

The Social and Behavioral Sciences Strengthen U.S. Security, Prosperity, and Health

Social and behavioral sciences research at America's leading research universities generate insights into human behavior: how our minds work, how we make decisions, and how nations, social networks, and markets function. The social and behavioral sciences include psychology, cognitive science, sociology, political science, economics, linguistics, and other disciplines. Through rigorous quantitative and qualitative methods, research in these fields builds evidence about what works, for whom, and at what cost. Social and behavioral sciences research help policymakers design more efficient, cost-effective, and equitable policies for achieving national priorities in health, national security, economic prosperity, education, public safety, social resilience and well-being.

How can Congress support the social and behavioral sciences?

- The Association of American Universities (AAU) urges Congress to sustain federal funding for social and behavioral sciences research in FY27 and support the agencies, offices, and programs that competitively award funding in these fields.
- AAU expresses deep concerns about the proposed elimination of the [National Science Foundation's Directorate for Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences \(SBE\)](#) in the president's FY27 budget request. This proposal would undermine NSF's ability to support broad-based social and behavioral sciences research.

Which federal agencies support research in the social and behavioral sciences?

- Multiple federal agencies award competitive funding for university research in the social and behavioral sciences, including the NSF, the [Office of Behavioral and Social Sciences Research](#) at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), the [Institute of Education Sciences \(IES\)](#) at the Department of Education, the [Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality \(AHRQ\)](#), and the [National Institute of Justice \(NIJ\)](#) at the Department of Justice (DOJ).
- Despite recent cuts, the Department of War (DOW) has a long history of funding social and behavioral sciences research through the [Minerva Research Initiative](#) and the [Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency \(DARPA\)](#).

Why should Congress support the social and behavioral sciences?

The social and behavioral sciences lead to lifesaving and life-extending health interventions.

Individual and group beliefs, behaviors, and social circumstances profoundly shape mental and physical health and well-being. Social and behavioral sciences research can help design effective interventions to boost individual and public health.

- NSF-funded economics research on matching theory and algorithms led to the development of regional and national [kidney exchanges](#) – computerized systems that quickly and efficiently match kidney recipients to compatible live donors, saving tens of thousands of lives.
- NIH-supported research informs [behavioral interventions and therapies](#) to manage severe mental illness, obesity, alcoholism, addiction, diabetes, heart disease, and other chronic conditions.

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- Social and behavioral sciences research has helped inform a national strategy for addressing the **opioid crisis** – from estimating its economic cost to identifying unintended consequences of state laws to developing effective prevention, intervention, and pain management strategies.
- Research on the social contexts that influence health has helped **expand access to health care and reduced health care costs**.

The social and behavioral sciences are indispensable to national security and public safety.

Political science, sociology, anthropology, international affairs, and economics can help strengthen diplomatic ties with other nations, reducing the need for armed conflict. Criminology, psychology, and forensic sciences can improve criminal justice and lead to safer communities.

- Two decades of social and behavioral sciences research supported by the Department of War's **Minerva Research Initiative** informed our post-9/11 security strategy. Social and behavioral sciences research on the roots of radicalism and terrorist networks is essential to countering external threats and developing effective counterintelligence.
- NSF-funded research on political instability, cooperation, ethnic conflict, governance, and terrorism resulted in the development of the worldwide **Integrated Crisis Early Warning System**, which helps forecast geopolitical conflict and instability, informing U.S. intelligence and military operations.
- NSF and the National Institute of Justice at the DOJ have supported research on **predictive policing**, which employs algorithms and big data to predict and prevent crime. These agencies support research on reducing recidivism and facilitating social integration for justice-involved individuals.

The social and behavioral sciences help us maximize the benefits of AI while safeguarding human health and well-being.

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming society and social relationships and has already broadly affected individuals, families, the economy, health care, and work.

- NSF is making significant investments in **AI education and workforce initiatives** to prepare students and workers to compete in and contribute to an AI-driven economy. Social and behavioral sciences research is uniquely positioned to evaluate these initiatives' effectiveness.
- Social and behavioral sciences research also ensures that AI systems are designed to **uphold ethical and moral standards** and with safeguards that prioritize human health, safety, and well-being, without being unduly restrictive.

The social and behavioral sciences help families achieve financial security and prosperity.

Insights from behavioral science research inform policies and consumer products designed to improve the economic prospects of individuals and families.

- Research on 401(k) retirement accounts found that **limiting decision points and creating a default opt-in** significantly increases employee contributions to retirement savings.
- Research on "**nudging**" and "**choice architecture**" has yielded insights into human biases that can help the government guide consumers to make better decisions and reduce taxpayer burden.

