

## An Open Letter to the APSA Leadership and Members

As many of you are aware, the American Political Science Association has recently experienced an extraordinary outpouring of frustration with the current state of the *American Political Science Review*, the APSA, and the profession generally. An anonymous scholar writing as "Mr. Perestroika" circulated to an extensive roster of political scientists a passionate memo asking many provocative, indeed painful, questions. Why do so many leaders of our profession not even read, much less submit, to the *APSR*? Why is purchase of the *APSR* made mandatory for membership, thus subsidizing a journal many find unsatisfactory, instead of permitting membership without the journal or with other journals? Why do the APSA Council and *APSR* Editorial Board seem to be chosen essentially by their predecessors? Why does the *APSR* and why do other prominent professional fora seem so intensively focused on technical methods, at the expense of the great, substantive political questions that actually intrigue many APSA members, as well as broader intellectual audiences?

Though some recipients may have felt uncomfortable with the anonymous authorship and the highly polemical tone of this post, nonetheless an astonishing number of scholars, from all ranks of the profession, felt impelled to announce that they, too, shared these profound dissatisfactions with the status quo. Many noted that in 1998 an APSA membership survey reportedly found that, in fact, a very large proportion of APSA members, to say nothing of scholars who have given up on APSA, were critical of the current condition of the *APSR*. A lively discussion ensued, in which scholars discussed whether the problems arose from the biases of *APSR* editors and APSA leaders, from more structural problems in the reviewing processes, or from problems in Ameri-

### Editor's Note

In September 1999, the APSA Council initiated a Strategic Planning Process ([www.apsanet.org/new/planning/](http://www.apsanet.org/new/planning/)). According to 1999-2000 APSA President Robert Keohane, the purpose of strategic planning was to "evaluate the overall condition of the Association relative to its mission and key challenges and opportunities in the external environment; to analyze APSA's strengths and weaknesses, including its financial strengths and weaknesses; to make recommendations on the most pressing issues or critical choices that must be made, including those pertaining to membership, revenues, services, and publications" ([www.apsanet.org/new/planning/statement.cfm](http://www.apsanet.org/new/planning/statement.cfm)). Over the course of the next 12 months, the Strategic Planning Committee chaired by Paul Beck of Ohio State University issued three preliminary reports ([www.apsanet.org/new/planning/](http://www.apsanet.org/new/planning/)) and a final report published in this issue of *PS*.

Over the same period, the Council appointed a search committee to select a successor to *APSR* Editor Ada Finifter, whose second term is slated to end August 2001. (Her annual report appears in this issue of *PS*). The search committee, chaired by Peter Gourevitch of the University of California, San Diego, working with a highly competitive list of 17 individual and team applications, enthusiastically recommended Lee Sigelman of George Washington University to President Keohane and the APSA Council. Sigelman was unanimously approved by the Council in September 2000 (see

the announcement in this issue of *PS*).

Even before the Strategic Planning Committee or the search committee had completed their work, the APSA Council initiated in April a change in the Association's bylaws to provide for the Council's advice and consent to the editor's nominees for the *APSR* Editorial Board.

At its August 2000 meeting, the Council decided to develop a new journal or new content in the *APSR*, either in print or electronic format, that would feature book reviews, review essays, and policy-related articles, and charged a Publications Implementation Committee with making the new journal a reality no later than January 2003.

There has been a remarkable level of member participation in strategic planning in focus groups held at regional meetings, in Hyde Park sessions offered during the 2000 Annual Meeting, in print and email submissions to the relevant committees, in email discussion groups, and even the public press. Even now, the debate continues. In the spirit of providing a venue for open discussion of issues of concern to the Association's members, a selection of comments received after the planning committee ended its work is available of the APSA web site ([www.apsanet.org/new/comments.cfm](http://www.apsanet.org/new/comments.cfm)). In this issue, the debate continues with these articles and recent additions to the debate. Future issues will continue to cover the discussion and your comments are invited.

RJ-PH  
November 7, 2000

### Talking Strategic Planning Online

An additional collection of comments and discussion regarding APSA, *APSR* and the Strategic Planning process are available online at [www.apsanet.org](http://www.apsanet.org).

can intellectual and political life more broadly. Inevitably, people differed in their views. There has been, however, extensive agreement that whatever the sources of the problems, changes need to be made.

