

Summary

The Trump Administration has tried to radically cut scientific funding and ensure that scientists are subject to political control. The reasons come down to ideology, which has drowned out any sense of the value of science.

Make no mistake, the Trump Administration is engaged in a serious, carefully honed effort to undermine American science. The National Science Foundation has [lost](#) a third of its staff, while the National Institutes of Health have lost 20%. EPA's science office is being shuttered. Trump's proposed budget [included](#) a 54% cut for NSF, 12% for NIH, and 46% for NASA's research. And last week, the government [proposed](#) changes to politicize research funding at the expense of merit review. It also proposed making continuation of long-term funding dependent on political whim, which will drive researchers away from major projects with long timelines.

Given how important scientific progress has been to our economy, health, and national defense, this creates a real puzzle. What is behind the massive attack on one of our country's greatest areas of excellence?

The answer seems simple: culture wars. The President's [proposed budget](#) contained a familiar litany of conservative criticisms of research funding such as promotion of "radical gender ideology," DEI, and "promotion of dangerous ideologies." It proposed reforming NIH to align it with the anti-science MAHA movement led by RFK, Jr. The cut to the Geological Survey is partly aimed to eliminate research with a "focus on social agendas (e.g., climate change)."

Justifications for cutting other agencies are similar. The NSF proposal is designed to cut funding for "climate; clean energy; woke social, behavioral, and economic sciences; and programs in low priority areas of science." The budget proposal also complains that "NSF has fueled research with dubious public value, like speculative impacts from extreme climate scenarios and niche social studies." The NASA proposal "eliminates funding for low-priority climate-monitoring sites." It focuses on "beating China back to the moon and putting the first human on Mars," neither of which has any particular scientific value. And of course, most research is conducted in universities, which the Administration regards as citadels of wokeness.

Similar accusations against the government's science agencies were found in Project 2025, which has provided the blueprint for much of Trump's second term.

Project 2025 calls NIH and the CDC, the duo most responsible—along with President Joe Biden—for the irrational, destructive, un-American mask and vaccine mandates that were imposed upon an ostensibly free people during the COVID-19 pandemic.” (No mention of all the lives saved by the vaccine.) Quoting a critic of NIH, Project 2025 says that “despite its popular image as a benign science agency, NIH was responsible for paying for ‘research in aborted baby body parts, human animal chimera experiments’—in which the genes of humans and animals are mixed, ‘and gain-of-function viral research that may have been responsible for COVID-19.’”

The report also worries about the “the ill-advised attempt to expand the National Science Foundation’s mission from supporting university research to supporting an all-encompassing technology transition.”

It is difficult to separate ideology from rejection of science, given that MAGA rejects the overwhelming evidence about climate change and vaccine effectiveness while MAHA prefers folk remedies to scientifically tested treatments. One problem with science is that the facts may not fit our political preferences. Science also involves a respect for expertise that Trump rejects in many settings, such as his appointment of someone with no national security experience or knowledge as Director of National Intelligence.

Unlike the current Administration, the Project 2025 report did endorse the goal of ensuring “that America continues to lead the world in fundamental science.” This is a view [shared](#) by a healthy majority of Democrats and Republicans alike. But not by the Trump Administration.

Other theories are no doubt possible, but the best explanation of the Administration’s hostility to science seems to be the simplest one: a belief that the research community is entangled with woke beliefs and practices. Excising those is more important than any resulting damage to scientific progress. Unless science can be quickly monetized, the Administration doesn’t seem to see much value to it anyway.