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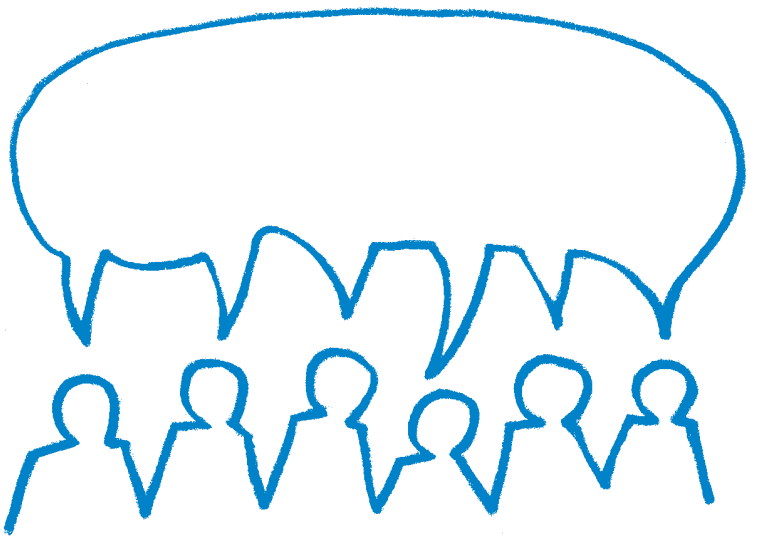
ESOMAR WORLD RESEARCH CODES & GUIDELINES

ESOMAR/WAPOR GUIDE TO OPINION POLLS AND PUBLISHED SURVEYS



WORLD ESOMAR RESEARCH

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The ESOMAR/WAPOR Guide to Opinion Polls and Published Surveys was drafted in English and the English text is the definitive version.

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ESOMAR WORLD RESEARCH CODES & GUIDELINES

ESOMAR/WAPOR GUIDE TO OPINION POLLS AND PUBLISHED SURVEYS

INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

Public opinion polls are regularly conducted and published in many countries. They measure not only support for political parties and candidates, but also public opinion on a wide range of social and political issues. They are published frequently by a variety of print, online and broadcast media.

The public discussion of opinion polls is not always well informed. However, the case for restricting the publication of polls during election campaigns is hard to support with rational argument or empirical evidence. ESOMAR and WAPOR have produced the present guide in order to help those interested in the subject of opinion polls to reach a more informed judgement about the value of such polls and the most appropriate ways of conducting and reporting them.

There are five sections in this guide.

First there is a statement on the role of opinion polls in democratic systems. ESOMAR and WAPOR's position on this issue is quite clear. We believe that there should be no restriction on the conduct or publication of opinion polls which have been carried out according to the *ICC/ESOMAR International Code on Market and Social Research* and published according to the ESOMAR Guideline for the Publication of Opinion Poll Results. The ICC/ESOMAR International Code and this associated Guideline are observed by members of ESOMAR working in more than 100 countries around the world.

Second there is a section on frequently asked questions about how to judge the quality of an opinion poll. These questions are designed to help journalists, politicians, academics, the public and other interested parties understand how to judge the quality of an opinion poll.

Third there is the *ESOMAR Guideline for the Publication of Opinion Poll and Survey Results* which is intended to reduce the risk of the public being misled by research which is inadequate or badly presented or interpreted.

Fourth there is a section which provides specific guidance for practitioners on the conduct of pre-election polls.

Finally, there is a Guideline for the Conduct of Exit Polls and Election Results Forecasts. These last two guidelines are designed to help ensure that election polls are carried out to high standards.They provide technical guidance to researchers and background information but they are not intended to

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be a "How to do it" manual. The subject of public opinion research and the measurement of voting intention continue to evolve and each election may bring new circumstances the researcher must address. The professional skills and previous experience of polling organisations are essential components of effective public opinion research. It is not possible to write them into guidelines or codes of practice.

1. OPINION POLLS AND DEMOCRACY – AN OVERVIEW

Public opinion is a critical force in shaping and transforming society. Properly conducted and disseminated survey research gives the general public an opportunity for its voice to be heard. Through opinion research the public, politicians, the media and other interested groups have access to accurate measures of public attitudes and intentions.

"Scientific" polling is among the most successful political developments of the last century. Public opinion polls help guide policy by giving decision-makers impartial information about what the public wants. Polls also alert the public to their own hopes, desires, and political goals. They are mirrors, permitting individuals to understand where they fit into the political system. Media reports of the results of opinion polls tell readers and listeners that their opinions are important, and can even sometimes be more important than the opinions of the elite.

The democratic urge towards participation and the journalistic desire to ask questions have merged to create the extensive media polling of the last 70 years. Imagine a political system where the public is told what it thinks by its political leaders, where election winners have the ability to tell voters why they voted the way they did and where the government, when it looks for public input, asks only its friends what the public thinks. The alternative to properly conducted polls is a public and a government exposed only to unscientific and probably inaccurate assertions about what people believe, in many cases presented by partisan individuals or organisations with a political agenda.

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2. FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT POLLS

1. What is an opinion poll?
An opinion poll is a scientific and representative survey designed to measure the views of a specific group – for example a country's electors (for most political polls) or parents or trade union members.

2. What makes a survey "scientific"?
The two main characteristics of scientific surveys are a) that respondents are chosen by the research organisation according to explicit criteria to ensure representativeness, rather than being self-selected, and b) that questions are worded in a balanced way. For example, if the population being sampled contains 52% who are women and 30% who are over 55, then a scientific opinion poll will represent those groups appropriately and the questions will be balanced and not lead the respondent towards a particular answer.

3. How does a poll choose a sample that is truly representative?
There are two main methods. The first is "random" sampling, the second "quota sampling". With random sampling, a polling organisation either uses a list of randomly-drawn telephone numbers or email addresses (for telephone or some Internet polls); or visits randomly-drawn addresses or names from a list such as an electoral register (for some face-to-face surveys). The polling organisation then contacts people on those telephone numbers or at those addresses, using a random selection procedure, and asks them to take part in the survey. "Quota" sampling involves setting quota controls – for example, age and gender – and letting the interviewer seek out different people who, together, match those characteristics. Surveys based on quota sampling are often used in face-to-face surveys. In addition, some Internet polls employ quota sampling to select representative samples from a database of people who have already provided such information about themselves. Quota sampling may be used, in otherwise randomly sampled telephone surveys, to select the person to be interviewed within the household, in order to speed up the fieldwork process.

4. Do polling companies do anything else to achieve representative samples?
Usually they do. While well-conducted random and quota samples provide a broad approximation to the public, there are all kinds of reasons why they might contain slightly too many of some groups and slightly too few of others. What normally happens is that polling

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companies ask respondents not only about their views but also about themselves. This information is then used to compare the sample with, for example, census statistics. The raw numbers from the poll may then be adjusted slightly, up or down, to match the profile of the population being surveyed. If, for example, a poll finds that, when its survey-work is complete, it has 100 members of a particular demographic group, but should have 110 of them (in a poll of, say, 1,000 or 2,000), then it will "weight" the answers of that group so that each of those 100 respondents counts as 1.1 people. This way, the published percentages should reflect the population as a whole.

