

CHAPTER 1

30 Years of *West European Politics*: And The Winner Is...

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Introduction

There are many ways to tell a story, and when the story is about the state of Western Europe over 30 years, there are certainly numerous interpretations. Founded in 1978 by Gordon Smith and Vincent Wright, both lecturers at the LSE, the original goal of *West European Politics* was to offer a comparative journal on European politics, covering “all the major political and social developments in all West European countries”¹. Three decades later, the journal has become a standard for all comparativists².

In 2007, in order to celebrate *West European Politics*' 30th anniversary, leading scholars in political science gathered in Florence's European University Institute to discuss the social and political issues that have occurred in (West) European democracies over the last thirty years, and their impact on the discipline. For the world in general, and for political scientists in particular, those years have been marked by turbulence. At the macro level, the fall of the USSR, the globalization process, and the evolution of the European Communities into an enlarged political union have dramatically shifted research agendas to the point where even the journal's name was, for a while, questioned (Mény 2008). At the micro level, the study of the values and preferences of individuals has been an endless source of inspiration since Inglehart's pioneering work, *The Silent Revolution* (1977). The development of computers

¹ Taylor & Francis Group online platform: <http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fwep20#.Ur1zkbQ09Bk>

² In 2012, according to *Web of Knowledge's Journal Citation Reports* for political science, *West European Politics* was the 35th most influential journal out of 157 ranked. Over the last ten years, it has almost doubled its impact factor (from 0.89 in 2002 to 1.368 in 2012). For further information about *Web of Knowledge's Journal Citation Reports*: http://wokinfo.com/products_tools/analytical/jcr/

and the Internet, by generalising the use and the generation of global data, has also largely sustained research in that way. At the meso level, the usual units of analysis have, in turn, been subjected to enormous pressure from both sides by the growing processes of individualization and globalization of European societies. Above all, political parties, yesterday's gatekeepers of politics, seem to have been fighting a losing battle since the beginning of the 1970s, i.e. the end of their "so-called Golden Age" (Mair 2008: 218). These are, of course, only brief descriptions of the upheavals experienced. Nonetheless, they help us to remember how "the passage of time can turn the unconventional into something fairly established" (Poguntke 2009: 457).

The 30th anniversary of *West European Politics* was also a good opportunity to look back at the discipline's achievements in Europe. Having emerged as a discipline in its own right not long after 1945, political science was, at that time, mainly driven by US academics. Retrospectively, the launch of *WEP* corresponds to a new stage in the development and the emancipation of political science in Europe. The 1970s witnessed the creation, one after the other, of the European Consortium for Political Research (1970) and of the European University Institute (1976), promoted by the six founding member states of the EEC. Originally, Gordon and Wright's ambition with *West European Politics* was to differentiate themselves from other political science journals – too often focused on single large-scale cases – by offering a platform taking account of smaller European democracies as well (Klaus et al. 2008: 1). In itself, comparative politics as taught in universities is a broadening exercise that emphasizes the need to look beyond national cases in order to test key political science theories and models. Together, these developments in the 1970s certainly attest to European political scientists' willingness to work more closely with each other. Thirty years later, Yves Mény, a former president of the EUI, in the foreword of the *WEP*'s special issue on the occasion of its 30th anniversary, recognized the progress achieved as well as the important role played by the journal in the internationalization of young scholars across Europe. As he stated, "*Splendide isolement* is not only a luxury that nobody can afford, but is an ever-poorer excuse for not addressing the challenges ahead of us" (Mény 2008).

Since 1978, European politics and European political science have indeed experienced dramatic changes. However, tracking such changes is a difficult task, as retrospective readings are often impacted by our knowledge of the subsequent course of events. In this chapter, I suggest that these difficulties may be overcome by implementing a systematic content analysis over time. I would also maintain that by not only focusing on what has changed over time, but also exploring what has remained constant, we can achieve a more balanced overview of the range of topics covered by *West European Politics* and the state of comparative politics in Europe. More precisely, my first objective in this chapter is to track variations and trends in the subjects addressed over time in *West European Politics*, in order to test to what extent the journal actually covers "all the major political and social developments in all West European countries", and may thus be considered a journal for "generalists". I am also interested in identifying the areas, if any, where it tends to specialize. My second research objective is to question what is meant by "West European countries" by looking at which countries have been studied. This will then allow us to verify if *WEP*

has fulfilled its role as a platform for both large and small European democracies. My third and final objective is to identify where the authors were based at the time of their publication and to use this as a means for measuring the use of *West European Politics* as a vehicle of exchange among European scholars. In short, my goal is to record what has been said, about which countries, and by whom during the first thirty years of publication of the journal.

