

The Disparity of Knowledge in the Global Context

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In an era in which a global phenomenon defined by the open flow of goods, services, capital, people, and ideas has been established there remains an entrenched divide between the Western world and developing nations. The polarization of wealth and resources within this current international structure is significant, and this divide extends to the field of knowledge. Knowledge is a fundamental part of the complex global flow of commodities, one which is intertwined with the neo-colonial relationship between the developed West and the developing world. Developed nations, most notably the United States and Great Britain, dominate the means for the production and dissemination of knowledge. The result of this disparity is a wealth of intellectual output flowing from the developed West, but very little original scholarly work disseminating from the developing world. Our research reveals a distinct disparity between the number of socio-political sources used from the West and developing nations, which result both from tangible economic causes and the dominance of the Western intellectual tradition. These economic causes, such as lack of access to higher education and printing resources, are often byproducts of the post-colonial economic system. The intellectual factors in relation to the dominance of the Western tradition, as displayed by the prominence and resources of the Western scholarly community, play an even greater role in restricting the availability of non-Western sources.

Our research involves the analysis of sources and authors of fifty-three different scholarly articles, all randomly selected from the political science journals *Comparative Politics*, *World Politics*, *American Political Science Review*, and *American Journal of Political Science*. We recorded the subject of each article, origin of the author, and the place of publication of each cited source. The origin of these scholarly articles were then categorized into six categories based on the geographical region and political development of the nation(s) discussed; the first containing the United States and United Kingdom, the second the nations of Western Europe and Japan, followed by those of

Central and Eastern Europe, Africa nations, Asian nations, and Latin American nations. For the purposes of the study, developed nations are defined as the post-imperial nations of Western Europe, Japan and the United States. In this instance, Japan is an exception to the prevailing trend, as it does not dominate the academic sphere as these other nations do. While Japan is highly developed, there are not a significant number of Japanese articles within the sample. Next, the sources cited were divided into one of the six geo-political categories. This process made it possible to compile the data in a way which revealed underlying trends in the use of certain sources. The overwhelming trend exposed was the prominence of sources from the United States and the United Kingdom. As Figure 1 illustrates, 86% of the articles included in our research cite a majority of their sources from the United States and the United Kingdom.

Analysis of the data reveals this dependency on Western scholarly work, a pattern which becomes apparent in Figures 2-6. In regards to the articles written about the United States and the United Kingdom, the highest number of cited sources originated in those nations. The second-largest block of sources utilized by scholars comes from Western Europe and Japan, as illustrated in Figure 2. As the subject of the articles shifts to Western Europe and Japan, little changes with regard to the apparent reliance on American and British sources. The most utilized sources come from the United States and the United Kingdom, followed by Western Europe and Japan. The examination of articles written concerning affairs in Central and Eastern Europe nations further supports our belief in the dependency on American and British sources, shown in Figure 3. Notably, the second most cited region in terms of sources cited is the Central and Eastern Europe category. This trend continues in regards to the citation of African, Latin American, and Asian sources. In each instance, the majority of sources cited come from the United States or the United Kingdom, directly followed by sources from the region being studied.

Originally we wondered whether this discrepancy between the utilization of sources from developed and undeveloped nations was a result of bias toward scholars in developing nations. However, we realized that while the existence of some bias should not be fully dismissed, other factors play a far more notable role in shaping the diversity of the scholarly world. To better understand those factors, we collected data regarding the availability of publication resources, which would allow us to discuss academic publications (or lack thereof) in developing nations. In addition, we examined the state of educational systems in developing and developed nations and considered explanations offered for the prominence of Western sources in scholarly work, as well as naturally-occurring barriers such as language. These inconsistencies indicate a post-colonial dependency on the part of the periphery on the “knowledge-centers” of the Western world.

The research suggests several reasons for the lack of scholarly works originating in the developing world, with one of the most important factors being lack of educational infrastructure within these countries. Educational infrastructure includes high-quality educational systems, access to scholarly materials, and enough of an incentive to encourage local scholars to continue their work in their own nation. In Africa, educational attainment is extremely low, as is indicated by Figure 7. This low rate of attainment is a contributing factor to the low rate of scholarly output from this continent. While Africa has registered gains in their educational infrastructure in past years, the vast majority of countries on the continent still fall far short of the educational systems found in the West. The reasons for poor or nonexistent educational infrastructure are numerous. In some cases, academic populism plays a role. In such instances, a nation’s political ideology is emphasized over academic integrity, resulting in the university’s use as an “instrument to train cadres for political activism” (Albornoz 94). In these instances, the university is reduced to an indoctrination machine rather than a

meaningful educational institution which promotes the development and expression of original and meaningful academic work.

While it not always true that universities in developing nations behave this way, even those that maintain the “entrepreneurial university” model described by Albornoz may find themselves unable to carry out their task effectively, often due to lack of funding. The largest university endowment in the United States, that of Harvard University, totals a staggering \$25.4 billion (Infoplease). By comparison, CIA estimates for the year 2007 put the gross domestic product of Kenya at about \$29.5 billion, as reflected by the official exchange rate (Central Intelligence Agency 1). Obviously, a vast gulf exists between the resources of a single United States university and an entire developing nation. As a result of this lack of financial resources, many universities in developing nations use irrelevant and out-of-date materials, simply because they have no other choice. This undercuts educational quality. Lack of proper resources also discourages professors from teaching at these disadvantaged universities, which compounds the problem. In these instances, even if a university has sufficient resources to hire professors and obtain up-to-date textbooks, it is possible they have only obtained these resources at the expense of outside agencies, including foreign governments and Western aid agencies. The involvement of these outsiders often results in developing nations undergoing a self-defeating process in which the educational aid offered by developed nations to “cure” the problems of the developing makes the situation worse. In such situations, the resulting education obtained by students able to afford it may be a sound one, but there is an increased likelihood that the curriculum will follow a Western ideology or educational doctrine, simply because the materials available to them were produced in the West. Such an educational focus, we theorize, perpetuates Western ideals at the expense of the work and theories of native scholars.

