

A Study of Visitors to  
*Southern Identity:  
Contemporary Argentine Art*

An Exhibition by the  
Smithsonian Latino Center at the  
International Gallery of the  
S. Dillon Ripley Center

March 2011

Smithsonian Institution  
Office of Policy and Analysis

## Preface

*Southern Identity: Contemporary Argentine Art*, an exhibition organized by the Smithsonian Latino Center (SLC) in conjunction with Argentina's Secretariat of Culture, opened at the International Gallery of the S. Dillon Ripley Center in October 2011. Visitors to the exhibition were offered a glimpse into the creativity of contemporary Argentine artists and dynamic nature of contemporary Argentine art.

It was a pleasure to have the opportunity to do a visitor study of *Southern Identity* and I would like to thank SLC's Director, Eduardo Diaz, and Exhibitions and Public Programs Director, Ranald Woodaman, for having asked the Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) to work on it. I also wish to acknowledge Ranald's contributions to the administration of the survey. Additional thanks go to OP&A staff Lance Costello and intern Lindsay Haslebacher who designed the questionnaire, analyzed the data, and wrote the final report.

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Director  
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## **Background**

From October 11 through January 23, 2011 the Smithsonian Latino Center (SLC) exhibition *Southern Identity: Contemporary Argentine Art* was on view in the International Gallery of the Smithsonian's S. Dillon Ripley Center. The bilingual exhibition, which was part of the 2010 Smithsonian exhibition series celebrating Argentina's bicentennial, was organized in conjunction with Argentina's Secretariat of Culture and featured 80 works by 32 living Argentine artists.

The exhibition highlighted the major movements and trends in contemporary Argentine Art—divided into four sections featuring political art, landscapes, national identities and abstraction. This largest survey of Argentine contemporary art ever organized in the United States displayed various mediums including: paintings, drawings, sculptures, video art, photography, and prints.

SLC requested that the Smithsonian's Office of Policy and Analysis (OP&A) conduct a visitor study of *Southern Identity: Contemporary Argentine Art*. Of particular interest to the Center was public's reaction to the exhibit and characteristics of the visitors it attracted.

## **Methodology**

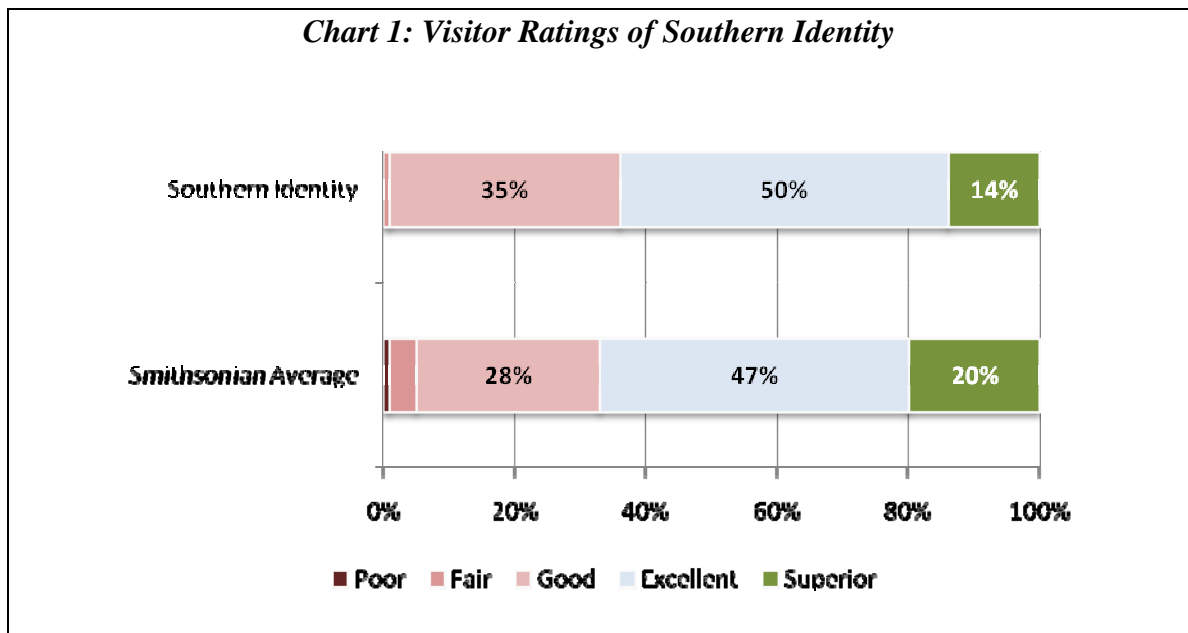
In conducting this exhibition study, the study team surveyed a sample of visitors exiting the exhibition. Visitors completed 102 self-administered survey questionnaires, with a response rate of 90 percent. Frequencies of responses to the questions on the survey are provided in Appendix A.

