



Arts Data Profile #10: Results from the Annual Arts Basic Survey (2013-2015)

Research Brief #1: *Visual and Performing Arts Attendance; Movie-Going; Literary Reading; and Learning through Arts Classes or Lessons*

The Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA), a comprehensive and detailed survey that has been conducted periodically since 1982, has shown significant declines in attendance at performing arts events and at art museums/galleries over long timeframes, particularly for the decade spanning 2002-2012.

The Annual Arts Basic Survey (AABS), though less detailed in subject matter than the SPPA, is a new survey that reveals, for the first time, more incremental changes in U.S. arts participation patterns. Despite long-term declines evident in the SPPA, the AABS findings suggest that recent levels of attendance are holding steady.

In 2015, nearly 160 million people, or 66 percent of U.S. adults, attended at least one visual or performing arts event or went to see a movie. That rate was virtually the same as the share of adults who did these activities in 2013, the first wave of the AABS to capture arts-attendance rates.

(For an explanation of the corresponding AABS and SPPA waves used to estimate trends in arts participation, please see *Comparing the Annual Arts Basic Survey with the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts*.)

Attendance at Visual and Performing Arts Events

Trend analysis of the SPPA indicates declining attendance at performing arts events over a decade-long period. Between 2002 and 2012, the share of U.S. adults attending a jazz, classical music, opera, theater (musical or non-musical plays), or ballet or “other dance” performance dropped by an estimated 4.8 percentage points.

However, the AABS shows that between 2013 and 2015, U.S. performing arts attendance was stable.

In 2015, **nearly 32 percent of U.S. adults (76 million people) attended a live music, theater, or dance performance.** This rate is similar to the share of adults who attended in 2013, the first year in which the AABS was conducted.¹

The survey also shows that approximately **5 percent of adults went to a live book-reading or a poetry or storytelling event in 2013 and 2015.** This rate represents a small uptick in the share of adults who attended in 2012—4.1 percent.²

Additionally, **19 percent of adults (45 million) attended an art exhibit featuring paintings, sculpture, pottery, graphic design, or photography** in 2015. The attendance rate for these events were virtually unchanged from the 2013 figure, as well as the share who attended art exhibits in 2012.³

Trends in movie-going—the most popular activity tracked by the AABS—are also stable. In 2015, **141 million U.S. adults went to see movies or films. That figure represented 58 percent of the adult population** in 2015; the movie-going rate was similar in 2013 (57.2 percent), and in 2012 (59.4 percent).⁴

The AABS also captures trends in adults' visits to buildings, neighborhoods, parks, or monuments for historic or design value. The AABS suggests a modest increase in the percentage of U.S. adults engaging in this activity.

In 2015, for example, **27 percent of U.S. adults visited sites for their historic or design value.** That rate represented a small increase from the 2013 rate (26 percent), and it was up from the 24 percent in 2012 (using the 2012 SPPA).⁵

