Improving Neighborhoods to Improve Lives

IPR Capitol Hill research briefing explores evidence-driven solutions to reduce U.S. inequality

Neighborhoods are more than just physical spaces—they are communities shaped by people, institutions, and the connections that bind them together. These relationships, along with access to both internal and external resources, define these communities and shape the lives and wellbeing of their residents. Yet vast disparities exist among them and their residents.

At a Capitol Hill research briefing this fall, IPR Director Andrew Papachristos, a sociologist, highlighted the role of policy in creating and addressing disparities between America's neighborhoods.

"Policies we make have a tremendous impact, not just on the people living in particular physical neighborhoods, but on America more broadly, and the inequality we see," he told the attending researchers, congressional staffers, and civil servants.

Studies show that residents in impoverished neighborhoods face poorer health, more stress, higher rates of violence, and shorter life expectancies. Papachristos, alongside IPR economist Kirabo Jackson, Johns Hopkins sociologist Stefanie DeLuca, and Stanford sociologist Sean Reardon, explored evidence and policies addressing housing, education, and public safety to bridge these gaps.

Investing in Children

Jackson, who was then a member of the White House Council of Economic Advisers, emphasized the significant role of place in shaping futures.

From left: IPR Fellows Andrew V. Papachristos and Kirabo Jackson discuss the importance of evidence-based policy in addressing disparities across U.S. neighborhoods at an Oct. 9 Capitol Hill policy briefing.

"We can improve the lives of Americans and enhance prosperity and equity by improving the mobility of those who live in disadvantaged neighborhoods," he said.

Highlighting initiatives like the Justice40 program and childcare block grants, he focused on the role of school funding.

A study Jackson co-authored found that a 10% increase in K–12 funding over 12 years resulted in higher graduation rates and wages for low-income students. He also noted that universal pre-K boosts employment, particularly for mothers, and stimulates local businesses. "These investments are good for neighborhoods, families, businesses, and the overall economy, both today and in the future," Jackson concluded.

Housing and Opportunity

DeLuca reinforced Jackson's point, stating, "Where a child grows up matters over and above the family she's born into."

Her research showed that only one in four eligible families receive housing subsidies, likening the process to winning a lottery.

She described programs like Creating Moves to Opportunity (CMTO), which provide support services to help families move to opportunity-rich neighborhoods. The program's success showed that such investments can significantly improve access to better neighborhoods and social mobility.

IN THIS ISSUE

Northwestern
INSTITUTE FOR POLICY RESEARCH

IPR Impact: A Note from Our Director

R. Hart

Andrew V. Papachristos

As we navigate a period of pivotal change, I never been more convinced of the value of our faculty's work.

IPR experts continue to conduct rigorous research that shines a light on the pressing problems of our time. They offer clear-eyed examinations and tested policy solutions for issues such as entrenched poverty, stubborn health disparities, cycles of violence, and political polarization.

Their insights continue to inform policymaking efforts, appearing in a groundbreaking U.S. Surgeon General's advisory on gun violence, presidential economic reports, state and local legislative initiatives, and measures of water insecurity worldwide.

This impact would not be possible without the robust intellectual community we've built together, and keep building: Since September 2023, we welcomed six new fellows, including three Morton O. Schapiro Fellows, and more than 17 associates, bringing our faculty to more than 170 strong.

They have also broadened our research investigations into critical areas like artificial intelligence, data science, and climate policy.

IPR is—and will continue to be—a home for serious scholarship and thoughtful policy conversations. Join us at our **events** to engage in our particular brand of interdisciplinary exchange, and check out the many resources available 24/7 on our **website**.

Andrew V. Papachristos is the John G. Searle Professor of Sociology and IPR director and fellow.

Harbridge-Yong Becomes Associate Director

Political scientist **Laurel Harbridge-Yong** stepped into the role of IPR associate director on Sept. 1, 2024

Harbridge-Yong is known for her studies of bipartisanship, polarization, and how elections, institutions, and policy are connected in the United States. She joined Northwestern after receiving her PhD in political science from Stanford in 2009 and became a full professor in 2023.

"Laurel has been an outstanding IPR fellow and colleague over the years," said IPR Director **Andrew V. Papachristos**.

Across her research, she explores a range of questions surrounding the difficulty of reaching bipartisan agreement and legislative compromises in American politics. Her body of work spans projects on Congress, state legislatures, and the public. Two of her current projects investigate the power of primary voters in American politics and how worrisome trends of threats and violence toward elected officials might alter democracy.

R. Hart

Laurel Harbridge-Yong

An IPR fellow since 2010, she has been a member of its Executive Committee since 2019. She succeeds James Druckman, IPR's former associate director.

As associate director, Harbridge-Yong is taking the lead on organizing IPR's signature colloquia **series** and faculty seed grant program, as well as helping to onboard new fellows and other projects. Her appointment is for five years.

Laurel Harbridge-Yong is professor of political science and IPR associate director and fellow.
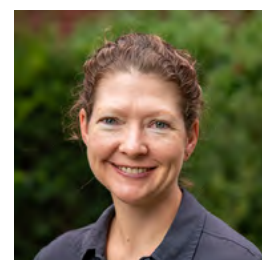
Fourteen New Experts Join IPR to Strengthen Policy Innovation

Faculty explore critical topics including artificial intelligence, teen brain development, inequality, and gender dynamics

IPR's newest fellows are bringing fresh ideas and energy to the Institute. They are (from left): Jessica Hullman, Katie Insel, Michael Kraus, Ivy Onyeador, Rob Voigt, and Kate Weisshaar.

This fall, IPR welcomed its largest cohort since 2016 with 14 new faculty—six fellows and eight associates—covering topics from AI to workplace equity. These scholars, from Northwestern's Weinberg, Kellogg, Education and Social Policy, and McCormick schools, join IPR's 190 faculty across 30 disciplines, all focused on data-driven policymaking.

IPR also now has three Morton O. Schapiro (MOS) Fellows: anthropologist Sera Young and social psychologist Michael Kraus, joined Eli Finkel, who was appointed in September 2023. These fellowships are supported by an anonymous donor in honor of former University president and IPR fellow and economist Morton O. Schapiro.

Using Data Science to Help People Make Better Decisions: Jessica Hullman

Jessica Hullman, the Ginni Rometty Professor of Computer Science, develops tools to improve decision making by combining human knowledge with statistical models, focusing on AI alignment with human needs. Hullman has earned several awards, including a Microsoft Faculty Fellowship in 2019, and her work is supported by the National Science Foundation (NSF), Adobe, Google, and the U.S. Navy.

Exploring How Young Brains Develop: Katie Insel

Neuroscientist Katie Insel studies brain development in children and adolescents, especially as it relates to mental health. She leads a lab that combines brain scans and computational models to study motivation, learning, and self-control. The NSF and the National Institutes of Health have funded her work.

Examining How We Make Sense of Inequality: Michael Kraus

Social psychologist Michael Kraus examines how emotions and social structures perpetuate inequality. Recent work explores how information affects attitudes toward reparations and the racial wealth gap. He was a Russell Sage Foundation visiting scholar in 2023–24.

Investigating Racial Interactions and Promoting Understanding: Ivuoma (Ivy) Onyeador

Social psychologist Ivy Onyeador focuses on reducing bias in organizations and improving perceptions of inequality. Her work, supported by the NSF, has been published in top journals and covered by top media outlets. She was named a 2022 "Rising Star" by the Association for Psychological Science.

Uncovering What Language Can Reveal About Biases: Rob Voigt

Rob Voigt uses computational linguistics to examine how language patterns reflect biases, especially in law enforcement. His research, published in major journals like *Sociological Science,* won the 2017 Cozzarelli Prize for his work analyzing police language from body camera footage.

Analyzing Gender, Work, and Family Dynamics: Katherine (Kate) Weisshaar

Sociologist Kate Weisshaar researches workplace inequality, focusing on gender and family roles. Her research on hiring and pay discrimination has been supported by the NSF and the Russell Sage Foundation, with findings published in top sociology journals. She received the 2019 Kanter Award for Excellence in Work-Family Research.

Eight Associates Join in September

Kristian Hammond, Bill and Cathy Osborn Professor of Computer Science, focuses on AI and co-founded Narrative Science, which turns data into natural language.

David Morton, Walter P. Murphy Professor of Industrial Engineering, applies optimization to public health, energy, and security, including disease modeling and disaster response.

Political scientist **Martin Naunov** studies political behavior and intergroup relations, using audio data to explore stereotyping and discrimination.

Sociologist **Hatim Rahman** examines AI's role in labor markets. His book *Inside the Invisible Cage* (2024, U. of California Press) covers algorithmic control in workplaces.

Sociologist **Doron Shiffer-Sebba** investigates family wealth inequality across generations with ethnographic and quantitative methods.

Sociologist **Oscar Stuhler** uses quantitative text analysis to examine public discourse and social structures.

V.S. Subrahmanian, Walter P. Murphy Professor of Computer Science, leads the Security & AI Lab, using machine learning for applications like forecasting terror and detecting social media threats.

Sepehr Vakil studies STEM education and tech ethics and directs the TREE (Technology, Race, Ethics, and Equity in Education) Lab.

POLICY IMPACT

U.S. Surgeon General Declared Gun Violence a Public Health Crisis

Advisory cites IPR faculty research on gun violence interventions and statistics

In June, the U.S. Surgeon General declared gun violence a public health crisis due to the sharp rise in firearm injuries since 2020. A first-of-its-kind **report** issued by then-U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy provides a look at the crisis, drawing on available scientific evidence including research from five IPR faculty.

Gun violence is now the leading cause of death among children and teenagers, surpassing car crashes, cancer, drug overdoses, and poisoning. In 2022, 48,204 people died from gun-related injuries, marking an increase of over 8,000 deaths compared to 2019 and more than 16,000 compared to 2010.

Community Violence Intervention

The report cites a **study** by IPR director and sociologist **Andrew Papachristos** and his colleagues at **CORNERS,** the Center for Neighborhood Engaged Research & Science housed in IPR, on community violence interventionists in Chicago. These are trained civilians who work to stop street and gun violence. The study found that 94% of these workers showed signs of secondary traumatic stress, such as emotional numbness and difficulty sleeping, due to their work.

Impact on Children and Adolescents

Survivors of school shootings face significant long-term consequences, such as anxiety and depression. The report highlights a **study** co-

The **U.S. Surgeon General** issued a **first-of-its-kind** report declaring gun violence a **public health crisis.** This advisory report highlights critical research from **five IPR faculty**.

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authored by IPR economists **Molly Schnell** and **Hannes Schwandt** which looks at youth antidepressant use following school shootings. The study shows that in the two years following a fatal school shooting, the use of antidepressants among local youth goes up by 21%.

Surviving a firearm injury can have both short-term and long-term health effects and is linked with a higher risk for future injury. The report cites a **study** by chair and professor of medical social sciences and IPR associate **Rinad Beidas** that examines the long-term consequences of firearm injuries and exposure to others' injuries—such as suicide, assault, and mass shootings—on children's mental and physical health. It shows that chronic behavioral health problems like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and substance abuse disorders are linked to firearm injuries.

Mental Health and Violence

While individuals who commit mass shootings often have mental health

issues, experts warn against oversimplifying the link between mental health diagnoses and violent behavior.

The report features a **study** by behavioral scientist and IPR associate **Linda Teplin**, showing that people with serious mental illness are more likely to be victims of violence themselves.

Teplin's finding underscores the complexity of tackling gun violence and addressing factors like mental illness. She emphasizes that confronting firearm violence requires a broad, holistic approach. Her study suggests that improving housing and financial stability could not only lower the risk of people with serious mental illness becoming victims of violence, but also make communities safer overall.

Andrew Papachristos is the John G. Searle Professor of Sociology, IPR director, and faculty director of the Center for Neighborhood Engaged Research and Science (CORNERS). Linda Teplin is the Owen L. Coon Professor of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, professor of medicine, and vice chair for research in psychiatry and behavioral sciences. Molly Schnell is assistant professor of economics. Hannes Schwandt is associate professor of human development and social policy. Rinad Beidas is the Ralph Seal Paffenbarger Professor of Medical Social Sciences and chair of the department. All are IPR faculty.

IPR Research Drives Policy Solutions in White House Report

2024 Economic Report of the President was co-authored by IPR economist Kirabo Jackson

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The 2024 "Economic **Report** of the President" explores some of the country's greatest economic hurdles and presents policymakers with possible solutions with the support of research from top academics, including several IPR faculty.

This year's report, compiled by the White House Council of Economic Advisers (**CEA**), was co-authored by IPR economist **Kirabo Jackson**. He was **appointed** by former President Joe Biden as a senior member of the CEA in August 2023 and stepped down in October 2024. The CEA sits within the Executive Office and delivers research-driven recommendations on national and international economic policy to the president.

Filling Workforce Gaps and the Benefits of Childcare

As the U.S. population ages, the **number** of workers has dwindled. The report underscores the contribution of immigrants in bridging labor-force gaps across different occupations and regions. It cites a **study** by strategy professor and IPR associate **Benjamin Jones** and his colleagues that suggests that immigrants act more as "job creators" than "job takers" by initiating new businesses, generating employment

opportunities, and reducing the cost of household services provided by the market.

According to the report, prioritizing investments in children's health and education is a proven strategy to increase work productivity, echoing the commitment of the Biden-Harris administration to support children.

To further support the benefits of school spending, the report cites Jackson's **study** with University of California, Berkeley economist Rucker Johnson. In it, they examine how changes in funding for Head Start and K–12 education affected children later in life by improving educational attainment and earnings while reducing poverty and incarceration rates for.

Trends in the Labor Market

The report examines persistent challenges within the job market, particularly focusing on racial disparities in unemployment rates. Drawing from a **study** by IPR economist **Jonathan Guryan** and Yale University's Kerwin Charles, the report emphasizes the role of racial prejudice in perpetuating higher unemployment rates of Black individuals compared to their White counterparts. The 2008 study estimated that

a quarter of the racial wage gap can be attributed to prejudice.

Competition and Physician Prescribing

In the U.S., death rates from causes such as motor vehicle accidents, homicides, suicides–notably, drug overdoses– are on the rise among older children and middle-aged adults. The report investigates the upsurge in drug overdose deaths since the mid-1990s and its continued impact today.

The report references **findings** by IPR economist **Molly Schnell**, Princeton economist Janet Currie, and economist **Anran Li** (PhD 2024), indicating that increased competition among healthcare professionals for patients led to a more lenient approach to opioid prescriptions. It also highlights a **study** by Schnell showing that doctors who were stricter about prescribing opioids became more cautious when there was a risk of the drugs being diverted to other users.

Infant and Maternal Mortality

The report notes the advancements made in maternal health and the narrowing of racial mortality gaps, relating to the 2022 Biden-Harris blueprint on maternal mortality rates. The report spotlights a **study** by IPR economist **Hannes Schwandt** and his colleagues whose research revealed a significant rise in life expectancy among Black Americans between 1990 and 2012, particularly in low-income areas.

Kirabo Jackson is the Abraham Harris Professor of Education and Social Policy and professor of economics. Jonathan Guryan is the Lawyer Taylor professor of Education and Social Policy. Benjamin Jones is the Gordon and Llura Gund Family Professor of Entrepreneurship and professor of strategy. Molly Schnell is an assistant professor of economics. Hannes Schwandt is an associate professor of human development and social policy. All are IPR faculty members.

Harnessing the Power of Artificial Intelligence

Former White House policymaker shares insights on governing AI within democracy

Alondra Nelson (left) discussed potential benefits and harm of AI with IPR Director Andrew V. Papachristos.

In a joint IPR and Medill Distinguished Public Policy Lecture on March 27, sociologist and former White House official **Alondra Nelson** provided insights on how we should govern AI, drawn from her work in the former Biden administration and her own **research**.

