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# A Life in Political Science

Sidney Verba

Department of Government, Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138;  
email: [sverba@gov.harvard.edu](mailto:sverba@gov.harvard.edu)

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Watch an interview with the author online.

## Keywords

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## Abstract

Political science has been a central part of my life for over half a century. This essay records thoughts about the discipline, what it has given me, and what I hope I have given it. It records my entrance into the field and the direction of my work, and offers a personal view of the nature of political science. Using my own work as the examples, it traces the evolution of comparative survey research as a method. And it outlines a list of works on citizen voice and political equality. It focuses as well on the openness and breadth of the discipline, two of its finest virtues.

## INTRODUCTION

I realize each time I attend an APSA Meeting how much my identity is bound up with the discipline of political science. If I were asked to identify myself, “political scientist” would come up in the top three or four answers. It is how I made a living as teacher and researcher. It is an enterprise that has supported me and that I have supported in many ways. Many of my dearest friends are similarly identified. It is not that my skills or concerns or interests encompass the immensely broad span of the discipline, which ranges from postmodern writings whose sentences I sometimes cannot understand to mathematical models whose equations are usually beyond me. But the wide range of approaches and works are all part of an ever-growing discipline, immensely varied in its methods, encompassing an ever-widening subject matter. It is an open discipline, borrowing approaches from neighboring and not-so-neighboring disciplines. This is key to its value to scholarship and its meaning to me.

When the editors asked me to write this prefatory essay for the *Annual Review of Political Science*, they suggested either an autobiographical statement about my career or a statement about the discipline itself. I have had no intention of writing on either topic and have long followed Nancy Reagan’s advice: “Just say no.” But in the year of my fiftieth APSA Meeting (minus the very small number that I have missed), it is intriguing to say yes. I find that the two options, autobiography and discipline, fit very closely together.

## EARLY EXPOSURE TO POLITICS

I was born in 1932 to an immigrant family in Brooklyn, a Depression and FDR baby. My parents were Roosevelt worshippers who ran a small mom-and-pop dry goods store and always worried about money. Other parts of the family covered a spectrum of politics from the extreme left (an uncle who was fairly high up in the American Communist Party) to the

moderate, but fervent, left of my parents—a general approach to politics I inherited. Our neighborhood was diverse: Irish, Italian, Polish, and Jewish. I did not meet a Republican until college.

An early political memory is from the 1944 presidential election, when Republican billboards appeared, quoting FDR’s famous comment, “Clear it with Sidney.” I was flattered to be placed so high up as someone to be consulted until my father explained to me that the billboards referred to Sidney Hillman, the head of the Amalgamated Clothing Union. They were a way for Republicans to say that FDR was beholden to the unions, and a not-very-subtle way of implying FDR was a Communist supporter and maybe dominated by Jews.

I went to James Madison High School in Brooklyn, an ordinary middle- and lower-middle-class high school that graduated a justice on the U.S. Supreme Court (Ruth Bader Ginsburg) and a justice on the International Court in The Hague, three Nobel Prize winners (including economists Robert Solow and Gary Becker), as well as the singer Carole King, and the person who was probably the most important figure for getting high school students into college, Stanley Kaplan—not to mention many academics. At one time, three sitting U.S. senators were Madison alumni—one from each of the three American political parties: Chuck Schumer—Democrat, Norm Coleman—Republican, and Bernie Sanders—Social-Democrat/Independent.

The college advisor at Madison told me that I had high grades and I ought to apply to a good college. I asked what they were. He said Harvard, Yale, and Princeton. I looked them up at the Brooklyn Public Library branch near my house and applied to all three. I was admitted to Harvard and Princeton, and luckily chose to go to Harvard. Princeton, at the time, had a student body of more consistently elite background (I did not even know what a prep school was). Harvard was still elitist but had changed more. It took me six months to realize that perhaps I did not belong there, by which time I felt I belonged.

## BACKING INTO POLITICAL SCIENCE

My academic road into political science was largely a matter of drift and accident. I majored in History and Literature and took only one course in the Department of Government. After college, the largest part of my friends went to law school. I wanted something different and went to the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton to prepare for the Foreign Service. (Graduate school at Princeton was very different and separate from the undergraduate college.) I thought it would be exciting. My fiancée (now my wife of 56 years) agreed. It was, however, the height of the McCarthy era, and that road lost its attraction. I had been taking courses in the Politics Department, which I found interesting; and I switched over. It was drift that got me into political science, and luck that got me into it at Princeton at that time. It was a small but high-quality department in which I thrived.

My graduate career was amazingly easy and successful, as was my entrance into the profession as a teacher. Many years later, I was chatting with my middle daughter and her friends, who were getting their Ph.D.'s and worrying about finding a job and then the road to tenure. I told them I never had any such problems because I was smarter than they were. In the first place, I was born at the right time so that I entered the job market when universities were expanding and the social sciences flying high. Second, I was born a male; the road for women was much more rocky at that time. And last, I was lucky.

