INSIDE

The Pew Charitable Trusts

Trust

In the Outback, a Model Park

A new Australian national park drives a conservation and cultural success story.

Summer 2025 | Vol. 27, No. 2

DATA DRIVEN

90%

After installation of a wildlife crossing on State Highway 9 in Colorado, collisions between vehicles and animals were reduced 90% between 2015 and 2020.

Thanks to advances in research and technology, agencies can precisely site wildlife crossings in the places they'll do the most good for both motorists and animals. These efforts draw strong bipartisan support, and Pew is working in states and at the federal level to encourage construction of more bridges, underpasses, and culverts to allow migrating herds of animals to move freely—and to prevent accidents that kill or injure tens of thousands of people each year.

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Cover: Courtesy of DBCA

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Founded in 1948, The Pew Charitable Trusts uses data to make a difference. Pew addresses the challenges of a changing world by illuminating issues, creating common ground, and advancing ambitious projects that lead to tangible progress.

Putting Knowledge to Work

All the data tells us that housing is an expensive, and often unaffordable, proposition for many Americans. A shortage of between 4 million and 7 million homes has led to the average house now costing $420,000—an increase of 25% since 2019. At the same time, the housing shortage has driven rents to record highs, forcing more Americans than ever before to spend upwards of 30% of their income on rent.

The Pew Charitable Trusts has spent the last five years examining why the shortage and prices got to this point and—more importantly—what can be done about it. Our housing policy initiative has looked at zoning and other regulatory hurdles that limit the availability of homes, especially lower-cost options such as apartments and town houses, and has researched outdated financial regulations that have prevented millions of creditworthy homebuyers from obtaining mortgages on lower-priced homes.

That research has produced a body of knowledge that can be put to work fixing the obstacles to affording a home. One suggestion, outlined in this issue of *Trust*, is allowing more manufactured homes. A generation ago, these homes might have been dismissed as flimsy and poor alternatives to a traditional house. New federal building standards have changed that—today's manufactured homes are sturdy, affordable, and quick to produce. But outdated regulations in nearly every state classify them as personal property, not houses. This makes getting mortgages harder, forcing many buyers to choose riskier financing. So Pew is urging state policymakers to take a fresh look at these regulations.

Another crucial issue that needs renewed scrutiny is the health of the ocean. This issue explores the work of a number of Pew marine fellows, including 2020 fellow Andrianus Sembiring, from Indonesia, where demand for shark fins, which are used in luxury food products and traditional medicine, poses a serious threat to shark populations. Indonesia prohibits the sale of 12 specific shark species, but too often, the species of exported shark fins can't be identified and regulated.

Sembiring built a reliable genetic test that quickly identifies fins from the protected species of sharks that are sold in international markets. And he has trained government staff, university scientists, representatives from nongovernmental organizations, and others to use the tool to improve monitoring and enforcement of the export market.

In this 35th year of the program, one of the newest fellows, Kristen Marhaver, a marine biologist with the CARMABI Marine Research Station in Curaçao, researches corals. These colorful living organisms that make up reefs have been dying at an alarming rate. She is exploring an array of innovations that could help coral eggs fertilize and grow into baby corals, which will go on to provide shelter, nurseries, and feeding grounds for untold marine species.

In Australia, the island's landmass and its offshore waters are important for both people and nature. Since 2008, Pew has supported the work of Indigenous communities, scientists, conservation organizations, and others there to support healthy ecosystems and the communities that rely on them. Staff writer John Briley provides a first-person account in this issue of his visit to Australia when he traveled with a group of his Pew colleagues, and the Martu Rangers, into the Outback to see the impact of these efforts.

"Our people traveled this desert on foot, following Songlines"—melodic stories that connected water holes, ranger Bradley Wongawol told Briley. Like roads on a map, every Songline has a beginning and an end, and Indigenous Australians used them to navigate. Wongawol added, "We still pass these on to our young ones to make sure our culture and practices survive." That knowledge is now leading to agreements between the Indigenous people and the government for co-management of Australian lands and waters—providing answers to the questions of how best to conserve these places for the people who live there.

These seemingly disparate endeavors are united by Pew's approach to its work: We research subjects deeply, use facts to make recommendations for improvement, and always seek an array of partners to pursue common cause. That makes for a powerful combination of efforts—which leads to measurable and meaningful change.

Susan K. Urahn, *President and CEO*

Trust

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THE BIG PICTURE

A rarely seen *Andiperla willinki* stonefly moves over glacial ice in Chilean Patagonia. The insect—not quite an inch long—spends its entire life cycle in glaciers, surviving thanks to an antifreeze-like substance in its body and a diet of algae that grows in the glaciers' crevices. The dragon of Patagonia, as it's commonly called, is highly sensitive to pollution, so its presence is an indicator of a pristine environment. And per the United Nations, 2025 is the International Year of Glaciers' Preservation. Since 2016, The Pew Charitable Trusts has worked to protect the special geological features of Chilean Patagonia, a 175,000-square-mile region of glacial-fed rivers, ancient forests, and sea harboring some 40,000 islands.

The Pew Charitable Trusts

Philadelphia Explores Tax Reforms

BY DEMETRA APOSPOROS

Despite relatively strong economies, many cities are bracing for fiscal challenges in 2025, partly because of revenue dips from new commuting patterns and the expiration of American Rescue Plan Act funds. Consequently, some are revisiting their tax rules.

In Philadelphia, Mayor Cherelle Parker and the City Council agreed in early 2024 to pause previously scheduled incremental rate cuts in the city's business and personal income taxes and convened a tax reform commission to recommend changes for the new fiscal year. The commission asked The Pew Charitable Trusts for technical assistance.

Pew's research on Philadelphia's residential tax burden found that the city's overall tax structure has been mildly progressive for homeowners, largely because of its relatively generous homestead exemption. However, it is regressive for renters without public subsidy for housing. These renters typically shoulder the cost of taxes in their monthly rent but aren't eligible for the homestead or other property-related exemptions, which offset the city's "flat" tax rates and are required by the state constitution.

The high effective tax rate for low-income renters and high wage taxes in general could be mitigated through higher participation in existing tax relief programs. One program reduces the income taxes that low-income earners owe in the city; another provides a rebate on certain housing/tax costs low-income renters pay.

Cities should also regularly revisit tax incentives for businesses. Philadelphia taxes both the net income and gross receipts of businesses through the business income and receipts tax, or BIRT. Although businesses generating less than $100,000 in annual gross receipts are exempt from BIRT, inflation has eroded the exemption's value, and the $100,000 exemption is likely to be eliminated in fiscal year 2026. Pew suggested exploring ways to determine whether tax programs meet their goals—and pay off for taxpayers.

"As cities throughout the U.S. face shifting economic realities, they're weighing tax changes that will provide revenues without overburdening residents and businesses," says Thomas Ginsberg, senior officer of Pew's Philadelphia research and policy initiative. "Such changes can improve a city's tax system and provide meaningful value for taxpayers."

Pew's Board Gains New Member

The Pew Charitable Trusts announced the addition of Diana Farrell to its board of directors effective April 14.

"Diana possesses an impressive combination of board leadership experience, financial acumen, and policy expertise," said Christopher Jones, chair of Pew's board of directors. "As Pew continues to address an array of global challenges with a distinctly nonpartisan approach, Diana's skills and creative thinking will be an invaluable asset."

"On behalf of the entire organization, I am pleased to welcome Diana to Pew's board of directors," said Susan K. Urahn, Pew's president and chief executive officer. "Diana's experience includes leadership roles in both the public and private sector. Her presence on Pew's board will sharpen the organization's ability to advance projects that will lead to tangible progress."

Farrell is an independent director and trustee of various nonprofit organizations. She serves as vice chair of the Urban Institute and is a member of the executive committee of the National Bureau of Economic Research and a trustee of the Institute for Pure and Applied Mathematics at the University of California, Los Angeles. She was the founding president and chief executive officer of the JPMorganChase Institute, and she worked for McKinsey & Co. in several roles, including senior partner, founder and global head of the McKinsey Center for Government, and global head of the McKinsey Global Institute.

Farrell also served in the White House from 2009 to 2010 as deputy director of the National Economic Council and deputy assistant to the president on economic policy. She holds a bachelor's degree in economics from Wesleyan University and a master's in business administration from the Harvard Business School.

Who Are Social Media's News Influencers?

In the heat of the 2024 election, U.S. news influencers seemed to be everywhere. Both Republicans and Democrats gave content creators credentials to cover their conventions—and encouraged influencers to share their political messages. Influencers also interviewed the candidates and held fundraisers for them.

But up until now, it has been difficult to get a sense of the size and characteristics of this new wave of news providers. A Pew Research Center study, as part of the Pew-Knight Initiative, sought to provide a deeper understanding of them by looking at 500 popular news influencers, derived from a review of more than 28,000 social media accounts. The study also conducted a nationally representative survey of Americans to better understand who regularly gets their news from news influencers.

The unique study, released after the November election, found that about 1 in 5 Americans (21%)—including a much higher share of adults under 30 (37%)—say that they regularly get news from influencers on social media. News influencers are mostly likely found on the social media site X, where 85% have a presence, though many are on Instagram (50%) and YouTube (44%). Slightly more explicitly identify as Republican or conservative (27%) than Democratic or liberal (21%). And most are men (63%) and most (77%) are not affiliated with a news organization.

Further looking into Americans' experience with news influencers, the study found that:

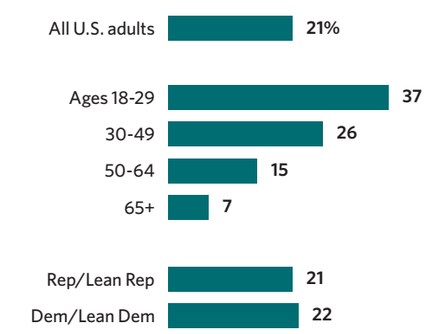
Among U.S. adults who get news from news influencers on social media, most (65%) say that news influencers have helped them better understand current events and civic issues. And 7 in 10 say the news they get from news influencers is at least somewhat different from the news they get from other sources.

These Americans also say they get a variety of different types of information, from basic facts and opinions to funny posts and breaking news. When it comes to opinions, most who see them say that they are an even mix of opinions they agree and disagree with (61%), but far more say they mostly agree with what they see (30%) than mostly disagree (2%).

–Bernard Ohanian

Almost 4 in 10 U.S. adults under 30 get news from news influencers

% of U.S. adults who regularly get news from new influencers on social media



PEW RESEARCH CENTER

In Australia, an Ancient Culture Drives Conservation Success

With a new national park, Martu Rangers show they're ready to lead.

By John Briley

The Outback sun is boring holes in us but the Martu people—whose ancestors roamed these desert lands for more than 50,000 years—seem unbothered. Together with six Martu Indigenous Australians and two Pew colleagues, I'm walking through brittle brush and wildflowers on an August day in Matuwa Kurrara Kurrara, a new national park some 70 miles north of the tiny town of Wiluna, Western Australia, which sits more than 500 miles northeast of Perth.