## Survey Findings

### Rating

Visitors were asked to rate their overall experience in the exhibition on a five-point scale that has been applied by OP&A across Smithsonian exhibitions: *Poor*, *Fair*, *Good*, *Excellent*, and *Superior*. Visitors critical of their visit to some degree tend to choose *Poor*, *Fair*, or *Good*. Those that are satisfied with their experience and have few or no criticisms tend to select *Excellent* and those who feel that their visit was so special that *Excellent* is not adequate as a rating tend to mark *Superior*.

Slightly fewer than two in five visitors rated their experience in *Southern Identity* as *Fair* (2%) or *Good* (35%); half marked *Excellent* (50%); and one in seven selected *Superior* (14%). These ratings are at the Smithsonian Average<sup>1</sup>. (See Chart 1.)



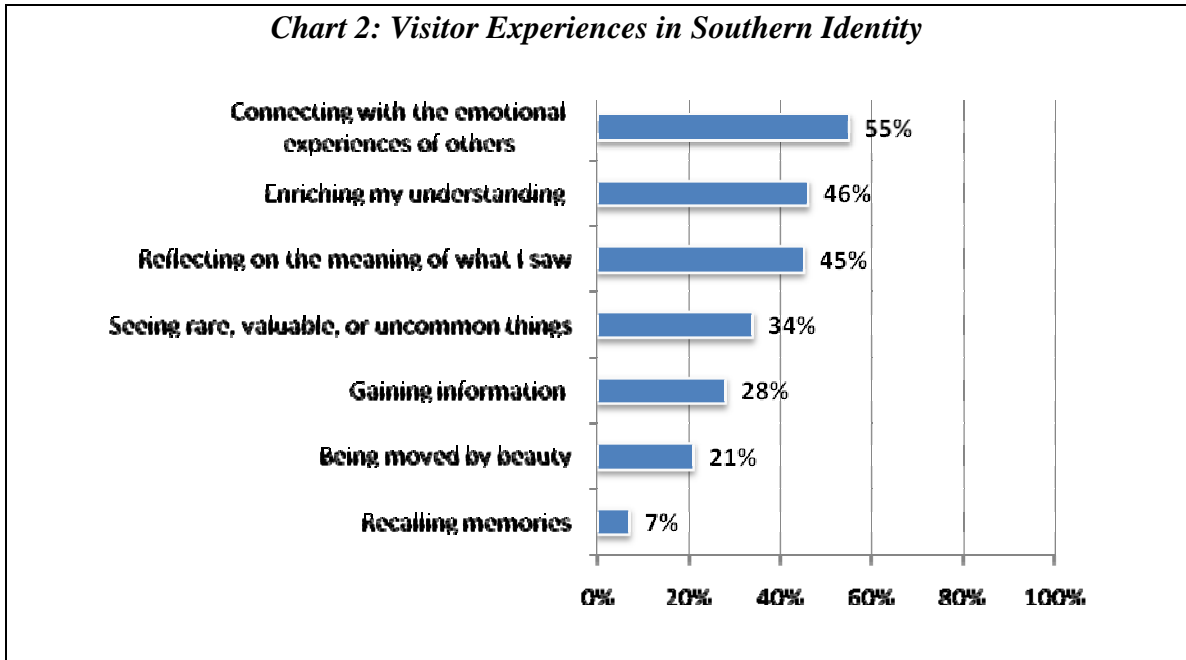
### Experiences

Visitors were offered a list of seven possible experiences and asked to select the ones that they found especially satisfying in *Southern Identity*. On average, visitors marked slightly more than two experiences.

Looking at the experiences individually, *Connecting with the emotional experience of others* stands out as the only option selected by more than half of respondents (55%).

