



American Journal of Political Science

Annual Report to the
Executive Council of the
Midwest Political Science Association

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Introduction

On June 1, 2019, we began a four-year term as editors of the *American Journal of Political Science*. As we stated in our proposal, our goal is to maintain the status of *AJPS* as the premier journal in the discipline while simultaneously modernizing the journal's processes, providing more transparency to the user community, and working to represent the diversity of the discipline in its many forms. This report summarizes operations from January 1, 2019 through December 31, 2019. Given that our team was been in place for only six months of that time period, we urge caution in making comparisons over time as well as across editorships. Next year's data will allow for cleaner comparisons.

Journal Performance

Like previous editors, we strive to maintain and enhance the journal's outstanding reputation, both in terms of visibility and impact. We inherited a journal that was going strong and that continues to date. Both the Thomson Reuters/JCR Impact Factor and the Google Scholar h5 Index are solid.

More specifically, the *AJPS* 2018 five-year impact factor (based on citations of papers published in *AJPS* between 2013 and 2017) is 7.324, compared to the 2017 five-year impact factor of 6.3. The 2018 score is an all-time high score for *AJPS*. Moreover, using this metric, *AJPS* is the most highly-ranked journal in the discipline. The second ranked journal, with an impact factor of 6.631, is the *American Political Science Review*.

In 2019, the *AJPS* Google Scholar h5-index score increased to 69, compared to a score of 68 in 2018 and scores of 64 in both 2017 and 2016. This indicates that 69 articles have been cited at least 69 times during the five-year period from June 2014 through June 2019. This score is the highest achieved by any political science journal included in the Google Scholar metric. By comparison, the *American Political Science Review* and the *Journal of Politics* scores are 58 and 50 respectively. 50. Among all social science journals in 2019, *AJPS* ranks 9th.

We should also note that our social media visibility continues to rise. As of April 2020, *AJPS* had 11,989 Twitter followers, which represents a 17% increase from last year at the same time. We also have 5,622 Facebook followers, which represents an 11% increase from August 2019. Part of the growth is likely due to the fact that in the past few months, we have used the *AJPS Editor's Blog* to host a series of posts that provide information to the user community about various aspects of the manuscript submission process – proposing and opposing reviewers, appendices and supplemental materials, and keys to a smooth verification process. Our next set of posts will address issues around gender representation in our submission and accepted manuscript pools.

Submission and Turnaround Time

From January 10, 2019 to December 23, 2019, we received 1,185 submissions – an average of 3.6 submissions per day. As indicated in Table 1, this submission rate represents nearly a 15% increase from 2018, which was previously the year that received the most submissions. As usual, Comparative politics (39%) and American politics (31%) dominated the submission pool. Political Theory (9%), International Relations (12%), and Methodology and Formal Theory (10%) lagged

behind. In the year we've been editors, however, we've seen an uptick in theory and methods submissions, so we are confident that we will strike more of a subfield balance as the term goes on.

Despite an increase in submissions, the mean turnaround time (from date of submission to first decision) has not taken a hit. In 2019, it was 46 days. With the exception of 2015 (when the average was 45 days), this is the fastest turnaround time the journal has seen in 15 years. Roughly five days of this review time are taken up by authors correcting submissions because of failed technical checks.

Table 1. Manuscript Submissions and Turnaround Time		
Year	Submissions	Turnaround Time
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	1,035	55
2019	1,185	46

Note: Turnaround time is reported in days from initial submission to initial decision.

Editorial Decisions

The overall acceptance rate at *AJPS* remains low: 7.6% from January 1 to May 31, 2019, and 7.2% from the time we became editors on June 1. (Both rates increase to 10% if we remove desk rejects from the denominator.) Approximately 70% of manuscripts are sent out for review, making our desk rejection percentages somewhat lower than other top journals in the discipline. At this point,

most desk rejects are the result of a bad fit for the journal or an obvious lack of a theoretical or empirical contribution. The rates are roughly consistent across subfield, although Political Theory manuscripts are desk rejected more often because of poor fit. Given the increase in submissions during our term, we will likely increase the share of substantive desk rejects, which will bring the overall rate closer to one third, which is more in line with other top journals. The team believes that we should not burden reviewers with a manuscript that has virtually no chance of receiving an invitation to revise and resubmit.

Since we've taken over as editors, we are offering roughly the same percentage of invitations to revise and resubmit as the interim team did in the first half of 2019. But our detailed letters and instructions to authors have allowed us to cut second round R&Rs substantially (see Table 2).

Table 2. Editorial Decisions, 2019			
	Initial Decision	First Revision	Second Revision
<i>January 10 – May 31</i>			
Desk Reject	28.1 %		
Reject	62.7	19.7 %	
Revise and Resubmit	9.2	42.6	
Accept	0.0	37.7	100.0 %
N	466	61	23
<i>June 1 – December 31</i>			
Desk Reject	30.2 %		
Reject	60.1	10.2 %	
Revise and Resubmit	9.5	22.4	6.7
Accept	0.0	67.3	86.7
N	702	49	15

Reviews and Reviewers

From January 1 to December 31, 2019, the editors sent 4,530 reviewer invitations and received 2,582 reviewer reports. Of the reviewers who responded affirmatively to the invitation, roughly 74% completed a review; the other 26% were “uninvited” because we were able to dispose of the manuscript with two reviews. To decline, we require two reviews. To extend an invitation for a revise and resubmit, we require at least three. In general, the reviews were lengthy, detailed, and professional in tone. The mean number of days between sending out a reviewer invitation and receiving a review was 34 days.

