

Report on CARP ActionOnline Surveys October 30, 2009

Polling Since October, 2008

We have conducted 20 polls since October 2008, on subjects ranging from elder abuse, pensions, health care and retirement to voting intentions. During the “election scare” of August/September, 2009, we were polling every ten days:

1. Election Issues Poll, October 2008 (n=1500)
2. Stock Market Survey, October 2008 (n=2000)
3. Pension Survey, November 2008 (n=500)
4. Retirement Poll, November 2008 (n=500)
5. Fraud Survey, December 2008 (n=1000)
6. Federal Budget Poll, January 2009 (n=1800)
7. Economic Stimulus Poll, January 2009 (n=3000)
8. Caregiver Poll, March 2009, (n=500)
9. e-Health Poll, March 2009 (n=2000)
10. Universal Pension Plan Poll, March, 2009 (n=4000)
11. Health Care Teams Poll, May 2009 (n=5900)
12. Ageism Survey, May 2009 (n=4600)
13. Elder Abuse Survey, June 2009 (n=2500)
14. Elder Abuse Ad Survey, July 2009 (n=2200)
15. Election Issues Poll, August 2009 (n=3300)
16. Pre-Election Poll (1), September 2009 (n=3700)
17. Pre-Election Poll (2), September 2009 (n=3000)
18. Pre-Election Poll (3), September, 2009 (n=4500)
19. Age-Friendly Cities Poll, October 2009 (n=2300)
20. Election Issues Poll, October 2009 (n=3800)

It can be seen that sample sizes increased from October, 2008, on. This is when we started running better-written, more engaging, longer and more complex polls than previously. Counter to

expectations, members respond in greater numbers when the poll has multiple questions dealing with different topics.

Attention to polling protocol, such as no inbuilt bias and no leading questions, also appears to increase response rates. Of course, when a poll is timely, such as a pre-election poll, interest is high.

Polling Logistics

The polling instrument we use (a survey program bundled with CARP’s ActionOnline e-newsletter software) is primitive at best, and imposes some critical limitations on our polling capabilities:

- We cannot gather open-ended or volunteered responses; all responses must be pre-coded
- We can only accept one answer per question; no multi-mentions allowed
- No skip patterns are possible, so every respondent must answer every question, or the response will not be included; this can lead to question repetition
- No more than 10 responses per question may be listed

Despite these limitations, we have learned how to work with the instrument available to us in such a way as to deliver accurate and insightful polling results.

Coded responses are carefully researched and considered, and approved and reviewed for completeness by the entire team; Ranking algorithms are used to allow single-response questions to stand proxy for multi-mentions; question flow is crafted so that even those who skip through a question have a response to check - these and other strategies are used to shape an acceptable polling instrument from some very rough clay.

The polling program has some advantages over other online polls - respondents can only enter



once, incomplete responses are discarded, and the entire data set is available at any time as an Excel file for downloading and tabulating.

Sample Size and Reliability

Our sample sizes have ranged between 500 and 5900 - between 1% and 9% of the roughly 65,000 subscribers to ActionOnline. Given that many panel surveys and other methodologies have response rates of no more than about 10%, we appear to have acceptable response rates for our larger samples.

In total, we have tabulated responses from more than 35,000 members this year.

It appears that polls on social issues such as health care, elder abuse and caregivers attract higher numbers of respondents than political polls. Political polls attract more males, and social and retirement polls attract more females.

Purists may say our sample is self-selected from a very small group. We would counter that our sample is like any online panel - the most engaged and opinionated people in the target group, which, in our case, happens to be CARP members.

On a sample of 3000 responses, we can make the following accuracy statement:

“Results are based on a sample of 3000 readers of CARP’s ActionOnline newsletter and are accurate within plus or minus 1.8%, at the 95% confidence level. That is, if all readers of ActionOnline who answered surveys were asked the identical questions, their answers would be within 2% of those shown here, either up or down, 19 out of 20 times asking”

The critical phrase here is “if all the readers of ActionOnline who answered surveys...”. This is our sampling universe, and as long as it is described accurately, ie: that our results only represent the views of those members who read ActionOnline and answer surveys, then we cannot be faulted on the accuracy statement, despite the fact the sample was self-selected and not randomly drawn.

