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Notes from the Editors

As our editorial team's third "Notes from the Editors" goes to press, nearly a year has passed since the World Health Organization declared COVID-19 a pandemic. At this time last year, colleges and universities began moving classes online, requiring instructors to retool by adopting new teaching technologies and, in many cases, substantially revising and restructuring courses. At the same time, many childcare centers suspended or modified operations, and K–12 schools shifted to online instruction, leaving those with young children to juggle additional care work alongside increased teaching demands. Many academics with adult children and elder care obligations saw their care work increase. Family members became ill with the virus, and academics themselves became ill. Some grieved the loss of loved ones or struggled with anxiety and depression. There were ripple effects, as well, as faculty stepped in to cover teaching or service obligations for sick colleagues or those stretched thin by pandemic-related demands.

These challenges did not affect all scholars equally. Instead, they disproportionately affected members of the communities hardest hit by COVID-19, especially people of color; those who teach at underresourced institutions and/or hold contingent faculty positions; and those who provide the majority of caregiving labor, often women.

Over the past year, scholars in a wide range of disciplines have tried to understand the pandemic's effects on research. Early indicators suggested that, during the first several months of the lockdown, although overall research productivity remained stable or even increased, women's research productivity declined. For example, when Megan Frederickson analyzed preprint submissions to major open-access STEM paper archives, she found that, although in the early months of the pandemic overall submissions had increased, the rate of growth in submissions by men exceeded the rate of growth in submissions by women. Social scientists identified similar patterns. For example, when Olga Shurchkov, Tatyana Deryugina, and Jenna Stearns examined preprints and working papers by economists, they found relatively stable rates of research productivity overall but a decline in the proportion of working papers authored by women, especially in the prestigious National Bureau of Economic Research series. In political science, *Comparative Political Studies* reported early on that the journal had seen dramatic increases in submissions by men relative to women, while the *American Journal of Political Science* reported a decline in the percentage of solo-authored submissions from women.

In this issue's "Notes from the Editors," we take stock of submissions patterns at the *American Political Science Review* since the onset of the pandemic. Our analysis is complicated by the fact that the journal's new editorial team began its work on June 1, 2020, shortly after widespread implementation of pandemic lockdown procedures. Typically, new *APSR* editorial teams see an initial increase in submissions. Given our editorial vision, we also hoped to see growth in submissions focused on pressing political problems, including structural inequalities and the exercise of power by oppressed people, including submissions from scholars who themselves identify as members of marginalized communities. The patterns that emerged from our analysis are consistent with typical expectations for a new team, especially one encouraging a wider range of submissions. However, we caution that these generally encouraging data may mask countervailing trends. Pandemic-driven declines in submissions may have been offset by the normal increase in submissions during the first year of a new team, which explicitly seeks to diversify submissions. The relatively short period and the small number of data points make it difficult to disentangle these effects. Moreover, we expect pandemic-related declines in research productivity to be lagged, particularly for field-based research. Scholars may spend years in data collection, analysis, and writing before submitting their manuscripts for peer review, a fact that underscores the importance of monitoring these patterns for several years.

AGGREGATE SUBMISSIONS

With these caveats in mind, we begin by comparing submissions during 2019 and 2020 across roughly similar-length periods defined in relation to the onset of widespread pandemic restrictions (March 16, 2020), the change in editorial teams (June 1, 2020), and the usual seasonal shift in submissions after the APSA annual meeting (September 8, 2020). In the first part of 2020, before widespread pandemic restrictions, new submissions had increased by 9.4% compared with the same period in 2019 (January 1–March 15; Figure 1). Then, contrary to what we might expect, between March 16 and May 31, 2020 (the first pandemic peak and final months of the prior editorial team), new submissions increased even more (16.3%) compared with the same period in 2019. Submissions from June 1, 2020 through the end of the calendar year increased by 37% compared with the same period in 2019. As this suggests, during each period, we saw more submissions in 2020 than in the comparable period in 2019, both before and in the aftermath of the pandemic.

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FIGURE 1. New Manuscript Submissions to the *APSR* (2019–20)

