



INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN



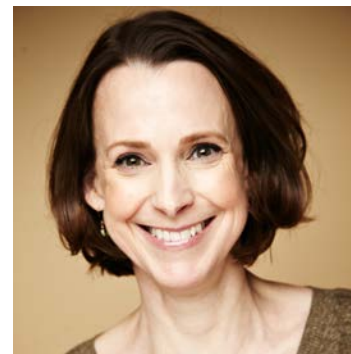
2025 ANNUAL REPORT

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Letter from the ISR Director



Dear ISR Community,

I am pleased to share the Institute for Social Research 2025 annual report. As an organization dedicated to advancing knowledge and fostering collaboration, this report highlights the relevance of social science research in helping us understand an increasingly complex and interconnected world. ISR's scholars continue to investigate bold questions using rigorous methods, producing research that informs policy, practice, and public life.

Over the past year, ISR has developed new interdisciplinary partnerships. We were proud to showcase our collaboration with the Wallace House Center for Journalists to support the intersection of journalism and social science research. Working with the College of Engineering, pilot grants to study rural life are supporting teams of interdisciplinary researchers. These collaborations highlight the potential of cross-disciplinary inquiry to develop practical solutions to real-world problems.

Training and mentorship remain core to ISR's mission. We continue to invest in the next generation of social scientists through our graduate and postdoctoral fellowships, as well as our Junior Professional Researcher (JPR) Program. The JPR initiative, now in its third year, has been especially impactful in providing early-career researchers with the tools, experience, and professional networks necessary to launch meaningful careers in research.

This year, our artist-in-residence, Rick Lowe, has worked alongside ISR scholars to join artistic practice together with social science research. His work has offered new ways to visualize and engage with themes of equity and justice. Additionally, our collaboration with the Berlin Philharmonic explored the social dynamics of performance and audience engagement, further demonstrating how the arts can enrich and expand social research.

Across the five ISR research centers, our faculty, staff, and students have made significant contributions to understanding human behavior and society. This report provides updates on major studies, initiatives, and milestones achieved within each center.

I am grateful to our partners and supporters for your continued engagement and belief in the importance of social research. As we look ahead, we remain committed to rigorous research that informs our understanding of the world around us.

All the very best,

Kate Cagney
Director

Center for Political Studies

Driving insight into elections, institutions, and political change

The Institute for Social Research's Center for Political Studies (CPS) continues its status as a leader in the study of politics, including research on elections, human rights, violence, democracy, social media, and government performance.

Over the last year, CPS faculty member Nicholas Valentino led a multi-university effort collecting data on the 2024 election. The American National Election Studies (ANES) released its preliminary data from the 2024 election cycle, opening a window into the long-term and short-term forces affecting the race for the White House and control of Congress.

CPS faculty led important research projects to enhance our understanding of democracy's operation, vulnerabilities, and promise. In 2025, CPS faculty won four of the University of Michigan's five Presidential Awards for Understanding Democracy. CPS also did important work examining trust in political institutions, including on the overall health of the American political system. Just prior to the 2024 election, CPS's John Barry Ryan and Yanna Krupnikov presented key findings on whether and how political hostility damages democratic functioning.



Nicholas Valentino presents ANES data

Additional CPS faculty publications showed that political attitudes affected vaccine uptake during the COVID-19 pandemic, and highlighted the role that social media networks can play in shaping political beliefs and personal decisions.

In light of rapid changes that followed the 2025 inauguration, multiple faculty members in CPS organized a series of teach-in forums to inform students about democratic processes and the international implications of shifting US policies, highlighting impacts on world trade, foreign aid, and the centralization of executive power.



Pauline Jones speaks at a teach-in



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“Polls are important because elections are infrequent, and issues arise that should have been discussed during a campaign or did not even exist at the time of the campaign. So the conduct of polls in between elections is important for communicating these preferences.”

-Michael Traugott, Research Professor Emeritus at the Center for Political Studies

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Partnerships for Impact

ISR collaborates to expand the reach and relevance of social science

The Institute for Social Research is built on collaboration — between researchers, across disciplines, and among its five centers. ISR has launched several transformative partnerships aimed at deepening the societal relevance of its work.

