

MUSEUMS AND CENSORSHIP:

A 2026 ANNUAL SURVEY OF MUSEUM-GOERS DATA STORY

"It is worrisome when museums are told to censor or hide history. It's important to present history in a way that tells the historical truth - not the way the left or right wish it went. To rewrite it in a way to appease our sensitivities is a disservice to us and future generations."



THE CURATORIAL INDEPENDENCE OF MUSEUMS has been increasingly in the news. While donor influence over museum content has periodically drawn scrutiny, national political influence has resurfaced and become far more prominent in recent years.



A demographically-representative sample of over 2,000 U.S. adults, however, makes an emphatic point:

most Americans do not want museum content to be censored. Period.

Let's look at the full question and results.

Some museums have been pressured to remove content that addresses things like:



GENDER, RACE, AND ETHNICITY



SCIENTIFIC TOPICS LIKE CLIMATE CHANGE



HISTORICAL TOPICS LIKE SLAVERY



AND SIMILAR TOPICS



How do you think museums should respond if pressured to remove this type of content?

(Choose one.)



I strongly disagree with these pressures and would NOT want museums to remove this content



I somewhat disagree with these pressures and generally would not want museums to remove this content



Neutral/I don't feel strongly either way



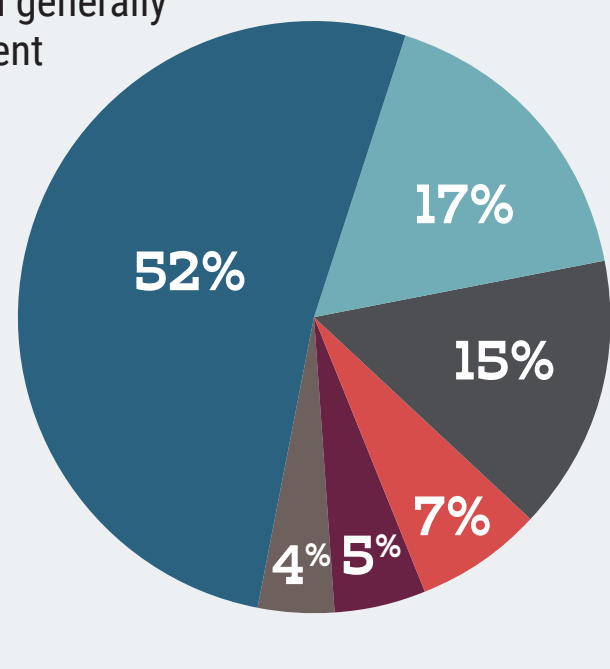
I somewhat support these efforts to remove this type of content



I strongly support these efforts and want museums to remove this type of content



I don't know



Crucially, these results are bipartisan. Significant majorities of conservatives, moderates, and liberals agree that museums should maintain curatorial independence.

Overall, 69% percent of U.S. adults do not want museum content removed due to external pressures, and only 12% support these efforts.

Disagree/don't remove Neutral Support removal I don't know

Conservatives

63%

16%

17%

3%

Moderates

66%

19%

11%

4%

Liberals

83%

7%

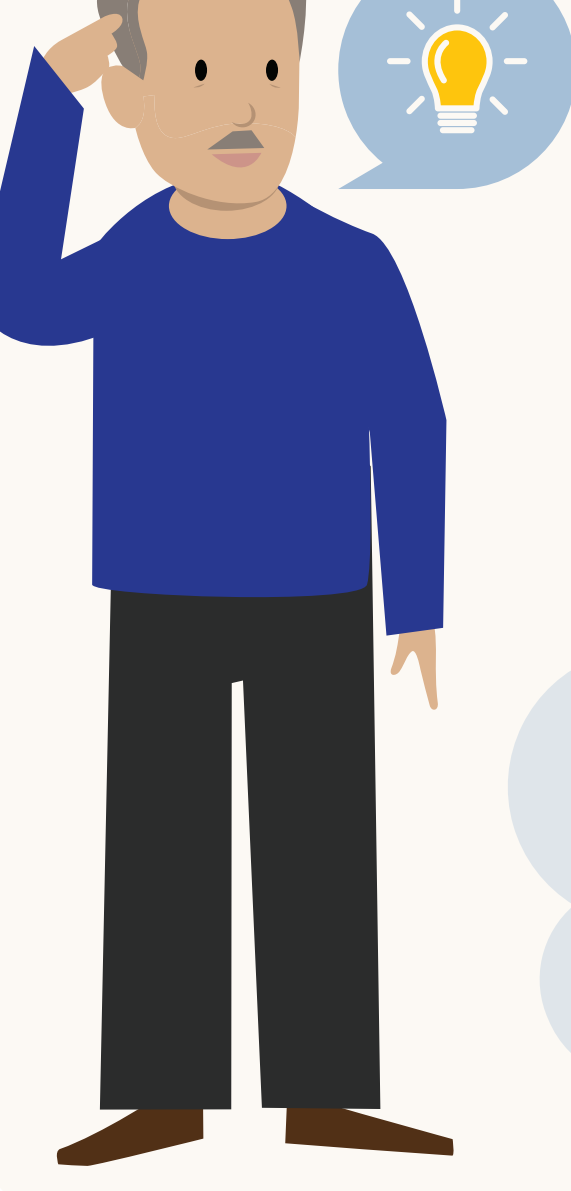
8%

2%

Political pressure on museum content is no longer only a concern within the field. Museum-goers are increasingly aware of it as part of the broader public conversation.



In the Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, respondents repeatedly shared their thoughts on this topic, *even when we asked a completely different question*. Their concerns are top-of-mind and expressed in clearly articulated yet impassioned terms, imploring museums to stand up for the truth, evidence, and facts.



Respondents told us they are watching closely as museums respond to these pressures, and that those responses will shape museums' current and future credibility.



"I am concerned about censorship and self-censorship. Museums are part of the civic fabric of our society and they continue to enjoy an incredible (astounding!) amount of trust. We need to protect this by protecting their independence and ability to share content that is true and sometimes challenging. In a country where people trust media, government, and scientists less than ever, museums matter. Their responsibility to accuracy and high quality research and diverse expression is significant."



Over the coming months we expect there will be more external pressures to influence and/or remove content in museums. We'll continue to monitor public opinion on this and related topics (such as trust) as the United States heads into mid-term elections and events continue to unfold.

Annual Survey of Museum-Goers Data Stories are created by Wilkening Consulting on behalf of the American Alliance of Museums. Sources include:
• 2026 Annual Survey of Museum-Goers, n = 75,742; 186 museums participating
• 2026 Broader Population Sampling, n = 2,045
• 2017 - 2025 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, sporadic, and non-visitors to museums).

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



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American
Alliance of
Museums



audience research | knowledge curation

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