

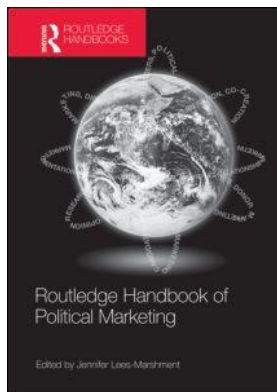
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The use of public opinion research by government

Insights from American and Canadian research

Lisa Birch and François Pétry

The topic: government public opinion research

Political marketing research has previously discussed the use of focus groups and polling by political parties, but it has neglected to consider the substantial opinion research commissioned and conducted by government agencies. Government public opinion research (POR) is not well publicised, but provides a significant resource for politicians that can influence policy development, decisions and communication. Paraphrasing the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada (Treasury Board of Canada 2006), we define government POR as applied social science and marketing research using surveys and focus groups, commissioned by government agencies to map the attitudes and perceptions of citizens in order to produce policy-relevant information that will respond to the knowledge and marketing intelligence needs of policy-makers and managers. This definition of government POR includes the gathering of information from civil society for evaluations; however, it excludes citizen consultations involving two-way communication between government and civil society through public hearings, web-based consultations or memoirs, even though some political actors view these state-citizen interactions as legitimate ways of knowing about public opinion on a given issue. Government POR is intended primarily for internal use to improve the knowledge base on which policy-makers and public managers conduct policy. Unlike political polling, which is not government-regulated, government POR is regulated at the federal levels in both Canada and the US to ensure political neutrality and methodological quality. Political neutrality requirements preclude government polling about voter preferences for political parties or candidates. Many of the uses of market research for a 'permanent campaign' presented by Sparrow and Turner (2001) would not be acceptable uses of government POR under current Canadian and US rules and regulations. This chapter will explore this hitherto neglected area of market research by considering government POR within a political marketing context.

Previous research

The existing literature within the political science discipline that links public administration, public opinion and public policy provides a basic starting point for bridging this research gap. Overall, there have been relatively few empirical studies of how executive agencies and bureaucracies actually use POR commissioned by the government. Instead, there is a vast literature on government responsiveness (or lack thereof) to public opinion at the macro-policy level. Three schools of thought can be distinguished within this literature depending on whether public opinion is seen as influencing policy-makers (see Page and Shapiro 1983 and Monroe 1998 for US evidence; see Johnston 1986 and Pétry 1999 for Canadian evidence), or as being influenced by policy-makers (Bourdieu 1979; Chomsky and Herman 1988; Ginsberg 1986; Hoy 1989; Margolis and Mauser 1989), or whether the relationship is seen as reciprocal, with public opinion influencing and being influenced by policy-makers at the same time (Geer 1996; Jacobs 1992; Soroka and Wlezien 2004; Stimson 1998; see Eisinger 2008 for a recent review). This literature relies mostly on data from mediatized polls¹ commissioned by non-governmental policy actors and by the media. The problem is that there is no solid proof that policy-makers use or trust mediatized polls when it comes to elaborate and decide public policy (the government responsiveness literature implicitly assumes this without providing the evidence). In fact, the evidence suggests that policy-makers do not trust mediatized polls and prefer to use other sources of information about public opinion when they make policy decisions (Herbst 1998; Pétry 2007). As we will see, one of the other sources of information on public opinion that policy-makers trust is government-sponsored POR.

A more directly relevant research program focuses on the use of government-sponsored POR by the executive branch of government for strategic communication purposes. In the US, qualitative studies have shown how presidents commission public opinion polls not so much to change policy toward majority opinion, but rather to better promote actions that they believe will improve society, and to steer presidential policy initiatives through the legislative process (Canes-Wrone 2006; Eisinger 2003; Heith 2004; Morris 1997). Cox *et al.* (2002) document the way in which US presidents, members of Congress and interest groups have invoked public opinion about social security. They conclude that these invocations often fail to be based on evidence, and are rarely contested even when they have little factual basis. Jacobs and Shapiro (2000) show how polls were used by President Clinton to 'craft talk' in ways that appealed to the public by appearing to show responsiveness, while enabling the pursuit of his preferred policy objectives.

