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MAPOR is a chapter of
the American
Association for Public
Opinion Research



Exploring the Future of Public Opinion Research

By Dominique Brossard, University of Wisconsin
MAPOR Conference Chair

As the 21st century unfolds, audiences, communication channels, and issues discussed in the public arena are evolving. Audiences are becoming more elusive, more selective in their media consumption, to some extent more segmented, and harder to reach by public opinion researchers. The use of social networking media has become widespread, as has broadband Internet access, either at home or through cell phones, while phone land lines are less and less employed. The media landscape is changing at an incredible pace with established newspapers disappearing routinely and others attempting to adapt by moving online and exploring different formats. Complex controversial issues mixing scientific, ethical, legal and social dimensions are routinely discussed in the public sphere, highlighting the need to think of novel concepts for public opinion research and to reconsider established theoretical frameworks.

This is therefore the time to reflect upon new trends for public opinion research and explore its future, be it conceptually with refined definitions of public opinion, or methodologically with new methods for public opinion research. At this year's conference we are therefore inviting papers or panel proposals dealing with the following theme: Exploring the Future of Public Opinion Research. Of course, we are welcoming as well papers dealing with any area relevant to public opinion research, theory, or methodology. Included at the end of the newsletter is the call for papers and panels for the upcoming conference. I am looking forward to seeing you all in Chicago!



Exploring the Future of MAPOR

By Patricia Moy, University of Washington
MAPOR President

As with many professional associations, MAPOR's annual conference serves as the face of the organization. It also is the primary vehicle by which its members can interact and engage in intellectual discussions. However, at our spring Executive Council meeting, it became clear that MAPOR's rapid growth in recent years calls for a serious discussion of the direction in which the organization is headed.

This growth – reflected in an increasing number of conference submissions and a greater number of sessions held at the annual

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Exploring the Future of MAPOR...

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conference – generates a need to identify members' needs and how they can be met best. Regardless of the direction or members' needs, MAPOR needs to be abreast of and work in tandem with developments in the field.

With an eye on these concerns, the Executive Council discussed a number of potential value-added benefits for MAPOR members, including: offering everyone access to papers presented; creating a listserv on which members could post questions, answers, and information such as job and research opportunities; hosting training sessions – at the conference or in webinar format; and increasing our website capability. We discussed various considerations related to each of these undertakings, and by the end of our meeting, three points became quite evident.

First, MAPOR has the potential to be much more than just its annual conference. We have a very loyal cadre of members who, as people like to joke, will show up in Chicago the weekend before Thanksgiving even if the conference had been cancelled. But this cadre, consisting primarily of academics, has become increasingly more geographically dispersed and has other commitments vying for time and attention. We therefore need to consider facilitating ways in which MAPOR members can keep up to date with the latest academic professional developments in public opinion and survey research.

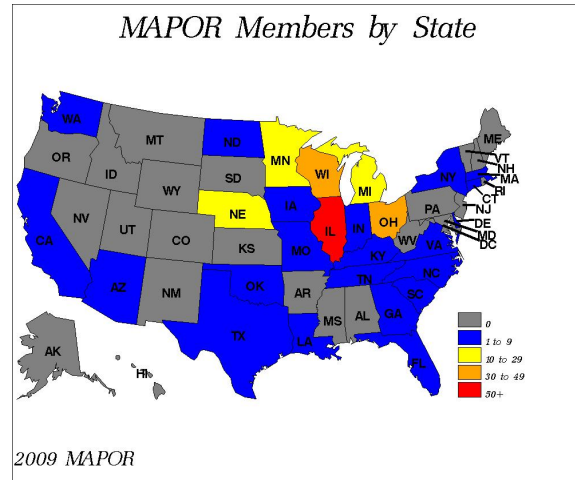
Second, though MAPOR prides itself on being very student-friendly, we have a professional constituency as well. As a whole then, MAPOR members' needs cannot be neatly classified; presenting a paper before submitting it for publication is qualitatively different from learning the latest about a particular methodology or analytic technique. And even within MAPOR's academic sector, there exists a vast array of research foci and methodological capabilities. As a chapter of AAPOR, MAPOR can take advantage of some of the short courses offered at AAPOR's annual conference; these offerings include basic topics (e.g., questionnaire design) as well as advanced topics such as multi-mode surveys and weighting. We are currently exploring the fiscal and logistical viability of bringing some of these courses to MAPOR members.

