Engaged Pluralism: The Importance of Commitment

Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier

Engaged pluralism entails active interaction, debate, and learning from each other. I argue that individuals need to undertake the challenges arising from engaged pluralism to ensure a healthy, vibrant disciplinary future, and for a democracy that thrives. I consciously extend the term "engagement" to apply not only to understanding across sub-disciplines and different grounds of knowledge, but also to addressing research to the needs of society. There are golden opportunities centered around the benefits of a more open, rigorous, and contentious science that can be maximized through focused engagement around methodologies and methods. In short, two primary themes encapsulate my views on where our discipline should be heading. First, the pursuit of engaged methodological pluralism in our scholarship is critical. Second, supporting democratic principles and civic engagement, which is at the core of the American Political Science Association and has continued, in ebbs and flows, throughout the discipline's life, is necessary.

In my talks throughout the year, I have referred to the importance of *promoting pluralism* in political science by strengthening our association's commitment to democratic principles; encouraging civic engagement more broadly; and advancing our critical diversity, equity, and inclusion work in the profession. Specifically, many of you who have joined me in conversation have explored the idea of *engaged pluralism.* Engaged pluralism entails active interaction, debate, and learning from each other, not at separate tables. Instead, together, where we, as Craig Parsons puts it, "retool multiple epistemologies into a shared, broadened, substantively inclusive epistemology in which we recognize the valid knowledge-generating potential of methods we had previously dismissed or at least overlooked" (Parsons 2022). Here I elaborate on these ideas and argue that individuals need to undertake this challenge for a healthy, vibrant disciplinary future, and for a democracy that thrives; moreover, as I use it here, I am consciously extending the term "engagement" to apply not only to understanding across sub-disciplines and different grounds of knowledge, but also to addressing research to the needs of society.

The problems facing our nations, and our world, are formidable. There are traditional problems like war,

corruption, insuperable international disputes, nuclear proliferation, brutal authoritarianism, the menace of some new technology, systemic racism, and social injustice, to name a few. On top of these realities, global climate change, with deadly implications for health, habitat, and much more, threatens the very existence of the world as we know it. Individuals, groups, states, and nations do not agree on what the problems are, much less what can be done about them. At the same time, confidence in democracy and in government in general here and abroad seems to be flagging.

As citizens, this audience need not be reminded of the situation. Doubtless, most of us vote, volunteer in our communities, and contribute to worthy causes, but I am seeking more from our profession. Specifically, what does social science and political science in particular have to offer in solving public problems? The question "why social science" is regularly asked and answered by our colleagues via the Consortium of Social Science Associations (COSSA). My answer to this question at the broadest level is that for many challenges facing the world today, the underlying science and technical solutions are becoming well understood. Instead, the primary obstacle to solving these challenges is connecting solutions to the political, social, economic, and behavioral environment we inhabit. This connection is provided by social science. Look, for example, at the work of scholars in the field of International Relations on nuclear proliferation. Yet ominously it is back on the world's agenda, but for seventy years catastrophic nuclear war has been forestalled. I have no doubt that scholarship, teaching, and training public servants have contributed to this success.

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Serving as a link between technical solutions and the political, social, economic, and behavioral environment, then, is step one. Taking our scholarship further to civic engagement is step two. By civic engagement for political scientists, I am referring to moving our research to action whereby we develop scientifically sound solutions to address social challenges, especially in the realms of government and public life. Civic engagement increases both the usefulness and necessity of political science to the world. Many social scientists, though not all, are uniquely suited to translate the scientific and technical solutions for general understanding and the action needed for equitable societal change.

Arthur Lupia, head of the Directorate of Social, Behavioral, and Economic Sciences at the National Science Foundation, has a particularly compelling answer to the question of "Why Social Science?"—because it is a form of service that improves quality of life for people around the world (Lupia 2019). Lupia emphasizes the importance of communicating the value of the social sciences in his conclusion: "improved communication, transparency, and engagement … can give people new reasons to support social science and, hence, give social scientists new opportunities to serve others more effectively" (2017, 691)." However, not all is well with social science as a cursory read of Lupia might suggest. To me, teaching and service aid and guide our students, universities, and society. Research, on the other hand, while aiding and guiding society, is less direct than teaching and service. To talk about our work in research as service (explicitly and directly) is a change from the way universities typically reward professors, e.g., with tenure, promotions, and salary increases, and fits with the movement to reward engaged scholarship.

Fortunately, many organizations are working to communicate the value of social science to colleagues in disparate areas and to the public, and thus facilitating and magnifying the individual efforts of the American Political Science Association (APSA), COSSA, and the Network for Advancing and Evaluating the Societal Impact of Science (AESIS). Yet, we as individual political scientists are called to do this as well. Civic engagement, an area in which the political science discipline has made significant strides, is a central part of this involvement and demonstrates the value of social science to both society and our students. Closer working relationships with the media and our colleagues in industry, government, and non-profits are an essential part of this effort.

