Can political science save democracy?

Learning from models of civic and political education across the world

Abstract

This paper introduces the idea that institutions are social models ('dynamic social theories'), which offers an innovative approach for political science to strengthen democracy and enable people to improve the quality of life for all.

Part I outlines threats to representative democracy and argues that most political science is like anatomy, analyzing the body politic without healing it, with notable exceptions. It suggests that health sciences offer alternative models for political science.

Part 2 shows how institutions act as social models that combine everyday knowledge with research, and suggests that this insight offers political science a powerful approach to helping citizens understand and improve democratic governance.

Part 3 uses Pippa Norris's diagnosis of democratic deficits as a framework for identifying areas for action-research to strengthen democracy, then draws lessons from models of civic education at different levels. It concludes by proposing that political scientists should launch a "global mission" to heal democracy at scale.

This paper is a work in progress and the latest version after 31 Aug 2023 is here. It is written for discussion at APSA conference 2023, Strategies for Democratic Engagement, Division 58: Civic Engagement. It develops ideas from a chapter in ***Who's Afraid of Political Education?*** edited by Henry Tam, Bristol University Press (2023); a blog published by *The Loop*, EPCR (https://bit.ly/LoopDM); and an APSA *Working Paper on Political Science and the Democratic Method: How Higher Education Can Strengthen Democracy at Scale* (2021). The thesis on institutions as social experiments and 'dynamic social theories' will be published in the September 2023 edition of *The Journal of American Culture* as *Unwrapping the McDonald's Model: An Introduction to Dynamic Social Theory* (DOI: 10.1111/jacc.13467).

The idea that institutions are social models ('dynamic social theories') equivalent to theories in the natural sciences requires a shift in perspective like trying to see a young woman in the famous dual image optical illusion when you only see the old woman. Please make an effort to see its potential.

Comments & opportunities to discuss these ideas welcome: Please email titusa03@gmail.com

Part I: Political Science and the Crisis of Democracy

The ultimate test of a science is its contribution to the human condition. Francis Bacon, one of the earliest champions of scientific method, celebrated its ability to produce "Great and Marvelous Workes for the Benefit of Men" (1620). The scientific method makes extraordinary contributions to humanity - but also created existential risks by enabling people to cause global heating, mass extinctions, nuclear annihilation, and other catastrophes. Most of these cannot be solved by natural science but require political solutions.

Political science can help society solve these problems, but there is a gulf between professional practice and actions needed to solve social problems. Liberal democracy, an experimental method for collective problem solving, is in a critical condition, despite more than a century of political science.

Politics is complicated and difficult, while elections simplify people's choices into battles between slogans of competing parties and personalities, dependent on financial backers, campaign strategists and allies in the media. The health of democracy depends on many factors, including economic conditions, income disparities, social cohesion, people's values, media, the integrity of institutions, international relations and the abilities of governments to deliver for their citizens. Each of these in turn also depends on political decisions, some decades in the past.

Expecting political science to enable society to deal with these difficulties better may be unrealistic, but it is a worthy aspiration. This paper explores the question of whether our model of political science is fit for purpose and suggests an alternative, based on the use of social research to improve the outcomes of institutions as 'dynamic social theories' of social sciences.

The Tragedy of Political Science

This critique of political science is not new. David Ricci's *The Tragedy of Political Science: Politics, Scholarship, and Democracy* (1984) analyzed the conflict between its current model of scientific inquiry and the knowledge needed for a healthy democracy. Over a decade later, in a paper to the APSA annual conference, Tim Duvall lamented that "professionalism and positivism have combined to force us to ignore the relevance of action. Accordingly, professional political analysts produce research that fewer and fewer people

have an interest in or a use for" (1998: 21). Professor John E. Trent observed that "The majority of the papers are addressed to the discipline" and asked "is political science out of step with the world?" He concluded "We are of less and less interest to the public due to our focus on the pure production of knowledge and general rejection of participation in the 'great debates' of society." (2011)

Scholars are rightly wary about politicizing their subject or engaging in partisan politics, but there is considerable scope to promote a more inclusive, robust and effective democracy by upholding respect for evidence, free inquiry and professional ethics. The **APSA Ethics Guide**, for example, states that "APSA supports and protects the rights of all social scientists to communicate their research and advocate for adoption and reform of public policies." I would go further to say that strengthening democratic norms, equal citizenship, and pluralism are *essential conditions* for political science, while recognising that these ideas may be contested within academic inquiry.

The end of liberal democracy?

In 2004 an APSA Task Force on *American Democracy in an Age of Rising Inequality* concluded that "Progress toward realizing American ideals of democracy may have stalled, and in some arenas reversed." Since then both inequality and the health of democracy have become worse. According to *The Economist*'s **Democracy Index**, just 6.4% of the world's people live in a full democracy. Since 2017 it has classified the United States as a 'flawed democracy'. Dissatisfaction with democracy is high (Global Satisfaction with Democracy 2020). IDEA's **2021 Global Democracy Report** reveals that more than a third of humanity lives under authoritarian rule. Wiebrecht *et al* (2023) show that between 1992 and 2022, autocracies increased their share of the global economy to 46%. Flawed democracies enable authoritarian rulers to legitimize their control and erode democratic norms, as in Hungary, India, Israel, USA and elsewhere. The fact that liberal democracies do not apply democratic principles in global governance also undermines their credibility as role models (Alexander 1996).

Liberal democracy also faces powerful competition. China's model of "people's democratic dictatorship" and "consultative governance" (*Minben* 民本 'people-as-root'), combining one-party control of a technocratic state with a

https://doi.org/10.33774/apsa-2023-sqfqx **ORCID:** https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1166-3251

guided market economy, has dramatically improved material living standards. Its model has many attractions for developing countries (Li, 2015; Lin & Wang 2017; UNCTAD 2022). Meanwhile China's active engagement in global governance and its massive Belt and Road initiative are building a worldwide network of political allies that could sideline democracies internationally. China's Global Development Initiative (2021), Global Security Initiative (2022) and Global Civilization Initiative (2023), are bold bids for leadership in world affairs, supported by a majority of nations. For peoples of Africa, Asia, the Middle East and Latin America who experience western liberal democracy as exploitative, hypocritical, corrupt and sometimes violent, China's model offers a credible alternative.

China's growing influence, the rise of "illiberal democracy", and the election of competent authoritarians in America could end humanity's brief experiments with representative democracy. A crisis as a result of global heating, another pandemic or major conflict could increase the appeal of a strong leader .

This may be too pessimistic. But when democratic Germany elected an authoritarian ruler in 1933 it led to a war within six years. The war was only won at immense cost by an alliance of imperial Britain, Soviet Russia, and a United States where racial segregation was still legal. Decolonisation, better management of the world economy, rapid economic growth, and struggles for civil liberties enabled representative democracy to become the dominant model of government, but it is far from healthy or secure today.

Liberal democracy is only a stage in politics, but whether it decays and disappears or develops into a more effective, inclusive and responsive political system depends on action taken now.

Political science and the health of democracy

Political scientists have published numerous studies of democratic backsliding, decay, degeneration, and death, as well as detailed diagnoses and prescriptions for its revival. Many provide nonpartisan support for civic education, the integrity of elections, and democratic innovation, through organizations such as the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, the Commonwealth, Campus Compact, International IDEA, Electoral Integrity Project at Harvard University, Danish Institute for Parties and Democracy, European Democracy Hub, European Partnership for Democracy, National Endowment for

Democracy, National Democratic Institute, Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, OECD's Reinforcing Democracy Initiative, Open Society Foundations, Westminster Foundation, and UNDP's Democratic Governance programme. These initiatives are important but they have not been sufficient to halt the erosion of democratic norms for over twenty years.

A growing number of political scientists are working on democratic innovations, particularly deliberative democracy, which are gradually being used in many countries across the world (see O'Flynn 2021; Fishkin 2018; OECD 2020; Smith 2009; Youngs 2021; Youngs & Godfrey 2022; and Participedia). But political scientists are less visible in recent initiatives, such as President Biden's **Summits for Democracy**, the European Democracy Action plan, or the many civil society coalitions. As Professor Trent observed, most of their work is still "addressed to the discipline" and does not assist citizens, practitioners and politicians grappling with the difficulties of democratic governance.

The tension between academic analysis and work on democratic renewal could be reduced by recognising social models as the equivalent of theories in natural sciences and embedding social research into institutions, as outlined in Part 2. But first it is worth noting that several scientific disciplines combine active engagement in society with rigorous research, particularly health.

Lessons from health sciences

Compared with **health**, democratic systems have made much less progress over the past century (see Figs 1 & 2). The parallels are not exact. Many improvements in life expectancy are not due to health sciences, and there are significant differences between health and political sciences.

