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## **Revelations about the intersectional struggles for academic freedom within Indian Universities (SRHE)**

Belluigi, D. Z., Dhawan, N., & Idahosa, G. (2021). *Revelations about the intersectional struggles for academic freedom within Indian Universities (SRHE)*. Paper presented at Annual Conference of the Society for the Research of Higher Education: (Re)connecting, (Re)building: Higher Education in Transformative Times, virtual, online, United Kingdom.

### **Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

### **Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:**

[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

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# Revelations about the intersectional struggles for academic freedom within Indian Universities

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*Paper presented at the symposium 'Academic Citizenship and the (Im)possible Imaginaries of Social Justice: Higher Education in India and South Africa' as part of the the SRHE annual conference, 10 December 2021*

## Abstract

Recognising that the university is a site of struggle for democracy and justice, this paper presents insider insights into academic citizenry within four Indian universities over 70 years after the country's independence.

Drawing from data generated from academics within four Indian universities, we analysed responses that revealed the limits and possibilities of academic freedom as 'professional freedom' within teaching, research, community engagement, governance and administration.

Insights were gained into the politics of participation between academic citizens within this transforming sector. Intersectional analysis revealed varied experiences of identification, in addition to constraints to exercising power. Substantial differences in 'being' and 'belonging' in academic functions emerged in relation to academic position and social location.

# 'academic freedom'

- An aspirational idea(I) (Observatory Magna Charta Universitatum, 2018)
- A central value
- Coupled with 'institutional autonomy'
- Pertains to individual freedoms of academic citizens
  
- Complex phenomenon (Abdel Latif, 2014)
- Protections?
- Struggle for freedom and equality of authority

Shaban, F., Abdullateef, S., Anis, R., Parkinson, T., & Belluigi, D. Z. (under review). *Advancing Critical University Studies for academia/cs at risk: Four priorities to inform scholars/hip*. Manuscript submitted for publication. In D. Belluigi, A. Keet, & J. Arday (Eds.), *Advancing Critical University Studies (Higher Education in Africa)*. SunMedia

Observatory Magna Charta Universitatum. 2018. The Magna Charta Universitatum. Observatory Magna Charta Universitatum. <http://www.magna-charta.org/magna-charta-universitatum/the-magna-charta-universitatum>

Abdel Latif, M. M. M. 2014. Academic freedom: Problems in conceptualization and research. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 33(2). <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2014.881766>

# Measuring academic freedom

(Hoffman & Kinzelbach, 2018)

1. Academic freedom as 'professional freedom'.
2. 'Socially-engaged academic freedom'.
3. The human rights.

Hoffmann, F., & Kinzelbach, K. 2018. *Forbidden knowledge. Academic Freedom and Political Repression in the University Sector Can Be Measured. This is How.* (p. 34). Global Public Policy Institute (GPPi). [https://www.gppi.net/media/Kinzelbach\\_Hoffmann\\_2018\\_Forbidden\\_Knowledge.pdf](https://www.gppi.net/media/Kinzelbach_Hoffmann_2018_Forbidden_Knowledge.pdf)

Zavale, N., & Langa, P. 2018. African Diaspora and the Search for Academic Freedom Safe Havens: Outline of a Research Agenda. *Journal of Higher Education in Africa / Revue De L'enseignement Supérieur En Afrique*, 16(1/2):1-24. <https://doi.org/10.2307/26819626>

The UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Higher-education Teaching Personnel (1997) with a user's guide—UNESCO Digital Library, ED.2008/Ws/24 72. <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000160495>

# Dominant discourses of 'academic freedom':

- The normative subject of the academic citizen
- Threat is 'othered' as **external** to the university and its citizens
- Structure of relations and practices **within** remain under-explored

# Counter-narratives of 'academic freedom':

- Struggle for academic freedom is a struggle for citizenship
- Rights, participation, democracy
- Infringement, unfreedom, repression and oppression

Sall, E. (ed.). 1997. *Women in Academia: Gender and Academic Freedom in Africa*. CODESRIA.

