

expertise is overlooked and ideas—especially bad ideas—are spread unchallenged. Podcasting stands as an ideal medium for filling that gap and, in the process, fostering civic engagement and education.

In his explanation for why political science has been unable to fully break into the ideas industry, Drezner (2017) asserted that the current marketplace of ideas is flooded with thought leaders, or what Berlin (2013, 8–10) called hedgehogs, as opposed to public intellectuals or foxes. The fox (i.e., public intellectual) is an expert who knows much about many things, whereas a hedgehog (i.e., thought leader), by contrast, knows one big thing and it is value-laden. Drezner's characterization of public intellectuals as critical, skeptical, and deductive thinkers speaks to the very core of what political scientists can offer and what our political discourse so desperately needs. Victor (2016) called political scientists to action with a list of responsibilities, particularly when we were at the beginning stages of a Trump presidency. She wrote: "Political scientists may also have common values on which we can agree. It would be appropriate to make observations and express judgment when it appears political actors or institutions are violating those values" (Victor 2016). This is how we remain "foxes" while also breaking into the marketplace of ideas—and podcasting provides the platform.

In the current political climate, it is more important than ever for political scientists to embrace the role of public intellectual and find venues to share our disciplinary knowledge and expertise. Our growing audience, positive podcast reviews, and social media feedback indicate that there is genuine public interest in the type of deeper political analysis that political scientists can provide. Listeners describe the podcast as "thoughtful and entertaining without being overly partisan," and they emphasize the way in which we are able to bring political science concepts to a discussion of current events, leaving the listener more informed and engaged. In addition, local media outlets have reached out to us for commentary on political events as a direct result of the podcast, thereby further expanding the impact that it has on a broader audience. Our academic institutions also have been supportive and encouraging of our podcasting endeavor. All told, our experience of podcasting has pushed us out of our comfort zone and empowered us to fully embrace the role of public intellectuals. In the process, it also has allowed us to break down the conventional boundaries of teaching and to reevaluate who we think of as our students. ■

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## PODCASTING POLITICS IN AN ERA OF FATIGUE

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DOI:10.1017/S1049096519001641

Condoms and conflict. Henry the VIII and maternal mortality. Mariah Carey and population aging. These are only some of the seemingly disparate topics that podcasting legitimates juxtaposing in the good name of sharing research about the ways that population shapes our world, the tagline of my podcast: *Everybody Counts*. As one devoted to the liberal arts who teaches at a college with that very mission, I have been struck by how ideal podcasting is as a medium for using the trove of literary and popular references accumulated during years of reading Shakespeare, sci-fi, and *People Magazine* to hook listeners from outside academia and get them to listen to 20 minutes of research findings.

These days, there is an equal sense of fatigue about and hunger for politics; I am feeling fatigued so I wanted to avoid producing a podcast overtly in that genre. Instead, I wanted to trick my listeners into reflecting on politics by drawing them in with good stories and by showing them how fundamental political science questions about who gets what, when, where, and why connect to their own lives. I have found that everyone knows a little about demographics but not quite enough to understand the full range of implications. My podcast aims to build on that initial interest in population but to share some of the research that explains why population trends matter (or do not), connecting to both historical and contemporary issues.

I have been most gratified when listeners with little experience in either higher education or politics have praised the podcast. The birth-dearth episode, in particular, seemed to resonate with a wide audience. If framed in political science terms, it was an episode about the political, economic, and social consequences of low-fertility societies, such as Japan and Germany. However, it also was about a personal issue to which most people can relate: whether to have children and how many? In that episode, I interviewed the author of a trade book on fertility who had herself suffered through seven miscarriages, eight fresh in-vitro fertilization (IVF) cycles, two frozen IVF attempts, five natural pregnancies, four IVF pregnancies, nine years, and \$200,000. In political science, we often see how individual decisions such as whether to have children aggregate to produce large-scale outcomes. However, in traditional scholarly outlets, there is little room to engage across those levels of analysis or across disciplines. In a podcast, I am finding, we can do exactly that.

If I use Serena Williams or Megan Markle to hook listeners and then lead them down the path of peer-reviewed scholarship, that bait and switch is morally justified in my mind. I see my podcast as a way to make some of the most interesting aspects of my research and teaching on political demography—which are available to only a narrow audience—accessible to those outside my area of specialty and academia in general. I believe that as a political scientist, I am obligated to broadly share my work, which is why my podcast is aimed not at experts in the field but instead at voters, business leaders, students, and advocates. Each episode interweaves interviews with my own commentary to provide context and synthesize what we are learning.

