

Americans went to the library more often than they went to the movies, poll finds



By **Harmeet Kaur**, CNN

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(CNN) — Who says libraries are dying?

Last year, Americans visited the library more than they went to the movies, live sporting events, museums, concerts, amusement parks and casinos, among other activities, [according to a Gallup poll](#).

US adults reported taking 10.5 trips to the library on average in 2019, the poll found -- about twice as many times as they went to the movies. They went to live music or theatrical events and national or historic parks roughly four times last year, and visited museums and casinos about 2.5 times. Trips to amusement parks and zoos were the least common activities on the list.

The results are based on phone interviews conducted by Gallup between December 2 and 15 with a sample of 1,025 random adults, and are an update to a survey the analytics company conducted in 2001.

People were still visiting libraries more often than they were visiting movie theaters two decades ago, though trips to movie theaters have declined slightly, Gallup said.

"Despite the proliferation of digital-based activities over the past two decades -- including digital books, podcasts, streaming entertainment services and advanced gaming -- libraries have endured as a place Americans visit nearly monthly on average," according to the Gallup report.

"Whether because they offer services like free Wi-Fi, movie rentals, or activities for children, libraries are most utilized by young adults, women and residents of low-income households."

Adults aged 18 to 29 visited the library much more than older age groups, possibly reflecting the college students who go to the library to study, Gallup reported. Women reported visiting the library nearly twice as many times as men did, and adults from low-income households reported using the library more than adults from higher-income households.

Makes sense, given that going to the library is free and virtually everything else on the lists costs (sometimes a lot of) money.

Library use overall has fluctuated

The relationship between Americans and libraries is a little more complicated though.

Most Americans agree that libraries are important and add value to their communities.

Two-thirds of Americans say that closing their local public libraries would hurt their communities, according to a [2016 Pew Research Center](#) report, the most recent year the organization collected data on libraries.

"Many Americans are interested in libraries offering a range of services -- including those that help people improve their digital skills and learn how to determine what information is trustworthy," the Pew report reads.

"People think that libraries are a major contributor to their communities in providing a safe place to spend time, creating educational opportunities for people of all ages, and sparking creativity among young people."

But fewer Americans had actually visited the library in the prior year, Pew's research found. About 48% of adults reported visiting a library or bookmobile in the past 12 months before the survey was given, while 27% of people said they used library websites or apps.

The number of people who visited the library in 2016 was actually an increase from the previous year, when 44% of people said they visited a library or bookmobile, according to Pew. But a few years before in 2012, 53% of people said they visited a library or bookmobile.

CORRECTION: This headline has been corrected to specify that while the number of Americans who visited the library has gone down, those who went to the library visited more times than they went to the movies.

