

# The Limits of Normalization: Taking Stock of the EU-US Comparative Literature\*

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## Abstract

This article contributes to the research on the normalization of European Union (EU) studies by presenting an analysis and assessment of the EU-US comparative literature. Using an original and comprehensive data set of 104 publications, it shows not only that these comparisons have grown considerably since the early 1990s, but also and more interestingly that EU-US scholarship itself has increasingly conformed to mainstream political science by becoming more diverse, causal in nature and empirically inclusive. Unlike other accounts of normalization, however, it is argued here that these transformations are only partly desirable, and that a better direction for the future is to develop EU-US research as a distinct programme within EU studies, centred on a ‘dual mission’ – theoretical and empirical – that accepts political science’s scope and explanatory objectives, but at the same time sees the two cases as worthy of being studied in isolation owing to their importance and the political value of their comparison.

## Introduction

The United States has always been the single most important political benchmark for the European Union (EU).<sup>1</sup> Ever since the early days of European integration, supporters of the project have time and again pointed at the US as, if not a historical example to follow entirely, at least a model from which to borrow selectively or, at other times, a competitor to match in the international arena (Spinelli, 1957; Glencross, 2009a; Fossum, 2009; Parent, 2009). Over the past two decades or so, interest in looking across the Atlantic has expanded from the political into the academic realm, where scholarly EU-US analyses have multiplied rapidly, turning what would have once been seen as an eccentric choice of cases into a legitimate comparison spanning a wide range of topics and questions.

With the partial exception of a handful of cursory overviews, (for example, Glencross, 2009b; Mendez and Mendez, 2010) the proliferation of EU-US comparisons so far has proceeded without a serious attempt to take stock of this literature. Such an exercise is now overdue, not only to map the contours of what has practically become a genre of its own within EU studies but also, and more importantly, because it can contribute to a fuller understanding of the latter’s methodological evolution. Rejecting by definition the ‘N = 1’ problem – the idea that European integration is a unique political phenomenon to be

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, hereafter I will use ‘European Union’ to indicate the EU and its predecessors.

studied in isolation and interpreted through *ad hoc* theories – EU-US scholarship is, at least *prima facie*, a key component of the ‘normalization’ of EU studies – namely the opposite tendency to analyze and compare the Union as an ordinary polity, which is a topic that has been debated both theoretically (Caporaso *et al.*, 1997; Hix, 1998; Fossum, 2006) and empirically (Keeler, 2005; Woll, 2006; Exadaktylos and Radaelli, 2009; Kreppel, 2012). Analyzing the development and characteristics of EU-US comparisons can open a novel and interesting window on this subject.

This article presents such an analysis on the basis of an original and comprehensive data set of 104 EU-US publications. As Kreppel (2012) has noted, normalization is a multifaceted process that can be measured in several ways. Accordingly, in what follows I will look at a number of different aspects of the EU-US literature. In the next section I will examine some of its basic characteristics, including its temporal distribution and the evolution of its scope. I will then take one step further and focus on two key methodological aspects of EU-US analyses: the types of comparison employed, and their inclusion, or lack thereof, of additional cases. Consistently with most accounts of normalization, I find that EU-US scholarship has increasingly conformed to the rest of political science in all these respects, becoming more diverse, causal in nature and empirically inclusive. Unlike other analyses, however, I do not regard normalization as entirely desirable. I will therefore propose an alternative course for EU-US research centred on the notion of a ‘dual mission’ – theoretical and empirical – that accepts the scope and explanatory goals of mainstream political science but at the same time sees the two cases as worthy of being studied mostly in isolation because of their importance and the political value of their comparison.

## I. The Basics of the EU-US Literature

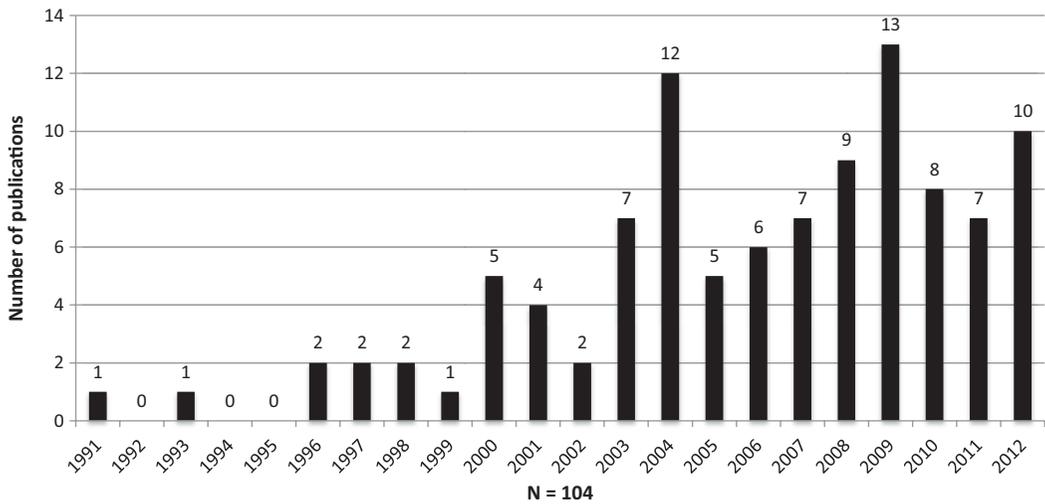
The data for this study was collected in the first half of 2013 following procedures designed to find all English-language EU-US analyses in the field of political science – inclusive of all its subfields and especially comparative politics, public policy and international relations – published until 2012 (see Appendix for details).<sup>2</sup> The resulting 104 publications (71 articles, 18 books and 15 edited volumes) thus constitute the existing population – or at least a very close approximation of it – of EU-US comparisons. Figure 1 shows the distribution of this literature over time.

