The Disciplinary Roots of Disagreement in Development Studies:

Evidence from a Global Survey of Scholars

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Abstract: Development Studies is well established institutionally and over the last 20-30 years has become more intellectually diverse. This paper asks how scholars in the field understand what Development Studies is, using a new survey of about 300 academics in departments offering postgraduate Development Studies programmes across more than 30 countries. We focus on three long-standing fault lines: whether Development Studies is oriented toward transforming underlying structures or solving problems within existing systems, whether the field is centred on the Global South or expanded to a universal scope, and whether knowledge about development is understood in more positivist or constructivist terms. Our central finding is that disciplinary training explains these understandings more consistently than does institutional geography. Differences between respondents based in high-income and non-high-income countries are small, while differences by PhD discipline are larger and more coherent. Respondents with PhDs in economics and political science are more problem-solving-oriented and positivist while those with PhDs in anthropology sit on the transformative and constructivist end of the field. Across both high-income and non-high-income country groups, problem-solving orientation is strongly associated with positivism, while transformative orientation aligns with constructivism. These findings suggest that much of the contention within Development Studies is less about the North-South divide and more about the tensions among academic disciplines.

1. Introduction

Development Studies is a well-established field of scholarly inquiry. [1] It can point to the longevity of DS-specific journals, departments, institutes, academic associations, and teaching programmes across the Global South and the Global North. The QS rankings identify over 150 universities with postgraduate Development Studies programmes in approximately 40 countries (QS 2025). Yet the field has long been characterised by intellectual differentiation and unresolved tensions concerning theoretical orientation, where development is understood to occur, and how it can be known.

These tensions are not new. The 1980s and 1990s 'impasse' in Development Studies reflected widespread dissatisfaction with dominant theoretical frameworks, disillusionment with both state-led and market-led development strategies, and post-structuralist critiques that challenged the legitimacy of development itself (Booth 1985; Escobar 1995; Schuurman 1993). The field responded with greater intellectual diversity. This has deepened rather than resolved its internal differentiation. Contemporary Development Studies finds itself pulled between competing modes of thought that hold contrasting positive, normative, ontological, and epistemological assumptions. Some schools within Development Studies, such as post-development, even view Development Studies itself as part of the problem. Some have even called to eliminate the field entirely (Rutazibwa 2019).

Historically, Development Studies has built its core identity around the study of the Global South, formerly the 'Third World' or developing countries. However, even this core identity has been a source of intellectual tension periodically evident in the late 1970s and late 1990s (Seers 1979; Maxwell 1998) and resurfacing again in the late 2010s and early 2020s (Horner and Hulme 2019; Leach et al. 2023; Wiegratz et al. 2023).

In terms of genealogy, Development Studies' origins can be traced to several places (Behuria and Sumner 2025). Southern scholars and anti-colonial movements were central to the field's intellectual formation and emergence from classical development economics (e.g. Lewis 1954; Prebisch 1950) through to Latin American structuralism and dependency theory and the politics of the 1955 Bandung conference. At the same time, Northern institutions, colonial histories, aid architectures, and Truman's (1949) call for "the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas" have played a role in shaping the field's intellectual and institutional geography. Whether these different influences have produced different understandings of what Development Studies is, and should be, is an empirical question.

Our paper asks: How and why do modes of thought differ in Development Studies? We address this question using a novel survey of academics in the over 150 university departments identified by the QS rankings as offering postgraduate Development Studies programmes.[2] We emailed over 3000 scholars from 40 countries, and approximately 300 from 30 countries completed the survey (see details in Appendix 7). The survey measures how Development Studies is understood in terms of three dimensions: theoretical orientation, scope, and onto-epistemological stance. By measuring key features of the DS community with a global survey, it builds on past research such as Briggs (2024).

[1] We would like to thank Jayden Lakhani-Travis for research assistance.

[2] A caveat is necessary. The QS-ranked list of post-graduate teaching in Development Studies is not necessarily comprehensive given its basis in a mix of quality metrics and perceptions of quality. However, it is the only global list of Development Studies post-graduate courses from which to build a sampling frame.

We find that disciplinary background, defined by the discipline of a respondent's PhD, is a more telling predictor of how scholars understand Development Studies than whether they are based in a high-income country (HIC) or not. Differences across income groups sometimes exist but are substantively small. The correlations across the three dimensions, by contrast, reveal meaningful patterns that are not due to disciplines and sometimes vary by income grouping. The most notable correlation is a strong association between problem-solving orientation and positivist onto-epistemologies that holds across both HIC and non-HIC income groups. Our paper thus brings, for the first time, direct empirical evidence to debates that have rested on theoretical argument or anecdote.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews competing 'modes of thought' in Development Studies. Section 3 sets out our methodology. Section 4 presents the findings. Section 5 discusses why the observed differences arise. Section 6 concludes.

2. Competing perspectives in Development Studies on its identity

Development Studies emerged as a cross-disciplinary field in the post-WWII era, particularly in the period of time when many then Third World countries became independent.[3] The precise origins of DS are contested. One genealogy links the field to colonial-era knowledge production and Truman's Point Four framing of "the improvement and growth of underdeveloped areas" (Truman 1949; Kothari 2005). Another genealogy traces DS as emerging from classical development economics, with scholars such as Lewis (1954), Prebisch (1950) and Rosenstein-Rodan (1943) working on structural transformation in what would become the Global South. Relatedly, there were anti-colonial struggles and the 1955 Bandung conference, where newly independent nations articulated an emancipatory vision of development rooted in self-determination.

The field has matured institutionally. Over 150 universities worldwide offer postgraduate Development Studies programmes (QS 2025). Journals, institutes, and scholarly associations have proliferated since the 1960s and 1970s. Yet this institutional robustness sits alongside deepening intellectual differentiation. The 'impasse' of the 1980s and 1990s (Booth 1985; Escobar 1995; Schuurman 1993) prompted theoretical pluralisation rather than greater coherence, and the range of ways of theorising development has only widened since.

Structuralist political economy is the most distinctive of three currents that have shaped DS. Dependency theory (Cardoso and Faletto 1979), world-systems analysis (Wallerstein 1974), and Latin American structuralism (Prebisch 1950) all framed development as a question of systemic transformation. Post-structuralist and constructivist thought, rooted in Foucault (1970, 1972, 1980) and Said (1978), challenged assumptions of objectivity and universality and reframed development as a discursive regime. Running in

[3] Several institutions in the Global South were doing developmental research and training earlier. The UN regional commissions were among the first: UNCEPAL began work in 1948 and the Economic Commission for Africa in 1958. India's National Council of Applied Economic Research opened in 1956. The Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences in Chile followed in 1957. In West Africa, the University of Ghana's Economic Research Unit was founded in 1962 and later became the Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research in 1969.

the opposite direction, the expansion of neoclassical economics or what Fine (2002) calls 'economic imperialism' has reinforced universalist and market-centric approaches to development.