Nelson was welcomed by Northwestern President **Michael Schill** and Provost **Kathleen Hagerty**, who leads the Data Science and Artificial Intelligence Steering **Committee**, with Vice Presidents **Eric Perreault** (Research) and **Sean Reynolds** (Information Technology).

IPR Director and sociologist **Andrew V. Papachristos** praised Nelson for her leadership on AI in his introduction to the 120-plus in attendance, noting that "moral problems and potential harms associated with AI cannot be reduced to engineering or technological problems." Rather, developing AI requires "deep engagement across sectors, intellectual spaces, industries, and those most likely to be impacted by the technologies themselves."

While AI has existed for years, **ChatGPT** arrived in November 2022 and prompted questions and anxiety among the public, experts, and government officials. The arrival of the consumer-friendly AI chatbot marked the beginning of a "breathless year" of media coverage as we tried to identify

where we are and anticipate what's next, Nelson said.

Nelson pointed to several headlines touting potential threats, ranging from dystopian scenarios of AI chatbots plotting bioweapon attacks to concerns about AI adversely affecting children, voters, and workers, some of which are rooted in truth.

AI has been used to create convincing **deepfake** content to spread misinformation and can create **biases** in decision-making systems used in hiring, resulting in discriminatory outcomes.

"This is a kind of whole of society transformation that we are potentially dealing with here and we should be very mindful of this change," Nelson said.

Despite these apprehensions, Nelson also expressed optimism about leveraging AI for societal benefit. She stressed the importance of adopting a nuanced approach to AI governance, recognizing both its potential pitfalls and the "distant hope" looming on the horizon of using it to positively change society in **agriculture**, **accessibility**, and **science**.

In her own research, Nelson is investigating AI threats to society, democracy, and values through the AI Democracy Projects, created with investigative journalist **Julia Angwin**. Their recent **report** on whether generative

AI is useful for democracy focuses on whether it can provide voters with accurate election information.

In an experiment to test AI responses, a group of more than 40 state and local election officials and AI experts posed 26 questions to five of the leading AI models, including OpenAI's GPT-4 and Google's Gemini.

Over half of the responses were wrong, 40% harmful, 38% incomplete, and 13% biased.

The findings underscore concerns about the alarming prevalence of inaccurate, incomplete, harmful, and biased election information generated by AI models.

When it comes to AI, Nelson said she rejects the notion that you can have safety or innovation, but not both. She sees the potential benefits AI can bring but acknowledges that a great deal of work will be required to harness the good, while still enabling innovation and opportunity.

During her time at the White House, Nelson led the development of the **Blueprint for an AI Bill of Rights**. Nelson is currently the Harold F. Linder Professor at the **Institute for Advanced Study** and the U.S. representative to the United Nations High-Level Advisory Body on AI, which released an interim **report** in December on governing AI for humanity.

According to Nelson, AI governance doesn't have to start from scratch, but can emerge from the same basic vision of the public good we have tried–imperfectly–to articulate throughout history. "We hope—even in our very polarized and imperfect and fractured democratic U.S. society—that we can find and circle back to from time to time our core values that we cherish: privacy, freedom, equality, and the rule of law."

Alondra Nelson is the Harold F. Linder Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study and senior fellow at the Center for American Progress. Andrew Papachristos is the John G. Searle Professor of Sociology, IPR director, and faculty director of the Center for Neighborhood Engaged Research and Science (CORNERS).

Reckoning with the Impossible

Princeton author and scholar Ruha Benjamin urges us to question the status quo

E. Molony

Princeton University professor Ruha Benjamin (left) speaks with SESP Dean Bryan Brayboy.

During a joint lecture for Northwestern's School of Education and Social Policy's Nancy and Ray Loeschner Leadership Lecture Series and the Institute for Policy Research's Distinguished Public Policy Lecture Series, Ruha Benjamin, a sociologist, author, and professor of African American Studies at Princeton University asked the standing-room-only crowd at the Segal Visitors Center in January 2024 to reckon with the impossible.

"We need to remind ourselves how many times people have overturned things that seemed impossible to change," Benjamin said as the event began.

IPR Distinguished Public Policy Lectures are given by prominent individuals who straddle the worlds of policymaking and academia and can speak to the use of research in policymaking and other issues.

Benjamin's inquiry takes place at the intersection of race, technology, and justice. She was introduced by IPR director and sociologist Andrew Papachristos , who said her work "pushes us to think bigger and bolder about how we approach these sorts of problems."

A self-described "ambivalent academic," Benjamin talked with School of Education and Social Policy (SESP) undergraduate students over dinner before heading to the main event, a conversation with SESP Dean Bryan Brayboy, the Carlos Montezuma Professor.

Below are edited highlights:

Abolitionist thinking involves breaking apart and rebuilding. Benjamin's two most recent books, *Viral Justice* and *Imagination: A Manifesto*, urge readers to question the status quo and think about new ways to approach inequities in health care, education, work settings, and more. "It's asking ourselves, what do we want to uproot? What do we want to grow? That can apply to every area of our life, personal, political, and everything in between. Abolition is reckoning with what we consider impossible in our own minds."

Keeping one foot in the academy and one foot in the community changes the questions you ask. "It changes what I write about, how I write, how I'm thinking through things," Benjamin said. "It makes the work more joyful and makes me feel more purposeful."

You have to name something before you can fight it. Eugenics is often associated with Nazi Germany era, but from school funding to resource allocation and patient triage, "some lives are deemed desirable and others disposable," Benjamin said. "This manifestation of a eugenics imagination poses the question: If there are powerful actors engaged in eugenic world building, what is the opposite? To work on it, we need language. We have to name it."

Planting a seed is progress. "There was no evidence that slavery would ever end," Benjamin said. "And yet because it was unlivable, our ancestors resisted. Most of them didn't see the end in their lifetime, but they planted that seed in the next generation. Or take public education, which was for the male elite. It was unthinkable to educate the poor and racialized children. Now it's so taken for granted, some of us may even drag our feet and complain when we have to get up and go to school. I'm inviting people to strengthen the muscle of our collective imagination and to really question those things that we're told are impossible."

Hope is a discipline. "You can keep yourself hopeful by shining a light on the things that are life-affirming, the places and people that are working to create a more habitable planet for everyone," she said. "As a teacher, I can't just diagnose what's wrong. I have to give students a sense of power to think about, okay, what are you going to do about that?"

Giving up hope is a luxury. "If your life depends on the systems changing into something new, then hope is something you need. As James Baldwin said, 'I can't be a pessimist, because I'm alive.' To be a pessimist means that you have agreed that human life is an academic matter. So, I'm forced to be an optimist. I'm forced to believe that we can survive whatever we must survive."

Ruha Benjamin is the Alexander Stewart 1886 Professor of African American Studies at Princeton University and was named a MacArthur Foundation Fellow in October 2024.

RESEARCH NEWS

Partisanship and Voters' Perceptions of Campaign Promises

How do U.S. voters' political loyalties affect their view of how well politicians keep their campaign promises? In a working paper, IPR political scientist Tabitha Bonilla seeks to answer this question through two studies. In the first study, in 2019, she surveyed 237 Democrats and 140 Republicans about a political candidate of their own or of the other political party, who kept a promise, broke a promise, or failed to keep a promise related to the highly partisan issue of immigration. Results reveal that respondents of both parties viewed a candidate's success in keeping campaign promises according to the candidate's political party. Generally, candidates of the other party seem to be rated more for their political beliefs than for their promise keeping.

In the second study in 2020, Bonilla posed a similar question to 2,303 people, with two new factors: A candidate might have no party affiliation, and respondents were asked either about immigration or human trafficking, an issue around which there is more bipartisan consensus. As in the first study, participants rated candidates of their own party far more favorably than those in the other. However, for the nonpartisan issue of human trafficking, participants rated all candidates similarly. Bonilla's investigation demonstrates how voters perceive political promise fulfillment is heavily influenced by partisan beliefs when the issue is a partisan one, especially if it is unclear whether the promise was kept.

Tabitha Bonilla is associate professor of human development and social policy and an IPR fellow.

Concerns About Downward Mobility Among Students of Color

What impact do concerns about downward socioeconomic mobility have on college students' academic experiences? IPR social psychologist Mesmin Destin, graduate research assistant Josiah Rosario, and their colleagues published two studies on this question in the *Social Psychology of Education*. In the first, the researchers found that when students had stronger concerns about the possibility of moving down the socioeconomic hierarchy during their lives, they also expressed more academic avoidance goals, meaning they were more focused on avoiding negative goals like bad grades than achieving positive ones like earning honors.

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This was especially true for students of color. In an experiment, the second study randomly assigned students to momentarily focus on the possibility of downward mobility, upward mobility, or a control condition. Building on the first study's findings, students of color who were led to focus on downward mobility became more focused on avoidance goals than other students in the study. Prior research shows that over time, this type of sustained focus on avoiding mistakes rather than learning and improving can lead to lower effort, achievement, and wellbeing. The researchers conclude that broader societal risks of downward mobility for students of color can contribute to challenges that they face in pursuing their goals.

Mesmin Destin is associate professor of psychology and human development and social policy, an IPR fellow, and Northwestern's first faculty director of student access and enrichment.
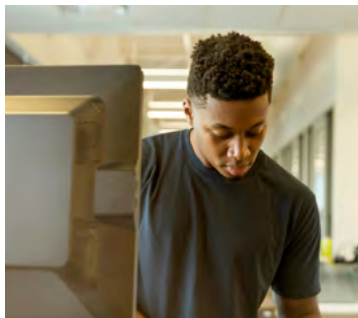
Chicago CVI Program Proves Effective

L. McDermott

Given the national increase in gun violence, interest in Community Violence Intervention (CVI) programs, which address gun violence by utilizing local experts and circumventing interactions with the criminal justice system, has risen in recent years. Sociologist Andrew V. Papachristos, Marisa Ross, and Erin Ochoa of the Center for Neighborhood Engaged Science & Research, or CORNERS, conducted a study to determine the effect of the Chicago Create Real Economic Destiny (CRED) program on the participants' experience with violence. Their study, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, compared 324 arrested men who took part in the CRED program between 2016 and 2021 to 2,500 arrested men, who also lived in CRED's service areas, but did not participate. Researchers compared data to determine CRED's effect on individual violence-related outcomes of participants, such as violent crimes, shootings, or other gun-related violence, including those who completed the entire CRED program and those who only completed parts of the program. Results indicate that those who completed the entire program were over 73% less likely to be arrested for a violent crime in the two years that followed, as compared to the individuals who did not complete the program. CRED participants were also significantly less likely to engage in assaults, robberies, shootings, and other gun-related violence. Based on these results, researchers suggest addressing obstacles to CVI program participation, scaling up CVI programs, and integrating CVI programs in other community efforts.

Andrew Papachristos is the John G. Searle Professor of Sociology, IPR director, and faculty director of CORNERS.

How Do Voters Think About Electability?

During the crowded 2020 Democratic presidential primary, many considered Joe Biden the most electable candidate given his moderate policy positions. Four years later, former President Biden's perceived lack of electability led him to end his 2024 re-election campaign.

A candidate's electability, or their chance of winning a general election, can have an impact on primary results. Few studies, however, examine how voters understand electability.

Research by IPR political scientist Laurel Harbridge-Yong suggests that Republicans and Democrats think about electability differently during primary elections. She finds that Democrats believe moderate candidates will have a better chance of winning in general elections, while Republican voters prioritize a candidate's ability to fundraise.

A consequence of voters' different beliefs about electability could be that Republicans pick more extreme candidates than Democrats during the primary stage. By valuing fundraising, Republican voters may also favor wealthy candidates who can self-fund their campaigns or shift politics toward the interest of wealthy donors.

Laurel Harbridge-Yong is professor of political science and IPR associate director and fellow.

Unraveling the Drug Crisis

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The United States has faced recurring drug crises, from Civil War painkiller addictions to the 1980s crack cocaine epidemic. Today's challenge, according to IPR associate Lori Ann Post, is the evolving nature of drug use, with new substances emerging faster than screenings and treatments can keep up. Post argues this is not a drug epidemic, which has a clear end, but a continuous crisis with no resolution in sight.

Post leads the Ohio River Valley Corridor Regional Drug Data Research Center (ORVC-C), launched in 2024 with funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance, now expanded to serve additional regions. The center focuses on prevention, harm reduction, treatment, and recovery, while addressing delays in overdose death data—currently lagging by two or three years.

In 2021, overdose deaths hit 107,622, with opioids involved in over 75%. Post identifies four waves: prescription opioid misuse in the 1990s, rising heroin overdoses starting in 2010, a surge in fentanyl-related deaths starting in 2013, and since 2019, continued fentanyl deaths worsened by stimulants like cocaine and meth.

ORVC-C operates a Central Data Repository for analyzing comprehensive drug-related data and a Dissemination and Engagement Center to foster partnerships and share insights—on a timeline that can make a difference for policy and people's lives.

"The timelier the data is, the more relevant it is to solving drug use and preventing drug overdose deaths," she said. "That's the whole point."

Lori Ann Post is the Buehler Professor for Aging, director of the Buehler Center for Health Policy and Economics, and an IPR associate.

Do "Revolving Door" Laws Work?

iStock

On May 2, 2023, four ComEd employees, including former lobbyist and ex-Illinois legislator Mike McClain, were convicted of trying to corruptly influence Illinois Speaker Michael Madigan. The scandal highlighted the conflicts that can arise when officials take lobbying jobs after leaving office. To prevent corruption, many states have adopted "revolving door" laws, requiring politicians to wait up to two years before lobbying. IPR economist Silvia Vannutelli examines how these laws influence who runs for office and how long officials stay in politics. Using data from state legislators' biographies (1972–2016) and lobbying records from FollowTheMoney.org, she and her colleagues compared states that implemented revolving door laws earlier versus later. Their findings reveal that while the laws reduce ex-legislators registering as lobbyists, they also increase uncontested elections, boosting incumbents' reelection chances. Preliminary results suggest these laws reduce competition in state elections, potentially impacting candidate quality, policymaking, and government functioning.

Silvia Vannutelli is an assistant professor of economics and an IPR fellow.

Encouraging Cognitive Skills with Video Games

Is playing action video games associated with the development of cognitive abilities? In their meta-analysis of studies in *Technology, Mind, and Behavior,* IPR statistician Elizabeth Tipton and her colleagues investigate this association. The researchers examine action video games, defined as first- or third-person shooter games, and cognition using two types of studies: cross-sectional and intervention. Cross-sectional studies compared the cognition of those who play action video games regularly to those who do not play them. The intervention studies compared experimental groups playing action video games to a control group that played video games that are not action or brain games. The selection of studies began very broadly, using basic search terms, but was then narrowed through stringent criteria, leaving 74 cross-sectional studies, 22 intervention, and 14 that fell into both categories. In the cross-sectional studies, researchers saw significant effects in perceptual, goal-oriented attentional, spatial, and multitasking skills when compared to non-video game players. For intervention studies, there was a medium causal effect in goal-oriented attentional and multitasking skills. The researchers conclude that playing action video games is linked to the growth of some cognitive skills, and they suggest developing computer games to foster cognitive development.

Elizabeth Tipton is professor of statistics and data science and an IPR fellow.

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U.S. Employees Overestimate Racial Progress at Work

A 2024 working paper highlights that while many Americans support diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at work, U.S. workers may be overly optimistic about progress, leading to misconceptions about the effectiveness of DEI policies.

The study, led by Yale University's Jennifer Richeson and IPR psychologist Michael Kraus, finds that employees who believed racial progress was occurring rapidly failed to distinguish between effective DEI initiatives, like targeted recruitment, and less impactful ones, such as racial bias training. This overconfidence could undermine support for evidence-based DEI strategies that foster diversity.

The study surveyed 1,776 Black and White workers, revealing that employees believed leadership would naturally become more racially diverse over time, a view not supported by actual data. Participants' estimates of racial diversity in leadership were compared to Equal Employment Opportunity Commission data, showing that optimism about progress was widespread, regardless of race.

