

Making the university relevant

Rohan Samarajiva

Open University of Sri Lanka, 10 April 2015



- *“Sadly, role of think tanks has not increased to provide critical inputs to policy making. Universities must also play a big role in this.”*

Tweet from Hon. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, 9 June 2014

- *“Some of the smartest thinkers on problems at home and around the world are university professors, but most of them just don’t matter in today’s great debates.”*

Nicholas Kristof, “Professors, we need you,” New York Times, 15 February 2014

Agenda

- Are Sri Lankan universities relevant?
 - Direct influence
 - Constitutional reforms
 - Right to information
 - Trade agreements
 - Broadening policy horizons & expanding policy capacity
- Can the university deliver?
- Possible solution

**ARE SRI LANKAN UNIVERSITIES
RELEVANT?**

Types of Policy Influence		
<u>Expanding Policy Capacities</u>	<u>Broadening Policy Horizons</u>	<u>Affecting Policy Regimes</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving the knowledge or data of certain actors • Supporting recipients to develop innovative ideas • Improving capabilities to communicate ideas • Developing new talent for research and analysis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing policy makers with opportunities for networking or learning within their jurisdiction or with colleagues elsewhere • Introducing new concepts to frame debates, putting ideas on the agenda, or stimulating public debate • Educating researchers and others who take up new positions with a broader understanding of issues • Stimulating quiet dialogue among decision-makers (and among, or with, those involved in knowledge production). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modifying existing programs or policies • Leading to the fundamental re-design of programs and policies • Helping create a new policy regime in an emerging field.

Lindquist, E. A. (2001). Discerning policy influence: Framework for a strategic evaluation of IDRC-supported research

How university-based scholarship could influence policy

- Directly influencing policy
 - Short timeframe
 - Easy to measure
- Broadening policy horizons & expanding policy capacities (dealt with together)
 - Longer timeframe
 - Less easy to measure and prove

Direct influence on significant policy debates of our time

- What role have social scientists or humanities or legal scholars in Sri Lanka universities in three of the most important policy issues of our time?
 - Constitutional reforms of 2015
 - Right to Information Bill of 2015
 - Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement with largest trade partner (India) and free trade agreement with largest donor (China), 2010-present

Limited to social science/humanities/law

Examples drawn from debates I participated in

Contrary examples from audience welcome

Constitutional Reforms of 2015

- Extraordinary moment in Sri Lanka's history
 - Surprising result of premature Presidential election created a “policy window” of short duration (~100 days) wherein 2/3rd majority is available for
 - Significant reductions in the power of the Presidency, including rollback of 18th Amendment and restoration of good-governance provisions of 17th Amendment (19th Amendment)
 - Reforms to the way members of Parliament are elected (20th Amendment)

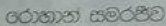
Did scholars from Sri Lanka universities play a role?

- Is there an equivalent of Sir Ivor Jennings, 1st Vice Chancellor of U Peradeniya (Soulbury Constitution)?
 - In 1972 it was Dr Colvin R. de Silva (a PhD but not a university academic)
 - In 1978 it was Professor A.J. Wilson (U of New Brunswick)
 - Dr Jayampathy Wickramaratne in 2015 (one of 3 drafters of 19th Amendment; has PhD, but is not a university academic)?

Electoral reforms

- Parliamentary Select Committee from 2003 on
 - Professor Sudantha Liyanage of U Sri Jayawardanapura advised
- Technical inputs to Commissioner of Elections and others
 - Dr Sujata Gamage; Dr Wigneswaran (both outside university)
- From the outside
 - Professor Laksiri Fernando (formerly U of Colombo)
 - Asoka Obeysekera of Verite Research
 - Professor Rohan Samarajiva (outside university)

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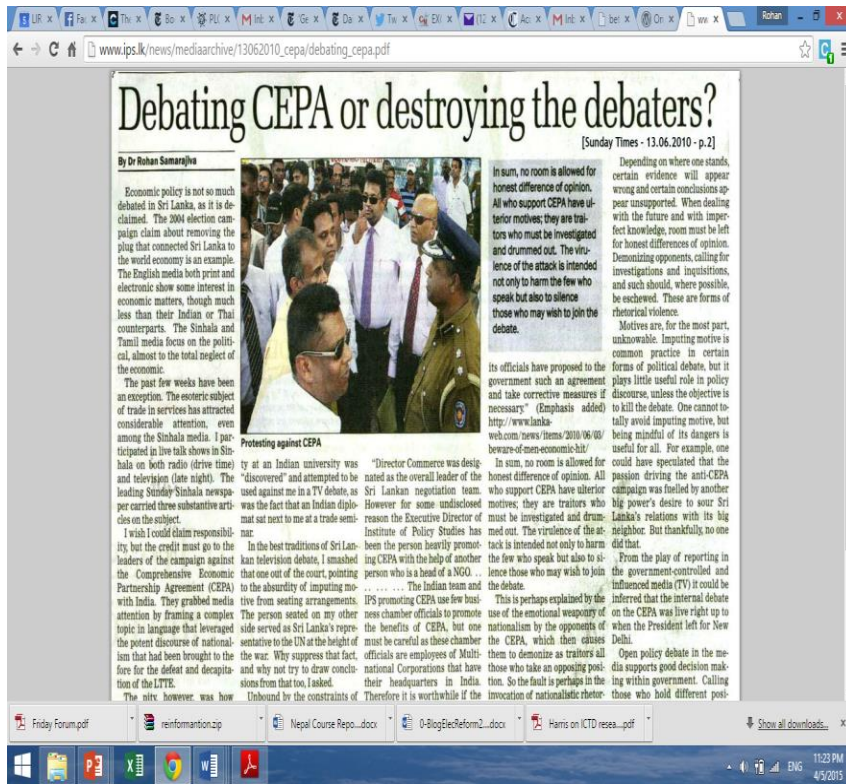
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Right to Information Bill