One lucky break was having my plan for a dissertation rejected by the professor who dominated the field of European politics at Princeton. I wanted to write something about postwar Germany and the then flourishing subject of "national character." He did not like the idea. I don't think he knew what the term meant. I was not so sure myself what it meant, but it seemed interesting. I then floundered, seeking a new dissertation topic. I spent several months on a constitutional law topic I did not like, and finally

decided on a political analysis of psychological studies of decision making in small groups, a subject to which I had been exposed in a social psychology course. The subject had two overlapping components. One was the role of primary groups—families, friendship circles, small social networks—in political life. The other component was the experimental study of small groups that had been pioneered by Kurt Lewin and others—experimental studies of leadership and participation in experimental settings. The small groups that he and his students studied seemed to be miniature decisional units, some more democratic than others. I thought they might be models for larger decisional units.

There had been various political science explorations of primary groups (e.g., Festinger 1947, Katz & Lazarsfeld 1950, Demerath & Thibault 1956, McCloskey & Dahlgren 1960), but the subject of experimental groups was unknown in political science. Unbeknownst to me, however, various political scientists were just beginning to be interested in small-group experiments. My dissertation was the first systematic consideration of small primary groups in politics and of the connection between those real-life studies and experimental literature. It dealt, thus, with an interesting component of the emerging research in political behavior that drew on sociological and psychological work, and the methodological issues—especially the issue of external validity—in the experimental field (see, e.g., Strodtbeck 1954, Hare et al. 1955, Guetzkow 1958). It was published by Princeton University Press as *Small Groups and Political Behavior: a Study of Leadership* (Verba 1972). The Press gave me a no-royalty contract, since the market would be so small—though, when it went into a third (small, but still a third) printing, they added on a small royalty.

While I was finishing *Small Groups*, I took a job as a research assistant to Gabriel Almond, who was beginning the research that would eventuate in *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*. He was one of the leading and most innovative political scientists of the era. I was a graduate student struggling to finish my dissertation on a very different topic.

As time went on, I got to play a somewhat larger role than the usual R.A. because I knew a smattering of statistics and was interested in surveys. Almond generously asked me to become a coauthor. It would not have been unusual or inappropriate for him simply to have acknowledged me in the preface, rather than putting me on the title page with equal billing. My role in the book (Almond & Verba 1963)—which, to say the least, gave my career a boost—is another example of being lucky. At the time, I had no idea how revolutionary the book was—a large-scale comparative survey study (there were almost none in political science at the time) on the new topic of political culture. I had gone to work for Almond mostly because my wife was pregnant and could no longer support me by teaching school, so I had to earn some money. Her parents agreed that it was about time.

## THE CIVIC CULTURE

Let me turn to the intellectual autobiography—to a half century of political science research. The dissertation and my small-groups book, as well as the work with Almond, set me on a course of research that I have followed—more or less—ever since. It has been concerned with broad issues in democracy involving questions of citizen engagement and political equality, as well as concerned with methods. I do not mean methods in the technical sense (I was not equipped to be and have not been a statistical innovator), but such broad issues as experimental design and the external validity of laboratory studies, as well as survey studies.

The *Civic Culture* study, which recently had its fiftieth anniversary, is a good place to begin reflecting on my research career because that study did a lot to shape it, and, I believe, to influence political science research more broadly. It did many important things that were followed, amplified, and improved in later research. The *Civic Culture* research was done in the five participating nations—Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Mexico, and the United States—around 1960; the book came out in 1963.

To start with the negative, it did much that, with hindsight, one can see was wrong. The book has been criticized as having a naïve model of democracy that was too Anglo-Saxon; paying too little attention to context and institutional structures; and putting cultures into too similar a mold. The substantive conclusions have, in many ways, been superseded. Its methods were much too simple in the light of current practice.

There is much to these criticisms. I do not consider that a failure of the book. As the great Italian sociologist-economist, Vilfredo Pareto, put it (quoted by Triska et al. 1977, p. vii), “Give me fertile error bursting with the seeds of its own correction; . . . you can keep your sterile truth!” *The Civic Culture* was fruitful. Its substantive and technical approach was such that it could be improved on, and it has been.

## The Process

The process we used to carry out the *Civic Culture* study had at least four features unusual for its time.

First, it was systematically comparative. Comparative politics back then was largely a field in which individual countries were studied in a configurative manner, with little systematic comparison. There were comparisons of some institutional structures or of constitutions, but systematic, data-based comparisons were rare.

Second, its method was a set of comparative surveys across a set of nations. There were hardly any such studies at that time. There is a connection between the survey method and a systematic approach to comparison. Survey studies, if they are to be conducted across nations in a way that allows comparison, require that one think systematically about what one does, why one does it, and how to do it.

