2019

President's Report



SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL 2019 President's Report

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SSRC President Alondra Nelson in conversation with 2018 Albert O. Hirschman Prize recipient Sheila Jasanoff

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT: Advancing Social Knowledge

Science and technology permeate almost every interaction in today's society, from communication to electoral politics. What is the proper role of the social scientist in a world where data so thoroughly mediates and shapes our lives? How can we ensure that the knowledge generated by social scientists best serves the common good?

The Social Science Research Council has been helping to address pressing questions like these for nearly a century. Since its founding in 1923, the Council has supported scholars, shaped research agendas, and mobilized social knowledge for the benefit of the public at large.

Today, the Council continues to build on this nearly 100year tradition by pioneering new partnerships and modes of collaboration. Social scientists now operate in a dramatically different research ecosystem from the one that existed a halfcentury ago. For example, Amazon employs more economists than most universities, and algorithms have overhauled fields ranging from health sciences to textual analysis. In addition, institutions that once served as the stalwart supporters of the social sciences, such as the federal government and large philanthropies, have shifted funding priorities and adopted new models for underwriting research. Our work at the Council involves looking broadly across this terrain to identify issues that need sustained scholarly attention and opportunities to meet that need. The content of SSRC work covers a range of themes—from climate change to racial inequality and our projects extend worldwide, from Brooklyn to Bamako. Recently, we've inaugurated a new structure that organizes our diverse projects into clusters such as **Transnational Initiatives** and **Media, Technology, and Politics**. This structure enables our programs to have coherence around core issues while also granting them the flexibility to respond organically to new possibilities and demands.

This fall, the Council is launching a program that exemplifies our new mode of engagement: the **Transregional Collaboratory on the Indian Ocean**. The Indian Ocean is the fastest-warming ocean in the world, and the SSRC's Transregional Collaboratory unites scholars across the region and the globe focusing on the implications of environmental issues such as saltwater intrusion, disruption of traditional trade patterns, and changing migration dynamics. While the Collaboratory focuses on a central location and theme, it disrupts traditional ways of understanding regional and environmental issues by bridging geographic, institutional, and academic boundaries. The program is purposefully designed to foster a new model of transnational research ethics that emphasizes South-South collaboration and supports institutions and researchers that have been overlooked by traditional models of funding and collaboration.



Audience at the 2018 Albert O. Hirschman Prize lecture

Another new project, the Council's **MediaWell** platform, sets a new standard for mapping scholarship related to disinformation and politics. As social media has become vital to political discourse, scholars ranging from data scientists to historians have begun investigating false news and its implications for democracies. MediaWell tracks emerging scholarship on the topic and seeks to foster scholarly discourse, public conversation, and informed policymaking related to disinformation. These initiatives build on the Council's long tradition of both field-building and agenda-setting in the social sciences. Promoting research excellence for the generation to come will require constant recalibration and renewal. As we move into a new century of SSRC work, the Council remains committed to creating more-equitable research partnerships and better understandings of shared social challenges.

Alondra Nelson President Social Science Research Council

WHO WE ARE

ADVANCING KNOWLEDGE The Social Science Research Council is an international nonprofit organization committed to advancing knowledge and mobilizing it for the public good. Through our work, we convene scholars, focus research attention on social questions, and serve as a trusted bridge between academics, policymakers, NGOs, philanthropic institutions, and the private sector. Since our founding in 1923, we have operated independently of any university or political agenda, and our diverse projects challenge the boundaries that separate disciplines, institutions, and geographies.

BEYOND FELLOWSHIPS The Council provides support for researchers around the world. Our fellowships offer one of the largest sources of graduate-student funding, as well as support for junior and senior scholars working with a wide range of topics and research methods. Council fellowship programs create cohorts, convening fellows in workshops that focus on cross-disciplinary dialogue, research design, and writing for multiple audiences.

SSRC initiatives also support diverse outputs, including public forums, white papers, and websites. Our ability to serve as both a platform for launching research and a producer of knowledge makes the Council uniquely able to shape agendas for social science inquiry.



fellows supported by SSRC projects since

1923



2017 SSRC Fellow Danielle Allen in conversation with legal scholar Jeremy Waldron



2019 SSRC Fellow Lorraine Daston speaks with graduate students

THEMATIC BREADTH From our headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, the Council engages with scholars, academic institutions, NGOs, philanthropies, and governmental bodies across the world on a wide range of issues. Last year alone, the Council helped generate cutting-edge work about gun violence in the United States, the role of social media in democracies around the world, and the relationship between global climate change and social conflicts, among other topics. Throughout SSRC history, our collaborative approach has guided scholarly discourse and helped establish academic fields, from area studies in the 1950s to migration studies in the 1990s. Today, the Council continues to shape research agendas and catalyze knowledge creation to build a more just and democratic world.

