

advantage of the intimacy of the podcast medium to make connections with a varied audience of scholars, journalists, policy makers, and interested citizens. These podcasts illustrate that political scientists know how to have engaging conversations, exchange witty banter and bad puns, and even assess the quality of beers.

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Stein, Anne. N.d. "Podcasting for the People: Sharing Scholarly Works with the Masses." *The Grinnell Magazine*. Available at <http://magazine.grinnell.edu/news/podcasting-people>.

The Editors of *n+1*. 2019. "Friends of the Pod." *n+1* 34 (Spring). Available at <https://nplusonemag.com/issue-34/the-intellectual-situation/friends-of-the-pod>.

## *As academics explore ways to end ivory-tower isolation and contribute to public discourse, the time seems right for an examination of the state of podcasting within our discipline.*

The following articles explain how and why some of our colleagues produce their shows. Most important, the articles emphasize that the focus of these podcasts is on making connections with an audience.<sup>1</sup> In that sense, the art of podcasting is much like the practice of classroom teaching. Whether we produce or listen to political science podcasts, the ultimate joy and value in them is that we learn from others. The spotlight closes with practical considerations and resources for any political scientist who sees a future in podcasting.

Naturally, this spotlight cannot provide a comprehensive account of political science podcasts. The numbers continue to grow and important new contributions to the genre continue to appear. One valiant effort by political scientists (The Politics Guys 2019) to provide a census of podcasts featuring our disciplinary colleagues seemed to be incomplete, if not out of date, on the day it first appeared. Because I am a regular listener and fan of many shows, the process of reaching out to potential contributors helped me to discover many podcasts previously unknown to me—ones that have since found a permanent place in my feed. My hope is that this spotlight will help readers see the benefits of podcasting for our students, our discipline, and our communities. Certainly, the podcasts featured here—and those too numerous to mention—have helped me grapple with new ideas in the literature, find political scientists to follow on social media, learn of important books to read, and discover colleagues to bring to my campus for presentations and conversations. ■

### NOTE

1. Speaking of connecting with the audience, it is noteworthy that the single most popular episode for the New Books Network of podcasts was a *New Books in Political Science* interview with Cas Mudde regarding his book, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press 2017). According to Anne Stein (n.d.), that episode "was downloaded nearly 12,000 times in one week."

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### "ROCKING OUR PRIORS": FUN, ENTHUSIASTIC, RIGOROUS, AND GLORIOUSLY DIVERSE

Alice Evans , King's College, London

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Our colleagues are rigorously analyzing global politics and inequalities. Yet, so much of that valuable knowledge remains trapped behind paywalls and impenetrable jargon, dumbed down for mass consumption, or entirely overlooked due to widespread prejudice. I started my podcast to make fascinating research more accessible and exciting to a wider audience. I purposefully amplify women and people of color so that more people can learn from their work. The interviews are fun, but they also are in-depth discussions: testing and questioning different ideas.

I am a lecturer in the social science of international development. Since 2017, I have run a podcast called "Rocking Our Priors" interviewing academics about their published research on global politics and inequalities. Topics include the drivers of economic growth and poverty reduction, global supply chains, organized crime, authoritarianism, social movements, and trade unions. My goal is to make academic research fun, fascinating, and engaging for a mass audience.

### The Status Quo Isn't Working

Much of our mainstream media is consumed by current events: speeches, summits, spectacles, and speculations. In the chaos of Brexit, Trump's tweets, and trade wars, we lose sight of the bigger picture. However, many people want to understand what lies beneath the iceberg: the underlying, long-term drivers. Vast campuses of students, academics, and related practitioners are grappling with these questions; they lack the time to read journal articles in full but enjoy listening to podcasts.

Yet, when academics are interviewed by journalists, we are usually stopped after three minutes max, restricted to top-line summaries. There is no time to explain how we arrived at these conclusions, explore alternative hypotheses, debate the model, or question the reliability of the underlying data. I think there is a gap in the market for fun, engaging, and analytically rigorous podcasting!

### Showcasing Exciting Research

I think my podcasts are popular because we discuss these big questions in great depth—carefully thinking through the process of data collection and the choice of variables; scrutinizing

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different interpretations; exploring alternative hypotheses; and reflecting on the wider, practical implications of these findings. The good thing about podcasts (as distinct from academic articles), however, is that they can be fun, lively, upbeat, and humorous. In my opinion, academia does not necessarily need to be somber or sedate. In fact, it is perfectly possible for rigorous analysis to be enthusiastic and engaging. That is certainly what my own students appreciate.