Where did the topic come from? Social science often takes its agenda from major events. The study proposed a general explanation of a complex phenomenon: stable democracy. This was one of the great puzzles of the era. The particular democracy that posed the puzzle was Weimar Germany. Many of the leading figures in U.S. social science were refugees from

the Nazis. For them, the collapse of Weimar democracy was both an intellectual puzzle and a deeply personal part of their history. My introduction into political science in the 1950s included attention to that issue. Political science had been a subject that focused heavily on constitutional structures; and comparison was often comparison of constitutional forms. Weimar had one of the most carefully and self-consciously drafted democratic constitutions. And yet it did not survive. Why had such careful constitutional engineering failed? One answer was cultural; one cannot impose a constitutional form on a people whose values are not supportive of democracy. This, in turn, influenced the study that Almond and I conducted of political culture (a subject everyone thought important, though no one was sure what it meant). How else to study political culture but to look at the values and attitudes in a population? And how else to study the evolving political values and attitudes of a people than by surveying them? Hence, we designed a study of two established democracies (the United States and Britain), two nations coming out of authoritarian regimes (Germany and Italy), and one nation that we thought of as an aspiring democracy (Mexico).

Following that lead, the study proposed a cultural explanation of democratic survival. This was the fourth unusual aspect of its process.

The combination of these features indicates how bold—or foolhardy—was the study. It applied a new technique (social surveys) never or rarely used across cultures, to a vast subject (political culture) never studied systematically, and it connected culture to democracy. Luckily, I was so early in my career that I did not realize the hubris of this enterprise, or I would have been terrified.

## The Substance

The substantive results of the *Civic Culture* study were interesting. It made clear the role of civic values and beliefs in relation to democracy, measuring the extent of such democratic values

and the citizen's belief in their importance, the importance individuals attached to citizen voice in politics, their own sense of political efficacy (which we called subjective competence), their willingness to act, and their experience acting. The questions were whether citizens should, could, and, if the opportunity or need arose, would be active—and whether they had ever in fact been active in trying to influence government. The study was one of the first to highlight the organizational structure of civil society underlying much civic participation, including family socialization and organizational participation. And it went from there to the role of civil society in a democratic polity.

This is, I believe, an example of fruitful research. It addressed the important topic of democratic functioning; it focused on a significant aspect of the underlying social circumstances that foster democratic functioning, the family and the organization of civil society; and, since that set of explanatory factors was so significant and so richly complex, it left lots of room for follow-up research to extend the analysis. Some of that extension is the work of my collaborative colleagues and myself (see below), and much has been done by others. Numerous studies have followed *The Civic Culture*. It has been replicated, expanded, and corrected. It has in various ways been revised. The seeds it planted have borne fruit.

In one crucial aspect, the study had the future wrong. It focused heavily on the role of education in developing a civic culture. Educated individuals were more likely to participate in politics, more tolerant of others, and more supportive of democratic norms. This result about individuals has held up pretty well over time. But the book was written in a time of great optimism about the future of democracy. As education spread, we, and many other scholars of that period, expected that a new, more secular and rational world would emerge. The roles of religious, ethnic, and racial identity would diminish, and so would the incidence of clashes based on such characteristics, creating a more peaceful and democratic world. Looking back 50 years, it is clear that the prediction was

wrong. We live in a world of conflict, and much of it centers on the divisiveness of those basic characteristics.

## **EQUAL POLITICAL VOICE AND DEMOCRACY**

I have focused on *The Civic Culture* because it was the beginning of a long series of works on civic engagement. The works are all, in some way, descendents of that first large work. They are based on large-scale population surveys; they focus on citizen engagement; and they are all embedded in a deep concern with basic issues in democratic governance.

The works that followed *The Civic Culture*, however, differed in two significant ways. The earlier work was concerned with democratic culture and differences across the nations in commitment of the populations to democratic beliefs and values. The later work maintains an interest in such cultural and attitudinal matters but is centered on political activity and the equality of that activity. A basic democratic ideal is the equal consideration of the preferences and interests of all citizens, an ideal embodied in the principle of “one person, one vote.” Equal consideration depends on equal citizen voice—voice that may be expressed through many kinds of citizen activity. The newer research has as its central theme the description and measurement of equal voice and the deviations from it, as well as a search for the origins of the deviations.

The works are held together by this overriding theme but touch many different aspects of it: Some works are comparative, some on the United States alone; some on differences across gender or racial/ethnic lines; some on the role of elites; some on particular populations, for example, the unemployed or those with strong views on issues such as abortion. The many specific studies inform and enrich the more general understanding of the overriding concern.

The work on equal political voice appears in eight published books and one to be published—and in many journal articles as well. Six books are about American politics and three are comparative studies. The following two

sections are an inventory of the books: the topics covered and their relevance to the general issue of equality of political voice. My comments on the books indicate the aspect of the equality problem addressed but are, of necessity, short and schematic. The books are discussed in order of their publication.

