Smart cities
The intelligent approach to urban life

Referendum reflections: What the result means
Bucket brigade: Why so popular?
Voices: Increasing understanding of society
Welcome

to the Autumn issue of Society Now, the ESRC’s regular magazine which showcases the impact of the social science research we fund.

This issue our main feature looks at how the spread of computing into public spaces and areas such as transport and energy is making cities more efficient places to live and work.

The ESRC Future of the UK and Scotland programme examined the independence referendum process and helped to inform the political, civic and public debates. Academics from the programme reflect on the meaning of the result.

The words that speakers of British English use have changed radically – what does this tell us about public attitudes towards key issues?

We look at food and how the economics of mass-production may make food less safe.

And we talk to Professor Jane Elliott, the new Chief Executive of the ESRC, about how social science can tell us more about ourselves, our families and societies.

I hope you find the magazine enjoyable and informative.

Nick Stevens, Editor - nick.stevens@esrc.ac.uk

In this issue

REGULARS

3 News
14 Opinions
Oz Hassan looks at President Obama’s strategy to defeat Islamic State; Kimberley Scharf and Sarah Smith examine the ice-bucket challenge.
20 The UK by numbers: Food
29 Information and updates
People, publications, news in brief, websites and events.

FEATURES

10 The age of the smart city
How is technology helping researchers, planners, technology experts and councils make cities more efficient?

16 Referendum reflections
Academics from the ESRC Future of the UK and Scotland programme evaluate what the independence referendum result means for Scotland and the rest of the UK.

22 Safe to eat?
Is food safety simply about better regulation and law enforcement or do we need to think again about the conditions under which the food we eat is produced?

24 A new world of words
The words we use show what was, and is, most important to us and how public attitudes towards key issues in society are evolving.

26 Voices: Increasing understanding
The new Chief Executive of the ESRC, Professor Jane Elliott, explains her fascination for research, the priorities and main challenges for the ESRC, and how social science can tell us more about ourselves and societies.
INFORMATION ABOUT terrorism is often remarkably difficult to access, even when formally and legally available to the public, according to recent research into how governments and courts deal with security-related matters, and the relationship between the state and the media.

“A complex, far-reaching legal framework governs the way information about terrorism is obtained by the media and conveyed to the public,” says researcher Dr Lawrence McNamara. “Some of the most important and reliable information about terrorism emerges as prosecutions and civil actions unfold in the courts. Democratic traditions of media freedom characterise and sustain our liberal democracy through open, informed public debate – the basis of the public’s right to know – and the ability to access and report information from the legal process is a mainstay of those traditions.”

To explore how the law affects these matters, and how media freedom functions, and should function, at a time of often heightened terrorist threat, Dr McNamara undertook 60 confidential interviews with UK judges, government officials, the Crown Prosecution Service and criminal defence lawyers as well as journalists and editors.

Findings suggest that even legally available information about terrorism is hard to access. “The government and police are cautious about releasing information and often distrust the media,” he points out. “And the authorities are not greatly trusted by journalists either.” The information that is accessed and reported is very closely considered and managed by all parties before it reaches the public eye. Hence, even when restrictive laws are not applied to control information, and may even be seen as benign with regard to the media, the study shows that the legal framework is currently extremely powerful in shaping the behaviour of everyone involved and, ultimately, the information that reaches the public.

Based on evidence gathered during this four-year study, Dr McNamara helped shape the Justice and Security Act 2013 (JSA) which now includes the legislative requirement that government reports to parliament annually on applications for, and use of, closed material proceedings, ie, court cases which are closed to the public where the non-state party will not see all the evidence.

“It is crucial that we ensure that, whenever possible, what governments do in the name of their citizens is made visible.”

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“Everyone accepts that sometimes information must remain secret,” he concludes, “but it is crucial that we ensure that, whenever possible, what governments do in the name of their citizens is made visible.”

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Supporting the public’s ‘right to know’

Ageism affects how well old people feel
Maths difficulties prompt change
Improving safety of elderly people on stairs
Antisocial outcomes of neighbourhoods
Winter Fuel Payment saves lives
Living apart together needs greater recognition
Doorsteps beat digital tools in race for votes
Food growing from the grassroots
Offenders at higher risk of problem gambling
Higher education’s positive effects
Church of England is losing Generation A pew power
SHARING ONLINE
What do people choose to share online when affected by difficult circumstances such as natural disasters, emotional distress and suicidal thoughts, drug use and addiction? Those online need to know how to respond to people in genuine distress. Researchers and project partner, the Samaritans, aim to increase understanding of the issues of sharing, empathy and trust online.

ESRC grant number ES/M00354X/1

LANGUAGE CENTRE
Learning to use language to communicate is hugely important for society. Failure to develop these skills at the right age is a major predictor of inequalities in later life. The new International Centre for Language and Communicative Development (LuCiD) aims to transform understanding of how children learn to communicate, and deliver information needed to design effective interventions in child healthcare, communicative development and early years education.

ESRC grant number ES/L008955/1

FLOOD RESILIENCE
Researchers will explore a more effective way for communities to become resilient in the face of changing risks associated with anthropogenic climate change. This study will focus on flooding in a rural Devon community and explore the potential for ‘co-learning’ between community members, researchers and local agencies to understand flood risks with the aim of working towards a community flood resilience plan.

ESRC grant number ES/L009234/1

IN BRIEF

AGEISM IS STILL the most commonly experienced form of prejudice in the UK and across Europe, according to a large-scale study of people’s attitudes to age and experiences of ageism.

The Eurage research team, led by Professor Dominic Abrams, examined data from more than 50,000 individuals from 28 European countries based on the Ageism Module in the 2008-9 European Social Survey. While ageism is a significant problem across the 28 countries, the study shows that prevalence of ageism, and perceptions of status and old age, vary considerably. People aged 70 or over who identify themselves as ‘old’ feel worse about their own health in societies where old age is perceived as signifying low status. But in societies where older people have higher status identifying oneself as ‘old’ had no negative impact on how healthy people felt. In the UK, researchers found that ageism was most strongly related to lowered life satisfaction and happiness among people over 70. In this age group those who experienced ageism reported 16 per cent lower life satisfaction and 14 per cent lower happiness compared to people who had not experienced ageism.

Researchers used the data to dispel the notion that older people are generally able to maintain wellbeing in later life, even though many experience age-related changes or declines in their circumstances, health or income. “This ‘paradox of wellbeing’ is only observed in countries with higher GDP. Our analysis revealed that GDP disproportionally affects the wellbeing of older people relative to younger people,” says research team member Dr Hannah Swift.

Ageism varies considerably among countries and is far more prevalent in countries such as the Czech Republic, Slovakia and the Russian Federation compared to, for example, Cyprus and Portugal. As ageism appears strongly influenced by external factors such as culture and legislation then the possibility of developing policies and strategies to help prevent and challenge ageism clearly exists.

“Different strategies to deal with ageism may be needed to be effective in different countries,” says Professor Abrams. “Strategies can be deployed at different levels. At the social psychological level, it is important to change people’s stereotypes of ageing and associated emotional reactions to older people.” Society often segregates older people from young people ranging from special social activities for older people to age-segregated residential schemes. Researchers say encouraging more contact and friendships between older and younger people would do much to provide a buffer against damaging age-related stereotypes.
A NEW STUDY of how elderly people negotiate stairs suggests that some staircases in the UK’s older homes and commercial buildings are particularly hazardous for older people. Falls are a major problem in old age, and most falls occur when people are walking down stairs. The reason, explains researcher Professor Costis Maganaris, is that the downward movement of the body has to be controlled and halted every time the foot hits the step and our ability to do this depends on muscle strength, joint mobility and our sense of balance – all of which deteriorate with age – as well as certain stair geometry characteristics, namely the rise and going of the steps.

Older buildings with staircases outside current regulations (ie, higher step rises or smaller step goings) pose particular problems for older people, say researchers. “Since non-conforming staircases in many older buildings are difficult or expensive to modify to make them less demanding, this hazard is likely to continue for many years,” says Professor Maganaris. But findings suggest that exercise may help prevent falls on stairs. Resistance and stretching exercise, in particular, could improve older people’s functional capabilities and competence and confidence on stairs. Researchers believe that further research will establish which effective, pragmatic and practical exercise programmes could be included in physical activity sessions run in community settings and by rehabilitation centres to help reduce both the fear and actuality of falling.
IN BRIEF

REFERENDUM REACTION
Researchers will use one online survey held before the 2014 Scottish Referendum followed by two surveys after the ‘No’ vote to help identify whether and why people voted the way they did. The study will examine the impact of the campaign itself as well as the reaction of those who backed the losing side, and the unique socialisation into electoral participation this offered 16- and 17-year-olds.

