

# Blogging for (Applied) Economists: Disseminating and Popularizing Modern Academic Research

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# Introduction

Consider a lighthouse

Lighthouses communicate knowledge to the public, preventing potentially deadly accidents while safely guiding travelers

They are easy to see from afar

Without lighthouses ship captains would have to sail tentatively with constant worry of making a potentially deadly mistake



# Introduction

Blogs are like lighthouses

Blogs communicate knowledge to the public

They are easy to access and read

Without blogs applied researchers don't have as much access to the knowledge needed to perform top-notch research



# Introduction

Throughout this presentation...

Think of blogging like contributing to a public good

But, just as Ronald Coase discovered even a lighthouse can generate private returns (depending on the institutions)

Blogging also can generate private returns



**WHY BLOG?**

# “Why I don’t blog”

- “I’m not paid to write blog posts”
- “I just don’t have time to write blog posts”
- “Blog posts don’t get cited by other researchers”
- “My research is very technical”
- “I don’t know what I’d write about”

# 1. Resource Allocation

“You are making a huge investment in your education by attending grad school. It would be a grossly inefficient allocation of resources to limit yourselves to writing journal articles and the occasional book.”

- Marc Bellemare  
([www.marcfbellemare.com](http://www.marcfbellemare.com))

# 1. Resource Allocation

- Becoming an economist and doing applied research takes **a lot** of time and money
- It'd be quite a shame if the only outputs that came from all of this were technical journal articles and synthesizing book chapters
- Blogging adds value to the research output of the applied researcher



# 2. Policy Impact

UNCLASSIFIED U.S. Department of State Case No. F-2014-20439 Doc No. C05795219 Date: 01/07/2016

RELEASE IN PART B6

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**From:** H <hrod17@clintonemail.com>  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 13, 2012 2:14 PM  
**To:** 'Russov@state.gov'  
**Subject:** Fw: a very concrete idea (short) on blocking Syria from entering into odious contracts from Ctr for Global Development

Pls print.

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**From:** Anne-Marie Slaughter [mailto: ]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, March 13, 2012 01:00 PM  
**To:** H  
**Cc:** Abedin, Huma <AbedinH@state.gov>; Cheryl Mills <MillsCD@state.gov>; Jacob J Sullivan (SullivanJJ@state.gov) <SullivanJJ@state.gov>  
**Subject:** a very concrete idea (short) on blocking Syria from entering into odious contracts from Ctr for Global Development

B6

I think this has real potential. Michael Kremer at USAID was an intellectual pioneer on not recognizing odious debt after the fact; this would prevent the Syrian govt from entering into contracts based on the same reasoning.

## Preventing Odious Obligations: A New Tool to Pressure Syria's Bashar Assad

Kimberly Ann Elliott and Owen Barder

03/09/2012

Countries that throw off a repressive dictator are too often left saddled with illegitimate and odious obligations. To maintain access to international credit markets, legitimate successor governments must honor these debts and comply with other contracts negotiated by dictator, even if the proceeds were stolen or used to violently repress opposition.

## 2. Policy Impact

- Most policymakers don't have time to weed through the details of an academic journal article
- Well-written and easily digestible blog posts that share key ideas increase the propensity of our work influencing policy
- Either by policymakers themselves reading our blogs or by journalists reading and reporting on our blogs

## 2. Policy Impact

“One way to reach policymakers is by translating the content of technical work for journalists. If journalists can understand and report on it, there is a prayer it might influence policy.”

- Austin Frakt

([www.theincidentaleconomist.com](http://www.theincidentaleconomist.com))

# 3. Private Benefits

**Table 2: Does blogging increase reputation?**

Marginal effects from Probit estimation of the likelihood of being a favorite economist

	(1) All	(2) Under 60	(3) Over 60
Blog regularly	0.426*** (0.127)	0.413*** (0.158)	0.406* (0.245)
In Repec top 50	0.341*** (0.0748)	0.418*** (0.0958)	0.243** (0.118)
In Repec rank 51-100	0.107* (0.0600)	0.157* (0.0894)	0.0269 (0.0761)
In Repec rank 101-200	0.00750 (0.0335)	0.0750 (0.0479)	-0.129*** (0.0395)
Proportion of sample on favorite list:	0.093	0.069	0.146
Observations	514	350	164

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses,

\*, \*\*, and \*\*\* indicate significance at 10, 5 and 1% levels respectively.

