

## **PROCEEDINGS OF THE SIXTIETH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR PUBLIC OPINION RESEARCH**

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The 2005 conference of the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) was held May 12–15 at the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach and set records in several categories. First, there were 913 registrants, easily topping last year's record attendance of 843 in Phoenix (which was boosted by being a World Association for Public Opinion Research year). Among these attendees were five Burns "Bud" Roper Fellows, whose expenses were covered by Roper's generous endowment to AAPOR. Second, there was also a record number of papers and authors—a total of 318 oral presentations and 75 posters with about 1,450 authors. Third, another record was surpassed with 25 exhibitors participating. Likewise, the AAPOR book exhibit, organized by Patricia Moy, University of Washington and associate conference chair-elect, had volumes from 12 publishers. Fourth, Karl Feld, of RTI and the conference operations committee, led the effort in recruiting nearly double the level of sponsorships of last year's conference.

Finally, the Miami Beach conference returned to an AAPOR tradition of having two plenary sessions. Both reflected the conference theme, "Improving Data Quality." The first, on Thursday evening, covered total survey error. As AAPOR conference chair Tom W. Smith, of the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) and the University of Chicago, noted, this plenary was organized in response to remarks in the last two presidential addresses by Mark Schulman and Elizabeth Martin, who voiced concern about an overemphasis on response rates. As Smith observed, Schulman and Martin are correct. As important as response rates are, they are but one element that determines survey quality. This is seen in the AAPOR's code on minimal disclosure, which mentions response rates as one of 20 methodological details that need to be reported for surveys. This is also demonstrated by the total survey error perspective, which establishes that one must consider error from all elements of a survey and how the different parts of surveys interact with one another. Response rates are no more, nor no less, important than other aspects of surveys. The main presentation was made by Robert Groves, Institute for Social Research/University of Michigan and AAPOR councilor-at-large, who described the concept of total survey error, its historical development going back to Deming in the 1940s, and its utility in guiding survey research today.

Responses to Groves's presentation and additional comments were then offered by Paul Biemer, RTI, and Kenneth Rasinski, NORC/University of Chicago.

The second plenary session during Saturday lunch was on the 2004 exit polls. Organized by Smith, it was chaired by Rob Daves, of the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* and AAPOR president-elect. The featured speaker was Warren Mitofsky, of Mitofsky International, who described the firm's exit polls, the nature and correlates of errors in the polls, and steps that are being taken to reduce errors in the future. The second speaker was Kathy Frankovic, CBS News. CBS News was one of the members of the National Election Pool (NEP) that had commissioned the 2004 exit polls by Edison/Mitofsky. She spoke on NEP's experience (including making every election call correct) and the sources of errors in exit polls. The final presenter was Fritz Schueren of NORC/University of Chicago and president of the American Statistical Association. His remarks emphasized the importance of using data other than exit polls to assess election returns and reported on a new analysis of Ohio voting that failed to find any evidence of widespread fraud.

As usual, the conference led with methodological sessions about the art and science of survey research. Fifty-six of the 84 regular oral presentation sessions and the majority of the poster presentations dealt with methodological issues. Among the many vital topics covered were cell phones, the do-not-call list, nonresponse, mode effects, Internet surveys, response scales, cognition, sampling, the use of incentives, informed consent, question wordings, translation, and satisficing.

Of course, there were also many substantive sessions dealing with such important topics as intergroup relations (also the subject of the winner of the AAPOR Book Award, *Racial Attitudes in America: Trends and Interpretations*, by Howard Schuman, Charlotte Steeh, Lawrence Bobo, and Maria Krysan), the 2004 elections, cross-national research, religion and politics, social change, the war in Iraq, genes, and terrorism.

Finally, several other important topics were covered. First, there was a special emphasis on career development. As part of the short-course program, there was a special free course on early career development organized by Gerri Mooney, of Mathematica and AAPOR education committee chair, featuring Peter Miller, of Northwestern University and editor of *Public Opinion Quarterly*, David Moore, of Gallup and AAPOR associate conference chair, and Elizabeth Martin, of the U.S. Census and AAPOR past president. Also, there was a session organized by Sandy Berry, of RAND and AAPOR secretary-treasurer, on how AAPOR can assist members who are in mid-career. Second, there was a "wake" for the Detroit Area Study (DAS), organized by Elizabeth Martin, former DAS director. The DAS had for five decades been a central part of the University of Michigan training program in survey research. Third, there was a panel on blogs organized by AAPOR president Nancy Belden, of Belden, Russonello, and Stewart. Fourth, there was a session on standards in survey

research with presentations from Diane Bowers, of CASRO, and Tom W. Smith. Finally, Patricia Moy organized three, meet-the-authors sessions with (1) the AAPOR Book Award winners, mentioned above, (2) George Bishop, author of *The Illusion of Public Opinion*, and (3) Stanley Presser, Jennifer Rothgeb, Mick Couper, Judith Lesser, Elizabeth Martin, Jean Martin, and Eleanor Singer, authors of *Methods for Testing and Evaluating Survey Questionnaires*.

At the Saturday awards banquet the Seymour Sudman Student Paper Award was given to both Amy R. Gershkoff of Princeton University and Jennifer Dykema of the University of Wisconsin; the AAPOR Book Award to the above-named Schuman, Steeh, Bobo, and Krysan; the AAPOR Innovators Award to Thomas B. Jabine, Miron L. Straf, Judith M. Tanur, and Roger Tourangeau; the AAPOR Policy Impact Award to the HIV Cost and Services Utilization Study by RAND and others; and the AAPOR Award for Exceptionally Distinguished Achievement to Andrew Kohut of the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press.

Making it all run smoothly were the AAPOR conference operations committee, headed by Kat Lind Draughon and Nancy Whelchel, with Carl Ramirez handling audio-visual needs, Linda L. Dimitropoulous leading social activities, and Karl Feld chairing development and sponsorships; the AMP professional staff—Michael Flanagan, Monica Frihart, and Missy Johnson; and a “village” of paper reviewers, award committee members, exhibitors, sponsors, mentors, discussants, chairs, and presenters.

TOM W. SMITH  
*Conference Chair*