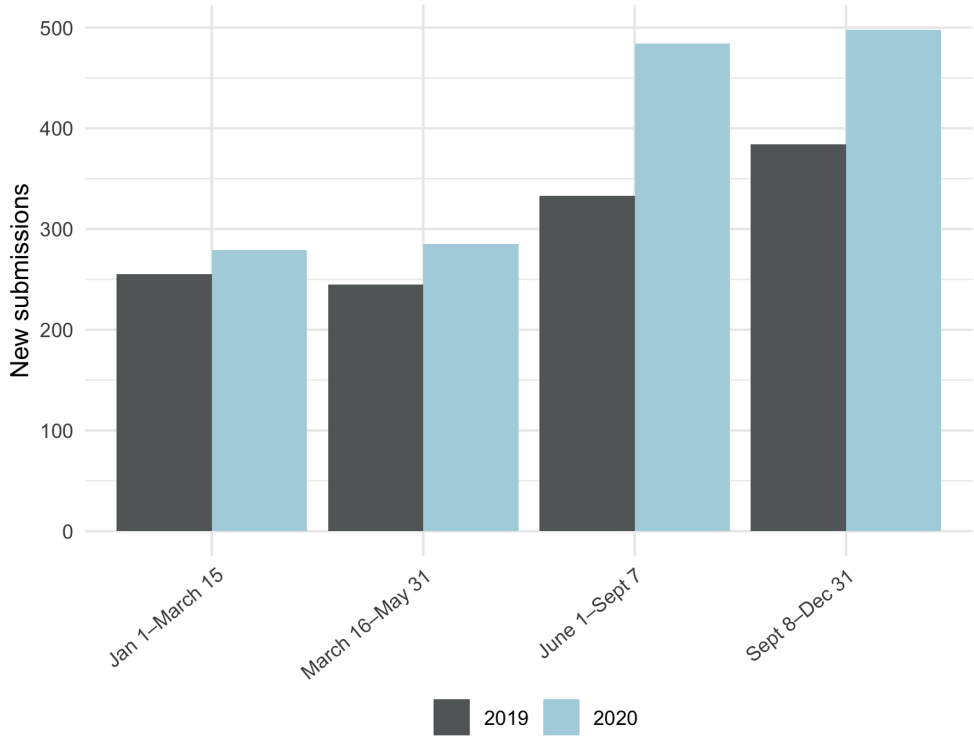


TABLE 1. New Submissions to the *APSR* (2019–20) by Author(s) Reporting Binary Gender Identities

	Male solo or team			Female solo or team			Mixed team		
Period	2019	2020	change	2019	2020	change	2019	2020	change
1/1–3/15	166	149	–10.2%	29	40	37.9%	38	54	42.1%
3/16–5/31	145	162	11.7%	26	33	26.9%	53	54	1.9%
6/1–9/7	176	238	35.2%	52	87	67.3%	68	105	54.4%
9/8–12/31	202	243	20.3%	53	90	69.8%	89	104	16.9%

SUBMISSIONS BY GENDER

The overall increases shown in Figure 1 may mask gender-differentiated trends. Since January 2018, authors who submit to the *APSR* have been asked to report their gender identity, allowing us to examine submission patterns by gender identity before and after the start of the pandemic. Between January 2019 and December 2020, a total of 2,763 new manuscripts were submitted by a total of 5,279 authors, of whom 4,912 reported their gender identity.[1] Of these authors, 23 (0.47%) identified as gender nonbinary.

Table 1 summarizes the distribution of authors who report binary gender identities. About 12.5% of new submissions in 2019 and 2020 do not have the author gender(s) coded when one or more authors identified as nonbinary or declined to provide their gender identity.[2] In multiauthor teams, if at least one author identifies as female and one identifies as male, the team is coded as mixed gender, regardless of whether other authors answered the gender identity question. Comparing submissions from March through May 2019 with submissions from March through May 2020, new submissions increased across all author types. However, submissions by mixed gender teams were relatively flat, and new submissions during that period in 2020 by male authors or author teams still outnumbered those by female authors or author teams by five to one. In the latter half of 2020, after our editorial team began work, submissions continued to increase

[1] Authors are invited to complete the author questionnaire for each new submission to the *APSR*. These author counts may include authors with multiple new submissions.

[2] Manuscripts with one or more author who identified as nonbinary are not included in Table 1 unless the manuscript also had two other authors who identified as male and female, in which case the manuscript was coded as a mixed team.

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TABLE 2. Author Race or Ethnicity of New Submissions to the *APSR* (2019–20)

	BIPOC solo			BIPOC team			BIPOC 1+ team		
Period	2019	2020	change	2019	2020	change	2019	2020	change
1/1–3/15	27	32	18.5%	12	14	16.7%	39	48	23.1%
3/16–5/31	29	30	3.4%	11	21	90.9%	37	50	35.1%
6/1–9/7	44	84	90.9%	8	22	175.0%	47	91	93.6%
9/8–12/31	43	62	44.2%	15	35	133.3%	69	102	47.8%
	White solo			White team			Uncoded		
Period	2019	2020	change	2019	2020	change	2019	2020	change
1/1–3/15	93	74	–20.4%	56	61	8.9%	28	50	78.6%
3/16–5/31	72	79	9.7%	68	65	–4.4%	28	40	42.9%
6/1–9/7	107	129	20.6%	86	109	26.7%	41	49	19.5%
9/8–12/31	108	126	16.7%	102	121	18.6%	47	52	10.6%

