

# MAPOR

The Newsletter of the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research • Spring 2002

## **MAPOR 2002 Conference Announcement** **Conflict and Consent: Public Opinion in Times of Transition**

by Allan McCutcheon, 2002 Program Chair

We'll be meeting Friday and Saturday, November 22-23 at the Radisson Hotel & Suites in Chicago, IL. Following multiple meetings with, and presentations by the convention staffs from a number of possible alternate hotels, and substantial discussion at this year's board meeting in early March, the MAPOR Board has agreed to stay with the Radisson for our 2002 conference.

So, we'll be back in familiar surroundings this fall!

We also want to continue with our strong encouragement of student participation in MAPOR conferences. The 2002 call for student papers is included with this issue of the newsletter, and details the submission process for the MAPOR Fellow Student Paper Competition. Also, the 2002

conference will once again feature the Careers in Survey Research panel, bringing representatives of some of the prominent commercial opinion research organizations together with students and others interested in exploring career changes. Finally, as in past years, the Board has reconfirmed its commitment to keeping conference costs to a minimum for student members by continuing our practice of lower student conference fees, as well as greatly reduced prices for our President's Luncheon.

In addition to the papers/panels (please see the box to the left) presented in the sessions, Vish has promised us that he is lining up outstanding speakers for the President's Luncheon and Pedagogy Hour. Be sure to send me (email, fax, post) your paper and panel proposals by June 30; the details (addresses, etc.) are in the enclosed call for papers and call for student papers. We're also looking to build on our record-setting 2001 conference attendance, and looking forward to seeing our old (and new!) friends in Chicago the weekend before Thanksgiving. Watch for more 2002 conference details in MAPOR's autumn newsletter.

We hope to see you November 22-23 in Chicago.

### ***Topics for papers/panels...***

The conference theme, "Conflict and Consent: Public Opinion in Times of Transition," is meant to reflect both the public's varied responses to the events of September 11, 2001, as well as to the upcoming 2002 elections. Although papers/panels proposals often reflect the theme, other topics may include (but certainly are not limited to!):

- Internet surveys (survey research on the world wide web, issues, answers, possibilities)
- New technologies in public opinion research
- Mass media and public opinion (public journalism and opinion, influences of mass media on public opinion, use of polls by the media)
- Methodological issues in public opinion research (questionnaire design, refusals, sampling issues, response rates)
- Ethical issues in survey research (confidentiality for respondents, the client, data, or the instrument, institutional review boards impact on survey research),
- Campaigns (methodological and substantive issues as they relate to election polls, use of polling in a campaign, coverage of polls)
- Qualitative studies of public opinion, its process and effects (variety of theoretical/analytical questions raised in public opinion studies)

The deadline for submission of abstracts is June 30.

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## *The President's Column...*

*by Vish Viswanath*

Almost fifteen years ago, as a graduate student at Minnesota, I attended my first MAPOR conference and presented a paper on the knowledge gap hypothesis. I had heard of MAPOR through my advisor, Phil Tichenor and several colleagues at Minnesota, but never anticipated how enjoyable that meeting was going to be and that MAPOR would go on to remain an integral part of my academic meeting circuit fifteen years later. The warm, friendly and informal nature of MAPOR keeps bringing back people who attended the annual conference either as graduate students or at the suggestion of their colleagues. It continues to be one of the more lively chapters of the American Association for Public Opinion Research, providing a place for graduate students to present their first academic conference papers in a friendly atmosphere. It evolved into a forum for dialogue among colleagues from the academy, industry and the government and an arena to test out new research ideas in an informal, intellectually vibrant and hospitable environment.

In the recent past, because of increasing commitments and escalating costs, it has become challenging to continue to offer the traditional MAPOR hospitality. As we discussed at our last business meeting the costs of room and equipment rentals, the modest breakfasts including beverages and lunches has been going up steadily over the last few years. MAPOR has somehow managed to meet the increases from the annual membership dues, but that has now become untenable. This last year, things have come to a head with the conference hotel demanding a cashier's check at the conference and by charging

very high rates for various amenities.

