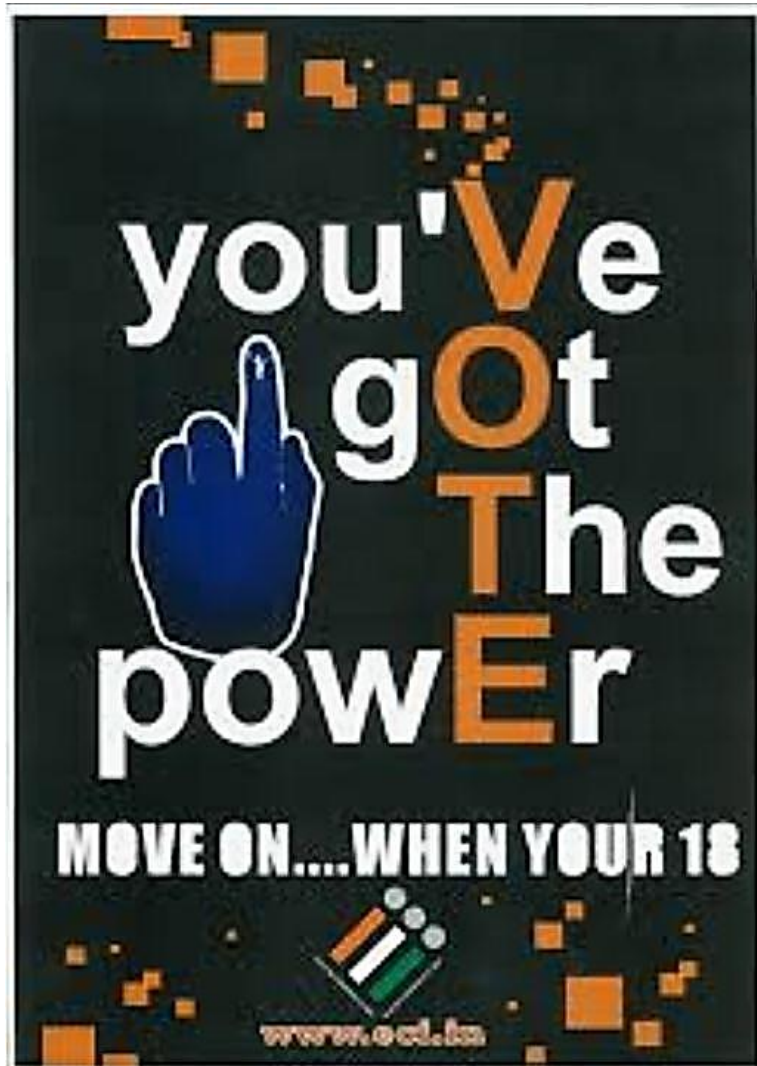


**COMPARATIVE APPROACHES TO DISINFORMATION WORKSHOP,  
WASSERSTEIN (WCC) MILSTEIN EAST A/B, HARVARD LAW SCHOOL,  
OCTOBER 04, 2019.**



**Political Polarization of First-Time Voters: The Role of  
Disinformation in Strengthening Bias of Indian Youth in  
the 2019 General Elections**

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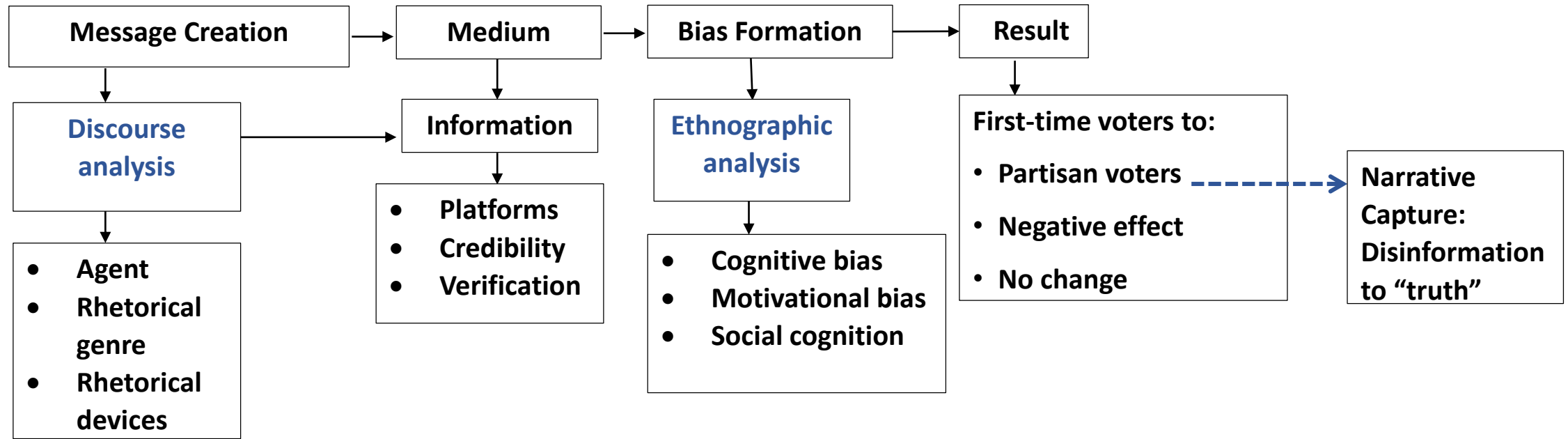
Source: Election Commission of India poster targeting first-time voters.