ESRC grant number ES/M003418/1

SPORTING DEVELOPMENT
The Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) sector now includes hundreds of programmes and organisations across the world that use sport as a tool of intervention to promote non-sport goals such as development, peace, human rights and social justice. Researchers will investigate how the SDP sector is structured and how different kinds of SDP work are planned, implemented and experienced in diverse cultural contexts.

ESRC grant number ES/L002191/1

HOME ALONE
In China 58 million children, or 28 per cent of all rural children, have been left behind by parents migrating to cities to work. Six million of these children are thought to live alone. Researchers will explore whether a community-based intervention, consisting of ‘clubs’ for left-behind children, can have a positive impact on their health, wellbeing, behaviour and educational attainment.

ESRC grant number ES/L003619/1

Winter Fuel Payment saves lives

THE WINTER FUEL Payment (WFP), a tax-free payment of £100 to £300 for those age 60 years and older, costs around £3 billion a year. Is it money well spent? New research from the University of Lancaster finds evidence not only that cold weather kills, but that the WFP reduces the numbers of deaths. “Our preliminary results provide support for the continuance of Winter Fuel Payments, although it is not yet clear whether more specific targeting of the payment to, for example, those over 80 would be more justified,” says researcher Professor Ian Walker.

Researchers used data on temperature, seasonal mortality and household expenditure to determine the impact of the Winter Fuel Payment. While mortality increases in winter only about half of that increase can be attributed to cold weather. Other reasons for the increase include causes such as illnesses such as flu and accidents caused by ice. “Nevertheless, our results do suggest that the WFP has an impact on mortality rates,” Professor Walker suggests. “These relatively small amounts of money appear to make a big difference to people on low incomes and who are perhaps already not in the best of health.”

Researchers say more research is required to establish whether the impact of the fuel payment only succeeds in lengthening an elderly person’s life for a short period. Also, it is unclear whether the fuel payment has greater value for its more elderly recipients, the over-80s for example, compared to younger and potentially healthier recipients in their 60s. “It’s clear that the WFP is a very popular payment among the elderly,” Professor Walker concludes. “But, given the significant cost of this initiative, more robust evidence may provide pointers to the best way forward.”
“LIVING APART TOGETHER” where couples in a relationship live separately is a contemporary and relatively common phenomenon which deserves greater recognition and understanding, a recent study suggests.

“Over a fifth of people normally classified as ‘single’ are actually in a relationship but not living with their partner,” says researcher Professor Simon Duncan. “So that’s around five million people in the UK (or nine per cent of the adults in Britain) who are now living apart together.” This sizeable minority has only recently been recognised by social researchers, although people have long been having relationships without living together.

Using a survey of 572 people living apart together as well as a further 66 in-depth qualitative interviews, researchers set out to gain a thorough understanding of living apart relationships which could inform policymakers, practitioners and researchers concerned with couples, families, and individual wellbeing today.

Far from being the prerogative of celebrity couples, or the professional commuting couple, findings show that Living Apart Together (LAT) is now found among all sorts of people in Britain. Yet, researchers point out, this fairly common relationship practice is ignored by the Census, and other social, family and household surveys. Living apart together is rarely recognised by those collecting administrative information about users of services in either the public or private sectors. Indeed, many people who are in a LAT relationship are currently misrecognised as ‘single’.

Living apart is not necessarily a permanent state, and some LATs are young people who will go on to cohabit. But many others are in committed, long-term LAT relationships that are meaningful and important on their own terms. For those reasons, researchers suggest that Living Apart Together should be a relationship status that is recognised and counted by those producing statistics and seeking to understand contemporary relationships.

Consideration should also be given to extending legal recognition to those in LAT relationships who wish to ‘opt-in’, to secure recognition, for example, as next of kin by healthcare providers. And those providing personal, health and social care services, particularly relationship counselling and family support, should recognise the prevalence of Living Apart Together relationships, and audit how they take such relationships into consideration in the provision of services.

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Doorsteps beat digital tools in race for votes

PERSONAL, FACE-TO-FACE methods of contacting voters are more successful than digital and social media contacts in ensuring people turn out to vote, says a study of online voter contact during the US 2012 Presidential election and the UK 2010 General Election.

Despite increased attention on campaigning through the internet, email and social media, the study shows that contacting voters through digital channels makes little difference to their likelihood of voting. “This is true whether contact comes directly from the political party or indirectly through online social networks. Personalised face-to-face contacting of voters remains the ‘gold standard’ to mobilise turnout at elections,” says researcher Professor Rachel Gibson. But web campaigning does appear to sustain levels of involvement among party activists and those already involved in helping with the campaign. “Our results indicate that a two-step approach to voter mobilisation and disseminating the campaign message may be worthwhile where digital communication and resources are used to support activists who then engage in wider offline personalised canvassing,” says Professor Gibson.

“Rather than develop new and more sophisticated online forms of ‘cold calling’, digital channels should be used to support and extend communication with members. Online contact may be quicker and cheaper but based on current trends it’s not particularly effective in getting people to take action.”

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Food growing from the grassroots

WHILE OLDER allotment holders garden happily, a new wave of younger people are being drawn towards ‘urban agriculture’ – a range of initiatives aimed at growing, processing and distributing food in and around cities. “Small intensive urban farms, food production on housing estates, land-sharing, rooftop gardens and beehives, schoolyard greenhouses, public space food production, balcony and window sill vegetable growing are just a few examples of current urban agriculture initiatives,” says researcher Dr Chiara Tornaghi.

In a two-year project, Dr Tornaghi from the University of Leeds investigated emerging forms of urban agriculture in the UK and their impact on social cohesion and environmental justice. Based on these findings and the experiences of urban food growers in the Leeds City Region, researchers have published two guides explaining to users and policymakers how to set up an urban agricultural project with a socio-environmental justice perspective.

The project has also supported development of an umbrella organisation (Feed Leeds) and research informed a supporting document proposal presented to Leeds City Council in September 2014 by a delegation of citizens, asking to initiate a local Sustainable Food Strategy in which urban agriculture will play a key role.

Offenders at higher risk of problem gambling

LESS THAN ONE per cent of the general UK population are problem gamblers and only two per cent of people are at medium risk of problem gambling, according to the 2010 British Gambling Prevalence Study. In contrast, new research carried out by Lancaster and Glasgow Universities finds that 26 per cent of male offenders and 16 per cent of female offenders are rated as medium-risk and problem gamblers using a comparable measure (the Problem Gambling Severity Index). Almost a fifth of all prisoners reported that gambling had caused problems for their families, confirming the wider impacts of this often hidden problem.

“Offenders who have gambling as their main problematic issue are rare,” explains researcher Professor Corinne May-Chahal. “Drug and alcohol problems were highly prevalent for all prisoners and gambling problems tend to receive less attention in prison treatment programmes.”

In-depth analysis of interviews with more than 160 male and female offenders aimed to identify risk and resilience factors for problem gambling compared to low-risk gamblers and non-gamblers. A large proportion of offenders were highly motivated to ‘start afresh’ on leaving prison, determined to make significant positive changes in their lives through finding employment and registering for training/college courses. For some, these goals do become a reality, while many others are met with myriad barriers to achievement, particularly those with substance use issues, mental health and gambling problems.

But not all problem gamblers have the same problems. The most frequently reported difficulty was chasing losses, spending more and more money to win back money lost. For seven per cent of all prisoners this seriously affects their family relationships, their financial security and health. “Greater understanding of how prisoners understand their gambling behaviour may enable more specific, tailored interventions for problem gamblers,” Professor May-Chahal concludes.

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Higher education’s positive effects

Higher levels of education are associated with a wide range of positive outcomes including better health and wellbeing, higher social trust, greater political interest, lower political cynicism, and less hostile attitudes towards immigrants, according to a study of the psychological effect of differences in education.

The study, the first to compare the strength and stability of the effect of education on a range of outcomes over time, suggests that it’s harder for people with low levels of education to develop a positive social identity. To counter this problem, researchers recommend awareness campaigns promoting the benefits of education and portraying vocational skills as valuable in their own right as well as policies to remove the stigma attached to lower levels of education.

Church of England is losing Generation A pew power

The Church of England is losing the unique contribution provided by ‘Generation A’, the stalwart group of Anglican women, born in the 1920s and 30s who have provided not only numbers in the congregation but also a kind of labour, leadership and knowledge which has quietly kept churches going, says researcher Dr Abby Day. “This may well be the final active generation of the Church of England because their descendants are not replacing them.”

“Generation A is unique and has wielded a ‘pew power’ very different from priestly leadership but still instrumental to church life,” she explains. The passing of Generation A signals an inevitable decline of the Church of England and Anglican Communion of the global north due to Generation A not being able – amid widespread cultural revolutions – to transmit specific skills, beliefs and practices to their ‘baby-boomer’ children and churches, she argues.

