BACKGROUND GUIDE

ALL INDIA POLITICAL PARTIES MEET

AGENDA: **DISCUSSING THE IMPORTANCE AND IMPACT OF OPINION POLLS ON THE RESULTS OF THE ELECTIONS.**

INDEX

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE BOARD

Dear delegates,

We welcome you to the All India Political Parties Meet at Nath Valley MUN 2024. It will be a pleasure to host you in committee in a manner that has not been seen in almost the past three years now.

This background guide has been created while keeping in mind that the agenda is a bit technical and you'll be tested based upon both your analytical and research skills in the committee. This background guide is not intended and should not restrict your research base, additionally the guide can in no way be used as a source of proof in the committee.

The guide has been created to help you start your research and give you hints about the important aspects of the committee. The guide has been divided into following parts in order to ease the process of research for you:

Introduction to the agenda

Case studies/ Noteworthy Incidents of 3 nations:

1. France (2024)
2. UK (2015)
3. India (Generic)

You are requested to go through the Background guide in the order it has been made because each is connected to the previous section in some way or the other.

If I could give you a tip before you start research regarding the agenda, it would be to keep in mind that this is an analytical agenda and how you interpret the agenda from your portfolio/party's point of view is critical to how you begin your representation in committee from the get go. Analysis and Policy should play a major role in keeping your point forward in front of the committee, hence make sure you understand the terminologies and research you find regarding the agenda.

Apart from that, in case of any queries related to the committee or Rules of Procedure you may contact us on the email ID mentioned or on the committee whatsapp group.

We look forward to seeing you at the conference!

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GENERAL UNDERSTANDING OF OPINION POLLS

In the lead up to an election, political pundits and interested members of the public will refer to opinion polls to see how results might land. But while polls have been viewed as a reliable guide, recent failures – including predictions for the 2015 UK General Election - have been viewed as being potentially damaging for the industry. Opinion polls, are a survey of public opinion from a particular sample group, and as such can be useful in informing politicians about the views of specific groups of people. In practice, pollsters need to balance the cost of polling a large sample against the reduction in sampling error, and so a typical compromise for political pollsters is to use a sample size of 1,000-10,000 respondents.

Polls survey a variety of issues relating to voters' views on, from specific policies to political leaders' approval rates. Between elections, "polls act as a feedback mechanism which could affect parties' policy choices, whereas nearer to an election, they are feedback mechanism on how the campaign is going". However, their main use is prior to elections, where politicians use polls as a tool to inform their campaigns and to craft messaging. As such, they are not independent of the political process. Rather, they could also influence voters' behaviour by affecting expectation about the outcomes of the election. Because polling results around voting intentions are often publicised, the information they provide can influence voters' perception of the various parties' likelihood of winning an election, or the chances of being part of a coalition government. This can influence how people vote at the ballot box. When people vote for the party they think is going to win, this is referred to as the "bandwagon effect". Alternatively, voters may evaluate parties more positively if their chances of winning appear to be good or evaluate parties more negatively if their chances seem to be low, in what is called the "boomerang effect". Opinion polls are valuable as they guide policy development by giving decision makers impartial information about what the public wants. But this requires pollsters to be both transparent and accurate in their statistical methodologies, something recent polling failures have called into question.

The case of the 2015 UK Elections:
The 2015 General Election was widely considered to be a failure for the polling industry. In the weeks prior to election day, much of the focus was on the possibility of a hung Parliament, only for a Conservative majority to emerge. This wasn't just an upset for the polling industry - many politicians suggested that the inaccurate polls may have influenced the election outcome, and social/market research industry professionals highlighted that such a failure undermines public confidence in social and market research, and official statistics more generally. Expert analysis has been undertaken to understand the reasons behind these polling failures, most notably the Report of the Inquiry into the 2015 British general election opinion polls. Their analysis into the failure was able to rule out a range of potential causes of the failure, including postal voting, overseas voting and late swing votes. Instead, the problem lay with the methodology used in the sampling of voters.

The inquiry found that the main cause of error was the sampling pollsters used - samples over-represented Labour supporters and under-represented Conservative supporters and the statistical weighting applied to the raw data were not sufficient to correct for the imbalance. Consequently, the samples were mainly unrepresentative of the population of voters, leading to the polling miss. The analysis was key in providing important recommendations on how the industry can continue to innovate and adapt to improve its approach to estimating voting intention. Twelve changes were suggested in total, including enhanced efforts to obtain representative pools of respondents and reviewing processes for weighting samples by adding in new variables to account for under-sampled populations.