The research suggests that both Black and White workers might overestimate the impact of their own DEI efforts, with Black workers potentially more involved in these initiatives, which may fuel their optimism. This mirrors broader societal tendencies to believe in a "just world," despite contrary data on racial progress.

The researchers argue that companies can help shift mindsets about DEI by sharing accurate data about the reality of racial progress and by being smart about the DEI narratives that they share with the public.

Michael Kraus is professor of psychology, and a Morton O. Schapiro IPR Faculty Fellow.

Examining Tribes' Sovereignty Through Their Constitutions

In 2020, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *McGirt v. Oklahoma* that crimes involving Native Americans on lands designated as Indian reservations must be prosecuted by tribal or federal courts. However, this was revised in 2022 with *Oklahoma v. Castro-Huerta*, which gave states the power to prosecute non-Native Americans accused of crimes against Native Americans. This shift reflects ongoing debates over tribal sovereignty and legal rights.

IPR sociologist Beth Redbird, who co-leads the Tribal Constitutions Project, studies how tribal constitutions have been shaped by both internal tribal choices and external pressures. In 2018, Redbird noticed there was no comprehensive database for tribal constitutions and, with National Science Foundation support, began cataloging these documents. The project now includes over 1,000 tribal constitutions written between 1934 and 2020, covering about 80% of all Native American constitutions.

The Tribal Constitutions Project aims to understand these documents legally and historically, with help from law students from the NYU-Yale American Indian Sovereignty Project and computer science master's students from Northwestern University. Redbird emphasizes that tribal constitutions, first recognized after the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934, reflect tribes' struggles for sovereignty. Despite the challenges of creating these documents under various pressures, they reflect tribal values and governance.

The project is especially relevant as Native American populations grow, according to the 2020 Census, and as tribes may begin revising their constitutions. Redbird argues that tribes' evolving constitutions will shape their future, but lack of centralized access to other tribes' constitutions makes policymaking challenging. Eventually, these constitutions will be made publicly available, accompanied by context about their formation and the complex trade-offs tribes faced.

Beth Redbird is assistant professor of sociology and an IPR fellow.

The COVID-19 'Baby Bump'

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Birth rates typically drop following recessions, so how did the economic downturn of the COVID-19 pandemic influence births? In the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science*, IPR economist **Hannes Schwandt** and his colleagues **examine** the effects of the pandemic on U.S. childbearing. The researchers analyzed national birth data from 2015 to 2021, and California birth data from 2015 to February 2023. The researchers show that U.S. fertility rates fell by much less than predicted by standard economic models in 2020, masking two separate patterns. The number of births to foreign-born women fell sharply in early 2020, although the decline was too early to reflect fertility response to the pandemic. In contrast, U.S.-born women saw little decline in percentage terms and experienced a "baby bump" in 2021, resulting in a net increase of 39,760 births over 2020 and 2021. Data from California suggest that the increase in fertility among U.S.-born women continued through February 2023. Not only was this the first recession in recent history not followed by a baby bust, but it reversed declining fertility rates for the first time since the Great Recession of 2007–09. For foreign-born women, births decreased by more than 45,000 in early 2020 and remained 4.7% lower into 2021. This was likely due to the Trump administration's restrictions on international travel from China in January 2020, followed by restrictions on those traveling from Mexico and other countries. Some likely reasons for the bump among U.S.-born women include pandemic government aid that kept many Americans financially stable. The increase was also driven largely by women having their first child or children and college-educated women, who may have been more likely to benefit from working from home.

Hannes Schwandt is associate professor of human development and social policy and an IPR fellow.

In-School Counseling Improves Teen Girls' PTSD Symptoms

Young women, especially Black and Latina girls, suffer disproportionately from trauma-related depression, PTSD, and anxiety, yet little is known about effective treatment options. In *Science Advances*, IPR economist **Jonathan Guryan** and his colleagues **examine** the effectiveness and affordability of a school-based counseling program, Working on Womanhood (WOW), a trauma-informed, relationship-centered counseling and mentoring program designed by and for Black and Latina women. WOW focuses on addressing anxiety, depression, and PTSD in young women of color. It was developed and is delivered by Youth Guidance, a Chicago-based social services provider. The study is the first large-scale randomized controlled trial of such an initiative for young Chicago women. Across the 2017–18 and 2018–19 school years, 3,749 high school girls in 10 public schools in Chicago participated in the study. The research finds that attending the weekly in-school counseling program for four months decreased participants' PTSD symptoms by 22%, depression by 14%, and anxiety by nearly 10%. The results suggest that group-based, in-school therapy programs such as WOW can improve mental health symptoms. The results also highlight the lack of alternative mental health services available to young women. The authors conclude that WOW appears very cost-effective when judged based on its ability to alleviate mental health symptoms.

Jonathan Guryan is the Lawyer Taylor Professor of Education and Social Policy and an IPR fellow.

Adolescent Experiences and Wellbeing During the Pandemic

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Adolescents' wellbeing and development are influenced by the context they develop in, everyday stressors they experience, and support from loved ones, among other factors. Beginning in 2020, a new factor affected adolescents: the COVID-19 pandemic. Teenage mental health was an increasing concern prior to the pandemic, and many feared that the pandemic would exacerbate the issue. In *Current Opinion in Psychology*, Northwestern postdoctoral fellows Tierney McMahon and Sarah Collier Villaume (PhD 2022) and IPR developmental psychobiologist **Emma Adam investigate** how pandemic policies affected teenage stress, support, coping mechanisms, and wellbeing. They analyze teenagers' diary entries in various longitudinal studies conducted during the pandemic. Applying their Contexts, Histories, and Everyday Stressors and Supports (CHESS) Model of Adolescent Affective Wellbeing, the researchers consider how policies relating to the pandemic interact with teenage developmental contexts and histories to alter their everyday experiences of stressors and supports. They conclude that the unprecedented nature of the pandemic increased depression and anxiety symptoms, and that those with mental health issues prior to the pandemic and those with fewer socioeconomic resources, were particularly affected. Several helpful supports, including coping and positive health behaviors, were also identified. Based on these conclusions, the researchers suggest that public health and economic policy makers should consider mental health risks for adolescents, focusing on policies supporting family economic resources, access to mental healthcare, and social connection.

Emma Adam is the Edwina S. Tarry Professor of Human Development and Social Policy and an IPR fellow.

Post-COVID, Young Adults Struggle More with Their Mental Health Than Those Over 40

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic almost four years ago, a broad spectrum of people across the U.S. have reported increased rates of depression and anxiety.

A study published in *JAMA Network Open* led by Northwestern postdoctoral fellow Sarah Collier Villaume, a former IPR graduate research assistant, with IPR developmental psychobiologist Emma Adam finds that young adults aged 18 to 39 did not recover along with the rest of the adult population aged 40 to 59 as the country emerged from the worst of the pandemic.

"For years, there has been a pressing conversation about mental health concerns among adolescents," Collier Villaume said. "This is a sobering realization to see that some of those same reported stresses of being a young person in the United States extend well into early adulthood."

Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey conducted over 27 months between 2020 and 2022, the researchers analyzed surveys from more than three million 18–59 year olds, which asked about their pandemic experiences.

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Such datasets "offer an unprecedented opportunity to examine trends in wellbeing through multiple years of a global pandemic," Collier Villaume said.

The highest levels of pandemic-era anxiety and depression were observed in 2020 for all age groups and began to decline in early 2021, coinciding with the availability of the COVID-19 vaccination. When broken down by age group, the researchers identified a widening gap in anxiety and depression between the young adults and those in middle adulthood. They show that younger adults' levels of self-reported anxiety and depression were higher than those of older adults after surges in COVID-19 case counts,

yet they did not decrease as much as those of older adults once a COVID vaccine became available.

In searching for reasons why, the researchers pointed to lower incomes and rates of home ownership as key differences between young and middle-aged adults. Younger adults typically earned less, with 40% earning less than $100,000 per year, and they were also more likely to be living with others, compared with older adults who tended to have their own homes.

"This is a wake-up call for policymakers and for everyone who cares about the wellbeing of young people in the U.S.," Collier Villaume said. "Individuals whose annual household income is less than $100,000 are potentially more vulnerable to a novel stressor like the COVID-19 pandemic, compared to those who have more economic stability."

Sarah Collier Villaume (PhD 2022) is a postdoctoral fellow in Northwestern's School of Education and Social Policy E4 Center. Emma Adam is the Edwina S. Tarry Professor of Human Development and Social Policy and an IPR fellow.

The Mental Health Effects of School Shootings

School shootings are a growing threat to American students, with over 378,000 students experiencing shootings since the 1999 Columbine tragedy. These incidents not only result in loss of life but also have lasting psychological impacts for survivors. A 2024 study reveals that prescription drug use to treat mental health conditions, including depression and anxiety, increased by more than 25% among youth living near fatal school shootings.

The study, led by IPR economists Molly Schnell and Hannes Schwandt and co-authored by Northwestern graduate student Max Pienkny and Stanford professor Maya Rossin-Slater, finds that prescription rates peaked three and a half years after a shooting and remained high for another year

and a half. The research builds on previous work showing that antidepressant use increased by over 20% in the two years following fatal school shootings.

Researchers examined 15 fatal school shootings between 2008 and 2013 using data from the Washington Post's school shootings database and IQVIA Longitudinal Prescription Data. They focused on prescriptions for antidepressants, antipsychotics, and antianxiety medications for children aged 5 to 19, within a five-mile radius of the shooting site. Antidepressants accounted for 57% of the increase, antipsychotics 36%, and antianxiety medications 6%.

One notable finding was the significant rise in medication use among children who had not previously been on psychotropic drugs.

The study shows that the mental health effects of school shootings can persist for over five years, with no evidence of diminishing over time.

While not all students will experience a school shooting, the fear of such events is linked to increased anxiety. The study emphasizes the need for policies that support survivors and address the long-term mental health consequences of school shootings. Researchers suggest expanding school-based mental health services, especially for disadvantaged students.

Molly Schell is assistant professor of economics and Hannes Schwandt is associate professor of human development and social policy. Both are IPR fellows.

Knowledge About People's Interracial Friendships Influences How They Are Viewed

People's biases about other groups are shaped by their interactions with and by characteristics of those groups. In the *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, IPR social psychologist Ivuoma Onyeador and her colleagues conduct four studies to investigate how interracial friendships affect how an individual is viewed.

The first two studies sought to determine whether perceptions of an individual's race changed based on their assumed friendship circles. The approximately 180 participants, split between Black and White Americans, were shown two images at a time of either Black or White Americans' faces with random noise added. They were asked to select the image most likely to be a person with mostly Black, mostly White, or an equal number of Black and White friends. Those selections were then averaged to create a "mental representation" of Black and White people whose friendship network varied in its racial makeup. Participants perceived Black individuals with mostly Black friends to have darker skin than Black individuals with mostly White friends and perceived White individuals with more Black friends to have darker skin than White individuals with mostly White friends, which the researchers termed the "racial assimilation effect."

In the third study, 120 White participants rated how African or European individuals

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appeared, perceiving the images determined to have mostly Black friends as more African and those determined to have mostly White friends as more European.

In the fourth, 102 participants, half Black and half White, rated how African and European the images looked, and how threatening, trustworthy, warm, competent, or lower class the individuals appeared. Study four finds that in general, participants rated images of an individual generated by participants who believed the person had mostly Black friends more negatively than an individual with mixed or mostly White friends. The one exception

was evaluations of White individuals with mostly White friends generated by Black participants.

The research shows that interracial friendships influence perceptions of race, group loyalty, and traits. Additionally, because Black and White participants positively viewed those whom they perceived to have other-race friends, the researchers suggest interracial friendships may influence perceptions of interracial solidarity.

Ivuoma Onyeador is assistant professor of management and organizations and an IPR fellow.

Making Space for Black and Latinx Parents to Engage in Their Child's Learning

Educational programs outside of traditional school hours can offer parents a different way to engage in their child's learning. In the *International Journal of Child-Computer Interaction*, learning sciences scholar and IPR associate Nichole Pinkard and her colleagues analyze the Digital Youth Divas (DYD) program, which provides youth educational programming, to understand how caregivers navigate out-of-school (OST) learning programs, relationships in these program, and what supports are necessary for them to be involved. DYD is a youth educational program the researchers run providing activities around STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics) for Black and Latina girls in fifth through eighth grades. During the 2021–22 program year, 16 girls met twice a week during the school year to work on activities such as cooking, digital design, rocket building, and block-based coding.

The researchers interviewed 10 families to understand their experiences in the program, how they manage their child's activities and interests, and how they navigate OST learning programs. Parents discussed a desire to give their child an inclusive learning environment, how much autonomy to give their daughter in choosing the program, and their appreciation for the opportunities to engage with their daughter through DYD. The researchers argue that to engage in justice-orientated approaches to computer education, OTS must be designed to meet the needs and desires of families in the community, make space for multiple parenting styles, and give parents ownership and opportunities to participate.

Nichole Pinkard is the Alice Hamilton Professor of Learning Sciences and an IPR associate.

Three Assumptions About Inflammation That May Be Wrong

IPR anthropologist examines how inflammation affects aging and health

C. Gall

Chronic inflammation is likely not part of 'normal' aging, says anthropologist Thomas McDade.

Inflammation protects against infections and aids in healing. But if left uncontrolled, it can lead to heart disease and other degenerative diseases of aging and is often considered a "normal" part of getting older. But should it be?

In an article published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, IPR biological anthropologist Thomas McDade addresses three assumptions about inflammation and its association with aging and health.

Assumption #1: Everything we need to know about inflammation can be learned from research in affluent industrialized settings.

Our understanding of the human body is largely based on White men living in the U.S., one of the world's richest nations, according to McDade. But due to the unprecedented access to high-calorie foods, lower amounts of physical activity, and cleaner environments that have reduced microbe intensity and diversity—all of which can contribute to high inflammation—our understanding of inflammation has been altered. He finds that people in countries without these conditions fare better when it comes to inflammation.

In a study conducted in the Philippines—as part of the ongoing Cebu Longitudinal Health and Nutrition Survey—McDade and his colleagues find that despite high levels of infectious diseases, C-reactive protein (CRP) levels, used to measure inflammation, were actually lower in the Philippines when compared with the U.S.

"Most people assume that inflammation is bad for our health, and that levels of inflammation increase as we get older. This is largely true in the U.S. and other rich countries," McDade said. "But studies in other parts of the world show us that chronic inflammation is not necessarily a 'normal' part of aging, and that it doesn't always contribute to cardiovascular disease and other diseases of aging."

Assumption #2: Aging begins at 50.

"Inflammaging" was coined to describe the concept that chronic and uncontrolled inflammation comes from and contributes to declines in the human body as people age. But studies supporting this claim, McDade shows, might not give an accurate look at why inflammation increases at this point of the life course.

McDade highlights evidence of an association between inflammation in adulthood and environments experienced early in childhood during which children go through a series of highly sensitive and critical developmental stages. In prior research, McDade has found that nutrition during pregnancy and infancy can impact CRP in adulthood. Inflammation in adulthood is also associated with childhood trauma and a lack of exposure to diverse bacteria, viruses, and other microbes during childhood. By assuming aging begins at 50 and by not looking at the entirety of human development and environments, McDade says we may be missing the opportunities to stave off inflammatory and degenerative chronic diseases, and even aging itself before they begin.

Assumption #3: Inflammation is synonymous with pathology.

Inflammation is thought to be dangerous—and in excess and when unregulated, it can be, McDade says—but it might not have to be that way. Inflammation is often considered a pathway to other diseases and that can undermine the good that comes with it: Without inflammation we cannot survive infections, grow our bodies and brains, or reproduce.

For example, McDade points to a study examining the Tsimane', an indigenous group in lowland Bolivia with an average life expectancy of 43 years, that reveals remarkably high levels of inflammation and "high risk" CRP across all age groups.

