
Social Scientists, Other

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Significant Points

- About 41 percent of these workers are employed by governments, mostly by the Federal Government.
- The educational attainment of social scientists is among the highest of all occupations, with most positions requiring a master's or Ph.D. degree.
- Overall employment is projected to grow about as fast as the average for all occupations, but varies by specialty.
- Job seekers may face competition, and those with higher educational attainment will have the best prospects.

Nature of the Work

The major social science occupations covered in this statement are anthropologists, archaeologists, geographers, historians, political scientists, and sociologists. (Economists, market and survey researchers, psychologists, and urban and regional planners are covered elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Social scientists study all aspects of society—from past events and achievements to human behavior and relationships among groups. Their research provides insights into the different ways individuals, groups, and institutions make decisions, exercise power, and respond to change. Through their studies and analyses, social scientists suggest solutions to social, business, personal, governmental, and environmental problems. In fact, many work as policy analysts for government or private organizations.

Research is a major activity of many social scientists, who use a variety of methods to assemble facts and construct theories. Applied research usually is designed to produce information that will enable people to make better decisions or manage their affairs more effectively. Social scientists often begin by collecting existing information. Collecting information takes many forms, including conducting interviews and questionnaires to gather demographic and opinion data, living and working among the population being studied, performing other field investigations, and experimenting with human or animal subjects in a laboratory. Social scientists also look at data in detail, such as studying the data they've collected, reanalyzing already existing data, analyzing historical records and documents, and interpreting maps and the effect of location on culture and other aspects of society. Following are several major types of social scientists. Specialists in one field may find that their research overlaps work being conducted in another discipline.

Anthropologists study the origin and the physical, social, and cultural development and behavior of humans. They may examine the way of life, archaeological remains, language, or physical characteristics of people in various parts of the world. Some compare the customs, values, and social patterns of different cultures. Anthropologists usually concentrate in sociocultural anthropology, linguistics, biophysical, or physical anthropology. Sociocultural anthropologists study the customs, cultures, and social lives of groups in settings that range from unindus-

trialized societies to modern urban centers. Linguistic anthropologists investigate the role of, and changes to, language over time in various cultures. Biophysical anthropologists research the evolution of the human body, look for the earliest evidences of human life, and analyze how culture and biology influence one another. Physical anthropologists examine human remains found at archaeological sites in order to understand population demographics and factors, such as nutrition and disease, which affected these populations. *Archaeologists* examine and recover material evidence including the ruins of buildings, tools, pottery, and other objects remaining from past human cultures in order to determine the history, customs, and living habits of earlier civilizations. With continued technological advances making it increasingly possible to detect the presence of underground anomalies without digging, archaeologists will be able to better target excavation sites. Another technological advancement is the use of geographic information systems (GIS) for tasks such as analyzing how environmental factors near a site may have affected the development of a society. Most anthropologists and archaeologists specialize in a particular region of the world.

Political scientists study the origin, development, and operation of political systems and public policy. They conduct research on a wide range of subjects, such as relations between the United States and other countries, the institutions and political life of nations, the politics of small towns or major metropolises, and the decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court. Studying topics such as public opinion, political decision making, ideology, and public policy, they analyze the structure and operation of governments, as well as various political entities. Depending on the topic, a political scientist might conduct a public-opinion survey, analyze election results or public documents, or interview public officials.

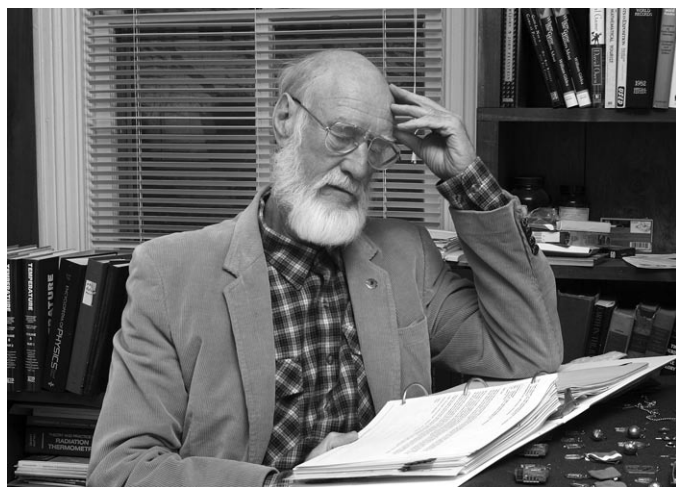
Sociologists study society and social behavior by examining the groups, cultures, organizations, and social institutions people form. They also study the activities in which people participate, including social, religious, political, economic, and business organizations. They study the behavior of, and interaction among, groups, organizations, institutions, and nations and how they react to phenomena such as the spread of technology, health epidemics, crime, and social movements. They also trace the origin and growth of these groups and interactions. Sociologists analyze how social influences affect different individuals. They also are concerned with the ways organizations and institutions affect the daily lives of individuals and groups. To analyze social patterns, sociologists design research projects that use a variety of methods, including historical analysis, comparative analysis, and quantitative and qualitative techniques. The results of sociological research aid educators, lawmakers, administrators, and others who are interested in resolving social problems and formulating public policy. Most sociologists work in one or more specialties, such as social organization, stratification, and mobility; racial and ethnic relations; education; the family; social psychology; urban, rural, political, and comparative sociology; gender relations; demography; gerontology; criminology; and sociological practice.

