



International Studies Quarterly Review

2006-2010

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Introduction

This paper reviews the peer-reviewed academic journal *International Studies Quarterly (ISQ)*. In the first section, I briefly present the general overview of the journal, namely its background, focus and the position within the discipline of International Relations (IR). The second section contains the quantitative analysis which employs basic descriptive statistics. Data were extracted from the total of 223 articles in 20 issues covering five consecutive years 2006-2010, i.e. volumes 49-54. The findings about the authors and their affiliation, the topics of articles (research areas), and the theoretical vs. empirical character of published papers are presented in the form of commented frequency distributions. Also, a broader discussion on methodology is included. The third section then provides a qualitative oriented report on the main topics discussed in the journal. The paper closes with a couple of observations that are summarized in the concluding section.

About the journal

International Studies Quarterly is the flagship journal of the International Studies Association (ISA) and it is published since 1956. This means that in 2011 the journal entered its 55th volume. Similar to the majority of the scientific journals in the field, the *ISQ* has four issues per year. At present, every issue provides a space for 10 to 12 articles covering approximately 250-300 pages. This is more than the usual extent of other academic journals, which typically do not exceed 200 pages. It could be perhaps attributed to the fact that the *ISQ* is already a well-established journal with world-wide recognition and significant appeal within the scientific community.

To illustrate, the ISI Journal Citation Reports Ranking for 2009 puts the *ISQ* to the 8th position out of 59 journals in International Relations and to the 12th out of 112 journals in Political Science. The *ISQ*'s Impact Factor as per 2009 is 1.625.¹ In comparison with other two leading journals in the field, it is a fairly good position; *International Organizations* had the Impact Factor in the corresponding year 2.0 and *International Security* 3.243, respectively. According to the official statement, the mission of the *ISQ* is to "acquaint a broad audience of readers with the best work being done in the variety of intellectual traditions included under the rubric of international studies".² This is, of course, supported by the journal's founding

¹ Updated rankings as per 2011: 14/81 International Relations; 28/149 Political Science, Impact Factor: 1.265.

² <http://www.isanet.org/publications/>

association. The ISA was established in 1959³ in order to “promote research and education in international affairs and to give American scholars and practitioners interested in international studies a regional base for developing and sharing research”.⁴ Besides the *ISQ*, the association also publishes other titles, namely *International Studies Review*, *International Studies Perspectives*, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, *International Political Sociology*, and *International Interactions*.

In other words, the ISA and its journals seem to promote and reflect essentially American (i.e. the US) view of the discipline in both selection of the topics and applied methodology. This observation is supported by the quantitative analysis below. Nevertheless, the scholars from other countries are also part of the ISA’s large network. According to its website, the ISA has over 5,000 members world-wide representing 80 countries. The ISA thus openly claims that it is “the most respected and widely known scholarly association in this field”.⁵

According to the journals’ editors, the contributions to the *ISQ* are welcomed in three strands of research – theoretical, empirical, and normative. However, as can be seen in the second section of this review, the majority of all published articles is empirical or has at least an empirical element. This reflects the quantitative (rationalist) orientation of the research conducted in social sciences (and particularly in IR) in the US. The editors explicitly encourage submissions which deal with disciplinary as well as interdisciplinary issues and the articles covering important questions and controversies in the field are continually being given the “first preference”.

An interesting fact about the journal’s mission statement is an appeal to all authors employing quantitative empirical methodology to make their data fully accessible. This is to ensure that the results and procedures could be verified and replicated at any time, should anyone wish to do so. Moreover, the required material must include not just initial data but also any computer program codes used in the analysis, as well as clear explanation of how the analysis has been conducted. Such an open statement can be only welcomed since it helps to guarantee the scientific character of the conducted research. However, making data and computer codes publicly available, together with transparent methodology, still does not

³ Interestingly, if we are to take the *ISQ*’s volume information then it implies that the journal was being published actually before the formation of the ISA.

⁴ For more information, see the website of ISA at <http://www.isanet.org/about-isa/historypurpose-of-isa.html>

⁵ <http://www.isanet.org/>

mean that the research is actually significant or that it makes an important contribution. To ensure this is the case, a review process is necessary.

