

International Political Science

Opportunities and Constraints in Developing Post-Soviet Political Science

Richard M. Mills, *Fordham University*

In some countries the study of politics has been considered so highly sensitive or potentially subversive that central authority essentially prohibited it or, at best, kept it under tight control.

Until recently a paradoxical situation obtained in the former Soviet Union. Political science was authorized to function at one level: the Soviet Political Science Association was established in 1960 specifically to play an external role in international political science. At another the discipline as such never became a field of legitimate study and research in Soviet universities and institutes even though the major political changes of the late 1980s finally made it possible to create several departments devoted to the study of politics (Malcom 1984; Mills 1990).

But what to name those departments became problematical because language, the basic vehicle for conceptualization, acted as a constraint. There was no entry for *politologiya*, the Russian word for political science, in the latest definitive four-volume dictionary published in Moscow (Evgen'eva, ed. 1983). The word existed, but the discipline had not been legitimized. By 1990 the now freer media had quickly turned *politologiya* into a term of common use—but its substantive meaning remained unclear to most who heard it, including many professional students of politics. Earlier both Soviet and foreign scholars who studied politics were unfailingly called *sotsiologi*, sociologists. Now at last they were *politologi*, political scientists.

Just before the Communist party collapsed following the failed coup in August 1991 the party's publishing

house announced imminent publication, in 100,000 copies, of the first comprehensive textbook on political science ever written in the Soviet Union, in this case containing the party's emergent version of political science (*Politologiya* 1991). But with the former Soviet republics now free to develop their own study of politics there is debate over what to call the discipline (and the department) since *politologiya* sounds too Soviet or Russian to some.

Some additional constraining factors already apparent in the recent past may become even more significant in the future. This situation is visible at the levels of individuals, institutions, and the general public.

Those who advanced the study of politics most in the pre-Gorbachev era were Georgii Kh. Shakhnazarov and Fedor M. Burlatskii, for many years respectively president and vice president of the Soviet Political Science Association. In their books and articles over the decades both succeeded in incrementally shifting political analysis in the Soviet Union away from the especially constricted Soviet version of the class paradigm by cautiously incorporating elements of mainstream Western social science into their publications (Mills 1990). Eventually, they advocated a radical, comprehensive agenda for transforming Soviet political studies (Shakhnazarov and Burlatskii 1984-85).

Their already significant contributions could have increased substantially in the Gorbachev era had they implemented their agenda. But when Shakhnazarov became a senior advisor to Gorbachev and Burlatskii was elected to both Soviet federal parliaments and also served as editor of the periodical *Literaturnaya gazeta*

[*Literary Gazette*] until the August 1991 failed coup, their attention was deflected from scholarly endeavors. If the demands of their new responsibilities left little time for their earlier activities in laying the groundwork for political science, their involvement in practical politics allowed them to apply some of what they had studied. In particular, Gorbachev's public advocacy of pluralism and the separation of powers is most probably attributable to their influence and that of his close adviser Aleksandr N. Yakovlev.

Other Soviet political scientists and scholars in other disciplines also entered practical politics. Many ran for office and a good number won posts at various levels of government. Some served as campaign advisers to politicians and as consultants to newly-created parliamentary commissions. Still others turned to writing in the popular press on the plethora of topical political issues on the nation's overcrowded agenda. Welcome and necessary though it was, such frequent direct political participation limited and continues to restrict the effective contributions the small community of political scientists could make to the academic discipline.

On the other hand, their substantial experience in the political arena will undoubtedly shape their perceptions of and future contributions to political science in innovative ways. Several generations of Soviet political scientists are not only present at the creation of whatever political system or systems finally emerge, they are also participants in that process. They are positioned to contribute fresh insights in the areas of crisis management, the transition to

democracy, and political participation that can advance theory. Out of this intersection of professional knowledge and practical experience should come new forms of creative marginality, paralleling the way innovation occurs through the interpenetration of insights coming from the intersections of various academic disciplines (Dogan and Pahre 1990).