5. Are other kinds of surveys bound to be wrong?

No. Just as a stopped clock tells the right time twice a day, unscientific surveys will occasionally produce right percentages. But they are far more likely to be badly wrong. The most common forms of unscientific surveys are phone-in polls conducted by television programmes and self-selecting surveys conducted over the Internet. These contain two defects. First, their samples are self-selecting. Such polls tend to attract people who feel passionately about the subject of the poll, rather than a representative sample. Second, such polls seldom collect the kind of extra information (such as gender and age) that would allow some judgement to be made about the nature of the sample.

6. But surely a phone-in or write-in poll in which, say, one million people take part is likely to be more accurate than an opinion poll sample of 1,000?

Not so. A biased sample is a biased sample, however large it is. One celebrated example of this was the US Presidential Election in 1936. A magazine, Literary Digest, sent out 10 million post cards asking people how they would vote, received almost 2.3 million back and said that Alfred Landon was leading Franklin Roosevelt by 57-43 percent. The Digest did not gather information that would allow it to judge the quality of its sample and correct, or "weight", groups that were under- or overrepresented. Since the Literary Digest sent its postcards primarily to individuals with telephones and automobiles, their "sample" included few working class people. A young pollster called George Gallup employed a much smaller sample (though, at 50,000, it was much larger than those normally used today), but because he ensured that it was representative, he correctly showed Roosevelt on course to win by a landslide.

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7. How can you possibly tell what millions of people think by asking just 1,000 or 2,000 respondents?
In much the same way that a chef can judge a large vat of soup by tasting just one spoonful. Providing that the soup has been well stirred, so that the spoonful is properly "representative", one spoonful is sufficient. Polls operate on the same principle: achieving representative samples is broadly akin to stirring the soup. A non-scientific survey is like an unstirred vat of soup. A chef could drink a large amount from the top of the vat, and still obtain a misleading view if some of the ingredients have sunk to the bottom. Just as the trick in checking soup is to stir well, rather than to drink lots, so the essence of a scientific poll is to secure a representative sample, rather than a vast one.

8. But isn't there some risk of sampling error in a poll of 1,000 or 2,000 people?
Yes. Statistical theory allows us to estimate this. Imagine a country that divides exactly equally on some issue – 50% hold one view while the other 50% think the opposite. Statistical theory tells us that, in a random poll of 1,000 people, with a 100% response rate, then 19 times out of 20, a poll will be accurate to within 3 percentage points. In other words, it will record at least 47%, and no more than 53%, for each view. But there is a one in 20 chance that the poll will fall outside this range. With a sample of 2,000, the poll will be within 2 percentage points 19 times out of 20.

9. You say those calculations apply to "a random poll with a 100% response rate". Surely that's pie in the sky?
Fair point. Many polls are non-random, and response rates are often very much lower – well below 50% in many countries for polls conducted over just a few days.

10. So isn't the real margin of error much larger?
Possibly – but possibly not. Here are two examples, at opposite extremes of this issue. Return to our example of an equally divided country. Suppose everyone who holds view A lives in the northern half of the country, while everyone who holds view B lives in the southern half. In that case, if pollsters ensure that half of each survey is conducted in the north, and half in the south, then their polls should be exactly accurate. Structuring polls in this kind of way is called "stratification". Properly done, stratification can help to increase a poll's accuracy.

Now make a different assumption about our mythical, equally divided country.

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Suppose people who hold view A are far more likely to be members of a religious or ethnic minority who refuse to answer questions than people who hold view B. Unless the polling company is aware of this bias, and knows how big it is, it could well produce results showing that view B is far more popular than view A. This is an example of a systematic error.
To measure the "true" margin of error, we would need to take account of random sampling error, and the effects of stratification, and possible systematic errors. The trouble is that it is hard, and arguably impossible, to be sure of the true impact of stratification and systematic errors. (If the impact of all systematic errors were known, a competent survey company would adjust its results to compensate for them.)

11. Doesn't this mean that polls can't really be trusted at all?
No. Polls may not be perfect, but they are still the best way of measuring what the public thinks. In most countries where poll results can be compared with actual results (such as elections), well-designed polls are usually accurate to within 3 percentage points, even if they occasionally stray outside that margin of error. Moreover, much of the time, polls provide a good guide to the state of opinion, even allowing for a larger margin of error. If a well-designed, representative survey finds that the public divides 70-30% on an issue, then a margin of error of even 10 percentage points cannot alter the fact that one view is expressed far more widely than the other. However, it is true that in a closely-fought election, a polling lead (in a sample of 1-2,000) of less than 5 percentage points for one candidate or party over another cannot be regarded as a certain indicator of who was ahead at the time the survey was taken – let alone a guarantee of who will in the days, weeks or months ahead.

12. Can I Trust an Internet Poll?
The answer depends on the people being sampled and the answer is the same for telephone or face-to-face interviewing as well, not just the internet. If a representative sample of people can be reached by any of these interviewing modes, the answer is yes, the poll can be trusted. There are places and populations where it is very difficult for an interviewer to get a representative sample using face-to-face interviewing, just as there are places and populations where only certain classes of people have telephones or access to the internet. Obviously if the interviewing mode cannot be corrected by stratification and weighting to allow for this bias, the interviewing mode cannot provide a representative sample

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and should not be trusted. In some cases the coverage of the internet may be sufficiently high for internet interviewing to be a good, or even the best, way of carrying out surveys, but with the level of access to the internet still low and unrepresentative in most countries, internet polls of the general public should be treated with caution. Internet surveys use panels of people who have given permission to be contacted for surveys. The ESOMAR 26 Questions to Help Research Buyers of Online Samples provides help on how to assess the quality of an internet panel sample.

13. I have seen polls conducted by different, well-regarded, companies on the same issue produce very different results. How come?

There are a number of possible reasons, beyond those issues related to sampling error.

a) The polls might have been conducted at different times, even if they are published at the same time. If the views of many people are fluid, and liable to change in response to events, then it might be that both polls were broadly right, and that the public mood shifted between the earlier and the later survey.

b) The polls may have used different definitions of the group that they are representing (e.g. different age, regions, ethnic groups etc.)

c) They might have been conducted using different methods. Results can be subject to "mode effects": that is, some people might, consciously or sub-consciously, give different answers depending on whether they are asked questions in person by an interviewer, or impersonally in self-completion surveys sent by post or email/Internet. There is some evidence that anonymous self-completion surveys may secure greater candour on some sensitive issues, than face-to-face or telephone surveys.

d) The polls might have asked different questions. Wording matters, especially on subjects where many people do not have strong views. It is always worth checking the exact wording when polls appear to differ.

e) There might be an "order effect". One poll might ask a particular question "cold", at the beginning of a survey; another poll might ask the same question "warm", after a series of other questions on the same topic. Differences sometimes arise between the two sets of results, again when many people do not have strong views, and some people may give different answers depending on whether they are asked a question out of the blue or after being invited to consider some aspects of the issue first.

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14. Does the way the question is asked influence the answers?
There is a great deal of knowledge about how questions should be worded, based on what we know about how people process information. But this is really a matter of common sense. It is important to look at the exact question which was asked and, if possible, to check the questions asked before it. Questions can contain concepts within them which lead the respondent in a certain direction e.g. "There seem to be fewer policemen on the streets and a lot of people around here are concerned about rising crime, do you think the police in this area are over-stretched?" or questions which contain more than one concept but where only one answer is reported e.g. "How well is the city council dealing with traffic congestion and the lack of public transport?" reported as the level of concern with public transport. Questions like these will not provide clear or helpful answers about what people really think of the police or public transport.

