

## POLL'S MANY USES AND USERS

By Lois Timms-Ferrara

The Roper Center's on-line public opinion retrieval system is in its fourth year. POLL, an acronym for the Public Opinion Location Library, was created by the Center to provide quick and easy access to the thousands of questions in its archive. The system enables researchers to locate relevant data on any topic covered in the polls.

The database now houses 135,000 survey questions from nationwide polls conducted over the last thirty years. The information on each question includes the exact question text, the response percentages and certain survey-level information such as the polling firm and research sponsor, interview dates, and sample size. We update POLL daily, adding the most recently collected data available and some older data too. More than 60 survey firms have contributed data to POLL; the box contains a partial listing of them.

Nearly eighty organizations subscribe to POLL, accessing the database from their own facilities through a computer and modem. These users represent the academic social sciences, survey research firms, business corporations, public affairs groups, government, and the news media.

### Press

News organizations, themselves very active in gathering public opinion data, are major users of the POLL database. They find it helpful in designing questionnaires and in comparing their own results to other sources. More newspapers and local television stations are conducting statewide and metropolitan area surveys. POLL offers them direct access to the question wordings that are being used

### A Sampling of Our Data Suppliers

ABC News/*Washington Post*; Associated Press/Media General; Gordon Black/*USA Today*; CBS News/*New York Times*; Gallup Organization; Louis Harris and Associates; *Los Angeles Times*; National Opinion Research Center; NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*; Opinion Research Corporation; Research and Forecasts; Roper Organization; Daniel Yankelovich Group; Yankelovich Clancy Shulman

by the leading national firms, and lets them compare their findings to nationwide results.

The media use POLL to access data relevant to fast breaking news events. If, for example, an international crisis is underway, a reporter can in a matter of minutes locate data on public response to similar events in the past. The media also use POLL to monitor opinion change on policy questions like gun control and abortion. One researcher in the polling unit of a leading US newspaper summarizes her utilization of POLL this way: "I not only use it for gathering data related to upcoming polls, but also when reporters call to see if we have any polling data on specific subjects they are writing about."

### Business

Corporate researchers track attitudes toward business through POLL. They also find questions showing public perceptions of particular industries. Another common interest of businesses is governmental regulation in areas that have the potential of affecting the company's competitive position. Public affairs departments, public relations firms, and advertising agencies interested in corporate image and the regulatory environment frequently tap POLL to study the public's views on these topics.

A brokerage firm concerned with investor confidence after the 1987 stock market crash used POLL to track consumer behavior. They studied public attitudes and buying patterns before, during, and just after the crash. Using data from POLL and various economic indicators, they formulated a baseline from which they could determine their strategy for approaching new and existing clients on investment opportunities.

### Academia

Social science researchers have found POLL a valued tool in a wide range of scholarship. As Robert Blendon, professor at Harvard University's School of Public Health puts it, "POLL...enable(s) us to be more productive as researchers and assure(s) us that we are citing data that have been carefully edited and archived." He goes on to say that POLL is essential to the work of their program on public opinion on health care issues and has provided "...the basis of much of our secondary analysis of survey data on health issues." Health-related questions in the database now number *more than 8,000*.

Many academics who subscribe to POLL use the system to identify studies that may be particularly rich in a specific subject area. They are then able to purchase a copy of a raw data file (on tape or diskette) for further analysis at their own facility.

### Others

Public policy organizations keep a close eye on attitudes relevant to their concerns. Groups whose constituencies include the elderly, children, minorities, and women have come to rely on public opinion surveys—and on POLL as a vehicle providing that information. Groups focusing on discrimination, capital punishment, censorship, abortion,

and other policy issues covered in survey research obtain results from many hundreds of relevant survey questions via the system in just minutes. Government agencies are now beginning to use POLL on issues relevant to their responsibilities—for example, a unit of the Defense Department exploring public sentiment on the role of women in the armed forces.

Those wanting additional information on POLL or any of the other Center services should call or write the User Services Unit, The Roper Center, P. O. Box 440, Storrs, CT 06268-0440. Telephone: (203)486-4440; FAX: (203)486-2123.

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### **Public Opinion Location Library (POLL)**

#### **Subscribers as of March 1, 1990**

ABC News; AFL-CIO, Committee on Political Education; American Association of Retired Persons; American Farm Bureau; American Medical Association; Americans Talk Security; *The Arizona Republic/Phoenix Gazette*; The Associated Press; BBDO Advertising; Baruch College/CUNY; Brulé Ville Associés, France; Burson-Marsteller, Inc.; CBS News; Charlton Research Company; Child Trends, Inc.; *The Christian Science Monitor*; Coldwater Corporation; *The Courier Journal*; The Daniel Yankelovich Group; Duke University; *The Evening Sun*; Fairfield University; The Gallup Organization; Gordon S. Black Corporation; *The Hartford Courant*; Harvard School of Public Health; Health Insurance Association of America; Hill & Knowlton, Inc.; Hill Research Consultants; J. Walter Thompson Co.; The Kettering Foundation; *Los Angeles Times*; Louis Harris & Associates; Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod; Michigan State University; National Opinion Research Center (NORC) Univ. of Chicago; NBC; *The New York Times*; New York University; *Newsday*; Northern Illinois University; Nuffer, Smith, Tucker, Inc.; *The Oregonian*; Peter D. Hart Research Associates; Philip Morris USA; Port Authority of New York and New Jersey; Princeton Survey Research Associates; Princeton University; Prodigy Services Company; *Psychology Today*; Public Agenda Foundation; The Roper Organization, Inc.; Royal Dutch Academy of Science - Univ. of Amsterdam; Rutgers University; *The Seattle Times*; Stanford University; State of Connecticut, Legislative Program Review Committee; State University of New York - Geneseo; *Time, Inc.*; *Times Mirror Center*; United States Naval Academy; *U.S.A. Today*; *U.S. News and World Report*; University of Cincinnati; University of Iowa; University of Minnesota; University of Missouri - Kansas City; University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; University of Wisconsin; Virginia Commonwealth University; *Washington Post*; Washington University; Wesleyan University; Williams College; The Wirthlin Group; Yale University; Yankelovich Clancy Shulman