There are many outstanding examples of past and current efforts to communicate the value of political science. I highlight some that are the most familiar to me. One such example in making a difference in civic contributions is the APSA's Institute for Civically Engaged Research (ICER) directed by Amy Cabrera Rasmussen, Peter Levine, and Valeria Sinclair Chapman. Former APSA President Rogers Smith's Task Force on New Partnerships launched the now-annual APSA Institute for Civically Engaged Research

in 2019. The stated mission of ICER defines the issue: "scholars in many disciplines are grappling with how to produce rigorous scholarship that addresses significant social challenges in collaboration with communities, organizations, and agencies. They strive to learn from those working outside of academia, to benefit from the insights of all kinds of groups and institutions, and to give back to communities rather than extract value from them. Although political scientists offer models of excellence in civically engaged research, relevant methods and strategies are not yet widely taught in the discipline's graduate programs or sufficiently valued in the profession as a whole." (Institute for Civically Engaged Research 2021). The goals of ICER fit nicely with engaged pluralism: enhancing partnerships beyond the academy and thus multiplying the impact of political science as well as appreciating, understanding, and using a variety of methods.

My 2020 APSA Presidential Task Force on Election Assistance is another example of harnessing our collective insights and the power of using diverse methods to then communicate the value of political science. The task force combines the expertise and experience of political scientists to support free, fair, and open elections. The purpose was to "foster broader knowledge and understanding of non-partisan election assistance, including resources on non-partisan voter mobilization organizations, poll worker recruitment, technical aid to election officials implementing new systems, voter registration, the prevention of voter intimidation and disenfranchisement, and an understanding of how political scientists empirically identify and measure voter fraud" (American Political Science Association 2020). The members of the Task Force, led by Lee Ann Banaszak and David Lublin, included the creation of educational resources for use in the classroom and identifying colleagues to serve as experts for the media. I am proud to say there is now a permanent standing committee, Election Assistance and Policy Planning, co-chaired by Lee Ann Banaszak and Erik Herron.

Over the course of the recent COVID-19 crisis, teams and individual social scientists have also stepped up to make a difference. David Lazer and his colleagues issued their first COVID States Project report on April 2020 with report number 62 (and counting) just released (Lazer et al. 2021). In collaboration with Laura Moses, she and I examine, among other things, the role elite messaging plays in shaping public debate and the spread of misinformation during the emergent international COVID-19 crisis (Box-Steffensmeier and Moses 2021). Undoubtedly, social scientists will be examining the myriad implications for the discipline for years to come.

Not only are APSA and related social science organizations increasing their civic engagement and demonstrating the value of political and social science, as these examples show, but also the recognition of the need for social science has reached the highest levels of government in the United

States. In 2015, President Barack Obama established the presidential Social and Behavioral Science Team by Executive Order. The team was charged to develop and use behavioral science research to create policy solutions. Social scientists were tapped in government, nonprofits, industry, and academia to participate. "By improving the effectiveness and efficiency of Government, behavioral science insights can support a range of national priorities, including helping workers to find better jobs; enabling Americans to lead longer, healthier lives; improving access to educational opportunities and support for success in school; and accelerating the transition to a low-carbon economy" (Executive Order No. 13707, 2015).

Since then, the team now known as the Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES), has completed nearly a hundred studies. Political scientists played central roles in this group. For example, the OES has relied on the Methods Guides from the Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP) network when communicating about statistical concepts with policy partners (Evidence in Governance and Politics 2021). And political methodologists have helped the OES develop a research integrity process to ensure trust in their results and thus make their results actionable in government. The team has marshalled insights from social science, in one small example, to expand direct enrollment school lunch programs by adopting an opt-out option in place of an opt-in approach. And by publishing all results, the OES studies have allowed systematic learning from null results in a way that academic incentives have hindered. For example, showing that across eight large studies, light-weight messaging campaigns have extremely small, and even indetectable, effects on flu vaccine take up (Kappe et al. forthcoming). Bowers and Testa (2019) provide an insightful overview of what "evidence-based policy" might mean, specifically, "evidence-as-insights" from theory and science, and "evidence-as-evaluation" from careful research designs aiming to learn whether something worked or not.

Different types of work, using different types of methods, can all be policy relevant. Policymaker Surveys show, for example, that area studies and case studies (both historical and contemporary) are "very useful" for policy (Avery and Desch 2014). The Minerva Research Initiative was launched in 2008 by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates to improve understanding of social, cultural, behavioral, and political forces that impact security and broadly incorporates all methods. This is reaffirmed in the 2019 "Future Directions in Social Science" publication that explicitly calls for and highlights the value of qualitative and interpretivist methods (Loewenstein, Musante, and Tucker 2019).

However, the rejection of science and evidence-based policymaking by some politicians and sections of the public, as well as the undermining of democratic norms by the last president and many of his supporters, present considerable challenges to our society and for educators. Non-partisan civic research and engagement also need to reach out to those who distrust democracy, because there is a danger that many people resort to authoritarian solutions to complex problems.

President Biden has provided another opportunity for social science to shine. His memorandum on "Restoring Trust in Government through Scientific Integrity and Evidence-Based Policymaking" includes the goal of equitable delivery of policies, programs, and agency operations. The memorandum highlights civic engagement and methodological pluralism in approach, calling for the " use of pilot projects, randomized control trials, quantitative-survey research and statistical analysis, qualitative research, ethnography, research based on data linkages in which records from two or more datasets that refer to the same entity are joined, well-established processes for community engagement and inclusion in research, and other approaches that may be informed by the social and behavioral sciences and data science" (Memorandum 2021). President Biden's Summit for Democracy will put these issues on the international agenda in December 2021, creating opportunities for political scientists to develop follow-up initiatives with partners across the globe (U.S. Department of State 2021).

