

MUSEUM VISITATION RATES: A DEMOGRAPHIC DATA STORY

It's easy to make lots of assumptions about who does, and doesn't, visit museums. After all, we are looking at who we see at our museums, who are our members, as well as who responds to surveys. But some of those assumptions, such that museum-goers are primarily older, well-educated, and/or white, don't turn out to be totally true when we look at *casual* museum visitors.



The reality is that people who visit museums come from lots of different demographic backgrounds. And more casual visitors to museums are more diverse across different demographic criteria than more frequent museum visitors.

NOTE: in this Data Story, we are primarily examining casual visitors to museums. These are individuals who have been to at least one museum in the past two years, but is not an assessment of frequency. (We typically use one year for this metric, but increased it to two years in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The patterns we see here, however, have been consistent over the past several years.)



Let's pick this apart.

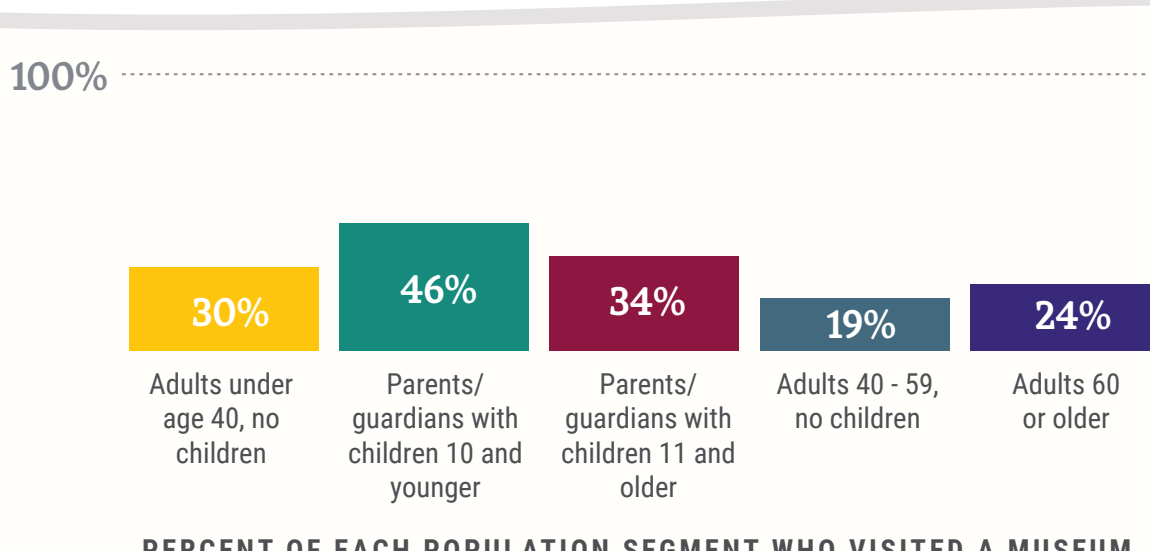


1 in 3 American adults have been to a museum in the past two years.

AGE

THE ASSUMPTION: Older adults are more likely to visit museums than younger adults.

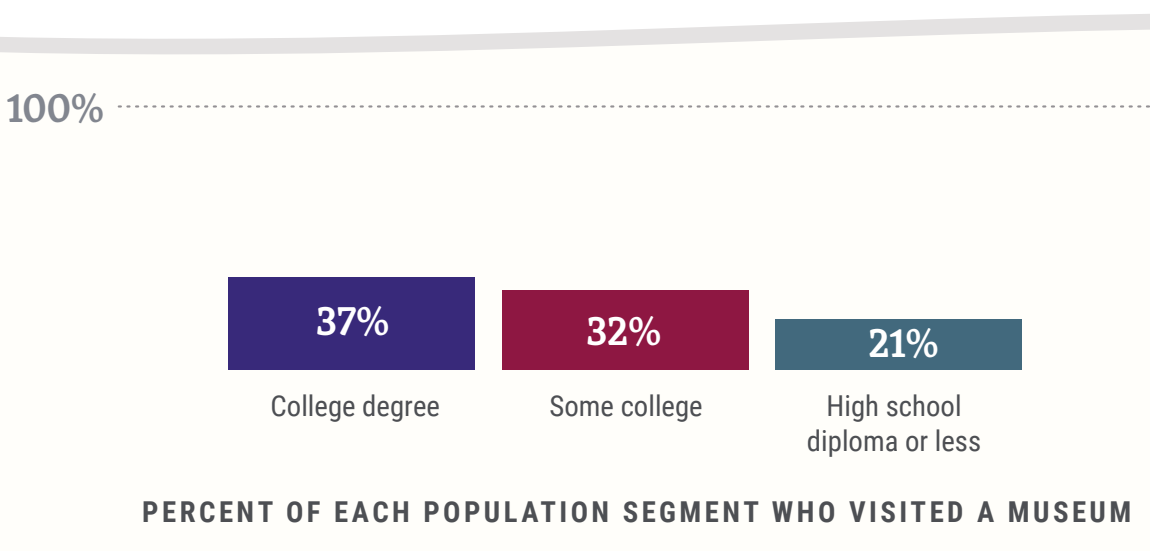
THE REALITY: Young adults are significantly more likely to have been to a museum in the last two years than older adults. And parents/guardians of children 10 and younger are the most likely to have visited.



