The Replication and Verification Policy at the American Journal of Political Science

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Scientific Objectives

The American Journal of Political Science (AJPS) is committed to the general objectives of science:

- Generating and testing powerful theories of political and social phenomena
- Rigorous and cumulative research efforts

Science is inherently a social enterprise. Progress within any field can only occur when researchers have ready access to the procedures, tools, data, and results that were used to produce the existing state of knowledge within that field.
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AJPS is Taking a Leadership Role

Establishing a research-conducive environment within the political science discipline

Publishing great scientific work!

Making sure that interested researchers have access to the “raw materials” that generated work published in the AJPS

Only feasible way to establish and confirm the quality of evidence-based claims within the social science research community

AJPS has made public commitment to best practices in data access, research transparency and reproducibility of published research
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AJPS Has Always Encouraged Replication

For many years, authors of AJPS articles have been asked to provide their data for replication purposes. Compliance with request was entirely voluntary. Availability and quality of replication materials varied widely.

Previous AJPS Editor, Rick Wilson, established a new policy in 2013. Authors must upload replication files to the AJPS Dataverse within the Harvard Dataverse Network (https://dataverse.harvard.edu/dataverse/ajps).

No real guidance about what information and materials should be provided. Content of replication files continued to vary across articles.
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"The American Journal of Political Science Guidelines for Preparing Replication Files"

Originally oriented toward quantitative data, recently updated to include guidelines for qualitative data.

Replication materials are verified to make sure that they do, in fact, reproduce the analysis results.
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For quantitative analyses, the Replication Dataset must contain:

- A README file listing and describing all replication files contained in the article's Dataset
- The analysis dataset and a codebook describing its contents
- Detailed, clear code to reproduce all tables, figures, and exhibits in the AJPS article
- Information about the source of the analysis dataset
- Instructions for extracting the analysis dataset from the source data (including all recodes, transformations, details about missing observations, etc.)
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Diversity of qualitative analyses requires more flexibility in replication requirements. Certain qualitative analyses (e.g., automated content analysis or qualitative comparative analysis) require data in matrix form, so requirements parallel those for quantitative data. A "granular" approach requires consideration of specific individual sources of information and typically requires a "Tracking Appendix" (TRAX) for an overview of research trajectory. Annotations that make connections between information sources and inferences/interpretations are also important.
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AJPS Guidelines for Replication Files

Objective is to establish a general standard for the information that must be made available. The Guidelines probably will not cover every possible situation. They should be sufficient for most data analyses that are reported in AJPS articles. Authors can request exemptions from replication requirements in some limited circumstances. Restricted access datasets. Human subjects protection.
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Verifying Replication Materials

Authors are informed that acceptance of a manuscript is contingent upon successful replication of the results. Verification carried out by third parties.

For quantitative analyses, verification is carried out by the Archive Staff at the Odum Institute for Research in Social Science, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. For qualitative analyses, verification is carried out by the staff of the Qualitative Data Repository (QDR), Syracuse University. Support for the verification process is provided by the Midwest Political Science Association.
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Articles that are verified successfully receive a notation to that effect in the Dataverse Dataset.

Articles that are verified successfully qualify for “Open Practices Badges” from the Center for Open Science. Badges are displayed in the Dataverse Dataset and in the published article.
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How is the AJPS Policy Working?

The AJPS Dataverse was first announced in July 2012. The first Study (i.e., set of replication files for an AJPS article) was released for public use in September 2013. The AJPS Dataverse currently contains 235 Datasets (formerly called Studies). The new AJPS Replication Policy was announced on March 26, 2015. As of June 15, 2016, Odum Institute staff have worked with replication materials for 72 accepted manuscripts. Of these, 59 have been released and are now available on the AJPS Dataverse.
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Verification process does add some time to the publication workflow.

Number of days from arrival at the Odum Institute to release of Dataverse Dataset ranges from 8 to 156. Mean length of verification process is 53.37 days and median is 44 days.

Part of the time in the verification process is due to author responses.

Number of days from arrival at the Odum Institute to the initial Verification Report ranges from 1 to 63. Mean time until initial Verification Report is 22.48 days, and the median is 17 days.
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Conclusions

The AJPS Replication and Verification Policy is only possible because of the Harvard Dataverse Network. The AJPS policy makes an important contribution to the infrastructure of social science research. Social sciences traditionally have paid lip service to the standards of research transparency and replicability of results. The AJPS policy requires us to "practice what we preach" and adhere to standards in a meaningful way.
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