

1 **The Code of Professional Ethics and Practices**

2 We—the members of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) and its affiliated chapters—subscribe to the  
3 principles expressed in this document, the AAPOR Code of Professional Ethics and Practices (“the Code”). Our goals are to support  
4 sound and ethical practice in the conduct of public opinion and survey research and promote the informed and appropriate use of  
5 research results.

6 The Code is based in fundamental ethical principles that apply to the conduct of research regardless of an individual’s membership in  
7 AAPOR or any other organization. Adherence to the principles and actions set out in the Code is expected of all public opinion and  
8 survey researchers.

9 As AAPOR members, we pledge to maintain the highest standards of scientific competence, integrity, accountability, and  
10 transparency in designing, conducting, analyzing, and reporting our work, and in our interactions with participants (sometimes  
11 referred to as respondents or subjects), clients, and the users of our research. We pledge to act in accordance with principles of  
12 basic human rights in research. We further pledge to reject all tasks or assignments that would require activities inconsistent with the  
13 principles of this Code.

14 The Code sets the standard for the ethical conduct of public opinion and survey research at the time of publication.  
15 Recommendations on best practices for research design, conduct, analysis, and reporting are beyond the scope of the Code but may  
16 be published separately by AAPOR Executive Council.

17 **Definitions of Terms Used in the Code**

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- 19 1. “Public opinion and survey research” refers to the systematic collection and analysis of information from or about individuals,  
20 groups, or organizations concerning their behaviors, cognitions, attitudes or other characteristics. It encompasses both quantitative  
21 and qualitative research methods, traditional or emerging.
  - 22 2. “Participants” refers to individuals whose behaviors, cognitions, attitudes, or other characteristics are measured and analyzed.  
23 Participants can include individuals representing groups or organizations, and individuals such as minors or those unable to consent  
24 directly, for whom a parent, legal guardian, or other proxy makes participation decisions or provides information.
  - 25 3. “Personally identifiable information” refers to (i) measurements, records, or other data that can be used alone or in combination to  
26 distinguish or trace an individual’s identity and (ii) any other information that is linkable to an individual (e.g., employment information,  
27 medical history, academic records).

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29 **I. Principles of Professional Responsibility in Our Research**

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- 31 A. Responsibilities to Participants
  - 32 1. We will avoid practices or methods that may harm, endanger, humiliate, or unnecessarily mislead participants and potential  
33 participants.

- 1       2. We will not misrepresent the purpose of our research or conduct other activities (such as sales, fundraising, or political  
2       campaigning) under the guise of conducting research.
- 3       3. We recognize that participation in our research is voluntary except where specified by regulation or law. Participants may  
4       freely decide, without coercion, whether to participate in the research, and whether to answer any question or item presented  
5       to them.
- 6       4. We will make no false or misleading claims as to a study's sponsorship or purpose and will provide truthful answers to  
7       participants' questions about the research. If disclosure of certain information about the research could endanger or cause  
8       harm to persons, could bias responses, or does not serve research objectives, it is sufficient to indicate, in response to  
9       participants' questions about the research, that some information cannot be revealed.
- 10      5. We recognize the critical importance of protecting the rights of minors and other vulnerable individuals when obtaining  
11      participation decisions and conducting our research.
- 12      6. We will act in accordance with laws, regulations, and the rules of data owners (providers of research or administrative records  
13      previously collected for other purposes) governing the collection, use, and disclosure of information obtained from or about  
14      individuals, groups, or organizations.

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#### 16 B. Responsibilities When Collecting Personally Identifiable Information

- 17      1. We recognize the right of participants to be provided with honest and forthright information about how personally identifiable  
18      information that we collect from them will be used.
- 19      2. We recognize the importance of preventing unintended disclosure of personally identifiable information. We will act in  
20      accordance with all relevant best practices, laws, regulations, and data owner rules governing the handling and storage of  
21      such information. We will restrict access to identifiers and destroy them as soon as they are no longer required, in accordance  
22      with relevant laws, regulations, and data owner rules.
- 23      3. We will not disclose any information that could be used, alone or in combination with other reasonably available information,  
24      to identify participants with their data, without participant permission.
- 25      4. When disclosing personally identifiable data for purposes other than the current research, we will relay to data users any  
26      conditions of their use specified in the participant permission we have obtained.
- 27      5. We understand that the use of our research results in a legal proceeding does not relieve us of our ethical obligation to  
28      protect participant privacy and keep confidential all personally identifiable data, except where participants have permitted  
29      disclosure.

