

Article: "What Political Science Owes the World"
Author: Larry Diamond
Issue: N/A
Journal: *PS: Political Science & Politics Online Forum*

This article appeared as part of a special online forum.

This journal is published by the American Political Science Association. All rights reserved.



APSA is posting this article for public view on its website. APSA journals are fully accessible to APSA members and institutional subscribers. To view the table of contents or abstracts from this or any of APSA's journals, please go to the website of our publisher Cambridge University Press (<http://journals.cambridge.org>).

This article may only be used for personal, non-commercial, or limited classroom use. For permissions for all other uses of this article should be directed to Cambridge University Press at permissions@cup.org.

What Political Science Owes the World

**Larry Diamond, *The Hoover Institution,*
*Stanford University***

In the wake of the horrific terrorist attacks of September 11, every institution that touches in any way on governance, development, and security in the world must reevaluate what is doing. The imperative for rethinking is both a moral and an intellectual one. The attacks exposed a new global reality of heightened danger, insecurity, and uncertainty. This is a world sharply demarcated from the immediate post-Cold War world, when democracy was hegemonic, democracies felt secure, and intellectuals could debate the possibility of an "end of history." We have entered what is likely to be a protracted period of political and ideological struggle, violent conflict, volatile alignments, regime instability, and quite possibly more reversals of democracy, both subtle and overt. It is a tremendous intellectual challenge to understand the parameters of this new world and the factors that will shape and drive it.

There are profound moral imperatives at stake as well. Terrorism threatens innocent lives and the stability of established democracies to an extent that we have never before witnessed. One lesson of September 11 (and of the anthrax scare that has followed it) is that modern technology can "superempower" (to use Thomas Friedman's term) alienated individuals and fanatical sects and cells. We can no longer dismiss the possibility that such superempowered fanatics could wreak havoc on the United States and other democratic societies to an even much more devastating degree than we witnessed on September 11. A diabolically planned attack with the smallpox virus could quickly spiral out of control, claiming hundreds of thousands of lives and generating such a panic that (in one recent gaming scenario among specialists) martial law would need to be declared. An attack in downtown Washington with a tactical nuclear weapon or (more likely) a crude explosive radiological device could wipe out most of the United States federal government and render the capital uninhabitable for thousands of years.

Science and technology have obvious responsibilities and potentials to contribute to the containment of these new threats, and to improve our ability to detect them, preempt them, or at least respond more quickly and effectively to them. But at bottom, the threats of catastrophic terrorist attacks stem from political, not technological or scientific—or for that matter religious—causes. And the discipline of political science has a responsibility to rise to the challenge of comprehending these causes, and to engage in the search for responses and solutions. Yet as an academic discipline, political science is in many ways less prepared to rise to this kind of challenge than it was a generation ago. At this dawn

About the Author

Larry Diamond is a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution. He is also professor of political science and sociology (by courtesy) at Stanford University. He is a specialist on democracy in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and U.S. foreign policy affecting democracy abroad. He can be reached at diamond@hoover.stanford.edu.

of a new and formidably difficult historical period, political science has obligations to the world that it can only meet by changing its priorities and direction.

Renewing a Commitment to Area Studies

One reason why political science is poorly suited to meet the urgent challenges of our time is that the discipline has steadily diminished and devalued area studies over the past two decades. With the rise to preeminence—some critics say, hegemony—of rational choice, game theory, and related mathematical and formal approaches to the study of politics, the quest to understand, apply theory to, and derive theory from individual countries and cultures has been delegitimized. In department after department, deep, specialized knowledge of a particular country or region has been deemed inferior to command of mathematical models and supporting statistical techniques. Increasingly, aspiring and emerging political scientists believe that the best jobs in the discipline go to those using rational choice reasoning and mathematical modeling, even if they are substantively unsatisfying in the importance of what they reveal. Tests of quantitative aptitude weigh increasingly in graduate admissions, along with evidence (or rhetorical hints) of enthusiasm for formal approaches. Except for those rare cases where it accompanies a formal approach, ethnographic research boring deeply into a particular country is viewed as "soft," "unscientific," and inappropriate for scholarship in a truly serious department. When a first-year Ph.D. student questioned a famous rational choice theorist a few years ago about the possibility of multiple paths and tools of political science, the reply, pointing to a nearby building, was: "You want to be a historian? The history department is over there." Too often, methodology is elevated over substance, and what can be quantified (or gamed) reigns supreme over what is urgently important to know. It used to be the case that a Ph.D. in political science—or at least in comparative politics—required knowledge of a foreign language. Now, mathematics is exalted over language, technique over direct experience, parsimony over explanation. One can even get a Ph.D. in comparative politics today without ever having visited a foreign country!