In Canada, no systematic study of the strategic polling done by central executive agencies (the Office of the Prime Minister and the Privy Council Office) has been published. Roberts and Rose (1995) have studied how the Conservative government of Brian Mulroney used polls to try to change public opinion about the Goods and Services Tax (GST) (but failed to do so). Lachapelle (1996) has shown how Prime Minister Jean Chrétien used polling for strategic purposes in the decision to join the 1991 Gulf War. Ponting (2006) has documented the strategic use of POR and the subsequent invocation of public opinion by the New Democratic Party (NDP) government of Premier Glen Clark in its campaign to 'sell' the Nisga'a Treaty to British Columbia's electorate. Work by Kiss (2009) traces the development of the 'public relations state' in Alberta and shows how government POR activity became centralized and structured during Premier Ralph Klein's era. He argues that the Klein government used POR mainly as a tool for public relations despite democratic responsiveness rhetoric. Finally, in his study of the use of government-sponsored POR on constitutional renewal, the GST and gun control in Canada, Page (2006) argued that the primary purpose of POR was to help policy-makers

influence government communication. Since POR was commissioned too late to influence policy design, he argued that the only useful role left for POR was one of marketing the policy and informing the public about it. This begs the question of whether POR may be commissioned early in the policy process in other cases.

While POR may be limited to facilitating political communication in some cases, this is far from being the sole or even the primary role of government POR. Hastak *et al.* (2001) argue that POR use occurs throughout the policy process, although the intensity and the nature of use vary from stage to stage. They analyze three case studies of patient package inserts, direct-to-consumer advertising, and environmental marketing guides. They found that US government agencies use POR to ‘build policy mandates’ at the agenda-setting stage, during which the government chooses which problems will require state action. They argue that policymakers tend to commission large-scale conventional surveys at that stage in order to match the competing influence of polls commissioned by other policy actors. They show that US government officials use survey research to variable degrees at the subsequent policy formulation, execution and enforcement stages, depending on factors such as the amount of controversy and the degree of complexity associated with the policy initiative. Similarly, in a study of the use of public opinion research by the Canadian Biotechnology Secretariat, Medlock (2005) finds that POR is used in communication (to inform senior management and to shape future communication strategies) as well as in policy development (to provide background information and context, to supply evidence to support policy decisions and to forecast areas of controversy). Rothmayr and Hardmeier (2002) analyze polling by the Swiss government and find that public relations is only one of four functions of the government POR utilization process, the others being essentially information functions for planning for future policy decisions, evaluating existing policies essentially to gather information to plan future policy decisions, and observing the development of certain problems in a specific policy area. They found that the impact of polls on decisions was more likely when the commissioning department had the power to implement decisions based on poll results.

Inspired by scientific work in the field of knowledge utilization, Birch and Pétry (2010, 2011b) show how policy-makers use POR findings for strategic, instrumental, conceptual and managerial purposes to develop, design, implement and evaluate policies and their instruments. This includes a surveillance function following implementation. They find that there is a link between POR utilization, the knowledge needs at each stage in the policy cycle, and the nature of the decisions involved at each stage of the policy cycle, just as Fafard (2008) theorized. Their demonstration is based on the analysis of POR utilization by Health Canada in tobacco control. Their work in progress extends the analysis to other health policy issues. To explain how government POR is used and the kind of impact it has on policy, future research needs to explore explanatory factors such as the level of opposition to an initiative, the activities of interest groups, the complexity of an initiative, the time factor and perceptions of citizens’ knowledge and competency regarding an issue as well as the organizational capacity of the government agency for research uptake.

New research: government POR in Canada and the US in practice and theory

Since government POR is a relatively new area of research, this section simply explains and illustrates the nature, source and implications of government POR conceptually and also empirically with Canadian and US examples.

