American Journal of Political Science

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

August 24, 2020

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Introduction

Because we delivered our annual report in June 2020, this report simply updates key data and reports on our first full-year as co-editors of the *American Journal of Political Science*. The report also includes a few miscellaneous updates that are relevant to the journal's operations.

Journal Performance

One year in, *AJPS* remains strong in terms of both visibility and impact.

More specifically, the *AJPS* 2019 five-year impact factor (based on citations of papers published in *AJPS* between 2014 and 2018) is 6.991. Using this metric, *AJPS* maintained its spot as 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 2020, the *AJPS* Google Scholar h5-index score held steady at 69 for the second year in a row. This is 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 2015 through June 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 58 and 54 respectively. Among all social science journals in 2019, *AJPS* ranks 10th.

We should also note that our social media visibility continues to rise. As of August 2020, *AJPS* had 12,875 Twitter followers, which represents a 7% increase from just April 2020. We also have 5,753 Facebook followers, which represents a 2% increase since April 2020. 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 as well as gendered patterns of submissions (we elaborate below).

Submission and Turnaround Time

From June 1, 2019 to May 31, 2020, we received 1,208 submissions – an average of 3.7 submissions per day that the journal was open. This represents an 11% increase from the same period last year and a 20 year high. As usual, Comparative Politics (37%) and American Politics (30%) dominated the submission pool. Political Theory (10%), International Relations (11%), Methodology (6%), and Formal Theory (6%) 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. From June 1, 2019 to May 31, 2020, it was 44 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
2020	1,208	44

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

Editorial Decisions

The overall acceptance rate at *AJPS* remains low: 6.0% from June 1, 2019 to May 31, 2020 (down from 6.7% last year at this time). This rate increases to 8.5% if we remove desk rejects from the denominator. We sent roughly 70% of manuscripts out for review, making our desk rejection percentages somewhat lower than other top journals in the discipline (see below).

Since we've taken over as editors, we've offered roughly the same percentage of invitations to revise and resubmit as the interim team did in 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			
	Initial Decision	**First Revision**	**Second Revision**
June 1, 2019 – May 31, 2020			
Desk Reject	32.1 %		
Reject	57.2	15.4 %	6.7 %
Revise and Resubmit	10.4	22.0	6.7
Accept	0.3	62.6	86.7
N	1179	91	15
June 1, 2018 – May 31, 2019			
Desk Reject	26.5 %		
Reject	63.5	21.0 %	8.1%
Revise and Resubmit	9.5	31.4	8.1
Accept	9.9	47.6	83.8
N	1081	105	37

Reviews and Reviewers

From January 1 to December 31, 2019, the editors sent 4,324 reviewer invitations and received 2,382 reviewer reports. Of the reviewers who responded affirmatively to the invitation, 72% completed a review; the other 28% 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 33 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 June 2019, authors reported a conflict of interest with the editorial team on 36 manuscripts. On an additional 25 manuscripts, a member of the editorial team spotted a

conflict.

Of the 61 manuscripts that involved conflicts, all but one 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 remaining manuscript identified a potential conflict involving harassment, assault, or discrimination with one or more of the editors. But 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

COVID: Submissions have remained strong during COVID; indeed, we've experienced an uptick. At the same time, it has become increasingly difficult to identify willing reviewers. We continue to work on expanding our reviewer pool, but we're also trying to release reviewers when we receive two negative reviews on a manuscript, allowing us to preserve a willing reviewer for another submission. We expect that these difficulties will ramp up with the start of the semester.

Diversifying Submissions: We continue to focus on ensuring that we are recruiting, reviewing, and publishing from as diverse an author base as possible. In April, we published a piece entitled, "It Takes a Submission: Gendered Patterns on the Pages of AJPS" on the *AJPS Editor's Blog.* The piece gained quite a bit of traction and the findings were reported in an *Inside Higher Education* article.[1]

Put simply, we have a supply problem. Based on manuscripts submitted from January 2017 – October 2019, only about 35% of manuscripts had at least one female author. And the lion's share of the manuscripts that included a female author also included at least one male co-author (see Figure 1).