What changes? Many ideas have been explored in recent email discussions. These have included:

- Permitting APSA members not to purchase the *APSR*, but rather to choose alternative journals or none at all.

- Making the selection of the *APSR* Editorial Board, the APSA Council, and basic policy decisions concerning the journal and the association more open to genuine democratic decision making by the APSA membership.

- Revising the *APSR* reviewing process to seek both to ensure that some methodologies are not automatically vetoed and that most articles are of interest to a broad scholarly audience.

- Finding ways to encourage scholars who have given up on the *APSR* to submit their work to it once again.

- Pursuing the suggestions both for an electronic *APSR* and a separate "book reviews" journal that the Association's Strategic Planning Committee has raised.

- Making the 1998 survey of attitudes toward the *APSR* widely available, and, yet more importantly, developing mechanisms to examine regularly how satisfied political scientists are with the publications and professional activities they underwrite via their APSA dues.

It is very unfortunate that deeply committed political scientists genuinely believe, whether rightly or wrongly, that they cannot criticize the status quo safely without the cloak of anonymity. We should have regular channels through which dissent can be effectively communicated.

We, the undersigned, do not represent any consensus on just why the *APSR* and the APSA are in the condition they are now in, nor any consensus on just what should be done. We are also not an organized or systematically recruited group. We are simply scholars who, after

discussing the Perestroika memo over the course of a few days, decided to join in this letter. We do so because we believe strongly that the profession is in danger of alienating a larger and larger number of those who should be its active members, and contributing less and less to the kinds of understanding of politics that it is our responsibility to advance. Hence, we urge the APSA leadership and membership alike to look seriously at the issues raised above, to speak out on them, and to take soon the actions that emerge as most widely endorsed in the ensuing discussions.

Christopher S. Allen, *University of Georgia*  
Belinda A. Aquino, *University of Hawai'i, Manoa*

Myron Aronoff, *Rutgers University*  
Robert Art, *Brandeis University*  
Zoltan D. Barany, *University of Texas, Austin*  
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Deborah Baumgold, *University of Oregon*  
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Thomas U. Berger, *Johns Hopkins University*  
Gerald Berk, *University of Oregon*  
Larry Berman, *University of California Washington Center*

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Jack Bielasiak, *Indiana University*  
Marc Blecher, *Oberlin College*  
Mark Blyth, *Johns Hopkins University*  
John Bokina, *University of Texas, Pan American*

Joe Bowersox III, *Williamette University*  
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Stephen Eric Bronner, *Rutgers University*  
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Wendy Brown, *University of California, Berkeley*

Fran Buntman, *University of Akron*  
Susan Burgess, *Ohio University*  
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Gus diZerega, *Whitman College*  
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John Ehrenberg, *Long Island University*  
Fred Eidlin, *University of Guelph*  
Richard J. Ellis, *Willamette University*  
Edward C. Epstein, *University of Utah*  
Peter Euben, *University of California, Santa Cruz*

Daryl R. Fair, *College of New Jersey*  
Richard A. Falk, *Princeton University*  
Tom Farer, *University of Denver*  
Kathy E. Ferguson, *University of Hawai'i*  
Leela Fernandes, *Rutgers University*  
Joel Fetzer, *Central Michigan University*  
Stephen L. Fisher, *Emory & Henry College*  
James C. Foster, *Oregon State University*  
Samantha Frost, *University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana*

John Gerring, *Boston University*  
Edward Gibson, *Northwestern University*  
Howard Gillman, *University of Southern California*

Robert S. Gilmour, *University of Connecticut*  
Jon Goldberg-Hiller, *University of Hawai'i*  
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Clement M. Henry, *University of Texas, Austin*  
Gary Herrigel, *University of Chicago*  
Eric Hershberg, *Social Science Research Council*

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Jennifer Hochschild, *Harvard University*  
Bonnie Honig, *Northwestern University*  
Marc Morjé Howard, *University of California, Santa Cruz*

