How U.S. Adults Perceive Science in this Moment

5•6•25

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Study and Report by

ASTC Association of Science and Technology Centers

LISTEN Network
Leaders in Science and Technology Engagement Networks

EDGE research

Who We Are

Erica Kimmerling, PhD
Senior Advisor

- Served 3.5 years in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy focused on public participation in OSTP policy-making.
- Staff lead on the American Academy of Arts and Science Public Face of Science Initiative which examined the relationship between science and society

Eve Klein, MEd
Senior Advisor

- Leads the LISTEN Network, connecting leaders across the science engagement ecosystem
- Co-led national studies on public motivations for and barriers to engaging with science
- Experienced in cross-sector partnerships and infrastructure-building for science engagement

Who We Are

The Association of Science and Technology Centers (ASTC) is a network of nearly 600 science and technology centers and museums, along with allied science engagement organizations who have a shared vision of increasing understanding of and engagement with science and technology among all people.

ASTC is committed to strengthening connections between science and society, providing our member organizations and the broader science engagement field with valuable insights into public attitudes.

Purpose of this Study

- To gain actionable insights into current public attitudes;
- To support effective communication about science, science engagement, and science policy in the current landscape; and
- To inform how our member institutions, and the broader science and technology ecosystem, can better serve their communities.

Survey Methodology

The Sample

- 1017 adults (18 years of age or older) in the United States
- Data Controlled for Census Representation Distribution
- Volunteers through Big Village/CARAVAN panel

The Survey

- Administered by EDGE Research
- Online
- 11 questions
- Fielded April 4-6, 2025

The Bottom Line:
People value and rely on science
AND
There is an urgent need to deepen and clarify the connections between people's everyday lives and interests and our public investments in scientific institutions and infrastructure.

For the science engagement community there are opportunities to:

- Increase **public awareness** of the **impact of recent federal actions** on their interests (including their current everyday lives and their economic future)
- Close **gaps in public understanding** of how science and technology are impacted by **federal policy**
- Respond to the **growing public interest** in having **deeper touchpoints** with the scientific community

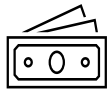
People Value and Rely on Science

Scientific information is deeply integrated into everyday decision-making

Percent of respondents that use the following information when making decisions about their day-to-day activities, household planning, health, or work:

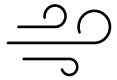
84% Weather forecasts and severe weather alerts

52% Nutritional information



47% Economic forecasting (e.g., inflation rates, job market trends)

39% Public health updates (e.g., food recalls, flu trends)

