

Communication

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Are Local Journals More Policy Relevant? Evidence From Policy Citations to Australian Journals

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Abstract: In a metric-driven publishing landscape, local journals often struggle for visibility and recognition, despite their potential to inform national policy. This study investigates the policy relevance of Australian journals using citation data from the Overton database. By comparing citations in policy documents to Australian-authored articles published in local versus international journals between 2010 and 2022, we find that local journals are more likely to be cited in policy documents, especially those related to Australia. However, the average number of citations per article is lower for local journals, which probably reflects their niche focus and limited international uptake. These findings illustrate the vital but undervalued role national journals play in supporting local scholarship and addressing context-specific issues. We argue that greater institutional support is needed to sustain national publishing ecosystems and prevent the marginalisation of research with local relevance.

Keywords: local journals, policy citation, Australian journals, journal publishing, policy impact

1 Introduction

The current scholarly publishing landscape is increasingly shaped by a metric-driven culture that prioritises international rankings and traditional citation metrics, often at the expense of local and national journals. This emphasis on publishing in high-ranking journals – such as Scimago Quartile 1 (Q1) titles – has disadvantaged domestic publications, particularly in countries like Australia, where over 650 active journals contribute to a rich yet vulnerable research ecosystem (Jamali, Wakeling, & Abbasi, 2022a). Despite their critical role in supporting local scholarship and addressing context-specific issues (Jamali, Wakeling, & Abbasi, 2022b; Larivière, 2014), Australian journals continue to struggle with submission drain, limited institutional support (Jamali & Wakeling, 2025), and lower visibility in major citation databases (Asubiaro, Onaolapo, & Mills, 2024; Haddow & Genoni, 2010). These challenges have resulted in over 140 Australian journals ceasing publication in the past decade (Jamali et al., 2022b), exacerbating concerns about the sustainability of national publishing infrastructures.

The pressure for internationalisation further complicates the survival of local journals, as indexing in major citation databases like Scopus or Web of Science often leads to a long-term shift away from a national orientation towards broader, international audiences (Koch & Vanderstraeten, 2021; Moed, de Moya-Anegón,

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Guerrero-Bote, & Lopez-Illescas, 2020). This shift can undermine the ability of local journals to fulfil their essential functions, including providing a platform for research on locally relevant issues, connecting academics with practitioners, and informing national policy and practice (Hughes, 2015; Ma, 2019). In the Australian context, these journals are particularly significant in fields such as humanities, arts, and social sciences (HASS), where local context and policy relevance are important, but international visibility remains limited.

Given these dynamics, there is a need to reassess how local journals contribute to national research ecosystems beyond conventional citation metrics. One such contribution that local journals may make is in influencing local policymaking. We define local journals, also sometimes called national or domestic journals (Bocanegra-Valle, 2019), as those belonging to or affiliated with an Australian entity such as a university, learned society, or professional association. We distinguish them from mainstream journals owned and operated by major international publishers. While researchers are increasingly incentivised to publish in internationally ranked outlets, the extent to which Australian journals are utilised in national policies remains underexplored. It is important to remember that, as past research indicates, simply looking at the number of citations received from other articles might not tell the whole story about how research influences policy. Traditional measures of research quality “might not even capture the essence of research excellence from a policy perspective” (Mahfouz, Capra, & Mulgan, 2025, p. 1848).

This study seeks to address this gap by examining the policy relevance of Australian journals using data from the Overton policy database. Our research question is: *To what extent are local journals cited in local policies, and how does this compare to citations of non-local journals?* By investigating policy citations (i.e. citations in policy documents) to Australian journals, we aim to highlight their contributions to national policymaking and argue for a recalibration of the current metric culture. Greater recognition and support for local journals are essential not only for sustaining national research outputs but also for ensuring that locally significant research informs policy decisions within Australia.

2 Data and Method

Overton is one of the largest databases for policy documents. It aggregates materials from over 30,000 organisations including governments, intergovernmental organisations, think tanks, and charities through web-crawling of publicly accessible documents. The database processes these documents to extract bibliographic information and cited references, and to link academic literature to policy usage. Documents in Overton include reports, white papers, clinical guidelines, parliamentary transcripts, and legal documents intended for policy-makers, government officials, and citizens (Szomszor & Adie, 2022).

