

# **EMERGING CONSENSUS ON DIGITAL DYNAMICS**

## **THE KNIGHT RESEARCH NETWORK IN YEAR 4**

**ASSESSMENT REPORT  
JOHN S. AND JAMES L. KNIGHT FOUNDATION  
KNIGHT RESEARCH NETWORK, 2023**

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**COMMISSIONED BY**



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# Executive Summary

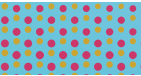
This report analyzes activities of the Knight Research Network (KRN) in its fourth year. Established in 2019 through Knight Foundation's \$50 million commitment to catalyze a new field of academic research at the intersection of technology, media and democracy, the KRN now enters its fifth year. As several of Knight Foundation's initial grants creating or scaling research centers now draw to a close, the KRN is approaching a significant milestone. It is appropriate that Knight Foundation and grantees begin to reflect on what has been built and what might come next. The fourth in a series of evaluation-and-learning assessments, this report focuses specifically on outputs and outcomes in the calendar year 2023.<sup>1</sup> It also consolidates longer-term perspectives from grantees about progress and challenges for KRN. This assessment finds:

- In 2023, KRN researchers published 820 articles across a wide array of high-impact venues, including more than two dozen studies in the world's top general science journals—such as Nature, Science and PNAS (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences)—and dozens of articles in major media outlets. This compares with about 900 articles over the last period studied (2021–2022).
- KRN researchers participated in or hosted more than 800 speaking engagements through podcasts, webinars and conferences. These included briefings to branches of the U.S. federal government such as Congress and the White House, institutions across civil society and the technology and media sector. This also compares with about 900 speaking engagements during the last year-long period studied.
- The network saw a considerable rise—a doubling—of media coverage. Researchers were mentioned or were involved in nearly 2,900 written, audio or video media pieces, compared to 1,400 over the last period studied (2021–2022).
- KRN continues to face significant challenges to enhancing its access to data for research purposes since its establishment.
- The network's connective capabilities continue to improve. There is substantial evidence that researchers are finding more ways to connect, collaborate, amplify one another and plan projects and events together.
- Newer themes in the research and scholarship appeared in 2023, expanding KRN's collective scope of research. Researchers are responding to external events, such as increased public attention to questions of trust, safety and ethics related to artificial intelligence (A.I.), harms to minors and the study of digital platforms from the perspective of economics and law.

<sup>1</sup> The three prior KRN reports (2020–22) can be found [here](#).



- There is a need to synthesize disparate lines of research and make their implications clear to policymakers and industry professionals. Knight Foundation or the Knight-Georgetown Institute might convene field leaders to consider paths toward reaching academic consensus on key topics, ultimately to help craft policy-relevant outputs that inform public policy, industry decision-making and future philanthropy.
- Knight Foundation should continue to monitor the speed and scale of research translation efforts, particularly as KRN's new Knight-Georgetown Institute builds its full capacity. The speed at which KRN's research is made actionable for society's decision-makers directly bears on its impact.



# Introduction

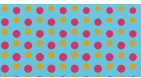
At the outset of its grantmaking, Knight Foundation leadership promoted the concept of field-building, echoing the intentional, measured growth of the public health field in the early 20th century—a “new field of study on an informed society in a digital age.”<sup>2</sup> Academic experts affirmed this vision, declaring that “a new field is forming.”<sup>3</sup> Knight Foundation has since seeded more projects with a diverse array of organizations, developing a wider strategic framework of “media and democracy” that seeks to make contributions through many disciplines while still focusing on dynamics relating to digital, online and informational spaces. Disciplines included within Knight Foundation’s framework are “social science, data science, computer science, humanities, journalism and the law.”<sup>4</sup> Knight Foundation has articulated a three-pronged funding strategy: 1) Accelerate research, 2) Build a diverse network of experts and 3) Connect research to nonpartisan policy impact.

KRN launched just before the COVID-19 pandemic era and the tumult that characterized the period 2020-21. Those events catalyzed a massive amount of research and engaged scholarship to respond to the emergency. By 2023, the year evaluated in this report, it appears that the network has developed a more consistent output cadence. It has created and boosted a wide and diverse bench of experts at the intersection of media, technology and democracy who regularly connect with policymakers, journalists and civil society organizations. The aggregate output of research products (papers, articles, op-eds) and engagements (talks, testimonies, convenings) is substantial and continues to grow, albeit at a more incremental pace compared to the rapid growth of its early years.

KRN’s structure remains a decentralized or “loosely coupled” network or community of practice. Beyond a reasonably active, supported listserv and a major annual convening, the network is largely self-organizing. From the outset, Knight Foundation has taken a supportive and attentive posture towards grantees as they work but has maintained a largely arm’s-length approach to connectivity within the network. Knight Foundation has awarded grants to individual researchers and single institutions, not multi-institutional grants that demand greater collaboration. Further, over the first four years there has been no centralized coordinating body or entity, and the network of institutions was meant to grow organically without top-down direction, although Knight Foundation recently awarded a grant that funded the establishment of the Knight-Georgetown Institute to enhance coordination among the network and field more broadly. Knight Foundation has hosted two convenings of the KRN—dubbed INFORMED: Conversations on Democracy in the Digital Age—and has sponsored convenings and special events among grantees to further encourage collaboration and connectivity within the field.<sup>5</sup> As this report describes below, KRN grantees have found ways to connect with one another through diverse and creative pathways.

As of December 2023, Knight Foundation committed \$107 million in grant support to researchers across roughly 60 colleges and universities and personnel in nearly 40 civil society organizations. Since Knight Foundation’s initial \$48 million in investments to 57 grantees in 2019, the total dollars invested and number of organizations involved has roughly doubled.

2 Sam Gill, *Why Knight Foundation Is Investing in a New Field of Study on an Informed Society in a Digital Age*, Knight Foundation (Oct. 1, 2018).  
 3 Nathaniel Persily and Joshua A. Tucker, “Introduction,” In *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 1-9.  
 4 *Media and Democracy in the Digital Age*, Knight Foundation.  
 5 *INFORMED Conference Series*, Knight Foundation.

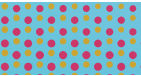


# I. Methods, Questions and Findings

## Methods and Questions

In coordination with Knight Foundation, the evaluator fielded a survey in winter 2024 with all active organizations in the KRN, gathering information about their activities throughout 2023 and asking for perspectives on the KRN and their fields and subfields of research and policy focus. This process resulted in more than 50 completed surveys, with grantees documenting their personnel, media, scholarship and speaking/events outputs.<sup>6</sup> They also commented on questions relating to the impact of the network and their perceived areas of emerging research consensus. The evaluator also did extensive field interviews during Knight Foundation's second INFORMED conference in January 2024 and followed up with additional interviews to explore themes that the survey responses raised. Selected individual leaders were also asked to give insights about how Knight Foundation funding and collaboration with the KRN have affected their career and individual research programs over the past four years.

The analytical framework for the evaluator's inquiry was based on the three prior KRN reports that spanned 2020, 2021 and 2022. Knight Foundation sees its goal as catalyzing a field of research. In prior years of this assessment, this evaluator has identified key areas which have been barriers to or necessary for accomplishing this goal. As this report will discuss, the 2023 evaluation-and-learning report focuses its analysis on five areas that previous assessments have identified as areas of opportunity. They include: 1) Increasing researcher access to data, 2) Increasing connectivity within the KRN, 3) Effective branding and promotion of the KRN, 4) Maximizing impact through the translation of research to inform policy and 5) Enhancing the KRN's diversity of research. These five objectives frame the questions asked in this report.



<sup>6</sup> The data and representations of research outputs in this report reflect the work of only those grantees who responded to the survey.