Priests may need to think quickly about how to replace the kind of leadership provided by Generation A. “Counterintuitively, the church’s emphasis on attracting young people appears misplaced: it is the ‘middle-generation’, the children of Generation A, they should have retained,” Dr Day concludes.

Church of England is losing Generation A pew power

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IN BRIEF

POLICE ECONOMICS

Three broad areas of policing will be examined in a project of interest to academics and policymakers at national and local level. Researchers will explore the factors that affect retention of police officers, the impact of local labour market conditions on the quality of police recruits, and the scope for local discretion over spending on police officers and the deployment of police officers.

ESRC grant number ES/L0081165/1

SPEECH PROBLEMS

Speech communication can be difficult for older people due to the combined effects of age-related hearing loss, a decline in speech articulation, and cognitive problems such as poorer short-term memory. Researchers aim to provide a better understanding of communication difficulties to assist professionals such as social workers and care professionals in improving the quality of life for older people.

ESRC grant number ES/L007002/1

PARTY ORGANISATION

How do political parties’ structures and resources shape democratic life? The new Political Party Database Project aims to gather systematically collected data on 138 parties in 19 countries which will provide a public database on party organisation. This regularly updated database will be an ongoing resource for students of politics as well as reformers seeking to improve representation and increase political participation.

ESRC grant number ES/L016613/1
The age of the smart city

Improvements in technology are helping researchers, planners, technology experts and councils monitor the way we interact with our cities, automate decision-making and make cities more efficient places to live and work. By Aaron Boardley

From the entertainment system that learns what you want to watch to the thermostat that determines when best to heat your house, improvements in technology and falling prices have led to a network of ‘smart’ equipment that is changing the way we interact with our homes and offices, saving time and effort and helping us to make the most efficient use of resources. But these same principles can apply on a grander scale in our streets, public spaces and municipal facilities too. We’re moving into the age of the smart city.

“Smart cities are developing from the ground up,” explains Michael Batty, Professor of Planning at University College London. “We’re seeing the spread of computing into public spaces and areas such as transport and energy.” As technology has become smaller, cheaper and wireless, it can be used in more ways to monitor usage and automate decision-making – such as turning on a streetlight or letting you know when the next bus is going to arrive.

Swapping a manual switch for a bit of computer code can be helpful, but it’s not by itself revolutionary. “Most of smart city management is really about routine activities,” says Professor Batty. “The bigger issues tend not to be automatable.” But, as the use of smart technology grows, it provides a whole host of data that could now be used to inform those bigger issues and make a larger impact on the future of a city.

Take transport. As Professor Batty points out: “Planners can change how a city operates, but Transport for London is not a planning agency as such – they run the tube.” Transport for London has been using smart technology for several years in the form of Oyster – a smartcard which allows users to quickly and wirelessly pay for the tube and bus travel. Though its primary role may not be to change the face of construction in London, its data is too useful to disregard. “A lot of technology is not designed to collect data, but rather data is a by-product,” says Professor Batty. That by-product should not be wasted.

It’s time for a huge revolution in planners’ training to be much more scientifically literate

Planners may be primarily concerned with changing land use, but using data to do so intelligently – with strategically built cycle paths, for example – can nudge behaviour to change how a city operates. So should there be more collaboration between planners and those who make the city run? “Absolutely!” says Professor Batty. “There’s a disjunction between management and planning. Lots of planning tasks are farmed out to consultants who can really be informed by the big data from new technology – they could benefit enormously.” But changing the way planners operate isn’t a quick fix; it needs to start from first principles. “It’s time for a huge revolution in planners’ training to be much more scientifically literate, for them to be educated in new technologies.”

The transport, energy, financial and social elements of a city don’t function in isolation, though – they’re increasingly interconnected, making it hard to model what the consequences of a single change may be. With increased complexity, bigger questions need to be asked about a city’s resilience, which require input from all sorts of stakeholders. Ultimately, the groups who are affected by a changing city can be the very people to solve its problems, and businesses providing the smart technology have a big role to play in engaging with the adapting communities to find out exactly what is needed. These businesses can be involved in two ways, according to Adrian Ulisse, the CEO of Ethos Smart who is researching and providing solutions for the development of smart cities.
One might picture a ‘top-down’ smart city as having a big command and control centre with huge business contracts awarded to run it. Though these do exist, Adrian explains – citing an IBM project in Rio de Janeiro – they aren’t the only way to make a city smart. Many businesses are taking the bottom-up approach, identifying problems that are common across cities and then developing the tools to solve them. “For example we’re currently developing a digital platform tool to help motorists find parking more easily,” says Adrian, whilst highlighting the limits of relying on technology alone. Each tool needs adapting, as every city is unique. “The boulevards of Paris are not the same as the winding streets of London.”

The global market for smart city technology could be worth $442 billion by 2020 and it is hoped that the UK could serve around ten per cent of this, so seeing the rollout done well is a priority for government. It set up the Smart Cities Forum – chaired by Minister for Universities, Science and Cities Greg Clark MP – which is hoped to inform policy on how governments can support smart city initiatives in the UK.

“It’s a unique mix of local and central government, and business,” explains Adrian, who is part of the forum. “Governments need to put plans in place today for these things in the future; we need to be prepared.” This doesn’t necessarily mean more layers of policy and legislation, but a new way of approaching collaboration. Kevin O’Malley agrees: “You can’t just parachute in a solution. Cities have characteristics which have to be respected.” Kevin is City Innovation Team Manager for Bristol Futures, the department responsible for preparing the largest city in South West England for the future. In 2011 Bristol City Council took the bold step of bringing together different bits of the Authority into a single unit – the Bristol Futures team. “I hadn’t heard of any other local authority who had done this,” Kevin explains. “It brought together teams around digital innovation, economic development and sustainability to make something that is more than the sum of its parts.” The bold move proved successful, and by bringing in expertise from across the city the team have been responsible for a number of successful bids – including a £15-million grant from the Technology Strategy Board – that Kevin puts down to the innovative way of working. Lots of other cities are now taking the same step.

The City Innovation team of Bristol Futures is dedicated to three priority areas: infrastructure, innovation and inclusion. Whilst the infrastructure may be an obvious part of a smart future – with wireless internet and communication networks across the city – it’s the other two that really focus on empowering the residents. The innovation goal has seen the team set up a research and development testbed to connect some of the city’s major hubs of research and enterprise – giving SMEs and larger businesses the tools they need to develop and test new digital services on dedicated infrastructure – and pushing the envelope of what their products can do without damaging their day-to-day systems. “We want to provide a testbed where businesses can safely develop and test a service to disruption,” says Kevin. By providing this capacity, the council is empowering the city itself to innovate, rather than just play catch-up.

The team is mindful of inclusion too, wanting to avoid a city on ‘twin tracks’ where only those with digital skills and tools are at an advantage. It’s one of the biggest challenges, with less funding available to tackle it, so the team is investing in partnerships with organisations who already work in these communities, providing training to those who need it and gathering views from across the spectrum of residents. “We’re exploring what it means to put technology in cities, rather than saying ‘this is what you’re getting,’” Kevin explains.

Smart cities aren’t intended to force change upon people; if a city wants to function better then it makes sense to base any changes on the best data and evidence available, whatever the level of technology involved. The UK Research Councils are funding £65 million of research into smart cities, to help understand every aspect of how new technology fits together in a complex, working community. Researchers from all disciplines have as many sources to draw from as they have services to influence, but this all hinges on cities being committed to purposefully engaging with experts to tailor the tools to their needs.

“We wanted to make the smart city that suits Bristol, rather than buy one off the shelf,” concludes Kevin, on behalf of his city’s 437,500 residents. “That’s not going to happen by accident.”

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Looking for a strategy
Why President Obama’s strategy to defeat the Islamic State fails to deal with the grievances that are fuelling alienation. By Dr Oz Hassan

On 10 September, President Obama made an announcement that the US will form an international coalition that will “degrade and destroy” the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. Expressed in terms of a ‘counter-terrorism’ strategy, the US asserted the necessity for airstrikes, the need to support opposition movements inside Syria and Iraq, humanitarian assistance, and the use of broader preventative counter-terrorism instruments.

Remarkably, this announcement came just two weeks after the President publicly declared that the US did not have a strategy in place. The speedy turnaround of the announcements is highly significant not least as it goes some way towards explaining why the declared strategy is problematic. The strategy fails to set out a long-term and holistic strategy for dealing with the social, economic and political grievances that are fuelling alienation, and allowing ISIS to recruit fighters from all over the world.

This hastily concocted strategy needs to be tied to a wider Middle East and North Africa (MENA) strategy if the US and its allies want to avoid an indefinite extension of American led military engagement and halt the ever-greater levels of spiralling violence that are spreading across the MENA. Simply put, the US needs a wider regional strategy, and not just an ISIS strategy, if it is to help deal with the causes of the region’s security issues, and create a policy through which it can direct its resources, capabilities and goals to achieve realistic ends.

