

Instructions For Conducting An Election Verification Exit Poll

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(Warning: These instructions will help with the planning of an election verification exit poll (EVEP). However, an EVEP will be challenging to conduct in practice. Competent polling of any kind requires knowledge, practical experience, adequate resources, and common sense. These instructions will help, but a few pages of instructions cannot possibly answer all of the questions that might arise in the implementation of an EVEP, nor can they guarantee automatically a successful poll. I, therefore, do not want to take responsibility for any EVEP that I am not directly supervising).

1. Before addressing the steps in conducting an EVEP, it is appropriate to tell you what one is and how it differs from a regular media exit poll (As president of **The Warren Poll**, I have been conducting media exit polls for over twenty years in Missouri and Illinois). The purpose of a media exit poll is to strategically poll many precincts to get a representative sample for an entire district (e.g., a state) so election outcomes can be predicted. Demographical data are obtained in media exit polls so pollsters can tell how Blacks voted, women voted, rural people voted, etc. Most of the polling is done before 2:00 pm so the exit poll results can be tabulated and presented by the news outlets immediately after the polls close. In sharp contrast, an EVEP's purpose is not to predict election results, but to audit or verify the accuracy of vote counts in selected precincts. Thus, the purpose is to concentrate on targeted precincts and to poll very comprehensively in these precincts so election results in *these precincts only* can be verified. In media exit polls many fewer voters are sampled than in an EVEP in a particular precinct. Consequently, an EVEP should be considerably more accurate for the targeted precincts than for media exit polls since a much larger percentage of all voters would be interviewed in these precincts. Therefore, if EVEP results differed significantly from the actual results in the targeted precincts, we could conclude that something went wrong with the vote count.
2. The first step in planning for an EVEP is to gather the necessary materials. This would include: a map of the district; a current listing of all the polling places within the district, including the addresses of the polling places, the precincts at each polling place, and the number of registered voters in each precinct; a history of voting at these precincts going back to at least 1998; contact numbers at the County Election Boards within the District; and the laws governing what exit pollsters are allowed to do at the polling places (e.g., that exit pollsters must not poll any closer than 50 feet from a polling place).
3. Set your objectives for the exit poll. What do you want to test? What precincts would satisfy your research objectives (e.g., testing for accuracy in precincts that have a reputation for "funny business" or vote fraud; testing for accuracy in precincts using different kinds of voting machines; testing for interviewer bias in predominately minority versus non-minority districts).
4. Select your polling places carefully with your research objectives in mind (note: polling places may include one or more precincts). Study the districts well so you know the demographics of the polling places, the relevant political history of the polling places; and the number of registered voters at the polling places. For example, if you want to compare the accuracy of the vote counts in polling places using paper ballots versus touch screens, make sure that you know what precincts are using these two ways of voting. If you want to test for vote fraud at a polling place with a history of suspected vote fraud, make sure that you study the district enough to know where these suspect polling places are. Also, normally you want to poll at polling places where there are a significant number of voters to measure what you want to test. This is one of the reasons why you need a listing of the polling places showing the number of registered voters. Inexperienced exit pollsters have been known to send interviewers to polling places that may have only 67 registered voters with only 39% of them voting which would mean

- that you would have only 26 voters to interview in an entire day or only about two per hour.
5. Once you have selected the polling places that you are going to conduct interviews, make sure that you have enough interviewers to do the job competently. You will need to conduct interviews all day long from right after the polls open up to the time that they close (in most states polls open at 6:00 am and close at 7:00 pm). Ideally, you will need two pollsters at the polling place for most of the day. One person can be there for some of the time to handle the polling, but two pollsters should be there for most of the day. If one pollster is used and this has been done, the pollster would have to be relieved after no more than four hours. Thus, you would need to use pollsters at the polling places in three hour shifts. If one person is at a polling site and needs, for example, to go to the bathroom, another person would have to cover for the pollster. If another pollster is not there, it is usually not difficult to ask a responsible person at the polling place to take over for a few minutes while you go to the bathroom. My experience is that most people are more than willing to help you with this. Just ask them to guard your supplies and especially the box where the questionnaires are dropped in. If you briefly explain the process to them, the substitute could even hand out a few questionnaires to voters and ask them to fill out the questionnaire. Since you will only be gone a few minutes, nothing can really go wrong as long as you recruit a responsible person.
 6. Interviewers should be trained before they are sent out into the field. Interviewers should know what is expected of them. They should know how to conduct the interviews, how to make sure the interviews are deposited in the questionnaire box, and how to safeguard the box. They should know what polling place to go to, when to be there, how long they must stay, and how to recruit a substitute when they need to take a bathroom break, especially if there is not another pollster at the site with them.
 7. Interviewers should dress appropriately for the interviews, but comfortably for the weather. It can be cold and rainy in November. Interviewers should interview as many voters as reasonable as voters walk out of the polling places. Randomness is achieved by interviewing the next person who exits from the building as convenience in the polling process permits. This takes care of interviewer bias because the interviewer is going to interview the next person who walks out of the polling place regardless of the person's race, age, gender, etc. DO NOT try to interview every fifth person or so because this method will break down in practice and then it will be impossible to defend the methodology. The best approach (and one that can be defended) is simply to approach for an interview (many will refuse, but at least 20% will agree to the interview) the next voter exiting from the polling place after you have time to approach the next voter. Wearing a tag that identifies you as an EVEP interviewer interviewing for an organization noted on the tag, you ask the person if they could fill out a very brief exit poll questionnaire that will take less than two minutes of their time and then to put it in the questionnaire box. Do not worry about being refused. Just approach the next person. Use a pleasant personality to obtain as many interviews as possible. Always guard the box. You may answer any questions about the EVEP as commonsense would dictate, just don't answer any questionnaire questions for them (i.e., what is the poll going to be used for?). You should have a "hot line" number so voters can call a person designated to answer any questions or respond to any problems that voters or poll workers may have with the poll. Remember, obey all election laws and be courteous to all voters and election officials.
 8. Make sure that you have enough polling supplies with you. Never run out of supplies. The supplies are cheap. Make sure that you have the questionnaire box plus an extra one for unanticipated problems. Keep the extra one in the car. Parenthetically, ideally, all interviewers should have a car so they can reach the polling places. Have plenty of questionnaires. If there are 300 registered voters in the precinct, make sure that you have at least 150 questionnaires. Yes, you will not use that many, but just have extra ones and do not keep them in the same place in case someone decides to steal them. Keep plenty of

