To: "Dr. Baruch Fischhoff - Chair, National Academy Committee on Improving Intelligence" <baruch@cmu.edu>, "Dr. Kenneth Prewitt - Chair, Committee on Social Science Evidence for Use" <kp2058@columbia.edu>, "Dr. Michael Goodchild - Chair, NSF/SBE Advisory Committee" <good@geog.ucsb.edu>
From: Lloyd Etheredge <lloyd.etheredge@policyscience.net>

Subject: 149. DNI Assistance: NSF Political Science, NIMH, and Other Implications

Dear Dr. Fischhoff and Colleagues:

If behavioral science research is to help us to understand the world of the 21st century, it ought to include many non-US sites and subjects. With a light touch of institutional leadership, this could happen.

A Recommendation to the DNI?
The DNI would do a great service if it activated an inter-agency planning process to build this capacity. The US design should be a state-of-the-art *scientific* strategy: (The comparisons that would be the easiest and most convenient to organize logistically - e.g., the UK or Western Europe - are not likely to be the most informative:)

Rapid Learning and New Lessons Re Political Behavior?
One of the challenging, agenda-creating, questions for the next decade will be how many of the generalizations and major findings about human behavior by US behavioral scientists in the 20th century - e.g., concerning voting - are true of the 6 billion++ non-US subjects and in other cultures on the planet?

Concerning topics: A good place to start might be theories of voting. These could benefit from maximum-discrepancy or other data designs to yield critical tests of a wide range of competing theories.

I discussed these questions recently with a researcher in the intelligence community. He thought that many improvements were likely to emerge. For example, US researchers are studying a highly individualist culture and derive/test scientific theories by analyzing individual personality traits and personality x situation interactions in experimental studies. But in many of the world's cultures, the best theoretical predictions of real-world behavior may arise from social network analysis and a subject's perception of what others in his/her immediate social network will do or expect. <1> <2>

Going Outside NSF?

My perception is that NSF's Assistant Directors for Social & Behavioral Science often have many tasks on their agendas, and global comparative capabilities for fast discovery seem sufficiently daunting and time-consuming that they never rise high enough to get done. IF NSF is too institutionally limited to move rapidly, perhaps there could be a direct contract with one or more leading universities to build the new systems and data architectures?

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<1> And the truthfulness/reliability of answers may vary: Lie detectors, for example, assume guilt or anxiety from lying, but they can be useless in cultures where dissembling is common or a social virtue or where the "truth" of a statement is understood to be embedded in the social relationship with others to whom the statement is made.

<2> Correlations of social class with almost every kind of behavior declined in the US and Western Europe across most of the 20th century, but perhaps less so elsewhere. In many cultures, you still can easily predict the likelihood of divorce from cultural or related group characteristics, but in the US it has become an N-variable problem in recent decades.

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