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# How to Thrive in Times of Threat and Uncertainty

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## ABSTRACT

President Donald Trump's Executive Orders in January 2025, subsequent grant terminations, and attacks on science elicited widespread concern and uncertainty regarding the future of science and the viability of research labs, institutions, and careers. We suggest the Executive Orders and anti-science proposals not only created an existential threat to science but threatened people's fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Drawing upon social psychological theory and research, we offer suggestions for how people can cope with threats at the individual, relational, and group level. At the individual level, scholars can expand their research programs, reappraise stressors as challenges, cultivate resilience, and find opportunities for growth in the face of difficulty. At the relational level, researchers can adopt a communal orientation, seek social support, collaborate with others in their communities both in and outside academia, and strengthen social connectedness. At the group level, scholars can engage in coalition-building and collective action to show allyship and solidarity with marginalized communities. Throughout the paper, we discuss how scientists can find meaning and purpose in times of threat and work together to redefine and reshape culture to mutually benefit science and society at large.

## 1 | Introduction

> Even the darkest night will end and the sun will rise.
>
> -Victor Hugo, Les Miserables (1862)

In the wake of President Donald Trump's Executive Orders (Trump 2025, January 29) and the administration's scrutiny of science and academia, the scientific community experienced deep concerns and uncertainty surrounding the future of higher education and science (Mervis 2025a, 2025b; Shabad et al. 2025). Anti-science attitudes and the anti-intellectualism movement have resurged since the COVID-19 pandemic and the rise of authoritarian leadership in the U.S., harming researchers and discrediting the merit of the physical and social sciences (Hotez 2021, 2023). As the Executive Orders target scientific research and initiatives related to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (DEIA), reverberations from the Executive Orders continue to be felt by faculty, students, and administrators across the country concerned about the viability and sustainability of their research labs, institutions, and careers (Bush et al. 2025; Holthaus 2025; Mervis 2025; Mueller 2025a, 2025b).

The administration's anti-science stance not only thwarts scientific advancement, but threatens people's basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci and Ryan 2000; R. M. Ryan and Deci 2000). Drawing upon social psychological research, we discuss how people respond to and cope with threats at the individual, relational, and group level. In doing so, we provide suggestions for how the scientific community can find meaning and purpose in their work and everyday lives in times of threat and uncertainty. By intervening at these levels, individuals can also help to redefine and reshape culture in ways that benefit both the scientific community and the general public.

Our goal in writing this paper is not to simply create a checklist of tasks for researchers to complete. Rather, we provide a range

of possibilities that individuals can try out— based on the social psychological literature on how people can respond to threat and uncertainty—in this case, resulting from the Executive Orders and anti-science stance of the current administration. Importantly, we do not suggest that these tools will be equally effective for everyone; some of these recommendations may be more effective for some individuals than for others, so we encourage researchers to experiment with different strategies to see what works best for them.

## 2 | Threat to Basic Psychological Needs

In the name of reducing wasteful government spending, President Trump's Executive Orders and ensuing decisions censored and canceled important areas of scientific research. For example, the government flagged key words related to DEIA in federal grants (Miller and Rabin 2025) which posed a threat to researchers studying areas such as intergroup relations, stereotyping and prejudice, implicit bias, gender, and stigmatized identities. For example, federally funded research on transgender populations (Reardon 2025) and the largest study of women's health (Wadman et al. 2025) were halted by the Trump administration. Notably, researchers studying these topics often hold marginalized identities themselves and are therefore more vulnerable to funding cuts and cancellations in this drastically shifting political climate. Even if one's own research area was not impacted by the Executive Orders or federal grant terminations (Mervis 2025), most researchers knew people in the field whose work was affected—or is likely to be affected—so the ripple effects of the Executive Orders, grant terminations, and anti-science proposals were felt widely throughout the academic community.

To date, there have been thousands of federal grant pauses and terminations (Cameron 2025; Mervis 2025; Mueller 2025a, 2025b), drastic cuts to indirect costs on grants (Bush et al. 2025; Nietzel 2025), hiring freezes (Treisman 2025), and reneging of graduate student offers of admission (Saul 2025). The administration also canceled grant funding pertaining to the application of social psychological theory and research to address real-world problems, such as improving public attitudes toward vaccinations and preventing future pandemics. The sheer swiftness and number of Executive Orders not only sparked fear and uncertainty about the future of higher education and scientific research in the U.S. but also hurt the economies of university towns and the broader competitiveness of the U.S. in the global market (Casselman 2025).