The Golden Age of Political Science? Assuredly for Methodologies and Methods

Kenneth Prewitt (2019) also sees golden opportunities. He argues that "not since its birth in the late nineteenth century has social science been faced with such a massive opportunity" for demonstrating the value of the social sciences. Next steps include pushing "the human dimensions of" so many of the grand challenges of our times. This will definitely require not just academics employed in our colleges and universities, but all trained social scientists whose impact is felt strongly through the application of knowledge in government, nonprofits, and industry.

We may indeed be in a golden age of the social sciences, as Anastasia Buyalskaya and her colleagues contend (Buyalskaya, Gallo, and Camerer 2021). There is a confluence of two important factors – the opportunity to address diverse and important questions and the opportunities for social scientists to engage with each other for deeper understanding. Civic engagement is also a defining aspect of this new golden age. As Flyvbjerg (2001) outlines in his much-discussed book, *Making Social Science Matter*, our research needs to help people address the problems they face.

The case for the golden age of methodologies and methods in political science is strong. The explosion of data on human behavior is the obvious first point. More data is collected on human behavior than ever before. It is linked and networked better than ever before. For example, Schmitt, Segatti, and van der Eyck (2021) bring together over 150 European surveys and country context data in what is sure to become a landmark in the study of individual

voting behavior as it extends across multiple elections in multiple countries. Today we can even go back in time given new data collection methods to measure and collect data. For example, Christenson and I (with a team of students) created a database of all organizations that have signed onto amicus curiae briefs over one hundred years to create a network of coordinated and purposive interest group behavior, which we used with Matt Hitt to explore judicial behavior (Box-Steffensmeier, Christenson, and Hitt 2013); with Alison Craig on congressional behavior (Box-Steffensmeier, Christenson, and Craig 2019); Sahar Abi-Hassan, Garrett Carder, and Enan Srivastava (2020) on geography and law; and with others in other contexts. Finally, novel types of data are also being generated via text in documents (Monroe, Colaresi and Quinn 2008; Grimmer and Stewart 2013) or video or image analysis (Dietrich, Hayes, and O'Brien 2019; Casas and Williams 2019). Indeed, Jeff Gill calls this the Data Century (Gill 2021).[1]

Our analytic methods have expanded as artificial intelligence and machine learning mature (Moses and Box-Steffensmeier 2022). We can trace and model human interaction better than ever before with methods and extensions such as network analysis, time series, event history, spatial modeling, and the intermingling of these methods to capture interdependencies.

In addition, the vast increase in computing capability allows us to take advantage of big data and new methods. As more computing power becomes available to study human interaction, new methods will follow and vice versa.

Technological advances cannot answer all questions and there remains foundational value in using more traditional methods along side machine learning and artificial intelligence, specifically ethnography or interviewing to get at meaning, which is central to the interpretivist tradition. Cramer's work on rural consciousness has been and remains important for understanding trends in American politics (2016). Qualitative and interpretivist methods offer significant contributions in shedding light on the ways the world operates.

The development of diverse teams is also a leading factor contributing to a golden age. As Page (2007, 2017) lays out, such teams leverage differences for the benefit of all. First, building diverse teams across backgrounds—gender, sex, race, ethnicity, first generation, religion, ideology, partisanship, and cultures—provides a distinct advantage as different people contribute alternative purchases on a solution to a problem. Diverse teams in the golden age of methodologies and methods now within political science and within the social sciences likewise provide such a distinct advantage. Finally, traversing disciplines provides a distinct advantage as well. Almost all disciplines are now reaching out and collaborating—arts and humanities, computer science, engineering, and physics with social scientists.

Career diversity is yet another aspect of diversity in need of support for the health and future of our discipline and for our impactful production of knowledge. Our new standing committee on Career Diversity can lead the change to provide greater support for careers in industry, government, nonprofits, journalism and academia.

This is an issue I have cared about throughout my entire career. As a first-generation college student whose father's dream was to see me get to college, education has always been highly valued in my family. For the same underlying reasons, serving as a mentor has always been an indispensable part of me. I see helping students discern their career path to be a fundamental part of being a mentor. It has been important to me to appreciate what career my students want for a myriad of reasons. Whether these reasons are job location, family concerns, personal work habits, work and life balance, where personal satisfaction is found in mission, skills fit, or any other reason, it is our role as teachers and mentors to assist.

We *need* contributions from more social science PhDs to make the world better. This was abundantly clear when I attended the International Political Science Association's Congress in July 2021 as a representative for APSA due to the prominent topics on the agenda, such as democratization, economic growth, and ethnic politics, as well as participation by those serving and working in governments, nonprofits, and industry. We need our students, around the world, to participate in policymaking and civic life. We need more PhDs for a better understanding of the world around us. We need more PhDs for engagement. We need more PhDs for better public policy. The bottom line is that we need more PhDs for the production of knowledge that changes the world. And we need to help them find those careers in all realms—academia, government, nonprofits, and industry.

We need to be engaged with and able to learn from our colleagues employed in industry, government, nonprofits, community colleges, and small, medium, and large teaching and research focused colleges and universities. We need a bigger table. This expansion will result in improved scholarship and policy, more innovation, and wider job placements and student satisfaction. What is our mission and vision for our discipline and thus for our society? My answer is inclusive, diverse, nonhierarchical, and yes, engaged.

As we join more interdisciplinary teams, our methodologies, methods, and especially our *theories* illuminate the value of our scholarship even more. The interdisciplinary engagement makes this vast improvement in understanding possible.