The first evident aspect of this distribution is the absence of pre-1991 publications and the lack of consistent scholarly production before 1996.<sup>3</sup> Assuming a couple of years of lag between developments on the ground and publication, this characterizes EU-US comparisons quite clearly as a post-Maastricht endeavour. Going a bit further, one could even hypothesize a relation between some recent highs and lows of European integration and variations in EU-US scholarly production: on one side, the 2004 and 2009 peaks corresponding, respectively, to the 2002–3 Convention on the Future of Europe

<sup>2</sup> In restricting my analysis to political science comparisons I deliberately exclude EU-US work in cognate disciplines such as economics and law. This choice is dictated by the need to have a coherent and objectively delimited data set, and above all one able to contribute to the EU normalization debate, which has developed predominantly within political research. The complete data set is available at: <http://pierotortola.weebly.com/research.html>.

<sup>3</sup> The only noteworthy pre-1991 political science comparison of which I am aware is Elazar and Greilsammer (1986) – a study that I excluded from my data set as it is not a self-contained publication but part of a wider comparative law project. The reader should, however, be aware of its existence and be assured that its exclusion does not affect my analysis in any significant way.

Figure 1: The Growth in the EU-US Literature, 1991–2012



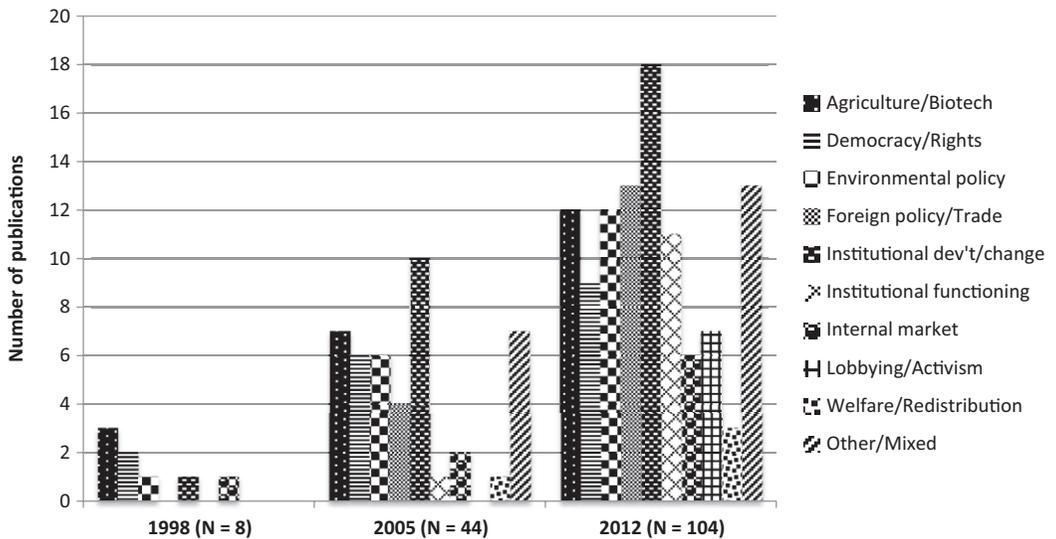
Source: Author's own data.

(a gathering which deliberately echoed the Philadelphia Convention) and the works and signing of the 2007 Lisbon Treaty; and, on the other side, periods of decline or stagnation in correspondence of the timid Amsterdam and Nice treaties and the demise of the constitutional project following the French and Dutch referendums. Finally, the mixed trend – declining yet not falling production – of the latest years might reflect the contradictory effects of the recent economic crisis, which has accentuated some rifts within the Union but also provided a new stimulus for integration in certain areas such as banking.

Regardless of how far one wants to push this exercise, its underlying logic is straightforward: as the integration process moves forward and the EU becomes (or at least is perceived as) more akin to a traditional federal polity, opportunities for meaningful comparisons with the US increase not only in those areas directly affected by integration (comparisons in the field of monetary policy, for instance, became possible only once the Union acquired one) but also, and generally, with respect to all those questions that rely on the two institutional contexts being similar for reasons of variable control or simple plausibility. Needless to say, comparisons are further facilitated by the several social, economic and cultural traits shared by the EU and the US – such as their size, level of economic development and liberal-democratic tradition, to mention just a few – all of which add important extra-institutional factors pulling, methodologically speaking, the two cases closer together and apart from other federal systems.

It should be noted, however, that while the majority of EU-US analyses are framed within the subfield of comparative federalism, not all of them are. The data set contains a substantial minority of comparisons in areas where the federal element is often marginal at best (such as foreign policy, trade or lobbying), 17 of which are unmistakably outside the boundaries of federal studies due to the presence of unitary states as additional cases (for example, Chadwick and May, 2003; Toke, 2004; Eijffinger and Geraats, 2006; Harrison and Sundstrom, 2010). This confirms that European integration is, from a

Figure 2: Breakdown of the EU-US Literature by Topic: Cumulative Totals, 1998, 2005 and 2012



Source: Author’s own data.

conceptual standpoint, best thought of as movement along a continuum between anarchy and hierarchy rather than a step-like process. In this linear view, while the US is one of the first – if not *the* first – polities the EU ‘meets’ along its path, the Union’s comparability increases more generally with *all* hierarchical polities to which it gets closer, and which can be grouped and juxtaposed to the EU (and the US) within categories more inclusive than federalism, such as ‘political system’ (Hix, 2005).