## Evaluation Findings: An Overview

This report details various stories, insights, outputs and outcomes from across the KRN to help Knight Foundation, its grantees and other stakeholders consider the broad patterns of activity.

Based on a review of the data collected through this study and the external materials available, this report summarizes insights on the following issues of interest to the KRN:

### 1) Data Access

The KRN has faced significant challenges in enhancing its access to data for research purposes since its establishment. The shuttering of the Twitter/X publicly accessible API in February 2023 required researchers to adjust the course of their research or end projects entirely. Reddit shortly thereafter constrained its own data access tool, and Meta's primary research tool, CrowdTangle, was scheduled to be eliminated in August 2024. KRN researchers, however, have played significant roles in domestic and international policy engagement to help facilitate more access. Knight Foundation has also supported projects, such as the Media and Democracy Data Cooperative at UT-Austin, that attempt to create new resources and pathways. And in at least one instance, in the case of the Facebook and Instagram study of the 2020 election, KRN researchers partnered with the world's largest social media company to engage in a groundbreaking research project that involved sharing an unprecedented amount of data, albeit dependent on the platform's express permission and cooperation. It is unclear if that type of project will be done again.

Overall, this pattern of a lack of data access continues to threaten the KRN's impact potential. Without more robust access, scholarship will have a difficult time generalizing broadly, and researchers will find difficulty exposing systemic harms, making well-informed conclusions and offering recommendations. Reproducing lines of analysis over time by independent teams becomes more difficult the harder it is to gather data, leading to a potential "incoherency problem."<sup>7</sup> Put simply, researchers should be able to build on one another's work and to check if findings are consistent over time. But this is currently difficult because it is hard to gain access to the same and similar types of data. Researchers report having to generate new methods to address this "data crisis." One leading researcher said, "This situation impedes reproducibility of past research, severely limits current and future research and, in general, makes this field brittle."

### 2) Networking

The KRN has improved its connective capabilities. There is substantial evidence that researchers are finding more ways to connect, collaborate, amplify one another and plan projects and events together. This is not uniformly true across the entire KRN. But many of the core grantees—the longest-standing grantees with the greatest amount of Knight Foundation support—are collaborating productively. There is room to improve the inclusivity and connectivity of the KRN among the more peripheral nodes in the network.



<sup>7</sup> Duncan J. Watts, *Should Social Science Be More Solution-oriented?*, *Nature Human Behaviour* 1, no. 1 (2017): 0015.



### 3) Branding

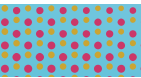
The KRN as a marketing and promotional mechanism for the research community has gained only modest attention. However, Knight Foundation's effort to boost research in this area has become widely known in policy, journalism and tech industry circles. There is no "card-carrying" element of the KRN. As previous KRN reports have noted, this stands in contrast to other major foundations' network-funding efforts. But, importantly, the relevant audiences know that a growing body of researchers is producing significantly more work as a result of the KRN effort. Notably, KRN is only part of a broader emerging field of research, and Knight Foundation's arm's-length approach to branding the network is appropriate and respectful to the other researchers not currently funded but whose work is co-equal.

### 4) Translation

Among grantees, there appear strong efforts to do more research translation for policy and public (non-technical) audiences. Many grantees actively cite and discuss each other's research to broader audiences, and some civil society organizations see themselves as part of a translational pipeline. The new Knight-Georgetown Institute, announced in May 2023, was established to bolster this capacity within the field. Grantees expressed concern, as well as high expectations, about how this new institute will integrate with the KRN.

### 5) Research Diversity

New themes in the research and scholarship emerged in 2023, expanding KRN's scope of research. Researchers are responding to external events, such as increased public attention to issues of trust, safety and ethics related to artificial intelligence (A.I.). There are promising new areas being explored, such as an increasing focus on risks and actual harms to minors and digital platforms from the perspective of economics and law, which reflect the shifting policy landscape. Some KRN researchers continue to focus on how harms experienced online impact marginalized communities. In 2023, a greater diversity of topics accompanied more longstanding interests, such as mis- and disinformation, which have been core concerns to many KRN researchers. That said, some KRN researchers worry that the KRN focuses too much on misinformation on social media platforms.





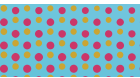
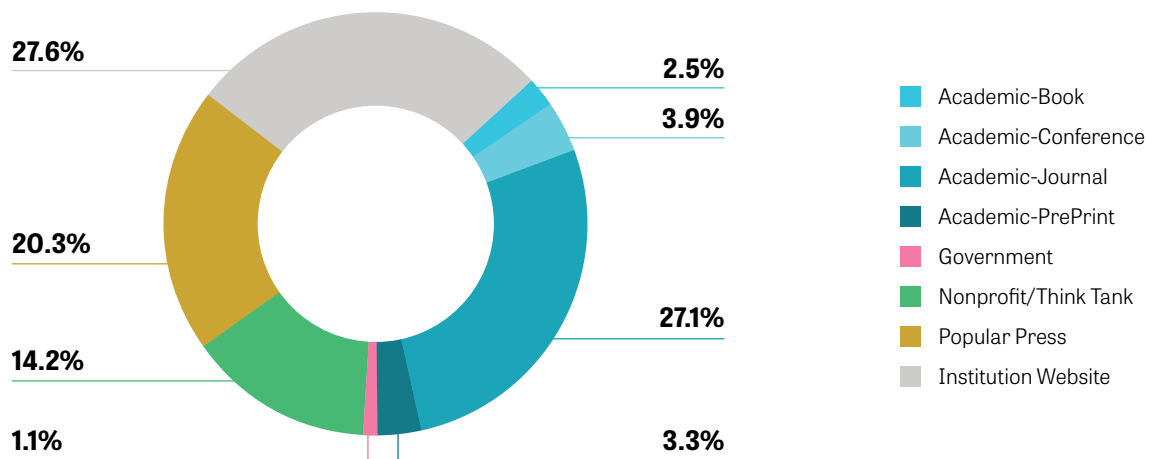
# II. Network Outputs and Outcomes

## Outputs

During 2023, researchers contributed greatly to KRN's total historical output. In 2023 alone, KRN researchers published 820 articles across a wide array of high-impact venues, including more than two-dozen studies in the world's top general science journals, such as Nature, Science and PNAS (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences). This output is consistent with KRN's output of about 900 articles from 2021 to 2022, the last period studied. KRN's academic insights advanced public understanding of areas such as algorithmic bias on social media platforms, A.I. risks, misinformation, American news and comprehension and how harmful content flows through the information environment. In the popular press during 2023, KRN researchers published in venues such as the Wall Street Journal, Wired, Slate and the New York Times.

Figure 1 below shows the distribution of KRN publications organized by publication type: academic, government, nonprofit or think tank, popular press and self-published on their own institution's website. Approximately 36.8% are academic (book, conference or journal), 27.6% are published on the institution's website, 20.3% are published in the popular press, 14.2% are published with a nonprofit or think tank and 1.1% are associated with a government entity (e.g., reports). The academic category is divided into several publication subtypes: monographs (2.5%), journal articles (27.1%), conference proceedings (3.9%) and article preprints such as SSRN or arXiv (3.3%).

Figure 1. KRN categorical publications by type, 2023



One additional way of looking at publications is seeing where there is overlap. Each of the past three KRN assessment reports has analyzed the concept of “shared knowledge space,” defined here as publications in the same venues. Why is this important? Traditionally, academics have been fairly siloed and publish in niche venues in narrow subfields. The idea of shared intellectual space is important because it indicates that these researchers are speaking to one another and common communities and audiences. This increases the chances of coherence and knowledge-building. Overlap in publication venues suggests a certain degree of connectivity and shared intellectual interests.

