

# African Studies

## Publisher Data for Understanding the Research Landscape

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### Abstract

Research can only be truly inclusive and global if voices from all locations, genders, ethnicities, backgrounds, and areas of experience are heard and represented across all stages of knowledge production and academic publishing. Although the academic publishing process plays a key role in supporting the dissemination and impact of high-quality research within the research lifecycle, it can also be a propagator of inequality. In this paper, I ponder over this question: ‘what can we learn from publisher data about the state of the African Studies research landscape?’.

I consider how the systems and tools invested in by commercial publishers allow for the collection, collation and analysis of detailed data that serve a threefold purpose: supporting authors to make informed choices about publication routes, surfacing opportunities for journal editors to examine their practices and to address inequalities, and providing evidence-based information to publishers so as to help them in strategic decision making. Lifting the curtain on the data that can be gathered by the major publisher Routledge, Taylor & Francis (T&F), this study interrogates comprehensive data covering submissions, published research content, acceptance rates, peer reviewers and usage, collected from internal T&F systems, dashboards and reporting tools.

The analysis of the publisher data uncovers that there are currently patterns of overrepresentation of some countries and regions – notably South Africa, the USA, and the UK – within African Studies publishing, and underrepresentation of the majority of Africa-based scholars, with lower numbers of submissions converting to published papers, as well as fewer invited reviewers. The data surfaced underscore the ongoing need for publishers, journal Editors and society partners to both continue and expand their work to diversify all corners of the publishing process.

### Keywords

Academic publishing, journals publishing, knowledge production, DEI, metrics

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## Introduction

Research can only be truly inclusive and global if voices from all locations, genders, ethnicities, backgrounds, and areas of experience are heard and represented across all stages of knowledge production and academic publishing. The academic publishing process plays a key role in supporting the dissemination and impact of high-quality research within the research lifecycle, but it can also be a propagator of inequality. Collyer (2018) surmises the fundamental contribution made by publishing as its capacity to assist with the establishment and maintenance of knowledge networks and disciplines, while also drawing attention to academic publishing as being 'equally implicated in the isolation or marginalization of specific social groups and the inhibition of alternatives to mainstream knowledge production' (Collyer, 2018, p. 69). As any journal Editor will no doubt attest, the effective running of a journal is an intricate and multi-layered pursuit, extending far beyond administrative duties into a deep commitment and engagement with the issues facing the research community with which they are intrinsically connected. African Studies is no different in this respect, and questions of diversity, inclusion, equity, and representation continue to be embedded within the fabric of editorial processes and decisions made by the editorial teams of African Studies journals and their publishers.

For researchers, especially those early in their careers, comprehension of the journals publishing landscape in their field can often be murky, with scholars viewing the path to publication as being obfuscated by mysterious processes and systems, guarded over by enigmatic Editors, Editorial Board members and peer reviewers. Contemporary academic publishing has even been compared to a vortex (Wasserman & Richards, 2015), with papers sitting within a black hole once submitted. An author, particularly if their paper is rejected, may find it difficult to situate their experience within the wider publishing landscape. Having worked with the African Studies community for 15 years in my role at Routledge, Taylor & Francis (T&F), far from clandestine collectives, I have found the editorial teams of these journals to be vibrant clusters of researchers, sharing an innate commitment to bringing new research to their community, supporting the development of Early Career Researchers (ECRs), and being keen to provide a space for diverse voices to be heard. To address the perceived opacity of journals publishing, in this paper my intention is to lift the curtain somewhat on publishing processes and systems, and to share analysis of data pertaining to the T&F core African Studies journals portfolio. I am not an academic researcher, and these primary data are only available to me because of my position within an academic publishing company, with such in-depth data not usually made available externally. In this article I provide context of current knowledge production, publishing trends, and citation metrics, and analyze data to illustrate patterns and changes in Editors and Editorial Boards, submissions, published research content, acceptance rates, peer reviewers and usage. As such, this paper offers unique insights into the world of publisher data and how it is being, and can be, used.

Behind the oft-perceived veil of editorial decision making and peer review, there are myriad systems, processes and technological developments invested in by commercial publishers. Aside from online submission and peer review systems and portals, most of these tools are internal-facing and not visible to authors, but enable publishers to collect, collate and analyze data down to a very granular level. Revenue from subscriptions, Open Access (Article Publishing Charges (APCs) and transformative ('Read and Publish') agreement allocations) and other income streams are invested back into the work by developers, analysts, and other publishing staff to improve the publishing process for authors, Editors and reviewers. These ongoing innovations allow commercial publishers such as T&F to track and examine essential data on journal publishing trends, working closely with librarians, journal Editors and society partners, and enriching the research ecosystem. The tools and systems available to commercial publishers such as T&F mean that extensive, up-to-date data, both quantitative and qualitative, can be collected from research communities at every stage of

the publishing process. In an age of predatory publishing, where it can be difficult to separate fact from fiction online, the significance and value of ensuring that reliable, accurate data is available to inform decision making on all levels cannot be understated<sup>2</sup>.

Scholars publish their research for a number of reasons, including to contribute knowledge to their field, to raise their profile, and for professional obligations. In deciding where to publish, academics must consider who they are trying to reach and what type of impact they are looking to make, and decide on the most appropriate route for communicating their research. For an academic in the 2020s, there are a multitude of dissemination channels available, from traditional research articles and special issues, to shorter form journal content, monographs, edited collections, conference proceedings and Open Access (OA) platforms<sup>3</sup>. More informally, and reaching both academic and lay audiences, a researcher may engage with blog posts, social media, webinars, personal and organizational websites, and association newsletters, as well as the ‘brave new world’ (Williams, 2023) of digital newsletter platforms such as Substack. Even within academic publishing a range of content types exist, from pictorial works, exhibition reports, media reviews and even haikus<sup>4</sup>, to methods, data notes and registered reports, not to mention video abstracts and video articles<sup>5</sup>. To ensure consistency in the naming of article types, articles published with T&F journals align to a taxonomy of nearly 50 different article types<sup>6</sup>.

The phrase ‘publish or perish’ is commonly heard across the African Studies research community, as in other fields of study<sup>7</sup>. Academics based in many African countries contend with higher education systems that for the most part prioritize teaching over research and burden scholars with heavy teaching workloads. Combined often with budget cuts, a scarcity of resources and/or curtailing of academic freedom, academics may have limited time and energy to produce research outputs. Kilonzo and Magak (2013) argue that a significant amount of the substandard work submitted for academic publishing is attributable to the professional pressure to publish, quickly and frequently. Getting published is often viewed as guaranteeing employability (Tella & Onyanacha, 2021) and to avoid ‘perishing’, scholars may – knowingly or unknowingly – turn to so-called ‘predatory’ publishing outlets for fast publication. A discussion of the ‘publish or perish’ phenomenon and predatory publishing practices in African Studies merits its own paper and, indeed, has been written about extensively through the lens of different countries (e.g. Amutuhaire, 2022; Chatio et al., 2023; Kilonzo & Magak, 2013; Madikizela-Madiya, 2023; Mills & Robinson, 2022; Mills et al., 2021; Moletsane et al., 2015; Nyamnjoh, 2004; Omobowale et al., 2013; Wadesango, 2014). Across a number of institutions in eastern Africa, including Addis Ababa University in Ethiopia, Makerere University in Uganda, and the University of Nairobi in Kenya, PhD candidates are required to publish – or to have had accepted to publish – two articles in reputable journals in order to graduate (Adamu, 2021; Mills et al., 2023). Maseno University in Kenya further stipulates that one article is required in an international peer-reviewed journal in order to defend a PhD, with ‘international’ seeming to refer almost exclusively to journals from western Europe and North America, while Kenyan and regional journals are eschewed (Kilonzo & Magak, 2013). Tensions and variances in the understanding of the definition of ‘international’, including power dynamics and whether a journal can be local in one place and international in another, have been explored in a number of studies (e.g. Msuya & Muneja, 2011; Omobowale et al., 2013; Tella & Onyanacha, 2021; Thomas, 2018).

The pressure to publish has fueled a rise in papermill activity and in bad faith actors groups offering gift authorship (where a listed author has not contributed substantially, or at all, to the paper) and authorship for sale (where an author spot on a paper has been ‘bought’ or ‘sold’)<sup>8</sup>. Vigilance by publishers and journal editors to the increasingly sophisticated practices of these bad faith actors

2 See <https://scholarlykitchen.sspnet.org/2018/02/06/focusing-value-102-things-journal-publishers-2018-update/> for insights into the spectrum of services provided by academic publishers.

3 See <https://openresearchafrica.org/>

4 See <https://books.openbookpublishers.com/10.11647/obp.0363.08.pdf>

5 Journal of Marketing Management (2018), 34(5-6) <https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/rjmm20/34/5-6>

6 See <https://editorresources.taylorandfrancis.com/welcome-to-tf/policies-guidelines/streamlining-how-we-describe-research-outputs/>

7 The phrase ‘publish or perish’ describes the pressure an academic may feel to publish their research in scholarly journals in order to advance their career and to be deemed successful.

8 See <https://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/editorial-policies/misconduct/>

is vital. Data are essential to investigating and protecting the integrity of the scholarly record, and T&F is continually innovating, such as developing tools to identify duplicate submissions across journal peer review systems and take appropriate action, and creating pop-up notification that can be temporarily added to the online version of an article – subject to strict criteria – to inform readers that an article is under investigation. T&F, like many publishers, is a signatory to UNITED2ACT, a group of international stakeholders working collaboratively to address the collective challenge of paper mills in scholarly publishing<sup>9</sup>.