- extra ones in your car. Have a good supply of pencils because many people will walk off with them. It may be a good idea to have several clip boards so respondents can use them to fill out their questionnaires. You can also use them to hold the questionnaires that you will be giving out. Clip boards make you look like a real pollster. You can buy clip boards for about \$1.29 a piece at Office Max, etc. Bring any personal supplies that you may need (e.g., bottled water, snacks, medicine, glasses, warm cloths or rain protection if there is a threat of rain). If you have a cell phone, bring it. You may need it if problems of any kind develop. Make sure that you have essential contact numbers and they have yours.
9. An interviewer schedule should be set up for the entire day so the whole day is covered. Alternates should be on hand to take over for emergency situations such as no one showing up at a scheduled time, an interviewer getting sick, etc.
 10. The questionnaire boxes should be obtained from an office supply place such as Office Max, Office Depot, Mail Boxes, etc. They should be standard size (big enough to accommodate all the questionnaires), a wide slit needs to be made so the questionnaires can easily be placed in them, the boxes need to be reinforced with duct tape, and the boxes need to be clearly marked (PLEASE PLACE COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRES IN THIS EXIT POLL BOX).
 11. The boxes with the questionnaires in them should be taken to “central headquarters” after the polling places close. The pre-coded questionnaire data (i.e., the responses) should then be entered into Microsoft Notepad and then exported to SPSS for processing. Note: pre-coded questions would mean that the questionnaire’s answers are entered in the logical rows. For example, if the question is: Please indicate your race. ___ White ___ Black ___ Other, the entry would be “0” for NA, “1” for White; “2” for Black, and “3” for Other. Entering and processing the data are too technical to explain here. It is assumed that someone associated with the EVEP has enough knowledge about data processing to know how to enter and process the poll data.
 12. Note: No discussion has been made here about the questionnaire. Each questionnaire must follow a standardized format and be professionally designed. Each questionnaire must be designed to meet the research objectives. Each will also be different, depending upon the various races that will be covered in the questionnaire. Naturally, trying to explain how to develop a professional questionnaire here would be impossible. There are whole college courses taught in survey research design. It is a must to find a professional who would help in the design of your questionnaire. The questionnaire should be very short (one that can be completed in less than two minutes), asking questions on only the top political races (e.g., U.S. Senate, U.S. Representative, Governor) and maybe a major ballot issue, if appropriate. A few demographical questions should also be asked so voters can be profiled and you will know the percentage of, say, women interviewed, blacks interviewed, etc. The core demographical questions would be: gender, race, age ranges (e.g., 18-30; 31-45; 46-65; Over 65), party preference, and any others that they may relevant to your objectives in the EVEP. Also indicated on the questionnaire should be the U.S. Congressional District, County, and Precinct(s) in which the poll is being administered. Sometimes, to avoid confusion and error when coding the results, major areas that are being polled are color-coded (e.g., if a Congressional District has four counties in it, the questionnaires for each County is assigned a different color). Make sure that each questionnaire is also assigned an ID# to identify each respondent in poll. The first four columns of the data entry for a respondent should be reserved for the ID#, followed by a code number for the district, then county, then precinct, then the answers to the questions. 0001 would be the first respondent, 0002 the second respondent, and so forth. Once the actual results are in, the actual results must be entered and compared to the EVEP results. This can be done in a variety of ways.
 13. For questions, e-mail me; Warrenkf@slu.edu. I will be happy to answer simple questions, but I will not be able to provide elaborate answers to complex methodological questions about survey research since whole courses are offered on this.

