Surveying Asian-Americans: Challenges, Current Practice, Solutions

A research project jointly sponsored by the Asian American Journalists Association and the Reynolds School of Journalism, University of Nevada-Reno

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Jennifer Greer, Ph.D. Director of Graduate Studies Reynolds School of Journalism University of Nevada-Reno

Section	Page Number
1. Background on the issue/Overview of the project	2
2. Sampling issues in public opinion surveys	4
3. How the study was conducted	7
4. Results of the poll question analysis	9
5. Results of the depth interviews with pollsters	19
6. Suggestions for pollsters, journalists and researchers	31
7. Appendixes (Codesheet, Protocol, Questionnaire)	34

Section 1: Background on the issue/Overview of the project

Overview:

This research examines representation of Asian Americans in public opinion polls. Specifically, by analyzing questions asked and methods used by major U.S. polling organizations, this study looks at whether Asian American representation in poll results is proportional with their representation in U.S. society. This study also examines what types of questions about Asian Americans are being asked, in what language poll questions are asked, and whose voices are answering those questions. Finally, this study looks at the reasons behind these practices with interviews with researchers at polling organizations.

Background:

Starting in 1997, the U.S. Census Bureau adopted a definition of an Asian as "a person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent including, for example, Cambodia, China, India, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippine Islands, Thailand, and Vietnam"¹ In the 2000 Census, 10.2 million people self identified as being Asian only, and another 1.7 million identified themselves as Asian and at least one other ethnic group. Those 11.9 million comprised 4.2 percent of the U.S. population, making Asian Americans the fourth largest ethnic group in the country, behind Caucasians, Latinos, and African Americans.² By July 1, 2002, the latest numbers available, the Census Bureau listed the number of people identifying themselves as at least part Asian at 13,087,372, a 9.0% increase in just the two years since the last full census.³ Depending on which figures are used, the U.S. Census Bureau places the growth in the Asian American population at between 46 percent and 72 percent between 1990 and 2000, a decade in which the total U.S. population grew only 13 percent.⁴

Yet Asian Americans have been one of the most underrepresented groups in news. One study of *The New York Times*, conducted by Carolyn Martindale, found that from 1934 to 1994, Asian Americans were virtually ignored in news coverage. In the first four decades of the study, less than one column inch per issue, on average, covered Asian Americans.

³ U.S. Census Bureau. (2003, June 17). *National population estimates -- characteristics*. Available online at <u>http://eire.census.gov/popest/data/national/tables/asro/NA-EST2002-ASRO-04.php</u>. This figure is up from 12,006,894 in 2000. People identifying themselves as Asian only accounted for 11,559,027 of the total in 2002, up from 10,589,265 in 2000.

⁴ Barnes, Jessica S., & Bennett, Claudette E. (2002, February). *The Asian population, 2000: Census 2000 brief.* Available online at <u>http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/c2kbr01-16.pdf</u>.

¹U.S. Census Bureau. (n.d.). *State and county quickfacts: Race*. Available online at <u>http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/meta/long_68180.htm</u>.

²Barnes, Jessica S., & Bennett, Claudette E. (2002, February). *The Asian population, 2000: Census 2000 brief.* Available online at <u>http://www.census.gov/prod/2002pubs/c2kbr01-16.pdf.</u> Note: Asian populations are often combined with Pacific Islanders for analysis and discussion in Census documents. These numbers are for the Asian population only.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the per-issue average was two to three inches. More than half of that coverage portrayed Asian Americans as involved in crime, highlighted interracial violence or focused on racial problems, Martindale found.⁵

Although no formal study has been conducted, evidence suggests that Asian Americans also are invisible to pollsters, who increasingly drive and reflect news coverage. Anecdotal evidence suggests that few polls are conducted about Asian or Asian American issues, and when they are, it is not clear whether Asian American opinions are being represented accurately. When demographic information is included in surveys, some suggest, ethnic background of respondents is rarely included, even in studies about minority issues. When ethnic information is reported, Asian Americans often are not broken out as a separate category, a practice that would allow journalists and the public to see whose opinions are represented in the results. Finally, when Asian Americans are broken out as a group, critics contend that it is not clear whether they are represented in numbers proportionate to their numbers in the U.S. population.

Another issue that arises in surveying Asian Americans is the common practice of polling exclusively in English. Language issues provide a potential barrier to the views of recent immigrants from Asian countries being heard. Other than one survey, a 2002 survey of 1,000 California residents conducted in 12 languages by the University of Southern California, few major U.S. polls have been conducted in any language other than English. Polls conducted in English and Spanish have become slightly more common in recent years, but polls in other languages are virtually non-existent. "Multilingual polling is a powerful tool, maybe even an essential one, for journalists, researchers, and educators to keep up with public opinion in California and the country as a whole," said Steve Montiel, director of the Institute for Justice and Journalism at USC. "This (multilingual) approach could revolutionize public polling and lead us to stories that otherwise wouldn't be told."⁶

This study is an attempt to move beyond the claims made by critics and the anecdotal evidence cited above to provide systematic study of polling practices in regard to Asian Americans and other minority groups. To do this, a quantitative analysis of polling methodology is presented, supplemented by information gathered through qualitative depth interviews with pollsters. The next section provides some background on sampling in public opinion surveys to provide context for the issues raised in the study. The methods used in this study are then described, followed by presentation of the results.

⁵ Martindale, Carolyn (1997). Only in glimpses: Portrayal of America's largest minority groups by *The New York Times*, 1934-1994. In S. Biagi and M. Kern-Foxworth (eds.). *Facing difference: Race, gender, and mass media*. Pine Forge Press, pp 89-95.

⁶Baum, Geoffrey (2002, Sept. 5). *New California media, USC Annenberg Justice & Journalism survey Californians in twelve languages about impact of 9/11.* Available online at <u>http://ascweb.usc.edu/news.php?storyID=19</u>.

Section 2: Sampling issues in public opinion surveys

The goal of public opinion surveys is to make a prediction about how a population thinks or acts. However, virtually all public surveys are based on samples of members of a given population rather than the entire population. Gathering information from an entire population, or conducting a census, is both time consuming and expensive. In addition, because reaching an entire population of interest, whether it is Missourians, teenagers, Republicans, or all people living in the United States, can be problematic, selecting a sample often can provide more accurate information.

However, sampling – defined as "selecting some units out of a population or universe" ⁷ – provides accurate information only when done correctly. For example, a survey based on a poorly selected sample of 100,000 people nationwide could be a far less accurate gauge of public opinion than a survey based on a carefully selected sample of 1,000 people. Therefore, although in general larger samples produce more accurate results, the most important issue in sampling, some argue, is how the sample is drawn and how the population of interest is defined.⁸

Researchers break samples into two broad categories: Probability sampling, which involves random selection, and non-probability sampling, which does not involve random selection. Because non-probability sampling is condemned and not used by quality survey organizations, this sampling is discussed first.

Non-probability sampling:

Because non-probability samples do not use random selection of units for the sample, researchers cannot use probability theory in interpreting the results. In other words, pollsters cannot estimate the odds that you are accurately representing views or behaviors in a population. While this does not make it impossible that nonprobability samples are representative of the population, quality pollsters rarely use such samples because they cannot estimate how accurate the results might be.⁹

Non-probability samples include "accidental, haphazard, or convenience" samples, which include "man-on-the-street" polls used by news organizations and call-in polls. As social science research methods expert William Trochim writes: "Clearly, the problem with all these types of samples is that you have no evidence that they are representative of the populations you're interested in generalizing to, and in many cases, you would suspect that they are not."¹⁰

⁷Cotter, Patrick R., & Stovall, James G. (1999). *A citizen's guide to surveys*. Available online at <u>http://www.southernopinion.com/archives/1999/citizensguide.html</u>.

⁸Cotter, Patrick R., & Stovall, James G. (1999). *A citizen's guide to surveys*. See above note.

⁹ Trochim, William. (2001). *The research methods knowledge base* (2nd edition). Cincinnati, Ohio: Atomic Dog Publishing.

¹⁰ Trochim, William. (2001). The research methods knowledge base. Section 2.5a.

