

# For a More *Public* Political Science

Jeffrey C. Isaac

Many scholarly journals contain Editor Introductions designed to furnish brief yet inviting summaries of each issue's contents. Ever since June 2005, when I became *Perspectives* Book Review Editor, I have written Introductions that do more than summarize. I have sought to highlight common themes and promote a "problem-driven" and thematic approach to inquiry, in order to help bridge the subfield and methodological divides that have plagued the modern discipline of political science in the United States, and to foster a robust and relevant "political science public sphere."

*Perspectives on Politics*, by its very title and origins, is a journal that highlights the *perspectival* nature of political inquiry. It is a unique journal, and editing it requires a special attentiveness to the best ways of promoting productive dialogue across scholarly differences and stimulating productive debate within scholarly agreements. This is an ongoing interpretive process, involving communication with reviewers, board members, authors, and readers, and involving editorial *judgments* of consequence. This interpretive dimension of inquiry is not unique to *Perspectives*. It is, arguably, characteristic of all journals and indeed of all human living. But *Perspectives* is uniquely committed to foregrounding, and *owning*, this interpretive dimension of political science inquiry. One reason I write elaborate

Introductions is to highlight the connections and synergies behind the production of every issue we publish, thereby encouraging readers to read and think broadly beyond their normal comfort zones. The second reason is because every issue bears the imprint of my editorial judgments and decisions, and it seems only right to call attention to these judgments and decisions, and to allow them to be an explicit part of ongoing discussion about the political science contained in our journal and about political science in general. *Perspectives on Politics* is a "flagship" journal of the American Political Science Association. As its editor, I am an important professional "gatekeeper," and I make consequential decisions for individuals and for the discipline. Why not be explicit about this? Why make believe that I am simply enacting the anonymous and ineluctable requirements of "science?" Everyone knows that this is not the case. And yet we so often pretend. *Why pretend?*

This issue's Introduction is different from any I have written before. For while it comments on the contents of this issue, it has a much broader and more candid academic-political purpose. It is an *Editorial* in the true sense, an effort to promote the scholarly praxis at the heart of the journal's mission. I feel the need to explain this praxis, but also to *defend* it. For in my opinion it faces a number of challenges associated with what I will call a resurgent neo-positivism within the discipline. I don't think this neo-positivism is a bad thing. A robust political science public sphere ought to be pluralistic. Intellectual vitality is a good thing, and the tendency of which I speak is a resurgent, *revitalized*, neo-positivism, animated by a sincere commitment to a conception of political science that has value for many colleagues and that ought to be respected. But it does not speak for all of political science, and indeed in many ways its manner of speaking is rather narrow and technocratic.

As a long-time participant in discussions about the future of the discipline, as an APSA Council member and as an editor, it has become clear to me that it is important for me to use this space to reflect on the past, present, and possible futures of our discipline. My purpose is simple: **to clarify, defend, and expand the spaces in political science where broad and problem-driven scholarly discussions and debates can flourish.** And my goal is equally simple: to provoke critical discussion in the

---

*I have shared this piece with many colleagues, and with the entire editorial board, before publishing it. I would like to thank the following for their helpful criticisms and comments: Rick Battistoni, Michael Bernhard, Charli Carpenter, Dan Drezner, Henry Farrell, Ange-Marie Hancock, Marc M. Howard, Bryan Jones, Mary Katzenstein, Peter Katzenstein, Ira Katznelson, Bob Keohane, Marc Lynch, Samantha Majic, Liz Markovits, Anne Norton, Paul Pierson, Andy Sabl, Jim Scott, Rogers Smith, Joe Soss, Paul Staniland, Dara Strolovitch, Sid Tarrow, and Kathy Thelen. And I would like to thank especially these current and former members of my editorial staff, who are amazing in every way, for their comments: James Moskowitz, Margot Morgan, Adrian Florea, Rafael Khachatryan, Katie Scofield, Brendon Westler, Laura Bucci, Rachel Gears, Pete Giordano, Katey Stauffer, and Fathima Mustaq.*

discipline, so that this journal can move forward strongly into the future, beyond my editorial tenure, and so that the kinds of work that we feature can continue to have not simply a place, but a *valued* place. I am writing this substantial essay for all of our readers, and especially for the many colleagues who care about this journal and the kinds of political science it represents. It is my hope that it will spur constructive and collegial discussion and debate in our profession.

I will pursue this task in four steps: (1) by revisiting the debates that helped to give rise to this journal, and suggesting that such critical energies need to be continually renewed; (2) by identifying, and criticizing, a resurgent positivism in the discipline, which I believe jeopardizes what this journal represents—if it is allowed to claim the mantle of “political science” and to present itself as speaking for the discipline as a whole (here I criticize a heavily prescriptive *meta*-approach to what counts as “science,” and *not any particular style of research itself*; our journal indeed publishes work in virtually every style of research); (3) by making explicit some of the values and practices promoted by *Perspectives on Politics*, and (4) by making the case that what the discipline most needs today is not more technique or methodological purity but more *publicity*—broader, more comprehensible, and more publicly relevant forms of research, writing, teaching, and professionalism.

### Thinking Historically about Perspectives, Perestroika, and American Political Science

*Perspectives on Politics* is one important part of a broader process of rethinking that has taken place in American political science over the past two decades, mirroring similar processes that have unfolded in other social science disciplines (such as the movements for “Public Sociology” and “Post-Autistic Economics”). This rethinking was most recently spurred by the highly publicized “perestroika” movement within the discipline, which sought to promote greater methodological pluralism, greater transparency and openness in disciplinary institutions, and for some also greater “relevance.”

*Perspectives on Politics* was created in response to this general intellectual ferment. One impulse behind the journal’s founding was the felt need for the discipline to have a broader public profile, and a venue that, in the words of founding Editor Jennifer Hochschild, “reaches across and outside our discipline and seeks to draw all of its members, and others, into a conversation about politics, policy, power, and the study thereof.” As Robert Putnam noted in his 2002 APSA Presidential Address, “The Public Role of Political Science,” this impulse was hardly new in the discipline, which has experienced continual cycles of argumentation pitting “scientific rigor” against breadth of approach and “relevance,” and has progressed through the unfolding of this productive tension. As Putnam wrote:

“in all the social sciences, waves of scientism and activism have succeeded one another in a dialectic process . . . we are nearing the end of a period in which activism has been de-emphasized and even de-legitimized by our professional norms.” Putnam’s address made the case for a political science that is sophisticated, systematic, and rigorous and at the same time has “a greater public presence” and significance.

If one impulse behind this journal was a felt need for the profession to address matters of public consequence, another was the sense that political science had become hyper-specialized and balkanized, consisting of subgroups of scholars who spoke only to each other in increasingly private languages, to the detriment of both collegiality and real intellectual *progress*. Gabriel Almond articulated this concern in his widely-cited 1988 *crie de coeur*, “Separate Tables: Schools and Sects in Political Science,” which bemoaned the fact that increasing numbers of young political scientists were vacating the broad “cafeteria of the center” in favor of the exotic specialties on offer at “separate tables.” Almond wrote as a former leader of the “behavioral revolution” now reflecting on a revolution gone astray, a self-described former “Young Turk” who had come to feel that his own broad theoretical background and wide-ranging interests had marked him as a “dinosaur” in a discipline enamored of “virtuoso mathematical and statistical displays” and other forms of esoteric expression. Almond’s rhetorical appeal to a “vital center” that was in danger of extinction indeed harkened back to the *early* days of behavioralism, and to what Ira Katznelson has labeled its interest in “political studies enlightenment.” It was none other than Almond’s behavioralist colleague David Easton, who wrote, in a 1951 *Journal of Politics* article entitled “The Decline of Political Theory,” that:

our value framework becomes of crucial significance for what is generally viewed as empirical research. It influences the kind of problems we select for research and the way in which we interpret results . . . unless the [political scientist] is constantly aware that he himself does make value decisions, and that his research is inevitably immersed in an ethical perspective, he is apt to forget that social science lives in order to meet human needs. By shying away from his own role as a value builder, as well as analyzer, the research worker is less apt to identify the crucial problems of human life in society that require examination. In part, this search for an amoral science and its correlative hostility to a creative redefinition of values accounts for the feeling today that social science lives isolated in an ivory tower.

The parallels between the intellectual situation Easton described in 1951, and the post-behavioral pathologies bemoaned by Almond in 1988, are striking. The fact that the critical descriptions were offered by leaders of the discipline’s move toward a more “scientific” profile who are regarded as heroes of the political science “mainstream” is telling.

It underscores the *centrality* of this journal's mission to our discipline's core commitments.

*Perspectives on Politics* was created to foster the kind of scholarly reflexivity, and broad mindedness, that Easton extolled, and that *APSR* editor Lee Sigelman endorsed, in 2002, when he called for a greater "intellectual diversity [that] endows political science with vibrancy, energy, and openness to new and often challenging perspectives." It also reflected the thinking behind the Task Force on Graduate Education created in 2002 by APSA President Theda Skocpol, which underscored the advantages of social-scientific specialization, but which also highlighted the pressing need for political scientists to "communicate clearly to each other and to broader publics" why and how their inquiries promote "improved understandings of substantively important features of human life."