The failure of the Obama administration to recognise the need for a wider political strategy is remarkably similar to that first conceived by the George W. Bush administration in the aftermath of September 11 2001. The G.W. Bush administration’s first iteration of the ‘war on terror’ focused exclusively on counter-terrorism, attempting to eradicate al-Qaeda by targeting its leaders and eradicating its members through force as if there were a finite number.

The Obama administration’s strategy promises a similar approach, yet this carries risks of collateral damage and further radicalisation that will help ISIS find new recruits. Moreover, while ISIS is well organised and hierarchical in nature, removing its top leadership without a wider political approach to the region will merely allow new leaders to emerge in their place and prolonged periods of ISIS splintering into cells that will return to their homes across the globe.

Indeed, when the G.W. Bush administration recognised this phenomenon occurring in the mid-2000s the war on terror evolved into the Freedom Agenda that sought to promote democracy not only as a method of eradicating terrorism, but also as a wider strategy for engaging with the MENA. Problems with the Freedom Agenda aside, as the war on terror evolved, it did at least recognise that its initially narrow counter-terrorism strategy was failing and that a wider regional policy needed to be put in place that challenged the authoritarian status quo. The Obama administration has yet to reach this conclusion in spite of the Arab uprisings and multiple opportunities that have presented themselves. Instead, the White House is formulating policy on an ad hoc and reactive basis.

Trying to deal with ISIS in isolation of the wider regional context, which favours restricted civil societies, well-established authoritarian elites, poorly administered bureaucracies, and fractured and divergent identities fitting within mismatching state boundaries, shows that the Obama administration is treating the symptoms of the current regional crisis rather than the cause.

Moreover, forming a coalition that includes some of the region’s most authoritarian states will surely mean that the US turns a blind eye to their contribution to the current climate and their human rights violations carried out in the name of domestic ‘wars on terror’. In attempting to deal with ISIS, the US needs regional partners and allies but doing so in a manner that seeks to maintain the regional status quo and ignores the causes of political upheaval will lead to further alienation, sectarian divide and radicalisation.

President Obama’s hastily developed strategy may well suit an appetite for a response to the atrocities carried out by ISIS, but it also carries serious risks of failure by design.
The ice bucket challenge was the latest charity fundraising campaign to go viral in the US and UK. For anyone not connected to the internet in July/August 2014, the challenge was to have a bucket of iced water dumped over you, to post the video online and then to nominate three others who had 24 hours to comply. It was all in the name of charity – if you accepted the challenge you donated to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS) charities; if you dodged the challenge, you donated more. The response was huge – 1.2 million video shares on Facebook between June and the middle of August. The challenge has succeeded in raising awareness (Wikipedia recorded more than 430,000 hits on its ALS page in a single day in August, compared to 8,000 pre-ice bucket challenge) as well as tremendous sums of money – $100 million for the US ALS Society and £6 million for the UK Motor Neurone Disease Society (MNDS).

The challenge has also provoked strong reactions – many of them negative. Some critics have focused on people's motivations for participating and donating. The challenge has been described as ‘narcissism masked as altruism’ – although, since selfies are here to stay, it might be better if they are for a good cause than only for self-promotion. But the underlying assumption seems to be that you can only do good if you do it for the ‘right’ reasons.

In fact much of giving has little to do with the cause and is socially motivated. People care about who else is donating – and how much. Giving is often a very personal response to the person who is asking for donations. Our ESRC-funded research shows that individual fundraising, for example, is more about the relationship between the donor and the fundraiser than it is about the relationship between the donor and the charity. The ice bucket challenge has probably attracted more criticism than individual fundraising because of its sheer scale. Recent research from the US has suggested that spreading donations through social networks can be hard work. Simply asking your friends to donate to a wonderful charity has little effect. It takes a bucket of cold water – and an opportunity for self-promotion – to make giving go viral.

But when it succeeds, such a campaign can shift huge sums of money in a very short space of time. The second set of criticisms has focused on whether this money comes at the expense of other – and perhaps ‘better’ – charities. In theory it is possible that other charities lose – the money has to come from somewhere. But while there isn’t much direct evidence, what there is (which relates to disaster appeal giving) suggests probably not. Would the money have been better going to other charities? Economist and journalist Tim Harford gave most of his donation to the Schistosomiasis Control Initiative charity because, compared to MNDS, it could demonstrate a bigger improvement in quality of life years per £1 spent. Focusing on effectiveness is important, but whether it can be reduced to a single easy-to-compare metric is unclear. Ultimately, it is also a matter of personal preference.

A final important issue is that the money is well spent. For most people, however, good charity spending seems to be interpreted as spending everything on the programme. Other ESRC-funded research shows that donors are reluctant to give to charities that spend money on core costs – even where these are essential for growth (fundraising and marketing investment) and dynamic efficiency (R&D). Social entrepreneur Dan Pallotta put it well when he said: “Imagine if Tim Cook had to get people to dump ice on their heads in order to bring revenue into Apple – and had to figure out a new idea like that every six months – with an R&D budget for hatching it of precisely zero, to boot.” This is no way to change the world.
THE SCOTTISH INDEPENDENCE referendum campaign produced what one commentator described as a ‘festival of democracy’. Discussion and debate over the issues at stake could be heard in cafes, pubs and community halls around the country. A staggering 84.6 per cent turned out to vote on the question of whether Scotland should be an independent country – Scotland’s highest ever electoral turnover. By a margin of 55.3 per cent to 44.7 per cent, they voted ‘No’.

Academics engaged in the ESRC Future of the UK and Scotland programme had an invaluable opportunity to observe and examine the process as it unfolded, and to participate directly by helping to ensure that political, civic and public debates were informed by academic research. We offer here some preliminary observations on the referendum and its aftermath.

A fair and decisive outcome? – Robert Lineira

The Edinburgh Agreement set out that the referendum should deliver ‘a fair test and a decisive expression’ of the views of people in Scotland. The available evidence indicates that the process and the campaign were generally perceived to be fair. In our June survey, 50 per cent of voters agreed with the proposition that both sides of the referendum debate had a fair chance to present their point of view, whereas only 19 per cent disagreed. Although at time of writing we do not yet have post-referendum survey data that would allow us to examine perceptions of fairness from the perspective of winners and losers, the general view suggests that the fairness criteria has been met.

Was the referendum decisive? Although the margin of victory produced a clear No outcome, the meaning of the No vote is far from clear. The pro-Union parties committed to increasing the powers of the Scottish Parliament in the event of a No vote, but did not agree on which powers would be devolved. Consequently, the referendum may have produced a decisive expression on the question of independence, but not on the constitutional status of Scotland within the Union. These are not wholly separate issues. A failure to deliver appropriate new powers could reopen the independence issue. Lord Ashcroft’s post-referendum poll suggested that 61 per cent of Yes voters and 38 per cent of No voters believed the referendum settled the question of independence only for the next five to ten years. Only one in four No voters believed it settled the question forever. The referendum may have been fair, but its decisiveness should not be overstated.

Robert Lineira as a post-doctoral fellow in the ESRC Centre on Constitutional Change

Lesson learned: Trust 16-year olds and schools with politics – Jan Eichorn

One of the unique features of the Scottish independence referendum was the extension of the franchise to include 16 and 17 year olds. This gave us the opportunity to collect representative data on the political attitudes of under 18s, bringing out two core conclusions.

First, young people are interested in and engaged with politics. We need to stop assuming that low voting turnout is associated with political apathy. Their political interest levels were equivalent to those of adults and their engagement with a variety of information sources was impressive. However, many did not find that traditional political institutions provided an avenue for the expression of their political interests. These feelings applied in particular to political parties, which is why many young people are involved in other forms of participation.
Second, the referendum experience suggests that lowering the voting age has the potential to harness this energy and engage young people with representative democracy. This goes beyond the referendum-specific effect (as also evidenced by research in Austria following the lowering of the voting age there). Schools have a crucial role to play. Those young people who had discussed the referendum in class had greater political confidence – an effect that talking to parents could not produce. Fears about inappropriate forms of ideologising school students could not be backed up empirically. To increase young people’s engagement with politics, enfranchising them at 16 and providing a space for engagement through schools would most likely be highly beneficial. Politicisation in schools should be embraced and the great work of teachers supported through appropriate curriculum space and materials.

Jan Eichorn is Chancellor’s Fellow in Sociology at the University of Edinburgh and Principal Investigator on the project ‘Young persons’ attitudes on Scotland’s constitutional future’

Setback or progress for the national movement?

– Nicola McEwen

Does the rejection of independence in the referendum suggest that Scotland’s future is now cemented within the Union? The result was clearly a defeat for the Yes campaign, but for the SNP in particular, the referendum was never only about winning or losing. Viewed historically, securing 45 per cent support for Scotland to be an independent country has to be seen as significant progress for supporters of independence, while the campaign itself generated a mass pro-independence movement which went far beyond the SNP’s rank and file. All of this helps to ensure that debates about Scotland’s place within the Union, and its degree of political autonomy, will continue.