Matuwa Kurrara Kurrara is a conservation and cultural success story in the making, a park co-managed by the Martu people and the Western Australian State Government—in Australia, states and territories create and manage national parks. The Government created the park in 2023, thanks in part with support from The Pew Charitable Trusts, and the co-management arrangement is a groundbreaking step toward restoring Martu stewardship of hundreds of thousands of square miles. This is but a fraction of the vast area the Martu people traditionally lived on and were forcibly removed from in the 1900s to make room for cattle ranching and mining.

The human toll of that removal, which concluded only in the 1970s when the last Martu walked out of the bush and saw "the whitefella" for the first time, persists to this day. For decades, Martu were rounded up and forcibly relocated, with families separated, children sent to reeducation schools, and cultural practices banned.

As the people suffered, so did the land. For millennia, Martu had managed their country to ensure it could continue to sustain them. They did this in many ways, including by shifting hunting grounds to allow prey populations to recover, protecting water sources, and setting small, controlled fires to remove the fuel that can feed much larger infernos. Such fire management also stimulates the new plant growth preferred by kangaroos and other creatures.

Once colonizers began sweeping across the Outback, ecological problems multiplied. Cattle trampled the landscape and fouled precious water sources. Camels, brought to Australia as transport in the mid-1800s, are similarly destructive and now number over a million. Invasive cats and foxes introduced by Europeans proliferated and decimated native species—particularly small mammals such as bilbies and bettongs. Ranchers planted invasive grasses that crowded out native flora.

And then there was mining. Australia is the world's top producer of iron ore and bauxite and ranks in the top four for 19 other minerals, including zinc, nickel, lithium, gold, and diamonds (the broader region around the new park is known as the Goldfields).

The industry's dominance is on display in Perth, where mining companies' office towers glitter above the skyline. But the wealth comes at a cost: Flying over the Outback one can spot the pits, roads, and other evidence of the industry from miles away.

At the same time, the vast Outback—twice the size of India—has nature so resilient that, on foot within Matuwa Kurrara Kurrara, it's hard to spot any major impact from human activity.

"This is what country should look like," says Bradley Wongawol as we weave among knee-high tufts of spinifex grass, mauve wildflowers, and twisty Hakea trees that rise defiantly from the red, rocky ground. He's dressed for outdoor work in rugged long pants, a long-sleeved shirt, and a knit tricolored beanie. Wongawol, a Wiluna Martu Ranger who lives in Wiluna, is a board member of the Tarlka Matuwa Piarku Aboriginal Corporation (TMPAC), the body that represents Martu interests. TMPAC works mainly with the Western Australian State Government's Department of Biodiversity, Conservation, and Attractions (DBCA) to manage Matuwa Kurrara Kurrara and the nearby Lake Carnegie Nature Reserve.

We're not on a trail (very few exist out here) and fortunately aren't going far. Wongawol and four other Wiluna Martu Rangers are leading us a few hundred yards from the dirt road where we've parked our vehicles to what they call a "men's site," a place where males of all ages would gather to tell stories and pass knowledge from the older generation to the younger ones. Women have similar sites throughout this country.

We arrive at a rising wall of sedimentary rock capped by 25 feet of coarse sandstone. With striking color contrasts in the morning sunshine, it feels like a rare oasis in the parched expanse. But in the coming days we'll see spots like this throughout the desert, many with trees, shade, and flowers, and some even with reliable water.

Opposite page: A satellite view shows the ephemeral Lake Carnegie and its surrounding desert environments, located east of Wiluna in Western Australia's new Matuwa Kurrara Kurrara National Park, which is co-managed by the Indigenous Martu people. Though one of Australia's largest lakes, measuring some 62 by 19 miles, Lake Carnegie fills only after significant rainfall—in dry years it is a muddy marsh. *NASA*

Indigenous Australians believe this entire landscape was created in the "Dreamtime," a period before humans arrived when spirit animals—kangaroo, snake, turtle, and others—swept across the continent.

"Our people traveled this desert on foot, following Songlines"—melodic stories that connected water holes—Wongawol says as he crouches in the shade. The Martu were originally nomadic, and not by accident. As the author Bruce Chatwin explains in his book *The Songlines*: "Most of Outback Australia [is] arid scrub where rainfall was always patchy and one year of plenty might be followed by seven years of lean. To move in such landscape was survival: to stay in the same place suicide."

Like roads on a map, every Songline has a beginning and an end, and Indigenous Australians use them to navigate, Wongawol says. "We still pass these on to our young ones to make sure our culture and practices survive."

For much of the 20th century, that survival was in jeopardy. Assimilation not only took Martu off their Country, reform schools also quashed the children's use of native language and other connections to their culture.

"We regained some rights in the 1960s and 1970s," Wongawol tells me, "but it was pretty much the right to drink and live in town. They still had the cattle stations fenced off and we weren't allowed to go out here—to our own land."

Even as Indigenous Australians nationwide have regained native title to their lands, the Martu guard their cultural stories and practices fiercely. During our time in the park, we visit three or four sites where our hosts prohibit me from taking photos or even notes.

"You can't write about these places, John," says Robbie Wongawol (no blood relation to Bradley). "These stories are 'under the blanket,' for our people only."

Pew has been working to advance conservation across Australia's unique and richly biodiverse lands since 2008. The effort has spanned the continent, which is home to some of the world's most unique plants and animals, and helped to safeguard vast swaths of the Outback, many coastal and marine areas off the mainland, and even a few remote islands. Throughout it all, Pew has sought to support the work of Indigenous communities, scientists, conservation organizations, and more in ensuring that these unique and important landscapes, rivers, and seas remain in good shape and able to support healthy ecosystems and the communities that rely on them. Pew works in ways that help create sustainable opportunities for local people and communities, particularly for Traditional Owners, and often this work is happening in far-flung locales.

I had traveled from Pew's Washington, D.C., offices to witness these efforts firsthand, which is why on the next morning I awake in a tent at first light to the cries

Opposite page: Spiky purplish flowers of *Ptilotus exaltatus*, known as pink mulla mulla, flourish in the new national park after a season of above-average rainfall. Martu Rangers track the presence and health of such native plants as part of biodiversity monitoring and the sharing of intergenerational knowledge. *The Pew Charitable Trusts*

This page: Martu Ranger Robbie Wongawol and his mother-in-law sit in front of Tarlka Matuwa Piarku Aboriginal Corporation's ranger base in Wiluna. *The Pew Charitable Trusts*

"Matuwa Kurrara Kurrara is a conservation and cultural success story in the making, a park co-managed by the Martu people and the Western Australian State Government."

> “Indigenous Australians believe this entire landscape was created in the ‘Dreamtime,’ a period before humans arrived when spirit animals—kangaroo, snake, turtle, and others—swept across the continent.”

Top: Researchers Bethany Pittway (at left) and Cheryl Lohr of the Western Australia Department of Biodiversity, Conservation, and Attractions prepare to record data on *Bettongia lesueur*, also known as the burrowing bettong or Lesueur’s rat-kangaroo—a rabbit-size desert marsupial more commonly known as a boodie. *The Pew Charitable Trusts*

Bottom: A trapped boodie crouches in the back of a cage. Scientists working in a 4-square-mile area surrounded by a predator-proof electric fence are trapping and tagging the animals to monitor their health, an effort to help the boodies and other species recover from annihilation by feral cats. *The Pew Charitable Trusts*

of bright pink galah cockatoos at the former Lorna Glen cattle station, a stamp of lush grass and massive gum trees in the middle of the vast national park. After coffee and a spartan breakfast, we roll into an eternal, lonely landscape save for a network of dirt tracks, some barely navigable in burly four-wheel-drive vehicles.

There’s wildlife here but most of it eludes our notice, for good reason: The Martu rarely pass up an opportunity to secure a meal. On one drive, Robbie spots movement in the bush and we abruptly pull over. Richard Narrier slides out of the back seat, loads a small rock into a slingshot, and casually dispatches a 3-foot goanna lizard with a single shot. He folds the reptile into a cooler and we move on.

The next day, from the driver’s seat, Bradley drops a kangaroo that’s 100 feet away with a single bullet from an old Winchester .22. The Martu swing into action, cutting vertical slits in two of the animal’s legs, weaving the other appendages through them, and binding the ’roo to our Landcruiser’s front grate for our drive back.

Like all Indigenous people in Australia, the Martu have thrived for millennia by following their customs, which dictate everything from whom they could marry, to where Songlines start and end, to how to divvy up kangaroo meat among the community. We drive to the small town of Bondini, a few kilometers outside of Wiluna, where we meet up with Lena Long and her three sisters—Jennifer, Karen, and Caroline—in the side yard of a small, modest house.

The Martu women, all in their 60s, had just returned from a two-week, women-only camping trip “to correct family stories,” Lena says. To the Martu, it’s vital that their history is passed along—verbally, per tradition—and is accurate.

“I learned from my parents, and I’ve been teaching my grandson,” Lena continues. “He’s 9 now and he tells his teacher how to live in the desert. He knows.”

This is the spirit of what the Martu and the Government call two-way science—the exchange of knowledge to find the best ways forward to manage the land and wildlife.

In addition to advising DBCA scientists on park decisions, the Martu take school kids, some from as far away as Perth, out to the national park to show them how to track animals and hunt, what plants are in season, and the importance of “managing Country.” For example, by eradicating invasive plants and animals.

These programs are working. In 2024, the independently run Australian Education Awards recognized the Wiluna Remote Community School as one of the best First Nations education programs in the country.

From the air, a range of geologic features is visible across the new park. Matuwa Kurrara Kurrara is also home to an abundance of animals—133 species of birds and 20 different mammals live there. *Western Australia Department of Biodiversity, Conservation, and Attractions*

For its part, the Government is leveraging resources to help native animals recover from decimation by feral cats and foxes.

Early one morning, we join a team of scientists in an area of the park, some 4 square miles, surrounded by a predator-proof electric fence. The team is tagging and releasing bettongs—rabbit-sized marsupials—that they had trapped overnight. Known colloquially as "boodies," these marsupials once ranged throughout the continent and play a key role in the desert ecosystem, digging extensive burrows that not only help aerate the soil and encourage new plant growth but also serve as homes for other native species, including brushtail possums and snakes.

"They're very big ecosystem engineers," says Cheryl Lohr, a DBCA research scientist, as she kneels in the dirt measuring and tagging a boodie.

The population had been so diminished here that, to reintroduce them, researchers imported boodies from an island off the west coast that feral cats had yet to inhabit. The animals are now thriving within the fence, Lohr says, so much so that she and her team have devised PVC tunnels to release some in hopes that they can reestablish the species throughout the desert. This is occurring in concert with programs that poison feral cats.

"We've had 28 mammals go extinct in Australia over the past 100 years, with the highest rates of extinction in the arid zone," Lohr says. "The cats are a major problem because they can get almost all of their water by eating prey and barely need to drink at all to survive."

The fence, which has stood since 2010, has helped bring back other species, including bilbies and golden bandicoots. As Lohr explains this, another Martu Ranger, Dennis Richards, carries boodies in cloth sacks to the edge of a massive warren. As soon as the animals see daylight they bolt, often bypassing numerous holes en route to the specific burrow from which they last emerged—a risky instinct with wedgetail eagles wheeling in the brilliant blue sky above.

