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# New Zealand Political Polling Code



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## Introduction

This code documents best practice guidelines for the conducting and reporting of political polls in New Zealand.

The code is binding on companies that are members of Research Association New Zealand and on researchers that are members of the Research Association New Zealand.

The code only covers “political polls”, which for the purpose of the code are polls that related to public votes such as national elections, local body elections and parliamentary referenda. This is in recognition of the fact that reporting of polls may have an impact on how people vote.

For each issue, the code details:

- Best practice for the market researcher conducting the poll
- Best practice for the market researcher in reporting results
- Best practice for the media in publishing results

The term “must” indicates a requirement, while the term “should” indicates recommended best practice.

It is intended that the code assist politicians, political scientists, journalists and members of the public to be confident that political polls do

in fact represent the opinions of the wider public and are a guide as to likely voting behaviours.

The development of the code is in recognition of the fact that reporting of polls can have an impact on how people vote.

Inaccurate polls or polls that are reported inaccurately can impact on voting attitudes and behaviours and thus influence the democratic process.

It behoves all members of the polling and media communities to treat polling responsibly. Reliable polls, rather than informal surveys, require a high degree of rigour. These guidelines are designed to ensure that rigour is understood and applied.

The guidelines have been developed in the light of the European Society of Market Research (ESOMAR) international guidelines.

ESOMAR is the global authority on research best practice and RANZ is a member of ESOMAR.

We recommend that those interested also read the ESOMAR /WAPOR guide to opinion polls and published surveys at;  
[http://www.esomar.org/uploads/public/knowledge-and-standards/codes-and-guidelines/WAPOR-ESOMAR\\_Guidelines.pdf](http://www.esomar.org/uploads/public/knowledge-and-standards/codes-and-guidelines/WAPOR-ESOMAR_Guidelines.pdf).

## The Code

	Conducting	Reporting	Publishing
<b><u>Sampling</u></b>			
<b>Size</b>	A <i>minimum</i> size of 500 is required for nationwide polls	Report must include the sample size, and the sample size of “decided” voters	Story should include the sample size
<b>Sampling Method</b>	Should be either “random”, “stratified sample” or “quota”	Report must disclose the sampling method	Story should include the sampling method
<b>Response Rates</b>	Researchers should aim to maximise response rates by conducting multiple call-backs, and other mechanisms to target difficult to contact groups	Report should disclose that multiple call-backs occurred  The report should include the response rate	Story should include the response rate
<b>Representativeness</b>	The sample should represent either those self-identified as eligible to vote or those likely to vote	Report should disclose the population the sample represents	Story should include the population the sample represents
<b>Likely Voters</b>	Those who say they are unlikely to vote should be excluded from the analysis	Report must exclude those unlikely to vote from the analysis of voting behaviour.  The report should include a definition of how it was determined someone was likely to vote	
<b><u>Collection Method</u></b>			
<b>Phone</b>	When employing random probability sampling, both the household dialled and the respondent selected in the household should be random. When employing quota sampling, the household dialled should be randomly selected, but the person in each household may be selected to achieve specific quota requirements.	Report must disclose how a respondent is selected.  The report should disclose if calls were to landlines only, and any impact this may have had on the poll	The story should disclose if calls were to landlines only

<b>Online</b>	<p>No panel member must be asked to complete the same poll question more than once every six months, unless the poll is deliberately of the same set of respondents as a previous poll, and reported as such.</p> <p>The final panel sample should reflect a true cross-panel of eligible New Zealand voters, which may be achieved by screening or weighting.</p> <p>The panel should stay open for at least 72 hours.</p> <p>Researchers should try and minimise people signing up to their panel, just to participate in political polls as such self-selection can bias the result.</p> <p>The panel should be managed in line with the ESOMAR guideline for online research</p>	<p>Report should disclose panel recruitment and makeup, and that it complies with the ESOMAR guideline for online research.</p> <p>The report should disclose if there were any major platforms that the poll was not accessible on</p>	<p>The story should disclose if there were any major platforms that the poll was not accessible on</p>
<b>Omnibus</b>	<p>If the political questions are part of a longer omnibus poll, they should be asked early on.</p>	<p>The report must disclose if the questions were part of an omnibus survey.</p>	<p>The story should disclose if the questions were part of an omnibus survey.</p>
<b>Question Order</b>	<p>It is recommended the principal voting behaviour question be asked before all other questions</p>	<p>The report must disclose the order of questions asked and any political questions asked before the principal voting behaviour question.</p>	<p>The story should disclose any other questions which may have impacted the responses to the principal voting behaviour question</p>
<b><u>Weighting</u></b>			
<b>Weighting Method</b>	<p>A random sample poll should ideally be weighted using an industry accepted weighting methodology to correct for the probability of selection and/or non-response.</p>	<p>The report should confirm the sample was weighted.</p>	

