



## A view from France

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The internationalisation of political science in France has been a topic of concern for scholars and professional associations alike. Regardless of the exact definition and indicators (Boncourt 2011: 15), the consensus is that the field of political science in France is relatively disconnected from the international community. Andy Smith, a former President of the French Political Science Association, notes that many non-French political scientists regard French political science as “insular and cut-off from the rest of the world’s political science” (Smith 2020: 261). Yves Déloye and Nonna Mayer, former General Secretary and former President of the French Political Science Association respectively, identify internationalisation as one of the three main challenges facing political science in France over the past 50 years, along with its institutionalisation and demographic development (Déloye and Mayer 2019). Within French political science, a recent report by the French Political Science Association states that there have been improvements in internationalisation, particularly in research and teaching, whilst disparities remain when it comes to publishing in foreign languages. In particular, the Parisian research teams linked with Sciences Po dominate foreign language publications, creating an unequal distribution with other research centres in political science in France (Boncourt et al. 2018).

I will first present the part internationalisation plays in academic careers and how it is framed by universities leadership and, second, discuss my practices of internationalisation within this context.

Like in many other countries, the job market in political science is challenging in France, due to its relatively restricted nature. The field of academic political science is composed of a limited number of professionals. There are approximatively about

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150 CNRS full-time researchers,<sup>1</sup> about 400 tenured lecturers and professors at public universities, and a few dozen of academics at private institutions. These numbers suggest that the opportunities for career advancement in political science in France may be limited, and that competition for available positions is intense.

Becoming a CNRS junior researcher in political science is a highly selective process that involves Ph.D. holders having to get through a national competition, with about only 4 positions available each year. On top of that, these positions are not exclusively open for political scientists.<sup>2</sup> For those seeking a (tenured) associate professorship (*maître de conférences*) at a French public university, the process is carried out in two stages. Firstly, Ph.D. holders must be approved by the National Council of the Universities (CNU), which evaluates their skills in political science. Once they have obtained this qualification, they are then allowed to apply to French universities that open lecturer positions in the discipline. However, the number of available positions is small, usually around a dozen each year, whilst there are roughly 150 qualified individuals annually.<sup>3</sup> The recruitment process for private contracts, such as much of those offered by Sciences Po Paris or the Espol Lille positions, differs slightly but remains highly selective. In that case, the appointments are made by the decision of an ad hoc committee appointed by the institution.

In the next stage of the career, the selection processes are also very competitive. CNRS researchers can apply for senior positions of CNRS research directors, although these positions are rare. For associate professors, there are three different ways to become a full professor in political science at French public universities. At the national level, the *agrégation* competition is open to all Ph.D. holders, including the less experienced ones. At the university level, the 46.1 and more recently the *repyramidage* tracks are available to experienced associate professors who hold a *habilitation* to supervise research (HDR).<sup>4</sup> Every two years, there are approximately 3–5 *agrégation* positions available, with a similar number of 46.1 and *repyramidage* positions together (Duclos and Gourgues 2022). This means that out of the approximately 280 tenured associate professors in political science at public universities, only a maximum of 3–5 individuals can be promoted each year, considering that the *agrégation* positions may also be awarded to external candidates.

<sup>1</sup> CNRS, the French National Centre for Scientific Research (Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique) is one of the main French public research institutions. It is the only French one that includes the social sciences. In 2010, Fabien Jobard counted 129 CNRS researchers in political science (Jobard 2010, 118).

<sup>2</sup> Researchers are appointed depending on their 5-year research project. Sociologists can also be recruited to these positions.

<sup>3</sup> The number of qualified candidates was 145 in 2020 and 152 in 2021 (Lévêque 2021). The qualification remains valid for 4 years.

<sup>4</sup> The 46.1 is a position open to all experienced and ‘habilitated’ (qualified) associate professors, including the ones not working at the university where the position is vacant. The *repyramidage* is a new opportunity of internal promotion, created in 2021 for experienced and habilitated associate professors. These positions are opened by a university to benefit its own associate professors, when it is demonstrated that there is a lack of professors in the discipline. The French Political Science Association published a press release about the very small number of free positions in 2021 and 2022, due to the small number of political scientists at each university <https://www.afsp.info/communique-motion-sur-le-repyramidage/>.