The *ISQ* is a peer-reviewed journal. This means that the articles are only accepted for publication once they survive a lengthy double blind (anonymous) review process, which assesses the scientific value of the submitted article. In theory, this should result in the selection of only the best contributions. However, it has to be taken into account that the reviews are conducted by fellow scientists who may, but also may not, reach the consensus about the quality (or any other aspect) of the research behind the submitted article.

Thus, it might be rather difficult to publish an article which has, for instance, a very unorthodox view about the discipline. This is not just about different opinions. The editors and reviewers can be implicitly biased towards one particular conception of IR (such as the “Western view” on the discipline) and those scholars offering a very different perspective or working with non-favored methodology could be automatically excluded from the process of getting published. The readers of the journal, as well as the whole scientific community around it, are then left with a self-supporting and self-confirming view of the discipline.

On the other hand, these are rather hypothetical and partial concerns. The fact that the peer-review process is functioning rather well and, consequently, that only the best articles are being published, is reflected in the journal’s position within the field and the respect it earns among the scientists. These aspects, however intangible, add up over time and are subsumed in the journal’s Impact Factor. Strong reputation of the journal then constantly encourages the editors to maintain this position and it also attracts submissions from good authors.

According to the latest annual report,⁶ the acceptance rate in 2010 was about 8.6% of all submissions on which a decision was made. This is not a surprising figure. Low acceptance rate corresponds to the position the journal holds in the rankings. The higher place the journal has, the more articles are submitted for publication which results in a higher rejection rate. Much more important indicator is the Impact Factor, which is contingent on the actual reception of the articles published in the journal. This is measured according to the number of citations and references these articles receive in two years after their publication. Even this indicator is not without its problems but such meta-assessment of how to evaluate the added value of scientific research is not the purpose of this review.

⁶ 2010 Annual Report, *International Studies Quarterly*, available from: <http://www.isanet.org/publications/>

The journal is edited by William R. Thompson, currently at the Department of Political Science at Indiana University, who also serves as its managing director. The broader editorial board consists of almost hundred scholars affiliated mostly with the universities throughout the United States. The *ISQ* is indexed and abstracted in major scientific databases, which include (among others): EBSCO Online, ProQuest, and Thomson ISI. Thematic keywords, which already indicate the focus of the journal, are *politics*, *sociology*, *psychology*, and *history*. At present, the *ISQ* is published by Wiley Periodicals, an established and renowned publishing house since 1807.

Quantitative analysis

1. Institutional affiliation of authors

The *ISQ* publishes papers by the researchers who represent different academic and international research institutions. The analysis of the authors' affiliation suggests that over 73% of the authors, who published their articles in the journal during the period 2006-2010, are associated with the universities in the US. Such high success rate for the publications among the US scholars may indicate a substantial quality and importance of research conducted at the US universities in the fields of IR and political science. However, it should not be overlooked that the journal voices primarily the views of the US based scientists, which are not necessarily identical with the opinions of other researchers from different cultural backgrounds. Also, since the US is an active and one of the most important players in international politics, we could expect that the journal based in the US will be publishing more articles related to the American foreign policy issues than, for example, the topics about south-east Asia.

Regarding other affiliations, about 7% of all authors are affiliated with the universities in the UK, and around 10% with other European universities and research institutes (almost half of the authors from European universities represent Norwegian and German institutions, respectively). The papers written by the authors affiliated with institutions in other countries appear rather rarely in the journal, with almost 3% for the universities in Australia and New Zealand, 2% for the universities in Canada, and less than 1% for Asian universities.

Since the journal focuses predominantly on international relations, it publishes also papers written by the researchers from international institutions and research institutes (around 5% of the authors of the *ISQ*'s publications have this affiliation category). Several papers in the

journal were written by the researchers from the Centre for the Study of Civil War (CSCW) at the International Peace Research Institute in Oslo, which concentrates on studies of international and domestic conflicts, institutional changes, human rights and governance. Additionally, there are several papers co-authored by the representatives of the United Nations organization.

