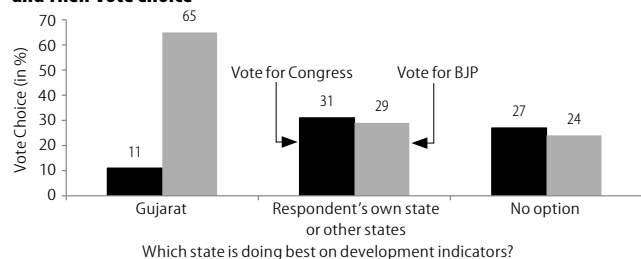
In these elections, Modi and his team managed to turn a parliamentary election into a presidential-style referendum after his appointment as the BJP's prime ministerial candidate in September 2013. Over the next nine months, between September 2013 and May 2014, Modi attended 5,187 events, addressed 477 rallies in 25 states, and used the internet and mobile telephony to connect with an estimated 230 million people, or one in every four voters.⁵ So ubiquitous was his presence and so persistent and effective his campaign that many who thought tv news channels to be biased in favour of Modi were still ready to vote for the BJP.⁶ In an NES pre-poll survey (conducted in March 2014), voters were asked whether they thought tv news channels were favouring some political leaders in their programmes. Approximately 30% answered in the affirmative, while 36% did not think the media was being biased, and the rest did not express any opinion. In a follow-up question, respondents were asked to name which leader they thought tv news channels were favouring, and one in four (26%) named Modi. A similar proportion of respondents said that news channels were favouring the Congress (Rahul Gandhi's and Sonia Gandhi's names were mentioned by 9% each, and Manmohan Singh by 7%). The voting preferences of these respondents suggested that those who perceived that tv channels were favouring Modi were equally likely to vote for the BJP and the Congress, whereas those who perceived that tv channels were favouring the Congress were twice as likely to vote for the BJP as the Congress. This is very important as it suggests that the wide support for Modi in this election

was not due to his ubiquitous presence on media platforms, but possibly because of the sentiments he was representing.

The popularity of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government had begun declining much before Modi arrived on the scene. Data from Lokniti-csds surveys conducted in July 2011 and July 2013 show that satisfaction with the performance of UPA government had declined, as had Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's approval ratings. In this context, Modi presented himself as an agent of change – a change in which a country could be governed with Gujarat as the model of economic development. Notwithstanding the debate surrounding the “facts” on Gujarat as a development model, NES 2014 pre-poll data indicates that most people perceived Gujarat to be a well-managed state. Respondents were asked an open-ended question about which state in their opinion was doing best on development indicators. One in five respondents named Gujarat, a little less than half the respondents did not mention any state, and the rest either named their state or other states.

The analysis also suggests that respondents with high media exposure were at least four times more likely to say Gujarat as a state was doing best compared to those with low media exposure or no media exposure. A large proportion of respondents perceived Gujarat to be a well-managed state. This was also reflected in their vote choice in the NES 2014 pre-poll survey (Figure 3). The BJP and Congress were placed neck and neck among respondents who named states other than Gujarat, or those who did not mention any state. The Congress had a slight advantage in these two groups of respondents. However, Gujarat seems to have tilted the balance in favour of the BJP. Among respondents who perceived Gujarat to be doing best on development indicators, the BJP was six times more likely to be the preferred party than the Congress. The results presented in Figure 3 do not change even if we take out the respondents from Gujarat from the analysis. This suggests that Modi's media managers ran an effective and strategic campaign and managed to convince voters that Gujarat under him was a well-governed state.

Figure 3: People's Perception of State with the Best Development Indicators and Their Vote Choice



Source: NES 2014 (pre-poll).

Media Exposure and Vote Choice

The 2014 elections result confirmed that Modi's campaign team delivered on the strategy that had been devised to reach out to voters.⁷ The BJP's extensive media campaign kept gaining strength as the election approached, and regular viewers and readers of news were influenced by it. Table 2 (p 85) reflects the increasing popularity of the BJP and Modi in the run-up to the elections. The BJP's popularity was the highest among those who regularly saw television and read newspapers. In July 2013,

the BJP's lead over the Congress in terms of votes was just 3 percentage points among those who saw TV news regularly (daily or sometimes). This increased steadily in the next nine months to 20 percentage points in May 2014. Similarly, the BJP's lead over the Congress among regular readers of newspapers increased from 7 percentage points to 20 percentage points, and among internet users from 13 percentage points to 26 percentage points. Modi's lead over Rahul Gandhi as the preferred choice for prime minister also increased during this period. His lead increased from 9 percentage points to 25 percentage points among regular TV news viewers, from 11 percentage points to 27 percentage points among regular newspaper readers, and from 14 percentage points to 35 percentage points among frequent internet users.