Types of government POR

In practice, government POR is quite varied in nature by the research objectives pursued, the methods used and the data produced. Government POR sometimes comes in the form of survey questions purchased from syndicated polls. In Canada, a moratorium on new syndicated contracts was imposed in 2008 to ensure better coordination of syndicated POR across departments to avoid duplication. At the time of writing, all Canadian government POR comes in the form of custom research tailored to particular objectives that are associated with specific policy needs which range from better understanding a problem or target group, to designing possible policy solutions then monitoring and evaluating the impact of policy decisions. Custom POR entails quantitative, qualitative and mixed research designs, some of which can be quite sophisticated and most of which defies preconceived ideas that equate POR with syndicated polls. The examination of hundreds of government POR reports led us to conclude that this POR is a form of applied social and marketing research.

Unlike multi-client syndicated POR, custom POR is exclusively sponsored by single government agencies that own the property rights (the rights to syndicated polls are owned by polling houses). US and Canadian regulations governing this POR activity have similar objectives to guarantee the quality of the research, the transparency and the political neutrality of government-sponsored custom POR. US regulation seems preoccupied with 'paperwork reduction' and over-soliciting citizens for information, whereas recent Canadian regulation appears focused on value-for-money considerations. Since 2008, all custom POR proposals must have ministerial approval. In the US (less in Canada) it is not uncommon to find custom POR reports that present a secondary analysis of POR commissioned by the media or non-governmental actors made available through the Office of Management and Budget Information Collection Services at the White House.

To prevent the party in power from using government POR resources to collect politically sensitive information, periodic independent assessments of government POR are performed by the Auditor-General of Canada or by independent advisors (Paillé 2007). In the US, the Comptroller-General has not investigated the federal government's POR activity. However, a detailed examination of the content of government POR reports suggests that safeguards similar to those found in Canada are enforced. In Canada, unlike the US, the administrative guidelines for POR include the obligation to make all reports available to the public. There is evidence of POR production in the Canadian provinces and US states, but research on its utilization is sparse and what is available suggests that there seems to be considerable variation in the regulations and disclosure rules for government-sponsored POR across jurisdictions.

Sources of government POR

POR may be conducted internally within government agencies or externally through contracts to private suppliers. In Canada, the dominant pattern is to contract-out to private suppliers. Only the largest agencies have the capacity to commission the data collection and then conduct their own analysis. Private suppliers in Canada are almost exclusively polling firms. There are specializations among these firms by type of research (e.g. general POR or advertising) and by type of clientele (e.g. youth, first nations). In the US there is a wide variety of supply options. In addition to internal production capacity, federal departments contract-out to private research firms according to their area of expertise as well as to university-based POR centres. In Canada, academic research centres and think-tanks are increasingly left out of government POR activity, at least at the federal level (it was not always like that), whereas in the US government agencies

are more willing to share government POR with private think-tanks and university-based research centres.

How government POR differs from mediatized POR

Government-sponsored POR seems to differ from mediatized POR by its higher overall level of quality. For example, a systematic inquiry of over 200 Canadian health surveys sponsored by Health Canada, private interest groups and by the media reveals that the frequency of measurement errors (ambiguous survey questions, unbalanced answer choices, absence of split sample rotation) is lower in government polls (Birch and Pétry 2011b). The difference in the level of quality can be attributed in part to the fact that pollsters often get larger amounts of time, money and resources to conduct government-sponsored POR than what they get to conduct surveys sponsored by interest groups and the media. Another consideration is the credibility of government-sponsored surveys. The accuracy of government POR, and the credibility of the pollster who does the research, is ultimately sanctioned by the success of the policy, program or instrument that it helped achieve. This ultimate sanction may constitute an incentive to produce survey results that are valid and accurate. By contrast, political polls conducted for media release are followed by no tangible outcome. Often the results of privately sponsored polls are mobilized in the media as 'news' by policy actors seeking to influence the public agenda and debate on a particular issue. However, there is very little really to test the validity and accuracy of their results, or to sanction the credibility of the pollsters who administer these polls, and the policy actors who sponsor them. The incentive to achieve and maintain high quality standards may not be as elevated in mediatized polls, since their purpose is to influence agendas, not to produce policy-relevant knowledge for policy decisions and implementation. One last consideration is that government polls are strictly regulated, whereas polls conducted on behalf of private actors or as a joint-venture between a polling firm and a media network are not subject to regulations requiring political neutrality, periodic and independent reviews of POR practices, and full transparency through the public disclosure of POR reports.

