Growing access to novel data sources, the development of powerful computing tools, and innovation in quantitative and qualitative research methods are opening a new frontier for social scientists to explore bold, inventive research questions. In this burgeoning era for social science research, the Stanford Institute for Research in the Social Sciences (IRiSS) facilitates first-rate interdisciplinary research, trains the next generation of scholars, and incubates research projects to address critical societal challenges. IRiSS ensures that world-class evidence-based research is produced to meet evolving problems in areas of governance and democracy, economic inequality, immigration policy, and other social issues that affect communities across the globe.

INNOVATIVE RESEARCH PROJECTS
• Engage over 100 graduate and postdoc fellows throughout our research centers
• Support graduate students with grants for dissertation and survey research
• Host workshops on state-of-the-art methods for data acquisition and analysis
• Provide community and mentorship for graduate students

FACILITATING INNOVATIVE RESEARCH
• Collaborate with over 100 faculty from seven departments and five graduate schools
• Encourage collaboratory, interdisciplinary research through faculty fellows program
• Provide seed grants to develop research proposals into proofs-of-concept to attract further funding

TRAINING THE NEXT GENERATION OF SOCIAL SCIENCE SCHOLARS
• Host over 100 graduate and postdoc fellows throughout our research centers
• Support graduate students with grants for dissertation and survey research
• Host workshops on state-of-the-art methods for data acquisition and analysis
• Provide community and mentorship for graduate students

INCUBATING AND SUPPORTING RESEARCH LABS FOCUSED ON SOLVING SOCIETY'S GREAT CHALLENGES

DATA DRIVEN DISCOVERY FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

PROVIDING VALUABLE RESOURCES TO THE STANFORD SOCIAL SCIENCE COMMUNITY
• Host one of 29 Federal Statistical Research Data Centers in the nation, providing restricted government data to Stanford scholars
• Obtain access to restricted data from US academic partners and the EU to advance Stanford research
• Engage community, connecting dozens of community college students to Stanford faculty to serve as research interns

HIGHLIGHTING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH
• Summits and symposia
• Academic conferences
• Policy Briefs and op-eds
• Working papers

CUTTING-EDGE DATA AND METHODOLOGIES

INTER-DISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

POLITICAL SCIENCE
ECONOMICS
SOCIOLOGY
PSYCHOLOGY
COMMUNICATION
ANTHROPOLOGY
Shift in polarization changes motivations for political participation

In an effort to understand heightened polarization’s effect on the American electorate’s voting behaviors, Stanford political scientist and co-PI of the American National Election Studies (ANES) at IRiSS, Shanto Iyengar, conducted an analysis of ANES time series data. One of the most striking conclusions he reached is that it is strong dislike of an opposing party, rather than favoring one’s own party, that most motivates citizens to participate in the political process, whether it be through voting, campaign contributions, or more active measures such as canvassing. Iyengar notes these findings can explain why running critical ads and attacking one’s opponent can prove so effective, and why voters may be less inclined to hold their own candidates accountable for failing to live up to election promises, as their primary goal becomes to keep their opponents out of office.

Using computer vision to measure neighborhood health

Exposure to physical disorder in neighborhoods is known to affect the health of residents as well as crime levels, contributing to inequality in the U.S. With support from an IRiSS seed grant, Stanford sociologist Jackelyn Hwang and coauthors developed an AI tool to assemble a database of millions of images to measure the physical conditions of neighborhoods, across cities and over time. Remarkably, initial testing reveals that their algorithm is able to recognize trash in an image at similar rates as human subjects. In a complementary effort, Hwang gathered health and crime data from the cities analyzed, in order to assess how physical neighborhood conditions are related to economic and health outcomes. These measures will provide a powerful new resource for understanding inequality in the U.S., as well as helping policymakers track neighborhood progress and target improvements.

Was building the U.S.-Mexico border wall worth the cost?

The 2006 Secure Fence Act enabled the construction of 550 miles of fence along the U.S.-Mexico border at a price tag of $2.3 billion, or $7 per U.S. citizen. Stanford economist Melanie Morten examined the effects of this legislation during her IRiSS faculty fellowship, constructing measures of exposure to the border wall to study its effect on both migration flows and the U.S. economy. She found a slight reduction in migration, with a 0.8% decrease in flows of Mexican citizens to the U.S. As for the economic impact, U.S.-born, college-educated workers lost $4.32 in annual income, while less educated American workers gained $0.36. The net wage changes did not add up to a gain of $7 to match the per person cost of wall’s construction, rendering the wall’s net economic effect as negative.