

## Mediatization And Political Discourse: Impact Of Selective Content On The Voting Behaviour Of People

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### Abstract

The media is the Fourth Pillar of a democratic society. It works as a watchdog over the legislative, executive, and judicial systems of the government. The media's fair and unbiased reporting is essential for the smooth and better functioning of a democratic setup. The media, which once functioned as mere channels of communication within the election process, have now emerged as independent power centres operating 'autonomously, according to its own economic and symbolic logics'. The capacity of the media to set political agendas, which has been defined as the 'assignment of special relevance to one particular issue or set of information by the source of the message' with the expectation that the audience will respond with heightened attention to the content and format of the message has also been noted. The broad aim of the present paper was to explore the current academic literature in the field of Mediatization of Politics and Political discourse in India. Hence, this study looked into the following problems, through which we try to find out how media affect society in terms of political discourse especially during the elections and secondly we will also try to find out how opinion polls or elections surveys help to enhance political awareness

of voters and how it affects their voting behaviour during elections.

Keywords: Mediatization, Political Discourse, Propaganda, Election Survey, Opinion Polls.

## INTRODUCTION

### MEDIATIZATION OF POLITICS

Mediatization is a word that has its origin in German, *mediatisierung* (Livingstone, 2009). The term “mediatization” firstly emerged among the German-speaking countries. This term was considered to be an awkward term among the native English speaker. Couldry and Hepp (2013) however argue that a term is needed for non-native English speakers to encompass the broad consequences of media in our lives, hence mediatization is coined.

Mediatization comes to theorize broad media-related or mediatic transformations, instead of particular media-caused, that is, transformations in the age where the “media no longer form a distinct sector but are fully integrated into human life” (Fornäs, 2014, p. 39), the age of “deeper social penetration of modes of ‘media awareness’ and ‘media relatedness’, following recognition that we now ‘live in the media rather than ‘live with’ them” (Corner, 2018). By this token, the mediatization of politics goes hand in hand with the mediatization of other social domains, from investment banking (Stanley, Mackenzie Davey, & Symon, 2014) and education (Livingstone, 2014) to romantic love (Storey & McDonald, 2014) and grieving (Morse, 2018); it is one among our multiple and overlapping “mediatized worlds” (Hepp & Krotz, 2014). To account, therefore, for the mediatization of politics is also to account for the popularization of the “political” and the politicization of the “popular”, that is, the opening of institutional party politics to and merging with various aspects of popular culture, the “personal”, the “every day”, and the “spectacular” (Stanyer, 2013; Street, 2016; Williams & Delli Carpini, 2011), or what I shall refer to as personalization, conversationalization and dramatization of politics.

Mediatization is a theory that contends that media shapes the public opinion and agenda of the political discourse among the general public and society in which it exists. Media has a role in setting the dialogue of political communication. Political communication is a subfield of political science and communication, where factors like- how information spreads and influences the public, polity, and policymakers, citizens, and the news media; determine the decision making. According to this,

the news media has high power over the shaping of the institutions and societies, as they are dependent on the mass media. In recent times, especially during election campaigns, we have seen the impact of media on politics, that is, how media has influenced decision making. In present times, the media plays an essential role in politics compared to earlier times. In previous times too, media had a role in political communication in societies. Still, due to societal development in modern times, the present time to be specific, the media has become an indispensable part of politics, that the discourse has been shifted from 'mediated politics' to 'mediatized politics.'

Mediatization of politics, therefore, is a long process in which the media has a significant impact on political communication, policymakers, institutions, and citizens. In India, due to mediatization, politics has lost its autonomy, is increasingly dependent on media coverage to influence the people, and media coverage shapes political opinion. In the field of journalism, one of its subfields mass media is a communication tool for political institutions as well as society.