Government POR in Canada and the US

In Canada, federal government POR expenditures have rapidly expanded since the mid-1990s. The annual cost of POR increased from C\$4 million in 1993–94 to C\$31 million in 2006–07. Since then, the POR budget has been drastically reduced by the Harper government, which has also imposed new, stricter POR contracting rules. Regrettably, comparable data is not readily available for the US because there is no overarching institution that gathers and centralizes information about government POR in the US.

The rapid rise of POR capacity in the Canadian federal government coincided with new discourses on governance, result-based management, citizen consultation and engagement and, more recently, evidence-based policy. Organizational thinking and arrangements in the Canadian federal government have incorporated many of these ideas into public management policies such as the Communications Policy of the Government of Canada (Treasury Board of Canada 2006). These policies encouraged the institutionalization of POR through the development of specialized POR units within departments and the creation of the Public Opinion Research Directorate of Public Works and Government Services (PWGS). The PWGS directorate acts as a broker for POR for all departments, provides best practices guidelines, offers webinar training and publishes annual reports on government POR activity. POR institutionalization in the Canadian public sector was seen as a means of 'focusing on citizens, embracing a clear set of

public service values, managing for results and ensuring responsible spending' (Treasury Board of Canada 2000). Despite this institutionalization of POR, the link between POR capacity and political marketing as well as the potential of POR for political marketing and strategic management escaped most of the Canadian public officers who were surveyed by Mintz *et al.* (2006). Yet the Communications Policy, which is easily accessible online, specifically identifies government POR as policy tool in the following passage:

Public opinion research helps the government to better understand Canadian society and to identify citizen needs and expectations. It is used to assess the public's response to proposals or to possible initiatives; to assess the effectiveness of policies, programs and services; to measure progress in service improvement; to evaluate the effectiveness of communication activities such as advertising; and to plan and evaluate marketing initiatives, among other applications.

(Treasury Board of Canada 2006)

Recent research using a mixed method design with interviews, document analysis, content analysis of government POR reports, and cross-analysis of POR reports relative to policy decisions suggests that there is such utilization, although the practitioners may not employ political marketing lingo to describe their activities (Birch and Pétry 2010, 2011a; Birch 2010). Let us illustrate this with a discussion of salient findings from a case study of Health Canada's internationally acclaimed health warning messages (HWM) on cigarette packages.

The case of graphic health warning messages

Between the late 1990s and 2010 extensive, pioneering POR activity guided the development of the first generation of HWM implemented in 2000, monitored their impact on the general public and smokers, then contributed to the design of the second generation of HWM announced in 2010. In this case, POR is first used conceptually to allow decision-makers to acquire a better understanding of problems surrounding cigarette labelling and to appreciate the range of possible solutions. There is also evidence of conceptual use during the early stages of the HWM program, when extensive use of POR took place to understand smokers and what motivates them to smoke and to quit. Interestingly, HWM were rated by Canadians as less effective than smoking cessation instruments (tax breaks for cessation) and exhortation instruments (information campaigns and TV advertisements). This did not deter Health Canada from moving forward to impose new warning messages on the basis of scientific evidence of labelling effects.

After it was decided to proceed with the HWM program, POR was used extensively to assist in micro decisions about the design of the new graphic messages. This use of POR can be characterized as instrumental use in which one is able to link specific POR findings to the adoption of discrete decisions about specific policy instruments. As many as 68 distinct messages and graphics were tested through a series of 35 focus groups across Canada in 1999–2000. The data show that two-thirds of the messages that were favourably assessed by focus group participants were retained, while virtually all the retained messages that had received mixed or negative reviews were modified according to focus groups' recommendations, which does suggest some instrumental use of POR findings (the χ^2 test for favourably reviewed messages retained vs. negatively reviewed messages rejected was statistically significant at $p = .05$). The opinion research design was carefully constructed to also study how different target groups within the population understood and responded to HWM using focus groups, surveys and

mixed research methods. This reflects a sophisticated understanding of who needs to be reached if the overall policy objectives of tobacco control are to be achieved. It also shows an application of marketing notions in policy instrument design.

