



S. CLARKE/REX FEATURES

# A MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH

**F**ew issues in biology have the power to fire up emotions like the topic of animal research. The public face of the debate is largely characterized by polarized positions: the use of animals in the laboratory is simply either 'all good' or 'all bad'. The imagery and arguments tend to be quite crude. On the one hand members of the public are confronted with images of angry animal-rights protesters picketing labs and offices, calling for an end to all animal experimentation. On the other, they are presented with claims from supporters of animal research that the use of such creatures in the lab is essential and should not be questioned.

Somehow, the voice of the middle ground has been lost. With stories appearing in the news of scientists and their families being threatened by extremists, it is not surprising that many researchers are reluctant to talk publicly about their work. But, as Emma Marris reveals on page 808, those who are prepared to discuss the issue add a range of highly nuanced views to the debate. To explore this further, *Nature* conducted an anonymous survey of 1,682 biomedical scientists, and found a simi-

larly broad range of opinions. Interestingly, the survey also suggested that many scientists feel that they receive insufficient support from their universities or institutions to allow them to speak on the subject more openly (see page 789 and the full poll results online at [www.nature.com/news/specials/animalresearch](http://www.nature.com/news/specials/animalresearch)).

Bench scientists are not the only ones who can find themselves in the firing line. On page 811, Kerri Smith talks to a vet, whose job it is to care for experimental animals, about the challenge of balancing the pressures from both anti-vivisectionists and researchers, while trying to improve the lives of lab primates. On page 812, David Cyranoski speaks to researchers working on primates who are worried that, in addition to violent animal-rights protests, regulations are an increasing threat to their work. And on page 814, Jane Qiu looks to the future of mouse research and how the advent of large-scale genetics projects will affect the use of this rodent. ■

To voice your opinions in this debate, visit *Nature's* newsblog at [www.nature.com/news](http://www.nature.com/news).