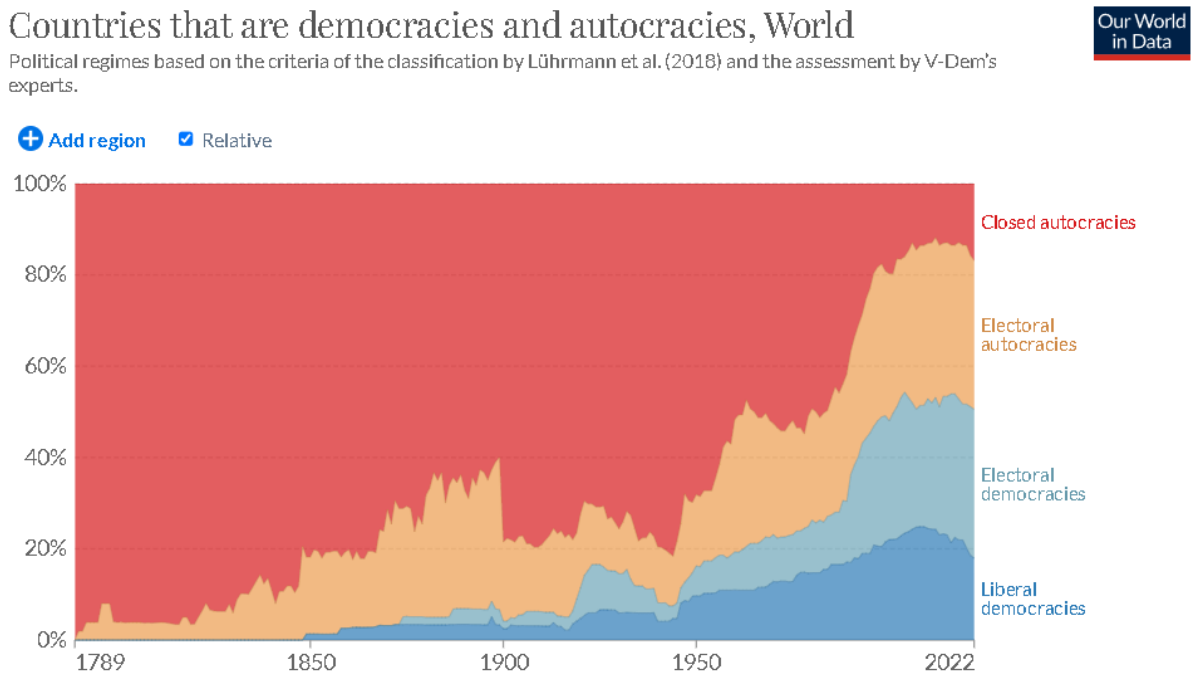

Fig. 1 The rise of democracies and recent dip in liberal democracies

Source: Our World in Data - https://ourworldindata.org/democracy

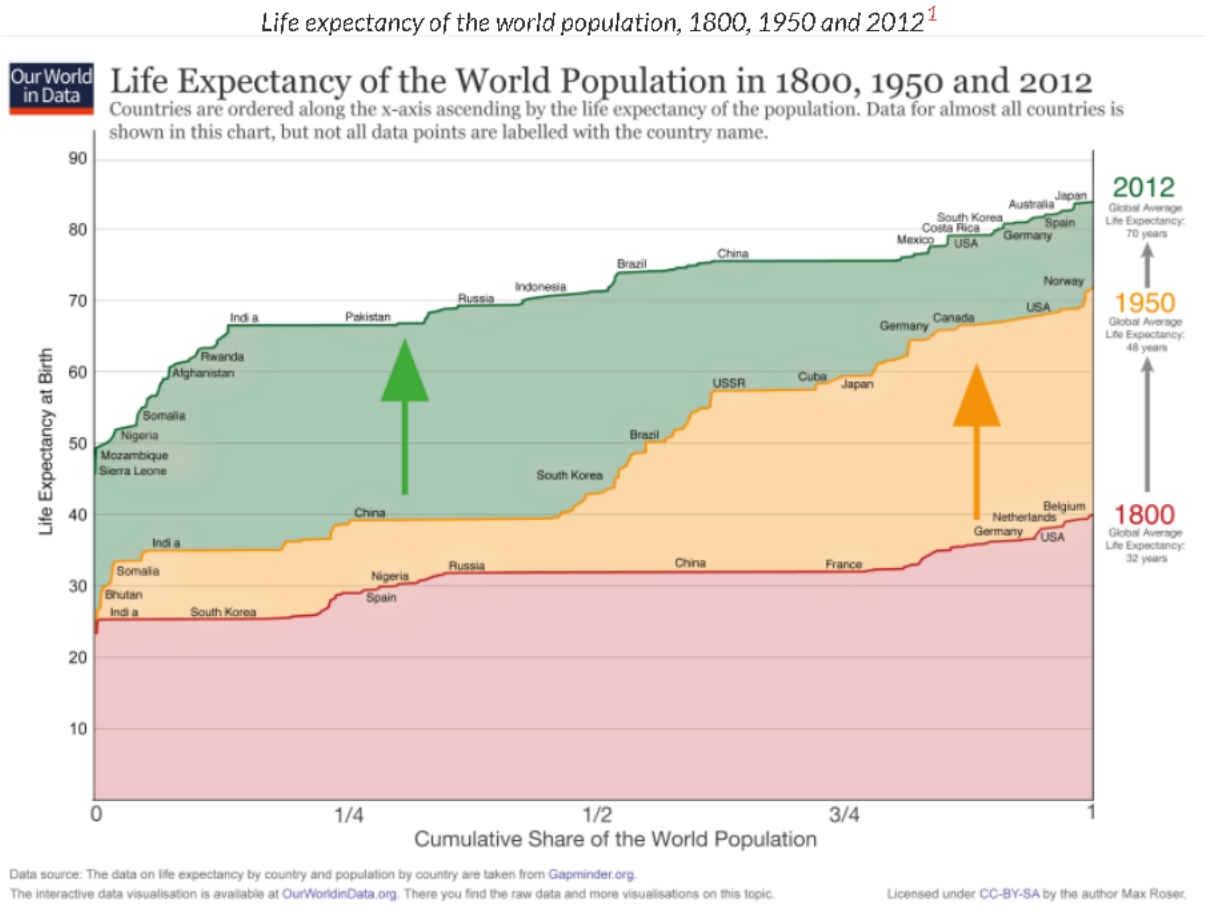

Fig. 2 The rise in life expectancy Source: https://ourworldindata.org/health-meta

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Over the past fifty years most mature democracies have progressed less than their health systems. There have been improvements in democratic politics - they deal with a wider range of issues, women and ethnic minorities are better represented, and there is more transparency and accountability - but improvements in health are comparatively greater while democracies are backsliding.

The primary purpose of health science is to cure disease and promote health. This is supported by institutional relationships between researchers and practitioners to collect, analyze, and disseminate knowledge in a collective learning process that stretches from pharmacies, clinicians and researchers to national and international policy makers (see for example Health Knowledge; Unim *et al*). Health sciences are enmeshed in commercial, state and charitable sectors, so research priorities are often driven by external funding. But researchers still follow rigorous procedures to establish findings and, when necessary, use influencing skills to persuade policy makers and the public to act on them.

The Lancet, a leading medical journal, connects research with advocacy:

> **Improving lives is the only end goal**
>
> *Too much research is done for research's sake. We believe that improving lives is the only end goal and that research is only relevant when it has an impact on human lives.*
>
> **Increasing the social impact of science**
>
> *We recognise that a great research paper is not enough and that it requires development, mobilization, and exposure. So we promise to set agendas, create context, inform leaders, start debates, and advocate for the idea that research can and will make a difference.*

The **British Medical Association** (BMA), represents doctors and medical students. Similarly, it aims to be a 'leading voice advocating for outstanding healthcare and a healthy population'. By contrast, the **vision** of the world's largest political science association, APSA, is:

> ***promoting scholarly understanding of political ideas, norms, behaviors, and institutions to inform public choices about government, governance, and public policy***

Eight of its Objectives are about the profession and only one is about "serving the public, including disseminating research and preparing citizens to be effective citizens and political participants".

The **mission** of Europe's largest political science association, ECPR, is to "advance political science", "help the world understand and benefit from the critical importance of political science" and "help interpret the world's complex and changing political landscape for the benefit of all."

These are worthwhile aims, but knowledge and understanding are not enough for societies to make wise choices. Extensive research evidence about the harmfulness of tobacco, fossil fuels, and other substances did not convince governments to protect lives. Intense lobbying, exposed in the book and documentary ***Merchants of Doubt*** (Michaels 2008; Oreskes & Conway 2010), means that governments resist better, fairer and safer ways of doing things, while enacting reckless deregulation or excessive constraints on freedom. If medical sciences were only about scholarly understanding and interpreting the complexities of health, **life expectancy** might be much shorter today.

Political science should be at the forefront of ensuring that citizens have the mechanisms to make wise choices for the health of society. Health promotion and public health are well-established professions that work with the public, policy-makers and other stakeholders to increase wellbeing. Health advocacy is a required competency for physicians in some countries, as in the Canadian CanMEDS framework developed by the Royal College in the 1990s (See Fig. 3)

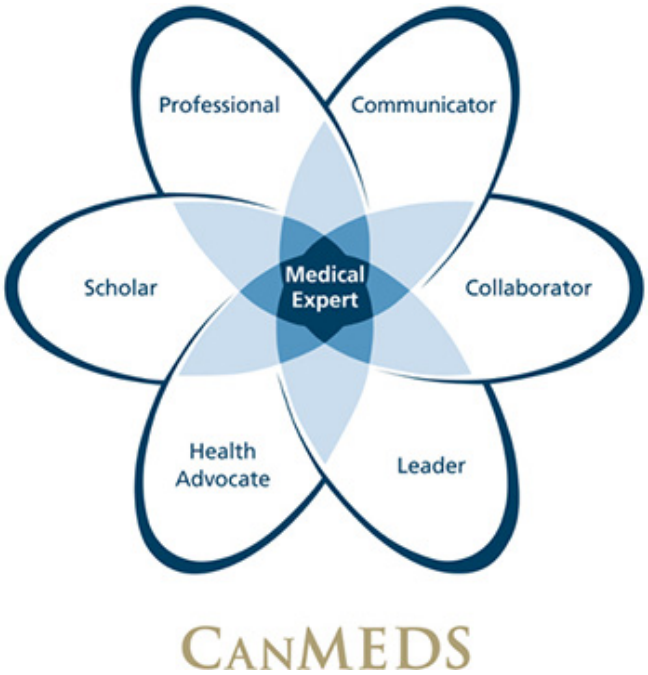

Fig. 3: The CanMEDS model has been adapted around the world, both within and outside the health professions (permission to reproduce diagram agreed).

Most U.S. medical schools offer at least one advocacy course, usually elective rather than required, and the content of advocacy-related courses vary substantially (see

Brender *et al.* 2021). The debate on the place of advocacy within the medical profession and the inclusion of advocacy training in medical education offers useful insights for political science (see for example Boroumand *et al,* 2020; Croft *et al.* 2012; Smothers & Wigfall 2019).

Almost every profession requires political knowledge and skills in some area of their work, yet political scientists rarely provide courses about political processes to health professionals or other disciplines. It is even more remarkable that courses in advocacy, influencing, and political skills are not a required competency in political science.

The US has about 50,000 political science graduates a year (College Factual), more than the 30,000 graduates from medical school (Statista). They pursue careers in business, government, politics, public administration, diplomacy, law, lobbying, journalism, non-profits, teaching, research and other areas of public life. Equipping graduates to help citizens improve democracy and achieve better outcomes through politics could significantly improve society, but their education rarely develops the abilities required.

