

Pollsters, Political Telemarketing and “Push Polls”:
Ensuring Voters’ Opinions Count on Super Tuesday and Beyond

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(Glastonbury, CT): As the Presidential primary season reaches a climax with Super Tuesday, expect to hear reports about waves of push polls. Both the general public and targeted candidates are increasingly annoyed by push polls or political telemarketing, which often include negative—even inflammatory—information about a candidate. The media describe these telephone calls as “push polls” because they seek to “push” a certain candidate or position.

These are not legitimate polls being conducted for research purposes. Rather, they are persuasion calls: Quick sales efforts; not the collection of unbiased responses of legitimate polls or surveys.

“Not all calls with negative information are push polls,” clarifies Larry Brownell, Executive Director of the Marketing Research Association (MRA). “Researchers and political campaigns often test the effectiveness of possible messages about opponents and even themselves. That’s legitimate surveying, and citizens should feel confident about participating in such efforts.”

MRA developed this tool to help voters distinguish between legitimate polls/message testing and push polls. Legitimate researchers would tell you it’s not worth your time responding to a push poll. But if you want your opinion to count, respond to legitimate surveys.

Legitimate polls/message testing...	“Push-polls”...
... Are generally five minutes or longer.	... Calls are generally 1 to 2 minutes long.
... Neither support nor oppose a candidate/issue or information being tested; seek only to collect unbiased information.	... Are designed to persuade people—not to measure opinion.
... Are based on scientific methodologies and use sound sampling methods. Calls are governed by strict industry ethics and standards.	... Usually ask one or only a few questions and then read a statement (usually negative) about a candidate/issue. There is no attempt at collecting opinions.
... Include questions regarding respondent demographics.	... Do not ask any personal – or demographic – questions, which could be used to validate data.
... The organization or call center making the call is clearly identified.	... The organization or call center making the call may not be identified (or uses a phony name).
... Number of completed interviews fall within the range of legitimate surveys (between 300 and 1,500 interviews).	... Call thousands of people regardless of demographics.

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