compared with 2019 levels, with an even more pronounced increase in the proportion of submissions from women. Since June 1, 2020, the *APSR* received 1 manuscript authored by a woman or all-woman team for every 2.7 manuscripts submitted by a man or an all-man team. Thus, Table 1 shows that submissions by women or women-only teams increased in 2020 compared with the prior year during all periods. Perhaps surprisingly, then, given the emerging research on the pandemic, our data does not reveal the clear decreases in submissions from women that other journals have reported, though as noted, such a decrease may be obscured by countervailing trends or may not yet fully reflect lagged effects that have yet to be manifest.

SUBMISSIONS BY RACE AND ETHNICITY

Because *APSR* authors are asked to report their racial and ethnic identities, we were also able to examine submission patterns by race and ethnicity before and after the start of the pandemic. Table 2 summarizes authors' self-identified race or ethnicity. We code solo and team authorships according to whether the author(s) identified as white or Black, Indigenous, or another racial or ethnic identity (BIPOC). We also report the number of author teams in which at least one, but not all authors identify as BIPOC as well as the number of authors we are unable to code because one or more authors declined to self-identify.[3] About 8% of new submissions in 2019 and 2020 were unclassified because one or more authors declined to report their racial or ethnic identity. We begin by comparing submissions from March through May 2019 with submissions from March through May 2020. Submissions were either stable or increased across all author types, except entirely white teams, who submitted a handful fewer manuscripts in 2020 compared with 2019. Comparing June through December 2019 with June through December 2020, submissions by solo or teams of scholars who all identify as BIPOC rose from 110 in 2019 to 203 in 2020, an 84.5% increase, and submissions authored by two or more people among whom at least one identified as BIPOC increased from 116 to 193, or 66.4%. Over comparable periods, the number of submissions by self-identified white authors (solo or all authors of a team) increased from 403 to 485, or 20.3%. In the latter half of 2020, the ratio of manuscript submissions by white authors to manuscripts with one or more BIPOC authors was about 1.2 to one. Again, any effect of the pandemic is difficult to discern in these data.

OTHER SUBMISSION PATTERNS

In addition, we examined submission patterns by manuscript subfield and methodology, by authors' rank and institution type, and by the world region in which the corresponding author was based. In general, submissions increased across all categories, and we found few patterns that clearly differentiated submissions from before and after the onset of the pandemic. We did find a marked decrease in the proportion of new submissions to the journal that are full-length articles relative to the proportion that are letters.[4] Letters as a proportion of submissions have steadily increased over time, perhaps because authors became familiar with the format introduced by the Mannheim team. We did not expect that the change in editorial team would further increase the shift toward letters. However, article submissions increased by 30 (14.4%) in the year between the mid-March to end-of-May period in 2019 and the same period in 2020, whereas letter submissions increased by 10 (27.0%) during the same period. The shift toward letter submissions accelerated in the

[3] Authors are allowed to choose multiple racial or ethnic identities. If an author identifies both as white and as Black, Indigenous, or another racial or ethnic identity, they are coded as BIPOC, not white.

[4] Similar to what other journals call "research notes," letters are relatively short, focused scholarly contributions with a maximum length of 4,000 words, compared with 12,000 for full-length articles.

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TABLE 3. Review Process and Turnaround at *APSR* (2019–20)

	2019				2020			
	1/1–3/15	3/15–5/31	6/1–9/7	9/8–12/31	1/1–3/15	3/15–5/31	6/1–9/7	9/8–12/31
Reviewers per manuscript								
Average invited	4.9	4.9	5.1	5	5.4	5.5	6.1	5.9
Average completed	2.9	2.9	2.9	2.8	2.8	2.9	2.8	2.5
Percentage of those invited who completed reviews								
Overall	59.4	58.6	58	57.2	52.5	52.0	46.7	41.4
Female reviewers	50.0	49.6	54.3	55.2	49.0	45.6	43.1	38.4
Male reviewers	64.0	63.5	60.2	58.5	54.4	55.8	49.1	43.7
N. Amer. reviewers	58.6	57.3	58.5	56.8	51.7	49.9	48	41.6
European reviewers	61.5	58.5	58.1	57.0	52. 4	56.2	39.2	40.9
Other reviewers	61.0	79.4	48.9	64.0	61.9	60.0	53.4	42.3
Median number of days between editorial statuses for new submissions								
Submission to desk reject	6	8	6	3	3	3.5	9	10
Submission to under peer review	11	14	14	16	12	9	9	10
Submission to 2 reviews complete	54	57	58	63	59.5	49	49	46
Submission to 3 reviews complete	67	74	75	76	84	60	65	56
1st review invitation to 2 reviews complete	39	38	40	40	45	38	39	38
1st review invitation to 3 reviews complete	53	56	53.5	54	72	50	56	47
1st review invitation to decision	74.5	79	88	78	82	55	60	53
Submission to reject after review	82	86	98	92.5	96	64	64	61
Submission to revise and resubmit	157	138	142	133	104	75.5	88.5	66
Submissions w/o decision by end of next period	37.2%	28.5%	20.3%	23.6%	22.0%	4.5%	3.9%	62.3%

