

American Journal of Political Science

Editor's Midterm Report to the Executive Council of the Midwest Political Science Association

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Introduction

This Report from the Editor of the *American Journal of Political Science* to the Executive Council of the Midwest Political Science Association covers the first seven months of operations for the Editorial Offices at Michigan State University. The Report presents information about the *Journal's* status and influence, manuscript processing statistics, and some of the issues confronting the Editorial Offices. Where appropriate and useful, information from previous years will be provided for comparison. Finally, the Report lists the *AJPS* Editorial Office staff and the members of the current Editorial Board.

Impact and Importance

The *AJPS* strives to maintain its position as one of the premier publication outlets, not only within the political science discipline, but also throughout the social sciences more generally. To that end, we continue to monitor closely the *Journal's* performance on the various metrics that summarize its presence, visibility, and usage within the research community. The main indicators used for this purpose are the Thomson Reuters Impact Factors and the Google Scholar h5-index scores.

The 2013 Two-Year Impact Factor for the *AJPS* is 2.516. This value represents a downturn from the previous multiyear pattern of increasing Impact Factors. For example, the comparable figures for 2011 and 2012 were 2.756 and 2.811, respectively. The current Two-Year Impact Factor places the *AJPS* in fourth place among political science journals, behind the *American Political Science Review* (2013 2-Yr IF = 3.844), *Perspectives on Politics* (2013 2-Yr IF = 3.035), and *Political Analysis* (2013 2-Yr IF = 2.879).

The 2013 Five-Year Impact Factor for the *AJPS* is 4.324. This value represents an increase over the comparable 2012 figure of 3.960. The current Five-Year Impact Factor puts the *AJPS* in third place among political science journals, behind the *American Political Science Review* (2013 5-Yr IF = 5.298) and the *Annual Review of Political Science* (2013 5-Yr IF = 4.526).

Of course, any decline in the Impact Factor is undesirable. But, Production Editor Michael Streeter, from Wiley-Blackwell, emphasizes that “both the two and five-year IFs are excellent scores.” He also explains that “*AJPS'* two-year IF . . . has over the years remained stable. We see spikes from other journals like *PA* and *Perspectives* typically due to articles that are highly cited and float the score for a year or two, then drop out.” Therefore, I agree with his assessment that the figures for 2013 are not really cause for great concern.

Additional grounds for optimism about the professional visibility of the *AJPS* are provided by current citation statistics from Google Scholar. The h5-index for the *AJPS* is 53; this means that

53 articles have been cited at least 53 times during the five-year period from 2009 through 2013. The h5-median for the *AJPS* (the median number of citations to the articles used to create the h5-index value) is 84. The h5-index value places the *AJPS* ninth among all social science journals and at second place within political science. It is exceeded only by the *American Political Science Review*, which has a slightly higher h5-index value of 54 and an h5-median of 85. All of these figures confirm that the *American Journal of Political Science* is maintaining its stature as one of the premier outlets for high-quality research in the social sciences.

Submissions and Turnaround Times

Table 1 provides the total number of manuscript submissions and the mean number of days from submission until the editorial decision for the past fifteen years and for January 1 through August 1, 2014. Stated simply, the number of submissions has increased sharply since last year. During the first seven months of 2014, 538 manuscripts were submitted to the *AJPS*. This produces a submission rate of 2.54 manuscripts per day! During the same periods in 2012 and 2013, the numbers of submissions were 374 and 344, respectively. Thus, the 2014 figure represents a 56% increase over submissions during the first seven months of 2013!

Table 1: Yearly submissions and mean turnaround times.

Year	Number of submissions	Mean turnaround time (days)
2000	530	46
2001	586	39
2002	657	51
2003	803	36
2004	783	36
2005	691	41
2006	694	67
2007	583	130
2008	531	118
2009	479	113
2010	760	101
2011	665	91
2012	750	107
2013	696	93
2014 (Jan. 1 until Aug. 1)	538	54

As the figures in Table 1 show, the *AJPS* Editorial Staff and I have been fairly successful at reducing the turnaround time for processing manuscripts. The mean number of days from submission until the editorial decision so far in 2014 is a bit more than half of that from 2013. But, this figure is a bit misleading. For one thing, it contains manuscripts that are not sent out to external referees for review. These “desk rejects” are processed very quickly: The mean turnaround is 1 day. Once the desk-rejected papers are removed from the calculation, the mean turnaround time is 75 days. But, this latter figure is inflated by delinquent reviewers (i.e., those who never provided a review or

never responded to my invitation to review). In those cases where the editorial decision was based on two or one reviews, the mean turnaround time is 119 days. For manuscripts that received a full set of three reviews, the mean turnaround time is only 56 days.