## To study the build-up of 'bias in action' of first-time voters

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- **Largest democracy: 84.3 million first-time voters including 15 million aged 18-19 (Election Commission of India, 2019)**
- **Largest digitalized democracy: 61% of owners of smartphones among voters, highest exposure to social media at 31%, highest users of Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter (CSDS-Lokniti, 2019)**
- **First-gen of social media elections: Aggressively targeted by BJP and INC by SNS and SMS**
- **Further segmentation: First-time voters and information agents**

# Research Design



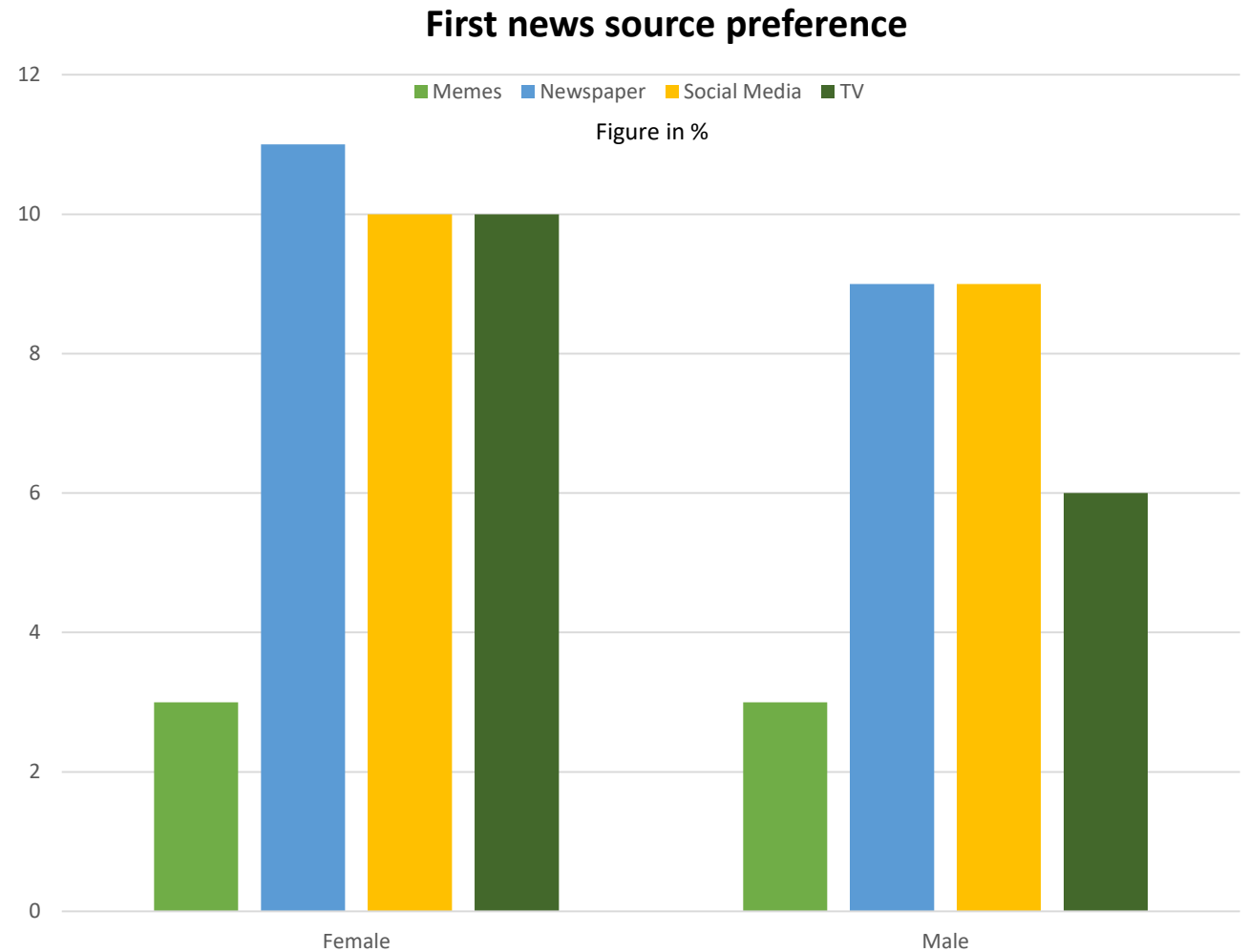
- **First-time voters: N=61, SEC, High SMS and SNS Users from Kolkata and Bangalore**
- **Time of study: Election (March- May 2019) and Post-Election (November-December, 2019) phases**
- **Composite identity: Focus on polarization rather than tribalism**
- **Biases: Information verification bias, pre-existing bias, and new/mutated bias**
- **Stakes: Individual, collective, national prestige, economic, political**
- **Salience: Parameters for a heuristics-based analytical engine model/blockchain approach on dependencies of disinformation**

