

Name Change Survey Final Report 2024

Abstract

In light of emerging disturbing details of John James Audubon's life, the National Audubon Society's (NAS) Board of Directors spent more than a year considering whether to continue to include "Audubon" in their name, eventually deciding not to change the name. The Board of the Buena Vista Audubon Society (BVAS) also decided to explore the value within our local communities of keeping or changing our chapter name.

An eight-question online survey was developed and sent to all BVAS members (n=909); 156 people submitted responses (17%). Overall, the majority of the BVAS membership who responded to the survey saw no need to change the BVAS name by dropping "Audubon" because the name was an important brand and changing the name could negatively impact the work.

As a result, the BVAS Board has decided that, at this time, no action is recommended concerning changing the name.

Introduction

John James Audubon has long been known for his studies of American birds and his detailed illustrations that depict birds in their natural habitats. But Audubon also took part in unethical practices and behaviors that included not only his having enslaved Black/African-American people but also desecrating Black, Indigenous, and Mexican people's graves in order to advance anti-abolitionist views—which historians and experts assert was controversial, even for his time.

In light of such recently emerging details of his life, the National Audubon Society's (NAS) Board of Directors spent more than a year considering whether to continue to include "Audubon" in their name. In March, 2023, they decided **not** to change the name. The NAS Board believed that the name was a well-respected brand that carried value when working with national and international partners.

NAS was clear that all NAS chapters are independent and can retain or change their names and still maintain their affiliation with NAS. As a result, many chapters in

California and across the nation have begun discussions about whether retaining “Audubon” in their names has the same value locally as NAS felt it did nationally and internationally. Some chapters have decided to keep their names as is; a number have already decided to change their names; at this writing, others are still in the process of deciding.

The Board of the Buena Vista Audubon Society (BVAS) also decided to explore the value within our local communities of keeping or changing our chapter name. According to their bylaws, some chapters are Board-directed, where the Board makes all decisions and informs their members (who are actually more like donors with benefits such as newsletters or programs). BVAS, however, is a member-directed chapter: The Board makes recommendations and the membership votes on them. So in September, 2023, the Board decided to use an online survey to get member feedback about how they felt about the name and the importance of keeping or changing the name. That process and those findings are described in this document.

Methods

Survey

Items. We reviewed items from other chapters' surveys as well as created our own items. We used Google Forms, which allowed an unlimited number of anonymous surveys and a variety of item styles. Following several rounds of feedback from Board members, we finalized the items and their response sets (3 open-ended and 5 close-ended or Likert-type items).

Procedure. We first sent an informational email to be sent to all members (n = 909), summarizing background information about the name change controversy and including links to sources for more information. Approximately two weeks after the informational email went out, we sent a 2nd email that contained a link to the informational email, as a reminder, as well as a link to the online survey, with a request to fill it out and submit it within the next week. We sent a reminder about three days before the deadline.

We also sent the informational email as a link to 21 organizations that had partnered with BVAS in the past. This email also contained a link to the survey asking that one person in the organization fill it out. As before, the deadline for submitting the filled-out survey was one week later; a reminder email went out about three days before the deadline.

Results

Sample

We received 159 surveys: 156 from members and 3 from partner organizations. This represented a total membership response rate of 17%. (Because we received so few responses from organizations, we did no further analyses of those responses.)

Data Transformations for Close-ended Questions

Google Forms doesn't provide data in numeric form, instead offering the aggregate data grouped just by the text of the responses (e.g., "strongly disagree," "somewhat agree"). To generate means (e.g., an average across all responses), we needed to transform the data. We first exported the Google Forms data into Excel (using a comma-separated-values file, an option provided by Google Forms). We then used either the IF/COUNT command (for the checklist in question 1; 1 = "no," 2 = "yes") or the VLOOKUP command (for the Likert-type items 2, 3, 4, 6) to change the response text into a number (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). In this way, we were able to generate means for the close-ended questions.

Close-ended Questions (Figure ??)

Question 1 (relationship to BVAS—choose all that apply). In all, 94% of respondents reported being members of BVAS; over half also reported being donors (57%) or volunteers (55%). Nearly one third (30%) followed BVAS on social media and almost one quarter (24%) were volunteers. Overall respondents reported nearly 3 (mean = 2.9.) ways in which they were involved with BVAS.