Zezeza, P. T. (2003). Academic Freedom in the Neo-Liberal Order: Governments, Globalization, Governance, and Gender. *Journal of Higher Education in Africa / Revue de l'enseignement Supérieur En Afrique*, 1(1), 149–194. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24486118>

# Free to Think 2021 -Scholars at Risk Academic Freedom Monitoring Project

<https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/resources/free-to-think-2021/>

Similarly, in India, university matters pertaining to syllabus, appointments and resignations of vice-chancellors, professors in different universities have been accused of being done under political influence in recent years, says a [report](#). The University Grants Commission's (UGC) new syllabus for history also faced charges of saffronisation and distortion by historians, as per a [report](#).

According to the [report](#), the students of South Asia particularly in Pakistan and Bangladesh, as well as in South Africa, Thailand, Palestine and Zimbabwe has faced the brunt of this recent phenomenon with roughly half of the total reported incidents accounting for stifling non-violent student's expression through violent attacks, arrests, disciplinary measures and prosecutions by the state.

In Myanmar and Afghanistan, entire university campus communities have been targeted and subjected to state repression, as per the [report](#), after the military and Taliban took over the respective countries in February and August 2021, respectively. The Nigerian government, in an attempt to abduct students and faculty members, conducted armed raids in different universities.

In the wake of the anti-CAA-NRC movement in India, the students, teachers and officials of [Jamia Millia Islamia](#), [Jawaharlal Nehru University](#), [Aligarh Muslim University](#), [Jadavpur University](#), [University of Delhi](#) and other higher education institutions were similarly attacked, either by the police or by the political outfits affiliated with the current ruling party.

## South Africa

In South Africa, repeated violent clashes between police, private security forces and students protesting on- and off-campus over access to higher education, were reported by SAR.

“Incidents reported during this period in South Africa centred around student protests over access to higher education, especially from March when the [minister responsible for higher education and training] announced a massive funding shortfall that would severely impede many students' ability to commence or resume their studies, especially those who had historical debt,” stated the report.

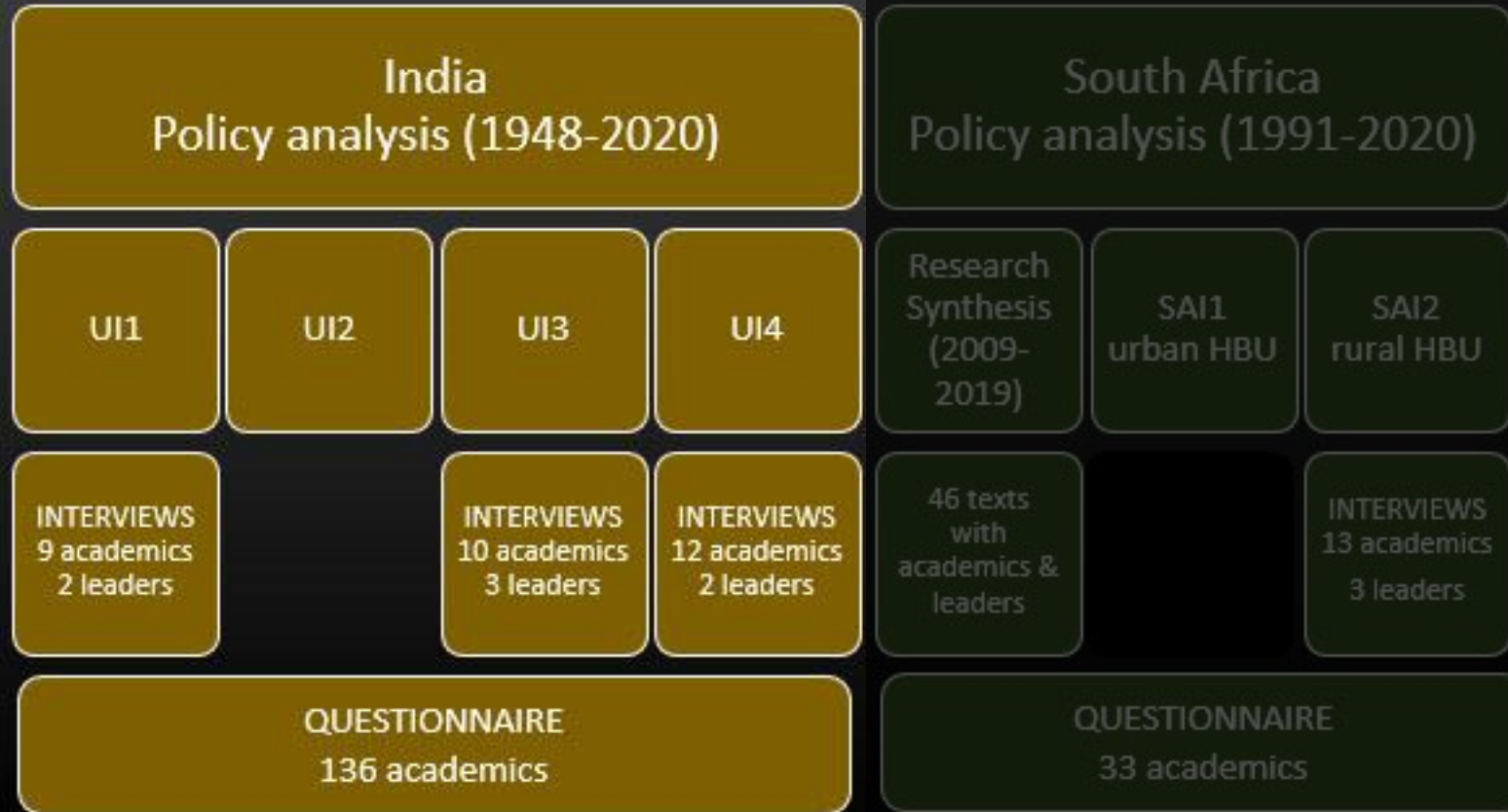
On 9 March, police used force against students of the University of the Witwatersrand who had blockaded a road near campus with burning tyres. Police also responded by firing rubber bullets to disperse the students and, according to the report, one student was arrested.