The data in Table 2 lays bare a very important fact. In these nine months, there was a comparable increase in Modi's and the BJP's popularity even among those who were either remotely or not exposed to news. That means the BJP's media campaign was certainly effective, but it was only one of many factors as other papers in this volume demonstrate. Media outlets were just another platform for the BJP and Modi to attack the Congress government for non-performance. The time-series NES data indicates that voters with higher media exposure generally tend to be more educated, are wealthier, live in urban areas, belong to higher castes, and are younger in age. There is enough evidence to suggest that this is essentially the BJP's constituency (Chhibber 1997; Hansen and Jaffrelot 1998; Heath 1999). In simple words, the BJP tends to draw more votes from these segments than from those who are less educated, poor, from rural localities, from the lower castes, and elderly (Yadav 2004; Yadav and Palshikar 2009). The time-series NES data also confirms that the greater the exposure of a voter to the media, the greater her or his chances of voting for the BJP (Figure 4).

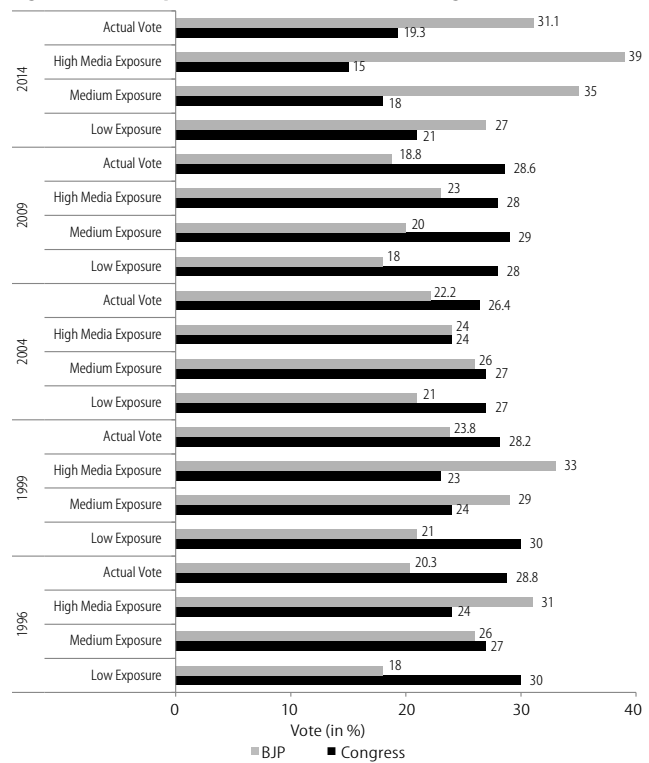
Table 2: Media Exposure and Increasing Popularity of the BJP and Narendra Modi in 2014

	Watch TV News				Read Newspaper				Internet Usage For News			
	July 2013	Jan 2014	Mar 2014	May 2014	July 2013	Jan 2014	Mar 2014	May 2014	July 2013	Jan 2014	Mar 2014	May 2014
The BJP's vote lead over the Congress (percentage points)												
Regularly	+3	+10	+13	+15	+7	+14	+15	+20	+13	+19	+23	+26
Rarely	-7	+3	+7	+6	-2	+13	+8	+13	+8	+18	+13	+22
Never	-6	+3	+1	+3	-7	-1	+3	+4	-2	+6	+9	+10
Narendra Modi's lead over Rahul Gandhi as Choice for prime minister (percentage points)												
Regularly	+9	+21	+21	+25	+11	+24	+25	+27	+14	+27	+30	+35
Rarely	+5	+15	+18	+13	+5	+22	+17	+21	+10	+30	+21	+30
Never	+5	+13	+12	+12	+5	+13	+13	+16	+7	+22	+18	+19

Sources: Tracker I, Tracker II, NES 2014 (pre-poll and post-poll).

