American Journal of Political Science

Annual 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 – December 31, 2021, also includes a few miscellaneous updates relevant to the Association, Board, and user community.

Journal Performance

Now nearly three years into our term – and the two most recent 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, *AJPS* ranked 16th.

We should also note that our social media visibility continues to rise. As of March 2022, *AJPS* had 16,541 Twitter followers, which represents a 5% increase from our last report in September 2021. We also have 6,310 Facebook followers, which represents a 1% increase during the same period.

Submission and Turnaround Time

From January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021, we received 1,093 submissions – an average of 3.3 submissions per day that the journal was open (nearly identical to last year). Comparative Politics (40%) and American Politics (23%) dominated the submission pool, with International Relations (15%), 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 challenge we continue to 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, but even accounting for those manuscripts, AP continues to lag behind CP.

The mean turnaround time (from date of submission to first decision) remails swift: just 46 days. 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 and we send manuscripts to reviewers. Indeed, the average time from receiving an author's original submission to sending it out for review is only 7.5 days. Given that seven of those days, on average, are spent with the manuscript back in the authors' hands, we are processing manuscripts as expeditiously as possible.

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	1,093	46

Note: Turnaround time is reported in days from initial submission to initial decision. The reporting period for 2021 is January 1, 2021 – December 31, 2021.

Editorial Decisions

The overall acceptance rate at AJPS remains low: 7% from January 1, 2021 – December 31, 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 rate (37%) a bit lower than other top journals in the discipline. This rate is somewhat higher than in our first years as editors, when it hovered at 25%. The increase is not the result of more substantive desk rejects, though. In the last year, we received an unusually high number of manuscripts that are simply not political science as we define it; they were journalistic or opinion pieces, review essays, or those containing neither data nor a theoretical argument.

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	37%		
Reject	54	17%	0%
Revise & Resubmit	9	11	0
Accept	0	72	100
N	1,044	92	18

Reviews and Reviewers

From January 1, 2021 to December 31, 2021, we sent 3,633 reviewer invitations and received 2,016 reviewer reports. Of the reviewers who responded affirmatively to the invitation, 73% completed a review; 26% 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 35 days. This number is only two days greater than it was in 2019 and 2020, which is remarkable given the toll that Covid and all that accompanies the pandemic has brought.

The reviewers' recommendations were largely consistent with manuscript decisions. Roughly half (50.2%) recommended an outright rejection; nearly one-third (31.6%) 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 December 31, 2021, authors reported a conflict of interest with the editorial team on 46 manuscripts. On an additional 40 manuscripts, a member of the editorial team spotted a conflict. All 86 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

New Associate Editors: Jonathan Woon, our Associate Editor for Methods and Formal Theory, accepted an administrative position at the University of Pittsburgh and resigned his editorial role effective December 31, 2021. We've split the position into two and are thrilled that Fred Boehmke (Methods) and Maggie Penn (Formal Theory) have joined the team. They've hit the ground running and the transition has been seamless.

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.

IRB Requirements: When we became co-editors-in-chief, *AJPS* had no requirements for work involving human subjects. Given that research ethics and transparency are increasing areas of concern in the discipline, we instituted the requirement that all research involving human subjects must receive IRB approval from at least one of the author's home institutions. In most cases, this is a straightforward requirement and one that occasionally renders submitted manuscripts unacceptable at *AJPS*. In the last several months, however, scholars in a couple of countries whose institutions do not have independent IRBs have asked for a waiver to the requirement. We are reluctant to make exceptions to the requirement for several reasons:

- We feel strongly that human subjects protection is a vital part of the research process.
- We believe that these protections should be granted *before* the research is conducted.
- Because the members of our editorial team are not trained in these issues, we do not think it's prudent for us to act as a post-hoc IRB that grants waivers and approvals after the fact. The complex nature of some work involving human subjects only adds to our leeriness.
- Granting internal review/approval of human subjects work conducted by non-U.S. based scholars creates an equity issue in which U.S.-based scholars conducting similar kinds of research have to seek and gain institutional IRB approval while others do not.

That said, we don't want to disadvantage scholars from universities that don't have university-based ethics boards or some sort of functioning IRB. And we recognize that IRBs don't always do a good job spotting ethical issues anyway.

We plan to discuss this issue with the Board at our April meeting. In the meantime, we continue to require IRB certification of all work we send out for review that involves human subjects.

Verification: The verification process has now been underway at *AJPS* for seven years. Based on our experiences dealing with both quantitative and qualitative verification over the course of the last three 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 had 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%.