Another significant factor impeding the growth of political science is the need to contend with populist attitudes toward politics that are widespread among the general public but are most problematic among the fledgling lawmakers in the newly elected legislatures. A session of the Estonian Parliament's Legislative Committee in late 1990 as described by Rein Taagepera (1991: 480) illustrates the severity of the problem:

The Committee members locked horns on whether the prime minister should be able to call for new parliamentary elections in case of a vote of no-confidence. The committee vice-chair, physicist Peet Kask, referred to Arend Lijphart's *Democracies* (1984) to document the fact that almost all stable parliamentary regimes (with the exception of Norway) do give the government such power. However, most of the committee members still felt such power was "undemocratic" and the experience of stable democracies was irrelevant to Estonia's special conditions.

This is not the first or last time that intuitive knowledge has superceded data collected and analyzed by political scientists. More often than not democracy is understood as direct, participatory democracy. Partly for that reason many initially created representative institutions at all levels tended to be almost unmanageably large, as if to include as many people as possible. Coupled with this is the widely shared concern that democracy ensure "social justice." In Soviet usage the expression meant either achieving equality of result quickly, or at least precluding significant inequalities in wealth.

Working in combination, these factors impede the adoption and especially the implementation of policies that make rapid marketization and privatization possible. When post-Soviet political scientists try to explain how representative democ-

racy works to a public which feels that important aspects of that form of democracy are undemocratic, they frequently encounter incredulity and total lack of comprehension. Meantime, some trends in real political life like the tendency toward authoritarianism in the executive branch (which is often produced by the failure to develop smooth legislative-executive working relations) contribute toward democracy's decline.

These are just a few illustrations of the many challenges involved in transforming a subject political culture into a participant culture.

Conservatism in the former Soviet universities when carried over into the post-Soviet environment also continues to retard the development of political science. Politics had been taught and researched under four rigidly formalistic rubrics that were part of the Soviet Marxist-Leninist class paradigm: state and law, political economy, the history of political thought, and international relations. Breaking out of the paradigm or, alternatively, incorporating elements of differing approaches into the study of politics has been a long, complex process marked by generational conflict, struggles over academic governance, budget allocations, turf, and control of perquisites. These issues are now intimately connected with cleavages in the polity at large over the degree of autonomy of the universities and institutes and their financing. Even in today's radically changed political culture a persistent legacy remains to be overcome.

Best positioned to advance the study of politics are scholars in Moscow and St. Petersburg who work in universities or institutes with libraries containing substantial collections of Western books and periodicals on political science. They also have long had direct contact with foreign political science and political scientists through visits and studies abroad, interaction in international political science associations, and hosting foreign political scientists in the former Soviet Union. Many have entered into collaborative research with American social scientists.

Most unfavorably positioned are those in the outlying republics of Central Asia or the far-flung vastness

of Russia where library holdings on politics are meager and where opportunities for interaction with foreign political scientists have been fewer. Moreover, among the Central Asians there may be a culturally conditioned preference for associating with Indian, Turkish or other Middle Eastern political scientists rather than with those from the West.

Somewhere in between are the republics with a significant diaspora abroad. Even before glasnost their contacts with the West were well developed and now they are at liberty to tap those resources to expand library holdings in political science as well as to broaden professional contact with their ethnic confreres and others abroad. The Baltic states, Ukraine, and Armenia are in this category. Once the discipline of political science is established in these republics, an organization of political scientists is sure to follow. In the interim, the long-established universities, institutes, academies of science, and the more recently founded private research and consulting institutions will serve as the organizational channels of contact with foreign political scientists and political science associations.

For both American political scientists and their organized discipline two issues arise: What is involved in establishing and developing political science in the context of rapidly changing political situations (one must now think in the plural), and what can or should we do as individuals and as a discipline to assist in these processes?

The primary needs are to establish departments and adequate libraries, and to improve training and retraining of individuals through broadening the conceptual apparatus used in the study of politics, publishing new teaching materials, and expanding the range of methodologies and research techniques applied in political studies.

In the post-Soviet age political science as an organized discipline would minimally comprise an association in each of the republics, associations representing the major subfields, and political science departments in four locations: in universities which continue to operate under republic governmental auspices, in such private

institutions as may appear, in the relevant institutes that are components of the Russian Academy of Sciences, and in the analogous academies in the other republics.

There used to be only one central organization, the Soviet Political Science Association, but none in any republic or for any subfield, and now there are only a few recently founded departments in universities and institutes. The creation of departments is key to establishing and developing the discipline, and the pioneering experience of Vilnius University in organizing a department of political theory in 1990 reveals much about the sometimes anomalous processes involved.