ISR's Rural Life Program, launched in 2023 in partnership with the University of Michigan's College of Engineering (CoE), awarded four more pilot grants in 2024. Each of the projects will receive \$150,000 in funding over a two-year period, giving them a chance to fully explore key issues facing rural populations in Michigan, the United States, and around the world. These new projects join a series of others previously sponsored by ISR and the College of Engineering, uniting social scientists and engineers to tackle pressing issues in rural communities.

As part of the University of Michigan's Year of Democracy initiative, ISR also partnered with the Wallace House Center for Journalists for a special event. "One Nation, Divergent Views: A Pre-Election Roundtable" brought together political journalists and researchers, including Vincent Hutchings of ISR's Center for



Bret Stephens, Lydia Polgreen, María Elena Salinas, Vincent Hutchings, and Stephen Henderson

Political Studies, in the run-up to the 2024 election. Together, they discussed key issues shaping the 2024 election, examining how and why the election might unfold the way that it did.

In addition, ISR and Wallace House enhanced their partnership through a newly established fellowship. The first fellow is Tim Alberta, an award-winning journalist, author and staff writer for The Atlantic, who has been named the James S. House and Wendy Fisher House Social Science Fellow. ISR and Wallace House will support Alberta in the 2025-26 academic year as he collaborates with ISR scholars to explore the roots and consequences of declining trust in American institutions.

ISR's global engagement also continues through annual participation in the 2025 International Doctoral Symposium in Hong Kong. Four University of Michigan students presented there, including two students in ISR's Program in Survey and Data Science. Not only did this give these four early career researchers a key opportunity to present their research, it supported ISR's longstanding commitment to building up the next generation of social scientists.



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“It meant a ton to me to present [at the Hong Kong symposium]. It shows the importance of my research in a much broader and worldwide context, while shoring my thoughts that my research is important to others, and not just myself.”

-Curtiss Engstrom, Ph.D. student in ISR's Survey and Data Science program

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ICPSR: Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research

Leading global efforts in data preservation and researcher training

The Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) remains a cornerstone of academic data stewardship, serving a global network of more than 800 partner institutions. As one of the foremost curators of social science data, ICPSR plays a pivotal role in advancing research, training, and long-term data preservation.

Over the past year, ICPSR has continued several important initiatives central to its mission. The annual ICPSR Summer Program has trained more than 25,000 researchers in important methods and strategies since 1963, and to this day is one of the most comprehensive training programs for researchers of all career levels.

As government and research data face increasing risk of disappearance, ICPSR has stepped

in to preserve access to vital data. Through DataLumos, ICPSR has facilitated the rescue and preservation of high-value datasets essential to the social sciences, preserving data for use by future generations, and ensuring researchers' data can be utilized for decades to come. As of mid-2025, DataLumos has published more than 800 projects containing at-risk data.



The ICPSR Summer Program

ICPSR played a key leadership role in helping researchers understand and navigate recent changes in the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Data Management and Sharing Policy. ICPSR support for this initiative included developing training materials and instructional videos, conducting workshops for data users, and providing ongoing guidance on evolving data policy. These efforts ensure that researchers remain compliant, informed, and equipped to share their data responsibly.



Linda Detterman, Stephanie Labou, and Annalee Shelton at the 2025 ICPSR Biennial Meeting

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We remain committed to maximizing the social good produced by collaborative, open, and equitable data sharing. Our researchers are working tirelessly to preserve and expand access to datasets that provide impactful insights across a variety of populations and topics, continuing our legacy of data stewardship

-Margaret Levenstein, Director of ICPSR

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Engagement with the Arts to Advance Research

Partnerships explore the social impact of creative expression

The Institute for Social Research is expanding its reach through meaningful collaborations in the arts, reflecting a growing commitment to interdisciplinary innovation and cultural engagement.

