

EDITORIAL

A Future-Proof Journal for the Low Countries: *Politics of the Low Countries* Embraces Diamond Open Access

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The year 2025 marks a watershed moment for *Politics of the Low Countries* (PLC). From 1 January 2025, PLC transitioned from Boom/Elsevier Publishers to Radboud University Press (RUP) as a Diamond Open Access (DOA) journal, making all articles free to publish and free to read. This editorial outlines the rationale behind PLC's decision to adopt a DOA publishing model, examines the implications of this transition for the journal's financial structure and editorial workflow, and demonstrates how researchers in Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg will benefit from this change.

The Irrationality of Contemporary Academic Publishing

The dominant publishing model in political science, and academia more broadly, represents a system everyone recognizes as highly irrational, yet academics rarely take steps to change it within their own journals. The logic is perverse: predominantly tax-funded researchers conduct research in the public interest, and then publish their work with commercial academic publishers such as Elsevier, Sage, Taylor & Francis, and Wiley, who do not remunerate researchers nor their universities for their work. To access their own academic work, universities pay these commercial publishers exorbitant fees in subscriptions and access charges.

The financial burden is staggering. The 2019 European Universities Association Big Deals Survey Report (Morais et al., 2019), covering 30 countries across Europe, estimated that universities spend more than €1 billion annually on electronic

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resources, with at least €726 million dedicated specifically to journal subscriptions. In 2018, Flemish universities spent approximately €20 million on subscriptions to academic periodicals and journals (De Cleene, 2018). Universities in the Netherlands spent an estimated €43 million on academic access contracts with publishers in 2015 (TU Delft Delta, 2016) and approximately €49 million on 'learning materials' in 2020. These figures underscore a fundamental problem: public institutions paying private corporations for access to publicly funded research.

Beyond the financial inefficiency, this model undermines the fundamental purpose of academic research. If publicly funded research remains inaccessible to large segments of society, we fail citizens, journalists, and other stakeholders who need access to vital research information. Moreover, researchers in institutions with fewer financial resources, or with no institutional affiliation, face barriers to accessing scholarship essential to their work. The current system also operates without remunerating peer reviewers, who provide crucial quality control labor without compensation, while publishers generate substantial profits.

The Open Access Movement and Its Shadow Side

Since the 2010s, Open Access publishing has established itself as the dominant norm for both researchers and research funding agencies. And as from 2021, the major European public funders require all scholarly publications emerging from research funded by their grants to be published Open Access without any embargo (see cOAlition S, <https://coalition-s.org>). The move towards Open Access publishing represents an important step toward democratizing research accessibility. Open Access not only enhances the accessibility of research but also fosters a wider use of the knowledge produced. There is first a clear direct benefit for authors as Open Access publications generally receive a greater number of citations than those that are not – the so-called Open Access Citation Advantage (Langham-Putrow et al., 2021). But on top of that, these citations are derived from a more diverse range of researchers, including those from different geographical locations, institutions, and disciplinary backgrounds (Huang et al., 2024).

However, the Open Access trend casts a significant shadow. Many political science journals and publishers rely on Gold or Hybrid Open Access models, in which researchers or their institutions pay Article Processing Charges (APCs). Publishers demand substantial APCs, often around €4,000 per article in top political science journals.

Hybrid Open Access journals combine Open Access with Restricted Access, creating a patchwork of accessibility in which some articles are freely available while others remain behind paywalls for researchers lacking funds to pay APCs. Gold Open Access journals, where all articles are published openly, avoid this patchwork but

still rely on the APC model, creating an unequal playing field with lower-resources researchers de facto prevented from considering publishing with them.

The umbrella organization of Dutch universities, *Universiteiten van Nederland*, has negotiated Open Access deals with key publishers including Taylor and Francis, Wiley, and Elsevier. These agreements alleviate the burden on individual researchers and institutions by covering all APC fees. While preferable to individual negotiations, this model keeps the fundamental logic of commercial academic publishing intact: universities pay commercial publishers to access predominantly publicly funded research. A 2021 report commissioned by the Dutch university umbrella organization estimates that €51.5 million is paid through Open Access collective agreements with publishers, with an additional €11 million spent on APCs for articles in journals outside these agreements (van der Graaf & Johnson, 2021).

Some publishers, such as MDPI, Frontiers, and Cogitatio, operate exclusively using the Gold Open Access model with APCs. While full Open Access is desirable, funding models based on APCs create adverse incentives for publishers to accept low-quality research, prioritizing volume over rigor. Consequently, the MDPI and Frontiers publishing models have received considerable criticism over the years (Oviedo-García, 2021; Siler, 2020; Mills et al., 2025).

Diamond Open Access: A New Paradigm for Political Science Publishing

For these reasons, political science research (and beyond) requires a new model: one not predicated on maximizing profit for private actors using public means, one in which journals base editorial decisions solely on academic quality without financial incentives to accept or reject research, one in which all researchers, irrespective of their budget size, can make their work known and cited, and one in which value created in publicly funded institutions remains in public hands. Diamond Open Access publishing fulfills these requirements. In DOA journals, articles are published Open Access without APCs.

As Wim Pouw and Bert Bakker recently argued in *Science Guide*, given budget cuts in higher education in the Netherlands, transitioning to a DOA model has become increasingly urgent (Pouw & Bakker, 2024). Since then also the Flemish Government announced budget cuts in higher education. Put simply, we can no longer afford research under the traditional publishing model.

