Notes from the Editors

Since June 1, the *American Political Science Review* has been edited by a new team composed of sixteen editors at thirteen different universities.

Before delving into what is new, we want to take this opportunity to thank Michelle Dion, Julie Novkov, and the rest of the previous team for their great work on the Journal and their important reforms concerning ethics and transparency. Under their leadership, submissions increased, the number of published articles increased, and the Journal's impact factor increased—a testament to their acumen and devotion. We are privileged to assume leadership of the Journal at this high point.

We also recognize that it is no easy task. In recent years, there has been extensive discussion on how to achieve scientific progress in the social sciences. Goals such as transparency, replicability, and cumulation are widely shared but not so easy to achieve. One must also reckon with the danger that an extensive regulatory apparatus might hinder the efficiency, creativity, and sheer joy and excitement that is essential to our work. Finally, there is a risk that the search for greater transparency might infringe upon the obligation to protect human subjects.

Any editorial team must navigate among these competing objectives. In this short statement of purpose, we outline our general approach as well as some specific initiatives we hope to implement over the next four years. Further details will be posted on the *APSR* homepage. In the meantime, we invite discussion and look forward to your feedback.

More, Better, Different

We hope to publish more of the great work being produced in the discipline and to make that work widely available.

Currently, roughly 90% of the articles published in the Journal are open access. We will encourage Cambridge University Press to increase this to 100%.

Currently, the Journal accepts roughly 6% of submissions, in large part because submissions have increased dramatically—from 678 in 2008 to 1,600 in recent years. We are anticipating 1,700 or more in 2024. To meet this demand, we propose to continue the Journal's expansion.

In our view, there can be no standard length for a political science journal article. Some subjects, and some methodologies, demand more space than others. To that end, we relaxed word-count limits to make room for shorter papers as well as longer papers, as

topic and approach demand. (In keeping with this change, the category of "Letters" has been dropped.) This should make it easier for work that employs qualitative or mixed methods, as these papers tend to run longer than the traditional journal article.

We welcome submissions from all subfields, topics, methodologies, and regions of the world—especially those traditionally under-represented in the pages of the Journal. Articles will be judged not based on the site of investigation—which might be large or small, well-studied or rarely studied, rich or poor, western or non-western—but on what can be learned from that study.

We believe there is no single template for an *APSR* paper. Studies make different contributions to scholarship, e.g., theoretical, empirical, and methodological. Empirical analyses might be qualitative or quantitative, experimental or observational, contemporary or historical. They might consist of a novel dataset or a systematic review of the literature. Both internal and external validity are important. "Negative" findings are sometimes as informative as "positive" findings.

We expect that most papers will make important contributions along one, or at most two, dimensions. Authors should not feel obliged to be innovative in all respects. In particular, they should not feel obliged to present a novel theory complete with new concepts for a set of findings that is adequately explained by an extant theory. Nor should they feel obliged to invent new methods unless there is a significant payoff relative to established methods. Novelty for novelty's sake impedes the accumulation of knowledge.

Having said this, we want to signal that work qualifying for a leading general-interest journal such as the *APSR* should propose, elaborate, or test a general theory or question, or shed light on an event with broad significance. Work with a narrower focus fits more comfortably into subfield journals.

We see nothing wrong with incremental research; it is hard to envision scientific progress without studies that fill out an existing research agenda. At the same time, we see the need for a publication venue that is willing to take chances on research that is uncertain and/or provocative, perhaps because it addresses a new area of research or because it makes bold claims that contradict extant findings and/or common understandings. To that end, we will not allow individual reviewers to exercise a veto in the review process. Our responsibility is to seek fair-minded reviewers and to override negative reviews where we think there is a compelling justification for publication.

Finally, we want to signal our commitment to science. This entails following the trail of evidence wherever it might lead, even if findings don't reinforce widely

shared hopes and aspirations. The quest for truth is unpredictable.

Efficiency

The review process at all major journals consumes a great deal of time for authors and reviewers, time that could be put to better use in research or teaching. The time-consuming nature of the review process is especially burdensome for those without tenure, who face tight deadlines with momentous consequences. It also slows the progress of science and diminishes the impact of our work on public debates. By the time a study is published, it is often old news.

To increase efficiency, we have taken several measures.

