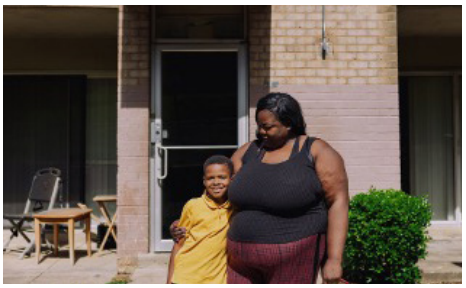
Pew Catalyst

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Devon Wellesley/Unsplash

IN THIS ISSUE:



3 A Significant Boost to Curb America's Housing Shortage



5 Kenya Takes a Major Step to Protect Its Blue Carbon Ecosystems



6 A National Conversation About Democracy's Future

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO

When leaders stay focused on serving the public and working across differences, it can become the starting point for better outcomes. The 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act embodies this approach. Passed in July, this federal legislation addresses some of the United States' biggest barriers to housing affordability. Lawmakers incorporated Pew's research on the roots of the country's housing shortage into provisions that will make it easier to build and finance homes. Building on this progress, Pew is working with states and communities to advance practical, evidence-based solutions.

You can read about our housing policy work, along with perspectives from one of our funding partners, in this issue of *Catalyst*. This issue also includes the latest findings from the Pew-Knight Initiative on how Americans engage in public life, as well as highlights from "TED Democracy Philadelphia: Founding Futures," where 1,500 people gathered to reflect on America's 250th anniversary and the future of our democracy. Together, these stories reflect Pew's strong commitment to finding common ground and using data to make a difference.

I'm also pleased to share news about Pew's future. Our board of directors has selected William Foster to take over as president and CEO of Pew in March. You may already know William through his role as managing partner at The Bridgespan Group. I've had the benefit of working with William over the past decade, and I'm confident he will help the organization continue to evolve and keep pace with changing times.



Susan K. Urahn is president and CEO of The Pew Charitable Trusts.



By the Numbers

Pew's impact on housing policy



15 states

have housing reforms informed by Pew's research and technical assistance.



50 housing laws

in those states were enacted over three-plus years.



Half of U.S. states

have received presentations, testimony, or technical assistance from Pew's housing experts.



40 in-depth case studies, white papers, and research briefs

produced by Pew have translated complex housing evidence into practical guidance for policymakers.



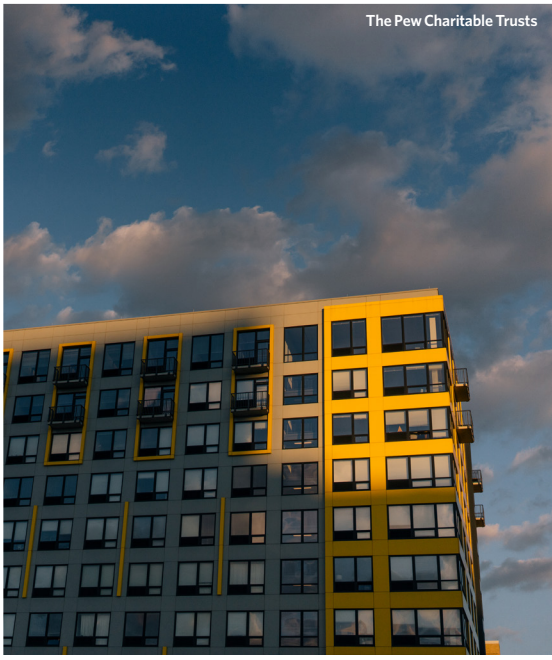
10 major U.S. cities

were included in Pew's innovative office-to-housing conversion research.

Learn more about how Pew supports evidence-based housing reforms in the article on page 3, and find out how philanthropy has made a difference in New Mexico in the Q&A on page 11.


The Pew Charitable Trusts


Drew Darby/Unsplash


The Pew Charitable Trusts

A Significant Boost to Curb America's Housing Shortage

Eight years ago, Washington, D.C., resident Titi was living in a shelter, separated from her 2-year-old son, Michael. But after Titi secured an affordable apartment, Michael was able to come home from foster care. Her apartment became available because of a housing "moving chain," a ripple effect that occurs as one household moves and a newly available home opens for another family. Today, Titi helps others navigate the shelter system and pave their own paths to opportunities that accompany stable homes.