The best hope for democratic governance

Representative democracies should be able to self-correct better than autocracies, but extensive use of dis-information, mis-information, and denigration of fact-based media as 'fake news' for political purposes undermines the ability of citizens to make informed decisions. Partisan media, deception and dishonesty have always been a problem for democracies, but when coupled with deliberate undermining of democratic norms the system ceases to be democratic in any meaningful sense.

The best hope for democratic governance is for citizens to understand how it works, use it effectively, and experience the benefits of better governance as a result. No democracy is perfect, nor the same as any other, but all should be a process of continuous improvement. Political science can play a significant role in this task, just as medical science does in improving health outcomes.

China and "illiberal democracies" offer attractive alternatives to liberal democracy. The best hope for democratic governance is for people to use it to create better outcomes and to develop a more equal and effective system of global governance based on accountability, civil liberties, human rights, good governance, and impartial rule of law.

Part two explores the potential of developing social models as the equivalent of theories in the natural sciences. This would also provide an epistemological, theoretical and methodological justification for political science to be directly engaged in improving models of democratic governance in practice.

Part 2: The power of social models

A social model is any social organization that is replicated, imitated or adapted by people for a purpose. Entrepreneurs study successful business models to create better businesses. Health professionals study and apply successful procedures and practices. Political parties adopt models of successful electoral campaigns from other countries. Protest movements inspire citizens elsewhere to follow their example, like #MeToo, Black Lives Matter, or the color revolutions of Eastern Europe. Governments adopt and adapt social models that are seen to work elsewhere.

The role of social models in providing examples that people follow or adapt has profound implications for social science. This section explores the potential of social models for both political science and democratic politics, unwrapping roughly nine layers of knowledge involved in real-time models and twelve levels from nano to supra-national. Parts three and four then considers strategies for learning from models to improve the health of democracy.

A social model is any form of social organization that is replicated, imitated or adapted by people for a purpose.

Institutions as forms of knowledge

Every institution embodies knowledge of how to achieve certain outcomes, while adapting to shifting power relations, social conditions, ideas and aspirations. Thus a school, street market or synagogue is recognizable across centuries, countries, and cultures, although their content and particularities may vary greatly. Each institution is also a rough and ready experiment in how to achieve a range of objectives. History is full of examples of social models that are replicated, improved or imitated by successive generations to achieve relatively reliable outcomes over time, from Roman legions and christian missionaries to McDonalds and Amazon.

Modern governments include many ancient elements, evolved over millennia, including codes of law, courts, assemblies, rulers, plebiscites, and prisons. Governments learn from experience, from each other, and from other institutions. The institution of elections can be traced to ancient Rome, Greece or even earlier (Keane 2009). Modern welfare states were modeled on the German system of social insurance, which in turn was based on mutual-aid societies created by craft guilds of the late Middle Ages that informed Bismarck's Health Insurance Bill (1883), statutory accident insurance (1884) and pensions (1889), including its principles of solidarity, subsidiarity, and co-determination. Another example is the way the Chinese Government of Deng Xiaoping exhorted Communist Party cadres to learn from Singapore's model of development, which combined entrepreneurship, foreign investment, a strong state, one party rule and subtle repression to promote economic growth (Buckley 2015). China's rulers also learnt from the fall of the Soviet Union that relaxing political control could lead to chaos and decline.

People experiment and adapt institutions to meet changing conditions and beliefs, according to their understanding, power and ability. Whenever a government creates a new post or department to meet a newly perceived need, they modify their model. When they change their way of doing something, by creating social insurance, opening markets, putting services out to tender, or establishing participatory budgeting and deliberative assemblies, they develop new models of government.

Social models, whether governments, companies or economies, are social experiments as well as embodiments of knowledge and examples for others. They can be seen as "dynamic social theories" and the social science equivalent of theories in natural science.

Social models as dynamic social theories

In the natural sciences theories provide reliable models of reality that enable people to unlock the power of nature and transform the world. Scientific findings are so consistent they enable people to drive vehicles on Mars over thirty million miles away. They enable companies to mass produce smartphones that access vast quantities of information at the touch of a screen.

It is hard for social science to develop theoretical models that can be consistently relied on because society is constantly changing. Theories of society influence people to change behavior, so that they cease to be relevant over time, like fading organizational charts.

The nearest thing to a reliable model in society is an institution, a pattern of behavior repeated over time and replicated in different contexts to achieve roughly similar outcomes. Because people have agency and are not autonoma, their institutions create and incorporate new knowledge to meet changing circumstances or purposes. Nevertheless, institutional behaviors and structures are more persistent than the beliefs which guide them. The continuities of form and function from ancient temples through synagogues, churches and mosques to the secular Sunday Assembly facilitate social cohesion, mutual support, personal relationships and the transmission of beliefs, even although actual beliefs vary greatly. Similarly, many structures of government from medieval England, Tsarist Russia, and Imperial China persist in their modern successors, although their theories of government have changed radically. Britain, in turn, provided a model of parliamentary democracy for many former colonies, which now work together on a new model of international cooperation through the Commonwealth. Meanwhile, the once warring states of Europe are experimenting with another model of transnational cooperation, building on older models of law, states, diplomacy, currency, and representative assemblies. The European Union in turn is a model for the African Union (Babarinde 2007).

Institutions are social models that can be replicated, refined, or scaled up, to provide similar functions in many different societies, or adapted to achieve different outcomes. They are, in other words, like proto scientific theories. The knowledge embodied in every institution is tested daily by social reality—a process that is rarely rigorous or scientific but a rough and ready empiricism.

Over the centuries people have developed countless methods to collect data and improve the performance of institutions. Governments developed accounting, writing and record keeping thousands of years ago to keep track of taxes and population. Statistics originated as the science of statehood. Modern governments are more systematic in collecting and analyzing data about their performance to improve outcomes of their model. Businesses are even more

rigorous in collecting data, testing and developing their model in competition with others. Aspiring entrepreneurs study case studies and business models because they provide a template - like a theory - of how to achieve their objectives.

Every social model can be seen as a 'dynamic social theory', equivalent to a theory in the natural sciences, that embodies a great deal of knowledge about how to do something in society. Apparently successful models are imitated or adapted by others who want similar outcomes, as the Chinese government did by studying Singapore in the 1980s, and many countries do by studying China's model of development.

Social models in the philosophy of science

The idea that institutions (social models) embody theories recalls Karl Popper's observation that "organic structures are theory-incorporating as well as problem-solving structures". He wrote "practical problems arise because something has gone wrong, because of some unexpected event. But this means that the organism, whether man or amoeba, has previously adjusted itself (perhaps ineptly) to its environment, by evolving some expectation, or some other structure (say, an organ). Yet such an adjustment is the preconscious form of developing a theory; and since any practical problem arises relative to some adjustment of this kind, practical problems are, essentially, imbued with theories." (133)

Institutions are natural experiments, learning in response to problems and opportunities, imbued with everyday knowledge and preconscious theories about how to solve problems. They are also purposeful, striving to survive, multiply and flourish in their social environment. An institution may not be the best "theory" (most aren't), but it can be improved or superseded if people do things differently or want different outcomes.

The implication of seeing social models (institutions) as 'dynamic social theories' is that it means helping citizens to improve their models of government should be a central task for political science, just as improving theories of quantum computing is for physics, or developing better models of public health or more effective cures is for physicians.

Real-time social models

Academic research into institutions rarely influences their outcomes. As sociologists Lindblom and Cohen observed, many professional social scientists "go on writing and talking as though they were making a contribution to the solution [of social problems]. The effect is often to introduce distraction or noise into problem solving—a positive obstruction to social problem solving" (1979: 88). In fact, "Much of the world's work of problem solving is accomplished not through PSI [Professional Social Inquiry] but through ordinary knowledge, through social learning, and through interactive problem solving." (91).

The problem is that our model of social science is inadequate. As Ricci commented, "political science does not conclusively point the way to a good society" and "the scholarly community seem unable to generate a product capable of providing the nation with all the political knowledge it needs." (1984: 20) With notable exceptions this remains true today.

Political science could do a great deal more to enhance and improve the wide range of ordinary knowledge used by citizens, civil servants, commentators, policy-makers and politicians to govern our increasingly fractious and complex global society. To do this, scholars need to engage more directly with problems people seek to solve and work with the many different forms of ordinary knowledge people use to bring about the outcomes they want.

As Ricci observed, "in democratic politics it is a matter of widespread participation in the formulation of the ultimate product that counts. For in a democracy it is the public which, through discussion and election, must continually engage in the business of constructing new political artifacts - i.e., new policies, new institutions, new rights, new habits, and more. It follows that whatever special knowledge or insight political scientists acquire can be maximally useful only if transmitted to society as an intelligible element in the sort of debate that free men [and women] have always conducted on public affairs." (1984: 300)

Layers of analysis in social models

People use many different kinds of knowledge to understand, influence or run institutions (social models). For simplicity, these different kinds of knowledge can be separated into eight or nine categories of analysis. These can be seen as layers within a real-time model (see Fig. 4). Professional social inquiry, such as

political science, is only one of these (the 6th layer). It may inform other layers when used up by practitioners, educators or mainstream media. By understanding how people integrate these different forms of knowledge into particular real-time models, social science can improve social problem solving, as Lindblom and Cohen advocated.