The quantitative analysis of the authors' affiliation shows that scholars from the US universities are the most successful in getting published in this journal. More generally, apart from the American dominance in the IR research, a dominance of Western published research is noticeable. This creates an impression of Western hegemony in the discipline. Large majority of published papers comes from the institutions located in advanced countries which tend to exhibit the Western way of thinking and approaches to international issues. This may constitute an implicit cultural bias. However, Western universities continue to attract large numbers of foreign students and the US are usually their first preferred destination when choosing the university abroad. Western, and especially the US universities, are continuously occupying top positions in academic rankings. Still, the views and findings of the IR researchers from the developing countries find little space in the journal. This could be interpreted as a "cultural bias" of the editors or, alternatively, that these papers did not meet the quality standards for the publication in the journal. In any case, the *ISQ* could become more "international" by including research from outside of the Western academic circles.

2. Multiple authorships

According to the frequency analysis, over 55% of all papers published in the *ISQ* during 2006-2010 had a single author, almost 37% had two authors, and the rest (almost 8%) of the papers were written by more than two authors. Thus, collaborative research constitutes almost a half (45%) of published studies in the journal. Apparently, having a co-author may improve the research project and increase the success rate of its publication, although that is not always the case. Interesting observation is that only 10% of the authors managed to get published twice or even three times during this period; all other authors had just one publication. Thus, it could be inferred that the process of publication is rather difficult and the success rate is very low.

3. Topics

Papers published in the *ISQ* cover a broad range of topics from the disciplines of IR, political science, political economy and, to some extent, sociology, economics, and even epistemology.

Figure 1 presents the frequency distribution of main topics covered by the articles during 2006-2010.⁷

Almost 33% of all papers focus on political violence. This category includes research on international security and international conflicts, domestic conflicts and civil wars, as well as international terrorism. It is the most frequent topic in the journal. The second most frequent category is political economy with slightly over 30% (including international economic and trade policy). Combined, these two categories represent almost two-thirds of the journal's content.

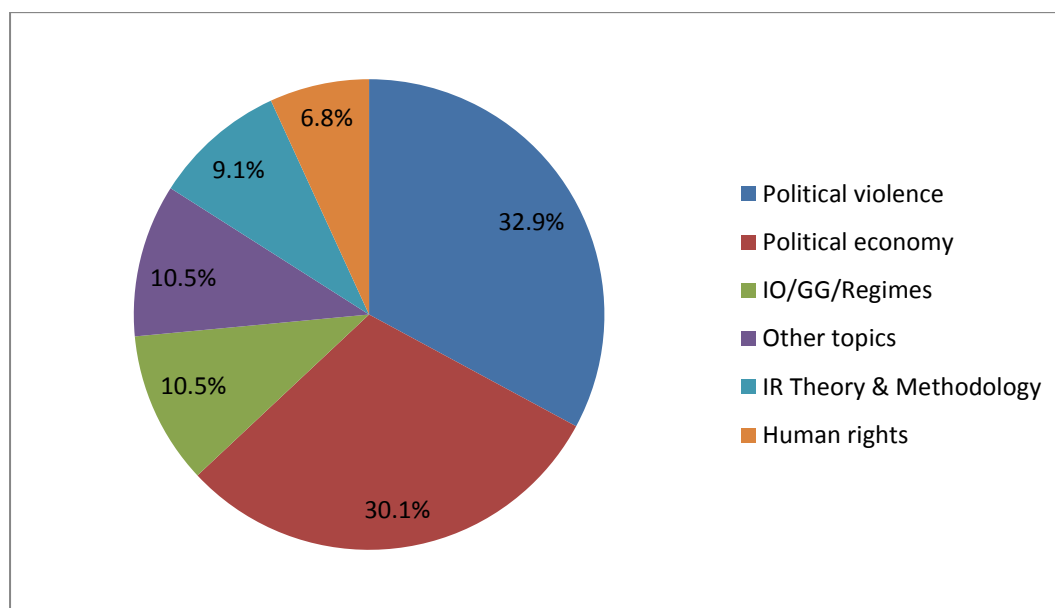
10.5% of papers discuss the issues concerning international (global) governance and international institutions, such as the IMF, the WTO, the World Bank, the United Nations and other intergovernmental organizations (IGOs). Next, 9% of articles concentrate on the theoretical and methodological aspects of IR, covering various theoretical issues within several schools of thought (though mainly Realism and Liberalism), the formation of political regimes, the interactions between the governments and political players, etc. Almost 7% of articles focus broadly on human rights issues.

