

Toward a comparative politics of France

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We began this Handbook by noting the turbulent nature of French political life. We wanted to explore how scholars have tried to make sense of the shocks and upheavals that France has experienced over the years, particularly during the Fifth Republic since 1958. How has France been studied? What paradigms have emerged and how have they changed over time? We also wanted to place these questions in a comparative perspective. In what ways have scholars of France learned from their colleagues elsewhere? To what extent have students of French political life shaped the international research agenda? Have there been separate and parallel scholarly developments in France relative to elsewhere, or has there been a cross-national dialog?

In this Conclusion we reflect on how scholars have addressed these questions and the observations they have made about them. What has been the object of study? What aspects of the world have scholars of France focused on? What has been the unit of analysis? Has the ontological focus of the study of French politics changed over time? How does it compare with the equivalent focus elsewhere? From an epistemological perspective, what do we know about French political life, or, rather, what do scholars think we can know about French politics? Can we identify general laws of political life that apply equally to France as elsewhere? By contrast, is France so different that we have to place the study of French political life in its specific historical, social, and cultural context, identifying a specific French perspective to more general trends? Can we know even that much about France in general? Is France such a diverse place that we can expect to draw only very local and contingent conclusions, perhaps even highly subjective, observer-dependent interpretations? From a

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methodological perspective, how has France been studied? What has been the relative weight of deductive versus inductive methods? Have scholars studied France as a case on its own, or as one case amongst at least one other and perhaps many others in a comparative study? Whether the focus is comparative or purely French, have scholars preferred quantitative or qualitative methods, or a mix of both? What particular methods have been used? Has there been a tendency towards survey research, elite interviewing, participant observation, and so on? In these terms, we wish to sketch at least a basic map of the study of French politics as it has appeared in this Handbook.

In addition, we wish to relate the scholarship on France to more practical issues. Throughout this Handbook we have asked scholars not merely to report on how France has been studied, but also to identify the most important political and policy developments in the various areas under consideration. In this Conclusion we wish to return at least briefly to this theme. How has France changed over time and how has scholarship reacted to these changes? Moreover, given that we are in a period of profound economic, social, and international turbulence, where does France stand now in relation to other countries, and how do we expect future scholarship to take account of current challenges?

There are three sections to this Conclusion. The first reviews the general trends in the study of French politics from a comparative perspective, revisiting the outside-in, inside-out themes that we introduced in Chapter 1. The second section focuses on the individual chapters in more detail and puts forth a classification of chapters in terms of what they tell us about the study of French politics. What, if any, is the evidence of international scholarly convergence across the different subject areas? Is France studied in the same way as any other country, or is the scholarly tradition among scholars of France very different? Is there a high level of scholarly convergence in some areas, but only a very low level in others? In the third section, we try to explore potential explanations for diverging trends. What about the relative strength of a given subdiscipline in France? What about real-world changes? We conclude by exploring some assumptions about the future of the study of French politics.

The development of the study of French Politics in comparative perspective

In Chapter 1 we introduced the idea of thinking about the study of French politics from both an inside-out and an outside-in perspective. We think of the former as the extent to which the academic study of French political life has shaped developments within the discipline of political science elsewhere, and the latter as the extent to which the academic study of French political life has been shaped by developments within the discipline of political science outside France. In this section, we chart the development of the study of French politics from these perspectives. Reflecting on what we have learned from the various chapters in the Handbook, we identify four periods in the study of French political life. This schema is deliberately broad. We do not wish to imply that it fits every subject area, or that the time periods are rigidly fixed. Certainly, we do not suggest that the authors of the Handbook chapters would



necessarily agree with this characterization. We think, though, that it can provide an interesting and deliberately provocative summary of how the study of French politics has developed over time.

The height of the inside-out perspective: late nineteenth century to the 1960s

The first period runs from the late nineteenth century to the 1960s. It captures the beginning of politics as an object of professional study through to political developments associated with the onset of the Fifth Republic. This is the period when the inside-out perspective was strongest. During this time a small number of French scholars developed paradigms that were highly influential outside France. This is most notably the case for Émile Durkheim in the late nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century and the study of sociology. It is also the case for Maurice Duverger in the 1950s and 1960s and the study of political parties, electoral systems, and party systems. Indeed, Duverger's influence is greater still. It is worth remembering that, immediately following the end of the Second World War, Duverger, along with a number of French colleagues, was instrumental in setting up the International Political Science Association/Association Internationale de Science Politique (IPSA/AISP). At this point, then, French scholars were at the forefront of international scholarly developments. Indeed, testimony to the founding French influence on the IPSA/AISP is that it still has a bilingual policy with French and English as the two official working languages of the organization.