In its fourth year, the KRN has shared spaces of knowledge to a similar extent it did in the previous observed year. In 2023, there were 50 outlets in which two or more KRN institutions published work, and 24 outlets in which three or more institutions published. These numbers are similar to the previous year of KRN output. *See Figure 2.* Top venues include Tech Policy Press, Lawfare and Brookings Institution. These outlets are important intermediaries that help disseminate scholarship and advance academic debate. Further, the world’s top two general science journals, Nature and Science, also contained significant contributions, with KRN members contributing 25 peer-reviewed studies. The academic journals in which KRN researchers most frequently published were Science (fourteen total publications across six unique institutions), Nature (eleven total publications across eight unique institutions), Political Communication (ten total publications across five unique institutions), the Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction (nine total publications across three unique publications) and Social Media + Society (seven total publications across three unique institutions).

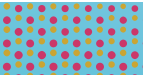


Figure 2. Institutions and publications (excludes institution website self-publications)

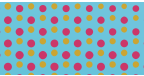
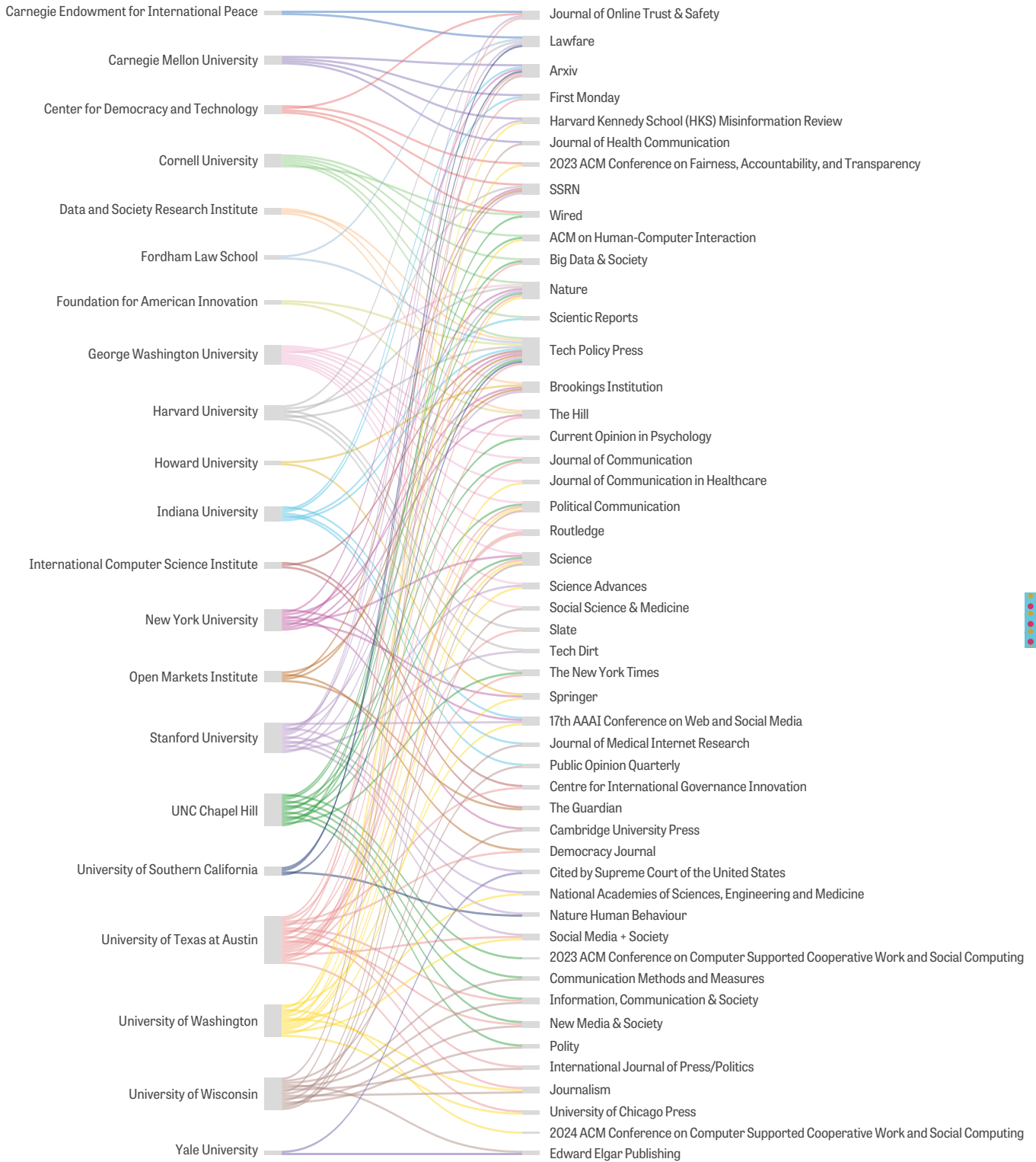


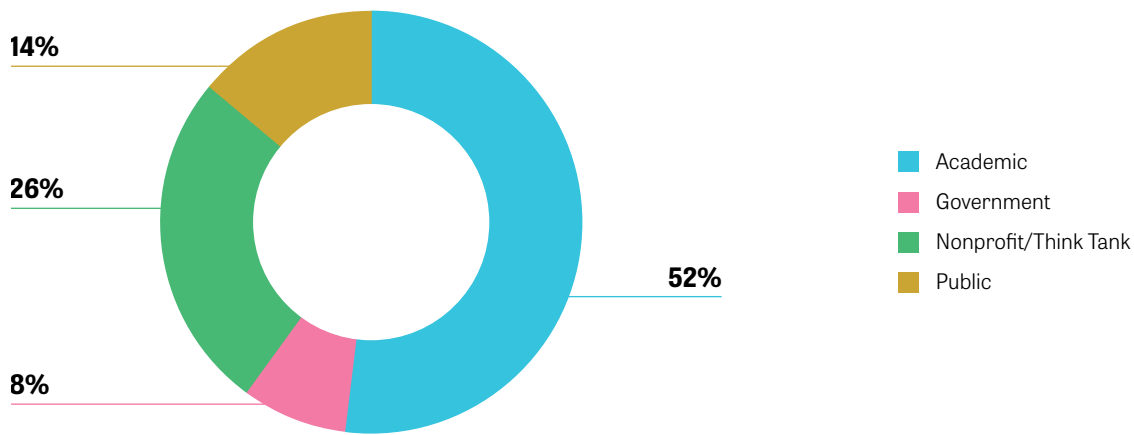
Figure 3. Table of top 20 publications/outlets (excluding self-publications) by number of different Knight Research Network institutions

Publication	# of unique Institutions	# of publications
Tech Policy Press	13	40
<i>Nature</i>	8	11
Lawfare	7	16
Brookings Institution	6	16
<i>Science</i>	6	14
arXiv	6	13
<i>Political Communication</i>	5	10
SSRN	5	7
<i>The Hill</i>	4	9
<i>Journalism</i>	4	4
<i>Proceedings of the Seventeenth International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media</i>	4	4
<i>The New York Times</i>	3	10
<i>Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction</i>	3	8
<i>Social Media + Society</i>	3	7
<i>New Media &amp; Society</i>	3	6
<i>Information, Communication &amp; Society</i>	3	5
<i>Journal of Communication</i>	3	4
<i>Wired</i>	3	4
<i>Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Misinformation Review</i>	3	3
<i>Science Advances</i>	3	3
<i>Journal of Online Trust &amp; Safety</i>	3	3
<i>First Monday</i>	3	3
<i>Big Data &amp; Society</i>	3	3
<i>Democracy Journal</i>	3	3

In 2023, KRN researchers participated in or hosted more than 800 speaking engagements through podcasts, webinars and conferences. This compares to about 900 such engagements during the last observed period. These speaking engagements included briefings to congressional committees, meetings with congressional staff and engagements with officials from the White House, North American Aerospace Defense Command (NORAD), U.S. National Laboratories, National Institutes of Health and Department of State. Speaking engagements also took place at the Nobel Prize Summit, the World Bank Data Forum and the U.N. General Assembly Health Forum. Other venues included industry-focused audiences, including the Meta Security Summit, AMA Reddit Mod World and Google/Jigsaw workshops. Audiences for these speaking engagements included representatives from academia, government, nonprofits and think tanks. See Figure 4.



