Scholasticism in Political Science

Lawrence M. Mead

Criticism of trends in political science centers on specific methodologies—quantitative methods or rational choice. However, the more worrisome development is scholasticism—a tendency for research to become overspecialized and ingrown. I define that trend more closely and document its growth through increases in numbers of journals, organized sections in the American Political Science Association, and divisions within the APSA conference. I also code articles published in the *American Political Science Review* to show a growth in scholastic features in recent decades. The changes affect all fields in political science. Scholasticism serves values of rigor. To restrain it will require reemphasizing relevance to real-world issues and audiences. To do this should also help restore morale among political scientists.

For several decades, political science has suffered deep divisions over its methods and direction. These disputes seem deeper and more enduring than found in other academic fields. At times, virtual civil war has broken out. These disputes have been centered on particular research methodologies. In the 1960s, with the "behavioral revolution," quantitative methods seemed to be taking over the discipline. A movement for a "new political science" arose to recover more engagement with political issues.[1] In the 2000s, the vogue for rational choice provoked the "perestroika" movement to defend methodological pluralism.[2]

I offer a different diagnosis: Political science is becoming *scholastic*. That term originally referred to medieval philosophy, but it has come to connote academic work that is over refined at the expense of substance. It is said that some medieval scholastics debated how many angels could dance on the head of a pin. Similarly, today's political scientists often address very narrow questions, and they are often preoccupied with method and past literature. The changes affect all areas of political science. Scholars are focusing more on themselves, less on the real world. That has harmed the realism of their work and the audience for it.

Critics attack the specific methodologies. They say that quantitative modeling or rational choice misconstrues the nature of politics. Or they argue that no one analytic method is sufficient to understand politics.[3] That may be true, yet the greater problem is the narrowing of inquiry itself. Research questions are getting smaller, and data-gathering is contracting. Inquiry is becoming obscurantist and ingrown. The dominance of quantitative methods or rational choice is objectionable mainly to the extent it reflects this wider change. As I will show, even if these methods were eliminated, trends toward scholasticism would remain.

I seek here mainly to define scholasticism more closely and document its growth. More briefly, I discuss the implications. The trends have shifted the values served by research. Today's political science seeks to be rigorous in a manner modeled on the natural sciences, but this has come at the expense of relevance to political problems and issues as nonacademics perceive them. The shift, I suspect, is one cause of the discouragement of many political scientists about their discipline. A return to broader, more realistic, and more relevant research seems essential to restore morale.

Scholastic Trends

The following four trends constitute what I mean by scholasticism. I have observed them strengthening ever since I joined the Politics Department at New York University in 1979. They also have advanced at other universities where I have taught or know well, including Harvard, Princeton, and Wisconsin.

Specialization

Most political scientists today are far more specialized than they once were. Formerly, scholars teaching in American politics or international relations covered that entire field. Today, Americanists are likely to "do" only public law or public opinion, not all of American politics; internationalists will do perhaps international political economy, but not all of IR. Specialists' research is only in those subjects, and their intellectual world has also contracted. They interact with other academics, go to conferences, or review

A list of permanent links to supplementary materials provided by the author precedes the references section.

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manuscripts mainly in these specialties. Their work is also read mainly by other specialists doing the same kind of research.

Methodologism

Attention to methodology has sharply increased. Much more attention is paid now to research design and data analysis than formerly. In itself, that would be a gain, but the cost is that political scientists today often are interested mainly in methodology or statistics, rather than in the subject of analysis. For many, politics or government is something to model, not important in itself. The same is true of graduate students, who today often have strong backgrounds in methods but know less about their subject than they used to. Methodology has itself become a field within political science, perhaps the most prestigious. Methodologists have become censors of the discipline, criticizing past research and setting standards for others.[4]

The older research style pursued a subject using various methods. One read up on secondary sources, interviewed people, perhaps directly observed the phenomenon of interest, such as an election or a Congressional debate. Only then did one come up with a question and a research design. Research aimed to uncover some reality about politics. That truth was to be discovered "out there," beyond the researcher, and all methods might contribute. Today, typically, background knowledge counts for much less. One seeks not a reality but a finding. It is not to be discovered but constructed by some deliberate procedure. No truth is thought to exist apart from this.

Academic discourse has also changed. Formerly, giving a paper at a seminar or conference would lead to questions about the argument and then a wide-ranging discussion of the issues raised. Today, the questions are much more about methodology, and there is little interest in the argument otherwise. Compared to their predecessors, today's political scientists are more skilled technically but less knowledgeable about politics and government and less intellectual. They have a method, but they often have little to say apart from it. They seldom construct whole arguments from scratch. Rather, they generate findings using a recognized methodology developed mostly by others.

Nonempiricism

The emphasis on method has tended to thin out the evidence behind research. The older, more catholic research produced a lot of information. It yielded a picture of politics that was robust but unsystematic. Observers outside academe could recognize it. But this sort of scholarship is non-rigorous. It cannot give an exact account of its inferences, so it has been discredited. Today, the preference is for mathematical analyses that can be precisely explained and defended. The cost is that less evidence is generated or consulted. Many published articles rest on a single, bulletproof analysis of a single data base. At the extreme, the empirical dimension of research disappears entirely, as in formal models of politics that are not verified.