As a result of the commonly lacking educational infrastructure in developing nations, many students from such nations who possess great academic potential often choose to enroll in institutions of higher learning in the West, particularly the United States. According to USINFO information posted on the State Department website, “the number of non-U.S. students enrolled in U.S. higher education institutions during the 2006-2007 academic year rose by 3 percent to...582,984 [students]...and new enrollments rose sharply” (Thomas 1). In addition, “[f]irst time enrollments rose 10.2 percent in 2006-2007, as compared with an 8 percent rise in the previous year” (Thomas 1). This is empirically verifiable evidence that students lacking academic opportunities in their home countries tend to choose developed nations, with the United States as the top choice, to continue their studies (as illustrated in Figure 8). For many students, a Western education provides them with their only real chance for academic advancement, simply because the necessary educational opportunities are not available in their own countries. Those students who enroll in the United States (or United Kingdom) tend to utilize the resources offered them at their respective institutions, and often decided to remain in the West to continue post-tertiary studies or pursue their own research. This tendency of students to study and remain in the West upon completion of their academic work has the effect of depleting developing nations of their few promising scholars, causing further damage to what little educational infrastructure developing nations have.

Those students who manage to obtain a tertiary-level education, whether in the West or in their native country, compose very small minorities in developing nations. As shown in Figure 9, which details the percentage of a country’s population that obtains an education after the age of 15, the United States possesses the highest number of students who receive a tertiary-level education. Nearly 50% of its population aged 15 or over attends an educational institution, and of those 25% of this population continues to

complete a tertiary-level education. In Japan 22% of population over the age of 15 attends an educational institution. The percentage that completes what in the United States would constitute a “college education” is half that of the US rate, at 11.7%. The United Kingdom continues the downward trend, where less than half of eligible students go on to obtain a tertiary-level degree. Moving into the developing world, academic achievement drops sharply. For example, the number of students in Columbian schools is less than the number of students who attend tertiary school in Japan. Tertiary attendance rate in Colombia is only 4.4%, less than half the secondary-level attendance rate. Moving to Afghanistan, the picture becomes bleaker still as 2.4% of the 15 and older population is attending school, with 1.7% earning a tertiary-level degree. In Ghana, only 1% of the target population attends school, and a tiny 0.5% obtain an undergraduate degree. Thus, it can be inferred that this disparity arises from a lack of educational resources, which in turn prevents publication of scholarly articles from these countries.

Assuming an aspiring scholar manages to overcome lack of educational infrastructure in his or her place of birth, there are other barriers to be overcome if they wish to gain recognition in the field. One of the largest of these is language, as “manuscripts from authors whose first language is not English often must be rejected, not because [the work] is deficient, but because the English is deficient” (Chan et al.; Morcos). The report further details the existence of “persistent pressure to write in English” to the extent where “96% of the publications [in the journal *Science*] were in English” and even in French-speaking Africa, only “33% of the articles retrieved [from another journal] had been published in French, 66% in English.” Although many scholars from developing nations produce quality work, there is often minimal time and resources devoted to translating such works, simply because the primary language of

the field is English. Thus, if an author does not write in fluent English, chances of being published or recognized drop dramatically.

Even if a student succeeds in his or her studies, surmounts the language barrier, and becomes a scholarly author, finding adequate access to peer review and printing opportunities can be a challenge. Many developing nations simply do not possess the service-based economy that yield publishing houses. This is evident through the fact that the largest printing houses are all situated in the West. Companies such as Time Warner, Inc., Random House, Pearson, von Holtzbrinck, HarperCollins, Oxford and Simon & Schuster are all located in the United States or developed areas of Europe. HarperCollins is actually a merger between companies in the United States and United Kingdom. Ultimately, lack of access to reputable publishing opportunities can be a huge barrier to scholars in developing nations. As an alternative to publishing in their own nations, scholars often choose to publish through Western publishing houses, and therefore publish for Western audiences. This often has the effect of diluting the work of developing nation's scholars, simply because in order to achieve recognition in the West a work must reflect a Western ideology. Additional problems, such as limited access to peer review, can also be detrimental to the emergence of scholarly works from the developing world. The lack of an established scholarly community to advise, collaborate with, and support emerging scholars can lessen the quality of what work is produced, and further discourage authors from attempting to undertake their own research. The lack of opportunities in developing nations hinders the ability of scholars who wish to gain recognition for their work within their own nations.

Applying this notion of Western domination of publishing resources to a global context reveals that academic work from developing countries is almost predestined to have a pro-Western viewpoint, simply because Western academic backing (usually funding) tends to promote only authors who share their views. One author we contacted

told us that “I made a conscientious effort to publish some of my work in India and Pakistan, but only after I published articles in the American Political Science Review and the Journal of Asian Studies in order to win tenure and promotions” (Wright). Furthermore, Dr. Wright wrote “I had a young colleague who didn’t get tenure, partly because several of his articles were published in German journals.” Scholars who do not conform to the unwritten precedent that work should first be submitted to Western publications often find themselves held back. Conversely, academics from developing nations are rewarded for their contribution to the field and their promotion of Western intellectual ideology. This Western domination of intellectual resources is paralleled by the West’s approach to economic transactions, specifically relating to the debate between free markets and command economies.

