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Americans Divided on Whether Recent Science Protests Will Benefit Scientists' Causes

More Democrats and younger adults believe the science marches in April will lead to public support for science; Republicans and older adults tend to disagree

BY Cary Funk and Lee Rainie

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Americans Divided on Whether Recent Science Protests Will Benefit Scientists' Causes

More Democrats and younger adults believe the science marches in April will lead to public support for science; Republicans and older adults tend to disagree

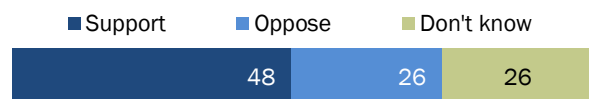
In the wake of last month's marches for science and climate in Washington and around the country, Americans are divided in their support of the events' goals and their sense of whether it will make a difference. In particular, a new Pew Research Center survey finds that most Democrats and younger adults are convinced that these public events will help the causes of scientists. By contrast, Republicans and older adults believe the marches will not raise public support for scientists, aid efforts to increase government funding of science, enhance the role of scientists in policy debates or lead to increased efforts to combat global climate change.

Overall, 44% of adults think the protests, marches and demonstrations will boost public support for science, while an equal share believe the protests will make no difference and 7% believe the demonstrations will actually hurt the cause. But on this and other questions about the marches there are consistent divides along political and generational lines. For example, 61% of Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents believe the marches will increase public support for science, while only 22% of Republicans and those who lean Republican say the same. Instead, 60% of these Republican backers think the protests will make no difference, compared with just 32% of Democratic partisans who think that.

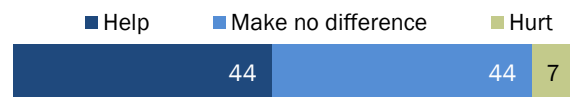
Younger adults (ages 18 to 29) are particularly likely to think the marches will increase public support for science (55%). In contrast, 54% of seniors 65 and older believe the recent science

Americans closely divided in support for science marches' goals and whether the events will affect support for science

% of U.S. adults who say they support or oppose the goals of the protests, marches and demonstrations about science held this April



% of U.S. adults who say the protests, marches and demonstrations about science held this April will _____ public support for science



Note: Strongly support/support and strongly oppose/oppose responses combined. Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown in the bottom chart.

Source: Survey conducted May 3-7, 2017.

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marches will make no difference to public support for science; just 29% say the marches will help.

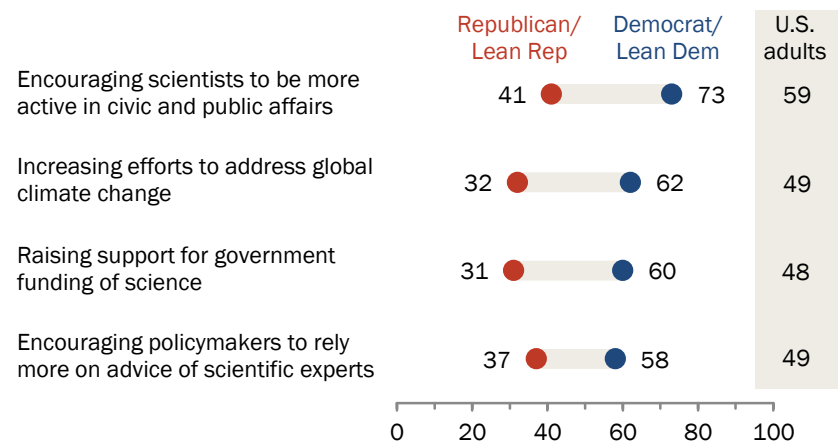
These are some of the findings from a Pew Research Center survey conducted among a nationally representative sample of 1,012 adults, ages 18 or older from May 3-7, 2017.

Americans are divided along political lines about the impact of the recent science protests

The March for Science, which took place on April 22, [stemmed from](#) a Reddit thread made on President Donald Trump's inauguration day. A number of groups were involved in planning the event held in Washington, D.C., and some 600 other locations around the world. The [People's Climate March](#) was organized before the 2016 election and held April 29 to voice support for action to address global climate change. Rather than being in support of one specific policy outcome, marchers said there were a [number of reasons](#) they participated in the two science marches held in close sequence at the end of April.

