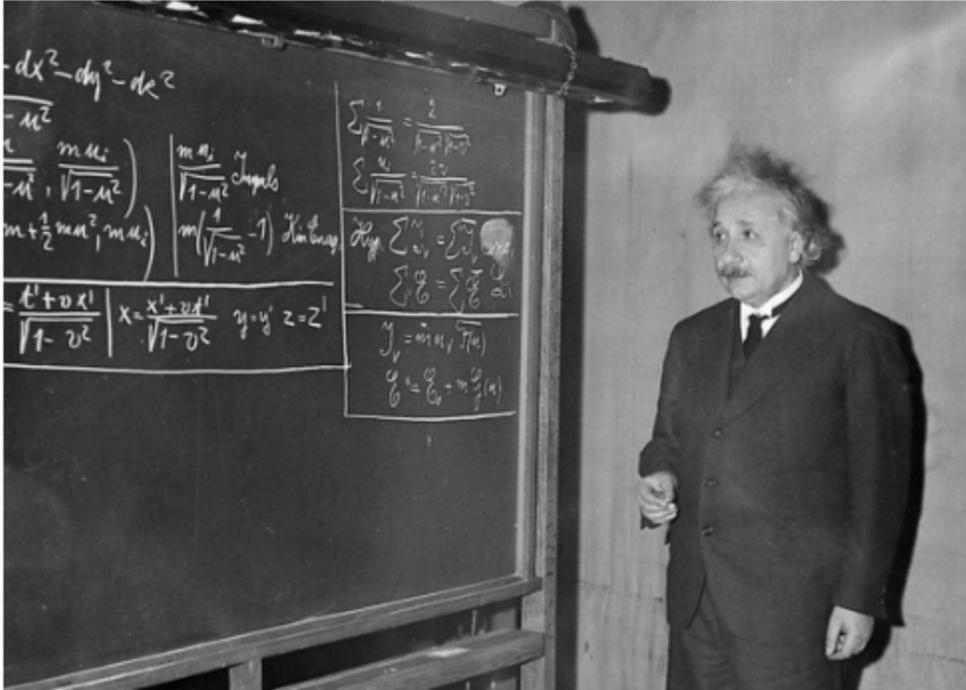


# The Washington Post

## Americans' increasing distrust of science — and not just on climate change



*Albert Einstein delivers a lecture at the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in the auditorium of the Carnegie Institute of Technology Little Theater at Pittsburgh on Dec. 28, 1934.*

**By Aaron Blake: January 30, 2015**

Eight in 10 Americans believe science has made life better for most people, but they still don't trust scientists — and/or aren't aware of their consensus — on many of the most important science-related issues of the day. And that goes for far more than just climate change. And it includes plenty of Democrats too.

A new Pew study comparing the attitudes of scientists and the public shows wide gaps between the two when it comes to climate, food that uses genetically modified organisms and pesticides, research using animals, and also the threat posed by the fast-growing world population.

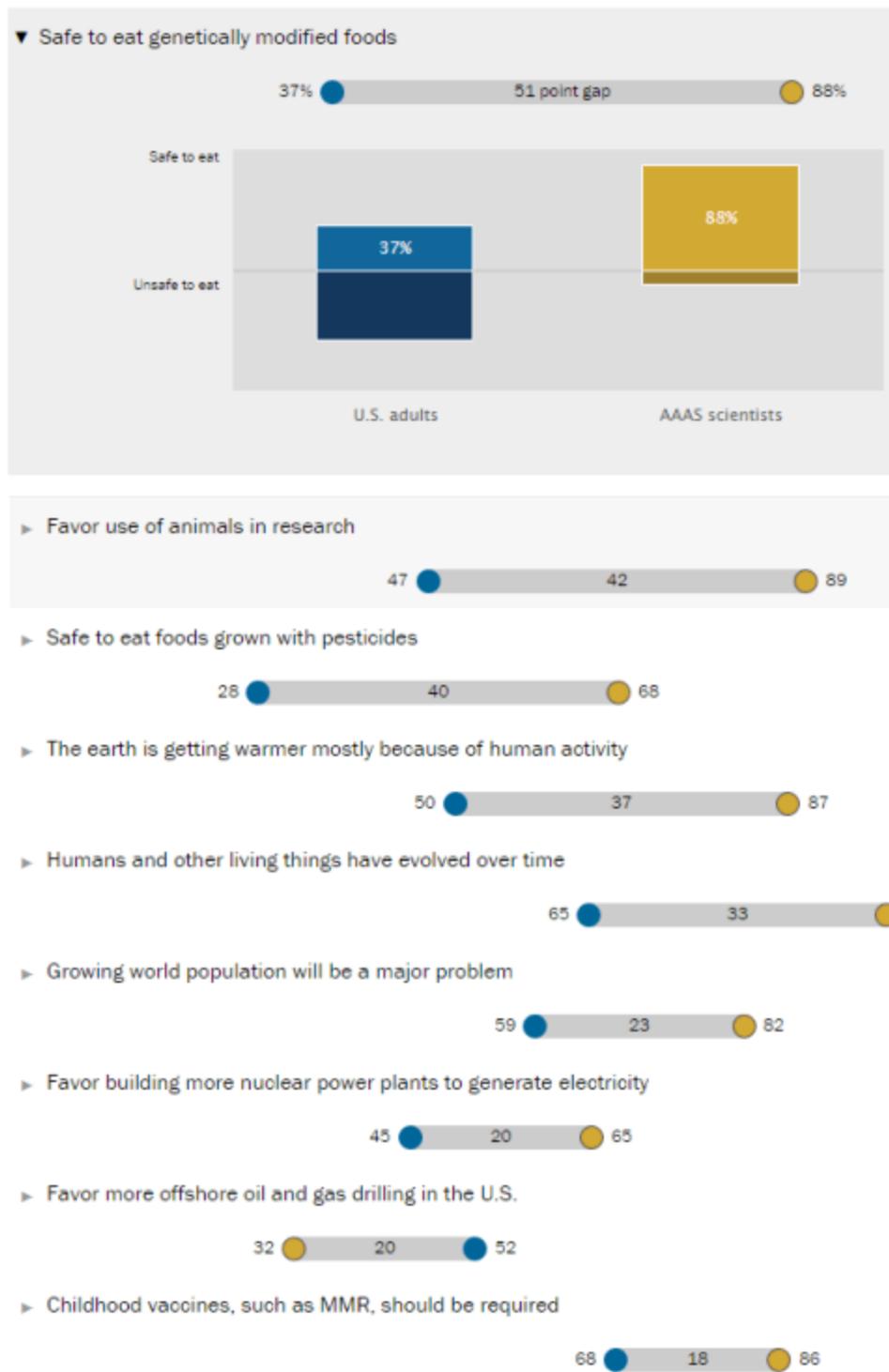
While 87 percent of scientists in the American Association for the Advancement of Science (the world's biggest scientific society) say climate change is caused by humans, just 50 percent of U.S. adults agree — a 37-point gap.

There's an even bigger gap when it comes to GMOs. A similar proportion of scientists say they are safe in food, but just 37 percent of Americans agree.

Also bigger than the climate-change gap are the use of animals in research (89 percent of scientists favor it, versus 47 percent of Americans) and using pesticides to produce food (68 percent of scientists, 28 percent of Americans).

## Major Gaps Between the Public, Scientists on Key Issues

Despite broadly similar views about the overall place of science in America, there are striking differences between the public and American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) scientists' views on a host of science-related issues, from whether genetically modified foods are safe to eat to whether the world's growing population will be a major problem. See how their views differ by clicking on the topics below.



Chris Mooney has more details. But it's worth breaking out some political lessons here.

One, as mentioned above, is that climate change is hardly the only issue on which Americans doubt and/or aren't aware of the scientific consensus. In fact, it ranks behind food issues and using animals and research, which all feature 40-plus-point gaps.

And actually, on some of these issues, Republicans are more in line with scientists. A similar 2009 Pew study showed 62 percent of Republicans favored using animals in research, versus 48 percent of Democrats. The same study showed a similar split on nuclear power, which 65 percent of scientists favor. And on GMOs, past polling has generally shown at least slightly more concern among Democrats.

While Republicans remain more skeptical on top-line issues like evolution and climate change, there has been less partisan difference than one might think on issues like evolution. And on vaccines, the doubters in the two parties have been about equal.

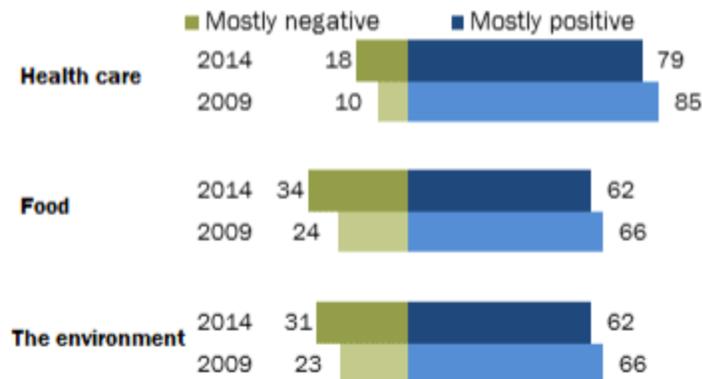
The second is that, as much as some want to chalk up the differences between scientists and Americans to lack of information, it's also pretty clear that many Americans don't totally trust scientists to do more good than harm.

### Public Still Largely Positive About the Contribution of Science to Society, But Uptick in Negative Views

*% of U.S. adults saying science has made life easier or more difficult for most people*



*% of U.S. adults saying effect of science on the quality of each area in the U.S. has been mostly positive or negative*



Survey of U.S. adults August 15-25, 2014. Q4, 5a-c. Comparison with survey conducted April 28-May 12, 2009. Those saying don't know or volunteering no effect are not shown.

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The 2009 version of this study showed that 24 percent of Americans said science has had a negative impact on food, while 23 percent said it has had a negative impact on the environment.

Today, 34 percent cite a negative impact on food and 31 percent on the environment. While Republicans have moved more against science's impact on food, both Republicans and Democrats shifted about equally against its impact on the environment.

And on basically every measure, Americans are more skeptical of science's impact on American life than they were five years ago. Which doesn't bode well for science — or building political consensus on it.

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