Geographic diversity in economic publishing☆

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ABSTRACT

Is the representation of editors at prestigious economics journals geographically diverse? Using data on the affiliations of academics working in an editorial capacity at such journals, we map the locations of editorial power within the economics profession. This allows us to rank institutions according to this measure of power. Further, by considering the average distance of a journal's editorial affiliations from a geographic mean, we rank journals by geographic diversity. We find that power is concentrated in five geographical hubs and that most editorial teams are less geographically diverse and more North American than the authors they publish.

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Spiderman, Amazing Fantasy Vol. 1 Issue 15. "… with great power there must also come – great responsibility!"

1. Introduction

Diversity in the economics profession has become a pressing topic. In light of evidence that the representation of various groups in the profession varies greatly (see, for example Bayer and Rouse, 2016), the American Economic Association, arguably the most powerful institution in academic economics, has conducted programs and committees related to this observation.[1] In this note we consider a less-studied type of diversity, *geographic diversity*, by which we mean diversity in

[1] See, for example the Committee on the Status of Minority Groups in the Economics Profession, https://www.aeaweb.org/about-aea/committees/csmgep, or the panel discussion "How Can Economics Solve Its Race Problem?", https://www.aeaweb.org/conference/2020/preliminary/2264.

the locations where people, by choice or necessity, live and work. Specifically, we consider diversity in the institutional affiliations of people who serve in some editorial capacity at leading journals in the economics profession.[2]

Why should we care where economists live and work? We can think of two main reasons. Firstly, it is possible that the environment in which one lives affects one's thinking, so a lack of geographic diversity could lead to a suboptimal narrowing of perspectives. Secondly, it is possible that economists might exhibit bias in favour of those who inhabit the same ecosystem as themselves. In the words of Heckman and Moktan (2020),

> "It is well documented that journals in economics tend to publish work by authors who are connected with the journal's editors (see Brogaard et al., 2014; Laband and Piette, 1994; Colussi, 2018).[...] Network effects are empirically important."

For the purpose of exploring diversity in the editorial staff of leading journals, we have collected data on the affiliations of academics working in an editorial capacity at such journals. Using these data, we map the geographic location of editorial power within the economics profession. Ordinally, the results of this exercise are mostly unsurprising, but the magnitudes are striking. Over half the journals we consider have over two thirds of their editorial power located in the USA. A large majority of journals have a tiny editorial contribution from academics located outside of North America and Europe. Any one of the states of California, Massachusetts and Illinois has more power than the four continents of Asia, South America, Africa and Australasia combined.[3]

Further, the locations of a journal's editorial affiliations can be used to construct a geographic mean location for the journal. The average distance of the journal's editorial affiliations from this geographic mean can be considered as a measure of the geographic diversity of the journal's editorial team. This allows us to rank journals by geographic diversity. Some patterns emerge from this exercise. For example, newer journals tend to be more geographically diverse, with the notable exception of several journals founded between 2009 and 2019 that exhibit extremely low geographic diversity. Theory and econometrics journals are, on average, more geographically diverse than applied journals. However, applied journals are the most heterogeneous in terms of diversity, so that both the most and the least geographically diverse journals are applied journals.

Comparing the locations of editorial affiliations to the locations of authors who publish in these journals, we find a positive correlation between the geographic diversity of a journal's editors and the geographic diversity of its authors. Typically, the geographic diversity of a journal's editors is lower than the geographic diversity of its authors. This relates to the fact that the share of authors from outside of the USA is typically higher than the share of editors from outside of the USA. In particular, academics based in East Asia contribute significantly to authorship in prestigious journals but hold a tiny share of editorial positions.

2. Data and methodology

Data were collected on the affiliations of academics working in an editorial capacity at economics journals that were given the highest rating of A^* on the Australian Business Deans 2019 journal quality list.[4,5] This includes 49 journals and 2402 journal-person-affiliation triplets. Where present, affiliations listed on journal websites were used. Where journal websites did not list affiliations, this information was sourced from academic webpages. Location data were collected for institutional affiliations using the Google Maps website. Data were collected between 28th July 2020 and 3rd August 2020.

For each location, the number of journal-person-affiliation triplets was summed to give the total editorial power at that location. This was repeated, restricting the data to Top 5 journals only.[6] Location data were further aggregated by country and by continent. The above data were used to map editorial power in economics and to rank institutions in terms of their editorial power. These rankings were produced for various geographic locations (World, North America, Europe, the Rest of the World) for overall editorial power as well as power restricted to Top 5 journals.