Beyond the critical imperative to lead by example in our academic environment, PLC's decision to adopt DOA publishing reflects the journal's fundamental character. Since its inception as *Res Publica* (Gregoire, 1959), and particularly since transitioning to *Politics of the Low Countries* in 2019 (Bouteca et al., 2019), PLC has been co-owned and supported by the professional associations of political scientists in Belgium,

the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. This collective spirit made the decision to move to Open Access straightforward: a way of giving back to the community of political scientists in the Low Countries who seek access to research on politics in their own living and working environment. Moreover, it is important to us that publishing in PLC is accessible to all, especially to early-career researchers. Imposing fees to publish or read would fundamentally contradict the journal's core commitment to supporting early-career researchers, most of whom cannot rely on extensive research funding. What is more, PLC aims to serve not only an academic audience but also to engage in debate with practitioners. The State of the Profession section functions as a debating platform on political and political science developments in the Low Countries. Widespread access to these pieces is essential, which would not be possible without DOA.

The Challenges of Diamond Open Access Publishing

Unlike commercial publishing arrangements, choosing a DOA publisher entails a significant loss of financial resources for PLC. Commercial publishers typically offer journals budgets for editorial assistance and other costs, along with in-house copy-editing, typesetting, and access to commercial journal management software such as EditorialManager. While these contributions are modest compared to publishers' earnings, they fund vital aspects of editorial workflow. DOA, therefore, requires not merely switching publishers but fundamentally rethinking the financial model.

At PLC, we approached the political associations that formally owned the journal, the Flemish and Francophone Belgian political science associations (VPW, Vereniging voor Politieke Wetenschappen, and ABSP, Association belge francophone de science politique), requesting structural contributions. We successfully added the Dutch political science association (NKWP, Nederlandse Kring voor de Wetenschap der Politiek) to this partnership. All three associations committed to financially supporting PLC with yearly fees. Combined with Radboud University Press's financial contribution, we established a modest but functional financial model with an annual budget of € 4000.

RUP facilitated the creation of a new logo and journal style, and in the editorial process, produces articles into typeset PDFs. Crucially, RUP provides access to open-source editorial software through its collaboration with Openjournals.nl. Funded by NWO (Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek), Dutch university libraries, and partner journals, Openjournals operates using the open-source Open Journal Systems (OJS) editorial software created by the Public Knowledge Project (PKP), a Canadian initiative aimed at democratizing knowledge. Openjournals assists partner journals in setting up their websites, supports editorial teams in using the system, migrates existing articles, maintains and updates the platform, and provides

helpdesk support. The staff at Radboud University Press, moreover, helps with the registration of DOIs and with indexation processes. We are moreover pleased that PLC has secured a grant from the Francophone Belgian Fonds de la Recherche Scientifique (Fund for Scientific Research, F.R.S.–FNRS) to financially support the journal for the period from 2025 to 2027 in its copyediting process.

Yet despite the support from the publisher and the copyeditor in some stages, the greatest deal of the editorial and managerial work continues to be performed without charge by the Editors-in-Chief and the editorial board, with only the Editorial Assistant and Copywriter receiving compensation.

Reflecting on our first year as a DOA journal published by Radboud University Press, we have made substantial progress. We have fully integrated the OJS editorial software into our editorial workflow and secured funding for copyediting, enabling us to hire a dedicated professional copyeditor. In a DOA journal, editors maintain control over and responsibility for the entire editorial process. This means that every stage of the publishing workflow, from submission through peer review, copyediting, production, and social media dissemination, falls under the purview of the Editors-in-Chief. Inevitably, the first year involved some trial and error. However, this experience has positioned us well to make PLC an effective and efficient journal with strong turnaround times in 2026.

Looking Forward: The Need for Structural Support

We are enthused by the financial and material support from all our partners. This collaboration demonstrates that DOA publishing is possible when stakeholders commit to making it work. However, our transition from a hybrid open-access journal to the DOA model also reveals how little experience key stakeholders have in facilitating DOA publishing. Coordinating these different funding sources has required significant management efforts from the Editors-in-Chief.

The sustainability of the DOA model depends critically on the continued financial support of various organizations. In the case of PLC, we rely strongly on the financial and material support from ABSP, NKWP, VPW, and Radboud University Press. There is little direct public funding available for DOA journals – making it hard for other academic journals to make the change to DOA, whose numbers are growing over the years but remain limited compared to other kinds of journals (see Livio and Kramer, 2025, for an up-to-date list for the Netherlands). A further obstacle to reform for many journals lies in the structure of journal ownership. While PLC is owned by the Belgian and Dutch political science associations, this is not true for many other journals. Many journals cannot transition to more equitable models because commercial publishers hold full or partial ownership rights of the journal, which effectively inhibits progressive change regardless of the best intentions of journal editors.

We therefore call on funding agencies in the Low Countries, FWO, F.R.S.-FNRS, NWO, and the FNR-Luxembourg National Research Fund, to structurally fund DOA journals in transparent ways. Public financing, whether through direct university funding of associations or support for Open Access publishers, is essential for ensuring the long-term viability of Diamond Open Access publishing.

All in all, the transition to Diamond Open Access reflects PLC's commitment to accessible scholarship and support for early-career researchers while maintaining high academic standards through a dedicated network of authors and reviewers based in Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, and beyond. Although challenges remain, this model demonstrates that alternative publishing structures are viable when associations and funding agencies work together to sustain them.

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