AJPS

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, 2023 – September 8, 2023, also includes a few miscellaneous updates relevant to the Association, Board, and user community.

Journal Performance

Four and a half years into our term, *AJPS* remains strong in terms of both visibility and impact. More specifically, the *AJPS* five-year impact factor (based on citations of papers published in *AJPS* between 2018 and 2022) is 6.6. Using this metric, *AJPS* is the eleventh highest ranked journal in the discipline. For some context, the *Annual Review of Political Science* ranked first, with an impact factor of 13.3, the *American Political Science Review* placed third (8.6), and the *Journal of Politics* came in at number 30 (4.3). We've expressed concerns about the decline to Wiley, yet they have been unable to offer anything other than idiosyncratic explanations – that it is a short-term issue and actually a result of inflated scores for the journals that surpass us, that some of those journals have single highly-cited articles, that we did not publish virtual issues as steadily as we had in the past. Our editor at Wiley is confident that the high impact factors of the other top journals are unlikely to hold, but given the lack of specificity she can provide, this is an additional reason to consider moving from Wiley to another publisher (see below).

In 2023, the *AJPS* Google Scholar h-5 index score was 68 (a slight decrease from last year's score of 69). This indicates that 68 articles have been cited at least 68 times during the five-year period from June 2018 – 2022. This score is the second 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 73 and 65 respectively.

Our social media visibility continues to rise. As of September 2023, *AJPS* had 18,773 Twitter followers, which represents a marginal increase from September 2022. We also have 6,392 Facebook followers, which represents roughly a 0.1% increase in the last six months.

Submission and Turnaround Time

From January 1 – September 8, 2023, we received 790 submissions – an average of 3.5 submissions per day that the journal was open (slightly more than last year). Comparative Politics (39%) and American Politics (26%) dominated the submission pool, with International Relations (15%), Political Theory (11%), and Methodology and Formal Theory (8%) comprising the rest. Compared to 2022, these numbers represent an uptick in American Politics, IR, Political Theory, Methodology, and Formal Theory. But compared to just a couple of years ago, our total number of submissions is down. This isn't unique to *AJPS*, though – our decline is consistent with what we're seeing in terms of full-length article submissions at other top-tier, general audience outlets. This may be a consequence of the proliferation of specialized journals and the increased number of journals publishing short articles.

The mean turnaround time (from date of submission to first decision) remains swift: just 34 days. Roughly one week of this review time is taken up by authors correcting submissions because of failed technical checks and resubmitting the paper. Indeed, the average time from receiving an author's original submission to sending it out for review is only 7.1 days (compared to 8 days last year). Six of those days are spent with the manuscript back in the authors' hands. Thus, we continue to process 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
2022	1,019	44
2023	790	34

Note: Turnaround time is reported in days from initial submission to initial decision. The reporting period for 2022 is January 1, 2023 – September 8, 2023.

Editorial Decisions

The overall acceptance rate at *AJPS* remains low: 7% from January 1 – September 8, 2023. This rate increases to roughly 11% when we remove desk rejects from the denominator. We sent roughly 60% of manuscripts out for review, making our desk rejection rate (40%) comparable to other journals in the discipline. This rate is higher than in our first years as editors, when it hovered at 25%. A large part of the increase can be attributed to the 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 2023, 9% received an invitation to revise and resubmit, and more than two thirds of those manuscripts were accepted 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). We did see a somewhat higher proportion of manuscripts go out for a second round of revisions, though, likely a result of the switch in our Methods and Formal Theory editors. Although we expect to accept most of these manuscripts, a shift in editors often requires a new set of comments for authors to address. We did have one manuscript that we did not accept for publication after it had undergone two sets of revisions. But this is highly unusual at *AJPS* and a result of additional revisions undermining the piece's core finding.

Table 2. Editorial Decisions, 2023			
	Initial Decision	**First Revision**	**Second Revision**
Desk reject	40%		
Reject	51	13%	12%
Revise & Resubmit	9	18	0
Accept	0	69	88
N	761	61	17

Reviews and Reviewers

From January 1 – September 8, 2023, we sent 2,545 reviewer invitations. Of the reviewers who responded affirmatively to the invitation, 62% completed a review, 13% are currently working on a review, and 25% 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 34 days. This number is the same as it was in both 2021 and 2022.

The reviewers' recommendations were largely consistent with manuscript decisions. Roughly half (49%) recommended an outright rejection; three in 10 (32%) 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, and sometimes their explicit recommendation to us, points toward a clear decline.

