

# Fake Data and the War in Iraq

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In the middle of the Iraq war:



There was public opinion polling – many dozens of polls.



The US State Department alone sponsored several dozen public opinion polls in Iraq between 2005 and 2009.

A media consortium led by US-based ABC News, and that included our beloved BBC, sponsored a series a polls in Iraq and Afghanistan that won multiple prizes, including the Emmy and the Policy Impact Award of the American Association for Public Opinion Research.

And there were more opinion polls which were sponsored, e.g., by other branches of the American government.

A common thread runs through many of these surveys – the field work was handled by [D3 Systems](#), working through its partner [KA Research Limited](#).

Unfortunately, all D3/KA Iraq surveys I have analyzed contain a lot of data that was almost certainly fabricated.



Datasets for other D3/KA Iraq surveys, including the award-winning ones sponsored by ABC and the BBC, are hidden.



'We're going to need a bigger rug or we're sunk.'

I have made multiple requests for these datasets but have been refused.



Worse, D3 Systems, backed by [Langer Research Associates](#) tried to cover up the problem by [threatening legal action](#).





“This firm represents D3 Systems, Inc. (“Our Client” or “D3”). Our client has retained us to commence litigation against you and any entity with which you are affiliated (including....) seeking compensation for, and equitable relief to terminate, your distribution and publication of false and defamatory statements about D3 to its clients and others.”

You can find details of this episode [here](#) or, in more summary form, [here](#).

Here are some highlights of the evidence of fabrication in D3/KA Iraq polls.

Note first that all of the datasets identify (with numbers) the person who conducts each interview and the supervisor of that person.

In slides 11 - 20 give some results from a pair of surveys for which the same questionnaire was administered at the same time by two separate fielding companies - D3/KA and another company called ICRSS.

The “focals” column shows the responses to interviews covered by a group of supervisors in the D3/KA fielding operation who, I contend, fabricated responses over a series of surveys.

The “ICRSS Survey” column gives ICRSS survey responses to the same questions and in the same regions covered by the focal supervisors in the D3/KA survey.

If both surveys are legitimate then the fraction of answers in each category should be roughly the same across surveys.

## Water Supply

	Focals	ICRSS Survey
Very Good	0	189
Good	0	977
Poor	245	466
Very Poor	198	128
Not Available	0	3
Don't Know	0	0
NA	0	8

## Electricity Supply

	Focals	ICRSS Survey
Very Good	0	11
Good	0	224
Poor	245	626
Very Poor	198	822
Not Available	0	80
Don't Know	0	0
NA	0	8

## Telephone Service (land line)

	ICRSS Focals Survey	
Very Good	0	71
Good	0	608
Poor	245	433
Very Poor	198	571
Not Available	0	36
Don't Know	0	40
NA	0	12

## Telephone Service (mobile)

	Focals ICRSS Survey	
Very Good	0	266
Good	0	1105
Poor	245	185
Very Poor	198	142
Not Available	0	40
Don't Know	0	21
NA	0	12

## Garbage Collection

	Focals	ICRSS Survey
Very Good	0	57
Good	0	608
Poor	245	667
Very Poor	198	373
Not Available	0	53
Don't Know	0	0
NA	0	13



## Sewage Disposal

	Focals	ICRSS Survey
Very Good	0	64
Good	0	574
Poor	91	662
Very Poor	352	370
Not Available	0	87
Don't Know	0	0
NA	0	14

## Conditions of Roads

	Focals	ICRSS Survey
Very Good	0	26
Good	0	532
Poor	148	769
Very Poor	295	388
Not Available	0	39
Don't Know	0	5
NA	0	12

## Traffic Management

	Focals	Nonfocals
Very Good	0	111
Good	0	834
Poor	245	505
Very Poor	198	207
Not Available	0	58
Don't Know	0	35
NA	0	21

## Police Presence

	Focals	ICRSS Survey
Very Good	0	255
Good	217	948
Poor	24	390
Very Poor	202	124
Not Available	0	23
Don't Know	0	10
NA	0	16

## Army Presence

	Focals	ICRSS Survey
Very Good	0	250
Good	217	834
Poor	24	371
Very Poor	202	171
Not Available	0	109
Don't Know	0	19
NA	0	17

## A few observations

The focal data is obviously fabricated.

This is not even clever fabrication which could be very hard to detect.

Rather, this is blatant fabrication by people who assumed that nobody cared about data quality.

Slides 11-20 give just one battery of questions on two surveys – it is just a small sliver of all the evidence - the following four points provide an overview of the bigger picture:

1. On many questions there are many possible responses but the interviewees of the focal supervisors use only two or three of them.
2. There are anomalous relationships between answers to pairs of questions for the focal supervisors, for example, 100% of interviewees saying they own a short-wave radio and 100% of the same people saying they never listen to a short-wave radio.

3. Distributions of lengths of interview times often look very different for focal supervisors than they do for other supervisors.
  
4. There is one survey for which consecutive interviewees for focal supervisors flip their television sets on and then off at consecutive  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour time slots (e.g., 8:00 – 8:30 for one interviewee followed by 8:30 – 9:00 for the next, etc.)

I haven't yet come close to analyzing all the surveys but there is already a massive pile of fabrication evidence.



And what about those [award-winning surveys](#)?

The legal threat protecting this work evaporated after we asked D3 Systems and Langer Research Associates to specify what they thought was wrong with my analysis.

Later I wrote to D3 systems asking for the data – they directed me to ABC News.

ABC News did not respond to my request.

I made a separate data request to ABC's pollster, Gary Langer, now running his own company.

[Langer replied](#) saying (correctly) that I made a spelling error in my request which he did not otherwise address.

I then had a long [back-and-forth](#) with the BBC which, recall, was also a sponsor of these polls.

I learned, ultimately, that the BBC [never had the data](#).

The BBC's [stories](#) on these polls were just fed to them by ABC News.

I advised the BBC to request the data from ABC News and that the BBC should retract the work if ABC refused to share.

I also advised that if ABC did share the data and it turned out to look the way I think it looks then the BBC should also retract.

The BBC refused to say whether they did any of this but their spoon-fed-by-ABC [write ups](#) live on.

## The Current State of Play in the Survey Research World

There has been no visible penalty to any of the players who are implicated in this debacle – D3 Systems, KA Research Limited, Langer Research Associates, the US State Department, ABC News, the BBC and others.

Perhaps some things have happened behind the scenes? I don't know.

There was an awkward [Huffington Post article](#) but this did not, for example, prompt the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) to reexamine its [2010 impact award](#) given, in part, for a series of D3/KA Iraq polls.

And there was no outcry over the abuse of the legal system by survey research organizations to cover up their corruption – similar threats to other researchers may still circulate.

At the same time, some parts of the survey research profession are starting to stand up against fabrication in survey research.

[Steve Koczela](#) and [Fritz Scheuren](#) organized a series of [conferences](#) on data fabrication in surveys and have also published [great articles](#) on data fabrication in the *Statistical Journal of the IAOS*.

[Michael Robbins](#) published an [important paper](#) (with [Noble Kuriakose](#)) exposing the wide extent of the fabrication issue in public opinion research and has done great work at [Arab Barometer](#) in getting the fabrication problem under control there.

AAPOR has a [Data Fabrication Task Force](#) and also a [Mixed Mode Task Force](#) which is also reportedly looking into the fabrication issue.





I don't know where this will lead.



***Thank you for listening***

# Questions??

