

# WELCOME TO:



Threats to Opinion Polling Around the World:  
The ESOMAR/WAPOR Report on the Freedom to  
Conduct and Publish Opinion Polls

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# Join us for the Next Webinar in the 2024 Series:

Navigating AAPOR: Your Guide to Membership,  
Involvement, and the Annual Conference

April 24, 2024

2:00 PM – 3:00 PM ET



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Please complete the webinar survey immediately following the session.



# TODAY'S PRESENTERS

Dr. Kathy Frankovic

Dr. David Jodice

- ▶ **HISTORY**
- ▶ **METHODOLOGY**
- ▶ **FINDINGS**
- ▶ **FUTURE**

# THE PROJECT'S HISTORY

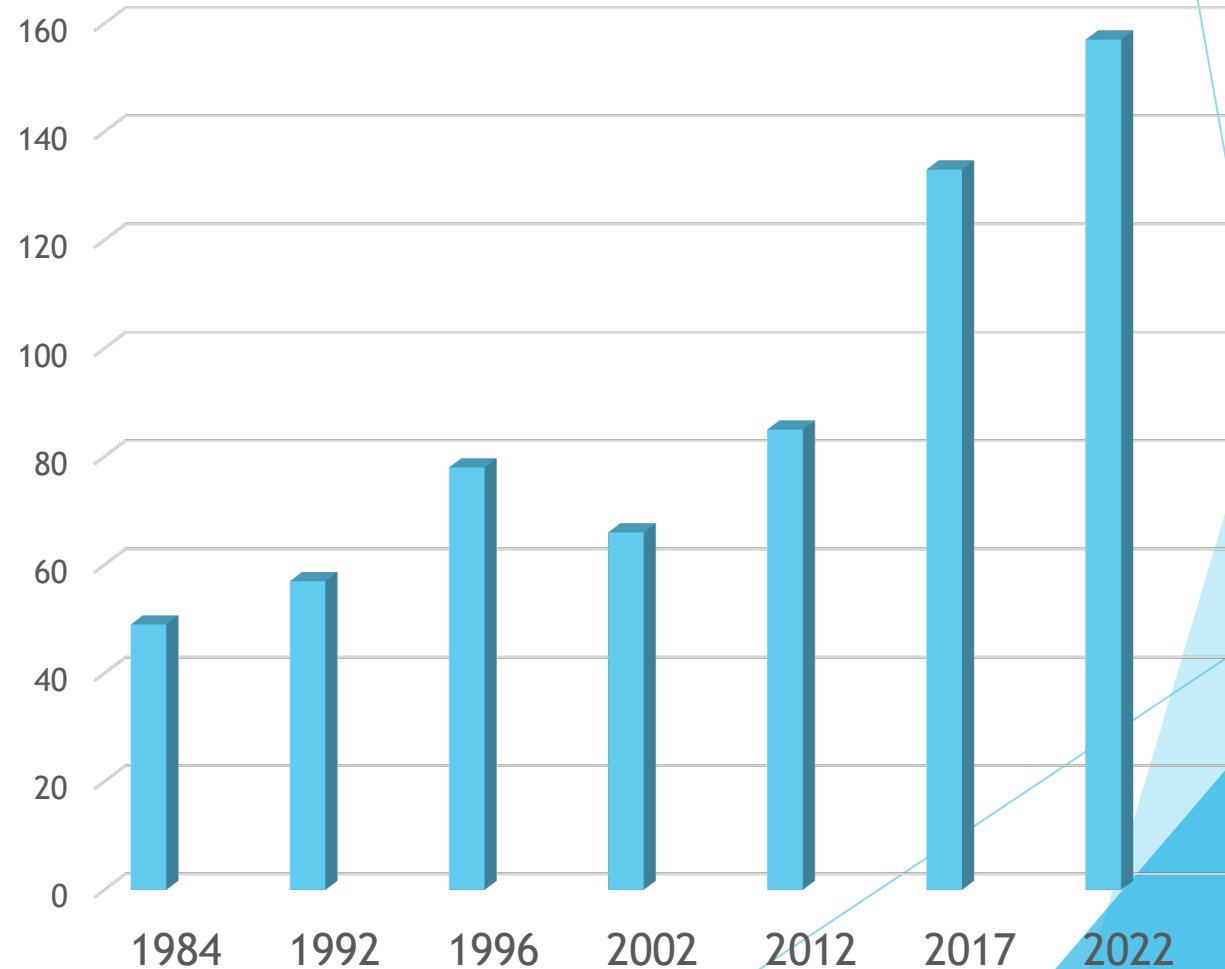
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# The Project's Long History NOW Nearly Global in Coverage