Whereas striking gender disparities emerge during the submission process, we find no significant gender differences when it comes to manuscript decisions. During this time period, we accepted roughly 6% of submitted manuscripts. Our rates of acceptance are consistent across the composition of authors. Regardless of how many women or men author a piece, only about 6% are accepted for publication.

Given the comparable acceptance rates across author composition, it's no surprise that the percentage of female authors on our pages is roughly the same as the proportion of manuscripts submitted that included at least one female author (35%). Of course, given that most of the manuscripts submitted by women also include at least one male co-author, 84% of the articles published during this time had at least one male author.

As a discipline, it's incumbent upon us to encourage female scholars to submit their work to *AJPS* and other top journals. It's our responsibility to let them know that their work is just

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[1] See: https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2020/04/21/early-journal-submission-data-suggest-covid-19-tanking-womens-research-productivity.

as competent and just as important as that of their male colleagues. We are not so naïve as to believe that encouragement is all it takes to close the gender gap in rates of submission. That women are still not similarly situated with men in important resources (tenure track jobs, research support, family obligations) poses obstacles that encouragement alone cannot surmount. But while the discipline continues to address these resource gaps, we can change the face of tables of contents by calling attention to the myths about women not succeeding when they submit their work.

Figure 1. Composition of Authors for Manuscripts Submitted to *AJPS*
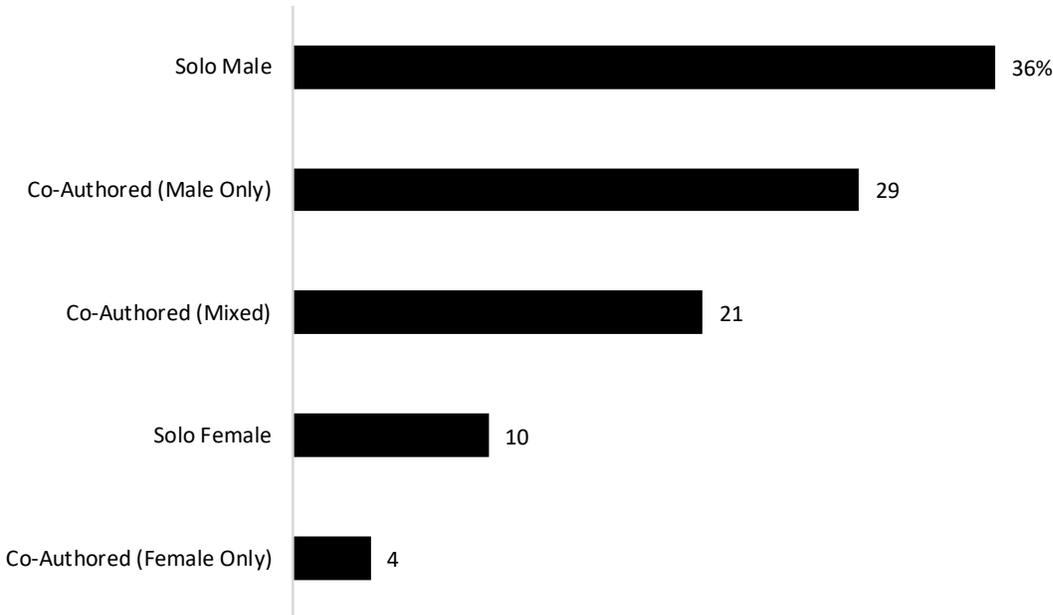
Notes: Bars represent the percentage of manuscripts that fall into each category. The analysis is based on the 2,672 manuscript for which we issued a final decision (accept or decline) from January 2017 – October 2019.

While some of our outreach efforts that were to take place at the MPSA and APSA conferences are no longer possible, we will continue to work with our Associate Editors to expand author and reviewer pools.

Desk Rejects: We have been invited to participate in a symposium on desk rejects for *PS*. The pieces in the symposium raise a host of issues about the role desk rejects (DRs) should play in our discipline – how to strike a balance between a focus on publishing the best work, managing a taxed reviewer pool, and helping to develop the work of scholars by providing peer reviewed critiques to those articles not accepted for publication.

