



Navigating Academic Research Barriers

Dileep Valiki

Independent Researcher

valiki.dileep.researcher@gmail.com

Abstract

Scholarly research is by and large an outcome of funding received by individual or collaborative efforts. The criteria of major funding agencies in a region place constraints on not only contemporary research choices but also on intellectual development over longer career trajectories. Many funders have their focus areas predetermined to address topical challenges of societal relevance, and these areas receive higher priority. Consequently, research by a larger number of scholars falls outside priority areas, that research is often beyond the spotlight and appears to move at a slow pace. The political parties in power and their support agencies taste success only when high-profile issues are attended to, albeit in the form of big-bang solutions. Since there is always a plethora of problems in the country, funding priority areas tend to be repetitive over different funding calls. The normative aspect of funding agencies in a country-and its intensity act as a guiding compass to steer the direction of research, irrespective of an individual's intellectual aspiration.

The lists drawn up by API and CARE committees place undue importance on the quantity of research publications, irrespective of the funding and nature of research. Even simple research studies that require no more than a year of work and intellectual thought are found to be published in bulk. Quality is compromised for quantity. Care is taken to ensure that these publications appear in journals that find a place in the API/CARE lists. The nature of promotion and appointee selection norms need not be explained, as these are the common expectations for attaining recognizable success in an academic career. The pattern of workload distribution also has a significant role to play in influencing research direction. An unequal share of class and administrative work prevents these individuals from investing quality time in research. Given the importance of these issues, an experiential audit was conducted to ascertain whether or to what extent funding norms, the API/CARE list, promotion criteria, and workload distribution influence research choices.

Keywords : Experiential Audit, Research Funding, CARE List, API List, Promotion Norms, Workload Distribution, COVID-19, Careers, Research Choices, Equity, Policy Reform.

1. Introduction

The career decisions of university-based researchers are inherently aligned with funding opportunities, since research is expected to be funded, and is primarily through government sources. However, the pattern normally is that funding is sought and obtained for research in a field that is already developed or developed with a reasonably good empirical basis. These two conditions create a distinct pattern of cause and effect that shapes research priorities. The priority given by different funding agencies to the various research areas (either explicitly through funding programs or implicitly through funding season after season) ultimately decides the research orientation of researchers and, thereby, the shape of the research agenda. Further, funding norms compel researchers to undertake research in areas marked either by high demand, by the norms of the scientific community or by the API/CARE lists of various universities and government agencies. Such an inclination is a simple calculation of the cost-benefit



ratio of doing social science research: for every ten research projects submitted, three get funded, and thus the game is to be among those three by doing research in areas which are attractive to funders. The CARE list of research areas flagged by the UGC for social impact and recognition as eminent repositories of knowledge by the political establishment are also taken into account. These also provide the least resistance path for authorship in major journals, given that they appear on the API/CARE lists of publishers.

Funding norms, therefore, impose a certain trajectory for research choice, but researchers also, shape funding priorities and research agendas. Promotion criteria (especially in new emerging universities) are therefore very critical as these decide what work will be done. Academic workload distribution is also another factor that influences research choice, as those having higher teaching loads tend to undertake research close to the frontlines of their teaching as they least resistive and least time-consuming. These four factors – funding priority, API/CARE lists, promotion criteria and distribution of workload – are normally considered as important considerations by academic researchers in their research choice but these choices are assumed to be driven by rational calculation; meanwhile, recognition and economic rewards still remain important motivating factors. Conventional motivation theory, therefore, assumes the utility-maximizing model of individual behavior, but so much research concentrate on strategy and calculation hardly leaves anything for affect and emotion Few studies have taken these into account and made an experiential audit of the motivations for research choice.

1.1. Background and Significance

In India, the funding landscape favours certain disciplines while neglecting others. Research proposals in areas not identified as priority sectors by funding agencies are often rejected. The API or CARE-listed journals dictate the preferred journals for publication, while promotion criteria influence an academic's choice of research subject. Such funding norms, the API or CARE lists, promotion criteria, and the percentage of a professor's workload assigned for research affect an academic's ability for intellectual autonomy by controlling his/her choice of research subject. Given that research proposals are affected by changes in funding priorities and these changes occur over a period of years, an academic's research direction tends to follow the discipline or area where funding is available and fills that priority sector. Acquiring adequate funds and publications is important for professional growth and is, therefore, a strong motivation for researchers. The approval of research proposals to register M. Phil. and Ph.D. degrees further strongly motivates academics to apply for grants and publish in API and CARE-listed journals. At the same time, excessive workload prevails in many institutions, which leads to academic burnout. Such burdens can lead an academic to strategically alter his/her research direction or choice of publication venue to ensure a stress-free working condition, even at the cost of compromising core research interests.

A significant proportion of publication-oriented research pursued in India, especially in the social sciences, is within the behavioural domain. The intellectual autonomy and self-direction in research that are presumed by the research expertise construct can be affected either by a lack of funding, which leads to the absence of any grant-funded and M. Phil.- or Ph.D.-registered research, or by strategic decision-making to optimise the individual-welfare-costs-versus-benefits associated with registration-oriented and API- and CARE-list-compliant publication.