## Discursive Strategies: Hyperbole vs. Humor

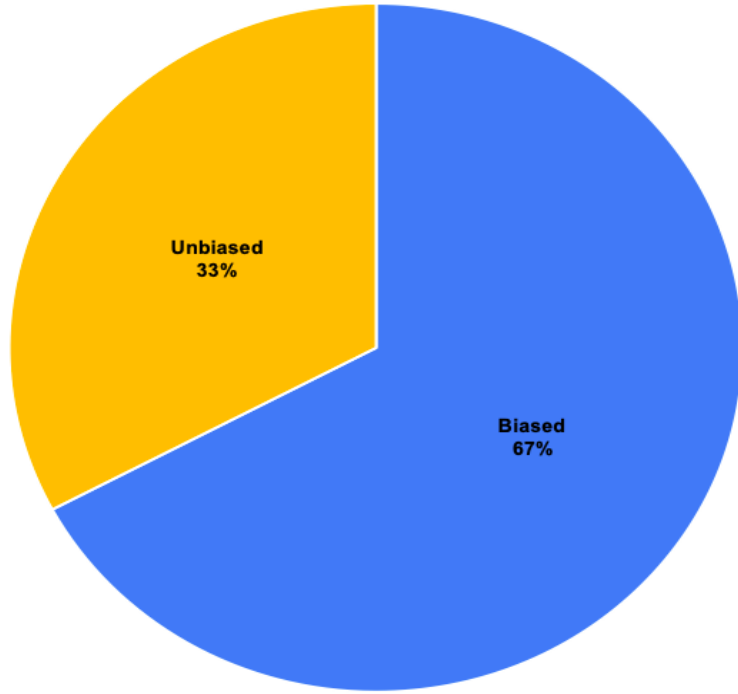
Themes	Formats	Discursive genre	Rhetorical devices (Conservative)	Rhetorical devices (Liberal)
Leadership/ party	Videos, memes, infographics, quote cards	Emotive, epideictic	Hyperbole, metaphor, ad hominem	Satire, litotes, paralipsis, ad hominem
Issue (soft- power like economy)	Videos, memes, infographics, text	Rational	Enumeratio, binary opposition	Enumeratio, satire
Issue (hard- power like national security)	Videos, memes, cartoons, infographics, newspaper grabs	Emotive	Hyperbole, metaphor, ad baculum, binary opposition	Satire, ad hominem
'Us' versus 'Them'	Videos, cartoons, text, newspaper grabs	Emotive	Ad hominem, ad personam, binary opposition, whataboutery	Amplification, binary opposition, whataboutery

## Key Findings: Information Bias

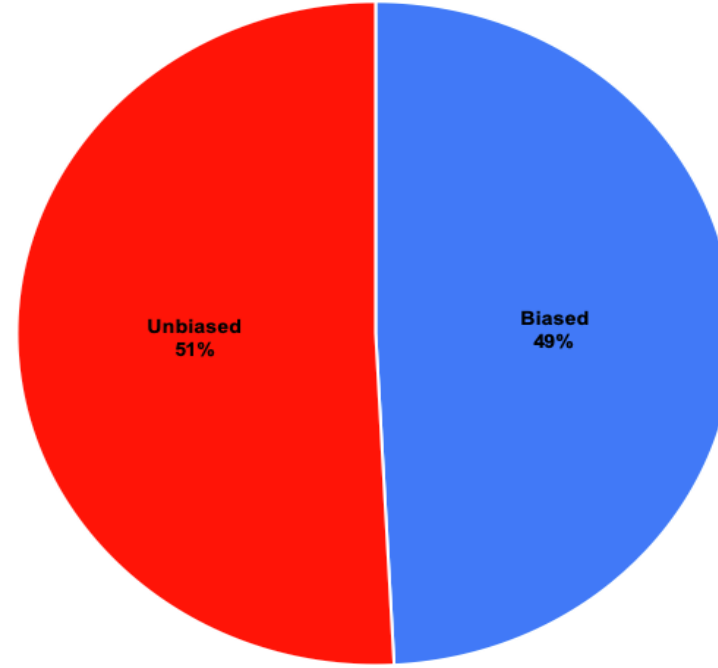
- Diversity of sources, not of content: **41% access information from social media +memes**
- Preferred news format and common disinformation formats are the same: **Videos, memes, text**
- Prefer reading **headlines and news-shorts**
- Social media considered less biased than traditional media but without much variance
- Both perceived to be tilted towards **Right-Wing/Conservative**, though high percentage of those who cannot identify any particular bias
- **Social media** considered a **major source of disinformation** compared to traditional media, though not much variance, **biased media** considered **'major security threat'**
- Fact-checking sites, media accountability, citizen awareness to fight disinformation
- **58/61 never fact-checked**



