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# Coverage of Delhi legislative assembly election 2025: A comparative analysis of two English dailies

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**Abstract**
This comparative analysis study examines the coverage of the Delhi Legislative Assembly Election by two leading Indian newspapers, Hindustan Times and The Hindu, from January 8, 2025, to February 9, 2025. The research aims to analyze how election-related news is framed, the tone of coverage, and the extent of political bias or objectivity in both publications. Using a systematic coding approach, the study evaluates the frequency of election-related articles, the prominence given to different political parties and candidates, the nature of issues discussed, and the framing of electoral events. Several factors, including article placement, the presence of images, and political inclinations, were systematically analyzed during data collection. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of media bias, journalistic objectivity, and how different media sources construct political narratives.

**Keywords:** Election, newspapers, media coverage, framing

## Introduction

The role of newspapers during elections is significant in molding public opinion, informing citizens, and influencing democratic processes. As one of the oldest forms of mass communication, newspapers continue to serve as a critical platform for political discourse, agenda-setting, and framing of election-related narratives (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) [10]. During election seasons, newspapers not only provide coverage of political campaigns, candidate profiles, and policy discussions but also act as watchdogs, holding politicians accountable and exposing electoral malpractice (Graber & Dunaway, 2017). The framing of news in newspapers plays a significant role in how voters perceive candidates and political parties, ultimately impacting electoral outcomes (Entman, 1993) [3]. Given the influence of newspapers in shaping democratic participation, analyzing their coverage of elections is essential in understanding media biases, objectivity, and their role in shaping public discourse.

### The Relevance of the Delhi Election

The 2025 Delhi Assembly Elections hold significant political importance in India's democratic landscape. Delhi, as the national capital, has always been a focal point of political contestation, with regional elections often setting the tone for broader national political debates. The 2025 election is particularly relevant due to the intense competition among major political parties, including the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), and the Indian National Congress (INC). Historically, Delhi's political landscape has witnessed significant shifts, with AAP securing a landslide victory in 2015 and 2020, largely due to its governance model focusing on education, healthcare, and subsidized utilities (Chhibber & Verma, 2020). Moreover, the elections were held against the backdrop of major national issues such as economic slowdown, inflation, and rising unemployment, making them a referendum not just on local governance but also on national political leadership. The role of newspapers in covering these elections is critical in shaping voter perceptions, as they act as intermediaries between political actors and the electorate. The extent to which newspapers provide balanced coverage, increase policy discussions or exhibit political bias significantly influences democratic engagement.

**Controversies Surrounding the Delhi Election 2025**
Like previous election cycles, the 2025 Delhi Assembly Elections were marred by several controversies, which further intensified political polarization and media scrutiny. One of the most contentious issues was the allegations of misuse of government resources for election campaigning. Opposition parties accused the ruling AAP government of using state funds for populist schemes and advertisements, raising concerns about the ethical use of public money in electioneering (Kumar, 2025).

Another major controversy revolved around allegations of media bias and misinformation. Certain newspapers and media outlets were criticized for favoring specific political parties, leading to debates on journalistic ethics and press freedom. Studies on Indian media have shown that ownership structures and political affiliations often influence editorial decisions, impacting the objectivity of election coverage (Thakurta, 2012) [15]. The role of newspapers in setting election narratives came under scrutiny, with accusations that some publications selectively framed issues to benefit certain parties while downplaying controversies linked to their preferred candidates. Furthermore, concerns over election security and the credibility of the electoral process surfaced during the campaign. Reports of alleged voter intimidation, misinformation campaigns, and tampering with electronic voting machines (EVMs) led to legal battles and widespread public debates (Sharma, 2025). The Election Commission of India (ECI) had to intervene multiple times to address allegations of code violations, reflecting the high-stakes nature of the elections.

Given these controversies and the heightened political climate, the role of newspapers in providing unbiased, accurate, and comprehensive election coverage became even more crucial. By analyzing the coverage of the 2025 Delhi Elections in two major newspapers, Hindustan Times and The Hindu, this study aims to explore how mainstream print media shape electoral discourse, influence public perception, and contribute to the democratic process.

**This study seeks to answer the following research questions**
- How do The Hindu and Hindustan Times report on the Delhi Elections?
- What is the tone of their reporting?
- Is one political party or one candidate more positively portrayed than others?
- What issues are emphasized, and how are they framed?

