



The Science of Politics

THE recent publication of a five-volume report on *Presidential Nominating Politics in 1952*, prepared under the auspices of the American Political Science Association, affords an appropriate occasion for remarking on the status of the science of politics. It was in a spirit of bravery, if not of bravado, that the American Political Science Association was formed 50 years ago. Scientific research in the field of politics was to be the true hallmark of the profession. But in the intervening years, many other activities have been allowed to pass as political science that are much less strenuous and much less dangerous. The recent project was an attempt, among other things, to bring renewed attention to a central area of professional concern.

The project started modestly enough as an effort to learn something currently about how the delegates to the national political conventions were being selected in the spring of 1952 in about 15 states. A remarkable outpouring and mobilization of voluntary efforts eventually produced reports for all 48 states. These reports covered not only the methods of selection but also the composition of the delegations, their instructions, their voting behavior at the conventions, and what happened to them after they went home.

This observational material has been sifted, organized, edited, surrounded by an apparatus of general reference material on politics in the 48 states, and published in the four regional volumes of the report. Volume I of the report contains historical, analytical, and theoretical approaches to the problem. The report as a whole is probably the most elaborate effort to describe and analyze a complicated phenomenon on a 48-state basis that has ever been completed.

Participants would, nevertheless, be the first to admit that the effort represents no more than an application of rudimentary types of scientific method. The only excuse is the fact that there is no part of the American political system that is more mysterious, more bewildering, or more chaotic. If Ostrogorski's description of the national political conventions, written a half-century ago as an eyewitness account and still widely quoted in the textbooks, is to be regarded as a first approximation, the present effort is not much more than a second. There is need for a third approximation that will get closer to an adequate description of those elements of reality that may be found to have some continuing importance.

As political science moves into its second half-century as an organized profession, it can be hoped that there will be many future projects that will undertake to observe and describe the phenomena of politics and to develop the necessary techniques of classification and analysis. The social sciences have recently been enriched by many advances in methodology that are pertinent to scientific research in politics. What is needed increasingly is some plan or system for the conduct of research in politics that will utilize the more advanced methodologies while also applying them in simultaneous field research throughout the country. This is not an easy goal to achieve, but progress in that direction can be anticipated.

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Presidential Nominating Politics in 1952

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SCIENCE, founded in 1880, is published each Friday by the American Association for the Advancement of Science at Business Press, Lancaster, Pa. SCIENCE is indexed in the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*.

All correspondence should be addressed to SCIENCE, 1515 Massachusetts Ave., NW, Washington 5, D. C. Manuscripts should be typed with double spacing and submitted in duplicate. The AAAS assumes no responsibility for the safety of manuscripts or for the opinions expressed by contributors.

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Annual subscriptions: \$7.50; foreign postage, outside the Pan-American Union, \$1.00; Canadian postage, 50¢. Single copies 25¢. Special rates to members of the AAAS.

The AAAS also publishes THE SCIENTIFIC MONTHLY.