Submission Rates by Subfield

Table 2 reports submission rates by subfield for the first seven months of 2012, 2013, and 2014. There are some comparability issues that should be noted. First, previous *AJPS* Editor Rick Wilson used a different system for calculating the percentages. If an author classified a manuscript into several different categories, he used a uniform weighting system to “distribute” that paper’s contribution across the subfield categories. We create the set of subfields based only upon the first category listed by each author. Second, the reporting periods differ slightly. The 2012 and 2013 figures cover January 1 through August 15. The 2014 figures only cover January 1 through July 31.

Table 2: Submissions by subfield, January 1 through July 31 for 2014 and January 1 through August 15 for 2012 and 2013.

Subfield	2012	2013	2014
American Behavior	29.5%	28.3%	24.9%
American Institutions	20.8%	20.1%	15.8%
Comparative Politics	22.0%	21.5%	32.2%
International Relations	14.0%	11.7%	16.4%
Methodology, Formal Theory	9.8%	13.2%	7.6%
Normative Theory	3.2%	4.5%	3.2%

There are several interesting features in Table 2. First, there is a sizable increase in the relative number of submissions in comparative politics (10.7%) , along with a smaller increase for international relations submissions (4.7%). These increases are offset by decreases in the submissions to the other subfields. But note that part of the decline in American institutions submissions appears because we changed the definition of that subfield a bit. Specifically, the vast majority of manuscripts in the author-selected field of “Mass media and political communications” clearly belong in the political behavior category. Similarly, many of the “Representation and electoral systems” submissions involved topics in political behavior (although quite a few of those also focus on comparative politics). Finally, the apparent decline in methodology and formal theory submissions probably is due to the fact that our figures are based only on the author’s first classification category. Many authors list methods or formal theory as a second category, so they would have contributed to the percentage for this subfield under Rick Wilson’s system. They are omitted from consideration here. The submission rate for normative theory remains very low.

Editorial Decisions

From January 1 through August 1, 2014, I made decisions on 326 manuscripts. The decision outcomes for initial submissions and first revisions over the preceding time period are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Editorial decisions, January 1 through August 1, 2014.

Decision	Initial Submission (<i>n</i> = 326)	First Revision (<i>n</i> = 40)
Desk Reject	28.5%	—
Reject	59.2%	17.2%
Revise and Resubmit	12.3%	22.8%
Accept	—	60.0%

If desk-rejected manuscripts are eliminated from consideration, then 82.8% of submissions were rejected upon the initial review while 17.2% were issued a “revise and resubmit” decision. Note that all of the 22.8% of manuscripts that received a second “revise and resubmit” decision (*n* = 8) were accepted for publication. Combining those with the manuscripts that were accepted after an initial “revise and resubmit” decision, the total acceptance rate for manuscripts submitted to the *AJPS* during the first seven months of 2014 is 8.9%.

Reviews and Referees

From January 1 through August 1, 2014, the *AJPS* Editorial Office received 1,098 referee reports. The mean number of days from the invitation to review until receipt of the review is 36.7 (or 33.5 days from the day the referee accepts the invitation). The distribution of recommendations from the reviews we received is given in Table 4.

Table 4: Reviewer recommendations, January 1 through August 1, 2014.

Recommendation	Percentage (<i>n</i> = 1,098)
Reject	54.8%
Revise and Resubmit	29.8%
Publish with Minor Revisions	9.6%
Publish as Is	5.8%

Of course, we only receive reviews from a subset of the individuals who are invited to serve as referees. During the first seven months of 2014, I invited 1,599 individuals to review manuscripts for the *AJPS*. The distribution of responses (and non-responses) to the invitation is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Responses to Editor's invitation to review a manuscript for the *AJPS*, January 1 through August 1, 2014.

Response	Percentage (<i>n</i> = 1,599)	Subtotal
Completed review	58.8%	
Review in progress	12.1%	70.9%
Declined invitation	20.8%	
Never responded	3.4%	24.2%
Did not need review	4.9%	4.9%

Possible Policy Changes for the Journal

The *AJPS* Editorial Staff and I have discussed several policy changes that we are considering for the *Journal*. All of these require further discussion and elaboration of details. We welcome input from any interested parties.

1. Increase the Word Limit for Submissions to the *AJPS*.
 - A. Increase the limit from the current 8,500 words to 10,000 words
 - B. Word limit would include body text, notes, references, and headers for figures and tables
2. Changes to Replication Materials Required for Accepted Articles
 - A. Require replication files at manuscript submission rather than at acceptance (which is current practice)
 - B. More detailed specification for contents of replication files (documented computer code to replicate all analyses in manuscript)
3. Addition to Acknowledgment Letter Sent to Corresponding Author of Submitted Manuscripts
 - A. All authors of submitted manuscripts must agree to provide two reviews to the *AJPS*
 - B. Co-authors can request exemptions if they are not academics or if they are not practicing social scientists

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