

American Journal of Political Science

Mid-Year Report to the Executive Council of the
Midwest Political Science Association

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Introduction

The following pages update key data from the *American Journal of Political Science*. The report, which summarizes journal operations from January 1, 2021 – August 20, 2021, also includes a few miscellaneous updates relevant to the Association, Board, and user community.

Journal Performance

Now more than two years into our term – and the most recent 18 months completely amid the pandemic – *AJPS* remains as strong as ever in terms of both visibility and impact.

More specifically, the *AJPS* five-year impact factor (based on citations of papers published in *AJPS* between 2015 and 2019) is 9.534. Using this metric, *AJPS* maintained its spot as the most highly-ranked journal in the discipline. For some context, the *Annual Review of Political Science* ranked second, with an impact factor of 9.057, the *American Political Science Review* placed third (8.756), and the *Journal of Politics* came in at number 32 (4.758).

In 2021, the *AJPS* Google Scholar h-5 index score was 68 (nearly indistinguishable from the score of 69 on 2019 and 2020). This indicates that 68 articles have been cited at least 68 times during the five-year period from June 2016 – 2020. 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 65 and 59 respectively. Among all social science journals in 2020, *AJPS* ranked 10th.

We should also note that our social media visibility continues to rise. As of August 2021, *AJPS* had 15,690 Twitter followers, which represents a 5% increase from our last report in April 2021. We also have 6,263 Facebook followers, which represents a 3% increase during the same period.

Submission and Turnaround Time

From January 1, 2021 to August 20, 2021, we received 764 submissions – an average of 3.6 submissions per day that the journal was open (nearly identical to last year). Comparative Politics (42%) and American Politics (23%) dominated the submission pool, with International Relations (14%), Political Theory (11%), and Methodology and Formal Theory (10%) comprising the rest. Compared to previous years, these numbers represent an uptick in IR and Political Theory. The newest challenge we face is to increase the number of AP submissions, which until the last couple of years, had been roughly equal to the number of CP submissions. Of course, many of the Methodology and Formal Theory papers focus on topics that address substantive issues in American Politics.

Despite a comparable number of submissions per day, the mean turnaround time (from date of submission to first decision) improved in 2021 – to just 39 days. This is the fastest turnaround time the journal has seen in 16 years. Roughly one week of this review time is taken up by authors correcting submissions because of failed technical checks and resubmitting the paper. Then, our editorial assistants reconduct the technical check.

| Table 1. Manuscript Submission 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 |
| 2020 | 1,161 | 43 |
| 2021 | 764 | 39 |

Note: Turnaround time is reported in days from initial submission to initial decision. The reporting period for 2021 is January 1, 2021 – August 20, 2021.

Editorial Decisions

The overall acceptance rate at AJPS remains low: 7.9% from January 1, 2021 – August 20, 2021. This rate increases to roughly 11% when we remove desk rejects from the denominator. We sent nearly two-thirds of manuscripts out for review, making our desk rejection percentages a bit lower than other top journals in the discipline.

In terms of manuscripts submitted in 2021, 7.5% received an invitation to revise and resubmit, and the overwhelming majority of those manuscripts were ultimately accepted (typically after just one round of revisions). Careful reviews and our detailed letters and instructions to authors have allowed us to ensure that second round R&Rs are rare (see Table 2).

Table 2. Editorial Decision, 2021

| | Initial Decision | First Revision | Second Revision |
|-------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------|
| Desk reject | 38.5 % | | |
| Reject | 53.9 | 13.1 % | 0 % |
| Revise & Resubmit | 7.5 | 9.8 | 0 |
| Accept | 0.0 | 77.0 | 100 |
| N | 676 | 61 | 16 |

Reviews and Reviewers

From January 1, 2021 to August 20, 2021, we sent 2,465 reviewer invitations and received 1,312 reviewer reports. Of the reviewers who responded affirmatively to the invitation, 75% completed a review; 18% were “uninvited” because we were able to dispose of the manuscript with two reviews. To decline a manuscript, we require at least 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 33 days. Remarkably, this number was the same in 2019 and 2020, so our reviewers have been just as efficient and reliable amid the Covid pandemic as they had been before.