- Bills prepared in 2003 and 2010
- In 2011, significant discussion triggered by inclusion in municipal election manifestos
- Where is the public discussion today?
 - Several articles in Ravaya, including one by Wijayananda Jayaweera (formerly with UNESCO)
 - One in Colombo Telegraph by Kishali Pinto Jayawardene
 - Draft made available online by Manthri.lk, but few seem to be aware
- Would be useful to see how many submissions were received from university academics in response to call for comments on 23 February 2015

Debating economic policy

- Economic policy is not so much debated in Sri Lanka, as declaimed. The claim used prominently in the 2004 election campaign about removing the plug that connected Sri Lanka to the world economy is an example. The English media both print and electronic show some interest in economic matters, though much less than their Indian or Thai counterparts. The Sinhala and Tamil media focus on the political, almost to the total neglect of the economic.
- The past few weeks have been an exception. The esoteric topic of trade in services has attracted considerable attention, even among the Sinhala media. I participated in live talk shows in Sinhala on both radio (drive time) and television (late night). The leading Sunday Sinhala newspaper carried three substantive articles on the subject.



Trade agreement with India, 2010

- Perhaps the most important economic policy debate in Sri Lanka
 - Participants were a few industrialists opposing CEPA with India and just me defending it
 - Dr Sirimal Abeyratne (U Colombo) participated in one TV talk show and commented
 - Professional associations convened seminars
 - Sri Lanka Economics Association was silent
 - Leading economics think tank, Institute for Policy Studies (IPS) went silent as debate hotbed up
 - Other economics think tank Center for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) never participated

Economic policy in general

- IPS posts items on its blog that appear to be driven by when research is completed rather than what is topical
- Pathfinder Foundation keeps up a steady stream of topical “economic flashes” in English which are well circulated through social media
 - Sole voice on economic relations with China



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Great Leap Forward in Sino-Lankan Relations- A way forward

Posted by [Pathfinder Foundation](#) • September 30, 2013 • [China Watch](#) • [2 Comments](#)

China's Steadfast Friendship

Sino-Lankan relations are on the threshold of a transformative leap forward. Contacts between Sri Lanka and the Middle Kingdom go back several centuries to the visits by the monk/scholar Fa Hsien and the impressive naval fleet of Admiral Zheng He. In the post-colonial era, the historic Rubber-Trade Pact (1952) was the landmark that initiated the very cordial relations that have prevailed between the two countries during the subsequent decades. China has been a steadfast friend which has played a very important role in protecting the unity and territorial integrity of the country. China's Massive Role in Infrastructure Development

Since the end of the conflict in 2009, China has been the lead player in assisting Sri Lanka's unprecedented accelerated infrastructure development program. Chinese funding have, inter alia, supported the development of the Norochcholai Power Plant, the Hambantota Port, Mattala Airport and the road development program (including Katunayake - Colombo Highway, a part of the Southern Highway and the Northern Road Rehabilitation Project). The significant backlog of

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Provisional assessment

- Social scientists and scholars in humanities and law in Sri Lanka universities have made only marginal contributions to contemporary policy debates
 - Some persons associated with think tanks (Samarajiva, Gamage and Obeysekera) made substantive contributions
 - In economic-policy debate, principal think tanks failed
 - Natural scientists (Liyanage and Wigneswaran) have contributed
 - Contributions by Fernando and Pinto Jayawardene have been in Colombo Telegraph; not sure how effective in engaging policy makers
 - I discount the non-evidence based pure opinion pieces by those working in universities
- Possible I have missed some behind-the-scenes contributions, especially in areas I have not been engaged with

Provisional assessment

- Natural science, engineering and medicine make greater contributions in some areas, e.g.,
 - Professor Amal Kumarage on transportation
 - Professors Oliver Ileperuma and Upali Samarajeewa on chemistry-related issues

Conclusion

- University based scholarship in social science, humanities and law has had little direct influence on policy in Sri Lanka
 - Writing pure opinion pieces that include no evidence does not count

Broadening policy horizons & expanding policy capacities

University-based scholars have access to young minds

- “... the ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the natural encroachment of ideas. Not, indeed, immediately, but after a certain interval; **for in the field of economic and political philosophy there are not many who are influenced by new theories after they are twenty-five or thirty years of age, so that the ideas which civil servants and politicians and even agitators apply to current events are not likely to be the newest.** But soon or late, it is ideas not vested interests, which are dangerous for good or evil.”

But do they use this unique advantage well?

- While teaching in an MBA course offered by a local university, I was frustrated because my students did not read; they would not spend time in libraries or search data bases. I believed that relying solely on what went on during class time does not constitute real education.
- Did a back-of-the-envelope calculation about the demands on their time
 - Making reasonable assumptions about how much time a person has to spend at work (40 hours a week), how much time they need for sleep (56 hours a week), how much time they need to spend on travel, and so on,
 - Concluded that the 12 or so hours of in-class time the university expected of them on weekends and evenings left them with zero time for reading and library use.

Perhaps there is need for a time-use study

- My story is just an anecdote
- It would be useful to see how university students (including those in graduate courses) actually spend their time

What works and what should be done

- My students actually learned when they dealt with real problems for their theses, applying theory to data
 - As confirmed by a multitude of studies
- Universities should change the model of learning
 - Reduce fixation on time spent at lectures and exam formats
 - A procedural safeguard driven by inferiority complex?
 - A workaround for the problem caused by poor faculty recruitment
 - Reallocate that time to problem-based learning

Possible results if teaching/ learning methods are changed

- “Academic scribblings of a few years back” will actually sink in → Policy horizons will be broadened and policy capacities expanded
- Because even undergraduate students would be engaged with real-world problems, likely that university-based academics will have something substantive to say when policy windows open up → improved ability to directly influence policy

CAN THE UNIVERSITY DELIVER?

Universities or individual faculty members?

- Taking evidence to policy is not a neutral activity
 - Evidenced by the failure of IPS, the government and internationally supported economic policy think tank, to participate in the most important economic policy debate of our time
- Government universities should not seek to influence policy qua universities
 - Even private universities should exercise caution
- But a university should create an environment within which individual faculty members can

Can Sri Lankan universities create such an environment?

