



## Measuring the Coverage of Assembly elections and Covid 19 during the pandemic in India

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### Abstract

India is still facing the aftermath of the second wave of covid 19. However, in between the first wave and second wave India witnessed long and tortuous assembly elections in four states of Southern India. This paper explores the coverage of covid 19 and assembly elections in the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu in two of the most circulated newspapers Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi from Kerala and Dinamalar and Dinathanthi from Tamil Nadu. E-papers from February 26, 2021- April 6, 2021, are collected for analysis. 7466 news articles are analyzed to find out the coverage of Covid 19 and assembly elections. The study questions the social responsibility of media platforms that set the media agenda in favor of assembly elections and hence averting the covid 19 news.

**Keywords:** Assembly elections, Covid19, Newspaper coverage, India, Data Analysis.

### Introduction

The Covid 19 pandemic, which is one of the most devastating catastrophes the world has ever witnessed in recent times, is still a nightmare to the countries all over the world. According to recent studies, Covid 19 has been confirmed in over 220 countries and provinces. More than 15 crore cases of Covid 19 are reported all-round the world and 32 lakh people have lost their lives because of the disease till May 2021. “COVID Live

Update: 157,564,677 Cases and 3,284,544 Deaths from the Coronavirus [1] The pandemic has its repercussions in every nook and corner of the planet. India is also witnessing the unprecedented havoc caused by the Covid 19 pandemic. More than 2 crore Indians are infected by the disease and about 2.5 lakh people lost their lives in the Covid 19 pandemic by May 2021 [2] India is still grappling with the second wave of the pandemic, which is more minacious than the first wave. The rise in the number of covid-19 cases has been exponential in the second wave. On June 18, 2020, India recorded nearly 11,000 cases and in the next 60 days, it added 35,000 new cases on average every day. On February 10, 2021, at the start of the second wave, India confirmed nearly 11,000 cases - and in the next 50 days, the daily average rose to 22,000 cases. But in the following 10 days, there was a steep hike in the number of new cases. The daily average reached approximately 89,800. Experts say this rapid increase shows that the second wave is spreading much faster across the country [3].

The scenario is very grim in India where the daily count on April 15, 2021, itself is double the first peak. The spread of the second wave is much faster than the first wave. Hence, quick and effective administrative intervention is needed to arrest the rapid growth of the epidemic [4].

During the initial stage of the second wave of Covid 19, India witnessed assembly elections for four states and one union territory. The elections were conducted for the states of Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Assam, West Bengal and also for the union territory of Puducherry [5]. About 186 million people are eligible for voting in 824 seats where the assembly elections are conducted [6]. The elections are scheduled from March 27, 2021, to April 29, 2021, and the results were published on May 2, 2021 [7]. Elections are very important for citizens as they cast their vote and participate in the democratic process of the country. Numerous reports have discussed the contribution of elections in the

rapid increase of Covid 19. But the media coverage of the assembly elections and covid 19 pandemic is an under-explored area.

Indian media failed to predict the detrimental nature of the second wave of covid 19. In addition, there has been widespread criticism regarding the coverage of Covid 19 pandemic news and assembly election news. Instead of being the watchdog of society Indian media act just as poodles to the government [8]. Besides Indian media have celebrated the assembly elections and subsequently demoted the issue of Covid 19. Times now, one of the media conglomerates in India suspends their election coverage on the result declaration date to give importance to the gravity of the Covid 19 pandemic [9]. The question that arises here is how Indian media cover both election news and Covid 19 pandemic news at a time. Do they give importance to any one of these issues in particular? Do they subside any one of this issue? Is there any difference in the coverage between states? Is there any difference in the coverage between newspapers? It is very significant to answer these questions as the media coverage of the election and Covid 19 at the time of the pandemic is a relevant area to be explored.

### **Objectives of the study**

The prime objective of the study is to find out the media coverage in the initial stage of the second wave of Covid 19 in India. To find out the trend in the coverage of covid 19 pandemic and assembly elections news in the chosen newspapers.

- To understand whether there is any significant difference in the coverage of covid-19 and election campaign news stories among newspapers.
- To understand whether there is any significant difference in the coverage of covid-19 and election campaign news stories between states.

- To find out if there is any correlation between the covid-19 news and election campaign news in the chosen newspapers.
- To find out if there is any correlation between the covid-19 news and election campaign news in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