It is definitely a unique and exciting time to be a political scientist. The greater recognition of the value added by social science, increased recognition of the indispensability of social science by industry, government, and nonprofits; more team science, more interdisciplinary science, more methodological tools at our disposal, and more diverse research teams provide an ideal mix of opportunities. The ability to be more confident that one's scholarship will make a difference due to the increase in pathways for collaboration and civic

engagement significantly contributes to the excitement of our enterprise.

As political scientists, we study people—socially, politically, and economically—and societies, across time and space. In short, we use time and space to leverage context. I return to the topic of time and space later, but I raise this here too as the lens of time and space explicitly sets up comparisons. These comparisons clarify policy impact, and thus the focus on context contributes to a golden age of the social sciences. And yet there is untapped potential to do more and have more policy impact. The limits are only those set by our imaginations.

To those contemplating a career in social science, have recently launched their career in social science, or even to those who have been at this enterprise for a while, like myself, but perhaps need a bolt of inspiration, I encourage you to be bold and ask the questions that inspire you. There are compelling problems that need your unique insights. Which questions keep you up at night? Which ones do you know will make a difference in the way we understand a political, social, or economic problem? Or in the way a life or lives could be changed around this political, social, or economic problem? Those are the questions to pursue.

Yet significant challenges remain when considering the inability to adequately leverage social science insights to address pressing problems, indeed perhaps wicked problems, such as climate change, COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy, or social justice.[2] Solutions exist, but the willingness of many of the public to explore them does not.

Threats to the Golden Age of Methodologies and Methods

Threats to this possible golden age of the social sciences are interconnected. For example, the barriers to crossing different methodologies and methods, one threat, are deepened by dogmatic loyalty to a particular methodology, a second threat. Such dogmatism holds back advancements in scholarship. We are all familiar with the concern that the dominant approach is closing out possibilities for other methodologies and methods—this concern has been constant over the years even as the nature of the dominant approach itself has changed. However, dogmatism, even within a nondominant tradition, creates barriers and stifles research and teaching. Third, specialization, necessary for knowledge to expand, can nevertheless block leaps of scholarly understanding that are possible only if we build bridges across areas of specialization.

One way partially to break down this fragmentation is to recognize the role that diversity, equity, and inclusion can play. Specifically, welcoming people and approaches that methodological dogmatism precludes, even if by accident, can help. Rather than closing off alternative methods and ways of seeing the world, embracing the new insights they can offer counters the threats to our golden age.

Every field, specialization, and methodology has something to offer, but receptivity to this idea is needed by everyone. Particularly pressing right now is the rapid change on the extreme end of quantitative methods, e.g., big data, artificial intelligence, and machine learning. Those scholars who are learning how to exploit these developments can help lower the barriers to understanding and using them by, for example, leading workshops for the benefit of all who want to engage, or by inviting graduate students or colleagues in a different subfield or with different perspectives to participate in such research.

The benefits of such collaboration accrue not only to scholars less familiar with, for example, the uses of artificial intelligence, but also to those who share their specialized knowledge. Their research can be sharpened and perhaps made more widely applicable with a wider, more diverse research team. Biases inherent in what might be an otherwise closed society of artificial intelligence researchers can be identified and eliminated, to the benefit of all.

The achievements of those who serve as connectors and translators across methodologies and methods, regardless of the approach, have been and should always be, particularly valued and rewarded. To understand the approach of others and to explain one's own approach, engagement across methodologies and methods is needed. A full examination of the advantages and disadvantages of one's own methodologies and methods is an essential component of this engagement. We need to at least be well-versed in understanding the assumptions underlying different types of methods and methodologies, especially when we disagree, so we can evaluate the work based on the logics of the work itself.

A recognition of the benefits of broader collaboration can stave off the idea that one approach, method, or subfield is better than another. For such collaboration to succeed, it is necessary to proceed with true, sincere, and difficult engagement with one another to understand the value of methodologies and methods that are not the dominant paradigm in particular substantive areas. Fortunately, because political science is such a pluralistic discipline, room already exists for tolerance, but that is only the beginning if we are to take advantage of the possibilities in our reach as a profession. We can choose empty pluralism by excluding the scholarship of others when it is unlike our own, or we can choose engaged pluralism. While the pluralistic nature of political science is a distinct advantage for the advancement of scholarship, it is not enough.

To take advantage of our pluralistic engagement, we should begin with a reexamination at the most basic level, of the verities underlying research design, especially considering new data and new methods. What could social scientists improve in the research design process? At the very start, more inclusive research designs and examination of bias in our approach. As an example, it is now well recognized that there are biases in data and machine learning. The

very communities shepherding these developments are those where many identities and their complementary perspectives are hardly considered. Relatedly, algorithms can be inherently biased, not by political agendas, but by the ignorance of those who create them. If we are to make use of new methods and data, we must extirpate such biases by, for example, diversifying our research teams, as I have argued.

However, the political science of tomorrow requires that scholars be in conversation not only with one another, but also with the broader public. As called for by Pollins, methodological and epistemological rules of practice can help advance that wider conversation (2007). Specifically, the public can gain an appreciation of our enterprise when we scholars address them in nontechnical language. They can gain confidence in our findings as we explain how falsifiability in our claims and reproducibility of our results work and function without using jargon. In short, we can engage at least part of the public if we engage in what Pollins calls good rhetorical practice (Pollins 2007, 104).