Dow's (1990, 2002, 2007) concept of 'modes of thought' offers one way of thinking about this differentiation. Dow developed the concept within economics.[4] It refers to the assumptions and inferential dispositions that orient how scholars in a given tradition reason about their subject matter. An economist trained in randomised controlled trials and an anthropologist trained in immersive ethnography do not simply use different methods. They hold different views about what social reality is, how it can be known and what constitutes a legitimate research question. In Development Studies, these commitments shape how knowledge about development is produced and how claims to developmental knowledge are advanced. Building on Sumner (2024), we distinguish three continua along which modes of thought vary: orientation, scope, and onto-epistemology. Continua are appropriate here because these are graduated characteristics that vary across a spectrum rather than discrete categories.

The first continuum concerns theoretical orientation: what is Development Studies for? Drawing on Cox (1981), we distinguish between transformative and problem-solving orientations.[5] At one end, Development Studies is understood as a transformative project aimed at altering socio-economic structures, whether through state-led industrialisation, redistribution, or a more radical rupture with capitalist modernity. Part of classical Development Studies, drawing on Lewis (1954), Prebisch (1950) and the broader structuralist tradition, sits here. So too from a different onto-epistemology do post-development and decolonial theory, though these call for transformation of a different kind, not material modernisation but a revaluation of what is valued and typically a rejection of modernity (Escobar 1995; Esteva 1992; Mignolo 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020; Quijano 2007).

At the other end, Development Studies is understood as a problem-solving enterprise concerned with improving the operation of existing systems rather than transforming them. This orientation is not marginal: classic postwar American development research (Rostow 1960; Hirschman 1958), World Bank-based development economics research and policy (World Bank 1991, 1997, 2001), governance reform (Grindle 2004), state-capability work (Andrews, Pritchett, and Woolcock 2017), and contemporary evidence-based policy (Banerjee and Duflo 2011) have taken this form. Its central questions are how to raise growth, reduce poverty, improve institutions, correct market failures, strengthen state capacity, or design more effective interventions within existing political-economic arrangements.

Scope is the second continuum. Where does development happen or where is it to be studied? Development Studies has historically focused on countries in the Global South, most of which were colonised. The basis of DS can be connected to Seers (1963) who argued that the economies of developing countries were fundamentally different from those of the Global North, a 'special case' requiring distinct analytical frameworks. Countries in the Global South, including those that have experienced sustained economic growth, retain many of the structural characteristics Seers identified. A competing view holds that development challenges are now global in nature and the difference between 'developing' and 'developed' countries has blurred. On this view, poverty, inequality, climate change, and urbanisation affect all countries and should be studied across all countries (Horner and Hulme 2019; Leach et al. 2021). 'Global

[4] See also Lawson (1997, 2003, 2019).

[5] Cox's distinction is not a typology of development policy positions. His contrast is between problem-solving theory, which takes existing social and institutional arrangements as its starting point, and critical theory, which historicises those arrangements and asks how they might be transformed. We adapt this distinction more narrowly to Development Studies as a contrast between orientations toward existing systems: improving their operation versus questioning and transforming the structures that are thought to produce development problems.

Development', as this school has been termed, challenges the North-South binary and advocates a universalist analytical scope. The tension is not merely geographic. It concerns how historical legacies and global hierarchies are conceptualised. Those who maintain a Global South focus tend to emphasise colonial and neo-colonial structures. Those with a universalist orientation tend to foreground shared challenges and convergence.

Onto-epistemology is the third continuum. It asks what the nature of social reality is and by what means it can be known. In economics and parts of political science, positivist commitments lead scholars to privilege empirical regularities, statistical analysis, and causal inference, studying a reality assumed to be accessible through systematic observation. Anthropology and parts of sociology take a different starting point. Constructivist approaches in these disciplines treat knowledge as situated, partial, and shaped by power relations. They privilege meaning, discourse, and reflexivity over law-like generalisation. These differences carry practical consequences: they determine which methods pass muster and whose knowledge is taken seriously. They also intersect with contrasting understandings of power. Some scholars locate power in class relations and economic hierarchies. Others locate it in discourse and systems of representation.

Onto-epistemological stance also bears on decolonisation debates, which now occupy a central place in DS and across the social sciences. Hull (2021) differentiates two often conflated concepts. The first is intellectual decolonisation or a pluralisation of knowledge beyond North American and European scholarship, addressing racial hierarchies in teaching and research and pursuing equitable international collaborations. This concern cuts across schools of thought in Development Studies. The second is decolonial theory or a specific body of work that treats Northern-produced knowledge about the Global South as inherently Eurocentric and as functioning to justify the imposition of capitalist modernity (Mignolo 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2020; Quijano 2007). Intellectual decolonisation can coexist with a range of onto-epistemological positions. Decolonial theory, by contrast, carries specific claims about the nature of knowledge that place it at the constructivist end of the onto-epistemological continuum.

In short, Development Studies is characterised by competing modes of thought that differ on questions of orientation, scope, and onto-epistemology. The survey reported in this paper measures how these dimensions vary by place and by discipline, and how they relate to one another.

3. Methodology

We use the QS global rankings to build a sample of academics working in postgraduate DS departments worldwide. A research assistant compiled a list of all universities with DS departments that have ever been ranked using the QS rankings for Development Studies for a decade from 2015-2025. This produced a list of 209 universities, of which 43 were not in HICs. We then collected the email addresses of all academics who taught or did research in those departments. We emailed 3056 professors in ranked development studies departments, of whom about 19% were not in HICs. 292 respondents completed the survey, of whom about 15% were not in HICs.[6]

[6] Not all respondents answered every question and so in some analyses the sample size is moderately smaller. We aspired to study respondents by country or by disaggregated income groupings, but we ultimately lacked the sample size to do this so we binned respondents into groupings of HIC vs. non-HIC. In our final sample, 251 respondents were based in HICs and 41 were based in non-HICs.

Aside from some basic demographic questions, we asked respondents three sets of questions corresponding to the three dimensions described above.[7] We briefly outline the logic of how we designed the questionnaire here.

The transformative vs. problem-solving orientation questions ask whether Development Studies should challenge existing structures or improve them, whether one should prioritize root causes or pragmatic improvements or fixes, what emphasis is appropriate when designing or teaching interventions, and whether development requires radical changes in power relations. The Global South vs. Universal scope questions ask whether the field should focus on the Global South or on universal development challenges and all countries, whether theories should be universal or tailored to Global South contexts, how important global trends are, what kinds of case studies scholars prefer, and whether development studies should address specific historically marginalized regions or extend the scope to all countries. The onto-epistemology question asks about observer-independent social reality, replicable methods, situated meanings, discourse and knowledge hierarchies, and material structures.