Non-probability sampling also includes "purposive" sampling, where researchers seek the gauge opinion of a certain groups. For example, in "mall intercept" surveys, interviewers might seek out teenage boys, then screen them for additional criteria before proceeding. Again, there is no way of knowing whether the teenage boys in the mall at any given time on any given day even represent the views of all teenage boys who use that particular mall, much less represent the views of all teenage boys in the population.¹¹

Probability sampling:

The American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR), the premier organization for pollsters and public opinion researchers, states clearly that surveys must be based on random or probability samples because they are grounded in statistical and probability theory. Random selection means that each unit in the defined population has an equal chance of being selected for the survey. The AAPOR Standards and Best Practices guidelines state: "In a bona fide survey, the sample is not selected haphazardly or only from persons who volunteer to participate. It is scientifically chosen so that each person in the population will have a measurable chance of selection. This way, the results can be reliably projected from the sample to the larger population with known levels of certainty/precision."¹²

Pollsters face many challenges when attempting to use probability sampling. First, researchers have to be reasonably sure that they can access the entire population. In order for every unit of the population to have an equal chance of being selected, pollsters have to be able to reach the population. Rarely is the entire population listed for researchers or even available. Only small, clearly defined populations – for example members of the U.S. Congress – could be accessible for drawing a true random sample. Trochim defines the population pollsters would like to generalize to as the "theoretical population" and the population that pollsters can actually reach as the "accessible population." ¹³ In reality, most public opinion polls use the accessible population.

AAPOR writes: "Critical elements in an exemplary survey are: (a) to ensure that the right population is indeed being sampled (to address the questions of interest); and (b) to locate (or 'cover') all members of the population being studied so they have a chance to be sampled."¹⁴

http://www.aapor.org/default.asp?page=survey_methods/standards_and_best_practices/best_practices

¹⁴ AAPOR. (2002). *Standards and best practices*. See above note.

¹¹Cotter, Patrick R., & Stovall, James G. (1999). *A citizen's guide to surveys*. See above note.

¹² American Association for Public Opinion Research. (2002). *Standards and best practices*. Available online at

¹³ Trochim, William. (2001). *The research methods knowledge base*. Section 2.4b.

Pollsters generally eschew public listings, such as phone books or lists of registered voters, when assembling a sampling frame, the listing of the assessable population from which the sample will be drawn¹⁵. This is because many of these lists are not up-to-date and often don't include all members of a population. For example, many people have moved or have unlisted phone numbers. Therefore pollsters use alternative methods, such as random digit dialing (RDD), a service that randomly generates lists of phone numbers from available area codes and prefixes. When a household is reached, a method through RDD, pollsters use techniques to randomly select a specific member of that household to interview.

However, pollsters concede that even these alternative methods miss pockets of the population, including people who don't have phones, people who screen their calls, people who are hearing impaired, and other groups. AAPOR cautions: "Where a particular sample frame is suspected to provide incomplete or inadequate coverage of the population of interest, multiple frames should be used."¹⁶

Pollsters also have to deal with the issue of non-response bias, meaning that people who are available to answer surveys might be different than people who are not available. Similarly, pollsters must ask themselves if people who refuse to answer questions or participate in surveys differ in any systematic way from people who do participate.¹⁷

These issues are particularly critical when examining how minorities are represented in public opinion polls. Because of language issues or interpersonal issues, minorities might be less available or less likely to participate in surveys. Just as pollsters miss hearing impaired citizens as a segment of the population when conducting traditional phone surveys, researchers miss the non-English speaking segment of the population when they ask questions only in English.

Research questions:

With this background in mind, this study poses two main research questions:

- 1) How are Asian Americans represented in public opinion polls?
- 2) Are polls on Asian American issues significantly different in terms of methodology than polls on issues concerning Latinos/Hispanics or African Americans?

¹⁵ Trochim, William. (2001). *The research methods knowledge base*. Section 2.4b.

¹⁶ AAPOR. (2002). *Standards and best practices*. See above note.

¹⁷Taylor, Humphrey. (1998, May 4). *Myth and reality in reporting sampling error: How the media confuse and mislead readers and viewers*. Available online at <u>http://www.pollingreport.com/sampling.htm</u>.

Section 3: How the study was conducted

An analysis was conducted of 435 poll questions posed in national surveys since January 1, 1990, that mentioned the word Asian or Asian-American. These 435 poll questions were located on Public Opinion Online, published by The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research. This database, available on the proprietary *Lexis/Nexis* service, is the most comprehensive full-text collection of U.S. public opinion questions. It includes data from leading U.S. polling organizations such as Gallup, Harris, Roper, ABC, CBS, CNN, NBC, *The Los Angeles Times, The New York Times, USA Today*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and *Newsweek*.

Entries in this database are organized by question, not by poll. Each question has its own accession number. Each entry contains the exact wording of the question, the results (listed as percentage responding to each option) for the question, the organization conducting the survey, the population sampled, the number of participants (which sometimes listed the number of participants of different ethnicities), the interview method (for example, telephone or in-person survey), the survey sponsor (if different from the organization conducting the survey), survey notes (where information was listed about oversampling, weighting, using multiple languages, etc.) the beginning and ending dates of the data collection, the source document (which poll was releasing the data), the release date of the source document, a question ID, and the load date of the information into the database.

While the Roper Center database does include some polls of local interest, national polls or polls with broad impact are most heavily represented in the portion of database accessible to the general public. This is important to note here because clear differences may exist between local and national polls, especially in regions where ethnic minorities are found in larger numbers.

To collect surveys for analysis, the researcher searched the database for the dates of interest in the study (1990 to present) by asking for all questions that included the words "Asian" or "Asian American." The researcher assumed that that if pollsters were seeking out an oversample of a minority group or using other specialized techniques (such as surveying in multiple languages) this would occur most likely for questions in which the minority group had a vested interest. Searching only for questions containing the word "Asian" certainly excludes a large number of surveys that would touch on issues of interest to Asian Americans. However, this convenience sample was drawn as a solid starting point for analyzing methods used when conducting surveys on issues of interest to Asian Americans.

Often, multiple questions containing the word "Asian" were asked in the same survey. In addition, some poll questions were repeated in the database. As a result, the 435 questions that emerged in the database search resulted in 88 separate polls with at least one question containing the word "Asian." These 88 polls were used to analyze polling techniques related to Asian Americans.

Next, a sample of poll questions with the words "Black or African-American" and the words "Hispanic or "Latino" was selected. Compared with the term "Asian," these terms were found in nearly 1,000 questions from national polls throughout the 12-year-plus study period. Therefore, because these groups were simply being analyzed for comparison purposes, the researcher selected a random sample of these questions, generating 41 polls for each other ethnic groups of interest. Selecting 82 polls for analysis from other groups and 88 dealing with Asian Americans netted 170 total polls for the content analysis.

After the sample was drawn, 10 coders analyzed the 170 polls identified.¹⁸ All coders were trained in two sessions and all used a uniform code sheet (*See Appendix A*). In addition to the training, the 10 coders also were given a protocol (*See Appendix B*), which outlined all rules governing the coding procedure. To verify the reliability of the coding instrument, 24 polls (14.1% of the sample) were analyzed by more than one coder. Intercoder reliability using Holsti's¹⁹ method ranged from 81.8% to 100%, with an average of 92.2%. Therefore, the coding instrument was considered highly reliable.

Data was entered into the SPSS program for data analysis. Because the goal of the study was to describe current practices in polling, most questions asked below were answered through purely descriptive data. In some cases, non-parametric statistics, such as Chi-Square analyses, were used to compare results among groups.

¹⁸The author wishes to thank the following University of Nevada, Reno graduate students in journalism for their work on this project: Joseph Allen, Brett DeGroff, Ethnie Groves, Qingmiao Hu, Robin Joyce, Maren Manning, Catherine McCarthy, Lucy Walker, and Yan Yang. The researcher was the 10th coder.

¹⁹ Holsti, O. R. (1969). Content analysis for the social sciences and the humanities. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Section 4: Results of the Poll Question Analysis

This section first presents a brief overview of the demographic information on the polls analyzed. Next, the section details results of the study's two main research questions: 1) How are Asian Americans represented in these selected polls? and 2) Are polls on Asian American issues significantly different in terms of methodology than polls on issues concerning Latinos/Hispanics or African Americans?

Demographic information on the sample

This study examined 170 selected national surveys indexed on the Public Opinion conducted between January 1, 1990, and March 15, 2003. These surveys were selected in two ways.

