
MAPOR News

The Newsletter of the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research • Spring 2003

Public Opinion in Crisis

by Douglas Blanks Hindman, 2003 Program Chair

Isn't it nice to know that some things never change?

The Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research (MAPOR) conference will again be the Friday and Saturday before Thanksgiving week – November 21-22. This “Old Faithful” of conferences brings together public opinion professionals, academics, and students in the same setting as in several of the past years: Chicago's Radisson Hotel and Suites on Huron Street, a half block away from Michigan Avenue.

Our conference dates and locations may be unchanging, but the ideas expressed by our conference participants are never the same.

MAPOR attendees bring new ideas, innovative methodologies, fresh interpretations of world events, and penetrating critiques of conventional theory. Attendees leave the conference with dozens of ideas for research, a suitcase full of papers and business cards, renewed friendships and deepened appreciation for the work of colleagues.

This year's conference theme: “Public Opinion in Crisis,” is

designed to capture the dynamic nature of public opinion research.

The theme has multiple meanings. It reflects the ebb and flow of public support for the conflict in Iraq. It reflects the news media's tendency to report events as crises, while ignoring context and history. It represents the challenges facing the public opinion industry – declining response rates, national do not call lists, online surveillance, and predictive marketing.

We welcome research proposals addressing any or all aspects of the theme, as well as any topic relevant to public opinion research, theory, or methodology.

Please submit abstracts to me either via e-mail (dhindman@wsu.edu) or regular mail to:

Doug Blanks Hindman,
MAPOR Program Chair
Murrow School of
Communication
226 Murrow Hall
Washington State University
Pullman, WA 99164-2520.

I must receive your mailed abstracts by June 30, 2003, and your e-mailed/faxed submissions by 7 pm CDT, June 30, 2003. The details are on the attach-

ment.

We are also holding our sixth-MAPOR Fellows Student Paper contest (see the attachment) Each paper is thoroughly reviewed by some of the top public opinion scholars in our field. Please encourage your best students to submit.

We are planning special panels dealing with media coverage of war. We are also planning a reprise of the popular careers in public opinion panel. Any other ideas for panels are welcome. Please submit your ideas for invited panels to me via the above address, along with your list of participants.

Consider making your hotel reservations early, and plan to take advantage of the special MAPOR rate of \$152 for singles and \$172 for doubles – the same rate as last year. If you make your reservations order through the hotel and use the MAPOR rate, you'll help us meet our room guarantee, and help us control the costs of the conference.

I hope to see all of you at the 2003 MAPOR conference. Your presence helps make MAPOR the reliable, and yes, predictable organization that we all love. Your ideas give MAPOR the dynamism that keeps us all coming back.

The President's Column...

by Julie Andsager

Since when did the notion of gauging public opinion become so tawdry? True, presidents and other politicians have always said they don't pay attention to the polls, but their actions usually indicated that they did.

In February, though, President Bush not only said that he doesn't pay attention to the polls, but he dismissed the worldwide protests against the then-impending war against Iraq by saying "size of protests—it's like deciding, 'Well, I'm going to decide policy based upon a focus group.'"

A focus group with about 6 million participants? (Six million is the estimate provided by CNN. Police in Madrid counted more than 650,000 protesters there, and about 750,000 people protested in London.)

Granted, people comprising a protest are the product of a volunteer sample (plus a little convenience sampling), probably the least representative sampling method there is. When hordes of people actually go out of their way to express themselves, however, merely to be told that their opinions indeed do not matter, what kind of impact might that have on public opinion in the long run?

Public opinion research is also impacted by the demise of the Voter News Service, which is being replaced in 2004 — at least

for the Iowa caucus in January — by projections made by two winners based on data from the same exit poll sample. That's fine, but isn't there a polling firm? The television networks will compete to be the first to project danger that this competition will result in errors that further erode the public's confidence in our research.

Some critics are already calling for an end to election night projections, considering the increase in absentee ballots and Florida-like counting errors. (See the March/April issue of *CJR* for Lawrence Grossman's take on VNS and the future of exit polls.)