This chapter is organized as follows: in the first part, I introduce the methodology used and the reasons that led me to conduct a content analysis based on the assignation of keywords to every article. In the second part, based on my empirical findings, I demonstrate that *West European Politics* is largely given over to the analysis of governmental issues – that is, the exercise of political authority – at the national level. More specifically, political parties, despite the tough times they are experiencing, constitute the journal’s unchallenged backbone and if the *WEP* were to award a prize for the most-covered subject matter, “political parties” would definitively receive it. Although lagging behind compared to political party issues, European Union topics have progressively gained in importance over the period analysed and today account for a significant number of the articles published. Following on from this, a careful analysis of the countries addressed gives a nuanced picture of the geographical coverage offered. Since its origins, *WEP* has been a window on Western democracies in general, and not only on the largest ones. However, until recently, large countries have received the lion’s share of coverage. Finally, a look at the authors’ geographical locations bears witness to the huge gap that exists in terms of publication between British and American institutions on the one hand, and continental Europe on the other. In the third part, I focus on the implications of the above-mentioned content analysis for comparative politics in Europe. Two points in particular are discussed: firstly, to what extent is the focus on political parties – doomed or not – and the European Union an indication of their importance within the discipline? Secondly, what can be learned from the *WEP*’s gradual opening up to encompass Eastern Europe?

1. Unlocking comparative politics through the use of keywords

In view of the objectives adopted, I opted for a systematic analysis of the content of the journal over its first thirty years of publication. In the main, this choice is explained by the methodology’s ability to deal with emotionally-charged events in a rather disengaged and neutral way. However, with 157 issues published, each containing five to ten articles, penetrating *West European Politics* seems to be, at first sight, something of a treasure hunt. To keep track of topics addressed by the journal while enabling data to be collected in a manageable way, I based the longitudinal content analysis on the attribution of keywords to each article. I explain below why and how those keywords were chosen, what data they cover, and how they can be interpreted.

In academic journals, the attribution of a limited number of keywords to an article is a widespread practice. They serve as field markers and allow reviewers to quickly identify whether an article falls within their area of expertise. They also constitute a useful tool for anyone interested in skimming through a publication. However, articles published in *West European Politics* are not accompanied by a selection of keywords.

Hence, the only way for the reader to obtain a quick overview of the content of *WEP*'s articles is to read the abstract, which involves reading more than a hundred words instead of only a few. Elaborating on this, I chose to attribute keywords to articles as a way of summarizing their content. To allow both diversity and a manageable approach, I set a limit of three keywords per article, selected with the aim of highlighting the main topics addressed. Although not sufficient to identify the exact subject of an article, this is enough to get an idea of its core content. For instance, even without further knowledge, an article coded with the keywords "political parties", "social democracy" and "monetary and budgetary policy" may be classified as an article about political parties' positions on macroeconomic policy, with a likely focus on socialist parties.

Regarding the selection of keywords utilized, I referred to the Taylor & Francis index for Politics and International Relations³. There are two reasons behind this decision. Firstly, working with a closed sample of pre-identified descriptors has the advantage of avoiding an endless expansion of the range of potential classification terms. Secondly, Taylor & Francis Group – which owns Routledge, the publisher of *West European Politics* – offers an exhaustive index for Politics and International Relations that is easy to operationalize as it contains a little more than a hundred keywords divided into 21 categories. In the present case, and as most of the articles published in *West European Politics* are devoted to the study of just one or a few countries, I did not take into account the categories associated with a specific area⁴. Furthermore, the question of the selection of cases is analysed separately, based on a precise count of the countries examined. In total I adopted 15 categories and 75 associated keywords. As categories themselves may act as general descriptors, articles have been coded on the basis of a total of 90 keywords (see Table 1.1). Taking into account the aims of this chapter, a choice was also made to focus only on those abstracts and titles of articles published in the first 141 issues in order to attribute the keywords. As they are limited to 150 words, abstracts allow the reader to get a general idea of the content of an article, and highlight its most important features. Hence, they constitute a valuable and convenient source of data for the present study. Finally, given the aim of the research, I did not include those reviews and analysis of electoral results which accompany every issue.

³ The online platform for Taylor & Francis Group content, <http://www.tandfonline.com/action/showPublications?category=43983500>, 07/01/2014.

⁴ Respectively "Asian Politics", "Eastern European Politics", "French Politics", "German Politics", "International Politics", "Irish Politics", "Italian Politics", "Russian and Soviet Politics", "Scandinavian Politics", "US Politics".