Similar incidents also occurred at the University of the Free State, Mangosuthu University of Technology, Walter Sisulu University and the Central University of Technology when, between March and April this year, police used stun grenades, rubber bullets and water cannons to disperse students protesting about fees increases. Students and members of the police services were injured.

The Wire Staff, 2021. Academic Freedom is under attack globally - including in India: Report. *The Wire*, 9 December. <https://livewire.thewire.in/campus/academic-freedom-is-under-attack-globally-including-in-india-report/>

Kigotho, W. 2021. Report warns that space for free flow of ideas is shrinking. *University World News, Africa Edition*, 9 December. <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20211209090140549&emci=64c73329-2a59-ec11-94f6-0050f2e65e9b&emdi=668f6324-4c59-ec11-94f6-0050f2e65e9b&ceid=9148261>

# Transformation for Sustainability?



*Overview of project data generation*



# Background info (self-reported)

- Age
- Primary disciplinary area
- Gender
- Social group ('caste')
- Economic status during childhood
- Languages most dominant in upbringing
- Religions
- Sexual orientation
- Marital status

Tick all which relate: \*

- I am an early career academic
- I am a senior academic
- I am in a leadership position within the institution
- I am a first generation graduate (ie.your parents/ caregivers did not have a tertiary qualification)
- I currently have direct caring responsibilities of a child/ren.
- I currently have direct caring responsibilities of others, such as elderly parents; guardianship over minors; dependents.
- I am differently abled (also termed 'disabled')
- I had a rural upbringing (i.e. not an urban environment)
- I am a displaced person ([ie.in](#) exile/ refugee/ asylum)
- I am currently a migrant from another state in India (inter-state migrant)
- I am currently a migrant from within this state in India (intra-state migrant)
- I am a foreign national
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

I have observed these general conditions for academic contributions to DECISION-making at this institution, in matters related to

	inclusive	exclusive/ exclusionary	I am not sure
university governance (i.e. high level management)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
administrative responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
how academic staff matters are managed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
teaching strategy (ie programme design; quality assurance approaches; what goes/ stays etc)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
teaching labour (who does what)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
teaching opportunities (supervision; exchanges; professional development)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
research strategy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
research content	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
research labour (who does what; who is hired to do what)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Strategy with engaging with stakeholders beyond the University (such as industry, media/ press, activist groups, research participants, governmental organisations and officers, NGOs, community organisations etc)

Labour when engaging with stakeholders beyond the University (such as industry, media/ press, activist groups, research participants, governmental organisations and officers, NGOs, community organisations etc)

Opportunities when engaging with stakeholders beyond the University (such as industry, media/ press, activist groups, research participants, governmental organisations and officers, NGOs, community organisations etc)

Can you 'be' the person who YOU want to be when enacting the following...  
Leave blank if not applicable.