## **FROM U.S. HEGEMONY TO COLLABORATIVE INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH: THE SEVEN-NATION STUDY**

The first study after the five-nation *Civic Culture* study was of seven nations—Austria, India, Japan, the Netherlands, Nigeria, the United States, and Yugoslavia—very different nations and cultures. One of the major changes from the earlier study was its organization, a change from a U.S.-centered to a collaborative structure. The *Civic Culture* study was centrally designed and implemented. Almond and I designed it in our offices in Princeton, and the field work was contracted out to survey organizations in the several countries. Although we consulted with country specialists in the United States and in the cooperating countries, as well as with the survey organizations, it was largely a U.S.-based project. In contrast, the seven-nation study was not centrally run. The principal investigators were the partners from the participating nations. And although it drew on the analysis of the earlier study, it incorporated a more systematic consideration of the political structures of the participating nations. We did not compare the citizenry in each nation as a set of individuals, but as people in different political parties and organizational structures—which provided a much more complete account of their attitudes and behaviors.

The seven-nation study differed from the five-nation study in its organization, but it benefited from the survey method of the earlier study in overcoming the difficulties of such a multilateral approach. It is an example of how one can build new social science work by learning from earlier work. The crucial aspect of *The Civic Culture* was its use of systematic surveys



in each country; the follow-up work relied on the bond of a common research technique. We were seven teams from seven nations. We differed in background and in many values and expectations. Our goal was to collaborate in studying citizens' civic values and attitudes, as well as their behaviors. We agreed on wanting to study values, but which were important? We wanted to study political activity, but what kinds of activity were key? Equality was a major theme, but equality among whom? Whose voice was heard in each country? Whose voice should be heard? Throughout the many discussions and disagreements on such basic issues, we were held together by our method and its requirements: the need to come to a common research design in a technical field.

We had a long discussion of the role of gender. At one point it was suggested by a few collaborators that we might perhaps only sample men. Women, after all, did not take much part in politics and had few political views. In the 1960s, when this second study was done, that notion was not unusual. Women were less active in politics—and in some of the countries almost completely inactive. Politically, they were invisible. We now know that the silence was not voluntary but enforced by men—or enforced by culture, or enforced by culture defined by men. Luckily the bulk of the collaborators wanted a sample of women and men. If they had not, our study would have been an anachronism before it was done!

One might say that we were inventive in having a common substantive research question, and then finding and refining a research technique that allowed us to pursue our agreed-upon goal. In fact, it may have been the common technique that created the collaborative program. Policy analysts often talk about solutions looking for problems. It may be that we had the technique, and then found a problem to which we could apply it.

The seven-nation study produced a number of books in the participating countries and many articles (for a list, see Verba et al. 1978, pp. 384–86). Three of the books from the study are summarized below.

## **Caste, Race, and Politics**

The first book to emerge from the seven-nation study, coauthored with Bashiruddin Ahmed and Anil Bhatt, was a comparison of two racial/ethnic groups at the bottom of the ascriptive status hierarchy in two very different countries. The book was called *Caste, Race, and Politics: A Comparison of India and the United States* (Verba et al. 1971). In India the group at the bottom was the former Untouchables, then labeled Harijans, currently Dalits; in the United States it was blacks or African-Americans. Both groups were in similar relative positions in their societies, in terms of the ascriptive nature of their disadvantage as well as the ratio of their socioeconomic positions (income and education) to that of the dominant members of the population (Caste Hindus and whites, respectively). Each disadvantaged group was mobilizing to improve its political position. But the cultural contexts were different. And although their relative socioeconomic positions were similar, the absolute positions were very different. Culture along with absolute—in contrast with relative—disadvantage had a significant effect on their activity. The book was a focused study of two nations, intriguing in its own right, that also raised general comparative issues.

## **Participation in America**

Norman Nie and I wrote *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* based on the U.S. sample from the seven-nation study. It considered citizen activity in America from a number of perspectives: the different modes of political activity, the way in which social and economic characteristics shape the stratification of citizen participation, the role of parties and organizations in recruiting activists, how such organizations shape political activity and are themselves political actors, the role of race, and more. The book presented an “SES model” of participation: how inequality in socioeconomic status leads to political inequality. The SES model became the starting point for much research on citizen activity that used it,

elaborated it, improved it, and criticized its inadequacies—just what Pareto would have said fruitful research should lead to.

An important focus was on the relative importance for citizen activity of the individual characteristics of citizens (their education, their incomes) and the nature of the community in which they lived. Studies of political development argued that urban areas created a more educated and engaged, and, therefore, more active population; other approaches described the loss of community and common bonds in the anomic urban world. The data in *Participation in America* showed how both forces were at work, sometimes canceling each other out (Verba & Nie 1972). In addition, the study, using communities as the unit and data based on samples of citizens and community elites, studied the link between stratified citizen activity and the concurrence between citizen and elite community agendas. It was one of the earliest studies that showed systematically the link between inequality in citizen participation and in inequality in the response of community leaders.

