

I attempt to ask broad and enduring questions about politics rather than arcane, specialized questions that drive the scholarly world. These questions got me into political theory in the first place and they fuel my love for the conversations in this podcast. Moreover, these questions are accessible and exciting to students as well.

The long-form interview can attract student interest, but it also can assist in teaching political theory by modeling how political theory is done in the academy. We spend significant time studying the classics—Plato, Aristotle, Machiavelli—but little time demonstrating to students how to conduct research on these figures. Of course, we can assign secondary works, but a conversation about the primary texts by an intelligent author ignites student interest and also demonstrates what types of questions they should be asking about the text and how to read it closely and well. I invited Michael Walzer to discuss his recent book on the politics of the Hebrew Bible and required my students to listen to it—they had many suggestions of which questions I should have asked!

In the two years since I started this podcast, I have expanded my own horizons as an academic, reading texts from authors whose training was very different than mine. The experience has been extremely enjoyable and also enriching of my own work in that I find myself speaking to a broader imagined audience. I hope that my podcast and others like it can build a forum in which we can escape the academy's often deadening specialization and discuss issues of great significance at the great length they deserve. ■

### THE SCIENCE OF POLITICS PODCAST

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In October 2017, I launched a political science podcast under the auspices of the Niskanen Center, a think tank in Washington, DC. The podcast initially was titled *Political Research Digest*, but the name was changed to *The Science of Politics* based on listener feedback.

The podcast is released biweekly, with 54 episodes completed as of this writing. I interview two researchers per episode about two new articles or books that they have published on related topics. Although the tone is conversational, I edit the interviews (with the help of my assistant Alejandro Gillespie) and introduce each statement from the interviewees.

With the support of Kristie Eshelman and Louisa Tavlas at Niskanen, the podcast is widely distributed and promoted. Every episode has had more than 1,000 listeners, with recent episodes averaging more than 2,000. All episodes are transcribed, so there

The podcast is still produced for a niche audience. Although my guests and I strive to make research accessible, the content is data driven and detailed compared to other podcasts. It has been easiest to gain an audience among scholars, but we focus on targeting nonacademics working in or around American national politics and policy making as well. Distribution by Niskanen allows the podcast to reach the rare bipartisan policy-making audience. My impression from listening to many other political podcasts (and being a guest) is that most succeed by taking a clear partisan and ideological point of view and then focusing on punditry over research. *The Science of Politics* does not make this tradeoff.

Most of my guests have never participated in a podcast. I strive to include early-career scholars, including graduate students, to expand the number of publicly engaged scholars and diversify the public voice of political science. I also actively try to achieve gender, ethnic, institutional, and ideological diversity—but I do not always succeed. It is easiest to track gender diversity: 43% of my guests have been women. I reach out to more women than men, but women are thus far more likely to decline. Trying to match two guests who have written recently on a similar topic limits the options but also enables clear criteria.

The podcast focuses on American politics research relevant to current events. Although we use recent news as a hook for listeners, we delve into the broader research (including history). The most popular episodes so far have covered partisan cable news, public opinion on climate change, identity politics in partisanship, genetic attributions for human difference, white identity, partisan asymmetry, rural–urban divides, homeownership and segregation, polarization on Facebook, and philanthropy in social movements. Listeners relate that they are exposed to a broad range of new scholars and research areas through the podcast.

I am most proud of the podcast's role in promoting political science to a broader audience. One of the best paths to influence has turned out to be our audience among reporters. Several new research articles and books have generated wider media interest after the authors' appearance on the podcast. Some guests also have been invited to appear on other podcasts and media. Even reporters who do not listen to the podcast infer that the guests are experts on the topic and are willing to discuss it publicly, which leads to media interviews. The podcast itself also has been featured in *The Washington Post* and *Vox*.

Podcasting can be beneficial even for those without media savvy. I am not especially gifted as a presenter but I try to make up for it with knowledge of the guests' research. It takes two to three hours per week of my time. I connect with many scholars that I did not previously know and generate better connections with those whom I already know. Interviewing incentivizes me to keep up on current research, including topical trends and

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is a substantial readership to complement the listenership. The podcasts initially were limited to about 20 minutes but have since expanded to 40–60 minutes (based on user suggestions). Average listening time is 35 minutes. We have experimented with advertising on Twitter, Facebook, Google, and other podcasts.

methodological innovations. I have regularly used work highlighted on the podcast in my own research.

I also ask that professors consider assigning *The Science of Politics* (or specific episodes) in their courses. It is useful to read research, but students benefit by hearing directly from

the researcher in an accessible format. A podcast interview can help students generate their own questions about course material and better relate to the goals that drive research. Clips also can be played in class to stimulate discussion.

