

MAPOR News

The Newsletter of the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research

Spring 2004

Polarized Publics? The 2004 MAPOR Conference

by Dietram A. Scheufele, 2004 Program Chair

The upcoming presidential race between John Kerry and George W. Bush promises to be one of the most interesting elections in recent history. Most importantly, the fact that the current president was not elected with a majority of the popular vote in 2000 left the electorate sharply divided across party lines. And it looks like the 2004 race will be even more defined by partisan campaigning. Issues like gay marriage, the war in Iraq, and the candidates' military records create deep ideological divides, and an increasingly negative campaign could potentially leave the public even more polarized than it already is.

Hopefully we will know more about what happened in this election when we meet on November 19 and 20. This year's MAPOR meeting will take place after election day again, but maybe the election will actually be decided this time. Either way, I am certain that MAPOR attendees will

present new ideas related to the presidential race, develop innovative methodologies of opinion measurement, offer interesting interpretations of what happened in the election, and make contributions to public opinion theory more generally. MAPOR is an opportunity for networking with colleagues as much as it is a marketplace for new ideas.

Out theme this year is "Polarized publics?" Opinion And Measurement In The 2004 Election." This theme, of course, can be interpreted in many ways. Some people have argued that the public is indeed polarized. In fact, for many Democrats the election will come down to a referendum on Bush. And Kerry's virtual sweep of the primaries demonstrated clearly that there is some truth to this assumption. Who the Democratic candidate will be is not as important as the question if he or she can beat Bush. At the same time, it will be interesting to see if the

electorate is polarized *enough* to vote for a candidate like Kerry who is not the most charismatic and engaging person on the campaign trail.

But there are other issues – gay marriage, for instance. And the public is not nearly as polarized on this issue as many pundits make us believe. In fact, in a recent national survey we conducted here at Cornell, we found that almost 90 percent of Republicans but also about 60 percent of Democrats oppose gay marriage. But more importantly, almost three out of four self-identified Independents were opposed to gay marriage. This group of voters, of course, is critically important for both campaigns, and neither Bush nor Kerry can afford to alienate them on this issue.

Either way, the upcoming election season will be an interesting one and provide virtually unlimited material for panels and presentations at our 2004 conference. As always, MAPOR welcomes **Polarized, p. 5**

The President's Column

By Allan L. McCutcheon

As I write this column, I am reminded of the curse: “may you live in interesting times.” In recent days, the war in Iraq appears to be growing increasingly unpopular at home and abroad. The Gallup Organization’s nationwide poll of Iraq—a face-to-face survey of 3,444 Iraqi adults fielded in late March and early April, 2004, with a 98% response rate—indicates that 57% of Iraqis believe that the American troops should leave in the next few months. The most recent CBS News poll—an RDD telephone survey of 1,042 American adults fielded April 23-27, non-response rate not reported—indicates that 46% of Americans now believe that the U.S. should have “stayed out of Iraq,” while 47% report the “U.S. action was the right thing” to do; further, 55% report believing the U.S. is on the “wrong track.”

Both the measurement of public opinion and the role of public opinion researchers are critically important features of modern democracies. The

abortion debate, gay marriage, the war in Iraq, the handling of the war on terrorism, the economy—there are indeed many issues that appear to be polarizing the American public. Certainly, we should remain mindful of America’s internal struggles during the McCarthy era of the early 1950’s, the Civil Rights era of the 1950’s and ‘60’s, and the Viet Nam war era of the late 1960’s and early 70’s. Still, following the lulling effects of the “new American morning” of the early 1980’s, the collapse of European Communism of the late 80’s, and the economic expansion of the 1990’s, the contentiousness of America’s public debate in the early 21st century comes as an unwelcome splash of cold water.

As we plan for our annual November meeting in Chicago (where else!), centered on the theme of “Polarized Publics? Opinions and Measurement in the 2004 Election,” we should remain mindful of the vitally significant role we

play in researching, and informing, public debate. We need also acknowledge, however, that MAPOR’s traditions of encouraging and supporting the next generation of public opinion researchers, and appreciating that the Midwest is a “state-of-mind,” not a location, strengthens our sense of community, even if the general public does appear to be polarized.

The run-up to the 2004 national elections in the months ahead will provide all of us with ample opportunity to research public opinion. Our annual meeting will provide us with a wonderful opportunity to inform one another and to learn from one another. It will also, of course, provide us with our annual opportunity to renew and sustain our long-term friendships, and to form new friendships that will become long-term.

Clearly, we live in interesting times.

Student Paper Competition

MAPOR announces its seventh 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 2003 winners of the competition are featured on pages 3 and 4 of this newsletter.