The context in which questions are asked can obviously influence the way in which people respond. If a question about concern with crime is asked after a series of questions about whether people have ever felt nervous on public transport or have a relative or friend who has been mugged etc. it is likely that more people will say they are concerned than if this question had been asked before the others.
When using answers to questions like this, it is important to be aware that the questions were biased or ambiguous and therefore the answers cannot be an accurate reflection of what the people answering them really believe. This type of questioning is particularly popular with pressure groups, who use them to try and get media coverage for their point of view. Responsible journalists and commentators should not report those polls, or they should draw attention to misleading questions when reporting the results of opinion polls.

15. When I read or see a report of a poll, how can I tell whether to take it seriously or not?
Check the following:

a) Who conducted the poll?
Was it a reputable, independent polling organisation? If not, then regard its findings with caution. If you are not sure, then one test is its willingness to answer the questions below. Reputable polling firms will provide you with the information you need to evaluate the survey.

b) Who paid for the poll and why was it done?
If it was conducted for a respected media outlet, or for independent

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researchers, there is a good chance it was conducted impartially. If it was conducted for a partisan client, such as a company, pressure group or political party, it might still be a good survey (although readers/listeners/viewers should be told who the client was). The validity of the poll depends on whether it was conducted by an organisation that used a scientific approach to sampling and questionnaire design, whether it asked impartial questions, and whether full information about the questions asked and results obtained are provided. If such information is provided, then the quality of the survey stands or falls according to its intrinsic merits. If such information is not provided, then the poll should be treated with caution. In either event, watch out for loaded questions and selective findings, designed to bolster the view of the client, rather than report public opinion fully and objectively.

c) How many people were interviewed for the survey?
The more people, the better – although a small-sample scientific survey is ALWAYS better than a large-sample self-selecting survey. Note, however, that the total sample size is not always the only relevant number. For example, voting intention surveys often show figures excluding "don't knows", respondents considered unlikely to vote, and those who refuse to disclose their preference. While excluding these groups ensures that, the poll reports the opinion of the most relevant group – "likely voters" – reported voting-intention sample size may be significantly lower than the total sample, and the risk of sampling error therefore greater. Likewise, be careful when comparing sub-groups – for example men and women. The sampling error for each sub-group could be significantly higher than for the sample as a whole. If the total sample is 500, and made up of equal numbers of men and women, the margin of error for each gender (counting only random errors and disregarding any systematic errors) is around 6 percentage points.

d) How were those people chosen?
Is it clear who is included in the sample and who was left out? If the poll claims to represent the public as a whole (or a significant group of the public), has the polling company employed one of the methods outlined in points 2,3 and 4 above? If the poll was self-selecting – such as readers of a newspaper or magazine, or television viewers writing, telephoning, emailing or texting in – then it should NEVER be presented as a representative survey. If the poll was conducted in certain locations but not others, for example, cities but not rural areas, then this information should be made clear in any report.

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e) When was the poll done?
Events have a dramatic impact on poll results. The interpretation of a poll should depend on when it was conducted relative to key events. Even the freshest poll results can be overtaken by events. Poll results that are several weeks or months old may be perfectly valid, for example, if they concern underlying cultural attitudes or behaviour rather than topical events, but the date when the poll was conducted (as distinct from published) should always be disclosed. The date of the fieldwork is particularly important for pre-election polls where voting intention can change right up to the moment the voter records their vote.

f) How were the interviews conducted?
There are four main methods: in person, by telephone, online or by mail. Each method has its strengths and weaknesses. Telephone surveys do not reach those who do not have telephones. Email surveys reach only those people with Internet access. All methods depend on the availability and voluntary co-operation of the respondents approached; response rates can very widely. In all cases, reputable companies have developed statistical techniques to address these issues and convert their raw data into representative results (see points 3 and 4 above).

g) What were people asked?
Try to get a copy of the full questionnaire, not just the published questions. A reputable organisation will publish the questionnaire on its website, or provide it on request. Decide if the questions were balanced and be cautious about the results if the interview was structured in a way which seemed to lead the respondent towards a particular conclusion.

h) Are the results in line with other polls?
If it is possible, check other polls to see if the results are similar or very different. Surveys aiming to cover the same topic should come to similar conclusions. If the answers are very different, the reasons may become apparent when the questionnaire or the sampling method is examined.

i) Was it a "push poll"?
The purpose of "push polls" is to spread rumours and even outright lies about opponents. These efforts are not polls, but political manipulation trying to hide behind the smokescreen of a public opinion survey. In a "push poll," a large number of people are called by telephone and asked to participate in a purported survey. The survey "questions" are really thinly-veiled accusations against an opponent or repetitions of rumours about a candidate's

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personal or professional behaviour. The focus here is on making certain the respondent hears and understands the accusation in the question, not in gathering the respondent's opinions. "Push polls" have no connection with genuine opinion surveys. The best way to guard against "push polls" is to find out who conducted the survey. Reputable companies have nothing to do with "push polls", a phenomenon that has grown in recent years in a number of countries.

j) Was it a valid exit poll?
This question applies only at elections. Exit polls, properly conducted, are an excellent source of information about voters in a given election. They are the only opportunity to survey actual voters and only voters. They are generally conducted immediately after people have voted, and are therefore able (in theory) to report actual behaviour. Pre-election surveys, even those conducted the day before the vote, cannot entirely avoid the danger that some people may change their mind, about whether to vote or which party/candidate to support, at the very last minute.

Properly conducted, they are an excellent source of information about voters in a given election. In addition to answering the question "Who won?" they provide information to answer the questions: Who voted for the winner and why did candidate/party (a) or candidate /party (b) win?. Exit polls are characterised by an elaborate design and a much higher number of interviews than pre-election polls; often tens of thousands and, in some countries, hundreds of thousands are interviewed.

Exit polls have four distinct sources of error, apart from pure random error:

a. Supporters of one candidate/party may be more willing to disclose their vote than supporters of another. This phenomenon, "differential nonresponse",is especially hard to judge accurately in exit polls.

b. Some people may genuinely have thought they voted for a particular candidate/party, but may inadvertently have voted for someone else, or spoiled their ballot paper or (when using voting machines) not have completed the process properly.

c. Exit polls may not have been conducted on an absolutely representative group of polling stations. Even if the total sample is very large – say, 5,000 or more – it may suffer from an effect known as "clustering". If, say, 50 polling stations are selected, and 100 voters questioned at each, the figures could be wrong if the overall political

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balance of those 50 polling districts is even slightly askew.

d. There may be operational difficulties in sampling voters accurately at polling places – either because of interference by local election officials or because of legal restrictions on where interviewers my stand. Reputable polling organisations go to considerable lengths to avoid these problems. Other organisations may conduct exit polls in a minimal number of voting locations using interviewers who do not have experience or specialist training in this method of polling.

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3. GUIDELINE FOR THE PUBLICATION OF OPINION POLL AND SURVEY RESULTS

3.1. Introduction

1. Public opinion research – the study of people's attitudes and beliefs and behaviours about political, social and other issues – forms a part of the total market and social research field. It is subject to exactly the same professional and ethical requirements as other forms of survey research. These requirements are set out in the ICC/ESOMAR International Code on Market and Social Research.