Apart from Durkheim and Duverger, we can point to others whose influence was also strongly felt outside France. They include Léon Duguit and the study of public law in the early part of the twentieth century; André Siegfried and the study of electoral geography especially in the 1920s and 1930s; and Raymond Aron and his impact on the study of international relations in the 1950s. In short, at a time when the studies of politics, society, and the law were in their infancy, French scholars were able to shape general thinking, including comparative theory-building, on all of these topics.

French exceptionalism goes international: 1960s–1980s

The second period runs from the 1960s through to the 1980s. This was a time when there was the potential for the outside-in perspective to take hold, but it failed to do so, leaving France to be studied as a special case. In this period, the study of France was internationalized. France was on the curriculum in many universities outside the country, notably in the USA and the UK. In the end, though, what emerged in these areas was the paradigm of French exceptionalism. Stanley Hoffmann's work perhaps best sums up this development. The idea of French exceptionalism was highly damaging for comparative theory-building. It encouraged scholars interested in France to focus on France separately from other countries. It also encouraged comparativists to ignore France, because they were being told that it was different and, by extension, incommensurable. For example, it is noticeable, as Mayer and Tiberj remind us in their chapter, that France was not included in Almond and Verba's classic study of the civic culture.



It is perhaps no coincidence that the beginning of this second period coincides with the time when the Gaullist control over the Fifth Republic was at its strongest. French greatness, France's special role in world affairs, France's cultural distinctiveness, and equivalent themes were a common part of political discourse at the time. Scholarship on France was perhaps shaped, wittingly or unwittingly, by this rhetoric. In France, this period also marked a key turning point in the development of the discipline. In 1971 there was the first "*concours d'agrégation*" for politics. This is the professional exam that allows entry to the professorial *corps* of university professors. From this point on, scholars in France studying politics had an incentive to follow the curriculum necessary for obtaining the *agrégation*.

Interestingly, even though Duverger was one of the people most closely involved with setting up the exam, the curriculum tended to downplay comparative politics.¹ Instead, it helped to reinforce the strength of political sociology in France. Indeed, a number of authors in this volume have stressed the importance of this tradition in the development of scholarship in their area. We can see that this is not a coincidence. For various reasons, then, the second period was marked by a certain retrenchment. France was widely studied outside the country, but it tended to be studied as a special case. In France the study of French political life was professionalized, but in a way that did not necessarily encourage scholars to adopt an outside-in perspective.

Inside-In!: French approaches resist american domination in the 1980s–1990s

The third period covers the 1980s and 1990s. Rather than outside-in or inside-out, we might think of this period as "inside-in!" This period is marked by major policy developments both within France and across Europe, as well as profound changes within the international political science scholarly community. Within France, the election of President Mitterrand brought about an immediate wave of policy reforms, including decentralization and media pluralism. This period also saw ongoing economic difficulties that questioned received wisdoms about social and economic policy, leading to changes in the role of the state generally. There were also major changes to the party system. More broadly, the process of Europeanization moved on apace at this time, generating new dynamics that affected France in many ways. French politics had clearly changed. Unsurprisingly, scholars wanted to study these developments and in detail. The result, though, was a certain academic retrenchment with the focus turning inward on France and to the study of the transformations that the country was undergoing.

More broadly, political science was changing. In the US, the driver of international scholarship in the discipline, there was a rational choice revolution. This is a deductive paradigm based on certain assumptions that can be perceived to be

¹ It is perhaps worth noting that Duverger's participation in international scholarly political science conferences seems to have ended in the late 1960s. He was also the author of a textbook on political sociology. So, the particular disciplinary focus of the *agrégation* was perhaps not inconsistent with Duverger's personal trajectory at that time and, needless to say, he was not the only figure involved in the process of professionalizing the discipline of political science in France.



individualistic. Empirically, it tends to be associated with quantitative methods. It was also often expressed through a focus on institutions and the effect of variation in institutional features on various outcomes. In France, to the extent that it was acknowledged, this revolution was met with skepticism and sometimes outright hostility. There was a fear in some quarters that methods were being imposed on the discipline.² There was a more general belief that this way of doing political science did not suit the French tradition, which was strongly influenced by the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and which rejected the study of institutions that were seen as belonging to the domain of constitutional or public law. The result was a growing gap between the study of politics in France and developments in political science elsewhere, particularly the US.