**Review of Literature**
The role of media in shaping public opinion during elections has been widely studied, with scholars emphasizing its influence on electoral events, voter perceptions, and political agendas (Entman, 1993) [3]. Media organizations act as primary sources of information, and their reporting significantly impacts how voters perceive political candidates, parties, and key issues. This literature review explores major theoretical perspectives and previous studies on media influence in election coverage, with a particular focus on media framing, bias, and comparative media analysis through content analysis as a research method.

Framing theory is one of the most influential approaches used to examine how media reporting shapes election narratives. As Entman (1993) [3] explains, framing involves selecting and emphasizing specific aspects of a news story, thereby shaping public perceptions of those issues. In an electoral context, media framing determines which political figures and topics receive emphasis and whether they are portrayed in a positive, negative, or neutral light. Previous research has demonstrated that framing influences voter behavior by shaping narratives around critical electoral issues such as leadership qualities, governance, and corruption (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) [6]. If the media frames the incumbent government as ineffective or corrupt, it could lead voters to favor opposition parties (Goffman, 1974) [5]. Studies on Indian media's election coverage indicate that the press plays a crucial role in shaping political debates and electoral dynamics. Media coverage can either elevate or marginalize political parties and candidates, particularly in closely contested elections such as the Delhi Legislative Assembly election (Jha, 2013) [7]. Research on media bias during the 2014 Indian general elections revealed that national newspapers often exhibited implicit biases toward specific political parties, influenced by factors such as ownership, editorial stance, and readership demographics (Pande, 2014) [12, 13]. Content analysis serves as an effective method to assess these biases, as it enables researchers to systematically evaluate the volume, tone, and framing of election-related news coverage (Kaufhold, 2017) [8, 9].

Content analysis has been widely applied in electoral studies to examine patterns, themes, and biases in media reporting. This methodology allows for a structured analysis of textual data, revealing how media coverage shapes public opinion and influences voter turnout. A content analysis of Indian media during the 2019 general elections depicts significant variations in how different newspapers framed political parties and candidates (Bhat & Raina, 2020) [1]. Additionally, content analysis has been instrumental in comparing election coverage across various media platforms, including print newspapers and online news outlets (Pandey & Singh, 2019) [11]. Given the distinct editorial perspectives and target audiences of newspapers such as Hindustan Times and The Hindu, a comparative analysis of their election coverage can offer valuable insights into the influence of media on electoral discourse. Prior research on Indian newspapers has also examined the tone and prominence of election reporting. Studies suggest that English-language newspapers based in metropolitan cities, such as Delhi, tend to focus on issues relevant to urban audiences, whereas regional newspapers could emphasize different electoral concerns (Bhushan, 2016) [2]. To illustrate, The Hindu, known for its in-depth political analysis, often illustrates policy discussions and governance-related issues, while the Hindustan Times, with a broader mass appeal, could prioritize political rhetoric and high-profile campaign events (Ghosh, 2015) [4]. Understanding such differences is crucial to comprehending how media outlets influence public perception of the electoral process.

The media scholarship on elections describes the effectiveness of content analysis in assessing the power of newspapers to shape political narratives. By examining election coverage in Hindustan Times and The Hindu, this study contributes to the growing body of research on media framing, bias, and tone, and their impact on voter attitudes and electoral decision-making. Furthermore, the findings will offer insights into the role of media in India's multiparty democracy, shedding light on its influence on the democratic process.

## Materials and Methods

In this study, content analysis serves as the primary method to examine the reporting of the Delhi Elections in two of India's leading newspapers, Hindustan Times and The Hindu, from January 8, 2025, to February 9, 2025. Content analysis is a systematic and objective research approach used to identify patterns, trends, and thematic elements within media texts. This method allows for an independent assessment of the tone, frequency, and framing of election coverage, as well as the presence of bias or disparities in how these two newspapers report on the Delhi Elections.

A purposive sampling method was employed to select relevant news articles, ensuring that the sample included substantial election-related content. The study analyses 263 articles published during the study period, chosen based on their relevance to election coverage. A structured code sheet was developed in Excel to facilitate data collection and analysis. The code sheet included key variables such as the page number on which the article appeared, the number of columns occupied, the presence of images, the tone of the article, and the framing of political events, candidates, and issues. The researchers have prepared inclusion and exclusion criteria for selecting the news articles (Table 1).

