

NEWS

Researchers take to streets in historic March for Science

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Tens of thousands of people took to the streets on Saturday to protest the U.S. administration's anti-science policies. With sister marches in an estimated 600 cities across the globe, from Washington, D.C., to Berlin and Sydney, people came together to advocate for evidence-based science and its importance in urgent matters such as climate change and autism.

In New York City, for example, subway riders on a packed uptown A train donned lab coats, spacesuits and hats knitted with the brain's grooves and folds — and argued volubly about scientific ideas such as what makes humans special.

For many, the event was a protest against President Donald Trump: During his 95 days in office,

Trump has rolled back environmental regulations, silenced government scientists with gag orders and proposed **harsh cuts to biomedical research** funding.

“It has come to a point where many politicians make up their own ‘facts’ and dismiss rigorous scientific studies and conclusions as ‘just theory,’” says **Olav Olsen**, a neuroscientist at Rockefeller University in New York. “It’s an unsettling trend, and I think that it is this fundamental shift in the political climate that has mobilized scientists to march for science.”



Associated Press / Rex Features

The cuts to the research budget could limit advances in autism research. “We need basic research to understand the fundamental way our brains work. Without that, we’re often shooting in the dark,” **Jackie Giovanniello**, a graduate student in **Bo Li**’s lab at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory in New York, told *Spectrum* at the New York march.

Trump has also promoted **false information** about the role of vaccines in autism. “It’s extremely

disconcerting,” said **Carla Golden**, a graduate student in **Joseph Buxbaum**’s lab at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai in New York City. “The energy spent worrying about this fabrication could instead be spent on supporting autism research that seeks to uncover the true causes of autism.”

Political science:

The march’s main site was in Washington, D.C., where an estimated 40,000 people braved the chilly rain to gather in the National Mall and march to the foot of Capitol Hill.

In the months leading up to the march, scientists were divided on how political the event should be. Signs at the march reflected this split. Some protesters vouched for nonpartisan science, holding “I’m with her” signs that showed a photo of Earth. Others targeted Trump, Vice President Mike Pence, and House Speaker Paul Ryan with pointed, satirical messages.

The New York City march started on city’s Upper West Side and ended in Times Square. As the route took demonstrators past the Trump International Hotel and Tower, some slowed down to chant, “Shame! Shame!”

One common theme at the march was the need for scientists to become more politically engaged and to speak up when scientific freedom is under threat. “Science, Not Silence,” was a popular sign, also available as a pin sold by street vendors. Many demonstrators held signs lamenting the fact that they need to march for facts at all. “I should be writing,” read one sign. “So bad, even introverts are here,” read another.

They had a point. Protesting policies, on the streets no less, is well outside many scientists’ comfort zone. When scientists have marched, they have typically been focused on a particular issue, such as the production of nuclear weapons during the Reagan administration. The March for Science, according to **historians**, is unprecedented in terms of the breadth of the topics addressed and the number of scientists involved.

“There are people here who are physicists, astronomers, neuroscientists, people doing all sorts of research,” said **Ana Badimon**, a graduate student in **Anne Schaefer**’s neuroscience lab at Mount Sinai. “It’s great to see everyone come out and get together.”

Some researchers also brought their children. “I want to raise engaged citizens who are motivated to make their voices heard,” said **Stephen Shea**, associate professor at Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory.

Golden, who says she is most worried about what she perceives as the public’s growing distrust of science and scientists, helped to organize a team of about 50 researchers to attend the march. Some of her coworkers did not attend because they are here on visas. Trump’s **proposed travel**

ban has made them anxious about potential repercussions of participating in a protest.