

# Is Political Science a Science?

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01. Although there are many international research contacts and the International Political Science Association (IPSA), Political Science is still mainly organized in national terms.<sup>1</sup> Thus the German association for Political Science operates as an association of diverse sub-disciplines such as Political Theory and History of Ideas, International Relations, Political Systems, Comparative Politics, Political Economy, Policy Analysis and Public Administration. British, US, French and other communities of Political Science show individual features of those sub-disciplines.

02. In Germany still diverse concepts of science, for instance normative-ontological thinking (*Practical Philosophy*), the empirical-analytical school, and historic-dialectical (Marxist) thinking, can be found in Political Science. The methodical core criterion of falsifiability, indeed, has meanwhile by and large accepted. Accordingly regular prescriptions of using sources in a scientific way as well as both qualitative and quantitative methods of empirical research are standards of research. A similar statement can be made regarding many other national communities of Political Science.

03. Theory plays a role in diverse sub-disciplines, above all in *theory and history of ideas* where historical and current ways of political thinking are presented and discussed. Besides, specific approaches of theory are issued in *International Relations, Comparative Politics, Political Economy* and some other sub-disciplines such as Political Psychology.

04. A particular profile of performance concerns consulting. Thus political scientists are often involved in consultancies of their national foreign policies and processes of consulting in international organizations. The same applies to political parties, associations, and public administration. Political scientists are often used as dialogue partners regarding politics in the media.

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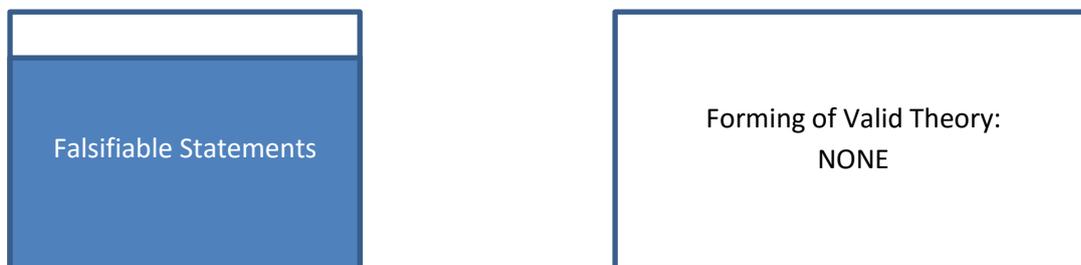
<sup>1</sup> IPSA: <http://www.ipsa.org/> Political Science Abstracts: <http://iab.sagepub.com/>

05. In policy research political scientists analyze practical politics in issue-areas as members of issue-related networks (policy networks) - having contacts to diverse actors, exchanging views with colleagues of other scientific disciplines, and - may be - exerting some practical influence on current processes of policy-forming and decision-making.<sup>2</sup>

06. Political Science constitutes a rather attractive option for students since it renders a rich field of diverse issues with quite developed structures of teaching and research as well as with many linkages to practical issue-areas. Indeed, it may be not that easy to find a well-paid job after having absolved the study - nowadays also young political scientists belong to the *generation internship*; nevertheless a relatively low joblessness is associated with Political Science today since there are diverse options of entry into a the working process - see journalism, parties, associations, teaching and public administration.

07. Whether current Political Science constitutes a science in more specific terms can be assessed by reference to two basic requirements: checkable (falsifiable) statements and the formation of valid theory.<sup>3</sup>

Image 1: *How far are basic demands of science fulfilled in Political Science?*



The criterion of working with falsifiable statements is by and large accepted in Political Science; however there are no valid theoretical basics of the discipline. Even no try to produce valid theory can be found. Consequently Political Science does not produce basic insights or impulses for relevant innovations.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance the Berlin Research Centre for Environmental Policy Research Centre with diverse research activities (<http://www.polsoz.fu-berlin.de/en/polwiss/forschung/systeme/ffu/studium/promotion/index.html>) as well as many political scientists that deal with international climate politics - for example Oberthür, Sebastian: *Where to go from Paris? The European Union in Climate Geopolitics*, Taylor & Francis Online 23 May, 2016: <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23340460.2016.1166332>

<sup>3</sup> Following Karl Popper and Kuhn Prittwitz, Volker von: What is science? [http://diberlin.info/index\\_htm\\_files/PA%201%20What%20is%20Science.pdf](http://diberlin.info/index_htm_files/PA%201%20What%20is%20Science.pdf)

That's why **Political Science cannot be sorted as normal science** (organizing knowledge-oriented methods and theory-building).

