

July 1, 2016

Poll: Americans Overwhelmingly Support the Right of Students, Teachers, and Scientists to Discuss Dissenting Scientific Views on Evolution

As Americans celebrate their country's freedom this holiday weekend, a new nationwide survey has been released revealing that an overwhelming 93% of American adults agree that "teachers and students should have the academic freedom to objectively discuss both the scientific strengths and weaknesses of the theory of evolution." And 88% agree that "scientists who raise scientific criticisms of evolution should have the freedom to make their arguments without being subjected to censorship or discrimination."

More broadly, Americans overwhelmingly agree that dissenting views in science are healthy:

- 84% believe that "attempts to censor or punish scientists for holding dissenting views on issues such as evolution or climate change are not appropriate in a free society."
- 94% believe "it is important for policymakers and the public to hear from scientists with differing views."
- 87% think that "people can disagree about what science says on a particular topic without being 'anti-science.'"
- 86% think that "disagreeing with the current majority view in science can be an important step in the development of new insights and discoveries in science."

"Freedom of inquiry is a cornerstone of the scientific enterprise, but it's under increasing attack by some who claim to speak for science," says molecular biologist Douglas Axe. "So it's very good news that a large majority of Americans still believe in open and free discussion." A Caltech trained scientist, Dr. Axe is Director of Biologic Institute and a former researcher at Cambridge University. He is author of the soon-to-be released book *Undeniable: How Biology Confirms Our Intuition that Life is Designed* (HarperOne; out on July 12). Axe's book challenges the idea that only professional scientists should be allowed to evaluate ideas about the origin and development of life. "The question of our origin is far too important to be left to professional scientists," he comments.

"In the public arena, we hear a growing chorus arguing for the government to punish or criminalize dissenting scientific views," says Dr John G. West, the political scientist who directed the survey. "But for the public, free speech in science is not a partisan issue. It's supported by the overwhelming majority of people across party lines, gender, religion, and age." For example, West notes:

- 95% of Republicans believe that teachers and students should have the freedom to discuss the scientific strengths and weaknesses of evolution—but so do 93% of Democrats and 94% of Independents; so do 96% of theists, 92% of agnostics, and 86% of atheists.
- 87% of Republicans oppose attempts to punish or censor scientists who hold dissenting views on issues like evolution and climate change—but so do 84% of Independents and 82% of Democrats, as well as 86% of theists, 83% of agnostics, 76% of atheists, 82% of women, and 86% of men.
- 95% of Republicans think it’s important for policymakers and the public to hear from scientists with differing views—but so do 94% of Democrats and 93% of Independents, 95% of theists, 92% of agnostics, 90% of atheists, 95% of women, and 93% of men.

Survey Methodology

The data for this national survey was collected over the period Jan. 5-9, 2016 using SurveyMonkey Audience, a nationally representative panel of more than 6 million people recruited from the 30+ million people who take SurveyMonkey surveys each month. The SurveyMonkey platform has been utilized for public opinion surveys by NBC News, the *Los Angeles Times*, and other media organizations.

Survey respondents were randomly sampled from members of SurveyMonkey Audience in the United States who are 18 years of age or older, and there were 2,075 respondents for the overall survey. According to SurveyMonkey, “SurveyMonkey Audience respondents represent a diverse group of people and are reflective of the general population. However, as with most online sampling, respondents have Internet access and voluntarily joined a program to take surveys... We automatically balance results according to census data for age and gender, while location tends to balance out naturally.” SurveyMonkey conducts “regular benchmarking surveys to ensure our members are representative of the U.S. population.” Although SurveyMonkey Audience is a representative panel, respondents to this particular survey were significantly more secular and more Democratic than the general American adult population. However, we chose not to do any post-survey weighting to correct the overrepresentation of these groups. More information on how respondents are recruited for SurveyMonkey Audience is available here: www.surveymonkey.com/mp/audience.