**Table 1:** Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

| Inclusion Criteria | Exclusion Criteria |
|---|---|
| Directly related to the Delhi Elections (e.g., coverage of political parties, candidates, election strategies, voter concerns) | They did not mention the Delhi Elections or were not relevant to the election campaign. |
| Focused on political issues pertinent to the election, such as governance, public welfare, corruption, and policy discussions. | They focused on non-political events or issues unrelated to the Delhi Elections. |
| Published in the specified period (January 8 to February 9, 2025). | They were reports not directly related to election coverage (e.g., general news stories unrelated to political topics). |

## Results

The content analysis of election coverage in The Hindu and Hindustan Times revealed the differences in prominence, framing, and political tone during the 2025 Delhi Assembly Elections. The findings provide insights into how these two newspapers covered the elections, including the placement of articles, their length, the use of visuals, and the framing of political narratives. The table below presents the cross-tabulation of codes identified from both newspapers (Table 2).

**Table 2:** The cross-tabulation of the data

| | | News Paper | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | **The Hindu** | **Hindustan Times** |
| Appearance | Front Page | 15 (11%) | 16 (12%) |
| | 2-7 Pages | 116 (89%) | 103 (78%) |
| | 8-15 Pages | 0 (0%) | 13 (10%) |
| Number of Columns | Less than 3 columns | 49 (37%) | 23 (17%) |
| | 3 columns | 23 (18%) | 43 (33%) |
| | More than 3 columns | 59 (45%) | 66 (50%) |
| Number of Pictures | No Picture | 47 (36%) | 30 (23%) |
| | More than 1 Picture | 84 (64%) | 102 (77%) |
| Type of the Story | An original news report | 88 (67%) | 93 (70%) |
| | Reports from other sources such as agencies | 21 (16%) | 3 (2%) |
| | Story Explained | 0 (0%) | 2 (2%) |
| | Editorial discussion | 0 (0%) | 32 (24%) |
| | Long-format interview | 5 (4%) | 2 (2%) |
| | Other | 17 (13%) | 0 (0%) |
| Size of the text | Small (less than 300 words) | 54 (41%) | 67 (51%) |
| | Medium (300- 600 words) | 42 (32%) | 54 (41%) |
| | Large (More than 600 words) | 35 (27%) | 11 (8%) |
| Is the theme mentioned in the Headline? | Yes | 126 (96%) | 71 (54%) |
| | No | 5 (4%) | 61 (46%) |
| Is the theme discussed in the text? | Yes | 126 (96%) | 121 (92%) |
| | No | 5 (4%) | 11 (8%) |
| Frames of the Story | Religious | 0 (0%) | 2 (2%) |
| | Educational / Jobs | 6 (5%) | 7 (5%) |
| | Infrastructure | 5 (4%) | 8 (6%) |
| | Security And Awareness | 12 (9%) | 7 (5%) |
| | Basic Needs (Electricity and Water) | 27 (21%) | 20 (15%) |
| | Election based only | 81 (62%) | 85 (64%) |
| | Others | 0 (0%) | 3 (2%) |
| Political Tone of the Story | Aam Aadmi Party | 30 (23%) | 42 (32%) |
| | Bhartiya Janta Party | 21 (16%) | 28 (21%) |
| | Congress | 12 (9%) | 14 (11%) |
| | Other | 0 (0%) | 2 (2%) |
| | No prominent biases | 68 (52%) | 46   (35%) |

## Placement and Visibility of Election News

The prominence of election news coverage varied between the two newspapers. A total of 31 articles appeared on the front page, with The Hindu publishing 15 (11%) and Hindustan Times publishing 16 (12%). The majority of election-related articles were positioned between pages 2 and 7, accounting for 116 (89%) of The Hindu's coverage and 103 (78%) of the Hindustan Times' coverage. Notably, Hindustan Times also allocated space to election-related news on pages 8-15, with 13 articles (10%), whereas The Hindu did not feature any election news beyond the seventh page. This suggests that The Hindu prioritized election-related stories in the earlier sections of the newspaper, while the Hindustan Times distributed its coverage more broadly across different pages.

