

Guidance for Authors Submitting MSS to *POQ*'s Poll Trends Section [February 2016]

General advice

Poll trends articles provide longitudinal public opinion data on questions that have been asked multiple times using identical or near-identical question wording. The typical minimum time period between data points is a few months. There is no maximum span of time between time points, though spans of no more than a year or two are most useful to readers. Regarding the overall length of series, most authors focus on at least a 10-year period. Longer series also can be useful. Articles that update previously published collections are certainly welcome and should begin their coverage at the point where the previous article(s) ended. Of course, collections that speak to topics that have not been covered in poll trends articles in the past are also welcome. Authors are encouraged to include between approximately 15 and 30 tables, with each table displaying one question asked multiple times. A single fielding of a question, no matter how interesting, should not be shown in a table, though it may be useful to mention such particularly interesting and relevant items in the text.

Authors should search for documentation of survey methodology and response rates. If this information is publicly available it should be included in an appendix. The method of calculation for a response rate may be indicated in one of several ways, following the methods explained in AAPOR's "Standard Definitions" publication available on-line (http://www.aapor.org/Standard_Definitions1.htm). Response rates for each data point shown should be indicated in an appendix. If response rates are not publicly available, the author should state that. Many survey organizations will provide this information if asked, though they often require a few weeks to produce it. Variations in methods of survey administration must be documented (i.e., personal interviews, telephone via RDD, etc.). One economical way to indicate response rates is as follows:

CBS / *New York Times* (RR1): landline sample unless otherwise noted; 6/93, 44.34; 1/94, 39.96; 12/01, 20.6; 5/07, 13.4; 12/07, 14.37; 4/09, 10.12; 5/10, 10.14; 9/11, 11.45; 12/11, 9.04 landline, 7.04 cell phone; 2/12, 10.66 landline, 8.33 cell phone.

GSS (RR5): 1985,78.7; 1987,75.4; 1989,77.6; 1990,73.9; 1993,82.4; 1994,77.8; 1996, 76.1; 1998, 75.6; 2000,70.0; 2002,70.1; 2004,70.4; 2006,71.2.

Pew (RR3): Table 3: 1999,NA; 2000, NA; 2004,31; 2005, 16.9; 2006,22.5; 2007,24.

Table 6: 2003,31; 2004,31; 2006,23; 2007,23; 2008,19.

Table 7: 2002,NA; 2003,31; 2007,23.

Gallup (RR3): Table 5: 2001,20; 2002,16; 2003,19; 2004,17; 2005,17; 2007,16; 2008,13.

Table 11: 2000-20; 2007-14.

Time/CNN/Yankelovich: Table 8: Authors requested information, but it was not made not available.

The appendix should also include a key to names of survey organizations whose data appear in the collection. You may find it useful to abbreviate survey organizations in your tables. See previously published poll trends articles for examples. The appendix should indicate the full names of both the survey organizations and the sponsor (i.e., Pew Center for the People and the Press, Princeton Survey Research Associates).

Include an abstract of no more than 150 words, and take care to be sure that your introduction sets up a discussion of the data trends you present. Lengthy discussions of previous academic treatments of the topic are not encouraged, given the 2,500 word limit for the main text of poll trends manuscripts.

In recent years several organizations have adopted the practice of fielding their U.S. surveys in Spanish in addition to English. If your manuscript includes such data you will need to note this in your methodological appendix and create a separate translation appendix that will, pending publication, appear online as an accompaniment to your article. This appendix needs to show a side-by-side English-Spanish wording for the relevant items identified by numbers corresponding to your table numbers. In the event survey organizations decline to provide the translation, note this in your methodological appendix. Naturally, this guidance also applies to any non-English versions of questions included in your collection. You should clarify in your methodological appendix when this use of a foreign language began and alert readers that your translation appendix is available at the POQ website (<https://poq.oxfordjournals.org/>).

Table formatting

When preparing manuscripts for submission to the poll trends section, please take care to format tables as illustrated by the examples below. **Tables must be in Microsoft Word.** Do not send Excel tables or tables in any other spreadsheet format. Group all of your tables after the text, appendix, and bibliography. If accepted for publication, the tables will later be inserted at appropriate places within the text during the editorial phase. You should indicate where in the text they should be placed, preferably immediately following the first paragraph in which the table is referenced.