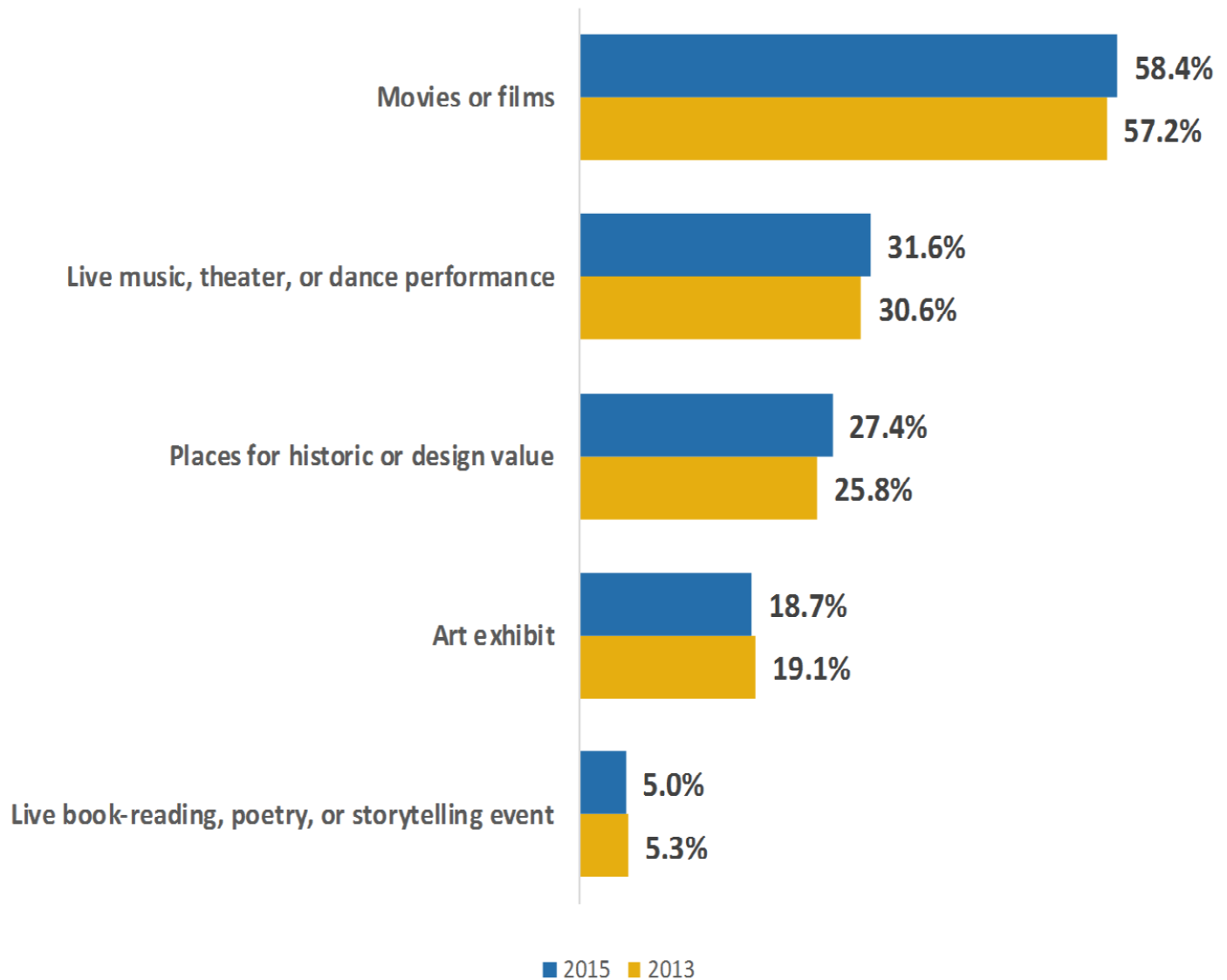
Art Classes Taken in the Last Year

Beyond arts attendance, both the SPPA and the AABS track the percentage of adults who take arts classes or lessons of any type. The 2015 AABS shows that **nearly 21 million U.S. adults took one or more arts classes in the previous year. As a share of the population, the numbers amount to 8.5 percent**—a rate virtually unchanged from the share who took any type of art class or lesson in 2013.⁶

Moreover, in 2015, just under 3 percent of adults took visual arts classes (e.g., classes in drawing, painting, pottery, or design) in the previous year; 2.4 percent took classes in music or music appreciation. Those participation rates were similar to the share of adults who took visual arts or music classes in 2013.

Finally, the percentage of adults who take creative writing or photography or film classes has not changed—comprising approximately 2.1 percent and 1.3 percent, respectively, in 2013 and 2015.