2. However, public opinion research often concerns an especially 'sensitive' area. It deals with issues which arouse greater public interest and emotion than do most market research projects. In addition, its findings are much more widely published and debated, and may sometimes be presented in a provocative or even tendentious way. ESOMAR has therefore set out specific recommendations about the publication of such research.

3. Opinion polls and surveys have a valuable role to play in present-day society. Because the data from polls and surveys have far-reaching implications, it is important that the general public, politicians, the media and other interested groups should through research have access to accurate and unbiased measures of public attitudes, intentions and behaviours. We recognise concerns regarding the effects of such poll data on voting or other behaviour. However, the alternative is that the public would be exposed only to unscientific and probably inaccurate assertions about the situation, in many cases presented by individuals or organisations who take an extremely partisan or ideological approach to presenting the facts. The objective of this Guideline is to reduce the risk of the public being misled by research which is inadequate or badly presented.

4. Recommendations in this Guideline are based on the previous ESOMAR Code for the Publication of Opinion Polls. This was examined by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe which then recommended the widespread application of the Code to govern the publication of polls. The Code has since been combined with updated guideline advice.

5. The validity and value of public opinion surveys depend on three main considerations:

(i) the nature of the research techniques used and the efficiency with which they are applied,

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(ii) the honesty and objectivity of the researcher carrying out the study,

(iii) the way that the findings are presented and the uses to which they are put.

This section of the Guide concentrates primarily on the second and third of these issues. Specific guidance on techniques and the conduct of preelection polls and exit polls is given in the following two sections – 4 and 5.

6. Major misunderstandings can arise when opinion poll or survey findings are published and debated. It is unrealistic, and unreasonable, to expect the media to quote the full technical background of a survey when presenting its findings: they have limitations of space and must also hold the interest of their audience. However, there is certain basic information which must be provided if that audience is to have the opportunity of judging for itself the evidence presented and deciding whether or not it agrees with any conclusions drawn from the research. This Guideline is primarily concerned with trying to ensure that the public has reasonable access to this key information about the survey, and that published reports of the findings are not misleading. The Guideline tries to strike a realistic balance between what would be theoretically desirable and what is practicable.

7. All reputable research organisations apply the appropriate scientific methods and operate with professional objectivity. In doing so they conform to the ICC/ESOMAR International Code on Market and Social Research. There is also general agreement among them on the principles which should underlie the publication of research results. However, normal professional practice varies between countries in some respects and in certain countries additional information to that specified in this Code will also customarily be provided as part of the standard key material.

Research organisations have a particular responsibility in the field of public opinion polls, to make sure that both the client and the public have a reasonable understanding of the special problems and limitations involved in measuring attitudes and beliefs as distinct from behaviour. Such research frequently deals with complex and sensitive issues about which respondents have varying degrees of knowledge and interest, and where their views may often be half-formed, confused and inconsistent. High professional integrity and skill is essential if the research itself is to be unbiased and meaningful,

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and if the findings are to be presented and interpreted clearly and accurately. It is important also that the research budget available is sufficient to carry out a valid study. ESOMAR and WAPOR fully recognise that such considerations are vital if public opinion polls are to merit public confidence and support.

8. If as a result of past experience, a researcher has reason to believe that a particular client will not fairly present opinion poll results in the published version of the findings, the researcher has a responsibility to stop carrying out polls for publication by that client.

9. Finally, one particular type of work which can be confused with an opinion survey is a consultation exercise or straw poll. In this type of study people reply to questions in the same way as in a sample survey, but the individuals who answer the questions select themselves rather than being chosen as part of a scientific sample to represent a particular universe or population. It is extremely important that the results of this type of work, which can provide insight and engage the public in the democratic process, are never reported in a way which could lead to it being confused with a representative survey of opinion.

3.2. Scope

1. This Guideline must be read in conjunction with other ESOMAR codes, guidelines and principles available at www.esomar.org

2. Market, social and opinion research involve the gathering and further processing of personal data, which is regulated by law in many countries. In addition, certain countries have laws regulating the publication of pre-election opinion poll results. This Guideline does not provide a description of the legislation in force around the world, and cannot replace the advice of legal experts and self-regulatory bodies. Rather it sets minimum standards of ethical conduct to be followed by market research professionals and is to be applied against the background of any stricter standards that may be required in a specific country.

3.3. Requirements of the ICC/ESOMAR International Code

3.3.1. General requirements

1. All researchers who conduct public opinion polls and surveys must conform to the ICC/ESOMAR International Code. Particular attention is drawn to the requirements of Article 1d (concerning the clear separation of research from nonresearch activities), Article 3b (concerning protecting

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respondents from harm or adverse effects as a result of participating in a survey), Article 7 (concerning data protection and privacy) and Article 11 (concerning interpretation, reporting and publication of results).

2. It is important to distinguish between the requirements which apply to the reporting of public opinion poll results by a researcher to the original client, and those which apply to the subsequent publishing of any poll findings by that client to a wider audience. The first of these situations is largely covered by Article 11 of the International Code which specifies reporting requirements in detail. This Guideline is intended to clarify certain additional requirements which arise in connection with the wider publication of the findings, and therefore applies especially to the second situation.

3.3.2. Specific requirements for published public opinion surveys

1. This section covers requirements for all published public opinion surveys, Section 4 covers specific and more detailed requirements for surveys of voting intention.

2. When public opinion survey findings are published in print media they must always be accompanied by a clear statement of:

(a) the **name of the research organisation** carrying out the survey;
(b) the **universe** effectively represented (i.e. who was interviewed);
(c) the **achieved sample size** and its geographical coverage;
(d) the **dates of fieldwork**;
(e) the **sampling method** used (and in the case of full random probability samples the response rate achieved);
(f) the **method by which the information was collected** (face-to-face, telephone interview, internet panel etc.);
(g) whether **weighting** was used to adjust the results and the universe used for the weights
(h) the relevant **questions asked**. In order to avoid possible ambiguity the actual wording of the question should be given unless this is a standard question already familiar to the audience or it is given in a previously published report to which reference is made.

3. "Achieved sample size" is the number of interviews actually reported. **"Geographical coverage"** should state which broad regions of the country (national or other such as urban areas only or a specific geographical area) were represented. In addition the number of sampling locations used should be given as an indication of the adequacy of the sample design. In referring to the number of "locations" the objective is to provide a realistic picture

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of the extent to which the sample is widely distributed geographically. The best terms to use would vary by country – for example "Départements" might be best in France, "Parliamentary Constituencies" in the U.K.

4. It is important for the reader to be given some general indication of the **sampling method** used since this may in certain cases have very strong implications for the likely representativeness of the sample. A published report cannot necessarily provide all the relevant data for a technical assessment; but even a limited reference can be helpful. In the case of probability sampling, the main objective is to identify those studies where an unusually low response rate has been achieved, for whatever reasons. Although it is preferable wherever possible to quote the actual response rate, the main requirement is therefore to indicate if the response rate is below that regarded in the profession as "normal" for that type of study (this is a matter for experienced professional judgement).

