

# 2015 Conference Theme Statement

## Diversities Reconsidered: Political Science and Politics in the 21st Century

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The concept and reality of “diversity” is fundamental in politics and Political Science. This central notion is so pervasive and imbedded that articulating and grappling with it is integral to what political scientists study and how they study it. There is, of course, a tremendous range of diversity – indeed, diversities. These diversities have different levels of salience, take on different meanings, and have different implications across time and space. A host of diversities are plain and obvious: across and within fields and subfields of the discipline; in the nature of politics and exercise of power; in social identities and interests; in political and governmental institutions and political processes; as well as in the diversity of methods used to analyze these phenomena. We encourage scholars to reconsider and reflect on those diversities to address such questions as: which diversities receive (or don’t receive) and/or ‘should’ receive scholarly attention, and why; how do we define, conceptualize, and include diversities in the issues we address and how we approach them; and what are the theoretical, empirical, and normative implications of the diversities we examine and how we examine them? We encourage papers and panels that engage these and other dimensions of diversities. Some ways this theme might pertain to fields within the discipline come to mind.

In political theory, we may want to ask, are the existing categories stipulating diverse approaches, temporalities and geographical sources of theory most useful in advancing research and conversation? The subfield is currently organized by distinc-

tions and divisions between, for example, Western and Comparative, Historical and Contemporary, Ancient and Modern, Historical and Normative, Continental and Analytic, American and European, Liberal (Democratic) and Non-Liberal theory. Are these binaries appropriate to the contemporary world and orders of knowledge? Are they felicitous for scholarship, thinking and teaching? Are there potential fields of inquiry that they constrain or occlude? The subfield also frames its undertakings according to marked and unmarked categories that may represent outdated notions of universalism or Eurocentrism. It features the unmarked category of “political theory” alongside other, marked categories of “feminist political theory,” “African American theory,” “postcolonial theory” and “comparative theory.” Are there reconsiderations of diverse topics and foci, and ways of naming them that could be useful here?

Regarding methods, to what extent are diverse sets of methodologies a desirable goal for political science as a field, and for individual scholars and research projects? Or, are some methods almost always more appropriate than others, given the objectives of the discipline? Papers could consider the advantages and disadvantages of mixed methods research designs, which have become the de facto approach in some subfields. Is it reasonable, or even desirable, to expect scholars to develop a mastery of qualitative, formal and statistical methodologies? Or should specialization, driven by the logic of comparative advantage, prevail? Others might consider the extent to which the recent focus on experimental research designs enhance scholars’ capacity to make and evaluate causal claims, versus limit the ability of scholars to study

certain phenomena and questions. More broadly, we encourage work that considers political science as a whole. The fields of the discipline most often have operated in isolation from one another. To what extent are field boundaries useful and necessary, and to what extent do they hinder our ability to study the political world?

In international relations, we observe continued diversity across nations, despite the incentives and pressures related to globalization. While the structure of the global economy has shifted with the economic rise of large middle income countries (the so-called BRICS nations), the consequences of this shift for political outcomes remains to be seen. Under what conditions, for example, will global economic institutions reform their structures to accommodate the changing interests and importance of some low and middle income countries? Additionally, we encourage work that considers the causes and effects of new modes of governance, including private regulation, joint government-private initiatives, and the private control of military force, among others. We also welcome work that considers the ways in which diversities can generate inter- and intrastate conflict. For instance, when a government fails to protect the human rights of its citizens, activists and foreign governments may demand changes, perhaps even going so far as to threaten economic sanctions or military action. More frequently, governments may have competing claims for territory, contradictory views on the acquisition of nuclear weapons, or differing approaches regarding how (and whether) to address environmental change. Under what conditions, then, is diversity an appropriate goal at the international level, and under what

conditions does it generate additional conflict?

For comparative politics scholars, diversities often are at the core of research agendas. Despite the spread of democracy to many parts of the world, mixed and authoritarian regimes remain in -- or have returned to -- many nations. Diversities also exist in how authority is divided between federal and sub-national units; in how representatives are elected and appointed; and in how legal systems adjudicate the competing claims of constituent groups. What are the implications of such institutional variations for governance and distributional outcomes? What are the tradeoffs associated with these varying political institutions? Furthermore, scholars have given considerable attention recently to ethnic, racial and religious diversity, and conflict, in both developed nations and developing societies. To what extent is there a tradeoff between representing diverse interests in society and in taking effective actions on economic and social issues? Governance arrangements also include some delegation to supranational bodies, such as the European Union. Fiscal crises and calls for austerity in Europe, however, have brought to the fore the tension between EU-wide decision-making and the demands of (diverse) domestic citizens and interest groups.

For scholars of American politics, social diversities have frequently been an object of



Reaching a top speed of 9.5-mph a California Street cable car pauses before it continues its journey to the end of the line near Market and Drumm streets. San Francisco Travel Association/Scott Chernis

analysis. The United States has grappled with 'factions,' once enshrined a subordinate status for African slaves, creating unique, problematic racial legacies; recognized religious freedom early in its history; and views itself as a 'nation of immigrants.' These features of the American political system shape, and are shaped by, public opinion, voting behavior and interest group competition. Institutions with different goals and structures, such as separation of powers and federalism, both imbed and reflect diversities; for example, federalism fosters institutional diversities, variation in populations and culture, across the fifty states and the thousands of local governments in the

U.S. Moreover, America's increasing racial/ethnic diversity also continues to be major force in its politics, as seen in Barack Obama's election in 2008; federal and state-level court and legislative actions related to the Voting Rights Act; and debates around immigration. Marriage equality and sexual identity also have become highly salient in recent years.

All these diversities, singly and in their frequently vast and intricate interconnections, provide both reasons and intellectual grounds for reconsidering diversities as inherent, important and worthy of reconsideration across the fields, substantive concerns, and methods of our discipline.