We used a previously compiled list of 651 Australian journals (Jamali, 2022). The list and the process of compiling it and its inclusion/exclusion criteria are described in detail in Jamali et al. (2022a). The list was compiled by searching multiple databases (including Ulrich’s Global Serials Directory, Scopus, Web of Science, and DOAJ) for journals with Australia as the country of publisher or with Australian geographic terms in their titles. Each journal was then verified through examination of corporate authorship information and journal websites to determine whether it belonged to or was affiliated with an Australian entity (university, learned society, professional association, etc.). The final inclusion criterion was ownership by or affiliation with an Australian body, resulting in 651 verified Australian journals from an initial set of 1,088 potential candidates.

We searched the Overton policy database, using the ISSN of the journals, for all articles published in these journals from 2010 to 2022 and filtered to include only those authored by at least one author with an Australian affiliation. In the rest of the paper, the Australian author refers to authors with an Australian affiliation. We restricted the analysis to Scopus-indexed local journals ($n = 380$) to be able to compare citation data with all Australian-authored Scopus-indexed articles. We selected the 2010–2022 publication window to provide a sufficiently long timeframe for capturing both recent trends and a reasonable historical perspective. Concluding the period in 2022 was to allow a few years for articles to be cited. Although Australian journals publish many articles by non-Australian authors (Jamali, 2025), we restricted the analysis to articles by Australian authors as it allowed us to compare them with all other Australian-authored articles published

elsewhere. To retrieve data on all Australian-authored articles, we used Scopus, which provides broader coverage of Australian journals compared to Web of Science (Jamali et al., 2022a). We restricted our analysis to English-language “article” and “review” document types published in journals.

2.1 Limitation

Our data have a few limitations. First, Overton only tracks citations to scholarly articles that have a digital object identifier (DOI). Although DOIs are widely used by journals, not all assign them to their articles – especially in the case of older or smaller publications. We hypothesised that this issue is more pronounced for local journals compared to all journals. To test this, we calculated the proportion of Australian-authored articles without DOIs in both local journals and all journals in all years. To calculate the number of articles without DOI, first we searched for all Australian articles and recorded the statistics for each year, then we did the same search but added “AND DOI(10*)” to the query to retrieve only Australian articles with DOI and recorded the statistics. Subtracting the number of articles with DOI from the total gave us the number of articles without DOI. We crosschecked this approach with a manual approach (downloading the metadata of all articles in Excel format and checking how many do not have DOI) for 3 years to validate the accuracy of the method. These searches were conducted in July 2025.

As Table 1 shows, although the use of DOIs has generally increased over time in both local and non-local journals, the rate of increase has been slower in local journals. This means that not only do local journals have a higher volume of articles without DOIs, but they also account for a growing share of all Australian articles lacking DOIs. For example, in 2010, while 6.6% of all Australian-authored articles lacked a DOI, the percentage of Australian-authored articles published in local journals lacking a DOI was 15.5%. Furthermore, the share of local journals from all Australian-authored articles without DOI increased from 25.6% in 2010 to 47.1% in 2022.

In addition, we randomly checked 242 (a sample size calculated based on a 95% confidence and a 5% margin of error) of the Australian journals in our list for DOI usage, and found that 39% of them ($n = 95$) did not assign DOIs to their articles. We can safely assume that DOI is not an indicator of content quality and that articles without DOIs are not necessarily less valuable in terms of content and potential policy application. This suggests that it is possible that articles published in local journals are likely underrepresented in the Overton data. Confirming this, however, requires further research, especially as the lack of DOI might affect aspects such as visibility and discoverability, and therefore, use and citation.

Table 1: Use of DOIs for Australian articles in local journals vs all journals

Year	All Australian articles (<i>N</i>)	No DOI (<i>N</i>)	No DOI (%)	Australian articles in local journals (<i>N</i>)	No DOI (<i>N</i>)	No DOI (%)	Share of local journals from all No-DOI articles (%)
2010	48,429	3,213	6.6	5,306	822	15.5	25.6
2011	52,692	3,107	5.9	5,571	867	15.6	27.9
2012	57,237	2,970	5.2	5,803	757	13.0	25.5
2013	63,914	2,660	4.2	6,059	838	13.8	31.5
2014	68,574	2,587	3.8	6,281	814	13.0	31.5
2015	73,284	2,482	3.4	6,664	859	12.9	34.6
2016	75,845	2,358	3.1	6,238	785	12.6	33.3
2017	78,798	2,016	2.6	6,727	761	11.3	37.7
2018	83,960	1,922	2.3	7,086	846	11.9	44.0
2019	88,393	1,652	1.9	7,292	739	10.1	44.7
2020	95,261	1,545	1.6	7,282	666	9.1	43.1
2021	102,938	1,207	1.2	7,378	503	6.8	41.7
2022	100,599	1,016	1.0	7,152	479	6.7	47.1

