

Subversion of publishing comes to a boil: is it time to lance it?

Gin S. Malhi, Erica Bell, Kinga Szymaniak, Jeffrey C. L. Looi, Emilio Fernandez-Egea and Gregers Wegener

Summary

Recent changes instituted by the US government pose a sinister threat to the integrity of science worldwide. We roundly refute the many contrived assertions that have been unfairly levelled against scientists and their natural philosophy and implore them to champion the apodictic principles of science.

Keywords

Publishing; censorship; integrity; diversity; equity.

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The very first sentence of Section 1 ('Policy and Purpose') of the Executive Order 'Restoring Gold Standard Science'¹ issued by the US government on 23 May 2025 begins with the statement 'over the last five years confidence that scientists act in the best interests of the public has fallen significantly'. This assertion is remarkable given that it was doctors and scientists who over the past five years first determined that the cause of the debilitating symptoms people around the world were experiencing was a new strain of virus for which there was no available cure. Then, after determining which measures would best limit the spread of infection, it was scientists who developed effective vaccines to curb and prevent the lethal effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequent research has shown that in Europe alone, over a period of two and a half years, vaccines saved at least one and a half million lives and reduced overall deaths by nearly 60%.²

The Executive Order continues its criticism with the statement that 'a majority of researchers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics believe science is facing a reproducibility crisis', but then it shifts its focus and states 'the falsification of data by leading researchers has led to high profile retractions'. The intentional juxtaposition of these two independent statements implies they are somehow causally linked, but this is not the case as problems of reproducibility in science have not come about solely because of falsification of data.³ Indeed, generally this is uncommon, with approximately only 2% of scientists reporting that they have falsified or fabricated data at some point in their careers.⁴ Nevertheless, on its own, even this statistic may seem somewhat concerning, and of course it is not a matter that should be treated lightly, nor can the figure be ignored. However, it is worth mentioning that among the most trusted professions, nurses, doctors and engineers remain at the top, and notably many of them have scientific backgrounds and training.⁵ In addition, the fact that scientists investigate reproducibility and check the veracity of data illustrates the potentially self-correcting nature of the scientific endeavour.

Section 1 of the Executive Order then presents a disjointed criticism of the previous administration before returning to what sounds somewhat more promising. It states that the aim of the order is to ensure that science is 'transparent, rigorous and impactful, and that [it provides] credible, reliable and impartial scientific evidence' that has been obtained via 'unbiased peer review [which] must be maintained'. It is also transiently reassuring that the Executive Order aims to restore scientific integrity and ensure that scientific data is communicated accurately. However, any confidence that this statement may have instilled soon evaporates

upon learning that senior government-appointed individuals will be responsible for 'taking appropriate measures to correct scientific information in response to violations'.

Authorising political appointees to supervise scientific standards fundamentally compromises core scientific principles. Political interventions and censorship from a top-down approach inherently contradict these principles by centralising control and potentially politicising the interpretation and dissemination of data. Historical instances of political interference, such as the suppression of open genetic research during the era of Trofim Lysenko in the Soviet Union, underscore the significant risks and long-term detriment to scientific progress and public trust that occurs when science is subjected to political control.⁶ Indeed, scientists themselves overwhelmingly support systemic reforms, such as encouraging open data practices and more rigorous methodological transparency, as opposed to punitive oversight or politicised intervention.⁷

This Executive Order follows other attempts to subvert science beginning with the Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) Directive introduced on 20 January 2025 – akin to the presentation of a Trojan horse.⁸ The Directive appealed to some because of its claim that it was combating inefficiency and 'waste' and that DEI policies were 'discriminatory' in practice, but soon its alarming motive became apparent, namely, to politically exert control over science by influencing its direction and the ability of researchers to collaborate. The concern for us is that the distortion of scientific methods, medical facts and the principles and values of science undermines not only the discipline of scientific inquiry, but the integrity of our professions.

Contrary to the White House Executive Order termed 'Restoring Gold Standard Science',¹ genuine gold standard science involves free scientific enquiry, the robust examination of evidence and the freedom of expression. This standard is underpinned by the editorial independence of scientific journals, which is being threatened by the proposed governmental inquisitorial powers invested in the Order. Empirical evidence consistently shows that transparent institutional reform, which prioritises methodological clarity and incentivises replication studies, substantially enhances the reproducibility of scientific research and bolsters public confidence in science.⁹ Therefore, rather than resorting to political interference, creating environments that promote transparency, replication and collaboration will more effectively address issues of reproducibility and thereby reinforce rather than compromise scientific integrity.

In this context, the latest untenable threat to ban scientists from publishing in top-tier journals that are not supported by the US government, such as *The Lancet*, is a further clear attack on the very foundations of scientific integrity. Over the past few months, the increasing corruption of minds and the poisoning of thinking, brought about by insinuations coupled with the suppression of ideas and the removal of resources, has finally come to a boil – a ‘boil’ that is now pointing dangerously in the wrong direction and thus needs to be lanced. Hence, we argue, it is time to ‘lance it’ and cauterise this destructive propaganda.

Gin S. Malhi , Academic Department of Psychiatry, Kolling Institute, Northern Clinical School, Faculty of Medicine and Health, The University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia; CADE Clinic and Mood-T, Royal North Shore Hospital, Northern Sydney Local Health District, St Leonards, Australia; Department of Psychiatry, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK; and Oxford Uehiro Centre for Practical Ethics, Faculty of Philosophy, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK; **Erica Bell** , Academic Department of Psychiatry, Kolling Institute, Northern Clinical School, Faculty of Medicine and Health, The University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia; and CADE Clinic and Mood-T, Royal North Shore Hospital, Northern Sydney Local Health District, St Leonards, Australia; **Kinga Szymaniak** , Academic Department of Psychiatry, Kolling Institute, Northern Clinical School, Faculty of Medicine and Health, The University of Sydney, Sydney, Australia; and CADE Clinic and Mood-T, Royal North Shore Hospital, Northern Sydney Local Health District, St Leonards, Australia; **Jeffrey C. L. Looi** , Social Psychiatry and Epidemiology Research Unit, School of Medicine and Psychology, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia; **Emilio Fernandez-Egea** , Department of Psychiatry, University of Cambridge, Cambridge, UK; and Cambridge Psychosis Centre, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough NHS Foundation Trust, Cambridge, UK; **Gregers Wegener** , Translational Neuropsychiatry Unit, Department of Clinical Medicine, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark; and Department of Affective Disorders, Aarhus University Hospital – Psychiatry, Aarhus, Denmark

Correspondence: Gin S. Malhi. Email: gin.malhi@sydney.edu.au

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