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Bachelor of Science in Development Studies

# **The Nexus of Media and Civic Engagement in India**

**A Quantitative Study**

by

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# Abstract

The world's largest democracy, India, is experiencing dwindling civic engagement. Amongst a plethora of factors that could explain this phenomenon, this study has chosen to explore the role of media. While causality isn't assured, the profound capacity of the media to influence public opinion and action makes it a vital component in understanding public behaviours with respect to civic engagement. Drawing upon a rich literature review on media and civic engagement and the Agenda-Setting Theory, the study investigates how the public's consumption of media and confidence in media condition civic engagement behaviours. This study employs a quantitative approach, utilising logistic regression analysis to examine data from the World Values Survey 2012. Furthermore, an independent online survey was conducted with N=130 participants and the data was synthesised to derive findings. These two datasets were combined to provide a general study of the role media plays in India's civic engagement. It was found that rather than fostering civic engagement, an increase in consumption of media corresponded to a decrease in engagement amongst individuals. Subsequently, individuals with low confidence in media were found to be less likely to engage in civic activities. With limited research on the intriguing case of India's inert civic engagement and its relationship to media, the present study aspires to contribute to the existing academic discourse and broaden the understanding of the intricate relationship between media and civic engagement in India.

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# 1. Introduction

India is the world's largest democracy, with a population of over 1.4 billion people and a thriving civil society. However, despite this vibrancy, civic participation is low (International IDEA, 2019). The 2019 Global State of Democracy Report by the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA) revealed that India's citizen participation score stands below the global average, ranking 96th out of 154 countries (International IDEA, 2019). Additionally, the Participatory Democracy Index by V-Dem shows that India's score has fallen by 46% from 0.48 in 2000 to 0.26 in 2022 (Our World in Data, 2023). This absolute change in the measure of participatory democracy puts India at the 6th spot amongst 88 countries that observed a decline in participatory democracy across the globe (Our World in Data, 2023). Media is a vital actor in fostering civic engagement by virtue of its influential stance within a democracy. Not only can the media promote civic engagement by providing citizens with more information, it also creates an informed citizenry that can make informed decisions and engage in the civic sphere. As per the World Bank (2018), the media acts as a catalyst for informed citizenship by providing access to a multitude of diverse perspectives and providing the public tools to hold public officials accountable. This leads to increased participation in civic life, as it allows citizens to be better equipped to participate in political processes, thus increasing their civic engagement. Further, the media provides a platform for the general public as well as marginalised groups to voice themselves, promoting greater scope of inclusivity in the civic sphere. While a robust media presence in a country can prove to be crucial for flourishing civic engagement, there is concern regarding how media practices and trends in India may contribute to the issue of low civic participation (CSDS, 2022). Thus, the fundamental impetus of this thesis is to explore the nexus between media and civic participation in India.

## 1.1 Aim and Relevance of the Study

This thesis aims to explore the dynamic relationship between media and civic engagement in India. Drawing on a range of academic literature, research, theories and survey data, this study

will present a quantitative analysis of the relationship over time. Particularly, the study focuses on analysing the influence of media consumption and confidence in explaining civic engagement in India.

The study will contribute to an enhanced understanding of the complex and intricate relationship between media and democracy in India, with possible insights for policy and practice. In order to achieve this aim, the thesis poses the following research questions;

*RQ1: What is the relationship of news consumption to civic engagement in India?*

*RQ2: What is the relationship of news confidence to civic engagement in India?*

The relevance of this study investigating media consumption, media confidence and civic engagement patterns in India stems from three main causes. Primarily, being the world's largest democracy, a healthy civic sphere is essential for the development of India (Mitra, 2007). This makes the recent inert civic engagement in India an important subject of research. Secondly, the massive power of the media in any society significantly affects public opinion and engagement, (World Bank, 2018). Understanding how this power can materialise or hinder civic engagement in a developing society assumes a relevant course of study within the development field. Finally, the relatively recent phenomenon of changing media landscape, such as the concentration of ownership, growing concerns of bias, and erosion of trust in media institutions, might impose significant implications for understanding the rates of civic engagement in India over time (Tyagi, 2021). Thus, the study will explore the possible correlation between media and civic engagement, contributing towards a better understanding of the dynamics of their relationship.

## 1.2 Thesis Outline

The thesis will begin by presenting information that will serve as a background to the research. The background will constitute an oversight of civic engagement trends in India and the issues in Indian media that could contribute to civic disengagement. Then, the thesis will present a literature review that will provide academic context to the scholarly perspectives on the relationship between media and civic engagement and the possible implications of this

relationship for a democracy. Following this, the study will introduce the theoretical framework that supports this research. The succeeding section, the methodology section, will explain the research design. It will motivate the data used as a facilitator for this research and the methods employed to carry out the data analysis. Thereafter, the study will present the findings of the research and discuss the results, connecting them to the literature review and the theoretical framework. The thesis will end with concluding remarks that will provide a comprehensive summary of the research.

### 1.3 Limitations

The foremost limitation of this study is generalizability. Since this study's aims are specific to the effect and changing nature of the media landscape in India, the results may not be generalizable to other countries or regions as the political, social and cultural factors may differ significantly. Nonetheless, this study can still confer insights for countries exhibiting a similar political, social and media background as India. Another identified limitation could be justifying full causality. Due to the complexity of the topic, the study may not be able to establish an independent causal relationship between media consumption, confidence and civic engagement. There are a range of social, political and economic factors that could influence civic engagement. Despite this, a correlation can certainly be established using findings from apt literature and data. The study also has a limited scope in addressing the complexities of the Indian media landscape, such as the influence of smaller regional media, which could entail differing perceptions than that of general Indian media and thus have varied effects on civic engagement. To overcome this limitation, the study could incorporate a larger and more diverse sample of participants that includes media of different regions of India and accounts for their influence on civic engagement. However, this study will aim to establish a general understanding of media's impact on civic engagement in India.

## 2. Background

### 2.1 Civic Engagement in India

The role of civic engagement in sustaining a healthy democracy can seldom be overestimated, and Indian democracy is no exception. A project titled *The State of Democracy in South Asia* by the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS, 2007) in collaboration with International IDEA provides an insight into citizen engagement and political participation in India, examining various aspects of contemporary Indian democracy including low voter turnout and diminishing grass-root based initiatives. The CSDS (2007) report highlighted that while there is a high level of political awareness among the general public in India, actual participation in public affairs remains relatively low. Breaking out of the colonial past, the Indian struggles during the early 20th century created a strong foundation for groups and individuals to participate in politics, mobilising themselves in society. However, the CSDS (2007) report found only 11% of the respondents reported active membership in a trade union, a mere 15% reported participation in protests, demonstrations and related activities and 6% of the respondents participated in other non-party or non-political forums.

According to a V-Dem report (2019, p.181), since 2013, India has seen significant declines in a multitude of democratic rankings such as Civil Liberties, Civil Society Participation and Media Integrity. While a vibrant and democratic civil society upheld by civic engagements nurtures and builds social capital, India has been experiencing a democratic backslide. For instance, despite achieving a four-fold increase in the electorate since 1951, nearly a third of voters “stayed away from exercising their franchise” in the last general Indian elections (The Hindu, 2023). The Election Commission of India (ECI) conducted awareness rallies on the importance of voting, requesting urban voters and young voters to increase their participation, yet seeing negligible improvement in electoral participation, the ECI ended up ruling that “voter turnout figure was dampened by urban apathy” (The Hindu, 2023). Additionally, CIVICUS Monitor, an organisation tracking transformations in civil society space, categorised India as a “repressed”



civil society in 2019 following a series of restrictions on civic engagement mediums such as civil society organisations and NGOs, further increasing the urgency of understanding the nuances of Indian civic engagement and civic sphere (The Wire, 2023).

## 2.2 Indian Media Landscape: The Issues

The horizon of the Indian media landscape has expanded by leaps and bounds in just a couple of decades. However, it's not just the landscape that has observed this notable hit. The credibility of the media appears to have also taken a hit, but in an inverse proportion. Media in India is now characterised by a number of factors, which include a highly competitive market that lacks regulatory oversight, a growing tendency to favour sensationalism and entertainment-oriented content as well as partisan coverage of the news (Chakravarty, 2017; CSDS, 2022). These factors not only take away from the knowledge dissemination virtues of the media, but they have also negatively affected the citizen-empowering role of the media in holding those in power accountable and shaping a citizenry capable of making informed decisions.

As per the World Press Freedom Index, India's ranking has tumbled from 142nd out of 180 countries in 2021 to 150th in 2022 (RSF, 2022). Another study by the CSDS (2022) states that instead of being a "watchdog" of the authorities, fulfilling one of the most crucial duties of the media, "...the Indian media is acting as their lapdog and mouthpiece" (CSDS, 2022, p. 127). Instead of focusing on substantive issues in the country, the media has been observed to be diverting attention and redirecting them towards divisive issues mainly pertaining to "inciting hatred against religious minorities" (CSDS, 2022, p. 127). In the same study, the overall perception of bias in the media is also reported to be high, with nearly half (45%) of the participants stating that the media portrays the current government too favourably (CSDS, 2022, 132). A relevant course of discussion following this segment is the issue of bias eroding trust in Indian media. A national survey conducted by the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism in 2020 reported that a mere 32% of Indians trust the news they consume (Aneez et al., 2020). This comes as a significant shock in trust decline, compared to the 54% who trusted the news in 2019.

The concentration of media ownership poses yet another growing risk for the Indian media landscape. Media Ownership Monitor, a research led by Reporters Without Borders India (RSF India) highlighted the importance of paying attention to the media ownership structure of India as plurality in media is crucial to maintaining freedom of press (MOM, 2018). It states that the concentration of media ownership with elites or other powerful groups with political or business affiliations will bring about dangerous consequences for India, such as compromised press freedom and an unhealthy democracy. The key findings of the research puts India at a high risk for 8 out of 10 indicators of risk to media pluralism in India. This includes high risk to regulatory safeguards for media ownership contraction, political control over media outlets and distribution networks, political control over media funding and more (MOM, 2018). With declining media integrity and trust, India's democracy is bound to face setbacks.