Details regarding the competition rules are in the "MAPOR Fellow Student Paper Competition" announcement, which is 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 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, Dietram Scheufele, conforming to the 2004 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 2004 conference, then the student will need to submit three (3) copies of a full paper by regular mail to Rick Perloff, which must be received by October 1 to be eligible for the 2004 competition. His address is:

Professor Richard M. Perloff
Department of Communication
Cleveland State University
2121 Euclid Avenue
MU231
Cleveland, OH 44115

Top 2003 Student Paper Abstracts . . .

Mobilizing the "Silent Center": Alternative Measures of Public Opinion on Vietnam Within the Johnson White House

Brandon Rottinghaus
Northwestern University

This article explores President Lyndon Johnson's aggregate mail opinion summaries on the disposition of the Vietnam War. The results show that, contrary to popular perception and previous academic findings using public opinion polling, the Johnson Administration routinely followed the "silent center" of mail-based opinion (individuals who disliked the war, wanted a quick end and rejected capitulation of North Vietnam) on the Vietnam War rather than ignored it. The analysis of the White House

opinion mail summaries demonstrates that the mail favoring escalation of the War had a significant and persuasive impact on President Johnson's policy rhetoric in the near-term (mail-gauged opinion from the current or previous week). The results illustrate that motivated opinion mail from an activated public can have a positive, but possibly temporal, effect on the direction of presidential rhetoric on foreign policy.

Top 2003 Student Paper Abstracts . . . (cont.)

Voting and Authoritarianism: The Mediating Role of Media Use, Efficacy and Trust

John C. Besley, Janie Diels, and Erik Nisbet

Department of Communication

Cornell University

Voting behavior and authoritarianism are often studied dimensions of political communication, but very little research has explored the relationship between them. In this paper we used structural equation modeling to investigate how a set of individual values associated with authoritarianism may directly impact voting behavior, or may be mediated by other social-psychological predictors of voting behavior such as social trust, candidate knowledge, and efficacy.

These findings build upon traditional political science literature on voting behavior that attempts to explain individual party preference using a range of socio-economic variables. In our model, we find that the anti-participatory nature of authoritarianism is associated with lower levels of all of these traditional precursors to participation in voting.

Our analysis demonstrates that those relatively higher in authoritarianism are generally less trusting and less efficacious. Furthermore,

authoritarian individuals tend to avoid exposing themselves to potentially contradictory messages through news media use, and have lower levels of participation in political discussion networks, both resulting in lower levels of candidate knowledge. We conclude that individual authoritarianism has a negative influence on voting behavior, but that an individuals media use and political discussion network, as well as levels of social trust, candidate knowledge and efficacy primarily mediate this influence.

Media Frames of Protest Groups: The Effects of Exposure on Perceived Legitimacy

Lindsay H. Hoffman and Michael E. Huges

School of Journalism and Communication

The Ohio State University

Protest has been an integral part of democracy's history, but how do media representations of protests impact audiences? Critical and content analyses have revealed the existence of delegitimizing media frames. Other research has focused on the media's powerful impact by revealing the relationship between media frames and negative attitudes toward protesters. This study attempted to enhance the current literature by combining two previously used but separate measures—perceived utility and legitimacy—to reveal the powerful effects of media protest framing on attitudes. Subjects were randomly assigned to one of two experimental

conditions—high and low status quo support. They viewed actual news coverage of a protest that was notably more critical of protesters in the high status quo support condition than the low support condition. Results showed that even after controlling for age, sex, political ideology, political interest, media use, and perceived reality of television, the status quo support manipulation was still a significant predictor of the perceived legitimacy and utility of protesters in the stimulus. The study also revealed political ideology as predictor of evaluation of the legitimacy and utility of protesters.

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research proposals addressing any or all aspects of the theme, as well as any topic relevant to public opinion research, theory, or methodology. If you plan to propose an invited panel, please submit your proposal along with a complete list of participants.

Please submit abstracts to me either via e-mail (das72@cornell.edu) or regular mail to:

Dietram A. Scheufele
MAPOR Program Chair
Department of
Communication
Cornell University
308 Kennedy Hall
Ithaca, NY 14853

All abstracts must be received no later than **June 30, 2004, 5pm EST**. Please see the call for papers included with the newsletter for details.

We are also holding our seventh MAPOR Fellows Student Paper contest (details included with the newsletter). Each paper is thoroughly reviewed by some of the top public opinion scholars in our field.

Finally, please consider making your hotel reservations early, and plan

to take advantage of the special MAPOR rate. 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 2004 MAPOR conference.

**Officer Nominations
Needed for 2004-2005**

The MAPOR Board is seeking nominations for two officers in 2004-2005. The officers that will be elected are—Vice President/President Elect and Program Co-chair.

**Nominations should be
emailed to:**

Allan McCutcheon
President—MAPOR
amccutcheon1@unl.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 the subsequent year.

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

**2003-2004
MAPOR Officers**

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amccutcheon1@unl.edu

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