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Museum Attendance, Population Shifts, and Changing Tastes

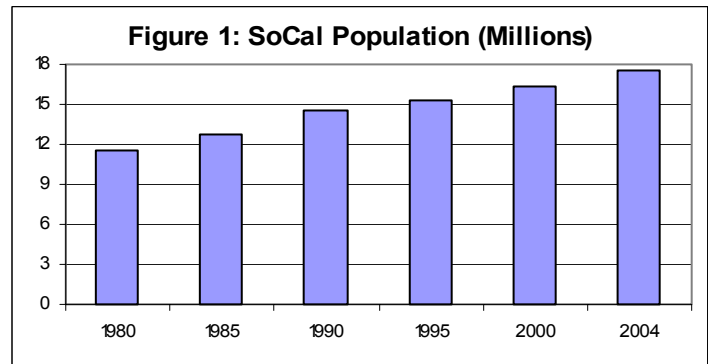
INTRODUCTION

Public opinion surveys can play an important role in decision making as they gather information that complements data from standard sources such as the Decennial Census and Current Population Survey. This Fact Sheet presents findings from a recently completed survey of Southern California residents (those living in the counties of Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura). Details of the survey can be found in the appendix. The information from the survey can help better inform elected officials about the public's concerns and priorities, and can also help the residents of this region to gain insight into who they are as a community. Here we look at the extent to which Southern California residents attend art and cultural museums. The findings are consistent with other studies, which have found differences in museum attendance based on ethnic and socioeconomic characteristics. We also found similarities in the general rate of museum attendance in the region over the past twenty years, as well as some changes in attendance rates among groups over the past two decades.

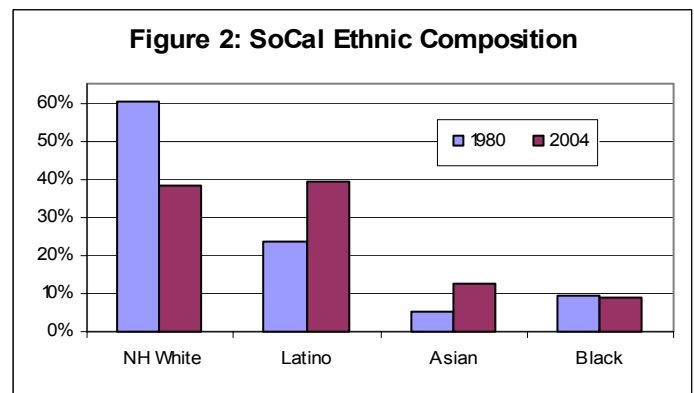
BACKGROUND

Arts and cultural institutions have the potential to enrich the lives of the residents of Southern California, providing them access to a diversity of art exhibitions, cultural activities, and educational programs. This region is particularly blessed with many world-class art and science museums, as well as a large collection of ethnic-based institutions. For a region known for its automobile culture, there are also museums specializing in transportation and motorized vehicles. Moreover, there are scores of smaller community-based operations. These operations are an important resource for children and adults, but many museums are struggling to fulfill their mission because of budget constraints. Like their counterparts throughout the nation, museums in Southern California are concerned with declining support and membership and have worked on strategies to increase attendance. However, it is not clear that attendance is actually declining. For one thing, the total population in this re-

gion has continued to increase (see Figure 1). Between 1980 and 2004, the number of residents climbed from 11.5 million to 17.6 million. There is certainly a much larger potential base of patrons, and this may well explain the increase in the number of museums.

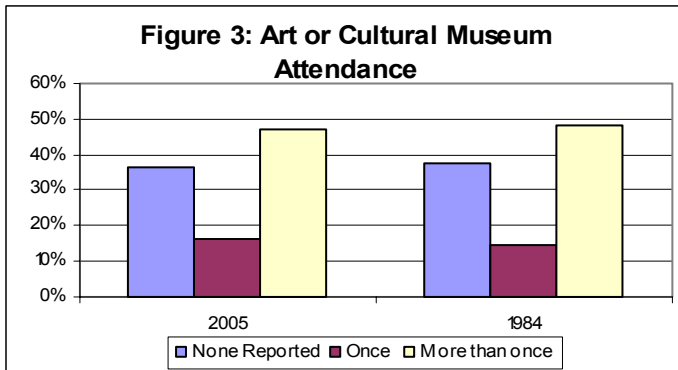


What is not known is whether the attendance rate has changed, that is, the proportion of the population that goes to arts and cultural museums, and how frequently they go. One of the factors that may affect the attendance rate is the dramatic shift in the composition of the population by ethnicity (see Figure 2). The dramatic increase in the relative numbers of Asians and Latinos means changes in cultural taste, which some major museums may not be able to respond to very quickly or extensively. This hypothesis is consistent with the findings from one recent report that documented low attendance by residences of minority neighborhoods. However, much is still unknown. Developing appropriate policies and programs requires a better understanding about whether and how attendance patterns have changed over the last two decades. This Fact Sheet provides some insights.