"Conservation requires people," Lohr tells me. "There's been enough change with invasive species that the land can't just heal itself anymore." And with Matuwa Kurrara Kurrara's large size, she says there are plenty of opportunities for Martu Rangers.

TMPAC is the funnel to that employment, and the Aboriginal Rangers embrace and value the work. After releasing boodies, Richards and Narrier help two other DBCA scientists set monitoring lines in a grid, which they'll use to gather data on the animals' burrows. Robbie notes that the scientific exchange in this area started before the first fence post pierced the ground.

"The Martu told the Government where to do this, with the high trees here and the different types of land," he said. "We knew the boodies would thrive. The Elders approved this."

Those Elders take their responsibilities seriously. While the immensity of the Outback makes it hard to fathom scientists or tourists wrecking the place, it doesn't take much to desecrate a sensitive site. We visited one where a column of red rock covered in Aboriginal petroglyphs had been scarred with graffiti. In other places, the Martu have arranged items in a particular way for ceremonial visits, an order that a single tourist visit could disrupt, potentially angering an animal spirit.

Martu and DBCA representatives expressed confidence that they could balance conservation, tourism, and science in Matuwa Kurrara Kurrara.

"It's important to know what's important to them, but we don't need to know the details of why," said Simon Choo, senior policy and planning officer at DBCA. "We owe them that respect." Choo explained that the co-management represents "a huge opportunity for partnerships in managing country."

"Indigenous groups now approach the Government asking for a national park," Choo said. "That's a total flip from 10 years ago."

Ultimately, the Martu would like to expand Matuwa Kurrara Kurrara and are working to raise funds to purchase more land nearby to make it happen.

On our final day in the park, we're driving through Sydney Head Pass and burnt-red hills carpeted with wildflowers. "This national park is a very good thing, a big step for our people," Bradley says, one hand on the wheel and the other holding a hunk of cooked goanna, which he is eating like an apple. He's in his element, out on Country, alert, animated, and at peace.

"I can't forgive the whitefella for everything in the past," he says. "It's too much. But we need to move on, you know? This is the way forward."

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John Briley is a Trust *staff writer.*

Robbie Wongawol (far right) explains the ancestral significance of a water hole—a natural depression that reliably holds rainwater—to Pew staff members Tim Norton and Bill Kruse (seated, left to right) and Chris Major, a ranger coordinator with the Tarlka Matuwa Piarku Aboriginal Corporation. The Martu's generational knowledge has been crucial to finding the best ways forward to manage the land and wildlife in Matuwa Kurrara Kurrara, a park co-stewarded by the Martu people and the Western Australian State Government. *The Pew Charitable Trusts*

AN INVESTMENT IN OCEAN CURIOSITY

For more than three decades, Pew marine fellows have yielded ideas and solutions to protect global seas.

By Carol Kaufmann

A colorful coral reef is a diver's beacon in Raja Ampat, a chain of islands in Indonesia known as one of the Earth's most biodiverse reef ecosystems. Such pristine places also attract marine scientists and researchers, who study how healthy reefs function to help restore those in decline. *Tracey Jennings/Ocean Image Bank*

In one of the world's most urbanized coastal environments—the waters around Hong Kong—pressure from human activities is threatening the vulnerable Indo-Pacific humpback dolphin, known locally as the Chinese white dolphin. "Evidence shows—clearly and unequivocally—that Chinese white dolphins are hanging on by a thread, clinging on to their last remaining habitat refuge in Hong Kong," says Stephen C.Y. Chan of the Cetacea Research Institute, who calls the dolphins "important sentinels of coastal ecosystems."

"Just as canaries in the mines alert coal miners of the presence of dangerous gas, a rigorous understanding of the well-being of these animals serves as indicators" of the impacts of a changing environment, Chan says.

He now has the support, resources, and time to develop a scientific body of research that will lead to recommendations for conservation measures for the dolphins. Chan has just been named one of six recipients of the Pew Fellows Program in Marine Conservation. The program—35 years old this year—enables breakthroughs in marine science that address critical conservation issues on land and in the sea. One of the oldest marine science fellowship programs in the world, it also acts as a convening forum, allowing past and current recipients to share their findings and knowledge and collaborate with other experts in the community.

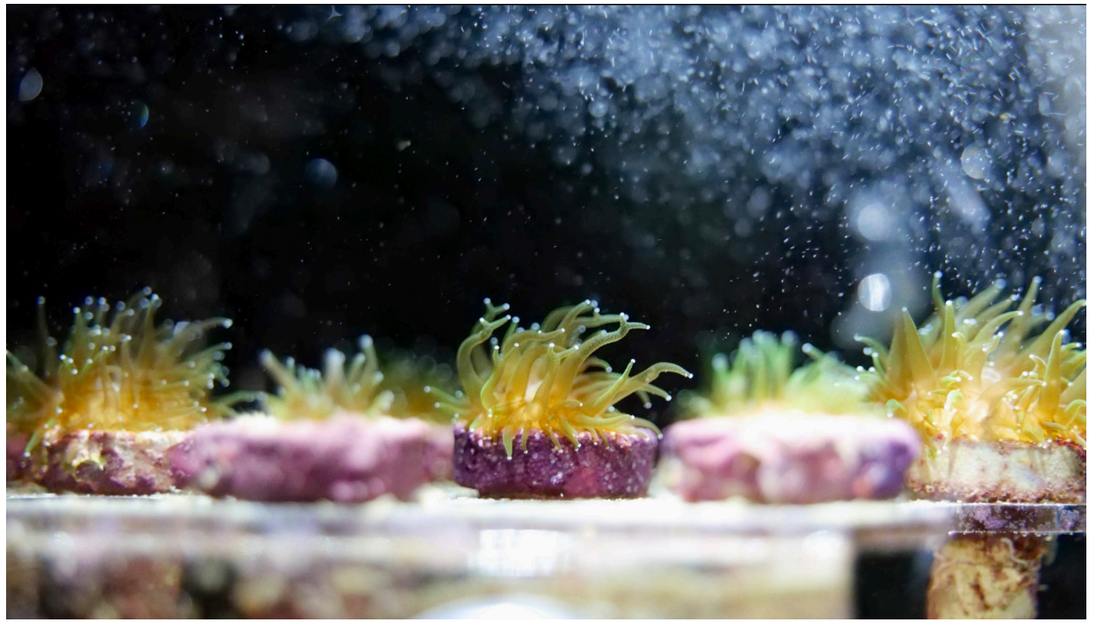
The new fellows, announced in March, will work on a vast array of subjects, such as investigating the epaulette—or "walking"—shark in the archipelago of Raja Ampat in Indonesia, conserving sandy beach ecosystems in the Western Indian Ocean, using the expertise of local communities and Indigenous people to preserve biologically rich marine sites in Indonesia, and employing community-friendly protocols to help restore reefs in the Philippines.

Another project will look at the corals—those colorful, hard-shell organisms that may look like rocks to some but are actually living animals—that make up reefs. Corals have been dying at an alarming rate and need to recoup their numbers.

"Most of the big reef-building corals in the world have stopped having babies," says Kristen Marhaver, a marine biologist with the CARMABI Marine Research Station in Curaçao in the Dutch Caribbean, where she grows corals in a lab. "Imagine if no human had successfully had a baby in the last 30 years—we would be so scared for the future of our communities, cultures, and entire species. But corals can have babies when humans lend a hand."

With research from her fellowships, Marhaver wants scientists throughout the world to grow more corals—foundations for biodiversity in so many marine ecosystems—and faster.

She's learning what corals need in nature to become parents on their own and knows from working with the most fragile corals that fertilization often fails. But she also knows about a whole array of innovations that could help coral eggs fertilize and grow into baby corals, which will go on to provide shelter, nurseries, and feeding grounds for untold marine species.



Juvenile pillar corals grow in 2025 Pew marine fellow Kristen Marhaver's lab in the Caribbean. Marhaver works on assisted breeding techniques to help corals fertilize and grow successfully so they can become building blocks of ocean habitats that some 25% of all marine animals will depend on throughout their life cycle. *Kristen Marhaver*

Andrianus Sembiring, 2020 Pew marine fellow, examines stingrays at a market in Bali, Indonesia. Sembiring is developing a fast and reliable genetic test to identify protected shark species from parts, especially fins, that are often sold in markets throughout the world. *Fauzy Chaniago for The Pew Charitable Trusts*

Chan, Marhaver, and the four other 2025 fellows will join the community of 208 scientists who have received the Pew marine fellowships since 1990. The fellowship provides a boost to midcareer scientists and other marine experts who have research experience, advanced degrees, and strong records of achievement and are working on innovative, interdisciplinary work in marine conservation. To select the recipients, an independent advisory committee composed of experienced global experts and leaders identifies individuals whose future scientific contributions will be significantly enhanced by their fellowships. Each recipient receives a $150,000 grant, allocated over three years, to complete an original marine conservation research project, test viable solutions, and offer them to the global marine body of knowledge, marine scientists and conservationists, and the public.

The time yields valuable dividends, as past fellows can attest. During his fellowship, 2020 fellow Andrianus Sembiring, from Yayasan Biodiversitas Indonesia, developed advanced tools to monitor the shark trade in Indonesia. Global demand for shark fins, used in luxury food products and traditional medicine, poses a serious threat to shark populations in his country, which prohibits the sale of 12 shark species. Because mostly shark body parts, such as fins or tails, are exported from Indonesia, the species can't be identified and regulated.

With Pew's support, Sembiring built a reliable genetic test that quickly identifies fins from the protected species of sharks that are sold in international markets and allowed him to test his methods off the coast of Bali. He then trained government staff, university scientists, representatives from nongovernmental organizations, and others to use the tools to improve monitoring and enforcement of the shark fin export market, an opportunity that was "a game changer," according to Sembiring.

Further north, a 2019 fellow also made a breakthrough with how she approached the study of sharks, as well as the closely related rays.

Rima Jabado, lead scientist from the Gulf Elasmo Project in the United Arab Emirates, used her fellowship to study guitarfishes and wedgefishes, sharklike species of rays, in Mauritania, Senegal, India, and Sri Lanka, countries where the fish were under pressure from

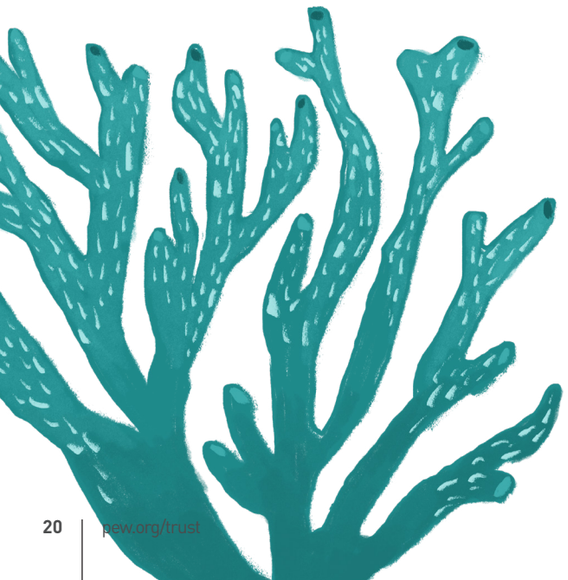
commercial fisheries. Support from the fellowship allowed her to learn more about the major threats to these understudied and often misunderstood species that seldom receive attention. "There's so many population declines over the years," Jabado says of sharks and rays, "but we don't talk a lot about that because we see them more as a fisheries commodity, something we can eat on our plate, rather than wildlife."