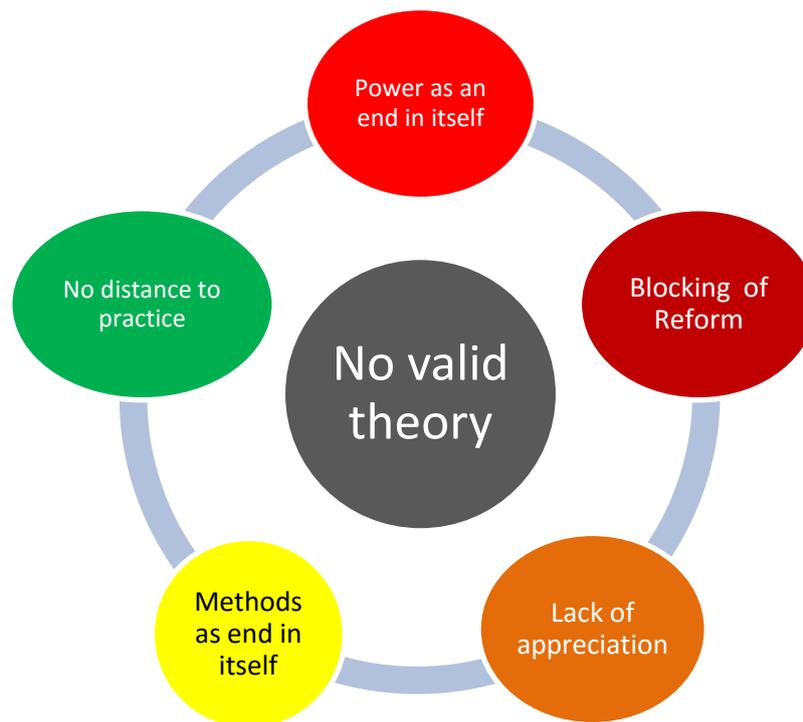
08. That deficit has **grave** - more or less direct - **impacts**: Whereas techniques and economy are enormously stimulated by basic research of diverse sciences and have developed to a virtually dramatic degree - meanwhile mankind sends satellites to the Mars; the human genome is being decoded more and more, and the development of artificial intelligence is accelerating - , political learning goes on only to a low degree and in a highly uncertain way: Practical learning processes, it's true, can develop - see for instance the emergence and widening of the European Union since the 1950s ; those learning processes, however, often quickly disappear again or even turn into their contrary. Thus also in the 21<sup>st</sup> century war, the most primitive and annihilating way of human interaction, belongs to the standard patterns of socio-political behavior. Thinking in terms of friend or foe currently even appears to spread, and terrorism and war on terrorism reinforce themselves dynamically. Obviously those tendencies are influenced by a complex variety of factors and dynamics. The fact that there is no valid theory of political affairs, indeed, significantly contributes to the sketched imbalance between technological progress on the one hand and political instability on the other hand.

9. The inability of Political Science to produce valid theory results in characteristic **interior consequences**, too:

- a) Without disposing at a basic orientation on the production of valid theory, methodical criteria can easily become an end in itself. If, for instance, comparatists (Comparative politics) do not have substantial criteria of relevance of their research efforts, the demonstration and usage of methodical tools seems to be the only relevant criterion of good research. Methodical criteria substitute demands of theory-forming.
- b) Relevance criteria of political practice seem to offer another alternative. This option, that is often legitimated with Karl Marx' phrase, *philosophers have only interpreted the world in diverse ways, but it matters to change this world*, or simply results from practical enthusiasm, indeed leads to the exact opposite of what has been proclaimed: If science is immediately and completely oriented at practical efforts, it dissolves as science and cannot produce any specific insight or stimulation for practical development.

- c) Without substantial criteria of science, power structures have a great chance to gain momentum; since under these preconditions only crude power, for instance resulting from ruling networks or organization lower, structure the *scientific* process, for instance decision about jobs or research funds. Accordingly rational political scientists primarily orient themselves on getting network and organizational power or using it.

Image 2: The vicious circle of failing Political Science



10. Corresponding with the sketched phenomena, a **vicious circle** of failing Political Science emerges: Since the discipline does not try to build valid theory, it is unable to produce results of basic research - resulting in a lack of basic stimulations for development and practice. Without these impulses and valid theory, the discipline is scientifically appreciated only to a low degree, and it lacks internal orientation by substantial criteria. Thus theory is often substituted by methods; science and practice are mingled, and power structures play a prevailing role. These failing processes, in turn, block any issuing of the problem and practical tries to come to a reform.

