



APAPC Code of Professional Ethics & Practices – Polling Services

We, the Board of Directors of the Asia Pacific Association of Political Consultants, subscribe and adhere to the principles expressed in the following code.

Our goals are to support sound and ethical practice in the conduct of public opinion research and in the use of such research for policy- and decision-making in the public and private sectors, as well as to improve public understanding of public opinion and survey research methods and the proper use of public opinion and survey research results.

We pledge ourselves to maintain high standards of scientific competence and integrity in conducting, analyzing, and reporting our work; in our relations with survey respondents; with our clients; with those who eventually use the research for decision-making purposes; and with the general public.

We further pledge ourselves to reject all tasks or assignments that would require activities inconsistent with the principles of this code.

THE CODE

I. Principles of Professional Practice in the Conduct of Our Work

- A. We shall exercise due care in developing research designs and survey instruments, and in collecting, processing, and analyzing data, taking all reasonable steps to assure the reliability and validity of results.
 - 1. We shall recommend and employ only those tools and methods of analysis that, in our professional judgment, are well suited to the research problem at hand.
 - 2. We shall not knowingly select research tools and methods of analysis that yield misleading conclusions.
 - 3. We shall not knowingly make interpretations of research results that are inconsistent with the data available, nor shall we tacitly permit such interpretations.
 - 4. We shall not knowingly imply that interpretations should be accorded greater confidence than the data actually warrant.
- B. We shall describe our methods and findings accurately and in appropriate detail in all research reports, adhering to the standards for minimal disclosure specified in Section III.
- C. If any of our work becomes the subject of a formal investigation of an alleged violation of this Code, undertaken with the approval of the APAPC Board of Directors, we shall provide additional information on the survey in such detail that a fellow survey practitioner would be able to conduct a professional evaluation of the survey.

II. Principles of Professional Responsibility in Our Dealings With People

- A. The Public:
 - 1. When preparing a report for public release we shall ensure that the findings are a balanced and accurate portrayal of the survey results.
 - 2. If we become aware of the appearance in public of serious inaccuracies or distortions regarding our research, we shall publicly disclose what is required to correct these inaccuracies or distortions, including, as appropriate, a statement to the public media, legislative body, regulatory agency, or other appropriate group, to which the inaccuracies or distortions were presented.
 - 3. We shall inform those for whom we conduct publicly released surveys that APAPC standards require members to release minimal information about such surveys, and we shall make all reasonable efforts to encourage clients to subscribe to our standards for minimal disclosure in their releases.
- B. Clients or Sponsors:
 - 1. When undertaking work for a private client, we shall hold confidential all proprietary information obtained about the client and about the conduct and findings of the research undertaken for the client, except when the dissemination of the information is expressly authorized by the client, or when disclosure becomes necessary under the terms of Section I-C or II-A of this Code.
 - 2. We shall be mindful of the limitations of our techniques and capabilities and shall accept only those research assignments that we can reasonably expect to accomplish within these limitations.
- C. The Profession:
 - 1. We recognize our responsibility to the science of survey research to disseminate as freely as possible the ideas and findings that emerge from our research.
 - 2. We shall not cite our membership in the Association as evidence of professional competence, since the Association does not so certify any persons or organizations.
- D. The Respondent:
 - 1. We shall avoid practices or methods that may harm, humiliate, or seriously mislead survey respondents.
 - 2. We shall respect respondents' concerns about their privacy.
 - 3. Aside from the decennial census and a few other surveys, participation in surveys is voluntary. We shall provide all persons selected for inclusion with a description of the survey sufficient to permit them to make an informed and free decision about their participation.
 - 4. We shall not misrepresent our research or conduct other activities (such as sales, fund raising, or political campaigning) under the guise of conducting research.

5. Unless the respondent waives confidentiality for specified uses, we shall hold as privileged and confidential all information that might identify a respondent with his or her responses. We also shall not disclose or use the names of respondents for non-research purposes unless the respondents grant us permission to do so.
6. We understand that the use of our survey results in a legal proceeding does not relieve us of our ethical obligation to keep confidential all respondent identifiable information or lessen the importance of respondent anonymity.

III. Standards for Minimal Disclosure

Good professional practice imposes the obligation upon all public opinion researchers to include, in any report of research results, or to make available when that report is released, certain essential information about how the research was conducted. At a minimum, the following items should be disclosed.

