

The Country Configuration of Global Private Higher Education

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PROPHE (Program for Research on Private Higher Education) has a regular column in IHE.

Given the large and expanding reality of private higher education (PHE) globally, it is important to know its country configuration. This is now possible from analysis of the first-ever comprehensive and reliable worldwide dataset on private higher education, which may be found at <https://prophe.org/en/global-data/global-data-files/global-enrollment-by-country/>. It covers all 192 countries showing higher education enrollment data, though 179 is the total allowing us to see or calculate data for both private and public sectors. This article uses figures from 2010 (with limited longitudinal comparison).

The article shows that a twin reality captures the key country configuration of global private higher education. One reality is the dispersion of the private presence to so many countries in all regions. The other, however, is the heavy, disproportionate concentration of private higher education in the largest country systems. Obviously, the impressiveness of each reality qualifies the impressiveness of the other reality, but it is by identifying the patterns of dispersion and concentration side by side that we can appreciate the overall country configuration of global PHE.

PHE IS WIDELY DISPERSED

Large expansion is not a necessary condition for widespread dispersion of PHE across countries but it certainly facilitates it. Until a few decades ago, many countries had no or only quite marginal PHE. During these decades, however, PHE has grabbed a greater and greater share of total enrollment even as the public sector itself has expanded more rapidly than ever in raw enrollment. Although the private proportional growth is now finally slowing, its absolute growth remains powerful. In the first decade of this century, while the global private share increased from 28 percent to 33 percent, private enrollment jumped from roughly 27 million to nearly 57 million. We could conservatively estimate PHE today as having at least 75 million students.

One clear illustration of country dispersion is the near disappearance of public monopoly systems (as already laid out in *IHE* volume #94, “Vanishing Public Monopoly”). Among our 179 countries, perhaps only 10 still lack PHE, and some of these are either grappling with PHE proposals or have some ambiguous private form (e.g., international rather than national). We can now add that some 98 percent of the world’s enrollment is in dual-sector systems.

Yet near ubiquity is not the only illustration of country dispersion. As late as in the middle of the last century, US PHE was the sole towering private enrollment presence. Although it still towers in quality, prestige, research, and finance, it holds only a tenth and shrinking share of global private enrollment. Whereas India is the new giant—its over 12 million private enrollments more than doubling any other country’s—delete India and global enrollment falls only from 33 percent to 29 percent. The global spread of PHE has already been such that it will never again be nearly as concentrated in any one country as it once was in the United States. Further, other than Brazil in Latin America, the deletion of the country with the largest PHE lowers no region’s private share by more than 2 percent (and the deletion of the largest two country private sectors never by more than 3 percent). Region after region has seen dispersion of PHE of some significant size to more and more countries.

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Much of the increased country dispersion of PHE involves the developing world. While the developing world accounts for most of the growth and increased dispersion of higher education overall, this is particularly so for the private sector. Some developing countries, China foremost, build large private sectors even with relatively low private shares of total enrollment, but many developing countries with large higher education systems (e.g., Brazil, India, and Indonesia) have large private shares. Why the special growth and dispersion of PHE in the developing world? One reason lies in developing countries’ limited public finance amid great higher education growth. Another is that whereas most developed countries experienced formidable growth in a world era in which, for most countries, public was the nearly unquestioned dominant empirical and normative form, most developing countries have greatly expanded their systems in an era of greater privatization

in social arenas, with dual-sector options quite available in higher education.

PHE CONCENTRATES HEAVILY IN THE LARGEST SYSTEMS

But for all these realities of PHE country dispersion, the country spread is far from uniform. Indeed, global PHE concentrates significantly in a set of countries. While PHE holds 33 percent of total global higher education taking its average as a mean, its median by country is 20 percent. Just three countries—India, the United States, and Brazil—hold over 40 percent of global PHE. In fact, 17 different combinations of just three countries (always including India) aggregate to a third of global PHE. On the other hand, whereas one can be struck by just any three countries holding such a high share of global PHE, the reality that 17 different combinations exist could also be taken as some further evidence of relative dispersion across countries.

The most robust manifestation of the country concentration of PHE is how much it clusters in *large* higher education systems. Of course, we might well expect some correlation between total and PHE enrollment. The world's largest 10 systems (the only ones with over 3 million enrollments) do hold an impressive 58 percent of total global enrollment—but they hold 69 percent of global private enrollment. Choosing the largest 10 countries by private enrollment rather than by total enrollment would raise the private share by only 2 percent. Indeed, nine of the top 10 countries would remain the same, while the Philippines would replace Turkey. In descending order, the 10 largest private enrollment sectors are in India, the United States, Brazil, China, Japan, Indonesia, South Korea, Iran, the Philippines, and Russia. Six of these have private sectors larger than their public sectors. Whereas Asian countries are the majority on this top 10 list, Latin American countries are the majority in the next 10.

This last observation suggests that alongside the country concentration of PHE lies regional concentration, a topic for another occasion. What the present article shows is that global PHE's country configuration features a combination of significant dispersion across systems alongside significant concentration in large higher education systems. ■

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Governance of Higher Education in the Arab World and the Case of Tunisia

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Public universities in the Arab world have suffered from what might be called a *political model* of governance. This model involves the subordination of universities to political influence, from top to bottom as well as horizontally. It leads to the closing of minds, the undermining of knowledge production, and a limited ability of universities to bring about social change. The exception to this dominant model in the Arab world is Tunisia, which, not coincidentally, has also been the only exception to the failure of the “Arab Spring,” continuing on the path of democracy and progressive reform despite some setbacks.

THE POLITICAL MODEL

An edited volume recently published in Beirut recounts the historical development of 10 Arab public universities—the oldest in each country—from their inception until 2016. It shows that the typical Arab public university fell under a political model of governance, mostly in the 1970s, moving away from the Napoleonic model used previously. This Napoleonic model references the French system established by Napoleon Bonaparte (1769–1821), in which higher education is centralized (state oriented), secular, and provided in distinct professionally and academically oriented schools apart from research institutes (which are also centralized).

For example, in 1977, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat issued a law prohibiting political activity at Egyptian universities. Based on this law, security agents began setting up checkpoints at the entrances of university buildings and intervening in university decisions. In fact, Sadat revived the strong legacy of control familiar in the Nasser era (1953–1970) while, paradoxically, adopting a liberal economic policy and new openness to the West and Israel in foreign policy. To fight the continuing political influence of Nasserism inside universities, Sadat relied on conservative Islamic forces, including both faculty and students. The same approach continued under the next president, Hosni Mubarak, who held power until 2011. Indeed, Egyptian universities remain the topic of many reports on academic freedom violations by Human Rights Watch. During the same