Location data was used to calculate a *geographic centroid* for each journal's editorial team, effectively the average location of those involved with the journal in an editorial capacity. This centroid is calculated through three dimensional vector addition of the locations of all journal-person-affiliation triplets associated with the journal. This can be thought of as attaching a weight to a globe at the location of each journal-person-affiliation triplet. If the globe is then allowed to rotate under gravity, then the centroid will become the lowest point.

The average great circle distance from a journal's geographical centroid to the journal-person-affiliation triplets associated with that journal was then calculated. This average distance is the *standard distance* (Bachi, 1962) for a journal, which can be measured in degrees (as we are on a globe) or in kilometers. Standard distance is similar to standard deviation in that

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[2] The issue is not unique to the economics profession, as suggested by recent similar studies in other disciplines (e.g., Goyanes and Demeter, 2020; Lohaus and Wemheuer-Vogelaar, 2020).

[3] Espin et al., 2017 find similarly for journals in environmental biology, with 55% of editors based in the USA.

[4] The ABDC journal quality list is available at https://abdc.edu.au/research/abdc-journal-list/. We include journals coded 1401: Economic Theory, 1402: Applied Economics, 1403: Econometrics, 1499: Other Economics, although there are no A^* rated journals in the final category.

[5] Included in these journals are the top 20 journals from the rankings of Palacios-Huerta and Volij (2004) and Demange (2014), excluding the Journal of Financial Economics which is coded as a finance journal by the ABDC. Also included are the journals created or taken over by the AEA and the Econometric Society since 2009.

[6] Conventionally, "Top 5" journals in economics are the American Economic Review, Econometrica, Journal of Political Economy, Review of Economic Studies, Quarterly Journal of Economics.

it is a measure of statistical dispersion. As such, the standard distance of a journal can be interpreted as a measure of its geographic diversity, with more geographically diverse journals being associated with higher standard distances. These statistics were then used to rank journals in terms of the geographic diversity in their editorial teams.[7,8]

As a comparator, we further collected data from Scopus and Google Maps on the geographic location of authors publishing in the journals in 2019 and 2020 (see Appendix for details). Data were collected on 28th Oct 2020. The resulting 21,262 journal-author-affiliation-location quadruples were used to calculate the geographic centroid of the authorship of each of the journals and authorial power at gridded locations across the globe, with the exception of AER:Insights for which Scopus data could not be found.

3. Results

The global distribution of editorial power is shown in Fig. 1. It is immediately clear that a majority of power resides in the USA. In fact, 63% of editorial power is in the USA. This rises to 65% if we restrict attention to Top 5 journals. North America as a whole accounts for 66% of power, Europe 27% and the rest of the world 7%. Fig. 1 shows that there are four major centres of power in the USA, centred on Northern California, Southern California, the central-northern part of the country and the north-east coast. As noted in the introduction, any one of the three states of California, Massachusetts and Illinois has more power than the four continents of Asia, South America, Africa and Australasia combined.

The only other hub of comparable power to the four major US hubs is London. Note that even relatively minor centres of power in the USA such as North Carolina or East Texas would be considered powerhouses in any other part of the world. For example, Duke University in North Carolina has more power (42 editorial affiliations) than Japan and China combined (38). The most powerful institution in the world outside of North America and Europe, Monash University (14), is only as powerful as the 32nd most powerful institution in North America, but would rank 8th if it were located in Europe. Indeed, the Top 10 for North America is identical to the Global ranking except that LSE (47) is absent and Duke takes the 10th spot. Outside of the USA, the most powerful institutions in North America are Toronto (24) and UBC (13). Rankings of the Top 99 institutions globally, the Top 10 institutions in various categories and the Top 10 most powerful countries are given in the Appendix.

Comparing the global distribution of editorial power (Fig. 1) to the global distribution of authorship (map given in the Appendix: Figure A4), we see broad similarities. Locations with many authors who publish in prestigious journals tend to be the locations of editorial power at such journals. However, relative to editorial power, authorship is shifted to the East. The density plot in Fig. 2 clearly illustrates that, relative to authorship, Europe and the Far East are underrepresented in an editorial capacity. Notably, there is a large cluster of authors in East Asia. Academics located in East Asia contribute considerably to authorship but have almost negligible editorial power.