Teaching?

Leave blank if not applicable.

Strongly agree    1    2    3    4    5    Strongly disagree  
           

Researching?

Leave blank if not applicable.

Strongly agree    1    2    3    4    5    Strongly disagree  
           

Administration within the University?

Leave blank if not applicable.

Strongly agree    1    2    3    4    5    Strongly disagree  
           

Interactions with academic colleagues in the University?

Leave blank if not applicable.

Strongly agree    1    2    3    4    5    Strongly disagree  
           

Interactions within stakeholders beyond the University?

Leave blank if not applicable.

Strongly agree    1    2    3    4    5    Strongly disagree  
           

# The politics of participation

- Being and belonging
- Decision-making

# Institutional culture

- Dominant values
- How these mis/align with the dominantly held values of that academic
- Internal conflict
- Policy-implementation gaps

# Academic agency

# Transformation for Sustainability?



*Overview of project data generation*

# Transformation for Sustainability?

India  
Policy analysis (1948-2020)

UI1

UI2

UI3

UI4

INTERVIEWS  
9 academics  
2 leaders

INTERVIEWS  
10 academics  
3 leaders

INTERVIEWS  
12 academics  
2 leaders

QUESTIONNAIRE  
136 academics

Category	AISHE	Our study
Male	57.8%	66.2%
Female	42.2%	31.6%
Non-Conforming	Omission	1.5%
Intersec	Omission	0.7%

Category	AISHE	Our study
General	56.7%	66.2%
OBC	32.1%	15.4%
SC	8.8%	9.6%
ST	2.36%	2.9%
Muslim	5.4%	1.47%

Overview of project data generation



# The conditions for decision-making

## Transformation for Sustainability

India  
Policy analysis (1948-2020)

