

# Michigan Law Review

---

Volume 54 | Issue 3

---

1956

## Bailey, Simon, Dahl, Snyder, de Grazia, Moos, David & Truman: Research Frontiers in Politics and Government. Brookings Lectures, 1955

Henry L. Bretton  
*University of Michigan*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr>



Part of the [Law and Politics Commons](#), and the [Legal Writing and Research Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Henry L. Bretton, *Bailey, Simon, Dahl, Snyder, de Grazia, Moos, David & Truman: Research Frontiers in Politics and Government. Brookings Lectures, 1955*, 54 MICH. L. REV. 438 (1956).

Available at: <https://repository.law.umich.edu/mlr/vol54/iss3/16>

This Book Reviews is brought to you for free and open access by the Michigan Law Review at University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Michigan Law Review by an authorized editor of University of Michigan Law School Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact [mlaw.repository@umich.edu](mailto:mlaw.repository@umich.edu).

## RECENT BOOKS

RESEARCH FRONTIERS IN POLITICS AND GOVERNMENT. Brookings Lectures, 1955. By *Stephen K. Bailey, Herbert A. Simon, Robert A. Dahl, Richard C. Snyder, Alfred de Grazia, Malcolm Moos, Paul T. David and David B. Truman*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution. 1955. Pp. vii, 240. \$2.75.

This is a timely book. It consists of a series of eight lectures by leading political scientists on the newer research developments in politics and government and is designed to reach beyond the relatively small circle of specialists to the larger group of political practitioners and other persons likely to derive direct benefits from research in the social sciences. The publication, sponsored by the Brookings Institution, is timely because it appears when the public is just beginning to become aware that something is stirring in the social sciences. But the awareness is likely to produce erroneous conceptions of what is going on if it is left solely to the press and congressional committees to provide news on the subject and to interpret trends. The attack on the various philanthropic foundations and the so-called "jury-tapping" case, unless counteracted by objective examination of the facts, concepts and scholarly purposes which are involved may in time cause the death of exceedingly worthwhile and significant academic projects in the arena of partisan politics. The jury-tapping case, for instance, involving the application of the "behavioral" research techniques to the legal system may, unless the facts are fully explained, result in the impression that "behavioral" is to be equated with conspiratorial, and that the theory behind it may bring about the destruction of our established institutions. The book should contribute toward a better understanding of what it is social scientists are trying to do to society. But controversy and confusion are not confined to lay circles. Social scientists also are divided over the claims filed in behalf of some of the newer research methods; and the extravagance displayed by some of the claimants is not contributing to clarification of the basic issues.

Essentially the controversy among political scientists concerns the applicability or relevance of natural science methods to social or political science. For a variety of reasons, a number of political scientists—especially those concerned with voting behavior—have become fascinated with the techniques used by their colleagues in the natural sciences. This tendency has caused others, like the skeptical author of the concluding lecture, David B. Truman, to point out that "admiring the neighbor's clearing fells no trees in one's own woodlot."

Fortunately, the lecturers are all reasonable men. They are conscious of their responsibilities as scholars and cognizant of the warning issued by an eminent colleague of theirs that "political scientists should be modest because they have plenty to be modest about." The warning, it might be added, does apply with equal accuracy to all social scientists.

The lectures provide a panoramic view of the broad forward movement in the social sciences, a movement which in some instances may bring us closer to the promised land of fully explained and fully predictable society. In other instances, however, this reviewer fears, the sea—or should one say the fog—may never part. Whatever one's point of view, one fact should not be lost sight of, namely, that many of the research techniques discussed in this volume have not yet emerged from the stage of theoretical consideration, have not yet been put to the empirical test. There can be no doubt, however, that as the old frontiers recede, new perspectives are opened up, political science becomes revitalized—even if nothing else occurs but controversy—and the discipline becomes endowed with new meaning and new purposes.

The first lecture, by Stephen K. Bailey, represents a disarmingly straightforward and modest exposition of misunderstandings separating the scholar from the decision-maker, the political theorist from the political practitioner. Bailey has some incisive comments about scholars who "on occasion try to build superstructures of verbiage and mathematics on foundations of thin air." Other criticism is directed at the decision-maker who fails to appreciate the scholar's endeavor to expand the frontiers of knowledge about human affairs and who therefore objects to the use of linguistic or other symbols of operational convenience to the exploring scholar. Similarly, the decision-maker is reminded that only if he "preserves the environment of free inquiry can scholars operate effectively." Misunderstandings concerning the responsibilities and purposes of scholars and of practical men of affairs can only be minimized if both recognize that each has a high stake in the success of the other's work.

