Explaining Gender Gap Variation in Political Science Knowledge Production

Daniel Stockemer, *University of Ottawa, Canada*
Stephen W. Sawyer, *American University of Paris, France*

ABSTRACT When we open a random political science journal, we have a roughly two-to-one chance that the article is written by a man. Beyond this general finding, we know little about the gender gaps within political science knowledge production: Are women more represented in lower- or higher-ranked journals? Do they publish more single-authored or multiauthored papers? Do they publish more content in some fields than in others? This article answers these questions by analyzing an original dataset based on the *International Political Science Abstracts* (a peer-reviewed academic journal) from 2022 consisting of more than 7,000 articles and more than 13,000 authors in political science from around the world. We find no difference in the percentage of female authors between higher- and lower-ranked journals. We find a slightly higher propensity among women to publish in teams. Regarding subfields of study, women are particularly underrepresented in political theory, in which they publish only 21.6% of all published articles—which is an approximate 12-percentage-point deviation from the overall average.

There exists a healthy literature in political science that focuses on gender and publishing. Most important, this literature has established that there is a knowledge production gap between the two genders in published content (Closa et al. 2020; Grossman 2020; Østby et al. 2013). Most of the research estimates that published content in disciplinary scholarly journals is slanted toward men at an approximate two-to-one ratio. This implies that if interested readers open a political science journal at random, they have an approximate 66% chance of reading an article written by a man (Stockemer 2022; Stockemer, Blair, and Rashkova 2020). For books, women's distribution in the author pool has been slightly lower (Samuels and Teele 2021). Beyond an "iron rule" of male dominance in knowledge production, the literature in political science and other social science fields reveals further variations. For instance, there is an increasing consensus that the knowledge production gap has two likely causes: aggregate and individual. At the aggregate level, women still occupy fewer faculty and research positions than men (Abels 2016; Casad et al. 2022). In turn, this underrepresentation in the discipline translates into an underrepresentation in published content.

At the individual level, there also is evidence—albeit indirect—that the average male political scientist publishes more articles than the average female political scientist and their work is cited more (Cellini 2022; Teele and Thelen 2017). Therefore, the overall knowledge production gap likely is a combination of the individual differences in publishing attitudes and behaviors and the aggregate underrepresentation of women. To explain the individual variation, several research articles have begun to highlight structural reasons for women's underperformance compared to men's. This includes increased administrative duties, the difficulty of combining academic productivity with demands of family life, and a masculine culture that makes it difficult for women to gain access to the same networks and recognition (Misra et al. 2021; Okeke-Uzodike and Gamede 2021).

Despite the increased interest in questions of gender and publishing in political science, there are areas that still need

Corresponding author: Daniel Stockemer *is professor of political studies and Konrad Adenauer Research Chair in Empirical Democracy Studies at the University of Ottawa. He can be reached at dstockem@uottawa.ca.*
Stephen W. Sawyer *is Ballantine-Leavitt Professor of History and Director of the Center for Critical Democracy Studies at the American University of Paris. He can be reached at ssawyer@aup.edu.*

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scrutiny. This article is interested in understanding the dearth of scholarship that explains variation in the knowledge production gap across the discipline. It does so by analyzing an international database that includes a sample of more than 7,000 political sciences articles representing more than 13,000 authors. Political science is one of the largest disciplines in the social sciences, with a great variety of subfields as well as a multitude of journals and subcultures. The discipline also benefits from a healthy distribution of single-authored, coauthored, and multiauthored articles. This study focuses on three important parameters—journal ranking, type of authorship, and subfield—and determines whether any or all of them can explain variation in the gendered distribution of published content. We find that there is little variation regarding authorship types (i.e., single-authored, coauthored, and multiauthored) and journal ranking. However, we find substantial differences in articles published by subfield, with political theory articles having the strongest underrepresentation of women.

The article is organized as follows: the first section presents the three types of indicators that may explain variation in the gendered distribution of authorship in political science articles. The second section presents our dataset and research design. The third section displays and discusses the results of our quantitative analyses. The fourth section concludes and offers avenues for future research.

FOCUS OF THE STUDY

This research focuses on three factors that may explain variation in the gendered nature of published content: ranking of the journal, type of authorship (i.e., single-authored, coauthored, or multiauthored), and subfield.

