

Correspondence

Another diversity problem – scientists’ politics

According to your poll before the US presidential election (see *Nature* 586, 654; 2020), the political leaning of scientists was 86% in favour of Democrat Joe Biden, now president-elect, with just 8% supporting Republican Donald Trump, the outgoing president. However, this finding is glaringly out of step with the voting of the population from which the US scientists were drawn (about 51% versus 47%, respectively).

This misalignment could be attributed to differences in education, understanding and awareness of the issues at stake. But such a gulf risks isolating science further from society at a time when we should be building bridges beyond this election.

As academics become more aware of the importance of diversity of thought, we must be careful not to recreate different forms of the old elitist patterns of collective behaviour recently challenged by anti-racism. Any association of science with political archetypes could turn some against it by enhancing the view that it is an exclusive pursuit.

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Land use predicts pandemic disparities

COVID-19 morbidity is linked to social, economic and environmental factors, including residential location, air pollution and median household income (H. A. Washington *Nature* 581, 241; 2020). These have an overlapping determinant that could prove to be an important predictor of COVID-19 disparities: land use.

The United States has a strained history of land use and land governance, including ethnic constraints on land ownership and unfair mortgage-lending practices. Decisions on land-use classification have led to hazardous and polluting facilities being sited next to minority and other vulnerable residential communities. Despite policies enacted in 1968 to protect against housing discrimination (go.nature.com/39v1bt3), the United States is witnessing a correlation of historical ‘redlining’ – the systematic denial of services to residents of certain areas, on the basis of race or ethnicity – with COVID-19 incidence today.

It is crucial that land-use practices are considered when making public-health management decisions. This could help to mitigate the multi-generational, compounding impacts of isolated or confined residential spaces. Those who live in such areas will continue to take a disproportionate hit unless land-use equity is made a priority in governance.

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What counts as climate finance? Define urgently

To resolve arguments over what funding actually flows from developed to developing nations, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change needs to draw up a definition of what constitutes climate finance.

At the 2009 UN climate summit, developed countries pledged to mobilize US\$100 billion annually by 2020 to help developing countries mitigate and adapt to climate change. Has the promise been met? The answer to this question will be available only in “the first quarter of 2022 at the earliest”, according to a report published last month (go.nature.com/2kdekl) by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), a club of wealthy countries.

Letting the OECD decide what counts as climate finance on the world’s behalf risks introducing questionable accounting practices (see R. Weikmans and J. T. Roberts *Clim. Dev.* 11, 97–111; 2019). The OECD, for example, continues to account loans at face value, which equates a \$10-million loan (which has to be paid back) to a \$10-million grant. It is therefore no surprise that developing countries have found OECD reports unacceptable before (see *Nature* 573, 328–331; 2019).

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Combine resilience and efficiency in post-COVID societies

As countries prepare to remodel themselves after the COVID-19 pandemic, they must tackle growth and development expectations by using resources more sustainably, and by ensuring that their societies are better placed to weather future disruptions.

The COVID-19 experience indicates that society could become more vulnerable to systemic shocks and cascading disruption if the practices on which it depends excessively prioritize system efficiency over resilience. Efficiency emphasizes performance at maximum capacity with minimal use of scarce resources. To meet the rising demands of society, efficiency-based approaches often rely on increasingly complex and interconnected systems. But when a tightly interdependent society encounters acute or chronic stressors beyond its expectations or operating capabilities, such highly efficient systems are prone to catastrophic failure that can delay or prevent recovery.

More resilient systems might be less efficient, but they recover better from systemic disruptions. Building resilience does not mean abandoning efficiency, but rather maximizing socio-economic systems’ long-term sustainability in the face of future disruptions. Marrying resilience with efficiency would allow society to preserve or even improve living standards in current and future crises.

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