Mediatization is the process by which media has been influencing political communication since 1990. Mediatize means how communications transform society, media's impact on political systems, assessing how the techniques and methods of communication transform society, media's impact on political communications, and emerged as the key institutions. Political communication is a subfield of political science and communication. Factors like- how information spreads and influences the public, polity, and policymakers, citizens, and the news media; determine the decision making. According to this, the news media has high power over the shaping of the institutions and societies, as they are dependent on the mass media. Although, the term mediatization is more of an evaluative concept. Mediatization is a scenario within a community where instead of interpersonal communication, media becomes the most critical source of information. It doesn't matter how 'free' the media is to meditate for a society. It's more about measuring how much society depends on the media for the exchange of information. Media effects are the study of the causal impact mediated communication has on individuals; it comprises quantitative functions like framing, agenda setting and priming. Mediatization essentially is more complex and looks at how media permeates everything. It is a multi-flow, systemic change that is larger than just media influence. The media has always been an institutional arena of interaction, so it plays an essential role in any political discourse and public opinion formation.

Mediatization of society has polarised political communication completely. The myth of objectivity has been erased and replaced by 'news that suits my ideology' versus 'fake

news. 'Fake news' here is not just deliberately misreported, fabricated pieces- but any work that doesn't suit the perspective of an ideological faction. The fake news problem is, of course, even more, ironic because the manufacture of doctored, misreported, unsourced misinformation forwarded virally through social media intermediaries have been the ground-zero for political communication or miscommunication in today's age at the same time. Therefore, if one goes about believing every person speaks for an agenda, fact-checking is often also another layer of misinformation, and there is no absolute truth; one would find themselves describing news in contemporary India.

Mediatization of politics is a process with complex-mediated relationships between three sets of actors:

1. Mediatized public
2. Political Actors
3. Media Actors

1. **Mediatized publics:** The first is a heterogeneous set of neither political actors (broadly defined as parties, pressures or representatives of lobby groups in civil society) or media actors (defined as paid employees of media institutions). For analytical purposes, this group can be divided by class, gender, region, educational background etc. **Mediatization** occurs when this group (s) consumes an increasing amount of media material about politics produced by political actors or media actors in a given area (whether in a democracy or authoritarian society) over a given period. They can be heavy or light consumers of political news, whether or not they can involve themselves in mediation or non-mediated political debate, whether or not they can engage in political activities (voting, participating in protests and so on). With the rise of social media, the media public can engage in political debates either with the media or political actors or with other members of their media public.
2. **Political actors:** Political actors (Spokesperson or representatives of political parties, pressure and lobby groups) have recognized the importance of increasing mediatized political information. This helps build public opinion and engage in electoral/political logic to win more votes either by using media institutions or the media content they control: directly or indirectly. Now means using political advertising, social media, party-controlled newspaper or news channels, whereas indirectly refers to how political parties can convey their policies and manifestos among the citizens by more or less autonomous media institutions. A more sophisticated version would be where ten political parties consider how well policies will play directly with media institutions and indirectly with the public during policy-

formation, i.e. the issue of public opinion formation is built into policy design. Political actors may also use media (email, social media) to mobilize supporters, ask for donations, etc.

- 3. Media actors:** Media actors are the owners or the employees of media institutions. Media actors respond to efforts to manage their production of political news based on a variety of factors which includes the degree of independence of media institutions from the political powers, professional norms of journalists, ideologies or policies of political parties supported by the media institutions, the importance of commercial imperatives along with the views of audiences and advertisers and the needs of media owners to support political parties or political leaders for the commercial purpose). Media owners may seek to use media institutions or media organizations as a mouthpiece to propagate policies and views of political parties. Media institutions may attempt to maximize their profit by maximizing the revenue and minimizing the costs. There is also a possibility of tie-ups between media actors and political parties or political actors forgoing earnings in the short run to maximize profits in the longer term. Journalists can also be put under pressure (greater or lesser) by media owners to promote a particular political ideology or maximize profit. Still, they may also be influenced by professional norms of serving the public interest (this may be through advocacy or campaigning journalism or more 'objective' styles).

In recent times, the role of mass media is under continuous investigation, with its relation to social changes. It suggests that media as a platform has become a political territory. If we analyze the media coverage of the two Lok Sabha elections from 2014 and 2019, it is evident how the Indian mainstream media and press set an agenda, presented a fabricated reality before the public and used 'nationalism' as a sentiment to influence the political opinion of the people.

### **POLITICAL DISCOURSE**

The English word 'politics' is derived from three Greek words like 'polis' (city), 'polity' (government), and 'politics' (constitution). The original Greek meaning of 'Politics' became old when Hobbes identified it with 'Shakti' and Auguste Comte popularized the trend of 'positivism'.

