

Report of the Editor of the *American Political Science Review*, 2001–2002

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One year ago, Ada Finifter completed her service as Editor of the *APSR* and I assumed the post, assisted by Elizabeth Cook, the new Assistant Editor, and Editorial Interns John Donaldson, Jason MacDonald, and Tricia Mulligan; our new editorial office opened at The George Washington University; Susan Bickford and Greg McAvoy, the new Book Review Editors, opened their office at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, with a staff of Elizabeth K. Markovits, Maria Murray Riemann, and Carisa R. Showden; a new Editorial Board, 45-strong, was appointed and a six-member Executive Committee was named; and Cambridge University Press began publishing the *APSR*.

As if the challenges imposed by all this change were insufficient, our early operations were disrupted by the events of September 11 and the subsequent interruptions of mail service. Nevertheless, I am pleased to report that during 2001–2002 the *APSR* not only survived this often-disharmonic convergence of forces, but managed to grow and prosper while doing so.

Submissions

The number of papers submitted

In describing my goals to the Executive Council and various other groups a year ago, I expressed both the hope and the expectation that we would immediately begin to receive more manuscripts than had previously been submitted to the *APSR*. One reason I hoped for such growth was that it could bring in more potentially publishable manuscripts; even if the proportion of promising submissions remained constant, having more of them to consider would itself be a good thing—especially in light of the expanded number of pages that will soon be opening up for articles. No less importantly, I hoped that an enhanced flow of manuscripts would bring in more papers from parts of the discipline that have been underrepresented in the *APSR*'s pages. My expectation that we would in fact begin to receive more submissions was based on my determination to make it known far and wide that we are eager to receive more pa-

pers than the *APSR* has gotten in the past, that we are working to ensure that the review process runs as it should, and that we aspire to publish the best article-length work across the full range of our substantively, theoretically, and methodologically diverse discipline.

This expectation was more than amply fulfilled during 2001–2002, as the data in Table 1 indicate. Under the three editors who preceded me, the number of papers submitted rose annually, from a mean of 426 under Samuel Patterson (1986–1987 through 1991–1992) to 485 under G. Bingham Powell (1992–1993 through 1994–1995)—an increase of 14%—and then to 506 under Ada Finifter (1995–1996 through 2000–2001)—an increase of 4%.¹ The comparable figure for 2001–2002 was 615, a 44% increase over 2000–2001, a 22% increase over Finifter's six-year average, a 27% increase over Powell, and a 44% increase over Patterson. On the likely assumption that my three predecessors in turn received more papers than *their* predecessors, the implication is simply that during 2001–2002, our office was very busy indeed—considerably busier, in terms of the total number of submissions, than any previous *APSR* editorial office has ever been.

The figures just given tell us something well worth knowing: that 2001–2002 was a record-setting year insofar as the total number of submissions was concerned. However, these figures are somewhat misleading, for they intermingle resubmissions with original submissions; thus, a single paper that was submitted *n* times is counted as *n* papers. For purposes of charting the popularity of the *APSR* as a potential outlet for authors seeking a good home for their papers, it makes more sense to focus on the number of "original" or underlying papers submitted rather than on the total number of submissions. These figures, shown in the rightmost column of Table 1, indicate even more substantial growth during 2001–2002, to 509 in 2001–2002 from 327 in 2000–2001. That is a 56% one-year increase, or, from Finifter's six-year mean of 381, a 31% increase. Clearly, then, the *APSR* attracted much greater interest from contributors during 2001–2002 than it had in recent years.

The mix of papers submitted

In light of charges that the *APSR* ill serves those whose interests fall outside of American politics and that it is overtly or covertly hostile to research not based on formal models or complex statistical analyses, the substantive and methodological mix of the papers we receive and publish are matters of special concern. A major goal of my editorship is to achieve greater diversity in the manuscripts we receive and the articles we publish.

