

## Notes from the Editors: Advice to Authors

Colleagues occasionally ask what we are looking for in an article for the Journal. A reasonable question, one might think. Editors ought to know what they want, and they owe it to the scholarly community to make those criteria public. However, upon reflection, we realized that it is a devilishly tricky question to address meaningfully.

Platitudes are easy but not informative. Methodological advice trespasses on a large and continually evolving field that we have no business legislating on. Moreover, any advice beyond a platitude that we might offer is apt to encounter exceptions and thus may be damaging if it leads authors astray or discourages them from submitting their work to the Journal.

Nevertheless, after a long think and a good deal of internal discussion, we decided to offer a few general suggestions in the hopes that they might be useful to authors. Most of our suggestions concern format, framing, and style and thus presumably have broad applicability. We apologize in advance if what follows is obvious, incomplete, or even occasionally wrong-headed.

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As a general rule, it is a good idea to foreground the key elements of your paper in the introduction. In an empirical paper, this would include the main argument, the evidence (including key features of the research design), and the findings. There is no need to write a mini paper, but you should give readers the main takeaway. Also, try to anticipate any special concerns that editors and reviewers might have, either discussing them briefly or indicating where they will be discussed in the sections that follow.

Reviews of the literature need not be lengthy; indeed, we would urge brevity wherever possible. However, it is important to clarify the contribution of your paper relative to the existing body of work, and the latter must be accurately represented (avoid “straw men”). What is new, different, or improved? Answers to this question should be clear and explicit. Only in this fashion can readers judge how your paper adds to the cumulation of knowledge on a subject.

Frame your paper in a way that might be interesting and relevant to readers in the broader discipline. For example, if your focus is on a specific region or period, discuss its relevance for theoretical questions and politics elsewhere. If your focus is political theory, clarify its relevance to the broader discipline or contemporary political issues. If the main contribution is a formal model, make the assumptions clear and ground them in the empirical interpretation the model proposes to shed light on. When discussing the results, strive to provide intuitions behind them and some empirical

implications. We do not insist that you test or even corroborate your model with data (though it would be great if you did), but make the job of empiricists easier by clearly stating the empirical implications.

Assuming your paper makes empirical claims about the world, think about how those claims might be challenged. Try to bring choices of conceptualization, measurement, and estimation to the foreground rather than relegating them to footnotes and appendices or neglecting them entirely. Clarify what turns you took in “The Garden of Forking Paths” that is all research. This is important as a matter of transparency and credibility and will also save future embarrassment if your research is replicated (a high probability at the Journal).

For papers with an empirical referent, address the question of generalizability. Where is the model, thesis, finding, or method likely to apply? What are the scope conditions? (Is it limited to the units or the period under study?) This issue needs to be addressed whether the sample is small (e.g., case study) or large (e.g., millions of observations from social media or censuses). All things equal, a general interest journal like the *APSR* is looking for concepts, theories, and methods that travel. If the implications are narrow or pertain mostly to current events, the paper may fit better into a subfield journal.

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To most readers, these points are probably mundane. But perhaps not for everyone. In any case, here they are. We wish we could say more, but we cannot. The reason is quite simple: good political science is hard to define because it is a large and heterogeneous field. Any journal criterion that surpasses the mundane would place boundaries around the field, and we are reluctant to do that.

This brings us to a final question. What qualifies as *political science*? What sort of topics are eligible for review in the Journal? There is no easy answer to this question as the discipline, like all social science disciplines nowadays, does not have clear boundaries.

One might suppose that anything having to do with politics is eligible, but this just begs the question of how to define politics. One might suppose that anything that political scientists do qualifies as political science, but this is arbitrary in the extreme. In this interdisciplinary age, it behooves us to embrace contributions from scholars in neighboring fields, e.g., anthropology, archaeology, demography, economics, geography, history, linguistics, philosophy, psychology, and sociology. Indeed, many of the most cited authors in the *APSR* are not political scientists by training.

Given this ambiguity, we fall back on a best-fit criterion. If a submission fits better into a journal in another field, and if it is more likely to obtain qualified reviewers and readers in that field, we advise you to send it there. If journals in other fields are inappropriate, if there is considerable overlap with work already published in political science journals on a given topic, or if there is a benefit to importing ideas/methods from other fields into political science, it may be eligible for the Journal.

In the broader scheme of advancing social science, some division of labor among disciplines is probably desirable. So, the operative question becomes which journal is best suited to provide reliable peer review and an appropriate audience for a given paper, a matter that must be worked out on a case-by-case basis. Your hunch is probably better than ours since you know the subject better than we do, but if you are in doubt, we are happy to offer input.