This wholesale promotion of Western values over all others figured prominently in attempts to rejuvenate the collapsed post-Soviet economy of both Eastern Europe and the Russian Federation. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, many Western economists pushed the so-called “Washington consensus,” which involved transforming the entire post-Soviet economy into a free market, capitalist economy all at once (Nutti in White et. al 255). Unfortunately, while the United States’ plan was sound by American and European economic standards, it did not function in a post-Communist Eastern European setting. This was clearly illustrated as the economy of the former Soviet states imploded to the tune of a 40% recession (Nutti in White et. al 256). This economic depression demonstrates the manner in which Western scholars may possess good intentions, but can wreak havoc on developing nations by applying a Western theory with no considerations for the nation the theory is being applied to. This type of inadvertently-destructive help is not limited to Russia, and has appeared in many other developing nations where Western aid has resulted in the creation of a dependency cycle, both economic and intellectual.

An intellectual application of detrimental Western aid can be viewed in India. There, attempts by Western aid agencies to assist Indian schools with the problem of “expensive” textbooks by providing free or reduced-cost books have been detrimental to the development of the Indian textbook industry. In *The Knowledge Context*, author Philip Altbach found that in “the social sciences, American books were not relevant to the Indian situation.” Further complicating the situation, “the subsidized books tended to drive their more expensive unsubsidized domestic counterparts off the market” (Altbach 203). The problem of academic dependency was further compounded because “the orientations of American social scientists [expressed in these books] reflected their own ideological biases,” which illustrates the use of Western academic populism, wrapped up in an attempt to aid a developing country (Altbach 203). Aid programs may “circulate materials which the industrialized countries think will win them influence at the cost of discouraging the development of local publishing” instead of reaching their stated goal of “bring[ing] out relevant locally written books” (Altbach 203). It is often the case that “indigenous scholars [in developing nations]...often must learn about their own...[nation]...through the writings of their Western counterparts” simply because “Western scholars have done much of the research” on the developing world (Altbach 203). Indeed, as Figures 10.1 and 10.2 show, while the majority of scholarly authors hail from the United States and United Kingdom, the nations they chose to study are fairly evenly represented. Therefore, it is evident that much of the literature being published regarding the developing world is produced by Western scholars. The World Library and Information Congress illustrates this disparity in their report from 2005, which points out that “researchers in eight countries – led by the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Japan – produce almost 85 percent of the world’s most cited publications” but another “163 countries, mostly developing countries, account for less than 2.5%” of said publications (Chan et al.). These figures clearly illustrate the size of the disparity

separating Western and non-Western scholars, and alludes to the difficulties developing nations face if they are to compete with Western academics.

While the economic and intellectual factors play a far more notable role in shaping the dissemination of academia around the globe, the existence of actual bias against the scholarly work of developing nations should not be dismissed. This bias generally stems from scholars' long standing preferences or inclinations to use work published in the developed world, simply because they are often more available and have been awarded more notice as a result of access to publishing and peer review. As a result of this prejudice against the often unproven works of developing nations, many Western scholars dismiss the legitimacy of these works. This dismissal of scholarly work from developing nations illustrates the social stigma that surrounds these developing nations, and cause scholars to dismiss their work as of lesser quality. A professor of Latin American Politics at the University of Texas at Austin, whom we contacted, insisted that "[S]ince scholars in their own work want to engage "the best," they cite a good number of US and US-based authors." This ideology, however, perpetuates the notion that only those works published in the developed West are credible and quality sources, thereby shutting out the recognition of original work from developing nations' scholars.

Because of the complexity of this topic and the plethora of factors that contribute to the low output of scholarly material in developing nations, we recognize that a study such as ours can only scratch the surface of the issue, and we recognize the limitations of our own work. Firstly, in order to create a more representative sample, a more expansive database than the one we have access to is necessary. Because of the limited information we possess, some of our statistical analysis is not as precise as would be the normal standard for academic work. However we feel that the underlying

trends in our research, particularly the lack of cited work from developing nations, are viable.

Ultimately, we conclude that the lack of reliance on scholarly materials from developing nations result from numerous factors, most leading back to the simple inexistence or unavailability of these materials, rather than Western bias against them. The World Library and Information Congress reported, "...until the imbalance in access and distribution of scholarly literature is redressed, science in the developing world will continue to lag behind" (Chan et al.). This imbalance will continue until developing nations can break away from their post-colonial reliance on the scholarly work of the West. School materials, produced by and for developing nations must be made available in order to allow students in those nations to obtain a quality education shaped by domestic beliefs and values, rather than a doctrine imposed by the West in the name of "development." Educational opportunities free of Western ideological influence must be made more widely available to the people of those nations, in addition to regional printing opportunities. These goals, unfortunately, will be difficult to meet. As modern politicians have demonstrated, there is no such thing as a "quick fix" for the stalled economic or academic growth in developing nations. However, it is only when these requirements are met that scholars of developing nations will have the ability to carve out their own niche in a global community dominated by Western knowledge.