In Fig. 3 we plot the geographic centroid of editors of each journal (closed circles) and the geographic centroids of authors who publish in these journals (open circles). Most journals have centroids of editors close to the great circle flight path from London to Chicago, with the biggest concentration observed as we cross North America. No journal has its centroid in the Southern Hemisphere. Only one journal, Energy Economics, has its centroid in the Eastern Hemisphere. Journals whose centroids are quite close to one another can exhibit very different geographic diversity as measured by standard distance (given in Table 1; see also Appendix: Figure A5).

Comparing the centroids of editors to the centroids of authors who publish in these journals, we see that author centroids lie north-east of editor centroids for a large majority of journals. This illustrates that these journals have more authors in Europe and Asia than they have editors in Europe and Asia. The journal with the largest shift to the north-east is the Journal of Financial Econometrics (29.47 degrees distance, see Table 1). The journal with the smallest shift is the Journal of Political Economy, which has an author centroid very close to its editor centroid (4.50 degrees). There is one notable exception to the pattern of author centroids being north-east of editor centroids. This exception is the Review of Economic Studies, which has a large share of its editorial team based in Europe but whose authors are predominantly based in the USA.

In Table 1 we give the ranking of journals by geographic diversity of editors as measured by standard distance. It can be observed that there is quite a lot of heterogeneity between journals in this respect, ranging from the Journal of Monetary Economics with a standard distance of 986 km to Energy Economics with a standard distance of 5,679 km. To put these in perspective, consider that the distance from New York City to Chicago is 1,149 km.

In Fig. 4 we plot geographic diversity of editors against the age of journals and the geographic diversity of their authors. From this, we see that newer journals tend to be more geographically diverse, with the notable exception of several journals founded between 2009 and 2019 that exhibit extremely low geographic diversity. These journals include all four of the

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[7] It is possible to calculate a version of standard distance that is mathematically more similar to standard deviation. To do this, rather than finding the average great circle distance from the centroid, one would find a root of the sum of squared great circle distances from the centroid. As this would overweight large distances considerably relative to small distances, we choose to pursue the linear approach.

[8] An alternative measure for diversity would be the reciprocal of Simpson's Index (Simpson, 1949), known in economics as Herfindahl's Index (Herfindahl, 1950). This alternative approach requires data to be sorted into categories (e.g. countries), following which differences within a category are ignored. As such, it is a measure of category diversity rather than geographic diversity, although categories may be based on geography.
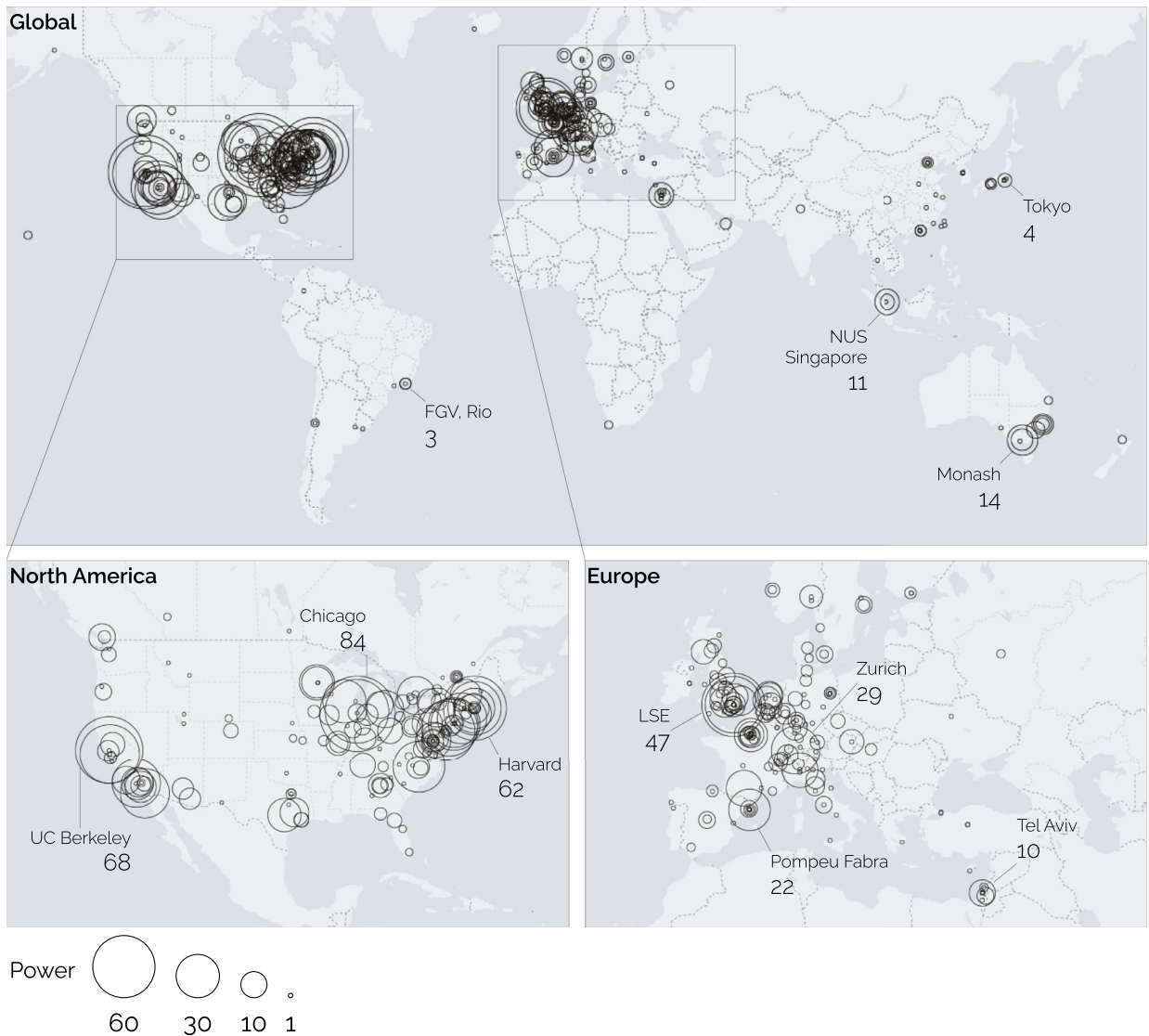
Fig. 1. The global distribution of editorial power. Each circle is centred on an institution having at least one editorial affiliation. The size of the circle scales with the sum of editorial power at the institution. Selected institutions are labeled. Rankings of the Top 99 institutions globally, the Top 10 institutions in various categories and the Top 10 most powerful countries are given in the Appendix.

