

MAPOR

The Newsletter of the Midwest Association for Public Opinion Research -- Spring 2006

The 2006 MAPOR Conference:

Changing opinion climates

By Ward Kay

MAPOR Conference Chair

The new century has brought great changes in the public

MAPOR Board seeks officer nominations

The MAPOR Board is seeking nominations for two officers in 2006-2007. The officers that will be elected are Vice President/President Elect and Program Chair. 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 in November. Nominations should be e-mailed to:

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opinion climate, the way we communicate and how we measure public opinion. As public opinion researchers, these changing opinion climates can alter some of our theories of public discourse and the development of public opinion. The changes also can affect how we measure public opinion with ever-changing technology.

In the post 9/11-world, the threat of terrorism and our country's response to that threat has become a major theme in political domains. Immediately following 9/11, the country was united at levels unseen since World War II. Yet, a few short years later, the President was one state from losing reelection. The close election and a rise in partisan messages and fervor have created the impression of deeply divided nation. Is the nation divided, or has the partisan activism created an increasing apathetic middle who are turned off by the extremes. This is one aspect of the changing opinion climate.

New media have eroded the traditional media's influence and trust. The New York Times, The

Washington Post and the network newscasts follow up on stories first reported on web sites such as the Drudge Report or The Smoking Gun. Conservative blogs helped Dan Rather when they questioned the veracity of the evidence he presented about Bush's National Guard duty. Fox News network presents news and analysis with a slant not previously seen in television news. New media is another aspect of the changing opinion climate.

Public discourse is increasing being conducted on the internet in communities of like-minded individuals, who may have never met and live anywhere in the world. Communications in these communities may not fit traditional theories of public discourse. Technological communications: a changing opinion climate.

Measuring public opinion in the twenty-first century has become more difficult because of the technological changes. Telephone surveys are facing the challenges **(Continued on Page 4, "2006 Conference . . .")**

The President's Column

Looking back on 30 years of public opinion research and scholarship in the Midwest

By Dietram A. Scheufele
University of Wisconsin, Madison

MAPOR is 30 years old. This means that we have met 30 times in Chicago for our annual convention. Generations of public opinion scholars and their students have presented their research, discussed public opinion and socialized with friends and colleagues they have not seen in a year. And I mean generations quite literally. Jack McLeod and Doug McLeod, father and son and both professors at Wisconsin, have probably presented a few dozen MAPOR papers between them. And Jack, of course, is one of our MAPOR Fellows. But generations, in this context, also refers to the intellectual heritage within MAPOR. In fact, it is difficult to not notice the impact that the Weavers, Tichenors, McLeods and many others had on our field and continue to have on every idea and every paper presented at MAPOR.

Most MAPOR members would probably agree that MAPOR is a unique organization. We are the largest regional chapter of AAPOR, but compared to many other associations in communication or political science we are small. And that is one of our strengths. Our annual confer-

ence at the downtown Radisson in Chicago only has three concurrent sessions, and it is impossible to not meet most attendees in person at some point during a session, the pedagogy hour, or a luncheon or cocktail reception.

Ironically, our size has nothing to do with diversity. We have members and conference attendees from both Washington State and Washington, D.C., from Tennessee, and from Montana. Most of them were Midwesterners at some point. They went to graduate school in the Midwest, or taught at a university here. And they continue to come back to Chicago every year to catch up with friends and discuss their latest research. Most importantly, however, they bring their students. Every year we have a number of new attendees who have no connection to the Midwest other than their advisor who encouraged them to attend their first MAPOR conference in the Windy City.

And this is what MAPOR is all about: students. I was introduced to MAPOR as a graduate student at Wisconsin when Jack McLeod gave me a ride to Chicago to attend my first MAPOR con-

ference. I have been back every year since, and I am no exception. MAPOR is proud to be a student-friendly organization. We heavily subsidize student membership and conference fees, we offer reduced luncheon tickets, and we have cash prizes for the winners of the MAPOR Fellows student paper competition as well as the runner-ups.

But creating a student-friendly infrastructure will only get us so far. MAPOR has always relied on advisors and faculty to bring their students to the conference and on professionals to encourage their colleagues to submit papers or serve on panels. And this has served MAPOR very well. We have grown slowly but steadily and many of those who join MAPOR continue to be members in the long run.