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Patrick Thaddeus Jackson, *American University*  
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Marisa Kelly, *University of the Pacific*  
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Jennet Kirkpatrick, *Rutgers University*  
Ramsey Kleff, *Virginia Union University*  
Philip A. Klinkner, *Hamilton College*  
Audie Klotz, *University of Illinois, Chicago*  
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Jeffrey S. Kopstein, *University of Colorado, Boulder*

Henry Krisch, *University of Connecticut*  
Sankaran Krishna, *University of Hawai'i, Manoa*  
Judy B. Krutky, *Baldwin-Wallace College*  
Jan Kubik, *Rutgers University*

- Joseph LaPalombara, *Yale University*  
Susan E. Lawrence, *Rutgers University*  
David Lempert  
Frederick Lewis, *University of Massachusetts Lowell*  
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Keir Lieber, *Georgetown University*  
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Tracy Lightcap, *LaGrange College*  
Ann Chih Lin, *University of Michigan*  
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Anne Norton, *University of Pennsylvania*  
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Howard Reiter, *University of Connecticut*  
Edward Rhodes, *Rutgers University*  
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Edward Ian Robinson, *University of Michigan*  
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Daniel Tichenor, *Rutgers University*  
Charles Tilly, *Columbia University*  
Aili Mari Tripp, *University of Wisconsin, Madison*  
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Stephen Van Evera, *MIT*  
Ashutosh Varshney, *University of Notre Dame*  
Robert Vitalis, *University of Pennsylvania*  
James L. Walker, *Wright State University*  
Thomas C. Walker, *University at Albany-SUNY*  
Stephen M. Walt, *Harvard University*  
Artemus Ward, *California State University, Chico*  
Dorian Warren, *Yale University*  
Lisa Wedeen, *University of Chicago*  
Paul I. Weizer, *Fitchburg State College*  
Donald Will, *Chapman University*  
Eliza J. Willis, *Grinnell College*  
Elizabeth Wingrove, *University of Michigan*  
Alexander Wendt, *University of Chicago*  
William C. Wohlforth, *Dartmouth College*  
Meredith Woo-Cumings, *Northwestern University*  
Charlotte Wood, *Rutgers University*  
Ken Woodside, *University of Guelph*  
McGee Young, *Syracuse University*  
Sara L. Zeigler, *Eastern Kentucky University*  
Linda Zerilli, *Northwestern University*  
Cyrus Ernesto Zirakzadeh, *University of Connecticut*

November 3, 2000

## “Technicism” Supplanting Disciplinarity among Political Scientists

I write to express my support for the spirit if not all the particulars of the Perestroika protest letter concerning the representativeness of APSA and its journals. In my view this question should be settled democratically via the market and the voting booth.

To assure the representativeness of the APSA leadership, which is the real issue behind the Perestroika protest, there should be competitive, membership-wide elections to the top posts. Put multiple candidates on the ballot and publish statements of their ideas concerning political science and the Associa-

tion. If it is clear that the organization's leaders represent a majority of the membership, the issues of legitimacy raised by Perestroika will have been addressed in perhaps the fairest way possible. Allow us to choose, instead of having an appointed nominating committee select leaders in a closed discussion to which the mass membership is not privy. The results may show that Perestroika is right or wrong about mass disenchantment with the Association. Let the chips fall where they may. But in my view, the problem here is not just with

results, it is with the organizational procedures that produced those results.

As for the *APSR*, my preference is to separate the book review section from the journal, make the book review publication longer and more comprehensive (including a few review articles), and circulate the book review journal only to all members. Let the *APSR* fend for itself on the subscribers' market. I suspect that the *APSR* will either change its colors or it will lose its preeminent status and become just one of many good publications in political science that caters to a select constituency. Whether this or

any other change is to be made, however, should not be decided by the APSA Council or an executive committee. It should be put to the entire membership for a vote. What possible objection could be raised to that? We are only asking that political scientists be allowed to make a rational choice as to what it is in their interests to read, and to enjoy the prerogatives of democratic citizens everywhere.

I should be specific about why I consider the reform of APSA and the *APSR* to be desirable, even if such reform is not in my view a panacea for the ills afflicting the profession.

