

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

Over 800 people attended the sixty-first annual American Association for Public Opinion Research conference in Montreal, May 18–21, 2006. The fifty-ninth annual WAPOR conference, May 16–18, provided the biannual opportunity for joint AAPOR/WAPOR sessions.

A highlight of the AAPOR conference was the plenary session on Thursday night, which underscored the conference theme: “Confronting Core Values and Cultural Conflict.” President and founder of Environics Research Group, Canadian Michael Adams, reported the findings in his latest book, *American Backlash: The Untold Story of Social Change in the United States*. Three AAPOR members responded to Adams’s presentation: Kathleen Frankovic of CBS News, Andrew Kohut of the Pew Research Center, and Vincent Price of the University of Pennsylvania.

AAPOR president Cliff Zukin gave the traditional presidential address on Friday morning at a specially scheduled plenary session. (See a transcript of his speech in this issue of *Public Opinion Quarterly*.)

Several joint sessions of the AAPOR and WAPOR focused on topics of global concern, including the challenges of measuring and comparing opinions in a cross-cultural context and opinions on global warming.

Among the 83 AAPOR panels scheduled from Thursday afternoon through Sunday morning were 7 panels that focused explicitly on the conference theme; 17 panels on public opinion, the media, and public policy; 8 on elections; 11 on questionnaire design; 13 on nonresponse; and close to 20 on data quality, cell phones, sampling, and modes and techniques of data collection. A variety of other panels rounded out the offering.

In addition to the panels were approximately sixty excellent poster papers with an eclectic selection of subjects, including personality testing, use of the Internet for dating, the importance of libraries, the Bulgarian elections, the frequency of getting tattoos, remedies for the defamed, origins of charity, the future of democracies, and the cost of being female, among many others.

For those who wanted to expand their knowledge of the mechanics of conducting surveys, they had their pick of five short courses, taught by highly qualified experts, on the nuts and bolts of designing and conducting Web surveys (Reg Baker), weighting survey data (Karol Krotki), conducting surveys

of organizations (David Cantor), focus group interviewing (Richard Krueger), and practical tools for studying nonresponse bias (Robert Groves and Michael Brick).

Those who were interested in starting their own polling business joined Nancy Belden and five other small business owners for an early breakfast Saturday morning, where they discussed “The Ups and Downs of Running a Small Survey Research Organization.” Other panelists included Kat Draughon, Maureen Michaels, Michael O’Neil, Kelly Myers, and Rebecca Quarles.

AAPOR members were also invited to attend two other special interest group meetings: a Saturday morning breakfast meeting for those concerned with multilingual issues in surveys and a Saturday lunch meeting for people interested in conducting racial attitudes research.

As usual, the annual business meeting was held on Saturday afternoon, when the AAPOR council reported on the major accomplishments of the previous year and raised important issues for discussion by the members.

Some Panel Highlights

A new type of panel this year, which could be repeated in the future, was an “Author Meets Critics” session, where Lawrence Bobo elaborated on the findings of his new coauthored book, *Prejudice in Politics*, and answered his critics—including members of the audience.

Another new type of panel was a “debate” between George Bishop and Frank Newport on the utility of polls to policymakers and political leaders. Bishop emphasized the theme of his recent book, *The Illusion of Public Opinion*, while Newport made the case that *Polling Matters*, the title of his new book. Diana Mutz and Robert Shapiro provided commentary.

A special panel included an implicit debate over the accuracy of the 2004 exit polls—on whether they more accurately reflected voter sentiment than the actual vote count.

One theme panel included findings from the latest international polls, including results from polls in Islamic countries, and what they revealed about world opinion concerning the United States and other issues. Other theme panels examined core values in an international perspective, how values are affected by and related to religion and politics and race, and the strength of the relationship between values and behavior.

A group of survey research methodology experts shared their thoughts in a special round table on the “Survey Interview of the Future.”

The current and former *POQ* editors (Peter Miller, Stanley Presser, Vincent Price, Howard Schuman, and Eleanor Singer) discussed trends in public opinion theory and research, led by AAPOR president Cliff Zukin.

Anything AAPOR members ever wanted to know about nonresponse could be found in the many panels devoted to that subject, as well as a few poster

papers: the factors that cause nonresponse, how to overcome it, how prevalent it is, whether it even matters, how it varies by mode of interviewing, and the specific impact of various types of incentives to reduce it.

A special round table discussion focused on the perils of polling for the courts.

The panels on questionnaire design included research on measuring instruments such as scales and question wording, context and social desirability effects, cultural considerations, the problems of translating questionnaires, and the challenges in designing questions on special topics, among others.

Among the wide variety of topics that were addressed in the public opinion panels were health, immigration, stem cell research, gender issues, the news media, Hurricane Katrina, interpreting the public, and other social issues.

One of the several election panels was a round table on the implications of the 2005 elections for the 2006 midterms. Other panels looked at how the Internet, ballot designs, polls, and the news media affect and help us to understand voting and political participation.

Conference participants will have an opportunity to express their views in a postconference survey, which will help inform the incoming conference chair, Patricia Moy, as she prepares for the 2007 AAPOR conference, scheduled for May 17–20, at the Hyatt Regency Orange County, Anaheim, California.

DAVID W. MOORE
Conference Chair