With the expansion of EU-US comparative research has come its diversification. Figure 2 divides the period under examination into three parts and breaks down the literature cumulated in 1998, 2005 and 2012 by primary topic. Up until the end of the second period, when almost half of the literature had been published, EU-US analyses clustered predominantly around four areas: agriculture, democracy, environmental policy and institutional development. While work on all these topics has continued in the third period, research in other areas – most notably foreign policy, institutional functioning and lobbying – has grown at a higher rate, thus increasing the diversity of the literature. In addition to the expansion in comparison opportunities explained above, two factors might help explain this change. One is a simple ‘catch-up effect’, whereby scholars working more recently have concentrated on topics that had remained, for any reason, uncovered in the past. Another is exogenous shifts of interest in the broader political science discipline from certain topics to others. Regardless of the weight of each of these causes, the interesting fact remains that over time EU-US scholarship has become increasingly generalist in nature, and thus more coherent with the scope of political science as a whole.

## II. A Methodological Map of the EU-US Literature

It has long been argued that comparing political systems can serve different purposes. In their seminal article on comparative historical analysis, Skocpol and Somers (1980)

identify three distinct uses of this method: making macro-causal inferences, applying existing theories to different socio-political contexts and contrasting contexts themselves. In the same issue, Bonnell (1980) proposes a typology in which ‘analytical’ and ‘illustrative’ comparisons can be mediated either by theories and models or by ideas and concepts. More recently, Sil (2000, p. 511) has noted that

there are not one, not two, but *many* different strategies for ordering and comparing facts across contexts, and *each of the strategies involves different purposes, different logics, and different kinds of returns that are all significant and valuable to the collective endeavor of social scientists.* (emphasis in the original)

This sort of methodological pluralism certainly applies to the EU-US literature, in which four distinct types of comparison co-exist: ‘descriptive’, ‘conceptual’, ‘analogical’ and ‘explanatory’. I will briefly illustrate each of them.

#### *The Descriptive Group (25 Publications)*

As their name suggests, descriptive comparisons are univariate analyses aimed simply at gauging differences and similarities between the EU and the US, whether adopting a comprehensive view or, more frequently, looking at a specific area or question. Examples of the former kind are Menon and Schain’s (2006a) edited volume and Fossum’s (2009) appraisal of the EU’s ‘American Dream’, whereas more focused comparisons include Zweifel’s (2002; 2003) work on the democratic deficit, Vig and Faure’s (2004) edited book on environmental policy, Grugel’s (2004) study of regionalist strategies in the Cono Sur, and Chari *et al.*’s (2007) article on the regulation of lobbying.

#### *The Conceptual Group (13 Publications)*

This group contains studies akin to what Bonnell (1980) calls ‘history mediated by concepts’. These are empirical accounts in which the material is not juxtaposed mostly as an end in itself as in the descriptive type, but is instead selected, organized and interpreted in light of some broad idea that exists independently of the comparison, but which the EU and the US serve to illustrate, often as its main manifestations. This category includes, among others, Nicolaidis and Howse’s (2001) edited volume on political legitimacy in multilevel governance, Ansell and Di Palma’s (2004) project on the transformations of territoriality, Fabbrini’s (2004, 2007; Fabbrini and Sicurelli, 2004) extensive work on ‘compound democracy’, and the analyses of the EU and US’s strategic culture contained in Berenskoetter (2005) and Kirchner and Sperling (2010).

#### *The Analogical Group (Nine Publications)*

This category includes analyses of the US (in isolation or with other political systems) as a case from which to draw lessons about (un)likely or (un)desirable political events, decisions or developments to be applied to the EU by analogy. While often based upon, or making, conceptual or theoretical statements, these studies nonetheless remain distinct from the rest in that they never use the EU as a case on a par with the US to build or validate their arguments (hence being comparisons only in a loose sense) but rather as a political system about which to make *predictions* based on the US’s past experience.

Prominent in this group are Shapiro's (1997) article on independent agencies, McKay's (2001) book on the Union's institutional design, Thorlakson's (2006) study of the problem of authority migration and Parent's (2009; 2011) work on voluntary unions.