*Perspectives*, in short, represented something new that in fact was also something of a throwback, to a time, not that long ago, when political scientists across the discipline, regardless of subfield, methodological orientation, or political perspective, could talk meaningfully to each other about their work, and could open the pages of their discipline's "flagship journal" and read everything or almost everything—not just article abstracts or introductions, but *entire articles*—with genuine understanding and *interest* (I am speaking here about intelligibility; the discipline has a history of being quite "exclusive" in its disinterest in questions of class, race, and gender). At the dawn of the twenty-first century, American political science, only a century old in institutional terms, seemed to have outgrown such broad disciplinary understanding. The size of the profession, the increased sophistication and specialization of political science research, and the heightened sense of epistemic expertise that attended the "maturation" of political science as a profession and a discipline, made it increasingly difficult for political scientists to do and to share their "best" research in ways that were broadly intelligible even to their own disciplinary colleagues. The discipline, in short, seemed to have lost its core—a common, public language of concepts and concerns capable of facilitating serious critical engagement, mutual understanding, and intellectual learning across the field as a whole, and thus indirectly beyond the field.

It was in this historical context that our journal was authorized by the APSA Council and begun, in 2003, under the leadership of founding editor Jennifer Hochschild and her editorial team. The fine journal that I inherited in 2009 from my predecessor, James Johnson, was only seven years old, still gaining its footing and only beginning to establish its credibility in the discipline. *The best new things often have a precarious existence*. And thirteen years is not a long time. And so a brief comparative observation is in order. In 2006, *APSR* editor Lee Sigelman—a visionary editor—edited a Centennial issue looking back on a century of American political

science. His introductory essay, "The Coevolution of American Political Science and the *American Political Science Review*," was aptly titled, for "the Review" was the discipline's sole flagship journal throughout the entire first century of its organizational existence. As Sigelman pointed out, the journal served as the place where excellent research from across the discipline could be published. And given its mission, it was endowed not simply with intellectual credibility but with very strong institutional backing. I wonder how many of our readers know that for the first 43 years of its existence, the *APSR* had *only three* editors! Its inaugural editor, W.W. Willoughby, served for 10 years (1906–1916); his successor, John A. Fairlie, served for 10 years (1916–1926); and *his* successor, Frederic Ogg, served for 23 years (1926–1949). Our discipline's premier "flagship" journal thus enjoyed extraordinary editorial and institutional stability during the first five decades of its existence. In contrast, I am only the third editor in the history of *Perspectives*, and at almost six years, I have served longer than either of my predecessors, who served terms of three and four years respectively. When my term as editor expires in May 2017, I will have served as editor in chief for eight years. *Perspectives on Politics* is *still* a very new and young journal. Will the journal one day have its equivalent of Lee Sigelman, looking back on a hundred years of publishing, able to reflect on important connections between the journal and the evolution of the discipline? And will it be said that the journal served as a fine thermometer of the discipline, or rather as a *thermostat* that helped to promote intellectual vitality and public relevance through leading by example?

These are questions of historical judgment, and obviously they are questions for the future. At the same time, we contribute *now* to the making of that future. And taking stock of where we stand, now, in the discipline's recent history, is thus an important task, and one of the central themes of this issue.

The Centennial issue of the *APSR* included an essay by John Gunnell, the profession's premier disciplinary historian, on "The Founding of the American Political Science Association: Discipline, Profession, Political Theory, and Politics." It is only fitting that this issue of *Perspectives* also contains an essay by Gunnell, "Pluralism and the Fate of Perestroika: A Historical Reflection" that sounds similar themes. Gunnell argues that the "perestroika" movement in American political science was a reform movement that echoed previous reform movements in the discipline, and was plagued by a forgetfulness of an endemic tension that has afflicted the discipline from the start:

Despite the particular circumstances in which perestroika arose and notwithstanding the changes in the discipline and profession that might reasonably be attributed to it, it was basically a reverberation of longstanding problems about the relationship between political science and politics and about the tensions between the search, on the one hand, for intellectual unity and,

on the other hand, the commitments to both disciplinary and political pluralism. These problems had been present from the inception of the field, but they were most immediately the legacy of the 1960s.

Gunnell further argues that, as has happened before, deep anxieties and concerns about public relevance and political engagement “were sublimated in discussions about methodological pluralism and professional diversity.” The result, he suggests, is that perestroika resolved little, and the discipline continues to be torn between the urge to be ever more sophisticated as “science” and the aspiration to contribute to broad public enlightenment or democratic civic engagement (See also James Farr’s review of Robert Adcock’s *Liberalism and the Emergence of American Political Science: A Transatlantic Tale*).

Our symposium on Gunnell’s piece features important disciplinary historians and critics and disciplinary leaders active in the debates surrounding perestroika. The vigorous exchange presents no strong consensus about the achievements of perestroika or its legacies moving forward. A number of the discussants—especially David Laitin, Anne Norton, and Sanford Schram—follow Gunnell in underscoring the gap separating the highly politicized struggles of the Caucus for a New Political Science in the late 1960s, and the largely intra-disciplinary conflicts animating perestroika. But whereas Laitin sees this gap as a sign of political progress, Schram and Norton seem to support a closing of the gap, and a further politicization. As Norton writes,

perestroika was a victory for reform and, like most reformist victories, it resulted in disappointment. A few doors were opened, a few careers were advanced. A few more journals were marked as appropriate venues for publishing, a few more methods taught in methods courses. These were small gains, but they have been transformative, permitting a slightly (though only slightly) more open, adventurous, and at the same time rigorous political science. Perestroika made life easier for scholars whose work is valuable. It made things harder for those who sought to claim the mantle of science without satisfying the demands of science: who claimed title to rigor on the basis of an aesthetic formality and the concealment of carelessness in numbers. But these are dark times and that is not enough.

At the same time, even Norton acknowledges that in important ways the discipline was transformed by the perestroikan opening. Yet a number of the commentators worry about whether the openings created by Perestroika will remain. Robert O. Keohane speaks for many when he notes that many of these openings remain precarious:

In some ways the problem of methodologically-induced narrowness to which perestroika responded remains as strong as ever—perhaps even stronger—despite the incorporation of this counter-movement into the mainstream of the discipline. Political science faces a problem of “nominal pluralization,” comparable to the “nominal democratization” that we find in many countries around the world: in the organization of the

Association, and in official rhetoric, many flowers bloom, but in actual employment decisions at high-status departments, methodological sophistication and theoretical pretension trump genuine engagement with politics and policy, informed by the exercise of imagination and sophistication about how politics works.

Michael Desch sounds similar concerns in his “Technique Trumps Relevance: The Professionalization of Political Science and the Marginalization of Security Studies.” Desch advances three key claims: (1) “that scholars increasingly equate rigor with particular techniques (mathematics and models) and ignore broader criteria of relevance,” a trend that has particularly harmed the field of security studies; (2) that while this tendency of academic disciplines towards insularity and specialization has sometimes been offset by pressing political demands for useful knowledge associated with “periods of war or heightened threat,” these counter-tendencies have recently been weakened; and (3) both public policy and academic political science are diminished by this gap separating methodological obsessiveness, on the one hand, and policy-relevant knowledge on the other. Desch, along with John Mearsheimer, Joseph Nye, Stephen Walt, and others, has long advocated a more pragmatic and policy-oriented approach to the study of world politics. Our symposium on his piece includes a diverse group of scholars—Ido Oren, Laura Sjoberg, Helen Turton, Erik Voeten, and Stephen Walt—who generally support a more engaged scholarly posture, and yet raise critical questions about how such topics as “security” are defined, and whether closer links with U.S. national security institutions and interests are likely to have the general benefits to scholarship and society that Desch anticipates—something challenged especially in the pieces by Sjoberg, Turton, and Oren. (An interesting counterpoint is offered in the Praxis essay by Celestino Perez on the experience of teaching military ethics to U.S. Army officers.) Like Gunnell, Desch insists that the discipline has not changed quite as much as the perestroikan critics had hoped.

This theme is also taken up by Rogers Smith in “Political Science and the Public Sphere Today.” Smith, well known for his activism at the early stages of perestroika, revisits concerns that he has addressed repeatedly since the late 1990s. Like Gunnell, he holds that “from its inception, the discipline of political science in the United States has been shaped by a desire to be as rigorous a science as possible, on the one hand, and to serve American democracy, on the other.” And like Gunnell, he contends that while perestroika helped to clear a space in the discipline for a wider variety of perspectives on politics, the tendencies towards scientism remain very strong in the discipline and the commitment to publicly-relevant research and writing remains weak:

Yet despite Robert Putnam’s hope for an upsurge in publicly-relevant research, and despite general disillusionment with the most sweeping ambitions of rational choice theorists, the different

camps are still by no means equal in size or status. Political science has continued to trend toward the predominance of research that is most focused on achieving rigorously specified and tested findings, with only secondary concern for how far those findings are relevant to major aspects of contemporary public issues.