It would be unrealistic to expect immediate wholesale changes in the mix of papers we receive. Suspicions built up over the course of many years are unlikely to be overcome simply by the brave words and good intentions of a new Editor, and even a sudden surge of submissions from a previously underrepresented field (e.g., comparative politics) could be offset by the continuing or enhanced flow of submissions from another field (e.g., American politics).

Categorized in terms of primary analytical approach, the papers we received after our office opened last September

Table 1
Number of Papers Submitted

Year	Number of Submissions	
	Total	Original
2001–2002	615	509
2000–2001	427	327
1999–2000	461	346
1998–1999	536	393
1997–1998	537	411
1996–1997	540	391
1995–1996	533	420
1994–1995	495	NA
1993–1994	480	NA
1992–1993	487	NA
1991–1992	479	NA
1990–1991	438	NA
1989–1990	428	NA
1988–1989	447	NA
1987–1988	391	NA
1986–1987	427	NA

Source: Data for 1986–87 through 1999–2000 are from Finifter (2000, Table 1). Data for 2000–2001 are from personal communication with Finifter.

Table 2
Distribution of Papers Submitted by Approach and Field (%)

Year	Approach					
	Formal	Quantitative	Formal and Quantitative	Small N	Interpretive/ Conceptual	Other
2001–2002	17	45	7	1	29	2
1995–2000	13	48	7	2	30	0

Year	Field					
	American Politics and Policy	Comparative Politics	International Relations	Normative Theory	Formal Theory	Methods
2001–2002	30	25	14	17	8	6
1995–2000	38	23	12	18	6	2
1991–1995	35	22	12	21	10	0
1985–1991	41	17	10	19	13	0

Source: The 1985–2000 figures are from Finifter (2000, Tables 5 and 2). The 2001–2002 figures are for new papers on which Sigelman initiated the review process. Figures for 2000–2001 are not available for Tables 2, 3, and 4.

closely resembled those submitted to the *APSR* during Ada Finifter's two terms as Editor. As the top portion of Table 2 indicates, almost half of the papers that we received between September 1, 2001, and August 15, 2002, relied principally on quantitative methods, and another quarter made use of formal modeling, either exclusively or in combination with quantitative analysis. About three papers in ten were classified as interpretive/conceptual; of these, about 60% were normative theory papers. "Small-N" or comparative case study-based submissions were rare.

Some early signs of change can, however, be gleaned from the field-by-field composition of submitted papers, as shown in the bottom portion of Table 2. Before discussing these figures, let me urge caution in interpreting them, given the obvious difficulty of establishing which papers belong in a given field. For example, comparative politics and international relations increasingly blend into one another, and American politics meets international relations in research on American foreign policy. Similarly, even the most arcane formal theory papers are about *something*, but the "formal theory" category intermixes a methodological criterion with several substantive ones.² Accordingly, many of these classifications are somewhat arbitrary. To complicate matters further, different Editors undoubtedly defined the fields differently in compiling the annual figures on which these comparisons are based.

Even with these caveats in mind, there was perceptible movement during 2001–2002 toward a lessening of the dominance of submissions about American politics. This does not mean that

the number of American politics-focused papers declined. Because the total number of submitted manuscripts increased sharply, the absolute number of American politics papers increased even though their proportion of the total was dropping. Nor should it be assumed that the American politics submissions were invariably quantitative or formal in approach, for some promising qualitative papers on American politics were also received (a good case in point being Howard Gillman's "How Political Parties Can Use the Courts to Advance Their Agendas: Federal Courts in the United States, 1875–1891," which appeared in our September 2002 issue). Whether the small increments in the comparative politics and international relations categories represent first steps toward greater diversification remains to be seen. However, the small up-tick in methods-oriented submissions should not be interpreted as a counter-trend, for some of these papers were qualitative rather than quantitative (e.g., Tim Búthe's "Taking Temporality Seriously: Modeling History and the Use of Narratives as Evidence," also in our September 2002 issue).

Processing

If the trends considered so far amount to a combination of major change (in the number of submissions received), some signs of change (in the distribution of submissions across fields), and little or no change (in the distribution of submissions across analytical approaches), the news concerning manuscript processing is unambiguous.