The reviewers’ recommendations were largely consistent with manuscript decisions. Roughly half (49.9%) recommended an outright rejection; nearly one-third (31.1%) supported an invitation to revise and resubmit; and the remainder supported publication of the initial submission. It’s important to use caution 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

From January 1, 2021 to August 20, 2021, authors reported a conflict of interest with the editorial team on 26 manuscripts. On an additional 20 manuscripts, a member of the editorial team spotted a conflict. All 46 of the conflicts involved authors who are colleagues at the same institution, current collaborators, or are/were involved on a dissertation committee with one of more of the editors. In those cases, a different editor was assigned to shepherd the manuscript through the review process. As such, it was not necessary to approach the MPSA Publishing Ethics Committee for any cases in 2021.

Miscellaneous Updates

COVID: Submissions have remained strong during COVID. Because of overburdened reviewers, we continue to work on expanding our reviewer pool and releasing reviewers when we receive two negative reviews on a manuscript, allowing us to preserve a willing reviewer for another submission.

Impact Factor: We want to highlight a change in the methodology used for computing impact factors starting in 2020. Rather than count only citations to articles as they appeared once an article published in an issue, Early Access and Early View versions of articles in 2020 were included in the numerator, but not the denominator. That change significantly increased the universe of citations included in the numerator of the impact factor and rewarded journals with a backlog (which we don't have). As a result, the *AJPS* two-year impact factor was numerically higher than it has ever been (6.081), but our ranking dropped from 4th to 12th. Note that *AJPS* still ranks first based on the 5-year impact factor. Beginning next year, Early Access and Early View articles will also be included in the denominator, so some of the journals that received a big boost this year will fall back down. But it's now more important than ever to publicize papers as soon as they publish online. We have also spoken with Wiley about producing one additional virtual issue every year so that we can drive more users to our content.

Verification: The verification process has now been underway at *AJPS* for more than six years. And based on our experiences dealing with both quantitative and qualitative verification over the course of the last two years, we began a conversation at our April 2021 board meeting about the process, its strengths, and its weaknesses. We all agreed that the first step in evaluating the process – and assessing whether verification is meeting its goals or potentially harming our competitive position in the discipline – would be to survey *AJPS* authors who have undergone the process and ask about their experiences with the process and their attitudes about verification more broadly.

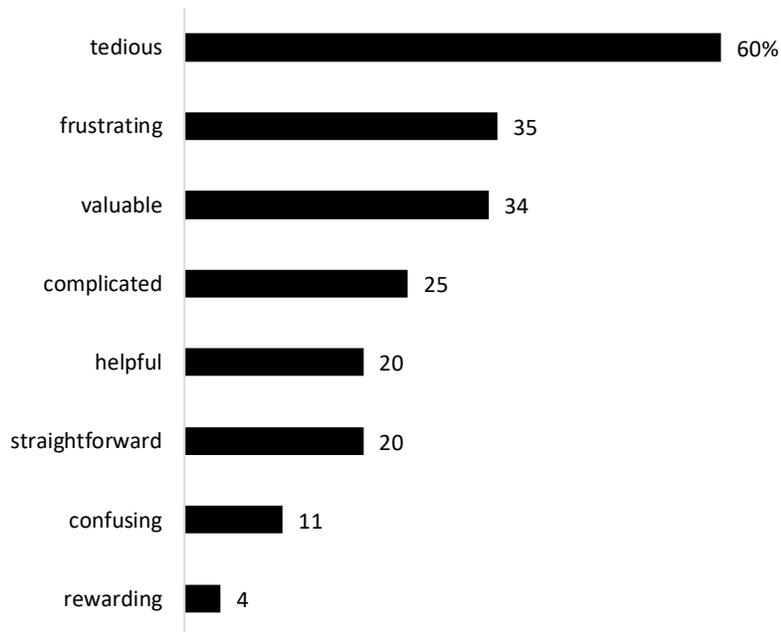
In September 2021, we emailed the 390 *AJPS* authors whose manuscripts have undergone verification since June 1, 2019 (the date our editorial term began). We asked them to complete a short online survey which consisted of a series of multiple-choice questions and one open-ended question that allowed authors to share any additional aspects of their verification experience. We received 268 completed surveys, for a response rate of 69%.