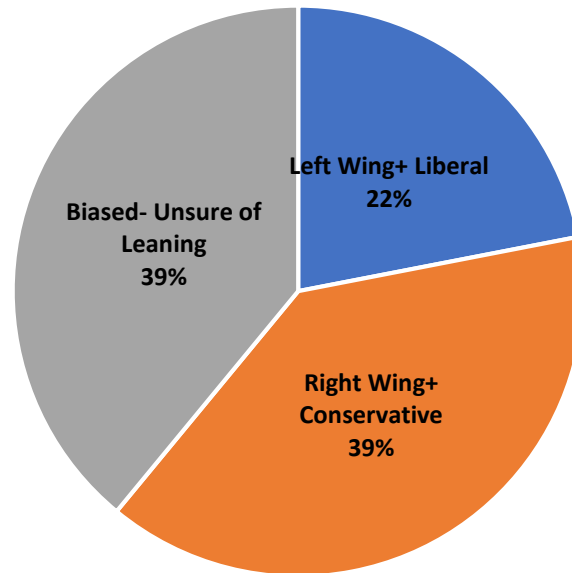
**Belief in Traditional Media**



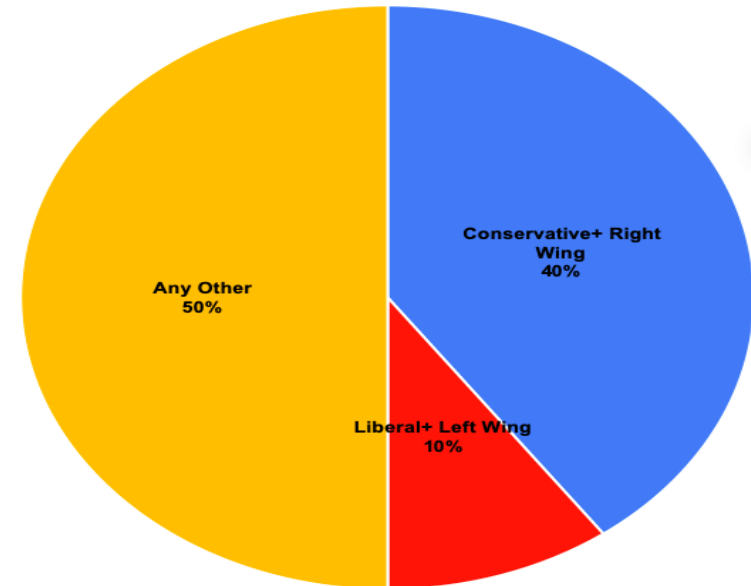
**Perception of Bias in Social Media**



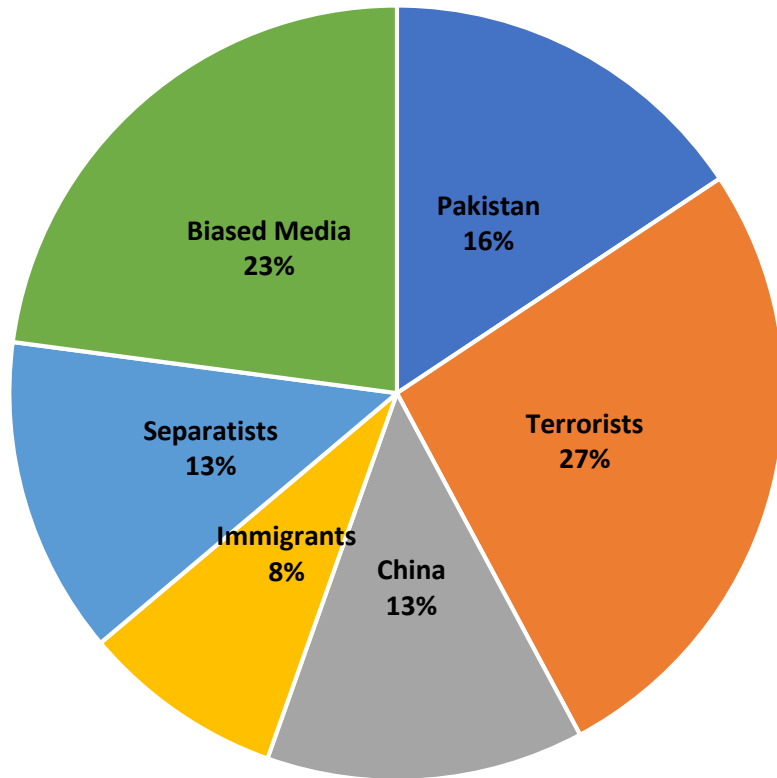
**Perception of Bias in Traditional Media**