Titi's story reflects a challenge facing millions in the U.S. Stable housing is linked to improved health, education, and economic outcomes. But America's nationwide housing shortage of 4 million to 7 million homes makes stable housing harder to find. According to Pew research, restrictive zoning regulations, lengthy approval processes, and financing barriers have led to the shortage and have driven up rents and home prices.

In July, Congress took a major step toward addressing this challenge with the bipartisan 21st Century ROAD to Housing Act—the single most significant federal housing supply reform in decades. The legislation addresses some of the biggest barriers to housing affordability by making it easier for communities to build new housing quickly and efficiently; this expands affordable pathways to homeownership and supports state and local efforts to remove outdated development restrictions.

Pew helped lay the groundwork for this law by producing nonpartisan research on the causes of America's housing shortage and identifying practical, evidence-based reforms to make it

Photos, clockwise from left:
Safe, affordable housing helped Washington, D.C., resident Titi reunite with her son, Michael.

New housing construction can help communities meet growing demand and create options for families seeking affordable places to live.

An increase in residential units creates movement in the housing market as people relocate.

easier to build and finance homes. Many of the bill's provisions reflect solutions Pew has studied and shared with policymakers at the federal, state, and local levels. That work continues in states and local communities, which set many of the rules that influence housing supply.

Since 2023, Pew has worked with states to adopt different approaches to address housing shortages. By producing research, policy analysis, and technical assistance and providing testimony, Pew has helped lawmakers learn from other communities' successes. Pew has played a role in:

- Texas enacting a series of bipartisan reforms to reduce barriers to housing development, including measures that make it easier to build homes near jobs and commerce and expand middle-class housing options in cities.

- Colorado advancing bipartisan legislation allowing more single-stair apartment buildings, supporting construction of lower-cost homes that can fit into smaller lots.

- Other states, including Montana, Arizona, and Virginia, adopting policies to increase housing supply by modernizing zoning, permitting, and building regulations.

Support from Arnold Ventures and the Thornburg Foundation has helped Pew explore novel solutions to the housing shortage. Working with Gensler, a global architecture, design, and planning firm, Pew has examined how 10 major U.S. cities could transform vacant office buildings into co-living spaces or add co-living buildings on commercial corridors. In places like Albuquerque and Santa Fe, New Mexico—where the severe housing shortage is driven by years of underproduction—this cost-effective approach could stretch subsidy dollars further by adding low-cost housing, and it could also help curb homelessness. Realizing the full potential of these projects will require additional philanthropic investments to expand research and pilot initiatives, as well as policy adoption in areas facing acute housing shortages.

When communities introduce modern, innovative housing policies, the results are encouraging. In Austin, Texas; Minneapolis; Houston; and Raleigh, North Carolina, reforms that made it easier to build housing have spurred increased production, while inflation-adjusted rents fell and affordability improved. For families such as Titi's and the people she now serves, these results represent security, opportunity, and solid foundations for the future.



By removing barriers to housing construction, Austin increased housing affordability and availability.

A Blueprint for Housing Reform

A decade ago, Austin faced soaring rents and a severe housing shortage. In response, local leaders adopted reforms that made it easier to build housing. These included zoning changes, streamlined permitting, fewer parking requirements, and support for a wider range of housing types. As a result, between 2015 and 2024, Austin added about 120,000 homes, increasing its housing stock by around 30%. Rents fell as supply grew, including in lower-cost apartment buildings. Austin illustrates that when communities remove barriers to housing construction, more homes can be built and affordability can improve even in rapidly growing cities.

READ: Pew's analysis of the impact of Austin's housing reforms includes data and practical recommendations for other cities looking to replicate Austin's success.



Rainer von Brandis/Getty Images

Kenya Takes a Major Step to Protect Its Blue Carbon Ecosystems



Seychelles Seagrass Mapping and Carbon Assessment Project



The Pew Charitable Trusts

Coastal wetlands are nature's powerhouse, serving as habitats for fish and wildlife, bolstering local economies, and buffering communities from rising sea levels, flooding, and other climate change impacts. These seagrass beds, mangrove forests, and salt marshes also mitigate climate change by trapping large amounts of carbon in the soil, earning them the nickname "blue carbon" ecosystems. When coastal wetlands are damaged or destroyed, however, the stored carbon is released back into the atmosphere, contributing to a warming planet.