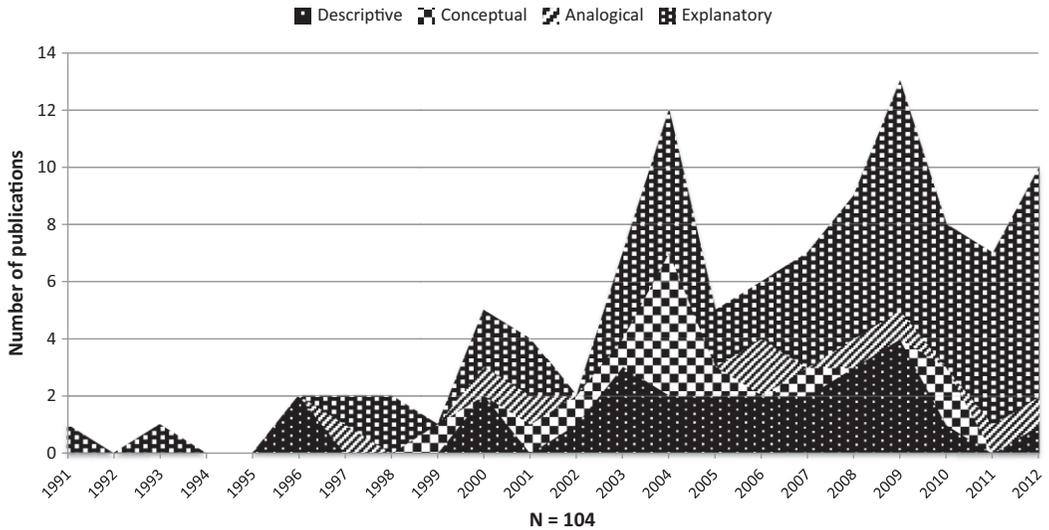
### *The Explanatory Group (57 Publications)*

These comparisons use the EU and the US as cases to validate precise causal statements about the political *genus* – often, but not always, the federal one – in which they are categorized. Explanatory studies are different from analogies because they always treat the EU and the US as equals in the comparison, and from descriptions because they contain causal (hence bivariate or multivariate) analyses. Unlike conceptual studies, explanatory comparisons are always centred on concrete and falsifiable propositions rather than abstract and all-embracing concepts. These parameters make the explanatory group the most consistent among the four with the paradigm and goals of positive political science. At the same time the parameters are open enough to define a broad version of positivism, which includes different schools of thought and research approaches so long as they accept the minimal principle of objective explanation. Some examples in this group are Goldstein's (1997; 2001) work on state resistance to central authority in early federations, Kelemen's (2000; 2004) research on the location and rigidity of environmental regulation, Joppke's (2001) article on the sources of immigrant rights, Beramendi's (2007; 2012) work on redistribution in federal systems, Bolleyer's (2009; Bolleyer and Börzel, 2010) analysis of peripheral government coordination and Bomberg's (2012) article on climate activism.

The first fact emerging from the foregoing is that while the absolute majority of EU-US comparisons conforms methodologically to the mainstream of political science, almost half of them remain variably removed from it, preferring description, prediction or the illustration of concepts over causal analysis. More interesting than this static breakdown, however, is the evolution of the four comparison types over time, shown in Figures 3 and 4.

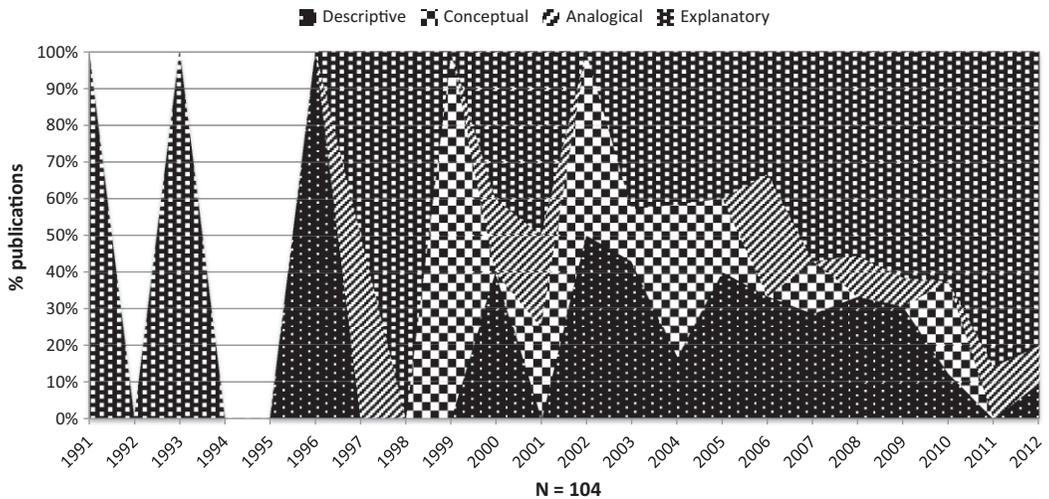
The charts show an historical increase in explanatory research in both absolute and relative terms that is especially marked in the past decade or so, when scholarly production has been larger and percentages more meaningful. Using the same division as before, during the first two periods (1991–2005) explanatory studies were, on average, 43 per cent of the total (19 publications out of 44), while in the third period (2006–12) their share went up to 63 per cent (38 publications out of 60). Overall, the data indicate a trend of increasing normalization in the use of EU-US comparisons, which, like the increase in scope observed above, might result from several, not necessarily exclusive, factors. In line with what was argued in the previous section, the most plausible explanation is that as the EU becomes more federal in nature, and hence similar to the US, causal work, which presents stricter requirements in terms of variable control, becomes easier. An important concurrent factor, however, might be a 'maturation effect' whereby recent explanatory studies have built upon previous work of other kinds (especially descriptive and conceptual) that was in some respect propaedeutic to them. This idea is expressed, for instance, by Menon and Schain (2006b, p. 3), who set as a central goal of their volume that of 'provid[ing] a useful basis for future comparative research efforts'.

Figure 3: EU-US Publications by Comparison Type, 1991–2012



Source: Author's own data.

