

# Public Views of Space Exploration

An Independent National Survey  
February 2009



THE EVERETT GROUP

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# ***National Space Survey***

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- **Purpose**
  - **Gauge Americans' impressions of the space program relative to other national institutions**
  - **Determine what the public perceives to be the greatest benefits of the space program**
  - **Gauge the level of public support for an increase in funding for the space program**
  - **Identify future missions that the public would support**

# ***National Space Survey***

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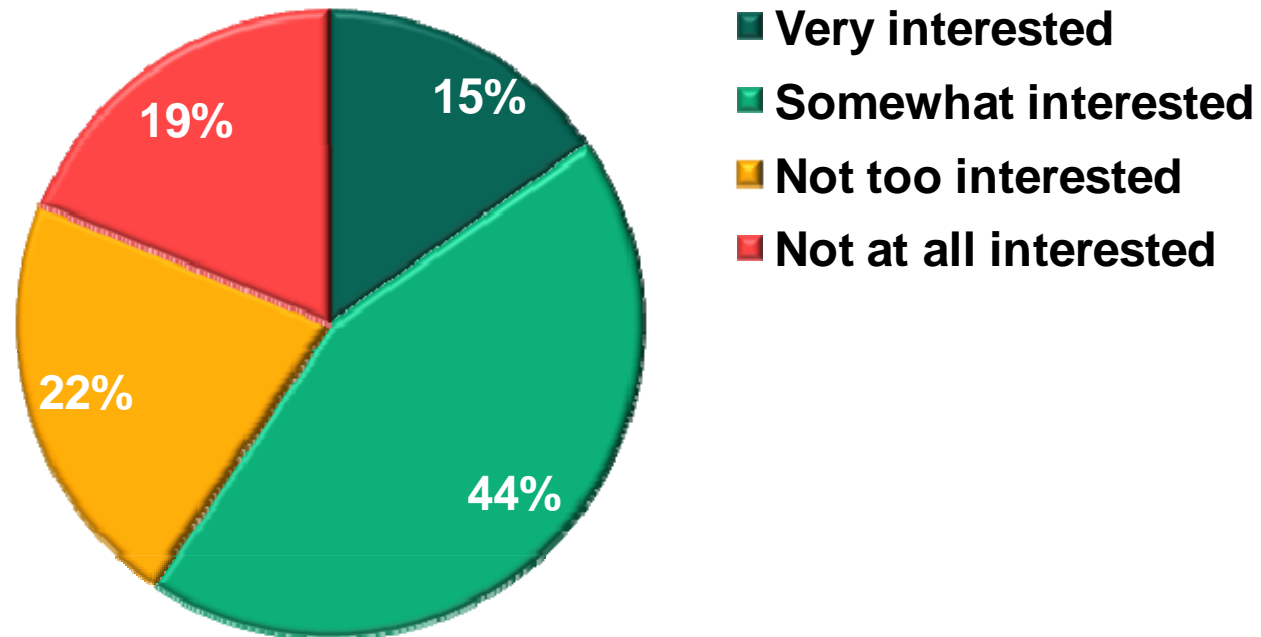
- **Methodology**
  - **National telephone survey, with both landline and cell phone respondents, conducted as part of larger methodological study**
  - **Data collected 3 – 22 February, 2009**
  - **Random sample of 360 U.S. adults**
  - **Sample aligned to Census population margins for key demographics**
  - **Questionnaire developed independently by the Everett Group**

# **Interest and Confidence in the Space Program**

# Interest

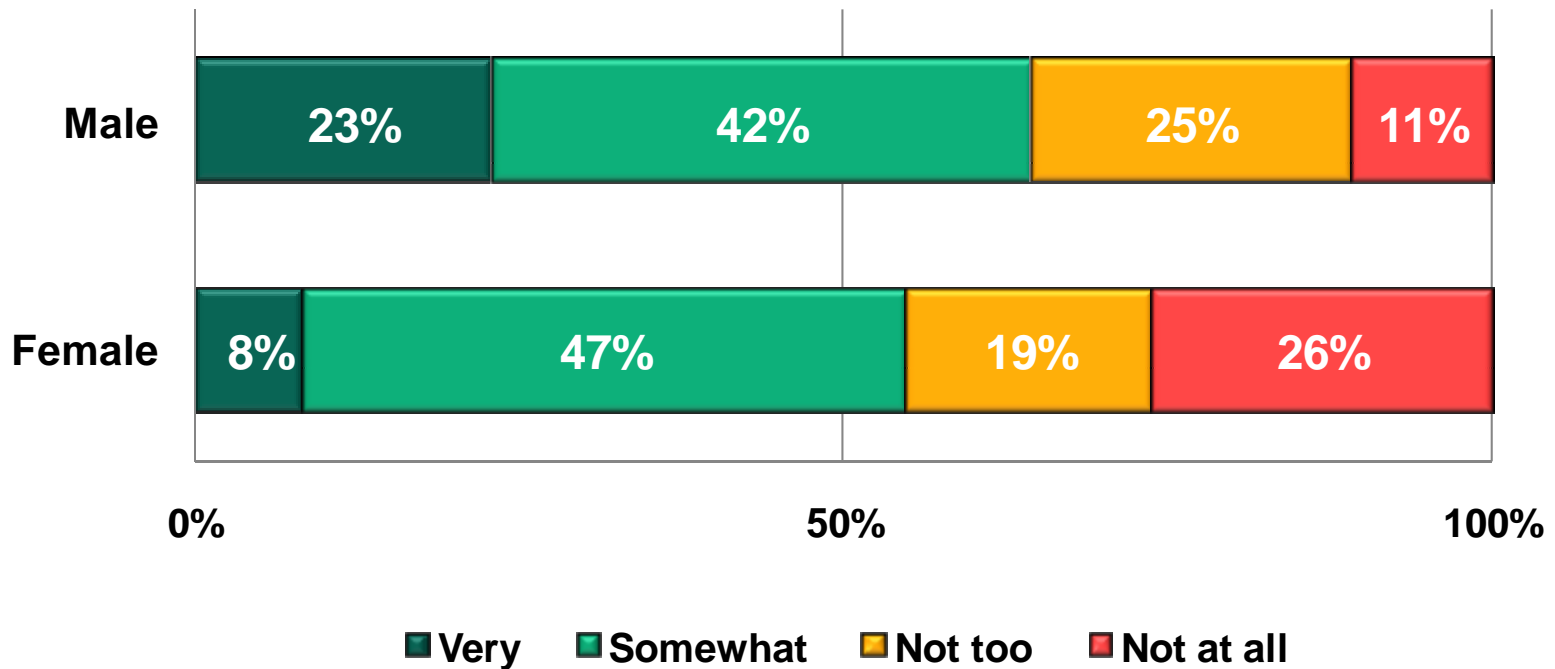
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How would you describe your overall interest in the U.S. space program?



