
The Profession

Political Scientists' Journal Evaluations Revisited

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Refereed journals are a principal means of communication within the scholarly community. Accordingly, publication in refereed journals is taken as a *sine qua non* for success within the discipline. Tenure and promotion decisions and salary increases are influenced by the number of articles which a professor has published and the importance of the journals in their work has appeared. While more objective means have been suggested (Christenson and Sigelman, 1985), subjective judgments of the quality of journals is the most commonly employed indicator of their importance. Over a decade ago *PS* published a study which examined political scientists' subjective evaluations of sixty-three social science journals (Giles and Wright, 1975). Given the passage of time and the introduction of many new journals, it is appropriate to re-examine those evaluations.

Of the sixty-three journals examined by Giles and Wright, fifty-six remain in print and are included in this study. An additional twenty-two journals are also examined, bringing the total to seventy-eight. The additional journals allow for the representation of journals established since the earlier study (e.g., *Legislative Studies Quarterly*) and for greater representation of comparative journals with specific regional foci (e.g., *China Quarterly* and *Soviet Studies*). Data for the study were gathered from questionnaires mailed during the summer of 1988 to a sample of 550 polit-

ical scientists. This sample was drawn randomly from the faculty listed in the 1986 *APSA Guide to Graduate Study*. Usable questionnaires were received from 215 respondents for a return rate of approximately 40%. Respondents were asked to evaluate the journals presented alphabetically. Additional space was provided for rating journals not included on the list.

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As in the Giles and Wright study, the respondents were instructed to rate each journal in terms of the general quality of its articles on a scale from 0 to 10 with 0 = poor, 2 = fair, 4 = adequate, 6 = good, 8 = very good, and 10 = outstanding. Respondents were instructed to rate only those journals with which they were familiar. Information was also collected from the respondents on their age, academic rank, academic affiliation, journal publications, and areas of professional interest.

The principal results of the survey are presented in Table 1.¹ As would be expected, the respondents are most familiar with established journals which have a general substantive focus. On average over 80% are familiar with the regional journals (*AJPS*, *JOP*, *WPQ*, and *Polity*) and virtually all the respondents are familiar with the journal of the national association, *The Ameri-*

The Profession

can Political Science Review. The principal journals of major subfields, such as *World Politics*, *Comparative Politics*, and *Public Administration Review*, also enjoy widespread familiarity. While familiarity is positively associated with the respondents' subjective evaluations ($r = .39$), it does not assure a high evaluation. *Presidential Studies Quarterly* and *The Annals*, for example, are familiar to a large segment of the respondents but receive relatively low evaluations.

The ranking of the journals in terms of average perceived quality is correlated strongly ($r = .82$) with the ranking from the earlier study.² Indeed, the unstandardized regression coefficient for our mean scores

on those of the Giles-Wright study is .99 which indicates exceptional stability in the perceived quality of the journals over a more than ten-year period. Of course, this stability may reflect real stability in the quality of the journals, the tendency for perceptions of quality to change more slowly than reality, or both of these factors. Some of the journals did experience notable changes in perceived quality. For example, *International Studies Quarterly*, *International Organizations*, and the *American Journal of Political Science* experienced increases in mean evaluations of .75 or more between 1975 and 1988. On the other hand, *Experimental Study of Politics*, *Simulation and Games*, and *Behavioral Sci-*

Table 1. Political Scientists' Ratings of Selected Journals

| Journal* | % | Rating | | Specialists |
|---|------|----------|------|-------------|
| | | Familiar | Mean | |
| <i>World Politics</i> | 59.5 | 7.9 | 1.4 | 8.0 |
| <i>American Sociological Review</i> | 54.9 | 7.6 | 1.8 | |
| <i>American Political Science Review</i> | 98.6 | 7.6 | 2.3 | |
| <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> | 50.2 | 7.5 | 1.6 | |
| <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> | 83.2 | 7.5 | 1.8 | |
| <i>Journal of Politics</i> | 91.1 | 7.4 | 1.6 | |
| <i>American Journal of International Law</i> | 18.6 | 7.3 | 1.6 | |
| <i>Soviet Studies</i> | 9.3 | 7.2 | 1.4 | 7.4 |
| <i>International Organization</i> | 37.7 | 7.1 | 1.8 | 7.2 |
| <i>Comparative Politics</i> | 55.3 | 7.0 | 1.5 | 7.3 |
| <i>Slavic Review</i> | 7.4 | 7.0 | 1.5 | 7.1 |
| <i>Administrative Studies Quarterly</i> | 42.8 | 6.9 | 1.9 | 7.2 |
| <i>British Journal of Political Science</i> | 58.1 | 6.8 | 1.7 | |
| <i>Journal of Political Economy</i> | 23.8 | 6.8 | 2.8 | |
| <i>China Quarterly</i> | 14.9 | 6.6 | 1.8 | 7.0 |
| <i>Political Theory</i> | 28.0 | 6.6 | 2.0 | |
| <i>Public Administration Review</i> | 57.7 | 6.6 | 2.1 | 7.1 |
| <i>Comparative Political Studies</i> | 46.0 | 6.5 | 1.5 | 6.7 |
| <i>International Studies Quarterly</i> | 41.9 | 6.5 | 1.9 | 6.7 |
| <i>Journal of Conflict Resolution</i> | 57.5 | 6.4 | 1.8 | |
| <i>Foreign Affairs</i> | 75.8 | 6.4 | 2.3 | 6.8 |
| <i>Journal of Latin American Studies</i> | 13.1 | 6.4 | 1.6 | 6.8 |
| <i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i> | 60.5 | 6.4 | 1.6 | 6.4 |
| <i>European Journal of Political Research</i> | 21.9 | 6.3 | 1.7 | 6.7 |
| <i>Daedalus</i> | 62.6 | 6.3 | 1.9 | |
| <i>Law and Society Review</i> | 31.3 | 6.2 | 1.9 | 6.3 |
| <i>International Affairs</i> | 26.0 | 6.2 | 1.8 | 5.9 |
| <i>Social Forces</i> | 32.6 | 6.2 | 1.7 | |
| <i>Political Studies</i> | 24.7 | 6.2 | 2.0 | |
| <i>Canadian Journal of Political Studies</i> | 34.4 | 6.1 | 1.6 | 6.3 |

