

Quick Reference Guide

MRIA CODE OF CONDUCT FOR MARKET AND SOCIAL RESEARCH

APPENDIX "L"

Polling Standards

This document contains the following information:

1. Mandatory disclosures when releasing polling results
2. Additional responsibilities of researchers
3. Telephone polls (IVR and Live interviewer) and CRTC regulations
4. Mixed Modes
5. Margin of Error
6. Canada Elections Act

1. Mandatory disclosure requirements for publishing results (the detailed technical information)

Researchers who conduct public opinion polls and publicly release the survey results must make available the following mandatory disclosures about their research to allow the public, and the MRIA, ensure that the research is reliable and valid. This information must be available at the same time the survey results are released:

This information has to be available in one of two ways:

- Posted on the researcher's website
- A document containing the information that is available immediately upon request by any member of the public, media and the MRIA.

A "public" release of opinion survey results includes news releases, online mentions, social media postings, television or radio appearances, and comments made to print and online news media.

The mandatory disclosures requirements for all public opinion surveys are as follows:

- The names of the organization which conducted the poll and its sponsor
- The universe effectively represented (i.e. who was interviewed)
- The actual sample size (number of completed interviews included in the reported findings) and the geographical coverage.
- The dates of fieldwork.
- The sampling method used.
- The method by which the poll was conducted (in-person, telephone interview (live interviewer or IVR), internet access panel, mixed mode etc.).
- If the poll was conducted using an internet access panel, and if the recruitment method to build the panel is based on multiple sources
- The number of call-backs for telephone interviews, IVR or live interviewer (CATI).
- Details of any strategies used to help gain cooperation and whether incentives were used
- Whether weighting was used to adjust the results and the general demographic or behavioural characteristics used for the weights.
- The weighted and unweighted results presented in data tables, and an explanation if there are any significant differences. The data tables must include base numbers and percentages
- 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).
- The full disposition including the survey qualification questions
- The questions asked, and the results for each question.
- In data tables, the full question wording must be included
- When the questions are part of a more extensive or omnibus survey, this must be clearly indicated
- Any relevant stimuli, such as visual or sensory exhibits or show cards that were used.

Recommended disclosure

- The "likely voter" model, if used, and the details of the model

Researchers must ensure that all communications of opinion survey results indicate that the mandatory disclosures are available either on their website and or upon request.

More detailed information for each of the mandatory disclosure requirements listed above is available in the official polling standards document.

2. Additional responsibilities of researchers

All researchers must:

- Register their research project with the MRIA's Research Verification Service to allow the public to verify the legitimacy of the project.
- Immediately notify clients, or media who have published the results, of any error(s) made by the researcher
- Notify the MRIA Compliance Officer (by email) if an individual or organization is misreporting the results of a poll, and/or is reporting results without permission, and/or using polling results in the way they were not intended to be used (i.e. aggregators)
- Publish on their website the reasons for any "rogue" polls, or drastically different results between polls they (the individual researcher) have conducted on the same subject (e.g. during elections)

3. Telephone polls (Live Interviewer/CATI and IVR)

The MRIA has adopted the CRTC regulations for Automated Dialing-Announcing Devices and the recommended "best practices" from the Ministry of Public Works and Government Services Canada (for public opinion polling data collection) for all telephone polls (live interviewer/CATI or IVR). This standard applies to public opinion polls AND any other type of research that uses IVR or live interviewers.

Researchers **must** take the following steps to minimize the level of intrusion:

- Begin each call "with a clear message identifying the person on whose behalf the telecommunication is made and a brief description of the purpose of the telecommunication. This identification message shall include:
 - An electronic mail address or postal mailing address and a local or toll-free telecommunications number at which a representative of the originator of the message can be reached.
 - In the event that the actual message relayed exceeds sixty (60) seconds, the identification message shall be repeated at the end of the telecommunication¹

¹ <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/trules-reglest.htm> Part IV: Automatic Dialing-Announcing Device (ADAD) Rules, 4.d)

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE – POLLING STANDARDS – APPENDIX "L"

- Make no more than 8 calls to the same telephone number². This number includes:
 - callbacks made to establish initial contact with the potential respondent (for instance, when there was no answer or the line was busy on previous calls); and
 - callbacks made after contact has been established (for instance, when the potential respondent asked for a callback at a more convenient time, or when the selected respondent was not home)
- Calls to prospective respondents may only be made between 9 a.m. and 9:30 p.m. Monday to Friday, and 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Saturday and Sunday.³
- Researchers who want to reach a representative sample of the population **must** include mobile phones in their sampling frames. The specific proportion of interviews on mobile phones and the sample mix of landline and mobiles are dependent on the specific proportions of landline and mobile phones in Canada.
- However a sample is drawn, researchers must disclose any non-coverage.
- When incorporating mobile phones in a sample, researchers must follow the MRIA Guideline for Conducting Mobile Market Research
- If phone samples are used for polls, methods must be applied to correct for any under-representation of supporters of particular political parties. Simple demographic profile adjustments may not be adequate.

4. Mixed Modes

The use of multiple modes within a single poll is becoming common, especially as a way of ensuring coverage for groups that may be difficult to reach by the main polling method. For example, telephone interviews may be combined with online polls.