UI1

UI2

UI3

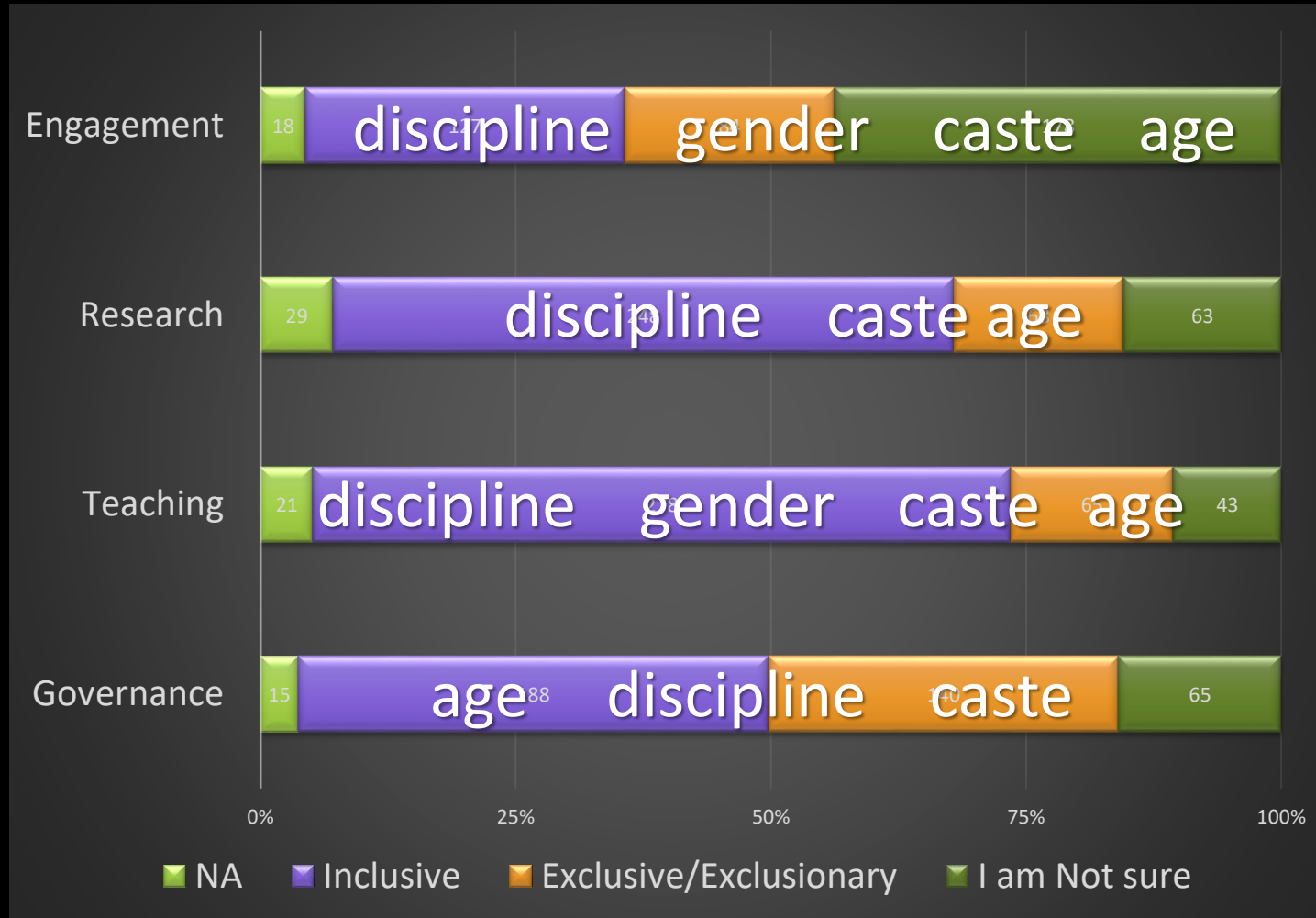
UI4

INTERVIEWS  
10 academics  
3 leaders

