

Introduction

Ithiel de Sola Pool was one of the most original thinkers in the development of the social sciences. These papers introduce research methods that he helped to invent and that are especially suited for: (1) Wider applications, now that more powerful computers are available; (2) Integrating the sensibilities of the humanities more fully into social science; and (3) Studying the social and political effects of new communications technology. They also present his belief that social science adds a new dimension (beyond what is provided by the humanities and natural sciences) that can improve decision making in democracies and produce more humane politics.

The research methods include:

- the computer-assisted analysis of the content of communications;
- computer simulations (e.g., of Presidential elections and of crisis decision making in international politics);
- forecasting the future of international politics and methods to forecast the impacts of new telecommunications technology;
- the rigorous analysis of domestic and global contact networks and the so-called "small world" phenomenon.

A final section concerns challenges to the use of social science to create more humane politics. These include:

- the question of value neutrality;
- the unexpected tenacity and competition of simple ideological ideas;
- the challenge of deconstruction from the humanities;
- the threats of governments and a bureaucratized society to the health of universities and the progress of social science.

In the final chapter, I will draw upon Ithiel Pool's work and discuss several new ways in which methods in this volume can be applied to current problems of informed decision making and more humane politics.

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Today, the social sciences are taken for granted as part of American universities and undergraduate education. The title of this book, linking social science research methods to more humane politics, may want explaining.

Social science is primarily a twentieth-century, and an American, invention. The movement grew at the University of Chicago in the 1930s, partly in response to the historical circumstances: the domestic political turmoil and unexpected collapse of the economy in the Depression, and the international rise of Communist and Nazi movements that began to threaten another global conflict within two decades of the unexpected and murderous trauma of World War I. The search for new methods to apply human intelligence effectively was spurred, too, by the anxiety that the traditional humanities-based education of ruling classes was not sufficient: the most civilized countries in Europe and their leaders were part of the problem.

In recent decades it has become fashionable for outside critics from the humanities to portray social scientists as technocratic and unconcerned with freedom. This is an ahistorical misreading of the origins. To Ithiel Pool's generation of founders, it was axiomatic that people were entrapped in traditional identities and, often, manipulated by their societies. During World War I and again in the 1930s and 1940s, hundreds of millions of people were marching to war under the leadership of national demagogues and their use of new mass communications technology for propaganda. After World War II, the end of colonialism and the modernization (often violent) of traditional societies, and the communist dictatorships in Russia, China, and Eastern Europe (held in place, in part, by totalitarian control of the media) made the battle for human freedom a strong (implicit) motivation for research. They believed that social science could be liberating and provide an independent, steadier, truer, and more realistic framework for democratic decision making than was provided by the world politics they inherited.

In later sections I will return to the idea that the invention and development of social science can contribute to democratic decision making and humane politics. However, there is an important caveat: Ithiel Pool was, in social science terms, a "soft" determinist. He did not believe that inventions (like research methods for social science) automatically force or assure specific effects, although they can make them possible, easier, or more likely. It is the decisions of individuals about what to *do* with inventions that create the future. And this caution (and implicit invitation) also applies to the potential benefits of social science research methods.

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