In line with the goals of simultaneously enhancing the quality of reviews,

speeding up the review process, and making it more transparent, we introduced several new review procedures during 2001–2002. For one thing, we began inviting authors to suggest the names of appropriate reviewers of their papers. For another, we began sending anonymous copies of my decision letter and of all the reviews to the reviewers. Moreover, even though we send every paper

out to three reviewers, if the first two reviews point clearly toward rejection, we continued my predecessors' practice of rejecting the paper at that point rather than waiting for the third review to arrive. These procedures have been very favorably received by authors and reviewers alike. It is worth noting, however, that although some of these procedures (most notably, declining papers on the basis of two negative reviews) speed up the review process, others (especially sending the decision letters and reviews to the reviewers, which involves a good deal of extra paper-handling) undoubtedly slow things down somewhat.

The data shown in Table 3 indicate that, notwithstanding the start-up status of our office, the disruptions we experienced during the fall, and the unprecedented, large number of submissions we received, our efforts to speed up the review process met with success. We generally managed to get submitted manuscripts out for review within a day of receiving them; our reviewers typically met or bettered the short target dates we requested for completing their reports; and as soon as we had in hand the information I needed to make a decision, I made it. As a consequence, our median turn-around time was just 39 workdays from the day a paper arrived through the day I signed the letter informing the corresponding author of the outcome. If we manage to avoid the disruptions that plagued us in the fall of 2001 and as more and more reviewers submit their reports electronically, we may be able to speed up the process even more. However, this is not a high priority, and given the pace at which the process is already moving, we may

Table 3
Elapsed Time (Median Number of Workdays) in the Review Process

Phase of Review Process	Editorship			
	Sigelman	Finifter	Powell	Patterson
From receipt to reviewer assignment	1	9	20	9
From assignment to last review	39	47	43	43
From last review to decision	0	3	7	6
From receipt to decision	39	61	67	54

Source: All figures except those for Sigelman are from Finifter (2000, Table 6).

be close to the limit of the possible. Indeed, we will probably do well to hold our own in this respect in coming years, especially if the high volume of submissions continues.

To give credit where it is due, I want to emphasize that our ability to process manuscripts in a timely and efficient manner has been greatly enhanced by the time, effort, and care that Ada Finifter and programmer Paul Wolberg devoted to designing and implementing a database program for overseeing the *APSR*'s operations. By graciously making this program available to us and by going out of her way to respond to our numerous requests for her counsel, Ada Finifter not only helped ensure a successful editorial transition but also made a contribution to the *APSR* that has continued beyond her term as Editor.

Outcomes

In recent years, the *APSR* has been criticized for overusing "revise and resubmit" invitations—for extending these invitations to too many papers, for too often piling one "revise and resubmit" decision on top of another, and for rejecting too many of the papers that authors had taken the time and trouble to revise, often multiple times.

I am following a conservative course vis-à-vis "revise and resubmit" invitations. In deciding whether to invite a resubmission, I ask whether (most of) the reviewers are genuinely enthusiastic about the paper, and whether the suggested revisions are narrow enough to be readily accommodated within the current framework of the paper. If I can answer "Yes" to both questions, I issue a "revise and resubmit" invitation. If I cannot, I reject the paper.

Following this conservative course during 2001–2002 produced a considerably lower first-round "revise and resubmit" rate than that of preceding years, and a correspondingly higher rejection rate (see Table 4). Of every 100 first-round decisions I made, 85 were reject-

tions and another four (shown as "other" in the table) were decisions not to open the review process in the first place. (The latter decisions were for papers that were too long, not anonymous, or in some other way inappropriate for *APSR* review. Most of the authors of these papers subsequently submitted corrected versions.) Only 11 of every 100 of my first-round decision letters conveyed an invitation to prepare a revision—almost exactly one-half the rate of first-round "revise-and-resubmit" invitations issued between 1995 and 2000.

