

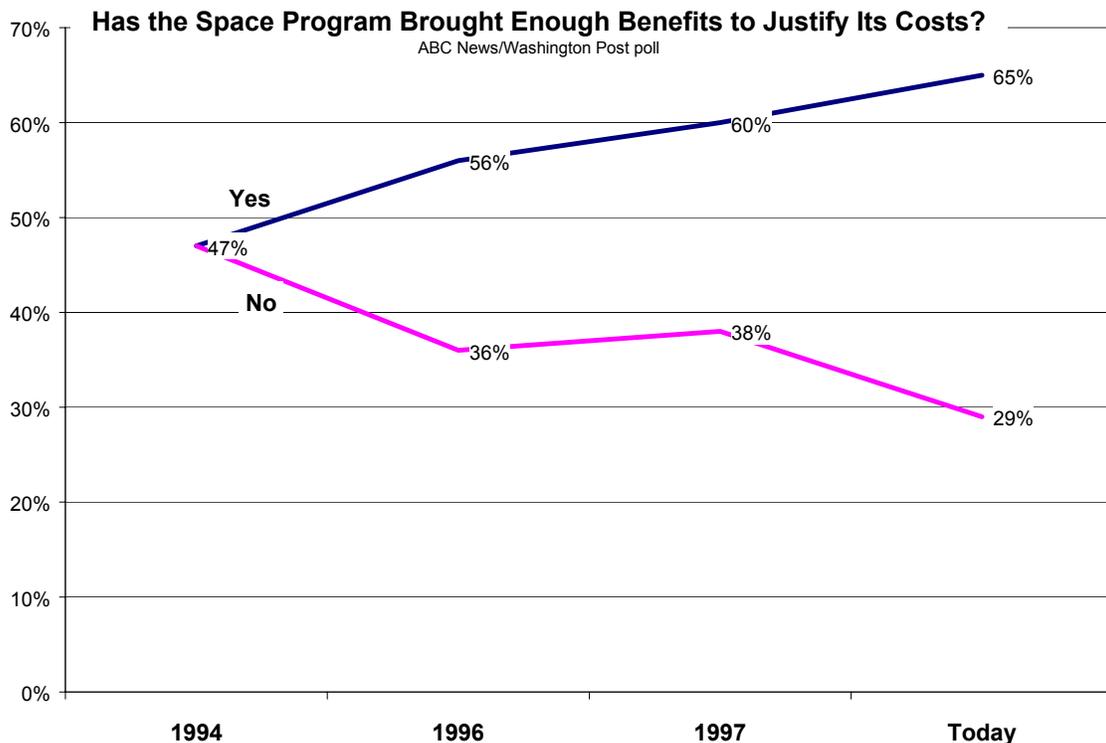
Support for Space Program Endures; Most Call Accident Unavoidable

Expressing continued commitment to manned space exploration, nearly two thirds of Americans call the loss of the space shuttle Columbia and its crew an unavoidable accident, rather than a result of errors NASA reasonably could have prevented.

As both an investigation board and a joint House-Senate committee begin to examine the accident, 64 percent of Americans say it was “the kind of unavoidable thing” that happens in space flight. Far fewer, 28 percent, blame NASA for avoidable errors.

Even more – eight in 10 – also say that, despite the loss, the United States should continue the manned shuttle program. That’s almost precisely the level of continued support for the program that followed its last disaster, the loss of the Challenger in 1986.

One reason is a broad perception that the space program brings the country enough benefits to justify its costs. Sixty-five percent now say that’s the case, up substantially from 47 percent in 1994.



People who think the Columbia accident could have been avoided are somewhat less likely to think the costs of the space program are justified, though a majority still does – 55 percent, compared to 70 percent of those who call the accident unavoidable. And even among those who blame avoidable errors, 74 percent favor continuing the program.

GROUPS – Better-educated Americans are more likely to think the space program’s benefits pay off – 76 percent say so, compared to 58 percent of people with no more than a high-school degree. Similarly, people with college degrees are 12 points more likely to want to continue manned space exploration.

METHODOLOGY – This ABC News/Washington Post poll was conducted by telephone Feb. 6-9, 2003, among a random national sample of 1,001 adults. The results have a three-point error margin. Fieldwork by TNS Intersearch of Horsham, PA.

Analysis by Dalia Sussman.

ABC News polls can be found at ABCNEWS.com on the Internet at:
<http://abcnews.go.com/sections/us/PollVault/PollVault.html>

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Results follow.

*= less than 0.5 percent

20. On another subject, do you think the U.S. government's space program has brought enough benefits to this country to justify its costs, or don't you think so?

	Yes	No	No opin.
2/9/03	65	29	5
7/9/97	60	38	2
1/21/96	56	36	8
7/17/94*	47	47	7

*Gallup. Intro: "It is now 25 years since the United States first landed men on the moon."

21. In light of the space shuttle accident last weekend in which seven astronauts were killed, do you think the United States should or should not continue the manned space shuttle program?

	Should	Should not	No opin.
2/9/03	78	18	3
2/12/86*	83	16	1
1/28/86*	79	16	5

*Wording: Should the United States continue the manned space shuttle program in light of last week's/today's shuttle explosion, which killed all seven crew members, or not?

22. Do you think the accident is (the kind of unavoidable thing that just happens from time to time in space flight), or do you think it's (the result of errors by NASA that could reasonably have been avoided)?

	Unavoidable	Result of errors	No opin.
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2/9/03

64

28

7

END