

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

The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) held its Fifty-Seventh Annual Conference at the TradeWinds Beach Resorts and Conference Centers in St. Pete Beach, FL, on May 16–19, 2002. The AAPOR conference overlapped with that of the World Association for Public Opinion Research (WAPOR), May 15–16, providing the opportunity for several members to attend both conferences and for many joint WAPOR/AAPOR sessions on the AAPOR program.

Background

Planning for the meetings in Florida began shortly after AAPOR's highly successful 2001 conference organized by Peter Miller, which drew over eight hundred registrants to Montreal, a new registration record. While a return to the TradeWinds and St. Pete Beach (where the 1999 conference took place) held considerable promise in providing an informal, relaxed setting and environs for our meetings, the steadily increasing attendance at our conferences in recent years raised considerable concern that the space we had contracted for at the TradeWinds would not be able to accommodate our needs. Thus, during the summer, the council approved a commitment for an additional large block of rooms at the Sirata Beach Resort and an acknowledgment that the program might have to be spread across two of the TradeWinds' facilities—the Sirata Beach and Island Grand.

By early fall, both the planning process and nature of our concerns took a quite different turn in light of September 11 and the events that immediately followed. When the council met in September, a key concern was what else was in store for the nation and also the possibility that large numbers of people might not be willing or able to attend the conference (still months away, however) due to continuing fears of terrorist attacks, major disruptions to our travel system, and a significant decline in the economy. Thus, when the final Call for Conference Participation was issued, the upcoming conference was anticipated with a considerable degree of uncertainty and some trepidation, and both the call and the submission, review, and program-building processes sought to achieve the highest levels of participation possible in spite of these very real potential barriers.

Inspired by Murray Edelman's presidential address in Montreal, the conference theme—Strengthening Our Community—sought to emphasize the great importance and value of AAPOR as a community and the special needs and benefits of coming together this year—especially in the wake of September 11, 2001—to reaffirm, nurture, and strengthen that community while also meeting jointly with WAPOR colleagues from nations throughout the world to share experiences, research innovations, and compare data. This conference also marked AAPOR's return to a resort hotel venue with a full American plan covering group meals for the entire conference, a key aspect of the AAPOR conferences' long-standing attraction as A Meeting Place, a time for catching up with old friends and meeting new ones, and for informal discussion of important research topics. Fortunately, both our nation and the association rallied significantly from that ominous period, and over seven hundred fifty public opinion and survey researchers came to Florida this year to meet with colleagues and friends from throughout the world to participate in the interdisciplinary, international program.

The Call for Conference Participation, distributed in September 2001, brought in over 330 submissions to the AAPOR website by mid-December, including not only individual papers and posters but a substantial number of ideas for panels and roundtables. Members of the conference committee (44), several members of the council (10), and other volunteers (10) graciously gave time during the busy holiday season to review a large number of abstracts (each was reviewed by at least two, and more often three, reviewers) using the AAPOR website reviewing system designed by Mei Lu, AAPOR's webmaster. These reviews identified many excellent proposals, and it was clear when Associate Chair Jon Krosnick and I (joined by Rachel Casper and Joe Eyerman) met in January that there was more than enough material for a full conference program.

The issue of how large a program we could accommodate remained, however, due to the distribution and size of the rooms at the Island Grand (which had been under construction when we previously met there in 1999) and the potential need to distribute the program over two different TradeWinds hotels. On a site visit to Florida in mid-January with Conference Operations Chair Shap Wolf and Associate Chair Kat Lind, an innovative plan was developed to make optimal use of the two sites for the WAPOR and AAPOR programs. By using the outdoor venues at the Island Grand for all breakfasts and lunches, it was possible to schedule all of the AAPOR sessions (other than the plenary and one short course) at one hotel (the Island Grand), while still providing additional space in some of the smaller rooms for special meetings, presentations, and functions. We were able to readily accommodate up to eight concurrent sessions in each time slot, with seven large breakout rooms in the main buildings and another very large room close by. In addition, we were able to provide ample space for books and exhibits and the spacious and bright Grand Palm Colonnade for poster sessions, which served to greatly facilitate

conversations among presenters and attendees. We were also able to provide space for ten breakfast or luncheon meetings for special interest groups and committee meetings, a record number for our conferences.

