

PROMOTION AS A TEMPORAL REGULATOR OF SCHOLARLY WORK IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

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Introduction

Across contemporary higher education systems, academic promotion has become a central mechanism through which research evaluation is operationalized. Promotion criteria translate abstract notions of merit and excellence into concrete thresholds that structure academic careers. In doing so, they do more than assess past performance. They actively shape how, when, and in what form scholarly work is produced.

An expanding body of research documents changes in publication activity around academic promotion, often pointing to intensified output in the years preceding evaluation thresholds (e.g. Azoulay vd., 2011; Espeland & Sauder, 2007; Hlatshwayo & Ngcobo, 2023; Lee, 2014). These studies provide valuable insights into how promotion criteria interact with scholarly productivity and career trajectories. At the same time, differences across disciplinary fields are not always the primary focus of such analyses, and publication dynamics are frequently examined through indicators that are assumed to be broadly comparable.

Building on this literature, this paper approaches academic promotion as a temporal regulator of scholarly work and explores how its effects become visible in the social sciences and humanities. In these fields, dominant evaluation metrics intersect in complex ways with field-specific epistemic practices, publication formats, and research temporalities. Rather than positioning the analysis against existing studies, the paper extends current discussions by foregrounding how promotion-related dynamics may be experienced differently in SSH contexts.

Why social sciences and humanities require a distinct lens

Research in the social sciences and humanities is often characterized by long research cycles, cumulative theoretical development, and publication formats such as books and book chapters that resist short-term quantification (Doğan & Taşkın, 2020; Ochsner et al., 2017). Knowledge production in these fields frequently unfolds through extended engagement with concepts, archives, or social contexts, and its societal relevance may become visible only over time.

Promotion systems, however, increasingly rely on journal-based indicators that privilege rapid output, standardized formats, and international index visibility. When such criteria are applied uniformly across fields, they create a temporal misalignment

for SSH scholars. Evaluation does not simply measure SSH research; it reshapes it by privileging outputs that fit promotion calendars and marginalizing those that do not.

Data and analytical approach

The analysis draws on findings from an ongoing TUBITAK 1001-funded research project examining publication behaviour under metric-based evaluation regimes. Using a nationally representative sample of academics in Türkiye, the study traces publication trajectories around promotion to assistant professor, associate professor, and full professor.

Event-study visualizations, fixed-effects panel models, and publication burst analyses will be used to examine how journal articles, books, and book chapters evolve around promotion events. While the empirical analysis spans multiple disciplinary fields, this paper will interpret the results through a social sciences and humanities perspective, with particular attention to publication forms central to SSH scholarship.

SSH-relevant findings

The results show that journal article output increases systematically in the years preceding promotion, especially at the associate professor stage. Burst analysis indicates that these increases are driven largely by short-term concentration of publication activity among subsets of academics rather than by broadly shared productivity growth.

Books and book chapters display markedly different patterns. Their production shows weaker alignment with promotion timing and lacks sharp pre-promotion peaks. Post-promotion adjustments are limited or absent. These patterns reflect longer production cycles and the comparatively marginal role these outputs play in metric-based promotion frameworks.

For SSH fields, this divergence is consequential. Evaluation systems cantered on journal metrics implicitly redefine scholarly effort in ways that favour short-cycle outputs. Research that depends on sustained inquiry, theoretical depth, or local engagement becomes structurally disadvantaged, regardless of its epistemic or societal value.

Implications for research evaluation reform

The Turkish higher education system offers a revealing context due to its centralized and nationally standardized promotion criteria, which intensify the alignment between evaluation thresholds and publication behaviour. However, the implications extend beyond a single national setting. Any evaluation regime that applies uniform, metric-based promotion criteria across heterogeneous fields risks producing similar distortions.

As part of a TUBITAK-funded project on responsible research evaluation and questionable publishing practices, this paper contributes to ongoing debates on reforming research assessment. It underscores the need for evaluation frameworks that recognize disciplinary temporalities, publication cultures, and the distinctive societal roles of social sciences and humanities research.

Conclusion

By approaching promotion as a temporal regulator rather than a neutral assessment tool, this paper shows how evaluation systems shape the rhythm and orientation of SSH scholarship. Metric-based promotion regimes privilege short-cycle, easily countable outputs while constraining research that depends on long-term engagement and contextual depth.

Addressing these tensions requires evaluation systems that are sensitive to disciplinary diversity and temporal structure. Without such sensitivity, social sciences and humanities research risks being assessed through criteria that systematically misrepresent its contributions and undermine its scientific autonomy.

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