There is much less "hands-on" inquiry such as reading documents, conducting interviews, or field observation—direct observation of a subject unmediated by a specific methodology. This journalistic dimension to research has almost disappeared. Instead, most research is done entirely from behind a computer. Political scientists learn a particular methodology and a data base in graduate school, and in their later careers they continue to generate papers based on these. They seldom have much first-hand contact with government.

Without qualitative research, however, findings can become unrealistic. Hypotheses tend to be based on past research or on academic theory, usually economics, rather than contact with actual politics. Political science has largely adopted the view of many economists that analyses need only account for outcomes in the sense of predicting them; they need not be realistic in any broader sense.[5] One common error is that analysts often exaggerate how goal-oriented behavior is. Actors are imagined to calculate and maneuver, when anyone with direct knowledge of government would more likely cite inertia or bureaucratic rules, factors that do not appear in the data bases. Unrealistic images persist in the literature because common sense, general knowledge, or field observation have lost the authority to discredit them.[6]

Today what we call research is mostly confined to data analysis. For their empirical content, political scientists usually rely entirely on data bases gathered by others, particularly the National Election Studies and other surveys. Such data is systematic. One can precisely define and defend inferences based on it. But it actually contains very limited information. No data base, however rich, contains more than a fraction of the information conveyed by direct contact with politics or government. It is like comparing a laser, which illuminates in a highly specific way, to the midday sun, which floods all of reality.

Observers note that some subjects in political science are exhaustively studied, generating many publications, while others are neglected. In the American field, for example, public opinion or incumbency advantage in Congressional elections have received much attention, while urban politics, bureaucracy, and program implementation have received little, notwithstanding their substantive importance. The explanation is that data is already available on the popular subjects, whereas on the neglected ones one would have to leave one's computer and engage in onerous, low-tech information gathering out in the world.[7] To generate new data would more likely add to knowledge, but has little academic standing today.

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Literature Focus

Finally, political scientists orient far more than they once did to the literature in their specialty. Before, scholars formed their own impression of a research problem based on general knowledge or earlier study. They might cite past studies and extend them, yet their inquiry rested on an independent appraisal of the problem. Today, however, the entire structure of the analysis will likely be dictated by past research. One takes sides in some existing controversy among specialists, or one seeks to resolve it with some definitive test.

Today's scholars often are expert primarily about the literature on a subject, rather than the subject itself. To them, the subject *is* the literature, and research often turns into a form of literary criticism. Much of what they study and talk about is this body of past work, rather than politics or government directly. In academic papers, literature review plays a growing role. In graduate school, students study not so much a question as the literature on that question. Their ambition, in their dissertations and afterwards, is to add something that the specialty will recognize and reward. One effect is to conservative research. It is difficult to advance any genuinely new idea or approach, since all assumptions and hypotheses are already set in "the literature."

Illustrations

Two examples will help underline the contrast between the older political science and the new, more scholastic style. In the 1970s, Samuel H. Beer published several influential articles on American federalism. Public officials at all levels, he argued, had collaborated to expand federal programming and spending, and this was difficult for the general public to restrain. Beer's specific research was on general revenue sharing, but he reasoned more broadly about problems of political control in a federal democracy.[8] This eclectic, confident, but unconscious research style was typical of the earlier era. Much in contrast, a recent paper on intergovernmental relations presents it as a debate between two literatures. One of these treats "multi-level governance" in terms of subordinate but general units of government, the other in terms of special-purpose districts.[9] The focus is on academic issues rather than on a widely perceived problem or the stakes for the broad public.

In 1988, Mark Roelofs published an essay on religion and political radicalism. He contended that liberation theology was based less on Marxism than on the Biblical tradition. He referred to Latin American base communities as expressing that heritage, but his main point was the radical potential of Biblical faith itself.[10] In contrast, a study of churches in Florida analyzed how they shape members' political beliefs. An elaborate methodology measured that influence, and the authors positioned their work within the literature on "contextual" determinants in politics.[11] Both papers are about religious community, but Roelofs assumes that the political facts of religion are clear, and the main task is to interpret them. The other paper generates more rigorous findings, but it covers much less ground. The question and the inquiry have radically contracted.

I believe that wide-ranging research of the sort seen in Beer or Roelofs has become less common in recent decades. More rigorous but narrower research now dominates. My sense is that the shift has affected all fields in our discipline, from political theory to international relations. While the nature of evidence and methods differs by field, all are becoming more self-conscious and self-protective. More attention is paid to addressing past arguments and to anticipating criticism, less to making a fresh argument. That inevitably narrows the scope of inquiry.

I do not suggest that the shift is universal. In every era, political scientists deploy a range of methods from the less to the more rigorous. Decades ago, some political scientists were already highly systematic, just as today some prominent figures still address broad questions in more eclectic ways. My contention is only that the mode has shifted. There are *relatively more* political scientists addressing narrow issues with narrow, focused methods today than was true several decades ago.

