SYMPOSIUM

An Unfulfilled Methodological and International Agenda

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In this article, we speak to two of the Perestroika movement's contributions to political science: heightened awareness of (1) the need for a more catholic approach to methods and (2) the increased sensitivity to the special demands of international cross-cultural research. We make several suggestions here that address each of these topics.

METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

First, there is the urgent need for more catholic methodological approaches to the discipline. One practical solution that addresses this need is for journal editors to vary the length of their publications, since some methodologies—interpretation of narrative interviews, participant observations, and field notes, for example—require more space to present evidence that is nuanced enough to capture the complexity of the argument. Given the importance of journal articles, rules that limit the page length of journal submissions to 20 to 40 pages privilege work conducted using methodologies that require less space for the presentation of results. This means that scholars who rely on narratives, for example, will turn to books for the publication of their scholarly work. Because books take longer than articles to produce, a reliance on book publications can jeopardize young scholars' prospects for job offers, tenure, and promotion.

Traditional approaches such as surveys and polling are impossible in a variety of political contexts. Subjects in many developing societies, especially in rural areas, view requests for "formal" interviews, questionnaires, and surveys as suspicious activity sponsored by state agents. Suspicion and disapproval also mark any request for oral or written authorizations to meet the documentary requirements of institutional review boards, whose extensive forms intimidate many people in other countries. IRB requirements are intimidating both in democratic and non-democratic settings, where such heightened legalism is viewed with suspicion across regimes. This is a problem that needs to be addressed by the scientific community. On the other hand, informal conversations in local languages and participant observation over extended time periods can reveal vital political data.

More important, in the absence of research using these methods, we ignore a variety of lines of inquiry that may challenge our political assumptions about the world. Events in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Pakistan reveal the heavy economic, political, and policy costs of narrow—or false—scholarly and intellectual assumptions. Research on sensitive topics—such as jihad and terrorism—may be especially affected by research methods that rely too heavily on governmental data collected for public consumption.

INTERNATIONAL CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH

A second contribution of the Perestroika movement lies in its focus of attention on the imperative for and special requirements of international cross-cultural research. Scholars who engage in cross-cultural research may require more time to complete graduate school. The need for extra time is immediately obvious for students who must learn a new language or multiple languages, as is frequently the case in diverse and multiple settings. Even after students acquire language skills, the need for field work to study diverse institutions adds a valuable dimension to the educational experience that students who do theoretical work or model American politics may not have. Recent pressures at most universities to streamline graduate study and have students complete their degrees in four to five years may discourage students from doing such in-depth international, cross-cultural research, especially in cultures and contexts that differ significantly from those of their home country.

The need for cross-cultural research is increasingly evident in a global world. As we shift from the bipolar world of the Cold War, the rise of other powers—India, Brazil, South Africa, inter alia—poses a fundamental challenge to our political assumptions about the role of the environment, the balance between state and economy, the appropriateness of a regime, and the utility of war spending. We need more, not fewer, political scientists doing fieldwork in neglected areas of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Boxing graduate students into shorter programs provides reverse incentives. This approach discourages them from learning foreign languages during graduate school and encourages reliance on preexisting data sets and conventional models whose assumptions may not hold in cross-cultural situations. Field work, especially in risky and inhospitable locations, poses further challenges to researchers, but it is essential if we want to obtain accurate information, especially in states where the majority of the population is rural—such as India, Indonesia, or Pakistan—and where brief visits to big cities can provide spurious information. For a discipline that rewards rapid completion of graduate school and immediate publication, staying longer to learn about the chosen societies, regimes, and states has no professional pay-off, and graduate student summers are therefore spent in intensive methodological

doi:10.1017/S1049096510001198

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096510001198 Published online by Cambridge University Press

summer training camps or big East Coast libraries and data centers. But in a complex and increasingly globalized world, this state of affairs is a loss for both academia and public policy.

The broadening of methodological training and the internationalization of programs will have to overcome another serious obstacle: the profession's addiction to state-generated data. The production and growth of statistics is possible only with the acknowledgement, if not the approval, of states (Sadiq 2005, 182). States monitor and make legible society, the economy, and politics in an effort to maintain order. They collect, organize, and shape the census and health and economic data, as well as authorize the local collection of international surveys. Notably, state agents or those sympathetic to state goals, such as current and retired politicians, bureaucrats, advisors, and military personnel, are appointed gatekeepers in institutions that collate data. Later, the same data are shared with international bodies—the United Nations, World Bank, European Union, and Interpol—who then further aggregate, reconfigure, and legitimize such data. State and elite cooperation to generate data toward a preferred consensus or outcome supportive of their governance is common to both democratic and authoritarian states. Hence, there are bound to be more statistics that relate to issues that support the idea of state governance, national consensus, and a state's preferred self-image that is liberal, open, and kind (Sadiq 2005, 182). States and political elites naturally want to suppress data that contradict the existing consensus, preferred outcome, and power in the polity. This perhaps natural tendency makes it all the more important for political scientists to encourage the independent collection of a wide variety of data on politically sensitive topics. The politics of data collection may be as important as the assembly, collation, and subsequent operationalization of the data.

An equally contentious issue is the validity of data that the state is unable to count, estimate, and monitor. Partly because these data reflect a lack of state control or, worse, complicity and corruption by state elites, data on important topics such as illegal flows of drugs, people, arms, money, animals, and biochemicals pose fundamental challenges to a discipline addicted to states' numerical largesse. Yet, ethnographic data collection, snowballing, and participant observation tracing *jihadi* or *hawala* networks remain on the margins of American political science. When scholars return to preexisting datasets to organize their own dataset, uncritically accepting state-generated data, the loss to the discipline, and to the world, seems obvious. ■

Even after students acquire language skills, the need for field work to study diverse institutions adds a valuable dimension to the educational experience that students who do theoretical work or model American politics may not have. Recent pressures at most universities to streamline graduate study and have students complete their degrees in four to five years may discourage students from doing such in-depth international, cross-cultural research, especially in cultures and contexts that differ significantly from those of their home country.

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https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096510001198 Published online by Cambridge University Press