We used the answers from these to construct scales on which we place respondents. We do this in two parallel ways.[8] First, we take the mean of the scored survey items in each battery. Second, we extract the first principal component from the same scored items and then standardize it using the pooled sample mean and standard deviation to produce z-scores. The PCA version is useful because it summarizes the common variation across items (the single 'thread' that best captures what they have in common) without forcing each question to receive exactly the same weight, and the resulting z-scores are directly comparable across the three dimensions. The mean scale adds a more transparent descriptive benchmark in the original response metric. Higher values are always oriented toward problem-solving, universal scope, and positivism, respectively. The density figures below show both versions side by side, revealing that the results are similar regardless of scale construction. Most analyses in the paper use the PCA z-scores and Appendix 9 reports scale diagnostics.

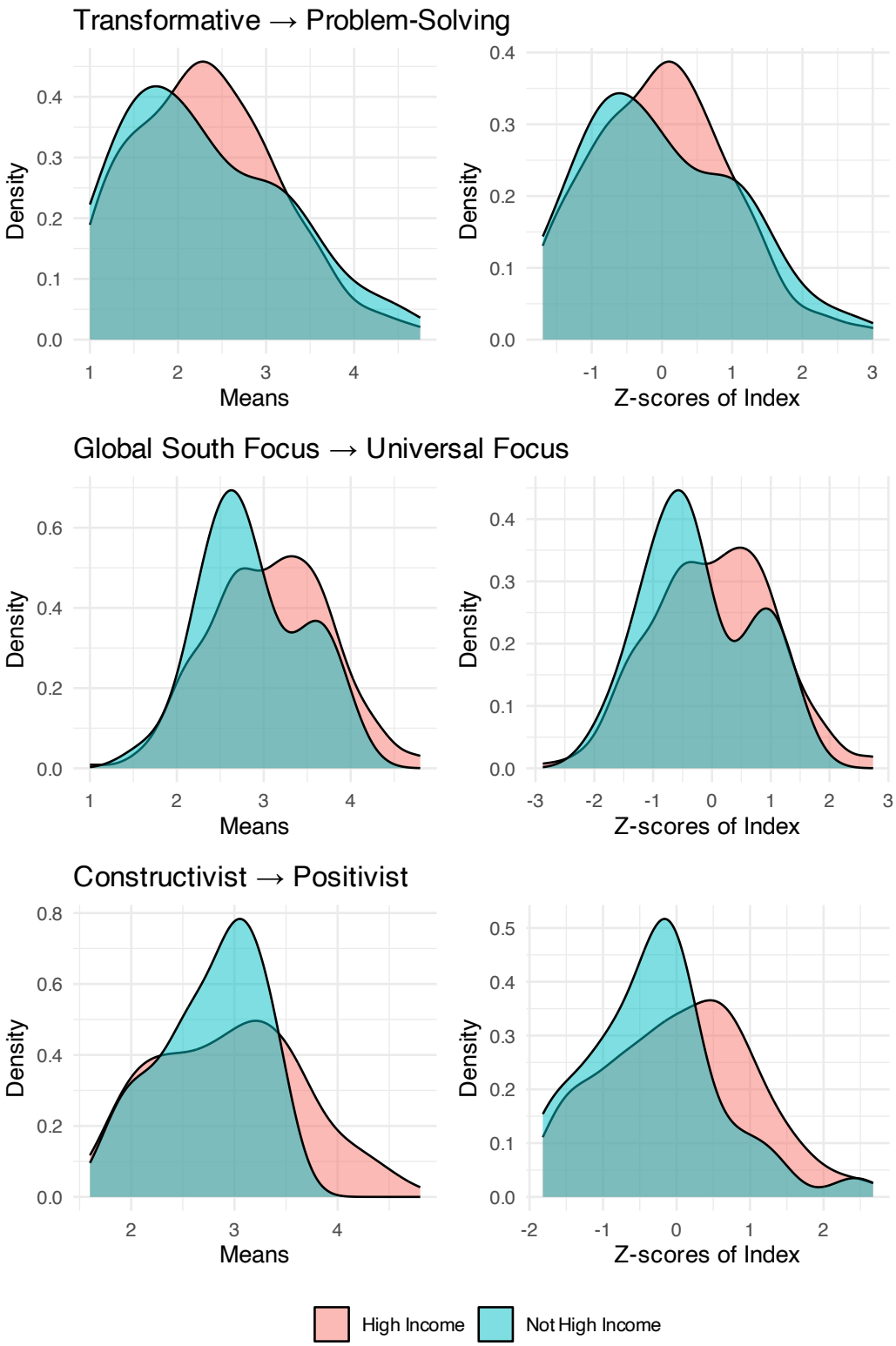
4. Results

We first examine the distributions of the three dimensions and how they vary by place. Figure 1 combines the distributional comparisons for all three dimensions in one plot. Examining the left-hand mean-scale plots shows absolute positioning. All mean scales run from 1 to 5, and we can see that respondents tend to lean more towards transformative orientation, sit close to the midpoint on Global South versus universal scope, and lean slightly towards constructivist onto-epistemologies.

[7] These questions are fully described in Appendix 8.

[8] We only score a respondent on a scale if they answered at least 75% of the items in that set of questions. Given the length of these batteries, eligible respondents skipped at most one item. For the mean scale, we average the answered items. For the PCA scale, we impute any remaining single missing item using the item mean before extracting the first principal component.

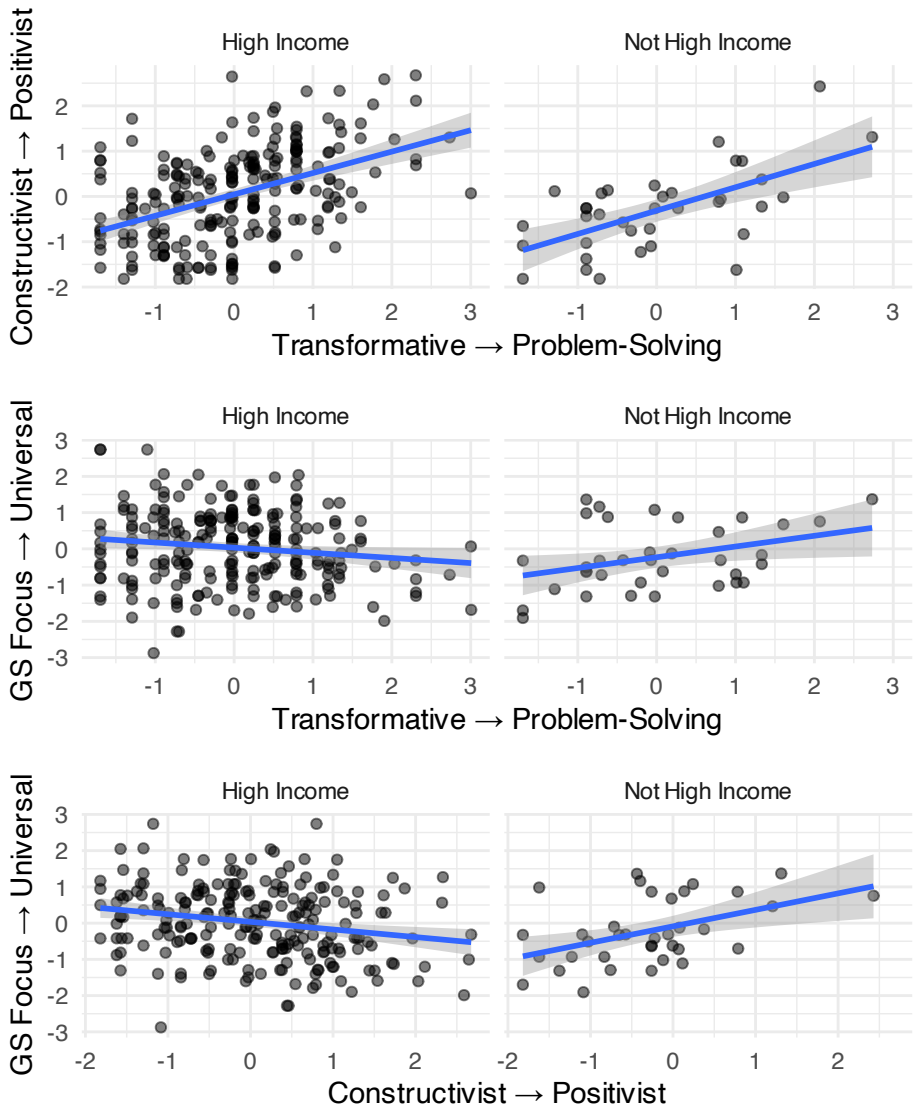
Figure 1: Distributions of mean scales and PCA z-scores by country income group. Higher values correspond to the second pole named in each row.