Documenting the Trends

How does one document that change? Ideally, one would survey the types of research done by political scientists and track shifts over time, a practical impossibility. I offer more limited evidence here. It strongly suggests, at least, that many political scientists today are indeed more likely to be narrow specialists and to publish research on smaller questions than they did 40 years ago.

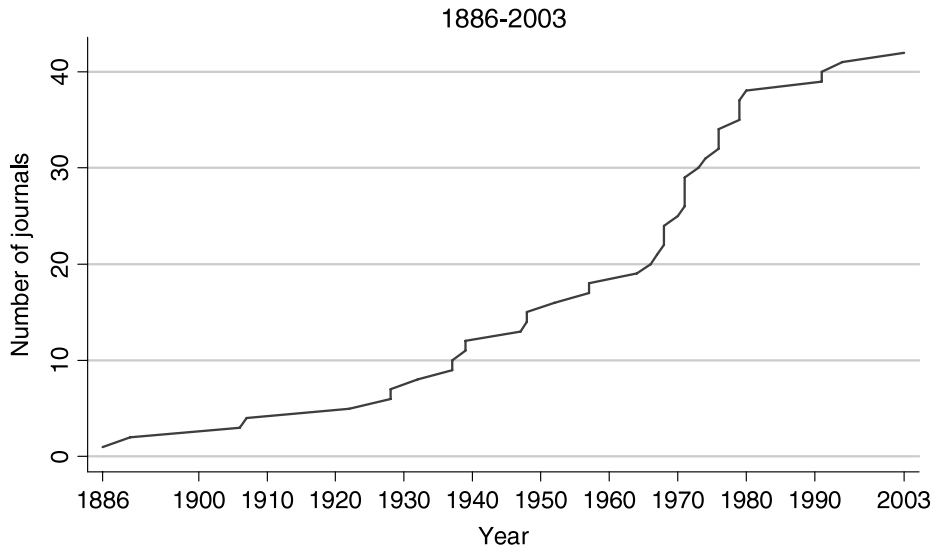
The growth in specialization is the easiest trend to document and the one that has elicited the most comment to date. Critics say that political science is breaking up into cliques pursuing separate specialties and methods, with little communication between them.[12]

Journals

One sign of this is the growing number of political science journals. General journals are the most prominent, among them the *American Political Science Review,* the *American Journal of Political Science,* and *Journal of Politics*. However, there are many others, and the number has sharply risen in recent decades. Figure 1 shows the cumulative number of political science journals listed in JSTOR by the date when they began publishing. The number grows from one in 1886 (*Political Science Quarterly*) to 42 today, with especially sharp increases in the 1970s.[13] The less exclusive Social Science Citation Index lists no fewer than *160* titles under political science and public administration. Beyond these lie various ad hoc collections of papers available on the web.

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Figure 1
Cumulative Political Science Journals in JSTOR



Note: Journals are shown by first year of publication of the journal or its predecessors.

Since many of the newer journals are specialized, the effect has been to promote research on narrow subjects. As a recent *APSR* editor remarks, it is now "more likely that a given paper will be selected for publication because it passes muster among a narrow range of specialists rather than because it is considered to be of potentially great interest and importance to a broad range of readers."[14] Even the *APSR* itself under its current editorship has partially devolved decisions about manuscripts to area specialists.

Organized Sections

The American Political Science Association has increasingly fragmented into subunits. Already in the 1970s, the association faced pressures to recognize subspecialties. Most of these were narrower than the fields long recognized in the discipline—political theory, American politics, comparative politics, and international relations. The APSA council approved organized sections in 1981, and from 1983 they expanded explosively.[15] Figure 2 shows the trends for both APSA membership and sections. By 2007, there were 35 organized sections, covering traditional subjects such as the presidency or comparative politics but also "conflict processes," "political communication," "politics, literature, and film," and so on.

From one viewpoint, the sections suggest vitality. Perhaps they helped reverse the worrisome decline of APSA membership in the 1970s.[16] However, they also helped fragment the discipline.