The French touch contributes to comparative theory-building in the 2000s

The fourth period goes from the 2000s to the present. This is a messier period. There has certainly been an opening up of the study of French politics. This is particularly noticeable at the European level. French scholars now regularly collaborate in broad research projects with colleagues elsewhere. This is a clear result of Europeanization, though there has also been more collaboration with US colleagues. This is also a result of professional developments, such as the openness of the Association Française de Science Politique to work with the American Political Science Association and vice versa. In addition, we should not forget the importance of the increasing trend towards the international ranking of universities by organizations such as The Times Higher or the QS World University Rankings. French universities want to improve their place in these rankings. One consequence is that they have rewarded journal publications in English more than was previously the case, sometimes covering the cost of translation from the original French. Finally, English-language skills have also increased almost beyond measure over time. This point applies to franco-phone scholars, but also to scholars throughout Europe, where English has become the working language of academia, facilitating cross-national collaboration.

In this context, the outside-in perspective has become more pronounced. Scholars of France are now more familiar with comparative scholarship and have found fruitful ways of incorporating it into their research. There has also been a revival of the inside-out perspective. The French focus on political sociology and micro-level studies, including policy studies, has resonated elsewhere, particularly in Europe. There is also a middle-range position where the study of particular areas is considered to have a “French touch.” What this usually means is that scholars are aware of international academic developments, but they are also aware of the specific French context in which those developments have occurred, with scholarship reflecting the mix of these two traditions.

² In the US, political science departments were split apart as the rational choice revolution gained ground. In this sense, the fears in France of a paradigmatic takeover were grounded in a certain clearly observable US experience.



We stressed that this was a broad-brush way of trying to capture scholarly developments in the study of French politics. The periodization can be questioned, and the characterization of the developments can be contested. There are, for example, some very clear exceptions. As Nadeau and Lewis-Beck show us in their chapter, the study of French voting behavior has long been internationalized, with the outside-in perspective being dominant for long periods. By contrast, Mayer and Tiberj also show us that the study of political culture still has a very strong inside-in focus. Nonetheless, we do think that this periodization captures some general trends that we have picked up in our reading of the contributions to this Handbook. In the next section, we drill down into the specific chapters, identifying existing levels of convergence and divergence between scholarship on France and broader academic trends in the international arena.

Towards international convergence?

Measuring convergence

In this section we turn to assessing the degree to which the study of French politics as outlined by our contributors has been integrated with international work. We present and apply here a measurement of international convergence to identify the degree to which French scholars and research on France have influenced the international/comparative scholarly agenda outside France (inside-out) on one hand, and the degree to which work on France has been influenced by the international/comparative research agenda outside France (outside-in) on the other.

Ultimately our question is to identify whether there has been a “meeting in the middle” (Nadeau and Lewis-Beck in this volume), or convergence of French and international research so that French and comparative scholarship have a shared analytical agenda which advances in a more systematic manner theory-building and the accumulation of knowledge both in particular substantive areas and in a larger comparative perspective. Thus, integration and convergence do not mean that comparative and international approaches dominate and take over French analysis or that French approaches dictate the analytical parameters for comparative work. Rather, convergence here is about whether French-focused approaches to doing research—what many in this volume have called the “French touch”³—and the findings and foci that come out of those approaches have been incorporated into comparative theory-building efforts, and whether comparative approaches, theory, and findings have penetrated and been embraced in research agendas and scholarly work on France. A further part of this integration is whether the French case itself has gone

³ The “French touch” is typically associated with qualitative approaches that are more grounded in sociology, inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, where the objects of analyses are at the micro level, often with a detailed “ethnographic” focus on actors and often on discourse through for example “référentiels” (Muller 1992). The French touch also tends to shun hypothesis testing and formalization of concepts and theory, associated with more anglo-american positivist approaches. For a discussion of the French touch in public policy analysis see Boussaguet et al. (2015).