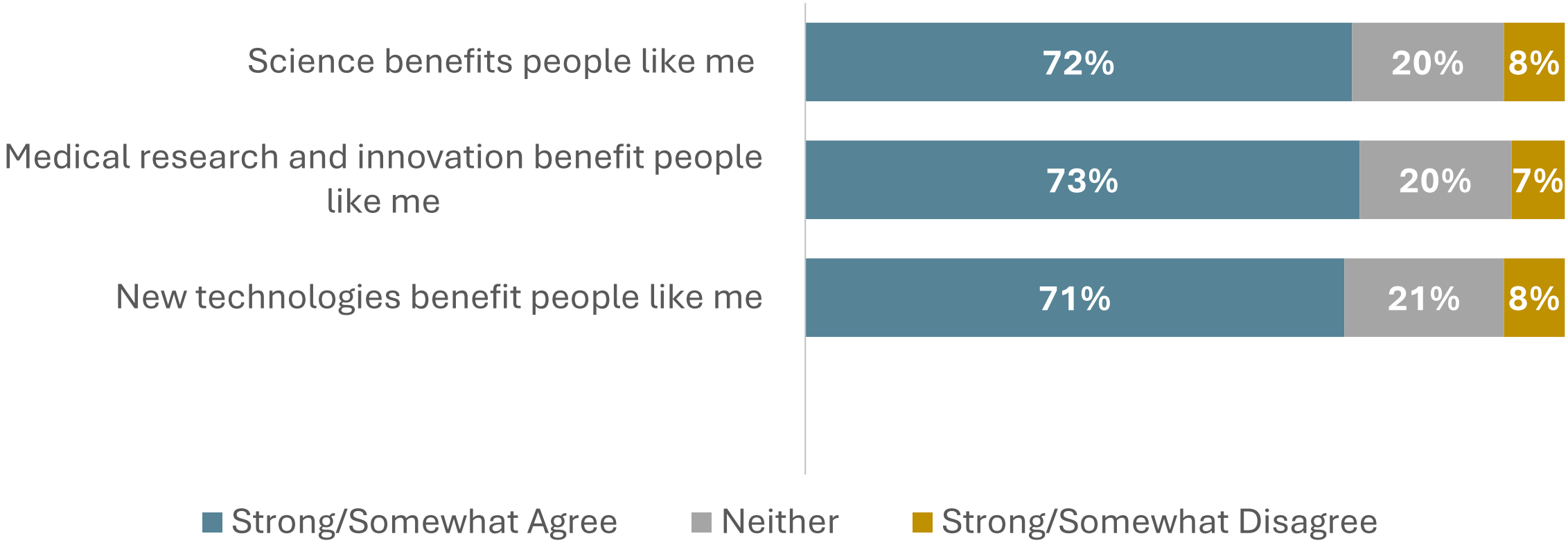


34% Air quality reports

> **9 of 10 respondents** used one or more of the 11 listed information types **at least weekly.**

7 in 10 respondents say science benefits "people like me"

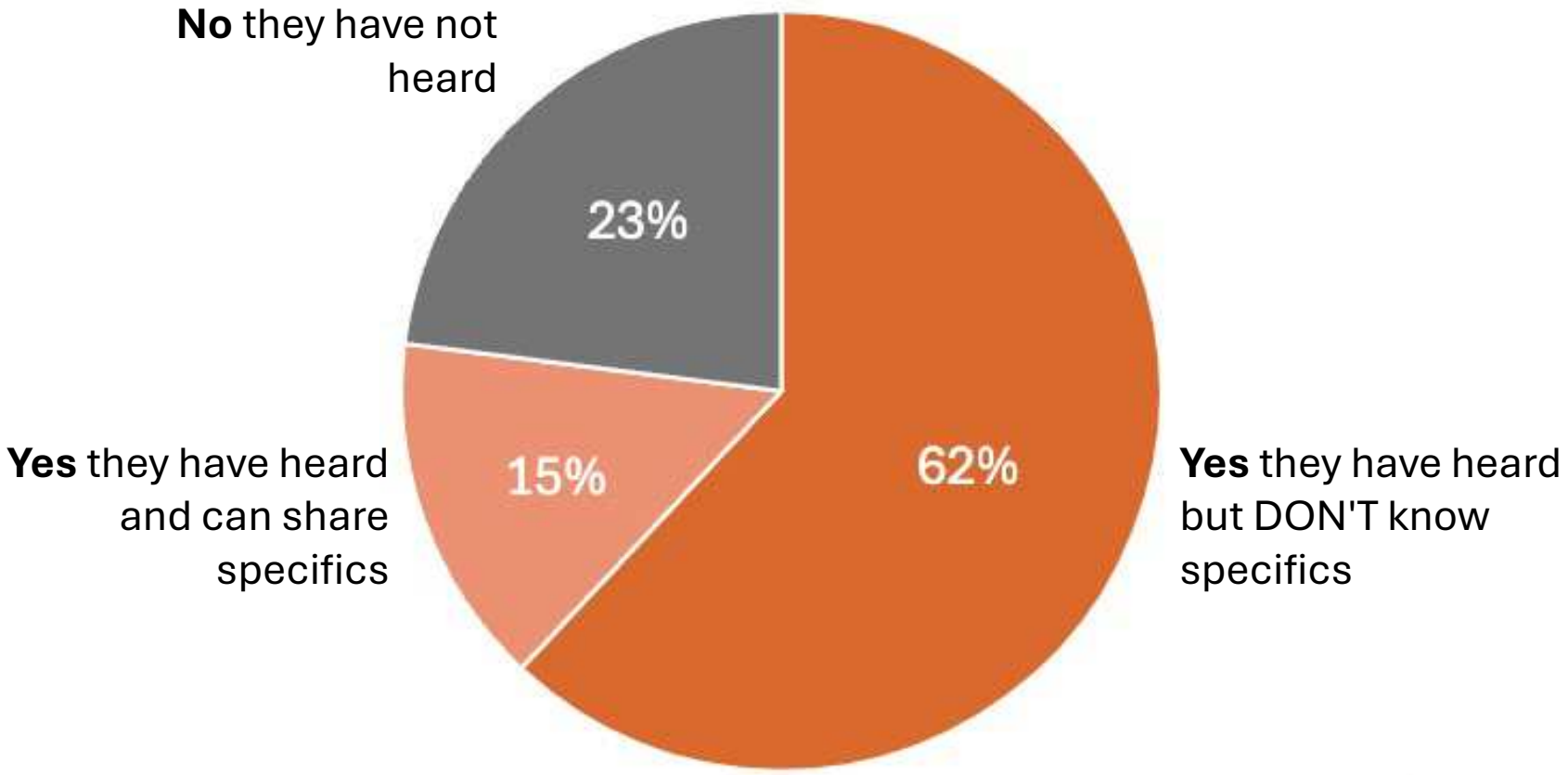
Percent of respondents who agree or disagree with following statements:



Awareness and Concern

A majority of respondents have a **vague** awareness of federal policy changes impacting science

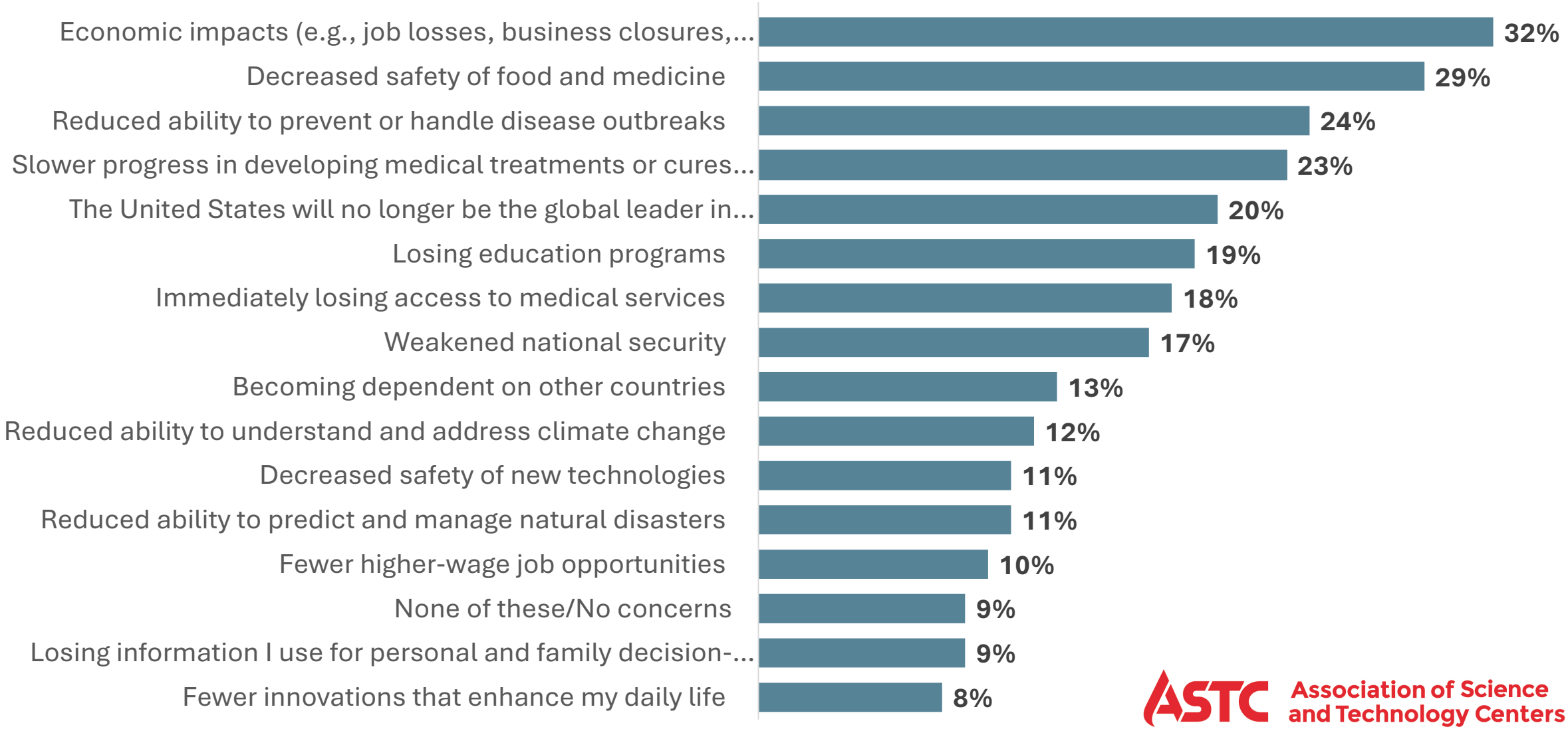
Percent of respondents who have heard about federal policy changes, canceled programs, or budget cuts that could impact science research and innovation:



Awareness and Concern

Top public concerns about federal funding cuts for science research and innovation are economic and medical issues

Percent of respondents who selected the following as top three concern:



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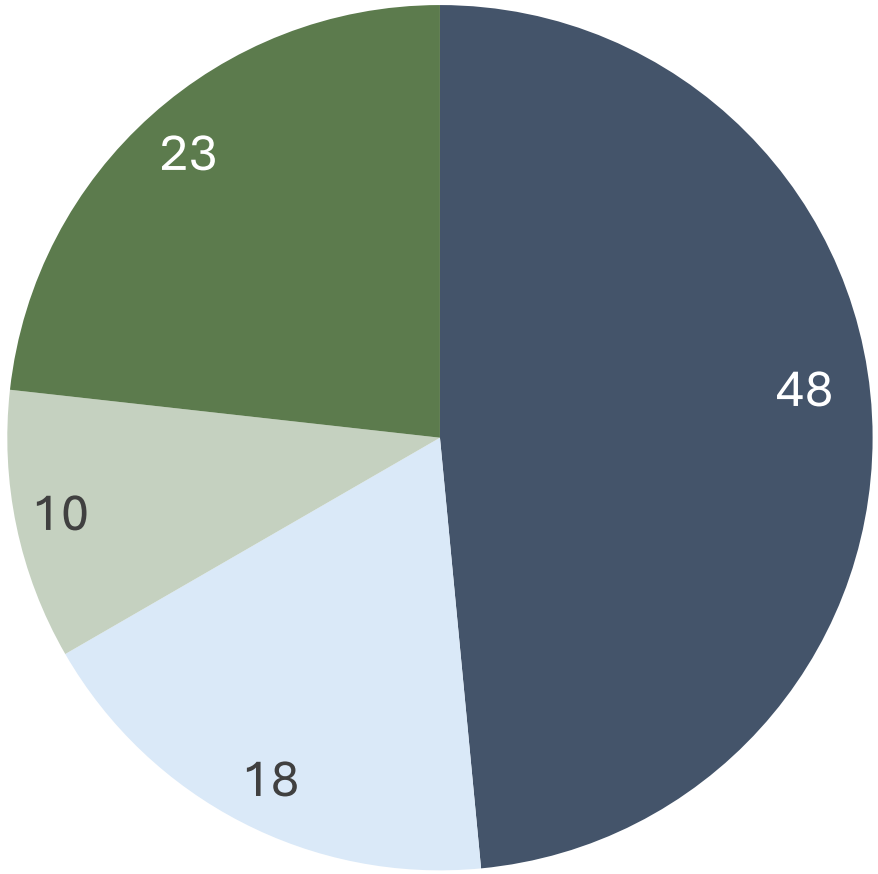
7 out of 10 respondents care about the U.S.'s ability to attract and retain talent

Percent of respondents who have heard about federal policy changes, program cancellations, or budget cuts that might affect the United States' ability to attract and/or retain top scientists:

71% are or would be concerned



Aware of cuts and **concerned**

Not aware of cuts but **would be concerned** if true

Aware of cuts but **not concerned**

Not aware of cuts and **not concerned** either way

Awareness and Concern

Democrats are significantly more aware and concerned about actions impacting scientific talent

Percent of respondents who have heard about federal policy changes, program cancellations, or budget cuts that might affect the United States' ability to attract and/or retain top scientists:

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Mental models of the infrastructure that enables research and development may not match reality

- Almost half of respondents believe that "corporations, foundations, and wealthy individuals would fund scientific research to fill the gap created by federal spending cuts."

- Although 94% of respondents use scientific data at least weekly, only 10% are concerned that cuts to federal support for science might impact their access to this information.

