

## Notes from the Editors

### *When the APSR Went Global*

**F**our years ago, unexpected news broke that for the first time since 1905 a European-based team would take over the editorial duties of the *American Political Science Review*, the premier political science outlet of the *American Political Science Association*. Experiencing Brexit, “America First,” and the rise of nativism in the period of our editorship, the slogan “Going Global” of this British and German collaboration sounds anachronistic today. But four years have come and gone, and while our editorship has ended, the *APSR* continues to attract more global readership and contributions from authors and reviewers. In our concluding *Notes from the Editors*, we would like to present not only the statistics you all have grown accustomed to reading but also a recap of our experience before signing off from what has been a fulfilling and challenging adventure. In particular, we wish to thank all the people—authors, reviewers, board members, editors, producers, and organizers—who have contributed to and supported our “good old Europe” editorship. Thank you!

Independent from the global development of our scholarship, we noticed in the beginning of our editorship that other political science outlets had found increasing recognition and were outperforming the *APSR*. According to the prominent five-year impact factor (IF), *APSA*’s premier political science outlet steadily declined from 2012 (IF: 3.933) to 2017 (IF: 3.252), dropping from the 1st to the 10th position of political science journals if ranked by their impact factor. In response to this negative trend, we emphasized our dedication to publishing scholarly research of exceptional merit in the *APSR*, covering all disciplinary fields of political science, which should demonstrate the highest pluralist standard of excellence in scholarly political science analysis. But how to realize this ambitious goal in an academic world with higher publication competition and more specialized “excellence” while acknowledging that the overall submission pool continues to grow? In essence, we tackled this challenge from two sides: one, by reorganizing the internal decision-making process of the *APSR* mainly to reduce editorial subfield differences and, two, by reforming the publication model to increase the outreach of the journal.

With regard to the former, we started small, first by improving the effectiveness, fairness, and transparency of our double-blind review process. For this purpose, we reorganized our decision-making procedure by installing a lead editor to generate more oversight vis-à-vis the field-specific associate editors. This model aimed at overcoming individual differences in responding to reviewers’ recommendations. Furthermore, we carefully read the reviews instead of only counting recommendations; we justified our editorial decisions by sending out all the reviews to authors and reviewers, and we reevaluated when authors challenged our

decisions by assigning a third editor. Last but not least, we began increasing desk rejections of manuscripts that do not satisfy the conditions outlined in our guidelines to relieve the burden felt by our reviewer pool.

With regard to the latter, we moved to a FirstView online publication model for accepted articles, allowing published work to reach our readership and community faster; which is particularly important for younger scholars where every published article counts towards establishing their career. We also established an *APSR* Dataverse to open the channels of data sharing and reproduction. This should also enhance the visibility and confidence in the reliability of our publications. Moreover, we introduced the publication format of *letters*, which are shorter, more focused, demonstrate a novel perspective on existing research, and encourage scholarly debate. Today, *letters* account for more than 10% of submissions and publications.

Only the future will tell whether these changes and four years of hard (team) work were ultimately enough to reverse the negative trend that we observed in the beginning of our editorship. While the most recent 2018 impact factor shows that the *APSR*’s score is increasing again, we have to wait until the 2019 impact factor is published in 2020 to see our impact. Regardless, we are confident because other measures, such as the Altmetric Score, indicate increasing attention to our articles. For example, two out of the 10 most trending political science papers published in the past year were published in the *APSR*—more than from any other journal.<sup>1</sup>