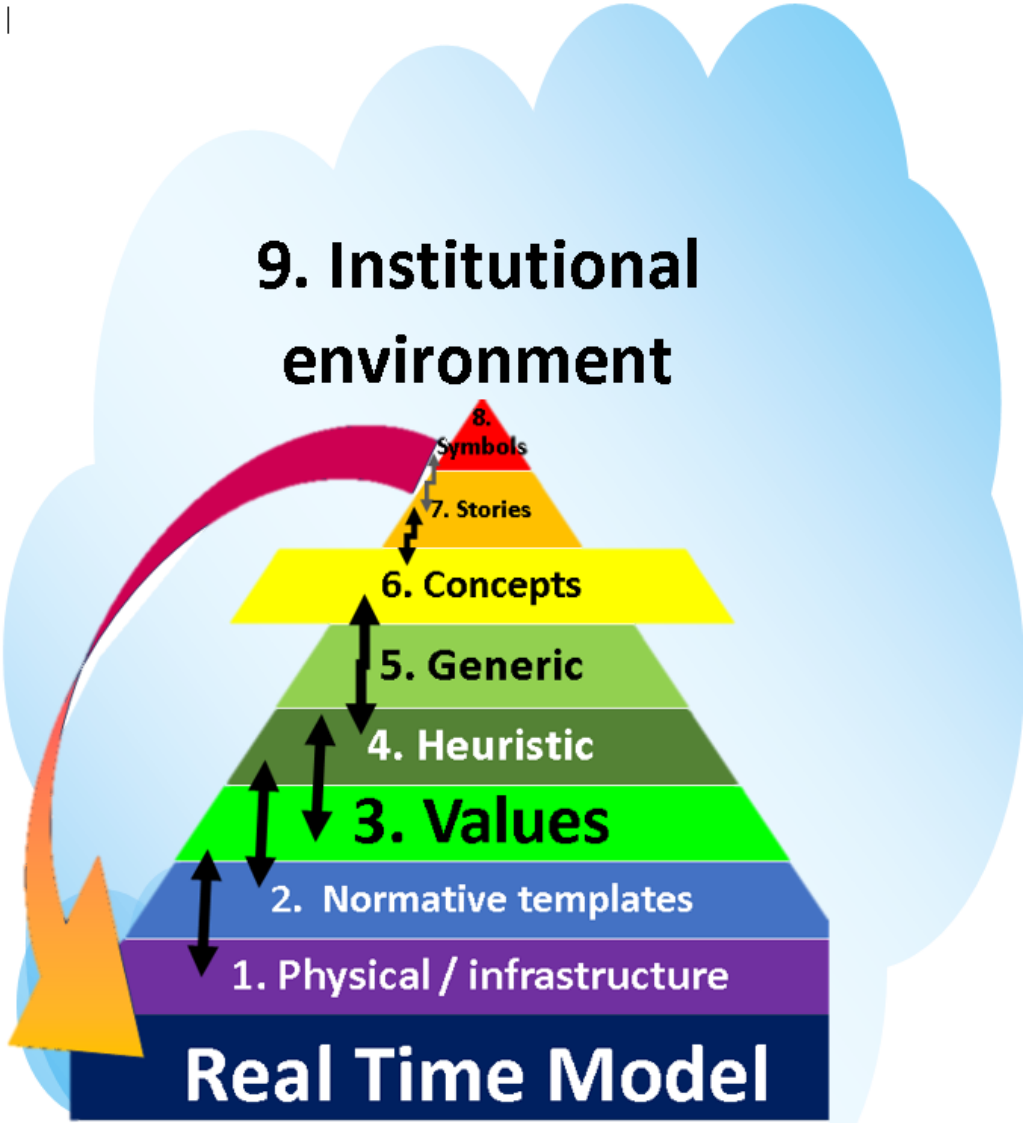

Fig. 4: Real-time social models involve nine layers of analysis that blend into and inform each other to bring about their outcomes (from Alexander 2023) *Unwrapping the McDonald's Model: An Introduction to Dynamic Social Theory,* in *The Journal of American Culture*, September 2023.

Institutions are complex, but no more than a human body, which embodies 3.7 billion years of evolution in its DNA, cells and organs. Physicians study the many different systems used by the body to regulate itself, relate with others, and interact with its environment. Physicians also use many different forms of

intervention to promote public health and cure disease, helping individuals and public authorities to increase wellbeing and life expectancy. Political scientists can take a similar approach to the health of democracy.

Unwrapping layers of a social model

Real-time models are the institutions we inhabit and see around us. Many have been around for centuries, or even millennia, transmitting patterns of behavior, methods, values, and knowledge across generations. Farms, markets, places of worship, and states are ancient institutions that people have replicated and developed over centuries. While some structures persist for centuries, institutions change and adapt to deal with social reality as people see it. Their current reality includes the experiences, emotions, aspirations and beliefs of the people involved, as well as their relationships with wider society and the knowledge, skills, processes, routines that make it work, as outlined below.

Literature, philosophy and social science provide extensive insights into the nature of institutions, but human agency and technological change can disrupt apparent certainties. “Reality” television, social media, and wealth enabled Donald Trump to disrupt and potentially destroy the American political system. Meanwhile Artificial Intelligence, big data, and other innovations are transforming familiar social models. Real-time models therefore need to be observed in action to fully understand what is happening.

Consciously or unconsciously, each real-time model integrates complex bodies of knowledge to achieve its outcomes, intended and unintended, building on foundations developed over millennia. The following sections outline nine forms of knowledge that inform most institutions, presented as layers for simplicity:

1) **Physical infrastructure** shapes behavior and perceptions. Buildings like the Whitehouse, 10 Downing Street, Tiananmen Square, and the Kremlin, play a significant role in politics. A physical forum, town hall, state border or prison embodies beliefs and knowledge about what a state does. When people with power change their ideas about the institution - whether rulers, voters or mass movements - they change its physical embodiments, replacing castles and palaces with parliaments and government offices, for example. But the physical reality often survives changes in rhetoric as the old model

dons new clothes. Presidents replace emperors, perpetuating ancient behaviors behind new facades.

2) **Normative models** are the templates, formulae, methods, mantras, checklists, career structures, and strategic plans used to guide real-time models. In politics they include written constitutions, laws, codes of conduct, guidance and informal rules of thumb used to inform everyday conduct as well as crisis management. Normative models may be based on an ideal or on best practice based on other real-time models, but these are often unreliable. Stated norms may be out-of-date, inaccurate, or deliberately misleading, deflecting attention from where power is exercised. An institution may survive by bribing officials, cheating users, and other forbidden activities that don't appear in any handbook but are established norms difficult to eradicate. Normative models often have the most significant role in replicating and improving outcomes of real-time models. Changing a procedure, developing new norms, creating a checklist, or introducing regulations can have large-scale, long-term impact on outcomes, which social research can help to identify and improve.

3) **Values** are the "know why" of societies, institutions and individuals, expressing their purpose and aspirations. Values can be powerful drivers of behavior, leading people to achieve extraordinary feats or commit terrible deeds. Like norms, actual values may be very different from those professed (Schein 2016). People have inconsistent and unconscious values, so values within societies and institutions are even more diverse. When the values of individuals and their institution are aligned they can achieve remarkable things.

4) **Heuristic models:** Wise leaders use projections, scenarios, feasibility studies and other heuristic models when planning a new policy. *Heuristics*, from the ancient Greek "to find," are experiential methods for discovery, problem solving, or understanding a new situation. They often use a combination of data and experience together with metaphors, stories or drawings to find underlying patterns, meanings, and possibilities. Scenario planning, strategic foresight, games, simulations are just a few of the many heuristic methods used by people who run organizations to analyze their social environment, anticipate events, identify threats and opportunities to plan for the future.

Heuristic models are also widely used to advocate alternative ways of doing things by critics, social commentators and pressure groups.

5) **Generic models** are a distillation of lessons from real-time models, widely used in business by aspiring entrepreneurs and corporate leaders. They are less prominent in politics, partially because business is intrinsically simpler and it is harder to apply political models from one context to another. Mrs Thatcher's model of privatization, the 'Scandinavian model of political economy', the Soviet model, the 'public health approach to reducing violence' or 'Portuguese model for decriminalizing drugs' have all been used as generic models by various governments.

   Good generic models can increase people's ability to shape society. For a discussion of models in the public sector, see Lane or Osborne *et al*. Non-profits use Theories of Change, social marketing, community organizing, or *ad hoc* models (Brest; Wendt; Brennan). Comparative studies such as *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (2012) by Daron Acemoglu and James Robinson provide a compelling argument for the benefits of certain institutional arrangements, thus providing a generic model for good governance - in this case based on a fifth layer of analysis:

6) **Conceptual models** (theories)**:** Participants in politics draw on many theoretical models, including economics, finance, their particular priorities, political communication, and philosophy. Academics, businesses, campaigners, journalists, and think tanks all use and produce conceptual models from different perspectives. Most institutions draw on theoretical models from their own traditions, religious, political, organizational or cultural. To be useful, conceptual models must inform the actions of practitioners, policymakers, investors, customers, or citizens. This is often achieved through one of the most powerful forms of representation of all, stories.

7) **Stories**: Politicians and campaigners communicate through stories to tap into people's emotion and convey notions of identity, agency, and belonging. Slogans such as 'Homes fit for Heroes' (Lloyd George after WWI in 1919), 'Make America Great Again' (Trump), 'Take Back Control' (Brexit), or 'Net Zero' (climate change) are micro stories used to build public support for a larger narrative. Complex political or economic ideas are often reduced to

short stories or slogans, such as class struggle (Marxism), let markets decide, competition drives progress (neoliberalism) or 'my country right or wrong' (nationalism). Stories are also an essential tool of organizational development, distilling knowledge into memorable narratives. Organizations with effective champions and good stories spread more widely than those which lack champions and stories.

Social scientists have long studied and understood the nature of stories (e.g. Czarniawska; Gabriel; Gelman and Basbøll). The lesson is that social scientists need to tell better stories about research findings to help people create improve their practice and social models

8) **Symbols** such as flags, badges, crowns, logos, ceremonies, etc., play a significant role in politics. Placards, raised fists, occupations and sit-ins are traditional symbols of protest, joined by the pride flag, taking the knee, and #hashtags. More recently campaigners have developed the use of awards, certification and kite marks as instruments of social change. In academia, degree classification, mortar board, graduation gown, titles, and citation scores all contribute to the status of university as the apex of education.

9) Finally, people who run institutions study their **institutional environment** as a ninth layer of analysis. The actions of regulators, funders, media, competitors, and other agencies have a direct influence, so all institutions have methods for monitoring and engaging with them.

All nine layers are wrapped up in each real-time model, which people may change in unpredictable ways. People use whatever knowledge, abilities and power they have to adapt institutions or create new ones to meet their needs and aspirations.