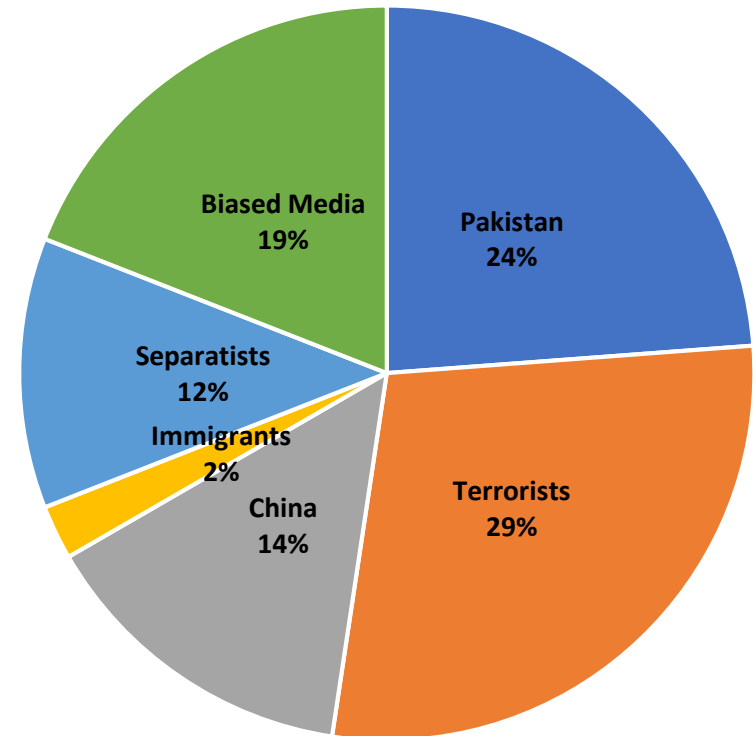
**Perception of Bias in Social Media**



**Percentage of Social Media Readers identifying Security Threat from different sources**



**Percentage of Newspaper Readers identifying Security Threat from different sources**



## Key Findings: Pre-existing Bias

- **Partisanship:** Different issue priorities, only six partisan supporters (BJP), moderate supporters (19 of BJP and INC) and 36 swing voters. Among moderates and non-partisan voters, no use of discursive terminologies tropes or topoi of disinformation
- **Composite identity:** Different ideological, issue, and interest positions. No clear political bias (55/61)
- **Socializers:** Voting along family lines, peer groups, selfie citizens