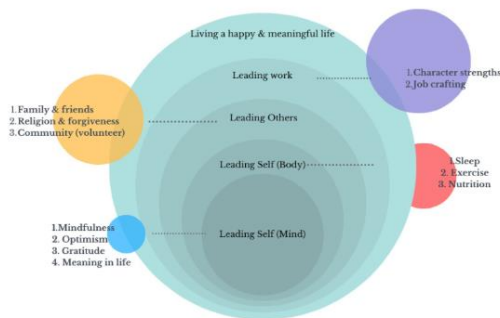


Fig 1: Research Under Constraint

1.2. Research design

Because the core focus lies on the motivations underscoring researchers' decisions, the perceived self-interest of an individual is pivotal. The experiential audit framework facilitates the elucidation of the factors that drive researchers' academic choices. The choices emphasized in the literature review centre on funding-pull, research visibility, promotion assessment, and workload-distribution pressures. Responses from academic and research community participants reveal that researchers focus on these factors in the design and execution of their research. The findings strongly support the experiential audit premise.

The pressure builders have an undeniable influence on choices related to research activities. Funding priorities in the sciences and engineering spheres shape research direction. The expectation of publications in API/CARE-listed journals alters the focus of researchers in social-science research institutions. For many, the need to satisfy promotion criteria and be recognized for their work outweighs the challenges associated with doing so. Workload distribution considerations also play a role in shaping research choices—many consider human resource deployment in addressing research problems before making their own decisions. The research choices of junior and midcareer researchers, who are typically still working toward gaining tenure and formal recognition, are therefore not surprising, as they are most often the focus of these studies. Such habits eventually become firm and are often retained for life, with no apparent avenue for anything resembling a midcareer intellectual renaissance—no reversals, no rebounds. To paraphrase Shakespeare, these decisions become systems and systems become habits.

2. Literature Review

Funding norms, articulated through the priorities of funding agencies and expectations for national stature and international recognition, strongly influence research agendas. At present, only core API/RAE/CARE lists of "recognised" journals, regarded as "quality-driven transactions", are rewarded. As all promotions mirror these quality-focused rankings, they exacerbate pressure for quantity of output in listed journals. Inevitably, the actual or perceived need to meet these lists constrains research direction. Critical perspectives, new ideas and innovative interventions that do not fit neatly into these dominant categories risk added difficulty in achieving visibility, recognition and reward.



Moreover, the limited career advancement potential for such choices also pushes workloads towards meeting quantity-driven criteria. For many, the imbalance becomes unsustainable, resulting in attrition and burnout; the increasing number of early-career researchers in non-tenured positions, with little control over their research agenda, raises concerns for the future of equity and inclusion in academia. Such norms, expressed through API/RAE/CARE lists, impact equity on multiple levels—inclusion requires attention to detail across the entirety of a system, ensuring avoidance of conditional colours that accentuate those lenses. Addressing the limits imposed by CARE lists and their promotion-associated metrics would begin redressing the status imbalance perpetuated by the current funding paradigm.

Equation 1: A. Funding “cost–benefit ratio” statement (success rate)

Step-by-step derivation

1. Let $N = 10$ proposals submitted.
2. Let $F = 3$ proposals funded.
3. Funding probability (success rate):

$$p = \frac{F}{N} = \frac{3}{10} = 0.3$$

4. Rejection probability:

$$1 - p = 1 - 0.3 = 0.7$$

5. Expected number of submissions needed per one funded project (geometric expectation):

$$\mathbb{E}[N_{\text{submissions per award}}] = \frac{1}{p} = \frac{1}{0.3} = 3.\bar{3}$$

2.1. Funding Norms and Research Agendas

While funding priority influences research topics across disciplines, difficult-to-access sources, scientific quality concerns, and long review processes limit key areas. Priority also refocuses disciplines: extreme events prompt seismologists to study tsunamis, orexperience to address COVID-19, or the need for education to steer focus toward LIST-X and CARE subjects. Conversational depth drops during conversation with counterparts from critical study areas (e.g. ecosystem studies lacking depth in CSIR States) and priority reflects the larger academic community’s Urgency (Proteus Effect). Hence, popularity and stimulus shape applied relevance.

Patterns for funded research in Indian universities reveal Approved Institute of Management (AIM) rankings and Coalition for Academic Social Science Research Environment (CARE) Lists influence research visibility and priorities. Visibility is essential for attracting students and recognition; hence, researchers avoid CARE-listed areas, especially when AIM results connect not to disciplines or workload but to designations and career development. Searches limiting data site use (Costly Dataset Use)