Close-ended questions (Questions 2, 3, 4, 6). Three quarters of respondents (76%) somewhat or strongly agreed that BVAS was an important brand (Question 2, mean = 4.1). Nealy half (48%) at least somewhat agreed that change the name would negatively affect the work, while more than one third (37%) somewhat or strongly disagreed that a change would negatively impact the work (Question 3, mean = 3.3). Close to two thirds (61%) at least somewhat agreed that keeping the name would have a positive impact on the work; nearly one quarter (24%) somewhat or strongly disagreed (Question 4, mean = 3.7). Finally, two thirds (67%) of the respondents either somewhat or strongly disagreed that BVAS should change its name, while over one quarter (27%) at least somewhat agreed a new name was in order (Question 6, mean = 2.3).

Open-ended Questions

In all, respondents wrote comments to 3 questions (5, 7, and 8), although some comments contained an opinion about more than one issue. We classified the open-ended questions into 14 categories; if a respondent expressed more than one opinion in a comment, we coded each opinion.

Overall, 74% of the 231 coded opinions opposed changing the name; 26% supported a name change. More specifically, among the comments *opposed* to a name change, the three categories most often endorsed were “the name is an important brand” (35%), “can’t judge the past by today’s standards” (21%), and “Audubon did good work” (6%). Among comments *supporting* a name change, the top three categories were “a new name would be more inclusive” (8%), “the name Audubon doesn’t reflect conservation work” (6%), and “it would be no problem to change the name” (5%).

Discussion

Overall, the majority of the BVAS membership who responded to the survey saw no need to change the BVAS name by dropping “Audubon.” Most felt the name was an important brand and changing the name could negatively impact the work.

These findings should be considered in their appropriate context. First, only a small proportion of the membership responded to the survey. Such results aren’t uncommon in online surveys, although the 15% response rate was low. It should be noted that one can become a member of BVAS in two ways: by joining directly through BVAS (n = 492) or indirectly through choosing BVAS as a local chapter when joining through NAS (n = 417). One could make the argument that those who joined BVAS directly were more likely to feel more strongly invested in BVAS and would have been more likely to have responded to the survey. If that were the case, the response rate would at most have been 32% (The true response rate likely lies between those two extremes.) Either way, we can’t truly say what the overall membership felt, just what those who cared enough to respond to the survey request believed.

Second, we only surveyed those who were already connected to BVAS. That group, practically by definition, wasn’t so concerned with the name that it caused them to not get involved initially, to quit, or to limit their involvement. With this procedure, it is impossible to estimate how many people might be interested in becoming involved (or more involved) but have been put off by what a name honoring Audubon tells them what the organization values.

Third, some might note that deciding issues around marginalization—such as who might be harmed by a name—by majority vote is ill-advised, often guaranteeing support for the status quo. However, as noted earlier, BVAS is a member-directed organization. Any decisions or changes can be made only through majority votes by the members. As a result, the Board felt it was important to quantify the attitudes of the membership on this important topic.

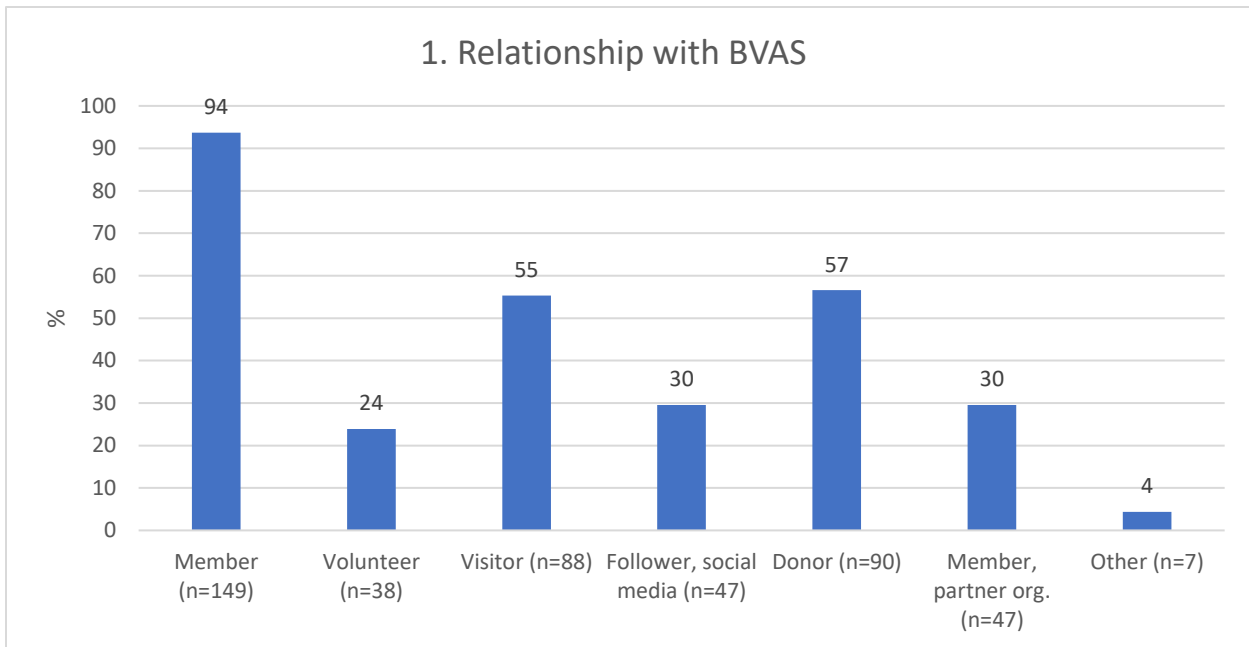
Fourth, since the surveys were anonymous, concern was raised early on that people might submit more than one response. (Google Forms would have had to collect email addresses in order to prevent duplicate submissions. Since we didn’t want respondents to worry that we might connect specific comments with specific members, we chose to collect surveys anonymously.) However, given the low-to-moderate response rate overall, that practice seems unlikely.