Interdisciplinary studies emerged in many ways out of the work of the SSRC, and today the Council continues to raise the bar for social research.

-Mamadou Diouf, Chair, SSRC Board of Directors



Media & Democracy roundtable with Naomi Oreskes, Harvard University; Paul Starr, Princeton University; Jane Mayer, *The New Yorker*; and Yochai Benkler, Harvard University

HOW WE WORK

The Social Science Research Council is guided by the belief that justice, prosperity, and democracy require better understanding of complex social, cultural, economic, and political processes. SSRC projects span the globe and engage sectors ranging from academia to politics to technology. Our programs address a wide range of social challenges, from economic inequality to violent conflict, and our modes of engagement focus on several core activities:

- Supporting scholars
- Building research networks
- Fostering innovation
- Communicating knowledge

As a respected, nonpartisan, and cross-disciplinary organization, the Council is uniquely positioned to steward the production of social knowledge to improve public understanding and policymaking around social issues.

Recent Publications



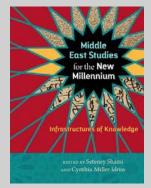
"The Rise of Platforms: Challenges, Tensions, and Critical Questions for Platform Governance"

by Kirsten Adams, Bridget Barrett, Mike Miller, Cole Edick



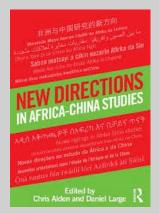
"A Political Science Research Agenda on Climate Change"

by Scott Barrett, Deborah Coen, Jessica Green, Robert O. Keohane, David Konisky, Melissa Lane, Doug McAdam, Michael Oppenheimer, Nancy Rosenblum, and Johannes Urpelainen



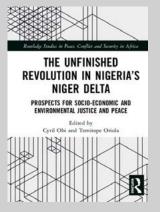
Middle East Studies for the New Millennium: Infrastructures of Knowledge

by Seteney Shami and Cynthia Miller-Idriss, eds.



New Directions in Africa and China Studies

by Chris Alden and Daniel Large, eds., with preface by Tatiana Carayannis



The Unfinished Revolution in Nigeria's Niger Delta: Prospects for Environmental Justice and Peace

by Cyril Obi and Temitope Oriola, eds. "Social Media and Democracy: Assessing the State of the Field and Identifying Unexplored

Media

by Kris-Stella Trump, Jason Rhody, Cole Edick, and Penny Weber

Questions"

MEDIA, TECHNOLOGY, & POLITICS: Understanding Democracy and Disruption

From smartphones to satellites, the digital revolution has changed traditional politics around the world. With the upcoming US elections in 2020 and the global popularity of social media, societies are confronting new questions about whether our democratic institutions are equipped to handle today's technological transformations. How can societies reclaim the democratic potential of communication technologies?

Scholars in a range of fields are attempting to address this question, but structural and institutional barriers have impeded public access to the information needed to build this knowledge. Several SSRC initiatives are investigating how the digital revolution interacts with our systems of governance.

Last year, the Council launched its pioneering **Social Data Initiative** to spur research on social media's impact on society. A key component of this



Nearly **\$5 million** awarded to support research in the **social sciences**, **humanities**, and **STEM fields**

work, the Social Media and Democracy Research Grants Program, was established to allow researchers to access Facebook's proprietary data for the first time ever, while ensuring that transparency and privacy safeguards are maintained. The Social Data Initiative also engages issues of privacy and ethics of social media research and hopes to catalyze a range of methodological approaches.



Sheila Jasanoff receives the 2018 Albert O. Hirschman Prize from selection committee chair Teresa P. R. Caldeira and SSRC President Alondra Nelson

Another SSRC initiative, **MediaWell: Live Research from the Digital Edges of Democracy**, aggregates knowledge and research about disinformation and false news. Today, disinformation studies are proliferating in fields ranging from sociology to computer science, but no overarching network exists to connect scholars and gather recent findings. MediaWell links researchers and institutions, not only through an online platform but also in workshops and discussion forums. The project seeks to focus scholars' attention on pressing political issues and create linkages that mobilize social knowledge for the benefit of scholars, policymakers, and the public at large.

While it is tempting to see challenges such as algorithmic propaganda and online echo chambers as unique to our digital era, the Council seeks to put today's technological questions in a broader historical and social context. Novel communications technologies—from moveable type to televised presidential debates—have been upending political systems for centuries.

Projects such as MediaWell and the Social Data Initiative build on a longer history of SSRC research on **Media & Democracy**, as well as the Council's decades of work in establishing new academic fields and approaches that open up space for scholarly innovation. From comparative politics in the 1950s to sociolinguistics in the 1970s to sexuality studies in the 1990s, the Council has encouraged and helped to establish research fields that were once imagined as risky or marginal. The Council's current projects in **Media**, **Technology**, **and Politics** continue this tradition of shaping research agendas in the social sciences by creating new structures to link scholars and identify research priorities.



