



The Impact of State and Federal Policies on Academic Researchers

Findings from a National Survey

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ITHAKA S+R

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Introduction

As of late 2025, 21 states had enacted legislation limiting postsecondary instruction on a range of topics, while imposing new requirements and restrictions in areas such as curriculum and shared governance. These states include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, West Virginia, and Wyoming.¹ These laws differ in their language and enforcement mechanisms, but focus on what supporters have referred to as “divisive concepts,” “woke ideologies,” “DEI,” or “critical race theory.”² They limit how topics such as racial or gender identity, and in some cases policy issues such as immigration, foreign relations, and climate change, can be taught. We group these state laws under the umbrella of “divisive concepts and similar laws” or “laws restricting academic speech” in this report.

In addition to these state policies, last year, the Trump administration initiated agency policies, executive orders, and investigations that resulted in the cancellation of already-awarded grants made to individual researchers, systematically withheld grant funds from entire universities, and required that future grants awarded by federal agencies conform strictly to the administration’s stated priority of dismantling diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.³

¹ We wish to acknowledge Laura Benitez at PEN America for helping us identify those states that have enacted divisive concepts and similar laws (or, in the case of Montana, state policies) during the period of survey administration. See also, Amy Reid et al, “Expanding the Web of Control,” *PEN America*, January 15, 2026, <https://pen.org/report/americas-censored-campuses-25-web-of-control/>.

² PEN America maintains a comprehensive resource tracking the status of state legislation related to higher education restrictions: “PEN America Index of Educational Gag Orders and International Restrictions,” *PEN America*, <https://airtable.com/appg59iDuPhILPPFp/shrtwubfBUo2tuHyO/tbIZ4Ow5HLBuTK9vs/viW5IFPxKHGkamFOk>. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* maintains a similar resource focused on federal policies: “Tracking Trump’s Higher-Ed Agenda,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/tracking-trumps-higher-ed-agenda>.

³ The White House, “Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies,” February 6, 2025, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/02/memorandum-for-the-heads-of-executive-departments-and-agencies/>; The White House, “Defending Women from Gender Ideology Extremism and Restoring

Recent surveys indicate that divisive concepts and similar state legislation, as well as federal actions on DEI, are influencing how faculty approach teaching potentially controversial topics and making curricular decisions, although assessments of the magnitude of this effect vary.⁴ Data on the impacts that these policies are having on individual researchers and their research agendas, however, are scarce.

Last fall, Ithaka S+R fielded a national survey of researchers at US academic institutions. The wide-ranging research instrument yielded 4,003 responses and a comprehensive data set about collaborative practices, support needs, and motivations of researchers from a wide range of fields and institution types. We will publish full results later this year. The survey included several questions about academic freedom within the research enterprise, and those findings are the subject of this brief.

In open-ended comments left by 663 survey respondents, concerns about the state of academic freedom within the research enterprise were a common theme. Recent federal policies, noted one, are “beyond perilous for the system of higher education, and will have a far-reaching impact on the quality of life in the US and the world.” Another described their state government as working aggressively to limit academic freedom and institutional autonomy. While a few respondents noted that they agreed with the premise of divisive concepts or anti-DEI legislation or felt that this type of legislation had improved academic freedom, we heard most often from those who expressed concern that the future was bleak. “The collective institutional research capacity of the United States is in free-fall,” said one respondent, “we are losing our leadership position in the world.”

Biological Truth to the Federal Government,” January 20, 2025,

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/01/defending-women-from-gender-ideology-extremism-and-restoring-biological-truth-to-the-federal-government/>.

⁴ Ashley P. Finley and Hans-Jörg Tiede, “Academic Freedom and Civil Discourse in Higher Education: A National Study of Faculty Attitudes and Perceptions,” American Association of Colleges and Universities, January 2025,

[https://dgm81phvh63.cloudfront.net/content/user-](https://dgm81phvh63.cloudfront.net/content/user-photos/AACU_AcademicFreedomReport_010825_PUBLISHED.pdf)

[photos/AACU_AcademicFreedomReport_010825_PUBLISHED.pdf](https://dgm81phvh63.cloudfront.net/content/user-photos/AACU_AcademicFreedomReport_010825_PUBLISHED.pdf); Ioana G. Hulbert and Ess Pokornowski, “Perceptions of Academic Freedom in Teaching: Findings from a National Survey of Instructors,” *Ithaka S+R*, July 25, 2024,

<https://doi.org/10.18665/sr.321056>; see also reporting from FIRE

(<https://www.fire.org/>) which is a useful reminder that there other pressures are also affecting academic speech.