All three UK parties had pledged to strengthen devolution, and are now committed to doing so through a cross-party process under the auspices of the Smith commission. That process includes the SNP, and involves engagement with civic Scotland. It is unlikely to produce a lasting settlement which can appease those whose motivations are to maximise Scotland’s decision-making autonomy. Meanwhile, the SNP has witnessed a dramatic upsurge in party membership – from 25,642 on referendum day to 75,000 (and rising) within two weeks – far higher than all other Scottish parties put together. In the coming months, the SNP will seek to redefine the terms of the ‘devo max’ debate, and try to push their competitors further than they have thus far been willing to go. Going forward, we can expect the SNP to revert to the gradualist strategy that has dominated the party’s recent history, pursuing a more incremental path towards greater Scottish self-government, with independence remaining the medium- to long-term goal.

Nicola McEwen is Professor of Territorial Politics at the University of Edinburgh and Associate Director of the ESRC Centre on Constitutional Change
Scottish devolution: the next steps – Paul Cairney

One of the unfortunate things about the independence referendum campaign was its failure to clarify ‘devo max’. For some, ‘devo max’ refers to the idea of devolving everything except foreign and defence policy – something that can’t happen if Scotland seeks meaningful membership of the UK and the UK remains a member state of the EU. Instead, at the very least, the Bank of England would remain in charge of monetary policy and the UK Government would retain control of many fiscal policies.

In the lead up to the referendum vote, the three UK party leaders offered ‘extensive new powers’ in a remarkably short space of time, with draft legislation to come before the next general election. From that starting point, several obstacles remain. First, the parties will have to agree on extensive new powers in less than a year, when their previous attempts to produce the more-limited Scotland Act 2012 took several years. Second, the balance of power in Westminster after the 2015 election, which is likely to influence the final settlement, is unclear. Third, the devolution of more powers will require more co-operation between the UK and Scottish Governments, to pursue shared aims or distinctly Scottish solutions under a UK framework.

Yet, the experience so far is of two governments working as independently as possible. The potential devolution of economic, welfare, energy, and other powers will not be enough to allow the Scottish public a sense that it can hold the Scottish Government to account for tax and spending decisions. Rather, it will increasingly share responsibilities with the UK. This outcome should prompt us to consider how we can hold such governments to account. If two or three authorities – in Scotland, the UK and EU – share responsibility for many policy choices, how can we blame any one of them at election time for the outcome?

Paul Cairney is Professor of Politics and Public Policy at the University of Stirling and leads research on public policy within the ESRC Centre on Constitutional Change

The English Question – Charlie Jeffery

People in England who went to bed on 18 September 2014 thinking the issue at stake was whether Scotland would vote Yes or No to independence may have been surprised to hear the Prime Minister David Cameron speaking about England at breakfast time on the 19th. In his post-referendum statement, the PM linked the commitment to additional devolution to Scotland that he had promised if Scotland voted No to action on ‘English Votes on English Laws’ (EVEL). EVEL of course is shorthand for MPs from Scotland not being able to vote on legislation in the House of Commons that focuses on England.

Linking Scottish devolution and EVEL was in part about internal party management. Many on the Conservative backbenches think that devolution outside of England – and further devolution for Scotland – leaves people in England without an effective voice in the UK political system. Cameron needed to act on England to shore up his own right flank.

But he also had Labour in his sights in promising action on EVEL. Labour is strong in Scotland. It could emerge from a UK General Election with a UK-wide majority because of its strength in Scotland, but a minority of MPs in England. EVEL could deny a future Labour administration the capacity to deliver policies in England. So Labour doesn’t like the prospect of EVEL. But that could create the impression that it opposes the right of people in England to have their own representative arrangements. That, as the May 2015 UK election approaches, may be a difficult sell in England.

Charlie Jeffery is Professor of Politics and Co-ordinator of the ESRC Future of the UK and Scotland programme
Changing World

young people’s photographic competition

Total prize fund: £2,000  Closing Date: 9 December 2014  Entries open to young people aged 14 to 18*

To enter, or for more information visit: www.esrc.ac.uk/photocomp

* Please see website for full terms and conditions
Dietary health

The eatwell plate highlights the different types of food that make up our diet, and shows the proportions we should eat them in to have a well-balanced and healthy diet. Source: NHS/Department of Health

- Plenty of fruit and vegetables: 33%
- Some meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein: 12%
- Some milk and dairy foods: 15%
- Small amount of foods and drinks high in fat and/or sugar: 8%
- Plenty of bread, rice, potatoes, pasta and other starchy foods: wholegrain when possible: 32%

“Part of the secret of a success in life is to eat what you like and let the food fight it out inside” Mark Twain

Consumer choice

Price is increasingly important in driving product choice, with 41% of shoppers naming it as the most important factor and 88% listing it within their top five influences. Quality was rated as the highest influence by 16% of respondents, followed by taste or smell (12%) and healthy (9%). Promotions are highly influential with 65% listing it in the top 5 factors.

The food sector in GB employed 3.1 million people in Q1 2014 (3.6 million if agriculture and fishing are included along with self-employed farmers), a 2.3% increase on Q1 2013. It covered 11% of GB employment in Q1 2014 (13% if agriculture and fishing are included along with self-employed farmers). Non-residential catering is the largest food sector accounting for 45% of the total (excluding agriculture). Employment in this sector increased 6.1% on Q1 2013 (82,000 employees). Source: Labour Market Statistics (ONS) and June Survey (Defra)
Retail price changes

All food groups have risen in price since 2007 (the start of the recession), with rises ranging from 22% to 57%. Food prices overall (including non-alcoholic drinks) rose 8.6% in real terms between 2007 and 2014. UK retail price changes by food group 2007 to 2014

Food waste

The highest proportion of food and drink waste in the food chain was wasted in households, with 7 million tonnes being thrown away in the UK in 2012, or just under half of the 15 million tonnes. UK food and drink waste through the food chain (million tonnes) 2011-12

Food prices

Food prices rose 18% in real terms between 2007 and their peak in August 2012, following a long period in which they had fallen. Gradual price reductions since early 2013 to June 2014 have reduced that real terms increase to 8.6% compared to 2007. UK trend in food prices in real terms, January 1980 to July 2014 (Index Jan 1980=100)

Expenditure on food

Spend on food shopping has increased 30% since 2007 and accounted for almost half of spend (49%) in the sector in 2013. Spend on catering accounted for 27% of sector spend in 2013 and has increased by 20% since 2007. UK Consumer expenditure on food, drink and catering

“What is food to one man is bitter poison to others”

Lucretius
Safe to eat?

Food safety is in the news, but is the answer simply better regulation and law enforcement or do we need to think again about the conditions under which the food we eat is produced? Steve Hinchliffe, John Allen and Stephanie Lavau explain why chickens suggest an answer.

Food relates to our budgets, our wellbeing, health and, just as importantly, it makes us what we are. It sustains our living tissues and informs our identities. We are, of course, what we eat. In this sense, it is hard not to come to the conclusion that we are, in part, chicken. Fifty-two billion chickens are slaughtered for consumption globally every year. Chicken is the protein source of choice for an increasing number of people. For the world’s main religions, it is considered ‘clean’ and in the global north, white meat seems to offer health benefits, suits modern palates and is relatively cheap. And chicken production is expanding globally as large corporations seek to tap rapidly growing and urbanising protein markets.

This healthy and clean image and the expectation of value for money arose in part from the expertise of mid-twentieth century market innovations in the UK and US that helped to make a highly perishable product into something that could be sold safely and in quantity. The logistics of breeding, the placement of chicks on farms, raising and ‘harvesting’ of fully grown chickens, the post-slaughter packaging and cooling, and delivery in the right numbers and conditions for processors and retailers, made chicken a perfect mass consumer food in the latter decades of the 20th century.

And yet, in recent months, the food we eat has come, once again, to be a matter for concern and analysis, particularly if that food includes meat, fish or poultry. The horsemeat scandal in 2013 drew attention to food adulteration within the shadowy portion of the production chain called ‘processing’. More recently, this concern over the integrity of meat-based products has been re-joined by concerns over contamination of the food we eat with food-borne diseases. It’s a serious matter. The UK’s Food Standards Agency estimated that these food-borne diseases cost the UK economy an estimated £3.5 billion annually.

The most recent food-borne bug of this nature to hit the headlines in tabloids and broadsheets alike is Campylobacter, a bacteria that is regarded as the main cause of food poisoning in the UK and, in more severe cases, is responsible for over 20,000 hospitalisations and over 100 deaths a year. It’s a nasty bug that has emerged as an issue in the last few decades and now has a worldwide distribution. It is most often associated with poultry, and its relatively recent rise up the food risk agenda correlates with the rise of chicken as a staple part of many people’s diets.