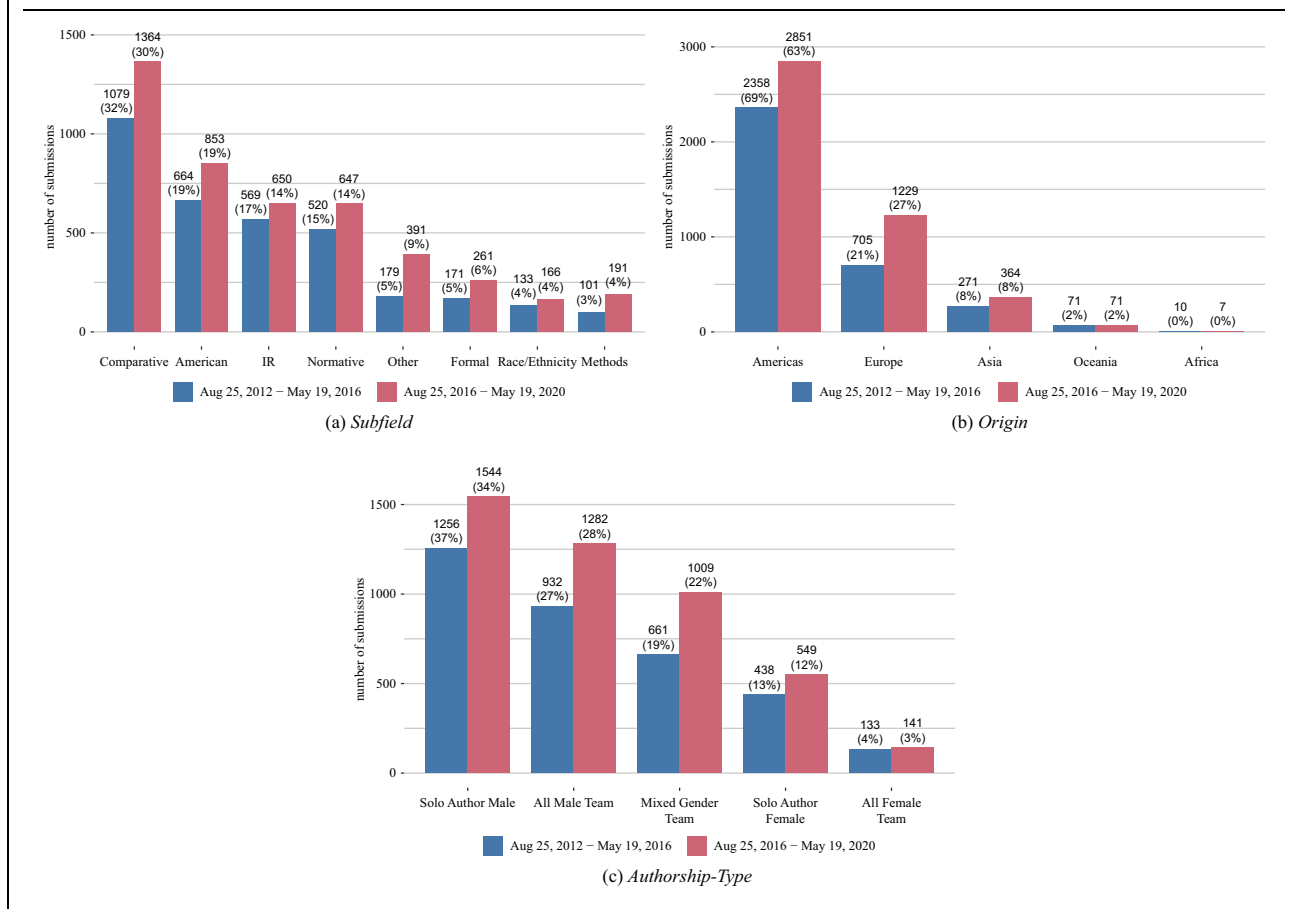
One final, noticeable change was an update of these very editorial notes in each issue to explore external debates in academia with trends present in our journal. We followed our promise not only to be transparent with our decisions but also to provide empirical insights into our processes by reporting on statistics of, at times, controversial issues—after all, getting published in the *APSR* is and always has been a rare outcome for submitting authors. In these final notes, we have the opportunity to review one more time some of the major trends and challenges we have been facing—most notable for us was possibly the continuous increase in submission rates.