### Participation and Political Equality

For *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven Nation Comparison*, Norman Nie and I worked with Jae-on Kim. We drew on the approaches developed in the book about the United States but went well beyond it in the comparison of some similar issues in very different structural settings. The comparison of the United States on the one hand, and Austria and the Netherlands on the other, showed systematically how the absence of a strong socialist party and union system as political mobilizers affected the stratification of political activity. If one considered the relationship between SES and political activities such as voting and campaign activity, one found a sharp difference between the United States and the other countries. The relationship sloped sharply upward in the United States and was relatively flat in the other two nations. The reason for the difference was that in the Netherlands and Austria, but not in the United States, those lower on the

SES hierarchy were mobilized by their party to vote and take part in campaigns—electoral activities crucial to party success. If one looked at the relationship between SES and political interest or political discussion—aspects of political engagement that were not as affected by party recruitment—the upward slope was the same in all three nations. The mobilization by parties in Austria and the Netherlands overrode the effect of individual characteristics when it came to activity in elections but did not do so in relation to political interest or discussion. The placing of individual-level processes within different structural contexts is a major contribution of the analysis.

In addition, the comparative framework of the seven-nation study allowed analysis of participation and equality in relation to levels of development (in Nigeria and India) and in the very different political setting in Yugoslavia. *Participation and Political Equality* (Verba et al. 1978) considered two conflicting aspects of comparative research: It sought general patterns of political behavior across nations (and found them) while facing the fact that despite those similarities, things work out differently in different contexts (and found that also).

### ADDITIONAL BOOKS ON POLITICAL EQUALITY

The seven-nation study was followed by a series of books. All of them focused on the big question of political equality in relation to specific substantive questions.

#### Unemployment, Class, and Political Response

In the late 1970s, when the U.S. unemployment rate was very high, many disadvantaged groups (minorities, women, the elderly, gays) were organizing to have a louder political voice—but the jobless, whose economic strain was unquestionable, were not. Why not? *Injury to Interest: Unemployment, Class, and Political Response* (Schlozman & Verba 1979) centered on that particular issue, but it also had more general



themes. One theme was micropolitical: the relationship between the strains that individuals face in their personal lives—in this case, economic strain—and their political attitudes and behavior. The other theme was the circumstances in which such strains in private life are placed on the political agenda. One reason why unemployment did not result in organized activity to advocate policy change was that joblessness was, unlike other disadvantaged statuses, temporary—or at least so the jobless hoped. The theme of the private roots of public action recurs in other works that follow, as does the more general theme of the relationship of economic position to political engagement.

### Equality in America

*Equality in America: The View from the Top* (Verba & Orren 1985) was based on three comparisons: between the views of Americans on political equality versus economic equality; between their perceptions and their values in relation to each (how unequal is income or political influence, and how unequal should it be); and between the views of the citizenry from a national population sample and the views of various elite groups. The latter were leaders from ten sets of interests: business, labor, agriculture, intellectuals, media, Republicans, Democrats, blacks, feminists, and youth. It revealed—as others have found—that Americans are much more tolerant of economic inequality than of political inequality.

The heart of the book was the material on perceptions (what is) and values (what ought to be). When it came to economics, there was general agreement across the various elite groups as to the extent of inequality in America, but there were differences in views as to what it should be. When it came to political equality, there was more similarity in the desire for equal political voice, but substantial difference between the groups' perceptions of the present situation; each group thought that others were more powerful. The study highlighted the importance and the differing roles of perceptions and values.

### Elites and the Idea of Equality

Following *Equality in America*, the study of the elite in the United States was expanded to two other nations. *Elites and the Idea of Equality: A Comparison of Japan, Sweden, and the United States*, a book with seven coauthors (Verba et al. 1987), revealed the importance of values as well as market forces within differing political and social structures. The variation between the United States and Sweden in values concerning economic equality was striking; and within each country, there was a vast difference in values as to how equal incomes ought to be. The most egalitarian elite group in the United States supported a wider top-to-bottom income difference than did the most inegalitarian group in Sweden. Japan fell in between the United States and Sweden. In Sweden, somewhat surprisingly, more groups were in favor of a wider income gap and fewer wanted to cut the income of the top earners. But this anomaly was due to the (correct) perception that the income distribution in Sweden was more equal than in other nations and, perhaps, ought to be widened.

In two of the nations—Japan and Sweden—there were similar patterns of value in relation to redistribution and the welfare state. All groups accepted the basic programs of the welfare state, but they disagreed about redistribution, some favoring it and some not. In the United States, in contrast, the welfare state was a matter of dispute, some favoring it much more than others. However, there was little division about redistribution; all opposed it. Thus, in Sweden and Japan, the welfare state was not in question, redistribution was. In the United States, the pattern was reversed. It is difficult to summarize the main results of this study given the multidimensionality of the problems considered (see the three comparisons cited in relation to *Equality in America* above) across two nations.