### Research Questions

**Table 1:** The summary table of the research question, alternative hypothesis and null hypothesis.

Research Question	Hypothesis	Null hypothesis
<b>RQ1:</b> Is there any trend in the coverage of covid 19 pandemic and assembly elections news in the chosen newspapers?	<b>Ha1:</b> There is a trend in the coverage of covid 19 pandemic and assembly elections news in the chosen newspapers.	<b>Ha1:</b> There is no trend in the coverage of covid 19 pandemic and assembly elections news in the chosen newspapers.
<b>RQ2:</b> Is there any significant difference in the coverage of news stories (Covid-19 and election campaign) among newspapers?	<b>Ha2:</b> There is a significant difference in the coverage of news stories (Covid-19 and election campaign) among newspapers.	<b>Ho2:</b> There is no significant difference in the coverage of news stories (Covid-19 and election campaign) among newspapers.
<b>RQ3:</b> Is there any significant difference in the coverage of news stories (Covid-19 and election campaign) between states?	<b>Ha3:</b> There is a significant difference in the coverage of news stories (Covid-19 and election campaign) between states.	<b>Ho3:</b> There is no significant difference in the coverage of news stories (Covid-19 and election campaign) between states.
<b>RQ4:</b> Is there any correlation between the covid-19 news and election campaign news in the chosen newspaper?	<b>Ha4:</b> There is a significant positive correlation between the covid-19 news and election campaign news in the chosen newspaper.	<b>Ho4:</b> There is no significant positive correlation between the covid-19 news and election campaign news in the chosen newspaper.
<b>RQ5:</b> Is there any correlation between the covid-19 news and election campaign news in Tamil Nadu and Kerala?	<b>Ha5:</b> There is a significant positive correlation between the covid-19 news and election campaign news in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.	<b>Ho5:</b> There is a significant positive correlation between the covid-19 news and election campaign news in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Social Responsibility theory***

Siebert, Peterson and Schramm are the pioneers of social responsibility theory. The theory was developed in 1956. The theory is associated with the Hutchins committee report of 1949 in the United States. This theory validates the need for the press to be responsible to society [10]. The press should not only report factual data but also interprets, investigate news stories that are affecting society [11]. The press is expected to report all the aspects of the second wave of the Covid 19 pandemic. Also, assembly elections should be covered by the responsible press as the Covid 19 pandemic and assembly elections are crucial for society. Did the Indian press do a socially responsible reportage during the critical period is still a question of debate? This study tries to investigate the social responsibility of the press in the coverage of the second wave of covid 19 and assembly elections.

### ***Agenda Setting Theory***

Agenda setting theory was developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in the year 1972. It was formed based on the study of the 1968 United States presidential elections [12]. Agenda-setting theory states that the media filters and shapes the reality for the viewers. The more attention the media gives to an issue, the more likely the public will consider the issue important [13]. According to M. McCombs, [14], the basic assumption of agenda-setting theory is the measurement of issue salience. Three theoretical dimensions to measure the issue salience are attention, prominence and valence. Attention refers to the number of news stories devoted to a particular topic. Prominence mentions the importance of a news article includes page placement, size of the headline, amount of space, number of images. Valence on the other hand deals with the amount of conflict in a news story as well as the tone of the news story [14].

Agenda setting theory is applicable to the new horizons of internet-mediated communication in the present-day scenario [15]. It is vital to understand the newspaper agenda during the pandemic as the covid 19 pandemics have furious repercussions among the public. The current study aims to understand the agenda-setting of newspapers during the second wave of the covid 19 in India.

### **Research Methodology**

The aim of this research is to measure the coverage of Covid 19 news and assembly election news during the initial phase of the second wave of Covid 19 in India. In this study, we have selected two of the southern states in India; Kerala and Tamil Nadu where assembly elections took place. We have selected Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi from Kerala and Daily Thanthi and Dinakaran from Tamil Nadu which are the highest circulated Malayalam and Tamil newspapers [16]. The researchers have selected the period of study from February 26, 2021, to April 6, 2021. The selection criteria for the period are from the date of election notification to the poll date. The date is also the initial phase of the second wave of Covid 19 in India. The researchers collected all the e-papers of the above-mentioned newspapers for the aforesaid period. The researchers have collected all the news articles that deal with the Covid 19 and assembly elections from the newspapers. 7468 articles are collected that are relating to Covid 19 and assembly elections for the period of 40 days. For the study, the date on which the article was published, the name of the publication, the number of columns of the news article, the number of photos included in the news article and the page weightage details are collected. After collecting the relevant data, the Microsoft excel and SPSS application were employed for the analysis of data. Time series analysis is used to find out the trend in news reportage; Independent sample T-test and One-way ANOVA was run to find out the mean difference and statistical significance of the data, and correlations tests are carried out to find out the existence of relationships between the variables.