Moreover, the Executive Orders and ensuing proposals threatened people's fundamental psychological needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci and Ryan 1985). When people are forced to comply with external standards and regulations, they are extrinsically motivated; they feel obliged to engage (or not engage) in certain behaviors to obtain rewards or avoid punishment (R. M. Ryan and Deci 2000). Many scholars felt pressure to avoid certain areas of study (e.g., DEIA-related topics) or to remove language from their websites, grants, or other public-facing documents to comply with these orders. In short, when external forces mandate compliance and censorship, individuals feel controlled and less autonomous, which is related to lower intrinsic motivation and well-being (Deci and Ryan 2000).

The administration's attacks on science also threatened researchers' basic psychological need for competence—the perception that one has mastery and skill in an area (R. M. Ryan and Deci 2000)—by devaluing certain areas of study and science more generally. Although researchers may have been able to maintain their self-perceptions of competence despite the anti-science stance of the Trump administration, the Executive Orders are likely to have threatened researchers' *ability* to conduct research and in doing so, negatively impacted researchers' sense of competence. For example, the heightened scrutiny and sudden cancellation of DEIA-related grants created a sense of fear and uncertainty that threatened researchers' ability to carry out federally funded projects (Rodriguez et al. 2025). Similarly, such attacks may have left diversity science researchers feeling as if their competence was invalidated and unmarketable amidst universities and organizations abandoning their stated commitment to these topics and desired competencies. Scientists across all career stages were affected by the Executive Orders, especially early career scholars, scientists of color, and researchers from poor, rural areas (Zernike 2025).

The Executive Orders also cast doubt upon the perceived value of conducting research, especially work related to DEIA, such as examining racial health disparities. Researchers spend countless hours designing studies, recruiting participants, analyzing data, writing and submitting manuscripts for publication, and sharing their findings with the academic community and general public. The Trump administration's decisions are likely to undermine (especially early career) researchers' sense of competence by conveying that certain areas or types of scientific knowledge and skills are unimportant and a waste of taxpayer dollars (Bush et al. 2025), spread misinformation (Ecker et al. 2022), and promote radical leftist ideologies (Sundar 2025).

The Executive Orders and anti-science proposals also threaten people's need for relatedness—having close, mutually caring relationships with others (R. M. Ryan and Deci 2000). For example, opportunities for forming relationships in the field were abruptly canceled or banned, such as training workshops, conference travel (Wadman and Kaiser 2025), and research projects with foreign collaborators (Rabin 2025).

Although individuals may have their close relationships intact, researchers from marginalized groups or those who study DEIA-related topics may experience a threat to their sense of belonging and inclusion in American society (see Rios 2022, for a review). For example, researchers studying DEIA topics may perceive heightened social evaluative threat resulting from the Executive Orders, reflecting the real or imagined experience of being negatively evaluated by others (Park et al. 2023). Notably, the Executive Orders against DEIA claim to restore “meritocracy” (Trump, 2025, April 23). However, in doing so, members

of marginalized groups are portrayed as undeserving of their positions which is likely to amplify their experience of social identity threat in academic spaces and reinforce and justify existing social hierarchies.

Identity-blind ideologies also dismiss members of marginalized groups' experiences of discrimination and devaluation, reducing their sense of belonging and inclusion in society (Markus et al. 2000). The Executive Orders' focus on eliminating DEIA from academic research and curricula directly communicate identity-blind ideologies. In turn, marginalized group members will experience less belonging in the field and in American society because these policies communicate that group differences —and studying such differences—are unimportant. For example, Black professionals who saw a company brochure that promoted racial color-blindness and had few racial minorities reported less trust and comfort in the organization (Purdie-Vaughns et al. 2008). In another study, when White people avoided talking about race during an interracial interaction, they showed less friendliness and more negative nonverbal behavior toward Black people (Apfelbaum et al. 2008).