Issue and information source and format preferences rather than bias



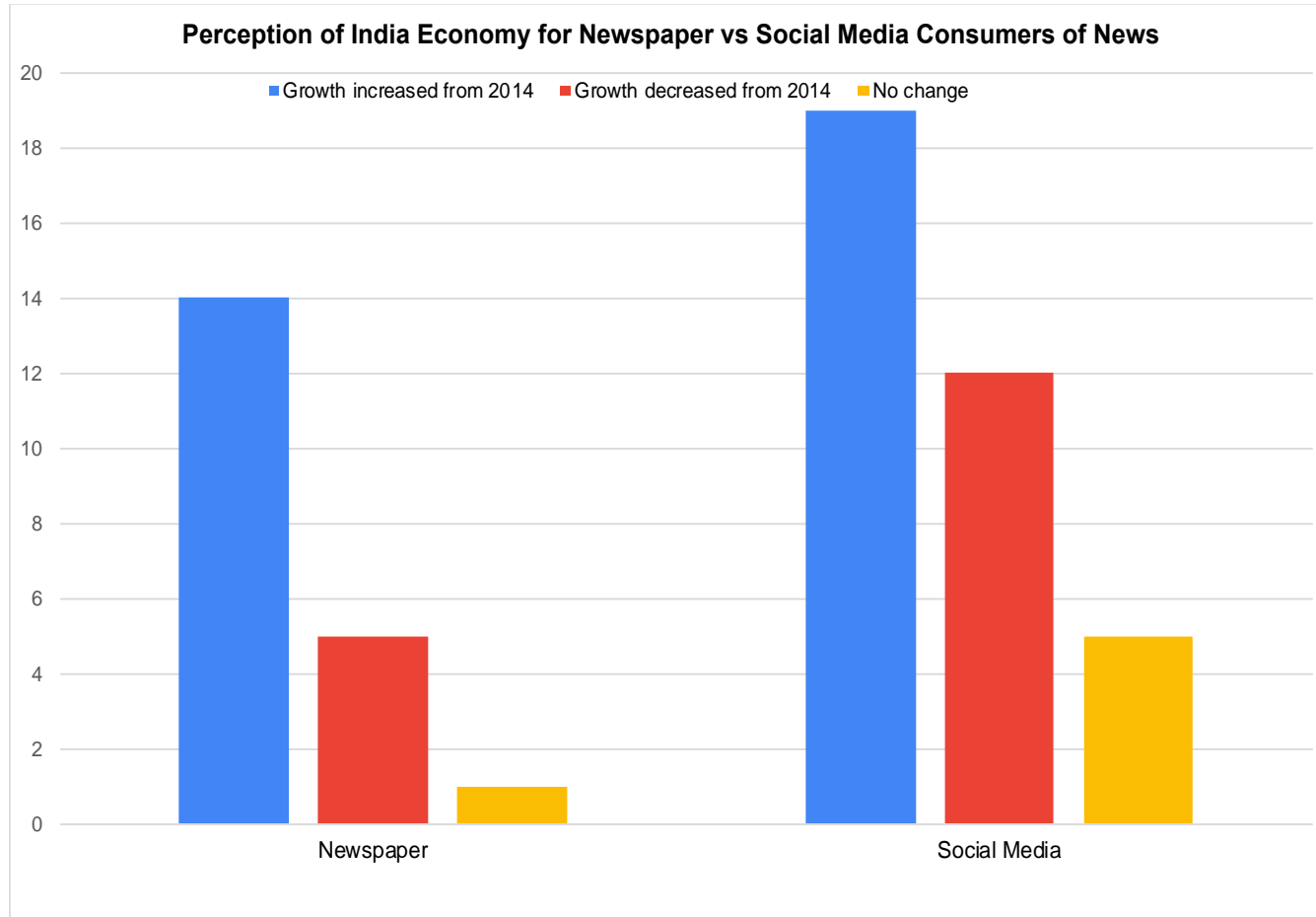
Source: Youth Ki Awaaz (Voice of the Youth), 2019