The researchers theorized that based on the association between high CRP levels and future heart attacks and strokes, early heart disease is a factor in the higher adult mortality of the Tsimane'.

But in a follow-up study a year later, the researchers challenged their original hypothesis. According to McDade, the original theory relied on the assumption that the findings from inflammation research in Western countries are universal. But for the Tsimane', inflammation and infection do not promote aging of the arteries and heart disease risk factors, possibly due to their lean diet of home-grown food and active lifestyle.

The findings underscore McDade's point that high inflammation levels may not cause disease, but rather other underlying factors are to blame. This adds to the growing number of studies from lower-income regions and nations, like West Africa, Siberia, Ecuador, and Indonesia, also break the link between inflammation, aging, and disease. These findings bolster his idea that to fully understand inflammation, we need to expand our world view.

"If we really want to understand inflammation and how it matters to health, we need to study it in everyday people around the world," McDade said. "If we can generate knowledge into the experiences and contexts that shape how our bodies regulate inflammation, hopefully we can leverage that knowledge to break the links among inflammation, aging, and disease."

Thomas McDade is the Carlos Montezuma Professor of Anthropology and an IPR fellow.

Racial Discrimination Links to Worse Health 10 Years Later

Difficulty sleeping and higher inflammation may drive this relationship

A growing body of research **shows** that racial discrimination can negatively impact physical health. What isn't fully understood are the mechanisms that link the two.

A 2024 study **finds** that young Black adults who reported experiencing racial discrimination in their late teens and early 20s had an increased risk of metabolic syndrome—a predictor of heart disease, diabetes, and stroke—at age 31. The study's authors wanted to understand the relationship between racial discrimination and metabolic syndrome in Black youth over time.

Co-authored by pediatrician and IPR associate **Nia Heard-Garris** and IPR health psychologists **Edith Chen** and **Greg Miller**, the research suggests that inflammation and difficulty sleeping may be pathways that explain how racial discrimination leads to poor health. It also shows that experiencing racial discrimination at a young age can be especially damaging.

"This study provides more evidence that racial discrimination, even in adolescence, may have a lasting influence on health," said Heard-Garris, who is the first author of the *JAMA Network Open* study.

The researchers analyzed data from the **Strong African Americans Health Adults Project** (SHAPE). It has followed a group of Black participants in rural Georgia from age 11 to young adulthood for nearly three decades.

Between 2009 and 2010, 322 participants between 19 and 21 years old answered questions about their experiences with discrimination such as "Have you been treated rudely or disrespectfully because of your race?"

When they were 25 years old, participants reported whether they had trouble sleeping. They participated in a biomarker study between the ages of 19 and 21 and also had blood samples taken at ages 25 and 31 that researchers used to measure inflammation.

This study is one of the first to identify possible pathways that racial discrimination can predispose young Black adults to

metabolic syndrome over a long period. The researchers show that at age 25, 19%, or 60 participants, had metabolic syndrome. By age 31—only six years later—metabolic syndrome nearly doubled to 37% (118) among participants.

"This particular research question was interesting to me because we know that racial discrimination is harmful for health," Heard-Garris said. "But it sometimes can be difficult to isolate the mechanisms that drive this relationship."

Chen says racial discrimination could impact sleep because it can lead to negative thoughts and emotions about the incident.

"These thoughts and emotions may then disrupt sleep, and in turn, poor sleep over time can contribute to metabolic syndrome," Chen said.

Heard-Garris says that while the study does not test interventions that could reduce the risk of metabolic syndrome, we know that quality sleep is essential for good health. Because many Black Americans face racial discrimination, she encouraged doctors to consider ways to help their Black patients get longer and better quality sleep.

Heard-Garris and her team at the **ARISE Health Lab**, which examines the role of adversity and racism on health,

completed a pilot intervention testing how racial justice activism affected adolescents. Early results suggest this intervention may reduce depressive symptoms.

Future research, she says, should test whether other interventions can help decrease the impact of racial discrimination.

The findings suggest that promoting better health and healthcare will not be enough to reduce or prevent metabolic syndrome among minorities.

Heard-Garris notes, "Ultimately, policy and large-scale societal interventions are required to reduce racial discrimination as a whole."

Miller explains that the results show that even when health issues don't appear until adulthood, the root problem happens much earlier in a person's life.

"We can use that knowledge to develop better policies and practices that prevent health problems from emerging," he said.

Nia Heard-Garris is an assistant professor of pediatrics and an IPR associate. Edith Chen is the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Professor of Psychology and an IPR fellow. Greg Miller is the Louis W. Menk Professor of Psychology and an IPR fellow.

What Happened in the 2024 Election?

IPR scholars discuss how the economy, policy, and the deep partisan divisions played into the election results

L. Schaffer

From left: Laurel Harbridge-Yong, Chloe Thurston, Eli Finkel, and Erik Nisbet break down the results of the 2024 presidential election.

During a Nov. 11 post-election panel, four IPR experts unpacked the 2024 election results, putting polls, partisanship, and policy reactions into context for the more than 160 in attendance.

"The past few weeks and months have brought intense debate about the state and the direction of our country and our democracy," IPR Director Andrew V. Papachristos said. "It's in moments like these that it's essential to come together in spaces like this and to work together to better understand these extremely complex issues."

IPR political scientist Laurel Harbridge-Yong began by framing the election and the Republican sweep of Congress and the presidency, putting Donald Trump back in the White House for a second term.

"Coming into this election, it seemed like things might be close," Harbridge-Yong explained, as polls showed a tight presidential race between President Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris.

But the results didn't end up being that close. All seven swing states went to Trump—who won 312 electoral votes to Harris' 226—as well as the popular vote.

"In many respects, this was a normal, anti-incumbent election that just so happened to benefit an abnormal candidate," she said, with poor perceptions of the economy and Biden's low approval ratings helping the opposing party.

Harbridge-Yong then invited three IPR faculty—political scientist Chloe Thurston, IPR social psychologist Eli Finkel, and communications and policy scholar Erik Nisbet—to reflect on what their research reveals about this political moment.

Policy Doesn't Make Politics

How did the Biden administration's policies influence the 2024 election's outcome? Thurston argued the post-election narrative about whether the economy mattered more than concerns about democracy is incomplete.

"I think that there is a mistaken, in my opinion, view that robust economic policymaking that targeted specific areas and needs would restore faith in American democracy," Thurston said.

During his time in office, former President Joe Biden presented himself as occupying a role similar to President Franklin Roosevelt in a moment of economic and

political crisis, she said. Biden's administration had several successes with legislation like the Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS and Science Act, which led some, including Biden's staff, to believe that voters would reward the administration for these policies at the ballot box.

"Policies can shift the political views of the mass public," Thurston said. "They affect what people think the government can do, is capable of doing, but also what they value and what they don't necessarily want to lose."

But she sees a limit to how much policy can change voters' attitudes toward politicians. Her research on policy feedback with IPR political scientist Daniel Galvin, shows that a person's political identity is often what shapes their views about a given policy, not the other way around.

"This is one reason why Obamacare was not very popular among conservatives when it was first created, but many years later, people do appreciate some of the things that the Affordable Care Act provided them with," she said.

And just because people benefit from policies passed by the opposing party, doesn't mean that they will stop supporting their party. Ultimately, "Bidenomics" didn't gain enough support to build a partisan majority and win Harris the presidency, Thurston explained.

"It's hard to design policy to produce its intended policy consequences," she said. "It's harder still to design policy to produce our intended political consequences."

Partisan Division Becomes a 'Holy War'

To understand what happened in 2024, Finkel argued, you need to understand what's been going on in presidential elections across the last decades. He explained that the margins in the popular vote in presidential elections have grown closer since the early 20th century, which means that immense power rests on a knife's edge every election.

As elections shift power in Congress and the presidency every few years "you see the parties really focus in on the differences," he said.

To gain political power over their opponents, both parties use moral outrage to bring voters to the polls. While narrower election margins have made it more urgent to get votes, politics have calcified, or grown more rigid, meaning there's less of a chance of big swings in either party's favor. The narratives we share about elections also matter, Finkel says.

"The stories that we—when I say we, I mean active partisans—tell about what's happening in these elections gets more and more serious," he said.

He shared examples of both conservatives and liberals talking about their political opponents in existential terms, like a poll conducted in October 2020 where 70% of respondents agreed that "if the wrong candidate wins this election, America will not recover."

As partisan division reaches new levels, Finkel argued that "our politics have become a holy war." He cited research he co-led with former IPR political scientist James Druckman, now at the University of Rochester, showing that political sectarianism, or bitter partisanship where party members have more contempt for the other party than affection for their own, has increased.

"What I would like to propose to all of us, is to consider what the greater threat is to our society: Is it insufficient moral clarity, that is, we haven't really stood up with fervor for the things we believe in?" Finkel asked. "Or is it too much moral fervor—we are so sure of the rightness of what we're doing that we will absolutely do what is required to make sure that our side wins?"

Why 'Democracy on the Ballot' Lost

In the 2022 midterm elections, extreme candidates lost in heavily Republican areas in most cases, Nisbet said, which seemed to show the success of the Democrats' message that democracy was at stake. Still, nearly 200 Republican candidates who denied the 2020 election results won their midterm races.

"What is undemocratic behavior by a candidate or party is easily rationalized based upon our polarized partisan views or sectarian views," he explained.

But would a "democracy on the ballot" strategy or a strategy to unite against an illiberal candidate work in 2024? Nisbet asked. He cited a CNN poll showing that more voters in 2024 thought democracy was under threat than in 2022. So why did Trump win?

Nisbet argues that the way in which people define democracy matters. Through the Comparative National Elections Project, he conducted a survey on issues Americans believe are important for democracy after the 2022 midterm election.

"What we see here is when we ask people how you define democracy, Trump did best or moved the needle among those voters who believe that democracy should be defined, at least to some degree, as 'jobs for everyone,'" he said.

This broader, distributive understanding of democracy which includes economic wellbeing, benefited Trump who had a strong economy during his first term. In contrast, demographic groups that tended to understand democracy more in terms of free and fair elections or civil liberties like freedom of expression moved away from Trump in 2024 compared to 2020.

"My argument is that the Dems' democracy strategy failed because they took the wrong lessons from the midterms," Nisbet said. "Who threatens democracy and what is democratic is subjective and depends on very polarized views."

Harris ultimately lost because she failed to communicate a vision of democracy that was "more inclusive for these other voters who were not very ideological, but look at democracy through a broader lens," he said.

Eli Finkel is professor of psychology and management and organizations and a Morton O. Schapiro IPR Fellow. Laurel Harbridge-Yong is associate professor of political science and IPR associate director and fellow. Erik Nisbet is the Owen L. Coon Endowed Professor of Policy Analysis and Communication and an IPR associate. Chloe Thurston is associate professor of political science and an IPR fellow.

Outrage Fuels the Spread of Online Misinformation

In an era where misinformation threatens democracy, public health, and social cohesion, a new study by Kellogg social psychologist and IPR associate William Brady and colleagues investigates how moral outrage drives the spread of false information online. Analyzing data from Facebook (more than 1 million links), Twitter (44,529 tweets, 24,007 users), and two experiments involving 1,475 participants, the researchers found that misinformation evokes more outrage—a mix of anger and disgust—than trustworthy news, making it especially engaging and likely to be shared. Outrage fuels the spread of both misinformation and accurate news, but its connection to political conflict and group identity makes it particularly effective for spreading falsehoods. Users share outrage-inducing content impulsively, often without checking its accuracy; they appear to be driven by motives like signaling political loyalty or reinforcing group biases. The study builds on Brady's previous work showing that social media algorithms, designed to prioritize engaging content, fuel cycles of sharing and extend the reach of posts that evoke outrage. Current approaches to slowing the spread of misinformation, such as accuracy prompts, fall short because they don't address the deeper reasons people share outrageous content, like out of habit and the desire to connect with their social groups. By revealing the psychological and technological forces behind misinformation, the researchers offer key insights for creating strategies to curb its spread and promote healthier online conversations.

The New Politics of Alt-Labor

IPR political scientist's new book and research lab focus on low-wage workers' rights

Daniel Galvin's research shows how outdated labor laws led states to strengthen worker protections.

In 2016, the progressive community organization Living United for Change in Arizona (LUCHA) successfully **pushed** for a higher minimum wage and the right to paid sick leave in Arizona through a ballot measure.

During the 2020 election, the group **registered** 47,000 new voters—playing a role in former President Joe Biden's victory in the battleground state.

LUCHA's advocacy demonstrates some of the new ways low-wage workers are engaging in politics outside of unions.

In his book *Alt-Labor and the New Politics of Workers' Rights* (Russell Sage Foundation, 2024), IPR political scientist **Daniel Galvin** traces the rise of alt-labor organizations, nonprofits that organize and support low-wage workers.

Low-wage workers make up roughly 44% of the **U.S. workforce**, earn $10 an hour on average, and include a disproportionate number of Black and Latinx workers, immigrants, and women.

Galvin also recently launched the **Workplace Justice Lab** at Northwestern, a sister organization of the **Workplace Justice Lab** at Rutgers University. The lab supports state and local agencies in enforcing labor standards and collaborates with alt-labor groups.

Tracking the Rise of Alt-Labor Groups

Galvin became interested in alt-labor groups after studying wage theft and state laws that protect workers from losing their earnings.

"It was surprising and interesting to me that a lot of these laws were being pushed by small community-based nonprofit groups that were not unions, but that still organized workers," he said.

He explains in his book that as New Deal-era labor laws failed to keep pace with a changing economy, states began to enact employment laws to create stronger worker protections. Those rights and protections, however, were scattered across different states, difficult to access, and did not protect the most vulnerable workers from abuse and exploitation.

Starting in the 1970s, deregulation, the decline of unions, and the changing composition of industries altered low-wage work and drew millions of new immigrants to the U.S. The growing problems low-wage workers faced—poor job quality, rampant exploitation, and a lack of adequate protections—set the stage for the 250–300 alt-labor groups there are today to emerge, Galvin says.

Alt-labor groups traditionally provide services and organize direct actions to expose employer wrongdoing through protests and negative media coverage.

To protect against future workplace abuse, alt-labor groups turned their attention to passing public policies at the local level to combat issues like wage theft, minimal health and safety rules, and discrimination.

Given how small and poor the groups are and how marginalized their workers are in the political arena, Galvin says it's amazing how alt-labor groups try "to alter the contours of their political environment" through direct political activity such as voter registration campaigns, influencing who is selected for office, and pushing new issues onto the agenda.

Supporting Labor Standards Enforcement and Alt-Labor Groups

The new Workplace Justice Lab grew out of a multiyear collaboration between Galvin and his colleagues at Rutgers examining wage theft and encouraging state and local agencies to adopt more strategic enforcement practices. The team is made up of academic researchers, lawyers, former government staff, and labor organizers.

Along with conducting research, the lab helps state and local agencies improve their enforcement of labor standards through a program called "Beyond the Bill." They have trained and worked with government labor departments in several states and localities, including Illinois, New Jersey, Los Angeles County, and Minneapolis. New Jersey's labor department recently **overhauled** its enforcement procedures as a result of studies and trainings offered by the lab.

They also collaborate with community-based workers' organizations. Through their program "Build the Base," they teach alt-labor groups about cutting-edge organizational models used by successful worker centers to help grow their memberships and establish more democratic leadership structures.

Galvin says alt-labor organizations face serious challenges because of their precarious structures and finances. Unlike labor unions, alt-labor groups don't usually require membership dues and often rely on private philanthropic support. Despite their small size, he says that alt-labor groups have been surprisingly successful at exposing the problems low-wage workers face and highlighting the disconnect between the rights we have as public citizens and the far more limited rights we have in the workplace.

"Most people spend the majority of their time either sleeping or at work," Galvin said. "So, the rights people have at work are critical."