In the matter of online surveys, Canada’s professional body for pollsters and market researchers, the Market Research and Intelligence Association (MRIA), has recently published work demonstrating that online surveys can be as accurate as telephone surveys, if correctly managed, and, as a result, have dropped their ban on associating accuracy statements with online polls.

Respondents

We ask four basic demographic questions on each poll:

- Age
- Region
- Gender
- Retired/not retired

These demographic data points are used to classify respondents at the tabulation stage.

Respondents may not be completely representative of the entire CARP membership: For instance, respondents are, on average, 68 years old, which may be somewhat younger than the average member.

They have, by definition, computer skills and online access, and this will be an indicator of high social engagement and involvement in current affairs.

They hold very strong opinions.

More men than women answer our polls, especially the political polls, despite the fact the CARP membership skews slightly female.

Respondents are distributed as per CARP’s membership, approximately:

- Atlantic 5%
- Quebec 5%
- Ontario 60%
- Prairies 15%
- BC/Territories 15%

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Apart from the lack of a Quebec sample, this is relatively similar to the approximate population distribution of Canada:

- Atlantic 10%
- Quebec 25%
- Ontario 40%
- Prairies 15%
- BC/Territories 10%

For this reason, poll results are not regionally weighted at the tabulation stage

Cross-Tabulations

After the poll has run to a robust sample size, identifying data are stripped off the data set and it is cross-tabulated.

Cross-tabulations allow us to look at poll findings by other internal poll variables, such as political preference by region, or attitudes to retirement by age.

At the tabulation stage, other analytical tools may also be employed.

We have crafted a “Leadership Index” and an “Age Friendly City Index”, by offering respondents semantic bipolar scales, subtracting negative “scores” from positive “scores”, and cumulating the result of several attributes into one numerical index, either positive or negative. Brief descriptions of these Indices are appended.

These tools, available at the cross-tabulation stage, are more ways in which we can overcome the limitations of the polling instrument we work with.

Comparisons with Other Polls

It is difficult to track our subject matter with other polls, but some examples may demonstrate our reliability:

- Elder abuse has been estimated roughly at affecting between 4% and 10% of seniors. Our poll on the subject found an incidence of 9%

- In the same poll, we found 30% of respondents knew someone who had been abused. Health Canada puts this figure at 20%

- Our political polls offer the best examples. Although our members are more conservative and older than the general populace, and although we have few members in Quebec, we are able to derive a correction factor for the CARP voter to bring them into line with the general voting populace in Ontario, and make some relatively accurate electoral projections for the province:

The following chart shows CARP’s projections for Ontario’s conservative vote compared with a selection of results from national polling firms. It should be noted that CARP’s projections actually foreshadow the results of the national pollsters:

	Late Aug	Early Sept	Mid Sept	Late Sept
CARP	37%	40%	45%	48%
Nat’l Polls	39%	39%	41%	46%

Reliability of Polls

In the example above, CARP’s projections, once corrected for the CARP membership’s conservative bias, were completely in line with findings from national polling firms, and, in some cases, we anticipated trends before they registered them.

It is known that 70% of older voters vote regularly compared to only 45% of voters under 45. The CARP member exceeds even these levels, and respondents claim electoral participation rates well over 90%. If this is true, then our CARP respondents, in addition to being especially well-connected and involved, are also a significant bellwether for the voting intentions of the population at large.

In some senses, we may have a more accurate voting sample than national pollsters, in that all our respondents intend to vote, and at least 90% of them do, whereas younger members of the population, included in national polls, are infrequent and inconstant voters.

CARP Leadership Index™

Members were presented with a list of six words defining character, organized into pairs, as follows:

Caring/Uncaring
Down-to-Earth/Elitist
Effective/Ineffective

They were asked which ONE word applied to each of the federal party leaders. We used the results from this exercise to create a **CARP Leadership Index™**, where the score for each negative characteristic is subtracted from the score for each positive characteristics to give a “net” score on each characteristics. “Net” scores are then summed for a total index score, as follows:

	Caring	Down To Earth	Effective	INDEX™
Harper	-18%	-8%	+25%	-1
Ignatieff	+4%	-35%	-6%	-37
Layton	+13%	+9%	-60%	-38
May	+20%	+16%	-50%	-14
Duceppe	-14%	-11%	-35%	-60

On an individual basis, Stephen Harper is mainly seen to be effective (39%), followed by uncaring (20%), elitist (16%) and ineffective (15%).