The reviewers' recommendations were largely consistent with manuscript decisions. Roughly half recommended an outright rejection; one-third supported an invitation to revise and resubmit; and the remainder supported publication of the initial submission. It's important to be cautious when considering these proportions, though, as reviewers often click "R&R" despite the fact that the substance of their review points toward a clear decline.

Conflicts of Interest

Since January 2019, authors reported a conflict of interest with the editorial team on 46 manuscripts. On an additional 47 manuscripts, a member of the editorial team spotted a conflict.

Of the 93 manuscripts that involved conflicts, all but two involved authors who are colleagues at the same institution, current collaborators, or are/were involved on a dissertation committee with one or more of the editors. In those cases, a different editor was assigned to shepherd the manuscript through the review process. The two remaining manuscripts identified a potential conflict involving harassment, assault, or discrimination with one or more of the editors. But in both cases, when approached by the MPSA Publishing Ethics Committee, the authors indicated that they had unintentionally checked off the box. There was, in fact, no conflict.

Miscellaneous Updates

Ensuring IRB Approval: When we took over the journal in June 2019, we immediately instituted a new requirement that authors of work based on human subjects confirm institutional IRB approval of their projects at the time a manuscript is submitted for consideration. This step helps us ensure that the work was conducted in accordance with accepted disciplinary practices.

Proprietary Data: It has become increasingly common for authors to rely on proprietary data. This has implications for the verification process as well as the post-publication data-sharing we support. We modified the Editorial Manager interface so that authors can verify that they do, indeed, have permission to use the data included in their analyses, as well as describe any potential limitations to making it publicly available should the manuscript be published.

Unethical Behavior: Most of the time, when we think about publishing ethics, we think about plagiarism or conflicts of interest. But in just the last few months, we've encountered additional types of "bad behavior" – unauthorized use of data, resubmission of papers declined by a previous team, reviewer recommendations that pose a conflict to name just a few. We've called attention to these issues on the *AJPS Editor's Blog* and are vigilant about checking new submissions against previous ones. The problem, fortunately, seems to be abating.

Corrections, Retractions, and Expressions of Concern: We inherited an Expression of Concern from Jan Leighley as she ended her editorship. We resolved the issue, which

pertained to the alleged use of unauthorized data. More recently, we investigated a case pertaining to alleged falsification of data. With the help of our editorial team, we determined that there was an error in the paper that needed to be corrected, but that the data were not, in fact, falsified. Although both cases generated discussion with Wiley about the process by which to retract articles, a retraction was not necessary in either case.

The Workshop Section: Guidelines for the Workshop section were fuzzy at best and, in some cases, provided a “back door” to publish in *AJPS*. The team has decided to discontinue the section, but we are in ongoing discussions about whether we might bring it back with more specific guidelines.

Plans for Year Two

As we move forward, our top priority will remain encouraging and processing submissions that represent the top work across the discipline. But we have two broad initiatives we will also pursue.

Diversifying Submissions: We will continue to focus on ensuring that we are recruiting, reviewing, and publishing from as diverse an author base as possible. We recently completed a rather time-consuming data collection exercise pertaining to the sex of all authors who have submitted manuscripts to the journal dating back to January 2017. After all, that’s a first step in determining whether the gender imbalance in publication is a supply or demand problem.

Overall, 64% of submitted manuscripts are male-author only (compared to 14% written only by women). The remaining 22% are co-authored by a mix of women and men. From the outset, then, that means that women author or co-author 36% of the submissions. This is clearly a “supply” problem. We need to figure out how to increase the number of female authors. The good news is that we do not have a “demand” problem. Of those manuscripts we publish, “only” 58% are male-only; 42% have at least one female author. So, female authors actually have a somewhat higher rate of acceptance than men do.

We plan to analyze the data a bit more and call attention to the findings, especially because that will allow us to (1) discuss the reasons for women’s under-representation on our pages, and (2) refute what has become the conventional wisdom about gender bias in the review and editorial process. While some of our outreach efforts that were to take place at the MPSA conference are no longer possible, we will attend APSA – if it is held – and will continue to work with our Associate Editors to expand author and reviewer pools.

To the extent that we can obtain data on race and ethnicity of submitting authors and reviewers, we hope to conduct similar analyses in the near future.

Revisiting the Verification Process: Throughout the course of the last year, it’s become apparent that the agreements that *AJPS* entered into with the Odum Institute (quantitative verification) and the Qualitative Data Repository (qualitative verification) did not anticipate the volume of manuscripts we currently receive or the level of sophistication many of the verifications entail. We are in the process of speaking with Will Morgan about the contract

details and the possibility of approaching other organizations to do the work. We think the turnaround time and processes can be streamlined and improved, yet our conversations with both Odum and QDR have not been wholly satisfying.



Appendix: Editorial Team

Co-Editors in Chief (and Field Editors for American Politics):

- Kathleen Dolan, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee
- Jennifer L. Lawless, University of Virginia

Associate Editors:

- Elizabeth Cohen, Syracuse University
- Graeme Robertson, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
- Jonathan Woon, University of Pittsburgh

Editorial Board:

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