Third, in anticipation of an increased reliance on technology, MAPOR is looking to appoint a webmaster to its ranks. Steve Everett currently hosts and maintains our website, but webcasting, maintaining social networking pages (a formal Facebook page will be live later this summer), and taking advantage of technological advances will require additional staffing power. If you know of anyone interested in helping out, please let us know.

These changes will take a while to implement as various members of Council fully explore the advantages and disadvantages of the aforementioned options. In the meantime, to help MAPOR members learn more about each other and their work, this newsletter includes several features: an article about Robert Groves, MAPOR's 2008 Fellow, and his nomination to head the U.S. Bureau of the Census; a write-up of the winning entry from last year's MAPOR Fellows Student Award Competition; and a set of profiles about some MAPOR members – their day jobs and how they first became involved with the organization. With this series, we hope to remind our members that indeed, "Midwest" is a state of mind, and that much interesting and useful research is being conducted outside our annual conference.

As summer approaches, keep in mind that 30 June is our deadline for submitting proposals. Additional information about the conference theme is included in this newsletter. Also, voting (non-student) members of MAPOR should expect to see election ballots in their mailbox in mid-September.

As always, we welcome whatever feedback or comments you might have. Best wishes for a relaxing and productive summer.





Groves Nominated to Head Census Bureau

By Kristen Olson,
University of Nebraska-Lincoln

This November's MAPOR conference will be missing one notable member. Bob Groves, 2008 MAPOR Fellow, is President Obama's nominee for Director of the U.S. Census Bureau. As of May 20, 2009, the nomination passed unanimously from the Committee and has been recommended to the full Senate. The hearing, held by the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, was led by Senator Thomas R. Carper from Delaware.

Although Groves' sudden nomination was unexpected by many friends and colleagues, his qualifications are unquestionable. His nomination has been endorsed by major professional organizations, including AAPOR, the American Statistical Association, the American Sociological Association, and the Consortium of Social Science Associations. AAPOR's three presidents – Dick Kulka, Nancy Mathiowetz, and Peter Miller – wrote a strong letter of endorsement, as did six former directors of the U.S. Census Bureau.

Despite Groves' credentials, his nomination is not without controversy. Media coverage of Groves' nomination has ranged from benign ("Obama turns to Survey Researcher for Census Post," *Associated Press*, April 2, 2009) to congratulatory ("Building a Better Census Bureau," *New York Times* Editorial, April 15, 2009) to skeptical ("Statistical Voodoo Witch Doctor Tapped for Census Post," *The American Spectator*, April 3, 2009). Of course, it is not only his experience with survey research that makes Groves an ideal candidate. As news stories in *Time* magazine, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post* have pointed out, Groves' first job was as a Vermont prison guard. What better experience to have when overseeing one of the largest data collections in the country?

Groves' absence from MAPOR and the University of Michigan will be missed, as he leaves behind important contributions to the survey research community. A long-time faculty member at the University of Michigan and (now former) director of the Survey Research Center at the Institute for Social Research, Groves started his career as a survey methodologist examining differences across telephone and face-to-face survey modes. His research during the last two decades has contributed to our understanding of survey participation and nonresponse bias. From developing Leverage-Salience Theory to writing *Nonresponse in Household Interview Surveys* (with Mick Couper), Groves' research has simultaneously synthesized the literature and pushed the boundaries of our knowledge on why people participate in surveys and how nonparticipation affects survey estimates.

In addition to his research, Groves' mentorship will also be missed. He strongly encouraged his students to actively participate in MAPOR and other professional meetings. From filling vans with Michigan students to valiantly missing the Michigan/Ohio State game to support student participation, his encouragement and dedication to his students' professional lives was evident at MAPOR and elsewhere.