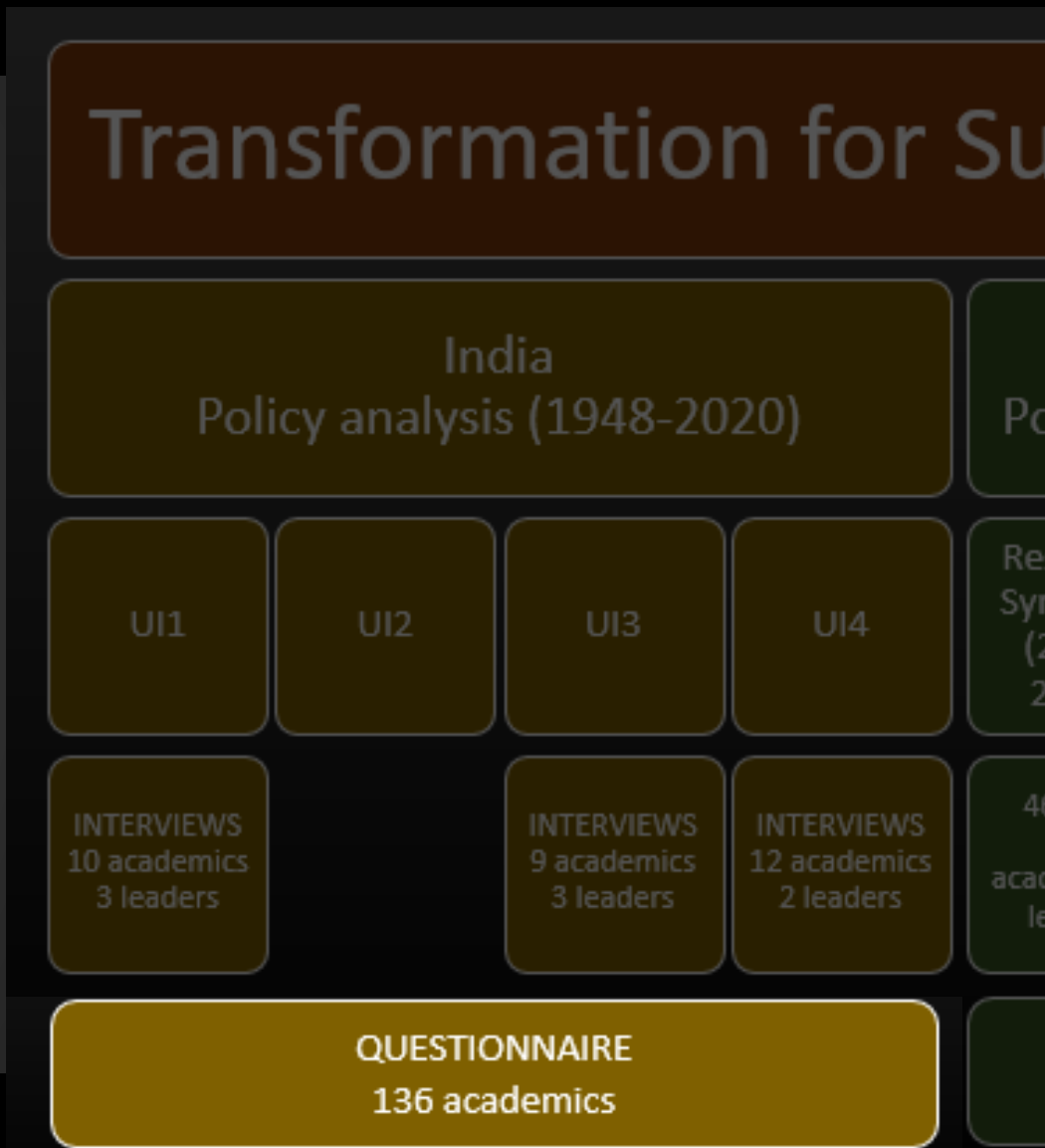
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3 leaders