Smith remains critical of this trend, which he believes is exacerbated by changes in the landscape of higher education. One such change is the development of a highly segmented academic labor market, which sustains an elite of tenured and tenure-track teachers at top research universities and liberal arts colleges, and a mass of insecure, precarious, and marginalized graduate students, lecturers, and professors who staff most universities and colleges. A second, related change is the growing gap between a small group of research-oriented academics, and a much larger group of academics who have neither the time, the resources, nor perhaps even the interest in state-of-the-art research methods and high-powered research agendas, because they are both dedicated to teaching and often forced to scramble to secure highly-precarious teaching jobs. (On this topic, I recommend the October 2014 special issue of *New Political Science* on “The Future of Higher Education and American Democracy.”) As Smith writes,

The contested but predominant internal trend to give priority to the goal of becoming more scientific has been bolstered by the external trends separating research from teaching, and by the increasing need to rely on non-governmental research funding, which goes primarily to what is seen as more “scientific” work. But the profession’s research contributions may well prove to be narrowed and skewed by these developments. As top research scholars are increasingly relieved of many of their teaching responsibilities, it becomes easier to pursue highly technical, often esoteric dimensions of the discipline’s internal theoretical debates, since those topics are generally not suitable for undergraduate courses.

Smith argues that these developments render political science vulnerable to efforts to defund research and to roll back tenure guarantees (as recent developments in Wisconsin and North Carolina indicate). More importantly, they deprive political science of its *raison d’être*: to develop publicly relevant and meaningful knowledge about the world of politics. He thus concludes that

we have to use our professional protections and privileges well. This means doing our research in ways that do more to unite the contributions of different flavors of political science and that also address more effectively topics that matter to participants in modern public spheres. It also means something else. In America today, perhaps much more than in other nations, political scientists particularly need to resist the pressures and temptations to move further away from the researcher/teacher model of academic life and toward disciplinary segregation into those who are almost exclusively researchers and those who almost exclusively teach.

This issue is also raised bluntly by Kristen Monroe in her comments on Gunnell:

Will the profession listen, and respond to the demand that a wider-range of scholars be included at the table in which decisions are made, with all the implications that has for how we define the very nature of our professional work and life? This remains an open question. In this regard, perestroika’s call to open the profession to all—as a welcoming warm house does—constitutes a battle that even now remains to be fought. Sadly, it can still be lost, to the detriment of us all.”

## Have Perestroikan Energies Been Coopted and Overtaken?

*Perspectives on Politics* was created to promote a political science incorporating a broader range of methods, theories, and perspectives on politics, one whose substantive concerns, and modes of communication, allowed it to reach to broader reading publics. As Robert O. Keohane, an APSA President involved in its creation, maintains, “plans for this journal, *Perspectives*, were already under way before the first perestroika manifesto, but the perestroika movement surely gave impetus to the project of having an official APSA journal with a broader ambit than the *American Political Science Review*, more open to commentary and to broadly interpretive work.” The launching of *Perspectives* was clearly fueled by an upsurge of critical and creative energies.

Indeed the journal, in only its thirteenth year of operation, continues to be fueled by such energies. Thanks to the activities of a wide range of authors, reviewers, editors, copy-editors, and an extraordinary editorial staff, and thanks also to a growing readership, the journal is thriving. We regularly and efficiently fill over 1,200 pages per year. Our article submissions have climbed dramatically, from around 150 per year when I assumed editorship, to over 250 per year now (there are other journals that receive more submissions, but only half of our pages are dedicated to articles; we publish over 300 reviews a year of over 400 books; and many of these appear in special formats). Perhaps one sign of the interest in the journal is the fact that *Perspectives* went from being unranked by the Thomson-Reuters Citation index to being ranked number 9 in 2012 to being ranked number 2 in 2014. According to this citation index, *Perspectives* is now the second-most cited journal in political science, behind only the *APSR*. (To be clear, such rankings offer a very crude and reductive approach to the concerns about *quality* that ought to animate any self-respecting journal; they rest upon an approach to scholarly writing that places an emphasis on relentless citation; and they are particularly ill-suited to judging the impact of a journal that places a premium on the serious reviewing of books, for book reviews are rarely cited in scholarly articles, and while books are often cited, the journals that publicize these books and help them enter the scholarly discourse are unrecognized in such citation systems. In addition, there are serious gender and network biases at play in the citation business. For these reasons, at *Perspectives* we do not place

much credence in citation metrics, even as we are happy to cite them for those colleagues who are impressed by such things.) My point here is a straightforward one: the journal fills a need, and a great many colleagues eagerly participate as writers, reviewers, and as readers. In this sense, I think it is fair to say that the journal has been “consolidated,” and has become more or less part of the “mainstream.” In institutional terms it is the fraternal twin and coequal of the *APSR*.

At the same time, as students of social movements well know, there are costs to consolidation.

On the one hand, old habits die hard. Disciplines have “path dependencies,” and it’s often a constant struggle to remind the most well-intentioned people that there are new ways of doing things. On the other hand, at a certain point, having “arrived” means being taken for granted as part of the ordinary landscape of things, requiring no special concern or support. Journals have their operating systems, and their staffs, and their timetables. *Perspectives* comes out on time every three months. So what’s the worry? Well, there is no worry. But there is *concern*. Because thirteen years is not a very long time. More importantly, as the perestroika energies—however limited—have dissipated or been absorbed, there has recently been a revival of some of the very tendencies against which perestroika set itself. These developments lean in the direction of a very different conception of political science than the one to which *Perspectives* has been linked from the start. And I believe it is important for these developments to be widely understood, and taken seriously, so that those political scientists who do not embrace them—as I do not—can continue to strengthen a broader, more intellectually pluralistic, and more publicly engaged political science.

What do I mean in speaking of a resurgent neopositivism? I mean, very simply, a reenergized and dynamic commitment to the idea that the most important challenge of a “progressive” political science is to promote methodological hyper-sensitivity, “scientific rigor,” and expert authority. This takes many forms. But the general approach is outlined in Gary King’s “Restructuring Social Science: Reflections from Harvard’s Institute for Quantitative Social Science” (*PS*, January 2014). As King observes, “the social sciences are in the midst of an historic change, with large parts moving from the humanities to the sciences in terms of research style, infrastructural needs, data availability, empirical methods, substantive understanding, and the ability to make swift and dramatic progress. The changes have consequences for everything social scientists do and all that we plan as members of university communities.” King’s argument centers on the recent progress of quantitative social science. Driven by intellectual ingenuity and “the enormous quantities of highly informative data inundating almost every area we study,” quantitative social science is

growing intellectually—in terms of the capacity of scholars to analyze vast quantities of data in innovative ways—and institutionally—in terms of the development of new research communities centering on this progress. This is transforming, and modernizing, the sociology of knowledge: “Social scientists are now transitioning from working primarily on their own, alone in their offices—a style that dates back to when the offices were in monasteries—to working in much more highly collaborative, interdisciplinary, larger scale, labstyle research teams.”

Importantly, for King this is not merely an advance for quantitative research; it portends the “end of the quantitative/qualitative divide” in social science:

The information collected by qualitative researchers, in the form of large quantities of field notes, video, audio, unstructured text, and many other sources, is now being recognized as valuable and actionable data sources for which new quantitative approaches are being developed and can be applied. At the same time, quantitative researchers are realizing that their approaches can be viewed or adapted to assist, rather than replace, the deep knowledge of qualitative researchers, and they are taking up the challenge of adding value to these additional richer data types.

This general approach to “adding value” via new forms of methodological rigor lies behind some recent developments in the American Political Science Association that are “high profile” in terms of their institutional cachet, but are not well understood by the large numbers of colleagues who are uninvolved. These developments have the potential to significantly reshape the way the discipline thinks about publication and about publicity, promoting a conception of publication as the dissemination of specialized research findings rather than as the sharing of ideas and arguments, and promoting a conception of publicity as the spreading of “information” to interested “consumers.”

The most important development for our purposes is the recent APSA elevation of the theme of “DA-RT,” an acronym for Data Access and Research Transparency. To their credit, the leaders of this initiative, Arthur Lupia and Colin Elman, organized a fine symposium explaining the initiative in the January 2014 issue of *PS: Political Science and Politics*. The symposium contains contributions by a range of colleagues representing both quantitative methods and qualitative methods, and also includes as Appendices relevant documents of an “Ad Hoc Committee” of APSA scholars who have been pressing for greater institutional attention to the issue. What is “DA-RT?” In a nutshell, it is an effort to codify, institutionalize, and reinforce a more “rigorous” practice of data access and research transparency in political science. As Lupia and Elman explain in their symposium introduction, the initiative was motivated by

the growing concern that scholars could not replicate a significant number of empirical claims that were being made in the discipline’s leading journals. There were multiple instances where

scholars would not, or could not, provide information about how they had selected cases, or how they had derived a particular conclusion from a specific set of data and observations. Other scholars refused to share data from which others could learn. Still others would have been willing to share their data, but failed to archive them in effective ways, making their information unavailable for subsequent inquiries.

I strongly encourage readers of this journal to carefully read the entire DA–RT symposium, and think hard for themselves about what this initiative means. On the one hand, it is presented as a common sense effort to promote better scholarly sharing (Lupia and Elman note that “The view that social science is a group activity, requiring inter-subjective knowledge being created using public processes that are warranted to add value, is common to virtually every scholarly tradition”)—the kind of thing that in principle no serious scholar could be against. On the other hand, it is linked to some very elaborate plans to codify and enforce uniform standards of citation, data archiving, and indeed the presentation of evidence, all in the name of greater analytic and empirical rigor.