<sup>1</sup> Due to the sample size, the margin of error on the *Southern Identity* was  $\pm 10\%$ .

However, *Enriching my understanding* and *Reflecting on the meaning of what I saw* were not far behind, with slightly less than half of respondents selecting those options (46% and 45%, respectively). The other four options were selected by approximately one-third or fewer respondents as seen in Chart 2.



Of the seven experiences, only one had a statistically significant correlation with ratings: *Being moved by beauty*. Nine in ten visitors who marked *Being moved by beauty* gave the exhibition a rating of either *Excellent* or *Superior* (91%).

### *Visitor Characteristics*

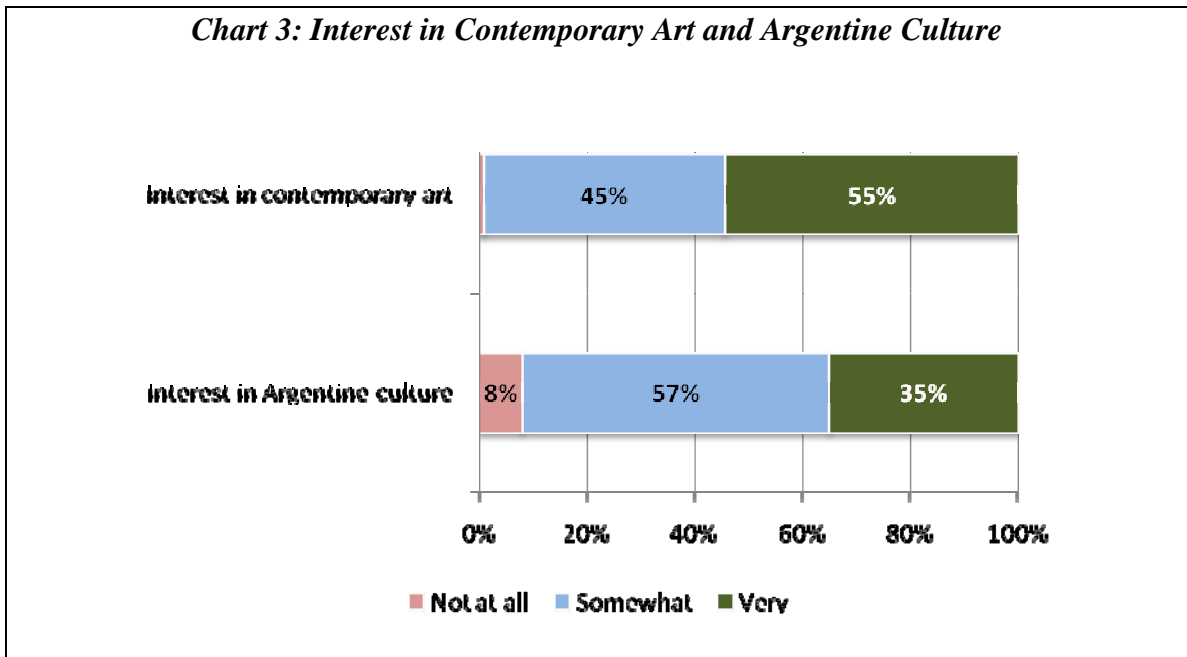
Approximately one-quarter of the visitors to *Southern Identity* (26%) came to the Smithsonian specifically to see the exhibition—these visitors will be subsequently noted as *exhibition specific* visitors. Over four-fifths (85%) of *Exhibition specific* visitors rated the exhibition as either *Excellent* or *Superior*.

More than two-thirds of visitors (67%) were *repeat visitors*, that is, they had previously been to a Smithsonian museum. *Repeat visitors* were just as likely as non-repeat visitors to be *exhibition specific*.

## Interest in Contemporary Art and Argentine Culture

Over half of all respondents marked that they were *Very* interested in contemporary art (55%) and approximately one-third noted that they were *Very* interested in Argentine culture (35%). In comparison, *Exhibition specific* visitors were less likely to be *Very* interested in contemporary art (44%) and more likely to be *Very* interested in Argentine culture (56%). (See Chart 3.)

Among visitors who marked that they were *Very* interested in Argentine culture, over eight in ten (85%) gave the exhibition a rating of either *Excellent* or *Superior*. It is interesting to note that being *Very* interested in contemporary art did not have a statistically significant correlation with rating<sup>2</sup>.