American Economic Journals, Quantitative Economics, and AER:Insights.[9] These journals have little representation from outside the USA. In fact, AER:Insights has none. A further observation is that theory journals and econometrics journals, with the exception of Quantitative Economics, are more diverse than applied journals, which in turn are more diverse than Top 5 journals.

Just because a journal is high in the ranking (Table 1), does not mean that it is diverse in any absolute sense. Restricting attention to theory journals, for example, we see that Games and Economic Behavior is the most diverse. Power at this journal is split between North America (41), Europe (26), Asia (12) and Australasia (2). This seems quite diverse until we realize that almost all of the power in Asia is located in a single Mediterranean country, Israel (11). At the other end of the spectrum, the least diverse theory journal, the Journal of Economic Theory, is split between North America (35), Europe (14), Asia (1) and Australasia (1). Considering the set of 27 journals ranked below the Journal of Economic Theory, these

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[9] AER:Insights is omitted from Fig. 4 as (i) it does not yet have an impact factor, and (ii) the Scopus query was not responsive to the journal name and its variants, so we have no authorial data for this journal.
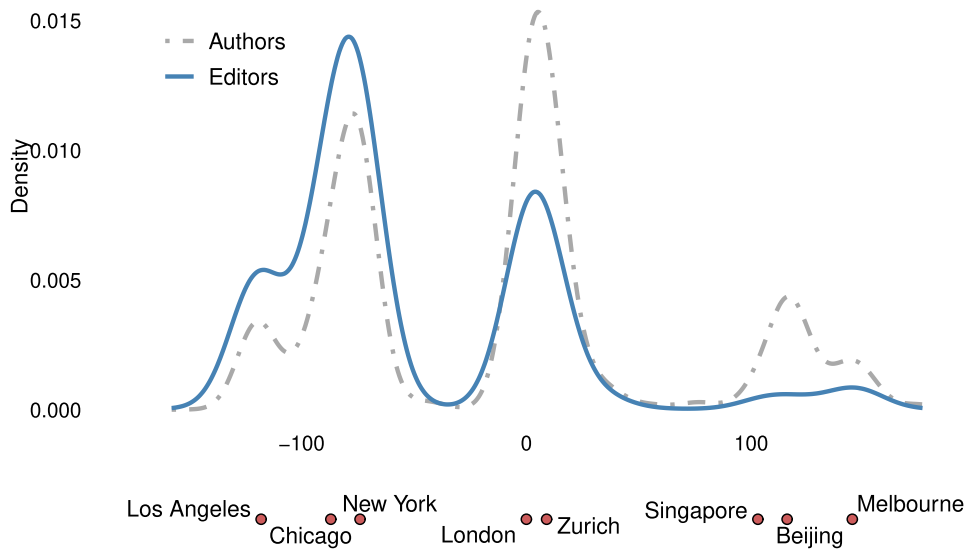
Fig. 2. Density of editors and authors by longitude. The plot illustrates the West to East location of editors and authors in prestigious economics journals. Cities are marked at the appropriate longitude for reference. Relative to authorship, Europe and the Far East are clearly underrepresented in an editorial capacity.
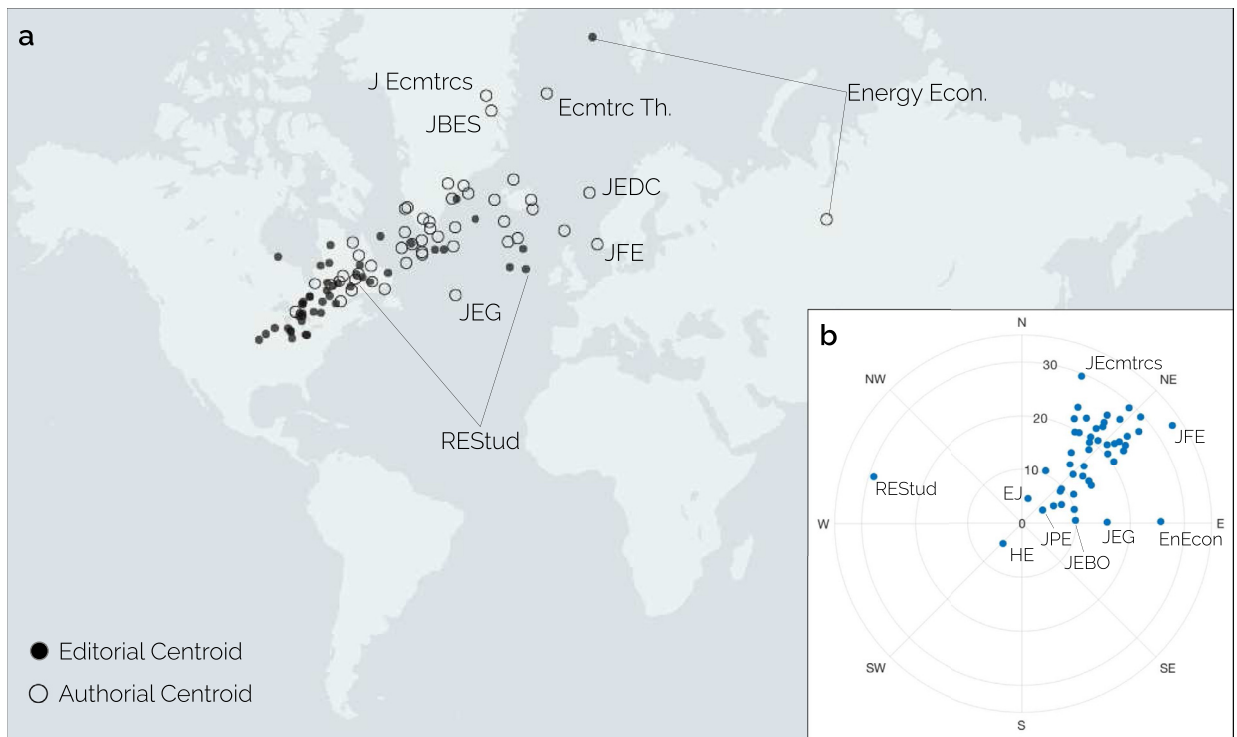
Fig. 3. Difference between mean locations of journal editors and authors. **(a)** Each closed circle is the geographic centroid of the editorial affiliations of a journal, whilst each open circle is the geographic centroid of the authorial affiliations of a journal. **(b)** Initial direction (i.e. the azimuth) and distance in degrees when traveling along the shortest path from the editorial to the authorial centroid of each journal.

journals have almost three times as much power located at the University of California, Berkeley (56) as they do in Asia, Africa, South America and Australasia combined (19).[10]

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[10] This is not something particular to Berkeley. The numbers for Harvard (46), Chicago (57), Northwestern (39), MIT (34), or Duke (21) serve equally well to make the point.