Seeing DEIA efforts dismantled and terminated in the current sociopolitical environment advances identity-blind ideologies in which group differences are ignored, dismissed, and deemed inconsequential (see Rattan and Ambady 2013, for a review). Indeed, exposure to identity-blind ideologies has been shown to increase stereotyping and bias (Plaut et al. 2009; Richeson and Nussbaum 2004; C. S. Ryan et al. 2007; see Sasaki and Vorauer 2013, for a review; Wilton et al. 2015) and serves to justify inequality and the status quo (Knowles et al. 2009; Plaut et al. 2018).

Finally, research on perceptions of safety and threat in the environment may be relevant to the current sociopolitical context. Cues in the environment—whether they be physical or social cues—convey to people whether they are likely to fit in and be accepted in that space (Chaney et al. 2025; Cheryan et al. 2009; Kirby et al., 2020; Kruk and Matsick 2021; Murphy et al. 2007). Importantly, cues can signal whether the overall environment will be safe (i.e., welcoming, inclusive, supportive) or threatening (i.e., critical, intimidating, emotionally harmful) (Park et al. in press). For example, when people saw objects or other people that signaled that the environment was not welcoming or inclusive, they reported less intended engagement and interest in entering that space, and less desire to encourage others to join that environment.

Although these studies examined actual spaces (e.g., via photos of classrooms, gyms, boardrooms), the same logic can be applied to American society/the U.S. as an environment where one may perceive safety or threat. For example, in the current sociopolitical environment, researchers may perceive low safety and/or high threat in academic spaces, especially when institutions remain silent or preemptively comply with Executive Orders. These perceptions, in turn, may reduce their intended engagement in the field (e.g., discontinuing a line of research, not applying for grants), lower their interest (e.g., considering alternative jobs), or decrease their intentions to recruit others to the field (e.g., discouraging junior scholars from pursuing a career in a particular research area).

## 3 | Ways to Mitigate Threat

Scientists are likely to feel threatened by the Trump administration's abrupt pauses and cancellations of research programs (e.g., research on marginalized populations, racial health disparities, climate science, misinformation), faculty and staff layoffs, and forced reductions in graduate student enrollments, all of which heightened anxiety, fear, and uncertainty across the country (Mueller 2025a, 2025b). As a result, researchers may disengage from their work and feel helpless or hopeless about the future. Indeed, a survey of over 800 academics examining the impact of Trump's Executive Orders found that many were very worried about academia (87%), had low confidence in the government (92%), self-censored (44%), or considered leaving academia (43%) in response to the Executive Orders, particularly researchers who studied DEIA or were members of minoritized groups (Lorenzo-Luaces et al. 2025).

Although emotion-focused coping may provide temporary relief from anxiety and uncertainty, avoiding problem-focused coping is maladaptive over time. For example, when people focus primarily on venting their negative feelings, they may inadvertently prolong distress and prevent alternate forms of coping to deal directly with the stressor (Carver et al. 1989; Folkman and Lazarus 1985). For instance, when people behaviorally disengage from stressors, they may feel helpless, decrease the effort they put into addressing the problem, and give up on important goals.

In the following section, we discuss alternative, sustainable ways that scientists can respond to threats to their research, career, and well-being to not only survive but thrive in the current sociopolitical environment. In doing so, we offer coping strategies that span from the individual to relational to collective group level.

### 3.1 | Intrapersonal Strategies to Reduce Threat

#### 3.1.1 | Reappraise Stress as Challenge

One way that researchers can cope with stressors is to change the way they perceive the stressor. According to the biopsychosocial model of challenge/threat (Blascovich and Mendes 2000; Blascovich 2008; Seery 2013), individuals' psychological and physiological states of challenge and threat can be inferred depending on their perception of resources and demands of a situation. When individuals perceive resources to be low and demands of the situation to be high, they experience threat. In contrast, when individuals perceive resources to be high and demands of the situation to be low, they experience challenge.

However, research shows that when people encounter acute stressors, they can reframe the experience as either a threat or a challenge, which has implications for their reactions to the event. Specifically, when people reframe stressful events or tasks as a challenge, they show improved physiological outcomes, better performance, and less attentional bias for negative emotion-laden information (e.g., Jamieson et al. 2012, 2013; Jamieson et al. 2022).