So please keep up the good work. Encourage your colleagues to submit abstracts and your students to enter the MAPOR Fellows student paper competition. Bring your students to the luncheon and the President's dinner on Friday night. And pencil in the conference date in your calendars: November 17-18, 2006. I look forward to seeing you all in Chicago.

2005 student paper award winners

Winning paper:

“Coorientation in a Public Opinion Context: Predicting Accurate Perceptions of Community Opinion”

Lindsay H. Hoffman
Jason B. Reineke
The Ohio State University

Perceptions of public opinion and the accuracy of those perceptions have long been of interest to social scientists. Historically, one model for assessing accuracy in interpersonal contexts has been Newcomb’s coorientation model, which suggests that the more people communicate their opinions to each other, the more accurate their perceptions of the other’s opinions. In the current study, we used the coorientation model in order to investigate majority and minority group opinions concerning a local ballot issue and the relationship between accuracy and community attachment. In assessing individual accuracy about community opinions toward the ballot issue, we found that discussion with others of different opinions was a significant positive predictor of accurate perceptions of community support for the issue. Additionally, individuals who talked more frequently about the issue expressed more attachment toward their community. However, attachment to community did not result in increased accuracy

of assessment of community opinion. Group-level analysis revealed that majority and minority groups differed in the accuracy of perceptions for community opinions. Implications for conceptualizing coorientation at the group level and limitations are addressed.

Runners-up:

“Media Effects on the Tendency to Reason”

Ray Pingree
Rosanne Scholl
University of Wisconsin-Madison

The extent to which people employ reasons in political discussions or cognitions is an important measure of the health of a democracy. It is possible to talk or think about politics without reference to policy reasons, focusing instead on relatively superficial reasons related to aspects such as candidate traits, strategies, and performance, or even omitting reasons altogether. This study examines whether exposure to media coverage of presidential debates can affect the subsequent tendency to focus on policy reasons. Specifically, superficially framed coverage is found to decrease this tendency. These results point not only to a serious negative consequence of superficial media coverage of politics but also to a potential point of leverage for positive change.

“Doing Unto Others as One Does Unto One’s Self: Exploring the Association Between Support for Public Censorship and Self-Censorship”

Jason B. Reineke
The Ohio State University

Freedom of expression sometimes comes into conflict with other values. The outcome of such a situation may be censorship. Public censorship occurs when potentially controversial expression is constrained by some outside authority, whereas self-censorship takes place when one prevents one’s own potentially controversial expression. This research was designed to determine whether there is a relationship between individuals’ support for public censorship and their tendency to self-censor. A sample of 169 participants responded to a survey that included measures of support for public censorship, the tendency to self-censor, the traits of the five-factor model of personality, and assorted demographics. Indeed, a positive relationship was suggested such that those who were more supportive of public censorship also tended to self-censor more, and no evidence of spuriousness was discovered. However, the results also indicated that the relationship was conditional, as it only existed among those classified as overcontrollers by a cluster analysis of the five-factor traits.

2006 Conference . . .

of caller-id and call screening. The use of cell phones which fall outside of telephone sampling frames, but including cell phones have ethical (pay/minutes used for incoming calls) as well as sampling issues (cell phones are personal, land lines are household). Internet surveys can be done at the fraction of the cost of other methods, but is limited by sampling issues. Survey methods: another changing opinion climate.

The MAPOR conference theme this year is "Changing Opinion Climates: Challenges for Theory and Research" Our goal is to encourage participants to consider their research in terms of the ways that our current social, political, and economic environment is shaping communication processes and opinion formation, as well as how we measure it.

As always, MAPOR welcomes research proposals addressing any or all aspects of the theme, as well as any topic relevant to public opinion research, theory, or methodology.

The conference will be November 17-18, 2006 at the Radisson Hotel & Suites, Chicago.

If you plan to propose an invited panel, please submit your proposal along with a complete list of participants.

Please submit abstracts as electronic attachments in MS Word or PDF format via e-mail to abstracts@mapor.org. If you are unable to send attachments, send the abstract by regular mail to:

Ward Kay
MAPOR Conference Chair
Adirondack Communications
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Vienna, VA 22181

All abstracts must be received no later than June 30, 2006, 5 p.m. CDT. The details are on the Call for Papers.

We are also holding our ninth MAPOR Fellows Student Paper contest (see the Student Call for Papers). Each paper is thoroughly reviewed by 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 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 2006 MAPOR conference.