



American Perceptions of Archaeology



The Society for American Archaeology commissioned Ipsos to perform a study of the American public on their perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes about archaeology in January of 2018. The overall purpose of this study is to gain insights and understanding of the American public's views and opinions of archaeology. The following research findings are organized in a somewhat different order from the questionnaire design. To observe the order of questions as seen by the respondent, see the annotated questionnaire.

The analysis of this data is based on numerous cross-tabulations of the data and statistical tests of significant differences. Statistical tests of significant differences were performed among the estimated parameters at the 95% level of confidences. The data is analyzed and reported using the overall results of the entire sample of respondents surveyed and by different segments or groups where differences are observed.

The main objectives of this research are to understand Americans' awareness, perception and knowledge of archaeology, their opinions on the importance of archaeology, and their interest in the subject and in participating.

The key topics addressed in this study include:

- America's level of interest in archaeology
- What they think about archaeology in general
- Their attitudes towards funding and protecting archaeology and archaeological activities
- What they think archaeologists study
- How they have learned about archaeology
- How they prefer to learn about archaeology
- Their interest in participating in archaeology and archaeological activities

To begin to understand their awareness of archaeology, Americans were asked about their level of familiarity with archaeology. About two-thirds of Americans say they are very familiar (9%) or somewhat familiar (56%) with archaeology. Degree holders (74%), men (71%) registered voters (68%), and those who have visited a museum in the past 12 months (89%) are more likely to say they are familiar with archaeology.

Throughout the findings of this report there is a connection between familiarity with archaeology and more positive opinions and attitudes toward archaeology. Compared to those who are not familiar with archaeology, Americans who are familiar are also significantly more likely to:

- be interested in archaeology and the subjects of archaeology,
- believe the work of archaeologists is important,
- believe in funding and protecting archaeological sites,
- have a better understanding of what archaeologists study,
- say archaeologists are scientists, and
- say archaeology should be included as part of the regular schools' curriculum.

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America's interest level in archaeology

Americans were asked to rate their level of interest in archaeology and several other sciences on an 11-point scale, where 0 meant 'not at all interest' and 10 meant 'very interested'. About one-quarter of Americans say they are interested in Archaeology (26%), rating their level of interest between 8-10. They show similar levels of interest in several other sciences; astronomy (27%), zoology (21%), oceanography (20%), and geography (18%). Conversely, 22 percent of Americans said they are not interested in archaeology, rating their level of interest at 0-2. Overall, these ratings equate a 5.2 mean score interest in archaeology.

Compared to the general population, Americans who are interested in archaeology tend to be more male (57% compared to 48% gen pop), Hispanic (24% compared to 16% gen pop), and college educated (49% compared to 45% gen pop). There is no significant difference across age groups or income groups between the general population and those interested in archaeology.

Americans who said they are registered voters show a statistically higher interest level in archaeology (5.3) compared to non-voters (4.5). Those who have visited a history-related museum in the past 12 months have significantly higher levels of interest in archaeology than those who have not visited a museum (6.4 and 4.6 respectively). Similarly, those who are familiar with archaeology have a significantly higher level of interest in archaeology than those who are not familiar (6.4 and 3.0 respectively).

Among the 22 percent of Americans who said they are not interested in archaeology, the most cited reasons for their disinterest are that they don't feel it is important to them (39%), that they find it boring (27%), or they have never had the opportunity (27%). Some other reasons for disinterest in archaeology are that they don't have the time (22%), it's too complicated (16%), it's not relevant to their personal history (15%), that they don't see the value (13%), or that they just are not interested in the past (12%).

To help measure what role lack of understanding of archaeology may play in disinterested, Americans were also asked to rate their level of interest in several subjects of archaeology and several topics unrelated to archaeology on an 11-point scale, where 0 meant 'not at all interest' and 10 meant 'very interested'. Overall, Americans are most interested in the animals (7.1), but also have high levels of interest in the past (6.6) and American history (6.5). They are somewhat more interested in space (6.4), than ancient civilizations (6.0), pottery, relics, and artifacts (5.2), or bones (4.8).

