

## Global Epistemologies: Concepts, Methodologies, and Data Systems

# Global Social Sciences? Introducing a Series of Special Collections on the State and the Potential of the Social Sciences across the Globe

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Keywords: state and potential of the social sciences, Western academic hegemony, epistemological considerations, ideologies and normative foundations, academic freedom, professionalization, commercialization, postcolonialism, social science impact

<https://doi.org/10.1525/gp.2023.75284>

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## Global Perspectives

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Nominally, the social sciences maintain the ideological aspiration of a unified, global endeavor for a better understanding of human societies, their economies, cultures, and politics. Over 150 years after their founding period, there is significant fragmentation and unevenness in this quest to understand the human condition. Distinct hierarchies and exclusionary structures emerged between the "West" and regions like Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, China and India and many parts of Asia. Some countries, even entire regions, are terra incognita from a Western vantage point and relegated to "area studies." At the same time, distinct social science traditions have formed in countries and regions outside the West, with a new interest in developing approaches that rely less on Western foundations and conventional academic practices.

The questions become: Are the social sciences drifting further apart, or is there a possibility of greater dialogue, even cohesiveness, to advance our knowledge and understanding globally rather than only in some regions or countries? And if so, why, how, and for what? What are the main foci in research and teaching? What is the degree of institutionalization, and how could the global, regional, and national potentials of the social sciences be better realized?

To approach these questions, *Global Perspectives* launches systematic assessments of the state and the potential of the social sciences in different parts of the world. They address five key issue clusters: Western hegemony and fragmentation; basic conceptual and epistemological considerations; ideologies and normative foundations; academic freedom; and professionalization and commercialization. Given the significant scale and complex scope of the social sciences with their many specific subfields, methodologies, and curricula as well as varying degrees of professional institutionalization and different political backgrounds, the special collections present reflective essays on the state and the potential of the social sciences rather than comprehensive empirical stock-taking.

## INTRODUCTION

*Global Perspectives* (GP) is a transnational and transdisciplinary academic journal seeking to address the most important debates within the social sciences. Alongside substantive fields such as cultures, values, institutions, networks, economic systems, technology and society interfaces, communication, and international relations (GP's eight sections), this includes a profound interest in the state of the social sciences in different parts of the world, how they differ and interact, what challenges they face, and what their potentials might be. GP's interest in these questions is not only intellectual but also normative: as a journal, we strive

to foster greater, more open and equitable relationships between academic fields in different regions.

In launching this series, we are reminded of Pippa Norris's (1997) seminal study of the state of political science internationally. She challenged the notion of a greater convergence of both methodological approaches and research agendas. At that time, her findings indicated a continued emphasis on local and national rather than international and comparative research. She concludes:

*For those who regard localism as way of encouraging theoretical pluralism and cultural diversity, this may be regarded as healthy... But for those who believe a more cosmopolitan political science will lead to greater intel-*

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*lectual enrichment, stronger general theories, and more interchange within the discipline, the results are discouraging. We have easier means to communicate, for sure, but whether we can actually surmount and break down the boundaries of national political science remains under doubt.* (Norris 1997, 32–33)

More than two decades later, based on a survey of more than two thousand political scientists conducted by the European Consortium for Political Research and the International Political Science Association, she finds, however, that “considerable similarities in political science as a profession can indeed be observed today around the world, from working conditions and professional qualifications to evaluations of academic change, role priorities, research subfields and methods” (Engeli, Boncourt, and Garzia 2020, 15). For her, this brings out a tension between a political science deeply rooted in national intellectual traditions, on the one hand, and on the other hand, an internationalization that may “generate uniformity of ‘one-size-fits-all,’ accompanied by a loss of local cultures, depth and diversity within the discipline” (2020, 15).

Of course, these tensions are not limited to political science but are found in other disciplines as well. What is more, the contest between the local and national versus the international and global is unequal and biased. It involves well-known issues that include existing knowledge hierarchies, exclusionary structures, the lasting effects of colonialism, methodological nationalism, political pressures and threats to academic freedom, funding limitations, the increasing dominance of English, disciplinary “silos,” citation networks, hiring practices, the administrative capacity of universities, and authorship parasitism,<sup>1</sup> among others.

