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Die Junge Akademie

International Workshop “Free Scientific Research Under Threat”

National Academy of Medicine, Buenos Aires, Argentina

October 14-16th 2025 (Hybrid format)

REPORT

The aim of this meeting was to share experiences and exchange reflections on the current scenario, which is characterised by various forms of attack on free scientific research around the world. These attacks include the selective funding cuts implemented by the government of Donald Trump in the United States of America, and the budgetary restrictions imposed by the government of Javier Milei in Argentina. These public policy decisions are often accompanied by stigmatisation campaigns on social networks. These anti-science stigmatisation strategies can be traced back to the proliferation of conspiratorial discourse, anti-quarantine and anti-vaccine rhetoric during the recent global Coronavirus pandemic. In this regard, it is worth remembering the denialist attitude adopted by the Trump administration. This dangerous position had a prominent exponent in the former Brazilian president Jair Bolsonaro, who characterised the virus as a 'minor flu'.

The workshop was organized in five panels of three communications each. After the presentations, we shared an interesting discussion together with the panellists and the audience. It is worth noting that we had the honour to establish a dialogue with colleagues from Latin America, Europe, Asia and Africa. We would like to thank all of them, as well as the moderators, attendees, and the staff of the National Academy of Medicine. On the

other hand, we consider that there is not a better report of the event than the own testimony of the speakers. Because of that, we share below the words that some of them sent to us after the Workshop:

-Pablo Méndez (National Council for Scientific and Technical Research – National University of Lanús), who presented the communication “Disputing What Is True: Neoliberal Think Tanks and Far-right Parties as Knowledge Makers”, told us:

“In this lecture I addressed the threats that sciences are facing nowadays due to the activities of think tanks linked to a right and far-right parties. Organised through networks around the world, think tanks have struggled to spread economic ideas about the State and freedom among the public opinion. To do this, they were able to combine the scientific world and the language of the mass media, disputing what is true with universities and scientific institutes. As we saw during the COVID-19 pandemic, think tanks and right parties collaborated to present health policies as a return of totalitarian States. This narrative strategy had implications, provoking deep tensions between individual freedoms and social security.”

-Matías Saidel (National Council for Scientific and Technical Research – Institute for Social Studies – National University of Entre Ríos), whose communication was entitled “Understanding the attack on science from the paleolibertarian perspective”, shared these words with us:

“In this presentation I analysed the attacks against Argentine science institutions under Javier Milei’s presidency, focusing on the paleolibertarian ideology that frames public investment in science as illegitimate and parasitic. Milei’s government has defunded research agencies and denigrated academic communities, promoting market fundamentalism and anti-statist rhetoric. Paleolibertarian views reject public investment in education and research, siding with privatization and opposing state intervention, even for pressing social challenges. This context exacerbates misinformation, undermines scientific contributions to democracy, and limits the ability of public science to address issues like health, inequality, and the environment in favour of individualism and market solutions.”

-Claudio Cormick & Valeria Edelsztejn (National Council for Scientific and Technical Research) presented the communication “Know your enemy (and no, it's not «antiintellectualism»)”. With respect to it, they remarked that:

“From a strictly practical perspective, it is undeniable that Javier Milei’s far-right government is dismantling Argentina’s public research institutions, such as CONICET and state-funded national universities. While there is broad consensus among scholars—and comrades in the struggle against the government’s measures—on this point, disagreement arises when attempts are made to characterize the discourse through which the government justifies its actions against the national scientific system. Contrary to those characterizations that claim Milei’s rhetoric is “anti-intellectual” or, adapting Mooney’s words, that it wages “a war on science,” our presentation (based on a review of 150 hours of video footage of Milei’s interviews and speeches) argued that Milei’s approach is, instead, a war over science: an attempt to “seize” the term “science” to describe and legitimize a project in which only research financed by the private sector—and for which there is “demand” in the form of “books” purchased by agents in the free market—is considered legitimate. Such restrictions on what qualifies as “good” science, however, exclude most fundamental scientific discoveries, including precisely those whose value for human development Milei claims to vindicate in his discourse.”

-Natisha Duki and Kamini Govender (South African Young Academy of Science), presented the communication “The Consequences of Global North Funding Reductions on South African Research and Science Diplomacy for Equitable Scientific Access”. With respect to it, they shared this reflection:

“On behalf of the South African Young Academy of Science (SAYAS), at the international workshop we reflect about how global reductions in Global North funding are reshaping South Africa’s research landscape and weakening science diplomacy efforts, particularly for LMICs striving for equitable scientific access. SAYAS highlighted the growing misalignment between donor priorities and national needs, and the increasing vulnerability of early-career researchers whose work depends on stable international partnerships. A key insight from the panel discussion was the shared recognition across regions that funding insecurity is not just a financial issue, but a structural threat to scientific freedom, mobility, and global knowledge production. The dialogue underscored the urgency of re-imagining partnerships that centre reciprocity, co-creation, and long-term sustainability rather than dependency. The workshop reinforced the importance of

strong South–South alliances and diversified funding pathways to safeguard scientific autonomy while ensuring African researchers remain active contributors to global science. It was a powerful platform for collective reflection, learning, and advancing strategies to protect the future of open, equitable research.”