Three basic findings emerged from the survey:

1. ***AJPS* authors see value in the verification process in general.** Fifty-five percent of respondents report that they know which journals require verification, and 52% feel more confident in an article's quality when it has been through verification. In addition, 70% of respondents contend that the process allows authors and editors to identify and correct errors that might not be uncovered throughout the peer review process and nearly 75% appreciate how the process improves the quality of codebooks and data sets, making it easier for other scholars to use those materials. Importantly, the overwhelming majority of authors do not view verification as a way to elevate some types of research over others (6%) or as a gatekeeping exercise that works to exclude certain scholars (3%).
2. ***AJPS* authors believe that the specific verification process at *AJPS* leaves much room for improvement.** The survey results make it very clear that our authors are not satisfied with the verification process. Part of the issue is time – 67% of respondents report that the process was more time-consuming than they expected.

But authors' dissatisfaction is not only rooted in the fact that the process requires them to undertake an additional set of steps in preparation for publication. Their experiences with the process are also a source of discontent. Indeed, when we asked respondents to indicate which words best describe the verification process at *AJPS*, negative words were far more popular than positive words (see Figure 1).

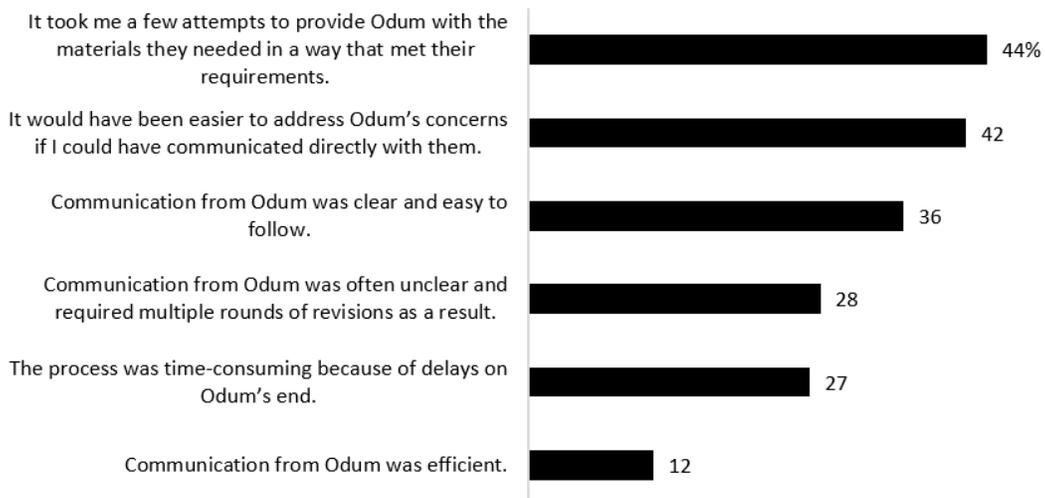
Figure 1. Words *AJPS* Authors Use to Describe the Verification Process



Notes: Bars represent the percentage of respondents who reported that each word Described their experience with the *AJPS* verification process. Respondents could select as many words as they thought applied. N = 268.

The survey results indicate that the source of many authors’ frustration is not the *AJPS* team, but rather, the Odum Institute and the procedures they follow. In particular, authors identified several inefficiencies on Odum’s end – including their policy not to communicate directly with authors (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. *AJPS* Authors’ Experiences with the Odum Institute

