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Issue: July 2004
Journal: *PS: Political Science and Politics*



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Small Spaces for Different Faces: Political Science Scholarship on Asian Pacific Americans

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Asian Americans have received relatively little attention from political scientists. Although a rapidly growing segment of the population, their political behaviors, impacts on political institutions, and the policies affecting them have been rarely studied in our discipline.¹

In recent years, the situation has been changing. The APSA Organized Section on Race, Ethnicity, and Politics, founded in 1995, created an institutional space devoted solely to the study of racial and ethnic minorities. The establishment of the Asian Pacific American Caucus (APAC) in 2000 and the APSA Committee on the Status of Asian Pacific Americans in the Profession in 2003 helped bring together political scientists and activists interested in Asian Pacific American (hereafter APA)² politics, and a recent *PS* symposium (September 2001) on APA politics is also a sign that political science research on APAs is growing (Aoki and Nakanishi 2001).

In this article, we address the following questions: what research has political science produced on APAs? To what extent has the research on APAs spread among various subfields of political science? Has the amount of research on APAs increased over the years, and if it has, with what factors can we account for the trend? And, more generally, how much are political science journals publishing research on racial and ethnic minorities in the United States?

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We investigate these questions by searching top political science journals and APSA Annual Meeting programs from 1990 through 2003 and identifying published articles and conference papers that dealt with APAs. The number of journal articles tells us the extent to which studies on APAs are accepted by the scholarly community; the number of conference papers gives an idea of the volume of research on APAs that has not yet reached the level of journal publication. Together, these data reveal the trend and status of research on APAs.

Journal Article Selection Criteria

For the journal articles, we focus on the top 25 political science journals in Garand and Giles's (2003) rankings. From these 25, we excluded eight journals that are primarily concerned with comparative politics and international relations or that focused on narrow subfields.³ Most of the remaining 17 were political science journals, but we also had two from sociology, one from economics, and two interdisciplinary journals. Seeking a greater comparison between interdisciplinary and political science journals, we added three interdisciplinary journals that ranked between 25 and 50—*Politics and Society* (#33), *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (#36), and *Urban Affairs Research* (#45)—giving us a total of 20 journals.

For these journals, we scanned all issues published from 1990 through 2003.⁴ We recorded the number of articles that dealt with APAs, as well as the number of articles that dealt with African Americans, American Indians, and Latinos.⁵

To examine trends beyond what is ascertainable from published articles, we turned to APSA meet-

ing programs. We read final programs of the APSA meetings from 1990 through 2003 and identified papers that dealt with Asian Americans.⁶ We judged a paper as dealing with Asian Americans if the title included the term "Asian American(s)," a specific Asian American ethnic group name, or a phrase peculiar to Asian American history (such as Japanese American internment).⁷ We searched Annual Meeting programs of all sections except comparative and international politics. We searched only panels and posters and excluded lectures, business meetings, and receptions; we counted roundtables without papers only toward the number of APA panels and not for the number of papers.

Trends in APA Scholarship

As Table 1 shows, articles on APAs are relatively scarce, with no journal having more than 3% of its articles dealing with APAs. Even this percentage is an overstatement of the attention given to APAs, because a closer look of the 98 APA articles shows that well over half focused on APAs and other minority groups together, rather than APAs alone (breakdown not shown on the table; available from authors). Because the total number of articles published each year varies greatly by journal, Table 1 gives the percentage as well as the number of each journal's APA articles.

