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International Relations as Area Studies: Debating the Provincial Foundations of the Discipline

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In his famous 2014 ISA Presidential Address, Amitav Acharya called for International Relations (IR) to transcend the division between western and non-western IR scholarship and embrace 'global international relations'. Central to 'global IR' is the idea that IR discipline is Western-centric and marginalises scholarship from non-Western societies. Ten years later, this provocation has led to significant scholarship that takes Acharya's call seriously, from dismantling the Western-centric foundations of the discipline to analysing many forms of non-Western scholarship. Taking this call further, this roundtable debates one specific notion in the 'global IR' conversation: that IR as a discipline has been essentially 'Area Studies'. The way IR scholars understand international politics has been characterised not only by Western-centrism, but also the fact that there are many IR scholars who are European or American specialists with narrow regional expertise but generalising their knowledge as 'international relations'. As such, IR scholars tend to prioritise or privilege one area over another and embrace a provincial viewpoint when discussing regions deemed 'other' from the Euro-American vantage point. This roundtable debates whether, how, and to what extent the existing international relations discipline is a form of area studies, and discusses the implications for 'global IR'.

Track Classification: Critical Alternatives for World Politics