

VOX POP Newsletter

of Political Organizations and Parties

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Founding POP: The Origins of Our APSA Section

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Few members of today's Political Organization and Parties Section know its origins nearly thirty years ago within the American Political Science Association. Some oldtimers may recall that its original acronym (POPO) was also the name of a clown, but otherwise the group's history proved foggy even to those present at the beginning. When John Green asked me, as one of POP'S early chairs, to write about its origins, I planned to contact some key emeritus professors and write it from collective memory. Our memories were all faulty, however, and I had to read back issues of *PS* and *VOX POP* to reconstruct its creation.

Unlike other professional associations in anthropology, psychology, and sociology, the APSA had no subdivisions by scholarly fields for the first 70 years of its existence. Responding to calls for change, the APSA Council in 1976 directed the 1977 Program Committee to "explore the degree of interest in beginning to organize continuing sections" for the annual APSA meeting.

The co-chairs of the 1977 convention, James Q. Wilson and Harvey Mansfield, Jr., addressed their mandate in an item titled, "Shall the APSA Have Organized Subfields?" in the Winter 1977 issue of *PS* (p. 67). They scheduled separate meetings of scholars in various subfields to "discuss and make recommendations regarding the feasibility and desirability of having permanent or semi-permanent, sections," with an aim "to provide greater clarity and continuity in the program sections and to permit scholars working in those subfields to participate more fully in defining the panel topics." Distinguished conveners were invited to preside over eleven different subfields:

- Political philosophy and political thought (Dennis Thompson);
- Empirical theory, methodology, and the philosophy of science (Henry Teune);
- Comparative politics (Suzanne Berger);
- International and transnational politics, and international organization (Robert Keohane);
- Public policy analysis (Aaron Wildavsky);
- Electoral and voting behavior (Donald Stokes);
- Law, courts, and judicial behavior (Samuel Krislov);
- Legislative processes, behavior, and representation (Samuel Patterson);
- Administration, organization, and executives (Francis Rourke);
- Political psychology and political socialization (Jack Dennis); and
- Federalism, intergovernmental relations, and urban politics (Deil Wright).

Note that political parties and interest groups were not among the invited subfields.

Apparently, five of the chosen eleven decided against the idea of sections at that time, for the next Program Chair, Elinor Ostrom, arranged for only seven "organized subfields" to meet at the 1978 convention (*PS*, Spring

1978: 203-204). Left to continue the discussion were these six groups (different conveners are in parentheses) and a seventh and new group:

- Electoral and Voting Behavior;
- Law, Courts, and Judicial Behavior (Joseph Tannenhaus);
- Legislative Processes, Behavior, and Representation;
- Federalism, Intergovernmental Relations, and Urban Politics;
- Administration, Organization, and Executives (John Kirlin);
- Political Psychology and Political Socialization; and
- Political Economy (Edward Tufte).

Still, there was no representation of political parties and interest groups.

When Leon Epstein became President-elect of the APSA in 1978 and began planning for the 1979 convention, things changed. Known for the comparative analysis of political parties, Leon asked Frank Sorauf, fellow parties scholar and Chair of the 1979 Program Committee, to explore interest in organizing a subfield around political organizations. In a personal communication, Frank admitted that he and Leon were both concerned about growing specialization in the discipline but thought that if organized subfields were inevitable, political parties and interest groups ought to be represented. Busy himself with the 1979 program, Frank sought help from others, including Kay Lawson who more than anyone became the moving force behind the effort to establish our section.

When asked to help unravel the early days of the parties and organizations section, Kay Lawson wrote in an email:

Frank Sorauf initiated POP. When Frank was APSA program chair, he thought there should be such a section and asked me to form it. As still quite junior faculty I was certainly honored and did my best. As I recall,

(Continued on page 3)

FOUNDING POP (Continued from page 1)

that meant setting up some panels and starting a newsletter. I do remember very clearly indeed typing the first newsletters (and I do mean typing: on a typewriter), xeroxing what I typed, cutting it up and pasting it into columns so it would look like a “real” newsletter, xeroxing all that again, and mailing it out as widely as I could - which was, of course, done by what we now call snail mail.

Kay neglected to mention the clever tactic she employed for the 1979 convention and implemented through her dual role as organizer of our subfield and section head of the program committee. Given that scholars in political parties and interest groups were already two years behind other subfields in planning for a role in the APSA program, Kay opted to catch up by combining the initial organization meeting for the subfield, “Parties and Other Political Organizations,” with a series of seven panels under the section heading: “Parties and Other Political Organizations.” As a result, the scholars who met on Saturday, September 1, 1979 to form the subfield had, in effect, their own place in the 1979 APSA program.

Members present at the first organized subfield business meeting elected John Bibby as Chair and Kay Lawson as Secretary. John served for two years to 1981. I succeeded him and served until 1983. Kay fortunately stayed on until 1982. All three of us wrestled with three key issues confronting the group in its infancy: (1) should the group pick a name? (2) should we formally affiliate with the APSA? (3) should we start our own journal? — and (4) how should we treat voting behavior?