According to the second row of Table 4, 25% of my second-round decisions were rejections. That does not, however, mean that I turned down one out of every four of the resubmitted papers that had been issued a "revise and resubmit" in the first round. In fact, every second-round rejection, with only one exception, was of a paper that had received an "other" decision in the first round, had been "fixed" by the author and resubmitted, and had then been sent out in the second round for its initial review. Thus, I rejected only one paper

that had been resubmitted after receiving a "revise and resubmit" invitation.³ Nor, again with a single exception, did I pile one "revise and resubmit" decision on top of another; that is, I issued only one paper a second "revise and resubmit" invitation. All the remaining invited resubmissions that we received were accepted, either conditionally or finally, in the second round. Thus, the issue of whether a given paper would be accepted for publication in the *APSR* was, with only a single exception, always resolved within the first two rounds of the review process.

In most instances, my second-round acceptances were conditional rather than final. In accepting a paper conditionally, I advise the author (1) that I will assess the next version myself rather than sending it out for further review, and (2) that I will accept it as soon as I receive a version of it that settles a few remaining issues. Most often, the point of the remaining revisions is to improve the accessibility and appeal of a paper by reworking its introductory and concluding sections and/or editing the text to enhance readability; on some occasions, relatively minor substantive matters also require attention.

Of obvious interest is the question of whether certain types of papers fare better than others. Table 5 addresses this issue by comparing first-round outcomes; the pattern is virtually identical, but more complicated to present, when decisions from subsequent rounds are considered as well. The answer is that during 2001–2002, rejection rates varied very little across papers represent-

Table 4
Outcomes in Successive Rounds of the Review Process (%)

Review round	Decision				
	Reject	Revise and resubmit	Conditional accept	Accept	Other ^a
2001–2002					
First	85	11	1	0	4
Second	25	9	47	13	6
Third	0	0	23	77	0
Fourth or later	0	0	0	3	0
1995–2000					
First	69	23	0	2	7
Second	38	35	0	27	1
Third	19	15	0	66	1
Fourth	14	16	0	71	0

Source: The 1995–2000 figures are from Finifter (2000, Table 9).

^aPapers classified as "incorrect submissions," i.e., papers that were too long, non-anonymous, in some other way inappropriate for *APSR* review, or – for second-round submissions in 2001–2002, insufficiently responsive to the conditions of acceptance.

Table 5
First-Round Rejection Rates, 2001–2002 (%)

Approach or field	Rejection + "other" rate
Approach	
Formal	87
Quantitative	89
Formal and quantitative	88
Small N	33
Interpretive/conceptual	87
Field	
American politics and policy	90
Comparative politics	88
International relations	84
Normative theory	89
Formal theory	92
Methods	79

ing different approaches to and fields of political science. Certainly rejection was no less likely for papers representing approaches and fields often assumed to enjoy "most favored" status at the *APSR* (formal and quantitative papers and those focused on American politics) than it was for other papers. Indeed, if anything, papers from supposedly favored approaches and fields were more likely to be rejected, though it would be unwise to make much of these minor differences. The only substantial deviation from the overall pattern was the unusually low first-round rejection rate for the few small-N studies that we received, though the number of submissions on which this percentage is based is extremely small. In any event, if the small-N papers on which I invited resubmissions are ultimately accepted, I hope their publication in the *APSR* will encourage a considerably larger volume of submissions of this type in the future.

A different way to assess outcomes is simply to see how many papers representing each approach and field were accepted for publication during

2001–2002. For this purpose, Table 6 focuses on papers on which I made the first-round decision, disregarding papers I inherited at a later stage of the review process from my predecessor. Arrayed across fields, the 18 "new" papers I accepted closely followed the field distribution of the papers we received, as a glance back at Table 2 will establish. That is,

the more papers submitted in a given field, the more accepted. A somewhat different pattern, however, held in

quantitative or formal and just 30% were interpretive/conceptual. Thus, relative to the papers we received during the year, the papers that were accepted actually overrepresented interpretive/conceptual submissions and underrepresented quantitative and formal ones.

