



# American Journal of Political Science

## Editor's Mid-Year Report to the Executive Council of the Midwest Political Science Association August 31, 2018

Jan E. Leighley, *Lead Interim Editor*  
American University

on behalf of *Associate Editors*

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## INTRODUCTION

This mid-year editorial report is submitted to the Executive Council of the Midwest Political Science Association by Jan Leighley, Lead Editor, on behalf of the editorial team including Associate Editors Sarah Brooks, Ohio State University; Mary Dietz, Northwestern University; Jennifer L. Lawless, University of Virginia; Layna D. Mosley, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill; and Rocio Titiunik, University of Michigan. Leighley was announced as interim lead editor on May 3, 2018 following the resignation of William Jacoby on April 19, 2018, charged with identifying an editorial team that would maintain the standards and expectations of the *American Journal of Political Science*. The five associate editors—all distinguished scholars in their respective subfields—agreed to serve for the one-year interim term despite prior commitments, no advance notice, and minimal support from their home institutions. Their commitments to the journal allowed us to minimize consequences of the suspension of editorial operations from April 18 through May 21.

Included below are details on editorial activities, policies and office operations from January 1, 2018 through August 19, 2018. Where appropriate, information from previous years, or information pre-/post- the appointment of the interim editorial team is provided for purposes of comparison. However, given the unexpected editorial transition, caution should be used in making comparisons over time as well as across editorships.

## IMPACT AND IMPORTANCE

The common goal of the Jacoby and Leighley editorships in 2018 was to maintain or enhance the outstanding reputation and scholarly excellence of the *AJPS* within the discipline of political science as well as in the social sciences. Key to accomplishing this goal is monitoring the visibility and impact of the journal using standard metrics. The commonly-used indicators of visibility and impact include the Thomson Reuters/JCR Impact Factors and the Google Scholar *h5*-index. The two-year/five-year impact factors (IF) reflect the number of citations to papers published in the *AJPS* in the previous two/five years. The Google Scholar *h5*-index is the largest number *h* such that *h* articles published in the previous five years (for 2018, 2014-2018) have at least *h* citations each.

Both measures reflect the continuing visibility and impact of papers published in the *AJPS*. The two-year impact factor score increased from 5.044 in 2016 to 5.22 in 2017. This is the third year in a row that the *AJPS* two-year impact factor has increased; it is also the third year in a row in which the *AJPS* ranked as the top-ranking journal in political science. In comparison, the *Annual Review of Political Science* has an impact factor score of 3.636, the *European Journal of Political Research* has a score of 3.576 and the *British Journal of Political Science* has a score of 3.326. The *American Political Science Review* ranks 10th in 2017 with an impact factor of 3.252. The *AJPS* five-year IF for 2017 is 6.287, compared to a 2016 five-year IF of 5.436.

The 2018 Google Scholar *h5*-index score increased to 68, compared to scores of 64 in both 2017 and 2016. The 2018 *h5*-index score for the *American Political Science Review* is 59, and the 2018 *h5*-index score for the *Journal of Politics* is 48. The *AJPS* ranks 8th among all social science journals in 2018, as it did in 2017. Additional comparisons of *AJPS*'s visibility and impact to other journals will be provided in the 2018 annual report.

## SUBMISSIONS AND TURNAROUND TIME

Table 1 reports the number of submissions received by the *AJPS* each calendar year from 2000 to 2018. Between January 9 and August 19, 2018, we received 643 manuscripts, which represents 3.74 submissions per day (172 total days, with the interim and summer break days excluded). This submission rate represents a 14.6% increase over 2017, which had 561 submissions over the same period, and a 10.3% increase over 2016, which had 583 submissions over the same time period. Should this rate continue, we might near 1000 manuscript submissions by the end of the calendar year.

**Table 1. Manuscript Submissions and Turnaround Time**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of submissions</b>	<b>Mean turnaround time (days)</b>
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	928	54
2017	906	54
2018	643	52
1/9 – 8/19		

Also reported in Table 1 is the mean turnaround time (from date of first receipt to first decision) for January 9 through August 19, 2018, compared to turnaround times for previous years. I am pleased to report that turnaround has decreased slightly—by two days—from 2017. About two days of this review time is taken up by authors needing to correct submissions due to failing the technical checks, or a delay between passing the technical check and inviting the first reviewer. Because turnaround time decreased in the post-interim team appointment period (from 61.5 days to 34.5 days), we anticipate that turnaround will continue to decrease as we complete the 2018 calendar year.