Daniel Galvin is professor of political science, an IPR fellow, and director of the **Workplace Justice Lab@NU** *housed at IPR.*

A WISE(r) Way to Measure Water Insecurity

IPR anthropologist captures voices of those unheard and their experiences with water

On World Water Day, March 22, 2024, the World Health Organization and UNICEF enhanced the U.N.'s current indicators on measuring progress toward its sixth Sustainable Development Goal (**SDG** 6), on clean water and sanitation, with a list of 15 gender-informed recommendations. To understand who has experienced water insecurity by age and gender, WHO and UNICEF recommend using the Individual Water Insecurity Experiences (IWISE) Scales, IPR anthropologist **Sera Young** and colleagues developed.

That same day, at the Center for Strategic and International Studies (**CSIS**), Young traced how her study of food insecurity in Kenya as a budding assistant professor **led** to many conversations about how water affected women and children. Over the past 10 years, Young has collaborated with colleagues from around the globe to develop and validate scales that could easily but reliably measure lived **experiences** with water in any setting.

Young also previewed **findings** on water insecurity drawn from the latest Gallup World Poll in 38 countries and a further two collected by national governments. This builds on the original **survey** of 31 countries in 2021. The poll relies on WISE Scale questions to capture experiences beyond water infrastructure or quality of more than 40,000 people in low-, and middle-income countries.

Five days later on March 27, Young sat in Gallup's London headquarters in the Shard to **unveil** a **report**, "Measuring Human Experiences to Advance Safe Water for All," covering the real-world impact of the WISE Scales for areas like Mexico or Australia.

"We are at an inflection point in the way the world thinks about one of our most precious resources," Young said.

Practically, the scales capture experiences with water access, use, and reliability in 12 succinct questions, taking about three minutes to answer. The researchers have developed four different versions so far, to confidently compare data across different countries, as well as across social, cultural, infrastructure, and ecological contexts. The Household Water Insecurity Experiences (HWISE) Scale assesses the frequency and severity of household experiences, and the IWISE Scale does the same for individuals. Additionally, one-minute versions exist (HWISE-4 and the IWISE-4) that only assess frequency.

WHO and UNICEF are addressing a gender gap and a policy puzzle for integrating gender into their priority recommendations for indicators of progress on SDG 6. The current "gender-blind" indicators mean it is impossible to see how a person's gender might impact their access and use of water. Increased understanding of gender disparities gleaned from the collected WISE data can lead to some surprising findings. Young says that women spend billions of hours more than men every day fetching water for their families.

Beyond revealing gender disparities, the WISE Scales offer an invaluable tool to help define the burden of global water insecurity and to understand how it plays out in different countries. The **infographic** and one-page country reports provide key data on water insecurity for 40 countries.

Data collected via the WISE Scales are also providing crucial knowledge to communities around the world to detail personal and household experiences with water—and thus lead to change.

The water shortages and extreme drought plaguing countries across the globe speak to the growing urgency of understanding how water insecurity affects people and the need for better measurement. Currently, more than 100 organizations have used the WISE Scales in at least 55 countries.

WaterAid CEO Tim Wainwright called on those at the March 27 release of the report, "Measuring Human Experiences to Advance Safe Water for All," to use the WISE Scales, "a fantastic tool," and underscored the urgent need for such data. "Water is at the heart of how climate change affects the human race," he argued.

Young says that the data on global water insecurity is overdue, but the data can tell us how common and severe water insecurity is, where progress is being made towards Sustainable Development Goals, and where it is not. Young also points out how water insecurity can increase the chances of food insecurity. The data can help distribute resources to where they are most needed and inform decisions in other sectors like humanitarian crises, conflict, and economic prosperity.

"In the WISE scale data we see the ingredients for development and the ingredients for peace in the information that the scale enables us to unpack," CSIS senior fellow David Michel noted during the March 22 CSIS webinar.

Young added, "We have come an extraordinary way in bringing unheard voices to the water sector. I am looking forward to build on that momentum with folks around the world—in governments, universities, NGOs and the private sector—to improve the water security of those who need it most."

Sera Young is professor of anthropology and global health and an IPR fellow. She leads development of the Water Insecurity Experiences (WISE) Scales.

Courtesy of S. Young

IPR's Sera Young visits with Kajiado county water officials in Kenya to learn about ongoing water issues.

Partnership Supports Irish Families with Disabilities

IPR policy expert's new collaboration takes a two-generation approach to wellbeing

Ireland faces significant challenges in supporting families with disabilities. More than 700,000 people in Ireland live with neurological conditions, and the country has the second-highest rate of spina bifida in the European Union (EU). Individuals with disabilities in Ireland have some of the lowest employment rates in the EU.

A new collaboration among Northwestern University and institutions in County Cork, Ireland, aims to understand and address the needs of Irish families living with neuro-physical disabilities.

In spring 2024, Northwestern's Roberta Buffett Institute for Global Affairs awarded IPR research professor **Terese Sommer** a Global Collaboration Grant to work with Padraig Mallon, chief executive at the **Crann Centre**, and Siobhán Cusack, director of research strategy and projects at **University College Cork** (UCC). The partnership will engage families with disabilities to produce translatable research.

> *"When I originally went into research, I wanted to make sure that I didn't just focus on the numbers, but be close to the phenomenon of what's actually happening."*
>
> **— Terese Sommer**

Sommer leads **Northwestern's Two-Generation Research Initiative** (NU2Gen), with **Lauren Tighe**, IPR research assistant professor. It has been at the forefront of aligning educational services for children with workforce training and education for their parents for the last 15 years.

This emerging collaboration comes on the heels of an article by Sommer and colleagues in *Child Development Perspectives* **calling**

Terese Sommer (third from the right) meets with project partners at the Crann Centre in Ireland this spring.

for coordinated, simultaneous services for children and their caregivers to maximize children's developmental potential and alleviate poverty.

"Children are often a major motivator for their parents to improve their own lot in lives, whether that be through education, career, or overall wellbeing," Sommer **explained** in a Crann Centre podcast. "And then we know that, in turn, influences outcomes for children."

Sommer's collaboration in Ireland is a prime example of this global two-generation work.

The NU2Gen and Crann Centre collaboration was initiated through the Ascend at the Aspen Institute, an initiative promoting intergenerational family prosperity. As NU2Gen and Crann Centre began initial conversations, the Crann Centre and UCC were formalizing a partnership to enable collaborative research and teaching.

The collaboration between NU2Gen, Crann Centre, and UCC is setting up a Research Advisory Working Group, co-design a research agenda, and seeking cross-national funding sources. They will evaluate the Crann Centre's whole family care model, aiming to influence policies and programs on a broader scale.

The Crann Centre, an Irish NGO which was co-founded by American philanthropist Kate Jarvey, supports over 500 families with

neuro-physical disabilities. Its comprehensive care model addresses independent living, mobility, social capital, psychological wellbeing, health, education, and career pathways.

"What is particularly distinctive about this partnership with the Crann Center is that they were true 2Gen from the beginning," Sommer said. "From day one, Crann was invested in helping families whether the primary client was the child that had the neurophysical disability or the adult."

Leveraging the UCC team's extensive experience in community-engaged research in Cork, the initiative is committed to centering the input of families living with disabilities in their study of the Crann Centre's model—something Sommer has learned is essential.

"When I originally went into research, I wanted to make sure that I didn't just focus on the numbers, but be close to the phenomenon of what's actually happening," Sommer shared. "And it's just been incredibly rewarding to see changes in families over time—to be able to document them, and then to actually use that to influence policy."

Teresa Eckrich Sommer is the director and co-founder of the Two Generation Research Initiative (NU2Gen) and an IPR research professor.

Faculty Spotlight: Eli Finkel

IPR social psychologist's research sits at the intersection of relationships and politics

From a young age, IPR social psychologist Eli Finkel pursued a "life of the mind," driven by curiosity. While studying social psychology as a Northwestern undergraduate, he quickly discovered his primary interest: relationships.

"Why is an individual attracted to one partner but not another? Why do some relationships end in divorce and others end up happily ever after?" Finkel said. "Those sorts of questions were extremely interesting to me, just like I think they're interesting to most people."

Until 2018, Finkel's research primarily focused on romantic relationships, including initial attraction, marital dynamics, and the pursuit of shared goals. His book, the highly lauded *The All-or-Nothing Marriage: How the Best Marriages Work* (Dutton, 2017), delved into his research on the institution of marriage over time, finding that the best marriages of today are better than the best ones of the past.

The same curiosity that led him to study relationships also guided him to a seemingly unrelated field: politics.

American Partisans: 'The Most Toxic Marriage I Can Fathom'

Finkel's view on politics changed with Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings to become a Supreme Court justice in July 2018. He watched, transfixed and disturbed, at the Rashomon-like scene as Kavanaugh and Christine Blasey Ford provided irreconcilable testimony before Congress regarding her accusation that he had sexually assaulted her in high school.

Among the alarming conclusions Finkel drew from this event is that the addition of so much new information barely changed anyone's mind. Gallup polling conducted before and after the hearing showed the gap in percentages of those for and against Kavanaugh's confirmation remained virtually unchanged—and Democrats and Republicans remained highly polarized in their views.

Finkel felt that America was split between two realities. "I started to think, 'I don't know

Eli Finkel sees politics as "the most toxic marriage."

Courtesy of E. Finkel

if there's a future for my nation," he said. "I think we're driving off a cliff, and I don't know where the off-ramps are."

The concern he felt following the hearing served as a catalyst for Finkel. He saw all-too-familiar patterns: The deep divide between Democrats and Republicans looked to him like a dysfunctional marriage.

"With this sort of confusion that I had when I was looking at politics, I started to realize that we have created—Democrats and Republicans, for example—the most toxic marriage I can fathom," he said.

In *Science*, Finkel and his co-authors, who include IPR political scientist Mary McGrath, review evidence showing that the level of hatred partisan Americans feel for their political opponents far exceeds their level of disagreement on policy. "This is the sort of thing that you see in corrosive marriages," he said. "The sort of fights that, from an external perspective, you might say, 'I don't really see why that was such a big deal,' become sources of absolute, extreme moral outrage."

Finkel also highlights the role of the news media and social media in creating misperceptions. In a study with Northwestern postdoctoral scholar in psychology Michalis Mamakos (PhD 2023), he finds that comments by politically engaged Reddit users are toxic even if they are not discussing politics.

Finkel believes that the outrage shown on the news and social media can misshape perceptions, and direct communication is needed to understand opposing viewpoints.

Free Speech on Campus: Finding the Right Fault Line

Direct communication is also the "missing link" in the debate about free speech, especially on campuses, Finkel says. He criticizes the prevailing either/or debate, in which the question becomes, do you prioritize the First Amendment—or do you protect individuals from harmful speech?

"I think that's the wrong fault line," Finkel said. "It ignores the people who are on the periphery who might enter the public sphere, who might enter the debate, but are prevented from doing so because the most aggressive voices turn the public sphere into the Thunderdome."

Instead, Finkel sees a need for an expansive approach to talking about important ideas, even potentially hurtful ones, while rejecting harmful ways of communicating such ideas.

In February 2024, Northwestern President Michael Schill appointed Finkel to a committee tasked with examining the issues of free, institutional speech. Finkel underscores the importance of respectful, open dialogue and thoughtful discussion to bridge divides.

That same belief led him to launch the Center for Enlightened Disagreement at the Kellogg School of Management with his colleague Nour Kteily, professor of management and organizations and co-director of Kellogg's Dispute Resolution Research Center. The center is built on research, outreach, and curriculum development and will serve as a hub for discussion. The goal is to identify and address conflicts openly and constructively, rather than letting them become corrosive.

"We're not shying away from disagreement. Nobody wants a one-party state. Let's find where the actual disagreement is and lean into it," he said. "I don't want to have people so polite, that they just pretend to get along with everybody and probably just reinforce whatever the status quo is. I want to have serious, intense, robust disagreement."

Eli Finkel is professor of psychology and management and organizations and a Morton O. Schapiro IPR Faculty Fellow.

'An Existential Crisis' for Science

What IPR scholars are doing to solve the replication crisis

From left: Larry Hedges, Brian Uzzi, Jennifer Tackett, and Jessica Hullman tackle various aspects of the replication crisis.

In 2011, one of the American Psychological Association's flagship, peer-reviewed journals published a **study** that claimed to prove that ESP—or extrasensory perception—exists. This heavily **questioned** and controversial finding marked an event in what would come to be known as the "**replication crisis**."

In its most basic sense, the replication crisis refers to a pattern of scientists being unable to obtain the same results previous investigators found. The crisis threatens the scientific enterprise itself, leading to questions not just about research practices and methods, but the very reliability of scientific results. IPR education researcher and statistician **Larry Hedges** calls it "an existential crisis" for science.

Where does addressing the replication crisis stand today? Coming from multiple disciplines, four of our faculty experts shed light on how science can repair itself.

Larry Hedges explains what replication means and why he sees assessing it as a "statistical problem." Brian Uzzi discusses using machine learning to predict replicability. Jennifer Tackett advocates for changes in research practice and scientific culture in clinical psychology and beyond. Jessica Hullman shows that researchers in both social science and machine learning can learn from each other's mistakes and work to improve science.

Larry Hedges: Defining Replication and Its Methods

As a statistician, Larry Hedges uses a methodological perspective to examine the replication crisis.

Hedges **began** by defining replication. First, he **says** you have to distinguish "reproducibility" from "replicability." He noted that reproducibility is important and

needed, but that replicability is much more difficult to achieve. To reproduce scientific findings, an investigator takes the original experiment's data and sees if analysis leads to the same results. To replicate scientific findings, a scientist runs the same experiment and collects new data, after which analysis leads to the same results, a distinction that is now widely accepted.

When the replication crisis burst onto the scene, it seemed as if scientists only needed to redo experiments. Using statistical methods, Hedges **showed** that this simple idea of replication—that is, seeing if doing the same experiment over gets the same results—often is doomed to yield ambiguous results. He also found that the benefits to doing the same study multiple times to test for replicability can have the same limitations unless the proper analysis is conducted. Hedges suggests alternatives similar to those used in meta-analysis; rather than one or more repetitions of a single "original" study, ensembles of studies are performed together.

Since the early days of the replication crisis, Hedges notes, progress has been made in improving the scientific enterprise. In addition to understanding the distinction between reproducibility and replicability, scientists know they need to check a study's replicability. Moreover, they have some good incentives to do so.

As Hedges pointed out, "A scientist can make a big splash by discovering that a famous result cannot be replicated."

Additionally, preregistration, where scientists document their hypothesis and methodologies before launching into their research, and other types of registries for study protocols now exist, in addition to more elaborate supports, such as the **Open Science Framework**.

Hedges is cautiously optimistic: "I hope, but am not sure, that the better methods we now have for assessing replicability and for the design of ensembles of studies to assess replication will become more widely used."

Brian Uzzi: Predicting Replicability

The replication crisis presented science with the big question of how much previous research was true. If studies could not be replicated, were their findings valid in the first place? Were there other ways to predict whether any given study could be replicated without undertaking costly new experiments?

Network scientist, sociologist, and IPR associate **Brian Uzzi** tries to answer these questions, **identifying** two approaches to improve replicability. One would be to improve scientific methods. The other would be to develop procedures to review research that would accurately predict whether it could be replicated. In the last few years, he has focused on the second path—better prediction.

Uzzi **used** artificial intelligence (AI) to read scientific papers searching for cues that correlate with replicability. He and his colleagues Youyou Wu at University College London and Yang Yang at Notre Dame wanted to create a "system for self-assessment." The model they made worked quickly, and it correctly **predicted** replication outcomes 65%–78% of the time.

In 2023, when the researchers **applied** their model's algorithm to over 40,000 articles published over 20 years in top psychology journals, they found that roughly 40% of studies were likely to replicate. Experiments only had a 39% chance of replicability, while other research procedures had about a 50% chance.

Uzzi points to three advantages to using AI to tackle replicability. First, rather than looking at a study's statistics, AI examines the text of the article, which can include much more information. Second, replication is too expensive to scale individually and manually. Third, the algorithmic method, he noted, "is the only self-diagnostic tool currently available to help researchers overcome unavoidable blind spots."