During the fall 2024 semester, ISR welcomed Rick Lowe as its artist in residence. A painter and sculptor of international prominence from Houston, Texas, Lowe collaborated with acclaimed curator Abigail Winograd to develop his work during the residency. Throughout his residency, Lowe worked with ISR and University of Michigan faculty and staff to conduct research exploring the social impact of art throughout Michigan. He also taught a class with ISR's Christian Davenport titled "De/Re-Imagining and Building Black Progress" in the fall and winter semesters of the 2024-25 academic year.



Christian Davenport (center) and Rick Lowe (right) teach at ISR



Katja Frei, Olaf Maninger, Shinobu Kitayama, Kate Cagney, Andrea Zietzschmann, Stefan Dohr

In another collaboration, ISR partnered with the University Musical Society and the University of Michigan School of Music, Theatre & Dance for a collaboration with the Berlin Philharmonic orchestra. During its visit to Ann Arbor in November 2024, ISR director Kate Cagney moderated a panel discussion with Andrea Zietzschmann, Stefan Dohr, Olaf Maninger, Katja Frei, and ISR researcher Shinobu Kitayama. The panel delved into the Philharmonic’s democratic governance model and its pioneering educational and research initiatives.

By bringing artists, musicians, and scholars into dialogue, ISR is not only broadening its reach but also reimagining how social science can intersect with cultural expression to foster new forms of inquiry and public engagement.

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We are thrilled to welcome Rick Lowe and incorporate his innovative, community-focused vision into our work. Lowe will engage with social science scholars at ISR and across the university to identify ways in which social science and the arts can come together to seed novel research and inform creative practice.

-Kate Cagney, Director of the Institute for Social Research

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Population Studies Center

Training future population scientists and advancing global research

The Population Studies Center (PSC) and its more than 300 scholars represent one of the oldest population centers in the United States. It continues to be a multidisciplinary home for research and training.

Over the last year, PSC has continued its central role in training the next generation of social scientists with its Training in Demography and Population Studies Program. In this program, graduate and postdoctoral students collaborate with training faculty on multidisciplinary projects, preparing them for high-level research on population studies and positioning trainees for roles in leading academic and governmental research institutions.

PSC's research spans the globe. In Detroit, research by PSC Faculty Associate Alexandra Murphy highlights concerns about transportation insecurity and the lack of access to safe and timely travel options. Murphy's Transportation Security Index (TSI) is a tool designed to guide local

governments in planning equitable transportation investments, akin to food security indices.

Internationally, PSC affiliate Emily Treleaven leads a study in Nepal that examines how inter-generational disadvantages affect the health of young children. With data from the Chitwan Valley Family Study, the research tracks illnesses like diarrhea and acute respiratory infections, with the goal of informing global child health strategies.



Emily Treleaven at the ISR 75th Anniversary Symposium

To further enhance global research collaboration, PSC and the Survey Research Center have established an International Research Hub. This initiative, directed by William Axinn, aims to expand social research worldwide by supporting University of Michigan faculty and staff working on international projects. The Hub leverages the strengths and partnerships across ISR's five centers to foster new collaborations and diversify funding sources.



Shane Burns displays a PSC t-shirt



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We are interested in how individual actions aggregate up to population levels of behavior, and how those behaviors help us understand needs in the future. How many elementary schools should we be building? Why are some groups facing much higher mortality or morbidity rates than others? Our work in many of the social sciences helps us to understand the dynamics of populations and ways we might intervene to make everyone's life chances more equal.

-Sarah Burgard, Director of the Population Studies Center

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Cultivating the Next Generation of Researchers

Empowering emerging scholars with research skills and support

The Institute for Social Research is deeply committed to cultivating the future leaders of social science through two key programs: the Next Generation Initiative and the Junior Professional Researcher (JPR) Program. Both initiatives are vital components of ISR's mission to train and support emerging social scientists who will advance critical knowledge in the decades ahead.

The Next Generation Initiative gives important funding opportunities to early career students, allowing them to attend research

conferences, conduct their own research, and access training they may not have otherwise been able to. With the help of funds from the Next Generation Initiative, dozens of early career scholars every year are able to advance their careers in the social sciences.

