

## **THE VALUE OF STATE POLITICAL SCIENCE ORGANIZATIONS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Fewer than half of the states in the United States have a state political science organization and of these even fewer can be said to have active, vibrant organizations. This article argues for a revitalization of the state-level political science organization, as these organizations can offer a variety of important research, service, and networking/socialization benefits to political scientists at all stages of their careers.

## INTRODUCTION

Part of the professional socialization process for political scientists consists of membership in professional organizations. Professional organizations in the discipline are generally designed to promote the interests of their members, exchange ideas on teaching and research, and provide avenues to network with other political scientists (Gupta and Waismel-Manor, 2006; Cooper, 2008; Zorn, 2000). While professional political science organizations exist at the international, national, regional, state, and local levels, the focus of this article is the state-level political science organization. Fewer than half the states in the U.S. have such an organization and several large states such as California and Texas appear to have no state-level organization at all. This article argues for a revitalization of the state-level political science organization, as it offers a variety of important research, service, and networking/socialization benefits to political scientists (and students) of all stripes.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There are numerous professional organizations that attract political scientists at the international, regional, state, and local levels. Some organizations are general in nature while others cater to specific audiences defined by location and/or subject matter. The American Political Science Association (APSA) is the discipline's national professional society. With over 15,000 members from over 100 countries, it is the largest professional organization in the discipline.<sup>1</sup> Other organizations that boast large numbers of political scientists include the International Studies Association (ISA), with a membership of over 5,000<sup>2</sup> and the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA), whose members number over 9,000.<sup>3</sup> These organizations contain members who work in academia, government, non-profit, and international organizations. Also prominent among political science organizations are regional organizations, such as the Midwest Political Science Association (MPSA).<sup>4</sup> MPSA and other regional organizations, such as the Western Political Science Association (WPSA)<sup>5</sup> and the Southern Political Science Association (SPSA),<sup>6</sup> also sport large memberships, multi-day conferences, a professional journal, and reputations as valuable networking vehicles.<sup>7</sup>

The author was unable to locate *any* published scholarly papers, books, or articles dealing specifically (or even tangentially) with state political science organizations outside of a handful of articles with a general focus on the benefits of attending professional conferences (Cooper, 2008; Gupta and Waismel-Manor, 2006), information that could apply to state political science conferences, though they are not specifically mentioned by name. Gathering information on state political science organizations is not a simple task, primarily because there is no central place where such information exists. There is a listing of state organizations on APSA's web site, but much of this data is missing, incomplete, or outdated.<sup>8</sup> As a result, answering even the basic question of whether a state has a political science organization can be a murky one, since it is certainly possible for organizations to exist without a web presence. The information contained in this article is largely derived from the links found on APSA's page, targeted Internet searches, and email correspondence with state organization officers. Most of the remaining observations are those of the author who has participated in a variety of capacities in state political science organizations in Florida, Georgia, Indiana, New York, Pennsylvania, and Ohio.

The APSA web page lists twenty-four states as having state political science organizations (table 1). An additional web search revealed no additional state organizations. Many of the states listed as having state organizations on the APSA page have no more than a list of officers or a contact person. As a result, it can be difficult to ascertain whether the state organization is an active one. From the APSA list, Kansas and West Virginia were determined to have inactive organizations, leaving a total of twenty-two active state political science organizations.

Many states on the APSA list have web links to that state organization's web page. The quality of state organization web pages and the amount of information provided on these pages also varies considerably. Some states such as Pennsylvania, Alabama, Oklahoma, and Ohio provide considerable information about

their organizations, including contact information, bylaws/constitutions, histories of their respective organizations, and journal/conference information.<sup>9</sup> Other state organization web pages have not been updated in a considerable period of time, and some are just ‘dead links.’ Several large states, such as California and Texas, appear to have no statewide organization. Less than a quarter of the states that do have organizations can be found west of the Mississippi River (with Oklahoma being the westernmost (figure 1)).