Nevertheless, Groves' nomination for Census Director should not be viewed as a loss. Few people are more qualified for the job or will be better able to explain the complexities of Census Bureau work to Congress, the American public, and the scientific community. Perhaps we MAPOR members can invite him in a few years to be our lunchtime conference speaker to hear about his experience directing the Census Bureau.



Bob Groves "strongly encouraged his students to actively participate in MAPOR and other professional meetings."

2008 Student Paper Award Winner

“Effects of Gain-Loss News Framing and Political Ideology on Audience Sympathy”

By Melissa R. Gotlieb, Itay Gabay, and Stephanie Edgerly, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Our study examined how the frames journalists apply interact with audience orientations to influence their emotions regarding current issues and events. In particular, using the context of employee access to healthcare and the rising incidence of bankruptcy due to medical expenses among young adults in America, we examined how audience members' political ideology shapes their feelings of sympathy for uninsured employees subject to waiting periods as well as business owners who mandate the waiting periods, and how this varies according to the way in which news stories frame the debate surrounding fabricated legislation to remove these employer-mandated waiting periods.

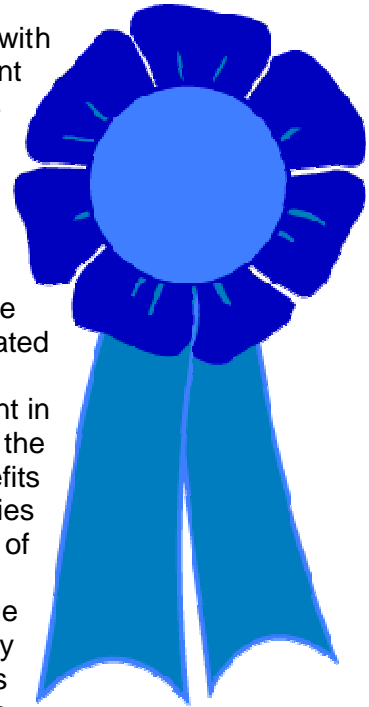
To examine this research question, we conducted an experiment in which participants watched similar news stories that varied whether the debate over policy alternatives was presented in terms of either benefits or risks for both employees and business owners. The news stories shown to participants were written and produced with the assistance of media professionals from a local PBS affiliate.

Additionally, our experiment provided us with a unique opportunity to examine the nature of any observed framing effects. By controlling whether the benefit and risk versions of the news stories contained identical or varying pieces of information, we were able to address the debate among scholars regarding whether news framing effects are the result of differences in the overall theme (i.e., benefit or risk) of the story or in the corresponding facts introduced into the story that vary according to the theme.

Results of this experiment showed that participants expressed more sympathy when the debate surrounding the fabricated legislation to remove employer-mandated waiting periods was presented in terms of risks as opposed to benefits. This finding is consistent with past research which has shown that framing information negatively increases audience attention to the associated risks.

Additionally, results showed that the amount of sympathy for various people affected by health insurance waiting periods was different among liberals and conservatives. While liberals were more likely to express sympathy with an employee interviewed in the news story, who had recently declared bankruptcy due to medical expenses that were incurred during the waiting period, conservatives were more likely to express sympathy with a business executive, who explained that the mandatory removal of waiting periods would maximize up-front costs, making it difficult to create new jobs. We were further able to demonstrate that this finding was based on ideological differences in attributions of responsibility for personal and social problems, with liberals being more likely to blame society and conservatives being more likely to hold individuals as responsible for their personal problems.

Regarding the nature of news framing effects (i.e., theme versus content), we found no evidence to suggest that framing effects are merely the result of differences in facts. Rather, we found that the interaction between the frame and audience members' political ideology was stronger when the news stories were factually equivalent. This has important implications for the way in which researchers attempt to measure news effects.



Public Opinion Mavens of MAPOR

MAPOR members share with us some of their current research and how they became involved with MAPOR.



