# Conservative Americans show widespread distrust towards science, study finds



New research conducted by social psychologists at the University of Amsterdam has revealed that conservative Americans exhibit a greater level of distrust towards science than was previously recognised. The study, published in the journal Nature Human Behavior, involved surveying 7,800 Americans about their views on 35 different scientific professions, with respondents identifying as either conservative or liberal.

The findings showed that right-leaning individuals are significantly more likely to be sceptical of scientists, particularly those working in fields such as climate science where conclusions may contradict conservative political beliefs. Unexpectedly, the research also highlighted a notable distrust among conservatives of more technical professions, including industrial chemists. This is striking because such fields often have direct positive implications for economic growth and prosperity – issues commonly associated with conservative values.

Republican participants in the study were also found to be especially resistant to attempts by researchers to intervene and shift their attitudes more favourably towards scientific disciplines. The researchers warn that this widespread distrust has far-reaching implications for addressing societal challenges that depend on broad public agreement, such as combating climate change and managing future pandemics.

Bastiaan T. Rutjens, one of the study’s authors, told the Independent: “In America, but also in other countries, conservatives generally have lower trust in science. Since the 1980s, trust in science among conservatives in America has even been plummeting.” He added that science has increasingly been viewed as a “leftist hobby,” with universities perceived as bastions of left-wing ideology.

This antagonism is exemplified by former President Donald Trump’s decision to cut $2.2 billion in federal funding to Harvard University after the institution resisted his demands. The study also found that climate scientists, medical researchers, and social scientists ranked among the least trusted scientific professions among conservatives. Rutjens suggested this stems from these fields frequently producing findings that clash with conservative principles, such as free-market policies and traditional social values.

Explaining the distrust extended towards more applied scientific fields, Rutjens commented: “It remains striking that even here, conservatives show lower trust. Their distrust extends across science as a whole.” The patterns documented in the study come amid a broader context of scepticism, including a decade of populist politicians dismissing climate change as a “scam,” public questioning of vaccines by U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr., and the prevalence of COVID-19 conspiracy theories on social media.

On the prospect of overcoming this pervasive scepticism, Rutjens called for more robust approaches. “These short interventions do not work to make science more transparent and reliable for certain groups. We need stronger interventions that make science truly personal. What can science contribute to your life, here and now?” He noted that while such issues are extreme in the U.S., similar debates accompanied by distrust towards science have also surfaced in countries such as the Netherlands.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.uva.nl/shared-content/uva/en/news/press-releases/2025/04/conservative-americans-consistently-distrust-science.html> - This University of Amsterdam press release corroborates the main finding that conservative Americans distrust science broadly, including technical fields, and that this distrust has been increasing since the 1980s. It also details the survey of 7,800 Americans across 35 scientific professions and the failure of short interventions to improve trust among conservatives.
* <https://phys.org/news/2025-04-americans-distrust-science-survey.html> - This article supports the claim that conservatives show lower trust in science overall, including fields linked to economic growth such as industrial chemistry, and that interventions designed to increase trust among conservatives were ineffective.
* <https://www.cidrap.umn.edu/anti-science/us-political-conservatives-have-deep-unbudging-suspicion-science-survey-suggests> - The University of Amsterdam study overview here confirms conservatives' greater skepticism toward scientific fields like climate science, medical research, and social sciences, as well as their resistant attitude toward research interventions aimed at increasing trust.
* <https://www.the-independent.com/news/world/americas/us-politics/conservatives-science-distrust-research-study-b2734467.html> - This Independent article verifies the broad distrust conservatives have toward science, highlights the political context such as Trump’s cut of federal funding to Harvard, and includes quotes from Bastiaan Rutjens about science being seen as a 'leftist hobby' and universities as left-wing bastions.
* <https://scienceblog.com/conservative-americans-consistently-distrust-science/> - This science blog details how conservatives distrust scientists across all examined fields, including those contributing to economic productivity, and confirms that messaging interventions failed to change conservatives’ distrust, emphasizing the deep roots of this skepticism.