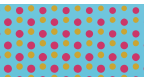
Figure 4. Speaking engagements by audience sector



Further, in 2023 KRN researchers were mentioned or were involved in nearly 2,900 written, audio or video media pieces. This compares to 1,400 such outputs from 2021 to 2022, indicating significant growth in KRN's public communication. In four national U.S. press venues including the Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, New York Times and USA Today, researchers were quoted or added commentary in more than 150 stories. Across the major traditional networks—NBC, ABC, CBS, Fox and PBS—researchers appeared more than 70 times. Researchers also provided commentary across hundreds of local and regional news sources.

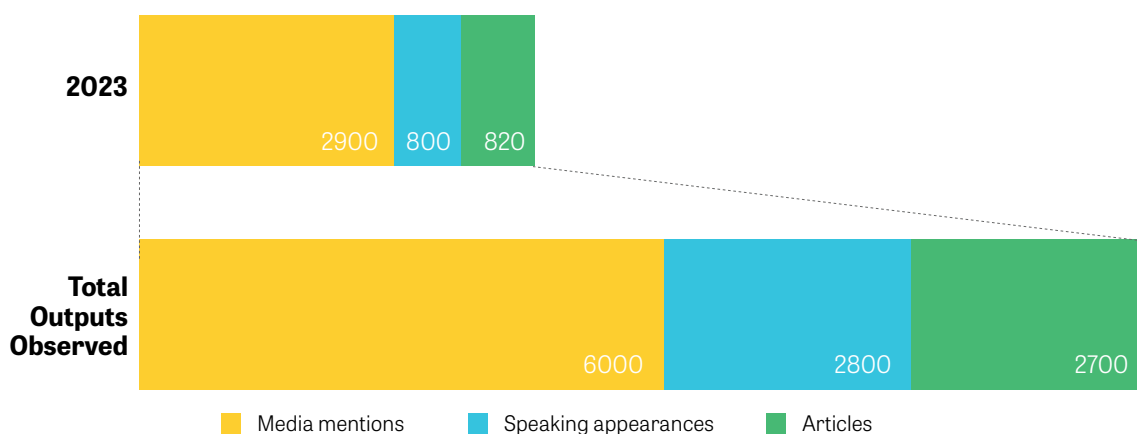
Figure 5. Media outlets covering Knight Research Network institutions (limited to outlets with 10 or more pieces of coverage)

Outlet/Publication	# of stories	Outlet/Publication	# of stories
<i>Washington Post</i>	65	<i>Wall Street Journal</i>	15
<i>New York Times</i>	63	ABC News	15
Tech Policy Press	38	<i>Newsweek</i>	14
<i>Politico</i>	34	NBC News	14
<i>Associated Press</i>	31	<i>Business Insider</i>	14
<i>Deseret News</i>	27	Vox	13
<i>Bloomberg</i>	27	<i>Slate</i>	13
<i>The Hill</i>	25	<i>Seattle Times</i>	13
CNN	22	<i>The Verge</i>	11
<i>Wired</i>	20	Spectrum News	11
NPR	19	<i>The Guardian</i>	11
<i>Washington Examiner</i>	18	Fox News	10
<i>The Atlantic</i>	17		



The KRN produced outputs throughout 2023 in relative proportion to previous years observed. Since the KRN's inception in 2019, it has grown to include more than 1,000 research and program staff personnel. During that period, researchers have been mentioned or involved in more than 6,000 written, audio or video media pieces across hundreds of unique media outlets. KRN researchers participated in or hosted more than 2,800 speaking engagements at in-person or online venues, including conferences, panels, public testimonies, workshops and podcasts. Grantees have published approximately 2,700 articles of various kinds, both within academia and across the popular press and online venues.<sup>8</sup> The KRN's outputs throughout 2023 thus represent almost 40% of all outputs monitored in its first four years.

Figure 6. KRN's outputs in 2023 meaningfully added to its existing body of work



Finally, KRN research teams have served as a pipeline for rising talent—graduate students, post-doctoral fellows and other personnel—to secure research positions at other organizations and direct their training and talent into the broad field at the intersection of technology, media and democracy. The field's emergent talent has gone into the White House Office of Management and Budget, national and global nonprofits and in tenure-track research positions. Talented young researchers trained at KRN institutions have moved to other academic institutions, such as UNC-Charlotte, Johns Hopkins, U.S. Military Academy-West Point, Stanford, Harvard, Yale, Duke and Northeastern, as well as universities in Germany and South Korea.

<sup>8</sup> Notably, earlier evaluation of KRN research outputs analyzed outputs from the network's core fourteen centers funded through grants of \$1 million or more. Those aggregate estimates of the number of research outputs produced are thus undercounts, as smaller grant research products were not fully counted until 2023.



## Outcomes and Social Impact

One metric by which KRN may be judged is the degree to which academic insights and research find their way into the public policy and industry policy spheres. A companion narrative report to this evaluation details some examples and provides perspective into the ways ideas and insights find their way into policy.<sup>9</sup>

In 2023, KRN researchers shared their expertise with several public policymakers and administrators. Grantees testified before key domestic government bodies more than 30 times, including to the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation; U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Competition Policy, Antitrust and Consumer Rights; the U.S. Senate Bipartisan AI Working Group's AI Insight Forums; the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary; the U.S. House Committee on Energy and Commerce; and the U.S. House Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Information Technology and Government Innovation. Researchers also advised numerous state-level bodies, such as legislatures and governors' offices, as they considered matters of technology policy. Grantees filed amicus briefs in several legal cases and were cited in Supreme Court opinions. KRN members also submitted numerous comments to federal agencies and departments. To take just one example, researchers at the Citizens and Technology Lab at Cornell University responded to calls from the federal government for comments on administrative policy, including on the U.S. National Telecommunications and Information Administration's A.I. Accountability Policy. Grantees also advised the White House Office of Management and Budget and joined the National Institute of Standards and Technology's A.I. Safety Institute.

KRN researchers also shared their expertise with a variety of foreign and international governance bodies. Researchers provided testimony and research products to institutions such as the World Bank, European Commission, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), UNESCO and the Canadian Parliament.

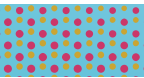
2023 was a banner year for the social impact of KRN research centers' efforts. A groundbreaking paper on how online misinformation affects rates of vaccine COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in the U.S. by the Observatory on Social Media (OSoMe) at Indiana University was included in the 2023 Economic Report of the U.S. President.<sup>10</sup> A research report from the Stanford Cyber Policy Center on the dangers of A.I.-generated explicit images of children spurred a leading global A.I. technical consortium to take new measures to prevent exploitation worldwide.<sup>11</sup> Further, the landmark Facebook/Instagram 2020 elections studies were led and conducted by grantee teams from University of Texas at Austin and NYU, among others.<sup>12</sup> The work done as part of the 2020 election study project provided compelling new scientific evidence for the influential role of algorithms in society. The studies received media coverage from more than 100 outlets, including NBC News, NPR and the New York Times. Novel research from New York University's Center for Social Media & Politics (CSMaP) on search engines and misinformation coincided with Google making significant product changes relating to warning labels and additional source information, affecting billions of users. The Thurman Arnold Project at Yale created a unique academic-government partnership

9 Issie Lapowsky, *Bridging the Divide: Translating Research on Digital Media into Policy and Practice*, Knight Foundation (June 2024).