*Those journals with which at least 50% of the sample are familiar are italicized.

Political Scientists' Journal Evaluations

Table I (continued)

| Journal* | % Familiar | Rating | | Specialists |
|---|------------|--------|------|-------------|
| | | Mean | S.D. | |
| Legislative Studies Quarterly | 48.8 | 6.1 | 1.7 | 6.4 |
| Social Science Quarterly | 56.7 | 6.1 | 1.7 | |
| Public Policy | 20.1 | 6.1 | 1.6 | 6.5 |
| Urban Affairs Quarterly | 29.8 | 6.1 | 1.8 | |
| Western Political Quarterly | 78.5 | 6.0 | 1.6 | |
| Public Choice | 33.0 | 6.0 | 1.9 | |
| Polity | 69.2 | 6.0 | 1.6 | |
| Political Science Quarterly | 66.2 | 6.0 | 2.1 | |
| Politics and Society | 31.2 | 6.0 | 1.9 | |
| Policy Sciences | 33.0 | 5.9 | 1.9 | 6.2 |
| Journal of InterAmerican Studies and World Affairs | 10.7 | 5.9 | 2.0 | 6.4 |
| Law and Policy | 17.7 | 5.9 | 1.7 | 5.3 |
| Journal of International Affairs | 15.8 | 5.9 | 1.8 | 5.5 |
| Administration and Society | 29.3 | 5.8 | 1.9 | 6.4 |
| American Politics Quarterly | 58.9 | 5.8 | 1.5 | |
| Judicature | 19.6 | 5.8 | 2.1 | 6.2 |
| Publius | 46.7 | 5.8 | 1.8 | 6.2 |
| Government and Opposition | 33.0 | 5.8 | 1.8 | |
| Journal of Asian Studies | 12.1 | 5.8 | 1.9 | 5.8 |
| Public Interest | 48.4 | 5.8 | 2.1 | |
| Journal of Developing Areas | 23.4 | 5.8 | 1.7 | 6.2 |
| Political Behavior | 32.6 | 5.7 | 1.8 | 6.0 |
| Review of Politics | 39.7 | 5.7 | 2.0 | |
| Journal of Peace Research | 31.2 | 5.7 | 2.6 | 5.1 |
| Far Eastern Survey | 8.8 | 5.7 | 2.1 | 5.8 |
| Middle Eastern Studies | 11.2 | 5.6 | 1.6 | 5.9 |
| International Interactions | 13.0 | 5.6 | 2.5 | 5.3 |
| Dissent | 33.2 | 5.5 | 1.8 | |
| Asian Survey | 21.4 | 5.5 | 2.2 | 5.9 |
| American Review of Public Administration | 26.2 | 5.5 | 2.2 | 5.9 |
| Behavioral Science | 22.3 | 5.4 | 1.9 | 5.9 |
| <i>Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science</i> | 80.8 | 5.4 | 1.9 | |
| Political Quarterly | 23.8 | 5.4 | 1.8 | |
| <i>PS: Political Science & Politics</i> | 86.9 | 5.4 | 2.1 | |
| International Social Science Journal | 20.5 | 5.3 | 1.7 | |
| American Behavioral Scientist | 39.5 | 5.3 | 1.9 | |
| Public Administration Quarterly | 29.4 | 5.3 | 1.8 | 5.7 |
| Orbis | 40.5 | 5.2 | 2.1 | |
| Social Science Journal | 20.0 | 5.2 | 2.0 | |
| Policy Studies Journal | 50.7 | 5.0 | 1.8 | 5.6 |
| Political Science | 16.3 | 4.9 | 1.8 | |
| Presidential Studies Quarterly | 63.3 | 4.6 | 2.1 | |
| National Civic Review | 20.0 | 4.5 | 1.8 | |
| Women and Politics | 13.1 | 4.4 | 2.4 | |
| Journal of Black Studies | 12.6 | 4.3 | 1.8 | |
| Simulation and Games | 7.9 | 4.1 | 1.5 | |
| Experimental Study of Politics | 9.8 | 4.0 | 1.7 | |
| Southeastern Political Review | 14.0 | 3.5 | 2.1 | |

The Profession

ence experienced decreases of 50 or more.