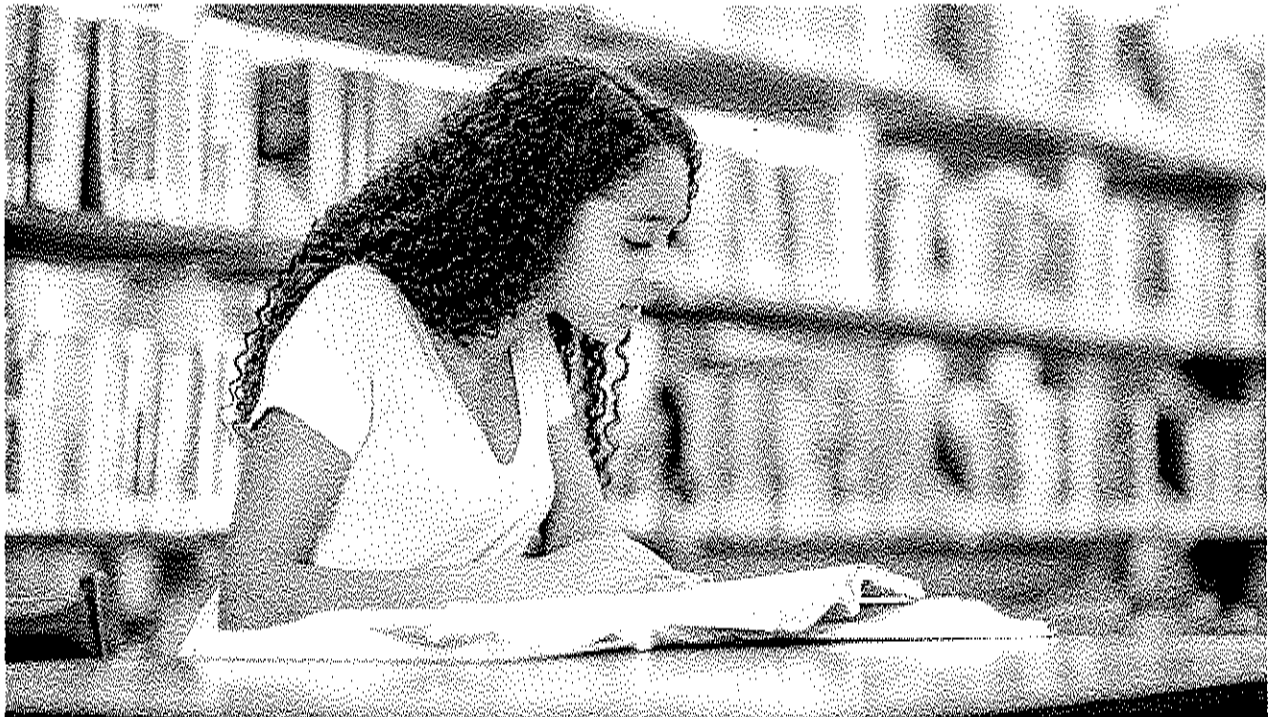


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JANUARY 24, 2020

In U.S., Library Visits Outpaced Trips to Movies in 2019

BY JUSTIN MCCARTHY



STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Library most frequented by young adults, women and low-income households
- Average U.S. adult attended five movies and five live sporting events
- Age and income among key factors in frequency of activities

WASHINGTON, D.C. -- Visiting the library remains the most common cultural activity Americans engage in, by far. The average 10.5 trips to the library U.S. adults report taking in 2019 exceeds their participation in eight other common leisure activities. Americans attend live music or theatrical events and visit national or historic parks roughly four times a year on average and visit museums and gambling casinos 2.5 times annually. Trips to amusement or theme parks (1.5) and zoos (.9) are the least common activities among this list.

Americans' Reports of Leisure and Activities

About how many times in the past year, if any, did you do each of the following? How about -- [RANDOM ORDER]?

	2019 Dec 2-15
	Average
Go to a library	10.5
Go to a movie at a movie theater	5.3
Attend a live sporting event	4.7
Attend a live music or theatrical event	3.8
Visit a national or historical park	3.7

Dec. 2-15, 2019

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2019 Dec 2-15

	Average
Visit a museum	2.5
Visit a gambling casino	2.5
Go to an amusement or theme park	1.5
Visit a zoo	0.9

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These data -- collected in a Dec. 2-15, 2019 Gallup poll -- are an update from a December 2001 survey. Though the overall rankings at the beginning of the millennium remain the same today, a small decrease has occurred in reported trips to the movie theater (down 1.3 average visits). Meanwhile, small increases have taken place in average reports of visiting a museum (up 0.7 average visits), attending a live music or theatrical event (up 1.1 average visits) and visits to a national or historical park (up 1.3 average visits).

Women Visit Libraries Nearly Twice as Frequently as Men

Men and woman report doing most activities at about the same rate, but there are a few key differences:

- Women report visiting the library nearly twice as frequently as men do, 13.4 to 7.5 visits.
- Men are more likely than women to visit casinos, attend sporting events and visit national or historical parks.

Reports of Leisure and Activities, by Gender

	Men	Women	Difference
	Average	Average	(Men minus women)
Go to a library	7.5	13.4	-5.9
Go to a movie at a movie theater	5.1	5.6	-0.5
Attend a live music or theatrical event	3.7	3.8	-0.1
Visit a zoo	0.9	0.8	+0.1
Visit a museum	2.7	2.3	+0.4
Go to an amusement or theme park	1.8	1.3	+0.5
Visit a gambling casino	3.4	1.7	+1.7
Attend a live sporting event	5.7	3.7	+2.0
Visit a national or historical park	4.9	2.4	+2.5

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The 30-49 Age Group Most Active Across Most Activities

Across nearly all measures, the highest average activity rates are among the 30 to 49 age group, while the lowest are among those 65 and older.

The 30 to 49 age group's higher activity may reflect their relative youth combined with mid-life financial stability. Middle-aged adults' activity is particularly above-par in terms of attending live sporting events. Their average attendance of 7.4 events during the year is more than twice that of younger adults and exceeds older adults by more than three visits.

The two exceptions to the pattern of middle-aged adults being the most active are visits to libraries and casinos. U.S. adults aged 18 to 29 visit the library much more than all older age groups -- possibly reflecting college-going adults, who visit the library for studies. This youngest age group also visits casinos the most.

Reports of Leisure and Activities, by Age Group

	18-29	30-49	50-64	65+
	Average	Average	Average	Average
Go to a library	15.5	12.3	6.8	8.2
Go to a movie at a movie theater	6.6	6.8	4.1	3.6
Attend a live sporting event	2.8	7.4	3.9	3.7
Attend a live music or theatrical event	3.1	4.5	3.8	2.7
Visit a national or historical park	4.2	5.9	2.3	1.6
Visit a museum	2.9	2.9	2.0	1.8
Visit a gambling casino	4.4	2.9	1.8	1.4
Go to an amusement or theme park	1.8	2.6	1.0	0.5
Visit a zoo	0.7	1.5	0.6	0.4

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High-Income Households Generally Do More Activities

In general, Americans in high-income households report doing activities the most, while Americans in low-income households participate the least.

