

Introduction to the Fiftieth Issue of *Public Perspective*

By Everett C. Ladd

In November 1989, my colleagues and I at the Roper Center published the first issue of *The Public Perspective*. The current one is our 50th, and we're celebrating this event. Volume 9, Number 2 is a special issue, longer than any of its 49 predecessors. A host of distinguished researchers have written for it, and we have brought together more than 50 pages of public opinion findings and related social data.

In a brief introductory essay to Volume 1, Number 1, Bud Roper, who chaired the Center's Board of Directors, and I described the two broad objectives we had for the new publication. "On the one hand it will be a regular source of information on important, and sometimes controversial, developments in opinion research: major new surveys; new approaches to the always-difficult task of measuring the public's views; areas where more complete or reliable information is needed—even amidst the current polling abundance—and ways of getting that information."

Looking back now on the 50 issues, we believe we have done a pretty good job in meeting this assignment. The current issue alone contains nine pieces by distinguished survey practitioners, in which each addresses briefly what he or she believes is a major challenge or problem facing research in the field in the 1990s.

Our second major objective for the magazine involved charting public opinion itself. We wanted to examine in an on-going basis in detail "the substance of opinion on policy issues and on the great political competition we call democracy." We

opined that "the highest claim of opinion polling is...that it can amplify the public's voice, letting that voice be heard clearly amidst the babble of special interest pleading and partisan jockeying. This goal is at once enormously worthy, and extremely difficult to achieve. We will try to clarify what opinion actually is on various issues—and we will alert our readers when the big story is that opinion has not congealed."

Now in Issue 50, we review major findings on public opinion in the Nineties in five large domains: the economy; government's role and performance; the way the political process is seen to be working and areas where reforms are endorsed; the state of the country's ethnic relations and the social and political outlook of America's many ethnic groups; and broad dimensions of contemporary social values. Leading experts in each of these fields have contributed interpretive essays, and we've tried to show

through comprehensive data essays on each what's been happening to public sentiment in this last decade of the Twentieth Century.

I want to take this opportunity to express my deep appreciation and that of my colleagues to all of the scholars, survey researchers, and others who have contributed their insights in these pages over the 50 issues we've been publishing the magazine; and my thanks as well to our readership across business, government, the media, academe, and the survey research profession. With your continuing support, we'll try to make as many improvements to our coverage in the next 50 issues as, we believe, we've made in the first 50.

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