Ranking of the Journal

With regard to the ranking of the journal, we expect women to be underrepresented in higher-ranked journals. Research in psychology has discovered that the so-called imposter syndrome is a common feature in academia (Abdelaal 2020). The phenomenon postulates that in competitive environments, people may perceive a discrepancy between their self-perception and the reality of their position within the field (Parkman 2016). This implies that scholars may be high-achieving academics but, in their self-perception, they do not feel as intelligent as they are. Bothello and Roulet (2019) have established that these feelings of inferiority are more intense among female than male academics (see also Jaremka et al. 2020). This has consequences not only for women's academic careers but also for their publication preferences. The imposter syndrome may explain female scholars' hesitancy to submit their work to journals and their hesitation to submit to highly ranked journals (Verney and Bosco 2022). For example, more than men, women may interpret a rejection as a sign that their paper is not good enough. Thus, they might not resubmit it at all or resubmit it to a lower-ranked journal, where the chance of rejection or failure is lower. Research in economics and philosophy also confirms that men are significantly more likely than women to have submitted a paper to a top-five journal (Hassoun et al. 2022; Shastry and Shurchkov 2022).

Other literature that is particularly strong in economics suggests that men are more successful than women in building influential networks and that this skill affects their publication output. For example, Ghosh and Liu (2020) compare male and female curricula vitae (CVs) of untenured faculty members and found that female assistant professors have significantly fewer coauthored and multiauthored publications because of the lower quality of coauthors and networks (see also Hamermesh 2013). Evidence from the hard sciences corroborates these findings. There seems to be a higher likelihood that male researchers will collaborate with other male researchers, especially on widely recognized and well-cited research projects (Frances et al. 2020).

Even if for political science there exists only limited evidence of differences in publication frequency between men and women—for example, women comprise 23% of full professors in Teele and Thelen's (2017) sample but only 11% of all papers in major political science journals are written by women—this study nevertheless follows the literature in other fields by hypothesizing that:

H1: Women should be more highly represented in less highly ranked journals.

This research focuses on three factors that may explain variation in the gendered nature of published content: ranking of the journal, type of authorship (i.e., single-authored, coauthored, or multiauthored), and subfield.

Type of Authorship

There is general evidence that coauthorship and multiauthorship increase the chances of any article to be published and also increases scholarly productivity (Cainelli et al. 2012). Beyond this general tendency, there is indication from other disciplines (e.g., economics and sociology) (e.g., Bartosch et al. 2023) that women might be less likely to coauthor and multiauthor than men. One reason for this lower propensity to collaborate with others may be networks, which—according to Ghosh and Lui (2020)—women may not have at the same level as men. Another reason may be that highly quantitative articles are more commonly coauthored and multiauthored than qualitative articles, and men have a higher publication rate in the former (Cellini 2022). There also may be questions of incentives. For example, Gërxhani, Kulic, and Liechti (2023) illustrate for the case of Italy that when the evaluator is a man, highly collaborative women academics receive less favorable evaluations of their qualifications than men with similarly collaborative CVs. These differences in evaluation practices may provide a different incentive structure for the two genders; that is, men may recognize the benefits of coauthorship more than women.

In political science, the research available so far on the relationship between gender and coauthorship and multiauthorship focuses on relatively small samples of the literature. Young's (1995) groundbreaking research in this area focused on 15 journals; Breuning and Sanders's (2007) on eight journals (2007); Teele and Thelen's (2017) on 10 journals; Williams et al. (2015) on three journals; Cellini (2022) on three journals; and Verney and

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Bosco (2022) on one journal. In all of these studies except one, men are more likely to coauthor or multiauthor than women (Brown and Samuels 2018; Fisher et al. 1998;). There is a strong tendency for coauthored and multiauthored articles to be solely written by male teams (i.e., an increase of 39.2%) as opposed to cross-gender collaborations (i.e., an increase of 13.5%) (Teele and Thelen 2017). Whereas it is known that the number of coauthored and multiauthored articles in the discipline has increased during recent decades (Henriksen 2018), this distribution has not been equal across types of methodology; that is, quantitative articles are more commonly coauthored and multiauthored than qualitative articles (Cellini 2022). Only Verney and Bosco's (2022) study suggests that women collaborate more than men. It is possible that their finding is a result of the subfield of the journal on which they based their study—namely, national and area studies. Building on these studies, we expect an underrepresentation of female authors among coauthors and multiauthors across all subfields of political science. We thus hypothesize that:

H2: Women are less likely to be coauthors and multiauthors compared to men.

