INTRODUCTION

> [NSF social science funding] should not come at the expense of areas of science—math, engineering, computer science, physics, chemistry and biology—that are most likely to produce breakthroughs that will save lives, create jobs, and promote economic growth.
> —U.S. Republican Representative Lamar Smith, 2014[1]

> [The NSF is the] flagship of the [U.S.] social science enterprise.
> —Roberta B. Miller, leader of the NSF's Social and Economic Sciences Division, 1988[2]

> The social sciences have prospered best in the federal government where they have been included under broad umbrella classifications of the scientific disciplines. … In close company with scientific areas which enjoy the prestige and status of biological or physical sciences, the social sciences have enjoyed a protection and nourishment which they normally do not have when they are identified as such and stand exposed, "naked and alone."
> —Harry Alpert, sociologist and the NSF's first social science policy architect, 1960[3]

In the contexts of U.S. federal science policy and American political culture, the social sciences have often found themselves under attack. Recently, the most persistent and strongest critics have come from conservative quarters and the Republican Party. Their criticisms have informed repeated efforts to slash public funding for the social sciences at the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF), one of the country's premier federal science agencies.

In 2009, two rising stars in the Republican Party, John Boehner from Ohio and Eric Cantor from Virginia, sent President Obama a proposal to decrease NSF funding for social and behavioral science (SBS) research awards by 50 percent.[4] In 2011, Tom Coburn, a Republican senator from Oklahoma,

suggested eliminating the NSF unit that funded SBS altogether.[5] The following year, in 2012, Republican Representative Jeff Flake from Arizona argued that NSF funding for political science "might satisfy the curiosities of a few academics," including one research grant for a study about "why political candidates make vague statements," but this was an inappropriate use of taxpayer money. Curiously, Flake himself had a master's degree in political science from Brigham Young University.[6] And in 2012, though Coburn's more ambitious proposal to eliminate SBS funding entirely had not been implemented, he did succeed in getting a restriction passed that limited NSF political science funding to studies that promised to enhance national security or economic growth, thus rendering a wide range of other research pursued by political scientists ineligible for support.[7]

Although that restriction did not remain in force for long, challenges from the right kept coming. In 2014, Texas Republican Lamar Smith said he supported NSF funding for "worthy" social science studies. However, far more important was funding for "math, engineering, computer science, physics, chemistry and biology" because, in his view, these fields—not the social sciences—were "most likely to produce breakthroughs that will save lives, create jobs, and promote economic growth."[8] Smith chaired the House science committee with jurisdiction over the NSF budget. Thus, his skepticism had considerable influence on congressional deliberations over social science funding at the agency. More recently, during Donald Trump's first year in the White House, the president's budget proposal to Congress included a 10.4 percent decrease in funding for the NSF Directorate for Social, Behavioral and Economic Sciences (SBE Directorate).[9]

This series of attacks merits serious attention because the NSF has had a central responsibility for maintaining the health of American social science. In 2016, the SBE Directorate received less than 5 percent of the agency's entire research budget. Yet, this same directorate provided two-thirds of all federal funding for basic research in the social sciences—not including basic research in psychology, which received extensive funding from other agencies, especially the National Institutes of Health and the Department of Defense. NSF support for basic research has aimed, first and foremost, to strengthen the academic foundations, methodological resources, and knowledge contributions of the social sciences. During the past few decades, the practical benefits of social research have also been of considerable interest to the agency. But

the goals of strengthening the knowledge contributions and the knowledge-producing capacities of the social sciences have remained central.[10]

In addition, the NSF has an impressive track record of funding social scientists who receive high honors in their respective fields. Take the case of economics, where fifty-four scholars who received NSF funding at some point during their careers also won the Nobel Prize in Economics. And every single Economic Nobel Laureate from the U.S. between 1998 and 2016 received NSF funding.[11]

