

INCLUSIVE ATTITUDES: SHIFTS OVER TIME

A 2023 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS DATA STORY

FOR MANY OF US, when we think about people's shifting attitudes about inclusion, we tend to think about individuals taking a linear journey. That over time, attitudes evolve in one direction or the other, either towards a more inclusive attitude (hopefully) or a less inclusive one (unfortunately).

But that's too simplistic.

People are more complicated than that, and the path isn't strictly linear but can have pauses, backtracking, and then new steps forward.

2021
2022
2023

This became clear to us with the 2023 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers and Broader Population Sampling. For the third year in a row, we asked a set of three questions that helped us assess individual attitudes towards inclusive content in museums. With those results, each year we develop a spectrum of attitudes from anti-inclusive to inclusive.

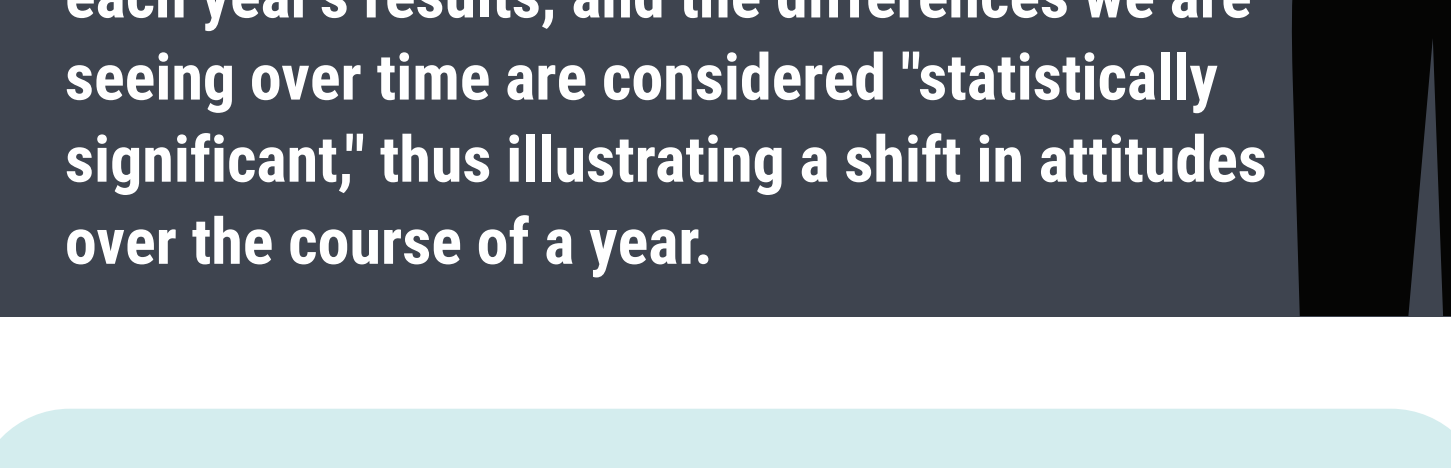
WHY THREE QUESTIONS? It isn't fair to assess someone's attitude on this subject with just one question, as there is no single question that helps us sort this out accurately. To learn more about the three questions we use, see our 2021 Data Story "[The Spectrum of Inclusive Attitudes: Methodology.](#)"

Overall, results show good news. The majority of people want museums to share inclusive content, and inclusive attitudes strongly outnumber anti-inclusive attitudes. There is a lot to celebrate here!

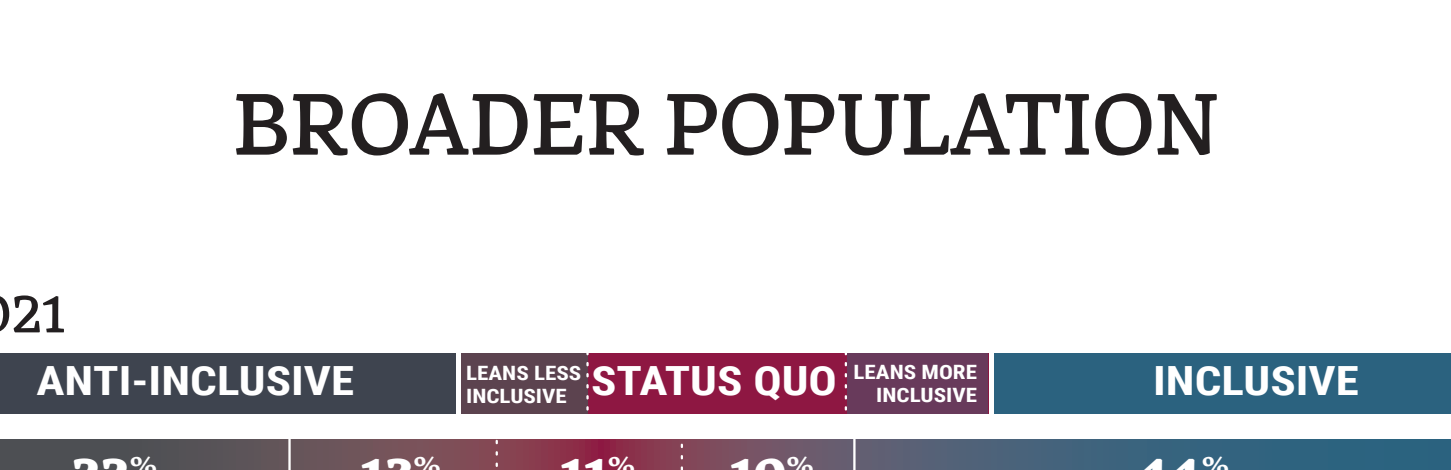
Over time, however, things are a bit more complicated.