Subfield

We expect the gender distribution in publications across subfields in political science to be uneven. For example, subfields involving complex quantitative methodology should be disproportionally male dominated whereas other subfields (e.g., comparative politics and area studies) should have more female authors (Shames and Wise 2017). We also know that the thematic and methodological focus of a journal can influence the rate according to which women publish in it. For example, from 2010 to 2019, the percentage of female authors was less than 24% in the *Journal of Politics*, a journal that disproportionally attracts statistical methods papers (Saraceno 2020). In contrast, the percentage of female authors was 38% during approximately the same time frame for *South European Politics and Society*, a journal that focuses more on area studies (Verney and Bosco 2022), which are more qualitatively and ethnographically oriented. In addition to these case studies, Lönnqvist (2022) demonstrates that in the political psychology subfield, men disproportionally publish articles using quantitative methods, whereas women predominantly publish in the more interpretive subfields of gender and identity, culture and language, and religion. We extrapolate from this evidence to hypothesize that within the entire field of political science:

H3: Women should be more highly represented in more qualitative subfields, such as area studies, and less highly represented in more quantitative subfields, such as political processes and political institutions.

DATA AND METHODS

We used publication data from the *International Political Science Abstracts* to compile what may be the largest existing sample of political science articles. Produced by the International Political Science Association, nonevaluative abstracts of articles are provided for the field of political science published in journals and yearbooks around the world. We used the 2022 version, which contains 8,006 abstracts of articles and are classified in eight fields: (1) political science: method and theory; (2) political thought and theory; (3) governmental and administrative institutions; (4) political process: public opinion, attitudes, parties, forces, groups, and elections; (5) international relations; (6) national and area studies[1]; (7) book reviews; and (8) book chapters. We excluded book reviews and chapters because these are not original articles. This resulted in a sample of slightly more than 7,000 abstracts (Stockemer and Sawyer 2025).

For each abstract, we extracted the following data: the gender of each author in any abstract, the subfield for which the article is written, the number of authors per article, and the ranking of the journal in which the article was published. We extracted data for a total of 13,002 authors, who comprised the sample for our study. The dependent variable was a dummy coded 0 for men and 1 for women. We used the following criteria to code the gender of a scholar. First, we observed the first name; if the gender was not clear, we relied on the photograph on the scholar's professional page, as well as third-person biographies that included the person's pronoun. For the few cases for which we could not find this information, we used a gender Application Programming Interface. For ranking, we ranked each article according to the SCImago Journal Citation Index (i.e., a measure of the prestige of scholarly journals including the number of citations received by a journal and the prestige of the journals from which the citations came), and classified abstracts and articles according to the Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4 ranking.[2] We also coded the few non-ranked journals as Q4. For the variable of coauthorship, we used three categories: single-authored, coauthored, and multiauthored papers. For the final subfield variable, we used the six qualifications of the abstracts, excluding the seventh and eighth classifications of book reviews and chapters, respectively.[3]

To test the effect of each of our three independent variables on the gender of the author, we first present descriptive statistics displaying the average percentage of women's representation among authors across the three parameters: journal ranking, number of coauthors, and subfield. In a second step, we tested each indicator's influence in one multiple logistic regression model featuring gender as the dependent variable.

RESULTS

Across the 8,006 articles published in 2022, women and men comprised 33.4% and 66.6% of authors, respectively. Table 1 illustrates that there was little variation across the classifications in Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4 journals. In all four classifications, women comprised approximately 33% of authors. A multiple comparison test further illustrates that there was no statistical difference in

Table 1

Women's Representation and Journal Ranking

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4
Percentage of Women Authors	33.53%	34.11%	32.67%	32.88%

Note: A multiple-comparison test (i.e., the Sidak specification) indicated that none of these differences is statistically different from 0 ($p<0.05$).

