



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's Program on Religion and the Public Sphere with the support and partnership of the Fetzer Institute.

Applications are due March 16, 2020. 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 religion presently engages the public sphere is in many ways dramatically different than earlier historical moments. During the past half-century alone, the American religious landscape has undergone dramatic changes, including both rising religious diversity and rising religious disaffiliation. Both shifts have prompted scholars to consider anew the relationship between religion and spirituality. The political landscape, too, has been transformed by myriad, often countervailing, forces, including an increasingly diverse citizenry, rising social and political inequality, and sharpening polarization. This is an especially important and complex time for discerning 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 between religion, spirituality, and democracy at this fraught moment in US history.

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 all aspects and dimensions of religion and spirituality in its relation to democracy from across all fields in the social sciences, humanities, and theology. 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 postdoctoral researchers, should demonstrate strong interest in disseminating findings both to academic audiences and to practitioners and 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.

RESEARCH THEMES

Applicants may address questions such as (but not limited to):

1. Have recent shifts in American religiosity inhibited or strengthened the various forms of civic engagement associated with democratic citizenship? In what ways? How do religious institutions, discourses, and practices either contribute to or undermine civic engagement?
2. Have recent changes in the American religious landscape affected public understandings of when and how religion is a legitimate part of civic engagement? If so, how? Conversely, do changing modes of civic engagement (e.g., use of digital and social media) shape the way religion enters the public sphere?
3. As growing socioeconomic inequality and new dynamics of participation and exclusion shape American civil society, have patterns of religious affiliation, organization, and intensity been affected? In what ways? Conversely, have religious leaders and organizations responded to socioeconomic change and new patterns of associational life? How?
4. What new constructive conceptions of democracy are emerging from within or among different religious and spiritual traditions? Relatedly, what immanent critiques of antidemocratic tendencies within different religious and spiritual traditions can be identified and articulated?

Additionally, projects that investigate the religious or spiritual dimensions of topics central to related SSRC programs in [Anxieties of Democracy](#) and [Media & Democracy](#) (e.g., inequality, identity, political participation, the impact of social and other media on democracy, immigration, and the politics of climate change) are welcome.

ADDITIONAL FELLOWSHIP ACTIVITIES

The fellowship includes participation in an interdisciplinary workshop upon the completion of RSDR-funded research. These workshops will focus on fostering interdisciplinary dialogue on key research topics, writing, 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](#) (TIF).

TO APPLY

Applications must be submitted through the SSRC's online application system no later than 11:59 p.m. EST on March 16, 2020. 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.**