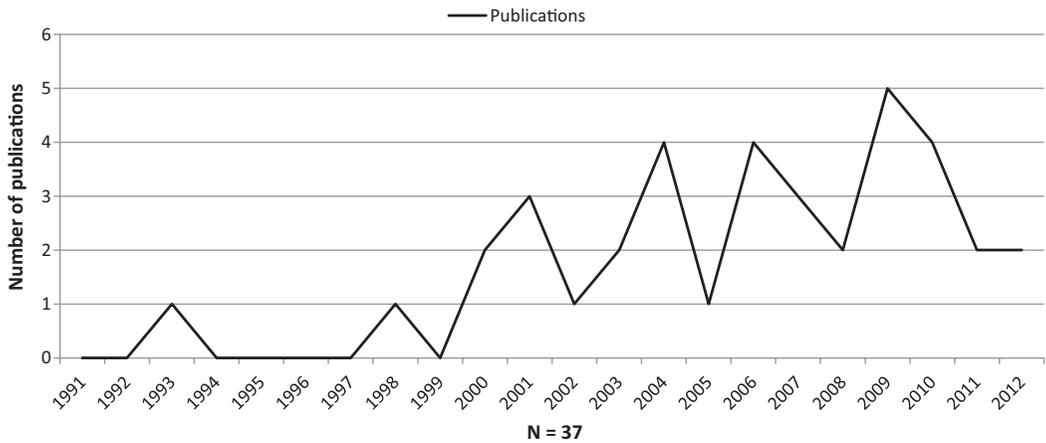
Figure 4: Relative Breakdown of EU-US Publications by Comparison Type, 1991–2012



Source: Author's own data.

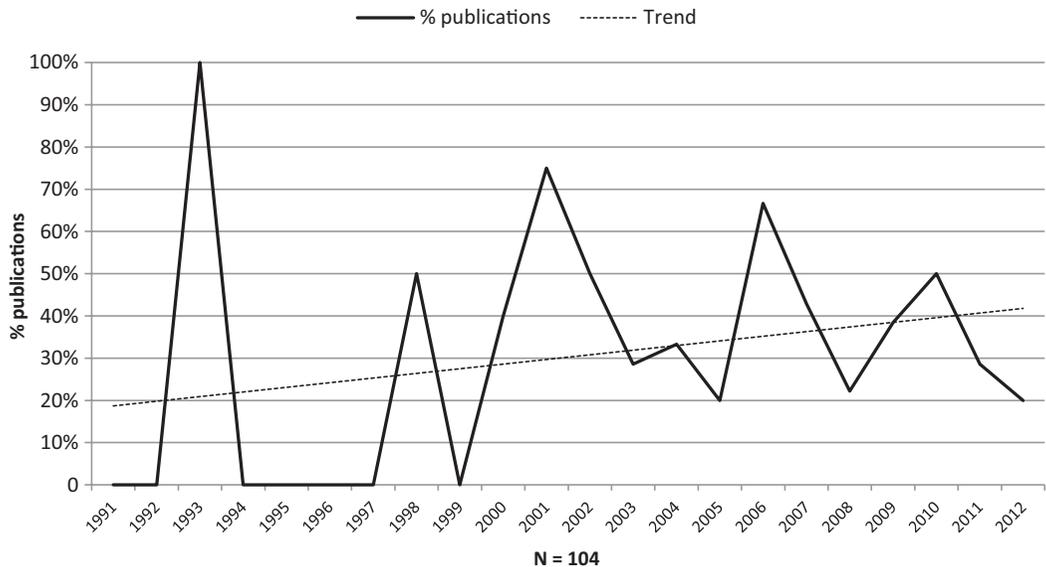
An alternative way to measure the methodological normalization of EU-US scholarship is to look at the incidence of publications with additional cases (hereafter ‘three-plus’), which should tell us to what extent EU-US analyses, regardless of type, are inserted in a wider and more general comparative context. Of the 104 publications in the data set, 37 are three-plus. Figure 5 shows the temporal distribution of these studies.

Figure 5: ‘Three-Plus’ EU-US Publications, 1991–2012



Source: Author’s own data.

Figure 6: ‘Three-Plus’ EU-US Publications as a Percentage of Total, 1991–2012

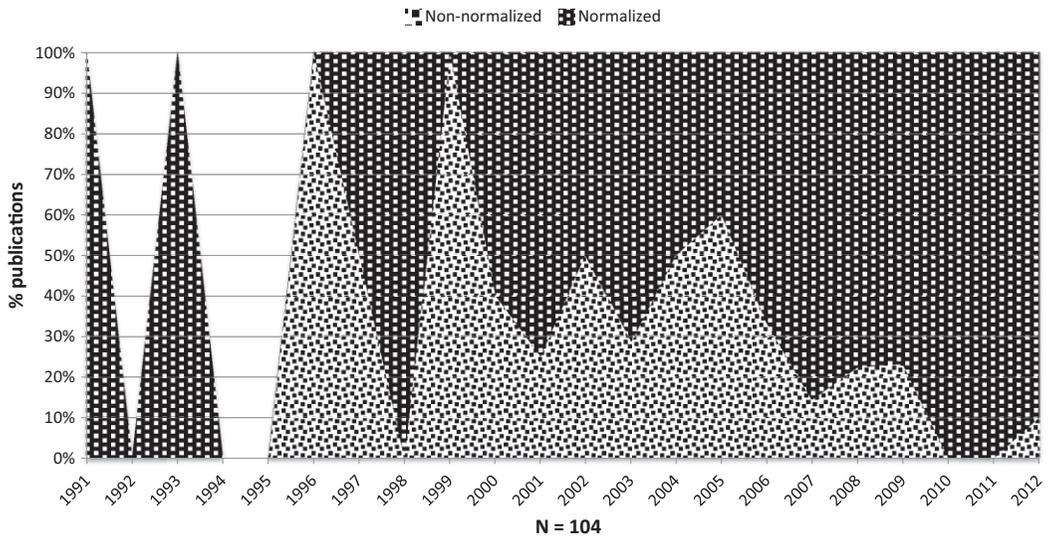


Source: Author’s own data.