During our editorship, we received a total of 4,616 submissions, of which 3,987 were articles (86%) and 629 were letters (14%)—an impressive share within a short time, which highlights the general acceptance of this newly introduced format.<sup>2</sup> In comparison to the

<sup>1</sup> See <https://oair.org/trending.php?d=360&category=polisci>, accessed May 23, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> As of May 19th, 2020.

**FIGURE 1. Distribution of Submissions by (a) Subfield, (b) Origin of Corresponding Authors, and (c) Authorship Type Comparing Our Editorship (August 25, 2016–May 19, 2020) with the Same Period Four Years Ago (August 25, 2012–May 19, 2012)**



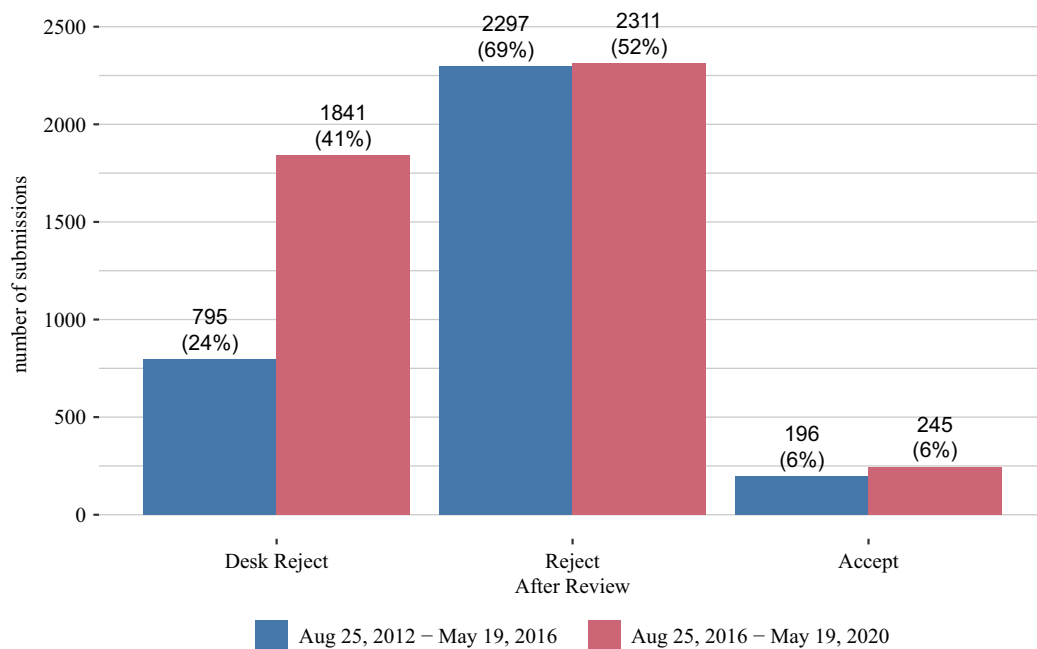
same period four years ago before we became editors when the *APSR* had received 3,476 manuscripts, it constitutes an increase of 1,240 submissions (about 33%). Despite these numbers, only 245 of the manuscripts that we handled were eventually published. It is noteworthy that these are still 49 manuscripts more than in the comparable period four years ago (about 25% more publications).

Although we increased the absolute number of publications, the relatively high share of rejections naturally tends to raise concerns about editorial gate-keeping effects. Every once in a while, we faced questions and concerns surrounding the possibility of editorial bias against certain subfields, methods, or gender as well as regions and the corresponding specificities of research that is being conducted. While we refrain from reopening this discussion at this point, we want to illustrate some interesting insights that we found worth publishing. Figure 1 shows the distribution of submissions we received over our four year editorship by subfield, origin of the corresponding author, and authorship type. Most importantly, the numbers presented are the absolute numbers and to put these numbers into perspective, we compare the respective distribution in the four years before our editorship.