Co-authorship of journal articles is increasingly typical, with a T&F study finding that 74% of researchers<sup>10</sup> working across Humanities and Social Sciences believe two or more authors on a paper to now be the norm (Taylor & Francis Group, 2017). The top reason for this growth in co-authorship was identified by respondents as competition and greater performance-based pressures, especially for scholars earlier in their careers. While co-authorship provides the opportunity for collaboration and the sharing of multidisciplinary perspectives, it is not without its challenges. It has been highlighted that ‘collaborative research between scholars in the Global South and Global North, albeit well-intentioned, may end up merely “ethnicizing” a project, while also raising concerns around moral geography, proximity, and distance’ (Walker, 2019). Furthermore, with the shift towards a fully open future progressing at different speeds globally, researchers based at institutions in northern and western European countries are currently more likely to have access to OA funding than their co-authors based within Africa<sup>11</sup>. Whilst T&F does not collect data on how co-authors decide on who will be listed as the corresponding (lead) author, it may be that a co-author with OA funding is more likely to be named the corresponding author on a paper in order to access this funding. Similarly, an Africa-based co-author with an additional affiliation at a European institution may list their European affiliation first, with research by Mills et al. (2023) having uncovered examples of such practices amongst Ghanaian researchers. As such, the submissions and publication data may reflect this assumed behavior.

## Data Collection

Data were collected by running reports across multiple internal T&F systems, including custom Power BI dashboards, Atypon Insights and DataSalon Paperstack, utilizing filters and fields to exclude journals outside of the core 15 African Studies journals and to set reporting parameters. Reports were exported in Excel format and data manually analyzed. While some dashboards automatically produced graphs, the charts and maps for other data sets were created manually in Excel and with the mapchart.net online tool.

It is important to highlight that data collection for submissions and peer review is only possible for T&F journals using electronic (online) submission and peer review systems<sup>12</sup>. For those journals not using submission systems, only data for published papers and for usage are available. While it is not claimed that the data are without gaps, the data sets are extensive enough that in their entirety they can be taken to be a substantial sample of the African Studies journals publishing ecosystem.

For the purposes of the data collection for submissions, reviewers, and published papers, I have looked only at research content, as not all submissions to a journal will be peer reviewed. Items such as book reviews are assessed by the Editors or a Book Review Editor, but are not usually sent out for full double anonymous external refereeing, and so excluding these types of content allows

9 See <https://united2act.org/>

10 Of 9,180 respondents.

11 The exception is the South African National Library and Information Consortium (SANLiC), which has Read & Publish (R&P) agreements in place with many publishers.

12 ScholarOne Manuscripts (S1M) is the most common system used by T&F journals, with some journals using Editorial Manager (EM). 13 of the 15 T&F core African Studies journals do use such a system, but one journal moved to a system halfway through 2017, one started using a system in 2018, and another in 2020, so full data from January 2017 to the present is only available for 10 of the 15 journals in the portfolio.

for closer alignment of the data sets<sup>13</sup>. Within T&F, research content has the meaning of original research articles, review articles and shorter types of content such as discussions and brief reports. I use the term ‘article’ to denote all submissions and published papers categorized as research content in the T&F systems, while in respect of readership, the terms ‘usage’ and ‘downloads’ are used interchangeably.

I recognize also the complexities of capturing and representing data on identities and place. As with other studies looking at African authorship, the data do not measure citizenship or any kind of self-identified African status (Briggs & Weathers, 2016). The submissions data provide a snapshot of where a researcher was based at a particular point in time and give no sense of the extensive African diaspora, and of academics globally who may be based temporarily or permanently away from the country they identify as home.

The journals that T&F publishes are owned and edited across the globe, and there are T&F staff based in Europe, Africa, Asia, North America, and Australasia<sup>14</sup>. However, as T&F was founded and has its primary base in the UK, this study comes from the Anglophone perspective. While T&F publishes a number of bilingual journals, such as the English-French *Canadian Journal of African Studies/Revue canadienne des études africaines*, and with other journals publishing abstracts in an author’s first language, English language material comprises the bulk of journal content. Of the major journal publishers, T&F publishes the highest number of African Studies journals. At the time of writing, the African Studies taxonomy at T&F contains over 50 journals<sup>15</sup>, whilst few other Anglophone publishers publish more than ten Africa-related journals<sup>16</sup>. Many of the T&F journals can be viewed as ‘cousin’ journals to the 15 ‘core’ African Studies journals managed within the Area Studies portfolio, and are housed within discipline-specific lists, such as Literature, and Politics & International Relations. In respect of the data in this study, I have focused solely on the core African Studies journals and have not interrogated the related journals.

## Citation Metrics and Editorial Teams

For this study I have purposely elected not to examine citation rates and patterns for African Studies journals, but it is important to give space to reflect on how citation metrics intersect with the African Studies research ecosphere, and to understanding that data do not always show the complete picture. Similarly, I have chosen not to analyze the composition of the current Editors and Editorial Board members across the core T&F African Studies journals, but there are previous analyses and findings that it is helpful to highlight.

One metric that is calculated on journal citation rates is the Journal Impact Factor (JIF)<sup>TM</sup>, and publishing in a journal with a high Journal Impact Factor (JIF)<sup>TM</sup> is the aim for many academics. This approach, however, is problematic and reduces a journal’s worth to an annual number calculated on a very small set of data. Although I am not exploring the citation networks of African Studies journals in detail, given that this study seeks to shed light on the complexities of journals publishing, it is beneficial to reflect on changes initiated by the main citation indices in recent years, as well as to situate African Studies journals within the wider citation ecosystem.

13 Within the 46 article types available in the T&F systems, 19 are categorised as research (core) content, and 27 are categorised as specialist and professional (non-core) content. Specialist and professional content is usually shorter in length than most research content. Book reviews are the most common, followed by editorials and introduction, with this category also being applied to works such as interviews and obituaries.

14 The T&F Area Studies list brings together the segments of African, American, Asian, Australasian, Central Asian, Russian & Eastern European, European, Hispanic & Latin American, and Middle Eastern Studies. There are three UK-based Portfolio Managers on the T&F Area Studies team, with Portfolio Managers in Australia, China, India, Japan, South Africa, Sweden, and the USA, managing journals where the main Editors have a base in that country or region. For example, six of the fifteen core African Studies journals moved in early 2017 to be managed by colleagues based in Cape Town, in addition to all of the Unisa Press and NISC co-published titles.

15 This figure adjusts for journals which have multiple records due to title or subtitle changes, or which are no longer published by T&F.

16 Pinpointing exact numbers is challenging, as most publishers do not have an African Studies subject taxonomy on their platform, with these journals being categorised under other subject areas.



The two main citation indices are those developed by Clarivate (formerly Thomson Reuters) and Scopus (owned by Elsevier). While the evaluations and rankings released by these companies have impacted decisions within academia over the past 60 years (e.g. tenure applications), these names may not be well known to all scholars. An aim of Eugene Garfield's Institute for Scientific Information (ISI)<sup>TM</sup> was to establish an index of the world's scientific and scholarly literature, and the Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE)<sup>TM</sup> emerged in 1964. This was followed by the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI)<sup>TM</sup> and Arts and Humanities Citation Index (AHCI)<sup>TM</sup> in the 1970s. The first annual Journal Citation Reports (JCR)<sup>TM</sup> were launched in 1976, housing the JIF metric, which presents a score based on citation activity. 1997 then saw the launch of the Web of Science (WoS)<sup>TM</sup>, the searchable web interface for the Clarivate indices.<sup>17</sup>

Journals indexed in the SCIE<sup>TM</sup> or SSCI<sup>TM</sup> are awarded a two-year JIF<sup>TM</sup><sup>18</sup> in an annual JCR<sup>TM</sup> release, ranking them within a subject category or categories. A journal's JIF<sup>TM</sup> is calculated by looking at the citations made in a calendar year to items published in that journal in the two preceding years, in relation to the source items<sup>19</sup> published in the journal in those same two years. Only citations from other journals indexed in the Clarivate indices are counted, and so innumerable citations from non-indexed African Studies journals are excluded and overlooked. This misrepresents the rich citation tapestries of the subject area and instead privileges journals receiving citations from other journals that have the infrastructure to meet the requirements for indexing<sup>20</sup>. The JIF<sup>TM</sup> can be viewed as a volatile measure of a journal's quality and prestige, as a small increase or decrease in either the number of citations or source items, or both, will result in a journal's JIF<sup>TM</sup> fluctuating from year to year, especially for smaller journals.

T&F is a signatory to the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA)<sup>21</sup> and espouses its values by guiding scholars to consider metrics beyond the JIF<sup>TM</sup> when looking at where to submit. A T&F colleague currently sits on the DORA Research Assessment Metrics Task Force, with the Task Force issuing additional guidance in 2024 on a variety of commonly used research indicators beyond the JIF<sup>TM</sup>. Five key principles regarding the use of quantitative information more generally were identified: be clear, be transparent, be specific, be contextual, and be fair (DORA, 2024).