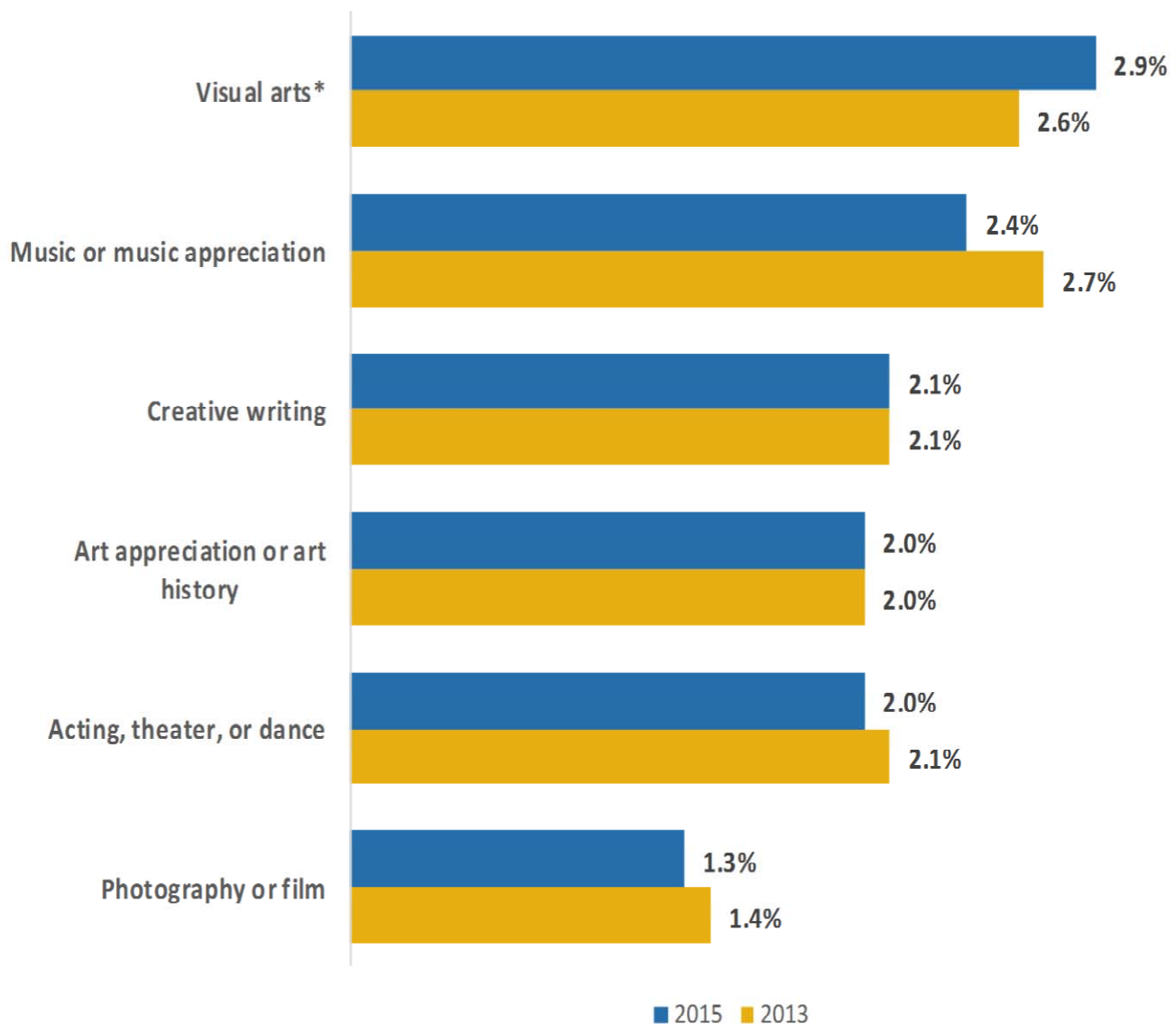
Percent of U.S. Adults Who Attend or Visit Various Arts Events: 2013-2015



Note: None of the differences in attendance reported for 2013 and 2015 are statistically significant at 95 percent confidence.

Data source: Annual Arts Basic Survey (AABS), National Endowment for the Arts

Percent of U.S. Adults Who Took Art Classes in the Past Year: 2013-2015



*Includes classes in drawing, painting, pottery, and design.

Note: None of the differences reported in 2013 and 2015 are statistically significant at 95 percent confidence.

