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.

Ian Shapiro is William R. Kenan, Jr. Professor of Political Science at Yale University, where he also serves as Henry R. Luce Director of the Yale Center for International and Area Studies. His many books include The State of Democratic Theory, The Moral Foundations of Politics, Democratic Justice, and (with Donald Green), Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory.

Rogers M. Smith is the Christopher H. Browne distinguished Professor and Chair of Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania. His previous books include Civic Ideals: Conflicting Visions of Citizenship in US History, Liberalism and American Constitutional Law, and Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morals of Political Membership.

Tarek E. Masoud is a doctoral student in Political Science at Yale University.
Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics

Edited by
Ian Shapiro, Rogers M. Smith, and Tarek E. Masoud
In memory of Gabriel A. Almond
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Contributors

TRUMAN F. BEWLEY, Department of Economics, Yale University
BRUCE BUENO DE MESQUITA, Hoover Institution, Stanford University
WILLIAM E. CONNOLLY, Department of Political Science, Johns Hopkins University
GARY COX, Department of Political Science, University of California, San Diego
ROBERT A. DAHL, Department of Political Science, Yale University
ELISABETH ELLIS, Department of Political Science, Texas A&M University
JOHN FEREJOHN, Department of Political Science, Stanford University
ALAN S. GERBER, Department of Political Science, Yale University
DONALD P. GREEN, Department of Political Science, Yale University
EDWARD H. KAPLAN, School of Management, Yale University
MARGARET LEVI, Department of Political Science, University of Washington
TAREK E. MASoud, Department of Political Science, Yale University
JOHN MEARSHEIMER, Department of Political Science, University of Chicago
ANNE NORTON, Department of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania
FRANCES FOX PIVEN, Department of Political Science, City University of New York
x List of contributors

Adolph Reed, Jr., Department of Political Science, New School University

Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, Department of Political Science, University of Chicago

Alan Ryan, New College, Oxford University

Ian Shapiro, Department of Political Science, Yale University

Rudra Sil, Department of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania

Rogers M. Smith, Department of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania

Lisa Wedeen, Department of Political Science, University of Chicago
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