The situation in France:

In a result that took France wholly by surprise, the left-wing New Popular Front (nfp), dominated by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, looks poised to become the biggest bloc in parliament after final-round voting at legislative elections closed on July 7th. Official final results gave the nfp 182 seats in the 577-seat National Assembly. This is far short of the 289 seats needed to control the lower house. Voters have returned a badly hung parliament, and France is now set for a period of uncertainty and political manoeuvring as the country tries to learn how to act as many other European countries already do, and forge a majority coalition.

The results contained surprises all round. Marine Le Pen's hard-right National Rally and friends, which polls had suggested would top voting, is on course to become only the third-biggest parliamentary bloc. They have secured 143 seats. This represents a big jump from the 88 the rn held in the outgoing parliament, and shows how far it has travelled from its days as a fringe pariah outfit to a near-respectable party backed by a big chunk of French voters. But it will be a disappointment to Ms Le Pen, who wanted a majority, and Jordan Bardella, her 28-year-old protégé, who had hoped to become the next prime minister.

CONCEPT OF EXIT POLLS IN INDIA

Exit polls give estimates about how people voted in an election. They are arrived at on the basis of interviews with voters right after they exit the polling stations (hence exit polls), as well as other calculations related to voter data. A large number of Indians give the same importance to exit polls as they do to the actual results. Normally, exit polls are released on the last day of voting, as agencies conducting such polls are mandated by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to wait until polling has been completed in all phases. This is to avoid influencing voters who are yet to vote. On the day when exit polls are finally released, pollsters often give varying estimates. It is interesting to see that people generally take interest in those exit polls whose estimates are closer to their political preferences. They have little interest in looking at the vote share estimates, which some polls indicate, leave aside looking at their methodologies. More often than not, the accuracy of exit polls is judged by personal opinions on political parties.

When exit polls for the ongoing Lok Sabha elections are released on the evening of June 1 (Saturday), this phenomenon is likely to be repeated. Many television channels will rush to air the polls. Unfortunately, there is greater competition for being the 'first' to show the exit poll numbers, than about having the superior quality of data. Many exit polls have also proven erratic in recent years, throwing up conflicting results. Last year, many polls estimated incorrect winners in the Legislative Assembly elections for Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, while some were way off the mark in Rajasthan. There is no pattern to this – an agency may have predicted the results for Madhya Pradesh correctly, but made a mistake in Rajasthan's case. There were states where all of the exit polls were correct (Telangana) and others where everyone was wrong (Chhattisgarh).

Basis of exit polls

The science of surveys, which includes exit polls, works on the assumption that data were collected after interviewing a large number of respondents using a structured questionnaire, whether over the telephone or face-to-face.

This method is not new; it began back in 1957 during the second Lok Sabha elections when the Indian Institute of Public Opinion conducted a poll. But not even the best guesswork or estimate can skip the methodology required. Without a structured questionnaire, the data can neither be collected coherently nor be analysed systematically.Since exit polls began in 1957, there has been enormous improvement in at least one aspect, which is sample size. Gone are the days when a national sample of 20,000 to 30,000 respondents was considered large. Today we have survey agencies conducting exit polls with samples as big as 10 lakhs. Exit polls of a few lakhs samples have become very common today.

Though the Lokniti-Centre for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) does not normally conduct exit polls, it did conduct a few. Technology — call-backs to respondents, images of

interviews being conducted and phone calls from the field, WhatsApp groups and similar tools — have helped us in overcoming such shortcomings, yet there is no thumb rule for how to get the prediction correct.

There are other challenges. The prediction of seats is based on a swing model — the poll makes an estimate of vote shares for different parties and alliances by interviewing selected respondents, and the seat forecast is made based on the result of the previous election. Estimating the vote share is not an easy task, given various diversities in India — of location, caste, religion, language, levels of education, economic class — all of which impact voting behaviour. Over- or under-representation of any of these diverse sections of voters can affect the accuracy of estimates.

If these were not enough, there are other difficulties. Since the swing model is applied on the previous vote shares, a change in alliances, or a split or a merger of parties between two elections poses a difficulty. For example, BJP and JD(U) in Bihar. Measurement of swing and electoral change is easier when the contest is limited to two parties. The complexity of swings increases as more and more political players are added.