There are new and emerging issues, too, including the technological aptitude of academic institutions, the role of big data and artificial intelligence, the growing trend toward open-access publishing, the digital divide, privacy policies, pressures to show impact and relevance, and tense geopolitics limiting international intellectual exchange, as well as increasing mobility limitations for social scientists and students. How these issues will shape the social sciences in the longer term remains uncertain, as do the ways in which they are likely to interact with existing challenges and opportunities.

Yet irrespective of prevailing realities, the social sciences, at least nominally, maintain the inspirational ideology of a unified, global endeavor for a better understanding of human societies, their economies, cultures, and polities (Anheier et al. 2020). They are basically a product of the Enlightenment and modernity. Emerging from a common origin in eighteenth-century philosophy and moral political economy, the social sciences are now well into their second century. The various social sciences disciplines were closer to each other when they first developed in earnest in the

late nineteenth century onward than they are now. The borderlines between what is today regarded as science, social science, and the humanities were more fluid at that time. Throughout that period, the social sciences were significantly shaped by national interests, security needs, pressing social problems, and frequent attempts at professional and political control. While they continue to be both subject and object of numerous contestations, many politically motivated, they have generally gained in relevance as well as acceptance.

Today, social scientists teach, research, publish, and practice in all regions and virtually all countries of the world in a diversified set of disciplines and in numerous professions. Even with precise data lacking, it may be safe to state that there have never been more social scientists in more departments teaching and graduating more students, engaging in more research projects, and publishing more papers in more journals than at present.

Yet we also observe significant unevenness in the development of the social sciences. While several networks have emerged among Asian universities (Anheier et al. 2020) and growing and deepening collaborations have developed among social scientists from EU member states (also including countries such as Switzerland, Norway, and Israel and soon, again, the United Kingdom), federal funding in the United States, which houses the world’s largest social science system, has waned, and some fields like gender or ethnic studies have been, and are, subject to great political pressure.

Indeed, funding constraints and political influence have resulted in a dearth of stable, long-term academic positions and research collaborations in many countries. In parts of Africa, Latin America, the Arab world, and Asia, social science communities are often small, and infrastructures frequently remain fragile, are undercapitalized, and are intellectually relatively isolated from each other. By contrast, countries such as Brazil, China, India, Japan, Mexico, South Africa, and South Korea have significant social science communities, even though issues with academic freedom and governmental interference may prevail in some. In still other countries, the social sciences are highly controlled, instrumentalized by state authorities, and ultimately marginalized.

## FUNDAMENTAL CHALLENGES

Given this unevenness, there seems growing uncertainty whether the quest for an ever greater and deeper understanding of the human condition will universally advance as the founding era and the rapid expansion in the twentieth century promised—an expansion, we hasten to add, that did not always contribute to universal liberatory goals but also helped support racial injustices, social and eco-

<sup>1</sup> Authorship parasitism (i.e., no authors affiliated with the country in which the study took place) occurs frequently in research conducted in low-income and middle-income countries, despite published recommendations defining authorship criteria (Rees et al. 2021).

conomic inequalities, and discriminatory gender practices, to name a few. Rather than being a solution to society's problems, the social sciences were at times part of the problem itself, when judged by the promise of the Enlightenment and, especially, nineteenth-century progressivism, which coincided with their founding period.

On balance, the social sciences did more good than harm, even though any more precise assessment could be easily contested. However, this mixed track record is always in the background when debating the numerous challenges facing the social sciences today, as are concerns that they have yet to realize their full potential. Several closely related issue clusters seem fundamental in this respect: Western hegemony and fragmentation; basic conceptual and epistemological considerations; ideologies and normative foundations; academic freedom; and professionalization and commercialization. Let's review each in turn.