- The widest gaps between high- and low-income households are in reports of attending a live sporting event, a live music or theatrical event, a museum, and going to the movie theater -- all things often associated with significant ticket prices.
- Conversely, the library -- which is free and offers a variety of services including WiFi -- is visited most by adults in low-income households and least by adults in high-income households.
- Despite having smaller incomes, Americans in low-income households visit gambling casinos with slightly greater frequency.
- Meanwhile, the three income groups are about as likely to attend an amusement or theme park as well as the zoo.

Reports of Leisure and Activities, by Income Group

	\$100,000+	\$40,000-99,999	Less than \$40,000
	Average	Average	Average
Go to a library	8.5	10.4	12.2
Go to a movie at a movie theater	6.3	5.7	4.4
Attend a live sporting event	7.5	3.8	3.6
Attend a live music or theatrical event	5.9	3.8	2.3
Visit a national or historical park	4.0	3.6	3.5
Visit a museum	3.5	2.8	1.5
Visit a gambling casino	2.5	2.2	3.5
Go to an amusement or theme park	2.1	1.3	1.5
Visit a zoo	0.9	0.8	1.0

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Certain Activities More Frequented Among Households With Children

For most measures, there are not meaningful differences between adults who report having children under the age of 18 in their households versus adults who do not have children living in their homes. But for a few activities, there are some differences between the two groups:

- Adults with children in their household attend live sporting events and go to the movies about two times or more than adults who do not have children.
- Meanwhile, adults who have no children in their household attend live music or theatrical events slightly more frequently than adults who have children in their homes.

Reports of Leisure and Activities, by Children Under 18 in Household

	Children under 18	No children under 18
	Average	Average
Go to a library	10.1	10.8
Go to a movie at a movie theater	6.8	4.7
Attend a live sporting event	6.7	3.7
Attend a live music or theatrical event	3.1	4.2
Visit a national or historical park	3.9	3.5
Visit a museum	2.2	2.7
Visit a gambling casino	3.9	2.0
Go to an amusement or theme park	2.0	1.3
Visit a zoo	1.5	0.6

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Regional Variations in Some Activities

Americans' reports of doing activities vary by the four regions in which they live:

- Those who live in the East report having visited a museum with the greatest frequency.
- In the West, adults have the highest reports of visiting historical or national parks and gambling casinos.

Reports of Leisure and Activities, by Region

	East	Midwest	South	West
	Average	Average	Average	Average
Go to a library	10.4	12.9	9.3	10.1
Go to a movie at a movie theater	5.3	4.9	5.4	5.6
Attend a live sporting event	4.5	4.6	5.1	4.3
Attend a live music or theatrical event	3.7	3.0	3.8	4.6
Visit a national or historical park	3.0	2.7	3.1	5.9
Visit a museum	4.0	1.7	2.0	2.5
Visit a gambling casino	1.4	3.3	1.0	5.1
Go to an amusement or theme park	1.8	0.8	1.7	1.7
Visit a zoo	0.6	1.1	0.9	0.7

Dec. 2-15, 2019

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Bottom Line

Despite the proliferation of digital-based activities over the past two decades -- including digital books, podcasts, streaming entertainment services and advanced gaming -- libraries have endured as a place Americans visit nearly monthly on average. Whether because they offer services like free Wi-Fi, movie rentals, or activities for children, libraries are most utilized by young adults, women and residents of low-income households.

Activities that typically cost money are visited or attended less frequently. Among this group of activities, outings to movie theaters and sports events remain the trips Americans make the most, while zoos are the least frequented.

Many factors determine how Americans spend their free time, and financial means is a key factor. Age, too, is a large determinant. While middle-aged Americans may tend to be the most active in these activities due to their relative youth and greater financial stability, the 30 to 49 age cohort's activeness may also reflect its household makeup. The average age of a first-time mother in the U.S. is 26 and 31 for a first-time father, according to 2016 data from the National Center for Health Statistics. So, the need to keep growing children entertained through trips to the movies or to sporting events -- which are more popular among households with children -- may be more common among this age group.

But one's personal interests also factor into such decisions, which may bear out in activities showing significant gender differences, such as a women's book club at the local library, or activities that are more popular or available in certain parts of the country.

[View complete question responses and trends.](#)

SURVEY METHODS



Results for this Gallup poll are based on telephone interviews conducted Dec. 2-15, 2019, with a random sample of 1,025 adults, aged 18 and older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. For results based on the total sample of national adults, the margin of sampling error is ± 4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. All reported margins of sampling error include computed design effects for weighting.

Each sample of national adults includes a minimum quota of 70% cellphone respondents and 30% landline respondents, with additional minimum quotas by time zone within region. Landline and cellular telephone numbers are selected using random-digit-dial methods.

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CONTACT: Gallup World Headquarters, 901 F Street, Washington, D.C., 20001, U.S.A
+1 202.715.3030

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