- Not best places to generate policy-relevant research and to provide homes to motivated, effective research-to-policy communicators because of
 - Demands of teaching: 14-16 hrs/week (Indian data; assume in same range for Sri Lanka)
 - Emphasis on abstract knowledge, now driven by compulsion to publish in ISI journals and count citations
 - Different communication competencies
 - Droning on for an hour to a captive audience is not the best training for giving sound bites to the media or holding the attention of a politician

From analysis of a Canadian Telecom Policy Review Panel (TPRP)

- “Only a handful of submissions to the panel relied on research undertaken by Canadians. Not many submissions to the panel were made by researchers as stand-alone participants.”
 - 2 of 109 submissions to TPRP’s first round of submissions, and 2 of 89 submissions to the TPRP’s second round, for a total of 3 of 198, were from “educational institutions”. Adding to these the individual submissions of 4 academics in the first round, and 2 in the second round, suggests that academics were responsible for 4.5 percent of submissions to the study panel.

Universities in developed economies have understood the problem

- Specialized information-broker units are being set up within developed-country universities in recognition of the problem


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PPG provides thorough analysis and recommendations for a variety of clients; providing an interface between academia, the private, public and 'third' sector.

News

Review of new book, *Growing the Productivity of Government Services* in latest issue of the *International Review of Administrative Sciences*.

PPG Chair, Professor Patrick Dunleavy and Leandro Carrera's new book *Growing the Productivity of Public Services* has been favourably reviewed in the September issue of the *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, by Christopher Pollitt, Research Professor at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven.

He writes:

"This is an important book, one that should be read by academics and practitioners alike. It is also one proof (among others) that books still have a place in the world of

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Think tanks are better positioned

- Their raison d'être is policy influence, being free-standing equivalents of public policy units
- Have advantage of focus and specialization
- Attract persons motivated to engage in research-to-policy
- BUT
 - They lack the “organic” legitimacy university faculty enjoy & struggle with perception that social-science research is non-objective & ideological
 - Some have difficulty navigating the line between dissemination and activism
 - Some lack the required independence
 - All have to retrain recruited staff because universities do not produce graduates equipped to take research to policy

POSSIBLE SOLUTION EMERGING FROM A PILOT

Communication Policy Research South (CPRsouth)

- is a capacity-building initiative initiated by LIRNEasia, which has been active since 2007. Its objective is to facilitate the creation, sustenance and continuous advancement of policy intellectuals capable of informed and effective intervention in ICT policy and regulation processes in specific country and regional contexts in the south. In order to fulfill its objectives, CPRsouth targets aspiring junior and mid-level policy intellectuals in Africa and the Asia-Pacific. Its main activities are its annual conference and tutorials. Approximately 30 paper presenters and 30 young scholars (for the tutorials) are selected through competitive processes. A network is maintained using social media.