Key findings

- State and federal policies targeting divisive concepts or DEI are shaping research agendas at scale and across disciplines. Twenty percent of all respondents, and 29 percent of researchers working in states with divisive concepts or similar laws, reported having avoided certain research topics because of state laws and policies.
- Eight percent of respondents representing a wide range of disciplines reported having had a federal grant cancelled in 2025.
- Eleven percent of respondents reported that federal and state policies restricting research activities are compelling them to seek employment out of state, to leave the academy, or to look for academic positions overseas.
- Researchers, particularly those at doctoral institutions and those employed in states with divisive concepts legislation, report concerns about whether university presidents and, especially, boards are willing to advocate for their academic freedom as researchers.

Broad impacts of state legislation

State laws restricting academic speech and institutional autonomy are impacting the research agendas of many scholars. Forty-eight percent who lived or worked in states with divisive concepts or similar legislation or policies in effect during our survey period described those laws as limiting their academic freedom over their research. For many researchers, those limits may be largely theoretical, but 29 percent of respondents from these states indicated that they had personally avoided research into certain topics in response to those laws or policies (Fig. 1).

Researchers from certain disciplines were more likely to have adjusted their research agenda. Researchers in education, nursing, and allied health were more likely to have altered their research agendas in response to changes in state law or policy, while mathematicians were less likely to have avoided researching certain topics.⁵ However, researchers from a range of fields are altering their research behavior in response to divisive concepts legislation.

⁵ Throughout the text, see Appendix A for statistical methodology.

Figure 1: Impacts of State Laws and Policies on Researchers

■ All respondents ■ Respondents in states with divisive concepts and similar laws

In the past five years, my state has enacted laws or policies restricting academic freedom or institutional autonomy that limit my ability to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.



In the past five years, I have avoided pursuing certain topics in my research, scholarship, or creative activity due to changes in state law or policy.

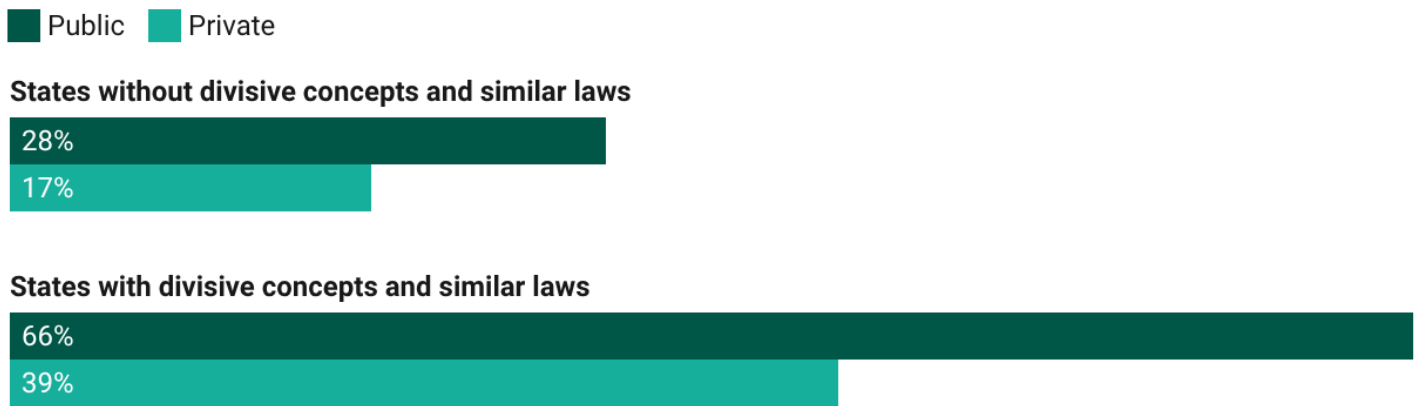


Created with Datawrapper

The impact of state laws was especially stark at public institutions: 66 percent of respondents at a public institution in a state with laws restricting academic speech indicated that their choice of research topics and/or freedom of inquiry had been impacted. Figure 2 below shows the percentage of respondents who agreed with one or more of the following statements:

- In the past five years, my state has enacted laws or policies restricting academic freedom or institutional autonomy that limit my ability to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.
- In the past five years, I have avoided pursuing certain topics in my research, scholarship, or creative activity due to changes in state law or policy.
- In the past five years, I have relocated to or applied for an academic position in a different US state due to laws or policies restricting my ability to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity
- In the past five years, I have applied for a non-academic position due to laws or policies restricting my ability to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.