- For Asian-American questions, any poll with the word "Asian" in the question was identified. Because so few polls were in the database met this criterion, all 88 polls were analyzed.
- For comparison purposes, 41 polls conducted over the same time frame with at least one question containing the words "Black or African American" were randomly selected for analysis. Another 41 polls with at least one question containing the words "Hispanic or Latino" were randomly selected.

%

Most polls were conducted by telephone, as Table1 shows. Polls including "Asian" questions were slightly more likely than those with "African-American or Black" or "Hispanic or Latino" questions to use methods other than the telephone for data analysis.²⁰

Method	"Asian" polls	All polls
Telephone	81 (92.0%)	161 (94.7%)
Mail	1 (1.1%)	1 (0.6%)
In-person	5 (5.7%)	7 (4.1%)
Other	1 (1.1%)	1 (0.1%)
Total	88	170

*Table 1: Method for conducting the polls*²¹

²⁰Throughout this report, the word "Asian" in regard to issues, references and polls, as well as the names of other minority groups, are placed in quotes. This is to indicate that these are not necessarily the only issues of concern to Asian Americans and to remind readers of the method of this study, which defines the type of poll by the ethnic group listed as a keyword in the question.

²¹Note: Because the focus of this study is on the representation of Asian Americans in polls, polls containing at least one Asian or Asian American question are separated from the total.

Table 2 details the survey organizations that conducted the surveys selected for analysis during the 12-year study period.

Surveying organization	Number of Total number	
	"Asian" polls	of polls
ABC/Washington Post	6	12
NBC	1	1
CBS/New York Times	5	16
AP News	0	2
Los Angeles Times	3	6
Gallup Organization	13	22
Harris Interactive/Harris & Associates	6	10
Roper Center	0	1
National Opinion Research Center	4	4
Other polling organization	24	46
Princeton Survey Research Associates	22	42
Other university/academic	1	2
Undecided	3	6
Total	88	170

Table 2: Organizations represented

Fewer than half of the 88 polls (39 or 44.3% of the total) from the second column mentioned ethnicity in any form in the methodological notes on the poll. These 39 polls were ones that mentioned race or ethnicity in any form in the sections of the database that provide information on the population, number of participants, or survey notes.

The 88 polls concerning "Asian" or "Asian-American" topics contained from 1 to 36 questions with word "Asian" for a total of 326 poll questions analyzed (and an average of 3.7 questions per poll). In total, 118,747 U.S. adults participated in these surveys, with the average poll including opinions from 1,349.4 adults.

As Chart 1 shows, the majority of those 326 poll questions asked about respondents' general attitudes toward Asian Americans (and often other ethnic minority groups) or about race relations, specifically interpersonal relationships with Asian Americans or other minority groups. Fewer questions dealt with workplace issues, general knowledge of Asian Americans, or education.





Topics of questions concerning "Asian" issues

The following are examples of the types of questions asked in the polls analyzed in this study:

- "How important do you think it is for a college to have a racially diverse student body – that is a mix of blacks, whites, Asians, Hispanics, and other minorities? Is it very important, somewhat important, not too important, or not at all important? (Asked by CBS News/*New York Times* on January 19, 2003. This question was classified as an Education question.)
- "I'm going to read a list of groups, and I'd like you to tell me how close you feel to each group. For each, using a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 means you do not feel at all close to the group and 10 means you feel extremely close to the group). Please tell me how close you feel to Asian Americans." (Asked by Gallup on March 23, 2001. This was classified a General Attitudes question.)
- "Thinking specifically about Asian Americans, do you think the average Asian American is better off, worse off, or just about as well off as the average white person in terms of . . . income? Is that a lot better/worse off or just a little?" (Asked by *The Washington Post* on March 8, 2001. Classified as a General Knowledge question.)
- "How would you feel if someone in your family married a person of . . . Asian American descent? Would you approve strongly, approve somewhat, would not care, disapprove somewhat, or disapprove strongly? (Asked by Zogby International on March 1, 2001. Classified as an Interpersonal Relations/Contact With question, listed in the chart as Race Relations.

Research Question 1: How are Asian Americans represented in these polls?

Note: For this research question, only the 88 polls containing at least one question asking about "Asian" or "Asian American" topics were analyzed.

Surprisingly, not one of the 88 polls analyzed that contained the word "Asian" reported asking questions in any other language than English. This does not guarantee that no other languages were used because this information may not have been reported to the Roper Center database or the Roper Center might have excluded this information for some polls. However, a review of recent national polls in the database did reveal that alternate languages were mentioned in the poll methodology section of the database. The only example of other languages used in polls conducted in early 2003, however, was the rare mention of a survey conducted in Spanish. No other languages were found.

Of the 88 polls, 31 listed the ethnicity of the participants responding to the questions. More than 44,000 respondents participated in those 31 polls, for an average of 1,420.52 respondents per poll. Asian Americans, on average, represented 18.81 respondents per poll, a number suppressed because 16 of those 31 polls did not list any Asian American participants. It should be noted that not listing the number of Asian American participants does not mean that none responded. Some pollsters may have omitted this number because the responses were too low for meaningful analysis. In total, 583 Asian American participants were listed as respondents in these 31 polls (or 1.3% of all surveyed in the 31 polls that listed ethnicity of respondents). Chart 2 shows the percentages of respondents listed by *ethnicity*.



Chart 2: Participants listed by ethnicity

Only 31 poils that listed respondents by ethnicity are represented

The above chart details whether the polls listed the number of respondents participating from each ethnic group. In addition, coders noted whether polls reported responses to questions by ethnic group. For example, did a pollster report how many Caucasians, African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans agreed with the statement posed? In total 28 (31.8%) of the polls did break out responses by ethnicity. As Chart 3 displays, virtually all polls who listed responses by ethnicity listed the opinions of Caucasians and African Americans. However, only 18 (20.5%) did so for Asian Americans.



Interestingly, the practice of breaking out results by ethnicity, at least for the limited type of poll question examined here, seems to have decreased from the first part of the 1990s to the present, as Chart 4 shows.





Chart 3: Responses broken out by ethnicity

To examine what selection and statistical methods were used to allow pollsters to draw conclusions about the views of different ethnic groups, the types of sampling techniques listed were analyzed. Again, just because a technique was not mentioned in the Roper Center database does not mean pollsters did not use the technique for a particular survey. For example, most national polls routinely weight (although by a small percentage) any population of interest. But it does provide a look at what information is shared with the media and the public, who are left to interpret the data.

In total, 33 of the 88 polls (37.5%) mentioned some sort of specialized sampling method, but only 20 (22.7%) reported using these techniques in conjunction with trying to represent any ethnic group. Only 7 polls (8.0%) reported using specialized sampling techniques in regard to Asian Americans. Table 3 outlines the special sampling or statistical techniques mention for polls asking at least one question on "Asian" issues.

Table 3	
Technique	Percent using
Over sample	14 (15.9%)
Weighted	13 (14.8%)
Other technique	4 (4.5%)
Parallel international surveys	1 (1.1%)
Additional sample	1 (1.1%)
Half sample	0 (0.0%)
Cross section	0 (0.0%)
Total	33

Research Question 2: Do polls containing "Asian American" questions differ significantly in any way from polls containing "Hispanic/Latino" or "Black/African American" issues?

The second part of the quantitative content analysis was designed to examine how the representation of Asian Americans in polls differed from that of other minority groups in the United States. For comparison purposes, the two largest ethnic minority groups, Latinos and African Americans, were analyzed. Native Americans, Pacific Islanders, or other ethnic minority groups were not analyzed because they were mentioned in only a handful of questions cataloged on the Roper Center database.

To analyze any differences among these three groups, Crosstab analysis were run on each of the results, comparing the representation of Asian Americans in 88 polls, the representation of Hispanic/Latinos in 41 polls, and the representation of Blacks/African Americans in 41 polls.