Motivated to help improve management of the species, Jabado used her fellowship to gain firsthand knowledge from those who witness the decline of marine wildlife—the fishers and traders who are catching on a daily basis. "They are the ones that are at sea every single day," she says. "They are the ones that know and see differences. The scale of what's happening is only understood by them.

"Fishermen don't usually have a lot of people interested in the work that they're doing, and they want to talk about it and explain what they're seeing," says Jabado. "But if you show them that you care about what they're doing, they want to contribute. They're the most amazing contributors because they know exactly what's happening and why it's happening."

Sangeeta Mangubhai, a 2018 fellow from Fiji, also spent her fellowship learning from those doing the work—in her case, the people who catch fish for small-scale fisheries and for their communities and families in the Pacific region. An analysis in Fiji had shown that small-scale fishers had low bargaining power, limited access to technology and market information, and poor knowledge of techniques for adding value to their products. In addition, they often have low incomes and are vulnerable to exploitative business practices and the impacts of natural disasters.

Women make more than half of small-scale catches in the Pacific region.



So Mangubhai, a biologist by training, brought a social science approach to her work. During the three years of her fellowship, she tapped the vast knowledge that women in the Pacific region have that affects subsistence and commercial fisheries. She interviewed more than 100 people in Fiji, Vanuatu, and the Solomon Islands and used her findings to make fisheries management more accurate and effective.

For Mangubhai, the fellowship altered the course of her life's work. It "opened up many, many doors," she says. "And as a result, my career feels like it's shifted. I feel empowered as a woman from the Pacific to produce research that is pushing some of those 'glass ceilings.'"

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The work done by individual fellows is multiplied as they bring their research and ideas into the global network of Pew marine fellows.

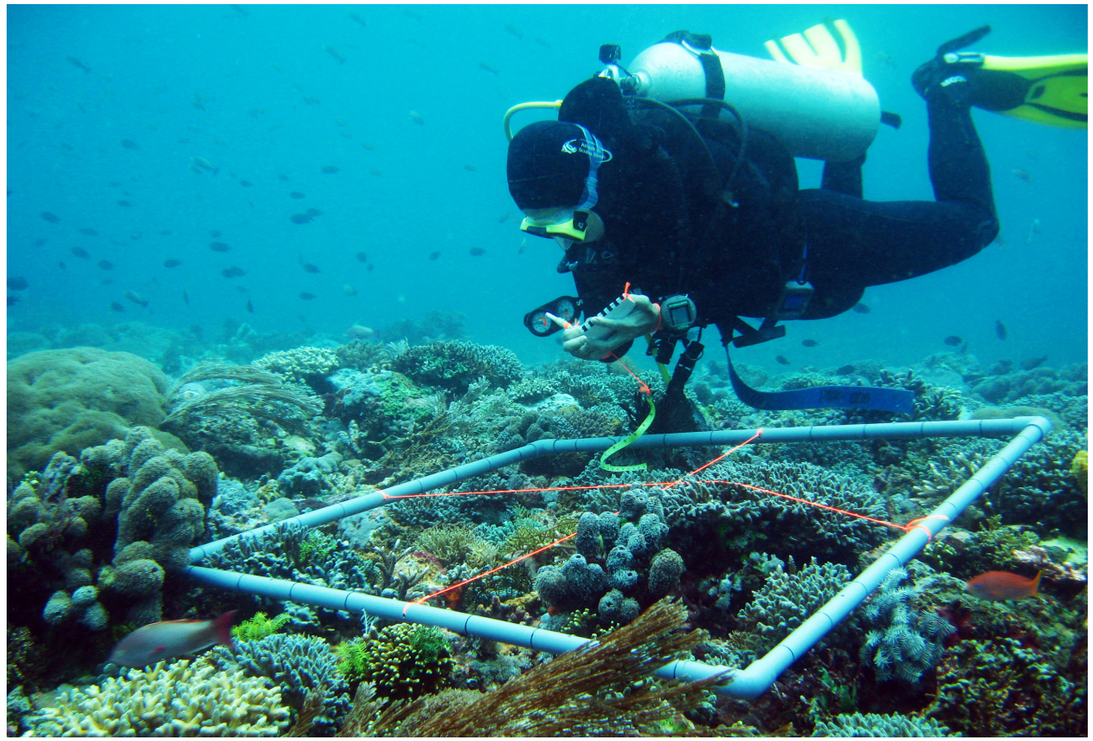
"Receiving the fellowship is the first door into a worldwide network of marine biologists and conservationists who care deeply about ocean management," says Donna Frisby-Greenwood, Pew's senior vice president for scientific advancement. "The connections made throughout the fellowship and for years after allows the scientists to keep sharing what they've learned and foster new ideas and approaches to investigation."

The marine fellows gather once a year in different locations around the globe for a Pew-sponsored annual meeting, for the express purpose of fostering such collaborations. There, they can build on past work, learn about additional funding, and continue to build their networks.

"By gathering this brainpower and curiosity about marine life and the seas every year at the annual meeting—and allowing it to mix—the benefits to ocean conservation are exponentially multiplied," says Frisby-Greenwood.

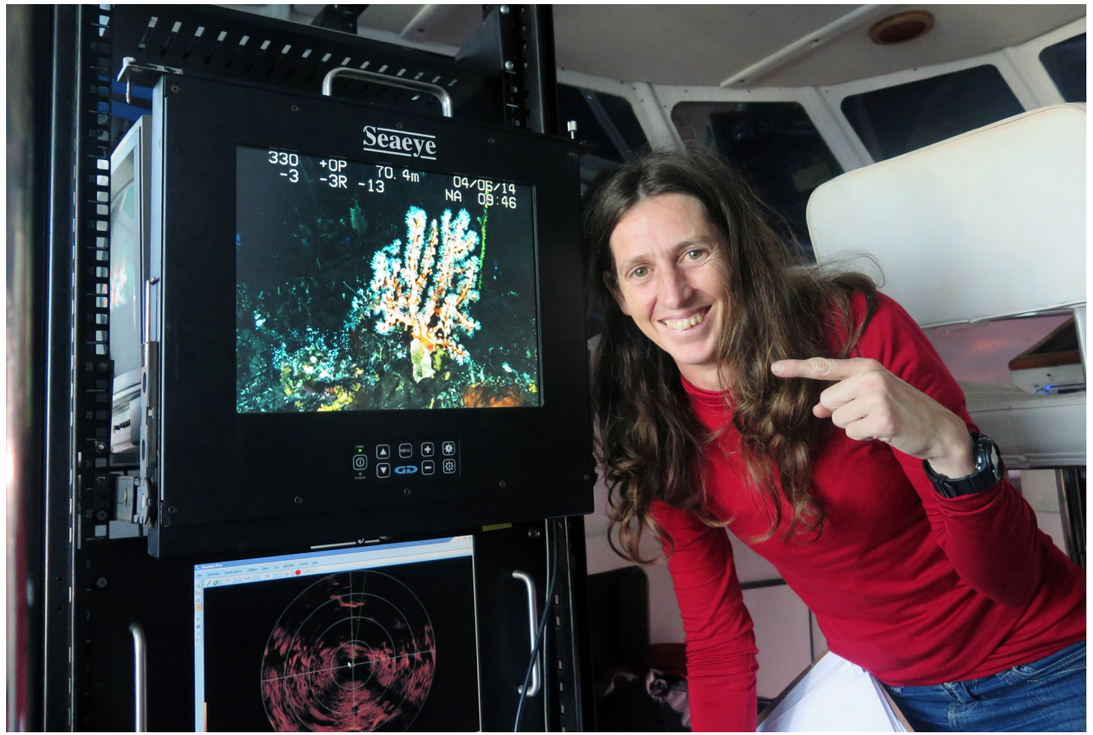
Conversations lead to collaboration. Through the network, Mangubhai met 2018 fellow Katherine Mills, from the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, who develops strategies for fisheries to adapt to warming waters. Now, the two are working on a project that will help build resilience in fisheries in Fiji, engaging both men and women fishers in the process.

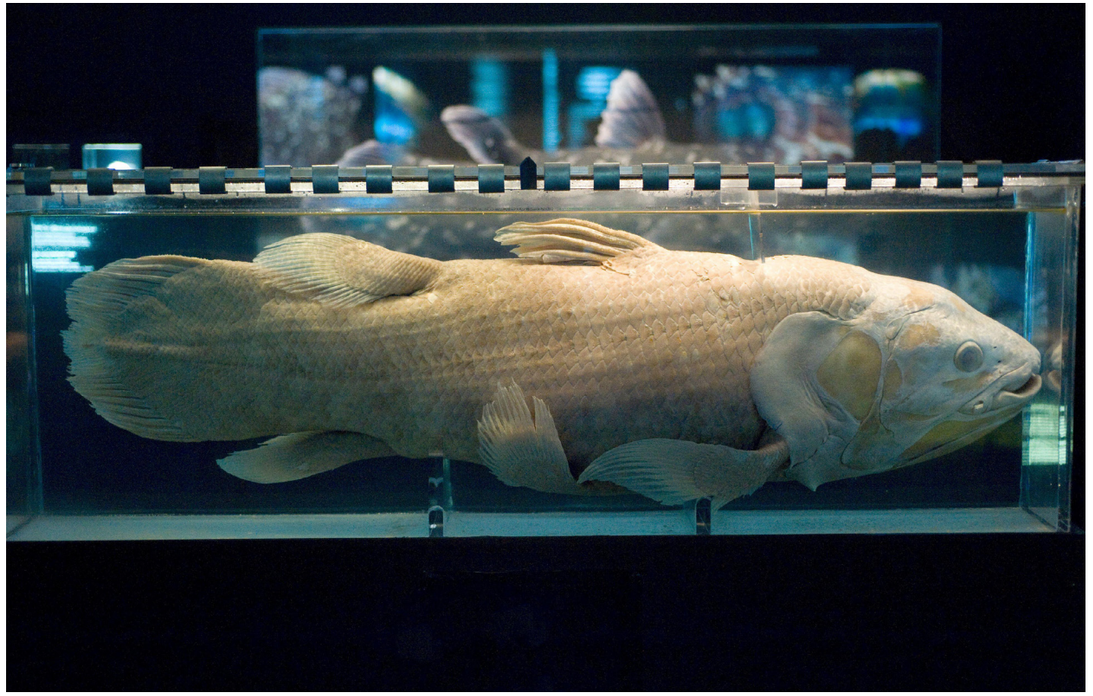
At the program's 2019 annual meeting in Hilo, Hawaii, 2017 fellow Ester Serrão and Jabado established a plan to conduct joint fieldwork in Mauritania's Banc d'Arguin National Park, a World Heritage Site and hot spot of marine biodiversity in North Africa facing growing threats from illegal industrial fishing and the wildlife trade. The team collected DNA samples from traded sharks and rays to help park managers identify species present in the park so they could improve monitoring and help protect threatened fish. Serrão and Jabado also