Robert Y. Shapiro

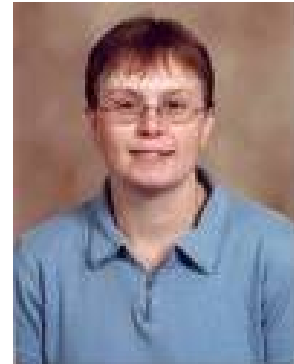
I'm a professor of political science at Columbia University, where I teach and do research on American public opinion, survey analysis, political leadership, the mass media, and policymaking. Along the way I have chaired my department and I am now ending a year as acting director of the Columbia's Institute for Social and Economic Research and Policy (ISERP), which is the current reincarnation of Paul Lazarsfeld's Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR). I have served as a member of the Board of Directors of The Roper Center, President of NYAAPOR, and as Councilor-at-Large of AAPOR. I have just begun a term as chair of the advisory committee of *Public Opinion Quarterly*. My recent research has examined the partisan and ideological polarization of public opinion in the United States since the 1970s, with a particular focus on foreign policy issues and the normative implications of this partisan conflict for American democracy. I have also completed a book manuscript on counter-terrorism, the media, and public opinion (with Brigitte Nacos and Yaeli Bloch-Elkon).

I can directly say that the MAPOR conference paper that I presented with Ben Page in 1980, when I first joined MAPOR while a student at the University of Chicago, was the starting point of my research career and my involvement in the AAPOR world. That paper, "Changes in Americans' Policy Preferences, 1935-1979," was published in *POQ* and led to our book, *The Rational Public*. I have kept my MAPOR membership to acknowledge my debt to MAPOR (and to remind me to present another paper there!). I was honored to be invited to give the luncheon talk at the 2007 MAPOR conference, where I was most pleased to see that the tradition of launching young scholars' academic careers has flourished.

Jolene D. Smyth

I am an Assistant Professor in the Survey Research and Methodology Program and the Department of Sociology at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. I teach courses on Data Collection Methods, Questionnaire Design and the Sociology of Gender. My survey methodology research focuses on measurement and nonresponse in single- and mixed-mode surveys. In previous research, I have examined multiple-answer questions, open-ended questions, scalar questions, visual design, Internet surveys, and context effects in web surveys. I'm currently working on two research projects with colleagues. One project examines the effect of respondents' mode preference on survey response and data quality; the other explores the relationship between literacy and nonresponse and measurement error.

I joined MAPOR after moving to the Midwest in late 2007. I originally joined the chapter so that I support my students who were presenting their research at the annual conference. The students say they find MAPOR to be a very welcoming venue in which to make their first professional research presentations, and after attending the 2008 conference, I have to say that I agree. I also found the conference quite useful for meeting and networking with colleagues and for exchanging research ideas in a more casual setting than the large national meetings. And of course, being near the Magnificent Mile (Chicago, IL) for the conference just prior to the holidays isn't bad either!



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Public Opinion Mavens of MAPOR...

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Trevor N. Thompson

I'm Director of Polling for The Associated Press, where I am responsible for all public opinion research around the globe conducted for the world's largest news organization. I also set and enforce standards for the reporting of survey data, whether done by AP or other organizations. I conceive and implement research projects, analyze the results and work with our journalists to report the findings of our polls. I also manage AP's participation in the pool made up of the television networks and AP that conducts exit polls in major elections. In my five years at AP, I've worked on polls covering almost every field – from politics to health, baseball to the weather – in more than a dozen countries. I am working hard to expand our polling into topics and populations not covered by other media polls, and to bring our polling into additional international markets.

I first came to MAPOR when I was a graduate student at Northwestern taking a class on media and public opinion polling with Paul Lavrakas. I found it so interesting and with Paul's encouragement I kept coming back. That first MAPOR conference was one of the reasons I wound up becoming a professional survey researcher, and I still keep MAPOR in mind every November.

And how did Trevor's mentor get involved with MAPOR? We asked Paul Lavrakas to share his thoughts about MAPOR.