Some of these state organizations have been around for a considerable period of time. The Ohio and New York organizations date back to the 1940s and the Pennsylvania Political Science Association claims the title of the oldest state political science organization with its founding in 1939. The Georgia, Kentucky, Michigan, and West Virginia associations were established in the 1960s, and the Arkansas, Alabama, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Florida associations were established in the 1970s. Founding dates on the remaining state organizations are unavailable. No states have added organizations since the 1970s.

Membership data is almost completely unavailable online but membership numbers in state organizations generally run from as low as a few dozen to as high as a few hundred. Yearly membership dues for faculty range from twenty to one hundred dollars, with most between twenty to forty dollars. Student memberships generally range from five to forty dollars, with most falling in the ten to twenty dollar range. Many of these memberships, even at the lower end of the range, include journal subscriptions. Membership in state organizations is considerably cheaper than their regional and national counterparts. APSA membership dues for regular members fall on a sliding scale and range from \$97–\$316, based on one’s yearly salary. MPSA dues likewise range from \$62–\$117. The WPSA charges regular members a flat annual fee of \$70 per year. Student rates for both APSA and MPSA are currently \$45 per year while WPSA charges \$40 (APSA 2013, MPSA 2013, WPSA 2013).

Another way in which state political science organizations are different from regional and national organizations is in terms of organizational goals. APSA lists the following as its core objectives:

- Promoting scholarly research and communication, domestically and internationally.
- Promoting high quality teaching and education about politics and government.
- Diversifying the profession and representing its diversity.
- Increasing academic and non-academic opportunities for members.
- Strengthening the professional environment for political science.
- Representing the professional interests of political scientists.
- Defending the legitimacy of scholarly research into politics and government.
- Recognizing outstanding work in the discipline.
- Encouraging the application of rigorous ethical and intellectual standards in the profession.
- Serving the public, including disseminating research and preparing citizens to be effective citizens and political participants (APSA 2013).

These objectives are certainly broad and most state organization objectives and goals reference at least some of them. For instance, the Alabama, Illinois, Louisiana, and Pennsylvania organizations all specifically note that one of their primary objectives is to foster scholarly research in the discipline of political science. The Kentucky, Minnesota, and Pennsylvania organizations also articulate the goal of disseminating research to facilitate public discussion about citizenship, politics, and government.

However, some subtle differences can be found. Virginia, Pennsylvania, Alabama, and North Carolina all emphasize the state organization’s role in developing and maintaining communication and “collegial relations” among political scientists within the state and the surrounding region. The Virginia organization in particular emphasizes its networking role. Other organizations such as those in Kentucky and Minnesota also place an emphasis on the importance of a strong relationship between political scientists and policy makers/public officials. Some of these organizations place an emphasis on holding

an annual conference where research can be presented. Sponsoring a meeting or annual conference was particularly referenced by the Kentucky, New York, North Carolina, and Ohio organizations.

One common theme that receives less emphasis at the regional and national level, but that runs through the mission statements of many state organizations, is an explicit focus on fostering participation among graduate and undergraduate students. The Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, Virginia, and Ohio organizations all emphasize this particular purpose. The Mississippi Political Science Association web site states, “While the association encourages participation by faculty and graduate students, it particularly emphasizes undergraduate participation.”<sup>10</sup> Even a brief review of the mission statements of these state organizations compared to APSA would seem to indicate that some of these organizations pursue goals that receive less attention at the national level, particularized goals which in some instances may be more important to political scientists who reside in that specific state.

This short review of state political science organization characteristics raises a number of interesting questions. For instance, why have organizations developed in some states but not others? Are there general (or particular) organizational challenges faced in some states that are not present in others? Why are there almost no state political organizations west of the Mississippi? Why have there been no new state organizations since the 1970s? In short, future research in this area is writing on a largely blank slate. This article focuses on what state organizations have of value to political scientists.

