

Midwest Social Sciences Journal

Volume 26
Issue 2 *Emerging Themes and Perspectives in
the Social Sciences*

Article 3

8-1-2024

Introduction to the Special Issue

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Recommended Citation

(2024) "Introduction to the Special Issue," *Midwest Social Sciences Journal*: Vol. 26: Iss. 2, Article 3.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22543/2766-0796.1149>
Available at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/mssj/vol26/iss2/3>

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE

This special issue of the *Midwest Social Sciences Journal* (MSSJ) commemorates 75 years and more of the journal and its legacy as a repository of high-quality social science research and scholarly interaction amongst social scientists from across the state of Indiana and beyond. The MSSJ is an open access journal of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences (IASS).

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE JOURNAL

The IASS was established in 1929, and at its meeting at Spring Mill State Park in 1946, an anonymous gift allowed for the publication of six of the papers presented at the meeting, with the number of presentations increasing to 11 and 12 in 1947 and 1948, respectively (Tobin 2014). The publication, titled *Proceedings*, expanded its reach across the state, and by the late 1950s, it “became standard practice to send copies of the *Proceedings* to libraries of all institutions of higher learning in Indiana and to all high schools in towns of more than 10,000 in population” (Tobin 2014:119–20). When consistent funding support from academic institutions for the *Proceedings* became a possibility, the IASS officers and directors worked to develop a cohesive editorial policy, including creating submission guidelines, soliciting submissions from conference participants, and creating a fact-checking process (Tobin 2014). The practice of publishing conference proceedings continued until 1997, at which point the title of the *Proceedings* was changed to the *Journal of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences*. This change was intended to “strengthen the publication, raising its status and the quality of articles accepted” and “to serve as a clearing house for research in the social sciences in Indiana” (Tobin 2014:124–25). Beginning in 2010, senior editor and Butler University sociologist Kenneth Colburn implemented a double-blind process of peer review that encouraged submissions from authors who had not presented at the annual conference. Following this, the journal also became an online publication, hosted on the Digital Commons, in keeping with the technological needs of the time and also to expand the geographical reach of the journal. Furthermore, in 2019, the journal underwent a second name change to be called the *Midwest Social Sciences Journal*. This title change was reflective of the “fact that the journal’s non-Indiana authors, topics, and readership have grown considerably and frequently reflect a regional, Midwestern focus” and to continue to maintain the “ ‘Hoosier’ outlook and interest in Indiana” and also “to publish even more social science research that addresses regional, national, and international contexts and perspectives” (Colburn 2019:124–25).

The journal’s editors have been drawn from diverse institutional and diverse backgrounds (Tobin 2014:122), and all have striven to publish only the best research. Volumes 22–26 of the MSSJ received more than one hundred manuscript submissions, and the double-blind peer-review process was implemented with the assistance of regional, national, and, in some cases, international reviewers (Devaraj and Babu 2023), reflecting its geographical outreach. The MSSJ remains one of the few places where one can find

high-quality research from across the social sciences in one location, and this is reflected in the international scope of its readership (Bepress n.d.). Moreover, the interdisciplinary commitment of the journal serves to fulfil the potential of the social sciences to provide deep knowledge and understanding of our society (Colburn 2019:vi).

SPECIAL ISSUE GUEST EDITOR

The guest editor for this special commemorative issue is **Dr. Rajiv Thakur**. The broad scope and interdisciplinary nature of Professor Thakur's work made him a natural fit for this role and for the Journal. Dr. Thakur is an AAAS (American Association for the Advancement of Science) Science and Technology Policy Fellow at the U.S. Department of State's Office of the Science and Technology Adviser. During his first-year fellowship (2022–23), he worked at USAID's Input Systems Division in the Center for Agriculture-Led Growth, of the Bureau for Resilience and Food Security. He is currently on sabbatical from Missouri State University, where he is a professor of geography specializing in economic geography. His research and program interest resides at the intersection of international development, science and technology policy, and innovations from an interdisciplinary perspective.

At USAID, Dr. Thakur contributed to the innovations team, focusing on technology transfer through data collection and network mapping. In his second year at the Department of State, his portfolio includes multilateral diplomacy, innovation ecosystems, scientific integrity policy, and STEM ecosystems. He has coauthored books and held various leadership roles, including Faculty Senate Chair at Missouri State University and advisory roles with national panels such as the Boren Award and the Gilman Scholarship Program of the U.S. State Department. Dr. Thakur obtained a master's degree in geography from the University of Akron, his doctoral degree in economic geography from Indiana State University, and a master's degree in political science from the University of Delhi.

SPECIAL ISSUE

This volume brings together papers from eminent national and international scholars in cultural anthropology, social justice, urban development, and postcolonial politics. These papers undertake to tackle the complexity of contemporary social problems using innovative methodologies and analytical tools.

GRATITUDE

As always, I am grateful to our copy editor, Stephanie Seifert Stringham, and our publishing advisor, Jonathan Bull, for their continued support in bringing out the MSSJ. I also thank Gregg Johnson, Interim Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences of Valparaiso University, for his support of the Indiana Academy of the Social Sciences, and Trisha Mileham, Dean of the Library at Valparaiso University, for her support for hosting the *Midwest Social Sciences Journal* on ValpoScholar.

INCOMING EDITOR

My current term as editor of the MSSJ expired in October 2023, and I was fortunate to be involved in bringing out this special issue. The next volume of the MSSJ, volume 27, will be published by our new editor in chief, Dr. Surekha Rao. Dr. Rao served as deputy editor of the *Journal of the Indiana Academy of Social Sciences* and is a past president of the Indiana Academy of Social Sciences. I am confident that the MSSJ will continue to thrive as a repository of high-quality social science research under her editorial guidance.

Nirupama Devaraj
Valparaiso University
July 2024

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