There was also some strategic use of POR to justify regulatory change for tobacco labelling. The policy actors who we interviewed all ranked the HWM among the top policy instruments for an effective, comprehensive tobacco control strategy, alongside taxation, other retail controls and smoking bans. Notwithstanding this ranking, comments from some non-governmental organization (NGO) actors indicate that they would have preferred even more audacious labels, some of which were pre-tested through their own POR. The story of Canadian HWM is cited on the World Health Organization's website as a 'best practice' in tobacco control. The effectiveness of the Canadian warnings is supported by empirical evidence from their own quasi-experimental scientific work, as well as POR commissioned by the Australian government and independent scientific studies.

POR was also used for surveillance purposes. Successive waves of survey research preceded and followed implementation, with the main objective being 'to provide information to assist in the evaluation of the impact of HWM on tobacco packaging'. Time-series analyses of survey data trends led policy-makers to anticipate the eventual wear-out of some warning messages. This prompted the government's decision to begin a new regulatory proposal process in 2004. A first round of focus groups allowed the testing of a dozen new warning concepts. The concept that came out the strongest in these focus groups inspired the creation of some 50 messages, which were subjected to subsequent testing in 40 focus groups to determine which ones, in the words of one policy actor, 'are the most effective, which are the most noticeable and resonate more with smokers'. Subsequent POR studies examined the impact of the size of warning messages and the impact of 50 mock-ups of potential health warnings and 24 mock-ups of potential health information messages. Every last detail of the content and visual packaging of these messages was subjected to extensive testing with the target groups. There were tensions behind the scenes as the tobacco industry lobbied against new labels and anti-tobacco groups pressured for even larger ones. Nonetheless, on 30 December, 2010 (a year and a half after the last POR work was completed), Leona Aglukkaq, the Canadian minister of health, presented new regulatory submission with 16 new health warnings and health information messages which will cover 75 percent of the cigarette packages as opposed to 50 percent, and which will be used on a rotational basis. These new messages will include more health information with links to free cessation services by phone and internet as suggested in the POR.

This example demonstrates how the surveillance work is linked proactively to work in regulatory development and thus overall policy management. The POR activity that led to the successful first generation of HWM provided a model for subsequent POR to design the second generation of messages. Again, the results of the first focus groups influenced the choice of marketing concepts retained for the new HWM. These concepts were transformed into 50 mock-ups of health warnings and 14 mock-ups of health information messages which were subjected to extensive quantitative and qualitative testing with smokers, who were classified into various market segments by variables such as gender, age and language to assess the effectiveness of these final mock-ups and their ability to resonate with each target group. Similar work is in progress to develop warning messages for smokeless tobacco products. This case attests to instrumental use through a rigorous, structured approach to policy development. It also demonstrates how POR data gathered for surveillance use loops back into the policy process. Similar stories can be told for policy initiatives for smoking cessation, second-hand smoke and smoking bans, as well as the regulation of 'light' and 'mild' descriptors.

Preliminary work exploring the use of POR in US tobacco control suggests very similar patterns. We identified US equivalents of the Canadian wave surveys designed for the monitoring and surveillance of smoking behaviour among adults and youth. We also found evidence of survey and focus group work to better understand the target audiences, to design campaign tools and to evaluate their impact in the context of social marketing initiatives. Whereas in Canada this work is linked to Health Canada's tobacco control program, in the US the Centers for Disease Control is the key federal agency. In both contexts, tobacco control is a policy matter that benefits from a permissive consensus among the electorates (Studlar 2002), which may facilitate the utilization of POR for instrumental and conceptual purposes in policy design, implementation and evaluation. However, POR utilization patterns may be quite different in contexts where there is more controversy.

What does the case of graphic health warning messages tell us?