Let's first examine frequent museum-goers and their attitudes.

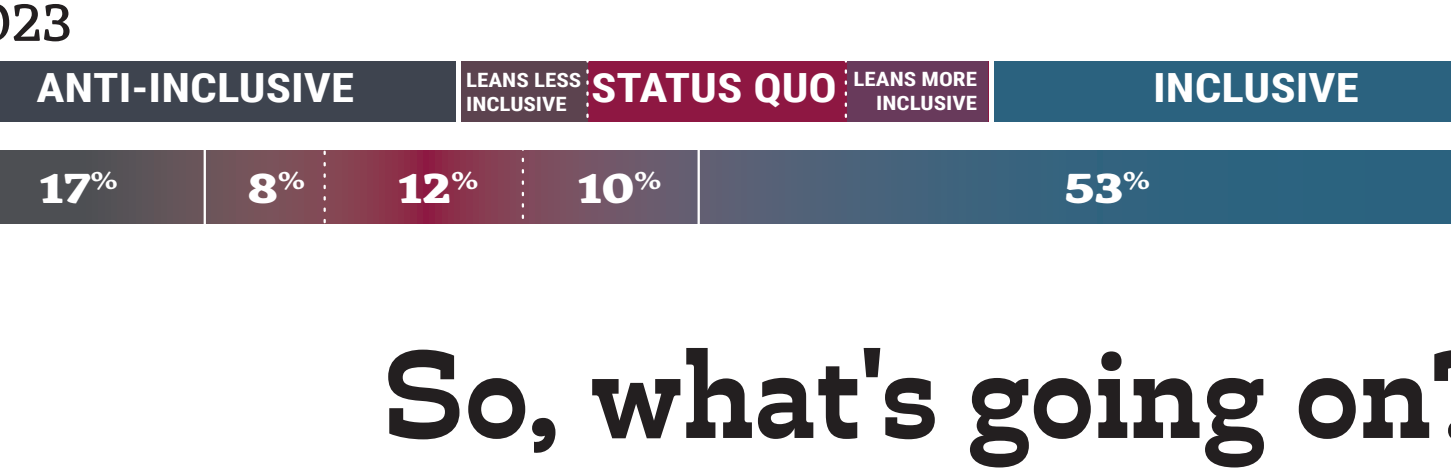
BACK IN 2021, we found that just under half of museum-goers fell in the "inclusive" segment of the spectrum, and just under one in five were in the "anti-inclusive" segment.



IN 2022, we were delighted to see that there had seemingly been a lot of progress on this issue, as the percentage of respondents falling in the "inclusive" segment grew quite a bit, to nearly 60%.



2023, HOWEVER, was somewhat discouraging. While just over half of respondents fell in the "inclusive" segment (still a lot more than in the anti-inclusive segment!), this represents a fairly substantial drop from 2022.



Let's talk statistical significance.