Data source: Annual Arts Basic Survey (AABS), National Endowment for the Arts

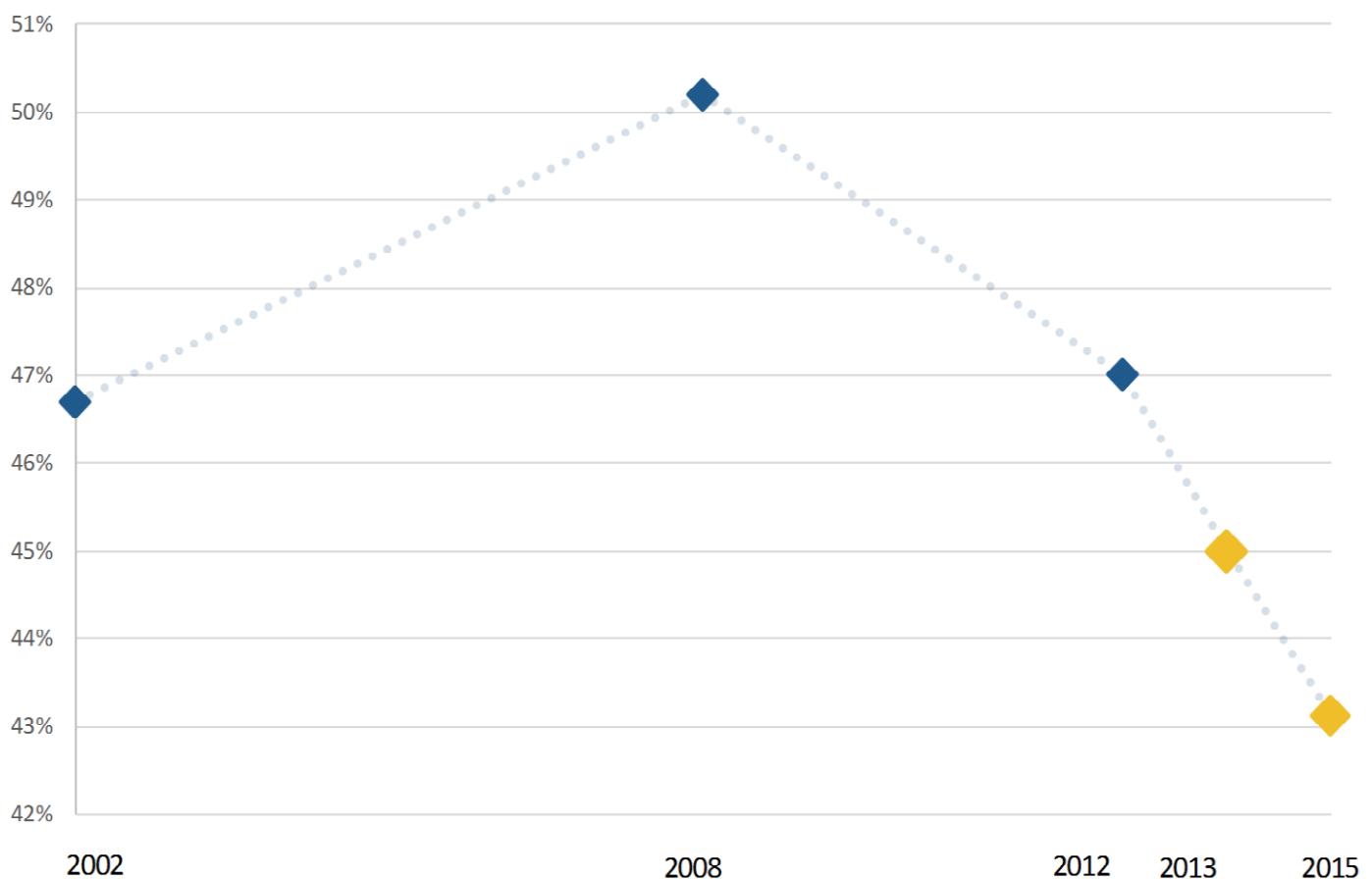
Literary Reading

The 2012 SPPA reported that 47 percent of U.S. adults read literature (poetry, plays, short stories, or novels). That rate was comparable to the literary-reading rate obtained from the 2002 SPPA, but it was down from the 54 percent estimated from the 2008 SPPA.

Indeed, the share of U.S. adults reading literature has generally declined since the first SPPA was fielded in 1982. In that year, nearly 57 percent of Americans read poetry, plays, short stories, or novels.⁷

The AABS continues to show a drop in the share of adults reading literature. **From 47 percent in 2012, literary-reading rates fell to 45 percent in 2013, and to 43.1 percent in 2015.** Further research is needed to identify factors potentially causing the decline.

Percent of U.S. Adults Who Read Literature: 2002-2014



Data sources: Survey of Public Participation in the Arts and Annual Arts Basic Survey, National Endowment for the Arts

Endnotes

¹As a supplement to the Current Population Survey, the AABS is not primarily designed to analyze cumulative changes in the U.S. population. That information is available from the U.S. Census Bureau's [Population Division](#). The Bureau's data tables, available on [AmericanFactFinder](#), show population changes by component, as well as by geographic areas.

²Identical wording between the 2012 SPPA (Module A) and the AABS concerning attendance at a live book reading or a storytelling or poetry event facilitates trend analysis between the two surveys.

³Core 2 of the 2012 SPPA contained wording identical to that of the AABS concerning attendance at art exhibits. This identical wording enables valid trend analysis between the SPPA and the AABS.

⁴Wording between the SPPA (Module A) and the AABS concerning movie-going was also identical. Differences in movie-going rates based on the 2012 SPPA and the 2013 and 2015 waves of the AABS are not statistically significant.

⁵Wording about visits to sites for their historic or design value was similar, though not identical, in the AABS and the 2012 SPPA.

⁶Wording of questions concerning arts lessons or classes during the past 12 months differed considerably between the 2012 SPPA and the AABS. These differences bar valid trend analysis using the two surveys. However, comparisons between the 2002 and 2012 SPPAs suggest an increase in the share of U.S. adults who took arts lessons or classes. For more information, see [A Decade of Arts Engagement: Findings from the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts, 2002-2012](#), Chapter 4, National Endowment for the Arts.

⁷For more information, see [Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America](#), National Endowment for the Arts.