# Interest

How would you describe your overall interest in the U.S. space program?



The difference by gender is highly significant (Pearson Chi-square=24.5, df=3,  $p < .01$ ).  
Sample Sizes: women N=183, men N=177  
The difference by age group is not significant (Pearson Chi-square=10.2, df=9,  $p = .338$ .)

# **Confidence**

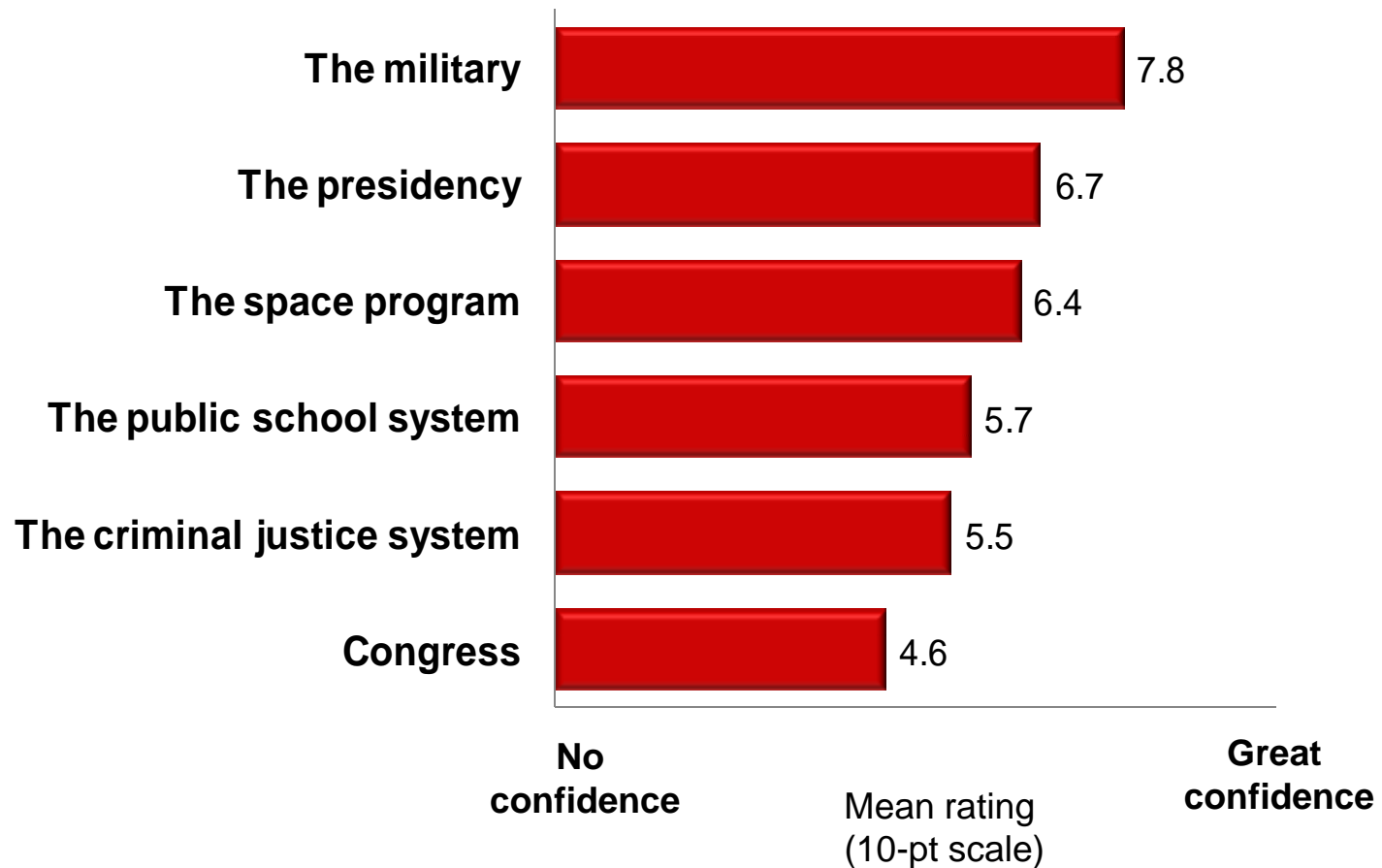
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- **Question wording**

**I'd like to ask you about some institutions in American society. As I read each one, please tell me how much confidence you have in that institution using a scale from zero to 10, where 10 means “great confidence” and zero means “no confidence at all.”**

# Confidence

How much confidence do you have in this institution?



Each mean is based on between 352 and 358 cases. The mean for the space program is significantly different from each of the other means at the .01 level, except that it is significantly different from the Presidency at the .10 level