## Smithsonian Latino Center

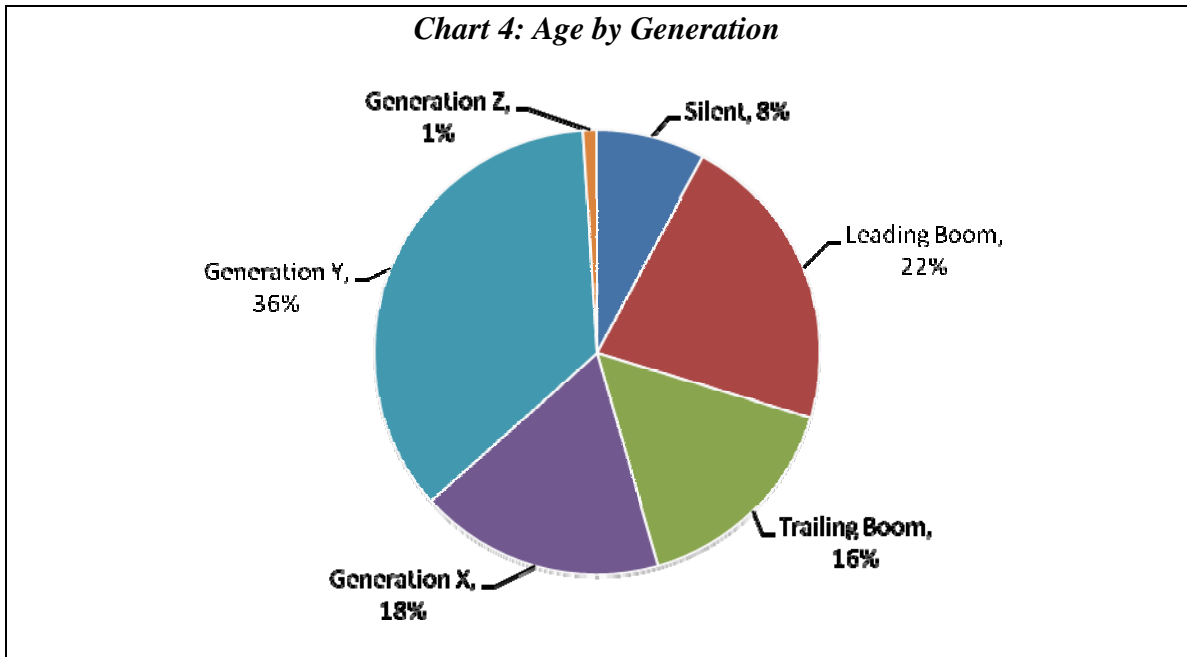
More than half of the respondents found out that there is a Smithsonian Latino Center *During this visit* (55%) and one in four found out *When I read this question* (27%). Only one in five knew *Before this visit* (18%).

However, more than three in five visitors would *definitely* visit another Smithsonian Latino Center exhibition if they were in Washington in the next year (62%) and almost all of the rest *might*. Only one percent indicated that they *would not*.

<sup>2</sup> This may be due to the sample size, however, it does indicate that, at the very least, interest in Argentine culture was more significant than interest in contemporary art with regards to ratings.

## Demographics

**Age:** The average age of respondents was 40 and the median age was 39. Dividing the survey respondents by generation: 8% were of the Silent generation (Born 1925-1945); 22%, Leading Boomers (Born 1946-1955); 16%, Trailing Boomers (Born 1956-1964); 18%, Generation X (Born 1965-1981); 36%, Generation Y (Born 1982-1998); 1%, Generation Z (Born after 1995). (See Chart 4.)