Starting with political science subfields, Figure 1a shows that the number of submissions increases across all subfields as compared with the previous editorial term. Although the “classical” subfields Comparative and American remained dominant in terms of numbers of submissions, we observe the highest increase of number of submissions in Methods (about 89%), Other (about 62%), and Formal (about 52%). Only in the subfields of International Relations, Comparative, and Normative, the increasing number of submissions does not exceed the overall trend, which means that their relative share decreases between 1% (Normative) and 3% (IR) of submissions. We are proud to have motivated more scholars from less dominant subfields.

With regard to our motivation to increase the global scope of the *APSR*, Figure 1b suggests that while the majority of (corresponding) authors is still coming from the United States (63%), our initiative was accomplished particularly due to the increasing submissions from authors based in Europe. The number of U.S. submissions increased from 2,358 to 2,851 manuscripts (about 21%), while the number of European submissions heavily increased from 705 to 1,229 manuscripts (about 74%), followed by 271 against 364 submissions

**FIGURE 2. Final Editorial Outcomes Comparing Our Editorship (August 25, 2016–May 19, 2020) with the Same Period Four Years Ago (August 25, 2012–May 19, 2012)**



from Asia (about 34%). Again, relatively speaking the shares show a more stable picture.

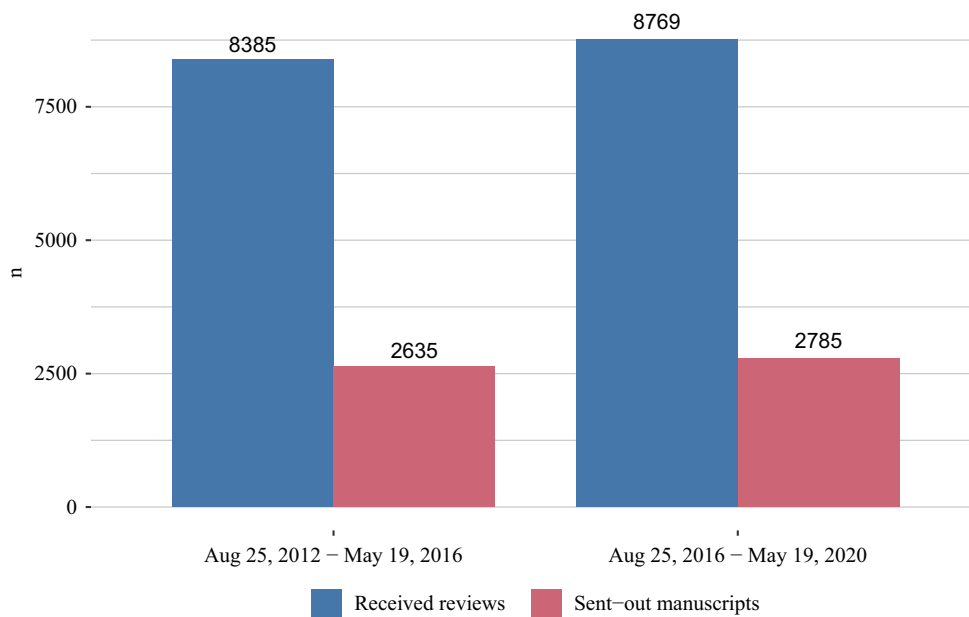
Another important (and maybe the currently most controversial) topic during our editorship was the role of gender in the editorial processes of the *APSR*. We started our editorship by taking part in a cross-journal examination on the role of gender in political science journals, highlighting the role of a comparatively low submission rate of women (König and Ropers 2018). Figure 1c shows that we still receive the highest number of submissions from male authors. However, the number of submissions of solo female authors increased slightly more than that of solo male authors (about 25% versus about 23%), and the increasing number of mixed-gender submissions increased from 661 to 1,009 (about 53%), outperforming male team increases of 932 to 1,282 (about 37%). Unfortunately, the number of solo female submissions only marginally changed from 133 to 141. Together with the increase in mixed-gender team submissions (both in absolute and relative terms), the overall number of women among submitting authors in the *APSR* has increased in the past four years—a trend that we hope continues with the new editorial team.

