75 YEARS OF INSIGHT, INNOVATION, AND IMPACT
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The Evolution of Insight: NORC at 75

Since its founding, NORC has been a vital player in the research enterprise. This year marks NORC’s 75th anniversary, a milestone at which we have had the privilege of reflecting on our firm’s long history and the steady expansion of our reach and influence. NORC’s work is as diverse as the world itself, and we have had the honor of working on studies that have helped shape society, from the very first NORC studies conducted by our founders in the 1940s to the most recent research that we conduct today. In this article, we will explore how NORC has evolved over the years and discuss some of the key developments that have shaped our organization.

The Evolution of Insight: NORC at 75

The 1940s and 1950s: The Founding Years

In 1941, NORC was founded by researchers at the University of Chicago and the American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR). These crucial steps not only established NORC as a leader in the field of social science research but also enhanced the field of social science research more generally. Our University of Chicago affiliation has made us part of a pr

The 1950s and 1960s: Expansion and Diversity

In 1948, we championed probability sampling over the more popular quota sampling. And after 1954, NORC researchers co-authored the book Interviewing in Social Research, which explored the ways that interviewers influence responses and how researchers can use their data to inform society.

The 1970s and 1980s: Innovation and Collaboration

Our first decade of work also produced another NORC hallmark: our leadership and innovation in survey design and research methodology. In 1969, NORC pioneered rapid-response surveys, using telephone to small-scale questions and create minimum responses to the summer's fad. The NORC staff government, leadership, and policy experts who conduct and use public opinion surveys, survey research, market research, and emerging methods for understanding teams. We can report data as evidence that the data is NORC.

The 1990s and 2000s: Global Impact and Digital Revolution

The 2010s and 2020s: The Future of NORC

Today, AAPOR members number dozens and promote uniform standards and practices as well as new technologies and approaches. Our first decade of work also produced another NORC hallmark: our leadership and innovation in survey design and research methodology. In 1969, NORC pioneered rapid-response surveys, using telephone to small-scale questions and create minimum responses to the summer's fad. The NORC staff government, leadership, and policy experts who conduct and use public opinion surveys, survey research, market research, and emerging methods for understanding teams. We can report data as evidence that the data is NORC.

Understanding and revealing the human condition

The heart of NORC’s work lies in revealing the attitudes, opinions, and behaviors that shape the way different populations across the United States and around the world make decisions while also informing the social, economic, political, and health factors that influence the trajectories of their lives. Each new study adds to NORC’s subject matter expertise—enabling researchers to draw on our unique dataset and insights to inform policymakers and other decision-makers.

Conclusion

In conclusion, NORC 75 is a celebration of the past and a moment for looking forward. As we continue to innovate and expand our research capabilities, we remain committed to our core principles: the pursuit of knowledge, the advancement of understanding society, and the cultivation of engagement in the world. NORC’s work is as relevant today as it was when we began, and we look forward to continuing our impact for another 75 years and beyond.
The GSS has provided the nation and the world with a clearer and unbiased perspective on what Americans think and feel about a variety of important social issues, including national spending priorities, crime and punishment, race relations, quality of life, and confidence in institutions. With each biennial data collection, the GSS questions shift subtly to reflect emerging trends. Because rounds of the GSS have included questions on national priorities, religion, education, health, social mobility, participation in the arts, age, marriage, and social media. GSS data far exceed 25,000 scholarly papers, books, and PhD dissertations and are used by more than 400,000 students in their classes each year. As the digital age has transformed the way we analyze, sort, and compare more than 40 years of GSS data.

In 1979, NORC partnered with The Ohio State University and the U.S. Census to launch the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY79). The NLSY97, surveyed a cohort of 12- to 14-year-olds in 1979. The survey was comprised in-depth interviews with Americans who were then 14 and 17 years old and followed through age 26. By continuously examining the ever-changing communication needs of their subjects and employing new messaging and media strategies, the GSS researchers have managed to maintain a cumulative participation rate of nearly 80 percent. Researchers across the country have used NLSY data to study a variety of social issues, including national spending priorities, crime and punishment, race relations, quality of life, and confidence in institutions. With each biennial data collection, the GSS questions shift subtly to reflect emerging trends. Because rounds of the GSS have included questions on national priorities, religion, education, health, social mobility, participation in the arts, age, marriage, and social media. GSS data far exceed 25,000 scholarly papers, books, and PhD dissertations and are used by more than 400,000 students in their classes each year. As the digital age has transformed the way we analyze, sort, and compare more than 40 years of GSS data.

The experience and methodological insights NORC continues to derive from the GSS and NLSY have informed the success of other longitudinal studies, including High School and Beyond, which was launched in 1980 to examine the long-term impact of high school attendance on social, professional, and academic success, and the National Social Life, Health, and Aging Project, which began in 2004 to study the interactions among aging, social relationships, and health outcomes.

Perhaps no studies better symbolize the overarching scope and impact of NORC’s survey work than two major studies that continue to influence the trajectory of both the organization and the field.

In 1972, NORC launched the General Social Survey (GSS), with support from the NSF and the Research Foundation. The GSS has since become NORC’s longest-running project, and one of its most important. The GSS has provided the nation and the world with a clearer and unbiased perspective on what Americans think and feel about a variety of important social issues, including national spending priorities, crime and punishment, race relations, quality of life, and confidence in institutions. With each biennial data collection, the GSS questions shift subtly to reflect emerging trends. Because rounds of the GSS have included questions on national priorities, religion, education, health, social mobility, participation in the arts, age, marriage, and social media. GSS data far exceed 25,000 scholarly papers, books, and PhD dissertations and are used by more than 400,000 students in their classes each year. As the digital age has transformed the way we analyze, sort, and compare more than 40 years of GSS data.
job creation, income attainment, and financial systems and behaviors that inform economic policies. This research on society, and now looks toward a common goal: to combine the best of themselves to the table and work together because the best solutions to the most daunting (and profound and necessary questions about how data can be properly created, gathered, mined, understood, and used to create social good) will continue to guide us as we pursue our mutual commitment to scientific excellence, innovation, and collegiality.