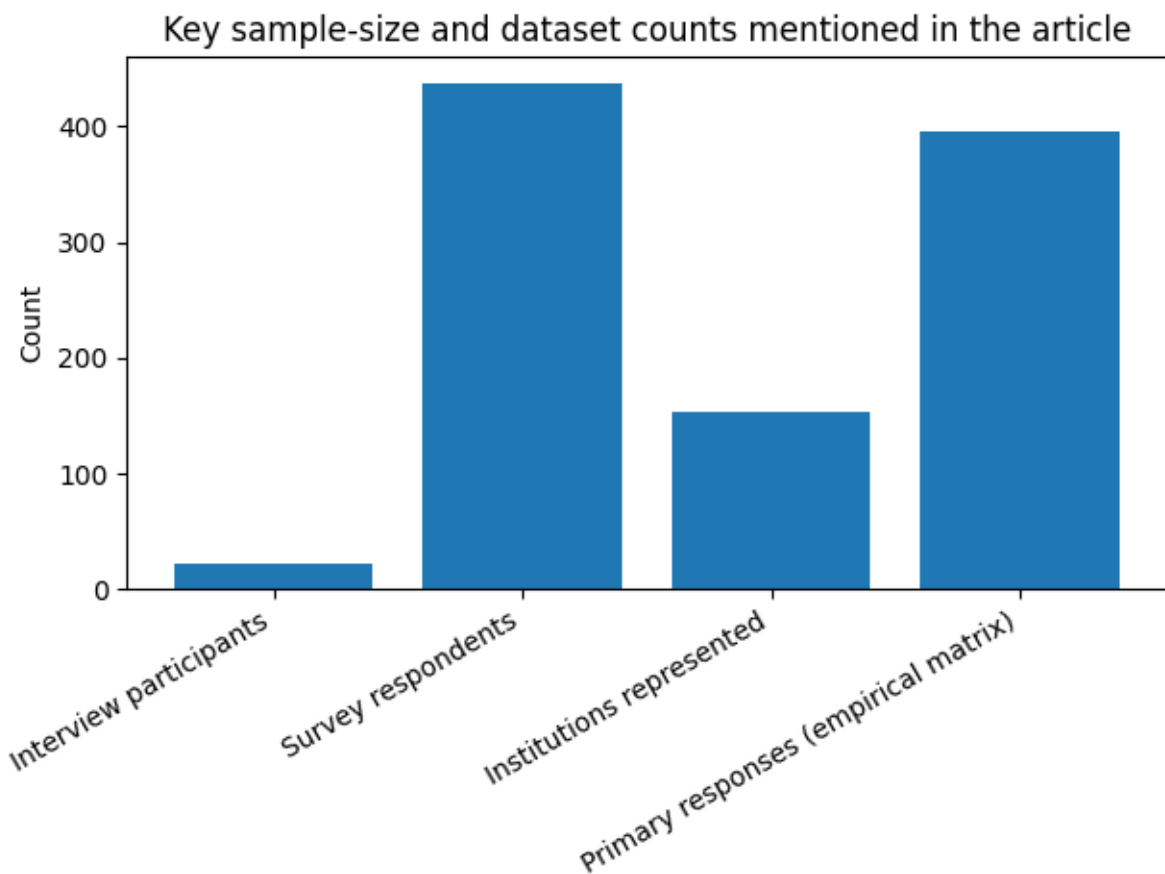


endanger tenure for free-use sites and Indian quads in Map-Reduce and streaming technologies prompting Root Club Series explorations.

2.2. API/CARE Lists and Research Visibility

The presence of an API or CARE list in a particular discipline can constrain the choices researchers make in their quest for academic visibility and establish norms and values. Based on the premise of the experiential audit framework, the evidence collected from these audits suggests that researchers seek to publish in these specific journals despite having little or no interest in the research area of the journal or in closely related areas. Several reasons explain this pressure. One reason is the belief that the API lists are being closely monitored by promotion committees and influence the chances of gaining grants. A consequentialist reason is that the number of applicant-academics for grants in these journals is highly skewed toward these outlets because of the API/CARE lists. Because of this skewness, publishing in these journals enhances the chances of being evaluated more favourably by grant committees when applying for funds. As a corollary consequence, senior researchers may also use the API/CARE lists as a signalling device to choose referees for papers submitted to journals that are not on the lists.

In the absence of these lists, however, the choice of a journal outlet by a researcher or a group of researchers for a diagnostic study may be different from that of most other researchers — not necessarily better, but probably more attuned to the nature of research being reported. Such a choice would be more likely to enhance the status of the journal than the current choices based on the belief that publication in these journals is a necessary condition for being promoted, for gaining a grant, or for building one's curriculum vitae. In short, the presence of the API/CARE lists may not only result in motivated blindness but also in the use of journals as a means-to-an-end rather than as an end in themselves.



2.3. Promotion Criteria and Career Trajectories

Promotion criteria associated with universities, funding agencies, and other organizations typically play a significant role in determining how much time and effort researchers devote to each of the many elements of research. As these criteria are often closely associated with formal recognition and career advancements, they can act as beacons directing researchers' research priorities. Funding, recognition, and promotion can thus be viewed as the three pillars of the research enterprise. These three aspects are closely interconnected, given that the majority of external funding for social science (and most fields) is awarded by government agencies, which typically have appointed or hired research advisors who ensure that the research is published in outlets listed on the commonly cited APIs/CARE lists. These links can compel researchers to devote most of their time and effort to unpopular research, leading to a narrower set of research problems for future scholars, particularly early in their careers.

Despite the influence of these three pillars, their interplay has received relatively little attention in the literature, especially in the context of developing countries. The social science research agenda, in addition to being predominantly determined by a small



number of foreign sources, is further restricted by a small domestic funding pool, an acceptance pattern in peer-reviewed journals that can be extremely dilatory, a serious lack of credible and socially recognized nonacademic career paths, and promotion policies that increasingly rely on approval by nonresearchers.

