

Political Science Scope and Methods

A decorative graphic consisting of five light purple circles arranged in two rows. The top row has three circles, and the bottom row has two. The text 'Political Science Scope and Methods' is centered over the top row, and 'Models and Theories in Political Science' is centered over the bottom row. The circles are semi-transparent and overlap slightly.

**Models and Theories in
Political Science**



Models and Methods

- History of Political Science
 - Recent debates
- Specific Research Programs
 - Duverger's Law (Riker)
 - Realignment literature (Mayhew)

Almond's History



- Place of political theory
- The Behavioral revolution
 - Foundations of behavioralism
 - Reaction to existing methods of political science
 - The quantitative divide



Tenets of Behavioralism


- Emphasis on discovering regularities
- Generalization through “covering laws”
- Focus on causality

...very Popperian



Reactions to Quantification

- Statistical methods and Rational Choice theory
 - One and the same?
 - Battle between quantoids and non-quantoids



“Some may question the coupling of deductive theory and quantitative research under the one rubric of “hard science.” Quantitative researchers do at least schematically empirical work, whereas most deductive theorists use empirical data only for anecdotal illustration. But it was radical quantifiers, those who analyze all questions with statistics, who first deformed the discipline in the name of hard science. It was they who popularized the study of politics outside of its historical and cultural setting, who made methodology into the core of graduate education while degrading political philosophy and foreign language study, and who spawned the trend toward method-driven rather than problem-driven research.”

Gregory Kaska (2001)



A clash of Paradigms?

“Mr. Perestroika”

- Charges political science with being run by "a coterie" that "dominate and control" the major scholarly journals and impose "the same methodology" on everyone, thereby "ignoring diverse knowledges and methodologies."
- "Why are all the articles of *APSR* from the same methodology—statistics or game theory? ... Where is political history, international history, political sociology, interpretive methodology?"

More from Kaska



The Perestroika movement is a reaction against scholars who wish to turn the study of politics into what Thomas Kuhn called a “normal science.” They seek to impose a consensus on epistemological and methodological questions in order to hasten scientific progress. This group of scholars comprises mainly rational choice theorists, formal modelers, and those who do exclusively quantitative research. I refer to them as advocates of “hard science.”



What is the end result? The evil of quantification

“Numbers crunchers created [the scientific] approach to political education; rational choice theorists thrive on it. Despite their differences, they share the daydream of a hard science of politics. That is why they have formed a ruling coalition in economics departments and aspire to do so in political science.



What is Perestroika for?

“If the hegemony of hard science is what the Perestroika movement opposes, what vision of political research does it support? Against the flawed conception of normal science, we espouse the ideal of an ecumenical science. It is based on three principles: problem-driven research, methodological pluralism, and interdisciplinary inquiry. While normal science identifies itself by its method, ecumenical science will unite scholars of diverse backgrounds.”



Paradigm shift (redux)?

- Robert Dahl (1961) on the Behavioral revolution:

“a protest movement within political science” by scholars who subscribed to notions of systematic theory building and empirical testing against “the achievements of conventional political science, particularly through historical, philosophical, and the descriptive-institutional approaches.”

Sound familiar?

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Where does this leave us?

A scientific ideal

- Multiple methods
- Good research design
- Fair collection and presentation of evidence
- Logical inferences drawn from that evidence

Realignment and Duverger's Law

- Inductive vs. Deductive theorizing
- Does knowledge cumulate?
- What is political science? What should it be?