Democrats are more likely to think the science marches will effectively accomplish protesters' goals

% of U.S. adults who say protests, marches and demonstrations about science held this April will be effective at ...



Note: Respondents who said not effective or who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey conducted May 3-7, 2017.

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Americans render a split verdict about the marches and their impact, though a majority (59%) thinks that the protests will be effective in encouraging scientists to be more active in civic and public affairs. But on this and other possible impacts from these marches, there are consistent divides between political party groups:

- 73% of Democrats and independents who lean Democratic think the marches will encourage scientists to be more active in civic affairs, while Republicans and those who lean to the GOP

break the other way: 52% think the marches *will not* be effective in encouraging more activism by scientists.

- 60% of Democrats and Democratic leaners say the protests will be effective in raising support for government funding of science, while only 31% of Republican and Republican leaners hold this view.
- 58% of Democrats and independents leaning to the Democratic Party say the marches will be effective in encouraging policymakers to rely more on the advice of scientific experts, compared with 37% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents who think that.
- 62% of Democrats and Democratic leaners say the demonstrations will be effective in increasing efforts to address global climate change, while just 32% of Republicans and Republican leaners agree.

By one main measure, the marches about science have registered with Americans: They have drawn a share of public attention. Roughly six-in-ten Americans say they have heard a lot (24%) or a little (37%) about the protests, marches and demonstrations about science held this April. More than a third (37%) say they have heard nothing at all.

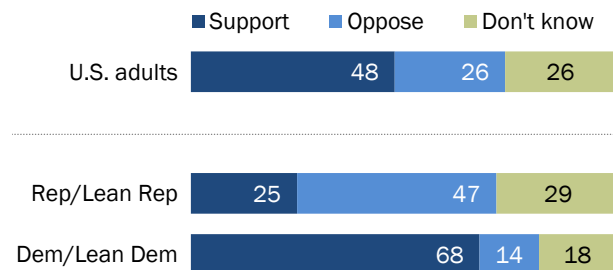
Overall, 48% of Americans say they “support” or “strongly support” the goals of the pro-science marches, while 26% “oppose” or “strongly oppose” the goals of the demonstrations and 26% say they don’t know how they feel about them.

Support for the goals of the science marches is divided by political party. Republicans and Republican leaners *oppose the goals* of the science marches by a 47%-25% margin; some 29% are undecided about their views.

Democrats and Democratic leaners *support the goals* of the marches by a 68%-14% margin, with 18% undecided.

Roughly half of Americans support the goals of recent science marches, while many are uncertain

% of U.S. adults who say they support or oppose the goals of the protests, marches and demonstrations about science held this April



Note: Strongly support/support and strongly oppose/oppose responses combined. Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted May 3-7, 2017.

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People who have heard about the recent science marches are largely supportive of the protesters' goals. Those who have heard at least a little about the recent science marches support the goals of the science marchers by a margin of 61% to 27%.

Americans are closely divided on the issue of whether the marches will increase public support for science: 44% think they will help and 44% think they will make no difference. Another 7% believe they will hurt public support. Most Democrats and Democratic leaners (61%) believe the marches and demonstrations held in April will benefit public support for science. By contrast, just 22% of Republicans and independents who lean to the GOP say the marches will help drive public support for science, while six-in-ten (60%) of this group believes the marches will have no impact on public support and 13% say the marches will hurt public support.

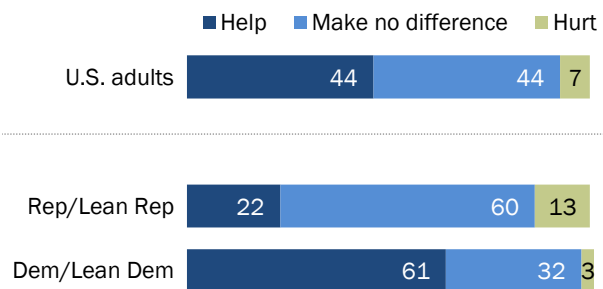
Younger Americans hold different views on protests and their impact

While there are sizable partisan divisions on these issues, the differences between younger and older adults are also striking.

