An Organizing Approach to Diversifying Political Science

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The field of political science in the United States has been largely unable to diversify its faculty ranks during the past 20 years. Women, Latinx, Black, Afro-Caribbean, and African American political scientists in the United States remain vastly underrepresented in the membership of the American Political Science Association (APSA) vis-à-vis their proportion of the US population (Mealy 2018, 3–4). Despite the "small and glacial" magnitude and pace of gains, as aptly detailed in the 2011 APSA "Task Force Report on Political Science in the 21st Century," political scientists from underrepresented groups are building momentum for a transformative push within the field. Drawing insights from their own findings about minority and women's agency in legislatures (Sinclair-Chapman 2015) and social movement coalition building (Beckwith 2015), women, minority, and minority women political scientists, specifically, are enacting a pathway for diversifying political science. This article identifies a series of opportunities that political scientists can seize to achieve the goal of this transformative push, diversify political science, and open it to historically underrepresented groups. Moving closer to this goal, I argue, will require an intentional and intersectional organizing approach.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE IN POLITICAL SCIENCE

Minority-led and diversity-oriented groups and status committees within political science are creating opportunities to empower scholars from historically underrepresented groups to bring about demographic and systemic changes within the field.[1] They are doing so by launching equality- and justice-oriented campaigns (e.g., Me Too Political Science, Feminist Mafia, and the Climate Justice Network); building coalitions across them (Beckwith 2015; Sinclair-Chapman 2015); forming partnerships with counterparts in other fields (Beaulieu et al. 2017; Mealy 2015); and building on previous diversity efforts (e.g., APSA Presidential Task Forces under the Pinderhughes, Thelen, and McClain presidencies). These organized sections and campaigns resemble what Minta and Sinclair-Chapman (2012) referred to as "diversity infrastructures." These infrastructures may act as policy agencies (McBride and Mazur 2010). They also serve as spaces of deliberation within the field of political science from which women and minority scholars can form (Mansbridge 1999) and forward their claims to broader publics and secure resources necessary for their long-term sustainability (Jackson 2019). They also act as "coral reefs" (Tarrow 2005) that gather social-change–oriented scholars and enable them to coordinate action within a broad and complex disciplinary "sea."

The minority-led and diversity-oriented groups, networks, campaigns, and programs that have potential for opening up opportunities for change in political science include but are not limited to the APSA Status Committees and diversity-oriented 2011 APSA "Task Force Report on Political Science in the 21st Century" Task Forces[2]; the Me Too Political Science collective; Women Also Know Stuff (WAKS); People of Color (POC) Also Know Stuff; the Diversity and Inclusion Hackathon; the National Conference of Black Political Scientists; Politics of Race, Immigration, and Ethnicity Consortium; Symposium on the Politics of Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity; Minority Graduate Placement Program (MIGAP); the APSA Minority Fellowship Program; and the APSA Ralph Bunche Summer Institute (RBSI). New opportunities also are emerging from notable changes in the editorial teams of two prominent political science journals (i.e., *American Journal of Political Science* and *American Political Science Review*) and the creation of journals that focus on questions of identity under the leadership of women and minority scholars (i.e., *Politics, Groups, and Identities* and *Journal of Race, Ethnicity, and Politics*).

The term "political opportunity structures" refers to a polity's openness to claim makers and the openness of the political climate in which a movement operates. Social movement scholars identified these opportunities in electoral shifts, alliances with elites, a state's capacity to repress, activist perceptions about the likelihood of success, and divisions among elites (Brockett 1991; Kriesi et al. 1995; McAdam 1996; Rucht 1996; Tarrow 1998). In the context of the field of political science, Kittilson (2015) identified political opportunities in the set of institutions that govern the field, including formal and informal rules, shared norms, and common practices. Political opportunity structures are racialized (Bracey 2016) and gendered (Beckwith 2015; Ferree and Roth 1998; Kenney 1996; Lovenduski 1998; McCammon et al. 2001), meaning that race and gender relations are constitutive elements of institutional designs and governance, including those of political science. Although mobilization is largely assumed to operate within these structures, organizing can alter them and activists can create their own political opportunities for change (Morris 1984). The history of failure to address the long-standing exclusion of underrepresented groups within political science demonstrates that new opportunities for change will not be built for women and minority political

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scientists; rather, they must build them (Lemi Casarez, Osorio, and Rush 2020).