*Western hegemony and fragmentation.* The United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and France clearly dominate the social sciences. They are joined by other academic powerhouses, such as Canada and Australia, and other major European countries, such as Italy, Spain, Sweden, and the Netherlands. Japan, South Korea, and Israel are integrated in this academic system, as is Singapore. Roughly speaking, they form the core of the social sciences whose influence radiates outwards, in a geography not dissimilar to that of the colonial empires of the previous century.

While significant variations exist, the social sciences in these countries enjoy academic freedom and are securely institutionalized in their respective higher education systems and school curricula. Furthermore, university departments and research organizations are relatively well funded, career opportunities for social scientists exist inside and outside academia, and a substantial part of the professoriate has traditionally had some degree of job security, mostly through various forms of tenure and promotion systems.

Several indicators illustrate the extent of Western (and often US) dominance in the social sciences: in the field of economics, of the ninety-two Nobel laureates up to 2022, less than a handful were born in non-Western countries, and all but two were based at US or European universities when they won their prize.<sup>2</sup> Virtually all the leading journals in the major social science disciplines are based in the United States and Europe. The same pattern holds for the leading economics, sociology, political science, and anthropology departments. In the QS World University Rankings, non-Western universities and social science departments are rarely among the top 50 or 100, and usually find themselves ranked below 250.<sup>3</sup>

In sum, even though any such ranking of departments and journals is and can be contested, there are clear indications of a distinct hierarchy between the "West" as the core

and "peripheral" regions like Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. The same peripheral status applies to many parts of Asia, even though some Asian countries, most notably China and India, have made major advances and developed significant social science communities (see below). Nonetheless, there remains a tendency for social scientists in North America and Europe to disregard countries (and their social scientists) outside the Western core, even entire regions (e.g., the Caribbean with its cluster of small island states or Central America), leaving them as terra incognita, at least from a Western vantage point, relegated to "area studies" at best.

Yet the strict center-periphery structure has changed in recent years as burgeoning social science communities have emerged in many countries outside the developed world, with Brazil, China, India, Indonesia, Nigeria, and South Africa as some of the most salient examples. The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), for example, reports significant increases in the number of students enrolled in social science programs. The report also notes that there has been a significant increase in the number of social science research institutes, which now number more than 1,300. Similarly, reports by Indonesia's Ministry of Education and Culture (Ministry of Education and Culture 2018) and Nigeria's National Universities Commission (National Universities Commission 2018) note that there are now hundreds of social science university programs offered in each country, with a corresponding increase in graduates from these programs. According to a report by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics 2019), social sciences and humanities programs account for more than 20 percent of all undergraduate programs. The South African Council on Higher Education (National Universities Commission 2018) reports the same share. Singapore's Ministry of Education reported that social sciences and humanities programs accounted for 28 percent of all undergraduate degrees awarded in 2019 (Ministry of Education (Singapore) 2020). In the United Arab Emirates, universities such as the American University of Sharjah and the United Arab Emirates University offer a range of social science programs. Qatar has established a National Research Fund and the Qatar Social Science and Humanities Research Foundation.

Today, it seems more appropriate to speak of a constellation with the West as the still dominant center; a semi-periphery of emerging social science communities, some of which are both contesting and collaborating with the West; and a periphery of countries with smaller and mostly weaker social science infrastructures. There also seems a new interest in developing approaches that rely less on Western epistemological foundations and conventional academic practices. The postcolonial debate is one prominent example of this.<sup>4</sup> Quests to "decolonize the academy"

2 See <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262901/nobel-prize-winners-in-economics-by-nationality/>.

3 See <https://www.topuniversities.com/subject-rankings/2022>.

are both a political movement and an academic approach that seeks to challenge the social sciences in their very foundations and across the disciplines. This approach questions the legitimacy of the social sciences and the humanities in their present form to constitute *the* system of global knowledge and points to what are seen as inherent biases and inequities.