<b>Weighting Variables</b>	A minimum of gender and age should be weighted.	Report should disclose the variables the poll is weighted on	Story should include that the sample is weighted.
<b>Variables not to weight on</b>	When weighting to correct for demographic non-response, the calculated sample weights should be based on known or estimated population characteristics (for example, from Statistics New Zealand or the Electoral Commission). Weighting should not be based on previous voting behaviour, which is subject to memory accuracy.		
<b><u>Margin of Error</u></b>			
<b>Maximum Error</b>	The maximum sampling margin of error must be 4.5 percentage points for national polls, at the 95% confidence level.	The report must disclose the maximum margin of error.	The story should include the maximum margin of error
<b>Maximum errors for breakdowns</b>		The report should disclose the sample size and maximum margin of error for demographic breakdowns.	Stories should avoid reporting breakdown results from very small samples
<b>Significance</b>		The report should highlight results that are statistically significant. This includes trend changes, not just from the previous poll.	Stories should focus on changes that are statistically significant
<b>Errors for results &lt; 50%</b>		The report should include the maximum margin of error for results below 50%, such as for 10%.	Media should be careful not to assign the maximum margin of error to low polling parties.
<b>Other Errors</b>	Care should be taken to eliminate sources of error not associated with the sampling process	It is acceptable to state the margin of error for a simple random sample, at the 95% confidence level, but other sampling errors should be reported on if deemed significant.	

<b><u>Timing</u></b>			
<b>Data Collection Dates</b>	The final poll before an election should be conducted as close as possible to the reporting date	The report must disclose the dates the data collection occurred	The story should disclose the dates the data collection occurred
<b>Median Date</b>	As more responses often occur earlier in the poll, the date the median response was collected should be calculated	The median date of collection should be included in the report	
<b><u>Results</u></b>			
<b>Undecideds</b>	The poll script should probe initially undecided voters as to a lean or preference.	The report must state the number and percentage of undecideds and refusals	The story should include the percentage that was undecided
<b>Trends</b>		Reports should highlight significant trends	Stories should focus on significant trends, which may not be just between the current and last poll, but over a number of polls
<b>Seats</b>		Reports should include seat projections, and any assumptions used for electorate seats.	Stories should include analysis of not just individual party results, but also likely “bloc” results as the highest polling party may not be most likely to get to form Government
<b>Reports</b>		The agency should prepare a report suitable for publication with full results and methodology.  The report should include the wording of the voting questions.	The online version of stories should link to the full report, as quickly as practical.
<b>Terminology</b>			Examples of un-scientific research include surveys where the sample selects itself (for example, when a website seeks views from those who are browsing it).

## Describing polls

A sample standard paragraph or box which media can use in stories which conforms to this code is:

This poll was conducted by Agency Name for Media Name. It is a sample method poll of sample size sample populations and is weighted to the overall adult population. It was conducted by method between dates, has a maximum margin of error of +/- x% and y% were undecided on the party vote question. The full results are at URL.

An example would be:

*This poll was conducted by Kiwi Research for Kiwi Media. It is a random poll of 1,000 adult New Zealanders likely to vote and is weighted to the overall population of adult new Zealanders. It was conducted by phone between 15 and 19 June, has a maximum margin of error of +/- 3.2% and 8.5% were undecided on the party vote question. The full results are at [www.kiwiresearch.com/polljune2012.pdf](http://www.kiwiresearch.com/polljune2012.pdf).*

## Compliant polls

Polls following the code are entitled to use the emblem below to signal their compliance.



## Polling Best Practice Guidelines for Media

1. If possible, get a copy of the full poll report and do not rely on a media release.
2. The story should include the name of the company which conducted the poll, and the client the poll was done for, and the dates it was done.
3. The story should include, or make available, the sample size, sampling method, population sampled, if the sample is weighted, the maximum margin of error and the level of undecided voters.
4. If you think any questions may have impacted the answers to the principal voting behaviour question, mention this in the story.
5. Avoid reporting breakdown results from very small samples as they are unreliable.
6. Try to focus on statistically significant changes, which may not just be from the last poll, but over a number of polls.
7. Avoid the phrase "This party is below the margin of error" as results for low polling parties have a smaller margin of error than for higher polling parties.
8. It can be useful to report on what the electoral results of a poll would be, in terms of likely parliamentary blocs, as the highest polling party will not necessarily be the Government.
9. In your online story, include a link to the full poll results provided by the polling company, or state when and where the report and methodology will be made available.
10. Only use the term "poll" for scientific polls done in accordance with market research industry approved guidelines, and use "survey" for self-selecting surveys such as text or website surveys.

