

EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

REFLECTIONS AND SPECULATIONS ON THE 75TH ANNIVERSARY OF *PUBLIC OPINION QUARTERLY*

Why now? This was a question posed to us when we approached one of the contributors for this special issue, marking the 75th anniversary of *Public Opinion Quarterly* (*POQ*). This is a good question—one need not commemorate every anniversary, and so why acknowledge the dodranscentennial? Indeed, just 25 years ago, a special issue reflected on the first half century of the journal.

Our motivation for moving forward with the issue comes from reflecting on two statements found in prior issues. First is the statement with which *POQ* began 75 years ago (which we also noted in the foreword to our first issue as editors, in 2009): “we are confronted nearly everywhere by *mass* opinion . . . its surging impact upon events becomes the characteristic of the current age—and its ruin or salvation” (1937, p. 3). Then, 50 years later, Eleanor Singer (1987, p. S1) began the 50th-anniversary issue by citing three items of “bad news” for public opinion scholars: declining response rates, using methods of opinion measurement to manipulate opinions (e.g., via specialized media), and the loss of control over polling quality. To provide some context—these concerns were raised before the profusion of caller identification and cell phones, before many of us had cable television, and before any of us had heard of IVR, robo-calling, PDAS, smart phones, VoIP, or even the World Wide Web.

If nothing else, the technological evolution (or revolution) of the past quarter century has changed how public opinion researchers gauge opinions and presumably how citizens gather information to form opinions. The field now grapples with how to combat response rates that fall far into the single digits (particularly on Web surveys), how to study targeted messages that come from media that seem to evolve on a daily basis, and how to somehow ensure polls that receive attention meet professional standards. These are overwhelming challenges that have the potential to fundamentally alter the practice of public opinion research—and in the background always looms the larger question posed in the first issue about the potential deleterious consequences of public opinion.

On the positive side, however, these technologies provide opportunities to gauge opinions and behaviors nearly instantaneously, making data available like never before. As Robert Groves explains in his essay in this issue, a central

challenge for contemporary opinion researchers is how to manage information overload and combine multiple data sources.

Although we have no way of knowing how public opinion research will unfold in the next 25 years, we suspect it will look fairly different than it does today. This possibility is exactly why a 75th-anniversary issue seemed important. We want to ensure a careful recording of how we arrived at the current state of opinion research, the issues being debated today, and the current perspectives on what the future may hold. Doing so guarantees some documentation of the intellectual evolution of the field and provides context to how public opinion researchers operate at this point in time (context that may be long forgotten 25 years from now).

With these motivations in mind, we solicited three types of papers for this issue. The issue begins with a series of retrospectives by previous editors of the journal. We asked former editors, including Eleanor Singer, Howard Schuman, Stanley Presser, Vince Price, and Peter Miller, to discuss the critical issues and challenges faced during their editorial terms. These essays are followed by Robert Groves's essay on the current state of the field. He reflects on the phases of public opinion research and where it may go in the future. Finally, we asked prominent scholars to write topical essays on what we view as the key areas of opinion research, both substantive and methodological. The authors discuss current challenges and future prospects on communication and public opinion (Diana Mutz and Lori Young), elections (D. Sunshine Hillygus), public opinion and democracy (Robert Shapiro), sampling (Michael Brick), survey mode (Mick Couper), and questionnaire design (Nora Cate Schaeffer and Jennifer Dykema). Although these articles look forward, they provide valuable reflections of the development of public opinion and survey methodology research.

Eleanor Singer concluded her introduction to the 50th-anniversary issue by asking whether POQ would exist 50 years later—she stated, “if I had to bet, I'd give odds on survival.” At the halfway point, we still think survival is a good bet, but what the journal and field will look like in 2037 is anyone's guess.

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