

# NATIONAL REVIEW

## How a Leading Academic Journal Was Captured by Left-Wing Radicals

By Brittany Bernstein

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During the height of the U.S. racial reckoning in June 2020, a radically progressive editorial team was installed at one of the country's premier journals of political science.

The editorial team, which dubbed itself the "Feminist Collective," and led the *American Political Science Review* for a four-year term ending last year, declared the need for political science to "actively dismantle the institutionalized racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, and settler colonialism that continue to characterize and structure it."

With that goal in mind, the team instituted a two-tiered system of standards, in which they actively screened submissions differently based on the authors' race and sex. Submissions from women and "scholars of color" were much more likely to advance to the peer-review stage, while papers written by white, male scholars were often subjected to "desk rejection" without being advanced, regardless of quality.

The team further favored submissions that focused on "pressing political problems, including structural inequalities and the exercise of power by oppressed people," along with "policing and the carceral state, [and] racialized and gendered health and economic inequalities."

Now, a new report out from the Goldwater Institute finds research published in the APSR during the reign of the Feminist Collective ultimately "devolved into outlandish social activism." In one example, "Wages for Earthwork," the study's author proposes "'wages' or reparations to Indigenous peoples for debt owed to them for their devalued climate work. . . . I contend that (re)valuing earthwork must also be central to projects aimed at

decolonizing climate justice . . . and wider structural transformation of colonial capitalism.”

In fact, the editorial team’s goals led to the publication of “other ‘scholarship’ indistinguishable from left-wing activism,” the report finds, including articles like “Violence in the American Imaginary: Gender, Race, and the Politics of Superheroes,” which finds that the Marvel character “Punisher’s unrestricted violence valorizes white male grievance.” In yet another article, “Feminist Demands and the Problem of Housework,” the author endorses “the demand to socialize housework.”

Another paper aims to show that support for President Trump is “uniquely tied to animus towards minority groups.”

The report, “Peer Review Gone Wild: Flagship Political Science Journal Shows How Academic Gatekeepers Promote Ideology Over Scholarship,” authored by Timothy K. Minella, finds that APSR “adopted an explicit ideological agenda rewarding political conformity over sound scholarship” and that the output of the journal under the Feminist Collective’s leadership shows that academic journals are “increasingly unreliable as barometers of worthwhile research” and therefore “increasingly undependable as instruments of evaluating public employees for promotion at state-operated institutions.”

The Goldwater Institute report also raises concerns that much of this “activism masquerading as research” was performed at taxpayers’ expense, as several members of the Feminist Collective and numerous authors of articles cited in the report served as professors at public universities, including the Universities of Arizona, Mississippi, and Michigan.

Under the Feminist Collective’s leadership, women and scholars of color were given a huge leg up in the editorial process. In 2021, the editorial team announced that the proportion of article submissions authored by women and by scholars identifying as “Black, Indigenous, or another racial identity” had increased over that of the previous editorial team’s tenure.

In a second update, in 2023, the collective said it had succeeded in increasing the number of “women, BIPOC and LGBTQ scholars” who published articles in the APSR.

One professor of political science in the south told NR he co-authored a paper on immigration with a female colleague and ultimately suggested to his colleague that they submit the paper to APSR because of the Feminist Collective’s policy of giving preferential treatment to women scholars. “My thinking was if that is their policy, then this would at least get our foot in the door, because my co-author is a woman and I thought, if this can at least get it out to peer review, that gives us a better shot,” the professor said, adding that the paper was, in fact, published in the APSR after a very long review process.

Another senior political science professor told NR he had only submitted one article to the APSR during the Feminist Collective's tenure because he found the submission process "really obnoxious." "You have to check off all these boxes of race and your sex and things like that. It's really become bureaucratized but also I just don't have any confidence whatsoever that I'm going to get a fair shake through the process."

Meanwhile, a senior political scientist at an R1 doctoral university, expressed confidence that there are women and scholars of color who have written papers that are not of APSR quality, but have submitted their work to the journal all the same in hopes of taking advantage of the racialized and gendered editorial policies. "I am also confident that there are authors who have written APSR-quality papers (using standard scientific standards) who have submitted their papers elsewhere because they realize that their work is disadvantaged by the racialized and gendered editorial policies of the journal," the professor said.