The Evolution of Insight: NORC at 75

While much in our field and within the organization itself will continue to change, our core principles will remain the same:

• a relentless drive to innovate, to bring to bear the most effective of the latest technological tools, and to be a learning organization that constantly strives to advance the theory and practice of research
• a belief in the value of collaboration and collegiability, because the best solutions to the most daunting (and fundamental) challenges are found when researchers, data scientists, technologists, and policymakers bring the best of themselves to the table and work together toward a common goal

We live in an increasingly data-saturated world, one that is daunting to understand and one that is prompting profound and necessary questions about how data can be properly created, gathered, mined, understood, and used to create social good. Governments, business, academia, and the general public are turning to NORC to answer these questions and address their most critical challenges. NORC’s core principles—and the fundamental work that we do—will continue to guide us as we pursue our mission to provide insight for informed decisions.
ECONOMICS, MARKETS, AND THE WORKFORCE

Our perception of the economy exerts a profound influence on our sense of personal and national well-being. It affects how we vote, how we save and spend money, and whether we see the future as bright or foreboding. During NORC’s 75-year history, few things have changed as much as the economy. The rationing during World War II. The economic expansion of the 1950s and 1960s. The energy- and inflation-driven retrenchment of the 1970s. The growth spurt that came with the end of the Cold War and the beginning of the digital revolution. The upheavals and opportunities of globalization and the lingering effects of the Great Recession. NORC has stayed abreast of these changes with major studies like the Survey of Consumer Finances, the only fully representative source of information on the financial state of American households; the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth (1979 and 1997 cohorts), which tracked Americans as they traveled through the workforce; and groundbreaking explorations of aging and work and the interactions among health, education, and employment. In the process, NORC has provided citizens, policymakers, and business leaders with the thorough, unbiased data and analysis they need to respond to the challenges and opportunities of a constantly evolving economy.

The modern workplace—and the modern workforce—is vastly different than it was when NORC was founded. After peaking in the 1970s, manufacturing jobs as a percentage of nonfarm payroll have steadily declined, even though the United States remains the world’s largest producer of consumer goods and food products. Meanwhile, manufacturing employment that declined, jobs in retail, information technology, financial services, health care, and other areas of the service sector have grown. At the same time, the shift from “defined benefit” pensions to “defined contribution” programs like 401Ks has changed the way workers plan for retirement. NORC’s research has helped policymakers, other researchers, and workers themselves better understand the contours and contexts of working in America.

In 1947, NORC created the sociological idea of “job prestige” with its seminal survey, Jobs and Occupations: A Popular Evaluation, which asked participants to rate the social standing of 90 different occupations, from Supreme Court justice to garbage collector. The findings were used to create the influential Duncan Socioeconomic Index, which correlates the relationships among education, income, and occupation. It has become the standard for measuring occupational prestige in the United States. Since 2013, The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research has pursued an ongoing investigation of the intersections of aging and work. Its first study, Working Longer: The Disappearing Divide between Work Life and Retirement, found that the majority of Americans over the age of 50 plan to work well past the traditional retirement age. The second survey, Retirement Planning in America: Anxiety, Inequality, and the Role of Social Security, focuses on attitudes and planning behavior around retirement. Data from another AP-NORC Center study, America’s Lower Wage Workforce: Employer and Employee Perspectives, is being used by a number of stakeholders to improve workforce development and education programs and to identify business practices that benefit both workers and employers.
Much as the nature of work has changed over the course of NORC’s 75-year history, so have income, wealth, and poverty. From the end of World War II through the 1970s, the gap between the nation’s richest and poorest steadily narrowed. That trend then reversed itself. Today, issues of wealth, poverty, and inequality have become topics of increasingly heated debate across the political spectrum. As government officials and other stakeholders attempt to better understand the dynamics of wealth and poverty and develop policies that respond to the challenges of a changing economy, NORC’s research, which has addressed a broad range of income levels, has been a primary source of objective, nonpartisan data on Americans’ economic well-being.

Exploring the Dynamics of Wealth, Poverty, and Inequality

The 1958 Skid Row Study is a dramatic example of the lengths to which NORC researchers will go to collect thorough and reliable data in a way that respects the needs and sensibilities of the subjects being studied. A team of researchers led by sociologists from the University of Chicago lived incognito for several days among the residents of Chicago’s skid row. The data they collected in this first-of-a-kind study shed valuable light on the intersections of age, poverty, substance abuse, and mental illness.

By the 1980s, the nature of urban poverty had begun to change, with many of the nation’s homeless living on the streets rather than in skid row housing, much of which had been razed. For the 1985 Chicago Homeless Study, a team of investigators designed a modified area probability study that allowed researchers to produce an unbiased sample of the truly “street homeless,” as well as those with some forms of shelter. They took to the streets of Chicago to count and interview the city’s homeless in the sheltered spaces that individuals had found and used as places to sleep. Interviews were conducted under bridges, in alleys, and in doorways. Insights from both studies continue to inform how cities across the country develop policies to address homelessness.
The policymakers and agencies working to improve the economic welfare of poor families need accurate measures of poverty in order to develop the most effective interventions and deploy their resources efficiently. To meet that need, NORC is evaluating and suggesting refinements to the U.S. Census Bureau’s new Supplemental Poverty Measure. Designed in 2010 to more accurately reflect the household incomes of the U.S. working poor—whose finances are often further depleted by work-related, non-discretionary costs such as child care, transportation, and taxes—the new measure augments the official poverty measure that has been in place since the 1960s.

Developing Reliable Measures of Poverty

Since 1992, NORC has conducted the triennial Survey of Consumer Finances (SCF)—the Federal Reserve Board’s main source of information on the financial state of American households. The survey includes 6,500 participants from across the income spectrum and covers topics ranging from debt and savings to taxes and charitable giving. The Federal Reserve uses SCF data to help inform tax and monetary policy and consumer protection laws, while journalists and social scientists use the data for independent research into a variety of topics related to the economic health of the nation.

Assessing the Financial State of American Households

While the views of economically successful Americans are often discussed in the media, they have actually received little in the way of rigorous scholarly study. The Survey of Economically Successful Americans (SES), piloted in 2010, examines how successful Americans view the challenges facing the country and compare their positions on taxes, spending, and government regulations, as well as market-based and philanthropic solutions to social problems.

Tracking the Opinions of Economically Successful Americans
As the national and global economies have grown increasingly complex and interconnected, so have the various markets in which American goods and services are rendered. Businesses and governments alike need to clearly understand the social, economic, and political trends that influence those markets so that they can make sound policy and investment decisions. NORC’s reputation for innovative data collection and rigorous, unbiased analysis has made it a valued partner to market stakeholders of all kinds.

Keeping Tabs on Energy Consumption

Energy consumption has an important influence on national issues, including security, economic and agricultural policy, and the ongoing debate over climate change. Since NORC’s initial examinations of food and gas rationing during World War II, our researchers have played an integral role in shaping energy consumption and informing energy policy.