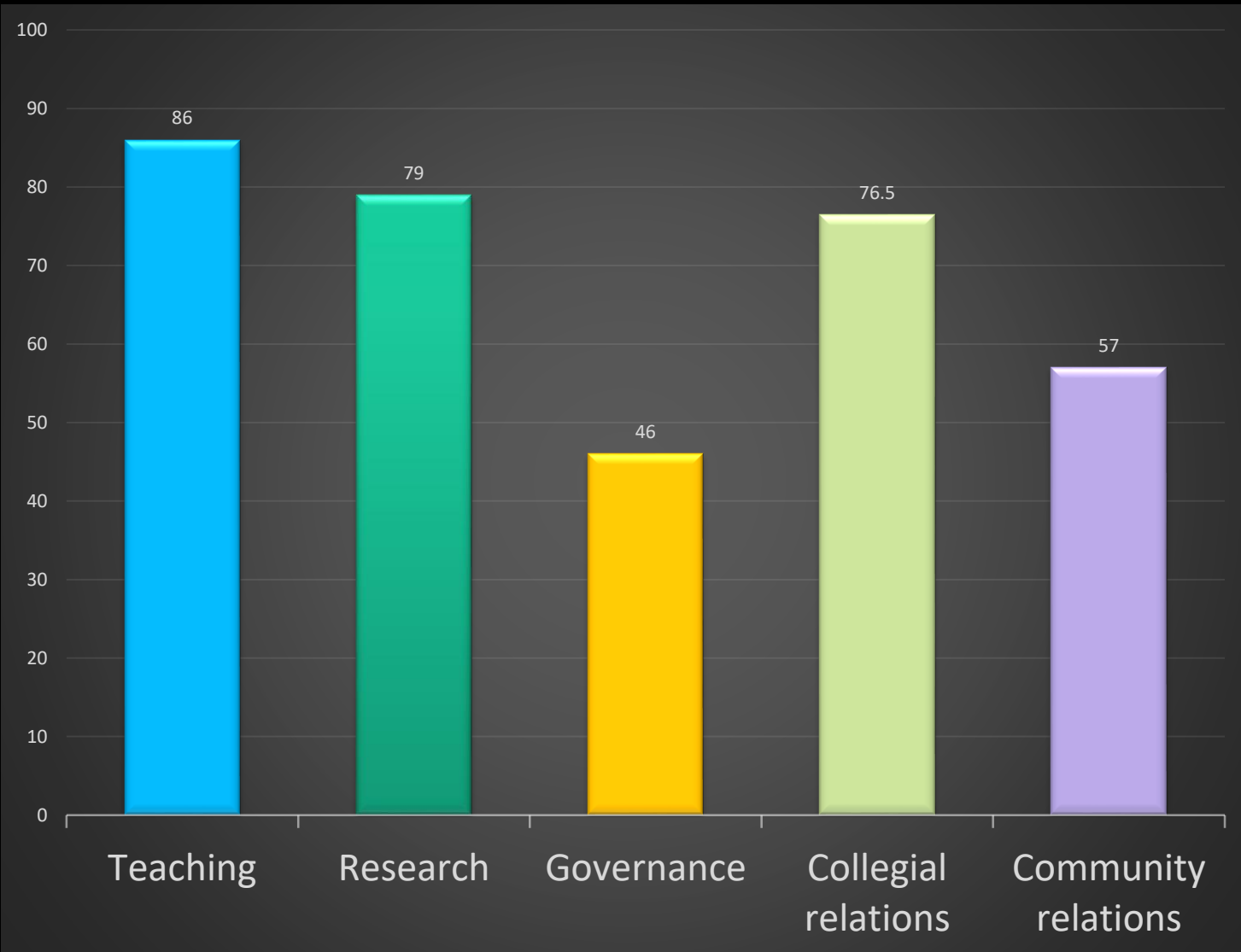
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136 academics



