

DOING SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH IN THE AGE OF TRUMP

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Science is “universal”, with the latest research results being accessible to any one with a high-speed Internet connection. However, of late it has become parochial and narrow minded—with Trump (and the earlier Brexit referendum) being just the latest manifestation of it.

This kind of narrow mindedness is not new. Einstein’s theory of relativity—despite overwhelming experimental evidence for its validity—was not accepted in Nazi Germany because Einstein was a Jew. Mostly because of this prejudice, he emigrated to the US. There he saw that science was above religion; in fact, many of the top scientists—like Weisskoff—were immigrant Jews. He never forgave the (Christian) Germans for it, even though German was his mother tongue.

The same attitude prevents school students from learning about relativity in religious schools (*madrassas*) in Islamic countries like Pakistan. Students are taught – nay indoctrinated—that everything is in the Quran.

And Einstein’s relativity is wrong because the theory was uttered by a heretic Jew. Not surprisingly, Abdus Salam – Pakistan’s only Nobel laureate—believed in the infallibility of the Quran and quoted from it in his Nobel acceptance speech. Despite his fundamentalist view that religion was an integral part of his scientific work, he was forced to leave Pakistan because he was a member of the minority Ahmadi Muslim community—not all Muslims are equal!

I remember as a doctoral student at MIT that some of my smartest colleagues and teachers were Muslims from Iran. This is because they came out of a highly competitive exam system—similar to JEE in India—and hence represented the *creme de la creme* of Iran. Thus the travel ban and visa ban imposed by Trump on Iranians is not going to help research at places like MIT. This loss to the US (hopefully temporary) will act as a gain to Canada and mainland Europe. It is natural to require background check on visa applicants—because some of them can be terrorists as the recent experience in France and Germany shows—but a blanket ban on applicants from 7 Islamic countries is not going to help matters.

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