Category "Other" (10.5%) contains papers on wide range of topics which appear only a few times. These include subjects such as humanitarian aid, refugees, environmental problems, public health and HIV/AIDS, public opinion, and other topics with international aspects.

The conclusion of this frequency analysis is that the *ISQ* is rather broadly oriented journal in terms of problems that are covered by the published papers. The journal chooses to include the most important issues in politics and IR. Such wide-ranging coverage makes the *ISQ* attractive for the readers with different backgrounds and scientific interests. It also increases its flexibility in accepting papers with different topics which in turn makes the journal attractive for the authors working on various research projects.

⁷ These categories were selected according to abstracts and keywords. While there is a bit of arbitrariness involved, usually it was possible to identify the dominant topic and classify the article accordingly.

Fig. 1 Overview of topics



Source: own calculations

4. Theory vs. Empirics

The papers published in the *ISQ* focus on theoretical and empirical problems. However, the frequency distribution indicates that empirical papers tend to dominate in published works in the analyzed period. They represent 73%, while theoretical papers constitute 22% of all papers.⁸ Remaining 5% are papers that employ equally theoretical as well as empirical approach.

This high proportion of empirical studies suggests that the *ISQ* prefers to publish and promote research, which concentrates on analyzing empirical relations between political, social and economic factors based on the existing data. Even theoretical papers tend to have some empirical elements and thus pure papers on theory are very rare. Apparently, the IR researchers that publish in the *ISQ* prefer to study empirical topics and analyze empirical phenomena rather than discuss theoretical issues. Due to the growing popularity of empirical research in IR, the *ISQ*, which tends to publish works on current issues in this field, is also more interested in publishing empirical papers that reflect the mainstream scientific research. The next section describes methodology that is employed most frequently in the published articles.

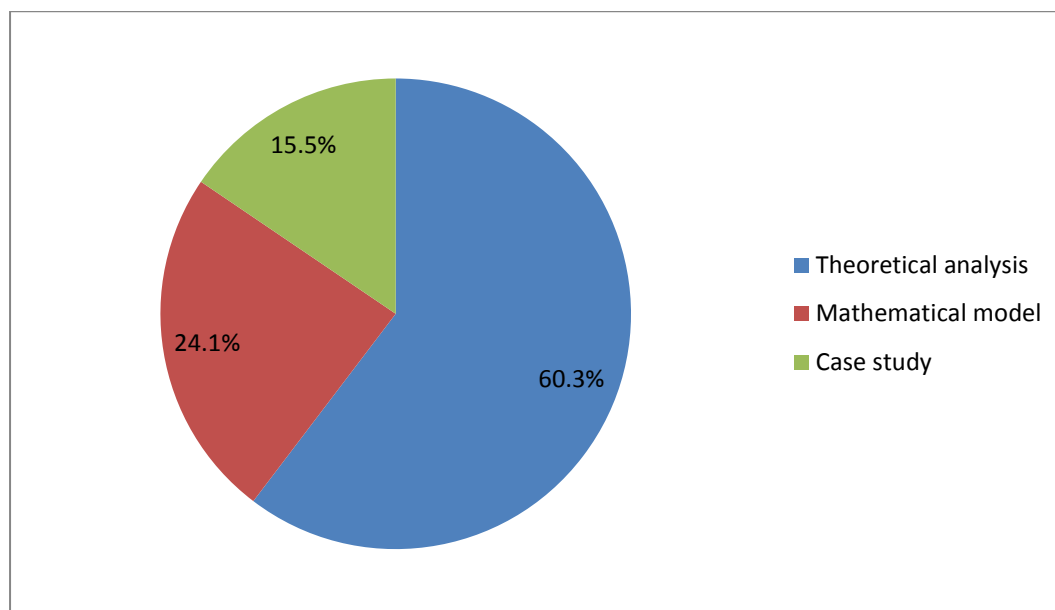
⁸ However, even theoretical papers tend to have some empirical considerations. Pure papers on theory are very rare.

5. Methodology

5.1. Theoretical papers

Theoretical papers in the *ISQ* apply various methodologies, which can be grouped into three main categories (see Figure 2 below).

