



Northwestern | INSTITUTE FOR POLICY RESEARCH

YEAR IN REVIEW  
2020-21





Photo by Nicole Jones

During this unusual and challenging time, the Institute for Policy Research has continued to thrive—taking our innovative, apolitical, rigorous, and relevant work to new heights.

I am particularly proud of the great strides IPR faculty have made in providing actionable research for the COVID-19 era. We had a record number of working papers this year and continued to add to our Rapid Research Reports series addressing a wide range of timely topics including community transmission of COVID, ways to address rising violence, the public’s pulse on national topics like vaccinations and misinformation, and the impact of the economic shutdowns. Our faculty have published their COVID and other policy-relevant research in top outlets such as *Science*, *Nature Communications*, and the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, and talked with many policymakers and the press. We at IPR know that our data and analyses are crucial to creating the smart, effective policies our nation needs.

In addition, our faculty continue to win major awards and accolades. Just to name a few: IPR anthropologist **Thomas McDade** was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the National Academy of Sciences in the same month, IPR economist **Jonathan Guryan** was elected to the National Academy of Education, and IPR policy scholar **Sally Nuamah** took home three awards for her book *How Girls Achieve*. We are excited to welcome IPR psychologist **Sylvia Perry** as our newest faculty fellow, who was recently elected as a fellow of the Association for Psychological Science.

If you ask me why IPR continues to push forward the very edge of policy research and accomplish so much, I would point to our interdisciplinary community, unique among our peers. In many places, commitment to interdisciplinary work is shallow. But at IPR and Northwestern, we have been building these connections for decades. It’s fundamentally who we are, and we work hard work to foster the trust and respect that it takes to collaborate across silos.

I hope you enjoy this snapshot of our research and accomplishments across 2020–21.

*Diane*

Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach  
Margaret Walker Alexander Professor and IPR Director

**On the cover, clockwise from top left:**

Many IPR researchers pivoted to COVID-19 related research at the beginning of the pandemic, including IPR anthropologist **Thomas McDade**. He and colleagues at Northwestern created a novel, at-home antibody test, which they used to track COVID cases in Chicago neighborhoods.

Photo by Monika Wnuk

IPR development psychologist **Onnie Rogers** meets a student in the Development of Identities and Cultural Environments (DICE) lab, which conducts research on the development of identities and intersectionality among children and adolescents in diverse cultural environments.

Photo by Monika Wnuk

During the COVID-19 pandemic, IPR Director and economist **Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach** closely analyzed the rise of food insecurity, which led many families to rely on food pantries and government support to have enough to eat.

Photo by J. Thomas; Flickr

IPR anthropologist **Sera Young** discusses her work building the Household Water Insecurity Scale (HWISE). Young and a group of over 50 experts developed the HWISE Scale to collect better data about water access and use around the globe.

Photo by Rob Hart

How much does school spending matter to long-term outcomes? IPR labor economist **Kirabo Jackson** has examined this question in his research, finding that every \$1 spent on students generates a \$2 return in higher earnings down the road.

Photo by Monika Wnuk

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# IPR RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

## RAPID RESEARCH REPORTS

IPR launched a series of Rapid Research Reports during the COVID-19 pandemic to quickly disseminate preliminary research findings and analyses by its faculty. Rapid Research Reports covered the COVID States Project, public opinion surveys conducted by a consortium of researchers from Northwestern, Harvard, Rutgers, and Northeastern universities. The researchers, including IPR political scientist **James Druckman**, have gathered data for more than 60 public opinion surveys since July 2020 asking about vaccine passport support, mental health, and responses to the government's handling of the pandemic. Another report highlighted community-based research by IPR anthropologist **Thomas McDade** and his colleagues showing that more people were exposed to the COVID-19 virus than were previously known and why two doses of the vaccine are necessary for protection against COVID-19.