5. It is also important to indicate whether the results quoted have been adjusted by **weighting** procedures or other statistical methods and it is recommended that the raw data is made available wherever the findings reported differ substantially from the raw data collected in the field. (This recommendation is especially relevant in the case of **non-standard** weightings – e.g. weighting applied to correct for disproportionate sampling, like over-representing particularly competitive states or constituencies to improve efficiency, under-representing specific ethnic or religious groups or to correct for poor coverage of the population when using online or telephone interviewing).

6. The guiding principle when deciding which question wordings are relevant to publish should be the elimination of ambiguity and misunderstanding. This is particularly important where the actual wording of the question is critical to the interpretation of the findings, and where the reported answers can be affected by the precise form of the question or its context – especially on politically or socially sensitive issues (for example, attitudes towards abortion). The description should therefore help the reader understand exactly what was asked. In some cases this will be sufficiently clear from the text itself and the actual answers reported, but when in doubt the question wording used should be reported. Certainly where tabular data are given, the full question wording must be included. Experience shows that it is in practice often possible to include the questions

without overloading the published report. Where the company is able to publish information on its website, the full question should be made available, together with, as a minimum, the answers for the weighted sample in total. These answers should include "Don't know and non-response"

7. Any recommendations for a standard publication format in print must take account of the different styles, layouts, etc. of widely varying types of publication. One example of a suitable form of wording would be:

> This survey was carried out by ABC Research, on behalf of News Inc., using a national quota sample of 1111 adults of voting age personally interviewed in 102 locations between 1st-5th March 2008.

Another alternative is to use a 'data box' of the kind:

> Survey carried out by XYZ Research, on behalf of News Inc. National survey of 1234 adults aged 18 and above, interviewed by telephone between 25th-28th February 2008 using random digit dialling and a quota sample.

A further example is:

> A national online survey of 2222 adults interviewed online on 5th March 2008 by XYZ research and weighted to represent national voting shares. Full details of survey available at www.xyzresearch."

8. There are certain specific situations in which it is clearly difficult to follow all the recommendations listed:

(i) where the survey reported on is **very extensive and complex** and where the media report can therefore provide only a relatively brief overview of the total survey

(ii) where an article summarises the results of a number of surveys, when again it would be too complicated to give all the key information for each of the surveys referred to.

Also, where a given survey is reported on 'serially' (for example in the course of several consecutive issues of a newspaper) it might be unnecessary to repeat all the technical details in every issue.

These situations are exceptions. Most published reports on public opinion polls refer to much more limited studies than these. Even in the more complex

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cases it should frequently be possible to give the key information required. In all cases where the key information cannot be fully provided, the basic principle of fair and informative reporting must be followed, **and it should be made clear how and where the serious enquirer can obtain fuller details.** The advent of the internet makes it possible to publish a considerable amount of information about a survey, including details of sampling, weighting and questionnaire which might be difficult to provide in the original publication or broadcast. ESOMAR recommends that the survey company publishes full details of all public polls on a website and that the website's address is given to the public by the media, so that people can check details if they wish to.

9. In the case of broadcast media it may not always be possible to give information on all these points. As a minimum, points (a) through (f) in paragraph 2 above must be covered in any broadcast reference to the findings of a public opinion poll, preferably in visual (written) form where practical. Some research organisations currently arrange with their client to provide a press release at the same time as the broadcast report on a survey. Such a press release can more easily include some kind of fact sheet covering all the basic pieces of information referred to in paragraph 2 above. The publication of this type of information on the agencies or broadcaster's website is also a way of making fuller detail available.

10. The percentages of respondents who give 'don't know' answers (and in the case of voting-intention studies, **of those who say they will not vote)** must always be given where they are likely to affect the interpretation of the findings significantly. When comparing the findings from different surveys, any changes (other than minor ones) in these percentages must also be indicated. There are many occasions on which the interpretation of particular findings will be quite different if the level of 'don't know' answers is 5% or 50%. In the case of voting-intention studies the same consideration also applies to 'will not vote' answers. A researcher must apply their experience and professional judgement in deciding when such situations arise. It may not be necessary to include all the 'don't know' percentages in any tables given, although where this is possible it is frequently the best way of dealing with the issue. It may be quite sufficient, for example, to make a general comment such as: "the proportion of 'don't knows' was never higher than 5%" - or to comment specifically on those instances where the proportion was much higher.

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11. Whatever information may be given in the published report of the survey, the publisher and/or the research organisation involved must be prepared on request to supply the information described in paragraph 2 of this Guideline on the survey method, as required by Article 11 of the ICC/ESOMAR Code. Where the questions formed part of a more extensive or 'omnibus' survey, this must be made clear to any enquirer, including a general indication of the placement of the questions in the larger questionnaire. There is no obligation under the Code for further information beyond this to be supplied – although organisations will normally be prepared to discuss their research methods in more detail with bona fide enquirers.

3.3.3. Arrangements between the Research Organisation and its Client

1. In order to ensure that the requirements of the ICC/ESOMAR Code are followed, and to avoid possible misunderstandings, the research organisation must make clear in advance to its client:

(i) that the research organisation itself is bound by the requirements of the general International Code.

(ii) that subsequent wider publication of the research findings should be in accordance with this guideline.

It is therefore the responsibility of the research organisation to draw its client's attention to this Guideline on Publication of Results and to use its best endeavours to persuade the client to follow the Code's requirements.

2. The research organisation and the client each have a responsibility in the public interest to ensure that the published report on a public opinion poll does not misrepresent or distort the survey data. For example, misleading comments based on non-significant differences must be avoided. Special care must be taken to ensure that any graphs or charts used do not convey a misleading impression of the current survey's results or of trends over time. It is also important that the reader or listener should be able to clearly distinguish between the survey findings as such and any editorial or other comments based upon these findings. Wherever feasible, the research organisation must approve in advance the exact form and content of publication as required in Article 11b of the ICC/ESOMAR Code.

3. In preparing material for publication, journalists and others connected with the media themselves normally follow their own professional codes of practice and ethics. The present Guideline is not intended in any way to substitute

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these but rather to support them. (In this context, 'published report' covers non-print as well as print media.)

Article 11a of the Code emphasises the importance of distinguishing as much as possible the results that emerge directly from the questions asked, and any commentary/interpretation based on these results. Although the dividing line is not always a simple one to define, in most cases the distinction between 'fact' and 'comment' is in practice a workable one.

Article 11d of the Code requires that the research institute must reserve the right to publish the total study and not just the technical specifications in the event of:

- a shortened version of the publication distorting the analysis of the results
- an unforeseen and abridged version of the publication
- a publication which does not conform to the prior agreements

4. The research organisation cannot normally be held responsible for any subsequent use made of public opinion poll results by people other than the original client. It should however be ready to immediately issue such comments or information as may be necessary to correct any cases of misreporting or misuse of results when these are brought to its attention.

5. In the event that a client releases data from a survey which was not originally intended for publication, this Guideline will apply to it as if it had originally been commissioned for publication.