Uzzi is positive about the future: "The error correcting mechanisms in science have been working, making results stronger for all."

Jennifer Tackett: Improving Structure and Practice

Psychologist and IPR associate Jennifer Tackett has worked to identify the issues and propose solutions for the replication crisis in her field of clinical psychology for nearly a decade.

In an overview published in the *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology,* Tackett and her colleagues lay out causes of the crisis and strategies to combat it, focusing on making research more open and transparent. Tools include open materials and open data, preregistration, registered reports, and multisite collaborative research studies.

In preregistration, researchers publicly identify the details, like hypotheses and methodologies, of their planned study before beginning work. Tackett called preregistration "a good step in the right direction," but noted it will not "solve everything."

It also puts a challenging burden on the researcher. It's time-consuming, labor intensive, and therefore, expensive to preregister. Despite the challenge, Tackett appreciates how registering things in advance keeps researchers honest.

The replication crisis makes clear, Tackett explains, that scientific culture must change in order to preserve trust in the literature.

Tackett advocates for both immediate changes in practice and larger structural changes in incentives for scientific behavior to address the replication crisis.

Tackett is encouraged by younger scientists who are adopting improved methods to make replication easier and more accurate.

However, she warns, the larger issues in science that the replication crisis uncovered should be addressed by structural changes in the incentives and culture of science. She believes that the "business-as-usual" approach has enabled the scientific culture to prioritize "quantity over quality and innovation over rigor." She also calls on funders, publishers, and universities to reward better scientific research.

Jessica Hullman: Machine Learning and Replication

As a PhD student, computer scientist and IPR associate Jessica Hullman began thinking about replication and reproducibility. She examines "uncertainty communication," or the challenges of representing the inherently limited certainty that drawing inferences from data can provide.

Machine learning, a type of artificial intelligence, trains algorithms on data to predict new outcomes. Hullman explains that machine learning depends on the data the computer is given. The common practice when training in machine learning is to withhold one dataset so that the model is not too attuned to specific data. However, Hullman says the processes that are typically used by developers to ensure that models can generalize to new datasets are not enough to ensure that machine learning will accurately predict in new situations. The goal is to create a model that will predict outcomes. In both types of modeling, researchers use the model with varying degrees of success in the real world, and failures in reproducibility and robustness occur when conditions differ from the conditions that the model was trained on.

In her research, Hullman finds similarities between the replication crisis in fields such as psychology and in machine learning. In both, people may put too much faith in theory or a particular procedure, tend to disregard

sources of uncertainty in their results, and overgeneralize from their study sample in social science or the dataset they input in machine learning—leading to claimed effects that cannot hold up when others attempt to replicate them in different circumstances.

Hullman is encouraged by improvements the open science movement has brought about and the greater attention to statistical methods sparked by the replication crisis. Still, Hullman wants to see "greater sensitivity" to uncertainty in the improvement of science.

It is vital, Hullman explains, to define carefully and rigorously what needs to be fixed in science. Even the idea of replicability as a hallmark of good science has its limitations. Just because an experiment's effects can be replicated does not mean that those effects represent scientific truths.

"If effects vary depending on who you are studying—as we should expect—then it doesn't make sense to think that we'll see the same result every time we run the same study," she said. "There may be subtle differences in the sample of people that explain the difference, which doesn't necessarily mean there isn't an effect—it's just not as simple as estimating an average effect on one sample and expecting it to transfer outside of that particular set of experimental participants."

Where We Go from Here

Science rests, as the science philosopher Karl Popper wrote, on repetition and testing. IPR scholars intend to improve that process.

"It's our responsibility as scientists to figure out how to build a more trustworthy, credible scientific base that serves policymakers, serves the public, serves patients," Tackett said. "People turn to the science for answers, and we need to feel confident in the answers we're providing."

Larry Hedges is the Board of Trustees Professor of Statistics and Education and Social Policy, professor of psychology and medical social sciences, and co-directs the Center for Statistics for Evidence-Based Policy and Practice. Jessica Hullman is the Ginni Rometty Professor of Computer Science. Jennifer Tackett is professor of psychology. Brian Uzzi is the Richard L. Thomas Professor of Leadership and Organizational Change and co-directs the Northwestern Institute on Complex Systems. All are IPR faculty.

Ysa Quiballo

Students Learn How Research Can Address Social Issues

Undergraduates develop valuable research skills through projects addressing education inequality and democratic backsliding, among others

IPR is helping to shape the next generation of researchers through its Summer Undergraduate Research Assistants (SURA) Program. Each summer, the initiative connects students directly with IPR faculty, giving them a chance to develop their research skills.

This year, 37 students joined the program, working on projects on critical social issues like education inequality and threats to democracy. SURA gives students more than research experience—it helps them see how their skills can make a real difference.

SESP senior Sarah Abara, majoring in data science and social policy, said working with IPR statistician Elizabeth Tipton gave her not only important insight into the research process and education policy, but also future career paths.

"I learned a lot from her. We communicated on more than just research. We communicated about future career goals, and she just really served as a great mentor for me," she said.

Abara worked with Tipton to analyze testing data for K–5 students in the Evanston school district. The project aimed to identify and quantify disparities in achievement between Black students and their non-Black peers.

Tipton said she enjoyed learning about Abara's experience as a student and helping her think through different career trajectories. "It was fun to see her beginning to make connections between her coursework and her social justice interests, and to see how her skillset could be useful in the policy world," Tipton said.

With graduation approaching, Abara noted that in job interviews, interviewers are often more interested in her research experiences than her work experiences because of the analysis, organization, and communication skills involved in research.

"Those are all things that are transferable to anything that you want to do in your future, whether it's continuing to be a researcher or moving on a different path," she said.

Twenty-two summer undergraduate RAs take a break from their onboarding session for a photo, with the faculty director Christine Percheski (second row, second from the right).

Weinberg junior Inaya Hussain, majoring in mathematical methods in social sciences and history, said working with communications and policy scholar and IPR associate Erik Nisbet deepened her understanding of the research process.

"I also got experience with the iterative process of research. At lab meetings, we always talked about how we could tweak our past processes and try again for a more effective result," she said.

Hussain worked with Nisbet on a range of projects focused on technology, media, and public policy. Her main projects included training an artificial intelligence program to identify misinformation around climate change, conducting a network analysis of online political groups to see how different ideologies connect, and gathering articles on democratic backsliding—when democratic systems start weakening and move toward more authoritarian rule—to develop a framework for media's impact on democracy.

"One thing I love about the work is that I see real applications for the information we create, either in governmental policy or elsewhere."

Nisbet also highlighted the program's distinctive ability to show students how research can directly influence policy, emphasizing its vital role in equipping students like Hussain with the skills and experience needed for meaningful, impact-driven research careers.

"This program is deeply rewarding—for students, who develop valuable research skills and knowledge while contributing to projects with real-world impact, and for faculty, who mentor young researchers and witness their growth into collaborators making meaningful contributions," he said.

Hussain believes research skills will always be valuable, as research is all about quickly adapting and processing large volumes of information, and, as she put it, "having the faith in yourself to be able to create knowledge if you can't find it anywhere else. My experiences this summer will help me through my life!"

Elizabeth Tipton is a professor of statistics and data science and co-director of the Statistics for Evidence-Based Policy and Practice, or STEPP, Center. Erik Nisbet is the Owen L. Coon Endowed Professor of Policy Analysis and Communication and directs the Center for Communication & Public Policy. Both are IPR faculty.

A Small Amount of Funding Helps Novel Projects to Grow

IPR's seed grant program will jumpstart six new research projects

IPR's 2024 Seed Grant Recipients (clockwise from top left): Daniel Galvin, Chloe Thurston, Sandra Waxman, Elisa Jácome, Eli Finkel, Sylvia Perry, and Silvia Vannutelli.

Seven IPR faculty received seed grant funding in 2024 to launch their research in new directions, with an emphasis on interdisciplinary collaborations.

IPR political scientists Daniel Galvin and Chloe Thurston will investigate the politics of U.S. industrial policy, the government's efforts to shape the economy by targeting specific industries, since the early 20th century.

IPR psychologist Sandra Waxman and Medill professor Candy Lee will research the link between college students' social justice goals and career paths, surveying Northwestern students, Chicago nonprofits, and some major for-profits in order to support commitments to social policy and justice.

IPR economist Silvia Vannutelli and her colleagues are using survey data on Europe's Recovery and Resilience Plan to understand socioeconomic heterogeneity in policy knowledge. Their seed grant will help fund an extended survey on access to political information and how policy knowledge affects trust and attitudes toward the European Union.

IPR psychologist Sylvia Perry and IPR graduate research assistant Jonathan Doriscar will explore how defensiveness, negative moral behaviors, and bias awareness affect prejudice and influence interpersonal relationships. The researchers will investigate how White people respond in difficult conversations about personal and systemic racism and how participants' responses influence the Black individuals with whom they will be discussing racism.

IPR social psychologist Eli Finkel and Northwestern PhD student Trevor Spelman will launch a project to reveal key factors driving changes in political belief and self-censorship in familial and other close relationships and to provide ways to enhance the quality of political discussions.

IPR economist Elisa Jácome and her colleagues will examine Swedish data on hospitalizations and deaths from mental illness to deepen our understanding of the effects of mental illness on families and peers. This research can help shed light on the economic costs of mental illness to society, as well as the cost-effectiveness of specific interventions.

Neighborhoods
(Continued from cover)

"The way we get there is through mixed methods, interdisciplinary research designed to help us translate science to policy," DeLuca said.

Addressing Community Violence

Papachristos pointed out that gun violence disproportionately affects certain neighborhoods, with 60% of Americans knowing someone impacted by it. Community Violence Intervention (CVI) programs, which involve individuals with firsthand experience of violence, show promise in reducing harm.

His research estimates that CVI programs prevented 383 homicides and non-fatal shootings in Chicago since 2017. However, he stressed the need for sustained support for CVI workers, who often lack adequate pay, benefits, and labor protections. "Without adequate support for the workers, sustained funding, and policy changes, efforts to reduce gun violence risk falling short," he warned.

Educational Opportunity

Reardon explored educational disparities, noting that third graders in affluent districts often perform at the level of eighth graders in poorer ones. These gaps stem not from innate differences but from unequal access to early educational opportunities.

His research reveals that educational segregation—worsened by the rise of school choice and charter schools—has increased by 35% in 30 years, exacerbating inequalities. Reardon also discussed the pandemic's impact, with test scores in high-poverty districts dropping twice as much as in wealthier ones. Federal aid helped mitigate these setbacks, showing the power of targeted policy interventions.

Reardon advocated for place-based policies addressing segregation, affordable housing, and early childhood education. He argued for initiatives like the Strength in Diversity Act to address long-standing inequalities.

Kirabo Jackson is the Abraham Harris Professor of Education and Social Policy and professor of economics. Andrew Papachristos is the John G. Searle Professor of Sociology, IPR director, and faculty director of CORNERS. Stefanie DeLuca is the James Coleman Professor of Sociology and Social Policy and director of the Poverty and Inequality Research Lab at Johns Hopkins University. Sean Reardon is professor of poverty and inequality in education and of sociology and faculty director of the Educational Opportunity Project at Stanford University.

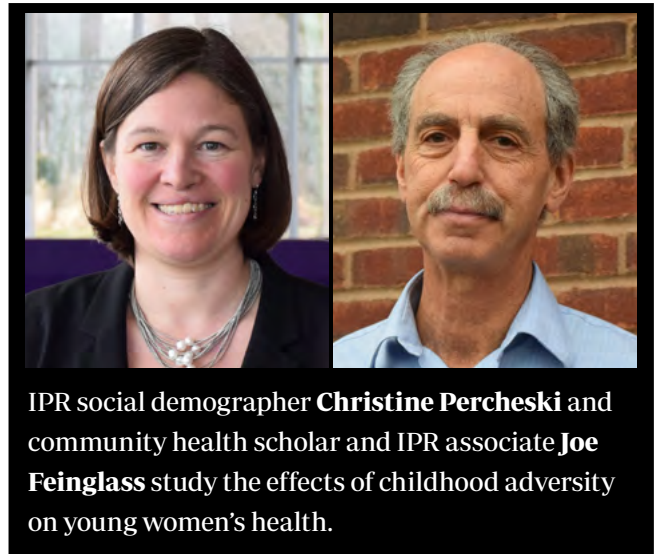# Health Impacts of Childhood Adversity on Potential Mothers

OVERVIEW

Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) are linked to a wide range of negative health outcomes, from mental to physical, and women are significantly more likely to report them. Despite this well-documented association, most research on how health conditions affect women's health before and after pregnancy overlooks ACEs. IPR social demographer Christine Percheski, community health scholar and IPR associate Joe Feinglass, and their colleagues examine the connection between ACEs and health conditions that could increase pregnancy and birth complications.

ACEs include childhood abuse (physical, verbal, sexual); living with a person experiencing mental illness, alcohol or drug issues, or who was incarcerated; and divorced or separated parents.

IPR social demographer **Christine Percheski** and community health scholar and IPR associate **Joe Feinglass** study the effects of childhood adversity on young women's health.

POLICY TAKEAWAYS

- The most promising way to stop the intergenerational transmission of ACEs is to invest in social infrastructure: Policies that give parents access to affordable housing, a living minimum wage, and access to quality childcare will reduce chronic family stress, yield tremendous health benefits, and prevent intergenerational transmission of ACEs.

- These findings underscore the need for a trauma-informed and healing-centered approach to prevention and treatment strategies.

FINDINGS

Adult health is strongly linked to ACE scores upholding previous findings linking chronic disease, obesity, and depression to childhood neglect, abuse, and household stressors. These findings have serious implications for women's current and future physical, obstetrical, and mental health as well as for the health and wellbeing of their children.

Women had higher overall ACE scores than men, largely driven by reported sexual abuse. Almost a quarter (24%) of women aged 18 to 39 reported ACEs compared with 18% for men, with women reporting seven of the eight ACEs more than men. Women reported being sexually abused almost three times more than men.

Almost one in four young women reported experiencing four or more ACEs. After accounting for demographics, young women with four or more ACEs were more likely to be obese, have high blood pressure, and develop diabetes than those with none. They were also almost four times as likely to report a history of depression and more than twice as likely to report only fair or poor health.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) Among Young Women

In 2019, over half (55%) of young women reported one or more ACEs.

Women with four or more ACEs were 62% more likely to be obese, 41% more likely to have high blood pressure, and 36% more likely to have diabetes.

= No ACEs (44.3%)　　= One ACE (15.4%)　　= Two or three ACEs (16.9%)　　= Four or more ACEs (23.4%)
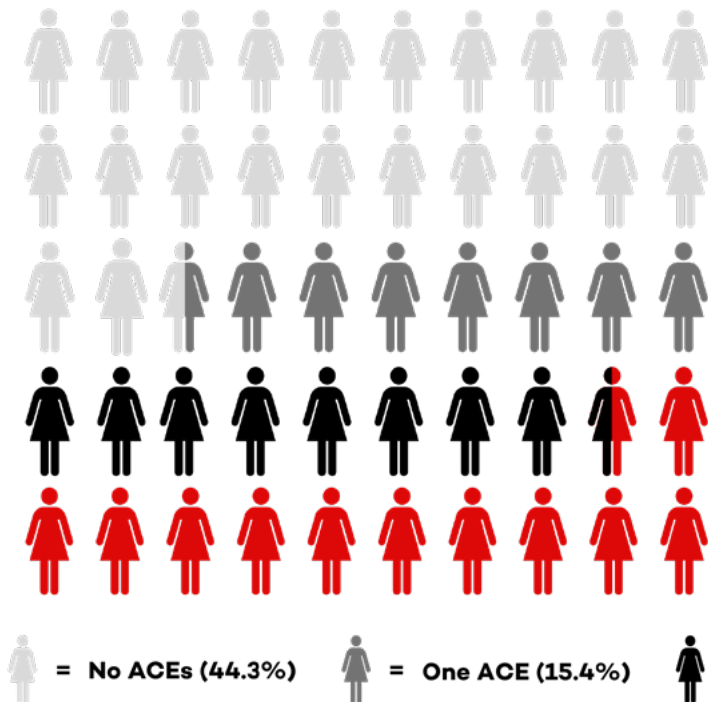
METHODOLOGY

The researchers analyzed self-reported ACEs and health histories for 13,629 women and 13,722 men aged 18–39, using survey data from the 2019 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. The ACEs they looked at include childhood physical, verbal, and sexual abuse, exposure to family violence, family member incarceration, mental illness, alcohol, or drug issues, and divorced or separated parents. The researchers assessed differences by gender in overall ACE scores and specific ACEs, identified trends in women's ACE scores by birth cohort, and estimated the association of ACE scores with health conditions that increase risk for adverse perinatal outcomes.