To estimate the unbiased effect of media exposure on vote choice in 2014, we used two logistic regression models, controlling for socio-demographic factors. For both models, the dependent variable is vote choice for the BJP (BJP=1, Others=0). However, the main independent variable differs in both models. In the first model, we use an index of media exposure, that is, we combine the frequency of exposure to TV news, newspaper readership and internet access for news.⁸ In the second model, we use a separate category of frequency of exposure to TV news, newspaper readership and internet access for news. The independent variables in this model for TV and newspaper have been clubbed with the language in which they are watched

Figure 4: Media Exposure and the Likelihood of Voting for the BJP since 1996



Source: Time series NES 1996-2014.

or read.⁹ The results in these two models are broadly similar for socio-demographic factors (Table 3, p 86). Respondents who were from a higher economic class, were younger in age, and were highly educated were more likely to vote for the BJP. The upper castes, Other Backward Classes (OBCs), scheduled castes (SCs), and scheduled tribes (STs) were more likely to vote for the BJP, whereas Muslims were less likely to vote for it. In essence, the BJP managed an umbrella social coalition in this election due to an unprecedented consolidation of the upper-caste and OBC vote, with many SCs and STs supporting it as well. Respondents' place of residence was statistically insignificant – rural voters were equally likely to vote for the BJP as urban residents. Similarly, there was no difference in male and female voting patterns after holding other variables constant.

As far as the main independent variables are concerned, in the first model, media exposure is positively correlated with the likelihood of voting for the BJP, and it is statistically significant even after holding socio-demographic factors constant. In the second model, we find that with reference to respondents who watch TV news very rarely or do not watch at all, those who frequently watch the news in English are no more or less likely to vote for the BJP. Those who watch news in Hindi are more likely to vote for the BJP, and those who watch in regional languages are less likely to do so. Interestingly, daily Hindi newspaper readers and regional language newspaper readers are more likely to vote for the BJP compared to those who do not read newspapers or read it very rarely. Internet usage to access news makes no difference to the likelihood of voting for the BJP.

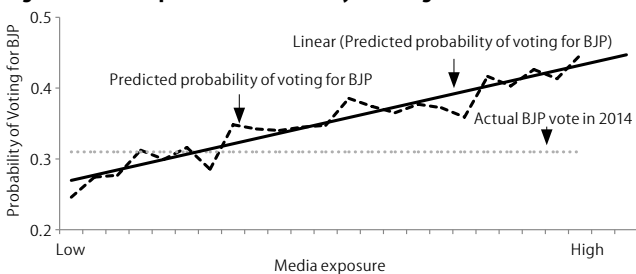
Table 3: BJP Vote and Effect of Media Exposure in 2014

	Model I		Model II	
	B	SE	B	SE
Media exposure (low to high)	0.07**	0.01	-	-
TV English (high/medium exposure)	-	-	0.52	0.28
TV Hindi (high exposure)	-	-	0.65**	0.06
TV Hindi (medium exposure)	-	-	0.73**	0.06
TV regional (high exposure)	-	-	-0.59**	0.06
TV regional (medium exposure)	-	-	-0.50**	0.06
Newspaper English (high/medium exposure)	-	-	0.18	0.20
Newspaper Hindi (high exposure)	-	-	0.20**	0.06
Newspaper Hindi (medium exposure)	-	-	0.12	0.07
Newspaper regional (high exposure)	-	-	0.29**	0.07
Newspaper regional (medium exposure)	-	-	0.10	0.07
Internet (high exposure)	-	-	-0.04	0.08
Internet (medium exposure)	-	-	0.10	0.09
Economic class (low to high exposure)	0.07**	0.02	0.06**	0.02
Education (low to high)	0.06**	0.02	0.05*	0.02
Locality (rural)	-0.05	0.04	-0.08*	0.04
Upper caste	1.32**	0.07	1.14**	0.07
Other Backward Classes	0.83**	0.07	0.75**	0.07
Scheduled caste	0.40**	0.08	0.22**	0.08
Scheduled tribes	1.10**	0.09	0.91**	0.09
Muslims	-0.88**	0.10	-1.18**	0.10
Age (young to old)	-0.05**	0.01	-0.04**	0.01
Gender (male)	0.07*	0.03	0.06	0.03
Constant	-1.62**	0.11	-1.56**	0.14

** p<0.01, * p<0.05. Total cases included in the analysis = 19,997.
Source: NES 2014.

We calculated the predicted probability of voting for the BJP by media exposure categories and plotted it graphically. Figure 5 depicts the increasing probability of a BJP vote with higher media exposure (calculated from the first regression model), and we have drawn a linear forecast line to show how the probability of voting for the BJP increases with higher media exposure. Figure 6 shows the predicted probability of voting for the BJP (calculated from the second regression model) is highest among respondents who watch or read news in Hindi. This graph well illustrates why the BJP along with its allies virtually swept the Hindi heartland by winning 201 of the 225 seats in it.