Figure 2: Research Impacted by State Law or Policy in the Past Five Years, by Institution Type



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Impacts of federal research funding

The federal government is the largest single funder of academic research in the United States. Soon after taking office, the Trump administration ordered a widespread cancellation of already-awarded grants, the cancellation of numerous grant programs and, in some cases, the shuttering of federal funding agencies, including the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS).⁶ According to data from *Nature*, these cancellations disproportionately targeted research on LGBTQ individuals or subjects, issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, vaccination policy, and global warming. Some of these actions have since been reversed by court orders or other reasons, but 2025 saw the cancellation of federal research grants at an unprecedented scale: together, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and National Science Foundation (NSF) cancelled or suspended 7,840 already-awarded grants. Those agencies also awarded roughly 25 percent fewer new grants than they have in the past 10 years.⁷ Overall, 8 percent of respondents to our survey reported that they had personally had a federal grant cancelled in 2025.

⁶ The administration's efforts to close NEH and IMLS have not been successful. Both are currently funding projects, though with fewer professional staff.

⁷ Max Kozlov, Jeff Tollefson, and Dan Garisto, "US Science After a Year of Trump," *Nature*, January 20, 2026, <https://www.nature.com/immersive/d41586-026-00088-9/index.html>.

Overall, 8 percent of respondents to our survey reported that they had personally had a federal grant cancelled in 2025.

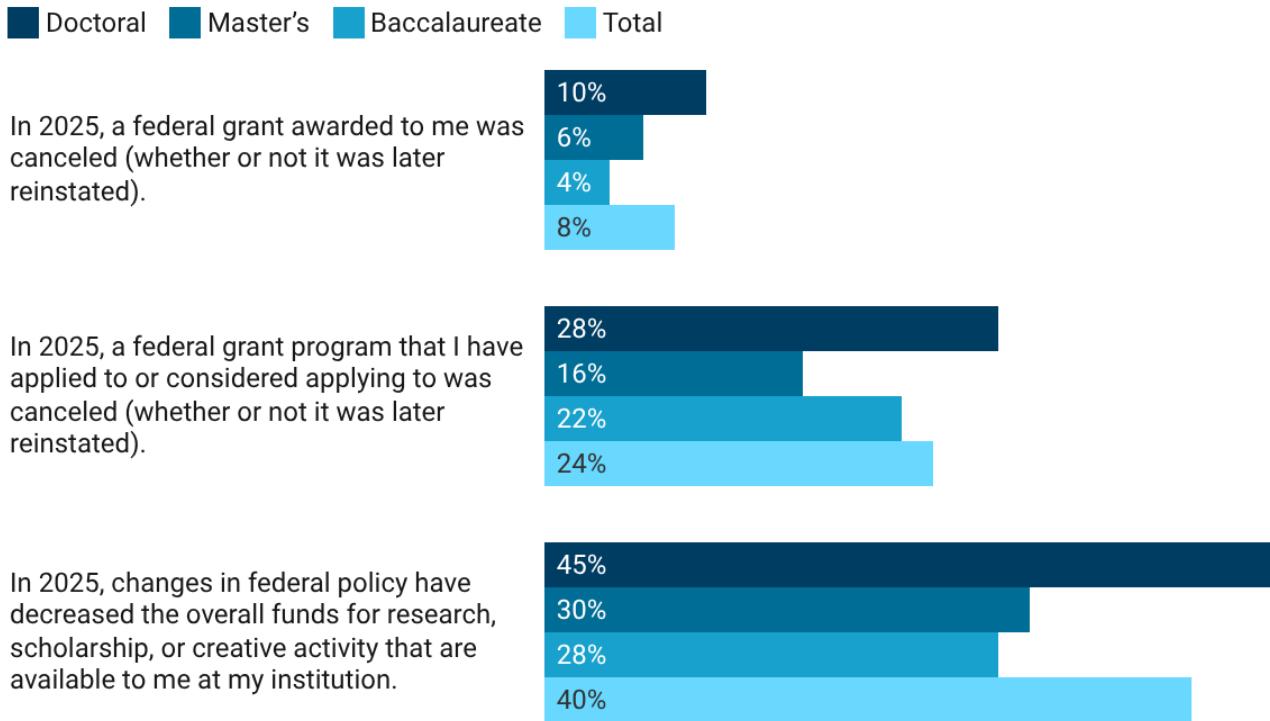
Given this context, it is unsurprising that researchers expressed significant concern over the federal funding situation. Forty percent of respondents described a decrease in research funds available to them due to changes in federal policy, and 24 percent indicated that a federal grant program to which they had applied or were considering applying had been cancelled. In some fields—especially those funded by the NIH, NSF, and the US Department of Agriculture (USDA)—more than 50 percent of respondents reported that federal policy changes had reduced funding opportunities in their fields.

