



AMERICAN JOURNAL OF POLITICAL SCIENCE

Editor's Midterm Report to the Executive Council of the Midwest Political Science Association August 27, 2016

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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 operations and editorial activities from January 1, 2016 through July 31, 2016. 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 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 generally. To that end, we continue to monitor closely the *Journal's* performance on the various metrics summarizing 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.

I am very pleased to say that the 2015 Two-Year Impact Factor puts the *AJPS* into first place among political science journals! The impact factor gives the average number of citations in 2015 to articles published in the *AJPS* during the 2013 and 2014. The 2015 Two-Year Impact Factor for the *AJPS* is 4.515. This figure is quite impressive, representing an increase of slightly more than 1.2 citations over the 2014 Two-Year Impact Factor (which was 3.269). The rankings for the next few journals place *Political Analysis* second (2-Yr IF = 3.491), the *Annual Review of Political Science* third (2-Yr IF = 3.457), and the *American Political Science Review* fourth (2-Yr IF = 3.444), in terms of average citations to articles over the preceding two years. I believe that this is the first time the *AJPS* has achieved a higher Impact Factor than the *APSR*.

The 2015 Five-Year Impact Factor for the *AJPS* is 5.424. Again, this represents a substantial increase over the 2014 figure of 4.506. And, the 2015 Five-Year Impact Factor ranks the *Journal* in third place behind the *American Political Science Review* (ranked first, with 5-Yr IF = 6.341)) and *Political Analysis* (ranked second, with 5-Yr IF = 6.098), and just ahead of the *Annual Review of Political Science* (ranked fourth, with 5-Yr IF = 4.288).

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 64; this means that 64 articles have been cited at least 64 times during the five-year period from June 2011 through June 2016. The h5-median for the *AJPS* (the median number of citations to the articles used to create the h5-index value) is 85. The h5-index value places the *AJPS* eighth among all social science journals and at first place within political science. The *American Political Science Review* is just behind the *AJPS*, with an h5-index value of 61. This ranks the *APSR* ninth among social science journals and second within political science. After that, the *Journal of Politics* has the next-highest h5-index, although there is a substantial gap between the two: The h5-index for the *JOP* is 48. All of these figures confirm that the *American Journal of Political Science* is maintaining—and perhaps even enhancing—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 sixteen years, as well as for January 11 through

July 16, 2016. Stated simply, the number of submissions remains at the high level to which it jumped in 2014. During the first six and one-half months of 2016, 549 manuscripts were submitted to the *AJPS*, generating a submission rate of 2.94 manuscripts per day! This represents a sizable increase over the comparable figure from 2015: 515 submissions from January 5 through the start of the summer hiatus on July 18, 2015, or a rate of 2.44 submissions per day. Thus, the 2016 figures so far suggest that we may set a new record for the number of submissions in a single calendar year.

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	874	73
2015	876	45
2016 (Jan. 11 until July 16)	549	47

As the figures in Table 1 show, the *AJPS* Editorial Staff and I have been fairly successful at maintaining relatively short turnaround times for processing manuscripts. The mean number of days from submission until the editorial decision so far in 2016 is just two days longer than the average time in 2015. 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 less than one day. After the desk-rejected papers are removed from the calculation, the mean turnaround time is 64 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 109 days. For manuscripts that received a full set of three reviews, the mean turnaround time is only 58 days.

Submission Rates by Subfield

Table 2 reports submission rates by subfield for the first seven months of 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, and 2016. There are some comparability issues that should be noted. First, previous *AJPS* Editor

Rick Wilson used a different system for calculating the percentages in 2012 and 2013. If an author classified a manuscript into several different categories, he used a 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. The 2015 figures cover January 1 through August 23. The 2016 figure cover January 1 through July 16.

Table 2: Submissions by subfield, January 1 through July 16 for 2016, January 1 through August 23 for 2015, January 1 through July 31 for 2014, and January 1 through August 15 for 2012 and 2013.

Subfield	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
American Behavior	29.5%	28.3%	24.9%	23.2%	23.4%
American Institutions	20.8%	20.1%	15.8%	15.0%	15.0%
Comparative Politics	22.0%	21.5%	32.2%	35.9%	27.1%
International Relations	14.0%	11.7%	16.4%	14.8%	21%
Methodology, Formal Theory	9.8%	13.2%	7.6%	7.5%	7.7%
Normative Theory	3.2%	4.5%	3.2%	3.5%	5.8%

The distribution of submissions across subfields during the first six and one-half months of 2016 shows both continuity and change relative to previous years. The percentages for American behavior, American institutions, and methodology/formal theory are virtually identical to the figures for the previous two years. Comparative politics submissions have declined by about nine percentage points since 2015, to about 27%. But, international relationships manuscripts now comprise 21% of submissions, up six percentage points since 2015. And normative theory submissions are up to almost six percent of new submissions. Of course, the latter figure is not very large in absolute terms. Still, it represents a very sharp increase in the number of theory manuscripts the *AJPS* received compared to previous years. As noted in previous Midterm Reports, the distributions of submissions look quite a bit different for 2012 and 2013, the last two years of Rick Wilson’s term as *AJPS* Editor. These apparent differences almost certainly are due to changes in the subfield definitions (e.g., moving “Mass media and political communications” to the political behavior subfield) and in the counting procedures (e.g., methodology and formal theory often are listed as the second field, which would have boosted the submission figures for this combined subfield under Rick Wilson’s weighting system).