## SUBMISSION RATES BY SUBFIELD

Table 2 reports submissions by subfield, as coded by the editorial office staff. Between January 9 and August 19, 2018, 30.4% of manuscripts submitted were in the subfield of American politics (institutions or behavior), compared to 38.2% submitted in the subfield of comparative politics. Other subfields comprised far smaller

portions of submissions, with International Relations at 13.2%, Methodology and Formal Theory at 8.1%, and Political Theory at 4.3%; some 7.8% of manuscripts submitted were unclassifiable. Comparing subfield submissions before/after April 18 suggests a notable increase in comparative politics manuscripts submitted (from 33.8% pre-transition to 39.1% post-transition).

**Table 2. Manuscript Submissions by Subfield, Editorial Office Codes (Jan. 9-Aug. 19, 2018)**

Subfield	
American political behavior	15.7%
American political institutions	14.7
Comparative politics	38.2
International relations	13.2
Methodology and formal theory	8.1
Political theory	4.3
Unclassifiable	7.8

### EDITORIAL DECISIONS

Table 3 reports editorial decisions made between January 1 and August 19, 2018. Out of 599 initial/original manuscript submissions, 24.1% were declined without review, 65.6% were rejected, and 10.4% were invited to revise and resubmit. Of those manuscripts that received an R&R, 30% were rejected, 22% received an additional R&R, and 48% were accepted for publication. About 15% of papers revised a second time were invited to revise and resubmit, 7.7% were invited to revise again, and 76% were accepted. If desk rejected manuscripts are removed from the calculations, 86.2% of initial submissions were rejected, while 13.8% were invited to revise and resubmit. Including desk rejects, the acceptance rate was 5.4%; excluding desk rejects, the acceptance rate was 6.9%.

**Table 3. Editorial Decisions (Jan. 1 to Aug. 19, 2018)**

	Initial Submission (n=599)	First Revision (n=54)	Second revision (n=13)
Decline without Review	24.1%		
Reject	65.6	29.6%	15.4%
Revise and Resubmit	10.4	22.2	7.7
Accept	---	48.1	76.9

Table 4 presents editorial decision outcomes for January 1 to April 18, 2018, while Table 5 presents editorial decision outcomes for May 21 through August 19, 2018. The total number of decisions made during the earlier period was 293, compared to 373 post-transition. In the post-transition period, the editorial team made fewer desk reject decisions (30.2% vs. 19.1%), but invited about the same number of revisions (10.4% vs. 10.6%). On first revisions, during the post-transition period we rejected slightly fewer revised manuscripts (27.3% vs. 31.3%), but invited far fewer second revisions (36.4% vs. 12.5%). In the post-transition period, revised manuscripts were more likely to be accepted (36.4% vs. 56.3%). There were also more second revision papers on which we made decisions in the post-transition period, with 72.7% of those being accepted.

**Table 4. Editorial Decisions (Jan. 1 to April 18, 2018)**

	Initial Submission (n=269)	First Revision (n=22)	Second revision (n=2)
Decline without Review	30.2%		
Reject	59.3	27.3%	
Revise and Resubmit	10.4	36.4	
Accept	---	36.4	100%

**Table 5. Editorial Decisions (May 21 to Aug. 19, 2018)**

	Initial Submission (n=330)	First Revision (n=32)	Second revision (n=11)
Decline without Review	19.1%		
Reject	70.3	31.3%	18.2%
Revise and Resubmit	10.6	12.5	9.1
Accept		56.3	72.7

Table 6 presents editorial decisions by subfield for the January 1 through August 19 period. Here, the percentage of desk rejected manuscripts is relatively similar, except for comparative politics (at 30%, compared to around 20-25% for other subfields). International Relations and Political Theory had higher rejection rates on the first round (77% and 73%), and also invited fewer revise and resubmits (2% and 5%).

