

Public Opinion and the Politics of Peace Research

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<http://www.peacepolls.org>

Abstract

This paper will review the authors experience in running public opinion polls on peace processes in Asia (Israel, Palestine, Syria, Kashmir, Sri Lanka) and other countries around the world (Northern Ireland, United Kingdom, Macedonia, Bosnia Herzegovina, Kosovo, Sudan) with a focus on the politics of their timing, funding, publication and the interests of the commissioning agencies. A nations security, war and peace processes are arguably the most sensitive political issues that pollsters have to deal with, and it is to be expected that interested parties will want to manipulate the outcome of such research to meet the needs of their own political agendas. But is this in their 'true self best interest' or the best interests of the peoples that they are ultimately responsible for in a democracy? With all these points in mind various approaches to the management and implementation of peace polls will be considered with a view to exploring pragmatic solutions to this delicate political problem.

Discussion

Table 1 lists the polls I have undertaken to assist the parties to their conflict to 'get to peace'. By way of an introductory discussion I will briefly review each one of these projects and note where the polling was done in the life cycle of the conflict – generally speaking towards the end and/or when all other methods to reach a negotiated peace had failed. At was at this point that the parties or interested third parties were willing to try something new that might help to produce the outcome that they wanted. The table lists the most relevant third parties and funders. Interestingly the funders' relationship to the conflict and interested third parties is not always immediately obvious where a degree of independent distance was considered an advantage to success or at least an appearance of such independence. With regards to outcomes they were very 'mixed' depending more on the willingness of the parties to find a solution to their conflict than the effort and resources put into the peace polling project. That willingness, in turn, was dependent on the pressure on the parties to the conflict to reach an agreement due to the circumstances of their own conflict and also the interests of influential third parties to the conflict. Significantly the solutions to most of the conflicts were obvious to the conflict parties at the beginning of their conflicts which suggests that peace polling done, if taken seriously, early on in their conflicts, could have helped to save many lives and much economic and social pain. For example, in Northern Ireland the Belfast Agreement was called 'Sunningdale for slow learners'¹ all of which suggests that the early deployment of peace polls as a matter of normative policy would be in keeping with the well know proverb 'a stitch in time saves nine'.

¹ On signing the Belfast Agreement in 1998 the SDLP negotiator Seamus Mallon suggested it was not very different to the Sunningdale Agreement reached in 1973.

Table 1. Peace Polls and their sponsors.

Conflict Parties (Start date) ²	Peace Poll Date	Third Parties	Funder	Outcome
Northern Ireland (1969) Catholics/Protestants	1996-2003	UK, Ireland, USA, EU	JRCT, UK and Ireland NGO	Belfast Agreement
Macedonia (1991) Serb/Albanian	2002	Balkan States, Kosovo NATO, EU	CDRSEE Open Society NGO	Elections
Bosnia and Herzegovina (1991) Bosniaks/Serbs	2004	EU	CDRSEE BBC	Post Conflict Report and BBC Production
Kosovo and Serbia (1991) Albanians/Serbs	2005	EU, NATO, US	CDRSEE, Germany, UNESCO, OSCE, USAID	Failed AED polls/ negotiations and unilateral independence
Sri Lanka (1983) Tamil/Buddhist	2008-2010	India	British Academy, Norway	Support for APRC Proposals
Israel and Palestine (1948) Jews/Muslims	2002 then 2008- 2009	USA	British Academy, One Voice	Process poll and failure of process Shikaki EU polls
Kashmir – IaK (1947) Muslims/Hindu	2008	UN	Norway, CVoter Foundation	Report and WAPOR Presentations
Kashmir – PaK (1947) India/Pakistan	2009	UN	CVoter Foundation	IPSOS/Mori/RIIA in 2010
Sudan (2003) Darfur African/Arab	2009	UN, US	Department of State/U Penn	Closed down and revolution
Egypt (2011) Revolt (p191-192)	2011	Arab Spring	CVoter Foundation	Closed down, elections and army coup
Syria (2011) Revolt	2014-2016	Arab Spring, Region, US, Russia	UK, TDA, USIP, Germany, Norway	Defeat of ISIS to Idlib and Assad in place
UK Muslims (9/11 2001)	2006	UK/USA	PIPA, GMI	Presentation House of Lords
West and Muslim World (9/11 2001)	2003-2007	UK/USA	Yaffe Centre at U of Michigan	Critical analysis of failed research
Cyprus (1974) Turkish/Greek	2002-Present	Greece, Turkey, UK, UN	British Academy, CDRSEE, US, Interpeace	Negotiations and CBMs
Korea (1950) North/South	2018	US, China, UN	None	CBMs and negotiations
Peace Index	2013/14/15	All States	CVoter and Gilani Foundations	ESRC Proposals

Table 2 lists the grant applications I have made with various colleagues with the intention of institutionalising peace polls as a matter of normative international policy. Sadly, all these grant applications failed. It is worth pointing out here that the teams involved were some of the best and most experienced in the world and in the most recent of these applications included partnerships and financial support from other significant globally recognised organisations in the fields of conflict analysis and monitoring. In practice then I tend not to

² These dates are approximate and can reasonably be argued to be earlier or later.

apply for grants to undertake peace polls anymore but rather just take commissions when they are offered to me. Clearly, on this ad hoc basis, all this evidence suggests that parties and third parties to conflicts only want to undertake peace polls at a time and place of their choosing when they believe it is in their interest to do so. But as has been pointed out this is more often than not a case of doing ‘too little and too late’ at considerable cost to themselves and those directly involved in the conflict. How can this problem be overcome? How can we get these parties and states to act in their ‘true self best interest’?