There is an **urgent need** to **close gaps in public understanding of how science and technology are enabled and impacted by federal policy.**

Awareness and Concern

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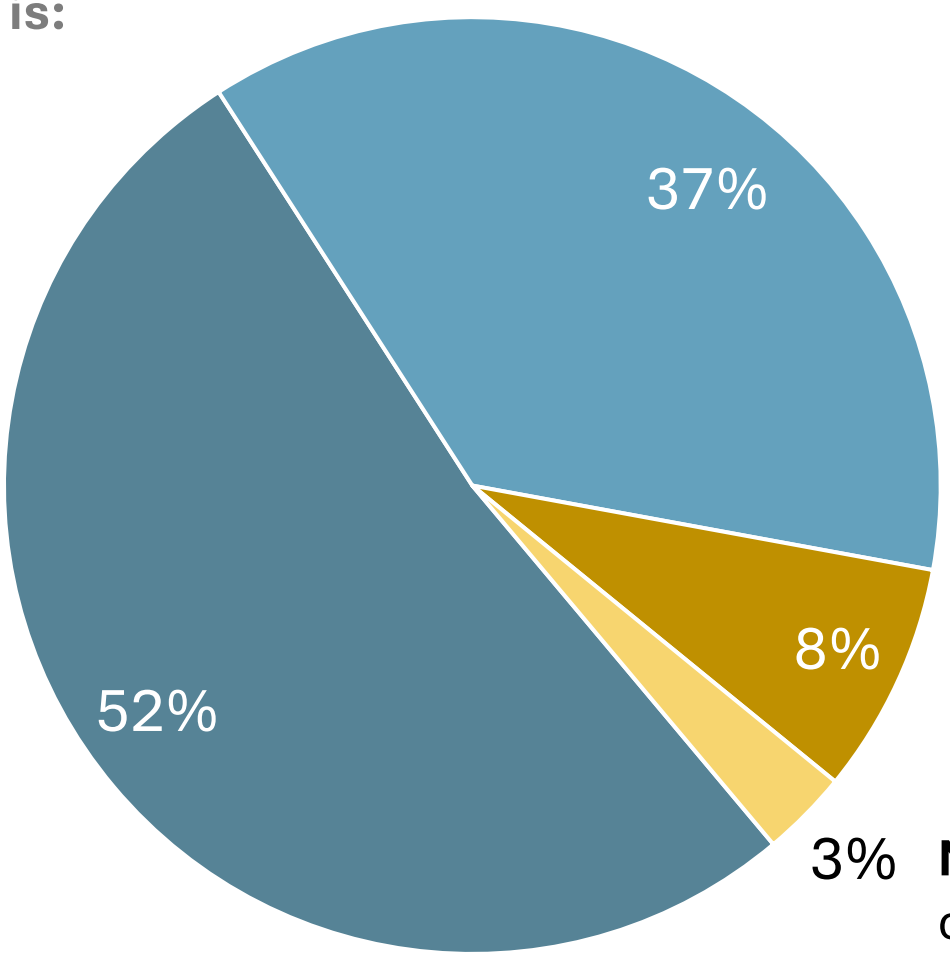
Disconnect Between Public Priorities and Policy

9 out of 10 respondents believe federal investment in **STEM education** is important for future economic prosperity

Percent of respondents who say federal investment in STEM education is:

Very important, there should be significant long-term investment



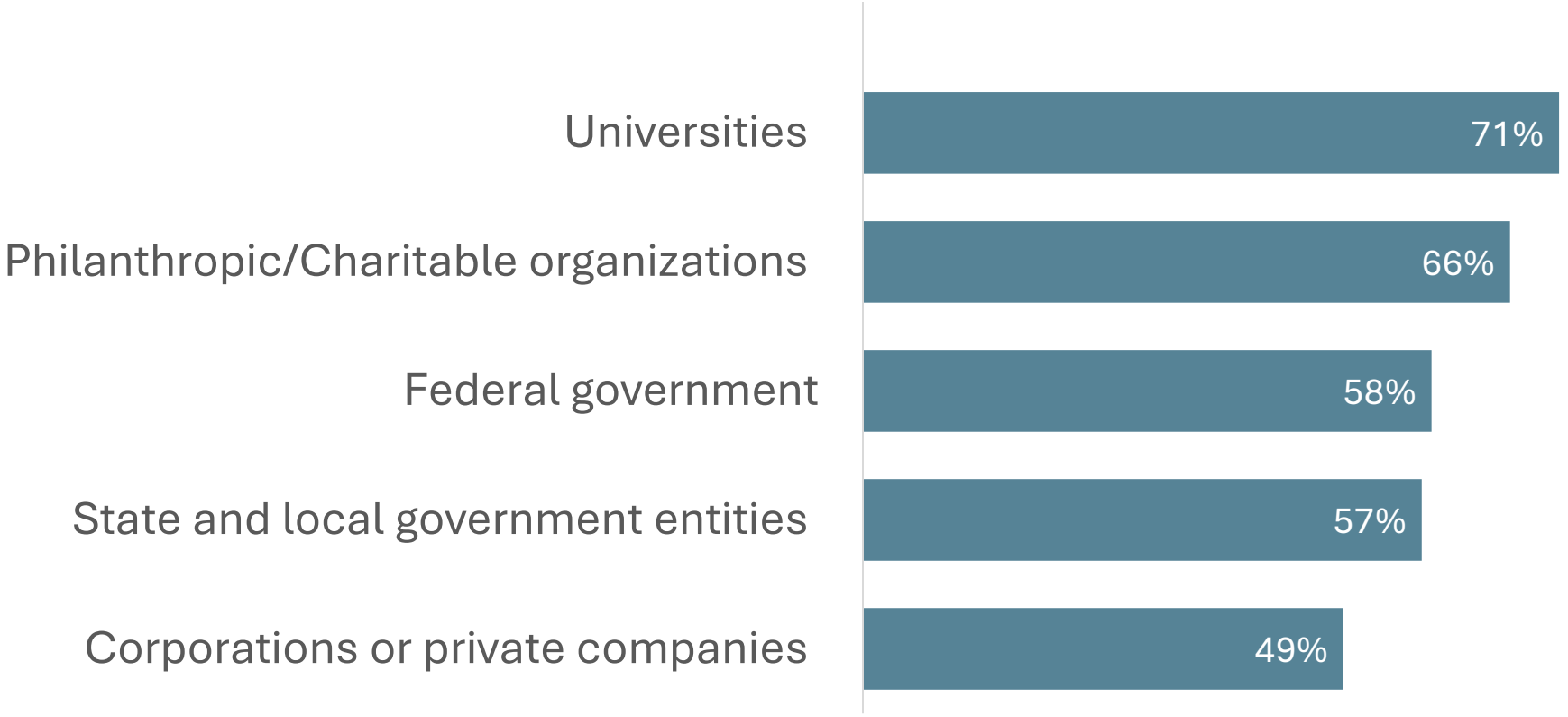
Important, there should be a good amount of careful (or selective) investment

Limited importance, only small, focused investment is needed

Not needed, businesses will take care of developing these skills on their own

The public recognizes universities as trusted sources of information and leading contributors to innovation