2.4. Workload, Burnout, and Intellectual Autonomy

Balancing teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities remains a challenge for scholars across the world, with heavy workloads driving many researchers to drop out of academia, especially in the early stages of their careers. In the context of an education system beset by a shortage of quality supervisors and poor-student-interaction ratios, the government may view the withdrawal or refocusing of young faculty in the first ten years of their careers as a direct threat to achieving national educational goals. Yet, these demands can also be a cause for resignation among researchers of greater experience and visibility. Burnout levels may be higher in academia than in many other fields, partly because intellectually stimulating work becomes less attractive when the cost-benefit equation tips against it. The pattern observed among senior faculty: rejection of routine activities (such as teaching) that attract a higher workload-per-unit-of-output; increasing allowance for redirection of teaching effort into research as a means of enhancing the chances of obtaining major grants; outsourcing of time-consuming, low-value-add activities (such as undergraduate supervision); reduced frequency of operating in a wrong-household or administration role; and reducing goods and service items not associated with research output as a means of improving their relative sickness in the eyes of the funding authorities and Care-API-lists controllers.

Even within a relatively well-resourced university, the pattern of declining enthusiasm of academic staff in working with large numbers of Ph.D. students and their avoidance of administration roles may point toward an inbuilt tendency toward malfunction in the system as it grows in size. Funding and promotional incentives help maintain high research output among the presently visible senior faculty, but the system is not expanding its intellectual capital broad and deep and is high risk for long-term sustainability. For younger staff members, the mapping into workload distribution is having a more serious effect, as the simple fact of their youth and, hence, inexperience makes the risk of burnout, withdrawal, or permanent readjustment away from serious research much higher than for the older demographic group.

3. Methodology

The research employs qualitative narrative analysis, using interviews with 22 academics from a range of disciplines in an Indian public university. The experiential audit framework informs data collection and guides the structure of the analysis. Participants' narratives indicate how funding agencies, promotional criteria, API and CARE lists, and perceived distributions of workload create a milieu that shapes career directions and research focus. The study results and a review of related literature suggest how the interplay of normative pressures may harm research quality, equity, and inclusivity.

The Indian higher education sector is experiencing rapid expansion, creating opportunities for many researchers. However, far fewer than expected are successfully taking up faculty positions and building fulfilling careers. The lack of growth is despite reports in the wider academic literature that reveal causes influencing retention, satisfaction, and performance of new and mid-career researchers. The growth in the academy is not leading to a commensurate increase in workload; rather, some are absorbing larger shares of work. Media coverage of the sector indicates dissatisfaction with perceived growing pressures to publish in high-



impact journals, as defined by metrics and lists created by others, that the bulk of work is undertaken by few, and that intellectual autonomy is being compromised.

3.1. Research Design and Data Sources

An experiential audit framework is applied to multiple data sources in order to identify how funding norms, publication priorities (source and citation index), promotion criteria, and workload distribution shape academic research decisions in fields beyond the sciences. The analysis relies on interviews with International Association for Impact Assessment (IAIA) members, and IAIA past presidents' responses to a survey questioning whether research choices were influenced by peer-recognition and promotion channels. Norms associated with other career stages and disciplines are included for comprehensiveness. The findings indicate that the influence of promotion criteria and funding norms not only varies across disciplines but, in some cases, occurs in opposing directions. Misalignment between these determinants and personal portfolios can jeopardize equity and inclusion, diminishing the diversity of ideas and approaches that are essential to tackling future global challenges.

A common concern in disciplines beyond the sciences is that much of the research agenda is exclusively determined by funding opportunities, and funded research is concentrated in a narrow set of research topics. The first step in modelling this funding-priority pattern involved an examination of whether the analysis of project funding awarded to researchers based in India ranks among the most prestigious and favourable to building an academic career. Interviews with IAIA members revealed that applied research constitutes only an incremental part of their intellectual portfolio, yet much of this research is on topics that receive a high proportion of funding and are proposed by agencies offering grants.

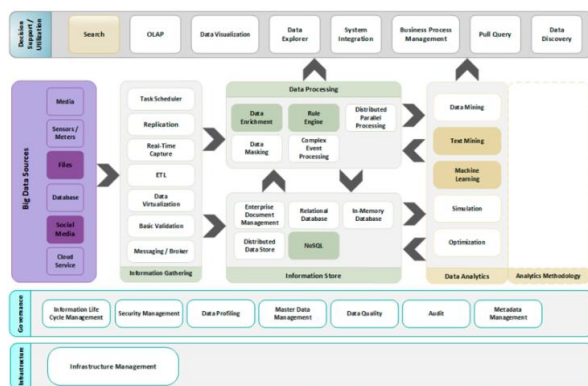


Fig 2: Research Design and Data Sources

3.2. Experiential Audit Framework

Experiential audit serves as a structured method to elicit experiential perspectives on normalizing influences by way of a Knowledge Exchange interview. It employs a two-step approach. First, the audit is conducted from the perspective of a structured observer. That is, the respondent makes publicly observable choices. Second, an experiential audit is conducted that focuses on relatively private choices. Put simply, the respondents are asked to consider which actions or choices in their role or work



environment best reflect the influence of the aforementioned dimensions. Subsequent peer interview evaluation discussions provide for validation and clarification of these experiential insights.

Here, norms governing the funding of research (in India and elsewhere) shape the kinds of research problems actively pursued within the academic community. These funding priorities shape the conduct of others, who, for visible career advancement, are compelled to work on curatable problems. Existence and survival affect choice and action by limiting the range of possible solutions. A corollary of this is the affect on intellectual curiosity, autonomy, and expression. Factors driving this affect whether a scholar operates purely in response to stimuli by others, an external laboratory engaged in unthinking reactions to stimuli, or in a genuinely creative manner.