## SEVEN STUDIES

### NUMBER OF COUNTRIES

- ▶ 2022 (157)
- ▶ 2017 (133)
- ▶ 2012 (85) WAPOR ONLY
- ▶ 2002 (66)
- ▶ 1996 (78)
- ▶ 1992 (57) WAPOR ONLY
- ▶ 1984 (49) WAPOR ONLY





# How Did the Freedom Report Begin?

## THE ROLE OF UNESCO

- ▶ Early links between WAPOR and UNESCO, which contracted for polls in in 9 countries (1948).
- ▶ UNESCO funded three studies in cross-country polling in 1953
- ▶ A hoped-for Barometer of World Opinion didn't follow from the WAPOR-UNESCO connection.

# BUT...in 1983, WAPOR Council Decided to Examine Threats to Polling, Like...

- ▶ Banning publication of poll results within a certain period before a general election
- ▶ Restrictions of issues which may be surveyed or published
- ▶ Whether samples are adequate
- ▶ Whether information on methodology is adequate.

**THESE ARE STILL THE BASIC ISSUES IN THE FREEDOM REPORTS**

# The First Two Reports Appeared in Journals, the Rest as Documents

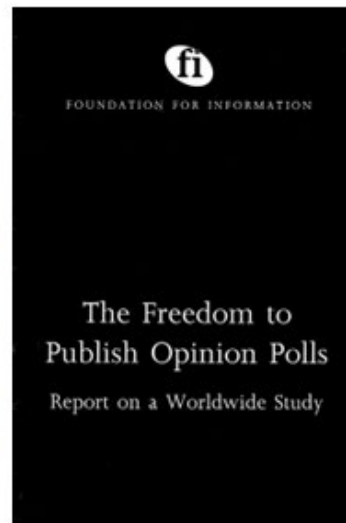
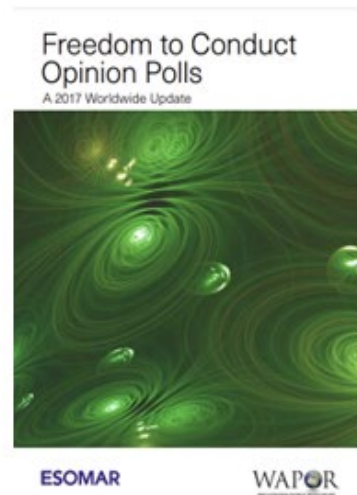
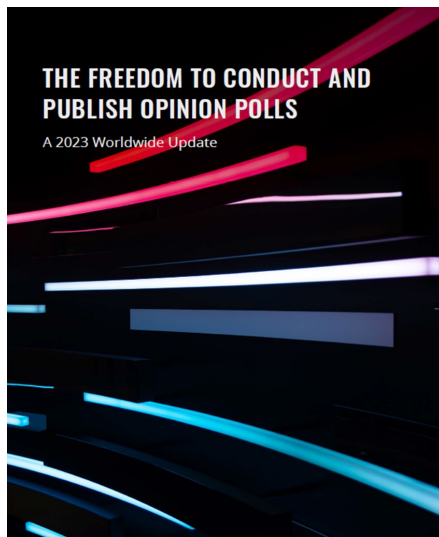
- ▶ 1984: *European Research*, January 1985
- ▶ 1992: *Marketing and Research Today*, September 1992

[*Marketing and Opinion Today* was an ESOMAR publication]

All future reports but one would be conducted jointly by WAPOR and ESOMAR. Reports for 1996 and 2002 were published as pamphlets by the Foundation for Information, an organization formed by ESOMAR in 1996 and based in Amsterdam. The 1992 Report was aided by a grant from UNESCO.