For those considering starting a podcast, you should think about audio quality. Our biggest initial challenge was that the app for recording phone calls often did not produce audio that made it easy to decipher what interviewees said. Various audio reengineering strategies created other problems. We solved the issue by moving to online recording using Zencaster, an inexpensive service. It starts a Voice Over IP call between me and the guest but also locally records the guest's audio for uploading as a .wav file at the end of the call.

Podcasters also should consider filling audience niches. In addition to *The Science of Politics*, I am involved in the *State of the State* podcast. Associated with the Institute for Public Policy and Social Research at Michigan State University, it covers state public-policy issues in Michigan with research-informed commentary. It is even more highly targeted to those interested in detailed discussions of politics and policy in one state; however, the format easily could be replicated at other universities. We invite faculty guests to talk about their research and the major issues being discussed in the legislature. We record the episodes, mostly unedited, in a studio on campus in cooperation with the local National Public Radio affiliate. Clips from the podcast also can be heard on a Detroit radio station as part of a university hour. Partnering with a studio and interviewing local guests improves audio quality.

The flowering of the political science podcasting community is an exciting development for the discipline. From a teaching tool to an outreach opportunity, scholars should welcome podcasting as an important outlet for research communication. ■

#### A FEW REASONABLE WORDS

Casey B. K. Dominguez<sup>1b</sup>, *University of San Diego*

Cory Charles Gooding<sup>1b</sup>, *University of San Diego*

Timothy W. McCarty, *University of San Diego*

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Our podcast, *A Few Reasonable Words*, offers listeners a political science perspective on current events in US politics. Through generous support from the University of San Diego, we have been podcasting since 2016 on a wide range of topics, including immigration policy, US identity, the unitary executive, government shutdowns, voting, and various types of political reforms.

#### How Do We Use Our Different Perspectives to Find Interesting Ways to Talk about Current Events?

We are all at least part Americanist, so we usually begin with current events in American politics. We do not have a daily podcast (our frequency varies between weekly and monthly), so we tend to step back from the news cycle while still having a conversation that people find relevant for understanding the current moment.

We also have different specialties: Tim is a political theorist, Cory is a racial and ethnic politics scholar, and Casey studies elections and the presidency. This helps us to have discussions that

hit historical and cultural points that three people in the same subfield might not be able to have. (Plato comes up so often that we have a running gag about him.) We did a four-part series on immigration politics in 2018 that was a great example of conversations across subdisciplines.

#### Why Do We Want to Talk to an Audience in This Format?

Our primary reason for podcasting is that it allows us to extend the reach of our teaching. We are all active scholars, but teaching is our vocation, and we feel like podcasting is another outlet for sharing what we know with the public. As political scientists, we are frequently frustrated by the “shiny objects” and points of emphasis that capture the attention of the media and, as a result, the public. This reality challenged us to think about how we could offer the public an alternative resource in a way that is accessible and informative. Like other political scientists who are blogging and writing op-eds, we seek to fill the void that the current media leaves open in terms of providing context for the maelstrom of current events.

We have continued the podcast into our third year for two additional reasons. First, it is fun for us. The fact that we enjoy our conversations makes them more fun to listen to and a worthwhile way for us to challenge and refine our individual perspectives on political events and trends.

Second, whereas there is no immediate professional benefit to podcasting, there also is no penalty. Our department and our university value public service as part of the tenure and promotion process. If we received signals that the time we spend on the podcast would be held against us, we probably would not continue. That said, we do have to balance podcasting against other demands on our time, which creates variability in how often we post new episodes.

#### How Do We Think about and Try to Reach Our Audience?

Our audience is different from podcasts aimed at true specialists (e.g., *New Books in Political Science*), journalists, and policy makers. We want to speak to regular folks, much like we do in our classes.

We know that we have fans among our current and former students, but we also know that our listenership extends far beyond this group. Our feedback comes in the form of occasional emails about specific episodes. Based on the questions and comments we receive, we imagine our audience to be people who follow politics closely, who perhaps once took classes in political science and miss it. We try to engage with current events at that informed, general-interest level.

None of us are experts in reaching a mass-market audience. We have not systematically analyzed the demographic, ideological, or partisan profile of our audience, other than reviewing the number of downloads. (We are happy knowing that, in total, our podcast episodes have been downloaded tens of thousands of times.) To reach beyond our personal and student networks, we rely on our social media circles and our university's public relations department. They have helped us get spotlights on our local public radio station and in our university's magazine. We saw a small but measurable uptick in downloads after the public radio spotlight in particular, and we received emails after the magazine spotlight.

#### What Are Our Hopes for the Podcast?

Obviously, we would love to be an inspiration for the US political media and have political science replace punditry, but no