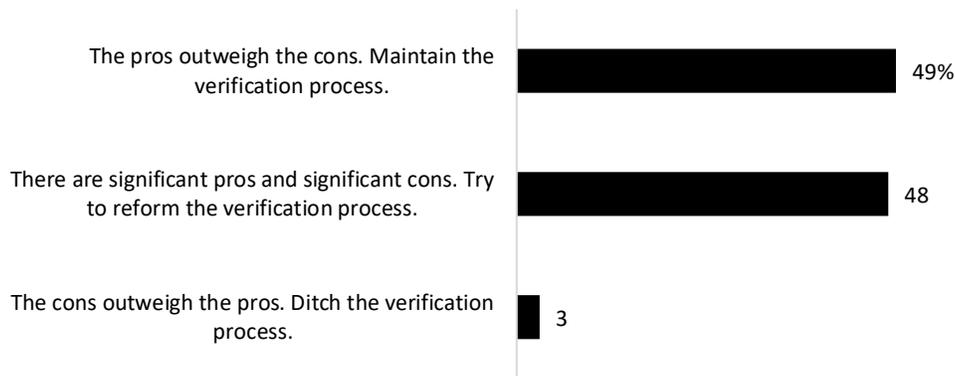


Notes: Bars represent the percentage of respondents who reported that each sentence described their experience with the Odum Institute. Respondents could check all that applied. N = 252.

Overall, when asked to characterize the feedback they received from Odum, only 27% report that the corrections requested fundamentally improved the data set and the replication files associated with the article. The remainder report either that the corrections forced them to clean the data set and replication files, but not in a way that would really matter to a user who downloaded them (44%) or that the corrections focused on detailed minutiae that were irrelevant for a user who downloaded the materials (29%).

3. *AJPS* authors support maintaining a verification process at the journal and plan to continue to submit manuscripts that require it. Despite frustrating experiences, 97% of our authors believe that it is important to maintain the verification process, although half of those support reforming the process (see Figure 3). Regardless of whether and how we modify the process, though, 95% of respondents report that they are “likely” or “very likely” to submit a future manuscript to the journal.

Figure 3. *AJPS* Authors’ Preferences for Maintaining, Reforming, or Scrapping Verification



Notes: Bars represent the percentage of respondents who reported that each sentence described their experience with the Odum Institute. Respondents could check all that applied. N = 244.

Given these findings, we plan to discuss with Odum options for reforming the process. Our main goal is to ensure that the user community can replicate tables, figures, and statistics cited in any published articles. That means that data sets must be clean and codebooks accurate. But the closed- and open-ended responses we received suggest that many of the details on which Odum concentrates and for which they return manuscripts to authors do not affect a user’s ability to download the data set and replicate the results. We will also pursue conversations with CISER, a verification firm that is willing to communicate directly with authors.

It is important to recognize, however, that what we learned from our survey is only a first step. It’s vital at this point to get a broader sense of how the user community feels about verification, the extent to which non-*AJPS* authors perceive of the process as an impediment, and the extent to which the pros outweigh the cons more broadly. Thus, we have begun a conversation with Will Morgan about surveying the MPSA membership. Such a survey will also allow us to shed light on variation in perceptions. Our author survey, after all, saw little demographic variation. More specifically, 80% of respondents identified as men, 71% identified as White, and 89% work at R1 institutions. Although we uncovered no differences in attitudes or experiences along these demographic lines, it could very well be the case that certain scholars view verification as an impediment and opt not to submit to *AJPS* in the first place. A survey of the membership will help offer clarity with regard to such issues.

Appendix: Editorial Team (Updated for the Second Half of Our Term)

Co-Editors on 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
Dan Reiter, Emory University
Graeme Robertson, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
Jonathan Woon, University of Pittsburgh

Editorial Board:

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|
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| David Broockman, University of California, Berkeley | Rahsaan Maxwell, University of North Carolina |
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| Adam Harris, University College London | Andrew Sabl, University of Toronto |
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| Kristin Kanthak, University of Pittsburgh | Debra Thompson, McGill University |
| Kimuli Kasara, Columbia University | Mike Ting, Columbia University |
| Josh Kertzer, Harvard University | Mike Tomz, Stanford University |
| Jack Knight, Duke University | Jessica Trounstine, University of California, Merced |
| Mona Lena Krook, Rutgers University | Lee Walker, University of North Texas |
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