Notably, in these past studies, reappraisal did not eliminate stress or distract people from the stressor. Instead, reappraisals shifted people's attention in a way that led them to believe they had sufficient resources to meet the demands of the situation. Applied to the current context, researchers may have initially viewed Trump's Executive Orders and anti-science decisions in a way that magnified their perceptions of threat (e.g., by increasing demands and decreasing available resources like grant funding). However, if researchers reconstrue their stress-related arousal as a resource, rather than a threat, they may be better equipped to tackle difficult tasks, such as finding creative ways to persist in conducting research. Along these lines, studies on stress optimization suggest that rather than seeking to reduce or avoid stress altogether, shifting one's valuation of stress—from thinking "stress is bad" to "stress can be good"—can be helpful in achieving one's goals (Crum et al. 2020).

#### 3.1.2 | Cultivate Resilience

Although the Executive Orders and anti-science proposals pose logistical, funding, and ideological roadblocks for many researchers, these changes also created opportunities to push back or find new ways to conduct research despite external forces. Consistent with this broader idea, studies suggest that people can rebound from life stressors and become resilient in the face of difficult times (Seery 2011). For example, a longitudinal study found that people with a history of some lifetime adversity showed better mental health and well-being (e.g., less overall distress, impairment, higher life satisfaction) than those with no history of adversity or high history of adversity (Seery et al. 2010). In fact, people with a history of moderate adversity also showed greater resilience in response to recent stressors in the lab (Seery et al. 2013; Seery and Quinton 2016).

Recognizing past moments of resilience—personally or for one's social group—may also facilitate greater engagement in activism on behalf of one's own social group or others (Pham et al. 2025). Along these lines, researchers can strive to find meaning and choose to adopt a stance of radical joy in everyday life despite adverse circumstances, which can help to make a positive impact on themselves and on others (Pearson and Hernández-Saca 2024).

#### 3.1.3 | Expand Your Research Program

Another way to minimize the impact of threat resulting from the administration's Executive Orders is to expand one's research portfolio. Just as individuals can diversify their financial investments to avoid putting all their money into one stock—which could be risky in the face of a stock market crash or drop in stock valuation—researchers can broaden their research portfolio and pursue separate lines of work. This approach resonates with self-complexity theory (Linville 1985, 1987); people with high self-complexity have multiple self-aspects that allow them to think about themselves in different ways.

In contrast, people with low self-complexity have fewer distinct ways of thinking about their self-aspects. Indeed, those with low self-complexity tend to experience more ups and downs in their emotional reactions and self-appraisals in response to stressful events, suggesting that low self-complexity makes one vulnerable to instability in affect and self-evaluations (Linville 1985). Conversely, individuals with high self-complexity tend to report fewer depressive symptoms, lower perceived stress, and less physical illness than those with low self-complexity because they have other distinct identities they can call upon to restore their sense of self following self-threats (Linville 1987).

In a similar vein, research on social identities shows that individuals with multiple racial identities can adaptively switch between identities to build resilience (see Shih et al. 2019, for a review). For example, individuals can identify more strongly with a social identity that is valued in a particular context, and/or distance themselves from a stigmatized identity, thereby protecting their self-esteem, well-being (Gaither et al. 2013; Hong et al. 2016; Sanchez et al. 2009), and performance (Shih et al. 1999). This idea is also similar to self-affirmation theory whereby individuals can remind themselves of important values or self-aspects unrelated to the domain of threat to repair their self-esteem following self-threats (Critcher and Dunning 2015; Steele 1988).

Applying this idea to the current sociopolitical context, scientists who have less diversified research portfolios may experience greater threat due to the Executive Orders, especially if they solely study topics related to DEIA or other areas the administration is hostile toward. Thus, one way that researchers can protect themselves from such threats is to expand their research portfolio and increase the self-complexity of their research programs. By doing so, future threats to their work may be attenuated because they can switch their focus to other lines of research. This does not mean, however, that researchers should wholly abandon their important DEIA-related research. Rather, researchers can recognize unique and creative ways they can continue doing DEIA-related work and maintain their labs, such as securing funding for a separate line of research to continue training the next generation of researchers and advancing DEIA efforts. In addition, researchers can reflect on the broader meaning of their work. For example, one study found participants who wrote about how their work served the greater good (vs. advanced their own career vs. a control condition) reported greater sense of meaning in their work, which predicted greater momentary job engagement (Cantarero et al. 2022).