T&F's systems and tools allow for the collection of a wealth of data, and by displaying different types of metrics on journal homepages, the publisher's aim is to help reduce bias, ensure use of the appropriate metric(s) for the context, and provide a more rounded view of all the different ways a piece of research or a journal is making an impact in the world. That impact can include being read widely, cited by peers, or referenced in policy documents. Turning to African Studies, this approach aligns with ongoing broader discussions on hegemony and the influence of 'Northern' parameters or indicators which are not necessarily useful across different subjects, geographies, and languages. Valuable outputs of research can take many different forms, from data and coding, to works of art, songs or oral outputs, and metrics cannot capture all societal and community impact.

The Emerging Sources Citation Index (ESCI)<sup>TM</sup> was launched in 2015 and indexes content in the same way as the other citation indices, but without the same requirement for high citation levels<sup>22</sup>. Journals indexed in the ESCI<sup>TM</sup> need to meet basic standards, such as carrying out rigorous peer review, and are viewed as being high quality but having lower impact, where impact is judged by the level of citations to a journal. In this way, many journals that focus on more niche topics or very specific areas of the world can often be found in the ESCI<sup>TM</sup>. Starting from the 2022 JCR<sup>TM</sup> release in June 2023, journals indexed in the AHCI<sup>TM</sup> and the ESCI<sup>TM</sup> now also receive a JIF<sup>TM</sup>. Clarivate view this change as levelling the playing field for all quality journals, including journals with a niche or regionally-focused scope, and journals from the Global South (Quaderi, 2022). One result of this

17 For a full history of these indices, see <https://clarivate.com/the-institute-for-scientific-information/history-of-isi/>

18 Clarivate also calculate an annual five-year JIF<sup>TM</sup> for journals in the JCR<sup>TM</sup>, using a wider citation window. As content published in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences (AHSS) journals is often cited over a longer timeframe, the five-year JIF<sup>TM</sup> for some SSCI<sup>TM</sup> journals is sometimes higher than their two-year JIF<sup>TM</sup>.

19 Research articles, review articles and proceedings papers. For other types of original research content, Clarivate consider on a case-by-case basis whether to count these as source items.

20 See <https://clarivate.com/products/scientific-and-academic-research/research-discovery-and-workflow-solutions/webofscience-platform/web-of-science-core-collection/editorial-selection-process/editorial-selection-process/>

21 See <https://editorresources.taylorandfrancis.com/peersupport/taylor-francis-signs-dora/>

22 See <https://editorresources.taylorandfrancis.com/understanding-research-metrics/esci/>

change is that 9,000 additional journals from 3,000 publishers (many of which are smaller publishers from the Global South) now have a JIF™ (Heaney, 2023). In a two-step shift, ESCI™ journals will be given a ranking and quartile from the 2024 release.

The Area Studies category of the Clarivate JCR™ comprises journals from across the broad spectrum of Area Studies, indexing mainly journals that focus on one region but also those publishing comparative research across regions. The category has seen very few additional journals indexed in recent years and remains dominated by Asian Studies journals. Of 176 journals indexed in the Area Studies category of the 2023 JCR™, 61 were Asian Studies journals (35%) while there were 22 African Studies journals (13%), plus three comparative journals that have Africa as one of their regions of focus<sup>23</sup>. With ESCI™ journals given rankings in summer 2024, this has nearly doubled the size of the Area Studies JCR™ category, from 87 to 176 journals.

Scopus has neither an African Studies nor an Area Studies category, and so the journals examined in this study are included in multiple Scopus categories; again, reflecting the multidisciplinary nature of African Studies research. The CiteScore is the metric produced by Scopus, and covers a wider period than the Clarivate two-year JIF™, looking at citations over the most recent four calendar years to articles, reviews, conference and data papers published in those same four years. While many researchers and institutions focus on the Clarivate indices and the JIF™, that is not to say that African Studies academics do not engage with Scopus metrics. It has been highlighted, for example, that Covenant University in Nigeria states that candidates for full professorship should have a Scopus h-index of not less than three (Mills et al., 2023).

Turning to editorial teams, a number of reflections by editors on the role of the Editor and the Editorial Board have been published, spanning journals across African Studies, Education, Journalism and Communication, Literature, Marketing, and Gender Studies, amongst others (e.g. Acker et al., 2022; Coetzee, 2018; Moletsane et al., 2015; Preece et al., 2023; Titlestad, 2021; Tomaselli, 2015; Wasserman & Richards, 2015). These insights reject perceptions of the editor as gatekeeper, with Coetzee (2018) putting forward instead the notion of holding the door open for entry into mutual spaces. Moreover, editors have underscored their work helping authors to develop and bring their papers into the research community, with images of the Editor-midwife invoked (Ogunniyi, 1998; Titlestad, 2021).

My own past analysis found that of the 42 Editors across the top ten ranked African Studies journals in the Area Studies category of the Clarivate 2016 Journal Citation Reports (JCR)™, only five were based in Africa, with only South Africa and Ghana represented. Moving forward, in August 2021 I analyzed the editorial team compositions of the T&F core African Studies journals. At that moment in time, the journals had a median of 23 Editorial Board members, of which a median of nine were Africa-based (39%). Collectively, scholars from 20 African countries were represented within the Editors and Editorial Boards, with Figure 1 showing that representation is greater in southern and eastern Africa than in central, western, and northern Africa.<sup>24</sup> Editorial Board representation is predominantly Anglophone, with only three journals having representation from francophone African countries in 2021. Lusophone representation fared similarly, with Mozambican scholars sitting on the Boards of four journals, and Angolan scholars present on one Board. It should be noted that Editorial Boards are continuously shifting, with members stepping down and new members joining each year, and that many journals are actively working to diversify their Editorial Boards.

<sup>23</sup> *Journal of Asian and African Studies* and *African and Asian Studies*

<sup>24</sup> *The Journal of North African Studies* (JNAS) includes representation within its Editorial Board from scholars located in Morocco, but it is not included in this study as it is managed under the T&F Middle Eastern Studies list.



Figure 1. African countries represented on T&F African Studies editorial teams, August 2021. Map created using mapchart.net.

At least one academic from South Africa was found to be present within the Editors or Editorial Board of every journal, with Kenya and Nigeria being the next most commonly represented countries. It is important to signal that some journals are centered on particular regions and so are more likely to have a higher number of representatives from the countries of that region than journals with a wider geographical remit<sup>25</sup>. In respect of editorial team members<sup>26</sup>, 43% were located within Africa, though this comprised 36% South Africa and 7% other African countries (Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius and Nigeria).

## Findings

The key findings surfaced by the data collected from the internal T&F systems are that there has been a growth in usage from Africa in recent years and an increased number of submissions from Africa-based authors, but that these submissions are generally converting to published papers at a

25 11 of the core African Studies journals (73%) welcome articles focusing on any area of Africa, while four have a specific regional focus (27%) – *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* and *Safundi*.

26 See appendix 1 for an overview of which roles are being defined here under 'editorial team'.



lower rate than many Northern and Western submissions, with the exception of South Africa. From the publisher data we learn also that peer review networks are, in general, not currently adequately diverse, being dominated by South Africa, the USA and the UK.

## Usage

Inequities in access to published research pose a barrier to scholars, but there is a positive picture in respect of access initiatives that are in place for researchers based in Africa. Content published by over 100 publishers is available free of cost, or at a highly discounted rate, to institutions in the majority of African countries via the Research4Life (R4L) program<sup>27</sup>, though with the understanding that there are often still hurdles posed by internet or Wi-Fi access, electricity and load shedding, and in that R4L is not always well advertised within institutions and requires passwords to be obtained from a university librarian. Individual publishers may also have their own initiatives, with the T&F Special Terms for Authors and Researchers (STAR) program providing many researchers based in Africa with free access to all T&F journals<sup>28</sup>.

Examining usage data, there are clear positive trends in how researchers based in Africa are accessing African Studies journals. Readers based in all 54 countries of Africa – as well as two non-sovereign territories – downloaded at least one article between January 2017 and October 2023. The journals examined were collectively read by users from, on average, 32 African countries in 2016, and 40 in 2019, with São Tomé and Príncipe being the only country not to download at least one article in 2022.

The data establish that usage from the African continent of the T&F core African Studies journals has grown at a faster rate than the global readership. While worldwide usage of the 15 journals examined increased by 110% from 2017 to 2022, usage from the African continent grew by 142%. As shown in Figure 2, usage from readers based in northern and central Europe grew by 82.8%, while usage from North America increased by 83.6% during this period.

Region	2017	2017 %	2022	2022 %	Growth, 2017-2022
Africa	170,618	31.4%	412,993	35.6%	142.1%
Northern & Central Europe	173,166	31.9%	316,496	27.3%	82.8%
North America	106,706	19.7%	195,925	16.9%	83.6%
Asia Pacific	24,993	4.6%	82,346	7.1%	229.5%
Southern Europe	17,495	3.2%	41,000	3.5%	134.4%
Australasia	25,651	4.7%	39,348	3.4%	53.4%
South Asia	11,354	2.1%	32,024	2.8%	182.1%
Latin America	3,431	0.6%	14,805	1.3%	331.5%
Eastern Europe	4,984	0.9%	13,686	1.2%	174.6%
Middle East	4,378	0.8%	11,951	1.0%	173.0%
<b>Total Downloads</b>	<b>542,776</b>		<b>1,160,574</b>		

Figure 2. Usage by region, 2017 vs 2022.

Source: Journals Usage Dashboard, Atypon Insights.