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#### 31 C. Responsibilities to Clients or Sponsors

- 32      1. When undertaking work for a client, we will hold confidential all proprietary information obtained about the client and about the  
33      conduct and findings of the research undertaken for the client, except when the dissemination of the information is expressly  
34      authorized by the client.
- 35      2. We will inform those (partners, co-investigators, sponsors, and clients) for whom we conduct publicly released research  
36      studies about AAPOR's Standards for Disclosure in Section III of the Code, and provide information on what should be  
37      disclosed in their releases.

3. We will be mindful of the limitations of our expertise and capacity to conduct various types of research and will accept only those research assignments that we can reasonably expect to accomplish within these limitations.

#### D. Responsibilities to the Public

1. We will disclose to the public the methods and procedures used to obtain our own publicly disseminated research results in accordance with Section III of the Code.
2. We will correct any errors in our own work that come to our attention which could influence interpretation of the results. We will make good faith efforts to identify and issue corrective statements to all parties who were presented with the factual misrepresentation or distortions. If such factual misrepresentations or distortions were made publicly, we will correct them in a public forum that is as similar as possible to original data dissemination.
3. We will correct factual misrepresentations or distortions of our data or analysis, including those made by our research partners, co-investigators, sponsors, or clients. We will make good faith efforts to identify and issue corrective statements to all parties who were presented with the factual misrepresentations or distortions, and if such factual misrepresentations or distortions were made publicly, we will correct them in a public forum that is as similar as possible. We also recognize that differences of opinion in the interpretation of analysis are not necessarily factual misrepresentations or distortions and will exercise professional judgment in handling disclosure of such differences of opinion.

#### E. Responsibilities to the Profession

1. We recognize the importance to the science of public opinion and survey research of disseminating as freely as practicable the ideas and findings that emerge from our research.
2. We can point with pride to our membership in AAPOR and adherence to the Code as evidence of our commitment to high standards of ethics in our relations with research participants, our clients or sponsors, the public, and the profession. However, we will not cite our membership in the Association nor adherence to this Code as evidence of professional competence, because the Association does not certify the professional competence of any persons or organizations.

### **II. Principles of Professional Practice in the Conduct of Our Work**

A. We will exercise due care in developing research designs, samples, and instruments, and in collecting, processing, and analyzing data, taking all reasonable steps to assure the reliability and validity of results.

1. We will recommend and employ only those tools and methods of analysis that, in our professional judgment, are fit for the purpose of the research questions.
2. We will not knowingly select research tools and methods of analysis that yield misleading conclusions.
3. We will not knowingly make interpretations of research results that are inconsistent with the data available, nor will we tacitly permit such interpretations. We will ensure that any findings we report, either privately or for public release, are a balanced and accurate portrayal of research results.
4. We will not knowingly imply that interpretations are accorded greater confidence than the data warrant. When we generalize from samples to make statements about populations, we will only make claims of precision and applicability to broader populations that are warranted by the sampling frames and other methods employed.

- 1 5. We will not engage in data fabrication or falsification.  
2 6. We will accurately describe and attribute research from other sources that we cite in our work, including its methodology,  
3 content, comparability, and source.  
4 B. We will describe our methods and findings accurately and in appropriate detail in all research reports, adhering to the standards  
5 for disclosure specified in Section III of the Code.  
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### 8 **III. Standards for Disclosure**

9 Broadly defined, research on public opinion can be conducted using a variety of quantitative and qualitative methodologies,  
10 depending on the research questions to be addressed and available resources. Accordingly good professional practice imposes the  
11 obligation upon all public opinion and survey researchers to disclose sufficient information about how the research was conducted to  
12 allow for independent review and verification of research claims, regardless of the methodology used in the research. Full and  
13 complete disclosure for items listed in Section A will be made at the time results are released, either publicly or to a research client,  
14 as the case may be. As detailed below, the items listed in Section B, if not immediately available, will be released within 30 days of  
15 any request for such materials. If the results reported are based on multiple samples or multiple modes, the preceding items (as  
16 applicable) will be disclosed for each.  
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#### 18 **A. Items for Immediate Disclosure**