second half of 2020 after our editorial team began its work on June 1, from 107 letters submitted in the second half of 2019 to 194 in 2020, or an increase of 81.3%. Nevertheless, article submissions continued to outnumber letters by four to one in the second half of 2020. Anecdotally, we note that many recent letter submissions offer rapid responses to recent events, including the pandemic, global mobilizations associated with the Black Lives Matter movement, and 2020 electoral politics, particularly in the United States. The pattern is also consistent with a shift toward focused, short contributions as an adaptation to pandemic pressures at home and in the classroom.

THE PEER REVIEW PROCESS

Given the additional work and care demands during the pandemic, some may have reduced their professional service contributions, including peer reviews for journals. Table 3 reports various indicators related to the peer-review process in 2019 and 2020 for manuscripts with an editorial decision.[5] In 2019, the Mannheim team invited about five reviewers, on average, for each manuscript sent out for review, but in 2020, after the start of the pandemic, the same team needed to invite more reviewers to yield the same number of completed reviews, a pattern that has continued under our stewardship. During 2020, the overall percentage of those invited to review a manuscript who completed a review has also declined, both in the last team's final six months and in our first six months. We do not have self-identified gender for reviewers, but instead rely on automated coding based on first names, which is fairly accurate for binary genders (Teele and Thelen 2017, fn. 11). In general, female reviewers have lower completion rates, but the completion rates for all reviewers have further declined since the onset of the pandemic. Declining completion rates also hold across geographic locations of the reviewer. However, editorial processes also affect the completion rate. For example, if editors invite more reviewers and terminate outstanding requests when sufficient reviews are received, then completion rates decline.

Table 3 also includes the median number of days for various parts of the editorial process, some of which are heavily dependent on the timeliness of peer reviews. The editorial team has the most influence over the median number of days for an initial decision to desk reject or send a paper out to reviewers, and the

[5] Because we exclude manuscripts that are still with reviewers, these indicators may understate review times for the most recent period, September through December 2020.

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previous and current editorial teams performed similarly. The slightly longer median time for a desk reject under our team is an artifact of our process, which requires that at least two editors support each desk reject decision. We also provide the median number of days from manuscript submission or the issuing of the first reviewer invitation to various stages in the consideration process. The stability in the median number of days for reviews under both teams and before and after the start of the pandemic, combined with the evidence that the number of invitations per paper has increased, suggests that both teams adjusted their editorial practices to expedite decisions in the face of reviewer delays or inability to complete reviews. Because these calculations do not include manuscripts that are still under review, they may underestimate the turnaround times for the most recent period. Therefore, we also include the percentage of submissions without an initial decision after peer review by the end of the next period. These figures suggest that we allow very few manuscripts to languish in the review process.

WHAT CAN WE DO IN OUR ROLE AS JOURNAL EDITORS DO?

As members of the *APSR*'s editorial team, we harbor no illusions about our power to redress what is, at heart, an enormous structural problem that the onset of the pandemic appears to have worsened. Journal editors cannot directly change universities' labor practices; we cannot reform healthcare or dependent care policies; and we cannot directly alter the racialized, classed, and gendered division of domestic labor through editorial policies. As the pandemic creates new pressures and challenges for so many of our colleagues, we find ourselves with limited options for sparking change.

However, we are committed to doing what we can do to support the journal's authors and reviewers in the face of the unique challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic poses. We have continued to attend conferences online in order to interact with and learn from our colleagues. To avoid adding to authors' stresses the burden of waiting an inordinately long time for publication decisions, we have almost always extended deadlines for authors and reviewers who request more time while also augmenting our efforts to keep our turnaround times relatively short.

We are grateful to so many of our colleagues for their generosity as they continue to serve as Editorial Board members and reviewers for the journal and as they continue to share their advice and insights with us, even in this difficult time. Our interactions with authors and reviewers remind us often not only that are many of us balancing challenges on multiple fronts but also that members of our community are resilient, strong, and still generous with their time and expertise, for which we are so grateful. We very much welcome your thoughts and suggestions about how, going forward, we can work together to meet the unique challenges that the pandemic poses.

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