Figure 5: Media Exposure and Probability of Voting for the BJP

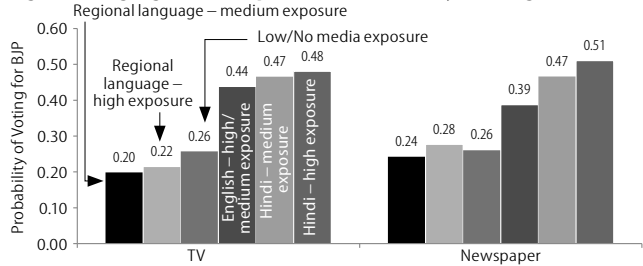


Source: NES 2014.

Media Exposure and Political Attitudes

What explains the correlation between media exposure and a respondent’s likelihood of voting for the BJP in 2014? The first and foremost reason is that the BJP’s traditional voter base – urban, upper caste, more educated, and wealthy – is more exposed to the media than those of its counterparts. Second, due to increasing media exposure, in the last decade, the BJP has had a much larger catchment pool of electors. While these two reasons are true, they do not explain why Modi succeeded in rallying voters with higher media exposure behind the BJP in such large numbers.

Figure 6: Language, Media Exposure, and Probability of Voting for the BJP



Source: NES 2014.

Till very recently, the literature on voting behaviour did not consider media exposure to have a sizeable effect on election outcomes. Only a few among the early studies on voting behaviour considered media impact and campaign effort to be a predictor of vote choice as they assumed that partisan attachments were built over a long period of time and were rather stable. These studies suggested that media exposure and campaign efforts in an election cycle could not change strong partisan ties. However, later works adopted “the minimal effects” perspective, assuming that campaign and media coverage do have some influence on voters’ preference (Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet 1944; Klapper 1960). The findings of these researches suggest that exposure to campaigns only activates voters’ prevailing partisan attitudes rather than changing their vote choice (Lazarsfeld and Katz 1955).

At the turn of the century, election campaigns in most parts of the world evolved into nationally coordinated, personalised, capital-intense, and media-oriented demonstrations; famously referred to as the “Americanisation of election campaigns” (Norris 2001). As a result of structural changes (declining partisanship attachment; proliferation of media sources; and the professionalisation of campaign communications), curiosity about campaign effects began increasing, and the minimal effects hypothesis began losing its central position in political communication (Finkel 1993). The development of more sophisticated theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches enabled scholars to find that campaign strategies and events, and the media’s coverage of them, influence voter preferences and shape election outcomes, particularly in close elections (Box-Steffensmeier, Darmofal and Farrell 2009). The research on campaign effects in general and the role of media in particular began seeking a broader perspective for multiple effects beyond the activation of partisan loyalties, such as the indirect cognitive effects of campaigns (Iyengar and Kinder 1987; McCombs and Shaw 1972); the role of campaigns on knowledge of candidates and issues (Alvarez 1998; Freedman et al 2004; Gelman and King 1993); and the effects of campaigns on voter turnout (Ansolabhere and Iyengar 1995; Finkel and Geer 1998; Freedman and Goldstein 1999). Now there is enough evidence to suggest media sources may influence the public not only through the slant of a particular report (DellaVigna and Kaplan 2007), but also by choosing what to cover (George and Waldfogel 2006). Largely, there is a consensus among scholars that the media shapes the public’s political knowledge, attitudes and behaviour (Besley and Burgess 2002; Hamilton 2003).

In these elections, Modi’s campaign team pushed his message on Gujarat as a model of economic development, and the analysis suggests that a substantial section of voters leaned towards the

BJP because they perceived Gujarat to be doing well on development indicators. Many commentators have noted that they were perplexed by Modi's campaign speeches in which he stressed the economy and development more than the BJP's plank of Hindutva, or social conservatism (Varshney 2014). In his speeches, Modi repeatedly highlighted his plans to improve infrastructure, address unemployment, and fight poverty. He chanted a slogan of "minimum government and maximum governance" in his speeches. We claim that Modi managed to connect to voters with higher media exposure with his promise of reducing the role of the state in the economy and his image as a pro-business reformer. We hypothesise that voters with higher media exposure were more likely to support economic reform, and this was the reason why media exposure had such a large effect on the choice of the BJP in 2014. We argue that this effect of media exposure was independent of the BJP's traditional vote base, and this leads to our second hypothesis – media exposure had no independent effect on a respondent's likelihood of supporting a social conservative agenda. We tested for these two variables, and the indices on economic reform and social conservatism are identical to the one used by Chhibber and Verma (2014) in this volume.¹⁰

