



Spotlight on Academia, Research and Policy

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Abstract:

With this publication, the JOSHA editorial team brings back its Spotlight series—curated thematic groupings of relevant articles that delve into today’s most pressing academic and societal challenges. This Spotlight focuses on the shifting landscape of academia, research, and policy, particularly under the growing influence of political agendas. From immigration crackdowns affecting legal scholars and students, to sweeping NIH policy changes that cut off international collaborations, the articles reveal how science and education are being reshaped by nationalism and fear. They also expose the halting of critical global disease surveillance efforts, threatening decades of public health progress. We highlight the vulnerability of science under political pressure and the urgent need to reaffirm academia’s role in society. As the U.S. retreats from its leadership role, Germany is called upon to offer new possibilities for displaced international scholarship and innovation.

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Keywords: Academic Freedom; Science Policy; Immigration; Global Collaboration; Political Interference; Research Funding.



1. As Trump Broadens Crackdown, Focus Expands to Legal Immigrants and Tourists

By Zolan Kanno-Youngs, Tyler Pager and Hamed Aleaziz

The ideal that political action should lead to a freer society fades when said actions contravene constitutional law. The scenario, which is depicted by the enforcement of the U.S. immigration agents, constitutes an abuse of authority aimed at suppressing free expression and instilling social fear. The National Security measures promoted by the Trump administration, such as the seizure of private property as cellphones or intercepting personal information, leads to the detention of green card holders, approved visa holders or tourists, exceeding the rights established by the First Amendment of the Constitution. The recurring paranoia of the Trump government to suppress “dangerous” speech—such as expressing support for Palestine or any other open opinion considered a threat to security—intensifies with each individual case presented in this article, evidencing the situation of injustice faced by immigrants under his political term.

This article was previously published in *The New York Times* on March 21, 2025.

[Read the full article here](#)

2. ‘Orchestrated assault’: New tsunami of NIH grant cuts hits South Africa hard (South Africa caught in new tsunami of NIH grant cuts)

By Jon Cohen and Sara Reardon

A memo gets sent and just like that a U.S. \$2.5 million grant to the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) is cut with no further explanation. To be more precise, President Donald Trump’s administration on March 21st began terminating or putting on hold South Africa’s grants from the U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH). Under his usual protective flag of “for the sake of Americans”, the one-sided decision of cutting the funding to HIV/AIDS affects not only the lives of thousands of patients in South Africa but the established medical research that is done there, pausing the scientific advancement of fundamental science, clinical science, supervisors for Ph.D.s, masters and postdocs among other professionals like scientists, doctors, nurses and laboratories. This political decision also aims to discriminate against the DEI and the LGBTQ community, not to mention the impact



that the prevention of global health security will receive due to this unfounded decision.

This article was previously published in *Science* on March 25, 2025.

[Read the full article here](#)

3. ‘Borders on the insane’: New NIH policy on funding foreign scientists stirs outrage (NIH bans future grant sharing with foreign scientists)

By Jon Cohen and Meredith Wadman

The U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH) will halt “foreign subawards” by the end of September 2025, ending the practice of U.S. grant recipients sharing funds with foreign collaborators. The change, aimed at improving tracking of funds and addressing “national security” concerns, will require foreign scientists to apply directly for separate grants. While existing awards remain intact, no new or renewed grants with foreign subawards will be issued until NIH unveils a new collaboration framework. Critics, including former NIH officials and global health researchers, warn the move will disrupt projects tackling major diseases such as HIV, malaria, tuberculosis, and dengue, and could undermine scientific collaboration, cost-effectiveness, and U.S. research leadership. Many emphasize that foreign projects already face rigorous oversight and that some studies can only be conducted abroad due to relevance and feasibility. NIH leaders cite poor tracking and management of subawards, with one senior official stating projects abroad must clearly benefit the American public or be shut down. The shift follows political scrutiny of a grant to EcoHealth Alliance, which funded China’s Wuhan Institute of Virology, amid unproven COVID-19 origin claims. Supporters of international research stress that such collaborations generate globally relevant knowledge and cannot be confined within national borders.

[Read the full article here](#)

This article was previously published in *Science* on May 8, 2025.

4. The new reality for American academia

By H. Holden Thorp



U.S. universities are grappling with political hostility toward science under the Trump administration, which has disrupted funding, programs, and international collaborations, prompting calls for a renewed social contract between higher education and the federal government. Harvard's Danielle Allen and Ryan Enos advocate for a relationship rooted in academic freedom, mutual respect with the public, and acknowledgment of taxpayer support, alongside reforms such as countering elitist perceptions, expanding enrollment, and rebalancing medical schools' focus toward education and primary care. Drawing on the post-World War II model that linked federal funding to scientific and economic advancement, H. Holden Thorp argues that academia must admit shortcomings, embrace its societal obligations, and defend its core values, continuing truth-seeking and knowledge-sharing as acts of resistance in a politically charged climate.

This article was previously published in *Science* on May 8, 2025.

[Read the full article here](#)

5. Es ist Zeit für ein ambitioniertes Programm! (It is time for an ambitious program!)

By von Uwe Cantner, Michael Hüther, Joybrato Mukherjee

The United States has for a long time been a place where international scientists have worked together, creating an intense exchange of information and a great production of scientific knowledge. However, since the attacks of Trump against the academic community and universities, the system has entered a crisis. According to Uwe Cantner, Germany must take advantage of this opportunity to become the builder of a new hub for science. In his opinion, the admission of international students would be essential for the creation of a melting pot of science in the German universities. This step would not only provide an opportunity for the academic community but also for the country itself, considering the advantages these students represent, especially if, after their studies, they remain in Germany and contribute to the labor market. The author proposes the establishment of state structures to accommodate new students, facilitate their arrival in the country, and make a future in Germany possible for them. According to Cantner, if the German government takes the necessary steps, they could fill the vacant position left by the USA in scientific production.



This article was previously published in *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* on June 18, 2025.

[Read the full article here](#)

6. Trump cuts damage global efforts to track diseases, prevent outbreaks (U.S. cuts hamper disease surveillance worldwide)

By Jon Cohen

After years of establishing scientific cooperation between nations to track diseases and prevent outbreaks, all research is halted by a unilateral statement. Viruses and diseases don't wait for political decisions. The Trump administration, however, is once again cutting off funding to organizations like STOP Spillover, NIAID, PEPFAR, and the WHO, without offering a clear justification. Researchers are thus left in limbo, with studies and experiments on viruses like Ebola, Lassa, HIV, and tuberculosis completely paused and with orders to remain silent about them to the public. Once again, Trump's political and economic plan of action is to baselessly halt scientific progress at the expense of global health security, risking thousands of lives across seven countries and possibly millions across continents if these outbreaks are not studied and controlled. Time will tell which is the most costly.

This article was previously published in *Science* on March 25, 2025.

[Read the full article here](#)

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