

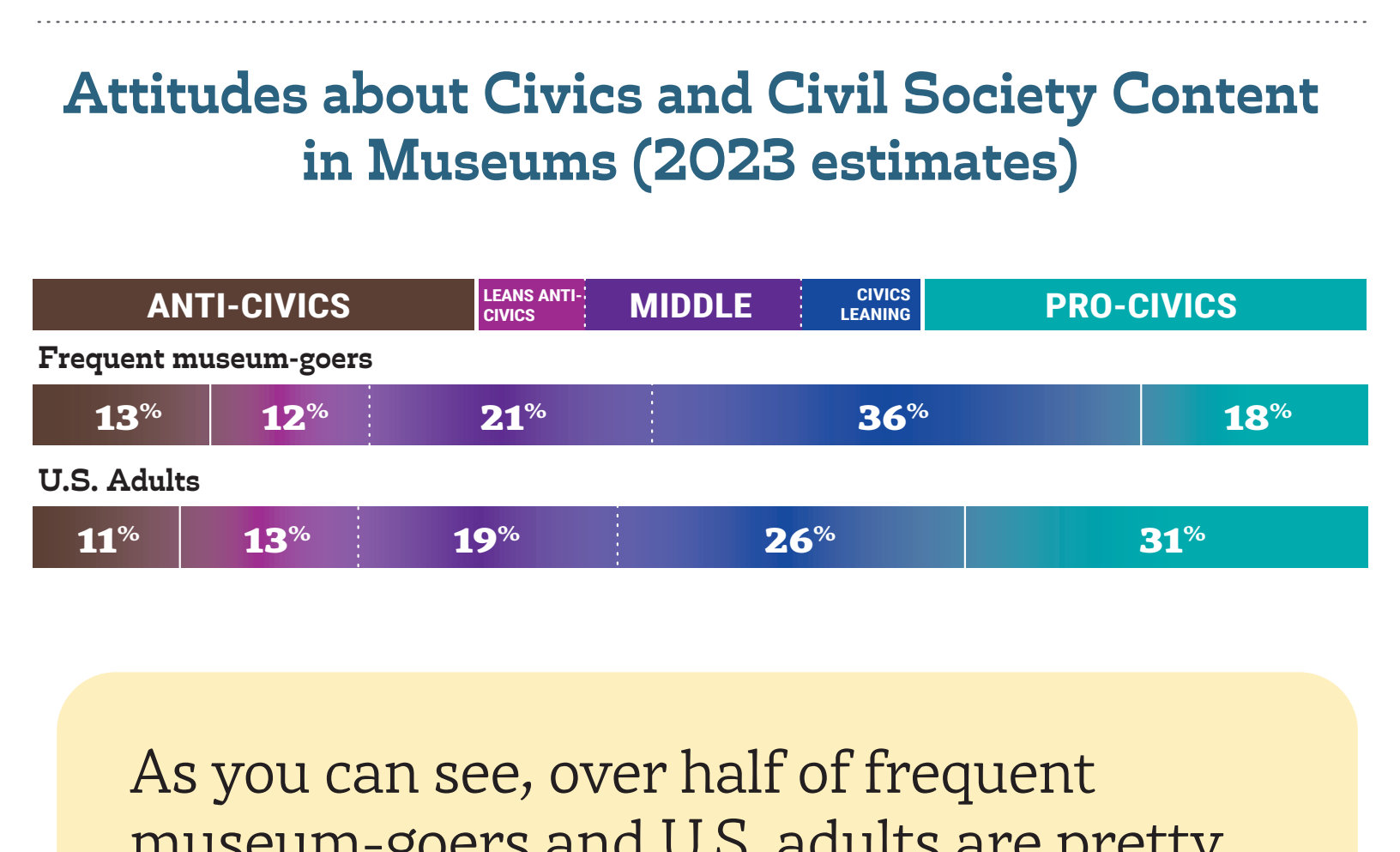
CIVICS, CIVIL SOCIETY, AND MUSEUMS, PART 2: THE SPECTRUM OF ATTITUDES

A 2023 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS DATA STORY



"Museums are spaces where people come to experience their world, in a participatory way. It is a place for escape, but the escape is centered on our planet, our histories, our cultures, and our universe — what museums showcase is truth and reality. Because of this role museums play, I believe there is a clear connection with museums and civic engagement, and if the experience of this cultural moment is rooted in division, and museums have a mission to be inclusive and unifying, then civically there is a relevant role museums can play in finding spaces and themes that draw us towards each other authentically, through the lens of community through culture. Culture impacts politics, and museums are high up in the cultural hegemony. Museums must continue to evolve their roles as safe places for vulnerable voices to be heard in a world where disquieting, divisive, and judgmental noise is drowning out basic human truths."

Sometimes, doing quantitative research, it's easy to start drowning in numbers. This is especially true when we ask a number of questions on a specific topic. Following the threads of who said what becomes complicated.



