



WORLD ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

PRESS RELEASE

The Greek Ban on Publishing Election Polls Violates the Principles of Freedom of Research, Information and the Press

LINCOLN (Nebraska, USA), August 10, 2009. The World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR) was greatly concerned to learn that the Greek government has again enacted a law banning the publication of election survey results in the final 15 days before an election—and this only one year after previous bans were loosened. This decision goes against the fundamental democratic principles of freedom of research and information, and it also imposes highly problematic limitations on the freedom of the press.

"Unfortunately, Greece is not an isolated case," notes Thomas Petersen, a German communication researcher and the current president of WAPOR. "In many countries, including many a democracy, we are witnessing an increasing tendency to limit the freedom of survey research and to place the publication of research findings under state control. There is probably no other area in which journalists would accept a ban on publishing scientific findings. Unfortunately, there is a lack of awareness of the problem in Greece. It is particularly regrettable that the Greek government turned down all offers to discuss the issue with the international scientific community, including experts from WAPOR."

In WAPOR's view, most of the attempts around the globe to impose limits on survey research are based on two misapprehensions. The first is the assumption that election polls influence the opinion formation process among voters. In fact, however, all research on the issue thus far indicates that this effect is very slight—and even if surveys did exert such an influence, this would still not be sufficient grounds for banning survey results as a source of information.

On the contrary: in a free society, voters must have the chance to obtain information about the political opinion formation process from an independent source. And there are good reasons why no one would ever dream of banning all political media reporting prior to an election, even though reporting of this kind has a demonstrable influence on voting behavior.

The second reason for forbidding the publication of election polling results is the assumption that voters could be misled by false forecasts. As a rule, however, well done surveys conducted in most countries do provide a fairly accurate reflection of the opinion formation process at a given point in time. Even in those few cases where election surveys deviate from the final election outcome, they are still a considerably more reliable source of information than other non-scientific sources. Banning the publication of election survey results essentially means suppressing the only solid, independent source of information available to the public, while leaving the field wide open to speculation. In the process, this also means opening the floodgates for attempts to manipulate the public, since unfounded, potentially biased contentions about the alleged election outcome, especially partisan sources, cannot be corrected via sound scientific data.

A free country needs free survey research. The suppression of survey findings is irreconcilable with democratic principles and is thus unacceptable. In the future, WAPOR has resolved to join together with other social scientific associations in order to demand more emphatically that the right to free research be respected—and this includes the right to publish the findings of survey research. In a democracy, freedom of research is no less important than freedom of the press.

The World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR), founded in 1947, is a global association of scientifically oriented survey researchers with members in more than 60 countries. Further information about the organization's goals, activities and representatives are provided by the WAPOR website: www.wapor.org

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