### 2.3 Implications for Indian Development

“The journey of India from [a] developing nation to a developed nation will depend on the role played by the media in the country” (Rai, 2015, p. 441). The media is considered the fourth pillar of democracy and assumes a vital role in the development of a country. India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, regarded the media as the ‘the watchdog of our democracy’. Putting the media on a pedestal and placing a huge responsibility on the shoulders of the media in the progress of Indian society (Rai, 2015, p. 441). Thus in India, the media has grown to assert significant power and influence in all matters of politics and different aspects of development (Sarkar, 2017). This interplay between media and democracy leeches into all aspects of Indian development, such as economic, political and social development.

It is a mirror of society, reflecting on the state of democracy and serving as a tool for the general public to exercise their democratic rights. It is a tool for social change, promoting social development programs and bringing awareness to social issues facing the developing society of India. It is a strong agency to formulate and organise public opinion, fulfilling its role of communication between the government and the common people. These qualities of the media should strengthen the democratic fabric and foster developmental growth (Rai, 2015; Sarkar, 2017).

However, the rapid commercialization of media in India has led to a disregard for the media's obligation to social responsibility. In the face of commercial interest, the Indian media has embarked on its own development journey "at the cost of truth and accuracy" (Sarkar, 2017, p 114). Instead of uplifting weaker sections of society and escorting social development, the current Indian media feeds off extreme coverage of sensitive, sensational and repetitive news that "breeds apathy and insensitivity" (Sarkar, 2017, p 114). This dismissal of duty poses a grievance for India's development.

Achievement of good governance and development requires an environment of widespread awareness and participation of all the members of society. For which, the media and its channels, roles and contents can be regarded as "the most powerful weapon" that can lead this achievement to become a part of Indian reality (Rai, 2015, p. 438). Only when the Indian media realises its full potential as a force of development communication, can it uphold democratic principles and be the instrument of social change, economic progress and development India needs.

## 2.4 Hypotheses

Having touched upon the crucial contextual information on India, setting ample backdrop to the study's research questions, the paper hypothesizes the following;

***Hypothesis 1: Higher consumption of news would decrease an individual's likelihood of civic engagement.***

With respect to the first research question, the study hypothesizes that a higher consumption of media, with low perceived credibility of media, will lead to a decrease in political interest, awareness and action (Ksiazek et al.,2017; Livingstone & Markham, 2008).

***Hypothesis 2: Lower confidence in news will decrease the likelihood of civic engagement.***

With respect to the second research question, the study hypothesizes that lower trust in media institutions would correspond to lower consumption which would then reduce political interest,

awareness and action leading to lower civic engagement (Uslaner, 2004; Wanta & Yu-Wei, 1994).

## 3. Literature Review

### 3.1 Defining Civic Engagement

The concept of civic participation might seem self-explanatory, yet it is a topic of ongoing discourse. The discussion surrounding civic engagement maintains a debate over what forms of participation ought to be encompassed within this concept. The vast literature relevant to the matter has approached the notion of civic engagement (which comprises civic participation) from various angles. According to Gibson (2000, 17), there is an evident lapse in achieving a consensus on what civic engagement constitutes. One of the most well-known contributions to this discussion was made by Putnam (1995, 2000). Adler and Goggin (2005, 239) note that while Putnam's work did not explicitly define the term civic engagement, he used the term to "refer to an entire gamut of activities that build social capital". This includes informal social activities, formal activities, community as well as political participation. Ekman and Amna (2012, 285) also argue that Putnam's definition is vague and includes an excessive range of activities ranging from reading newspapers to social network engagement to associational affiliations and interpersonal trust. However, scholars have criticised this overly broad definition proffered by Putnam, which was mainly criticised for classifying a vast range of activities as civic engagement. Putnam's work presented a simplistic, perhaps too simplistic definition of civic participation that did not have enough limitations.

Adler and Goggin (2005) present a comprehensive collection of different definitions of civic engagement in the literature, where civic engagement is defined with four different perspectives: First, civic engagement as *community service* emphasises participation in one's local community voluntarily (Diller, 2001, 21 cited in Alder and Goggin, 2005). Second, civic engagement as *collective action*, where it is defined as the means by which an individual influences the larger civil society (Van Benschoten, 2001 cited in Alder and Goggin, 2005). Third, civic engagement as *political involvement*, where civic engagement is the means to direct individual efforts for collective action into problem solving through political processes (Diller, 2001, 7 cited in Alder

and Goggin). Fourth, civic engagement as *social change*, where the term encompasses the way through which an active citizen participates in the community to shape the community's future (David, n.d. cited in Alder and Goggin, 2005). Following this, the final definition offered by Adler and Goggin (2005) states that civic engagement is the way in which “citizens participate in the life of a community in order to improve conditions for others or to help shape the community's future”. This definition is also arguably broad and does not specify what constitutes civic engagement, bringing the discussion back to the debate.

Keeter et al., (2002) presented a list of 19 core indicators of engagement derived from the results of a national telephone survey in the United States. These 19 indicators were sorted into three categories; i) Civic indicators (active membership in an association, participation in fundraising for charity etc.), ii) Electoral indicators (regular voting, campaigning, volunteering for political organisations etc.) and iii) Indicators of political voice (petitions, protesting, boycotting etc.) and were considered the components of civic engagement.

Given the complexity of defining civic engagement, the study has chosen to use Putnam's (1995) broad definition of civic engagement for three main reasons. First, despite being broad, Putnam's definition offers a well-established framework for understanding and measuring civic engagement by including various forms of individual and collective engagement activities. Second, it fulfils contextual relevance to this study. Since this study does not aim to understand a specific aspect of civic engagement, but rather civic engagement in general, Putnam's definition suffices the purpose of the research. Third and most importantly, Putnam's definition will provide validity and reliability to this study. It is a well-established and widely accepted definition in academia and related research, in spite of the criticism it has received over the years.

### 3.2 Media and The Civic Sphere

It is safe to claim that a relationship between media and civic engagement has been evident over a diverse range of research revolving around these two actors. .. Within a society, the media is often referred to as its eyes and ears. In principle, there is one overarching reason behind this; the

media is the main source of widespread information regarding current affairs in a society (UNESCO, 2014). Media's capacity to disseminate information makes it a crucial social agent in influencing civic engagement, for the better or for the worse (Gans, 2004; Neuman et al., 2011; Peer. et al, 2003; Putnam, 2000).

### 3.2.1 Consumption of Media and Civic Engagement: A Positive Correlation

The first view harmonises a positive relationship between consumption of media and civic engagement. In this perspective, the media assumes a central role in empowering citizens in a democracy by being a vital facilitator of an informed citizenry which is important for any civil society (Gans, 2004, Putnam, 2000). An informed citizenry would have better decision making abilities which enhances their civic awareness and thus encouraging civic participation (Gans, 2004). Livingstone & Markham (2008) advocate for this consensus in their study on the contribution of media consumption to civic participation. Their findings support the general perspective on the potential of news media to foster civic engagement, arguing that media consumption can be a positive predictor of civic participation. They suggest that exposure to news and current affairs can increase citizens' awareness of political issues and encourage greater involvement in civic activities. However, they acknowledge that the degree of influence of media use on civic participation accounts to a moderate degree. The collected evidence through survey suggested the media's role as more 'enhancing' than 'undermining' in relation to its effect on civic participation.

A study by Ksiazek et al. (2017) presented the idea of 'News-seekers' and 'Avoiders', dividing the American population in two in order to explore the patterns of total news consumption across different media and its relationship to civic participation. The findings of the study, using a second-hand data analysis of a large consumer survey by Experian Simmons, indicated a strong and clear positive relationship between total news consumption and civic participation. In a similar fashion to Livingstone & Markham (2008), the study by Ksiazek et al (2017) also acknowledges the variability of this relationship between media consumption and civic participation. While there is a strong correlation between total news consumption and civic participation, the relationship between specific news media consumption and participation

observed differing results. For instance, the study observed a weak association between the consumption of internet news and civic participation. However, the study concludes that this could be credited to the study's measures of civic participation being rather "traditional indices of membership", which could differ from the ways in which an online news consumer may participate in civic life.

A study by the Pew Research Center (2016) found that local news habits and civic engagement exhibited a strong relationship in community life in the United States. The survey study established that a high level of civic engagement among Americans, considerably more often than not, reflects news habits across a range of measures such as interest in news, news consumption and news attitudes. A high level of civic engagement in this study referred to civic participation through local voting habits and political activity. Additionally, the study also established that the medium through which news is consumed also has an effect on the type of civic activity engaged in i.e. citizens that consumed news primarily through traditional sources such as television or print media engaged more in offline civic engagements while citizens that consumed news through digital sources engaged in online civic engagements. This finding is also relevant to the study by Ksiazek et al.(2017) , which justifies the varying strength of correlation between consumers of news from traditional sources vs consumers of news through the internet.

### 3.2.2 Consumption of Media and Civic Engagement with The Angle of Trust: A Negative Correlation

The second view posits a negative relationship between media consumption and civic participation, arguing for an inversely correlated relationship (Putnam, 1995; Putnam, 2000; Habermas, 1991; Habermas, 1994; Uslaner, 2004). Putnam's (1995) work on the relationship of civic engagement with declining 'social capital' and the causes behind this decline has contributed immensely to the succeeding research on civic engagement and media. Social capital is defined as the social networks, norms and trust that facilitate civic life through enhancing cooperation within individuals of a society. He argued that American civic engagement was declining due to the phenomena of 'time replacement' or shift of time spent on social activities such as civic participation (voting, volunteering, community building etc.) to solitary activities



(use of media; watching television, using the internet etc), thus the phenomena of time replacement. In his later work Putnam explores the issue of a focal shift in media (2000). Putnam (2000) argues that the rise of commercialised media parallel to the decline of public media has led to a shift in the objectives of the media. Where once the media used to fulfil the role of providing accurate and informative news, the focus of digital media now has become sensationalism and entertainment. This hurts the integrity and purpose of the media. He argues that this has led to a decline in civic engagement.

