

Press Release--May 22, 1995

A Press WARNING from the National Council on Public Polls

The National Council on Public Polls is issuing a warning about a growing and thoroughly unethical political campaign technique, commonly called "Push Polls," masquerading as legitimate political polling. These are not polls at all. They are political telemarketing.

A "Push Poll" is a telemarketing technique in which telephone calls are used to canvass vast numbers of potential voters, feeding them false and damaging "information" about a candidate under the guise of taking a poll to see how this "information" effects voter preferences. In fact, the intent is to "push" the voters away from one candidate and toward the opposing candidate. This is clearly political telemarketing, using innuendo and, in many cases, clearly false information to influence voters; there is no intent to conduct research.

These telemarketing techniques damage the electoral process in two ways. They injure candidates, often without revealing the source of the information. Also, the results of a "Push Poll", if released, give a seriously flawed and biased picture of the political situation.

The 1996 election campaign is already being tracked by legitimate political polls. These surveys use samples representative of all voters. "Push Polls" use telephone banks to canvass large numbers of voters. Legitimate polls may seek out weaknesses of candidates and attempt to ascertain the impact on voters of knowledge of these weaknesses, as well as issues and other facets of a political campaign. "Push Polls" attack selected candidates. The intent of legitimate polls in each case is research; a sample is interviewed, not a canvass, and the survey is not designed to deceive.

When asked to participate in a political survey as a respondent or to report the results as a journalist, beware of negative or derogatory questions or statements. The results of "Push Polls" should never be reported by the media, but the use of such polls by a candidate may, of course, be a legitimate news story.