The count method is time-consuming and labour-intensive, as one is expected to make an estimate for each seat. When agencies claim to have made seat-wise estimates, it is presented as the most comprehensive poll. This is when the sample size is as high as several lakhs. However, some agencies have made innovations in the count method and this results in maximising gains by spending relatively less time and resources.

While an exit poll might claim to have covered all constituencies, in practice the poll is not required in some seats — for instance, why would one waste time and energy in conducting a poll in Varanasi where the Prime Minister is contesting, or in Gandhinagar where the BJP president is contesting? If one looks carefully at constituencies, state-wise, many such seats could be eliminated and one could still make the most accurate estimate. After this elimination method combined with the count method, the survey is required in a limited number of difficult constituencies (swing constituencies). It is possible for an innovative exit poll to be far more accurate than polls conducted using traditional methodology. But while the polls using traditional methodology estimate vote share and help us analyse voting behaviour on the basis of different socioeconomic backgrounds, the count method can hardly give an estimate of vote shares, and any systematic analysis of voting behaviour could only be a dream.

Accuracy of previous exits polls of 2014 and 2019

Exit poll predictions are never to be blindly relied on as there is always room for mistakes. Instances where exit polls went awry in the recent past are not scarce either. However, in 2019 and 2014, the exit poll predictions did not miss the mood of the nation. In 2019, the exit polls on average predicted NDA's tally at 306 and UPA's at 120. The prediction was underwhelming when the actual results came as the NDA won 352 seats with the BJP at 303. The then-UPA got 93 seats with the Congress at 52.

2014 marked the landslide victory of the BJP-led NDA which many exit polls failed to gauge though they anticipated that the NDA was coming to power. They only missed the huge margin the NDA was going to make. An average of eight exit polls predicted 283 seats for the NDA and 105 seats for the UPA. The NDA for 336 seats with the BJP at 282; the UPA got 60 with Congress 44.

Exit Poll agency	NDA (2019)	UPA (2019)
India Today-Axis	339-365	77-108
News 24-Today's Chanakya	350	95
News18-IPSOS	336	82
Times Now VMR	306	132
India TV-CNX	300	120
Sudarshan News	305	124
Actual Result	**353**	**93**

Exit Poll agency	NDA (2014)	UPA (2014)
India Today-Cicero	272	115
News 24-Chanakya	340	101
CNN IBN-CSDS	280	97
Times Now ORG	249	148
ABP News-Nielsen	274	97
NDTV-Hansa Research	279	103
Actual Result	**336**	**60**

<u>Cases where Indian Exit Polls have been incorrect in grasping the extent of Indian politics</u>

1. 2004 Lok Sabha Elections Exit Polls
   In 2004, the Atal Bihari Vajpayee-led BJP government, buoyed by victories in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Rajasthan, called for early elections with the slogan "India Shining." Exit polls predicted a comfortable majority for the BJP-led NDA, forecasting between 240 to 275 seats. However, the actual results were surprising: the NDA secured only 187 seats, while the Congress and its allies won 216 seats, contrary to projections.

2. 2014 Lok Sabha Elections Exit Polls
   The 2014 Lok Sabha elections saw exit polls predicting a win for the BJP-led NDA but falling short of a majority. Most exit polls estimated NDA seats between 261 and 289, yet the actual results exceeded expectations. The NDA secured 336 seats, with BJP alone crossing the majority mark, while Congress suffered a historic defeat with only 44 seats.

3. 2017 UP Assembly Elections Exit Polls
   Following demonetisation, the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections had exit polls predicting a hung assembly, with BJP as the largest party. Contrary to these predictions, the BJP won an overwhelming 325 seats, a stark contrast to the exit polls that suggested a significantly lower tally

4. 2015 Bihar Assembly Elections Exit Polls
   The 2015 Bihar Assembly elections were intensely contested, with high voter turnout. Exit polls indicated a tight race with no clear majority. However, the actual results showed a decisive victory for the RJD-JDU-Congress alliance, with RJD emerging as the largest party. This result was far from the mixed picture painted by exit polls.

5. 2015 Delhi Assembly Elections Exit Polls
   In the 2015 Delhi Assembly elections, exit polls predicted a majority for the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), but none foresaw the extent of their victory. AAP won 67 out of 70 seats, a landslide not captured by any exit poll, which at best had forecasted their tally to cross 50 seats.

   These examples highlight the unpredictability of exit polls. As the country waits for the final results of the current elections, these historical precedents remind us that while exit polls generate discussion, the actual outcomes can be quite different.