Gas prices affect almost every American citizen and a huge swath of American businesses, particularly those in or dependent upon the shipping and transportation industries. NORC’s weekly Metro Gasoline Price and On-Highway Diesel Fuel Price surveys, sponsored by the U.S. Energy Information Administration, provide the most accurate and timely reporting available on national fuel price trends. Businesses rely on the data to create budgets and expense forecasts. Policymakers use it to analyze the impact of new laws and regulations.
Businesses, journalists, policymakers, and concerned citizens rely on a variety of economic measures, including monthly and quarterly reports on everything from housing starts and job creation to retail sales and gross domestic product. The extensive expertise of NORC economists and the foundational data provided by NORC’s General Social Survey, the National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth, and other NORC studies allow us to provide context and nuance to conversations about the state of the national and global economies that frustrate measures often lack. NORC’s research capacity is especially valuable, as what businesses and consumers think about the economy can have as much influence on spending, investment, and other economic activity as do salaries, savings, and prices.
The perpetual debates around education that argue over what should be taught, who should teach it, and how it should be paid for testify to education’s fundamental importance to national success. When the nation needed to integrate World War II veterans back into the economy, it turned to the GI Bill. In response to the Soviet launch of Sputnik, Congress passed the National Defense Education Act to support education in scientific and technical fields. In the 1960s and early 1970s, education was an integral tool for social change, with a series of acts meant to guarantee equal access to education regardless of race, gender, or disability. Today, through both public and private funding, Americans invest more than a trillion dollars a year in primary, secondary, and higher education. Throughout that history, NORC has been an invaluable resource, providing the data, analysis, and program expertise that educators and policymakers rely on to ensure the accessibility and quality of education throughout a learner’s lifecycle.

IDENTIFYING EFFECTIVE PATHS TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Begun in 1980, High School and Beyond: A National Longitudinal Study of High School Sophomores and Seniors (HS&B) was the first NORC study to begin in students’ sophomores year and follow them into young adulthood. Follow-up studies were conducted throughout the 1980s as well as in 1990 as students progressed from high school through the early stages of their adult life. In 2014, NCES and the University of Texas contacted the reconstituted cohort members again, to learn more about their lives in the years since the last survey. NORC conducted a series of surveys to collect information on students’ educational, occupational, and family experiences, drawing from the respondents’ high school experiences, college, and work life.

The National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 surveyed a nationally representative sample of eighth-graders on topics including school, work, and home experiences; educational resources and support; the role of parents and peers in their educations; their educational and occupational aspirations; and related student perceptions. NCES conducted follow-ups in 1990, 1992, 1994, and 2000. NORC also conducted a follow-up study in 2012, which included additional topics such as wage and earnings information, the allocation of resources within households, including the flows of money and time from the respondents to their children, and special attention to divorced noncustodial parents.

These seminal studies laid the foundation for much of the longitudinal education research conducted today, and the data they provide continue to inform conversations in the assessment and future outcomes of student performance.
One of the best ways to keep the United States competitive in the innovative industries supported by science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) is to encourage more students—particularly women and minorities—to enter STEM fields. NORC has been a pioneer in tracking STEM students, their career outcomes, and the economic and educational policy decisions that influence their success. NORC also hosts the National Science Foundation’s Center for Advancing Research and Communication in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics, which supports education research in these important fields.

Two surveys that NORC conducts for the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health provide a benchmark for our understanding of who is pursuing careers in STEM research and their career trajectories. The Survey of Earned Doctorates (SED), which NORC conducted for 18 years beginning in 1997, is an annual census of all new research doctorate recipients in the United States. The SED has been especially useful in tracking trends in the entrance of women and underrepresented minorities into STEM research fields. The Survey of Doctorate Recipients (SDR) is the only source of data on the career outcomes of people who earned doctorate degrees in science, engineering, or health-related fields from U.S. academic institutions. The SDR has run biennially since 1973 and has been conducted continuously by NORC since 2002.

In 2015, NORC conducted a pilot project for the National Science Foundation to better understand why young women who choose to major in computer science are not persisting to degree completion. Over a period of two weeks, NORC used a smartphone app to send survey questions to male and female computer science majors at two leading research universities. Early review of the data suggested that among the many dynamics at play in this phenomenon are important personal commitments to the field.
To encourage more students—especially women and minorities—to pursue advanced STEM degrees, the National Science Foundation launched the Graduate Research Fellowship Program, which awards approximately 2,000 fellowships annually for students who are pursuing research-focused master’s and doctoral degrees at accredited U.S. institutions. NORC’s evaluation report of the program, released in 2014, found that fellowship recipients were more likely than their peers to complete a PhD within 10 years. They also published more frequently and received more research grants.

One of the biggest challenges of assessing student performance in math and science at the K-12 level is reconciling differences in the way individual states track student progress. Responding to a request from Congress, the National Science Foundation asked NORC and other research organizations to help them develop improved indicators for measuring and tracking progress in math and science performance. With the help of a panel of national experts, NORC is designing and developing a tool to measure and report on assessment policy information by state. An enhanced tool and reporting platform will help educators, leaders, and policymakers at the national, state, and local levels better understand the most effective ways to measure student performance and determine the degree to which assessment methods are aligned to state and national content standards.

Assessing Mathematics and Science Achievement in K-12 Education
Few areas of human endeavor have been subject to more attempts at reform than education. That dynamic is a testament to both the passion of all stakeholders to “get education right,” as well as the myriad challenges of providing equal educational opportunities to all children in a country as socially, economically, and politically diverse as the United States. The depth of NORC’s expertise in the education arena makes it a key participant in the evolution of education, providing the data and analysis to develop innovative new programs and the assessment tools needed to measure their impact.

Improving Education through Evaluation and Innovation

Digital and sensor technologies have become an integral part of how we work, shop, socialize, and—increasingly—how we learn. NORC has been at the forefront of the development and evaluation of technology as both learning and assessment tools in the home and in the classroom. To help researchers more accurately assess the amount of time parents spend reading to their children, NORC has prototyped two programmable sensor devices that measure the time a book is open, closed, and moved, all of which are proxies for the time parents and children spent reading.

In partnership with the University of Chicago Medicine, NORC developed an innovative “word pedometer,” called LENA that provides feedback to parents on the number of new words their young children encounter and allows them to set and monitor personal goals. NORC used the pedometer in its evaluation of Thirty Million Words®, a 12-week in-home intervention that harnesses multimedia technology to teach parents of one-year-old children about language development and gives them evidence-based techniques for enhancing their children’s language skills. The program is based on research that shows low-income children are exposed to as many as 30 million fewer words than their upper-income peers by the time they reach kindergarten. This word gap puts them at a significant academic disadvantage that can persist and even deepen in later grades.

NORC is also conducting psychometric evaluations of assessment tools developed by ABCmouse.com, one of the nation’s largest providers of online educational enrichment programs for children age two to six. NORC researchers are conducting the analysis via a series of rolling evaluations. The insights each evaluation will reveal will inform refinements to the site’s current programming, as well as future versions of the assessment. ABCmouse.com’s subscriber base constitutes a ready-made panel of millions of users. Each iteration of the evaluation will generate tens of thousands of responses, creating a uniquely large and detailed body of data while measuring the effectiveness of early childhood enrichment programming used by a significant percentage of the nation’s children.

