



DESPITE DEEPLY POLARIZED PUBLIC OPINION, NEW POLL SHOWS CLOSE TO 90% OF AMERICANS TRUST IN SCIENCE AND THINK PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF SCIENCE IS NECESSARY

**Cleveland Museum of Natural History Survey Conducted by the Marist Poll Shows
85% of Americans Want to Increase Their Scientific Understanding While
Nearly Half Report They Are Falling Behind**

Cleveland, OH—September 15, 2021—With crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and disasters caused by climate change dominating headlines and people’s lives—and at a time when the American public is deeply divided on a broad range of issues—a new national poll developed by the Cleveland Museum of Natural History (CMNH) and conducted by the Marist Poll reveals that a vast majority of Americans trust science and think public understanding of scientific information is necessary.

The poll shows:

- 90% of Americans think it is necessary for people like themselves to have a basic understanding of science;
- 88% of the public trusts in science;
- 85% of Americans want to learn more about science, while close to half (44%) report they are falling behind in their understanding; and
- Scientists were cited as the most trusted source of accurate scientific information (58%), while only 4% of Americans place most of their trust in either the government (2%) or social media (2%) as reliable sources.

“The Cleveland Museum of Natural History sponsored this survey to advance our mission to promote scientific literacy and empower individuals with the tools they need to engage meaningfully on issues of human health, climate change, protecting the natural environment, and other vital challenges,” said **Sonia Winner, President and CEO of the Cleveland Museum of Natural History**. “While Americans have traditionally trusted science, in the face of an ongoing international pandemic and polarized public opinion on so many issues, we needed to know if that trust still held. The resounding response from the public is yes.”

The survey also showed that the majority of Americans perceive the natural world is changing for the worse and that these changes affect their lives.

- 86% of Americans feel connected to the natural world;

- 92% think that the health of the environment directly impacts their own health; and
- Nearly two thirds (63%) think the natural world has changed for the worse since they were children.

These opinions all align with the evidence the scientific community has gathered, and tested, on these issues.

The survey also reveals a lack in basic understanding of scientific concepts but—more importantly—a desire to learn about science.

- Almost two thirds (63%) of Americans are not aware that the elements in our bodies were present in the universe millions of years ago;
- Slightly over half (51%) of the public incorrectly answered that scientists have documented nearly all the living things on Earth; and
- More than one in four Americans (29%) could not answer correctly when asked how long it takes the Earth to go around the sun.

Formal education helps, but does not guarantee scientific knowledge. Only 40% of college graduates correctly answered that the human body is composed of elements such as stardust from the ancient universe. College graduates are divided (49% to 49%) about whether or not most species on the Earth have yet to be discovered. And nearly one in five college graduates (17%) are not able to identify the amount of time it takes the Earth to orbit the sun.

“The most telling findings of the survey are not the gaps in people’s knowledge, but the public’s clear grasp of the fundamental importance of science in their daily lives and their tremendous desire to learn more,” said **Dr. Gavin Svenson, CMNH Director of Research and Collections**. “It is our responsibility as scientists not only to advance our understanding of the world, but to respond to this call from the public to share the relevance of this research and enable people to navigate the constantly evolving body of scientific evidence and knowledge.”

CMNH President and CEO Winner added, “The Museum’s \$150 million campaign to transform all our exhibitions and programs—and even our building—is designed to give scientists the platform to share their passion and their knowledge with the public. There are very few places where the public can directly experience new scientific information, see *how* science progresses, and find new perspectives on how to use those insights in their daily life. The events of the last months have demonstrated how vital that is.”

Cleveland Museum of Natural History Transformation Project

In June 2021, the Cleveland Museum of Natural History broke ground on a reinvention of its entire complex. The design is based on the geological history of the Museum’s site, evoking the glaciers that created Lake Erie and the Great Lakes and revealing how these same forces have shaped the Earth and the universe—and continue to affect life today. The Museum will use its exceptional historical collections and 11,000 acres of protected ecosystems, along with the latest scientific research and immersive technologies, to enable visitors to see how they are part of a continuum of the natural world.

In tandem with its expansion, the Museum is adding new curatorial and other scientific posts to reflect CMNH's approach of dismantling the structure of traditional, siloed scientific disciplines to more effectively link interdisciplinary research to education, public programming, and the work of other researchers nationally and globally.

Various areas of the Museum will remain open throughout the expansion and phased openings of the new and reimagined spaces will begin in 2022.

Poll Methodology

This survey of 1,132 adults was conducted July 21st through July 29th, 2021 by the Marist Poll sponsored by the Cleveland Museum of Natural History. Adults 18 years of age and older residing in the United States were contacted on landline or mobile numbers and interviewed by telephone using live interviewers. Survey questions were available in English or Spanish. The samples were then combined and balanced to reflect the 2019 American Community Survey one-year estimates for age, gender, income, race, and region. Assistance was provided by Luce Research for data collection. Results are statistically significant within ± 3.5 percentage points. The error margin was adjusted for sample weights and increases for cross-tabulations. For complete survey results, please see maristpoll.marist.edu/cleveland-museum-of-natural-history-survey.

About the Cleveland Museum of Natural History

The Cleveland Museum of Natural History illuminates the natural world and inspires visitors to engage with the scientific forces that shape their lives. Since its founding in 1920, the Museum has pioneered scientific research to advance knowledge across diverse fields of study and used its outstanding collections, which have grown to encompass more than five million artifacts and specimens, to engage the public with the dynamic connections between humans and the world around us. Through its [Natural Areas Program](#), the Museum stewards more than 11,000 acres of protected ecosystems across northern Ohio. A community gathering place, educational center, and research institution, CMNH is a vital resource that serves the Cleveland community and the nation. For more information, visit cmnh.org.

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