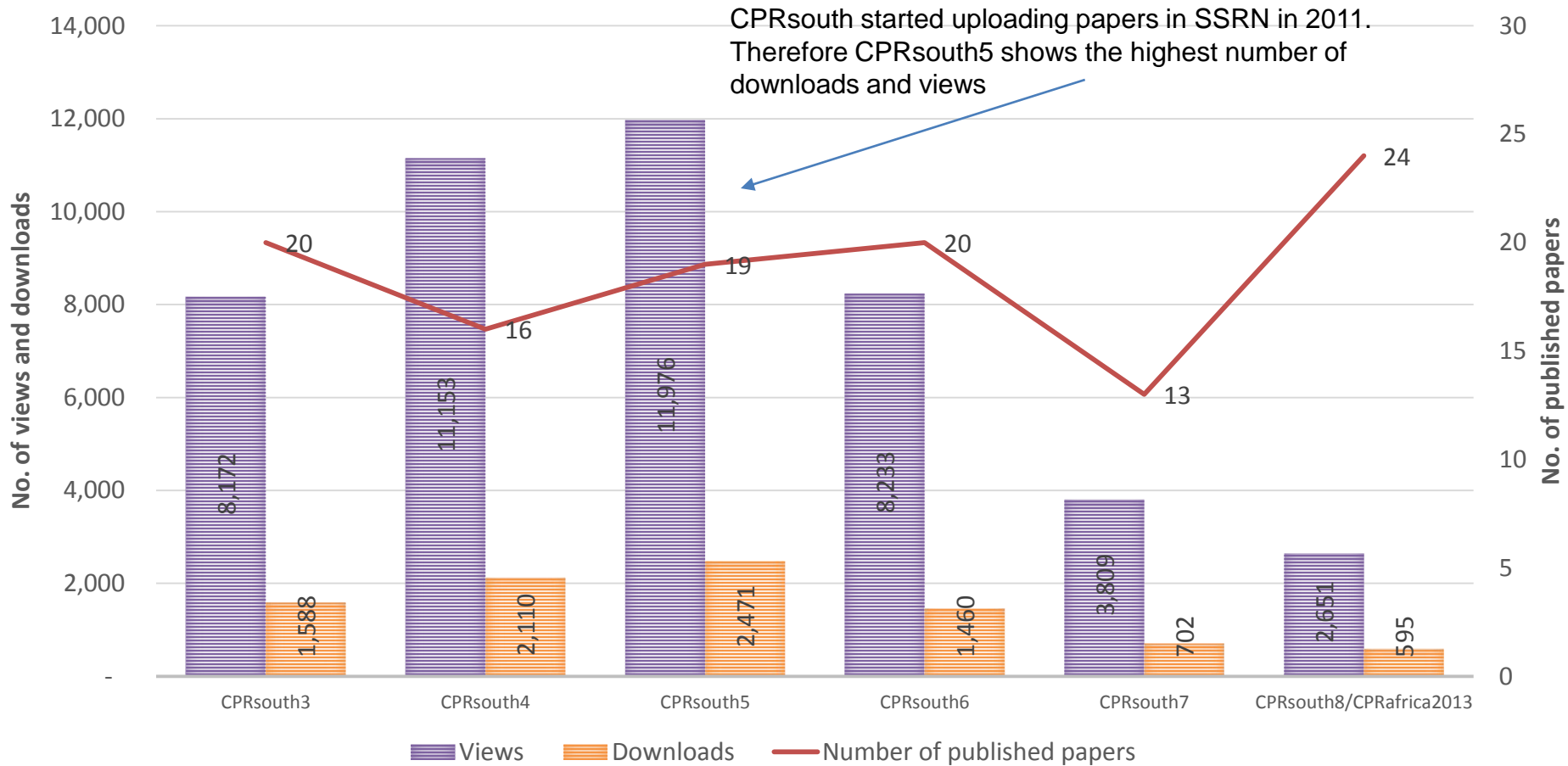
CPRsouth theory of change

- Identify motivated junior- and mid-level individuals within and without the “iron triangles”
 - Not nominated by superiors
 - Based on initiative
- Enhance their skills and motivation
- Reinforce through virtual community

CPRsouth theory of change

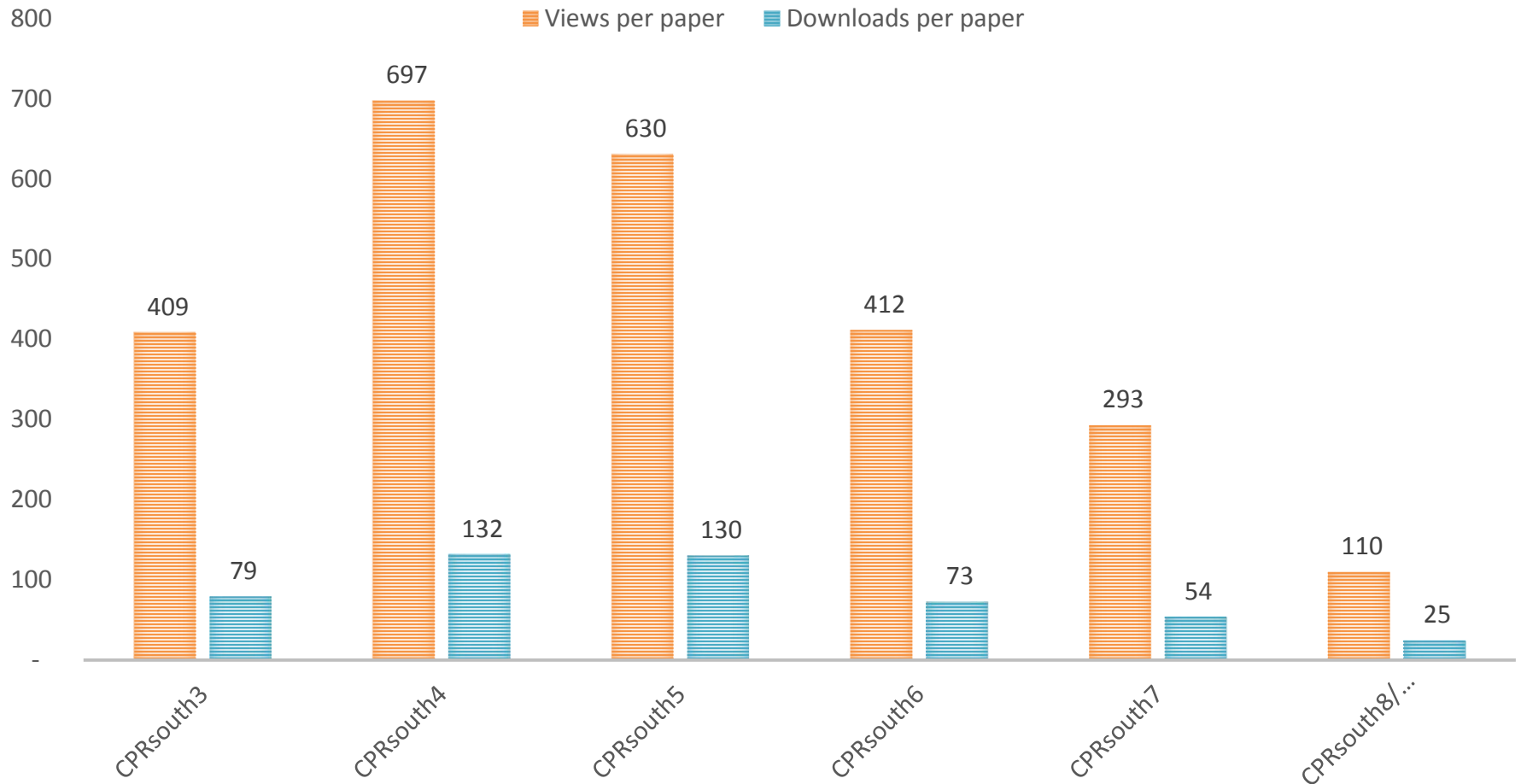
- How will they influence change?
 - Take research to policy
 - As public-interest advocates
 - As consultants to stakeholders
 - Through media
- Once they establish a profile as skilled individuals, they could be
 - Hired as officials / retained as consultants
- Those already within government or firms could rise to positions of power