Pioneering the Use of Technology in Learning Assessment

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There is a growing consensus among education specialists and policymakers that high-quality early childhood education enhances academic success and improves social and economic outcomes. NORC is a go-to partner for school systems, nongovernmental organizations, and other stakeholders looking to develop and evaluate early childhood learning strategies.

When the Kenneth Rainin Foundation committed itself to ensuring that all school children in Oakland, California, were reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade, it turned to NORC to conduct a literature review of existing early reading programs and establish in-home surveys of families in Oakland’s diverse neighborhoods. Informed by this research, NORC is recommending reading interventions and adaptations that meet the needs of Oakland families. In tandem, NORC and Oaknine have established the Early Childhood Research and Practice Collaborative, which will conduct quick, responsive, small-scale research studies and promptly disseminate the results of that research to researchers, practitioners, and other stakeholders.

Focused on providing actionable insights to teachers, as part of the Getting on Track for Early School Success project, NORC developed and piloted a variety of tools with the goal of creating statistically reliable K–3 literacy and mathematics assessments. The assessments provided preschool teachers with data that can advance individual, small-group, and whole-class instruction. The assessments also revealed the core, coherent system of instruction NORC developed for math and language, which enables children to achieve social, ethical, and linguistic backgrounds to attain high levels of academic achievement by third grade.

Providers of early childhood care and education must act as the gateway for those low-income families to continue their education and develop careers. The June 1961, College Graduating Class examined how and why high school students and college students chose their paths of college, and the sources of guidance available to them. The researchers interviewed 8,700 Illinois high school students about their college choice and the impact of those choices for more than 50 years. In 1958, as part of the Choosing a College project, NORC researchers interviewed thousands of high school students about the factors that might lead them to go to college, their perceptions of a college’s value, and the sources of guidance available to them. The researchers compared the students’ ideal colleges with the schools they actually attended and attended, laying the groundwork for future studies that measured college choice as a market for success after high school. The Plans and Experiences of the June 1961 College Graduating Class examined how high school students and college students chose their paths of study. It provided the groundwork for more than 50 years of longitudinal data to study change at the individual level. In partnership with the University of Virginia and funded by America Achieves, NORC is conducting College Point—a longitudinal evaluation of a virtual advising program aimed at helping low-income high school students as they transition from high school to college. The study tracks the impact of virtual advising on high school students and concludes this fall. Informed by their work, researchers have developed innovative uses of Short Message Service technology, using texting to reach this important young adult population. 

### Choosing a College

The ballooning student debt crisis and the increasing pressure students feel to choose—angst-laden—"the right" college have become important contemporary issues for families and educators. But NORC has been exploring the factors influencing college choice and the impact of those choices for more than 50 years. In 1958, as part of the Choosing a College project, NORC researchers interviewed thousands of high school students about the factors that might lead them to go to college, their perceptions of a college’s value, and the sources of guidance available to them. The researchers compared the students’ ideal colleges with the schools they actually attended and attended, laying the groundwork for future studies that measured college choice as a market for success after high school. The Plans and Experiences of the June 1961 College Graduating Class examined how high school students and college students chose their paths of study. It provided the groundwork for more than 50 years of longitudinal data to study change at the individual level. In partnership with the University of Virginia and funded by America Achieves, NORC is conducting College Point—a longitudinal evaluation of a virtual advising program aimed at helping low-income high school students as they transition from high school to college. The study tracks the impact of virtual advising on high school students and concludes this fall. Informed by their work, researchers have developed innovative uses of Short Message Service technology, using texting to reach this important young adult population.
Global development takes many forms—from individual governments launching programs to improve the health, economic, and educational outcomes of its citizens to nongovernmental organizations efforts to strengthen civil society and fight poverty and disease. In 2014, the world’s richest nations spent $135 billion on development assistance. Development aid is an important foreign policy tool. Improving health and promoting economic and educational opportunity can enhance political stability and make it easier to combat terrorism, drug trafficking, and other societalills. NORC researchers have extensive expertise in areas such as education, health care, and economic development with a finely tuned cultural literacy that comes from decades of international experience. That experience includes a close partnership with the United States Agency for International Development and a wide range of international aid agencies that turn to NORC to understand the impact their projects are having on target populations, and to hone in on what does and does not work among the myriad interventions being implemented in the development field.

NORC has also deployed data gathering and public outreach methods to help international aid agencies determine and improve the electoral process. In Peru, NORC partnered with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the University of Wisconsin to evaluate a program to combat the electoral influence of money from drug traffickers and other illegal sources. The program included a number of public outreach activities designed to educate voters about the mechanisms and negative impacts of political corruption.

NORC has also conducted a number of public outreach programs to educate voters about the mechanisms and negative impacts of political corruption. For example, NORC conducted a series of surveys in four countries—Egypt, Nepal, Peru, and the Philippines—to evaluate the extent of political influence and the perceived fairness of elections. In Peru, NORC partnered with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the University of Wisconsin to evaluate a program to combat the electoral influence of money from drug traffickers and other illegal sources. The program included a number of public outreach activities designed to educate voters about the mechanisms and negative impacts of political corruption. NORC has also conducted a number of surveys in four countries—Egypt, Nepal, Peru, and the Philippines—to evaluate the extent of political influence and the perceived fairness of elections. In Peru, NORC partnered with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the University of Wisconsin to evaluate a program to combat the electoral influence of money from drug traffickers and other illegal sources. The program included a number of public outreach activities designed to educate voters about the mechanisms and negative impacts of political corruption.

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HELPING TO STRENGTHEN DEMOCRACIES AND CIVIL SOCIETY

Few areas of international development are as challenging as democracy and governance. Countries emerging from war or lacking the institutional or educational systems to create strong, transparent, and accountable governments face a host of problems—political instability, corruption, and threats to human rights. Norc has conducted surveys in many countries to study political attitudes and trends and to inform the construction of programs to combat political corruption, address threats to democratic governance, and enhance transparency. Some of these projects have focused on specific issues like trafficking, which is one of the most pressing challenges facing the international community today. NORC has conducted surveys in many countries to study political attitudes and trends and to inform the construction of programs to combat political corruption, address threats to democratic governance, and enhance transparency. Some of these projects have focused on specific issues like trafficking, which is one of the most pressing challenges facing the international community today.