Reminding researchers of valuable self-aspects may be particularly helpful for members of underrepresented or marginalized groups. For instance, whereas reminding women of negative gender stereotypes can hinder performance through stereotype threat, thinking about other positive social identities can serve to deactivate threats and buffer impaired performance (Rydell et al. 2009). In a similar vein, researchers could seek to minimize the impacts of threat resulting from the Executive Orders and funding cuts to science by expanding their work into new research areas and collaborating with researchers outside the U.S., thus creating distinct lines of research that may be less susceptible to the effects of threat in one research area or country.

### 3.2 | Interpersonal and Collective Strategies to Reduce Threat

#### 3.2.1 | Draw Upon Social Support

Whereas the previous section provided internal tools to mitigate threat and uncertainty resulting from the Executive Orders, researchers can also adopt interpersonal strategies, such as turning toward close others to decrease feelings of threat. In fact, one of the strongest, most robust predictors of health and well-being is perceived availability of resources from others—whether they be tangible or psychological resources—to help cope with stressful events (Cohen 2004; House et al. 1988; Uchino et al. 1996; Uchino 2009).

In close relationships, individuals can turn toward their partner for reassurance or assistance in times of need (Zee and Bolger 2019). Partners, in turn, can convey responsiveness by showing care, concern, and validation, which help to lower the other person's feelings of sadness and anxiety (Maisel and Gable 2009). Perceiving support from others is related to higher self-esteem, more positive emotions, feeling closer to one's partner (Collins and Feeney 2004; Sullivan et al. 2010), and to better relationship quality (Overall et al. 2010). Even with strangers, engaging in responsive behaviors—such as high-quality listening in which one signals understanding and responsiveness to another person's concerns—can increase autonomy and relatedness (Weinstein et al. 2022), increase tolerance of opposing viewpoints (Itzchakov and Reis 2021), and reduce loneliness for the person being listened to (Itzchakov et al. 2023).

In response to the current sociopolitical environment, researchers can cope by turning to close others to find a sense of meaning and security in their personal and interpersonal worlds. The Social-Safety System Model (Murray et al. 2021) suggests that people sustain a sense of safety by placing compensatory trust in agents in their personal or sociopolitical world. Specifically, when people experience threats in one area, such as in the sociopolitical context, they can avoid the acute anxiety aroused by this threat by putting greater trust in close others who are central to their personal worlds. Along these lines, a daily diary study found that on days when participants distrusted the intentions of fellow community members—based on their political sentiments and increases in daily COVID-19 infections—they reported greater happiness within their family relationships (Murray et al. 2021).

#### 3.2.2 | Engage in Group Events, Activism and Advocacy

In addition to social support from others, another underappreciated source of social connection that may enhance health and well-being and help individuals cope with threats from the current sociopolitical environment is participating in larger collectives. When people engage with large crowds and group events, such as attending sporting events, religious gatherings, or music festivals, they may experience collective effervescence—a sensation of sacredness and connection to the other people in the crowd (Gabriel et al. 2019). Past work has shown that collective effervescence increases life satisfaction, belonging, and perceived meaning in life (Gabriel et al. 2024), predicts greater happiness (Koefler et al. 2024), and protects against social isolation (Naidu et al. 2022). Thus, engaging with other people in group events, from academic conferences to concerts and parades are all ways that people can actively seek joy in their lives, reestablish meaning and purpose, and form close connections with others in their community.

Another way to thrive during times of threat and uncertainty is to engage in activism. Although public trust in science and institutions of higher education has declined, especially along partisan lines (Tyson and Kennedy 2024), researchers can challenge this trend by embracing scientific advocacy and activism. Activism offers a way to cope that is both problem- and emotion-focused. For example, anger in response to perceived injustices or moral violations can spark action, affording an outlet for people to express their emotions that may, at first glance, seem counterproductive (Agostini and van Zomeren 2021). For example, after engaging in activism, people report greater meaning in life and community connection (Becker et al. 2011; Szymanski et al. 2023), demonstrating benefits to getting involved in one's community at a collective level.