Around 65 per cent of raw chicken sold in the UK is thought to be infected with the bug – a high strike rate that is only offset by the reassurance that careful handling and proper cooking of chicken will remove the risk of poisoning. Nevertheless, and to add to the problems, Campylobacter is developing resistance to some of the common anti-microbial drugs that are used to treat the gastroenteritis that can result from infection.

In the press, attention has focused on the ‘accidents’ that can occur along the food chain and that raise the likelihood of bacterial contamination of the parts of the birds that are destined for the table. Carcasses and viscera on the factory floor and breaches of strict hygiene standards along the food chain may, it seems, go unreported and are kept from consumers. Worrying though these breaches are, the inevitable focus by supermarkets on cleaning up the food chain and the very use of the term contamination may paper over some of the key drivers that make Campylobacter and other recently emerging infections more rather than less common.

A focus on mishaps and the negligent, purposeful or inadvertent corruption of an otherwise sound product seem to suggest a social

Campylobacter is developing resistance to some of the common anti-microbial drugs"
science that should attend to human behaviour and its regulation. But an alternative social science approach involves broadening the analysis and questioning the extent to which control can be reasserted by regulators and retailers.

Taking our cue from sociologist Charles Perrow, we’ve suggested that bugs like Campylobacter don’t so much use failures to breach the systems that deliver chicken to the table, rather they breed within that system. In turn, food poisoning should be regarded as a ‘normal’ accident that is characteristic of ‘just-in-time’ production.

Cheap chickens require a tightly coupled system that involves breeding and setting out genetically similar birds in densely stocked, high-volume sheds, the rapid throughput of birds (chickens are finished in half the time compared to only a few decades back), animal bodies that are (in the words of one industry vet) ‘one hand clap’ from diarrhoea, and casual labour that moves from farm to thin and then empty poultry houses at break-neck speed. Viewed in this way, the efforts at disease control that retailers and processors talked to us about look rather optimistic. In short, it doesn’t take much in this system to tip the balance in favour of a bacteria that is already common in the guts of birds and that can, in stressful and high pressure conditions, spread to the muscles and the tissues that people commonly eat.

There are limits to the ways in which further hygiene, control and biosecurity can be implemented in a food system that is so tightly coupled and delicately balanced. Contracts between retailers, processors and growers already specify a great deal about the process. As one processor told us, the major retailers already know more about their suppliers and the farms they source from than any other player in the chain. The problem may not be knowledge and surveillance or the further specification of contract, it may be that the very economics of aiming for mass sales at low margin and the ‘contracted’ or foreshortened lives of chickens conspires to make life less not more safe.

As the anthropologist Sarah Dry has noted, the tendency in dealing with emerging infectious diseases is to adopt a ‘fast-twitch’ or acute approach to a situation that many agree has plenty of ‘slow-twitch’ or chronic causes. And this tendency may be part of the problem. Campylobacter is not unique in this sense – the focus on contamination sets up and offers as a solution an inside/outside dichotomy that is common to a suite of emerging and re-emerging infectious diseases that affect people, environments and both wild and domestic animals.

Keep the disease outside the system and all will be well might be the mantra of biosecurity, but it may be the systems themselves that require diagnoses and treatment. Indeed, as we have detailed in this work, and in a forthcoming book, Pathological Lives, it is not so much the ability to exclude microbes or their vectors from food and farming systems that is key, but it is the terms on which life is produced and the ways in which the inevitable entanglements between hosts, microbes and environments are handled that require critical analysis.
The words that speakers of British English use in casual conversation have changed radically over the last two decades, according to preliminary results of an ongoing study by researchers at Lancaster University’s Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Science (CASS) and Cambridge University Press. Such changes reveal not only what is, or was, important to British English speakers in the 2010s or 1990s, but how public attitudes towards key issues in society have changed between those periods of time.

The study is known as the Spoken British National Corpus 2014, and its researchers have set out to collect a ten-million word collection of conversations between people from across the UK whose first language is British English. This is being done by inviting participants to record conversations from their home life, using the audio recording feature on their mobile phone, and to email them to the researchers. Recordings are being accepted from any and all settings, including family meal times, meeting friends for a coffee, visiting grandparents, car journeys, or simply relaxing in the living room. The researchers then transcribe the conversations and add them to their electronic collection, or corpus, of real-life language data.

So far, the researchers have collected and transcribed two million words of conversations from over two hundred speakers across England. They compared this data to the original version of the Spoken British National Corpus, which was collected in the early 1990s, and found out which words had most radically decreased and increased in use between the two. The words which occurred relatively much less in the new data compared to the old data, and which are said to characterise the conversation of the early 1990s when compared to today, include \textit{fortnight}, \textit{marmalade}, \textit{drawers}, and \textit{cheerio}. In contrast, the words which, relatively, are much more frequent in the new data, and as such characterise the conversation of today when compared to the early 1990s, include \textit{facebook}, \textit{internet}, \textit{website}, \textit{awesome}, \textit{email}, \textit{google}, \textit{smartphone}, \textit{iphone}, \textit{essentially}, and \textit{treadmill}.

These words suggest that the ubiquity of digital communication, and perhaps American culture, have influenced the conversation of the British speakers of today’s society. “These very early findings suggest the things that are most important to British society are indeed reflected in the amount we talk about them. New technologies like Facebook have really captured our attention, to the extent that, if we’re not using it, we’re probably talking about it,” says Lancaster University’s Professor Tony McEnery, who is leading the study with Dr Claire Dembry of Cambridge University Press.

The research team have found so far that the word \textit{Facebook} is now spoken more often than the words \textit{computer}, \textit{internet}, and even \textit{television}. Furthermore, while the speakers in the data collected so far spoke about Facebook more than social media rival Twitter, the researchers suggest that the latter has been more successful at adapting the meaning of an existing word for the purposes of describing the activity of its users. The word \textit{tweet} occurs only in the context of birdsong in the original Spoken British National Corpus, and in the new data this is said to have been entirely replaced by discussion of Twitter activity. The researchers claim that in this way, more so than any words in the ‘vocabulary’ of Facebook users (words such as \textit{status}, \textit{comment}, and \textit{wall}, etc, which have retained earlier
Women seem much less likely to be described based on their appearance or sexualised meanings), Twitter has formed a strong foothold in the lexicon of British English speakers.

As well as this, the data collected so far has allowed the researchers to begin to track how attitudes towards issues in British society have changed since the early 1990s. Whether or not speakers in the present day data are behaving more healthily than their 1990s predecessors, the researchers found that, aside from the occurrence of the word treadmill in the list of words which have risen in use the most drastically, the word calories is twice as frequently spoken as it was in the 1990s data. And the word carbs is said to have become much more popular in present day speech.

Professor McEnery, Dr Dembry and their team predict that this is symptomatic of an increased awareness of food consumption in the country that has allowed such words to become more salient in everyday speech.

Other strands of the research so far attempted to answer the question ‘What do speakers of British English love?’ The findings suggest that the objects of British English speakers’ love have shifted during the 20-year gap between the British National Corpus projects. In the 1990s data, when speakers used the word love, they were most likely to refer to other people in their lives, like members of their family. Twenty years later, the researchers claim that material objects like cheese, gardens and clothes are more likely to be awarded the love of the speakers in the data collected so far.

The researchers have also used the data from the Spoken BNC2014 to track how attitudes towards women have changed over time. In the 1990s British National Corpus, the most commonly used adjectives to describe women were old, young, stupid, pretty, big, naked, nice, silly, married, and beautiful. In the Spoken BNC2014 data, the adjectives are old, young, other, little, many, international, different, crazy, and fifty-year-old. “The most striking difference is that women seem much less likely to be described based on their appearance or, worse, sexualised. So we can see real change taking place before our very eyes in the data already,” said Robbie Love, a researcher on the project. In this sense, the researchers claim, a corpus the size of the Spoken BNC2014, once complete, could be as useful, if not more useful, than survey data for gauging the tastes and opinions of the public.

The Spoken British National Corpus 2014 project is ongoing, and the researchers invite you to participate by emailing corpus@cambridge.org. For every hour of good-quality recording you contribute, you will be paid £18.

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Increasing understanding

The new Chief Executive of the ESRC, Professor Jane Elliott, talks to Society Now about her fascination for research, the priorities and main challenges for the ESRC, and how social science can tell us more about ourselves, our families and societies.

What inspired you to go into academia?

My main motivation was my love of the research process. I was first introduced to data analysis in my second year at Cambridge by the late Cathie Marsh. She was pioneering at the time in emphasising the importance of students having the chance to analyse real data. Then in my third year my dissertation was on the impact of divorce on children, using a questionnaire to find out the perspective of over 350 students on having divorced parents and their attitudes towards divorce and its impact on the family. My supervisor Martin Richards was very supportive of me doing an ambitious empirical project, which was unusual at the time, and it paid off as I won the University Gladstone Memorial Prize. I enjoyed the process of designing the questionnaire, collecting the data, analysing it using SPSS software and writing it up.