Finally, we had little response from our partner organizations. Several felt it wasn't their place to weigh in on the decision; several responded to our email solicitation to participation with a "form" email that directed us to their website for more information about their organization. But again, these organizations had already established a relationship with BVAS, so the name likely presented little or no obstacle to their collaboration. As with non-members, we can't know the thinking of organizations that might be interested in our work but have not reached out due to obstacles the name might convey.

Within this context, the BVAS Board has decided that, at this time, no action is recommended concerning changing the name.

February 16, 2024

FIGURE 1



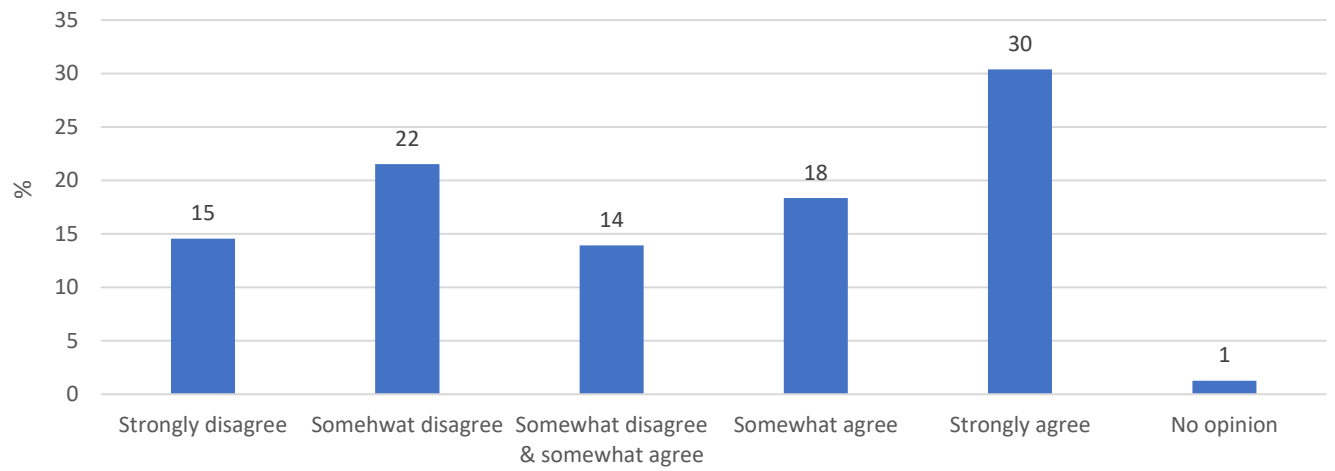
Mean # of relationships with BVAS—2.93 (out of 7)