Fig. 2 Methodology of theoretical papers



Source: own calculations

The first methodological approach, which has been applied by more than 60% of theoretical papers, is theoretical analysis. Such studies use this methodological approach to justify their theoretical argumentation, to analyze various schools of thought in international relations and political science, or to explain political concepts and regimes, social phenomena and individual behavior. Additionally, literature analysis is applied to the studies of legal documents and international political and economic agreements.

The second methodological approach is mathematical modeling (24%). Theoretical papers, which apply mathematical models, construct three main types of models: agent-based models that are borrowed from economic theory, game theory models of bargaining and cooperation, and models based on asymmetry of information. Game theoretical models are broadly used in the research on international cooperation, bargaining, negotiation and conflict resolutions, on interactions between political players on the national level, on the cooperation between public and political powers, international institutions and national governments. Since the IR research published in the *ISQ* focuses on analyzing the interactions between

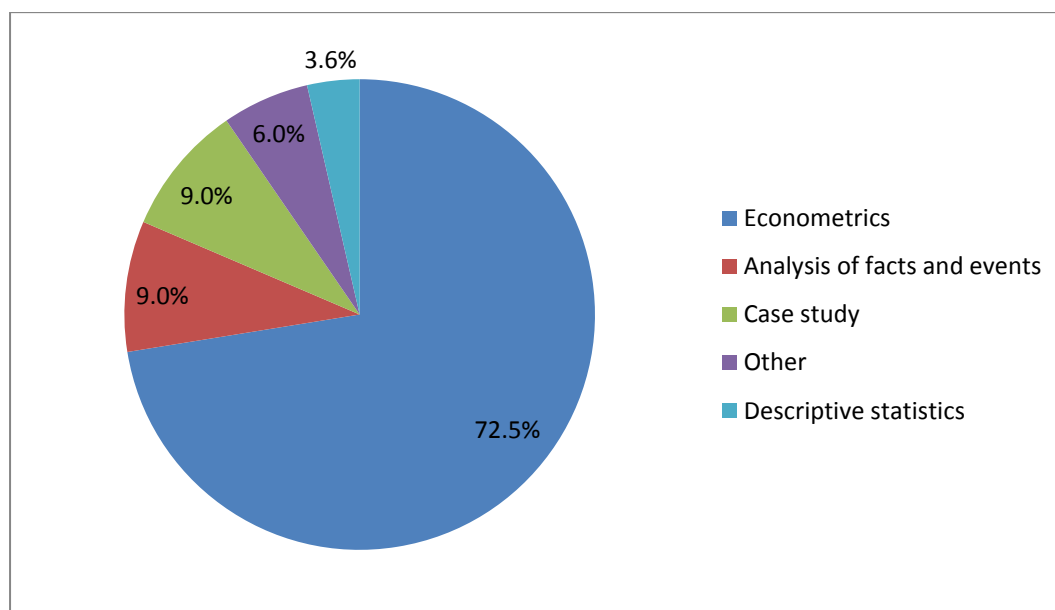
different political, economic and social forces, the choice of game theory models is reasonable and well justified.

The third methodological is a case study (15.5%). It is important to note that case study cannot be considered as a purely theoretical approach since it has some empirical elements. Case study is used to explain a certain theoretical concept, often limited to a particular situation, geographic location or political phenomenon (e.g., identity in Asian countries, global governance, or the democratic peace theory).

5.2. Empirical papers

The analysis of methodology used in published empirical papers shows that econometrics clearly dominates among the methodological approaches. Almost 73% of all empirical papers apply an estimation technique based on econometric models (see Figure 3 below). For example, studies of political regime changes, economic and foreign policy choices and event history analysis tend to use binary and multinomial response models. Studies on international and domestic conflicts and military involvement often apply hazard models to estimate the risks of such conflicts and probabilities of their resolution. The authors also often use OLS regressions, time series, panel data and negative binomial models. In addition, a couple of papers are promoting the use of spatial econometrics to analyze spatial interdependence between countries in their policy choices. A dominance of econometric methodology in empirical papers suggests that the mainstream research in international relations and politics focuses on applying econometric techniques. These tools help scholars to examine the causal relationships between political, institutional, and economic variables in different context and with available data. Thus, *ISQ* seems to promote the research that uses sophisticated econometric tools and well-constructed datasets.