Table 1

Journals ranked by geographic diversity of editors. Journals ranked by standard distance of those involved in an editorial capacity at the journal (see Section 2), which can be measured in degrees (as we are on a globe) or in kilometers. Standard distance can be interpreted as a measure of the geographic diversity of a journal, with more geographically diverse journals being associated with higher distances. Standard distances of authors published at these journals, as well as distance (in degrees) between author and editor centroids is also given. Founding Year and Type, except for Top 5 journals, is as per the ABDC journal ratings. As alternatives to the ABDC journal ratings, the symbol * indicates journals ranked as Category 1 in the French National Centre for Scientific Research's Categorization of Journals in Economics and Management (June 2020); † indicates journals ranked as 4* or 4 in the Chartered Association of Business Schools' Academic Journal Guide 2018; ‡ indicates journals ranked as Category A in the Federation of Management Societies of China Journal Rating Guide (August 2020).

Journal	Type	Founding year	Number of editors	St. dist. edit. (deg)	St. dist. edit. (km)	St. dist. auth. (deg)	St. dist. auth. (km)	edit.–auth. dist. (deg)
Energy Economics	Applied	1979	39	51.07	5679	52.73	5863	25.65
Experimental Economics*‡	Applied	1998	58	48.81	5427	44.91	4994	23.12
J of Economic Behavior & Organization	Applied	1980	77	46.60	5182	42.7	4748	9.87
Health Economics*‡	Applied	1992	45	46.38	5157	39.14	4352	5.09
J of Economic Dynamics and Control*	Applied	1979	71	42.50	4726	43.39	4825	27.54
Games and Economic Behavior*‡	Theory	1989	80	39.90	4437	45.61	5072	14.11
Economic Theory*	Theory	1991	82	39.67	4411	44.19	4914	29.57
J of Applied Econometrics*	Econometrics	1986	64	39.67	4411	38.71	4304	24.01
Econometric Theory*†‡	Econometrics	1985	59	37.86	4210	49.19	5470	21.78
J of Financial Econometrics	Econometrics	2003	52	36.97	4111	28.78	3200	33.19
J of Economic History*‡	Applied	1941	25	36.76	4088	42.86	4766	23.56
International Economic Review*†‡	Applied	1960	19	36.39	4046	43.37	4823	25.29
J of the European Economic Assoc.*†‡	Applied	2003	72	35.76	3976	33.05	3675	10.02
Theoretical Economics*‡	Theory	2006	46	35.62	3961	42.05	4676	13.11
J of Business and Economic Statistics*†‡	Econometrics	1983	77	35.44	3941	50.03	5563	23.98
J of Env. Economics and Mgmt.*‡	Applied	1974	64	33.94	3774	43.69	4858	20.88
J of Health Economics*‡	Applied	1982	50	33.02	3672	38.81	4315	20.51
J of Econometrics*†‡	Econometrics	1973	59	32.70	3636	50.54	5620	29.47
European Economic Review*	Applied	1969	79	32.44	3607	33.99	3780	6.70
J of Risk and Uncertainty‡	Theory	1988	39	31.54	3507	35.71	3971	14.66
J of Economic Growth*	Applied	1996	34	30.71	3415	42.72	4750	15.78
J of Economic Theory*†‡	Theory	1969	51	30.04	3340	45.03	5007	22.39
Economic Journal*†‡	Applied	1891	40	28.28	3145	38.84	4319	4.71
J of Urban Economics*	Applied	1974	61	27.20	3025	42.26	4699	24.13
J of International Economics*†‡	Applied	1971	66	26.55	2952	41.48	4612	19.58
Econometrica*†‡	Top 5	1933	65	25.86	2876	34.07	3788	14.20
J of Law and Economics*	Applied	1958	7	24.79	2757	30.19	3357	9.73
J of Public Economics*‡	Applied	1972	28	24.60	2735	35.77	3977	22.69
RAND J of Economics*†‡	Applied	1970	31	23.69	2634	46.94	5219	19.96
J of Development Economics*‡	Applied	1974	78	22.76	2531	47.38	5268	22.95
Review of Economic Studies*†‡	Top 5	1933	79	22.15	2463	31.7	3525	29.13
J of Money, Credit and Banking*	Applied	1969	83	21.88	2433	42.78	4757	20.52
American Economic Review*†‡	Top 5	1911	81	21.62	2404	32.1	3569	9.17
Quantitative Economics*‡	Econometrics	2010	40	20.71	2303	36.56	4065	18.44
J of Human Resources*‡	Applied	1966	41	20.11	2236	36.85	4098	19.58
J of Economic Perspectives*†	Applied	1987	16	19.31	2147	28.07	3121	14.59
J of Political Economy*†‡	Top 5	1892	23	19.18	2133	28.09	3123	4.50
Review of Economic Dynamics	Applied	1998	44	18.64	2073	40.38	4490	23.38
AEJ: Applied Economics*‡	Applied	2009	32	18.28	2033	30.03	3339	10.94
Review of Economics and Statistics*†‡	Applied	1917	31	17.38	1933	35.18	3912	21.51
Quarterly J of Economics*†‡	Top 5	1886	33	17.32	1926	22.48	2500	8.07
AEJ: Economic Policy*‡	Applied	2009	39	17.08	1899	30.91	3437	15.61
AEJ: Microeconomics*	Applied	2009	22	16.52	1837	37.76	4199	29.22
American J of Agricultural Economics*‡	Applied	1919	36	16.24	1806	33.62	3738	10.64
AER: Insights	Applied	2019	21	15.67	1742			
J of Labor Economics*†‡	Applied	1983	23	13.32	1481	35.17	3911	16.06
J of Economic Literature*†‡	Applied	1963	31	11.10	1234	26.94	2996	20.51
AEJ: Macroeconomics*	Applied	2009	19	10.90	1212	35.59	3957	26.47
J of Monetary Economics*†‡	Applied	1975	47	8.87	986	37.65	4186	25.59