To get a better understanding of Russian public opinion overall it is essential to study what differentiates the “western” and “eastern” segments of the electorate. NORC conducted the first nationwide survey of Russian attitudes about the United States and the Cold War in 1989. The study included more than 1,000 respondents in each of 15 geographic regions that reflect Russia’s ethnic, political, and economic subgroups. Data collection was complicated by flooding and an ethnic conflict in the Chechen Republic of Ichkeria, which left more than 500,000 refugees in need of assistance. NORC has also deployed data gathering and public outreach methods to help international aid agencies determine and improve the electoral process. In Peru, NORC partnered with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the University of Wisconsin to evaluate a program to combat the electoral influence of money from drug traffickers and other illegal sources. The program included a number of public outreach activities designed to educate voters about the mechanisms and negative impacts of political corruption. NORC has also conducted a series of surveys in four countries—Egypt, Nepal, Peru, and the Philippines—to evaluate the extent of political influence and the perceived fairness of elections. In Peru, NORC partnered with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the University of Wisconsin to evaluate a program to combat the electoral influence of money from drug traffickers and other illegal sources. The program included a number of public outreach activities designed to educate voters about the mechanisms and negative impacts of political corruption. NORC has also conducted a series of surveys in four countries—Egypt, Nepal, Peru, and the Philippines—to evaluate the extent of political influence and the perceived fairness of elections. In Peru, NORC partnered with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the University of Wisconsin to evaluate a program to combat the electoral influence of money from drug traffickers and other illegal sources. The program included a number of public outreach activities designed to educate voters about the mechanisms and negative impacts of political corruption. NORC has also conducted a series of surveys in four countries—Egypt, Nepal, Peru, and the Philippines—to evaluate the extent of political influence and the perceived fairness of elections. In Peru, NORC partnered with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the University of Wisconsin to evaluate a program to combat the electoral influence of money from drug traffickers and other illegal sources. The program included a number of public outreach activities designed to educate voters about the mechanisms and negative impacts of political corruption.
Donor governments and nongovernmental organizations have often emphasized improving education and social well-being as a means of fueling broader social and economic development. Improved educational outcomes in particular have been linked to greater political stability and more vibrant economic activity. NORC researchers have evaluated, as well as helped design and conduct, a variety of global education and community development programs, addressing concerns like curriculum development and child welfare.

Focusing on Children, Families, and Communities

Much of the violence after Kenya’s 2007 presidential election was driven by young people whose political and economic marginalization was exacerbated by interethnic tensions. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) responded with Yes, You Can! (YYC), a program to improve relationships among ethnic groups by organizing young people into multiethnic community groups. NORC’s evaluation of the program included an innovative self-efficacy scale that measured self-esteem and empowerment in cross-cultural settings. The evaluation found that YYC was important in fostering civic engagement, promoting more informed political views, and facilitating engagement with political leaders. USAID used the evaluation findings to develop follow-up programming in Kenya.

In 2002, the State of Qatar charged its Supreme Education Council with the creation of a reformed K-12 education system that would better prepare its young people to compete in the 21st century. To help achieve this, NORC designed and implemented systems to gather, organize, and analyze educational data from a wide range of sources, including surveys with teachers and principals and databases containing student test scores. NORC also prepared Qatari officials to take over the data collection and analysis once the new procedures had been established.
NORC has greatly expanded its portfolio of international projects related to education and recently launched impact evaluations of USAID-funded early-grade reading programs in Ethiopia, South Africa, Uganda, and Zambia, where conflict affects the daily lives of families. Uganda’s literacy interventions focus on curriculum, instructional materials, and teacher training. The interventions in Ethiopia, Zambia, and South Africa emphasize community and parental involvement in improving children’s reading. For all of these programs, NORC is using randomized controlled trial designs to evaluate the impact on reading skills and other intermediate outcomes. NORC is also initiating a new evaluation in Mali to assess the impact of an accelerated education program on access to education for vulnerable students who have dropped out of school because of conflict and security concerns. NORC will use this opportunity to test tools and methodologies that it will allow it to conduct evaluations and collect associated data safely in insecure environments. In 2016, NORC completed an impact evaluation of a five-year pilot project designed to improve reading and math skills in 122 schools in the former Soviet state of Georgia. The program provided in-service training and ongoing support for teachers and principals, including student assessment tools.
EVALUATING INVESTMENTS IN AGRICULTURE AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Agriculture is a primary source of revenue in many developing countries and a main source of the world’s poor. Investment in infrastructure, energy, communication, and sanitation infrastructure is an important development tool that can drive economic growth and improve productivity and income and improve public health. NORC’s work in agriculture and infrastructure has included the evaluation and design of a variety of programs addressing water treatment, livestock management, microfinancing, and a host of other agriculture and infrastructure needs.

For the German development bank DfD and international agency CGI, NORC has evaluated programs to help farmers, coffee, and cotton farmers become more productive and to grow their crops in a more sustainable fashion. For the World Bank Group’s International Finance Corporation, NORC is evaluating programs that provide training, financing, and supply chain improvements to cashew, coffee, and cocoa farmers. NORC’s work includes evaluating and designing the impact of MCC-funded road improvements on the incomes of farmers in Ghana.

In the Republic of Georgia and Honduras, NORC determined the impact of investments in river transport are reducing truck traffic and vehicle emissions, and traffic flows over older harbor bridges. In Bangladesh, NORC is evaluating the extent to which FMO-financed investments in road transport are reducing truck traffic and improving road safety.

Microfinancing—or loaning small sums of money to farmers and entrepreneurs in developing countries to start or grow their enterprises—has been a topic in the development community for many years. Unfortunately, there have been few rigorous impact evaluations to validate their effectiveness. Anecdotal evidence suggests that because most microfinancing recipients are in an economically precarious state, money often goes to pay for emergency medical care or to other crises rather than for the or business they were meant to start. NORC is collecting data on an innovative approach to microfinancing being conducted by Opportunity International that loans seed and fertilizer rather than cash to farmers in Ghana.
The history of health care in America has been a story of change. New drugs, surgical techniques, medical devices, and screening procedures have dramatically improved outcomes for many patients and driven many new businesses into the sector. Coupled with this innovation has been a growing understanding of the impact of income, ethnicity, and other socioeconomic factors on individual health and public health systems. This evolution has not been inexpensive. In 1950, shortly after NORC’s founding, health care expenditures accounted for 4.6 percent of the gross domestic product—those expenditures now account for more than 17 percent. The rise of employment-based medical insurance, the creation of Medicare and Medicaid, and the passage of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act have changed how we pay for care, who has access to what types of services, and the quality of that care. NORC has been an integral resource in this evolution—first with in-person interviews and increasingly effective, accessible, and affordable.

Shifting the focus from data and paperwork to digital health care systems work. NORC is assisting the Maine Health Data OSC with the information it needs to better understand health care delivery and financing reform initiatives rely on secure exchange of clinical data across provider settings, findings from these evaluations offer important lessons for improving health care services in the United States.

NORC’s comprehensive, data-driven strategy for program evaluation offers important lessons for improving health care services in the United States.
Men and women, children and adults, rich and poor, all have different health needs and outcomes. Incidence of chronic and infectious diseases—and even responses to different treatments—also vary by race, ethnicity, geography, and environment. Understanding how differences in the human condition and life circumstances influence our health is crucial to making sound policy and clinical decisions, as well as informing personal choices.

