

Insights in Society, Media, and Public Affairs

A nuanced understanding of people’s opinions, beliefs, and behaviors is essential to making informed policy decisions and implementing policies as efficiently and effectively as possible. 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 understand and serve citizens in a world of vast and accelerating change.

Arts and Culture

Cultural institutions and opportunities to participate in arts and culture can provide entertainment and personal fulfillment. They can also enhance civic pride and act as an indicator of a healthy economy. NORC’s Cultural Policy Center is a nationally recognized, joint initiative with the University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy dedicated to researching the most significant issues affecting arts and culture from an interdisciplinary perspective. The center’s varied projects include Cultural Infrastructure in the United States, a comprehensive analysis of museums, theaters, and performing arts centers built between 1994 and 2008; the California Survey of Arts & Cultural Participation, which examined the ways that people participate in a range of arts activities and how they express themselves through artistic means; and the Teaching Artists Research Project, which explored the role of teaching artists in arts education.

Communications and Outreach

NORC conducts comprehensive assessments of the effectiveness of communication and outreach campaigns through formative studies, audience research, message testing, and other methods. NORC was selected to conduct a rigorous evaluation of the communications campaign for the 2010 Census, with applications for the 2020 Census. Working with the California Department of Public Health, NORC has collected data to inform the messaging and assess the ongoing effectiveness of a statewide obesity prevention campaign targeted to low-income families.



Start a conversation.
Contact us.

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NORC at the University of Chicago is an objective, non-partisan research institution that delivers reliable data and rigorous analysis to guide critical programmatic, business, and policy decisions.

Communities, Neighborhoods, and Urban Development

Building socially cohesive, economically vibrant communities and driving sustainable urban development are concerns for developing and developed nations alike. Data gathered and interpreted by NORC researchers help governments and NGOs around the world enhance their community development policies and initiatives. Working with a variety of partners, NORC has examined the social characteristics that helped or hindered neighborhood recovery after Hurricane Sandy, 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. Internationally, NORC has also conducted impact assessments on rural and urban housing initiatives and other community development programs in Rwanda, Azerbaijan, and other countries.

Criminal Justice and Violence

Explorations of the causes of, responses to, and attitudes about crime and violence make up one of the deepest and most varied portions of NORC’s project portfolio. To conduct that work, NORC has assembled a group of talented researchers whose areas of expertise include law enforcement, crime prevention, indigent defense, human trafficking, courts and sentencing, and teen dating violence. Our researchers have surveyed law enforcement agencies and prosecutors about their policies and practices, assessed the impact of programs to re-integrate ex-offenders into society, and examined the dynamics of methamphetamine markets, among many other initiatives. As part of our work with the Bureau of Justice Statistics, NORC developed a software package that converts state criminal history records into nationally standardized codes that clarify the extent to which former prisoners return to criminal activity.

The General Social Survey provides a wealth of data on American attitudes toward the law and law enforcement, and NORC has created a public-use database from the 1997 cohort of the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth data to establish a research agenda to understand the social, economic, and educational factors that influence recidivism rates.

Democracy, Governance, and Citizenship

NORC’s earliest projects included opinion polling during World War II to help policymakers, academics, and government officials better understand public attitudes toward rationing and other elements of the war effort. Since then, examining the intersection between public opinion and public policy has been at the heart of much of NORC’s work and is the focus of our Center for the Study of Politics and Society. The General Social Survey collects public opinion on a host of issues related to democracy, governance, and citizenship, including civil liberties, immigration, and national security. Additionally, NORC conducts evaluations and implementations of international programs designed to promote democracy and civic engagement and reduce election-related violence, among other objectives.

Media and Technology

As digital media and computer technology continue to transform the way people around the world work, shop, communicate, and stay informed and entertained, NORC tracks these changing behaviors and the attitudes people have about them. The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research explores major topics in media and technology, including how millennials get their news and how the explosion of digital media outlets has led to the creation of a “personal news cycle.” The AP-NORC Center also examined American attitudes toward internet surveillance and how people balance privacy concerns with concerns about their safety. MTV and the AP-NORC Center studied teens’ exposure to discriminatory and hurtful language online. NORC also developed a tool that scans, collects, and analyses data from relevant social media sites to help law enforcement identify and combat human sex trafficking.

News and Journalism

Few things are more important to the success of democracy than ensuring that citizens and policymakers have accurate, unbiased information and analysis about the key issues of the day. To meet that need, NORC partnered with The Associated Press to create The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. By combining NORC’s worldwide research capacity with the authority and communications reach of The Associated Press, the AP-NORC Center has been able to conduct fast, in-depth research on a number of issues, including health care costs and coverage, Americans’ opinions about security and online surveillance, and public opinion in Russia. The AP-NORC Center also promotes quality, data-driven journalism through its fellowship program, which provides mid-career journalists with the skill and experience they need to accurately interpret social science research data and report on it in a relevant and compelling way.

Public Opinion and Attitudes

NORC was founded to survey public opinions and attitudes and to gather data on behaviors and societal trends. And while our research scope has grown to include fields as diverse as agriculture, finance, early childhood education, and law enforcement, finding out what people think and examining how these opinions shape their behavior remains an important part of our work. Through the General Social Survey, NORC’s largest and longest running opinion survey, we’ve traced the evolution of American opinions on employment and work, civic liberties, immigration, and a host of other issues.

Since 1985 we’ve also conducted the International Social Survey Program, which gathers public opinion data from 57 countries around the world. The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research conducts public opinion research on important issues and uses the results of its studies to foster data-driven journalism. The AP-NORC Center’s recent studies include surveys of Americans’ opinions about global warming and the cost and accessibility of health care.

Spirituality and Religion

Faith and spirituality are of great importance to many Americans and to people around the world. Examining the diversity of religious belief in the United States and around the world and how those beliefs influence social and political opinions, as well as how faith affects quality of life measures, has become an important avenue of inquiry for NORC. The National Congregations Study documents the work, programs, and activities of America’s religious congregations. The Landmark Spirituality and Health Survey gathered baseline data—including information about subjects’ religious beliefs and practices and biomeasures such as weight and blood pressure—that will allow researchers to examine the connection between faith and health.

Youth Development

The factors that influence youth development exist at the intersection of several of NORC’s deepest areas of expertise: economics, education, and health. Since 1979, NORC’s National Longitudinal Surveys of Youth have been tracking the educational attainment and employment outcomes of the nation’s young people, with a special emphasis on how education, marriage, health, and geography influence professional success and earning power. The Making Connections program examined how family and community characteristics influence youth development. Overseas, NORC has conducted impact evaluations on many programs related to youth development, including Yes Youth Can!, a United States Agency for International Development-funded initiative in Kenya aimed at combating political violence and other forms of civil unrest through youth empowerment.

Engage our experts.

NORC is a collaborative and interdisciplinary research institution with 75 years of experience helping clients identify and exceed their research goals. Our experts in society, media, and public affairs hail from a variety of disciplines, including criminal justice, journalism, and public opinion research. They collaborate to yield new and layered perspectives.



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