1. Who sponsored the survey, and who conducted it.
2. The exact wording of questions asked, including the text of any preceding instruction or explanation to the interviewer or respondents that might reasonably be expected to affect the response.
3. A definition of the population under study, and a description of the sampling frame used to identify this population.
4. A description of the sample design, giving a clear indication of the method by which the respondents were selected by the researcher, or whether the respondents were entirely self-selected.
5. Sample sizes and, where appropriate, eligibility criteria, screening procedures, and response rates computed according to APAPC Standard Definitions. At a minimum, a summary of disposition of sample cases should be provided so that response rates could be computed.
6. A discussion of the precision of the findings, including estimates of sampling error, and a description of any weighting or estimating procedures used.
7. Which results are based on parts of the sample, rather than on the total sample, and the size of such parts.
8. Method, location, and dates of data collection.

From time to time, APAPC may issue guidelines and recommendations on best practices with regard to the release, design and conduct of surveys.

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Survey Practices that APAPC Condemns

APAPC condemns certain misleading practices sometimes performed in the name of research. In no case are the following practices deemed legitimate or acceptable elements of professionally conducted research:

- **Requiring a monetary payment or soliciting monetary contributions from members of the public as part of a research process.** This set of practices amounts to fund raising under the guise of research. It takes unfair advantage of the cooperative attitude that a majority of the public manifests when asked to take part in a legitimate information gathering process. In some cases, unwary members of the public are enticed to contribute money as a condition of gaining some future "benefit" from their participation.
- **Offering products or services for sale, or using participant contacts as a means of generating sales leads.** A common practice is to gain entry or acceptance in order to make a sales pitch by initially defining the contact as being made for "research" purposes. This trades on the prestige of science, and it exploits the willingness of the public to reveal information about themselves in the public interest. In some cases, questions establish respondents' susceptibility to sales pressure or their interest in some product or service. Follow-up contacts are then made to those so identified, all under the guise of "research."
- **Revealing the identity of individual respondents to a survey or participants in a research process without their permission.** It is normal research practice to pledge anonymity or confidentiality to the public in order to secure their cooperation and frankness in responding to questions. Revealing the identity of individuals, for whatever purpose, is a violation of that pledge unless a respondent's prior informed consent has been

obtained.

- **Representing the results of a 900-number or other type of self-selected "poll" as if they were the outcome of legitimate research.** 900-number and other types of write-in, call-in, and interactive polls have become increasingly common. These "polls" report the opinions of only those people who called in, and not those of the general public. APAPC believes that any publicizing or promotion of such activities not only damages legitimate market and survey research, but can be very misleading when used to influence public policy or simply to disseminate information about the general public.
- **Conducting a so-called "push poll," a telemarketing technique in which telephone calls are used to canvass potential voters, feeding them false or misleading "information" about a candidate under the pretense of taking a poll to see how this "information" affects voter preferences.** So-called "push polls" are not polls at all. They are a form of political telemarketing whose intent is not to measure public opinion but to manipulate -- "push" -- voters away from one candidate and toward the opposing candidate. Such polls defame selected candidates by spreading false or misleading information about them. The intent is to disseminate campaign propaganda under the guise of conducting a legitimate public opinion poll.

As members of APAPC, a professional organization which relies on public cooperation to gather information that is useful in formulating public policy as well as in understanding the public's preferences for products and services, we condemn these practices in the strongest terms.

APAPC Statement on "Push" Polls

The problem of so-called "push polls" When advocacy calls are made under the guise of research

June 2007 This statement from APAPC explains how to tell the difference between fraudulent political polls—commonly referred to as "push polls"—and legitimate polling, including message testing. APAPC condemns political telemarketing under the guise of research and is committed to providing information that explains what this unethical campaign practice is and what you can do about it.

A "Push Poll" is not a Legitimate Poll

A so-called "push poll" is an insidious form of negative campaigning, disguised as a political poll. "Push polls" are not surveys at all, but rather unethical political telemarketing -- telephone calls disguised as research that aim to persuade large numbers of voters and affect election outcomes, rather than measure opinions. This misuse of the survey method exploits the trust people have in research organizations and violates the APAPC Code of Professional Ethics and Practices.

Identifying Advocacy Calls Made Under the Guise of Research

Political telemarketing calls, when disguised as research, may sometimes be difficult to differentiate from a legitimate survey. Here are characteristics that will *usually* indicate to a respondent that the call is *not* a legitimate survey.

- One or only a few questions are asked, all about a single candidate or a single issue.
- The questions are uniformly strongly negative (or sometimes uniformly positive) descriptions of the candidate or issue.
- The organization conducting the calls is not named, or a phony name is used.
- Evasive answers are given in response to requests for more information about the survey.
- In addition, the following characteristics will indicate to journalists, reporters, and survey professionals that a telephone call is not a legitimate survey.
- The number of people called is very large, sometimes many thousands.
- The calls are not based on a random sample.
- It is difficult to find out which organization conducted the interviews.