### Voice and Equality

Coauthored with Kay L. Schlozman and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism*

*in American Democracy* is perhaps the best example of the continuity of research in this string of books, at least until the final book in this list (described below) is published. *Voice and Equality* (Verba et al. 1995) took up the issues raised in *Participation in America*. The earlier book had presented the SES model of political participation, a descriptive account of the extent to which citizen activity is stratified by socioeconomic characteristics. *Voice and Equality* developed a fuller and more mature explanation of the way in which such socioeconomic characteristics foster participation.

The book's Civic Voluntarism Model showed how education (which is the best predictor of political activity) and income function to foster activity. Education and income produce a set of participatory factors—resources, such as civic skills and money; motivations, such as civic norms, political interest, and political efficacy; and social networks, which recruit citizens to activity—that are converted into political activity. The model showed how inequality of political voice derives from some of the basic inequalities of ordinary life. The work went further to show how concern with particular issues also mobilizes activity, sometimes countering the impact of SES and sometimes reinforcing it.

A major contribution is the development of measures of “representational distortion.” The preferences held within the population are distorted by the processes fostering unequal citizen voice, so that the representation of the public to the government differs from that which would have been expressed if each citizen spoke out with equal force.

### **Gender and the Paradox of Political Inequality**

Why it is that three generations after women received the vote they were still less active in politics than men? The difference between the genders in the United States is less than that in many other nations, but it is still significant. *The Private Roots of Public Action: Gender, Equality, and Political Participation* (Burns et al. 2001)

applied the Citizen Voluntarism Model to this issue.

Nancy E. Burns, Kay L. Schlozman, and I explored the life course progression of women and men through the institutions of youth and adult life: schooling, marriage, the work force, and nonpolitical institutional involvements in religion and organizations. We went beyond the specification of how institutions create participatory factors—resources, motivation, and networks—that affect the political activity of citizens. *The Private Roots of Public Action* showed how the activity potential of men is enhanced compared with the potential of women. It showed that institutions have a differential impact on different groups. It demonstrated, further, that politics appears to be a “man’s game” because of the paucity of women in office. When women occupy political office, the gender gap in political activity in the citizenry disappears.

For this study, we added a third wave of interviews to the two waves for *Voice and Equality*. We interviewed a sample of those interviewed earlier and added their spouses. The data allowed an analysis of relations within the family and their effect on political activity.

### **The Unheavenly Chorus**

As I write this essay, a book tentatively titled *The Unheavenly Chorus* is approaching completion. Coauthored with Kay L. Schlozman and Henry E. Brady, this work takes the political-voice story into new territory. It places citizen activity in its historical and institutional context, starting with the writing of the Constitution and the ambivalence displayed in that document to equal political voice. The book follows up the story of the federal constitution through the state constitutions, which have a more expansive, but still limited, view of political equality. It also explicates the ambivalent view of the American public toward political equality and the uneasy relationship of political and economic equality.

Whereas *Voice and Equality* presented a largely static picture of political voice, *The*

*Unheavenly Chorus* traces the long-term staying power of political inequality, including from generation to generation. A central and innovative section of the book considers the role of organized interests in maintaining—and increasing—political inequality. Based on what is probably the largest compilation of data on organized lobbies in Washington over a 25-year period, it demonstrates that the bulk of political lobbying is supportive of the interests of the better-off. Few organized voices speak for the poor.

Chapters at the end of the book ask how the ongoing patterns of inequality might be broken. We consider the role of political recruitment and the role of the internet in possibly bringing into politics new activists—especially the disadvantaged who would otherwise not be there. Neither recruitment nor the internet does this; rather, they either replicate or enhance the inequality of political voice. In a chapter entitled “What, If Anything, Is To Be Done?” we explore various public policies that might level the playing field of American politics. The answer is that most of the inequalities we see are deeply embedded in American social structure and beliefs. It is hard to envision major changes.

## TWO MORE BOOKS

The foregoing is the research autobiography of someone concerned with citizen equality. There have been other books, but none with the continuing focus of the political voice books. I would like to mention two.

### Designing Social Inquiry

*Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, written with Gary King and Robert O. Keohane, attempted to apply understandings from quantitative political science analysis to qualitative analysis, mindful that there are differences between the two genres but much overlap between them. The book bridged the gap between quantitative and qualitative studies, showing their mutually supportive function and their joint contribu-

tion to political analysis (King et al. 1994). It has had an impact on methodological thinking and practice.

### Vietnam and the Silent Majority

I have not been a public intellectual. My publications have been scholarly, not political. One of the rare entrances into a politically motivated book grew out of the debate about the Vietnam War. *Vietnam and the Silent Majority: The Dove's Guide to Public Opinion*, written with Milton J. Rosenberg and Philip E. Converse, had a preface by George McGovern. Its purpose was to help opponents of the war—who sometimes made arguments and behaved in ways that hurt their cause—become more effective in presenting their positions. Although political in intent, it was a policy-oriented application of social science knowledge as to how political views are formed and influenced (Rosenberg et al. 1970).

