

NOTES FROM THE EDITOR: A QUESTION, AN INNOVATION, AND AN EXPLANATION

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Greetings from *The Journal of Politics* Editorial Office! As I said in an earlier issue, I prefer to maintain a low profile within the pages of the *Journal*. But, there are several points—specifically, a question, an innovation, and an explanation—that I would like to bring to readers' attention. So, I hope you do not mind me taking a small amount of page space in order to do so.

A QUESTION FOR YOU

As many of you already know, manuscript processing at *The Journal of Politics* is now carried out largely via electronic channels of communication. We recommend strongly that authors submit their manuscripts as PDF files attached to e-mailed cover letters. We also prefer that referees e-mail their reviews to the *JOP* office. Electronic manuscript processing speeds up turnaround times by a significant degree, drastically reduces office supply usage, and nearly eliminates postage costs. I am happy to say that the scholarly community's response to these innovations has been almost uniformly positive.

However, there is one element of the process that I am not sure benefits from the movement toward electronic communications: The Editor's decision letter to the author of a submitted manuscript. Although I have begun e-mailing my decisions (with referee reports attached to the message in PDF form), I must admit feeling a certain ambivalence about doing so. On the one hand, e-mailed decision letters are a logical continuation to the electronic manuscript review process that we have already initiated. On the other hand, the outcome from that process is momentous enough for the author that the "personal touch" of an actual letter and hard-copy reviews might be more appropriate.

Given my own mixed feelings on this topic, I would like to pose a question to *JOP* readers: How do you feel about e-mailed versus hard-copy decision letters? I am sincerely interested in what you have to say and I welcome any suggestions or ideas that you are willing to share. I know the next Editor of *The Journal of Politics*, as well as the editors of other political science journals, will also be very interested in your reactions. So, if you would like to express your opinion on this point, send an e-mail message to jop@msu.edu. I look forward to hearing from you!

AN INNOVATION

In my experience as an editor, I have discovered what appears to be a general rule about the journal publication process: Authors have more to say than there is page space available in the journal. Of course, much of the excess content can be removed from a manuscript with careful editing and rewriting.

Still, there is often material that would be useful to readers but which just does not fit neatly within the major "flow" of the author's argument or analysis. Traditionally, this kind of

information has been “available to interested readers upon request” from the author either through the mail or on the author’s personal web site. It seems to me that the preceding system is problematic: For one thing, it places the major responsibility on the reader. In addition to that general concern, authors often move and web URL’s can change, making it even more difficult to track down information.

In order to overcome these problems, I am introducing a new feature at *The Journal of Politics*: Authors of accepted manuscripts can now have space on the *JOP* web site (<http://journalofpolitics.org>) for supplemental materials to accompany their articles. This can include appendixes, diagnostic tests for models, reports on additional related analyses, and so on. I am also encouraging authors to make the data from their analyses available for replication purposes; when they do so, it will be included on the web site, as well.

Of course, there are fairly strict limits on the content of web-based supplemental materials. And, the latter are still subject to editorial review. But, I do hope that the availability of space on the *JOP* web site will help alleviate at least some of the frustrations that authors experience when they prepare their work for publication. My primary objective with this innovation is to give readers as much information as possible about the work that appears in the pages of *The Journal of Politics*. This will enable them to evaluate the research more effectively and it should, therefore, facilitate the cumulative process of theoretical development within the discipline.

The *JOP* web site can be found very easily: The URL of the home page (<http://journalofpolitics.org>) appears in every issue of the *Journal* and from there, users will find convenient links to the supplemental material. The use of this particular URL guarantees that the web site always appears in a fixed location (at least from the user’s perspective). Therefore, the information can always be retrieved from the same place, regardless where the authors and the *JOP* Editorial Offices are currently located.

This issue of *The Journal of Politics* is the first one to include any articles with supplemental web materials. But, authors of accepted manuscripts have known about the feature for several months. Therefore, many more web supplements will appear in the near future. So far, the responses to this feature— at least, those reactions that have been communicated to me— have been very positive. I hope you like it, too, and find the supplemental materials useful for your own work!

AN EXPLANATION

If you have looked at the Table of Contents, you already know that we are publishing an erratum in this issue. That, in itself, is not particularly unusual. However, this erratum is somewhat distinctive in that it consists of two separate works by different authors. Accordingly, I believe it is best for me to provide a brief explanation of why this occurs.

Several years ago, an article appeared in *The Journal of Politics* with erroneous information in some of its tables. This problematic content made it through the entire review process, without being discovered by the author, the referees, or the *JOP* Editor. Recently, the author of the original article made his data available to another set of researchers, who replicated the analysis and immediately found the error.

When this situation was brought to my attention, I asked the original author and the subsequent researchers to collaborate on a single brief article that corrected the earlier error. However, the various parties disagreed about the sources, nature, and consequences of the problem. Therefore, I am providing both sets of researchers with a small amount of space to present their respective cases. Interested readers can weigh the evidence for themselves and reach their own conclusions.

Of course, we all recognize that errors will sometimes occur in the research and publication process. Unfortunately, the implications of these errors are often ambiguous and difficult to pin down. In such situations, I believe that the responsibility of the journal editor is to remain neutral and make as much information as possible available to the scholarly community. That is what I have done here, and I hope you will agree that this is the proper course of action to take.