Mr. Bailey discusses the new research frontier in terms of four categories: historical, institutional, behavioral, and philosophical, and in keeping with his basic characteristic of modesty, he finds merit in every one. Mr. Simon, examining "Recent Advances in Organizational Theory," shows "where the theory stands today, how it has progressed over the past twenty years, and in what direction it appears to be moving." He expresses the belief that research on organizations can "show us how to construct administrative organizations that can act with a foresight and planfulness commensurate with the magnitude and importance of the issues they face."

Mr. Dahl is concerned with research toward the construction of scientific models. He advances the proposition that central to all political relationships is the relationship between leaders and non-leaders. It is further proposed that this relationship can be classified into three or four categories generally revealing the method by which decisions are made. Mr. Dahl distinguishes these four methods (the fourth with a qualification): democracy, hierarchy, bargaining, and the price system. These four categories Mr. Dahl suggests are most useful "conceptual devices for mapping out the real world in which we live." In order to shed more light on these ways of decision-making, much research will have to be

done and Mr. Dahl confines the remainder of his lecture to an analysis of the problems "that have made it very difficult for observers to construct something approaching scientific models of democracy, hierarchy, and bargaining." The obstructive problems concern power, political participation, personality and predisposition, and the policy-maker's application of the "models."

The scope and purpose of this type of research is perhaps best illustrated by the observation that our society contains within itself features of all four control systems. Consequently, discussion about the need for training "personalities" for our society, who are only "democratic" in orientation, is not entirely to the point. Actually, many individuals in our society are members of more than one type of control system; the business executive is a citizen and thus in need of democratic orientation. But he also is enmeshed in bargaining controls operating between him and trade union leaders, he operates within "the set of cues, rewards, and penalties provided by the price system," and at home he is involved in a hierarchy. Thus, a model society needs to train people who can shift rapidly from one kind of control relationship to another without being exposed to too great an emotional or psychological strain.

Mr. Snyder examines the utility, applicability, and pertinence of the "theory of games" to research in politics and government. The "theory" is a method of analysis and a method of selecting the best courses of action from among given alternatives. It is primarily concerned with decisions, decision-makers, and conflict. The theory employs as its basic model the game of strategy as distinct from games of chance. The game theorist wishes to characterize decision-making behavior in certain situations and to discover, if possible, the conditions under which the aims of the policy-maker can be promoted or protected to the greatest extent. The theory utilizes the assumption that within the limits of a given strategy game situation (military, political, sport, etc.) the range of strategic alternatives open to any one player is usually not infinite, and each player's strategies are known to the others. It is held that, within reason, such problems confronting the political scientist as decision-making, or policy selection, may undergo substantial clarification with the benefit of the game theory.

Mr. Snyder observes that at present the application of game theory to politics is limited by the absence of needed data. The question may be asked whether the game theorist will ever be able to collect *all* data required for a meaningful application of the theory to the art of politics? Furthermore, this reviewer is most hesitant to accept Mr. Snyder's dictum: "There is nothing like a cold shower of mathematical symbolization to sober up the imprecise words and phrases that stagger from one meaning to another. If something meaningful is said, and it is expressed clearly, it will stand the test of mathematical formulation." Granted that social science literature is frequently, and often unnecessarily, cluttered up with

vague terms and phrases. But, this reviewer suspects that substitution of mathematical symbols may not necessarily bring mankind any closer to an understanding of the mysteries of our existence and to the lesser mysteries related to it, nor will every social, political, or philosophical question be resolved by utilization of such symbols, nor should every concept and every proposition which does not "stand the test of mathematical formulation," be rejected out of hand.

An example of practical application of game theory to the political process is given on page 96. It is suggested that political parties might get some help from the game theorist. One cannot quarrel with that. However, there follows this illustration: "The strategy of the Republicans in maneuvering their 1956 national convention to come late in the summer after the Democrats have nominated their candidate seems to be a classic example of game theory intuitively applied to a practical problem." The implication is that had a game theorist been consulted by the Republican National Committee, he would have suggested the identical maneuver. Now if one considers the cold facts in this case it becomes apparent that the final decision actually hinged on a matter of health. If as a result of the President's inability to run, a lesser-known candidate would have to take his place, then the maneuver clearly might not "pay off." Then the comparatively unknown candidate would require the greater part of the summer to make himself known to the electorate. One wonders of how much help a game theorist could be under such conditions.