Figure 1
Articles on APAs, 1990–2003, by Discipline

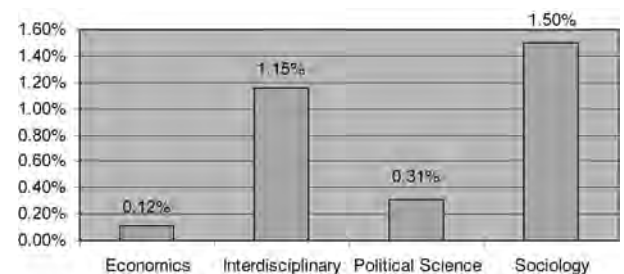


Table 1
Articles on APAs, Race & Ethnicity—All Journals, 1990–2003

Journal (Giles and Garand ranking in parentheses)	Discipline	% APA articles	% Articles on race*
<i>Urban Affairs Research/Quarterly</i> (45)	interdisciplinary	2.90% (14)	19.71% (95)
<i>Social Science Quarterly</i> (25)	interdisciplinary	2.77% (24)	23.82% (206)
<i>American Sociological Review</i> (7)	sociology	2.72% (20)	13.20% (97)
<i>PS: Political Science and Politics</i> (12)	political science	1.22% (7)	9.20% (53)
<i>Annals of American Academy</i> (36)	interdisciplinary	0.76% (8)	7.39% (78)
<i>Journal of Politics</i> (3)	political science	0.73% (5)	7.11% (49)
<i>American Journal of Sociology</i> (10)	sociology	0.67% (4)	5.71% (34)
<i>American Politics Research/Quarterly</i> (24)	political science	0.66% (2)	7.24% (22)
<i>American Journal of Political Science</i> (2)	political science	0.40% (3)	4.55% (34)
<i>Politics and Society</i> (33)	interdisciplinary	0.36% (1)	2.92% (8)
<i>Public Administration Review</i> (21)	political science	0.35% (3)	2.07% (18)
<i>Political Research Quarterly/Western Political Quarterly</i> (13)	political science	0.33% (2)	4.64% (28)
<i>Political Science Quarterly</i> (15)	political science	0.23% (1)	3.93% (17)
<i>Public Opinion Quarterly</i> (16)	interdisciplinary	0.23% (1)	7.01% (31)
<i>American Political Science Review</i> (1)	political science	0.14% (1)	2.67% (19)
<i>American Economic Review</i> (8)	economics	0.12% (2)	0.69% (12)
<i>Political Theory</i> (20)	political science	0.00% (0)	1.59% (6)
<i>Polity</i> (23)	political science	0.00% (0)	2.57% (11)
<i>Legislative Studies Quarterly</i> (19)	political science	0.00% (0)	3.06% (11)
<i>British Journal of Political Science</i> (6)	political science	0.00% (0)	3.03% (12)
ENTIRE SAMPLE		0.77% (98)	6.64% (841)

Source: Compiled by authors. Journal ranks are from Giles and Garand (2003).

Figures in parentheses after article percentage show number of articles.

*Includes APA articles.

When examining the pattern of journal publications, perhaps the most interesting is the sizable gap between political science and other social science journals. The three journals that ranked highest in the number and percentage of APA articles (and the number and percentage of race articles)—*Urban Affairs Research*, *Social Science Quarterly*, and *American Sociological Review*—are all interdisciplinary or sociology journals. When we aggregate the numbers by discipline (Figure 1), we see that the interdisciplinary journals scanned contained considerably more articles on APAs, and on race and ethnicity broadly, than the political science journals.⁸

Table 1 also suggests that the concern made by Ávalos (1991) more than a decade ago still holds today: that young scholars studying race and ethnicity may endanger tenure and promotion chances because top journals publish few articles in these areas, while journals more likely to publish literature on race and ethnicity are ranked lower by peers. The *APSR*, flagship journal of the profession, published only one article on Asian Americans, while the two journals that published the most articles on race and ethnicity are ranked at number 25 or lower.⁹

When we examine the number of all articles on race and ethnicity, we find that interdisciplinary journals also had a far higher percentage of articles than did political science journals (Figure 2), a pattern observed by Ávalos over a decade ago (Ávalos 1991).¹⁰ Interdisciplinary journals' practice of featuring symposia on race and ethnicity greatly increased their numbers. The *Annals of the American Academy* and *Social Science Quarterly* featured a substantial number of articles on race and ethnicity this way.¹¹ Not surprisingly, the political science journal with the highest percentage of articles on race and ethnicity (*PS*)

also publishes symposia; virtually all of the *PS* articles on APAs were published in a 2001 symposium, and a little over half of all the *PS* articles on race and ethnicity were published in symposia.

Table 2 shows the number of papers on APAs in the final programs of the

APSA meetings from 1990 to 2003. As was the case with published articles on APAs, the number of papers that dealt with APAs is very small (less than 1% of the entire papers presented every year). With the exception of 1990 (in which two papers on the Japanese American internment were presented, probably echoing Congress's historic passage of the internment redress bill in 1988), there were only four papers on APAs at most before 1998. There was a jump in the number of APA papers in 1998, however, and at least seven papers have been presented every year since.