Topic of interest	Asian	Hispanic/	African
	American	Latino	American
	Polls	Polls	Polls
Language other than English used	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Ethnicity mentioned in any form	44.3%	31.7%	36.6%
Ethnicity of participants listed	35.2%	26.8%	26.8%
Sampling method mentions ethnicity	22.7%	22.0%	9.8%
Sampling method mentions ethnic group queried	8.0%	12.2%	9.8%
about in question			
Method mentions weighting responses	14.8%	19.5%	17.1%
Method mentions over sampling groups	15.9%	17.1%	17.1%
Method mentions additional samples	1.1%	0.0%	4.9%
Method mentions parallel surveys	1.1%	2.4%	4.9%
Method mentions other technique	4.5%	2.4%	12.2%
Responses to questions broken out by ethnicity	31.8%	14.6%	26.8%
Caucasians responses broken out	31.8%	14.6%	26.8%
African American responses broken out	30.7%	14.6%	26.8%
Hispanic/Latino responses broken out	20.5%	9.8%	26.8%
Asian American responses broken out	20.5%	4.9%	19.5%
Total number of polls analyzed	88	41	41

Table 4: Comparison among three poll categories analyzed

As Table 4 indicates, in some cases "Asian American" polls had more of the criteria present; in other cases, fewer of the criteria were present. Overall, Table 4 paints a picture that shows that Asian American polls do not differ significantly from polls focusing on other minority group issues in terms of sample selection and polling methodology.

It should be noted here that none of the differences among groups shown above were statistically significant. While this is partially a function of the small number of polls analyzed (which in the "Asian American" analysis were the only polls available), the number is at the low end of an acceptable sample to show statistically significant differences in this type of analysis.

Nevertheless, a more in-depth look of these comparisons is called for, as some interesting patterns did emerge in this portion of the study.

- First and foremost, the table indicates that not one of the 170 polls analyzed reported using any language other than English in querying respondents. Again, while this doesn't necessarily mean that multilingual polling was not used in any of the polls analyzed here, it is a clear indication that multilingual polling is, at best, quite rare. Few would expect polls focusing on "African American" issues to be asked in languages other than English, but as the Hispanic/Latino population has soared over the years, one might expect to see at least one of those 41 polls containing a question about Hispanics or Latinos to be conducted in Spanish as well as English.
- The "Asian American" polls analyzed are slightly more likely than "Latino" or "African American" polls to include information anywhere in the methodology concerning the ethnicity of respondents (for example noting an oversample of one or more ethnic group or listing the number of one or more ethnic group responding to the survey). In addition, a slightly higher proportion of "Asian American" polls list the ethnicity of the respondents to the polls.
- A contradiction of sorts emerges in examining sampling methods listed in the polls. • For the most part, "Asian American" polls are less likely to employ (or mention employing) specialized sampling techniques such as weighting and oversampling. When examining whether these types of techniques are mentioned in relation to any ethnic group, "Asian American" polls come out on top. However, "Asian American" polls are the least likely to apply these specialized techniques to the ethnic group mentioned in the question – in this case Asian Americans. In contrast, all of the 9.8 percent of the "African American" polls that mentioned ethnicity in any form used the specialized techniques for African Americans. In short, while "Asian American" polls are likely to mention ethnicity in sampling techniques, they're more likely to apply these techniques to groups other than Asian Americans. Polls containing at least one "African American" question do use specialized sampling methods more than other types of polls, but these techniques appear to be applied to non-ethnic groups (for example, teens or Democrats). In contrast, "Asian American" polls don't use these techniques as often, but these polls are more likely to apply them to an ethnic minority group when they do.

An equally interesting pattern emerges when examining how polls report responses to specific questions. "Asian American" polls are more likely to break out responses by ethnic group, meaning they're drawing conclusions based on responses by these subjects to the entire population. "African American" polls are equally likely to do so. But Asian American responses are the least likely to be broken out across all three groups of polls analyzed, even the "Asian American" polls. Across the three types of ethnic polls analyzed, nearly all polls that broke out responses by ethnic group listed results for Caucasians and African Americans. The "Asian American" and "Latino" polls listed responses for Latinos less frequently than they did for Caucasians and African Americans. There was a marked drop for each type of poll in reporting out Asian American responses. Only 28 polls, or 16.5% of all polls analyzed, listed Asian American responses, compared with 19.4% that listed Latino opinions, 25.9% that listed African American responses, and 26.9% mentioning Caucasian responses. It is important to note, again, that these were polls that contained questions listing at least one ethnic minority group and that often used specialized sampling techniques to help represent ethnic populations.

Section 5: Qualitative analysis: Depth interviews with pollsters

The goal of this final portion of the research project was to shed light into the findings of the poll question analyses above. The poll question analysis found that Asian Americans' opinions – as well as those of other minority groups – were rarely reported out separately in poll results. Further, in some instances, conclusions about how Asian Americans felt were based on the responses of fewer than 20 people. In addition, the analysis found that none of the 170 selected polls analyzed reported asking questions in any language other than English.

Method: The researcher contacted leading media and non-media polling organizations and asked to schedule an interview with the director of polling or another official that could speak about polling techniques. In total, eight organizations were contacted, and five directors of polling agreed to be interviewed. Because of scheduling conflicts, four interviews were completed between May 25 and July 29, 2003. To ensure that the depth interviews included a variety of polling organizations, two non-media and two-media polling organizations were selected: a large national polling organization, an independent academic polling group, a television network polling division, and a large metropolitan newspaper polling department.

The polling officials were asked about current practices in surveying minority groups, Asian Americans in particular, and the reasons behind these practices. All interviews were conducted by the researcher and followed a set list of questions (See Appendix C).

These phone interviews yielded much information, with some of the interviews lasting more than an hour as the polling directors willingly explained the challenges they face in surveying minority populations. Although no polling director requested anonymity or confidentiality in their responses, the researcher has opted to present quotes and information in a compiled form because much of the information shared by pollsters was quite similar. Also, attributing information to one person might open that organization to criticism for practices that are common throughout the polling industry. Singling out any organization was not the goal of this research. However, when necessary to explain a specific practice or procedure, a polling director name or organization name is used.

The four directors of polling who participated in this study were:

- Gary Langer, Director of Polling, ABC News
- Frank Newport, Editor in Chief, The Gallup Poll
- Susan H. Pincus, Director, Los Angeles Times Poll
- Doug Schwartz, Director, Quinnipiac University Poll

For simplicity, these responses are broken into the following four areas:

- 1. Barriers to surveying minorities
- 2. Issues related to surveying Asian Americans
- 3. Multilingual polling
- 4. Sampling techniques used to overcome these barriers

Area 1: Barriers to surveying minorities

All of the pollsters interviewed said that unless it is a highly specialized poll of a particular group, members of all ethnicities are included as respondents in the poll. In most quality polls, the number of respondents of each ethnic group – either obtained or corrected by statistical weighting – is nearly equal to representation of each group in the U.S. population (or the area population for local surveys). Pollsters always proportionately represents any subgroup of the population, including left-handed people, Democrats, Asians, etc. "Any subgroup that you'd want to look at is proportionately represented," one polling official said.

Whether the responses of any group are broken out for reporting depends on a number of factors, including the polling objective, the sample size, and timing issues, polling directors say.

Polling objective: "You have to ask yourself what is your objective of the poll," said one director. "The objective with much polling is to represent the total adult population. Our primary purpose is not to break out any subgroup . . . or to look at any of the infinite number of subgroups, but to give an accurate representation of the total adult population."

Even if they have sufficient numbers to analyze, pollsters typically do not report responses by group unless there is a valid reason for doing so. If there is reason to believe that groups differ in their responses or if the objective of the poll is to compare groups, pollsters might report their data by subgroup response. But in most cases, these are not goals of the poll. For example, most surveys of voters, especially on national issues or opinions toward candidates or officeholder performance, use a general adult population sample.

ABC News mainly conducts and analyzes national polling. The network rarely conducts polls on small populations or groups who speak languages other than English. Gary Langer, director of polling for ABC News listed only two situations in which ABC would concentrate on small groups when conducting a survey: 1) if the network was interested in the views of that specific group or 2) if it was surveying mainly in a local area where there was a large minority or group speaking a foreign language. Like most national polling organizations, these situations are rare for ABC News, Langer said. For ABC News, the most common ethnic minority surveyed is African Americans.

Sample size: Even if reporting out results by subgroup is the primary objective of the poll, reputable survey organizations will not do so unless the numbers are statistically large enough to provide meaningful results. For example, if an organization would like to generalize minority opinion from an average general, U.S. adult random sample, they can do so if the sample is large enough. But even with a poll of 1,000 people, a typical size for a national poll, generalizing even to large minority groups is problematic.

