Protecting Independent Social Science: NSF Funding Restrictions

Brooklyn, NY, April 1, 2013 – The Continuing Appropriations Act of 2013, passed by Congress to keep the federal government open past March 27, includes an amendment, first proposed by Senator Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, that prohibits the National Science Foundation from funding research in political science unless the agency certifies it as "promoting national security or the economic interests of the United States." This is a dreadful development, especially because it introduces tests to be superintended by governmental officials that are not consistent with independent scholarship and peer review. As the American Political Science Association put the point, “The amendment makes all scientific research vulnerable to the whims of political pressure.” Efforts are underway in more than one place to document how, in fact, NSF-funded research serves larger public purposes. The SSRC knows this to be the case. Yet what is even more fundamental is the quite shocking use of nonscholarly tests as criteria for making decisions about the worth of intellectual work. As a guardian of independent social science, the SSRC will actively seek to have these provisions repealed and the NSF returned to the standards and process that have served so well for some six decades.

About the SSRC

The Social Science Research Council is an independent, nonprofit international organization founded in 1923. It nurtures new generations of social scientists, fosters innovative research, and mobilizes necessary knowledge on important public issues.