Nevertheless, we need more than openness to each other and to the public. Verba's (2005) challenge to the discipline still exists. His specific challenge is to incorporate the values and culture of the subjects in our research and to better understand who we are and who other people are. To embrace this challenge is to make progress. Verba's challenge to understand the role of ideology, religion, and ethnicity remains, and, I would add, there are even more dimensions to consider.

For example, how identities are reinforced or diminished by institutional development is of the utmost importance for our collective consideration. Elinor Ostrom, a PhD in Political Science, the first woman to win a Nobel Prize in Economics, and a previous President of APSA, reminds us of the central role of institutions in the functioning of society. Thanks in part to her scholarship, we know to look for solutions for wicked problems via the structuring of institutions that incorporate individual preferences, individual information, and individual strategies (see, in particular, Ostrom 2005). Institutions can fundamentally shape behavior. And they can help us to meet the challenge of advancing equality in the American political system, the world, and our discipline.

I am optimistic about the ability of social science and in particular political science to help create, advance and take advantage of this golden age. In sum, the answer to the threats to the possible golden age of the social sciences is engaged pluralism, not simply tolerance, at the heart of which is proactive, civically engaged research.

The Role of Time, Space, Context and Dynamics—Global Golden Possibilities

Whereas many have seen disconnects across quantitative and qualitative methods or across methodologies, I see the concern for time and context as a bridge between them. For example, qualitative research reminds us upfront about the

fundamental role of time and context. Similarly, interpretive approaches have a basic premise of study in the socio-historic context. It is important that all of us, as researchers and teachers, take engagement seriously, and incorporate, to the best we can, the insights gleaned from our various colleagues to improve our scholarship and inferences.[3]

My own work has always centered around time and context (Sokhey 2020). Having been a student who focused on approaches that incorporate longitudinal methods and interdependence, namely time series, event history, and then network analysis, it is not surprising that I see leverage and great opportunity for engagement with colleagues from different perspectives when thinking about change and dynamics.[4] How do we study the vast array of interesting and vital social science questions that arise from this perspective? How do we study questions that are complex and intertwined, indeed, questions that are wicked?

Dynamic analyses, which are inherently about time and change, allow us to look more closely at interconnections and interdependence. They are certainly not the only method or methodology that allows this; rather they are what I have utilized. Such a focus also turned my attention to the study of heterogeneity. This allows a look at difference, which is a more universal principle for scholars regardless of methodological orientation. Namely, moving towards understanding the causes and consequences of change, which begins with comparing for similarities and differences. Many of the problems, hypotheses, and theories underlying social science research have, at their core, an implicit or explicit interest in the notions of timing and change. Such a lens allows new questions to be asked, rediscovery of old data, finding of new public policy pathways, and opportunities for engagement.

Other illustrative examples that focus on time, space, context, and dynamics include Darmofal et al. (2019), which leverages spatial panel data to examine whether deunionization diffuses from one state to neighboring states. In short, he finds that what happens in Wisconsin does not stay in Wisconsin. In fact, the pressures that deunionization in one state produces for neighboring states have a greater effect on union rates than does the ideology of states themselves.

In other examples, Moore and Reeves (2020) use 2.6 million GPS records from over 400 people to gain dynamic measures of the people, places, and institutions that people encounter in their daily lives. While Cohen (2018) provides a perspective that explores the idea of time within democratic theory and practice, Dionne and Turkmen (2020) employ history for perspective on the ongoing global pandemic. Rodman (2019) looks at the changing cultural meanings of words, such as equality, over time.

An Elaboration of the Answer: Engaged Methodological Pluralism

The importance of engaged methodological pluralism is centered around the benefits of a more open, rigorous, and

contentious science. Methodological pluralism adds rigor 1) through the give and take of engagement that helps us refine and clarify our arguments, 2) because we examine our research from new angles, and 3) via a new perspective on diversity. [5] All of these paths to rigor result in better solutions to complex, wicked problems. Through the lens of methodological pluralism on diversity, we can better see the limitations of a body of scholarship. "Research that is unaware of its own limitations, say research that fails to account for the experiences of women, which is half of the population, or of sizeable populations based on race, ability or sexuality, all of who may experience common political phenomena quite differently from others, may purport to present generalizable findings that are in fact limited to only certain kinds of people with certain kinds of shared features."[6]

Methodological pluralism adds tension. It is this tension that makes political science so fruitful. As those of us who have had our articles rejected by scholars or editors outside of our substantive topic or methodological approach can attest to, we do not always feel good about this tension. But from a macro and longitudinal perspective, perhaps the mix has translated into a discipline that is not only more open, but also more scrupulous. The different perspectives and approaches on related questions make for an invaluable tension. We argue that where that tension exists, we have made greater gains than where it does not exist (Box-Steffensmeier, Christenson and Sinclair Chapman 2022).

Collaborations across methodologies and methods, across the social sciences, and across disciplines lead to more engaged pluralism and a bridging of the competency-difficulty gap as we stretch ourselves for broader and deeper understanding of human phenomena. Engaged pluralism also means that the pressures towards fragmentation by specialty can be reduced.