- The value of using multiple modes is their representativeness; however, researchers must always be aware of the possibilities of mode effects as different modes may produce different answers.
- When publishing results from polls using mixed modes, researchers **must** provide for each mode the mandatory disclosures.

² See <http://www.tpsgc-pwgsc.gc.ca/rop-por/rappports-reports/telephone/etape-stage-02-eng.html>, section 2.1.3. "Using callbacks well is one of the most common and effective ways to increase response rates. **Under the current Standing Offer of the Government of Canada, eight callbacks are required before a sample record is retired.** This number includes callbacks made to establish initial contact with the potential respondent (for instance, when there was no answer or the line was busy on previous calls) *and* callbacks made after contact has been established (for instance, when the potential respondent asked for a callback at a more convenient time, or when the selected respondent was not home)."

³ <http://www.crtc.gc.ca/eng/trules-reglest.htm> Part IV: Automatic Dialing-Announcing Device (ADAD) Rules. 4.b)

5. Margin of Error⁴

The MRIA recognizes that the marketing research industry is changing and the notion of the margin of error, and what modes of research are considered probability samples, is evolving.

The MRIA DOES NOT consider online polls to be probability samples.

As per Appendix D – Scientific Integrity of the MRIA Code, the following is the current **guideline** for reporting a margin of error:

Integrity of Reporting

Section b)

[...]

"Researchers must not present research results with greater confidence than the data warrants. Instead, as responsible professionals, members must point out the relevant limitations of the research. This includes but is not limited to the following guidelines:

- i. Disclosing relevant potential sources of error, both sampling and non-sampling (e.g. response, non-response, measurement, coverage, etc.).
- ii. Being explicit about the assumptions made about data accuracy when employing quota or stratification methods with probability samples.
- iii. Refraining from making unqualified statements about confidence intervals or margins of sampling error on population estimates when probability samples are not used. For example, panels of repeat volunteers will not ordinarily qualify as sources of probability samples of the general population."

6. Canada Elections Act

The Canada Elections Act contains several regulations all researchers must be aware of and abide by – failure to do so could result in charges being laid under the Act.

There are mandatory disclosure requirements when reporting "election opinion surveys," and blackout periods. The MRIA's mandatory disclosure requirements continue to apply during elections.

The mandatory disclosure requirements are not limited to researchers. They apply to the *"first person who transmits the results of an election survey...to the public during an election period and any person who transmits them to the public within 24 hours after they are first transmitted to the public."*

⁴ This section cannot be finalized until AAPOR makes a decision.

Researchers should be aware of this regulation and communicate it to media, or anyone else, who plans to publish poll results.

Below are the applicable sections of the Canada Elections Act that all researchers must be aware of⁵:

Transmission of election survey results

Section 326 (1) The first person who transmits the results of an election survey — other than a survey that is described in section 327 — to the public during an election period and any person who transmits them to the public within 24 hours after they are first transmitted to the public must provide the following together with the results:

- (a) the name of the sponsor of the survey;
- (b) the name of the person or organization that conducted the survey;
- (c) the date on which or the period during which the survey was conducted;
- (d) the population from which the sample of respondents was drawn;
- (e) the number of people who were contacted to participate in the survey; and
- (f) if applicable, the margin of error in respect of the data obtained.

Additional information — published surveys

(2) In addition to the information referred to in subsection (1), the following must be provided in the case of a transmission to the public by means other than broadcasting: (a) the wording of the survey questions in respect of which data is obtained; and (b) the means by which a report referred to in subsection (3) may be obtained.

Report on survey results

(3) A sponsor of an election survey shall, at any time during an election period after the results of the survey are transmitted to the public, provide, on request, a copy of a written report on the results of the survey, as transmitted under subsection (1). The report shall include the following, as applicable:

- (a) the name and address of the sponsor of the survey;
- (b) the name and address of the person or organization that conducted the survey;
- (c) the date on which or the period during which the survey was conducted;

⁵ <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/e-2.01/>

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE – POLLING STANDARDS – APPENDIX "L"

(d) information about the method used to collect the data from which the survey results are derived, including

(i) the sampling method,

(ii) the population from which the sample was drawn,

(iii) the size of the initial sample,

(iv) the number of individuals who were asked to participate in the survey and the numbers and respective percentages of them who participated in the survey, refused to participate in the survey, and were ineligible to participate in the survey,

(v) the dates and time of day of the interviews,

(vi) the method used to recalculate data to take into account in the survey the results of participants who expressed no opinion, were undecided or failed to respond to any or all of the survey questions, and

(vii) any weighting factors or normalization procedures used in deriving the results of the survey; and

(e) the wording of the survey questions and, if applicable, the margins of error in respect of the data obtained.

Broadcast of surveys not based on recognized statistical methods

Section 327 The first person who transmits the results of an election survey that is not based on recognized statistical methods to the public during an election period and any person who transmits them within 24 hours after they are first transmitted to the public must indicate that the survey was not based on recognized statistical methods.

Prohibition — causing transmission of election survey results during blackout period

Section 328 (1) No person shall knowingly cause to be transmitted to the public, in an electoral district on polling day before the close of all of the polling stations in that electoral district, the results of an election survey that have not previously been transmitted to the public.

Prohibition — transmission of election survey results during blackout period

(2) No person shall transmit to the public, in an electoral district on polling day before the close of all of the polling stations in that electoral district, the results of an election survey that have not previously been transmitted to the public.