Leadership in Scholarship: Editors’ Influence on the Profession’s Narrative

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Abstract

We study the influence of editors and coeditors of the American Economic Review (AER) on the topic structure of papers published in the AER between 1976 and 2013 using a textual analysis of manuscripts. We compare AER’s topic structure to that of other top general interest journals and we find:

1. The appointment of new AER editors is accompanied by a minor co-movement of AER topics towards topics of editor’s post-appointment publications

2. The appointment of new AER editors serves more to premeditate trends in the other top journals.

Results

Table 2: Journals’ Topics and Editors’ Preferences with Four Year Window and One Year Lag

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<thead>
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<th>Topics FE</th>
<th>Topics Top5 FE</th>
<th>Editor Preferences FE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AER</td>
<td>0.380</td>
<td>0.771</td>
<td>0.228</td>
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<tr>
<td>Top5</td>
<td>0.228</td>
<td>0.771</td>
<td>0.228</td>
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We find that AER’s topic frequencies align with those observed in editors’ own publications while being an editor, which align with the topics of the other Top 5 before becoming an editor. Editors’ topics remain significantly correlated to the other Top 5. Moreover this is significantly correlated to the topic gap between the AER and the other Top 5.

Editors’ topics before their tenure at the AER strongly align with topics in the other Top 5.

A 4-year window with 1-year publication lag (Table 2) reveals that post-tenure topics of editors positively correlate with post-tenure topics observed in the AER and the other Top 5 and with a larger point estimate in case of the other Top 5.

When publication lag is increased to 2 years (Table 3) no significant correlation is obtained between editors’ and AER’s current topics. Editors’ topics remain significantly correlated to the other Top 5. Moreover this is significantly correlated to the topic gap between the AER and the other Top 5.

The size of the effect is quite small, amounting to a replacement of 1-3 regular papers in 100 by a paper that is devoted only to the newly appointed editor’s interests. Most editors’ work is not too far from what was published in the AER before their appointment. So, 1-3% is the estimate of the appointment effect from above.

We know neither the editors who were handling individual papers nor what was rejected by the very same editors. The effect of the former clearly will make our coefficients biased towards zero.

Conclusions

We find that AER’s topic frequencies align with those observed in editors’ own publications while being an editor, which align with the topics of the other Top 5 before becoming an editor. Moreover, point estimates for editors’ topics when regressed on topics of other Top 5 are larger.

A possible interpretation is that editors are hired to make sure that the AER keeps up its line of publication topics in line with what is trending in the other Top 5 journals.

References


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