For Harold Laswell, the study of politics is "The study of influence and influencers" and influencers are those who receive the most what to get "(1951: 295). While, for Robert Dahl, a political system is "a persistent". A pattern of inhuman relations that includes a significant boundary, power, rule or authority "(1965: 6). On similar terms, Michael Curtis stated that " Study of Politics deals

with the description and analysis of manners in which power has achieved, exercised and controlled, the purpose for which it is used, the way decisions are made, which factors influence the making of those decisions and the context in which the decision takes place "

In more modern times it was probably George Orwell who first caught our attention toward political Competence of Language. This is seen in his article related to the "Politics and the English language," where he considers how the language can be used to manipulate thoughts and suggestions. For example, he mentioned in his article that "the political speech and writing are largely the defence of indefensible (1969: 225). Examples quoted by George Orwell are based on inverted logic (mentioned in his book 1984) and they can be resonated through the current work on political discourse. Instances like the use of the word "pacification" mean the bombing of defenceless villages, or the use of "Rectification of frontier" refers to relocation" or to remove thousands of farmers from their homes. George Orwell was also concerned about the decline of political language and firmly believe that politics is responsible for this decline.

However, it is not just manipulation that is the issue in terms of political language, but It is the goal of such manipulation that is seen as problematic. Orwell also believed that the Politicians want to hide the negative within special formulations so that the population cannot see the truth or problem/issue in front of them. Later Political Scientist Murray Allemen (1971,1977,1988) also stressed the "symbolic manipulation of reality to achieve political goals". Later, Pêcheux (1982, 1978) in a more directed political sense, while following Althusser claims that ideology is not merely an abstract system of thought, but becomes actualize in a variety of physical forms, one type of discourse is set about studying material form.

Pecheux strongly argued that the meaning of words will be transformed on the condition of who used them, or in the terms of Foucault (1972) we can define it as "discourse formations". In discourse formation, the words and their interaction may be interpreted differently within the other. Like conservative or right-wing ideas of "Social benefits" and "defence spending" can differ fundamentally from interpretations of socialist or leftist discourse. Here, in political discourse, the general principle is transformation. Similar words and phrases can be reinterpreted within various conceptual frameworks. Directly linked to this process is the concept of "representation". Representation here refers to the issue of how language is employed in various ways to represent what we can know, believe, and maybe think.

There are two concepts of representation: one is Universalist and the other one is Relativist (Montgomery 1992). **Universality** holds

that we understand our world concerning a set of universal ideological primes. Language, in this view, reflects these universal possibilities. Language is the only medium through which we can express our system of thought, with this system being independent of language itself. While the **Relativist** position sees language and thought as inseparably related. Our understanding of the world within a relativist perspective is influenced by the available linguistic resources.

Democracy does not mean contesting and winning elections. The quality of a country's democracy is gauged from the fact that leaders and managers of democratic institutions follow democratic norms and values in principle and practice. The language used by political leaders in a fragmented democratic country needs to reflect decency and respect for differences of views and opinions; And the inevitability, importance of other political groups. When a nation's public discourse becomes vicious and biased, fully democratic politics begins to diverge. In recent years, with the rise of ultra-right ideology in various parts of the world, the language publicly used by leaders has become vicious and personal. Loud rhetoric is based on half-hearted truth rather than bringing together the anger, hatred and division of people in society.

The language of public discourse matters a lot in any democracy. As psychologists have found, many political leaders are regularly using offensive language in public as if they are "expressing their true feelings" to project themselves differently than their peers. Those who are afraid, to tell the truth. However, the 'unscrupulous truth' made by the loud politicians is not a truth, but a populist statement to further their and their parties' narrow interest in electoral politics.

Mark Twain once said, "The difference between a near-perfect word and a right word is a really big case - it's the difference between a lightning bug and a lightning." Forget almost the right words, political leaders in India have become masters of using all the wrong words, and this trend has greatly eroded the level of public discourse in the country. On the eve of elections in Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat, political rhetoric has again reached a new level.

