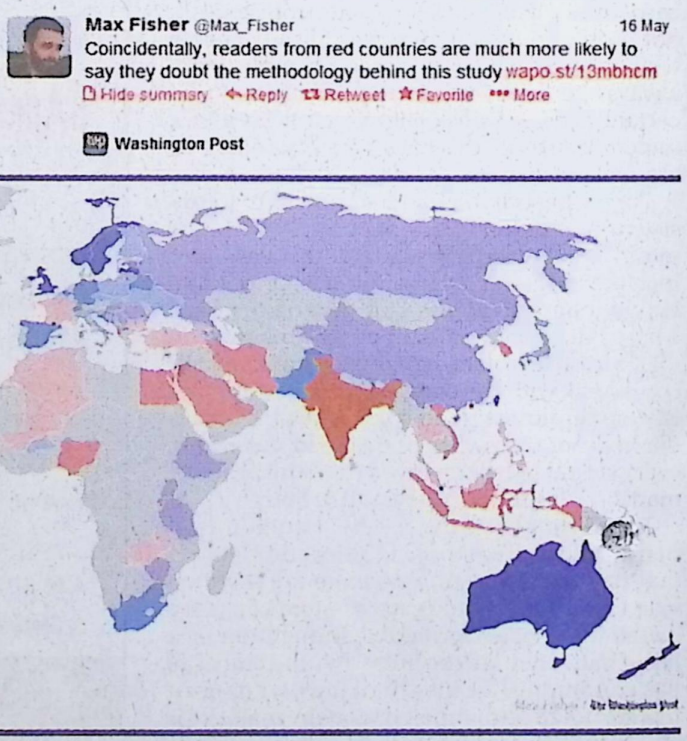
Painting the Country Red

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"Bangladesh is the second most racist country in the world", screamed the map of global racism. So to the list of 'disaster-prone', 'poor', 'corrupt' and 'fundamentalist' – the world will now add 'racist' when describing Bangladesh. The map was colour-coded and Bangladesh appeared in deep Crimson. Plus, it came with the powerful masthead of the Washington Post – stamped with majestic-blue moral and intellectual superiority of the proverbial West.

Max Fisher, Foreign Affairs Blogger and Worldviews page host at the Washington Post (WaPo) had picked up the scent from two Swedish economists examining if economic freedom made people more or less racist. After some manipulation and extrapolation – Fisher produced the compelling write-up and what he called the 'fascinating' map on 15 May, 2013. Fisher's phrasing and caveats made it difficult to decipher or question results beyond the blue and red. Basically: blue was good (not racist) – red, bad (racist).

Hong Kong, Bangladesh, Jordan and India were the most racist countries – compared to say Pakistan or South Africa. USA, Britain, Canada, Scandinavia, Australia and South America were among the least racist. In broad strokes, the West was tolerant – the middle and south East, racist.



The post can't be ignored, because: firstly, it's the WaPo (read: 2nd highest circulation in Washington and 47 Pulitzers). Secondly, because major news outlets picked up the map and millions shared and reblogged it. Websites of HuffPost and The Guardian were abuzz with debate, personal experience of racist behavior and the occasional hate-speech: "what? India is worse than Pakistan? More racist than South Africa?" The posts gave birth to a new slew of racist remarks. One can't afford to not take note of the fascinating map and engage in some soul-searching.

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The question that immediately comes to mind is: why, in a country of mostly homogeneous, centrist people, would 72 percent respondents appear racist? To understand how we got bathed in crimson, three important dimensions of the map need to be reviewed: (1) what Racism means, (2) how it was measured and (3) how robust the methodology was.

Firstly, what are the origins of modern 'Racism'? Race identities are rooted in physical features such