10 Pierri, F., B. Perry, M. DeVerna, K. Yang, A. Flammini, F. Menczer, and J. Bryden. 2022. "Online Misinformation Is Linked to Early COVID-19 Vaccination Hesitancy and Refusal." *Scientific Reports* 12, no.1; *Economic Report of the President 2023*, The White House.

11 Thiel, D., Stroebel, M., and Portnoff, R. (2023). *Generative ML and CSAM: Implications and Mitigations*. Stanford Digital Repository.

12 See, e.g., Allcott et al., *The effects of Facebook and Instagram on the 2020 election: A deactivation experiment*, PNAS 121, no. 21 (2024).





wherein nearly two dozen student-faculty working groups produced a white paper series on antitrust and competition law trends to inform U.S. Assistant Attorney General Jonathan Kanter and the Department of Justice Antitrust Division. Kanter visited the students at Yale, and the students subsequently traveled to Washington, D.C., to present ten white papers to Department of Justice (DOJ) officials.

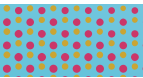
Civil society organizations also contributed significantly to KRN's impact in 2023, particularly in Washington, D.C. For example, the Brookings Institution convened a roundtable discussion about competition policy and digital platforms between the Department of Justice, congressional staff, scholars, tech sector and public interest representatives, as well as competition lawyers and economists. R Street Institute “translated” a variety of research outputs from KRN scholars, writing concise policy briefs that were circulated and socialized in policy circles in Washington, D.C., and beyond. The Center for Democracy and Technology’s work earned 212 mentions in press coverage, and it was featured in more than 28 interactions with policymakers and industry decision-makers. Following two rounds of testimony before congressional committees reviewing technology regulation, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies wrote a comprehensive report on Section 230’s impact on Black communities to inform further policy debates. The McCain Institute co-organized a multi-day meeting with Meta’s Oversight Board, convening leading experts and policy practitioners (many of whom were KRN-affiliated) to discuss the platforms’ current decision-making practices and the future of content moderation and governance. Over the same period, Tech Policy Press has served as a podcasting and web-publishing platform that often features KRN scholars and shapes a conversational space that includes leading thinkers from many different sectors.

Teams within the KRN have also built diverse tools and digital infrastructures. The Media and Democracy Data Cooperative at the University of Texas at Austin is one example of a useful and important effort to consolidate data resources across multiple institutions and make them accessible to the network.<sup>13</sup> There are many other examples. The team at the Center for Communication and Civic Renewal at University of Wisconsin-Madison created Chime In, an app that helps information professionals share verifiably accurate information into networks of low-quality information at scale.<sup>14</sup> Researchers at the University of Washington Center for an Informed Public (UW CIP) continue to develop misinformation-focused educational gaming resources through an ongoing collaboration with other local partners and a local technology firm. These games, which are based on a “misinformation escape room game concept” have been tested and used in library, school and hospital settings.<sup>15</sup> A research team at Clemson University’s Media Forensics Hub is currently developing software to help study narratives across social media platforms. This tool will allow researchers and users to examine central socio-political claims and cluster them together with similar messages. By providing a way of taking large amounts of information and more easily interpreting it, this tool may help detect bots and coordinated inauthentic behavior, trace the behavior of influence actors and monitor changing online narratives.

<sup>13</sup> [Media and Democracy Data Cooperative](#), University of Texas-Austin.

<sup>14</sup> [Chime In: Amplifying Accurate Information into the Wisconsin Information Ecology](#), University of Wisconsin-Madison Center for Communication and Civic Renewal.

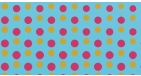
<sup>15</sup> [Misinformation Escape Room](#), University of Washington Center for an Informed Public.



# III. Consensus, Opportunities for Further Research and Observations across the KRN

Many stakeholders, including Knight Foundation, have inquired about what the KRN may be learning as a whole—specifically what the accumulating studies say about the digital and information environment and its dynamics. Where are researchers beginning to agree and find common ground? As mentioned, KRN researchers have published more than 2,700 articles—hundreds of which are deeply technical, peer-reviewed studies—since 2019. The topics of these articles are diverse, and researchers do not always share the same perspective.

The subsections below describe areas of emerging consensus among KRN researchers, opportunities for additional research and field-wide observations. All the points listed below in this section should be investigated further because the evaluator did not ask researchers to articulate areas of *total* concurrence across the KRN and did not undertake a scientific meta-analysis of findings. As the Recommendations section of this report notes, there is an opportunity for convenings among KRN researchers to engage in more consensus-themed discussions around specific points like those presented here.<sup>16</sup>



<sup>16</sup> The points noted below are informed by interviews and surveys with twenty research teams across the KRN. They were not peer-reviewed across multiple teams and do not represent the conclusive positions of the KRN. Rather, they represent the responses articulated by individual research teams in response to the evaluator's survey and interviews. The author of this report tried to preserve their phrasing for fidelity and accuracy. Of course, this is a limited sample and conclusions derived from this report's descriptions should be similarly limited.

## Areas of Emerging Research Consensus

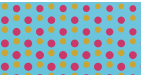
### Online Harms

- A consensus is building that online harms often follow a “power law,” meaning specific forms of online harms are not randomly or equally distributed across the population, but instead occur unevenly across sub-populations.
- Misinformation consumption and sharing are concentrated among small portions of the American public; further, a small minority of online users produce hate speech, and a small percentage of online news consumers consume radical content.
- A small number of “superspreaders” are responsible for circulating a large portion of low-credibility content online. These influencers both post content that is widely reshared, and they reshare low-credibility content posted by others, amplifying its reach and exposure.
- Certain sub-populations are more often targets of online harm, such as Spanish-language communities in the U.S. These patterns mean that large data collections through platforms may not capture the so-called “long tails” of distributions where specific harms are concentrated. When big data studies compute averages and do statistical tests, they can overlook the profound harms that smaller groups suffer.
- Vulnerability to online misinformation and manipulation is not uniform among demographic groups. Studies have continued to document how certain groups—such as older people, conservatives and communities of color—are particularly vulnerable and account for a disproportionate amount of exposure to low-credibility content. Those vulnerable groups may not yet have the media literacy skills or other support to stay resilient against manipulation attempts. Additionally, some of these groups may be responsible for a disproportionate amount of sharing of lower-credibility content.

### Social Media Platforms and Information Integrity

- Social media platforms are a source of political information for some. People self-report that they turn to social media for news and information. Now several studies identify knowledge as an important outcome of social media use and how virality works.<sup>17</sup>
- Algorithmic changes on platforms—at least those that have been investigated thus far—have not reversed current levels of political polarization.
- Research on the detection of coordinated influence campaigns and information operations is coalescing around a suite of methods based on the construction of networks among accounts that are suspiciously similar. Signals to calculate similarity are derived from many kinds of content, as well as temporal and behavioral features.

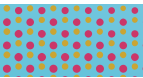
<sup>17</sup> These findings were later supported in an independent Pew-Knight Initiative report. Colleen McClain, Monica Anderson, Risa Gelles-Watnick, *How Americans Navigate Politics on TikTok, X, Facebook and Instagram*, Pew Research Center, June 12, 2024.



