

Is Western culture balancing on a tightrope between science and humanities?

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Pseudoscience is on the rise and so is the constant clamour of 'fake

news.' Should we, therefore, be questioning the West's grip on rational, empirical evidence-based reason? While the West is fending off resurgent claims of a flat Earth—last dispelled by Magellan and Elcano's circumnavigation in the early 16th century—as well as persistent climate change deniers, Asia is making rapid technological and scientific progress.

In his book, Carlos Elías discusses why Western countries are losing interest in the STEM subjects, which once reigned as the beacon of civil development and [culture](#), in favour of post-truths, alternative facts and, occasionally, irrationality.

Elías provides a critical perspective on modern-day scientific development in an era dominated by social media culture. Students are flocking to the [humanities](#) and, consequently, associated academics are accumulating increasingly more power despite having little to no scientific knowledge. He also suggests the humanities and its academics play the role that Spain, the Jesuits and the Catholic Clergy had during the Counter-Reformation in the 17th century, where contempt and an intolerance of science and technological development led to the decline of the Spanish imperial power.

"The university and its influence on the media have fostered a celebrity culture that puts the emotional before the rational. They have established university degrees in which literature about magic is studied more than physics and chemistry," says Elías.

In contrast to the West, where the importance of science is regarded with increasing doubt and suspicion, in Asia, country leaders often have scientific or engineering backgrounds. This so-called STEM vocation crisis could also have adverse economic consequences for the West, and may also lead to a decline in its cultural hegemony, historically based on rational decision-making.

STEM educators, scientists and academics interested in scientific culture will undoubtedly find *Science on the Ropes* an informative and elucidating read. So, too, will readers looking to unveil the momentum behind a social media culture obsessed with vilifying scientific knowledge.

Carlos Elías, Ph.D., is Professor of Journalism, Science and Society at the Carlos III University of Madrid as well as the Jean Monnet Chair holder on the subject of the EU, Disinformation and Fake News. His research focuses on the relationship between policy-making, [science](#), technology and mass media culture.

More information: Elías, Carlos. *Science on the Ropes: Decline of Scientific Culture in the Era of Fake News*:
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