There is a "technicism" prevalent in political science research that is hardly limited to rational choice, statistical analysis, or APSA's journals, though it certainly flourishes in the latter. The preoccupation with method and research design has taken precedence over contributions to knowledge about politics. The means of our work have somehow become more important than the end. It is reminiscent of medieval Catholicism, when the form of the sacraments became a bigger concern than leading a virtuous life. Political science is in need of a Protestant Reformation. But this technicism is common to many of the journals people have cited as praiseworthy alternatives to the *APSR*, not only in the latter. Whether referees like my work or not, nearly all of the praise and blame I read any more is related to research design, with nary a word about whether I have added something worthwhile to our knowledge of politics.

What is the source of this technicism? Is it that the end of the Cold War has made substantive

political issues less compelling? Is it due to the demise of classical political philosophy as a standard part of our graduate education? Whatever its other causes, I think that this technicism reflects a vain attempt to restore some sort of coherence to a "discipline" whose diversity has robbed it of any substantive focus.

The presentations that I heard at the recent APSA meetings concerning the state of the discipline (ostensibly the topic of the conference) were of the fiddling-while-Rome-burns variety, ignoring the obvious fact that political scientists *qua* political scientists have nothing in common anymore. As Sidney Verba commented at the Atlanta meeting, once upon a time there were four or five books published every year that all political scientists would read, but today there aren't any. Another reflection of the discipline's lack of a center is that the "innovations" that occur in political science these days usually reflect only the discovery of one part of the discipline by another, rather than anything really fresh. I suspect that some of the frustrations with the refereeing process at journals derive from this lack of focus--the referees for a given piece today often have not read the same books as the author and are not interested in the same topics, even when they hail from the same subfield. This is not exclusively a problem of the *APSR*, and it must make the editor's task of selecting readers at any journal all but impossible.

Whatever the source of the technicism that reigns in political science, it disturbs me that increasingly I read research that seems unmotivated by any substantive

interest in politics (i.e., the kind of politics that goes on outside the window). The author appears to have chosen a topic merely for its utility to test drive some method, model, or approach. Although the *APSR* is hardly the only journal that features such work, I agree with those leading the Perestroika protest that the *APSR* has a special responsibility to be representative of the chaos that prevails in the "discipline" and not the mouthpiece of a few cliques.

Thus, I endorse the idea that the *APSR* should have to sell subscriptions in the marketplace, or, barring that solution, that its governance be radically overhauled. And I suggest that this issue as well as the selection of APSA's leaders be decided in a more democratic manner by the membership as a whole.

Gregory J. Kasza,  
*Indiana University*

The following participants in the Perestroika forum have expressed via email their desire to co-sign this letter.

Christopher S. Allen, *University of Georgia*  
Jack Bielasiak, *Indiana University*  
Paul R. Brass, *University of Washington*  
Joseph H. Carens, *University of Toronto*  
Kiren Aziz Chaudhry, *University of California, Berkeley*  
Gary Herrigel, *University of Chicago*  
Bonnie H. Honig, *Northwestern University*  
Chris Howell, *Oberlin College*  
Stuart Kaufman, *University of Kentucky*  
Margaret E. Keck, *Johns Hopkins University*  
Jeffrey S. Kopstein, *University of Colorado, Boulder*  
Timothy W. Luke, *Virginia Tech*  
Gretchen Ritter, *University of Texas, Austin*  
James C. Scott, *Yale University*  
Anna Seleny, *Princeton University*  
Samer Shehata, *New York University*  
Dorothy Solinger,  
Charles Tilly, *Columbia University*

November 3, 2000

## **APSR a Reflection of Its Submissions for Better and Worse**

[Gregory Kasza's letter of November 3] raises a number of important issues that need to be addressed by our membership and deliberated by the APSA committees and Council, but here I'd just like to provide some information on the Council's decisions in August,

some of which responded to the position [Kasza takes], which was conveyed to and shared by the Strategic Planning Committee.