6. ESOMAR strongly advises the use of contracts between research organisations and their clients to ensure adherence to the ICC/ESOMAR Code (see *ESOMAR Guideline on the mutual rights and responsibilities of researchers and clients*). For example, some contracts stipulate that the agency has the right to examine and approve a copy of the publication based on its research. Where the agency reserves the copyright of the findings this can also help to reduce some of the problems involved in misleading 'secondary reporting' of the findings by other people. In addition to any other requirements it is suggested that such a contract should cover:

- clarification of the point that the contract binds both the survey sponsor and the media involved, where these are different parties
- some measure of control by the research organisation over the published form of the results including figures and graphs

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Certain contracts also provide that if research findings commissioned for publication are not in fact published, such findings can subsequently (after a specified period of time) be released by the research organisation itself; or alternatively the organisation is free to repeat the survey for another client. It is also increasingly common practice in certain countries for data tapes from public opinion surveys to be lodged with appropriate archives for subsequent secondary research by academic researchers and others. Such steps can help to reduce the danger that polls may be thought sometimes to be used in a 'manipulative' way by less scrupulous clients.

7. Any code of practice in this area has obvious limitations, in that researchers can exercise only restricted control over how their results are presented in the media, and still less influence over any comments and interpretations (sometimes misguided and tendentious) based on the findings. A code therefore depends on spreading the use of 'best practice' and influencing media clients to avoid misleading presentation of survey results. ESOMAR expects its members to follow this Guideline with this objective firmly in mind.

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4. SPECIFIC GUIDANCE ON CONDUCTING PRE-ELECTION OPINION POLLS AND POLLS ON VOTING INTENTION

4.1. Introduction

1. This section concentrates on the conduct of pre-election polls and assumes that the requirements of the ICC/ESOMAR Code described in the preceding section will be met. At first it may seem strange to have specific guidelines on pre-election polls since they are just one particular type of political poll. While all opinion polls require high technical standards, it is pre-election polls that feature most frequently in the debate about polls, and which are restricted in some countries. These guidelines have two main objectives – to protect the interests of the voter in a democracy and to protect the credibility of market and opinion research.

2. The first objective of these guidelines is to ensure that polling organisations take all possible technical steps to ensure that polls published close to the vital decision point for voters are an objective guide to the state of public opinion and voting intentions. The process of sampling cannot guarantee highly precise measurement by every single poll. Also, the measurement of stated intentions to vote is only an estimate and cannot guarantee that all electors will actually vote in line with their earlier stated voting intentions. People do change their mind, some even in the second before marking their vote on the ballot slip. Polling organisations have a responsibility to electors to ensure that polls, especially those polls published in the last few days of an election campaign, provide reliable and objective information.

3. The second objective of these guidelines is to protect the public reputation of market research using sample surveys. Pre-election opinion polls which are published in the final days of an election campaign have a major influence on this. While it is true that opinion polls are a snapshot of intentions at a specific point of time, they are inevitably seen as predictions of the election result when they are published late in the campaign. In general, pollsters have not effectively challenged this use of polling data, partly because the track record of the polls in "predicting" the result is good.

4. In some countries where the publication of polls in the final stages of a campaign is restricted, polls based on national samples are often conducted on polling day, or the day before, for publication within minutes of the close of the polling stations. Also carrying out exit polls (interviewing voters as they

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leave the polling station) has become much more common. Such polls are even more likely to be seen as prediction polls and the analysis of their results is often used to explain why the election came out the way it did. Their accuracy is equally important to the public image of market research.

5. Pre-election polls are a very public test of sampling theory and survey research in action. Polls have a good track record for accuracy but the occasional poll which appears to be wrong gets extensive media coverage. "Polls wrong" is news and always gets major coverage. "Polls accurate" is a headline that is seldom written. ESOMAR hopes that these guidelines will contribute to the technical education of journalists responsible for poll reporting. However, special care must still be taken by polling organisations to minimise the risk of "getting it wrong".

4.2. The Guidelines

4.2.1. Timing of fieldwork

Anyone attempting to prepare a critical case about polls would certainly decide that the date of publication of a poll is a key piece of information. Regardless of when the interviewing took place, the publication date is the important fact in judging the contribution of the poll to the electoral process.

Polling organisations must be responsible for ensuring that polls published in the very late stages of an election are likely to be a fair representation of public opinion as close as possible to the end of the campaign.

Guideline Polling companies should try to reduce the risk of "getting it wrong" by minimising the time elapsed between fieldwork and publication. A poll is more likely to achieve a good representative sample if the fieldwork period includes some time in the evening and during week-ends when potential electors in full-time employment are available for interview.

4.2.2. Sample size

The measurement of the share of the vote for a party is subject to the normal statistical confidence limits for sample surveys. Two factors affect the size of the confidence limit of any party share. The first is the absolute level of support for a party. The closer this gets to 50%, the wider will be the confidence limit around the share estimate. The second is the size of the sample interviewed in order to produce the estimate. In most pre-election polls the size of the sample is the more important factor.

In countries with a simple proportional representation system, the pre-election poll measurement of the share of the

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vote to each party is a fair indicator of the election outcome. In other electoral systems this may not be the case. However, the best that the polls can do is estimate the share of the vote to each party at a national level. The key statistic reported in the media is the gap in share of vote between the leading parties, and the measurement of the gap has much larger confidence limits than those for an individual party's share.

Polling organisations frequently represent the margin of error of their polls as ± 3 percentage points. This may be accurate for a single party but is rarely accurate for the key media figure – the gap between leading parties. A poll that produces a 95% confidence limit of ± 3 percentage points on the share for one of the leading parties, could produce an equivalent confidence limit of ± 5.7 percentage points on the gap between the two leading parties.

Guideline Pre-election polls should not have a sample of fewer than 1,000 respondents. In circumstances where the gap between leading parties is expected to be small, the sample size should be larger and samples of 1,500 to 2,000 should be used.

4.2.3. Sample distribution

In European countries there are two main approaches to selecting samples for face-to-face interviews.

Method 1
Select sampling points in proportion to the number of electors. Then, in each selected area take an equal number of interviews. For any given sample size, the rule for samples using this methodology should be to **maximise** the number of sampling points and **minimise** the number of interviews conducted at any one sampling point. This implies minimising the number of interviews conducted by any single interviewer.

Guideline There is empirical evidence that if the number of interviews per sampling point exceeds 20, then the influence of increased interviewer variation outweighs increased sample size.

Method 2
Select sampling points with equal probability but then to take a different number of interviews in each area proportional to the size of the electorate in the area.

Guideline Polls using this method should still aim to minimise the number of interviews conducted by any single

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interviewer and stick to the maximum of 20.

Guideline For both methods, the sample design should give priority to maximising the number of sampling points and minimising the number of interviews conducted by each interviewer.

4.2.4. Telephone interviewing

In principle telephone surveys offer high-quality, unclustered, random samples with fast completion of fieldwork. In countries with limited telephone ownership or availability, ownership is frequently correlated with voting intention, i.e. those who cannot be contacted by phone are more likely to support one rather than another of the parties in the election. This may also be the case for those telephone owners who are not listed in the telephone directory, which is why random digit dialling is to be preferred, or those whose telephones may not be part of the sampling frame (e.g. mobile/cell phone households).

Guideline If telephone ownership is not high and/or likely to produce an unrepresentative sample, this method of interview should not be used for pre-election polls, or should be supplemented with data collected using another mode of interviewing. If telephone samples are used for polls, the polling organisation must use methods to correct for any under-representation of supporters of particular political parties. Simple demographic profile adjustments may not be adequate.

4.2.5. Online Polls

Internet surveys are increasingly being used for opinion polls. As with telephone, its viability as a method of carrying out pre election polls depends to a large extent on the accessibility of a representative sample via the internet. Given the spread of the internet, there are a number of countries where this can be done, if care is taken to include people who do not have the possibility to use the Internet at home, but connect to the internet at work or in some other place. The *ESOMAR Guideline on Research Using the Internet* contains additional guidance on requirements including online sampling and the use of access panels.