DA–RT seeks to enhance “the legitimacy and credibility of scientific claims,” among political scientists and in the broader world of knowledge “consumers,” by upgrading the methodological purity of research procedures. But it is linked to no particular scholarly problem. Have major arguments about any particular domain of inquiry or any broad theoretical perspective—historical institutionalism? rational choice institutionalism? theory of democratization? theory of civil war onset and duration?—been damaged by the lack of sufficient standards of data transparency? Have the standard practices of political science publishing—prepublication double-blind peer reviewing, demanding processes of revision and resubmission and further review, and ongoing post-publication processes of scholarly critique—failed to “remedy” weaknesses that have been discerned in particular pieces of research? These questions are never seriously addressed by DA–RT proponents, who appeal to general principles of science, combined with the fact that similar forms of scholarly “modernization” are apparently being promoted in other social-scientific disciplines (Psychology is always the principal example).

It is very important to note that this effort involves leading qualitative methodologists like Elman who, writing with Lupia, insists that DA–RT is something that *all* serious political scientists should embrace:

Our prescriptive methodologies all involve extracting information from the social world, analyzing the resulting data, and reaching a conclusion based on a combination of the evidence and its analysis . . . Sharing information about these assumptions, decisions, and actions is necessary for scholars to place one another’s meanings in a legitimizing context. DA-RT is motivated by this premise—the principle that sharing data and information fuels a culture of opening that promotes effective knowledge transfer.

In his contribution to the symposium, entitled “Transparency: The Revolution in Qualitative Research,” Andrew Moravcsik carefully makes the case that DA–RT is essential to qualitative approaches to political science research—which he defines as “the use of textual evidence to reconstruct causal mechanisms across a limited number of cases—and represents “a fundamental precondition for other advances in qualitative work.” Moravcsik, like most of the contributors to the symposium, recognizes that qualitative and quantitative approaches typically draw on different kinds of evidence, and that DA–RT must attend to these differences. At the same time, he also makes clear that what joins DA–RT proponents is a commitment to heightened methodological rigor. The historical discussions of perestroika show that the push for methodological pluralism was linked to a broader push for intellectual openness, attentiveness to a broader range of themes and approaches, the desirability of more plain talking across differences, *and* the importance of more nuanced relationships between scholars and the “human subjects” that they study. Yet Moravcsik, like Elman, focuses on a much narrower concern: “the revitalization of qualitative methods in recent years has focused on various tools for promoting research transparency. These include data archiving, qualitative data-basing, hyperlinks, traditional citation, and active citation.” His point: qualitative methods may differ in some respects from quantitative methods, but in the end they share a common commitment to the idea that *political science at its core is a form of data analysis*.

Data—what I would prefer to call *forms of empirical evidence*—are obviously central to political science research and writing, whether this empirical evidence is statistical, ethnographic, archival, or literary (and nothing that I say here represents a critique of the use of empirical or quantitative methods, which are for many political scientists—though not all—the most important means of substantiating arguments). And clearly high-level political science scholarship ought to and does require that arguments be supported by relevant data and also involve both the citation and *engagement of* relevant scholarly interlocutors. DA–RT advocates have very little to say about promoting “intellectual engagement,” which of course is more nebulous—as well as more interesting and important—than methods of citation. And they simply assume that a fundamental weakness of contemporary political science is a lack of seriousness about data that requires major changes to professional ethics statements and major journal editorial policies to promote *and enforce* more rigorous “data transparency.” The DA–RT initiative is animated by a preoccupation with methodological purity, and an interest in institutionalizing new forms of expectation *and evaluation* of scholarly work. Behind these commitments is a particular view of social science—that it is not a never-ending contest between *perspectives on politics* but

instead about the *veridical* understanding of the world as a set of objective processes. Almost a century ago, John Dewey referred to this conception of science as a “quest for certainty.” There are many reasons, both epistemological and practical, to be suspicious of this quest. And it is an interesting fact of our recent intellectual history that while such a view had fallen out of favor among many with the waning of “positivism,” in recent years it has experienced a resurgence, this time abetted not by philosophers but by quantitative and qualitative *methodologists* who are joined by a commitment to methodological rigor as the preeminent source of political science’s credibility.

These are weighty intellectual issues that warrant more discussion and debate within our profession (some of these issues are discussed in William Kelleher’s review of Kevin Clarke and David Primo’s *A Model Discipline: Political Science and the Logic of Representation*). And the question at issue is not whether “transparency” is a good thing—for who would argue in favor of hiding or of deceit? It is whether the lack of transparency is really the problem it is being made out to be; whether there are substantial costs—to intellectual vitality and to the willingness to take intellectual risks in the name of being interesting—to enforcing new norms of transparency; and whether methodological rigor is really the primary thing that political scientists ought to be worrying about today. (There are *huge* ethical dilemmas at stake here that the entire DA–RT discussion seems to ignore, the kind of dilemmas discussed in Charli Carpenter’s June 2012 *Perspectives* essay, “‘You Talk So Matter-of-Factly in This Language of Science’: Constructing Human Rights in the Academy.”)

These are not merely philosophical questions. On September 18–19 2014, a workshop on DA–RT was convened by APSA and hosted by the Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research (ICPSR), with support from Syracuse University’s Center for Qualitative and Multi-Method Inquiry and the University of Michigan’s Center for Political Studies. The workshop included around two-dozen prominent journal editors and political science methodologists active in the DA–RT initiative. (I was not present due to illness, but Managing Editor James Moskowitz attended in my stead.) On October 6, 2014, the assembled journal editors issued a draft joint statement “commit(ing) their respective journals to the principles of data access and research transparency, and to implementing policies requiring authors to make as accessible as possible the empirical foundation and logic of inquiry of evidence-based research.” (This statement, now signed by the editors of 21 political science journals, is posted online at <http://www.dartstatement.org/>.)

Shortly thereafter I shared with the workshop list serve a letter explaining why I could not sign their statement.

Part of this letter is worth quoting, because it articulates what I consider to be the distinctive value of this journal, but also because I believe that the readers of political science journals deserve to be fully informed about the important back channel conversations that may affect the future of the discipline:

I respect those of you who have worked hard to develop the DA–RT initiative and to draft various statements advancing the principles to which you adhere. But I cannot sign onto the statement.

There are two reasons.

The first is that I regard both the DA–RT initiative and the current move to gain journal buy-in as very consequential developments, and I believe they require serious due diligence, at the level of APSA and its members, and at the level of the editorial boards of the journals involved. I intend to initiate a serious discussion with my own board. But I will not rush this discussion.

The second reason is that I personally do not agree with this initiative.

Behind this initiative is a model of science that I understand, and respect, and regard as both flawed and contestable. I do not question that science requires openness, transparency, and vigorous peer review and methods of critique more generally. In this respect I am a follower of both John Dewey and Karl Popper. But I do question whether the standard method of hypothesis-testing ought to be regarded as normative for the entire political science discipline or its top journals. And I believe that while the DA–RT initiative has bravely and convincingly incorporated many kinds of qualitative research, there are many kinds of research that are not neatly encompassed within the model of hypothesis-testing and replication. To codify uniform expectations for the handling of “data,” and indeed to reduce all questions of evidentiary argument to the language of “data,” does a disservice to many kinds of political science inquiry and is likely to be very awkward and indeed impossible for many journals to accept. I assume this is why the “core group” was defined as it was—fairly narrowly it would appear. I honor the *range* of approaches to research that define our discipline. And I respect editors who consider DA–RT essential to the missions of their journals. But I do not favor encouraging all journals to undertake this initiative, and I do not support making this initiative normative or mandatory for the discipline as a whole.

More importantly, the journal that I edit—the only reason I am even party to this conversation—was created with a very specific mission: to provide a space for a wide range of approaches to and perspectives on politics, and to enact an editorial commitment to methodological and intellectual pluralism within the political science discipline. The one-size-fits-all expectations articulated in the DA–RT statement do not fit much of what *Perspectives on Politics* publishes. The strong prescriptivism of the statement is too heavy-handed to suit our journal’s eclecticism. Perhaps most importantly, our journal operates on a distinctive epistemic premise: that the primary “problem” with political science research today is not that there needs to be more replicable research, “replication studies,” and specialized inquiries, but that there needs to be broader discussions, and research projects, that center on *ideas* that are *interesting* and *important*. I know that for many serious, accomplished, and well-intended colleagues, these words—*ideas*, *interesting*, *important*—might seem very impressionistic. All the same, they are central to what



our journal does. And it would appear that many political scientists consider this worthwhile, for *Perspectives*, still a relatively young journal, seems to be very widely read and respected . . .

Our journal is a political science journal edited by political scientists at top academic institutions. It is very serious about the quality of data, evidence, and argumentation. This is why we organize a rigorous peer review process, and always send submissions to skeptical readers, and challenge authors to seriously engage criticisms of their data, evidence, and argumentation. Indeed, for many years we have encouraged authors of empirical research articles to make their data, or at least some of it, available via online appendices hosted at permanent links, so that readers can better understand the evidentiary bases of their arguments, and colleagues can criticize these arguments and thereby contribute to the processes of conjecture and refutation at the heart of social science broadly construed.