# **Benefits of the Space Program Resonating with the Public**

# ***Perceived Benefits***

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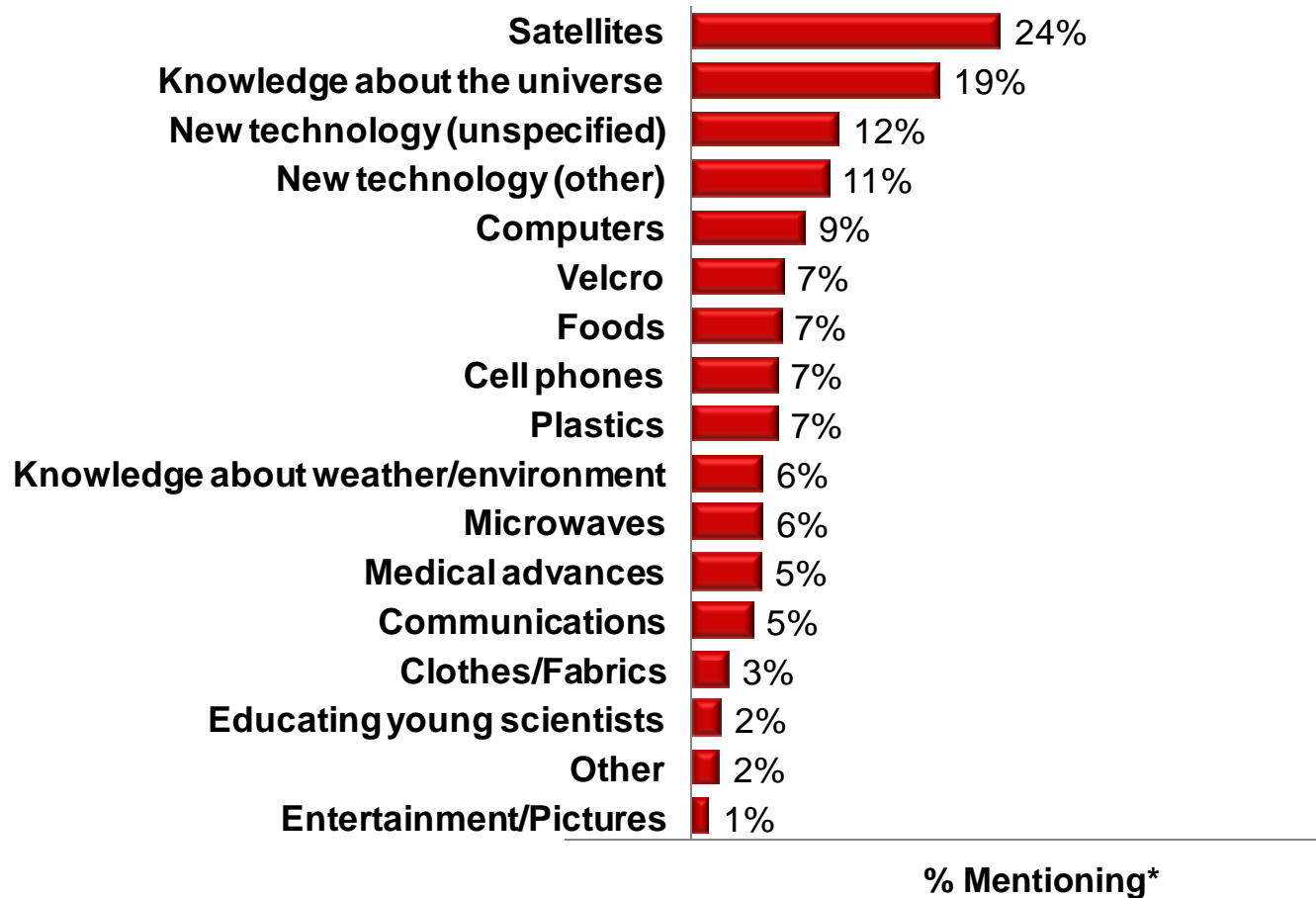
**Can you think of any ways that your life has been improved directly by the U.S. space program?**

## ***Answer***

- **Half of the public says “Yes” and can name one or more ways that the space program improved their life.**
- **The other half says “No” and believes that the program has not improved their life in any way.**

# Perceived Benefits

Ways your life has been improved directly by the space program



\*Figures are based on the 164 respondents who mentioned at least one way that the space program improved their life. Up to three mentions per respondent were recorded.

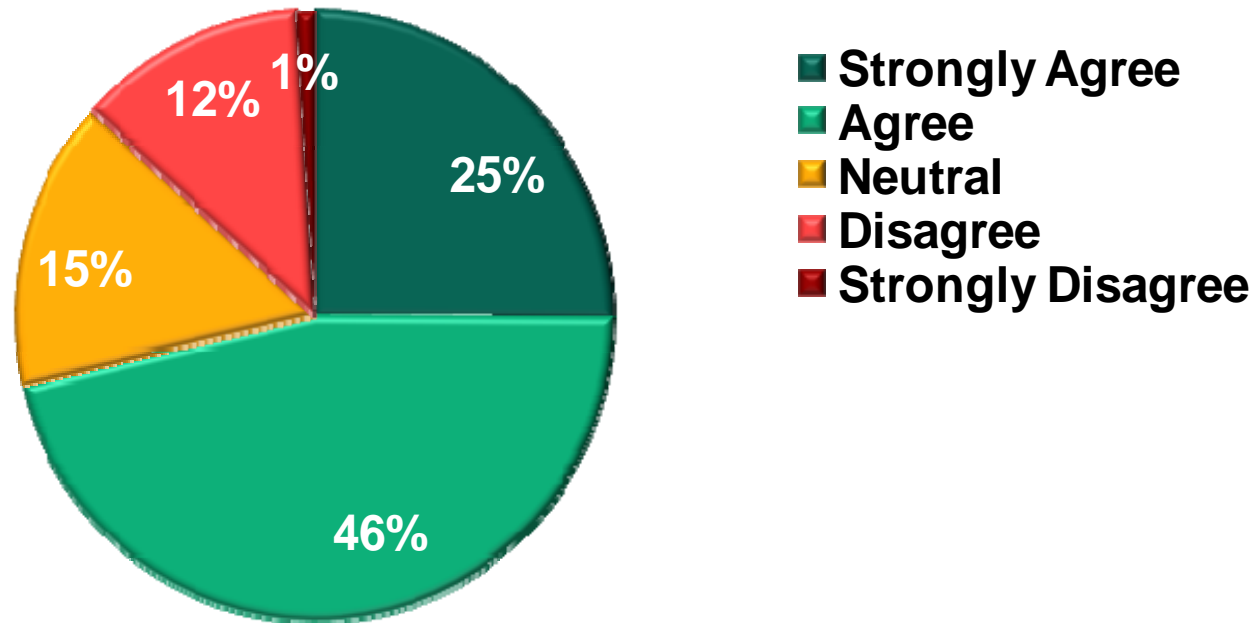
# ***Perceived Benefits***

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**I'm going to read some statements about the U.S. space program that some people agree with but others disagree with. For each one, please tell me how much you agree or disagree...**

