

## Research Brief

# Americans' Evolving Views on Science

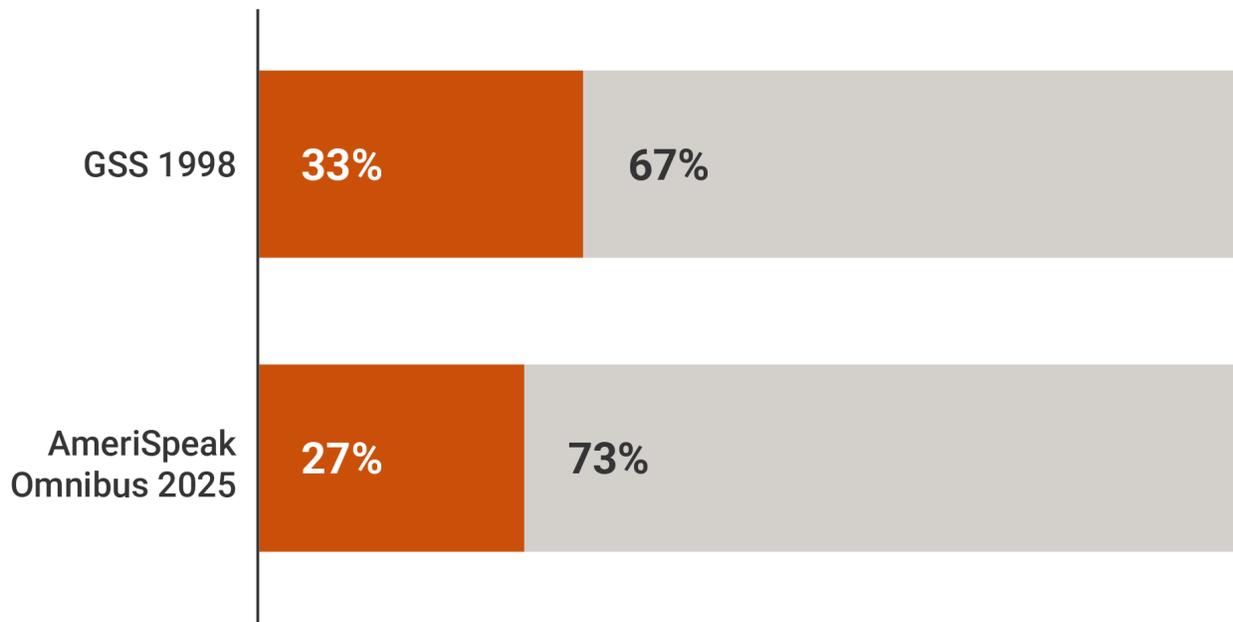
Public attitudes toward science in the United States are shifting subtly but significantly. A new AmeriSpeak study revisits questions originally posed in the General Social Survey (GSS) to explore how perspectives on science have changed over time. Our findings reveal a modest increase in trust toward scientific inquiry, greater comfort with the pace of scientific advancement, and notable decline in support for federal funded research that lacks immediate benefits. These trends offer insight in to how Americans are recalibrating their expectations of science.

To explore these shifts, we selected questions from previous iterations of the General Social Survey (GSS), using data from the GSS survey from 1998 up to 2022. Two questions were asked in 1998 once and a third question was first asked in 2006 and then repeated 8 times afterwards. We re-administered those questions to a representative sample of AmeriSpeak® panelists in September 2025, allowing for direct comparisons between past and present public opinion.

One question asked respondents whether they agreed with the statement: *"Scientists always seem to be prying into things that they really ought to stay out of."* In 1998, 33 percent of Americans expressed agreement with this sentiment. By 2025, that share had declined to 27 percent. While the shift is modest, it reflects a gradual increase in public trust toward scientific inquiry and a softening of skepticism about the role of scientists in society.

# Trust in Science Is Growing—But Slowly

■ Agree ■ Disagree



**Question:** Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the statement “Scientists always seem to be prying into things that they really ought to stay out of.” [Summary of Agree/Disagree]