Our journal has not encountered any problems with this way of proceeding.

Our authors submit to a rigorous editorial process, and seem willing to do so, but have expressed no great desire to surmount new administrative hurdles.

Editors of certain kinds of journals may have reason to be very concerned about DA–RT—though I am unaware of any major breach of scholarly ethics in our discipline in recent years (one of my colleagues at IU, himself a quantitative researcher, has described DA–RT to me as “a solution in search of a problem”). But I do not share these concerns. And my job as editor in chief of *Perspectives* is to foster, develop, and protect a space in the discipline that embraces a plurality of approaches to politics and to political inquiry. And so I will not sign the statement.

I will share this statement, and relevant materials, with my editorial board, and we will discuss the DA–RT initiative at our next board meeting in the Spring.

I respect the opinions of my colleagues, especially when I don’t share these opinions. I thus appreciate why many of you will proceed with this initiative. I hope you will appreciate why I feel obliged to proceed differently, by expressing my reservations about turning your concerns into normative standards for the entire profession.

Sincerely,

Jeff Isaac

*Perspectives* publishes first-rate research and writing for a broad readership of professional political scientists, including many who are not attached to research centers and do not fancy themselves methodologically *de rigueur*, but who are most definitely serious thinkers and writers and teachers and citizens. Replication studies and research reports have their place in the discipline. But we are committed to cultivating a space where scholars can develop creative and often big *ideas* about how and why the political world works and how it might work differently. And from my vantage point as editor of this journal, what political science *most* needs now is not new and more rigorous data standards, but new and interesting work that speaks to the real political concerns facing the students we teach—and most of us spend most of our professional time teaching students—and the world in which we live.

The DA–RT initiative, in contrast, is linked to recent efforts to promote a rather narrow conception of political science relevance. One important link is the desire to justify, secure, and expand the funding of ambitious research projects by corporate and governmental agencies, none more important than the National Science Foundation. In the past few years efforts to eliminate NSF funding of political science have preoccupied many in the discipline, and with good reason. I have been public about the importance of defending such funding, and indeed in 2013 I organized and chaired an official APSA panel on this topic that featured, among others, APSA President-elect John Aldrich, Arthur Lupia, NSF officer Brian Humes, US Representative Daniel Lapinski, and a range of major figures in the discipline. At the same time, I have joined others in the discipline, including Rogers Smith and Ira Katznelson, in arguing that the defense of NSF funding ought to be linked to a much broader projection and *improvement* of political science as a discipline relevant to the challenges of democratic citizenship. This latter concern does not seem to have received the same attention in the discipline. A case in point is the 2014 “Improving Public Perceptions of Political Science’s Value,” a Report of an APSA Task Force appointed and led by APSA President John Aldrich and chaired by Arthur Lupia. To be clear, the Task Force included a range of participants, and did very important and valuable work, for which it should be commended. At the same time, the animating concern of the entire report seems limited to the improvement of “public perception.”

At least since John Dewey’s 1927 *The Public and its Problems*, it has been well understood that “the public” is a notoriously problematic concept. Indeed, it is probably more accurate to speak of a range of actual and possible *publics*. What are the range of public concerns, public interests, and public groups to which political science speaks and ought to speak? What does it mean to be relevant, and are all forms of relevance equal? At the heart of these and other important questions is a deeper question: how should political scientists, and political science as an organized discipline, relate to—speak to, but also *listen to*—the complex and power-infused world that it both inhabits and take as its object of study? These are complex and difficult questions, and there will never be consensus about how best to answer them (this issue’s symposium on security studies nicely airs these differences). But they are fundamental questions, and ones that warrant serious attention and vigorous discussion and debate. And yet the Task Force Report is largely silent on them. It takes for granted that academic disciplines are best seen as insulated and standing apart from society (“Political Science as a corporate entity engages in two principal tasks—the creation of knowledge and the dissemination of knowledge”), and that the constituencies that constitute “the public” are essentially “consumers” of

the “information” political science provides. The fundamental problem, on this view, is “how information should be presented.” As the Report outlines:

Many of the ways in which political scientists currently communicate—through their teaching, publication in journals, and conference presentations—were developed in less competitive communicative eras. Strategies for presenting information that were once seen as acceptable, in part because there were few other options, are now seen as slow, unengaging and ineffective. Evolving technologies change individual and cultural expectations about what kinds of information should be available and how information should be presented. At this moment, political science’s professional associations have an opportunity, and perhaps an obligation to their members, to take the lead in improving perceptions of political science’s public value. If not APSA, who will? This report, commissioned by the American Political Science Association, identifies means by which individual scholars and professional organizations can make political science’s insights and discoveries more accessible, more relevant, and more valuable to more people. Our main finding is that there are many ways in which APSA, and similarly situated professional organizations, can help political science communicate its insights to a wide range of diverse constituencies using a dynamic collection of communicative strategies and technologies.

Again, much of what it outlined here is true. New modes of communication present new challenges, and the discipline, and especially its professional association, can do a much better job proactively of engaging these challenges. But at the same time, too much is simply taken for granted by this Report: that political science is a more or less homogeneously “research-oriented” discipline, and that its principal challenge is not to be more open or engaged or interesting, but to “disseminate its information” and thereby “add value” to society and in turn receive value—state support and funding. (Many of these ideas were first articulated in Arthur Lupia’s interesting and important 2013 Ithiel de Sola Pool Lecture, “What Is the Value of Social Science: Challenges for Researchers and Government Funders,” published in *PS: Political Science and Politics*, January 2014). In the same way, journals are described here as information containers and “products” more than as actual spaces where ideas are represented, shared, contested, and then *publicized*. The Report thus states: “An expansive number of entities are providing information about topics relevant to political science. For APSA and its members to be focal parts of this conversation, its journal products must have attributes that match or surpass its desired audiences’ evolving expectations. APSA journals must provide fast, relevant, and accessible representations of political science’s extensive knowledge base.” And on this basis the Report recommends consideration of a range of e-journal ideas, all of which take for granted that digital technologies ought to drive publishing formats and that the most important imperative is to satisfy social demands for “speed.” This is surely one conception of what publication is about. But it

is hardly the only one. Indeed, it is a conception of publication that is very different from the conception that animates the journal that you are currently reading. And this is something that is worthy of reflection by our readers.

### **Perspectives on Politics between Past and Future**

The conception of political science reflected in the DA-RT initiative (and accompanying statements and editor endorsements) and in the Task Force Report is a *modernizing* vision centered on the revolutionary scholarly and communicative possibilities conferred by the new digital technologies. In this sense, it is novel and indeed pioneering. But at its heart, this vision articulates the old positivist idea that social science, like natural science, is all about employing the most up-to-date methods and techniques to generate and then disseminate veridical truths about the world. On this view we must work as hard as possible to eliminate the perspectival and interpretive dimensions of science, and support methods and procedures to ensure that every piece of research is purged of partiality and oriented toward achieving an accurate representation of reality that anyone else, anywhere, can potentially “replicate” and assess. Few today would deny that we social scientists are part of the world we study—that we draw on vernacular descriptions (“democracy,” “authoritarianism,” “political party”), are largely shaped by the problems of our time, and are housed and supported by schools and institutions that are most definitely part of society. Indeed, the effort to promote the “public perception” of political science hinges on the worldly character of the discipline. But the initiatives I have been criticizing presume that the epistemic and the ethical challenges presented by this worldliness are of no great importance, and warrant no particular consideration or disciplinary attention. Indeed, they seem to regard methodology as a means of curing social scientific work of partiality, so that social science can restore its credibility as something more than the disciplined, contextualized, and contestable *interpretation* of a complex world, a world in which we are at once inquirers and participants.

*Perspectives on Politics*, from the start, has drawn on and sought to empower a different conception of political science, one that is signified by its very title, which proclaims that a flagship journal of the American Political Science Association will publish articles and essays that offer *perspectives* that can and should be brought into fruitful dialogue and debate with *alternative* perspectives. The journal publishes articles employing diverse perspectives and methods—some examples: while Kathleen Bawn et al.’s “A Theory of Political Parties: Groups, Policy Demands and Nominations in American Politics” centers on a formal model; Tali Mendelberg, Christopher F. Karpowitz, and J. Baxter Oliphant’s “Gender Inequality

in *Deliberation: Unpacking the Black Box of Interaction* draws on experimental research; Keith Bentele and Erin O'Brien's "Jim Crow 2.0? Why States Consider and Adopt Restrictive Voter Access" rests largely on statistical analysis; Barbara Geddes et al.'s "Autocratic Breakdown and Regime Transitions: A New Data Set" presents a new data set; and Deborah Boucoyannis's "The Equalizing Hand: Why Adam Smith Thought the Market Should Produce Wealth without Steep Inequality" draws largely on the history of political thought. In every case, authors—serious scholars whose work has met demanding standards of double-blind peer review—deploy a perspective that they consider to be most illuminating for the purposes of understanding a problem at hand; explain why this perspective ought to be considered illuminating; employ methods and techniques, and present evidence, to support their explanation; and offer an account of why the perspective that has been presented is interesting, important, and fruitful for further thinking about things that matter. In every case these authors challenge some existing interpretation. And in every case it can be assumed that at some future point another author will come along and renew the challenge. **The journal has published *nothing* that has settled, once and for all, any major analytical, conceptual, empirical, or normative dispute in political science. In this, it is like every other journal in the discipline.** But unlike most journals in the discipline, this journal *embraces* the *perspectival* character of the very best things it publishes, and places a premium on lively discussion and debate on matters of consequence to a broad range of political science scholars and readers irrespective of their particular areas of expertise.

