

As the volume of social sciences journal articles increases, academic book publication is slowing

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An Academic Analytics Research Center (AARC) study published in the journal *PLOS ONE* has found that the social sciences are changing: In the

last decade, journal article publications have increased, while the publication of books has declined. The overall increase in scholarly journal articles in recent decades is widely documented, but whether that increase impacts other publishing types remains unknown. "The majority of publications in most STEM fields are journal articles, but in the social sciences books also play an important role in how scholars communicate their findings, so the social sciences were a great place to explore publication patterns," said study co-author Anthony J. Olejniczak.

The study explored publishing patterns throughout the 2010s in more than 1,500 [academic departments](#) at 280 American research universities across twelve social sciences disciplines. Book publications decreased between 34% and 54% over the study period, while journal [article](#) publications increased by as much as 64%. According co-author to William Savage, "Changing research methodologies and the emergence of performance-based funding mechanisms have substantially altered the way [social science](#) researchers approach research dissemination. Increased collaboration through research teams, a heightened tempo of publishing, and the timely delivery of results to funding agencies all impel social [science](#) researchers toward peer-reviewed journal articles rather than books."

Declining book authorship was observed across age cohorts, although increasing journal article publishing expectations for early career researchers may contribute to the shifting publishing behaviors observed. The decline in books published is likely to impact library acquisitions strategies.

The authors also note that declining book publications "...may have detrimental effects for social sciences disciplines most closely related to the humanities. Long-form scholarly publishing provides the place and space to explore a topic in detail, analyzing subjects with greater contextualization than shorter-form [journal](#) articles typically allow,"

Richard Wheeler, Graduate Dean Emeritus, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Senior Advisor to AARC (who was not a part of the study), commented. "With remarkable precision, this study demonstrates trends in social science publication patterns in the 2010s and identifies factors external to and internal to the research itself that have driven significant changes. Their findings will likely spawn more studies that explore the many issues the data raise, including an accelerating dissolution of an old kinship between social sciences and humanities disciplines."

More information: William E. Savage et al, More journal articles and fewer books: Publication practices in the social sciences in the 2010's, *PLOS ONE* (2022). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0263410](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0263410)

Provided by Academic Analytics Research Center (AARC)

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