False Dualities and the Future of Democracy: Field Notes from a Scientist on the Campaign Trail

The 2016 U.S. presidential election was viewed by many in the STEM and academic communities as an attack on science, spurring a rapid growth in science activism, including the pro-science PAC 314 Action and the 2017 March for Science. In this context, an unprecedented number of STEM professionals ran for federal office, frequently citing attacks on science and truth as motivating campaign platforms. Many STEM candidates struggled to gain traction with a pro-science platform. In contrast to the deep complexities and contingencies that are generally understood and intrinsically valued in the scientific community, political messaging and electoral success rewards simplicity and clear dualities, often falsely constructed and at odds with real-world conditions and complexity. Dr. Ross draws on her own 2018 campaign experience to explore shortcomings of the contemporary science-in-politics movement, threats to the future of American democracy, and next steps for the science community.

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