Measured in absolute terms, the number of three-plus publications has increased over time, although erratically. The trend is less marked when these studies are counted against total production: as Figure 6 shows, while the relative weight of three-plus research has generally increased historically, its variability has been too large to allow confident conclusions.

The picture becomes more interesting, however, if the two measures of normalization are intersected. Nine of the 19 explanatory studies published in 1991–2005 were

Figure 7: The Normalization of the EU-US Literature, 1991–2012



Source: Author's own data.

three-plus, while in 2006–12 the number was nine out of 38, which is a relative decrease from 47 to 24 per cent. On the non-explanatory (that is, descriptive, conceptual and analogical) side, the number of three-plus publications was six out of 25 in 1991–2005 and 13 out of 22 in 2005–12 – an increase from 24 to 59 per cent. What these figures tell us is that not only the absolute, but more importantly the relative increase in three-plus studies has occurred entirely in the non-explanatory part of EU-US research, where these comparisons have grown by such a margin to more than offset the relative decline among explanatory studies. This in turn reveals two distinct and largely separate routes of methodological normalization in the EU-US literature: while one part has increasingly used the comparison as a tool for contributing to a body of causal work on politics, the other part has widened the comparison itself to make it more inclusive. Figure 7 combines the two modes of normalization by showing the percentage of explanatory and/or three-plus publications as it has evolved over time.

Aside from some sharp variations in the left side of the chart (due to the low number of total publications in those years) the trend is clear. Adopting the usual cut-off point, in 1991–2005 the methodologically normalized literature represented 57 per cent of total production (25 publications out of 44), while in 2006–12 the figure went up to 85 per cent (51 out of 60). These figures indicate quite plainly that EU-US research is becoming less and less distinctive within the broader context of political science.

### III. N = 2: EU-US Comparisons as a Research Programme

One thing most analysts of EU studies normalization have in common is that they are also advocates of it: by and large, the increasing tendency to study the EU as an ordinary political system, using the questions, theories and methodological tools employed in the rest of political science, is seen by observers as a positive process to be welcomed if not

encouraged (for example, Keeler 2005; Woll 2006; Kreppel 2012). Can this judgement be extended to the normalization ongoing in EU-US scholarship? In other words, should we treat this as a comparison like any other? With respect to the expanding scope of the EU-US literature, the answer is easy: general considerations on the primacy of certain political themes over others aside, one would be hard-pressed to argue against extending EU-US comparisons as much as possible across the range of subjects that political science as a whole deems research-worthy. Methodological normalization, on the other hand, is a trickier matter that requires a more articulated reflection. In the remainder of this section I will argue for a mixed position that supports the transition to an explanatory model in EU-US research, but is sceptical about the growth of three-plus studies.

As noted above, different types of comparisons have different immediate purposes, all of which are valuable in the greater scheme of research. However, even the most open-minded scholar would agree that to be characterized as such, political science needs ultimately to work toward the construction of a body of empirical theory about politics. To the extent that EU-US scholars identify with the discipline, therefore, they should regard the explanatory model as superior to the remaining three because of its concurrent focus on causality and concreteness, which allows it to respond to political science's basic 'theoretical mission' more directly and completely than descriptive, conceptual or analogical comparisons. Granted, some scholars might find the hypothesis-testing or puzzle-solving logic of explanatory work too constraining, and point to the advantages of other modes of research, such as the ability to make normative and predictive statements or engage with broader and more abstract ideas. The strength of the explanatory model, however, is that it can complete and improve on the other three types in a way that is not true in reverse. This is most obvious in the case of univariate descriptions, which explanatory work can fully contain, but it is also true of analogical/predictive studies, which should build, whenever possible, upon theories tested on the cases under examination, and of conceptual comparisons, whose core ideas can only benefit from being validated in their concrete implications. In sum, what is proposed here is a perspective that recognizes both the value of, and the synergies between, different types of comparisons, but, unlike other pluralist accounts, does not place alternative research styles at the same level (as in Skocpol and Somers's (1980) circular model, for instance), opting instead for a hierarchical view in which explanatory comparisons, while not always sufficient for good EU-US scholarship, are the only indispensable component of it.

The same sort of endorsement cannot be given to the three-plus literature. True, extending the comparison beyond the EU and the US is consistent with the generalizing ambitions of political science. However, the longstanding 'breadth versus depth' debate has shown that the opposite approach of focusing on a small number of cases (two in this instance) has different and equally important advantages for the overall goals of the discipline – for example, greater accuracy in measuring variables, the possibility of tracing causal processes and greater internal validity more generally. As a result, political science's theoretical mission alone does not offer enough guidance to choose between alternative modes of research. There is, though, another factor to consider in evaluating the three-plus literature, which one might call the 'empirical mission' of political research – namely the extent to which certain cases are studied as interesting *per se* in addition to being examples of some political *genus*. As one adds cases to any comparative analysis, its empirical mission with respect to each of them is always diluted. In the EU-US case,

however, such dilution also weakens two desirable attributes specific to this comparison, which should make us wary of three-plus research.

