

March for Science: Should Scientists Become Activists?

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Under most circumstances, scientists have chosen to stay out of the political arena choosing to let the data speak for themselves. However, some of the plans of the Trump administration seem to downplay the importance of empirical data to policy making. President Trump has plans to withdraw from the Paris climate change agreement, and to dismantle the Environmental Protection Agency and the Food and Drug Administration regulations. The administration [imposed gag orders](#) on the Environmental Protection Agency, and the Departments of Interior, Agriculture, and Health and Human Services. This has muzzled the response of scientists.

March for Science

In light of these troubling developments, the [March for Science](#) was born. This event will be held on Saturday, April 22 (which is also Earth Day) in Washington D.C. There will be a teach-in and assembly at the National Mall followed by a march. It was conceived as a rallying point for scientists in the United States and around the world. One of the organizers, Johnathan Berman, says that the [message of the march](#) is the need to have policy decisions which are based on a thoughtful evaluation of the facts. Their stated mission is to champion robustly funded and publicly communicated science. The movement also calls on political leaders to create policies based on the evidence for the good of all.

Activist or Scientist?

Within the research community, there are those who support the March for Science and those who think it will do more harm than good. Major supporters of the March for Science include the American Association for the Advancement of Science ([AAAS](#)), the American Society for Cell Biology ([ASCB](#)), the Association for Research and Vision in Ophthalmology (ARVO), and [many others](#). This kind of support is a little unusual as the research community generally avoids getting involved in political situations. However, Valorie Aquino who is another march organizer sees the response of the research community as a clear signal that scientists no longer feel that it is enough to remain in their labs. Dana Fisher, a sociologist, thinks the march is an opportunity to create a collective identity that moves people from being sympathizers to becoming actual activists.

Scientists who become activists are sometimes ostracized. David Sedlak, editor-in-chief of *Environmental Science & Technology* is of the opinion that activism undermines researchers' role as objective seekers of truth. Dietram Scheufele, a professor of science communication, fears that the message of the march could be lost if attendees carry signs supporting political agendas. Mixing science and political messages could be damaging to the movement and the research community as a whole. However, there are some scientists who think that trying to remain apolitical does not take activism far enough. They argue that science [naturally lends itself to political struggle](#). In light of the important role of science in advancing the economy and social issues, these members of the research community see the March for Science as fulfilling only a fraction of our moral obligations. The march has obviously stirred some controversy in the research community, leaving each scientist to ponder on the best way to defend science.

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