Private institutions are free to organise their own promotions to the full professor level.

Internationalisation is reported to be one of the criteria for each of these recruitment processes and career steps, but it is far from being the only one. The process of recruitment for political science positions in France is multi-dimensional and often unpredictable. From 2013 to 2017, 123 political scientists were recruited by the CNRS, French public universities (associate professorships and *agrégation*), and Sciences Po Paris. Of these 123 recruits, 116 had defended their Ph.D. thesis in France (including 7 co-supervised and co-defended in another country). Amongst those recruited, 45 focused exclusively on the French field for their Ph.D. research, whilst 40 had been postdoctoral researchers abroad, mainly in European countries (Boncourt et al. 2018, 19, 20). Amongst the individuals recruited, those at Sciences Po Paris had the highest level of internationalisation.

Once appointed, French political scientists working at public universities face significant challenges in achieving greater internationalisation in their field. Accepted approaches to increase engagement with the global community of political science is through the acquisition of research grants and /or sabbaticals, and to reduce teaching loads. In France, there are some arrangements to reduce the teaching load for academics that receive specific grants like a European Research Council (ERC) grant, a Institut Universitaire de France (IUF) grant or an Agence National de la Recherche (ANR) young researcher grant. However, only a very few academics benefit from them, especially as some of the grant arrangements have to be approved by the University. Political scientists who work at public universities are also eligible for a sabbatical of one year every six years, or one semester after three years.<sup>5</sup> They can also apply for a period of full-time research at the CNRS, but this is not always granted, unlike in other countries. Additionally, the successful applicants may face a challenge in finding someone to replace them during their absence. The financial compensation from the University only covers casual hours, not a full-time working contract, which means that the teaching workload falls on colleagues most of the time.

Once granted, these research periods offer valuable opportunities to enhance internationalisation. For instance, the University of Lorraine has established an initiative called “Widen Horizons” (<https://www.univ-lorraine.fr/lue/widen-horizons/>), under the overarching framework of “*Lorraine Université d’Excellence*”, which is funded by the French Ministry of Higher Education and Research. This programme provides funding for research stays abroad of three months or longer, usually associated with a sabbatical or a research period at the CNRS. The “Widen Horizons” programme is primarily used by academics and researchers who already have established international connections. In addition to this initiative, there is also a separate programme specifically designed for Ph.D. students to support their field work and international collaborations.

Internationalisation is a concept that is often mentioned in official discourse and strategic plans related to the future of universities. The use of metrics such as the

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<sup>5</sup> The possibility of being awarded a sabbatical exists at private institutions, depending on their internal rules.



number of highly cited researchers, ERC grants, and international university rankings are seen as indicators of “excellence,” but this approach is not without tension. I have occasionally heard about these controversies and debates as a member of my University’s Scientific Council.<sup>6</sup> Internationalisation is often associated with a hard science model and a “publish or perish” mentality. This, along with the competition to achieve good world rankings and be awarded international research grants, greatly intensify the pressure on academics. It is unclear whether this process produces more knowledge or just reinforces cultural standardisation and a “principle of distinction” between dominant and dominated institutions, or dominant and dominated disciplines. In the context of French political science, internationalisation involves developing skills for students that are not typically emphasised in current undergraduate degrees, mostly qualitatively oriented.<sup>7</sup> This carries the risk of moving away from a theoretically grounded and critical academic tradition and towards a more empirical approach that is closer to economics than to history or to sociology.

As a political scientist working in a small political science department at a French public University,<sup>8</sup> I see internationalisation as both a necessity and a challenging process. By going international, I connect with and belong to a broader community, stay informed about cutting-edge methodologies, and gain new insights and perspectives for my research. Internationalisation nourishes and enriches the research process. It provides opportunities to learn about other matters, such as ethical considerations in research, as well as participate in international debates. I like very much working with colleagues from a diversity of countries, as well as discovering and getting inspired by their work.

But on a practical and daily basis, internationalisation is a challenging path. Researchers who use quantitative or more formal methods tend to publish internationally to a greater extent (Grossman quoted in Smith 2020: 264). This results in social science most funded projects at the European or international level focusing

<sup>6</sup> The Scientific Council is “responsible for the quality and coherence of the University’s scientific policy and contributes to the latter’s drafting”, according to the University website (<https://www.univ-lorraine.fr/en/the-universite-de-lorraine/decision-making-and-advisory-bodies/>). The elected representatives come from different disciplines, representing the natural and social sciences, academics, administrative staff and Ph.D. students. From 2017 to 2020, I ran as elected representative for academic staff.