Fig. 3 Methodology of empirical papers



Source: own calculations

Apart from econometrics, empirical papers tend to employ the analysis of data, facts and events (counts for 9% of all empirical papers). The authors use this approach to study certain historical events, describe policy-making processes, explain social behavior, and analyze the international relations using facts, data and documents. Another applied methodology is case study, which is used by 9% of empirical papers. Case studies are found in articles on international politics and political regimes in developing countries, human rights issues, and political violence in certain states.

The last two methodological approaches include statistical analysis (3.6%) and all other approaches (6%), such as interviews and surveys analysis, meta-analysis, and literature analysis. These approaches are applied in a wide range of topics in IR. For example, the interviews and surveys are used for the study of public opinion on political regimes, elections or policy changes. Statistical analysis includes descriptive statistics and variance (ANOVA) analysis, also applied by empirical papers on various subjects.

To conclude this methodology assessment, *ISQ* publishes papers that apply different methodological approaches, however, significant preference and interest is given to the research based on econometric techniques of data analysis.

Qualitative assessment

In this section, I reflect on the most frequent topics which are covered by the *ISQ*. To recapitulate, the top four domains (excluding category “Other topics”) of published research that jointly represent almost 80% of the overall topical coverage include political violence (33%), political economy and international trade (30%), international governance and institutions (10.5%), and the IR theory and methodology (9%). Almost two-thirds of published articles deal with either political violence or political economy. This should not be surprising observation but it is worth to notice what constitutes the nature of the IR discipline according to the *ISQ*. The answer is that it is essentially the study of conflict and cooperation between and among the nation states.

In fact, this is nothing new. Even the earliest attempts to study and understand the IR were primarily concerned with the issues of war and trade since these are the basic interactions between human societies. Over time, much more detailed picture of the field emerges and only then we can see that topics become more differentiated. This allows us to discuss more subtle issues – for example not only wars in general but also domestic political violence, the democratic peace phenomenon, or terrorism. And the specification goes on as each of these subtopics is broken down into smaller and smaller pieces, allowing us to see finer details and connections.

The advantage of the *ISQ* for its readers is that the journal deliberately chooses to stay on a rather more general level rather than focusing closely on a single topical area (e.g. international conflicts or international trade). There are, indeed, other journals which take the other approach and deliberately select very narrow field which they specialize in. The *ISQ*'s approach, however, makes it a bit more difficult to spot significant trends or paradigm shifts within the given five year focus period. This would require first to categorize the topics in the journal (which was already accomplished in the quantitative analysis section) and then take on each subject and analyze it within longer time period of 10-15 years.

The situation is different with journals focusing on a single research area since they publish more articles on the topic in every issue as opposed to the comprehensive journals such as the *ISQ*. Focused journals are better suited for such trend-spotting analysis. Moreover, the *ISQ* does not publish single topic (special) issues thus, in effect, excluding the possibility of having a *debate* within an issue. According to the editors, this was not the intention since they preferred to treat all submissions in the same way. Potential special issue papers were

reviewed in the same way as other articles which significantly reduced the chance of publishing them all as one bundle.

This situation did not go unnoticed. In the *ISQ* Issue 3, Volume 54 (i.e. fall 2010, almost at the very end of the analyzed period) a short Editor's Comment is published, announcing a couple of changes to the issue format. From now on, the clusters of papers on similar or related issues are going to be published. Apparently, in order to disturb too calm waters of the IR theory debates, the *ISQ* editors also decided to occasionally publish the "elements of controversy" to "make trouble but also to stimulate debate on interesting questions".⁹ Whether this is really the beginning of a new approach remains to be seen in the upcoming issues and volumes.

Perhaps it can be checked and discussed what, if any, is the impact of major international events on the content of research articles. Major event concerning the economy and international economics in 2006-2010 period was definitely the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008 which resulted in a global economic slump. Although the recession has been officially over, the recovery is still weak in the developed countries and high budget deficits keep troubling the policymakers. Nevertheless, the prospects for the world economy are better, with more growth opportunities in Asia than in the West. The US and the UK are not exhibiting strong growth and are under pressure to introduce budget cuts, the Eurozone countries are still coping with heavily indebted members with solvency problems that are consequently facing harsh debt restructuring measures. The recent political turmoil in the Arab world and rising oil prices do not bring much stability for both the politics and the economy.

