Esomar-WAPOR Position on Electoral Polling Regulations in Bolivia

In recent years, operational challenges affecting the conduct, publication and dissemination of public opinion polls – including increased regulatory scrutiny – have grown significantly across many regions of the world[1]. On 29 December 2025, the Plurinational Electoral Body (Órgano Electoral Plurinacional, OEP) of Bolivia adopted a new regulation governing the conduct and publication of electoral polls and opinion surveys within the framework of the 2026 Subnational Elections[2], held officially on 22 March 2026. Among other measures, the regulation introduced restrictive requirements for margin of errors: ±2% at the municipal level and ±1.5% at department level, with confidence levels between 95% and 99%. These requirements differ from internationally recognised research standards and may create substantial operational and financial challenges for individuals and organisations seeking to comply with professional and methodological principles. While the regulation applied specifically to the 2026 subnational electoral process, **it risks setting a precedent for future regulatory measures that could unnecessarily constrain the conduct and publication of electoral polling**.

Esomar, the world association for market, opinion and social research, and data analytics, and the World Association for Public and Opinion Research (WAPOR), an international leading association in the public opinion research, **support regulatory measures aimed at strengthening the quality, transparency, and methodological rigor of opinion polls**, including efforts to combat illegitimate research practices and promote the highest professional standards in research. However, restrictions on polling, such as inflexible margin-of-error requirements, create rules which are disproportionate and inconsistent with **fundamental principles of freedom of expression, access to information, and democratic participation**.

Esomar and WAPOR strongly recommend Bolivian authorities to ensure that future frameworks regulating electoral surveys preserve an enabling environment for polling organisations and, consequently, safeguard the freedoms that are essential to transparent and impartial elections – including citizens' right to access reliable information about the socio-political landscape in Bolivia.

Why do Public Opinion Polls Matter?

As highlighted in the Esomar-WAPOR Guidelines on Opinion Polls and Published Surveys[3], public opinion research plays a vital role in democratic societies by

[1] Esomar and WAPOR Study on the Freedom to Conduct and Publish Opinion Poll
[2] https://web.oep.org.bo/wp-content/uploads/2026/01/05-01-26-REGLAMENTO-PARA-LA-ELABORACION-Y-DIFUSION-DE-ESTUDIOS-DE-OPINION.pdf
[3] 2026-06-12 - Polling Guideline_Esomar-WAPOR_Final.pdf

supporting transparent and competitive electoral processes. When conducted according to recognised scientific principles, polling data contributes to a more informed public debate by helping citizens understand the evolving socio-political landscape. This is particularly important in the period leading up to elections, when voters and political parties are making decisions that will shape the future of their communities and countries. Restricting the publication of polls during these critical moments deprives citizens of valuable information while doing little to prevent speculation, or misleading claims.

International human rights standards recognise the importance of protecting the free flow of information. Article 19 of the *UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* guarantees the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds. Obstructing legitimate opinion research limits public access to trustworthy information and can create conditions in which misinformation spreads more easily, weakening informed democratic engagement. Moreover, government officials and decision-makers depend on high-quality research to understand public priorities and concerns, enabling them to design policies that are responsive, effective, and grounded in evidence.

A Call for Balanced Regulatory Frameworks on Polling

Esomar and WAPOR support Bolivian and international polling agencies in expressing concerns about legislative approaches that may unnecessarily restrict the conduct, publication and dissemination of electoral poll and opinion surveys. The existing legal framework has proven to be sufficient in ensuring that polling agencies in Bolivia accomplish their important societal task of capturing snapshots of public opinion at any given moment.

Introducing additional restrictions is neither necessary nor proportionate to the stated objective of improving research quality. Future regulatory initiatives should therefore seek to balance ensuring research quality with the protection of fundamental democratic freedoms and internationally recognised research standards.

Esomar and WAPOR therefore urge Bolivian authorities, when considering future regulations on electoral polling data, to prioritise:

- **Flexible and proportionate methodological requirement**, including for margins of error, in line with appropriate standards for different administrative levels (municipal, departmental, and national).
- **Increased transparency around the data that is available to the public and around who is publishing polls**, including technical audits.
- **Establishment of a forum** including national electoral authorities, opinion research companies, professional associations, and academia to ensure that future regulatory frameworks are evidence-based and operationally feasible.

- **Recognition of international research standards and sectoral ethical guidelines**, such as those developed by Esomar and WAPOR, as a reference point for assessing polling quality and integrity.

Efforts to strengthen opinion research quality should focus on transparency, methodological rigor, and accountability rather than restrictions on the free flow of information.

Esomar is a worldwide, self-regulatory organisation committed to promoting ethical practice and representing the market, opinion and social research, insights and data analytics community. Since 1947, Esomar and its partner associations have ensured the healthy and responsible practice of research by ensuring its trustworthiness and accountability. Esomar represents and provides connections among 50,000+ individuals and 750+ companies in 130+ countries. Esomar's programs, initiatives, reports, and events promote international ethical standards for the profession, education, best practices, networking, as well as a structured dialogue with policy and decision-makers.

World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR) is an international leading association in the survey and public opinion research founded in 1947, with approximately 500 members in more than 100 countries representing the industry's most respected names in the survey and public opinion research field. WAPOR promotes the highest professional standards, ethics and techniques for polling around the world. Through publications, seminars, meetings and educational initiatives, WAPOR engages in a rich ongoing conversation about how best to collect data and maintain data quality not just in advanced democracies, but also in emerging democracies.