At the September MPSA Council meeting, we discussed the results. These results also appear in the mid-year editorial report, which we shared with Board members and Council members in September. In general, authors see value in the verification process and want it to continue, although they express interest in reforming the mechanics of the process.

In particular, authors indicated that the process itself was tedious and that the Odum Institute's process – which requires that they not communicate directly with authors – makes verification slower and more difficult than might otherwise be the case. In response to this concern, we met with CISER, a competing verification entity based at Cornell. Although they were excited by the prospect of working with us (and they've verified two manuscripts for us that Odum could not), they are not yet ready to take on the scope of work we represent.

While getting the reactions of those who have experienced verification is important, it's also important to assess the views of the broader user community. Specifically, do MPSA members know which journals verify empirical results? Do they think verification of published manuscripts adds value to the quality of publications? Do they see verification as a barrier to submission? To answer these questions, we conducted a brief survey of the 2,869 members of the MPSA with faculty status in October 2021. We received 1,237 responses, for an overall response rate of 45% (this takes into account the 150 emails that bounced back as undeliverable). In January 2022, we circulated to Board members and the MPSA Council a memo summarizing the findings.
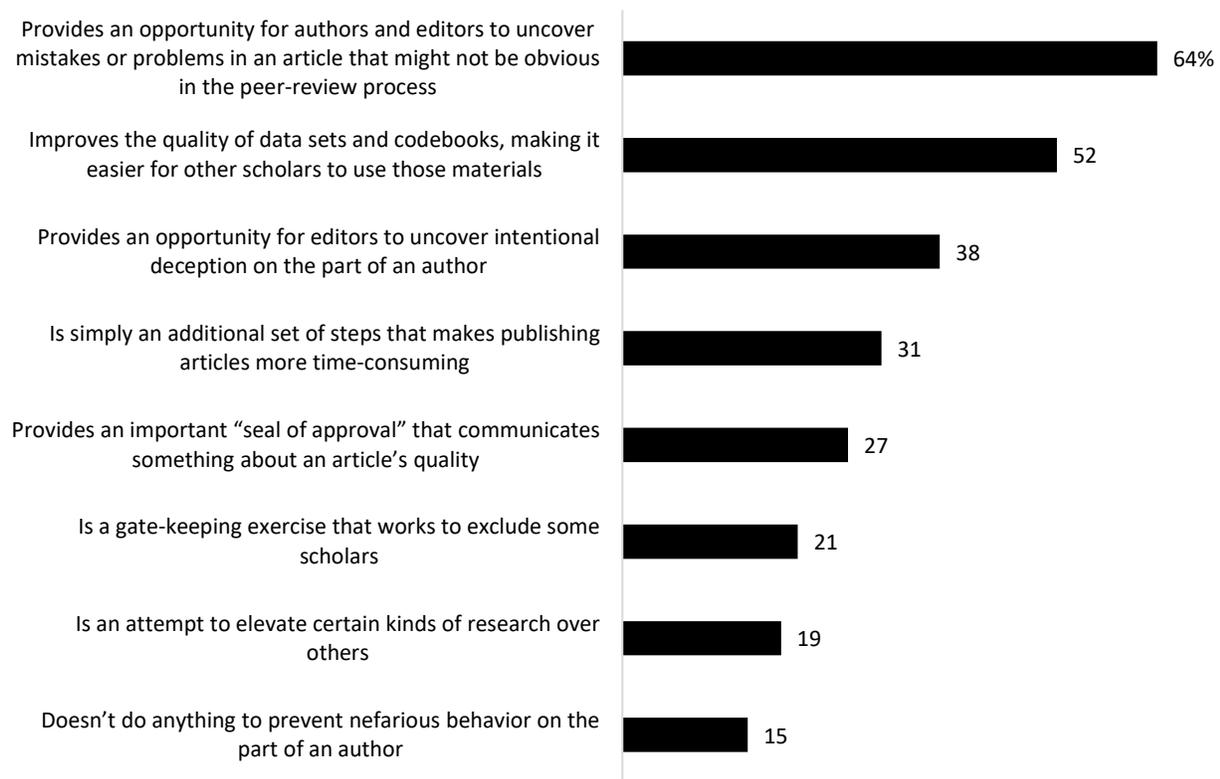
Perhaps most notably, fully one-third of respondents indicated that they are not aware of the verification status of journal articles they read, and another one-third do not see verification as an important enhancement to an article's quality or contribution.