To address this underrepresentation, we applied an adjustment to performance statistics (as shown in Findings). For each year, we adjusted the performance ratio based on the percentage of local journal articles captured by Overton (i.e. articles with DOI). For instance, in 2010, 15.5% of Australian articles in local journals did not have DOI; therefore, the Overton database captures roughly 84.5% of all articles in local journals ($1 - 0.155 = 0.845$). We multiplied the relevant statistics by 1.18, which is the inverse of 0.845 (i.e. $1 \div 0.845$), to provide an estimated adjusted value.

A second limitation is that, for practical reasons, we used Scopus to obtain data on all Australian-authored articles. However, approximately half of Australian journals are not indexed in Scopus (Jamali et al., 2022a). Lack of indexing in Scopus can reduce the visibility and discoverability of journals, and, therefore, potentially affect their citation and policy impact. At the same time, Scopus indexing is often associated with a broader scope and stronger international orientation (Moed et al., 2020), which means that local journals not indexed in Scopus are likely to have a more pronounced national or local focus (Jamali, 2025).

3 Findings

The number of Australian articles, in alignment with global trends, has increased over time. The total number of Australian articles published in any journal indexed in Scopus increased from 48,429 in 2010 to 100,599 in 2022. The number of Australian articles in local journals increased from 5,306 in 2010 to 7,152 in 2022.

To assess the policy relevance of local journals, we compared four indicators between articles published in Australian journals and all Australian-authored articles, regardless of journal origin:

3.1 Proportion of Articles Cited by Policy Documents

Each year, a greater percentage of articles in local journals received at least one policy citation compared to the general pool of Australian articles. This suggests that local journals are more likely to be referenced in policy, even if not heavily cited overall. Figure 1 shows the percentage of policy-cited Australian-authored articles published in Scopus-indexed local journals (green line) and any Scopus-indexed journal.

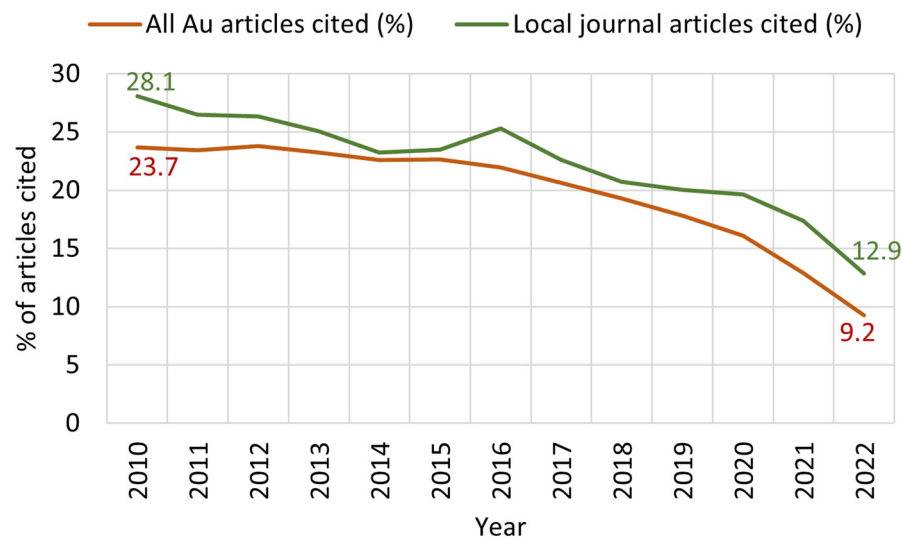


Figure 1: Share of articles cited in policy that are published in Scopus-indexed local journals vs any Scopus-indexed journal.