Through podcasting, I also try to showcase and celebrate one of the greatest joys in academia: learning from colleagues and being intrigued by their findings. I know I am not alone in this; we became academics because we are fascinated by research. Even if we write alone, all of us rely on vast support networks. Before submitting, we swap papers, share ideas, and offer advice. Yet, such practices often are hidden from view. The visible tip of the iceberg is a published article. That might foster an image of academia as isolated or self-interested. My podcast is all about intellectual excitement and collaboration.

To improve our understanding, we also need to tear down barriers that blind us to diverse voices and analyses. Across the world, we tend to venerate white, Western men as knowledgeable authorities. These stereotypes are self-perpetuating: by paying more attention to their ideas and analysis and citing their work more frequently, we reinforce widespread assumptions of male expertise. We also blinker ourselves to alternative perspectives. This is self-defeating if we are trying to understand complex problems. To quote Atif Mian (2019): “Science dies in hierarchies.”

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Diversifying academia also is hugely important for our students. If our black, brown, female, first-generation, and/or queer students never see people like them revered as experts, they may doubt their own capacity and give up easily when struggling with assignments—or even opt out of those subjects entirely (Bettinger and Long 2005). I am grateful that a global breadth of scholars take time to share their insights on my podcasts.

### **Fascinating Episodes**

One of my most popular episodes featured the deeply thoughtful Professor Yuen Yuen Ang. She provided a captivating explanation of “How China Escaped the Poverty Trap” (Ang 2016) by highlighting top-down targets and local autonomy within the party–state. Local authorities iteratively experimented with new initiatives, building on local institutions, securing investment and improving governance, and working out the best solution in that context. Curious but skeptical, I inquired how she arrived at this theory. We then talked through her methodology: tracing change over time as well as comparing inland and coastal provinces.

Another popular episode was with the brilliantly astute and hilariously witty Dr. Naomi Hossain. Drawing on her new book, she explained the history and politics behind Bangladesh’s unexpected success in reducing extreme poverty (Hossain 2017). Like Professor Ang, she explained the long-term political drivers of

poverty reduction. These ideas do not make the headlines but they are deeply important for understanding our world today.

For years, political scientists have struggled to explain why some African countries (but not others) are democratizing. In a recent podcast, Dr. Ken Opalo answered this question by highlighting a phenomenally important yet widely overlooked dynamic: legislative independence and how this was mediated by decolonization and multi-partyism (Opalo 2019). Many white Western academics have dismissed legislatures as mere rubber stamps on executive power. Dr. Opalo observed their independence and then tested his hypothesis through careful quantitative and qualitative analyses.

Likewise, listeners enjoyed my podcast with one of the United Kingdom’s coolest professors: Anand Menon. Stepping back from current events, he detailed how decades of economic but also political exclusion (particularly in small towns of Northern Britain) led to the Brexit vote (Evans and Menon 2017). That podcast was popular because it tapped into a huge public debate.

Other episodes appeal to specific communities, such as Dr. Dan Honig’s work on bureaucracies (Honig 2018). We actually recorded two episodes: one on his academic book (the importance of front-line autonomy rather than top-down management) and another on its practical implications (tailored to civil servants themselves).

### **Practical Tips**

For those interested in creating their own podcast, here is what I do (of course, others may have different priorities and ideas):

- *Read authors’ books and papers in advance* (to ensure more in-depth discussion—not only listening to the experts but also questioning their ideas and suggesting alternative hypotheses).
- *Email questions beforehand* (so they can prepare and feel at ease, knowing what is coming).
- *Take authors out for tea or coffee* (again, to ensure they feel comfortable. My podcasts always work best when they are casual conversations. For this reason, I only record podcasts in person, never remotely).
- *Record in a quiet room.*
- *Relax!* Keep it fun, chatty, and conversational.
- *Edit with Audacity* (this software is free and easy to use; however, many of my episodes do not require any editing).
- *Upload to Soundcloud* (change the privacy settings to “Creative Commons” and add links to the RSS feed, iTunes, etc.).
- *Share links* on Twitter, your blog, or your website.