Again comparing editor data to author data, there is a positive correlation between the geographic diversity of a journal's editors and the geographic diversity of its authors (Fig. 4). For a large majority of journals, the authorship is more geographically diverse than the editorship as measured by standard distance. Again, there is considerable heterogeneity between journals, ranging from the Quarterly Journal of Economics with a standard distance of 2500 km to Energy Economics with a standard distance of 5863 km. See Table 1 for further details.
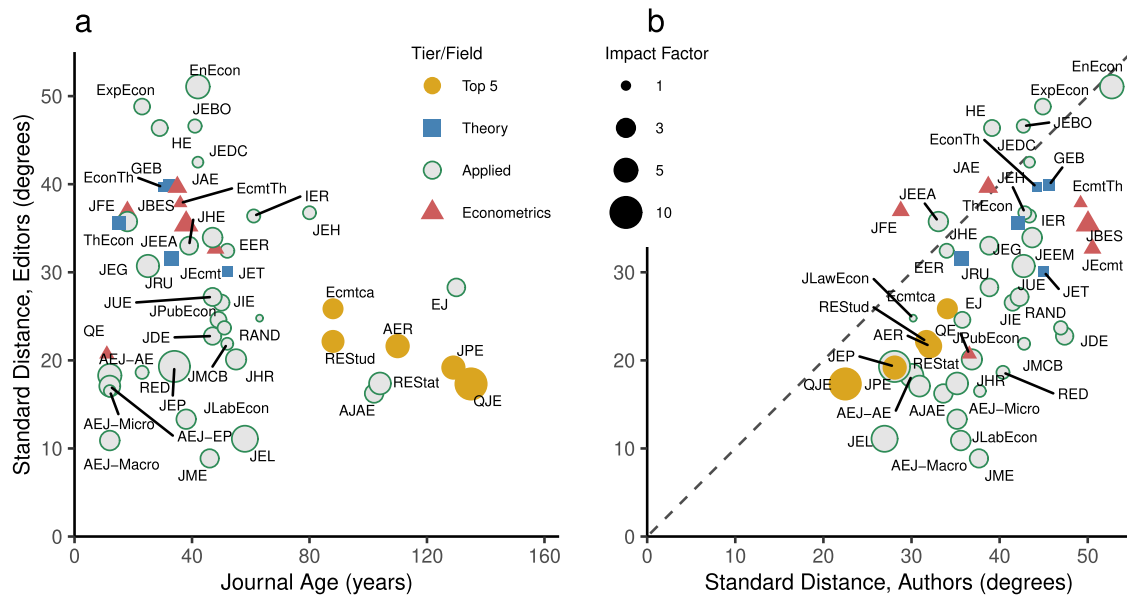
Fig. 4. Geographic diversity by journal age and type. each journal, the standard distance of the journal, measured in degrees, is plotted against **(a)** the number of years since the journal was founded, and **(b)** the standard distance of the authors. Data are given in Table 1. The Pearson correlation coefficient between editorial and authorial diversity measures is 0.57.