Implications for social science

Recognizing institutions as the equivalent of theories in the natural sciences means that social scientists need to prioritize work that enables people to improve the ability of institutions to achieve better outcomes for society, because the most effective institutions embody the most advanced knowledge in and of society. Many businesses, governments and nonprofits use social research to achieve their objectives better, but it has much lower status in academic circles, as the eminent social scientist Henry W. Riecken observed:

“The prestige which most social scientists attach to academic social science may or may not be justified but it is a fact. The low status of applied work is probably undeserved, but it too is a fact” (1969).

This raises many questions about who decides what are the most desirable outcomes and what methods are acceptable for achieving them. These questions apply to all scientific work, but are largely obscured by veils of academic detachment across the priorities of funding bodies, university departments, publications, and personal careers. As Alexander argues in *Political Science and the Democratic Method* (2021), democracy itself is a method for setting social priorities, in which scientists participate as citizens. In authoritarian societies priorities are set by rulers and ruling parties.

Better democracies should lead to better social science, which in turn should improve democracy. This thesis is testable and is being tested in both authoritarian and democratic societies. The results may be seen in measures of life satisfaction, healthy lifespan, ecological sustainability, crime, violence and social wellbeing.

Social and political sciences have produced extensive research about how to reduce crime, violence and poverty, or to improve democracy, education, and almost every area of life, but much of it is inaccessible to people who could use it to improve the human condition. To make use of this treasure trove of research, the social science community needs to radically review and reorientate the way that it works.

A key area is to improve the methods used by institutions to monitor and develop their work by collaborating with practitioners and policymakers on

- **Systems for collecting, analyzing and using data to improve performance**: modern institutions collect and analyze vast amounts of data about finance, services and users to meet requirements of funders, regulators, politicians, marketing or public relations. Data is usually collected for narrow institutional purposes and compliance with external rules rather than systematic research to improve outcomes. Governments also use data and funding formulae to allocate resources, without systematically using the flow of information to improve institutional performance and social outcomes. Work with practitioners

and decision-makers could improve the systematic use of data and feedback for organizations to achieve better outcomes.

- **Objectivity in decision-making:** institutions use systematic forms of detachment to improve decision-making, such as auditors, boards of government, consultants, ethics committees, feasibility studies and other measures. Societies also create many different forms of external scrutiny to improve the performance of institutions, such as complaints mechanisms, courts, judges, juries, journalists, inspectors, regulators, indices, due-diligence and many more. Researchers could do more to help people improve these decision-making processes.
- **Development and dissemination of reflective practices** such as After Action Review, coaching, evaluation, post-legislative scrutiny, solution-focus, etc., to improve everyday experiments by institutions. Aristotle's concept of practical knowledge (phronesis), John Dewey's practical epistemologies, Greory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind,* Systems Thinking, Action Science (Argyris et al,1985) and Vygotsky's work on meaning making are useful in this context (1934; 1978) .
- **Comparative studies** to identify and analyze different institutional models and practices, such as the work of Pippa Norris, Arend Lijphart, Hall and Soskice on *Varieties of Capitalism* (2001), Acemoglu and Robinson on *Why Nations Fail* (2012), or Kathleen Thelen's *Varieties of Liberalization and the New Politics of Social Solidarity* (2014).
- **Test alternative models:** analysis of how to deal with specific social issues, from community safety and health promotion to democratic systems and global governance.
- **Systematically identify, improve, disseminate and apply knowledge of "what works"**. There are justifiable critiques of how "what works" has been used (Biesta, 2007), but practitioners and policy makers can learn from centers[1] and scholars (Bretschneider et al 2004; Bardach2000; Veselý, 2011) that distill and share practice in different sectors.

[1] eg Evidence Based Education, Centre for Effective Global Action (CEGA) at the University of California, Berkeley; Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) at MIT; NICE, the UK National Institute for Health Care and Excellence; New Philanthropy Capital (NPC), a think tank and consultancy for the social sector;

- **Improve public knowledge:** Citizens, policymakers, and practitioners rely on knowledge to inform decisions, but much of it is distorted for commercial, ideological, political, religious or other purposes, leading to poor decisions. Social science could make a major contribution to improving the quality of public information and debate. Bastow et al describe (2014) how findings in social sciences percolate into use through news media, books, consultants, management training, think tanks, pressure groups and popular culture, as well as academic services to business and government. This means understanding, developing and using the array of methods to communicate and work with the users, staff and governors of institutions to improve the quality and reliability of everyday knowledge.
- **Evaluate** the institutional practices of political science and higher education itself.

These activities follow the tradition of reformers who set up the London School of Economics, Chicago School of Economics and many policy centers, but current incentives to publish peer reviewed papers means there are fewer resources for the more demanding, less glamorous and unpredictable work of assisting citizens, practitioners and politicians to develop better institutions. Peer reviewed papers have a place in evaluating the development and impact of work on social models and natural experiments, as part of the deeper social learning process. But the proof of social research is demonstrated through outcomes sustained over time, not assessment by peers.

Part 3 considers a range of institutional models in higher education that assist humanity's experiment to create more effective democratic governance. But first it is worth looking at the different levels at which social models can be improved.

Levels of social models (scale)

Social models exist at all levels, from voting booths, ceremonies and conferences to states, transnational corporations and global governance. Lower levels are nested within higher levels with varying degrees of autonomy and influence on other levels. Table 1 is a rough sketch of different levels of institutions, which may need revision. Boundaries between them may be fuzzy. There is a case for analyzing distinctive behaviors and features of structures at

each level (e.g. Abrutyn 2009, 2014). The main purpose of this table is simply to note that social models range from the very small to planet-wide. Networks, regimes and systemic levels have a different quality from other institutions, but they also have identifiable features and rules that govern their behavior.
Real-time models within each category have varying abilities to achieve their purpose, which can be improved through social research, training, behavior change, organizational development and other interventions.

	Level	Description	Example: formal	informal
1	Nano	Behavioral norms & customs, memes	Handshake, bow, etiquette, wearing a headscarf, hijab or clerical collar	Queue, deference, toast,
2	Micro	rituals, routines, checklists, organizational methods	Hippocratic oath, Marriage, burial, job interview processes, election procedures, pedagogic methods	Play, games, yoga, dieting, counting calories
3	Mini	Organizational units (also within entities)	course, conference, project, department,	Team, crowd, nuclear family, Household,
4	Midi	entities	business, school, hospital, university	social movements, village
5	Network	Reciprocal or mutual relationship connecting entities	research network, umbrella body, business or professional association, franchise,	Extended family, Community of practice, old school tie, alumni, organized crime
6	Meso	Intermediate institution,	regulatory body, Ofsted, big business, local government, public service,	Town, City,
7	Macro	Large scale, national institutions	National government, NHS, army	mafia, ramblers association
8	Supra	Global governance, transnational corporations	UN, World Bank, NATO, catholic church, transnational company, Airbnb, Uber	Faith community, Facebook, Twitter
9	Regime	Rules governing an institutional environment	Varieties of capitalism, communism,apartheid, financial system, criminal justice systems,	
10	Systemic	Underlying causal relationship between entities	Market economy, nation states, science,	Class, corruption
11	Deep	Fundamental	gender roles, markets, money, hierarchy, patriarchy, property,	caste, gender relations

12	Physical	Infrastructure of institutions at each level	Stonehenge, field, farm, roads, harbor, pier, cathedrals, dwellings, water/sewage system	Trails, internet,,

Levels are a rough distinction between patterns of behavior at different scales.

Improving a real-time model at one level can influence and improve other levels, so that a good course programme can enhance a department or college, which in turn can improve a neighborhood, city or country. Part 3 outlines examples of different levels of learning for democracy.

Political science and social models

The central argument of this paper is that social models (institutions) embody collective understanding of how to do things in society. Social scientists therefore need to work more closely with citizens to improve the ability of institutions to bring about the outcomes people want or need. Conceptual models are only one of several forms of knowledge used to run institutions, and often the least influential in practice.

Political scientists have a professional as well as civic responsibility to assist their fellow citizens in creating the most effective institutions for democratic governance and in using them to achieve the best possible outcomes for society. This does not mean abandoning respect for evidence and the search for truth in human affairs - on the contrary. Impartial and dispassionate analysis of evidence is essential for our collective understanding and ability to act effectively. It would also be unwise for the profession to become embroiled in partisan politics. However, just as health scientists acted when the evidence about the harmfulness of pesticides, tobacco, sugar, and fossil fuels became overwhelming, political scientists need to act on the suppression of democratic norms, emergence of dictatorship, and existential risks to humanity.

The central argument of this paper is that social models (institutions) embody collective understanding of how to do things in society, and that social scientists can help to improve social outcomes by working on the forms of knowledge used by institutions to achieve their aims.

Aristotle, one of the earliest writers on political philosophy, proposed that the ultimate purpose of human life is *eudaimonia*, meaning well-being, happiness, and flourishing. He wrote that the purpose of the state is to provide the conditions under which all its citizens can flourish. These aims are echoed in the American Declaration of Independence and Constitution, the United Nations Charter, Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and many other

constitutions. It is not unreasonable to see these as fundamental to the mission of political science, just as physicians have a responsibility for helping people stay healthy

In other words, the task of political scientists is to help people improve their institutions and achieve better outcomes by consciously working on real time models and the many layers of analysis they use, not just the conceptual (layer 6). In the language of this paper, political science can help citizens improve their dynamic social theories of democracy to achieve better outcomes. Part 3 summarizes a broad approach to tackling democratic deficits then outlines existing models of education for democracy at different levels.

Part 3: Improving education for democracy

To help citizens improve democracy and achieve better outcomes, political scientists can diagnose problems and advocate solutions, drawing on current knowledge and undertaking research where necessary. In this context Pippa Norris's general model of democratic deficits (Fig. 5) and five dimensions of system support provide a robust framework for developing support for citizens to improve their models of democratic governance (2011; 1999a).