11. Indeed, the object of Political Science, political affairs, constitutes an analytical challenge of specific complexity: Processes of communication and interaction amongst rational actors, who are partly able to steer themselves or

even their environments, can only be understood if there are sufficiently complex models of these actors, of their relations and possible dynamics - differing from models for other subject areas such as plants and developmental processes of those plants.

12. Nevertheless it goes wrong to infer from this difference of complexity a fundamental difference between Social Sciences (specifically Political Science) and (Natural) sciences:

- a) At latest since Kuhn's work on scientific revolutions, we know that also natural scientist insights can be outdated and have to be assessed or restructured within frames of new paradigms - a fact that so far was only associated with Social Sciences.<sup>4</sup>
- b) It could be investigated more thoroughly how far natural scientist approaches and theories - for instance Darwin's theory - have been influenced by social insights.
- c) Reciprocal interactions between nature scientist arrangements of research, produced results, and forms of technological usages show a wide spectrum of different alternatives, for instance concerning environmental compatibility. That means: Also nature scientist results and processes can be reflected in different ways, hence also exerted in different ways.<sup>5</sup>
- d) Vice versa, Social Sciences (with Political Science) do not operate only with qualitative methods (for instance open interviews); also so-called quantitative methods are meanwhile part of Political Science - a remarkable approaching to Natural sciences.
- e) Both Nature science and Social sciences are products of human culture, and they should be dealt with, at least so far, in a comparable way - a position that Karl Popper suggested already in the year 1973: *Finally science is a part of literature; and scientific work is a human activity like building a dome... For long time It has been quite in fashion and virtually boring*

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<sup>4</sup> Kuhn, Thomas S. (1962). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (1st ed.)*, University of Chicago Press. p. 172. [LCCN 62019621 ; https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Structure\\_of\\_Scientific\\_Revolutions](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Structure_of_Scientific_Revolutions)

<sup>5</sup> Ulf Skirke, Technologie und Selbstorganisation. Zum Problem eines zukunftsfähigen Fortschrittsbegriffs mit Bezügen auf Arnim von Gleich u.a.: [http://www.on-line.de/~u.skirke/1\\_2.html](http://www.on-line.de/~u.skirke/1_2.html)

*to insist on the principal contrast between human sciences and natural sciences.*<sup>6</sup>

13. If we conceive of science as a knowledge-oriented institution that operates with methodical and theoretical conventions (that can be furtherly developed), it becomes clear that also natural scientist knowledge cannot be won simply as objective knowledge: Very different methodical and theoretical conventions are possible also in natural sciences such as chemistry. Starting from certain conventions, those sciences can develop research questions. The resulting new knowledge becomes not only an impulse for developing new technologies, but also starting point for an open discussion about possible paradigm shifts.

14. Political Science, in contrast, has so far not been able to agree certain theoretical basics; but it could try to do so (respecting minority opinions): Political scientists usually talk about concrete issues with each other without big problems - a process of communication that presupposes common horizons, terms, and questions. That's why, under cognitive aspects, a communication process about general theories should be possible, too.

15. Measured by current reality of Political Science indeed such a project of communication appears to be naive.<sup>7</sup> Already the degree of discord within the German Association for Political Science is very high.<sup>8</sup> Even wider is the spectrum of diverse methodological and theoretical approaches in global comparison - and the density of communication is still quite low in spite of some international conferences, projects and even associations. That's why initially the project of building a methodically and theoretically well-based Political Science has to be brought forward independently. The hope lives on - that the ruling Political Science will react constructively as soon as it becomes apparent that communicative theory-building is possible.

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<sup>6</sup> Popper, Karl. *Objektive Erkenntnis: ein evolutionärer Entwurf*. Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe, 1973, S. 206; cited according to: Daniella Jancsó / Daniel Krause: Geistes- und Naturwissenschaften – gleich oder verschieden? Ein neuer Beitrag zu einem alten Problem: <http://www.tabvlarasa.de/25/JanscoKrause.php>

<sup>7</sup> I made some tries to communicate my ideas with the German Association for Political Science - without any success. The reaction was grotesque maneuvers of arrogance and ignorance.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.dvpw.de/debatte-zum-fach.html>