
Editorial

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Welcome to the first issue of Volume 7 of *British Politics*. In our first ever issue of the journal, we published a series of papers reflecting on the current and future state of the discipline. Back then, of course, we were working within a different political and economic context to the post-Browne era of Higher Education restructuring that we inhabit today. Therefore, in the light of this changed context and the many challenges it is likely to pose, we thought it fitting to devote this special issue to the same theme as before and have invited a number of contributors to provide personal reflections on the current contours of the discipline and the future directions it might, or indeed should, take. Having given each of the authors an open remit, we hope you will agree that the collection of papers we received are all highly reflective, informative, candid and on the whole optimistic but critical. Hopefully, they provide a sound basis for continued critical reflexivity and further debate on the nature of the subject area.

Our opening contribution, from Matt Beech, provides a nicely interwoven analysis of how trends in British government, changes to Higher Education and developments within the discipline have all combined to produce exciting, but often negative, challenges for the future study of *British Politics*. Noting the increased tendency towards the ‘internationalisation’ of the discipline, prompted as much by the RAE/REF as by political developments, Beech highlights a number of ways in which this has enriched the field, while at the same time potentially marginalising or undermining *British Politics* as a discrete subject area, a subject area that Beech ultimately provides a robust defence of. In our second article, Vicky Randall provides a number of reasons as to why we should be optimistic about the direction the discipline is travelling, while also arguing strongly that there are some negative trends that still need to be addressed. In particular, the author points to an overall lack of diversity within the discipline not only in terms of ethnic and gender representation, but also in terms of the range of subjects, viewpoints, themes and approaches that comprise its focus. Overall, Randall argues that the subject area would benefit both from a greater plurality of themes and perspectives and also from adopting a more expansive definition of its subject matter.

In our third piece, Wyn Grant takes us through a personal reflection of the many notable contributions to the discipline that various authors have made throughout his 40 years in the profession. He also highlights a number of changes to the focus of the discipline, placing particular emphasis on the fact that the study of some formerly core areas of interest, particularly public administration and the role of interest groups, as well as the overall influence of American political studies, have been in steady decline. He concludes by arguing that one area of focus that may need greater prominence in the future is the management of public expectations in light of slow economic growth. In our fourth offering, David Marsh provides a ‘view from afar’ as he reflects on the changes over the past two decades to the ways in which the British state has been both characterised and approached. Echoing earlier work by Andrew Gamble, the author notes the historical absence of ‘organising perspectives’ within the discipline, but also points towards the fact that both the differentiated polity model and the asymmetric power model have not only helped to plug that gap, but have also developed over the past two decades as credible and widely accepted alternatives to the Westminster model.

In our fifth article, James Cronin, in a different type of view from afar, notes that in recent years the gap that has hitherto existed between the approaches of both American and British scholars has been gradually eroding. Both have been more inclined to embrace a number of theoretical concerns, although the latter have also become more open towards quantitative and ‘scientific’ approaches. However, the author makes a strong case that both could benefit from taking history more seriously and, in order to demonstrate the utility of an historical approach, offers five different historical narratives that can help to illuminate contemporary trends in Britain’s international relations. Finally, Sukhdev Johal, Michael Moran and Karel Williams turn their attention towards the Great Financial Crisis and its impact, or indeed lack thereof, on the current direction of *British Politics*. These authors reflect on a number of reasons as to why the biggest financial crisis since before the First World War has failed to trigger fundamental political change, instead entrenching the position of traditional elites in the face of civil protests. The revolution, they argue, is likely to be postponed until some way is found of reconciling programmatic change with wider civil society engagement.

Overall, we hope that these types of critical reflection on the state of the discipline and *British Politics* more generally can be helpful in creating a positive impact on the future development of the subject area. In addition, to ensure that *British Politics* remains a key focal point for further debate, we, as editors, are always happy to receive further reflections from other authors

on some of the themes that have been touched upon, or indeed ignored, in this issue.

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