The conditions for decision-making





‘Being and belonging’

# Transformation for Su

India  
Policy analysis (1948-2020)

UI1

UI2

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UI4

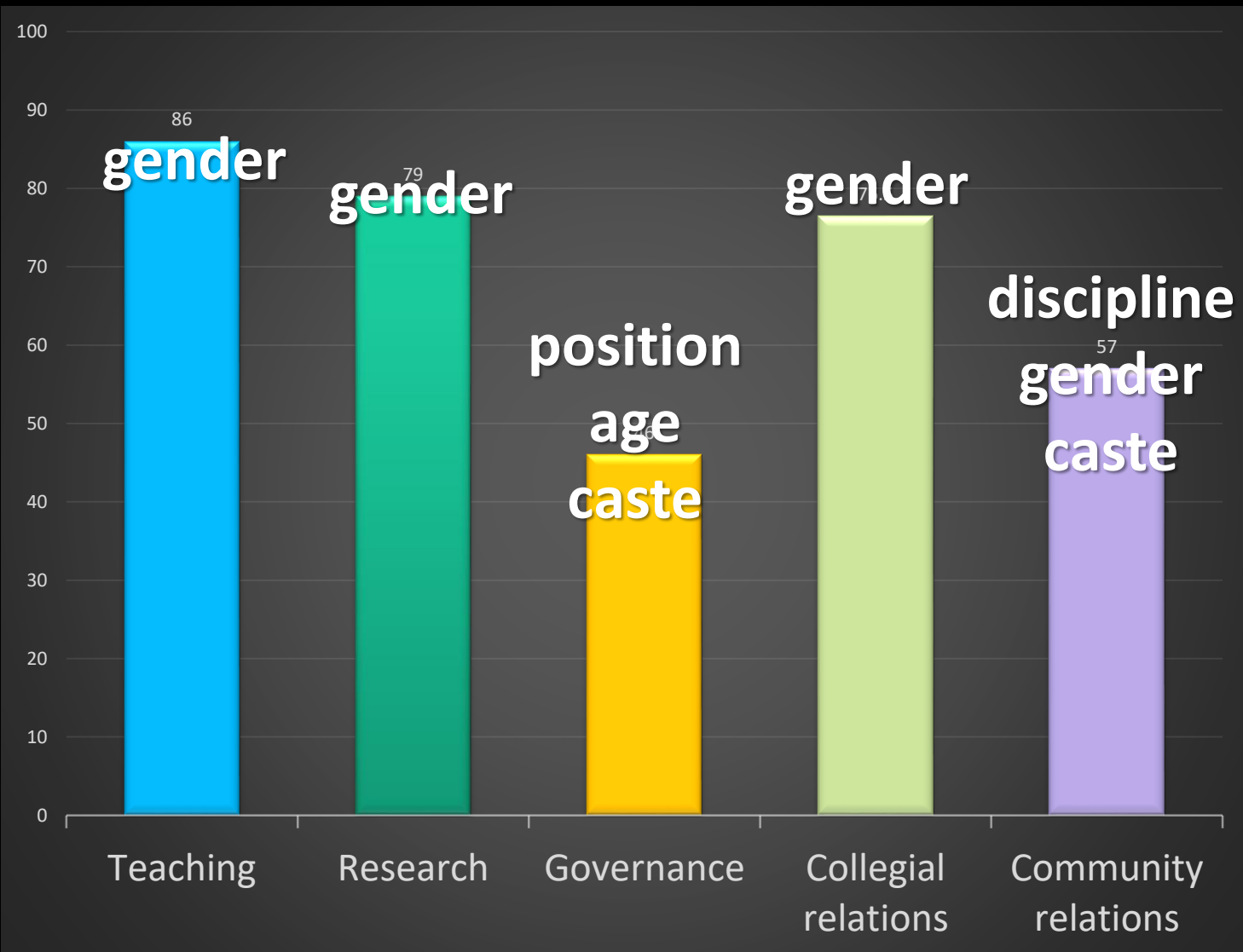
INTERVIEWS  
10 academics  
3 leaders

INTERVIEWS  
9 academics  
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INTERVIEWS  
12 academics  
2 leaders

QUESTIONNAIRE  
136 academics





‘Being and belonging’



# Transformation for Sustainability?

India  
Policy analysis (1948-2020)

South Africa  
Policy analysis (1991-2020)

UI1

UI2

UI3

UI4

Research  
Synthesis  
(2009-  
2019)

SAI1  
urban HBU

SAI2  
rural HBU

INTERVIEWS  
9 academics  
2 leaders

INTERVIEWS  
10 academics  
3 leaders

INTERVIEWS  
12 academics  
2 leaders

46 texts  
with  
academics &  
leaders

INTERVIEWS  
13 academics  
3 leaders

QUESTIONNAIRE  
136 academics

QUESTIONNAIRE  
33 academics

*Overview of project data generation*

# Transformation for Sustainability?

India  
Policy analysis (1948-2020)

South Africa  
Policy analysis (1991-2020)

UI1

UI2

UI3

UI4

Research Synthesis (2009-2019)

SAI1 urban HBU

SAI2 rural HBU

INTERVIEWS  
9 academics  
2 leaders

INTERVIEWS  
10 academics  
3 leaders

INTERVIEWS  
12 academics  
2 leaders

46 texts with academics & leaders

INTERVIEWS  
13 academics  
3 leaders

QUESTIONNAIRE  
136 academics

QUESTIONNAIRE  
33 academics

UI1: an old and large university of high national ranking

“cold war”

“a mask of democracy”

“the state must be held responsible”

“partisan”

“there is no peace and justice in the university”

“bad elements”

Overview of project data generation

# Transformation for Sustainability?

UI3: a previous institute of technology

India  
Policy analysis (1948-2020)

*“for the interests of the professional vs personal, the balance. How do we do that? This is the biggest challenge... my conscience will not permit. But at the same time for the interest of the institution we might want to take. So such kinds of compromises will be more as you grow”*

UI1

UI2

UI3

UI4

Research Synthesis (2009-2019)

SA11  
urban HBU

SA12  
rural HBU

*“just [the] opposite to democracy”*

INTERVIEWS  
9 academics  
2 leaders

INTERVIEWS  
10 academics  
3 leaders

INTERVIEWS  
12 academics  
2 leaders

INTERVIEWS  
academics & leaders

INTERVIEWS  
academics & leaders

*“If the director is not taking the decision, there are very few people who would oppose the director’s decision. Therefore, even if the heads of the departments have their presence in the Senate of the institution, it doesn’t make much of a difference”*

QUESTIONNAIRE  
136 academics

QUESTIONNAIRE  
33 academics

*“pollution”*

*“What kind of work ethics is this? I hate it. It is different among male colleagues... I feel women lack upright smartness. This may be because of social upbringing”*

Overview of project data generation

# Transformation for Sustainability?

India  
Policy analysis (1948-2020)

South Africa  
Policy analysis (1991-2020)

UI1

UI2

UI3

UI4

Research  
Synthesis  
(2009-  
2019)

SAI1  
urban HBU

SAI2  
rural HBU

UI4: an institution of eminence  
“institution of patriarchy”

INTERVIEWS  
9 academics  
2 leaders

INTERVIEWS  
10 academics  
3 leaders

INTERVIEWS  
12 academics  
2 leaders

46 texts  
with  
academics &  
leaders

INTERVIEWS  
13 academics  
2 leaders

“tick box”  
“anguish” “guilt”

QUESTIONNAIRE  
136 academics

QUESTIONNAIRE  
33 academics

Overview of project data generation

# Agency?

“When my protests make a difference, I’ll protest”  
- Women academic (STEM, UI4)