When it comes to backing the goals of the protesters, 56% of those ages 18 to 29 “support” or “strongly support” the goals of the marchers, while just 36% of those 65 and older say they back the goals of the marchers.

Americans are divided over whether the science marches will help or make no difference to public support for science

% of U.S. adults who say the protests, marches and demonstrations about science held this April will ____ public support for science



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey conducted May 3-7, 2017.
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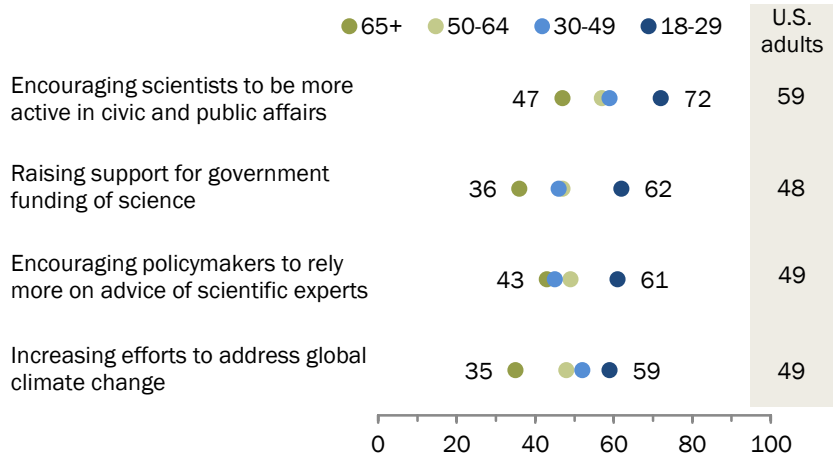
And in terms of perceived impact, 72% of those ages 18 to 29 think the marches will encourage scientists to be more active in civic affairs, compared with 47% of those ages 65 and older. Some 62% of younger adults believe the protests will raise support for government funding of science, while only 36% of those 65 and older say this. Additionally, 61% of younger adults think the protests will encourage policymakers to rely more on the advice of scientific experts, versus 43% of adults 65 and older.

Younger adults are also more likely to think the protests and demonstrations will lead to public support for science: 55% of adults younger than 30 believe the recent marches and demonstrations will help public support for science, compared with 29% of those ages 65 and older.

These differences by age hold even when accounting for the tendency of older adults to identify with the GOP. There are no notable demographic differences in views about the

Younger Americans are most likely to think science marches will effectively accomplish protesters' goals

% of U.S. adults who say protests, marches and demonstrations about science held this April **will be effective** at the following



Note: Respondents who said not effective or who did not give an answer are not shown.

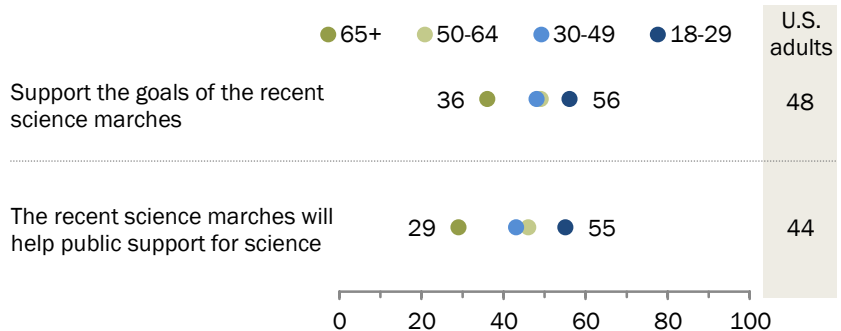
Source: Survey conducted May 3-7, 2017.

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Younger adults are most likely to support the goals of the science marches or to think these protests will lead to more public support

% of U.S. adults who say the following about the protests, marches and demonstrations about science held this April



Note: Strongly support/support responses are combined. Respondents who gave other responses and who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted May 3-7, 2017.

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recent science protests by gender or education.

Trump’s handling of science issues brings out partisan judgments

President Trump’s election signaled major changes to federal policy connected with science, particularly for climate and environmental policies but also for funding science research at NASA, the National Institutes of Health and other federal agencies. Many in the scientific community have [voiced concern](#) about Trump’s views about science issues, particularly childhood vaccines and climate change, and have raised concerns about [the appointment and role of science advisers](#) in guiding policy decisions in the coming years.