OVERVIEW OF ART AND CULTURAL MUSEUM ATTENDANCE IN SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

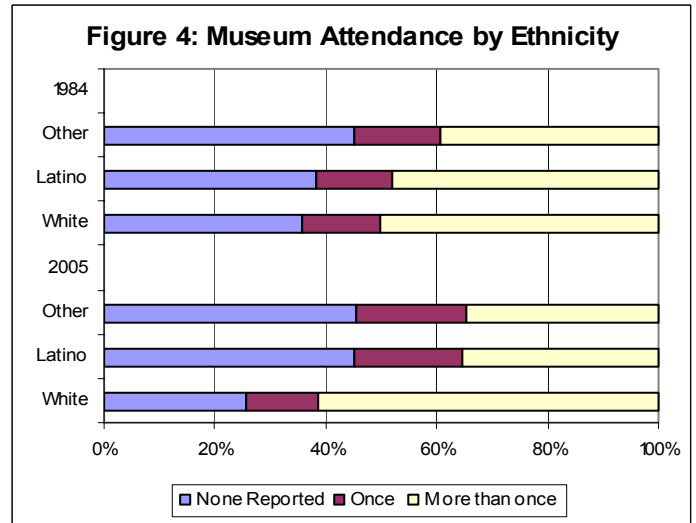
In 2005, 47 percent of Southern California residents reported attending an arts or cultural museum more than once in the past twelve months. The rate of museum attendance is surprisingly similar to the rates of museum attendance in this region twenty years ago (see Figure 3). Results from the 1984 Southern California Social Survey (SCSS) give us a rough sense of what museum attendance looked like a generation ago. The SCSS asked two separate questions on museum attendance¹ that we combined to compare overall rates of museum attendance and to make comparisons among groups over time (see the Appendix for more detail on the 1984 survey). According to the tabulations for 1984, 48 percent attended more than once during the past 12 months.



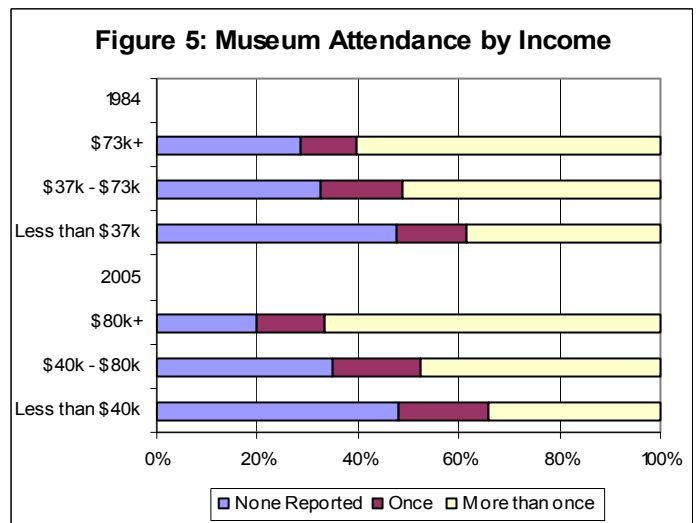
VARIATIONS IN MUSEUM ATTENDANCE

Attendance at museums and cultural institutions varies by demographics. Another Lewis Center publication has looked in detail at the percentage of members, visitors, and school tours to museums by neighborhood type and found that residents from high poverty neighborhoods and minority neighborhoods are much less likely to attend museums (Houston et al., 2004). Other research has also found significant differences in museum attendance by demographic groups². Our findings are consistent with these studies. While almost two-thirds of whites reported attending an arts or cultural museum more than once in the past twelve months, only a little over a third of Latinos and other³ ethnic groups did the same (see Figure 4). Income also was related to museum attendance. Those making less than \$40,000 per year were two and half times more likely to report not having attended a museum in the past twelve months

than those making \$80,000 per year or more. Similarly, those in the high-income group were almost twice as likely to have attended a museum more than once in the past year than those in the low-income group (see Figure 5).