Guideline This method should not be used for pre-election polling without evidence that a representative sample of electors can be contacted via the internet. As with telephone surveys, the polling organisation must correct for any under-representation. Simple demographic profile adjustments will generally not be adequate. The organisation should provide information about sample coverage and the weighting variables used to correct the data.

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4.2.6. Weighting

In order to conduct fast surveys with large samples, most pre-election opinion polls based on face-to-face interviews will use quota sampling methods. The application of simple demographic weights to ensure an accurate sample balance is standard good practice. If some parts of the electorate have been deliberately over-sampled, weighting should be used to re-establish the correct balance (see section 4.2.11 for additional information).

Guideline The demographic profile of pre-election polls should be checked for representativeness and, if necessary, weighting should be applied to represent correctly the electorate. Polling companies should ensure that the population profile used is that of electors eligible to vote rather than the more normal all adults profile used in commercial market research.

4.2.7. Adjustments

In some circumstances polling organisations may feel that the result of their pre-election poll is not an accurate guide to the likely outcome. The most obvious example is where the voting intention of those with a high likelihood of casting their vote is different from the total sample.

In some countries it is common to measure self-reported voting at the previous election and use this to adjust the voting estimate from the current survey. In Denmark and France this is an important quality improving procedure. However, this approach does not work as well in other countries.

Experience has shown that voting intention measurements in some countries need adjustment in order to provide a reliable guide to public opinion. In these countries the weighting or adjustment strategy of the polling organisation may be confidential to that company for competitive reasons. In such circumstances, where the adjustment is made via a stable and systematic procedure, the polling company may wish to withhold full details of its method.

Guideline Polling organisations should not make any adjustments to the simple poll result which cannot be documented and defined in advance of seeing the results. Any adjustments must be capable of being repeated and justified. It is good practice for pre-election polls to measure key variables such as likelihood to vote, and to consider whether the simple poll result should be adjusted. Where adjustments to the unweighted poll findings are made, this should be noted in the publication of the poll findings.

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4.2.8. Survey content

Pre-election opinion polls will have greater political and social value if they do not confine themselves only to measuring voting intention but also explore the reasons for party choice and opinions on important campaign issues.

Guideline Wherever possible, pre-election polls should measure reasons for party choice or attitudes on issues or other aspects of the campaign.

4.2.9. Time series

Polling organisations use different methodological designs that may distinguish one firm from another. The meaning of a final pre-election poll is far easier to determine if it is the latest of a series of polls conducted by the same organisation during the campaign.

Guideline The validity of the methods used by an organisation can be judged better if they produce a series of voting intention estimates during the campaign. Any obvious biases will become apparent by comparison with the published polls of other organisations.

4.2.10. Consistent design

The ability to compare a final pre-election poll with previous polls from the same organisation is weakened if the organisation changes key aspects of its methodology for the final poll. It could be argued that there is a benefit if polling organisations improve the methodological quality of the design they use for final polls. However, this reduces the comparability of a series of polls from the same polling organization, and suggests that some campaign polls can be of poorer quality. However, if polls are to make a valid contribution to informing the political process, they must **all** be of high quality. A two-tier quality policy undermines the value of polls.

Guideline Polling organisations should attempt to keep key elements of methodology consistent throughout the election campaign. This particularly applies to sampling method, question wording and the positioning of voting intention questions. It does not apply to sample size. Where polls are based on eligible (registered) voters early in the campaign and subsequently move to samples of "likely" voters late in the campaign, this adjustment should be clearly noted and distinguished.

4.2.11. Indicator variables

It is possible to interview a sample representative as far as age, sex and social grade are concerned, but still have a politically unrepresentative sample. For example, section 4.2.1 refers to the issue of representing working electors by ensuring that the fieldwork period

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includes some evening and weekend interviewing.

It is good practice in a pre-election poll to include the collection of information which is correlated with voting behaviour but which is not part of the quota control. The item should have a known distribution from alternative sources. Variables such as religion or language spoken may be possible indicator variables if they have not been used in the design of the survey quota controls.

Guideline Polling companies should be encouraged to develop an indicator variable for sample weighting purposes. In the period between elections it is possible to calibrate the electoral implication of an over or under representation of the indicator variable.

4.2.12. Unusual poll results

Probability theory suggests that one poll in twenty may give results outside the normal 95% confidence limits. A polling organisation may therefore find itself with a pre-election poll that is out of line with all the campaign evidence available up to that point. Usually there will be little time available between getting the final result and writing the copy for publication.

Guideline It is unacceptable to suppress a pre-election poll that looks out of line with earlier polls unless a valid technical reason why the poll is wrong has been established. It is also unacceptable to make a "gut feeling" adjustment. The poll should be published with appropriate warning about the unusual poll result. The odds are 20:1 in favour of the poll being correct and voters do change their minds even in the polling booth.

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5. GUIDELINE ON CONDUCTING EXIT POLLS AND ELECTION RESULT FORECASTS

5.1. Introduction

An increasingly popular component of the television coverage of election nights is the exit poll. These are not based on nationally representative samples of **voters** asked their voting intention. Exit polls are polls of voters, interviewed **after** they have voted, and **no later** than Election Day. They may include the interviewing before Election Day of postal, absentee and other early voters. In some countries Election Day polls cannot be conducted at the polling place, but in most cases, interviewing takes place at the polling location.

Exit polls can serve three different functions that are not mutually exclusive:

- predicting election results
- describing patterns of voter support for parties, candidates, and issues
- supporting extensive academic research efforts

The main difference between these may be the speed with which the results are formulated and disseminated.

Exit polls used for projections should be reported as soon as is practical after the polls close. Any delay in disseminating the results will inevitably raise questions about the legitimacy of the effort, especially with regard to estimating the outcome of the election. If analysis is the only purpose of the exit poll, prompt release is less important.

In some countries, election laws prohibit the publication of exit poll data until after the polls have closed. WAPOR and ESOMAR oppose regulation of the conduct and reporting of polls in principle. Nevertheless, statements about the outcome of an election based on exit polls **must not** be published before all the polls in the contest have closed. In national elections, this means polls relating to election results for elections in smaller voting units can be reported when all the polling places have closed in those locations, rather than waiting until all polling places used for voting that day have closed. Descriptive information other than voting behaviour may be published before the polls have closed, unless this is prohibited by local legislation or codes of practice.

5.2. Specific requirements for exit polls

Survey researchers in general and those conducting exit polls in particular need to follow certain broad principles in conducting their research:

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1. Exit polls conducted for public consumption must be impartial and non-partisan. Exit polls are designed to collect data from voters and report information on electoral outcomes. They are not tools for partisan advocacy.

2. Methods must be transparent, public, and well-documented. These goals can be achieved by publicly describing the methods prior to conducting the exit poll and by adhering to the standards of minimal disclosure delineated in this Guideline. It is also recommended that when the exit poll is used for analysis, the data set (without individual identifiers) along with appropriate survey documentation be deposited in public archives and/or on websites for general access.

3. Researchers must adopt study designs for their exit polls that are suitable for producing accurate and reliable results and that follow specific procedural and technical standards stipulated in this document.