Conference Divisions

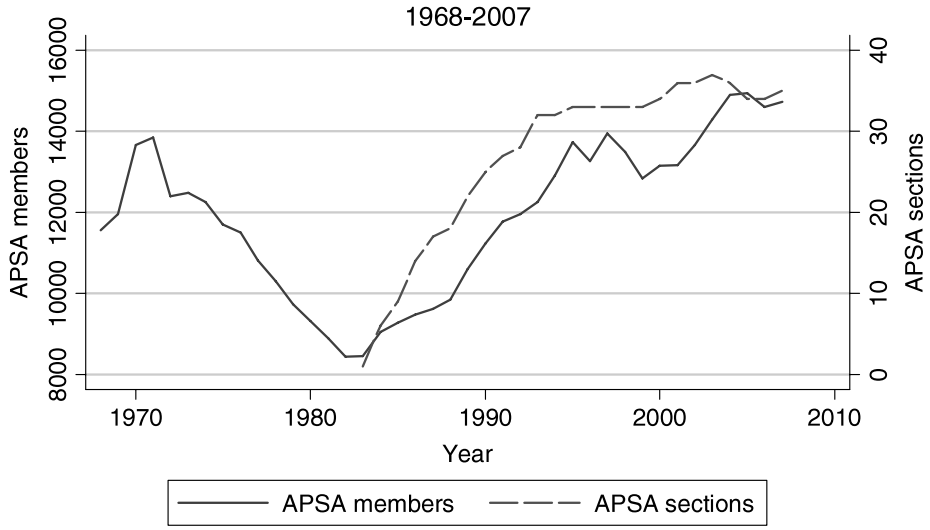
As the sections grew, so did specialties recognized at the annual APSA conference. The program committee traditionally allocated groups of panels to certain subjects. The number of these "divisions" expanded sharply from the 1980s. Figure 3 shows the trends for both divisions and registrants at the conference. Again, the picture might suggest vitality. The rise in divisions closely tracks the more-than-doubling in the size of the conference since 1980. Perhaps more political scientists are attending the conference because it recognizes more specific interests. However, the effect again was to emphasize narrow specialties.

The growth in divisions of the official program actually understates the trend, because meanwhile the organized sections were holding their own panels. Conference managers allocated some panels to the official divisions but also to the sections and even to "unaffiliated groups." Furthermore, the sections claimed some role on the official program committee. Ordinarily, the head of a section became the program committee member for the equivalent division. This diluted the power of the program chair. Messy compromises emerged where the program chair and the sections shared power to name committee members, the details varying from year to year.[17] Nothing could be more scholastic than these internecine battles over subfield preferment, entirely invisible to the outside world.[18]

The result was the fragmentation of the conference. In 1972, it had organized 142 panels, but by 1987 this had mushroomed to 659, counting official program panels, section sessions, and unaffiliated groups together. An ad hoc committee on the conference reported that this has produced a "scheduling nightmare," and also that attendance at some panels had become "low to non-existent."[19] Anyone who has attended recent APSA conferences knows

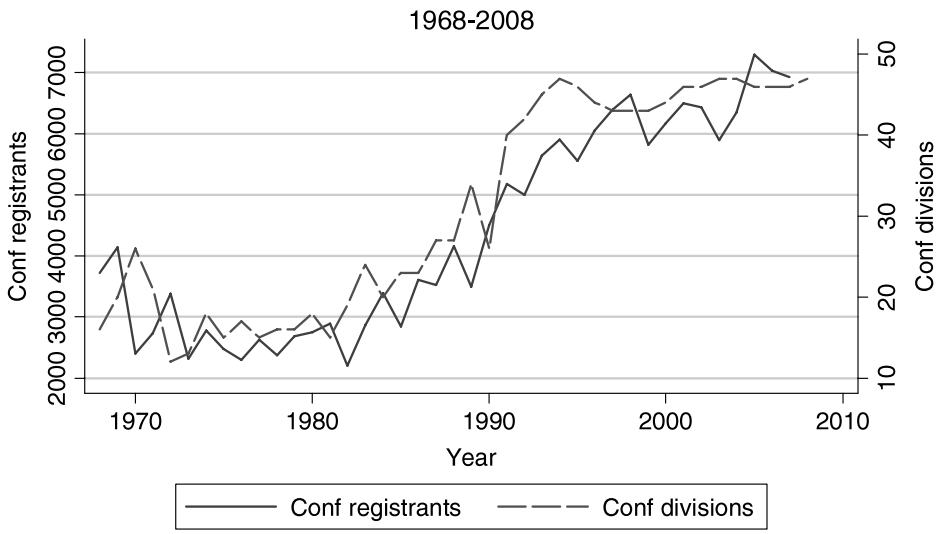
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Figure 2
Trends in APSA Membership and Sections



Source: APSA Executive Director reports from PS and PS: Political Science and Politics various years

Figure 3
Trends in APSA Conference Registrants and Divisions



Source: Preliminary programs and, if unavailable, calls for papers from PS and PS: Political Science and Politics, various years