-Daiana Capdevila (National Council for Scientific and Technical Research – Leloir Institute – Biochemical Research Institute of Buenos Aires), whose communication was entitled “Biosensors for citizen monitoring of water contaminants: a joint development with an endangered government agency”, shared these words with us:

“My presentation at the Young Academy Workshop focused on our joint work with the Matanza Riachuelo basin authority on the development of biosensors for lead contamination in drinking and spring water. I presented how biotechnology developments aim to tackle societal needs interdisciplinarity. The success of our approach heavily relies on the definition of water insecurity that derives both globally and locally by research groups in both anthropology and sociology and local authorities that define the problem and the need for point-of-care sensors with unique analytical properties. In parallel, our group and different collaborators in the fields of synthetic biology and analytical biochemistry jointly tailor sensors to tackle the challenges that were identified. From our perspective, this work highlights the importance of interdisciplinarity and public administration involvement in promoting locally developed solutions for local problems. During the workshop, we discussed the challenges posed by the current administration in Argentina denying the consequences of contamination in aquifers and spring water and cutting funding to various programs that promoted scientific development.”

-Sandeep Sandhou (Innovate UK Business Connect – UK Young Academy) presented the communication ““Displaced Voices, Global Solidarity: Protecting Academic Freedom Through Diplomacy and Diaspora”. With respect to it, she shared this reflection:

“I explored how academic freedom can be supported through science diplomacy, institutional mechanisms, and the lived experiences of displaced researchers. The discussion highlighted the importance of sustained international collaboration and the role of diaspora scientists as informal ambassadors for academic freedom. I was particularly struck by the shared commitment among participants to build practical frameworks for solidarity and mobility equity across global research systems.”

-Syed Mohammad Abbas Zaidi (NED – University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi, Pakistan), whose communication was entitled “Challenges of Doctoral and PostDoctoral Research Scholars Navigating Rough Waters of Academia”, sent to us these words:

“I focused on myriads of challenges confronting the young researchers and proposed collaborative solutions via introspection and policy reviews to inspire positive transformation in the research landscape especially in the oversight of collective intellect of the academics from across the world.”

-Aleena Kanwal (University of Engineering and Technology, Taxila), presented the communication “Silencing Science? How Selective Funding Cuts Target Controversial Research”. With respect to it, she sent to us this reflection:

“My talk explored how selective funding decisions can unintentionally restrict academic freedom and silence critical scientific inquiry. What stood out to me during the panel discussion was the collective recognition that international cooperation and transparent funding policies are vital to safeguard scientific independence. Hearing perspectives from diverse countries reminded me how essential it is to keep science open, inclusive, and fearless in pursuit of truth.”

-Guro Nore Fløgstad (University of Southeast Norway – Young Academy of Norway), whose communication was entitled “The dimensioning of the Ph.D.-education system in Norway: toward an instrumentalization of research?”, shared these words with us:

“I gave a presentation about threats to academic freedom in Norway. Overall, academic freedom is well protected in Norway. Researchers are able to conduct research, disseminate their findings freely, and engage in public debate. However, as in several other European countries, Norway is experiencing an increased politicization of the academic sector. Politicians are increasingly imposing thematic limitations on research funding and defining certain academic fields as more societally relevant than others. Is this an attack on academic freedom? Regardless of how we choose to define this politicization, it has consequences for young researchers, who have less freedom to choose their research topics. Society will ultimately bear the consequences if less fundamental research is conducted.”

-Antonella Lemos (George Washington University – LAW), who presented the communication “Argentina in the Lithium Era: Between Economic Crisis and Human Rights Claims”, told us:

“My presentation at the Young Academy Workshop focused on the conflicts that arise from lithium mining when it is carried out without adequate consideration of the human rights involved. I examined the case of Argentina, where —despite the existence of extensive legislation protecting the right to a healthy environment and the rights of Indigenous peoples— these rights are often disregarded in times of economic crisis. During the workshop, we discussed the potential conflicts that emerge from decision-making processes that overlook these principles, the questions raised by the so-called energy transition, and the shared responsibilities of developed and developing countries within this process. I am deeply grateful to the Young Academy of Argentina for the opportunity to present this research, which stems from my master’s studies in Environmental Law. The insightful questions and contributions from participants enriched the discussion and allowed me to expand and deepen my research, making it even more comprehensive.”

We hope that the Workshop will be a starting point to raise awareness of this problem and to further strengthen cooperation with young academies around the world.

Valeria Berros and Iván Dalmau
(Co-Chairs, Argentinian Young Academy)