Table 1.1: Taylor & Francis Group adapted index for Politics and International Relations

Comparative Politics	International Organizations	Politics & Technology
Environmental Politics	International Relations Theory	Internet Politics
European Union Politics	Migration & Diaspora	Politics & the Media
European Integration	Public Diplomacy	Film & Politics
European Union Expansion	Regionalism	Political Communication
European Union History	Transnationalism	Public Administration & Management
European Union Institutions	Introductory Politics	Budgetary & Economic Policy
European Union Policy	Political Behaviour & Participation	Policy Analysis
Government	Political Psychology	Program Evaluation
Devolution	Racial & Ethnic Politics	Publ. Adm. Research Methods
Elections	Social Movements	Public Policy
Executive Politics	Political Philosophy	Regulatory Policies
Federalism	Anarchism	Administrative Law
Governance	Conservatism	Bureaucratic Politics
Law & Courts	Democracy	Education Policy
Legislative Politics	Fascism & Nazism	Energy Policy
Local Government	Gender Politics	Health Policy
Political Institutions	Human Rights	Immigration Policy
Political Leaders	Liberalism	Organizational Theory & Behav.
Political Lobbying & Interest Groups	Marxism & Communism	Public Ethics
Political Parties	Nationalism	Public Management
Protest Movements	Political Ideologies	Science & Technology Policy
Revolution – Government	Social Democracy	Social Policy
Urban Politics	Socialism	Security Studies
International Political Economy	Political Theory	Conflict Resolution
Globalization	American Political Thought	Intelligence
Politics of International Trade	Ancient & Medieval Pol. Th.	Peace Studies
International Relations	Critical Theory	Peacekeeping
Foreign Policy	Modern Political Theory	Terrorism
Global Governance		War & Conflict Studies
International Law		

In the following sections, the content analysis is divided into three periods of ten years, each covering different sequences in the history of the journal and West European politics in general. The years 1978-1987 correspond to the launch of *West European Politics* and a decade of new hopes at the European level, starting with the

first European elections and given concrete form by the creation of a new agenda for Europe when the Single European Act came into effect in 1987. The years 1988-1997 were then years of laying down roots for *WEP*, and of great changes for Europe and the world. The collapse of the Soviet Union began a new era of transition for Eastern countries and led to the hegemony of market economy at the macro level. Retrospectively, the years 1988-1997 also appear to be resolutely European in the sense that they were characterized by a significant deepening of European integration. During the final period, 1998-2007, *West European Politics* increased the number of issues per year from four to five (and six since 2008), which demonstrates its degree of maturity. In contrast to the former period and despite achieving three waves of enlargement – including the Big Bang enlargement – the expansion of the EU is generally seen as having experienced a slowing down during the 2000s, with criticisms reaching a peak in the rejection by referendum of the European Constitutional Treaty by both France and the Netherlands. Although far from exhaustive, this division into three stages provides a framework for our analysis.

2. Issues that count: *West European Politics* through the prism of content analysis

2.1. 1978-1987: *WEP's* positioning between the one and the many

Ranging from commonly-encountered issues such as institutions, ideologies or social movements to less usual ones, such as “films and politics”, *WEP* made its initial mark on the discipline by offering a forum for open discussion in comparative politics. Empirically, 70% of the 90 keywords are addressed at least once (see Table 1.2, General Coverage Ratio). Higher thresholds indicate nonetheless that the general coverage is rather superficial. In fact, more robust indicators measure a drop-off in the ratios when multi-occurrence of a single keyword is measured. Over the period, during the second part (1983-1987) the journal is rather more tightly focused, as fewer issues are covered in a more extensive way.

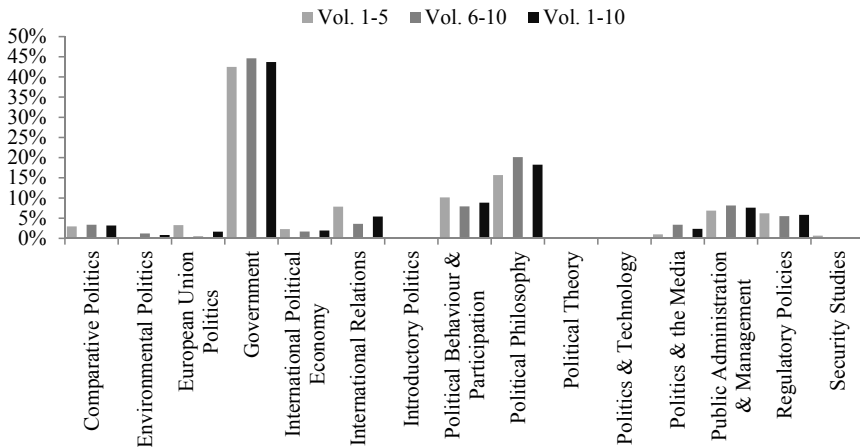
Table 1.2: Coverage ratios 1978-1987

	Vol. 1-5	Vol. 6-10	Vol. 1-10
General coverage ratio	0.67	0.58	0.70
≥ 5 coverage ratio	0.37	0.52	0.44
≥ 10 coverage ratio	0.18	0.29	0.27