Program Features

The final outcome of this extended submission, review, and planning process was a conference with 58 paper sessions, 10 roundtables, and three poster sessions that accommodated 54 poster presentations. Ten of the paper sessions, the first poster session, and the Thursday night plenary were jointly sponsored with WAPOR (in close collaboration with Mike Traugott, WAPOR conference chair) and another 10 jointly sponsored with the International Field Directors and Technologies Conference (IFD&TC). With a few regrettable exceptions, paper sessions consisted of three to four papers and a discussant's remarks. The latter, which we felt were particularly important, were carefully hand-picked from a list of knowledgeable researchers assembled by Jon Krosnick; others were suggested by members of the conference committee and from a group of volunteers, whose fit to each panel was ultimately determined by the conference chair.

Even with up to eight concurrent sessions, attendees were generally able to hopscotch between breakout rooms with little difficulty to listen to individual papers on different topics. However, we sought to continue efforts from the previous year to balance conferees' complaints that there were multiple paper sessions that they would like to attend at the same time while also assuring that each time slot contained a number of interesting sessions. To minimize overlaps in some major areas of interest, we sought to identify and group several especially popular topics (e.g., 9/11, nonresponse, web surveys, and questionnaire design) and assign one session for each in every time slot in the program (often in the same or adjacent rooms).

As one might anticipate, the attack on America on September 11, which had a significant and recent impact on both the nation and the world, was a major focus of many papers and sessions throughout the conference. The joint AAPOR/WAPOR plenary session on Thursday evening provided a unique, timely perspective on this theme by exploring "How the Arab/Islamic World Sees the West." To address this critical issue, Frank Newport and Richard Burkholder of The Gallup Organization presented the methodology and results of the "2002 Gallup Poll of Nine Predominantly Islamic Countries," based on hour-long, in-person interviews conducted with 10,000 people in Saudi Arabia, Iran, Pakistan, Indonesia, Turkey, Lebanon, Kuwait, Jordan, and Morocco. Hans Zetterberg, a Swedish sociologist, public opinion analyst, publicist, and partner at ValueScope AB in Stockholm, and Ellen Lust-Okar of Yale University, a specialist in political opposition, formation of political

institutions, and links between foreign policy and domestic crisis in the Middle East, served as discussants for this session.

Over the next two and a half days, the implications of September 11 and the war on terrorism were examined from several different perspectives, including public response both within and outside the United States; the psychological impact of 9/11 on our citizens; attitudes toward civil liberties and immigration; foreign policy; public opinion and polling in time of war (a roundtable organized by Richard Rockwell); the role of the media; and the effects of 9/11 on our industry. The conference also provided a great variety of panels, roundtables, and discussions on our core interests in public opinion research and survey methodology. These included sessions on sources, trends, and changes in attitudes and public opinion; election polls, campaigns, and political attitudes; and media effects. Paper sessions and discussions on key methodological issues included several on questionnaire development; strategies for measurement and reduction of nonresponse and nonresponse bias across all survey modes; interviewer training and interview effects; internet and web-based data collection and comparisons with other modes; sociocultural influences on measurement and data collection; and challenges associated with measuring race and ethnicity, income, health insurance, and disabilities.

As a follow-up to his presidential address last year, Murray Edelman organized a paper session on "Religion, Religiosity and Public Opinion"; Marek Fuchs organized a joint AAPOR/WAPOR roundtable on "Mobile Phones in Telephone Surveys"; and Warren Mitofsky organized a roundtable discussion on standards for survey evidence in legal proceedings. Issues of privacy, confidentiality, and treatment of human subjects were highlighted in three special sessions: (1) a presentation by Norman Bradburn on "Privacy and Confidentiality Issues Related to Survey Data"; (2) a roundtable organized by Michael Fendrich in which Greg Koski (director of the Federal HHS Office for Human Research Protections [OHRP]), Eleanor Singer, and Richard Campbell addressed "Regulating and Reviewing Survey Research to Protect Human Subjects: Emerging Trends on the National Scene"; and (3) a roundtable organized by Sandra Bauman on "Public Opinion on Internet Privacy and Information Security."