Figure 3: Percentage of respondents indicating that federal policy changes have reduced funding available in their field, broken down by departmental affiliation.

In 2025, changes in federal policy have decreased the overall funds for research, scholarship, or creative activity that are available to me at my institution.	
Overall percent	40.1%
Agriculture	57.5%
Allied Health	50.8%
Business	16.1%
Communications	37.3%
Computer Science	37.9%
Education	45.0%
Engineering	52.7%
English Literature	33.3%

Fine Art	33.7%
Foreign Language	29.8%
Interdisciplinary Studies	41.4%
Mathematics	28.2%
Medicine	50.6%
Natural Science	54.8%
Nursing	48.4%
Physical Education	37.3%
Social Science	39.2%

Figure 4: Impacts of 2025 Federal Funding Policies on Researchers, by Carnegie Classification.⁸



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Researchers relocating

Over the past several years, there has been considerable reporting about the possibility that researchers may leave states with divisive concepts and similar laws. Recent surveys of faculty in southern states have indicated that as many as a quarter of faculty from across disciplines are actively looking for new jobs in other states, many of whom cite academic freedom or the general political climate as a key motivator.⁹ Likewise, surveys of faculty in Texas and Florida, two states that have passed divisive concepts legislation, indicate that many faculty are pursuing academic opportunities in other states or considering leaving the profession.¹⁰ More recently, similar questions have been raised about the

⁸ These classifications are based on the 2021 Carnegie classifications, which were still in effect when the survey was designed and the sample created.

⁹ Laurie Udesky, "Policed and Censored: Professors in the Southern US Feel Under Siege," *Nature*, October 29, 2025: <https://doi.org/10.1038/d41586-025-03290-3>.

¹⁰ Nicholas Gutteridge and Alex Ford, "Professors Want to Leave Texas Because of Tense Political Climate, Survey Says," *The Texas Tribune*, September 5, 2025,

possibility of researchers leaving the US for academic positions in other countries, or leaving academia entirely, motivated by federal funding cuts.¹¹

Ten percent of faculty from states with laws restricting academic speech reported trying to find out-of-state academic positions, and 6 percent reported seeking to leave the academy.

Our survey shows that 10 percent of faculty from states with laws restricting academic speech reported trying to find out-of-state academic positions, and 6 percent reported seeking to leave the academy. In open-ended comments, others volunteered that they were considering early retirement due to the current political climate. However, our questionnaire differed from the studies cited above in that it specifically excluded those whose decisions were due to factors other than laws or policies restricting their ability to conduct research. Four percent of all respondents indicated that they had actively sought employment in another country in 2025 due to restrictions on their research activity. Overall, 11 percent of all respondents indicated that they were seeking to leave the academy or obtain an academic position in another state or country.

<https://www.texastribune.org/2025/09/05/texas-faculty-university-political-climate-survey/>; Margot Susca, Chaya Tong, and Alex Angle, “Why Faculty Members Are Fleeing Florida,” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, December 6, 2023, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/why-faculty-members-are-fleeing-florida>. See also Williams Institute, “Half of LGBTQ+ College Faculty Surveyed Have Considered Moving to Another State Because of Anti-DEI Laws,” *Williams Institute at UCLA School of Law*, May 2024, <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/press/anti-dei-press-release/> for information specifically about LGBTQ+ faculty working in states with divisive concepts laws.

¹¹ Andrew Joseph, “Brain Drain: Many Scientists See Better Research Options Overseas,” *STAT*, December 17, 2025, <https://www.statnews.com/2025/12/17/research-cuts-fuel-scientific-brain-drain-american-science-shattered/>; Anna McKie, “More than Half of Authors of Leading Research Say Funding Is Declining,” *Nature*, January 20, 2026, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-026-00054-5>; Laurie Udesky and Jack Leeming, “Exclusive: A *Nature* Analysis Signals the Beginnings of a US Science Brain Drain,” *Nature*, April 22, 2025; Elizabeth Gibney and Max Kozlov, “Dozens of Researchers Will Move to France from US Following High-Profile Bid to Lure Talent,” *Nature*, February 10, 2026, <https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-026-00405-2>.