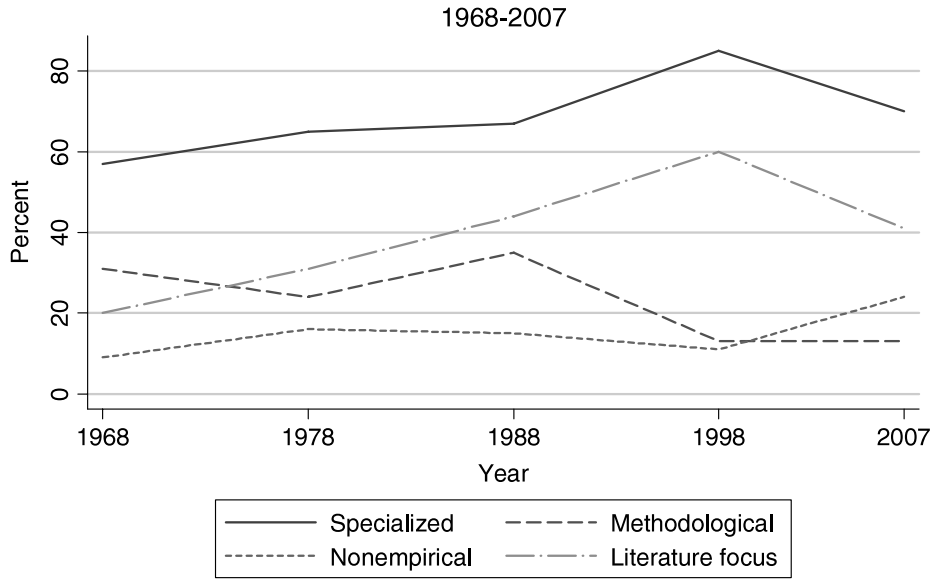
that the "audience" for many panels, even on the official program, is now no more than the panelists themselves. That is true to what scholasticism means—the reference of specialists primarily to themselves. In recent years, organizers have tried to restrain the proliferation, so far to little effect.

An Analysis of the *APSR*

Scholastic trends other than specialization are harder to document. To suggest their growth, I offer an analysis of the *American Political Science Review,* the leading journal in our discipline. Over its history the *APSR* shows trends toward greater methodological rigor and sophistication. Articles based on mere narrative or "barefoot empiricism" have declined in number while those based on quantitative analysis, survey data, or formal analysis have increased.[20] These are the shifts that provoked protests. They need not correspond, however, to scholasticism as I have defined it—a focus on narrow subjects, methodological interests, or the literature.

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Figure 4
Scholastic Trends in APSR Articles



Note: Figures are averages for years shown based on the coding explained in the text.

I coded the articles published in the *APSR* in the years 1968, 1978, 1988, 1998, and 2007 according to whether they showed scholastic features. The coding covered all research articles and articles about controversies but excluded book reviews and review essays, a total of 259 papers. I operationalized each of the four trends mentioned earlier as follows. The definitions were conservative, designed to minimize the number of articles scored positively under each heading: I illustrate each feature with examples drawn from the coded articles:

- ***Specialization***: An article was coded "1" if in my judgment it was of interest mainly to other specialists working on this subject, "0" if it would interest political scientists generally. A nonspecialized article thus had to interest other political scientists but not the general public. Two examples of specialization: Saxonhouse (1988), on the theory of tyranny in the ancient Greek polis, and Powell (2007), an analysis of anti-terrorism strategy with limited resources.
- ***Methodologism***: An article was coded "1" if it offered a major methodological innovation or made general arguments about how to conduct inquiry on its subject, "0" if it did not. To be methodological, an article had to make a point about method, not only be methodologically advanced. Two examples: Gerber (1998), a reestimation of the effects of campaign spending on Senate elections using instrumental variables, and Jenco (2007), a new approach to the study of non-Western political theory.
- ***Nonempiricism***: An article was coded "1" if it discussed an empirical question but did not offer any serious evidence about it, "0" if it did offer such evidence. Standards for evidence were lenient, accepting arguments grounded in any substantial way on factual material.[21] Two examples: Smith (1988), a discussion of "new institutionalist" approaches to public law, without evidence; and Lax (2007), a model of appellate court opinion writing which is unverified.
- ***Literature focus***: An article was coded "1" if it took its structure from past literature, "0" if it was based on an independent assessment of the problem. Literature focus required that an analysis be framed in terms of past research, not simply that it refer to or add to that research. Two examples: Almond (1988a), a critique of recent rehabilitations of the "state" based heavily on a literature review, and Timpone (1998), a study of voting turnout that takes its departure from the literature.

Trends in the four indicators are shown in figure 4 and the top panel of table 1. The share of articles that were specialized or focused on the literature grows dramatically. While 57 percent of articles were specialized even in 1968, the figure climbs to 85 percent by 1998, before falling to 70 percent in 2007. For articles focused on the literature, the comparable figures were 20, 60, and 41 percent. The share of articles judged nonempirical ran lower, rising irregularly from 9 to 24 percent. The share of articles with a methodological argument was also lower and actually fell,

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Table 1
Incidence of scholastic features in *APSR* articles, 1968–2007, overall and excluding particular methodologies (percent)

	1968	1978	1988	1998	2007
Overall (259 articles)					
Specialized	57	65	67	85	70
Methodological	31	24	35	13	13
Nonempirical	9	16	15	11	24
Literature focus	20	31	44	60	41
Excluding quantitative (131 articles)					
Specialized	55	63	62	88	71
Methodological	30	8	31	6	13
Nonempirical	15	25	27	24	42
Literature focus	21	17	50	53	35
Excluding rational choice (212 articles)					
Specialized	55	59	62	84	58
Methodological	29	22	38	11	13
Nonempirical	4	10	6	0	3
Literature focus	18	27	47	59	42

Source: Coding of *American Political Science Review* articles as explained in text.

from 35 percent in 1988 to 13 percent in 1998 and 2007.[22] Scholasticism has somewhat abated in the last decade, perhaps in reaction to the "perestroika" controversy.[23] Overall, however, it has still increased greatly in the last 40 years.