For example, to break out responses for African Americans, which are about 12 percent of the population, might be possible if pollsters actually got 120 African Americans

responding to the poll. But because minority response rates are somewhat lower than those for Caucasians, out of 1,000 adults, pollsters would probably reach 80 to 100 African Americans, a sample too small to produce generalizable results. "On a poll of 10,000, it's a different story," said one pollster. "But even with that very large sample size, generalizing to a smaller minority groups, such as Native Americans, would still be problematic, because you're still talking about 100 so respondents at the most."

The Quinnipiac University Poll does break out results by minority respondents, but only for New York City, because the organization receives sufficient numbers of minority respondents in that area. However, the groups the university poll breaks out for analysis in New York City are Hispanics/Latinos and African American only. Asians typically aren't large enough as a group to break out for analysis, said Doug Schwartz, director of the Quinnipiac University Poll. Like most pollsters, Schwartz won't break out any group for analysis unless he gets at least 100 respondents from that group.

"A hundred is a rough rule of thumb; 100 is kind of like a magic number," Schwartz said. But even with 100 you're still getting a pretty large margin of error. Even if I had 100 in a group, I might report it out, but I certainly wouldn't make it the story" when reporting the poll to the media and the public. There is a difference between reporting it and making it the story. For the story, you want to have a pretty decent sample size of at least 300 to 400."

Time: Finally, pollsters all report time as a significant barrier to seeking and reporting out minority opinion. To use any of the sampling and statistical techniques to accurately represent the views of minority voters (see section below), pollsters must add days, or sometimes weeks, to their data collection time. This is especially detrimental when survey organizations are trying to gauge public opinion in response to breaking news. Media organizations are keenly aware of the value of putting timely data out, which often means that oversampling certain groups is not feasible. Pollsters, while sensitive to accurately representing minority opinion, want to conduct polls that are most relevant to their audiences. Delaying a survey on a breaking issue to oversample minority groups for two to three extra days would do more of a disservice to the polling audience than it would a good to the public, said one pollster.

These three barriers do mean that minority opinion isn't represented as frequently, and in some cases, as accurately as it could be in an ideal situation. But pollsters are aware of these issues and try to address them in many ways.

One pollster asked: "Are we doing a disservice? "I don't know. There are areas that we can improve on. It's a mater of logistics."

Area 2: Issues related to surveying Asian Americans

As a group, pollsters say they are sensitive to the concerns of the Asian community in the United States when it comes to polling. Small minority groups, such as Asian Americans, seek to be heard in the polls and to have their views represented accurately. But pollsters say doing so poses a dilemma. "To get the Asian sampling frame 100 percent matching the makeup of the population is very difficult," said one pollster.

The challenges faced in regard to polling Asian Americans parallel the topics discussed in Area 1 above. First, pollsters have limited resources that prevent full and completely accurate representation of all Asian Americans. Second, Asian Americans pose unique challenges to pollsters, especially in the realm of political polling. Third, the multiple languages spoken in the U.S. Asian American community pose a challenge for pollsters, one that is not found for the U.S. African American or Latino communities.

Limited resources: "As with any smaller group, time and money are the major reasons we don't do it (routinely oversample Asian Americans)," said one pollster. When smaller groups express concern about being represented accurately, pollsters understand. "But sometimes I'd like to say 'You give me the money'... We don't have the budget, and it's getting worse."

For example, one polling director reported seeking an oversample of 130 Asian Americans for a specialized topic of interest to the organization. However, collecting just 130 completed surveys from this group meant that the data collection period had to be extended three days past when the pollster planned to complete the survey. The pollster noted that this delay was encountered in a large metropolitan area with a large number of Asian Americans. Pollsters conducting surveys in other areas or those conducting national polls might have to make hundreds of thousands of calls to generate a sample of 100 Asian Americans. "When you're polling in an area like New Hampshire or Iowa, it (oversampling Asian Americans) really doesn't make any sense," the polling director said.

Asian Americans and political polling: When conducting political polls, survey organizations tend not to be as concerned with representing the views of Asian Americans as they might be with other types of polling. This is primarily because the Asian Americans population, much like most ethnic minority groups in the United States, contains a smaller proportion of likely voters than the U.S. Caucasian population.

In political surveys, pollsters say they are concerned only with registered voters or, even more so, with likely voters. With voting, those likely voters are crucial to predicting election outcomes. Because the proportion of Asian Americans who are registered to vote and likely to vote is smaller than in the Caucasian population, oversampling this group doesn't make sense for political surveys, polling directors say. "It just doesn't pay to do it," said one pollster. "It's knocking down an already small sample."

Even if pollsters were to begin routinely oversampling to find a large enough number of likely Asian American voters, the results probably would not accurately represent the views of this group.

"The other problem is that we lump all Asians together when there are clear differences on certain topics," explained one polling official. For some lifestyle issues, treating Asian Americans as a uniform group is not as problematic. But with political polling, clear differences exist among Asian Americans, based on the Asian country to which they are most strongly linked. "Blacks are a huge voting block, Asians are not," another pollster said. Even oversampling for Asian Americans would not paint an accurate picture because there would still be too few Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, or members of other Asian groups for pollsters to draw firm conclusions.

The language barrier: For most minority groups other than African Americans and Native Americans, language issues come into play. Members of the U.S. Latino population have ties to a variety of countries, but Spanish is the primary language for all of those countries. For Asian Americans, the language challenge is unique, in that pollsters are trying to survey respondents speaking a variety of languages – and ultimately represent them all as a uniform group. "Surveying Asian Americans in languages other than English presents a much bigger challenge because of the logistical issues," according to one polling director.

When pollsters do conduct surveys in a language other than English, they typically choose Spanish. "Interviewing Asian Americans in native languages is something that is very different because there are multiple languages that you would have to use." This issue is discussed in depth in the following section.

Area 3: Multilingual polling

Pollsters, for the most part, rarely ask survey questions in any language other than English. If another language is used, the odds are it is Spanish. Respondents are given the opportunity to answer in English or Spanish. General interest surveys are rarely conducted in other languages, pollsters said.

The problem: Not polling in all native languages spoken in the United States means that the sampling frame is compromised. In other words, the sample is not being selected from the entire population; instead the sample is only selected from the subset of the U.S. population that feels comfortable answering questions in English. "Our sampling frame has some limitations," conceded one pollster. "We're generalizing to a population that is slightly smaller than the U.S. population as a whole."

Language is only one of the many limitations to the sampling frame that pollsters live with every day. For example, the sampling frame is compromised by people who don't have access to telephones, by those who are homeless, by those in prisons, and by those living in other institutional settings, such as the military or college.

"We make a decision to live with the fact that our sampling frame is not representative of the totality of the American population," said one director. "Our ideal as pollsters is to represent all the U.S. population, but everything that we do involves some compromise . . . All of these decisions involve compromise."

Another pollster acknowledged this problem: "We only speak to Asians in English, so you're only getting English-speaking Asians."

While pollsters recognize the problem of excluding non English speakers, "we're probably talking about a fairly small number" because most people in the U.S. population speak at least some English, another pollster said.

The exceptions: A few survey organizations have begun conducting surveys in languages other than English, when the topic warrants multi-lingual polling. As one pollster said, "there's always a discussion of time and expense" before conducting any poll, and language is one of the issues broached in those discussions. The researchers justify multilingual polling based on the goal of the survey.

For example, *The Los Angeles Times* conducted a series of ground-breaking polls in the 1990s, surveying four Asian American communities (Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Pilipino) in the L.A. metropolitan area. *The Times* wanted to better serve these communities and help the city connect more closely with the issues facing these four Asian American groups. For each community, the *Times* translated the questions into the group's native language, then had the questions translated back to English as a way to double check the translations. More than half of the respondents asked to have the polls read to them in their native language. It was a successful undertaking, but because of the time and

money involved in conducting such polls, the *Times* will not likely repeat these multilingual polls frequently, *Times* poll director Susan Pincus said.

Fewer polling organizations uniformly conduct multilingual surveys. One exception is the Quinnipiac University Poll, which started interviewing people in Spanish or English, based on respondent preference, two years ago. Because the university often conducts surveys in New York City, where polling in Spanish and English is common, director Doug Schwartz decided to give all respondents for all surveys this option. While few respondents to polls outside of New York City choose to have the Spanish version read to them, the Quinnipiac does give this option for consistency. "When you do the cost-benefit analysis, it is worth it for the accuracy," Schwartz said. "There is some expense, but I want to be consistent, even in Connecticut."