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Table 2

Women's Representation and Number of Authors

	Single-Authored Articles	Coauthored Articles	Multiauthored Articles
Percentage of Women Authors	31.93%	33.22%	34.58%

Note: A multiple-comparison test (i.e., the Sidak specification) indicated that the percentage of female authors is statistically higher for multiauthored compared to single-authored articles ($p<0.05$).

women's representation across journal rankings. Thus, table 1 refutes our hypothesis of women being less highly represented in highly ranked journals. Regarding coauthorship, we also found comparatively little variation (table 2). However—and contrary to our initial hypothesis—women seem to be more represented in multiauthored teams. The gap between single-authored and coauthored articles also was statistically significant, even if it substantively was approximately only 2.6 percentage points.

We found more variation when we examined the six different subfields: (1) political science: method and theory; (2) political thought and theory; (3) governmental and administrative institutions; (4) political process: public opinion, attitudes, parties, forces, groups, and elections; (5) international relations; and (6) national and area studies. The most prominent variation was women's underrepresentation in political thought and theory. Within this subfield, female scholars constituted only 20% of authors, which makes it an outlier because women's representation in published content in other subfields fluctuates between 30% and 36% (see Table 3). In fact, a multiple-comparison test illustrated that women have a statistically lower tendency to publish in political theory compared to any other subfield. Women have the second-lowest representation rate in the subfield of governmental and administrative institutions; the difference also was statistically significant compared to most other subfields. Contrary to expectations, women were not underrepresented in the subfield of method and theory; rather, their representation reflected the global average of approximately 33% female scholars. Women have the highest relative representation in the subfield of national and area studies—even if the difference with other subfields was not statistically significant for most of them. Because we did not find women's underrepresentation in the subfield of method and theory, we believe that the variation in the percentage of women authors stems from a topical rather than a methodological preference.

The multiple logistic regression model confirmed the descriptive statistics (table 4 and figures 1–3). Most notably, women experience underrepresentation in the subfield of political thought and theory. Figure 3 illustrates that the predicted value for the percentage of female authors in this subfield is statistically lower than in all other categories. The graph also provides evidence that the percentage of female authors is lower in the subfield of governmental and administrative institutions compared to the subfield of national and area studies. For the other two indicators depicting journal ranking an authorship type, we found that none of the variables was statistically significant (i.e., $p<0.05$). Therefore, there was little variation in the percentage of female authors in highly ranked and not as highly ranked journals. (See also figures 1 and 2 for a graphical description of the effect of authorship type and subfield.)

Table 4

Multiple Regression Model Measuring the Influence of Journal Ranking, Authorship Type, and Subfield of Study on an Author's Gender

	Coefficient	Standard Error	Z
Quartile (Reference Category Is Q1)			
Q2	0.086	0.049	0.080
Q3	–0.017	0.057	0.772
Q4	0.066	0.051	0.198
Authorship (Reference Category Is Single-Authored Articles)			
Coauthored Articles	0.050	0.048	0.301
Multiple Authors	0.090	0.048	0.064
Chapter and Subfield (Reference Category Is Political Science Method and Theory)			
Political Thought and Theory	–0.589	0.126	0.000
Governmental and Administrative Institutions	–0.157	0.084	0.062
Political Process: Public Opinion, Attitudes, Parties, Forces, Groups, and Elections	0.045	0.053	0.396
International Relations	–0.056	0.068	0.407
National and Area Studies	0.110	0.067	0.103
Constant	–0.757	0.059	0.000
Pseudo R-Squared	0.003		
Log-Likelihood	–8,280.24		
N	13,002		

Table 3

Women's Representation and Subfield of Study

	Chapter 1	Chapter 2	Chapter 3	Chapter 4	Chapter 5	Chapter 6
Women's Representation	33.68%	21.57%	30.50%	34.81%	32.30%	36.19%

Note: A multiple-comparison test (i.e., the Sidak specification) indicated that the percentage of female authors is statistically lower in chapter 2 compared to all other chapters. The percentage of female authors also is statistically lower in chapter 3 compared to chapter 6 ($p<0.05$).