Moreover, social scientists and their advocates argue that by funding basic research and by strengthening social science at other levels (i.e., through the support of advanced training fellowships, workshops, conferences, and scientific resources such as computers), the NSF fortifies its ability to promote human welfare. According to a 2016 report from the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA), despite persistent questions about the benefits of federally funded social science research, such research "makes meaningful contributions to nearly every aspect of American life." NSF-funded research has led, among other things, to many "discoveries" that have

> helped to improve public health, enhance the safety of troops in combat zones, understand how to prepare for and respond to natural and human-made disasters, reduce violence among our youth, improve the effectiveness of the criminal justice system, and generate billions of dollars for the U.S. Treasury with the creation of the telecommunications spectrum auctions.[12]

It must be emphasized as well that the scholarly oriented basic social research supported by the NSF has had little chance of attracting strong, broad-based, and sustained support from other funding sources in the philanthropic, commercial, and public sectors, which, by and large, have placed much greater emphasis on achieving practical goals. So, not only has NSF support been of considerable importance, but it is also not easily replaceable.

In light of these observations, why has the agency's work in this area been such a regular focal point of controversy? Note that social science funding is a thin slice of the total NSF research budget—less than 5 percent. So, why have Republican critics singled out this rather minor component of the agency's overall efforts for intense scrutiny and budgetary cuts? What is all the fuss about? Is this simply a matter of political grandstanding, where politicians eager to demonstrate their strident commitment to "responsible"

budget making seek out potentially vulnerable items that they can pinpoint in the immense federal budget?

Surely, this political dynamic is part of the answer. However, there is also much more to the story that deserves our attention. To understand the recent events sketched above and to appreciate their broader significance for the social sciences, federal science policy, American political culture, and for the NSF itself, we require a deeper historical perspective.

Indeed, the NSF's engagements with the social sciences were problematic right from the beginning. In his famous national science policy report, *Science—The Endless Frontier* (1945), Vannevar Bush proposed a new and comprehensive science agency as the centerpiece of a greatly expanded postwar national science system. His report suggested that the task of creating such an agency should concentrate on supporting the natural sciences, while the social sciences could be set aside for later consideration. Shortly after Bush transmitted his report to President Truman in July 1945, a landmark national science debate over competing legislative proposals for a new science agency ensued. Finally, in 1950, the federal government passed enabling legislation for an independent and thus officially nonpartisan National Science Foundation, which would be located in the Executive Branch and dependent on Congress for annual budgetary appropriations.[13]

Led by a full-time director and a twenty-four-member governing board (called the National Science Board), the NSF's primary mandate was "to promote the progress of science" and, in doing so, to advance the "health, prosperity, and welfare" of the nation and "secure the national defense."[14] The NSF also had a specific directive to fund basic science, which, throughout the agency's history, has played a crucial role in shaping its mission and activities. The idea was that support for basic scientific investigation, rather than research with more practical aims in view, would advance the frontiers of scientific inquiry. Scientific advances, in turn, would lead, somewhere down the road, to powerful applications and practical benefits. Thus, in the long term, federal support for basic science would result in major contributions to national well-being. Along with this basic science focus, a strong commitment to funding the "best possible science" defined the agency's character from early on.[15] In pursuit of these objectives, it awarded research grants to scientific project proposals approved through a competitive, multilayered evaluation process that placed great weight on the judgment of scientific peer reviewers, who were instructed to focus principally on a proposal's scientific merit.[16]

Efforts to place the social sciences in the NSF faced an uphill battle from the beginning. As noted earlier, Vannevar Bush suggested they were not as important as the natural sciences. In addition, many passages in the 1950 NSF charter specifically mentioned the physical and biological sciences, thereby guaranteeing that the agency would have a strong natural science orientation. Yet the charter did not mention the social sciences—not even once. Yet the charter did include passages stating that the agency could support "other sciences" beyond those specifically mentioned, thereby leaving open the possibility that the social sciences would eventually be included and supported.