In summary, academic podcasts can fill a gap in the market by providing fun, in-depth discussions of complex issues and by showcasing the brilliant diversity of our field. Going forward, I plan to incorporate a new section—asking how other methodologies and disciplines have been used to approach the same question. I hope this fosters broader recognition of

the strengths and synergies of interdisciplinary scholarship. If readers want to hear more, try “Rocking Our Priors.” ■

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#### THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL: PODCASTING POLITICAL SCIENCE

Heath Brown, *City University of New York*

Lilly J. Goren , *Carroll University*

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Hitting the red “record” button to start the podcast is no different than any other button on a computer screen, but for the first dozen recordings, we were filled with dread. What if the enormous microphone malfunctions or I mistakenly call Dave Hopkins Dan, and

#### *Humor, which is largely absent from most written scholarship—including most blogging—also emerges during conversations with authors.*

Dan Hopkins Dave? Several hundred podcasts later, the dread has been replaced with nervous enjoyment of engaging in deeply personal conversations about remarkable new books in political science.

Academic podcasting fits into a suite of new approaches to sharing knowledge creation, understandings, and research findings, but it has unique strengths compared to blogging, social media, and novel conference formats. The ease of use, inexpensive distribution, and deeply personal nature make it incredibly valuable for the podcaster and listener.

This contribution focuses on our experiences producing and hosting a political science podcast for the last several years un-cleverly called the *New Books in Political Science Podcast* and affiliated with the New Books Network. Our goal—which is shared by all of the podcasts in the New Books Network—is to provide a platform to share the key findings of newly published books in interviews with the author or authors. More than five years in and more than 300 podcasts later, we continue to love the format and the opportunity to connect great work with a growing audience. We eagerly fight among ourselves on Twitter to be the first to invite a guest, as well as the chance to come together to reflect on our favorite books of the year during our year-end wrap-up podcasts in December.

First—and rather interesting in this age of fragmented and often disconnected media—podcasting is a deeply personal medium that shares the intimate qualities of radio but none of the expensive makeup of vlogging. Hearing authors describe their book brings out so many personal aspects of the scholarship and the scholar. What we imagined was the sound of birds chirping outside the window of Julia Azari’s office during one recording remains a blissful podcast memory.

We often ask our authors to explain how they came to the project that has now become a published book, and the responses are fascinating. They often combine particular personal interests, such as travel or social justice, or an experience in the classroom with an academic pursuit. Some of this may be gleaned from a book’s acknowledgments, but it often is a truly intriguing and curious dimension within our podcast conversation, providing an avenue into the substance of the book itself.

Humor, which is largely absent from most written scholarship—including most blogging—also emerges during conversations with authors. During one podcast recording, the author grew so animated and foul mouthed that we had to take a break and begin again with a promise of fewer F-bombs. Whereas we each have our own hosting style—Lilly has the relaxed charm of Jon Stewart and Heath does his best to channel Dick Cavett—most of the time we try to keep the salty language to a minimum and the enthusiasm turned up to 11. To be sure, humor is an aspect of all media, but the aural aspect of podcasting—as opposed to blogging—allows for the audience to hear an author’s laughter, which is a critical way for a guest to relax and the audience to better relate to the topic. Any soon-to-be podcasters should invite laughter; the quality of the podcast and listeners’ enjoyment will soon increase.

Authors often are candid and revealing when they describe the “aha” moment in their research—which might be obvious once the research is completed and the book is written—but for the authors, it was a startling moment of “OMG, now it all makes sense.” Sometimes guests position themselves within the discussion of their work by pointing out ironic experiences. Dan Kapust (2018), at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, once came on the podcast to discuss his book, *Flattery and the History of Political Thought: That Glib and Oily Art*. He regaled the audience with his fascinating research as well as his self-deprecating honesty about student praise for his dubious basketball skills as an example of how flattery works.

Some authors combine academic studies with self-reflection in pursuing their work. One of our first podcasts featured Christina Greer from Fordham University. She described her experience as a first-year college student meeting African students and reflecting on her identity as an African American. Years later, she wrote *Black Ethnicity: Race, Immigration, and the Pursuit of the American Dream* (Greer 2013), an exploration of this same issue with survey data and statistics. In 2019, she launched her own weekly podcast, @FAQNYC.

More recently, Melanee Thomas (University of Calgary) and Amanda Bittner (Memorial University) came on the podcast to