## **RESEARCH AND THE STATE ORGANIZATION**

Many, if not most, political scientists are expected to engage in scholarly research as a condition of employment at their respective colleges and universities. While the old “publish or perish” mantra means different things to different types of colleges, the expectation that political scientists will do at least some publishing via peer-reviewed articles or scholarly books is widespread. The pressure to publish is especially great for junior-level faculty on the tenure track. At the same time, publishing expectations for graduate students have risen as well. It is common for job search committees to find newly minted PhDs with peer-reviewed publications on their vitas. With this pressure to publish, state political science organizations can provide one outlet for the research efforts of political scientists at all stages of their careers.

### **A. CONFERENCES**

One stage of the research process involves presenting at professional conferences. Conferences can serve a number of important functions for individual political scientists. They provide opportunities to present research and discuss it with colleagues, allow individuals to catch up on the latest trends in the discipline, and they provide opportunities to network with other scholars in a particular subfield (Cooper, 2006; Zorn, 2000; Gupta & Waismel-Manor, 2006; Van Cott, 2005). Acceptance rate for conference papers at regional conferences is moderately high, while competition for a seat at APSA is stiffer with a rejection rate for papers that exceeds 50% (Sigelman, 2008). Moreover, participation at specialty conferences is often by invitation only—and that is often reserved to senior scholars who are well established in a particular subfield. One of the benefits of participating in a state political science conference is that it is easier to get one’s work accepted for presentation. Rejection rates for paper proposals at state conferences are extraordinarily low (in fact, the author has yet to meet people in a state organization that say “no” to the prospect of more papers at their conferences).

The majority of state political science organizations hold yearly conferences. Attendance at these conferences can vary considerably and range from roughly 50–250 individuals. Indeed, for some state organizations holding a yearly conference is the primary goal of the organization. Some conferences, such as those in Georgia, Oklahoma and New York, are large enough to draw publishers/sponsors such as McGraw-Hill, Cengage Learning, and W.W. Norton, have book displays and a job placement service.<sup>11</sup>

The number of papers presented at these state conferences can vary considerably. A sampling of recent state conferences showed that the numbers can range from about two dozen to over one hundred papers at a given conference, with most conferences averaging between twenty and fifty papers presented. Most state political science conferences have panels specifically dedicated to graduate and undergraduate student research. Moreover, about a third of state organizations offer cash awards for the best graduate and undergraduate papers presented at their conferences. Virtually all of these state conferences also offer numerous roundtable discussions on everything from teaching to state-specific issues. In many instances, state and local politicians are invited to participate, often adding a real-world perspective to academic discussions. Some state conferences also boast keynote speakers who often include distinguished political scientists and state/national legislators. In other words, these small state conferences can, and often do, pack a considerable amount of activity and information into a small conference, especially when it comes to the participation of elected officials.

State political science conferences can be particularly good places for graduate students and junior faculty to gain experience making research presentations. Presenting at state conferences can especially benefit those unfamiliar with the panel format used at most political science conferences. Making APSA one's first conference presentation can be an intimidating experience. State conferences are smaller venues and can provide opportunities to develop and refine one's presentation style and learn the professional norms associated with presenting one's research on conference panels. Even for political scientists that do not need smaller venues, state conferences can provide a good vehicle to test-drive new ideas or elicit feedback at early stages of the research process. And while it is true that one's panel most likely will not be attended by lots of 'big names' in the subfield, it is also true in many instances that attendance at panels in state conferences is no worse than what one might find at many regional conferences (Zorn, 2000).

## **B. STATE JOURNALS**

While most political scientists are expected to publish their research, not everyone is necessarily expected to publish in the discipline's top-tier journals or write multiple scholarly books in order to achieve tenure and/or promotion. True, everyone would like to publish in the *American Political Science Review* (APSR), but many, if not most, scholars find publication outlets in lower-tier or subfield journals.<sup>12</sup> Competition for limited space leads most of the top-tier journals in the discipline to have very high rejection rates. The *Journal of Politics*, considered one of the top journals in American politics, rejected 75% of submissions outright in 2010. Authors of 13% of the submissions were asked to revise and resubmit their papers, while only 12% of submissions were initially accepted (Leighley and Mishler, 2011). In 2010 another top journal, the *American Journal of Political Science* "desk-rejected" 24% of its submissions (meaning they were not even sent out for peer review). Another 61% are subsequently rejected by the reviewers, resulting once again in a very low publication rate (Wilson, 2011). Finally, the *American Political Science Review*, considered by many to be the discipline's flagship journal, had an overall rejection rate of 93.5% in 2008–2009 (Rogowski, 2010). At the same time, submissions to these top-tier journals continue to climb as pressures to publish continue.