## Data analysis and interpretation

**RQ1:** *Is there any trend in the coverage of covid 19 pandemic and assembly elections news in the chosen newspapers?*

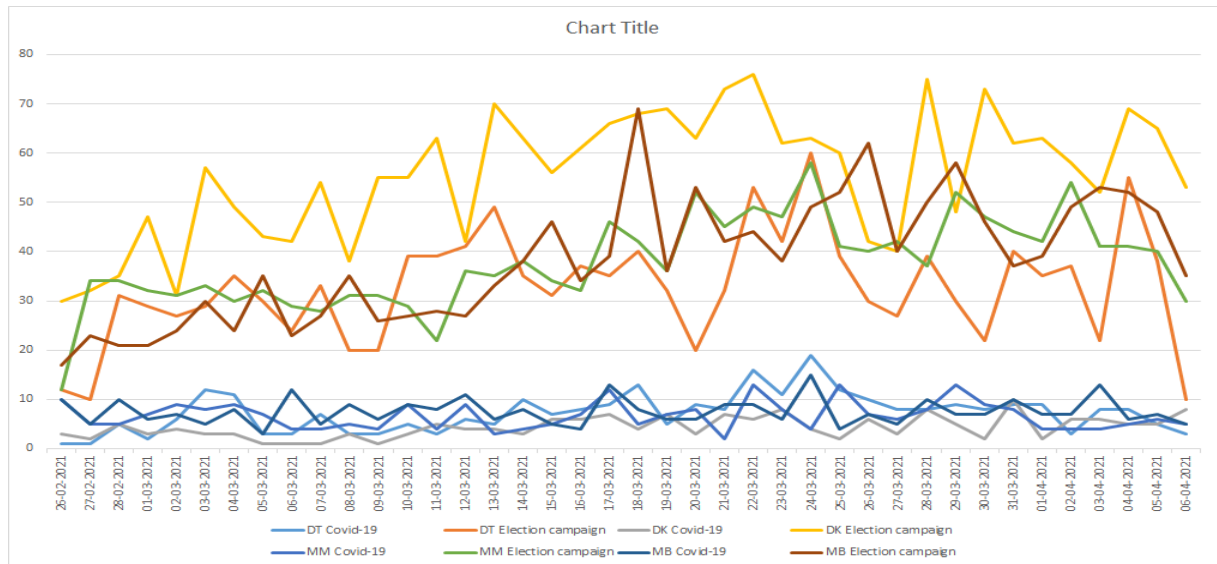
To analyze the coverage of covid-19 pandemic and assembly election news in the chosen four newspapers—Daily Thanthi, Dinakaran, Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi—Time-series analysis was performed. Figure 1 illustrates the reporting trend of issues. The news published in Daily Thanthi newspaper was divided into two variables-Daily Thanthi Covid-19 and Daily Thanthi Election campaign. The news covered in Dinakaran was categorized into two variables-Dinakaran Covid-19 and Dinakaran Election campaign. The news articles published in Malayala Manorama were divided into two variables-Malayala Manorama Covid-19 and Malayala Manorama Election campaign. The news stories published in Mathrubhumi were split into two variables-Mathrubhumi Covid-19 and Mathrubhumi Election campaign. The Newspaper wise reporting trend is listed below in Table 2.

**Table 2: Newspaper-wise reporting trend**

Date	DT Covid-19	DT Election campaign	DK Covid-19	DK Election campaign	MM Covid-19	MM Election campaign	MB Covid-19	MB Election campaign
26-02-2021	1	12	3	30	10	12	10	17
27-02-2021	1	10	2	32	5	34	5	23
28-02-2021	5	31	5	35	5	34	10	21
01-03-2021	2	29	3	47	7	32	6	21
02-03-2021	6	27	4	31	9	31	7	24
03-03-2021	12	29	3	57	8	33	5	30
04-03-2021	11	35	3	49	9	30	8	24
05-03-2021	3	30	1	43	7	32	3	35
06-03-2021	3	24	1	42	4	29	12	23
07-03-2021	7	33	1	54	4	28	5	27
08-03-2021	3	20	3	38	5	31	9	35

09-03-2021	3	20	1	55	4	31	6	26
10-03-2021	5	39	3	55	9	29	9	27
11-03-2021	3	39	5	63	4	22	8	28
12-03-2021	6	41	4	42	9	36	11	27
13-03-2021	5	49	4	70	3	35	6	33
14-03-2021	10	35	3	63	4	38	8	38
15-03-2021	7	31	6	56	5	34	5	46
16-03-2021	8	37	6	61	7	32	4	34
17-03-2021	9	35	7	66	12	46	13	39
18-03-2021	13	40	4	68	5	42	8	69
19-03-2021	5	32	7	69	7	36	6	36
20-03-2021	9	20	3	63	8	52	6	53
21-03-2021	8	32	7	73	2	45	9	42
22-03-2021	16	53	6	76	13	49	9	44
23-03-2021	11	42	8	62	8	47	6	38
24-03-2021	19	60	4	63	4	58	15	49
25-03-2021	12	39	2	60	13	41	4	52
26-03-2021	10	30	6	42	7	40	7	62
27-03-2021	8	27	3	40	6	42	5	40
28-03-2021	8	39	8	75	8	37	10	50
29-03-2021	9	30	5	48	13	52	7	58
30-03-2021	8	22	2	73	9	47	7	46
31-03-2021	9	40	10	62	8	44	10	37
01-04-2021	9	35	2	63	4	42	7	39
02-04-2021	3	37	6	58	4	54	7	49
03-04-2021	8	22	6	52	4	41	13	53
04-04-2021	8	55	5	69	5	41	6	52
05-04-2021	5	38	5	65	6	40	7	48
06-04-2021	3	10	8	53	5	30	5	35