Editorial Decisions

From January 1 through July 31, 2016, I made decisions on 479 manuscripts. This number is smaller than the comparable figure from 2015, when I made 692 decisions from January 1 through

August 23. Of the decisions so far in 2016, 455, or 95%, were made on initial submissions and 24, or 5%, were made on resubmitted revisions. The decision outcomes for initial submissions and first revisions during the first seven months of 2016 are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Editorial decisions, January 1 through July 31, 2016.

Decision	Initial Submission ($n = 455$)	First Revision ($n = 24$)
Desk Reject	27.3%	—
Reject	64.8%	12.5%
Revise and Resubmit	7.9%	8.3%
Accept	—	79.2%

If desk-rejected manuscripts are eliminated from consideration, then 89.1% of submissions were rejected upon the initial review while 10.9% were issued a “revise and resubmit” decision. These percentages are almost identical to the comparable figures from 2015. Note that one of the two manuscripts that received a second “revise and resubmit” decision was accepted for publication and the other was rejected. Considering only the 443 decisions on manuscripts that completed the entire review process during the first seven months of 2016 (regardless of start date), the total acceptance rate for manuscripts submitted to the *AJPS* is 6.3%.

Reviews and Referees

From January 1 through July 16, 2016, the *AJPS* Editorial Office received 1,155 referee reports. The mean number of days from the invitation to review until receipt of the review is 34.6 (or 32.4 days from the day the referee accepts the invitation). The average turnaround time for reviews is about the same as during the similar period in 2015. The distribution of recommendations from the reviews we received is given in Table 4.

Table 4: Reviewer recommendations, January 1 through July 16, 2016.

Recommendation	Percentage ($n = 1,155$)
Reject	54.8%
Revise and Resubmit	33.2%
Publish with Minor Revisions	8.4%
Publish as Is	3.6%

The distribution of recommendations is fairly stable over time. There are just over 2% more “Reject” recommendations, and about 4% more “Revise and Resubmit” recommendations compared to 2015. And, there is a corresponding decrease of about 6% in the combined “Publish” recommendations.

Of course, we only receive reviews from a subset of the individuals who are invited to serve as referees. During the first six and one-half months of 2016, I invited 1,707 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 11 through July 31, 2016.

Response	Percentage ($n = 1,707$)	Subtotal
Completed review	61.8%	
Review in progress	13.3%	75.1%
Declined invitation	16.8%	
Never responded	2.5%	19.3%
Did not need review	5.6%	5.6%

When compared to the first seven months of 2015, the 2016 distribution of responses to referee invitations has remained very stable. First, the percentage of completed reviews declined a bit (from 67.2% in 2015 to 61.8% this year), but the percentage of reviews in progress has gone up by more than seven points, from 5.8% in 2015 to 13.3% in 2016. Second, the percentages of declined reviews and non-responsive invitees are virtually identical to the 2015 figures for these categories. The combined figure for these two categories is 19.3%, compared to 10.2% in 2015. Third, the instances in which an invited review was not needed (i.e., I was able to make an editorial decision on the basis of two reviews) decreased by about two percent. All of these figures confirm that the efforts of the *AJPS* Editorial Staff to encourage our colleagues throughout the discipline to complete their reviews are paying off nicely. Hopefully, these trends will continue into the future, although we will continue our efforts to reduce the number of declined invitations and totally non-responsive invitees.

Policies and Innovations

Manuscript processing operations continue to run very smoothly. The procedures implemented by the Editorial Staff to encourage timely submission of reviews clearly have paid dividends. I believe that we are fulfilling our commitment to submitting authors by providing them with informative and timely critiques from referees. The feedback we have received from various participants in this

process—including a sizable number of authors who received negative editorial decisions—has been overwhelmingly positive. In addition, the *AJPS* is being recognized throughout the broad scientific community for our innovations and leadership in the area of data access and research transparency. For example, our guidelines for preparing replication files have been adopted by other journal editors. And, both the Center for Open Science and the Harvard Dataverse have used the *AJPS* repeatedly as an example of “best practices” procedures in research transparency.

The remainder of this section briefly lists some policy changes for the *Journal* that have either been implemented recently or will be carried out in the near future.