- 19 1. **Data Collection Strategy:** Describe the data collection strategies employed (e.g. surveys, focus groups, content analyses).  
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21 2. **Who Sponsored the Research and Who Conducted It.** Name the sponsor of the research and the party(ies) who  
22 conducted it. If the original source of funding is different than the sponsor, this source will also be disclosed.  
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24 3. **Measurement Tools/Instruments.** Measurement tools include questionnaires with survey questions and response options,  
25 show cards, vignettes, or scripts used to guide discussions or interviews. The exact wording and presentation of any  
26 measurement tool from which results are reported as well as any preceding contextual information that might reasonably be  
27 expected to influence responses to the reported results and instructions to respondents or interviewers should be included.  
28 Also included are scripts used to guide discussions and semi-structured interviews and any instructions to researchers,  
29 interviewers, moderators, and participants in the research. Content analyses and ethnographic research will provide the  
30 scheme or guide used to categorize the data; researchers will also disclose if no formal scheme was used.  
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32 4. **Population Under Study.** Survey and public opinion research can be conducted with many different populations including,  
33 but not limited to, the general public, voters, people working in particular sectors, blog postings, news broadcasts, an elected  
34 official's social media feed. Researchers will be specific about the decision rules used to define the population when  
35 describing the study population, including location, age, other social or demographic characteristics (e.g., persons who

1 access the internet), time (e.g., immigrants entering the US between 2015 and 2019). Content analyses will also include the  
2 unit of analysis (e.g., news article, social media post) and the source of the data (e.g., Twitter, Lexis-Nexis).

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4 **5. Method Used to Generate and Recruit the Sample.** The description of the methods of sampling includes the sample design  
5 and methods used to contact or recruit research participants or collect units of analysis (content analysis).

- 6 a. Explicitly state whether the sample comes from a frame selected using a probability-based methodology (meaning  
7 selecting potential participants with a known non-zero probability from a known frame) or if the sample was selected  
8 using non-probability methods (potential participants from opt-in, volunteer, or other sources).
- 9 b. Probability-based sample specification should include a description of the sampling frame(s), list(s), or method(s).
  - 10 i. If a frame, list, or panel is used, the description should include the name of the supplier of the sample or list  
11 and nature of the list (e.g., registered voters in the state of Texas in 2018, pre-recruited panel or pool).
  - 12 ii. If a frame, list, or panel is used, the description should include the coverage of the population, including  
13 describing any segment of the target population that is not covered by the design.
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- 15 c. For surveys, focus groups, or other forms of interviews, provide a clear indication of the method(s) by which  
16 participants were contacted, selected, recruited, intercepted, or otherwise contacted or encountered, along with any  
17 eligibility requirements and/or oversampling.
- 18 d. Describe any use of quotas.
- 19 e. Include the geographic location of data collection activities for any in-person research.
- 20 f. For content analysis, detail the criteria or decision rules used to include or exclude elements of content and any  
21 approaches used to sample content. If a census of the target population of content was used, that will be explicitly  
22 stated.
- 23 g. Provide details of any strategies used to help gain cooperation (e.g., advance contact, letters and scripts,  
24 compensation or incentives, refusal conversion contacts) whether for participation in a survey, group, panel, or for  
25 participation in a particular research project. Describe any compensation/incentives provided to research subjects and  
26 the method of delivery (debit card, gift card, cash).

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28 **6. Method(s) and Mode(s) of Data Collection.** Include a description of all mode(s) used to contact participants or collect data  
29 or information (e.g., CATI, CAPI, ACASI, IVR, mail, Web for survey; paper and pencil, audio or video recording for qualitative  
30 research, etc.) and the language(s) offered or included. For qualitative research such as in-depth interviews and focus  
31 groups, also include length of interviews or the focus group session.

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33 **7. Dates of Data Collection.** Disclose the dates of data collection (e.g., data collection from January 15 through March 10 of  
34 2019). If this is a content analysis, include the dates of the content analyzed (e.g., social media posts between January 1 and  
35 10, 2019).