American higher education in general is paying the price of this trend in the erosion of understanding, teaching, and training in area studies at precisely the moment when foreign areas matter to our security and economic well-being more than ever. Of the top 17 ranked departments in political science, six lack any professor with even partial specialty in the Middle East, and fully 12 of the 17 lack a tenured professor whose primary area of specialization is the Middle East (Table 1). These 17 top departments offer an average of 1.7 courses this year on the Middle East (and a median of 1). Five of the departments do not offer a single course on the Middle East.

The coverage of South Asia—home to a fifth of the world's population, and suddenly a region of great strategic consequence—is no better. Nine of the top 17 departments have no South Asia specialist, and again a total of 12 departments do not have a tenured one (Table 2). Seven of the departments do not offer a course on South Asian politics; and the average number of courses on the region per department is not quite one. The situation is slightly better in African Studies, but six of the top 17 departments are without an active Africanist (Table 3), and Stanford and Berkeley are losing theirs to retirement and administration, respectively. Five departments offer no courses on Africa, and the average number of courses per department is two.

My guess is that the situation is better in postcommunist studies and Latin American studies. But the above data speak to a distressing reality. In their zeal for the new methodological fashions, the best departments (and many in the second and third tiers) are failing to keep up with the real world. Indeed, they are simply ignoring large and immensely important parts of it.

Universities have ways of covering their inadequacies and responding to surges of interest. Part-time and visiting lecturers are brought on. One-time courses are hastily constructed. This may do something to quench a sudden undergraduate thirst to learn about some part of the world, but it does not cumulate into a coherent program. It does not fit together with language and history and cultural studies. It does nothing to train and recruit graduate students. It leaves gaping holes not only in the curricula of great universities, but in the capacity of the United States to understand countries and peoples whose politics, passions, grievances, and suffering are intimately bound up with our

Table 1: Middle East Specialists and Classes in Top 17 Departments

	Poli Sci Dept. (ordered by USA- Today Ranking)	# Mid-East Professors	# Mid- East Classes
1	Harvard University	1 Associate Professor	1
2	Stanford University	0	0
3	University of California, Berkeley	1 Associate Professor	2
	University of Michigan, Ann Arbor	1 Professor	4
5	Yale University	1 Assistant Professor	3
6	Princeton University	0	3
7	University of California, San Diego	0	1
8	Duke University	0	0
	University of California, Los Angeles	2 Professors	3
	University of Chicago	1 Assistant Professor	4
11	Columbia University	1 Associate Professor	4
	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	1 Professor	2
	University of Rochester	0	0
	University of Wisconsin, Madison	1 Professor	1
15	Ohio State University	1 Professor (partial focus) 1 Associate Professor (partial focus)	1
	University of Minnesota, Twin Cities	1 Associate Professor (partial focus)	0

own.

This is one thing that political science owes the world after September 11: to get serious about the real world again. All of it. Above all else, this requires a significant reorientation of priorities and practices in the hiring of tenured and tenure-track faculty. More emphasis must be given to comparative politics and international relations in general, and to deep empirical knowledge of specific countries and actual institutions. Those of us who have watched with regret and alarm as area studies have been degraded do not seek to replace the (incipient) hegemony of mathematical modeling and reasoning with some alternative bias. What we want is pluralism in the types of knowledge, tools, and theoretical approaches that are valued. This bears not only on who is recruited, but what type of work is rewarded in political science (an issue to which I will return shortly).

The progressive narrowing of perspective in many political science departments, and the traditionally decentralized nature of university hiring, means that some political science departments will be unable to repair their own deficits without replicating the same biases that have diminished their relevance to the real world. In such circumstances, university provosts and deans must step in forthrightly to open up the hiring process to a more diverse set of judgements. Recruitment of senior faculty with area specialties will typically be enriched by the participation in the search process of area specialists from other disciplines, such as history, anthropology, and sociology (I would say economics if there were enough area specialists left in leading university economics departments to be worth counting). However, in some cases, such broadened participation may be the only way to ensure that new positions in comparative politics (and regionally focused positions in international relations and international political economy) are not hijacked to the