Conflicts of Interest

From January 1 – September 8, 2023, authors reported a conflict of interest with the editorial team on 32 manuscripts. On an additional 29 manuscripts, a member of the editorial team spotted a conflict. Sixty 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.

The remaining case was referred to the MPSA Publishing Ethics Committee (PEC) as the authors

indicated that their conflict involved a current or past interaction that may unduly influence an editor's professional judgment. That manuscript was referred back to the editorial team; however, the editor with the conflict of interest was blinded in Editorial Manager and the manuscript was assigned to a different editor for handling.

Miscellaneous Updates

IRB Policy: In June, we implemented our new IRB policy. In short, if a manuscript contains human subjects research and was conducted at an institution with an IRB (meaning that any of the authors works at an institution with an IRB), then evidence of IRB review is required upon submission of the manuscript. If none of the authors' institutions has an IRB, then authors must (1) state in the main text that their institution(s) do not have an IRB and, as a result, IRB review was not obtained; and (2) include an appendix section that should convince reviewers that the research would be deemed ethical under the U.S. federal IRB regulations. This Appendix must answer at least the following questions:

- Who were the human subject participants in the research? Were vulnerable populations recruited (e.g., children, prisoners, pregnant women, victims of violence, etc.)?

- How were the subjects recruited? If you provided compensation or there were other benefits from participation, was the opportunity to participate made available fairly?

- How were the subjects compensated, if at all?

- Did subjects participate voluntarily? E.g., did students feel obligated to participate by a professor in a course, or employees by their employer?

- What are the risks posed to human subjects from participating in the research? It is expected that most research poses minimal risk, meaning there is little chance of upset, distress, physical harm, or discomfort greater than would be encountered in daily life. This minimal risk category includes benign behavioral interventions ("brief in duration, harmless, painless, not physically invasive, not likely to have a significant adverse lasting impact on the subjects, and the investigator has no reason to think the subjects will find the interventions offensive or embarrassing").

- What are the risks posed to human subjects from accidental disclosure of original data? Are the original data fully anonymous, or is it possible to identify subjects from the original data? Beware that combinations of multiple demographic categories, IP addresses, IDs from websites such as MTurk, etc. can all be considered identifiable. If the original data are identifiable or potentially identifiable, what risks to subjects would accidental disclosure of the data pose, and what security steps have been taken to limit the risk of accidental disclosure? For example, do the original data contain sensitive personal information (e.g., identity card numbers) or data that could put subjects at risk of embarrassment or civil or criminal liability?

- Was informed consent obtained from research participants, and if so, how? Note that informed consent is not necessarily required for minimal risk studies if not obtaining consent does not adversely affect the welfare or rights of subjects, if it is impractical to obtain consent, and if debriefing subjects would not be appropriate.

- Did the research take place in a country that requires government ethics review of human subjects research, and if so, was such an approval obtained?

It's then up to reviewers – the vast majority of whom have submitted to IRBs, and to whom the appendix will be flagged – to raise concerns.

Since implementing the policy, we have sent out four manuscripts for review that included such an appendix. Two have completed the review process and in both cases, reviewers took their tasks seriously. In each case, the reviewers commented specifically on the IRB appendix (they found it more than adequate), indicating that the policy is working as intended.

Verification: In June, we also implemented the new, streamlined set of requirements for verification:

- When authors receive notification that we have accepted their article, they will be required to share with Odum, and upload to Dataverse, the complete dataset they used in the analysis. In the paper and/or appendix, authors will be responsible for explaining where the data come from and how they compiled the analysis dataset.

- Authors will no longer be required to submit the raw data or provide citations or information to Odum on how to access the raw data.

- Authors can opt to make the code used to construct the analysis dataset available to people who contact them, but the only requirements for verification will be to submit the analysis dataset and the code for all analyses conducted in the manuscript.

The new process has posed no problems. When we issue our annual report in April, we will have data on the turnaround time with Odum and the extent to which the new policy has expedited the verification process.

Evaluating the Relationship with Wiley: We continue to be concerned with Wiley as a publisher and encourage MPSA to solicit proposals from other publishers. In addition to concerns about a falling impact factor, there are important issues to consider – including a push to publish more articles, encouraging more Open Access contracts, continued production and quality issues, a move away from Editorial Manager, and adopting new production and layout systems.

New Board Members: In June 2023, as we began the fifth of our six-year term, we retired half the Board and appointed new members. The Board continues to reflect diversity on numerous dimensions – subfield, rank, institution type, race, gender, and methodological approach.

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

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Elizabeth Cohen, Syracuse University
Dan Reiter, Emory University
Graeme Robertson, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
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