REFERENCE

Hurley, L., A. Stillerman, J. Feinglass, and C. Percheski. 2022. **Adverse childhood experiences among reproductive age women: Findings from the 2019 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System.** *Women's Health Issues* 32(5): 517–25.

FACTS AND FIGURES

- More than 23% of women respondents reported four or more ACEs.

- Women with four or more ACEs were 62% more likely to be obese, 41% more likely to have high blood pressure, and 36% more likely to have diabetes than those with zero ACEs.

- Nearly one-half (49%) of all women reporting four or more ACEs have a history of depression compared with fewer than one in five women with none.

The Value of Cross-Disciplinary Interactions

Courtesy of S. Perry

IPR psychologist Sylvia Perry was a **fellow** at the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences (CASBS) at Stanford University over the 2022–23 academic year.

Before Perry returned to IPR and Northwestern University, she co-led CASBS's inaugural **Summer Institute on Diversity** workshop for junior scholars. She spoke to IPR about her fellowship and the workshop.

This Q&A has been edited for length and clarity.

IPR: What made CASBS distinct while you were there as a fellow?

Perry: One of the unique and beneficial features of the CASBS fellowship is its commitment to the study of the social and behavioral sciences through an interdisciplinary lens. Despite our varied disciplines, it was nice that we all shared a common interest in understanding human behavior. In addition to facilitating an exchange of my ideas with other scholars, the fellowship also inspired my intellectual growth and novel approaches to my research.

My interactions at CASBS helped me think about how culture, context, and history shape how we see these socially constructed groups, and how this differs outside the U.S.

In my work, I encourage White parents in the U.S. to avoid "colorblind" language when discussing race, especially in the context of inequality. But, being at CASBS allowed me to chat with other researchers and realize that the appropriateness of this approach can vary dramatically depending on whether you're in the U.S., India, or South Africa. The discussions I had there helped shape how I think about these issues and approach them in my research.

IPR: You co-led a diversity workshop this summer through CASBS. Can you tell me about the workshop and the purpose of it?

Perry: It's called the CASBS Institute on Diversity. The Institute is a two-week program I co-direct with the founder, Dr. Mary Murphy of Indiana University Bloomington, and Dr. Jennifer Richeson, a former IPR fellow now at Yale University. The Institute aims to empower early career scholars from underrepresented backgrounds in higher education.

Another unique and essential aspect of the Institute is that it allowed the early career scholars to form a community and created a network of senior scholars they could call on for support.

Sylvia Perry is an associate professor of psychology and an IPR fellow. She directs the Social Cognition and Intergroup Processes Lab.

Studying the High School Experience

In a forthcoming book, IPR sociologist Simone Ispa-Landa explores how students experience life at a large multiracial suburban high school and the way school administrators manage public pressure to reduce racial disparities in discipline.

Ispa-Landa spoke with IPR about what she learned about the student and administrator experience.

This Q&A has been edited for length and clarity.

IPR: What made you interested in studying this particular high school?

Ispa-Landa: In some ways it's an ideal case study for looking at the selves and relationships students can form in high school because it's a school with very strong leadership on equity and really clear messaging to staff about the importance of relationships and trust.

IPR: Was there anything unique about how you conducted the research for this book?

Ispa-Landa: It [the school] gave me unprecedented access, I think. Typically,

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when qualitative researchers go into schools, they do not have the view of what happens behind closed doors with top-level administrators.

IPR: Are there any findings from the book you can share?

Ispa-Landa: I found a lot of pervasive and hard-to-address sexualized bullying and that Black male students were simultaneously hypersurveilled and controlled. But there was also a reluctance to authentically engage with them because teachers were afraid of appearing racist.

I was surprised to find out that a lot of teachers mistrusted the administration and mistrusted how they went about trying to create equity.

IPR: Do you think the issues you saw at this high school reflect larger issues going on within education?

Ispa-Landa: I do. The rise of accountability policies for more and more aspects of schooling is a nationwide phenomenon. This creates a new context for administrators and is likely to shape the problems they see and notice across a number of new domains.

Simone Ispa-Landa is an associate professor of human development and social policy and of sociology, and an IPR fellow.

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The Chicago Universal Pre-K Study: Does the Impact of Universal Pre-K on Access Vary Based on Neighborhood Poverty Rates? (April 2024)

By **Terri Sabol** (IPR/SESP) and **Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach** (IPR/SESP), Northwestern University

The Chicago Universal Pre-K Study: The Impact of Chicago's Universal Prekindergarten Expansion on Access to School-Based Pre-K, 2023–24 Update (December 2023)

By **Terri Sabol** (IPR/SESP) and **Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach** (IPR/SESP), Northwestern University

The Chicago Universal Pre-K Study: Early Care and Education Trends in Chicago's 47th Ward (August 2023)

By **Terri Sabol** (IPR/SESP) and **Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach** (IPR/SESP), Northwestern University

Pre-K Capacity and Enrollment in North Lawndale (July 2023)

By **Terri Sabol** (IPR/SESP) and **Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach** (IPR/SESP), Northwestern University; Kathryn Gonzalez (Mathematica); **Tianshi Wang** (IPR) and **Elana Rich** (IPR), Northwestern University

Bringing Chicago's Early Childhood Community Together

Research hub EC*REACH shares a community-driven research agenda at its launch

During a panel at EC*REACH's launch conference, Marquinta Thomas and Leslie McKinily (from left) discuss early childhood education and care in Chicago.

On June 10 in Chicago, nearly 250 attendees gathered for the city's first early childhood research conference in seven years. Hosted by the **Early Childhood Research Alliance of Chicago** (EC*REACH), the launch conference brought together almost 100 researchers and 70 educators and service providers, along with policymakers, early childhood thought leaders, funders, and community organizers. They represented over 100 different organizations and institutions around the city.

Highlights included keynotes from **Vivian Tseng** of the Foundation for Child Development and **Cristina Pacione-Zayas** from the Chicago Mayor's Office. They bookended a conference focused on discussions around key community and research issues.

Led by faculty co-directors **Terri Sabol** and **Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach**, executive director **Maia Connors**, and senior advisor and advisory board chair **John Q. Easton**, EC*REACH seeks to be a research hub in the city and is housed at the Institute for Policy Research (IPR) at Northwestern University. With a team of faculty and staff, the research alliance produces relevant and rigorous research about early childhood care and education in Chicago. It also works to facilitate partnerships with early childhood organizations to identify important issues to investigate.

"At EC*REACH and for many of us in Chicago, we think that we can do better by thinking holistically about our understanding of how policies and programs interact with one another," Schanzenbach said during opening remarks. "And then we can work together to find new ways to optimize the limited investments that we are making in children."

The research alliance stands on three pillars: conduct rigorous research, harness data for research, and gather and connect the early childhood community. With its mission to find "research-powered answers to

community-driven questions," EC*REACH will work closely with the community to bridge the divide between researchers and those working in early childhood policy and practice.

Launching a Research Alliance

In fall 2020, the city of Chicago and Start Early, an early childhood nonprofit, launched Every Child Ready Chicago (ECRC)—a public-private partnership to create a shared vision for the early childhood ecosystem, young children, and their families.

"There was this general agreement that good evidence needed to get into the hands of decision makers more quickly," Sabol explained. "And it needed to be more deeply tied to the questions that could guide policymaking."

Through ECRC, the group began to explore the possibility of creating a research consortium to support their initiatives. Around the same time, Sabol and Schanzenbach launched a study to examine Chicago's expansion of its universal prekindergarten (pre-K) program for 4-year-olds. The study, in partnership with the Department of Family Support Services, Chicago Public Schools (CPS), and former

EC*REACH's leadership team (from left): Terri Sabol, Diane Schanzenbach, Maia Connors, and John Q. Easton

Mayor Lori Lightfoot's office, highlighted the potential to build deeper research-practice partnerships.

Sabol and Schanzenbach were selected to launch EC*REACH at IPR. In summer 2023, EC*REACH started building its team, including hiring Connors as its executive director. By February 2024, it had organized an agenda-setting task force that kicked off with a work session hosted at the Carole Robertson Center for Learning in North Lawndale. This effort brought together a diverse group of 45 providers, researchers, community and program leaders, parents, and policymakers to lay the groundwork for the research agenda they would introduce at the conference.

"What we seek to do here at EC*REACH is bring everyone together to make this work a little easier for all of us," Sabol said. "The goal is to facilitate collaborations across researchers, city agencies, programs, policy, philanthropy, and families to produce research that can be transformational for Chicago's children."

For example, over the past year, the nonpartisan alliance has released five **rapid research reports** from the universal pre-K study—fulfilling a key aim of sharing timely evidence with the Chicago community. Their findings look at the impact of Chicago's universal pre-K program on capacity, enrollment, and programming in CPS and across neighborhoods.

"The people who are closest to early childhood programs and policies in Chicago have to make important decisions that have big consequences for children and families all the time—whether or not there is relevant evidence to work from," Connors said. "At EC*REACH, we partner closely with members of Chicago's early childhood community and strive to be nimble and responsive to get them the information they need to make informed decisions."

Developing an Early Childhood Research Agenda for Chicago

During the June launch conference, **panels** centered on community-focused issues such as the early childhood education and care workforce, supporting new migrant families with young children, and maternal child health. The EC*REACH team designed the program to bring together key leaders—including researchers, policymakers, and advocates—to support the connection between research and practice.

Schanzenbach and Sabol shared their findings on CPS's pre-K program rollout during one panel. They pointed out that while CPS has seen a decline in kindergarten enrollment, the pre-K program has steadily grown since it expanded in 2018–19.

Connors also outlined the citywide **research agenda** created by the alliance and its partners outlining future directions for early childhood research.

The agenda highlights the need for research that helps Chicago's early childhood community improve and reduce inequalities in children's learning and development, children's health and wellness, and the early childhood workforce. This research, Connors explained, should focus on Illinois' priority populations, historically marginalized groups, and new migrant families with young children.

"We hope that this agenda will focus our attention and coordinate our efforts so that what we're doing is moving in a direction that can make real change," Connors said. "Ultimately, we hope that all of us will use research more often to build a stronger early childhood ecosystem."

Highlighting Early Childhood's 'Pivotal Moment'

In her keynote remarks, Pacione-Zayas, chief of staff to Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson, argued that this is a "pivotal moment" for early childhood work due to additional investments from the city and state. These include the recent creation of Illinois' first Department of Early Childhood. A former Illinois state senator who holds a PhD in educational policy studies, Pacione-Zayas has worked to support young children across her career, including through policy development at the Erikson Institute.

"This event alone, I'm sure will propel new research as well as deepen and extend the partnerships between researchers and community," Pacione-Zayas said. She called EC*REACH an organization that "creates the

L. McDermott

Cristina Pacione-Zayas, chief of staff to Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson, points to the 'pivotal moment' for early childhood education in her conference keynote.

table to ask the questions and ask if we are asking the right questions."

In the conference's keynote address, Tseng, president and chief executive officer of the Foundation for Child Development, reflected on the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing visibility of racial inequality over the past several years.

"How might this work be different now than if you had launched five years ago?" she asked. "How can we learn from the recent past?"

Easton praised Tseng for being "a little ahead of everyone else" by commissioning a **white paper** on research-practice partnerships when she was at the William T. Grant Foundation, co-authored by IPR associate **Cynthia Coburn** in 2013.

Tseng encouraged EC*REACH to center the children most likely to be marginalized, embrace historical perspectives, and contend with power imbalances as they start their work.

"It sounds like there's a lot of excitement about investing in young children in the city," Tseng said. "I hope that we're moving on this journey together."

*Terri Sabol is an associate professor of human development and social policy. Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach is the Margaret Walker Alexander Professor. Maia Connors is executive director of EC*REACH. All are IPR faculty members. John Q. Easton is a senior advisor at IPR and advisory board chair for EC*REACH.*

U.S. Immigration: Rhetoric and Reality

IPR experts' findings illuminate how the two can differ, with some counterintuitive results

Even before the United States was founded, Benjamin Franklin **worried** about the number of Germans "swarming" into the colony of Pennsylvania in 1751, accusing them of "herding together [to] establish their Language and Manners to the Exclusion of ours." More than two centuries later, we hear echoes of this same rhetoric, such as in the 2016 presidential campaign when then-candidate Donald Trump **exhorted**, "This is a country where we speak English!"

In comparing the two, one has to wonder: Have opinions about immigration changed at all over the course of American history—and how does such rhetoric stack up to reality?

Using the latest quantitative methods paired with archival and historical data, IPR faculty experts are examining key aspects of immigrants' integration into American society, uncovering some unexpected answers to century-old questions.

Do More Immigrants Bring Crime?

Nearly half of Americans **polled** in June thought immigrants to the U.S. are making crime worse—and this belief is not new. **Elisa Jácome**, an IPR economist, and her colleagues **delved** into 150 years of census records and incarceration rates to see if this belief is, or ever was, true.

They established that between 1870 and 2020, incarceration rates for immigrants were lower than for U.S.-born men, a gap that has only widened since 1960. Today, immigrants are 60% less likely to be incarcerated than all U.S.-born men, and 30% less likely to be incarcerated than White U.S.-born men.

The verdict: Immigrants are not more crime-prone than their U.S.-born counterparts. Instead, first-generation immigrants are doing better overall than are U.S.-born men, especially among those with lower levels of education. In addition to lower incarceration rates, Jácome explains, immigrant men are more likely to be working than U.S.-born men with similar education backgrounds and are more likely to be married and to be living with children.

Previous economic studies have shown that structural changes such as globalization and technological change have had more negative effects on less-educated U.S.-born men.

What makes immigrants different? Jácome says that's next on her research agenda, but that some possible explanations are that they possess certain positive traits, like ambition or grit, or that they are more mobile and relocate more readily for work.

Do Immigrants Hurt the Economy?

That immigrants take jobs from U.S.-born people is a well-known, persistent, and seemingly logical opinion. Those who endorse it believe that if jobs are scarce, immigrants will take whatever employment is available at lower wages. Members of Congress have expressed this view since the 1880s when mass immigration to the U.S. began, as IPR computational linguist **Rob Voigt** and his fellow researchers **find** in a recent study. The speaker's political party and the immigrant group's home country have changed over time, but the concern about immigrant labor has continued across the last 140 years.

Chinese immigrants were framed as threatening in the 19th century; today, Mexican immigrants are the people categorized by words like "crime," "labor," and "legality," once applied to the Chinese. Voigt and his colleagues' research shows that since World War II, overall political speech about immigration has become more positive than in the past. He points out, however, Mexican immigrants today, like the Chinese over a century ago, are special targets and specially contentious.

"There are political actors who can make use of the idea that all of our problems can be blamed on this one group," Voigt said.

To understand if this rhetoric is reflective of reality, strategy professor and IPR associate **Benjamin Jones** and his colleagues **examined** how often immigrants started companies between 2005 and 2010, the number of jobs the firms created, and then compared them to firms created by U.S.-born entrepreneurs. Results indicate that immigrants are far more likely to start companies and that they create more jobs than they take.