Despite their importance, these wetlands are threatened by development, pollution, and other dangers.

Today, countries are beginning to take protective measures. At the June Our Ocean Conference in Mombasa, the Kenyan government announced the country's national plan to safeguard its coastal wetlands. Pew and its partners provided direct support to the government in developing the plan, which will work to conserve and restore Kenya's blue carbon ecosystems while strengthening community leadership and livelihoods. The plan draws on Kenyan scientific research and monitoring and identifies sustainable finance options to support its implementation. By 2035, Kenya aims to protect more than 14,500 hectares of healthy mangroves, restore 18,000 hectares that have been damaged, and safeguard at least 20,000 hectares of seagrass.

Kenya's plan is part of a broader effort to help countries harness the climate and economic benefits of coastal wetlands. Since 2019, Pew has worked with eight countries across the Western Indian Ocean and Latin America and Caribbean

Photos, clockwise from left: Vibrant coastal wetlands provide habitat for myriad species, including sea turtles, while trapping carbon and mitigating climate change impacts. Kenya's recent commitment to safeguarding its "blue carbon" ecosystems provides a model for other nations looking to harness the climate and economic benefits of coastal wetlands.

Scuba divers conduct research on a dense underwater seagrass meadow, enabling them to monitor and assess the health of these important coastal ecosystems.

A school of reef fish swims over a healthy seagrass meadow, highlighting the rich biodiversity and ecological importance of coastal marine habitats.

regions to develop ambitious, evidence-based commitments as part of their contribution to the Paris Agreement climate change goals.

This includes bolstering their understanding of these ecosystems through mapping and estimating carbon stored in mangrove forests and seagrass beds. Pew is also supporting these countries as they move from commitments to implementation.

Kenya is one of five countries in the Western Indian Ocean where Pew has established in-country partnerships, including through the regional Large-Scale Seagrass Mapping and Management Initiative, known as LaSMMI. Collaboration with Bloomberg Ocean Initiative, ICONIQ Impact, and other partners has made this regional effort to map, manage, and protect seagrass meadows along the East African coast possible. LaSMMI gives governments the data they need to inform key climate-related decisions, and it played a pivotal role in the development of Kenya's new national plan.

This partnership also builds on Pew's work in the Seychelles, where the country's first field-verified seagrass map and carbon assessment informed a national commitment in 2021 to protect seagrass ecosystems. Philanthropic support and leadership have helped scale this project from a handful of countries in 2019 to a regional effort spanning the Western Indian Ocean and Latin America and the Caribbean, demonstrating that coastal nations can harness the power of blue carbon ecosystems. New avenues are emerging for funders and other collaborators to build on the program's momentum—like that seen in Kenya—by bringing this proven model to coastlines around the world.

> "The plan moves beyond conservation planning and moves blue carbon ecosystems to being recognized as strategic economic and development assets."
>
> **— Dr. Deborah Mlongo Barasa**, Kenya's cabinet secretary for environment, climate change, and forestry



READ: Kenya Launches National Plan to Protect Blue Carbon Ecosystems



A National Conversation About Democracy's Future

Donna Frisby-Greenwood (second from right), Pew's senior vice president for Philadelphia and scientific advancement, shares insights during a Rock the Vote panel at the "TED Democracy Philadelphia: Founding Futures" event.

Although the United States marked its 250th anniversary this year, questions about the future of democracy are as urgent and relevant as they were at the nation's birth. To help spark a national conversation, Pew sponsored "TED Democracy Philadelphia: Founding Futures," a one-day gathering of pioneering thinkers, researchers, philanthropists, and civic leaders exploring how Americans can recommit to and build a stronger democracy for the next 250 years. The event, which featured more than 15 TED Talks and conversations, reflected Pew's long-standing commitment to strengthening democratic institutions through rigorous research, civic engagement, and evidence-based solutions.