Table 2: South Asia Specialists and Classes in Top 17 Departments

	Poli Sci Dept. (ordered by USA- Today Ranking)	# South- Asia Professors	# South- Asia Classes
1	Harvard University	0	1
2	Stanford University	0	1
	University of California-- Berkeley	1 Associate Professor	2
	University of Michigan--Ann Arbor	1 Associate Professor	2
5	Yale University	0	2
6	Princeton University	1 Professor	0
7	University of California--San Diego	0	0
8	Duke University	1 Assistant Professor	0
	University of California, Los Angeles	0	1
	University of Chicago	2 Professors	3
11	Columbia University	0	1
	Massachusetts Institute of Technology	1 Assistant Professor	1
	University of Rochester	0	0
	University of Wisconsin-- Madison	1 Assistant Professor	2
	Ohio State University	2 Professors	1
	University of Minnesota--Twin Cities	0	0
	University of North Carolina--Chapel Hill	0	0

prevailing methodological or ideological mission in a department. This is painful to concede but it is the juncture we have reached. On some campuses, our discipline may be unable to repair itself.

The same biases and dilemmas bear down upon the hiring and promotion of junior faculty. This is an even more vexing problem. Junior faculty hired without the strong support of their own departments or at least departmental fields face poor prospects for tenure. It is no secret that many junior faculty live in anxiety, if not outright fear, that they will be seen as "out of step" with the formal modeling revolution in political science. Again, it is the responsibility of university deans and provosts to ensure that junior faculty function in a climate of genuine intellectual freedom, that they are truly free to do the work that they believe is worth doing, in the sense that different styles of work are rewarded and valued. On some campuses, this may require proactive scrutiny by deans, compensatory leaves, highly confidential interviews, external assessments, and close inspection of negative departmental tenure decisions. Where the hiring of true area specialists at the junior level requires extradepartmental participation, some kind of similar participation will, logically, be required to evaluate those candidates for renewal and promotion.

It is not difficult to anticipate many of the criticisms that will be leveled against these proposals. One will be that the revaluing of area studies will mean a devaluing of theory and method, and a general lowering of standards. This is the primary argument with which area studies has been dragged down and ghettoized in political science, and it is one main argument that will be resurrected to resist reform. The question of quality is an empirical one. There are outstanding scholars who use formal methods and whose work pushes out the boundaries of our understanding at many levels. However, there are also great political scientists who are pushing out the boundaries of both empirical knowledge and theory by the use of ethnographic, historical, and other qualitative methods, as well as more conventional quantitative methods (such as survey research). Each scholar must be evaluated on the quality and impact of their work, and the appropriateness of their methods to the questions they address—not on the basis of some fixed hierarchy of methodological prestige. It is simply a canard of the most unscholarly and unconscionable kind to assert that country- or region-specific, qualitative

Table 17	Top Africa Specialists and Classes in 17 Departments	# Associate Professors	# Africa Classes
1	Harvard University	0 Professor	0
2	Rochester University	1 Professor	1
	Stanford University	1 Professor (partial focus)	4
	University of Wisconsin--Madison	1 Professor	4
15	University of California--Berkeley	2 Professors	4
	University of Michigan	0	0
	University of Minnesota	1 Associate Professor	3
5	Vanderbilt University	1 Professor	5
	University of North Carolina--Chapel Hill	1 Associate Professor (partial focus)	5
6	Princeton University	1 Professor	2
	University of California--San Diego	0	0
7	Duke University	0	2
	University of California--Los Angeles	3 Professors	6
	University of Chicago	0	0

work is, ipso facto, inferior.

Addressing Multiple Audiences (Intelligibly)

Political science has an obligation not only to cover the pressing issues and areas of our time but also to do so intelligibly, in ways and forums that are accessible to broad audiences. Every fashion in the social sciences (Marxism, structural-functionalism, realism, post-modernism, and rational choice) carries with it a whole vocabulary that breeds inward and excludes outsiders. For the most part, these internal vocabularies do not enhance but rather diminish the English language. They erect barriers to intellectual dialogue, inhibit the cross-fertilization of perspectives, and impede broader access to the work of the discipline. There is no good reason why political science has to read like much of it does. Specialized fields of inquiry accumulate specialized problems, findings, and terms. That is necessary and unavoidable. New terms can summarize whole theories and approaches, or frame a problem in a new way. But terminology can also mask the lack of having much really new to say—pouring old wine into new bottles. Breaking down the polarization of political science along methodological lines will require some reining in of terminology run amok, some pursuit of clarity over cliquishness. Editors and publishers have to get tougher in demanding it.

Then there is the question of what we publish as political scientists, where, and for whom. Many departments and universities have a clear hierarchy of prestige for publications. Some of them (generally not the best ones) are even silly enough to boil it down to a rigid point score. An article in the *American Political Science Review*, for example, earns the most points. A less prestigious but still more narrowly disciplinary journal will come second in the sweepstakes. Publication in an area studies journal may earn an honorable mention—or a gentle warning from the chair not to publish too much of "that kind of thing." One cannot deny that there is a correlation between the prestige of the journal and the impact of the article. But it is very far from perfect. A better way to assess a scholar's impact is to assess how and to what extent other scholars are using her work—rather than where she is publishing.