Asked whether the pro-science demonstrators were driven to act by the Trump administration’s handling of science issues, 48% say they think opposition to Trump was a major reason people participated, 22% say it was a minor reason, 17% say it was not a reason at all and 13% say they do not know. Fully 63% of Democrats and Democratic leaners say opposition to Trump was a major reason for marchers’ participation, compared with 36% of Republicans and Republican leaners who say this.

Those following news about the recent science marches are particularly likely to believe that opposition to the new administration’s handling of science issues is a motivating factor for the recent protests. Some 55% of those who had heard at least a little about these marches say opposition to the Trump administration’s handling of science issues was a major reason for the protests, compared with 37% who had heard nothing about these science marches.

Most Americans see the Trump administration’s handling of science as a reason for the recent marches

% of U.S. adults who say that opposition to the Trump administration’s handling of science issues is ___ that people participated in protests, marches and demonstrations about science in April



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey conducted May 3-7, 2017.
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Split views on how the media cover protests

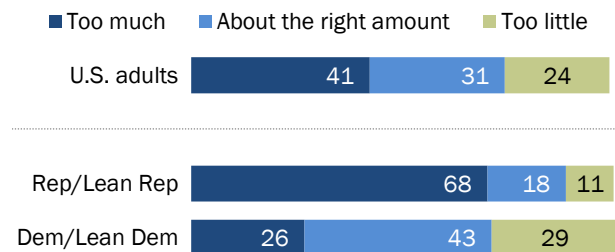
When asked about news coverage of protests, marches and demonstrations these days – whether the cause is related to science or something else – 41% of Americans say the media give too much coverage to demonstrations these days compared with recent years, 31% believe the coverage is about the right amount and 24% think there is too little coverage.

Here, too, there are differences in views by party and age. Fully 68% of Republicans and Republican-leaning independents think there has been too much media coverage of demonstrations, while 18% think the amount of coverage has been about right and 11% say there has been too little coverage. By contrast, 43% of Democrats and Democratic leaners think there has been the right amount of coverage, 29% think there has been too little and 26% say there has been too much media coverage of demonstrations these days.

Half (50%) of those ages 65 and older believe there has been too much media coverage of protests, marches and demonstrations these days; in contrast, 34% of those 18 to 29 think there has been too much coverage.

Americans are divided about media coverage of protests these days

% of U.S. adults who say news organizations give ____ coverage to protests, marches and demonstrations these days compared with recent years



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.

Source: Survey conducted May 3-7, 2017.

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pewresearch.org/science.

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Methodology

The analysis in this report is based on telephone interviews conducted May 3-7, 2017, among a national sample of 1,012 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in the continental United States (602 were interviewed via cellphone and about 410 were interviewed on a landline telephone). The margin of error for the full sample is plus or minus 3.7 percentage points.

The survey was conducted under the direction of Social Science Research Solutions (SSRS). A combination of landline and cellphone random-digit-dial samples were used; both samples were provided by Marketing Systems Group. Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish.

The combined landline and cellphone sample is weighted using an iterative technique that matches gender, age, education, race, Hispanic origin and nativity, marital status and region to parameters from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2016 Current Population Survey and population density to parameters from the 2010 decennial census. The sample also is weighted to match current patterns of telephone status (landline only, cellphone only, or both landline and cellphone), based on extrapolations from the 2016 National Health Interview Survey. The weighting procedure also accounts for the fact that respondents with both landline and cellphones have a greater probability of being included in the combined sample and adjusts for household size among respondents with a landline phone. The margins of error reported and statistical tests of significance are adjusted to account for the survey's design effect, a measure of how much efficiency is lost from the weighting procedures.

The following table shows the unweighted sample sizes and the error attributable to sampling that would be expected at the 95% level of confidence for different groups in the survey:

Group	Unweighted sample size	Plus or minus ...
Total sample	1,012	3.7 percentage points
18-29	156	9.4 percentage points
30-49	263	7.2 percentage points
50-64	289	6.9 percentage points
65+	304	6.7 percentage points
Republican/Lean Rep.	377	6.0 percentage points
Democrat/Lean Dem.	456	5.5 percentage points
Heard about science protests this April		
A lot/A little	635	4.7 percentage points
Nothing at all	359	6.2 percentage points

Sample sizes and sampling errors for other subgroups are available upon request.

