

Editorial: British Politics and International Relations in Times of Change

A new editorial team taking the reins of *The British Journal of Politics & International Relations* (BJPIR) is an opportune moment to reflect on what the journal is seeking to achieve. This issue marks a change of editorial team, with the highly successful six-year Nottingham term coming to a close, and a team based in the School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy at Queen's University Belfast assuming custodianship of the journal. BJPIR has grown considerably since its launch in 1999. It is now, for instance, an ISI-cited journal, which should increase the reach, impact and 'citability' of BJPIR articles. The new team aims to build upon the successes of the previous Birmingham and Nottingham editorial teams. In our view, the journal has been evolving into a major outlet for political studies and international relations scholarship in the UK and beyond for some time now, but that itself is an ongoing process that needs to be fostered and encouraged by the editors. This editorial sets out the vision of the new editorial team for BJPIR and highlights some new areas that we will be seeking to develop in an attempt to address some of the important challenges facing the profession. The bottom line facing any editorial team seeking to progress and develop a journal is to increase the volume and quality of submissions, as well as increasing the readership, circulation and awareness of the journal among the international scholarly community. We view these tasks as mutually reinforcing. We hope that the following will encourage authors to think of BJPIR as a venue when deciding upon an outlet for articles, because ultimately BJPIR is nothing without its authors, readers, subscribers and reviewers.

BJPIR Mission and Direction

BJPIR's original mission statement declared:

BJPIR is committed to acting as an outlet for the best of British political science and of political science on Britain. A fully refereed journal, it publishes topical, scholarly work on significant debates in British scholarship and on all major political issues affecting Britain's relationship to Europe and the world.

A key founding aim, set out in an editorial in the first issue in 1999, has been both to deepen and to broaden our understandings of the study of British politics and international relations (BJPIR 1999). This remains the aim of the new editorial team. Like the first editors at the University of Birmingham, we take deepening to mean setting articles on institutions, processes, theories and policies in their appropriate comparative and theoretical perspective. In terms of broadening, we also mean work which examines key questions in political theory, international relations and comparative politics, and which extends our knowledge of British politics and international relations.



One of the key questions we anticipate encountering is the extent to which *BJPIR* is a journal exclusively devoted to British politics. Our answer is that it is not exclusively so. However, a significant proportion of the articles we carry will focus on aspects of UK politics, because that is part of the distinctive identity and emerging tradition of *BJPIR*. We are also keen to develop, discuss and critique British scholarly traditions, debates, theorists and practices. This involves locating those traditions, voices and practices in international and comparative contexts, in a way that is candid and open in terms of assessing the respective strengths, merits and weaknesses of British scholarly methods and traditions, as viewed from within and outside the UK. It also means opening the journal up to, and increasing its prominence among, those outside the UK, in areas of the discipline as diverse as political thought, comparative politics, electoral and party politics, public policy, political economy and international relations. This is no easy task, but we are keen to encourage reflective pieces that consider how the study of British politics and British scholarly practices can learn and benefit from engagement with scholarly practice and debate in other parts of the world and from scholars outside the UK, and vice versa.

The international relations element of *BJPIR* is an important and distinctive part of the journal and developing this is a priority for us. This means not just attracting articles on British foreign policy, Britain's strategic position in the world, the internalisation of global and international forces in domestic politics, or the outward projection of UK political developments, but also articles on issues of global and international importance, which are of such critical significance to the political universe we inhabit that they are of crucial relevance to all major states. We are less interested in the partisan promotion of specific British schools of thought, or scholarly practices, than in scholarship that enhances, develops and improves those traditions, or identifies and suggests remedies for shortcomings, as a means to enhancing the robustness and rigour of British political studies and international relations, in ways that will attract the attention and interest of scholars throughout the world.

In addition to those general objectives, priorities and intentions, the fast-moving and profound nature of the changes that have impacted upon the British polity at many different levels in the years since the journal was launched are such that we feel it would be beneficial to specify five key themes, albeit in no particular order of priority, which will help the journal increase the quality and quantity of its submissions and guide it through the next period of its growth.