**Figure 1: Time-series plot: Covid-19 and Election Campaign reporting trend**



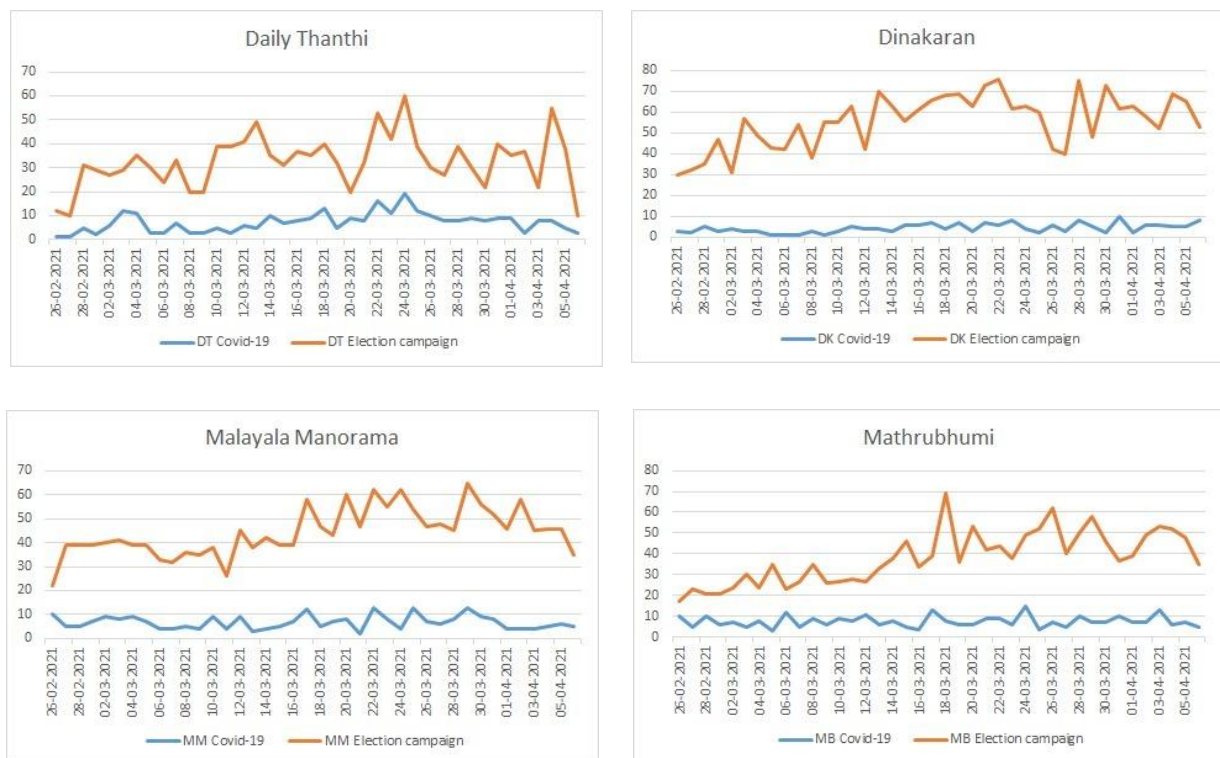
**Figure 1** illustrates the reporting trend of covid-19 and election campaign news in the chosen four newspapers—Daily Thanthi, Dinakaran, Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi. Out of the four chosen newspapers, Mathrubhumi (Kerala newspaper) has reported the highest number of Covid-19 pandemic news, followed by Daily Thanthi (Tamil) newspaper, Malayala Manorama (Kerala Newspaper). Dinakaran (Tamil newspaper) reported the least number of news related to the covid-19 pandemic. Out of the chosen four newspapers from Kerala and Tamil Nadu, Dinakaran (Tamil newspaper) reported the highest number of news related to the assembly elections. It is followed by Kerala newspaper-Mathrubhumi, Malayala Manorama. The Tamil newspaper Daily Thanthi reported the least number of news related to assembly elections. From the above figure, it can be concluded that the news related to the covid-19 pandemic are reported less, whereas the assembly election news is reported in elevated numbers. There is a notable disparity in the coverage of covid-19 pandemic news stories and news related to election campaigns. Therefore, Ha1—There is a trend in the coverage of covid 19 pandemic and assembly elections news in the chosen newspapers— is accepted.

**RQ2:** *Is there any significant difference in the coverage of news stories (Covid-19 and election campaign) among newspapers?*

To find out the difference in the coverage of Covid-19 news stories and election campaign news among the newspapers, a time-series analysis test was performed. The reporting trend of covid-19 and election campaign news in Daily Thanthi, Dinakaran, Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi newspapers are presented in Figure 2.

To find out the mean, standard deviation, statistical significance and means plot among the four chosen newspapers, a One-way Anova test was performed and the results are presented in Table 3.1, Table 3.2 and Figure 3.

**Figure 2:** Newspaper reporting trend of covid-19 and election campaign news in Daily Thanthi, Dinakaran, Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi newspapers



The Category-wise reporting trend of issues in the chosen four newspapers over a chosen time period of 40 days is presented in the Figure. As many as 7466 news articles were published on Covid-19 and election campaign news in the Daily Thanthi, Dinakaran, Malayala Manorama,

Mathrubhumi newspaper. A significant difference in the number of news articles published during the time period was observed between the Tamil Nadu and Kerala regional newspapers.