Not surprisingly, social scientists and their advocates in the nation's political and scholarly communities recognized a major opportunity here. Being included under the NSF umbrella would give them a place alongside the more firmly established, more highly valued, and more generously funded natural sciences. Inclusion would also mean at least some funding for scholars with basic social science research projects judged, by the agency's evaluation process, to be of high scientific caliber.[17]

As it turned out, the young NSF decided to include the social sciences and eventually became a patron of singular importance for them. In the decades that followed, the NSF provided extensive funding to advance scientific inquiry carried out by the nation's sociologists, political scientists, anthropologists, economists, and scholars in related fields of inquiry at a wide range of universities, colleges, and research institutes. In 1988, Roberta B. Miller, the head of the NSF Social and Economic Sciences Division at the time, recognized the agency as the flagship of American social science, attesting to the far-reaching significance it had acquired since its founding. However, as Miller herself noted, that positive assessment regarding the NSF's special role also came during a decade filled with serious difficulties, beginning with a 1981 proposal to drastically cut NSF social science funding put forth by the newly established Republican administration led by President Reagan.[18] The story of the social sciences at this agency was never an easy one.

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In the chapters that follow, I examine the contentious story of the NSF's social science efforts, starting from the beginning. The principal time period of analysis runs from the mid-to-late 1940s, marked by the end of World War II and the onset of the Cold War, up through the end of the Reagan presidency in the late 1980s.[19] In the final piece of this study, we will see how insights gleaned

from that time span provide an essential foundation for understanding more recent developments and the continuing controversy over the NSF's engagements with the social sciences leading up to the present day.

Telling this story involves four levels of analysis. The first one focuses on the NSF's social science efforts in relationship to the agency's broader history. Here, we will consider many basic issues of interest, including the evolution of the agency's social science policies and programs within the context of the agency's mission, leadership, structure, and budget; changes in the organizational standing, representation, and status of the social sciences inside the agency; and the trajectory of NSF funding for these sciences. The second level of analysis concerns the agency's position within the federal science establishment and the national science funding system more generally. This is necessary to understand how this one agency, which at the outset was rather small and rather cautious in approaching the social sciences, nevertheless became a leading federal patron of academically oriented social science.

The third level investigates the importance of NSF social sciences as a regular focal point for discussions about their nature and value within American political culture, especially within Congress. As hinted at already, those discussions have often had a strong partisan underpinning. The fourth and final level of analysis centers on the agency's relevance to the social sciences themselves. Topics of particular concern here include the agency's participation in longstanding debates regarding the scientific identity and practical value of the social sciences; its role in providing valuable support for social science research, theory, and methodology; and efforts by social scientists and social science organizations to support, reform, and sometimes critique NSF social science.

THE CENTRAL ARGUMENT

The primary goal is to establish the NSF's considerable yet underappreciated importance in the recent history of American social science. With this in mind, my central argument consists of two distinct but closely related claims.

The first is that the particular conditions and developments in American society, politics, and science that shaped the NSF's legislative origins and formative years had a powerful influence on the establishment of what I call a *scientistic* framework for understanding, evaluating, and supporting the social sciences. The conditions and developments of greatest relevance from the

mid-1940s through the late-1950s include the following: the enormous presence of the natural sciences, especially the physical sciences, in the national science policy arena and federal science establishment; the corresponding second-class position of the social sciences in those spheres; intense partisan conflict over the social sciences, including conservative criticisms that raised sharp doubts about their scientific status, practical value, and political involvement; widespread (although by no means universal) agreement among social science leaders that gaining inclusion in the NSF had paramount importance in the nuclear age; and salient features of the new agency itself, especially its basic science mandate and natural science orientation.

