



Political Geography Open Research

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The promise of open-access publishing in contentious times

Political Geography Open Research (PGOR) provides a purely open-access publication format for conceptually and empirically driven research focused on the geographical and spatial dimensions of politics and the political. The journal has been created in response to momentous changes in academic publishing initiated by Plan S. Plan S is a cooperative agreement among European research funding agencies that aims to increase access to publicly funded research. The main idea behind Plan S is that research funded by the public should be readily available to the public without any corporate or institutional paywalls. Public funding agencies outside Europe have made similar moves toward open-access publication. In 2022, for instance, the Biden Administration in the United States announced that all peer-reviewed, taxpayer funded research must be made available to the public as soon as it is published. This is a significant expansion of open-access rules passed in 2013 during the Obama Administration, which allowed publishers to impose a one-year embargo on such publications.²

Clearly, PGOR is stepping out into a rapidly changing landscape of academic publishing, and we, as PGOR's editors, are mindful of the contentions therein. For instance, the push for open-access publishing has taken place amidst mounting criticisms against large academic publishers, including Elsevier. For years, scholars and library administrators have pointed out that academic publishers extract enormous profits from the largely uncompensated labor of scholars who conduct peer reviews and serve on read editorial boards. For a time, the University of California, Berkeley, and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, both of them major recipients of public research dollars and advocates of open-access publishing, broke off their relationships with Elsevier, citing the high cost of subscriptions and Elsevier's exorbitant profits.^{3,5}

It is hard to argue with the idea that public research should be available free of charge to everyone, without any paywall, given that such research has been undertaken for the public good using taxpayer money. But open-access publishing poses some challenges. While traditional journals are paid for through library subscriptions, open-access journals are instead funded through fees charged to researchers. Researchers holding large research grants can, in principle, pay these fees, but those with smaller grants or no grants at all could effectively be blocked from publishing in open-access journals. In the past few years, some institutions, including Berkeley, have negotiated institutional agreements with Elsevier to ensure that the costs of open-access publishing do not stifle the dissemination of research.^{3,4} Similarly, a consortium of over 40 universities in Texas recently negotiated an agreement with Elsevier to limit subscription costs, saving university libraries millions of dollars (though this deal does not touch upon open access).¹ While institutions may be gaining some leverage over large

academic publishers to reduce the cost of access to published work, other challenges remain. For instance, new open-access requirements for publicly funded research may have deleterious effects on non-profit journals published by scholarly societies, which have typically relied on regular library subscriptions. There are also more fundamental concerns about the 'pay-to-publish' model, which has been embraced by many 'predatory journals'. Such journals are ostensibly peer reviewed, but they tend to lack academic rigor. The problem here is that new journals like PGOR are entering an increasingly crowded marketplace in which they must distinguish themselves from a wide array of unscrupulous pay-to-publish journals.

Adding to the complexities of the contemporary landscape of academic publishing are ongoing questions about who produces knowledge and who profits from that knowledge—questions that have become increasingly fraught as academics have been forced to confront systemic inequalities that operate from the institutional to the global scale. As editors of an open-access journal, we are committed to making political geography scholarship available to readers worldwide, at no cost. At the same time, we are committed to making the journal accessible to scholars who wish to publish with us. Toward this end, we will advocate for reductions in the costs of open-access publishing, especially for scholars from the Global South who may not have institutional publishing agreements or research grants that can support open-access fees. Whenever possible, we will also lend our vocal support, however modest it might be, to efforts by institutions and consortia to negotiate fees with academic publishers.

In terms of journal content, we have envisioned PGOR as a companion journal to *Political Geography* (PG), the flagship journal of the subdiscipline and one of the premier journals in academic geography. But while the aims and scope of PGOR are identical to those of PG, and while we maintain the same level of quality and rigor that readers expect from PG, we are also developing a unique identity. Specifically, in addition to more traditional research articles, we offer a peer-reviewed 'research notes' feature. This feature is designed for scholars who are still conducting fieldwork or who are in the early stages of analysis, but who may have compelling preliminary findings or methodological insights to report. Our intention is for the research notes feature to facilitate the timely publication of early research outputs and to provide a format that may be less intimidating for early career scholars than a standard research paper.

As a new journal, we invite conversations with scholars who are starting to explore the field of political geography and who may need some guidance and advice on engaging with the field's current debates. We also strive to foster a peer-review process that offers constructive help, especially to early career scholars. In this sense, we recognize that

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journals are important gatekeepers to academic success. In their gatekeeping role, journals editors, editorial boards, and peer reviewers have sometimes preserved their privilege and authority by marginalizing and denigrating women, people of color, and non-Anglophone scholars. While peer-review will always be a form of gatekeeping, we believe that journals must acknowledge and address the exclusions that have operated within academic disciplines and within the pages of journals. Scholars today face many anxieties around job insecurity, low pay, and attacks on academic freedom; they should not have to endure a soul-destroying review process. At a practical level, reducing the intimidation factor of peer-review publishing means that we, as editors, must make ourselves available to our contributors and potential contributors. This might involve having a face-to-face Zoom call with an individual contributor, or doing a workshop with a group of scholars who wish to transform a conference session into a special issue. It might also involve connecting contributors to the many services offered by Elsevier, including language services for non-native English speakers.

The subdiscipline of political geography has changed dramatically since the launch of PG forty years ago. The subdiscipline has expanded to include topics that in the past would not have been considered properly 'political'—for instance, expressions of identity and emotion and ideas of care, morality, and justice. As editors, we will continue to push forward political geography scholarship, expanding its boundaries to include not just the 'high' politics of states and militaries, but also the workings of power in the seemingly ordinary and unremarkable spaces of everyday life. We welcome discussions and debates about the relevance of research, about the politics of methods and fieldwork, and about what counts as 'political' geography. We invite you to contact us

to discuss ideas for papers and special issues. More generally, we look forward to working with you and to becoming a trusted venue for open-access research in political geography.

References

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Caroline Nagel*

Department of Geography, University of South Carolina, United States

Deirdre Conlon

School of Geography, University of Leeds, United Kingdom

* Corresponding author.