Received: 26 June 2017 | Accepted: 26 June 2017

DOI: 10.1111/gove.12303

COMMENTARY

WILEY Governance

Our Asian challenge

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Sometimes we are reluctant to admit it, but most scholars who study the institutions of government are driven by a broader ambition. We want to build a world in which governments are effective, respectful of human rights, and subject to popular control. However, there is a mismatch between our labor and our ambition. Research focuses on the developed West, but the future of liberal democracy will be decided in Asia, and especially in India and China. Scholarly journals like *Governance* must do more to address this mismatch.

The reluctance of academics to be candid about our ideological commitments is understandable. We want to conduct research that is free of bias. Still, scholars do have commitments that influence the choice of research questions, judgments about the desirability of observed behaviors and policy outcomes, and prescriptions for reform. We believe that states ought to be resilient and effective in fulfilling basic functions such as the maintenance of peace and order. We believe that states should respect human rights, although we disagree about how expansively those rights should be defined and how they ought to be secured. And we are committed to popular control of government, although we disagree on how that idea ought to be realized.

These three qualities of government—basic effectiveness, respect for human rights, and self-rule—cannot be taken for granted. Most people living on this planet do not know what it is like to be governed in this way. They live in fragile states where leaders govern arbitrarily and ignore the needs of their people. As scholars, our long-run goal is to change that reality. Through research, we hope to understand government and show how it can be improved.

But if that is our goal, our focus is misplaced. We do not give adequate attention to those parts of the world in which governance falls short of expectations. Leading journals in public administration and political science dwell excessively on a small number of rich countries that are stable, democratic, and broadly respectful of human rights. Within that small cluster of rich countries, just two—the United States and the United Kingdom—account for a very large share of scholarly production.

Governance does not escape criticism on this point. While it does better than some other journals in seeking balance, one third of manuscripts received by *Governance* between 2010 and 2016 came from just two countries, the United States and the United Kingdom. The next third came from Australia, the Netherlands, Sweden, Germany, Canada, Italy, China, Israel, and Spain. Only three non-OECD countries (China, India, and Brazil) made the list of 20 countries that accounted for 80% of our inflow in those 7 years. We received as many manuscripts from Australia as we did from those three non-OECD countries combined.

Of course, governance in OECD countries is far from perfect; there are many problems in those countries that deserve attention. But that is not where the main battle for effective government, human rights, and self-rule will be waged. The era in which Western European states played the dominant role in the worldwide struggle of ideas about good government is over. The relative power of the United

States is also on the decline. This is a long-term trend that has merely been accelerated by the election of President Donald Trump.

The real battle for liberal democracy will be waged in Asia. And within Asia, the struggle will be between two behemoths: India and China. By 2050, these may be the two largest economies in the world. In that year, each of these states will govern a population that is comparable to the combined population of all high-income countries. Today, one of these states (India) is a liberal democracy, while the other (China) engages in a form of "responsive authoritarianism." Which of these two systems will become the model for other states? That is the critical question.

Bearing this in mind, we should have three concerns about the inflow of manuscripts to leading journals in public administration and political science. The first concern is the inadequate representation of both India and China (and many other developing countries) in the overall flow of submissions. The second concern is the growing imbalance in representation between India and China. The inflow of manuscripts relating to China has increased dramatically over the last decade, but the same cannot be said about India. The imbalance is especially marked when you look only at the number of manuscripts coming from scholars *within* India and China. This is probably the result of differences in the institutional support and incentives provided to scholars. There is a determined effort in China to increase the number of articles that are published in internationally ranked journals. There does not appear to be a comparable drive within Indian universities.

A third concern relates to the kind of research that is done by scholars working within China. China is not an open society. The Communist Party controls senior appointments in leading academic institutions and monitors for "improper" speech on campuses. Faculty at Chinese universities and colleges have been punished for making "false remarks" about the regime. In a 2016 speech, President Xi Jinping said that universities "must adhere to correct political orientation" and function as "strongholds that adhere to Party leadership." All of this means that there is pressure to avoid awkward questions about the design and performance of the Chinese system. Added to this is the understandable desire to highlight, for an international audience, the genuine accomplishments of the nation over the last 40 years.

Put these concerns together, and here is the result. In general, we do not publish as much material relating to India and China as we ought to. When we do publish such material, it is more likely to relate to China than India. And the research from China is inclined to avoid sensitive questions about the existing system. Consider what the means in the broader contest of ideas about liberal democracies and one-party states. Scholarship on Indian governance will be relatively sparse and more critical of the status quo. Scholarship on Chinese governance will be more abundant, but also more likely to pull its punches. In the long run, what overall conclusion are readers around the world likely to draw about the relative merits of these two systems?

Scholarly journals like *Governance* have an obligation to address these concerns. We must try to increase the flow of research from major countries that are inadequately represented in leading journals. And we must find ways of assuring that the research we publish gives adequate attention to awkward questions. Published research from nondemocratic countries should be just as likely to pose hard questions as research from countries in the developed West.

This is not simply a matter of maintaining rigorous review processes. Reviewers cannot comment on papers that are never written and research questions that are never posed. More fundamental adjustments are required. We can start with a change of mentality among journal editors. We are accustomed to accepting the flow of manuscripts largely as it is, on the assumption that a broader scholarly community has the capacity and freedom to think critically about the overall direction of research. But this assumption is only tenable for a small set of countries that are relatively affluent and open, and perhaps not even then. Journal editors need to spend more time thinking deliberately about gaps—about

countries and questions that are overlooked—and what journals can do to promote research that fills those gaps.

Journal editors will reply that they cannot single-handedly compensate for institutional shortfalls in developing countries, and that they lack the resources to do much that is useful. We should take such protests with a grain of salt. Journal publishing is a profitable enterprise, and publishers ought to return a larger share of that profit to the scholarly community than they do now. (How profitable? Good question. Scholars ought to be as demanding about transparency in the domain of journal finances as they are everywhere else.) And while journals cannot change the world by themselves, they can think more creatively about this problem than they do today. Contrast the time and attention that is lavished by journal editors on the project of improving data access and research transparency (DART). Research transparency is a noble goal, but it is not costless. We can reasonably ask whether this is the best way to spend scarce resources. It does nothing to address the larger problem of imbalances in research. Indeed, DART requirements may raise the hurdles for scholars in the developing world.

Editors may also question whether they have the right to cast judgment about imbalances in the inflow of manuscripts. But editors do this all the time, albeit on a smaller scale. They decide whether papers fall within the scope of their journals, and whether the questions posed in those papers are novel and important. Now is the time for editors to raise their sights. Few would disagree that our goal is to produce a world in which most people are governed by regimes that are effective, respectful of human rights, and subject to popular control. How do we get there? Not by neglecting those parts of the world that are furthest away from the realization of that goal, and hard questions about the performance of current systems.

BIOGRAPHY

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How to cite this article: Roberts A. Our Asian challenge. *Governance*. 2017;1–3. https://doi.org/10.1111/gove.12303