**Table 6. Editorial Decisions by Subfield (Jan. 1 to Aug. 19, 2018)**

Subfield	Initial Submissions:			Revise & Resubmits:	
	Desk Reject	Reject	Revise & Resubmit	Accept	Reject
American political behavior	21%	66%	14%	71%	29%
American political institutions	21	66	13	50	50
Comparative politics	30	61	9	64	36
International Relations	21	77	2	75	25
Methodology and formal theory	25	50	25	60	40
Political theory	23	73	5	100	0

## REVIEWS AND REFEREES

Between January 1 and August 19, 2018, the editors sent 2,326 reviewer invitations and received 1,383 reviewer reports, as shown in Table 7. Of the reviewers who responded affirmatively to the reviewer invitation, about 65% completed a review or have a review in progress; the other 35% of reviewer invitations were withdrawn. The reviews received in the journal office were generally lengthy, detailed and professional in tone.

**Table 7. Reviewer Response to Invitation (Jan. 1 to Aug. 19, 2018)**

<b>Response</b>	<b>Percentage (n=2,326)</b>	<b>Subtotal</b>
Completed reviews	55.5%	
Review in progress	9.8	65.3%
Declined invitation	20.7	
Never responded	0.0	20.7
Did not need review	14.0%	14.0

The distribution of reviewers' substantive recommendations between January 1 and August 19, 2018, are provided in Table 8. 53.6% of the submitted reviews recommended the manuscript be rejected; 31.2% recommended a revise and resubmit, 9.5% recommended to publish with minor revisions; and 5.7% recommended to publish as is. The mean number of days between reviewer invitation until receipt of the review was 34.3 days.

**Table 8. Reviewer recommendations (Jan. 1 to Aug. 19, 2018)**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Percentage (n=1,383)</b>
Reject	53.6%
Revise and Resubmit	31.2
Publish with Minor Revisions	9.5
Publish as Is	5.7

## **SOCIAL MEDIA METRICS**

A few additional details about changes in social media visibility suggest that that the journal's presence in these venues continues to be strong. As of August 1, 2018, the *AJPS* had 4,670 followers, compared to 4,425 followers as of March 12, 2018. Twitter followers have increased over the same period from 7,817 to 8,675.

## **EDITORIAL POLICIES**

The outstanding reputation and impact of the *AJPS* at the start of the new interim editorship suggested that our primary task was to "do no harm" while the journal was our responsibility. As such, I have focused on continuing most general editorial practices established by previous editors. The goals of publishing papers that make notable theoretical advances, using the most sophisticated, rigorous methodological approaches, as appropriate, are ones that the entire team has embraced. By choosing the most qualified reviewers, reading each manuscript carefully, and assessing the potential impact of each paper, we have continued decision-making on submitted manuscripts using the same standards as previous editors.

The major shift in the editorial office is a new model of decision-making that relies heavily on five associate editors—each primarily responsible for the research subfields in which they have established their research expertise. As lead editor, I review every paper that is submitted and assign each paper to the appropriate associate editor. The associate editor then identifies appropriate reviewers, manages the review process, and

drafts decision letters. I again review the manuscript, its reviews and the decision letter before sending notification of the outcome of the review process to each author.

A priority in the first month or so was to follow the intentions of the previous editor, as reflected in decision letters, so that authors felt that they were treated fairly over the course of the transition. We also focused on the backlog of manuscripts that needed more reviewers, or for which reviews had been received while the journal was on hiatus and were ready for decisions.

Another priority was the implementation of the new conflict-of-interest policy passed by the MPSA Council in April 2018. This policy required re-working the submission interface of Editorial Manager to allow editorial operations to comply with the COI policy, as well as working with the Publication Ethics Committee (PEC) to establish procedures for COI's that require external review by the committee. Sarah Binder, PEC committee chair, was especially helpful to the editorial office in addressing various COI-related issues from the submission process through the selection and implementation of any modified (internal and external) editorial review processes. We have now sorted out the EM software issues, and both internal and external review processes, in the case of COI's, as far as getting manuscripts out under review. We have requested the council's approval of one revision to the COI policy initial passed by the Council in April.

To date, we have had COI's reported on 28 out of 306 manuscripts (9.2%), with three manuscripts being reviewed by the chair of the PEC committee. Of those "COI manuscripts," 27 (96.4%) involved conflicts where one or more of the authors are colleagues at the same institution, current collaborators, or are/were involved on a dissertation committee with one or more of the editors. Only one manuscript (3.6%) identified a potential conflict involving harassment, assault, or discrimination with one or more of the editors. However, the corresponding author has failed to respond to inquiries from the MPSA Publishing Ethics Committee and thus the manuscript remains unprocessed and has not undergone review by an external editor. We will report additional details about the decision status breakdown of these manuscripts in the 2018 annual report.

