
REVIEW

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A NEW STEP IN THE EVOLUTION OF RUSSIAN POLITICAL SCIENCE

Gaman-Goutvina, O. V., Nikitin, A. I. (eds.). *Sovremennaya politicheskaya nauka: Metodologiya [Modern political science: Methodology]. Second edition — revised and updated. Moscow : Aspekt Press, 2019. — 776 p.*

It has become generally accepted that a correct methodology is imperative for the success of research, which begins with methodological design. Overall, contemporary political science develops within a system that includes various methodological strategies. It is hard to believe that half a century ago, in the 1970s, as Nathaniel Beck and Christopher Achen recall it, ‘no political science journal welcomed methodological articles, and many journals rejected them out of hand’ [2, p. 1]. When methodology was emerging as the foundation of political science and a research area in its own right, specialist periodicals often juxtaposed it with other ways of obtaining political knowledge that were considered as established at the time. Authors often questioned the motifs, features, and educational, personal, career, and political ramifications of commitment to the idea of a political methodology. In the early 1990s, when describing the stages of development of the sub-discipline, Gary King mentioned a dozen terms used by political scientists at different times to describe ‘the field we now call “political methodology”’ [3, p. 1]. These were ‘political statistics’ (1926), ‘political arithmetic’ (1971), ‘politometrics’, ‘polimetrics’, ‘politometrics’ (1972, 1975, 1976), ‘quantitative political science’ (1973), and others. According to King, this patchwork of terms gives a clear picture of landmarks in the history of the research area (there were five of them from 1906 to 1988). A major factor in the development of international political methodology was the establishment of the *Political Methodology* journal (today, *Political Analysis*). The periodical helped to identify the scope and theoretical framework of the research area. The establishment of the journal marks the birth of the discipline, which was considered young even at the beginning of the century [4, p. 423]. This area of professional communication gives an impetus to development at a higher level [2, p. 651].

I believe that a major boost for the development of political methodology in Russia will be the publication of the first voluminous (about 800 pages) work on political methodology in this country. The book was edited by eminent specialists: the president of the Russian Political Science Association, Chair of the Political Sciences and Regional Studies Association, Professor at MGIMO University Oksana V. Gaman-Golutvina (who initiated and oversaw the project) and Honorary President of the Russian Political Science Association, Professor at MGIMO University Aleksandr I. Nikitin. Remarkably, the book was prepared under the aegis of MGIMO University, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, and the Russian Association of Political Science. Over past years, both institutions have published a number of influential works including the five-volume series *Russian political science: origins and prospects* edited by Gaman-Golutvina.

The project attracted a truly remarkable team of contributors representing Russia's major schools of political thought, particularly, MGIMO University, which is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year. Among the authors are Fellow of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS), Rector of MGIMO University, Anatoly V. Torkunov; Fellow of the RAS, Member of the Directorate of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the RAS (IMEMO) Vladimir G. Baranovsky; President of the IMEMO, Fellow of the RAS Alexander A. Dynkin; Director of the Institute of International Security Problems of the RAS, Dean of the Faculty of World Politics of Moscow State University, Fellow of the RAS Andrei A. Kokoshin; Fellow of the RAS Nodari A. Simoniya; Corresponding Fellow of the RAS, Deputy Director of the IMEMO Irina S. Semenenko; heads of political science-related departments at different universities Professors Marina M. Lebedeva, Marina M. Mchedlova, Leonid V. Smorgunov, Aleksander I. Solovyov, Oksana V. Gaman-Golutvina, Mikhail V. Ilyin, Elena B. Shestopal; Directors of Research Centres at MGIMO University Professors Aleksander I. Nikitin and Aleksey D. Voskresensky; Special Presidential Representative for International Cooperation in Information Security Andrei V. Krutskikh; and other famous political scientists.