Similarly, Jürgen Habermas' works on the theory of public sphere (further developed into the theory of mediated public sphere) posits that the nature of mass media can assume a negative role in the course of the public sphere (Habermas, 1991; 1994 cited in Livingstone, 1994). He defines the public sphere as a domain of social life where public opinion can be formed and states that it is an essential space for the functioning of a vibrant democracy (Habermas, 1991; 1994 cited in Livingstone, 1994). Habermas argues that "the public sphere can be seen as a theatre in modern societies in which political participation is enacted through the medium of talk" (Nancy, 1990, p.174). This is done by the means of reasoned and critical debate about politics and the state (Shah, 2012). In his works, Habermas argues that increased commercialization is the root of public sphere degeneration and that the media has transformed a "forum for rational-critical debate into a platform for advertising" (Habermas, 1994, 181). The media creates a pseudo-public sphere that instead of fostering public debate and participation, distracts individuals from political action. Through means of profit-driven and entertainment nature of content, in addition to the persuasion of larger audiences over the promotion of substantive public debate, this pseudo-public sphere encourages passive spectatorship instead of genuine deliberation (Habermas 1987 cited in Livingstone, 1994).

Uslaner's (2004) comprehensive research study provides further basis for this argument in his paper exploring the relationship between trust, civic engagement and the internet. It is argued that trust in institutions plays a vital role in fostering civic engagement and that the internet, a relatively modern media of information, has the potential to enhance trust and engagement of citizens in a society. The paper finds that higher levels of trust in one's society and institutions are associated with higher levels of civic engagement, as people are more likely to engage in

political activities when there is a higher degree of trust present in institutions and amongst the citizens. Uslaner (2004) also highlights the potential negative effects of the internet on trust and civic engagement. These negative effects refer to the spread of misinformation on the internet and polarisation of information due to the 'echo chamber' promoting nature of the internet which isolates citizens from diverse perspectives. This shrinks the scope of civic engagement by limiting access to wholesome information.

In addition to establishing the positive relationship between media consumption and civic engagement, Livingstone & Markham (2008) also noted that the relationship between the two actors is far from simple. The study notes that the relationship is rather complex, further justifying this side of the argument. It is established that the type and quality of media content play an important role in shaping citizens' attitudes and behaviours, such as perceptions and levels of trust. In line with Uslaner's argument (2004), Livingstone & Markham (2008) argue that trust in media is important for civic participation because of the influential nature of media and that higher levels of trust correspond to higher civic engagement. However, the study acknowledges that this correlation between trust in media and civic engagement is not necessarily causal and that other factors, such as political efficacy and social capital also have a role to play in shaping civic participation.

## 4. Theoretical Framework

### 4.1 The Agenda-Setting Theory

While the first mention of the agenda-setting theory dates back to the 1920s, it took the forefront of explaining the media's influence in shaping public opinion in the 1970s by the work of Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw titled "*The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media*". The authors argue that while "the mass media may not be successful in telling people what to think, they are stunningly successful in telling people what to think about" (McCombs and Shaw, 1972, p.176). This posits significant implications for civic engagement.

The media's capability and capacity, as the most prominent source of information dissemination, influence civic engagement by providing a direction of thought for individuals in a society in prioritising issues that are worthy of their attention. Various studies succeeding McCombs and Shaws' work establish a strong link between media agenda-setting and civic engagement. For instance, Gentzkow & Shapiro (2010, p.35) found that media coverage of politics has a profound influence on voter turnout and political participation, stating "media slant can have significant effects on voting behaviour". Similarly, McLeod et al. (1999) also found that media coverage of social issues stimulates public interest and mobilisation of citizens to collective action. They highlight this influential role of the media in "bringing issues to public attention and motivating citizens to act" (McLeod et al., 1999, p.242). Thus, demonstrating how media's agenda-setting behaviour affects individuals' engagement in the civic sphere in a variety of forms.

Having established the core of agenda-setting theory, it is essential to also note the reciprocal relationship between civic engagement and media. In other words, while the media exerts influence over public opinion and perceptions of what is important, civic engagement also exhibits the potential to shape media coverage (Coleman & Ross, 2010). Coleman & Ross (2010, p.179) note that "citizens' active involvement in social and political life shapes media attention", thus making public activism and collective action a part of the agenda-setting process.

While the agenda-setting theory provides a solid foundation for the thesis' theoretical framework by providing a basis for the arguing the media's importance in fostering civic engagement, little is known about "factors affecting *how* individuals receive and process media messages", leaving the area relatively unexplored (Wanta & Yu-Wei, 1994, p.90). Wanta & Yu-Wei's study (1990) examines three potential variables that affect the agenda-setting process, namely: media credibility, media reliance and media exposure. According to the model examined in this study, in order for the agenda-setting theory effect to observe a positive influence in fostering civic engagement, individuals must perceive the media to be highly credible (Wanta & Yu-Wei, 1994). This would then lead to them becoming highly reliant on the media for information, increasing their exposure to media messages. Finally, this process will "demonstrate a strong susceptibility to the agenda-setting effects" (Wanta & Yu-Wei, 1994, p.91). Linking the agenda-setting theory to another prominent communication theory, i.e. the uses and gratification theory as suggested by McCombs' work (1981, cited in Wanta & Yu-Wei, 1994, p.91), the study establishes a significant relationship between an individual's perception of media credibility the susceptibility to agenda-setting effects of the media. Hence, the framework concludes that it is not only the media's agenda-setting virtue that allows civic engagement to thrive in a society, it is also media credibility. When there is a lack of media credibility, in forms of confidence in media and perceptions of bias (in the context of this study), this virtue might fail to foster civic engagement.

# 5. Methodology

## 5.1 Data

In order to study the impact of media consumption and confidence on civic engagement in India, this study will utilise World Value Survey's (WVS) national survey data as well as a complementary, independently conducted online survey with N=130 participants. The data will be analysed using descriptive statistics and examined within a regression framework.

### 5.1.1 World Value Survey

The data used in this study was extracted from the World Value Survey (WVS), Wave 6 which encompasses data collected between 2010-2014. The dataset for India was collected in the year 2012 and was published in the year 2014. Hence the data explored in this study dates to 2012. Characteristically, WVS (2023) identifies itself as an international research program and also the largest non-commercial social survey program ever executed. It is centred towards scientific and academic study of social, economic, political, religious and cultural values of people in 120 countries across the world. The project's main objective is to assess the impact of stable or dynamic values over time on social, political and economic development of societies and countries in the surveyed countries (WVS, 2023). WVS seeks to contribute towards scientists and policy makers' understanding of changes in values, beliefs and motivations of people throughout the world.

The survey boasts of its strengths such as its extensive geographic and thematic scope with over 600 indicators and free availability of data. These strengths make it one of the most widely used, cross-national surveys in academic studies and research by governments, scholars, journalists and international organisations such as United Nations Development Program, World Bank, World Health Organization among others (WVS, 2023). Another notable strength is the

extensive experience of WVS in conducting large scale social surveys. WVS has been measuring trust consistently since the year 1989, thus indicating their reliability on recording related categories of data that this thesis will base its findings on.

There are a few limitations to data, just as any other data source. One of the main limitations is the occurrence of data in ‘waves’ that comprises data from multiple year periods instead of individual years. This could prove to be problematic when conducting research for a specific period, however since this study does not aim to conduct its research on a specific time period, for instance a specified year, this limitation does not affect the study. However, in the current WVS Wave 7 conducted between 2017-2022, India was not included in the list of countries presenting a limitation. The last data set available for India dates to June 2012 which poses a risk of outdated information. This study is addressing this limitation by collecting primary data by conducting an independent online survey that will complement the findings observed using the WVS 2012 India dataset.

Another limitation of WVS data that is relevant to this study is the representation of Indian languages. As diverse as India is, there are 22 government registered languages in the sub-continent. The WVS includes 8 of the most spoken languages in India in addition to the official languages, Hindi and English, but also leaves out the remaining 12 which could result in exclusion of representation for certain groups. Despite this, since the 10 represented languages are the most spoken in the country, the survey has fairly represented most of the country’s population.

### 5.1.2 Online Survey

In order to complement the WVS India dataset, this study conducted an independent online survey (Appendix A) in India with 130 participants. The primary data collected from the survey included questions on demographic information such as age, sex, location (State/Union Territory of India), highest level of educational attainment and religion. The survey then included questions corresponding to the variables chosen from the WVS dataset; i) political beliefs - self ranking on the political spectrum from 1-5 where 1 means “extreme left” and 5 means “extreme

right”, ii) importance of politics in life - choosing between “very important”, “somewhat important”, “not very important” and “not important at all”, iii) civic engagement measures i.e. voting, signing petitions, joining strikes, attending demonstrations and protesting - choosing between “have done it”, “might do it”, “will never do it” and “cannot say” for each of the measures. Finally, the survey questioned the participants regarding their news consumption patterns including questions on iv) frequency of consumption across different information media sources i.e. television news, printed newspapers, social media and the internet (online newspapers, news sites) - choosing between “daily”, “few times a week”, “weekly”, “once in a few weeks” and “rarely”. Further, the survey inquired the participants on v) their degree of confidence or trust in each of the prior listed news sources - choosing between “a great deal of confidence”, “quite a lot of confidence”, “not very much confidence” and “none at all”. The survey was distributed through social media, namely Instagram, WhatsApp, Facebook and LinkedIn, and the sampling strategy applied was snowball sampling.