Institutional trust

Researchers had mixed levels of confidence in their institutional leaders' willingness to advocate for academic freedom over their research, with a general trajectory of diminishing trust as the seniority of leadership increased.¹² Department chairs were seen as reliable advocates, while trust in university presidents and governing boards was lower; 25 percent of respondents either disagreed or somewhat disagreed that their president or chancellor advocates for their academic freedom to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity; the figure was 37 percent for “boards of regents or similar governing body at my institution.” Some of this likely reflects simple distance: researchers appear to have the most trust in those leaders with whom they are likely to regularly interact. Department chairs were rated higher than all other actors, faculty and college/division leaders (e.g., deans) were rated similarly, and institution leaders and governing boards were rated lower than all other groups; differences in ratings were statistically significant between all groups, except for faculty and college/division leaders.

Researchers in states with divisive concepts or similar laws were more distrustful, on average, of their boards and presidents than were their colleagues in states without such laws. In open-ended comments, many described their senior leaders as either disinterested or, in some cases, hostile to academic freedom. As one respondent noted, “I have no confidence, whatsoever, that my administration will support faculty if academic freedom is under assault. In fact, they have indicated the opposite. In the past few weeks, administrators have told faculty to not speak, teach, or research certain things.”

¹² Finley and Tiede found a similar trend in: Ashley Finley and Hans-Jorg Tiede, “Academic Freedom and Civil Discourse in Higher Education,” American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2025. We confirmed this trend using a repeated-measures ANOVA model and corresponding post-hoc tests.

Figure 5: Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements (1=Disagree; 2=Somewhat disagree; 3=Neither agree nor disagree; 4=Somewhat agree; 5=Agree)

	States without divisive concepts or similar laws	States with divisive concepts or similar laws
The leader of my department or unit advocates for my academic freedom to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.	4.23 (median=5)	4.12 (median=5)
The leader of my college or division advocates for my academic freedom to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.	4.01 (median=4)	3.86 (median=4)
Through shared governance and committees, the faculty at my institution advocate for my academic freedom to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.	4.10 (median=5)	3.79 (median=4)
The president or chancellor of my institution advocates for my academic freedom to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.	3.63 (median=4)	3.19 (median=3)
The board of regents or similar governing body at my institution advocates for my academic freedom to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.	3.14 (median=3)	2.62 (median=3)

Discussion

Academic freedom is a foundational principle of the American research enterprise and a key contributor to the success of what has, until recently, been the world's largest and most generative engine for scientific discovery.¹³ The cumulative impact of state divisive concepts and anti-DEI legislations, and the myriad policies relating to the funding and conduct of higher education in general, and academic research specifically, puts this research enterprise at risk. According to the 2026 update of the Academic Freedom Index, academic freedom and institutional autonomy in the United States are in a state of “fast and steep deterioration.”¹⁴ The index, a joint project of the Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg (FAU) and the V-Dem Institute, has used a rigorous, peer-reviewed methodology to track global trends in this area. As recently as 2021, the US score was among the highest scoring countries: the 2026 edition now places us in the bottom 30 to 40 percent. Our peers once included Canada, the UK, the Netherlands, and Denmark. They now include Angola, Kyrgyzstan, Singapore, and Kazakhstan.¹⁵

¹³ For studies attempting to quantify the value of academic freedom to scientific research in general, see: Frank Fernandez, et al., “Science at Risk? Considering the Importance of Academic Freedom for STEM Research Production across 17 OECD Countries,” *PLOS ONE* 19, no. 2 (February 15, 2024): <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0298370>; David B. Audretsch, Christian Fisch, Chiara Franzoni, Paul P. Momtaz, and Silvio Vismara, “Academic Freedom and Innovation,” *PLOS ONE* 19, no. 6 (June 11, 2024): e0304560, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0304560>.

¹⁴ “Academic Freedom Index: Update 2026,” Friedrich-Alexander-Universität and V-Dem Institute, 2026, https://academic-freedom-index.net/research/Academic_Freedom_Index_Update_2026.pdf.

¹⁵ Katrin Kinzelbach, Ilyas Saliba, Janika Spannagel, and Robert Quinn, “Free Universities: Putting Academic Freedom Index Into Action,” Global Public Policy Institute and Scholars at Risk Network, March 2021, https://gppi.net/assets/KinzelbachEtAl_2021_Free_Universities_AFI-2020_upd.pdf; Academic Freedom Index: Update 2026,” Friedrich-Alexander-Universität and V-Dem Institute, 2026.