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Figure 1

Percentage of Articles Cited by Category

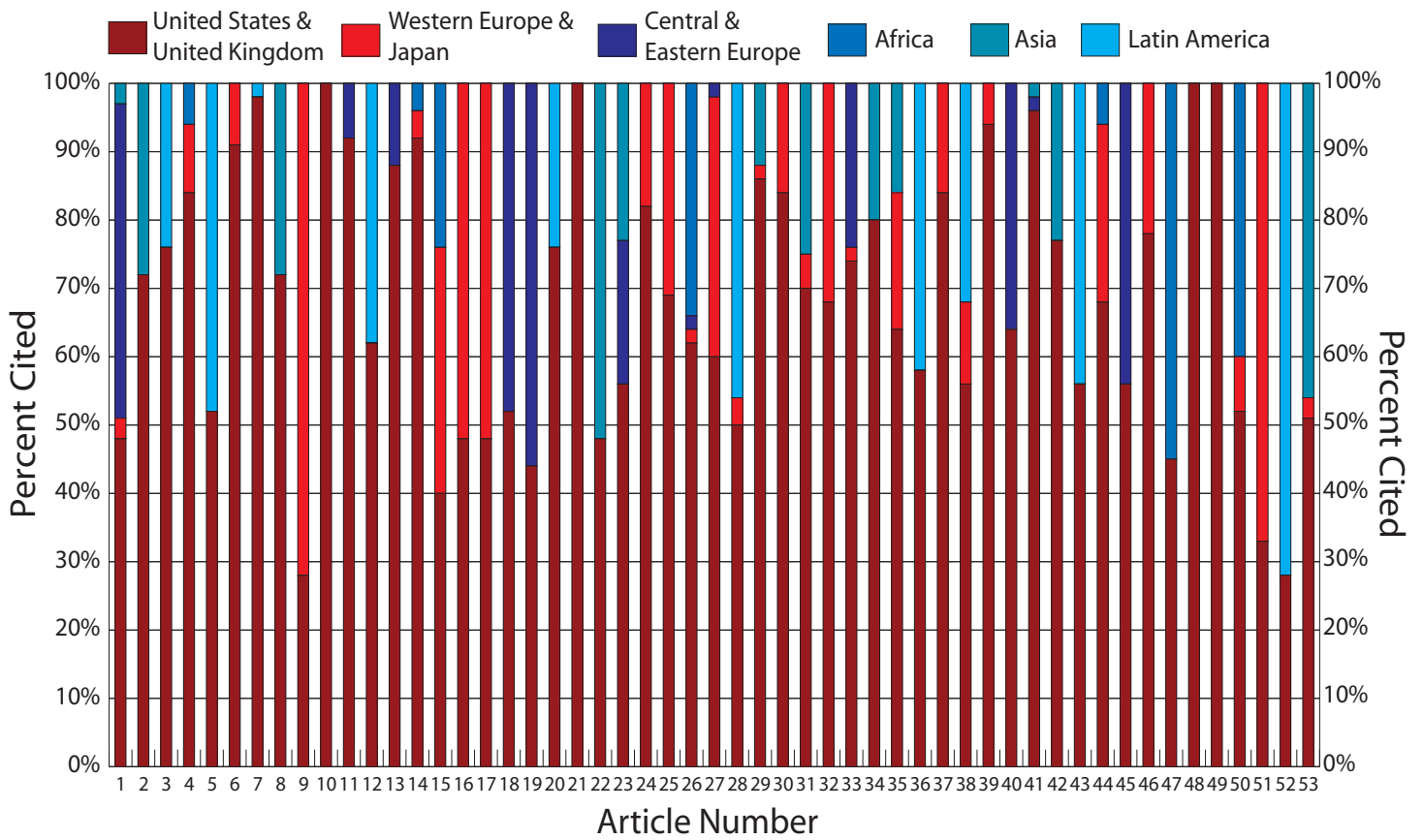


Figure 2

US & UK vs. Western Europe and Japan - Percent Cited