The inspiration for taking the step originated in the department of philosophy, which acted as sponsor for the new department. At the time, the Ministry of Higher Education in Moscow objected to the idea, but the university itself established the department, some of whose members reflected the theoretical preoccupations of the sponsoring department while others strove to achieve broader range in the study of politics.

There was yet another potential sponsor in the department of industrial economics whose younger members long had an interest in the management of innovation processes in organizations, a question of public administration in the Soviet context. This department was home to a number of academic innovators and political activists, three of whom were elected to the Supreme Council of the Republic of Lithuania, the 141-person unicameral legislature. One was Kazimiera Prunskiene, who became Prime Minister. Another, Kestutis Glaveckas (1990), planned and edited a book on the relationship of the market and governmental regulation in the advanced industrial democracies, an issue of paramount concern in discussions of economic reform policies in Lithuania and the other republics. Had this department sponsored the new political science department it doubtless would have assumed more of a public policy orientation.

The new department's faculty sense the need to familiarize themselves with the general contours of

the discipline in the United States and the central foci of the subfields as they plan for the department's future development. Although there is great variation in their level of acquaintance with political analysis, the faculty are alive with intellectual curiosity about a broad spectrum of issues and clearly are talented scholars ready to meet the challenge of creating a new field into which they are at last free to move. These too are academic innovators like those in the industrial economics department.

The problems confronting Vilnius University's efforts are similar to those facing most other universities in the newly sovereign nations which are not in the favored position of Moscow and St. Petersburg. The prospective political scientists' needs, which Western political scientists and their organizations can help meet, are great: basic information about the history and structure of the discipline and its subfields; a comprehensive collection of fundamental books and seminal articles in its subfields; a familiarity with the range of journals; and contact with foreign political scientists and their organizations so as to develop a sense of where the discipline's leading edges are.

If the opportunities for satisfying their needs are now present in principle, there are both domestic and foreign constraints in practice. Most importantly, republics, cities, universities and institutes are now preponderant in determining the funding and the nature of the social support from the community at large and from the university in particular that political science will receive. Populist attitudes in the community are not a promising source of support for academic political science and may create situations in which the study of politics once again becomes highly sensitive. In the universities the discipline faces all the problems of being new.

The chief foreign constraint grows out of the strain on the financial, material, and personnel resources available in the Western nations for supporting the development of political science in a large number of countries. These circumstances challenge American political scientists to consider achieving a consensus about

what would constitute an optimal program for dealing with this sudden outburst of opportunities for American and international political science to play a significant supporting role at a major turning point.

What can be done? Given the fluid situation in the newly independent nations a flexible, differentiated approach would be most productive. APSA could establish procedures to monitor and encourage the development of political science in the republics. It could assist in reorienting the Soviet Political Science Association to become more active in diffusing the discipline and to help indigenous publishers identify and translate key textbooks and monographs. Subfield organizations should establish contacts with institutes having analogous concerns in order to acquaint them with literature, concepts, methodologies, conduct joint research and arrange exchange programs.

Departments in American universities could establish direct relations with universities and institutes which are founding political science departments. Individual American political scientists can act as resource persons for indigenous specialists in their field on a prearranged basis or avail themselves of chance opportunities as I did while at Vilnius University. I was invited to lecture on the contours and scope of the discipline by the newly forming department and took the opportunity to leave behind several American books on policy studies. These were especially highly valued because the subfield was virtually unknown in the Soviet era.

The most useful mechanisms are exchange programs of scholars, students, and materials, especially books and journals. Since both the former Soviets and Americans have so much learning to do about each other's ways of thinking and working, these exchanges are helpful whether formal or informal, organized or chance. Ultimately, success will depend upon locating, working with, and supporting the most effective political scientists (Nechemias and Evans 1991) with due attention to prospective sponsors and supporters, be they philosophers or physicists or economists, at whatever level they may be found.

Our American economist colleagues face demanding challenges in facilitating the transition to a market economy in the republics. Political scientists confront similar complexities in promoting the transition to democracy. The development of a viable and vibrant political science profession in the independent republics is one of the necessary, though hardly sufficient, guarantees that the goal will be achieved.