Table 4 reports the results of OLS regression models using social conservatism and economic reforms as the dependent variable. We find support for our hypothesis in the regression models. The result shows that media exposure has no effect on social conservatism, that is, it is statistically insignificant, while it is positively correlated with economic reforms when holding socio-demographic factors constant. Not surprisingly, the data presented in the table suggests that social conservatism is positively correlated with caste-community variables, whereas wealthier respondents and those who live in urban areas are more likely to support economic reforms. Why is media exposure positively correlated with economic reforms and not with social conservatism? While we do not have a definitive answer at this stage, we suggest that opinions on social issues are reflections of a long-term ideological divide in Indian politics, and media exposure, being only a proximate cause, does not seem to make a difference here. In the case of economic reform, voters are not so ideologically locked in, and it is possible that this may explain why this is more malleable and easily affected by media exposure. This is where Modi's image of a pro-market leader helped the BJP in winning a larger portion of

voters with high media exposure. Our findings corroborate the conclusions in previous work such as *Politics after Television* by Arvind Rajagopal (2004), which explored the connection between the role of the media, support for economic liberalisation, and the tendency of voters to lean towards the BJP.

Conclusions

This paper shows that exposure to the media was positively correlated to the likelihood of voting for the BJP in the 2014 elections. However, such a relationship between the BJP vote and media exposure existed in previous elections as well, at least since 1996. We find that in the 2014 elections, voters with higher media exposure were more likely to support economic reforms. This way, Modi's image of a pro-business reformer helped him mobilise a huge chunk of voters. Modi and his media managers brought a paradigm shift to election campaigning in India. The findings in this paper suggest that with ever expanding media penetration; the increasing "live" coverage of political rallies and presidential-style campaigning; the growing link between political interests and owners of media houses; and agenda-setting political debates, Indian politics is likely to become more "mediatised" and the electoral process more "Americanised" in coming years (Palshikar 2014; Stromback 2008).

There are, of course, certain caveats to the conclusion. First, the magnitude of this "media effect" needs to be quantified by further empirical research in this area. Second, the positive correlation between media exposure and the likelihood of voting for the BJP deserves serious introspection. We need to delink the impact of the media from the impact of an effectively managed and efficient campaign. While it might be true that media outlets were in favour of Modi and that the BJP got more coverage on TV and in newspapers, we should bear in mind that Modi campaigned more than any other leader in these elections. Newspaper reports suggest that he attended three times as many rallies as Rahul Gandhi, and it was the intensity of the campaign that was reflected in media reports. We should also not forget that as the incumbent party, the Congress had no less resources, if not more (at least financially), than the BJP. Congress campaign managers hired Japanese advertising and communication firm Dentsu and Burson-Marsteller to devise strategies for the 2014 Lok Sabha poll campaign. Reports also suggest that the party may have spent a significant amount of money (comparable to the BJP) in this election. We propose that future research in this area should try to delineate the "media effect" from the "campaign effect". It is possible that the way the campaign was organised and planned; the mobilisation at the grass roots; and strategic decisions on where and when to advertise helped the BJP campaign peak at the right moment. The extent of this impact needs to be ascertained and acknowledged when understanding the determinants of vote choice.

Third, this paper is limited, in a sense, because the analysis is focused on the national level and understanding broad trends. The effect of media exposure could be much more localised, as evident from the rise and fall of the Aam Aadmi Party in Delhi. In addition, reports of "paid news", and the Election Commission of India's media certification and monitoring committees point

Table 4: Media Exposure and Political Attitudes

	Social Conservatism		Economic Reform	
	Beta Coeff	Std Error	Beta Coeff	Std Error
Media exposure (low to high)	0.01	0.01	0.05**	0.01
Economic class (low to high)	-0.02	0.01	0.05**	0.01
Education (low to high)	0.04**	0.01	-0.04**	0.01
Locality (rural)	0.05*	0.02	-0.13**	0.02
Age (young to old)	0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.01
Upper caste	0.51**	0.04	0.07	0.04
OBCs	0.29**	0.03	0.14**	0.04
Scheduled castes	0.28**	0.04	-0.02	0.05
Scheduled tribes	0.29**	0.05	0.08	0.06
Muslims	-0.03	0.04	-0.07	0.05
Gender (male)	0.02	0.02	0.07**	0.02
(Constant)	-0.39**	0.06	0.01**	0.07