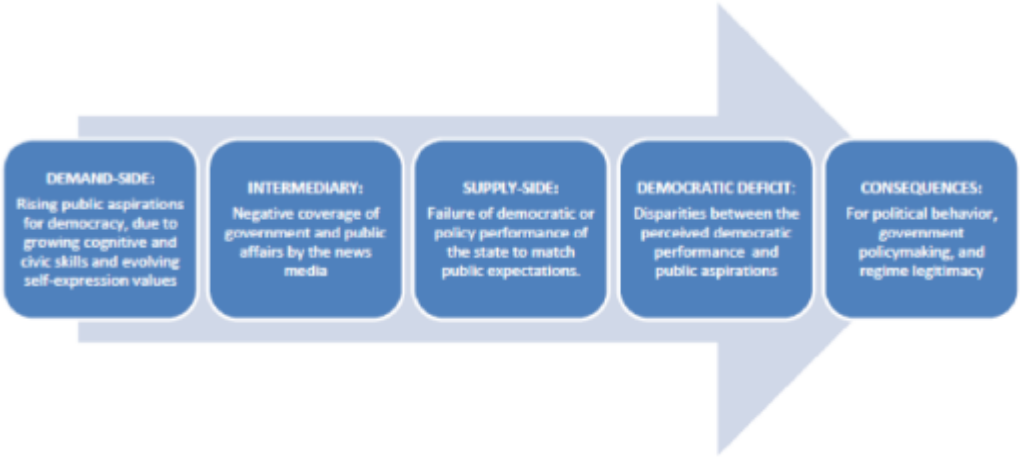

Fig 5. Norris's general model of democratic deficits

According to Norris, "*the democratic deficit can be explained by the interaction of rising expectations, negative news, and failing performance"* (2011:5). Norris concludes *"the democratic deficit has important consequences – including for political activism, for allegiant forms of political behavior and the rule of law,*

and ultimately for processes of democratization' (italics in original). … Overall it appears that closing the democratic deficit is therefore largely about strengthening processes of democracy and the actual quality of governance so the performance meets rising citizen expectations." (2011:245).

Norris's model describes three broad areas for action:

1) **demand side** factors, including community development and social action;
2) **intermediate** factors relating to political communication and social learning;
3) **supply side** factors, to address constitutional inequalities of power and improve the policy performance of democratic governments and their institutions.

The following sections explore each of these three areas, to suggest where better social models could strengthen democratic processes and the quality of governance through civic education and engagement.

Demand side: Supporting citizens' engagement in democratic governance

Norris summarizes many of the factors that contribute to "public aspirations toward democratic ideals, values, and principles, or the demand for democracy" (236). In particular, "*educational levels, self-expression values, social trust, and associational activism all help to predict higher democratic aspirations. Only the effects of education, however, actually widen the democratic deficit"* (243). This highlights the importance of 'enlightened democratic knowledge' (143, 152, 163, 244), which is "significantly strengthened at a macro-level by longer historical experiences of democratic governance" and at the micro-level by "cognitive skills and knowledge derived from education as well as access to news media information" (244). A concerted effort is needed to strengthen models of civic and political education to enable *everyone* to develop the necessary skills and knowledge, particularly people most dissatisfied with the current system, so that they can make the system work better for them. For democracy to flourish, political literacy needs to be as widespread as the ability to speak, read and write.

Civic education can learn from other disciplines such as health promotion, agricultural extension, participatory action research, participatory action research and community organizing, among others. These approaches start from where people are and work with local communities to bring about change from the outside in, rather than the top-down approaches of most models of organizational change. These methods are informed by a profound commitment to enabling all citizens to have an effective voice in society.

However, none of these are sufficient to provide civic education at scale. Here we can learn from Scandinavian Folk High Schools and study circles, which had a formative role in their national identities as social democratic nation states (Nordvall 2009). These models have been adapted in other countries on a much smaller scale, such as Highlander (Toiviainen 1995) and Everyday Democracy in the US. Another model of civic education at scale is Germany's Federal Agency for Civic Education, which promotes awareness and participation in democratic politics from preschool to adult education.

Intermediate factors: develop the social ecology of knowledge

Civic education is not enough. It needs to be accompanied with activities that foster social trust, civic organizations and reliable news media that foster critical thinking, challenge falsehood and provide accessible, accurate and authoritative evidence on problems. This is a huge task.

It means counteracting the torrent of misinformation, lies, and toxic memes that undermine trust and pollute politics, by fostering dialogue and mutual understanding without creating thought police. South Africa's Truth Commission and Germany's investment in education for democracy have some lessons from which to learn. It also means supporting local news outlets, discussion groups, study circles and adult education to share reliable information and develop pluralistic civic cultures.

We need to strengthen the **social ecology of knowledge** to enable citizens, policymakers, and practitioners to use research better. Universities could become "intelligence services for democracy" (Alexander 2016: 147). This means understanding, developing and using the array of methods to work with users, staff and governors of institutions to involve citizens in

- Setting the agenda and topics for action and research

- Involving potential users in the design, development and dissemination of findings
- Monitoring and evaluating outcomes to create cycles of continuous learning and development.

Academia has a privileged role in the ecology of organizations that fund, create and use knowledge. Most people rely on their experience, personal networks, social media and mass media to understand what is happening. In *The Impact of The Social Sciences: How academics and their research make a difference* (2014) Bastow *et al.*describe how findings in social sciences percolate into use through news media, books, consultants, management training, think tanks, pressure groups and popular culture, as well as academic services to business and government. To have impact, social scientists need to embrace more accessible forms of communication.

Supply side: Improving the effectiveness of institutions as social models

Perhaps the biggest challenges are **supply side factors**, to address constitutional inequalities of power and improve the policy performance of democratic governments and their institutions.

Learning from models of civic and political education

The following section identifies nine levels at which scholars and citizens can improve learning for democracy, with examples to show what is possible, where to find lessons, and potential allies. They suggest a spiral of engagement, starting with initiatives any student or teacher can take, working outwards through pedagogical practices, course programmes, issue-based partnerships, brokerage between communities and academics, university-wide models, to collaborative networks and the whole system.

1) Symbolic acts and social practices

The simplest and most direct way to promote education for democratic politics is through small, repeated social practices that **increase people's sense of agency** as members of a learning community. This starts with the image an education provider projects to attract learners and promote its role in society. How people join its community shows who is welcome, what is valued, expectations, norms, and how to take part. The smallest acts convey compliance and conformity, or inspire people to think for themselves, question

assumptions, seek reliable evidence, be open to challenge, curious about opposing views, and make a difference in the world. Symbolic actions, such as displaying flags, singing the national anthem, displaying or removing statues, or gay pride rainbow affirm or challenge beliefs, norms, and values. Symbolic acts and their underpinning codes of conduct are opportunities for political education.

Set-piece events like a public lecture, inaugural speech, prize giving, graduation ceremony, commencement address, and countless routines reinforce traditions or give new meaning and direction to an institution. Controversies over statues, free speech and identity are opportunities to review collective values and how they are communicated. Authoritarian regimes revel in awards, ceremonies, medals, and parades because autocrats know the power of symbolic action. Challenging and changing symbolic practices are forms of political education that create gateways to more far-reaching change.

2) Pedagogical practices, teachable moments and course enrichment

The next level is to develop political competence through **empowering pedagogical practices** in almost any subject. These include:

- enabling students to share experiences, thoughts, and feelings about the subject at the start, and connect on an authentic, human level.
- starting courses with questions and critical inquiry (what Paulo Freire called conscientization) rather than authoritative answers from established authors, whether critics or exponents.
- electing class representatives and devils' advocates.
- using buzz groups, study buddies, huddles, affinity groups, peer coaching, mentoring, and action learning sets to deepen understanding.
- exploring subjects in their social, political, and historical context.
- showing respect for evidence, analysis, experience, and arguments from different perspectives.
- inviting activists, elected representatives and practitioners to speak where relevant.
- basing assignments on real-life problems, projects or community service to learn how to apply knowledge.

- creating communities of practice beyond the university.
- twinning with learners in the local community or abroad.
- making time for reflection, evaluation, and feedback at the end of every lesson, lecture, and course programme.
- building systematic evaluation using Kirkpatrick's Four Levels Evaluation Model (2006) or specialized methods (Tamkin, Yarnall and Kerrin 2002; Torney-Purta *et al* 2015) to estimate impact and improve provision.

These practices develop confidence, a sense of agency, and skills of inquiry, communication, leadership, and teamwork, essential for effective citizenship.

Teachable moments are opportunities to learn practical politics in any context, often informal and unplanned. For example, whenever someone

- asks a question or makes an open-ended comment about an issue or conflict, you can stimulate curiosity or suggest a line of inquiry about how to tackle it.
- says it is impossible to change something, they are powerless or afraid, you can find out why, explore what they want to change, and pathways to it.
- notices a power dynamic or conflict, you can highlight different interests at play, possible scenarios, or routes to a resolution.

If people say something prejudiced or ignorant, encourage learning by asking questions:

- Do you really mean it (could you rephrase it)?
- What is your evidence, where is it from?
- Have you checked its reliability and looked at other sources?
- Have you considered … (a counter example)?Lagerspetz, Mikko (2021). 'The Grievance Studies Affair' Project: Reconstructing and Assessing the Experimental Design". *Science, Technology, & Human Values*. **46** (2): 402–424. doi:10.1177/0162243920923087.
- Put yourself in the opposite position.

Challenging ignorant, racist, or hateful views and behaviors is necessary for learning, but it is also important to respect the person, since blame, shame and

censure are usually counter-productive. This differs from conventional political arguments, in which both sides entrench their views and learn little. Discussing differences in respectful ways can deepen understanding and uncover common ground, but requires skill and experience.

Learning opportunities also arise from engagement with the many dimensions of oppression, such as class, gender, race, and sexuality. These are contentious issues on many campuses, as well as established in courses and research on cultural studies, Marxism, sociology, and what have been described as 'grievance studies' (Lagerspetz 2021; Pluckrose et al 2018; Pluckrose and Lindsay 2020). These issues can lead people to adopt a righteous orthodoxy that silences alternative views and insists on certain beliefs and behaviors. Challenging sexism, racism and exclusion has a vital role in improving society, but academic preoccupation with oppression can be a symbolic alternative to substantive action. Discussion between contrary views helps to deepen understanding, so it is important to create safe spaces for serious disagreement over difficult issues. The following questions can help:

1. What are the benefits of your position on this issue for you?
2. How do you feel and react when you are told to think or behave in a certain way?
3. If you held (an opposing point of view) or did (objectionable action), what would change your mind or persuade you to behave differently?
4. Where in the world has this issue been addressed effectively and what can we learn from it? What evidence is there for actions or policies that make a difference to this issue in practice?