<sup>27</sup> See <https://www.research4life.org/access/eligibility/>

<sup>28</sup> <https://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/star/>

Looking at global usage of the African Studies journals, Africa was the top downloading region from January 2017 – October 2023 (Figure 3), with 35.4% of downloads during this period attributed to readers within Africa. In 2017, Africa was the second highest downloading region, but surged ahead of northern and central Europe in 2022 to take the top spot.

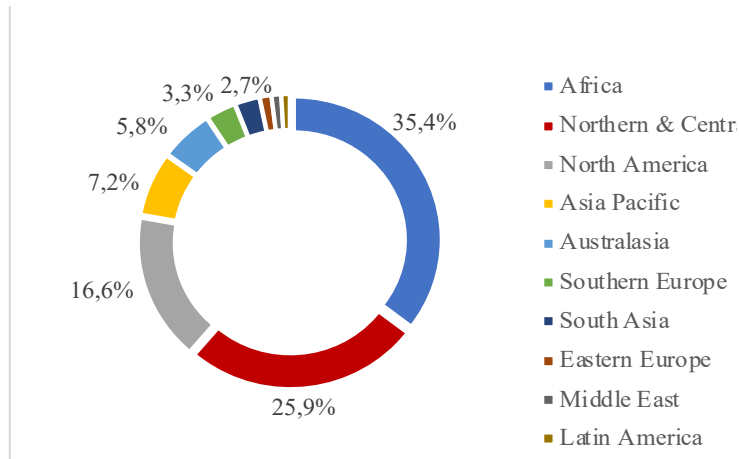


Figure 3. Usage by region, January 2017 – October 2023.

Source: Journals Usage Dashboard, Atypon Insights

The sense of South African dominance within the African Studies research landscape is supported by the usage data. As Figure 4 shows, South Africa was the top downloading country from January 2017 to October 2023, with 19.7% of total downloads. The UK (15.5%) and the USA (13.9%) were the second and third highest downloading countries, with the top ten completed by Australia, Canada, the Netherlands, Kenya, Germany, China and Zimbabwe. Usage from South Africa (19.7%) was higher than that of all other African countries combined (14.3%), and nearly seven times higher than the next highest downloading African country (Kenya, 2.9%).

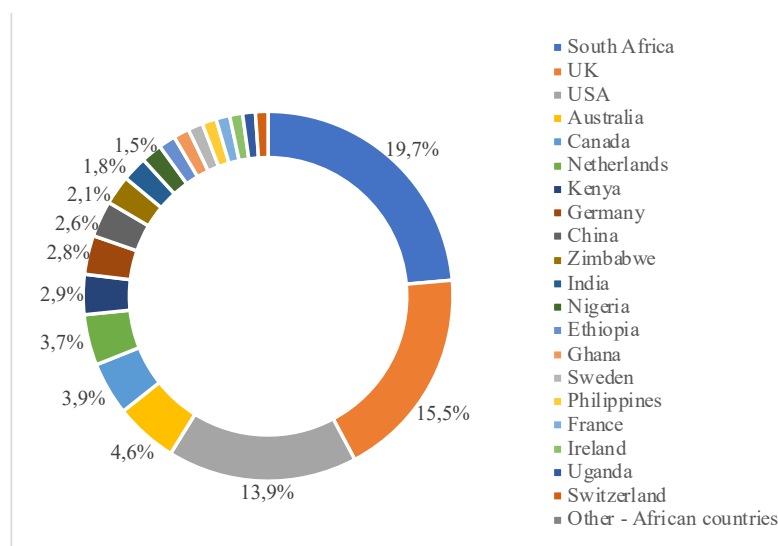


Figure 4. Usage by country, January 2017 – October 2023.

Source: Journals Usage Dashboard, Atypon Insights

It is important to highlight the variances of usage for journals with a regional focus, including *Journal of Southern African Studies* (JSAS), *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* (JIOR) and *Journal of Eastern African Studies* (JEAS), where readership is high in countries within those respective regions; seen also in Editorial Board representation. As one might expect, JSAS is widely read in Zambia and Malawi, JIOR is highly accessed by scholars from Mauritius, and JEAS finds strong readership within Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda and Tanzania. Ethiopian usage is inconsistent across the portfolio, with previous T&F analysis having shown that around 50% of the articles downloaded by Ethiopian scholars from the core African Studies journals in 2019 were from *Journal of Eastern African Studies* alone.

## Submissions

A study examining submissions to *Journal of Modern African Studies* found increasing levels of submissions from Africa-based authors over the period 1997-2012, with a submission level of around 40% by the early 2010s (Briggs & Weathers, 2016). My analysis, spanning a wider data set, corroborates findings about increasing submissions from the African continent, but finds a higher share of submissions coming from Africa-based lead authors: an average of 65.1% across the period examined. Over 10,000 articles were recorded across the submission systems of 13 T&F core African Studies journals from January 2017 to October 2023, with Figure 5 showing the breakdown by year, split out into Africa and Rest of World (RoW).

Figure 5 illustrates the 'pandemic effect', of increased submissions to the African Studies journals during 2020. This is a trend witnessed across all subject areas published by T&F, with many academics having written up and submitted their research during the Covid-19 lockdowns of 2020. However, I am conscious that not all academics experienced the same privileges of time during this period, and that researchers in varying locations, with caregiving or other responsibilities may in fact have had less time to devote to academic work. Submissions to the journals examined were already on the rise in 2019, having increased by 28.3% on 2018, but 2020 saw a further increase of 25.2% on the previous full year. While the increase in papers submitted during 2020 holds true for authors based in Africa and for authors located in other regions, it is surprising to note the significant difference between these two groups: a small 3.1% increase for RoW authors, but a 38.8% increase for Africa-based authors. It is notable that submissions did not increase at the same rate from every African country. Nigeria appears to have been the major actor during 2020, with a colossal 89.5% increase in submissions from the previous year, while South Africa saw a more modest 12% increase. During 2020, many African Studies journal Editors highlighted concerns about the impact of Covid-19 restrictions interrupting fieldwork, research and archive visits, and in the immediate post-Covid years, a number of Editors reported lower levels of submissions. It could be inferred that having finalized articles in 2020 from their earlier research, and with research activities curtailed in 2020-2021, there were fewer outputs ready to be written up in the immediate post-pandemic years.

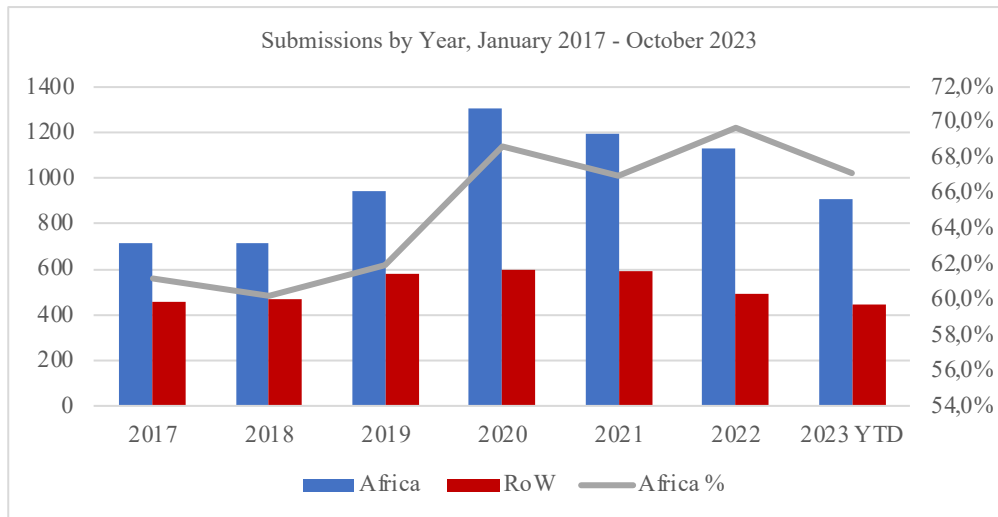


Figure 5. Submissions to T&F core African Studies journals by year, split by Africa and RoW.

Report: Number of Submissions by Submission Year, DataSalon Paperstack.

From January 2017 to October 2023, papers were submitted by authors located in 131 countries, including 47 countries within Africa (see Figure 6). While 65.1% of submissions had an Africa-based lead author, a further 2% of submitted papers had at least one African co-author. South Africa (23.2%) and Nigeria (18.3%) stood as the titans of submissions in African Studies, with a combined share of 41.5% of all submissions during this period, eclipsing the next highest submitting countries. In addition to South Africa and Nigeria, three other African countries feature within the top ten submitting countries during this period – Ethiopia (5.1%), Ghana (4.6%) and Zimbabwe (3.4%). From outside Africa, the top submitting countries rounding out the top ten were the USA (5.8%), UK (3.9%), China (2.6%), India (2.3%) and Canada (2.1%).