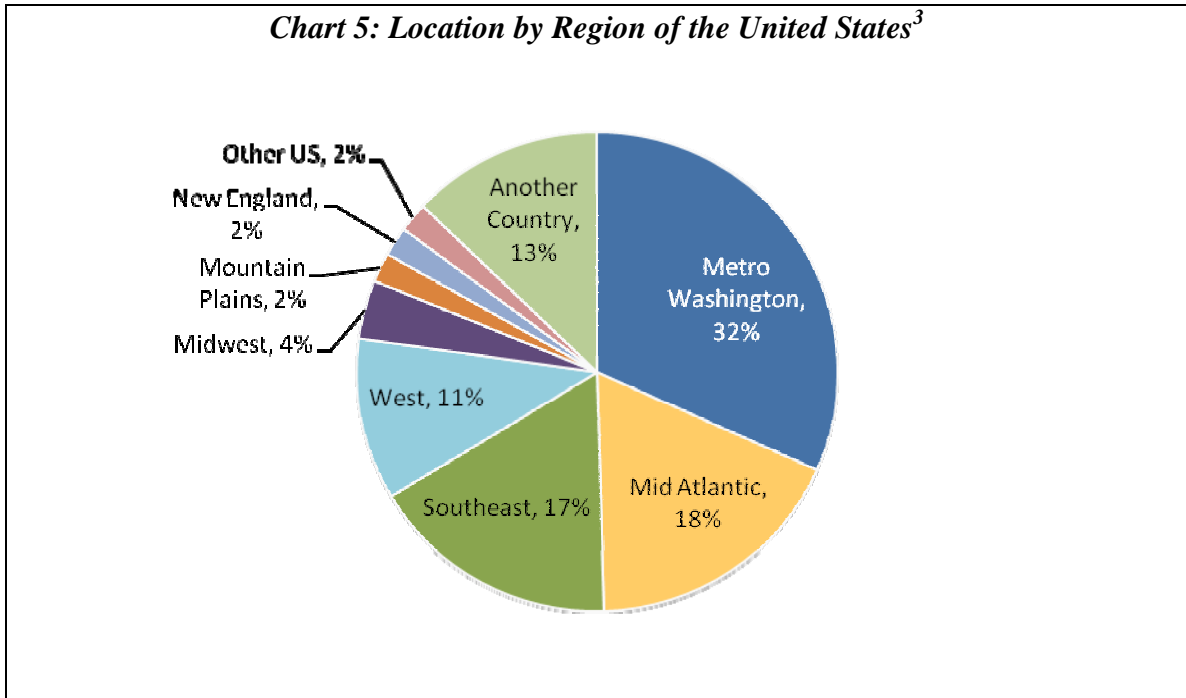
**Sex:** Visitors to the exhibition were skewed slightly towards males, 57%. Among *exhibition specific* visitors, 50% were male.

**Group composition:** Approximately seven in ten exhibition visitors were adults visiting with at least one additional adult (71%). About one in four visited alone (26%) and about one in twenty were with at least one child under the age of eighteen (6%).

**Latino:** Roughly one in seven visitors self-identified as being of Hispanic or Latino origin (14%). Those who did were significantly more likely to be *Very* interested in contemporary art (86%) and *Very* interested in Argentine culture (71%) compared to other visitors.

**Residence:** Nearly one-third of respondents were *local visitors* from the Washington D.C. metropolitan area (32%). See Chart 5 for a further breakdown of residential locations of respondents by region of the United States.

Notably, three-quarters of *local visitors* gave the exhibition either an *Excellent* or *Superior* ranking (76%), as compared to somewhat over half of non-local respondents (58%). *Local visitors* were also more likely to be *exhibition specific* visitors (42% compared to 19% of non-locals).



<sup>3</sup> Totals to 101% due to rounding.



## *Discussion*

Two factors in particular were significantly correlated with visitor satisfaction: an interest in Argentine culture, and the experience of *Being moved by beauty*. People who selected either of those were more likely to rank the exhibition as either *Excellent* or *Superior*. Also noteworthy within these findings is that visitors were more interested in contemporary art than in Argentine culture; however, interest in contemporary art did not have a significant correlation with rating.

Overall, it seemed that underlying these correlations was whether or not the visitor was *Exhibition specific*. These findings are generally consistent with visitors who intentionally sought the exhibition. However, the size of the data set limits further analyses.

Another key finding is that only 18% of visitors knew about the Smithsonian Latino Center prior to their visit, while 26% of visitors were *Exhibition specific*. This indicates that, prior to their visit, more visitors knew about the exhibition itself than who was hosting it. In future studies, the SLC may wish to explore how visitors are finding out about the Center and its offerings.

