National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics

InfoChart

Since the 1950s, Federal R&D Funding Has Shifted from Development to Research

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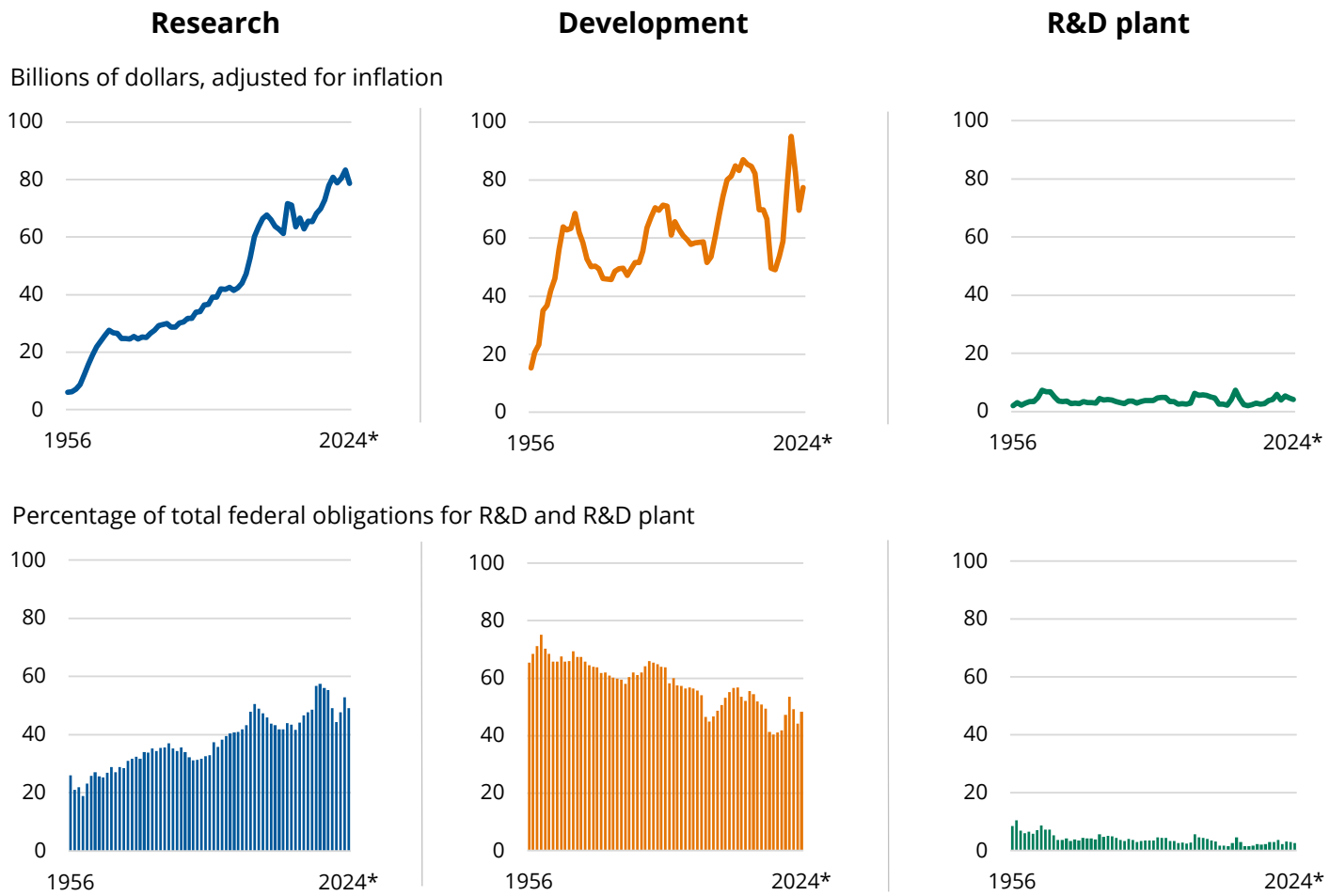
Figure 1. Federal obligations for research, development, and R&D plant: FYs 1956–2024



* Data for FY 2024 are preliminary.

Note(s):
Because of rounding, detail may not add to total. The federal fiscal year cycle changed for FY 1977, from 1 July–30 June to the current 1 October–30 September cycle; no data were collected for the 3-month transition period of July–September 1976. FYs 2009 and 2010 obligations include additional funding provided by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Beginning with FY 2016, the totals reported for development obligations represent a refinement to this category by more narrowly defining it to be "experimental development." Therefore, the data are not directly comparable with totals reported in previous years. FYs 2020–22 obligations include additional funding provided by supplemental COVID-19 pandemic-related appropriations.

Source(s):
National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, Survey of Federal Funds for Research and Development.

Inflation-adjusted federal obligations for research (basic and applied), development, and research and development (R&D) plant (the physical infrastructure and facilities used for R&D activities) from FYs 1956 to 2024 show that research increased from $6.1 billion in FY 1956 to $78.7 billion in FY 2024 and obligations for development increased from $15.2 billion to $77.4 billion during the same period. Federal obligations for R&D plant increased from $2.0 billion in FY 1956 to $4.2 billion in FY 2024. Obligations represent the amount for orders placed, contracts awarded, services received, and similar transactions during a given period, regardless of when the funds were appropriated or when future payment of money is required. As a percentage of total federal obligations for R&D and R&D plant, only the share for research increased during this period, from 26% in FY 1956 to 49% in FY 2024, whereas the share for development declined, from 65% to 48%. Throughout the period, R&D plant represented a relatively small share of total federal obligations (9% in FY 1956 and 3% in FY 2024). FY 2024 data are preliminary.

For more information, see the full set of data tables at https://ncses.nsf.gov/surveys/federal-funds-research-development/2023-2024#data.

NCSES has reviewed this product for unauthorized disclosure of confidential information and approved its release (NCSES-DRN25-029).

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