One of the main strengths of this survey was the diversity of demographics, given the time and resource restraints. The participant ages ranged from 17-75 years of age; 58% representing the Indian youth (ages 25 and under as per World Bank, 2023) and 42% between the ages 26-75 (Figure 1, Appendix B). 52.7% participants were male and 46.5% were female with 0.8% identifying as non-binary (Figure 2, see Appendix B). The participants originated from 14 different Indian states/union territories. Moving onto highest education attainment, 50% (49.6%) of the participants were postgraduates, 24% were undergraduates, 23.3% were pursuing undergraduates and 3.1% were intermediate/high school students (Figure 3, see Appendix B). The survey recorded 7 different religious beliefs with 62.8% identifying with Hinduism and 18.6% identifying with Islam, the two biggest religions followed in India (Figure 4, see Appendix B).

However aforementioned, the time and resources constraints did bring about a few limitations. Firstly, the main limitation of the survey is the sample size, in order to be able to draw meaningful conclusions at national level, the sample size would need to be bigger. Secondly, the sampling strategy poses some limitations. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling method. This means that in a population, not every individual has an equal chance of selection

which makes making generalisations for the entirety of the population or even a specific demographic difficult. The nature of snowball sampling entails reliance on the use of referrals which means that participants often share similar characteristics due to proximity such as being in the same friend circle or classroom (Nikolopoulou, 2022). This can lead to sampling bias. The most evident bias present in the data collected from the survey is the location where nearly 64% of the respondents belonged to the researcher's (my) home region i.e. Delhi. Having acknowledged this, the study argues that the city has the highest share of inter-state migrations all over India accounting for 40% of all inter-state migrations making this region exceptionally diverse (Hindustan Times, 2019). Hence, also accounting for an enhanced level of diversity in the data collected from the participants in the region.

## 5.2 Empirical Model

Having established the dataset to be used for this study, this section will now describe and motivate the statistical model implied to the WVS dataset to determine whether news consumption and confidence is a significant predictor of civic participation in India. On the other hand, the data obtained from the online survey will be synthesised and conclusions will be drawn from observations. These conclusions will be then compared to the WVS dataset findings in order to provide a complementary check on the general validity of the WVS data findings.

### 5.2.1 Logistic Regression

To answer the research question, a series of binary logistic regressions will be conducted. A binary logistic regression model is used when the objective is to examine the relationship between the dependent variable, when the dependent variable is a dummy variable and one or more independent variables to reach appropriate statistical conclusions. The logit model estimates the likelihood of the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable. For this study, the logistic regression takes on the following form:

$$Y_i(\text{Civic Engagement}) = \beta_0 + \beta_1(\text{News Consumption}) + \beta_2(\text{Media Confidence}) \\ + \beta_3(\text{Age}) + \beta_4(\text{Sex}) + \beta_5(\text{Social Class}) + \varepsilon$$



In the equation above,  $Y_i$  represents civic engagement, this study uses various dummy variables to proxy civic engagement. The impact of the independent variables on the measure of civic engagement will be measured in separate equations. When performing the regression, the dependent variables chosen to correspond to civic engagement were *local voting*, *signing petitions*, *joining strikes*, *attending peaceful demonstrations* and holding a *political party membership* using WVS data.

These variables will help measure civic engagement in relation to the independent variables which are i) *Media confidence* and ii) *Media consumption*. Media confidence was measured using the participants' responses to explicit question(s) on confidence in media from the dataset. In order to measure media consumption, a news consumption index was created combining WVS data for frequency of news consumption across multiple news mediums namely, television, newspaper, mobile and internet to measure media consumption. Lastly, control variables such as *age*, *sex* and *social class* were included. The control variables were chosen to increase the reliability of the regression model's results by eliminating the effect of these variables on the relationship between the dependent variable and the independent variables.

## 6. Results

### 6.1. World Value Survey - Regression Results

Civic Engagement					
Media and Civic Engagement: Regression Analysis	Local Voting	Signing Petitions	Joining Strikes	Peaceful Demonstrations	Political Party Membership
News Consumption Frequency					
Daily	-0.635*** (0.287)	-1.752*** (0.163)	-0.844*** (0.141)	-1.159*** (0.140)	-1.717*** (0.177)
Weekly	-0.172** (0.266)	-1.158*** (0.136)	-0.303** (0.122)	-0.491*** (0.122)	-0.878*** (0.133)
Monthly	-0.350*** (0.210)	-0.438*** (0.111)	-0.314*** (0.108)	-0.395*** (0.108)	-0.863*** (0.116)
Less than monthly	-0.308 (0.236)	-0.305** (0.118)	-0.0671 (0.118)	-0.0471 (0.119)	0.131 (0.115)
Confidence in Press					
Low confidence in press	-0.337* (0.176)	-0.304* (0.914)	-0.106 (0.848)	-0.128* (0.841)	-0.119 (0.0943)
Control Variables					
Age	0.00937* (0.00535)	0.00421 (0.00287)	0.00103 (0.00265)	-0.00199 (0.00265)	0.00132 (0.00292)
Sex	-0.302** (0.147)	-0.301*** (0.0833)	-0.579*** (0.0776)	-0.591*** (0.0761)	-0.666*** (0.0887)
Upper middle class	-1.745** (0.729)	-0.297 (0.235)	0.00135 (0.227)	-0.0546 (0.229)	0.0431 (0.224)
Lower middle class	-1.512** (0.721)	-0.651*** (0.224)	-0.158 (0.215)	-0.395* (0.218)	-0.378* (0.214)
Working class	-0.714 (0.740)	-0.548** (0.232)	-0.0492 (0.222)	-0.321 (0.225)	-0.297 (0.224)
Lower class	-0.765 (0.759)	-0.817*** (0.249)	-0.0325 (0.234)	-0.436* (0.236)	0.0676 (0.237)
Constant	4.010*** (0.759)	0.661*** (0.255)	0.233 (0.243)	0.946*** (0.246)	-0.120 (0.245)
Observations	3,632	2,926	3,159	3,198	3,571

Standard errors in parentheses \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Table 1. Logistic regression: Exploring Civic Engagement and Media using World Value Survey Data

Table 1 presents the findings from the regression analysis of the WVS data, providing insights into the relationship between media and civic engagement.

### 6.1.1 Local Voting

The regression results reveal that in comparison to individuals that never consume news, individuals with higher consumption of news are less likely to participate in local voting. With the highest significance to daily consumption of news and monthly consumption of news at 1% significance level, followed by weekly consumption of news at 5% significance level implying that the participants that consumed news on a regular basis had a reduced likelihood of participating in local elections. This finding also extends onto weekly and monthly consumption of news to a significant extent. Low confidence in media significantly reduced the likelihood of voting in local elections compared to individuals with higher confidence in media coverage at 10% significance level level.

### 6.1.2 Signing Petitions

The regression analysis highlights that a higher consumption of news significantly decreases the likelihood of participation in signing petitions in comparison to the likelihood of individuals that never consume news. This can be found true with a high significance at 1% significance level to daily, weekly and monthly consumption of news with negative likelihood of signing petitions as the news consumption increases. Less than monthly consumption of news also yielded this relationship at 5% significance level. Individuals with lower confidence in media exhibited lower levels of participation in signing petitions to a small degree than those with higher confidence.

### 6.1.3 Joining Strikes

While analysing the relationship between joining strikes and news consumption, it emerged that individuals with daily, weekly and monthly consumption of news observed a significantly less likelihood of joining strikes in comparison to those who never consumed news. The same relationship proves to be true for less than monthly news consumption as well however to a considerably lesser extent. Individuals who reported having low levels of confidence in media

had a lower likelihood of participation in joining strikes in comparison to those with higher confidence.

#### 6.1.4 Attending Peaceful Demonstrations

Similar to other forms of civic engagement thus far, a higher consumption of news implicated a lower engagement in attending peaceful demonstrations. Individuals with daily, weekly and monthly consumption of news were significantly less likely to attend peaceful demonstrations with a 1% significance level in comparison to those who never consumed news. Individuals that consumed news less than monthly also reported a lower likelihood of attending peaceful demonstrations. Lower confidence in the media was significantly associated with less tendency to attend peaceful demonstrations with a significance level of 10% significance level.

#### 6.1.5 Political Party Membership

The findings for the relationship between political party membership and news consumption demonstrate that individuals with higher levels of news consumption such as daily, weekly and monthly consumption of news have a significantly less likelihood at 1% significance level to hold a political party membership. Whereas consumption of news less than monthly shows a slight increase in likelihood. Individuals with lower confidence in media indicated a lower tendency to have a political party membership compared to those with higher levels of confidence in the media.

#### 6.1.6 Control Variables

With regards to control variables, age is overall positively correlated with local voting, signing petitions, joining strikes and holding a political party membership. With the highest degree of significance to local voting at 10% significance level, implying that older individuals have a higher tendency to participate in civic engagement across all forms and specially local voting.

The only outlier in this pattern is the likelihood of joining strikes, indicating that younger individuals have a higher tendency to join strikes.

Using females as the reference category, sex observes significant negative correlations with all forms of civic engagement at 1% significance level for signing petitions, joining strikes, peaceful demonstrations and holding a political party member and 5% significance level for local voting. This implies that women are significantly less inclined than men to engage in civic activities.

Social class differences show a reduced participation in comparison to individuals from the upper class overall with no consistent patterns. There was however an outlier in this relationship, where the upper middle class had a relatively higher engagement in joining strikes compared to the upper class.