The first is, simply, *relevance*. A principle as elementary as it is easily forgotten in the profession (see Shapiro, 2005) is that we should study problems and questions linked, at least indirectly, to the well-being of the societies in which we live. In the study of politics, which is dominated by observational work the external validity of which is hardly ever automatic, relevance varies not only with the subject studied but also with the cases under examination: *ceteris paribus*, studying bigger (or in any case, more influential) regions, countries or organizations is more valuable than studying smaller ones. This in turn has two consequences for the EU-US comparison: first, analyzing these two cases is particularly relevant due to their size, economic clout and international reach, which set them apart from most other polities in terms of overall weight and influence (although such influence might not be equally distributed across specific fields, as shown, for instance, by the EU and the US's different mixes of hard and soft power); and second and more to the point, the EU and US's position makes it especially costly, relevance-wise, to broaden their comparison because the marginal value of the empirical depth one has to sacrifice for each additional case is bigger than for most other pairs.<sup>4</sup> While this logic should not necessarily lead to rejecting *a priori* all extensions of the EU-US comparison, it definitely supports keeping it small – often to the point of eliminating additional cases altogether.<sup>5</sup>

The second quality of EU-US research is its *political value*. As explained above, the growth of EU-US comparisons over the past two decades has proceeded hand in hand with the interpretation of the EU as a federal-like entity – an interpretation usually unproblematic in the scholarly realm, but quite controversial in the realm of common parlance and politics, as recurrent quarrels around the ‘f-word’ demonstrate. Federalism can thus be seen in this case as an ‘essentially contested concept’ (Gallie, 1956; Connolly, 1993) – that is, a concept whose complexity, uncertain boundaries and, above all, appraisive nature (via the evocation of normative ideas such as community or solidarity) render its use in analyses of the EU an inherently political statement. The statement is, I posit, at its strongest when the EU is compared with the US not only because the latter is a paragon of federalism, but also and especially because of the US's unique combination of two additional attributes. First, the range of social, economic and political traits shared with the EU, which makes the US a very realistic overall benchmark against which to evaluate the Union's political dynamics and experiences, ultimately lending ‘seriousness’ to the federal interpretation of the EU and all its normative implications. Second is

<sup>4</sup> As an illustration of this point, consider two comparative studies – say EU-US and Canada-Switzerland – analyzing intergovernmental transfers in three sectors, in which more space can be made for a third case (for example, Australia) by sacrificing one sector, thus making the comparison shallower. If the EU-US pair is considered, on the whole, more research-worthy than the Canada-Switzerland one, the research value of the sector eliminated – that is, the ‘price’ one has to pay for the additional case – will be higher in the former comparison. Assuming, reasonably, that the value of each additional sector or case decreases with quantity, this means that the equilibrium at which the marginal value of depth and breadth are equal, and there is no more incentive to trade sectors for cases, will be reached with a smaller number of cases in the EU-US comparison.

<sup>5</sup> Another type of relevance, with similar effects on the EU-US comparison, is what Gerring (2001, pp. 192–3) calls ‘analytic utility’ – namely importance *vis-à-vis* a certain concept or debate. The relevance of the United States for the study of federalism is a typical example of analytic utility. While this relationship cannot be extended to the EU – hardly the archetypal federation – a case for the analytic utility of *both* the EU and the United States might be made with respect to the broader concept of ‘multilevel governance’ – a notion that originated within EU studies, but has subsequently extended to include the United States as one of its examples (Hooghe and Marks, 2003).

the US's longstanding role as a model for the Union's aspirations and future development, conjuring up images of the 'United States of Europe' whenever the two are studied together. Adding cases to the EU-US comparison, conversely, dilutes its political significance not only because it multiplies and hence weakens the benchmarks against which the Union is assessed, but above all because it extends the analysis to federations that are much less recognizable as models for the EU.

The argument just presented may raise some eyebrows among political scientists. Recognizing and accepting the political value of EU-US comparisons, however, by no means requires rejecting positivism altogether, but only its most scientific extremes in favour of a more realistic and socially conscious form of political science – one that, to paraphrase Flyvbjerg (2001), cares about where we are going, whether the direction is desirable, what should be done about it and is open about all this. Where I do make an important – although, I believe, plausible – assumption is in implying that most if not all EU-US scholars are sympathetic to the idea of a federal Europe, and hence ready to accept the political implications of their work (which, needless to say, will be more direct the greater this scholarship's ability to reach beyond academic circles). Insofar as this assumption is correct, EU-US researchers should regard the extension of the comparison with scepticism.<sup>6</sup>

Where does this discussion leave us? I propose that the best direction for EU-US research is to be centred on the idea of a 'dual mission' – theoretical and empirical – that recognizes the centrality of political science's explanatory goals but at the same time embraces the notion that the EU and the US are cases distinct from the rest, and *prioritizes understanding the dynamics governing these two systems in the quest for causal laws*. Practically speaking, the dual mission requires that EU-US research, or most of it, be explanatory in nature and have an N of 2 – needless to say by choice rather than necessity. This is a minimalistic rule that can accommodate a wide variety of research topics, schools of thought (provided they do not reject explanation altogether) and methods (including statistical analysis, if conducted at the sub-systemic level) and at the same time provide a clear and unifying mode of research for EU-US scholarship that combines optimally the advantages of normalization with those of heterodoxy.