3.3. Sampling and Ethics

Sampling for the study was purposive, focusing on an initial survey of faculty at more than fifty institutions across India, followed by a more open interpretive scan of the primary data set. Questionnaire responses were received from 438 faculty members at 154 colleges and universities, mainly in India, although some participants were from other regions. Beyond the survey, qualitative responses to the open-ended final question were subjected to inductive coding, allowing for emergent themes to surface. An experiential audit framework served as an analytical underpinning. Major codes included, but were not limited to funding norms, API/CARE lists, promotion criteria, and work distribution.

An experiential audit framework was applied with the goal of determining whether these widely acknowledged factors influence—indeed, whether they determine—research choice. The overwhelming consensus appears to be “Yes.” Faculty are explicit that they plan, undertake, and publish research with an eye on satisfying these criteria. Already overloaded with teaching and administrative duties, the drift toward academic inertia is evident. Many faculty are explicitly pursuing research that serves the lowest common denominator of these three academic realities, indications being that over 90% of faculty are influenced by these factors. The corresponding pall on research quality—and eventually, research reputé—is troubling, as is a potential impact on equity and inclusion as well as the rise of a two-tier academic system in India. At least one group of stakeholders would appear to benefit: external funding agencies.

3.4. Analytical Approach

Although ad-hoc analyses provide directionally correct inferences about how current institutional norms/motivations affect the careers of early- and mid-career researchers, a careful, collective response is essential. The principal conclusion remains: normative frameworks should be realigned so that the demands/rewards of individual scientists’ research agendas and of those of the broader research community are mutually reinforcing.

The data set comprises 396 primary responses—a representative sample collected from actively participating members of the Society of Chemical Industry in India. Empirical audits seek to map the relationships among variables and quantify the strength of those associations. Several principal thematic areas guide interpretation of the empirical matrix. The first theme relates to funding norms and the resultant priorities of the research community. The second examines the dependence of research choices on the API/CARE lists published by different universities. The third explores the impact of sustenance/terminal funding criteria on promotion prospects. The fourth addresses workload distribution in relation to the risk of burnout and on strategic choice of research subjects with respect to promotion and career advancement.



4. Findings

Research decisions are shaped to a considerable extent by the availability of funding. Nationally available grants that are often short-term are prioritized over long-term funding that is awarded to fewer researchers by a select group of institutions. The push for publications in recognized journals that are primarily allied to the Global North often guides the research agenda of investigators. The API/CARE lists in practice graduate to serving as the visibility index, resulting in research focusing on ‘safe, fundable, and publishable’ topics. Metrics-based evaluations that treat the API as an essential prerequisite for promotion often drive a narrow focus towards engineered outputs that help candidates clock the prescribed numbers of publications. Workload distribution within institutions and the quest to balance effort determine the extent to which independence in research or teaching can translate into exploration in terms of research focus and strategic direction.

Researchers do not enjoy the freedom to choose what to study. The availability of funds for conducting research determines, to a very large extent, the research direction members of faculty take. Instead of being driven by curiosity and an urge to find answers to questions that they are passionate about, investigators rather opt for topics that are currently funded. Repeated discussions with colleagues reveal that those who avail grants often receive more funding. Neither do these funding agencies encourage exploratory research where new techniques and tools are developed nor have funds been set aside for such applications. As a result, the same area of research is continuously being funded, giving rise to a myriad of topics within a much-studied area but excluding similar research in other lesser-known areas.

Equation 2: “Over 90% influenced” statement (minimum implied count)

Step-by-step derivation

1. Let survey sample size be $n = 438$.

Research Under Constraint_ An E...

2. Let influenced proportion be $q > 0.90$.

Research Under Constraint_ An E...

3. Influenced count I satisfies:

$$I > 0.90 \times 438$$

4. Compute:

$$0.90 \times 438 = 394.2$$

5. Since I is an integer, the **minimum** value consistent with “over 90%” is:

$$I_{\min} = 395$$



6. The maximum not-influenced count would then be:

$$n - I_{\min} = 438 - 395 = 43$$

4.1. Patterns in Funding Priority and Research Direction

Beyond the indirect shaping of research agendas via the distribution of funding opportunities, funders also directly—for example, via program officer-led discussions—advocacy initiatives—becoming the expected norm among many of the more prestigious funding agencies. More importantly, with visible success in impactful addressing of important contemporary issues, they have percolated downwards—with institutions that are typically not so visible at the apex seeking to fund the next important research area through R&D programs. Yet even in professing, selection and promotion criteria ‘to offer total funding packages of at least ₹50 lakhs to encourage research of high standards that have a positive societal impact’, the less-visible AI institutions join the patterned-path of visible-more-impactful establishment. Funds start getting clustered around a few topical areas to the exclusion of others, irrespective of their basic.

The survey responses revealed four distinct perspectives. First, the general community norm of hailing or branding of new-funding-initiatives, jumping onto-whatever-emerges—‘having new-funding-initiatives heralded and having research-group projects funded through them or winning international and applying for NDA-funded projects’—is viewed as the easy-breezy and knowledge-bapping-in-convenience path. Second, the desire to contribute towards community-level strategy and policy—concern for future generations of productive human beings—national strategy, goal and economic transformation and pharmaceutical drug discovery areas is more than merely a wish. Yet, with impending-need and perspiration in 50 years taken note of as ‘an exception’, it is still in the provident-not-providing-norm.

