AAPOR News: December 2012

Welcome to your December issue of AAPOR News offering timely and important association updates along with interesting news from the public opinion and survey research community.

This issue includes exciting information on AAPOR’s 2013 Annual Conference, a message from AAPOR’s President, an update on AAPOR membership and more.

Letter From the President

Sampling Imprecision and the 2012 Pre-Election Polls

The 2012 Presidential Election vote was very close for many states and nationally. As such, there was considerable uncertainty and concern about the accuracy of many of the pre-election poll-based forecasts and the forecasts of the aggregators who based their projections largely upon these polls. One factor that to me did not receive adequate attention was the size of the margin of sampling error (MOSE) in the pre-election polls that used probability samples.

In the past, many journalists have not been well informed about how a MOSE should be computed, applied and interpreted. AAPOR’s code was updated to address this by requiring that MOSEs for complex survey designs not report the MOSE that would apply to a simple random sample of similar sample size. These complex designs almost always have larger MOSEs, and often they are considerably larger. Thus, in a very close election, such as the Obama-Romney race, small differences in an MOSE can lead to substantially different ways in which the likely election outcome is framed in the news stream.

Section III.A.5 of AAPOR’s Code of Professional Ethics and Practices requires members to include the following in reports about their polls and surveys:

Sample sizes and a discussion of the precision of the findings, including estimates of sampling error for probability samples and a description of the variables used in any weighting or estimating procedures. The discussion of the precision of the findings should state whether or not the reported margins of sampling error or statistical analyses have been adjusted for the design effect due to clustering and weighting, if any.

Thus, it is appropriate now that the 2012 general election is over to ask how consistent the polling organizations, to which many AAPOR members belong, hewed to this standard of disclosure when they reported the results from their pre-election polls.

Writing about this topic for this newsletter article was not a mere academic exercise for me. During the six months of my AAPOR presidential term prior to November 6, I spoke with dozens of journalists, many of them more than once, and corresponded with others via email about various aspects of the methodologies of the pre-election polls that were being conducted. In addition, AAPOR’s current past-president, Scott Keeter, and future president, Rob Santos, spoke with other reporters when I could...
not.

All with whom I spoke were focusing their news stories on the challenges to polling accuracy that pre-election pollsters faced in 2012. Essentially all of the reporters had done a good deal of homework on the topic before we talked. They wanted to know about issues ranging from the impacts of extremely low response rates and the portion of the final sample in a dual-frame RDD survey that should come from the RDD cell phone completions, to how likely voters should be identified, as well as how survey data are weighted to try to reduce bias.

But, I do not recall one of the journalists asking me about the precision (sampling error) of the poll samples that were being analyzed. And, although I raised this with most of them—mostly in passing—I did not discuss it in detail with any, in part because the MOSE seemed too mundane (i.e., not newsworthy) to them.

Since the close 2012 Presidential election ended, I have thought further about the quality of 2012 pre-election polling and reporting of the horserace forecasts for the election. I have come to suspect that the statistical precision of many of the polls reported in the public news stream was not accurately known by the reporters, thus they did not understand the implications of its magnitude, and thus it was not adequately taken into account in their news articles.

As background to the point of this article, if a national, state or local survey of 1,000 likely voters used a simple random (equal probability of selection, EPSEM) sample and did not need to use any weighting to adjust for unequal probabilities of selection and/or coverage problems and/or nonresponse problems, then the MOSE for a very close two-candidate election forecast (e.g., one with 50/50 split) at the 95% level of confidence would be ± 3.1 percentage points. However, due to cost concerns and analytical needs, none of the 2012 pre-election national-level or state-level telephone polls that forecasted the outcome of the Obama-Romney race used such a simple sampling design.