In addition to the perspective of submitting authors, we have always stressed that reviewers are possibly the most valuable asset a journal has. Ultimately, editors rely on their knowledge and time—without being able to give back anything concrete in return. Many journals therefore suffer from so-called reviewer fatigue, which means a declining acceptance rate of invitations. Thus, we are more than thankful to the 4,521 reviewers who have provided us with their expertise and feedback in 8,771 reports since August 25th, 2016.

Having the many other duties of scholars in mind, saving the limited reviewer pool from overuse on manuscripts that fail to fulfill scholarly standards is therefore an important task for editors. This is the main reason why our editorial team ran a strict policy on desk rejection. Among the 4,397 manuscripts for which a final decision was taken during our editorship, 1,841 manuscripts were desk-rejected (41%), 2,311 manuscripts were rejected after review (52%), and 245 manuscripts were accepted for publication (6%). Consequently, despite almost doubling the desk-rejection rate compared with decisions taken in the four-year period prior to our editorship (as depicted in Figure 2), we were able to maintain a similar acceptance rate (with a higher number of publications). This allowed us to keep the number of reviewed manuscripts and, correspondingly, the number of reviewers needed at manageable levels over time, as shown in Figure 3.

Receiving submissions of outstanding merit and having dedicated reviewers constitute a large and important part of the peer-review process, but at the end of the day, all of this has only been possible through the close and friendly collaboration among the editors Ken Benoit, Thomas Bräuninger, Sabine Carey, Leigh Jenco, Thomas König, Ben Lauderdale, and Ingo Rolting; the extraordinary support of our managing editor Alyssa Taylor, research associate Sarah Goff, and editorial assistance of Britt Bolin, Emmy Lindstam, Samuel Müller, Felix Olsowski, Diana Popescu, Ivana Popovic, Paola Romero, Guido Ropers, Tilko Swalve, Arduino Tomasi, and Marta Wojciechowska; and the help from Katya Beebe, Sandra Dill, Ashrakat Elshehawy, Felicitas Eigenbrodt, Ursula Horn, Eashani Krishna, Adam McDowell, Anna Panutsa, and Viktoriia Semenova.

**FIGURE 3. Manuscripts Sent Out for Review and the Corresponding Reviewer Reports Received for These Manuscripts Comparing Our Editorship (August 25, 2016–May 19, 2020) with the Same Period Four Years Ago (August 25, 2012–May 19, 2012)**



We are also grateful for the openness of Cambridge University Press in helping implement our goals, in particular Mark Zadrozny, Patrick McCartan, David Mainwaring, Jim Ansell, among others, and the production managers and editors who made producing the *APSR* happen; thank you, Kelly Loftus, Lauren Marra, Katrina Swartz, and Andrea Williams. We hope that they will keep our European editorship in good memory. Last but not least, the support of Steve Smith and Jon Gurstelle, who helped us to find understanding of our endeavors among the *APSA* membership. Because *APSR* publications have become the currency for scholarly promotion, they helped us to establish a board of members who represent the different subfield, method, and diversity cleavages in *APSA* political science. Many board members helped us as reviewers and guest editors with their expertise. Looking back, while each board meeting brought up at least one cleavage, they provided an important forum to discuss pressing issues on a scholarly level—something that

tends to get lost in some of the exchanges held on Twitter and other social networks.

While we left our editorial post with a mixture of happiness and sadness, after four years it is time that new editors come in with new fresh ideas and take over. The new team is well equipped with a much higher number of editors and lead editors and range of expertise. This will certainly reduce the increasing editorial workload, which we already experienced during our editorship. We are confident that we are leaving the *APSR* in good hands and that the new team finds a well-organized premier outlet. We wish the new team and the *APSR* all the best.

## REFERENCES

- König, Thomas, and Guido Ropers. 2018. "Gender and Editorial Outcomes at the American Political Science Review." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51 (4): 849–53.