## ON COLLABORATION

The reader may have noticed that most of my research and writings have been collaborative. I believe in collaboration and practice it. I think I can write books and articles on my own, and have done so—but why would I want to, when I and (I think) my collaborators do better work together than we would do separately? Often collaborators bring separate skills to the task. And the process of collaboration stimulates better ideas. It is not always easy working with others, but it is very rewarding. It is also a positive-sum game: There is more than 100% credit to share. I learned that from my mother, who once described Gabriel Almond as “the coauthor of Sidney’s book.” I told Gabriel about this and he, as I knew he would, thought it perfectly appropriate that such was my mother’s view.

## POLITICAL SCIENCE AS A DISCIPLINE

One of the reasons I have found political science such a rewarding discipline with which to

be connected is that it has been, by and large, open and flexible: open to new ideas and ways of doing things from other disciplines and across parts of our own discipline. We are a discipline with a core set of concerns but many different emphases surrounding that core; a federated system with many specialized sections all under the APSA banner. I entered the discipline, as I indicated, at the beginning of the behavioral revolution, when political science opened to influences from sociology and psychology and, thereby, moved away from the central role of institutional and historical studies. Later there was a turn to parts of the humanities and postmodernism, as well as a major turn to economics. This and other connections have enriched our work.

I have always been of a mind that we ought to be a big tent with room for varied approaches and with cross connections among them. The behavioral revolution energized the discipline (or at least energized some of us caught up in it), although the best work remains, I believe, that which took up some new ways to consider politics and government without abandoning institutions and history. An unfortunate consequence of the waves of new ideas in a discipline is the stance among some who develop or take up the new approaches that everyone earlier had it wrong. I think of this as the Handel's *Messiah* approach—from the aria “The People That Walketh in Darkness Have Seen a Great Light.” That light might be carried by the postmodernist criticizing objectivity or the economist criticizing anything not based on economic theory. Luckily, we seem to be able to domesticate the new ideas.

My colleagues and I wrote an article on rational choice understandings of political activity (Verba et al. 2000), and another applying rational choice to political recruiting (Brady et al. 1999). We argued that it is hard to apply rational choice cost-benefit calculation to explain why some folks become recruiters (those who telephone or go house to house to get people to contribute money or time to a political campaign or cause). There are too many reasons for becoming such an activist. People may

become recruiters because of belief in a candidate or cause or because the role satisfies a sense of civic commitment; they may be asked to do so by a friend; they may get intrinsic enjoyment or gratification from contacting others; or they simply may be hired to do so. Calculating costs and benefits (except in the tautological sense of “the benefits must exceed the costs or they would not do it”) does not help explain why recruiters make those calls. But when they decide to recruit, they act as “rational prospectors.” They do make cost-benefit calculations. They call those who are capable of contributing and are likely to say yes; those with resources and those who have been active in the past or have the characteristics that make it likely that they will become active now.

A coauthor and I once gave this argument at a conference on rational choice. The commentators on our paper included a committed proponent of the approach and a leading critic. We explained our stance and were attacked from both sides: The supporter of rational choice was concerned we had not said that rational choice *always worked*; the critic thought we should have said that it *never worked*.

Rational choice was once the new messiah solving all our problems. But it is my impression that the rational choice Bolsheviks have been replaced or supplemented by rational choice moderates—who see it as a major answer, but not the only answer. It has shaped the thinking of many, including myself, who are not devoted to it as the key to all problems, but who find it a powerful tool for understanding political behavior. (My view on varying approaches may be traced back to my moderate-left upbringing; I am extremely committed to the middle of the road.) The arc of rational choice in political science is an example of the discipline's openness to other disciplines, and its ability to incorporate new ideas without necessarily abandoning all that came before.

When I was president of the American Political Science Association, there were major challenges to many of the academic disciplines from the Reagan administration based on concerns about the programming of the National

Endowment for the Humanities. In part, the criticism derived from concerns about the National Endowment for the Arts (the NEA being easily confused with the NEH) for support of projects that conservatives considered obscene. The presidents of various humanities and social science associations met to discuss the issues involved. It was an interesting opportunity to compare the APSA with the other associations. I found that although we were at least as intellectually and politically heterogeneous as many of the other associations, we had managed to remain more connected to each other through the APSA than had the other disciplines. Associations ranging from the American Sociological Association and the American Anthropological Association to the American Historical Association and the Modern Language Association—including even the American Musicological Society (about which I knew a lot through my wife, who is a musicologist)—were fragmented, sometimes splitting on the basis of substantive or methodological intellectual matters or political and ideological differences.

I was happy to report in my presidential address that we political scientists still remained in the same organization despite our differences. I attributed this to the nature of our discipline, which focuses on collective decision making and activity: how people with differing values and preferences manage to remain within the same nation or community or organization, and come to joint decisions peacefully. It is what we study and what we hope for.