Pew Research Center President Michael Dimock delivered the opening talk on TED's main stage, sharing research on rising polarization and declining trust in institutions. Yet his message was ultimately optimistic: Americans have the power to strengthen democracy through civil dialogue and a willingness to work across differences. Meanwhile, Donna Frisby-Greenwood, Pew's senior vice president for Philadelphia and scientific advancement, hosted a Rock the Vote panel to share insights on how democracy can accommodate differences and how best to engage young people.

"I think a lot of us are realizing that we weren't there when this right to democracy was given to us," said Vincent Wing, a staffer with PA Youth Vote who attended the event. "But now we have to be present and fight to keep it, and fight to sustain it and actively—actively—be a part of it."

Pew helped extend the conversation beyond Philadelphia by supporting "TED Democracy LIVE!," a broadcast that reached 77 libraries nationwide. Many of these libraries added their own programming, such as panel conversations. Watching the livestream from a university campus in Bellevue, Nebraska, 76-year-old Lilia Franciscony reflected on the hope she felt at the end of the event. "One thing I feel a little better about: We are not lost," she said. "There are things that we can do, that we can believe."

The discussion continued on Pew's "After the Fact" podcast, where Susan K. Urahn, Pew's president and chief executive officer, joined curiosity expert and TED event co-host Scott Shigeoka to reflect on the state of American democracy and the opportunities ahead. Shigeoka shared lessons from his travels throughout the United States, arguing that curiosity can serve as an antidote to polarization by encouraging people to listen, learn, and engage more openly with one another.

Together, the event and its follow-up discussions underscore Pew's belief that meaningful progress depends on bringing together people with different perspectives to engage in constructive dialogue and find common ground on society's most important challenges.

> "I think the goal of trying to make partisanship less painful for people is not to stifle disagreement. It's to surface it, deal with it in a productive way, articulate what you care about and why, and look at the person with whom you are disagreeing not as an enemy but as someone who simply has a different opinion."
>
> **— Susan K. Urahn**





Top: Participants connect and exchange ideas during "TED Democracy Philadelphia: Founding Futures."

Bottom: Attendees watch a live video broadcast of Pew Research Center President Michael Dimock's opening remarks on TED Democracy's main stage.

WATCH: Check out sights and sounds from "TED Democracy Philadelphia," including perspectives from speakers and attendees.



Examining How Americans Engage in Society

Of the four groups identified in a recent Pew-Knight Initiative report, "Mobilizers" are those most likely to participate in public life through activities like volunteering. Here, Pew staff members help prepare meals at MANNA, a therapeutic food program in Philadelphia.

The Pew Charitable Trusts

In today's divided political climate, it is easy to focus on our differences, rather than our commonalities. A recent report from the Pew-Knight Initiative highlights the shared ways Democrats and Republicans engage in democracy—despite differences of opinion.

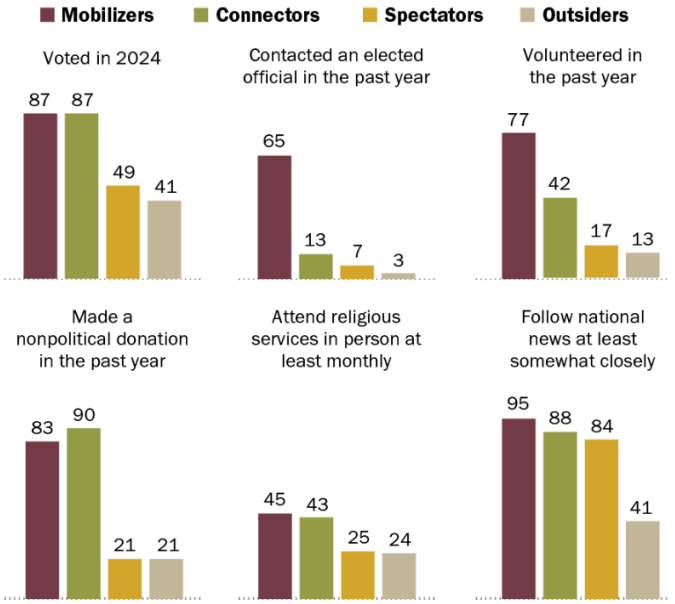
The survey examines how Americans participate in public life across a range of activities, including politics, community involvement, religious attendance, and news consumption. It analyzes how patterns of engagement, when clustered together, can form distinct groups within the U.S. public, often finding similarities in civic participation across partisan divisions.