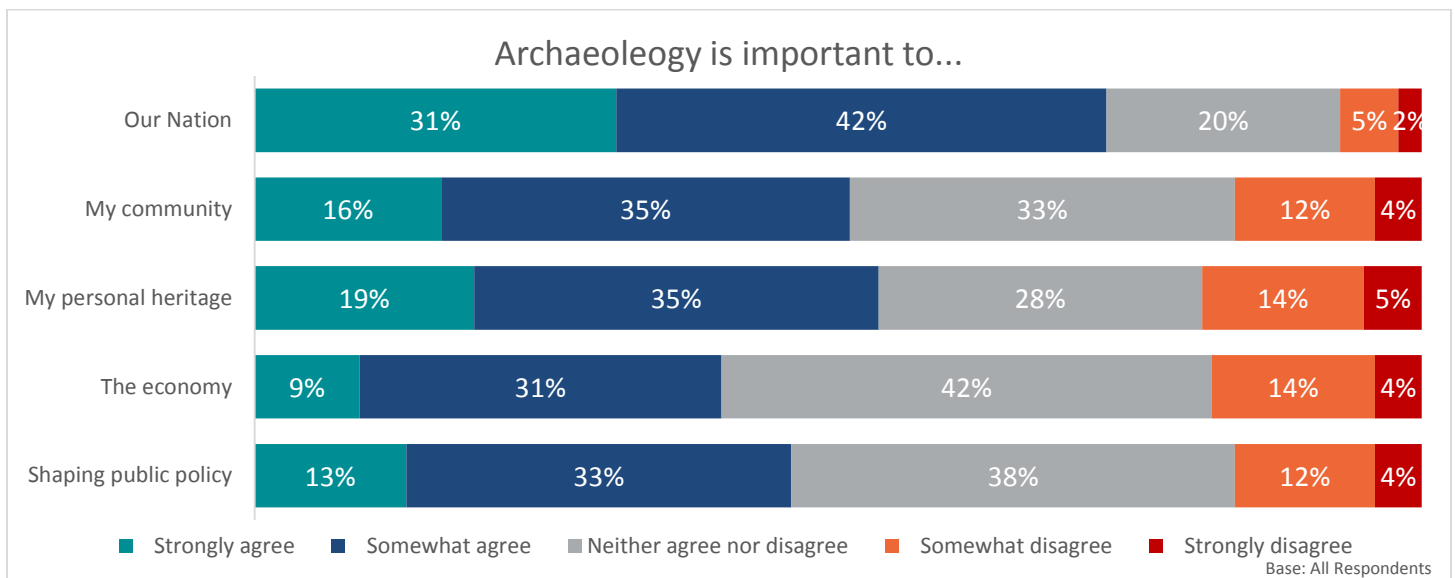
Lack of understanding does not seem to be a barrier to interest in archaeology. Those who say they are interested in archaeology are significantly more interested in subjects overall and are specifically interested in subjects of archaeology. Those who said they are interested in archaeology, rating their level of interest 8-10 on the 11-point scale, are highly interested in ancient civilizations (8.6), the past (8.3), and the pyramids of Egypt (8.1). Those who were neutral towards archaeology, rating their level of interest level at 3-7 on the 11-point scale, were most interested in animals (7.3), space (6.7), American history (6.6), and the past (6.6). Those who said they were not interested in archaeology, rating their level of interest 0-2 on the 11-point scale, had the lowest level of interest across all subjects. While they indicate some interest in animals (5.8), American history (4.7), and the past (4.7), they have very little interest in space (3.8), the pyramids of Egypt (3.2), ancient civilizations (3.0), artifacts (2.5), or bones (2.3).

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What they think about archaeology in general

Americans believe archaeology is important in general and to our nation. Overall, 93 percent of Americans say the work archaeologists do is important. Americans who say they are familiar with archaeology in general are significantly more likely to say the work archaeologists do is important (97%) compared to those who are not familiar with archaeology (85%). Similarly, those who have visited a museum in the past 12 months are significantly more likely to agree that the work archaeologists do is important compared to those who have not visited a museum (96% and 91% respectively).

Archaeology is believed to be important to the United States as a whole, but its importance on the individual level is not strongly voiced by Americans. Three-quarters of Americans agree that archaeology is important to our nation (73%). About half of Americans agree that archaeology is important to their community (51%), and their personal heritage (50%). While two-fifths agree that it is important to the economy (40%) and shaping public policy (46%), they are more neutral about its importance to these aspects of their lives (economy 42% and shaping public policy 38%).