Source: Authors' analysis of survey data.

Differences between respondents based in or outside of HICs are small. In mean-scale units the HIC minus non-HIC differences are: 0.04 for transformative vs. problem-solving orientation (95% CI: [-0.28, 0.36]), 0.2 for Global South vs. universal scope (95% CI: [-0.01, 0.42]), and 0.18 for constructivist vs. positivist orientation (95% CI: [-0.01, 0.37]). These are about a fifth of a point or less on a five-point scale, the confidence intervals include zero, and the densities overlap substantially. In sum, we do not see meaningful variation in these three dimensions by place.

Figure 2: Correlations across indices



Source: Authors' analysis of survey data.

We next examine how these dimensions relate to one another and whether those relationships differ by place. This is shown in Figure 2, which presents the pairwise correlations between the three index z-scores split by country income group. The top panel shows that respondents who lean toward problem-solving also tend to hold more positivist views, while those who favour transformation tend toward more constructivist onto-epistemologies. That relationship looks similar regardless of income grouping.

By contrast, the two relationships involving the scope of DS (Global South vs. Universal) differ more clearly across income groups. The relationship between Global South vs. Universal and Transformative vs. Problem-Solving Orientation is flat-to-negative among respondents based in HICs but positive among respondents based in non-HICs. This means that in HICs, scholars who think that Development Studies is more problem-solving-oriented tend to also think that development is specifically about the Global South, though this relationship is weak. The opposite holds in non-HICs, where scholars with more problem-solving-oriented views are more likely to also have a universal view of the scope of development studies.

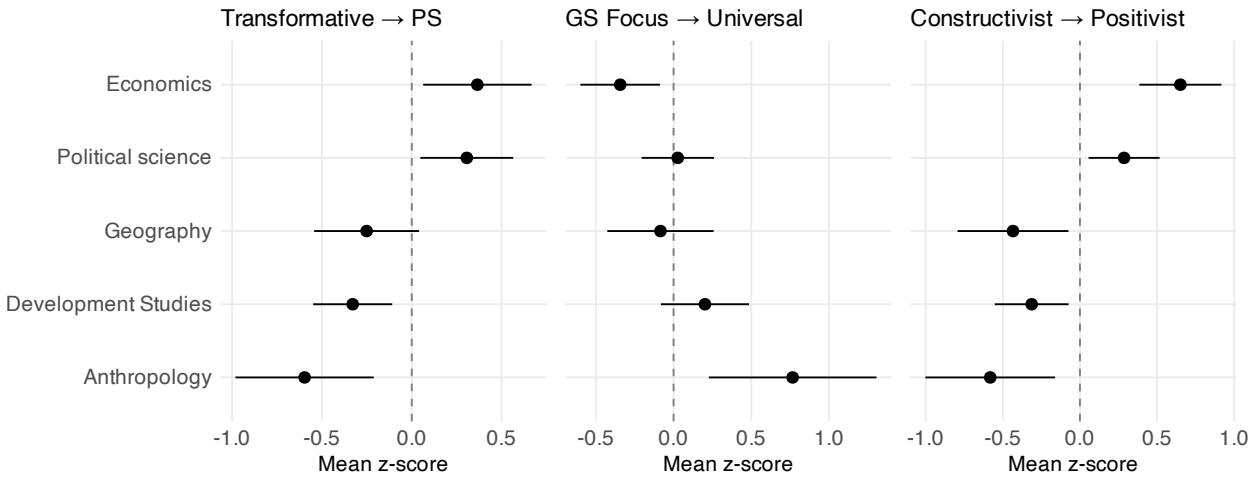
The relationship between Global South vs. Universal and Constructivist vs. Positivist is negative among respondents in HICs but positive among respondents in non-HICs. This suggests that more universal views of the scope of development are associated with more constructivist views among respondents based in HICs, but the opposite is true among respondents based in non-HICs.

The correlations described here are formally tested in Appendix Tables 8 and 9. The results are consistent with Figure 2 and do not substantively change with the addition of a set of discipline fixed effects, revealing that these relationships are not driven by compositional differences in disciplines across income groups. In sum, while we do not see meaningful differences in the distributions of these three dimensions across income groupings, we do see some differences in how these dimensions relate to one another across groupings.

Finally, we examine how our three core dimensions vary across disciplines. To keep estimates precise, we restrict attention to the 5 disciplines with at least 10 respondents, excluding the residual "Other" category.[9] For each of the three index z-scores, we fit a no-intercept OLS regression on a full set of discipline indicators, so that each coefficient is the mean z-score for that discipline, with heteroskedasticity-robust 95% confidence intervals.

[9] The remaining 9 disciplines with fewer than 10 respondents were dropped from the graph.

Figure 3: Mean z-scores by PhD discipline with 95% confidence intervals, for disciplines with at least 10 respondents and excluding the residual "Other" category.



Source: Authors' analysis of survey data.

Figure 3 plots these means across all three dimensions, with disciplines ordered by their problem-solving score from most problem-solving-oriented at top to most transformative at bottom. The same ordering is used in all three panels so that individual disciplines can be tracked across dimensions.