This study sorts U.S. adults into four distinct groups:

Mobilizers (9% of U.S. adults) are the most active, politically passionate, and vocal across all the different areas. They volunteer, attend local government meetings, donate to political causes, follow the news closely, and attend religious services at high rates. Members of this minority group are set apart most clearly by their political action and ideological intensity: Republicans in this group are more likely than Republicans in other groups to describe themselves as very conservative, while Democrats more often describe themselves as very liberal. These most-engaged adults are the most likely to feel negatively about the state of the country but are also more

How 4 groups vary by key measures of social and civic engagement

% of U.S. adults in each engagement group who say they ...



Note: Engagement groups are based on a cluster analysis that sorted Americans into four groups based on their responses to 19 questions about political activity, civic involvement, religious attendance and attention to news.
Source: Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults conducted July 9-Dec. 5, 2025. "How Americans Are Engaged With News, Politics, Religion and Civic Life"

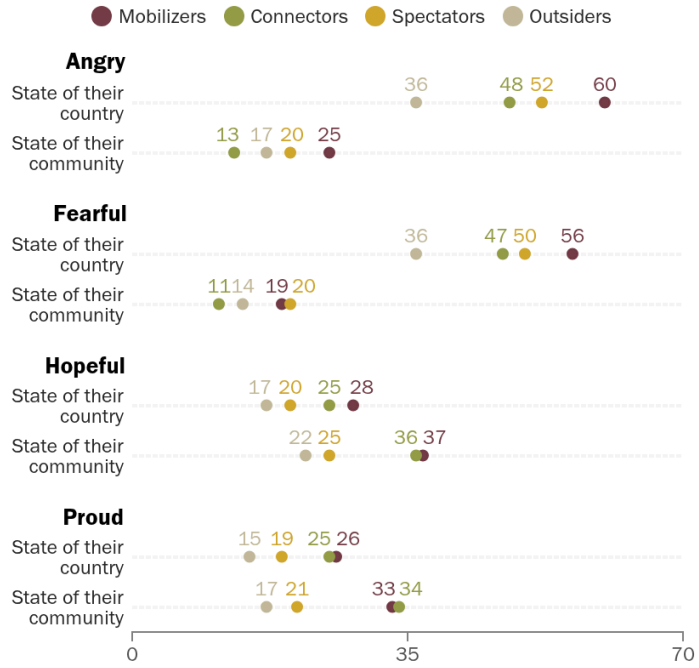
PEW-KNIGHT INITIATIVE

inclined than some other groups to say they feel hopeful and proud about their local community.

Connectors (28%) vote, attend religious services, and donate to nonpolitical causes at high rates, but they are less likely than Mobilizers to take political action, such as volunteering for campaigns or displaying a sign or bumper sticker for a political cause. They are highly involved in civic and community life but less involved in politics and are less likely than Mobilizers to say they often feel angry or fearful about the state of their community and their country.

Highly engaged Americans are more likely to have negative feelings about the state of the country

% of U.S. adults in each engagement group who say they ***extremely often/often*** *feel ___ when thinking about the ...*



Note: Engagement groups are based on a cluster analysis that sorted Americans into four groups based on their responses to 19 questions about political activity, civic involvement, religious attendance and attention to news.
Source: Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-14, 2025. "How Americans Are Engaged With News, Politics, Religion and Civic Life"

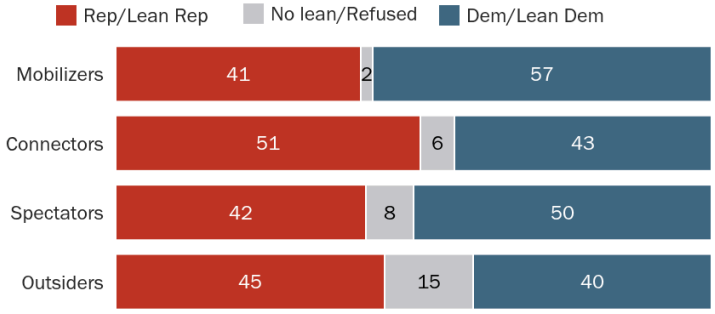
PEW-KNIGHT INITIATIVE

Spectators (31%) are much less likely than Mobilizers and Connectors to participate in civic or political activities, but they follow the news at similarly high rates. They are by far the youngest group: 28% are under 30, and 64% are under 50. Spectators stand out for their internet use—56% say they use the internet "almost constantly"—but when they engage with news online, they tend to do so by privately chatting about it or liking posts rather than publicly commenting or posting.