We also want to draw attention to the way the user community assesses the pros and cons to verification. As Figure 2 demonstrates, a majority of respondents see verification as a positive tool. Nearly two-thirds agree that verification processes can serve as an additional mechanism to uncover problems with a manuscript that might not be uncovered by the traditional review process. A majority also believes that verification enhances the quality of data sets and codebooks, making it easier for other researchers to use these resources. Nearly four in 10 respondents even see verification as an opportunity to uncover intentional deception by an author. And roughly one-quarter indicate that verification confers a "seal of approval" on an article.

The verification process is not without critics, though. Nearly one-third of respondents view the process as simply an additional set of steps that make publication more time-consuming. And one in five worries that it can serve as a gatekeeping exercise that works to exclude some scholars or as a process for elevating certain kinds of research over others. Although most respondents don't hold these negative views, we should still be concerned that one-fifth of MPSA members with faculty status see verification as a tool that can be used to exclude people based on resources, institutional status, or the kind of work they undertake.

Particularly concerning is that negative views pertaining to verification aren't evenly distributed among the MPSA membership. Whereas 27% of women contend that verification privileges some types of work over others, only 15% of men hold this view (p < .05). Similarly, 28% of women, compared to 17% of men, view verification as an exclusionary gatekeeping exercise (p < .05). Approximately one-third of professors at liberal arts colleges also hold these views, making them roughly twice as likely as faculty members at R1 institutions to do so (p < .05). We uncover no significant differences based on the race of respondents.

Figure 1. MPSA Members' Perceptions of the Pros and Cons of the Verification Process

Perception	Percentage
Provides an opportunity for authors and editors to uncover mistakes or problems in an article that might not be obvious in the peer-review process	64%
Improves the quality of data sets and codebooks, making it easier for other scholars to use those materials	52
Provides an opportunity for editors to uncover intentional deception on the part of an author	38
Is simply an additional set of steps that makes publishing articles more time-consuming	31
Provides an important "seal of approval" that communicates something about an article's quality	27
Is a gate-keeping exercise that works to exclude some scholars	21
Is an attempt to elevate certain kinds of research over others	19
Doesn't do anything to prevent nefarious behavior on the part of an author	15

Note: Responses are to the question: "Which of the following describes your reaction to a journal's requirement that the empirical work in published articles be verified before publication? Please check all that apply." N = 1,237.

As our discipline continues to think about research transparency and related issues, an increasing number of journals have implemented verification policies. Across these journals, approaches to verification vary. Almost all journals that verify accepted work require authors to make public clean data sets, codebooks, and accurate code. Others, like *AJPS*, go farther and conduct an independent review to confirm all results in an article. The costs – to both authors and outlets – increase as policies become more rigorous. Our survey results suggest that the benefits might not. Given that a segment of respondents voiced concerns that verification can be an exclusionary tool – and our results indicate that women and liberal arts college faculty are especially likely to feel this way – it is probably time to reassess the verification policy at *AJPS* and consider whether a less stringent process might offer the same level of benefit and fewer costs.

We will discuss the data at the April Board meeting and collect feedback and suggestions for reform. In addition, we will begin to do some research on the current practices at several top journals in the discipline to flesh out our understanding of what others are doing.

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:

Frederick Boehmke, University of Iowa
Elizabeth Cohen, Syracuse University
Elizabeth (Maggie) Penn, Emory University
Dan Reiter, Emory University
Graeme Robertson, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

Editorial Board:

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Valerie Hudson, Texas A&M University
Susan Hyde, University of California, Berkeley
Hakeem Jefferson, Stanford University
Kristin Kanthak, University of Pittsburgh
Kimuli Kasara, Columbia University
Josh Kertzer, Harvard University
Jack Knight, Duke University
Mona Lena Krook, Rutgers University
Katie Levine Einstein, Boston University
Andrew Little, University of California, Berkeley
David Lublin, American University
Ellen Lust, University of Gothenburg

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Liz Markovits, Mt. Holyoke College
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Carla Martinez Machain, Kansas State University
Rahsaan Maxwell, University of North Carolina
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Ken Meier, American University
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Jennifer Piscopo, Occidental College
Jeremy Pope, Brigham Young University
Markus Prior, Princeton University
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Deondra Rose, Duke University
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Kira Sanbonmatsu, Rutgers University
Keith Schnakenberg, Washington University - St. Louis
Melissa Schwartzberg, New York University
Paru Shah, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee
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Randy Stevenson, Rice University
Tracy Sulkin, University of Illinois
Sean Theriault, University of Texas
Debra Thompson, McGill University
Mike Ting, Columbia University
Mike Tomz, Stanford University
Jessica Trounstine, University of California, Merced
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Jessica Weeks, University of Wisconsin
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Jonathan Woon, University of Pittsburgh
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