## 6.2. Online Survey Results

The analysis of data obtained from the online survey presented a range of insights on the relationship of media to civic engagement. Figure 5 (Appendix B) reveals patterns in participants' confidence in different sources of media. Specifically, when it comes to television, the results indicate a concerning trend of very low confidence among the survey participants. Only a small proportion, 27%, expressed high confidence i.e. "a great deal of confidence" and "quite a lot of confidence" in television news with 23% indicating no confidence at all i.e. "none at all". Whereas newspaper was the source with highest observed confidence with 68% of participation indicating high confidence. In regards to social media, 43% indicated high confidence and 19% indicated having no confidence at all. These findings highlight the significant disparity in confidence levels across different forms of media. While newspapers seem to have a higher level of trust among the participants, the statistics underscore the pressing issue of very low confidence in television, as well as the overall scepticism towards social media. The data also shows that amongst the participants, 48% relied on social media as the main source of news consumption, followed by newspapers at 38% and lastly television at 13% (Figure 6, Appendix B).

## 6.2.1 Voting in National, State and Local Elections

Figure 7 (Appendix B) reveals levels of electoral participation among the survey respondents. For national elections and state elections, nearly 30% indicated low participation whereas 20% of participants indicated willingness to participate in the future. Local elections exhibited the lowest levels of engagement, with 53% of respondents participating on a consistent basis compared to 70% engaging in national and state elections. The willingness to participate in the future was also the highest for local elections at 27%.

Further analysis of the data (Table 2, Appendix B) showed that individuals that reported very low confidence in media i.e. responded with “none at all” were less likely to take part in voting at state and local elections compared to those with high confidence i.e those who responded with “a great deal of confidence”. When it comes to state elections, individuals with high confidence in the media had a 25% rate of negative response i.e. “never” and “never but willing to”, while those with low confidence exhibited a higher rate of 30.43% in terms of negative response to voting in state elections. These findings indicate that individuals with lower confidence in the media were more likely to express a negative inclination towards participating in state elections. Extending these findings to local elections, the impact of low confidence in the media on participation becomes even more pronounced. Individuals with very low confidence in the media displayed a 10% increase in negative response compared to those with higher confidence levels. This suggests that individuals with very low media confidence were considerably more likely to express a negative stance towards participating in state and local elections.

The data suggested that out of participants with low confidence in television (Table 3, Appendix B), 72% never engaged in national voting. This was followed by 49% never engaging in local elections and 32% reporting no engagement in state elections. This implies that low confidence in television has a considerable impact on voting behaviours, especially national and local. Furthermore, higher confidence in printed newspapers yielded higher participation rates in voting with 70% of participants with confidence in newspapers engaging in national elections, 68% engaging in state elections and 50% in local elections (Table 4, Appendix B). Confidence levels in social media were found to have an interesting effect on voting behaviours, with individuals with both high and low levels of confidence corresponding to a similar response share (= < 5%

difference) of engaging and not engaging in voting across all levels (Table 5, Appendix B). Finally, highest consumption of media i.e. daily consumption brought about a 21% decrease in participation in national elections and 25% in state elections compared to those with lower consumption frequencies i.e. weekly, monthly and rarely (Table 6, Appendix B).

### 6.2.2 Signing Petitions

*Signing petitions* was the most engaged in civic activity at 54% participants responding positively i.e. “have done it” with 30% indicating a positive attitude towards future participation in signing petitions i.e. “might do it”. Whereas 9% of participants indicated complete refrain from engaging in signing petitions i.e. “will never do it” (Figure 8, Appendix B). It was found that lower levels of confidence in the media had a negative effect on participation in signing petitions. Individuals with very low confidence in the media were 4% more likely to respond negatively to participating in civic activity in comparison to those with high confidence (Table 7, Appendix B). While confidence levels in television (Table 8, Appendix B) and newspapers (Table 9, Appendix B) overall reflected a difference of +/-10%, in positive or negative responses towards signing petitions, analysis of social media confidence presented interesting findings. Low confidence in social media yielded a 64% increase in negative responses towards participation in the civic activity (Table 10, Appendix B). This means that individuals with high confidence in social media tend to engage more in signing petitions by a significant margin. Consumption of media on a daily basis corresponded to a 9% decrease in participation compared to those who consumed news infrequently (Table 11, Appendix B).

### 6.2.3 Joining Strikes

*Joining Strikes* was the least engaged in civic activity with a mere 16% of the participants indicating they had joined strikes (Figure 8, Appendix B). It also observed a significantly higher share of participants indicating to refrain from participation with 40% answering “will never do it” and the least share of participants amongst all other activities, 28%, indicating a scope of engagement in the future. Individuals with low confidence in the media reported a 5% increase in negative responses to engagement with strikes compared to individuals with high confidence in

the media (Table 7, Appendix B). During analysis, no notable patterns were identified between confidence levels in television and newspapers in respect to joining strikes. The individuals that engaged in joining strikes were more likely to have high confidence in social media than low confidence. While 56% of individuals with high confidence in social media engaged in strikes, the number was a mere 11% for individuals with low confidence (Table 10, Appendix B). Consumption of news at a high frequency indicated a 15% decrease in positive responses compared to those who consumed news at a lower frequency (Table 11, Appendix B).

#### 6.2.4 Attending Peaceful Demonstrations

Nearly 31% of participants indicated having attended peaceful demonstrations making it the second highest engaged in civic activity amongst the survey sample (Figure 8, Appendix B). It is noteworthy that a significant share, 47% of participants indicated willingness to engage in peaceful demonstrations in the future which is the highest willingness across all forms of civic activity. While, 12% indicated refrain from engagement. There was a 26% increase in negative responses to attending peaceful demonstrations by individuals with low confidence in the media in relation to those with high confidence (Table 7, Appendix B). While confidence in newspapers did not exhibit any interesting patterns, confidence levels in television and social media offered some insights (Table 10, Appendix B). In comparison to those with low level of confidence in television, there was a 20% increase in negative responses in attending peaceful demonstrations amongst those with high confidence in television. 73% of individuals with high confidence in television reported low participation whereas, 54% of individuals with low confidence attended peaceful demonstrations. This implies that amongst the survey sample, low confidence in television corresponds to low levels of engagement in attending peaceful demonstrations. Amongst those with lower confidence in social media, 27% engaged in peaceful demonstrations whereas, amongst those with high confidence in social media 81% engaged. This indicates that high confidence in social media leads to a higher participation rate in peaceful demonstrations. News consumption frequency had an insignificant but negative effect on the civic activity (Table 11, Appendix B).



### 6.2.5 Engagement in Other Forms of Protest

Amongst the survey sample, 19% indicated having engaged in other forms of protest with 17% indicating to refrain from civic activity (Figure 8, Appendix B). Coming in second to attending peaceful demonstrations, willingness to future participation in other forms of protest amounted to 40%. Following a similar fashion to the rest of the civic activities, low confidence in the media reflected a higher negative response to engagement by 12% compared to individuals with high confidence in media (Table 7, Appendix B). Additionally, in analysis of different levels of confidence across the sources, there were no prominent patterns observed between confidence in television and newspapers. Social media confidence revealed that a higher confidence in social media correlated with higher engagement in other forms of protest by 52% (Table 10, Appendix B). Out of individuals with high confidence in social media, 67% engaged in other forms of protests while the share was 15% for those with low confidence in social media. High consumption of media corresponded to an 11% decrease in engagement in other forms of protest in comparison to those with lower frequency of consumption (Table 11, Appendix B).

## 7. Discussion and Analysis

The results shed light on various aspects of the relationship between media and civic engagement. Having discussed the results for WVS and the online results separately, this section will discuss the findings collectively and provide a basis for drawing conclusions for this study. The findings from the WVS and online survey data highlight the significant negative influence of high news consumption and low media confidence on civic engagement, academic discussions of which can be found throughout the literature review and the theoretical framework of this study.

The study finds that previous research on distrust in media institutions in India (Aneez et. al., 2020), presence of sensationalism and bias in media due to commercialization of media (Chakravarty 2017; CSDS, 2022; Sarkar, 2017) and concentration of media ownership (MOM, 2018) in combination with literature on different aspects of a negative relationship between media and civic engagement (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010; Livingstone, 1994; Ladd, 2011; Uslaner, 2004) provide a solid foundation for the findings of this study. The negative effects of erosion of trust in the Indian media become prominent when the data observes a decline in civic engagement despite high consumption of news. Ideally, credible media institutions and increased news consumption would lead to an increase in political awareness and action. Whereas, in the Indian context this does not prove to be true.

With respect to engagement in voting, higher consumption of news had a negative impact across both datasets. While higher frequency of news consumption had a significant effect in WVS data across all forms of civic engagement, the online survey data revealed that news consumption had the highest effect on voting behaviours in comparison to other civic activities. Low confidence in the media also has a significant effect on the likelihood of voting across both datasets. While low media confidence reduced the likelihood of participation significantly in the WVS data, parallelly, online survey data revealed that low confidence increased the rate of disengagement by 30% for state elections and 11% for local elections. Thus, a relationship between media

consumption, media confidence and voting behaviours can be established where high consumption of media, low confidence in media lead to disengagement from voting in elections.

Gentzkow & Shapiro (2010) referred to the impact of the concept of ‘media slant’ on voting behaviours, highlighting that media coverage of politics can significantly affect engagement in voting. This ties into CSDS (2022) findings of Indian media’s tendency to be favourable to the government, instead of holding it accountable. For instance, in the report it was found that 45% of individuals believed that the media portrays the current Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, ‘too favourably’ while the opposition is portrayed ‘too unfavourably’ (CSDS, 2022). This implies the media slant in India is perceived to be biased by a big share of the population which reduces its credibility in the eyes of the Indian public. This can also be seen by the 22% decrease in trust in sources of news between 2020 and 2019 (Aneez et al., 2020). Hence, a higher consumption of biased media with low credibility amongst the public contributes to the understanding of low electoral participation in India.

The online survey findings further highlight the impact of media confidence across different sources on voting behaviours. It shows that low confidence in television has a pronounced negative effect, while confidence in social media demonstrates an insignificant effect and higher confidence in newspapers is associated with higher voting rates. This correlates perfectly with the overall confidence levels of each news source where television is the least trusted, followed by social media and newspapers. These findings suggest that individuals who harbour greater scepticism towards television are more likely to disengage from voting in elections.