To be sure, it would probably be naïve – or, worse, arrogant – to want to exogenously impose a specific direction to a small but already important literature such as the EU-US one: to a great extent research agendas go where scholarly practice takes them. Yet research does need some reflection and steering from time to time, if only to set its most basic direction and goals. The dual mission advocated here is in a very good position in this respect. On the one hand, it is consistent with changes that have already been happening within the EU-US literature, where explanatory studies have grown in number and increasingly leaned toward the N = 2 variety. On the other hand, it is not at all clear how durable these trends will prove and, more importantly, to what extent they are the product of some reflection on the peculiar nature of the EU-US comparison of the sort presented here. The dual mission can play an important role as a methodological principle

<sup>6</sup> A counterargument to this might be that scholars supporting the federalization of Europe would do a greater service to the cause by instead expanding the comparison so as to de-politicize it and avoid provoking opposition to integration. The problem with this position, however, is that it relies on an overly optimistic view of European integration in which, cleared from political interferences (of academic or other origin), the path towards an 'ever closer union' would continue automatically and unopposed. If this view was ever tenable, it is certainly not so now – and neither is the argument that the best course of action for politically engaged academics is to pursue disengaged research.

around which the recent transformations of EU-US scholarship can be crystallized and reinforced for the future. Placing this idea firmly at the centre of EU-US comparative work will be, I believe, the best way to define the identity of this scholarly enterprise and ensure its development as a distinct research programme within EU studies.

## Conclusions

This article has contributed to the debate on the normalization of EU studies in two ways. Empirically, it has extended normalization research to the scholarship comparing the European Union and the United States – a growth industry mirroring in the academic realm Euro-enthusiasts' traditional fascination with the American federal experience. Using an original and comprehensive bibliographic data set I have shown not only that the number of EU-US comparisons has grown considerably since the early 1990s, thereby denoting increasing transcendence of the *sui generis* paradigm, but also and more interestingly that EU-US research itself has conformed more and more to the rest of political science by expanding its scope, becoming more causal in nature and more empirically inclusive.

Against the dominant view on normalization, however, I have argued that this transformation is not entirely good news. Accordingly I have proposed – the article's second contribution – an alternative epistemological model for EU-US scholarship that reconnects political research and actual politics by combining the scope and explanatory goals of mainstream political science with the recognition that the EU and the US are not political systems like any other due to their importance and the political implications of their comparison. Based on these ideas I have argued that future EU-US research should be centred on the notion of a dual mission – theoretical and empirical – to be implemented primarily through explanatory studies focusing on the two cases in isolation. This dual mission, I have concluded, is in the best position to support a rich and diverse research agenda while ensuring the development of EU-US comparisons as a distinct programme within European integration studies.

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## Appendix: Data Collection Procedures

The bibliographic research for this data set was conducted in different stages. In the first stage I ran a series of unstructured searches on the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) Web of Science, Google Scholar and Google Books data bases, followed by second-level searches within the literature cited by and citing the items found. Subsequently, I filtered this initial list of results by eliminating: (a) work written in languages other than English; (b) unpublished material (such as working papers and other grey literature); and (c) work published in marginal outlets or professional journals (such as *PS* or *European Political Science*).

I then integrated the list with the results of two more focused searches. For articles, I ran searches (terms: 'United States' AND 'European Union' OR 'European Community' OR 'European Economic Community') followed by analysis of abstracts on the full text data bases of the top 40 political science, top 20 international relations and top 20 public administration journals as ranked by the ISI Journal Citation Report 2011 and/or 2012. To the 72 journals in this list I added a further 22 based on scope or appearance among the results of my previous unstructured searches: *American Politics Research*, *Comparative European Politics*, *Comparative Politics*, *Conflict and Cooperation*, *Democratization*, *Electoral Studies*, *European Integration Online Papers*, *Government and Opposition*, *International Affairs*, *International Political Science Review*, *International Politics*, *International Studies Review*, *International Theory*, *Journal of European Integration*, *Publius*, *Regional and Federal Studies*, *Scandinavian Political Studies*, *Political Quarterly*, *Political Science Quarterly*, *Political Studies*, *Polity* and *Studies in American Political Development*.

For books, I ran the same searches as above on the data bases of the Library of Congress and Oxford University's Bodleian Library, restricting the search to the following publishers: Brookings Institution Press, Cambridge University Press, Columbia University Press, Cornell University Press, Edward Elgar, Georgetown University Press, Harvard University Press, Johns Hopkins University Press, MIT Press, Oxford University Press, Palgrave Macmillan, Princeton University Press, Routledge, University of California Press, University of Chicago Press, University of Michigan Press and Yale University Press.

I then proceeded to a final filtering of the overall list of results by discarding: (a) work in disciplines other than political science; (b) literature reviews and research notes; (c) studies focusing primarily on EU Member States (as opposed to the EU as a whole); and (d) studies focusing primarily on EU-US relations. The resulting data set can be accessed at: <http://pierotortola.weebly.com/research.html>.

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