Predictably, higher education leads to higher museum attendance. Those with a bachelor's degree or higher have the highest levels of museum attendance, as 69 percent reported attending a museum two or more times in the past year. Only 17 percent had not attended at all. Conversely, among those with only a high school diploma or less, 63 percent had not attended a museum at all, while only 21 percent attended two or more times. Finally, looking at museum attendance by age we find that young people are the least likely to attend museums. Among those 18-35, only 40 percent had attended more than once in the past year, compared to over 50 percent for older groups. Young people were also most likely to not attend a museum at all. Interestingly, this was not always the case, as we discuss below, in a comparison to attendance among age groups in 1984.



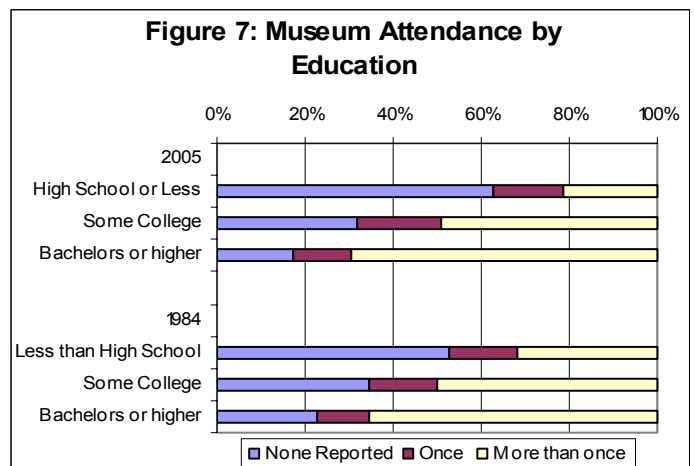
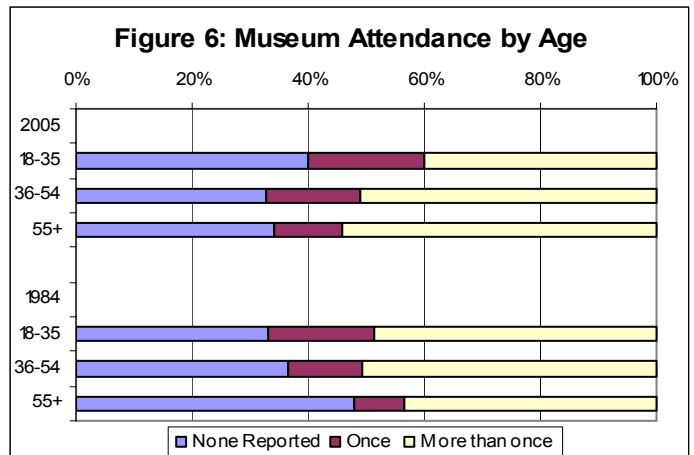
VARIATIONS IN MUSEUM ATTENDANCE BY GROUPS OVER TIME

Museum attendance by whites has actually increased over the past twenty years, with the percentage not having attended a museum in the past twelve months dropping from 36 percent in 1984 to 25 percent in 2005 (see Figure 4). The percent of whites attending more than once also rose from 50 percent in 1984 to 63 percent today. For Latinos, however, rates of museum attendance have dropped over time. In 1984 the percentage of whites that had not attended a museum in the past year was similar to that for Latinos – 36 percent and 38 percent, respectively. By 2005 that percentage had increased to 45 percent for Latinos, while dropping for whites. Similarly, the percentage of Latinos attending a museum more than once in the past year was close to that of whites in 1984 (48 percent), but dropped to 36 percent by 2005. For those in the “Other” ethnic category, rates of museum attendance have not changed much over the last two decades. The most likely explanation for the change in patterns of museum attendance by Latinos over the past twenty years is the considerable increase in the number of immigrants in the region, who may not attend museums for cultural or financial reasons. They may also face a significant language barrier.

Our comparisons of museum attendance by income in 1984 and 2005 are only roughly similar. We adjusted the income levels for inflation and then developed income level groupings that were close, but not exactly the same, as our current income level groups. We found that for the most part museum attendance by income groups has been fairly similar over the past twenty years. The most significant change is in the highest income category, where attendance has increased. The percentage of high income residents reporting that they attended a museum more than once over the past year increased from 60 percent to 67 percent, while the percent who had not attended in the past year dipped from 29 percent to 19 percent (see Figure 5).