Compared to other social science disciplines, I would argue that political science has historically been more accepting and pluralistic. In recent decades, tolerance of differences in methodologies and methods has generally characterized the orientation of most political scientists. This has been referred to as "empty pluralism" and it has been the modal orientation.[7] It is clear to many now that a golden age requires engaged pluralism, not empty pluralism, as demonstrated by their participation as part of my 2021 Task Force on Engaged Methodological Pluralism. Our goals for the task force seem close to those of Dryzek (2005) and Topper (2005) who call for "critical pluralism" where there is engagement of competing research traditions for learning and a combination of research methodologies.[8] Moon clarifies that critical pluralism means "approaches must justify themselves by their capacity to illuminate political phenomena" (Moon 2006, 734). We do not go that far, but we do insist that the dialogue reflects an appreciation of other

methodologies and methodological traditions and that participants use insights from other traditions to improve their own scholarship.

My vision of engaged pluralism also sees connectors, who are the scholars who can translate across research approaches and who make accessible their scholarship as well as that of others, as especially valuable to scholarly progress. Due to the division of labor, there will always be specialists. Yet the connectors play a critical, even if often unrecognized, role in advancing understanding. It is my goal that the Task Force on Engaged Methodological Pluralism be one more step in the progression of our discipline that speeds up advancement in greater understanding due to engaged methodological pluralism.[9]

As stated in the 2021 annual meeting call for papers,

> Political scientists are answering the call for a world characterized by complex issues that do not respect methodological, disciplinary or geographic boundaries. To continue to do so will require increasing agility and flexibility in methodological training and substantive knowledge spanning subfields and even disciplines. With specialization certain to be equally as important as it is today, problem solving in the future demands diverse teams able to address multipronged challenges. As scholars, we will always invite the messy, the inconclusive, and the hard to interpret, right along with the precise, the clear, and the parsimonious—all at the same table. We, as a society, benefit from a discipline that transcends traditional frontiers. We forge the most promising path forward when we recognize our differences as adding value from the perspective of the whole." (Box-Steffensmeier, Christenson, and Sinclair-Chapman 2020)

Perhaps even some of the threats to advances in methodologies and methods may instead be a bridge. That is, there is value and promise in machine learning and artificial intelligence. Perhaps these methods will be able to harness the nuances used by qualitative scholars to enlighten more quantitatively oriented colleagues. Machine learning holds the promise of being able "to improve the accuracy of outcomes, refine measurements of complex process, [and] discover latent patterns in data" (Moses and Box-Steffensmeier 2022).

To return to the critical question of what about engaged pluralism adds rigor to our enterprise? Parsons (2022) again advances our thinking: "a key feature that distinguishes 'rigorous' scholarly pursuits from others—whether unscholarly ones, or less rigorous ones—is effort to engage with the widest possible range of plausible alternative answers to a question. It follows that our main reason to push engagement to the widest range of diverse perspectives is not to show respect for others (though that too is worthy), but because our own pursuit of rigorous thinking demands it."

Communication and engagement in our wonderfully methodologically pluralistic discipline is a key next step. After scholarly exchange, civic engagement follows for many.

Lessons Imparted and Carried Forward: The Nature of Political Science

In thinking through the benefits of engaged methodological pluralism, we must think about the future of our discipline. What do political science and neighboring disciplines have of worth for understanding and projecting areas of fundamental import and consequence to the polis here and abroad? Looking back at the founding of the discipline can be enlightening—why was it founded? Under what conditions? For what purpose? What justification for expected consequences? And what needs to change?

When one looks back at the past APSA presidential addresses, one can be heartened by the progress and see more clearly where there is work left to do. Commonalities in past addresses ask: What is Political Science? What should it be? Certainly, it is a time for reflection and therefore guidance for the future that seeks to improve and inspire the discipline and society. Emphasis is given to consideration of the topics of democracy and inequality. While political institutions and behavior are also oft discussed, much less common are methods and methodologies. Although there are exceptions, almost always methodological reflections espouse tolerance. I argue that tolerance is not enough and that for our discipline to flourish, engagement is needed. Indeed, it is dangerous not to engage during this ripe time of methodological development and potential divisions over methodologies.

Continuing the theme of charges, cautions, and guidance, I see as critical to the future of our discipline that we build on what has been advanced in particular realms. First, Paula McClain's presidential address last year highlighted that we are currently at a critical inflection point in the need to acknowledge the discipline's racist origins, confront the continued influence of those origins, and move forward in recognizing the centrality of Race, Ethnicity and Politics to the health and future of the discipline (McClain 2021). And indeed, these points are necessary for the health and future of democracy.

Work in the domain of understanding race, ethnicity, and politics is a continuation of agendas set prior by other former APSA presidents. In particular, former APSA president Dianne Pinderhughes, who is currently serving as the President of the International Political Science Association (IPSA), has left an indelible mark. During her 2007–2008 APSA presidential term, she highlighted descriptive representation for people of color and women, and launched her Task Force on "Political Science in the 21st Century" (Brown 2016). In her presidential address, she said that while political science has studied race, its focus has not been consistent enough, broad enough or routinized enough to understand its place in American politics. Pinderhughes went on to predict a volatile and dynamic period in American political life (Pinderhughes

2009). She was prescient. Lucius Barker's call in 2005 where he reflects as a former president, takes us further back with his reminder for "more racial and gendered diversity among political scientists in order to change what the discipline knows and how we teach and transmit our knowledge" (Hochschild 2005). The Presidential Task Force on Engaged Methodological Pluralism tries to do more of exactly this while also pushing scholars on the need for civic engagement (Box-Steffensmeier, Christenson, and Sinclair-Chapman 2022).