While countries such as Brazil, India, Indonesia, and Nigeria enjoy growing connections with the core, and while epistemological challenges to the Western paradigm become more vocal, other countries seem to distance, even isolate, themselves deliberately from both the core and the international social science community. This happens often for religious reasons, as is the case with Iran after the Iranian Revolution of 1979 or the Taliban in Afghanistan after 2022. It also happens for political reasons, such as in China under Xi Jinping or in Putin's Russia since the annexation of Crimea. Both seem to shift away from collaboration and exchange with Western social science institutions. Finally, in failed states or countries under civil war, the social sciences are either mostly dormant or in jeopardy for political, security, and economic reasons. Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and Libya are cases in point for a much longer list.

The hierarchy between core and peripheries is full of barriers for institutions and scholars. What are the chances, let's say, of an assistant professor in a sociology department in Uganda or Vietnam getting his or her paper accepted in the *American Journal of Sociology*? What about the likelihood that a manuscript by a full professor in economics in Saudi Arabia or Bolivia finds its way into the pages of *Economics Letters*? Or what are the chances a paper by a Chilean researcher of civil society movements would get accepted by the *American Political Science Review*? Would they even think about European, Japanese, or Australian journals? Vice versa, few scholars in leading social science departments in the United States or Europe outside perhaps area studies would consider submitting their papers to disciplinary journals in Africa or the Middle East even if they had a solid regional or national reputation.

Exclusion and isolation are only part of the issue. We must also ask: why indeed should scholars from Pakistan or Nigeria aim at the premier Western journals as an outlet for their academic productivity? Perhaps a better way to frame the question is, Why are aspiring young scholars from the Global South still incentivized to publish in prominent Western journals, and why are promising Western academics not encouraged to submit to leading journals in the Global South? Would it not be better to publish locally and build an academic discourse and support social science infrastructure? Of course, the answer is that the *American Sociological Review* "counts" far more for career advancement than any regional or national sociology journal—which is

one reason that social science infrastructures outside the West remain oriented to America and Europe as the center.

And why are positions at American, Australian, or European universities so much more appealing than elsewhere? Again, the answer is found in the more lucrative conditions and prospects they offer, irrespective of greater academic freedom and less political interference. As a result, many social scientists in the periphery are trapped in a system of weak infrastructures, low salaries, fewer opportunities, and more control. Given the dearth of funding for universities, academics in the Global South tend to have second or third jobs, usually in NGOs, think tanks, or public administration, and indeed, consulting and other businesses. One consequence is the brain drain afflicting many social science communities in the Global South while they seek to advance their own research agendas, teaching curricula, and professional development.

*Basic conceptual and epistemological considerations.*<sup>5</sup> Concepts are at the core of the social sciences. They constitute the main building blocks of theories and guide methodologies. In this context, important issues arise: Are Western and non-Western notions of the "social" and the concepts of society, economy, and polity equivalent? Are these ultimately Western notions, carried initially by colonialism and then by academia and the institutions of the Bretton Woods world? Did they diffuse globally without variations of semantics and understandings? How were concepts of society, economy, and religion shaped in non-Western societies—and, crucially, in their languages? What conceptualizations and epistemologies exist outside the Western canons? For example, the various meanings of *al-ijtima'* (Arabic), *shehui* (Chinese), *samāj* (modern Hindi), *masyarakat* (Malay and Indonesian), and *sangkom* (Thai) are terms that equate to the English *society*. However, these terms do not necessarily carry the same semantic meaning as their Western counterparts. Epistemologically, such semantic incongruencies and reifications are likely to have an impact on the way social sciences are practiced in these countries and academic systems. In some cases, existing words were chosen to translate "society" (e.g., the Hindi *samāj* existed for centuries before the connotation "society" was introduced). In others, the decisive tensions between citizen and state disappeared in translation (as in the Korean *sahoe*).

Understanding this part of social sciences history in different parts of the world is critical for assessing its current state today, and not only in relation to methodological nationalism but also in terms of implicit Eurocentrism and Western biases. One approach to counteract Western dominance that has gained momentum in recent decades comes from postcolonial studies, particularly the notion of the subaltern. The approach draws on Gramsci's work on cul-

4 At *Global Perspectives*, we are featuring a special collection on this debate under the title "Decolonize This!" See <https://online.ucpress.edu/gp/collection/8705/Special-Collection-Decolonize-This>.