Table 1 Towards convergence

Elections and Voting—Nadeau and Lewis-Beck (OF)
European Integration Policy—Parsons (OF)
Europeanization of Public Policy—Saurugger (F)
Gender Policy—Mazur and Revillard (B)
Regional and Local Government—Pasquier (F)
Varieties of Capitalism—Schmidt (OF)

Key: Institutional base of the author(s): F = France, OF = Outside France, B = Both

beyond being identified in exceptional terms, defined always as a deviant case or an outlier and, hence, not taken into consideration in comparative theory-building, or whether more general comparative and international theories have been adapted to explain and account for the dynamics and determinants of the French case. Thus, convergence has the potential for more valid and reliable theories and better science more generally; a tenet that is espoused by many of our contributors to this volume, though admittedly not all.

As we have already asserted above, the 2000s have been marked by an increased integration between French and international theory-building and research communities and the rich, qualitative, actor-oriented, micro-level research on France being present in international and comparative research methodologies and being used to test and advance theories, often with the presence of French researchers in large-scale projects. The question we assess systematically here is the degree to which this has occurred in the 25 areas in Parts II–VI of this Handbook, from the early 2000s to the present. We develop a composite measure of convergence based on coding both inside-out and outside-in developments in each area of study.

Three profiles of convergence

Our assessment of these 25 areas identifies three patterns or profiles of integration. We call the first category “towards convergence,” because international and French research communities are not completely in sync; however, there has been a marked increase since the early 2000s in the presence of shared research agendas and common concepts, with the “French touch” being exported and used to move theory-building and knowledge accumulation forward whether it be through adopting French methodologies or employing French findings. In these cases, France has become “just another case” to be used in comparative analysis, and theories are able to cover the French case. Scholars based in France in these areas work on an equal footing with researchers from outside France to design research projects and move research agendas forward. We estimate that a certain level of convergence has been achieved in six out of our 25 areas, or 24 per cent of the cases (see Table 1).

In the second category we identify a slightly lower number of areas that have achieved “Asymmetric Convergence” (See Table 2)—five chapters, or 20 per cent of the total. In this second category, French work has brought in international work and has been in dialog with it, but the international and comparative



Table 2 Asymmetric convergence

Economic Policy—Clift (OF)
Environmental and Energy Policy—Halpern (F)
Identity—Kastoryano and Escafré-Dublet (F)
Political Communication—Gerstlé (F)
Women’s Movements and Feminism—Bereni (F)

Key: Institutional base of the author(s): F = France, OF = Outside France, B = Both

Table 3 Divergence

Low divergence	High divergence
Constitutional Politics—Brouard (F)	National Identity—Duschesne (F)
Executive Politics—Elgie and Grossman (B)	Parties and Party Systems—Haegel (F)*
International Aid and Development—Cumming (OF)	Political Culture—Mayer and Tiberj (F)
Globalization—Goyer and Glatzer (OF)	Public Administration—Bezes (F)
Interest Groups—McCauley (OF)	Security Policy—Irondele, Joana, and Mérand (B)
Legislative Politics—Costa (F)	
Multi-Level Governance—Pinson (F)	
Representation—Sauger (F)	
Social Movements—Fillieule (OF)	

Key: Institutional base of the author(s): F = France, OF = Outside France, B = Both, * = highest level of divergence

scholarship has not been very responsive to French analyses. Here, the French case is often covered in comparative studies without any “French touch” approach, or French scholars participate in large-scale comparative projects designed by scholars outside France without any reference to French work in that area.

The third category shows that convergence and integration has been limited in over half of the areas of study covered in the Handbook—14 out of 25 areas (See Table 3). Here, divergence between international/comparative research agendas and French touch approaches seems to be the norm. In nine of the 25 areas, there is a clear “gap” between international/comparative analysis and scholarship on France where few approaches, concepts, or methods are shared and where the French case, when it is covered, is neither the main focus of scholars working on France nor is brought centrally into comparative theory-building. In five areas, the gap is very wide, with very little overlap or integration. In the cases of the study of Political Culture and National Identity core concepts in the field at the international level do not resonate with French analysts—what Duchesne calls a “blind spot.” Haegel argues that the gap between the international and French research communities and scholarly agendas on political parties and political party systems has actually widened in recent years; a development that is not found in any other area covered in this volume.