1. *AJPS* Replication Policy

- A. Authors of accepted articles are required to submit replication files to the *AJPS* Dataverse within the Harvard Dataverse Network.
- B. We provide specific guidelines about what materials need to be provided.
- C. The replication guidelines recently were updated to cover the requirements for qualitative data and analyses. I am very grateful for the important contributions to this new version of the guidelines provided by Colin Elman, Diana Kapiszewski, and other scholars from the qualitative research community.
- D. Authors are now asked if they will comply with the *AJPS* Replication Policy as part of the manuscript submission process. If they request an exemption from the policy, they are asked to explain the situation leading to the request.

2. Verification of Replication Materials

- A. Article acceptances are conditional upon successful reproduction of results using replication materials submitted by the authors.
- B. Verifications of quantitative analyses are carried out by the Archive Staff at the University of North Carolina's Odum Institute for Research in Social Science.
- C. Verifications of qualitative analyses will be carried out by the staff of Syracuse University's Qualitative Data Repository
- D. The verification process was first announced on March 26, 2015. As of August 15, 2016, Odum staff worked with 82 accepted manuscripts. Of these, 68 have been fully verified, and 14 more are pending.
- E. The verification process for qualitative research was announced on May 26, 2016. Since that date, no manuscripts using qualitative analyses have been accepted for publication.
- F. So far, there have been no failures to reproduce reported analyses. However, it usually takes several iterations of the verification process to produce a full set of replication materials. So far, only seven analyses have been fully reproduced on the first try.

3. Innovations in the Replication and Verification Process

- A. The *AJPS* now awards the Center for Open Science's "Open Data" and "Open Practices" badges to articles for which replication materials are uploaded to the *AJPS* Dataverse. This should be all *AJPS* articles that are based on empirical analyses (with exceptions made for cases where the data cannot be made available to the general public).
- B. I am working with the Archive Staff from the Odum Institute and staff at the Center for Open Science to help develop a new "Reproducibility" badge. This would be awarded to articles that pass successfully through the *AJPS* verification process.
- C. The *AJPS* Editorial Staff and I are working with our colleagues at the Odum Institute, Wiley Publishers, and Aries Systems (the owners of the Editorial Manager software system) to incorporate the replication and verification steps more fully into the regular workflow of manuscript processing.

4. Participation in Pre-Registered Research Competition

- A. The *AJPS* is participating in the Election Research Preacceptance Competition (ERPC), organized by Arthur Lupia and Brendan Nyhan, and Funded by the Laura and John Arnold Foundation.
- B. Competing scholars will design papers with analyses based upon items in the 2016 ANES Interview Schedule, and pre-register their designs. The *AJPS*, along with eight other journals, has agreed to review the pre-registered designs and make editorial decisions prior to the release of the 2016 ANES data.
- C. Scholars whose work is accepted at one of the participating journals will also receive a cash award.
- D. The ERPC funders will pay for the page space required for the articles, if any of the pre-registered designs are accepted for publication at the *AJPS*.

5. Submitting Authors and Manuscript Reviews

- A. Upon submission of a manuscript, the corresponding author receives an acknowledgment message. As part of this message, the author is required to select one of two alternatives: The first is "In submitting this manuscript, I agree to review up to two manuscripts for the *AJPS*, if invited to do so, within the next 18 months" and the second is "I do not agree to review manuscripts for the *AJPS* (please explain)." Since these checkboxes were added to the acknowledgment message in January 2016, all corresponding authors have selected the first alternative. However, the current statement does not refer to co-authors. We plan to change this in the very near future.
- B. A chronic problem for the *AJPS* consists of authors who submit many manuscripts but refuse to review manuscripts themselves (either declining invitations to review or simply not responding to review invitations).
- C. In response to this problem, and with unanimous support from the *AJPS* Editorial Board and the Midwest Political Science Association Executive Council, the following passage was added to the "Instructions for Submitting Authors":

Authors and co-authors of submissions to the *AJPS* are expected to review manuscripts for the *Journal*. The *AJPS* Editor reserves the right to refuse submissions from authors who repeatedly fail to provide reviews for the *Journal* when invited to do so. Any such submission refusals will be made only after consultation with at least two members of the *AJPS* Editorial Board.

6. Seeking Advice from the Editorial Board and the MPSA Executive Council

- A. Should pre-registration be mentioned in the *AJPS* manuscript submission guidelines? If so, how? Are there any new procedures required for handling pre-registered studies?
- B. Should the *AJPS* accept submissions that are meta-analyses?

7. *AJPS* Cover and Website Redesign

- A. In consultation with the *AJPS* Editorial Staff, the designers at Wiley Publishers created a new cover design for the *AJPS* which we have been using since Issue 1 of Volume 60 (January 2016).
- B. Melissa Heeke, from the Midwest Political Science Association, redesigned the *AJPS* website, reorganizing the existing content and adding new content. The site currently emphasizes the *Journal's* content, along with editorial objectives, and useful information for *AJPS* authors and manuscript referees.
- C. We plan to add manuscript processing statistics to the website, along with more bibliometric information about specific articles.

Editorial Board (August 2016)

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