This negative effect of media on Indian civic engagement extends onto collective action such as signing petitions, joining strikes, attending peaceful demonstrations and other forms of protest as well. In accordance with WVS data analysis, high consumption of news had a significant negative impact on the likelihood of individuals signing petitions, joining strikes and attending peaceful demonstrations in comparison to individuals that reported a low consumption of news. This was corroborated to an extent with the survey data where high consumption of media reduced engagement in signing petitions by 9%, joining strikes by 15%, engagement in other

forms of protest by 11%. However, high consumption of news led to a negligible reduction in attending peaceful demonstrations.

Low confidence exhibited the same effect in collective action as observed with voting behaviours, a lesser likelihood of engagement. The survey data mirrors these findings to an extent with findings that correlate with WVS' data analysis but show variance between the different civic activities. For instance, individuals with a low confidence in the media reported an overall decrease of participation in other forms of protest by 12%, signing petitions by 4%, joining strikes by 5% and attending peaceful demonstrations by 20% compared to those with higher confidence. This study has not been able to identify the reason behind this spike in effect of low media confidence in attending peaceful demonstrations, however there is a possibility of the presence of other factors that dictate the extent to which low confidence in media can affect engagement across different civic activities. The study hypothesises that this may be an outcome of sampling bias. Nonetheless, the WVS findings highlight that confidence in media has a significant effect on civic engagement hence it is safe to conclude that low confidence in media decreases the likelihood of individuals engaging in signing petitions, joining strikes, attending peaceful demonstrations, other forms of protest as well as holding a political party membership.

In his book, Ladd (2011) presents findings that citizen's trust in institutional media leaks into their electoral and political actions. Finding distrust in media to be a main cause of disengagement from political activities, Ladd (2011) argues that a sense of distrust in media amongst the public leads to a 'feeling of disillusion' and 'disconnectedness from the political processes'. This study's findings establish strong links between confidence and civic engagement which aligns with previous research that explore the relationship between the two (Gentzkow & Shapiro, 2010; Ladd, 2011; Livingstone, 1994; Uslaner, 2004).

While overall confidence levels in television and newspaper did not pose an effect for a discussion, confidence levels in social media presented significant effects. There was a consistent pattern of high confidence in social media and high civic engagement. High confidence in social media corresponded to a 55% increase in engagement with signing petitions. Parallely, the individuals that engaged in joining strikes were more likely to have high confidence in social

media than low confidence by a margin of 45%. For attending peaceful demonstrations, 53% of individuals with lower confidence in social media did not engage however the number was only 4% of individuals with high confidence. Finally, out of individuals with high confidence in social media, 80% engaged in other forms of protests while the share was 15% for those with low confidence in social media.

The study also found that based on the WVS findings, older individuals have an overall higher likelihood to engage in civic activities and the same is true for the male population in India. However, such a difference was not evident in the survey data. The survey data had nearly equal share of participation by younger individuals and older individuals as well as males and females. This may be justified due to the mainly metropolitan background of the respondents which would reflect on decreased age and gender disparities in participation compared to the WVS dataset with a wider variety of participants with different socio-economic backgrounds. There is evidence that civic participation amongst the urban populations of India is low across a range of civic activities in comparison to rural populations (Bertorelli et. al., 2016). However, the WVS data highlights two issues of interest in the discourse of this topic. Reduced youth participation and female participation in the civic sphere is an issue of concern that has been explored in many academic studies and continues to have a scope for further research to diminish these gaps within the Indian population.

## 8. Conclusion

The study's attempt at understanding the general role of media in explaining civic engagement trends within the Indian context highlighted several findings. First, individuals that reported high consumption of media had a lower likelihood of engaging in a range of civic activities chosen in this study. The paper answers the first research question to a certain extent; it acknowledges the existence of factors that may have implications on this relationship. However, the study concludes that based on the analysis and findings, the first hypothesis was disproved and high consumption of media in India fails to foster civic engagement. Second, a strong link between confidence in media and lower incidence of civic engagement is established across all forms of civic activities used in this study. Individuals that reported a lower confidence in media exhibited lower engagement rates than those who were disengaged but had higher confidence in media. In accordance with this finding, the study concludes that the second research question was also answered to a certain extent. Aforementioned, influence of factors not included in this study may also present implications for answering this research question. However, on the basis of the analysis and findings of this study, it is concluded that the second hypothesis was proven to be true and lower confidence in media fosters lower rates of civic engagement. These findings avidly encourage governmental attention towards strengthening Indian media's integrity and restoring trust amongst the Indian public in media institutions. This may then lead to higher civic engagement rates in India and further bolster the fabric of Indian democracy.

### Further Research

The study identifies a lack of literature on the relationship between media consumption, media confidence and civic engagement thus encouraging further research with respect to the interplay between these factors. Given that the stark declining rates of trust are a result of the past decade of commercialisation and concentration of ownership in the Indian media landscape, there is

sparse literature exploring the nexus between media and civic engagement in the Indian context. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of a holistic approach in research to understand the true scope of media in fostering civic engagement in India. For instance, exploration of how confidence in regional media in their capacity to affect civic engagement and inclusion of content analysis in understanding the focus of media coverage in India are a few suggestions that will allow the discourse on the role media plays in Indian civic engagement to reach robust conclusions.

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# Appendix A

## Section 1 of 3 Demography

Let's begin with some general demographic information about you.

1. Age

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Sex

- Female
- Male
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Please fill in which State/Union Territory of India you come from.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Kindly selected you highest level of educational attainment

- Intermediate/High School
- Pursuing undergraduate
- Undergraduate
- Postgraduate

5. Kindly select which religion you identify with:

- Hinduism
- Islam
- Sikhism
- Christianity
- Atheist or agnostic
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

## Section 2 of 3 Civic Actions and Attitudes

The following set of questions require answers based on your own personal views

6. Please indicate the importance of politics in your life.
  - Very important
  - Somewhat important
  - Not very important
  - Not important at all
  
7. In political matters, people talk of “the left” and “the right.” If 1 means “far left,” and 5 means “far right,” where would you place your political views?
  - 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - 5
  
8. When elections take place, do you vote always, usually, never or never but willing to in the future?

National elections

- Always
- Usually
- Never
- Never but willing to in the future

State elections

- Always
- Usually
- Never
- Never but willing to in the future
- 

Local/Municipality elections

- Always
- Usually
- Never
- Never but willing to in the future

9. I am now going to list a few forms of political action below. I'd like you to indicate, for each one, whether you have done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never under any circumstances do it.

Signing a petition

- Have done it
- Might do it
- Will never do it
- Cannot say

Joining Strikes

- Have done it
- Might do it
- Will never do it
- Cannot say

Attending peaceful demonstrations

- Have done it
- Might do it
- Will never do it
- Cannot say

Any other act of protest

- Have done it
- Might do it
- Will never do it
- Cannot say

10. Are you/were you ever an active member of a political party?

- Yes
- No

11. Please indicate your belief on the importance of political participation for a democracy.

- Very important
- Somewhat important
- Not very important
- Not important at all
- Cannot say

### Section 3 of 3 News Media Perceptions and Habits

This final set of questions will seek answers to understand your news media consumption habits and confidence in news media. Just a few more questions to go!

12. How often do you consume news about India?

- Daily
- Few times a week
- Weekly
- Once in a few weeks
- Rarely

13. I am going to list a few sources of Indian news, for each one, kindly indicate how much confidence you have in them.

Television News (ABP, NDTV, Aaj Tak, Times Now etc.)

- A great deal of confidence
- Quite a lot of confidence
- Not very much confidence
- None at all

Printed or Online Newspapers (Hindustan Times, Times of India etc.)

- A great deal of confidence
- Quite a lot of confidence
- Not very much confidence
- None at all

Social Media (Youtube, Twitter, Instagram etc.)

- A great deal of confidence
- Quite a lot of confidence
- Not very much confidence
- None at all

14. Kindly indicate which of these sources is your **main** source of news consumption.

- Television News (ABP, NDTV, Aaj Tak, Times Now etc.)
- Printed or Online Newspapers (Hindustan Times, Times of India etc.)
- Social Media (Youtube, Twitter, Instagram etc.)

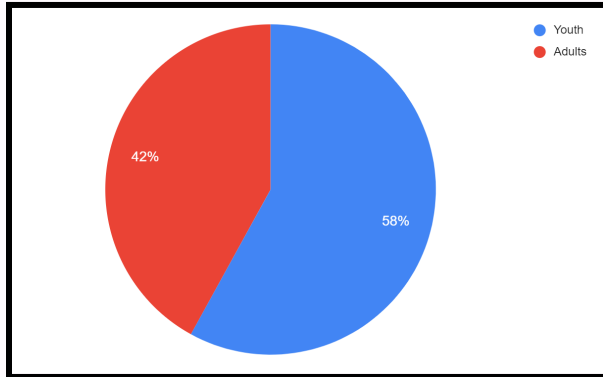
15. Kindly indicate which of these sources is your **least used** source of news consumption.

- Television News (ABP, NDTV, Aaj Tak, Times Now etc.)
- Printed or Online Newspapers (Hindustan Times, Times of India etc.)
- Social Media (Youtube, Twitter, Instagram etc.)