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The impacts of divisive concept laws on academic research received little attention until early last year, when a cascade of executive orders, grant cancellations, and reductions in force at major federal funding agencies brought them to the pages of newspapers and the mainstream of public discourse.¹⁶ Our research provides statistical evidence that the self-censoring practices that have been documented among faculty in their role as teachers are spilling over into their research agendas, imperiling American leadership in scientific research and higher education's capacity to contribute to solving complex global challenges.

¹⁶ "Some 1,900 Scientists Accuse Trump of 'Wholesale Assault' on Science," *The Washington Post*, April 3, 2025, https://www.washingtonpost.com/science/2025/04/01/trump-science-letter-national-academies-of-sciences/?utm_source=chatgpt.com; "Documenting a 'Drastically Changing' Scientific Landscape," *The New York Times*, February 27, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/17/insider/lost-science-research-cuts.html>; "A Crushing Year for Science in America," *The New York Times*, October 9, 2025, <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/10/09/climate/lost-science-newsletter.html>; Katia Riddle, Rob Stein, and Juana Summers, "What Cuts to Research Under Trump Have Meant for Science in 2025," *NPR*, December 22, 2025, <https://www.npr.org/2025/12/22/nx-s1-5642965/what-cuts-to-research-under-trump-have-meant-for-science-in-2025>.

Appendix A: Methodology

The survey was administered through Qualtrics to a sample of 225,663 higher education email addresses purchased from a third-party vendor whose list was compiled based on instructors of record; the list also included administrators. The sample excluded institutions that do not award a bachelor's degree. Survey responses were accepted from September 22 to November 17, 2025, with a response rate of 2.98 percent. The cleaned analysis dataset included 4003 complete and partial responses. Analysis was conducted using Excel, SPSS (version 26), Stata (version 18), and R.

We employed logistic regression to examine questions with binary outcomes. For example, to examine whether respondents reported altering their research agenda in response to divisive concepts or similar state legislation, we first estimated an unadjusted model with academic discipline as the sole categorical predictor. We then added covariates to assess whether discipline effects persisted after controlling for respondent demographics. The full model specification was as follows:

$$\text{logit}(P(\text{RESEARCH} = 1)) = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{DISCIPLINE} + \beta_2 \text{RACE} + \beta_3 \text{GENDER}$$

where RESEARCH is whether the respondent indicated altering their research agenda in response to state legislation. DISCIPLINE is a categorical variable with our largest group of respondents, social science ($n = 772$), as the reference category. Other disciplines are represented as dummy variables in the model. RACE is a binary categorical variable indicating whether the respondent identifies as white or a person of color, and GENDER is a binary indicator of whether the respondent identifies as a man. As a robustness check, we also specified the full model with the second largest group of respondents, natural science ($n = 489$), as the reference category. Results were similar across models and are reported in exponentiated form (odds ratios) in Table A1.

Table A1. Estimated Odds Ratios of Altering Research Agenda

	Bivariate Model (reference = Social Science)		Full Specification (reference = Social Science)		Full Specification (reference = Natural Science)	
	<i>Exp(β)</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(β)</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Exp(β)</i>	<i>SE</i>
DISCIPLINE						
Administration	0.55	0.23	0.54	0.24	0.55	0.25
Agriculture	1.30	0.32	1.45	0.37	1.50	0.40
Allied Health	1.87**	0.40	1.90* *	0.42	1.96**	0.46
Business	0.96	0.18	0.96	0.19	0.99	0.21
Communications	1.50*	0.31	1.49	0.31	1.53	0.35
Computer Science	1.09	0.35	1.26	0.41	1.30	0.44
Education	2.34***	0.38	2.24* **	0.38	2.31***	0.43
Engineering	0.83	0.19	0.86	0.21	0.91	0.23
English Literature	1.14	0.21	1.15	0.22	1.19	0.24
Fine Art	1.08	0.18	1.11	0.19	1.14	0.21
Foreign Language	0.67	0.17	0.68	0.17	0.70	0.18
General Studies	1.97*	0.56	2.05*	0.61	2.12*	0.54
Interdisciplinary Studies	1.37	0.29	1.37	0.30	1.41	0.32
Library Science	1.48	1.00	1.40	0.95	1.44	0.98
Mathematics	0.36**	0.13	0.37* *	0.13	0.39**	0.14
Medicine	1.22	0.35	1.32	0.40	1.36	0.42
Natural Science	0.89	0.14	0.97	0.15	-	-
Nursing	2.62**	0.73	2.13*	0.63	2.19*	0.67
Physical Education	1.07	0.34	0.82	0.30	0.85	0.31
Social Science	-	-	-	-	1.03	0.16
DEMOGRAPHICS						
Men	-	-	0.70* **	0.06	0.70***	0.06
White	-	-	0.88	0.08	0.88	0.08
<i>Model Chi-sq (d.f.)</i>	85.72 (d.f. = 19)***		99.87 (d.f. = 21)***		99.87 (d.f. = 21)***	