This raises a related issue as to "what counts" for tenure and promotion. There is a very odd fetish in our discipline (and most others) with "peer review." I will freely concede to a personal stake in this issue. I coedit a quarterly publication (the *Journal of Democracy*) that uses independent and semiblind peer reviews often, but by no means regularly. In addition, we limit our articles to a length (generally about 6,000 to 6,500 words) that readily invites reading, and we edit them vigorously for readability. In the process, we diminish the resort to disciplinary jargon, and we limit the use of tables and figures (and we generally confine highly technical statistical analysis and explanation to an appendix or a place on our website). I do not by any means assert that this is the only way political science should be published. We need as well longer articles and highly technical presentations. Indeed, I think all professional political scientists should be trained in statistics and should have some degree of literacy in interpreting statistical analysis, even if they do not want to undertake it themselves. But technique and abstraction are not the be-all and end-all of political science. Our purposes as political scientists are to

understand, explain, and educate. There are many ways and forums to achieve these goals. A comparison of appearances in course syllabi and citations in other academic journals will show that the way we do it at the Journal of Democracy is not inferior and indeed has a greater impact than many journals where publication "counts" more for tenure and promotion.

Indeed, I think a more radical position is warranted. In the world after September 11, political scientists have an obligation to write for and speak to broader nonacademic audiences. If rational choice and game theory deserve the pride of place they have acquired in many of the best departments, they have to justify it outside the Ivory Tower as well as within it. They must—and I think they can—speak in nontechnical language to broader audiences. (On two or three occasions, they have done so quite powerfully, to my mind, in the Journal of Democracy.) And they should engage the pressing issues of the day. What are the causes of terrorism and political and ethnic violence? What explains the growth of fundamentalist Islam? How do we account for state failure and decay? How do we construct effective international regimes for controlling the proliferation of weapons and technologies of mass destruction? What does rational choice have to add to our understanding of these issues beyond the theoretical, empirical, and policy insights of alternative perspectives?

It is not enough for political scientists to engage these issues in the pages of their academic journals and book series. We have an obligation to educate informed publics—opinion leaders and policy makers—in journals like Foreign Affairs and Foreign Policy, and on the op-ed pages of major newspapers and magazines. It is simply perverse that the academic discipline best suited to discussing public policy issues in these more far-reaching venues does not reward such contributions and sometimes even discourages them (with, again, a gentle warning not to do too much of that "kind of thing"). Indeed, an untenured professor takes great risks publishing for policy audiences. He may be dismissed as "unscientific," a popularizer. He may even offend somebody with his views or recommendations. No doubt, he will generate envy among senior colleagues who have not had the nerve, the timing, the luck, and the imagination to publish in this way. And he will be made to pay the price of having to publish more overall in order to show that this urge to analyze timely issues for consequential audiences is just an eccentric pastime. Indeed, he may even be advised to hide his work in a remote location on his curriculum vitae, or to leave it off altogether!

Here is a suggestion for professors and chairs and deans who want their departments and universities to be seen as relevant and worthy of financial support. Let's reward and encourage political scientists who publish their work prominently and well for broader audiences, not as the only thing they do but as something of value that they do. Let's factor that into the reward structure of the university and the discipline. Let's offer incentives for more political scientists to engage in the urgent policy questions our society confronts. And let's break down the deepening segregation that confines policy-relevant work—and books and articles that people other than political scientists actually feel they need to read—to think tanks and policy schools, while "real" political scientists publish in their vigorously refereed and sporadically read academic journals.

While we're at it, let's go further and think about the students, too—what they read and are taught. Even the top departments could stand to offer some incentives for professors to design new courses that illuminate the issues that haunt and challenge us after September 11. Those courses, and the vibrant engagement with the urgent issues of our time, might eventually reorient some research and writing in very welcome directions.

Our Obligation as a Profession

In these months after September 11, and perhaps for many anxious and bloody years to come, we will—as individuals and collectively as a profession—have to walk a fine line between engagement and opportunism. On the one hand, we have an obligation to use our knowledge and skills to inform increasingly attentive publics and to contribute to policy and legislative debates before they race off in hysteria to unwise courses of action. On the other hand, we need to avoid racing off from one current question to the next, in a hyperactive quest to be relevant now for whatever television defines as the issue (literally) of the day.

