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TV Rating Policy (TRP) 2026 — India Reforms Television Audience Measurement

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POLITY

GS2

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TV Rating Policy (TRP) 2026 — India Reforms Television Audience Measurement

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WHY IN NEWS

The **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB)** notified the new **Television Rating Policy (TRP) 2026**, replacing the **2014 Policy Guidelines for Television Rating Agencies in India**. The new policy aims to make audience measurement **more independent, transparent, and statistically robust** — addressing long-standing concerns about TRP manipulation, opaque governance, and limited sample size.

KEY CHANGES UNDER TRP POLICY 2026

PARAMETER	OLD (2014)	NEW (2026)
Net worth requirement	Rs 20 crore	Rs 5 crore
Independent directors on board	Not mandated	50% minimum
Sample size (metered homes)	~44,000	80,000 in 18 months (target: 1.20 lakh)
Landing-page viewership	Counted	Excluded
Compliance window for existing agencies	N/A	6 months
Compliance window for new entrants	N/A	18 months
Cross-holding restrictions	Limited	Tighter (broadcasters/advertisers/agencies)

WHAT IS A TRP?

TRP (Television Rating Point) is a measure of how many people are watching a particular TV channel or programme at a given time. Networks use TRPs to:

- Set advertising rates (higher TRP = higher ad revenue)
- Decide which programmes to continue or cancel
- Negotiate carriage fees with cable/DTH operators

Currently, **BARC India (Broadcast Audience Research Council)** is the sole TRP agency in India, measuring viewership through **People Meters** installed in panel homes.



WHY THE REFORM?

1. The 2020 TRP Scam

In 2020, Mumbai Police uncovered a **TRP manipulation racket** involving the now-defunct **Republic TV** and other channels, where panel households were allegedly bribed to keep specific channels on. The scandal exposed:

- Inadequate independence of BARC's governance
- Weak audit mechanisms
- Concentration risk in having a single rating agency

2. Digital Transformation

With the rise of OTT platforms (Netflix, Prime, Hotstar, Jio) and digital-first content, traditional TV measurement has become outdated. The 2026 policy is a step toward modernising the system.

3. Sample Size Concerns

~44,000 panel homes for a country of **1.4 billion** people and **~200 million TV households** has been criticised as statistically inadequate. The new 80,000-1.20 lakh target nearly triples coverage.

4. Landing Page Manipulation

Channels were allegedly being placed on the **landing page** (the channel that appears when a TV is switched on) of cable operators — artificially inflating viewership without genuine audience engagement. The new policy excludes landing-page viewership from measurement.

INDEPENDENT DIRECTORS — THE GOVERNANCE REFORM

The **50% independent directors requirement** addresses the conflict-of-interest problem. Under the 2014 policy, BARC's board was dominated by:

- IBF (Indian Broadcasting Foundation) — broadcaster body
- ISA (Indian Society of Advertisers) — advertiser body
- AAAI (Advertising Agencies Association of India) — agency body

These three are precisely the **stakeholders whose ratings determine commercial outcomes** — creating a perpetual conflict of interest. The 50% independent director requirement brings external scrutiny.



LOWER ENTRY BARRIERS — ENCOURAGING COMPETITION

The reduction of net worth requirement from **Rs 20 crore to Rs 5 crore** is designed to **break BARC's monopoly** by allowing new players to enter the rating business. With multiple competing agencies:

- Cross-validation becomes possible
- Manipulation is harder (would require collusion across agencies)
- Innovation in measurement methodologies (digital-first, AI-based)

TRP POLICY FRAMEWORK — CONSTITUTIONAL & LEGAL

PROVISION	SOURCE
Information & Broadcasting	Union List, Entry 31 (Posts, telegraphs, telephones, wireless)
Cable Television Networks (Regulation) Act	1995
TRAI Act (broadcasting under TRAI)	1997 (as amended)
Press and Registration of Books Act	1867
Cinematograph Act	1952
IT Rules 2021	Digital media regulation

The TRP policy is **executive guidelines** issued by MIB, not statutory legislation. This gives the Ministry flexibility but also subjects the policy to **judicial review** on grounds of arbitrariness.



GLOBAL COMPARISON

COUNTRY	RATING SYSTEM	SAMPLE SIZE
USA	Nielsen	~75,000 homes
UK	BARB (Broadcasters' Audience Research Board)	~5,300 homes (high-quality panel)
India (post-2026)	BARC (+ new entrants?)	80,000 → 1.20 lakh
Germany	AGF Videoforschung	~5,200 homes
China	CSM Media Research	~40,000 homes

India's new sample size will be among the **largest in the world** — necessary given India's massive TV market and linguistic/regional diversity.

IMPACT ON STAKEHOLDERS

Broadcasters

- **Pros:** Larger sample size = more accurate ratings; harder to manipulate
- **Cons:** May lose preferential treatment if dependent on landing-page placement

Advertisers

- **Pros:** Better data for ad placement decisions
- **Cons:** Higher measurement costs may pass through to ad rates

Cable Operators

- **Pros:** Less pressure for manipulation
- **Cons:** Loss of revenue from selling landing-page slots

Viewers (Public)

- **Pros:** Better-quality content as channels compete on genuine viewership; less programme cancellation based on flawed data



UPSC RELEVANCE

GS Paper 2 – Polity & Governance

- Media regulation in India
- MIB's role and policy framework
- Conflict of interest in self-regulation
- Institutional reform and corporate governance

GS Paper 3 – Economy

- Advertising market dynamics
- Sample size and statistical methodology

Prelims Fast Facts:

- TRP Policy: notified by **Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB)**
- Replaces: **2014 guidelines**
- Independent directors required: **50%**
- Net worth threshold: **Rs 5 crore** (down from Rs 20 crore)
- Sample size target: **80,000 metered homes in 18 months**, ultimately **1.20 lakh**
- Landing-page viewership: **excluded**
- Sole rating agency (currently): **BARC India**
- 2020 TRP scam involved: **Republic TV**

FACTS CORNER

- **BARC India** was set up in **2010** as a joint industry body – but became operational only in 2015. It replaced the earlier **TAM (Television Audience Measurement) India** which had multiple credibility issues.
- **People Meters** – small electronic devices installed in panel homes – record what is being watched, by whom, and for how long. They use technologies like **audio matching** and **picture matching** to identify channels.
- The **2020 TRP scam** led to **3 weeks of suspension** of BARC's services for all news channels – during which broadcasters operated without ratings, demonstrating how dependent the industry had become on a single source.
- India has approximately **200 million TV households** – making it one of the largest TV markets in the world. By 2030, this is expected to plateau as OTT platforms erode traditional TV viewership.

- The **Hindi general entertainment** category has historically been BARC’s most-tracked segment — Star Plus, Colors, Sony, Zee TV — driving ~40% of total TV ad revenue.
- **Free dish** (free DTH platform of Doordarshan) reaches an estimated **45 million households** — but is not measured by BARC because viewership data is harder to capture from free-to-air services.

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