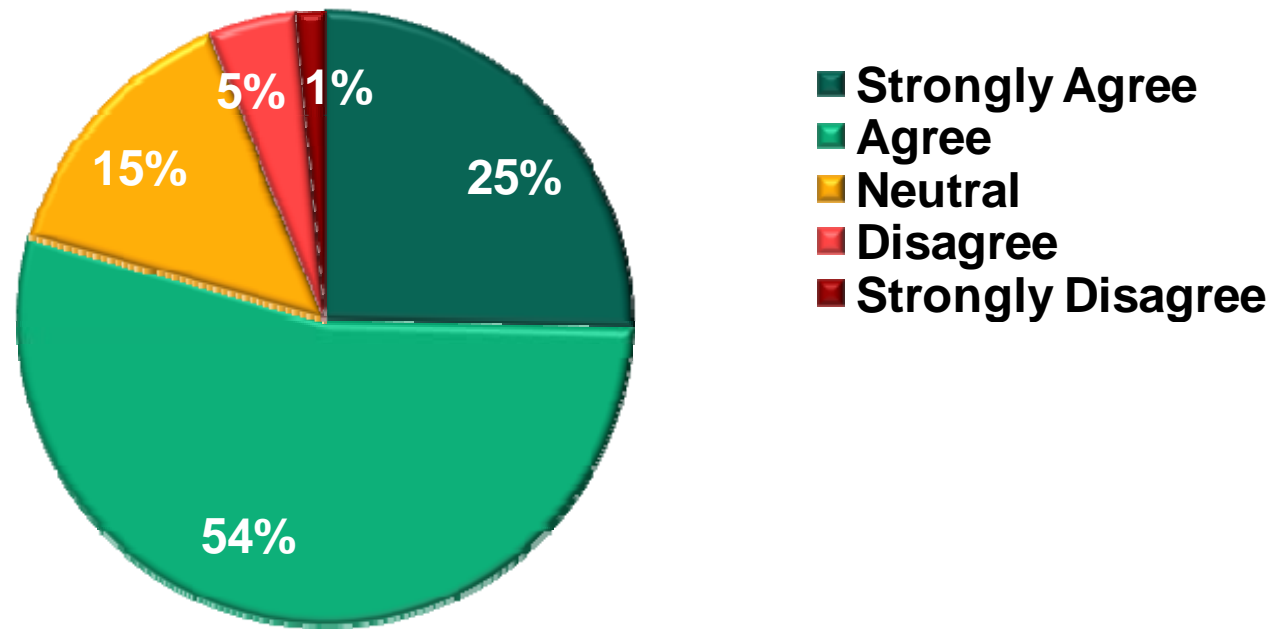
# Perceived Benefits

The space program is important to national security.



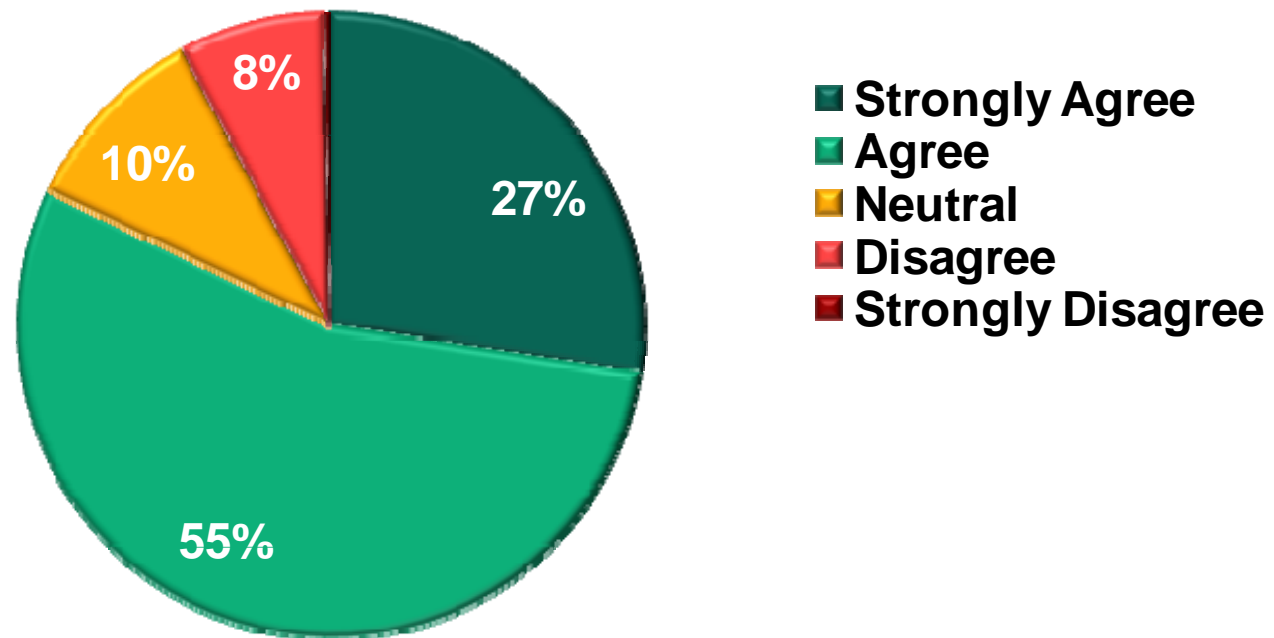
# Perceived Benefits

The space program contributes to American pride and patriotism.