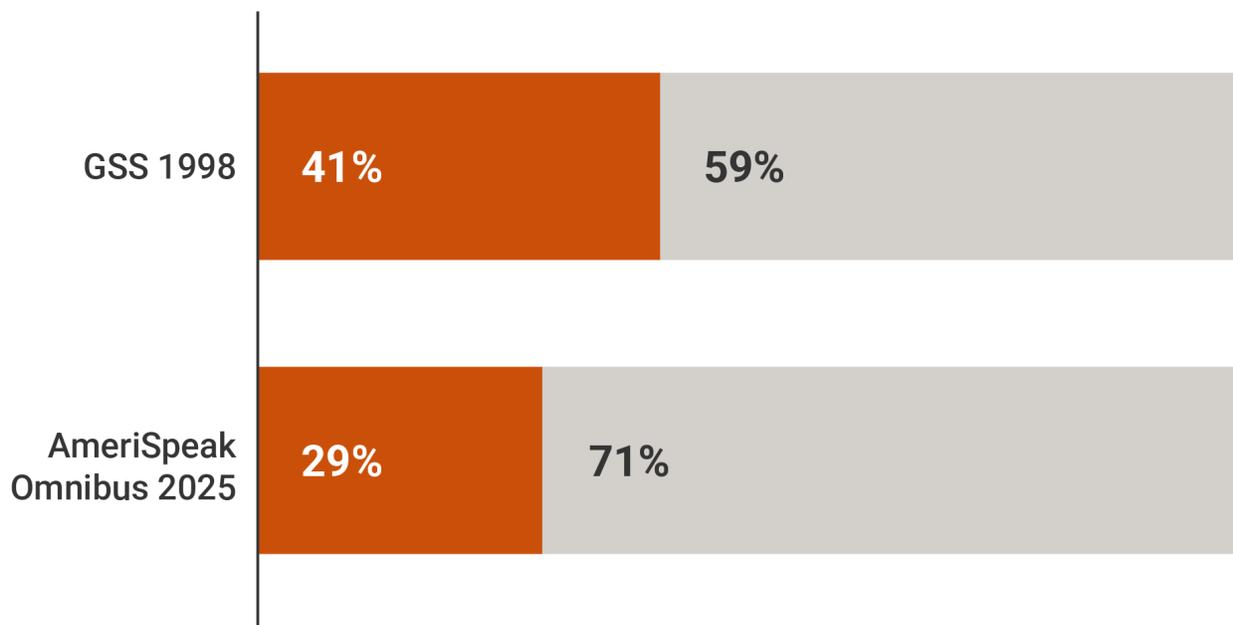
**Source:** 1998 General Social Survey and AmeriSpeak Omnibus poll conducted September 12-14, 2025, with 1,122 adults nationwide.



Another item examined whether Americans feel that science is changing our way of life too quickly. In 1998, 41 percent of respondents agreed with this concern. By 2025, that figure had dropped to 29 percent. This decline suggests a growing public comfort with the pace of scientific advancement and a reduced perception of science as a disruptive force in everyday life.

# Americans are Growing More Comfortable with Science and the Pace of Change

■ Agree
 ■ Disagree



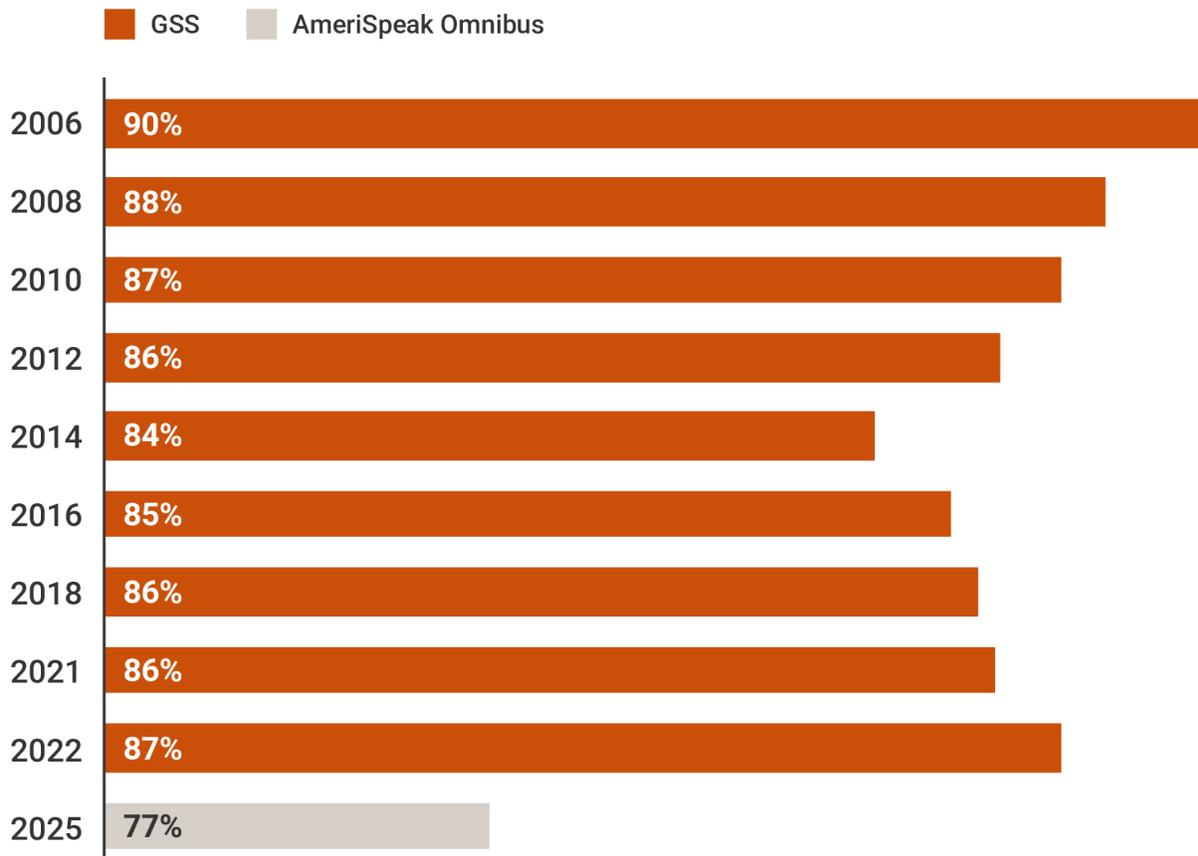
**Question:** Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the statement “One trouble with science is that it makes our way of life change too fast.” [Summary of Agree/Disagree]