- Providing people with corrective information to combat misinformation is useful, but there are persistent ideological divides in approaches to fact-checking, and the strategy used matters depending on the context.
- Social media users who are prompted to consider accuracy share less inaccurate information online. The magnitude of such changes is still being studied by researchers.
- Most research now suggests that there are mixed results around the impact of social media on children, indicating that there are both potential benefits and risks depending on factors such as age, platform, networks, gender, race, etc. Benefits might include the ability to find community and solidarity, but potential risks include risks to well-being and mental health, including addiction and overuse, which may crowd-out prosocial activity.
- Small changes to how news is presented—adjusting the framing, style or feel of news products—are unlikely to build relationships with audiences. More substantive, bolder changes such as incorporating a variety of “trust elements” into news stories may connect the individuals who consume news with those who produce it, but they do not necessarily revolutionize the connection between newsrooms and the communities that they serve.
- There is a growing body of work that codifies research methods to explore and quantify the harms of health-related misinformation, especially regarding vaccines. These methods include randomized controlled lab experiments, correlation studies based on mining large data sets and data-informed computational models that aim to capture causal effects.
- Privacy laws need to be more carefully crafted as they can make it more difficult to prosecute those spreading harmful disinformation.
- Bots—and indeed any forms of technology—used to spread disinformation have as many or more good uses, and banning them involves tradeoffs. Disinformation does not typically start with bots, but they are often used to amplify it.

### Artificial Intelligence

- Improving large language models (LLMs) in low-resource languages is becoming more difficult, not easier, because the web is filled with so much machine-translated and machine-generated text. Models trained in one language are more efficient and better able to capture cultural and linguistic nuance than models trained in many languages, even if those trained in many languages can do better on some benchmarks because of their sheer size.
- There is a growing consensus among researchers about the influence of A.I. on democratic processes, particularly in shaping information dissemination via search engines and social media platforms. Researchers are increasingly focusing on creating multifaceted networks of actors to approach this problem collaboratively, aiming to uncover and address the ways in which A.I. algorithms impact access to information and democratic initiatives.
- There is increasing awareness that digital companies should not be the ones to define the rules for their marketplace behavior. Decades into the era of digital platforms and, more recently, into the A.I. era, meaningful oversight of tech companies' activities has yet to be successfully achieved.



# Opportunities for Further Research

## Remedies to Harms

- There is a need to further measure and assess algorithmic harms and integrate those findings while identifying what types of harms exist and what their potential remedies are. The question of solutions is often stymied by lack of collaboration between technical and policy scholars and the uneven pace of research.
- There is a strong focus emerging within the KRN about the potential for algorithmic discrimination, leading to a call for an emphasis on harms that algorithmic systems are currently inflicting, especially on marginalized communities or otherwise vulnerable groups, such as gig workers.
- Researchers are paying closer attention to the enhancement of digital well-being and the promotion of prosocial social media patterns and behaviors. More scholarship is needed that explores the (re)design of platforms to mitigate hate, harassment and misinformation and instead foster positive interactions among users through the prioritization of trust and safety practices.

## Governance and Information Integrity

- There is a need to analyze existing—and develop new—regulatory frameworks and governance models that address the complex, global nature of today's platforms. This includes further exploration of the impact of global policies, the potential role of data intermediaries and the development of policies that are informed by a deep understanding of the challenges these platforms pose.
- There is a need to create and evaluate community-based interventions in response to misinformation's spread throughout and impact upon different communities and marginalized groups, including in non-English-speaking contexts.
- Scholars are increasingly focusing on understanding the ways in which Section 230 may exacerbate or mitigate racial bias in content moderation, particularly in relation to the disproportionate removal of content from Black users.<sup>18</sup> Ongoing research is needed to address the implications of Section 230 for issues of racial equity, free speech and democratic governance in the digital age.
- Researchers are trying to find consensus on how misinformation is effectively corrected at scale. One promising strategy is to amplify verifiable truth on social media platforms. Some scholars point out that most countermeasures that have so far been suggested and tested (e.g., inoculation, tagging, banning) are typically limited in that they either have only a short-term effect, push disinformation to the dark web or places it is harder to track or in which scaling solutions is difficult.

<sup>18</sup> This refers to Section 230 of the 1996 Communications Decency Act passed by the U.S. Congress, which "provides immunity to online platforms from civil liability based on third-party content and for the removal of content in certain circumstances," according to the [U.S. Department of Justice](#).



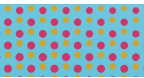
- As a result of strong academic agreement on the importance of ethical data access and independent oversight of platforms for the public interest, there is a significant opportunity for the research community to facilitate ethical, accessible data-sharing to enable research on digital platforms.
- While some ideological segregation is present on social media platforms, more investigation is required to determine to what extent such segregation is the result of algorithms or individual user preferences.
- While there has been some preliminary KRN research on political influencers' role in elections, social justice movements and public economic sentiment, there is a need for research on political influencers' growing role in the spread of mis- and disinformation and computational propaganda. Social media and emerging technologies have democratized propaganda, in that nearly anyone can relatively easily produce disinformation campaigns. More and more, contributions from the KRN have highlighted the evolving and increasingly important landscape of content creation on social platforms, emphasizing the role of creators in shaping cultural and political discourse.

### **Democratic Implications of Media & Technology Regulation**

- There are persistent concerns that digital technologies pose challenges to democratic practice, but paradoxically, despite their liabilities, they have become one of the central infrastructures for a functioning society. The more we entwine political communication, the delivery of social services, entertainment media and other essential social functions through digital technologies, the more these functions become dependent on these technologies, affordances and liabilities. Given that tools and platforms are changing rapidly, there is a need for patient and steady research that observes but does not react to trend cycles.
- Some scholars see an increasing skepticism about forms of ex ante (forecasted/predictive) regulation to regulate fast-moving technological markets growing in the antitrust community. This skepticism seems to be particularly relevant in the U.S., where none of the proposed antitrust bills aiming to regulate large digital platforms by default (ex ante) have passed. More detailed policy ideas need to be formulated in this area, as there are risks in promoting important policy and enforcement reforms through slogans or imprecise goals rather than robust scientific research.
- Scholars are trying to find ways to include non-experts in the oversight of technologies. The inclusion of the public in technology governance and research is growing increasingly more important. There is a notable uptick of interest in community-engaged research to ensure that research serves the public interest while also navigating people's expectations of privacy and ethics.

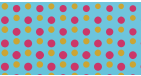
### **Artificial Intelligence**

- Persistent research gaps remain and more work must be done to develop accurate and fair A.I. models for non-English-speaking users.



## Observations on the Field of Research

- There is a need for better translation of social media research amid major disinvestments in platform trust and safety teams and data access for researchers. Emerging research from this field must better speak to policymakers to build protections for online safety in the absence of platforms taking substantive action themselves.
- Increasingly, researcher access to platform data is impeded. Platforms hold their data sets closely and only sometimes share it with few “favored” researchers, providing platforms a significant information advantage in policy discussions. Alternatively, data is prohibitively expensive to buy or has been encrypted or privatized. Thus, a more universal solution for data access is needed. Working out a more systematic and equitable path towards access is greatly needed.
- Definitions and precise methods for studying misinformation remain elusive. There is a need for the broader misinformation research field to grapple with somewhat contradictory findings (for example, how to define the problem quantitatively or create mechanisms for limiting its spread), which may be due to different conceptualizations of the problem across different fields (e.g., political science vs. psychology vs. media studies).
- Scholars continue to debate how open and rule-based social platforms should operate to ensure both individual expression and safety. Technology ethics researchers have focused on a central tension raised by technological progress: maintaining social stability versus pursuing dynamic social improvements. This raises questions about how much control technology platforms should exert over their users to achieve higher-level outcomes, such as higher-quality interactions and discourse.
- The proper mix of qualitative and quantitative approaches to answer core questions remains unclear. Researchers are seeing criticism (much of it in good faith) that the field is not “scientific.” As one team notes, it is possible that an over-emphasis of large quantitative studies—which, in some cases, reflect overly simplistic views of problems—may be contributing to a distorted view of what the field is and what core findings and contributions are.
- Although interdisciplinarity can be a virtue, there is a need to identify the precise mix of disciplines that best answer specific research questions. That said, research continues to benefit from insights of those who have different disciplines, backgrounds, expertise areas and lived experiences. These types of connections and collaborations often lead to more effective, thorough and holistic solutions to the problems affecting media, technology and democracy today.