Evidence of interest in/use of conference output

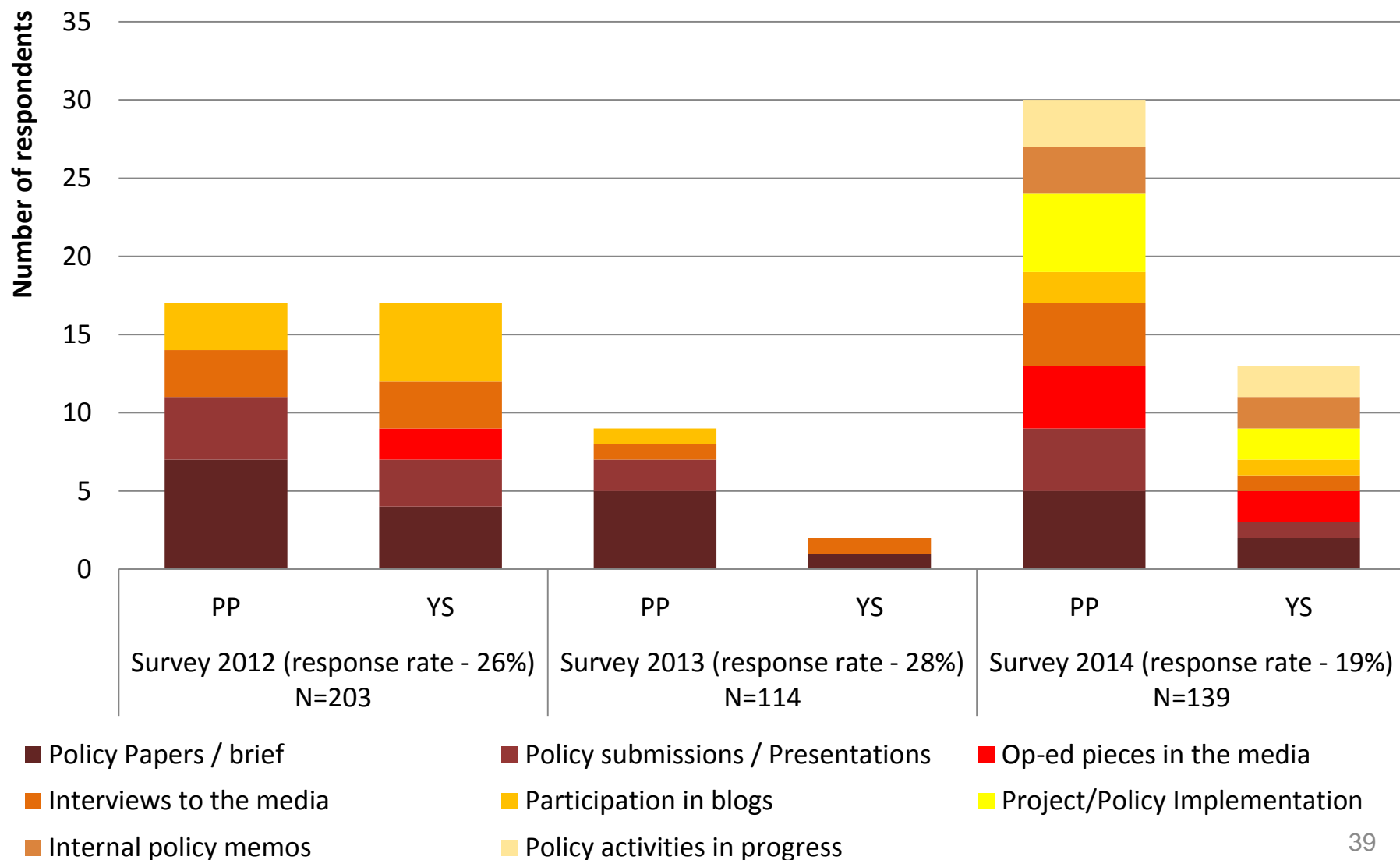


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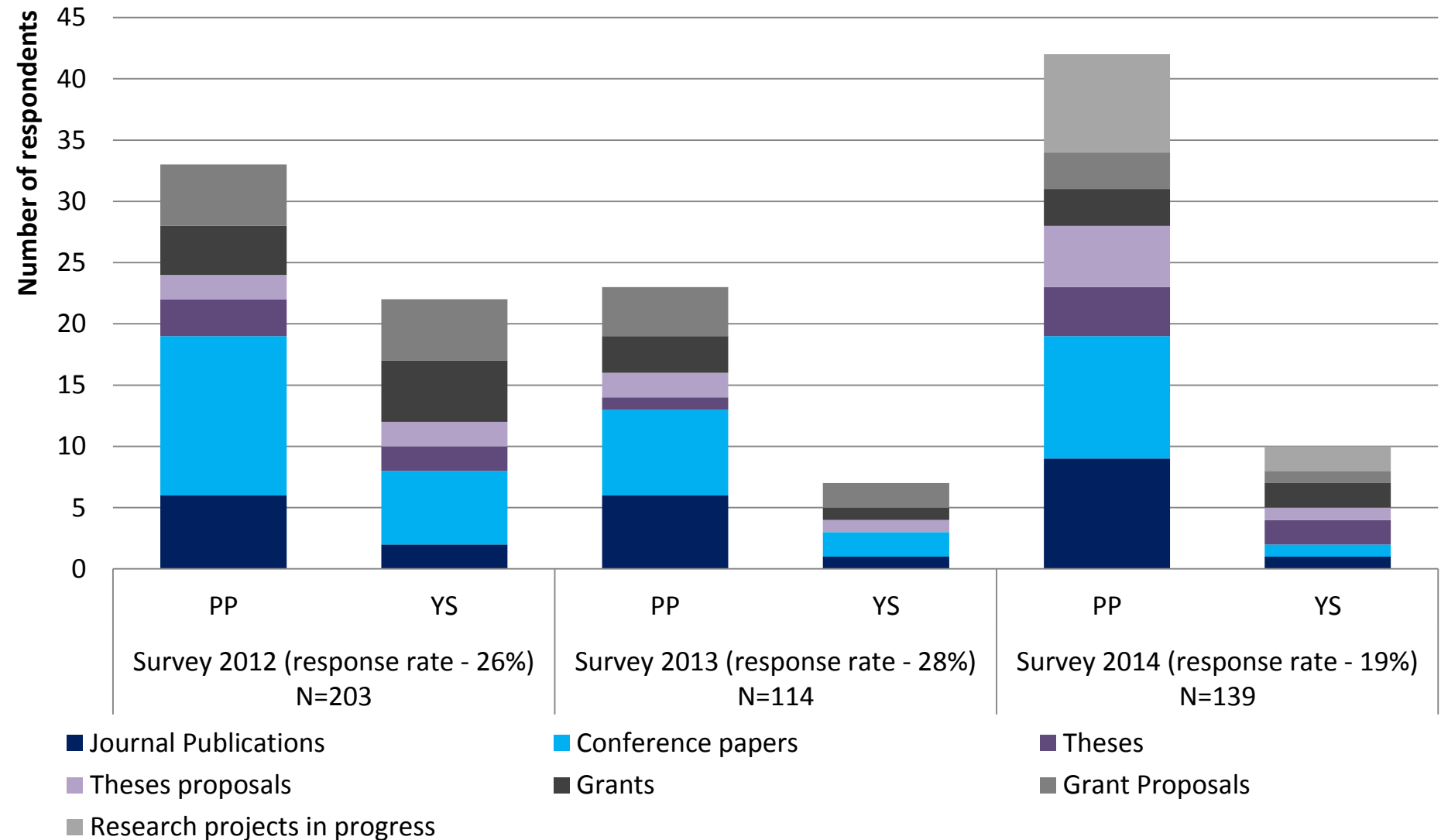
SSRN views and downloads per paper



