American Political Science Association
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Political Science Scholarship, NSF’s SBE Directorate for Political Science Research and the Public Interest

The National Science Foundation’s Directorate for Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences (SBE) – and the Division of Social and Economic Sciences (SES) – has been instrumental in supporting the research programs of political scientists for decades. Through rigorous, peer review competition, these scholars (including a 2009 Nobel Prize recipient) receive the necessary resources to pursue some of the most important questions of our time, the answers to which have enhanced the human condition in the United States and around the world as democratic values, rights, and processes are better understood and implemented into practice.

Research funds from the NSF are of particular significance to political scientists, who often examine phenomena that are by their nature politically charged. Concern about the legitimacy of the research process demands that the resources for political science research derive from the most objective, nonpartisan sources. The NSF fulfills this requirement where other potential sources of research funding – including many governmental agencies – do not.

Questions of Democracy

The most well-known and long-lasting studies on elections and voting behavior in this country require little attention here as their influence on these most fundamental aspects of democratic citizenship and participation is undisputed. The practical implications of the National Elections Studies for political polling and other contemporary political insights are immeasurable.

The reach of NSF funded political science scholarship is much greater than this seminal project. Consider the following research conducted within the NSF’s Political Science Program or by political scientists:
**National Security:** The SBE Directorate administered the Social and Behavioral Dimensions of National Security, Conflict, and Cooperation Program, funded by the Department of Defense (known there as the Minerva Initiative). The Program, which sought to improve our understanding of the social, cultural, behavioral, and political forces that shape regions of the world strategically important to the U.S., collaborated with numerous academics, including political scientists. In total, 13 of its 31 grants have gone to political scientists. Among them, Dr. Jaroslav Tir (University of Georgia) investigated resource management as a means to reduce conflict; Dr. Barbara Geddes (University of California, Los Angeles) developed indicators of behavior and the longevity of authoritarian regimes, and Dr. Martha Crenshaw (Stanford University), a leading expert on terrorism, conducted research that comprehensively maps the evolution of terrorist organizations (particularly Al-Qaeda) over time.

A SBE-funded project facilitated the development of the EUGene software program that allows researchers to analyze international conflict and gain a greater understanding of the political events that lead to both war and peace. Similarly, Paul Hensel at the University of North Texas and several other academics with the Issue Correlates of War (ICOW) Project have composed a substantial database on international conflicts from the early 19th century to the present that advances our understanding of the timing of conflicts and the likelihood of the success of peace initiatives. Ongoing NSF support for the Project has ensured that the database remains up to date and available to those who are interested in the empirical study of war and peace. SBE has also funded a unique database compiled by Kanchan Chandra (New York University) cataloguing international small-scale violence such as riots and political killings. Johanna Barnir of the University of Maryland has used SBE support to revitalize an international database tracking the political actions of communal groups.

An extensive dataset compiled by Dr. Burt Monroe (University of Pennsylvania) examines parliamentary proceedings in the Middle East and North Africa and will be a valuable resource for efforts of the international community to ensure that the region develops on a transparent and stable trajectory. Dr. Mark Tessler (University of Michigan) has surveyed public opinion in the Middle East to better understand political culture in that region. The grant facilitated collaboration between Arab and American
scholars and is an invaluable tool for policymakers to better understand democratic aspirations in this strategically significant and volatile region.

**Promotes Better Governance:** Dr. Elinor Ostrom of Indiana University was named a Nobel laureate the same year she received SBE funding for a project investigating how the design of public institutions impacts collective community action and public goods provision. The Directorate supports an active study by David Lewis at Vanderbilt that examines how government employment incentives impact the performance of federal agencies. SBE funding has also supported the development of the first database that tracks the result of all mayoral and city council elections for every American city with a population of over 25,000, allowing scholars and officials to gain crucial insights on governance, demographics, and citizen preferences at the local level. This collaborative project, conducted by Melissa Marschall of Rice University and Paru Shah of Macalester College, was partially funded by the NSF Office of Cyberinfrastructure.

**American Leadership in a Global Context:** Political scientists study American leaders and the power that they wield at different times in history and in different domestic and international environments. Among these projects funded by the SBE is Dr. James Rosenau’s (George Washington University) examination of international power relations and how global affairs influence the views of US leaders. Dr. William Howell (University of Chicago) was awarded funding to investigate the determinants of congressional support for the President’s agenda during wartime. The project resulted in the creation of four new public datasets examining actions of the Congress and the judiciary during war. Given current debates about President Obama’s directives in Libya, this is highly pertinent research.

**Investigative Intellectual Innovation:** The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 funded 38 SBE awards to political scientists in recognition of the critical short and long-term impact of the discipline’s research in spurring innovation and development crucial to maintaining America’s standing in the world. Among this research is the work of Elinor Ostrom, the previously mentioned Nobel laureate. Kosuke
Imai of Princeton received a grant to investigate the impact of the media on voter preferences by setting the standards the public uses to evaluate politicians. John Freeman (University of Minnesota – Twin Cities), Philip Schrodt (University of Kansas), and Patrick Bradt (University of Texas – Dallas) received ARRA support for a collaborative effort to develop a scientific tool to predict political violence in real time.