References

- Dogan, Mattei and Robert Pahre. 1990. *Creative Marginality: Innovation at the Intersections of Social Sciences*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Evgen'eva, A. P., ed. 1983. *Slovar' russkogo iazyka v chetyrekh tomakh* [Dictionary of the Russian Language in Four Volumes].

- Moscow: Russkii iazyk.
- Glaveckas, Kestutis, ed. 1990. *Rinkos ekonomika ir valstybinis reguliavimas* [The Market Economy and Governmental Regulation]. Vilnius: Lietuvos Laisvosios Rinkos Institutas, Balticon.
- Lijphart, Arend. 1984. *Democracies: Patterns of Majoritarian and Consensus Government in Twenty-one Countries*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Malcolm, Neil. 1984. *Soviet Political Scientists and American Politics*. New York: St. Martin's.
- Mills, Richard M. 1990. *As Moscow Sees Us: American Politics and Society in the Soviet Mindset*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Nechemias, Carol and Alfred Evans, Jr. 1991. "Political Science in the USSR," *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 24, 4: 632-33.
- Politologija. *Kurs lektzii. Uchebnoe posobie dlia vuzov*. 1991. [Political Science. A Series of Lectures. A Textbook for Institutions of Higher Learning]. Moscow: Vysshiaia shkola.

- Shakhnazarov, Georgii Kh. and Fedor M. Burlatskii. 1984-85. "On the Development of Marxist-Leninist Political Science," *Soviet Law and Government*, 22, 3: 3-26. [Originally published in 1980.]
- Taagepera, Rein. 1991. "Building Democracy in Estonia," *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 24, 3: 478-81.

About the Author

Richard M. Mills is a professor of political science at Fordham University, Bronx, NY. He is concerned with the challenges involved in deepening mutual understanding between Americans and former Soviets, a problem whose formative background he addressed in *As Moscow Sees Us: American Politics and Society in the Soviet Mindset* (Oxford, 1990). He is currently working on a study of the relationship of subfields in political science, especially American and comparative politics.

Political Dialogue with Some Women Leaders in Moscow and Leningrad

Wilma Rule, *University of Nevada, Reno*

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the Communist Party, Russian women are awakening to the possibilities of an independent role in their nation's decisionmaking bodies. The road ahead is fraught with barriers posed by the electoral system and the lack of knowledge of alternatives, and by inexperience with independent party building and grass roots organizations. Also a nascent anti-feminist movement threatens Russian women's advances.

These are my impressions from two lectures and discussions with two women leaders in Moscow and Leningrad (now called St. Petersburg) about electing women to parliament in democratic countries, which occurred prior to the establishment of the Commonwealth of Independent States. The first session took place on March 2, 1991, at the Center for Gender Studies of the National Academy of Sciences in Moscow where I was invited to give a lecture. The second was a week later in St. Petersburg with friends of the Gender Center.

The women attending these sessions were young, most in their twenties to early forties, articulate teachers, researchers, writers, computer experts, doctors, and one factory worker. Among them were founders of new women's organizations.

The lecture was based on my studies of women's proportions in parliament and the contextual factors associated with their greater or lesser success in democratic countries, and personal interviews with women parliamentarians and leaders in the United States, Finland, Sweden, New Zealand, Israel and the Philippines.

From this research, I concluded that the best electoral arrangement for women's parliamentary election is the party list/proportional representation system which allows the voter to choose preferred candidates in large multimember districts, and which has no minimum proportion of votes for a party to be represented in the parliament.

Moreover, this electoral system is most efficacious when used in conjunction with a quota for the number

of women placed on the party list. In Norway and throughout much of Europe, women's organizations within and without the parties directly influence the choice of about 40% women candidates who are then put in favorable positions on the parties' lists. That way the women elected must answer to women's groups and support women's programs. The women's groups—part of a wider women's movement—then mobilize the vote for the cooperating political parties.

The initial blank stares with which these statements were met revealed their unawareness of the electoral system which would most effectively help them achieve their goal for increased women's participation and influence. It was necessary, then, to detail how the party list/proportional representation system works in a multiparty system and how the parties' quotas advance women's nominations and their interests.

The mention of quotas for party nominations, however, was greeted with indignant cries of alarm.