### **Literature Review**

**Carpini, Keeter (1996)**, "Political awareness is a broad term in the literature of political science". Political awareness is the range of factual information about politics that is stored in long term memory". Therefore, appropriate political knowledge is important for an individual to effectively participate in political affairs, represent their own needs and develop attitudes. **Niemi,**

**Junn (1998)**, "Political awareness means Access to political information, participation, media exposure and education with political information being the best indicator. Through political talk shows people get aware of the political system in which they elect representatives. **Gastil & Dillard (1999)**, "Political awareness plays a significant role in explaining variation in political participation. The higher the level of political awareness the higher would be the level of participation in political activities. Discussing politics with people is a matter of interest and awareness.

Media shape political opinion (**Kuypers 1997, Graber 2002, Palets 2002**). Media exercise independent influence on policy and public opinion, most political sciences scholarship reduces the media's role to a "conveyor belt" that passively transport elite views (**Jentleson 1992, Brody 1991**) particularly the views of powerful elites to the public (**Zaller, Chiu 2000, Bennett et al.2006**).

**Norris (2008)**, "The existence of an unfettered and independent press within each nation is necessary for the process of the democratic system, by contributing towards the right of freedom of thought, expression and conscience, strengthening the responsiveness and accountability of government to all citizens. **Keeter (1987)**." Media users prefer the television shows as compared to print media for gaining the information about the political campaigns". (**Macleod et.al.1979**) "Media encourage and motivate the interpersonal discussion among public and that leads them to decide which party to vote". **Rogers (2002)**, "Media plays an essential role in agenda setting, prioritizing the audience preferences as to which news is important and hence influence their voting behaviour". Political shows support the general public by developing public opinion against the violation of human rights and dictatorship. The political talk shows provide efficient coverage about the issues which enable the public to understand the issues and demand their rights from the government. The outcome of such efforts can be judged in the general election.

**Hiel (2008)**, "Political awareness is important for making an informed choice. Such a choice may be expressed by voters by selecting policies and candidates of their choice. These talk shows put spirit and encouraged people in electing government according to their own choice. Free media emerges out of democracy but in Pakistan democracy is emerging out of free media". **Klapper, (1960)**, Political shows change the voting behaviour of the people and for that certain level of political awareness is required. "Voters need to kept themselves informed and aware about the political issues, functions and more importantly their political rights and role as political participants". These shows affect the voting behaviour more through a tie of



various factors and influence directly but in specific situations, it also has direct impacts.

### **ON THE IMPACT OF MEDIA ON SOCIETY IN TERMS OF POLITICAL DISCOURSE**

As we know, mediatization is a theory that contends that media shapes the public opinion and agenda of the political discourse among the general public and society in which it exists. Media has a role in setting the dialogue of political communication. In recent times, especially during election campaigns, we have seen the impact of media on politics, that is, how media has influenced decision making. In present times, the media plays an essential role in politics compared to earlier times. In previous times too, media had a role in political communication in societies. Still, due to societal development in modern times, the present time to be specific, the media has become an indispensable part of politics. The discourse has shifted from 'mediated politics' to 'mediatized politics.'

Therefore, the mediatization of politics in political discourse is a long process in which the media has a significant impact on political communication, policymakers, institutions, and citizens. For Harold Laswell, the study of politics is "The study of influence and influencers" and influencers are those who receive the most what to get "(1951: 295). While, for Robert Dahl, a political system is "a persistent". A pattern of inhuman relations that includes a significant boundary, power, rule or authority "(1965: 6). In his study of politics, Michael Curtis deals with the description and analysis of manners in which power has been achieved, exercised and controlled. The purpose for which it is used, how decisions are made, factors that influence the making of decisions and context in which decision takes place ".

It was probably George Orwell who first caught our attention toward political Competence of Language in more modern times. Orwell mentioned in his article related to the "**Politics and the English language**," where he considers how the language used to manipulate thoughts and suggestions; for example, he mentioned in his article that "**the political speech and writing are largely the defence of indefensible** (1969: 225). Examples quoted by George Orwell based on inverted logic (mentioned in his book 1984) can resonate through the current work on political discourse. He defined "pacification" as the bombing of defenceless villages or the use of "Rectification of frontier", which refers to relocation" or removal of thousands of farmers from their homes. George Orwell was also concerned about the decline of political language and firmly believe that politics is responsible for this decline.