While some colleagues place an ever-greater premium on methodological sophistication, specialization, rigor of presentation, and "data archiving," *Perspectives* places a premium on being integrative and being interesting. For us, these are the primary benchmarks of intellectual quality.

Certain features of *Perspectives* exemplify its integrative mission:

- The journal seeks to publish broadly interesting research articles. We are very explicit about publishing articles that tackle big questions, that bridge conventional subfield and methodological divides, and that are well written and readable. We have a growing queue of excellent accepted articles. In "market" terms, there is a strong "supply" of research that fits our journal's distinctive profile. There is also a very strong supply of reviewers who are willing to review manuscripts according to our specific and demanding criteria, and of readers who seem to read what we publish.
- We have a serious peer review process that involves hundreds of reviewers and is deliberately designed to counter disciplinary tendencies toward specialization. The reviewer pool for every article sent out for external review includes experts in the submission's topic and

approach; at least one expert on the topic who has published from a different approach and is likely to be critical; and one or two scholars who are not experts but generalists, who work on broadly connected topics and who "ought" to be interested in the paper if it is interesting and well written. Every article is thus critically subjected to a range of perspectives. We assume that reviewers will disagree. My job as editor in chief is to read every paper in light of the reviews, to balance the reviews against each other in terms of biases, expertise, and credibility, and then to use my own scholarly judgment about the promise of a piece and to explain that judgment to the author in a careful, constructive, fair, and kind way. Expert opinions count a lot. But the balance of a range of reviewer opinions about the significance of the work in question ultimately determines the future of the piece. A few things are notable about our review process: (1) it requires colleagues to go a bit outside of their comfort zones; (2) it typically involves extensive personal contact, actual correspondence, and human dialogue; (3) it involves a serious practice of editorial deliberation and judgment, but also a practice of prompt, efficient, intellectually serious, and collegial communication with authors that constrains editorial discretion. I have found that a great many of our colleagues are happy to participate in these processes, and indeed are hungry for this kind of experience of editing, reviewing, writing, and reading—of being treated with real intellectual seriousness. They value a dialogic approach to scholarly excellence and a broader style of communication. They know that political science will always consist of a range of perspectives, that no amount of methodological sophistication or scientific "progress" will erase this plurality, and that this ongoing contention, and the new perspectives it engenders, is what makes political science interesting. Publishing excellent articles that are also accessible and interesting is one of our journal's primary purposes.

- We also place a premium on the serious treatment of books. Books are at the heart of political science. Important books help to create new research agendas. The names Almond or Dahl or Katzenstein or Putnam or Skocpol or Ostrom or Riker or Olson or Fenno or Mansbridge or Aldrich do not evoke journal articles. Each evokes an important *book*, and typically more than one of them. Every year many hundreds of new political science books containing new political science perspectives are published. We know this. The Book Exhibit at the annual APSA conference is one of the main attractions for almost everyone who attends. Books are a literary genre of presentation very different from the standard, hypothesis-testing social scientific research article. In books, authors typically engage a big question in a sustained manner. Books take a long time to write. They do not merely report research results. They develop ideas, over many

chapters, typically in the distinctive voice of their authors, and typically after a degree of literary editing that is very uncommon in the world of social science journals.

Books are not standard research articles writ large, nor are they mere collections of articles. And they seek and deserve more than mere citation and more than glorified “Book Note” type reviews. They deserve serious discussion in a serious scholarly context. They deserve well-written reviews that are carefully edited by editors who work with reviewers, and prompt them to think a bit more broadly, and to view their book reviews as real scholarly engagements. Such reviews do much more than publicize and provide short cuts to books that readers might not otherwise know about. They *engage* the books and make them really a part of serious scholarly dialogue.

These book reviews also make *their authors* part of seriously scholarly dialogue.

Most of our colleagues do not work at research-intensive universities. Most of them spend most of their time teaching, often with heavy loads, either as tenured or tenure-track professors at teaching institutions, or as adjuncts and part-time academic workers. For many of our colleagues, the chance to write a fine book review, and to have it seriously engaged by an editor, and to have it published in a “flagship research journal,” is one of the only significant opportunities they may have to write and to publish in a given year.

Every year *Perspectives on Politics* publishes hundreds of book reviews written by a very wide range of scholars with a wide range of institutional affiliations. We are very serious about the range and diversity of the contributors to our book review section. One reason is because it allows our journal to reach broadly, and to *include many of our readers as contributors*. This “community-building” function of *Perspectives* is very important, for a scholarly community ought to be linked by scholarly conversation in which each participant has genuine opportunities to speak as well as to listen, and to be an author as well as a reader.

But this kind of inclusion is also important in an *epistemic* sense. For it “enforces” a breadth of scholarly perspective, and brings expert discourses into conversation with more generalist perspectives, to the benefit of the kind of true critical engagement that is the heart of the scientific enterprise. In this sense, every 1,500-word book review that we publish is much more than a professional “service”; it is a serious contribution to scholarship and to the development of scholarly research. And the publication of these reviews in a flagship journal of political science, alongside rigorously peer reviewed research articles, and essays, symposia, and dialogues, highlights their importance.

- The journal’s distinctive approach to what constitutes important research has leaned heavily towards work that addresses political problems and themes of broad importance. This is a matter of

editorial policy and vision. All scholarship involves judgments of significance. *Perspectives* seeks to promote research that is thematically oriented, whatever range of methods is employed in the research process.

This is deliberate. Our review process seeks a wide range of reviewer perspectives. And our editorial letters press authors to ask themselves how the representatives of other important perspectives might comment on their paper (e.g., “you are writing about Latin American elections. What do you think Guillermo O’Donnell would have said about your argument?” or “your piece as written is primarily as a contribution to the American political development literature; how do you think it speaks to the behavioral literature on parties? How might John Aldrich respond?”). Part of my editorial role is to prompt authors to construct imaginary conversations with their diverse readers (which are also real conversations with me) as a way of getting them to think harder about explaining and justifying their arguments. This makes their papers broader and better.

We also promote broader thematic thinking through the scheduling and packaging of particular issues of the journal. “Gender and Politics,” “Contesting Authoritarianism,” “Nature and Politics,” “Approaches to the Study of Violence”—these are among the themes that we recently have featured, in each case publishing research from a variety of perspectives and using a variety of methods. Our March 2013 issue, for example, centered on the theme “The Politics of Inequality in the Face of Financial Crisis.” The issue contained quantitative and qualitative work, and included work in every subfield. And it was planned so that this work could be read as part of a common conversation about an important and timely political theme. In the same way, our September 2014 issue centered on the theme of “Rethinking American Democracy” (our lead article was a large-N study by Martin Gilens and Benjamin Page that has gone viral). And our forthcoming September 2015 issue will feature work dealing broadly with the theme “The Politics of Policing and Incarceration.”

This is not the way most journals work. The pieces published in most disciplinary journals hardly speak to each other at all. The goal of such journals is, appropriately, to review submissions in terms of the particular standards of excellence that have evolved in a particular domain of inquiry. Specialized journals publish excellent peer reviewed work that advances knowledge in specialized domains. *Perspectives on Politics* incorporates into its very mission the goal of working proactively to bringing different domains of inquiry, and perspectives on politics, into more fruitful dialogue and debate, by highlighting the importance of *themes* over the importance of subfields or methods or paradigms. We believe that the ability to discern important research problems, and to think broadly about why they are important and how a wide range of

---

interesting scholarship can be engaged—what I will call, echoing C. Wright Mills, the possession of *political imagination*—does not come naturally. And it is not cultivated by an approach to disciplinary training and evaluation focused on methodological prowess and ever-more-specialized training in research methods, be they statistical or qualitative. It is cultivated by the promotion and publication of work that is, for want of a better phrase, broad-minded and interesting.

