

PROCEEDINGS OF THE SIXTY-THIRD ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH

The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) held its sixty-third annual conference on May 15–18, 2008, at the Sheraton New Orleans Hotel in New Orleans, Louisiana.

This year's AAPOR Conference attracted 850 attendees, including 235 first-time attendees and 145 short-course attendees. There were 87 sessions, panels, and roundtables involving over 400 papers and poster sessions, along with six short courses. The conference provided an outstanding opportunity for AAPOR members to maintain and upgrade their professional status at the cutting edge of the public opinion research profession. The conference also provided the opportunity for attendees to get to know the extraordinary city of New Orleans – both its fabled “fun” side and the resilient side resolutely recovering from the devastation of Hurricane Katrina.

A major focus of this year's conference was the impact of the restructuring of the American population's telephone use patterns. Seven separate sessions at the AAPOR Conference featured scientific papers devoted to research investigating the challenge to landline RDD methods being brought about by the shift to exclusive or predominant cell phone use. A number of additional sessions focused in part on the implications of telephone use pattern changes.

Other sessions dealt with combining and contrasting interviewing modes, the use of virtual interviewing, and a comprehensive review of new developments in television and radio ratings procedures. This year's conference also included research relating to broader issues affecting the validity of survey sampling and interviewing in a wide variety of contexts, including in particular issues relating to nonresponse.

All of these sessions underscored AAPOR members' interest in the core, methodological underpinnings of their profession, particularly important in a time of accelerating change in the research environment. Indeed, it would have been difficult for the conscientious Conference attendee to come away from New Orleans with anything less than a solid understanding of where the survey research profession stands at this point relating to the key methodological challenges we face.

The Conference included a number of papers examining the substance of public opinion. These ranged across analyses of issues relating to this year's



presidential election, attitudes toward immigration, news coverage of poll results, educational issues, public attitudes toward science, and many more. Sessions focused on the conference theme of “Polls for the Public Good” analyzed the way in which collective opinion can be used to inform and direct decisions that move society forward in a maximally effective way.

In that vein, the Thursday, plenary session – co-sponsored with Tulane University – allowed members to share in the insights and observations of key public officials responsible for the recovery of the New Orleans area in the aftermath of the devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina. New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin, Louisiana Lt. Governor Mitch Landrieu, Louisiana Recovery Authority Chair Dr. Norman Francis, Federal coordinator of Gulf Coast Rebuilding Donald Powell, and Tulane President Dr. Scott Cowen discussed the role of public opinion in their decision making and recovery efforts. Separately, many AAPOR members were part of tours and briefings on the post-Katrina New Orleans of today, and came away from a new understanding of the challenges the city continues to face.

The AAPOR Award for Exceptionally Distinguished Achievement this year was presented to Kathy Frankovic of CBS News. The Warren J. Mitofsky Innovators Award was presented to Mick Couper of the University of Michigan for his role in introducing and advocating the use of paradata as a key tool in understanding respondent behavior. The AAPOR Policy Impact Award was presented to the Medical Expenditure Panel Survey (MEPS) Team, a part of the federal government’s Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality. The AAPOR Book Award was presented to Robert M. Groves and Mick P. Couper, *Nonresponse in Household Interview Surveys*. The Seymour Sudman Student Paper Award was presented to Jennifer Heerwig, New York University, and Brian McCabe, New York University, “Social Desirability Bias in Estimated Support for a Black Presidential Candidate.”

Members attending the conference took advantage of the wonderful New Orleans spirit and ambience that was very much up and running full steam.

With the French Quarter no more than a brief walk from the hotel's front door, and the riverfront, casinos, Garden District, and museums all close by, members were treated to a conference environment difficult to duplicate anywhere else in the USA.

All in all, the AAPOR Conference 2008 proved to be an exciting, informative, and professionally rewarding three days of learning and sharing with public opinion research experts and colleagues.

Additional information about the New Orleans program can be found in the conference program included in an online appendix to this issue of *Public Opinion Quarterly*.

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Conference Chair