5 This section draws in part on Anheier et al. (2020).

tural hegemony, with an emphasis on narratives and sense making. It is also in the tradition of Said's (1978) notion of Orientalism; he argues that the West reduces Arab societies to a static, nonmodern image while portraying itself as dynamic and "rational." This creates a false outside view of "Oriental culture," which, once constructed, can then be portrayed—and indeed studied—in a way that serves imperial power.

Without doubt, postcolonial thinking has gained some influence, especially in anthropology and global studies. Yet can twenty-first-century social science be "de-Westernized," and for what purpose? If it is true that the current social science mainstream reproduces Western hegemony, what follows, and who or what would or should be served under alternative scenarios? And if the "Western" approach to the study of social phenomena can no longer claim some universalist status, and indeed becomes increasingly "provincialized" (Chakrabarty 2008), what are the implications?

These are difficult questions that soon enter normative, even political, terrain. They also point to a different challenge: the still-dominant Popperian and inferential approaches to social science. Critical rationalism, as the attempt to conduct research in as normatively neutral a way as possible, and to do so with a systematic engagement of theories, hypotheses, and facts, faces contestation by political-cultural forces that seem to be growing in strength and acceptance. This brings us to the next set of issues.

*Ideologies and values.* From their very foundation, the social sciences confronted the fundamental tension between some form of technocratic neutrality, on the one hand, and a commitment to certain ideologies and values, on the other. The current debate about postcolonialism is in line with previous challenges: during the *Werturteilsstreit* (value judgment dispute) of the early 1900s, Max Weber and Werner Sombart advocated value-free research in the sense that social scientists should refrain from making political judgments based on their findings. They were challenged by Gustav Schmollers and others as being politically naive and part of the problem, not the solution, in addressing the pressing issues of the time. During the *Positivismusstreit* (positivism dispute) of the 1960s, Karl Popper and other critical rationalists such as Ralf Dahrendorf were this time again accused of being naive positivists by critical theorists Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Jürgen Habermas. They challenged critical rationalism by pointing to the inherent biases of empirical social science in favor of capitalism, urging researchers to take political sides.

Both fundamental debates were about the role of the social sciences in shaping the social order. What kind of society would be good and desirable? What is the role of social scientists in finding answers to such questions? Politically, the debate of the early 1900s was largely about social ethics, the debate of 1960s about the New Left against the academic establishment seen as reactionary. Today, the

debate is about the epistemological and methodological foundations of the social sciences and the continued dominance of the Western academic system. Put differently, while past debates were mostly about social science and political ideologies within the Western capitalist system, the debates about postcolonialism and decolonization of the academy express persistent tensions between a colonial past and Western hegemony today.

Yet there is another debate that needs to take place given geopolitical challenges and that overlaps with the issue of academic freedom: can the social sciences exist, let alone flourish, as a state-controlled, instrumentalized system, or is academic freedom a *conditio sine qua non* for advancing our understanding of the human condition? Karl Popper, together with other leading thinkers of that generation, regarded the social sciences as an instrument of constructing a social order on the supposition of common core values, with the open society concept as a guiding principle. The assumption of linking value-free social science research to the liberal order has been its linchpin.

Gupta (2019) makes a strong argument when suggesting that before democracy, the context for the pursuit of social sciences did not exist. This statement, however, is historically rather questionable as the classical period of modern social science took place in political systems that would not qualify by today's understanding of what constitutes a democratic order. The flourishing of sociology in early twentieth-century Germany or France is a clear case in point, as is the highly productive period of the 1940s and 1950s in the United States with the color bar in effect in the American South, widespread ethnic discrimination, and deeply flawed electoral systems.