Meanwhile, the Junior Professional Researcher (JPR) Program brings recent college graduates directly into the research community by pairing them with research projects being conducted at the Institute for Social Research.



The 2024 Junior Professional Researcher cohort

Over a two-year period, cohorts of JPR participants do the actual work of social scientists, helping established researchers with their work on a variety of interdisciplinary projects. Participants emerge from the program with real experience in a research environment, prepared for career opportunities in all areas of the social sciences.

Together, these programs embody ISR's approach to fostering the next generation of social scientists. Through these sustained efforts, ISR is ensuring that the pipeline of skilled, innovative researchers remains robust and vibrant.



Weidi Qin

“My time at ISR definitely laid a solid foundation in multiple areas, including networking, research competency, and also professional development. All of these things have helped in my subsequent career development.”



Andres Pinedo

“The grant allowed me to conduct a rigorous assessment of student development within an ethnic studies curriculum in California. That project set the foundation for insights that are facilitating a long-term research agenda.”



Charles Katulamu

“The support and training from ISR and the Next Generation Initiative has not only been able to support me as I complete my educational milestones, but it has also prepared me to continue with my scholarship.”

Research Center for Group Dynamics

Advancing research on human behavior

Since 1948, the Research Center for Group Dynamics (RCGD) has worked to investigate the linkages between the psychological lives of individuals and their actions within the larger societies in which those individuals reside. While the topics investigated are diverse, all research at RCGD shares a unified scientific goal: to deepen understanding of the complex dynamics that shape human social behavior.

Over the past year, RCGD has pushed the boundaries on numerous research fronts,

plumbing the depths of human emotions and how they manifest in different ways. One notable area of RCGD's research is the examination of Indigenous approaches to youth suicide prevention. A study led by Lisa Wexler highlighted three American Indian and Alaska Native community-based initiatives that focus on cultural strengths and community engagement to address suicide.

A study by RCGD researchers Paul Boxer and Eric Dubow analyzed the impact of media portrayals of gun violence, suggesting that such



Sela Panapasa (second from right) with representatives of the Fiji Ministry of iTaukei Affairs

depictions may contribute to a contagion effect, potentially influencing real-life violent behaviors. This research calls for more responsible media reporting to mitigate the risk of imitation.

Additionally, RCGD engages in global research collaborations. In October 2024, Sela Panapasa hosted a research meeting with representatives from the Fiji government to explore ways that data can be used to develop a better understanding of life in Fiji. These international partnerships enhance the understanding of social dynamics across different cultures.

Through these diverse research initiatives, RCGD contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between individual behaviors and social contexts.



Lisa Wexler presents research at the ISR 75th Anniversary Showcase



The ISR Virtual Reality lab partners with research to design and run immersive, human-centered studies in a virtual environment. Current projects include a VR simulator to safely study the effects of communication while driving and the use of Dyadic VR as a behavioral intervention to reduce social isolation among older adults. The VR lab has also partnered with the U-M HomeLab to develop a high-fidelity digital twin of the HomeLab research space, allowing researchers to study human interactions in spaces not just as they are, but how they can be imagined.

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“The VR Lab represents high-quality research conducted in the public interest backed by one of the top social science research institutes in the world. It will be a hub for collaborative research across many disciplines and units on campus.”

-Rich Gonzalez, Director of the Research Center for Group Dynamics

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Celebrating the Past...

In 2024, the Institute for Social Research celebrated its 75th anniversary. Marking three quarters of a century of social research is no simple task, especially when the history is as deep and varied as that of ISR.

On October 14-15, 2024, ISR hosted a landmark research symposium, gathering researchers to explore the evolving landscape of social science data collection and its implications for addressing urgent societal challenges.

Through a series of keynote addresses and in-depth breakout sessions, ISR demonstrated its comprehensive impact on the world of the social sciences, celebrating its past while looking to the future.