At the NSF, the scientistic strategy rested on a number of principles or assumptions. Above all, this strategy supposed that the social sciences were part of a putatively unified scientific enterprise. In addition, it assumed (at least most of the time) that these sciences were relatively immature, junior partners compared to the allegedly more rigorous and more advanced natural sciences. Furthermore, this strategy postulated that, just as in the natural sciences, the key to progress in the social sciences depended on advances in basic research, at the levels of data, methodology, and theory. Such work would, presumably, yield reliable, value-neutral, and nonpartisan knowledge about fundamental features of society and basic social processes. In language commonly found in NSF documents, the agency committed itself to supporting work at the "hard-core" end of the social research continuum, defined as social inquiry that satisfied (allegedly) universal and rigorous scientific criteria, including objectivity, verifiability, and generalizability.

Furthermore, the agency's scientistic framework assumed and promoted a sharp distinction between social science and a variety of other things that the agency sought to distance its work from. These included ideology, philosophy, social criticism, and humanistic inquiry. In general, the agency took a strong stance against any viewpoint that posited fundamental differences between the social sciences and the natural sciences that seemed to threaten the presumed underlying unity of the sciences. Such a view, which would have implied the need for an alternative to the hard-core emphasis and scientistic strategy, never gained much support inside the agency.

In making these distinctions between legitimate social science and other areas of human activity that don't merit recognition as such, the agency became deeply engaged in what sociologist of science Thomas Gieryn and other scholars have referred to as scientific boundary work.[20] The agency

thus became an important participant in the debate over scientific identity, a debate that has played a crucial role in the development of American social science ever since the initial period of professionalization and disciplinary formation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[21]

My second claim is that the NSF's role in scientific boundary work and its scientistic framework had deep implications for developments in other areas. These areas correspond to the four lines of analysis identified above: concerning the NSF, the federal science establishment, American political culture and partisan politics, and the social sciences.

To begin with, at the NSF, the scientistic strategy was a pivotal rhetorical move as well as the basis for the agency's efforts to promote the social sciences in specific ways. This took place through the elaboration and implementation of agency policies, programs, priorities, and funding criteria for these sciences. In addition, the scientistic strategy both reflected and reinforced their rather weak position inside the agency, as will become evident by considering the presence of the social sciences in the agency's top leadership positions, the organizational standing of NSF social science programs, and the share of the NSF budget allocated to the social sciences. Over the decades, the agency grew in size considerably, as did the extent and scope of its programs aimed at strengthening the nation's social science enterprise. In addition, in 1968, the passage of landmark legislation known as the Daddario amendment moved the agency beyond its original basic science focus by giving it a new responsibility for supporting research relevant to national problems, including problem-oriented and applied research in both the natural and social sciences. Nevertheless, throughout this period and continuing into later decades, the agency maintained an unwavering commitment to a scientistic strategy for advancing the social sciences, reinforced by doubts about their scientific credentials raised by top natural science administrators, as well as an abiding quest for scientific legitimacy and funding within the social sciences themselves.

That strategy, with its assumptions about scientific unity, scientific hierarchy, and natural science superiority, helped to carve out a space for the social sciences at the agency. Equally important, it did so in a way that ensured their marginality.

The scientistic strategy also played a crucial role in establishing the significance of the NSF within the federal science establishment. No doubt, the dominant presence of the natural sciences, especially the physical sciences at

leading government science agencies and in top science policy circles, influenced the ways in which the NSF engaged with the social sciences. However, as the agency itself grew in size and importance, it became known as the premier federal patron for academically oriented science, including academically oriented social science research. As a result, the agency's particular approach to the social sciences became a central point of reference in national science policy discussions. Moreover, the agency's scientistic strategy was considered the only appropriate one by other influential nodes within the federal science establishment, especially at the National Academy of Sciences. This situation made it extremely difficult to mount a case for federal funding based on an alternative and broader vision of the social sciences. These circumstances, in turn, raised the question of whether the nation needed a separate social science agency, an option that did in fact receive extensive attention in the late 1960s.