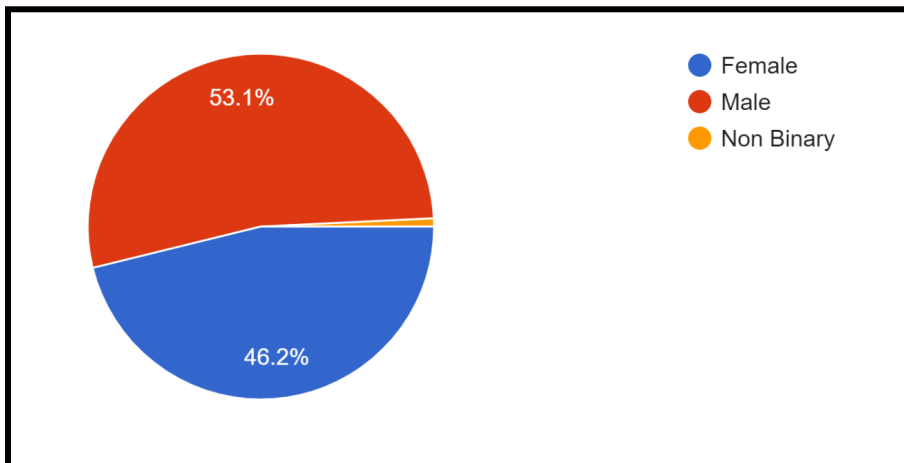


# Appendix B

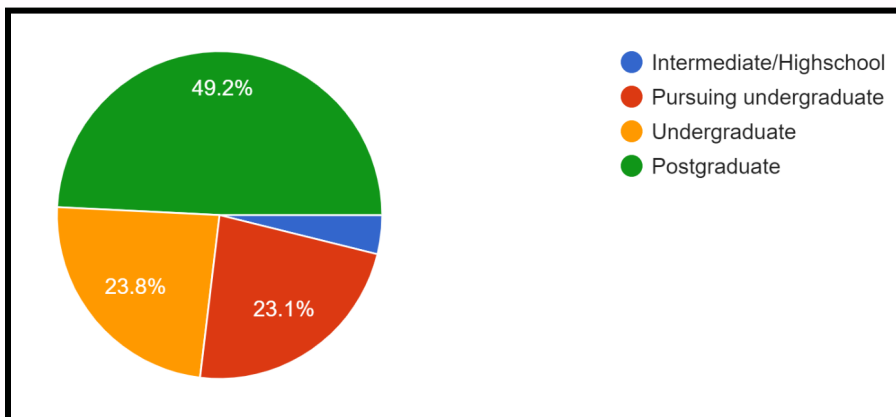
**Figure 1. Age of Online Survey Participants**



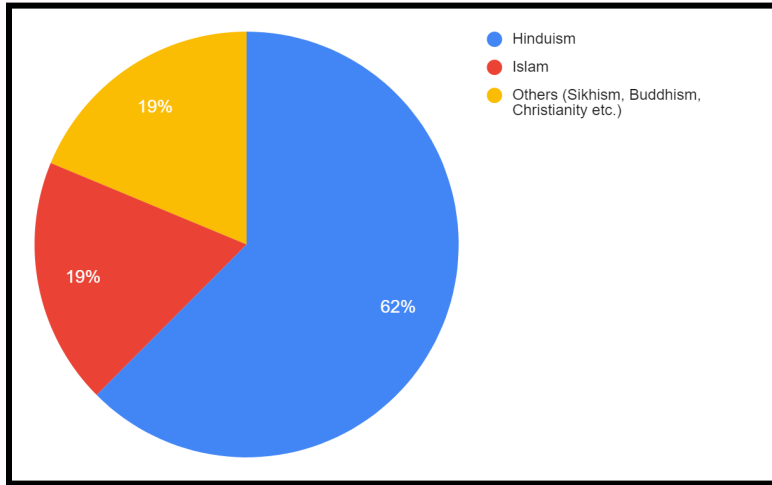
**Figure 2. Sex Distribution of Online Survey Participants**



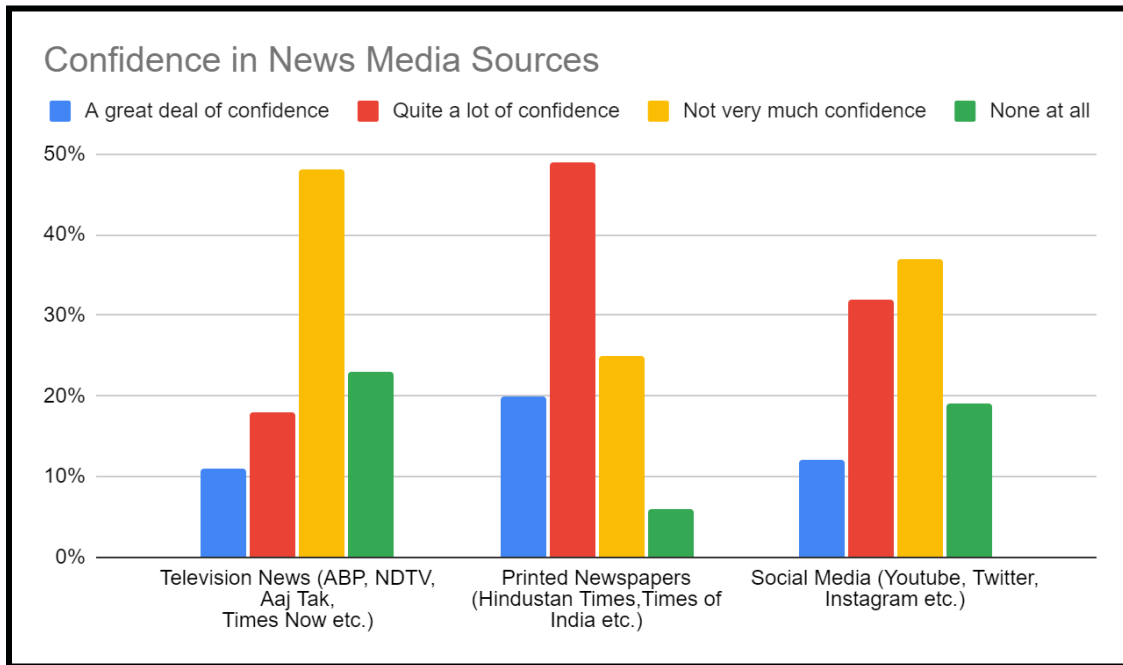
**Figure 3. Education Level of Online Survey Participants**



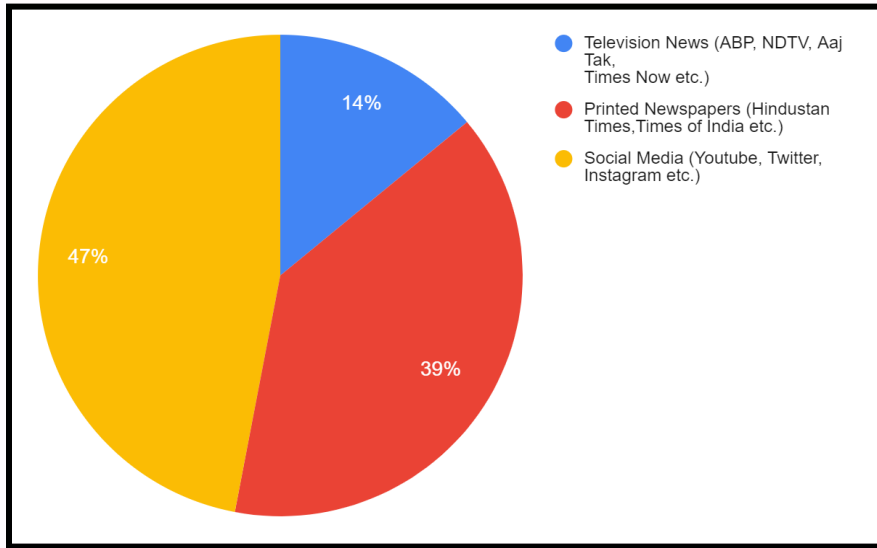
**Figure 4. Religious Beliefs of Online Survey Participants**



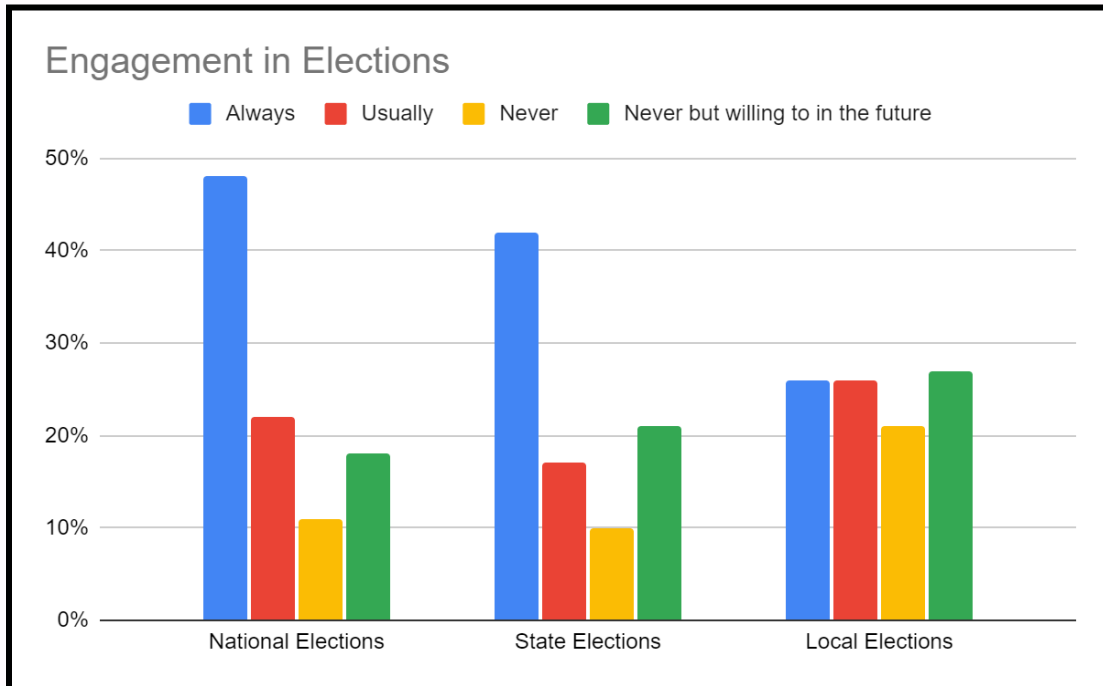
**Figure 5. Confidence in News Media Source**