Their attitudes towards protecting and preserving archaeological sites

Americans believe in protecting and maintaining archaeological sites. More than half of Americans say, 'the United States should set aside more land associated with archaeological sites as protected territory' (51%) rather than 'the United States should reduce the amount of land set aside as protected territory, even if the land has a significant connection to the past' (17%). Further, the clear majority believe there should be laws in place to protect archaeological sites and artifacts (82%).

The majority of Americans agree that preserving archaeological sites should be a priority of the American government (63%), that they are concerned that the government is not protecting archaeological sites well enough (60%), and that the government should increase funding for the discovery and protection of archaeological sites (54%), however, approximately one-third of Americans are neutral about these statements (28%, 31%, and 35% respectively).

Compared to those who are not familiar with archaeology, those who are familiar are significantly more likely to believe there should be laws to protect archaeological sites and artifacts (89% vs. 69%), that preserving archaeological sites should be a priority for the US government (73% vs. 43%), that they are concerned that the government is not

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protecting archaeological sites well enough (70% vs. 40%), and that the government should increase funding for the discovery and protection of archaeological sites (66% vs. 31%).

What they believe archaeologists study

More than three-quarters of Americans say that archaeologists are scientists (78%). Agreement is higher among those familiar with archaeology (82%), those who say archaeology is important (81%), registered voters (80%), and those who have visited a museum in the past 12 months (83%).

Many Americans have a good understanding of what archaeologist study, although, there is some misconceptions about the study of dinosaurs. Majority believe archaeologists study artifacts (81%), past cultures (74%), human remains (70%), dinosaurs (54%), and native people and societies (52%).

Compared to those who are not familiar with archaeology, those who are familiar are significantly more likely to say archaeologist study:

- artifacts (83% vs. 77%),
- past cultures (81% vs. 62%),
- human remains (75% vs. 61%),
- pottery (61% vs. 41%),
- native people or societies (58% vs. 41%),
- shipwrecks (42% vs. 21%), and
- written or spoken stories (36% vs. 21%).

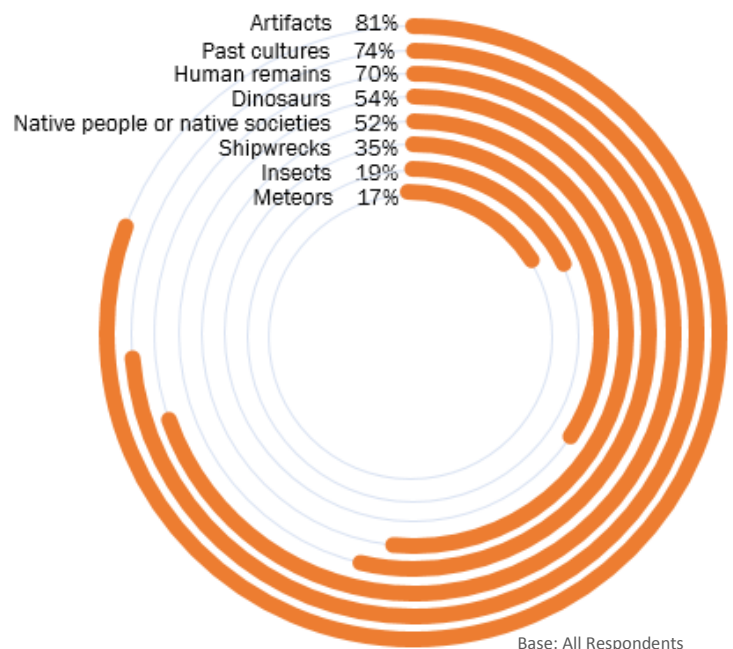
About half of both those who are familiar and unfamiliar with archaeology believe archaeologists study dinosaurs (56% and 50% respectively).

How they have learned about archaeology

The vast majority of Americans have learned at least something about archaeology in the past, although, their level of reported familiarity varies. Only 1 in 9 Americans say they have not learned about archaeology (11%). More than half of Americans say they learned about archaeology from classrooms or textbooks (58%), museums (57%), or television (56%). Movies (36%), print media (29%), popular books (25%), online news (18%), parks (13%), public events and lectures (12%), and social media (12%) also play a role in informing the public about archaeology. Additionally, few Americans say they have learned about archaeology from other sources (5%), local societies (5%), blogs (5%), radio (5%), video games (4%), direct participation (4%), or podcasts (4%).