We see meaningful differences in the three dimensions across disciplines. Economics and Political Science sit roughly a third of a standard deviation above the sample mean on the problem-solving scale. Anthropology sits about two-thirds of a standard deviation below it. On scope, economists report the strongest Global South orientation of any discipline, with anthropologists at the opposite end. The onto-epistemological pattern mirrors the orientation divide: economics and political science cluster toward positivism, anthropology toward constructivism. Geography PhD holders and scholars who earned a PhD in Development Studies or closely related fields are consistently in the middle on these dimensions. Appendix 10 shows that these results are not meaningfully different if we split the sample by HIC vs. non-HIC, though the estimates are noisy and so compatible with a wide range of values, and that the discipline patterns remain similar in joint models that adjust for country income group.

It should be noted that our survey provides descriptive rather than causal results. Because the survey observes respondents after both disciplinary selection and doctoral training, it cannot distinguish disciplinary socialisation from selection into disciplines or other career experiences, for example. However, the observed patterns are consistent with the idea that disciplinary socialisation is a key driver of the observed differences.

5. Discussion

Two results from the survey stand out. First, disciplinary training, defined by the discipline of a respondent's PhD, predicts how scholars understand Development Studies more consistently than whether they are based in an HIC or not. Second, there is a strong positive association between problem-solving orientation and positivist onto-epistemologies that holds across both HIC and non-HIC groups. Disciplines transmit more than methods or subject-matter expertise. They also transmit normative orientations and onto-epistemological commitments that persist when scholars move into Development Studies, irrespective of where those scholars are located.

Krishnan (2009) and Abbott (2002) offer a structural account of why this pattern would hold. Krishnan argues that disciplines function as socially constructed systems of knowledge production and professional organisation, sustained by shared norms, gatekeeping mechanisms, and distinct intellectual vocabularies. Abbott makes a related point: academic identity is closely tied to disciplinary affiliation, and crossing boundaries can unsettle established professional identities. An economist trained in causal inference and an anthropologist trained in ethnographic interpretation will differ on more than method. They hold different views on what development is for and how social reality can be known. The survey data bear this out. Anthropology leans toward transformation, a Global South scope, and constructivist onto-epistemologies. Economics leans toward problem-solving, a universal scope, and positivism. Bevan (2007) would recognise this as a case of epistemic communities reproducing their own foundational assumptions across institutional boundaries.

The correlation between orientation and onto-epistemology is the strongest pattern in the data. That problem-solving aligns with positivism and transformation with constructivism maps onto Dow's (1990, 2002, 2007) concept of modes of thought. A positivist is disposed to treat development as a set of measurable problems open to incremental reform. By contrast, a constructivist treats it as a contested discursive field that calls for structural critique. Orientation and onto-epistemology form coherent intellectual orientations that reinforce one another. That this correlation holds across HIC and non-HIC groups suggests it is driven by disciplinary socialisation rather than by the institutional or political context in which scholars work.

The findings on the scope of DS (Global South vs. universal) are of contemporary relevance given the debates in journals noted above. In HICs, views on scope are only weakly related to theoretical orientation or onto-epistemology. In non-HICs, more universal views are associated with both problem-solving and positivism. One reading of this is that the scope dimension is less tightly bound to disciplinary training and more responsive to the institutional and political environment in which scholars operate. Scholars based in non-HICs may experience the question of scope differently. Debates about universalism carry different stakes where the field's historical focus on the Global South meets lived experience of structural disadvantage. A larger non-HIC sample would allow us to test whether this pattern holds. These results bear on debates about whether Development Studies is divided along Northern versus Southern lines. The data suggest that geography matters less than may be assumed. The more important divisions run through disciplinary traditions that are present in both settings. The data do not settle debates about power asymmetries in knowledge production, but they do suggest that treating Development Studies' identity primarily as a North-South question may obscure a deeper source of fragmentation.

The findings carry implications for Development Studies as a field. Kanbur (2002) argued that full interdisciplinarity is often unattainable because different disciplines rest on fundamentally different ontological and epistemological assumptions. The survey data lend empirical weight to that argument. Cross-disciplinary dialogue is constrained less by geography than by disciplines holding incompatible assumptions about evidence and the nature of power. Mitra, Palmer, and Vuong (2020) find limited citation exchange between disciplinary communities. Moving beyond that pattern will require addressing onto-

epistemological differences directly, in curriculum design and editorial practice, not treating them as background noise.

6. Conclusion

This paper asked how and why modes of thought differ in Development Studies. The findings point to disciplinary training, not geographic location, as the primary fault line. Scholars trained in economics and political science cluster toward problem-solving and positivist epistemologies. Those trained in anthropology and interdisciplinary DS programmes lean toward transformation and constructivist positions. Where a scholar is based (in an HIC or not) matters far less than the discipline in which they earned their PhD.

If Development Studies aspires to genuine interdisciplinarity, it must contend with the fact that most scholars in the field arrive with doctoral training that is disciplinary. This 'baggage' reproduces disciplinary modes of thought that persist throughout careers. PhD programmes socialise scholars into specific ontological and epistemological commitments and into discipline-bound understandings of the role of theory. These commitments persist even when scholars later work in a nominally interdisciplinary field. Cross-disciplinary dialogue in both teaching and research requires deliberate institutional design, not merely co-location in the same department.

The correlation between problem-solving and positivism on the one hand, and transformation and constructivism on the other, reinforces this point. Orientation and onto-epistemology arrive as a bundle, shaped by doctoral training. Scholars reproduce the intellectual frameworks in which they were socialised, to a degree that the data make hard to dismiss.

The scope dimension (Global South versus universal) is less structured by either discipline or geography than the other two. This suggests that the recurring debate over whether DS should remain focused on the Global South or adopt a universal frame is somewhat orthogonal to the deeper divisions in the field. It is a debate about boundaries rather than about the analytical and normative commitments that actually differentiate scholars from one another.

Our study has limitations. We would have preferred to have a larger sub-sample from non-HICs. The survey also captures stated positions rather than revealed practice, and the three dimensions do not exhaust the ways in which modes of thought might differ in Development Studies. Two extensions would be worth pursuing. First, expanding the sample beyond QS-ranked departments would test whether the patterns generalise. Second, tracking how modes of thought shift across careers would reveal whether doctoral socialisation is as durable as these cross-sectional data suggest.

The data do not settle debates about power asymmetries in knowledge production. They do, however, suggest that treating the field's identity primarily as a North-South question may obscure a deeper source of fragmentation. The more pressing challenge for Development Studies may not be where scholars are based. It is what they were trained to believe about knowledge, power and the purpose of the field.

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Appendices

Description of the Sample

This appendix describes the composition of the survey sample (N = 292), including 251 respondents based at institutions in HICs and 41 in non-HICs.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of respondents by the country of their academic institution, with bars coloured by whether that country is classified as high income.