"Ironically, the result is exactly the opposite of the usual narrative. It seems like immigrants actually improve the economic outcomes for native-born workers," Jones **told** Kellogg Insight.

Jácome takes a longer view of immigrant economic activity in the U.S., **examining** the economic success of immigrants and their children over the last 140 years. She and her colleagues compare the earnings of the sons of immigrants to the earnings of sons of U.S.-born men. She and her colleagues find that majority of the second generation of immigrants whose parents started in the bottom of the income distribution in the U.S. are more likely to move up the socioeconomic ladder than the children of U.S.-born people, a finding consistent with the oft-told "immigrant story" of parents coming to the U.S. to offer their children a brighter future.

"Historically, immigrants tended to go to areas in the U.S. that had more

The daughter of an immigrant holds a flag at her mother's naturalization ceremony in 2019.

iStock

opportunities," Jácome explained. "It's unclear whether they were going there to maximize their own opportunities or whether they were choosing locations that would be good for their children."

Do Immigrants Fail to Assimilate?

Today, as well as throughout U.S. history, critics and members of the public have descried the failure, or even refusal, of immigrants to assimilate into American culture. Certain groups come under special suspicion. In the late 19th century, it was the Chinese. In the early 21st century, it is Mexicans and the erroneously lumped together group of Muslims and people from the Middle East and North Africa.

According to **research** by IPR political scientist **Tabitha Bonilla**, immigrants are seen as permanent outsiders due to their religion or race, regardless of their education or their ability to speak English. Bonilla and her co-author conclude that Muslims are seen as a "monolithic group" whatever their ethnic origins, and all may be seen with suspicion and discriminated against as such.

What do we know about immigrant assimilation? One measure is how well they come to speak English. In a 2023 study, Voigt and his colleagues **examine** how much and how well immigrants and refugees in the early 20th century spoke English. Using recorded oral history interviews of Ellis Island immigrants, the researchers analyzed their vocabulary in English, syntax, how fast they spoke, and their "accentedness," or the accuracy and fluency of their speech. They also determined who was a refugee fleeing violence or persecution and who was an immigrant coming for economic reasons or because they had family in the U.S.

They find that refugees fleeing persecution attained higher levels of English by the end of their lives, suggesting that refugees are especially motivated to learn English as they cannot return to their homeland. The researchers note the level of assimilation as measured by how well they came to speak English had nothing to do with government refugee assistance policies—as they did not exist at the time. Rather, the U.S. culture the refugees entered at the time enabled their assimilation.

"Even in this period where there is not official government support for folks as refugees," Voigt said, that refugees could

learn English as well as they did shows that "day-to-day social conditions" helped to enable assimilation.

Using Quantitative Methods for Immigration Studies

Understanding the reality of immigration's effects on the U.S. and the effects of the U.S. on immigrants and refugees increasingly relies on collecting and analyzing vast amounts of data. In addition to Jácome and Voigt, other IPR scholars are pushing the boundaries of quantitative analysis in their studies of these topics.

IPR associate **Joseph Ferrie**, an economic historian, pioneered work on immigrant economic life using longitudinal data from censuses, passenger ship records, tax lists, and city directories. His overview of immigration in American economic history **details** how immigration changed the U.S., and the U.S. changed immigrants, from the 1600s to the present day.

IPR sociologist **Julia Behrman** is **charting** new quantitative data availability, measurements, and investigations of immigration to the U.S. and other countries, as well as immigration policies. Her work points to how scholarship can inform policy by identifying the intended and unintended effects of immigration policies and enforcement.

Using data from waves of the General Social Survey conducted in 2006–18, Behrman **finds** that Hispanic immigrants living in states with the most punitive limitations on immigration report a larger ideal family size than the non-Hispanic White residents of those states. Her analysis suggests that these results may be largely driven by undocumented immigrants. The threat of harsh immigration policies and the

vulnerability immigrants feel in response are possible causes of the higher ideal family size—which may differ from the actual number of children in a family.

"Quantitative analysis allows us to compare ideal family sizes of respondents living in very different immigration policy contexts," Behrman said. "At the same time, use of nationally representative data allows for generalizability, thus providing a fuller understanding of how representative the trends we see are."

In his work, Voigt says, he is using such computational methods to understand how small-scale and personal attitudes and decision making, as well as interactions between people, might become larger patterns that researchers can measure.

People have strong feelings and stubborn attitudes about immigration, and quantitative analysis can cut through that, Jácome said.

"In my work with these co-authors, the goal has been to understand how patterns have changed over time, in particular, because there is this sort of nostalgia for the old immigrant groups in the U.S. and this notion that immigrants today are very different," Jácome said. "I think quantitative work is really important because it allows us to paint a more complete, holistic picture of the history of immigration."

Julia Behrman is associate professor of sociology. Tabitha Bonilla is associate professor of human development and social policy. Joseph Ferrie is professor of economics. Elisa Jácome is assistant professor of economics. Benjamin Jones is the Gordon and Llura Gund Family Professor of Entrepreneurship. Rob Voigt is assistant professor of linguistics. All are IPR faculty.

RECOGNITION FOR IPR FACULTY

2024

Elizabeth Tipton

IPR statistician **Elizabeth Tipton** was named one of 24 fellows in 2024 by the **American Educational Research Association** (AERA), the nation's largest interdisciplinary association devoted to scientific education research. She also became president-elect of the Society for Research on Educational Effectiveness and was named a fellow of the American Statistical Association.

The Provost named collective innovation scholar and IPR associate **Elizabeth Gerber** and **Tipton** Academic Leadership Program Fellows for 2024–25.

Tipton and professor and founding chair of medical social sciences and IPR associate **David Cella** were both included on Clarivate's 2024 Highly Cited Researchers list.

Professor and IPR associate emeritus **Daniel O'Keefe** received the Steven H. Chaffee Career Achievement Award from the International Communication Association.

IPR social psychologist **Eli Finkel** and his co-authors received an AMA-EBSCO-RRBM Award for Responsible Research in Marketing for their paper, "**Common cents: Bank account structure and couples' relationship dynamics**." He was also **appointed**

IPR Faculty Receive Promotions

Congratulations to the following IPR faculty on their promotions.

Political scientists **Daniel Galvin** and **Laurel Harbridge-Yong** and computer scientist **Jessica Hullman** became full professors.

Media scholar and IPR associate **TJ Billard** became associate professor.

Lauren Tighe became an IPR assistant research professor.

co-director of the Kellogg Center for Enlightened Disagreement.

IPR associates **Quinn Mulroy** and **Claudia Haase** were **awarded** Northwestern's Ver Steeg Award. Mulory for mentoring and supporting graduate students and Haase for distinguished research.

IPR psychologist **Sylvia Perry** was named a fellow of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues. She also received the Ann L. Brown Award for Excellence in Developmental Research from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

The NSF awarded IPR graduate research assistant **Jonathan Doriscar** a graduate research fellowship, and he was inducted into Yale University's Edward A. Bouchet Honor Society.

IPR economist **Hannes Schwandt** and healthcare economist and IPR associate **Amanda Starc** were **promoted** to research associates of the National Bureau of Economic Research.

Behavioral scientist and IPR associate **Linda Teplin** was **appointed** to the Division of Behavioral Social Sciences and Education Committee of the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine.

IPR social policy expert **Sally Nuamah**'s book *Closed for Democracy: How Mass School Closure Undermines the Citizenship of Black Americans*, won the W.E.B. Dubois Distinguished Book Award from the National Conference of Black Political Scientists.

Sally Nuamah

Social networking expert and IPR associate **Noshir Contractor** was named executive director of Web Science Trust.

Comparative media scholar and IPR associate **Pablo Boczkowski** received the Communication, Information Technologies, and Media Sociology Career Achievement Award from the American Sociological Association and 2024 Dorothy Lee Award for

Outstanding Scholarship in the Ecology of Culture from the Media Ecology Association.

The Northwestern Medical Women Faculty Organization **awarded** developmental psychologist and IPR associate **Lauren Wakschlag** the Paula H. Stern Award for Outstanding Women in Science and Medicine.

IPR statistician **Larry Hedges** received the José Vasconcelos World Award of Education at the University of Helsinki.

Michelle Birkett, health disparities researcher and IPR associate, is leading Feinberg's new **Center for Computational and Social Sciences in Health** (COMPASS).

2023

Mesmin Destin

Northwestern Provost Kathleen Hagerty appointed IPR social psychologist **Mesmin Destin** as the inaugural faculty director of student access and enrichment.

Cella received the 2023 Tripartite Legacy Faculty Prize in Translational Science and Education.

IPR developmental psychologist and associate **Yang Qu** won the 2023 Early Career Award from the Society for the Study of Human Development.

Tabitha Bonilla, an IPR political scientist, **received** the Adaljiza Sosa-Riddell Mentor Award from the American Political Science Association (APSA) for exemplary mentoring of Latino/a graduate students in political science.

Professor of medical social sciences and IPR associate **Brian Mustanski** was **appointed** to the Advisory Committee to the Director of the National Institutes of Health.

IPR political scientist **Chloe Thurston** received the APSA's Heinz I. Eulau Award for the article "From the Margins to the Center: A Bottom-Up Approach to Welfare State Scholarship."

FACULTY SOUNDBITES

66 *I think we all have an innate understanding that the gut and the brain are linked. We talk about 'feeling it in the gut,' and we know that stress and anxiety often lead to gut symptoms. However, this study goes even further to show how what happens in the gut may actually be the foundation that allowed our brains to develop over evolutionary time."*

Pexels

— Katherine Amato

"We may finally know how your brain got so big," BBC Science Focus, Dec. 2, 2024

66 *Gun violence isn't just a public safety crisis or a public health epidemic; it's a fiscal emergency."*

— Andrew V. Papachristos

Opinion: "Make America safe (again?)—A case for gun violence prevention now and in the future," Newsweek, Dec. 16, 2024

66 *Some of those functions such as administering debt or enforcing some of the rules around nondiscrimination, those are the types of things that could be enforced in different departments, but right now that lives in the Department of Education."*

— Kirabo Jackson

"Trump plans to 'close' the Department of Education. What does this mean?" NBC Chicago, Nov. 19, 2024

66 *When you study anything in epidemiology as a risk factor for disease, you look not just at, 'Yes or no, does the person have that risk factor?' But you look at the dose of that risk factor."*

— Linda Teplin

"Can prison cause dementia? New Northwestern study explores how incarceration impacts health," WBEZ Chicago, Oct. 26, 2024

66 *You can just imagine the humiliation, and a lot of women used that exact term, of being sort of regarded as someone whose main purpose was to get pregnant and to raise kids and just not trusted as a financial operator in your own right."*

Adobe Stock

— Chloe Thurston

"50 years ago, it was legal to deny a woman credit without a male co-signer," Marketplace, Oct. 21, 2024

66 *If Black moms are better candidates for C-section, then you should see them getting sent for C-section more—even when there is limited capacity."*

— Molly Schnell

"Doctors give Black women unneeded C-sections to fill operating rooms, study suggests," The New York Times, Sept. 10, 2024

Read more clips from IPR experts.

66 *These results suggest that the [Federal Assault Weapons Ban] discouraged potential perpetrators from committing a mass shooting with an assault weapon, and, furthermore, that these potential perpetrators did not simply carry out attacks with other types of weapons."*

Adobe Stock

— Alexander Lundberg

"Federal Assault Weapons Ban could have stopped 38 mass shootings since 2005," U.S. News & World Report, Sept. 24, 2024

66 *Sometimes the most extreme viewpoints have the loudest voices, but they might not reflect the most people."*

— David Rapp

"Misinformation could be the dangerous new normal for disaster response," The New Republic, Oct. 8, 2024

66 *And as long as that continues, there's going to be outrage and associated behaviors. ... And I expect that, therefore, the reputational damage for the brands associated with this is going to be that much greater."*

— William Brady

"As Gaza-inspired boycotts continue, new brands are emerging to fill the void," TIME, Aug. 23, 2024

Remembering John McKnight, Community Development Pioneer (1931–2024)

He empowered communities to adopt a glass 'half-full' perspective

John McKnight, professor emeritus of speech and urban affairs at Northwestern University and one of the co-founders of the Center for Urban Affairs—now the Institute for Policy Research (IPR)—passed away on Nov. 2 at his home in Evanston, Ill. He was 92.

A visionary in community organizing and civil rights, McKnight spent his six-decade career advancing what he termed "asset-based" approaches to community development. His philosophy centered on a simple yet revolutionary premise: that all communities have inherent strengths and resources that they can leverage to create lasting, self-sustaining change.

This approach, later formalized as the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model, shifted how practitioners, researchers, and policymakers engage with communities. McKnight's impact reaches far beyond Northwestern, touching communities and organizations in the U.S. and abroad that continue to draw from his insights on collective empowerment.

"He was an extraordinary man and thinker," said Northwestern professor and IPR faculty emeritus **Dan Lewis**. "His influence on me and dozens of others over the years is hard to calculate."

Beginnings of a Visionary Career

McKnight began his journey to becoming a leader in community development and social policy as a Northwestern undergraduate protesting discriminatory university policies in the 1950s. After graduating, he went on to serve in the Navy, lead the Illinois American Civil Liberties Union, shape federal affirmative action policy under President John F. Kennedy, and direct the Midwest division of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.

In 1969, McKnight rejoined his alma mater as a founding member of the Center for Urban Affairs (CUA), an initiative launched by faculty committed to addressing the complex challenges facing American cities. Against the social unrest of the late 1960s, CUA sought to use research as a tool to address issues related to urban inequality, poverty, and racial justice. McKnight was brought on board to lend on-the-ground knowledge of communities to the new center.

"With a joyous demeanor and a warm manner, he exposed academic conceits that undermined community health," Lewis said.

McKnight's contributions as CUA's first associate director were instrumental in shaping its agenda, with notable projects focused on exposing discriminatory practices. Alongside colleagues—sociologist **Andrew Gordon**, law professor **Leonard Rubinowitz**, and economist **Marcus Alexis,** who died in 2009—he investigated redlining, a practice in which banks systematically denied mortgages and other financial services to people in minority neighborhoods. This research laid the groundwork for legislation like the Community Reinvestment Act and the Home Mortgage Disclosure Act.

John McKnight illustrates his approach during his 2003 IPR Distinguished Public Policy Lecture "Regenerating Community: The Recovery of a Space for Citizens."

Legacy at Northwestern and Beyond

In the 1980s and 1990s, as CUA expanded its focus and became IPR, McKnight continued to drive applied research forward. He and collaborator Jody Kretzmann published their classic handbook *Building Communities from the Inside Out* in 1993, formalizing their asset-based approach to community development. This work led to creating the ABCD Institute at Northwestern in 1995, establishing a model that would become foundational in community development practices worldwide.

Under McKnight, CUA not only shaped Northwestern's approach to community engagement but also left a lasting mark on the urban studies and social policy fields. His ideas helped establish a broader understanding of "community" as a force for meaningful change and inspired a new generation of community leaders. The ABCD model has since been adopted internationally and serves as a guiding framework in sectors ranging from public health and education to urban planning and environmental conservation. Emphasizing a "glass half-full" perspective, McKnight's work revealed the potential for positive change when communities focus on their strengths.

McKnight's legacy at IPR and beyond reflects his belief that research institutions have a responsibility not just to study social issues but to engage actively with communities to solve them. More than 50 years after IPR's founding, his principles continue to buttress much of its work and his example inspires scholars and practitioners alike.

"I learned an immense amount from [McKnight] both substantively and...interactively, that is, the way he communicated with others," Lewis said. "He stuck to his analysis. He never belittled those with whom he disagreed. He treated people with respect and warmth and he stayed on his message his whole life."

McKnight is survived by his wife, Marsha Barnett, his son, stepchildren, grandchildren, and his many colleagues and friends.