



## Recommendations - Inquiry into the Performance of the Opinion Polls at the 2019 Australian Federal Election

Establishing an appropriate level of confidence in the polls and the reporting of the polls requires realistic expectations about the level of precision that can be delivered, adequate disclosure of the methods and statistical techniques used, and appropriately nuanced reporting.

The current disclosure standards as they apply to the publicly released election polls in Australia need consolidation, clarification and greater specificity. This would best be achieved by putting in place a new code of practice and new governance structure for election polling.

The Inquiry Panel agrees with the conclusion reached by Mansillo and Jackman (2020, p. 145) in their review of the 2019 polls, that ‘the quality of political discussion, the salience and content of the nation’s policy agenda—indeed, the health of Australian democracy—would gain from a commitment to ... transparency around the polling of Australian public opinion.’



### Governance

**Recommendation 1 – Establish a Code of Conduct for Election Polling:** AMSRO, as the initiators of this Inquiry, help facilitate the establishment of a Code of Conduct for Election Polling in order to provide an oversight, regulatory and disclosure regime for election polling in Australia. This could be achieved by working in tandem with the recently announced Australian Polling Council (YouGov, 2019). This Code should be in place before the next federal election polling cycle.

**Recommendation 2 – Consult the experts:** The development of this Code could be led by pollsters but should be informed by the views of experts from AMSRO, the Statistical Society of Australia, The Research Society, political scientists and the Australian Press Council and/or interested media outlets.

**Recommendation 3 – Ensure compliance:** Fundamental to the integrity and reputation of any such Code are the disclosure requirements it establishes, how these are monitored, and how compliance is ensured. We recommend a similar approach to that of the British Polling Council (BPC) in ensuring that a broad constituency sign up to the Code and that an appropriate arbitration and sanctions process is in place. BPC membership comprises almost every market research organisation in the UK that publishes political polls. Its management committee and officers are drawn from the member organisations, but its Sub-Committee on Disclosure (which provides the technical advice) comprises representatives from research organisations, academia and the media as well as member organisations. The rules of the BPC include a complaints-handling mechanism and enable sanctions to be determined including a period of probation, suspension or expulsion from the BPC.



## Methodology

### **Develop more effective sample balancing and/or weighting strategies:**

Pollsters need to identify and better understand the biases in their samples and to develop more effective sample balancing and/or weighting mitigation strategies to improve representativeness. Weighting or balancing by education seems promising and this report suggests several other variables that may warrant further consideration.

**Recommendation 5 – Trial new calculation method for the two-party-preferred vote:** Pollsters should not rely solely on the preference flow from the previous election to arrive at a two-party-preferred estimate, not least because some parties may be new, and for very small parties and independents preference flows from the previous election may be difficult to trace. Models that involve stated preferences with imputation of missing data or the use of stated preferences in combination with preferences from previous election could be experimentally trialled by pollsters.

**Recommendation 6 – Clarify measures of uncertainty:** Pollsters could use more robust methods of estimating the variability associated with their results beyond the currently inadequately calculated and inadequately reported ‘Margin of Error’ heuristic. In addition, pollsters should routinely report the proportion of respondents who are ‘undecided’ about their vote choice and identify those who are only ‘leaning’ towards a particular party.



## Disclosure

**Recommendation 7 – Establish disclosure standards:** The 24 disclosure standards set out by the Inquiry Panel act as a starting point for the development of a coordinated set of publicly available disclosure standards for election polls in Australia.

**Recommendation 8 – Extend beyond election polling:** AMSRO and The Research Society endorse the disclosure standards so that they apply to all Members and all publicly released research, not just election polling.

**Recommendation 9 – Get the media outlets onside:** The support of major news outlets and others who commission or publish polls should be sought to help ensure compliance with any new disclosure standards. Australian media organisations should play an active role in supporting these standards.



## Resources

**Recommendation 10 – Provide educational resources:** Educational resources about polling methods and standards should be made available to journalists and other interested parties. This could be along similar lines to election polling resources provided by AAPOR in the US, and by the British Polling Council in Britain. The Research Society, in its submission to this Inquiry, stated that it was willing to make such resources available. We recommend that AMSRO work with The Research Society and the Australian Press Council to make educational resources and training available.