Former APSA president Rogers Smith arguably did more to further civic engagement than any other president. Parallel to this charge, Smith emphasized improved teaching through his leadership of APSA, which reinforced Robert Putnam's call for real world civic engagement (2005). Smith's address highlighted the need for political science to focus more on the politics of identity formation that has generated resurgent nationalism and deep social division as well as placing studies in the big-picture context of how politics and the world functions (2020). That harkens us back to the core concerns of democracy and inequality for our discipline.

Teaching, of course, is a centerpiece of our professional life. Incoming President John Ishiyama's Presidential Task Force on Rethinking Political Science Education embraces this mission. Fortunately, continuing the theme of expanding our association beyond academe, his task force will include an examination of graduate education with an eye towards broadening career diversity to include not just academia, but also industry, government, and nonprofits. "The task force will examine the challenges and opportunities in political science education, the skills and knowledge of political science graduates, and strategies to more effectively communicate the importance and value of the political science major to the broader public."[10] This emphasis builds on the decades-long conversation that John has facilitated (Ishiyama et al. 2021). As Titus Alexander says in his guide to teaching practical politics, the ultimate test is "not in the discourse of political education, but a better society, just as the ultimate test of medicine is better health" (Alexander 2017, 14).

My current 2021 Presidential Task Force on Engaged Methodological Pluralism is collaborating with, and is led by, Dino Christenson and Valeria Sinclair-Chapman, who also served as the co-chairs of the 2021 annual meeting. The work of the task force will culminate in an edited volume to be published by Oxford University Press, which will help ensure a more lasting statement. The *Oxford Handbook* is built around the meeting theme while concentrating more on methods and methodology than the broader meeting call. Many first drafts of the chapters are being presented at the annual meeting, as a product of the intellectual leadership of the *Handbook* section editors' organizing panels. Tying the book to the meeting adds coherence, brings exposure, helps with cost and

dissemination, and most importantly, ensures a timely contribution on this critically important disciplinary topic.

To elaborate, the 2021 Task Force is on the state of methodology in political science with pluralism as its focus. Methodologies and methods impact every research project undertaken. In addition, questions surrounding epistemology and the choice of methodology are foundational topics taught in graduate school. The *Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* (2008), edited by Box-Steffensmeier, Brady, and Collier, is over a decade old and the field is changing quickly, particularly on the extreme of quantitative methods, e.g., artificial intelligence and machine learning, which has the potential to cause further division in the discipline as barriers to entry rise even higher.

Chapter authors can help change the trajectory. The new *Handbook* will be unique in looking at both methodology and epistemology, consideration of new data, and assessment of diversity, equity, and inclusion that intersects with our methods. We see the task force, annual meeting, and Handbook as ways to bring the discipline together, to celebrate the heterogeneity of approaches, and to advance topics of diversity and inclusion, which are intertwined with the methods used. Now is not the time for passive acceptance of difference in methodologies or methods, but rather, a time for engagement by incorporating many of them into our own scholarship.

Our unbridled enthusiasm about the Task Force on Engaged Methodological Pluralism stems from a number of sources. First and foremost, we feel the discipline is at a critical juncture in terms of debates around epistemology, quantitative, and qualitative methods. The pluralistic nature of the discipline, we feel, is a distinct advantage. Not all of our social science, or even political science, colleagues share this view. We are seeing other disciplines fracture further—to the point of exclusion of other lines of inquiry—in response to the ever-widening reach of artificial intelligence and computational social science. For example, in the call for conference papers for "Interpretivist Methods in the Digital Age: Methodology and Epistemology in the Social Sciences," sponsored by Australian National University, the organizers state that "profound epistemological debates have shaken the social sciences in the last decades … These debates provoked various disciplinary reactions, such as reinforcing the divide between qualitative and quantitative sociologies, a narrative turn in anthropology, a linguistic turn in history and the humanities, as well as a social turn in linguistics and the consolidation of Interpretivism as a specific methodological approach in political science and international relations" (Australian National University 2019). Similarly, the Politics and Computational Social Science (PaCSS) as well as Political Networks Communities recognize different dimensions of this challenge, stating that "the data and methodologies available to social scientists have exploded

with the emergence of archives of digital data collection, large scale online experimentation, and innovative uses of simulation. The analysis of these data requires more complex methodological approaches and greater computational complexity than the approaches that have dominated the study of politics for the last 50 years" (PaCSS 2021). We expect the Oxford Handbook to directly address and discuss these challenges for methodologists across the spectrum.

We need to bring into discussion the diversity of scholars, particularly of methodologists. It is broadly acknowledged that one's lived experiences—often shaped by such factors as racial and ethnic background, nationality, gender identity, sexual orientation and gender expression, first generation status, where they received their graduate training and professional career stage—can inform the questions they choose to explore and which methods they bring to bear to explore those questions. We intend to ensure the inclusion of a range of new questions and approaches by clearly laying out the agenda of the *Handbook* and the inclusion of particular scholars across generations and on topics such as intersectionality. It is important to discuss not only what we are doing in terms of methodologies and methods, but why we are doing what we are doing.

As pointed out in the call for the 2021 APSA annual meeting, "the most well-recognized dimension of political science's pluralism is methodological. Ours is a discipline rich in usage of methodologies and methods from a range of fields. We have an epistemologically pluralistic profession, which we should encourage, protecting as an asset the strength of our divergent voices. Yet most if not all of us have our preferred approaches, and, as a result, tacitly downplay others. But it is this *tension* that makes political science so fruitful. The mix has translated into a discipline that is not only more open, but also more scrupulous. Our discipline's heterogeneous field of methodologies, methods, and theories is and should be a hallmark of political science and an opportunity to lead other social sciences. This is a crucial time for the discipline in terms of the expansion and acceptance of a range of methodologies and methods" (Box-Steffensmeier, Christenson, and Sinclair-Chapman 2020).

