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Public less receptive to polling

The Globe and Mail

Although public-opinion polls are taking on more and more importance in how election campaigns are designed and run (and in the making of public policy generally), they are becoming more and more difficult to do, according to Canada's leading survey researchers.

Pollsters are finding it increasingly difficult to reach enough of the right randomly-selected people to give their results statistical validity – and the latest Globe poll, conducted by ComQuest Research Group, is no exception.

Pollsters often have to call four or more telephone numbers to obtain one completed interview.

The phenomenon is referred to technically as the response rate, the number of telephone calls that have to be made to get the necessary number of interviews. Toronto and Vancouver are now the most difficult cities in Canada in which to do public-opinion polling, in part because of the busy lives people live, the increasing use

of answering machines and general fatigue from telemarketing and polling.

The overall response rate for the new Globe Poll was 28 per cent in the country as a whole, a rate that compares favourably with other polls of this type, according to the poll supervisor at ComQuest Research Group.

That means that to interview 1,502 respondents, of whom 1,446 were eligible voters, 5,290 eligible telephone numbers had to be dialled.

Because of the difficulties in Toronto, the response rate in Ontario (26 per cent) is slightly lower than the national average.

For the Globe Poll, ComQuest Research Group makes several calls to a selected household to interview a specific individual who is selected through a probability sampling procedure.

Respondents have the right not to participate in a survey and about 50 per cent of the people contacted refused to participate in the Globe Poll.

The article EM9333 reprinted above is used in Figure 8.4 of the STAT 220 Course Materials, in Figure 3.4 of the STAT 231 Course Materials, in Figure 3.1a of the STAT 332 Course Materials and in Statistical Highlight #78.