

Role of media surveys in predicting and shaping the exit poll and opinion polls outcome

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Abstract

The present research paper is based on media role in covering general election of India. The research work is survey based, which showed that exit poll survey in India is bad and has large differences with the actual poll results.

Keywords: media, exit poll, survey coverage election, election commission

Introduction

The mass media are essential to the conduct of democratic elections. A free and fair election is not only about casting a vote in proper conditions, but also about having adequate information about parties, policies, candidates and the election process itself so that voters can make an informed choice. A democratic election with no media freedom would be a contradiction in terms. The prime concern is the right of voters to full and accurate information. Parties and candidates are entitled to use the media to get their messages across to the electorate. The media play a more specific part in enabling full public participation in elections, not only by reporting on the performance of government, but also in a number of other ways such as by educating the voters, by reporting on election campaign, by providing a platform for the political parties, by allowing the parties to debate, by reporting results and monitoring vote counting, by scrutinizing the electoral process itself in order to evaluate its fairness, efficiency, and probity.

Research Methodology

The research work is based on secondary data mostly past tv Reports, on exit and opinion poll results.

Role and Impact of Surveys in Various Elections

The IIPO was the first organization in India to conduct an election survey. In 1957, the first all India level election poll was conducted before the second Loksabha election. Based on this survey, the first election prediction was done which was quite accurate. Eric da costa reviewing the operations of IIPO in 1980 said: "...it was not known at that time whether in fact an all India poll was truly feasible. The obstacles of illiteracy and the difficulties of organizing random samples in many areas of the India union seemed overwhelming. The first that the experiment was a extraordinary success was not proved until the first national poll was published in 1957." The IIPO conducted election surveys till 1980s, but after the exit of Dr. Costa, opinion polling on elections did not figure high on the agenda of the organization and it was discontinued. The institutional beginning of academic study of general elections based on an all India sample survey started at the centre for the study

of developing societies (CSDS), Delhi, in the 1960s. The study popularly known as the national election study was first conducted in 1967 as a scientific study of the political behavior, opinion, and attitudes of the electorates in India. This was followed by another national level study conducted during the 1971 general elections. During the 1980 Loksabha elections, while the CSDS designed the all India survey, the IIPO conducted the fieldwork. Although this survey was not the part of the series, but it can be used to partly fill the gap in the series. During the 1980s, survey research of elections and voting behavior did not figure prominently on the centre's intellectual agenda, nor was the series take over by any other institution, which resulted in a long break in the time series data and it was in the mid-1990s that the CSDS revived the nes tradition and it remains one of the most prestigious studies of voting behavior in India. In 1991, most of the polls seemed to fare reasonably well. Three of the four nationwide surveys came up with forecasts that were within 20 seats of the final congress tally of 232 seats. (India today 233; frontline 224; week 245-270). Only one (Sunday 310) seemed seriously in error. But all these surveys conducted before the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. There is no doubt that the assassination produced a sharp swing to the congress. If the constituencies that voted belatedly in June had behaved like those that voted on 21st May, the Congress would seem to be the correct benchmark against which to assess the accuracy of the 1991 polls. Till 2009 in Loksabha election barring a few occasions, such surveys have, however, never been appropriate or even close to the mark. The opinion polls and the exit polls conducted during 2004 and 2009 general elections are examples of some of the worst surveys conducted by agencies. In the 2004 elections, every agency in its forecast declared NDA as the winner. But the results went the other way. It was predicted that the BJP and its allies would win about 230-250 seats and the Congress and allies close to 205. But the Congress and its allies went ahead and formed the government with 219 seats and the NDA could not cross the 190 mark. It's a matter of research also that why despite of surveys conducted by the many agencies, the outcome and direction of exit or opinion polls are in the same way. The reason for this tendency according to the director of

CSDS Mr. Sanjay Kumar “Also, agencies conducting opinion polls get influenced by each other’s polls. If two or more polls show a particular party as the winner, the third agency tries to dilute its survey if it has a different result,”¹⁷ In 2009 general election most opinion polls and exit polls conducted by major agencies gave the UPA an edge over the NDA, but none were predicted almost simple majority for the UPA. When the final results came UPA got close to the number of seats needed for simple majority. NDA was short behind prediction in many surveys.

Analysis of Exit Polls and Actual Results of Different Elections

To know the success and failures of exit polls in India, the analysis of election exit polls results have been done. The exit polls results sample taken randomly during last 10 years elections. It is noticeable that last 10 years are also the era of emergence and rapid growth of television news channels in India. To understand the success and failure of exit polls in India I randomly selected 24 elections for which exit polls have done since 2002. Among these 24 elections exit polls, 3 are of Lok Sabha General Elections and rest are of assembly elections. Out of 24 sample of exit polls 16 are of elections that were held since 2009 or during the last 5 years Period. It will help to understand the trends of the exit polls in predicting the election outcome in recent years. The results of exit polls were compared with actual results the election. On two basic grounds success and failure of the results decided. First, whether exit polls were able to read the mood of voters that which party or alliance is going to win largest number of seats and second, whether the exit polls prediction of seats for the parties got right or near the actual number. After the comparison of the exit polls and actual results the performance and evaluation of exit polls decided on four categories--- Very Good, Good, Bad and Worst.

