

## Should Science Media Have Political Stances?

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Scientific magazines in America—from academic journals to science communication sites—have long served as communicators of vital empirical information to scholars and the general public alike. Their existence implies thorough review and editing, guaranteeing quality, truth, and expertise. Although social science can be analyzed empirically and is regularly included, the role of science magazines becomes increasingly debatable when it includes politics. Notably, this year, in 2024, as in 2020, Scientific American openly endorsed a presidential candidate. News channels and science lovers alike expressed conflicting views on this intersection of science and politics, begging the question: Is it ethical for science media to have a say in politics?

On one hand, it is the responsibility of science media to inform citizens about all things science as they strive to make rational decisions, especially when a particular candidate may be spreading scientific misinformation or their policies affect research and long-established empirical principles. In the midst of COVID-19, for instance, Trump repeatedly pushed for hydroxychloroquine, a drug known for curing malaria, not COVID. His denial of COVID's severity, lack of action, and hesitation towards vaccines were also not the established scientific approaches to a global pandemic. Scientific American—or any science media—has the right and responsibility to provide accurate information on these current and pressing issues, regardless of how it factors into the political landscape. Thus, the magazine's endorsement can simply be viewed as an extension of spreading awareness: a scientific caution from experts.

On the other hand, endorsements are undoubtedly still opinions, which are in no way empirical, and calls into question the credibility and function of science magazines. By endorsing a candidate, magazines are pushing a subjective stance towards an audience that trusts them for factual, carefully peer-reviewed discoveries and data. Politics is based on personal values; science is based on objective inquiry—it's clear the two are fundamentally different. If these two hemispheres are combined, the result could be catastrophic for both fields: scientists could become further politically polarized and politicians could develop less trust in science. Many argue scientists should stick to what they know best—science—and leave the personal decisions to the people voting.

### Discussion questions:

1. What should be the role of the media (news versus scientific) in shaping our political decisions?
2. What constitutes an ethical intersection of science and politics?
3. Can a politician be a good leader even if they don't always stick to science?