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Here, in political discourse, the general principle is transformation, where one can reinterpret words and phrases within various conceptual frameworks. Directly linked to this process is the concept of "representation". Representation here refers to how language is employed in multiple ways to represent what we can know, believe, and maybe think.

There are two concepts of representation: one is Universalist, and another one is Relativist (Montgomery 1992). Universality holds that **we understand our world about a set of universal ideological primes**. Language, in this view, reflects these versatile possibilities. Language is the only medium through which we can express our system of thought, with this system being independent of language itself. At the same time, the Relativist position **sees language and thought as inseparably related**. The available linguistic resources influence our understanding of the world from a relativist perspective.

Democracy does not mean contesting and winning elections. The quality of a country's democracy is gauged because leaders and managers of democratic institutions follow democratic norms and values in principle and practice. The language used by political leaders in a fragmented democratic country needs to reflect decency and respect for differences of views and opinions; and the certainty, importance of other political groups. When a nation's public discourse becomes vicious and biased, fully democratic politics begins to diverge. In recent years, with the rise of ultra-right ideology in various parts of the world, the language publicly used by leaders has become vicious and personal—loud rhetoric based on half-hearted truth rather than bringing together the anger, hatred and division of society.

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Mark Twain once said, **"The difference between a near-perfect word and a right word is a massive case - it's the difference between a lightning bug and a lightning."** Forget almost the right words; political leaders in India have become masters of using all the wrong words. This trend has dramatically eroded the level of public discourse in the country.

Media effects are often significant, but they vary depending on the media type and results (Chapfi and Frank, 1996); John Helpern and Morris, 2002; McLeod et al., 19 68) (Chaffee). Moreover, media plays a vital role in shaping public perception on political issues like election campaigns or discussions in studios. Today media is central to politics due to the immediate and instant dissemination of political problems. For most citizens worldwide, television news coverage of politics and election campaigns is the most important and readily available source of information (Gulati, Just & Crigler 2004; De Vreese, 2008). Exposure to information sources such as television has an impact on the cognitive (awareness, knowledge, images of politics, etc.), affective (interest, attitudes toward political leaders, issues and attachment to the political system, etc.), behavioural (interpersonal discussion, political participation etc.) dimensions and of course, on voting decisions of the audience (Atkin, 1981).

In a democracy like India, where politicians and media shared a different set of relationships during elections and non-election times, it becomes essential to understand how they do election campaigns with varying agenda setting capacities. So, we can't ignore that the political parties tend to shape or influence the media agenda during election campaigns. In contrast, the media doesn't have any power to control or shape the agenda of political parties. In a multiparty system, like India, where we have several parties at the national and regional level, intuitively, it becomes implausible that all political parties are equally successful in influencing or shaping the media's issue coverage. In India, due to mediatization, politics has lost its autonomy, is increasingly dependent on media coverage to influence the people, and media coverage shapes political opinion. During the 2019 general elections in India, political rhetoric has again reached a new level.

#### **ON ENHANCING POLITICAL AWARENESS**

Media also plays a significant role in raising the political awareness of people within society. During elections, news channels have their various show's like Aaj Tak- **Dangal & Kaun Banega Pradhan Mantri**, NDTV's-**Campaign Trail & Ham Log**, News Nations-**Abki Baar Kiski Sarkar and Chunarv Ka Lie Detector Test**, ABP News- '**Seedha Sawal**', '**Siyasat Ka Sensex**', '**Desh Ka Mood**', '**Election Viral**', and '**2019 ke Joshiley**', News X- '**Who's Winning 2019?**', '**No Holds Barred**', '**Roundtable**', '**Policy and**

**Politics' and 'Cover Story',** India News– **'Ab Ki Baar Likh Kar Do Sarkar.** All these programs or shows focused on covering exclusive interviews of top politicians, debates with senior leaders on critical issues, elections agendas and narratives on top politicians.

In India, where mass media dissemination is low, mass media can be helpful to information campaigns. Debates, panel discussions and shows related to elections help people to understand better about the candidate, candidate and party's position on policies and issues, politicians' qualifications and their background information along with their stands on critical issues like youth affairs, women empowerment, employment, gender equality, National Security, education and healthcare etc. Exposure to shows related to general elections improved voters' political knowledge and the alignment between voters' reported policy positions and those of the candidates they voted. Candidates also conducted more visits and spent more on campaigning in constituencies where news channels screens debates. Even after the election, MPs who participated in debates invested more in their constituencies and regularly visited them.