After two or three years of casual discussions at our Board meetings, I feel that the time has finally come to face the issue head on and stabilize MAPOR's finances while preserving those features that have made MAPOR appealing. In fact, it is the intention of the MAPOR Executive and the Board to not only preserve but strengthen these very features that make our annual conference an attractive place to come to every year. It should hardly be a surprise that at our Board meeting in early March, we spent an entire day discussing various ideas around this topic and visited a competing hotel. It was one of the more productive meetings I have attended in the recent times and I intend to bring a number of issues for discussion at our annual Business Meeting in November.

Among the steps taken and ideas being considered, the following are worth mentioning:

- Successful negotiation of a contract with the Radisson, which allowed us to drastically reduce the costs from the previous years. I have to thank Allan McCutcheon and Dave Tewksbury for doing the necessary groundwork to help us negotiate the contract.
- As announced at the business meeting, I have asked Steve Everett to head the President's "Advisory Committee." Steve has enlisted the help of Fiona Chew and Rob Daves to come up with a number of suggestions and ideas to help resolve some of these long-standing issues, particularly fund-raising.
- Explore the idea of "Life Membership."
- Find sponsors for various

MAPOR awards and individual events such as the Luncheon and the Pedagogy speakers.

- Our Treasurer, Frank Markowitz is not only providing us with necessary contacts with different industry groups for sponsorship but is also working on saving expenses and managing our bank accounts and the balance sheet.
- Steve Everett has generously agreed to host the MAPOR website on his account for the next couple of years.

Several other issues are also under consideration. By no means, have we decided or finalized any of these issues and it is our intention to bring up a number of these ideas at our business meeting in November for discussion and ratification.

And, of course, the program for the November conference was also discussed extensively. Several innovative ideas are being considered to make the program appealing to diverse MAPOR audiences and Program Chair, Allan McCutcheon and Co-Chair, Doug Hindman are working on implementing those ideas.

I am impressed with the commitment and the enthusiasm of my colleagues on the Board, the Advisory committee and the Executive. I am confident that the steps we are likely to take will maintain MAPOR as a vibrant and viable organization that continues to attract colleagues with diverse ideas and backgrounds for continued friendly confabulations.

I hope to see you all in November. If you have any ideas or concerns, please feel free to write to me at [viswanav@mail.nih.gov](mailto:viswanav@mail.nih.gov).

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## New President's Group Supports Board

by Steve Everett

In an effort to strengthen MAPOR's institutional memory and take advantage of the advice of long-time members, MAPOR President "Vish" Viswanath created a "President's Advisory Group" as one of his first official acts last November. Vish asked me to chair the group and, terrified by the prospect of attending no more Spring Board Meetings, I accepted. Then, in my first act as chair, I recruited two MAPOR colleagues (both former presidents with many years of service to MAPOR) to help provide counsel to Vish and his Board cohorts -- Fiona Chew (Syracuse University) and Rob Daves (Minnesota StarTribune).

Our assignment: to help the MAPOR Board address two critical facets of maintaining a successful and vital organization -- more effective sponsorship and underwriting solicitation and

continued excellence in cultivating future members of MAPOR and our professional field, more broadly. To that end, we're assisting the MAPOR Board in developing and executing what we hope will become a "routine" sponsor recruitment program, implemented efficiently from year to year without requiring annual reinvention of the wheel. We hope this will free up MAPOR officers to devote their energies to the more intellectual tasks of creating and staging the best, most stimulating and enjoyable research conference possible. And it offers Fiona, Rob and me a way to continue to give back to MAPOR, an organization that's given us so much over our 40 or so years of membership (that's cumulative, mind you).

MAPOR's a tough habit to quit...so why fight it?

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### Officer Nominations Needed for 2002-03

The MAPOR Board is seeking nominations for two officers in 2002-2003. The officers that will be elected are—Vice President/President Elect and Program Co-chair.

Nominations should be emailed to:

“Vish” K. Viswanath  
President—MAPOR  
VV27S@NIH.gov

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.