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Figure 1

The Predicted Effect of Journal Ranking on the Gendered Distribution of Authorship in Political Science Journals

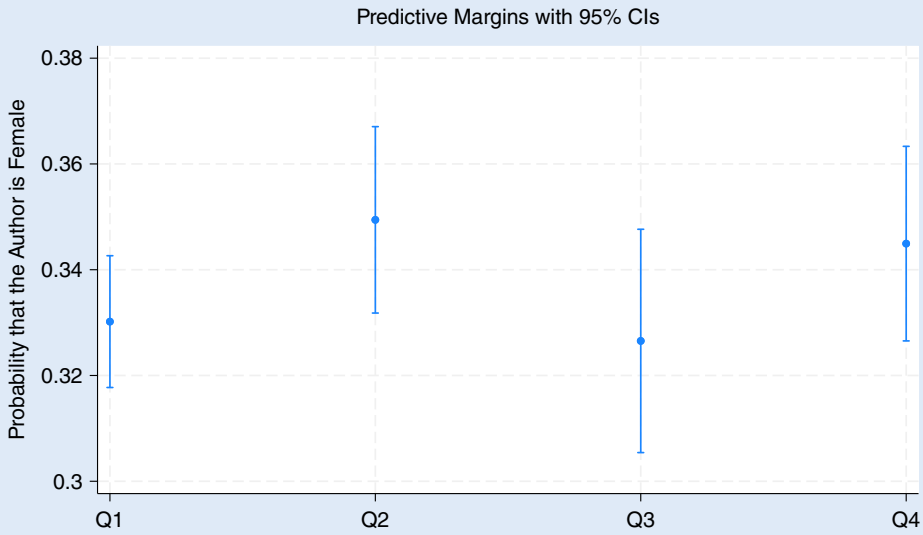

Figure 2

The Predicted Effect of Authorship Type on the Gendered Distribution of Authorship in Political Science Journals

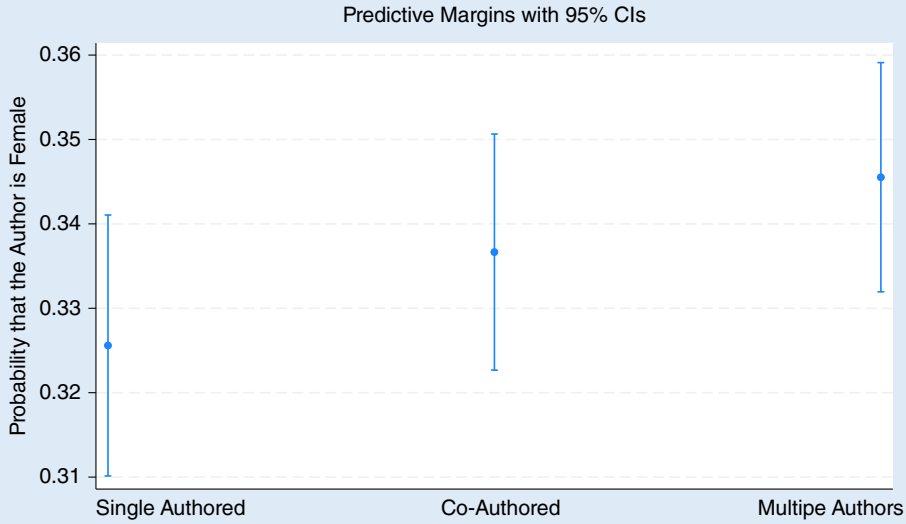

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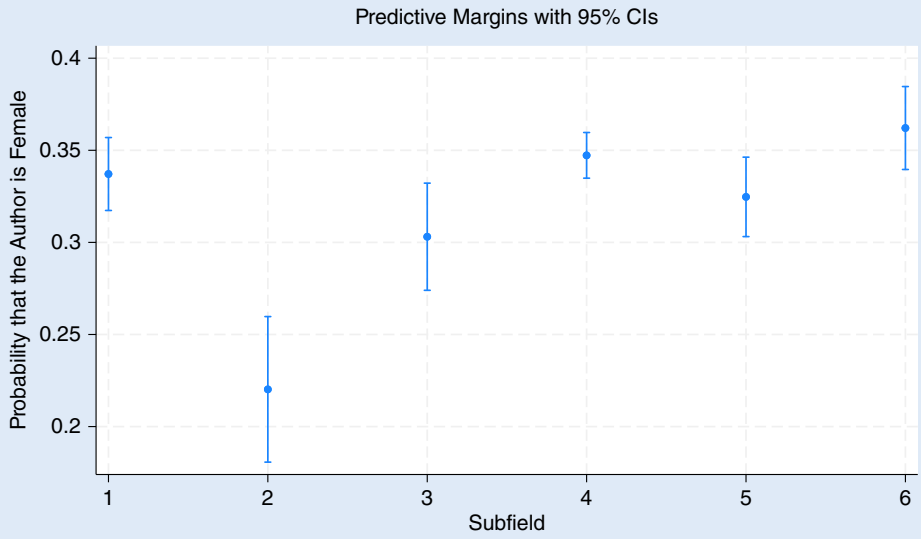
Figure 3

