

AMERICAN ACADEMY
OF ARTS & SCIENCES



PERCEPTIONS OF SCIENCE IN AMERICA

A REPORT FROM
THE PUBLIC FACE OF SCIENCE INITIATIVE



TOP THREE TAKEAWAYS

from *Perceptions of Science in America*

1

Confidence in scientific leaders has remained relatively stable over the last thirty years. (SECTION 1: GENERAL PERCEPTIONS OF SCIENCE)

- Americans express strong support for public investment in research.
- A majority of Americans views scientific research as beneficial.
- Americans support an active role for science and scientists in public life.
- Americans have varying interpretations of the word “science” and the scientific process; additional research is necessary to understand how these differing interpretations influence perceptions of—and support for—science.

2

Confidence in science varies based on age, race, educational attainment, region, political ideology, and other characteristics. (SECTION 2: DEMOGRAPHIC INFLUENCES ON GENERAL VIEWS OF SCIENCE)

- Although attitudes toward science are generally positive, the degree of confidence in science varies among demographic groups.
- For example, U.S. adults without a high-school diploma are less likely than those with a college degree to view science as beneficial.

3

There is no single anti-science population, but more research is needed to understand what drives skepticism about specific science issues. (SECTION 3: CASE STUDIES OF PERCEPTIONS ON SPECIFIC SCIENCE TOPICS)

- Attitudes toward science are not uniformly associated with one particular demographic group but instead vary based on the specific science issue.
- Recent research suggests that underlying factors, such as group identity, can strongly influence perceptions about science.
- A person’s knowledge of science facts and research is not necessarily predictive of acceptance of the scientific consensus on a particular question. Indeed, for certain subgroups and for certain topics such as climate change, higher levels of science knowledge may even be associated with more-polarized views.
- More research is needed to determine how cultural experience and group identities shape trust in scientific research, and how to address skepticism of well-established scientific findings.
- Future studies should include an expanded definition of science literacy that incorporates the understanding of the scientific process and the capacity to evaluate conflicting scientific evidence (see Reexamining the Deficit Model on page 3).