In addition to aiding researchers in the area of conference presentations, ten state associations also have peer-reviewed journals (See Table 2). Some, like the *Indiana Journal of Political Science*, have been around for a considerable period of time, while others such as Kentucky's *Commonwealth Review of Political Science* are brand-new. These journals are generally published annually and the article acceptance rate for these state journals is much higher than top-tier journals. These state journals often have preferences for work pertaining to the politics of that state (e.g., the *Florida Political Chronicle* and *Oklahoma Politics* emphasize articles focusing on their respective states) or will give association members/conference attendees a leg up in the review/decision-making process (e.g., the *Indiana Journal of Political Science* gives preference to in-state faculty/students and its state conference attendees). However, these state-level journals are generally receptive to a wide variety of topics and methods. Some

(Arkansas and Pennsylvania) are also amenable to publishing book reviews and research notes. The fact that some state political science organizations are joint organizations (e.g., Political Scientists and Economists or Political Scientists and Criminal Justice) also can offer opportunities for interdisciplinary publishing. One example of this is the Ohio association's *Journal of Economics and Politics*. Naysayers rightly observe that, at least for many, one is not going to make tenure or get that job at a prestigious Research I university by publishing exclusively in state-level political science journals. However, state political science journals can provide an outlet for pieces that are good, yet have a local focus and therefore are not destined for a national audience.

### **PROFESSIONAL SERVICE AND STATE ORGANIZATIONS**

Political scientists, like other academics, are also generally expected to engage in professional service. This can usually take a variety of forms and includes service to students, one's department, the university, the community, and the profession itself. State political science organizations provide an excellent opportunity for professional service, often an important component for those on the tenure track. State organizations often tend to be small so junior level faculty (and sometimes even graduate students) can easily find themselves in leadership positions that only senior faculty occupy in regional and national organizations. One could serve as an officer, an editorial board member, awards committee member, panel organizer, journal editor, manuscript reviewer, or panel chair/discussant. For some these may amount to nothing more than vita lines, but for others these types of opportunities can offer valuable experience, especially for junior faculty who may aspire to engage in similar activities for regional or national political science organizations at some point in the future.

Graduate students may benefit the most from the service opportunities offered by state political science organizations. For students who have never chaired a panel before or served as a discussant, state conferences provide a lower-stress venue to gain valuable experience. These conferences allow graduate students to develop professional skills in a venue that is smaller than regional or national conferences. Again, hiring universities are increasingly expecting newly minted graduate students to have attended conferences and state organizations provide one easy opportunity to do this.

Even undergraduates can benefit from participation in a state political science organization. Conferences at the regional and national level often restrict graduate student participation and undergraduate participation can be even rarer. State conferences can show undergraduate students who are interested in political science just what it is their professors do outside of the classroom. They can be exposed to what it means to conduct serious, rigorous research, either as reviewers or participants in a state-level conference.

### **NETWORKING AND STATE POLITICAL SCIENCE ORGANIZATIONS**

In a 2000 paper on political science professional meetings, Professor Christopher Zorn opened with the assertion that "unequivocally and without qualification ... the most important thing that happens at professional meetings is not what goes on in the panels" (1). It is often the conversations that occur after the panels, in the hallways, or over dinner and a cup of coffee that makes the conference experience a valuable one. Making the argument that state political science organizations provide valuable forums for networking may seem counterintuitive at first blush. These conferences are almost invariably smaller, are often ignored by faculty from that state's flagship university, and are not likely to draw a number of experts in any one particular subfield.