The NSF's engagements with the social sciences became a major focal point in discussions and debates about their intellectual character, practical value, and social relevance within American political culture and partisan politics as well. Liberal politicians, especially liberal Democrats, provided the strongest and most consistent support. For them, the agency contributed to the overall health and vitality of American social science through its commitment to first-class scholarship, its insistence on high scientific standards, and its support for objective, nonpartisan research whose results deserve respect regardless of one's politics or ideology. At the same time, liberals often anticipated that social science research and expertise would be useful in advancing causes that they supported, such as tackling the problems of racism and poverty. On the other side, the strongest and most frequent criticisms came from conservative politicians and the Republican Party. The reasons here surely include the common conservative worry that a great deal of social science has been aligned with liberal and more decidedly leftist causes, as seen, for example, in the extensive involvement of social scientists in the New Deal of the 1930s and, three decades later, in the Great Society of the 1960s. Another major line of conservative criticism focused on curbing NSF social science funding on the grounds that research in this area simply isn't very important to the national welfare and is much less valuable than research in the hard sciences. This partisan undercurrent is striking throughout the agency's entire history.

Last but not least, the evolution of the NSF and its commitment to a unified scientific enterprise, wherein the natural sciences were often taken as

the gold standard, gave the agency far-reaching importance for the social sciences themselves. For social scientists, for professional social science associations, for social science research organizations, and for the nation's research universities, the NSF became a major source of public funding. On top of this, the agency's scientistic outlook made it directly relevant to the long-standing quest for scientific legitimacy. Sometimes, the agency's importance in this area concerned the social sciences broadly, as will be seen in strong NSF support for quantitative methods of study, in its insistence on particular epistemological ideals such as value neutrality, objectivity, and generalizability, and in its promotion, starting in the 1970s, of large-scale social science databases and other projects akin to "big science" in the natural sciences. At other times, the agency took up questions about scientific methodology and epistemology with respect to a particular social science discipline or interdisciplinary field of study, as will be seen in NSF backing of behavioralism in political science starting in the 1960s or in the agency's recognition of economics as the most scientifically rigorous of all the major social science disciplines and hence especially deserving of support. These are a few examples that shed light on the sort of social science projects that the agency funded and, in the process, bestowed a measure of financial support, scholarly prestige, and scientific legitimacy to developments in the social sciences that meshed well with the agency's scientistic outlook.

THE POLITICS–PATRONAGE–SOCIAL SCIENCE NEXUS IN COLD WAR AMERICA AND BEYOND

By examining the development and impact of science patronage, historians have learned a lot about the nature of the sciences and their place in the broader society. This point provides a basic motivation for the present study of NSF social science. In addition, focusing on the NSF addresses a significant gap in the scholarly literature. To clarify the nature of this gap, a few observations about the state of scholarly inquiry will be helpful.

In the past three decades or so, historians have produced a rich body of literature in this area, including a small mountain of studies on American science, patrons, and society during World War II and the Cold War era. Numerous books and articles have explored the development of private and public funding bodies, funding priorities, and relationships between the sciences and their patrons across a wide arrange of disciplines and interdisciplin-

ary fields of study, including the physical, biological, medical, engineering, earth, psychological, and social sciences.[22] This literature attests to a widespread interest in making sense of the tremendous growth and heightened presence of the sciences in national and global affairs during the nuclear age. It also reveals considerable concern about the growing dependence of scientists, scientific projects, scientific infrastructure, research universities, and other scientific institutions on extra-university sources of funding, especially the federal government, including military and intelligence agencies.

In the case of the social sciences, historians have concentrated on work deemed relevant to the great social, economic, and political problems of the times, and the considerable importance of private and public patronage in supporting and shaping such work. Focusing on the complex and often problematic relationships between the social sciences and the national security state, scholars have charted the evolution of funding from military and intelligence agencies and their support for major research centers, such as the Special Operations Research Office and RAND. They have also analyzed the mid-to-late 1960s' debate over military patronage set off by the furor over Project Camelot, a U.S. Army–sponsored study of the revolutionary process that aimed to produce knowledge for counterinsurgency purposes. Other historical works have examined the enormous impact of the large private foundations (i.e., the Ford Foundation, Rockefeller Foundation, and Carnegie Corporation) on the development of area studies programs (Russian studies, Latin American studies, Southeast Asian studies, etc.) and on the evolution of support for social science research on related topics such as modernization, development, and population control.[23]

