

Mixing problem solving with politics? IMO histories

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The IMO river sprang from a communist block source during the Cold War. Starting as a friendly get-together, stimulating fun in mathematics at a high level, it soon became politicized and played a role in recognizing mathematical proficiency of a country, combined with the opportunity to scout and foster talents. Capitalist block countries regarded the communist approach to competitions as refreshing. They often copied the idea of a national competitions, mostly targeted at showing how mathematics could be fun as well as taxing. The growing international character made the IMO even more elitist, despite its initial goals.

The presumed non-political character of the competition made it appealing to mathematicians, who seemed to be completely unaware of the political meaning of international gatherings.