Consistent with the conference theme, a series of activities were initiated at the conference to recognize AAPOR's heritage that will continue in future years as a way to build and maintain our community and provide a foundation for current and future members to learn from our past. First, Nancy Mathiowetz organized a special panel honoring the career of Charlie Cannell, who passed away during the past year. The panel session highlighted his contributions to our understanding of the survey research process, and a videotaped interview with Charlie conducted by Paul Beatty was played throughout the conference in the exhibit area. Second, a special invitation to attend the conference was sent to all honorary life members of AAPOR, and those able to attend were each recognized and honored at the Saturday night awards banquet.

Third, this conference initiated the AAPOR Heritage Interview Series to organize and preserve knowledge about the founding of our field, the development of new ideas that have had an impact on the work we do, and the growth of AAPOR itself. Over time, this series will systematically identify and interview distinguished members and contributors to AAPOR's history who have made important contributions to our profession and preserve and archive those interviews for future generations. The first interview in this series was conducted as a special inaugural event—"An Evening with Kurt and Gladys Lang"—on Friday night. Mark Schulman served as moderator for this special event, and the Langs were interviewed by Jack Elinson and Kathy Frankovic, as well as some members of the audience. The Heritage Interview Series committee, chaired by Nancy Belden and Peyton Craighill, met the next morning and immediately scheduled a second interview in this series at the conference with Robert Ford, AAPOR president in 1968–69.

As in 2001, the 2002 conference offered seven short courses. These included two all-day courses on conducting focus groups by Janet Billson and Norman London, and project management by Mike Weeks. Half-day courses included a two-part course by Colm O'Muircheartaigh on survey sampling, courses on questionnaire design by Nora Cate Schaeffer, cognitive interviewing by Gordon Willis, and web survey design by Mick Couper. In all, these professional development opportunities, organized by AAPOR Education Committee Chair Tom Guterbock, drew 287 attendees.

At the Saturday night awards banquet, the Student Paper Award in Memory of Seymour Sudman was presented to David Dutwin of the Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania, for "The Character of Deliberation: Equality, Argument, and the Formation of Public Opinion." The 2002 AAPOR Innovators Award, created by AAPOR Council to recognize specific works or events brought about by an individual or a team of innovators and groundbreakers for contributions having an impact within the past 5 years, was presented to Judith Lessler, James O'Reilly, Charles Turner, David Cellentano, and Jerome Johnston for the development of an audio computer-assisted self-interviewing technology that addresses a difficult and important measurement problem—how to obtain accurate information about sensitive and stigmatized behaviors. The AAPOR Award, the association's highest honor for lifetime achievement, was presented by Don Dillman to Tom Smith.

Over 730 people contributed to the 2002 AAPOR conference program, including invited speakers, session organizers, presenters, coauthors, session chairs/moderators, and discussants. At this writing, abstracts for the papers and presentations, along with e-mail addresses for the contact authors, are available on the AAPOR website (www.aapor.org). As in the past 2 years, the process of handling the submission and review of abstracts and the organization of submissions accepted into a preliminary and final program was largely accomplished electronically on the AAPOR website, using the on-line forms, programs, and interfaces developed by Mei Lu and others over the

past few years. Although there were a few glitches, and a few submissions required some assistance, all submissions were captured electronically rather than through hard copy submissions by mail or fax. This automated process made it possible for the conference chair and a key assistant, Linda Miller (augmented as needed at key junctures by RTI editorial and clerical staff), to organize the program and abstracts and communicate with those submitting abstracts, reviewers, presenters, chairs, discussants, and other program participants—largely by e-mail—in a timely manner throughout the year. Throughout this period, the assistance of Marlene Bednarz at the AAPOR Secretariat in Ann Arbor was invaluable to the conference chair and committee on a large number of critical issues. Marlene and Mei Lu handled the formatting, printing, and distribution of the program and its electronic display on the website. Marlene and Kelly Ogden-Schuetz also coordinated the numerous other activities and details associated with conference registration and administration, both in Ann Arbor prior to the conference and later at St. Pete Beach, working nearly nonstop for 4 days. They were assisted on-site by Renae Reis of WAPOR, Lisa Carley-Baxter, Molly McNelly, and Kirsten Olson.

