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Where do Nobel Laureates come from?

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Country trends



Where do Nobel Laureates come from?

SARAH HUGGETT

The Nobel Prizes are awarded by various institutions in Sweden and Norway, but does this Scandinavian outlook have any impact on the geographical distribution of Prize winners?

In his will, Nobel specified that: "It is my express wish that in awarding the prizes no consideration whatever shall be given to the nationality of the candidates, but that the most worthy shall receive the prize, whether he be a Scandinavian or not." (1)

According to country rankings based on the number of documents or citations, such as the [SCImago country rankings](#), the leading nations in terms of article output are:

1. The United States
2. The United Kingdom
3. Japan
4. China
5. Germany

And the leaders in terms of citations are:

1. The United States
2. The United Kingdom
3. Germany
4. Japan
5. France

The United States and Europe lead

The geographical distribution of the Nobel Prizes for Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine, and Economic Sciences mirrors these results, with most Prize recipients coming from the US, the UK and Germany (see Figure 1). This prevalence persists for all subject areas (see Figures 2, 3, 4, 5) except for Germany for Economic Sciences. On a regional basis, most Laureates are, unsurprisingly, found in North America and Europe. Asia comes third due to Japan.

Taking a look at national performance for specific subject areas, we find that Canada leads on Nobel Prizes for Chemistry while Russia is strong in Physics. Most Physiology or Medicine, and Economic Sciences Prizes are won by Americans and Europeans, with the UK doing particularly well for Economic Sciences.

Emerging Laureates?

The Nobels have been awarded since 1901, and during this period of time, the leaders have remained relatively stable. However, the results of investment within emerging economies is already showing a rapid rise in output, and the most successful of these, such as China, are gaining prominence in country rankings. For instance, while China ranks fourth for output, according to SCImago, it still lags behind in terms of

citations, ranking 12th overall. However, this rank does represent a steady upwards trend in citation impact over the years.

It will be interesting to see if this investment starts paying off in terms of recognition, both through citations as well as potentially receiving prestigious prizes. Due to the average 20-year delay between discovery and recognition in the context of the Nobel Prizes, this particular indicator will not start becoming apparent for some time yet.

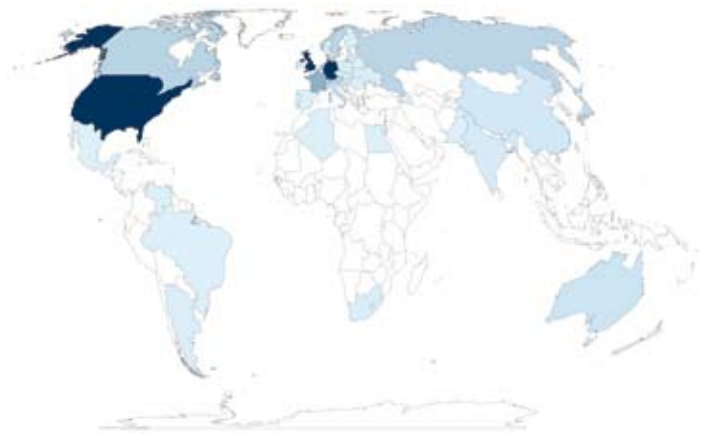


Figure 1 – Geographical distribution of Nobel Prize winners in Physics, Chemistry, Physiology or Medicine, and Economic Sciences (country of birth or affiliation at time of award).
Source: NobelPrize.org

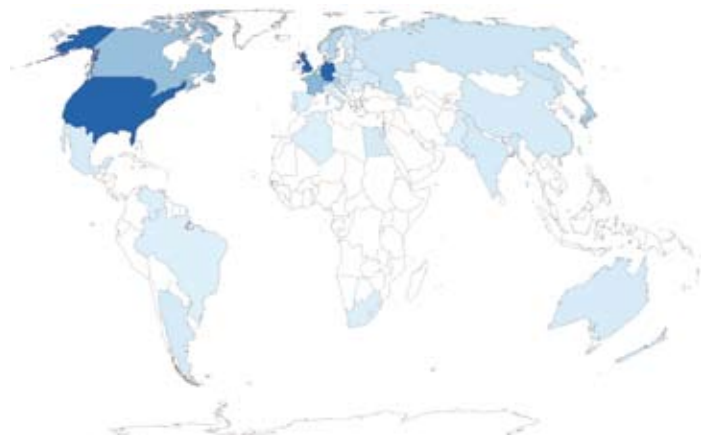


Figure 2 – Geographical distribution of Nobel Prize winners in Chemistry (country of birth or affiliation at time of award).
Source: NobelPrize.org

