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7-28-2018

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Medie, Peace A. and Kang, Alice, "Global South scholars are missing from European and US journals. What can be done about it" (2018). *Faculty Publications: Political Science*. 100.
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THE CONVERSATION

Academic rigor, journalistic flair

Global South scholars are missing from European and US journals. What can be done about it

July 29, 2018 4.28am EDT



Global South-based scholars are often not part of major debates and conversations. Shutterstock

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Studies have shown that scholars in the global South are under represented in top international peer-reviewed social and medical sciences journals.

The global South refers to African, Asian, Latin American, and Middle Eastern countries who are also members of the Group of 77. The intergovernmental organisation of mainly developing countries is used to identify countries in the South. The global North includes the Group of 8 and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council.

Our own analysis of gender and politics journals shows scholars in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East are missing from leading journals published in the US and Europe. We found that between 2008 and 2017 less than 3% of 947 full length articles in four gender and politics journals published in the global North were written by scholars based in the global South.

Researchers based in the global North have a wider global reach and are generally judged to be at the forefront of knowledge production and dissemination. Meanwhile, South-based scholars are often not part of major debates and conversations in their field. This points to a severe imbalance in the production of new knowledge.

But all countries in the South are not alike. We found that scholars at three universities in South Africa (Rhodes University, University of Cape Town, and the University of the Witwatersrand) published the most articles followed by researchers at four universities in India. Surprisingly, scholars from large countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, and Nigeria have not published articles in these journals.

The causes of this under-representation are many. In Africa, where we both conduct research, it has been attributed to factors such as poor funding for universities, heavy teaching loads, and the incentives faculty face; many universities do not adequately reward research.

But it's more than institutional constraints that contribute to the under-representation of scholars based in Africa and in other regions in the South. Even when South-based scholars publish in journals based in the North, they still remain on the periphery. Editorial board members continue to be overwhelmingly based in the North and articles published by Africa-based scholars are less likely to be cited and thus, generally don't have a major influence on the literature.

We argue that the exclusion of scholars based in the global South undermines the quality of scholarship and sends a negative message to students. But we also argue that there are solutions to the problem.

Undermining scholarship

An academy in which large groups are absent is one in which fewer research questions are asked and less diverse research tools used. For example, in the study of gender and politics, scholars based in the South have emphasised the importance of studying the effects of the global political and economic order on women's lives in the South. But this attention to the global order is often missing from studies of gender and politics in the global South.

Second, it signals to students, including students in the global South, that South-based scholars do not have a central role to play in knowledge production. This has implications for how students generally perceive and engage with scholarship that is produced in the global South.

Solutions

Myriad solutions have been proposed to address the under representation of scholars based in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East.

In Africa, these include the need for institutions to remove barriers such as heavy teaching loads, poor infrastructure, and inadequate research funding, that make research and publishing a challenge for many scholars. African governments have to invest in African universities and to implement policies that facilitate research.


The global academic community also has a role to play. Editors should invite contributions from scholars who might not normally submit papers to these journals. And journal editors can invite scholars based in the global South to join editorial boards and to edit journals.

Among other things, the presence of editors and editorial board members in the global South will

make it easier to identify promising research.

Another intervention is that research organisations should provide funding to scholars in the South to help give them space to develop their ideas and receive feedback from their peers. Organisations such as the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) and the American Political Science Association (APSA) have made some progress in this area. CODESRIA has provided research funding and APSA-Africa Workshops have been forums where African scholars gathered to share and receive feedback on their research from their peers.

While, in general, financial support is limited and may be on the decline, public agencies and private foundations still have the choice in where and how to allocate their funds.

 [Research funding](#) [G8](#) [Global South](#) [Global North](#) [Global perspectives](#) [RandD](#)