(“The Impact of Economics Blogs” McKenzie and Ozler 2011)

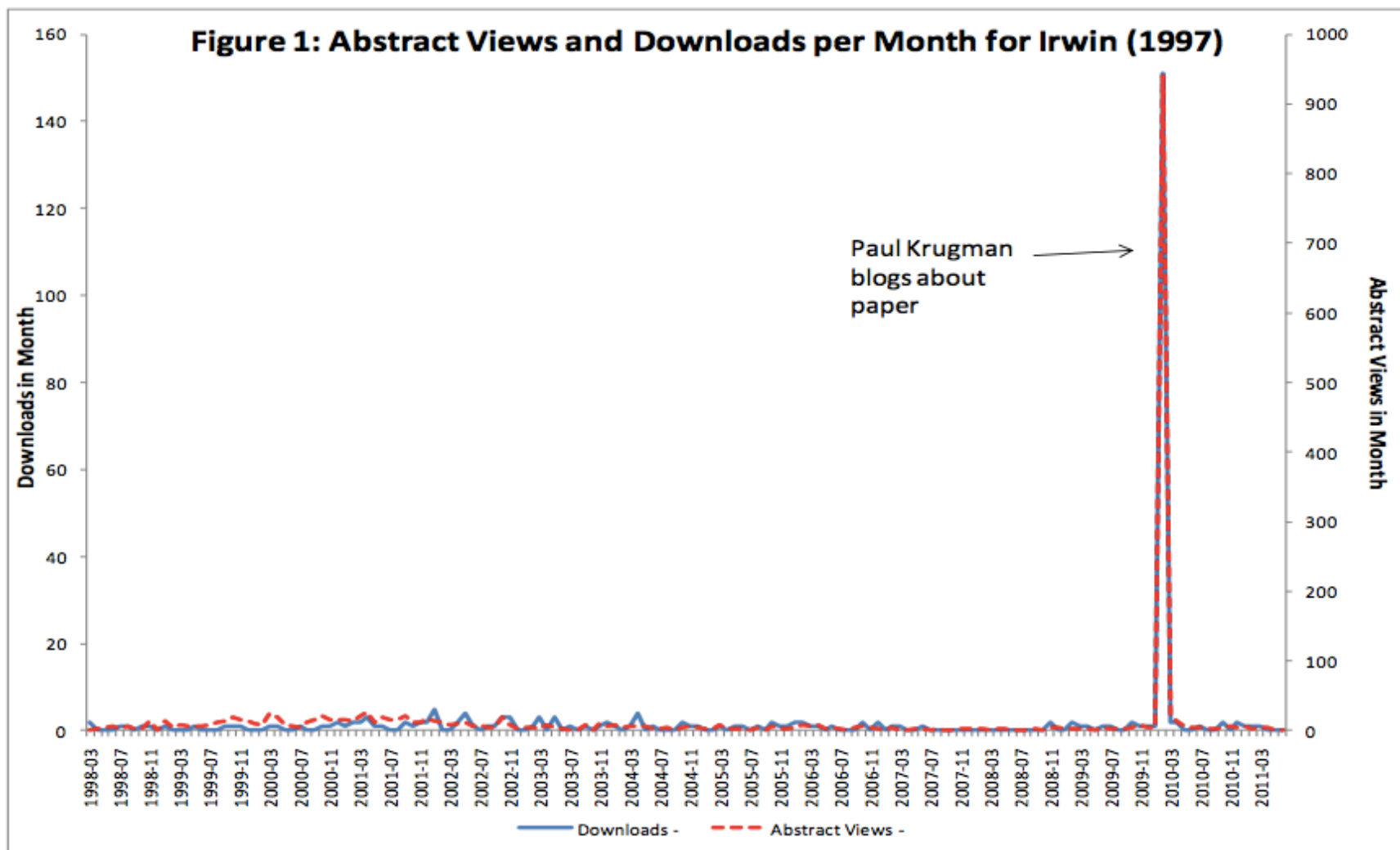
# 3. Private Benefits

- Find out who else is doing research in your area of interest – networking
- Develop new research ideas with new partners and collaborators – funding partners as well
- Improves writing and communication ability of the researcher – notoriously weak among economists