I believe that the SPC said that it believed that what was published in the *Review* did not represent the range of excellent work done across

the discipline. I know that this is my view and, more importantly, that it is the view of Lee Sigelman, who has just been selected as the new editor of the *Review*. (It may be worth noting that he was the unanimous choice of the selection committee chaired by Peter

Gourevitch, whose other members were myself, Gary King, Arlene Saxenhouse, and Katherine Tate.) Furthermore, although we lack good data, everyone I talk to believes that this skewing of the accepted essays reflects not—or at least not so much—biases in the referees but rather the self-selection process of what is submitted. Anticipated reactions and self-fulfilling prophecies are familiar to us and seem to be very strongly at work here. [Sigelman] explained to the Council that he will work to break this cycle, and I hope you will help him in this endeavor.

[Sigelman] also stressed to the selection committee and to the Council his commitment to seeing that articles in the *Review* are accessible to as many of our members as possible. He believes—as I do—that even “technical” articles can be written in a way that explains their significance to scholars who use different approaches and are interested in different substantive questions.

The Council also passed the following resolution:

The APSA will publish expanded book reviews and more integrative essays no later than January 2003 in a form—electronic and/or print, in an existing or new publication—to be decided. An ad hoc Publications Implementation Committee, appointed by the president and approved by the Council will be established to recommend to the Council plans to carry this out. The committee will report to the Council at its next meeting, April 21, 2001, and will have a completed plan in place for Council approval in time for its August 29, 2001 meeting.

By “integrative essays” the Council has in mind both essays that review the literature in an area and articles that are less specialized than our normal research and span larger parts of the discipline. The latter might also involve the application of political science to questions of public policy.

If you have followed the discussions of the SPC you will also know that one advantage of electronic publication would be the ability to run longer pieces, which would benefit several styles of research.

I'd like to make two other observations. First, there are strong criticisms of the *Review* from those who see it as insufficiently rigorous and scientific and who think the *AJPS* is the model to follow. I disagree, but any full dialogue and deliberative process must of course include these colleagues.

Second many of the problems stem less from the narrowness of the *Review* itself than from the combination of this and the fact that some departments and university administrations insist on publication in the *Review* as a crucial criterion for tenure or promotion. I regard this as an abdication of the responsibility to judge work on its scholarly merits. There are a wide range of excellent and highly selective journals and presses and we can argue about the size of the correlation between the prestige of an outlet and the quality of any one piece that it issues, but no one would claim that it is perfect.

APSA President Robert Jervis,  
*Columbia University*

November 4, 2000

## Rethink APSR Review Policy

APSA president Robert Jervis has written to the Perestroika forum avowing his support for the goal of expanding the range of articles carried by the *APSR*. He further noted that APSA's strategic planning committee and the incoming editor, Lee Sigelman, also embrace this goal. But his letter suggests that the self-selection of contributors was the main reason for the *APSR*'s unbalanced contents and, other than the good intentions of all concerned, he offered no plans for structural change in the journal. I am grateful that Professor Jervis shares some of the goals of the Perestroika forum, but I . . . take issue with some of his points and urge a more concrete and active program of change.

The contention that APSA's skewed publication of articles is entirely a product of self-selection is not persuasive. If scholars in

some fields have stopped sending manuscripts, it is because they perceived a prior bias against their work in the *Review*'s editorial policy. Professor Richard Betts outlined most of the problems with the *APSR* to the APSA Publications Committee in 1991 in a memo that has circulated via the Perestroika forum. If the *APSR*'s editorial staff were not biased in favor of certain forms of research, how does one explain that the staff has done nothing to remedy the situation in the nine years since? My purpose here is not to rebuke those responsible for past mistakes, but to foster an appreciation of the need for structural reform, and not merely a statement of good intentions in the present.

I am further concerned that Professor Jervis's description of an alternative future policy for the *APSR*, which echoes the views of

many contributors to the Perestroika forum, may actually serve to sustain the journal's current vices. Several people have pointed to a “general interest” doctrine as a praiseworthy alternative to current policy, i.e., each article should be of general interest to political scientists in different fields. In addition to ideological biases, however, it is the selective implementation of just such a general interest doctrine that accounts for much of the *APSR*'s *de facto* discrimination against soft-science research. Let me explain my reasoning.

I can imagine only two possible editorial policies for the journal.

### *Policy #1*

To publish the best research in any field of political science. This policy would require that every manuscript go exclusively to

referees in the same field as the author. An article on Japanese politics would go to three experts on Japanese politics, a quantitative study of American politics would go to three scholars doing that type of work, and so forth.