- The journal pushes beyond academic comfort zones in support of a robust “political science public sphere.” This refusal to take existing conventions for granted in the evaluation and publication of research is demanding editorial work and demanding scholarly work that requires nurturing the active cooperation of many hundreds of colleagues as authors, reviewers, and readers. At the same time, this work can have a large payoff, for the individual scholars involved and for the discipline as a whole. Take a look at any issue of the *American Political Science Review* before 2003. In it you will find important work, published in mainly two formats: the conventional, specialized scholarly research article, and the conventional 1,000-word book review. From the start, *Perspectives on Politics* sought to expand the forms in which important and interesting political science research and writing was presented: Review essays. Reflective essays. Symposia. The purpose of these formats was to nurture new and interesting conversations. Before we created the “Critical Dialogue” format in the Book Review, it was standard operating procedure for books to be assigned to reviewers who were “normal interlocutors.” A book on judicial behavior would be reviewed by an expert on judicial behavior. A book on European party systems would be reviewed by an expert on European party systems. A book on Plato would be reviewed by an expert on Plato. By such means, disciplinary specialization was unthinkingly reproduced and enhanced over time. With the introduction of “Critical Dialogues” we sought to challenge this. Our very first Critical Dialogue featured two major scholars of judicial politics—Lawrence Baum and Mark Graber—reviewing each other’s books, and responding to each other’s reviews. What’s the big deal? In fact, though these two scholars were—and are—both very accomplished, they work in two very different domains of inquiry, sometimes labeled “judicial behavior” and “public law,” the first a largely empirical domain, and the second a largely historical and normative-legal domain—yet both centered on understanding *law*. Scholars working in these domains can go entire careers attending conferences, sharing research, and publishing important work, without ever speaking to each other! And that is crazy. And so we decided to change it. From the very start, these Dialogues have been enormously successful. Have they “revolutionized” the practice of political science? No. But they have expanded the range

of conversation across sometimes arbitrary methodological divides, and they model a practice of scholarly dialogue that can only help greater numbers of colleagues understand each other, work together, and learn from each other.

And while *Perspectives* obviously can claim credit for no particular “advance” in political science—for many journals feature innovative work, and in each case it is the scholars doing their work who deserve the credit for it—it can claim credit for being open to, and proactive about, featuring new and promising lines of inquiry. One such line of inquiry is scholarship on democratization, at the intersection of “comparative politics” and “political theory,” centered on a multidimensional and rich understanding of “democracy.” Our journal’s June 2011 lead article was an early statement of the “Varieties of Democracy” (“V-Dem”) perspective—Michael Coppedge and John Gerring’s “Conceptualizing and Measuring Democracy: A New Approach.” The current issue contains two other contributions to this general discussion: Andrew Sabl’s “The Two Cultures of Democratic Theory: Responsiveness, Democratic Quality, and the Empirical-Normative Divide” and David Watkins and Scott Lemieux’s “Compared to What? Judicial Review and Other Veto Points in Contemporary Democratic Theory.” Our journal has also featured work in “American political development” that, for reasons of style and length, is sometimes difficult to place in more conventional disciplinary journals. Our March 2014 issue thus included a long piece by Paul Frymer on US territorial expansion, “A Rush and a Push and the Land Is Ours’: Territorial Expansion, Land Policy, and US State Formation”; and the current issue features two contributions to this genre of scholarship: Colin Moore’s “Innovation without Reputation: How Bureaucrats Saved the Veterans’ Health Care System” and Stephen Engel’s “Developmental Perspectives on Lesbian and Gay Politics: Fragmented Citizenship in a Fragmented State.”

Indeed, Engel’s piece is distinguished by the way it extends the study of American political development to the analysis of lesbian and gay politics (related themes are also featured in our Critical Dialogue between Julie Novkov and Carol Nackenhoff’s *Statebuilding from the Margins* and Megan Ming Francis’s *Civil Rights and the Making of the Modern American State*). The study of gender and sexuality has until recently not been considered a “mainstream” topic of inquiry in political science. And yet these themes quite obviously pervade every aspect of politics, which involves human beings who inhabit bodies, experience sexuality, procreate and raise children according to gendered divisions of labor, and identify and act politically as women, men, or transgendered, and as gay or lesbian or bisexual or heterosexual. In the entire history of the American Political Science Association, there have been only two issues of a flagship

research journal that have featured the theme of gender and politics: the March 2010 issue of *Perspectives on Politics* and the March 2014 issue of *Perspectives on Politics*.

*Perspectives on Politics* is by no means the only journal that is open to such themes. But it is, arguably, the only journal in American political science whose mission involves a commitment to fostering new lines of inquiry, and to broadening “a political science public sphere” of research and writing on matters of political consequence.

## In Defense of Publicity

Why am I writing these things, now? As an ex-officio and longest-serving member of the APSA Council, I have been party to important recent discussions about the need to “modernize” the discipline via the DA–RT initiative, the creation of new e-journals designed for rapid dissemination of “research reports,” and the public relations and outreach proposals contained in the 2014 Task Force. Like most discussions of “modernization,” these discussions have seemed heavily biased in favor of a “newer is better” ethos in which newer means “technically advanced.” This has concerned me—and I have not been alone. At the same time, as editor of this journal, I am continually thinking about related issues, and continually receiving pieces of writing that raise them. Many of the pieces contained in this issue seemed almost “naturally” to come together in this way. *Almost* naturally. For ultimately it was my decision to go beyond the conventions of even my own regular introductions, and to *editorialize* in this way. Why now? Because in recent years I have been appointed and twice reappointed as editor in chief of this journal. And as I now look toward the end of my editorial tenure, I think it is important to be very explicit about what is at stake in current disciplinary discussions, what this particular journal represents, and why it is important for the kind of political science represented by this journal to be defended and indeed promoted.

Gary King is correct to observe that “large parts” of the social sciences are “moving from the humanities to the sciences.” But large parts of the political science discipline are not part of this move and do not wish to be part of this move. And the fact that *Perspectives on Politics* exists as the institutional co-equal of the *American Political Science Review* is one important sign of this. In the very heart of institutionalized political science in the United States there exists a successful and arguably very popular scholarly journal that promotes, and enacts, a practice of broad-minded, ecumenical, intellectually serious, and politics-centered political science.

*Perspectives on Politics* is simply one political science journal among many, and its distinctive editorial philosophy is hardly universally embraced. It represents one possible vision of political science that coexists with, jostles with, and sometimes competes with other visions. And this

is as it should be. The proponents of the tendencies I have discussed here are to be admired for having the courage of their convictions. But this does not require the universal embrace of their concept of a modernized political science.

DA–RT is preoccupied with the accessibility and transparency of data and data-analytical techniques. Accessibility and transparency are no doubt good things. At the same time, DA–RT promotes a very limited, and indeed highly privatized, notion of scholarly “publicity.” It seeks to establish new bureaucratic procedures of data disclosure and housing, so that scholarly experts can re-do data analysis and replicate the findings of earlier data-driven research. Indeed, it seeks to deliberately erect new barriers to the publication of scholarly research, so that research that does not satisfy the prescribed methods and the mandated bureaucratic procedures can be filtered out, and so that the scholarly journals who sign on can ensure that their publications serve as disseminators of “information” and “research products” that have a particular “scientific” badge of approval.

*Perspectives on Politics* represents a very different conception of publicity. Our journal rests on the deep etymological connection between the ideas of publication, publicity, and public. The purpose of the journal is to broaden dialogue and debate, and to incite both scholarly boldness and scholarly skepticism, and not to restrict or to temper them. We are a scholarly journal, and we have standards. But we are open to a wide variety of formats and approaches and we resist the normalizing tendencies associated with *all* forms of methodological obsession. When I took over the journal, we emphatically branded it as “a political science public sphere.” We very deliberately understood our mission as primarily *intra*-disciplinary. Given the tendencies toward balkanization and specialization, and given the rhetorical importance of claims to “science,” we deliberately sought to enact a broader kind of political *science* that prized scholarly excellence and that placed a premium on broadening the discipline from *within*. *Perspectives* is not a public intellectual journal. It is a scholarly journal. At the same time, such a broadening of the discipline from the inside out has no necessary terminus. And by promoting research and writing that is problem-driven and intellectually accessible, we hoped—and we still hope—that the journal will speak to broader reading publics, in the academy and in the broader public domain, in the United States and beyond. We promote blogging by our authors. We have started a social media campaign, centered on a Twitter account. And we regularly un-gate large sections of the journal so that the interesting things that we publish can be read by journalists, elites, and ordinary citizens who do not pay APSA membership dues.

From the vantage point of our journal, the most important challenge facing contemporary political science is not to elevate the discipline’s expert authority via new

---

methodological regulations and new forms of professional public relations. It is to strengthen the discipline's *real commitment* to promoting new and interesting forms of research and writing that enhance scholarly and public understanding of things that are important—and to do so in ways that truly compliment the kinds of teaching, university “service,” and public engagement that most political scientists practice in the course of their ordinary lives.

Political science is a science. And so it is good that it fosters the development of a wide range of techniques, methods, experiments, arguments, and approaches. The dramatic growth in the sophistication, academic cachet, and instrumental usefulness of quantitative social science is an accomplished fact of contemporary scholarship. The methodological sophistication of much new qualitative research is an equally accomplished fact. And the current preoccupation with DA–RT represents progress for a conception of social science linked to methodological prowess. But it does not represent the future of political science writ large. For the future of political science remains open. Indeed, it is we, who stand in that gap between past and future, who will determine just how open this future remains. I have sought to be deliberately provocative here, and the reason is simple: because I want this journal to survive, and to thrive, well into the future, and for the vision that has animated it from the beginning to continue to play an important role in political science. The individual scholars, teachers, and citizens who make up the

large and diverse discipline of political science deserve nothing less.