Other polling officials say multilingual polling across the board may be consistent, but it doesn't necessarily lead to more accuracy in poll results. Omitting non-English speakers doesn't eliminate a large number of respondents from any group, and pollsters can take steps to weight responses to accurately represent any segment of the population. Multilingual polling, however, has advantages beyond the accuracy of results. For one, it shows that pollsters are responsive to the concerns of minority groups, a smart public relations move. "Frankly, it looks good to do it," said one director. "In the final analysis, 4 percent rather than 5 percent is not going to change the aggregate response for that group."

Schwartz said his organization has not systematically studied whether offering to ask the questions in Spanish has increased response rates among the Latino population. The university also has not analyzed if the views of Latinos who answer in Spanish differ from Latinos who answer in English. "My guess is that those (Latinos) who answer in English were not significantly different from the people who speak only Spanish," Schwartz said.

The case against multilingual polling: Polling directors cite several reasons why multilingual polling isn't used more frequently. In some situations, polling non-English speakers is not an issue, because pollsters aren't trying to generalize to that population.

For example, voting surveys are trying to predict election outcomes, and statistics suggest that citizens who don't speak English are less likely to vote than native English speakers. Therefore, few pollsters use any language other than English when trying to predict vote outcomes. "If you're trying to represent voters, you can make the argument that not representing people who don't speak English is not that big of an issue, because these are people who typically are not likely voters."

Time also is cited as another reason why multilingual polling is so rare. Event-driven surveys are the second most popular type of polls, behind voting polls, conducted by national organizations. When organizations want to gauge responses to a breaking news event, such as a presidential address or an international uprising, they try to begin asking questions within a day of the event. Translating questions into multiple languages and training interviewers in other languages, if done properly, takes time.

Finally, pollsters cite cost as a factor that limits multilingual polling. Quality translations of questions are expensive. One polling director said the cost for each language translation is \$600 to \$700. Pollsters who would like to reach the entire Asian American community might end up paying for five or more languages (for example Korean, Mandarin, Cantonese, Korean and Japanese) or more than \$3,000 just for the translation. In addition, pollsters would have to seek out special groups of telephone surveyors capable of speaking the language and recording answers in one or more languages.

The expense is one reason why multilingual polling is much more common in the commercial sector than it is in the general interest surveys. For example, Frank Newport, Gallup's editor-in- chief, said Gallup's marketing research division frequently interviews in other languages. Chinese is the most popular language used. Recently, Gallup's commercial survey group conducted a survey in Chinese for a Chinese television station. But this is possible because the client, who has a strong interest in this population, is willing to pay for information; therefore, the client picks up this cost.

Area 4: Sampling and statistical techniques used to overcome barriers

Regardless of group or language used, pollsters rely on a wide variety of tools to ensure that their results are as accurate as possible, given the limitations outlined above. This section discusses these techniques, concentrating on weighting and oversampling, two of the most commonly used methods.

Weighting: In virtually every poll conducted, the minority responses are at least slightly lower than the minority groups' true representation in the U.S. population. In most cases, officials weight responses of groups at least slightly. The ABC News poll Web site explains the weighting process as follows: "Final data are weighted using demographic information from the Census to adjust for sampling and nonsampling deviations from population values. Respondents customarily are classified into one of 48 cells based on age, race, sex and education. Weights are assigned so the proportion in each of these 48 cells matches the actual population proportion according to the Census Bureau's most recent Current Population Survey."²²

Polling directors interviewed said that they weight very carefully, because weighting too heavily can distort findings. While most pollsters weight minority responses to match the U.S. Census data, they only weight slightly. For example, if a group in a survey comprises 2.4 percent of the population, and the group represents 2.1 percent of the survey respondents, an organization would weight the survey responses so that they would equal 2.4 percent of the opinion expressed. "Weighting is more a minor adjustment, it's nothing significant."

However, some officials caution against weighting, especially for smaller minority groups. Weighting is generally a bad choice, said one survey director, because if the sample of a subgroup was too small to begin with, weighting "doesn't help. It's still skewing the results because you're generalizing with only a handful of people."

Oversampling: Regardless of issue, pollsters rarely will break out results for any subgroup with fewer than 100 responses. Even with 100 respondents of a group, pollsters are generally very cautious. If minority opinions are of interest on a given topic, getting 100 respondents of a group is a challenge. The Quinnipiac University Poll Website explains the university's standard methodology. "Professionally trained students and non-students conduct the interviews using a CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing system). For a typical public opinion survey, a randomly selected sample of about 1,000 adults aged 18 and over is interviewed over a 5-6 day period" (http://www.quinnipiac.edu/x699.xml).

For larger minority groups, such as African Americans or people of Hispanic or Latino origin, pollsters might get the magic 100 responses without oversampling. For example,

²² Merkle, Dan. (2002, March 28). *ABC News polling methodology*. Available online at <u>http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/poll_methodology.html</u>.

African Americans represent 12.3 percent and Latinos represent 12.5 percent of the U.S. population. So surveying 1,000 adults in some areas might generate about 120 respondents in each of these groups. For smaller ethnic groups, pollsters virtually never achieve 100 respondents without oversampling specifically for that group. For Asian Americans, who make up 3.6 percent of the U.S. population, according to the 2000 Census, calling 3,000 adults still would not net the 100 responses necessary for generalization.

In reality, for national surveys, pollsters might have to call 10,000 people or more to reach 100 Asian Americans. This is due largely to where minorities live. As one pollster explained, surveying minority populations is very difficult in national polls because minority groups, especially smaller ones, tend to be concentrated in certain areas. For example, in the 1990 U.S. Census, Asians (and Pacific Islanders) made up 9.6 percent of the population of California but only 0.5 percent of the population of Arkansas (http://www.census.gov/population/documentation/twps0056/tabA-01.pdf). Even within states, composition of the population varies widely, based on region. For example, minority groups often are more concentrated in large cities. Oversampling minority groups in cities skews the overall poll results, more heavily representing people living in large metropolitan areas. For these reasons, "for the most part in national polls, you're not going to break out any ethnic group," one pollster said. Local polls in metropolitan areas may be in the best position to accurately gauge minority opinion for respondents of those groups living in the region. These local polls, therefore, would be in a better position than national polls to gather a representative sample of a minority group.

Oversampling is rare. However, if the content of a survey is about Asian Americans or any other minority group, pollsters typically will invest in the time to oversample a population to get meaningful numbers. For example, one pollster recounted recently oversampling African Americans for a survey about racial profiling in New York City.

Susan H. Pincus of *The Los Angeles Times* said this was the reason behind oversampling in the four surveys the papers conducted in Asian American community in the 1990s. "The Los Angeles Times may be one of the only groups that try to oversample Asians . . . When it relates to their group, we try to do it," she said.

Oversampling techniques: While pollsters agree that sometimes oversampling is necessary, they disagree somewhat on how to reach minority groups in large numbers.

Most concede that pure random digit dialing (RDD) is the best technique to use to generate an oversample of minorities. But using this technique alone is quite expensive and time consuming, because, as noted above, pollsters would have to call tens of thousands of respondents nationwide to generate 100 useable surveys.

The ABC News poll Web site explains how RDD works: "A sample of households in the continental United States is selected via random digit dialing (RDD) procedures, to insure that all possible listed and unlisted phone numbers are included with equal probability of selection . . . Before sampling, exchanges are stratified into nine regions as defined by the U.S. Census Bureau: New England, Middle Atlantic, East North Central, West North

Central, South Atlantic, East South Central, West South Central, Mountain, Pacific. Counties within each region are then classified as metropolitan or non-metropolitan, using definitions established by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget. Within each of the resulting 18 strata, exchanges are grouped by state and then sorted by median county income as reported by the Census. These steps help ensure representativeness. Sampling then occurs in three stages. First, a systematic random sample of telephone exchanges is selected within each stratum, by taking every nth exchange. Next, telephone banks (the first two digits of the four-digit suffix) with more than one residential listing assigned in white pages directories are classified as working banks. A sample of four-digit suffixes is randomly selected from among working banks in each exchange, resulting in a selfweighting sample of households. This sample is checked against a database of known business telephone numbers to reduce business listings in the sample. The sampled phone numbers are pre-dialed via a non-ringing auto-dialer to reduce dialing of non-working numbers. The third stage of sampling is respondent selection within the household, accomplished by last-birthday selection. Interviewers ask to speak to the household member age 18 or over at home who's had the last birthday. To compensate for the fact that women tend to be easier to reach, in-house selection is stratified by sex, with interviewers asking to speak with the male household member 75 percent of the time and the female 25 percent of the time. If a person of the selected sex is unavailable, the interviewer asks to speak with the person of the other sex who had the last birthday."²³

Working through that normal process and then screening for ethnicity to generate a large sample is virtually impossible, pollsters say. Therefore, some pollsters rely on other techniques to generate oversamples of minority groups. However, each method has its drawbacks and detractors.