Looking at the content of *WEP* articles, it appears that contributions are markedly dominated by a limited number of categories. As shown below (see Figure 1.1), the “government” category is very well represented and accounts for almost half of all keywords attributed (44%). To a much lesser extent, the “political philosophy” category is also over-represented (18%). In contrast with the sophisticated definition given by Manuel Cervera-Marzal in this book, political philosophy is here understood in a broader sense, as the general study of political ideologies, and is conceptually differentiated from political theory. While it may be objected that the success of government and political philosophy is explained by the fact that these are also the two largest categories in the Taylor & Francis index for Politics (see Table 1.1), the

gap is too important to ignore these observations. If we look at what the “government” category contains, the differences become even more contrasted. One single keyword, “political parties”, accounts for 27% of the “government” category and 12% of the general classification. Regarding the state of the discipline at that time, the strong emphasis on political parties is not surprising. After more than a decade of founding contributions to comparative party studies made by fathers of the discipline such as LaPalombara and Weiner (1996) or Lipset and Rokkan (2008), the 1970s were particularly stimulating years for the study of party politics. More than any other publication, Sartori’s *Parties and Party Systems* (1976), “perhaps the most important single contribution to the field”, is characteristic of that trend (Mair 2008: 211). The dominance of the study of political parties in *West European Politics* nonetheless deserves to be highlighted as a marked feature of the journal. Regarding the selection of cases, a certain imbalance can also be noticed. On the one hand, *WEP* does offer a forum for the study and the discussion of both large and small democracies in Europe. Every member of the European Communities has been addressed at least once during the period, in addition to other European states. The United States of America has also been discussed once, which indicates that *WEP* is not *sensu stricto* limited to the study of European countries. On the other hand, large member states received the lion’s share of coverage. Together, France, West Germany, the United Kingdom and Italy comprise 68% of the cases studied.

Figure 1.1: Percentage of keywords per category



Interestingly, it can be seen that *West European Politics* began as a journal of comparative politics with an open orientation, and with a very strong core devoted to the examination of the exercise of political authority and underlying ideologies in general, and of political parties in particular. In addition, although faithful to its commitment to be receptive not only to changes in large states, but to what happens in smaller ones too, *WEP* devoted most of its attention to the study of the largest. In the absence of further temporal benchmarks, *West European Politics*’ positioning over

its early years may be described as torn between examining the one and exploring the many.

2.2. 1988-1997: *WEP's tardy look at the EU*

Before 1993, EU-related topics were almost a non-issue for *West European Politics*. As we have seen, between 1978 and 1987 most of the categories we use in this chapter received only limited coverage and “European Union Politics” is certainly one of these (see Figure 1.1). Over the first ten years of publication, the average coverage EU topics was only 2%. At that time, European politics had not yet permeated beyond dedicated journals (see for instance Camille Kelbel’s chapter in this book). Considering the work in progress it represents, its *sui generis* nature, and the organization of the first European elections in 1979, the quasi-absence of contributions related to European integration is surprising. During the second period analysed, the implications of the Single European Act seem not to have brought about any major change in coverage as, up until 1993, saliency remained very low. However, the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty seems to have changed the situation. Between 1993 and 1997, “European Union Politics” became the second most important category and the third in the 1988-97 period overall, which leads us to two observations. Firstly, comparative politics is not a science of the present times, although in the medium term, it is not blind to contemporary events affecting its environment. Secondly, the attention paid to EU-related topics in the 1990s is not limited to *West European Politics*. The emergence of Europe as a political issue *per se* – from this period on, as a European economic and political union – is characteristic of a more general awareness. Henceforth, after previously being limited to international and EU studies, the EU entered a new comparative age. Considering the results for 1978-1987, it is no surprise either that pioneering work by comparativists on the subject emerged in combination with what constitutes their preferred research topic, i.e. political parties. This is the case with, for instance, Delwit’s *Socialists Parties and European Integration* (1995), Gaffney’s *Political Parties and the European Union* (1996), and Hix and Lord’s *Political Parties in the European Union* (1997).