Each table should be numbered, have a title, and must show the full question wording, response options, sample size, and dates. When all the time points in a series were produced by a single survey organization, indicate that organization at the beginning of the question, as in the example below. When response options were accepted as volunteered, indicate that.

Organize the data chronologically from left to right. Create multi-part tables stacked one below another when the number of time points exceeds the page width.

Center the date, the percentage symbol, and the N in each table. Left-justify the question wording and the response options. Format numerals showing percentages per the following example (centered within table cell, but aligned vertically on numeral place).

Table 1. Homosexual Relations

GALLUP: “I’m going to read you a list of issues. Regardless of whether or not you think it should be legal, for each one, please tell me whether you personally believe that in general it is morally acceptable or morally wrong.... How about homosexual relations?”

	5/01	5/02	5/03	5/04	5/05	5/06	5/07
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%

Morally acceptable	40	38	44	42	44	44	47
Morally wrong	53	55	52	54	52	51	49
Depends on the situation (vol)	3	2	2	1	2	1	2
Not a moral issue (vol)	1	1	*	1	*	1	*
No opinion	3	4	2	2	2	2	2
N	1,012	1,012	1,005	1,000	1,005	1,002	1,003

* less than .5%

Here is one way to accomplish this formatting style:

1. Align numerals showing percentages to the left.

	5/01	5/02	5/03	5/04	5/05	5/06	5/07
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Morally acceptable	40	38	44	42	44	44	47
Morally wrong	53	55	52	54	52	51	49
Depends on the situation (vol)	3	2	2	1	2	1	2
Not a moral issue (vol)	1	1	*	1	*	1	*
No opinion	3	4	2	2	2	2	2
N	1,012	1,012	1,005	1,000	1,005	1,002	1,003

2. Select the cells whose contents you want to center.

	5/01	5/02	5/03	5/04	5/05	5/06	5/07
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Morally acceptable	40	38	44	42	44	44	47
Morally wrong	53	55	52	54	52	51	49
Depends on the situation (vol)	3	2	2	1	2	1	2
Not a moral issue (vol)	1	1	*	1	*	1	*
No opinion	3	4	2	2	2	2	2
N	1,012	1,012	1,005	1,000	1,005	1,002	1,003

3. Find the horizontal ruler just above the page display. On the far left side of the screen, directly in line with ruler, there is a tab stop marker (a small box surrounding an L-shaped icon.) Click the marker until the symbol for a decimal tab appears. The symbol looks like an upside down T (\perp) with a decimal point next to it.

4. Place your cursor on the ruler at a spot above the first column of numerals showing percentages. Position the cursor so that it appears to be centered over the column of cells. Click and hold down the mouse button. A vertical line will appear on the screen. This line indicates the new spot where the selected figures will be located. If necessary, fine tune the position of the cursor (and line) and then release the mouse button. The numbers in the first column will be realigned per the new location of the tab/decimal stop. If the rest of the selected columns are exactly the same width as the first one, they will in most cases be automatically reformatted correctly (see Table 1, above). If any of the columns of numerals do not center properly (and this can be due to cell-width disparities, hidden formatting commands, etc.), repeat steps 1 through 3 on each individual column requiring adjustment. If the columns of a table are vastly different in width, it might be best to format each column individually right from the start.

When a series involves data from more than one survey organization, indicate the organization for each time point at the top of each column, as in the example below. Over-samples or other targeted subpopulations should be clearly noted.

Table 2. Gays and Lesbians as High School Teachers

“Please tell me if you think gays and lesbians should or should not be hired for each of the following occupations. Should gays be hired as high school teachers?”

	PSRA	Pew	GALLUP
	7/98	3/00 ^b	5/05
	%	%	%
Should	60	63	71
Should not	34	32	27
It depends (vol) ^a	--	--	1
Don't know/no opinion	6	5	1
N	602	803	1,005

^a “It depends” accepted as a volunteered response only in May 2005

^b The sample included an over-sample of African-Americans and people aged 18-34. Results are weighted to represent the national adult population.

Wording variations

When including variant wordings, be sure that those differences are not material to the meaning or tone of the question. Variant introductions are often permissible, as in this example:

Table 3. Hate Laws: Women

GALLUP: “If a hate law were enacted in your state, which of the following groups do you think should be covered? How about women?”