# More Recent Reports: 2012, 2017 and 2023

- ▶ 2012 was conducted only by WAPOR, with the help of the University of Hong Kong.
- ▶ 2017 and 2023 were jointly conducted and published by ESOMAR and WAPOR. They have greater country coverage and provide more information.



# The Study Matters As Election Polls Are Important For Democracy

- ✓ They give information to all about citizens' preferences
- ✓ They are used by voters strategically in multi-party elections
- ✓ They tell parties which issues matter to voters and are a check on elite claims
- ✓ They encourage stability during election periods by managing public expectations
- ✓ Exit polls can be a test of whether elections are “fair and free”
- ✓ Polls can be a check on misinformation campaigns

# THE PROJECT'S METHODOLOGY

# The 2023 Freedom Report

- ▶ Field work conducted by Dr. Kseniya Kizilova of the World Values Survey
- ▶ Respondents were 200 WAPOR and ESOMAR national representatives and others
- ▶ Report written by Kathy Frankovic, David Jodice, Kseniya Kizilova and See Toh Wai Yu
- ▶ Next Freedom Report - Scheduled for 2026

# 2022-23 FREEDOM STUDY COUNTRIES







# Press Freedom Index, 2002-23

- ▶ Reporters Without Borders - <https://rsf.org>
- ▶ Ratings by Subject Matter Experts  
Political Context, Legal Framework, Economic Context, Sociocultural Context, Safety
- ▶ Methodology Changes in 2021 - Be Wary of Comparisons Before 2021
- ▶ 180 Countries, USA Ranking in 45th Place, Down 3 Positions Since 2022

# Press Freedom Index, 2023

- ▶ MOST Free Countries in Order: Norway, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Finland
- ▶ LEAST Free Countries in Order: Turkmenistan, Iran, Vietnam, China, North Korea
- ▶ Globally, 70% are rated as Negatively in terms of press freedom and 30% are rated Positively

# Freedom House Index

- ▶ Combined Metric of Political and Civil Rights for the 60 Countries with Elections Already Held, Scheduled or Expected in 2024
- ▶ From 1 (South Sudan, Syria) to 100 (Finland)
- ▶ **United States = 83, along with Croatia, Panama, Romania and South Korea**
- ▶ Countries Rated 90+ are Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Finland, Iceland, Kiribati, Palau, Portugal, Slovakia, Taiwan and Uruguay

# Examples of Recent Threats to Opinion Polling

- ▶ Angola (2022)
- ▶ Brazil (2023)
- ▶ Central Asia (2024) - Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan
- ▶ Kiribati (2024)
- ▶ Vietnam (2024)

# **SOME PROJECT FINDINGS**

# The Threats To Polling Covered In The Report

- ▶ **ACTIONS BY GOVERNMENTS:**
  - ▶ Limiting subject matter: Outright Censorship
  - ▶ Requiring registration or government supervision
  - ▶ Setting bans on publication
  - ▶ Extreme measures: attacks, controls
- ▶ **GROWING DIFFICULTIES IN CONDUCTING ELECTION POLLS**
  - ▶ Socio-Culturally “Taboo” Topics
  - ▶ **POOR REPORTING OF POLLS**

# Limited Subject Matter: “Taboo Topics”

|                         | GLOBAL | AFRICA/ASIA | WANA<br>West Asia, North Africa |
|-------------------------|--------|-------------|---------------------------------|
| Political Participation | 15%    | 24%         | 20%                             |
| Religion                | 18%    | 29%         | <b>43%</b>                      |
| Crime                   | 11%    | 17%         | 17%                             |
| Social Issues           | 11%    | 14%         | 19%                             |
| Foreign Policy          | 8%     | 14%         | 25%                             |
| International Relations | 9%     | 15%         | 33%                             |



# Threats: Prosecutions and Safety

- ▶ In 19 countries (12%) there have been arrests for conducting polls
- ▶ In 16 countries there have been arrests for reporting polls
- ▶ Most frequent in West Asia and North Africa: one in five countries report prosecutions

## Safety of Interviewers

Most countries (84%) report in-person interviewing is at least somewhat safe; nearly half say it is very safe.

