

## Editorial Note

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Journal readers rarely wish to hear an editor's musings on the journal and the journal enterprise. But in this first volume a few words about the enterprise are probably helpful. That way the annual can say what its content and editorial standards are, not leaving it to readers to guess by what appears and what doesn't. This little note will take up what the journal is, what it sees as appropriate "political analysis," why it came to be, and how it works.

### **What Is *Political Analysis*?**

*Political Analysis* organizes itself into four divisions. Intended to bring order to the enterprise, that early decision helped guide the selection of associate editors. But it was not intended to be a foundation for the field—other divisions would have done just as well. Certainly it was not intended to define as inappropriate work that doesn't cleanly drop into one or the other bin. The four divisions and their respective associate editors are: estimation (Christopher Achen, University of Chicago), measurement (Stanley Feldman, Stony Brook), modeling (John Ferejohn, Stanford University), and dynamics (Nathaniel Beck, University of California, San Diego).

### **Four-Part Division**

*Estimation* subsumes a wide range of empirical and statistical work on the development and use of estimators. It is probably the most common preoccupation of those who consider themselves political methodologists. Founders of the journal resisted the notion that it must be a central focus of political analysis or should be the dominating focus of *Political Analysis*. Econometrics applied to politics could have been the theme of the journal. It is not. We chose to avoid such a narrowing focus.

*Measurement* focuses on work relating to the design and analysis of surveys, scaling methodologies, and the like. Much more than "measure-

ment” in a narrow sense, the measurement division focus is on the acquisition of political data by whatever means and the diverse processes by which we bring meaning to political concepts through data.

*Modeling* covers the traditions of formal analyses of politics, rational choice, positive theory, and so forth. The modeling division accounts for part of the journal’s title, “analysis,” rather than “methodology.” This work is unrepresented in volume 1. It had either the lowest acceptance rate (none), or the lowest rejection (none), or was undefined (0/0); take your choice. No works of this type were submitted. That we expect not to continue.

*Dynamics* deals with the class of estimation problems where longitudinal relationships are a central theoretical focus. Our literature suffers a bit from preoccupation with the modeling of error processes. Usually a necessary preliminary, the dynamics division is much broader than error structure, a central concern being the modeling of causal structures in longitudinal formulations. Work in all dynamic traditions is welcomed.

#### Notation and Complexity

What level of complexity should readers expect? What level should authors produce? The governing principle is easy to state, if not to implement: the level should be appropriate to the message. Many messages are best communicated in ordinary English. We expect to publish some manuscripts written in English, beginning to end. Some, we hope, will be gracefully written and easy—maybe even fun—to read. A mix of levels of difficulty is desirable. We are eager to implement such a mix, eager to see those gracefully written English text manuscripts. Again, for emphasis, we are eager to see those gracefully written English text manuscripts.

Some messages require mathematical notation. And our trusteeship of the standards of political research requires that authors document what they have done. *Political Analysis* aspires to be the publication of record for methodological development in political science. The publication of record would be unwise to follow common practice in the substantive journals of omitting the formal derivations or intermediate equations and instead advising readers to communicate with the author. But, too, there is a balance to strike. Authors will sometimes glory in complexity, preferring the obscurity of the arcane to the more dangerous business of having the article read and understood. We aim to be important, and the likelihood is small that any article read only in narrow circles will be important.

### Why Political Analysis?

Political scientists are responsible, jointly with sister disciplines, for developing a set of analytic tools to serve the needs of political research. We have carried out that task, met that responsibility, at a variable rate over the years. Sometimes we have passively borrowed the contributions of others. Sometimes we have produced our own innovations and shared them.

Scientific development in theory is primarily disciplinary, secondarily interdisciplinary. Development in analytic tools – at least for social sciences in the twentieth century – is primarily interdisciplinary, secondarily disciplinary. There is much to be said for interdisciplinary activity. It is said often. And it is often said normatively. *Interdisciplinary* is a positively valenced term in commentaries on scientific practice. The cost side of the equation is less commonly noted.

### The Costs of Cross-Disciplinary Dependence: Appropriateness, Access, Access, and Diffusion

Researchers who develop tools have in mind interesting problems in need of solution, problems that are likely to be the problems of their own discipline. After the selection process of peer review, almost certainly they will be the problems of the discipline of the journal. One of the prices of cross-disciplinary dependence is the *appropriateness* of the product for our needs. Economists, for example, developed powerful tools for the estimation of nonrecursive causal structures. The problem that motivates a great deal of their work is the tautological relationships between supply, demand, and price. As commonly stated, the model is formally true; the problem is to estimate parameters for empirical data. That is *the* technology for nonrecursive systems. But the political problems for which we have borrowed the econometric technology have a very different character. Our causal linkages are often in question. Often they are *the* question. A failure to find the postulated linkage for the economics problem is an indication of flawed research. In the political case it is evidence for inference. Perhaps that difference isn't a difference that matters. But perhaps it does, and we will never get it right until we develop a nonrecursive technology designed to deal with the sort of problems that confront political science. The same case could be made of other sorts of political analysis.