Despite this, there are at least two ways in which these conferences can provide good networking opportunities. First, the settings that one finds in state political science organizations are almost invariably more intimate and allow for a degree of one-to-one contact that can be far more difficult to achieve at larger regional and national conferences. If one scans the program lineups for many recent state political science conferences, one might be surprised to find more 'big names' than one might initially expect.



Second, state conferences can also provide an avenue to network with political scientists in other institutions within a particular state, one's academic neighbors so to speak. The mission statements of the North Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Virginia organizations place a specific emphasis on this. Interaction of this type can be valuable at a number of levels. Political science departments in the same state may be facing similar budget or curriculum issues where communication and coordination among the state's political scientists can prove helpful. Some state organizations also seek to provide an active discussion between academics and state and local policy makers (e.g., Minnesota, Kentucky, and Alabama emphasize this).

One final benefit of state-level political science organizations that should not be overlooked is cost. Attending conferences is a must for political scientists and travelling to conferences can be expensive. Travel to regional conferences can easily run into the hundreds of dollars and travel (including registration and hotel) to APSA can exceed a thousand dollars. State conferences have the dual benefit of generally having low registration fees (especially for students) and being closer to one's institution, resulting in lower airfare/travel costs and often cheaper hotel costs as well. In an era where travel budgets for faculty are shrinking and travel money for students is often non-existent, cost can be an important consideration when choosing which professional conferences to attend.

### CONCLUSION

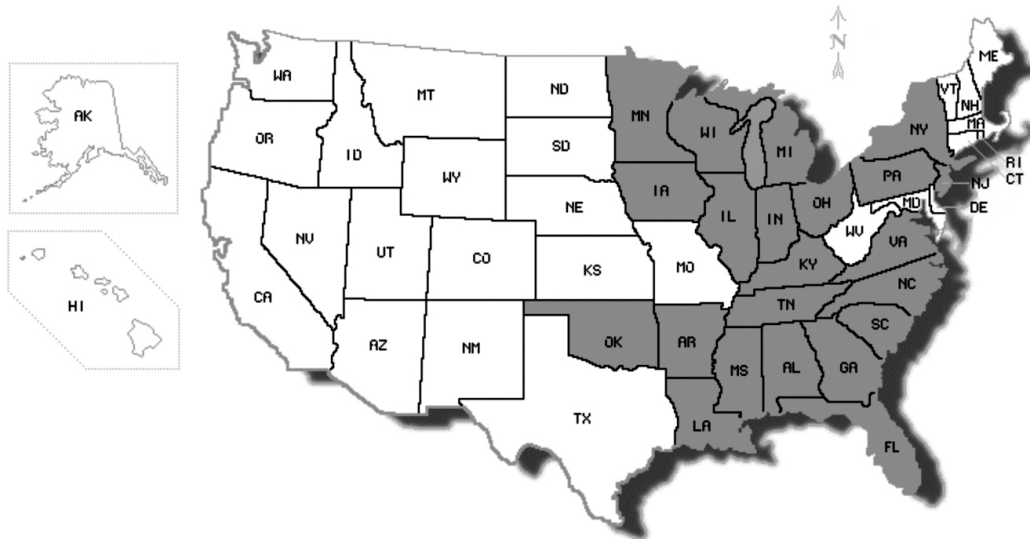
This article has highlighted a number of benefits that senior faculty, junior faculty, and students can accrue from participating in state political science organizations. To be clear, the argument in this article is not that these benefits can *only* be had via state organizations. Regional and national professional organizations are often preferable venues to pursue some of the research, service, and networking benefits described above. Still, state organizations can hold the potential for some unique opportunities especially for junior faculty and graduate students. There are truly opportunities for everyone regardless of age or experience. As a result, political scientists who seek to expand their professional horizons would do well to look no further than their local state political science organization.