4. When reporting results from exit polls, researchers must observe the requirements for publication of surveys in the ICC/ESOMAR Code and be careful to keep their interpretations and statements fully consistent with the data. Speculation and commentary should not be labelled as data-based reporting. Limitations and weaknesses in the design of an exit poll, its execution, and the results must be noted in all reports and analyses. Results must be released to the public and other interested parties through the general media and simultaneously made accessible to all.

5. The identity of respondents in exit polls must be protected. Identifying information (e.g. name, address, or other IDs) must not be maintained with the voter-level records, and the data set should not allow deductive disclosure of respondents' identities. To limit the chances of deductive disclosure, small-area geographic details such as the specific polling place in which votes were cast must not be revealed.

6. Poll methods used must be those generally accepted as good survey practice and must be disclosed in advance of the conduct of the exit poll, as well as with any projection or analysis or subsequent public release of the dataset.

5.2.1. Items for minimal disclosure

1. These items must be disclosed with any exit poll report or when any projection is made. Good practice would be to disclose as much of the methodology in advance as possible, particularly those **items in italics**, which must be disclosed **before** Election Day.

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- *Sponsor of the exit poll*
- *Name of the polling company or principal researcher; prior experience (if any) in exit polling; and whether the data collector has any business or personal ties to political parties, candidates, political organizations or governmental bodies.*
- *Name of the organization responsible for analysis and projections, if different.*
- *Number of interviews*
- *Number of polling stations or sampling points if this is not where the sampling takes place*
- *Sampling frame*
- *Geographic dispersion and coverage*
- *How sampling points are selected*
- *Where and how interviews are conducted: at polling places, in person at homes, by phone, by self-administered questionnaire etc.*
- *Any legal limits on data collection that might affect polling accuracy (e.g. minimum distance of interviewers from the polling place)*
- Time of day of interviewing
- Whether interviewers are part of a permanent field staff or hired for the occasion
- *How respondent anonymity is guaranteed (paper questionnaires, etc.)*
- The interview schedule or questionnaire and instructions
- Which results are based on parts of the sample, rather than the whole sample
- A description of the precision of the findings, including estimates of sampling error
- Monitoring and validation procedures (if any)
- Weighting procedures
- Response rates (using one of the definitions in the AAPOR/WAPOR "Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates for Surveys") and item non-response on vote questions.
- Any known non-response bias
- General description of how estimates are made and the kinds of variables that are being used, and whether adjustments for non-response have been made
- Known design effects

2. Political parties may sometimes make claims about private data. These claims also require documentation. Any public statement referring to exit poll results must abide by the disclosure principles and requirements above.

3. Those conducting exit polls must always use generally accepted statistical methods. However, there are a number of good practices that apply specifically to exit polls.

• Exit polls typically employ clustering in their sample designs. Because of the possibilities that various groups might

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attempt to influence voters and/or exit poll respondents, researchers are not expected to disclose the actual sample points or locations.

• Exit polls must collect information across the whole of the polling day. Probability sampling (or full census) for interviews conducted at the polling place is the only acceptable selection method. Quotas are not appropriate for sampling at the polling place.

• A national exit poll must represent the entire country, with 95% of the target population included in the sampling frame. If the sampling frame covers less than 95% of the target population, there must be an explanation for that decision.

• Researchers must keep in mind the relationship between small units for which the votes are tabulated and that can also serve as clusters for exit poll interviews. One way to evaluate an exit poll is to compare the actual election results with the estimates derived from the exit poll interviews for these same units. This comparison of small unit accuracy, typically at the precinct or polling place level, is one of the best ways to understand the exit poll's success. But there are situations where this will not be possible, either because no tabulations are reported at the smallest voting unit level or because the sampling units do not coincide with voting units.

5.2.2. Election projection methods and their disclosure

1. Election projections can be made in other ways than by interviewing voters as they exit the polling place. While most projections are based on interviews with voters after they have voted at a polling place, other forecasting models may include:

• interviews in person, by telephone, or by other means of communication with voters after or before having cast their votes
• counts of official votes in a sample of precincts, often known as quick counts
• a mix of methods

2. A projection is an estimate that leads to a conclusion about the outcome of an election in a jurisdiction such as a nation, a state or a district. This may occur in two different situations:

• If the winner is based on the popular vote for an office or a party, then a projection of the division of that vote is a projection of the outcome in the jurisdiction.
• If the winner is based on the vote in multiple jurisdictions, such as election of a Parliament where votes are cast in

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districts or of a President where votes are accumulated based on victories won in many jurisdictions, a conclusion about which party has a plurality of seats in the new Parliament or which presidential candidate has a winning number of votes is a national projection.

The projection need not reach a conclusion about each sub-jurisdiction. It need only reach a conclusion about the jurisdiction outcome.

The objective of any projection is a conclusion about an election for some jurisdiction. A sample of that jurisdiction must be adequate to reach an unbiased conclusion with sufficient/appropriate confidence in the estimate. A national projection typically requires the coverage of the entire country, with at least 95% of the target population in the sampling frame.

There will be times that a subset of the country will be used (for example, only competitive districts). But if the sampling frame is used that includes something less than the entire voting population of a jurisdiction, then the researcher should define in a disclosure statement what is and is not included in the sampling frame. The researcher must also publish a rationale to justify the researcher's ability to make an unbiased conclusion about the election outcome based upon collecting information from a subset of all jurisdictions. Similar rules to those for the provision of basic information apply. The following information should be made available before election day:

- Sponsor of the exit poll
- Name of the polling company or principal researcher; prior experience (if any) in projections; and whether the data collector has any business or personal ties to political parties, candidates, political organizations or governmental bodies.
- Name of the organization responsible for analysis and projections, if different.
- Source of the data used to make the projections (i.e. interviews in person, by telephone, or by other means of communication with voters after or before having cast their votes).

"Market research, which includes social and opinion research, is the systematic gathering and interpretation of information about individuals or organisations using the statistical and analytical methods and techniques of the applied social sciences to gain insight or support decision making.

The identity of respondents will not be revealed to the user of the information without explicit consent and no sales approach will be made to them as a direct result of their having provided information."

Definition of market research contained in the ICC/ESOMAR International Code

ESOMAR
Eurocenter 2
Barbara Strozzilaan 384
1083 HN Amsterdam
The Netherlands
Tel +31 20 664 2141
Fax +31 20 664 2922
E-mail professional.standards@esomar.org
www.esomar.org

ESOMAR is the world organisation for enabling better research into markets, consumers and societies.

With 5000 members in over 100 countries, ESOMAR's aim is to promote the value of market and opinion research in illuminating real issues and bringing about effective decision-making.

To facilitate this ongoing dialogue, ESOMAR creates and manages a comprehensive programme of industry-specific and thematic events, publications and communications, as well as actively advocating self-regulation and the worldwide code of practice.

Founded in 1947, the World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR, www.wapor.org) is dedicated to advancing the scientific study of public opinion.

Its members around the world work to maintain high standards for collecting, analysing, and disseminating public opinion data. Each year, the organisation holds conferences and workshops involving academics, practitioners, journalists, and policy-makers.

WAPOR sponsors the multidisciplinary research journal, the *International Journal of Public Opinion Research.*

WORLD ESOMAR RESEARCH

World Association for Public Opinion Research
WAPOR
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