Graduate students and junior faculty from SSRC College and University Fund for the Social Sciences member institutions participate in seminar with 2019 SSRC Fellow Lorraine Daston

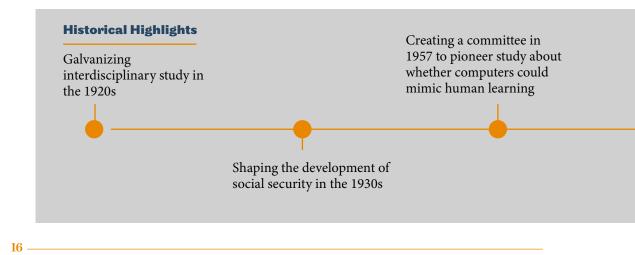
Recent Media, Technology, and Politics Events and Workshops

- Confronting Algorithms of Oppression
- A Modern History of the Disinformation Age
- How Social Media Influences Democracy
- Anxieties of Climate Change

How MediaWell Helps Scholars Track Disinformation

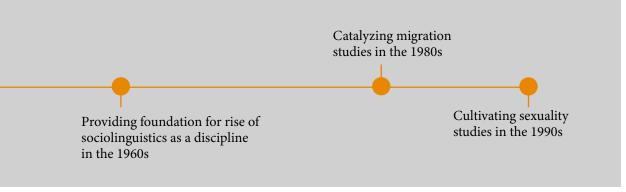
- Living Literature Reviews
- Expert Reflections
- News Aggregation
- Scholars Database
- Citations Library
- Calendar of Events

Through this agenda setting, the Council mobilizes knowledge about technology-related questions not only to understand today's challenges but also to anticipate the ways in which digital media and communications will affect our future. Traditionally, social scientists have focused on analyzing existing datasets and recent historical trends. However, social transformations produced by the intersection of technology and policy could profoundly reshape the ways we live for generations to come. The Council seeks to encourage approaches to social research that are grounded in current data and theory, while also attuned to future possibilities and perils of social and technological change. An anticipatory approach to social research would move beyond market forecasting or risk analysis to consider broader, imminent transformations in culture, institutions, and markets, as well as demands on regulatory and governance structures.





Marie Lynn Miranda, Provost of Rice University, and Adam Gamoran, President of the William T. Grant Foundation at the "To Secure Knowledge" task force report launch



TRANSNATIONAL INITIATIVES: Locally Engaged, Globally Resonant

How can social scientists move beyond the traditional geographic boundaries that often confine research in disciplinary and national silos? The Council is helping to shape new research models and scholarly agendas that can understand social challenges around the world at local, regional, and global scales.

SSRC initiatives examine geopolitical issues ranging from violent conflict to capital flows, in ways that are both locally grounded and attuned to international power structures. For example, building on the success of our China-Africa Knowledge Project, the **China-Africa Peace Fellowship** supports Chinese scholars examining African peacebuilding efforts and China's growing role in international peacekeeping. It also creates connections between Chinese and African scholars. A recent workshop featured scholars studying topics such as Chinese soft power in Tanzania and the impacts of Chinese multinational companies on Kenyan conflict dynamics.

Another trajectory of work involves bringing together nationally diverse scholars and experts to understand pressing issues. Our new **Transregional Collaboratory on the Indian Ocean** builds on a decade of SSRC work advancing international scholarship through the **InterAsia** initiative. The project is grounded in substantive questions about the impacts of climate change in the Indian Ocean, but it takes an expansive view of both themes and geographic boundaries. Questions include how US-China rivalries



InterAsia Program Transregional Research Fellowships projects include:

- Trans-Himalayan Science in Mid-Twentieth-Century China and India
- China Dreams in Authoritarian Contexts: Russia, Kazakhstan, and Ethiopia
- The Yellow Sea: A Window onto the Anthropocene

affect the region, as well as how the fastest-warming ocean in the world impacts adjacent communities.

A unique feature of the Collaboratory is its focus on equitable research collaborations and the ethics of transnational study. Traditionally, scholars based in more-privileged institutions—especially in Europe and the United States have dictated the terms for conducting research in fragile or under-resourced contexts. The Collaboratory seeks to create new modes of engagement in which locally situated researchers coproduce knowledge alongside international peers.

The Council's work also addresses structural challenges that can thwart international research. Many scholars today want to understand regions as

emergent, rather than predetermined by political boundaries or topography. The Council's initiatives provide space for new understandings of international challenges and create new knowledge networks and institutional connections. Our commitment to international collaboration is also evident through our partnerships with African universities to build research capacity; the **Abe** Fellowship program, which connects American and Japanese scholars sharing common research interests; and our work with the United Nations to help create the first connections between Chinese peace and security scholars and UN staff focused on the same issues.