But historians have devoted much less attention to social science funding channeled through civilian agencies, including science agencies. Furthermore, work in this area has focused mainly on funding for research closely tied to specific policy issues regarding pressing social problems such as poverty.[24] Consequently, the question of how civilian agencies helped to shape and how they fit into the social science patronage system in the U.S. during the Cold War era has suffered from relative neglect. This lack of analysis is especially problematic in the case of the NSF.

I began to establish the NSF's importance as a central patron for American social science in my previous book, *Shaky Foundations: The Politics–Patronage–Social Science Nexus in Cold War America* (2013). There, I examined the development, from the mid-1940s to the early 1960s, of a largely new

extra-university funding system for the social sciences, which included the NSF, the U.S. military, and the Ford Foundation. In certain respects, these funding bodies were very different from one another, for example, in the critical distinctions between private and public patrons, as well as between civilian and military patrons. Nevertheless, I showed that all three of these funding bodies supported two central commitments, to scientism and to social engineering, which makes it reasonable to consider them as complementary funding sources within a single, albeit loosely integrated, funding system. As suggested by the book's title—*Shaky Foundations*—my analysis also identified vulnerabilities in this funding system, including pointed challenges to scientism and social engineering, which rendered the system unstable by the mid-1960s. In the book's conclusion, I suggested that those criticisms are crucial for understanding the subsequent emergence, during the mid-to-late 1960s and continuing into the following decades, of impassioned debates about how powerful patrons (i.e., the military, intelligence agencies, and private foundations) threatened to compromise the intellectual, professional, and ethical integrity of the social sciences.[25]

The present study singles out the NSF for more extensive attention and covers a much longer period of time. Doing so deepens our appreciation of this agency's broad and enduring importance in the history of American social science during the Cold War era and beyond. This analysis also shows that to understand the evolution of the politics–patronage–social science nexus more fully, we need to recognize the special role of this civilian science agency and the broad significance of its scientistic strategy.

NOTE ON SCIENTISM

Throughout this study, I will use the term *scientism* in a specific sense. Readers may be familiar with a broader meaning of the word than I intend: the notion that scientific inquiry provides the only source of trustworthy knowledge in any realm.[26] Here, I use the term, instead, to refer to the notion that the social sciences are part of a unified scientific enterprise, wherein the natural sciences are often considered more rigorous, more objective, and more advanced, and hence following their lead seems to be a valuable—and perhaps even an essential—strategy for making progress in the social sciences.

This notion still leaves considerable room for interpretation, however. It has never been obvious what exactly following the natural sciences should

entail at various levels of the social science enterprise, including the subject matters, methods, and aims of social science research; the investigative stance of social researchers; arrangements concerning the social, institutional, and financial supports for social research; the social practices and organization of the social science community; and relationships between the social sciences and other spheres of society, including the political arena. In the course of this study, we will see how scientism gained traction as a general strategy at the NSF, how it was interpreted with regard to those more specific issues noted above, how it was implemented at various levels, and how the agency's social science policies, priorities, practices, and programs developed, encountered various challenges, and were modified in response to changing circumstances.

Note as well that the individuals in this study whose views I characterize as scientistic, including many natural scientists and social scientists, did not use this term to define their position. Typically, they claimed that modern science, especially recent science, had made tremendous progress; that such progress depended on developments in scientific epistemology and scientific practice as well as in the growth of particular types of social, political, and financial supports that facilitated and protected scientific research from corrupting factors; that the greatest progress had occurred in the natural sciences; and that to the extent that the social sciences failed to pursue a similar path, they remained insufficiently rigorous and perhaps did not even qualify as legitimate sciences. But proponents of this viewpoint simply said that they supported real scientific progress in the social sciences, rather than saying that they favored a particular viewpoint that I am referring to as scientism.