Developments from other disciplines present problems in *access*. The solutions to many problems of political science research can be

found in the pages of journals devoted to econometrics, psychometrics, mathematical statistics, signal processing, and what have you. Just as we formerly required our graduate students to learn French and German in order to translate work that would otherwise be unavailable, we now teach quite commonly the language of econometrics for the same motive. And we take a moralistic attitude toward the translation issue; the bedrock Protestant ethic underlying our philosophies of science says: "If it's important, pay the price. Do it." We who have paid some price feel superior to students and colleagues who have not; they are illiterates in this language of research. But the price to our discipline is a huge one; it is that most of the researchers on whom theoretical progress depends do not speak the language, do not have access to good solutions to their problems. That price is measured in the competence of political science research.

It is tempting to believe now, as I believed when I was getting my graduate training in the middle 1960s, that the problem is costly but temporary. "Some day we will all be well trained in  $x$ " (and never mind  $y$  and  $z$ , which also demand our attention). But it is costly and permanent. Development does not stop; it keeps happening. And it keeps being unavailable to most people who do political science.

The cost of a second kind of problem *access*—to journals by authors—is that potential development is stymied. The prospect that no appropriate outlet exists discourages analytic development at the outset. And that is pretty nearly the case. Excepting *The American Journal of Political Science* "Workshop," political science journals do not encourage work of a predominantly methodological character. "This is a work of pure methodology" is a referee comment offered as a reason for rejection of an article. The demise of *Political Methodology* leaves only the "Workshop" as an outlet, and even it—with four articles a year—is inappropriate for a great deal of specialized political analytic work.

The model of the spread of scientific information is neat; authors discover, write, and then publish, whereupon the discovery is radiated to other practitioners. Actual diffusion is flawed, scarcely operable. Political scientists are undertaking original methodological developments (usually paying the high price of casting such developments in the terms of the theory and with the data of another discipline) and then publishing that work in the journals of other disciplines. And those journals are not being read by political scientists. So developments diffuse imperfectly, and perhaps closer to not at all, to the research community. This is failure. Diffusion is sluggish at best. Such as it works at all, credit is owed to the classroom and to supplements such as the ICPSR summer training program. And those diffusion mechanisms reach almost exclu-

sively the next generation, leaving current researchers in the dark about current practices.

The costs to political science of failing to publish and diffuse works of a methodological character are the reason for the foundation of *Political Analysis*. Not an after-the-fact rationalization, these are the themes discussed over and over again (often in summer conferences of political methodologists). Exciting visions of a more competent political science were blunted by the knowledge that the necessary mechanism, a journal publishing the work of political methodologists that would be read by political scientists, did not exist.

*Political Analysis* is properly understood as a missionary effort. Its founders, predominantly senior and successful in our discipline, regardless of rank, did not need it. Few probably would call themselves methodologists, first and foremost. (And on that I can speak with certainty of the editor.) As a claim on our time it is a distraction, a cost. But we think the potential payoff for our discipline can be great. *Political Analysis* exists because we want to move the daily practice of political science in the direction of better science.

#### Who Reads, Who Writes, Who Referees

Our intended audience is political scientists. The publication was founded to facilitate the communication between political science authors and political science readers, to promote a political science methodology (not generic behavioral science or social science). The inward-looking focus flows from our purpose, to improve the practice of political science. We welcome authors and readers of diverse disciplinary perspectives, and we expect to have diversity in each case. But what we print in these pages must be useful to (and available to) political scientists if we are to succeed.

One might note a substantial (but not complete) overlap between the authors represented in volume 1 and the *Political Analysis* Editorial Board. That arises in part because the board members were chosen for their reputations for doing good work. But the large overlap of volume 1 is more mundane. The window between when the publication founding was official (and manuscript review could begin) and when the review process for initial submissions for the current volume had to be closed to permit orderly editorial and production processes was so small that almost no one who did not anticipate the founding could have had a manuscript ready for submission in time.

*Political Analysis* is anonymously refereed by the procedures customary for all political science journals. Referees (usually three) do not

know the authorship of the articles they read; authors are not told the identity of referees. In a field in which the number of potential authors and referees is relatively small and work is highly specialized, authors and referees may correctly guess the identity of one another – although my experience thus far leads me to believe that both over-estimate their ability to do so. But correct or otherwise, a guess is what it is. Procedural anonymity is maintained as an absolute standard. It encourages good science, toughens editorial spine, and is respected by the external academic community.