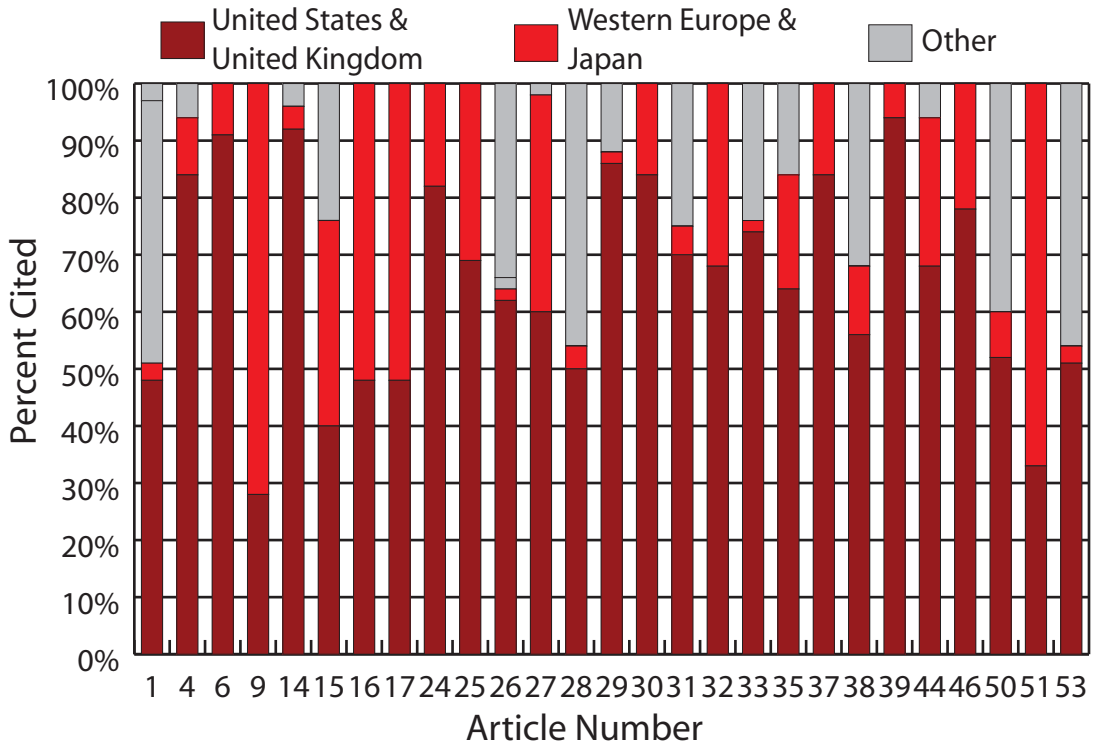


Figure 3

US & UK vs. Central & Eastern Europe - Percent Cited

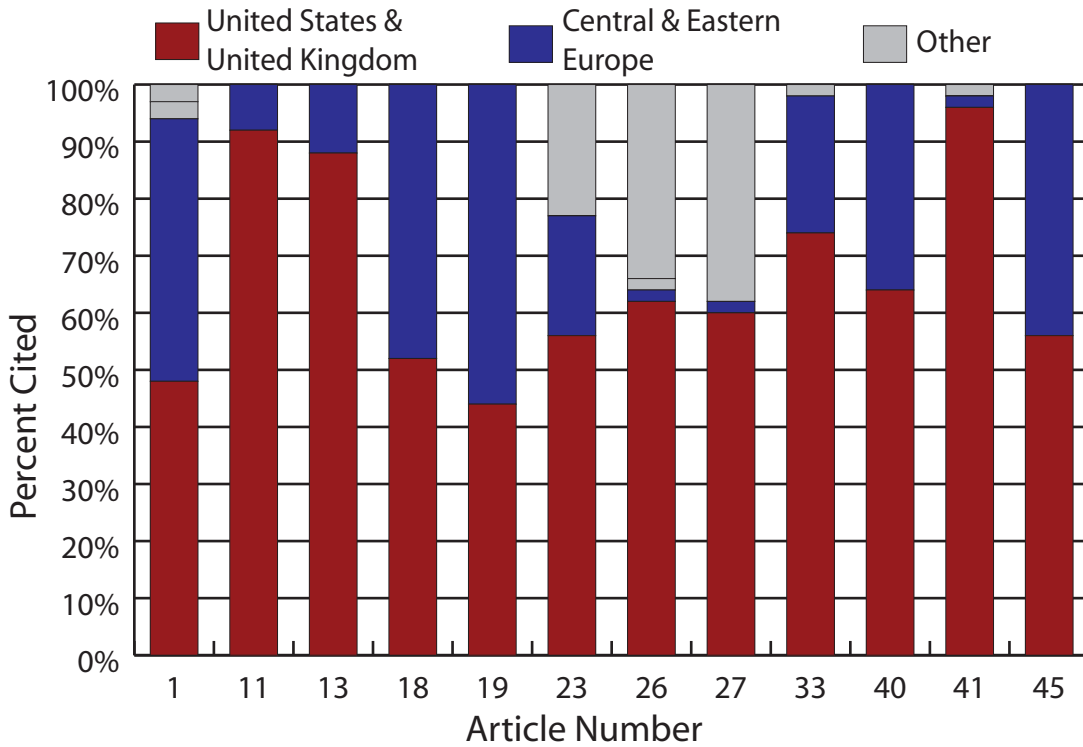


Figure 4

US & UK vs. Africa - Percent Cited

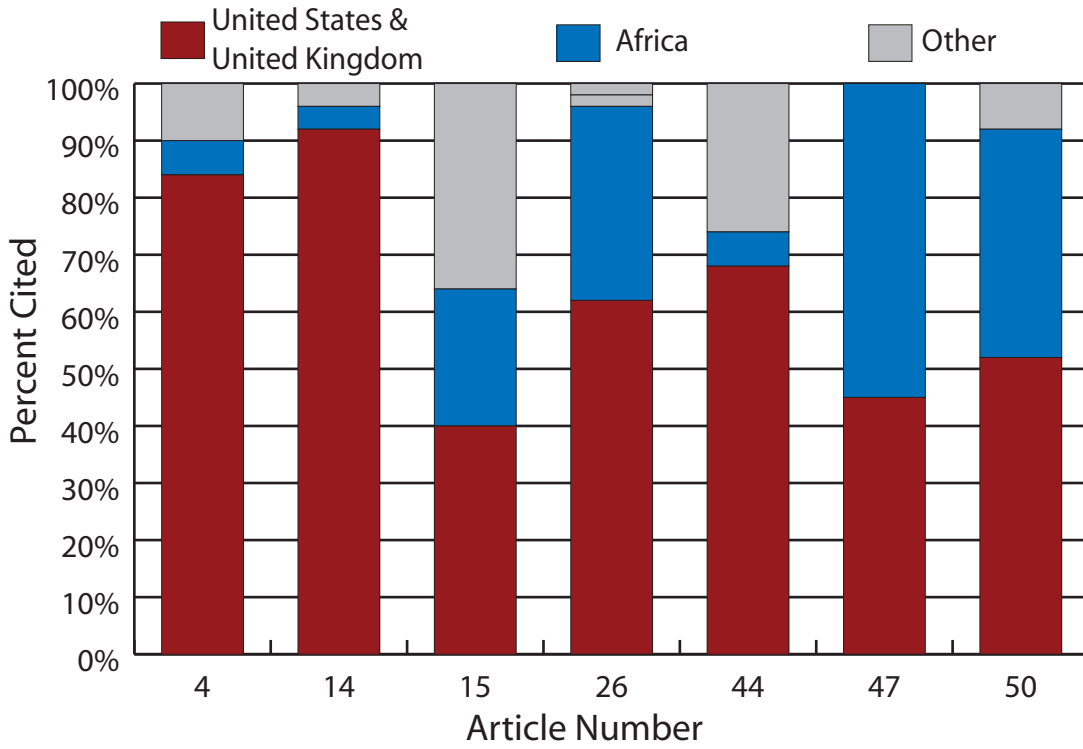