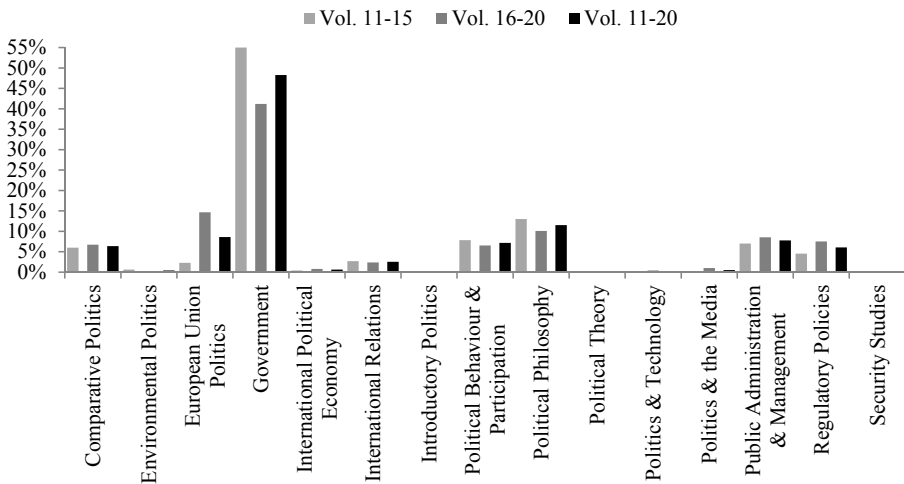
Besides the emergence of the EU, other developments in the journal, although less significant, deserve to be pointed out. Compared to 1978-1987, multi-occurrence ratios increase during the later periods, despite the general coverage ratio remaining consistent (Table 1.3). While this may be partly due to the rise in the number of issues published, it is also a sign that the journal was gaining maturity, in the sense that it was more likely to concentrate on a smaller number of related topics. It is also representative of a change to its original positioning.

Table 1.3: Coverage ratios 1988-1997

	Vol. 11-15	Vol. 16-20	Vol. 11-20
General coverage ratio	0.60	0.58	0.70
≥ 5 coverage ratio	0.44	0.52	0.59
≥ 10 coverage ratio	0.28	0.37	0.43

Concerning the representation of categories between 1988 and 1997, the rise of EU-related issues corresponds to a significant decrease in the salience of the “political philosophy” category (see Figure 1.2). Contrarily to what has been observed about EU developments, the collapse of the Soviet Union and its consequences did not feed explicit debates within the journal about the place of ideologies in a post-communist Europe. Aside from this, things remained rather similar to the previous period and confirm *WEP*'s orientation as a journal devoted to the exercise of political authority in various contexts and with a broad perspective. From 1988 to 1997, the domination of “government”-related issues in general and political parties in particular, was strengthened even further. Henceforth, the “government” category represents 48% of the keywords attributed (44% over 1978-1987) and political parties count for 14% (12% over 1978-1987). Regarding the selection of cases, we can observe a slight opening up of the journal to smaller states. While France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom occupy less importance (-14%), the Netherlands and Sweden were particularly discussed, as they together account for 15% of cases addressed (8% and 7% respectively). While this is largely explained by the publication of dedicated special issues, it also means that the saliency of a country is not (only) related to the size of its population. Accordingly, Spain, despite its size, does not receive a lot of attention, as was already the case during the former period. Finally, the inclusion of New Zealand confirms, as was previously the case with the United States of America, that *WEP* is not limited to the European continent, although focused on it.

Figure 1.2: Percentage of keywords per category



After ten years spent encouraging eclecticism, while defending a strong editorial line centred on political parties and government issues, *West European Politics* remained largely faithful to its original trajectory. During its second decade of existence, while preserving pluralism in its coverage, the journal was nonetheless evolving, and tended to be more centred on its core, despite opening up to smaller

European states. Above all, the period was characterized by one major change, which was the breakthrough of the EU.

2.3. 1998-2007: *Forging ahead*

In contrast to the previous decade, *WEP* did not experience any major changes in the topics addressed during the 1998-2007 period, thus confirming a certain normalization of the field covered. In 2003, after twenty-five years of existence, the shift from four to five issues was also a sign of good health, for a journal well on track. Performing without conforming, *West European Politics* also remained open to socio-economic developments in its environment. Beyond the general stability of the content analysed, the 1998-2007 years are first and foremost noteworthy for the range of countries studied. Most clearly, the period is marked by the opening of *WEP* to Central and Eastern democracies. While challenging the journal's geographical classification – to what extent does speaking of Western Europe still make any sense? – the inclusion of Central and Eastern European democracies represented recognition from the academic world. The presence of these countries in a journal devoted to the study of established democracies may be understood as independent recognition of the degree of the maturity which these states had reached. More than ten years after the dissolution of the Eastern bloc and two years before some of these countries acceded to the EU, their presence in the journal is representative of their reaching a certain stage on their roads towards (Western) democracy, and the end of the so-called “transition” period.

Among the three periods studied and despite the publication of a fifth annual issue since 2003, issues between 1988 and 2007 show the lowest ratio of general coverage. These are also the issues with the highest multi-occurrence ratios, which means that the articles published tended to cover a lower number of issues but to address them with higher regularity (see Table 1.4). These results from the 1988-1997 period are consistent with those previously observed for 1988-1997, which indicates the coherence of *WEP's* editorial line.