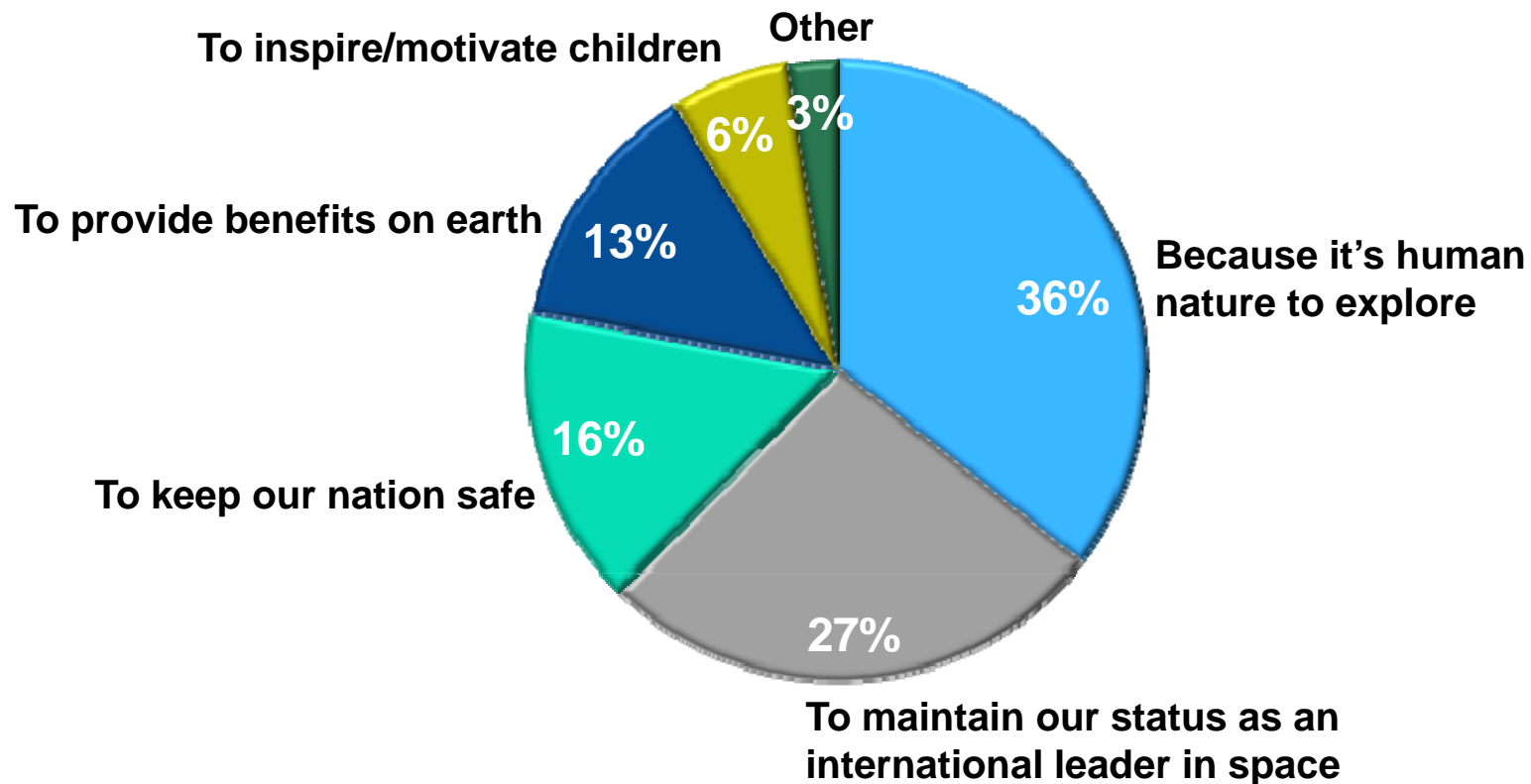
# Perceived Benefits

The space program inspires young people to study science and math.



# Perceived Benefits

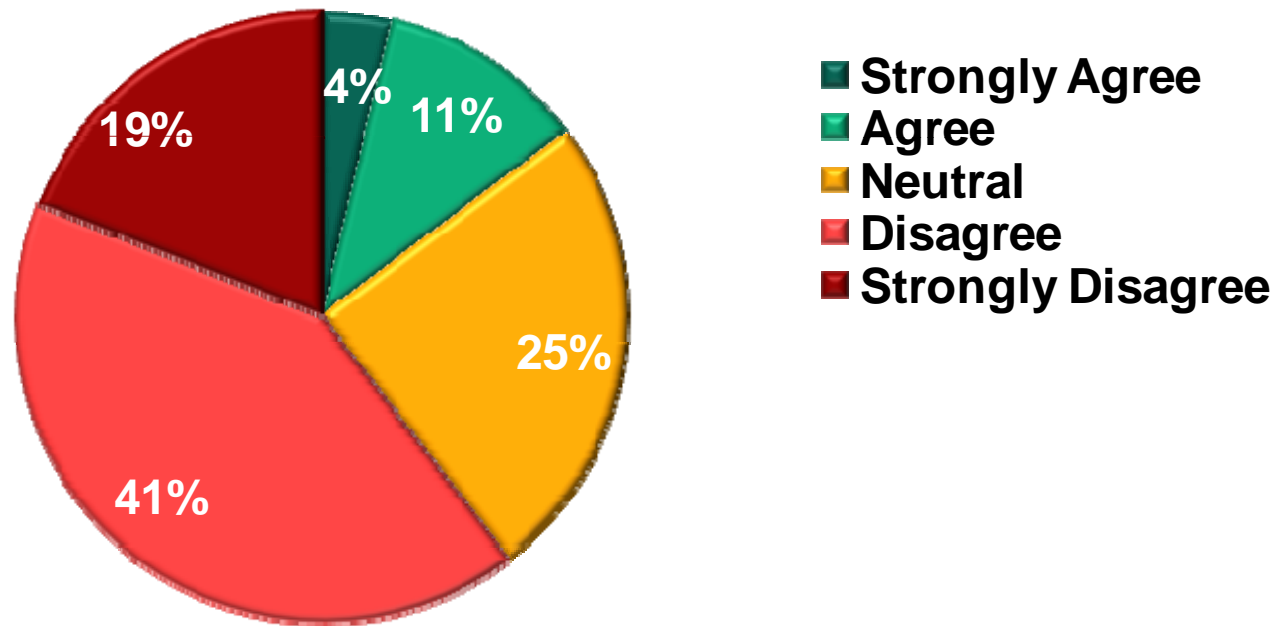
Which do you think is the main reason why America continues to explore space?