## Article Size and Column Space

The two newspapers also differed in terms of the space allocated to election coverage. In The Hindu, 49 articles (37%) occupied less than three columns, while in the Hindustan Times, only 23 articles (17%) were limited to this smaller format. Conversely, the Hindustan Times had a greater proportion of three-column articles (43 articles, 33%) compared to The Hindu (23 articles, 18%). Larger articles, spanning more than three columns, were nearly equal in both newspapers, with The Hindu publishing 59 (45%) and Hindustan Times publishing 66 (50%). These findings indicate that the Hindustan Times devoted more space to mid-sized election stories, while The Hindu had a more balanced distribution across different column sizes.

## Use of Images

Visual representation of election news also showed a marked difference between the two newspapers. In The Hindu, 47 articles (36%) contained no images, whereas in the Hindustan Times, only 30 articles (23%) lacked images. In contrast, the Hindustan Times used more visual elements, with 102 articles (77%) containing more than one picture, compared to 84 articles (64%) in The Hindu. This suggests that the Hindustan Times relied more heavily on visual storytelling in its election coverage.

## Type of Stories Published

Both newspapers predominantly featured original news reports, with The Hindu publishing 88 (67%) and Hindustan Times 93 (70%). However, The Hindu included more reports from external sources such as news agencies (21 articles, 16%) compared to Hindustan Times (3 articles, 2%). Additionally, the Hindustan Times published 32 editorial discussions (24%), whereas The Hindu did not include any editorials on the elections. Long-format interviews were rare in both newspapers, with The Hindu publishing 5 (4%) and Hindustan Times publishing 2 (2%). Furthermore, the Hindu included 17 articles (13%) categorized as "Other" types of election-related stories, which were absent in Hindustan Times. These findings indicate that Hindustan Times placed a greater emphasis on opinion-based content, while The Hindu relied more on original reporting and agency sources.

## Article Length and Depth

In terms of word count, The Hindu and Hindustan Times showed significant variations. Hindustan Times had a higher proportion of short articles (less than 300 words), with 67 articles (51%) compared to 54 (41%) in The Hindu. Medium-length articles (300-600 words) were fairly balanced between The Hindu (42 articles, 32%) and Hindustan Times (54 articles, 41%). However, The Hindu published significantly more long-form articles (more than 600 words), with 35 (27%) compared to Hindustan Times' 11 (8%). This suggests that The Hindu provided more in-depth election coverage, whereas the Hindustan Times favored shorter, more concise reporting.

## Headlines and Thematic Coverage

The way election themes were illustrated in headlines and discussed in articles also varied between the newspapers. Nearly all articles in The Hindu had headlines that explicitly mentioned election themes (126 articles, 96%), compared to only 71 articles (54%) in Hindustan Times. Similarly, election themes were discussed in the main text in 96% of The Hindu's articles and 92% of Hindustan Times' articles. The significantly higher percentage of themed headlines in The Hindu indicates a more direct approach to election coverage, while the Hindustan Times has used more general or indirect headlines.

## Framing of Election News

The framing of election news articles was analyzed based on thematic categories. The majority of election-related stories in both newspapers were framed purely as election coverage, with The Hindu publishing 81 such articles (62%) and the Hindustan Times publishing 85 (64%). Other significant themes included coverage of basic needs such as electricity and water, which appeared in 27 articles (21%) in The Hindu and 20 articles (15%) in Hindustan Times. Security and awareness topics were more prominent in The Hindu (12 articles, 9%) than in Hindustan Times (7 articles, 5%). Hindustan Times featured slightly more articles on infrastructure (8 articles, 6%) and employment/education (7 articles, 5%) compared to The Hindu (5 articles, 4% and 6 articles, 5%, respectively). Religious framing was absent in The Hindu but appeared in 2 articles (2%) in Hindustan Times, while 3 articles (2%) in Hindustan Times fell under the "Other" category. These differences indicate that while both newspapers primarily focused on election-related framing, The Hindu gave more attention to governance and security issues, while the Hindustan Times covered a broader range of frames, including religious and infrastructure themes.