Previous-year policy activity by CPRsouth community

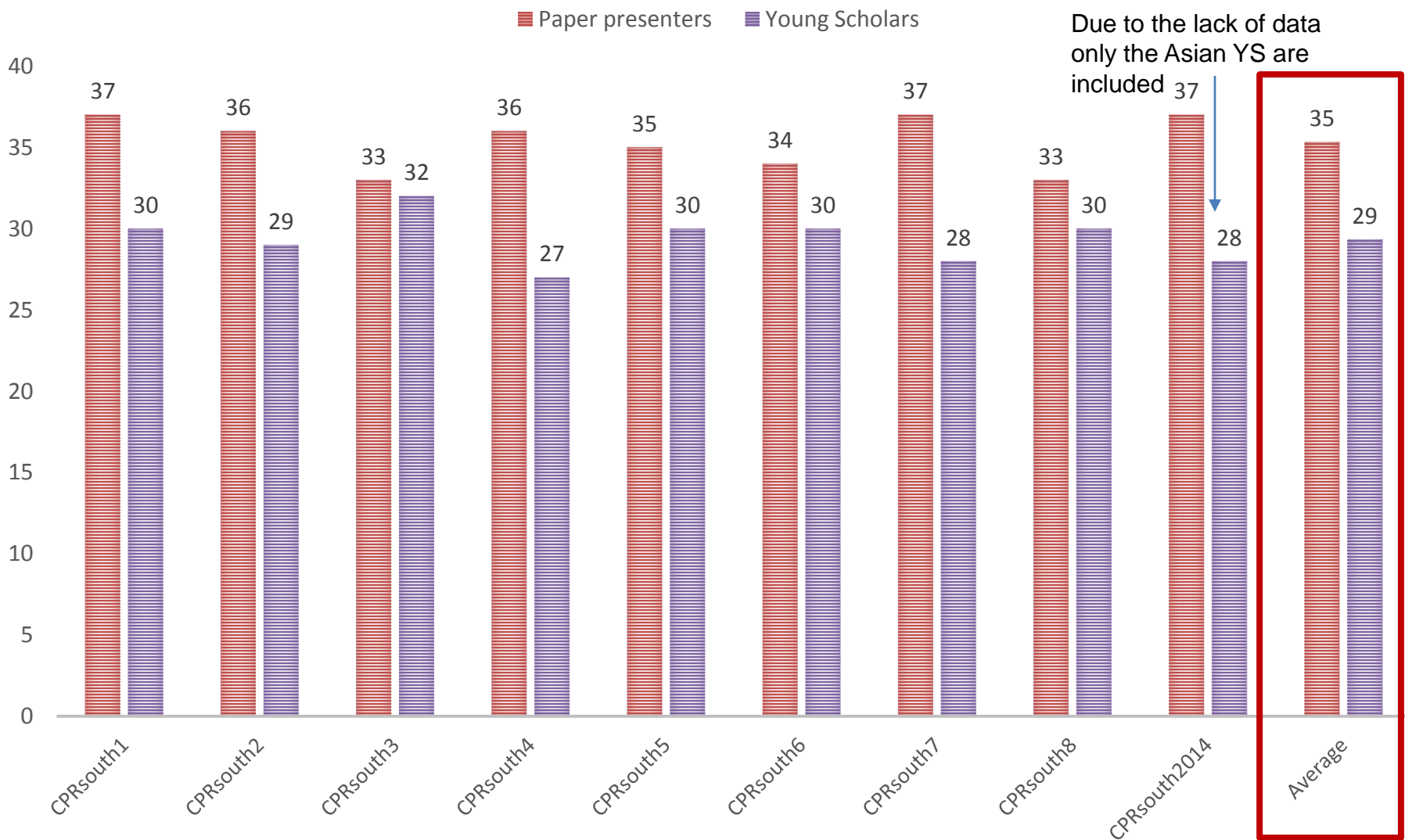


CPR*south* community: Previous-year academic output

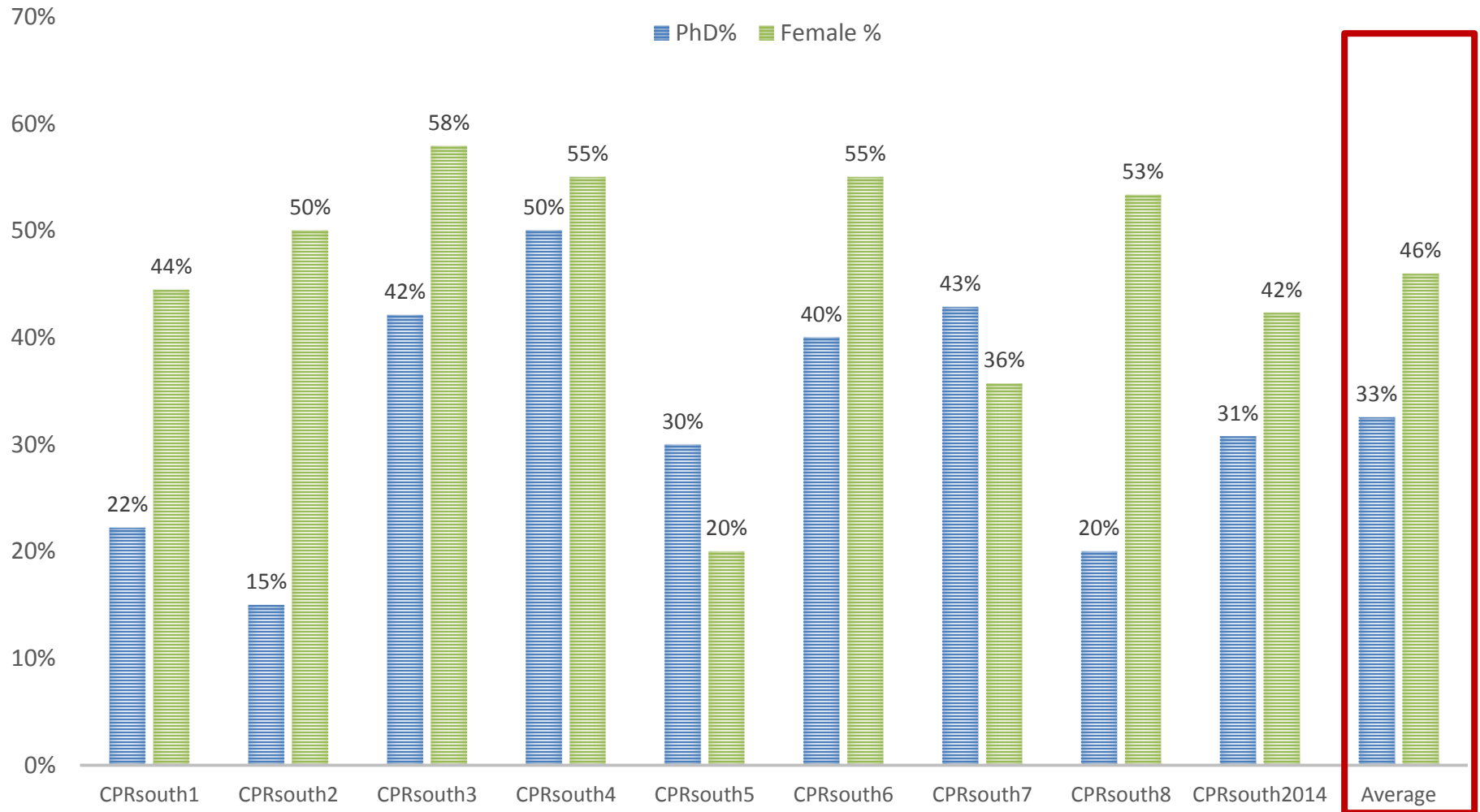


Performance must be seen in context
of career progression & credentials

A youthful community: On average, paper givers 35 yrs; young scholars 29



Paper-givers: PhDs (33%) & Females (46%)



CPRsouth's Grace Mirandilla-Santos



- Major contribution to Philippines Senate 1st public hearing on the Philippine Internet, in January 2015
- At 2nd public hearing on NTC's proposed memorandum circular on broadband QoS, Mirandilla reiterated that diagnostics should take into consideration consumer experience, must be transparent and results published in a format that consumers can understand and use, should help inform consumers' decisions when availing of services (e.g., publishing average or typical speeds per ISP per city). Her recommendations have been seconded by Senator Bam Aquino.

Grace Mirandilla-Santos

- An independent ICT4D researcher from the Philippines, Grace was a young scholar at the inaugural CPRsouth conferences in Manila in 2007 January. She participated as a paper presenter at conferences in 2007 December, 2008, and 2009. Her research examined telecom and ICT policy, the political economy of policy reform and ICT in politics. Currently she is a contributor to Telecom Asia, a leading online source for news and analysis. Her research includes an independent study, funded by SIRCA on Filipino political bloggers and their readership. The findings were published in a peer reviewed journal, Media Asia. She was a part of the editorial team of the publication, “Built on Dreams, Grounded in Reality: Economic Policy Reform in the Philippines”. In addition she authored the chapter, “Unleashing the Power of Competition: The Philippine Telecommunications Reform Story”.