2021 Pew marine fellow Tries Blandine Razak surveys an experimental reef rehabilitation site in Komodo National Park, East Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. During her fellowship, Razak identified and tested effective reef restoration practices. *Sangeeta Mangubhai*

Current and former Pew marine fellows plant mangroves during a field trip in Bali, Indonesia, during the program's annual conference in 2024. Meeting once a year gives fellows the opportunity to exchange ideas, share knowledge, and form new partnerships. *Fauzy Chaniago for The Pew Charitable Trusts*





Kerry Sink (above), a 2016 marine fellow, points to images from a remotely operated vehicle used to explore a submarine canyon off South Africa, where she helped define critical areas of ocean biodiversity. Years later, Sink and another fellow teamed up to study an ancient and endangered fish species—the coelacanth (below), such as this preserved specimen. *Top: The Pew Charitable Trusts, Bottom: José María Barres Manuel/Alamy*

A local sorts the morning catch in Papua New Guinea's Central Province. Women comprise more than 50% of small-scale fish catchers in the Pacific region and are valuable sources of information about declining sea populations—if consulted. Sangeeta Mangubhai, a 2018 marine fellow, listened to local knowledge and insights about daily fishing to make fisheries management more effective. *ADB*

collected genetic samples from sediments in the park's seagrass beds—some of the largest and most pristine meadows in the world—to assess changes in shark and ray populations over time and identify recent declines. The fellows also held conservation training sessions on genetic sampling and new data collection methods for employees of a national research institute and the national park.

More recently, following a chat at breakfast at the program's 2022 annual meeting in California, 2016 fellow Kerry Sink, a professor at the South African National Biodiversity Institute, teamed up with Stefano Mariani, a former member of the program's selection committee, to study coelacanths, an ancient and critically endangered fish that lives in deep, tropical marine caves. The team recently published a study that demonstrated using environmental DNA as a noninvasive tool to monitor the iconic species.

Cross pollination of expertise is a big draw for Mangubhai. "You need those diverse perspectives, people working in different fields, to try and find solutions to some of our pressing environmental issues," she says. "I might be working in a session and sitting next to someone who's an expert on penguins or polar bears or Arctic treaties, and they have different viewpoints to bring that might be applicable in my country in the tropics in the Pacific."

"We get to meet at least once in a year at this meeting, and that's huge!" says 2008 fellow Rashid Sumaila, an economist specializing in oceans and fisheries at the University of British Columbia, Canada. "Otherwise, we're all too busy in our own corners. But you get these days here, away from home, together with colleagues you respect, share great ideas, and you can even create new projects."

As it has for more than three decades, the Pew marine fellows program will continue to support those connections among the scholars whose work is crucial to conserving delicate marine species and habitats that underpin essential resources and food for billions of people—expanding exponentially the potential for bringing about positive change to secure the world's waters.

Carol Kaufmann is a Trust *staff writer.*

CAN MANUFACTURED HOMES HELP SOLVE THE NATION'S HOUSING SHORTAGE?

At a time of high rents and housing prices, manufactured homes offer an alternative—but they face regulatory hurdles that lawmakers can fix.

BY CAROL KAUFMANN
PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEXEY SWALL FOR THE PEW CHARITABLE TRUSTS

Hector Cardenas was skeptical.

His wife had fallen in love with a four-bedroom, two-bath single-family home that their real estate agent showed them in Petersburg, Virginia. The city of 34,000 was close to Fort Gregg-Adams, where Cardenas, a U.S. Marine instructor, would be based after the couple moved from Temecula, California.

The house was a manufactured home, which he had never heard of, so Cardenas began to research. Some sources dismissed the houses as being built with cheaper products and likened them to the single- or double-wide trailers of previous generations. But federal standards for the homes had been updated in recent decades, boosting quality—and the price was hard to ignore.

The 1,400-square-foot house was going for $240,000, whereas others near the military base that listed for up to $100,000 more were often "not in pristine condition" and would require work upon move-in, he says. The couple took a chance and bought it.

Regrets?

"None at all," he says. "There's so much room! I can't emphasize that enough." The house features an open-plan concept with a kitchen island, a porch, and a front- and backyard. And the couple has been pleased with the quality of construction. "We've had zero problems with it," says Cardenas. "I'd buy another."

Manufactured homes such as Cardenas' may offer an answer to the current shortage in the U.S. housing market. An estimated nationwide shortage of 4 million to 7 million homes has pushed rents to all-time highs, leaving a record share of Americans spending more than 30% of their income on rent. At the same time, the median home price has jumped to $420,000, leaving families unable to afford a house, forcing them to continue renting and miss out on the benefits of homeownership.

Manufactured homes are assembled on a chassis, or framework of a vehicle, that's permanently affixed to the house. They are built according to U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development standards that were updated after hurricanes in the 1970s destroyed thousands of flimsy trailer-style homes and now allow more modern and accessible designs. According to research by the Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies (JCHS) funded by The Pew Charitable Trusts, new manufactured homes cost buyers up to two-thirds less than building similarly sized single-family homes. And besides being less expensive, they can be produced quickly.

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At the Eagle River Homes production plant in Leola, Pennsylvania, a manufactured home rolls out of the warehouse every three days, the company's marketing manager, Lloyd Black, says as he stands in front of one of the 17 stations—each the size of a house—on the production line. Behind him, a house under assembly has a foundation, interior walls built around the water lines running up through the floor, and a vanity, toilet, and shower/bathtub combo. As it moves along the line to the next station, the structure takes shape, receiving insulation, walls around the fixtures, a roof, moldings, siding, lights, shingles, windows and doors, and appliances. At the final station, a foreman walks the unit and signs off. Then, the home will be ready for the highway and delivery to its destination. And, after that, it will likely never move again.

The modern kitchen (above) in an open-concept design lured Hector and Alexandria Cardenas (above, right) into buying a manufactured home when they moved to Petersburg, Virginia. The home's layout, with four bedrooms and two baths, was also a big draw; even the pets get their own room.

A roof (at right), built separately and then placed atop a house frame, receives finishing touches before the whole building moves along the giant assembly line at the Eagle River Homes plant in Leola, Pennsylvania.

In addition to a quick production time, the homes—which can be as big as 1,800 square feet—are built inside a facility, shielding them from bad weather and rain delays. "If [construction workers] were building that house outside when it's raining, the lumber is sitting there, getting wet," says Black. "In here, there's no weather damage. If you exceed moisture content, you can't use the lumber. Our inspections are more stringent than a stick-built house"—industry lingo for site-built homes—"can be."

From the outside, many manufactured homes look nearly identical to lot-built ones, even those in the same neighborhood. And on the inside, many of the furnishings also look the same: finished sheet rock, dual glazed windows, attractive roof pitches, walk-up attics, wooden cabinets and ceramic tiles in the kitchen and bath, and porches.

They no longer resemble the prefab trailers that many picture when they think of manufactured houses. "Misconceptions come from people who just haven't seen our product," says Black.

New construction at an affordable price gives "the missing middle market" more options, according to Tom Heinemann, a developer who specializes in affordable homes and manufactured houses and is selling and renting the houses in a new community in Hagerstown, Maryland, and in Petersburg, where Cardenas purchased his home. "One of the things we've found with manufactured homes is that they hit a certain market just right," he says. In Petersburg, the manufactured houses are priced between $250,000 and $280,000, and in Hagerstown, between $330,000 and $370,000.

"We're hitting a lot of sweet spots. It's not just one demographic," says Black. "It's young, middle ages, and retirees."

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But despite the affordability of manufactured homes, buying one can still be difficult for many who need and want them. Traditionally constructed homes are automatically titled as real estate. But almost every state automatically titles manufactured homes as personal property, like an automobile, regardless of the quality of the home or whether the homebuyer owns the land where the house will sit.

Pew research shows that only 44% of manufactured home borrowers have a mortgage—compared with 95% of site-built home borrowers. Home-only loans, which are also known as personal property or chattel loans, are an option but can be hard to get and come with higher interest rates, shorter repayment periods, and fewer protections than mortgages.

One in 5 manufactured home borrowers end up resorting to much riskier contract financing such as lease-purchase or contract for deed, in which actual homeownership doesn't transfer until the final payment—especially common among borrowers whose homes are titled as personal property. That puts borrowers at a much higher risk of eviction with little notice, foreclosure, loss of their house, and a loss of equity.

Tom Heinemann, a real estate developer, conducts business on site in Petersburg, Virginia, where he is developing a manufactured home community, with homes priced from $250,000 to $280,000, depending on size and customization.

Heinemann's Hagerstown, Maryland, development has space for more than 230 manufactured homes. Designed for a variety of owners, the community is located by schools and shopping centers and features paved nature trails, playgrounds, and a clubhouse. The homes, ranging from the upper $330,000s to the mid-$370,000s, are priced to sell. "Middle-class buyers were getting priced out of the market," says Heinemann. "The price point was right where they could afford it." *The Pew Charitable Trusts*

"Potential buyers who are looking for an affordable home—first-time homebuyers, single-income earners, retirees, and lower-middle-income workers—could really benefit from changes to safer, more affordable financing options," says Rachel Siegel, who works with Pew's housing policy initiative.

Those buyers are also potentially good candidates for safer loans. Of manufactured home borrowers, 89% report being current on their loans, and only 4% report being behind on payments by three or more months, says Siegel.

"States need to modernize title laws," she says. "Manufactured homes are not the trailers of yesterday and need not be treated that way."

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The same outdated views of low-quality trailer homes that have created financing concerns have also led to zoning restrictions, particularly in suburban or urban areas, that do not allow manufactured homes in single-family neighborhoods.

Changes to zoning laws and permitting would also allow more manufactured homes to help fill vacant lots, replace decrepit unoccupied houses, or create new subdivisions—and allow access to affordable homes. The JCHS research found that policymakers in hundreds of counties in the U.S. can expand access to manufactured homes and help 3.2 million moderate-income renters become homeowners. Many of these individuals, who earn between $50,000 and $100,000, might not be able to afford a site-built single-family house but would likely be able to purchase a manufactured home, according to the research.

Some state policymakers have taken steps to help expand access to these affordable homes. In 2024, Maryland, Maine, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island enacted laws to prevent zoning barriers for manufactured homes so that the houses can be built in places where single-family homes are allowed.

Proponents of manufactured homes say that they also can boost local economies. As more homes become available, other businesses to serve those residents come, too. The 46 vacant lots that Heinemann is developing for manufactured homes in Petersburg "are a catalyst," he says. "Now you see lots of other development."

And buyers like them. Cardenas has settled into his place—easily. "Downsides? I haven't seen them," he says. "The quality is good, and we've had no issues." He also checked the real estate listings for manufactured homes like his in the area and was pleased to see they're now going for more than he paid. Says Cardenas, "I've even made money."

