

GENETICS, NOTEWORTHY

WHY WE SHOULD ABANDON THE NOBEL PRIZE

11.10.2025

Here is comes a concise overview of common arguments for abandoning or radically reforming the Nobel Prize system.

The myth of the lone genius

Modern science and culture are highly collaborative. The Nobel rules limit the prize to at most three individuals and exclude institutions or teams, which distorts how major discoveries are actually achieved and reinforces a hero-focused narrative rather than recognizing collective effort.

Distorting scientific incentives

The prestige and financial reward attached to the Nobel can encourage unhealthy competition, secrecy, and risk-averse behavior. Researchers may pursue topics perceived as “Nobel-worthy” instead of socially urgent or less glamorous problems, skewing funding and public attention.

Outdated and elitist structure

Created in the late 19th century, many Nobel rules no longer fit current realities: some fields are excluded, posthumous awards are disallowed, and selection processes are often opaque and dominated by narrow demographics. This can lead to Eurocentric and gender-biased outcomes.

Legitimizing controversial work

Some laureates have been associated with ethically problematic activities. Awarding individuals without thorough ethical scrutiny risks whitewashing responsibility and giving prestige to work that may have harmful implications.

Oversimplifying and politicizing knowledge

Prizes in fields like peace, literature, and economics can be deeply political. The Nobel can function as a soft-power instrument, promoting specific ideological views while marginalizing alternative perspectives or non-Western traditions.

Mismatch with how value is created today

The Nobel model treats discoveries as singular moments, but progress increasingly emerges from iterative processes, large teams, shared infrastructure, and interdisciplinary networks. The current system fails to acknowledge those modes of creation and contribution.

Alternatives and reforms

Possible changes include recognizing teams or institutions, creating rotating and more transparent juries with global representation, adding new categories for areas like environmental or data science, and shifting recognition from single results to ethical process and collaborative impact.

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