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0521831741 - Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics

Edited by Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith, and Tarek E. Masoud

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Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics

The academic study of politics seems endlessly beset by debates about method. We hear of qualitative scholars versus quantitative scholars; of institutionalists versus students of political culture; of rational choice theorists versus everyone else. At the core of all these debates is a single unifying concern: should political scientists view themselves primarily as scientists, developing ever more sophisticated tools and studying only those phenomena to which such tools may fruitfully be applied? Or should we instead try to illuminate the large, complicated, untidy problems thrown up in the world, even if the chance of offering definitive explanations is low? Is there necessarily a tension between these two endeavors? Are some domains of political inquiry more amenable to the building up of reliable, scientific knowledge than others, and if so, how should we deploy our efforts? In this collection of essays, some of the world's most prominent students of politics offer original discussions of these pressing questions, eschewing narrow methodological diatribes to explore what political science is and how political scientists should aspire to do their work.

Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics is essential reading for anyone who cares about advancing rigorous understanding of the most important political problems and choices of our time. It is the first in a series of projected volumes growing out of the Yale University Political Science Initiative on "Rethinking Political Order." Future volumes will include *Crafting and Operating Institutions*; *Identities, Affiliations, and Allegiances*; *Order, Conflict, and Violence*; *Representation and Popular Rule*; and *Distributive Politics*.

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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

In memory of Gabriel A. Almond

Contents

<i>List of contributors</i>	<i>page</i> ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xi
1. Introduction: problems and methods in the study of politics	1
IAN SHAPIRO, ROGERS M. SMITH, AND TAREK E. MASOUD	
Part I. Description, explanation, and agency	
2. Problems, methods, and theories in the study of politics, or: what's wrong with political science and what to do about it	19
IAN SHAPIRO	
3. The politics of identities and the tasks of political science	42
ROGERS M. SMITH	
4. Political science as a vocation	67
ANNE NORTON	
5. The politics of policy science	83
FRANCES FOX PIVEN	
6. The study of black politics and the practice of black politics: their historical relation and evolution	106
ADOLPH REED, JR.	
7. External and internal explanation	144
JOHN FERREJOHN	

Cambridge University Press

0521831741 - Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics

Edited by Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith, and Tarek E. Masoud

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

viii Contents

Part II. Redeeming rational choice theory?

- | | | |
|-----|--|-----|
| 8. | Lies, damned lies, and rational choice analyses
GARY W. COX | 167 |
| 9. | Problems and methods in political science: rational
explanation and its limits
ALAN RYAN | 186 |
| 10. | An analytic narrative approach to puzzles and problems
MARGARET LEVI | 201 |
| 11. | The methodical study of politics
BRUCE BUENO DE MESQUITA | 227 |

Part III. Possibilities for pluralism and convergence

- | | | |
|-----|---|-----|
| 12. | The illusion of learning from observational research
ALAN S. GERBER, DONALD P. GREEN, AND
EDWARD H. KAPLAN | 251 |
| 13. | Concepts and commitments in the study of democracy
LISA WEDEEN | 274 |
| 14. | Problems chasing methods or methods chasing
problems? Research communities, constrained
pluralism, and the role of eclecticism
RUDRA SIL | 307 |
| 15. | Method, problem, faith
WILLIAM E. CONNOLLY | 332 |
| 16. | Provisionalism in the study of politics
ELISABETH ELLIS | 350 |
| 17. | What have we learned?
ROBERT A. DAHL, TRUMAN F. BEWLEY, SUSANNE
HOEBER RUDOLPH, AND JOHN MEARSHEIMER | 377 |

	<i>Index</i>	395
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Frontmatter

[More information](#)

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Frontmatter

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