Carol Kaufmann is a Trust *staff writer.*

The Decline of Christianity Has Slowed

An extensive Pew Research Center survey finds that a decades-long drop in people identifying as Christians in the U.S. may have leveled off.

BY DAVID O'REILLY

After many years of steady decline, the share of Americans who identify as Christians appears to have leveled off, at least temporarily, according to an extensive Pew Research Center survey.

The Center's third Religious Landscape Study (RLS), released in February, found that the religiously unaffiliated—sometimes referred to as religious "nones"—also has plateaued after a long period of growth. The data further shows that rates of prayer and attendance at religious services have stabilized and that large majorities of Americans have a spiritual or supernatural outlook on the world.

Conducted over eight months in 2023-24, the survey of nearly 37,000 U.S. adults found that the Christian share of the adult population stood at about 62%—roughly what the Center's researchers had been observing since 2021. What's more, the youngest participants in the survey—those born between 2000 and 2006—appear to be no less religious than survey respondents born in the 1990s.

These were notable departures from the downward trend that Christian identity has seen since at least the 1990s, when about 90% of U.S. adults identified as Christians. By 2007, when the Center released its first RLS, just 78% of U.S. adults identified as Christian. That number dropped to 71% in the Center's next RLS, in 2014, an average decline of about one percentage point per year.

The 2023-24 data also showed that the portion of all adults who say they pray daily and attend religious services at least monthly has held steady in recent years at about 44% and 33%, respectively—all of which came as glad tidings to some Christian organizations. The First Liberty Institute, a legal organization that defends religious liberty, reported that "the findings offer significant hope for the future."

Still, the Center's researchers point to strong crosscurrents rippling through the data. Despite the recent signs of stabilization, "other indicators suggest we may see further declines in the American religious landscape in future years," notes the report.

In particular, it points to the fact that younger Americans "remain far less religious" than the "older, highly religious, heavily Christian generations" now passing away. And while the youngest adults in the survey may be about as religious as their next oldest cohort, they "are significantly less likely than the oldest adults" to identify as Christian (46% vs. 80%), pray daily (27% vs. 58%), or attend religious services at least monthly (25% vs. 49%).

For lasting stability to take hold, the report states, "young adults would have to become more religious as they age, or new generations of adults more religious than their parents would have to emerge."

So far, that hasn't happened. There is "no evidence in our data that any generation or birth age group has become more religious—has become more Christian, or more likely to pray, or more likely to believe in God—as they've gotten older," says Alan Cooperman, the Center's director of religion research.

The RLS is the largest single survey Pew Research Center conducts and provides both nationwide data and information on every state, the District of Columbia, and 34 large metro areas. The Center's survey received support from the Lilly Endowment Inc., Templeton Religion Trust, The Arthur Vining Davis Foundations, and the M.J. Murdock Charitable Trust.

Using NORC —a Chicago-based organization that also produces the respected General Social Survey—as its data collection partner, Pew Research Center randomly invited a representative sample of U.S. adults to complete the survey online, by mail, or by telephone with an interviewer. The survey was conducted in English and Spanish, with 36,908 respondents, between July 17, 2023, and March 4, 2024. The response rate was 20%, and the margin of sampling error for the full sample is less than 1 percentage point.

Because the U.S. Census Bureau does not collect data on the religious identities of Americans or their beliefs and practices, the massively scaled RLS seeks to fill that void "with very reliable, rigorously gathered and impartial data," says Cooperman.

The scale of the study provides scholars with detailed and demographically specific data not available in any other sociological survey. "No other religion survey has as big a sample size or asks this many questions" says Mark Chaves, professor of sociology, religion, and divinity at Duke University.

Chaves, who read a draft of the report before it was published, also hails the Center's decision to show in its report how its data compares with other major religion surveys, including religion data collected within the broader General Social Survey. "This enhances [scholars'] confidence that the results are accurate. And as time goes on, Pew's data becomes more valuable because they're tracking trends."

Among the report's other key findings:

- 40% of U.S. adults are Protestants, 19% are Catholics, and 3% are other Christians. Together, those groups add up to the 62% Christian share of the population.
- About 35% of U.S. adults identify with a different religious group or category than the one in which they were raised. Most of the movement is out of religion into the ranks of the unaffiliated.
- 29% of all adults are religiously unaffiliated: 5% are atheist, 6% are agnostic, and 19% identify religiously as "nothing in particular."
- 7% belong to religions other than Christianity: 2% are Jewish, and about 1% each are Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu (all figures are rounded).
- The share of self-described political liberals who identify as Christians has fallen 25 percentage points since 2007, from 62% to 37%. Among self-described conservatives, the Christian share has declined 7 percentage points, from 89% to 82%.
- A majority of U.S. immigrants (58%) are Christian. About a quarter of foreign-born adults are unaffiliated, and 14% belong to other religions, including 4% who are Muslim, 4% who are Hindu, and 3% who are Buddhist.

Among the survey topics that Chaves found particularly valuable was the question of where in the religious spectrum the erosion of identity has been taking place. While the ranks of nonreligious Americans clearly have grown over the decades, what has happened to the *most religious* part of the population? Has it been stable or even growing, as some scholars have suggested?

If that were the case, says Gregory A. Smith, the Center's senior associate director of religion research, "it might leave us with a group of highly religious people that's stable in size, and a group of nonreligious people that's growing, with shrinkage in the middle." However, he says, "what we actually see is decline at the high end" of belief and observance, "growth at the low end" (the least religious part of the population), "and stability in the size of the religious middle."

The once reliable "stickiness" of a religious upbringing also seems to be declining. Compared with older people, fewer young adults who had a highly religious upbringing are still highly religious as adults.

In the oldest cohort of U.S. adults (ages 74 and older), 51% of people who say they grew up attending religious services weekly, in families where religion was very important, still go to services weekly and say religion is very important in their lives.

> *"Other indicators suggest we may see further declines in the American religious landscape in future years."*

In contrast, among the youngest U.S. adults in the survey (now ages 18 to 24), just 28% of those raised in highly religious homes are, today, highly religious themselves.

What, then, what might explain the recent leveling off after decades of decline? Cooperman says that the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020-23—which delayed the scheduled start of the RLS by two years—might have "reinforced the importance of religion to people who were already religious."

Nonreligious adults didn't start flocking to churches and synagogues in large numbers, he says, but '"many people lost family members, jobs, income and certainly were fearful. And in a hard time like that, what do people do? For those who were religious, many turned to their religious communities. And I think that may have slowed the erosion." (*The Wall Street Journal* reported in December that Bible sales increased from 9.7 million in 2019 to 14.2 million in 2023.)

Whether the anxieties of the pandemic explain the recent stabilization is "impossible to prove," says Cooperman, "because we don't know what would have happened if COVID had not come along."

Only future polling, he says, will determine if the leveling holds.

David O'Reilly was the longtime religion reporter for The Philadelphia Inquirer *and is a frequent contributor to* Trust.

How Shifting Demographics Are Reshaping State Finances

BY JOANNA BIERNACKA-LIEVESTRO, PH.D. & ALEXANDRE FALL

Clay Banks/Unsplash

It's a truism that demography is destiny—and that includes the financial destiny of states. Although the population of the 50 states grew at its fastest rate in nearly a quarter of a century last year, increasing by almost 1% between mid-2023 and mid-2024, and nearly all states gained residents—driven mostly by domestic and international migration—these numbers don't tell the full story. The long-term U.S. population trend is for slower growth. And this creates a reality check for state policymakers, as population shifts are tied to states' finances—affecting both revenue and spending.

In fact, the population boost in both 2023 and 2024 obscures the demographic outlook of most states. Over the past 15 years, the population has grown at a slower rate: only 0.69% per year. And during those years, three states—West Virginia, Illinois, and Mississippi—actually lost residents. West Virginia's population declined by almost 78,000, equal to 0.3% annually; Illinois lost over 86,000, or 0.05% a year; and the population of Mississippi fell by about 16,000 people, or 0.04% a year. The bottom line? Population growth nationally has been trending downward for decades, with most states grappling with steady slowdowns.

And the pace of population growth across states is expected to continue slowing. Data from the University of Virginia's Weldon Cooper Center for Public Service projects that while only three states—Illinois, Mississippi, and West Virginia—will lose population from 2020 to 2030, that number is expected to increase sixfold over the 2030s and reach 24 by 2050. (These projections are based on the 2020 decennial census data and don't reflect the pandemic-era swings in deaths, births, or domestic and international migration, nor recent policy shifts on immigration.) The Census Bureau also forecasts a steady slowdown in national population growth, which it attributes largely to the combination of declining fertility rates and rising death rates as baby boomers age.

Populations change because of shifts in the number of new residents—newcomers (from other states and abroad) and babies—versus those who died or moved away. For most of the 15 years ending in July 2024, the 50-state population growth was largely due to births outpacing deaths. But ever since the baby boom of 1946 to 1964, birth rates have generally been declining and the country has aged. As a result, migration—both domestic and international—plays a much more significant role in determining whether a state's population grows or shrinks.

According to the Congressional Budget Office, although net immigration (the number of people coming from other countries minus the number of people who move out of the U.S.) is projected to account for all population growth in the United States beginning in 2033, it's expected to slow in the years ahead. And the new federal administration's proposed immigration policies add uncertainty to the complex mix of economic, policy, and geopolitical trends that shape migration patterns.

The aging population can also generate challenges for states: Income and sales tax revenue may drop, while health care and pension costs will likely rise. The Weldon Cooper Center projections show that from 2020 to 2050, the population of adults ages 65 and over will increase in nearly every state, while K-12-, college-, and working-age populations will decline in almost half of states. These issues may be lessened in states that have growing populations of 25-to-64-year-olds, such as Utah and Texas; more residents in this age group typically translates to a larger labor force and more people who, through their taxes, help cover public costs for aging residents. But only about half of states are projected to experience steady, though often slow, growth in this age group in the coming decades. And an expanding working-age population may present issues of its own, including housing availability and cost.

So what are the consequences for states of these population trends? A shrinking or slow-growing population can be both a cause and an effect of weakened economic prospects. Less economic activity can limit state revenue collections. And although a smaller population can lead to a reduction in some spending, it also means fewer residents are available to help cover the costs of long-standing commitments, such as debt and state employee retirement benefits.

On the other hand, more people usually means more workers and consumers contributing to economic activity as they take jobs and buy goods and services—which generates more tax revenue. A growing economy, in turn, can attract more workers and their families. The size of a state's population, and annual changes to it, also influences how much the state will receive from some federal grants.

While population growth was widespread in 2024 and states seem to have moved past the pandemic-era lull, the risks to long-term fiscal prosperity remain. Thriving state economies depend on people, but aging populations mean higher mortality rates, while birth rates—already at historically low levels— are expected to decline even further. Immigrants fueled much of the national growth, yet immigration rates are also projected to fall in the coming years.

This leaves states with a pressing challenge: how to sustain economic growth and fiscal health in the face of demographic headwinds. Doing so will not be easy. But understanding the change that's coming is the first step toward ensuring continued prosperity.