These kinds of developments suggest one interpretation of our conference theme, "Public Opinion in Crisis." Is there reason to worry about the future for public opinion research?

The more obvious meaning of "Public Opinion in Crisis," of course, is how the public responds to its media, leaders, and international conflicts during war. Is our research business-as-usual these days?

Despite these weighty issues, I can guarantee that the MAPOR conference will be a terrific experience, as always. We will work hard, but we will be among friends. What better place to be in times of crisis?

Letter From the Editor

by Frank Markowitz

Our newsletter has changed! This is the first time we have delivered the newsletter electronically. And have you ever seen a letter to the editor before or a report regarding the Spring Board meeting?

The reason the latter two have never occurred before (at least in part) is because of cost. Although adding to the newsletter would make it more comprehensive, it would also add to the length of the newsletter and therefore, to the printing and postage fees. We never really had the money in our coffers before to consider doing that. Now, due to the electronic delivery of the newsletter, that issue has all but disappeared.

For this issue, I have written two articles. (In addition to this one, the other is titled Board Meets in Chicago). Please note the similari-

ties between the two. Both are fairly short. Both are on topics I wanted to write about. And both are written by a MAPOR member.

By now, it should be obvious where I'm heading with this. There is one more newsletter that I will be the editor for that will be sent out this Fall. If anybody wants to contribute to OUR newsletter and has an idea for an article...about a research issue, a letter to the editor, an announcement of importance, etc., please contact me at:

Frank Markowitz
FrankM@on-linecom.com

Thanks, and let the fun begin!

Officer Nominations Needed for 2003-04

The MAPOR Board is seeking nominations for two officers in 2003-2004. The officers that will be elected are—Vice President/President Elect and Program Co-chair.

Nominations should be emailed to:

Julie Andsager
President—MAPOR
Andsager@mail.wsu.edu

The Vice President/President Elect assists with the Board's decision making process and becomes President of MAPOR in the subsequent year.

The Program Co-chair assists the Program Chair in planning the conference. The Co-chair becomes Program Chair in the subsequent year.

MAPOR elections are held in the fall. New officers assume their duties following this year's conference.

Top Student Papers From 2002...

The Origins of Morality and Equality: Social Structure and Public Opinion About Gay Rights

Matthew C. Nisbet
Erik C. Nisbet

In this paper we apply work in sociology that updates and integrates past theories relevant to the nature of institutions and their individual level effects, and layout a framework for theorizing about institutions in political communication and public opinion research using the case of religion as an example. We then test an empirical model incorporating the social structural effects of religion, and the communication interactions that ensue across religious and secular contexts, predicting relevant value orientations, and specific attitudes to the culturally and politically salient issue of gay rights. Our results reveal a religious versus secular divide on the topic of gay rights, but more importantly, most of this divide is accounted for by the social and communication processes that occur within church-based versus secular networks. We conclude that the study of public opinion needs to move beyond research focused narrowly on how demographic predispositions link to political attitudes and behavior, and begin to incorporate the study of institutions as the social mold from which public opinion takes shape

Mass media and rally effect in international crisis: Media's integrating role in the wake of Sept. 11 terrorist attacks

Fang Yang, Cornell University

After the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, enormous public attention was focused on news about the terrorist events. Did the increased level of public attention to the news media help inform the public or their decision making? Did it contribute to the strong rally' round the flag phenomena in the wake of September 11?

This paper addresses these questions empirically. In particular, I analyzed two-wave longitudinal data collected one year apart, before and after the terrorist attack. Each wave was based on a telephone survey (RDD sampling) of 500 and 800 respondents, respectively.

The results show that television news attention in the wake of September 11 strongly boosted public support for the President, his administration, and the ground war in Afghanistan after controlling for demographic variables, party identification and ideological predispositions. Television news attention also made people more aware of the need of standing together at such a time, more likely to prefer control, order

In contrast, newspaper news attention made people more likely to explain the terrorist attacks in an American foreign policy perspective. This policy explanation of the terrorist attacks strongly undermined public support for the president, his administration, the ground war, and various wartime security and control policies.