Book Reviews

Between September 2000–August 2001, the book review office received nearly 1600 books to review. Between September 2001–August 2002, the number of submitted books rose to nearly 1800. (See Table 7.) Yearly fluctuations in the number of books submitted for review have been common, so it seems unlikely that this 13% one-year increase is indicative of any long-term trend. The same pattern of bouncing around from year to year with no clear trend holds for the distribution of books across subfields as well.

Table 6
Distribution of "New" Papers Accepted, 2001–2002

Approach					
Formal	Quantitative	Formal and Quantitative	Small N	Interpretive/Conceptual	Other
4	6	0	0	8	0
Field					
American Politics and Policy	Comparative Politics	International Relations	Normative Theory	Formal Theory	Methods
5	5	4	3	1	0

terms of the distribution of accepted papers across analytical approaches. Of the 18 "new" papers I accepted, ten were quantitative or formal and eight were interpretive/conceptual. By contrast, roughly 70% of the papers that were submitted during 2001–2002 were

Book Review Editors Susan Bickford and Greg McAvoy give first priority for review to single-authored or co-authored works published by university presses. They also consider single-authored or co-authored works published by other presses as well as ed-

TABLE 7
Book Received, 2000–2002, Books Reviewed, 2001–2002

Field	Books Received		Books Reviewed or Scheduled for Review (of 2001–2002 arrivals)	
	Sep 2000–Aug 2001	Sep 2001–Aug 2002	N	% Accepted
Political Theory	257	300	101	33.7%
American	391	497	91	18.3%
Comparative	429	608	148	24.3%
International Relations	502	379	113	29.8%
Total	1579	1784	453	26.5%

TABLE 8
Books Reviewed by Issue and Field, September 2001–
September 2002

Issue	Political Theory	American	Comparative	International Relations
Sep-01	27% (20)	21% (15)	22% (16)	30% (22)
Dec-01	23% (18)	25% (20)	25% (20)	27% (21)
Mar-02	27% (32)	22% (26)	31% (36)	20% (23)
Jun-02	24% (21)	26% (23)	28% (25)	22% (20)
Sep-02	23% (22)	26% (25)	31% (30)	21% (20)

Note: N's include books reviewed in review essay and multiple and single book reviews. Percentages across; rows sum to 100%.

ited volumes with a strong thematic focus. Their “acceptance” rate (that is, books reviewed as a proportion of

books received) was up during the reporting period relative to the previous period. This rise was slight in American

and comparative politics but more substantial in international relations and political theory. The proportion of books reviewed is generally higher in the latter two fields because they produce primarily single-authored or co-authored scholarly works. By contrast, in American politics and to some extent in comparative politics, many of the books received are textbooks or non-scholarly works.

As Table 8 shows, there was some variation in the number of books reviewed per issue from September 2001–September 2002. In the future, reviews are expected to stabilize in the range of 90–100 per issue. After the December 2002 issue, Book Review Editors Bickford and McAvoy will shift their operation from the *APSR* to the new APSA journal, *Perspectives on Politics*, where book reviews and review essays will appear on a quarterly basis, as they have in the past.

Notes

1. These numbers indicate the total number of submissions. It should be understood that what would ordinarily be considered successive iterations of a single paper would be counted here as several submissions. For example, a paper that was submitted, revised and resubmitted, and then revised and resubmitted a second time

would count as three submissions, not one. This counting rule may seem odd, but in terms of assessing workflow it is not at all unreasonable, for in the example just given, three separate review processes would have been conducted.

2. Recognizing this, Ada Finifter explicitly changed the rule for counting formal theory

submissions; thus, the apparent drop-off of formal theory submissions from Powell’s editorship to hers is a measurement artifact.

3. Of course, some of the authors to whom I issued “revise and resubmit” invitations have not yet submitted the revised version of their paper, and some probably never will.

Reference

Finifter, Ada W. 2000. *American Political Science Review* Editor’s Report for 1999–2000. *PS: Political Science and Politics* 33 (December): 921–928.