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‘We Are Known As the Salmon People’

How Indigenous people and their partners are working to recover wild salmon in New Brunswick, Canada

On the banks of the Nepisiguit River in New Brunswick, Canada, Atlantic Salmon Federation’s Kris Hunter, Pew’s Leah Baumwell, and two employees of Pabineau First Nation’s Natural Resources Division weigh, measure, and tag salmon that were captured in a newly installed wheel submerged in the river. *The Pew Charitable Trusts*

The people of Pabineau First Nation (PFN) have lived along the banks of the Nepisiguit River since time immemorial—as they say—in what is now the province of New Brunswick, Canada. And this year, PFN launched a joint project with the New Brunswick-based nongovernmental organization Atlantic Salmon Federation (ASF) to improve research aimed at rebuilding the local wild salmon population, including tagging (and then releasing) young salmon that are leaving the river for the ocean for the first time. The Pew Charitable Trusts’ conservation Canada project partners with in-country organizations such as ASF, which assists Indigenous communities such as PFN to further shared conservation goals. Earlier this year, PFN and ASF invited Pew’s Leah Baumwell to join them in tagging and releasing salmon.

This interview with Robert Kryszko, special research and programs coordinator with Pabineau First Nation, and Kris Hunter, regional director of wild salmon watersheds with the Atlantic Salmon Federation, has been edited for length and clarity.

What do salmon in the Nepisiguit River mean to Pabineau First Nation?

Kryszko: Pabineau First Nation is a small community—we have about 400 members, not all of whom live here—and we are known as the salmon people. It’s a fish we use for our powwows and moon ceremonies; our elders pray over the salmon before the feast. We also use salmon for other ceremonies on national holidays that recognize our history, such as Indigenous days and the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, which honors children who never returned home and survivors of residential schools. We’ve always had the right to our natural resources, a right that was recognized federally in Canada in 1999 in what’s known as the Marshall Decision—which stated that the first allocation of this salmon fishery is for our food, social, and ceremonial usage.

What have you noticed about the salmon populations in the Nepisiguit River?

Kryszko: When we first noticed declines in the salmon population, such as when toxic runoff from nearby mines destroyed the population in 1969, Pabineau First Nation began to conserve, protect, and repopulate salmon in the river. So now we collect eggs from mature female salmon in the winter, fertilize them in the spring, and then release baby salmon into their home river. And over the last 40 years, we’ve helped the population recover in the Nepisiguit River. But we have new concerns now, like climate change. A few years ago, there were several feet of thick ice during winter in the Bathurst Lake, at the start of the Nepisiguit River, and we used to walk across it. Now, you’d need a canoe to cross it. We know that when the ice melts in the spring, it transports aquatic life to the river, which in turn becomes fish food. So less ice means less food for our salmon. The warmer water is also affecting our salmon—we’re starting to see more disease. We’re monitoring and working on a plan to mitigate and adapt to these issues.

How do Pabineau First Nation and the Atlantic Salmon Federation work together?

Hunter: The Atlantic Salmon Federation is focused on the conservation and preservation of wild salmon populations. A mantra from ASF is: “If we look back in 100 years, what will we say we wish we did? Let’s do that now.” A few years ago, we launched a watershed program with an ecosystem perspective and partnered with Indigenous communities like Pabineau First Nation to understand the warning signs we’re seeing and to build solutions. There are multiple ways of knowing and seeing, and we need to value all those ways. I’m a biologist, and Western science is my tendency, but Western science doesn’t answer everything.

Kryszko: Pabineau First Nation looks ahead seven generations—something our ancestors have always done—to make sure they’ll have the same things we have today. ASF came and discussed with the chief, council, and me their watershed perspective to protect, conserve, and enhance salmon. After a few meetings with ASF, we talked with our members and the community. The council and chief had open arms, so we created a protocol with ASF and launched the joint program in January of 2024. By working with ASF, we now have more people and better capacity for a mitigation and adaptation plan for the river, to make sure salmon are there for future generations.

Can you describe the salmon smolt wheel project you’re doing together?

Kryszko: We had 43 years of data from our salmon stocking program, but in that time, we’ve never collected data about the smolt—basically, the teenager salmon that transition from the river to the ocean. ASF said they wanted to help us fill this data gap. A smolt wheel is essentially a large funnel that floats in the river and is rotated by the current. A portion of young salmon are captured and held safely in it as they migrate downstream to the ocean. Once they are collected, measured, and tagged, they are released upstream. The number recaptured in the wheel can be used to estimate the total number of smolt migrating to the ocean, which in turn helps scientists gauge the health of the river ecosystem. This stage is a big, stressful, and important change in the salmon life cycle. The smolt are only about 12 centimeters long when they leave, and when they return in two or more years, they’ve grown five times as long and can weigh up to seven pounds. If you catch and mark them as they leave, which the smolt wheel allows us to do, you can learn about what our watershed is producing. And when they return, we can learn not only how many make it back from the ocean, but which ones. Were they the bigger ones, the smaller ones, ones with certain genetic traits? We can use that knowledge to improve our recovery program.

Hunter: The first time you do something, it’s a steep learning curve; this is our learning year, and it’s been good and productive. We’ll soon be able to share a summary report of what we caught, and we’re aiming to collect five years of data. We see salmon as a lens to understand what is happening in the entire ecosystem.

What’s your hope for the future?

Hunter: I’m a realist and I know there’s a long, hard road ahead of us, but I have hope. Rebuilding the wild salmon population isn’t going to happen overnight, but we’re making progress. In September, PFN played a major role in hosting a once-a-year gathering to talk, share, and collaborate across the whole network of ASF’s Wild Salmon Watersheds program. And I’m inspired by the excitement we’re seeing at PFN and the broader community; I’m hearing both Indigenous and non-Indigenous partners in other places saying they like what we’re doing and want to do it too.

Kryszko: My hope is for the salmon’s survival; I’d like to see my kids’ kids’ kids have the same opportunity with salmon that I have. There’s a big team behind the goal of having the salmon coming out shining, like it was when we had thousands and thousands of healthy fish that could support our social and ceremonial uses.

RETURN ON INVESTMENT

The Pew Charitable Trusts applies a rigorous, analytical approach to ***improve public policy, inform the public,*** *and* ***invigorate civic life,*** *as these recent accomplishments illustrate.*

IMPROVING PUBLIC POLICY

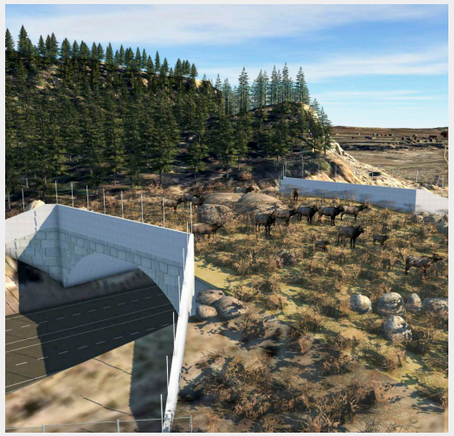
Tom Williams/CQ-Roll Call, Inc via Getty Images

Indiana and Utah modernize electric grids

Indiana Governor Mike Braun (R) and Utah Governor Spencer Cox (R) in March signed bipartisan legislation in their respective states to help modernize the electric grid by accelerating the use of advanced transmission technologies (ATTs). ATTs are fast-to-deploy technologies that can be installed on existing infrastructure to boost the capacity of transmission lines to carry 20% to 110% more power, depending on the technology. There are an estimated 2,600 gigawatts of electricity generation projects around the nation—95% of which are from solar, wind, or battery—that are stuck in the queue and unable to connect to the grid because of inadequate transmission capacity. By unlocking transmission capacity, ATTs help more of these clean energy projects connect to the grid and on a faster timeline than constructing new high-voltage transmission lines. Pew's energy modernization project provided research to policymakers in both states and worked with local partners to develop coalitions supporting the legislation.

New Mexico approves major conservation measures

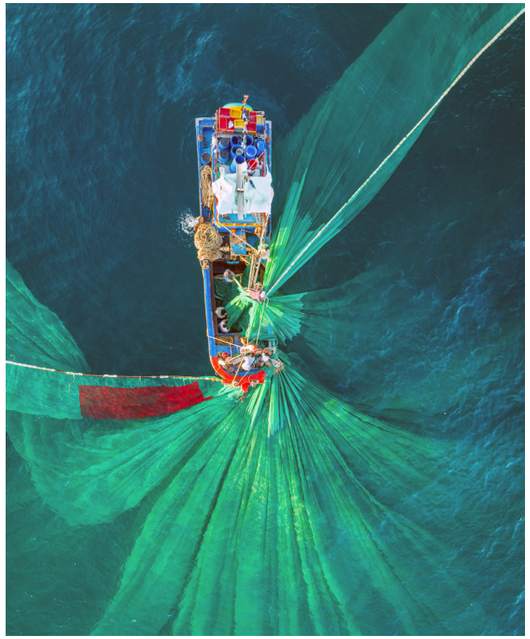
Governor Michelle Lujan Grisham (D) in April signed three bills into law that will protect the state's waters and wetlands and provide for wildlife crossings on highways and roads. One law seeks to avoid, minimize, and mitigate pollution in New Mexico waters. Another expands the strategic water reserve and empowers the state to purchase, lease, or accept donations of water rights for conservation purposes and cultural uses. And legislation approving the state budget includes $50 million—the largest one-time appropriation by a state—for wildlife crossings that allow herds of migratory animals to pass on bridges or through culverts constructed along highways and roads, preventing the deaths of drivers, passengers, and animals by reducing collisions. Pew staff provided technical advice and worked with local partners on the legislative efforts.



A herd of animals uses a wildlife crossing over a highway in a rendered image. *New Mexico Department of Transportation*

Fisheries managers adopt important ocean protections

Regional organizations and their 75 member governments that oversee major fisheries across more than half of the global ocean have agreed to new policies that they will be required to adhere to starting this year. Pew and its partners helped to secure these measures, which address inadequate management and control of large-scale fishing activities, and their implementation will help to protect marine biodiversity throughout these regions and safeguard food and livelihoods for the world's growing population. The policies adopted include:



A drone captures a fishing boat deploying its nets off the coast of Nha Trang , in Vietnam. *Pham Hung/Getty Images*

- New science-based frameworks called harvest strategies that will automate management decisions for fishing activities based on the long-term health of fish populations, among other priorities. New harvest strategies were adopted for commercially and ecologically important species such as sardines and anchovies in the Mediterranean Sea and swordfish in the north Atlantic Ocean.
- Plans that modernize oversight of fisheries operating on the high seas in the western and central Pacific Ocean, including new standards for electronic monitoring of these fisheries and improvements to inspections at port to reduce illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing.
- New commitments by fisheries managers in the northeast Atlantic Ocean to consider the impact of those commercial fisheries on the wider ocean ecosystem, including on wild species that depend on the targeted fish population as food.
- New commitments to incorporate the effects of climate change into fisheries management by regional organizations overseeing shared fisheries, like tunas, in the Atlantic and western and central Pacific oceans.