Figure 4: Country of institution, by income group

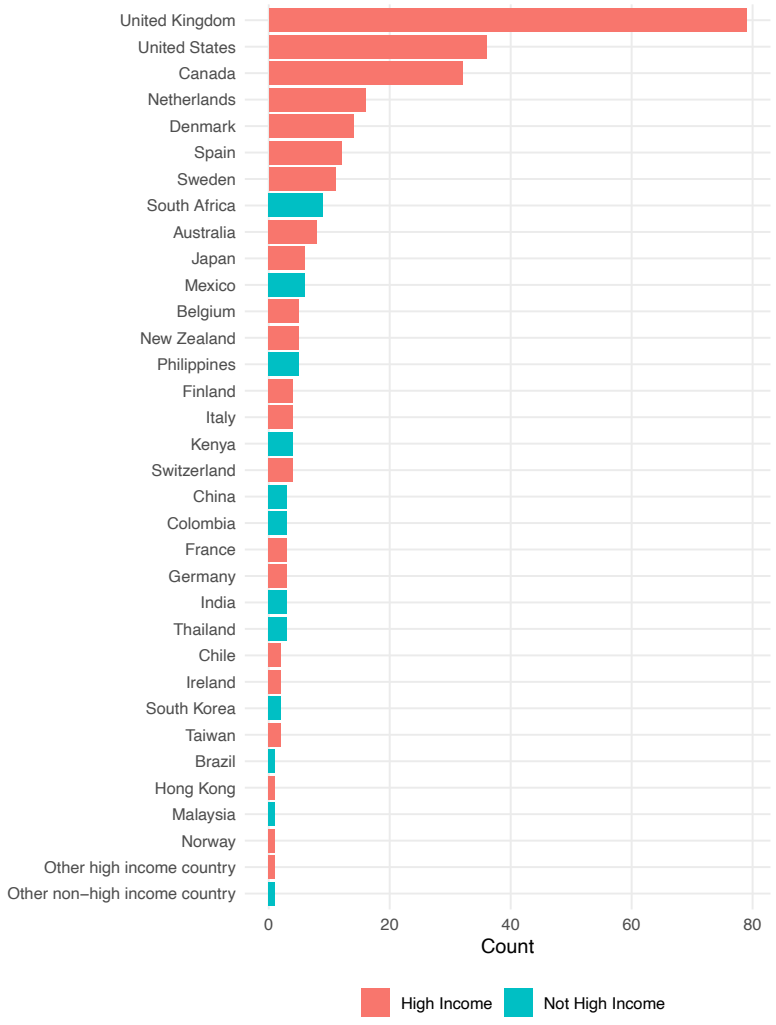


Figure 5 shows PhD disciplines as both counts and within-income-group shares, with separate bars for respondents at HIC and non-HIC institutions.

Figure 5: PhD discipline by country income group, shown as counts and within-income-group shares

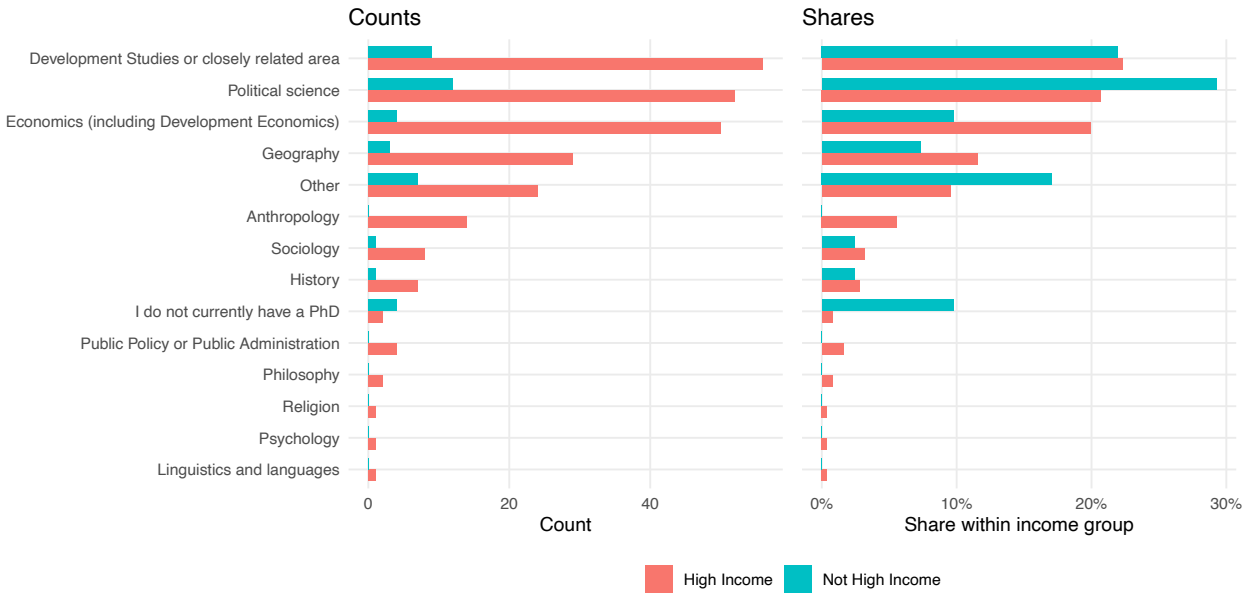


Table 1 shows the gender composition of the sample crossed with country income group, and Table 2 shows the income level of respondents' country of birth crossed with country income group.

Table 1: Gender by country income group.

Gender	High Income	Not High Income
Woman	44.22	39.02
Man	52.19	60.98
My gender identity is not listed above	0.40	0.00
Choose not to respond	3.19	0.00

Table 2: Country of birth income level by country income group

Country of birth	High Income	Not High Income
High income	79.28	7.32
Upper-middle income	11.55	29.27
Lower-middle income	7.57	53.66
Low income	1.59	9.76

Scale Items and Coding

This appendix lists the survey items used to construct the three scales. All items use five response categories. Reverse-coded items are marked explicitly below. After reverse coding, higher values always indicate problem-solving, universal scope, and positivism, respectively.

Transformative vs. Problem-Solving Orientation (STPS)

Response formats in this battery mix agree/disagree items with anchored five-point choices about priorities and emphasis.

- stps_mainly_trans_r: "Development studies should fundamentally challenge and transform existing economic and institutional structures rather than merely improving them." Response scale: Strongly disagree to Strongly agree. Reverse-coded.
- stps_root_vs_improve: "Which approach do you believe better addresses development challenges: Diagnosing and questioning the root causes of systemic inequalities or improving the functioning of existing institutions to solve immediate problems." Response scale: "Diagnosing and questioning the root causes of systemic inequalities is much more important" to "Improving the functioning of existing institutions to solve immediate problems is much more important." Not reverse-coded.
- stps_emphasis_r: "When designing or teaching about development interventions or policies, what emphasis is appropriate?" Response scale: "Primarily make improvements to existing systems" to "Primarily aim to transform existing systems." Reverse-coded.
- stps_radical_power_r: "Development requires a radical change in existing power relations." Response scale: Strongly disagree to Strongly agree. Reverse-coded.