**But not in Latin America, where 42% say interviewers are unsafe.**

# Threats: Government Control

Is there (a government body/a professional association) responsible for (controlling the conduct of/hearing complaints about) opinion polls?

GOVERNMENT BODY

PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION

**GLOBAL**

**36%**

**30%**

LATIN AMERICA

**53%**

15%

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

**51%**

38%

WEST ASIA/NORTH AFRICA

**38%**

15%

EUROPE

**22%**

**41%**

NORTH AMERICA/CARIBBEAN

**57%**

**71%**

# Threats: Many Election Poll Publication Blackouts

Globalizing the last two freedom studies found more restrictions:

**In 2017, 60% overall had embargoes  
(up from half before)**

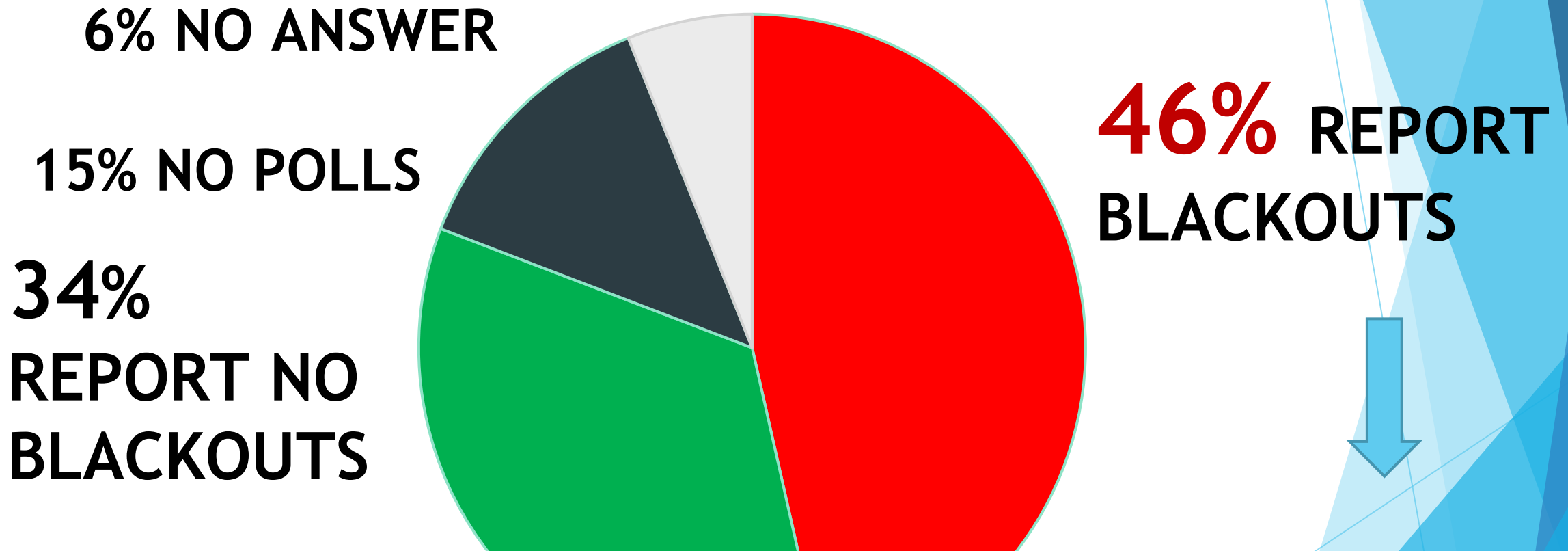
In addition, as many countries set restrictions on exit polls as conduct them without restrictions