Ibrahim Kohlilul Rohman

- Currently a researcher at the Joint Research Center of the EU. Ibrahim obtained his PhD at Chalmers University in 2008. Before that he worked as researcher at the Institute for Economic and Social Research of the University of Indonesia. There he conducted research in the field of economic and public policies as well as providing training for government officers. Ibrahim's first interaction with CPRsouth came in 2009, when he attended the young scholar tutorials. Since then he has presented papers at three CPRsouth conferences. These contacts enabled him to get involved in research projects on broadband access and usage and the quality of life in 14 African countries with Research ICT Africa. Ibrahim has used the media to take his research to the public. Over the last two years, he has published two op-ed articles in the Jakarta post, a leading English newspaper in Indonesia. One of the op-eds was co-authored with his research collaborators at Research ICT Africa.



Mobile phone — making a choice in uphill struggle

Ibrahim Kholilul Rohman and Christophe Stork, Gothenburg, Sweden | Opinion | Sat, December 03 2011, 12:43 PM

Cost of basket on selected pre-paid products



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Most

- 1 RI d... teach...
- 2 You... takin...
- 3 Edit... Que... ver...
- 4 Mal... cart... with... sed...
- 5 Indo... to V...
- 6 Pop... brav... in S...
- 7 Pos... to c... king...