First, we have limited the number of requirements placed upon initial submissions so that they can be processed quickly. (Most of these stylistic and administrative tasks can be postponed for later stages of the review process.) Second, we are continuing to decline reviewing papers that we believe have little chance of passing successfully through the review process. The desk-reject rate at the *APSR*, previously at 50%, has been ticking upward in recent years and will undoubtedly increase under our team. Third, we are striving to limit the turnaround on desk-rejects to one or two weeks. Fourth, we are seeking a minimum of two (rather than three) reviewers for each manuscript sent out for review. (Our thinking is that two well-qualified reviewers who do a bang-up job are better than three or four who are perhaps less qualified or less committed, while the lower requirement should substantially speed up the review process.) Fifth, we are terminating the review process after one round in cases where the outcome is fairly clear. Sixth, with Cambridge University Press's support we hope to adopt rolling publication, eliminating the purgatory of First View. Finally, we are exploring a review transfer for the Journal to allow authors whose manuscripts are not accepted for publication at the Journal to convey their reviews to another journal, if they wish, thus shortening the time for review and mitigating the burden of reviewing on the entire community.

These initiatives rest on a commitment from our team and our editorial board to be intimately engaged in the review process, to make decisions in a timely fashion, not to outsource responsibility to reviewers, and to coordinate with other journals.

Motivating Reviewers

It is increasingly difficult to motivate scholars to conduct reviews and to do so in a timely manner. Currently, it requires two invitations to obtain one reviewer at most journals—a ratio that climbs every year in tandem with the increase in submissions. The more we produce the more we must review. The problem is that there are incentives for the former but not for the latter.

In many fields, it is common to require submission fees, which can then be used to compensate reviewers. We sense that there is little appetite for this solution in political science. Accordingly, we have looked for ways to limit the burden on reviewers - including higher desk-reject rates, a quota of two reviewers, a one-round review process (wherever possible), and a system of review in which the editorial team and editorial board assume a strong role, as discussed.

In addition, we will require authors of each submission to agree to perform two reviews for the Journal. If they refuse (in cases where they are clearly qualified) we reserve the right to refuse submissions from that author for a period of time. This policy (which bolsters the Journal's current policy) will not affect most authors. It will affect a few authors who submit regularly but do not perform their share of reviewing. Reviewing is a public good, and it is our responsibility to ensure that this burden is equitably apportioned.

Registered Reports

Following the lead of the *Journal of Experimental Political Science* and the *Journal of Politics*, we implemented a registered report track at the Journal in October 2024. This seems appropriate for confirmatory (testing) projects (where there is a clearly defined theory, a priori) that have determinate research designs involving a limited number of empirical procedures that can be laid out in a detailed fashion in a pre-analysis plan.

Where appropriate, registered reports can mitigate "fishing" and "file-drawer" problems since they commit authors, reviewers, and editors to publish a paper if the pre-analysis plan is faithfully carried out. They can also enhance the quality of theory and research designs through early feedback, prior to implementation. They are in no way intended to discourage exploratory research.

Published Reviews and Commentary

Along with each published article, we hope to offer our community the opportunity to participate in post-publication commentary. The proviso is that each intervention (from anyone else who cares to discuss a paper previously published in the Journal) must be polite in tone and germane in content, and the author of the commentary must be identified (by logging in with their credentials to Cambridge Core). These commentaries will be reviewed by the editorial team, after which the authors of the original article may publish responses.

These twin initiatives provide essential information for the scientific community, recognizing that publication is not always synonymous with consensus and that debate must continue after an article appears in print. Publishing commentary—including dissent—places each article in front of the entire discipline for adjudication rather than in the hands of a handful of reviewers and editors.

Reproducibility

Readers of papers in the *APSR* should have confidence in the integrity of the reported results, should be able to understand exactly how those results are produced, and should be able to build on those results. To this end, we now allow (but do not require) authors to insert a link in their submission to anonymized data and code stored on an online repository so that editors and reviewers have access to the evidence. We are continuing the Journal's recent policy of requiring authors of conditionally accepted papers to deposit code and data necessary to produce quantitative empirical findings. We will verify that the submitted replication package produces the paper's results and is adequately documented. We will, finally, extend the verification process to formal theory papers by conducting verification of formal proofs in conditionally accepted manuscripts.

Replications

Discussion of a published article (in any journal) that surpasses the bounds of a short comment should be submitted through the replication track in Editorial Manager. In most respects, these submissions follow the same protocol as regular articles. That said, if a significant problem in an article published in the Journal is identified and if the replication is carried out fairly and rigorously (and the article has not previously been replicated or that earlier replication is limited or flawed), we have a strong ethical obligation (consistent with the COPE standards) to publish that replication. The authors of the original article will have the opportunity to comment on the replication and can also post a response as a Comment (as above).