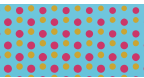


# IV. Mapping Collaborative Pathways

## Ways of Connecting

In this evaluation, teams across KRN were asked to describe how the work of other teams in the network has been useful and to describe ways in which they connect. As the 2022 edition of this report noted, there is a well-established body of literature about how to organize and tend to such large professional bodies:<sup>19</sup> “The canonical principles for forming and sustaining more informal or loosely coupled knowledge and learning networks—what are sometimes called ‘communities of practice,’ of which KRN is a particular type—are that the community should offer entry points at different levels of participation, be designed for evolution and develop a distinctive community rhythm or cadence.”<sup>20</sup> The engagements described below are various ways that teams and individual researchers connect with one another:

- Co-author papers together
- Write “translational” policy briefs that summarize KRN studies
- Comment and provide feedback on draft research products
- Leverage other research teams as sounding boards and idea generators
- Use each other’s analytical frameworks in their research
- Share data and software, as well as data expertise
- Cite one another in academic papers and scholarship
- Build on experiments and data analysis to advance the work of other teams
- Hire each other’s students and postdocs
- Write joint grant proposals together
- Work collaboratively on industry- or government-facing projects
- Sit on one another’s advisory groups for projects
- Mention each other’s work to journalists and policymakers
- Host visiting scholars and fellows from each other’s institutions
- Serve as speakers at each other’s events
- Partner to co-host events
- Help each other find stakeholders and speakers for events
- Amplify research outputs through social media and other digital means



<sup>19</sup> E. Wenger, R. A. McDermott and W. Snyder, *Cultivating Communities of Practice: A Guide to Managing Knowledge* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2002); E. Wenger and W. Snyder, *Communities of Practice: The Organizational Frontier*, Harvard Business Review 78, no. 1 (2000): 139-46.

<sup>20</sup> John P. Wihbey, *A Growing Community of Scholarship and Practice*, Knight Foundation (June 2022).

The data shows that there are multiple points of entry at different levels of participation. The KRN is well designed for flexibility and evolution, given that it is loosely coupled and allows for the entry of new ideas and building of new relationships, as inter-institutional collaborations are generally project-based and discrete. KRN's rhythm and cadence—how often people meet, connect, share ideas and produce outputs—merits further investigation. Multiple teams report a desire to connect with the network more frequently and while the email listserv grows more active for sharing of resources and announcements, there may be a need for more frequent but lower-intensity community events that help more peripheral or newer members better connect with the network. The new Knight-Georgetown Institute is well positioned to build capacity on these fronts. Each of the twenty activities outlined above offers both ideas for KRN researchers and a potential leverage point for Knight Foundation to help with connectivity.

Overall, the survey responses were positive about the present state of collaboration. The team at the Economics of Digital Services (EODS) initiative at the University of Pennsylvania shared sentiments about this community that many others echoed: “We find the interactions with the KRN colleagues very helpful.... The group provides a valuable platform to exchange initiatives and thoughts about common projects and research interests. You can easily grasp what are the most cutting-edge topics and where a more robust dialogue is needed. Everybody in the group feels part of a vibrant community. It is inspiring to witness everybody's commitment to a greater appreciation of fundamental issues, including democracy in all its forms.”



# V. Research Leaders: Reflections and New Directions

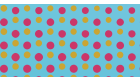
Over the past four years, this report has observed the impact that Knight Foundation support has had on the careers and research agendas of some of the nation's leading scholars in the growing research field at the intersection of information technology, media and democracy. This section details reflections from five such researchers, exploring their thoughts on work of KRN in the years ahead.

## Changed Careers: Scope, Relevance and Impact

Talia Stroud directs the Center for Media Engagement at the University of Texas-Austin. She notes that Knight Foundation has “affected my personal research agenda by connecting me to interdisciplinary scholars whose research interests align with my own, but who are asking different questions, using different methods and publishing in journals that I didn’t typically read.” “This support,” she says, beginning in 2019, has “expanded my horizons and made me think differently about what it is that we’re all doing and how we can make a difference given the critical role that the information ecosystem plays in our lives.”

Such sentiments are common among other KRN leaders interviewed, including Joshua Tucker, the Co-Director of New York University’s Center for Social Media and Politics (CSMaP). He said that the investment had a “huge impact on my personal research agenda,” providing him the “freedom to immediately pursue research on whatever we thought was important at the time.” The funding helped free him from the constant fundraising cycle (at least in early years) and to get help by adding administrative staff, which gave him and NYU’s team “the flexibility to pivot on research questions in real time, without the normal one-to-two year wait that accompanies finding project-specific support for research.”

Broadening horizons and increased relevance and speed are but two of the positive outcomes of Knight Foundation’s investments. Nate Persily, the Co-Director of the Cyber Policy Center at Stanford University, notes that Knight Foundation’s investment helped supercharge his team’s efforts and “allowed us to establish the Cyber Policy Center as the premier tech policy institute in the country.” He said that “Knight has been indispensable for all our work related to elections, disinformation, online speech regulation, social media and mental health, and now, the new challenges posed by artificial intelligence. The network that Knight has created has proven absolutely critical to the field in building community and providing venues for sharing research and ideas.” Fil Menczer, who leads



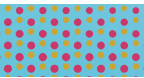
Indiana University's Observatory on Social Media (OSoMe), says that Knight Foundation's investment has allowed for more ambitious and powerful projects to come online: "The Knight grant has given us the room to focus on bigger projects that need more time and bigger teams." Menczer, who often runs large quantitative studies, noted, "These projects take years of work due to the need to combine modeling, data collection, machine learning and experiments. We could not have undertaken such long-term work without Knight support."

Asked to describe the impact of the Knight Foundation grant on her career, Kate Starbird, Co-Director of the University of Washington Center for an Informed Public (UW CIP), says, "The short answer is profoundly, along dimensions of capacity for research, breadth and depth of intellectual contribution, national and international visibility and impact." She has directed UW CIP since its establishment in 2019 with Knight Foundation support. Since then, the UW CIP has engaged some 20 researchers and 40 students. "The infrastructural support (software and data engineers) funded by Knight Foundation through the Center for an Informed Public has been especially critical during a time when access to social media data is changing rapidly, requiring new tooling and methodological innovation." Starbird says, "Currently, we are building new pipelines and developing new methodologies for collection and analysis of short-form video (or 'vertical video'), which will transform our research program in the years to come."

Beyond Knight Foundation's larger grant awards that helped establish or scale research centers, feedback from several key researchers who were awarded Knight Foundation grants for more discrete, individual research activities also feel that Knight Foundation support was vital and positively altered their career trajectories. For example, Jasmine McNealy of the University of Florida notes that Knight Foundation's funding allowed her to "articulate a research agenda focused on data governance and policy within the context of emergent technology like artificial intelligence, which is now advancing with publications and presentation." The support has "encouraged connections with other researchers and colleagues with allied interests, which has enabled the amplification of these research ideas."

Similarly, Kate Klonick of St. John's University School of Law notes that Knight Foundation funding helped accelerate her research agenda relating to the "quickly developing space of online speech governance and the regulatory and legal environments that are shaping it." Knight Foundation's grant gave her "time and support to write academic work, popular press opinion articles, convene workshops and speak to the media about what this means for our information ecosystem in both the United States and abroad." Klonick adds, "It's been absolutely critical assistance during the last few years, which has seen a period of intense development in this field as an academic discipline as well as a new technological industry and focus of government regulation."