Then towards the end of my third year there was a job advertised at the psychiatry department, again analysing data but with a much larger dataset – the Health and Lifestyle Survey. That really got me started on an applied research career and in the early years I worked on several different projects, including one led by Martin Richards that focussed on the impact of divorce on adults and children using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

My involvement with the ESRC goes back to working on data from the Social Change in Economic Life Initiative in the late 1980s with Jill Rubery, and then in the mid-90s I worked on an ESRC project on ‘Putting qualifications to work’ – led by Angela Dale. It made use of the National Child Development Study as well as the Samples of Anonymised Records from the Census. I registered for a part-time PhD, in parallel with that project.

In the early 2000s I applied for an ESRC grant to lead a study on gender segregation in Britain and the United States. It was very beneficial for my career – it gave me the opportunity to pursue a piece of research and direct it myself.

What drew you to the particular areas of research you have specialised in?

I have a longstanding interest in gender and inequalities – in a family setting and in the work environment, which led me to carry out research in these areas. For instance, when I researched divorce I was interested in whether any detrimental impact on children might be due to the poverty that often results from family breakup and the gender differences in the distribution of resources after divorce, rather than a result of potential conflict and lack of continued contact with both parents.

As society changes, and possibly as you get older yourself, your interests change. I’ve become interested in issues around successful ageing, as well as looking at narrative and identities – how people construct an identity for themselves around the narratives they tell about their lives. These narratives are shaped and reworked as we live our lives, so it’s important to get an understanding of time, and change through time. Of course, this fits well with my interest in longitudinal studies as well, where time and change is a core concept.

Why did you choose to move from being a researcher to your new role as Chief Executive of the ESRC?

Over the last ten years my work has become more focused on creating excellent research resources for other people, and facilitating both qualitative and quantitative research. As part of my role as Director of the Centre for Longitudinal Studies I also needed to keep in touch with the needs of policymakers and analysts in government departments. These elements are actually very similar to the role of the ESRC, so in some ways I don’t feel it’s such a big change.

The other thing I think I bring to the ESRC is a real love of data and high quality evidence. We’ll
need to make sure that the ESRC continues to make the best use of the evidence it has, in order to inform potentially difficult, decisions about how to focus funding most effectively in the coming years. **What do you believe is the value of social science?**

That question can be answered on a number of levels. If we focus purely on economic or monetary value, then clearly the social sciences make a major contribution to the UK economy. For instance, research at the ESRC Centre for Economic Learning and Social Evolution helped design the auction of the 3G phone network in 2000, which raised a total of £22.5 billion – four and a half times more than the original estimate of £5 billion. In another example, an economic evaluation of the ESRC-funded UK Data Service from 2011 estimated that it yields between a 2.5 and ten-fold return on investment.

In addition social science has a vital role to play in helping inform and shape policy, for example in reducing crime and making policing and the criminal justice system more effective. In this case social science may add value by reducing costs or reducing the experience and fear of crime, thereby improving people’s lives.

But value should be understood in far broader terms than economic value. The social sciences play a key role in helping us to understand more about ourselves, the families, communities and societies we are part of, and the institutions that we work within. The recent ESRC-funded programme The Future of the UK and Scotland is a good example of the work of social scientists that was made easily available to the public, to help inform their decisions about how to vote in the Scottish independence referendum. The programme illustrates not just the value but also the diversity of the social sciences – including resources on immigration policy, higher education, welfare, defence and security, business, currency and the constitution.

**The ESRC is turning 50 next year. Any thoughts on the organisation’s significance for the social sciences over this time?**

The role of the ESRC arguably remains unchanged since it was granted its Royal Charter 50 years ago. It is still charged with supporting high-quality research and related postgraduate training in the social sciences; to advance knowledge and provide trained social scientists to contribute to the economic competitiveness of the UK, the effectiveness of policy, and the quality of life; and to contribute to the public understanding of the social sciences. This role is as important today as it was in the 1960s.

However, of course, society has changed significantly in the last five decades, and this has led to some changes in the emphasis of social science. Fifty years ago we could not have foreseen the current wide availability of computers and access to the internet. This has resulted both in major changes in people’s lives and communities, but also has yielded an enormous amount of new data and a proliferation of different types of data that between them can provide insights into the behaviours, preferences and constructed identities of individuals.

As the largest funder of social science research in the UK, the ESRC therefore now has the additional responsibility of ensuring that we have...
a robust and flexible infrastructure to enable the analysis of this data. That means not just individuals with the skills to analyse the data, but agreed standards for the documentation and sharing of data and the computing capacity to store, retrieve and handle large scale datasets.

However, large datasets and sophisticated methodologies alone are not sufficient to address the major problems facing modern societies. It is vital that empirical research is underpinned by theory, and it is important that the ESRC provides support for a wide range of different types of projects, including what is sometime called ‘blue skies thinking’.

**Large datasets and sophisticated methodologies alone are not sufficient**

In addition, probably all of the challenges that we face in society today will require interdisciplinary approaches. The ESRC has an important role to play in promoting and facilitating interdisciplinarity - not just between the different social science disciplines, but also across the whole range of science, arts and humanities. The close collaboration between the ESRC and the other six research councils within RCUK is an important part of this work which I look forward to building on.

**What are the main priorities and challenges facing the ESRC?**

As we face continued austerity, a priority for the ESRC is to fund excellent social science as cost-effectively as possible. We need to use our own administrative data to help us to improve internal processes and become as efficient as possible. The corollary of this is that we need to ensure that, with appropriate security safeguards, the routine administrative and health data generated by government departments, the education sector and the health service is made available to researchers. Analysis of this data, in tandem with the rich and detailed information that is being collected by the UK’s unique portfolio of longitudinal studies, can potentially shape practice and inform policy. In this way we can also help make sure that scarce resources are targeted towards those who need them most in our society.

It will also be a priority to provide support and funding for each new cohort of PhD students to ensure that we not only have future academic researchers in disciplines across the social sciences, but also that we have highly educated social scientists to contribute to government, the third sector and business.

And not least, we need to help researchers engage with business, the third sector and the wider public, so that people gain a better understanding of the value of the social sciences. During my career, I have seen that people are fascinated by questions such as ‘What is the long-term impact of divorce on children?’; ‘Does it harm young children if both the mother and the father go out to work?’; ‘How do young people’s aspirations impact on their later careers?’ The media are often keen to provide coverage of such issues. However people do not always realise that it is social science research that provides evidence-based answers to such questions. It is important that we make the case for the value of the social sciences, and show the fundamental role they play in helping us do the best for our communities and families and how we can reach our own full potential.
NEWS BRIEFS

ESRC CELEBRATING IMPACT PRIZE 2015
Applications are now being welcomed for the ESRC’s third annual Celebrating Impact Prize.

The prize provides an opportunity to recognise and reward ESRC-funded researchers who have achieved, or are achieving, outstanding economic or societal impacts through their work. Applicants are also encouraged to nominate an Impact Champion – an individual who has inspired and enabled them to make a difference with their research.

As part of the ESRC’s 50th anniversary celebrations in 2015, any academic who has ever received ESRC funding - from 1965 to the present day – is eligible to apply. Whether by engaging with policymakers, shaping business practice or changing everyday life for a section of society, researchers who have made a difference could win a share of £90,000 prize money to further the impact of their work.

The categories are:

Outstanding Impact in Business
Recognising research which has brought about impact within business, management, commerce or industry. This could include benefits to a business through a direct change in practice or management structures, or through skills and training. It could also include benefits to a range of businesses by addressing a common challenge in new ways, with evidence of businesses responding to the research.

Outstanding Impact in Public Policy
Recognising research that has contributed to the development of public policy at the local, regional or national government level. This could include direct changes in policy or changes to how decision-makers view issues, supported by evidence that the research has been taken up and used by policymakers.

Outstanding Impact in Society
Recognising research that has made a contribution benefiting society or a specific group of the public. This could include impacts from working with local or community groups, charities or wider society, supported by evidence that the research has made a difference.

Outstanding International Impact
Recognising research that has achieved impact at an international level in business, policy or societal issues, demonstrating collaboration across multiple countries and an impact in countries beyond those where the research was undertaken.

Outstanding Early Career Impact
Recognising current students, and those who have submitted their thesis within the last three years, who have made an impact in any of the areas outlined above.

Impact Champion – sponsored by SAGE
Recognising an individual with a significant personal track record in inspiring, supporting and enabling others to achieve impact. The nominated individual does not have to be an academic and may be working in an administrative role within a centre, department, school, or university.