Figure 5

US & UK vs. Asia - Percent Cited

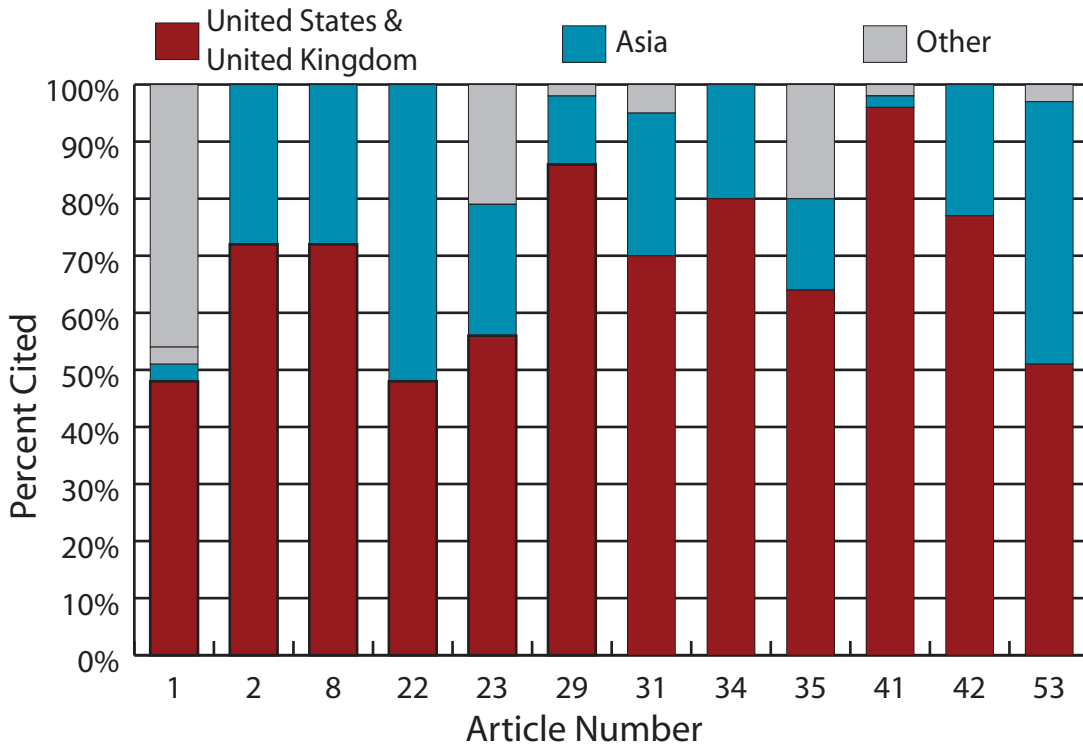


Figure 6

US & UK vs. Latin America - Percent Cited

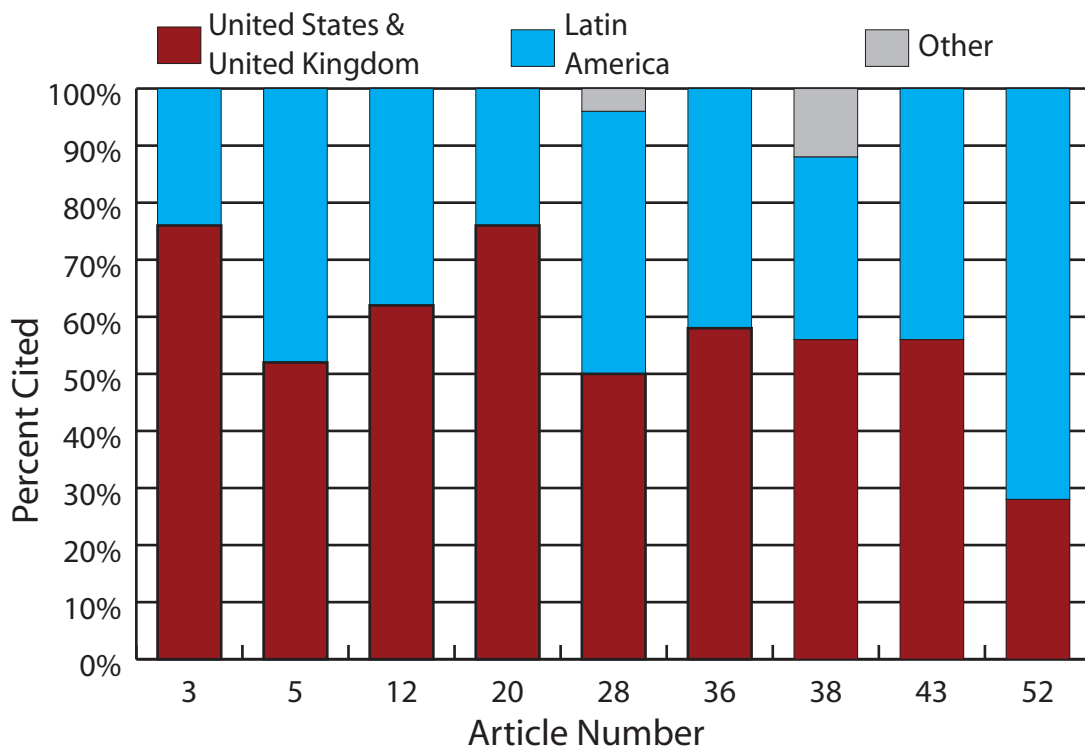


Figure 7