Thus, while for the large body of political scientists the APSR is without doubt the premier journal, a significant minority of the profession is exceptionally critical of the articles which it publishes.

Five of the six journals receiving the highest average evaluations from the respondents are general journals of either political science or sociology. The exception is *World Politics* which focuses on international relations. All of these journals are familiar to a large segment of the sample and differ little in their mean quality evaluations. Perhaps the most interesting outcome is the fact that the *American Political Science Review* does not fare better relative to the leading regional journals, *The American Journal of Political Science* and *The Journal of Politics*, or *World Politics*, a more specialized journal. This result parallels the earlier findings of Giles and Wright. Their explanation was that a segment of the profession is discontented with the APSR and gives it exceptionally low ratings. The present data are consistent with that explanation. While less than 6% of the respondents gave either *AJPS* or *JOP* scores of "4" or less, fully 12% of the respondents gave such ratings to the APSR. Conversely, while almost 64% of the respondents gave scores of "8" or more to the APSR, only about 57% gave similar scores to *AJPS* and *JOP*. Indeed, almost 20 percent of the respondents rated the work published in the APSR as outstanding (i.e.,

10'). Thus, while for the large body of political scientists the APSR is without doubt the premier journal, a significant minority of the profession is exceptionally critical of the articles which it publishes.³

While the case for the APSR appears to be extreme, the evidence in Table 1 suggests that there is some variation within the profession regarding the relative quality of journals. Most notably, evaluations of journals differ by the subfield of the respondent.⁴ In over 80% of the cases subfield specialists rate their journals higher than does the total sample of respondents. The general journals in political science are often criticized as being primarily outlets for articles on American politics.

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This criticism is reflected in the evaluations by subfield. The evaluations of the *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Political Science*, and *Journal of Politics* by respondents in the subfield of American politics are consistently higher than the evaluations given the same journals by respondents in the subfields of comparative politics and international relations. Respondents' evaluations also vary by whether they have published in a particular journal. As one would expect, in the overwhelming majority of cases (87%) respondents who had published in a journal rated the quality of its articles higher than did respondents who had not published in the journal. Two factors which did not systematically affect respondents' evaluations were the status of the school in which they were currently situated⁵ or their professorial rank.

In an ideal professional world the quality

of scholarly articles would be assessed by reading them. However, in reality we often do not have sufficient time to read an individual's work and/or do not have the substantive expertise to assess its quality. Under these conditions we tend to attribute to an article the quality of the journal in which it appears. While the present study does not provide a test of the validity of this attribution, it does indicate that the perceived hierarchy of journals has been relatively stable over time and that, while specialists favor their own journals, the general pattern of evaluations does not differ dramatically among different elements of the profession

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Notes

1. Only those journals with which at least 5% of the sample were familiar are included in Table 1. This did not exclude any of the 78 listed journals but did eliminate three journals that were "written in" by respondents. Those journals were *Policy Studies Review* (n=5), *Foreign Policy* (n=9) and *International Security* (n=9).

2. This analysis employs the 56 journals which were assessed in both surveys.

3. Several factors were examined as possibly influencing respondents' attitudes toward the APSR including age, sex, race, highest degree offered at the institution, prestige of the institution, professorial rank of the respondent, and area of specialization. Only area of specialization was found to have a significant effect on evaluations. Respondents who specialized in American politics on average were found to rate the APSR higher than did respondents with specialties in other areas.

4. Subfield was determined by items eliciting respondents' subfield of interest. The means for specialists are only shown for those journals with which at least 5 respondents in the appropriate subfield indicated familiarity.

5. Respondents' universities were divided into elite and non-elite. The elite schools were

those given a top rating by the American Council of Education (see Bair, Thompson, Hickey and Kelley, 1988) and those in the Big Ten.

References

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Social Science Journals: A Review of Research Sources and Publishing Opportunities for Political Scientists

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Twenty years ago, it was a common practice for professors to give their students mimeographed lists of the major journals in political science and related disciplines, but with the explosion in social science publication, it has become impossible for us to keep pace with more than a small part of the literature. So much is published each year that it is difficult to remain current in even a single subfield. As a result of the information explosion, most political scientists are not familiar with new developments in other social sciences, or even recognize the major journals of those disciplines.

One of the first proposed solutions in political science to the problems related to