<sup>7</sup> In order to stick to the current orientations of the social sciences, some Sciences Po, such as the ones in Grenoble, Lille or Saint-Germain-en-Laye, as well as universities such as the University of Montpellier or the University of Avignon, have now developed curricula that integrate strong quantitative skills and/or computational data methods to political science training. See “Entretien avec Sophie Duchesne”, *Mag AFSP*, December 2022, 4–7.

<sup>8</sup> Currently, the University of Lorraine employs 6 tenured political scientists (1 full professor, 5 associate professors) as well as one temporary lecturer, out of about 3100 academics and researchers. These 7 people belong to three different departments and faculties of the university, where political science is linked with law, public administration, economics or business, at the Bachelor level, depending on the department/faculty. There is also a Master’s degree in Political Science at the Faculty of Law.

As a research discipline, political science is part of a research team in law and political science, where about 15% of the members are political scientists, and the rest are law academics. This research team is part of a bigger cluster of four research centres in law, political science, business and economics, out of a total of 10 scientific clusters within the University. 3 out of these 10 clusters involve the social sciences and languages, 7 clusters are related to the natural sciences and medicine. The University has a main focus on the natural sciences.



on quantitative data and methods, including, in my field of research, digital traces. At my research centre, we lack many resources that are essential to be part of such big projects, such as access to databases or sophisticated statistical tools, research assistants or technical support for quantitative research and fieldwork, or project management staff. We only have partial access to (specialized) international publications through the library, and software and training that provide the skills required at the international level are unavailable. The local research team is not either a member of major professional organisations like the European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR), as membership is expensive. Furthermore, the theoretical and methodological arguments required for international research bids or papers are different from French research bids or papers. As pointed out by Duchesne (AFSP 2022),<sup>9</sup> going international usually doubles the workload for French political scientists, not because of some kind of translation or editing work, but mainly because of the changing nature of the requirements and theoretical/methodological/ethical norms depending on the intellectual context. In sum, external funding inputs may be found for casual research tasks, but dealing with larger-scale projects feels like running the marathon with a 500 kg bag on our backs, whilst other competitors run lightly towards victory.

This is especially the case since French academics at public universities are burdened with heavy teaching loads<sup>10</sup> which are not necessarily connected to their research. In some cases, a portion of teaching may be conducted in English (in my case, 20%). Teaching in English is fun, especially when presenting French political idiosyncrasies to international students. Obviously, it requires using Anglophone references, but this is easy since many resources are part of core political science, and freely available online and easily accessible to students. However, relying solely on international and Anglophone literature can mean sacrificing the detailed and informed insights offered by French academic texts. When I teach research methods at the master's level, I prefer to focus on Francophone literature, which provides a wealth of feedback on qualitative research based on fieldwork.

Therefore, I perceive internationalisation as a process that is diverse, depending not only of the skills of academics, but on their teaching activities and the academic institution where political scientists work. My own career has involved different forms of internationalisation (Greffet 2020), evolving over time depending on the contexts and opportunities. Initially, as a Ph.D. student in the 1990s, I was part of an internationalised CNRS team in Grenoble that analysed electoral data using comparative and quantitative methods. This team—now merged within the team Pacte<sup>11</sup>—was connected to international organisations such as the Inter-university Consortium

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<sup>9</sup> Sophie Duchesne underlines that obstacles to internationalisation for French political scientists are less a matter of language than a matter of methodological skills (AFSP 2022, 4–7).