In his commentary in this issue, Sanford Schram observes that the limits of prior efforts to reform political science should not

undermine our efforts as much as remind us that we were involved in a venerable tradition that spoke to issues that went to the very heart of what political science was about. The fact of the matter is that pushing for change is ineliminably iterative, more cyclical than linear, as Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward famously argued. As the forces of resistance inevitably reassert themselves, we are pushed to re-engage the battle, sometimes to re-claim the very same terrain that had been gained and then lost.”

The authors and readers who keep this journal going are the beneficiaries of earlier efforts to shake up the discipline and to clear a space for a more pluralistic, reflexive, and relevant political science. The ongoing operations of the journal represent an effort to keep this spirit alive. And the many colleagues who serve as our authors, reviewers, editorial staff, and readers deserve recognition for making important contributions to this ongoing effort.

At the same time, *Perspectives on Politics* has never been an ordinary journal. And if it is to continue to flourish and to grow, it will need to draw on an extraordinary reservoir of talent, energy, and intellectual agitation. For a journal can continue to promote a broad political science public sphere only if it is continually revitalized by informed, engaged, broad, pluralistic, and *active* political science publics.

# The Centrality of Books to Political Science and to *Perspectives on Politics*

By Jeffrey C. Isaac, Editor in Chief

Almost half of every issue of *Perspectives* is dedicated to our Review section. This structure of the journal is something that we inherited, for when *Perspectives* was created, it was decided to move the APSA book reviews, which had previously been published in the *APSR*, to *Perspectives*, and to open up the new journal to a range of writing formats.

We inherited this structure, but we also embraced it.

Indeed, I assumed the position of Editor in Chief of the entire journal after having served for four years as the Book Review Editor under the editorship of my predecessor, Jim Johnson. During my tenure as Book Review Editor we made a conscious decision to innovate with this section, by creating new formats—Critical Dialogues, Book Symposia, different kinds of thematic review essays, and Review Editor Introductions highlighting common themes—and trying to make the “back end” of *Perspectives* a space for lively conversation across conventional subfield and methodological divides in the discipline. These innovations were announced and explained in my inaugural editorial statement, “A Statement from the Book Review Editor” (*Perspectives on Politics*, March 2006, pp. 3–4), and the approach to the journal’s treatment of books has remained true to the perspective outlined in that public text.

When I was offered the editorship of the entire journal in 2009, I agreed to accept this position on the basis of a clearly defined vision that was grounded in our experience with the Review section, and I was committed to editing the entire journal as a whole. My reason was straightforward: I believed that the journal was a unique and precious intellectual resource, and I was—and am—deeply committed to placing it on the strongest possible footing as a venue that features a wide range of political science perspectives and formats in a genuinely integrated way. It is surely possible for the two “ends” of the journal to be edited by separate individuals, working together in a collaborative fashion. But I was and am strongly committed to the idea that the two ends can and should be integrated into a single whole; that each “end” should in fact have diverse formats, so that in fact the journal would be much more complicated and interesting than a simplistic oppo-

sition of “articles” and “reviews” implies; and that these formats should speak to one another.

This vision was endorsed by the APSA officials—the search committee chaired by Rogers Smith, APSA President Peter Katzenstein, and the APSA Council—who unanimously supported my appointment.

When my editorial team took over the entire journal in 2009, we “branded” the journal as “A Political Science Public Sphere,” and worked hard to nurture synergies between the research articles and essays published in the journal’s “front end” and the reviews and book discussions published in its “back end” (this vision was announced in “*Perspectives on Politics: A Political Science Public Sphere*,” my editorial statement published in the March 2010 issue, and now printed at the beginning of each issue). My staff and I have devoted enormous energy to this approach to the journal, with the strong support of our dedicated Editorial Board and with the support of the APSA Council. These efforts were recognized by the 2011 Performance Review Committee that recommended the extension of our editorial tenure. But in my view the most important “recognition” of this approach is the fact that we continue to enjoy the enthusiastic participation of many hundreds of authors and reviewers every year, and to produce a publication that includes a wide range of excellent contributions across a range of formats.

At the heart of the journal as it has come to be structured, read, and appreciated within the profession, is the deliberate effort of our editorial team to discern, nurture, and publicize complementarities, synergies, and broad thematic interests that might otherwise be insufficiently recognized by our increasingly specialized academic life. Our entire range of formats is dedicated to this end. We have nurtured the production of research articles that are rigorous, rigorously peer-reviewed, and at the same time are written and framed more broadly than conventional research articles. We have nurtured a range of conversations about political science books, and promoted conversations between our articles and our book reviews and essays. These connections have been essential to our vision of “a political science public sphere.”



---

Readers of the journal will be familiar with this range of formats, and with their complementarities:

- Research articles
- “Reflections” essays
- Book Review Essays
- Book Symposia
- Book Critical Dialogues
- “Undisciplined” Reviews and Review Essays (featuring reviews of books from other disciplines)
- A special thematic Book Review section in each issue
- Standard single, double, and triple Book Reviews

Readers will also be familiar with the ways that we have sought to plan our production schedule so we can package writings in these formats together thematically, and highlight these themes in my Editor Introductions. These efforts draw scholarly and public attention to broad and interesting themes. And by promoting broad and relevant scholarly discussion, they also help us reach beyond the discipline, and to gain the attention, and sometimes even the involvement, of journalists, policy intellectuals, and sometimes even a broader reading public. Recent examples include:

- Our June 2012 issue featuring work on violence
- Our September 2012 special 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary issue on “Post-Katrina New Orleans and the Politics of Reconstruction”
- Our March 2013 issue featuring work on “The Politics of Inequality in the Face of Financial Crisis”
- Our June 2013 issue featuring work on “Nature and Politics”

It is sometimes overlooked how central our Book Review section is to these efforts. But even a casual perusal of any recent issue of *Perspectives* will remind colleagues of the centrality of books.

I have been a professional political scientist for over thirty years. We are all well acquainted with the still widely accepted notion that book review assignments are convenient means of getting a free book that you want to read and of dashing off a thousand-word commentary during one’s breaks from “real” research and writing. For the past eight years we have worked tirelessly, and successfully, to counter this unfortunate notion.

*Books are important, and so serious intellectual attention to them is important.*

While promptly published scholarly articles are also important, the book format remains the only format that allows scholars, in every field and from every perspective, to take the time and space to develop an argument in depth. Books are at the heart of political science. Important books help to create new research agendas. The names Almond or Dahl or Katzenstein or Putnam or Skocpol or Ostrom or Riker or Olson or Fenno or Mansbridge or Aldrich do not evoke journal articles. Each evokes an

important *book*, and typically more than one of them. Every year many hundreds of new political science books containing new political science perspectives are published. We know this. The Book Exhibit at the annual APSA conference is one of the main attractions for almost everyone.

These books seek and deserve more than mere citation and more than glorified “Book Note” type reviews. They deserve serious discussion in a serious scholarly context. They deserve well-written reviews that are carefully edited by editors who work with reviewers, and prompt them to think a bit more broadly, and to view their book reviews as real scholarly engagements. Such reviews do much more than publicize and provide short cuts to books that readers might not otherwise know about. They *engage* the books and make them really a part of serious scholarly dialogue.

But there is something else: these reviews make *their authors* part of seriously scholarly dialogue.

Most of our colleagues do not work at research-intensive universities. Most of them spend most of their time teaching, often with heavy loads, either as tenured or tenure-track professors at teaching institutions, or as adjuncts and part-time academic workers. For many of our colleagues, the chance to write a fine book review, and to have it seriously engaged by an editor, and to have it published in a “flagship research journal,” is one of the only significant opportunities they may have to write and to publish in a given year.

Every year *Perspectives on Politics* publishes hundreds of book reviews written by a very wide range of scholars with a wide range of institutional affiliations. We are very serious about the range and diversity of the contributors to our book review section. One reason is because it allows our journal to reach broadly, and to *include* many of readers as *contributors*. This “community-building” function of *Perspectives* is very important, for a scholarly community ought to be linked by scholarly conversation in which each participant has genuine opportunities to speak as well as to listen and to be an author as well as a reader.

But this kind of inclusion is also important in an *epistemic* sense. For it “enforces” a breadth of scholarly perspective, and brings expert discourses into conversation with more generalist perspectives, to the benefit of the kind of true critical engagement that is the heart of the scientific enterprise. In this sense, every 1500 word book review that we publish is much more than a professional “service”; it is a serious contribution to scholarship and to the development of scholarly research. And the publication of these reviews in a flagship journal of political science, alongside rigorously peer reviewed research articles, essays, symposia, and dialogues, highlights their importance.

We are excited about the range of formats contained within *Perspectives*, and the way that they work together to project a vision of scholarly and intellectual seriousness. We believe that in this age of specialization, “modularity,”

---

## From the Editor

and almost costless digital creation and circulation of texts, it is important for an intellectually serious political science discipline to have at least one broad, integrated, and intellectually serious journal that features a range of perspectives, formats, and scholars.

We believe, in short, that it is important for there to be *a political science public sphere*.

We are also grateful to the many colleagues who support us in these efforts, and who embrace the chance to be active participants in and contributors to the journal and its many formats. We continue to receive a growing number of article submissions, and we have many exciting book review special features planned in the coming issues. As we move forward, we welcome your ideas and suggestions.