I also coded the articles for whether they fell into the traditional fields of political theory, American politics, comparative politics, or international relations. As I had expected, trends toward scholasticism were roughly similar in all the fields (details not shown). As in the overall results, trends toward specialization and a literature focus were the strongest and clearest, and scholasticism tended to decline from 1998 to 2007. Results were similar whether one included or excluded rational choice articles seeming to fall into these fields.[24]

Of course, these ratings represent merely my personal judgments.[25] However, they proved stable in repeated passes over the articles.[26] Another coder using these categories might score more of fewer articles positively than I have. The trends, however, would presumably be similar, and that is what I focus on here.

The results also show that scholasticism cannot be blamed on the recent controversial methodologies. I also coded the articles in terms of:

- *Quantitative methods*: An article was coded "1" if it presented data with statistical methods more advanced than simple univariate statistics, averages, or percents, such as significance levels, correlations, regression, or other multivariate methods. Other articles were coded "0."[27]
- *Rational choice*: An article was coded "1" if it analyzed politics in terms of game theory or actors optimizing their utilities, with or without formal mathematical analysis. Other articles were coded "0."

Figure 5 shows the trends in these articles. Quantitative work has dominated the *APSR,* but has declined recently. Rational choice has been less dominant than many perceive, but increased to 30 percent of the articles by 2007.

Sixty-one percent of rational choice articles were also judged nonempirical, but except for this neither rational choice nor quantitative methods correlated strongly with the four scholasticism measures. Thus, even if these methods were eliminated, scholastic trends would remain. The lower panels of table 1 show the shares of articles judged scholastic by the four measures if one excludes first the quantitative and then the rational choice articles.[28] As one might expect, the incidence of nonempiricism is higher without the quantitative articles and lower without rational choice, but otherwise the trends are little changed.

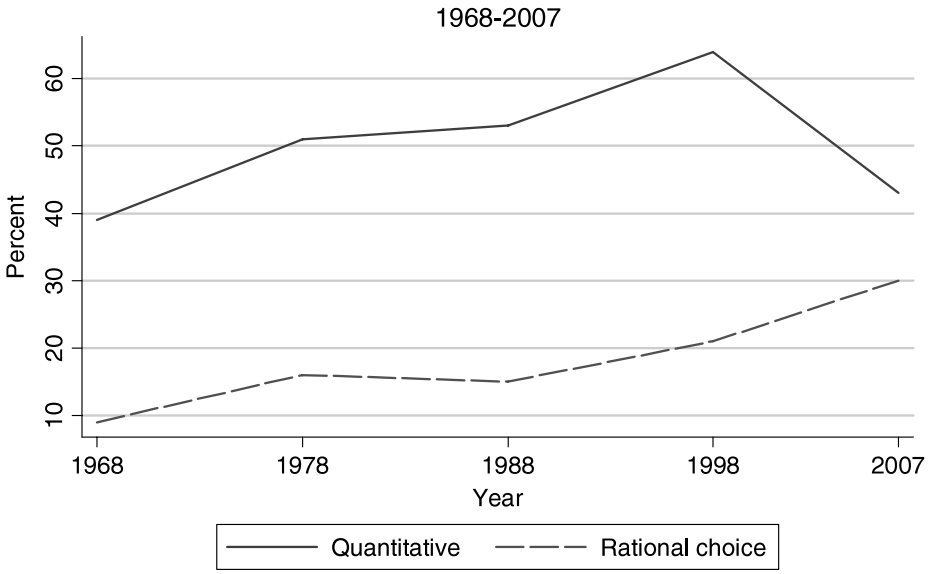
Has scholasticism grown outside political science? Informal discussions with academics in other subjects suggest that it has. In other disciplines, too, research is becoming more specialized and rigorous, but also more ingrown, less realistic, and focused more on issues among researchers than on problems perceived by the outside world.

Academic Values

The scholastic trends reflect an idea that political science, and social science generally, should be modeled on the physical sciences. The point of research is to hypothesize relationships between variables and then test them definitively. That logic should apply to any inquiry, either

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Figure 5
Quantitative and Rational Choice Articles in APSR



qualitative or quantitative.[29] Critics respond that there must also be exploratory research in order to define terms and imagine causal linkages, in advance of modeling. There is thus a role for case studies to help grasp a problem even though evidence drawn from single cases cannot prove anything.[30]

That is true, but defensive. It still accepts that the final purpose in research is to infer one variable as strictly as possible from another. If that is the goal, scholasticism will march on. There is no inherent limit to it, no hard floor of precision after which the narrowing stops. Complete precision is illusory. However exact one is, there will always be further issues about method, measurement, inference, and so on. The pursuit of precision leads inexorably to the narrowing of research I have described. That process could continue indefinitely until "research" becomes entirely mathematical and all contact with common-sense reality is lost.