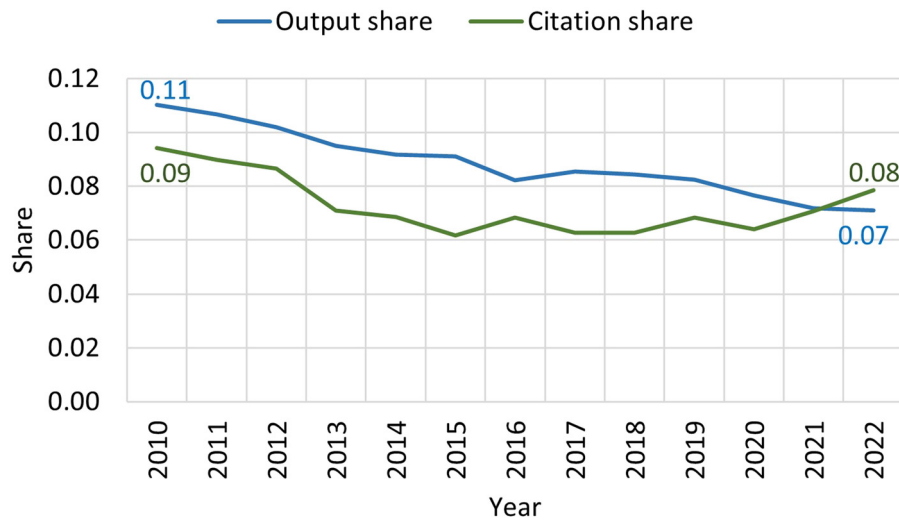


Figure 2: Output share vs citation share of Scopus-indexed local journals.

3.2 Output Share vs Citation Share

We compared the share of articles published in local journals (output share, i.e. fraction of all Australian-authored articles that are published in local journals) with their share of total policy citations (citation share). Total policy citation is the sum of times each journal has been cited in policy documents indexed in Overton. Except for 2021 and 2022, citation share consistently lagged behind output share (Figure 2). In 2022, however, local journals received a higher share of citations (8%) than their output share (7%). This could be COVID-related but we do not know for sure.

3.3 Performance Ratio

To have one indicator that takes into account both output share and citation share, we calculated a performance ratio by dividing citation share by output share. A ratio above 1 indicates overperformance. Local journals slightly underperformed across most years, except in 2022 (Figure 3). Adjusting upward for

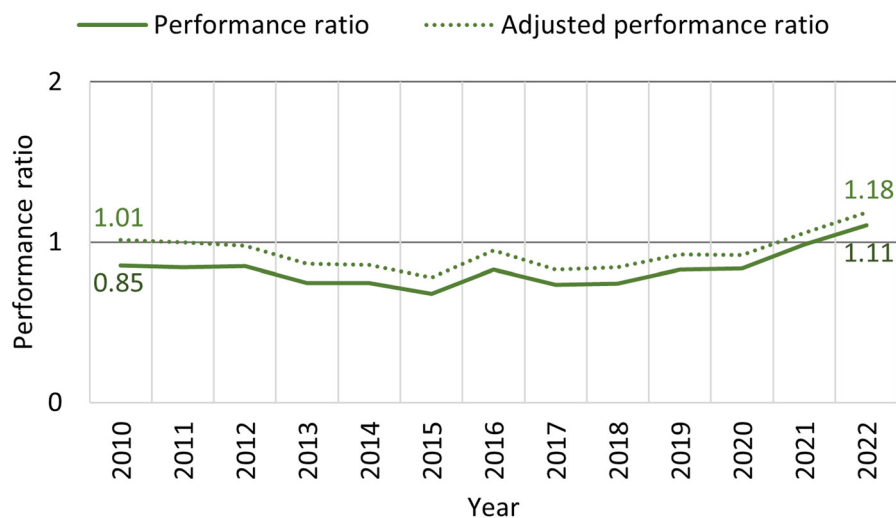


Figure 3: Performance ratio of local journals and performance ratio adjusted for DOI.

underrepresentation due to missing DOIs (as explained earlier) gives a more optimistic performance estimate, but does not change the overall trend.

3.4 Average Policy Citations per Article

To explain why more articles in local journals are cited by policies, but their total share of citations is lower than for all Australian articles, we calculated the average policy citation per article. Articles in international journals consistently received more policy citations on average than those in local journals (Figure 4). This indicates their broader or more frequent policy uptake across sources.