# 3. Private Benefits

- Helps the researcher clarify thinking about various topics – allows for “writing out” ideas
- Allow researchers to gain instant feedback on their work and ideas
- Popularizes good research – Chris Blattman:  
“Research without communication equals dustbin.”
- It’s fun – and actually doesn’t take much time

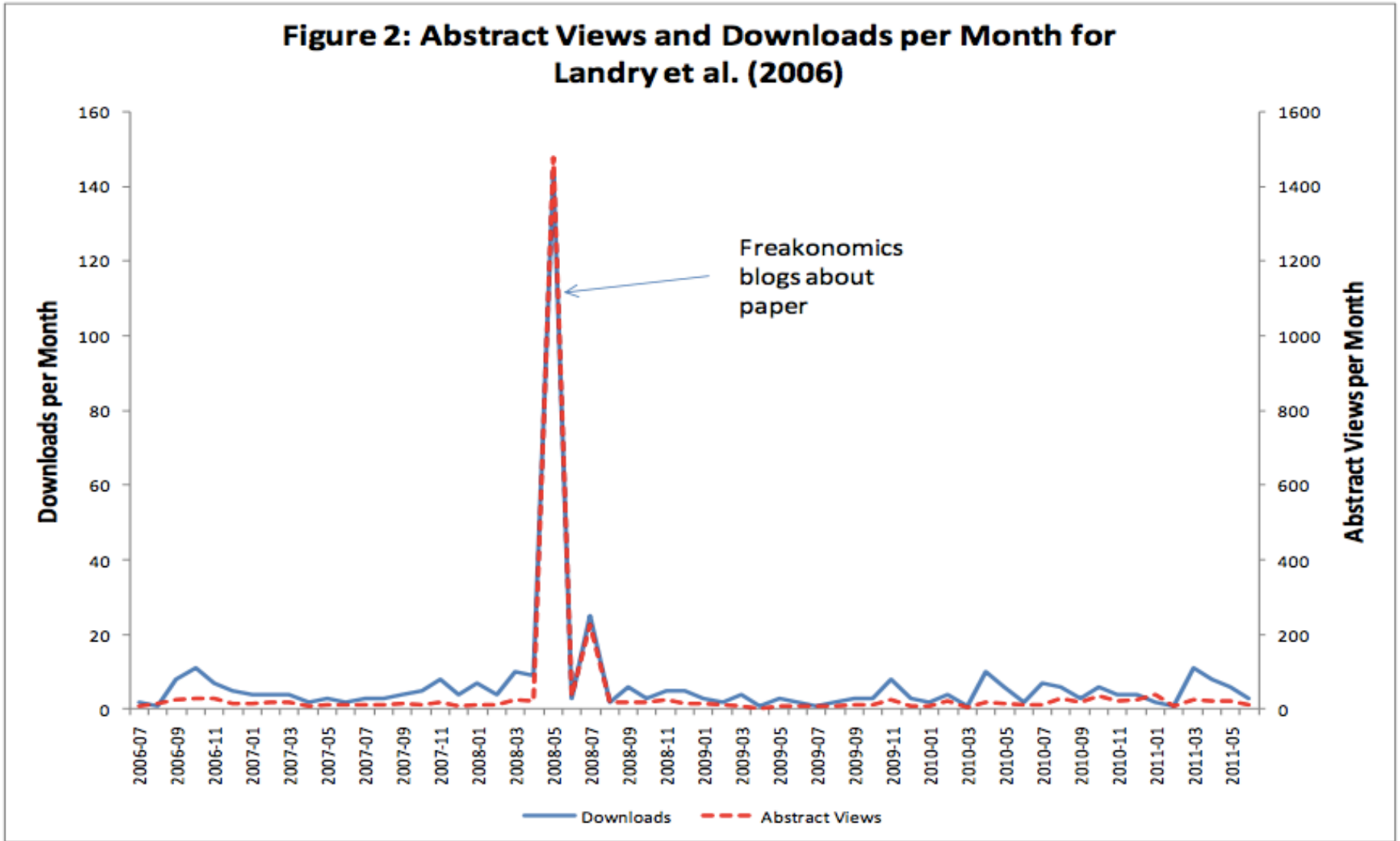
# **DISSEMINATING APPLIED RESEARCH**



(“The Impact of Economics Blogs” McKenzie and Ozler 2011)

