

WHY SOCIAL SCIENCE ?

Because It Produces Essential Data for Our Democracy

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The social sciences are vitally important to the institutions of democracy. Those institutions include a constellation of federal statistical agencies responsible for collecting and disseminating data. With these data, critical decisions are made such as where to build schools and fire stations, how to shape congressional districts, and the way more than \$600 billion in federal funds are allocated.

Consider just one such agency, the Bureau of Justice Statistics, responsible along with the FBI, and various other federal agencies, for generating national crime statistics. With these data, law enforcement officials at the state and local levels make informed assessments of the prevalence and frequency of crimes in their areas. Social scientists, such as criminologists, sociologists and others, go a huge step further. They use the same data to discern patterns of criminal behavior thereby facilitating more effective policing and crime intervention methods. They also are best positioned to create data-supported analyses about what types of crimes are occurring, where, and in relation to other considerations such as social, political, and economic factors. They also detect when justice may not have been consistently and fairly applied. The result is a more comprehensive and holistic approach to crime prevention and mitigation.

In a different area, the National Institutes of Health, the National Center for Health Statistics and the Census Bureau, among others, generate volumes of public health data. These range from disease, disability, and insurance coverage information to statistics relative to injury and disability among various demographic groups. Social scientists in fields ranging from anthropology to psychology to healthcare management use these data to evaluate trends, identify emerging public health challenges, focus public attention on policy options and even recommend funding allocations. Their analyses have a profound effect on the ever-unfolding public health and insurance coverage debates and decisions at every level of government.

Social scientists provide perspective and context to obtain a full understanding of what federal data tell

us. Such assessments are far more valuable than the numbers alone. While partisan commentators strive to shape public opinion, social scientists provide the public with intelligence and insight to make smart decisions.

Currently, federal statistical agencies are experiencing double-digit resource reductions, prompting layoffs and operational constraints. From health or transportation surveys, to employment research and even the decennial census, curtailment of data collection due to resource constraints is becoming far more the norm than the exception. If the system is diminished, social science's ability to deliver insights is greatly impaired.

That is why the American Statistical Association and more than 10 partners, including the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), have launched a new initiative: [Count on Stats](#). It is an effort to defend and protect the integrity of the 13 federal agencies and approximately 100 other government entities responsible for generating data used by social scientists and others every day to make decisions that impact the lives of every American.



This new commitment to the federal statistical system aims to ensure its ability to do its work so that our democracy – and our social science community – will continue to have useful and accurate tools with which to make informed decisions.



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