

## Authoritarian Attacks on Science

### What is going on?

Federal scientific funding is [under attack](#). This is happening through a variety of channels — frozen [grant funding](#), [cuts at federal agencies](#), and [changes in funding conditions](#) at the major federal agencies funding scientific research. Some of these changes are the result of presidential executive orders, some are DOGE-related, and others are agency level decisions.

**Yes, a lot of this is plainly illegal.** The President does not have the power to seize or refuse to spend funds appropriated by Congress. More on that [here](#).

**What is DOGE??** The so-called “Department of Government Efficiency” is a shadowy group taking what had been a technical support team and instead staffing it with [tech bros loyal](#) to Elon Musk and giving it control over critical federal government hiring, firing, and spending decisions — not to mention access to troves of sensitive personal data. It is not actually a department of the United States government — that would require an act of Congress. It’s very unclear who is in charge — Elon Musk publicly represents himself as the DOGE leader, however, in [court filings](#) the administration has sworn that Musk is not the “DOGE Administrator” Trump has granted sweeping (and likely illegal) authorities.

**DOGE faces a growing mountain of legal challenges** under the [Federal Advisory Committee Act](#) (which requires these sorts of advisory committees include a range of viewpoints and establishes transparency requirements); [Freedom of Information Act](#); [Administrative Procedure Act](#) (which requires federal agencies to follow the law and make reasoned decisions based on a public record); [Privacy Act](#); [Internal Revenue Code](#); and [Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act](#) as well as numerous [constitutional violations](#).

**Where is Congress??** There are lots of debates about our constitutional system, but some things are crystal clear, and one of those things is that Congress has the [power of the purse](#). The founding fathers made this choice very intentionally to ensure that Americans’ diverse interests are represented and because good funding decisions should be the result of compromise and negotiation. Congress is, by and large, currently failing to protect that authority; however it’s important to keep two things in mind:

- 1) The president can’t steal congressional powers just because the current congressional class is seemingly ok with being robbed — that’s not how constitutions or the rule of law work.
- 2) Pressuring members of Congress works — call them and demand they do more to protect congressional power and the programs they funded on behalf of the American people.

## Why is this happening?

These attacks are not about “cutting costs” or even “fighting woke” — they are intentional and [classic authoritarian tactics](#). Independent institutions, and particularly the pursuit of a knowable truth, are a threat to authoritarian governments, which is why autocrats in [Russia](#), [Hungary](#), and [Turkey](#) have all cracked down on independent research as they consolidated power.

These attacks are about dismantling our system of checks and balances and [centralizing power](#) in the hands of the president. In fact, of the seven key tactics we identified in [The Authoritarian Playbook](#), all seven are at play in the attacks on scientific and research funding.

## Who does this impact?

Everyone (but you already knew that). We have begun [collecting stories](#) about the deadly impacts of these funding freezes — please join the movement and share your story!

Here are some quick facts on just how essential federal research funding is to our economy, health, and communities:

- **Research funding is essential to our economy.** In FY 2024, [NIH alone awarded](#) \$37.81 billion in grants which generated \$92.89 billion in economic activity and provided more than 412,000 jobs. Cuts in NIH funding will impact colleges and universities in [every state](#).
- **Federal funding is crucial for drug development.** NIH funding [contributed to research](#) for roughly 99 percent of drugs approved between 2010 and 2019.

## Who is fighting back?

[Patient advocacy organizations](#) are speaking out! [Scientists are protesting across the country!](#) And many organizations are fighting back and winning in court!

**Indirect Cost Rates:** There are already cases challenging the “indirect cost rates” cuts for NIH research funding that would decimate our national research and educational infrastructure. A [coalition of states](#) won a temporary restraining [order](#), which means the changes are put on hold. A coalition of medical organizations, including the Association of American Medical Colleges and the Greater New York Hospital Association, also filed [suit](#) and won a [restraining order](#).

**Grant Freezes:** The [National Council of Nonprofits](#) and a [coalition of state](#) attorneys general separately challenged the freeze on federal grant funding and both won temporary restraining orders. The [order](#) in the attorney generals’ case “prohibits all categorical pauses or freezes in obligations or disbursements based on [the memo from the Office of Management and Budget] or based on the President’s 2025 Executive Orders.” The attorneys general also have raised concerns with the judge that the administration is not complying with that order and continues to unlawfully freeze funds.

## Join the fight

1. **Tell your story** to anyone who will listen on whatever platforms you have! Talk about it at church, on Facebook, at your pickup basketball game, wherever you gather with your community. You are the most persuasive messenger to your friends and family! Tell them about your work and why it matters (tips and tricks on how to do that persuasively [here!](#)).
2. **Call your elected officials.** Few things are a more effective use of 5 minutes. Tell them how you have been impacted and why your program is important. Find your representatives [here](#), senators [here](#), and local elected officials [here](#).
3. **Engage leaders at your institutions.** Make sure they have the stories and resources they need to tell a compelling story about the devastating harm caused by these funding freezes. Then encourage them to take action and issue public statements, engage with elected officials, and make plain to the American people that these funding cuts will hurt everyone.