**Source:** 1998 General Social Survey and AmeriSpeak Omnibus poll conducted September 12-14, 2025, with 1,122 adults nationwide.



Despite the more encouraging trends in trust and comfort with scientific progress, public support for research that lacks immediate benefits appears to be waning. When asked whether the federal government should fund scientific research that advances knowledge even without short-term payoffs, support has steadily declined. In 2006, over 90 percent of Americans backed this idea. That number held relatively steady through 2022, but dropped more sharply in 2025, with just 77 percent of AmeriSpeak respondents in agreement. This shift may reflect growing public expectations for tangible outcomes and a more transactional view of science’s role in society or a growing ignorance about how scientific research contributes to innovation and economic growth.

# Support for Science Without Immediate Payoff Is Declining



**Question:** Please indicate if you agree or disagree with the statement “Even if it brings no immediate benefits, scientific research that advances the frontiers of knowledge is necessary and should be supported by the federal government.” [Summary of Agree]

**Source:** 1998 General Social Survey and AmeriSpeak Omnibus poll conducted September 12-14, 2025, with 1,122 adults nationwide.



Taken together, these results reflect a complex and evolving relationship between the public and the scientific enterprise. While trust in scientists and comfort with the pace of innovation appear to be growing, the decline in support for research without immediate benefits signals a shift in expectations, one that favors short-term impact over long-term exploration. This tension underscores the importance of clear, consistent communication about the value of foundational research and the broader role science plays in shaping society. As public attitudes continue to evolve, engaging Americans in conversations about scientific purpose and progress will be essential to sustaining support for innovation in the years ahead.

## Study Methodology

AmeriSpeak data included in this brief were collected from an AmeriSpeak Omnibus survey among a nationally representative sample of 1,122 AmeriSpeak panelists aged 18 or older. Data collection occurred between September 12 to September 14, 2025 with 94% of respondents completing the survey by web and 6% by phone.

Funded and operated by NORC at the University of Chicago, **AmeriSpeak®** is a probability-based panel designed to be representative of the US household population. Randomly selected US households are sampled using area probability and address-based sampling, with a known, non-zero probability of selection from the NORC National Sample Frame. These sampled households are then contacted by US mail, telephone, and field interviewers (face to face). The panel provides sample coverage of approximately 97% of the U.S. household population. Those excluded from the sample include people with P.O. Box only addresses, some addresses not listed in the USPS Delivery Sequence File, and some newly constructed dwellings. While most AmeriSpeak households participate in surveys by web, non-internet households can participate in AmeriSpeak surveys by telephone. Households without conventional internet access but having web access via smartphones are allowed to participate in AmeriSpeak surveys by web. AmeriSpeak panelists participate in NORC studies or studies conducted by NORC on behalf of governmental agencies, academic researchers, and media and commercial organizations. For more information on AmeriSpeak, visit [AmeriSpeak.norc.org](https://AmeriSpeak.norc.org).

The General Social Surveys (GSS) data included in this brief were conducted in 1998, 2006, 2008, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016, 2018, 2021, and 2022. The GSS is a nationally representative survey of adults in the United States conducted since 1972. The GSS data were collected in-person until 2004. Between 2004 and 2018, the GSS data were collected either by in-person or via telephone. In 2021, the GSS data were collected either by phone or on the web. In 2022 and 2024, the GSS data were collected via in-person, telephone, web, or a multimode protocol. For more information about GSS, visit <https://gss.norc.org/about-the-gss.html>.