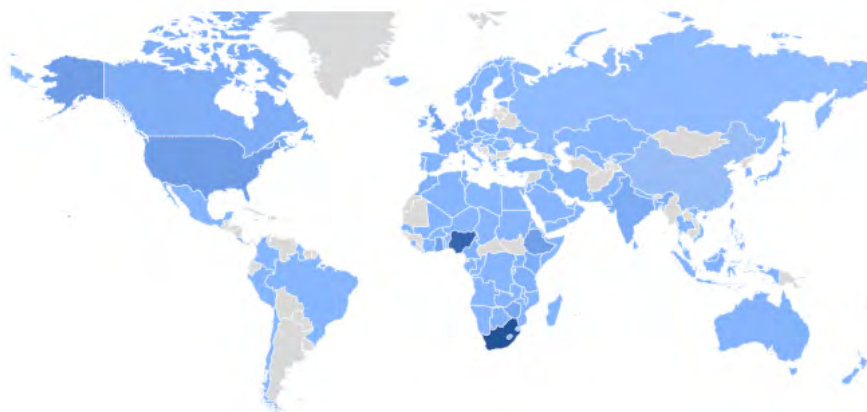


Figure 6. Submissions to T&F core African Studies journals by country, January 2017 – October 2023.

Report: Geographical distribution of submissions by author/reviewer location, DataSalon Paperstack. A legend is not produced by the reporting tool for this type of gradient map. The gradients are proportional to the different filters applied. The data range from one submission to 1,618 submissions per country.

## Peer Review

Market research conducted by T&F in 2015 sheds light on author attitudes towards peer review and, in particular, perceptions on what is considered to be a reasonable timeframe for receiving a decision from a journal. In the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), 96% of editors and 93% of reviewers felt that two months was a realistic timeframe for delivering an initial report, but only 44% of submitting authors confirmed that they had received initial feedback within two months. The T&F white paper outlines that these discrepancies can be due to processes behind the scenes that are not visible to the author, including administrative checks, plagiarism detection, reviewer search and selection, and tiered editorial decision-making processes, questioning whether there is scope for editors and publishers to be communicating more effectively on peer review processes (Taylor & Francis Group, 2015).

For most of the journals published with T&F, a number of ‘turnaround’ metrics are publicly available on the metrics tab on each journal’s homepage: the time to first (desk) decision and to first post-peer review decision, and the time from acceptance to online publication. These publisher data are valuable to authors in that they provide a more rounded, view of a journal beyond citation metrics, while also functioning to manage author expectations about how long the peer review process might typically take for a particular journal. If a researcher has a deadline by which they need to publish their article – perhaps to include in a portfolio when applying for a promotion, to count towards a required number of publications to graduate, or for inclusion in an assessment exercise such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF) in the UK – transparency around peer review and publication times helps them to make an informed decision about where to submit.

For the journals examined, for the second half of 2022 (June–December), the median number of days from submission to first post-review decision was 161, or just over five months. Further along the publication journey, the median number of days from acceptance to online publication for these journals was 31 days. An academic looking to publish in one of the T&F core African Studies journals could therefore reasonably expect an average timeframe of at least six or seven months from submission to publication, plus additional time for revising their paper, additional review, supplying proof corrections, etc. Once the necessary activities at the author’s end are factored in, it would not be unreasonable to see an article being published online one year after first submission, with many papers being published much faster, but others taking longer to reach publication. Stepping back from the data, it should be emphasized that journal metrics have their limitations and should never be considered in isolation, with quantitative metrics not capturing the time and care that editorial teams expend helping authors to refine their articles.

Figure 7 charts the number of submissions accepted and rejected by the T&F core African Studies journals by the average number of days taken to make a first decision, for articles which received a final decision in 2022. Only articles with a final decision of accept or reject are included, and that final decision may come at desk assessment stage, after external peer review, or after assessment of a revised paper where a first decision of minor revisions, major revisions, or revise and resubmit was shared with the author following independent peer review.



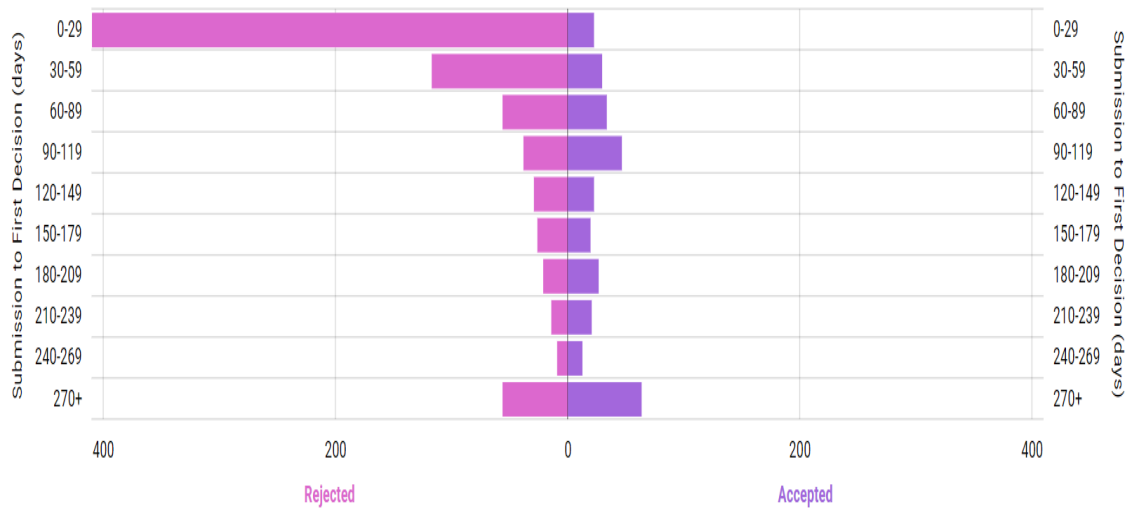


Figure 7. First decision times for accepted and rejected submissions receiving a final decision in 2022.

Source: T&F Peer Review Explorer Power BI dashboard.

For papers receiving a final decision in 2022, overall 27.3% of submissions were accepted and 72.7% were rejected. For final decisions, 40.4% were communicated in under a month, including 52.8% of total rejections, which will predominantly be desk rejects. Indeed, for just over two-thirds of rejected papers (67.9%), a final decision was shared with the lead author in under two months. This signals that editorial teams are, by and large, assessing articles and communicating with authors as quickly as possible, so that papers that fall outside of a journal’s aims and scope can be submitted to a more appropriate journal, or reworked from a report or consultancy piece into an academic article and resubmitted.

Rejection decisions are commonly made on the basis of a submitted paper not aligning with the aims and scope of the journal, or on grounds of quality. Many rejected submissions simply fall outside the scope of a journal and so receive a desk reject decision from the editors and are not sent out for external peer review. In 2023, 53% of papers submitted to the core T&F African Studies journals were desk rejected, compared to 60% across T&F Social Sciences journals and 57% across all T&F journals.

Desk Rejections 2023			
	Overall	Sub-Saharan Africa	South Africa
Core African Studies	53%	57%	58%
Social Sciences	60%	62%	51%
All T&F	57%	60%	47%

Figure 8. Comparison of desk reject decision rates in 2023 for papers submitted to core T&F African Studies journals, T&F Social Sciences journals and all T&F journals.

Source: T&F Submissions and Decisions Power BI dashboard.

Ethics best practice governs that a submission may only be under consideration by one journal at any time, and authors are required to declare upon submission that their paper is not under consideration elsewhere<sup>29</sup>. Beyond the pressure to publish signposted earlier, editors report anecdotally that they feel there can be a lack of understanding of expectations of academic research and scholarly publication, with many submissions being opinion-based essays or pieces based on secondary sources without sufficient primary sources or original analysis. There are also country and regional variances in approaches to academic research that should be taken into account. For example, Coetzee (2018) identifies that in the Nigerian higher education environment, scholars may be encouraged to reflect on the real world impact of their research and to make explicit its relevance to general society. As such, some resulting articles may read more like policy documents. Peer reviewers without an understanding of this cultural significance may not be best equipped to assess these papers and journals may explicitly not publish policy documents.

In respect of levels of content, handling more submissions and corresponding with authors requires more of journal editors' time. The 'invisibility' of labor in journals publishing has been discussed in detail by Coetzee (2018) and touched on by Titlestad (2021). Special issues and special sections are a mainstay of many African Studies journals and these must also be considered within the framework of acceptance and rejection trends. Articles are more likely to be commissioned or invited for special issues, and these articles are often pre-screened by guest editors prior to submission, with this quality control meaning that acceptance rates may be higher in periods when a large volume of special issue papers are being reviewed. Special issues can, however, be targets for bad faith actors. In the most extreme cases, such as with the example of the Hindawi brand, we have seen thousands of retractions, the delisting of journals from the Clarivate Web of Science™, and sweeping journal closures<sup>30</sup>.

The importance of accurate data is underlined when we examine the data concerning who is reviewing submitted articles. Location data was – and may still be – missing in the profiles of many reviewers, meaning that a current country of residence was not captured for 9.7% of invites and 18% of completed reviews included in this data set. These invites and completed reviews are grouped together as 'blank' in the internal T&F dashboards from which the data are pulled. Given these missing geographic indicators, the analysis presented in this article should be taken as a general indication of patterns, with an understanding that some countries may be underrepresented in the data. I use the terms 'reviewer' and 'referee' interchangeably.

The geographic spread of reviewers looks at first glance to be fairly broad, with researchers based in 78 countries invited to referee articles submitted between January 2017 and October 2023, including experts located in 30 African countries (see Figure 9). However, if we drill down, we see that 61.3% of invites to review were sent to researchers based in just three countries – South Africa (30.9%), the UK (13.3%) and the USA (11.9%), with these countries constituting 52.3% of all completed reviews.