3.5 Proportion of Citations from Local Policies

Finally, 65.4% of policies citing Australian articles from local journals were Australian, compared to only 36.1% for all Australian articles. This highlights the local orientation and relevance of Australian journals to national policy.

4 Conclusions

This study examined the policy relevance of Australian journals using citation data from the Overton database. We found that, relative to their publication volume, Australian journals are more likely to be cited at least once in policy documents than Australian-authored articles published elsewhere. However, when cited, articles in local journals tend to receive fewer citations from policy documents on average, which suggests a more limited but focused influence.

An important finding is the strong national orientation of local journals. While only 36.1% of citations in policy documents to all Australian-authored articles come from Australian policies, this figure rises to 65.4%

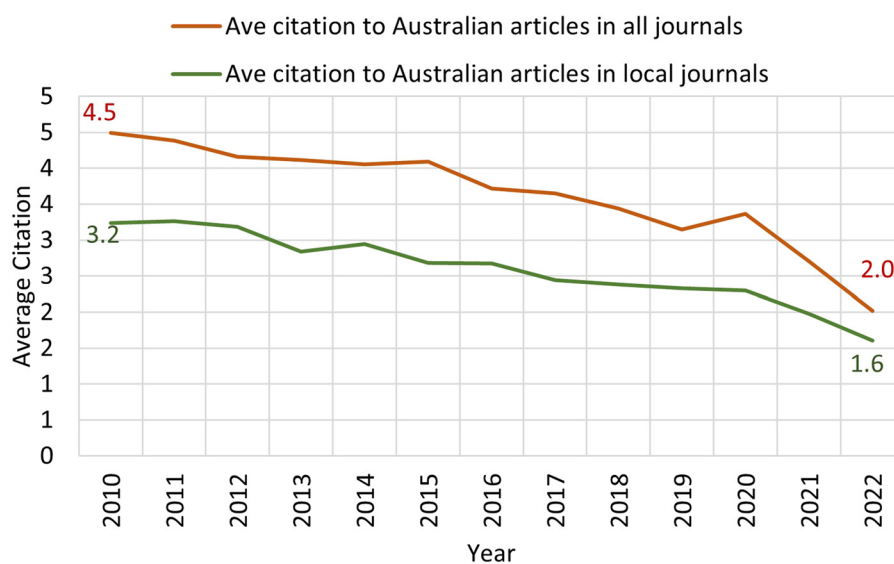


Figure 4: Average citations in policy documents per Australian-authored article for all Scopus journals vs Scopus-indexed local journals.

for articles in local journals. This demonstrates local journals' critical role in addressing specific national issues and policy needs.

Although local journals have a higher proportion of articles cited in policy documents, the individual articles tend to receive fewer citations on average. This is likely due to their focus on specific, applied topics – such as local reports or case studies or local issues – that are essential for policy but less visible in international academic discourse. As editors in our recent survey of Australian journal editors indicated, the ever-increasing metrification of research evaluation, and associated academic incentives, means that local studies are less likely to be published in international journals, and when they are, their contribution becomes diluted (Jamali & Wakeling, 2025), which leads to the marginalisation of Australian scholarship (Jamali, Wakeling, & Luca, 2025).

It should be noted that this study was limited to Australian journals indexed in Scopus, which represent only about half of all local journals. Although Scopus-indexed journals tend to be more internationally oriented, our survey of editors showed that even Australian journals that aspire to greater international visibility still value the national roles they play within Australia's research ecosystem (Jamali & Wakeling, 2025).

This situation puts local journals at a disadvantage in a metric-driven research environment and risks creating a “submission drain” toward Q1 international journals. It also threatens the sustainability of local journals, which often serve fields in which the country has a unique contribution (Ma, 2019) and where national relevance is critical (Sanz, Aragon, & Mendez, 1995; Sivertsen, 2016).

We argue that more support for local/national journals is crucial, not only to preserve diversity (Pradier, Céspedes, & Larivière, 2025; van Bellen, Alperin, & Larivière, 2025) in scholarly communication but also to ensure locally significant research continues to inform national policy. Without systemic support, including recognition of their value in research assessment and incentivising (or at least not deterring) authors to publish in them, local journals – and the policy-relevant knowledge they accommodate – risk further decline.

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Data availability statement: The data used were obtained from Overton and Scopus databases. No new data was generated in this paper.

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