<sup>10</sup> The teaching load for an academic working at a public institution in France is 192 TD (tutorial) hours, which are equivalent to 128 lecture hours. I usually lecture about 160 h a year, which corresponds to about 240 tutorial hours. This is not a legal obligation, but it is difficult to organise differently, for instance by hiring adjuncts, as their working conditions are tough. I also invigilate exams and mark them. There are however, a few possibilities for academic staff to do less teaching, for instance through highly sought-after and very competitive IUF (Institut Universitaire de France) grants, which are distributed at the national level.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.pacte-grenoble.fr/en>.



for Political and Social Research (ICPSR) and ECPR and had technical specialized staff helping with surveys, fieldwork and statistical analysis. This approach was mainstream in Europe at that time but was marginal in France. I realised how marginal it was, when I was appointed to an associate professorship in Nancy, France, at the end of the 1990s. In Nancy, through research work with local colleagues, I developed new skills, both theoretical—with a more constructivist and historical approach— and methodological, using qualitative approaches, since there were no quantitative resources. At that time, because I was familiar with international political science networks through my Ph.D. training, I created European research connections in the field of digital politics. From the 2010s, I have had more frequent and deeper collaborations with international colleagues, through different research projects.<sup>12</sup> Since then, the meaning of internationalisation for me has evolved to encompass both the dissemination of French intellectual approaches and (qualitative) research methodologies to international colleagues and the integration of their approaches (and research assistance resources) to combine qualitative results with quantitative research. Research with Quebec colleagues was beneficial as it contributed to bridge Northern-American and European approaches on digital campaigning, as well as work organisations, using the same language. As in research projects with Anglophone research, the research questions, conceptual approaches and methods can differ, but they always result in a richer vision of the topic. Given the growing recognition and appreciation of internationalisation in recent years, these projects also provided me the opportunity to participate in English language panels for political science Ph.D. candidates at both French and international academic institutions. I was lucky to work and publish with prominent international scholars in my field of research (Gibson et al. 2017).

However, up until now, internationalisation has remained an additional dimension to my daily work, which is predominantly focused on France and conducted in the French language. This francophone work is essential for engaging in discussions with political science colleagues in France, local law colleagues, as well as to obtain university funding. It is also important for my teaching, as most of my students aspire to work in the French political or administrative field. There is a need for up-to-date and Francophone knowledge of French institutions and politics, which maintains relationships with local partners such as local governments, local politicians, and NGOs. In contrast, the demand for international research training and Ph.Ds in political science is limited, since the job market is extremely narrow and typically dominated by Ph.D. graduates from the main French political science institutions. Thus, linking (internationalised) research activities with teaching and student professionalisation presents a very difficult challenge.

I also think that, rather than focusing on internationalisation, there is a need both to understand the structure of opportunities political scientists evolve in, and

<sup>12</sup> Mainly, the foundation of the ECPR standing group on Internet and Politics with Steven Ward, from Salford University (from 2009); the French-Quebec ANR-FQRSC enpolitique.com (2012–2015) with Thierry Giasson, University Laval in Québec, and currently, the DICED project, an ERC grant awarded to Rachel Gibson, at the University of Manchester, <https://sites.manchester.ac.uk/diced/>.



to interrogate the project of internationalisation itself, especially by monitoring its costs much more precisely. The environmental impact of internationalisation, specifically related to travel, is receiving more attention in informal discussions, but it is not yet widely discussed in official circles. At my university, the climate research laboratory is committed to monitoring its carbon emissions and has recently implemented measures to reduce them to zero. In the social sciences, this is far from being the case, even if video conferencing is becoming more popular. It seems however to be more a way to reduce financial costs, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, rather than addressing the climate change issue.

The personal costs of international research activity when travelling, especially for women with young children, are similarly often overlooked. In addition, the costs of internationalisation for universities with weaker and less developed political science programmes should be addressed more. In France, there is a risk that some universities will be unable to conduct research in political science due to its fragmentation and the limited number of academics. These universities may be tempted to give up political science as a teaching and research discipline, especially if it proves to require more and more resources to get global, whilst becoming the same time untied from local partners and contextual features.

That is why, in order to sustain and broaden the discipline of political science, it is crucial to utilise our knowledge of social and political sciences to think of internationalisation differently. This new approach of internationalisation could emphasise conceptual and methodological pluralism, cooperation, respect for local contexts, environmental resources, and gender equality. Rather than conforming to individual and institutional competition and the “publish or perish” paradigm, that is highly questionable in terms of knowledge as well as outputs quality, we must strive to establish a political science that aligns with the rapidly evolving global landscape and that is rooted. Echoing Tocqueville’s notable quote—*il faut une science politique nouvelle à un monde tout nouveau*—we must assert the necessity of a “new internationalisation, for a whole new world”.

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