The first theme is to acknowledge the differentiated polity that the UK has become after a major period of constitutional change, which has seen, among other things, devolution of power to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, considerable and ongoing reform of British political institutions at Westminster and local level, and the incorporation of the European Convention of Human Rights into British law. These multi-level developments have led to profound political and policy change in the various levels of government in the UK, and we would encourage the submission of articles that reflect upon these developments and their implications for the practice of British politics and government, as well as pieces that consider these developments as representative of wider global and international processes and trends, including work that locates the British experience in a wider international or comparative context.

The second theme involves acknowledging that the UK remains an important actor in the international arena as a member of the EU, the G7/8, NATO, the UN and the G20, but also as a key link between Europe and America, and as a central player in contemporary international events such as the 'war on terror'. Moreover, Britain's historical role as a leading imperial and colonial power and its leadership within the Commonwealth makes the UK a key actor in analyses of post-colonial politics, the reconfigurations of global affairs following the end of empire and the rise of emerging powers in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. We would encourage scholarship that examines Britain's changing place in the world, based on work that examines the UK's relationship with various countries and regions, or through research that considers the UK's strategic position in the international system, its role in international organisations and the changing nature and representations of British interests.

The third theme involves the journal charting and assessing ideological, party political, electoral and socio-cultural developments in the British polity. In the first half of 2010, for instance, the UK will hold a general election. This brings with it the possibility of a change of government after 13 years of Labour in office. Whoever wins the election, there will be implications for party strategy, organisation and leadership, for political cleavages and alliances, for public policy and for the continually evolving UK state. For example, the recession of 2008–09 and the imperative for spending cuts means that, post-election, the UK will experience a changed policy-making environment, with significant implications for wealth distribution and welfare settlements, which could have a profound impact on the conduct and context of British politics. Moreover, cultural developments, such as the use of the Internet, are impacting not only upon the way electoral politics is conducted, but also upon the formation of individuals' attitudes towards politics, often in an 'anti-politics' direction. As core aspects of the study of politics, we would encourage the submission of research reflecting upon the evolution of these important developments for the British political landscape, placed in their appropriate historical, theoretical and comparative perspective, and in an international or global context.

The fourth theme is that the journal should also be reflective of all the major trains of scholarship in, and on, British politics and international relations research. This is important as British scholarship can be distinctive, for example the 'English School' of IR, theoretical work on British 'Idealism', the burgeoning 'Welsh School' of Critical Security Studies and the so-called British School of International Political Economy, which has recently provoked much controversy, and which inadvertently owes its name to *BJPIR* (Murphy and Nelson 2001). However, the emphasis on scholarship that is 'on' British politics and international relations means that the journal opens itself to the best of scholarship on these themes from academics throughout the world, whether critical, comparative, reflective or developmental in orientation, especially where the objective is to enhance the robustness, rigour and sophistication of existing British scholarship and to facilitate its increased engagement with scholarly practice and debates in other parts of the world.

The final theme relates to methodological innovation. Previous editors have recognised the need for taking epistemological questions more seriously (*BJPIR* 1999). Like them, we would also point to the need to take such matters seriously, and we

favour no one methodological or epistemological approach over another. Instead we favour methodological pluralism and intellectual heterogeneity. Indeed the composition of our editorial team reflects that outlook and represents a range of areas and intellectual approaches and traditions. The key determinant for acceptance in *BJPIR* is quite simply demonstrable excellence as indicated through the blind and rigorous peer review process. Nevertheless, the competitive interview process for the editorship of *BJPIR* asked us to consider the ESRC/PSA/BISA International Benchmarking Report of the discipline (ESRC 2007) and its findings in relation to research methods. This found weaknesses across the whole range of research methods. In addition to bolstering knowledge of advanced quantitative techniques, the report found 'weakness in basic research design and in qualitative methods, which are not just the absence of quantitative methods but rather distinctive methods and protocols all of their own that need to be mastered' (ESRC 2007, 15). As a consequence, we welcome articles explicitly addressing methodological issues and innovations and their application to the study of politics and international relations. With the ESRC, we see these aspects in broad terms to encompass issues of research design, in addition to innovations in, and the application of, both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Journal Sections

BJPIR currently operates around a number of thematic sections. As the current mission statement suggests:

As well as submitted articles, *BJPIR* addresses developments in politics and international relations in its State of the Discipline surveys and offers up-to-the-minute commentary in its Controversy section. Annual Special Issues afford an opportunity to explore areas of particular interest for the Journal's readers.

Special Issues and the Controversy section will continue, largely as demand-led sections. The editorial team is of the view that there is space to develop the 'State of the Discipline' section further in order to encourage reflection on various aspects of the discipline of Politics and International Relations, particularly in the post-Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) environment and in relation to the build-up to the new Research Excellence Framework (REF) assessment exercise. Indeed, the continued success of the ECPR journal *European Political Science* demonstrates the need for disciplinary reflection, whether in relation to teaching, research or traditions of scholarship. Consequently, building up a regular 'State of the Discipline' section reflecting on such disciplinary issues differentiates *BJPIR* from competitor journals, while at the same time providing a broader service to the political studies and international relations community.

Recent arguments from policy-makers have suggested the need for greater engagement between policy-making and academic sectors. At the time of writing, this is being institutionalised in the REF process, which is aiming to assess the 'impact' that academic research has on public policy and social and political well-being (HEFCE 2009). This is also an issue outside the UK. In the USA the American Political Science Association recently had to respond to an amendment in the Senate to

eliminate funding for political science research from the National Science Foundation (APSA 2009; Cohen 2009). The amendment was subsequently defeated. Nevertheless, such pressure on the discipline is indicative of the times. We understand that some colleagues may have reservations about the introduction of 'impact'. While we have no wish to turn the journal into one focused solely on 'impact', or into a public policy journal, there is nevertheless an external imperative for the broader discipline of Politics and International Relations to demonstrate direct engagement with policy-related matters, whether through theoretical reflection or testing, or examining the impact of various policies through cutting-edge research. Moreover, much of the discipline is likely to welcome the chance to have some sort of 'impact' for its work. The Political Studies Association has recently engaged in such a way with the Association's *Failing Politics? A Response to the Governance of Britain Green Paper* (PSA 2007). The editorial team consequently feel that the time is right for an occasional section, which may run in tandem with the Controversy section or Special Issues, to address the interface between policy and the discipline. A brief discussion section entitled 'Policy Matters' is therefore being introduced in order to showcase work in political studies and international relations, which demonstrates the types of impact that our work can have in understanding the various political and international phenomena we deal with. Indeed, the first article under the 'Policy Matters' banner is published in this issue. Others will follow, but we wish to flag this up as an area where the editorial team is keen to accept submissions and proposals and to enter into dialogue with potential contributors.

Conclusion

As we stated in the opening paragraph of this editorial, our ultimate goal as editors is to increase both the number and the quality of submissions to *BJPIR*. The journal is nothing without its authors, readers and reviewers. We would like to thank all those who have contributed, as authors, readers or reviewers, to the journal over the years. We would also encourage authors to consider *BJPIR* as among their first choices when deciding on an outlet for publication. As an ISI-cited journal, *BJPIR* has now been accepted on to the list of the highest-impact outlets in politics and international relations. It is therefore an ideal place for authors to place articles. Something the editorial team is committed to is the efficient management of the submission and review process. We would hope that where possible there will be a swift turnaround for authors, involving the communication of prompt decisions, clear guidance and incisive, constructive commentary on submissions. We know from our own experiences that such an experience with review processes is valued by the academic community. This is certainly an editorial priority and policy, and we hope that you will find the *BJPIR* submission process under our stewardship to be positive, useful and prompt. We welcome inquiries both about articles and about contributions to the special sections listed above. We also welcome proposals for special issues and for themed symposia. The contact details for the editors are below. We look forward to hearing from you with your article manuscripts.

For inquiries, please contact the *BJPIR* Editorial Office at: bjpir@qub.ac.uk

To submit an article, please go to: <http://www.wiley.com/bw/submit.asp?ref=1369-1481&site=1>

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