	2/99	9/00 ^a
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	%	%
Should be covered	83	78
Should not	13	18
Don't know/refused	4	4
N	1,014	1,008

^a Thinking about what have been called hate crimes – those crimes committed because the criminal hates the group of people to which the victim belongs. If a hate law were enacted ...

Some variations in wording are so slight that they are safely combined in a single trend, so long as the verbatim wordings are shown in notes. Variations in response categories usually make such items inappropriate for combining into a single series. Exercise great caution when you consider combining such items, and document the wording differences in table notes.

Table 4. Language Offensive to Racial Groups and the First Amendment

“I’m going to ready you some ways people might exercise their First Amendment right of free speech. For each, please tell me if you agree or disagree that someone should be free to do it...strongly agree, mildly agree, mildly disagree, or strongly disagree. ... People should be allowed to use words in public that might be offensive to racial groups.”

	CRA	CRA	CRA ^a	CRA	CRA ^a	CRA ^b	CRA ^b	NESRA ^c
	7-8/97	2-3/99	4/00	5-6/01	6-7/02	6/03	5-6/04	5/05
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Strongly agree	8	8	15	16	14	18	17	21
Mildly agree	15	13	17	18	20	20	18	22
Mildly disagree	14	16	15	15	16	14	14	14
Strongly disagree	61	62	52	49	48	47	49	39
Don’t know/ Refused	2	1	1	2	1	1	1	3
N	1,026	1,001	1,015	1,012	1,000	1,000	1,002	1,003

^a I’m going to ready you some ways people might exercise their First Amendment right of free speech. For each, please tell me if you agree or disagree that someone should be free to do it. People should be allowed to use words in public that might be offensive to racial groups.... strongly agree, mildly agree, mildly disagree, strongly disagree.

^b Now please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the following statements.... People should be allowed to say things in public that might be offensive to racial groups... (if agree/disagree, ask:) Do you agree/disagree strongly or mildly?

^c People should be allowed to say things in public that might be offensive to racial groups ... strongly agree, mildly agree, mildly disagree, strongly disagree.

Table 5. Campaign Finance Reform

GALLUP: “In your view, would the Republican Party or the Democratic Party do a better job of dealing with each of the following issues and problems ... or would neither party do a good job? ... Campaign finance reform.”

	8/95	10/97 ^a
	(%)	(%)
Republican	26	37
Democrat	26	31
Neither ^b	32	21
Same (vol)	1	N.A.
Don't know/Refused	16	10
N	1,210	1,008

^a “Do you think the Republican Party or the Democratic Party would do a better job of dealing with each of the following issues and problems? ... Campaign finance reform.”

^b “Neither” was given as a response option in 1995. It was accepted as a volunteered response in 1997.

Table 6. Controlling Influence of Interest Groups

“Do you think the Democratic party or the Republican party can do a better job in keeping the influence of interest groups under control or don't you think there's any difference between them?”

	YCS	YP
	12/91	6/93 ^{a,b}
	(%)	(%)
Democratic party	20	27
Republican party	19	21
No difference	52	42
Not sure	10	10
N	1,500	901

^a “Do you think the Democratic party or the Republican party can do a better job in each of the following, or don't you think there's any difference between them? ... Keeping the influence of interest groups under control.”

^b An oversample of 364 adults who voted for Ross Perot for President was also taken. The results are weighted to be representative of the national adult population.

Other variations in wording preclude the combination of such items into a single trend, as in this hypothetical example where one version of the question invokes the authority of the U.S. Constitution and the other version does not:

Table 7. Presidential Term Limits

GALLUP “As you may know, the 22nd amendment to the Constitution limits presidents to two terms of four years each. Would you like to see this amendment repealed so that presidents could run for more than two terms, or not?”

	8/86	9/86	11/88 ^a	2/89 ^a
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Favor repeal of 22 nd amendment	37	34	18	24
Oppose repeal of 22 nd amendment	60	64	80	72
Don’t know	3	3	2	4
N	771	978	2,022	482

^a “Would you approve or disapprove of a proposal to allow a president to serve more than two terms in office?”

Other cautions

When survey mode changes, such as from in-person to telephone, clearly indicate this in table notes and in the accompanying text. Surveys of sub-populations, such as specific racial groups or registered voters, can be useful but must be clearly documented in tables and text. The Poll Trends section generally does not publish polling data gathered via internet surveys or convenience samples, with the exception of data from GfK (formerly Knowledge Networks). If in doubt on this or other points, please contact the journal’s editors.