My mission of sharing scholarship on political demography with a broader public drives each episode. There are many fascinating connections between population trends and politics, but there is much misinformation—and the gulf between peer-reviewed work

and what is reported in the media drives misunderstanding. For example, the global conversation about migration is riddled with inaccurate facts and half-truths. After I finished a week-long trip to the US–Mexican border, I could envision an entire podcast series connecting what was happening on the ground with what we know about migration trends writ large. The trick is to correct misinformation but keep listeners interested enough to think about how they could fold political demography analysis into their own work or life.

My podcast is designed for maximum exposure: episodes are less than 20 minutes and produced by an expert. Because they are short, the episodes work well in a classroom setting. They also work well during a commute, and I hope that somewhere on the DC Metro there is a staffer whose attention I can hold between stops. I have consistently found that the way I walk undergraduates through new concepts and theories, give them context, and apply theories and concepts to cases that resonate is also the most effective way to reach a policy audience. That comparison is not meant to insult policy makers—or students—but rather to convey that the exercise of pitching complex topics to a sophomore-level audience is useful in multiple settings.

It also is giving me confidence to stretch into new professional areas. My podcast was born of a desire to find a novel way of teaching others about complex political issues. An unintended byproduct was that podcasting is making me a better writer. I did not expect to script my podcast but, as a listener, I am drawn to podcasts that are polished and efficient. I found that fully scripting each episode helps me to replicate my favorite shows, such as *Hidden Brain* on National Public Radio. Writing something that is meant to be read aloud has pushed me to be more attuned to language, pacing, and structure. I can “scratch my journalistic itch” and see my scholarly material in a fresh light, which is exactly what I need at this middle stage of my career. Just as my students have been a test audience for which jokes fall flat, which stories inspire action, and which cases provoke ire at injustice, my podcast audience tests my ability to weave such material into a coherent narrative. Although my podcast is a labor of love, I am taking what I learn about storytelling and parlaying that into new writing ventures, such as the trade book that will be published in 2021 by W.W. Norton (with the same title as my podcast). Challenging myself in these ways is keeping me motivated to push through the fatigue and talk politics even in these dark times. ■

### THE PROFESSIONAL BENEFITS OF PODCASTING POLITICS

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DOI:10.1017/S1049096519001628

Much of the hype around academic podcasting focuses—rightly—on the medium’s potential to make research accessible and interesting for the public. To fully realize this potential, however, more scientists need to take up the art of podcasting. But why should they?

This article spotlights the supply side of podcasting and argues that it provides three key benefits for researchers: networking, archiving, and learning. Although certainly not an exhaustive list, these valuable byproducts of podcasting are particularly beneficial for the professional development of young scholars. In outlining why, I draw on three years of experience producing the *Social Media and Politics* podcast. The podcast

focuses on digital campaigning for elections and advocacy, and its material consists of interviews with academics and tech-industry practitioners.

### Networking

Building an academic network is crucial for scholarly development. A solid academic network opens doors for knowledge exchange, publishing opportunities, and future career paths. For young scholars starting out in academia, initiating contact with more established colleagues can be a daunting task. Producing a podcast, especially an interview-based one, provides a smooth icebreaker for reaching out and conversing with scholars outside of a conference setting. Even within a conference setting, inviting a scholar to take part in a podcast provides a concrete reason to follow up and arrange an in-depth, one-on-one conversation.

Moreover, the podcast medium provides networking benefits for both the interviewer and the interviewee. The interviewer (e.g., a PhD student) gains the opportunity to engage critically with another scholar’s work while, crucially, receiving their undivided attention. Unlike an informal meeting over coffee, the interviewee (e.g., an associate professor) receives a tangible output for their time—a podcast—that can be worked into personal websites, course syllabi, and annual performance reviews.

In addition to forging new connections, podcasting affords what I call a passive form of networking. That is, by hosting a podcast in repositories such as Apple Podcasts, Spotify, or YouTube, a podcaster maintains a constant online presence across a wide range of digital channels. For young scholars in particular, this enhanced digital exposure can lead to being contacted by stakeholders within and outside of academia for various purposes, including speaking engagements and media requests that bolster a budding CV.

### Social Media and Politics Podcast