From this discussion, it is clear that governments use POR in more varied and complex ways than to slavishly pander to or cynically manipulate public opinion as is often assumed. Granted, policy-makers sometimes use POR to craft their messages – to promote and legitimize their own preferred policy choices; however, they also use POR for the very different purpose of helping in the design, implementation and evaluation of policy instruments. This includes analyses of target clienteles for policy initiatives, customer/citizen satisfaction surveys, social marketing activities and, occasionally, public relations tools. Second, contrary to popular belief, even if governments still use POR commissioned by private actors for media release, governments sponsor their own POR more and more frequently. The fact that custom government POR results are not reported in the media suggests that this type of POR is needed less for public relations activities and more for improving the quality and effectiveness of public policies.

Advice for practitioners

There is no guarantee that the use of government POR will improve the quality and effectiveness of public policies as it did in the HWM case, but the case provides useful indications as to how the appropriate use of government POR may contribute to better policy-making. If governments are to use POR effectively as a tool for policy decisions and management, they must first formally recognize POR as a means of producing valuable, policy-relevant knowledge. To adapt marketing language, they must come to see how POR can be a powerful tool for policy (marketing) intelligence. In other words, they must see POR as more than just a tool for improving communications and public relations. Second, they must institutionalize POR in ways similar to the institutionalization of the policy evaluation process (Furubo *et al.* 2002). This entails four important elements, as follows:

- requiring that POR becomes a compulsory policy input and establishing clear standards for the quality of research, the presentation and the disclosure of final reports;
- developing POR expertise within the bureaucracy through training, networking among POR specialists and sharing of lessons learned through POR production and use in different policy areas with various clienteles and target groups;
- fostering a learning-oriented organizational culture that values research entrepreneurship and quality data gathered through rigorous methodology over anecdotal evidence about the attitudes, opinions and behaviour of citizens; and
- last but not least, allocating adequate, reliable funding for research initiatives and programs.

To protect democratic values by preventing the use of public funds for POR that would confer an unfair advantage to the governing party rather than contributing to the higher goal of serving the public interest through better designed and more effective policies, government POR activity must be subject to public scrutiny. This requires clear restrictions on partisan uses of POR as well as easy, transparent, public access to government POR reports within a reasonable time delay.

Impact on politics

Government POR can produce highly specialized knowledge about the beliefs, attitudes, opinions and behaviours of the general public as well as the specific groups targeted by any given policy. This knowledge can facilitate bringing evidence into policy and thus developing policies and mixes of policy instruments that are grounded firmly in the empirical reality of each particular policy context. It can also facilitate the policy management process through enhanced monitoring of the effectiveness of policy instruments and of general trends in the policy environment. When government POR is carefully designed to provide data throughout the policy cycle, it contributes to more effective, responsive and responsible policies, which in turn may enhance the legitimacy of policy decisions. When the government must decide whether to act or not in response to a new issue, its final decision will gain legitimacy in three cases. These arise when: (1) the government adopts policies that reflect citizens' preferences; (2) the government offers good explanations for choosing a different option; (3) the government benefits from a permissive consensus and thus adopts a policy that is within the public's zone of acquiescence for government intervention (Birch 2010, 2012; see Stimson 1998 for zones of acquiescence). In all three cases, POR conducted to understand citizens' preferences and their thresholds or comfort zones for state action (or inaction) can provide useful input into the decision-making process. In cases where a decision to act is rendered, legitimacy will depend on how the policy is designed, implemented and evaluated. The legitimacy of policy decisions at these stages depends on the state bureaucracy's respect of accepted regulatory procedures including public consultations as required, its capacity to justify decisions regarding policy instruments, often using scientific knowledge, and the subsequent effectiveness of these instruments in attaining policy objectives (Schrefler 2010). Again, POR can generate specialized knowledge to guide the bureaucracy in its decisions and actions by generating policy-specific data about what works with whom in which context and what does not, as well as data about policy outcomes and ways to improve them.