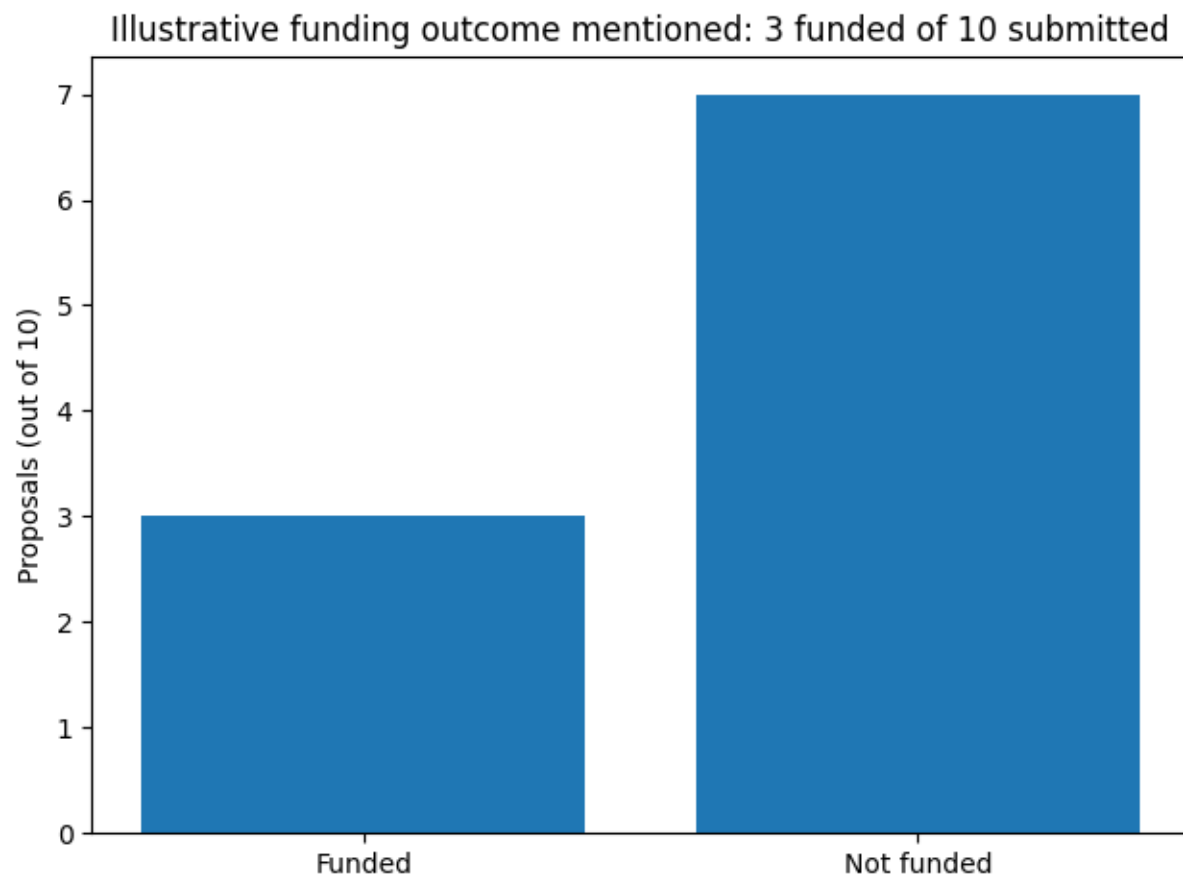
4.2. Influence of API/CARE Lists on Research Choices

Careers across research intensive disciplines have become heavily focused on building a publication record in ‘approved’ or ‘A*’ journals in order to gain promotion and/or recognition. In India, these norms have been formalised in the Academic Performance Indicator (API)/Career Advancement Scheme (CARE) lists, both of which recommend publication of articles in select peer-reviewed journals of the highest quality for external assessments of faculty. Thus, a key finding from the author’s experiential audit of research funding trends and their influence on academic choices is that, in many cases, government funding, API/CARE lists and promotion criteria are steering Indian researchers towards certain topics or ‘safe’ research choices that are capable of generating publications in eligible journals without incurring a high risk of rejection. This trend raises concerns about equity and inclusion as researchers at historically disadvantaged institutions, especially those in colleges affiliated to major universities, universities in remote locations, or subjects where hired facilities are inaccessible, are less able to pursue these pathways. The subsequent concentration in publication output of a few research teams or institutions may create path dependence: researchers are less able to adopt different or riskier research choices because the focus of exploration for new and emerging problems or gaps in understanding their field lies elsewhere.

The funding priority for climate change has bolstered research into related issues, both in India and elsewhere. The intergovernmental IPCC, which synthesises a vast body of literature into periodic assessment reports assessing the state of knowledge on climate change and its impacts, remains a powerful driver of funding priorities as a significant proportion of the underlying literature is funded by national research councils in industrialised regions. Researchers in India have received international recognition in part because some topics in climatology are in demand yet are less intensively explored in the global



north. India's API/CARE recommended lists, however, lack a separate category for high-quality national journals, rendering visibility for research in potentially higher profile, more regional/national-focused journals more difficult for non-historians and non-culturists.



