

ESOMAR/WAPOR Guide to Opinion Polls

(Reference website: <http://www.esomar.org>)

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1. Introduction to the Guide (part of)

Public opinion polls are regularly conducted and published in many countries. They measure not only support for political parties but also public opinion on a wide range of social and political issues and are published frequently in a variety of newspapers and broadcast media. They are the subject of much discussion by the public, journalists and politicians, some of whom wish to limit or ban them completely. In a small number of European countries legislation actually exists which restricts the publication of opinion polls during the late stages of election campaigns.

The public discussion of opinion polls is not always well informed. The case for restriction on the publication of polls during election campaigns is hard to support with rational argument or empirical evidence. ESOMAR has produced the present booklet 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.

WAPOR joins ESOMAR in the publication of this booklet. The WAPOR Council endorses all recommendations put forward in this document. WAPOR and ESOMAR believe there is a need for more consultation and coordination in issuing future guidelines and statements regarding standards of practice in the industry, given the rapid growth in market and opinion research around the world and the new technologies and developments.

4.2 The Code (part of, meaning the “International Code of Practice for the Publication of Public Opinion Poll Results”)

B. Additional Requirements

3. When any public opinion poll findings are published in print media these should 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 random samples, the success rate achieved);
- (f) the method by which the information was collected (personal or telephone interview, etc.);
- (g) 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 previous published report to which refer-ence is made.

4. In the case of broadcast media it may not be possible always to give information on all these points. As a minimum, points (a) - (d) above should normally be covered in any broadcast reference to the findings of a public opinion poll, preferably in visual (written) form where practical.

5. 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 significantly affect the interpretation of the findings. When comparing the findings from different surveys, any changes (other than minor ones) in these percentages must also be indicated.

6. In the case of voting-intention surveys, it must always be made clear if voting-intention percentages quoted include any of these respondents who answered 'don't know' or 'may not/will not vote' in reply to the voting questions asked.

7. 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 other information about the survey methods described in the Notes on the application of Rule 25 of the International Code. Where the questions reported on have formed part of a more extensive or 'omnibus' survey, this must be made clear to any enquirer.

C. Arrangements between the Research Organisation and its Client

8. In order to ensure that these Code requirements 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 supplementary Code.

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

9. 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 clearly to distinguish between the survey findings as such and any editorial or other comments based upon them. Particularly in the case of print reports, the research organisation must wherever feasible approve in advance the exact form and content of publication as required in Rule 27 of the original International Code.

10. 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 issue immediately 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.

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