

FEATURES, SPECIAL REPORT SUBARTICLE

# 2017: The year in tweets

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Politics mixed with science in some unsavory ways in 2017. The Trump administration's attempts to ban travel from certain countries to the United States led to worries about getting to scientific meetings. Proposed budget cuts to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) rattled researchers who depend on funding from the agency.

Many autism scientists voiced their opinions on these and other government actions over social media. Some used Twitter, among other outlets, to organize and participate in protests such as the March for Science.

*Spectrum* took a look back at the year in tweets and plucked out autism researchers' and advocates' reactions to the most-talked-about political events of the past 12 months.

## Trump's travel ban:

One of Donald Trump's first acts as president was to issue an executive order on immigration into the U.S., an act that became known as the 'Muslim ban' or 'travel ban.' Autism researchers and scientific societies and institutions were quick to voice their concerns over the **ban's impact on science**, including fear that it would **prevent scientists from traveling** to meetings in the U.S. and abroad.

<https://twitter.com/TonyZador/status/854852471411355648>

<https://twitter.com/russpoldrack/status/825757698436132864>

<https://twitter.com/WillClinPsy/status/826700277126414336>

<https://twitter.com/BerryS730/status/921381059274727425>

UPDATE: @CSHLmeetings is offering remote conference participation to scientists affected by the US #travelban. Info: <https://t.co/hC15UXqHKN>  
[pic.twitter.com/zVLeH4HD2E](https://t.co/hC15UXqHKN)

— ColdSpringHarborLab (@CSHL) **March 7, 2017**

<https://twitter.com/sbaroncohen/status/825862230558253057>

## Decrying DeVos:

Billionaire Betsy DeVos was confirmed as secretary of education in February. At the time, **Matthew Siegel**, faculty scientist at the Maine Medical Center Research Institute, **told Spectrum**, “We are in deep, deep trouble as an autism community in the next four years.” He wasn’t alone in his anxiety over her appointment.

<https://twitter.com/DSMandell/status/865034638238130176>

<https://twitter.com/stevesilberman/status/922996458051092482>

<https://twitter.com/ReframeEd/status/825039513923751937>

<https://twitter.com/utafrith/status/917468330944028672>

## Funding fears:

In March, Trump **proposed a \$5.8 billion cut** to the NIH’s 2018 budget. The following month, he recommended that the agency’s 2017 budget be slashed by \$1.2 billion. To researchers, this felt like “the administration is folding and giving up on us,” **Kevin Pelphrey**, a professor at George Washington University in Washington, D.C., told *Spectrum*. Others took to Twitter to share their frustration and to advocate for science.

(Despite the president’s plans, the NIH’s 2017 budget increased by \$825 million, and in September a Senate subcommittee approved a \$2 billion budget boost for 2018, although those numbers are still uncertain.)

<https://twitter.com/EricJNestler/status/844911293165383680>

<https://twitter.com/sebatlab/status/851537204459429888>

<https://twitter.com/AbePalmer/status/844040767895085057>

<https://twitter.com/DSMandell/status/848920963261583360>

## March for Science:

Many scientists marked 22 April on their calendars as the day they would gather with thousands of other scientists worldwide to ‘**March for Science**.’ The march was a response to the “fundamental shift in the political climate that has mobilized scientists,” **Olav Olsen**, a neuroscientist at Rockefeller University in New York, **told Spectrum**. Some scientists even enlisted their families in the cause.

[https://twitter.com/alon\\_goren/status/855898464223338496](https://twitter.com/alon_goren/status/855898464223338496)

<https://twitter.com/WiringTheBrain/status/855828428439912448>

<https://twitter.com/LucinaUddin/status/855864984521322496>

[https://twitter.com/J\\_McPartland/status/855839643652288513](https://twitter.com/J_McPartland/status/855839643652288513)

## Healthcare concerns:

Although attempts to repeal and replace the Affordable Care Act have stalled, anxiety looms over the future of so-called Obamacare, and what a repeal could mean for people with autism and their families. Scientists and research organizations made their concerns known over the course of the year as the various iterations of a health reform bill were tabled in both the House of Representatives and the Senate.

<https://twitter.com/DSMandell/status/910287745444171776>

<https://twitter.com/RVAwonk/status/842324082087624704>

<https://twitter.com/girlscientist/status/878069871044460545>

## Brexit blues:

Scientists in the United Kingdom are worried that the country’s **exit from the European Union** could disrupt staffing for scientific research, including that needed for autism studies. U.K. universities could see a decrease in the number of international students, and EU academic programs may become closed to U.K. students. For autism researchers who live in the U.K. but are not citizens, Brexit brings personal anxieties, too, such as the right to remain and work there

beyond March 2019.

[https://twitter.com/rosa\\_hoekstra/status/933837701727621120](https://twitter.com/rosa_hoekstra/status/933837701727621120)

<https://twitter.com/utafrih/status/937345553360457730>

<https://twitter.com/WillClinPsy/status/863917800468893696>

## Graduate tax:

In November, the U.S. House of Representatives passed a sweeping tax reform bill that was shortly followed by a Senate version. Both bills included a provision that would have dramatically increased the amount of income tax a graduate student owes. At the time, some researchers said this would have made **pursuing academic careers impossible** for all but the richest people. The final version of the bill, passed on 20 December, did not ultimately include that tax.

<https://twitter.com/RackebT/status/931299618633256960>

<https://twitter.com/girlscientist/status/931885011862736897>

<https://twitter.com/russpoldrack/status/931281465949556736>

<https://twitter.com/RackebT/status/931299618633256960>