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8. **Sample Sizes (by sampling frame if more than one frame was used) and (if applicable) Discussion of the Precision of the Results.**
    - a. Provide sample sizes for each mode of data collection (for surveys include sample sizes for each frame, list, or panel used).
    - b. For probability sample surveys, report estimates of sampling error (often described as “the margin of error”) and discuss whether or not the reported sampling error or statistical analyses have been adjusted for the design effect due to weighting, clustering, or other factors.
    - c. Reports of non-probability sample surveys will only provide measures of precision if they are defined and accompanied by a detailed description of how the underlying model was specified, its assumptions validated, and the measure(s) calculated.
    - d. If content was analyzed using human coders, report the number of coders, whether inter-coder reliability estimates were calculated for any variables, and the resulting estimates.
  9. **How the Data Were Weighted.** Describe how the weights were calculated, including the variables used and the sources of the weighting parameters.
  10. **How the Data Were Processed and Procedures to Ensure Data Quality.** Describe validity checks, where applicable, including but not limited to whether the researcher added attention checks, logic checks, or excluded respondents who straight-lined or completed the survey under a certain time constraint, any screening of content for evidence that it originated from bots or fabricated profiles, re-contacts to confirm that the interview occurred or to verify respondent’s identity or both, and measures to prevent respondents from completing the survey more than once. Any data imputation or other data exclusions or replacement will also be discussed. Researchers will provide information about whether any coding was done by software or human coders (or both); if automated coding was done, name the software and specify the parameters or decision rules that were used.
  11. **A General Statement Acknowledging Limitations of the Design and Data Collection.** All research has limitations and researchers will include a general statement acknowledging the unmeasured error associated with all forms of public opinion research.
- B. Additional Items for Disclosure. After results are reported, we will make the following items available within 30 days of any request for such materials:
1. Procedures for managing the membership, participation, and attrition of the panel, if a pool, panel, or access panel was used. This should be disclosed for both probability and non-probability surveys relying on recruited panels of participants.

- 1 2. Methods of interviewer or coder training and details of supervision and monitoring of interviewers or human coders. If  
2 machine coding was conducted, include description of the machine learning involved in the coding.  
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- 4 3. Details about screening procedures, including any screening for other surveys or data collection that would have made  
5 sample or selected members ineligible for the current data collection (e.g., survey, focus group, interview) will be disclosed  
6 (e.g., in the case of online surveys if a router was used).  
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- 8 4. Any relevant stimuli, such as visual or sensory exhibits or show cards. In the case of surveys conducted via self-administered  
9 computer-assisted interviewing, providing the relevant screen shot(s) is strongly encouraged, though not required.  
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- 11 5. Summaries of the disposition of study-specific sample records so that response rates for probability samples and participation  
12 rates for non-probability samples can be computed. If response or cooperation rates are reported, they will be computed  
13 according to AAPOR Standard Definitions. If dispositions cannot be provided, explain the reason(s) why they cannot be  
14 disclosed, and this will be mentioned as a limitation of the study.  
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- 16 6. The unweighted sample size(s) on which one or more reported subgroup estimates are based.  
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- 18 7. Specifications adequate for replication of indices or statistical modeling included in research reports.  
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1 C. Access to Datasets

2 Reflecting the fundamental goals of transparency and replicability, AAPOR members share the expectation that access to datasets  
3 and related documentation will be provided to allow for independent review and verification of research claims upon request. In order  
4 to protect the privacy of individual respondents, such datasets will be de-identified to remove variables that can reasonably be  
5 expected to identify a respondent. Datasets may be held without release for a period of up to one year after findings are publicly  
6 released to allow full opportunity for primary analysis. Those who commission publicly disseminated research have an obligation to  
7 disclose the rationale for why eventual public release or access to the datasets is not possible, if that is the case.

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9 D. AAPOR Standards Complaint

10 If any of our work becomes the subject of a formal investigation of an alleged violation of this Code, undertaken with the approval of  
11 the AAPOR Executive Council, we will provide additional information on the research study in such detail that a fellow researcher  
12 would be able to conduct a professional evaluation of the study.

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