## PUBLICATIONS

NEARLY  
**300**  
JOURNAL ARTICLES  
BY FELLOWS

OVER HALF OF FELLOWS  
PUBLISHED IN THE  
**TOP 5%**  
OF SCHOLARLY JOURNALS  
INCLUDING:

NATURE  
SCIENCE  
CHILD DEVELOPMENT  
JOURNAL OF ECONOMIC  
PERSPECTIVES  
POLITICAL PSYCHOLOGY  
SOCIAL FORCES  
SOCIAL SCIENCE AND MEDICINE

## *Black residents made up 48% of the public school population in Chicago, but 88% of those affected by a school closure in 2012–13.*

In 2012, the Chicago Public Schools Board initiated the largest wave of school closures in U.S. history, predominately affecting the city's Black residents even though they only made up half of the public school population. In a 2021 article published in *American Political Science Review*, IPR social policy expert **Sally Nuamah** investigates how racially concentrated policy changes in Chicago's Black communities translate to political action. Her study finds Black residents near a school closure became more likely to attend community meetings, mobilized to support a ballot measure for an elected school board, and decreased their support for then-Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who wielded control over school policy, in the 2015 election. Political participation in areas affected by school closures increased more than in other areas of the city—largely driven by Black residents from some of the city's poorest neighborhoods who had rarely participated in politics before the closures. Nuamah's research highlights the role of a local community as a site of political action for marginalized groups around issues that matter to them.



Barbara Kinney, CRED/Emerson Collective

## ADDRESSING A SPIKE IN GUN VIOLENCE

As the COVID-19 pandemic grew in 2020, so did gun violence around the U.S., with nearly a 25% jump from 2019. Since March 2020, The **Northwestern Neighborhood & Network Initiative** (N3) has issued nine reports that provide insights about the spike in gun violence in Chicago and efforts to reduce it during the pandemic.

Under the leadership of IPR sociologist **Andrew Papachristos** and executive director **Soledad McGrath**, N3 uses network thinking to address challenges in Chicago and surrounding communities.

In one report, N3 conducted a network analysis of shooting victims during the most violent weekends in Chicago. Three weekends between June 18 and July 5, 2020, accounted for about 416 fatal and non-fatal shootings. It shows 51% of the shooting victims during this period were located within 108 small social networks. Additionally, most victims had elevated levels of exposure to prior shootings and victimization.

Other recent research by N3 examines promising programs for community policing programs and street outreach, as well as detailing the average age of homicide victims in Chicago.

5,750+

NATIONAL AND  
INTERNATIONAL MEDIA  
MENTIONS

11

ANDREW CARNEGIE,  
GUGGENHEIM, AND  
YIDAN PRIZE AWARDS

2010 – 2021

39

NATIONAL ACADEMY  
MEMBERSHIPS

29

IPR FELLOW-LED AND  
AFFILIATED RESEARCH  
GROUPS

343

IPR WORKING  
PAPERS

2010 – 2021

280+

PEER-REVIEWED  
ARTICLES BY FELLOWS

2020 – 2021

280+

IPR FACULTY, STAFF,  
AND STUDENTS

97

BOOKS PUBLISHED

2010 – 2021

35

FACULTY IN THE TOP 2%  
OF MOST-CITED  
RESEARCHERS

IN THEIR FIELDS AS OF 2019

All figures are as of September 2021,  
unless indicated otherwise above.

## BALANCED MESSAGING CAN SUPPORT MARGINALIZED STUDENTS

Messages about the positive power of a student's background can support the achievement and wellbeing of marginalized high school or college students. The finding by IPR social psychologist **Mesmin Destin** holds important implications for educational policies and practices. Students who are Black, Latinx, or from lower socioeconomic (SES) or other marginalized backgrounds constantly hear negative messages about their problems and challenges. Such messages can lead them to believe that their backgrounds are only barriers and never strengths.

One significant influence on students is their instructors. Students pick up messages from faculty, intentional or not, that "aren't necessarily conveying a belief that their group that is seen as

marginalized in society actually is a source of some unique strengths," Destin said.

Other work in Destin's lab demonstrates that high school and college students can get "big messages" from society and the political world that affect students' sense of belonging in their academic communities.