Note. n = 3,539

p*<.05, *p*<.01, ****p*<.001

Whether or not we controlled for race and gender, results were similar across academic discipline, and each overall model specification was statistically significant. Compared to their peers in either social science or natural science disciplines, we found that respondents in allied health, education, general studies, and nursing were consistently more likely to report having avoided researching certain topics in response to state legislation, whereas respondents in mathematics disciplines were consistently less likely to report such avoidance. In both full model specifications, men were less likely to report avoiding certain research topics.

For analysis of Likert scale items involving only within-subject comparisons, we analyzed results using ANOVA models. For questions of confidence in colleagues and institutional leaders to advocate for respondents' academic freedom, we used a repeated-measures ANOVA design to account for respondents successively rating their confidence in institutional actors and the close relationship between each item. The repeated-measures ANOVA model was significant overall, $F(4,10205.9) = 1,172.6, p < .001, \text{partial } \eta^2 = 0.26$, and revealed that respondents did in fact rate the various institutional actors differently. Because Mauchly's test indicated a violation of sphericity, $W = 0.58, p < .001$, we applied a Greenhouse-Geisser correction ($\epsilon = 0.77$). The partial eta-squared value indicates that 26% of the variance in each respondents' ratings is explained by the position of the institutional actor being rated. Following generally accepted interpretation, this partial eta-squared value is above the 0.14 threshold that indicates a large effect of different institutional actors/leaders on respondents' confidence that the actor in question will advocate for their academic freedom. Post-estimation, Bonferroni-adjusted pairwise comparisons indicated that ratings for all institutional actors differed significantly from one another ($p < .001$), except for the comparison between deans and fellow faculty (as actors in shared governance bodies or in committees). Those pairwise comparisons are presented in Table A2. In general, there was a trend of decreasing confidence in advocacy for academic freedom as seniority/distance of the institutional actor increased from the respondent.

Table A2. Differences in Respondents' Perception of Institutional Actors' Advocacy for Academic Freedom

Comparison Groups	Mean Difference	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval
Fellow Faculty and Department Chair	-0.21***	0.02	[-0.25, -0.17]
Fellow Faculty and Dean	0.03	0.02	[-0.01, 0.07]
Fellow Faculty and Institution President	0.52***	0.02	[0.48, 0.59]
Fellow Faculty and Board	1.03***	0.02	[0.99, 1.08]
Department Chair and Dean	0.23***	0.02	[0.20, 0.26]
Department Chair and Institution President	0.73***	0.02	[0.69, 0.77]
Department Chair and Board	1.23***	0.02	[1.18, 1.28]
Dean and Institution President	0.49***	0.02	[0.45, 0.53]
Dean and Board	0.99***	0.02	[0.95, 1.04]
Institution President and Board	0.49***	0.02	0.46, 0.52]

Note. Post-estimation pairwise comparisons with Bonferroni-adjusted p-values. Overall ANOVA model was significant, $F(4,10205.9) = 1,172.6, p < .001, partial \eta^2 = 0.26$.

* $p < .005$, ** $p < .001$, *** $p < .0001$

In comparing ratings of perceived support for academic freedom between respondents from different types of institutions (baccalaureate, master's, and doctoral/research institutions), we used a linear mixed-effects model to account for both within- and between-subject factors, as they do not assume sphericity and provide a more flexible framework for handling repeated measures. Fixed effects (institution type, question, and their interaction) were evaluated using ANOVA-style F-tests. Because the overall model result was significant for the interaction between question and institution type, $F(8,13803.1) = 11.4, p < .001$, we conducted pairwise comparisons between each institution type for each question, using estimated marginal means, with Holm-adjusted p-values to correct for multiple comparisons. Due to the large sample size, we used asymptotic inference, meaning degrees of freedom were not reported. Ratings between master's level and doctoral/research institutions were only significant for questions related to institution presidents and boards; however, for every question, ratings provided by respondents at baccalaureate institutions were statistically significantly different from those provided by respondents at the other included institution types.

Table A3 presents differences in ratings between institution types for each question.