Yet in a fundamental sense, the future of the social sciences globally no longer depends on the West alone; it increasingly also depends on the trajectory of the social sciences in India and China in particular—not only politically but also in terms of its epistemological foundations (Reny 2016; Ahram and Goode 2016). What are the ideological debates in countries of the semiperiphery and the periphery, and how do they differ from the debates between Weber and Schmollers or between Popper and Habermas so long ago?

*Academic freedom.* The case of countries such as Iran or Russia but also Turkey, Hungary, and Hong Kong points to another fundamental challenge: the changing conditions of academic freedom. Indeed, in addition to the question of why scholars from non-Western countries want to engage with the West (and vice versa), we must also ask, Could they if they wanted to?—a question that goes beyond resources and external hierarchies and addresses internally imposed barriers to mobility and intellectual exchange, as well as domestic controls of academic freedom.

The Academic Freedom Index (AFI)<sup>6</sup> assesses levels of academic freedom for 179 countries and territories based on five indicators: freedom to research and teach; freedom of academic exchange and dissemination; institutional au-

6 See <https://academic-freedom-index.net>.



tonomy; campus integrity; and freedom of academic and cultural expression. The [Academic Freedom Index Update 2023](#) (Kinzelbach et al. 2023) shows that academic freedom is in retreat for more than 50 percent of the world's population. What is more, in 22 countries and territories—both Western and non-Western—universities and academics enjoy significantly less freedom today than they did ten years ago. During the same period, according to the AFI, academic freedom has essentially stagnated in most of the countries covered, some of which were already at low levels.

What do threats to academic freedom imply for research and teaching? Alongside limiting the topics that can be researched and taught, they also impact creativity and innovation. Are there examples of groundbreaking social science research in countries where academic freedom is limited, even virtually nonexistent? This question goes beyond the simple distinction between democracies and autocracies as the former also show declining academic freedom. Nor do threats to academic freedom necessarily come only from governments. A case in point: the so-called “culture wars” in the United States, where major donors, students, and even the professoriate itself often seek to censor or control who is hired, who speaks, and what is taught.

*Professionalization and commercialization.* The development of the social sciences in the United States and Europe was in no small measure due to significant state support; the GI Bill in the United States financing the massive increase of university student numbers is perhaps the clearest example, along with the expansion of higher education in Europe in the 1970s. In some countries, especially in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany, philanthropy played a significant role, too. Both politicians and philanthropists saw in the social sciences a tool for advancing the modernization of society and for helping solve problems of many kinds, from housing and education to social welfare and social integration. With the emergence of graduate professional schools, the social sciences took on a more applied and problem-oriented stance over time (Anheier 2019). Business managers, development consultants, public administrators, HR specialists, social workers, urban planners, and policy analysts, among others, have emerged as typical professions for social science graduates.

Seen from a global perspective, the ongoing professionalization has proceeded unequally. It is most developed in the West, especially in North America and Europe, as well as in Japan, and, to no surprise, the least developed in many areas of the Global South. Yet there are intensifying developments taking place, involving commercial applications of social science methodologies like data analytic tools, forecasting and foresight approaches, and fields such as organizational studies, public opinion research, electoral studies, and behavioral economics. Even though there was an initial commercialization phase in the 1950s through pub-

lic opinion research, and in later decades through consulting services, these new applications make social science applications attractive to businesses and policymakers alike at a scale not seen before. The emphasis is less on social problem-solving than on profits and return on investments, even on influencing politics through data analytics, as the scandals around Cambridge Analytica<sup>7</sup> have shown. The rise of big data and the rapid emergence of artificial intelligence will continue to add momentum to these trends.

At the same time, funding agencies and policymakers have been increasing pressure on the social sciences to demonstrate impact as a way of justifying their relevance, and indeed their legitimacy as recipients of public funds (Bastow, Dunleavy, and Tinkler 2014). The Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe programs of the European Union<sup>8</sup> are prime examples of this emphasis on transferability and applicability of social science research. While such programs tend to come with high expectations as to their practicability, it is, however, not clear whether the social sciences will be able to deliver. Philanthropic institutions seem to be following the same trend, and, in some instances, are actively spearheading the impact movement.