In addition, authors who have been critical of a natural science model for the social sciences sometimes deployed the term *scientism* with negative connotations. To take just one example, the famous libertarian political philosopher and economist Friedrich Hayek did so, first in a series of essays from the early 1940s and subsequently in his classic 1952 book, *The Counter-Revolution of Science: Studies in the Abuse of Reason*.[27] Here, then, is a good reason why advocates of the unity of sciences, who in many cases also urged the social sciences to follow in the footsteps of the allegedly more advanced natural sciences, would not have been inclined to use the term *scientism* to describe their own position.

A ROAD MAP

This book has ten chapters. The first one examines the problematic status of the social sciences in the landmark postwar national science policy debate that led to the NSF's founding. In light of the enormous expansion in federal science funding and the dramatic power of scientific weaponry during World War II, the initial legislative proposals for a new science agency focused, as Vannevar Bush did in *Science—The Endless Frontier*, on establishing adequate support for the natural sciences. Soon, however, a movement supported by leaders at the U.S. Social Science Research Council sought to include the social sciences based on the claim that they were part of a unified scientific enterprise. The case for inclusion also acquired significant support from liberal Democratic senator Harley Kilgore. In this context, controversy over the social sciences' scientific identity, political meaning, and practical relevance erupted, bolstered by considerable and mainly conservative opposition from influential figures in the nation's political and scientific communities.

Chapter 2 examines the development of a small but viable social science program at the young NSF during the early to mid-1950s. At this time, anticommunist, McCarthyite attacks created major headaches for social science scholars, organizations, and patrons. At the natural science–oriented NSF, responsibility for crafting a viable policy framework for social science funding rested largely with sociologist Harry Alpert. At the heart of Alpert's efforts lay a cautious, scientistic strategy, as he emphasized support for studies at the hard-core end of the social research continuum, in a manner that positioned the social sciences as junior partners to the natural sciences within a unified scientific enterprise and promised to keep the agency's social science efforts free from unwanted political criticism.

From the late 1950s to late 1960s, soaring federal science budgets following the national panic over Sputnik, together with the resurgence of reform liberalism during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, provided a much more favorable environment for NSF social science activities. Chapter 3 explores a deepened commitment to the social sciences during these years, marked by growth in NSF funding and the landmark establishment of a social science division, which had the same organizational status (although not the same level of funding) as the divisions for the physical and biological sciences. At the same time, persistent worries about the scientific

status of the social sciences and political disapproval kept expansion of the agency's efforts within carefully restricted bounds, as seen in the development of NSF funding for political science and a bold new program for social science curriculum building called MACOS—Man, A Course of Study.

The agency's growing importance as a major social science patron on the national stage is the subject of chapter 4, told through a tale of two contrasting legislative initiatives. In the House of Representatives, liberal Democrat Emilio Daddario put forth a successful bill—the 1968 Daddario amendment—that gave the agency responsibility for supporting relevant science and applied science, including such work in the social sciences. That amendment also made the agency's authority for supporting the social sciences more explicit than it had been. Meanwhile, over in the Senate, Fred Harris, another liberal Democrat, put forth a more ambitious but ultimately unsuccessful legislative proposal that would have given the social sciences an agency of their own—a National Social Science Foundation. Harris, along with many supporters of his initiative, argued that these sciences needed a separate agency within the federal science establishment, where they would not be watched over by the natural sciences and where a wider range of social research, including humanistic inquiry and social criticism, would be encouraged and supported, something that the established NSF was unwilling to do.