David Evan Harris, Sr., at the University of California-Berkeley, notes that Knight Foundation was able to help him immediately translate his five years' experience at Meta into new academic insights and policy impact: "The support allowed me to join the International Computer Science Institute at Berkeley and write about the urgent need to regulate social media and AI companies. My research agenda was rooted in my firsthand experience that convinced me that the tech industry could not be counted upon to act in the public interest without firm regulatory action." Harris's career pivot allowed him to make "trips to Brussels, Washington, D.C., and Sacramento... responding to regular requests for input from policymakers around the world seeking expert advice from people with tech industry experience but not currently beholden to the industry."



## Reflections on the Roads Ahead

As KRN approaches the five-year mark, research leaders from the institutions receiving the most support from Knight Foundation also provided their thoughts about what comes next. Many noted both the challenges in the current research environment and the urgency with which the study of the contemporary information environment must continue.

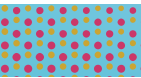
Menczer (Indiana University OSoMe) believes that more research must focus on the coming wave of automated technologies, namely, the “weaponization of generative A.I. to produce credible fake accounts and fake content at scale.” He believes such manipulation has the “potential to bring unseen harm to our society—from threatening democratic elections to increasing our vulnerability to epidemics.” His team’s recent research has found substantial evidence that this is already happening, and he is hoping more will join the effort to combat such potential harms.

Starbird (UW CIP) believes that the research community should pay more attention to online “influencers,” who “profoundly shape how information flows.” Indeed, she says, this “new class of opinion leader has risen to prominence by exploiting the attention dynamics of online ecosystems—for example, by spreading unsubstantiated claims that tap into outrage and resonate with prevailing political frames. Starbird also urges researchers to study solutions that take place outside of just smartphones and apps: “We need more research to both design and evaluate the efficacy of educational interventions—from classroom curriculum to public messaging to in-platform interventions. In particular, we should be exploring the redesign of online tools and platforms to better support new information literacies.”

Tucker (NYU CSMaP) notes that several KRN researchers “have conclusively illustrated the incredible value added by lab-based approaches to conducting computational social science research by harnessing economies of scale and communities of researchers.” But he concedes that such an approach is expensive and funding models need to reflect the new reality that large-scale social science can cost as much as physical and biological lab sciences. Tucker further hopes that researchers continue to expand their considerations to examine messaging apps, short-form video and other rising communications technologies. Tucker also noted that there are opportunities for the research community to understand how we can positively impact the information environment: “Experimentally, there’s a lot of work that can and should be done to understand how we increase trust in credible information and the institutions that produce it.”

Likewise, Persily (Stanford Cyber Policy Center) believes that the “field needs to move beyond its preoccupation with disinformation. This is not because of the fraught political landscape regarding this issue, but because the field has unwittingly contributed to media over-emphasis and over-correction on the problem.” He also believes that the field should re-orient itself to study emerging technologies: “I think the field needs to think seriously about the impact of AI outside of the context of disinformation—how it will affect media, change election campaigns and, in particular, either better distribute or further concentrate relevant tech resources so as to either democratize the information ecosystem or further distort it.”

Stroud (Center for Media Engagement at the University of Texas-Austin) suggests that, moving forward, researchers need to think more about solutions. “Our information ecosystem without question inflames some of these problems,” she says. “At the same time, it can be a source of solutions. The more creative thinking and rigorous testing in partnership with organizations serving the public, the greater the contribution of our field.”



# VI. Recommendations and Conclusion

## Recommendations

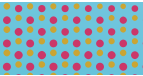
The 2022 report contained five recommendations, all of which remain potential long-term objectives: 1) Clarify longer-term funding as soon as possible, 2) Consider how universities can better accommodate this hybrid and emerging field of research by doing more hiring into interdisciplinary tenure/tenure-track professorships, 3) Prepare to support academic freedom, 4) Continue funding research on the impact of disinformation and online threats on communities of color and 5) Facilitate the next wave of research collaborations in the network.

Knight Foundation took steps towards achieving these objectives in 2023. It made commitments and awarded renewals to current KRN institutions. Knight Foundation likewise made investments towards the defense of KRN researchers from government attempts to impede independent research, particularly regarding information integrity and elections. Knight Foundation should continue to find ways to support researchers. With respect to new university hiring, the jury is still very much out, and future assessments might consider this variable. Knight has also leveraged its grantmaking and convening power to help get more university tenure-track lines created in the field, particularly through cluster hires where universities seek to create new interdisciplinary capacity around a given research domain. To solidify field development over a generation, more professors need to be hired, as they will drive the research agenda long into the future. Knight Foundation has continued to fund research on the distinctive impacts of misinformation and disinformation on communities of color and, indeed, has increased funding in this area over the past two years. This is also an area that bears future monitoring. Finally, the next wave of larger research collaborations seems to be percolating within the network, although more direct Knight Foundation seeding and encouragement of such efforts would be helpful.

To last year's recommendations, several additional recommendations may be added:

### 1) Encourage Faster Research Translation

The speed at which KRN's research is made actionable for society's decision-makers directly bears on its impact. Knight Foundation is in a position to consider how the network may structure and organize efforts to produce alternative research products, maximizing policy relevance. Early examples of rapid research translation efforts within the KRN, such as the University of Washington's Rapid Research Reports and R Street's translational articles, show some promise. Additionally, the new Knight-Georgetown Institute is poised to bring new capacity. Additional KRN participation in these efforts would help elevate KRN and its ability to inform a fast-evolving media ecosystem.



## 2) Capitalize on Opportunities to Establish Consensus

Reports and convenings that synthesize disparate lines of research and make their implications clear continue to be in demand from policy makers and industry professionals. Knight Foundation can convene field leaders to consider paths toward reaching academic consensus on key topics, ultimately to help craft policy-relevant outputs that anchor public policy, industry decision-making and future philanthropy. Working through convening bodies such as the National Academy of Sciences is one route, but KRN could also work on consensus reports.

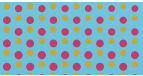
## 3) Think Creatively About Facilitating Researcher Data Access

Many KRN members are talking about new tools and new data collection methods and pathways. This “data crisis” is prompting many KRN teams to scramble to create new tools and approaches to obtain the data they need. A convening or workshop series may be useful so that teams effectively share insights and resources and Knight Foundation preserves the value it has created in the network by allowing everyone to refresh their toolkits. New approaches to analyzing data are needed in an increasingly fragmented environment with severely reduced transparency. In particular, KRN will need to innovate around analyzing video content, especially short-form video content from platforms like TikTok and Instagram, to understand how short-form video and the dynamics of recommendation-first “social” platforms shape information and entertainment flows and reconfigure political discourse.

Finally, KRN leaders suggest several substantive higher-level themes where the research community should pay more attention. Recommendations include: 1) Additional focus on specific educational interventions (from classrooms to platforms) to improve user literacy, 2) Additional research on closed platforms, including messaging apps and short-form video apps and 3) Further critical analysis of disinformation tactics and proposals of interventions and structural solutions to strengthen the information environment.

## Conclusion

KRN continued to grow and mature as a community through 2023. Questions relating to sustainability, future funding and access to data remain top of mind for many leaders of the larger institutions. But overall, there is a broad sense that KRN has created a rising tide of scholarship and inputs to policymakers and journalists that seems to have shaped a new ecosystem. More social scientific, critical and careful scholarly insights are helping to structure public debate and debate within state legislatures, the courts and the federal government. KRN can rightfully claim to have made a substantial contribution to this new situation in the U.S. public sphere. The year 2024 will mark the fifth year of evaluation for the network, and it should prompt even deeper reflection on how KRN can grow and be even more impactful.





## Acknowledgements

My gratitude goes again to John Sands, A.J. D'Amico and Ashley Zohn at Knight Foundation for their long support of this work. Ricardo Mor has my thanks for all of his time, design help and expert feedback. I would like to thank Dr. Garrett Morrow at Northeastern University for his partnership and analytical work and Northeastern graduate student April Qian for design work.