# Funding for the Space Program

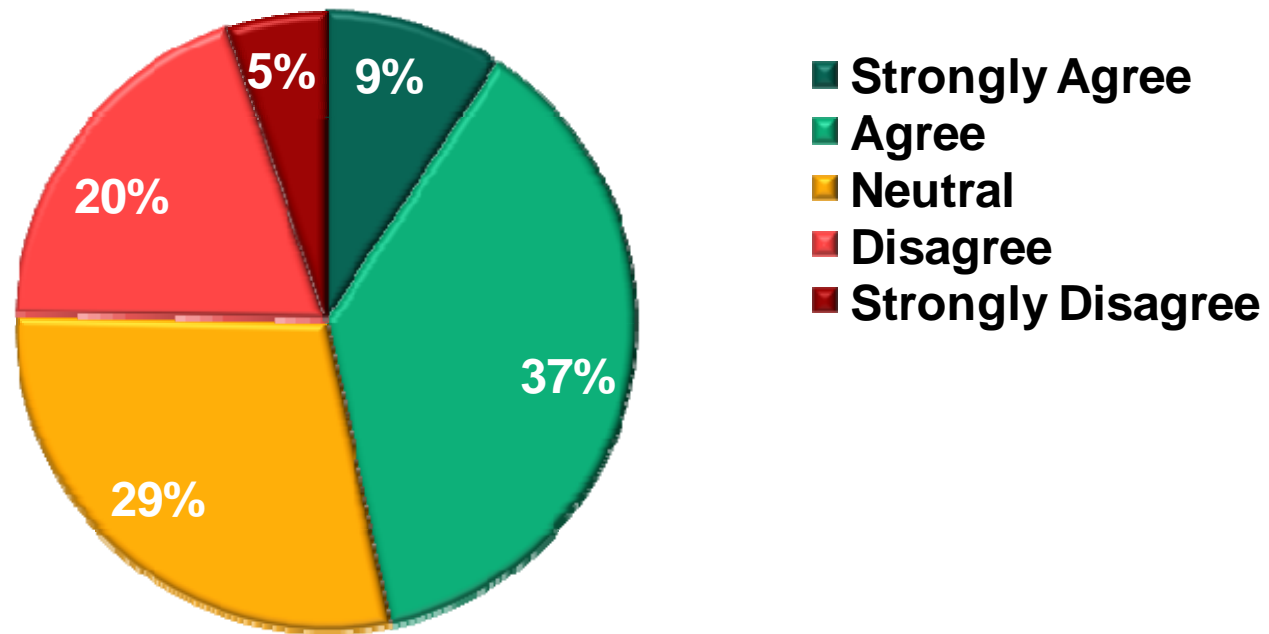
# Funding

The space program is a waste of taxpayer money.



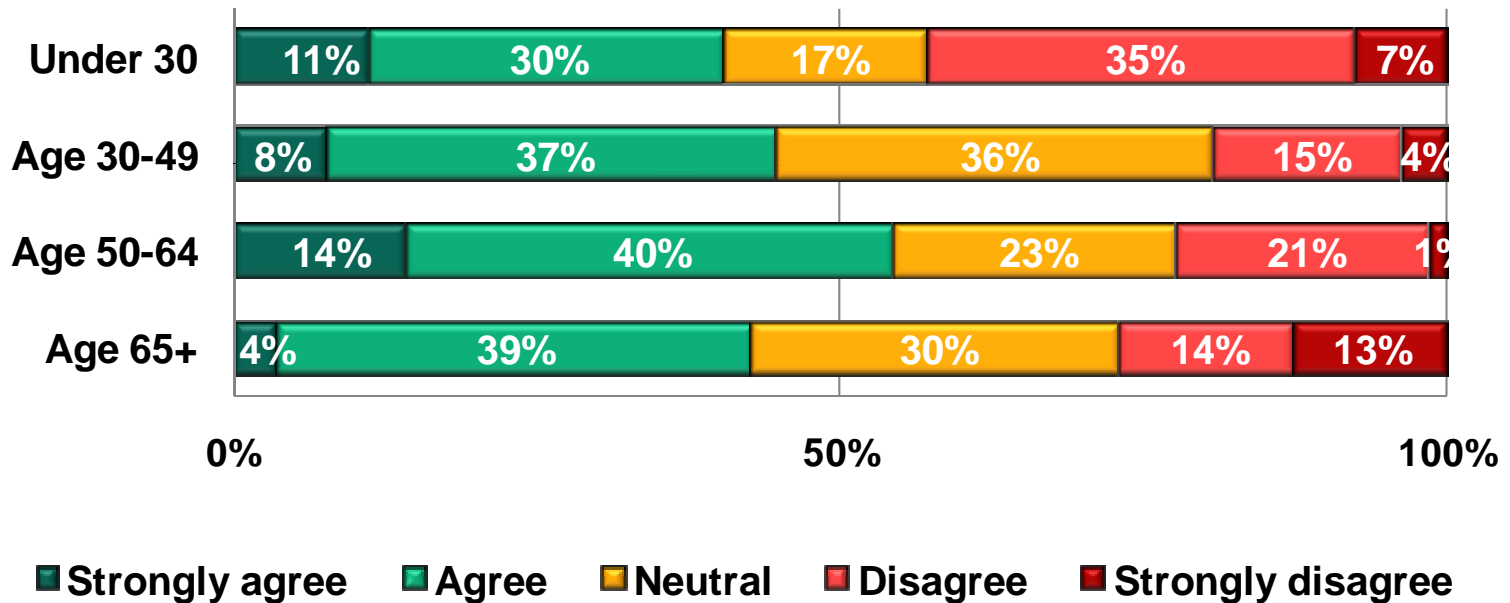
# Funding

The space program needs more funding to improve its technology.



# Funding

The space program needs more funding to improve its technology.



The difference by age group is significant (Pearson Chi-square=29.9, df=12,  $p < .01$ )  
 Sample Sizes: under 30 N=35, ages 30-49 N=122, ages 50-64 N=131, age 65+ N=170  
 The difference by gender is not significant.

# The Future of the Space Program

# ***The Future***

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- **First, respondents were asked an open-ended question:**

What do you think should be the next major mission for the U.S. space program?