Instead, the major 2012 pre-election polls that deployed telephone probability sampling designs performed adjustments using some combination of (a) a dual frame RDD design, (b) some with screening of respondents based on their telephone service and usage and others without any screening based on these factors, (c) a variable proportion of completions coming from cell phone respondents, (d) weighting for unequal numbers of telephone numbers on which someone could be reached, (e) weighting for within-household selection among eligible adults in the landline portion of the sample, (f) weighting to adjust for noncoverage-related unrepresentativeness in the final sample (e.g., related to geography), and (g) weighting to adjust for nonresponse-related unrepresentativeness (e.g., related to gender, age, race, and education). From my experience with such polls, this should have led to a design effect (deff) of at least 1.5-1.6; (unless the resulting weights were severely trimmed, which would run contrary to the original purpose of correcting for potential noncoverage and nonresponse biases associated with the unrepresentativeness of the unadjusted final sample).

So, for example, with a deff of 1.55, the effect on a survey’s MOSE would be to inflate it beyond its size were it an unweighted simple random sample by approximately 25 percent. (That is to say, the effective sample size would decrease by a factor of about one-fourth in the above case from 1,000 to only 750.) Thus, rather than having a MOSE of ± 3.1 percentage points, the actual MOSE would be ± 3.9 percentage points. This difference of approximately ± one percentage point may appear to be of an ignorable magnitude, but in a very close race such as the 2012 Romney-Obama race, even differences this small should impact the confidence of the judgments of anyone who is interpreting the likely outcome of the election, such as reporters and editors.

That is why I encourage all those who work with the results of pre-election polls to check exactly how the sampling errors are being calculated and applied by those who are responsible for the statistical aspects of the election polls commissioned, and/or reported on, by their news organizations.
I also encourage anyone publicly disseminating the results of any sample survey to do the same, as well as to go beyond the current AAPOR code requirement and disclose the basis on which the def was calculated.

A final point: For those pre-election polls that utilize nonprobability samples and who report a “credibility interval” as an estimate of sampling imprecision (as opposed to reporting a confidence interval that can be calculated only for a probability sample), I encourage them to publicly disseminate exactly how their estimate of sampling imprecision is computed (AAPOR’s Statement on Credibility Interval).

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AAPOR 68th Annual Conference Update: Record-Level Response to the Call for Presentations  
By Paul C. Beatty, 2013 Conference Chair

This year, the AAPOR Conference Committee received an astonishing 740 proposals for presentations at our 2013 annual conference in Boston. This is a record high, and much higher than last year’s tally of 655 proposals.

On the one hand, this is fantastic news, showing very strong interest in active involvement at our next conference. Just as importantly, most proposals received good reviews, with well over two-thirds of submissions earning average scores of at least 7 out of 10, based on readings by three reviewers. We are fortunate to have this level of material to work with!

But on the other hand, this creates a challenge. The 2013 Conference faces constraints of both time and space, and the reality is that we received almost twice as many requests for formal paper presentations as can be accommodated. Some submitters will be asked to consider other presentation formats, and some proposals—even high quality ones—might not get a slot in the program.

In an effort to include as many strong proposals as possible, the Committee has decided to limit the use of formal discussants in 2013. This will enable us to include more formal presentations, including some from first-timers who might not have previously considered AAPOR as an outlet for interesting and relevant work. At the same time, we know that some attendees strongly favor more discussants and believe that they strengthen the program in numerous ways.

For that reason, the Conference Committee has decided to replace the role of session Chairs this year with a somewhat more active role of Moderators. Session Moderators will have the responsibilities typically assigned to chairs, but with some added responsibilities to coordinating presentations with authors and initiating audience-based discussion. Hopefully this will help to capture at least some of the energy generated by discussants. We’ll tell you more about what we have in mind in upcoming months.

In the meantime, the committee is busy assembling the best program that we can. We have relied heavily upon the input of over 160 volunteer abstract reviewers, some of whom took on a high workload and offered to take on more. To all who offered their support thus far, and who offered proposals for the program, we are most grateful. More as it develops!