The texts by almost forty experts, who are highly influential figures in their fields, prove that methodologists 'wear two hats' [6, p. 597]. The contributors focus both on solving problems within their own sub-discipline and on analysing methods suited for general theoretical questions. The postulated change in the vision of methodology as a job and a vocation (the two do not exclude each other and there is no forced choice here) is a product of almost fifty years of efforts and evolution. The book covers all relevant political science approaches and paradigms — from those that have become classics in their sub-disciplines

to emerging ones. The areas that together are the mainstream of contemporary political science make very dissimilar theoretical and analytical contributions to political analysis [7, pp. 7–11] so that they seem to be ‘at war’ [9, p. 3]. This confrontation may reach the scale of an uprising [19] in the name of methodological pluralism and against the hegemony of rational choice and quantitative methods in both journal articles and student training [21; p. 293, 20, p. 73]). As is customary, professional intellectual battles are friendly affairs seeking to ensure the effective development of the chosen field of knowledge. Such debates may significantly increase the influence that political science has on practical politics. Thus, political scientists are fully equipped to meet the challenges of today’s politics [8].

The selection of contributors was a success in more than one respect. According to the initiator and supervisor of the project Prof Gaman-Golutvina, the idea was to present a wide spectrum of classical and contemporary intellectual political-theoretical paradigms, which serve as methodological frameworks for political studies [1, p. 10]. The authors did achieve this objective: the work both analyses major political science approaches and gives a clear picture of development trends in contemporary Russian political science voiced by its most prominent representatives. Moreover, the book proves that methodological pluralism and diversity have taken root in the discipline. Today, Russian political science is concerned with the same problems as most international communities are. The architectonic and focus of the new edition testify to the above conclusion. The book demonstrates that the goal of methodology is unchanged: to find the most effective research strategy in view of the stage of the study, data availability, and the problem under consideration. The authors have a deep ‘insider’ understanding of methodological objectives that present the most difficulty for both beginners and experienced political scientists [1, p. 10]. A clear idea of those objectives and a desire to achieve them make the text infinitely interesting for the latter group of researchers and a must for the former. The very attempt at a methodological project is a proof of the book’s thesis about the idiosyncratic development of political science in Russia. In the first decade of its official history, the discipline evolved within the ‘emergence paradigm’ (A. D. Bogaturov), which was unavoidable because of the need to integrate into global political science. In the early 2000s, Russian political science entered the stage of independent and original development. Its results have become visible today.

The academic element of the book contributes to an important tradition in Russian political science [10, p. 7]. The project team placed emphasis on the applicability of the findings. The vast material presented in the book is structured

in such a way that it can be easily used in teaching a number of political science disciplines. The book is a useful and reliable aid for navigating a wide spectrum of theoretical-conceptual frameworks for studying and interpreting domestic and international politics. Universities are welcoming the mutually complementary and synchronous nature of teaching and research since they 'both entail acquiring new knowledge and communicating it to others, albeit in slightly different forms' [9, p. 32]. All major international schools of political thought are paying special attention to the methodological aspect of research and teaching. This approach can be clearly seen in both the content of academic courses and the topics of publications [11–15]. Almost each large international centre for political research has a methodology department, which is shared sometimes with other faculties. A 'shared' methodological department at the London School of Economics and Political Science was established by the Economic and Social Research Council to narrow the methodological gap in training student researchers. Research skills in each discipline are among the basic requirements at the School. Since different faculties may develop similar skills, a methodology department was established to improve the educational process. Each research student at the School can attend the courses of the department, regardless of his or her faculty affiliation. This is an interesting practice, which may once be borrowed by Russian specialist training centres.

There is yet another dimension to the applied significance of the book under review. It is common knowledge that there is nothing more practical than a good theory. In this case, a correct methodology of theoretical political thinking may benefit practical political thinking and governance, the quality of which is not yet perfect in the post-Soviet space [17; 18].

In this context, the publication of a major Russian work on political methodology is both an important step in the development of Russian schools of political thought and a contribution to the international pool of ideas, much in line with the evolution of the international expert community. The authors of the book have unlocked the heuristic potential of the discipline. In this sense, the work is an intellectual investment in the training of young Russian political scientists, an investment that will hopefully pay off in leaps and bounds.

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