In political marketing lingo, government POR can enlighten decision-making and enhance governance by clarifying the wants and needs of citizens, identifying the characteristics of market segments (policy target groups) and their special needs, developing the best product (policy) to meet those needs, determining the best delivery channels (implementation), assessing the product's impact, refining the product as needed, facilitating market-oriented communication, producing market (policy) intelligence and ensuring continual market consultation. To conclude, then, government POR has the potential to contribute to policy decisions that are both responsive and responsible – that is, responsive to citizens' policy needs and responsible given the presumed preference of citizens for the effective and efficient use of public funds to attain legitimate policy goals.

The way forward

The scientific study of the government-sponsored POR and its utilization is an emerging field of study situated at the crossroads between political marketing, political science, political

communication, but also public administration. The study of POR has much to gain by borrowing from the vast public administration literature, particularly on the utilization of knowledge, scientific research and evaluation. By considering POR as one of the means of producing applied policy-relevant knowledge for government, research in this field may also contribute to larger questions about knowledge utilization in policy-making. In particular, we believe that categorizing government POR use as either instrumental, conceptual or strategic opens new avenues of research about government POR and enables comparisons with studies on the utilization of evaluation, scientific research and knowledge in policy. Future studies could analyze the production and utilization of government POR as well as the organizational capacity for knowledge utilization and the POR apparatus of government at the executive and bureaucratic levels. The guiding questions for these future studies could be: When, how and why is government POR utilized (or ignored) by public managers and decision-makers? What are the determinants of POR utilization by government? What are the implications of government POR utilization for the quality or effectiveness of public policies, for legitimating these policies and, ultimately, for democracy?

Conceptually, future research on the use of government POR ought to distinguish between macro political decisions about whether to act or not, which are usually made at the executive level, and micro political decisions about the fine details of policy instruments, which are usually made at the bureaucratic level. Conceptual designs must include a clear distinction between policy instruments, such as regulations, incentive schemes and social marketing, which are linked to specific policy goals, and communication activities focused strictly on state-citizen or state-media relations. Finally, our early explorations of this field suggest that the following variables may influence POR utilization: the nature of the policy area, the degree of conflict around the issue or sub-issue, the ideological orientation of the government, POR budgets and regulations, the distribution of competencies between orders of government, the policy environments and organizational capacity of government departments, the level of decision, the type of policy instrument, the stage in the policy cycle, the dynamics of policy actors in networks, issue salience and election proximity.

As for study, training and practice, while specific courses introduce students to the theories and empirical research on public opinion and democracy, it is amazing to note that very few political science departments offer courses on knowledge utilization and political and social marketing. After examining the current offer of social marketing courses in the US, Kelly (2009) suggested that this field would benefit greatly from the development of a bank of detailed case studies illustrating the different ways in which social marketing is applied in the real world. She found that most courses teach the methods of social marketing and require students to produce a social marketing plan as a main assignment. Desphande and Lagarde (2008) surveyed 477 practitioners, mainly in Canada and the US, who clearly expressed the need for training regarding marketing basics, research issues such as audience analysis, formative and evaluation research methods, marketing strategy, the application of the four Ps of marketing, and managerial issues linked to budgeting, funding and ethics. Although these studies focused on training for social marketing, we expect that similar training needs apply for POR when it is associated with political marketing or with public administration. If Lees-Marshment's (2003) vibrant plea in favour of integrating political science and management science is to become a reality, academics and practitioners will need tailored training that explicitly shows how to bridge the two.

Thus, the development of applied courses on POR as a tool of governance and management may facilitate bridge-building efforts. Such courses should offer modules on POR methodology, technical quality standards and POR utilization for policy decisions, be they in the context

of political and social marketing, routine program management or policy innovation. We would encourage the development of a bank of case studies of POR utilization with specific examples of social and political marketing as well as a bank of decision-making simulations which would require students to determine POR needs for a given policy issue, to assess the quality of POR, and then to use POR results to make policy decisions at the macro and micro levels.

Note

- 1 By mediatized polls, we mean surveys that are publicized through any form of mass media. In most cases, one of the primary purposes of such surveys is to gain media attention.

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