These intensely political issues are often very personal and difficult to deal with. They are attacked as woke, political correctness, or identity politics by people who feel threatened by them, or to gain electoral advantage. Understanding action and reaction is a core political skill that can be explored through dialogue, roleplay and project work.

Course enrichment means exploring social purpose, values, interest groups, history, power relationships, funding, and institutional dynamics within any subject area, as well as questions about 'decolonising the curriculum', gender

biases, and diverse perspectives (Page, 2017). It also means finding meaningful opportunities to develop experience through social engagement.

3) Course programmes

Most courses in advocacy, campaigning, practical politics and social change are outside academia, but provision is steadily growing in response to demand. A good course is life-changing, but creating one requires considerable ability to navigate academic labyrinths as well as skills and knowledge to meet learners' needs. A hospitable institution, supportive allies, and community of practice, as described in 7) below, are invaluable.

There will always be questions whether universities can support action-oriented courses. Professor Alberto Alemanno's courses in lobbying for citizens at HEC in Paris are now run through The Good Lobby, a non-profit. His book, Lobbying for Change: Find Your Voice to Create a Better Society (2017), is an excellent guide for anyone who wants to run a campaign and useful course material. When creating a new course programme it is best to start with short courses like this, to work with external partners, and join a community of practice to draw on experience, skills, and support from outside the institution.

Types of courses can be loosely described in relation to the four levels of politics outlined above, or politics within a policy area. Starting from the bottom up these are:

A. Educational support for the least powerful

Creating courses to address issues facing the least powerful is difficult for institutions designed by and for the most privileged participants in education. Historically most provision developed outside higher education, such as the workers education movement in Europe, Citizenship Schools to support civil rights in the US, and popular education in Latin America. The university settlement movement (Berry 1986) and extramural education are part of a progressive tradition to develop education with the least fortunate in society. Perhaps the closest equivalent today are courses in community organizing, such as Citizens UK Community Leadership Training for social justice, accredited by Newman University, which educate community leaders to build neighborhood power.

B. Civic education, community engagement, and political literacy

The largest area of provision is generic civic education and support for people to develop confidence, skills and knowledge to take part in civic life. Many dedicated educators have produced a wide range of resources. Rutgers University website *Teaching Civic Engagement* offers 'how to guides', with interactive platforms for educators preparing students to participate in democracy, with companion volumes from the American Political Science Association(2013; 2017; 2021). The Civic Engagement Research Group at University of California Riverside conducts research, develops resources, and promotes equitable political participation. Educating for American Democracy is a collaboration among academics, historians, political scientists, educators, and students to support civic learning.

With these resources, universities have no excuse not to offer students and citizens courses in democratic citizenship.

C. Challenging: political skills, strategies and methods

Generic civic and political education overlaps with courses that have a more explicit focus on equipping people to bring about social change. Scott Myers-Lipton, Professor of Sociology at San José State University, California, has taught students to take part in social justice campaigns since 2006. Lessons from this are in his *CHANGE: A student Guide to Social Action* (2017) and *A Guide to Teaching Social Action* (2021). His work informs the Social Action Course Initiative, a community of practice network in over 65 colleges. Similarly, experience from the 'Advocacy for Policy Change' course at Brandeis University in 2009/10 is shared by over 50 US higher education institutions through ENACT, Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation. A few British universities now offer courses, such as the BA in Social Change at Essex, an MSC on Political Activism and Campaigning at Aberdeen, and Power, Participation and Social Change MA at Sussex.

D. Governing and civic roles

Courses such as Politics, Philosophy and Economics (PPE), Masters in Public Administration (MPA) and Government Studies were traditionally created for students from elite schools aiming for leadership roles in politics or the civil service, but a growing number of institutions are widening their catchment. For example, City University New York (CUNY) MPA has an explicit commitment to a 'social justice leadership practice that is values-driven and inclusive', guided

by a commitment to undo systemic inequity, manage change in the public interest, collaborative problem solving and support for grassroots movements.

E. Politics within a policy area

Courses on how to influence a specific policy area, such as health, international development, and science, are also growing. Peace education and conflict resolution is well-established, with over 60 courses worldwide. Environmental politics is another growth area, with programmes such as Leadership for Sustainability MA at Malmo, Sweden; Environmental Politics BA at Brighton, and Environmental Campaigns and Policymaking: Strategies and Tactics at Yale.

One day most subjects will include modules on how to use knowledge as effective citizens and contribute better to our collective wellbeing.

4) Issue-based centers and partnerships

Many specialist centers bring academics and external experts together, providing expertise, knowledge and support to citizens. However, thousands of academic centers publish research and policy analysis with little impact on outcomes. Engagement with citizens often amounts to public relations. The following seven questions can help to identify whether a center is primarily concerned with furthering academic careers or citizens' ability to resolve social problems:

- **Accessibility**: Are they responsive to the public? Do they engage through events and outreach as well as social media? Are their outputs used by citizens?
- **Inclusivity**: Do they work with the diversity of citizens affected by their issues, including people with disability, disadvantaged or otherwise marginalized?
- **Solution-focus**: Do they focus on finding out what works and helping people bring about solutions, or are they more concerned with analyzing problems and publishing papers?
- **Persistence:** do they work on problems until they are resolved? Many problems take decades to solve, so institutional memory and persistence make a big difference.

- **Capacity**: do they work with other researchers, practitioners, and citizens to achieve the scale necessary to solve problems?
- **Reflexive**: Do they publish lessons from failure and evidence of impact? Do they welcome feedback?
- **Impact:** Above all, do they enable citizens to influence policymakers and outcomes?

Setting up and sustaining a citizen-facing center takes skill and determination, due to institutional pressures to generate income, publish peer-reviewed papers, and show short-term impact, so they sometimes become independent charities to thrive.

Effective issue-based partnerships focus on one or more of the following roles:

A. **Public information**, such as the **Academic Freedom** Monitoring Project, run by Scholars at Risk at New York University (NYU); the Costs of War Project at Brown University; or Participedia, a global crowdsourcing platform for public participation and democratic innovation. Our World in Data and the Global Change Data Lab publish accessible information to make progress against the world's largest problems.

B. **Resource centers**, such as Tools to Change Our World**,** run by the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas.

C. **Research, innovation, development and advocacy (RIDA)**:
   - Stanford's Center for Deliberative Democracy has run more than 100 Citizens' Assemblies and Deliberative Polls across the world to resolve complex issues (Fishkin, 2018).
   - The Nobel prize winning Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) at MIT, develops evidence-informed policy through an international network of professors.

D. **Pro-bono clinics** give students real world experience by providing advice and support to the public under professional supervision, such as innocence projects and clinics in legal education. Very few universities do this, but well-run pro-bono clinics have enormous potential to deepen learning by offering advice on campaigning, debt, environment, housing, planning, welfare, and other problems. As well as providing a direct

benefit to citizens, this helps to identify political issues arising from individual cases.

E. **Convening, hosting and facilitation** is when academics bring stakeholders together to act on an issue, neighborhood, or city (Kuttner *et al,* 2019). For example, in 2021 five higher education institutions of Greater Manchester launched an agreement with the mayor to work on education, skills, jobs, growth, the digital economy, the cultural economy, net zero and inequalities. The Political Literacy Oversight Group (PLOG) supports the UK network of citizenship education providers and All Party Group for Political Literacy, while five universities sponsor the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Climate Change.

F. **Policy development and advocacy** are undertaken by many of these centers.

University-based partnerships can help citizens and practitioners to make informed interventions in public life. Their impact is measured by outcomes rather than papers. Since many issues need large scale engagement to tackle them effectively, centers need to work strategically through collaborative networks, described in 7) below.

5) Brokerage Models

Effective brokerage between citizens and higher education institutions can level the playing field between citizens and industry or government agencies, of which there are many different models:

A. **Community Partnerships**: At least 77 campuses across the US have Civic Engagement Centres. In the UK Brighton's Community University Partnership Programme (CUPP) helps local community, voluntary, social enterprise and statutory organizations develop ideas into projects, offering start-up funding, student volunteers, access to knowledge and communities of practice, and support for evaluation. They enable academics, students and community partners to address local issues, and embed social engagement into teaching and research. Other brokerages include University of East London Civic Engagement, Manchester's Public Engagement Programme. Although most involve

little explicit political education, they share tacit political skills that are potential first steps.

B. **Issue or subject brokers**, such as the Urban Institute in Washington, DC, which promotes well-being of people and places across the US through research into social and economic issues, translating findings for diverse audiences, developing solutions to real-world problems, and sharing them in accessible ways with policymakers to improve decisions that affect people's lives.

C. **Dating Agency Model**: the Scottish Policy and Research Exchange (SPRE) is an independent broker between policymakers and academics, drawing on a network of 27,000 academics. SPRE aims to work with early career scholars and increase the diversity of voices contributing evidence for policy. It also trains researchers on how to provide evidence to policymakers and offers a range of online resources.

Most universities facilitate relationships between academics and policymakers or the media at a senior level, rather than grassroots citizens, perpetuating social divisions. Connecting marginalized, excluded and low-income citizens with relevant researchers is more difficult, but would strengthen their civic role and improve social outcomes.

(6) University-wide models

Many, if not most, universities are commercially oriented, market-driven institutions with legal privileges to accredit learning and be recognised as non-profits. They serve businesses, governments, professionals, and academic communities, including students, rather than citizens or society at large. At best they proclaim a public service mission, run side programmes in civic engagement, and enable a proportion of disadvantaged students to escape from marginalized communities. Many do this well. Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) may be one of the best. Its many centers include the Jameel Poverty Action Lab, mentioned above. Its Climate Portal provides detailed knowledge about the science and policy options, but nothing about learning the political skills needed to solve humanity's most critical issue. Its humanities, arts and social science programmes offer 'great ideas to change the world' with 'power skills' to 'serve the world well' and 'empower professional success'. But 'power skills' do not include politics. Its 'mind and hand' philosophy spurs

real-world engagement to set up innovative businesses rather than strengthen democracy. Like most universities, its excellent learning and research are more likely to perpetuate global inequalities through the corporate and political institutions that fund them.