### Student Paper Competition

MAPOR announces its fifth 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 2001 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, Allan McCutchen, conforming to the 2002 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 2002 competition. His address is:

Professor M. Mark Miller  
School of Journalism  
University of Tennessee  
330 Communications Bldg.  
Knoxville, TN 37996-0330

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**Public Opinion About Environmental Issues and the Media:  
A Preliminary Agenda Setting Study**

by Christine O'Brien

This study examines the question of media influence on public opinion about environmental issues from the perspective of agenda setting. While Americans have long expressed support for environmental issues overall, support for specific environmental issues has risen and fallen over time. One possible explanation for these changes in opinion is that the mass media routinely alters the amount and type of coverage individual environmental issues receive, thus transferring messages to the public about the changing relative importance of these issues.

The paper begins with an overview of agenda setting and some of the problems inherent in conducting agenda setting research, and it provides a discussion/critique of the ways in which agenda setting has been studied in the environmental arena. Next, public opinion and media attention data are presented over a five-year time period (1996-2000) for five environmental issues (drinking water, air pollution, water pollution, the ozone layer, and global warming). The public opinion data are collected from the marginals of all available national survey questions that asked American adults to make some assessment of these five environmental issues (for example, data is collected from Roper, Gallup, Pew and other majoring polling organizations). The opinion data are grouped into two main categories: questions which ask adults to make an assessment of the severity of environmental problems, and questions which ask adults how

much they worry about environmental problems. On the media content side, the data are collected from a five-year sample of newspaper coverage in *Lexis-Nexis*. In addition to determining the overall number of stories on each topic, a content analysis was performed to identify more detailed content features (e.g. length, tone, overall framing, etc.) for a sample of 750 articles (30 articles per issue per year).

The results suggest the continued difficulty in performing agenda setting studies, especially using secondary resources. However, several main findings do appear. First, most environmental stories are written as news stories in response to governmental actions or contamination incidents, and very little risk information appears in these articles. Second, the sheer volume of news coverage does not seem sufficient in predicting when agenda setting effects are likely to occur. Third, media content variables, such as the amount of scientific conflict in the newspaper article, show promise as potentially useful predictors of public opinion.

In conclusion, this study is only able to suggest that the media plays a very important role in shaping the way Americans view environmental issues. It is this author's view that the amount and tone of media coverage interact to influence public opinion. The exact interactions are as yet undetermined, but, as the paper concludes, "public opinion scholars who are interested in why and how Americans care about environmental issues are well advised to continue to look to the media as a potential source of answers".

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**Probing Psychological Processes Underlying Framing Effects:  
Knowledge Activation as a Mediator of News Frame Effects on Social Judgment**

by Jaeho Cho and Heejo Keum

This study examines the psychological mechanism that is responsible for framing effects. Drawing on data from verbal protocol analysis, this study attempts to shed empirical and theoretical light on the cognitive responses underlying framing effects. Consistent with framing literature, the data show that news frame did increase elaborations by

emphasizing certain attributes, which in turn account for subsequent judgment and evaluation process.

Ideas induced by a particular frame were clearly not the only ones brought to mind. Results of this experiment illustrate that certain kinds of ideas

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## Probing psychological processes underlying framing effects:

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tended to be generated by individuals even when news frame manipulations did not directly stimulate them. Probably these were already on individuals' minds, or at least very easily brought to mind. Thus, this finding implies how news frame interacts with individuals' pre-existing knowledge structure. However, the spontaneous elaboration did not explain much about subsequent judgment on framed issue. This is a somewhat counter-intuitive result, because spontaneous elaboration can be assumed closer to individuals' prior thoughts or attitude that should be powerful in predicting current attitude. One possible explanation of this finding is that the attributes emphasized by news story might be the most relevant categories to evaluate the framed issue.

Although these experiments did not explore news framing effects on "higher order" attitudinal variables such as causal attributions, cynicism,

or value, the findings help to illustrate some of the psychological mechanisms by which such effects could occur.

These results should not be interpreted as any sort of direct confirmation that accessibility does not contribute to accounting for the underlying mechanism of framing effects, since response latency was not employed in this model. For further study, it is necessary to test whether and how response latency works as a mediator of framing effects. Nonetheless, the present findings do illustrate the potential value of conceptualizing knowledge activation as elaboration.