This behaviour also suggested that political debates can increase voters' political knowledge and encourage politicians to engage and invest more in their constituencies. The shift in politicians' behaviour also indicates that the increase in voter knowledge through exposure to debates may have enhanced accountability.

#### **ON OPINION POLLS OR ELECTION SURVEYS AND VOTING BEHAVIOUR DURING ELECTIONS**

The psephology has now been equal to pre-poll surveys and exit polls conducted by media houses to predict winners during elections. It has now diminished in the media gimmick with allegations used as a communication tool to influence voters by a group of vested interest political parties, media and business houses. Media houses and television anchors in India have become "Nostradamus" using opinion poll findings to predict election results before actual vote cast, which have gone wrong on several occasions.

Popular media surveys began in the 1980s when renowned Journalist Dr Prannoy Roy conducted opinion polls during the elections to determine the mood of Indian voters. The spread of electronic media in the 1990s popularised election surveys and exit polls in India, and it began to capture the imagination of the people. Pre-poll surveys and exit polls have become a regular feature in the last decade and a half. Exit polls became very popular in 1996 when government-owned television channel

Door darshan launched the All India Exit Poll. Since then, there has been no election in India when exit poll results have not appeared on TV on the day of voting. They are used throughout election campaigns by candidates and by the media to see which candidates are ahead and who is likely to emerge victoriously. The results of these polls, in turn, largely determine where future campaigns are to be spent and where will concentrate each candidate's efforts until the close of the campaign.

Opinion polls tend to influence the voters or their voting behaviour. There are two ways of doing this, which are mentioned below:

- a) Bandwagon Effect
  - b) Boomerang Effect
- a) **Bandwagon Effect:** Bandwagon effect means if the opinion polls or surveys declaring a party leading before the elections can impact how people will cast their vote. In this, people vote for a party that they believe will win the election.
  - b) **Boomerang Effect:** If a party lags in the elections, either people will switch to it, or the leading party supporters will not bother to vote because they feel that their party has already won. This effect is known as the boomerang effect. Opinion polls may also affect strategic voting in the elections.

Here, we will discuss few opinion polls done by various agencies during the 2019 general election

- **Times Now-VMR Opinion Poll:** A VMR poll three days before the Lok Sabha elections shows that the NDA will come back to power with 279 seats. It has project 149 seats for the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) and 115 seats for other parties and candidates.
- **C-Voter Opinion Poll:** The C-Voter Polling Agency claimed that BJP and its allies expected to win 267 of the 543 Parliament seats at stake, just five short of the halfway mark required to rule. The latest estimate is that the 330-seat alliance was sharply below the current number when Modi was swept to power in 2014, promising to transform India. Referring to the raid in Pakistan's Balakot area, C-Voter claimed that the percentage of people strongly satisfied with the government immediately after the Balakot attacks increased to a recent all-time high of 52 per cent.
- **India TV-CNX Opinion Poll**

The third poll of the India TV-CNX pre-poll claimed Modi's alliance would clear the halfway mark and win 275 seats. The poll also suggests that the BJP's tally could fall below 52 seats to settle at 232 points in the Lok Sabha at less than half the mark in the upcoming elections. The poll said the Congress could increase its tally from 44 to 97 - falling short of the three-digit mark.

- **Lokniti-CSDS-Tiranga TV-The Hindu-Dainik Bhaskar (Pre-Poll Survey 2019)**

The fourth pre-election survey conducted by the Public Policy of the Centre for the Study of Developing Societies shows that the BJP and the National Democratic Alliance are the second terms. The survey shows that both the BJP and Congress are likely to register a four-percentage point increase in their vote share. But in the case of the BJP, this increase is not with the same increase in its seat share. Despite the rise in vote share, the BJP is likely to lose seats due to "more united opposition" insignificant states. The poll estimated the BJP seat between 222 and 232, much less than the 283 seats the party got in the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. The survey revealed that the NDA could cross the majority mark or not, winning between 263 and 283 seats. The UPA projected to between 115 and 135 seats. In Uttar Pradesh, the SP-BSP alliance is posing a formidable challenge to the BJP.

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