## Political Tone and Bias

The political tone of election coverage revealed differences in how parties were represented. Hindustan Times had a higher number of articles favoring the Aam Aadmi Party (42 articles, 32%) compared to The Hindu (30 articles, 23%). Coverage of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was also slightly higher in Hindustan Times (28 articles, 21%) compared to The Hindu (21 articles, 16%). Congress was mentioned in 12 articles (9%) in The Hindu and 14 articles (11%) in Hindustan Times. Notably, the Hindustan Times included 2 articles (2%) covering other political parties, whereas The Hindu had none. However, The Hindu had a greater proportion of articles that did not exhibit any explicit political bias (68 articles, 52%) compared to the Hindustan Times (46 articles, 35%). These results suggest that the Hindustan Times provided more party-specific coverage, while The Hindu maintained a more neutral stance.

## Discussion

The findings of this study align with existing research on media coverage of elections, reaffirming the role of newspapers in shaping public perception, agenda-setting, and political discourse. The comparative analysis of The Hindu and Hindustan Times revealed distinct editorial choices in framing election news, reinforcing established theories of media influence (McCombs & Shaw, 1972; Entman, 1993) [10, 3].

The framing of election news significantly impacts how voters interpret political developments. According to Entman (1993) [3], framing involves selecting and emphasizing certain aspects of an issue to shape public perception. In this study, both newspapers primarily framed election coverage around campaign activities, governance issues, and basic needs, with minimal focus on religion or security. This aligns with previous studies indicating that Indian newspapers tend to emphasize development and policy over ideological divides during elections (Pande, 2014) [12, 13]. However, the slight differences in framing between the two newspapers suggest editorial variations in how they prioritize election narratives. Agenda-setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) [10] suggests that media not only inform but also influence what the public perceives as important. The placement of stories in prominent sections and the selection of themes indicate a deliberate attempt to shape electoral discourse. While both newspapers gave significant coverage to election-related topics, the Hindustan Times incorporated a more diversified range of frames, including infrastructure and religion. This aligns with previous findings that popular newspapers often blend policy discussions with populist narratives to appeal to a broader readership (Jha, 2013) [7].

The study also sheds light on the role of editorial choices in maintaining journalistic objectivity. While both newspapers published a substantial number of neutral stories, The Hindu demonstrated a higher percentage of politically neutral reporting compared to the Hindustan Times. This finding supports the work of Bhushan (2016) [2], who found that The Hindu maintains a more policy-driven editorial approach, whereas the Hindustan Times integrates more opinion-based content, including editorials and interpretative reports. The greater presence of editorial discussions in the Hindustan Times suggests a more engaged, opinion-driven approach to election coverage, which can influence how readers perceive political candidates and parties. This difference aligns with prior research on media ownership and editorial independence, which suggests that corporate ownership structures often shape editorial bias in news reporting (Thakurta, 2012) [15]. While The Hindu has a reputation for in-depth political analysis with a relatively neutral stance, the Hindustan Times has been observed to exhibit selective editorial preferences, particularly in its coverage of political parties. This variation in editorial strategies reinforces the argument that newspapers, even when reporting on the same events, can present election narratives differently, thereby influencing voter perception and engagement (Iyengar & Kinder, 1987) [6].

The influence of media on voter perception is well-documented in political communication studies (Kaufhold, 2017) [8, 9]. The emphasis on certain political parties over others, even when unintentional, can lead to audience bias, particularly when readers rely on a single news source. The fact that the Hindustan Times had a higher proportion of coverage favoring specific parties suggests a potential lean in its electoral reporting, whereas The Hindu provided a more balanced representation. Previous research on Indian elections has highlighted that newspapers often function as mediators between political campaigns and the electorate, selectively amplifying or downplaying key political narratives (Sharma, 2020) [14]. The varying tone of coverage observed in this study supports the notion that media houses, consciously or unconsciously, contribute to shaping political sentiment, potentially affecting electoral outcomes.

## Conclusion

This study discussed the relevance of newspapers in shaping electoral discourse through content selection, framing, and editorial choices. By comparing The Hindu and Hindustan Times, the analysis accentuated how mainstream print media contribute to political narratives and influence public perception during elections. The differences in reporting styles, thematic priorities, and political tone reveal the complexities of media influence in a competitive democratic environment. The findings reinforce the necessity of media literacy among readers to critically engage with election coverage and recognize potential biases. As newspapers continue to be a primary source of political information, ensuring balanced reporting and journalistic integrity remains crucial for upholding democratic values. The study also stressed the growing need for comparative media analyses that extend beyond print to include television, digital platforms, and social media, as these mediums increasingly shape political communication.

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