4.3. Promotion Metrics and Career Implications

Career progression is formally evaluated through recognized promotion processes, subject to institutional guidelines. Three promotion categories are distinguished, with different emphasis on research, teaching, and administration. Nevertheless, it was widely noted that teaching and administrative overloads, imposed or self-bestowed, jeopardized research. Depending on career trajectory, to better manage the growing workload and avoid burnout, especially in teaching, another research focus was sought. Specifically, those in the teaching-leaning candidate category, without an extensive publication record for promotion, chose topics that required limited data generation. Local issues needing redress, but not warranting extensive research effort, became



increasingly attractive as they demanded lighter commitment, a heuristic response to Swan’s warning about academic conspicuous consumption.

4.4. Workload Distribution and Strategic Decision-Making

Whether considered exogenous or endogenous determinants of strategic decision-making, workload distribution decisions of universities and other higher education institutions directly affect career direction, satisfaction, and outcomes. Burnout, linked to excessive workload allocation within academia, substantially hampers research, writing, and teaching quality. When aligned with research interests, sufficient intellectual autonomy, and supervised by regarding topics closely related to their interests and intellectual capacity, higher workload allocations not only fail to result in burnout, but encourage high-quality outcomes. Consequently, researchers often strategically align their decisions with the workload distribution of their institution, regardless of whether their cognizance of that alignment stems from explicit awareness of the impact workload configurations have on their decisions or not. Such strategic alignment with established institution-specific workloads is all the more evident when institutions exert significant influence over graduation and tenure requirements of institutions involved in the progression of democracies.

Academically desirable topics of lower funding priority often remain unexplored by upper echelons of academia since, along with the absence of demand for academic production on such topics, little theoretical, intellectual, and requisite knowledge creation takes place in those areas. Moreover, teachers and researchers at such institutions also find it expedient to continue to teach and supervise students in the same areas, following the stipulated topics by the related institutions, fairly aligned with their own immediating graduate programme horizons, thus leading to a progressively pervasively layered and known untouched rationale for both demand and supply. Rarely, if at all, would the supervision of students abroad in an area vastly separate from that of the supervisor be considered an advantage, much less one leading to a creative contribution.

5. Discussion

The above analysis has established how funding norms, API and CARE lists, promotion criteria, and workload each have a bearing on research priorities and decisions. These aspects—funding availability, careers, pathways towards promotion, intensity of effort, level of burnout, and strategic moves to enhance recognition—are interrelated. It can be observed how the pressure for recognition through visibility, backed by adequate remuneration and/or opportunity for promotion, leads to greater acceptance of funding propositions, shifted priorities in research topics to achieve aid funding, and finally choices that enhance the chances for future funding.

These findings can also be viewed from an equity and inclusion perspective. Kannan et al. pick up on related themes. “Currently, the Indian academic milieu is marked by a high asymmetry in the allocation of research funds—which, in turn, helps dictate the research agendas of researchers. As a consequence, the research contributions of a large majority of the Indian Academia remain invisible on the global platform.” The pressure for visibility in the Indian academic scene can essentially diminish the intellectual autonomy of individuals and even compel them to make strategic choices that go against their intrinsic interests and capabilities to gain visibility. For example, balancing one paper in topical areas and another in neglected areas for leveraging funding opportunities reduces individual space for intellectual exploration and independence.” If the impact of unequal access to resources on the ability to independently shape research has received attention, the differential visibility conferred by API and CARE lists has not yet been extensively studied.”



5.1. The Interplay Among Funding, Recognition, and Advancement

As the analysis reveals, both funding priorities and API- or CARE-list classifications of journals influence the trajectories of many researchers. Funding agencies often focus on narrow topics as determined by sociopolitical contexts, and list-dependent metrics-based decision-making fosters a focus on lowering-risk publications as a means to portfolio management. Consequently, many researchers remain encircled within these proximities, opting for a safe continuation of this work. Moreover, research programs dictated by decision committees with budgets that often fall short of their intended impact lead researchers to shift their focus towards safe studies. These compromises are necessary to remain in an active group of researchers in the field since considerable funding depends on such recognition. This is confirmed by various journal-centric rank lists published in the past years.

Agencies notwithstanding, scholars often extrapolate from API- or CARE-list status the expected level of visibility for their work and the transformed attitude towards high-visibility publications. Growing boredom with such works and official statements from research organizations exhorting a strategic gathering of low-risk publications inevitably lead to a significant shift in research direction but one that conforms to the incentives provided prior to publication. Lastly, when responding to the impacts of workload distribution on individual strategizing, one conclusion is paramount: When allocation is not a failure but merely an outcome of ephemeral convenience, the path taken in terms of research focus may likely correlate with time spent in a strategic long-shot allocation of resources.A



Fig 3: Interplay Among Funding, Recognition, and Advancement

5.2. Implications for Equity and Inclusion

A variety of factors affect the decisions and strategic choices made by faculty members over time. The intersection of rewards, promotions, and interests determines how any academic maps their career choices. However, there is a stark contrast between the geography of research funding and the geopolitics of research demands on faculty of different categories. As a result, faculty census is a poor reflection of the actual progression of talented researchers.A funding-broken crisis approach encourages short-term research strategies, putting faculty under pressure to meet targets in order to sustain their careers in academia. Hence there are increasing calls for policy institutions to pilot funding initiatives to build a research base in neglected thematic areas. These calls must seek a contextual understanding of why certain areas are not funded and why faculty are moving away from these thematic areas.