Outsiders (31%) participate at relatively low levels across the activities measured in this study. Fewer than half of Outsiders say they have at least some trust in the information they get from national news organizations, and about 1 in 5 say they have no trust at all. They are fairly evenly split by political party, and about half (48%) describe their political views as moderate. More than half (56%) reported not voting in the last presidential election.

Engagement groups are politically mixed

% of U.S. adults in each engagement group who are ...



Note: Engagement groups are based on a cluster analysis that sorted Americans into four groups based on their responses to 19 questions about political activity, civic involvement, religious attendance and attention to news.
Source: Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults conducted July 9-Dec. 5, 2025. "How Americans Are Engaged With News, Politics, Religion and Civic Life"

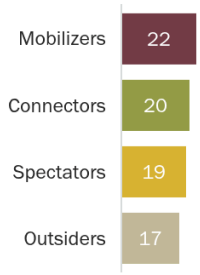
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Similarities in distrust

Categorizing the U.S. population on this spectrum of civic participation provides a new lens to see how Americans are feeling about major institutions. Across all four groups, the report finds similarly low levels of trust that the federal government will do what is right and widespread doubts about the fairness of news organizations.

Low trust in federal government across Americans' engagement levels

% of U.S. adults in each engagement group who say they think they can trust the federal government to do what is right ***just about always/most of the time***

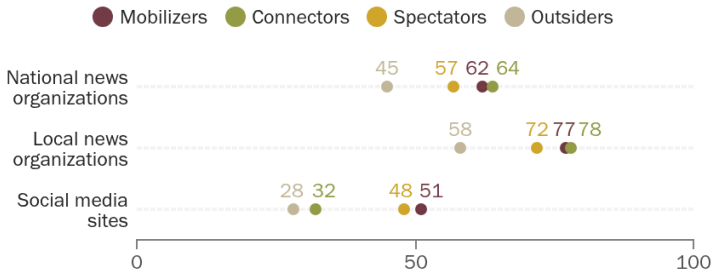


Note: Engagement groups are based on a cluster analysis that sorted Americans into four groups based on their responses to 19 questions about political activity, civic involvement, religious attendance and attention to news.
Source: Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-14, 2025.
"How Americans Are Engaged With News, Politics, Religion and Civic Life"

PEW-KNIGHT INITIATIVE

The least engaged U.S. adults are also least likely to express trust in news organizations

% of U.S. adults in each engagement group who say they have ***a lot of/some trust*** *in the information they get from ...*



Note: Engagement groups are based on a cluster analysis that sorted Americans into four groups based on their responses to 19 questions about political activity, civic involvement, religious attendance and attention to news.
Source: Pew Research Center survey of U.S. adults conducted Sept. 8-14, 2025.
"How Americans Are Engaged With News, Politics, Religion and Civic Life"

PEW-KNIGHT INITIATIVE

READ the full report about how Americans engage with news, politics, religion, and civic life.

Q&A

With the Thornburg Foundation

A conversation with Thornburg Foundation President Allan Oliver



Courtesy of the Thornburg Foundation

The Thornburg Foundation uses an evidence-based strategic approach to solve systemic problems that affect people and communities. In January, the foundation launched a new housing initiative and is a generous supporter of Pew's work in New Mexico.

We asked Thornburg Foundation President Allan Oliver about the organization's approach to housing and other issues.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

What inspired the Thornburg Foundation to enter this new line of work? What are its goals?

While the Thornburg Foundation has made grants to homelessness providers for more than two decades, in 2024, our board of directors challenged our team to look upstream and seek to identify the primary causes of homelessness. Our research identified a significant cause: the underproduction of affordable housing in New Mexico. This led to a critical conclusion: To address this key root cause of homelessness, we needed to jump into housing.

Our goal with the new Statewide Housing Initiative is to help build a housing ecosystem where families at every income level have a real pathway to a stable, safe, and dignified home. That means investing in coordinated statewide governance, supporting cross-sector coalitions, closing capacity gaps in smaller and rural communities, and strengthening protections for residents at risk of displacement.