The two chosen newspapers from Tamil Nadu, Daily Thanthi and Dinakaran, have published 1555 news and 2296 news respectively on covid-19 and election campaign in the chosen time period. The chosen two Kerala news dailies- Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi newspapers have published 1779 and 1836 news articles respectively on covid-19 and election campaigns respectively. When analyzing the data, a category wise trend was observed in the number of news reported on the Covid-19 and election campaign.

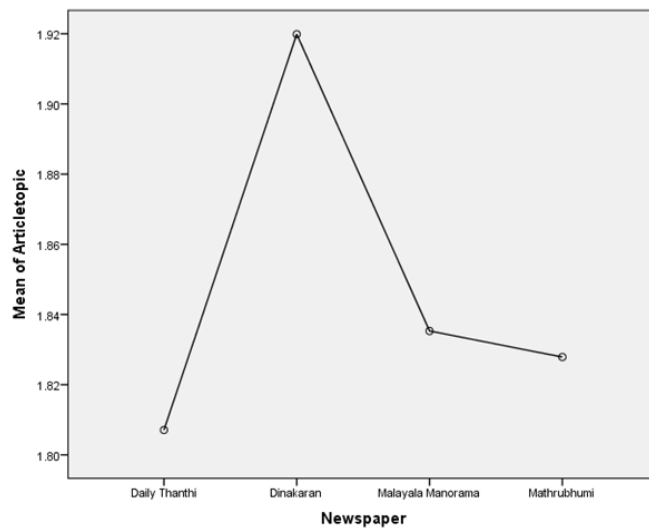
To examine the mean difference in coverage of news stories by the chosen newspapers in the study, an Anova test was run between the variables Newspaper and Article category and the results are presented in the Table 3.1, 3.2 and graph plotted in Figure 3.

Table 3.1: Anova test- Newspaper vs. Article type

Newspaper	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Daily Thanthi	1555	1.81	.395	.010
Dinakaran	2296	1.92	.272	.006
Malayala Manorama	1779	1.84	.371	.006
Mathrubhumi	1836	1.83	.378	.009
Total	7466	1.085	.354	.004

Table 3.2: Anova test- Newspaper vs. Article type

ANOVA					
	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between groups	15.256	3	5.085	41.349	.000
Within groups	917.732	7462	.123		
Total	932.988	7465			

**Figure 3: Means Plots-Anova test- Newspaper vs. Article type**

To answer research question 2, One-way Anova was conducted to evaluate the null hypothesis (H02) that there is no significant difference in the portrayal of news stories (Covid-19 and election campaign) among newspapers. (N=7466). Among all the chosen newspapers—Daily Thanthi, Dinakaran, Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi—the Tamil Nadu news daily Dinakaran (M=1.18, SD=.395, n=1555) showed the highest mean weightage, whereas the Daily Thanthi (M=1.92, SD=.272, n=2296), which is also a Tamil news daily, showed least mean weightage. The Kerala News daily—Malayala Manorama (M=1.84, SD=.371, n=1779), Mathrubhumi (M=1.83, SD=.354, n=1836)— showed almost equal mean weightage.

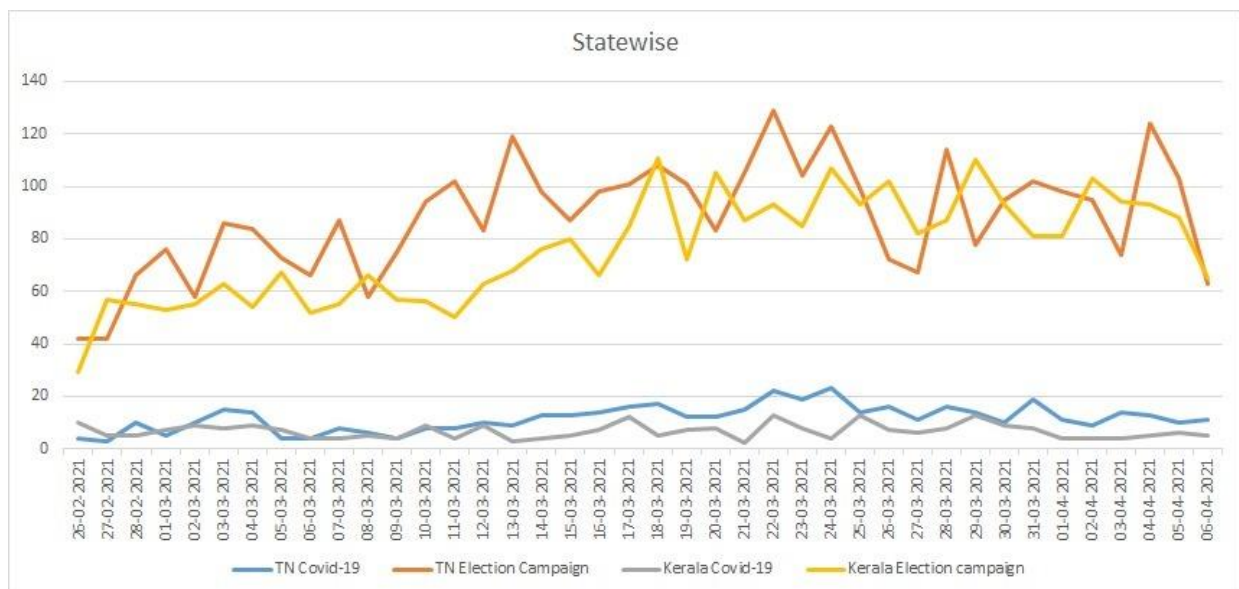
The ANOVA was significant,  $F(3, 7462) = 0.00, p < .05$ . Thus there is significant evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H02) and conclude there is a significant difference in the coverage of news stories (Covid-19 and election campaign) among newspapers. Therefore, Ha2—There is a significant difference in the coverage of news stories (Covid-19 and election campaign) among newspapers— is accepted.