Conference Operations Chair Shap Wolf and Associate Chair Kat Lind worked long and hard to arrange accommodations for attendees and to coordinate all on-site activities. As noted previously, anticipating needs for sleeping and meeting space for both AAPOR and WAPOR was a particular challenge this year. They worked closely with the TradeWinds Resort staff to secure and make optimal use of meeting and function rooms for a record number of events, while also arranging for the setup of rooms for all sessions, social events, and meals under the full American plan. Their work on-site in Florida followed months of planning and effort prior to the conference. Carl Ramirez was responsible for the audiovisual (AV) equipment. He negotiated the contract for audio-visual services and supervised the work of the contractor—who provided these services for a second year, based on their performance in Montreal, and who provided the most competitive bid—while also coordinating between presenters and the AV contractor. For the first time, AAPOR provided data projectors for all concurrent sessions (which resulted in a substantial increase in AV costs), since nearly two-thirds of presenters requested them at the time of proposal submission. Patricia Moy and Dianne Rucinski, who served as co-coordinators of the book and technology exhibits, recruited and managed relations with technology and book exhibitors, resulting in 12 technology and software exhibits, and books and journals from about 10 publishers for perusal by conference attendees, including two Meet the Author(s) and one Meet the Editor sessions. Susan Pinkus, with Kat Lind and two newly designated social coordinators—Nancy Whelchel and Linda Dimitropoulos—arranged for a number of important social events at the meeting, including the Fun Run and Walk and Saturday Night Disco Party. These events were supplemented by several others before and after the conference, including

the traditional AAPOR golf outing, organized once again by Rob Dawes, and several other events organized by two local coordinators—Kenneth Steve and Norman Trussell.

Final Accounting

As noted earlier, the months leading up to the 2002 conference were a period of considerable uncertainty, anxiety, and concern, and the prospects for having a successful conference were by no means certain. And, it is likely that the events of September 11 and their aftermath had some impact on conference attendance, as they certainly did on the content of the conference program. Yet, 753 public opinion and survey researchers registered and came to Florida for the conference, including 53 who registered for WAPOR, most of whom also attended AAPOR. First-time attendees to an AAPOR conference numbered 167, and there were 66 student registrants. About 108 people registered as nonmembers, but, for the first time this year, the nonmember rate included AAPOR membership for the remainder of 2002, subject to completing an application and agreeing to the conditions established for membership. A breakdown of registration by employment sector showed 44 and 35 percent from the academic and commercial sectors, respectively, 11 percent from government, 6 percent from not-for-profit organizations, and 3 percent other.

While registration was down a bit from the record of 801 established in Montreal last year, the steady growth of conference attendance in recent years has been a somewhat mixed blessing (and at times of some concern), as conference planners continue to try to balance increased size with maintaining the traditional character of the meetings, and that challenge is not likely to wane in the coming years. For those who were able to attend the 2002 conference, it provided a brief, though modest, respite from this sustained growth. Of far greater importance, however—perhaps this year more than ever—was the opportunity to recognize our heritage and the significance of AAPOR as a special community—a unique and vital source of affirmation, support, and fellowship for those in the profession, independent of our employers, institutions, and clients. This fifty-seventh rendition of A Meeting Place provided an ideal setting and context in which to reaffirm, celebrate, and strengthen our community, its traditions, and its values. Once again, we wish to express our deep appreciation to the many individuals and organizations whose efforts and support were essential to the success of this conference.

RICHARD A. KULKA
Conference Chair