Table A3. Differences in Perception of Institutional Actors' Advocacy for Academic Freedom by Institution Type

Ratings of Institutional Actors between Institution Types	Mean Difference	Standard Error	95% Confidence Interval
Fellow Faculty			
Doctoral vs. Master's	-0.06	0.05	[-0.19, 0.06]
Doctoral vs. Baccalaureate	-0.36***	0.07	[-0.52, -0.20]
Master's vs. Baccalaureate	-0.29***	0.08	[-0.48, -0.11]
Department Chair			
Doctoral vs. Master's	-0.05	0.05	[-0.18, 0.07]
Doctoral vs. Baccalaureate	-0.25***	0.07	[-0.42, -0.09]
Master's vs. Baccalaureate	-0.20*	0.08	[-0.38, -0.01]
Dean			
Doctoral vs. Master's	-0.10	0.05	[-0.22, 0.03]
Doctoral vs. Baccalaureate	-0.30***	0.07	[-0.46, -0.14]
Master's vs. Baccalaureate	-0.20*	0.08	[-0.39, -0.02]
Institution President			
Doctoral vs. Master's	-0.11*	0.05	[-0.24, 0.01]
Doctoral vs. Baccalaureate	-0.60***	0.07	[-0.76, -0.43]
Master's vs. Baccalaureate	-0.48***	0.08	[-0.67, -0.30]
Board			
Doctoral vs. Master's	-0.26***	0.05	[-0.38, -0.13]
Doctoral vs. Baccalaureate	-0.73***	0.07	[-0.89, -0.56]
Master's vs. Baccalaureate	-0.47***	0.08	[-0.67, -0.29]

Note. Overall model was significant for the interaction between institution type and question, $F(8,13803.1) = 11.4, p < .001$

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Appendix B: Survey questions

Academic freedom is the freedom of scholars in higher education to investigate and discuss the issues in their academic field, and to teach or publish findings without interference from college or university administrators, political figures, boards of trustees, donors, or other entities.

Institutional autonomy is the principle that the government has no role in determining what ideas are permitted on a college campus or what conclusions faculty, staff, or students can draw regarding those ideas.

Please select all of the following statements that apply to you:

- a. In the past five years, my state has enacted laws or policies restricting academic freedom or institutional autonomy that limit my ability to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.
- b. In the past five years, I have avoided pursuing certain topics in my research, scholarship, or creative activity due to changes in state law or policy.
- c. In the past five years, I have relocated to or applied for an academic position in a different US state due to laws or policies restricting my ability to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.
- d. In the past five years, I have applied for a non-academic position due to laws or policies restricting my ability to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.
- e. In 2025, a federal grant awarded to me was canceled (whether or not it was later reinstated).
- f. In 2025, a federal grant program that I have applied to or considered applying to was canceled (whether or not it was later reinstated).
- g. In 2025, changes in federal policy have decreased the overall funds for research, scholarship, or creative activity that are available to me at my institution.
- h. In 2025, I have relocated to or applied for an academic position in a different country due to laws or policies restricting my ability to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.
- i. None of the above
- j. Prefer not to answer

Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with the following statements (Disagree; Somewhat disagree; Neither agree nor disagree; Somewhat agree; Agree)

- a. The leader of my department or unit advocates for my academic freedom to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.
- b. The leader of my college or division advocates for my academic freedom to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.
- c. Through shared governance and committees, the faculty at my institution advocates for my academic freedom to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.
- d. The president or chancellor of my institution advocates for my academic freedom to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.
- e. The board of regents or similar governing body at my institution advocates for my academic freedom to conduct research, scholarship, or creative activity.

Appendix C: Survey respondent demographics

Carnegie classification	N
Doctoral	2552
Master's	891
Baccalaureate	441
Other	119

	N
Administrators	64
Agriculture	113
Allied Health	140
Business	257
Communications	171
Computer Science	73
Education	266
Engineering	180
English Literature	266

Fine Art	357
Foreign Language	179
General Studies	68
Interdisciplinary Studies	167
Library Science	12
Mathematics	139
Medicine	87
Natural Science	517
Nursing	68
Physical Education	73
Social Science	806

How do you describe yourself? Please select all that apply.	N	%
I prefer not to answer this question.	152	4.3%
Woman	1740	48.7%
Man	1625	45.5%
Non-binary	45	1.3%
Trans	21	0.6%
I use a different term (please specify):	14	0.4%

What is your race and/or ethnicity? Please select all that apply.	N	%
I prefer not to answer this question.	306	8.6%
American Indian or Alaska Native	38	1.1%
Asian	269	7.5%
Black or African American	154	4.3%
Hispanic or Latino	203	5.7%
Middle Eastern or North African	56	1.6%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	7	0.2%
White or Caucasian	2664	74.7%
I prefer to self-identify as:	54	1.5%