Fraudulent Polls vs. Message Testing

The fact that a poll contains negative information about one or more candidates does NOT in and of itself make it a 'push poll.' Political campaigns routinely sponsor legitimate "message-testing" surveys that are used by campaign consultants to test out the effectiveness of various possible campaign messages or campaign ad content, often including negative messages.

Political message-testing surveys may sometimes be confused with fake polling, but they are very different. One way to tell is that message-testing surveys exhibit the characteristics of a legitimate survey, such as:

- At the beginning of the call, the interviewer clearly identifies the call center actually making the calls. (However, legitimate political polling firms will often choose not to identify the client who is sponsoring the research, be it a candidate or a political party, since that could bias the survey results.)
- The interview contains more than a few questions.
- The questions usually ask about more than one candidate or mention both sides of an issue.
- Questions, usually near the end of the interview, ask respondents to report demographic characteristics such as age, education level, and party identification.
- The survey is based on a random sample of voters.
- The number of respondents falls within the range of legitimate surveys, typically between 400 and 1500 interviews.

APAPC stresses that these criteria apply most of the time, but exceptions will arise. Journalists and members of the public are encouraged to investigate allegations of "push polling" to ascertain whether or not the calling activity was carried out for legitimate research purposes.

The Threats of Fraudulent Political Calls (Political Telemarketing Under the Guise of Research)

Political advocacy calls made under the guise of a survey abuse the public's trust. They gain the attention of respondents under false pretenses by taking advantage of the good will people have toward legitimate research. When disguised as research, these calls create negative images of legitimate surveys, especially when they distort issues or candidate characteristics in order to influence opinion. They go beyond the ethical boundaries of political polling by bombarding voters with distorted or even false statements in an effort to manufacture negative attitudes. The hostility created in this way affects legitimate surveys by reducing the public's willingness to cooperate with future survey requests.

APAPC Position on So-Called "Push Polls"

- APAPC Councils have repeatedly warned members and the public about the harm done by unethical political telemarketing that is conducted under the guise of research.
- In 2005, the [APAPC Code](#) was amplified to identify fraudulent political polling as unethical conduct. The Code states: "We shall not misrepresent our research or conduct other activities (such as sales, fund raising, or *political campaigning*) under the guise of conducting research" [section II.D.4, emphasis added].
- APAPC has reacted to complaints about suspected "push polls" and conducted investigations.
- APAPC urges its members and the media to uncover instances of political telemarketing under the guise of research and help us alert the public promptly when these fraudulent political polls occur.

([The American Association of Political Consultants](#), the [National Council on Public Polls](#) and [The American Association for Public Opinion Research](#) have also issued statements condemning "push polls," and member organizations of these associations are pledged not to conduct them.)

Issues in Message Testing

Despite their legitimacy of purpose, message-testing surveys occasionally generate vigorous complaint. They are sometimes the subject of public controversy in political campaigns, and may appear in press stories about dubious campaign practices.

APAPC recognizes that message tests may need to communicate positive or negative information in strongly political terms, in a tone similar to campaign advertisements. Still, these surveys should be judged by the same ethical standards as any other poll of the public: Do they include any false or misleading statements? Do they treat the respondent with fairness and respect?

Issues with Automated Calling

New technologies for contacting people by phone, including pre-recorded political messages, automated touch-tone polls, and interactive voice response technology, all offer new opportunities for political campaigns—and new possibilities for abuse as well.

The issues are the same whether a live telephone caller or an automated system makes the call. Advocacy or canvassing calls should never be misrepresented to voters as research calls, whatever the mechanism of communication.

How Can You Help Combat Fraudulent Political Polling -- So-Called "Push" Polls?

APAPC urges its members and the media to uncover unethical political telemarketing and help alert the public.

If you suspect you have received a political telemarketing call disguised as a survey, try to get as much information as possible from the caller, particularly the name and location of the organization doing the "interviewing." Take notes on the specific questions that you were asked.

Also ask what organization is conducting the calls, the number of people called, the questions that will be included, and how the information from the call will be used.

If you are a reporter who receives information on a purported "push poll", seek to discern if the call in question was part of a legitimate message-testing survey or was indeed political telemarketing under the guise of research. Solicit the opinions of experts who can evaluate it accordingly.

For more information please contact:

[Debnath Guharoy, APAPC Regional Director - Research](#)
[Charlotte Steeh, AAPOR Standards Chair](#)