Table 2. Failed Middle East, Muslim World and global grant applications.³

Agencies	Partners	States	Title	Year
ESRC 2016	Professors: Johnathan Tonge, Adrain Guelke, Michael Traugott, Gilani Research Foundation, Oxford Uni. DigitalGlobe, Institute for Economics and Peace	Global	Analyzing Violent 'Glocal' Conflicts in Global, Regional, Transnational, National and Local contexts using 'Global Centric' Samples	2016
ESRC 2014	Professors: Johnathan Tonge, Stefan Wolff, Adrain Guelke, Michael Traugott	Global	Development and Deployment of a Global Perceptions-Based 'People's Peace Index' (PPI)	2014
FCO, EU and US State Department	Albany Associates	Israel, Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Egypt	Peace polling in the Middle East	2010
FCO, EU and US State Department	Albany Associates	Israel and Palestine	Peace polling in Israel and Palestine	2010
EU, Canada and Germany	Albany Associates	Lebanon	Palestinian refugees, the Lebanese and a poll	2010
Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Dr. Mina Zemach and Dr. Nader Said	Israel and Palestine	A proposal to undertake ‘peace polls’ in support of renewed Israel/Palestine negotiations	2009
AHRC/ESRC	Professors Stephan Wolff and Adrian Guelke	Global	The politics of religious conflict in local, regional and global perspective	2007
Leverhulme Trust	Dr. Ghassan Khatib JMCC	Israel and Palestine	Public opinion and the Israel/Palestine peace process	2007
JRCT	Professor Adrian Guelke	UK	Muslim alienation, radicalisation, public opinion and public diplomacy	2004
USIP/ Fulbright		Global	Improving relations with, and within, the Muslim World: Applying lessons of public diplomacy from Northern Ireland	2004
UK Home Office	Professor Adrian Guelke	UK	British Muslims and the problems of radicalization	2004

³ Israel and Palestine are the most well researched and funded peace process in the world. In this context the EU critically examined their policies to try and discover why they had failed. Dr. Mina Zemach and Dr. Nader Said were on the committee commissioned to make this review and it is my understanding that they expressed the opinion that the majority of projects chosen for support failed to effectively challenge the status quo. In my judgment this is funding for what can best be called the ‘peace industry’ not conflict resolution.

The problem is not a question of financial resources. Polling in times of war was first undertaken by Gallup during the Second World War to ascertain the welcome, or otherwise, of US forces invading Italy. The polls suggested they would be welcome, at least by the Italian population, so the invasion went ahead as planned and was successful. Since then governments have regularly polled populations that they have an interest in, with regards to conflicts that they have an interest in, as part of their intelligence gathering exercise. This polling is often difficult and therefore expensive creating a polling industry that would be in excess of 100M USD per year. A global peace poll, using modern methods, could be deployed for as little as 1M USD per year. The difficulty is clearly political not financial, and I would argue in the 'true self best interest' of the parties to the conflict.

Conclusion

Table 3 lists a number of strategies for overcoming this political problem. In all the conflicts I have worked on it is advisable to start with issues and proposals that will get a positive response from all the parties to the conflict before moving on to the more difficult contested issues. So perhaps we should start with saving the planet but by going beyond the easy answers of saving the rain forests to include the more difficult questions of who is responsible, who pays, who should limit their consumption of the Earth's resources and what about population control? UN SDGs are all relevant to these questions but many of the conflicts reviewed here are proxy wars in which members of the UN SC P5 have an interest so perhaps we first need to undertake a peace poll between the Super Powers, and to make this task as easy as possible start with Confidence Building Measures (CBMs). A private sponsor would be welcome and as our world becomes more difficult to manage, as appears to be the case, perhaps a private sponsor will come forward to track conflicts globally and run boosters in critical conflicts as may be required. WAPOR made an attempt to set international standards for peace polls some years ago but understandably that effort failed when confronted by the interests of its members. But perhaps regional chapters, including WAPOR Asia, would like to try a different strategy? Even China might welcome a save the planet peace poll? In the end, however, this will not work unless we 'speak truth to power'. All suggestions would be welcome. Discuss!

Table 3. Global peace poll strategies

1. Save the Planet – Environment (Ask the hard questions)
2. UN – SDGs (See Institute for Economics and Peace)
3. UN – SC – P5
4. Confidence Building Measure (CBMs)
5. Private sponsor
6. Conflict base line and tracking
7. Conflict boosters
8. Pilot with reduced Global Centric Sample
9. WAPOR peace poll policy
10. WAPOR global and/or regional peace poll