This requires both some sober professional reflection on the question of what issues really matter to our national and global security, and the determination and imagination to pursue them even if they fall out of fashion for the moment or appear just too terrible to contemplate.

Let me offer an example. The September 11 attacks suggest our democracy—our entire system of government—may confront an unprecedented danger. It is no longer inconceivable that pretty much the entire United States federal government could be wiped out in a single act of destruction. One well placed, well timed, nuclear attack could potentially eliminate the entire line of presidential succession—the president, the vice president, the speaker, the Senate president pro tem, every cabinet member—and virtually all of the Congress and the Supreme Court as well. Our constitution has no means to deal with a tragedy of this scale. Before September 11 we could say, why bother? It was never conceivable, or, for several decades it was only conceivable in the context of an all-out nuclear war that would leave little left to govern. Now, the unthinkable has become conceivable, even if it remains a remote prospect.

The initial instinct will be to say, "That can't happen." Or, "It is such a trivial prospect that it isn't worth the agony of a constitutional amendment process." It is our obligation as a profession to take on issues like this, to show that technologies and raw materials of mass destruction are very far from being under firm control, and that much more vigorous steps are urgently needed to secure them. It is within our ability to demonstrate that the odds of such a tragedy befalling our nation are not much different than the odds of a randomly selected 35-year-old working parent with two children suddenly dying for whatever reason. Most Americans would agree that with children depending on him or her, that parent should have life insurance, even if the odds of her dying this year are one in 10 thousand. With the entire, 225-year thread of continuous democratic legitimacy hanging on it, our country should have constitutional insurance.

Once we put our minds to the dreaded prospect, it would probably not be difficult to devise a means for repairing this deficit in our constitutional preparedness. We could, for example, use the genius of our federal design to lengthen and diversify the line of presidential succession, going through the 50 state governors in order of state size. We could construct means for replacing the House of Representatives (by the state legislatures) and the Supreme Court (from among federal appellate judges). The American Political Science Association could, for example, join with the American Bar Association to initiate a deliberate, measured, nonsensational debate on this awful but now necessary question.

There is plenty else for us to address as a profession and a discipline. How far should the erosion of civil liberties and due process go in a time of national emergency? What is the means to check this? How should we balance the need for states' cooperation in the war on terrorism with the need for states to govern with sufficient accountability and public purpose so that they do not themselves breed more terrorists than they can possibly arrest? What is the real role of culture in this conflict, and of religion, or even civilization? How can Americans respond to the call for greater "vigilance" as a society without trampling on the rights and dignity of Arab Americans?

I do not suggest that the "discipline" of political science or the American Political Science Association can or should take a professional position on these issues. But we need to become advocates for the dispassionate discussion of them. And we can provide forums for doing so. PS and APSR are two such forums. Our Annual Meeting is another. That meeting is largely structured well in advance and is always heavily dominated by purely academic panels. Let's open it up to some wide-ranging discussions of the fateful challenges we confront as a society and the obligations we have as a discipline. And let's be sure to invite the broad range of people we need for a meaningful dialogue on these matters—not just professional political scientists but politicians, government officials, journalists, writers, and prominent thinkers and leaders from foreign countries. It may take some additional resources to bring the kinds of people from outside government whom we need to hear. With a strong sense of purpose, we should not have difficulty raising the money from individual and foundation contributions. The problem is not really a financial one. It is a professional one: surmounting our insularity and realizing we have much to learn about politics from people who are not political scientists.

As the Vietnam War fractured our society and wasted countless lives, there were many calls for our discipline (and others) to become "engaged." As the war on terrorism grinds on controversially and without any obvious end, these types of calls will rise on many college campuses. Some will demand "engagement" for a particular political view or cause. Again, that is not what I am suggesting. I do not think our discipline, or any academic discipline, can or should advocate a professional political position. As a profession, our mission is to advocate, stimulate, and promote informed debate and reasoned analysis of the crucial questions in our politics. This requires not uniformity but pluralism—openness in thought and method. It beckons us to descend from the Ivory Tower to the real world of anguished people, messy problems, and vexing trade-offs. We

as political scientists can contribute something tangible to understanding these problems and clarifying these choices. In the wake of September 11, we owe this to the world.

© 2002 *American Political Science Association* Readers may redistribute this article to other individuals for noncommercial use, provided the text and this notice remain intact and unaltered in any way. This article may not be resold, reprinted, or redistributed for compensation of any kind without prior permission from the American Political Science Association. Questions regarding permissions should be directed to Steve Yoder at syoder@apsanet.org or by phone at (202) 483-2512 or Fax at (202) 483-2657.