The progressive capture at the APSR is just one example of the degradation of the peer review process that is "supposed to ensure the legitimacy of published academic research," the report finds.

After years of universities relying on "diversity statements" during the hiring process to effectively screen out scholars who would refuse to pledge an oath to uphold DEI efforts, the "peers" who are conducting peer-reviewed research are increasingly or exclusively left-leaning faculty, the report finds, "which creates a systematic bias against research that challenges leftist ideas, preventing the rise of meaningful ideological diversity in academia."

Under the Feminist Collective, only three APSR articles specifically focused on the U.S. Constitution or the 50 state constitutions, while the number of articles focusing on race, gender, and/or social justice accounted for nearly one-quarter of all APSR published articles.

"If the peer review process is thus populated by faculty overwhelmingly committed to advancing a single ideological perspective, it will increasingly fail to serve as a reliable mechanism for evaluating research and the faculty who produce it," the report adds.

The Goldwater report thus advocates for a change in the way universities make decisions around which scholars are eligible for tenure, as hiring committees have traditionally given significant weight to the number of articles an applicant has published in journals like the APSR.

"The APSR and other scholarly publications are private entities and thus rightly free to determine their own standards and practices," the report says. "But this also means,

therefore, that public universities, their governing boards, and state governments have had no means to restore standards of excellence to these journals. Indeed, despite recent actions at the state and federal levels to end discriminatory DEI practices, public universities are still beholden to entities such as the APSR that have committed to vetting research through the ideological screening mechanism of DEI.”

The Goldwater Institute, together with Defending Education and the James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal, has proposed the American Higher Education Restoration Act, encouraging public universities to make clear that non-STEM faculty are paid by taxpayers primarily to teach, and that any reduction in teaching responsibilities for research should occur only where it is actually advancing human knowledge.

The proposal would require new non-STEM faculty to teach a minimum number of courses per year. Faculty would be allowed to conduct research on any topic and to devote a portion of their contracted time to it, but would no longer have an “automatic blank check to spend more than half of their taxpayer-supported contracted hours on such pursuits.”

“Faculty seeking to spend a greater share of their taxpayer-supported time on research would be required to clear a minimal baseline of assent from peers and taxpayer representatives,” the proposal reads.

Additionally, the act would include a change in requirements for tenure and advancement to allow faculty in departments that focus on teaching core courses in American institutions and Western Civilization to earn tenure from their teaching performance.

As for the future of the APSR, the journal is now led by an editorial team headed by John Gerring, a University of Texas political scientist who campaigned to lead the journal in 2020 but lost out to the Feminist Collective.

In 2020, while the Feminist Collective proposed a two-tiered submissions system to improve diversity within the journal, Gerring’s prospective editorial team proposed “triple-blind review procedures, according to which neither the reviewers nor editors will know the identity of the author prior to a final decision.” Gerring’s team argued their proposed procedure “should serve to remove considerations pertaining to the author (his/her gender, race, or professional status) from the process.”

“Some might hope that the decision to grant APSR editorship to this group represents a corrective to the discriminatory policies of the Feminist Collective,” the report concludes.

The professor of political science in the south similarly said the progressive takeover of academia seems to be receding — if only out of self-preservation.

“Academia, I think, is trying to maintain its relevance and trying to stay at the forefront of a lot of these ideological movements, and I think that people in high positions of decision making have proven susceptible to that kind of capture,” he said.

But, “this is not 2020 anymore” and professors know the Trump administration is watching.

“I don’t think the sentiments have receded, but they’re not as openly or outrageously expressed,” he said.

Meanwhile, the senior political scientist at the R1 doctoral university acknowledged that while some journals have corrupted the peer-review process by promoting a political or ideological agenda instead of publishing the best scientific work, that in his experience, “most political scientists — on the left, right, and middle — try to set aside their political and ideological views when conducting scientific research, and the minority of political scientists who substitute political and ideological advocacy for social scientific standards give the rest of us a bad name.”