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## Public Health and Political Science - The Pathway to a Productive Partnership



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Public health remains a challenge for most governments around the world. This has never been truer than during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has clearly demonstrated the much-needed improvement in this particular domain. Whether it's the inevitable crisis of antibiotic resistance or the misuse of opioids, public health challenges continue, and decision-making on the part of most governments remains questionable, either because of a lack of agreement or inconclusive evidence about whether to act and, if yes, how and when.

If one examines this dilemma in public health, one has to automatically shift their direction to political science. This is because [public health and political science](#) seem like the most natural of partners. This is evident from the increasing interaction between political scientists and public health researchers. However, this partnership hasn't really blossomed. In most cases, the tools and insights of political science are usually not utilised properly and political science, in turn, fails to understand and relate to the complexity and heterogeneity of the public health enterprise.

What could be the solution? How could both these disciplines capitalise on each other's strengths and integrate and advance both fields? What are the key challenges hindering this partnership, and what can be done to overcome those challenges?

First, there is a lack of common language and shared understanding of the key principles of each discipline. Public health is obsessed with scientific evidence and insists on making policy decisions based on this evidence. Political scientists, on the other hand, also acknowledge the importance of scientific research but are more open to other aspects that should be considered to ensure a balanced decision. The two fields could work better together if they try to understand each other's concepts and principles instead of opposing them at every stage.

Second, it is important to recognise the [complexity and diversity](#) within each field. At present, both view each other through a narrow lens. Public health research relies on a limited set of models or tries to apply them in a simplified form. On the other hand, political scientists tend to conflate the perception of politics. Both need to find a middle ground.

The third issue is both a challenge and an opportunity. People in public health want to influence public policy, but successful policies are generally those that promote public health. Political scientists have the same objective - to advance public health. The only problem is that they both differ on 'how' to achieve this improvement. What could really help both fields is if they develop a greater understanding of the importance of scientific evidence but at the same time learn to use it in more democratic ways. This can enable them to incorporate this evidence into policy decisions more effectively.

What is needed is for professionals in both fields, whether it is public health or political science, to step outside their comfort zones and open their minds to different perspectives of each discipline. Incorporating these elements during the education and training of public health officials could be an important step in paving the way for greater collaboration and partnership. Cross-disciplinary courses should be introduced in schools of public health professionals, and should almost always be in [mph degree programmes](#) or any postgraduate degree programme focused on public health. Today's future public health leaders should be learning about the rich body of work in political science. Similarly, introducing political science students to public health should provide the same benefit.

In the end, it is important to understand that the integration and collaboration of both public health and political science would benefit the domain of public health as a whole because this integration is likely to result in improved public health policies and decisions.

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