To limit scholasticism one must step back and question the values it serves—those of *rigor*. One seeks to draw conclusions about reality in ways that draw the least question. Under the norm of rigor, one ideal is *proof*—demonstrating conclusions, not simply asserting them. Hence the appeal of mathematical methods, where inferences are precise. Another ideal is *transparency*. One's conclusions should follow strictly from the data rather than from contestable judgments, so that in principle others could replicate them.[31] These values may seem unobjectionable, even laudable, but to realize them usually requires limiting inquiry to very narrow questions, addressed usually using single data sources. The result is the sort of work that now dominates the journals—analyses of jewel-like precision that, however, generate only minor findings and arouse little interest beyond specialists.

In contrast, nonscholastic research serves the values of *relevance*. Under that norm, one ideal is *realism*—addressing problems as they appear in the real world of politics, as against the narrower issues that academics may define. Another ideal is *audience*—to speak to all those interested in a problem rather than just the researchers. When papers are presented, there should be people in the audience *not* from that field who take an interest. The point is not that research must be useful or applied. Research with theoretical goals need not justify itself by utility. Yet neither can it be entirely self-justifying. Inquiry should address the political issues that lay observers—not just academics—talk about, and it should do so in ways that draw some attention from beyond scholars themselves.

At its best, political science accepts a tension between rigor and relevance, serving both values to some extent. In the American field, which I know best, scholars sometimes have advanced bold new arguments about what makes American government tick. One example is David Mayhew's work, which contends that only reelection really matters to members of Congress, and that divided government makes little difference to Washington's ability to legislate.[32] Another is the work of Morris Fiorina, who contends that Congress members use casework and benefits to buy elections, and that the voters favor divided government in order to restrain the politicians.[33] All these arguments addressed concerns that were current in the political class at the time they were made, thus serving the cause of relevance. At the same time, all were somewhat overstated, leading to rejoinders based on more precise

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Table 2
Features of *APSR* articles and of twenty most-cited and twenty most-downloaded articles since 2001 (percent)

	Specialized	Methodological	Nonem-pirical	Literature focus	Quantitative	Rational choice
APSR overall	69	24	15	39	49	18
APSR 1998	85	13	11	60	64	21
APSR 2007	70	13	24	41	43	30
20 most cited articles	25	30	15	25	55	20
20 most downloaded since 2001:	60	50	0	55	40	5

Sources: *APSR* coding as explained in text: Most cited: Sigelman 2006b. Most down-loaded since 2001: APSA web site.

research, thus serving the value of rigor.[34] Political science advances best when it rides both of these horses.

Do these examples suggest that scholasticism is not, after all, so serious? Perhaps more relevant work is published in books like those of Mayhew or Fiorina, more rigorous work in the journals. But the results given here show a scholastic trend even within the *APSR*. And my impression is that academic books are becoming more scholastic as well. Several editors from academic presses have told me that the books they publish are becoming more specialized and technical. They fear they are losing their audience, weakening the economic basis of their enterprise.

Scholasticism has risen, in part, because the values of rigor have often met no convincing reply. The idea prevailed that precision could be pursued "all the way down" with only scholarly gain, and no loss. That is an illusion. One avoids subjective judgment in inference only by enormous, arbitrary judgments to limit the scope of inquiry. Values of relevance choose the other horn of the dilemma. Researchers accept more judgment about findings, in the interests of less judgment about the subject. Broader questions dictate multiple methods and information sources, and thus more judgment in reaching conclusions. Real-world complexities are allowed into the research rather than excluded by the ways problems and methods are defined.

Restoring Morale

Political scientists are uncommonly disillusioned with their discipline. One survey from the 1980s found them less excited about recent developments in their subject than the followers of 31 other disciplines. In another poll, 43 percent of political scientists rarely found anything of interest in their leading journal, the highest figure for any field surveyed.[35]

Much of the upset, I suspect, is rooted in scholasticism. Many political scientists resist current academic incentives, which require them to become pedants in order to publish and not perish. They may respect the values represented by scholastic rigor, but they want the values of relevance to be honored as well. This recent trends in the discipline have refused to do. Specialization might appear to be popular because of the rapid growth in organized sections. But only about half of APSA members belong to sections.[36] Section leadership is also narrow, comprising mainly the most committed leaders of a specialty and often becoming self-perpetuating.[37]

That scholasticism is unpopular is suggested by the fact that the most widely read political science is generally broader than what is now published. Table 2 shows how I rated the twenty *APSR* articles most often cited, using the same measures as earlier. Compared to the *APSR* generally and in recent years, these papers were notably less specialized and less literature-focused, although more methodological. That may be partly because many of these articles are older "classics." I also rated the twenty *APSR* articles most often downloaded from the Cambridge University Press web site since 2001. They look a good deal more scholastic.