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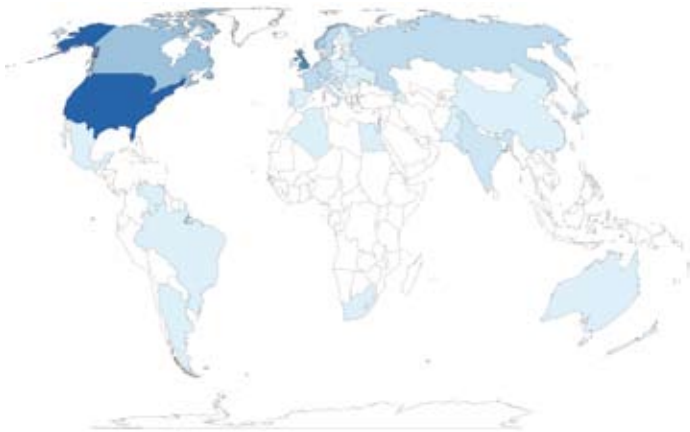


Figure 3 – Geographical distribution of Nobel Prize winners in Economic Sciences (country of birth or affiliation at time of award).
Source: NobelPrize.org

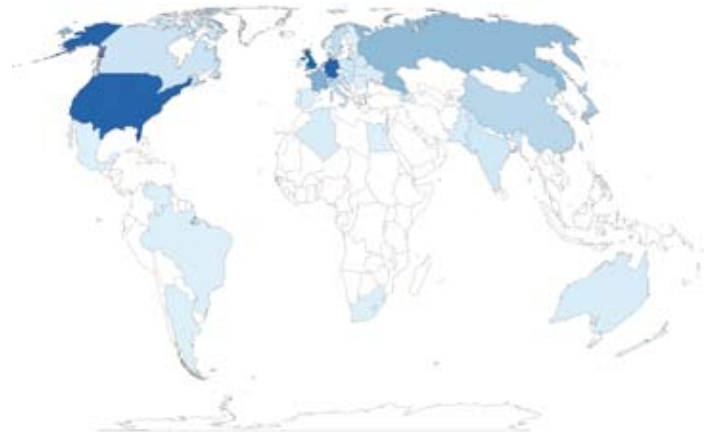


Figure 4 – Geographical distribution of Nobel Prize winners in Physics (country of birth or affiliation at time of award).
Source: NobelPrize.org

Reference:
(1) ["Full text of Alfred Nobel's Will", Nobelprize.org., Oct. 15, 2010.](#)

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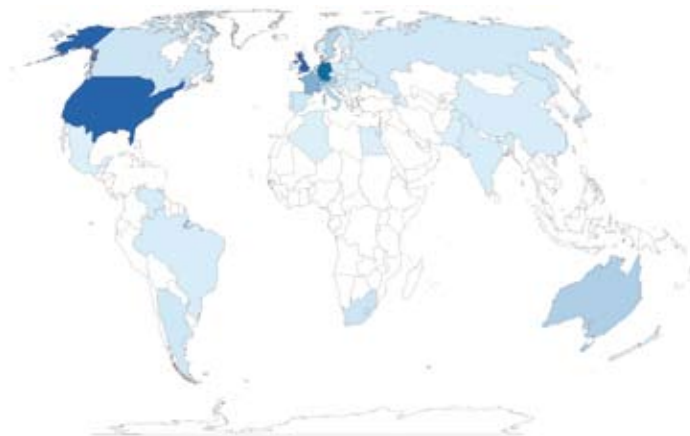


Figure 5 – Geographical distribution of Nobel Prize winners in Physiology or Medicine (country of birth or affiliation at time of award).
Source: NobelPrize.org