



APSA Statement on the Essential Role of Social Scientific Inquiry in Maintaining a Free, Participatory, Civil, and Law-Governed Society

As we approach our virtual 2020 annual meeting, which explores “Democracy, Difference, and Destabilization”, at a time when political polarization obstructs understanding of many urgent major issues, the American Political Science Association reaffirms the essential role of social scientific inquiry in maintaining a free, participatory, civil, and law-governed society, and our commitment to scholarship and professional practices that contribute to social as well intellectual progress. As a scholarly discipline, political science has a special connection to public life. It involves the analysis of ideas, institutions, and behavior to elucidate the distribution of power, the actions of governments, and their consequences for people’s lives.

In the United States, political science emerged at a time when education, publications, and the public sphere at large were shaped by state-sponsored discrimination—from universities segregated by race and gender to grotesque acts of racial violence perpetrated by federal, state, and local institutions, as well as private actors. All too often, political science scholarship aided in falsely essentializing human differences and justifying immoral state policies of marginalization, suffering, and death. Inevitably, today’s political science still bears some marks of its founding. Our journals, our syllabi, citation patterns and our canons of scholarship—even how we narrate the history of the discipline itself—have been shaped by the prejudices as well as the achievements of past generations.

Consequently, all of us in political science—especially those scholars who hold positions of privilege and power—bear an intellectual and ethical responsibility to critique our own practices. There is no scholarly inquiry without academic freedom, openness to diverse viewpoints, and the possibility of robust disagreement. This need for openness means that academic freedom diminishes when one racial or ethnic group, one gender, or one nationality dominates the conversation—in a table of contents, on a syllabus, literature review and bibliography or on a conference panel. Any studies that seek to defend such domination by evading the rigorous professional scrutiny essential to our work do harm to our scholarly community and to the cause of open debate.

To the degree that political science progresses, it does so through the unfettered accretion of new observations, evidence, and theories, all subjected to confidential peer review. The Association reaffirms its commitment to enabling a panoply of voices and viewpoints, and to supporting people whose advancement the discipline itself has too long impeded. We call on all our individual members, institutional members, and affiliated organizations to join in strengthening our quest for creative ways of making political science more open, plural, and self-critical.