

Forum

Political Scientist Responds to Practitioner

While browsing through the September 1992 issue I stopped to read "Practitioners and Political Scientists" by Dale Herspring. While I strongly endorse the effort to bring the scholar and the practitioner into closer collaboration, I can only lament the epistemological innocence of so many of the latter.

First, the author tells us that "there has been an explosion in theory" in IR (*infra-red*, information retrieval, international relations?) since *Politics among Nations*. Both sides of the discussion are harmed when we use "theory" to describe polysyllabic speculation or off-the-wall hunch. Why not adhere to higher semantic standards and restrict "theory" to a body of codified knowledge.

Second, to label our work under the Correlates of War here at Michigan as "the inductive approach" is accurate, but incomplete. The great bulk of research by historians and traditional political scientists is inductive in that it pays close attention to the empirical-historical facts. But most of that work is also pre-operational in that the classification or scaling of these facts is largely intuitive and idiosyncratic, with no specification of the coding and classifying and scaling criteria and the operations by which we include, exclude, or measure.

Third, Herspring suggests that the findings of projects such as COW "sound silly to the practitioner." This is indeed all too true, but the fault is often a function of the latter's indifference to the long haul and a preoccupation with the immediate past and future. Neither I nor John Vasquez in his 1987 review of our findings would contend that the generalizations that emerge will *always* hold true; in every scientific investigation, there will be a distribution of outcomes. Furthermore, if

there were not differences in the predictor and outcome variables in a given study, there would be no variation to be accounted for—and that, of course, is the name of the game in scientific research.

In sum, there is plenty of room for serious disagreement over research methods, not to mention the interpretation of our findings. But there is no excuse for this sort of semantic imprecision and epistemological ignorance, be it on the part of academics, practitioners, or our patrons.

J. David Singer
University of Michigan

Response to Kinnucan

The September 1992 *PS* article by Michael J. Kinnucan, "Political Economy and Militarism," which makes extensive reference to our 1989 *PS* article, "Socialism and Militarism," is a welcome improvement over the overheated blather that accompanied the appearance of our article several years ago. The appendix, listing armed conflicts, 1945-1989, by nation, merits publication, even at the price of wading through a swamp of Marxist polemics. However the central measure, number of "involvements," is fatally flawed. First, every "involvement" receives the same score. Thus, the American intervention in Guatemala in 1954 is equal to the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, which lasted ten years and killed tens of thousands of people. The Khmer Rouge's massive, almost incomprehensible, massacre is scored identically with the French suppression of riots in 1968. The use of the 1968 French case is surprising on another ground. The author defines an armed conflict, the dependent variable, as "any politically motivated act or series of related acts that results in the violent death of 1000 or more persons." Does Kinnucan seriously suggest that the

French riots in 1968 meet this criterion? *No* lives were lost! If the French riots are an example of the care with which Mr. Kinnucan records his evidence, what are we to think of the rest of it?

Surely a system that assigned weights (deaths, time, number of troops?) would be preferable. Second, open societies get "docked" for the repression of "civil insurrection" while closed ones, who do not tolerate unrest, come out OK. While he gives the U.S. a point for its repression of civil insurrection, 1963-1971, he does not give one to the USSR, which at the time was imprisoning dissenters in psychiatric hospitals, and torturing them with mind altering drugs. Finally, there are scattered examples of puzzling decisions on Kinnucan's part: China receives scores *both* for the KMT executions on Taiwan *and* the invasion of Tibet; Cuba's civil war against Batista earns this nation a "point" as does its intervention in Ethiopia. In both these cases, the "bad guys" damage the record of their successors, which does not seem fair. We suggest that Kinnucan's numbers be the starting point for a more sensitive effort.

As to Kinnucan's earlier point, that the nations classified by us as socialists are failed deviations from Lenin's pure dream and are not "really" socialist, we suggest that we call them "countries that, until recently, conspicuously displayed statues of Lenin." Like all who wish for human betterment, we await, and await, and await, the coming of the true socialist utopia.

Thomas R. Dye
Florida State University

Harmon Zeigler
University of Puget Sound

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