<sup>29</sup> See <https://authorservices.taylorandfrancis.com/editorial-policies/misconduct/>

<sup>30</sup> See <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2024/05/15/wiley-shutter-19-journals#> and <https://www.wiley.com/en-us/network/publishing/research-publishing/open-access/hindawi-publication-manipulation-whitepaper>

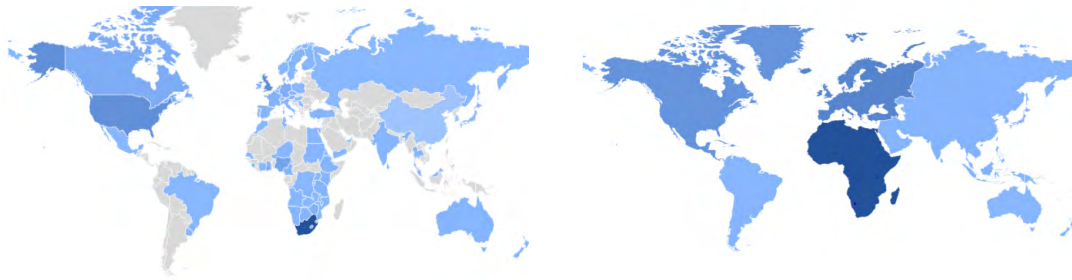


Figure 9. Reviewers invited by T&F core African Studies journals by country (left) and region (right), January 2017 – October 2023.

Report: Geographical distribution of submissions by author/reviewer location, DataSalon Paperstack. A legend is not produced by the reporting tool for this type of gradient map. The gradients are proportional to the different filters applied. The data on the country map range from one invite to 1,134 invites per country.

While just under half (47.6%) of all invites were sent to reviewers based in Africa, once South Africa is excluded, this figure plummets to 16.7%. Researchers based in Nigeria received the fourth highest number of invites to review, but that stood at 5.7% of the total invites sent. Beyond the top four invited countries, reviewers based in the other 74 countries received less than 4% of the total invites sent. Africa-based reviewers provided 46.7% of completed reviews, with 31.8% being attributed to South African academics.

Publisher data are key for providing an evidence base to illuminate that peer review networks currently remain very much skewed and that there is a continued need for diversification in the selection of academics invited to review journal articles. That South Africa commands two-thirds of the invites to review sent to African scholars, and nearly a third of the total invites sent globally, paints a stark picture of the dominance and exceptional profile of the country within the academic publishing landscape in African Studies.

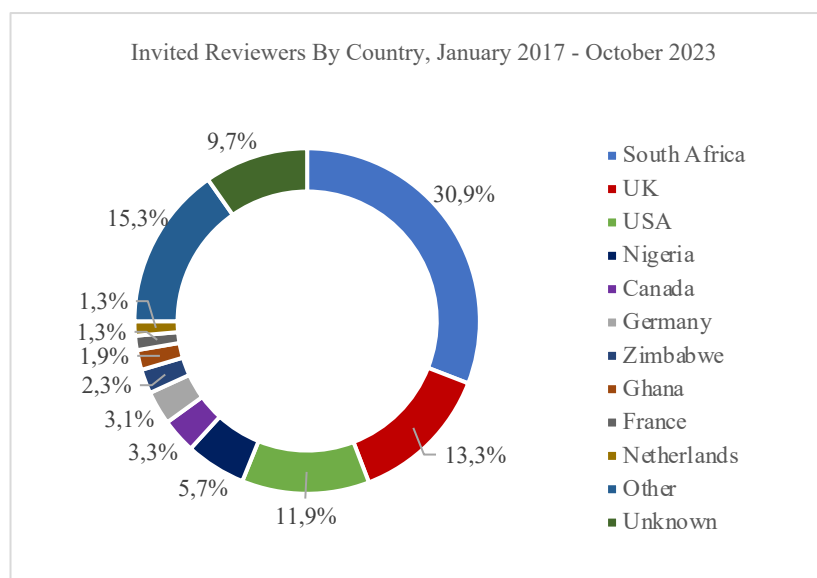


Figure 10. Invited reviewers by country, January 2017 – October 2023.

Report: Geographical distribution of submissions by author/reviewer location, DataSalon Paperstack.

The publisher data show that the bulk of African Studies reviewers are located within a limited number of countries, but is it the same academics being frequently called on? T&F's internal peer review dashboards can shed light on this question. Looking to the period January 2017 to October 2023, the median number of invites for these journals stood at 1.23 invites per reviewer. The median rate for acceptance to review was 57%, but this varied considerably across journals, ranging from 38% to 89%. Similarly, the median completion rate from scholars who had agreed to review was 85%, but this ranged from 67% to 100%.

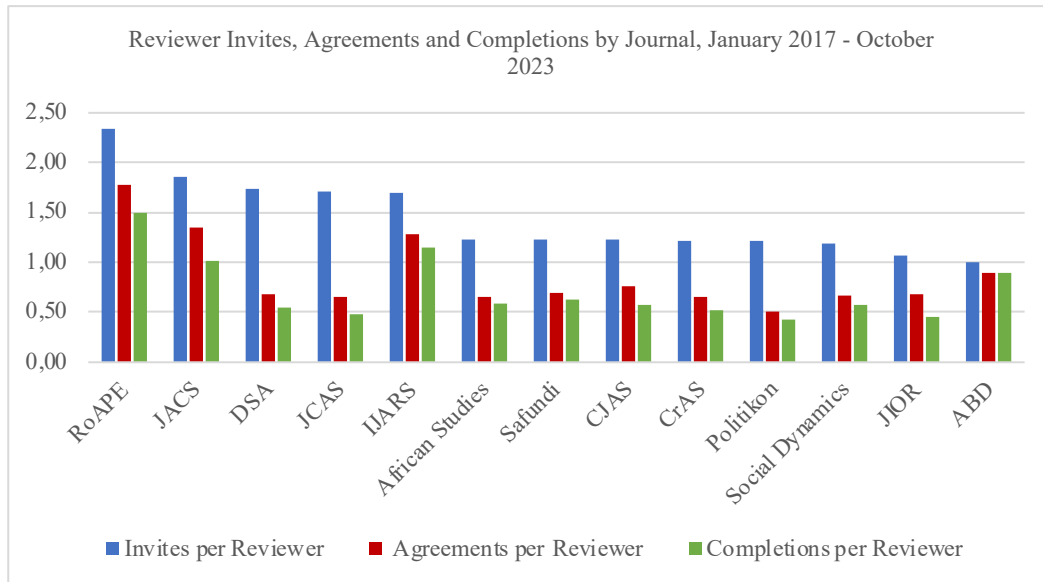


Figure 11. Reviewer invites, agreements and completion by journal, January 2017 – October 2023.

For articles in fields that are more specialized or emerging, there will demonstrably be a smaller pool of experts to call upon. Similarly, if referees have regularly delivered reviews in the past, loops may develop where certain reviewers are leant upon more heavily, if they reliably return constructive, thorough reviews in a timely manner, perpetuating existing patterns of who is invited to review. It would be reasonable to assume that researchers receiving a large volume of invites will not have the time to accept every invite that lands in their inbox.

Looking at articles with an invite to review first sent between January 2017 and October 2023, the mean number of reviewers invited was 3.8. Just over half (53.3%) of submissions saw between two and four reviewers invited, while between five and ten review invites were sent out for slightly over a quarter (25.4%) of papers (see Figure 12). For a small number of articles (0.2%), it was necessary to send out more than 21 invites to review in order to secure two available referees<sup>31</sup>, we see from the data that 17.3% of articles are noted as having one reviewer invited; this may be for a variety of reasons<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>31</sup> See <https://editorresources.taylorandfrancis.com/managing-peer-review-process/best-practice-guidelines-for-peer-review/>

<sup>32</sup> Reasons can include: recently submitted, withdrawal before two reviewers had been invited, some shorter form content may have a different peer review policy, revised articles may only be sent back to one original reviewer.

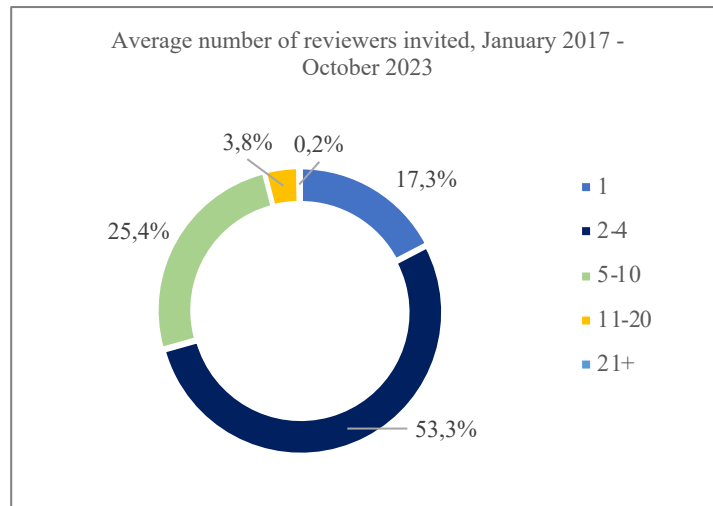


Figure 12. Average number of reviewers invited, January 2017 – October 2023.

Source: T&F Peer Review Explorer Power BI Dashboard.

