



Call for Proposals

Early-Career Fellowships in Religion and the Public Sphere Religion, Spirituality, and Democratic Renewal

The **Religion, Spirituality, and Democratic Renewal (RSDR) Fellowship** of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) aims to bring knowledge of the place of religion and spirituality into scholarly and public conversations about renewing democracy in the United States. These fellowships are offered by the SSRC Program on Religion and the Public Sphere with the support and partnership of the Fetzer Institute.

Applications are due **April 14, 2022, 5:00 p.m. Eastern time**. Apply online at apply.ssrc.org.

OVERVIEW

Since the country's founding, scholars and citizens alike have debated religion's place in US politics and civil society. The current moment is no exception. And while there are echoes from the past, the context within which American religious actors, institutions, and movements presently engage the public sphere is in many ways dramatically different than earlier historical moments. During the past half-century alone, the American religious terrain has undergone dramatic changes, including both rising religious diversity and rising religious disaffiliation. The political landscape, too, has been transformed by myriad, often countervailing forces, including an increasingly diverse citizenry, rising inequalities, and sharpening polarization. Shifting religious and political landscapes recently came to a head amidst a pandemic and presidential politics that surfaced deep existing tensions. In light of the fraught state of the US body politic, this is a crucial time for understanding the intersection of these religious and political transformations. This RFP will support work that seeks to discern whether, how, and under what conditions religion and/or spirituality shape American democracy, and vice versa.

Through research on **the intersection of religious and/or spiritual identities, behaviors, attitudes, and organizations with social and political structures, processes, and institutions**, RSDR fellows will deepen understanding of the evolving relationships among religion, spirituality, and democracy at this moment in US history.

RESEARCH THEMES

For this year's RFP, we especially seek projects that shed light on 1) the religious and spiritual dimensions of the deep political polarization and dysfunction in the US today and/or 2) the ways religious ideas, actors, and institutions may (or may not) be contributing to more inclusive and civil democratic politics.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- Religious nationalism, and particularly the rise of Christian nationalism
- Religious, spiritual, and theological dimensions of contemporary movements that challenge (or legitimate) racial inequalities and exclusions
- Gendered dimensions of groups and movements that situate themselves at the nexus of religion and politics
- Political participation and the social mobilization of religious identities
- The intersection of political polarization, the online circulation of mis-/dis-information, "New Age" spiritualities, and conspiracy theory movements
- Debates within and between religious and spiritual groups that connect with broader political issues (e.g. the proper role of government in a democracy) and public debates

Projects are welcome to take a historical perspective on the current moment, and are encouraged to engage with existing datasets or create new ones relevant to answering key questions about the connections between religion, spirituality, and democracy's malaise and renewal. We are pleased to be collaborating with the **Public Religion Research Institute (PRRI)** to support fellows' research with access to their extensive survey data on these topics, as well as working with fellows to gain access to other data sources. We also welcome projects focused on social media data and other innovative ways of gaining insight into the intersection between religion and democracy in the U.S. Given the urgency and ongoing relevance of these themes, fellows will be expected to make their findings accessible to a broad range of audiences.

ELIGIBILITY AND CRITERIA

The RSDR fellowship program invites proposals for research at the intersection of religion, spirituality, and democracy in the United States. The fellowships offer research support over a period of up to 12 months to doctoral students who have advanced to candidacy and to postdoctoral researchers within five years of their PhD. Doctoral candidates will receive up to \$15,000 and postdoctoral researchers up to \$18,000 toward research-related expenses. Applications are welcome from scholars at either of these career stages from any country around the world.

We welcome proposals on religion and spirituality in its relation to democracy from across **all fields** in the social sciences (including, but not limited to: anthropology, economics, geography, history, political science, and sociology), as well as the humanities, theology, and other relevant fields. Research projects using **any** social science methodology, quantitative, qualitative, or mixed, are eligible. Proposals will be evaluated by a multidisciplinary selection committee on their overall quality and their potential to deepen understanding of the role that religion and spirituality play in democracy and to inform practical engagement around these issues. Applications, especially from recent PhD recipients, should demonstrate strong interest in disseminating findings to academic audiences, practitioners, and to broader interested publics.

Fellowship funds will typically be used for activities directly related to research, such as travel expenses and accommodations, research equipment and supplies, support for research assistants, and costs for access to publications or proprietary databases. In exceptional cases, and in consultation with program staff, award funds may be used to cover other expenses.

Given the uncertainty with regard to the feasibility of travel and in-person activities due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, applicants are encouraged to consider the potential of virtual research methods. If travel or in-person research is proposed, applicants should account for the potential impact of the pandemic in their plans.

ADDITIONAL FELLOWSHIP ACTIVITIES

The fellowship includes participation in an interdisciplinary workshop upon the completion of RSDR-funded research. The workshop will focus on fostering interdisciplinary dialogue on key research topics, writing for multiple audiences, public communication strategies, and cohort building.

Participants will be expected to contribute at least one essay to the SSRC's flagship web forum on religion and secularism, *The Immanent Frame*.

ADDITIONAL FELLOWSHIP ACTIVITIES

Applications must be submitted through the SSRC's online application system no later than **5:00 p.m. Eastern time on April 14, 2022**. Applications will consist of a research proposal, a short application form, a curriculum vitae, and a letter of reference. **Apply now at apply.ssrc.org.**