**RQ3:** *Is there any significant difference in the coverage of news stories (Covid-19 and election campaign) between states?*

To find out the difference in the coverage of Covid-19 news stories and election campaign news stories between the states, a time-series analysis test was performed. In Tamil Nadu (from the chosen two newspapers—Daily Thanthi and Dinakara), the news related to Covid-19 covered and election campaign were taken as two variables—TN Covid-19 and TN Election Campaign. Likewise for Kerala (from the chosen two newspapers—Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi), the news related to Covid-19 covered and election campaign were taken as two variables—Kerala Covid-19 and Kerala Election Campaign. The result of the analysis was presented in Figure 4.

To find out the mean, standard deviation and statistical significance between the two states, an Independent sample T-test was performed and the results are presented in Table 4.1 and Table 4.2.

**Figure 4: Tamil Nadu vs Kerala (Covid-19 vs Election Campaign)**



**Figure 4** shows the time series analysis of the coverage of Covid 19 news and assembly election news of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Assembly election news is given prominence by the newspapers of both states. The coverage of Covid 19 news is very less compared to the assembly election news in both states. During the time frame, Covid 19 news coverage has not

surpassed the coverage of election news. Besides, there is a notable discrepancy in the coverage of assembly elections news and the Covid 19 news.

To examine the mean difference in coverage of news stories in the chosen two states, an independent sample test was run between the variables State and Article category and the results are presented in Table 4.1, 4.2.

Table 4.1: Independent Samples Test- State vs. Article type

State	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Tamil Nadu	3851	1.87	.332	.005
Kerala	3615	1.83	.374	.006
Total	7466	1.85	.354	.004

Table 4.2: Independent Samples Test- State vs. Article type

Independent Samples Test							
	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Equal variances assumed	110.412	.000	5.235	7464	.000	.043	.008
Equal variances not assumed			5.215	7220.710	.000	.043	.008

To answer research question 3, an independent sample T-test was conducted to evaluate the null hypothesis (H03) that there is no significant difference in the portrayal of news stories (Covid-19 and election campaign) between states. (N=7466). Among the chosen two states, Tamil Nadu (M=1.87, SD=.332, n=3851) showed the highest mean weightage, when compared with Kerala (M=1.83, SD=.374, n=3615) news daily.

The Independent sample T-test was significant,  $F(110.412)=0.00$ ,  $p<.05$ . Thus there is significant evidence to reject the null hypothesis (H02) and conclude there is a significant

difference in the coverage of news stories (Covid-19 and election campaign) between states. Therefore, Ha3—There is a significant difference in the coverage of news stories (Covid-19 and election campaign) between states—is accepted.

**RQ4:** *Is there any correlation between the covid-19 news and election campaign news in the chosen newspaper?*

To test the relation between the covid-19 news and election campaign news covered in the chosen newspaper, a correlation test was performed and presented in Table 5. The chosen four newspapers were divided into two variables each. The news published in the Daily Thanthi newspaper were divided into two variables-Daily Thanthi Covid-19 and the Daily Thanthi Election campaign. The news covered in Dinakaran was categorised into two variables-Dinakaran Covid-19 and the Dinakaran Election campaign. The news articles published in Malayala Manorama were divided into two variables-Malayala Manorama Covid-19 and the Malayala Manorama Election campaign. The news stories published in Mathrubhumi were split into two variables-Mathrubhumi Covid-19 and the Mathrubhumi Election campaign. Now the eight variables were used to perform the correlation test.

**Table 5: Correlation- Newspapers wise**

		Correlations							
		DT Covid19	DT Election campaign	DK Covid19	DK Election campaign	MM Covid19	MM Election campaign	MB Covid19	MB Election campaign
DT Covid19	Pearson Correlation	1	.600**	.184	.478**	.279	.621**	.233	.546**
DT Election campaign	Pearson Correlation		1	.252	.566**	.058	.418**	.213	.307
DK Covid19	Pearson			1	.368*	.089	.299	.221	.309

	Correlation								
DK Election campaign	Pearson Correlation				1	-.026	.479**	.026	.491**
MM Covid19	Pearson Correlation					1	.123	-.001	.077
MM Election campaign	Pearson Correlation						1	.175	.699**
MB Covid19	Pearson Correlation							1	.015
MB Election campaign	Pearson Correlation								1
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).									
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).									

