

Why You Might Never Have Been Surveyed — And Yet the Data Is Reliable

This is a **commonly asked question**, and it's one of the most common doubts people have. I have broken it down and provided a clear and informative answer:

1. Surveys Are Done on Samples — Not the Whole Population

- Pakistan has over **240 million people**. It is **impossible** (and unnecessary) to ask everyone.
- Instead, survey scientists use **representative samples**, often of **1,000 to 5,000 people**, selected **scientifically** to reflect the **entire population**. This is called **probability sampling**.
- **Think of it like a blood test — doctors don't need your whole body's blood, just a drop that represents the whole system.**

2. How Do Survey Teams Select Respondents?

In **face-to-face surveys**, researchers:

- Divide the country into **urban and rural areas**, and **provinces**.
- Then randomly choose **districts, towns, and villages**.
- Within selected areas, **households** are picked randomly, often using a technique like random **walk**.
- Then, within a household, one person is selected (e.g., using a **Kish grid**) to ensure it's not always the head of household or whoever is home.

In **phone surveys (CATI)**, surveyors use:

- **Random digit dialing** or
- A large, pre-screened **panel of phone numbers** (like we have — 400,000+ verified numbers across Pakistan).
- Software ensures representation by **gender, age, region, and socioeconomic class**.

3. Why You (or Your Friends) Might Never Be Contacted

There are a few reasons:

- Samples are **very small compared to the population** (e.g., 2,000 people out of 240 million = 0.0008%).
- If you live in a **posh or remote area**, chances are reduced further.
- Even if selected, people may **refuse to answer**, not recall later, or dismiss it as spam.

4. But Are Such Small Samples Trustworthy?

Absolutely — if the sampling is done properly. The **margin of error** tells you how much uncertainty there is. For a sample of 1,200, the **margin of error is $\pm 3\%$ at 95% confidence**. That means if 60% of respondents support a party, the true support is very likely between 57% and 63%.

This is **statistical science** — the same methods are used in medicine, economics, and even the census itself.

5. Are Surveys Manipulated?

This depends on **who is conducting** the survey:

- Professional firms (like IPOR, Gallup, Pulse, etc.) follow international standards and **ethical codes**.
- Political actors sometimes **cherry-pick** results or **commission biased surveys**, but credible firms **publish methodology** and are transparent about who funded the work.

6. So, What Should People Look For in a Reliable Survey?

Ask these questions:

1. Who conducted the survey?
2. What was the sample size?
3. Was it nationally representative?
4. What was the methodology (face-to-face or phone)?
5. Are results published with error margins and demographic breakdowns?

If answers are available, it's a sign of a **serious survey**.

Final Thought

So, if you've never been surveyed, it doesn't mean surveys are fake — it just means you weren't one of the few randomly selected. The science of sampling ensures your **voice is still statistically represented**.