Geographers analyze distributions of physical and cultural phenomena on local, regional, continental, and global scales. Economic geographers study the distribution of resources and economic activities. Political geographers are concerned with the relationship of geography to political phenomena, and cultural geographers study the geography of cultural phenomena.

Physical geographers examine variations in climate, vegetation, soil, and landforms and their implications for human activity. Urban and transportation geographers study cities and metropolitan areas. Regional geographers study the physical, economic, political, and cultural characteristics of regions ranging in size from a congressional district to entire continents. Medical geographers investigate health care delivery systems, epidemiology (the study of the causes and control of epidemics), and the effect of the environment on health. Most geographers use GIS technology to assist with their work. For example, they may use GIS to create computerized maps that can track information such as population growth, traffic patterns, environmental hazards, natural resources, and weather patterns, after which they use the information to advise governments on the development of houses, roads, or landfills. Many of the people who study geography and work with GIS technology are classified in other occupations, such as surveyors, cartographers, photogrammetrists, and survey technicians (who develop maps and other location-based information), urban and regional planners (who help to decide on and evaluate the locations of building and roads and other aspects of physical society), and geoscientists (who study earthquakes and other physical aspects of the Earth). (These occupations are described elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

Historians research, analyze, and interpret the past. They use many sources of information in their research, including government and institutional records, newspapers and other periodicals, photographs, interviews, films, and unpublished manuscripts such as personal diaries and letters. Historians usually specialize in a country or region, a particular period, or a particular field, such as social, intellectual, cultural, political, or diplomatic history. Other historians help study and preserve archival materials, artifacts, and historic buildings and sites.

Work environment. Most social scientists have regular hours. Generally working behind a desk, either alone or in collaboration with other social scientists, they read and write research articles or reports. Many experience the pressures of writing and publishing, as well as those associated with deadlines and tight schedules. Sometimes they must work overtime, for which they usually are not compensated. Social scientists often work as



Social scientists need strong research, analytical, and writing skills.

an integral part of a research team. Travel may be necessary to collect information or attend meetings. Social scientists on foreign assignment must adjust to unfamiliar cultures, climates, and languages.

Some social scientists do fieldwork. For example, anthropologists, archaeologists, and geographers may travel to remote areas, live among the people they study, learn their languages, and stay for long periods at the site of their investigations. They may work under rugged conditions, and their work may involve strenuous physical exertion.

Social scientists employed by colleges and universities usually have flexible work schedules, often dividing their time among teaching, research, writing, consulting, and administrative responsibilities. Those who teach in these settings are classified as postsecondary teachers.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

The educational attainment of social scientists is among the highest of all occupations, with most positions requiring a master's or Ph.D. degree.

Education and training. Graduates with master's degrees in applied specialties usually are qualified for positions outside of colleges and universities, although requirements vary by field. A Ph.D. degree may be required for higher-level positions. Bachelor's degree holders have limited opportunities and do not qualify for most of the occupations discussed above. A bachelor's degree does, however, provide a suitable background for many different kinds of entry-level jobs in related occupations, such as research assistant, writer, management trainee, or market analyst.

Training in statistics and mathematics is essential for many social scientists. Geographers, political scientists, and those in other fields increasingly use mathematical and quantitative research methods. The ability to use computers for research purposes is mandatory in most disciplines. Social scientists also must keep up-to-date on the latest technological advances that affect their discipline and research. For example, most geographers use GIS technology extensively, and GIS is also becoming more commonly used by archaeologists, sociologists, and other workers.