Significantly, many of these ARRA-based grants were awarded to the discipline’s most promising doctoral students studying with prominent political scientists around the country. Min Hee’s work under John Oliver at the University of Chicago uses Geographic Information Systems tools and personal interviews to investigate social conditions in poor neighborhoods in New Orleans prior to and in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. This work holds significant lessons for urban planners, community leaders, and local officials.

**Collaboration in the Natural Sciences:** Political scientists regularly push the frontiers of the discipline to ask new questions and to engage in interdisciplinary collaborations to investigate a wide range of political, economic, biological and other problems. The SBE has supported numerous research partnerships between political and natural scientists in their exploration of the consequences of natural disasters and climate change. A workshop convened by Paul Rosenbloom of the University of Southern California that assembled social scientists, computer scientists, emergency responders, and engineers is one noteworthy example. Mark Borsuk at Dartmouth has developed models that investigate international climate change policy negotiations while Jon Krosnick at Stanford has surveyed public opinion in the US on the credibility of arguments for global warming.

Prominent among this political science research with consequences in the natural sciences is the work by Dr. John Hibbing (University of Nebraska) on the political behavior of twins. This work is seen as the most serious example of scholarship examining the hereditary nature of political beliefs. A focus on the genetic component of the political attitudes and behaviors that form the foundation of open, free societies is gaining speed in the political and natural sciences. This is evidenced by efforts to
convene conferences and training sessions to create research teams and personnel equipped with the skills and resources to pursue this multi-disciplinary research. Among the prominent recipients of funding for these projects are Dr. Arthur Lupia (University of Michigan), John Alford (Rice University), and Peter Hatemi (University of Iowa).

Enhances Knowledge of the Electorate & Local Demographics: Henry Brady (former APSA President) and John McNulty (Binghamton University) received a SBE grant to investigate methods to lower voter opportunity costs, thereby increasing voter participation. The results of this study provide critical lessons for election administrators in their efforts to conduct free and fair elections as inclusively, reliably, and securely as possible. Brady also secured SBE funding that supported the establishment of the California Census Research Data Center. The Center provides a secure environment for researchers to access a large amount of micro data that is not publicly available. The data has proven to be particularly valuable for studies examining welfare policies.

Enables Technological Innovation: The Directorate has supported the development of technology that allows citizen activists to use cell phones as election monitoring tools in countries where transparent electoral institutions are weak. NSF funding allowed Clark Gibson of the University of California – San Diego to test this technology during the recent presidential election in Uganda. If this method becomes a viable alternative to traditional election monitoring, the process will not only be strengthened as there will be a larger pool of potential monitors, large amounts of money will be saved by eliminating the need to bring observers from foreign countries.

NSF has supported a project by Navin Bapat (University of North Carolina) and D. Scott Bennett (Pennsylvania State University) to develop computer simulations that will allow researchers to determine patterns, duration, and chances of success for insurgencies. This work offers concrete policy lessons for military and security officials. The Directorate has also supported collaboration between scholars, election officials, and cyber security specialists to determine the feasibility of electronic voting and develop efficient voting systems that would ensure all votes are correctly counted.
**Key Insights on Contemporary Crises:** Unlike most major foundation social science funding, NSF has several mechanisms to facilitate research on pressing and time-sensitive national needs. NSF’s Small Grants for Exploratory Research (SGER) funded urgent projects where a significant knowledge gap exists and rapid scientific advancements are necessary. In 2009, the SGER structure was replaced by the advent of RAPID grants to fund urgent proposals. These funding mechanisms allowed political science scholars such as Cherie Maestas (Florida State), Lonna Rae Atkeson (University of New Mexico), and Leonie Huddy (State University of New York – Stony Brook) to examine the response and perceptions of Americans to developments in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

The political consequences of other natural disasters such as the 2010 Chilean earthquake have been explored by Elizabeth Zechmeister (Vanderbilt), Ryan Carlin (Georgia State), and Gregory Love (University of Mississippi). Christopher Kenny of Louisiana State University led a team that examined how social networks shaped the responses of people in Louisiana communities to the Deepwater Horizon oil rig explosion. Rick Wilson of Rice University received SGER funding to investigate cooperation among evacuees in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Kenneth Rasinski and the National Public Opinion Center received SGER support to survey public reaction in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks.

SGER enabled Jim Granato of the University of Houston to develop a database of housing market data from a variety of sources in the immediate aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis, which ensued from a major market correction in the housing industry. This database provided an essential collection of data to inform policymakers at a time when it was clear that existing levels of oversight and regulation were not fostering sustainable home ownership. Granato’s data allows researchers to analyze housing issues with a significant set of new and comprehensive resources. These grants indicate that political scientists remain committed to a research agenda that will benefit the American public.