Percent Tertiary Education Enrollment per Region

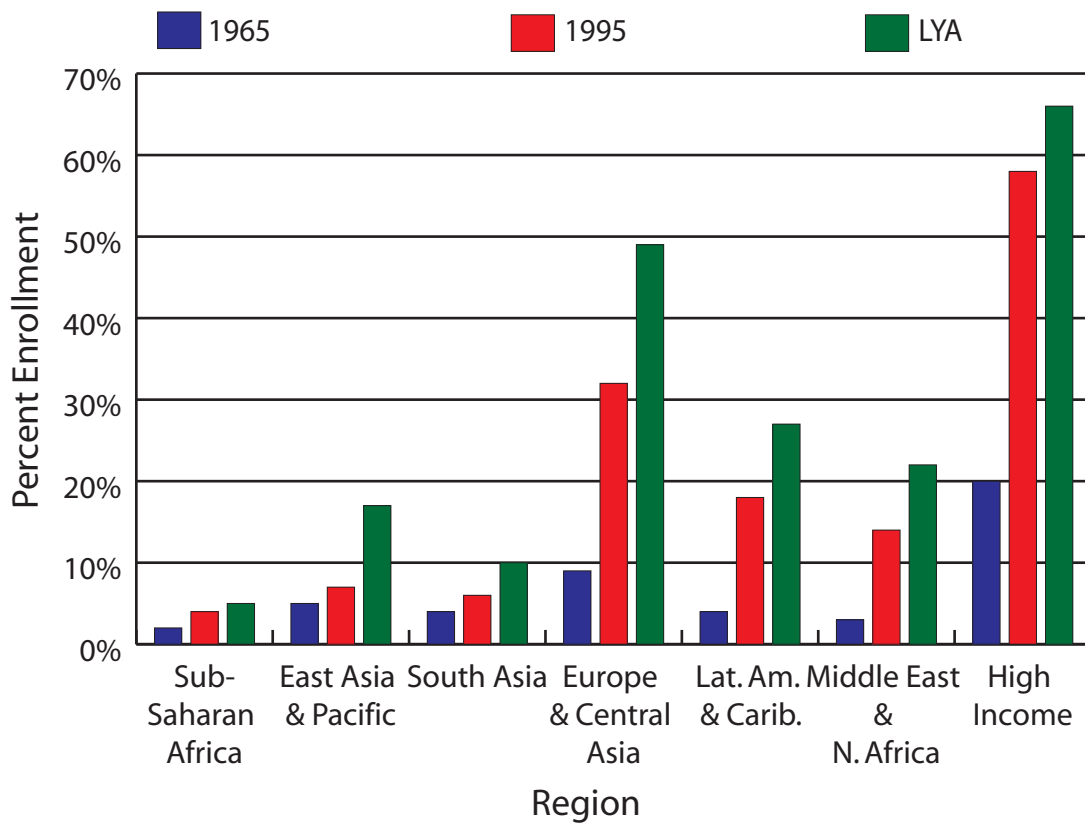


Figure 8

Global Destinations for International Students at the Tertiary Level

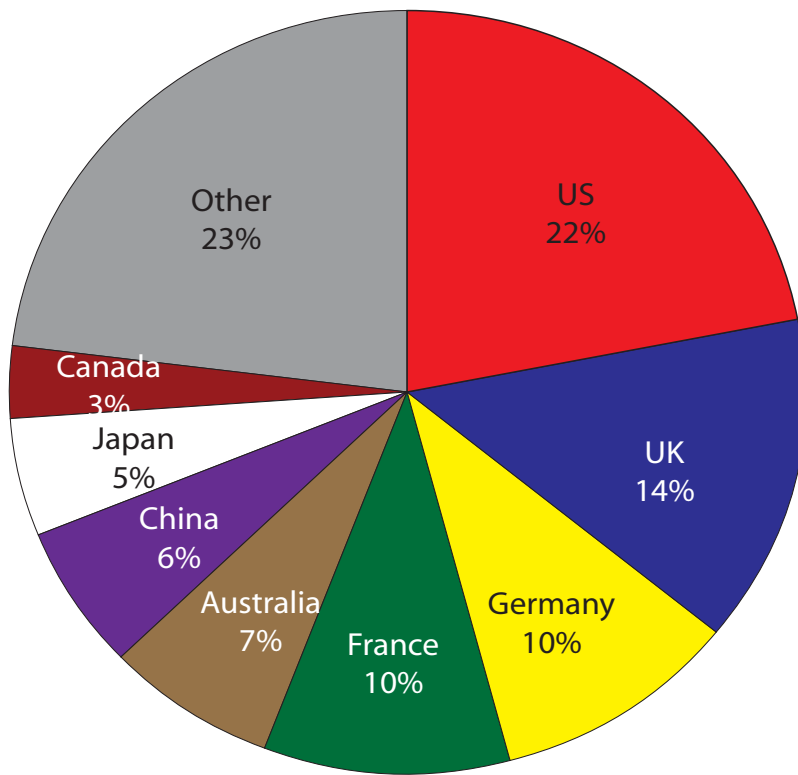


Figure 9

