

The Tradeoff between Altruism and Economic Growth in the Research Focus of Nations

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What motivates the research strategies of nations and institutions? We suggest that research primarily serves two masters – altruism and economic growth. Some nations focus more research in altruistic fields while others focus more research in fields associated with economic growth. What causes this difference? Are there national characteristics that would suggest why they are more aligned with altruism or economic growth? To answer this question, we have identified nine major fields of research by analyzing the publication activity of 4429 institutions using Scopus data. Three fields of research are clearly altruistic (there is little involvement by industry) and three fields are clearly aligned with economic growth. The altruistic vs. economic nature of nations based on their publication profiles across these fields is correlated with national indicators on wealth, education, capitalism, individualism, power, religion, and language. Previous research has suggested that national research strategy is aligned with national wealth. However, our analysis shows that national wealth is not correlated with the tradeoff between altruism and economic growth. Instead, the tradeoff is largely captured by a culture of individualism. Accordingly, implications for national research strategies are discussed.