4. Discussion

This note should not be read as a polemic. It is rather a simple snapshot of where power is located within academic publishing in economics. It takes no position on why the distribution of editorial power is as it is. Neither does it take a position on what would be a desirable distribution of editorial power. That said, it may be helpful to the reader to list some of the topics that have arisen when discussing our data with related parties.

4.1. Institutional constraints and convention

Some journals have rules or customs regarding who is involved in the editorial process. In some cases, a journal is effectively run from a specific institution.[11] In other cases, a journal may have a specific geographical tradition.[12]

Furthermore, some journal names contain geographical identifiers and, as we see in Figure A6, these journals tend to be less geographically diverse in both their editors and their authors.

Given these links between power and institutional or geographic identity, one would expect the boundaries between the objectives of journals and institutional or geographic objectives to be somewhat indistinct. At a minimum, one objective of journals linked to institutions is to perpetuate this linkage. Historically, there are good reasons for editorial board members to work in close proximity to one another. However, with the rise of the internet and reliable videoconferencing, these reasons are much weaker, so that any journal that wished to weaken its connection to an institution or geographic area could do so without technical difficulty.

Conversely, the conventional nature of institutional connections may relate to characteristics of the institutions themselves. Editorial work is time-consuming and some institutions provide incentives, such as relief from teaching duties, to those involved in such work. Such incentives will tend to be present at institutions whose members already participate in the editorial process to a significant extent. The presence or absence of such institutional support at potential editors' workplaces might play a role in journals' appointment decisions and also in the decision an appointee faces over whether to accept an appointment.[13]

4.2. Trade-offs

If a journal seeks to increase geographic diversity, there may be costs in some other dimensions. For example, if a journal wishes to publish a more homogenized product, with less variance in style and content across articles, then it may benefit

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[11] The Board of Editors of the Quarterly Journal of Economics is composed of people affiliated to Harvard University. Editors of the Journal of Political Economy are predominantly affiliated to the University of Chicago.

[12] The Editorial Board of the Review of Economic Studies is composed of people based in Europe, with an explicit additional group of Foreign Editors based outside of Europe.

[13] The authors thank an anonymous reviewer for this and other insights.

from having a relatively small number of people involved in the editorial process. However, we see in Figure A7 that, with some exceptions (notably, the International Economic Review and Journal of Economic History), this tends to be associated with low geographic diversity.

There may also be trade-offs related to other forms of diversity. Indeed, at first glance our data suggests a negative correlation between geographic diversity and the share of female editors (Figure A8). This negative correlation is largely driven by journals managed by one body, the American Economic Association, which has recently been greatly concerned with gender diversity and whose journals tend to have very low geographic diversity. Absent these journals, the negative correlation is modest (−0.12). Indeed, several journals exhibit relatively high diversity in both dimensions (e.g. Health Economics, the Journal of Health Economics, the Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization).

4.3. Power and dynamics

The current study refers the holding of editorial positions as "power". This does not mean that the hard work of those in such positions should not be appreciated. However, it seems unlikely that this hard work would be undertaken if there were not significant benefits accruing to the careers of those filling the positions and to the institutions to which they belong.[14]

Indeed, it is possible that some of these benefits work for or against geographic diversity. For example, upon joining an editorial board, a researcher's value in the job market may increase. If, as a consequence, the researcher moves to a location that already has considerable editorial power, this could frustrate attempts to increase geographic diversity. In the opposite direction, a researcher who has accumulated editorial power and networks while working in a powerful location may leverage their personal power to move to a location more consistent with personal preferences.

Finally, we note that methods of appointing editors and associate editors vary between journals. For example, some journals take a centralized approach to choosing associate editors, whereas at other journals associate editors are part of a group appointed and controlled by a co-editor. In general, there is a tendency to promote colleagues, coauthors and students. Recently, the Journal of Economic Theory restructured and publicized its procedures for appointments.[15] Such public discussion of procedures is a good starting point for institutional reform.

4.4. Concluding remarks

The data and descriptive statistics presented here give an overview of the state of geographic diversity in economic publishing. Naturally, opinions will differ on the reasons for and the desirability of the patterns we observe. Our hope is to have provided a useful input for both future research and policy discussion on this topic.

Declaration of Competing Interest

None.

Supplementary material

Supplementary material associated with this article can be found, in the online version, at 10.1016/j.jebo.2021.08.005

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[14] For example, see "Why you should join a journal's editorial board"– Nature Careers column, https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-019-02410-0.

[15] See https://www.journals.elsevier.com/journal-of-economic-theory/webinars/journal-of-economic-theory-looking-back-on-2020-webinar.