CREATING AND SEIZING OPPORTUNITIES

This article describes an intersectional organizing approach to diversifying political science and making it inclusive. This approach, I argue, will allow scholars to seize the opportunities that women and minority political scientists have created. An intersectional organizing approach is "an ongoing process of creating ties and coalitions across social-group differences by negotiating power asymmetries" (Tormos 2017). Within political science, scholars can enact this approach by engaging in efforts that recognize the ways in which intersectional forms of oppression manifest in academic spaces; representing scholars from intersectionally marginalized groups in institutional and organizational leadership; prioritizing the issues of intersectionally marginalized groups in agendas for disciplinary change and research; and apportioning resources for these efforts.[3] Adopting and enacting this approach is not a static outcome; rather, it is an ongoing process consisting of negotiating and addressing power asymmetries (Tormos-Aponte 2019). It entails embracing tactical diversity that builds on the strengths of both bottom-up organizing approaches (e.g., Sinclair-Chapman 2015) and top-down support from critical actors in leadership and privileged positions (Kittilson 2015). Furthermore, Kittilson (2015) called for rule making that shifts the opportunity structures in which tactically diverse efforts are deployed. These formal norms and rules may include clear and explicit tenure and promotion guidelines. Other shifts may come from social-group-identity–based quotas in the leadership of professional associations and political science departments, among other university units in which supporters of diversity can articulate and forward claims and proposals.

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Political scientists are increasingly adopting intersectional organizing approaches for their efforts to organize scholars from different social groups. Furthermore, various groups within political science currently are fostering the leadership of minority women who traverse and organize across status groups; strengthening women's and minority-status groups; and developing campaigns to center on issues of oppression, equality, and justice in the substantive content of the field, as well as in the structure, norms, and processes that govern the field. Intersectional and tactically diverse efforts allow scholars from different subject positions to share and redistribute information and resources, raise awareness of existing issues in the field, create ties that can be mobilized, and coordinate action. Collectives such as WAKS and POC Also Know Stuff are mobilizing through social media, web page, and database management; raising awareness about traditions of exclusion; and providing solutions to disrupt these traditions. They have displayed a capacity to adapt to the context in which they operate, identify the needs of women and minority scholars, and build diverse and broad leadership. This type of strategic capacity and leadership development empowers movements to increase their impact, even in contexts of repression and resource scarcity (Ganz 2009; Han 2014). Furthermore, the work of WAKS diffused to various social science fields in which women have launched similar efforts.

Me Too Political Science enacted an intersectional approach to building solidarity and organizing the diversity of scholars who wanted to engage in the collective's effort (Brown 2019). Brown (2019) reported that this type of approach and the work of Me Too Political Science is not easy and that there are "bumps and bruises on the way." Yet, despite these difficulties, this approach helped them to coordinate efforts that led to securing funding, leadership changes in political science journal editorial boards, and alliances with other collectives (e.g., WAKS) and political science caucuses. These efforts include the work to raise awareness about practices in political science that sustain a climate of hostility and exclusion, including but not limited to sexual harassment. Me Too Political Science also resulted in action and resource allocations from APSA that supported a bystander-intervention training (Brown 2019) and created safe spaces for discussion (Jackson 2019). Jenn M. Jackson (2019, 202) drew from a "Black Queer Feminist Lens" (Carruthers 2018) during an APSA 2018 #MeTooPoliSci pre-conference workshop to create a space that "opens up the possibility for greater connections and mobilization on pressing issues we face every day." Enacting an intersectional solidarity approach to this organizing work entailed efforts to "actively listen to one another, to respectfully address concerns raised during the planning and implementation of initiatives, and to be as inclusive as possible" (Brown 2019). Doing so allowed this collective to build solidarity and enact an intersectional praxis that centers the lives and experiences of marginalized groups in academic spaces.

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Participants in WAKS, POC Also Know Stuff, and Me Too Political Science reported a sense of responsibility, reward, and satisfaction as the drivers of their work (Beaulieu et al. 2017; Jackson 2019; Lemi Casarez, Osorio, and Rush 2020; Shames 2019). Despite the little progress achieved and the slow pace of change, scholars from underrepresented groups are becoming more optimistic about the possibility of changing the field (Beaulieu et al. 2017). This feeling is increasingly palpable as prominent faculty of color (e.g., Cathy Cohen and Michael Dawson) gain overdue recognition for their contributions to the field. Additionally, scholars from underrepresented groups have secured support to create spaces for fraternization and discussion, including joint receptions of minority organized sections, PGI receptions, as well as preconferences, workshops (e.g., Women of Color in Political Science Workshop), and conferences within a conference focusing on issues of scholars from marginalized groups.[4]

These opportunities for mobilization and promotion of intersectional leadership within the field of political science did not emerge in a vacuum. Rather, the opportunity structures in place for transforming political science are the intentional creation of women, minority, and intersectionally marginalized agents in the field. Now that these opportunities are in place, they must be seized to achieve transformation.

ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

Despite these gains, newly created opportunities, and increased sense of optimism, many challenges remain. The need to create these opportunities has placed the burden for diversifying on the scholars whose presence diversifies the field. Their overcommitment leads to fatigue, burnout, and illness (Brown 2019). Inequality and erasure persist even in the face of efforts that bring attention to these issues and in the abundance of solutions to the problem (e.g., Willoughby-Herard 2019). Even within organized sections on communities of color and on the Global South, scholars from these communities and regions continue to be overlooked in the process of conferring awards and recognizing their intellectual contributions (Willoughby-Herard 2019). As many women and scholars of color have noted, a gap continues to exist between university efforts to appear diverse and inclusive and the substantive structural and institutional shifts that enable diversity and inclusion (Jackson 2019).

Our positionality as thinkers and scholars within academic institutions exposes us to the risk of neglecting the social conditions under which political thought takes place (Bourdieu 1990), which is produced within institutions of higher education and are marked by exclusion and erasure of minds that do not benefit from the privileges of dominant-group status. Entire theoretical frameworks are built using marginalized groups as research subjects and their experiences as case studies, while ignoring, erasing, and appropriating the intellectual contributions that emerge from these groups (Watkins Liu 2017).

A crucial battleground for the fight to empower underrepresented groups in political science consists of the recruitment, retention, and placement of students from underrepresented groups seeking to gain admission and achieve academic success in graduate school. In light of this need, I worked with Mayra Vélez-Serrano to form a group of political scientists to develop the Minority Graduate Placement Program (MIGAP). We established MIGAP with the goal of broadening the pathway for students from underrepresented groups to gain admission and achieve academic success in graduate school. In doing so, we hope to foster more inclusive institutional climates for people from underrepresented groups and contribute to the success of ongoing efforts to diversify political science in the United States and beyond (Tormos-Aponte and Vélez-Serrano 2020). Through MIGAP, we seek to prepare future cohorts of graduate political science students to enmesh critical race and feminist analytical frameworks to the political theory, analysis, and praxis. In conjunction with these and ongoing efforts taking place, this program contributes to creating new opportunities for diversifying political science while also seizing existing ones. We draw inspiration from APSA's Diversity and Inclusion Programs, including the RBSI and the Minority Fellowship Program. Our vision is to replicate, scale up, and broaden the reach of programs focusing on underrepresented students, particularly women of color.

Programs such as MIGAP aim to expand what Sinclair-Chapman (2015) called diversity infrastructures. MIGAP consists of a campus visitation program, workshops to develop methodological competencies, one-on-one mentorship, research opportunities, graduate school applications counseling, and sharing information with students about existing opportunities that can prepare them to succeed and gain admission to graduate school. We also are fostering partnerships and resource transfers between well-resourced and resource-scarce institutions of higher education. Fostering these relationships and coalition work enables scholars from underrepresented groups to create and seize existing opportunities for diversifying political science. We developed this program at a time in which APSA, status committees, and various graduate programs are increasingly invested in pipeline, recruitment, and retention efforts (Mealy 2018).

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Regardless of the success of diversity-oriented programs, we recognize that making representational gains for marginalized groups and diversifying is not enough to achieve inclusion if scholars from these groups are brought into hostile climates (Edwards, Holmes, and Sowa 2019). The "glacial pace" at which political science is diversifying is a reflection of the ways in which the lasting legacies and continuity of systems of oppression map onto our field. Achieving critical and meaningful forms of diversity and inclusion entails engaging in collective efforts to address inequality not only within our field but also in our communities and institutions of governance (Jackson 2019).[5] Furthermore, it entails redistributive justice that supports marginalized groups (Herring and Henderson 2014). In our academic spaces, an intersectional organizing approach will foster the leadership of people from intersectionally marginalized groups, supporting their ability to form their own autonomous spaces within the field, and addressing the power differentials between them and dominant groups. Therefore, I, like others, recognize that diversity is not enough, and I join calls for supporting the ongoing efforts aimed at building collaborative ties across campaigns and social groups to defend what has been achieved, seize existing opportunities for change, and broaden the boundaries of what is considered possible. ■

NOTES

1. Contrary to dominant social movement perspectives, Aldon Morris (1984) argued that movement groups may draw resources from within and open up their own opportunities for social change.
2. More information on APSA Status Committees is available at www.apsanet.org/status-committees.
3. I draw from what Jackson (2019) and Carruthers (2018) called the Black Queer Feminist tradition and the social movement research of Strolovitch (2007), Tormos (2019), and Weldon (2006) to propose the adoption of an approach for collective efforts to diversify political science.
4. See Lavariega Monforti and Michelson (2020) for a discussion of their community-building efforts through the Women of Color in Political Science Workshops and the importance of intersectional approaches to mentoring.
5. The critical diversity perspective, developed by Herring and Henderson (2014), entails going beyond mere celebrations of difference to address power asymmetries.

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