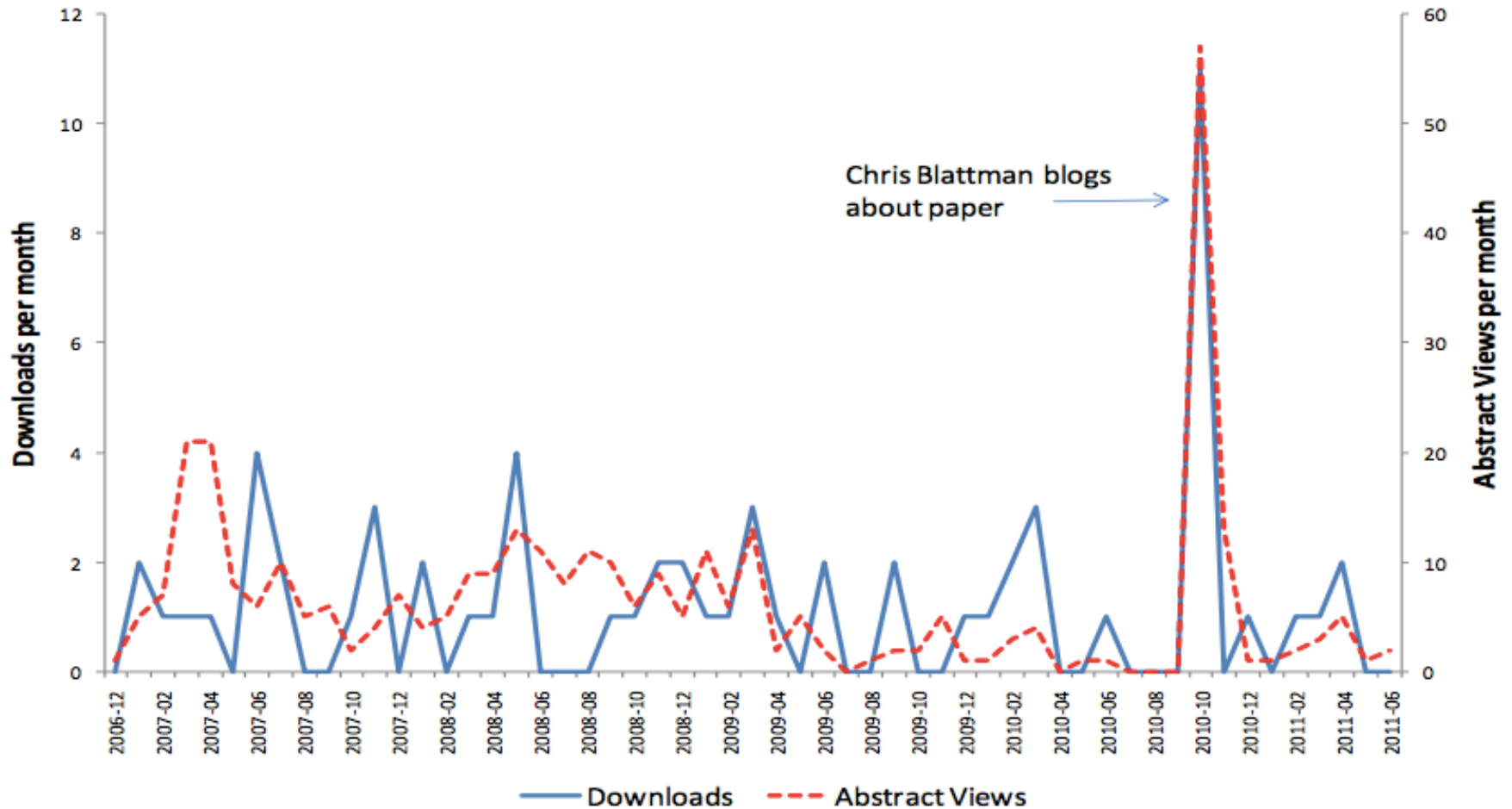


**Figure 2: Abstract Views and Downloads per Month for Landry et al. (2006)**

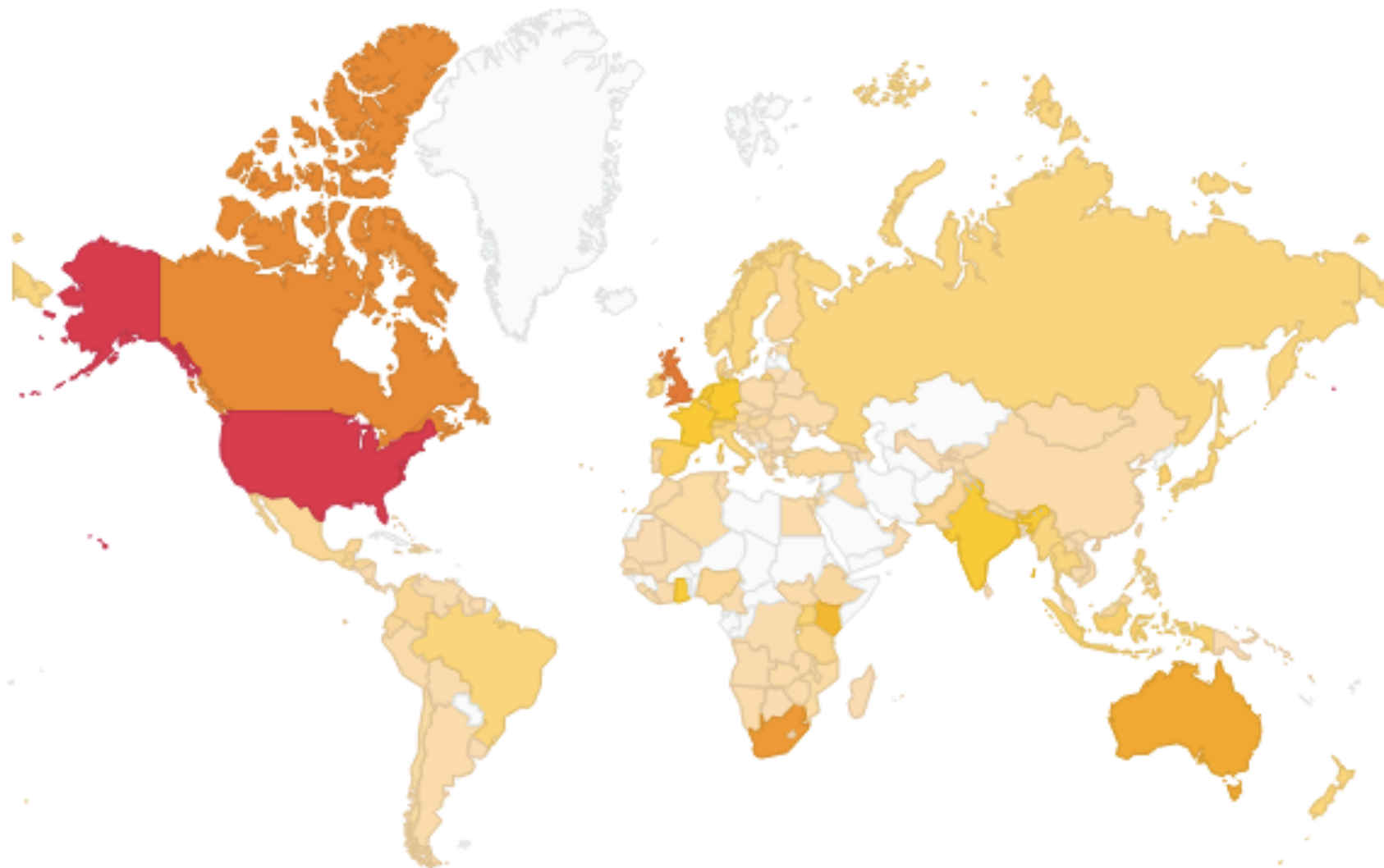


(“The Impact of Economics Blogs” McKenzie and Ozler 2011)

**Figure 3: Abstract Views and Downloads per Month for Arai and Thoursie (2006)**



(“The Impact of Economics Blogs” McKenzie and Ozler 2011)



1 12,966

# **POPULARIZING APPLIED RESEARCH**

A black and white close-up portrait of Ezra Klein, a man with dark hair and a slight beard, smiling warmly at the camera. The background is a plain, light color.