When this happens, we build tools to help us sort through the results more effectively.

This was true when we started examining results to our questions about civics and civil society in the 2023 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers and Broader Population Sampling.

The tool we developed used response patterns to automatically sort respondents into five categories, ranging from those who were consistently interested in civics and civil society content in museums to those who just don't think museums should even come close to the topic!

Here's what we found:

Attitudes about Civics and Civil Society Content in Museums (2023 estimates)

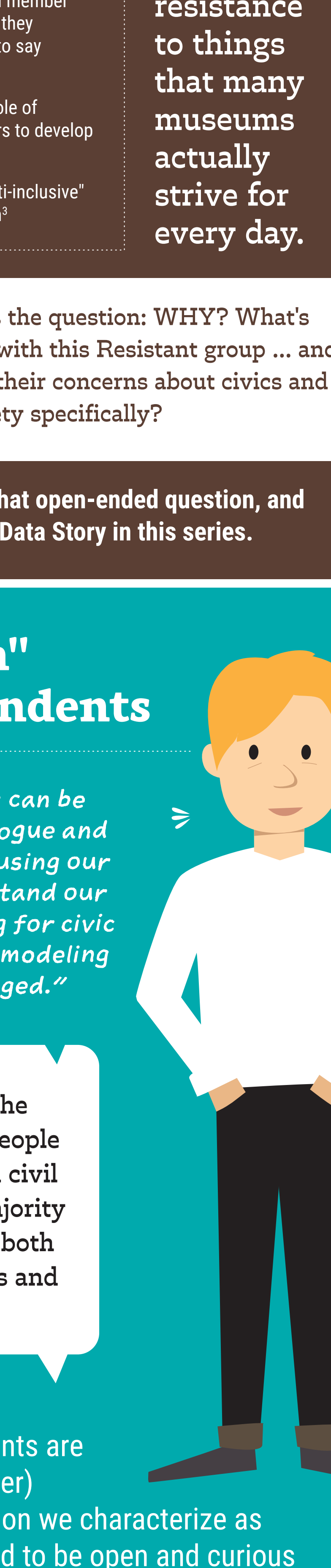
	ANTI-CIVICS	LEANS ANTI-CIVICS	MIDDLE	CIVICS LEARNING	PRO-CIVICS
Frequent museum-goers	13%	12%	21%	36%	18%
U.S. Adults	11%	13%	19%	26%	31%

As you can see, over half of frequent museum-goers and U.S. adults are pretty on-board with this content (in fact, the broader population is even more enthusiastic about it than museum-goers). That's great! And only about a quarter are on the more negative side of the spectrum.

But, no surprise, when we ran filters on all five of these segments of people, well, there were some significant differences that we uncovered. Let's take a look at how these play out.

"Resistant" respondents

"I do not feel the museum should be involved in the rebuilding of a civil society or become involved in ethical, cultural, political, scientific, or religious expressions. I feel the role of a museum is to solely report/display those facts without having a focused agenda."



The vast majority of the people we are characterizing as "anti-civics content" are also in that segment of the population we call "Resistant." These are people who tend to resist certain types of content that museums often share, especially content that is inclusive, supports climate action and science, encourages a connection to humanity, and most notably for this Data Story, promotes civil society and civics. Overall about one in five U.S. adults (and one in five frequent museum-goers) fall in this "Resistant" group. They are a small, but vocal, minority.

Overall, the people who are more resistant to civics and civil society content are **visiting museums less frequently** than those who are more enthusiastic. But there are other, less enthusiastic, traits they shared, including:

- Less likely to visit museums for learning, curiosity, or respite
- Less likely to say museums promote knowledge, inclusion, or empathy
- Indicated far fewer impacts that museums have had on their lives
- Chose far fewer options on the "what should people do to be a good member of society" question ... though they were significantly more likely to say "show patriotism"²
- Over half don't think it is the role of museums to encourage visitors to develop their connection to humanity
- Over two-thirds fall on the "anti-inclusive" side of the inclusion spectrum³

As you can see ... there is a lot of resistance to things that many museums actually strive for every day.

