

PROCEEDINGS OF THE FIFTY-SECOND ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) held its fifty-second conference May 15–18, 1997, in Norfolk, Virginia. The first AAPOR conference in Central City, Colorado, included just 11 sessions. The program at Norfolk included 59. That tally encompassed 38 paper sessions, seven roundtable discussions, eight panels, three short courses, two poster sessions, and a plenary session. (It does not count the two cocktail parties and the Fun Run, which were also on the program.) This year's program focused on the future of survey research—on new methods of data collection, problems in maintaining response rates, and the latest methods for developing questionnaires. And there were many papers on that highly visible test of the accuracy of surveys—the presidential elections.

The official conference registration was 547, slightly lower than last year's figure of 568. Of that total, 132 were first-time attendees, and 44 were students. The three short courses at the conference attracted a total enrollment of 81. Twenty-five took William Cleveland's course ("Analyzing Complex Data Sets: Visualization and Modeling"), from 10:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M. on Thursday. Thirty-five attended Judith Lessler's course ("Cognitive Laboratory Methods for Survey Research"), which ran from 2:00 P.M. to 5:00 P.M. on Thursday. The final short course ("List-Assisted Telephone Surveys: Design, Estimation and Administration") was held on Sunday and attracted 21. It was led by a team of instructors consisting of Robert Casady and Clyde Tucker, from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and James Lepkowski, from the University of Michigan.

Six sessions examined the polls, the 1996 election, or both. Critics of the polls during the 1996 campaign—notably C. Everett Ladd of the Roper Center—argued that they have not predicted the results so badly since the debacle of 1948, when the polls had Dewey defeating Truman. This year's single plenary session, held on Thursday night, examined the performance of the polls during the presidential election. The session, entitled "Controversies in Pre-Election Polling," featured Ladd, as well as Kathy Frankovic, Frank Newport, and John Zogby. Frank Newport, from the Gallup Organization, led off the session. He presented statistics on the margin of error in the presidential poll results going back to the 1940s. The major national polls were, according to Newport's figures,

closer in 1996 than they typically have been. Ladd spoke about the motivation behind his critique of the poll's performance and pointed out that, with the exception of the Zogby poll, all of the major national polls erred in the same direction, overestimating Clinton's margin of victory. John Zogby defended some of the controversial practices his polling firm uses, such as sampling only listed telephone numbers and weighting the data by party leaning. Other contributors to Zogby's success are his methods for identifying likely voters and for deciding how undecided voters will ultimately vote. Finally, Kathleen Frankovic, who heads the CBS polling unit, observed that the CBS results—which were farther off the mark in 1996 than were most of the other national polls—appeared to be thrown off by such standard practices as conversion of reluctant respondents and sampling of unlisted numbers. Both converted respondents and those with unlisted numbers tended to swell the apparent margin of the Clinton victory. A lively discussion lasted late into the night.

Several other sessions concerned the problems and impact of different modes of data collection. Two of these focused on the latest technology for doing surveys—the uses of the Internet for collecting data and disseminating the results. Two other sessions explored the impact of computer-assisted interviewing. A special panel, jointly sponsored with the Field Directors/Field Technology Conference and dedicated to the memory of the late Owen Thornberry, examined the future of interviewing. Do the new methods for computerized self-administration spell the end of interviewing as we have known it? Or will interviewers retain their central place within the survey enterprise? The session on Sunday morning provided a lively debate of these questions.

Two other themes of this year's conference were response errors and nonresponse rates. There were sessions on the measurement of race and income, mathematical models of measurement errors, question wording and order effects, record check studies to assess the accuracy of survey reports, cognitive methods for pretesting questions, and other methods for questionnaire development. And there were sessions on nonresponse in panel surveys and on nonresponse in establishment surveys; incentives and follow-up; and methods to contact respondents.

At Saturday night's awards banquet, Robert Groves presented the AAPOR Award for Exceptionally Distinguished Achievement to Irving Crespi. Groves also saluted a younger conference-goer—Diego Glusberg—who was celebrating his eighth birthday during the conference. Roger Tourangeau presented the Student Paper Prize to Paul Goren, a graduate student in political science at the University of Pittsburgh. His paper ("Political Expertise and Issue Voting in Presidential Elections") fit in well with the conference's overall themes. Tourangeau also gave a plaque to Robert Woodberry, the runner-up in the Student Paper Prize competition. Woodberry is a graduate student at the University of North

Carolina; his paper was entitled "How Then Shall We Measure? Adjusting Survey Methodology to Remove the Gap between Head-Counts and Survey Estimates of Church Attendance."

The conference was a group effort. Roger Tourangeau was the conference chair. Other members of the conference committee were Murray Edelman (the associate conference chair), Brad Edwards, Karen Goldenberg, Tom Guterbock, Tim Johnson, Scott Keeter, John Kennedy, Paul Lavrakas, Nancy Mathiowetz, Diane O'Rourke, Beth Ellen Pennell, Mark Schulman, Dawn von Thurn, Dick Warnecke, and Mike Weeks. In addition, Tourangeau received able assistance from Pam Ainsworth, Susan Ciochetto, Ward Kay, and Nichole Ra'uf. Nancy Mathiowetz also organized the short courses, and Paul Lavrakas and Dawn von Thurn headed up the Site Operations Committee. Jenna Powell handled audiovisual arrangements. Eleanor Singer chaired the committee that judged the Student Paper Prize entries; the other judges were Stanley Presser, Vincent Price, and Howard Schuman. Brad Edwards and Charles McNeill were responsible for the design of the program cover. Bob Lee organized the technology exhibit and Phyllis Endreny, the book exhibit. As always, Marlene Bednarz, AAPOR's secretary, played a key role in organizing the conference; this year she was assisted by Carol Milstein.

ROGER TOURANGEAU
Conference Chair

THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

PRESENTS THE

AAPOR AWARD

For Exceptionally Distinguished Achievement

to

IRVING CRESPI

An exemplary practitioner as well as a prolific writer, his work is notable for its excellence in design, its careful execution, and its impact. The Gallup Organization, and later Mathematica, Roper, and Total Research, all benefitted from his uncompromising commitment to rigorous methodology and thorough analysis.

The knowledge and insight gained through this distinguished career, he generously shared with us all. He authored the most complete assessment yet of pre-election polling procedures, presenting an empirical review of methods and the conditions associated with accurate prediction. Not limiting his efforts to research methodology, he has written eloquently about the role of public opinion in a democracy and the process of public opinion formation.

He has been a true AAPOR activist since attending his first conference 46 years ago. He served as President of both AAPOR and WAPOR, as AAPOR Conference Chair, and on the Advisory Committee to *Public Opinion Quarterly*. He was also Standards Chair during a critical turning point in the development of AAPOR's standards of disclosure.

A pollster, a professor, and a market researcher, his career encompasses all the activities that define AAPOR. For his many accomplishments, and for his friendship, service and collegiality, AAPOR bestows this award.

AAPOR Award Committee:

Herbert Abelson
Howard Schuman
Eleanor Singer
Seymour Sudman



Diane Colasanto, President
May 17, 1997
Norfolk, Virginia