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Ideas and Politics in Social Science Research

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Writing about ideas, John Maynard Keynes noted that they are "more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else." One would expect, therefore, that political science--a discipline that focuses specifically on the nature of power--would have a healthy respect for the role of ideas. However, for a variety of reasons--not least of which is the influence of rational choice theory, which presumes that individuals are self-maximizing rational actors--this is not the case, and the literature on the topic is fairly thin. As the stellar cast of contributors to this volume show, ideas are in fact powerful shapers of political and social life.

In *Ideas and Politics in Social Science Research*, Daniel Béland and Robert Henry Cox have gathered leading scholars from a variety of subdisciplines in political science and sociology to provide a general overview of the theoretical, empirical, and methodological issues raised by social science research on ideas and politics. Throughout, they hone in on three central questions. What is the theoretical basis for studying ideas in politics? What are the best methods? What sort of empirical puzzles can be solved by examining ideas and related phenomena such as discourse, policy paradigms, and framing processes? In sum, this is a state-of-the-art academic work on both the role of ideas in politics and the analytical utility that derives from studying them.

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