A bivariate correlation test was run to determine the relationship between the covid-19 and election campaign news among the newspapers. The factors are: DT Covid19 DT Election campaign, DK Covid19, DK Election campaign, MM Covid19, MM Election campaign, MB Covid19, MB Election campaign. There is a strong positive correlation between them, which was statistically significant (N=7466,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Results revealed a strong, positive and statistically-significant correlation between DT Covid-19 and DT election campaign ( $r=0.600$ ,  $n=7464$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), DT covid-19 and DK election campaign ( $r=0.478$ ,  $n=7464$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), DT covid-19 and MM election campaign ( $r=0.621$ ,  $n=7464$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), DT Covid-19 and MB election campaign ( $r=0.546$ ,  $n=7464$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). It can be inferred that if the reportage of covid-19 news in Daily Thanthi increases, then the reportage of election campaign news in Daily Thanthi, Dinakaran, Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi also increases. However, there is not statistically significant correlation between the reportage of covid-19 news in Daily Thanthi and the other newspapers chosen for study.

Results revealed a strong, positive and statistically-significant correlation between DT election campaign and DK election campaign ( $r=0.566$ ,  $n=7464$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). It can be inferred

that, if the reportage of election campaign news increases in Daily Thanthi, the reportage of election campaign news in Dinakaran also increases. However, there is no statistically significant correlation between the Daily Thanthi election campaign news, Dinakaran Covid-19 news, Malayala Manorama covid-19 and election campaign news, Mathrubhumi covid-19 and election campaign news.

Results revealed a strong, positive and statistically-significant correlation between DK Covid-19 and DK election campaign news ( $r=0.368$ ,  $n=7464$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). It can be inferred that, if the reportage of DK covid-19 increases, the reportage of DK election campaign news also increases. However, there is no statistically significant difference between DK Covid-19, Malayala Manorama covid-19 and election campaign news, Mathrubhumi covid-19 and election campaign news.

Results revealed a strong, positive and statistically-significant correlation between DK election campaign and MM election campaign ( $r=0.479$ ,  $n=7464$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), DK election campaign and MB election campaign ( $r=0.491$ ,  $n=7464$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). It can be inferred that if the reportage of election campaign news in Dinakaran increases, then the reportage of election campaign news in Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi also increases. However, there is no statistically significant correlation between the reportage of covid-19 news in Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi.

Results revealed a strong, positive and statistically significant correlation between MM election campaign and MB election campaign ( $r=0.699$ ,  $n=7464$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). It can be inferred that if the reportage of election campaign news in Malayala Manorama increases, then the reportage of election campaign news in Mathrubhumi also increases. However, there is not statistically significant correlation between the reportage of covid-19 news in Mathrubhumi. Therefore,  $H_4$ —There is a significant positive correlation between the covid-19 news and election campaign news in the chosen newspaper—is accepted.

**RQ5:** Is there any correlation between the covid-19 news and election campaign news in Tamil Nadu and Kerala?

To test the relation between the covid-19 news and election campaign news covered in the two states, a correlation test was performed and presented in Table 6. The chosen two states were divided into two variables each. The news published in Tamil Nadu were split into two variables-Tamil Nadu Covid-19 and Tamil Nadu Election campaign. The news covered in Kerala are categorized into two variables-Kerala Covid-19 and Kerala Election Campaign. Now the four variables were used to perform the correlation test.

**Table 6: Correlation- State wise**

Correlations					
		TN Covid19	TN Election Campaign	Kerala Covid19	Kerala Election Campaign
TN Covid19	Pearson Correlation	1	.508**	.171	.555**
TN Election Campaign	Pearson Correlation		1	-.173	.472**
Kerala Covid19	Pearson Correlation			1	-.028
Kerala Election Campaign	Pearson Correlation				1
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

A bivariate correlation test was run to determine the relationship between the Covid-19 and election campaign news between the states. The factors are TN Covid-19, TN Election campaign, Kerala Covid-19 and Kerala Election campaign. There is a strong positive correlation between them, which was statistically significant (N=7464,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Results revealed a strong, positive and statistically significant correlation between TN Covid-19 and TN Election Campaign ( $r=0.508$ ,  $n=7464$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), TN Covid-19 and Kerala Election campaign ( $r=0.555$ ,  $n=7464$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). It can be inferred that whenever the reportage

of Covid-19 news in Tamil Nadu increases, the reportage of Election campaigns increases in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. However, there is no statistically significant correlation between covid-19 news in Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

Results also revealed a strong, positive and statistically significant correlation between TN election campaign news and Kerala election campaign news ( $r=0.472$ ,  $n=7464$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). It can be inferred that whenever there is a hike in the reportage of election campaign news in Tamil Nadu, the reportage of election news in Kerala also hikes. However, there is no statistically significant correlation between election campaign news in Tamil Nadu and covid-19 news in Kerala. Therefore,  $H_4$ —There is a significant positive correlation between the covid-19 news and election campaign news in the chosen newspaper—is accepted.