One reason for disillusionment might be that, even if political scientists are able to publish in the journals, they are likely to remain invisible. Most articles published even in the *APSR,* Lee Sigelman writes, have "rarely if ever been cited." Of 2,628 articles ever published in the *APSR* through 2005, only 155 were cited even 100 times. How much more obscure are articles in lesser journals? In the above polls, sociologists appear almost as disillusioned as political scientists, but they do have a wider audience. More than twice as many articles in the *American Sociological Review* achieved 100 citations, even though political science is a much larger discipline. That is because sociology gets more attention from outside the discipline.[38]

To reduce scholasticism, the values of relevance in research must receive more weight. One way to do that is for political scientists to seek greater engagement with government. In policy research, in my experience, there is also pressure toward scholasticism, but it is weaker than in academic disciplines. Work published by scholars at think tanks in Washington is markedly less scholastic than what appears in academic journals. Typically, it is rich in information,

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simple in method. That probably is because policy researchers care about government. They seek a hearing in Washington or state capitals. Thus, they are willing to accept problem definitions that come from the political world, rather than from academic specialties. Most also are willing to present their work in forms accessible to nonacademic audiences. They also are not forced to publish in the journals. All these differences strengthen the values of relevance. Recent APSA efforts to speak to public issues thus help lead us away from scholasticism.[39]

The other necessity is to broaden the research published in the journals. *Perspectives on Politics* is supposed to publish broader work than the *APSR,* so its inauguration in 2003 was another step forward. Equally important would be to appoint editors to other journals—including the *APSR*—who will shift research somewhat away from rigor and toward relevance.

The scholastic emphasis on rigor supposedly serves the interests of science. But taken to recent extremes, specialized research becomes self-referential—preoccupied with the researchers themselves and their issues. Nonscholastic research is less ambitious methodologically but more humble. The focus is on the real world and its problems rather than the researchers, and ultimately this makes for better science.

Supplementary Materials

Explanatory File
http://journals.cambridge.org/pps2010008
Journal Data for Figure 1
http://journals.cambridge.org/pps2010009
APSA Member and Section Data for Figures 2 and 3
http://journals.cambridge.org/pps2010010
APSR Articles by Methodological Orientation and Field
http://journals.cambridge.org/pps2010011
Averages from APSR Coding for Figures 4 and 5
http://journals.cambridge.org/pps2010012

Notes

1 Parenti 1983, Ricci 1984.
2 Cohn 1999, Monroe 2005.
3 Almond and Genco 1977, Geertz 1973, Green and Shapiro 1994.
4 Beck and Katz 1995, King 1991, Nagler 1991.
5 Friedman 1953.
6 Edwards 2003.
7 Arnold 1982, Sigelman 2006a (471).
8 Beer 1976, 1977, 1978.
9 Hooghe and Marks 2003.
10 Roelofs 1988.
11 Wald, Owen, and Hill 1988.
12 Almond 1998b.
13 JSTOR lists 62 total titles in political science, but some are journals founded under one name and continued under another. Allowing for this, 42 titles are active today.
14 Sigelman 2006a (475).
15 Losco 1998.
16 Brintnall 1991.
17 Brintnall 1991, Mansbridge 1989.
18 My thanks to Michael Brintnall, the current APSA Executive Director, for clarifying these details.
19 Rudder 1988 (715–16).
20 Sigelman 2006a.
21 Data from simulations was treated as nonempirical. But simulation results were classified as quantitative if presented using quantitative methods as defined below.
22 The four scholastic features were largely independent of each other, the intercorrelations among them not exceeding .24.
23 Wolfe 2005.
24 I excluded articles in pure methodology, of which there were only three. Admittedly, the four traditional fields may seem archaic now that many political scientists define themselves as doing something more specialized. I allocated the rational choice articles to the American, comparative, or international fields depending on the empirical content to which they alluded. Those without such content I assigned to political theory.
25 In making these judgments, I do have the advantage of an unusually broad background. I was initially trained in political theory and comparative politics but now teach public policy and American government. I have published a good deal of quantitative research and am now working in international relations. I also teach in a department where I hear many rational choice presentations, although I have not used that method myself.
26 I coded all the articles for the scholastic trends three times. Each pass involved 1,036 judgments (4 variables for 259 cases). On the third pass I changed 18 codings, or less than 2 percent, and all the changes were in the methodologism and literature focus variables. I coded the articles for field two times, changing less than 3 percent of codings on the second pass.
27 Mathematical derivations used in formal theory are not themselves quantitative, because they do not involve real-world data, so they were ignored.
28 I did not exclude both quantitative and rational choice at once, because this left too few articles in some categories to get a meaningful result.
29 King, Keohane, and Verba 1994.
30 Laitin et al. 1995, Shapiro 2002; Thomas 2005.
31 King 1995.
32 Mayhew 1974, 1991.
33 Fiorina 1989, 1996.

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34 Fiorina 1989 (ch. 10–11) and Fiorina 1996 (ch. 10–11) summarize later research.
35 Sigelman 2006a (474).
36 Brintnall 1991 (560).
37 Mansbridge 1989 (660).
38 Sigelman 2006a (465), 2006b (667).
39 E.g., Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy 2004.

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