Michael Ignatieff is characterized as elitist (44%), followed by ineffective (21%) and effective (14%).

Jack Layton is seen to be ineffective (63%), followed by caring (15%) and down-to-earth (13%).

Elizabeth May is characterized as ineffective (53%), followed by caring (21%) and down-to-earth (19%).

Gilles Duceppe suffers by comparison, being described as ineffective (47%), followed by uncaring (17%) and elitist (16%).

As a comparison, we show below notional scores for previous Canadian politicians, based on a score of +1 for a generally-agreed-upon positive characteristic and -1 for a negative characteristic:

	Caring	Down To Earth	Effective	INDEX™
Paul Martin	+1	-1	-1	-1
Jean Chretien	+1	+1	+1	+3
Kim Campbell	-1	-1	-1	-3
Brian Mulroney	+1	+1	+1	+3
John Turner	+1	-1	-1	-1
Joe Clark	+1	+1	-1	+1
Pierre Trudeau	-1	-1	+1	-1
Mike Pearson	+1	+1	+1	+3
John Diefenbaker	+1	+1	-1	+1

It will be seen that Canada’s most successful leaders have positive scores, whereas the scores of none of the current federal leaders falls into positive territory.

CARP Age-Friendly Cities Index™

Respondents were asked five questions which touch on the key areas of concern spelled out in the WHO Guidebook To Age-Friendly Cities. These dealt ease of:

- Overall life in respondent’s town
- Using transit
- Obtaining low-cost housing
- Being a pedestrian
- Accessing health care and home services

All respondents were asked to think of their town, or the nearest town, and relate these ease of use questions to “older people”. Questions used a four point semantic scale ranging from 4 equal to very easy to 1 equal to not at all easy.

To derive the **CARP Age-Friendly Cities Index™**, we subtract the bottom two negative responses from the top two positive responses to yield an index score on each attribute. Index scores are

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summed across attributes to yield a Total Index Score.

Below are shown the Age-Friendly Indices for 17 major Canadian cities, as well as the average score for residents of the 17 cities, and average scores for all poll respondents:

	Overall	Transit	Housing	Pedestrian	Health	INDEX
Peterboro	77%	64%	30%	53%	64%	288
Winnipeg	62%	54%	-16%	23%	62%	185
Montreal	60%	34%	34%	20%	34%	182
Victoria	90%	68%	-72%	52%	40%	178
London	68%	28%	-22%	20%	42%	136
Vancouver	80%	60%	-88%	45%	18%	115
Kitch/W'loo	62%	21%	-40%	26%	34%	103
ALL CITIES*	58%	35%	-58%	20%	24%	75
Saskatoon	78%	44%	-78%	-12%	34%	66
Ottawa	60%	34%	-68%	28%	10%	64
Mississauga	36%	32%	-64%	10%	48%	62
Hamilton	51%	36%	-40%	24%	-10%	61
TOTAL POLL**	54%	6%	-47%	18%	24%	55
Halifax	42%	18%	-42%	18%	18%	54
Toronto	44%	34%	-78%	12%	10%	22
Edmonton	46%	20%	-46%	-6%	-20%	-6
Kelowna	56%	6%	-88%	-32%	6%	-52
Calgary	7%	10%	-86%	-8%	18%	-59

* all cities listed here

** all cities/towns of all respondents

Peterborough, Winnipeg and Montreal score significantly higher than other cities for their ease of life, and this is primarily due to affordable housing. Victoria also receives a high score, but housing is more problematic there.

Affordable housing is a challenge in every city shown, except Peterborough and Montreal, and this

brings average scores down. Calgary and Kelowna score significantly worse than other cities primarily for their lack of transit, affordable housing and pedestrian amenities.

Respondents in major cities give higher scores than rural or town residents, primarily because of transit issues.