We took advantage of making (required) changes to the EM submission process as an opportunity to consider other (ethical) issues that should be addressed through that process, and added new questions regarding who the authors of the manuscript submission have co-authored with over the past five years, who their dissertation chairs are, and whether the manuscript authors have received IRB approval (if needed) for the research that the manuscript reports. We were confronted by an unexpected issue regarding "text recycling" in the first few weeks of the editorship that required a substantial amount of attention. As a result, I focused on revising the submission guidelines available on the website, eliminating redundancies as well as ambiguities and inconsistencies in those guidelines.

The final policy change that we have initiated is a general limitation of twenty pages for Supplemental Information files that are submitted with manuscripts. This became an issue for the editorial team as we received a number of complaints from referees about the length of the SIs, and members of the editorial team agreed that some changes, or elaboration, would improve the utility, quality and value of having the SIs be available to reviewers. The team's sense is that there had been little discussion and even less clarity over what the appropriate use and presentation of SIs are, and that we needed a more formal policy of our expectations. We announced earlier this month that we would limit the length of the SIs to 20 pages, with an expectation that this limitation would "generally" apply. My assumption was that authors for whom the page limit creates a problem would communicate directly with the editorial office about the possibility of an exception. By doing so, I would have more information to base subsequent policy details. We imagined that there might be different needs across subfields, methodological approaches, and other dimensions. We also expected that SIs for revised papers might require more space, depending on what reviewers expected. We will be discussing how to develop a more detailed policy with the editorial board at APSA, and work to clarify a policy beyond length. So stay tuned.

## **EDITORIAL OFFICE OPERATIONS**

The editorial office has been in a state of transition for the entire summer, with associate editors coming on board over a month-long period, and the AU staff beginning at the end of July. We took an abbreviated (two-week) summer break to focus on shifting responsibilities more fully to AU, and only this week are finally training the last staff person in the AU office.

None of this would have been possible without the outstanding skills and commitment of Marty Jordan, who served as Managing Editor through the end of our interim break. Marty has now shifted to Production Editor, which includes a variety of key tasks associated with the publication process at Wiley, the replication process at Odum, and various reports and website communication responsibilities. In short, while the associate editors were learning their jobs, Marty was the one who was holding the operation together, and for that, I cannot thank him enough.

The new staff structure at AU relies heavily on Julia Salvatore, who serves as Editorial Administrative Assistant. Julia has been slowly taking on many of Marty's tasks relating to "clearing the inbox," managing students who are working as editorial assistants and providing various types of data base and other administrative support to all of the editors. We (finally) have three students—Ryan DeTamble, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Government, Natalie Hedden, and MPA/MPP student in the School of Public Affairs, and Bradley Erickson, an undergraduate political science and economics major with plans for graduate school.

The *AJPS* continues to benefit from the work of Nate Smith and another (new) Ph.D. student at Michigan State (Emma Slonina) through December 2018. We also appreciate the work by Jessica Schoenherr, a Ph.D. student at MSU who served as an editorial intern and stepped down in mid-August. Effective this month—as the AU staff has settled in—the graduate students at MSU will be updating the reviewer database and working on a variety of other projects that will benefit future editorial teams.

The *AJPS* has benefited greatly from the expertise of Mike Streeter at Wiley to expand the audience and impact of the *AJPS*. We also continue to follow the established policies and procedures associated with the *AJPS* Replication and Verification Policy, relying on the fine work of the Odum Institute. I attended or have been invited to attend related events (at a pre-APSA workshop and at a conference at the University of Chicago in the fall). These additional editorial commitments are important for ensuring that *AJPS* is represented and "at the table" in conversations taking place among data scientists, social scientists, and others. It is only by making this investment that the journal will continue to play a leading role in the discipline.

## **THANK YOU, THANK YOU, THANK YOU**

I have long believed that journals, associations and departments are fragile institutions. Yet the past several months have provided an uncounted number of examples of the impressive skills, professional values and expertise of the academic community that supports the *AJPS*. The MPSA Council, the associate editors, the Editorial Board, the Michigan State University staff, the MPSA staff, the production team at Wiley, the staff at the Odum Institute and the new staff at AU deserve recognition for the excellent work they have done to continue to produce the outstanding journal that is the *AJPS*.

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