Activism also offers concrete actions (e.g., calling representatives, attending protests) one can take to address a problem, which can help to re-instill autonomy and control in one's life. Participating in political action not only helps protect scientific institutions but also offers an outlet for community-building and coping. Many scientists have recognized and supported this stance, organizing efforts such as "Stand up for Science" (https://standupforscience2025.org) and participating in the No Kings protest marches nationwide in June 2025 (https://www.nokings. org/), which provided clear opportunities for individuals looking for actions they could take to be part of a larger movement to advocate for science. For example, the No Kings protests drew an estimated 5 million people at over 2000 gatherings across the U.S. on June 14, 2025, to denounce authoritarian actions by Trump's administration (Schneider and Archie 2025).

Activism need not be limited to advocating for science. Marginalized groups, in and outside of science fields, also face unprecedented attacks in the U.S., and human rights abuses continue globally. Recognizing the common antagonistic ideologies against multiple marginalized groups can facilitate solidarity across identity lines (Chaney and Forbes 2023) and allow more privileged groups to lift up people with marginalized identities (Pham and Chaney 2025). Similarly, engaging in activism on behalf of other groups can help to facilitate both problem- and emotion-focused coping and community-building. Even just volunteering in one's community can develop social networks and improve well-being (Tierney et al. 2022).

As social safety nets are dismantled, these types of collective efforts may be especially important for maintaining vibrant communities while expanding one's sense of self and offering a clear path for scientists to become more rooted in their local communities. At a group level, individuals can seek or provide social support to ingroup members who share a common social

identity (Turner et al. 1987), and those with marginalized or minoritized identities can join support groups or seek instrumental support from members of their communities (Sue et al. 2019). In sum, efforts to support science and other groups offer a path toward active coping that can ultimately help oneself and others thrive.

#### 3.2.3 | Challenge Cultural Norms

Even during times of threat and uncertainty, rather than falling prey to passivity, researchers can intentionally reshape and redefine culture. As attacks on academia continue, universities and researchers will need to reimagine their activities, goals, and outcomes and thus here we focus on approaches to reshape the culture and values within academia. Indeed, radical movements have often spawned from times of uncertainty and upheaval (e.g., abolition; Felber 2020; Hamedani et al. 2024).

As part of a cultural reimagining, researchers can consider how they conduct research and what priorities are valued. For example, as research funding becomes limited—especially research impacted by Executive Orders targeting DEIA— people may find it useful (and rewarding) to direct some projects that involve community-based participatory research (e.g., Buchanan et al. 2007) and encouraging their departments and universities to recognize and reward such research. Although community-based participatory research has been used extensively in the context of community health interventions, its practice has been successfully applied to the social sciences, as well (Wallerstein 2021). Community-based participatory research can involve exchanging research participation for researcher-led expertise (e.g., researcher expertise on how to motivate collective action), and aims to empower participants in a way that promotes autonomy and to build systems and access to resources that benefit the community. These types of collaborative practices could help to restore trust in science by being "by the people and for the people." Cultivating relationships with the community takes time and effort from both researchers and community leaders and members, particularly in light of the history of medical experimentation and abuse of marginalized groups in the U.S. (e.g., Tuskegee Experiment, Alsan and Wanamaker 2018; Henrietta Lack's stolen STEM cells, Baptiste et al. 2022). Thus, community-based participatory research offers a way to establish marginalized communities' trust in science.

Researchers should enter communities with caution and respect, as community-based participatory research requires transparency, humility, patience, and effort. This type of research may require some degree of funding and resources, but partnering with local community leaders and spaces could help to facilitate this process (e.g., Community Centers for the Elderly, LGBTQ+, Religious and Spiritual Centers). Thus, researchers can continue to study marginalized groups and perspectives, even if doing so requires more deliberate and slower methods of data collection. Such research methods further challenge the current norm of anti-DEIA science and whose vantage point in science is "fundable." Our aim is to encourage researchers who have faced recent funding cuts to re-think their toolkit—or sustain their toolkit—with such research practices that continue to center marginalized individuals. Such methods are not a panacea, but a reminder of how even small actions—like keeping momentum and continuing one's research, challenges whose perspective gets centered in science and more collaborative means of doing science with marginalized groups.