Therefore, I find a mixed role of the news media in the wake of September 11. Television was an indispensable means in the wake of September 11 for the public to share emotions and to show unconditional support for the government. It served a social integrative role for people to stand together and to oppose dissenting elements threatening security and war efforts during such a time. It did not help the public in policy debate or deliberation at such a time. Newspaper, however, did not serve a social integrative role. By embedding the September 11 into a larger international or foreign policy framework, newspaper news use potentially undermined the rallying effect.

The Big Dog That Did Not Run

An Analysis of President Clinton's Role In The 2000 Presidential Election

By Justin Horvath

The 2000 Presidential election was one of the closest in American history, the winning margin miniscule, no matter what your vote measure: 537 in Florida, five in the electoral vote, or one in the Supreme Court. At any rate, the outcome was an extreme disappointment for the man who should have won easily, Vice President Al Gore. The country had enjoyed an extended period of peace and prosperity. The outgoing President's job approval rating was high. On the surface, there was little to suggest that the country was ready to change the party occupying the White House. Why did Gore fail to capitalize on such an incredible opportunity?

Academics have attempted to answer this

using a variety of explanations (see Wlezien 2001, Campbell 2001). This paper focuses on President Clinton's impact on the 2000 election outcome. In the twilight of his presidency, he received a fascinating combination of high job approval ratings and low personal ratings. Gore wrestled over how to "praise Clinton for his successful economic programs without being identified with (his) character failures" (Golden 2277). Using exit poll data, I construct various election forecasting models using Clinton's job approval and personal approval ratings on a state-by-state level as predictor variables. The results show that support for the President's job performance was clearly the stronger factor of the two, suggesting that Gore's essential exclusion of Clinton was a mistake.

Student Paper Competition

MAPOR announces its sixth annual Student Paper Competition. The first place winner will receive an award of \$200, a free conference registration, and a free ticket to the Friday MAPOR luncheon. Any other top quality papers judged Honorable Mention will earn authors a free conference registration and luncheon ticket.

A group of MAPOR Fellows will make the awards. Abstracts of the 2002 winners of the competition are featured on the 4th and 5th pages of this newsletter.

Details regarding the competition rules are in the "MAPOR Fellow Student Paper Competition" announcement included with this newsletter. The basic guidelines of the Student Paper Competition are explained in the following paragraphs.

Students need not be members of MAPOR to submit papers.

The topic of the paper must conform to the general areas of scholarship that MAPOR addresses, which are public opinion and survey methods. The papers need not be quantitative nor must they report data in order to qualify for consideration in this competition.

Students first need to submit an abstract of their paper to this year's program chair, Douglas Blanks Hindman, conforming to the 2003 MAPOR Call for Papers by June 30. Students should specify on a letter accompanying the abstract that they are students.

Once a student has been informed that his/her paper is accepted for the 2002 conference, then the student will need to submit three (3) copies of a full paper by regular mail to M. Mark Miller, which must be received by October 1 to be eligible for the 2003 competition. His address is:

Professor M. Mark Miller
404 Mineral Avenue
Bozeman, MT 50718

2002– 2003 MAPOR officers

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Andsager@mail.wsu.edu

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Tmastin@mtsu.edu

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k.nuendorf@csuohio.edu

Board Meets in Chicago

by Frank Markowitz

The MAPOR Board meets two times a year. Once as part of the Fall conference. In the program it is listed as the business meeting and all members are invited to it. The other is typically held in Chicago in the springtime (if there's such a thing in Chicago!).

The latter meeting this year occurred on March 29 at Chicago's Newberry Library. Topics discussed at this meeting included last year's conference, the upcoming conference, a financial review of MAPOR's status, our web site, MAPOR Fellow selection and other topics as well. All told, it was an effective meeting.

It is important to note that Board members pay their own way to the meeting including airfare and hotel charges. MAPOR does rent the meeting room and pays for lunch that day.