Questions 2 – 4, 6: 1=Strongly disagree; 5=Strongly agree



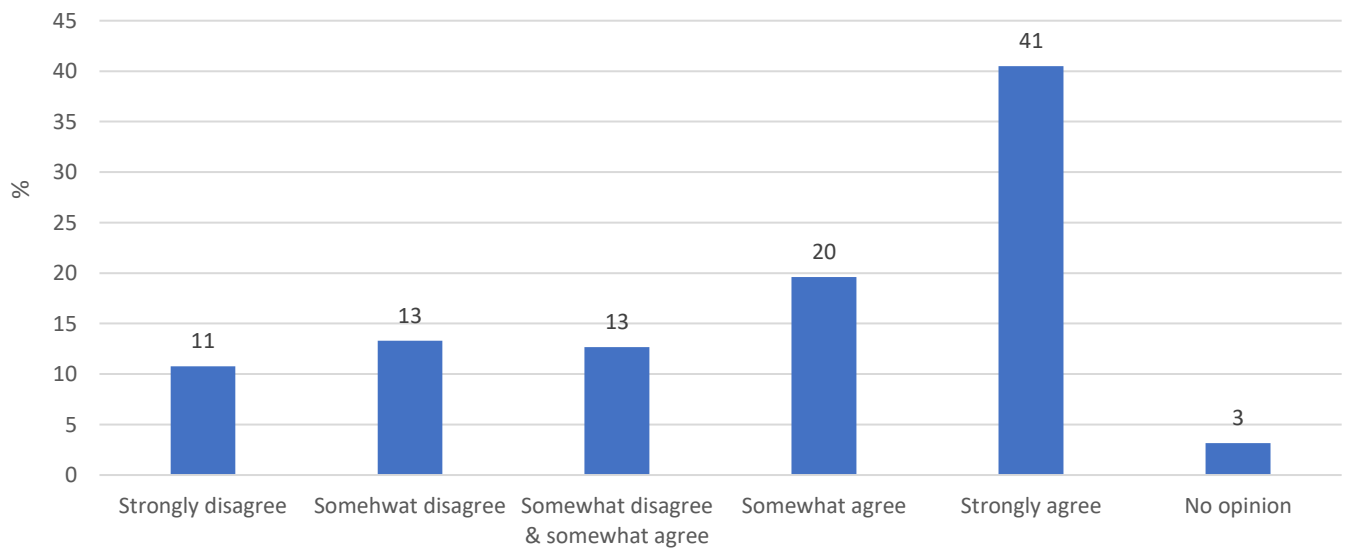
Mean response (excluding "no opinion") = 4.10

3. Changing BVAS's name will negatively affect its ability to achieve its mission.



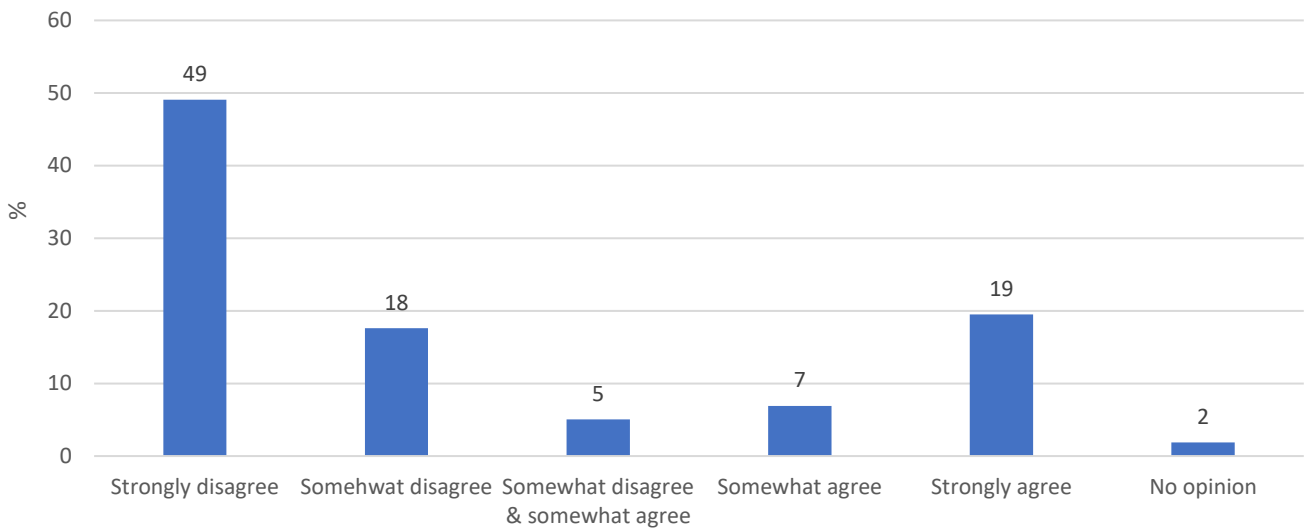
Mean response (excluding "no opinion") = 3.29

4. Keeping BVAS's name will have a positive impact on its ability to achieve its mission.



Mean response (excluding "no opinion") = 3.68

6. BVAS should choose a new name that doesn't include the name "Audubon."



Mean response (excluding "no opinion") = 2.29