EDUCATION

THE ASSUMPTION: Museum-goers overwhelmingly have college degrees.

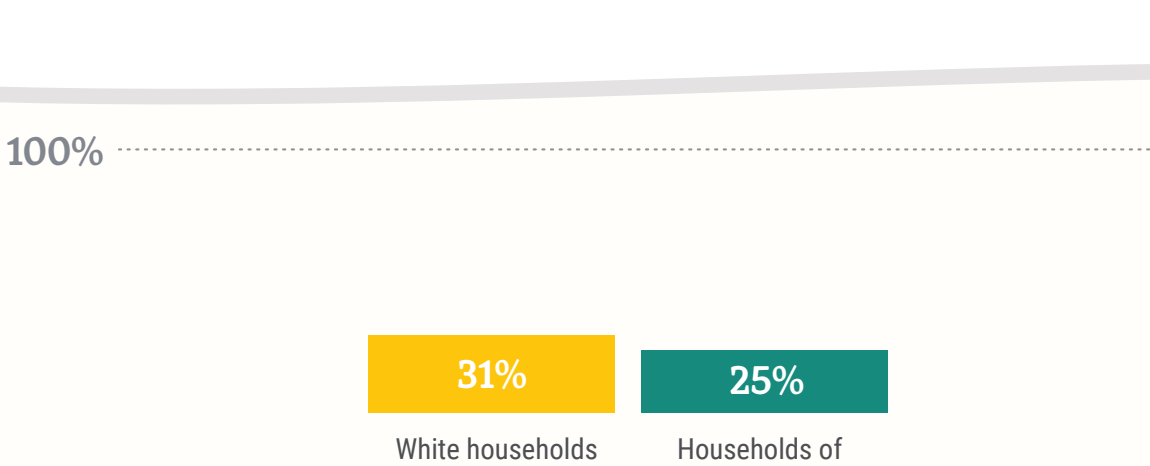
THE REALITY: College graduates are only *somewhat* more likely to have been to a museum in the past two years than those with "some" post-secondary education. The bigger gap is with those with a high school diploma or less.



RACE AND ETHNICITY

THE ASSUMPTION: Museums disproportionately serve white people.

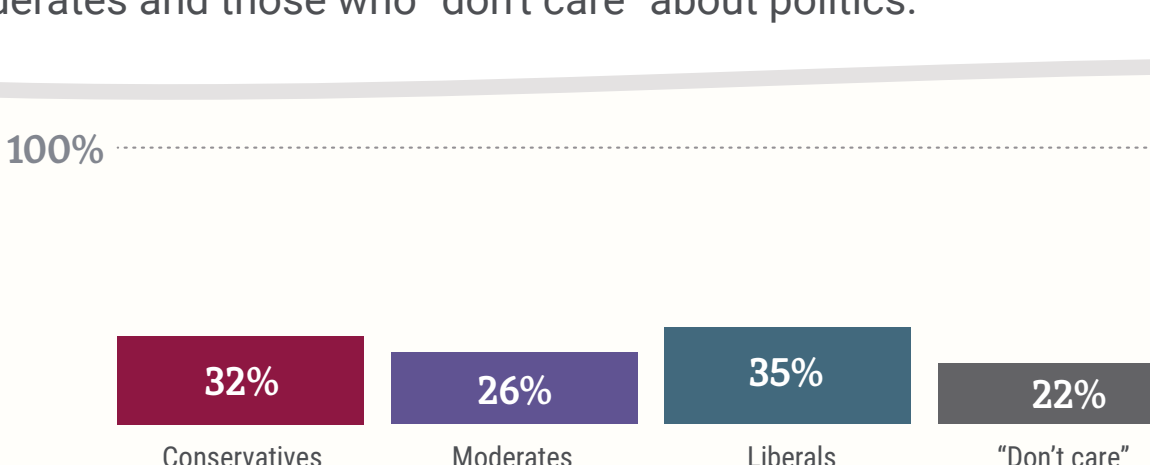
THE REALITY: While museums definitely skew towards white audiences, white people are only *somewhat* more likely to have been to a museum in the past two years than people of color.



POLITICAL IDENTITY

THE FINAL DATA POINT we want to share is around the political identity of museum-goers. We want to answer a question many of us have wondered about: **does political identity affect museum-going?**

Turns out, conservatives and liberals are about equally likely to have visited a museum in the past two years; about a third each. The bigger gap is with moderates and those who "don't care" about politics.



Why do we have assumptions that are different from these realities? It's because our observations are more likely to be about frequent museum-goers, rather than an assessment of who goes to museums in the first place (as a yes/no).

The older adults who do visit museums, for example, may be fewer in number, but they make up for it in higher visitation rates. They visit more museums, more often, and are more likely to be members. That is also largely true for museum-goers with college degrees and for white people. Understanding these differences between frequency gaps and visitation gaps is thus crucial for museums seeking demographic parity among visitors.



Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. Sources include:
 • Two May 2021 Broader Population Samples, combined n = 4,809 US adults

More Data Stories can be found at wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories