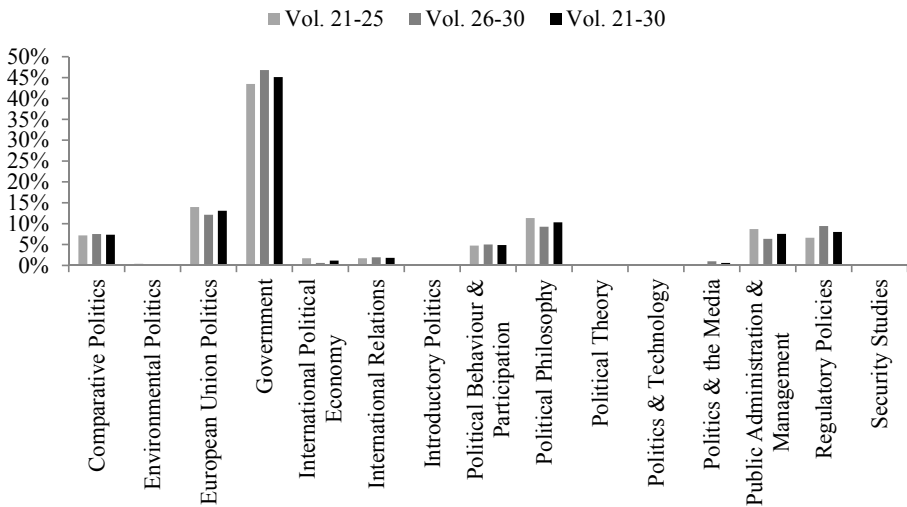
Table 1.4: Coverage ratios 1998-2007

	Vol. 21-25	Vol. 26-30	Vol. 21-30
General coverage ratio	0.56	0.57	0.66
≥ 5 coverage ratio	0.63	0.57	0.61
≥ 10 coverage ratio	0.44	0.45	0.51

Looking more closely at the data, the domination of the “government” category remains stable over time (45%, -3%). Five second-rank categories then occupy the rest of *WEP's* agenda. Together, they account for 46% of keywords referenced (see Figure 1.3). Combined with the “government” category, this means that six categories out of the fifteen included in the index represent 95% of the descriptors attributed; that is to say, the remaining topics received only occasional attention, if any. This is the case with political theory for instance, which is largely absent from *West European Politics* and, to a lesser extent, International Relations. After a decade of increasing saliency, EU politics continues to be popular among comparativists

and, henceforth, the associated category is the second most often referenced. This confirms the dual trend already noticed between 1988 and 1997. Firstly, EU politics was becoming more mainstream, in the sense that it was no longer restricted to dedicated specialists. Secondly, as a consequence, the EU was increasingly discussed and analysed as “regular” politics through the comparative lens, and, in turn, was becoming increasingly normalized. During this period, although they remain the most addressed topic, political parties register a lower score, with an average of 21.8% of the “government” category (-7%) and 9.8% (-4%) of the total amount of keywords attributed. Finally, behind political parties, attention was concentrated around other popular keywords, namely “comparative politics” (7%), “European integration” (6%), “political institutions” (5%), “governance” (5%) and “budgetary and economic policy” (5%). Taken together, these topics constitute *West European Politics’* DNA. By 2007, *West European Politics* had resolutely opened up to Eastern and Central Europe. Of the ten countries joining the EU in 2004, eight – i.e. the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia – were addressed at least once. Quantitatively, they only represented a small number of the cases selected, but this is mainly due to the fact that Central and Eastern countries were generally treated as a single bloc and were thus not included in the count. Once again, a few countries outside continental Europe such as Australia, Canada and the United States of America also appeared on the list between 1998 and 2007. Looking back at thirty years of publication, it appears that all the countries addressed which were located outside the strictly European environment (including Iceland, Norway and Switzerland) were English-speaking countries.

Figure 1.3: Percentage of keywords per category



2.4. 1978-2008: *West European Politics*, from “splendide isolement” to ongoing internationalization

The story of *West European Politics* would not be complete without shedding light on those individuals who constitute its beating heart, i.e. the authors. In the following section, I identify the location of the contributing authors according to their university affiliation as given by the journal at the time of their publication. In accordance with what has been highlighted already, the journal once again appeared to be torn. Looking at the data collected (see Table 1.5), it is striking how predominant UK- and US-based authors are. Together, they represent 68% of the authors published over the three periods of time analysed (57% and 43% respectively). Over time, this situation was also changing, shedding light on the place occupied by European comparative politics.

Table 1.5: Authors' affiliation

	Vol. 1-10	Vol. 11-20	Vol. 21-30
UK/USA	0.68	0.57	0.43
FR/GE/IT	0.16	0.18	0.17
Others EEC/EU	0.06	0.16	0.26
Others non-EU	0.09	0.09	0.13
Total EEC/EU	0.68	0.72	0.71

It was during the early years of the journal that this situation was the most contrasting. Between 1978 and 1987, authors based in the United Kingdom and in the United States accounted for 68% of the articles published (45% and 23% respectively). At that time then, *West European Politics* was essentially a British and American journal about political and social changes in Europe. The fact that the journal was created by two lecturers based in London and that English is the language of publication is probably a facilitating factor for authors from those two countries. However, it is difficult to believe that language alone can explain the difference. Despite the editor's willingness to open up to smaller countries, the predominance of British and American authors is also indicative of both the compartmentalization between academic worlds and, to a certain extent, of the influence of research in comparative politics in these two countries. In the words of Yves Mény, the time was one of “*Splendide isolement*” (Mény 2008). However, over thirty years, things have progressively changed. Firstly, the proportion of the journal occupied by British and American authors is decreasing. This is particularly true for those from the United Kingdom, whose representation falls from 45% between 1978 and 1988 to 27% between 1997 and 2008. And while by the end of the third period the United Kingdom and the United States remain at the forefront, their relative withdrawal seems to have benefited small EU democracies; although the enlargement of the EU directly impacts on the results for this category, these countries gained visibility within the journal and accounted for one quarter of the contributions during the final period. However, despite their recent inclusion on WEP's agenda, it must be noted that, in the final period, among EU newcomers only Hungary and Slovakia were represented. The “other non-EU” category is rather stable over the period and is constituted by countries

that are now EU members but which were not at that time, European countries which have not joined the EU, Commonwealth countries, and other OECD members, such as Israel and Japan. In the long run, *West European Politics* seems to be opening up. Observations are also encouraging for European comparative politics. Wherever they come from, political scientists in Europe are increasingly engaging in dialogue with one another. In that sense, it seems fair to see in *WEP* some welcome promises of an “ongoing internationalization”.

3. From content to challenges: questioning the core values of European comparative politics

3.1. Political parties in the 21st century: old dogs, new tricks?

Among the findings from the content analysis, the most persistent and robust is the undisputed dominance of political parties. For the past thirty years, these have been so central to the journal that it is now difficult to imagine what it would be without them. However, the future is shaping up to be no bed of roses for political parties in Europe. Among other issues, the individuation of societies, the transfer of sovereignty towards sub- and supranational entities, and the globalization of the economy are affecting political competition. Compared to “mass parties” of the past, their successors are said to have lost their ties with voters, to the point that the question of their relevance – “Do parties matter?” (Mair 2008: 217) – is being asked more than ever before.

From a disciplinary perspective, it is unlikely that we will see political parties disappear from research agendas, even in the long run. There is a variety of reasons for this. To start with, they remain fundamental actors in the exercise of political authority and, by extension, pillars of our democracies (Katz and Crotty 2006: 1). As reviewed by Caroline Close’s chapter in this book, the potential decline of political parties is also an important source for research. Organizationally, institutionally, or ideologically, the “crisis of political parties” has proved to be a recurring theme within the literature (Delwit 2013: 261). The different subfields related to the study of political parties themselves appear to be experiencing a different destiny (see Close in this volume). Finally, the passage of time itself is continuously adding new facts which deserve scientific attention. However, the centrality of political parties on the discipline’s agenda is a tricky issue. When combined with high saliency, centrality may lead to a monopolization of attention, which is often synonymous with conformity and doing “more of the same”. The risk of path dependency is even greater in an era where we have unprecedented capabilities for collecting and tracking data across time. Current research is nonetheless encouraging. Credit should be given to comparative European politics, and to *West European Politics* in particular, for the richness of the topics covered, the plurality of points of view gathered, and the variety of cases addressed. In turn, the success of *WEP* as a “generalist” journal covering a broad range of issues – although oriented around a well-identified core – illustrates the importance of flexibility in research. In particular, the increasing attention paid to the EU, in a journal not initially designed to study it, reveals comparativists’ awareness of this evolving political entity and their ability to cope with change. Based on the results of our content analysis, it is likely that political parties and the EU will increasingly be addressed together, as they now constitute the two largest categories. However,

according to the literature on Europeanization, national political parties are mostly “missing in action” at the EU level (Ladrech 2007).