# Blackouts Over The Long Term

| YEAR OF REPORT | TOTAL COUNTRIES | EUROPE N | REST OF WORLD N | PERCENT NO POLLS | PERCENT WITH BLACKOUT |
|----------------|-----------------|----------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| 1984           | 45              | 19       | 26              | 7%               | 20%                   |
| 1992           | 65              | 27       | 38              | 14%              | 29%                   |
| 1996           | 78              | 36       | 32              | 12%              | 27%                   |
| 2002           | 66              | 34       | 32              | 3%               | 45%                   |
| 2012           | 85              | 35       | 50              | 5%               | 46%                   |
| 2017           | 133             | 41       | 92              | 5%               | 55%                   |
| 2023           | 157             | 45       | 112             | 13%              | 45%                   |

# BLACKOUTS TODAY?

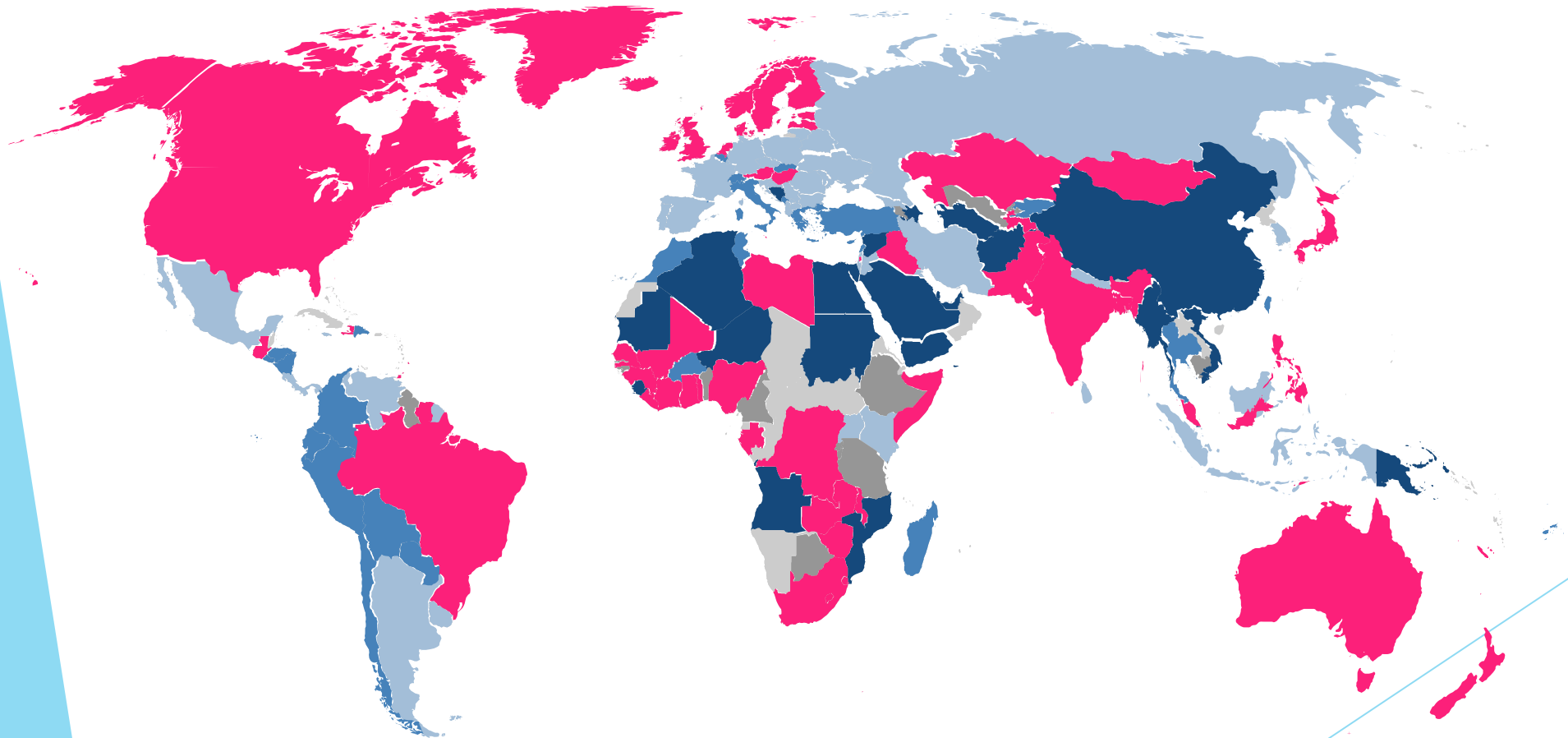
IN 2023, THERE WAS SOME IMPROVEMENT



TWO DOZEN COUNTRIES HAVE **NO** ELECTION POLLS

# Where are the Blackouts?

- Countries that do not conduct election polls
- Long blackout (7 days or longer)
- Short blackout (1-6 days)
- No blackout
- Unknown\*
- Not surveyed



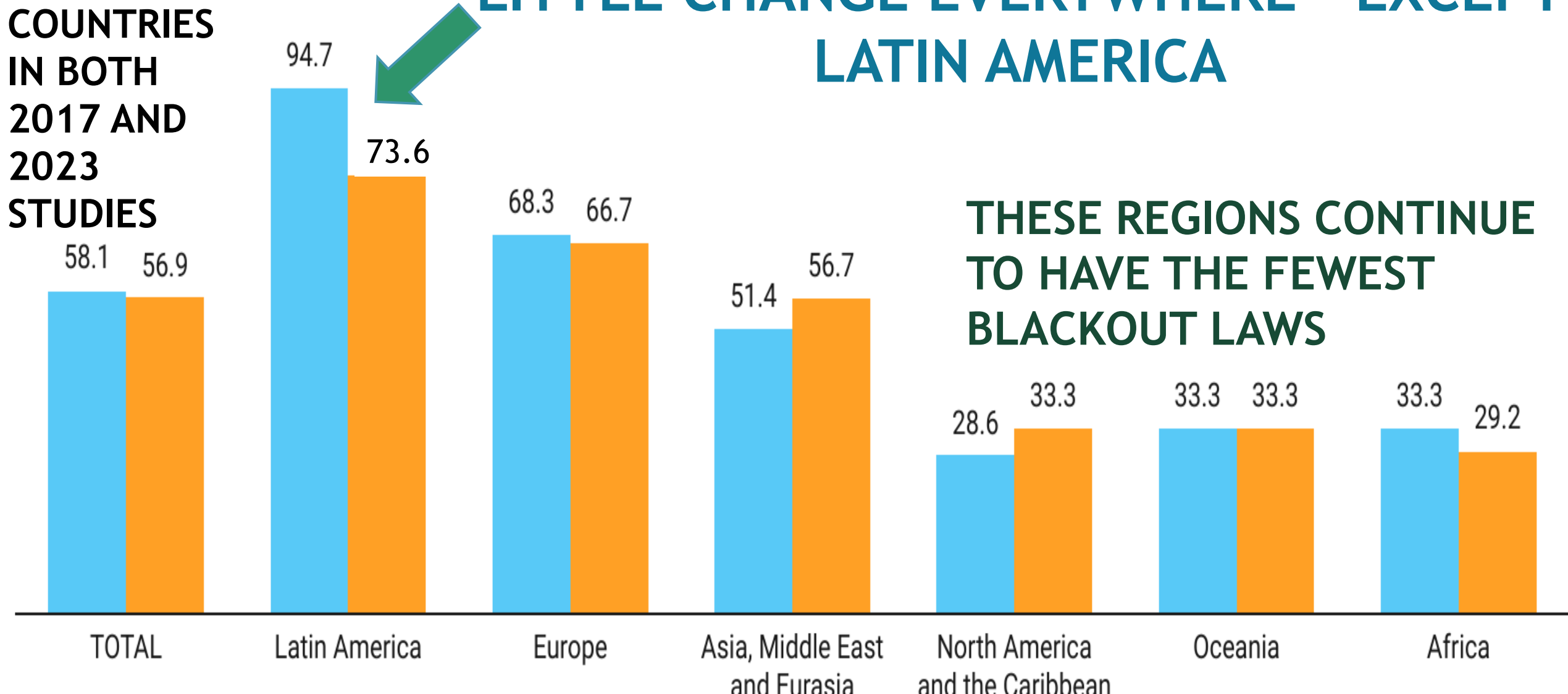
# Regional Differences In Pre-election Poll Blackouts