Paul J. Lavrakas

I joined MAPOR in the late 1970s early in my academic career at Northwestern. Despite moving from Chicago in 1996, I've stayed a member and have attended every annual conference since, but one. Not only do I enjoy the scholarship that's discussed, but it's great to see so many friends who attend.

For reasons of long-term health preservation, I stopped full-time work for any employer in 2007, after being in the academic sector for 26 years and the private sector for seven. I've been very fortunate since then in being able to help my wife, Barbara, (who is working in her 37th year in the public schools) pay our monthly bills with enough paid consulting projects for various media and other clients. One new area in which I have enjoyed engaging is litigation-related surveys. Here, I apply the Total Survey Error framework to either plan a survey to gather data to serve as evidence for the plaintiff, or serve the defendant to identify likely non-ignorable sources of error in a survey that the plaintiff has entered as evidence. Coupled with the paid work I am doing, is unpaid work for my professional organizations, in particular AAPOR, and doing various scholarly projects of interest. Since 2007, I've committed 45-50 hours of work a week on projects of my own choosing; which is a very healthy contrast to the 70-80 hours I was working in my last full-time job on many assignments that were not of my choosing or interest. I am very grateful to be able to continue to work in the field of intellectual inquiry in which I love to engage.



MAPOR Call for Papers

Exploring the Future of Public Opinion Research November 20-21, 2009, Avenue Hotel, Chicago

Research Papers: Submit an abstract no longer than two typed, double-spaced pages in MS Word or PDF format. No full-length papers will be reviewed. In the e-mail submission, please include the name(s), institutional affiliation(s), and e-mail address(es) of all author(s) (not just the contact author). Make sure you remove all personally identifying information from your abstract before submitting it to allow for blind reviewing. Indicate whether this paper is a student paper. Student papers are those where all authors are enrolled in an undergraduate or graduate program at the time of the conference. Student authors are encouraged to participate in the MAPOR Fellows Student Paper Competition. (See specific call for more details). Authors will receive notification of the action on their proposal by August 15.

Panel Proposals: Submit a written proposal (up to two double-spaced pages). Proposals should identify the topic, explain its importance, and list the potential panelists and their areas of expertise. Panels related to the conference theme are especially encouraged. However, we may not be able to accommodate as many panels as usual given the big increase in submissions in recent years.

Submission Information: All abstracts (papers and panels) must be received no later than **5 p.m. CDT on June 30, 2009**. Indicate if you would prefer to present your paper in the poster session. 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, you may submit the text in the body of the e-mail. Abstracts may also be sent by regular mail to:

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MAPOR Fellows 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 \$50 and free conference registration and a free Friday luncheon ticket. The winning paper will also be accepted for presentation at a session at next year's AAPOR conference, held in Chicago in May 2010.

Eligibility: For the purposes of this competition, a student is someone enrolled in a graduate or undergraduate program at the time of the Conference. A paper authored by more than one person is a student paper if all parties are students according to the above definition. Students need not be members of MAPOR. The topic of the paper must conform to the general areas of scholarship that MAPOR addresses, which are (1) public opinion and (2) survey research methodology. The papers need not be quantitative nor must they report data in order to qualify for consideration in this competition.

Procedure: 1) Students first need to submit an abstract of their paper, conforming to the 2009 MAPOR Call for Papers (see the call for more information). Deadline for submission is **5 p.m. CDT, June 30, 2009**. Students should specify on a page accompanying the abstract that they are students. Send the submission by electronic mail to abstracts@mapor.org. 2) Once a student has been informed that his/her paper has been accepted for the 2009 conference, the student will need to submit a **full paper** electronically to Cecillie Gaziano (cgaziano@prodigy.net), by **Friday September 25, 2009**, to be eligible for consideration for the 2009 student paper competition. No hard-copy papers will be accepted. All papers must be accompanied by the student's name, USPS address, phone number, e-mail address, and the name and e-mail address of the student's faculty sponsor for the paper.

A committee composed of MAPOR Fellows will make the awards. Winners will be announced at MAPOR's annual conference.