Steve Drey

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## INDIA SCALES UP PROGRAM TO COMBAT GENDER INEQUALITY



Unsplash

To combat gender gaps in India, one of its state governments is scaling up a school-based program that has proven to shift students' attitudes about gender. Punjab, which has a

population of 30 million people, will implement it in government schools in 2022, reaching 600,000 students per year.

The program's success was first documented by IPR economist **Seema Jayachandran** and her colleagues in a study looking at the intervention in schools in the neighboring state of Haryana.

The researchers conducted a randomized control trial of the program, involving more than 14,000 students across 314 government schools. Their results show the intervention increased seventh and tenth graders' support for gender equality and their gender-equitable behaviors.

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## GREATER WEALTH AT MIDLIFE MAY BE TIED TO A LONGER LIFE

Living a longer life may be tied to how much money you have made by midlife.

In the first wealth and longevity study to incorporate siblings and twin pair data, the researchers, led by IPR postdoctoral fellow **Eric Finegood**, analyzed the midlife net worth of adults (mean age 46.7 years) and their mortality rates 24 years later. They discover those with greater wealth at midlife tended to live longer.

The study, published in *JAMA Health Forum*, was co-authored by IPR postdoctoral fellow **Alexa Freedman**, IPR health psychologists **Edith Chen** and **Greg Miller**, and psychologist and IPR associate **Daniel Mroczek**.

"Our results suggest that building wealth is important for health at the individual level, even after accounting for where one starts out in life," Miller said. "So, from a public health perspective, policies that support and protect individuals' ability to achieve financial security are needed."



Foundations of Health Lab Photo by Shane Collins



## TWO-MINUTE VIDEOS SHOWCASE IPR POLICY RESEARCH

Does school spending impact students? In one of five new videos focusing on policy-relevant questions, IPR economist **Kirabo Jackson** answers this question and shows increased school spending benefits students from low-income backgrounds. They earn more in wages by as much as 13 percentage points.

In her video, IPR political scientist **Chloe Thurston** explains that citizen advocacy groups helped address discriminatory housing practices after World War II. In another, IPR statistician **Elizabeth Tipton** discusses how to improve

education research methods with her free public tool, “The Generalizer.”

IPR biological anthropologist **Thomas McDade** and IPR health psychologists **Edith Chen** and **Greg Miller** examine health-related issues in their videos. McDade’s research finds that breastfeeding babies for at least three months leads to better health in adulthood. Chen and Miller reveal that low-income students of color who make it to college “pay a price” for their success with worse physical health.

## IPR RESEARCHERS ARE PUTTING DATA INTO ACTION

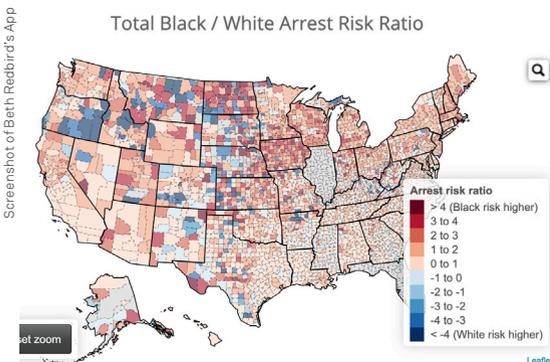
As the volume of information produced in the world increases every day, more data than ever are at the public’s fingertips. Simply generating and collecting data, however, does not necessarily lead to their use—so IPR researchers have developed tools to do just that.

They have built and released five data visualization tools, making them freely available to policymakers and the public. Led by IPR

faculty experts economists **Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach** and **Charles F. Manski**, sociologist **Beth Redbird**, and statistician **Elizabeth Tipton**, these apps tackle the following topics:

- Mapping racial disparity in police arrests,
- Designing educational evaluations with a population perspective—The Generalizer,
- Tracking seven key economic indicators from the Census’ Household Pulse Survey,
- Exploring vaccination planning under uncertainty.

“Thanks to a growing trend of open datasets, access to the data in so many critical areas has never been more ubiquitous,” Schanzenbach said. “But to be usable to policymakers, data need to be organized in a way that non-experts can understand it. I am glad to see IPR researchers building tools to improve access and usability of data.”