NORC has been a pioneer in surveying disparate and often difficult-to-reach populations. Our researchers constantly find new and innovative ways to overcome cultural, language, and economic barriers to gather reliable data on a variety of health issues, including access to care, environmental factors that influence health, and opinions about the health care system.

Improving Health Equity across Disparate Populations

Younger black men who have sex with men have the highest rate of new HIV infection of any risk group despite evidence that their individual-level risk practices are similar to or even lower than their white counterparts. As part of a study of the social and sexual network dynamics in this vulnerable population, NORC designed a Facebook app that, with participants’ permission, directly gathered information on their Facebook friends. This rich data on multiple overlapping social networks is being used to gain insights into the social structural components of HIV risk and inform public health prevention efforts to reduce and eventually eliminate HIV.

In 1984, just one year after the AIDS retrovirus was identified, NORC conducted the Needs Assessment of Persons with AIDS in northern New Jersey, which explored everything from the quality and availability of care to the impact the disease had on relationships. Results of the study helped the New Jersey State Department of Health prioritize services for AIDS patients and their caregivers. In 1994, NORC partnered with the RAND Corporation to launch the HIV Cost and Services Utilization Study, the largest, most comprehensive study ever undertaken on health care for persons infected with HIV.

Analyzing the Health Care Needs of HIV/AIDS Patients

Preparing for the Next Methods

Young Black Men Who Have Sex with Men

Displaying Network Data
Amid public concern over reports of widespread drug use by U.S. soldiers in Vietnam, NORC helped lead the Vietnam Veterans Drug Interview Survey. A random sampling of army enlistees were surveyed just before deployment and again three years later. The study provided previously unavailable data about the extent and persistence of drug use among returnees and informed the planning of support services.

Measuring Drug Use among Vietnam War Veterans

With funding from the National Institute on Drug Abuse, NORC investigated the role that neighborhood environment and social circles play in maternal smoking and alcohol consumption from preconception to the child’s birth and early childhood. Efforts to provide pregnant women with tobacco and alcohol prevention and cessation resources appear to be more effective when focused on individual characteristics, rather than neighborhood characteristics or measures of social integration or support.

Exploring the Social Ecology of Maternal Substance Abuse

At the turn of the 21st century, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention tapped NORC to conduct a series of annual surveys in communities across the nation for the Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program, which helps communities reduce health disparities among racial and ethnic minority groups. The REACH surveys provided community-based programs, researchers, and policymakers with rich data to identify and evaluate evidence-based health interventions.

Identifying Health Disparities

NORC’s research into rural health issues began with the 1952 Rural Health Conditions Survey. In 2003, the Walsh Center for Rural Health Analysis joined NORC, along with a team of talented researchers and analysts with special expertise in the needs of rural patients and the health care providers, health departments, and other entities attempting to meet those needs. Among its many initiatives, the Walsh Center researches the implications of health reform on rural providers, communities, and residents; explores inequities in rural health care access andfocused on the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy; helps the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services design new models of integrated, coordinated care at the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy; helps the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services.

Monitoring Rural Health

Data and insights from Walsh Center projects drive refinements to community-based grant programs designed to improve health care access and outcomes in rural areas.
Promoting the Screening and Prevention of Disease

No matter how one becomes sick—an infectious agent, a genetic predisposition, a response to an environmental factor—early screening and treatment typically allow for the most effective and cost-efficient means of treating physical and mental illness. For much of its history, NORC has been monitoring Americans’ health, keeping tabs on attitudes about various health issues and treatments, and assessing the effectiveness of screening, prevention, and outreach measures. These efforts have informed health policy and produced an extensive knowledge base for future public health research.

Creating a Baseline Understanding of Americans’ Health

In the 1950s, NORC led the fieldwork and data analysis for the National Commission on Chronic Illness’s field study on the prevalence of chronic illness in the community. The research was the first to compare individuals’ self-reported health conditions with the clinical findings of their physicians. The impact and effectiveness of the study elevated the standing of social science research within the medical and epidemiological communities.

Also during the 1950s, NORC conducted the Public Understanding of Mental Health Problems surveys, the first major study of American attitudes toward people with mental illness. The surveys, which included psychiatric case studies within the questionnaire, provided needed social and cultural information that policymakers and community health practitioners could use to create programs for helping people with mental illness. The data collected in this study are still used as a baseline for comparison in studies being conducted today. The General Social Survey carried this tradition forward with a series of studies on mental health stigma from 1985 to 2016, and in 2006 coordinated the Stigma in Global Context: Mental Health Study in the United States and 16 other countries.

More recently, NORC has helped the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services develop, implement, and evaluate Healthy People 2020, this decade’s set of objectives for improving the health of all Americans. NORC’s research has been integral to establishing the framework and process for Healthy People 2020 and understanding how the initiative drives stakeholder action.
The hepatitis C virus (HCV) is a chronic infection of the liver that, when left untreated, leads to liver failure or cancer in 30 to 40 percent of those infected. Newly developed treatments can eliminate the virus in most infected patients, but the treatments are most effective if they are administered before patients develop symptoms. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 50 to 75 percent of Americans with HCV are unaware of their infection. To improve the care of virus identification, NORC developed and led the Birth-Cohort Evaluation to Advance Screening and Testing for Hepatitis C, a randomized control trial that compared the current standard of testing and care to a new intervention recommended by the CDC that includes the testing of all Americans born between 1945 and 1965. Previous NORC research estimated that a conservative implementation of the new birth-cohort testing followed by treatment could prevent more than 320,000 deaths.

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Launched by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 1994 and administered by NORC since 2005, the National Immunization Surveys (NIS) are considered the gold standard for public health information on vaccination rates and a critical contributor to the prevention of childhood diseases. The CDC and local and state health agencies use the data to create the potential for disease outbreaks at the community level and allocate resources for the Vaccines for Children Program, which ensures that all children in the United States have access to vaccinations regardless of financial status. NORC also conducted a series of surveys designed to report real-time rates of influenza vaccination during the 2009 H1N1 pandemic, which allowed NORC to leverage its rapid response resources to complete 38,000 household interviews in just 14 days.
For almost 75 years, NORC has been tapping into the public consciousness to provide government agencies and other organizations with the data and insights needed to serve citizens in a world of accelerating change. And while NORC’s research capabilities have grown to include methods of inquiry beyond surveying public opinion, finding out what people think and examining how their opinions shape their behavior is still critical to what NORC does and what decision-makers need. Through the General Social Survey, NORC’s largest and longest-running opinion survey, we have traced the evolution of American views on employment and work, civil liberties, spending priorities, and a host of other issues. In 1985, we helped found the International Social Survey Program, which gathers public opinion data from 60 countries around the world. To help citizens, policymakers, and the media that serve them stay abreast of public attitudes and perceptions on emerging social and political issues, as well as to advance NORC’s commitment to disseminating research, we partnered with The Associated Press to create the groundbreaking AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

In the 1950s, concerned that rising anti-communist sentiment might be undermining the public’s support for civil liberties, sociologist Samuel Stouffer of Harvard University and a team of NORC researchers led what is widely considered the most comprehensive survey of American attitudes toward communism and civil liberties. Fast forward to 2011. The American populace was grappling with longstanding fears about the threat of terrorism, even as some were raising concerns about the government’s growing capacity to conduct digital surveillance. The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research explored those issues in Civil Liberties and Security, a landmark study of how the September 11 attacks changed American attitudes about their privacy and safety.