Museum attendance by age has changed significantly over the past twenty years (see Figure 6). In 1984 middle aged and younger residents were most likely to attend a museum two or more times in the past year. Among those 55 and older almost half had not attended a museum at all. Today, only 34 percent of seniors had not attended a museum in the past twelve months, and 54 percent had attended twice or more – the highest level of attendance by age group. Perhaps today’s seniors retire earlier and/or are more affluent, leaving more time for artistic and cultural pursuits.

Although in 1984 those with a high school diploma or less were least likely to attend a museum, as they still are today, attendance levels were significantly higher than they are currently (see Figure 7). In 1984, 53 percent of those with low education had not attended a museum in the past twelve months. This number rose to 63 percent in 2005. Those attending two or more times in the past twelve months dropped by almost the same amount over the past twenty years, from 32 percent in 1984 to 21 percent today. Among those with some college or a bachelor’s or higher, we do not see the same degree of change over the past two decades, but overall museum attendance has increased within these groups.



¹ The question on the 2005 survey was, “How many times in the past twelve months have you visited an art or cultural museum?” The 1984 questions, which were combined for analysis, were as follows: “During the last twelve months how often have you attended any of the following types of events? Art museums or galleries exhibiting paintings, drawings and sculpture? History or science museums, including historic buildings or sites?”

² Walker, Scott-Melnyk, & Sherwood (2003); McCarthy, Ondactje, & Zakaras (2001); Bradshaw (1997); DiMaggio & Ostrower (1990); DiMaggio & Useem (1978).

³ “Other” includes Asians, African-Americans, and mixed ethnicities, as well as respondents who did not indicate their ethnicity on the survey.

APPENDIX

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY, 2005: The 2005 Southern California Public Opinion Survey is supported by the UCLA Ralph and Goldy Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies and is designed to gather the views and opinions of Southern California residents on critical public policy issues in this region. The survey was developed with input from campus and community organizations. UCLA units include the Center for Communications and Community, the Institute of Transportation Studies, the Center for Civil Society, and the Anderson School of Management. Three public agencies participated in the process: the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG), the Metropolitan Transportation Agency (MTA), and the Los Angeles Economic Development Corporation (LAEDC). Several UCLA faculty provided valuable input: Professors Vickie Mays, Michael Stoll, Brian Taylor, Amy Zegart, Frank Gilliam, Helmut Anheier, Chris Thornberg, and Ed Leamer.

The 2005 Survey gathered basic demographic data and covered seven topical areas: 1) major issues facing the region, 2) the efficacy of local government, 3) transportation, 4) the state of the regional economy, 5) housing, 6) civic engagement, and 7) major disasters. When possible, questions were worded to parallel existing questions from other surveys. Half of the respondents were asked questions related to museum attendance.

The Survey was conducted in English and Spanish during the months of January and February 2005 using random digit dialing, and the data were collected by The Social Science Research Center at California State University, Fullerton. There are 1544 completed surveys for the five counties: Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Bernardino, and Ventura. The sample is divided proportionally by county household population. The characteristics of the sample by age, ethnicity, income, and home ownership categories are consistent with the 2004 March Current Population Survey. There is a sampling error of +/- 2.6 percent at the 95 percent confidence level for the full sample, and +/- 3.7 percent for the subsample answering the questions related to museum attendance. (Sampling error may be larger for sub-populations).

1984 SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA SOCIAL SURVEY: The 1984 survey had several similar characteristics to the 2005 Southern California Survey conducted by UCLA's ISSR. Both surveys were household-based, and surveyed the same five-county Southern California region. The 1984 survey was a stratified random-digit-dialed telephone sample of 1176 residents, based on area codes and telephone prefixes. Latinos were over-sampled to ensure that the number would be large enough to analyze separately as a group.

The **Ralph and Goldy Lewis Center for Regional Policy Studies** was established to promote the study, understanding and solution of regional policy issues, with special reference to Southern California, including problems of the environment, urban design, housing, community and neighborhood dynamics, transportation and economic development. It is a focus of interdisciplinary activities, involving numerous faculty members and graduate students from many schools and departments at UCLA. It also fosters links with researchers at other California universities and research institutes on issues of relevance to regional policy. Founded in 1988 with a \$5 million endowment from Ralph and Goldy Lewis, it was directed until December 1994 by Professor Allen J. Scott, directed by Roger Waldinger from 1994 through 1998 and is currently directed by Paul Ong. The Center is supported by its endowment, other private donors and foundations and research grants from a variety of agencies. The director works with an executive committee, with guidance from an advisory board that includes members drawn from both the University and the wider community.

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