With time-pressed academics needing to be selective about the papers they accept to review, it is evident that expanding existing reviewer pools is a necessary activity for journal editors. This is vital for three key reasons: to avoid overburdening committed existing reviewers, to provide decisions and feedback to authors within a reasonable timeframe, and to ensure that a plurality of voices and perspectives are involved in shaping who and what gets published in a journal. To improve visibility to researchers on how they can get involved with journals in their field, journals can recruit for reviewers and Editorial Board members alongside calls for editors. Open and transparent calls can help to bring researchers from all corners into a journal, providing an alternative to leaning on existing networks and ensuring that the people involved with a journal are truly reflective of the research community in that field. Longer term, it is posited that new peer reviewers can transition into Editorial Board members, and Editorial Board members into more senior roles within a journal. When these calls are managed via a publisher system<sup>33</sup>, publishers can collate data on who is responding to calls and share these data with journal editors and society partners.

## Published Content

A number of studies have reported on a general decline in published academic research authored by academics based in Africa, including a study by Briggs and Weathers focusing on two major African Studies journals. Their research examined articles published in *African Affairs* and *Journal of Modern African Studies*, finding that the share of articles authored by Africa-based scholars had declined from 25% in 1993 to 15% in 2013 (Briggs & Weathers, 2016). The study also revealed that in each year from 2005-2013, fewer than 20% of published articles were authored by researchers located in Africa. A 40% decline from the period 1993-2022 compared to 2003-2013, in the number of papers published by scholars based in South Africa was also underscored.

Turning to content assigned to the T&F core African Studies journals for the volume years 2017 to 2023 (as of October 2023), 75% of published items were classed as research (core) content and 25% as specialist and professional (non-core) content. Research articles continue to be the mainstay of African Studies journals, comprising 68.1% of the content published in the period examined. Book reviews made up 15.5% of total content and editorials comprised 3.5%, with the remaining 12.9% of content consisting of a mix of content types, each contributing less than 2% of total content recorded<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>33</sup> See <https://editorresources.taylorandfrancis.com/editor-recruitment/>

<sup>34</sup> See <https://editorresources.taylorandfrancis.com/editor-recruitment/>



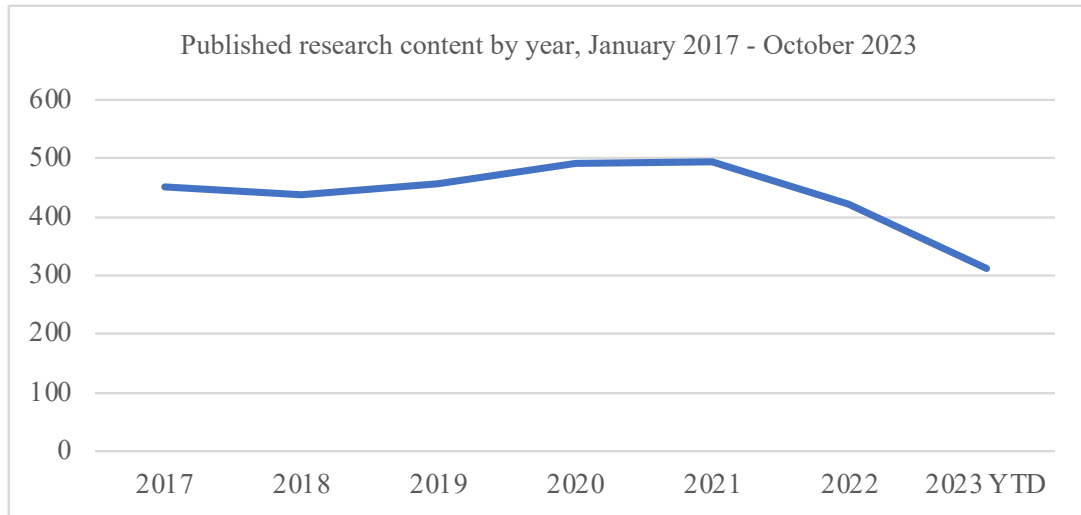


Figure 13. Published research content by year, January 2017 – October 2023.

Source: T&F Article Trends Explorer Power BI Dashboard.

Figure 13 shows that a steady level of research content has been published in T&F African Studies journals in recent years, with between 450 and 500 items of research content published in the 2017 to 2021 volumes. The dip in 2022 can be partially explained by several journals not yet having completed their 2022 volume as of October 2023. Likewise, the 2023 YTD figure is lower than it would normally be in October, as a number of African Studies journals were running multiple issues behind their production schedule at the time the analysis was undertaken. These delays have come to the fore since the pandemic, with editors working through increased volumes of submissions compared to pre-2020 and a reported difficulty in securing available reviewers. Figure 14 breaks down the locations of lead authors who published content in the T&F core African Studies between January 2017 and October 2023.

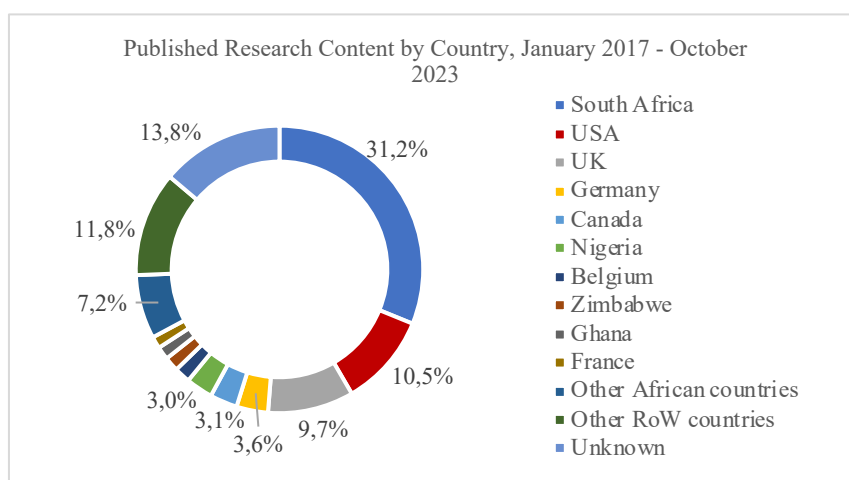


Figure 14. Published research content by country (lead author), 2017 – 2023 YTD journal volumes.

Source: T&F Article Trends Explorer Power BI Dashboard.

Furthermore, we can also review how published content compares to submitted content, invited reviewers and usage. The publisher data (Figures 15 and 16) show that while 65.1% of submitted papers during the period examined had a lead author based within Africa, this declines to 44.5% of published articles.

Country/ Region	Submissions (All Authors)	Submissions (Lead Author)	Published Re- search Content	Invited Review- ers	Usage
Africa	67.1%	65.1%	↓44.5%	↓47.6%	↓35.4%
South Africa	23.2%	24.0%	↑31.2%	↑30.9%	↑19.7%
Nigeria	18.3%	19.6%	↓3.0%	↓5.7%	↓1.5%
USA	5.8%	5.9%	↑10.5%	↑11.9%	↑13.9%
Ethiopia	5.1%	5.6%	↓0.9%	↓0.6%	↓1.2%
Ghana	4.6%	4.6%	↓1.5%	↓1.9%	↓1.2%
UK	3.9%	3.6%	↑9.7%	↑13.3%	↑15.5%
Zimbabwe	3.4%	3.0%	↓1.6%	↓2.3%	↓2.1%
China	2.6%	2.6%	↓0.5%	↓0.6%	→2.6%
India	2.3%	2.4%	↓0.5%	↓0.3%	→1.8%
Canada	2.1%	2.1%	↑3.1%	↑3.3%	↑3.9%
Unknown	<0.1%	<0.1%	13.8%	9.7%	N/A

Figure 15. Comparison of submissions, published research content, invited reviewers and usage for top ten submitting countries, January 2017 – October 2023

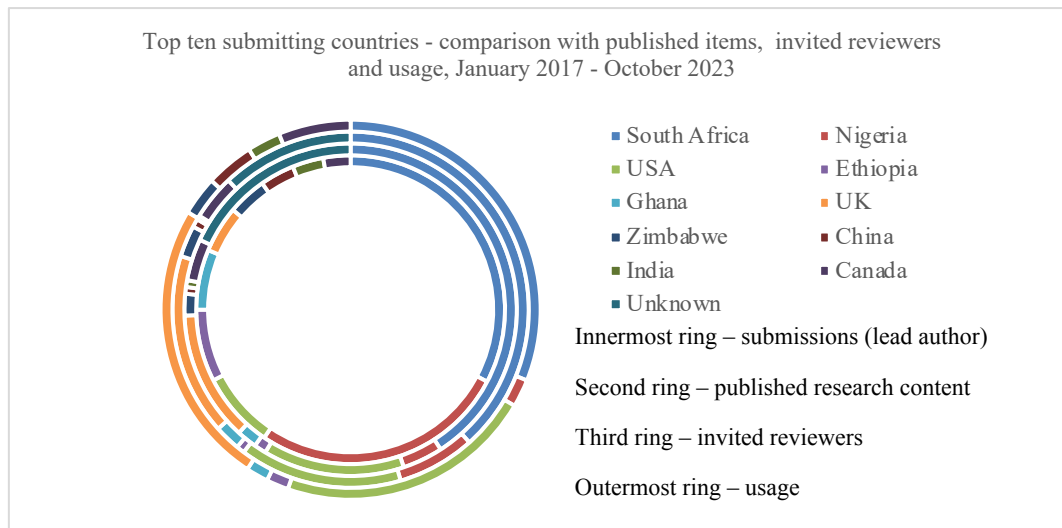


Figure 16. Comparison of submissions, published research content, invited reviewers and usage for the top ten submitting countries during the period January 2017 – October 2023.