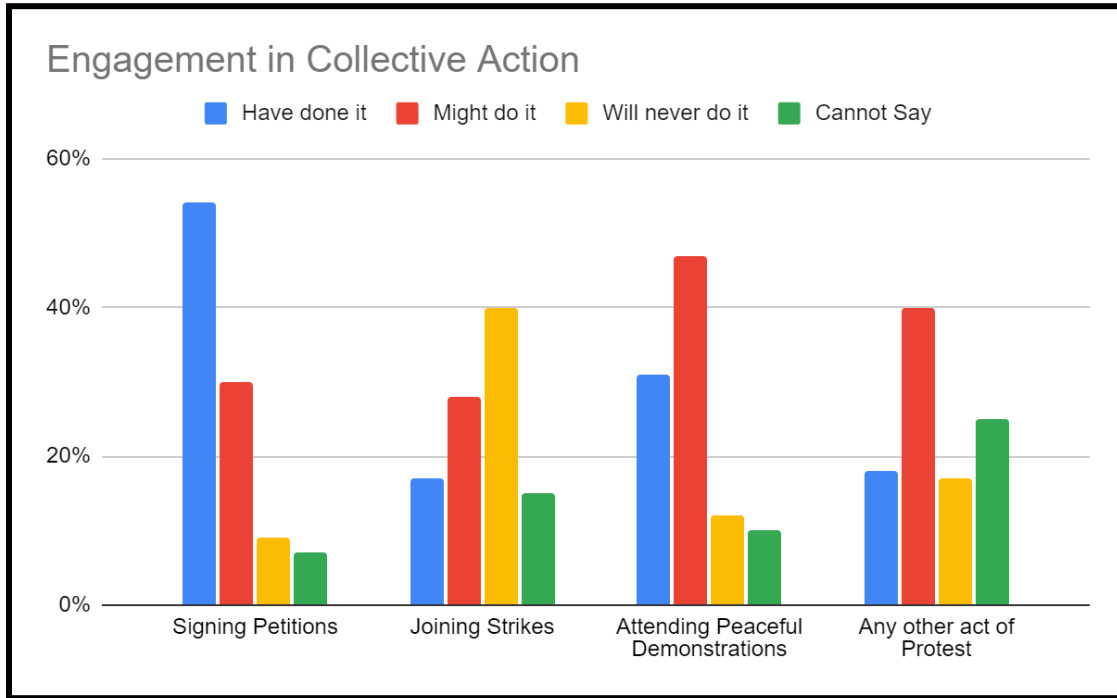
**Figure 6. Main Source of News Consumption**



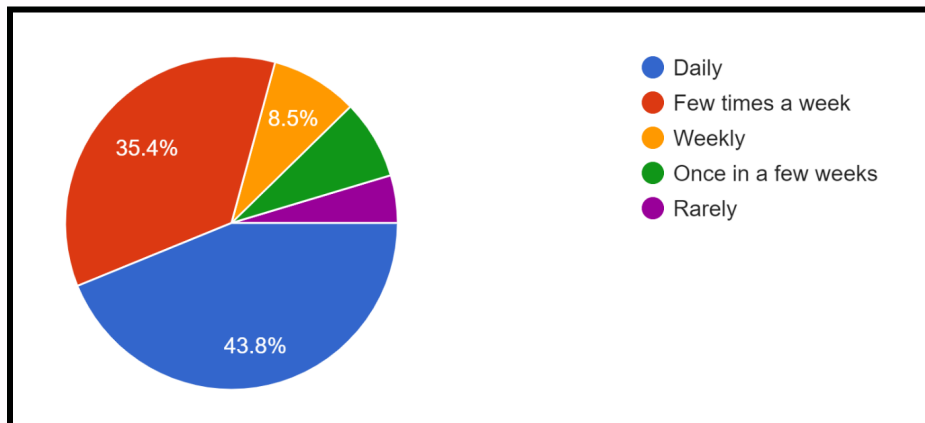
**Figure 7. Engagement in Elections**



**Figure 8. Engagement in Signing Petitions, Joining Strikes, Attending Peaceful Demonstrations and Other Acts of Protest**



**Figure 9. Frequency of News Consumption**



**Table 2. Overall Confidence in Media and Participation in National, State and Local Elections**

Overall Confidence and Participation	Very High Confidence (N=16)		Very Low Confidence (N=23)	
	High participation	Low participation	High participation	Low participation
National Voting	75%	25%	73.91%	26.09%
State Voting	75%	25%	69.57%	30.43%
Local Voting	62.5%	37.5%	52.17%	47.82%

**Table 3: Television Confidence and Participation in National, State and Local Voting**

Television Confidence and Participation	High Confidence (N=37)		Low Confidence (N=93)	
	High participation	Low participation	High participation	Low participation
National Voting	72.96%	27.04%	27.96%	72.04%
State Voting	72.96%	27.04%	67.75%	32.25%
Local Voting	56.76%	43.24%	50.54%	49.46%

**Table 4. Newspaper Confidence and Participation in National, State and Local Voting**

Newspaper Confidence and Participation	High Confidence (N=90)		Low Confidence (N=40)	
	High participation	Low participation	High participation	Low participation
National Voting	70%	33.34%	72.5%	27.5%
State Voting	67.78%	32.23%	72.5%	27.5%
Local Voting	50%	50%	57.5%	42.5%

**Table 5. Social Media Confidence and Participation in National, State and Local Voting**

Social Media Confidence and Participation	High Confidence (N=57)		Low Confidence (N=73)	
	High participation	Low participation	High participation	Low participation
National Voting	70.18%	29.82%	71.235	28.77%
State Voting	68.42%	31.57%	69.86%	30.13%
Local Voting	54.38%	45.61%	50.68%	49.32%

**Table 6. Overall Consumption and Participation in National, State and Local Voting**

Overall Consumption and Participation	High Consumption (N=57)		Low Consumption (N=73)	
	High participation	Low participation	High participation	Low participation
National Voting	82.46%	17.54%	61.64%	38.36%
State Voting	82.46%	17.54%	57.15%	42.85%
Local Voting	38.60%	43.86%	49.32	50.68%

**Table 7. Overall Confidence and Participation in Signing Petitions, Joining Strikes, Peaceful Demonstrations and Other Protests**

Overall Confidence and Participation	Very High Confidence (N=16)			Very Low Confidence (N=23)		
	High Participation	Low Participation	Can't Say	High Participation	Low Participation	Can't Say
Signing Petitions	43.75%	43.75%	12.5%	47.83%	47.83%	4.35%
Joining Strikes	10.75%	68.75%	20.5%	8.69%	73.91%	17.38%
Peaceful Demonstrations	33.04%	42.64%	24.28%	18.75%	68.75%	12.5%
Other Protests	44.89%	30.11%	25%	37.19%	52.17%	10.64%

**Table 8. Television Confidence and Participation in Signing Petitions, Joining Strikes, Peaceful Demonstrations and Other Protests**

Television Confidence and Participation	High Confidence (N=37)			Low Confidence (N=93)		
	High Participation	Low Participation	Can't Say	High Participation	Low Participation	Can't Say
Signing Petitions	45.95%	43.24%	10.81%	47.57%	47.05%	5.38%
Joining Strikes	10.81%	64.86%	24.32%	19.35%	69.89%	10.75%
Peaceful Demonstrations	10.81%	72.97%	16.22%	38.71%	53.76%	7.53%
Other Protests	18.51%	54.05%	29.43%	20.43%	58.06%	21.51%

**Table 9. Newspaper Confidence and Participation in Signing Petitions, Joining Strikes, Peaceful Demonstrations and Other Protests**

Newspaper Confidence and Participation	High Confidence (N=90)			Low Confidence (N=40)		
	High Participation	Low Participation	Can't Say	High Participation	Low Participation	Can't Say
Signing Petitions	56.67%	36.67%	6.67%	47.5%	45%	7.5%
Joining Strikes	17.78%	68.89%	13.34%	15%	67.5%	17.5%
Peaceful Demonstrations	32.23%	60%	7.78%	27.5%	57.5%	15%
Other Protests	18.89%	55.56%	25.56%	17.5%	60%	2.25%

**Table 10. Social Media Confidence and Participation in Signing Petitions, Joining Strikes, Peaceful Demonstrations and Other Protests**

Social Media Confidence and Participation	High Confidence (N=57)			Low Confidence (N=73)		
	High Participation	Low Participation	Can't Say	High Participation	Low Participation	Can't Say
Signing Petitions	82.45%	12.28%	5.26%	15.05%	76.73%	8.22%
Joining Strikes	56.14%	33.34%	10.53%	10.96%	71.23%	17.81%
Peaceful Demonstrations	80.7%	12.28%	7.02%	27.40%	60.27%	12.33%
Other Protests	66.67%	15.79%	17.54%	15.07%	54.79%	30.14%

**Table 11. Overall Consumption and Participation in Signing Petitions, Joining Strikes, Peaceful Demonstrations and Other Protests**

Overall Consumption and Participation	High Consumption (N=57)			Low Consumption(N=73)		
	High Participation	Low Participation	Can't Say	High Participation	Low Participation	Can't Say
Signing Petitions	85.96%	2.28%	2.28%	82.19%	10.96%	6.85%
Joining Strikes	38.36%	46.57%	15.07%	54.38%	31.57%	14.03%
Peaceful Demonstrations	78.95%	12.28%	8.77%	76.71%	12.33%	10.96%
Other Protests	64.91%	12.28%	22.8%	53.42%	20.55%	26.03%