## RESEARCH IN A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Early in 2020, IPR researchers quickly pivoted their research to measure the pandemic's impact on daily life. IPR sociologist **Beth Redbird** and colleagues from Stanford published a study in *Nature* showing how the virus spread early during the spring using a computer model of cell phone data.

IPR economist **Diane Whitmore Schanzenbach** continues to study the impact of food insecurity on Americans by analyzing data from the COVID Impact Survey and the Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey in six IPR Rapid Research Reports. She also testified on the rise of hunger in the U.S. before the House Rules Committee in a hearing on "Ending Hunger in America" on April 28, 2021.

As the recession and social isolation took a toll on mental health, IPR developmental psychobiologist **Emma Adam** led the design and data collection for a national survey conducted by the American Psychological Association on the mental health of teenagers.

Thanks to funding from the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, IPR faculty are leading pandemic-related



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projects. One by IPR social policy expert **Tabitha Bonilla**, IPR political scientist **Laurel Harbridge-Yong**, and Redbird examines the pandemic's disproportionate effects on Black and Latinx communities. IPR development psychologist **Terri Sabol** and Schanzenbach are investigating how the pandemic affected center-based childcare, and IPR political scientist **James Druckman** extends his ongoing research with the COVID States Project conducting national surveys of American public opinion.

LaVange/Flickr



## LISTENING TO LANGUAGE AND INFANT COGNITION

IPR psychologist **Sandy Waxman**, research specialist **Kali Woodruff Carr**, and their colleagues use electroencephalograms (EEGs) to measure infants' neural responses as they listen to human speech and lemur calls, providing novel insights into how listening to language supports infant cognition. "This new evidence is exciting because it permits us to look 'under the hood,' to discover how the infant brain is modulated by listening to language," Waxman said.



Website Screenshots

## MEASURING WATER INSECURITY

IPR anthropologist **Sera Young** launched a website outlining the 12-item Water Insecurity Experiences (WISE) Scales, a tool she and a group of over 50 scholars and practitioners published in 2019 to measure water access and use around the globe. The WISE Scales provide cross-cultural data on experiences of water insecurity across low- and middle-income countries to complement existing indicators of water availability and infrastructure. Data collection for the WISE Scales are the product of a consortium between UNESCO, Gallup, and Northwestern University. The tool is currently being implemented by researchers, NGOs, and government agencies globally.

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## THE OPIOID CRISIS: AN ‘EPIDEMIC WITHIN A PANDEMIC’

Before the COVID crisis, there was the opioid crisis. More than 840,000 Americans have died from opioid-related deaths since 1999, surging a record 37% in 2020.

This surge reveals inequities in who is afflicted, healthcare access, and treatments. Six IPR experts offer their research-based insights for addressing it.

IPR neuroscientist **Robin Nusslock**, who studies the brain chemistry behind opioid addiction, finds that the best treatments are rooted in rehabilitation—not punishment.

IPR economist **Molly Schnell** says reducing prescriptions is critical, but it has to be paired with treatments as the drop in prescriptions leads to use of more addictive illegal opioids.

Research by IPR associates and health researchers **Maryann Mason** and **Joe Feinglass** points to a need to decriminalize opioid use. Controversial, but effective, options like

medication-assisted treatment and safe consumption sites could help, especially to stem the overdoses occurring outside of hospitals.

Calling it “an epidemic within a pandemic,” IPR economist **Hannes Schwandt** and Schnell both find “deaths of despair” due to poverty or joblessness are not the main cause of the crisis. But in documenting the climb in Cook County deaths during the pandemic, Feinglass, Mason, and IPR associate and demographer **Lori Post** point to contributing factors such as economic disparities and social isolation.

Who are the hardest hit? Mostly White males so far, Schwandt says, but deaths of Black, Latinx, and Native Americans are accelerating.

Whatever happens in the policy world, adaptation is key.

“As the nature of the opioid crisis evolves, our policies to address it will also need to adapt,” Schnell said.