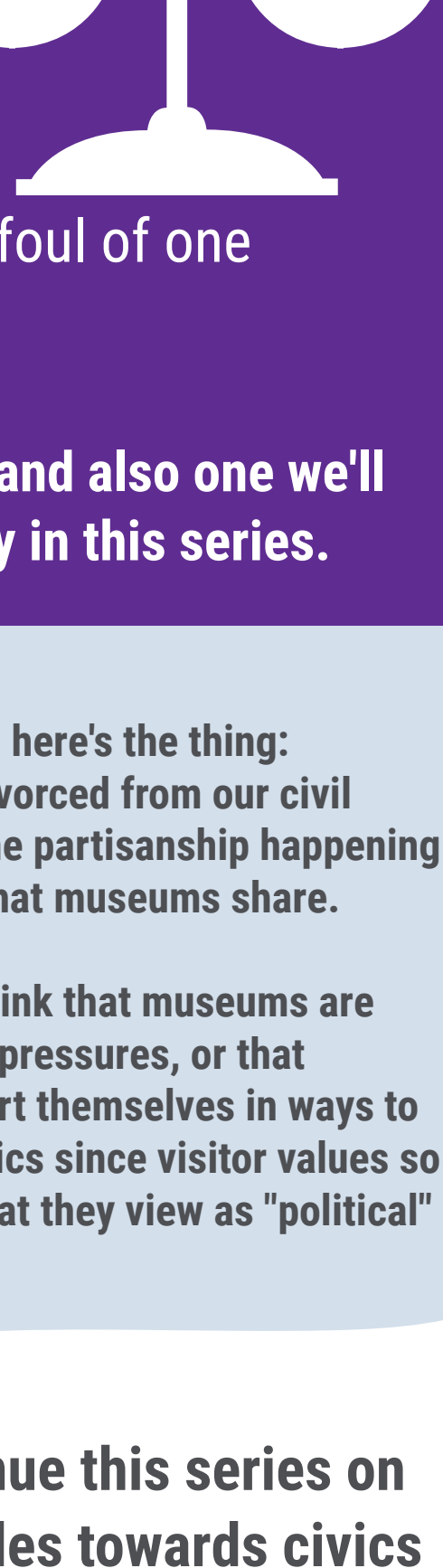
This begs the question: WHY? What's going on with this Resistant group ... and what are their concerns about civics and civil society specifically?

We did follow-up with just that open-ended question, and we'll share more in another Data Story in this series.

"Open" respondents

"Primarily, museums can be spaces that invite dialogue and perspective-building, using our past to help us understand our present and advocating for civic engagement as well as modeling being civically engaged."

At the other end of the spectrum we find the people who support civics and civil society content—the majority of respondents among both frequent museum-goers and U.S. adults!



Most of these respondents are falling in the (much larger) segment of the population we characterize as "Open." That is, they tend to be open and curious about many topics, including climate action and science, cultivating a connection to humanity, inclusive content, and yes, civil society, civics, and also the health of our democracy. We estimate about half of U.S. adults (and frequent museum-goers) fall in this more "Open" group.

These respondents visit museums more frequently than other respondents, but they are also more enthusiastic about other things, including:

- Giving more reasons for visiting museums, including learning, curiosity, and respite
- More likely to say museums promote knowledge, inclusion, and empathy
- Indicate far more impacts that museums have had on their lives
- Are much more enthusiastic about a wider variety of ways people can be good members of society
- Virtually all (97%) think museums should encourage visitors to develop their connection to humanity
- Nearly three-quarters fall on the "inclusive" side of the inclusion spectrum

Do these respondents look almost like the opposite of their anti-civics content counterparts?

Well, you wouldn't be wrong to think that. Overall, they think museums are the right places to learn about civics, and this faith is based in their trust of museums. We'll explore what that means, as well as some concerns they still have, in another Data Story in this series.

And the folks in the middle ...

"Whether or not the museum's position is something I agree with, I don't think that they should necessarily encourage the promotion of their position in this way. Because it would discourage people with viewpoints opposite of the museum's from going to the museum and perhaps learning about 'the other side.'"

What about those people in the middle? About 20% responded in more ambivalent ways. Not enthusiastic about this content, but not necessarily against it either.

And on most of the other things we assessed they ... fell in the middle. They don't tend to tip strongly one way or the other on inclusion, climate action, or anything else.

But what they do overwhelmingly feel strongly about is that museums should be non-partisan. They seem to be more sensitive to the hyper-polarization of so many things in our society, and worry more about museums falling afoul of one political side or the other.

It's a legitimate concern in many ways, and also one we'll unpack in, you got it, another Data Story in this series.

Ultimately, however, here's the thing: Museums are not divorced from our civil society, including the partisanship happening on so many topics that museums share.

It is unrealistic to think that museums are immune from these pressures, or that museums can contort themselves in ways to avoid polarizing topics since visitor values so deeply influence what they view as "political" or not.

As we continue this series on visitor attitudes towards civics and civil society content, our aim is to help you navigate this complicated and ever-changing landscape, so that your museum can be as effective and impactful as possible. More to come!

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 = 2,012; 2017 - 2022 Annual Surveys of Museum-Goers

See our Data Story "Civics, Civil Society, and Museums, Part 1: Introduction" for more information about the questions we used to develop the spectrum; https://www.wilkeningconsulting.com/uploads/8/6/3/2/86329422/2023_asmg_-_museums_and_civics_1_-_intro.pdf
The complete text of the "Civics Society" question can be found in the Data Story from footnote #1
See our Data Story "The Spectrum of Inclusive Attitudes: Methodology" for more information on these attitudes; https://www.wilkeningconsulting.com/uploads/8/6/3/2/86329422/data_story_-_inclusion_spectrum_methodology.pdf

*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](https://www.wilkeningconsulting.com/data-stories).