

Why ESRA is Publishing a Statement on Opinion Polls

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This editorial introduces ESRA's statement on opinion polls and explains why the Association considers it necessary in the current media landscape. It also invites ESRA members and national survey research organisations to promote the statement through authorised translations and closer collaboration with journalists.

Keywords: opinion polls; nonprobability samples; access panel; media reporting

Opinion polls shape media coverage and contribute to public debate and political communication, for example by influencing the visibility of political actors and issues during electoral campaigns (Atkin & Gaudino, 1984). The increasing use of opinion polls has coincided with major changes in survey research, particularly the emergence of digital technologies that have created unprecedented opportunities for collecting data quickly and at low cost. However, the growing number of surveys has also been accompanied by a rise in studies that fail to meet established methodological standards. As a result, journalists and poll-users are often confronted with findings from polls, for which the quality is difficult to assess.

Survey quality has long been debated within survey methodology and empirical social research, with ongoing discussions of the strengths and limitations of probability-based and non-probability samples, for example regarding response accuracy, coverage error, and statistical adjustment procedures (e.g., Cornesse et al., 2020, 2023; Freese & Jin, 2025; Kohler, 2019; Rohr et al., 2024). Despite these debates, there is broad agreement that high-quality surveys require transparent documentation, rigorous sampling procedures, appropriate statistical analyses, and careful interpretation of results.

As the leading professional association for survey researchers in Europe, the European Survey Research Association (ESRA Committee 2026, this issue) believes that opinion polls reported in the media deserve careful method-

ological scrutiny. This is particularly important because accurate reporting on polls has been linked to public trust in both journalism (e.g., Holtrup et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2000) and science (Chan, 2025). Therefore, ESRA has prepared a concise statement aimed primarily at journalists that offers practical guidance for assessing the quality of opinion polls before deciding whether and how to report their findings. The statement is not intended to resolve every methodological debate or to dismiss non-probability surveys categorically. Rather, it reflects a shared concern among survey researchers that declining quality standards in publicly reported opinion polls may contribute to biased representations of public opinion. Accordingly, the statement provides guidance on key issues such as sampling, transparency, survey mode, questionnaire design, conflicts of interest, and the communication of uncertainty.

To support the further dissemination of the statement, ESRA members are invited to engage with their national survey research associations and related organisations to prepare translations that reflect their national contexts. These translations may be submitted to the ESRA Committee for review and approval as authorised translations. Once approved, the statement can be disseminated nationally and promoted among journalists, editors, and other users of opinion polls.

Moreover, ESRA encourages national organisations to establish networks of survey experts who are willing to serve as points of contact for journalists. Such networks can provide methodological advice, support the interpretation of survey findings, and contribute to training activities and media literacy related to survey research.

By publishing this statement, ESRA reaffirms its commitment to promoting methodological excellence, transparency, and the responsible communication of survey find-

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ings. Improving the quality of poll reporting is a shared responsibility, and professional expertise should be readily available to those who communicate survey findings to the public. By strengthening connections between researchers and journalists, we hope to contribute to improving public trust in survey research and the quality of public discourse informed by the evidence it provides

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