Sampling heavily in geographic "pockets" where minorities live: When pollsters want to generate an oversample of a minority group, they often stratify the population by geographic location and survey in areas heavily populated by minorities. Concentrating on geographic areas that are known to have a high concentration of the group of interest ensures that a larger proportion of the people contacted will belong to the group.

To do this, pollsters will modify their RDD technique to exclude telephone prefixes and exchanges outside of the geographic area they are targeting. The technique is not perfect. For example, not all of the people who live in the region belong to one ethnic group. Even worse, says one pollster, this technique tends to oversample in urban areas and excludes minorities living in the suburbs or in rural areas. In conducting a political survey, for example, pollsters would be more likely to get minorities in lower income groups in urban "pockets." These residents also are less likely to vote than residents of the same ethnic group in suburban areas. "The type of Asian Americans that you would get with that technique might be a concern," said the pollster. "I've always had a concern about this. You're missing the middle class, the ones that are more integrated with other ethnic groups in the region."

²³ Merkle, Dan. (2002, March 28). *ABC News polling methodology*. Available online at <u>http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/DailyNews/poll_methodology.html</u>.

Aggregating survey responses: Another technique that is less expensive is aggregating results of multiple polls. For example, Gallup recently conducted a study on the political affiliation of Jewish voters. About 2 percent of the U.S. population identifies itself as Jewish. Because Gallup had conducted several polls in the past few years that had asked both religious and political affiliation, the organization could aggregate these results to save time and expense but still accurately represent the population of interest, said Gallup editor Frank Newport.

While aggregating past surveys has few drawbacks, pollsters concede that it can only be used in limited circumstances because questions have to be asked the exact same way over time. This is possible with demographic data such as ethnicity and political affiliation, but it is harder to achieve when gathering opinions on issues.

"Pyramiding" surveys: A technique similar to aggregating previous results is to "pyramid surveys." This involves combining a half dozen or more polls conducted during the past year and calling back people who identified themselves as belonging to a minority group. One pollster reported using this method to collect opinions from African Americans; no pollster reported doing so for Asian Americans. While this method of subject selection is not truly random, it does utilize lists generated initially by RDD.

Using published lists: Some polling organizations use published lists or other datasets to oversample Asian Americans or other minority groups. But as one pollster noted, "listed samples have their own vagaries." For example, many lists are imperfect, excluding some members of any group. One pollster called using a list of surnames to oversample for minorities a "really inferior type of sampling." Another pollster explained that last names identified with an ethnic minority don't guarantee that the respondent is a member of that group. For example, a female Smith might have married Mr. Zhang, while a female Zhang might have married Mr. Smith. By calling the Zhangs and not calling the Smiths, pollsters would err in both cases. Because published lists of minorities are not comprehensive and good published lists are virtually nonexistent, pollsters rarely use this technique.

Conclusion: One pollster, in an e-mail after the phone interview, summed up the problems survey organizations face when sampling minority groups: "My main point would be a word of caution about inferior methodologies," the pollster wrote. "Proper probability sampling is an expensive enterprise, especially when it comes to assembling sufficient numbers of small subgroups for reliable analysis. The best but costliest approach is direct screening via RDD. More practical, and also suitable, is using existing RDD data files to panel back to selected subgroups. More common are approaches such as surname sampling from listed households. These (methods) lead to very large and quite possibly systematic noncoverage. We have seen any number of minority-subgroup polls based on surname lists, without proper disclosure of the significant limitations of this approach. Even worse, in our view, is non-probability sampling, (which uses techniques) such as call-in, mail-in and online click-in polls, given the lack of a sampling frame, self-selection bias and vulnerability to manipulation."

SECTION 6: Recommendations

The qualitative analysis above indicates that leading polling firms are keenly aware of the challenges in surveying minority populations and accurately representing their opinions. These firms have taken steps to overcome some of these challenges, but pollsters concede that problems remain. This section outlines the researcher's recommendations for pollsters, journalists, and researchers working with polls of minority groups.

Pollsters

- Should work to educate minority groups and the general public about the challenges outlined above in surveying Asian Americans and other groups.
- Should be vigilant in adhering to the Standards and Best Practices outlined by the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) for surveys.²⁴
- Should be careful when weighting responses for smaller groups of ethnic minorities, especially if those responses will be reported out for each ethnic group.
- If reporting out responses by ethnic groups, should disclose whether weighting took place and, if so, list the obtained percentages and the weighted percentages so that journalists and the public can evaluate the information.
- Should not report out any results for groups with fewer than 100 responses. If results by smaller groups are of interest to the survey, pollsters should invest the time and money necessary to oversample.
- Should clearly report out all information journalists and the public need to make judgments about the quality of the survey. Should report out with the results information meeting the "standards for minimum disclosure" list compiled by the AAPOR.²⁵
- Should collaboratively work with other polling organizations in creating reliable lists and methods that allow for oversampling of minority groups when warranted by the goal of the survey.
- Should invest in high quality translations and hiring interviewers fluent in other languages when the goal of the survey warrants oversampling of any ethnic minority group that has even a small percentage of respondents who would prefer to answer in their native language.
- Should work collaboratively with public opinion researchers at universities and other institutions to investigate the effects of language use in polling.

²⁴American Association for Public Opinion Research. (2002). *Standards and best practices*. Available online at

http://www.aapor.org/default.asp?page=survey_methods/standards_and_best_practices/best_practices

²⁵American Association for Public Opinion Research (2002). *Standards and best practices*. See above note.

• Should avoid survey practices condemned by the AAPOR, especially using self-selected samples and "push" polls.²⁶

Journalists

- Should seek out training in survey methodology through short courses offered by journalists or university groups to become comfortable when asking questions about how polls are conducted.
- Should become familiar with the Standards and Best Practices and the survey practices condemned by AAPOR.
- If minority responses are broken out, should ask for the exact number of each minority responses in each ethnic group reported. Should be wary of any results based on fewer than 100 responses.
- If minority groups that include non-native English speakers are broken out for analysis, should inquire as to whether the polling organization used multilingual polling. If not, should ask the researchers what effect polling in English might have had on the results.
- Should be wary of polls not reporting out all of the information on the "standards for minimum disclosure" outlined by AAPOR.
- Should compare the analysis of the data by the pollsters with outside experts.²⁷
- Should, at minimum, include in a story how the sample was selected and the exact question wording used in the survey this allows the public to carefully evaluate the information.²⁸
- Should not report the results of call-in polls or other types of self-selected samples.
- Should remind the public in every survey story that all survey results are simply estimates. As one polling expert wrote in 1998: "When the media print sentences such as 'the margin of error is plus or minus three percentage points,' they strongly suggest that the results are accurate to within the percentage stated. That is completely untrue and grossly misleading.... They might be better off assuming –

²⁶American Association for Public Opinion Research. (2002). *Survey practices that AAPOR condemns.* Available online at

http://www.aapor.org/default.asp?page=survey_methods/standards_and_best_practices/best_practices

²⁷CBC Radio-Canada (n.d.). *Journalistic standards and practices*. Available online at <u>http://cbc.radio-canada.ca/htmen/policies/journalistic/surveys.htm</u>.

²⁸Cotter, Patrick R., & Stovall, James G. (1999). *A citizen's guide to surveys*. Available online at <u>http://www.southernopinion.com/archives/1999/citizensguide.html</u>.

as most of the readers surely do – that all surveys, all opinion polls (and, indeed, all censuses) are estimates, which may be wrong."²⁹

Researchers/academics

- Should carefully train future journalists about the basics of survey methodology. Should require all journalism students to have a firm understanding of sample selection and probability. Should give future journalists the tools needed to ask the right questions when covering surveys.
- Should work to train current journalists in survey practices and pitfalls. Should work with journalism organizations and polling organizations to sponsor workshops and short courses, perhaps online, that working journalists can attend.
- Should work with polling organizations to outline the critical issues concerning surveying ethnic minority groups. Should develop research projects to help the industry find the best practices for surveying minority groups.
- Should begin compiling lists and methods that allow survey organizations to oversample minority groups when warranted.
- Should conduct experimental studies testing the effects of English only versus multilingual polling for minority groups.
- Should seek grants and external funding for research designed to help pollsters accurately represent the views of minority groups.