The sample in this study consisted of general population rather than college students. The fact that only one exemplar of each frame condition was employed in these experiments limits the extent to which the present results will generalize across messages.

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## The Buck Stops Here: Exploring Formal and Informal Methods of Gauging Public Opinion in the Truman White House

by Brandon Rottinghaus

The use of institutionalized presidential polling in the White House has seen a gradual rise since the presidency of Herbert Hoover. Public opinion scholars have called for inquiry into the utility, aggregation and evaluation of public opinion data by presidents, however no empirical work has been done on the Administration of President Truman. This paper addresses the following questions: how did the Truman Administration use public opinion in the execution of political and policy goals, and was this method similar to or different from methods or uses employed by subsequent presidents? In answering these questions this paper will explore informal (such as mail tabulation, newspaper editorials and crowd counting) and formal (such as public opinion polling) methods of gauging public opinion in the White House, to provide a wider view of the utilization of public opinion in the Truman White House.

A number of findings are reported. First, archival evidence is uncovered, despite Truman's public dislike of polling, there were a number of polls utilized by the administration's staff. Many of these polls were initiated by the Democratic National Committee and were used by the Administra-

tion's staff during the 1948 Presidential Election and during General MacArthur's firing. Public opinion polling in general, however, remained less utilized by Truman than presidents before or after him.

Second, data on public opinion relating to policy problem formation, issue targeting and political solutions in the Truman White House was gleaned from multiple methods of gauging public opinion and was not ignored in favor of polling data.

Third, the president used public opinion in a different and independent manner than his staff. Public opinion gauging for the president was limited to feeding his "common touch" so that he could effectively serve as a trustee of the nation's interests. The staff, however, used public opinion in more political ways, such as to craft Truman's rhetoric and to track opinion on important issues.

Finally, public opinion in general had an effect on the Administration when the public opinion was targeted (focusing on key electoral or governing partners) or individualized (where an individual opinion could be surmised). In this sense, the Truman administration used public opinion in similar ways and dissimilar ways than previous and subsequent presidents.

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***Did you know...***

**Past MAPOR Fellows:**

1988 Doris Graber  
1989 George Donahue  
Clarice Olien  
Phillip Tichenor  
1990 Jack McLeod  
1992 Donna Charron  
1993 David Weaver  
1994 George Bishop  
1996 Lee Becker  
1997 Paul Lavrakas  
1998 Leo Jeffres  
1999 M. Mark Miller  
2000 Cecily Gaziano

**Most Represented Universities  
by Students at 2001 MAPOR:**

University of WI - Madison	9
Ohio State University	7
University of NB - Lincoln	4
University of Georgia	3
Southern IL Uni. - Carbondale	3
Total Students	52

**Number of States Represented  
at 2001 MAPOR Conference:**  
28 (includes one from Montreal)

**2001– 2002 MAPOR officers**

**President:**

K. "Vish" Viswanath  
National Cancer Institute  
Viswanav@mail.nih.gov

**Secretary/Treasurer:**

Frank Markowitz  
On-Line Communications  
Frankmonline@earthlink.net

**Past President:**

William Rosenberg  
Drexel University  
Rosenberg@drexel.edu

**Executive Board Members:**

Thomas Johnson  
Southern Illinois University  
Tjohnson@siu.edu

**Vice President/President Elect:**

Julie Andsager  
Washington State University  
Andsager@mail.wsu.edu

Teresa Mastin  
Middle Tennessee  
State University  
Tmastin@mtsu.edu

**Program Chair:**

Allan McCutcheon  
Gallup Research Center  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Amccutcheon1@unl.edu

David Tewksbury  
University of Illinois  
Tewksbur@iuc.edu

**Program Co-chair:**

Douglas Blanks Hindman  
North Dakota State University  
DB\_Hindman@ndsu.nodak.edu

**MAPOR News**

**Editor: Frank Markowitz**

Mailed from:  
On-Line Communications  
1930 East Marlton Pike  
Suite R-1  
Cherry Hill, NJ 08003

**First Class Mail**