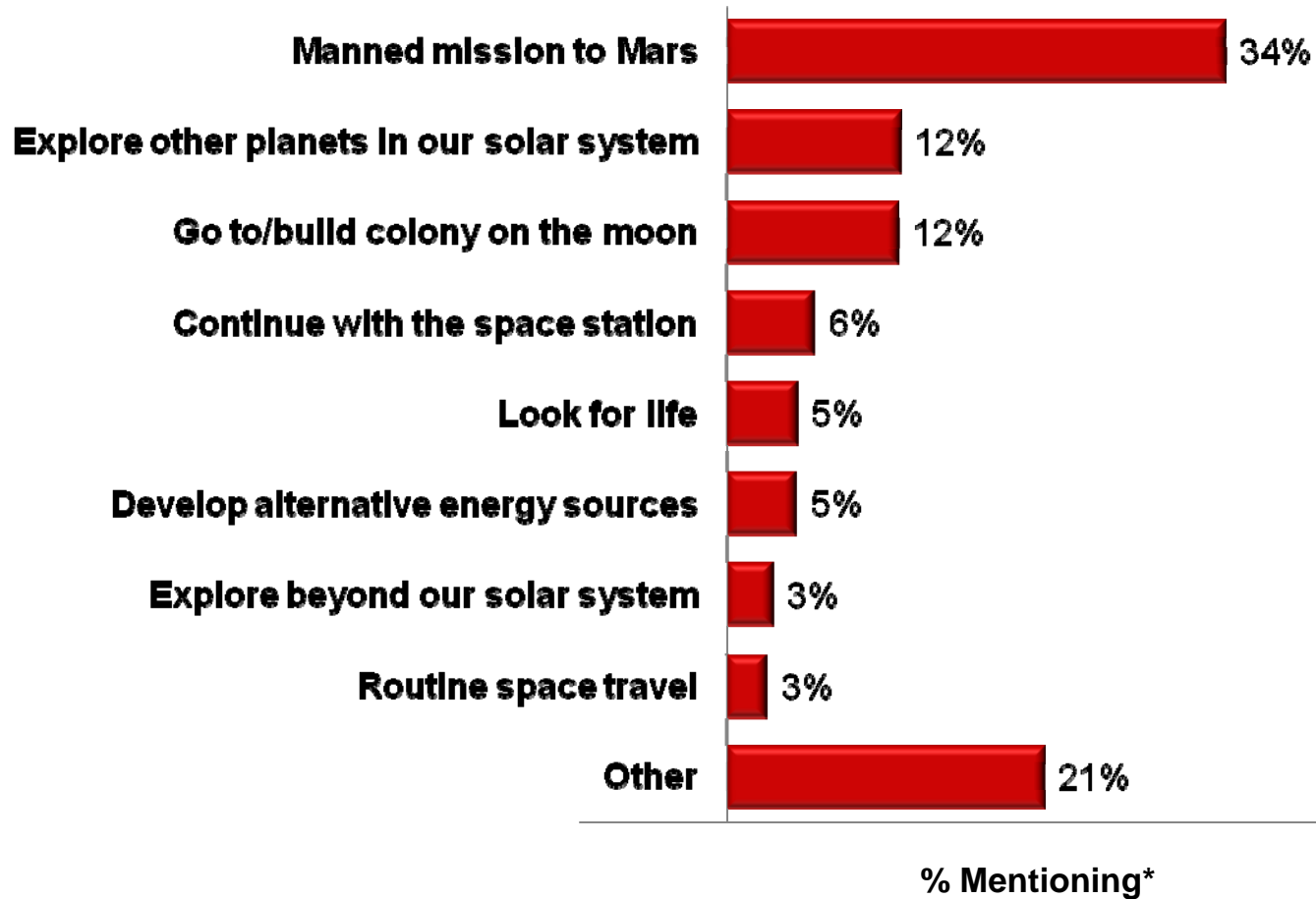
- **Later, respondents were asked to choose from a list:**

If the U.S. space program had more money, which of the following would be the best way to spend it?

- Making space shuttles safer
- Expanding the international space station
- Improving technology for flight on earth
- Human return to the moon
- Manned missions to other planets
- Unmanned missions to other planets

# The Future

What should be the next major mission for the U.S. space program?



\*Figures are based on the 244 respondents who provided an answer.

# The Future

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- Here is a sample of the other suggestions for the next major mission.

*“Figure out how to keep asteroids from hitting us.”*

*“Get some of that junk out of space orbiting earth.”*

*“Study our own atmosphere.”*

*“Understanding the effects of pollution on our environment.”*

*“Replace the space shuttle.”*

*“See if they can help in weather prediction.”*

*“I’d like to see countries join forces to create satellites that would stop nuclear attacks, i.e., Star Wars.”*

# The Future

- Others feel that, under these economic conditions, the space program should not be undertaking a major mission.

