

Report of the Committee to verify the reliability and validity of the SoNS Survey (July 2011) conducted in Andhra Pradesh

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Concerns were raised about the findings of the survey conducted by the Center for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS) between the 24th and 30th July 2011 regarding the extent of support for a separate Telangana state. This review committee assessed the sampling frame, the questionnaire, and the data to assess whether there was a bias in the survey.

Background: The State of Nation Survey (SONS) 2011 was a large sample cross-section national survey. The focus of the survey was on leadership, corruption, and economic issues facing the nation. At the end of the survey instrument a few state specific questions were asked, as was done in some of the earlier rounds too. In Andhra Pradesh, to gauge public opinion on the issue of separate statehood for Telangana, respondents were asked whether they favored bifurcation, trifurcation, a united Andhra Pradesh. A question was also asked about the recommendations of the Srikrishna Committee. The findings were reported in the *Hindu* and immediately sparked criticisms that the level of support for separate Telangana state in the Telangana region was low compared to the expected level and this arose due to a bias in the administration of the survey. This review committee was asked to look at the design of the survey and the data collection and assess whether there was a bias.

The review committee found three areas of potential concern.

Sampling: During the administration of the survey, investigators were not able to carry out their work in two constituencies – Mahboobabad and Ibrahimpatnam – two locations in the Talengana region that have seen strong support for a separate state. This increased the weightage of the sample from Hyderabad and its environs. Ideally, CSDS could have anticipated the consequences of this for the outcome of the survey or before the analysis and presentation of the data.

Questionnaire: The question that has sparked the most controversy asked respondents: “People have different opinions on the issue of a separate Telangana state. Some say that Andhra Pradesh should be bifurcated into Andhra and Telangana, while some say that it should be trifurcated into Andhra, Telangana, and Rayalaseema. Others say that Andhra Pradesh should continue as a united state. What is your opinion on the issue?” The response categories offered were Bifurcated; Trifurcated; United; and No Opinion/Don’t Know. The review committee felt that in the current political environment of Andhra Pradesh, the question wording and responses were perhaps too complex. A simpler question might have yielded different results. In fact, CSDS’s own surveys (such as the 2009 SoNS) show that where a differently worded question with a similar intent was posed the responses were different and support for a separate

Telangana state was higher. Second, the category No Opinion/Don't Know could have multiple meanings. These could include indifference to the division of Andhra Pradesh (i.e. a respondent may not care whether Andhra Pradesh is divided or not) and an actual do not know. The review committee recommends that CSDS provide nuance and perhaps pre-testing of various options for politically charged questions in the future.

Data: The review committee examined the data in detail and found that the number of Don't Know/No Opinion was much higher for Telangana than for the rest of Andhra. This is true not only for this question but for other political questions in the survey as well. The large proportion of Don't Know and No Opinion in Telangana on the question of a separate state is consistent with what is reported from other parts of the world when people are asked to take political positions in the midst of a political conflict. The review committee found that a significant proportion (one third) of those who said Don't Know/No Opinion to the question of a separate state for Telengana expressed a political preference for Telengana Rashtra Samithi (TRS) if elections were to be held in Andhra Pradesh. The review committee recommends that more careful analysis of the Don't Know/No Opinions should have been carried out before the presentation of the data.

In addition to the direct question on Telangana concerns of bias have also been raised because of the high proportion of respondents in Telangana who were reported not to have heard of the Srikrishna Committee report. The survey shows that only about 2 percent (1.7) said that they had not heard of the Srikrishna Committee report while about 25 percent had no opinion on the six options suggested by the Committee. In its reporting of the survey results, the CSDS combined these two responses, which have very different meaning. It is unfortunate that the two categories were clubbed and the data was presented as the proportion who had not heard of the Committee's report rather than the more accurate rendition – i.e. very few had not heard of the Committee's report whereas a quarter of the sample refused to offer an opinion on the recommendations of the Srikrishna Committee.

The review committee was surprised that the proportion of those who say Don't Know/No Opinion in the 'rest' of Andhra Pradesh is very low, much lower than for Telengana. It is low not only for the question of the separate state for Telengana but for a number of other political questions as well. This is an area of concern.

The committee found no evidence of any systematic bias in the drawing the sample or any noticeable internal inconsistencies in the survey data.