A Path Forward: Commitments to Fulfill

Two primary themes encapsulate my views on where our discipline should be heading. First, the pursuit of engaged methodological pluralism in our scholarship is critical. This is happening at the 2021 APSA annual meeting, through the scholarship of the Engaged Methodological Pluralism Task Force and resulting *Oxford Handbook*, the training of our students at all levels, and, I hope, in the future research and teaching of us all as individuals. A critical element of pluralism is to advance and build diversity, equity, and inclusion. APSA

initiatives and programs, including scholarships, grants, the Bunche Institute, and innovative programming are all important, and we need to pursue the goal of putting diversity at the center of our scholarship. Second is supporting democratic principles and civic engagement, which is at the core of the American Political Science Association and has continued, in ebbs and flows, throughout the discipline's life. The 2020 Election Assistance Taskforce has led to a Permanent Standing Committee on Election Assistance and Policy. Their work was fundamental in shaping the annual meeting, highlighting the scholarship of members, assisting in non-partisan civic engagement, advancing diversity, equity, and inclusion, and producing teaching resources. I am optimistic about the transformative power of the new Committee on Election Assistance and Policy.

We need to be more ambitious in making democracy work better for all and enable people to solve the formidable problems mentioned in my introduction. Political and social scientists can work together with civil society and others at scale to provide citizens with confidence, skills, and knowledge to make democracy work better for everyone. Our higher education institutions are trusted centers of learning and civic values of equality, diversity, freedom, justice, participation, human rights, and respect. As political scientists, we can strengthen the role of higher education in democracy through our commitment to engaged pluralism.

I am confident that pursuing the aspirations laid out here will advance the core mission of APSA. Doing so will also lead us to meeting and extending Sidney Verba's challenge to use political science to better understand who we are, and who other people are (Verba 2011). Furthermore, our subsequent research as individual political scientists and as a collective can help move towards equality in U.S. economic, social, and political systems, global systems, and our own discipline. To colleagues in the social sciences and beyond, I encourage—indeed I implore—all of us to continue asking the challenging questions and exploring various techniques to find proposed solutions through the dynamic lens of truly engaged pluralism.

Notes

1 There are differences in understanding around data and reproducibility for different research communities. See, for example, the conclusions reached in the Qualitative Transparency Deliberations; Jacobs et al. 2021.

2 Rittel and Webber 1973 are generally credited with the use of the term "wicked problem" due to the complexities of social problems. The problem begins with differences even in the aims desired. With social problems, there are usually real-world constraints that do not allow risk-free possible solutions either.

3 Wawro and Katznelson 2022 provide a stellar example of strides towards engagement, in their case, through a focus on the history of social science.

4 I owe a huge intellectual debt to Herb Weisberg, Aage Clausen, and Brian Pollins, who were Ohio State University methodologists who had a profound impact on me as an early career scholar. I would also like to recognize the generous and formative mentorship in American politics by my Ohio State colleagues Paul Beck, John Kessel, Pat Patterson, Larry Baum, Rick Herrmann, Greg Caldeira, Rip Ripley, Dick Sisson, Herb Asher, Elliot Slotnick, Katherine Tate, and Nick Nelson. It was the ideal place for this Midwesterner to begin her career due to the combination of strong, thoughtful mentors, stunningly brilliant graduate students, dedicated alums, and curious, ambitious undergraduate students. I would also like to recognize my graduate school mentors at the University of Texas at Austin—Melissa Collie, Tse-Min Lin, Brian Roberts, Walter Dean Burnham, Jim Enelow, Mel Hinich, and outside dissertation committee member, Charles Franklin. My formative undergraduate years were spent at Coe College and my special thanks goes to Peter McCormick, James Lindsay, Fred Willhoite, Jame Phifer, and Margaret Haupt.

5 A key question I begin to answer is "what about engaged pluralism adds rigor to our enterprise?" Parson 2022 provides a compelling reply to the hardest part of that question: "How can it be coherent to consider 'angles' that have come from people working on different philosophy of science/methods

assumptions from ours? That is, if we define rigor on the basis of our philosophy of science commitments and some elaborate choices in methods, do we have to loosen our rigor to take input seriously from outside those bounds?" Refer to his chapter for answers to this philosophy-of-science coherence problem.

6 Personal e-mail correspondence with Valeria Sinclair-Chapman regarding "Clarifying and Refining Arguments," September 20, 2021.

7 See Schram, Flyvbjerg, and Landman 2013 for an elaboration of empty pluralism.

8 By "our" I am referring to Dino Christenlon, Valeria Sinclair-Chapman and myself, as well as to the associate editors and indeed, all the authors who agreed to contribute as part of the vision around engaged pluralism. The associate editors include David Darmofal, John Gerring, Aarie Glas, Matthew Hitt, Aya Kachi, Heather Ondercin, Jessica Seodirgo, and Lisa Wedeen.

9 I readily admit I am a consumer, not a producer of the epistemological scholarship.

10 Personal e-mail correspondence with John Ishiyama regarding "Task Force on Rethinking Political Science Education," September 25, 2021.

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