

Book Review: Political Science in Motion edited by Ramona Coman and Jean-Frédéric Morin

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What are the new challenges facing political science research at the beginning of the twenty-first century? Political Science in Motion, edited by Ramona Coman and Jean-Frédéric Morin, explores this question through a collection of essays that traces the major trends in contemporary political science research since the end of the Cold War. Focusing on eight different academic journals, this book stimulates new questions about the changing role that peer-reviewed journals play in academic life, writes Wyn Grant.

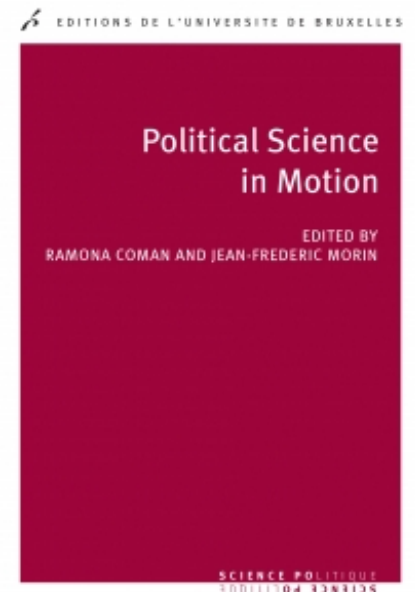
Political Science in Motion. Ramona Coman and Jean-Frédéric Morin (eds). Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles. 2016.

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Peer-reviewed journals are central to contemporary academic life. Publications in highly rated journals are a key to appointment and promotion, while the editors act as gatekeepers to disciplines, allowing new paradigms to emerge. As Krystal Wanneau notes in her chapter in *Political Science in Motion*, 'innovations in a field appear within academic journals because they act as both a place and as a means of competition for scientific authority' (130). The relationship between editors and contributors is a reciprocal one. She notes, 'researchers build up the legitimacy of the journal and the journal builds up the legitimacy of the researcher' (137).

However, there is very little literature on academic journals and how they function or what they achieve and *Political Science in Motion* is to be welcomed as a step towards filling that gap. It is well-edited, as is evident from the cross-references between chapters. It answers some of the questions that one might want to ask, while others remain unanswered.

The book examines a range of journals from the highly prestigious *American Political Science Review* to more specialised ones, such as *Electoral Studies* and *Security Dialogue*. The analysis in the various chapters is dependent on what has been published in the journals examined. Data is not available on the articles that were rejected. Hence, as the editors Ramona Coman and Jean-Frédéric Morin warn in their introduction, 'it is quite difficult to assess the degree to which published articles reflect patterns of submission, whether scholars self-censor their submissions, and whether editors exercise a bias towards certain approaches' (27).





Such a bias was the complaint made by the Perestroika movement against the *American Political Science Review*, which was seen as too narrow by its critics in its theoretical and methodological perspectives. Those who did not use quantitative or rational choice perspectives thought they were disadvantaged, and the result was the founding of a new journal, *Perspectives on Politics*. As Wanneau points out, 'each journal has its own particular ideology whether this is openly claimed or barely recognized' (137). Attempting to spell out those ideologies would assist transparency and stimulate debate.

Wanneau's chapter, '*Security Dialogue* on The Edge of International Security Studies: Uncovering A Process of Innovation', is one of the most interesting in the book because it attempts to reflect systematically on what the functions of a journal are, and also because she took the trouble to interview the editor of *Security Dialogue*. She points out that 'the editor acts as an evaluator, while also being a style coach, fostering incremental and revolutionary change, providing the conditions for knowledge development, framed around the creation and the shifting of consensus.' She is also alert to the importance of the editorial team, although how the roles of associate editors are specified and how they interact with each other would merit further investigation.

Wanneau's conception of the role of the editor does seem to be a rather passive one: 'they hold significant power over the selection of manuscripts to be published, but they are equally dependent on what they receive from authors.' Enterprising editors may, however, seek out the authors of promising papers at conferences. The growth of the special issue also gives opportunities for editors to shape the intellectual agenda, although when the journal is run by a learned society, they often insist that special issues are the result of an open competition.

West European Politics is regarded as a leading journal of comparative politics. It now, of course, covers Central and Eastern Europe, but has retained its old name. Journals rarely change their title, as recognition and prestige is attached to it. Hence, the title of the *Journal of Common Market Studies*, also examined here, refers to an earlier phase of the European integration project. As Clément Jadot shows in his chapter, the EU has increasingly become a focal point of the coverage of *West European Politics*. Political parties remain a major focus, despite the challenges they have been encountering. Political parties have also been a major theme in the *British Journal of Political Science*, but 'party organization and party in the electorate (i.e. voter behaviour and partisanship) studies appear as two declining fields, while party in office research has been continuously growing in the last two decades' (59).

This book tells us a lot about what journals publish and also who publishes in them, as in Marie-Catherine Wavreille's political sociology of the *American Political Science Review*. There are a number of other important

issues that deserve exploration in the future, hopefully stimulated by this volume. First, what is the relationship between the publisher and the editorial team? When a learned society is also involved, what is their role? For commercial publishers, journals are important and lucrative sources of revenue, but many learned societies are also dependent on them for their funding. From what I know, the crucial involvement of the learned society is when a new editorial team is appointed. How is that decision made and on the basis of what criteria?

Second, most academic journals have other academics as their main audience. However, there are also ‘bridge’ journals that seek to make academic knowledge available in an accessible way to policy makers, and may include contributions from policy makers themselves. What role do they have in the broader dissemination of academic knowledge and securing ‘impact’? Has their role been overtaken by think tanks and by blogs?

Third, what is the role of peer reviewers? How are they selected by different journals? Of course, with the pressures on academic time, it is increasingly difficult to get people to undertake this task. For their part, authors often complain about a tendency of peer reviewers not to review the article that has been written, but to call for a different article. How do editors reconcile conflicting peer reviews?

Last but not least, what are the implications of electronic publication and open access? The environment in which journals work is changing rapidly and many of our traditional understandings may no longer apply. However, we need to know how we got where we are and *Political Science in Motion* helps us to do that.

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Note: This review gives the views of the author, and not the position of the LSE Review of Books blog, or of the London School of Economics.

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