Many social science students also benefit from internships or field experience. Numerous local museums, historical societies, government agencies, non-profit and other organizations offer internships or volunteer research opportunities. Archaeological field schools instruct future anthropologists, archaeologists, and historians in how to excavate, record, and interpret historical sites.

Other qualifications. Social scientists need excellent written and oral communication skills to report research findings and to collaborate on research. Successful social scientists also need intellectual curiosity and creativity because they constantly seek new information about people, things, and ideas. The ability to think logically and methodically is also essential to analyze complicated issues, such as the relative merits of various forms of government. Objectivity, an open mind, and systematic work habits are important in all kinds of social science research. Perseverance, too, is often necessary, as when an anthropologist

spends years studying artifacts from an ancient civilization before making a final analysis and interpretation.

Advancement. Some social scientists advance to top-level research and administrative positions. Advancement often depends on the number and quality of reports that social scientists publish or their ability to design studies.

Many social scientists choose to teach in their field, often while pursuing their own research. These workers are usually classified as postsecondary teachers. The minimum requirement for most positions in colleges and universities is a Ph.D. degree. Graduates with a master’s degree in a social science may qualify for teaching positions in community colleges. Social science graduates with sufficient education courses can qualify for teaching positions in secondary and elementary schools.

Employment

Social scientists held about 18,000 jobs in 2006. Many worked as researchers, administrators, and counselors for a wide range of employers. About 41 percent worked for Federal, State, and local governments, mostly for the Federal Government. Other employers included scientific research and development services; management, scientific, and technical consulting services; business, professional, labor, political, and similar organizations; and architectural, engineering, and related firms.

Many individuals with training in a social science discipline teach in colleges and universities and in secondary and elementary schools. (For more information, see teachers—postsecondary and teachers—preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary elsewhere in the *Handbook*.) The proportion of social scientists who teach varies by specialty. For example, graduates in history are more likely to teach than are graduates in most other social science fields.

The following tabulation shows employment, by social science specialty.

Anthropologists and archeologists.....	5,500
Political scientists.....	4,700
Sociologists.....	3,700
Historians.....	3,400
Geographers.....	1,100

Job Outlook

Overall employment is projected to grow about as fast as average, but varies by detailed occupation. Job seekers may face

competition, and those with higher educational attainment will have the best prospects.

Employment change. Overall employment of social scientists is expected to grow 10 percent from 2006 to 2016, about as fast as the average for all occupations. However, projected growth rates vary by specialty. Anthropologists and archaeologists, sociologists, and historians are projected to grow about as fast as average. Employment of geographers and political scientists is projected to grow more slowly than average, reflecting the relatively few opportunities outside of the Federal Government. Employment is projected to decline slowly in the Federal Government, a key employer of social scientists.

The following tabulation shows projected percent change in employment, by social science specialty.

	Percent
Anthropologists and archeologists.....	15
Sociologists.....	10
Historians.....	8
Geographers.....	6
Political scientists.....	5

Anthropologists and archaeologists will experience the majority of their job growth in the management, scientific, and technical consulting services industry. Anthropologists who work as consultants apply anthropological knowledge and methods to problems ranging from economic development issues to forensics. As construction projects increase, more archaeologists also will be needed to monitor the work, ensuring that historical sites and artifacts are preserved.

Political scientists, sociologists, and historians will mainly find jobs in policy or research. Demand for political science research is growing because of increasing interest about politics and foreign affairs, including social and environmental policy issues and immigration. Political scientists will use their knowledge of political institutions to further the interests of nonprofit, political lobbying, and social organizations. Likewise, the incorporation of sociology into research in other fields will continue to increase the need for sociologists. They may find work conducting policy research for consulting firms and nonprofit organizations, and their knowledge of society and social behavior may be used by a variety of companies in product development, marketing, and advertising. Historians may find opportunities with historic preservation societies or working as a consultant as public interest in preserving and restoring historical sites increases.

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-2016	
				Number	Percent
Social scientists, other.....	—	54,000	58,000	3,500	6
Sociologists.....	19-3041	3,700	4,100	400	10
Anthropologists and archeologists.....	19-3091	5,500	6,400	800	15
Geographers.....	19-3092	1,100	1,200	100	6
Historians.....	19-3093	3,400	3,700	300	8
Political scientists.....	19-3094	4,700	4,900	300	5

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

Geographers will work advising government, real estate developers, utilities, and telecommunications firms on where to build new roads, buildings, power plants, and cable lines. Geographers also will advise on environmental matters, such as where to build a landfill or preserve wetland habitats. Geographers with a background in GIS will find numerous job opportunities applying GIS technology in nontraditional areas, such as emergency assistance, where GIS can track locations of ambulances, police, and fire rescue units and their proximity to the emergency. Workers in these jobs may not necessarily be called “geographers,” but instead may be referred to by a different title, such as “GIS analyst” or “GIS specialist.”