Source: The Hindu, 2019

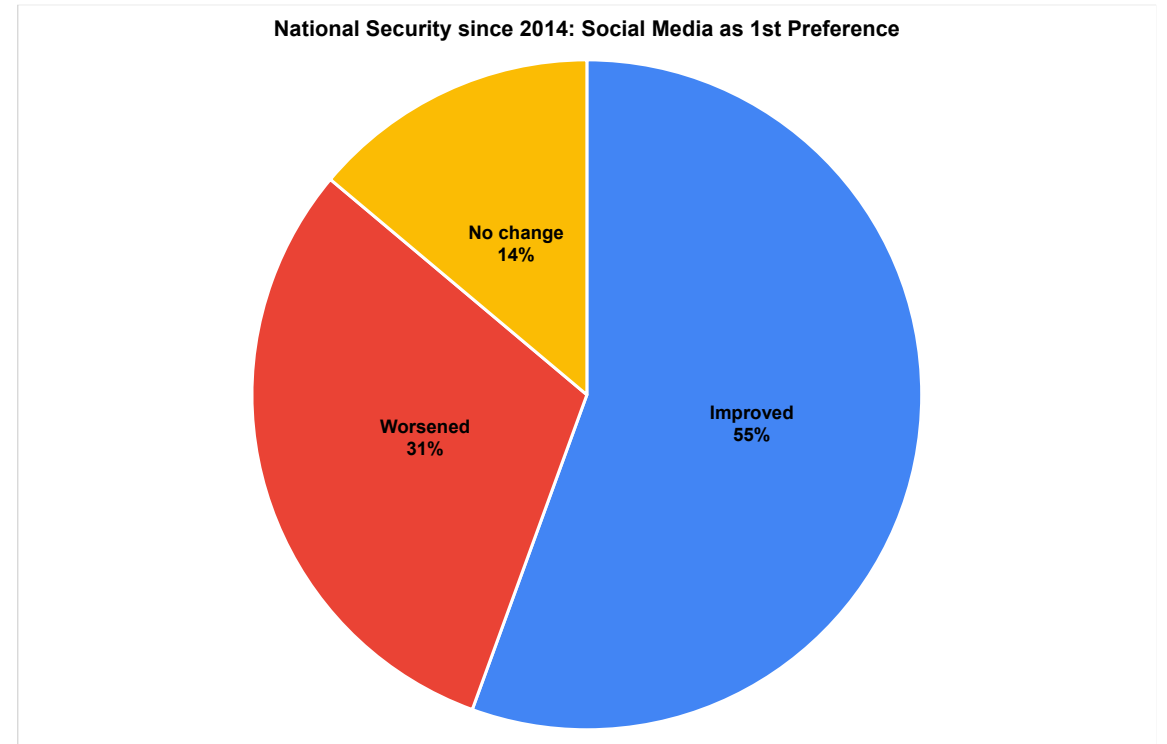
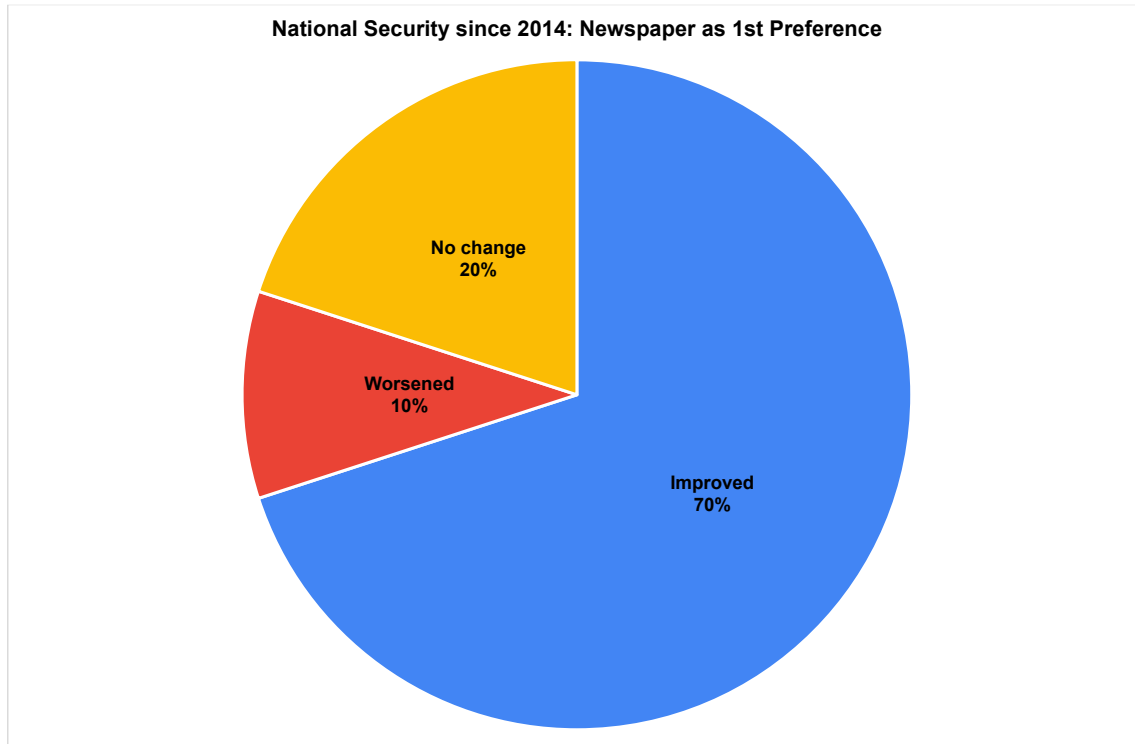