Incidentally, aside from the report on our cohesion (sometimes strained, but cohesion, nevertheless), I also gave a report on our financial situation. The APSA's endowment in the previous year had earned a larger return than that of the American Economic Association. That received the greatest applause of any line in my address.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

It is not my style to pontificate on broad issues; I like to keep my feet grounded in data. But it is

rare that one is given a forum to do the former, and I will take advantage of it.

Let me raise a broader question. I became a political scientist at the beginning of what seemed to be a social scientific revolution in the study of people, societies, and nations. It was an optimistic development. It predicted educational progress that would result in a world guided by reason: a more humane, tolerant, and globally cooperative world. And it foreshadowed a world of the social sciences that would be more scientific and more global, that would be more of a worldwide community. The latter seems to have happened. Global social science is not what we might want it to be, but it is thriving. Considered from the perspective of the work in which I have been involved (and it is true of other kinds of social science work), there is a worldwide flourishing global social science. Surveys of political and social matters across the world are common, in many cases coordinated cross-nationally. The coordination is sometimes, but far from always, out of the United States.

But while the optimism about global social science has in good part been fulfilled, the prediction of more enlightened politics within and across nations does not seem to be doing as well. Can the world of social science help us achieve our hopes for a more rational political and social world? Can what we do, as social scientists—and perhaps more specifically as cross-national survey specialists—contribute to fostering a better, more peaceful, healthier and, yes, more democratic world? How is that for a BIG question?

One positive feature of cross-national social science (and its survey component) is the commitment to science. By its nature, that commitment transcends national and cultural borders (not completely, but quite a bit). It gives us a common language and a common set of values and standards. Technical education is spreading and can create such communities. If they are linked to social, economic, and political issues, they may move us forward to that better world.

Social science can help us understand the dilemma of particularism versus universalism. Those who plow social science fields seek general truths. We look for general, or at least widespread, patterns of behavior; we seek general causes and effects. And yet we all know that everything, everywhere, is different. In a sense, we know that there are two truths: Every nation, every community, every person is different from every other; and all nations and communities are made up of members of one human species. If we are to create a more humane and peaceful world, we are going to have to reconcile these two truths: to find our common humanity and accept our differences.

The issue of universalism versus diversity is a major moral issue in the world. It is an important aspect of the great debates in the important and troubling area of human rights. How does one evaluate national standards on human rights issues? The issue comes up at international conferences and in relation to the policies of the United Nations and other international agencies. One position challenges the universality of human rights by arguing that such rights exist as a function of a nation's history, culture, level of development, and religion. The other position is that human rights are universal no matter what the culture, religion, or level of development. These arguments appear on such matters as the nature of democracy, the rights of women, and on and on.

Note how parallel this is to debates in the social sciences. Can one find universals across nations or regions or cultures, or is each place different? As a comparativist, I have long been committed to a search for broad, universal truths. The ultimate goal is to do away with those fixed-effects variables in our regression equations that control for unspecified differences from nation to nation or from place to place. But, however we try, we know we cannot.

Over the years, I have come to appreciate more and more the importance of context. My own substantive work in the area of political equality has been carried out in my own coun-

try, the United States, and in other nations. It searches for similar processes that work in different places. Such processes are found; but they work differently with different consequences in terms of whose voice is heard because of different institutional patterns. If surveys can tell us anything cross-nationally, it is that there are general processes and there are differences. And we need to understand both if we are to create societies with (some) universal rights and (some) acceptance of difference. What we do as survey researchers will not get us there, but it might move us a bit closer.

One feature of surveys is that they are at base democratic. The random sample is based on the assumption that all people are relevant and should have an equal chance to be heard. They should give equal voice to women and men, to rich and poor, and to different religious, racial, and ethnic groups. Thus, survey research can help create an international intellectual community and can tell us about the universality of humanity and the variations. And it can further social understanding.

Will the world then be better? One can hope, but one does not know. Consider the technology that does so much to make our cross-national work possible, and to further global communication: the internet. It is a positive force for connecting people across space. It can foster understanding. It can provide new ways by which citizens can cooperate and by which government control over individuals can be limited. But it can also be used for repression by governments and to allow terrorists to communicate and plan.

In Shakespeare's play *The Tempest* (act I, scene 2)—about a Utopia with a dark side—Miranda says to the misshapen and ill-tempered Caliban that she has given him a great gift of communication (perhaps better even than a high-speed internet connection). She tells Caliban, "I gave you language to express yourself."

Caliban replies: "You taught me language, and my profit on't is, I know how to curse."

Social science will not solve the evils of the world. It may be used for good or for evil. What



one learns about people can be used for oppressive purposes. Some of what it finds can lead to increased tensions among people. But I like to think that such will not be the largest impact. I believe it can give us better understanding of who we are and who the other people of our own nation and other nations are. And

this will especially be the case if we can stay together as a scientific community dedicated to understanding—objectively, rigorously, and openly—who we are. Surveys can give people everywhere the opportunity to express themselves. And we can hope the world will profit on it.

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