

THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

The Underrepresentation of Knowledge Production in Latin American Social Sciences

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Although Latin American social sciences have expanded significantly in recent decades, they remain structurally marginal within the global academic system. This article analyzes the persistence of epistemic hierarchies that limit the visibility and impact of social science research produced in Latin America. It argues that current global knowledge structures continue to prioritize English-language STEM outputs from wealthy institutions in the Global North, thereby marginalizing local languages, regional collaborations, and context-sensitive research.

Contributions from Latin America to the production of social science knowledge have grown dramatically. A review of 94,837 articles published between 2002 and 2018 that featured at least one author from Latin America confirms a sixfold increase in output during this period, an expansion led by countries such as Brazil, Chile, and Colombia.

Brazil's leadership is consistent with its comparatively high investment in research and development. In contrast, Chile and Colombia have achieved high levels of productivity despite investing much less in public research. In Chile's case, this growth can in part be attributed to performance-based evaluation systems, institutional competition, and dedicated efforts to improve visibility in international rankings.

However, this increase in research output has not led to greater global recognition of the Latin American social sciences. The global academic system continues to prioritize disciplines that are considered drivers of economic and technological innovation, particularly science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). These fields receive more funding, generate more citations and are more easily aligned with the indicators used in international university rankings. Consequently, universities that concentrate resources and prestige tend to perform better in these rankings. In contrast, the social sciences, especially research published in local languages or grounded in regional contexts, remain largely peripheral.

This marginalization is further reinforced by structural gatekeepers such as prestigious academic journals, whose editorial boards are often dominated by scholars from elite, research-intensive universities, which are mostly located in high-income, English-speaking countries. These institutions exert a disproportionate influence over what is recognized as valuable knowledge within the global academic system, frequently marginalizing research produced in other contexts or languages.

This discrepancy highlights an epistemic paradox: although Latin American social scientists are producing more knowledge than ever before, much of it remains invisible within the dominant channels of academic recognition.

Language, Legitimacy, and the Politics of Visibility

Language plays a central role in reproducing epistemic hierarchies. The dominance of English as the *lingua franca* of global academia means that much of Latin American research, which is often published in Spanish or Portuguese, is less visible and less valued. Despite growing efforts to publish in international journals, researchers must consider the tradeoff between maintaining cultural and contextual relevance and achieving international reach.

This tension is exacerbated by the dominance of global indexing systems such as Web of Science, which underrepresent journals from less-resourced countries. Although platforms such as SciELO have increased access to Latin American research, they still have limited global reach compared to commercial databases.

Academic Dependency and Epistemic Subordination

A significant proportion of social science research in Latin America involves international collaboration. On the surface, this indicates global integration. However, closer analysis reveals asymmetrical relationships that often perpetuate academic dependency. For example, data show that 42.5 percent of Latin American social science articles indexed in Web of Science were coauthored mainly with scholars from the United States, Spain, and the United Kingdom. While these collaborations are potentially enriching, they often position Latin American researchers in secondary roles. Those based at more powerful or better-resourced institutions often take the

lead in defining the research agenda, theoretical framework, and publication strategy. This dynamic is well-documented in literature on academic dependency, and it risks reinforcing epistemic subordination, a structural condition in which knowledge produced in Latin America must be validated through academic frameworks and institutions that often overlook the region's priorities, languages, or contexts.

Editorial power is another key axis of dependency and subordination. Most high-impact journals are based in well-resourced countries, where editorial boards often lack Latin American representation. Editors-in-chief, primarily from English-speaking countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, act as gatekeepers, defining which perspectives gain legitimacy. This creates a narrow pipeline through which Latin American social science must pass, often filtered through frameworks that fail to account for the region's specificities.

Furthermore, collaboration between Latin American countries remains limited. Regional coauthorship remains scarce, and most funding schemes do not prioritize or incentivize cross-border partnerships within Latin America.

Beyond Representation: Rethinking the Politics of Knowledge

Although increasing the presence of Latin American research in global databases is important, this is not enough unless the criteria used to assess knowledge are also challenged. The issue is not only access and volume, but also recognition and influence. Social sciences must remain grounded in local realities while questioning the dominant frameworks that continue to marginalize them.

We should therefore challenge the structural norms of knowledge production and dissemination. For example, the move toward open access publishing, which is often presented as a democratizing force, has introduced new inequalities. Many open access journals charge article processing fees that are unaffordable for researchers at underfunded institutions. While some regional platforms, such as SciELO, offer free publication, these platforms remain less visible and prestigious. The result is a knowledge economy in which primarily those who can afford to pay to publish gain visibility, particularly if they publish in English. Without systemic interventions, open access risks perpetuating the exclusions it aims to eliminate.

Recommendations

Addressing the underrepresentation of Latin American social sciences requires more than just inclusive gestures. Structural

change is also necessary. However, any recommendations must also consider the region's diversity and inequality. While some countries have relatively robust research systems, others face considerable challenges.

Three interrelated strategies or guiding principles should help to strengthen the conditions under which Latin American social sciences can flourish. These recommendations also address a broader concern that the pursuit of international visibility, often influenced by external standards, could reduce the ability of Latin American research to impact public, political, and intellectual life within the region. Strengthening regional infrastructures and evaluation mechanisms is essential to ensure that global engagement does not compromise local relevance, accessibility, or critical impact.

First, governments and regional organizations need to invest in initiatives that encourage cooperation between Latin American countries. Examples include joint research grants, regional doctoral programs, and incorporating Latin American journals in national evaluation systems. Second, support for publishing should address financial barriers, particularly article processing charges, which often prevent researchers from underresourced institutions from publishing. Where possible, this could include subsidies, translation services, and writing support. Regional platforms such as SciELO, RedALyC, CLACSO, and Latindex should also be promoted and strengthened as legitimate, high-quality venues for disseminating socially relevant research. Finally, research assessment needs to recognize social contribution, contextual relevance, and epistemic diversity, moving beyond rankings and impact factors. Evaluation systems must value not only where research is published, but also how it contributes to a more equitable and grounded understanding of complex realities.

Toward Epistemic Rebalancing

Social sciences in Latin America are at a decisive juncture. Although the production of knowledge has expanded significantly, its visibility and influence are still limited by established epistemic hierarchies. Rather than replicating dominant academic standards, the way forward is to critically redefine what constitutes valuable knowledge and whose perspectives and needs it should serve.

Latin American universities and research communities can reposition themselves as key actors in the global knowledge landscape by strengthening regional collaboration, reforming publishing structures, and embracing inclusive evaluation criteria. This is not only a matter of academic fairness, but also of epistemic justice.

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