Explaining patterns of convergence and divergence

So what accounts for this variation in convergence or divergence of work on and in France with the rest of the field? As the first section of this chapter asserted, there is a certain level of integration across all areas covered in this book. Even in the cases of high divergence, there have been, since the 2000s, some interchange and dialog and in nearly half of the cases quite high levels of integration. While divergence between French and international approaches may still be the norm and while a critical mass of areas is still quite resistant, the study of French politics has come a long way over the last 20 years, reflecting the processes of internationalization and globalization that have been changing research agendas and scholarly approaches both inside and outside France. France has become less of an outlier in theory-building and French approaches have been taken on board in international theory-construction efforts, although in only a fifth of the areas covered in this volume in a serious way.

In terms of the different substantive areas covered in this book, there is some variation in integration. While all but one of the chapters on institutions (Part III) have a divergent pattern, the chapters on the areas of study on parties, elections, and voters (Part IV) are distributed across all three types of integration. The study of civil society does not produce any convergent areas (Part V); there are two chapters that fall in the asymmetric group and two in the divergent group. The political economy and public policy areas of study are also distributed across all three profiles (Part VI). Area of study, thus, does not appear to be the most important factor in understanding integration.

Factors of variation

It is important to note that no single factor explains the success or failure of integration; thus understanding how to close the gap and promote better dialog between the international and French research communities must be considered within the context of each research arena.

We consider that there are different mechanisms at work. Divergence and convergence, the integration of French research in international comparative research agendas, the relative importance of outside-in and inside-out dynamics: all of this, we argue, depends on a distinct series of factors.

First, the historical development of a particular subdiscipline is particularly important. If there is a strong scholarly tradition in a particular area, this area is likely to have developed its own concepts, methods, and narratives. This should make it more resistant to outside-in dynamics. In this case, integration is only likely if the field has managed to significantly influence the field outside France (i.e. there has been an inside-out tendency). If, however, at the same time this particular field has strongly developed elsewhere and has concentrated on different exchanges, we may simply witness co-existence with little exchange or mutual knowledge. A potential indicator of the development of a given field is simply the scale of the research



community in this area. In a nutshell, the history of the subfield may be an important determinant of the degree of integration.

Following this logic, we should expect more outside-in influence in newer or smaller fields, but this will require the members of these subfields to have the will and the capacity to dialog with approaches developed elsewhere. A study on the publication strategies of French political scientists (Grossman 2010) has shown that subfields strongly diverge on this dimension, largely due to the degree of internationalization of individual researchers in a field. It is true that individual researchers may play an important role as translators or facilitators of contacts between different worlds. François Dosse (1995) has described a similar mechanism in other areas of the French social sciences. If researchers have spent time abroad, visiting or earning degrees, this is likely to create bridges between the two worlds that facilitate integration. A related factor and one not to be underestimated is the degree to which the field at the international level has been dominated by American behavioralism, quantitative methods, and rational choice. Where this is the case, it is difficult for advocates of the French touch to make a difference, while it also makes non-French scholars, at least those scholars based in the US, more critical of the French approach. Finally, there may be a generational issue: as the world grows more integrated, so does the world of the social and political sciences. Younger generations are more open to integration, even if there are also many exceptions.

A second major group of factors relates to the reality of the objects of study with which a given subfield is confronted. For a long time, the “exceptionalist” assumption dominated research agendas both *in* and *on* France, as we have seen in the first section. The main underlying reason was the perceived or real difference between France and other countries in Europe or elsewhere. It may also be related to a certain number of research traditions that were particularly reticent to comparative research, which would add to the historical argument developed above. Over and above researcher strategies or agendas, the real world has certainly dealt a blow to French “exceptionalism.” France has opened up to globalization, as Goyer and Glatzer’s chapter amply illustrates. As France has become less exceptional, research agendas have moved more readily to explore similar phenomena in neighboring countries and to benefit from the experience of studies elsewhere. Again, it is often an individual researcher’s outlook which is important here. Individuals who have studied abroad, traveled, etc. are more likely to build bridges to the rest of the world.

Explaining difference

Looking specifically at the convergence cases, we observe that when research communities are Europeanized—that is when there is a focus on processes of Europeanization—there are always higher levels of integration. As the chapters by Parsons, Saurugger, and Schmidt show, when Europe is brought into the mix, we always find higher levels of convergence. It is thus the reality of European integration that has spurred the integration of research in those areas, at least to some extent. This may also be true for regional and local government as Pasquier’s chapter shows, and also gender-related policies as shown by Mazur and Revillard. But, clearly, elements



specific to the subdiscipline play an important role in those areas too. In the first case, research on regional and local governance is strongly embedded in international research agendas and concentrates on the study of transnational processes, especially in the EU. It is thus no surprise that those resorting to this notion more often than not have a “bridging” background with substantial experience abroad and close links to international research communities. This story is confirmed by Mazur and Revillard on gender-related policies, who have both spent substantial amounts of time working both inside and outside France. In this burgeoning field, recent generations of scholars have clearly relied on international communities to better establish their object of study in France.