AAPOR Professional Development Webinar
AAPOR Chapters: A Great Place to Come Together

By Liz Hamel, Chair, and Jen Dykema, Associate Chair, Membership and Chapter Relations

You may already know that AAPOR has seven chapters operating in different regions throughout the U.S. and Canada, but here are some fun facts that you may not know:

- About half of AAPOR members belong to at least one chapter, including roughly 50 who are members of multiple chapters.
- The geographic area covered by AAPOR chapters ranges from city- and state-wide (NYAAPOR, DC-AAPOR) to the Pacific chapter (PAPOR), which covers “everything West of MAPOR.”
- Two chapters count parts of Canada within their geographic regions: PAPOR and the New England chapter (NEAPOR).
- Local chapter events are a great way to meet and network with other public opinion and survey professionals in your geographic area, and provide a great opportunity to learn and stay on top of developments in the field between the annual AAPOR conferences.
- Chapters are also a great place to develop leadership skills! Chapters are usually on the lookout for volunteers to help organize events and serve on committees and even their Executive Councils. For many, this is a stepping stone to serving a leadership position with AAPOR.

And here’s an exciting piece of news: The New Jersey chapter is currently undergoing a revitalization and geographic expansion. The “new” chapter will cover New Jersey and Pennsylvania, with a focus on events in the Princeton and Philadelphia metro areas, and will be renamed the “Pennsylvania and New Jersey Chapter of AAPOR” (PANJAAPOR). Marc Weiner, chapter president, says “The expansion from a state-based to a regional is an exciting and progressive change in the life of the New Jersey Chapter. I can think of no better way to celebrate our 35th year of formal association with AAPOR than by combining the extensive talent, experience, and energy of the greater Philadelphia area survey research network with the existing New Jersey membership to create a regional chapter greater than the sum of its parts. PANJAAPOR programming, to start in the spring of 2013, will combine new technologies, such as webinars and virtual meetings, with old-fashioned in-person wine-and-cheese networking, with the goal of benefiting all of members, from students to long-standing practitioners. So, if you’re in New Jersey, Pennsylvania, or Delaware, please join us and be part of the new energy of this rich tradition of survey research education, networking and collegiality.”

We encourage all AAPOR members living in or around New Jersey and Pennsylvania to join PANJAAPOR. And while we’re at it, we’d like to encourage all AAPOR members to join a chapter. If you haven’t renewed your AAPOR membership for 2013 yet (What? You haven’t renewed yet? Stop reading this newsletter, and renew right away!), consider joining a local chapter when you fill out your renewal.

And if you have already renewed, it’s easy enough to add a chapter membership.
Just download the renewal form [here](#), check off the appropriate chapter(s), and submit it to the AAPOR office. Or you can add a chapter membership by contacting Tonya Cabrera ([tmcabrera@aapor.org](mailto:tmcabrera@aapor.org) or 847-205-2651, x301). (Note that some of our membership forms haven’t been updated to reflect the name of the new chapter, so if you check off “NJAAPOR,” you’ll be joining the new “PANJAAPOR”.)

Finally, we’d like to take this opportunity to let AAPOR members know that because of our reciprocal relationship with the chapters, you may occasionally receive email or mail communications from a chapter in your area, even if you are not a member. If you’d like to opt out from receiving such communications, please contact AAPOR at [info@aapor.org](mailto:info@aapor.org).

### It's Time to Renew Your AAPOR Membership

We don’t want to start the new year without you! Renew today and continue receiving all of the benefits of your AAPOR membership, including:

- Members-only reduced rates for the [AAPOR Annual Conference](#), one of the most highly regarded conferences in public opinion and survey research.
- Subscription and online access to AAPOR’s journal, *Public Opinion Quarterly*, one of the most frequently cited journals of its kind.
- Members-only discounted rates for [AAPOR webinars](#) on the hottest topics in survey methods and research.
- Six issues of AAPOR News, the e-newsletter that keeps you in touch with colleagues and activities important to AAPOR members.
- AAPORNnet, the members-only listserv that gives you immediate access to insight from a wide range of experts.
- Online access to the searchable AAPOR Membership Directory, Career Center and Events Calendar.