²⁹Taylor, Humphrey. (1998, May 4). *Myth and reality in reporting sampling error: How the media confuse and mislead readers and viewers*. Available online at <u>http://www.pollingreport.com/sampling.htm</u>.

Appendix A: Code sheet

Sampling issues in minority polling, AAJA polls project, 2003

Unless asking for a specific number, all fill-in-the-blank questions will be 0 = no, 1 = yes. Coder:

4. Robin 7. Lucy 8. Yan 1. Joseph 7. Lucy 10. Ethnie 2. Brett 2. Dieu5. Ivialen6. I an3. Qingmiao6. Catherine9. Jennifer Ascension number Date of poll Number of questions asked on poll dealing with Asian Americans Number of participants Race mentioned in population, number of participants, or notes (0/1)**Ethnicity of participants listed?** (0/1) If yes, list number of participants in all ethnicities: _____ Caucasian _____ African American _____ Hispanic/Latino Asian American Native American ____ Other (specify) _____

Survey method:

- 1. Telephone
- 2. Mail
- 3. In-person
- 4. E-mail
- 5. Other (specify):
- 6. Not given

Sample selection methodology mentions:

- □ Not given
- □ Weighted
- □ Oversample
- □ Additional samples
- □ Half sample
- □ Parallel surveys done in other countries
- □ Cross-section
- Other (specify): _____

Sample selection method mentions race/ethnicity in any form (0/1)Sample selection method mentions Asian Americans in any form (0/1)Mention of language (other than English) used for the poll? (0/1) If yes, what language was used? 1. Spanish 2. Chinese 3. Japanese 4. Other (specify): Are the question results broken out by ethnicity? (0/1) If yes, what ethnicities are listed? _____ Caucasian _____ African American _____ Hispanic/Latino _____ Asian American _____ Native American Other (specify) **Organization(s) conducting survey:** Media 3. Roper Center for Public **Opinion Research** 1. ABC 2. NBC 4. National Opinion Research 3. CBS News Center

5. Other polling organization (specify):

University/academic

- 1. Princeton Survey Research Associates
- 2. Harvard University (including John F. Kennedy School of Government)
- 3. Other university/academic (specify):
- 4. Undecided other (specify)

- 4. CNN
- 5. AP News
- 6. New York Times
- 7. Washington Post
- 8. Los Angeles Times
- 9. Time
- 10. Newsweek
- 11. Other (specify):

Polling organizations

- 1. Gallup Organization
- 2. Harris Interactive/Harris & Associates

Number of questions asked of each type:

- General attitudes toward Asian Americans
- _____ Education/Schools
- _____Business/Economics/Workplace
- _____ Knowledge based
- _____ Contact with/Interpersonal relations
- Other (specify):

Appendix B: Coding protocol Sampling issues in minority polling, AAJA polls project, 2003

Unit of analysis:

The unit of analysis for this content analysis is the entire poll. To determine when the poll starts and stops, look at the list of polls from Lexis-Nexis. Look at the poll date and topic. If they are the same, it is the same poll. If they are different, it is a different poll. For example, look at this sample section from the list of polls:

- 1. Public Opinion Online, 73 words, EDUCATION, MINORITIES, BLACKS, HISPANICS, January 19, 2003, CBS NEWS, NEW YORK TIMES POLL.
- Public Opinion Online, 56 words, EDUCATION, EQUALITY, MINORITIES, January 16, 2003, PRINCETON SURVEY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, NEWSWEEK POLL.
- 3. Public Opinion Online, 99 words, FAMILY, MINORITIES, BLACKS, HISPANICS, January 9, 2002, ADOPTION ATTITUDES SURVEY.
- 4. Public Opinion Online, 127 words, FAMILY, BLACKS, HISPANICS, MINORITIES, January 9, 2002, ADOPTION ATTITUDES SURVEY.

Items three and four are two questions from the same poll because they are both from January 9, 2002, and the Adoption Attitudes Survey.

Coder: (coder)

Circle your coder number.

Ascension number: (pollnumb)

Enter the ascension number from the poll.

Date of poll: (date)

Enter the date from the beginning date section of the poll using the format MM/DD/YY.

Number of questions asked on poll dealing with Asian Americans: (aaquest)

Look at the list of polls from Lexis-Nexis to determine how many questions from the same poll dealt with Asian Americans. See the unit of analysis section above for an example.

Number of participants: (partnum)

If you answered yes to the previous question, look at the number of participants section and fill in blank accordingly. If you answered no to the previous question, skip this question.

Race mentioned in population, number of participants, or survey notes: (race)

Look at the population, number of participants, or survey notes sections of the poll and check whether or not the poll mentions race.

Ethnicity of participants listed: (ethnic)

Look at the population or survey notes sections and answer accordingly (0/1).

Number of participants that are list all races, fill in the blank: (partrace)

If you answered yes (1), list the number of participants in all ethnicities in the blanks provided. Look at the number of participants or survey notes sections to determine the number of participants in each ethnicity.

Survey method: (method)

Look at the method section and circle all methods listed. If no method is specified, circle not given. If the organization used a method that is not listed, circle other and specify.

Sample selection methodology mentions (overall, race, and Asian-Americans): (sampover); (samprace); (sampaa)

Look at the survey notes and check any sample selection methodology that is mentioned. If no sample selection methodology is given, check not given. If the organization used a sample selection methodology that is not listed, check other and specify. For the next two questions, look at the survey notes section and check to see if the sample selection method mentions any race or Asian Americans. Fill in the blank (0 = no, 1 = yes).

Do they mention the language used to conduct the poll?: (language)

Look at the survey notes section of the poll to determine whether or not multiple languages were used in conducting the poll. Answer accordingly (0,1).

If yes, what language was used?: (langtype)

If you answered yes to the previous question, circle all languages that are mentioned in the survey notes section. If a language was used that is not mentioned, circle other and specify the language. If you answered no to the previous question, skip this question.

Are the question results broken out by ethnicity? (resuleth)

Look at the results section to see if the results are broken out by ethnicity; answer accordingly (0,1).

If yes, what ethnicities are listed? (ethtype)

If you answered yes to the previous question, fill in the blank with the number in each ethnicity. If you answered no, skip this question.

Organization(s) conducting survey: (survorg)

Look in the organization conducting survey section and circle all that apply. If you cannot decide what category the polling organization fits into, circle "undecided other" and record the organization's name. If you know what category an organization fits into and it is not listed, circle other and record the organization's name.

Types of questions asked: (questype)

Look at the question section and determine into which category the question fits. Write the number of questions asked per category. Put each poll question into only one category. If the poll has more than one question, you may check multiple categories. If the question does not fit into any of the categories, check other and describe the question.

Appendix C: Depth interview questionnaire

Sampling issues in minority polling, AAJA polls project, 2003

Before the interview, record:

- Name of polling organization
- Name and title of interviewee
- Contact information

After an initial contact, explain that this study is a joint research project between the Asian American Journalists Association and the University of Nevada. The goal is to try to identify polling issues that Asian American Journalists should be aware of when reporting on polls, especially those that deal with results broken out by ethnic groups. Tell them this interview includes eight questions and should take no more than 15 minutes.

Questions

- 1. What are some of the challenges your organization (or pollsters in general) face in trying to accurately represent the views of minority groups in the United States?
- 2. Are there challenges specific to smaller minority groups in the United States, such as Asians or Native Americans?
- 3. When sampling minority populations, in which types of polls would you use sampling techniques such as oversampling or weighted samples?
- 4. How do you determine which method you will use?
- 5. Are you more likely to use these types of techniques with smaller minority groups, i.e. Asians, Native Americans?
- 6. What are some of the challenges that you face in trying to represent the views of non English speaking respondents (such as first-generation immigrants) or non-native English speakers?
- 7. How often do you poll in another language? Which other languages do you use?
- 8. Is there anything else about surveying minority groups or Asians in particular that you'd like to add?