Global South Focus vs. Universal Scope (GSU)

Response formats in this battery combine agree/disagree items, scope judgments, and five-point anchored choices about theory, case selection, and field boundaries.

- gsu_focus_south_r: "Development Studies should primarily focus on the challenges and opportunities facing the Global South." Response scale: Strongly disagree to Strongly agree. Reverse-coded.
- gsu_univ_theory_r: "Do you believe that development theories and practices should be applicable to all countries or tailored to the specific historical and structural contexts of the Global South?" Response scale: "Development theories and practices should always be universal" to "Development theories and practices should always be tailored to the Global South." Reverse-coded.
- gsu_global_trend: "How important is it to incorporate global trends (e.g., climate change, globalization) that affect both high-income and lower or middle-income countries in your approach to development studies?" Response scale: Not at all important to Extremely important. Not reverse-coded.
- gsu_examples: "In your research or teaching, when you have a choice between case studies that focus on the Global South or Global North, which do you prefer?" Response scale: "All of my case studies are from the Global South" to "Fewer than half of my case studies are from the Global South." Not reverse-coded.
- gsu_scope: "How would you characterize your view on the scope of development studies: Do you see it as a cross disciplinary area that should focus on the specific needs of historically marginalized countries, or as one that addresses development challenges across all countries?" Response scale: "Only about the specifics of historically marginalized regions" to "Only about universal challenges facing all nations." Not reverse-coded.

Constructivist vs. Positivist Onto-Epistemology (ONT)

All five ONT items use a five-point agree/disagree scale running from Strongly disagree to Strongly agree.

- ont_reality: “An important goal of research is to understand a single social reality that exists independent of observers.” Not reverse-coded.
- ont_science: “Valid academic knowledge about development arises mainly through observation, measurement, and hypothesis testing with replicable methods.” Not reverse-coded.
- ont_situated_r: “Social realities are multiple and context-bound; academic inquiry should foreground situated meanings rather than seek laws that apply broadly to many cases.” Reverse-coded.
- ont_power_r: “In development, power operates chiefly through discourse, representation, and control of knowledge production.” Reverse-coded.
- ont_inequality: “In development, global inequalities are reproduced chiefly by structures such as ownership systems, national institutions, class relations, and international economic rules.” Not reverse-coded.

Scale Diagnostics

This appendix reports diagnostics for the three item batteries used to construct the scales. These batteries are used as descriptive indices rather than as previously validated psychometric instruments, so the diagnostics are intended to show how the items behave in this sample.

Table 3 reports reliability statistics and PCA summaries. The Transformative vs. Problem-Solving Orientation battery is internally consistent. The Global South Focus vs. Universal Scope battery is moderately consistent. The ONT battery is psychometrically weaker, especially because respondents do not treat the two power items as opposite poles in a simple way. In particular, ont_power_r asks whether power operates chiefly through discourse, representation, and knowledge production, while ont_inequality asks whether global inequalities are reproduced chiefly through material and institutional structures. These are conceptually opposed in the scale design, but respondents often appear willing to endorse both material and discursive accounts of power.

Table 3: Scale diagnostics

scale	n_items	n	raw_alpha	poly_alpha	pc1_var	pc2_var	mean_pca_cor
STPS	4	280	0.736	0.813	0.566	0.181	0.996
GSU	5	269	0.643	0.672	0.416	0.200	0.995
ONT	5	262	0.489	0.420	0.419	0.224	0.887

Table 4 reports PC1 loadings, Table 5 reports corrected item-total correlations, and Table 6 reports inter-item correlations. The weak behavior of ont_inequality is visible in these item-level diagnostics. Because of this, Table 7 reports a sensitivity check that rebuilds ONT without ont_inequality. Dropping that item improves reliability but leaves the substantive results nearly unchanged: the four-item ONT index correlates very highly with the original ONT index and has similar correlations with the STPS and GSU indices. We therefore keep the original ONT battery, since ont_inequality captures a theoretically meaningful material-structure account of power, but interpret the ONT scale as a broader orientation rather than a tightly unidimensional psychometric scale.

Table 4: PC1 loadings by scale and item

scale	item	pc1_loading
STPS	stps_mainly_trans_r	0.506
STPS	stps_root_vs_improve	0.490
STPS	stps_emphasis_r	0.496
STPS	stps_radical_power_r	0.507
GSU	gsu_focus_south_r	0.545
GSU	gsu_univ_theory_r	0.513
GSU	gsu_global_trend	0.224

GSU	gsu_examples	0.440
GSU	gsu_scope	0.442
ONT	ont_reality	0.486
ONT	ont_science	0.409
ONT	ont_situated_r	0.546
ONT	ont_power_r	0.435
ONT	ont_inequality	-0.331

Table 5: Item-total correlations by scale and item

scale	item	item_total_correlation
STPS	stps_mainly_trans_r	0.560
STPS	stps_root_vs_improve	0.506
STPS	stps_emphasis_r	0.527
STPS	stps_radical_power_r	0.554
GSU	gsu_focus_south_r	0.539
GSU	gsu_univ_theory_r	0.484
GSU	gsu_global_trend	0.169
GSU	gsu_examples	0.397
GSU	gsu_scope	0.399
ONT	ont_reality	0.470
ONT	ont_science	0.374
ONT	ont_situated_r	0.467
ONT	ont_power_r	0.231
ONT	ont_inequality	-0.260

Table 6: Inter-item correlations by scale

scale	item_1	item_2	correlation
STPS	stps_mainly_trans_r	stps_root_vs_improve	0.404
STPS	stps_mainly_trans_r	stps_emphasis_r	0.369
STPS	stps_mainly_trans_r	stps_radical_power_r	0.514
STPS	stps_root_vs_improve	stps_emphasis_r	0.473
STPS	stps_root_vs_improve	stps_radical_power_r	0.356
STPS	stps_emphasis_r	stps_radical_power_r	0.418
GSU	gsu_focus_south_r	gsu_univ_theory_r	0.530
GSU	gsu_focus_south_r	gsu_global_trend	0.066
GSU	gsu_focus_south_r	gsu_examples	0.404
GSU	gsu_focus_south_r	gsu_scope	0.295

GSU	gsu_univ_theory_r	gsu_global_trend	0.100
GSU	gsu_univ_theory_r	gsu_examples	0.227
GSU	gsu_univ_theory_r	gsu_scope	0.337
GSU	gsu_global_trend	gsu_examples	0.167
GSU	gsu_global_trend	gsu_scope	0.185
GSU	gsu_examples	gsu_scope	0.236
ONT	ont_reality	ont_science	0.441
ONT	ont_reality	ont_situated_r	0.384
ONT	ont_reality	ont_power_r	0.225
ONT	ont_reality	ont_inequality	-0.138
ONT	ont_science	ont_situated_r	0.322
ONT	ont_science	ont_power_r	0.079
ONT	ont_science	ont_inequality	-0.068
ONT	ont_situated_r	ont_power_r	0.440
ONT	ont_situated_r	ont_inequality	-0.265
ONT	ont_power_r	ont_inequality	-0.283

Table 7: Sensitivity check excluding ont_inequality from ONT

ont_items	n	raw_alpha	poly_alpha	pc1_var	cor_original	cor_stps	cor_gsu
5	262	0.489	0.420	0.419	1.000	0.470	-0.123
4	263	0.645	0.705	0.493	0.973	0.463	-0.175

Other Supporting Analyses

This appendix supports the graphical analyses shown in the main text.