\$12.6 million will be awarded in grants in 2020

Creating opportunities for scholars to conduct international research is another core dimension of SSRC work. **The International Dissertation Research Fellowship** has received more than 20,000 applications and funded more than 1,400 projects around the world in its 22-year history. A significant trend over this period is the growing number of fellows doing crossregional research. As a new century of SSRC work approaches, the Council looks forward to continuing such vital support for transnational and transregional research, as well as to launching path-breaking initiatives that shed new light on global challenges.

The SSRC is unique in that its mission is to advance knowledge productionindependently and without a political agenda. It exists as an advocate for scholars and scholarship.

-Helen V. Milner, Executive Committee Chair, SSRC Board of Directors

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The SSRC is governed by a board of directors made up of social scientists and practitioners from a broad range of disciplines and institutions. The board regularly reviews the Council's intellectual program. An executive committee of the board oversees financial and operational aspects.

danah boyd

Founder and President Data & Society

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This development advisory group brings a wide range of knowledge and experience to critical questions of organizational and programmatic strategy.

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Joseph Schull Founder Corten Capital

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Dissertation Proposal Development Fellowship

Alexa Dietrich

Scholarly Borderlands, Religion and the Public Sphere, and Transregional Collaboratory on the Indian Ocean

Alma Granado Sloan Scholars Mentoring Network

Kristen Lewis *Measure of America*

Cyril Obi African Peacebuilding Network and Next Generation Social Sciences in Africa

Jason Rhody Digital Culture, Social Data Initiative, and Media & Democracy

Daniella Sarnoff International Dissertation Research Fellowship

Seteney Shami InterAsia

Leon Sigal Northeast Asia Cooperative Security

Cally Waite SSRC-Mellon Mays Graduate Initiatives

COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY FUND FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

A consortium of higher education partners providing annual financial support to enhance the infrastructure of social science research, catalyze interdisciplinary and cross-institutional collaborations, and help launch the careers of junior scholars through fellowships, workshops, and mentorship.

Arizona State University Boston College Brown University The Claremont Colleges Columbia University Cornell University Duke Universitv Emory University Georgetown University Harvard University Indiana University Iohns Hopkins University Massachusetts Institute of Technology Michigan State University The New School New York University Northwestern University The Ohio State University Princeton University **Rice University** Rutgers University, The State University of New Jersey Stanford University Stony Brook University, The State University of New York Swarthmore College University of California, Berkeley University of California, San Diego University of California, Santa Barbara University of California, Santa Cruz University of Chicago University of Michigan University of Minnesota University of Pennsylvania University of Pennsylvania University of Pittsburgh University of Southern California Vanderbilt University Yale University

ALBERT O. HIRSCHMAN PRIZE LAUREATE

2018 Sheila Jasanoff Harvard University

SSRC FELLOWS

2017 **Danielle Allen** *Harvard University* 2019 **Lorraine Daston** *Max Planck Institute for the History of Science*

SSRC GUEST LECTURERS

Jack Snyder Columbia University

Virginia Eubanks University at Albany, SUNY

Henry Farrell George Washington University

Marion Fourcade University of California, Berkeley

William Hanks University of California, Berkeley

Eric Klinenberg New York University

James Shulman American Council of Learned Societies

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Michael Watts

Sally West

Marina Whitman

William and Flora Hewlett Foundation

Richard Witten

Workforce Central

Yale University

Larry Yarak

Zach Zinn

Harriet Zuckerman

FINANCIALS

Operating Revenue

Endowment Payout	923,722
Program Revenues	20,554,898
Other Income	260,778
Annual Fund & CUF	2,070,000
Total Revenues	23,809,398



Expenditures

Programs	17,969,869
Operations	5,839,529
Total Expenses	23,809,398

Gun violence, youth disconnection, social inequality, and the use of new technologies in peacekeeping operations these are just some of the topics that the Social Science Research Council is tackling this year. For nearly a century, the Council has acted as a trusted intermediary connecting academic disciplines, universities, government organizations, NGOs, and world regions. We operate independently of any university affiliation or partisan interest, and our ability to serve as both a platform for launching research and a producer of knowledge makes the Council uniquely able to raise the bar for social science inquiry. Across our many activities—which range from providing fellowships to publishing books to organizing United Nations briefings to building online knowledge resource platforms—our mission is to mobilize scholars and social knowledge to build a more just and democratic world.

Please support the work of the Social Science Research Council. Contributions from partners like you allow us to support junior scholars, launch innovative research programs, strengthen networks across disciplines, and seek solutions to today's most pressing questions.

www.ssrc.org/donate



SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL

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