Continuing your membership in AAPOR offers you the opportunity to deepen your commitment to a community that cares about quality and ethics in the vital work of survey and opinion research. As an AAPOR member, you can keep abreast of advocacy issues, interact with leaders in the field, volunteer for committees, task forces and special projects and advance your career by attending or presenting at the Annual Conference.

[RENEW NOW](#)

*Contact [AAPOR Headquarters](#) with any questions.*

### Chapter Spotlight - DC-AAPOR

**By Gina Walejko, 2013 DC-AAPOR Program Chair**

With a membership more than twice the size of other regional chapters, AAPOR’s Washington-Baltimore Chapter (DC-AAPOR) takes seriously our mission to foster professional development by hosting events on the latest public opinion research developments. The past six months have been eventful for DC-AAPOR and hint at what’s to come next year.

We know that conference travel funds are tight. Therefore, in June, we teamed up with the Washington Statistical Society to bring selected conference presentations to DC. The Summer Conference Preview/Review included a range of talks presented (or soon to be presented) at the AAPOR conference, Joint Statistical Meetings, International Conference on Establishment Surveys, and others. Feedback was positive, so we plan to continue this event next summer.

In September, we put on the 6th *Public Opinion Quarterly (POQ)* Special Issue
Conference, which highlighted the 75th anniversary issue entitled "The Past, Present, and Future of Survey Methodology and Public Opinion Research." Next year, we look forward to hosting the 2013 POQ Special Issue Conference on measurement in survey research.

In October we organized two events, “Addressing Nonresponse in Establishment Surveys,” featuring talks on nonresponse prevention, evaluation, or adjustment for establishment data and “Issues in the Evaluation of Data Quality for Business Surveys,” a talk by Paul Biemer. In November, we hosted a visit from supporters of the Roper Center, who organized a roundtable of pollsters to discuss the 2012 Presidential election results.

Early next year, look for announcements about two upcoming events, a cognitive interview workshop and a usability workshop.

We hope to see you at one of our future events! You don’t have to be a member to attend, but members get sizable registration discounts. If you haven’t already, please consider joining. You can find membership and event information at www.dc-aapor.org.

Show Your Support! Consider an End-of-Year Gift to AAPOR

Consider making a gift to AAPOR. Your donation helps to send students to the conference, preserve AAPOR’s legacy and advance programs, awards and activities in the field. Keep an eye out for our end of year appeal and join with other AAPOR members in making a financial gift to help us to reach new goals and continue our current activities.

- Support talented young people who may find a good home in AAPOR, helping to grow our membership. As we have done through the Sudman Student Paper Award and the Roper Awards to new workers in our field, we want to extend our funding outreach to graduate students, making it possible for more students to engage in our annual conference.
- Expand AAPOR’s presence as a leader in polling and opinion research, especially in the environment of fast-paced information needs of society.
- Preserve our legacy by expanding the heritage interview series, updating A Meeting Place, and archiving our most important documents and experiences.
- Your help is essential to continuing AAPOR’s crucial impact and relevance in public opinion and survey research. Contributions beyond the cost of membership keep our conference, outreach and educational activities current and accessible.

Please make a financial commitment to help us reach these new goals and existing programs, either with your annual membership renewal or by visiting our Gifts to AAPOR page on our website.

AAPOR Member News

If you have news to share in the Member News column of the newsletter, please send information to Lindsay Arends.

AAPOR member Megan Thee Brenan, deputy editor of News Surveys at The New York Times, returned from maternity leave this summer after giving birth to Maeve Carol and Molly Dorothea on January 13.
Both girls are doing well, seen here during a Thanksgiving trip to visit their grandparents in Florida.

AAPOR member Barry Feinberg proudly announces the birth of his first grandchild, Asa Graham Pollock.

Asa Graham is eight months old and lives in Philadelphia with his mom Naomi (Barry's daughter) and dad Iain.

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Please send any comments about this email to info@aapor.org.