### **Policy #2**

To publish research that is of the broadest possible interest to political scientists in different fields. This policy would require that the referees for each manuscript include people inside and outside the author's field. An article on Japanese politics might go to one referee in that field, to another in some other subfield of comparative politics, and to a third outside comparative politics altogether.

I think that the *APSR* has been applying both policies simultaneously, but in a selective manner. In regard to complex quantitative studies, rational choice and other types of deductive theory, formal modeling, and (ironically) research in classical political philosophy, the *Review* has been applying policy #1. The editor thinks, "If I send this complex mathematical analysis or this manuscript on Hegel to referees in other fields, they will not be able to pass informed judgment." Such manuscripts thus go to three experts. But when a soft-science manuscript on the French party system or Chinese-Russian relations comes in, the editor applies policy #2, thinking: "This is written in (more or less) plain English, so I'll send it to referees inside and outside the author's field to see if it is of general interest." The result? Manuscripts subject to policy #1 get published in disproportionately high numbers compared to those that must jump the higher bar of policy #2. (Betts found that "quantitative research, game theory, and formal modeling comprise the nearly exclusive content of the journal apart from articles in political philosophy.")

Professor Jervis, Rogers Smith, and other contributors to the forum have suggested that a uniform general interest doctrine (policy #2) might put the *Review* on the right

path. I respectfully disagree. The only way to level the playing field is to implement policy #1 for all manuscripts, demanding that each author pass muster with three experts in the same field. Why? Because there are not enough manuscripts of general interest published anywhere in political science each year to fill even one edition of the *APSR*. It is irrelevant whether we would like there to be more; the fact is that there are not. I ask each reader of this note to consider his or her own reading habits. How many articles or books do you read each year outside your principal field in the discipline? The truth is that the soft-science manuscript on the French party system or Chinese-Russian relations is of no wider interest in the discipline as a whole than the hyperscientific stuff the *APSR* has been churning out over the last decade. We all belong to fairly exclusive minorities, and any realistic change in editorial policy must take that into account.

Since the general interest doctrine has worked against the publication of soft-science research, let's drop it. Assure every author that his or her submission to the *APSR* will be refereed by people in the same field and, to the extent possible, by people who are not methodologically averse to the type of work the author is doing. I suspect that the range of submissions will expand quickly. Moreover, this policy is one whose implementation the Publications Committee could easily verify. If the editors would like to add general interest to the journal, I suggest that they experiment with different types of articles, as the *American Historical Review* has done in recent years, highlighting certain debates in that discipline. But don't apply an unrealistic general-interest doctrine to the consideration of original research. What would happen if every manuscript went to a refereeing panel composed of one soft-science comparativist, one hard-science Americanist, and one scholar of classical philosophy? Rather than articles of general interest, I suspect

that we would get articles of no interest—vanilla ice cream from cover to cover—and not enough of them to fill the journal at that.

Even a verifiable change in editorial policy may not be sufficient structural reform to balance the contents of the *APSR*. Nine years after the presentation of Betts's memo, I am skeptical of this organization's capacity to reform itself. It is gratifying to read that Professor Jervis, too, favors reform, but Betts found in 1991 that several recent APSA presidents did types of research that were unwelcome in the *Review*. It made no difference. Structural change must back up good intentions, and there have been many good ideas for structural change. The idea of multiple editors, one per field, has merit. How can one person in American politics or any other field pretend to make intelligent decisions on manuscripts from every corner of the discipline? But the best structural change would be to make the *APSR*, and the Association as a whole, regularly answerable to its mass membership.

The ways to do this in relation to the journal are to subject the editorship(s) to a mass vote and to make subscriptions to the *APSR* optional for members, just like subscriptions to the *Personnel Services Newsletter*. Optional subscriptions would give each of us a chance to vote on the fairness of the *APSR*'s editorial policy every year when we renew our memberships. This reform should come in addition to those mentioned above, not as an alternative to them. Why are the people in charge of this Association so determined to force its members to take a journal that many of them clearly do not want? The inability of the mass membership to decide major policy questions in a regular, systematic way is the ultimate source of most of the complaints against the American Political Science Association.