Whatever the functions they perform, the organizational model they adopt, or the way they connect with civil society, “parties have always been in a process of change” (Katz and Crotty 2006: 1). Yet, in a pessimistic climate, marked by economic crisis and low levels of trust in political institutions⁵, the limited Europeanization they have experienced currently calls into question their ability to learn “new tricks”. Motivated by this question, various authors have entered the debate about what role they should play at the EU level (Hix and Bartolini 2006). Almost thirteen years after the publication of the Commission’s White Paper on Governance and the recognition of the need for more legitimacy at the EU level, the question of parties’ ability to find common ground with EU institutions – i.e. to what extent both act as mutual catalysts or burdens (Hix, Noury, Roland 2005; Moschonas 2009) – remains unresolved.

3.2. West European Politics opening up: one step at a time

Besides an analysis of the journal’s content, two other major changes in *West European Politics* have been previously highlighted: the enlargement of the geographical area covered by the journal and the opening up of the scientific community which contributes to it. In different ways, both provide insights about *WEP*’s editorial line.

Regarding the selection of cases to be addressed, *WEP* does not provide much information. On the website, no guidance is given about this question, except possibly the journal’s title. However, the analysis conducted above may help to clarify things. Of course, EU member states are extensively covered by the journal, and although not all of them have received specific attention over the thirty years studied, it may be expected that sooner or later they will do so. As noted already, several English-speaking countries across the world – i.e. the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia – were also covered, although they represent a very limited number of contributions. Shifting attention to the remaining cases, it is strikingly obvious that only a small proportion of Continental Europe is covered. Iceland is the only country applying to join the EU that has been addressed over the period and, with the exception of Israel, none of the countries constituting the current EU neighbourhood were selected. Considering the previous remarks, their not being “Western” does not appear to explain their exclusion as, strictly speaking, the term has been largely blurred by the latest enlargements. However, this fact represents an indirect way of confirming the focus put on the study of liberal democracy. Indeed, it appears that to be a democracy is a necessary condition for selection as, in thirty years, no authoritarian regime has been addressed as such. Furthermore, although the journal used to cover young democracies, as was the case with Spain (Medhurst 1978), Portugal (Gallagher 1979) and Greece (Danopoulos and Patel 1980), being a mature democracy – although the term itself deserves more

⁵ Since 2007, the level of trust in the political institutions has continuously decreased among European citizens and in 2013 reached an average of 31% regarding the European Union, 25% in Parliaments and 23% in Governments. European Commission, DG for Communication, *Standard Eurobarometer 80* (autumn 2013), http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/index_en.htm, 16/01/2014.

attention – seems to have become a criterion of selection. Over time, the editorial board have thus become more reluctant to study “fresh” democratic regimes. It is true that defining a strong editorial line requires narrowing the scope of the journal’s coverage. Moreover, younger democracies are empirically challenging to study because less data is generally available. Nonetheless, those countries would certainly benefit from more attention from comparativists. In turn, they may constitute a source of inspiration to comparative politics and challenging fields for the application of the tools developed by political scientists.

The progressive inclusion of authors from different countries is also representative of how boundaries may evolve with the passage of time. In thirty years, *West European Politics* went from an arena dominated by the United Kingdom and the United States to a much more balanced place, where institutions from different countries receive better representation. This is certainly encouraging for political science in Europe and for non native English-speaking institutions. Despite academic rankings indicating the dominance of US and UK institutions, this demonstrates that quality research is not confined to these countries, and that it can even help develop effective transnational networks. Yet, up to now, Eastern countries have been largely excluded from this development. Although it would be unfair to put the blame on the editorial board, let us hope that these countries can join the *West European Politics* family as soon as possible, in order for it to go further in its mission of uniting not only states, but also people.

Conclusion

Drawing its sources from the journal itself, this chapter is based on a content analysis of *WEP* articles’ abstracts using a system of keyword assignment. It thus constitutes an inductive piece of research, and must be understood as such. Hence, the data presented comes directly from the journal and is related to the content it addresses. As shown, the results highlight the way in which *West European Politics* promotes pluralism in the range of topics addressed, although at its core it is devoted to the study of political parties, which are overwhelmingly prevalent. The results also indicate how the EU, although emerging as an issue fairly late in the journal’s history, has become a major focal point. However, the analysis is not, strictly speaking, limited to the journal and *West European Politics* may be used with caution as a thermometer for measuring the evolution of comparative politics in Europe. Used in this way, the analysis indicates how the discipline and the community of researchers behind it are increasingly opening up and becoming more Europeanized. Based on the content analysis, I also came across what may constitute two challenges to the journal and to the discipline: specialising while avoiding conformity, and managing diversity in the selection of cases. Although the two may seem unconnected at first glance, they in all likelihood constitute pieces of the same larger puzzle. This chapter does not claim to have found the solution to these challenges, or to give an exhaustive description of developments in European comparative politics over the periods studied. As stated at the beginning, history is often subject to interpretation, and the history of European political science is no exception to the rule. This chapter is intended to deliver a rigorous and innovative reading of *WEP* and, in its own way, contribute to the debate.