## Key Findings: Post-disinformation exposure ( disinformation on economy)



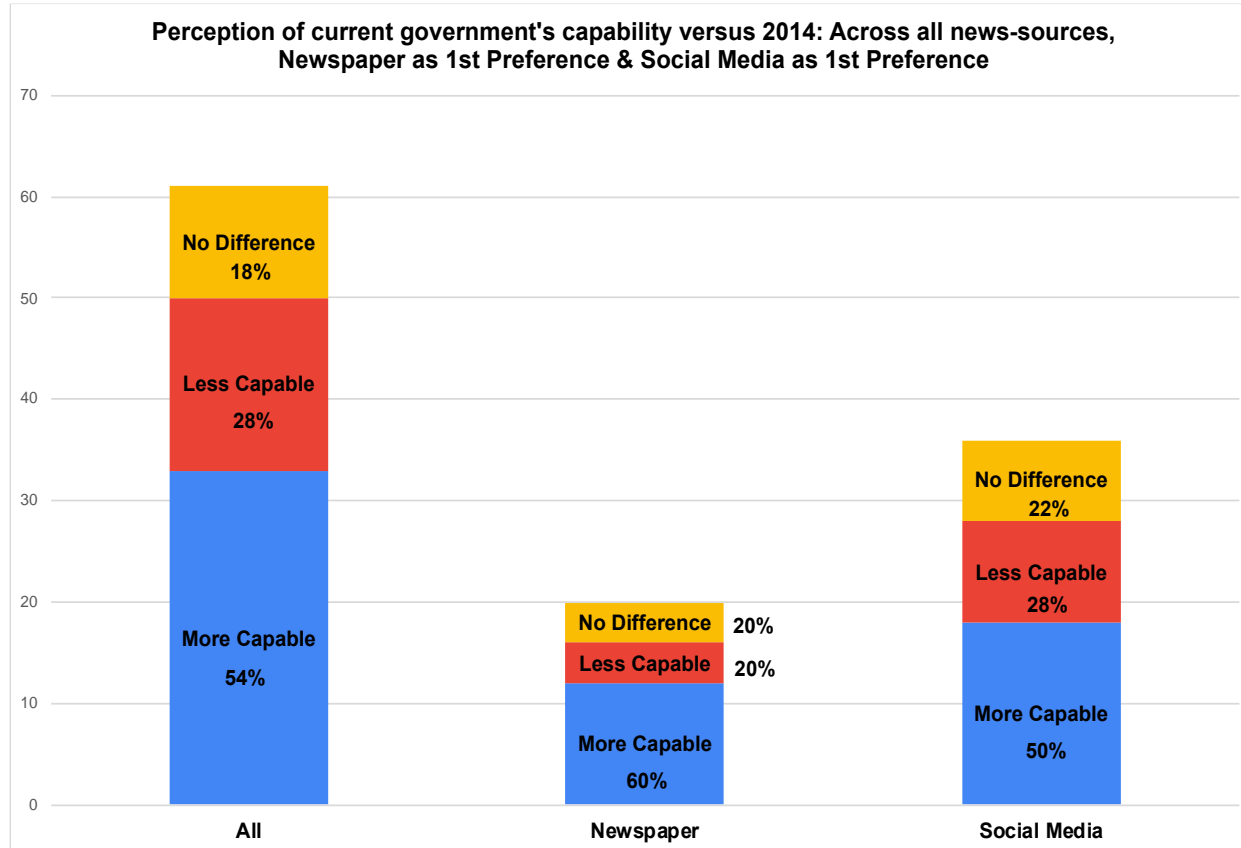
- **Increase in belief of both traditional and social media consumers of news on disinformation on economic growth, employment, success of government schemes, and foreign investment**
- Moderately partisan and non-partisan respondents were **less informed on economy**
- Moderately partisan and non-partisan respondents **believed disinformation by pro-BJP pages** than pro-INC pages

## Key Findings: Post-disinformation exposure ( disinformation on national security)



- Moderately and non-partisan respondents **believed disinformation on national security**; more for newspapers consumers (1<sup>st</sup> preference) than social media news consumers but with small variance
- Moderately and non-partisan respondents believed pro-BJP pages rather than pro-INC pages
- National security as a bridge issue: **National prestige (civic nationalism rather than ethnic nationalism) or collective stake**

## Key Findings: Post-disinformation exposure ( disinformation on leadership/party)



- More moderately and non-partisan respondents **believed pro-BJP pages** compared to pro-INC pages on Narendra Modi and BJP-led government to be stronger and more capable than Rahul Gandhi and INC-led UPA
- More moderately and non-partisan respondents **also believed pro-INC pages** of BJP being more corrupt and less tolerant to freedom of speech and expression

## Summary of initial findings

**Bias:** More cognitive (framing, anchoring, confirmation, herd) than motivational bias (partisan to affective). No invited manipulation. **Bellwether of bias:** Start using discursive tropes and topoi after exposure to disinformation

**Heuristics:** Credibility, liking, and consensus

**Stakes:** National prestige as a collective stake. No individual personal, political or profit stake for 55/61 respondents. Personal, social, and economic stakes for 6/61. Actively targeted by BJP and participation incentivized

**Media:** Is biased. Fact-checkers are biased. Acknowledge partisanship. Build credibility

**Information sources:** Multiple sources of same content, amplification of content. Preference to read abridged news, more prone to disinformation. Few inclined to fact-check

**Voting preference:** More issue-based priorities than guided by ethical, ideological or identity-based considerations. 'Bandwagon voting' guided by consensus heuristics

**Identify common disinformation's discursive devices, target cognitive than motivational biases**