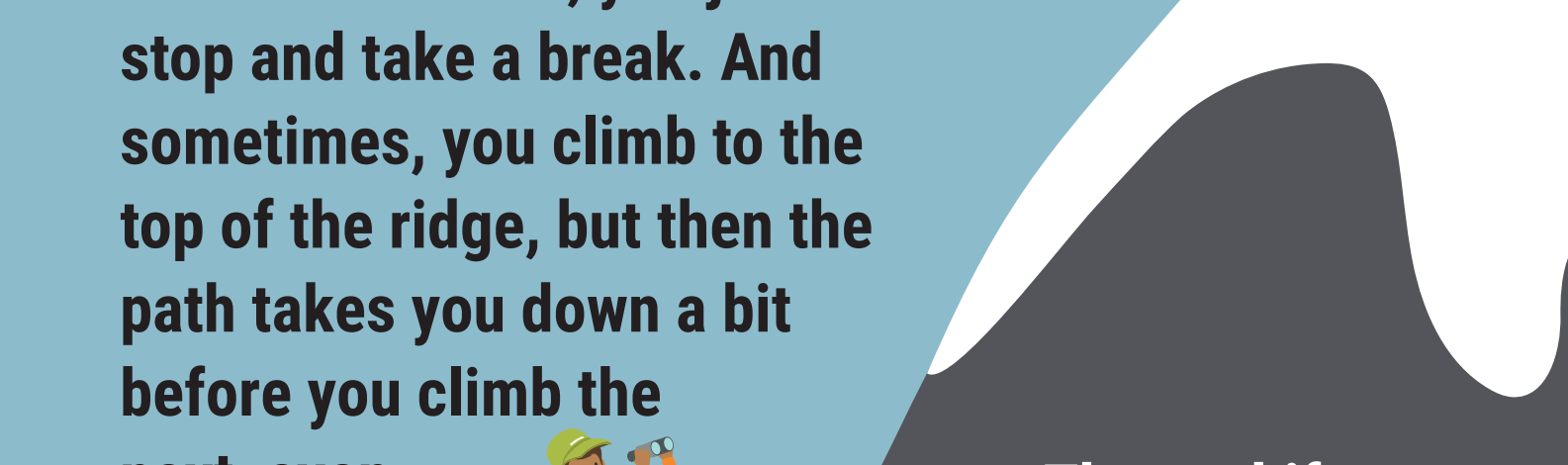
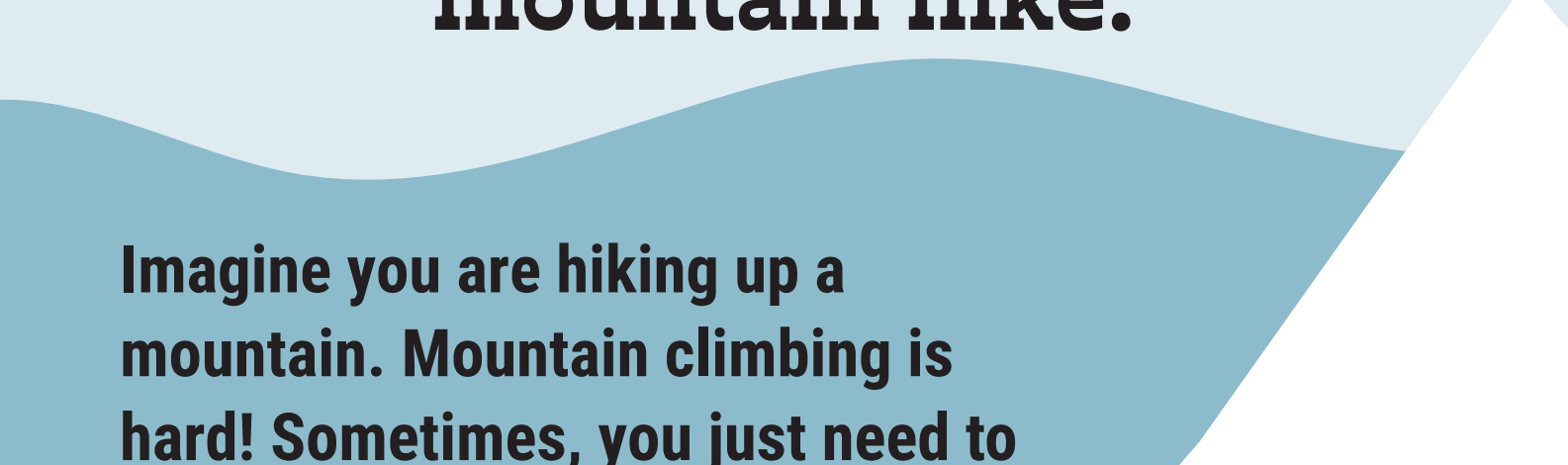
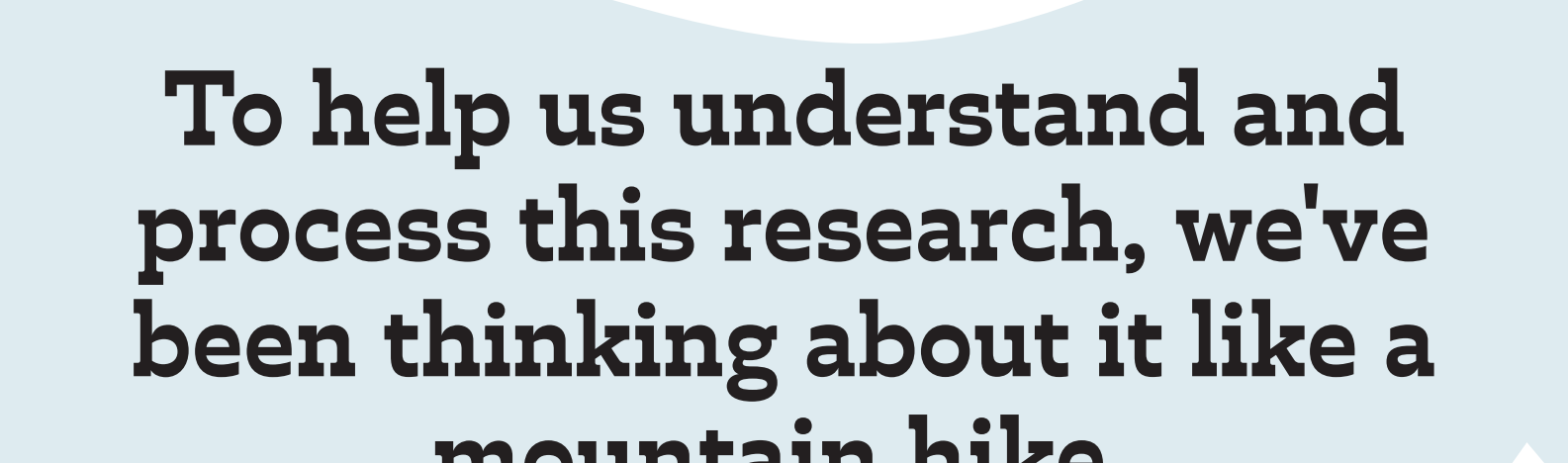
Because our sample sizes are so large (at least 50,000 people received these questions each year), the margin of error on these results is +/- 1% at 99% confidence.