Table 8 reports a simple joint model for each index, with each scale regressed on country income group and PhD discipline. This asks whether the discipline differences in Figure 3 remain visible after accounting for whether respondents are based in HICs or non-HICs, and whether income-group differences remain visible after accounting for PhD discipline. The pattern is consistent with the main text. The Not HIC coefficient is small and statistically uncertain in all three models, while the Economics and Political Science coefficients remain large for STPS and ONT relative to Anthropology. On GSU, the same ordering visible in Figure 3 also remains: economists are more Global South-focused than anthropologists, with Political Science, Geography, and DS in between.

Table 9 reports OLS regressions of each pair of index z-scores with an interaction on country income group, so the interaction coefficient directly tests whether slopes differ between HIC and non-HIC respondents. The first three models correspond directly to the comparisons shown in Figure 2, and the final three add PhD-discipline fixed effects. The key point is that the interaction terms change very little after adding these fixed effects. This is especially clear for the two GSU relationships, where the positive STPS–GSU and ONT–GSU interaction estimates remain similar with and without discipline fixed effects. For STPS–ONT, by contrast, the interaction is close to zero in both specifications, which matches the visual impression that this slope is similar across country income groups. Taken together, these results suggest that differences in PhD-discipline composition are not driving the slope differences (or lack thereof) across income groupings in Figure 2.

The final analysis reproduces Figure 3 but splits each discipline by country income group. This is done to see whether there is visible within-discipline variation by country income group. Many discipline-by-income-group cells are small, so these estimates are noisy and should be interpreted cautiously. Because the residual "Other" category is not substantively informative, it is omitted from both discipline coefficient plots. Among the remaining disciplines, the patterns are generally not statistically distinguishable across country income groups (though again, we have low power when slicing the data this finely). For this reason, we report only pooled means in Figure 3.

Table 8: OLS regressions of each index z-score on institution income group and PhD discipline.

	STPS	GSU	ONT
Reference mean: Anthropology, HIC	−0.596**	0.766**	−0.582**
	(0.196)	(0.274)	(0.214)
Economics	0.959***	−1.097***	1.255***
	(0.249)	(0.304)	(0.252)
Geography	0.342	−0.833*	0.179
	(0.247)	(0.325)	(0.282)
DS or related	0.264	−0.546+	0.300
	(0.227)	(0.311)	(0.248)
Political Science	0.896***	−0.708*	0.926***
	(0.238)	(0.302)	(0.248)
Not HIC	0.032	−0.158	−0.276
	(0.210)	(0.192)	(0.174)
Num.Obs.	222	214	207
R2	0.116	0.076	0.198
R2 Adj.	0.096	0.054	0.178
RMSE	0.95	0.98	0.91

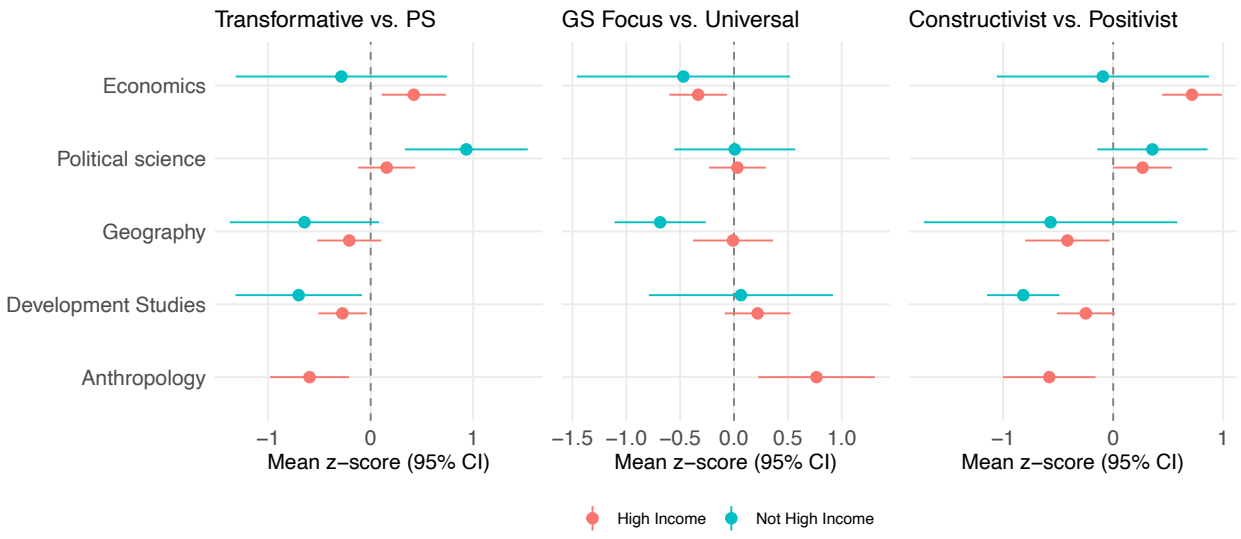
+ p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001
Heteroskedasticity robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table 9: OLS regressions of each pair of index z-scores with and without discipline fixed effects.

	GSU	ONT	GSU	GSU	ONT	GSU
Intercept	0.034	0.045	0.035			
	(0.066)	(0.060)	(0.065)			
STPS slope	−0.142*	0.472***		−0.091	0.394***	
	(0.068)	(0.064)		(0.067)	(0.062)	
Not HIC	−0.265+	−0.358**	−0.124	−0.336*	−0.400**	−0.178
	(0.155)	(0.133)	(0.146)	(0.160)	(0.131)	(0.154)
STPS × Not HIC	0.438**	0.043		0.415**	0.056	
	(0.141)	(0.140)		(0.136)	(0.140)	
ONT slope			−0.210**			−0.162*
			(0.065)			(0.074)
ONT × Not HIC			0.665***			0.623***
			(0.148)			(0.160)
Num.Obs.	268	262	260	265	259	257
R2	0.039	0.236	0.071	0.107	0.336	0.115
RMSE	0.98	0.87	0.95	0.95	0.81	0.93
Discipline FEs	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes

+ p <0.1, * p <0.05, ** p <0.01, *** p <0.001
Heteroskedasticity robust standard errors in parentheses.

Figure 6: Mean z-scores by PhD discipline with 95% confidence intervals, split by country income group for the same disciplines shown in Figure 3.



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