**Ezra Klein**

**Takes On the**

**World Bank's Efforts**

**to Popularize Research**

# 1. Important = Interesting

- There is nothing important that cannot be made interesting
- If great research isn't making it out, then there has been some failure. And it is not the fault of the audience
- A fundamental precondition to explaining something that is complicated well is understanding yourself

# 1. Important = Interesting

- The first mistake in this failure is the researcher leaving the communication and popularization of their research up to the communications department
- There is a tremendous amount of authenticity that comes with the author of a study personally reaching out to journalists or policymakers

# 1. Important = Interesting

“The public isn’t too stupid or uninterested to read your research. You’re just doing a bad job at communicating it.”

- Chris Blattman, paraphrasing Ezra Klein  
([www.chrisblattman.com](http://www.chrisblattman.com))



## 2. Target Your Audience

- Popularizing research is not a mindless hunt for maximizing readership
- Popularizing research is getting your research into the hands (on to the desks) of the people who need to read it
- Maybe that is the general population, but maybe that is only 5 or 6 policymakers

## 2. Target Your Audience

- Key question: Of the people who should know about your research, how do you get it to the largest number of them?
- This is a question of distribution more than anything else
- Develop a strategy on how to get research output to those who need to read it

# Popularizing Research on Blog

- Blogging is a great tool to use when popularizing research, because it's...
  - Sharable
  - Printable
  - Readable
  - Accessible
  - Email(able)

# TIPS FOR BLOGGING

# Tips for Blogging

- Before you start blogging build up a pile of fresh material or wait to promote your blog until you have a substantial pile of material.
- Keep the word count below (or around) 500 words. Split the content into a series of posts, if you need to write more on the topic.
- Post fresh material often and in some discernable pattern.

# Tips for Blogging

- Don't just write about yourself and link to your own research
- Write about and link to other people's work – be professional with critiques (don't make enemies and don't be unfair)
- Write in short and easy to understand paragraphs. As a rule of thumb, I write so that my grandfather can understand my posts.

# Tips for Blogging

- When you finish working papers or get papers published – blog about them
- Don't bury the lead – State the key point up front or in the title
- The best way to promote your blog is via Twitter – start following other people who share interests with you

# Tips for Blogging

- Don't worry too much about building your brand – write about what interests you (write the blog you'd want to read)
- Be original – don't be the 10<sup>th</sup> person to write about something
- Don't be afraid to try new things – experiment on your blog, be iterative



# Tips for Blogging

- I use Wordpress for my own blog – its easy to customize and free to use
- I schedule my blog posts to publish at around 5 or 6 in the morning – its on top of the email inbox for subscribers
- I also use my blog as my personal website – I list other writing, books I've read, background information.

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

# “Why I don’t blog”

- “I’m not paid to write blog posts”  
In a way you, as an academic, actually are
- “I just don’t have time to write blog posts”  
Blogging doesn’t have to take too much time
- “Blog posts don’t get cited by other researchers”  
It does influence what gets read and later cited
- “My research is very technical”  
Important research is always interesting research
- “I don’t know what I’d write about”  
Write about your interests and your passions

# Contributing to Blogs

- Economics That Really Matters
  - Run by Cornell’s Applied Economics Department
  - Focus: Development economics and agricultural economics
  - ([econthatmatters.com](http://econthatmatters.com))
- Development Impact Blog (World Bank)
  - GREAT blog to subscribe to
  - Focus: Empirical development economics
  - “Blog Your Job Market Paper” series

# Final Thoughts

- Blogging is more than just a source of procrastination for readers and writers
- It provides worthwhile private benefits with substantial positive externalities
- The presence of these externalities imply that there may be a vast undersupply of good applied economics blogs

**THANK YOU**