In 1996, NORC provided survey support for the Public Broadcasting Service’s National Issues Convention. The project included a “deliberative poll” in which a cross-section of American voters were surveyed twice: once before and once after three days of small-group conversations with each other, policy experts, and presidential candidates. Respondents’ attitudes toward several topics shifted notably after the discussions, including a 17 percent increase in those agreeing strongly that the nation should cooperate militarily with other nations to deal with trouble spots around the world. The convention was called “a microcosm of the whole country changing its mind.”

In its earliest work for the Office of Facts and Figures and later the Office for War Information, NORC was tasked with monitoring civilian morale, assessing the effects of wartime regulations, and collecting data on public attitudes toward the war. And in 1942 NORC conducted one of the first surveys on race relations, asking white participants about their awareness of African-Americans’ participation in the war effort and asking black participants about how they best could contribute to the effort. In 1943, NORC-trained interviewers conducted telephone and face-to-face interviews for an American national survey in which they were held. Since then, assessing the effects of these wartime public opinion and public policy has been at the heart of much of NORC’s work, and the focus of one of its longest-running research centers, the Center for the Study of Politic and Society. The Center houses the General Social Survey, which since 1972 has tracked public opinion and government spending across a wide range of programs.

Keeping government in touch with the citizenry

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Explorations into the multifaceted issues surrounding crime and violence make up one of the deepest and most varied areas of NORC’s research portfolio. NORC has assembled a group of talented researchers whose areas of expertise include law enforcement, crime prevention, courts and sentencing, prisoners and ex-offenders, drug markets, and intimate partner violence. They have used that expertise to survey prosecutors about their policies and practices, to assess the impact of programs to reintegrate ex-offenders into society, and to examine the dynamics of methamphetamine markets, among many other initiatives.

Pursuing the Causes and Effects of Crime and Violence

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Dating violence is a significant problem among youth, and many first experience abuse even before middle school. Once victimized, teens are significantly more likely to experience intimate partner violence as adults. To address this problem, NORC is leading several studies that explore the causes of teen dating violence and effective intervention methods. In a study funded by the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), NORC found that low-cost interventions like Shifting Boundaries—which uses antiviolence posters, heightened security, and guided student mapping of violent spots on school grounds, and school-based restraining orders—can reduce teen dating violence by about 50 percent.

Also for the NIJ, NORC conducts the National Survey of Teen Relationships and Intimate Violence (STRiV), a cross-sectional study of both the prevalence of teen dating violence and the characteristics that make young people more likely to become victims or perpetrators. The nationally representative STRiV data indicates that teen dating violence rates are the same across household income, geographic region, ethnicity, and other demographic variables. It also suggests that girls perpetrate dating violence at the same rate as boys.

NORC is also evaluating the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Dating Matters program, which focuses on evidence-based programming and partnerships among schools, public health agencies, and community organizations to combat teen dating violence in high-risk urban communities.
The prevalence of digital communications and social media platforms in the lives of teens and young adults raises questions about young people’s online behavior and whether they are emboldened to say hurtful things online that they would never say face-to-face. To explore this issue in more depth, The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research partnered with MTV and asked more than 1,300 young people between the ages of 14 and 24 about their experiences with and attitudes toward digital abuse and bullying. The survey found that online bullying has declined, young people are making better digital decisions, and more are seeking help from their families when they do encounter abusive online behavior.

Tracking Online Bullying

Beginning in 2006, NORC began surveying former prison inmates about the experience of sexual victimization while incarcerated. NORC developed a survey instrument that used touch-screen technology, supported by recorded questions audible only to the respondent, to ease respondent concerns on this highly sensitive subject.

Surveying Prison Inmates on Sexual Victimization

Conducted in 2007 on behalf of the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), NORC’s Finding Victims of Human Trafficking research collected data on the trafficking of women and children by the illegal commercial sex industry. In NORC interviews with trafficking victims and criminal justice officials, researchers uncovered types of victimization not often reported to police and revealed deficiencies in state’s abilities to distinguish among range of trafficking activities. In 2014, NORC developers and data scientists worked with the DOJ to develop software that scrapes and analyzes data from traffickers’ public social media posts. The software allows law enforcement officials to identify and geolocate individual posters and responders and track their relationships across jurisdictions.

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In a groundbreaking 2007 study sponsored by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, NORC researchers surveyed police agencies in every state and conducted in-depth interviews with narcotics detectives, narcotics wholesalers and dealers, drug treatment and prevention workers, family service providers, and others whose lives intersect with the methamphetamine industry in more than 280 cities and towns across the United States. This study found the meth industry to be a complex transnational business. At one extreme, meth is produced in small batches for use and sale to just a few people. At the other, it is a major business operated by international cartels. But regardless of those two extremes of production, the retail sale of meth is still driven by personal relationships, with the vast majority of buyers getting the drug from someone they know. The study also found that attempts to regulate ingredients used in meth production created huge opportunities for international cartels that could sour the ingredients overseas.
Building socially cohesive, economically vibrant communities and driving sustainable urban development are concerns for emerging and industrialized nations alike. Data gathered and interpreted by NORC researchers help governments and nongovernmental agencies around the world enhance their community development policies and initiatives.

In 2002, NORC partnered with the Annie E. Casey Foundation to evaluate Making Connections, an initiative to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children and their families in 10 poor urban communities. The study identified the characteristics—including mobility, social capital, and networks, and the availability and utilization of services—that most effectively contributed to individual and community success. Results have been used by community groups, government agencies, and other stakeholders in developing policies and programs related to poverty and family well-being.

Between 2002 and 2011, as part of the city of Chicago’s Plan for Transformation, NORC interviewed residents, at four points in time, who had relocated from dilapidated public housing to private market housing, new mixed-income housing, or rehabilitated public housing. The survey findings informed the Chicago Housing Authority’s broader efforts to transform public housing.

