

Acceptance speech

18 June 2026

René Bautista, Director of the General Social Survey, on behalf of **NORC at the University of Chicago**, awardee in the Social Sciences category (18th edition)

It is a great honor to accept the 18th BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award in the Social Sciences on behalf of NORC at the University of Chicago and the General Social Survey, or GSS. We are proud to share this recognition with our colleagues at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan.

We thank the Foundation, those who nominated us, and the evaluation committee. We accept this award with deep gratitude, fully aware that it stands on the work and dedication of many people.

For 85 years, NORC has had one clear mission: helping society understand itself better. We do this by asking people about their lives, beliefs, and hopes for the future, and by turning those answers into evidence that can serve the public good. The General Social Survey, launched in 1972, is one of the strongest examples of that mission. For more than half a century, the GSS has created a unique record of social life in the United States, revealing how views change across generations and during major events.

The idea behind the GSS is simple but powerful: one survey cannot tell the whole story, nor do individual patterns answer every question. But a collection of trends, revealed over time, brings us closer to separating the signal from the noise.

A broader historical view highlights the shifting tides of trust, changing dynamics within families and workplaces, and the steady evolution of values like freedom, equality, and responsibility. It lets us see whether attitudes change within a person's life, across generations, or when major events unfold.

The GSS also helps bring forward the voices of families and smaller communities who might otherwise remain statistically invisible. When information is gathered and combined over the years, it can reveal different perspectives, whether by region, occupation, background, or stage of life. That scope ensures the evidence reflects the diverse stories and experiences of all people.

From the beginning, NORC has treated the GSS as a public good. We have always released the data openly and promptly, granting everyone equal access. That spirit was unusual at first, but it remains central today. Thousands of scholars, students, journalists, and policymakers use the GSS to build knowledge, inform decisions, and support transparent public debate.

The GSS has inspired similar efforts in many countries. It helped establish the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP), built in partnership with colleagues abroad. Through the ISSP, comparable questions have been historically asked in more than 60 countries. Statistical results from this collaboration show us what is universal, and what is unique to each place. The ISSP stands as a true model of lasting scientific cooperation.

Maintaining this work not only requires innovation, but also steady support. We are deeply grateful to the U.S. National Science Foundation for its long-standing partnership. High-quality research relies on public and philanthropic support and on a community that values facts gathered with care. As resources tighten, this shared commitment helps us keep our methods innovative and strong and our data accessible, ensuring the GSS stays current and reliable.

I am personally grateful to the generations of Principal Investigators whose ideas have guided the GSS, and to our scientific advisory board for helping us balance innovation with consistency. I also want to thank NORC's researchers, operations teams, field staff, statisticians, and methodologists. Their dedication sets the standard for every question and every dataset. Together, they engineer the infrastructure of public knowledge.

Above all, the GSS's greatest debt is to its participants: the people who share their stories in the hope that their voices might serve the greater good. They are the bedrock of this work.

This award honors a core NORC belief: that carefully measuring social life does more than advance science. It builds trust in evidence among people and decision-makers, ultimately driving social progress. In times of rapid change and uncertainty, that principle matters more than ever.

Looking ahead, NORC's mission remains: to keep listening to both enduring questions and emerging voices. The GSS will continue addressing new issues, from artificial intelligence to evolving family life, trust, civil liberties, and new forms of community. We will continue to track the patterns that show how society changes and will work to make the data even easier to use and share.

On behalf of NORC, the General Social Survey team, and our ISSP colleagues, thank you for this extraordinary honor.