In addition to sampling error, one should bear in mind that question wording and practical difficulties in conducting surveys can introduce error or bias into the findings of opinion polls.

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MAY 3-7, 2017 OMNIBUS
FINAL TOPLINE
N= 1,012**

ASK ALL:

On another topic

PEW6 Which of these statements comes closer to your own views – even if neither is exactly right? **[READ AND RANDOMIZE RESPONSE OPTIONS 1 AND 2]**

May 3-7

2017

67	Ordinary citizens can do a lot to influence government if they are willing to make the effort
31	There's not much ordinary citizens can do to influence the government
2	No answer

ASK ALL:

PEW7 Just your impression, would you say there are more, fewer or about the same number of protests, marches and demonstrations these days, compared with recent years?

May 3-7

2017

75	More
8	Fewer
13	About the same number
4	No answer

ASK ALL:

PEW8 Would you say news organizations give too much, too little or about the right amount of coverage to protests, marches and demonstrations these days?

May 3-7

2017

41	Too much
24	Too little
31	About the right amount
5	No answer

ASK ALL

PEW9

How much, if anything, have you heard or read about protests, marches and demonstrations ABOUT SCIENCE held this April? **[READ]**

May 3-7

2017

24	A lot
37	A little
37	Nothing at all
2	No answer

ASK ALL

PEW10

From what you've heard, do you strongly support, support, oppose or strongly oppose the goals of the protests, marches and demonstrations about science held this April?

May 3-7

2017

20	Strongly support
28	Support
18	Oppose
8	Strongly oppose
26	No answer

ASK ALL:

PEW11

Do you think protests, marches and demonstrations about science held this April will be effective or not effective at the following? First, **[INSERT ITEM; RANDOMIZE] [NEXT ITEM]**? **[IF NECESSARY:** Do you think protests, marches and demonstrations about science will be effective or not effective at **[ITEM]**?

- a. Encouraging scientists to be more active in civic and public affairs

May 3-7

2017

59	Yes, effective
34	No, not effective
7	No answer

- b. Raising support for government funding of science

May 3-7

2017

48	Yes, effective
45	No, not effective
7	No answer

PEW 11 CONTINUED...

c. Encouraging policymakers to rely more on the advice of scientific experts

May 3-7

2017

49	Yes, effective
44	No, not effective
7	No answer

d. Increasing efforts to address global climate change

May 3-7

2017

49	Yes, effective
46	No, not effective
5	No answer

ASK ALL:

PEW12

Overall, do you think the protests, marches and demonstrations about science held this April will help, hurt or make no difference to public support for science?

May 3-7

2017

44	Help
7	Hurt
44	Make no difference
6	No answer

ASK ALL:

PEW13

Do you think that opposition to the Trump administration's handling of science issues is a major reason, a minor reason or not a reason that people participated in protests, marches and demonstrations about science held this April?

May 3-7

2017

48	A major reason
22	A minor reason
17	Not a reason
13	No answer

ASK ALL:

Z-11PARTY Generally speaking, do you usually think of yourself as...? [**READ; ROTATE OPTIONS 1-2**] NOTE: If respondent gives answer such as: "conservative, liberal, vote for best man" Probe: Would that be Republican, Democrat or Independent?

ASK IF INDEP/NO PREF/OTHER/DK/REF (PARTY=3,8,9):

Z-11PARTYLN As of today do you lean more to the Republican Party or more to the Democratic Party?

May 3-7

2017

23	A Republican
29	A Democrat
38	An Independent
2	Other party (VOL.)
8	No answer (VOL.)
11	Lean Republican
14	Lean Democrat
22	Refused to lean

ASK ALL:

D3IDEO Generally speaking, would you describe your political views as ...? [**READ LIST; ROTATE OPTIONS 1-5/5-1**]

May 3-7

2017

14	Very conservative
22	Somewhat conservative
30	Moderate
16	Somewhat liberal
11	Very liberal
7	No answer