Percent Tertiary Education Enrollment per Country

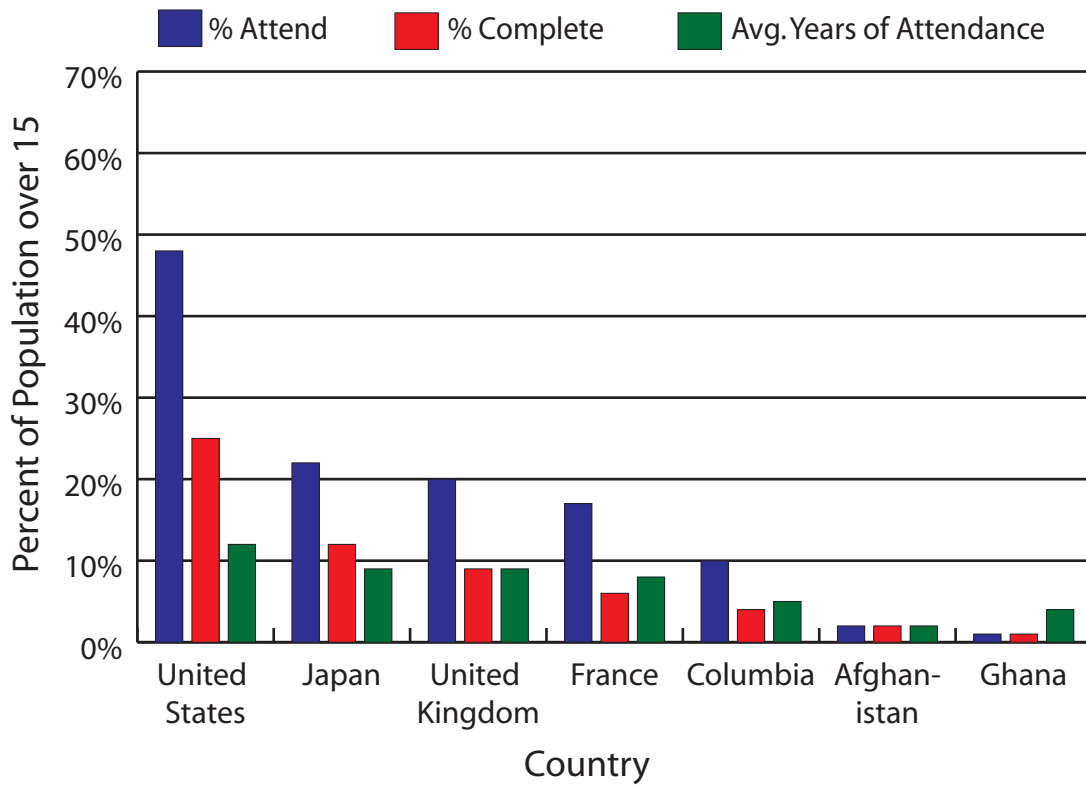


Figure 10.1

Origin of Authors per Category

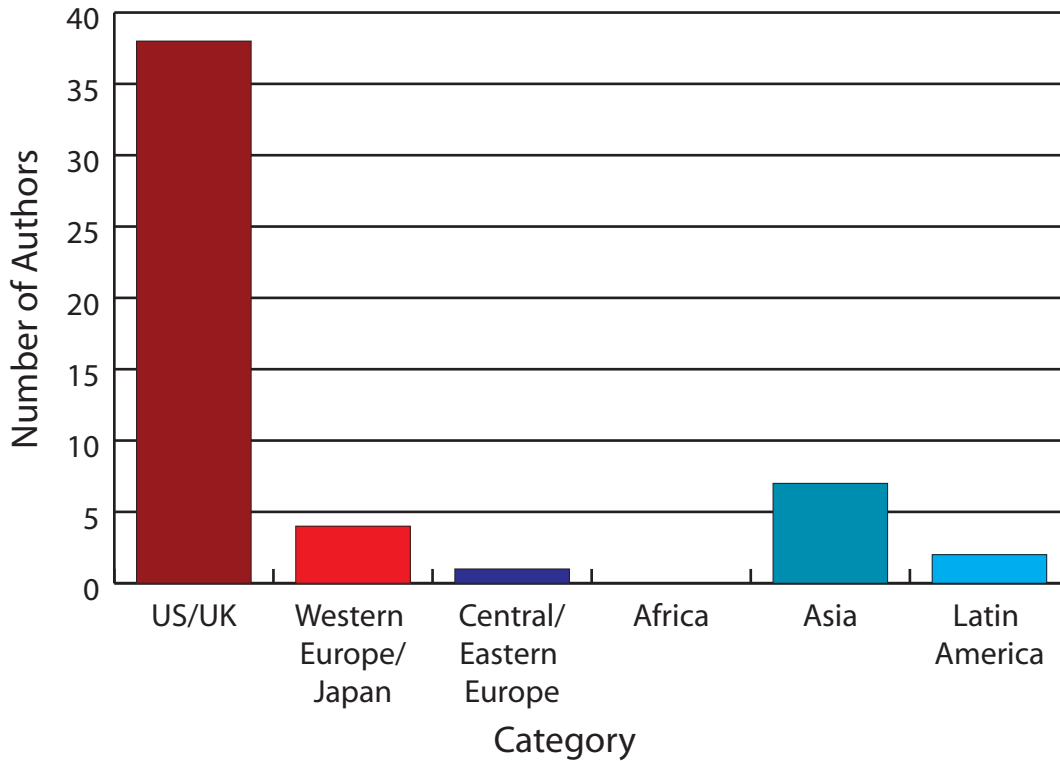


Figure 10.2

Origin of Articles per Category