**TABLE 1: U.S. STATE POLITICAL SCIENCE ASSOCIATIONS**

Alabama Political Science Association	Mississippi Political Science Association
Arkansas Political Science Association	New Jersey State Political Science Association
Florida Political Science Association	New York State Political Science Association
Georgia Political Science Association	North Carolina Political Science Association
Illinois Political Science Association	Ohio Assn. of Econ. and Political Scientists
Indiana Political Science Association	Oklahoma Political Science Association
Iowa Conference of Political Scientists	Pennsylvania Political Science Association
Kentucky Political Science Association	South Carolina Political Science Association
Louisiana Political Science Association	Tennessee Political Science Association
Michigan Conference of Political Scientists	Virginia Conference of Political Scientists
Minnesota Political Science Association	Wisconsin Political Science Association

**FIGURE 1**

**State Political Science Organizations**





**TABLE 2: JOURNALS OF STATE POLITICAL SCIENCE ORGANIZATIONS**

Arkansas	<i>The Midsouth Political Science Review</i>
Florida	<i>The Florida Political Chronicle</i>
Georgia	<i>Proceedings of the GPSA</i>
Illinois	<i>Illinois Political Science Review</i>
Indiana	<i>Indiana Journal of Political Science</i>
Kentucky	<i>The Commonwealth Review of Political Science</i>
Ohio	<i>Journal of Economics and Politics</i>
Oklahoma	<i>Oklahoma Politics</i>
Pennsylvania	<i>Commonwealth: A Journal of Political Science</i>
South Carolina	<i>The Journal of Political Science</i>

\*Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, New York, North Carolina, and Ohio are all affiliated with the journal *Politics & Policy*, a journal published by the Policy Studies Organization.

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## ENDNOTES

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- <sup>2</sup> International Studies Association (ISA) web site. Located at <http://www.isanet.org>. Last accessed May 15, 2013. Hereafter cited as ISA 2013.
- <sup>3</sup> American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) web site. Located at <http://www.aspanet.org>. Last accessed May 15, 2013. Hereafter cited as ASPA 2013.
- <sup>4</sup> Midwest Political Science Association. Located at <http://www.mpsanet.org>. Last accessed May 15, 2013. Hereafter cited as MPSA 2013.
- <sup>5</sup> Western Political Science Association. Located at <http://wpsa.research.pdx.edu>. Last accessed May 15, 2013. Hereafter cited as WPSA 2013.
- <sup>6</sup> Southern Political Science Association. Located at: <http://www.spsa.net>. Last accessed May 15, 2013. Hereafter cited as SPSA 2013.
- <sup>7</sup> Other regional political science organizations include: Southwest Political Science Association, located at <http://www.swpsa.org> and the National Capital Area Political Science Association, located at <http://www.apsanet.org/ncapsa>.
- <sup>8</sup> A list of U.S. state political science associations can be found on the American Political Science Association's web page at [http://www.apsanet.org/content\\_7703.cfm](http://www.apsanet.org/content_7703.cfm). Accessed February 4, 2013.
- <sup>9</sup> See e.g., The Pennsylvania Political Science Association (hereafter cited as PPSA) at <http://faculty.njcu.edu/fmoran/ppsa/papoliscihome.htm> and the Oklahoma Political Science Association (hereafter cited as OPSA) at [http://www.cameron.edu/history\\_government/opsa](http://www.cameron.edu/history_government/opsa).
- <sup>10</sup> The Mississippi Political Science Association. Located at <http://www.mspsa.net>. Last accessed February 6, 2013. Hereafter cited as MIPSAs 2013.
- <sup>11</sup> The Georgia Political Science Association's 2010 Annual Meeting. Located at [http://www.gpsanet.org/conference/GPSA\\_Program\\_11\\_2010.pdf](http://www.gpsanet.org/conference/GPSA_Program_11_2010.pdf). Last accessed October 7, 2011. See also Oklahoma Political Science Association's web site located at: [http://www.cameron.edu/history\\_government/opsa](http://www.cameron.edu/history_government/opsa). Last accessed February 11, 2013.
- <sup>12</sup> For an example of journal rankings in Political Science, see Giles and Garand (2007).