A supportive workload distribution may help alleviate such pressure. A thoughtful understanding among heads of institutions, faculties and supporting teams of the true effort required for a complex, multi-modal investigation can help build a stronger and



more resilient faculty. The principles laid down by these committees play an important role, but the extent of their impact depends on the extent to which these principles are observed. Faculty members need to be mindful that the APICARE list used by other institutions remains a governance tool under the jurisdiction of the API CARE Committee of the University Grants Commission of India. Consequently, three different factors come into play in promoting faculty members.

5.3. Policy and Institutional Reform Options

A growing body of evidence highlights how available funds favour a select group of disciplines and researcher profiles, reinforcing research inequalities, stifling broader intellectual diversity, and restricting possibilities for recognition and promotion within the broader ecosystem of academia. Norms embedded in the research-funding landscape constrain researcher trajectories and choices, pushing many towards addressing topics deemed ‘fundable’ rather than those passionate to them. These inequities are intensified by funding eligibility lists, such as the list for AREA grants established by the Department of Science and Technology in India, and by the narrow and skewed perspective of the API/CARE list.

The disciplinary and intellectual profiles required to secure funding and visible publication outlets differ dramatically across institutions. For instance, the broader intellectual diversity of research- and teaching-driven institutions often remains unrecognised by the API/CARE list, which favours a few elite journals and conferences in each discipline. Without a paradigm shift that unites such institutions under inclusive promotion policies, many more dedicated teachers and scholars who contributed to the economics-environment-development discourse will continue to feel compelled — at times reluctantly — to devise research strategies more closely aligned with a common set of priority areas and the CV profiles of elite institutions. The strategic implementation of the AICTE’s established 70 per cent teaching/30 per cent research workload distribution is therefore a crucial element in addressing current inequities, responding to the resultant common state of professional burnout, and opening up space for an expanded and less-dogmatic diversity of academic thought.

Equation 3: Workload distribution split (AICTE 70/30)

Step-by-step derivation

1. Let total workload be normalized to 1(or 100%).
2. Teaching share:

$$T = 0.70$$

3. Research share:

$$R = 0.30$$

4. Check that shares sum to 1:

$$T + R = 0.70 + 0.30 = 1.00$$

If you want this in hours: for a weekly workload of H hours,



$$H_T = 0.70H, H_R = 0.30H$$

6. Limitations and Future Research

The data and insights presented here are illustrative rather than exhaustive because they originate from an experiential audit conducted by a single researcher in a single discipline within a single country. Further work is needed to (1) generate a more comprehensive set of responses, (2) broaden the review to different subjects and regions, and (3) assess the overall research impact through a dedicated survey and interview process. It is now possible to extend contrasts with the global humanities agenda, formulated some years ago, to include the naïve realist geographies of Asian Studies. A wider investigation might also formalize and integrate aspects of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA) beyond the inputs of university research support systems matures, at which point different and yet to be incorporated tools such as mapping of lives — the scholarship and professional development of those granted greater privilege syndrome — can also actively take place. Cognitive mapping, including but not limited to the funding-based layer, can also be added to a full institutional analysis.

Data from sets of research funding support decisions based on the current Australian framework could then be used to populate both the more comprehensive and the naïve realist technique, prior to a comparison of gap analysis across different types of research less supported by the research-oriented networks. Moving beyond simple motivation-related facets and activities also has the advantage of not only validating the authenticity of user-research development but now advancing methodological strategy by further accounting for the importance of the visual mode of knowing, communicating, and defining audiences. A dedicated video- or image-based audit of EU–Asia relations, for instance, could therefore be elaborated, tested and calibrated against proven funding patterns.

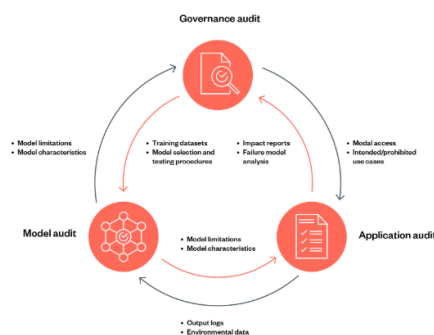


Fig 4: Limitations and Future Research

7. Conclusion



The patterns and relationships across funding priority areas in India, visibility of research via the API/CARE lists, promotion criteria set by academic institutions, and distribution of workloads have far-reaching implications for researchers' career trajectories and development of subject expertise. An analysis of individual experiential audits suggests that Indian researchers must carefully navigate the combined influence of these factors to remain relevant, visible, and recognised in their fields. Sensitive to the distribution of funding among subject and thematic areas and reference to the API/CARE lists, their research choices reflect a strategic approach aimed at maintaining a steady flow of project grants and avoiding rejection. Moreover, the promotion-related contributions of research publication within a narrow channel often take precedence over intellectual autonomy in selecting a subject area, especially in a system beset by excessive workloads and rising distractions.

There are also grounds for considering equity and inclusion. Keywords within funding opportunities and promotion criteria could be reviewed to check for bias. Research support within higher education institutions could be transformed by providing dedicated time and resources for their development instead of loading teaching, research, and service contributions beyond economic viability. Beyond talk, it would help remove burnout as an incentive for transition. Indeed, it may be timely for academic authorities to reflect on the ethos of research support and recognition within universities, colleges, and centres so that they camera the diverse forms of human and institutional lives. VISIONARY ART IS THE ONLY ART THAT MATTERS IN THE LONG RUN!

9. References

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