## Conclusion

To return to the question: what have we learned from the T&F publisher data about the state of the African Studies research landscape, and what further learning might be possible? I have contended that the rich data gathered by commercial publishers can help authors to make informed choices about publication routes, and provide editorial teams with robust data for holding a mirror up to their practices and fostering dialogue on future directions for journals. From the T&F publisher data, we can discern that there are currently sustained patterns of overrepresentation and underrepresentation in the African Studies research landscape. It is evident that South Africa, the USA and the UK are overrepresented in terms of published papers, invited reviewers and usage, compared to submission levels from researchers based in those countries. The four other African countries in the top ten submitting list are all underrepresented in all of the other metrics, highlighting that, with the exception of South Africa, submissions from Africa are converting into published articles at a lower rate than submissions from Western and Northern regions of the world. What could be inferred is that resourcing inequalities often translate into inequalities within publishing, with authors based in countries with well-funded higher education infrastructures more likely to see higher ratios of submitted papers going on to be published in reputable journals. Reflecting on why South Africa is an exception, with its financial incentives from the Department of Higher Education and Training for publishing in accredited journals, the research ecosystem in South Africa functions quite differently to that of other African countries; indeed, one Ghanaian researcher interviewed for a study commented that he viewed South Africa to be roughly approximate to a European country (Mills et al., 2023).

In respect of what further learning might be possible, publishing, like academia, is grounded in strong relationships. Fundamental to maintaining and developing these relationships are data and how these are communicated. Analyzing and sharing these in-depth data allows T&F both to better understand the communities with which it works, and to provide journal editors and society partners with a deeper understanding of patterns within their journals, trends across the subject area, and perspectives and shifts beyond their own networks, institutions, and regions. One recent advancement at T&F is the development of tools that allow for the tracking of data on rejected articles, analyzing papers rejected by T&F journals that subsequently went on to be published, and where. Sharing these data with journal editors affords a touch point for editors to follow the onward trajectories of rejected papers and to reflect on their peer review practices. To date, while we have the figures for desk rejection rates and overall rejection rates, data have not been reliable nor specific enough to build an accurate picture of what exactly drives rejections. Without a better understanding of these drivers, T&F is limited in its ability to identify what authors of rejected manuscripts need to support their journey to finding a home for their research. Enriched data on rejections provide an opportunity to offer more tailored feedback to authors on how to improve their work to get published. Expanding beyond basic 'reject – unsound' and 'reject – unsuitable' decisions, T&F has recently piloted a comprehensive list of rejection reasons with a small group of journals, with distinct categories facilitating improved analysis and reporting, and being positively received by the editors taking part in the pilot. If this functionality were to be developed and rolled out more widely, the data gathered could be used to uncover trends on the common pitfalls for submissions to a particular journal and to inform journal strategy, particularly if there were demonstrable patterns for a country or region.

The publisher data examined in this study establish an evidence base confirming the dominance of South Africa across all aspects of the African Studies research landscape. While the contributions and involvement of South African scholars should continue to be nurtured, the African Studies publishing ecosystem would be unequivocally strengthened by a greater diversity of African voices. The data lay stark a shortcoming of the current ecosystem, where South Africa is often synonymous with Africa as a whole, and where much African representation comes from scholars based in South Africa. As such, there remains the pressing need for editorial teams and reviewer pools to include scholars from across the full length and breadth of the African continent. Regular reporting using publisher data will ensure that these considerations remain at the forefront of journal strategy,

but new approaches are desirable in order to realize diverse representation. Further to applying set terms for Editors and Editorial Board members to ensure a rotation of diversity of thought and background within journal decision making teams, actions such as open calls for Editors – and accompanying these with calls for Editorial Board members and reviewers – are a step in the right direction to making journal communities more accessible and recruitment processes more transparent. Practices such as the third reviewer model<sup>35</sup> help to bring researchers into the publishing ecosphere early on in their academic careers, while initiatives such as the Journal Work Academy, developed by Carli Coetzee, not only work to train the next generation of Africa-based editors, Editorial Board members and reviewers, but build an enduring community and support network for these engaged young researchers<sup>36</sup>.

It is vital for publishers to listen to the research communities within which they are embedded, and to take action on what is vocalized to them. Publishers are continually learning, being challenged, and adapting their processes and approaches. The survey and focus groups contributing to T&F's 2015 white paper on peer review indicated the appeal from researchers for greater transparency around peer review and for publishers to display peer review times online. Two main factors contributed to the development of a publicly available metrics tab for each journal published with T&F: the researcher feedback from the survey and focus groups, and the intention to become a signatory to DORA. These turnaround metrics are updated on journal homepages every six months, to ensure that researchers exploring where to submit their articles have a snapshot of each journal in real time. Before T&F signed DORA, the publisher needed to ensure that its systems and reporting supported the pledges that it was making as a signatory. Scoping and scheduling the redevelopment of systems and tools can mean that publisher reactions to the rapidly evolving research landscape can appear delayed or prolonged, while compliance with data privacy and GDPR can mean that publishers are not able to share as much data, or data in quite the form that the research community would ideally like to see. Moving forward beyond DORA, the Barcelona Declaration on Open Research Information has recently been launched, and has to date been signed by a number of institutions, research funders and other organizations. One key commitment outlined by the Declaration is the requirement to make the research information (metadata) generated in publication processes openly available through open scholarly infrastructures, using standard protocols and identifiers where available. While T&F and other publishers have made strides in recent years in making a raft of metadata publicly available, T&F continues to assess the opportunities and possibilities for additional data sharing with the research communities within which it is embedded. With the expansion of Open Access and Open Research, and debates about how technology and Artificial Intelligence tools can, or could, be utilized within the research ecosystem, it is clear that data will continue to be a vital component for publishers, editors, and researchers alike, for navigating the continually shifting landscape of African Studies, and of academic publishing more widely.

35 See <https://editorresources.taylorandfrancis.com/peersupport/introduction-third-reviewer-model/>

36 See <https://asa.uk.net/writing-workshops/journal-work-academy/>

## Appendix 1: T&amp;F Core African Studies Journals (15), October 2023

Title	Editorial Team <sup>37</sup> Composition	Editorial Team Location(s)	Submis- sion System	Owner/Affiliation
<i>African and Black Diaspora (ABD)</i>	Editors	USA	Yes	T&F
<i>African Studies</i>	Editors	Nigeria, South Africa	Yes	University of the Witwa- tersrand
<i>Canadian Journal of African Studies (CJAS)</i>	Coordinating Editor, Managing Editor, Editors, Book Re- view Editors	Belgium, Can- ada, UK, South Africa	Yes	Canadian Association of African Studies (CAAS)
<i>Critical African Studies (CrAS)</i>	Co-Chairs, Editors	South Africa, UK	Yes	Centre of African Studies (CAS), University of Edin- burgh
<i>Development Southern Africa (DSA)</i>	Editor, Associate Editors	Finland, South Africa	Yes	Government Technical Advisory Centre (GTAC)
<i>International Journal of African Renaissance Stud- ies (IJARS)</i>	EiC, Deputy Editors, Book Review Editor	South Africa	Yes	UNISA co-publication
<i>Journal of African Cultural Studies (JACS)</i>	Editor	UK	Yes	International African Insti- tute (IAI)
<i>Journal of Con- temporary African Studies (JCAS)</i>	EiC, Co-Editors, Book Review Editor	Belgium, Mau- ritius, Nigeria, Norway, South Africa	Yes	Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER), Rhodes University
<i>Journal of Eastern African Studies (JEAS)</i>	Managing Editor, Editors	France, UK, USA	No	T&F [British Institute in Eastern Africa (BIEA)]
<i>Journal of South- ern African Stud- ies (JSAS)</i>	Co-Chairs, Senior Editor, Editors, Book Review Editor	South Africa, UK	No	JSAS Editorial Board
<i>Journal of the Indian Ocean Region (JIOR)</i>	EiC, Editors, Asso- ciate Editors, Com- missioning Editor, Book Review Editor	Australia, Cana- da, India	Yes	Indian Ocean Research Group, Inc. (IORG)
<i>Politikon</i>	Editor, Associate Editors	South Africa	Yes	South African Association of Political Studies (SAAPS)
<i>Review of African Political Economy (RoAPE)</i>	Chair, Deputy Chair, Editors, Africa Edi- tor, Briefings & De- bates Editor	Ghana, UK	Yes	RoAPE Ltd.
<i>Safundi</i>	Lead Editor, Co-Ed- itors	Canada, Ire- land, South Africa, UAE	Yes	T&F
<i>Social Dynamics</i>	Editor, Associate Editor	South Africa	Yes	T&F

<sup>37</sup> For the purposes of this study, I have classed the following roles as belonging to the core editorial team, rather than to an Editorial Board or Advisory Board: Africa Editor, Associate Editor, Book Review Editor, Briefings & Debates Editor, Chair, Co-Chair, Commissioning Editor, Coordinating Editor, Deputy Chair, Deputy Editor, Editor, Editor-in-Chief (EiC), Lead Editor, Managing Editor, Senior Editor. These positions involve some form of decision-making, with most also handling the peer review of submissions.



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