This brings us to the period from the late 1960s to late 1970s, which saw changes in American politics and national science policy that curtailed the expansionary era, ushered in sharp criticisms of the social sciences from various quarters, and had far-reaching implications for the NSF in particular. Chapter 5 analyzes three controversies that posed major challenges for the social sciences. One controversy concerned a new NSF program known as RANN—Research Applied to National Needs—and centered on skepticism about the agency's ability to support applied social research and, equally important, skepticism about the practical value of such research more generally. Another controversy arose from the charge, advanced most famously by the maverick Democratic senator William Proxmire, that various federal agencies were wasting hard-earned taxpayer money on esoteric research projects, including some NSF-funded studies in the social and psychological sciences. The third controversy involved sharp attacks from conservative quarters directed against MACOS, which by the mid-1970s had emerged, by a wide margin, as the NSF's most important social science curriculum project.

Chapter 6 shows how a series of changes inside the agency brought about a major repositioning and retreat of NSF social science activities by the late 1970s. Even so, those changes did not halt mounting displeasure by both critics and supporters of those efforts inside and outside the agency. Also of special interest, these troubles unfolded while the NSF was led by Richard C. Atkinson, an accomplished mathematical psychologist. Atkinson was the first social or behavioral scientist to hold the influential position of director—the previous ones had all been physicists or biologists.

The last period covered in detail features Ronald Reagan's years in the White House and a newly energized conservative movement, which had a profound impact on American political culture, national science policy, and the social sciences. Chapter 7 begins in the early 1980s, when the first Reagan administration sought to decimate NSF funding for these sciences. Although the administration claimed this was simply a prudent budget-tightening measure, informed commentators pointed out that conservative journalists, scholars, think tanks, and politicians regularly portrayed a great deal of social science as a politicized, ideological, and leftist enterprise that should be defunded. This situation provoked a widespread sense of crisis in American social science and galvanized social science leaders and organizations into action. It was in this context that the Consortium of Social Science Associations first emerged as a strong advocate for the social sciences, for federal social science funding, and for NSF social science in particular.

Chapter 8 returns to developments inside the NSF, exploring how and why the social sciences fared rather poorly here throughout the decade. Led by physicists and engineers during these years (the psychologist Atkinson had left in 1980), the agency provided strong support for the Reagan administration's position that federal science policy should focus on strengthening the economy and national defense but not on solving social problems, especially not through social engineering grounded in social science expertise. Under these conditions, the social sciences suffered dwindling support, although economics fared better than the other major disciplines. Equally important, my analysis shows that the troubles faced by the NSF and the social sciences did not entail an ideological reorientation of the sort that occurred in the burgeoning world of conservative think tanks and policy institutes. Thus, the longstanding NSF commitment to funding what Harry Alpert had long ago called hard-core social research, which presumably lay beyond partisan and ideological influences, remained strong.

The ninth chapter shifts gears to consider salient challenges to the notion that the social sciences should take the natural sciences as the gold standard and hence as an investigative model. Whereas Senator Harris's National Social Science Foundation proposal in the late 1960s had challenged the scientistic strategy within the NSF and the federal science establishment more generally, developments in American society and thought nourished a number of anti-scientistic currents. Although a wide-ranging examination of these developments lies beyond the scope of this study, consideration of a few currents with special relevance will further our understanding of the agency's importance as well as its limitations as a major social science patron.

The final chapter begins with a summary of the central argument before proposing that the main insights established in the preceding chapters can be extended in two directions. First, we will see how those insights are crucial for understanding the evolution and continuing importance of NSF social science in the post-Reagan years, all the way to the present day. Second, I offer an assessment of the agency's engagements with the social sciences that has special pertinence in our current "posttruth" age. I end with a call for fresh thinking about the need for a new social science agency—a National Social Science Foundation. *Author's note:* For a timeline of events occurring in the book, visit https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/social-science-what.

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But we should not get ahead of ourselves. Any lessons for the present that might be gleaned from this study need to come later, as they rest on the material presented in the following chapters.

So, let's start at the beginning. In 1945, Vannevar Bush suggested that questions about social science funding could be left aside for the time being. Within the scientific community, more serious criticisms concerning the scientific status and social implications of the social sciences surfaced during the postwar NSF debate. The first order of business, then, is to examine how at the outset the question of whether or not the social sciences should be included in the proposed agency became so problematic.