Name Change: Because “Parties and Other Political Organizations” was a section title for the 1979 APSA panels and the working title for the business meeting, the group took on the obvious acronym, POPO. However, POPO sounded undignified to enough members that Kay Lawson put this question to members in the group’s second newsletter:

“Do you have a new name for the sub-field?” Does the acronym POPO trouble [], amuse [], or seem unimportant [] to you? If you have thoughts on this weighty matter, please let us know (POPO Newsletter, Spring, 1981).

Kay wrote one other POPO newsletter (Spring 1980), and I wrote the third as the new Chair in November 1981. (Go to <http://www.uakron.edu/bliss/VoxPop.php> for past newsletters.) In a letter dated November 6, 1981, Kay noted that some people thought POPO “sounds sort of silly,” recalled that “the name was an accident anyway” of the 1979 section and meeting titles, and suggested that the name be changed—but noted that previous attempts generated “so much argument it wasn’t worth it.”

Kay, John Bibby, and I decided to change the name ourselves and then put the change to the membership. The next newsletter in Winter 1982, the first as *VOX POP*, began with this paragraph:

Exit POPO, Enter POP

“Parties and Other Political Organizations” seemed like a perfectly good name for our subfield when it was formed at the 1979 APSA Convention. As an acronym, however, POPO drew some snickers from members and prospective members. To fashion a more sober short name for the group with a minimum of fuss, the Chair, Secretary, and past Chair agreed to change our title to “Political Organizations/Parties.” This produced the new acronym, POP, and the new name for our Newsletter, *VOX POP*. Our trilateral action will be reviewable at our Annual Business Meeting at the 1982 APSA Convention in Denver. Friends of POPO will have their chance to undo our action, if they wish. The members accepted the name change at the 1982 business meeting.

Joining APSA: Although the APSA Council had voted to “explore” the idea of organized subfields in 1976, it did not approve of establishing “sections or organized subfields” until 1981, when it directed its staff to prepare guidelines for their organization and operation for approval at the 1982 Council Meeting (*APSR* Autumn, 1981, p. 729). The Fall 1982 issue of *VOX POP*

outlined the costs of joining (POP members must belong to the APSA) and benefits (maintenance of membership lists and mailing and preferential treatment in the annual program). That issue of *VOX POP* asked members to complete a questionnaire concerning their desire to affiliate with APSA at different rates of dues.

The Winter 1983 issue summarized responses from 49 returned questionnaires: most POP members already belonged to the APSA, were willing to pay a few dollars in dues, and offered positive comments about joining. The issue also called for more responses from the 194 members. A “special edition” of *VOX POP* in August 1983 reported that members had voted 113 to 6 in favor of section status. Accordingly, I petitioned the APSA for affiliation. POP was among the first five groups admitted in 1983 as APSA Sections. There are now 38.

Founding a Journal: Interest in publishing a journal, tentatively called *Political Organization* surfaced at the initial subfield meeting in 1979. Kay Lawson, as usual, took the lead in exploring the matter, and she reported in her second newsletter on the state of affairs at the 1980 business meeting. In May 1981, Kay submitted a formal proposal to M.I.T. Press for Publishing *Political Organization*, but the Press took no action. In the Fall/Winter 1983 issue of *VOX POP*, Bill Crotty as POP’s new Chair recounted the difficulties of “midwifing a new journal” and asked for suggestions of alternative university or commercial publishers. Despite a great deal of effort in pursuit of this avenue, POP did not succeed in publishing its own journal. (To this day, there is no journal called *Political Organization*.) However, *VOX POP* has grown beyond being a newsletter into a mini-journal. Moreover, the international journal *Party Politics* maintains links to POP and *VOX POP* on its website and sponsors the annual prize for the best paper delivered at POP panels at the APSA Annual Meeting. POP names the committee that determines the award winner. The *Party Politics* website is <http://www.partypolitics.org/>. (A proposal for a more formal association between POP and *Party Politics* is currently under discussion.)

The problem of voting behavior: The subjects of political parties and voting behavior are closely linked in American and comparative politics, and many scholars do original research on both subjects. More APSA members, however, focus on voting behavior than on political parties. Recall that the “Elections and Voting Behavior” was one of the original eleven “continuing subfields” invited to organizational meetings at the 1977 convention. Even now, that subfield is more popular. The APSA web site lists 837 members in the section on “Elections, Public Opinion, and Voting Behavior” and only 590 in POP (as of April 2007). Moreover, POP members seem more interested in their section than vice versa. According to 2004 data in the APSA’s “section by section” matrix, only 25 percent of members in the elections section belong to POP, while 34 percent of POP members belong to the elections section.

By forming POP, we aimed at creating a regular outlet for panel papers devoted to parties and other political organizations. The POPO newsletter of Winter 1981 reported on the neglect of panels on political parties and other political organizations in the official APSA programs from 1971 to 1981. In 1972 and 1973, for example, there were no sections on either political parties or political organizations and only a total of six panels in both conventions that dealt with either. The 1976 and 1978 conventions had a handful of separate panels but no sections on political organizations. By stretching the scope of POP to include public opinion and voting behavior, we feared that papers on voters would overwhelm our primary focus on political organizations. In any event, “Elections, Public Opinion, and Voting Behavior” is now an APSA section itself. It was the 32nd Section to join.

Despite getting a late start as a continuing subfield in the APSA, POP established itself quickly among the first official Sections in the Association and has flourished since. POP’s current activities are described at <http://www.apsanet.org/~pop/>.