On a trial basis, we will take the additional step of soliciting replications and reappraisals in a more organized fashion. From a pool of eligible studies, we will choose some at random, putting out a general call for their replication, broadly construed. After initial vetting, one applicant will be chosen for each study. We hope that this process ensures that a non-trivial share of studies is replicated, that the replicators are arms-length from the original authors and impartial, and that conclusions are reasonable. Since solicited replications are chosen randomly, they can speak to the universe of theoretical interest. Since replications are chosen regardless of whether they validate the claims of the initial study, we may learn something important about the larger problem of replicability in political science, and perhaps establish a model for replication that other journals might follow.
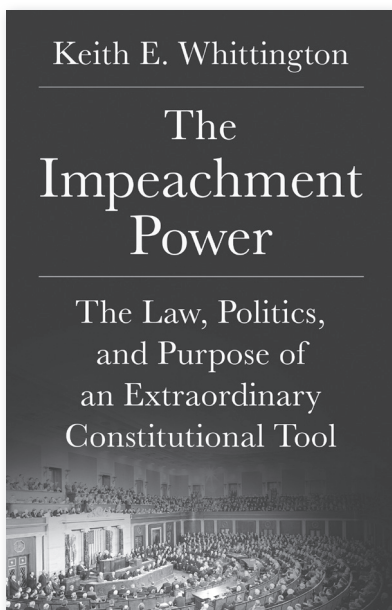
The purpose of a replication is to appraise the truth value of a study, not to embarrass its author. We need a model of scholarship in which the search for truth is gracefully embraced by all parties and acknowledged as a communal enterprise. Mistakes are normal and inevitable. Acceptance of mistakes should also be normalized.
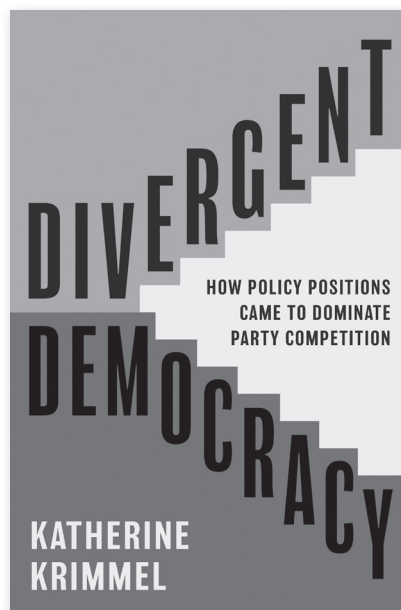
Conclusions

Operating a journal entails performing a gatekeeping function. At the end of the process, we must decide on what to publish and what to pass on. However, no one undertakes an editorial job solely to accept and reject manuscripts. (What drudgery!) Our principal motivation, which we assume is shared by editors everywhere, is the hope that we might improve the study of our subject.

With this in mind, we have carefully considered the current process of peer review and publication and have adopted several reforms, as outlined above. We cannot be sure which of these revisions will prove successful. But we are quite sure that we will learn from the experience. We trust that what is learned will inform future practices at the Journal and at other journals, and, ultimately, will enhance our understanding of politics.
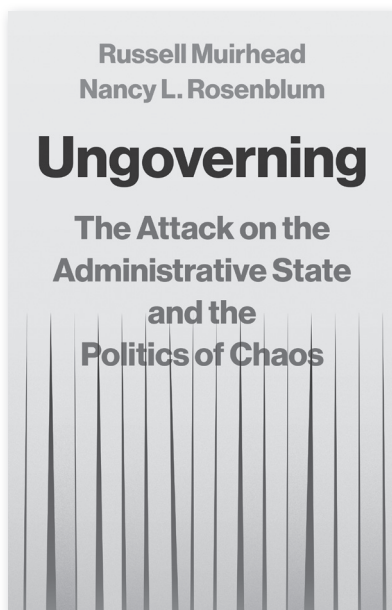
If you have thoughts about additional reforms to the peer review/publication process, or about those proposed above, we would be delighted to hear from you. In any case, we look forward to working with you—as authors and reviewers—in the coming years and we hope that the Journal provides a welcoming pla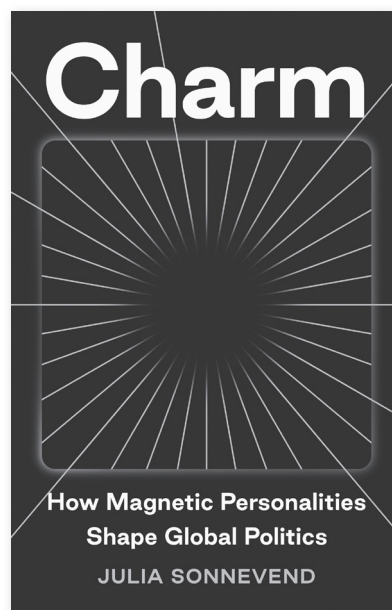tform for work in your area of research.