Some intriguing thoughts are contained in the application of the theory to the intra-group relationship within the small band of Soviet leaders. The suggestion is made that game theory may enable us to penetrate the secrets of Soviet power.

In keeping with the modesty displayed throughout the eight lectures, Mr. Snyder reassuringly concludes: "The reader should not infer from anything said . . . that the game theorist can replace the policy-maker, that Univac can replace the cabinet member, or that the policy-maker should replace his psychoanalyst with a game theorist."

Mr. de Grazia is concerned with research on voters and elections. He sketches the potentialities and problems of polling and sampling techniques, difficulties in obtaining reliable data for meaningful statistical compilations and particularly for significant correlations of social and political [electoral] data. De Grazia's discussion of new techniques to analyze political behavior should be of revealing interest to the practitioner of politics and to the social scientist as well. To select but one result obtained: "Politics, in what may be the most free political system in the world, is the work of a few people. There are about as many [politically] active citizens as there are active criminals in the United States." Mr. de Grazia is not immune to over-confidence in the efficacy of the sampling technique, however. Discussing the findings of the University of Michigan

Survey Research Center in a study of voter identification with political parties—the study establishes seven degrees of intensity ranging from strong Democrat through independent to strong Republican—he observes: “The advantages of such a division of the population becomes immediately apparent. The number of independents [becomes] accurately known and [is] suprisingly small.” That something became known, of that there can be no doubt. Whether the knowledge was “accurate” is another matter.

Mr. Moos’ observations on the presidential nominating process are most timely and thought provoking. His is an engaging, eloquent argument for the retention of the national convention system, certain adjustments and improvements assumed. Mr. David surveys research in comparative state politics and on party realignment. The series of hypothesis advanced by him as proper subjects for further research in comparative party politics are of great significance and there can be no doubt that much more can and should be learned about that subject. But Mr. David cannot successfully hurdle the obstacle of practical performance. The practical application given is unimpressive, although it must be admitted it has pioneer value, being the first such study of its kind. Reference is had to the study of the delegations to the two national political party conventions of 1952. It was a commendable effort but it was very modest, indeed. Some findings of that research were not of the same high quality as accounts which appeared in some outlet of the daily press. There were huge gaps, and serious omissions. Free application of professional jargon, the kind that opens foundation cash boxes, is not a satisfactory substitute for substance.

Mr. David B. Truman presents the concluding lecture. In terms of the controversies alluded to earlier, it is the most significant presentation. Here is the “cold shower.” But this shower must have the effect of sobering up the kind of researcher who, in the words of John Palmer Gavit, “bushwhacks around the edges of the inscrutable and pontificates about the week’s gropings in the realm of the mind as if he had ultimate truth by the tail.” Mr. Truman places things in their proper perspective, giving credit where credit is due, condemning excessive zeal and presumptuousness where that seems to be indicated. He discusses the impact on political science of the revolution in the behavioral sciences and defines “behavioral sciences” as “those bodies of knowledge . . . that provide or aspire to provide verified principles of human behavior through the use of methods of inquiry similar to those of the natural sciences.” Tracing various developments in the behavioral sciences, he then examines their relevance to political science and finds that the greatest relevance may be in the realm of theoretical expansion. He directs a warning at those who are given to hasty and indiscriminate application of tools and techniques unrelated to the problems of political science, those given to follow “technical fads,” and those who wish to “quantify” at any cost.

Mr. Truman finds it significant that the area of greatest impact of "behaviorism" on political science has been in connection with the study of voting behavior, "the most individualized, in a sense most uncomplicated, and perhaps least important element in the political process."

In conclusion, it may be said that those whose research methods are reviewed in this volume, and the reviewers themselves, are rendering an indispensable service. They point up new vistas, new areas of knowledge to be explored. They inject a revitalizing substance into political science. At the same time, however, this volume provides eloquent proof that in some respects politics and the political processes have not changed much since Aristotle.

*Henry L. Bretton,  
Assistant Professor of Political Science,  
University of Michigan*