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## Diversity of Depoliticization?

Bas van der Vossen

*Chapman University*, [bvanderv@chapman.edu](mailto:bvanderv@chapman.edu)

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### Comments

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# Behavioral and Brain Sciences

## Diversity of Depoliticization?

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<b>Corresponding Author:</b>	Bas van der Vossen University of North Carolina at Greensboro Greensboro, NC UNITED STATES
<b>Corresponding Author Secondary Information:</b>	
<b>Corresponding Author's Institution:</b>	University of North Carolina at Greensboro
<b>Corresponding Author's Secondary Institution:</b>	
<b>First Author:</b>	Bas van der Vossen
<b>First Author Secondary Information:</b>	
<b>Order of Authors:</b>	Bas van der Vossen
<b>Order of Authors Secondary Information:</b>	
<b>Abstract:</b>	An ideologically homogeneous discipline of political psychology is a serious problem. But undoing the field's homogeneity may not suffice to address this problem. Instead, we should consider undoing the politicization.

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- (3) **Title:** Diversity of Depoliticization?
  
- (4) **Author:** Bas van der Vossen
  
- (5) **Institution:** UNC Greensboro, Department of Philosophy
  
- (6) **Mailing address:** Department of Philosophy  
UNC Greensboro  
239 Curry Building  
Greensboro, NC 27402-6170  
336.334-5059
  
- (7) **Email:** [b\\_vande2@uncg.edu](mailto:b_vande2@uncg.edu)
  
- (8) **Homepage:** [www.basvandervossen.com](http://www.basvandervossen.com)
  
- (9) **Abstract:** An ideologically homogeneous discipline of political psychology is a serious problem. But undoing the field's homogeneity may not suffice to address this problem. Instead, we should consider undoing the politicization.

**Main text:**

Political psychologists, indeed academics in general, ought to seek the truth about their subject matter. The lead article demonstrates that an ideologically homogeneous field of political psychology is predictably bad at undertaking this task. This is a very serious problem. And I agree that it ought to be addressed. But while diversifying political psychology (and related fields) promises to be an improvement over the current state of affairs, I wonder whether this solution goes

far enough. Perhaps instead of undoing the profession's homogeneity, we should strive to undo its politicization.

Heterogeneity can help reduce the problems identified as a way of fighting one kind of bias with another kind. Conservatives can help call out the liberals' mistakes, point out their blind spots, correct their skewed operationalizations, and so on. Perhaps this will suffice to counter the harmful effects of political biases at the level of the profession as a whole. But it cannot suffice at level of the individual researcher. After all, even when our personal mistakes are countered by others, we are still making mistakes. And it seems obvious that we should avoid making mistakes, at least if we can do so at reasonable cost.

The mistakes in question are the result of biases from which we suffer in light of partisan attitudes. But it is by no means a given that we have such partisan attitudes. So why not say that taking seriously our task to seek the truth about political psychology requires that we avoid those attitudes? Instead of fighting the symptoms, why not get rid of the disease?

The basic thought here can be summarized as follows. (Van der Vossen) Being politically biased will predictably interfere with our ability to correctly undertake the task of political psychology. But we should avoid things that make us bad at undertaking our professional tasks. Doing so is, I think, a straightforwardly moral imperative. As a result, we should avoid being politically biased. This means depoliticizing political psychology. Or, more accurately, it means depoliticizing political psychologists (as well as others like them).

I do not deny, of course, what the lead article is careful to point out: ideological people do not necessarily produce faulty research. But focusing solely on this is also to miss part of the point. What matters is not just whether pieces of research are faulty. It also matters whether researchers are approaching their tasks in a morally and professionally acceptable manner. And when political psychologists (and those who research political questions in general) are partisan or ideological, the answer is no. This is precisely why a field can go astray.

The moral ideal, then, is that those academics that study political questions remain as a-political as can be reasonably expected. And the moral ideal of the field of political psychology should be one that asks its members to remain out of politics. Such an ideal is not unusual. As a general matter, it is plausible that researchers should not have a personal stake in the outcome of their research. We want scientific investigations to be impartial, guided by the facts, and not by personal preferences, motivations, and so on. Compare, for example, the demand that medical researchers should not be on the payroll of pharmaceutical companies. The reason here is the same as with partisan political psychologists: it threatens the impartiality of their research. (Angell)

The real solution to the problems identified, then, is not just to undo homogeneity. It is to undo politicization. Academic fields that focus on political issues should adopt something like a conflict of interests-guideline that prohibits or at least strongly discourages political activism by its members. Political psychologists (as well as philosophers, sociologists, and other related academics)

should be discouraged to be active in political parties, make campaign donations, advocate for political goals, and so on.

In the long run, a depoliticized field will be better for everyone involved. It will be better for the ideological minority (whose views, careers, arguments, and work do not receive the attention and appreciation that they objectively merit). But it will also be better for the majority. In an ideological and homogeneous field, the dominant view will receive less scrutiny, and therefore likely be developed less carefully, as its challengers. As a result, the truth (whatever it is) will likely end up being misrepresented, undersold, or skewed. And that harms our ability to achieve important social improvements.

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## **References**

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