So we ask: If there's a trend toward preparing professionals and therefore toward applied social sciences, is there still room for theory development? Where will the pressure for research funding lead? Does it come back to reduced academic freedom, so that funding availability and commercial promise dictate what is pursued? And, if it is all about measurable impact, will there be room for creativity and experimentation, and going off in less popular, less fundable directions? Will less “marketable” social sciences (not to mention humanities) lose their legitimacy and ultimately their relevance?

## QUESTIONS

For *Global Perspectives*, the questions become: Are the social sciences drifting further apart, or is there a possibility of greater dialogue and even cohesiveness to advance our knowledge and understanding globally, rather than in some regions or countries only? Can different social science traditions and approaches enrich each other? And if so, how and for what? How will epistemological debates about knowledge systems evolve? What will be the fate of academic freedom? Will ever larger numbers of social scientists teach students and conduct research under strict state control? Will professionalization continue, and will the social sciences commercialize, and in which ways? How will value-based disputes develop, and what likely ideological debates might emerge?

<sup>7</sup> See <https://dig.watch/trends/cambridge-analytica>.

<sup>8</sup> See [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/funding/funding-opportunities/funding-programmes-and-open-calls/horizon-europe_en).

## REFLECTIVE ESSAYS

These are, of course, challenging questions about challenging topics. Aware of the complexity, breadth, and, indeed, sensitive nature of the issues involved, *Global Perspectives* launches regional assessments of the state of the social sciences in different parts of the world, some curated by a dedicated editor or editors. Given the multifarious scope of the social sciences—with many specific subfields, methodologies, and curricula, as well as varying degrees of professional institutionalization and different political and cultural contexts—we will aim for reflective essays rather than some comprehensive stock-taking and detailed empirical analysis.

Of course, together, the various essays in the series of special collections address many different issues that relate to the fundamental challenges just outlined above, and with a focus on research, institutionalization, or teaching:

### CURRENT RESEARCH TOPICS

For example:

- Economic systems
- Inequalities, role of elites
- Cultures, values, and identities
- State capacity, public administration
- Political systems, political decision-making
- Internal and external conflicts
- Social cohesion, self-organization, civil society
- Climate change and environmental issues
- Epistemology and methodology

### INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Issues include:

- Professionalization
- Commercialization
- Instrumentalization
- Funding, major sources and issues
- Academic freedom
- Relations among disciplines
- Career patterns, professoriate, research staff
- Policy relevance
- International cooperation and networks

### TEACHING

- Teaching content of main curricular modules at BA and MA levels; what is the balance between “Western” versus “regional” curricula content?
- Undergraduate and graduate interest in social sciences
- PhD education, funding

## CONCLUDING THOUGHT

Why is this series of special collections needed? Other than documenting the state of the social sciences through a collection of reflective contributions in different parts of the world, there is a deeper reason: the exclusionary structure of the social sciences leaves many talents outside the Western core unrecognized and marginal. It is a phenomenon closely related to the “Missing Einsteins Problem” (Bell et al. 2019), which describes a situation where existing social and economic inequality and barriers to upward social mobility reduce the likelihood of younger scholars being exposed to academically nurturing environments that encourage their intellectual development and creativity.

In essence, access barriers stifle creativity and innovation in the social sciences. Having structures and institutions that encourage creativity across a wide range of disciplines and countries is something modern societies need urgently for economic, social, and cultural advancement. This is indeed the motivating idea to organize this series of special collections: too much talent seems lost, thereby reducing the potential contributions of the social sciences. The hope is that by initiating a structured dialogue among the world’s social science regions, including North America and Europe, on how more talent could find its way into the social sciences and flourish intellectually, we realize more of such potential for advancing our understanding of our societies, economies, polities, and cultures. Therefore, once the special collections have been submitted, we will invite commentaries by social scientists from other regions, and will welcome rejoinders as well on how to move forward.

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Submitted: April 19, 2023 PDT, Accepted: April 19, 2023 PDT

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