Figure 2
Articles on Race & Ethnicity, 1990–2003, by Discipline

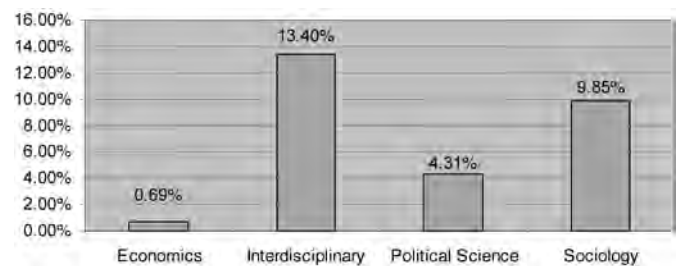


Table 2
APA Papers at APSA, by Year, 1990–2003

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
APA papers	7	2	0	2	4	4	2	1	8	7	8	11	8	9
Other APA panels	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0
All Papers	n.a.	1940	1986	2053	2200	2160	2414	2419	2825	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.

Source: Compiled by authors. The numbers of all papers for the meeting (available only for 1991–1998) are from APSA (1998, 892). “Other APA panels” are roundtables.

Although most of the APA papers we identified had “Asian(s)” or “Asian American(s)” in their title (rather than specific Asian ethnic group names) this does not necessarily mean that all Asian ethnic groups recognize a common identity. Scholars and activists often refer to a bias in favor of East Asian ethnic groups (i.e., Japanese, Korean, and Chinese Americans) in resources, recognition, and influence within the Asian American scholarly and political community. The ethnic breakdown of APA papers reflects that tendency; the East Asian ethnic groups were the focus of APA papers at least three times; papers specifically dealing with Vietnamese, Cambodian, and Native Hawaiians were presented only once. What is most striking is that we have not yet seen a paper on Filipino Americans and South Asians. Although Filipinos and South Asians are the second and third largest ethnic groups in the U.S. populations in the 2000 Census—1.9 million and 1.7 million, respectively (U.S. Census 2002)—their political activities have not received the scholarly attention that they deserve. This lack of research may reflect their ambiguous and often marginalized positions within the umbrella Asian American group. Yet Filipinos and South Asians are making significant electoral and other political progress at the local and state levels (Nakanishi and Lai 2003), if not on the national arena; this is one of the areas in which future APA political research needs to address.

Expanding the Study of Overlooked Groups

Institutional change probably helps to explain the post-1998 increase in APA papers at the APSA Annual Meeting that we saw in Table 2.¹² In the latter half of the 1990s, the APSA Organized Section on Race, Ethnicity, and Politics (REP) began to grow and offer substantially more opportunities for papers on APAs. Asian American politics specialists served as co-chairs of the REP program for the 1998 and 1999 conferences. The former saw the first panel that was entirely devoted to APA politics, while the latter helped bring together scholars who then formed the Asian Pacific American Caucus (APAC), an APSA Related Group. Since then, APAC has sponsored panels on APA politics, often working closely with the REP section. Further fueling the growth in APA studies was a new generation of scholars interested in Asian American politics, and a desire to combat the on-going backlash against Asian Americans in the wake of media reports on illegal campaign contributions from Asian donors to the 1996 Clinton-Gore reelection campaign.

In contrast, we have not discovered a clear upward trend in the number of APA articles published in the 20 journals we searched.¹³ Although there were some one-time increases in the number of articles on APAs (or articles on race, for that matter) when a symposium or guest-edited issue was published, articles

on APAs and other articles on race are not evenly distributed across journals and years. Rather, as seen above, articles are concentrated in particular journals. The same tendency pointed out more than a decade ago by Ávalos (1991) on race, gender, and ethnicity articles, and by Kelly and Fisher (1993, 548) on articles on women, still continues today.