Pew co-hosts 'Corridors, Connectivity, and Crossings Conference'

In January, Pew joined with the Department of the Interior, the Department of Agriculture, and state and Tribal natural resources agencies to host the Corridors, Connectivity, and Crossings Conference in Palm Springs, California. The event—attended by more than 300 federal, state, and Tribal officials; scientists; and conservation leaders—highlighted new research on wildlife migration and best practices and policies to maintain, enhance, and restore ecological connectivity as well as species movement across intact and fragmented environments. Conference speakers included U.S. Senator Alex Padilla (D-CA); U.S. Representative Ryan Zinke (R-MT), who was secretary of the interior during the first Trump administration and spearheaded a Pew-backed secretarial order to conserve big-game migration corridors and habitat; and Tom Dillon, Pew senior vice president, environment and cross-cutting initiatives. Speakers noted the importance of federal and state bipartisan efforts to facilitate wildlife migration by protecting corridors and establishing wildlife-friendly transportation infrastructure such as highway crossings.

INVIGORATING CIVIC LIFE

The 'State of the City' of Philadelphia

As 2025 began, Philadelphia appeared to be entering a new and different phase after years of COVID-19 pandemic reverberations: The question, according to Pew's annual State of the City report, is which effects from recent years will be temporary and which will endure? The report, a study of Pew's hometown that was released in April, noted that homicides and shootings, which rose dramatically at the height of the pandemic, have fallen to the lowest levels in a decade. Unemployment rates, which were high in 2020 and 2021, have been relatively low for several years, and the city's poverty rate continues to decline. The analysis found that the city still faces uncertainties from shifts in federal spending, increasing housing costs, the ongoing opioid crisis, and a population that's shrunk from its pre-pandemic peak. Eagerly awaited by city government, business, and civic leaders each year, the 2025 findings were presented at a release event on economic mobility in the region, held in partnership with the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia at the Loews Philadelphia Hotel, for an audience of approximately 400 people.

Hannah Yoon for The Pew Charitable Trusts

INFORMING THE PUBLIC

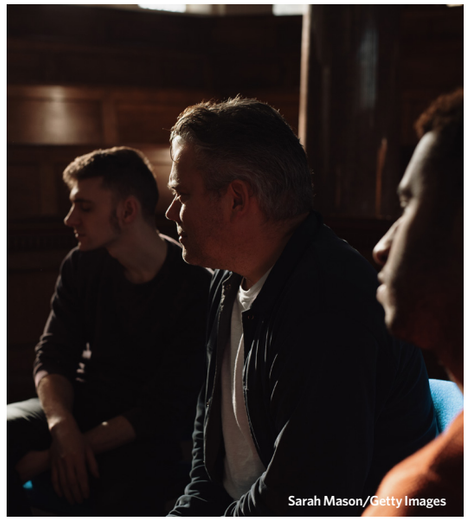
Survey examines teens' stresses and challenges

American teens face a host of challenges these days—both inside and outside the classroom. A Pew Research Center survey of U.S. teens age 13 to 17 that was published in March finds that anxiety and depression top the list of problems teens say their peers at school are dealing with, with 3 in 10 saying they're extremely or very common among their fellow students. The survey found that academics are the biggest source of pressure for teens today. Roughly 7 in 10 (68%) say that they personally feel a great deal or fair amount of pressure to get good grades. As they look forward in life, majorities of teens say it's extremely or very important to them that as adults they have a job or career they enjoy (86%), have close friends (69%), and have a lot of money (58%). Smaller shares of teens place a high level of importance on family life milestones such as getting married (36%) and having children (30%).


Lexey Swall for The Pew Charitable Trusts

Economic inequality seen as major challenge around the world

A Pew Research Center survey of 36 nations that was published in January found widespread public concern about economic inequality. A median of 54% of adults across the nations surveyed said that the gap between the rich and the poor is a very big problem in their country. Most say that the political influence of the rich is a major cause. In addition, a median of 57% of adults across the nations polled expect children in their country to be worse off financially than their parents when they grow up.


Sarah Mason/Getty Images

Men less likely to turn to friends for emotional support

About 1 in 6 Americans (16%) say that they feel lonely or isolated from those around them all or most of the time—including roughly equal shares of men and women—and about 4 in 10 adults (38%) say that they sometimes feel lonely, according to a Pew Research Center survey published in January. The analysis showed that women were more likely than men to say that they'd be extremely or very likely to seek emotional support from their mother (54% of women versus 42% of men), a friend (54% versus 38%), another family member who is not a parent, spouse, or partner (44% versus 26%), or a mental health professional (22% versus 16%). The findings also showed that men don't communicate with their close friends as often as women do, with higher shares of women than men saying that they send text messages, interact on social media, and talk on the phone or video chat with a close friend at least a few times a week.

5 YEARS LATER

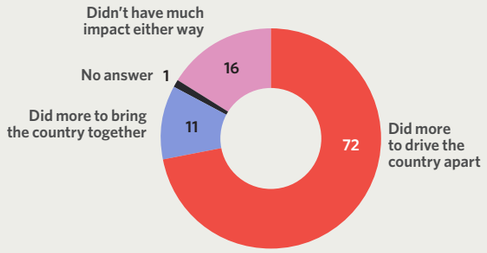
AMERICA LOOKS BACK AT THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

Gaby Bonilla/The Pew Charitable Trusts

The most significant pandemic of our lifetime arrived as the United States was experiencing three major societal trends: a growing divide between partisans of the left and right, decreasing trust in many institutions, and a massive splintering of the information environment. COVID-19 did not cause any of this, but these forces fueled the country's divided response. A Pew Research Center survey conducted in October 2024 found that nearly three-quarters of U.S. adults (72%) say the pandemic did more to drive the country apart than to bring it together. Fundamental differences arose between Americans over what we expect from our government, how much tolerance we have for health risks, and which groups and sectors to prioritize in a pandemic. Many of these divides continue to play out in the nation's politics today.

Most say COVID-19 drove the U.S. apart

% of U.S. adults who say that all in all, they feel the COVID-19 pandemic ...



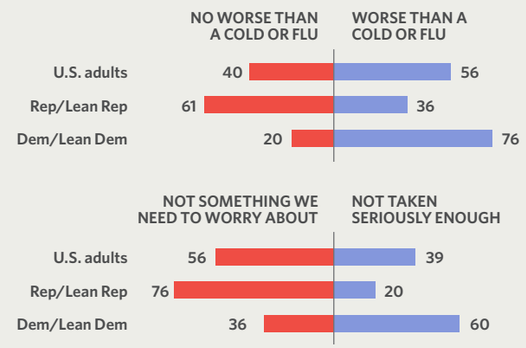
Three-quarters say the pandemic took a toll on them, though most say they've recovered at least somewhat

% of U.S. adults who say the COVID-19 pandemic took a toll on them (and if so, how much they have recovered)

Note: Respondents who did not answer are not shown.

Large partisan divides on views of COVID-19's severity

% of U.S. adults who say that thinking about the coronavirus today, it is ...



Note: Respondents who did not answer are not shown.

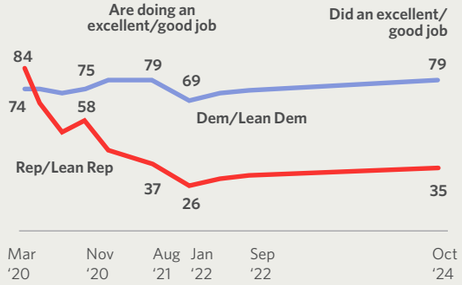
4 in 10 say the country would do better in a future emergency

% of U.S. adults who say that as a country, we would do __ in responding to a future health emergency compared with the COVID-19 pandemic

Note: Respondents who did not answer are not shown.

Democrats and Republicans remain divided over how well public health officials responded to COVID-19

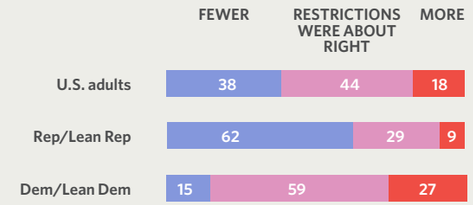
% of U.S. adults who say public health officials, such as those at the CDC __ responding to the COVID-19 pandemic



Note: Surveys conducted before October 2024 asked respondents to rate the job public health officials are doing responding to the coronavirus outbreak. Respondents who gave other responses or did not give an answer are not shown.

Majority of Republicans say there should have been fewer restrictions in their area during the pandemic

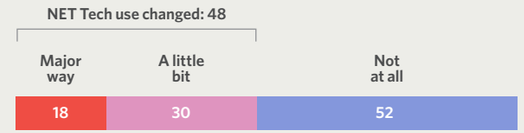
% of U.S. adults who say that thinking back on COVID-19 restrictions on public activity, there should have been __ restrictions in their area



Note: Respondents who did not answer are not shown.

About half of Americans say the COVID-19 pandemic changed how they use technology today

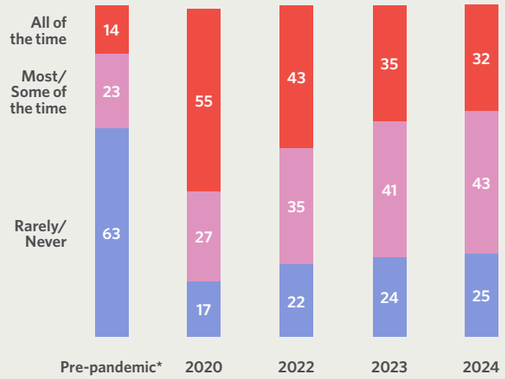
% of U.S. adults who say the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way they now use technology (in a) ...



Note: Respondents who did not answer are not shown.

Majority of workers whose jobs allow telecommuting continue to work from home at least some of the time

Among U.S. workers who say that, for the most part, the responsibilities of their job can be done from home, % saying they work from home ...

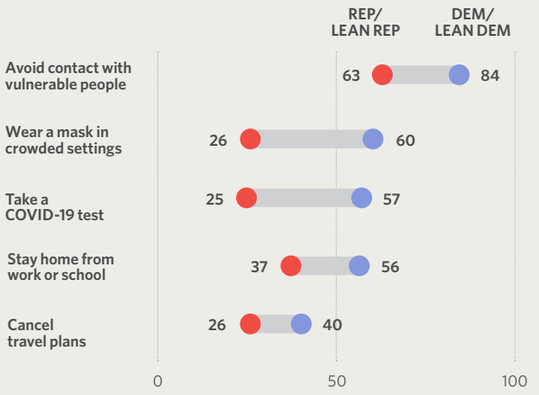


*Pre-pandemic data is based on what respondents said in 2024 about their work arrangement before the coronavirus outbreak and does not include those who did not have a job before the pandemic.

Note: Respondents who did not answer are not shown.

Democrats more likely than Republicans to say it's important for people with cold-like symptoms to wear a mask, test for COVID-19

% of U.S. adults who say that, in general, it is extremely/very important for people to do each of the following when they have cold-like symptoms



Note: Respondents who did not answer are not shown.

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At a time of high rents and housing prices, manufactured homes offer an alternative.

Can Manufactured Homes Solve the Housing Shortage? Page 24

Lexey Swall for The Pew Charitable Trusts