The best guarantee of the *APSR*'s reform is to force it to sell subscriptions on an open market. If it is unable to produce a useful, representative product, let it suffer the same pain of rejection experi-

enced by so many of its would-be contributors. Let the editors, and

not just the contributors, worry about their acceptance rate.

Gregory J. Kasza,  
Indiana University  
November 6, 2000

## Discipline out of Touch with Real-World Concerns

I am a graduate student nearing completion of my Ph.D., and the recent discussion regarding APSA's institutional exclusiveness and near-obsession with statistical methods resonates strongly with me. As an undergraduate, I majored in English and minored in political science and economics, and chose to enter a political science graduate program because of a passion for politics and intellectual inquiry. However, this initial (and somewhat youthful) idealism has gradually been supplanted by an ever-growing cynicism regarding both the discipline and my own function as one of its adherents.

Mr. Perestroika's claims regarding the hegemonic status accorded statistical methodologies deserve some comment here. During my tenure as a graduate student, I have encountered many "political scientists" whose fixation on quantitative tools blinds them to all else. They remain completely oblivious to the complexities inherent in social and political phenomena that we, as social scientists, are ostensibly charged

with understanding and explicating. Additionally, I have attended numerous APSA meetings and listened to so-called "luminaries" in the field tout their "parsimonious and elegant" models that bear little resemblance to the world I inhabit. It is gratifying to realize that I was not alone in thinking that many of these studies were both uninteresting and futile.

Incidentally, although I have presented individual papers at APSA meetings in the past, an analytically rigorous panel proposal on transnational social movements that I submitted to the 2000 meeting was unceremoniously rejected. While I do not think that my own research is particularly worthy of public approbation, the other panelists included accomplished scholars such as Saskia Sassen and Yossi Shain, both of whom have made significant contributions to our understanding of important contemporary political issues. This offhand dismissal seems indicative of APSA's preoccupation with methodology at the expense of

interesting, timely, and politically relevant scholarship.

I am extremely excited about this revolution from within and lend it my unequivocal support. However, I will not be formally affiliated with the discipline in the near future. While I have been exceedingly fortunate to have a supervisor who shares my intellectual *Weltanschauung*, I have decided not to pursue a career in academia for many of the reasons highlighted by Mr. Perestroika. Finally, I am a woman and a minority (who did not grow up in the United States), and am amazed at how out of touch many American-trained political scientists are with "real-world" politics. As those of us who study ethnic conflict are keenly aware, these real-world politics affect people's lives in tangible and sometimes terrible ways.

I commend Mr. Perestroika and others for having the courage to give voice to opinions that many of us have long held in silence.

Therese S. Gunawardena-Vaughn,  
University of Texas, Austin

## Ideas for Reforming APSA Officer Elections

Notably missing from your mission statement is the thought of staging competitive elections for key offices, including president, of the APSA.

It is ironic that the APSA, many of whose members (myself included) study and write on elections, is one of the few academic societies I know that does not nominate more than one candidate for president. I, personally, have had experience with seven societies, with collectively 600,000 members, that not only mandate competitive elections but also use approval voting in them.

I won't rehearse the advantages of using approval voting when there are more than two candidates to find consensus choices. Suffice it to say that none of the societies that has adopted approval voting (beginning about 15 years ago) has switched to another voting system.

In light of the Perestroika protest, may I suggest that the Strategic Planning Committee consider the use of competitive elections by the APSA and possible voting systems for implementing them. A recent popular discussion of alternative voting systems can be

found in two articles now posted on the web:

Mackenzie, Dana. 2000. "May the Best Man Lose" <[www.discover.com/current\\_issue/index.html](http://www.discover.com/current_issue/index.html)>. *Discover* 21(November 2000): 85-91.

Guterman, Lila. 2000. "When Votes Don't Add Up: Mathematical Theory Reveals Problems in Election Procedures" <<http://chronicle.com/free/v47/i10/10a01801.htm>>. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, November 3, A18.

Steven Brams,  
New York University  
November 6, 2000

# American Association of Political Consultants Joins APSA's Interdisciplinary Membership Program

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