

AMERICAN DOMINANCE OF ECONOMIC RESEARCH IS WEAKENING

American economists and economists affiliated to American institutions dominate the market for publications in top economic journals in absolute terms. But according to new research by **Martin Kocher** and **Matthias Sutter**, published in the latest issue of the *Economic Journal*, when these figures are adjusted for inputs, the gap between the United States and the rest of the world narrows significantly, with Israel and the UK emerging particularly favourably. What's more, over the last 10 years, Europe's influence on economics has begun to increase at the expense of the United States. This should encourage a more competitive market in economic thinking.

Kocher and Sutter examine data from the top 15 economic journals for every fifth year over the period 1977-97. They find that:

- American economists account for 72.2% of all publications in those 15 journals with the highest average 'impact factor'. The UK and Canada follow with a share of 10.2% and 4.7%, respectively. All other countries account for less than the highest ranked US institutions - Harvard (3.8%), MIT (3.7%) and Chicago (3.6%).
- Concentration is even more severe with regard to authors' PhD origins. The shares of the United States and the UK increase to 80.6% and 11.4%, respectively, giving grounds for concerns about an 'inbreeding' of young economists. Institutions in English-speaking countries account for 93.9% of all PhD affiliations. Most striking is the comparatively huge share of single American institutions. For example, MIT's share of PhD affiliations is larger than any single country's share, with the natural exception of the United States.
- The relative impact of the United States has declined in recent years and the contributions of continental European and UK economists increased. From 1987-97, the share of US economists' contributions fell from 77.1 % to 65.8 %, whereas the European share rose from 13.4 % to 23.3 %.

Is the concentration of authors with regard to their institutional and country origin really as high as these figures and many related studies suggest? This research provides evidence that the results are much less alarming when presented in other ways.

Most notably, the above figures do not involve any productivity considerations. Obviously, there are more professional economists in the United States than in the UK, for example. Although comparable data on research inputs in different countries are rare, it is possible to offer further insights by applying population figures, manpower figures and the number of universities with at least one economic department as productivity weights. Using these weights, Kocher and Sutter find that:

- For the authors' affiliation while writing, Israel takes the lead ahead of the United States and the UK in two of the three resulting rankings. When the manpower devoted to research in economics is used as the input, the UK comes out best, followed by Israel and the United States. But perhaps more importantly, the gap between the United States and the rest of the world narrows significantly.
- The same arguments apply to the PhD affiliations of the authors, although this category is still led by the United States, again with the notable exception of manpower weighting, where the UK fares excellently. Some relatively small European countries, like Sweden and Norway, score well in comparison to larger continental European countries.

Kocher and Sutter conclude that the overall picture is not as alarming as many have suggested. But they do concede that serious considerations should be assigned to the high concentration of economists' PhD origins. The establishment of many new PhD programmes in Europe and the improvements in quality of existing ones are important steps in the right direction.

Notes for Editors: 'The Institutional Concentration of Authors in Top Journals of Economics During the Last Two Decades' by Martin Kocher and Matthias Sutter is published in the June 2001 issue of the *Economic Journal*. The authors are at the Institute of Public Economics, University of Innsbruck.

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