Although we have not yet completed the piece, we have completed the data analysis (which includes all desk rejected manuscripts from the first year of our term: June 1, 2019 – May 31, 2020). So we want to highlight a few findings with respect to the 377 manuscripts we desk rejected during this time.

First, we employ a complex process that includes several people and subfield experts before

desk rejecting a submission. A highly-trained team of doctoral student assistants conducts a technical check on every manuscript. This first round-review often identifies papers that simply do not meet the criteria for a political science journal – pieces that are journalistic, opinion pieces, review essays, etc. The co-editors review these manuscripts and determine whether they are appropriate for consideration. If we opt to desk reject, then we send the letter to the author. More than half of the DR decisions we've issued fall into this category (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Reasons for Desk Rejects at *AJPS*
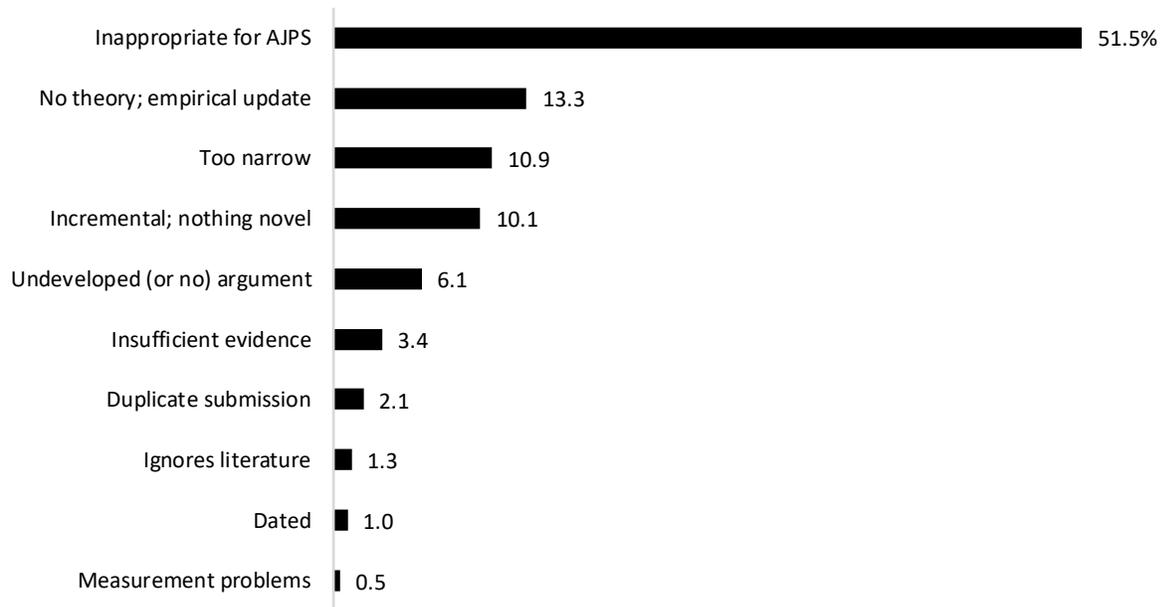
Notes: Data are based on the 377 manuscripts we desk rejected from June 1, 2019 – May 31, 2020. Bars represent the reason for declining to send the manuscript out for review.

The next step in the process of determining whether to desk reject is handled by the subfield experts – the co-editors for American Politics manuscripts and the relevant Associate Editors for the other fields. In evaluating whether a manuscript will go out for review, we consider whether it makes the necessary substantive theoretical and empirical contribution that would give it a chance to be reviewed positively. In most cases where we decide to DR, the subfield expert decides that the piece represents a mere update or is too incremental or narrow an advance for a top-tier, general audience journal.

We issue desk rejects within a matter of days, so authors are not left wondering the fate of their manuscript. The desk reject letter also offers some degree of guidance/justification for the decision, so even though the author does not receive a full set of reviews, he/she does get some degree of very fast feedback.

Moreover – and importantly – our initial analysis reveals no evidence that female authors, authors of color, authors from liberal arts colleges, or non-tenured authors are disproportionately likely to be desk rejected.

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

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