The strong convergence in the chapter by Schmidt is essentially due to the fact that political economy remains extremely marginal in France, and that, as a consequence, the field is dominated by scholars based outside France. Thus, there is both little inside-out or outside-in going on here. The few people working in this area in France mainly publish in English and are part of international research communities.

The case of elections, discussed by Nadeau and Lewis-Beck, stands out a little in that it has long been a field that was strongly represented in France, with an established local research tradition, but also permanent exchanges with the rest of the world. Of all the chapters in this category, it is probably the one with the longest record of both inside-out and outside-in dynamics. To a lesser extent, this is true for the fields of Europeanization and multi-level governance, two much “younger” fields.

In the second category, “asymmetric convergence,” like in the first, we find no stable pattern regarding either the history of the subdisciplines and/or of their objects of study. Economic policy has clearly become more integrated as a consequence of globalization. Energy and environmental issues have come to be increasingly recognized as issues that can only be dealt with efficiently in the international arena. But this is certainly not true of the three other fields, which are mainly structured at the national level. In those areas, discipline-specific developments are certainly more important.

None of these areas can be considered “central” in the sense of a place at the center of the discipline. Relative marginality with regard to the central field of political sociology, combined with numerical weakness, certainly limits the capacity of a given subfield to develop a fruitful dialog with international research communities. “Asymmetric integration” may mean that there is a distinct French research tradition in those areas that try to dialog with research communities abroad but—at least—partially fails to do so. The chapter on identity by Kastoryano and Escafré-Dublet is certainly a good example of this, probably also featuring a low level of integration of the field as such.

As far as the chapters on economic policy (Clift), political communication (Gerstlé), and energy and environmental policy (Halpern) are concerned, these are all fields that remain numerically weak in France and where no long-standing French tradition exists. This is maybe less true for economic policy in general, but is certainly true for economic policy from a political-economy perspective. The problems that are dealt with in works on France may be specific, but there is no specifically French approach. Yet, those are areas where a strong public demand for “expert”



input exists, in line with a more applied policymaking agenda in France. This may explain, to an extent, why small research communities exist in France on those issues that are only weakly connected to international research agendas.

Things are a little different for women's movements (Bereni) and identity (Kastoryano and Escafré-Dublet). While both objects have existed for some time, both areas of study have benefited from specific dynamics either in research or real-world changes that have largely reconfigured the field. Dialog exists in all of these fields, but sometimes suffers from differences in approaches or theory-formulation.

Finally, by far the largest amount of chapters conclude that there is soft or strong *divergence* between studies in and on France and the international research agendas. Fundamentally, this demonstrates the extent to which French political science continues to stay outside international research agendas and is, thus, poorly connected to research elsewhere. As Section 1 showed, there was a time when the study of French politics successfully influenced research agendas abroad. This is certainly a lot less the case today.

Overall, there are several main reasons for divergence, but there is certainly a greater stress here on the autonomy of French research agendas, sometimes despite objectively converging research objects. The two exceptions are perhaps the chapters on international aid and development (Cumming) and security policy (Irondele, Joana, and Mérand). Both chapters clearly show that policymaking and decisions in those areas continue to present very distinctive features in France compared to other countries. To a lesser extent this may also apply to French interest groups (McCauley), given the historical hostility towards interest groups in French politics. French exceptionalism appears to have receded less in those areas than others. This probably explains the lack of integration in those specific areas. Too much emphasis on specificity makes comparison more difficult, and, yet, those are the areas where comparative work exists and is even common both in academia and in operational research. Indeed, all three of these chapters provide some evidence that changes may be occurring even in those areas.

For all the other chapters mentioned in Table 3, distinctive research agendas are the main reason for divergence. Fillieule argues that there is a renewal in the work on social movements that has put the stress on rather different aspects and goals from mainstream US or British research in this area. By contrast, Elgie and Grossman argue that the relative weakness of the field in political science and the continuing influence of public lawyers may explain this continuing difference. While the latter point can probably be applied to the study of institutions more generally—see Costa on legislative politics or Brouard on constitutional politics—this is certainly not true for most of the other chapters.