# Appendix A: Survey Questionnaire for Southern Identity: Contemporary Argentine Art

4764017223	Smithsonian Latino Center Southern Identity: Contemporary Argentine Art
Is this your first visit to the Smithsonian? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Please rate your overall experience in this exhibition of Argentine art: <input type="checkbox"/> Poor <input type="checkbox"/> Fair <input type="checkbox"/> Good <input type="checkbox"/> Excellent <input type="checkbox"/> Superior	
Which experiences did you find especially satisfying in this exhibition? [Mark one or more.] <input type="checkbox"/> Being moved by beauty <input type="checkbox"/> Connecting with the emotional experiences of others <input type="checkbox"/> Enriching my understanding <input type="checkbox"/> Gaining information <input type="checkbox"/> Recalling memories <input type="checkbox"/> Reflecting on the meaning of what I saw <input type="checkbox"/> Seeing rare, valuable, or uncommon things	
Did you come to the Smithsonian today specifically to see this exhibition? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
When did you first find out that there is a Smithsonian Latino Center? <input type="checkbox"/> Before this visit <input type="checkbox"/> During this visit <input type="checkbox"/> When I read this question	
If you were in Washington in the next year, would you visit another Smithsonian Latino Center exhibition? <input type="checkbox"/> No, I would not <input type="checkbox"/> I might <input type="checkbox"/> Yes, I definitely would	
How interested are you in... ...contemporary art? <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat <input type="checkbox"/> Very ...Argentine culture? <input type="checkbox"/> Not at all <input type="checkbox"/> Somewhat <input type="checkbox"/> Very	
Are you male or female? <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female	
What is your age? <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>	
With whom are you visiting? [Mark one or more] <input type="checkbox"/> I am alone <input type="checkbox"/> Other adult(s) <input type="checkbox"/> Child(ren) under 18	
Do you live in the United States or another country? <input type="checkbox"/> United States, Zip Code: <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="checkbox"/> Another country, specify: _____	
Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	
Please write additional comments you may have on the back of this sheet.	
<b>Thank you!</b>	Admin <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> Stat C R L I ID <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/> <input type="text"/>

## **Appendix B: Survey Response Frequencies for *Southern Identity: Contemporary Argentine Art***

Is this your first visit to the Smithsonian?

- 67%** No
- 33%** Yes

Please rate your overall experience in this exhibition of Argentine Art:

- 0%** Poor
- 1%** Fair
- 35%** Good
- 50%** Excellent
- 14%** Superior

Which experiences did you find especially satisfying in this exhibition?

[Mark one or more.]

- 55%** Connecting with the emotional experiences of others
- 46%** Enriching my understanding
- 45%** Reflecting on the meaning of what I saw
- 34%** Seeing rare, valuable, or uncommon things
- 28%** Gaining information
- 21%** Being moved by beauty
- 7%** Recalling memories

Did you come to the Smithsonian today specifically to see this exhibition?

- 74%** No
- 26%** Yes

When did you first find out that there is a Smithsonian Latino Center?

- 18%** Before this visit
- 55%** During this visit
- 27%** When I read this question

If you were in Washington in the next year, would you visit another Smithsonian Latino Center exhibition?

- 1%** No, I would not
- 37%** I might
- 62%** Yes, I definitely would

How interested are you in...

- ...contemporary art?
  - 1%** Not at all
  - 45%** Somewhat
  - 55%** Very
- ...Argentine culture?
  - 8%** Not at all
  - 57%** Somewhat
  - 35%** Very

Are you male or female?

**57%** Male

**43%** Female

What is your age?

Average Age 40

Median Age 39

*By Generation*

8% *Silent (Born 1925-1945)*

22% *Leading Boom (Born 1946-1955)*

16% *Trailing Boom (Born 1956-1964)*

18% *Generation X (Born 1965-1981)*

36% *Generation Y (Born 1982-1995)*

1% *Generation Z (Digital Natives) (Born after 1995)*

With whom are you visiting? [Mark one or more]

**26%** I am alone

**71%** Other adult(s)

**6%** Child(ren) under 18

Do you live in the United States or another country?

**87%** United States

**13%** Another country

*By Region*

32% *Metro Washington*

18% *Mid Atlantic*

17% *Southeast*

13% *Another Country*

11% *West*

4% *Midwest*

2% *Mountain Plains*

2% *New England*

2% *Unspecified US*

Are you of Hispanic or Latino origin?

**86%** No

**14%** Yes