The research completed by Pew over the last two years clearly demonstrates that states can lead on addressing their housing crises and that many states are taking bold approaches to reduce or eliminate regulatory barriers and build strong incentives toward affordable housing development. Reducing regulatory barriers means that public and private dollars can and will go further, and providing incentives helps ensure buy-in across stakeholders.

It was also important for us to hear from state and local policymakers who receive regular calls from constituents demanding action on housing and homelessness, regardless of party. And while state policymakers have made significant investments in housing

over the past few years, they were still eager to learn about successful housing initiatives in other jurisdictions from trusted researchers like Pew.

What are some of the biggest opportunities to make an impact on housing affordability in New Mexico? What role does philanthropy play in seizing those opportunities?

The biggest opportunity is for New Mexico to maximize its current capital investment in housing by adopting land-use and governance reforms. Right now, regulatory costs and process barriers constrain supply and limit the impact of state investments.

A second opportunity is readying our state for changes at the federal level. The ROAD to Housing Act signifies a sea change in the federal government's role in addressing our nation's housing crisis, amid deepening cuts to HUD and other federal funding.

A third opportunity is supporting coalitions that are working on grassroots efforts to address the fragmentation of housing governance that is unique to New Mexico. These coalitions bring homebuilders, nonprofits, and government into the same room around a shared pro-housing agenda.

As a philanthropy, we have the opportunity to see a broader picture, which allows us to make strategic investments in research, support vital collaborations, take risks on pilots, and fund evaluation. We also believe we have a role in bringing other foundations and philanthropists into this work to co-fund and learn what works—together. We see ourselves as a partner with both the public and private sector, as we all benefit when our state has an adequate housing ecosystem.

What did your team learn from partnering with Pew on housing last year?

Our partnership with Pew over the last two years has dramatically sped up our learning curve on housing issues. We learned about how New Mexico's major underproduction of housing over the last decade has led to a 58% increase in rents for New Mexico families. We now know that 27% of New Mexican renters spend 50% of their income on rent. We know that our housing inventory is almost 30% lower than in 2018; meanwhile, median home prices have doubled in the last decade.

Just as importantly, we learned that every one of New Mexico's surrounding states has taken actions to address the housing crisis by adopting reforms such as allowing casitas on most lots, supporting by-right approval of apartments near transit, curbing parking mandates, and adopting building code reforms and/or permitting reforms that reduce administrative delays and fees. Jurisdictions that have adopted these reforms have seen an increase in housing production, as well as rent prices that slow or even decline. This research provided us a set of policy models that policymakers could reasonably adapt to address our housing crisis.

We aim to bring forward research and expertise that is trusted by policymakers regardless of party. In our view, The Pew Charitable Trusts' research continues to be well respected in our state capital.

America marked its 250th anniversary this year against a backdrop of heightened polarization. How does Thornburg navigate this environment? Has it been an obstacle to progress?

It's true that our country has become increasingly polarized at this moment in our long history as a nation. We do our best to navigate in this challenging environment. Often, polarization is not just a political divide. Sometimes we see that polarization in the differences of policy approaches between urban and rural policymakers. It can also translate into distrust between our state capital and rural localities.

We know that most mayors, city councilors, legislators, and even our governor are getting daily calls from their constituents demanding action on housing and homelessness. As we have seen rents spike in our state, so too has homelessness. Working families are getting priced out of the market. So policymakers know they need to respond to their constituents and are hungry for solutions, regardless of political party or locale. Our hope is to help lead with common values and evidence-based solutions.

I think this is why Pew's work is so important. Solid evidence-based, community-informed research can serve as a shared language across political divides. Policymakers are elected to solve problems and are seeking solutions that benefit their constituents.

The Thornburg Foundation also continues to take the "big tent" approach. We support coalitions of homebuilders, nonprofits, and government working together to generate progress in affordable housing solutions. Those coalitions take great care to develop approaches that appeal across the aisle and are truly nonpartisan. We believe that bipartisan solutions are the ones that will stick over time.

For information about working with Pew or to make an investment, please contact us at partnerships@pewtrusts.org.