These events, however, are still too recent to be reflected in the scientific research published in the *ISQ* or almost any other journal of this type. Scientific journals usually do not (they virtually cannot) react to such latest developments. Even if some data are already available for the given period, the fact that publishing process takes up to 18 months prohibits any meaningful and sufficiently general research to be conducted, let alone published.¹⁰ On the other hand, published were also the articles which clearly reacted on a subject brought recently to the public attention. Thus, the readers of the *ISQ* could browse the articles

⁹ Editor's Comment, *International Studies Quarterly*, Issue 3, Volume 54, p. 909.

¹⁰ The length of publishing process in the *ISQ* is similar to other prominent journals in the field. It usually takes more than a year from the submission of an article to its publication.

referring to the currency crisis, cyber security, the US response to Iran's nuclear program, or the new research wave in the literature studying deterrence.

One consistently recurrent topic within the main research areas is the impact of globalization. The articles which study the effects of globalization from different perspectives are published regularly and investigate for instance the transformation of the welfare state, the environmental problems, the issue of gender in world politics, the economic and financial globalization, or migration patterns.

Related to this group are the articles which explore the efforts of global governance and the developments in institutionalization, including the effects of global intergovernmental organizations. The stable popularity and appeal of this topic is understandable. Globalization is the outcome of modernization and with the end of the Cold War it only gained pace. In recent decade it has been again boosted as the high-tech information technologies based on the Internet became truly widespread. The contemporary world is interconnected as never before and it is becoming clear that many problems cannot be tackled on a nation-state level, as it was possible before.

Another regular subject concerns the human rights, especially regarding the gender equality and the status of women in the society. This topic reflects the ongoing trend in modern societies to pay much more attention to equal opportunities and the problems of discrimination.

Time to time, an article discussing the latest developments in already well-established research field is published. This includes, for example, the progress in the democratic peace theory, the effects of intergovernmental organizations on interstate conflicts, or the consequences of trade liberalization. Thus, the audience receives regular updates on how is research advancing in these mainstream research areas. These recurrent topics are then complemented by articles, which deal with "off-topic" or perhaps non-mainstream research in the IR. Such papers discuss for instance a specific legal question, distant historical issue, or even some meta-theoretical, almost philosophical subject.

Conclusion

This essay analysed five volumes of an established American interdisciplinary journal in the field of International Relations – the *International Studies Quarterly*. Using descriptive statistics applied to the topics, the authors' affiliation, and the methods in the published articles, the results can be summarized in the following observations:

1. There is a stable research interest in the fields of political violence and political economy. The articles on these two domains alone cover about a half of the content of a typical issue.
2. Published authors are significantly much more likely to be affiliated with the US universities than with any other geographical region. The US is followed by the UK and other European countries. This creates dominance (perhaps a bias?) of the Western type of thought in the IR with only limited views from outside. However, it is acknowledged that the best research (by any recognized scientific indicator) is conducted and published in the West.
3. More than 70% of all published papers are empirical studies, while purely theoretical articles are very rare. Even papers on theory usually have an empirical element.
4. Econometrics and quantitative approaches in general are the dominant methodologies employed by the authors.

The main observation from the qualitative assessment concludes that the *ISQ* chooses to bring its readers rather wider selection of articles that cover more research subjects, instead of specializing in one narrow research area. This approach can also explain the larger-than-usual extent of each issue. The broader spectrum of topics is further enhanced by the publication of papers, which bring readers up to date with recent developments in the most typical research areas. However, the more elaborated analysis of the trends in each research areas would require a longer time span (perhaps 10 volumes) in order to spot changes or significant shifts in the topics addressed in the journal.

Newly introduced changes to the issue format, namely the editors' determination to publish single-topic issues and to accept articles that raise certain amount of controversy within the discipline, could help to make the *ISQ* less "predictable" and more dynamic journal. The results of this step and its reception among the readers remain to be seen.