Research networks that seek to influence communication policy

	TPRC	EuroCPR	CPRsouth
# annual conferences	40	28	8
Funding	Mostly participant fees; major government support in first few decades	Mostly participant fees; major government support in early phase	Almost fully supported by IDRC & DFID with marginal participant & host contributions
Composition	Mostly senior academic scholars	Mostly senior academic scholars	Mostly mid-level & junior academic scholars
Disciplinarity	Multi	Multi	Multi
Target audience	US policy actors, centered on Washington DC	EC, centered on Brussels	All Asia-Pac policy actors; conference location changes
Evidence of demand from policy actors	At inception	At inception	None

Theories of change derived from mission statements

TPRC	EuroCPR	CPRsouth
Promote interdisciplinary thinking on current and emerging issues in communications and the Internet	Contribute constructively and critically to European Information Society policy developments	To facilitate creation, sustenance & continuous advancement of policy intellectuals capable of informed & effective intervention in ICT policy and regulation processes in specific country and regional contexts.
By disseminating and discussing new research relevant to policy questions in the U.S. and around the world.	By facilitating systematic interaction and critical analysis of both the highest academic excellence and the maximum policy and industrial relevance.	To develop capacity, stimulate interest, and promote research and systematic study in information and communication technology (ICT) policy and regulatory issues in the south.
Serves researchers, policymakers, and members of the private sector and civil society, from students to well-established practitioners.	Brings together academia, policy makers, and industry representatives.	Build capacity of junior- and mid-level scholars.

Objectives implicit in mission statements

	TPRC	EuroCPR	CPRsouth
Success as a platform*	✓	✓	✓
Success in catalyzing a policy research network	-	✓	✓
Success in taking research to policy	-	✓	✓

* each conference is a platform which brings together (a) researchers and practitioners and/or (b) researchers across disciplines and across countries

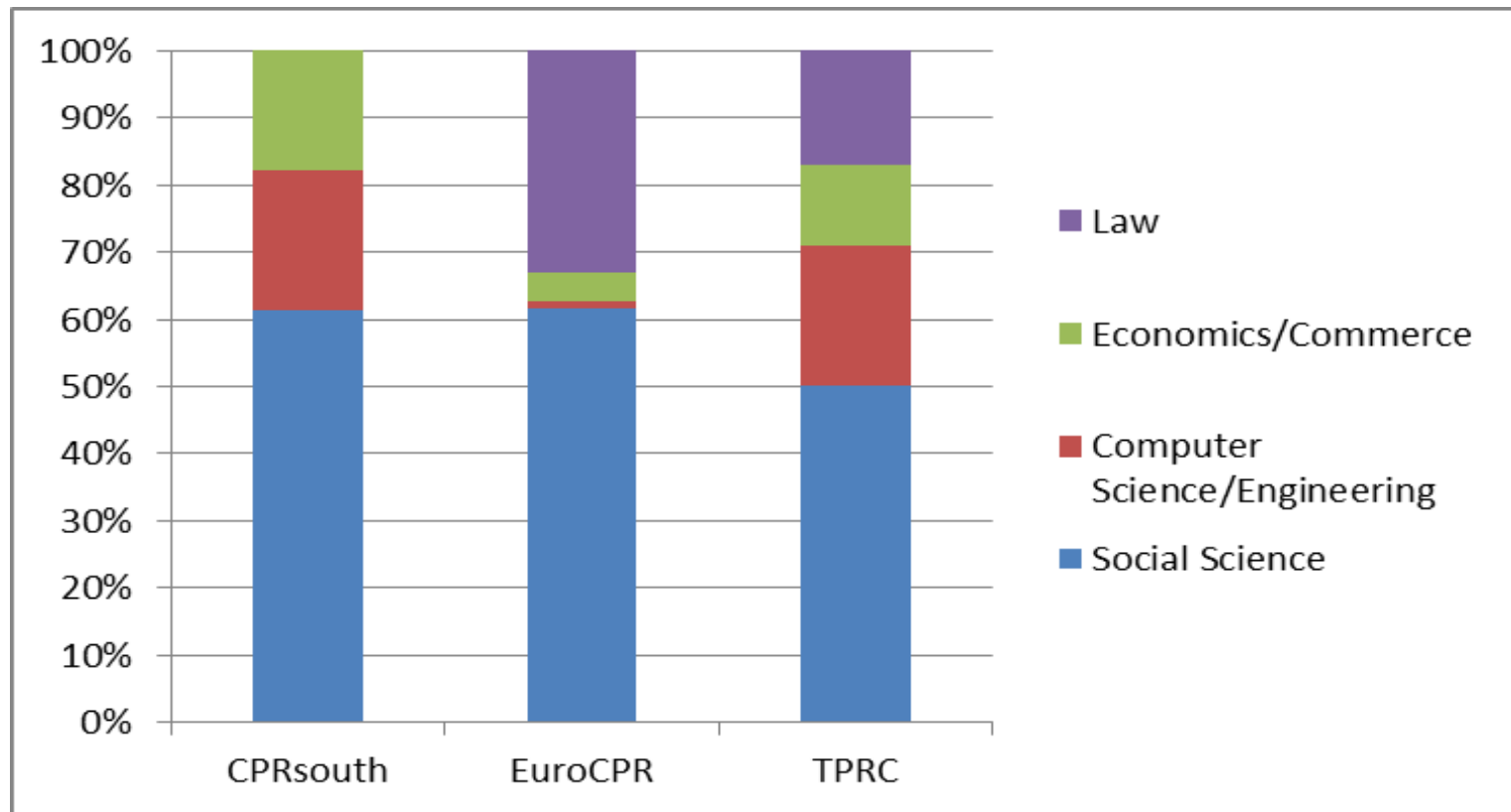
Success as platform

	TPRC	EuroCPR	CPRsouth
Distribution of attendees between mode-1 and mode-2*	✓	✓	✓
Distribution of attendees across disciplines	✓	✓	✓
Number of countries represented	-	✓?	✓

Surprisingly, all three organizations have around 20% Mode-2 scholars

- Gibbons et al.
 - Mode-1 = knowledge produced in formal settings such as universities and research institutes
 - Mode-2 = knowledge produced in work places and other settings
- Here
 - Mode-1 = those who represent universities or research institutions
 - Mode-2 = others who represent government, industry or non-profit organizations.

They converge on common topics but with different disciplinary approaches



High representation of lawyers in EuroCPR and total absence in CPRsouth (Based on 2012 data)

Establishing Research to Policy networks like CPRsouth will

- **Leverage** efforts of think tanks in ways that yield measurable contributions to policy from university faculty
- **Support** and encourage policy-oriented faculty within universities
- **Assist** universities produce graduates who are better equipped to take research to policy

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