Working with a variety of partners, NORC has also assessed housing needs in the tribal areas of the United States and studied the impact that social mobility, economic opportunity, and other factors have on early childhood development. In addition, NORC has conducted impact evaluations on rural and urban housing initiatives and other community development programs in Rwanda, Azerbaijan, and a host of other countries.

MEASURING PUBLIC RESPONSE TO CRISIS AND TRAGEDY

One of the primary functions of government is keeping the public safe. Much of the planning required to fulfill that function is informed by predictions of how the public will respond when they feel threatened. Since its earliest days, NORC has been a leader in disaster and resilience-related research and has provided a variety of government agencies and relief organizations with the data and insights they need to respond more effectively.

NORC conducted its first disaster- and resilience-related survey in 1952 when the U.S. Army asked NORC to study human responses to events such as plane crashes, earthquakes, mine explosions, and tornadoes. NORC also surveyed public anxiety in the height of the Cuban Missile Crisis and conducted more than 1,300 interviews within a week of the Kennedy assassination. The U.S. Army asked NORC to help understand how the population might react to a national disaster.

Two weeks after the 9/11 attacks, NORC conducted a study of its social, psychological, and political impact on the American public. More recent studies include an evaluation of the American Red Cross Community Resilience Pilot Project, an assessment of hospital infrastructure, and several projects conducted by the Walsh Center for Rural Health Analysis, including predictions of the evacuation routes people would most likely use in the event of a disaster and the impact an influx of survivors might have on the communities to which they relocate.

In 2013, The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research surveyed the residents of 12 communities hit by Superstorm Sandy to assess their levels of recovery and identify the social factors that most contributed to or hindered that recovery. The study found that neighborhoods with strong social connections before the storm were more resilient than neighborhoods that lacked those bonds. Further, these social resources especially bolstered lower-income neighborhoods, leading to greater resilience and preparedness should another disaster strike.
The history of NORC is a story marked by innovation. Our collaborations with other research centers and organizations helped establish the modern foundation of social science research. Our advancements in survey design methodologies have allowed researchers to ask increasingly nuanced questions of ever more diverse audiences. And the novel-yet-pragmatic ways in which we have invented, adopted, and adapted technology have made data collection, analysis, and dissemination more rigorous, more cost efficient, more accessible, and more secure.
Research Design

Evolution of Driving the
dominant data collection mode, the interviewer labor force tended to be married women with employed spouses, and response rates were often higher than 90 percent. The three decades between 1960 and 1990 saw a vast increase in the use of telephone surveys, a data collection mode fueled by rapid growth in the installation of landline telephones. The U.S. federal government began monitoring the effects of investments in human and physical infrastructure, and interest in the use of quantitative and qualitative measurements grew. In the early 1990s, the Downsizing and Rebalancing of the federal government spending, and overall economic recession led to major impacts on the field. Changes in the survey environment and technology into the 2000s led to further advances in survey methodology. Survey participants declined, alternative modes of data collection were created, and the telephone was decreased while cell phones proliferated and the advent of big data began—fueled by computerized databases and vast amounts of self-created consumer data. By then, insights from rigorous survey research were valued, and stakeholders wanted even more data gathered and analyzed even faster. This trend continues today. NORC researchers continually adapt and expand research methods to correspond with changes in society, in topic preferences for contact and communication, and incorporate technological advancements that could benefit the field for faster turnaround times and lower costs. NORC has found new ways to develop more geographic detail and lower costs. NORC has used small-area estimation to develop finer geographic detail and benefit the field with faster turnaround times enhanced representation of the U.S. population.

Difficult-to-Reach Populations

Illuminating One of the biggest challenges in conducting rigorous social science research is reaching the members of the NHO in a way consistent with respondents' survey invitations and responses more promptly. In 2011, NORC successfully completed the Survey of Economic Success of Americans and the Commonwealth. The first study of its kind to explore the social and political attitudes of the richest 1 percent of Americans. In 2012, NORC conducted a highly sensitive, multistage, mail-based sweep of approximately 650,000 adults from former Soviet bloc countries to assess the effectiveness of media freedom training programs. Emphasizing the confidentiality of the survey, NORC successfully conducted the survey and the personal security of respondents was not compromised. As their communications preferences have changed, NORC has made extensive use of social media and tools like Skype to keep in touch and keep respondents engaged. The National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth, which NORC has conducted with partners the National Bureau of Economic Research, United States Department of Labor, and the Centers for Disease Control, are skills NORC researchers have ably demonstrated through a number of studies, including an assessment of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian housing needs, and study the coordination of Tribal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Child Welfare Services.
NORC’s use of technology for data collection and analysis has been productive and often exciting blend of the pragmatic and entrepreneurial.

In a novel application of what even then was “old” technology, NORC used telegrams in 1945 to wire questions to interviewers, allowing them to conduct the first ever “quick turnaround” surveys, gathering data within 24–48 hours.

During the 1950s, NORC used punch card counter-sorters to do data tabulation. The process speeded up considerably when NORC purchased one of the first widely available scientific computers, the IBM 1620, in 1961.

The 1970s saw the pervasiveness of telephones in American households rise to 95 percent, and the development of rapid digit dialing and computer-assisted telephone interviewing technology, which NORC used to conduct even more thorough and accurate data collection.

Today, NORC researchers use tablet computers to conduct surveys in remote African villages, and employ environmental sensors and biomeasures to gather data to enhance health studies. They are using social media and text-based chat with interviewers to input data in longitudinal surveys and developing smartphone apps to put a digital spin on the experience, sampling particular and defined “targeted” survey audiences.

As NORC’s innovation hub, NORC Labs is adapting cutting-edge technology to create new tools for its clients and partners. The tools include:

NORC Data Enclave
The Data Enclave enables clients to store, manage, and facilitate the remote analysis of highly sensitive data, unlocking the power of large, complex datasets while preserving data privacy.

AmeriSpeak
AmeriSpeak gives clients access to a representative, probability-based sample of pre-recruited participants who have agreed to take part in regular online and telephone surveys regarding a wide variety of topics.

GSS Data Explorer
NORC’s General Social Survey (GSS) was already one of the nation’s most referenced datasets. The GSS Data Explorer makes that data even more accessible, allowing clients to run their own analysis, and open the data online, share their work with others, and download entire datasets or limited extracts for analysis in any statistical software program.

Innovation in Practice
Advancing the Science of Research
In every corner of NORC and the research industry, change is afoot. But perhaps more important is what has not changed. At NORC, our mission remains clear and consistent—we transform data into knowledge by conducting groundbreaking studies on the critical issues of the day. To succeed, this vision requires a commitment to helping NORC’s staff excel and a focus on the human elements of the subjects we study. It demands that NORC look beyond its traditional portfolio of clients and partners to drive insight and impact in an interconnected world. And it demands an innovative spirit and deeply held commitment to help chart the horizons of modern research.
Acknowledgments