What does that mean? It means that if we were to re-field the survey to another sample of museum-goers at the same time, 99% of the time the results would come in within one percentage point. For example, if 50% of people responded one way, then 99% of the time re-fielding would find 49% to 51% of people responding the same way (that is, +/-1% point from that original 50%).

Bottom line, we have a lot of confidence in each year's results, and the differences we are seeing over time are considered "statistically significant," thus illustrating a shift in attitudes over the course of a year.

We saw a similar shifting of attitudes when we asked a representative broader population sample of U.S. adults the same questions.

BROADER POPULATION



So, what's going on?

To be honest, we don't know for sure. We can't go to an individual person and ask why their attitudes are shifting, much less thousands of respondents.

But this is what we think is happening, based on the tens of thousands of open-ended responses we have collected over the past several years on this topic.

Human beings are emotional creatures. Individual attitudes towards inclusion are rooted in those emotions, including feelings of safety, curiosity, fear, anger, hope, and more.

How an individual feels on a given day can shift based on how they are responding to events in their own lives, their own learnings, and things happening in the community, the country, and the world. Those tiny shifts move people forward and back, and as things happen more broadly, those shifts become more measurable in the population. This research over time helps us observe the overall journey our society is taking, through the lens of their museum experiences and expectations.

To help us understand and process this research, we've been thinking about it like a mountain hike.

Imagine you are hiking up a mountain. Mountain climbing is hard! Sometimes, you just need to stop and take a break. And sometimes, you climb to the top of the ridge, but then the path takes you down a bit before you climb the next, even higher, ridge.

Those shifts we see may be the breaks and the descents into valleys before climbing that next, higher ridge.

Which means we need to take a moment ourselves, take a deep breath, and look at the overall trend of these attitudes over time. Maybe 2022 was a "ridge" year, and 2023 took us back into a "valley." But 2023 was still better than 2021.

That makes continuing to track the trendline going forward even more important.

The 2024 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers and Broader Population Sampling fields these questions yet again, so we can continue to track this journey we are all taking together.

We're hoping that 2024 shows growth in inclusive attitudes ... a new, higher, ridge attained as we strive towards that mountain peak of widespread inclusive attitudes.

In the meantime, we encourage you to check out some of our resources for sharing inclusive content with the public, including:

[Audiences and Inclusion: A Primer for Cultivating More Inclusive Attitudes Among the Public](#) and our Data Story "[Beware! The False Consensus Effect.](#)"

Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. Sources include:
* 2023 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, N = 107,187, 228 museums participating
* 2023 Broader Population Sampling, n = 2,002
* 2017 - 2022 Annual Surveys of Museum-Goers

* Data Stories share research about both frequent museum-goers (typically visit multiple museums each year) and the broader population (including casual and non-visitors to museums). See the Purpose and Methodology (Update) Data Story from September 12, 2023 for more information on methodology.

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

American Alliance of Museums

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