

Trust in Science Soars Amid Global Pandemic

New global survey shows increased confidence in science; 3M calls for renewed focus on sustainability; STEM equity and collaboration to help solve the world's greatest challenges

ST. PAUL, Minn.--(BUSINESS WIRE)-- If the world's biggest challenges are to be solved, science will lead the way.

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That's the takeaway from the annual 3M State of Science Index (SOSI). This year's survey shows that the image of science is on the rise, sustainable solutions remain critical, barriers to STEM and gender/race inequality must be removed, and public/private partnerships are expected to solve issues that people care most about.

"As people face the most challenging health crisis in our lifetime, science is more relevant, more trusted, and more important to people all over the world," said Mike Roman, chairman of the board and chief executive officer, 3M. "Advocating for science is important to 3M, but it's bigger than just us. We're leaning in with a focus on the things people care most about: pandemic preparedness, sustainability, social justice, and STEM equity. The State of Science Index shows that people want and expect science to make lives better and these are important issues that are at the heart of 3M's vision to improve every life."

Against the backdrop of COVID-19, trust in science and scientists is the highest it has been in three years since SOSI first began. Today, 89%* of those surveyed trust science; 86%* trust scientists; 77% are more likely as a result of the pandemic to agree that science needs more funding; and more than half (54%*) agree science is very important to their everyday lives – a double-digit increase from the pre-pandemic data (44%*). Rounding out the picture, 92% of global respondents believe actions should follow science to contain the global pandemic, revealing another measure of trust in science.

The evolving image of science is a key theme to emerge from findings of SOSI -- a third party, independently researched study commissioned by 3M to track attitudes towards science. The latest SOSI survey was fielded in eleven countries throughout July and August of 2020, about six months into the global pandemic.

COVID-19 has made people more sensitive to and appreciative of what science can do

A world that has been increasingly skeptical of science seems to be waking up to its relevance and importance. In 2020, rising skepticism reversed for the *firsttime* in three years. People who stated, "I am skeptical of science," dropped by 7 points to 28%* during the pandemic this summer, from its high of 35%* last year. Relatedly, respondents who only believe science that aligns with their personal beliefs is down six percentage points from when the question was first asked in 2018.

A renewed trust in science appears to translate into taking action too: more than half of those surveyed (54%) agree COVID-19 has made them more likely to advocate for science, whereas pre-pandemic data showed only 20% would stand up for science when debating its merits with others.

There is good reason to push for science advocacy because the needle hasn't moved on everything. Nearly two-thirds (63%) rarely think about the impact science has on their everyday lives—and nearly one-third (32%) still believe their lives "wouldn't be that different" if science didn't exist.

Sustainable solutions remain critical: science, sustainability and social justice

There are negative consequences to a world that does not value science, according to 82% of those surveyed. When those who agree were asked about the top negative consequences of concern — topping the list of concerns is “a higher risk of health issues” (68%) – which is not surprising in a year dominated by COVID-19. But sustainability remains an important priority too, with “negative environmental impact” (67%) cited as the second most concerning consequence.

Similarly, when asked about issues people most want to solve for, finding a cure for emerging viruses (such as COVID-19) ranks at the top (80%), followed by finding a cure for other major diseases (62%). Outside of healthcare, social justice and the environment are among the greatest priorities. Social justice/STEM equity (advocating for racial equality in society and/or ensuring underrepresented minorities have access to STEM education) is the top non-health related issue (55%) - and addressing the effects of climate change is the second (51%).

But, who will the world count on to resolve these problems people care about in the future? The next generation of scientists, which must be more diverse and better engaged to truly address global challenges.

Race and generational barriers to STEM education threaten future scientific advances

As a result of the pandemic, pro-STEM sentiment is even stronger: today, 74% are more likely to believe that the world needs more people pursuing STEM-related careers to benefit society, while 73% are more likely to believe a strong STEM education is crucial for students.

Unfortunately, too many people have been discouraged from pursuing science, especially younger generations; Gen Z respondents are three times more likely than their boomer counterparts to report being discouraged as K-12 students from pursuing science (28% adult Gen Zers, 24% millennials, 15% Gen X and 9% baby boomers).

The reasons for being discouraged reveal barriers that run deep: More than one-third of discouraged respondents (36%) say it was due to a lack of access to science classes in school, 34% were told they weren't smart enough, and 27% point to inequalities in gender, race and/or ethnicity as the problem; in the U.S., this issue is especially high, at 50%.

“We’ve learned from this year’s study and from previous years that people want and need science to solve global challenges,” said Dr. Jayshree Seth, corporate scientist and chief science advocate at 3M. “It has never been more important to enable bright, motivated students from all walks of life to reach their full potential and achieve their dreams through careers in STEM,” Dr. Seth continued. “Attracting the next generation of scientists starts with access to education and motivating students to pursue STEM. The science community – and therefore the world – will only benefit from a greater diversity of talent across gender, racial and ethnic lines.”

Businesses and governments have to work together to solve the issues people care most about

The pandemic has uncovered perceived gaps in science leadership around the world, but it has also revealed opportunities to make a difference. A vast majority of survey respondents around the world believe governments need to lead the way -- 86% say governments should be more involved in containing the spread of COVID-19. In the same way, they also look to governments to address challenges such as affordable healthcare (86%), food safety (86%), improving air quality (85%), and ocean plastics pollution (84%).

While governments are deemed the single most responsible organization, a combination of non-government entities emerge as viable partners (corporations, non-profits, and individual citizens) to help address challenges like climate change (48% non-government** vs. 52% government). For racial inequality, respondents are split 52% non-government** vs. 48% government; and for equal access to STEM education for underrepresented minority groups, the split is 38% for non-government** vs. 62% for government.

Importantly, 53% of respondents believe that, amid major challenges in 2020, corporations should prioritize collaborating with governments for solutions to global challenges — second only to preparing for future pandemics (61%).

3M will host a live media briefing and panel discussion on Tuesday October 6th at 2.20pm ET, to talk about the State of Science in 2020, insights behind the findings, and their implications to society with scientists from 3M; the American Association for the Advancement of Science; the UNCF; and the University of Texas at Austin. To register and join the live panel event, please click [here](#).

For more information about the 2020 SOSI Pre-Pandemic and Pandemic Pulse survey results, please visit www.3M.com/scienceindex.

Survey Methodology

3M's State of Science Index presents two waves of original, independent and nationally representative (based on census demographics) research in 2020, both conducted by global research firm Ipsos through a combination of online and offline interviews.

Pre-Pandemic Wave: The 2020 Pre-Pandemic Survey was conducted in 14 countries among 1,000 general population adults (18+) in each of the following countries: Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, Poland, Singapore, South Africa, South Korea, Spain, UK and the US. At the 95% confidence level, the margin of error is +/- 0.83 percentage points at the global, 14-country level and +/- 3.1 percentage points for each individual country.

Pandemic Pulse Wave: The 2020 Pandemic Pulse was conducted among 1,000 general population adults (18+) in 11 of the 14 countries from the 2020 Pre-Pandemic Survey. Countries excluded from this pulse include India, Mexico, and South Africa. At the 95% confidence level, the margin of error is +/- 0.94 points at the 11-country level and +/- 3.1 percentage points for each individual country.

To compare across all years of SOSI, a 9-country tracking average was used which has a margin of error of +/- 1.04 percentage points. Countries within this average include Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, Japan, Poland, Singapore, UK and the US.

2020 Pre-Pandemic survey results were fielded in August - October 2019, and 2020 Pandemic Pulse results were fielded in July - August 2020.

About 3M

At 3M, we apply science in collaborative ways to improve lives daily. Our 96,000 employees connect with customers all around the world. Learn more about 3M's creative solutions to the world's problems at www.3M.com or on Twitter @3M or @3MNews.

*9-country global tracking average used to compare tracking data among only countries surveyed within all previous waves of the study. See full methodology for details.

**Non-government is a combination of those who said individual citizens, corporations or non-profit organizations are most responsible to address each issue.


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