The continuing paucity of articles is probably in part due to factors which change slowly. The interests of faculty help shape the research interests of grad students and the choice of dissertations. Also important is the existence—or lack thereof—of data sets that junior faculty can use in their quest for publications and tenure. Survey data on Asian Americans is relatively scarce, although the situation is improving. The Pilot National Asian American Political Survey (PNAAPS), the first multilingual, multicountry survey of Asian Americans, is likely to produce a surge of research the way that the Latino National Political Survey did in the past decade.¹⁴

In an encouraging sign, the *APSR* (which averaged just over one article on race per year in our study) recently published a qualitative and interpretative analysis of gender and race issues in Congress (Hawkesworth 2003). However, unless leading political science journals continue to give more space to studies of race and gender in politics, scholars who study these issues may find sociology and interdisciplinary journals more promising outlets for their work.

Notes

1. In 2000, 3.6% of the U.S. population identified themselves as belonging only to an Asian ethnic group, and 4.2% identified themselves as Asian alone or Asian in combination with one or more other racial groups (U.S. Bureau of Census 2002).

2. We acknowledge that the term “Asian Pacific American” sometimes causes controversies because it lumps together the two different groups of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders, often without full understanding of the unique history of the latter. We use the term just to refer to both Asian Americans and

Pacific Islanders in fewer words.

3. The excluded journals are: *World Politics*, *International Organization*, *Comparative Politics*, *Comparative Political Studies*, *International Studies Quarterly*, *International Security*, and *Journal of Political Economy*. In our pilot study, we searched these journals and did not find any APA articles.

4. For *PS*, we excluded “The Teacher,” “The Profession,” and the “Association News” sections, as well as letters to the editor and e-symposia. For the *American Economic Review*, we did not scan the March issues, which con-

tain only selected papers and proceedings of the annual conference. For all journals, we did not scan letters, regardless of how they were labeled (e.g., some journals run letters under the heading “Comment”).

5. An article was coded “APA” if it includes an APA keyword in its title, or if its abstract identified APAs as a primary focus. In cases where the abstract was unclear, we reviewed the entire article, and coded the article as “APA” if APAs were the primary subject of at least one full paragraph, or if APAs were discussed in the text and listed separately in at

least two figures (tables, graphs, etc.). We used a broad definition of "APA article," including some articles that others might not consider to be focused on APAs. Given that, our numbers should be seen as a liberal measure of the number of articles on APAs.

6. We did not use preliminary programs in the June issue of *PS* because many additions and changes are made in the final programs. We thank Jennifer Richards and Lauren Chelf of APSA, Larry Bartels, and Ichiro Sunada for giving us access to old final programs.

7. For both the journal and the paper scan, we did not count works as dealing with APAs if there was only a general reference to race-related issues, such as multiculturalism, immigration, and affirmative action, but no explicit mention of APAs. The paper scan was largely limited to a review of titles, since we lacked access to most of the papers. It is sometimes difficult to judge from the title whether a paper

has substantial discussions of Asian Americans, so the paper scan is likely to produce an undercount. However, when questionable cases arose, we tried to check the content by reading the papers (if they were available); in some cases, we contacted authors.

8. Although other sociology journals contained considerably more articles on race and ethnicity, we only fully scanned two, so we have to be cautious in making generalizations about sociology journals.

9. And the single *APSR* article on APAs, about Congresswomen of color, included only a very brief section on Representative Patsy Mink, a Japanese American (Hawkesworth 2003).

10. Because our definitions differed from those used by Ávalos, our other figures are not comparable. However, our figures show considerable increases in the number of race and ethnicity articles in political science journals (for the 1990–2003 period, compared to Ávalos's findings

for the 1964–1988 period), while we do not find comparable increases for the sociology journals.

11. For example, see the June 1997 issue of *Social Science Quarterly* and the March 2000 issue of the *Annals*.

12. One may question if the increase of APA papers beginning in 1998 might reflect an increase in the total number of papers presented at the meeting. Although the *PS* discontinued recording the total number of APSA papers in its annual meeting recap in the December issue in 1999, the modest increase in total number of papers in 1998 (2,825) from 1997 (2,419) suggests that this is not a likely factor.

13. The breakdown of APA articles by years is available from authors upon request, and will also be posted on the APAC web site at <http://www.apa-politics.org/wpaper.html>.

14. The PNAAPS principal investigator, Pei-te Lien, was also one of the co-founders of the Asian Pacific American Caucus.

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