** p<0.01, * p<0.05. Total cases included in the analysis = 22,022.

towards the need for micro-econometric research to explain local-level variations. Finally, we need more sophisticated approaches to figure out whether voters in India are passive consumers of news or whether they actively engage with it and decide whom to vote for after discounting for media bias. For long, research

on voting behaviour in India held voters beholden to their caste and community (primordial loyalties), and now it is being suggested that voters get easily swayed by what they consume on news media (probably a “modern” loyalty). In our view, these relationships are not axiomatic and need more investigation.

NOTES

- 1 It would be important to point out that in this paper the term media exposure is limited to the frequency of accessing news, and the media exposure index ranges from low to high. Electors also get influenced by many other things they watch, read, or hear on media platforms, such as campaign advertisements, rallies and speeches, and interviews with political leaders, but these factors are not part of the media exposure index used in this paper.
- 2 Palshikar (2014) puts this succinctly “The politics in India has increasingly become ‘mediated’, and more particularly since the 1989 elections, but this aspect of politics (role of media in politics) has not been adequately considered, nor researched, in the Indian context.”
- 3 For example, the BJP’s prime ministerial candidate Narendra Modi collected 4 million followers on Twitter, and Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader Arvind Kejriwal had about 2 million followers at the time of the election.
- 4 See Himani Chandra Gurtoo (2014).
- 5 See Kunal Pradhan and Uday Mahurkar (2014).
- 6 A study conducted by the Delhi-based Centre for Media Studies (CMS) analysed the late evening news shows of three Hindi and two English news channels over a period of two months and found that stories about Modi occupied 33% of the time, seven times higher than his main political rival, Rahul Gandhi.
- 7 Modi’s media managers made the best use of technology to reach out to people in areas where the penetration of the media is very low. Vehicles equipped with the required paraphernalia, including pre-recorded video messages, were sent to remote villages to expand the campaign footprint. Newspaper reports suggested that the concept of *chai pe charcha* or “discussion over tea” seemed to have been a hit as people flocked to tea stalls where they could see or talk to Modi over a webcast and sip tea from paper cups with his picture on them. A *Financial Times* blog reported that Modi was present simultaneously at 150 locations, thanks to 3D hologram images created for his public meetings.
- 8 It is important to point out that the media exposure index used in the regression models is different from the index used in Figure 4. The media exposure index in Figure 4 combines TV, newspapers, and radio whereas the media exposure index in the regression models combines TV, newspapers, and the internet. We did so as media reports suggested that social media was likely to have a big impact on the 2014 election. For example, a study suggested that Facebook users were going to have an effect in 160 parliamentary constituencies.
- 9 Appendix 1 reports the distribution of NES sample by language and media exposure. NES 2014 reveals that most people in India watch television news and read newspapers in Hindi. The usage of English for obtaining news is very low. In this election, the BJP which has traditionally been perceived as a Hindi-belt party not only did well among those who watch and read news in Hindi, but also equally well among the relatively few voters who obtain news in English. Among those who watch and read news in regional languages, the BJP’s performance was way below its overall average; however a disaggregated analysis of specific languages does show variations with the BJP doing well among Gujarati, Marathi, Kannada, and Assamese speakers.
- 10 The social conservatism index was constructed using two questions; first, whether

the government should make special provisions to accommodate minorities; and second, whether the reservations based on caste and religion divide people of India. The economic reform index was constructed by using two questions; first, whether the government should curb the right of workers to strike; and second, whether the government should focus more on infrastructure than providing subsidies. Both scales were constructed by reordering the questions to represent a standard left-right view.

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Appendix 1: TV and Newspaper Exposure by Language (%)

	English - High/Medium Exposure	Hindi - High Exposure	Hindi - Medium Exposure	Regional Language - High Exposure	Regional Language - Medium Exposure	Low/No Exposure	Medium Exposure	High Exposure
TV	1	20	12	25	11	33	-	-
Newspaper	1	12	9	11	8	59	-	-
Internet	-	-	-	-	-	87	7	6