Liberal universities seriously underestimate the crisis of democracy, risks of authoritarian rule, and dangers of systemic inequality. Despite extensive evidence and analysis of all these issues, much of it produced by tenured scholars, few universities break the mold. Exceptionally, the University of the Western Cape (UWC) became a 'system defying' or 'struggle university' under apartheid in South Africa, providing intellectual, moral, and practical support for resistance following protests by students and the appointment of a coloured rector in 1975. UWC continues to 'Seek racial and gender equality and contribute to helping the historically marginalized participate fully in the life of the nation' as part of its mission. It has a research unit (ACCED) dedicated to 'questions of governance and development from a citizen-centered viewpoint' and 'more inclusive, democratic policies.' This is the most developed example of the 'third mission' of most African universities (Walters & Openjuru, 2014).

Global inequality is greater than in apartheid South Africa as a result of structural inequality in global governance (Alexander, 1996). Africa has 17% of world population, but just 3% of global income, and few representatives in the upper echelons of world politics. Inequality within liberal democracies contributed to the rise of populist nationalists who challenge democratic norms (Norris and Inglehart 2018). In this context, we urgently need 'system defying' universities to increase citizens' ability to have an equal and effective voice in their neighborhood, nation, and global governance.

The Carnegie Foundation's Elective Classification in Community Engagement for American universities provides a detailed framework for universities to assess themselves, but civic and political education are only a small part of it. Universities need to go beyond traditional community engagement by weaving knowledge in the service of citizens into their ethos, pedagogy, programmes and governance. This means elevating the role of 'professors of practice', service learning, and political skills across most subjects. It also means changing incentives in academic careers (Jessani, N.S., *et al* 2020) and being part of wider collaborative networks.

(7) Collaborative networks and professional associations

Collaborative networks enable people to build capacity across institutions and amplify their impact. One of the best ways to develop education in practical politics is to work with others through a relevant network, such as:

- Good Lobby Profs are European academics who provide pro bono analysis, 'rapid response' opinions and support for citizens' lobbying to counter abuse of power, strengthen democracy and human rights.
- ENACT, Educational Network for Active Civic Transformation at Brandeis University, runs non-partisan courses, workshops and mutual support for educators in more than 50 US higher education institutions to engage young people in civic activism for state-level legislative change.
- The American Campus Compact, founded in 1985, aims to promote public purposes of higher education and build democracy. It offers extensive online resources, practical initiatives, professional credentials for community engagement, support for Civic Action Plans, and impact awards to recognize achievement. Its Research University Civic Engagement Network (TRUCEN) shares knowledge and a Engaged Scholarship Toolkit for public scholarship and community-based research.
- The Democracy Commitment (TDC) is a non-partisan network of 100 community colleges serving over 2.5 million students in 27 states dedicated to making democratic skills available to students involved in local, state, and national discourse and action. It also runs a civic network to expand capacity for civic learning and democratic engagement.
- The National Campaign for Political and Civic Engagement is a consortium of more than 35 colleges and universities, based at Harvard University's Institute of Politics, to develop 'civic minded and politically engaged students.'

Some UK universities are creating collaborative networks for public engagement, such as:

- The new Civic University Network (CUN) of about 130 British universities, based at Sheffield Hallam, has a resources hub and Civic Impact

Framework for universities to map their civic activities and co-create Civic University Agreements with local partners. Its case studies share lessons in citizens' participation, such as the 'Commission Model: Learning from the Poverty Truth Commissions' that bring people living in poverty together with local decision-makers to explore poverty reduction.

- The UK's National Co-ordinating Centre for Public Engagement (NCCPE) was founded in 2008 to recognise, reward and build capacity for public engagement by universities. It publishes a wide range of resources and evaluation reports and grants and annual Engage Watermark awards to recognise strategic support for public engagement.
- The Universities Policy Engagement Network, UPEN, aims to increase the impact of research on policy, provide a contact point for policymakers, organize a collective response to requests for evidence, and share learning around knowledge exchange and policy impact between UK universities.

Collaborative networks and academic brokerage have a vital role in sharing lessons, providing mutual support, building capacity, and asserting a collective voice for civic engagement by universities. Although they tend to be under-resourced and overstretched they have the potential to influence the whole system.

8) System-wide models

Influencing national provision is the ultimate step to promote education for democracy. American universities have a stronger tradition than in Europe. John Dewey's Laboratory School at the University of Chicago and his 1916 book on *Democracy and Education* inspired generations of teachers. After World War 2 Harry Truman's *Commission on Higher Education for American Democracy* (1948) created a network of community colleges to 'strengthen democracy at home and to improve our understanding of our friends and neighbors everywhere in the world.' American universities have invested in citizen engagement and education for democracy for decades. But this has not prevented social polarization, the erosion of democratic norms, nor political stalemate over critical issues such as climate, healthcare, gun ownership, inequality and racism. Americans are poorer for it. Today national policies for

higher education are largely determined by market forces and funding priorities of private donors, which almost certainly contributes to the decay of democracy.

In China the task of higher education is to "train people to become senior specialists imbued with the spirit of creativeness and the ability of practice, to develop science, technology and culture and to promote the socialist modernization drive" ((MOE 1999 Article 5). The government represses dissenting minorities in Hong Kong, Inner Mongolia, Tibet, and Xinjiang, where the state runs large internment and re-education camps, officially called Vocational Education and Training Centers (see Xinjiang Documentation Project, University of British Columbia). The Chinese system also promotes understanding and support for China's priorities abroad through Confucius Institutes and associations, and actively opposes liberal democracy as a model. The success of the Chinese model in academic league tables and as a political alternative to liberal democracy raises profound questions for citizens and scholars.

9) Supranational models

Finally, it is worth noting that China, the EU, and the US have rival models of global governance. While China and the US continue to build competing political alliances within the Westphalian model of sovereign states, the EU has developed a new model of transnational governance, described by Jaap Hoeksma in ***The Democratisation of the European Union*** (2023) (read summary), which the African Union seeks to emulated. Meanwhile, global integration through finance, trade, technology, and migration is still moving faster than our political systems can cope with. This is likely to create catastrophic crises for humanity as a result of global heating and other existential risks. A growing number of networks of scholars, civil society, and policy-makers are addressing these issues, such as:

- Arizona State University's Global Institute of Sustainability and Innovation hub contributes to over 30 collaborative networks to bring about sustainability at scale by reaching millions of people.
- Global Public Policy Network is a partnership of seven 'prestigious universities in public policy to address the most pressing public policy

challenges of the 21st century and, as a result, to have policy impact, to be influential in public policy education and training'.

- The Talloires Network of 406 institutions across 78 countries aims to strengthen the civic roles and social responsibilities of higher education and build a global movement of engaged universities.

Scholars also take part in countless bodies to coordinate policies, research and action on global issues, such as the Intergovernmental Panel On Climate Change, the United Nations body for assessing science related to climate change and making recommendations to governments; the World Health Organisation, whose mission is to "champion health and a better future for all", in which research plays an indispensable role; the World Bank, IMF, and regional development banks, all of which conduct influential research programmes.

These agencies are part of a remarkable effort to develop and coordinate policies for a world of over eight billion people. They are our system of global governance, which are often overlooked in national politics, on which they nevertheless exercise considerable influence. Identifying and developing effective models of transnational governance, together with models of democratic accountability, is therefore an essential task for political science .

We need a mission for democracy

Throughout history, courageous scholars and institutions have expanded people's freedom to learn and use knowledge to benefit humanity. What we need now is a **Mission to Renew Democracy**, like the 1960s moonshot and the global coalitions against polio, AIDS-HIV and Covid19. Governments cannot be trusted to lead a process aimed at strengthening the power of citizens to scrutinize their actions and hold them to account, while civil society lacks the capacity to act at scale. Universities have the potential to convene and support a coalition from all sectors to make democracy work better for everyone.

Conclusion

Democratic government is in a critical condition. Political science can learn from health sciences about how to make improving lives its central goal and include advocacy as a core competency in the curriculum. To strengthen

democracy, political scientists need to set agendas, inform leaders, start debates, and advocate for research to strengthen democracy and solve political problems. This paper argues that recognizing social models (patterns of behavior and institutions) as the social science equivalent of theories in the natural sciences can give political science a robust epistemological basis for helping citizens to improve democratic governance and meet their needs and aspirations better. Every institution embodies collective knowledge about how to achieve certain outcomes in society, and uses several distinct forms of expression to do so, including symbols, stories, conceptual theories, values, generic models, normative templates and physical infrastructure. Institutions that appear to be successful often become social models in their field, providing a template for how to achieve similar results elsewhere. Pippa Norris's model of democratic deficits provides a framework for deciding where to target support to improve democratic governance, while existing models offer lessons for how to develop provision at every level, from symbolic actions and classroom practices to national and global networks. Ideally we would create a universal 'mission for democracy' to make democracy work better for everyone.

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Download a free copy of Titus Alexander's book *Practical Politics: Lessons in Power and Democracy,* here: http://bit.ly/2R0zsPl

Titus Alexander is an independent scholar and educator. His latest book, *Practical Politics: Lessons in Power and Democracy* (2016, UCL IoE Press/Trentham) focuses on teaching democratic politics. He created the Charter 99 for Global Democracy campaign and *Uniting Humanity,* a *Grundtvig* trainer of trainers' programme. As a founding member of the UK Parenting Education and Support Forum he influenced the government to develop a national programme of support for parents as a child's first and most enduring educators. He runs *Leading Change*, an advanced apprenticeship in campaigning, leadership and management. He founded Democracy Matters, an alliance for learning practical politics. Publications include *Discussing Democracy* (2015 Crick Centre), *Campaigning is OK!* (2009), *Learning Power* (2007), *Family Learning: The Foundation of Effective Education* (Demos 1997), *Citizenship Schools: A practical guide* (2001), and *Unravelling Global Apartheid: An overview of world politics* (Polity/Blackwell's, 1996). He studied Maths, Physics, German and Intellectual History at the Universities of Sussex (UK) and Marburg (Germany).

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