College degree holders and non-degree holders learn about archaeology from the same top 4 sources; museums (63% and 52% respectively), classrooms or textbooks (62% and 55% respectively), television (58% and 54% respectively), and movies (39% and 34% respectively), however, degree holders are significantly more likely to say they learned at a museum.

What do archaeologists study?



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How they prefer to learn about archaeology

The two most cited places Americans want to learn about archaeology are museums (64%) and television (60%). There is also interest in learning about archaeology from print media (34%), classrooms or textbooks (34%), online news (32%), public events or lectures (32%), movies (30%) and direct participation (29%). Americans are less likely to cite popular books (26%), parks (24%), social media (20%), local societies (17%), podcasts (14%), blogs (12%), radio (9%), video games (8%), or other sources (2%) as sources they would like to utilize to learn about archaeology.

The clear majority of Americans believe archaeology should be included in schools' core curriculum. Eighty-seven percent of Americans say archaeology should be included in the core curriculum for schools at some point in students' academic career. Conversely, only 5 percent of Americans said archaeology should not be included in school's curriculum, while 8 percent remain unsure.

One-fifth of Americans say archaeology should be included in all levels of education; elementary through college (20%). Most Americans believe students should learn about archaeology in middle school (59%) and high school (60%). About two-fifths say students should learn about archaeology in college (43%) and one-third say students should learn about archaeology in elementary school (35%).

Those who are familiar with archaeology are significantly more likely to say students should learn about archaeology as a regular part of their school curriculum at some point in their education (94%) compared to those who are not familiar (74%). Conversely, those who are not familiar with archaeology are significantly more likely to say archaeology should not be part of the school curriculum (9%) than those who are familiar (3%).

Their interest in participating in archaeology and archaeological activities

One-third of Americans say they have had some participation in archaeology (36%). Much of this participation is in the form of visits to archaeological sites (36%). While far fewer are employed or studying archaeology (3%) or have participated in a dig or laboratory work (6%).

Two-fifths of those who have not participated in archaeology in the past say they would be interested in participating (41%). Among those who have not participated in archaeology, those who are familiar with archaeology are significantly more likely to say they would be interested in participating in archaeological work than those who are not familiar (60% and 17% respectively).

More than one-third of Americans say they have visited a history-related museum in the past 12 months (36%). College educated Americans are significantly more likely to have visited a museum compared to those who do not have a degree (46% and 27% respectively).

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About the Study

These are findings from an Ipsos poll conducted January 4-5, 2018 on behalf of the Society for American Archaeology. For the survey, a sample of 1,024 adults age 18+ from the continental U.S., Alaska and Hawaii was interviewed online in English.

The sample for this study was randomly drawn from Ipsos's online panel (see link below for more info on "Access Panels and Recruitment"), partner online panel sources, and "river" sampling (see link below for more info on the Ipsos "Ampario Overview" sample method) and does not rely on a population frame in the traditional sense. Ipsos uses fixed sample targets, unique to each study, in drawing sample. After a sample has been obtained from the Ipsos panel, Ipsos calibrates respondent characteristics to be representative of the U.S. Population using standard procedures such as raking-ratio adjustments. The source of these population targets is U.S. Census 2013 American Community Survey data. The sample drawn for this study reflects fixed sample targets on demographics. Post-hoc weights were made to the population characteristics on gender, age, race/ethnicity, region, and education.

Statistical margins of error are not applicable to online polls. All sample surveys and polls may be subject to other sources of error, including, but not limited to coverage error and measurement error. Where figures do not sum to 100, this is due to the effects of rounding. The precision of Ipsos online polls is measured using a credibility interval. In this case, the poll has a credibility interval of plus or minus 3.5 percentage points for all respondents. Ipsos calculates a design effect (DEFF) for each study based on the variation of the weights, following the formula of Kish (1965). This study had a credibility interval adjusted for design effect of the following ($n=1,010$, $DEFF=1.5$, adjusted Confidence Interval=5).

For more information about conducting research intended for public release or Ipsos' online polling methodology, please visit our [Public Opinion Polling and Communication](#) page where you can download our brochure, see our public release protocol, or contact us.

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