Table 2: Depicting the Exit and Actual Poll Results Of Punjab Assembly Election 2002

Party/Alliance		BJP+	CONG+
Poll agency	Aaj tak	17	91
	Dd/c for	30	72
	Actual	44	62

Source-Indian Express, 26 February, 2002

The exit polls done during Punjab assembly elections 2002 was success in predicting mood of the voters but not the number of seats. All pollsters given congress the majority of seats but the difference of seats in actual and exit polls results may be considered as failure, if we see the strength of Punjab assembly, which is only 117.

Table 3: Depicting the Exit and Actual Poll Results of Punjab Assembly Election 2012

Alliance/Party		BJP-SAD	CONG	Others
Poll Agency	India tv/cvoter	44-50	62-68	
	Head linestoday	58-62	50-54	
	News24/chanakya	52	60	
	Csds/ibn	51-63	48-60	
	Star news-nielsen	58	56	
	Actual	68	46	3

Source-http://www.hindustantimes.com/punjab/chandigarh/4--exit-polls-give-an-edge-to-congress-in-punjab/article1-820349.aspx/Election Commission of India

In the Very Good category those exit polls have been place which were succeeded in reading the mood of the Voter and seats of the Party or alliance on the same line what final outcome has produced.

In Good category those exit polls have been placed which were able to read the voters mood but couldn't able to predict the right number of seats. For example: exit polls predicted that Party A will got largest number of seats or got majority marks but failed to get the extent of win or loss in terms number of seats.

In Bad category those elections exit polls were placed which were not able to predict the clear winner or loser...in some cases different agencies or news channels divided in their predictions for the same elections also.

In the Worst category case those exit polls were placed in which the actual outcome were entirely opposite to the exit polls predictions... Those exit polls were also placed in this category in which exit polls results were showing close fight between parties and alliance but finally the clear winner emerged.

Table 1: Depicting the Exit and Actual Poll Results of Uttar Pradesh Assembly Election 2012

Allian Ce/party	BSP	SP	BJP	INC-RLD	Others
Star News-Nielsen	83	183	71	51	11
Cnn-ibn	65-77	232-250	28-38	36-44	11-23
Aaj Tak	88-98	195-210	50-56	38-42	20
Actual	80	224	47	37	15

Source-

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uttar_Pradesh_Legislative_Assembly_election,_2012#O Pinion Polls/SOURC E-Election Commission of India

The exit polls of 2012 elections of Uttar Pradesh got almost right in terms of reading mood and predicting the seats. The exit polls were also succeeded in predicting the seats of rest of the Parties right.

The exit poll results of Punjab assembly election 2012 was in the category of failed. Not only it failed to predict but the different poll agencies are in difference in predicting, who will win. Some of them were showing win for BJP-SAD alliance and some of them showed win for Congress.

Table 4: Depicting the Exit and Actual Poll Results Of Kerala Assembly Elections 2011

Alliance/party		LDF	UDF	Others
Poll Agency	Csds-cnn ibn	69-77	63-71	
	C fore/asia net	58-68	78-82	0-2
	Headline s today-org	48-55	85-92	
	Star news	49	88	
	Chanakya-news 24	35-53	84-102	0-6
	Actual	68	72	

Source-http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/KeralaLegislative_Assembly_election,_2011# Post pollsurveys/Electioncommission of India

The Kerala assembly elections 2011 exit polls were able to read the mood of voters but they were not able to predict the number of the winner what they actually won in the final outcome. Few among them gave winner more seats in

comparison to actual numbers alliance got, and some of them gave lesser number of seats in comparison to actual numbers what the runner-up got.

Table 5: Depicting the Exit and Actual Poll Results of Karnataka Assembly Elections 2013

Allian CE/Party	CONG	BJP	JD S	KJP	Others
Timesnow	132	38	38		15
Headlines today	114	55	34	11	9
Cvoter	110-118	51-59	31-37	9-13	7-11
Abpnews	110-118	51-59	31-37	9-13	
Actual	122	40	40	6	16

Source: http://electionaffairs.cOm/Karnataka/Assembly_ele ctions_2013/exit_poll_karnataka_assembly_elections_2013.Php

In the 224 assembly seats of Karnataka, every poll agencies or news channels predicted majority for the congress party and predictions were also around the actual results. It is

clear from the table analysis that mood of voters and seats predicted for the different parties in the states were on the line of voter mood.