Job prospects. In addition to opportunities from employment growth, some job openings for social scientists will come from the need to replace those who retire, enter teaching or other occupations, or leave their social science occupation for other reasons.

People seeking social science positions may face competition for jobs, and those with higher educational attainment will have the best prospects. Many jobs in policy, research, or marketing for which social scientists qualify are not advertised exclusively as social scientist positions. Because of the wide range of skills and knowledge possessed by these social scientists, many compete for jobs with other workers, such as market and survey researchers, psychologists, engineers, urban and regional planners, and statisticians.

Some people with social science degrees will find opportunities as university faculty rather than as applied social scientists. Although there will be keen competition for tenured positions, the number of faculty expected to retire over the decade and the increasing number of part-time or short-term faculty positions will lead to better opportunities in colleges and universities than in the past. The growing importance and popularity of social science subjects in secondary schools also is strengthening the demand for social science teachers at that level.

Earnings

In May 2006, anthropologists and archaeologists had median annual wage-and-salary earnings of \$49,930; geographers, \$62,990; historians, \$48,520; political scientists, \$90,140; and sociologists, \$60,290.

In the Federal Government, social scientists with a bachelor’s degree and no experience often started at a yearly salary of \$28,862 or \$35,572 in 2007, depending on their college records. Those with a master’s degree could start at \$43,731, and those with a Ph.D. degree could begin at \$52,912, while some individuals with experience and an advanced degree could start at \$63,417. Beginning salaries were higher in selected areas of the country where the prevailing local pay level was higher.

Related Occupations

The duties and training of these social scientists are similar to other social scientists, including economists, market and survey researchers, psychologists, and urban and regional planners. Many social scientists conduct surveys, study social problems,

teach, and work in museums, performing tasks similar to those of statisticians; counselors; social workers; teachers—post-secondary; teachers—preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary; and archivists, curators, and museum technicians.

Political scientists often research the function of government, including the legal system, as do lawyers; paralegals and legal assistants; and judges, magistrates, and other judicial workers. Many political scientists analyze and report on current events, as do news analysts, reporters, and correspondents.

Geographers often study the Earth’s environment and natural resources, as do conservation scientists and foresters, atmospheric scientists, and environmental scientists and hydrologists. Geographers also use GIS computer technology to make maps. Other occupations with similar duties include surveyors, cartographers, photogrammetrists, and surveying technicians; computer systems analysts; and computer scientists and database administrators.

Sources of Additional Information

For information about careers in anthropology, contact:

► American Anthropological Association, 2200 Wilson Blvd., Suite 600, Arlington, VA 22201.

Internet: <http://www.aaanet.org>

For information about careers in archaeology, contact:

► Archaeological Institute of America, 656 Beacon St., 6th Floor, Boston, MA 02215. Internet: <http://www.archaeological.org>

► Society for American Archaeology, 900 2nd St.NE., Suite 12, Washington, DC 20002. Internet: <http://www.saa.org>

For information about careers in geography, contact:

► Association of American Geographers, 1710 16th St.NW., Washington, DC 20009. Internet: <http://www.aag.org>

Also see “Geography jobs,” in the spring 2005 issue of the Occupational Outlook Quarterly and online at:

<http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2005/spring/art01.pdf>

Information on careers for historians is available from:

► American Historical Association, 400 A St.SE., Washington, DC 20003. Internet: <http://www.historians.org>

For information about careers in political science, contact:

► American Political Science Association, 1527 New Hampshire Ave. NW., Washington, DC 20036.

Internet: <http://www.apsanet.org>

► National Association of Schools of Public Affairs and Administration, 1029 Vermont Ave. NW., Suite 1100, Washington, DC 20005. Internet: <http://www.naspaa.org>

Information about careers in sociology is available from:

► American Sociological Association, 1307 New York Ave. NW., Suite 700, Washington, DC 20005.

Internet: <http://www.asanet.org>

For information about careers in policy analysis, an important task for some social scientists, see “Policy analysts: Shaping society through research and problem-solving,” online at <http://www.bls.gov/opub/ooq/2007/spring/art03.pdf> and in the spring 2007 issue of the Occupational Outlook Quarterly.