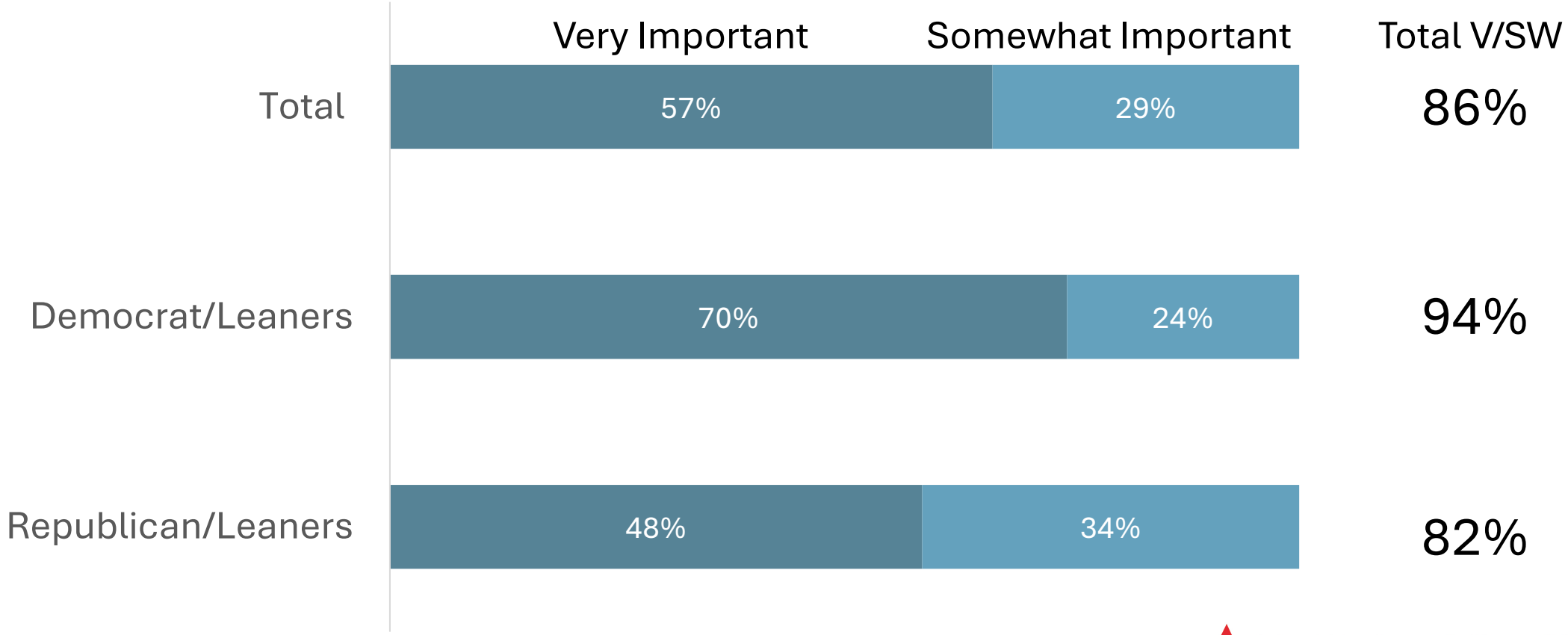
Percent of respondents who trust each of the following organization types either a "great deal" or "somewhat" to collect scientific data that affects public well-being:



Among the institutions listed, universities ranked highest as the primary contributor to cutting-edge scientific research and innovation, selected by 32% of respondents.

Across the political spectrum people want science to be free from political influence

Percent of respondents who say it is important for experts at federal scientific agencies to make decisions on scientific funding, regulations, and guidance free from political influence:



Deepening Engagement

Looking Ahead

Public interest in engaging on issues where science meets society

Percent of respondents who agree with the following statement:

Members of the public should have a say in whether and how new scientific discoveries are introduced in society based on the benefits and downsides of those developments

53% → 61%

December 2021 — April 2025

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Public interest in engaging on issues where science meets society

Percent of respondents who agree with the following statement:

Scientists should participate in activities to learn from the public about how their work affects the average person

65% → 73%

December 2021 — April 2025

Looking Ahead

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Despite areas of consensus, the public is not a monolith

Interesting highlights from the demographic data

Women

- Less likely to believe science and technology benefit people like them
- Less likely to have a "great deal" of trust in government in science

Baby Boomers (age 61-79)

- Older adults appear more engaged
- They care more about US leadership - connected to their generational narrative
- Motivated by threats to medical research

Non-College

- Less likely to see personal benefit from science and tech investment
- Attitudes toward STEM are less supportive and engaged

A note on political affiliation

- In recent years attitudes toward "science" have become increasingly polarized
- It is reductive to frame the issue as Republicans being "anti-science" - support/trust in science varies based on the issue, institution, and messenger
- Overcoming polarization will require a deeper understanding of shifts in institutional trust, recent ideological realignment, and the association of science with partisan identities

ISSUES IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The Strange New Politics of Science

BY M. ANTHONY MILLS, PRICE ST. CLAIR

Who's Afraid to Share Science in Their Listserv?

BY CELINDA LAKE, EMILY GARNER

Looking Ahead

Based on the data, in the moment the science engagement community should consider:

1. Engaging on the value of science may be less important than drawing connections between science in daily life to government funding and infrastructure

2. Reaching those who are (or would be) concerned, but who are not aware of what's happening.

3. Connecting policy actions and changes to the tangible, lived experiences with science.

Key messages for communicating science policy impacts now

1. Policy actions that impact science and innovation are taking place right now.

2. These actions affect the things we all care about.

3. Federal science is a public good – it's meant to benefit all of us. We all have a role to play in shaping its future.

Contact us

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