

# Americans' support for science remains strong

February 13 2016

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John Besley, Michigan State University associate professor of advertising and public relations, spoke at this year's AAAS meeting on the public's perceptions of science and scientists. He said surveys show a large majority of Americans hold both in high regard. Credit: MSU College of Communication Arts and Sciences

A large majority of Americans have favorable views of science and scientists, believing that the benefits from science outweigh any negatives and agree that science and technology will create more opportunities for future generations.

This is according to a survey of more than 1,500 people conducted by the National Science Foundation and is part of a report—Science and Engineering Indicators—that the National Science Board provides to the president and Congress every two years.

A Michigan State University faculty member served as lead author for the chapter in the report that covers public perceptions of [science](#). John Besley, an associate professor in MSU's Department of Advertising and Public Relations, highlighted key findings during the annual meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

The report uses 2014 General Social Survey data. The biennial GSS is one of the world's most-respected surveys, using face-to-face interviews and high response rates, Besley said.

One finding Besley emphasized was that Americans are more likely to have "a great deal of confidence" in leaders of the scientific community than leaders of any group other than the military. The data further shows

that scientists are one of the few groups in society that have maintained confidence levels over time.

"It's helpful for Americans to maintain a high regard for science and scientists," said Besley, who also is the Ellis N. Brandt Chair in Public Relations. "Confidence in scientists should make it more likely that society will see benefits from science."

The survey also found that about 80 percent of respondents agreed that scientific research needs funding from the government and about four in 10 said the country is spending "too little" to support [scientific research](#). Only one in 10 said they thought too much money was being spent on science.

Some of the other highlights of the chapter include:

- Science knowledge among the general public has remained stable in recent years.
- Nearly half of Americans cited the Internet as their primary source for science and technology information. That compares to one-tenth of Americans in 2001.
- Only about half of the respondents said they worry about climate change. However, a majority of Americans say they would prefer a focus on [alternative energy sources](#) over fossil-fuel development.

Provided by Michigan State University

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