In fact, many divergent areas represent relatively important areas in French political science. Distinctively French approaches and traditions continue to prevail in the study of parties (Haegel), values (Mayer and Tiberj), national identity (Duchesne), and public administration (Bézès). Those areas all feature rather large research communities in France. The central French-language publications, such as the journals *Politix* or *Revue française de Science politique* or the different book series at the Presses de Sciences Po, certainly focus on those issues in particular. Indeed, this is where a majority of dissertation projects emerge. Again, in all of those fields bridges



exist—individual researchers are part of international networks and even EU-funded collaborative research frameworks—but the level of divergence remains the largest.

The persistence of distinctively national research agendas is natural and cannot only be perceived as a disadvantage. Political scientists, like other social scientists, have to serve the community they live in and respond to problems that are actually encountered in French politics. As the chapters by Kastoryano and Escafré-Dublet on identity and by Bezes on public administration clearly show, those problems are mostly homegrown, despite European integration and economic or cultural globalization. This phenomenon is common to most countries with a non-trivial academic community. The real difficulty or challenge, from that point of view, is to successfully combine the participation of academic scholars in national policy debates with a contribution to international research agendas. While there need not be an opposition between these two goals, it often turns out to be difficult to pursue both at the same time.

Conclusion

Over the last two decades there has been an internationalization and particularly a Europeanization of French political life. In many of the chapters of this Handbook, we have heard talk of an equivalent internationalization and Europeanization of French political science. This is not to imply, though, that there is some teleological process at work; some one-way process towards international or European convergence; some inevitable trend towards “modernization.” This point applies to political life generally. The chapters in this volume have shown that in some areas France has been particularly marked by international economic, social, and political developments, whereas in other areas a French exception or at least a French “touch” remains. This point also applies to the development of French political science. We have seen that in some areas of study there is now what amounts to an international community of scholars, notably in areas that focus on European issues. At the same time, though, we have also seen that over the last couple of decades the study of French political parties and institutions broadly understood has become less integrated with the international/comparative scholarly community, focusing more and more on homegrown methods and issues. In short, this Handbook has demonstrated that the study of politics is as contingent as the practice of politics. There are overarching trends that affect everyone, everywhere. Some of these trends are very powerful indeed. Yet however powerful they may be, they are filtered through historical and local conditions. They are also interpreted by individuals who have to make sense of them for themselves on the basis of their own personal experiences.

In this context, we imposed a common schema on our contributors. This was a response to the nature of the exercise we were undertaking. We wanted to cover a wide range of topics, but we also needed to provide a coherent product. The outside-in, inside-out framework helped us to achieve that aim. At the same time, though, we did not impose a particular way of doing political science on our authors—we did not impose a specific methodology. We wanted authors to speak for themselves within the common framework that we set out. This aim was motivated by more



than the purely practical need to produce a cohesive volume. It was also a reflection of our broader academic philosophy. We are not ontological, epistemological, or methodological imperialists. For sure, we do believe that a completely inward-looking scientific community with its own terminology, paradigms, and professional norms will be less rich for adopting such a position. Much will be missed. By the same token, we believe that an international/comparative scholarly community which fails to pay attention to national and local contingencies will also be missing much of academic value.

The challenge is to integrate both the outside-in and inside-out approaches, or at least perhaps to have them coexist peacefully within any given national scholarly community and indeed within the international scholarly community more generally. In a number of the areas covered in this volume, we have a sense that with regard to the study of France a position of integration or mutual coexistence has indeed been reached. In other areas, though, there is still a long way to go. Without wanting to homogenize the study of French political life—and, indeed, starting from a position where we think that any such homogenization is unlikely to occur in any event—we hope that we have set a research agenda for the study of French political life. Indeed, and without meaning to sound too grand, we think that this agenda has the potential to be applied more generally, too.

In this Handbook we have tried to capture the state of the study of French politics. There is no doubt that if we had embarked upon an equivalent exercise 20 years earlier, then we would have captured a very different picture of French political studies. What is more, we have no doubt that if this exercise were to be repeated in 20 years' time, then there would be great developments, too. We only hope that this Oxford Handbook of French Politics will have contributed to some of these developments, and in a positive way.

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