...Looking to the Future

Directly following the anniversary symposium, ISR held a workshop focused on paradata — the data collected about the survey process itself. Designed to support methodological and substantive researchers interested in modern applications of survey paradata, the workshop featured presentations from international researchers exploring new applications of paradata in their research, as well as a panel session dedicated to developing a research agenda concerning the future of paradata. Presenters at the workshop will be invited to submit their work to a 2026 special issue of the *Journal of Survey Statistics and Methodology*.

Together, these events and research initiatives highlight ISR's commitment to the future of social science research, ensuring that data collection methods remain trustworthy, innovative, and responsive to society's evolving needs.



Survey Research Center

Innovating methodological approaches for groundbreaking research

Over the past year, the Survey Research Center (SRC) has continued its important role, investigating many different aspects of American and global society through careful application of the latest techniques in survey methodology.

SRC continues to look to the future of survey research and develop innovative methods for data collection. Notably, the University of Michigan Surveys of Consumers recently completed a significant transition from phone-based interviews to exclusively web-based surveys. According to U-M economist Joanne Hsu, director of the surveys, this shift preserves the surveys' robustness and reliability while amplifying consumer voices in an increasingly digital era. This shift is supported by research led by Brady West and William Axinn. Their recent study demonstrates that online survey methods can serve as a cost-effective and reliable alternative to traditional face-to-face approaches. This research supports the use of national probability samples combining web and mail data collection,

ensuring consistent and representative demographic estimates.

SRC leads several of the world's most influential longitudinal studies, such as the Health and Retirement Study, Monitoring the Future, and the Panel Study of Income Dynamics. These projects inform national policy and advance scientific understanding of human behavior over time.



Brady West

One of SRC's long-running studies, Monitoring the Future, found that teen drug use has continued to decline post-pandemic, with record-high abstinence among 12th graders, and new research on teen vaping trends allowed researchers to better define the reasons why teens participate in the practice.

SRC also developed significant new research on numerous other research topics, including the development of close friendships among older adults, how the gender pay gap in the United States may contribute to declining fertility rates, brain health, family caregiving, and the effects of both pollution and vision loss on long-term health.



Nick Priour shares information about the Monitoring the Future study at the ISR 75th Anniversary Showcase



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It is important to provide the highest quality data that we can in order to answer the important questions of social and behavioral science. That is why we have systems for checking the data throughout the data collection, processing, and dissemination phases to provide reliable and valid data to the community.

-Pam Davis-Kean, Director of the Survey Research Center

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The Power of Philanthropy

At ISR, addressing society's most urgent challenges is at the heart of our mission, and philanthropic support is essential to advance this critical work. ISR is well-positioned to leverage philanthropy's ability to make an impact on the world.

Here are just a handful of examples of how, in collaboration with partners, ISR has catalyzed and supported key programs around areas of pressing need.

Advancing Research for the Public Good

Scientific progress relies on robust data and consistent support. The Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) continues to lead the charge in safeguarding access to vital research data. With the generous support of our community, ICPSR's DataLumos initiative has published more than 800 projects containing at-risk data as of mid-2025.

Fostering Interdisciplinary Solutions

Complex problems require collaborative solutions. That's why ISR continues to champion interdisciplinary research, connecting experts across fields to explore issues from multiple perspectives. Now in its third year, our partnership with the College of Engineering through the Rural Contexts pilot grant program exemplifies this commitment. Together, we've awarded more than \$1.3 million to 11 groundbreaking projects addressing challenges such as energy inequality, rural housing, infectious disease, and flooding.

Training the Next Generation

Philanthropy also plays a crucial role in nurturing early-career researchers and keeping ISR at the forefront of the field. Since 2001, our 35 Next Generation funds have supported over 700 emerging scholars, empowering them to launch impactful research careers.

Through these partnerships, ISR stays at the forefront of social science research while continuing to lay a strong foundation for the future.

Scan to learn more about the impact of philanthropy at ISR.



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Director

Institute for Social Research

Thom Madden

Managing Director

Institute for Social Research

Center Directors

Michael Traugott

Interim Director

Center for Political Studies

Margaret Levenstein

Director

Inter-university Consortium for
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Sarah Burgard

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Population Studies Center

Richard Gonzalez

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