The Predicted Effect of Subfield on the Gendered Distribution of Authorship in Political Science Journals



CONCLUSION

This article contributes to the understanding of variation within the gender gap in publishing. We find that the subfield of study drives some of the variation. In particular, our results demonstrate the lowest and highest percentages of female authors in political thought and theory and in national and area studies, respectively. Among the other subfields, there was comparatively little variation. Regarding the other two parameters that we examined—journal ranking and authorship type—we found little variation. Our main finding that political thought and theory as a subfield is the most male dominated in published scholarship confirms anecdotal evidence that illustrates the sidelining of women's research in this subfield. For example, Bryson (2016) argues that Western political thought and theory (which remains a dominant strand of theorizing) has ignored women's writing and trivializes their absence from the canon of scholarship (see also del Cuvillo, Macioce, and Strid 2023). Our main finding also highlights that political thought and theory as a subfield needs much catching up to achieve more gender balance. Most notably, we must ask ourselves: Is the substantial publication gap between political thought and theory and the other subfields the result of a lack of women in the discipline of political thought and theory, or is there (also) an individual performance gap? That is, do female scholars in political thought and theory publish less compared to men than a comparable female academic in national and area studies or another subfield?

In addition to this main finding, this study illustrates that certain tendencies in other disciplines do not apply to political science. Most notably, women do not publish predominantly in lower-ranked journals, and they apparently are not excluded from higher-ranked publications. These tendencies are encouraging. We also did not find that female authors are disadvantaged in coauthored and multiauthored publications as other studies have found for other social science disciplines (e.g., economics) (Dorantes-Gilardi, Ramírez-Álvarez, and Terrazas-Santamaría 2023; Ghosh and Liu 2020). This article not only provides clarity concerning factors that create variation in the gender gap in publishing; it also generates a battery of research questions. Future research should expand the dataset over multiple years to reveal trends in gender variation across the entire discipline over time. Furthermore, it would be of interest to provide a better understanding not only of subfield but also territorial variation in closing or widening the gender gap. Although this study raises more questions than it answers, it nevertheless contributes to our understanding of gender variations in knowledge production in political science.

We find that the subfield of study drives some of the variation. In particular, our results demonstrate the lowest and highest percentages of female authors in political thought and theory and in national and area studies, respectively.

This article not only provides clarity concerning factors that create variation in the gender gap in publishing; it also generates a battery of research questions.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research documentation and data that support the findings of this study are openly available at the *PS: Political Science & Politics* Harvard Dataverse at https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/GVO2BA.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there are no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research. ■

NOTES

1. Chapter 1 focuses on methodology and theoretical approaches for writing political science articles; chapter 2 focuses on political thought and theory as a separate subfield. For example, an article about the value of a given survey method as opposed to a qualitative case study would be in chapter 1, whereas an article on Angela Davis and critical theory would be in chapter 2. The abstracts also include chapters on book reviews and edited volumes, but they were not included in this study because they rarely are coauthored or multiauthored and are not subject to the same criteria of blind reviews.
2. A common classification of journals is by quartiles: Q1, Q2, Q3, and Q4. Q1 journals cover the top 25% of journals in a discipline with the highest impact factor. Journals in the Q2 group rank between the 25th and 50th percentiles regarding the impact factor; Q3 and Q4 are journals in the 50%–75% and 75%–100% groups, respectively. Journals with no impact factor do not have a Q1–Q4 classification.
3. To ensure that there is no correlation among the three independent variables, we ran three tests of independence (i.e., Cramer's V). The Cramer's V statistic was 0.19 for the test of independence between the number of authors and subfield and chapter; 0.15 for the number of authors and journal ranking; and 0.12 between journal ranking and subfield and chapter. None of these values was statistically significant. Therefore, we conclude that the three categorical variables we used are not related or correlated.

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