The reciprocal relationships offered by community-based participatory research may also afford researchers the chance to give back and aid local communities while conducting impactful research. In turn, universities and departments may need to re-evaluate current systems, such that publication numbers and grant funding are not the only metrics that are rewarded, but research that connects to and contributes to one's communities are also valued. Indeed, some universities have allocated funding toward applied research that incentivizes this approach, despite the wave of Executive Orders (e.g., Harvard Impact Labs; Spenner 2025). Big-10 universities have also banded together to share monetary resources for research, underscoring the collaborative shift of higher education as a direct response to the anti-science Executive Orders (e.g., Mutual Defense Compact; Lonas Cochran 2025). These reimaginings from researchers, in addition to actions from universities, not only support researchers and communities, but also reduce perceived threats and uncertainties arising from threats (e.g., tenure and promotion concerns).

Shifting norms in one's local department or research lab is just as pertinent as broader cultural or institutional shifts in how one conducts research during these anti-science times. Statements that acknowledge systemic bias and outline actions the institution is taking to address societal or institutional threats can elicit greater identity-safety than statements that simply acknowledge the threats (Derricks et al. 2023). An institution's silence, or lack of a prompt response to ongoing societal threats (e.g., Immigration and Customs Enforcement Raids, police brutality, discriminatory Supreme Court rulings) and institutional threats to one's marginalized identities (e.g., acknowledging racist policies or practices) may signal surface-level, or disingenuous commitment to marginalized communities (Derricks et al. 2023; Wilton et al. 2020).

Universities, departments, and academic advisors should consider how their messaging about events can reframe threats as opportunities for collective growth. For example, rather than sending emails that merely outline threats to science and higher education, administrators could highlight the resources their university offers or is developing and outline plans to reinvigorate science's role in shaping public discourse. Effective messaging must be *consistent* (e.g., regularly messaging about threats as they occur; Ponce de Leon et al. 2024), *prompt* in conveying information about recent threatening events (Derricks et al. 2023), and emphasize *current actions*, resources, plans, or investigations to counter such threats (Derricks et al. 2023; Ponce de Leon et al. 2024). Although universities and researchers may not know exactly how the Executive Orders and loss of grant funding will impact them going forward, transparency—coupled with actions demonstrating support to personnel despite such threats—may help to alleviate the threat of uncertainty for researchers and students alike.

Further, taking the time to celebrate accomplishments, no matter how small, could help to boost morale by acknowledging the difficulties of pursuing research in an anti-DEIA, anti-science climate. Highlighting positive societal events could also mitigate the magnification of societal threats given that positive events tend to be underreported compared to negative events (Soroka et al. 2019). In creating an inclusive, affirming academic culture, both junior and senior researchers, scholars, and students can ask—What would be helpful? How can we support each other? Beginning the dialog and intermittently "checking in" is an important way to create an inclusive culture, rather than making assumptions about what one person or group's needs are (Wong et al. 2022). By integrating personnel across seniority and status, these types of questions and conversations could yield practical discussions of how to address a range of immediate needs—from sharing lab spaces and resources—to strategies to avoid "burnout," reduce stress, promote work-life balance, and engage in science advocacy.

## 4 | Conclusion

The Executive Orders enacted by the Trump Administration led to a great upheaval within the scientific community, prompting widespread anxiety and concern about the future of research and scientific progress. These orders aimed to reduce the ability of researchers to conduct important work (e.g., on DEIA and related topics), are likely to have threatened researchers' fundamental needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness, and created a sociopolitical environment marked by perceptions of low safety and high threat. Despite these events, we recommended concrete strategies that scientists and institutions can use to mitigate threat at the individual, relational, and group level. By cultivating resilience, turning to social supports, and engaging and collaborating with one's academic and local communities, scientists can adopt any number of these strategies not only to cope, but to thrive, as well.

### Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

### Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article because no new data were collected or analyzed for this manuscript.

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