## **Discussion**

The goal of the current study is to acknowledge the coverage of Covid 19 and assembly elections during the initial phase of the second wave of Covid 19 in the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. The coverage of assembly elections is unconscionable than the Covid 19 during the study period. All the newspapers analyzed have given prominence to the coverage of assembly elections than Covid 19. Hence it can be stated that media agenda setting favors the assembly elections. The study finding suggested that there is no fair coverage of covid 19 in the newspapers. This finding paved the way for the critical discussions about the social responsibility of the media in the pandemic situation.

The highest coverage of covid 19 is identified in Mathrubhumi followed by Daily Thanthi, Malayala Manorama and Dinakaran. Dinakaran reported assembly elections in an exorbitant way, followed by Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi and Daily Thanthi.

The present study also examines the coverage of assembly elections and covid 19 among the newspapers. There is a significant difference in the media coverage among the newspapers.

Among the newspapers, Dinakaran shows the highest difference in the coverage of covid19 and assembly elections followed by Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi and Daily Thanthi.

The study also explores the coverage of covid19 and assembly elections between states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. There is a significant difference in the coverage of assembly elections and covid 19 between states. Tamil Nadu shows a high difference in coverage between the assembly election and covid 19 news compared to Kerala.

The study also explores the correlation between the four chosen newspapers, each newspaper was divided into two variables—Daily Thanthi Covid-19, Daily Thanthi Election campaign, Dinakaran Covid-19, Dinakaran Election campaign, Malayala Manorama Covid-19, Malayala Manorama Election campaign, Mathrubhumi Covid-19, Mathrubhumi Election campaign—and performed correlation tests. The test result indicates that, if the reportage of covid-19 news in Daily Thanthi increases, there is a hike in the reportage of election campaign news in Daily Thanthi, Dinakaran, Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi. If the reportage of election campaign news increases in Daily Thanthi, the reportage of election campaign news in Dinakaran also escalates. If the reportage of DK covid-19 increases, the reportage of DK election campaign news also hikes. If the reportage of election campaign news in Dinakaran increases, then the reportage of election campaign news in Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi also rises. If the reportage of election campaign news in Malayala Manorama increases, then the reportage of election campaign news in Mathrubhumi also soars.

To analyze the existence of a correlation between the stats in publishing covid-19 and election campaign news, a bivariate correlation test was run. The two states were divided into four variables—TN Covid-19, TN Election campaign, Kerala Covid-19 and Kerala Election campaign. From the test, it can be inferred that whenever the reportage of Covid-19 news in Tamil Nadu hikes, the reportage of Election campaigns increases in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Along with this, whenever there is a hike in the reportage of election campaign news in Tamil

Nadu, the reportage of election news in Kerala also escalates. These findings suggested the need of media to be socially responsible in setting the media agenda during the pandemic.

## **Conclusion**

The repercussions of the Covid 19 pandemic will be around the world at least for some years. We have to go through a persistent battle with the Covid 19 pandemic for a long time. In this strenuous situation, everyone in the world should go hand in hand to resuscitate sanity. Media have an exceptional role to play in the pandemic as the general public relies on them to get informed at this critical juncture. Hence media either be print, electronic or new media have the social responsibility to inform the audience with unbiased and factual data. Besides, the media should be socially responsible to set news agendas that have an efficacious societal impact.

The present study which aims at measuring the coverage of Covid 19 and assembly elections in Kerala and Tamil Nadu has come up with several compelling findings. According to the present study, all the four selected newspapers Daily Thanthi, Dinakaran, Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi have a sound coverage of assembly elections and a feeble coverage of Covid 19. From this finding, it can be concluded that the media sets assembly elections as the primary agenda during the study period. The study findings also question the social responsibility of the media which covid 19 news are covered with less prominence.

The study also finds that Dinakaran has the highest coverage of assembly election news followed by Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi and Daily Thanthi. However, Mathrubhumi has the highest coverage of Covid 19 news followed by Daily Thanthi, Malayala Manorama and Dinakaran.

The study also finds out that there is a significant difference in the coverage of assembly election news and covid 19 news among the selected newspapers. Dinakaran shows the highest

difference in the coverage of covid19 and assembly elections followed by Malayala Manorama, Mathrubhumi and Daily Thanthi.

The study also revealed a significant difference in the coverage of assembly elections and covid 19 between the states of Kerala and Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu shows a high difference in coverage between the assembly election and covid 19 news compared to Kerala.

The correlation test result indicates a relationship in the news coverage of covid-19 and election campaign. If the reportage of covid-19 news in Daily Thanthi increases, there is a hike in the reportage of election campaign news in Daily Thanthi, Dinakaran, Malayala Manorama and Mathrubhumi. If the reportage of election campaign news increases in Daily Thanthi, the reportage of election campaign news in Dinakaran also escalates. Likewise, when the correlation test was employed between states, the result indicates that, if the reportage of Covid-19 news in Tamil Nadu hikes, the reportage of Election campaigns increases in Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Along with this, whenever there is a hike in the reportage of election campaign news in Tamil Nadu, the reportage of election news in Kerala also escalates.

The prioritizing of assembly elections over the covid 19 news by the Indian media is really an appalling trend. Media should be socially responsible to the society and people. Media agenda should always concern public and public safety. The media have to be extremely careful while prioritizing issues in the pandemic as the media have an astounding influence among the public.

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