Table 6: Depicting the Exit and Actual Poll Results of Bihar Assembly Election 2010

Party/alliance	JDU-BJP	RJD-LJP	Cong	Others	
Poll agency/news channel	Cnn-ibn	185-201	21-32	6-12	9-19
	Star news nielson	148	68	14	13
	C-voter	142-154	59-71	12-18	
	Actual	206	25	4	8

Source-20th Nov, 2010, Exit polls results: Bihar election 2010, A Website.

The exit polls of Bihar assembly elections 2010 was very much in reading the mood of the voters. But all pollsters except one were nowhere around the numbers what the NDA alliance got after the counting held. It clearly shows that the exit polls failed to gauge the number of seats what the different parties or alliance got. All exit polls were showing clear mandate to NDA but except one no one had predicted landslide victory to the NDA.

The maximum exit polls of 2012 Gujarat assembly elections were very close in predicting the seats and reading the mood of voters. It can be said that it was a success in both terms in predicting actual number of seats and reading the mood.

Table 7: Depicting the Exit and Actual Poll Results of Gujrat Assembly Elections 2007

Party/ Alliance	BJP	Cong	Others	
Poll agency	Cnn-ibn	92-100	77-85	
	Ndtv 24/7	90-110	70-95	
	Star news	103	76	
	Actual	117	59	6

Source-IBN POLITICS WEBSITE, 23DEC, 2007

The exit polls of Gujarat Assembly Elections were giving clear mandate to BJP and actual results also confirmed it with big mandate to the party. But in the case of congress all exit polls were giving more seats to the party what it actually won. It may be good to say that successful in reading the mood of voters but not in predicting the actual seats.

Table 9: Depicting the Exit and Actual Poll Results of Tamil Nadu Assembly Elections 2006

Party/Alliance	DMK+	AIADMK+	Others	
Poll agencies	Cnn-ibnhindu	157-167	64-74	2-6
	Actual	163	69	2

Source

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_Nadu_Legislative_Assembly_e lection,_2006 Exit_polls

The exit polls of Tamilnadu Assembly elections 2006 was a good success. The actual number of winner and runner-up were in same range what exit poll had predicted.

Table 10: Depicting the Exit and Actual Poll Results Of Tamil Nadu Assembly Elections 2011

Allianc E/Party	DMK+	AIADMK+	Others	
Poll Agency	Headlin es today/org	115-130	105-120	
	Cnn- ibn/theweek	102-114	120-132	
	Asianet-c fore poll	117	132	
	Starnews	124	110	
	Actual	31	203	0

Source

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tamil_Nadu_Legislative_Assembly_e lection,_2011#Post-poll_surveys

The exit polls of Tamil Nadu assembly election 2011 were a clear blot on the pollsters because the success achieved in 2006 were turned down completely in 2011 assembly elections. Even no pollsters were able to gauge the mood of voters, no one had given majority to any party or alliance. The exit polls performance were as worst as in 2004 General Election of Loksabha.

Table 8: Depicting the Exit and Actual Poll Results of Gujarat Assembly Elections 2012

Alliance/Poll	BJP	Cong	Others	
POLL AGENCY	C voter- times now	119- 129	49-59	
	Chanakya-news 24	140	40	
	Headlines today	118-128	50-56	
	Abp news	116	60	
	Actual	116	60	6

Source: http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2012-12-17 / news/35868737_1_vote-share-polls-on-television-channelsseats/ Election Commission of India

Results of Analysis

The analysis of the all twenty-four elections exit polls and actual results show mixed picture about the exit polls. After comparison between the actual results and exit poll results of 24 general elections (3 Lok Sabha+21 State Assemblies) it has been found that in 6 elections exit polls performance were in the category of worst. In 1 elections exit polls performance were in bad category. In case of 8 elections the exit polls performed in the category of Very Good and in 9 elections the performance were in Good Category. The analysis of the results show that the exit polls predictions were not so bad or worst as the public image is. However the analysis show that in Lok Sabha general elections 2014 exit polls got first time right since 1999 election. In last 3 Lok Sabha elections before 2014, the exit polls produced worst results. The public image about the opinion and exit polls are build up more on the basis of Lok Sabha elections because during Lok Sabha elections the electorate of the whole country get involved in the election process at the same period and every voters have eye on the any development about the elections and exit polls and opinion polls are among them. In state elections exit polls results show that out of 21 elections exit polls 7 performed very Good and 9 are in good category. 4 assembly elections exit polls predictions were worst and 1 election was bad for exit polls. The analysis of assembly elections exit polls give positive picture about the exit polls in India. Question is after the success of 2014 Lok Sabha general election exit polls, public image will change? "The prospects of Opinion poll and Exit poll are bright in a democratic country like India due to regular elections. Most of the polls were correct in making the assessment in Lok Sabha general election 2014".said Mr. Sanjay Kumar, Director, CSDS.

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