2017 2022

COUNTRIES  
IN BOTH  
2017 AND  
2023  
STUDIES

LITTLE CHANGE EVERYWHERE - EXCEPT  
LATIN AMERICA

THESE REGIONS CONTINUE  
TO HAVE THE FEWEST  
BLACKOUT LAWS



# Blackouts by Region

- ▶ LATIN AMERICA (79%) AND EUROPE (65%) ARE THE MOST LIKELY TO REPORT BLACKOUTS, BUT LATIN AMERICAN BLACKOUTS ARE LONGER.
- ▶ HALF IN LATIN AMERICA ARE FOR A WEEK OR MORE; COMPARE WITH FEWER THAN ONE IN FIVE IN EUROPE
- ▶ 13 COUNTRIES HAVE BLACKOUTS THAT LAST TWO WEEKS OR MORE
- ▶ LARGEST PERCENTAGE OF COUNTRIES WITH NO ELECTION POLLS: WANA (39%) AND ASIA/PACIFIC ISLANDS (29%)



# More Than Government Limits: Polling is Harder Today

- ▶ Globally, 45% report it has become harder to conduct polls, 22% say it has become easier
- ▶ Little change from five years ago
- ▶ **THE PROBLEMS ARE THE SAME EVERYWHERE: budget cuts, increased costs, declining response rates. The coronavirus hurt, but also helped.**

# More Than Government Limits: Poor Reporting

Rate the quality of journalistic reporting of public opinion poll findings in your country's mass media

|                             | HIGH | IN BETWEEN | LOW |
|-----------------------------|------|------------|-----|
| GLOBAL                      | 23%  | 34%        | 43% |
| EUROPE                      | 27%  | 30%        | 43% |
| LATIN AMERICA               | 18%  | 40%        | 42% |
| NORTH AMERICA/<br>CARIBBEAN | 43%  | 29%        | 28% |

**WHAT CAN BE DONE NOW?**

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# What Can Be Done Now?

## Organizations should promote good practice by pollsters:

- ▶ The ESOMAR/WAPOR Guide to Opinion Polls lists what information needs to be included in all public releases and made generally available on websites
- ▶ AAPOR promotes a “Transparency Initiative,” in which pollsters commit to always releasing specific information with their results.
- ▶ Associations can provide good models and “moral authority,” and can help protect against government action

# What Can Be Done Now?

**Organizations can work with journalists to ensure they understand how polls work and how to write about them.**

- This requires transparency on the part of researchers and journalists may need some training.
- ESOMAR and WAPOR have helpful documents for them.

**Government threats must be answered. ESOMAR and WAPOR have taken public positions in support of election polling and will continue to do so.**

# Lessons Learned

- ▶ Conduct The Freedom Surveys More Often (2026, not 2027)
- ▶ Build the Sample Frame Ahead of the Field Period
- ▶ Assess Gaps in our Country Coverage
- ▶ The 2023 Report Covered 98.4% of Global Population

# Thank you for your time and participation

▶ Any Questions or Comments ?

# THE FREEDOM TO CONDUCT AND PUBLISH OPINION POLLS

A 2023 Worldwide Update

## SCAN FOR REPORT