Applications close on 20 November. For more information, see: www.esrc.ac.uk/impactprize

HOW TO GET TO 100 – AND ENJOY IT
The ESRC Centre for Population Change brings a unique, interactive exhibition to the UK, which explores how our population is changing.

What are your chances of living to 100? How do your early years, your family life, where you live, your lifestyle and your work affect these chances? With one in three children born in 2014 expected to live to 100, these key questions have never been more relevant.

Touring six UK cities, the exhibition uses the latest iPad-technology to display up-to-the-minute research findings via interactive games, quizzes, pictures, interviews and easy-to-understand graphs and texts.

In addition, using research from the ESRC-funded Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity along with Census data, the local demographic story in each of the cities visited will be told through animated infographics.

The exhibition will provide a platform for the launch of the ESRC Festival of Social Sciences at its London venue, gallery@oxo. “We are delighted to bring the exhibition to the UK audience and celebrate social science research and the contribution from demography, gerontology and other disciplines” says CPC Director, Professor Jane Falkingham.

For more information, please visit: www.liveto100.cpc.ac.uk
Exhibition venues
gallery@oxo, London
29 October - 2 November
The Lowry, Manchester
10-14 November
Silverburn, Glasgow
17-21 November
Millennium Point, Birmingham
25-28 November
National Assembly for Wales
2-4 December

Exhibition venues

People

PROFESSOR JUDITH SQUIRES APPOINTED TO ESRC COUNCIL
Greg Clark, the Minister of State for Universities, Science and Cities, has appointed Professor Judith Squires as a new Council member for the ESRC.

Professor Squires is Pro Vice-Chancellor for Education and Students at the University of Bristol, where she leads on teaching and learning and champions the university’s Engaged University strategy to foster knowledge exchange activities and user engagement across the broad portfolio of its activities.

Judith is a scholar of Politics and International Relations and previously held the post of Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences and Law at the University of Bristol. She has a strong connection with the ESRC having held previous positions as Director of the ESRC South West Doctoral Training Centre and as a member of the Training and Skills Committee, Impact Network and Peer Review College. She is a member of the REF Sub-panel 21, and a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and the Royal Society of Arts (RSA).

Professor Judith Squires has been appointed to Council for four years from 1 September 2014 to 31 August 2018.

LORD STERN HONOURED BY THE BRITISH INSTITUTE OF ENERGY ECONOMICS
Professor Lord Stern of Brentford, Chair of the ESRC Centre for Climate Change Economics and Policy and the Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment at LSE, has received a prize from the British Institute of Energy Economics (BIEE) for the greatest contribution to British energy economics over the last ten years.

Members of the BIEE nominated the individual whom they believe has made the greatest contribution to British energy economics during the last decade. The committee was unanimous in recommending that Lord Stern should receive the prize. It was noted that his 2006 Review of the Economics of Climate Change has been the most influential single piece of energy economics published over the last decade, with important implications for both government policy and company strategies.

Lord Stern said: "It’s a tremendous honour to be given this award by the British Institute of Energy Economics. The Institute has played a leading role in public discussion of issues around energy and the economics of energy for a very long time. Indeed I think it has defined in many ways what a serious discussion on those issues should be."

BRISTOL ACADEMICS ELECTED FELLOWS OF THE BA
Professor Carol Propper of the Department of Economics and Professor Tony Prosser of the University of Bristol Law School have been elected Fellows of the British Academy, the national academy for the humanities and social sciences.

Currently Professor of Economics at Imperial College Business School, Carol Propper CBE helped to found the Centre for Market and Public Organisation at the University of Bristol, which has attracted major research funding from a number of bodies. She was Director of the Centre from 1998-2009.

She acted as Senior Economic Advisor to NHS Executive on Regulation of the NHS Internal Market 1993-4 and Co-Director of the Centre for the Analysis of Social Exclusion at London School of Economics from 1997-2007, and chaired the ESRC research grants board until 2009.

Tony Prosser was appointed Professor of Public Law at the University of Bristol in 2002, having previously been John Millar Professor of Law at the University of Glasgow and having taught at the Universities of Sheffield and Hull. He was also a Jean Monnet Fellow at the European University Institute, Florence.

His main research interests are in Public Law relating to economic management, privatisation and regulation.

CHANGING WORLD – PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION 2015
Can you capture one aspect of the changing world in a single image? Are you aged 14 to 18 and have an interest in photography or the social sciences? If so, then this competition is for you.

In 2015 the ESRC celebrates 50 years of supporting world-class social science research. Over the last 50 years our research has helped change the world, providing deep insights into key social and economic questions.

Social science research plays a vital role in our society. From big ideas to the most detailed observations, social science affects us all every day - at work, in school or college, within our communities, when exploring our identities and expressing our beliefs.

As part of our 50th anniversary celebrations, this year’s photographic competition will examine how the world has changed over the last 50 years, how will it continue to change and what social sciences can tell us.

The competition offers six diverse categories for you to enter, ranging from the family to technology to the environment. Your images should convey how you think the world has changed or will continue to change.

Submit your images using the online entry form: www.esrc.ac.uk/news-and-events/events/photographic-competition/enter.aspx

Any questions? Email us at photocomp@esrc.ac.uk
Publications

Frontier Encounters: Knowledge and Practice at the Russian, Chinese and Mongolian Border

This book presents a wide range of views on how the borders between these countries are enacted, produced, and crossed. It also sheds light on global uncertainties: China’s search for energy resources and the employment of its huge population; Russia’s fear of Chinese migration; and the precarious economic independence of Mongolia as its neighbours negotiate to extract its plentiful resources. The book is available in hardback, paperback and e-book or read for free on the publisher’s website.

India’s Risks: Democratizing the Management of Threats to Environment, Health, and Values

A prospective superpower, India is still grappling with a host of risks that threaten to hamper its progress. These range from environmental threats caused by GM crops and pollution; dangers to health from HIV/AIDS and maternal mortality; safety concerns about natural hazards, nuclear power, and industrial disasters; and challenges to livelihoods and values. This book explores some of these risks and challenges many of the dominant perspectives in India.

Good times, bad times: The welfare myth of them and us

This ground-breaking book, written by one of the UK’s leading social policy experts, uses extensive research and survey evidence to challenge the myth that the population divides into those who benefit from the welfare state and those who pay into it – ‘skivers’ and ‘strivers’, ‘them’ and ‘us’. It shows that our complex and ever-changing lives mean that all of us rely on the welfare state throughout our lifetimes, not just a small ‘welfare-dependent’ minority.

Thrive: the Power of Evidence Based Psychological Therapies

Britain has become a world leader in providing psychological therapies but the majority of people who need help still don’t get treatment. Thrive explores the new effective solutions to the misery and injustice caused by mental illness. It describes how successful psychological treatments have been developed and explains what works best for whom. It also urges us to do all we can to prevent these problems in the first place, through better schools and a better society. And it offers real hope.

Events

5-6 November

Innovate UK 2014

The UK is a world-leading environment to set up and grow a business with an incredible eco-system of government, academic and institutional support. Both UK and international investors seek to identify such businesses – Innovate UK 2014 is the event to find these new partners.

To register, visit the Innovate UK 2014 website: www.events.ukti.gov.uk/tsb-innovate

28 November

Labour Force Survey/Annual Population Survey user conference

The next Labour Force Survey/Annual Population Survey user conference is being organised by the UK Data Service for 28 November 2014.

The programme will contain a mixture of papers from the data producers, ONS, and researchers. Presentations will be based on analysis of the UK Labour Force Survey or Annual Population Survey.

4 December

Autumn Statement 2014: IFS analysis

The Autumn Statement 2014 will be made by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, George Osborne, on Wednesday 3 December. IFS researchers will present their analysis at a briefing the following day.

This event has been organised by the ESRC Centre for the Microeconomic Analysis of Public Policy at the IFS. Please email events@ifs.org.uk with your name, relevant affiliations, contact details and invoicing details. IFS members: £20; IFS non-members: £40. www.ifs.org.uk/events/1089

30 January 2015

The Politics of Wellbeing, Seminar 4/6

The Politics of Wellbeing seminar series is an ESRC-funded interdisciplinary project aiming to identify and communicate the distinctive contribution the politics discipline can make to the wellbeing debate and policy development in the UK and beyond.

Seminar questions: What is the relationship between the wellbeing agenda and debates on new growth/growth plus/sustainable growth models, post-financial crisis?

How might this dialogue be developed most productively for policymakers?

politicalwellbeing.group@shef.ac.uk
The ESRC magazine *Society Now* aims to raise awareness of our research and its impact. It addresses a wide range of readers, from the MP to the businessperson, the voluntary worker to the teacher, the public through to the social scientist, and is published three times a year (spring, summer and autumn).

*Society Now* offers a readable, intelligent, concise overview of current issues concerning society.

To subscribe to the magazine, please send an email including your full name and address to: societynow@esrc.ac.uk