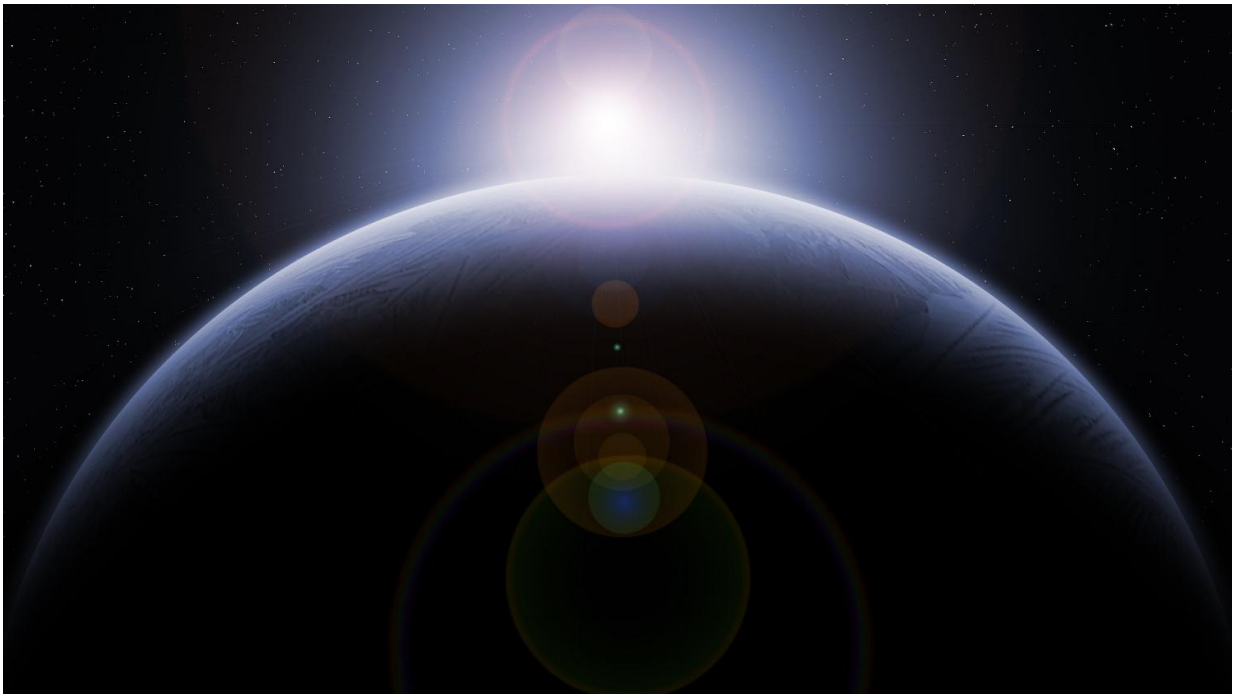


Majority of Americans believe it is essential that the US remain a global leader in space

June 6 2018, by Cary Funk, Mark Strauss



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Sixty years after the founding of NASA, most Americans say the U.S. should be at the forefront of global leadership in space exploration and believe that—even as private space companies emerge as increasingly important players—NASA's role is still vital for U.S. space exploration.

In a national survey of 2,541 U.S. adults conducted March 27-April 9,

2018, roughly seven-in-ten Americans (72%) say it is essential for the U.S. to continue to be a world leader in [space exploration](#). Strong public support is widely shared across gender, generational, educational and political groups. Also, some 80% of Americans say the International Space Station has been a good investment for the country.

In the decades since the U.S. landed astronauts on the moon, the landscape of space exploration has changed dramatically as other countries have expanded their capabilities and [private companies](#) have taken on larger roles. Some 65% of Americans believe that NASA's role in space exploration is essential, with 33% saying that private companies will ensure that enough progress is made in space exploration without NASA's involvement.

When asked to rate the importance of nine specific missions found in NASA's diverse portfolio, majorities say monitoring key parts of the Earth's climate system or monitoring asteroids and other objects that could hit Earth should be top priorities for NASA (63% and 62% respectively). By comparison, fewer Americans say crewed space missions should be top priorities, with 18% saying that sending astronauts to Mars should be a top priority and only 13% saying the same about the moon.

However, if NASA were to send expeditions into space, a majority of Americans say they consider it essential that humans, not solely robots, make the trip. Overall, 58% of U.S. adults believe it is essential to include the use of human astronauts in the future U.S. space program, while 41% say astronauts are not essential.

Also, half of Americans (50%) believe people will routinely travel to space as tourists within the next 50 years. But more anticipate that they would not want to orbit the Earth than say they would (58% to 42%). Interest in orbiting the Earth is greater among younger generations.

Other findings include:

Many Americans are confident private space companies will be profitable, but are more skeptical they will keep space clean.

- Some 44% have a great deal of confidence that private companies will make a profit in space-related ventures and 36% say they are fairly confident they will be profitable.
- A majority of Americans also express confidence that these private companies will build safe and reliable rockets and spacecraft, with 26% expressing a great deal of confidence and 51% having at least a fair amount of confidence.
- Americans are more skeptical that private companies will minimize human-made space debris, with only 13% saying they have a great deal of confidence; 35% saying they have a fair amount of confidence; and 51% saying they have not too much or no confidence at all.
- The 7% of the public that is highly attentive to news about NASA and private space companies tends to express more confidence in these companies to handle key aspects of space exploration. For example, 95% of those who are most attentive to news about space have at least a fair amount of confidence that private companies will build safe and reliable rockets and spacecraft; 58% of this group has a great deal of [confidence](#) that companies will do this.

More than half of Americans say they would not be interested in going into space, citing cost, fear, and age or health concerns.

- The 58% of U.S. adults who say they wouldn't want to orbit the Earth aboard a spacecraft believe that such a trip would be either "too expensive" (28% of those asked) or "too scary" (28%), or that their age or health wouldn't allow it (28%).

- Among the 42% of Americans who would be interested in traveling into space, 45% of them say the main reason for their interest would be to "experience something unique." Some 29% of this group says they would go so that they can see the view of Earth from space, while 20% want to "learn more about the world."
- Interest in orbiting the Earth is greater among younger generations and among men. Some 63% of Millennials (born 1981 to 1996) say they are definitely or probably interested in space tourism, compared with 39% of Gen Xers (born 1965 to 1980) and 27% of those in the Baby Boomer or older generations. Across all generations, men are more likely than women (51% vs. 33%) to say they are interested in traveling into space as tourists.

Compared with ratings of other NASA programs, fewer Americans say crewed space exploration should be a top priority. Potential priorities:

- Monitoring key parts of Earth's climate system: 63% said it should be a top NASA priority; 25% said it should be an important but lower priority; and 11% said it is not too important or should not be done.
- Monitoring asteroids or other objects that could hit Earth: 62% top priority.
- Conducting basic scientific research to increase knowledge and understanding of space: 47% top priority.
- Developing technologies that could be adapted for other uses: 41% top priority.
- Conducting research on how [space](#) travel affects human health: 38% top priority.
- Searching for raw materials and natural resources for use on Earth: 34% top priority.
- Searching for life and planets that could support life: 31% top

priority.

- Sending astronauts to Mars: 18% top priority, 45% important but lower priority, 37% not too important or should not be done.
- Sending astronauts to the moon: 13% top priority, 42% important but lower [priority](#), 44% not too important or should not be done.

More information: www.pewinternet.org/2018/06/06...bal-leader-in-space/

Provided by Pew Research Center

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