Survey Results

The following tables provide more detailed information about the survey results, including cross-tabulations comparing responses to the questions by gender, party affiliation, religion, and age. *Note: Some percentages may not add up to 100 due to rounding.*

**1. Rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement:
*Teachers and students should have the academic freedom to objectively discuss both
the scientific strengths and weaknesses of the theory of evolution.***

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
All Respondents (n=2,075)	58%	36%	3%	3%
Men (n=920)	59%	34%	3%	4%
Women (n=1,012)	58%	37%	3%	3%
Party: Democrats (n=743)	54%	39%	4%	3%
Party: Independents (n=701)	59%	35%	2%	3%
Party: Republicans (n=491)	65%	30%	2%	3%
Religion: Theists (n=1,239)	62%	34%	2%	2%
Religion: Atheists (n=234)	51%	35%	6%	8%
Religion: Agnostics (n=462)	53%	39%	4%	3%
Age: 18-29 (n=424)	61%	31%	4%	3%
Age: 30-44 (n=502)	57%	36%	3%	4%
Age: 45-59 (n=510)	59%	36%	2%	3%
Age: 60+ (n=496)	57%	38%	3%	2%

2. Rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement:
Scientists who raise scientific criticisms of evolution should have the freedom to make their arguments without being subjected to censorship or discrimination.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
All Respondents (n=2,075)	53%	35%	7%	4%
Men (n=920)	56%	33%	6%	5%
Women (n=1,012)	53%	36%	7%	4%
Party: Democrats (n=743)	48%	40%	8%	5%
Party: Independents (n=701)	54%	35%	7%	4%
Party: Republicans (n=491)	64%	28%	5%	3%
Religion: Theists (n=1,239)	58%	33%	7%	3%
Religion: Atheists (n=234)	44%	38%	9%	9%
Religion: Agnostics (n=462)	49%	40%	6%	5%
Age: 18-29 (n=424)	56%	33%	8%	4%
Age: 30-44 (n=502)	54%	36%	6%	4%
Age: 45-59 (n=510)	54%	35%	7%	5%
Age: 60+ (n=496)	53%	37%	6%	4%

3. Rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement:
Attempts to censor or punish scientists for holding dissenting views on issues such as evolution or climate change are not appropriate in a free society.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
All Respondents (n=1,998)	47%	37%	10%	6%
Men (n=920)	49%	37%	7%	7%
Women (n=1,012)	46%	36%	13%	5%
Party: Democrats (n=743)	41%	41%	12%	6%
Party: Independents (n=701)	50%	34%	10%	6%
Party: Republicans (n=491)	54%	33%	8%	5%
Religion: Theists (n=1,239)	50%	36%	9%	5%
Religion: Atheists (n=234)	39%	37%	14%	11%
Religion: Agnostics (n=462)	45%	38%	10%	7%
Age: 18-29 (n=424)	48%	35%	10%	6%
Age: 30-44 (n=502)	44%	39%	12%	5%
Age: 45-59 (n=510)	49%	36%	9%	6%
Age: 60+ (n=496)	49%	36%	10%	6%

4. Rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement:
It is important for policymakers and the public to hear from scientists with differing views.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
All Respondents (n=1,998)	53%	41%	4%	2%
Men (n=920)	53%	40%	4%	3%
Women (n=1,012)	54%	41%	4%	1%
Party: Democrats (n=743)	50%	44%	4%	2%
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Age: 18-29 (n=424)	54%	37%	5%	4%
Age: 30-44 (n=502)	50%	44%	4%	2%
Age: 45-59 (n=510)	55%	39%	4%	2%
Age: 60+ (n=496)	55%	41%	2%	1%

5. Rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement:
People can disagree about what science says on a particular topic without being ‘anti-science.’

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
All Respondents (n=1,998)	43%	44%	9%	4%
Men (n=920)	42%	43%	10%	5%
Women (n=1,012)	45%	45%	7%	3%
Party: Democrats (n=743)	34%	47%	13%	5%
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Age: 45-59 (n=510)	47%	42%	7%	4%
Age: 60+ (n=496)	44%	47%	5%	4%

6. Rate your level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement:
Disagreeing with the current majority view in science can be an important step in the development of new insights and discoveries in science.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
All Respondents (n=)	37%	49%	11%	3%
Men (n=920)	38%	48%	9%	4%
Women (n=1,012)	37%	48%	12%	3%
Party: Democrats (n=743)	31%	51%	14%	4%
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