*“We can’t afford any major missions at the moment.”*

*“I don’t think there should be another mission at this point in the economy.”*

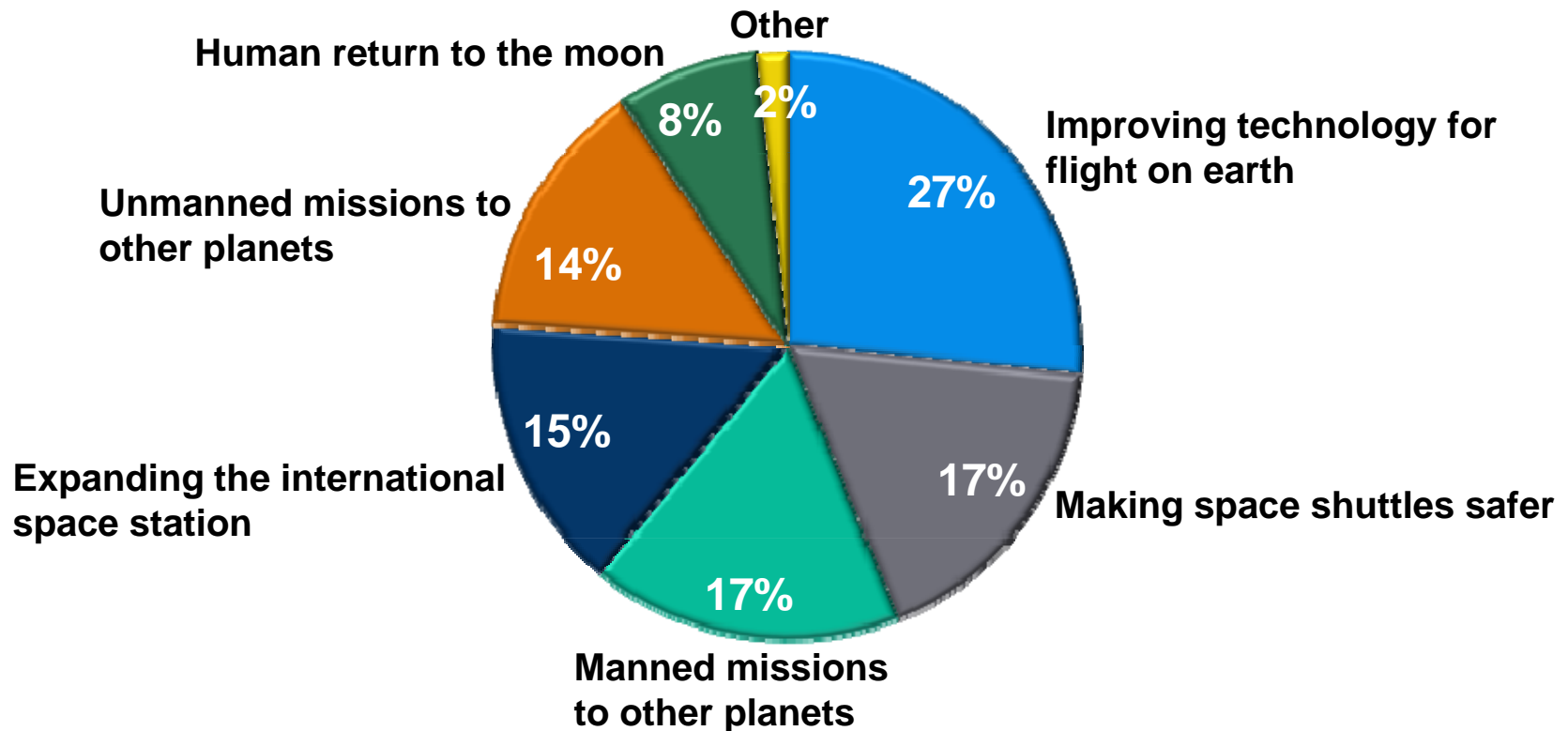
*“They should rest until the economy gets on its feet.”*

*“We should put the space program on hold until we get out national economic problem solved.”*

*“Maintain the space shuttle until the economy gets better.”*

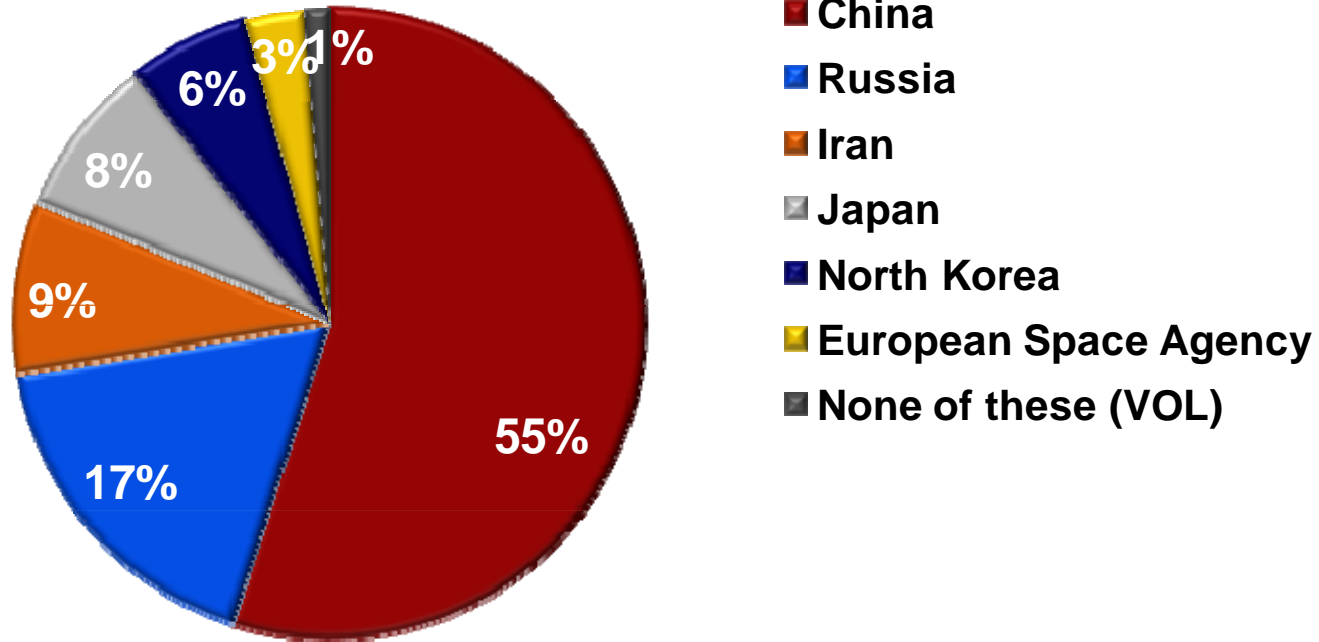
# The Future

If the U.S. space program had more money, which of the following would be the best way to spend it?



# Rivals in Space Exploration

Which of the following do you think will be America's greatest rival in space exploration over the next 20 years?



# **Key Take-Aways**

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- **Most Americans are interested in the space program (60%) but an alarming number have no interest at all (19%). Interest is particularly soft among women.**
- **On the positive side, large majorities feel that the space program is important to national security (71%), contributes to national pride (79%), and inspires young people to study math and science (82%).**
- **Half of the public feel that the space program has not directly improved their lives in any way. Those who do, however, cite technological developments and knowledge about the universe.**
- **Most believe that the U.S. continues to explore space in order to maintain our status as an international leader or because it is human nature to explore.**

# **Key Take-Aways**

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- **The majority of Americans (60%) reject the idea that the space program is a waste of taxpayer money. They are not convinced, however, that *more* funding is needed.**
- **A plurality feel that a manned mission to Mars should be the next major mission, but there is some sentiment that this should not be pursued during the current economic recession.**
- **Many Americans would prefer see the space program's resources used to help solve terrestrial problems rather than extraterrestrial ones for the time being.**

## **To discuss the findings or ask questions:**

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